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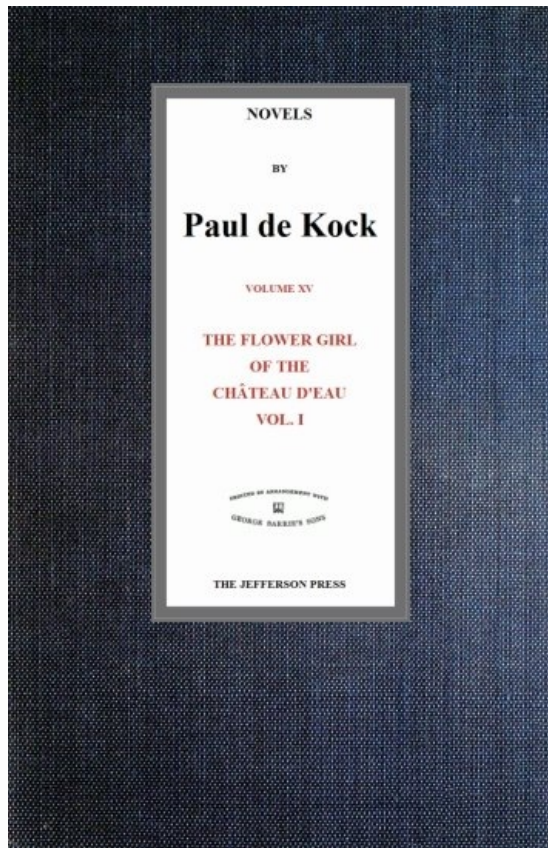
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VIOLETTE RESISTS JÉRICOURT

Violette's hands were active and strong; she put one of them to her persecutor's face and dug her nails in so far that the blood flowed freely, and the pain forced the young man to relax his hold.

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME XV

**THE FLOWER GIRL
OF THE
CHÂTEAU D'EAU
VOL. I**

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**THE FLOWER GIRL
OF THE CHÂTEAU D'EAU**

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I

PAPA'S BIRTHDAY

It was the month of May in the year 1853—you see that our subject is not lost in the night of time—it was a Monday and there was a flower market on Boulevard Saint-Martin, in front, or rather on both sides of the Château d'Eau. The booths of the dealers extended as far as Rue de Lancry, a favor which had been only recently accorded to the flower girls, but upon which the passers-by had as much reason to congratulate themselves as the dealers and the people of that portion of the quarter. Is there anything more delightful to the eye than flowers? What is there which charms the sight and pleases the sense of smell more?

Are there people who do not love flowers? If you should tell me that there were, I would not believe it.

The weather was fine, which was a rare occurrence during that spring, as you must remember as well as I. The sun had deigned to show himself, and people were very grateful to him, because the sun for the last few years had become too high and mighty a prince in France; he no longer condescended to mingle with the people, he showed himself too rarely to the inhabitants of this part of the globe. And yet, although we do not adore him on our knees, like the Incas, we take no less pleasure in seeing him, in feeling the pleasant warmth of his beams, and although we are great friends of invention and of progress, we have not yet found anything to replace the sun.

There were therefore many people on the boulevards, and particularly near the flower market; everyone was anxious to take advantage of a fine day, not being certain of another on the morrow; and everybody was sensible: fine weather, pleasure and happiness we must seize you when you come to us, and never say: "I will wait till to-morrow."

Among all the people who were walking and sauntering and examining the flowers displayed on the asphalt or the concrete, there were, as is always the case at that market, more women than men. Do the ladies care more for flowers than we do? I might say some very pretty things on that subject, as for example: "Birds of a feather flock together," or: "Where can one be more at home than in the bosom of his family?" or again—but no, I will not repeat what you have already seen or heard a hundred times. Moreover, I think that François I said something better than any of that.

Furthermore, if the ladies are fonder of flowers than we are, you see they have much more time to attend to them. I once knew a bachelor, a clerk in a business house, who adored flowers, and although of small means, could not resist the temptation to purchase a handsome rosebush or a wood-violet, which he instantly carried home and placed in triumph on his window-sill. But that gentleman was a heavy sleeper, and when he woke he had hardly time to dress and go to his office. He did not dine at home, and when he returned at night he was always in a hurry to go to bed. The result was that, after two or three days, when he attempted to gloat over the flower that he had purchased, he was surprised to find it dead.

"But why didn't you water it?" someone would ask him.

"Why—why—because I have noticed that it always rains sooner or later."

We will, with your permission, allow those of the passers-by who are indifferent to us to go their way, and will follow the steps of a family composed of a mother, her son and her daughter.

The mother's name was Madame Glumeau; her first name was Lolotte. She was a lady who had reached the wrong side of forty; she had once been pretty, a piquant brunette, whose bright and mischievous eyes made many victims. But time had passed that way! What a deplorable passage, that of time,—a passage which should be well barricaded!

It was not that Madame Glumeau's features had changed very much. No, her eyes were still very bright, her nose rather delicate; her hair, which was yet black, still fell in thick curls on each side of her face; but she had grown enormously stout, so that her whole figure was changed and her waist enlarged.

Even the face had undergone the influence of that exuberant health; the cheeks had become rotund, the chin had trebled, the neck had shortened, and the complexion had become purple; and there were people who were cruel enough to say to her:

"What perfect health you enjoy! No one needs to ask you how you are!"

At that compliment, Madame Glumeau would try to smile, as she replied:

"That is true, I am not often ill!"

But in the depths of her heart she bitterly lamented having become like a ball, and would willingly have

submitted to a severe illness, in order to recover her figure of earlier days. However, as one is always inclined to flatter oneself a little, Madame Glumeau was very far from considering herself a *tower*, as her dear lady friends called her; and when she looked at herself in the mirror, she still bestowed upon herself a satisfied smile.

Let us come to the two children; we are not speaking of little brats, who have to be led along by the hand, but of a boy of nineteen and a young lady of sixteen.

The young man was very ill-favored; he had no one of his mother's features, and squinted in too pronounced a fashion, a fact which necessarily imparted more or less vagueness to his countenance; but one might judge from the expression of his face that Monsieur Astianax—that was young Glumeau's name—was not displeased with his little person, and still less with his wit. Unluckily, nature had not bestowed upon him a figure corresponding to the advantages with which he considered himself to be endowed; despite the high heels that he wore and the double soles that he put in his shoes, Monsieur Astianax Glumeau had been unable to make himself taller than his mother, who was four feet nine.

If young Glumeau was short, his sister, by way of compensation, at sixteen, was as tall as a bean-pole, and threatened to attain the stature of a drum-major. As thin as her mother was stout, Eolinde Glumeau had at all events a face which did her honor; although she was not so pretty as her mother had once been, she had regular features, rather large eyes, a small mouth, fine teeth, and all the freshness of a peach still on the tree. But—for there were always butts in that family—Mademoiselle Eolinde was afflicted with a very noticeable defect of speech; she stuttered in a way that was very tiresome to those who listened to her. Her parents declared that that would cure itself, and as a corrective to that infirmity they insisted that their daughter should talk as much as possible. Mademoiselle Eolinde obeyed her parents to an extent that was sometimes very terrible for her friends and acquaintances.

The Glumeau family had been on Boulevard du Château d'Eau a long while, going from one dealer to another, stopping in front of the flowers, sticking their noses into the finest ones, asking the price, hesitating, and not deciding.

At last Madame Glumeau turned about once more and halted in front of a very handsome pomegranate tree, saying:

"I think I will buy this pomegranate for your father. A pomegranate will please Honoré; he will like it very much."

"But, mamma, what connection is there between this shrub and my father?" queried young Glumeau, looking toward Boulevard du Temple and Porte Saint-Martin at the same moment.

"What's that! what connection? What do you mean by that, Astianax? Isn't to-morrow your father's fête-day, as his name is Honoré? We are going to give him flowers as usual. I select this pomegranate, which is very handsome; I don't see what there is in that to surprise you."

"It isn't that, mamma; I said: 'what connection is there between a pomegranate—*grenadier*—and my father, who has never been a soldier?' Oh! if he had been a soldier, I could understand your choice of this shrub and the allusion, but—"

"But, my dear boy, you are terribly tiresome with your allusions; you want to put allusions in everything; just wait until you are a man."

"Excuse me, dear mamma, but flowers have a language; so in your place I should have thought that a myrtle, the emblem of love—"

"My dear boy, I have been giving your father myrtles for twenty years and he must have had enough of them. Everything in life goes by, and we have used the myrtle long enough; it seems to me that I can properly vary it a little. After twenty years one is not forbidden to change bouquets. I have decided, I am going to buy this pomegranate.—Don't you think, Eolinde, that this will please your father?"

"Oh! ye—ye—yes, it will pl—please him very mu—u—uch."

"But what are you going to buy for him? You must make up your mind, children, for we intend to go to the play after dinner, and it is getting late."

"B—b—bless me!" replied the tall young lady, "I would li—i—ike that fl—fl—flower—you know—you know—it's the—I d—d—don't see it."

"But what flower? tell us its name."

"I d—d—don't reme—e—ember."

"In that case, ask the woman if she has any," said Monsieur Astianax, smiling maliciously, for he very often made fun of the difficulty which his sister had in speaking.

"What a stu—u—u—pid you are, Astianax!" cried the girl, shrugging her shoulders and looking down at her brother as if she were searching for a little dog. "Let me alo—o—one; it's a flow—ower with b—b—bells."

"Bells?"

"No, little bell-flowers—brown."

"Oh, I know what you mean, daughter; it is a—I don't know the name; but come, I saw some over yonder."

And the stout lady, having paid for the pomegranate and hired a porter to carry it, led her daughter to the booth of a dealer who had a large assortment of tulips. Mademoiselle Eolinde examined them for some time, then murmured:

"This isn't what I wanted. No matter, let me see. Oh! they don't smell—they don't smell of anything; I'd rather get something else."

"Well, what? Come, choose."

"Oh! see that fl—flower over there; a m—m—mag—no—"

"The name makes no difference, let us go and buy it."

Mademoiselle Eolinde stopped in front of a magnificent magnolia, which had already flowered in the heat of a greenhouse; she placed her nose upon the lovely white egg-shaped blossom, which, as it opened, exhaled a delicious odor of orange and lemon; then she raised her head and said: "That smells too strong."

"Look here, mamzelle!" cried the flower woman, irritated to see the tall girl take her mother away in another direction, "you mustn't stick your face on our flowers like that! Did anyone ever see such a bean-pole as that

creature who buries her muzzle in the blossom of my magnolia, and then walks off, as if she had been sniffing at my poodle's tail! Go on, you long-legged cockroach! Go somewhere else and buy Indian pinks, they'll suit you better!"

The Glumeau family did not hear, or rather pretended not to hear the somewhat forcible complaints of the woman with the magnolia; they had stopped in front of a booth where there was a large quantity of laurel. Mademoiselle Eolinde, whom the lesson which she had just received had not corrected, smelled several laurel bushes and cried:

"Ah! that sm—smells nasty!"

This time Madame Glumeau hastily dragged her daughter away, saying in her ear:

"Why, Eolinde, do you want to get into a row and have scenes with all these flower women? You shouldn't say such things as that, my girl, especially when you don't buy; and if you won't decide upon what you want, we will go away and you won't have a flower to give your father, who is so fond of them. That will be very nice on his birthday!"

"If you will take my advice, sister," said Monsieur Astianax, "you'll give our father a pot of immortelles, because you see the immortelle means that he will live a long time, and the allusion is easily understood."

"A pot of immortelles!" cried the mother; "they are lovely flowers, upon my word! You are mad, Astianax! You might as well give your father a pot of sweet-basil such as the cobblers have in their stalls.—Look, Eolinde, there is a superb rosebush! come, let us buy that,—that will be your bouquet."

"Oh! but a ro—o—osebush; I wanted s—s—something else."

"That is to say, you don't know what you do want; and this unfortunate messenger who is following us with that huge pomegranate in his arms, looks as if he were swimming in perspiration."

"Why, it isn't so ve—ve—very hot, mamma!"

Madame Glumeau, paying no heed to the lamentations of her daughter, who did not want the rosebush, but did not know what she did want, ordered her messenger to take the flower, then turned to her son and said:

"Now, Astianax, you are the only one who has not chosen a flower, but I believe you told me that you preferred to give your father a bouquet to carry in the hand."

"Yes, dear mamma, because in a bouquet for the hand, you choose different flowers, which have even more meaning when placed side by side. The Turks call that a *selam*; I mean to give my father a *selam*."

"But in what connection? Your father never has claimed to be a Turk, so far as I know! He won't have any idea what your bouquet means."

"I beg your pardon, dear mamma, I will explain the allusion to him."

"All right, but make haste; it seems to me that you might very well have selected your oriental bouquet while we were choosing our plants!"

"I've been looking, but haven't found what I want!"

"But there certainly is no lack of flower girls here. Ah! there is one who is very pretty indeed; if her bouquets resemble her, I think that you will find what you want."

II

VIOLETTE

Madame Glumeau had said nothing beyond the truth, when she observed that the flower girl to whom she pointed was very pretty, for she was speaking of Violette.

Let us then make Violette's acquaintance; it is always pleasant to know a pretty girl, even though she sells bouquets, but especially when she sells nothing else.

Violette was from eighteen to nineteen years of age; her figure was slender and shapely; she was tall enough but not too tall, which, in women, is rather a defect than an advantage; but there was grace in all her movements, and refinement in her simplicity.

Her face was oval; her fine brown hair left bare a forehead which was instinct with innocence and pride. Her eyes too were brown, but their expression was immeasurably sweet and they were fringed by long lashes which imparted to them an infinite charm; the eyebrows were but slightly marked. Her mouth was not very small, but it was intelligent; small mouths, which are unintelligent, of which there are so many, are not nearly so desirable. Lastly, her teeth were white and very regular. As you see, all these things must have combined to make a very pretty girl. Still there are many who possess all Violette's advantages, but whom we pass without being charmed by them; the reason is, that it is not always sufficient to be beautiful in order to attract; a woman must also have in herself that indefinable something which fascinates, which surprises, which allures, which gives expression to the face and charm to the voice. That something is a gift of nature, which coquetry tries in vain to supply, and the flower girl had that gift. Moreover, there was in her speech and in her manners something which distinguished her from her companions. She expressed herself in better language and she was always courteous, even when one did not buy of her. So that Violette was noticed first for her beauty and then for her courtesy. Courtesy is a thing so rare among street peddlers, and even elsewhere! There are so many people who think that they acquire the air of being somebody by affecting an insolent tone and a contemptuous glance! Poor fools! If they did not arouse laughter, they would arouse compassion.

But was this flower girl, who expressed herself in better language than others of her trade, the child of rich people stricken by misfortune? Was it to support destitute and infirm parents that that pretty girl had decided to take up a business for which she was not born?

Not at all. Violette did not know her parents, she did not know whether they still lived, but what she did know perfectly was that they had abandoned her.

Put out to nurse in a small village of Picardie, near Abbeville, she evidently possessed little interest for them, for they had forgotten to pay the woman who had undertaken to replace her mother. The nurse was patient for a long while, but after three years, hearing nothing from her nursling's parents, and being too poor to add a little stranger

to her numerous family, the woman was about to leave the child at the Foundling Hospital, when an old lady who was passing through the village, touched with compassion for the deserted little one, offered the nurse to take charge of her and to take her to Paris with her.

The nurse assented, and took the lady's address, in order that she might write to her if the child's parents should ever claim her.

But who were her parents?

To the lady's question the peasant woman replied:

"Faith, I hardly know, or rather I don't know, at all. As to the mother, I am very sure I never saw her. I was at the nurses' bureau on Rue Sainte-Apolline; a fine gentleman—I guess he was a servant—came into the place, while I was taking the air in the yard; I was the first one he saw, and he asked me if I wanted to take a brat that was born the night before. I says yes; then he says: 'I don't need to look any further; you'll do as well as another; take your bundle and come.'—I went with him; there was a carriage at the door, and I got in with the swell servant. We drove to a street I don't know the name of, he took me into a house, with a concierge, and up to the second floor, into a handsome room. I found a gentleman there, very well dressed, a pretty man with a fine figure; he had a splendid gold chain sticking out of his fob. He was a young man, about thirty-two or thirty-three, more or less. And when he saw the man come in who had brought me there, he says:

"'Come, make haste, Comtois! I don't know what to do with the child! It has been crying until it has burst the drum of my ear, but I can't nurse it. Have you brought a nurse at last?'

"'Yes, monsieur, here's one who will take charge of the little girl.'

"'Ah! that is very lucky!'

"And with that the gentleman, without even looking at me to see how I was built and whether I had much milk, motioned to me to go with him into another room, where I saw a little girl, just come into the world, wriggling on a sofa with cushions; they didn't even have a cradle for her. The gentleman says to me:

"'Take this child and carry it away at once, for it cries enough to split one's head.'

"To that I answers:

"'It will be twenty francs a month, without counting sugar and soap!'

"'All right, that's understood,' he says; and he puts a hundred francs in my hand, saying: 'This is for the first expenses; don't you be afraid, I'll send you money, you shall have plenty of it.'

"At that I makes another reverence and says:

"'I am a Picarde, monsieur, from the village of Coulange, near Abbeville; my name is Marguerite Thomasseau; my husband raises donkeys, and we've had four nurslings already.'

"'All right, take this little one and go.'

"'But, monsieur,' I says, 'what about the *layette*; where's the little one's *layette*?'

"At that, the handsome gentleman looks at his swell servant as if he was surprised, and says:

"'What's this woman talking about? What's a *layette*?'

"The servant who was better instructed than his master, says:

"'Monsieur, it is the child's trousseau, the little things that people give to dress it in.'

"'Oh! the devil! I didn't know that myself, and it seems she didn't think of it either! Never mind, Comtois, give her some of my trousers and waistcoats, give her my old dressing-gown and some linen; the nurse can make them over and we'll send her something else later. Make haste, Comtois. Here, put in this handkerchief too, which belongs to the child's mother, and which I put in my pocket by mistake yesterday.'

"The servant made me up a bundle in a hurry; and a queer *layette* it was, I tell you! I don't believe that any young one ever had one like it; it consisted of a woolen dressing-gown lined with silk, three pairs of broadcloth trousers, six cravats, two white piqué waistcoats and one black satin one, six fine shirts, a pair of suspenders, and a white handkerchief embroidered with a cipher, with a coronet on it. As for the handkerchief, I still have that, I have kept it so that the child might have something that belonged to her parents. However, all that stuff was better than nothing; I took the bundle and they were already turning me out of the room with my nursling, when I remembered that I didn't know anybody's name.

"'Well, monsieur, what's the little one's name, and yours, and your wife's?'

"At that the gentleman made a funny kind of face; he hesitated a long while, as if he was trying to think what answer he could make, and finally he said:

"'The child's name is Evelina—Evelina de Paulausky.—Now go; I will write to you.'

"At that he pushed me out with the child and the bundle. I started back the same day; and since then, and that was three years ago, not a word from the child's parents. Evelina they called her, but we found that name too long and too hard to pronounce, and so, as the child when she was a year old, loved violets and could pick them as she rolled about on the grass, why we just called her *Violette*; you can call her so too, if you choose. She answers to that name better than to Evelina!"

That is what the nurse had told the good woman who took *Violette* to Paris. That charitable person was by no means wealthy, but she had given the child some education. *Violette* had learned to read, to write, and to do some kinds of sewing, but her protectress died before she was very learned. The child was only eleven when she lost her.

Being left alone and without resources, and having too much pride to beg her bread, she went from door to door, to all the people in the quarter, saying:

"Please give me something to do; I am able to work; I know how to knit and sew; I will do anything you want, but employ me, I beg you, for I would rather starve to death than beg and live on the charity of passers-by."

These words indicated a certain pride and a lofty spirit; they indicated above all else *Violette's* horror of idleness, which is the most dangerous of all faults. They were worth more than a letter of recommendation.

A dealer in fruit said to her:

"I know a lady who is looking for a young maid to take her little ones to walk. I will give you her address, you can go to see her, and perhaps she'll hire you. But oh, dear! I am afraid that she'll think you a little too young.—How

old are you?"

"Eleven."

"You must tell her you're fourteen."

"Oh, no! I won't lie, madame; my protectress always told me that that was a very wicked habit."

"Ah! my girl, anyone can see that you are young! If you pass your life without lying, you'll be a famous phenomenon, and they'll exhibit you later for two sous. However, that's your business. You can do as you choose."

Violette went to see the lady who was looking for a young nursemaid. Her first question, as she looked at Violette, was:

"How old are you?"

And when the girl told her the truth, she dismissed her, saying:

"Why, you are much too young! You are only a child yourself; how do you expect me to give you my children to take care of?"

"Oh! I am very prudent, very sensible for my age, madame; inquire at number thirty-two; and then you can give me whatever you please, madame, I don't care; so long as I can live without begging, that is all I ask."

These last words caused the lady to reflect, for there are people who calculate closely on every subject, even when the welfare of their children is concerned; such people are ordinarily the ones who consider it very hard that dogs are ordered to be muzzled. She called Violette back and said:

"Come again to-morrow; I will make inquiries at the house you mention."

The next day Violette became nursemaid, with a hundred francs a year. That sum seemed enormous to the child, who would have taken the place for nothing if it had been suggested to her. And as her mistress lived on Rue de Bondy, she took the two little girls of three or four years to walk every day on the Boulevard, near the Château d'Eau. When it was the day for the flower market, Violette never failed to take the children there, and then she was very happy, for she adored flowers, and even if she had not the means to buy any, on that day she could see them and gaze at them at her leisure.

More than three years passed thus. Violette's mistress had never had to find fault with her little maid, for she had never left for a single instant the children whom it was her duty to take to walk. However, her wages were not increased; to be sure, Violette did not ask for an increase, and to obtain distinction in this world, it is not sufficient to behave oneself well, to have merit or talent—one must ask, ask, and then—ask. And as people who are out of the line do not understand that, they prefer to be undistinguished except by their talent.

The mother of the two little girls whom Violette had in charge left Paris and France; she took her children, but did not take the young nurse. So that Violette was left once more without a home and without occupation. While waiting until chance should throw employment in her way, the girl as a matter of habit went to the Boulevard du Château d'Eau, where she had taken the children so often; and on market days she stopped in front of the flowers and sometimes remained there all day long.

One day, one of the flower women, an honest old soul, who had often noticed the little nurse when she was taking the two children to walk, said to Violette, who seemed to be admiring her bouquets:

"Well, my girl, what have you done with the brats that you always brought here to walk? For I know you, I have looked after you very often; and bless my soul, it don't seem to me that anyone had any reason to complain of you. You didn't run about from one place to another. You didn't talk with a lot of people, as most of the nurses do that have children to take care of! Mon Dieu! if nothing happens to the young ones, it isn't the fault of those young women, who attend to everything else except the children that are in their care!"

"Alas! madame, my mistress has gone to England with her children."

"And you didn't want to leave your country, eh?"

"Oh! I would have been glad to go with madame, but she didn't choose to take me!"

"And she left you like that, without getting another place for you—a girl of your age, who took such good care of her little ones? Ah! that isn't right, that isn't. That mistress of yours can't be good for much!—But what are you doing now, my child?"

"I am looking for another place, madame, but I haven't found it yet. Luckily I saved money at my mistress's; I earned a hundred francs a year!"

"Is that all? Well, upon my word! she wasn't very generous, that mistress of yours!"

"Oh! I had quite enough; I didn't spend anything except to dress myself; and now I have some clothes and sixty francs of my own; I spend so little to live; I get along with five or six sous a day."

"Poor child! In that case, you're not much of a glutton; why, you must live on bread and water."

"I beg pardon, I have a sou's worth of milk every morning; bread dipped in milk is so good!"

"Bless my soul! It is good for those who like milk! But no matter, that diet will soon take away your fresh color. I say, you must be very fond of flowers to look at them so long, as if you wanted to kiss them!"

"Flowers! oh! I am mad over them, madame, I am never tired of gazing at them."

"So, so! and how would you like to sell them, to make bouquets as I do?"

"Make bouquets! live among flowers! you ask me if I would like that? Oh, madame! that would be the happiest life for me. It seems to me that one has nothing more to wish for when one is a flower girl!"

"Well, my child, sit down here, by my side. I am alone, I have no children, and no one depending on me; I am beginning not to be so smart as I used to be; if you choose to stay with me and always be as good—as—as you were when you took the two little girls to walk, why, I will keep you, I will give you part of my profits; in fact, I will make a flower girl of you; does that suit you?"

"Does it suit me,—to be a flower girl! such a pleasant trade! Is it really true, madame? You are not making fun of me?"

"As true as my name is Mère Gazon; and yours?"

"My name is Violette."

"Violette! You see you were destined to be a flower girl."

So Violette took her place beside Mère Gazon; and she was so pleased with the skill and taste with which the girl made her bouquets, that she congratulated herself every day upon having taken her into her employ.

Violette reached the age of fifteen, sixteen, and became so pretty and her figure assumed such graceful proportions that people began to notice the young flower girl, and Mère Gazon's business constantly increased. Then came the lady-killers, the oglers, the gallants, who tried to make love to Violette, but she did not listen to them, or at all events paid no heed to what they said. Moreover, Mère Gazon was there and said to those who paid her companion compliments:

"For heaven's sake, let the child alone! You see well enough that you bother her with your fine words, without head or tail! Go and get your hair curled, that would be better."

But one night, Mère Gazon, who had rather abused currant brandy, which she adored as a cordial, felt an oppression that compelled her to keep her bed. The next day she was worse, and she said to her young companion:

"My dear Violette, I believe I am going to pack up and not open shop any more. I leave you all I have; my stock, my flowers, my furniture, my customers. Always be honest and virtuous, don't let anyone cajole you and I have an idea that you will prosper. If I myself had been more prudent with currant brandy, I might have kept shop much longer! but never mind! that's a small matter! I am glad, at all events, to have you with me to close my eyes."

That is Violette's whole story; that is how the little girl abandoned by her parents had become a flower girl.

III

GEORGET AND CHICOTIN

"We would like a magnificent bouquet, mademoiselle," said Madame Glumeau to Violette.

"Yes," said Mademoiselle Eolinde, "a su—su—superb bou—bou—"

"That isn't all," said Monsieur Astianax, doing his utmost to look at the pretty flower girl with both eyes at once. "I wish to express a certain meaning in presenting a bouquet to my father, so that the flowers must interpret my meaning; I would like a *selam*, mademoiselle; give me a *selam*."

Violette stared at him as she replied:

"I don't know that flower, monsieur; does it grow in boxes or in pots?"

"A *selam* is not a single flower, mademoiselle; it is an arrangement of flowers, which means something particular; it's an oriental bouquet."

"I have no oriental flowers, monsieur."

"But you don't catch my meaning, I mean—"

"Upon my word, Astianax, you are insufferable; you will keep us here two hours when you know that we are in a hurry; select yourself the flowers that you want, and she will make them into a bouquet for you."

Monsieur Astianax, confused by the flower girl's lovely eyes, turned very red and began to rummage among the flowers on the counter, stammering:

"But I don't see—I am looking—I don't find—I would like—haven't you got any?"

"Tell me what flowers you want, monsieur; that will be better than upsetting my whole stock."

But the little fellow could not admire the pretty flower girl enough, and he had no idea what he wanted.

The porter who had in his arms the box with the pomegranate, which was very heavy, and the rosebush, which was not light, said to Madame Glumeau:

"If you're going to be here long, lady, I am going to get a basket to put these things in."

"Oh, no! it isn't worth while, messenger; we are going at once.—Well, my son, have you chosen your flowers?"

"I don't find what I am looking for."

"Bless my soul! Eolinde, is not that Cousin Michonnard, standing over there?"

"Yes, yes, mamma, it is she."

"Ah! if she sees us, we are lost; she will follow us wherever we go; we shall not be able to get rid of her, for she is quite capable of inviting herself to dinner. You know that your father doesn't like her because she always says that he doesn't look well. Let's go along at once before she sees us.—Come, Astianax."

"But my dear mother, I haven't any bouquet."

"It is your own fault, you take too long to decide. You can present your father with a Savoy cake with his monogram, that will be just as respectful. Come, come!—Follow us, messenger."

And this time, without listening to the remonstrances of her son, who declared that a cake did not express his meaning, the stout lady took his arm and dragged him away, but not until the little fellow had darted a random glance in Violette's direction. In a few moments the Glumeau family had disappeared.

Thereupon, a young man in a blouse, with a cap on his head, and with a shrewd, clever face and a slender figure which denoted sixteen years at most, although he was past seventeen, began to laugh as he looked at the pretty flower girl, beside whom he had stopped, and said to her:

"Well, my word! there's customers for you! They come here and handle and move your flowers and spoil them, and then go away without buying anything."

"Dear me, Monsieur Georget, that's the way it is in business; one can't always sell."

"But the young man would have liked to stay, I fancy. What eyes he made at you, zigzag! A man shouldn't be allowed to squint like that! I am sure it would exempt him from the conscription; for when a man looks all ways at once, he can hardly fire straight at the enemy.—But no matter, you have turned his head."

"Mon Dieu! to hear you, Georget, one would think that everybody is in love with me!"

"Well, it seems to me that you don't lack suitors and gallants. There are days when a fellow can't get near your shop, there are so many people around you!"

"I have no reason to complain, that is true. I sell a great deal. My bouquets seem to please."

"Oh! your bouquets—and yourself too. When the dealer is good-looking, that makes business good; and deuce take it! you are mighty good-looking."

"You know very well, Georget, that nothing tires me so much as compliments!"

"Then you must get tired very often! you receive them all day!"

"I can't prevent the gentlemen who buy flowers of me from talking nonsense to me! but it seems to me that you might get along without it."

"So what I say to you is nonsense, is it?"

"Instead of idling away your time every market day, walking back and forth in front of my stand, wouldn't you do better to work?"

"Do you mean that you don't like to have me stop in front of your shop sometimes, mamzelle?"

"I don't say that, but I ask you if you would not do better to work."

"All right, mamzelle, that's enough. I won't stand near you any more, never fear! If you don't like it, why, I——"

"Oh! how wrong-headed you are, Monsieur Georget! a body can't give you a little advice, eh?"

But the young messenger was no longer listening to the pretty flower girl; he walked away with a very pronounced frown, and sat down upon one of the steps of the Château d'Eau. He had hardly settled down when another youngster of nineteen, tall, strong and active, with his cap cocked over one ear in true roistering fashion, came and stood in front of him, crying:

"Ah! here's Georget! here's my little Georget! I am glad of that; I thought he must have been swallowed by the whale on exhibition over yonder, behind us. To be sure, I know that it isn't alive; but never mind, you might have crawled into its mouth. I say, Georget, have you seen the whale?"

"Let me alone, I don't feel like talking!"

"Well! I paid to see the whale, because as I'd never seen the sea, I said to myself: 'That will give me an idea of its inhabitants.'—But confound it! how I was sold! Just fancy—I went into a long, narrow place, like a corridor with boarded walls. I couldn't see anything, no water at all. I said to myself: 'Where in the deuce is the whale?' but there was a fellow in a sailor's suit, walking up and down the corridor, singing out at the top of his lungs: 'See, ladies and gentlemen, look, examine this rare animal! It's the first whale that's been seen in France since the Roman conquest! It was harpooned at Havre and would have been brought to Paris alive, if there had been room enough for it in a first-class carriage!'—When I heard that, I squinted up my eyes to find the marine monster. When I first went into the corridor, I had noticed something like a pile of earth, on the floor between two boards, and I said to myself: 'It seems that they are going to plant flowers in the place to brighten it up!' But not at all: that black thing, between two boards, was the whale! I discovered it when I reached the end of the corridor, because then I saw a kind of head, with a beard, at one end of what I had taken for earth. I was mad, I tell you! I regretted my money, and I said to the sailor: 'If you'd told me beforehand that I was going to see a whale in a box, and dry as a herring, I wouldn't have come into your old barrack!'—Well, little Georget, why don't you laugh?"

"I tell you to let me alone, I don't feel like laughing!"

"Why, what under the sun is the matter with the little mummy! He's got to be as melancholy as an empty stomach for some time past! Come, I propose to cheer you up; I'll treat you to a glass at the wine merchant's on Rue Basse."

"Thanks, I am not thirsty."

"And then you will come to the theatre this evening with me. I don't mean the Délasses, or the Funambs, or the Petit-Lazare; I go to the big theatres now; I have become an habitué of the Folies-Dramatiques! Nothing less! You see, when one has seen Mamzelle Duplessis, in '*Une Mauvaise Nuit Est Bientôt Passée*,' one doesn't care to see anything else! It is magnificent! Mamzelle Duplessis is in a night jacket embroidered with lace, like a bride preparing to retire. Dieu! how lovely she is! I dream of her every night as I go to bed! And then, Monsieur Christian, in '*La Perruque de Mon Oncle*!' When he says: 'Ah! fichtre! sacrebleu! hush or I will thrash you!' or something else in that line, I tell you it's amusing! I laugh until I make a show of myself! And just now Monsieur Christian passed here—you didn't see him—the real man, the one who plays at the Folies; and he bought a bunch of violets, and smiled because I said to him: 'Monsieur Christian, do you want me to carry you?'—Ha! ha! that made him laugh!—Well, Georget, I say, Georget! you little wretch of a Georget! what in the world has somebody been doing to you, Gringalet?"

"If you call me Gringalet, I'll punch your head, do you understand?"

"Oho! how ugly the little rascal is! What have you been treading on to-day?"

"I may be small without being a Gringalet, or a wretch. I am seventeen years, eight months and ten days."

"You look as if you were about twelve or less!"

"The looks make no difference; I am not a child any more, and I don't propose to be treated like an urchin."

"Ah! you wish to be looked up to, perhaps?"

"If anyone insults me, he must fight me."

"Tell me what you have eaten this morning? You are not so ugly as this usually!"

"But you are teasing me! saying things that make me angry!"

"Then as I am in the wrong, thrash me right away and let's have it over with! But I don't propose to fight with you, because I am your friend, and I like you with all your ill-humor! Come, strike me!"

As he spoke, Chicotin Patatras—for such was the name of this last individual—coolly planted himself in front of his friend, and stooped as if he were all ready to be beaten. But when he saw that, Georget rose, his anger vanished, and he offered his hand to his comrade, saying:

"Can you think of such a thing? I, strike you! that would be pretty! Come, it is all over, I am not angry any more; nor you either, are you?"

"Oh! I haven't been at all!"

"You see, Chicotin, there are many people who say that you are a ne'er-do-well, a brawler, and a sot; they have nicknamed you Patatras, because wherever you go, you always arrive like a bomb and turn everything topsy-turvy!"

But I do you justice, and I have always defended you; and if you are noisy, and if you do sometimes throw a whole company into confusion, you have a good heart all the same, and when you are fond of anybody, he can always rely on you."

"Pardi! a man is a good friend, or he isn't. A door is open or shut, one or the other! that's all I know!—Well, will you go to the Folies-Dramatiques with me to-night? I'll treat you; I have some cash; I carried a bouquet to the young lady! Ah! bless my soul! that bouquet evidently gave pleasure, for she put five francs in my hand; the gentleman had given me as much! in all, two hind wheels, six times as much as the bouquet was worth! But these lovers! tell me who else is so generous, when they are satisfied, and are in funds? 'Tis love, love, love, that makes the world go round!"

"Oh, yes! the rich lovers, they are happy enough! they can make their sweethearts handsome presents!"

"Bah! they are not the ones I envy, especially as I have noticed that the ones who are loved the best are not the ones who give the most presents! A little more pains is taken to deceive them, that's all! I see so many things, when I am doing errands, opening carriage doors, or asking for theatre checks! But the actors! Oh, the actors! when I can be employed by one of them, then I am perfectly happy! I went on the stage once, that is to say, under the stage, at the Ambigu! It's mighty amusing, I tell you, and you see a lot of things—that you don't expect to see!—But you are not listening to me, Georget. Ah! I can guess what you're thinking about, with your eyes always turned in that direction! So it is all over, is it? You're in love for good and all!"

"Hush, Chicotin, don't say that, I beg you!"

"I say it because I see it; I don't need to be a sleep-walker to guess that! You're in love with the pretty flower girl, Mamzelle Violette!"

"I never told anybody so!"

"You don't need to tell it, it's plain enough; that's what upsets you so, and changes your whole disposition, and gives you a sour look, a dismal expression, like Monsieur Goujet of the Gaité, when he plays the traitors, the abductors who carry off young girls! Ah! how magnificent he was in *'Martin et Bamboche!'* I was a little bit of a fellow when I saw that, but I still have the piece in my head all the same, it impressed me so. He had on a white coat, rather neat, did Monsieur Goujet; he played the part of a well-dressed son, who treated his father like the deuce!—Confound it! He isn't listening to me because I've stopped talking about the flower girl! Why, is this passion of yours making you an idiot? As if a man ever fell in love for good at your age! For my part, I like pretty girls too; but it doesn't make me so stupid as it does you! it never lasts more than a week! Let your beard grow, then you'll have the right to pose as a sentimental lover! Ah! now he turns as red as a turkey-cock! What is going on? Ah! I see; because two fine gentlemen, two swells have stopped and are looking at the flower girl's wares. I suppose you'd like it if nobody ever bought anything of your pretty dealer? She'd do a fine business then!"

"Oh! but I know those two young men; they come very often to buy flowers of her and they always talk nonsense to her; especially the tallest one! He actually dared one time to ask her to be his mistress! Ah! if big Chopard hadn't held me back, I'd have jumped on him; I'd have scratched him and bitten him!"

"Hoity-toity! is that the way you propose to treat Mamzelle Violette's customers? You'll give her shop a good reputation!"

"That's what Chopard said, to calm me down!"

"Besides, don't all these dandies—that is what they call these fellows—don't all these dandies talk that way to women, especially when they are pretty? It's their way; they must always play the lady-killer; if they didn't, they wouldn't be dandies! But I know one of those young men, too; the tallest one is an author,—that means a man who writes plays; his name is Jéricourt; I've carried letters to his room sometimes from the other one, who isn't so tall; that one has employed me often; just now he's very attentive to an actress at the Folies, a little blonde with black eyes, who plays such parts as Rigolette,—Mademoiselle Dutailis. I'll bet that she's the one he's going to buy a bouquet for, and then he'll take her to dinner at Bonvalet's; and when she's in the cast, they keep sending me to the theatre, to the box office, to ask how far they have got. I always ask a handsome man who is sitting inside the office, and he answers with a sly look: 'Go and tell mademoiselle that she has time enough to eat another course, provided that it isn't carp, because the bones might make her lose her cue.'"

"Oh, yes! I know well enough that it isn't the light-haired one who is dangerous to Violette; it's the other one!"

"And why should the other one be dangerous, when everyone says that the little flower girl is virtuous? You yourself told me so a hundred times."

"Certainly she is virtuous, perfectly virtuous. If she wasn't, if she was anything else, do you suppose I'd be mad over her as I am?"

"Then what difference does it make to you whether people pay her compliments and make love to her? She won't listen to them."

"Who can tell? A young girl sometimes ends by allowing herself to be deceived by all these soft speeches. They offer her dresses, jewels, entertainments, love—it's all very tempting. Look, see how that tall, scented fellow is leaning over her counter to speak to her! I don't care; no matter what happens, I am going to tell that man to act different from that!"

"Upon my word! be good enough to stay here. You don't like to see him talking with the flower girl; very good, let me fix him; I haven't been nicknamed Patatras for nothing!"

IV

TWO WELL-KNOWN YOUNG MEN

Two young men had, in fact, stopped in front of the pretty flower girl's booth; each of them was from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age; their eccentric costumes marked them out as dandies, or at least as persons who strove to appear to be such.

Especially the shorter one, who wore plaid trousers of very bright colors, each plaid being so large that a single one extended from the thigh to the calf; his light sack coat hardly came below his waist, and when he bent forward a little, disclosed the whole seat of his trousers. He wore on his head a broad-brimmed gray hat with a long nap; and he had stuck in one eye a small bit of glass, set in tortoise shell, which, when not in use, hung down over his waistcoat of buff piqué, at the end of a black ribbon. He was, for all this dandified equipment, a very good-looking youth, with black eyes, a shapely aquiline nose, a small mouth with red lips, fine teeth, a pretty pink and white complexion, a little dimple in his chin, very light whiskers, a pointed beard, and with all that, a stupid expression which was not in the least misleading.

This young man had been a clerk in a business house with a salary of eight hundred francs, and a slight bonus at the end of the year; at that time, as may be imagined, his dress was much less elegant, and it was difficult for him to follow the fashions. But a distant relative died, and unexpectedly left him sixty thousand francs in cash. This unlooked-for fortune, which enabled him to gratify his dearest wishes, his fondest hopes, had almost turned his brain.

First of all, he began by correcting his certificates of baptism; his name was Benoît Canard, a name which struck the ear unpleasantly, and had nothing romantic or refined about it; he adopted the name of Alfred de Saint-Arthur, which was certain to attract the attention of the ladies. When a man's name is Alfred de Saint-Arthur, he must inevitably belong to the *haute*, as the lorettes of the Bréda quarter say.

Next, Alfred soon resigned his place, hired a dainty apartment, purchased a cabriolet and a horse, and patronized one of the first tailors in Paris; he affected the society of actresses, choosing those who were most talked about, and who had led their lovers into the most follies; for, although Monsieur Alfred de Saint-Arthur had some inclination for that life of dissipation, of parade and extravagances which some favorites of fortune lead, and which is excusable only in those who really have the means to support it, the thing that especially delighted the young man was to show himself, to put himself in evidence with a fashionable woman, to display himself in the proscenium box of a theatre, or in a calèche in the Bois du Boulogne; to make a great noise when he entered a restaurant, to declare all the private rooms inconvenient, to shout at the waiters, to find fault with everything, always to talk very loud, so that everybody might hear him, to smoke only eight sou cigars, and to see everybody turn to look at him when he was out driving.

In a word, what Alfred desired was to create a sensation; the same pleasures, enjoyed in private, without show, without witnesses, or in curtained boxes at the theatre, would have seemed to him tasteless, insipid and of no account; but to attract attention, to cause a sensation, to be noticed on entering a theatre or a concert hall, was to him supreme happiness. He did not suspect that many people said when they saw him:

"They say that he has already run through thirty thousand francs with her!"

"I believe him to be quite enough of a fool for that! Indeed, he looks it!"

"What an utterly absurd costume!"

And it was to procure this reputation that young Alfred had run through more than thirty thousand francs in one year; that was more than half of the fortune he had inherited. If he continued to live in the same way, he had not enough for another year; but once started on the path of folly, some people keep on, not knowing how to stop. The crash which awaits them, and in which they will involve some too confiding friends, is there before them, inevitable, if they persist in following the same road; they know it, and still they go on. Are they fools or knaves? they necessarily deserve both titles.

The other individual was not so good-looking as Monsieur Alfred de Saint-Arthur, but he had not his stupid look; indeed, there was in his eyes a shrewd expression which sometimes turned to mockery. Neither his trousers nor his coat were so exaggerated as his friend's, but all the world did not turn to look at him; he had no fashionable mistress upon whom he squandered money, but he strove to be on the best terms with the mistresses of his friends; he did not waste his fortune, because he had none, and he had not left his place, because he had never had any.

However, as one must needs try, in society, to have some talent, some profession, or some rank, in default of fortune, Jéricourt had become an author. He had not stopped to consider whether he had the necessary vocation and intellect for that; he had said to himself: "I propose to be an author;" and as one ordinarily effects his purpose by dint of perseverance and unbounded self-assurance, Jéricourt, by persistently frequenting the café where the young men who write for the stage ordinarily gather, had insinuated himself among them, playing billiards with one, dominoes with another; he had become one of their intimates, and then had begun to talk of plays, of plots, of original ideas which he claimed to have had; and when someone would say to him:

"That is old, that subject has already been treated fifty times!" he would exclaim:

"I don't see why it shouldn't be treated fifty-one times! A thing that has succeeded so often will succeed again. It is mere folly to try to do something new; one risks failure; whereas, by following roads already marked out, one is certain to arrive without hindrance."

Jéricourt found people of his opinion; and thus it was that he became an author by revamping what others had done before him. And he ended by believing himself to be an inventor, a man of genius, and by making idiots of the type of his friend Saint-Arthur believe it also. The number of fools is infinite!

"Well, my pretty flower girl, I must have a wonderful, a stupendous bouquet!" said Alfred, halting in front of Violette; "it's for a lady who knows what's what, and who has already had the most beautiful bouquets that are made in Paris,—isn't that so, Jéricourt?—*Sapristi!* I haven't a cigar; Jéricourt, my dear fellow, make me a cigarette, will you?"

"You don't like them."

"Ah! it is true that I have become so accustomed to panatelas—I say! look at that little woman yonder! She turned around to look at me. If I weren't in such a hurry, I'd follow her."

"Aha! would you be unfaithful to Zizi Dutailis?"

"Oh! pardieu! a little amourette of a moment.—Make me a cigarette.—Well, flower girl! you don't show me anything."

"Why, monsieur, you see what I have; choose for yourself."

"Choose for myself! why, all this stuff is horrible! these bouquets are good for nobody but circus riders! I don't want any of these. I told you that I wanted something wonderful, such a bouquet as never yet was seen."

"I will make you up one!"

"All right! but hurry. Zizi is waiting for me, and she doesn't like to wait; her nerves are all upset when I am late."

"Here's your cigarette."

"Thanks, my boy. Have you fire?"

"Always, when I am before this fascinating flower girl. Pray look at those eyes! did you ever see anything more alluring?"

"True! for a flower girl's eyes, they are very fair."

"And that nose, that mouth, and that cruel air, which would be so becoming to her if it were not genuine!"

"Ah! mademoiselle is cruel, is she?"

"Alas! yes, my dear Alfred.—Would you believe that for nearly a month I have been sighing at her feet, and without making any progress?"

"The deuce, my boy, you don't know how to go about it! You tempt me to try my hand with the flower girl. If I should undertake it, I will wager that the affair would go faster,—eh, my girl?"

As he spoke, Alfred tried to take Violette's arm; but she struck him across the fingers with a bunch of roses and lilacs that she held; and as there were some thorns in the bunch, the young dandy made a wry face as he withdrew his hand.

"*Bigre!* she has scratched my fingers! Is this flower girl a Lucretia?"

"I told you that she resisted me, and yet you choose to meddle!"

"She plays the prude; but if I had time! I am terribly afraid of being late. Zizi will be angry; she plays to-night, and she is much more nervous when she plays! You are coming to dine with us, Jéricourt, are you not?"

"Impossible."

"Bah! why impossible?"

"Because I dine with this lovely girl, with the flower girl.—Isn't it true, Violette, that you will dine with me to-day?"

"Monsieur, I thought that I answered you the other day in such a way that you would not give me any more such invitations."

"My dear love, you are too fascinating to remain virtuous long; why shouldn't you give me the preference? I will give you your own apartment, pretty furniture, pretty dresses; the theatre every evening; that's the life that awaits you!"

"I prefer to sell my bouquets, monsieur."

"That's absurd! Unless you have some passion that closes your heart to me, you ought to yield to me."

"No, monsieur, I feel no sort of obligation to you."

"Ha! ha! ha! poor Jéricourt! he fails in his suit to a flower girl! That will make Zizi laugh! I'll tell her at dinner.—I say, my pretty girl, don't make my bouquet all white, please. The other day I offered one like that to Zizi, and she declared that it looked like a cauliflower."

"There, monsieur, how is this? Do you like it?"

"Why, yes, it isn't bad; it has some style! I think that it will produce an effect.—Come,—Jéricourt, as Mademoiselle Violette refuses to dine with you, it seems to me that you can accept my invitation. If I don't bring you, Zizi will be sulky; she is much livelier when you are there; that is easily understood, for you make her laugh, you make puns, and she declares that there is no such thing as a good dinner without puns."

"I tell you again, Alfred, that Mademoiselle Violette will not be inexorable; why, I propose to launch her in society, to make her the fashion, for I have all the small newspapers at my disposal."

"He is telling you the truth, my girl, and the small newspapers are the only ones that are read nowadays, for they are much more amusing than the large ones. For my part, I know nothing better than the *Tintamarre!* Dieu! the *Tintamarre!*; there's a newspaper that always drives away the blues! I learn puns from it and I repeat them to Zizi; but unfortunately I don't remember them very well, so that she doesn't understand them.—Ah! what a beautiful bouquet!—Well, my dear fellow, will you come?"

And the pretty young man with the light whiskers, holding his enormous bouquet in one hand, tried with the other to lead away his friend, who, half leaning over the flower girl's counter, was gazing at her with his face close to hers, although she did her utmost to move away from him.

It was at this moment that Chicotin Patatras, who had spied one of his cronies a few steps from Violette's booth, ran to him and tripped him up,—a method of beginning a conversation decidedly fashionable among street urchins. The friend, taken by surprise, fell upon the sidewalk, and as he rose, saw Chicotin laughing and making fun of him, and apparently challenging him to retaliate. He immediately started to run after him, which was what young Patatras hoped that he would do. When he saw that his comrade was about to overtake him, he jumped back in such a way as to collide with the persons who stood in front of Violette's booth.

Chicotin had hoped to fall on Jéricourt, but having failed to calculate the distance accurately, he collided violently with the young dandy, Alfred de Saint-Arthur. The shock was so sudden and so unexpected by Alfred, whose back was turned to the passers-by, that he fell forward with his face against the flower girl's wares; and as the counter was not strong enough to hold the weight of his body, it collapsed under the young man.

Violette uttered a loud exclamation when she saw her flowers scattered over the concrete, and Monsieur de Saint-Arthur apparently trying to swim among them.

Jéricourt, taken by surprise by this unexpected mishap, also received a kick or two from Chicotin, for the latter, still pursued by his comrade, who finally overtook him, began with him a struggle which was all in jest, but in which, although they were merely fooling, the young men dealt each other blows so lustily applied that everybody who was near them received some.

"Will you stop, or go somewhere else and fight, you clowns?" cried Jéricourt. "Just look at what you have done! All of the girl's flowers are on the ground!"

"Ah! it's that good-for-nothing Patatras again!" said Violette; "he is always doing something of the kind; he must always be making trouble somewhere! It's outrageous; I am going to complain to the inspector."

"Oh, I beg pardon, excuse me, Mamzelle Violette," said Chicotin, rising, "you must know that I didn't fall against your stall on purpose. It's Chopard's fault; why did he chase me when I tried to get out of the way behind your customers?"

"Why did you come and trip me up when I wasn't saying anything to you?"

"I'll do it again when I choose, you long *bobèche*!"

"Oh, yes! just come and try! I'll show you!"

"Sapristi! are you going to begin again, you scoundrels, instead of picking up these bouquets which you knocked down?"

"But your friend has fallen too, monsieur, and he doesn't get up!—Help him! Perhaps he's hurt himself!"

At these words from Violette, Jéricourt condescended at last to pay some attention to his companion; with the assistance of Chicotin, he succeeded, not without difficulty, in placing him on his feet; for Alfred was almost suffocated; two rosebuds had been forced into each nostril, and had entered far enough to close them hermetically; and as he had in addition a bunch of gilly-flowers over his mouth, he could not breathe at all, and was beginning to turn purple. Once upon his feet, he opened his mouth as if he proposed to swallow everything in his neighborhood, and shook his head to try to rid himself of the two rosebuds, whose thorny stems tickled the lower part of his face unpleasantly. But he could not succeed; Jéricourt had to pull one of the stems and Chicotin the other, to uncork his nose. This operation was not performed without a number of shrieks from Monsieur de Saint-Arthur, but his nose at last recovered its air current, and everybody's mind was at ease.

When the young dandy recovered all his faculties, the thing that troubled him most was that he had broken one of his suspenders, and that his trousers on that side were not held in place.

"All sorts of misfortunes at once," cried Alfred; "I have broken my left suspender. But who was it, then, who came down on me like a bomb and pushed me onto that counter?"

"Excuse me, master, my excellency, I did it by accident, and not on purpose, for I was fooling with Chopard."

"What, you scoundrel, was it you?—Ah! I recognize you; I have employed you more than once."

"Oh! I remember very well! You are one of those generous and distinguished gentlemen that a man doesn't forget. I have often opened your carriage door, master, and you are always with such pretty ladies, ladies from the theatre, and so well dressed, that everybody looks at you. Shall I wait at Monsieur Bonvalet's, master, to see if you want to send me to find out how far they've got in the play?"

"All right, all right, we'll see. After all, as he didn't do it on purpose—And my bouquet, what became of that in the scrimmage?"

"Here it is, monsieur," said Violette; "luckily nothing happened to it."

"It's my broken suspender that worries me most; my trousers are all creased on that side! I'd give thirty francs for a pair of suspenders."

"Would you like mine, master?"

"No, thanks! That would look nice!"

"I'll go and buy you a pair at the druggist's on Rue du Temple."

"What does the idiot say?" muttered Jéricourt; "suspenders at a druggist's! do you propose to buy them made of marshmallow paste?"

"At all events I can't stop here any longer," cried Alfred; "Zizi will make a horrible row; she will be in an infernal humor; and if she sees that my trousers are creased, it will be much worse! And she will see it, for she always looks at them first when I join her; she is so particular about dress; she said to me once: 'A man who doesn't have morocco straps to his boots shall never step foot inside my door!'—Well, Jéricourt, are you coming?"

Tall Jéricourt decided at last to go away with his friend; for the flower girl, busily engaged in picking up her flowers, did not seem disposed to laugh, and he saw that he must needs abandon the idea of being listened to for that day at least. So he walked away, arm-in-arm with Alfred de Saint-Arthur, who, as he walked, did his utmost to hold his trousers up. When he saw the two young men take their leave, Chicotin Patatras nodded his head to Georget, who was not very far away, and who answered with a smile. And Violette, as she tried to replace her flowers in order upon her counter, did not fail to notice that pantomime.

V

A CONCIERGE'S LODGE

In a house of respectable appearance on Rue d'Angoulême, about half-past eleven one evening, the street bell was pulled so violently that it caused Monsieur Baudoin, the concierge, to leap from his chair, upon which he was beginning to doze, while his wife Hildegarde took advantage of his nodding to open a small cupboard and take therefrom a bottle, the neck of which she proceeded to introduce into her mouth, and took several swallows of a fluid which she seemed to enjoy greatly.

Baudoin the concierge was a tall, thin man, with a pale face and light hair, who had passed his fiftieth year, but was still very straight, and as active as a young man. To his occupation of concierge, he added that of clerk in a stage office, which kept him only until six o'clock. He was an honest man, to whom one could fearlessly entrust his house and his treasure; he did promptly whatever he was ordered to do, unless he did not fully understand; but in that case it was not safe to reproach him, for Baudoin lost his temper very readily, having an immeasurable self-esteem and claiming that he never made a mistake. When he did lose his temper, Baudoin swore like a trooper, and turned as red as a turkey-cock.

Hildegarde, the concierge's wife, was two or three years older than her husband; she had once been pretty and sentimental; she was not very well preserved, and her inclination to sentiment having with age become diverted to

brandy, Madame Baudoin had neglected herself considerably; there was a deplorable carelessness in her dress, which resulted in nothing ever being in place. Baudoin, who was always neat and decently dressed, often reproached his wife for her heedlessness in that respect, and as he had also discovered her unlucky fondness for liquor, he sometimes added to his reproaches lessons of an impressive sort, which made Hildegarde bellow loudly, and promise never to give way again to her miserable failing; but she never failed to forget that promise, whenever she thought that her husband would know nothing about it.

Moreover, Madame Baudoin was a genuine type of concierge: talkative, inquisitive, gossiping, scandal-loving, incautious, not evil-minded at bottom, but capable of setting the whole quarter at odds with remarks made without ill-intent. Her husband often scolded her for it; but "what's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh!"

At the jingling of the bell, and the somersault performed by her husband, Hildegarde, bewildered, and realizing that she had not time to replace the bottle of brandy in the cupboard, hastily put it on the floor between her feet, and then sat down, thus having her dear bottle in the place where the open air tradeswomen put their foot-warmers.

"Didn't someone ring?" said Baudoin, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes, my dear, yes, someone certainly did!" replied his wife, without moving from her chair.

"Well, then, draw the cord, Hildegarde; you're right near it."

"You can draw it much easier yourself, my dear; you have only to put out your arm and lean forward a bit."

"Look here, why won't you pull the cord, when you're right beside it? What sort of way is that to behave?"

"Why—why, you see I pulled it just now when the tenant of the first floor came in, so it's your turn."

"Ah! so this is a new idea you've got into your head! Madame is afraid that she will pull the cord oftener than I, who have just come in, all tired and out of breath after running about Paris all day! What a lazy hussy!"

"Mon Dieu! is it possible for a man to be as ugly as this to his wife! to be so unwilling to do anything for her! Ah! Monsieur Baudoin, how you have changed!"

While this little dialogue was taking place between the couple employed to take care of the house, the person who had rung remained at the door, which is rarely pleasing when one returns home at night. A second peal at the bell, much more violent than the first, announced that he was losing patience.

Baudoin decided to pull the cord, but as he did so he said to his wife:

"Ah! *bigre!* you shall pay for this, Hildegarde! by all that's good! I promise you that."

Hildegarde made no reply, but continued to sit over her bottle. Someone came in and closed the street door; and soon a man appeared at the concierge's lodge, and said curtly:

"Give me my light."

"Oh! yes, Monsieur Malberg; this minute, Monsieur Malberg.—Hildegarde, just take Monsieur Malberg's candlestick from the cupboard by you, light it at our lamp, or rather light it with a match, for the chimney of our lamp is cracked and it might break in your hand.—You are just from the theatre, I suppose, Monsieur Malberg? They say that they are giving a fine play there just now; I don't know which theatre, but no matter, it seems that it's fine, all the same! You have been to see it, of course?"

"I have been where I chose to go, and it is none of your business," replied the tenant, in a tone which did not invite further conversation. "Well! what about my light? Are you going to give it to me to-night? or do you intend to keep me waiting here as long as you did in the street?"

"What, Hildegarde, haven't you lighted Monsieur Malberg's light yet? Look here, what are you about? God forgive me, Monsieur Malberg, but I believe that my wife is getting deaf or idiotic; something's the matter with her to-night; it isn't possible—yes, she may have been tipping. You know her unlucky failing, which will lead her to perdition! and it isn't for lack of my trying to correct it by every means that I can think of."

Whereupon Hildegarde, who had her reasons for not stirring from her chair, made haste to reply:

"Oh, yes! the means you use are very nice! I advise you to boast of them; you ought to be ashamed of them! a man with an education, who has clerks under him, in an office, to raise his hand to his wife! Yes, Monsieur Malberg, I don't blush to confess that Monsieur Baudoin has the baseness to strike me! that's a nice thing to do, ain't it?"

But the man to whom these questions were addressed, observing that no one thought of giving him his light, pushed open the door of the lodge, took his candlestick, lighted the candle with a piece of paper, and went upstairs without another word to the concierge and his wife, who continued their conversation.

"Well, Hildegarde, do you see what you've done? Here's Monsieur Malberg had to light his candle himself! what will he think of us?"

"Oh! I don't care what he thinks! he's an agreeable man, that tenant! a fellow who never talks, who hardly answers when you speak to him, and always in a short, surly tone, as if he was always angry!"

"It is true that he seldom laughs; but still perhaps that's his nature; there are people who enjoy being dismal. However, he's a man who occupies an apartment at eleven hundred francs, and who pays on the dot, without having to be reminded that it is rent day, and who has very handsome furniture, and mirrors in every room, so that the proprietor has a very high regard for him."

"Oh! I don't say that he's a vagabond! but why doesn't he keep a maid, who'd come to our lodge in the evening and talk, as decent people always do, instead of that miserable blackamoor, that yellow negro, who doesn't know how to do anything but wax his floor and polish his boots? as if you could call that a servant! He ought to hire me to do his housework; that's my line!"

"You forget, Hildegarde, that the landlord doesn't want you to do housework. Of course, if you went away while I am at my office, there wouldn't be anybody but the cat to look after the lodge and answer questions!"

"A fine job this is, where the concierge's wife isn't allowed to do housework! That was my only ambition."

"Oh, yes! the fact is that you were the cause of our being discharged from the lodge we had before this, because you did housework for the men on the fourth floor and drank all their liquor."

"That isn't true, it's a slander!"

"Let's not go back to that. I am mortified that Monsieur Malberg had to light his candle himself; it's a stain upon our good name."

"Well then, you ought to have lighted it for him, if you have that on your conscience!"

"Hold your tongue, Hildegarde; you're very unreasonable to-night, you have something bad to say about everybody. You find fault because Monsieur Malberg has a yellow negro to work for him, and you don't seem to know that that is very distinguished. Swell people always have colored servants in their employ."

"It's a miserable fashion. But still, if that miserable Pingo or Ponceau—I never know what his name is—was only agreeable."

"Pongo!"

"Oh! what a dog of a name! Pongo! But he never talks, the blackamoor; or else he talks to himself, and says things that I don't understand; I believe that he talks Morocco!"

"Come, Hildegarde, it's almost twelve o'clock; go to bed, that's the best thing you can do."

"Everybody hasn't come in."

"Yes they have, everybody except little Georget, who lives up under the roof, with his mother.—By the way, how is the poor woman to-day?"

"Not very well; she's had more fainting fits this afternoon, and I thought she was going *to put out her gas*."

"And her son hasn't come home, at midnight! that's what I call a ne'er-do-well, a downright scamp! Hildegarde, heaven didn't give us any children, and I give thanks for it in my heart; because they aren't always honey for parents, and often absinthe rules the roost, as I see in the case of Mère Georget!"

"Absinthe—absinthe—I don't hate that! it helps the digestion!"

"Oh! bless my soul! you don't hate any liquid; but I know that absinthe is bad for the health; I've heard some of the clerks at the office talking about two talented actors who played at the theatre and who put an end to themselves with absinthe; without counting several others who are in a fair way to do the same thing!"

"Bah! that's all nonsense!"

"Come, Hildegarde, go to bed; I will come in a little while; and if little Georget isn't in at the quarter, I will leave him outside; I can't waste my oil for anyone who never makes it up to me. Well, you don't move; are you fastened to your chair to-night?"

"Go to bed first, Baudoin; I'll sit up for the young man, and put the lodge in order."

"You know very well that I am not in the habit of going to bed before you. I see your scheme: you will wait until I am asleep and then go to the cupboard to say a word or two to the bottle!"

"Oh! the idea of my going to the cupboard! It's much more likely to be you, for you like brandy too."

"I like it reasonably, like a man with some self-respect, who doesn't choose to make a brute of himself.—Hildegarde, go to bed."

"I don't feel sleepy."

"Hildegarde, we are going to have trouble! Will you go to bed at once?"

"You pester me——"

"Hildegarde, I shall be compelled to resort to severe means. Why, you certainly are glued to your chair; this isn't natural, I suspect some trick. Ah! I see! I'll bet that the bottle isn't in the cupboard."

And Baudoin rose to go to the cupboard, but as his wife was sitting in front of it and did not move, he pushed her roughly aside, whereupon she reeled, and almost instantly uttered a cry of distress so heartrending that her husband feared that he had hurt her. But it was not Hildegarde who was hurt, it was the bottle under her skirts, which she had involuntarily upset, and which had broken, overflowing the lodge with all the liquor which it contained.

"I say! what's all this?" cried Baudoin, when he found a stream flowing between his feet; but soon the odor which spread through the room left him in no doubt as to the identity of the liquid.

"It is brandy; she had the bottle under her skirt; what a vile trick!"

"Yes, and you made me break it! that's the worst of it, you brute! Such splendid brandy!"

"Hildegarde, you persist in your debauchery; I am going to give you a taste of the broomstick."

"Touch me if you dare! I'll call the watch! I'll make a disturbance in the house!"

Meanwhile Baudoin, who was in the habit of keeping his promises, had gone to fetch the broomstick. At that moment, the bell at the street door rang, and this time the woman made haste to open, hoping that it was somebody who would protect her.

It was Georget, the young messenger of the flower market, who entered the house, and in another instant the porter's lodge, just as Baudoin raised his broomstick over the head of his wife, who ran behind the young man, crying:

"Oh! monsieur, save an unfortunate woman, whose husband is trying to murder her!"

"Sapristi! how strong it smells of brandy here!" said Georget, sniffing; then, leaping upon the broomstick which the concierge held, he seized it with both hands. But Baudoin held on, he would not let go, and a struggle began between him and the young messenger, remarkably like the battles around the flag, which we see in the war plays at the boulevard theatres; only in this case the flag was a broomstick and the combatants were not in uniform.

The struggle continued for some time, on nearly even terms; Baudoin was stronger and little Georget more active. The concierge's wife paid no heed to the contestants; she had taken a small sponge, and was using it to soak up the brandy from the floor; and when it was well saturated, she put it to her lips.

Suddenly the broomstick broke, each of the contestants fell backward, and the battle was at an end. Finding himself then on a level with Madame Baudoin, who was kneeling on the floor with her body bent forward, still soaking and sucking her sponge, Georget could not restrain a burst of laughter; and the concierge, who was inclined at first to belabor his wife with what remained of his broomstick, suddenly decided to lie down on the floor, and to lap up the brandy with his tongue as thirsty dogs lap up the water in the gutter.

THE GENTLEMAN OF THE THIRD FLOOR

Georget left Monsieur and Madame Baudoin fighting over the remains of the brandy with sponge and tongue, and lighted one of the small, thin candles which are rolled up like small rockets and which are sold for one or two sous at the grocer's. Then running quickly up six flights of stairs, he reached a small door in which the key had been left; poor people are not suspicious, especially as they have nothing which is worth the trouble of stealing.

The young messenger walked through a small room, which received no light except through a little round window, in which room was a cot bed supplied with a very thin mattress and with an old window curtain which served as bedclothes. This was Georget's bedroom; but he did not stop there. Opening the door at the end of the room, and trying to make no noise, he entered another much larger one, where there was a little window. This room, although the walls sloped, was large enough to contain a bed surrounded by white curtains, an old mahogany bureau, a white wood table, a small sideboard, several chairs, and on the mantel a tiny mirror surrounded by a branch of consecrated boxwood. All this was more than modest, but it was neat and clean; it indicated not destitution, but poverty.

Georget was walking very softly, concealing his light with his right hand, when he heard a feeble voice from the bed:

"Is that you, Georget?"

"Yes, mother, it's I. So you're not asleep?"

"No, I haven't been able to go to sleep, I don't know why."

"It must be because you are sicker; and you have not been well for several days, although you didn't admit it to me."

"It's nothing, just the lumbago, it will soon be gone. If you would just give me something to drink, my dear, for I am very thirsty."

"Yes, mother, in a minute. Wait until I light your candle and put out this tallow thing of mine which smells worse than thirty-six lamps."

After lighting a bit of candle stuck in a bottle, Georget approached his mother's bed.

"Come, now you must tell me where your medicine is. But gracious heaven, how red your face is, mother! and black circles round your eyes! Are you worse?"

"Why, no, it is the heat of the bed that does that."

"Give me your hand, and let me feel your pulse. Oh! how hot your hand is! You are feverish, and very feverish too, I am sure."

"Nonsense, as if you knew anything about it."

"Oh! yes I do; you must have pain somewhere."

"No, I am not in pain."

"The first thing in the morning I'll fetch a doctor."

"I don't want you to; what's the use of a doctor, just because one has a little fever; it will go away all right without him!"

"Where is your drink?"

"I thought I wouldn't make any; I prefer water, I like it better."

"Water, when one is feverish! Why, you didn't do right! If I did such a thing, you'd scold me and say that I acted like a child, and you would be right. However, tell me where the sugar is; where do you keep the sugar, mother?"

"Sugar! I don't want any; it nauseates me; I prefer clear water."

"Water without sugar, when one is as burning hot as you are! I never heard of such a thing! You can't mean it! Do you want to kill yourself? I am going to give you some sweetened water, but I must heat it; it's better so."

"Oh, no! no!"

"I say yes; I will take care of you better than you do yourself. Come, where is the sugar? where is the coal?"

And Georget ran all about the room, fumbling over all the furniture, opening all the closets, looking in every corner, but he found nothing. Thereupon a bright light broke upon his mind. He stopped in the middle of the room, threw his cap on the floor, and cried in a tone of deep distress:

"Ah! I understand everything now! You didn't make yourself any drink, because you had no coal nor charcoal! You don't want any sugar, because you haven't a single particle of it here! Yes, yes, that is it! You are out of everything! You haven't any money either, I am sure! and I, instead of trying to earn some, so that you might have what you need, why, I do nothing at all! I pass my day loafing, and at night I go to the theatre with Patatras, who absolutely insisted on treating me. I go about enjoying myself when my mother is sick, and I come home without a sou, without a single piece of money; and I haven't anything to buy her what might cure her! Ah! I am a wicked son, a good-for-nothing! Forgive me, mother, forgive me; I won't do so any more! I will work, I swear to you that I will work now!"

And the young fellow fell on his knees beside his mother's bed; and the poor mother forgot her suffering, and tried only to comfort her son.

"What are you talking about, Georget? You, a good-for-nothing! Why, you don't mean that, my boy! Have I ever complained of your conduct?"

"Oh! I know very well that you never complain; you are too good!"

"You have been amusing yourself a little to-day; well, my boy, there's no harm in that; you must enjoy yourself while you're young. Your friend Chicotin took you to the theatre; the theatre is a decent amusement; it is much better than going to the wine shop; you don't make evil acquaintances there, or destroy your health with unhealthy stuff that they give you for wine. You haven't earned anything to-day—that is too bad, but to-morrow you will work, and you will be happier!"

"To-morrow! to-morrow! but you have had nothing to drink this evening; you haven't any sugar; and what will you take to quench your thirst to-night? cold water, I suppose?"

"I am going to try to sleep; when one is asleep, one doesn't need to drink."

"But when you wake in the morning, what shall I give you? for you have no money here, nothing at all; isn't that so, mother?"

"Dear me, yes, my dear; for unfortunately I haven't been able to work for a week; my sight has been all blurred!"

"Oh! you work too much, when you ought to rest."

"Why so, Georget? I am not old enough yet to give up work, I am only fifty-four! If a body was good for nothing at that age, it would be a great pity!"

"I know that you're not old, but still your health isn't very good, and then you didn't use to need to work for your living."

"Oh! my dear, we must never say such things as that, and sigh over the past! If one has been happy, so much the better; if one is so no longer, so much the worse; regrets don't help and only make our position worse!"

"All this doesn't give you any nice, hot, sweet drink, and that is what you must have!"

"Don't despair, we are not altogether without resources. You know that I have—your father's watch; and if it is absolutely necessary, why—"

"What's that you say! my father's watch, which you think so much of! the only thing of his that you have! part with that? No, I won't have it. Wait—suppose I should go and stand in front of some theatre?"

"What an idea! They are all over, all closed at this time of night."

"Never mind; in front of a restaurant, I may still get something to do."

"I don't want you to go out; it's too late."

"Well then, in the house; pardi! sugar and coal—people lend each other such things as that. Don't be impatient, mother, I will come right back."

"No, Georget, I don't want you to ask the neighbors; don't, I beg you!"

But Georget was not listening to his mother; he had already relighted his tallow-dip and hurried from the room. When he reached the landing, the young man stopped, for he was uncertain to whom he should apply for the loan which he wished to obtain; but he did not hesitate long. He ran down the stairs three or four at a time, and did not stop until he reached the ground floor and knocked at the concierge's lodge, saying to himself:

"Baudoin and his wife are not unkind; they dispute together, and fight sometimes, but they haven't bad hearts; they won't refuse me. Besides, it is only a loan, I will return it all."

But Georget forgot that he had left the concierge and his wife engaged in an occupation which was likely to plunge them into a profound slumber ere long. In fact, after sucking and lapping brandy for some time, the husband and wife had felt such an intense longing to sleep, that they had hardly strength enough to reach their bed; and as the sleep caused by intoxication is never light, Monsieur and Madame Baudoin did not hear the knocking at their door; one might have fired a cannon under their noses, and they would simply have said: "God bless you!"

Weary of knocking to no purpose, Georget walked away from the lodge, murmuring:

"Those concierges are regular beer kegs; I shall never succeed in waking them, and I might as well give it up. Let me see, where can I apply? on the first floor? The whole floor is occupied by a family of English people, who hardly understand what you say to them and who don't look very pleasant; I should not be well received there, they would not be able to understand what I said. On the second floor is a very pretty, very stylish lady, who receives fine gentlemen, but who refuses to open her door when she has company; her maid told me so the other day,—those are her orders. On the third,—ah! that is the gentleman that they call the *Bear* in the house, because he never talks with anybody, never receives any visitors, and hardly answers when you speak to him. Much use there would be in trying to borrow sugar and charcoal of that man! and still, if I thought that his black man would open the door;—but no, Pongo sleeps so sound that he never hears his master come home. So it would be the gentleman himself who would open the door, and he would shut it in my face without answering me. I don't even dare to try!—On the fourth, on one side is an old woman, so timid that she will never open her door after dusk; on the other, a student; but he has gone into the country. And at the top, opposite us, no one; the room is to let. Mon Dieu! whom shall I apply to then, if among all these people I can see no hope of help for my poor mother, who has a high fever and no cooling draft to lessen her suffering? Ah! Chicotin was quite right to say that I am a fool to be in love, that I am too young. Mamzelle Violette makes me forget my mother, my duty, my work. To think that I have done nothing to-day! that I came home without a sou when I knew that my mother was sick! Oh, I am a miserable, heartless villain! I shall never forgive myself!"

As he said this, Georget went slowly upstairs, stopping frequently because he was weeping; and he had stopped again, and rested his head against the wall, to sob at his ease, when a door opened within two steps of him.

He was then on the landing of the third floor, and it was Monsieur Malberg who stood before him. When he saw the young messenger, who still had the look of a mere boy, beating his head against the wall, and giving free vent to his sobs, the gentleman who was called the Bear, and who in fact had a rather stern expression and a rather rough voice, walked toward Georget and asked:

"What are you doing here?"

"Well! monsieur, you see, I am crying, I am unhappy."

"And why are you crying?"

"Because my mother is sick, and because she has nothing that might help her; because I didn't work to-day, and came home to the house without a sou; because I am a heartless wretch, and I deserve to be beaten!"

"Well, do you think that if you beat your head against the wall that that will help your mother?"

"Oh! no, monsieur! but when a fellow doesn't know which way to turn! I went down and knocked at the concierge's door; I wanted to borrow a little sugar and some charcoal of them; but they didn't answer; I suppose they sleep too sound!"

"So you live in the house, do you?"

"Yes, monsieur, at the top, under the eaves; I live there with my mother, who is the widow of my father, Pierre Brunoy, who was a soldier, a non-commissioned officer, who left the service on account of a wound. Oh! he was a fine man, was my father! He was a draughts-man, he had lots of talent, and he used to make designs for ladies who embroider; we were happy then; but he died. My mother undertook to keep a little smallwares shop, to earn enough to educate me; but she didn't succeed, for no one paid her. Then, as she works very well on linen, she began to work for people, and I, knowing that I ought to help mother, whose health isn't very good, and who has weak eyes, I said to myself: 'I will be a messenger, for I could never find a place, although I can read and write and figure; or else I should have to work without pay for a long while and I must earn money right away to help mother.'—So I started in as a messenger; for there isn't any foolish trade, so I was told;—and—that's all, monsieur."

The gentleman of the third floor listened attentively to Georget, and when he had finished, said to him:

"Come with me."

"Where, monsieur?"

"Into my room, of course."

"What for, monsieur?"

"You will see; come."

The youth placed his tallow-dip on the floor, and followed the gentleman; his heart was still heavy, for he didn't understand how the person who occupied the handsome apartment on the third floor could need his services so late. Monsieur Malberg passed through a reception room very carefully polished, and into a beautiful dining-room. There he stopped, opened a large sideboard, took out a loaf of sugar, which was hardly touched, and placed it in Georget's hand, saying:

"Take this!"

The poor boy looked at him with an almost dazed expression, and murmured:

"What is this, monsieur?"

"Don't you see that it is sugar?"

"Sugar, oh, yes! but this great loaf,—who's all this for?"

"For your mother, of course! Didn't you tell me that she hadn't any and that she was sick?"

"Oh! is it possible, monsieur, that you are so kind as—but this is too much, monsieur, too much."

"Hush, and come with me."

This time Monsieur Malberg went into his kitchen, where Georget followed him, holding the loaf of sugar in his arms. The gentleman pointed to a large box without a cover, which stood under the stove, saying:

"Take that box; there's charcoal in it."

"Oh! how kind you are, monsieur! How can I thank you for—"

"It isn't worth while, I don't like thanks; take this box, I say."

"Yes, monsieur, but be sure—I will return all this; pray believe me. Oh! I will work to pay my debt."

"Very well, very well! By the way, wait; I have some linden leaves here, and some mallow; perhaps they will be good for your mother, and you haven't any in your room, I suppose?"

"No, I think not, monsieur."

"Well, I'll give you some then; come."

Monsieur Malberg returned to his dining-room. Georget still followed him, holding under one arm the loaf of sugar, and under the other the box filled with charcoal. The gentleman opened the drawer of a small piece of furniture, took out several paper bags, looked to see what they contained, put two of them aside, and was about to give them to Georget, when he stopped as if a sudden thought had struck him, and left the dining-room, saying:

"I will return in a moment; what I want isn't there; wait here."

The young messenger was careful not to stir; he was so pleased that he wondered whether he was not the plaything of a dream; but he for whom he was waiting soon returned, bringing several small packages of herbs, saying:

"Here are some things which may be good for your mother,—linden, orange leaves, mallow and violet; take them all, or rather let me put them in your pocket, for you have no hand free."

"Oh, monsieur! excuse me for the trouble I put you to. Mon Dieu! you are too kind! I will pay you for this, monsieur; for we are not beggars, we don't ask alms, and I should be sorry for you to have that idea of us."

"Very good! Your mother is sick and may need you; don't leave her alone any longer."

"Yes, monsieur, you are right; my poor mother, she will be so happy, so—so—Thanks, monsieur, oh, thanks a thousand times! Remember that I am always here day and night, at your service."

"I will remember; but go."

And the gentleman pushed Georget before him, so that he soon found himself on the landing once more. The door of the apartment closed, and he reascended the staircase as quickly as he could, with his box of charcoal, his loaf of sugar, and his tallow-dip still lighted.

At last he reached his room; this time he was not afraid of making a noise when he went in; he was too happy not to wish to tell his mother about it; but she was not asleep, and she gazed in amazement at her son when he danced into the room, and placed the loaf of sugar on her bed, crying:

"There, mother; you shall not drink plain cold water any more! Here is sugar, here is charcoal, and in my pocket I have half a dozen herbs in leaves. Ah! what luck! you will be cured right away! I can nurse you nicely now."

"What does this mean, my dear? where did you get all these things? You hadn't a sou just now. Explain yourself, Georget, I insist."

"Why, yes, yes, never fear, I am going to tell you the whole story; but let me light the stove first, and then, while I blow my charcoal, I will tell you how Providence came to our assistance. Where is the stove? Ah! there it is. This will light very quickly, I know, although the bellows isn't any too good."

"Did you get all these things in the house, my son?"

"Yes, mother; you see, first of all, I went down to borrow from the concierge, Monsieur Baudoin; but it wasn't

any use for me to knock at their door, I couldn't wake them, they're worse than deaf people. So then I was coming up again in very low spirits, indeed, I believe I was crying, when the door on the third landing opened, and the gentleman who lives there came out to me. Oh! this thing proves, mother, that people very often say foolish things, or that it's very wrong to judge a person by his appearance. For that gentleman that they call the Bear, that gentleman that never speaks to anybody, and that everybody makes stupid jokes about, why, he took me into his room, and gave me all these things for you, because I told him that you were sick; and he didn't even let me thank him!—Ah! you miserable charcoal! you've got to burn! Now I am going to put some water over the fire."

"But, my dear, this is an enormous loaf of sugar, and it is almost whole; you ought not to have borrowed so much as this."

"As if that gentleman would listen to me! He says: 'Take this!' and if you try to remonstrate, he shouts: 'Hold your tongue!' and it's impossible to prevent him from doing what he wants to.—Ah! my fire is going at last!"

"But this Monsieur Malberg—for the gentleman of the third floor is named Malberg—I have never met him; what sort of looking man is he, Georget? You must have had a good look at him, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes! mother; why, he's a man neither young nor old. At first sight, I am sure that you would take him to be older than he really is, because when a person never laughs, that makes him look older. He may be somewhat over fifty years old; his face is not ugly, not by any means, but his features have a sort of stern expression; his eyes are always gloomy and melancholy, and there are great wrinkles on his brow; his eyebrows are heavy, and his hair must have been black, but it's a little gray now. When he fixes his great brown eyes on you, it frightens you; and yet I got used to them, for his expression is neither unkind nor contemptuous; it's—I don't know just how to describe it—it's sort of compassionate, or sorrowful; and his voice, which sounds harsh at first, is much less so when he's talked to you for some time. You see, mother, that gentleman isn't like most people; oh, no! he makes you respect him, and it comes natural to obey him, and you don't dare to say anything."

"Really, my dear, you make me long to know this gentleman; when I am able to go out, I shall go to thank him. And did you tell him——"

"Just how we are placed, what we used to be, and what father did. Yes, I told him everything. Did I do wrong?"

"No, my boy, we have done nothing which we need to be ashamed of or to conceal."

"Ah! my water is boiling; now I am going to make you some herb tea, mother; which would you rather have?"

"Why, tell me first what you have in your pocket."

"Wait and I'll show you; I have a whole lot of bundles! Here, see what this is."

"Violet."

"And this?"

"Linden leaves."

"And—and—well! here's something else now!"

"What's the matter, Georget? Have you lost something?"

"Lost! oh, no! not by any means, mother! What I have just found in my pocket certainly wasn't there before! I am sure of that."

"Why, what have you found in your pocket?"

"Here, look, mother!"

And the young messenger tossed upon the good woman's bed four five-franc pieces.

"Twenty francs, Georget! twenty francs! What does this mean? where did you get all that money, my son?"

"I haven't any idea, mother; and I am very sure that I didn't have it when I came home. I didn't have a sou."

"But this money didn't get into your pocket of itself. Answer me, Georget, and above all, don't lie."

"Mon Dieu! how you say that, mother! Do you suppose that I am capable of having stolen this money from someone, I should like to know?"

"No, my dear, I do not suppose that my son, that the child of my honest Brunoy, would ever do a wicked action; but I have always carefully preserved your father's watch, and some time, without my knowledge, to help me, you might have——"

"Pawned papa's watch! Oh! never! I'd rather pawn myself! but wait, mother; I remember now; yes, that must have been it."

"What? tell me."

"That gentleman on the third floor, when I had the loaf of sugar and the box of charcoal in my arms, insisted on putting all these little bundles of dried leaves in my pocket himself; and that's the way he stuffed these five-franc pieces into my pocket! Oh! I am sure of it now! for he went into his bedroom alone, to get the money, no doubt. It was him, mother, it was him; indeed, who else could have given me all this?"

"You are right, Georget, it can't have been anybody else; people who like to do good, think of everything, and it seems that he is very kind, this Bear!"

"Yes, indeed, he is kind, but I shall not keep his money. I will work to-morrow, and earn some; and he has put us under enough obligation by lending us sugar and charcoal. Mother, we mustn't keep these twenty francs that he slipped into my pocket so slyly, so that I could not thank him, must we? But still, it was very nice of him, all the same; he isn't like other people, that gentleman! I'll bet that when he tosses a piece of money to a poor man, he doesn't try to make it ring on the sidewalk when it falls."

"No, my dear, we mustn't keep the twenty francs, for it is quite a large sum, and it would be too hard to repay it."

"I am going to take it back to the gentleman right away."

"Oh! it must be quite late now; Monsieur Malberg has gone to bed, no doubt, and is probably asleep; if you wake him up, he won't like it. Wait till morning, and when he's up, you can take the money back to him, and thank him again for both of us."

"After all, you are right, mother; it will be better for me to let the gentleman sleep, who has helped me to cure you. I will go to-morrow morning, when his negro is up.—But the water is still boiling; give me what I need for your

tea."

The invalid chose one of the herbs. Georget soon made the tea and carried his mother a cup smoking hot and well sweetened; and when she had drunk it, he filled the cup again and placed it on the table by the bed.

"If you are thirsty again in the night," he said, "you must drink this; it will be all ready; now try to go to sleep."

"Yes, my dear, but it seems to me that I feel better already."

"Well! mother; it is always like that; when a person has all that he needs to get well, then the disease must go."

"Oh! not always, my boy, for in that case rich people would never be sick; but the thing that relieves one is contentment, happiness. It requires so little to make poor people happy! and what has happened to us this evening is real good fortune."

"Oh, yes! it is a kind of good fortune that the rich do not know, but that they can confer on others; and that must be a great pleasure too.—Good-night, mother; if you need anything, call me."

VII

A DIFFICULT ERRAND

The next day, before six o'clock, Georget was up and dressed; he went first to inquire concerning his mother's health; the invalid had slept, and felt better, although she was still too weak to rise. She smiled as she said:

"Up already, my dear?"

"I must earn a lot of money to-day, mother, in order to bring you all that you need."

"But I need nothing, as I have the material for making herb tea."

"Oh! nobody knows! if you get better, perhaps a little beef soup won't be a bad thing for you. When a fellow is out on the boulevard early, he is more apt to find work. There are maids who have bundles to send, people who have to go into the country and are looking for a cab——"

"Poor Georget! what a miserable trade yours is! Knowing how to write and figure as you do, you ought to have found a place in some office, or a clerkship in some shop."

"Oh, yes! and wait a year or two before earning any kind of a salary! Don't think about that any more, mother; I am very happy as I am! A clerk! shut up all day in an office! oh! how sick I should get of that! then I should never see her!"

"Who is it that you'd never see, my child?"

Georget blushed, but made haste to reply:

"I mean that I shouldn't see you during the day, whenever I wanted to. By the way, mother, I must go to see the gentleman on the third floor, the gentleman who is so kind, although he doesn't show it. I am going to return his twenty francs."

"Isn't it a little too early? He isn't up yet, probably."

"Oh! I am very sure that he gets up early; he isn't one of the kind to coddle himself. Anyway, I'll ask his valet, that mulatto who's such a strange creature, they say."

"Go, my dear, and thank the gentleman from me, until I can do it myself."

Georget cast a glance at the mirror to make sure that nothing was lacking in his costume. When a man is in love, he becomes particular about his looks, and Georget would have been very glad to please the pretty flower girl of the Château d'Eau, who seemed to look upon him as a child; that distressed the poor boy, he was sorry that he was not at least twenty years old, because he thought that then she would pay more attention to him. For we are never content with the passage of time; when we are young, we think that it doesn't move fast enough; later, we complain because it moves too fast. And yet we know that the wisest course is to take it as it comes; probably we are not often wise, as we are always growling about it.

Georget went down to the third floor, and rang softly at Monsieur Malberg's door; a very dark mulatto, whose hair age had not yet turned white, and who spoke French very well for a colored man, and very ill for a Parisian, opened the door and recognized the young messenger whom he had met sometimes on the stairs.

"Hullo! it's Monsieur Georget. Morning, Monsieur Georget! What you come here for so early?"

"Monsieur Pongo, I would like to speak to your master, Monsieur Malberg."

"Oh! master not up yet, he still sleep; I get up sooner, to tidy the room, rub floor here in the morning without waking master."

"If he is still asleep, I will wait."

"Yes, you sit down on a nice little chair, like this."

"Thanks, Monsieur Pongo; I hope I am not in your way; go on with your work."

"Yes, yes, then I go very soft and see if monsieur still sleep."

The mulatto went into another room. Georget sat down and waited. After a few moments he heard voices in the next room and supposed that Monsieur Malberg was awake. But still he was left alone, nobody came, and Georget, beginning to be impatient, coughed, walked about the room and stole softly to the door, which was ajar. He was surprised to find that the mulatto was alone, but that as he did his work, he kept up a steady conversation with all the furniture and other objects in the study, which to him were people to whom he gave names, according to the custom of the people of his country.

"You stay there, Broubrou!" said Pongo to a tall Voltaire easy-chair. "You all right, you satisfied, all brushed, all cleaned, all ready for master to use, unless he take Babo, the little horsehair chair. Oh! Babo, you'd be mighty pleased if master took you instead of Madame Broubrou! she take up much more room.—There! now you all cleaned, well rubbed, good 'nough to eat.—But I forget Zima; where you hide yourself, Zima? oh! no good for you to hide yourself, I know all right how to find you."

And the mulatto looked in every corner of the room, and at last succeeded in finding a small bamboo cane with a gilt head. It was that cane to which Pongo had given the name of Zima. He took it up and shook it impatiently, muttering:

"Ah! Mamzelle Zima, you try to make fun of Pongo and keep out of sight a long time. Suppose me cross and not rub you head to make you shine, how you like that, eh, Mamzelle Zima?"

At this point, the scene between the mulatto and the cane was interrupted by shouts of laughter. They came from Georget, who, not being used to the customs of Africa, had been unable to restrain longer the desire to laugh, caused by the faithful Pongo's monologue. He turned when he heard the laughter, and seeing the youth, began to laugh too, and, cane in hand, to take several steps of a strange dance which recalled the famous dance of the *Cocos*, performed in all the melodramas in which negroes are introduced.

A ring at the bell interrupted this extemporaneous ballet; Pongo dropped Mademoiselle Zima, and left the study, saying:

"That's master, he ring for me; he awake, I go tell him that you waiting."

A few moments later the mulatto returned, and ushered Georget into Monsieur Malberg's bedroom; that gentleman was enveloped in an ample dressing-gown and held a newspaper, which he seemed to be reading.

He glanced at Georget, who remained bashfully in the doorway of the room, twisting his cap about in his hands.

"It's you, is it, young man? What do you want of me so early in the morning? Is your mother sicker?"

"Oh, no! thanks to heaven and to you, monsieur! But I have come because I found this twenty francs in the pocket in which monsieur was kind enough to put some herbs for me to make my mother some tea. It was another kindness on monsieur's part, no doubt, but he is too kind; we must not keep this money, for it would take us too long to return it; and so I have brought the twenty francs back."

The gentleman in the dressing-gown resumed the perusal of his newspaper, as he answered in a crabbed tone:

"I don't know what you mean; the money is yours, if it was in your pocket; keep it and let me alone."

"But, monsieur, I am very sure that that twenty francs isn't mine, as I didn't own a sou to buy sugar, and that was why I was crying on the landing."

"Well! what then? how does that concern me?"

"Why, monsieur, as nobody else but you put anything in my pocket, it must have been you who put these five-franc pieces there."

"You are dreaming!"

"Oh, no!"

"It wasn't I!"

"I am sure that it was!"

"Corbleu! you tire me! Well, suppose it was? If I chose to put those five-franc pieces in your pocket, am I not at liberty to put my money where I choose? Do you propose to prevent me from helping you, when I have too much money, and know that you haven't enough? You are very proud, it seems, master messenger?"

"Oh! it isn't that, monsieur; but you have already overwhelmed us with your kindness; it would be wrong to show our appreciation of it by accepting what we don't need."

"You lie! you do need money, for last night you were without a sou, and I don't suppose that you have earned any during the night."

"But, monsieur, my mother has all she needs now, and I am going to earn some money to-day."

"Oho! you are very confident, aren't you? How do you know that you will find work to-day, that it will be a good day for you?"

"Why! monsieur, it very seldom happens that a whole day passes without someone employing us; a man would have to be very unlucky to have that happen."

"And you think that you are in no danger of such bad luck? Well, tell me how you expect to earn money for your mother?"

"By doing errands, monsieur, as that is my business."

"And how much do you get for an errand usually?"

"Why, that depends, monsieur, on how far I have to go; and then some people are more generous than others."

"But about how much?"

"Twelve sous, fifteen sous, sometimes twenty sous; but that's not often, unless we carry bundles."

"And you take without a murmur whatever anyone chooses to give you?"

"To be sure, monsieur, as it's the pay for our work."

"Well, Monsieur Georget, I take you for my messenger from to-day; and it's my pleasure to pay you two francs for every errand that you do for me."

"Oh! that is too much, monsieur; no one ever pays as much as that."

"If it suits me to pay that price, do you propose to prevent me from being more generous than other people?—You understand then, the twenty francs that you have received is a payment in advance on account of the errands you may do for me."

"Yes, monsieur; then it's for ten errands."

"Exactly, for ten errands."

"But there's the sugar too."

"Confound it! now it's the sugar! well, call it one errand more."

"Monsieur is mistaken; it was at least nine pounds of sugar, and that makes—that makes—I don't know just the price of sugar."

"Nor I; say no more about it, and don't bother me with all these trifles!"

"And the charcoal, monsieur?"

"This little fellow has evidently made a vow to drive me mad! Call it as many errands as you choose, and let me

alone.”

“I will call it fifteen, monsieur, but I am very sorry that I have offended monsieur, who is so very kind, and I will go, monsieur, I will go!”

And Georget had already reached the door, when Monsieur Malberg called him back.

“Listen, my boy, as you seem in such a hurry to pay your debt to me, I will employ you at once.”

“Oh! so much the better, monsieur, so much the better!”

“Listen: there is somewhere or other in the world a person whom I lost sight of almost—almost nineteen years ago, and whom I am very desirous to find. At that time, the gentleman in question, for it is a gentleman that I am talking about, was some thirty-three or thirty-four years of age; he was tall, with a good figure, and was rather a handsome man. Moreover, he was a dandy, a man of fashion, and always dressed with much elegance; but as that was nineteen years ago, his appearance may have changed greatly! However, the man’s name is Monsieur de Roncherolle.”

“Very good, monsieur; and where did this handsome Monsieur de—de——”

“Roncherolle.”

“Roncherolle live? Oh! I shall not forget the name again.”

“He lived—but what good will it do you to know where he lived then, as at that time he suddenly left his lodgings in Paris, and left France, I imagine?”

“Still, he might have returned to his lodgings since.”

“Do you suppose that I haven’t been there a hundred times to inquire? No, he has never come back to the place where he used to live; but he did come back to Paris ten years ago, I am certain of that; but I was travelling then, and we never met. When I returned, he had gone away again; but, if I can believe certain reports, certain indications, he returned to Paris some time ago, and is living—in what quarter of the city? I have no idea. You see that the errand that I give you is a difficult one. For a very long time, I, myself, have been looking for that gentleman, but have failed to find him. If you succeed in discovering him, why, then I shall look upon myself as your debtor, and shall find a way to prove my gratitude to you!”

“Monsieur is jesting! he forgets that he has already paid me in advance for fifteen errands. But if only this Monsieur de Roncherolle has not changed his name—for in that case it would be very difficult to find him!”

“He will not have changed his name, for he belongs to an old family, and was very proud of it.”

“Did he do anything?”

“Nothing except use up his fortune as slowly as possible; and in all this time he must have gone to the end of it. However, he has probably retained his youthful habits: it is in the Chaussée d’Antin quarter, at the close of the Opéra, or of the Théâtre des Italiens, or in front of the best restaurants in Paris, that you are likely to find him, that chance may lead to his being called by name in your presence; for you do not know him, my poor boy, you have no description of him, and I can supply you with no other means of identifying him. So I fancy that I am giving you a commission impossible to execute!”

“Why so, monsieur? We hear so many things, we messengers! We go about in all sorts of places; we see the whole of Paris, and I will bet that I discover him, and in that case I will come instantly and report what I have learned.”

“That goes without saying.”

“But this commission will not prevent monsieur from giving me others; and if he has any letters to deliver——”

“Yes, yes; very well; now go.”

Georget left the bedroom; in the reception room he found Pongo in a serious dispute with Mademoiselle Zima, who had fallen twice to the floor and refused to rise without assistance. But Georget had no time to stop; he was in too great a hurry to tell his mother of his interview with the gentleman on the third floor. He lost no time in doing so, as soon as he was with the excellent woman; and he tossed the four five-franc pieces on the bed, exclaiming:

“They are really ours now, for that gentleman absolutely insisted on paying me in advance. So we are rich! You shall have everything you want; besides, I am going to earn money too. Good-by, mother; stay in bed, and take care of yourself.”

“Why, Georget, you go off in such a hurry; you must take one of these pieces at least; for you must live too.”

“No, mother, I don’t mean to touch that money; I mean to earn some first of all, and not eat my breakfast until I have worked.”

“Georget, that’s nonsense! Will you listen to me?”

But the young messenger was not listening; he was already at the foot of the stairs, and in front of the concierge’s lodge, where he found Madame Baudoin, alone, still gazing with an air of deep affliction at the marks of the brandy on the floor.

Georget’s first thought was to go to the Boulevard du Château d’Eau, where he was very certain to find Violette, for the flower girl was always there, even when it was not a market day. That was the advantage of her branch of business; hand bouquets are of all times, and there are some flowers in all seasons; which is very fortunate for lovers, who give them all the year around, and for the ladies, who would like to receive them all their lives.

VIII

THE BLUE PHIAL

Violette was seated behind her counter, making bouquets; she had a peculiar knack at blending colors, and giving its full effect to the simplest flower; her bouquets were tasteful, even when they were made up of modest flowers only; there was taste and charm in their arrangement; her art was apparent in every one. There are people who spoil whatever they touch, and others who can make something out of nothing.

Georget stopped a few feet away from the flower girl, and looked at her; but she was so busy over her bouquets that she did not see him, or at least did not seem to see him; so he decided to accost her.

"Good-morning, Mamzelle Violette."

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur Georget?"

"Yes, it's me; I have been here some time already, within a few feet of you, looking at you; but you didn't deign to glance in my direction."

"I didn't deign! what does that mean? Do you think that I wouldn't have said good-morning to you if I had seen you? Do you accuse me of being impolite now?"

"Oh, no! that isn't what I mean, mamzelle; but sometimes, when one doesn't care to talk with a person——"

"Are you going to begin that again, Georget? If I didn't want to talk with you, what compels me to? I believe that I am my own mistress—alas! only too much my own mistress, as I don't know my parents, and my last protectress, Mère Gazon, is lying yonder in the cemetery."

"Well, now you are sad! I tell you, Mamzelle Violette, I was terribly sad last night too, for my mother was sick, and we were short of money."

"Why didn't you tell me so, Georget? I would have lent you money. You know very well that I have some, that I sell as much as I want to sell, and that it wouldn't have troubled me at all."

"Oh! upon my word! Borrow money of you, of you, mademoiselle! never!"

"What! never? what does this mean? Why not of me as well as of anybody else? Don't you look upon me as your friend, or do you think me a hard-hearted creature, who would not take pleasure in obliging you?"

"Oh, no! no! it isn't that! on the contrary I know very well that you are kind-hearted, that you love to do good; I have often seen you give money to unfortunate people! But it isn't that; it is—mon Dieu! I don't know how to express it; it is that I should be ashamed, I should blush to——"

"Well, well! you are getting all mixed up. I go straight to the point: Georget, do you want money? I have some here,—fifteen francs, twenty-five francs; it won't embarrass me in the least."

"Thanks, thanks, mamzelle; I am very grateful; but now it isn't as it was last night; our position has changed, and we are in funds."

"Is that really true? how does it happen that in so short a time—Georget, if you are deceiving me, it is very wrong; you have no money!"

To prove to the flower girl that he was not deceiving her, the messenger told her all that had happened since the evening before. Violette listened with the deepest interest, and her eyes filled with tears at the story of Monsieur Malberg's kindness.

"Ah! that gentleman is a fine man!" cried the girl, almost leaping from her chair. "Suppose I should carry him a bouquet from you; would that please him?"

"Oh, no! On the contrary it would make him angry; he doesn't like to be thanked; I am sure that he would be angry with me, if he knew that I had told you how kind he was."

"That's a pity; I would like to know him. Does he ever walk in this direction on market day?"

"No, I have never seen him here. He's a man who doesn't like society, nor noise; and when you don't know him, why, he hasn't an agreeable manner, I tell you!"

"But when one knows that he is kind and generous, then one ought not to be frightened by his manner."

"No matter, I assure you, mamzelle, that in his presence no one dares to laugh."

"Speaking of laughing, Monsieur Georget, I am going to scold you now."

"Scold me?"

"Yes indeed. Oh! it's of no use for you to assume your innocent air, I was not fooled by what happened yesterday afternoon. The idea of throwing my customers down! that's very pretty, isn't it? If you should do that often, I don't think that I should sell so many bouquets."

"But I didn't throw anybody down!"

"No, not you, but that good-for-nothing Chicotin, who had planned the thing beforehand with you, because he knew that it would please you. Am I right? Come, Georget, answer me—didn't you plan with Chicotin to throw that gentleman down?"

"Not that one, mamzelle, I haven't any grudge against that one; it was the other one; Chicotin made a mistake."

"One or the other, it was very wrong, monsieur, to run against my customers and overturn almost the whole of my shop."

"But I tell you that Chicotin made a mistake."

"And I tell you that if either you or he ever do that sort of thing again, that will be the end, and I will not speak to you any more."

"Oh! never fear, mademoiselle, we shan't do it again; not I, that is, for I can't answer for others."

"The others only do what you want."

"Not speak to you any more? would that be possible? In the first place, I should keep on speaking to you!"

"But I wouldn't answer you."

"Then you would mean to kill me with grief?"

"Nonsense, people don't die for that sort of thing!"

"Oh, you think so, because you don't feel what I do, here in the bottom of my heart."

"Georget, I thought that you intended to work hard to-day?"

"Ah! so I do, you are right.—By the way, mamzelle, you don't happen to know a gentleman named De Roncherolle, do you?"

"No, I don't know him."

"True, this isn't the quarter where I can expect to find him; I must go to Boulevard des Italiens, to the Chaussée d'Antin; that's a pity, for it's a long way from you."

"Do you mean that you don't expect to do errands except in the neighborhood of the Château d'Eau?"

"Why! of course I know that that isn't possible; but I hate so to go away from you."

"Really, Georget, you make me want to laugh; you are not old enough yet to be in love, it isn't so very long since I used to see you playing marbles with urchins of your age!"

"Oh! upon my word! it's a long, long time since I stopped playing marbles; why, that's a game for children."

"Oh! mon Dieu! don't defend yourself so eagerly; there's no harm in it. And let me tell you, Georget, you would do better to play now than to pass your time sighing and looking up at the sky, and always having a dismal expression; you are better looking when you laugh."

"Do you think so, mamzelle? Well! it isn't my fault, it isn't by preference that I am dismal sometimes; but you always treat me like a child, and that annoys me. However, I am seventeen and a half, and I believe that I am almost as old as you."

"No, I am more than eighteen; and at that age, a girl is much older than a boy and ought to have more common sense."

"Oh! that's all nonsense! on the contrary, there are men of seventeen who are already soldiers, and who have been in the army. Why, there's a little drummer, who was lately stationed at the barracks in Faubourg du Temple, who was not more than eighteen years old, and he had been to Africa, where he passed three years, and was in battles with the Arabs."

"Does that tempt you? Are you inclined to go as a drummer?"

"I don't say that; still, if I didn't have my mother, and if there wasn't any hope of my being loved by the person I love, why, then——"

"Come, come! go and do your errand, Georget; you forget that that gentleman paid you in advance!"

"You are right, mamzelle; I stand here talking, and the time passes so quickly when I am talking with you! But I mean that you shall be satisfied with me; I won't be sad any more, and I won't loaf any more."

"We shall see!"

"Then will you have a little affection for me?"

"Haven't I already? do you doubt it? Yes, I have affection for you, because I know that you are not a ne'er-do-well, a good-for-nothing, like so many others of your age, and because you are so fond of your mother, whose only support you are. Ah! how lucky you are to have your mother, Georget, and to be able to work for her! If I only knew mine, I would take such pleasure in giving her the fruit of my work, in kissing her and coddling her and taking every care of her! Oh, yes! I would have loved my mother dearly! but I never had one, or rather she is dead; or else—she deserted me!"

"There, now it is you who are sad! don't think about all that any more, mamzelle; they say that children without parents, and without a name, are the ones who always make their fortune."

"Why! that is easily understood, because then the good Lord takes the place of their family, He never loses sight of them, and gives them good inspirations; and with a protector like Him, they can never fail to make their way.—But you must go, Georget!"

"Yes, mamzelle. Ah! I am happy this morning! my heart is full of joy; I have talked with you, and I shall have a good day."

"Good! now you are in good spirits, and that is the way I love to see you, the way I would like you to be always, because—Well, it is changing already! your brow is clouded and you turn pale;—what is the matter, Georget? Don't you feel well?"

The young messenger had, in fact, changed color, and his smiling face, his eyes beaming with happiness, had suddenly assumed a different expression. A single glance in the distance had sufficed to cause this revolution: Georget had caught sight of Monsieur Jéricourt, the handsome man who was in love with the flower girl, walking very slowly in front of the Château d'Eau, not like a person who was going elsewhere, but like one who had come there with a purpose.

Violette followed the direction of Georget's eyes, and speedily discovered the cause of his change of countenance; thereupon she shrugged her shoulders impatiently and cried:

"Mon Dieu! is it going to begin again?—You are going to do your errand, I hope, Georget?"

"Yes, mamzelle, yes, I'm going, I'm going right away; for if I didn't, I might do more foolish things. Here comes that perfumed dandy who makes love to you—here he comes again; it seems that he means to come every day now; it's a regular thing!"

"That gentleman is perfectly free to walk on the boulevard; what makes you think it's on my account?"

"What makes me think so? why, it's plain enough; you know as well as I do that it's on your account. Oh! what a pity that the boulevard's free to everybody!—I'm going, mamzelle, I'm going!"

Georget made up his mind to go, at last; he passed Jéricourt, upon whom he bestowed a savage glance; but that gentleman did not notice him.

On the previous day the young author had been flatly snubbed by the flower girl, and before witnesses too, which made his discomfiture even more unpalatable. While dining at Bonvalet's restaurant, with his friend Saint-Arthur and the piquant little actress who was his friend's mistress, Jéricourt had had to submit to the raillery of Beau Alfred, who, to compensate himself for having been thrown down and having broken his suspenders, had not ceased to repeat:

"It was Jéricourt's fault! he was making love to the flower girl, and there seemed to be no end to it; but the pretty peddler didn't bite at his gallantries—I fancy that our dear friend will have nothing to show for his seductive propositions. Ha! ha! ha! repulsed with heavy loss by a flower girl! It's incredible, it's most annoying! He doesn't choose to admit it, but I am sure that he's terribly annoyed."

And Mademoiselle Zizi, the young actress who was so alluring in salacious rôles, and who perhaps had her own reasons for taking the thing to heart, outdid the little man in jocose remarks, and exclaimed with a most significant glance at Jéricourt:

"Ah! that was well done! it was well done! How pleased I am! I shouldn't be any happier if I were offered an

engagement at the Palais-Royal! What a nice little story to tell at the theatre! How they will laugh!—Ah! so our author friends affect flower girls, do they? that is very fine! Instead of sticking to actresses, who at least are in their line, and whom it would certainly induce to put more fire and talent into their parts—Ha! ha! to make love to a flower girl, and to have nothing to show for it! how humiliating!—Poor Jéricourt! he looks as glum as an owl.”

The young author, affecting the utmost tranquillity, simply replied to these attacks:

“If that young flower girl should appear on the stage, I’ll wager that she would eclipse many people who think now that they have a hold on the public!”

“Is that meant for me?” cried Mademoiselle Zizi, throwing a lobster claw in Jéricourt’s face.

“Why, no! of course not!” hastily interposed Saint-Arthur, as the author did not respond. “For you! upon my word! how can you imagine such a thing, when Jéricourt is wild over your talent? For he has told me so a hundred times; he says that you will replace Déjazet.—Haven’t you said that to me often, Jéricourt?”

But the angry author continued to maintain an obstinate silence, which increased the irritation of the little actress.

“In any event,” she cried, “no one will be able to judge of my talent in any of monsieur’s plays; for some time past he has given me nothing but unimportant parts.”

“I give you more than my brother authors do, for they don’t give you any parts at all.”

“What does that prove? That all authors belong to a coterie; that they allow themselves to be inveigled by the prayers of this one and the enticements of that one, or by the advice of the manager, who has his reasons for looking after still another one. O the stage! O you authors! it’s shocking, the injustice we have to put up with; and then they throw a flower girl in our faces! and tell us that she has only to appear to leave us behind! In that case, we’re only stop-gaps, eh?—Oh! it’s an outrage! it’s abominable! O God! my nerves! I am suffocating! I am dying!”

And Mademoiselle Zizi threw herself back on the divan, stretching out her legs and arms, gnashing her teeth, and wriggling like one possessed; whereupon Beau Saint-Arthur quickly seized a carafe, exclaiming in a tone of deep distress:

“The deuce! now she’s going to have a nervous attack; that’s very pleasant. The devil take you, Jéricourt, you’re the cause of it all; you spoke so roughly to her! Look, see how rigid she is!”

“That will pass away!” replied Jéricourt very calmly, helping himself to some truffled calves’ brains.

“*Canaille!*” muttered Mademoiselle Zizi, still rigid.

And Alfred, as he approached his charmer with a glass of cold water, was repulsed by her so sharply that a part of the contents of the glass splashed in his face, while the young woman muttered, taking pains to grind her teeth together:

“I want my blue phial with the opal stopper; I must have it.”

“Where is it, dear love? Shall I feel in your pocket?”

“Don’t come near me. My phial is at my rooms, on my dressing table in the boudoir.”

“Very good—I’ll send a waiter.”

“No, monsieur, I insist on your going yourself; the waiter would make some mistake.”

“But you haven’t two blue phials, and—”

“I insist on your going yourself, or else I won’t try to live.”

These last words were accompanied by such violent gnashing of the teeth, that the affectionate Alfred, fearing that his mistress would dislocate her jaw, hastened to take his hat, saying to Jéricourt:

“I must humor her; you see what a paroxysm she is having, and her blue phial contains some salt, I don’t know what—some mixture that brings her round at once. So that she often sends me to get it, for she never remembers to take it with her. I will run to her house; luckily it isn’t far—Rue Basse. But for all that it isn’t amusing.—Don’t leave her, Jéricourt, above all things; do what you can for her.”

“Never fear.”

The dandified Saint-Arthur, leaving Bonvalet’s, almost ran to Rue Basse-du-Temple, and on reaching his mistress’s abode, was received by her maid, who also was dining, and who had hurriedly locked the dining-room door, taking the precaution to remove the key; she ushered the young lion into the salon, saying:

“Come in here, monsieur, and wait; I’ll go and fetch madame’s phial.”

“I could have waited in the reception room just as well; I’m in a hurry.”

“No, indeed, monsieur, I should think not! I know too well what I owe you; stay here, I won’t be long.”

“Don’t bring the wrong phial!”

“Oh! there’s no danger of that—madame sends for it often enough. I know what she uses it for.”

Left alone in the salon, Alfred lost patience; he returned to the reception room, where he was nearer madame’s boudoir; thereupon he heard quite distinctly the rattle of knives and forks and glasses, and the popping of corks, which sounds proceeded from the dining-room.

He even heard a sneeze, so loud that the doors shook. But the maid returned with the blue phial with the opal stopper and handed it to the young man, saying:

“Why didn’t monsieur stay in the salon? Perhaps monsieur heard noises in the dining-room? Madame’s two cats are dining with me; they amuse me and are good company for me.”

“My dear girl, one of them has a cold in the head; he sneezes pretty loud for a cat—loud enough to break the windows.”

“Oh! monsieur is mistaken, the sneezing was in the yard. The concierge does nothing else; it’s downright disgusting!”

Paying no further heed to what the maid said, our young elegant, armed with the precious phial, ran back to the restaurant, and going at once to the door of his private room, tried to open it; but to no purpose did he turn the knob, the door was bolted inside.

Saint-Arthur began to knock and call.

"What does this mean? It's I, Zizi!—Jéricourt! Why do you lock yourselves in? What's the meaning of this jest?"

"Have you brought the phial?" murmured the young actress in an altered voice.

"Yes, of course I've brought it."

"Is it my blue phial?"

"To be sure; I know it well enough."

"With the opal stopper?"

"The stopper is in it! It's perfectly tight."

"Well! take it back, that isn't the one I want; I want the yellow one with an agate stopper."

"Oh! this is too much! Zizi, you abuse my good nature.—Open the door, Jéricourt."

"I should be delighted to, but madame says no. She has taken a knife and threatens to bury it in her breast if I take a step toward the door."

"Oh! in that case, don't budge, my friend! do me the favor not to budge, stay where you are! I know the mad creature; she would do some insane thing or other. I will run and fetch the yellow phial!"

And the simple-minded fellow started off again to get the yellow phial.

To those who say that this is an improbable incident, we reply that we have seen such ladies make the man whose fortune they were squandering do much more improbable things; and, in truth, they are quite right to do it, when they find blockheads ready to gratify all their whims.

On returning with the yellow phial, Alfred opened the door without difficulty. He found Jéricourt still at the table, attacking the dishes with more ardor than ever; and Mademoiselle Zizi, with cheeks as red as cherries, flew into his arms, crying:

"I wanted to put your love and trust to the proof, dear love, and you have come out triumphant from the trial; you are worthy of my affection; I give it to you once more, and more entirely; let me kiss you on the left eye."

Alfred submitted to the caress, smiling at Jéricourt with an expression that seemed to say: "You see how she loves me!"—And the dinner came to an end most amiably; everybody was satisfied.

IX

THREE FOR A BOUQUET

But the result of that dinner was that Jéricourt's thoughts recurred to Violette, and he said to himself:

"They made fun of me to-day on the subject of the flower girl; if I don't succeed with her, they will do it again. That will injure my reputation; I shall seem as big a donkey as Saint-Arthur. I have gone too far to stop. Besides, the girl is so pretty! I am inclined to think that I love her; I am not quite sure of it, but it may be so. I did not lie when I said that she would outshine Mademoiselle Zizi; she's worth ten, yes, a hundred Zizis!—I have an idea: suppose I should advise her to go on the stage? she would be a charming actress, and I can find managers enough who will be delighted to bring her out. I will give her lessons and advice.—By Jove! that's an excellent idea of mine. One of these days I will work it into a vaudeville.—Violette will not hold out against that proposition. The stage! the hope of making a sensation on the boards, the pleasure of appearing in a lot of unusual costumes—those things always fascinate a girl. This one must be as much of a coquette as the others, or she wouldn't be a woman! She will give way, and I shall triumph. A flower girl turned into an actress—what would there be so surprising in that? We have seen great talents start from much lower down in the scale. And then, when a woman is pretty, it takes so many difficulties out of the way. The thing will go all alone.—I really must make a play out of this idea."

With such thoughts in his mind, Jéricourt came to the Château d'Eau the next day, and he lost no time in accosting the flower girl, who was still looking after the young man who had found it so hard to leave her.

"Good-morning, my lovely flower girl."

"Good-morning, monsieur."

"Oh! what a curt tone! I see that you are still angry with me."

"I, monsieur? Why so?"

"Why, on account of what I said yesterday."

"Oh! I forgot that long ago! Such things go in at one ear and out at the other; they never stay in my head."

"If they stayed in your heart, that would be better."

"Thank heaven, my heart doesn't waste any time on such nonsense!"

"Mademoiselle Violette, you will not always talk like this, unless nature has given you a heart protected by a triple steel cuirass."

"Oh! I don't wear a cuirass, monsieur; a corset's quite enough!—Do you want to buy a bouquet, monsieur?"

"In a moment. I have many things to say to you, and I would like to talk with you first."

"If it's to repeat what you said yesterday, I assure you it isn't worth while to begin the conversation."

"Are you afraid that I am going to talk of love?—You have a way of saying things that is far from encouraging!"

"Mon Dieu! I don't choose my words; I say just what I think."

"A woman who says what she thinks! do you know that they are very rare?"

"I say, do you know that you ain't very complimentary to women? Have they caught you very often?"

"That isn't what I meant. Look you, Violette, I admit that I did wrong yesterday; I spoke to you as if I were certain that you loved me, and you hadn't given me any right to do it."

"Just as soon as you admit that you did wrong, that's the end of it, it's all forgotten. Let's talk about something else."

"It isn't that my feeling for you has changed; on the contrary, I adore you more than ever!"

"I say—it seems to me you're beginning yesterday's song again!"

"No; yesterday I made certain propositions that displeased you."

"Pardi! they were very pretty, your propositions! to dine with monsieur at a restaurant! to offer to furnish lodgings for me! Why on earth don't you marry me and be done with it?"

"That might have come in time!"

"Yes, in the thirteenth arrondissement! But I prefer the other twelve. As for furniture, I have some, monsieur, and it's my very own; Mère Gazon left it to me; it ain't violet wood, to be sure, but it's good enough for me; and besides, I think a great deal of it, in memory of the one who gave it to me."

"All that is very praiseworthy, no doubt; but I don't think that there's anything wrong in trying to improve one's position, to make a fortune; that's the object of all who haven't money, and no one has ever blamed them."

"Make a fortune! To be sure, that ain't unpleasant, that is, if you do it by honest means! If not, one had better stay in one's little corner."

"Oh! bless my soul! who said anything about ceasing to be honest? What extraordinary creatures these girls are—always thinking that somebody means to lead them astray!"

"That's because we know you, my fine gentlemen; and, if I remember right, you didn't propose to me yesterday that I should become a *rosière*."^[A]

[A] The maiden who wins the rose offered as a prize for virtue in certain villages.

"Listen, Violette; I will come straight to the point."

"Well! let us hear what your point is."

"You have been to the play sometimes, of course?"

"Why, yes, several times."

"And you like it?"

"I should say that I do like it! I think it's beautiful, and if I was rich, I'd go often."

"And what do you think of the actresses? Don't you think it must be delightful to appear in public, to be applauded, to wear hundreds of different costumes, and to be stared at and admired by a whole theatre full of people?"

"Oh! how fast you go! That must be fine when one has talent. I have seen some women who acted so well that you couldn't get tired listening to them; but I've seen others who acted so poorly that everybody grumbled, and laughed when they were trying to make you cry. I have seen some pretty ones; but there are some terribly ugly ones; and it's no use for them to wear handsome costumes and a lot of paint on their faces; it don't make them any better-looking.—But what makes you say all this to me?"

"Because, Violette, if you choose to go on the stage, it rests with you to do it; a glorious career is open to you, and I am sure that you will succeed, that you will obtain glory and wealth at once!"

"I an actress!—Are you making fun of me again, monsieur?"

"No, indeed, I am speaking in all seriousness. Listen to me: I am a dramatic author, so that the stage is my livelihood, or rather my constant study; therefore you must admit that I ought to know something about it. You have all that is needed for success on the stage: your figure is well set up, you are tall but not too tall; your face is lovely.—Oh! I am not paying compliments; indeed, you must know that you are pretty, you have been told so often enough! Your voice is clear and well modulated; with all these advantages and the lessons I will give you in declamation and in carrying yourself on the stage, it is impossible that you should not make a grand success. As for your getting a chance to make your *début*, that is my concern; I will undertake that and I shall have no difficulty. Better still, I will give you a part, a splendid part, in my next play; and as a reward of my zeal, of my lessons, of all that I will do for you, I will not ask you for anything,—except a little gratitude when you are a popular actress.—Well! what do you say? isn't that better than being a flower girl?"

"Is that all you're buying this morning, monsieur?"

"But you don't answer my proposition, Violette. Don't you understand that I am offering you a brilliant future—all the enjoyments, all the pleasures of life? And that won't interfere with your remaining virtuous."

"It's too risky in that business! No, thank you, monsieur, all this don't tempt me; it amuses me to see other people act, but it don't make me want to act myself. Everyone to his taste, and I prefer my flowers to your stage."

"Nonsense! it isn't possible that you refuse, when I undertake to remove all obstacles."

"Buy this bouquet;—just see what a pretty one it is, and what a sweet smell! I'll bet that it don't smell so good in your wings."

"Surely, this isn't your last word, Violette? You will think it over, and you will accept."

"Oh! my reflecting's all done, monsieur; it don't take long with me; I know right off what suits me. I don't feel any calling for the stage."

"But I tell you—"

"Don't take the trouble to say any more, monsieur; you'll just waste your words, and that would be a pity, as you make your business out of them, and you sell wit on paper."

Jéricourt was so vexed by the rejection of his proposition, when he expected a complete triumph, that he was tongue-tied, and could not think of a single word to answer the flower girl.

At that moment he felt a hand on his arm, and someone said to him:

"Good-day, Monsieur Jéricourt; I recognized you from behind by your cane; I said: 'That's my neighbor's cane.'—How are you?"

Jéricourt turned and found himself face to face with the little young man who squinted so horribly and whom we have already met at the Château d'Eau flower market, with his mother and sister—Monsieur Astianax Glumeau, whose room was on the floor above his parents, on the same landing as Jéricourt's apartment.

"Ah! is it you, young man?" said the author, as, with a patronizing air, he offered a finger to little Astianax, who deemed himself highly honored by that favor; because, in his eyes, a man who wrote plays which were actually

performed was a demigod. "What are you here for, my little rake? to buy a bouquet for some fair one whom you are courting, I suppose?"

"Oh! upon my word, Monsieur Jéricourt! I should not dare—I am too young as yet. However, it isn't the inclination that is lacking."

"How old are you, pray?"

"Nineteen."

"At that age I had already had fifty love-affairs!"

"Oh! but you—an author—that's a very different matter; you weren't shy."

"I never was that; there is nothing more disastrous for a man. If you take my advice, you will cure yourself of that failing."

"Papa and mamma don't say so; they want to keep me in leading strings like a poodle. Let them keep my sister so if they choose; that's all right—she's a girl! But me! Yes, you're right; there's nothing more foolish than a bashful man. But I don't propose to be bashful any more; I feel inclined to make people talk about me.—Were you buying flowers, Monsieur Jéricourt?"

"Yes—that is to say, I was looking over them; I haven't decided yet."

Little Astianax put his mouth to his neighbor's ear and whispered:

"The flower girl's mighty pretty!"

"Do you think so? That's a matter of taste."

"Hum! nonsense! Anybody can see that; I noticed her yesterday; I came with mamma and my sister to buy some flowers, because it was papa's birthday. I didn't buy any; I gave him some nougat."

"A very pretty bouquet that!"

"Oh! it doesn't make any difference, I am going to give him some flowers to-day; and I came here again, for I dreamed of the flower girl all night."

"Really!"

"Yes, yes; I was a pacha and she was a slave."

"Mademoiselle," said Jéricourt aloud, turning to Violette, "here's a young man who dreamed about you all night, just because he saw you yesterday."

Monsieur Astianax turned scarlet; he pulled the skirt of Jéricourt's coat and whispered: "Oh! I won't tell you anything more! You make me blush!"

"Don't be alarmed; on the contrary, I am acting in your interest; you are in love with mademoiselle—very good, I tell her so for you. Who knows? perhaps you will be more fortunate than the rest of us, especially as you have all that a man requires to succeed."

Jéricourt uttered the last words in such an ironical tone that any other than little Astianax would have taken them in very bad part; but he, on the contrary, accepted them as the truth; he smiled and twisted his mouth into the shape of an ace of spades, while his eyes shot flames to right and left.

Violette restrained the intense desire to laugh caused by young Astianax's contortions of feature; she said as she arranged her flowers:

"Come, monsieur, choose. Do you want a bouquet? Here's a very pretty one,—as monsieur doesn't take it."

"Yes—that is to say, you must make me one; but I'll explain what you must put in it: I want some heliotrope—that's the flower of witty people; then some myrtle—that means interest, affection; and a tulip in the centre—that means an honest heart, decent behavior."

"What, my dear Astianax, does the tulip mean all that?" said Jéricourt, laughingly; "I should never have suspected it. The devil! you are very learned about flowers. Go on—what else do you want?"

"A few red carnations—they mean that one would fight at need for the object of one's love; I put them in for myself, you understand; then a poppy and some immortelles—they promise strength and health, and they will please my father, for he is always thinking that he's sick; he took a bottle of lemonade only this morning—you know, the kind of lemonade that purges.—Surround the whole with pansies, and I shall have a bouquet full of meaning—a genuine *selam*."

"Bravo, young man, bravo! With such bouquets you will make your way very rapidly with the ladies!"

"This one is for papa; but later, I hope—"

"I am very sorry, monsieur," said Violette, "but I can't make such a bouquet as you want; I have no red carnations; you will hardly find any at this season, and I haven't any myrtle, or any poppies."

"The devil! that's annoying; but I should be sorry to apply to another flower girl; on the contrary, I mean to give you my custom."

"I am quite sure, monsieur, that no other flower girl will have what you want—not in this quarter, at all events. Take my advice, monsieur, and buy this bouquet that I was offering to monsieur—just roses and violets; it's very pretty, and it's the last one; I haven't got anything left to make one like it."

"I don't say that it isn't very nice, but it doesn't express my meaning—and it isn't a *selam*, either."

"But just see the pretty roses, the lovely buds! Anybody would say it was a lovely bouquet."

"And I agree with anybody; the bouquet is as pretty as the seller; and faith! that's saying a great deal!"

These last words were uttered by a gentleman of mature years, dressed with some elegance, whose bearing, whose manners, and whose smile even, instantly pointed him out as one who frequented the best society. His features were regular, refined and distinguished; but they also indicated that their owner had taken a great deal out of life; his face was worn, the flesh beneath his eyes was puffed out, his forehead and cheeks were furrowed with wrinkles. In a word, he was naught but a remnant of a very good-looking man, but he still had the *comme il faut* manner, the intelligent eye, and the slightly impertinent and satirical tone.

This individual was leaning on a very handsome cane, holding in his right hand an eyeglass through which he was examining Violette; he had paused in front of her booth and listened to her last words; and with his eyes fixed upon her lovely face, he muttered between his teeth:

"It's strange! there is a resemblance—to whom I can't say; but I know a face like that."

Jéricourt and little Astianax were greatly surprised when they saw the newcomer take the bouquet from the girl's hands, saying:

"How much for this bouquet?"

"Three francs, monsieur."

"Three francs! Pardieu! that's nothing at all; bouquets seem to be cheap in this quarter. I'll take it. Here, my pretty flower girl, pay yourself."

And he handed Violette a five-franc piece; whereupon little Astianax stood on tiptoe and cried:

"But I bargained for that bouquet before you did, monsieur, and I am going to buy it. You can't purchase it, not you."

The gentleman contented himself with a disdainful glance at the young man as he repeated:

"Here, my girl, pay yourself."

At this point Jéricourt thought fit to take part in the discussion. He stepped between Astianax and the stranger, and, assuming a self-sufficient tone, remarked to the latter:

"I was the first one who negotiated for that bouquet; so the flower girl has no right to sell it to anybody else, as I am ready to pay the price she asked. Be kind enough to give it to me, monsieur;—do you understand?"

The elderly gentleman simply turned his eyeglass on Jéricourt, and holding his head a little sidewise, said with an ironical smile:

"When I was your age, monsieur, I never allowed anything that I had in hand to be taken from me, and I have clung to that habit as I grew older;—do you understand?"

The gentleman's self-assured manner and the tone of persiflage in which he made this retort surprised our man of letters, who did not know just what to do; but it was not so with little Astianax, who was furious because the stranger seemed to pay no heed to him, to treat him like a child. He stepped up to him, looked him in the face as well as he could, and shouted, in a voice which anger made exceedingly shrill:

"I don't know why monsieur didn't answer me! You see, I don't allow myself to be insulted! I don't propose to be treated like a child, I don't! I have plenty of spunk, I have!"

"So! you are spunky, are you, my good friend?" rejoined the gentleman, turning his glass upon Astianax. "Indeed! so much the better! I congratulate you, for it may be a good thing for you when you grow up."

"What's that? when I grow up? I am nineteen years old, monsieur, and at that age one isn't afraid of anybody!"

"Nonsense! nonsense! that isn't possible! You mean nine."

This remark made little Astianax tremble with rage; he stamped the ground and seemed disposed to rush at the gentleman, who continued to stare at him and even ventured to smile as he scrutinized him. Violette, fearing that the little man would resort to violence, had risen to restrain him, and Jéricourt, whom the quarrel seemed to amuse, was wondering what would happen next, when the scene changed as suddenly as when the manager's whistle is heard at the Opéra.

On the boulevard, however, Chicotin Patatras acted once more as the scene-shifter.

Georget's friend had been sauntering about the Château d'Eau for several minutes; being desirous to spend during the morning all the money that he had left from the day before, the young rascal had breakfasted so sumptuously that his brain was a little excited, and he felt in the mood for perpetrating a practical joke. In this frame of mind, he had noticed that several gentlemen were standing in front of the flower girl's booth, and he soon recognized Jéricourt as the man whom he had tried to throw down on the preceding day. He said to himself instantly:

"Why shouldn't I do to-day what I missed doing yesterday? My little Georget don't like that scented dandy; he's there again, prowling round the flower girl; if I knock him over, I shall be doing a friend a favor, and then too it's fun for me. I must go about it playfully; Chopard ain't here to push me—that's a shame.—Ah! pardi! I'll just go and grab that cabby's glazed hat, as he stands dreaming there by his horses; of course he'll chase me, and I'll run between my man's legs."

Chicotin put his plan into execution forthwith. The cabman, bereft of his hat, ran after the *gamin*, shouting at the top of his lungs; he fled in the direction of the flower girl and hurled himself suddenly against the legs of someone, whom he bowled over, while the others hastily stepped aside; but Chicotin had missed his aim again; it was not Jéricourt, but little Astianax, who was sprawling on the asphalt.

"Upon my word, Mademoiselle Violette, it's impossible to stop in front of your booth, it seems!" said Jéricourt, turning angrily away. "I congratulate you on the way you treat your customers, and especially on the champion you have chosen for that purpose. If it's for him that you insist on remaining a flower girl, it doesn't speak well for your taste."

"What's that? what did the dark-haired dandy say?" cried Chicotin, rising and tossing the cabman his hat. "I didn't understand his apology."

"I don't know what the gentleman said," exclaimed Violette, "but I do know this, Monsieur Chicotin, that you have played the same trick two days in succession on people who were standing in front of my shop; and I propose that it shall stop; if not, I know to whom to complain."

During this exchange of words, young Astianax had risen, with a lump on his forehead, and both knees of his trousers torn; because he wore straps under his feet, which inevitably caused the cloth to tear at the slightest strain.

The rents that he saw in his trousers seemed to distress young Astianax; he heaved a deep sigh and muttered:

"Sapristi! and it's only the second time I have worn them!"

Thereupon, giving no further thought to the bouquet or to his quarrel, the little fellow walked rapidly away, trying to hold his hands over the holes in his garments, which his short coat did not cover.

Meanwhile the elderly gentleman had held the bouquet in his hand, still leaning rather heavily on his cane.

"Nobody will dispute possession of these flowers with me any more," he said at last. "My two rivals have abandoned the ground; it's a dangerous place, it seems, if I am to believe what that gentleman said.—Ha! ha! you rascal! is it true that you amuse yourself throwing down mademoiselle's customers?"

"Oh, no! it's only a joke, monsieur!" Chicotin replied slyly; "but I have bad luck, I never hit the ones I aim at."

"Were you aiming at me, pray?"

"No, indeed, monsieur; of course not!"

"Because, you see, I have the gout, and if you had knocked me down, it might have been a more serious matter for me than for that little man, who ought not to have lost the habit of tumbling yet."

"Oh! monsieur, if I had had that misfortune, I should never have forgiven myself; but I'd have picked you up."

"That would have been most generous on your part; but I prefer that you shouldn't have any occasion to pick me up. You look to me like a genuine ne'er-do-well; but I don't dislike knaves of your sort."

"Monsieur's a good judge."

"Would you like to come with me? I'll give you an errand to do."

"Yes, monsieur, why not? And you won't be sorry that you chose me; I do errands in first-class shape!"

"Very good! if I am satisfied with you, I will give you my work. What's your name?"

"Chicotin—nicknamed Patatras because——"

"Parbleu! I have a shrewd suspicion why you had that name given you, if you always make your entrée as you did just now, by throwing people down.—But this pretty flower girl doesn't like the way you treat her customers, and she is right."

"Bless me! monsieur," said Violette, "it's the second time in two days that he has run into my counter like that."

"It's the last time, Mamzelle Violette; I promise you I won't do it again; I'm done."

"This girl is really lovely!" muttered the gentleman, as he paid for his bouquet. "Whom in the devil does she look like? Faith! I've known so many!—Follow me," he said, turning to Chicotin.

He walked away, leaning on his cane and putting his left foot to the ground with great precaution, which necessarily kept him from walking fast.

And Monsieur Chicotin followed him, taking several steps very rapidly, then falling back to cut a caper or some monkey trick.

"If we keep on at this pace," he said, "we shan't beat the railway train."

X

A DOMESTIC INTERIOR

In a very handsome salon of an apartment on Boulevard Beaumarchais, in one of those fine houses recently built, which make that quarter one of the most attractive in Paris, three persons were assembled: Monsieur Glumeau, his wife and his daughter.

We know the ladies. Monsieur Glumeau, formerly a commission merchant, was a man of fifty years, of medium height, who had never been handsome, but who might have possessed some attractions when he was young, thanks to his light hair, his china-blue eyes—there are people who like china-blue eyes—and above all, to his slender figure, his shapely leg and his small and well-arched foot. As he grew older, Monsieur Glumeau had not taken on flesh like his excellent wife, but had retained a youthful appearance, especially when seen from behind; as to his face, that had become considerably wrinkled, but his eyes were still china-blue, and although he no longer possessed his fair hair, he had replaced it by a wig of the same color.

It is probable that Monsieur Glumeau's features would not have undergone so sudden a revolution, except for the mania that he had contracted of drugging himself, of putting himself on strict diet for the slightest indisposition. The dread of being ill constantly tormented the ex-commission merchant, and by dint of taking care of his health, he had succeeded in ruining it. His ordinary reading was the fourth page of the large newspapers; he took note of all the infallible remedies announced and extolled by their inventors; he often bought them although he had not the disease which they were supposed to cure; but he would take them all as a matter of precaution, saying to himself: "If I should have this disease, I shall have the remedy at hand."

To this weakness of mind, far from agreeable in a family, Monsieur Glumeau added the pretension of shining in conversation. He constantly sought to make sharp or clever remarks; but as he was never able to think of any, he often halted on the way, which fact imparted much incoherency to his speech. Lastly, having formerly been what is called a fine dancer, he had retained much liking for that exercise, wherein he could at his pleasure exhibit his foot, of which he was very proud, and upon which he kept his eyes fixed as he danced.

After retiring from business with a very considerable fortune, which had recently been added to by an inheritance, Monsieur Glumeau had purchased a country house at Nogent-sur-Marne; there he had had built in his garden a small theatre, where in the summer his family and friends indulged in the pleasure of theatrical performances, being actors and spectators in turn. Monsieur Glumeau liked to receive company; the presence of guests made him forget his imaginary diseases; as his wife and his children were also fond of pleasure, the ex-commission merchant's house was one of those where one was always certain to pass one's time agreeably; ceremony and etiquette were banished from it, and everyone was at liberty to do what he pleased; the company was sometimes a little mixed but it made up in quantity what it lacked in quality.

At the moment of which we write, the head of the family was in the act of drinking a cup of tea into which he had squeezed the juice of a lemon, because when he woke that morning he had a bitter taste in his mouth.

"I think that this will do me good," said Monsieur Glumeau, as he drank his tea in little sips; "lemon juice in tea clears up the bile."

"But why will you have it that you're bilious, my dear? Your complexion is very clear, you are not yellow."

"You say I am not yellow, my dear love; that's a question! I am a little yellow—on one side of my nose; and I don't propose to wait until I am as yellow as a pumpkin before I take a purgative."

"Do you mean to say that you propose to purge yourself again? That would be the last straw. You took Sedlitz

water a fortnight ago."

"What does that prove, if I need it again?"

Madame Glumeau shrugged her shoulders, exclaiming:

"You make yourself sick by dosing yourself, Edouard!"

"Why no, my dear love, one doesn't make oneself sick by taking care of oneself; on the contrary, it prevents one from being sick."

"You know that we have company to dinner to-day. I trust that you don't propose to select this moment to take medicine."

"I am not talking about medicine to-day; but listen: just now I was reading in my paper the announcement of a most valuable discovery."

"Something to prevent potatoes from being sick?"

"Oh! I am not talking about potatoes!"

"But, my dear, they are so useful, so nourishing, so valuable, so——"

"Let me alone with your potatoes; I don't like them. What I am talking about is an infallible remedy for the gravel."

"But you haven't that, monsieur!"

"No, but I might have it!"

"What a misfortune it is to be afraid of all diseases!"

"I am not afraid of them, madame, but I simply am on my guard against them; it isn't from fear, it's from prudence, from common sense."

"Bless my soul! if all men resembled you, it would be amusing."

"What do you mean by that, Lolotte?"

"I mean that by dint of thinking about diseases, you think that you have them all, and it doesn't tend to make you a lively companion in society."

"Madame, *si vis pacem, para bellum*."

"What does that mean, monsieur?"

"If you wish for peace, prepare for war."

"What connection has that with your lemon juice in tea?"

"It also means: If you want to be well, look after yourself as if you were ill."

"Oh! as to that, I don't believe a word of it; do I dose myself, monsieur? and you see how well I am!"

"It is a fact that you are getting too stout, my dear love; but if you would have consented to take a little white mustard seed, you would have lost flesh."

"No, thanks, monsieur; I should probably have become like a lath, and I prefer to remain as I am. To hear you talk, one would say that I was enormous."

"Not exactly, but you haven't any waist."

"I haven't any waist! I haven't any waist! Upon my word, I guess that it's your eyes that are diseased; you see crooked."

"What! why do you say that my eyes are diseased? Is it because they are red? Don't joke, Lolotte, are my eyes swollen?"

"Ah! so I haven't any waist! All men don't think as you do, monsieur, and in spite of my stoutness, if I chose to listen to all the pleasant things that are said to me——"

"Madame! you forget that your daughter is here.—Eolinde, come and look at my eyes; it seems to me that they sting."

Mademoiselle Eolinde was looking over a volume of plays; instead of answering her father, she cried:

"We must play *La Forêt Périlleuse*, papa, and I will be the fair Ca—Ca—Camille!"

"Yes, my child, yes, we have already decided to give that play," said Madame Glumeau; "and we are going to have here to-day all the people who are to take part in the first piece to be given at our country house, in order to distribute the rôles. But the other piece is what hasn't yet been chosen. We must have a very lively vaudeville."

"Oh, mamma! let's give *Estelle, ou Le Père et La Fille*!"

"I should like to know if you call that a lively vaudeville! My dear girl, when we have theatricals in our house, for our amusement, we mustn't undertake to make people weep, for the only result is to make them laugh. As a general rule, you are all very bad, but that is what is wanted; the worse actors you are, the more laughter you cause; if you acted well, it would be very dull, I fancy."

"Oh, mamma! how you ta—ta—talk, just because you—you—do—do—don't act yourself!"

"If I did, I should try to be funny, that's all; but I should know my lines, I tell you that; and you never know yours."

During this conversation between the mother and the daughter, Monsieur Glumeau had risen, had stationed himself in front of a mirror, and was looking at his eyes with a persistent scrutiny which finally ended in making his sight blurred; whereupon he paced the salon, muttering:

"I must get some eye salve; I ought to have a recipe somewhere."

"But there's nothing the matter with your eyes, monsieur!" cried Madame Glumeau impatiently; "you apparently propose to make yourself blind now! Why don't you take the elixir of long life, and have done with it?"

"That wouldn't be such a bad idea, madame!"

"Oh, yes! do as your friend Boutelet did. Do you remember what happened to him, because he drank heaven knows how many bottles of the elixir of long life in six months? He died of it!"

"Perhaps he would have died six months earlier if he hadn't drunk it!"

"After three o'clock and Astianax has not come home," said tall Eolinde; "it isn't very kind of my brother, for he

was to bring us a collection of plays to choose from!"

"Wasn't it his neighbor, Monsieur Jéricourt, that young author who lives on the fourth floor, who was to lend your brother the plays?"

"Yes, mamma."

"He has a very attractive look, has that young man, we must invite him to come to our play in the country; eh, Edouard?"

"I have no objection; isn't he a newspaper man too?"

"I don't think so."

"I'm sorry for that; we must try to have a few newspaper men; they go everywhere in society, they write articles about everything they see, and perhaps they would speak of me in the paper, and I should see myself in print; that would be very nice!—Whom have we to dinner to-day?"

"Why, you must know as well as I do, my dear."

"Ah! *bigre!* I really believe that I have a pain in my stomach."

"Oh dear! that would be the last straw."

"No, it's nothing, it's going away; I was in a constrained position."

"We expect to dinner Monsieur and Madame Dufournelle; Madame Dufournelle wants to act; she will be terribly awkward on the stage, I fancy, but that's her business!"

"She is graceful and pretty, and I believe that she will make a success of it."

"Oh! that's just like a man! to call that woman pretty, just because she is always laughing, and because she is a great flirt; indeed she carries it so far sometimes as to be almost indecent in her behavior with men!"

"Upon my word, Lolotte! where did you see that?"

"I have seen it more than once; and in our own house, in the country, with you, when she asked you to run after her and defied you to catch her! Monsieur ran like a deer, and then you both disappeared behind a hedge.—You had no pain in your stomach that day!"

"Madame! really, you should not say such things; your daughter can hear you."

"My daughter will be married some day, monsieur, and there's no harm in her being warned beforehand of the perfidy of the male sex. Besides, Madame Dufournelle's coquetry is evident to everybody. Her husband sees nothing in all that! Poor fellow! so long as he has somebody to play billiards with him, he doesn't care about anything else."

"He isn't jealous, madame, and he is very wise; that proves that he has some intelligence."

"Ah! you think that, do you? I have known husbands of much intelligence who were as jealous as tigers! Say rather that that fat Dufournelle is not in love with his wife. Indeed, he's too fat to be amorous."

"Mon Dieu! what spiteful creatures women are! If a man is not jealous, it's because he doesn't love them.—I suppose you'd like me to be jealous, madame?"

"You, Edouard! Merciful heaven! that's all you need,—to have that disease, with all those which you think you have! that would be the climax!"

"Say! suppose we play *Les B—b—bains à Do—do—domicile?*" cried Eolinde, who was still looking over the plays. "I would be Ninie."

"My dear girl, do you intend to take all the parts in the plays we give?" said Monsieur Glumeau, admiring his feet. "It seems to me that if you take one part, that will be quite enough; with your defective speech, you know very well that you make plays last an hour longer than they should, and you have a perfect mania for choosing long parts! The last time we gave *Andromache* everybody thought that your scene with Orestes would never end!"

"Because it was in ve—verse, papa, which is harder for me to pro—pronounce. But when it is p—p—prose, it goes all by itself."

"So I see! But why in the deuce did you insist on giving a tragedy, then?"

"Oh! my dear, they were quite right!" said Madame Glumeau; "for I assure you that they were enough to make you die of laughter, and you yourself in Pylades,—bless my soul! how fine you were!"

"Madame, you always take everything wrong. I played Pylades very nicely, and if it hadn't been for my helmet, that kept falling down over my eyes and prevented me from seeing the audience, I should have made a very good impression."

"Why, you did make a splendid impression, my friend! you looked like a blind man, and that was much more amusing!"

"You are very satirical, my dear love; it is very easy to see that you don't act!"

"If I acted in private theatricals, I should never lose my temper if people laughed at me."

"What will you do with Monsieur Dufournelle?"

"He will prompt, that's his forte! he puffs^[B] all the time like an ox!—We also expect little Kingerie; he's a very good fellow; he does whatever anyone wants him to; he takes whatever parts you give him."

[B] The same word—*souffler*—means to prompt, and to blow or puff.

"Mamma, have you noticed that Monsieur Kingerie has an entirely different voice when he sings, from the one he has when he talks?"

"That's true, but it's very lucky for him; when he talks, he always sounds as if he were hoarse; whereas, when he sings, he has a little clear, flutelike voice, so shrill that it is hard to believe that it is he who is singing.—Then we shall have Monsieur Camuzard and his daughter, Mademoiselle Polymnie, who also wants to act."

"You must give her a part; she's a very handsome woman, tall and well-built and stylish!"

"She did her little s—s—soubrette part very badly the l—l—last time, although she had only a few words to say: 'M—m—madame, the company is below in the salon'; and she said: 'Madame, the s—s—salon is below in the c—c—company!'"

"That was because her tongue slipped! But it doesn't make it any the less true that Mademoiselle Polymnie looks very well on the stage."

"Her nose is too big!"

"Big noses do very well on the stage. Besides, I tell you again, daughter, that I desire to be polite to Monsieur Camuzard, and I know that it gives him great pleasure when his daughter acts." And Monsieur Glumeau added, with a glance at his wife: "We must try to make Astianax act a lover's part, and let Mademoiselle Polymnie be the sweetheart. You understand my ideas and my plans, don't you, Lolotte?"

"Yes, monsieur, they are not hard to understand. Mademoiselle Camuzard would be an excellent match, I know; but Astianax is still so young!"

"I married very young myself, madame, and I have never repented it."

"Ah! that's the nicest thing you have said to-day!"

"It seems to me that I say nice things very often; but you don't notice them because you are used to them.—This tea has done me good; I feel as light as a bird; I would like to dance a mazurka.—Speaking of dancing, Eolinde, have you practised on your piano the new quadrilles that I brought you?"

"Oh! they are too hard."

"No, mademoiselle, it's because you don't choose to take the pains to study; and you are all the more wrong in that, because everybody plays the piano now; young men and young girls, everybody knows how to play for dancing; the young woman who did not know how to play a quadrille in company would be looked upon as a savage, as a Hottentot!"

"I know very well that everybody pl—plays the piano now. The c—c—concierge's daughter plays it; and the other day the l—l—locksmith who c—c—came to fix a lock which wouldn't l—l—lock, said when he heard me pl—playing: 'I play the piano myself Sundays, when I have time.'—Isn't that so, mamma?"

"It's the truth; indeed I was tempted to say to the locksmith that he ought to put over his shop door: 'Bells hung with piano accompaniment!'"

"In fact, papa, the p—p—piano has become such a common inst—st—strument, that I would rather play something else."

"What, I should like to know?"

"Why, the little flute, for example."

"You are mad, Eolinde; it would be very pretty to see a young lady playing on the flute! Wind instruments are exclusively for men."

"Why is that, papa?"

"Why, because, as Apollo played the flute when he kept flocks, and as that god was the god of melody, the pipes and the flute—By the way, Lolotte, I hope you told Chambourdin to come; he's a very pleasant fellow, a leader in all sorts of fun, always merry and a true sport. He will act, and I'll wager that he'll be most amusing!"

"Don't you know, monsieur, that we can't rely on your Chambourdin? You know very well that he never keeps his word; when he promises to come, that's the end of it. If we relied on him to take a part, he would spoil the whole performance. But we shall have Monsieur Mangeot and his sister; they are obliging and agreeable. Monsieur Mangeot takes the part of clowns and mimics very well; he plays carefully and always knows his part, and so does his sister."

"True, but as his sister is extremely hard of hearing, she always has to stand within two steps of the prompter, which is a great nuisance for the action of the play; and sometimes too she talks at the same time that her opposite is talking.—*Bigre!* here comes that pain in the stomach again. What can it be? Did we have mushrooms yesterday, Lolotte?"

"Mushrooms? there were some in the vol-au-vent we had; but everybody ate some of it, and it didn't make anybody sick."

"That doesn't prove anything; sometimes it doesn't show itself until late; Eolinde, you haven't a pain in your stomach, have you?"

"On the contrary, papa."

"What do you mean by on the contrary; you either have a pain, or—"

"No, s—s—since I—I say on the c—c—contrary!"

"My child, your answers are very foolish.—If this doesn't go away, I will tell the maid to prepare me an enema of marshmallow."

"Please remember that the maid is getting her dinner ready; she is looking after her kitchen fire, and how do you suppose that she can leave that to make you an enema?"

"I don't care for that; if I am ill, it seems to me that it is more important to take care of me than to get the dinner."

"But, monsieur, we have ten people to dinner, and it's after four o'clock."

"Then, madame, go and prepare it for me yourself."

"Mon Dieu! just for a paltry pain in the stomach! Often it doesn't amount to anything; go—somewhere, monsieur, and it will pass away."

"I shall not go anywhere, madame, because I have no desire to."

"Papa, suppose we should play *Pourceaugnac*?"

"Hold your tongue, my child; you tire me!"

"Dear me, Eolinde!" said Madame Glumeau with a sigh, "why should we play *Pourceaugnac* on our little stage; we play it often enough in our family, as well as *Le Malade Imaginaire*!"

Monsieur Glumeau was about to reply to his wife when the bell rang.

"Company! company already!" cried stout Lolotte, "and I haven't finished dressing!"

"And my enema, madame! I must have it!" said her husband in an altered voice.

"No doubt it's my brother," replied tall Eolinde in her turn; "it isn't worth while to put ourselves in such a flurry for him!"

THE ELUSIVE REMEDY

But the salon door opened, and Monsieur Dufournelle and his wife appeared.

Monsieur Dufournelle was a stout party of forty-five, with a jovial face which denoted a frank and hearty disposition. His wife, who was hardly thirty, was pretty, had a good figure, and laughed all the time; it is needless to say that she had fine teeth; if they had been ugly she would not have laughed on all occasions.

"Good afternoon, my friends!" said Monsieur Dufournelle, with an "ouf!" which sent the sheets of music scattered over the piano flying about the room. "We have come early; it's bad form, but we don't care for that!—You are all well, my dear friends?"

"Very well—extremely well! It is so nice of you to come early!" said Madame Glumeau, dissembling a slight grimace.

"I remarked to my husband," rejoined the lady with the fine teeth, "that perhaps it would be discourteous for us to come before five o'clock; but he replied that we didn't stand on ceremony with you."

"And he was right, he was quite right!" said Monsieur Glumeau, pressing one of his hands to his stomach; then he turned to his daughter and muttered: "The devil take them! I want my enema!"

"Besides, we have lots of things to talk about," said Madame Dufournelle; "aren't we to distribute the parts to-day for our performance?—Ha! ha! what fun it will be! I have never acted, but I am looking forward to it. Ha! ha!"

"Would you believe that my wife hasn't talked about anything else for a fortnight, and I have to take her to the theatre every night, because she claims that that is like giving her lessons! One day she tries to imitate Scriwaneck, another time Mademoiselle Fargueil; then it's Aline Duval whom she tries to mimic, or else pretty Alphonsine, or Grassot."

"Oh! really, Monsieur Dufournelle, what are you talking about? Imitate Grassot indeed! do you suppose that I mean to take men's parts? Ha! ha! ha!"

"I don't know, but I assure you that you caught some of Grassot's intonations when you were rehearsing—I don't know what rôle.—But where is our dear little Astianax? aren't we to see him?"

"Yes, indeed, you will see him; he should be at home before this; I don't know where he can have gone."

"I'll bet that he's gone to get a b—b—bouquet for p—p—papa."

"A bouquet! what! it can't be that it's Glumeau's birthday?"

"Why, isn't this Saint-Honoré's day?"

"Sapristi! and we never thought of it, Eléonore?"

"That is true, my dear; we are very thoughtless!"

"All the same, my dear friend, I wish you many happy returns; the bouquet will come later!"

"Thanks! thanks!" replied Glumeau, with a significant glance at his wife. "At this moment, a bouquet isn't what I want."

"I must go and complete my toilet," said the buxom Lolotte, answering her husband's signs with a wink. "You will excuse me, won't you?"

"Excuse you? why, of course."

"Yes, go and do—do what you have to do!" cried Glumeau, staring at his feet with a distressed expression. "And I will come too."

"You see, we came too early!" said Madame Dufournelle; "we are in the way."

"Why, not at all! you see that we do not stand on ceremony."

As Madame Glumeau was about to leave the salon, the door opened, and an old and exceedingly ugly man in blue spectacles entered, escorting a tall and well-built young lady, dressed with affected elegance, and endowed with one of those faces that never change.

"Monsieur and Mademoiselle Camuzard!" cried Madame Glumeau, turning back to welcome the newcomers. "How good of you to come early! Pray come in.—Edouard, here are Monsieur Camuzard and Mademoiselle Polymnie."

Edouard had gone to examine his complexion in the mirror; when he saw that more guests had arrived, he uttered a hollow groan, then did his utmost to assume a smiling countenance, saying to himself:

"I shall never be able to take my enema! this is getting to be very alarming!"

Mademoiselle Polymnie had in her hand a huge bouquet, which she presented to Glumeau, saying:

"Monsieur, will you allow me to wish you a happy birthday?"

"To be sure, mademoiselle, with the greatest pleasure; I am deeply touched. What a superb bouquet! You are too kind."

"Sapristi! how sorry I am that we didn't bring one!" exclaimed Dufournelle again, while his wife laughed heartily as she looked at the pictures on the music and at Mademoiselle Camuzard.

"How is your health, my dear Glumeau?" inquired the old gentleman, shaking his host's hand violently.

"Very good, Monsieur Camuzard; my health is very fair, although it isn't all that I could wish."

"Are you in pain?—I have pains in my knees and arms; and it keeps catching me here, you see, and extends all the way down my back."

"It's not my back that troubles me, it's—"

"And then I cough a great deal every morning when I wake up; there are days when I have regular paroxysms."

"I don't cough, but—"

"And then I expectorate very freely! Oh! I don't try to stop that—it does me good."

"This is not a very amusing conversation!" said Madame Dufournelle in an undertone to her husband; he frowned at his wife, to enjoin silence upon her, whereupon she went to Mademoiselle Eolinde.

"Well!" she said, "what are we to act? have you decided on the plays? What part are you going to give me? I want a pretty costume."

"You see how co—co—coquettish she is!" said Mademoiselle Glumeau, turning to her mother; "the co—costume is the first th—th—thing she th—thinks of."

"We haven't yet decided on the whole entertainment," said Madame Glumeau; "we are waiting until our whole troupe has arrived."

"If you need me," said Monsieur Camuzard, "don't hesitate; I'll play any small part, or a utility rôle."

"It's to be hoped that we shall not need him!" whispered Madame Dufournelle to her husband; "he's altogether too hideous; he looks like a bird of prey."

"Hush, Eléonore, I beg you."

"My dear love, pray go and attend to what you have to do," said Monsieur Glumeau, looking at his wife. "Our friends will excuse you; they know that the mistress of the house always has orders to give."

"Do go, dear lady; your charming daughter is here to do the honors, you know."

"Since you are good enough to excuse me—I have something to attend to."

"Would you like me to come and help you?" inquired Madame Dufournelle; "dispose of me."

"Oh, no! you are too kind; I don't need any help for what I have to do; I will return in a moment."

And the mistress of the house was once more on the point of leaving the room, when the door opened again to admit two other guests, a gentleman and a lady, both of mature years, who came forward smiling pleasantly at the company.

"Monsieur and Mademoiselle Mangeot!" exclaimed Madame Glumeau, who was obliged to step back as she curtsied, because the newcomers came straight toward her. "How very good of you to come early!"

"Why, you said five o'clock, and it is just about to strike the hour," replied the gentleman, bowing low. "I am as exact as a pendulum; I hurried my sister who, I thought, would never finish arranging her hair; I always dread being late."

"Yes, my brother wanted to ride," said Mademoiselle Mangeot, "but I reminded him that we should arrive sooner on foot than in an omnibus.—Will you allow me to wish you a happy birthday, Monsieur Glumeau?"

And the middle-aged damsel, producing a pretty little bouquet of *pompon* roses, which she had under her shawl, presented it to Glumeau, who smelt it, making a peculiar face, and replied:

"Really, mademoiselle, you overwhelm me—*pompon* roses!"

"You are fond of them, I believe?"

"Oh, yes! I am very fond of them—but not too hot."

"What! are there such things as hot bouquets?"

"Oh! I beg pardon, mademoiselle, I made a mistake; I meant to say that it would give me great pleasure to take it now."

"Why, take it then, monsieur; as you see, I am offering it to you for that purpose."

"To be sure—excuse me—I am absent-minded; I do take it—that is to say, yes, I accept these lovely roses."

"You take them awkwardly; you will prick yourself; you should let me put them in myself."

"Put them where, pray?"

"Why, in your buttonhole."

"Sapristi! how annoyed I am that I didn't bring a bouquet!" repeated stout Dufournelle; and Mademoiselle Eolinde, overhearing him, muttered between her teeth:

"He s—s—says that every year, but he n—n—never brings one."

"My dear Monsieur Glumeau," said Monsieur Mangeot, stepping forward to shake hands with the master of the house, who seemed determined to keep his hands pressed against his abdomen, "pray accept my good wishes also, and may I be able to offer them again a hundred years hence.—That's not a new idea, but it's always good!—And the dear boy, the charming Astianax, where is he, pray?"

"I can't imagine!" said Madame Glumeau; "to think of his not being here yet—to-day of all days! Really, I am beginning to be anxious."

"You know, mamma, that my b—b—brother was going to order a b—b—bouquet full of meaning; no d—d—doubt—no doubt that is what is k—k—keeping him."

"What on earth is a bouquet with a meaning?" inquired Monsieur Camuzard.

"It's a *selam*, monsieur."

"Ah! and what might a *selam* be?"

"It's a bouquet with a meaning."

"Excellent!"

"When a man has a daughter named Polymnie, he ought to be more learned," said Madame Dufournelle laughingly to Mademoiselle Mangeot; and she, being a little hard of hearing, replied:

"Yes, I think it will be fine."

Meanwhile Madame Glumeau, noticing her husband's repeated signals, determined to leave the salon without asking leave of the latest comers. And fearing that other guests might arrive to detain her, she made her escape by a door leading to her bedroom.

When he saw his wife disappear, Monsieur Glumeau uttered an exclamation of satisfaction which was drowned by the arrival of Monsieur Kingerie, the young man who did whatever anyone desired. He was a little fellow, who always acted as if he were ashamed of himself; on entering the room, he began by blushing to the ears, ran into a chair that was between himself and the master of the house when he attempted to salute him, and as he rose after picking up the chair, he ran his head into Monsieur Glumeau's stomach. That gentleman uttered a savage oath, while the timid Kingerie, distressed beyond words at what he had done, hastily stepped back and trod on Mademoiselle Mangeot's foot; and as she was afflicted with corns, she pushed the awkward youth violently away, whereupon he

collided with Monsieur Camuzard, causing his spectacles to fall off.

Madame Dufournelle laughed until she cried, saying to her husband:

"Pray stop that gentleman or he will upset the whole company."

They got young Kingerie seated at last; he was at a loss to apologize for his awkwardness and seemed disposed to weep; but, luckily for him, other guests arrived, so that he ceased to monopolize the attention.

First, there was a gentleman of very attractive appearance and with a distinguished air, whom they called Monsieur de Merval; he entered the salon with the ease of manner born of familiarity with good society, saluted one and all without knocking anybody down, and shook hands with Monsieur Glumeau without hitting him in the stomach. Although Monsieur de Merval was no longer a young man, he was still most attractive; which was proved by the fact that when he entered the salon, all the ladies, young and old, drew themselves up, and composed their features and their bearing; you will never see a woman do all that for a man who is not worth the trouble.

Monsieur Glumeau, who seemed to have much consideration for Monsieur de Merval, forgot for a moment the remedy he was awaiting, to say to him some of those courteous phrases which people exchange in society, as we exchange silver for small coins.

"I do not see madame," replied the newcomer, after paying his respects to Mademoiselle Eolinde.

"Mamma will be here d—d—directly; she has g—g—gone to pre—pre—"

"My wife has gone to see if dinner will be served soon," hastily interposed Monsieur Glumeau. "The master's eye, you know, or rather the mistress's, is always indispensable when one entertains a few friends."

"And your son?"

"My son—I can't understand his absence; he should have been here long ago; something has happened—"

"P—p—papa, I think I hear my b—b—brother's voice in the d—d—dining-room; he's with Monsieur Cha—Chambourdin."

"That's very fortunate; we shall know in a minute what has detained him."—And Monsieur Glumeau whispered in his daughter's ear: "Go and see if your mother has prepared—you know what. I must have it."

"But p—p—papa, I c—c—can't—can't leave the s—s—salon n—now; that would l—l—leave only you with the g—g—guests, and you're not very b—b—brilliant."

"Parbleu! you must come in with me, you rascal!" exclaimed a young man, the possessor of a comely face, but with an absolutely bald head, who entered the salon at that moment, dragging young Astianax, who had his hands over the rents in his trousers.

"Mesdames and messieurs, I have the honor to present a young man who was scampering upstairs, without stopping at his worthy father's door; but I seized him on the wing, saying: 'My dear boy, it is too late to go up to your room; the paternal arms await you and the soup must be served.'—Still, he wouldn't come, and you see now how he objects to coming in."

"What does this mean, my son?" inquired Monsieur Glumeau, after shaking the hand that Chambourdin offered him. "Why do you stand there at the door and not come in?"

"Excuse me, father—allow me to go up to my room a moment; I will come right down again; it is impossible for me to face our guests at this moment."

"What! impossible? why, you're facing them now."

"And I don't see that the boy is dressed like a wild Indian, either!" said Chambourdin, as he saluted the ladies.

"My dear good father, I assure you that I have something on that is—is not presentable."

"Mon Dieu! c—c—can it be that my b—b—brother has the same trouble as p—p—papa?" said tall Eolinde to herself; "does he want one t—t—too?"

Monsieur Glumeau, who had had the same thought as his daughter, dared say nothing more; but the bald youth, who was in the habit of playing jokes in company, and who was very unceremonious wherever he went, crept noiselessly behind the son of the house, and, giving him a sharp push, forced him to pitch forward into the salon; and in that movement Monsieur Astianax was obliged to remove his hands from his knees, thus disclosing the two rents; whereupon everybody uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Great heaven!"

"Ah! the poor fellow!"

"Both knees torn! he must have fallen."

"You fell, didn't you?"

"How does it happen, my son, that those trousers, which are almost new, are torn on both knees?"

"Well! now you know why I didn't want to come in—you see that I was right. Am I presentable like this?"

"But, my son—"

"It is I who am to blame for everything!" cried Chambourdin; "I forced him to disclose his disaster. Strictly, I ought to lend him some trousers, but as I believe he has another pair, I prefer that he should wear his own.—Go, hapless victim of a slippery sidewalk, but don't be long! something tells me that the soup is not far away."

Little Astianax disappeared, and Monsieur Glumeau would have been glad to do as much, but his guests surrounded him and talked to him; he was hemmed in on all sides.

"Everybody must have come, is it not so, my dear friend?" said Chambourdin, offering him snuff in one of those snuff-boxes known as *rat-tails*.

"No, indeed, and it's very lucky—otherwise there would be thirteen of us," replied Glumeau, writhing about as inoffensively as possible.

"Thirteen! I had just as soon sit thirteen at table. Truffles, champagne, chambertin and thirteen at table every day—I'll subscribe for that if I don't have to pay in advance."

"Or if you don't have to pay afterward, perhaps?" said Monsieur Dufournelle.

"Oh! what a spiteful thing to say, big Dufournelle! How fat the fellow is growing! If he keeps on he won't be able to go into any house; partitions of decent dimensions no longer conceal him—he will have to have some made expressly for him."

"Hold your tongue, advocate without causes!"

"I an advocate? Oh! I have abandoned the profession; I wasn't loquacious enough, and then I was too good a fellow. I settled disputes on the instant. I induced the parties to dine together and I dined with them; we all got tipsy; after dinner they embraced and that was the end of their litigation. My confrères begged me to give up practice—I was ruining the profession."

"Whom else do you expect, Monsieur Glumeau?" inquired Monsieur Camuzard.

"A lady—a charming lady—not very young, but very good-looking still."

"And her name?"

"The Baronne de Grangeville."

"A baroness! the deuce! a real baroness?"

"I never knew a sham one."

"I was joking.—Is she married?"

"No, she's a widow."

"Oho! a widow, eh? And rich?"

"I believe that she is very rich.—But I beg pardon—I have to say a word to my daughter."

"I can't conceive what your mother is doing!" said Glumeau in his daughter's ear. "I can't remain in this plight. Something must have happened to the instrument. Go and see, Eolinde, and urge your mother to make haste."

Mademoiselle Eolinde was sorely vexed to be obliged to leave the company; she went out of the room with a sulky expression, and without acknowledging the fifth bow that young Kingerie addressed to her.

"Something out of the natural course is going on here," said Madame Dufournelle to her husband; "Madame Glumeau goes out and does not return; the son's trousers are all torn, and he disappears; the daughter has left the salon in a pet; Monsieur Glumeau stands first on one leg, then on the other; he frowns and doesn't pay any attention to the conversation. There certainly is something wrong!"

"Some dish spoiled, or some entrée from the restaurant that hasn't come, perhaps; or rather, they are making great preparations to receive this baroness whom they expect."

"Nonsense! really? a baroness of what?"

"What do you say? a baroness of what?—A baroness, that's all I know."

"And that's why these ladies leave us like this! Aren't we as good as a baroness, I should like to know?"

"Hush, Eléonore!"

"Bah! I don't care a snap of my finger for their baroness!"

"It's after half-past five," said Monsieur Mangeot to his sister; "I trust they will give us some dinner soon; I am half starved!"

"I fancy that you have time to tighten your waistband; they are expecting a baroness, so Monsieur Camuzard told us just now."

"Oho! confound it! I must admit that at this moment I would much rather see a stuffed turkey than a baroness. They are capable of making us wait till six o'clock. I don't know anything more intolerable than not to give your guests their dinner at the appointed time. If you mean to dine at half-past six, don't invite me at five; for otherwise, I would make my arrangements accordingly and take something to stay my stomach.—Ah! the door opens—it is the long-desired baroness, no doubt."

"No, it's Madame Glumeau coming back."

The buxom Lolotte had, in fact, reappeared in the salon; she tried to catch her husband's eye, but she was obliged to stop and welcome the guests who had arrived during her absence. She had much ado to get rid of Monsieur Chambourdin, who embraced her, and of young Kingerie, who trod on her dress. At last she succeeded in joining Edouard, whose contortions were becoming alarming, and whispered to him:

"It's all ready in your dressing-room."

Glumeau's face beamed.

"Go, my dear," his wife added aloud, "and see if the table is laid as you wish; if the names of the guests are arranged to your satisfaction."

"Yes, yes, you are right; I will go; but we can't sit down, you know, until Madame de Grangeville comes."

"All right, all right! but go."

Glumeau did not wait to be told again; he hurried toward the door, saying to himself:

"At last I can take it!"

But as he opened the door, he found himself face to face with a very fashionably dressed lady who was just about to enter. The unhappy host stopped short, saying:

"It is written that I shall not take it!"

XII

THE BARONNE DE GRANGEVILLE

The Baronne de Grangeville, the latest arrival at Monsieur Glumeau's, was a lady who had once been exceedingly pretty, and who was still rather attractive; by artificial light she appeared no more than thirty-six years old; by daylight, about thirty-nine; we are not certain how she appeared by twilight.

It might be that Madame de Grangeville had not passed her fortieth birthday, but it would have been dangerous to make that assertion, because she was always so carefully gotten up, even in the most trivial details of her toilet, because she was always dressed in such perfect taste, made use of such delicious perfumery, and carried herself so gracefully, that she would inevitably be always young.

The baroness's arrival created a sensation in Monsieur Glumeau's salon, for it should be said that none of the guests there assembled had previously met that lady, to whom the Glumeaus had been introduced at a third house, where, delighted with her affability, they had invited her to dine with them.

The master of the house, despite his interesting situation, could not do otherwise than offer the lady his hand to escort her to his wife, who received the baroness with an effusion of cordiality and satisfaction which seemed overdone to some of the guests.

"She is very good-looking," said Monsieur Dufournelle to his wife, who whispered:

"No! you should say, she has been."

"But I say yes, she is now; she is a person who still makes conquests, I am sure."

"Ah! I am glad to hear that, my dear; it makes me think that I shall continue to be attractive for a long time to come."

"A lovely dress, a very distinguished bearing!" said Monsieur Camuzard to his daughter.

Mademoiselle Polymnie scrutinized it all without winking, and replied simply:

"Her dress is too long-waisted."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the facetious Chambourdin, tapping Monsieur Mangeot on the shoulder, "that's rather a dainty bit still, eh? What do we think of it, friend Mangeot?"

"I think that it's almost six o'clock, and that I am starving to death!"

"As the baroness has arrived, dinner will probably be served."

"Why, no—look—there's Glumeau running away now! Do you see how he slinks off? Where in the devil can he be going?"

"We must keep him here."

But the gentlemen were too late that time; Monsieur Glumeau finally succeeded in leaving the salon; he would have left one of his coat tails there rather than not go.

Amid all the reflections and comments to which Madame de Grangeville's entrance had given rise, a single person had said not a word—that person was Monsieur de Merval. However, he had scrutinized the baroness no less closely, perhaps even more closely, than the others had done, and his expression, as he looked at her, seemed to indicate that it was not the first time that he had seen her; being a man of the world, however, he was able to conceal his sensations.

As for her who was at that moment the cynosure of every eye, she was not embarrassed for an instant by all the glances that were bent upon her; smiling at one and all most graciously, acknowledging Madame Glumeau's curtsies, addressing a pleasant word to Mademoiselle Eolinde, she displayed as much ease of manner as if she were in her own house until the moment that her eyes met Monsieur de Merval's. Then a surprised expression, a faint suggestion of dismay, blended with the smile that played constantly about her lips; but, like Monsieur de Merval, she speedily recovered her self-possession; her emotion was only momentary.

Young Astianax reappeared in other clothes and was greeted with cheers by Chambourdin and Dufournelle, who told him that all the ladies had looked at his trousers.

The little fellow lost no time in presenting his respects to the Baronne de Grangeville, to whom he delivered a complimentary address that lasted a long time, while Monsieur Mangeot persisted in whispering to his neighbors:

"I say, are we never going to dine? It's after six; I was very hungry, but you will see that my appetite will have vanished when we sit down at the table."

"Where is the famous bouquet you were going to present to your father, young hidalgo?" Chambourdin asked the son of the house.

"The bouquet? Oh! don't mention it, my dear Chambourdin! It was that infernal bouquet that caused the accident to my trousers."

"Did you undertake to pick the flowers yourself, pray? Have you been flitting about the fields, my little shepherd?"

"No; it's a long story! There's a flower girl—who is very pretty—oh! I tell you she's a beauty!"

"Enough, enough, you scamp! I don't wish to know any more;—but you may give me the flower girl's address."

Madame de Grangeville continued to talk with Madame Glumeau and Mademoiselle Eolinde; but the rest of the guests assumed that morose and surly air which always invades a salon when dinner is delayed too long. Some looked at the ceiling, others walked about the room, concealing their yawns; this one consulted the clock at every instant, another stretched himself out in an easy-chair and tapped the floor impatiently. But at last the door of the salon opened, and a servant appeared and said:

"Madame is served."

Instantly the scene changed; faces became amiable once more, lips smiled; there was a general movement, a murmur of satisfaction passed about the room, and stout Dufournelle ran to offer his hand to the mistress of the house, eager to escort her to the dining-room. But, while accepting his proffered hand, Madame Glumeau still hesitated; she wondered whether they ought to sit down without her husband.—At that moment he appeared; he walked proudly and quickly; he carried his nose in the air and his foot gracefully arched; he was not the same man who was squirming and making wry faces a short time before. Madame Glumeau drew a long breath and said to herself:

"It seems that it did him good."

Glumeau shot through his guests like an arrow and offered his arm to the baroness, who accepted it. They adjourned to the dining-room and took their seats at the table in the order established by the cards. Madame de Grangeville naturally was seated beside the host, and Monsieur Camuzard was on her other side. Madame Glumeau had seated Monsieur de Merval beside herself, so that that gentleman was at some distance from the baroness; not so far, however, that his eyes did not meet hers from time to time; and, strange to say, at such times Monsieur de Merval always lowered his first.

When their appetites were appeased sufficiently to permit the guests to be agreeable, or at least to try to appear so, the conversation became animated, and they turned at last to the subject which had led to that festivity—the

performance to be given on Monsieur Glumeau's little stage in the country, and the distribution of parts.

"Unless something better is suggested, we propose to give *La Forêt Périlleuse*," said Madame Glumeau.

"Very good," said Chambourdin; "but in addition to the speaking parts, we must have robbers, a band of robbers."

"We will find some," said Glumeau; "robbers are not what we lack."

"The deuce! are they abundant in the neighborhood of your country house?"

"Don't joke, Chambourdin; if you do, nothing will ever be decided, and we must arrange everything to-day; we go into the country next week, and we must give the play at the end of June, no later."

"Of course, with a theatre in the woods, we mustn't wait until the bad weather begins."

"Well then, we will say *La Forêt Périlleuse*; my servants and my gardener will be the robbers."

"Oh! very good! excellent!"

"I will p—p—play the fair Ca—Ca—the fair Ca—Ca—Camille."

"You are entitled to."

"And my b—b—brother the robber chief."

"Better and better—just as it used to be at Nicolet's!"

"I say, I really believe Chambourdin is laughing at us! What do the company think?"

"No indeed! but it's lawful to laugh, isn't it?" said Chambourdin; "I don't imagine that you are going to act with sober faces all the time. Besides, am I not one of your troupe? I will take whatever part you wish—a robber, a tyrant, a victim. But allow me to make one suggestion; instead of your *Forêt Périlleuse*, which is not wonderfully clever, and in which there is only one female part—and that one doesn't come on in the first act—why don't you give *Roderic et Cunégonde*? That's a splendid parody on the fashionable melodrama, and full of wit from end to end; indeed, it's by the late Martainville, who had wit to sell, so I have been told; for I never knew him."

Chambourdin's suggestion was generally approved, except by Mademoiselle Eolinde, who regretted the fair Camille; but they gave her the part of Cunégonde, which was more in her line, because there are no long speeches in it.

"But there's a child in *Roderic et Cunégonde*," said Monsieur Mangeot.

"That's all right! we'll make one."

"What do you say? you'll make one?"

"To be sure, of pasteboard; with a doll; that's simple enough."

"But the child has something to say."

"That makes a difference; we will have one that can talk; at a pinch I will play the child myself."

"No, no," said Monsieur Glumeau, "we'll have my gardener's little one; he's a very smart child."

"Are there any other female parts?"

"There's a peasant—little Colas; we'll turn him into a girl—little Colette."

"That's right; and Mademoiselle Polymnie will take the part."

"She would have made a little Colas quite as well!" whispered Madame Dufournelle to Chambourdin, who replied:

"Such things are thought, not said."

"There's one piece chosen," said Mangeot, "so far so good; but you are going to give something besides that, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course; we must have a very lively farce."

"Have you made your selection? If not, I suggest *Il y a plus d'un Ane à la Foire*."

"Yes," said Dufournelle, "that's very amusing; we saw it, didn't we, Eléonore?—She laughed so much that we came near having to leave the theatre."

"I don't know that play," said Monsieur Camuzard. "Are there actually any asses in it?"

"There are three—but they're dressed as men."

"Ah! very good!"

And the old gentleman turned to the baroness and said: "I don't understand, do you, madame?"

The baroness looked at her neighbor with an ironical expression, and replied:

"Have you never seen any, monsieur?"

"Any what, madame?"

"Asses dressed as men."

"I don't think so—that is to say—Ah! I see, it's a metaphor!—That's a very unkind thing to say."

"Do you think so, monsieur? I don't."

The play suggested was adopted; then they desired a third, to begin the performance.

"Yes," said Chambourdin, "when you take so much trouble to put yourselves in training, you must give full measure—a performance *complet*, like an omnibus. I am going to propose a jolly farce, a little one-act affair with three characters: *Œil et Nez*."

"Oh, yes!" cried Dufournelle; "do you remember, Eléonore? when we saw it, you laughed so hard that—really you laughed too heartily."

"I had already suggested that," said little Astianax; "I know the part of Tityrus."

"And I will be the Eye, if you choose," laughed Madame Dufournelle.

"And I the Nose," said Chambourdin.

"But what on earth can this play be in which there's an Eye and a Nose?" queried Monsieur Camuzard, appealing once more to his neighbor. "I can't imagine, can you, madame?"

"I, monsieur? Why I am accustomed to seeing them in all the plays that are acted, and it doesn't seem at all

strange to me.”

Far from satisfied with this reply, Monsieur Camuzard dropped his chin on his cravat and his nose beneath his spectacles.

The choice of plays being made, they sent out for books, in order to distribute the rôles during the evening. Then they left the table and returned to the salon, where other guests, invited for the evening, were already assembled.

In the confusion that takes place when a number of people pass from one room to another, it is very easy to approach a person to whom one has something to say. A lover never lets that opportunity escape him, when he has not been seated beside the lady of his thoughts at dinner.

On this occasion it was a lady, who, as if without design, seated herself in a corner of the salon where a gentleman was already standing. The lady was the Baronne de Grangeville, and she said to Monsieur de Merval in an undertone:

“Have I changed so very much, pray, that Monsieur de Merval does not recognize me?”

“Pardon me, madame—I recognized you perfectly the instant that you arrived.”

“In that case, why did you not speak to me?”

“You have changed your name and I supposed that you did not wish to be recognized; I respected your incognito.”

“If I have changed my name, you must be well aware of the—the reason; you must have learned of what—of what happened to me.”

“People say so many things in society, madame, that one never knows what to believe, and in my opinion the man who believes nothing is wisest.”

“Ah! monsieur, if one could foresee—could conceive what would happen!”

“Why, there are some things that one can easily foresee.”

The baroness cast a penetrating glance at Monsieur de Merval, then rejoined:

“You are not married?”

“No, madame.”

“Faith, I am inclined to think that you have done as well to abstain!—Will you not do me the pleasure to come to see me?”

“You do me much honor, madame; and if it will not be indiscreet——”

“Oh! not in the least; I am absolutely my own mistress. We will talk of the past; that will not rejuvenate me, but it will give me pleasure. You will come, won’t you?”

“I shall take advantage of your permission, madame.”

“Here is my card.”

Madame Dufournelle, who always knew what was taking place in the salon, no matter where she happened to be, whispered to her husband:

“The baroness seems to be talking with Monsieur de Merval a great deal.”

“What of that? isn’t everybody here talking?”

“Yes, those who know one another.”

“Perhaps they know each other.”

“It looks to me very much that way; she just put something in his hand—something like a small piece of paper. What can it be?”

“Instead of worrying about that, go and select a part; they are just bringing the books.”

“A part. Oh! I mean to have a good one; I don’t propose that they shall make me play a supernumerary, or Monsieur Camuzard’s sweetheart—it’s so agreeable when he speaks to you; he would kill a fly on the wing! And it’s of no use to try to get away from it, for he has a mania for talking into your face.”

“What do you expect, my dear love? everybody hasn’t a perfumed breath.”

“No, indeed! I should think not! in fact, it’s a sad thing to see how rapidly mankind is degenerating! But there are people who seem to take pleasure in poisoning one. Nowadays, three-fourths of the young men carry about an odor of tobacco, of pipes, of the barracks, that turns the stomach of a person who doesn’t smoke; and women, as a general rule, haven’t adopted that habit.”

“And then,” said Chambourdin, who had overheard their conversation, “we have people with poor digestions—it’s dangerous to speak to them after dinner. And there are some too with decayed teeth; I can’t forgive them, for they might go to a dentist, who would make them inodorous. We also have ladies who lace too tight and ruin their stomachs in that way.”

“Oh! really, monsieur, I don’t believe that!”

“I will procure you the testimony of physicians, madame, to the effect that many ladies, married and unmarried, have attempted to make their waists so slender, have so squeezed their poor bodies, that the internal organs have suffered, and foul breath has arrived after some time. What madness! what idiocy! Ah! mesdames, the most willowy, the most slender waist will never be worth a fresh, pure breath, which is an indispensable accompaniment of beauty!—Dufournelle, I trust that we are going to have a little one?”

“A little what?”

“Parbleu! a little game of bouillotte—you and I and Monsieur de Merval, and that little villain of a Miaulard, who has just arrived sneezing; he always has a cold in his head.”

“Oh! messieurs, you think of nothing in the world but your cards; how nice it is of you, instead of playing with us!”

“Playing what?”

“Why, little games.”

“More or less innocent.—I’ll do it, on condition that I am allowed to play blindman’s-buff sitting down, and that

the ladies guess who I am.—Ah! good! if that unlucky Kingerie hasn't upset a Carcel lamp, and Mademoiselle Glumeau's dress is covered with oil! That youth is really very dangerous in company!"

"Oho! there's a different sort of thing over yonder! Just look at Mademoiselle Polymnie and Monsieur Astianax playing battledore and shuttlecock, and seated, at that!"

"Why, no, they're going to play cup and ball; they both have pointed sticks in their hands."

"It's a new kind of shuttlecock, monsieur: instead of hitting it with a racquet, somebody, not long ago, invented cornets to catch it in; but it's a much prettier way that they do it now: the shuttlecock has a hole at the end, and you have to catch it by sticking the point into the hole."

"That's a game that the ladies enjoy greatly; it is immensely popular in salons."

"But it must be rather hard."

"Mademoiselle Polymnie is very strong at it, they say; she has asked young Kingerie to come to count the strokes."

"Thus far I haven't seen him do anything but pick up the shuttlecock, which the players don't seem to catch on their sticks."

And Chambourdin walked toward them, saying:

"Oh! what a pretty game! I am sorry that I didn't see the beginning. How many times have they caught it in succession, Monsieur Kingerie?"

"Once!" the young man replied, as he stooped again to pick up the shuttlecock.

Many more guests arrived, and as the salon was crowded, Mademoiselle Polymnie and her adversary were obliged to abandon their game, evidently to the intense dissatisfaction of the young lady.

"It's a pity," she said; "we were beginning to play so well!"

"How does she succeed, I wonder, when she plays badly!" said Madame Dufournelle laughingly.

But the master of the house, having no pain in his stomach, insisted that they must dance. The bouillotte players were removed to an adjoining room, and an amateur took his place at the piano and played a polka, then a redowa, then a mazurka; for the quadrille is sadly neglected now; it is abandoned for new-fangled dances, which the dancers do not know in most cases, and which, consequently, they dance very poorly. The old-fashioned quadrille ventures to show its head only at long intervals nowadays, and it is treated with a discourtesy which will end by banishing it altogether.

Monsieur Glumeau took possession of a young lady of fourteen, with whom he danced the polka, redowa and mazurka without removing his eyes for a moment from his feet, which, however, was not likely to distress his partner. And Madame Glumeau, proud of the agility displayed by her husband, exclaimed in an outburst of enthusiasm:

"Ah! what a good thing it was that he took it!"

"What? a dancing-master?" queried Monsieur Camuzard. But Madame Glumeau turned away without replying and requested Monsieur Kingerie to leave the piano, as he had already broken several strings.

About eleven o'clock Madame de Grangeville vanished from the salon, after looking about in vain for Monsieur de Merval. But he had departed some time before, and the elegant baroness, who had counted upon a gentleman to escort her home, entered her cab all alone, frowning and muttering:

"Ah! men aren't so agreeable as they used to be!"

XIII

THE GOUTY GENTLEMAN

The gouty gentleman had followed the boulevards, walking toward the small theatres; when I say small theatres, I do it in accordance with an old habit, which it would be well to lay aside. Indeed, there are on Boulevard du Temple theatres which are very far from being small; and then too, even at the small ones sometimes they give works which are much superior to those which are played at the large ones.

The gentleman turned into Rue Charlot, in the heart of the Marais, walking very slowly, because of his lame foot, and also because he never failed to stop and turn around whenever a pretty face passed; which caused Chicotin to say:

"This old boy seems to be a connoisseur! I ought to have let myself out by the hour, and I should have made a handsome thing of it!"

The gentleman finally stopped in front of a small furnished lodging house, of very modest appearance, on Rue de Bretagne. He turned to the messenger and said with a smile:

"Here we are, this is my hotel. It doesn't come up to Hôtel Meurice, or even to Hôtel des Ambassadeurs! Other times, other hotels.—Follow me."

Chicotin followed the gentleman, who went up to the third floor and entered a room comfortably furnished, but without taste or style or harmony; the bed was mahogany, the bureau oak, and the chairs walnut; the bed curtains were modern in style; but there were curtains at the windows which were suitable for a peasant's cottage at best; in short, all the articles of furniture seemed to swear at finding themselves together, and the occupant of the room also made a wry face at finding himself surrounded by such things.

He threw himself down on a sort of couch, on which castors had been put to give it some resemblance to an easy-chair à la *Voltaire*, and said to the young messenger who had remained in the middle of the room:

"Well, what do you say to this? It is magnificent, isn't it?"

Chicotin shook his head as he replied:

"Well! it isn't bad, but I've seen better."

"Good! I am very glad to see that you know a thing or two! The fact is that this house is furnished in the most

wretched fashion! I have no idea where they could have picked up all this stuff; a second-hand dealer would never recognize himself here; and when one has lived a long while at the Hôtel Meurice, one finds a terrible difference! But still one resigns oneself to it, when one cannot do otherwise. Wait while I write a line; then you will carry my letter and this bouquet. Just pull that bell over there."

Chicotin pulled the bell; a maid-servant, covered with a layer of dust from top to toe, answered the summons and said:

"What does monsieur want?"

"Light to seal a letter, for there is nothing here! not a candle on the mantelpiece, no sealing wax on this desk—if that's what you call it."

"But there's wafers in the box where the night light is. Look, monsieur."

"Will you be kind enough to take all that away! Do you suppose that I would touch that filthy box? Do you suppose that I use wafers? I tell you that I want wax, a seal and a candle. Come, make haste."

The girl left the room grumbling. The gentleman moved his chair to the desk and began to write, swearing at the paper, the pens and the sand.

The maid returned, bringing a copper candlestick, with a tallow candle lighted, and a stick of wax, which she placed on the desk.

"As for a seal," she said, "madame says that she ain't got any, but that a big sou will do just as well."

"What's this you have brought me?" cried the gentleman, pushing the candle away in disgust. "Ah! what an outrage!"

"What's that? an outrage! I've brought what you ordered."

"You dare to bring me a tallow candle—for this certainly is tallow, isn't it?"

"Of course it's a tallow candle, as you want to use sealing wax."

"But a wax candle is what you ought to bring; as if one could use anything else! Since when has it been permissible to offer tenants a tallow candle? What do you take me for, my dear?"

"Your dear! Why, monsieur, I take you—I mean I don't take you at all; I bring you the best that I could find; there ain't no wax candle that's been used, and madame said that this was good enough to light your wax."

"And this place dares to call itself a hotel! There are furnished lodgings for masons here, and nothing else!"

"On my word, monsieur!"

"Take that candle away, I say. Pouah! how it smells! Let's make haste."

He sealed his letter, using a topaz set in a ring, which he wore as a charm on his watch chain; then he dismissed the maid, who muttered as she left the room:

"What airs he puts on! If he was a pacha, he couldn't put on any more. Why don't he have a hotel of his own?"

"Here, my boy," said the gentleman, when he had written the address on his letter, "take this note and this bouquet, which I stole from those gentlemen for the pleasure of playing a trick on them, for I hadn't the slightest idea of buying a bouquet. But since I have it, I must make some use of it, and I am not sorry to show myself a gallant once more. So you will carry this bouquet and this letter to this address. Can you read?"

"Yes, monsieur, a little—print; but as for hand-writing——"

"Why don't you say at once that you don't know how to read?—Well, you are to go to Madame la Baronne de Grangeville; she lives, or at all events she did live, twelve years ago, at 27 Rue de Provence. If by any chance she has moved, ask the concierge for her new address and take the things there. If you are not an idiot, you will succeed in finding the lady. If she is visible, you will wait for a reply; if not, you will leave both with her maid, and come back here, where I will pay you; I forbid you to take anything elsewhere. Do you understand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You remember the lady's name?"

"Baronne de Grangeville, 27 Rue de Provence."

"That's right; now be off, and hurry back.—By the way, if before admitting you, they should ask you from whom you come, you will reply that you come from Monsieur de Roncherolle."

"Monsieur de Roncherolle; very good, monsieur."

Chicotin took his leave. Thereupon, Monsieur de Roncherolle,—for now we know that that was the gouty gentleman's name,—placed his diseased foot on one of the chairs covered with cotton, then stretched himself in the easy-chair, rested his head against the back, and with his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, reflected thus:

"Dear Lucienne! I am sure that she will be delighted to see me again; and for my part it will give me pleasure to be in her company once more. It is fully twelve years since we met! Twelve years! This infernal time flies with terrifying rapidity, on my word! it seems to me that it was only yesterday; and yet a good many things have happened in the interval! Ah! I hadn't the gout then, and my sufferings were very much less. To grow old and to suffer—all varieties of annoyance at once! But that is the common law, and as the inimitable Potier says in *Le Chiffonnier*: 'When a man is not satisfied, he must be a philosopher!'—She was very pretty, was Lucienne! Yes, she was one of the prettiest women in Paris! and I was one of the handsomest gallants of my time; indeed, if it weren't for this infernal gout, I should still be very presentable!—Ow! There was a twinge, I wonder if I am going to have another attack? If so, it would be rather hard for me to go to present my respects to the baroness, as I have asked permission to do in my note. But let me see; as I think it over, it seems to me that Lucienne and I parted on rather bad terms, yes, very bad; she became jealous; what nonsense! she should know better than anyone that jealousy doesn't keep one from being deceived! But twelve years have passed since that, and there is no better refrigerant than time. The poor baroness must have become reasonable by now; we don't look at those things from the same point of view at forty as at thirty—if she isn't forty, she can't be far from it.—It's a pity! Women ought never to grow old, nor men either; children are the only ones who ought to grow, and they should stop when they reach maturity.—Ah! there's a twinge; and yet I am leading the life of an anchorite: no champagne, no truffles! To be sure, the funds are low, very low, in fact. I expected to break the bank at Baden-Baden: I had discovered a very ingenious *martingale*, an infallible method of winning at roulette; I don't understand how it happened that it was my pocket that was broken! Ah! if I were not short of money, how quickly I would send this dieting business to the devil! and

then if I had the gout, there would be some reason for it. They say that it is due to my past excesses; I don't believe a word of it, for I should have had it sooner!—And he—what has become of him, I wonder, of that dear friend of mine, who was absolutely determined to kill me? In the six weeks since I came back to Paris, it is probable that I should have come face to face with him on the street, if the gout had not kept me in this hotel, in this barrack. But still, it is so long ago, perhaps he is dead. On my honor, I should be very sorry to learn it! I should feel it badly. If he is dead, the baroness must know it.—How gloomy it is here! What a wretched neighborhood! One doesn't even hear the noise of carriages—I believe, God forgive me, that no carriages pass here. Ah! I will not stay here. I would rather have a room under the eaves in the dear old Bréda quarter! The only thing one can do here is to sleep! and as my gout permits it, I will take a nap, while I await the return of my messenger. He has a mighty cunning air, that fellow; he reminds me of a little Norman whom I employed in 1830, or thereabouts, and whom I surprised one day throwing oil on my trousers and coat, because I usually made him a present of my clothes as soon as they had any spots on them.”

Monsieur de Roncherolle fell asleep, dreaming of his past. It is what a man usually does who is on the decline, whereas in youth he dreams of the future.

Chicotin's shrill voice woke the ex-gallant abruptly, and he opened his eyes, muttering:

“Who is the rascal who dares to enter my room without ringing? Ten thousand devils! I was dreaming that I was at Baden-Baden again. Alas! I must return to the sad reality.—It's you, is it, my boy? Well, what reply to your message?”

“Here it is, monsieur.”

As he spoke, Chicotin held out the note and the bouquet, which he still had in his hands.

“What! you have brought them both back? She refused my bouquet and my letter?”

“Why, no, monsieur, the lady did not refuse anything, because I didn't find her; she has moved!”

“Pardieu! I thought you were cleverer than this, my boy! Because a person has changed her lodgings, you can't find her! There's a sharp messenger for you!”

“I am no more stupid than others, monsieur, and you will see if it's my fault. I went to Rue de Provence, to the number you gave me; a fine house, good style. I asked the concierge, who has a lodge furnished better than this room, for Madame la Baronne de Grangeville. He opened his eyes, looked at his wife who was sipping coffee from a silver cup, and said to her: ‘The Baronne de Grangeville—do you know her, wife?’ and his wife drank her coffee first and then answered: ‘We haven't got anybody here of that name.’—‘But,’ I said to her, ‘that lady did live in this house; the gentleman who sent me is certain of it; if she's moved, she must have left her address. Give me that and I will go away.’—‘How long ago did this baroness live here?’ asked the concierge.—‘Twelve years,’ I said.—At that the husband and wife began to laugh, and said to me: ‘In twelve years a lot of water has flowed under the bridge, my boy. It's seven years now since we took the place of the former concierge, who died here, and we never heard the name of your baroness. If the other concierge was alive, perhaps he might know her address. But he's at Montmartre, you know where; perhaps you'll go there and ask him.’ Faith, monsieur, I thought it wasn't worth while to go to Montmartre, so I came back with your letter and your bouquet. Do you still think that it's my fault?”

Monsieur de Roncherolle took the articles which Chicotin handed him. He tore up the letter, muttering:

“No, so long as you didn't find the scent. Hum! more of the ill effects of time. I come back, and I find nobody left: some are dead; others have disappeared. Ah! it's foolish to travel; or if one must travel, one should do like the Wandering Jew: keep going all the time, and never stop. But the Wandering Jew didn't have the gout.—Here, my boy, this is for your commission.”

Monsieur de Roncherolle paid the messenger handsomely, because the man who has always borne himself like a gentleman retains the habit of making a show of generosity, even when his means allow him no longer to be generous; and sometimes imposes great privations upon himself in order to enjoy the pleasure of throwing money out of the window.

“Then monsieur has no further need of my services?” said Chicotin, his appetite whetted by the fee he had received for his errand.

“Faith, my boy, I should have been very glad to find the lady to whom I wrote the letter. It isn't certain that she's dead, like the concierge of the house where she lived, for she was quite young a dozen years ago, and she should be a woman of about forty now. If chance should make you acquainted with her present residence, come at once and tell me, and you shall have a good *pourboire*.”

“All right, master. I'll look, I'll ask questions, and I shall end by finding her. I go into every corner of Paris, you know; but perhaps it will take rather a long time. However, as soon as I find out anything, I'll come to tell you.”

When Chicotin had gone, Monsieur de Roncherolle, whose face had assumed a melancholy expression, looked at the bouquet which he still held, muttering:

“Well, I will keep the bouquet; these flowers are very pretty; it's a long while since anyone gave me any; I will imagine that someone has sent them to me; I have reached the age where I must live on illusions.”

XIV

THE MOTHER AND THE SON

Georget passed several days scouring Paris; but he made the most minute investigations in the Chaussée-d'Antin quarter; he asked for Monsieur de Roncherolle in all the fine hotels, and received everywhere the answer that no person of that name had apartments there. Then the young messenger would return in the afternoon to Boulevard du Château d'Eau, to say good-evening to Violette, to whom he would confide the ill success of his efforts; and before going home he would try to find work to do in order to earn a little money. Georget no longer passed the day loafing on the boulevard as before; he no longer passed the time with his friend Chicotin, who, if he had known why Georget was exploring Paris, could have put an end to his search with a word. Chicotin, on his side, was looking for the Baronne de Grangeville, but without fatiguing himself overmuch and without exhibiting as much zeal as his friend in his inquiries. And when night came, instead of returning to the neighborhood of the Château d'Eau,

Monsieur Patatras, as he adored the play, hung about in the neighborhood of the people who were on their way to the theatres on Boulevard du Temple, and his felicity was complete when, toward the close of the evening, he succeeded in obtaining a check, by means of which he witnessed the last act of a melodrama or a farce.

Every morning before starting out, Georget deemed it his duty to go to Monsieur Malberg, to tell him what quarter and what streets he had explored the day before. Although the result of his investigations was not as yet satisfactory, he was desirous to prove to the man who had assisted him so generously that his zeal had not abated. The young messenger was rarely admitted to Monsieur Malberg's presence, but he always found Pongo deep in conversation with the furniture; then he would tell the mulatto what he had done, and he never failed to report faithfully to his master all that Georget had told him.

The perseverance which the young man displayed in demonstrating his gratitude, ended by touching the heart of the gentleman on the third floor, who told his servant one morning to admit Georget when he called; and that order had scarcely been given when the young man appeared as usual to tell what he had done the day before.

Pongo immediately suspended the toilet of a kitten which he had picked up the night before in the street, to usher Georget into his master's presence; then he left the room, saying:

"Now me breakfast with my new friend Carabi, that me found yesterday under a door, all alone and crying. Nothing to eat this long time, very thin, very unhappy; but me bring him here, me take him to bed with me, feed him, and this morning he all right, all happy; he purr and hump his back at me."

"Come in, my friend," said Monsieur Malberg to Georget, who stood timidly in the doorway; "come in and sit down."

"Oh! monsieur is too kind; but I am not tired, and then I cannot presume to sit down in monsieur's presence."

"I tell you that I want you to sit down; I have something to say to you. Take this chair."

Georget obeyed, and took his seat on the edge of a chair; then he made haste to say:

"I went to the Palais-Royal quarter yesterday, monsieur; I went the whole length of Rue Richelieu, Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs and all the streets leading into them. There are many hotels in that quarter, and yet I discovered nothing; no one there knows that gentleman."

"My boy, it is eight or ten days now, I believe, that you have been engaged in this tiresome business for me! That is quite enough! Cease your investigations; you have more than earned the money which you pretend that you owe me."

"But, monsieur, it doesn't tire me at all to go about Paris; besides, it's my trade, and I often do other errands while I am looking for monsieur; so why shouldn't I keep on? I haven't searched all Paris yet."

"I tell you again, my friend, that I don't want you to look any farther. I have reflected, and if heaven permits me to find this gentleman, whom you have sought in vain, it will bring me face to face with him; otherwise, it evidently means that He who governs everything does not choose that I should carry out my plans, and I must submit."

"Perhaps monsieur is not satisfied with me; perhaps he thinks that I do not go about it in the right way, and——"

"On the contrary, I am entirely satisfied with you; your mother, whom I have seen, because she absolutely insisted upon thanking me,—your mother has no end of pleasant things to say about you."

"Oh! you mustn't believe it all, monsieur; mothers exaggerate a bit, you know, when they talk about their sons!"

"That may be, but other persons too have confirmed what your mother said."

"Monsieur is too kind!"

"You have had some education; you know how to read and write and figure, do you not?"

"Yes, monsieur, tolerably well."

"Listen, this is what I have to propose. I have quite a large estate at Nogent-sur-Marne; there are eight acres of orchard, kitchen garden and woods; but it is wretchedly cared for and kept up by a gardener who is very lazy, and who, having no one to watch him, fancies himself the owner of the property and does only what he pleases; for I rarely go there, and even in the summer I pass only a few weeks there; but if the house were well kept up and the garden taken care of, I should enjoy it much more. Well, I suggest that you and your mother go to live on that estate; your duty will be, not to work in the garden, but to oversee and direct the work, the planting, and the improvements. Oh! you will have plenty to do! Eight acres of ground—there is room for lots of things in that. There are also repairs to be made on the buildings. I give you full power; you will take my place, and you will be obeyed as I should be. As for your mother, she will look after the house, the dairy, the poultry yard, which is well stocked; and then, when I take a fancy to visit my estate, I shall be certain at least of finding a room in condition to receive me and lodge me. I offer you for this a thousand francs a year, and of course you will have your lodgings and fuel, and as much as you want of fruit, vegetables, rabbits and all the occupants of a poultry yard. Now if this is satisfactory to you and to your mother, you may go down and install yourselves there to-morrow, and I will undertake to pay what you owe the landlord here."

While Monsieur Malberg was speaking, Georget, listening intently, changed color several times; sometimes he enjoyed the thought of the pleasant and happy life which was offered him; sometimes his brow became clouded and thoughtful; and it was plain that a bitter conflict was going on in his heart. When Monsieur Malberg ceased to speak, the poor boy said not a word, but seemed afraid to reply.

"Well, Georget, you say nothing; does that mean that you do not understand my proposal?"

"Oh! I beg pardon, monsieur; I understand perfectly all that you offer to do for us; what a peaceful and happy life you offer us; to live on a pleasant estate in the country, to have duties which are only pleasures, and to be paid for it all! Oh! that is too much good fortune. And my poor mother, who is so fond of the country and of gardens! Ah! how happy she would be there!"

"Well, then, you accept, Georget?"

The young man lowered his eyes; and soon two great tears escaped from them; he hid his face behind his handkerchief, stammering:

"No, monsieur—I—I decline."

"You decline what would be, you say, a happy life for you, and would give your mother so much pleasure! I can't understand you!"

"Yes, monsieur, I decline. Oh! I know very well that what I am doing is wrong! It is a horrible thing on my part to refuse what would certainly give my mother rest and happiness! It is outrageous, it is a wicked thing for me to do! But it is too much for me, monsieur! You won't tell mother, I implore you, monsieur—will you? You won't tell her that you offered me all this and I refused? It would make her unhappy and perhaps she wouldn't forgive me!"

And poor Georget knelt at Monsieur Malberg's feet, repeating: "I beg you, monsieur, don't say anything to my mother!"

"Rise, Georget, rise; no, of course I won't say anything to your mother. Indeed, you must have powerful reasons for acting thus! Don't weep, my friend, I do not wish to cause you pain; once more I say, forget my offer and let us not mention the subject again."

"Forget it! Oh, no! I know very well that I shall not forget it, monsieur! It was so kind of you! As to my reasons—my reasons for declining, I haven't got but one, but I don't dare to tell you what it is."

"Keep your secret; I don't ask any questions."

"But I don't want you to think of me as a bad son, as a fellow who prefers the life of a vagabond in Paris to his mother's happiness, monsieur. No; I would rather tell you everything. I am in love, monsieur; yes, madly in love with a young flower girl at the Château d'Eau, on the boulevard yonder. Violette is so pretty, and a respectable, virtuous girl, who doesn't listen to anybody!"

"But she listens to you, doesn't she?"

"No, monsieur, for I have never dared to tell her outright that I am in love with her; she may have seen it, but she doesn't act as if she had. But, monsieur, I can see her every morning when I go out, and at night before I come home, for I always find an excuse to pass by her stand. But if I should go and live on your place in the country, then I should have to give up seeing Violette, in the morning or at night or ever! and you see, monsieur, I feel that it would be impossible for me to live without seeing her! It would be like not living at all; and then it seems to me that I shouldn't be good for anything."

"Poor boy!" murmured Monsieur Malberg; "so young, and in love already! If he is happy, I shall be very much surprised."

"It's very bad of me to do as I am doing, isn't it, monsieur? On account of this love that turns my head, for this girl who perhaps doesn't love me and will never love me, I refuse to assure my mother a peaceful life and livelihood. Ah! I feel that I am an ungrateful, wicked son! I hate myself, I would beat myself if it would do any good; but it wouldn't cure me! This love has crept into my heart little by little; it's more than three years now that I have seen Violette almost every day; I was very young at first, and then as I grew up I got used to loving her, and that sentiment grew up with me, and grew much faster than I did. So now there is no way to drive it from my heart; it can never leave it; and indeed if it could, I wouldn't want it to. Could I ever guess that the day would come when it would cause me so much sorrow?"

"Don't despair, Georget; it may be that there is still some way of arranging matters. Suggest to your mother to go and live on my estate and take care of my house; don't tell her that there was a place there for you too; in this way your mother will be able to live in the country where you say she enjoys herself so much, and you can go to see her whenever you please; it is not far from here to Nogent,—three leagues at most."

"Ah! how kind you are, monsieur! In that way, as you say, my mother will live comfortably, and the fresh country air will cure her entirely. It is true that it will be hard for me not to see her every day, not to live with her; but I shall be able to endure that privation, because I will say to myself: 'It's for her good, it's for her happiness!' but still it isn't kind of me to think that I could get along without seeing mother and that I can't make up my mind not to see Violette; is it, monsieur?"

"It isn't your fault, my boy; nature has decreed that a new love is always fatal to the old ones."

"But one's love for one's mother, monsieur! that ought not to grow any less in our hearts; but it is less unreasonable than the other. Ah! if you knew Violette, monsieur, you would understand that I cannot cease to love her. She is so pretty! She has her stand on the boulevard, near the Château d'Eau; would you like me to tell her to bring you a bouquet? She would ask nothing better, monsieur."

"No, it isn't necessary; I have no need of bouquets, and I take your word for all that you say of this girl."

"Then, monsieur, with your permission, I will go right away and tell my mother what you are kind enough to offer her."

"Go, Georget, and come back and tell me her answer."

"Happy age," said Monsieur Malberg to himself as he watched the young messenger walk away; "happy age, when one does not doubt constancy in love, when one believes in the sincerity of friendship! I, too, believed in those things, but I was most cruelly undeceived! He sacrifices everything to his love for a woman! Poor boy! he will be deceived like the others; but he begins that trade too early!"

And Monsieur Malberg, whose brow had darkened, relapsed into profound meditation.

Meanwhile, his servant Pongo had a sharp altercation with the cat which he had named Carabi, and which, in payment for the hospitality that had been bestowed upon him, had savagely clawed his benefactor.

"Ah! you naughty, Carabi," said the mulatto, holding the cat by his two forepaws; "you hurt me, when me pick you up in the street; and you not handsome either; but thin, ugly, little short hair; you a gutter cat, you hear? You no angora, you gutter cat! and me take care of you, comb you and rub you, make nice porridge for you, so's to make you pretty and fat; and you claw me on the nose when me try to talk with you, like two friends. You take care, Carabi! if me take Mamzelle Zima to beat you, Mamzelle Zima, she mind me right off, and she strike hard, Mamzelle Zima; will you be good boy now?"

The cat's only reply was to howl in a piteous fashion; and he was beginning to vary his cries with snarls which boded no good to Pongo, when Georget returned and interrupted the conversation.

"Ah! little neighbor again! He want to speak to master or me?"

"I have come to bring your master my mother's reply. He is very good—"

"Oh, no! he not good; but me beat him, me whip him if he claw again!"

"I am speaking of your master."

"Oh! me tink it was my new friend Carabi; he claw my nose. Come, you go in right away.—Little gutter cat! you wait there till me come back. Don't stir, or me take Zima!"

When he reappeared before Monsieur Malberg, Georget was sad, and seemed embarrassed; he kept his eyes on the floor, and dared not speak.

"Well, Georget, you have come to bring me your mother's answer," said Monsieur Malberg; "but to look at you one would think that you dared not tell me what it is."

"Ah! monsieur, you see——"

"Mon Dieu! I will spare you the trouble of telling me, for I will wager that I can guess what your mother answered: she refused my offer, because she would have to part with you, and she prefers to live in poverty and not leave her son; isn't that it?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes, that's the truth; when I told her about monsieur's offer, she was struck dumb at first; and when she did answer, I heard her voice trembling as if she were going to cry, when she said: 'Well! if you want me to go away, if it bores you to live with your mother, why then I will go to this fine place in the country; but for my part, I should much prefer to live on a little, to be less comfortable, and to be where I could embrace my son every day; that would make me much happier!'—So then, monsieur, as you can imagine, I threw my arms about my mother's neck and said to her: 'It was in the hope of assuring your happiness that I offered you this; if you are happier with me, you must stay here, and I shall be happier too!'—Then she told me to come and thank you for your kindness, monsieur, and explain the reason for her refusal, and I beg you to forgive me for showing so little appreciation of your kindness; for in all this it is I who am most to blame. If I had had the courage to leave Paris, why, then my mother would have been very glad to go!"

"I don't blame you, Georget, but I hope that your flower girl is worthy of the sacrifice you are making for her. Go, my boy."

"And monsieur doesn't want Violette to bring him a bouquet, so that—so that he can make her acquaintance."

"No, I don't want any bouquet."

"And I am not to look for Monsieur de Roncherolle any more?"

"It's no use."

"But monsieur will still employ me when he needs a messenger?"

"That goes without saying. Now go."

Georget went away in a sad frame of mind, for at the bottom of his heart he was not content with himself. As he passed through the reception room, he made no reply when Pongo called out to him:

"Monsieur Georget, Carabi not so bad now, he no claw nothing but my ear."

XV

A TRAP

To Georget's mind, the best way to find an excuse for his wrongdoing was to go to her who was the cause of his committing it; so that was what he did not fail to do; and as he looked at the fascinating flower girl, he said to himself:

"As if it would have been possible for me to live without seeing her! Oh, no! I should have died of grief, and that would have made my mother more unhappy than all the rest! So I did well not to accept Monsieur Malberg's offer."

Thus it is that man always finds a way to compromise with his conscience and to put himself on pleasant terms with it.

Violette smiled pleasantly at Georget, saying:

"So you're not travelling all over Paris to-day, Georget?"

"No, mamzelle, my travels are ended; Monsieur Malberg doesn't want me to go on looking for his man.—But what has become of Chicotin? I never see him here now."

"That's true, he doesn't come so much as he did. I am not sorry, for he frequently knocked my customers down, and that would have ended by injuring my trade."

"Your customers! You mean the fine gentlemen who come here to make sweet speeches to you! Do you still see those fellows?"

"Dear me! when it pleases them to buy flowers of me I can't refuse to sell them."

"Ah! if I was rich, Mamzelle Violette, you wouldn't sell anything at all, you would have a home of your own, and a lovely room, with nothing else to do but arrange your hair!"

"Really, Georget, you would give me all that?"

"Indeed I would, and much more too if I had it!"

"Do you think that I would accept it from you rather than from another man?"

"Why, mamzelle, when a man has only honorable sentiments; you may be sure that I wouldn't offer that to you as a mistress, but as—as—as—Oh! Violette, you understand me well enough, but you are not willing to help me a little!"

"No, Georget, I do not choose to understand you, because I don't choose to take seriously the foolish things that you say to me."

"Foolish things! oh! you are mistaken, mamzelle; and if you knew,—if you could guess—you would no longer doubt my love! Yes, Violette, I love you. I must pluck up courage to tell you, if you refuse to believe it; I love you to the point of—but I mustn't tell you that."

"What is it? Come, Georget, finish. You say nothing? Poor boy! you imagine that you love me; but in a month, in less than that perhaps, you will have something else in your mind. You are a child, do you know! A boy should never

talk of love until he's twenty-one."

"Oh! mon Dieu! how I would like to grow old! So you don't believe me, mamzelle?"

"I say again that it's very possible that you believe what you say now; but it won't be so for long,—you are too young."

"Too young, that is the only thing you can throw in my face. What proofs do you want to make you believe in my love?"

"See, Georget, look at that little bit of a man passing over there, who looks at me in such a funny way."

"Ah! I recognize him; it's the little squint-eyed fellow. I had an idea that that creature was in love with you too; but I am not jealous of him! he's too ugly! Why do you point him out to me? I wasn't talking about him, mamzelle."

"I pointed him out to you, Georget, because that little fellow, who can hardly be any older than you, a year at most, has been prowling about here all the time for several days; he constantly bargains for flowers with me, and then he too has told me that he adores me, and has suggested carrying me off and taking me to Saint-Germain or to Versailles, or even farther, declaring that he would make me happy."

"What! that little wretch has told you all that?"

"Yes, that little fellow has told me all those foolish things; and I laughed in his face—that was the best thing for me to do. Since then, he has ceased to speak to me, but he comes here just as often and hurls savage glances at me—look, as he is doing now."

"Ah! if he treats you discourteously, I'll go and say a word to him."

"No, Georget, he's not discourteous, for he doesn't speak; we can't prevent his walking here; and besides, I am always tempted to laugh when I look at him, remembering that one day Chicotin knocked him down in such a way that he tore both knees of his trousers."

"Oh! how I would have liked to see that! There he goes away; he has made up his mind it's no use, and he has done well."

"Well, Georget, if I had listened to what that young man said, do you think that I should have done right?"

"Oh, no! of course not!"

"So then you see that I should be no more reasonable if I should listen to you."

"Oh! what a difference, Violette! You compare my love with that of that little popinjay who hardly knows you! Whereas I have seen you and loved you for three years! So I am nothing more to you than the first comer who pays you compliments as he buys your bouquets! Ah! it isn't right to treat me so. You wouldn't act like this if you knew ___"

"What? if I knew what? Ah! you tire me, constantly beginning sentences which you don't finish!"

Georget had on the end of his lips the avowal of the sacrifice he had made to his love for Violette; for in youth, one has not become accustomed to sacrifices, and it is natural to boast of them. However, the young lover retained that secret which was on the point of escaping him; he suspected that the pretty flower girl would scold him roundly for having acted so, and that, far from approving his conduct, she would try to compel him to accept Monsieur Malberg's offer; so he deemed it prudent to hold his peace, and he did not answer Violette's questions. At that moment someone came up who wanted Georget to run on an errand, and he seized that opportunity to take his leave, waving his hand as an adieu to the flower girl.

The pretty peddler was more moved than she had chosen to appear. Georget was such a dear fellow! It was the first time that he had told her in so many words that he loved her, and he had made that declaration in such a sweet voice, with such an affectionate expression, that it was difficult not to believe in his sincerity, and further, not to be touched by that genuine love, in which passion was so artlessly expressed.

While giving her young lover sage advice, and while pretending to laugh at his suffering, Violette had nevertheless felt a very keen sensation; her heart had opened to a happiness that she had not as yet known, and she was herself amazed by the unfamiliar joy which filled her whole being.

About an hour had passed since Georget had gone away, when a sort of servant approached Violette and said to her:

"Mademoiselle la bouquetière, I want a fine bouquet for my mistress, Madame de Belleval; all the rarest flowers that you have; the price does not matter. I will give you a hundred sous in advance, and if that isn't enough, she will give you the rest."

"That will be enough, monsieur; for a hundred sous I will make you a superb bouquet!"

"But, mademoiselle, you must have the kindness to carry it to madame yourself, for I am in a great hurry; I haven't time to wait, and I shan't come back this way."

"I am to carry the bouquet? Is it far from here?"

"No, mademoiselle, Boulevard Beaumarchais, 98."

"That is quite a long distance."

"No, mademoiselle; you know, if you don't leave the boulevard, you are soon there."

"Oh! I know all about that, and if there is no great hurry——"

"Can you carry it within an hour?"

"Yes, I will go within an hour."

"By the way, madame wants also to order a smaller one for to-morrow, to take to a wedding or a ball; madame will explain to you about it. So she can rely upon the bouquet, mademoiselle?"

"To be sure, monsieur, as I have received the money. You say Madame de Belleval, Boulevard Beaumarchais, 98?"

"That's it; good-morning."

The servant disappeared, and Violette began to select her finest flowers, saying to herself:

"It seems that this is likely to be a good customer! I can make as much as I choose! To think that Georget, when he was without money the other day and his mother was sick, didn't apply to me! And he says that he loves me! Perhaps I spoke too harshly to him; and he thinks that I have an unfeeling heart; I don't want him to think that!"

When the girl had finished the bouquet, with which she took the greatest care, she asked a neighbor to look after her booth and started for Boulevard Beaumarchais; she arrived at the number given her; she entered an attractive, newly-built house and asked the concierge:

"Madame de Belleval?"

The concierge assumed the expression of a person who does not know what one means; then suddenly he remembered and slapped his leg, exclaiming:

"Ah! what a stupid fool I am! I forgot all about it.—Go up to the fifth floor, the door at the right, for Madame de Belleval."

"The fifth floor?"

"Yes, the door at the right."

Violette went upstairs, saying to herself:

"That concierge acted very strangely when he answered me; perhaps he always has that manner. It's surprising that a lady who buys such handsome bouquets should live so high; but lodgings are very dear now; and after all, it's none of my business."

And without the slightest suspicion, the girl quickly climbed the five flights and rang at the door on the right hand. It was opened immediately, and a woman who had the appearance of a box-opener out of a job said to Violette:

"Ah! mamzelle has brought the bouquet; that's good! Come in, mamzelle, come in."

"But I only have to deliver the bouquet,—it is paid for."

"No matter; come in, mamzelle, she wants to speak to you; wait a minute."

And the girl was almost pushed into a small salon the door of which was at once closed upon her.

"To be sure," thought Violette, "that servant told me that his mistress wanted to order a bouquet for a ball tomorrow. I will wait. It isn't very fine here; it's pretty enough, but it's funny that there's no coquetry, no taste in the arrangement; I should think that I was in a gentleman's room rather than a lady's. And that woman who let me in—she's neither a lady's maid nor a cook. I believe that I am rather frightened here; I am inclined to go away."

And Violette had already taken several steps toward the door of the salon, when it opened and Jéricourt appeared before her, in dressing-gown and slippers, like a person in his own home.

The flower girl uttered a cry; she realized that she had fallen into a trap; but in an instant she recovered her courage, and Violette had an ample store of it; in her case, fright was but temporary. She raised her head therefore and gazed steadfastly at the man before her.

Jéricourt assumed one of his most winning smiles and stepped toward the girl.

"You didn't expect to see me, did you, bewitching damsel?"

"No, monsieur, I am waiting for a lady, Madame de Belleval; am I in her apartment?"

"Madame de Belleval is—is my aunt, dear child, and I live with her."

"Ah! you live here? Well, why doesn't your aunt come, monsieur? I have no business with you, and if this aunt doesn't mean to come then I will go about my business."

And Violette took several steps toward the door; but Jéricourt barred her passage and led her back into the salon, saying:

"Mon Dieu! how quick you are! Are you in such a great hurry, pray? Take a seat—she is coming."

As she did not choose to disclose her apprehensions, Violette decided to sit down for a moment. Whereupon the young man also took a chair and placed it beside her and very near.

"Do you know, charming girl, that I am overjoyed to have a chat with you at last? I have wanted it a long while, and it is so hard to obtain the slightest favor from you!"

"Are you going to repeat the same song as on the boulevard, monsieur? I know it already; I have no wish to learn it by heart, for, as I have told you, I don't like the tune."

"How unkind you are! But this little outburst of anger makes you prettier than ever! Women who surrender at once cease to have any value; whereas your conquest would be a genuine triumph."

"Your aunt doesn't come, monsieur, so I will go."

"My aunt! Ha! ha! ha! that's a good one! do you still believe in that, little one?"

"What, monsieur, is it a lie? And this Madame de Belleval, who sent to me for this bouquet——"

"Never existed except in my imagination. I wanted to decoy you to my rooms, for you refused to come willingly; so I resorted to stratagem. That's often done—it's fair fighting."

"Oh! but it's an outrage!—So the concierge whom I asked for that lady——"

"I had warned him that someone would ask for a person of that name, and I ordered him to send her up to me; it's as simple as good-day."

"And that woman who opened the door and told me that Madame de Belleval would come in a minute——"

"Is an obliging neighbor; I paid her for that little service with a ticket to the theatre."

"Why, this is frightful! And there are people who lend a hand to such outrages!"

"My dear child, you make a great fuss over a very small matter! To try to obtain a tête-à-tête with a pretty flower girl is no great crime; I might have kept up the deception much longer, but I am very honest, you see; I play with my cards on the table.—Come, don't be angry; you will have to end by calming down, anyway. Let's make peace at once, and seal the treaty with a kiss."

Before Jéricourt could put his lips to Violette's face, she rose and ran toward the door; but the young man ran after her and detained her by putting his arm about her waist.

"Oh! you shan't escape me so, my dear; you are in my room and we are alone.—Come, don't be so cruel; but let me kiss you."

"Take care, monsieur; you think that you have a weak girl to deal with, but I am not afraid of you; you won't get anything from me, I give you fair warning; and if you try to use force, look out! I won't spare your face, that you're so proud of.—Let me alone, monsieur, I don't propose that you shall kiss me."

Jéricourt paid no heed to the girl's entreaties; he attempted to pursue his enterprise, but he met with a resistance which he was far from expecting; Violette's hands were active and strong; she put one of them to her persecutor's face and dug her nails in so far that the blood flowed freely, and the pain forced the young man to relax his hold. He went to the mirror to look at himself, and exclaimed angrily:

"That's an abominable thing for you to do, mademoiselle—to scratch my face and mutilate me! only tigresses do that; it's only among the *canaille* that such things are indulged in."

"Indeed, monsieur! So I am of the *canaille* because I defend myself, because I don't allow monsieur to take liberties with me. Why do you pay any attention to me then? why do you degrade yourself with a dealer in flowers?"

"As if I could suspect anything of the kind! To attack a man's face—that's the worst possible form!"

"You've got no more than you deserve, monsieur; I gave you fair warning; and if you should try again to keep me, I promise you that you wouldn't get off so cheap."

"Oh! I won't keep you any longer, mademoiselle, I have had enough. You are free, but I have some scratches on my face that I shall not forget! You will be sorry that you treated me so!"

"Oh! I am not afraid of you, monsieur, and I have proved it. When a man acts as you have done, he shouldn't threaten other people—he should try to be more decent in order to obtain forgiveness for what he has done.—Adieu, monsieur."

Violette opened the door of the salon, passed through another small room, and opened another door; but in her haste she made a mistake; it was not the door leading to the landing, but she had almost entered the bedroom. Discovering her error, she retraced her steps, and at last found the outer door.

Meanwhile Jéricourt had followed and overtaken her, and he tried again to detain her by seizing her dress; but she roughly shook him off, and with a glance that banished any desire to stop her again, she rushed out on the landing and down the stairs, without turning her head; nor did she see a young man who was then standing at his open door, directly opposite Jéricourt's.

This young man, who was no other than little Astianax, uttered a cry of surprise on recognizing the girl, who passed very near him. Having followed her with his eyes as she descended the stairs, he turned toward Jéricourt, who was standing in his doorway, and said:

"It is surely she; it's the pretty flower girl of the Château d'Eau!—I say, neighbor, she came out of your room —"

"Why, to be sure; you must have seen her come out."

"Yes, yes, I saw her.—Aha! so the little flower girl comes to see you! The deuce! you're a lucky man!"

"It is true, I am generally lucky with women."

"Is your face inflamed, neighbor, that you are holding your handkerchief over your cheek?"

"No, but I have a slight toothache."

"All the same, I confess that I can't get over it; Mademoiselle Violette coming out of your room! She was very red, and decidedly ruffled too!"

"Why—that was the result of our interview."

"Oh, yes! I understand. Gad! you are favored by Venus! The pretty flower girl, who made such a parade of her pride and virtue, and sent me about my business when I made impassioned speeches to her, and snubbed me when I proposed to take her to Saint-Germain by train!"

"Let this be a lesson to you, young man; it will teach you that you mustn't trust the airs these young women assume.—Au revoir, Astianax."

"Au revoir, Joconde! Don Juan! Richelieu!"

Jéricourt returned to his room, saying to himself:

"Now I am sure of my revenge! Mademoiselle Violette will pay dear for the scratches she gave me!"

XVI

A DOWNFALL

Madame de Grangeville, whose place of abode Chicotin had not been able to ascertain, lived on Rue Fontaine-Saint-Georges, in a small apartment on the fourth floor of a recently-constructed house.

In houses which have just been finished, and of which the walls have not had time to dry and the paint to lose its odor, apartments are very commonly let to persons who offer to break them in, so to speak. Why are these persons very often lorettes or ballet-dancers out of employment? Probably because those ladies know that very little pains will be taken to seek information about them, and that they will be accepted as tenants with such effects as they choose to bring. Landlords are never exacting with those tenants who are willing to "dry the walls."

The Baronne de Grangeville, however, did not belong to either of the various classes of women who are in the habit of hiring apartments without asking the price, and who reply to those persons who remark that their rent is high: "What difference does that make to me? I never pay!"

However, from her position, her tastes and her habits, it was impossible to mistake her position in life; it was easy to see that that lady had fallen from opulence.

Her furniture still retained some traces of her former opulence: it included a dressing-table and a couch of extreme daintiness, and side by side with them, easy-chairs and common chairs that were out of style, spotted and in wretched condition. There were ample curtains, large and small, in her bedroom; there were only very small ones in her salon. The dining-room was almost bare and there was very little furniture in the kitchen, but the baroness never, or very rarely, had cooking done in her apartment; she sent out to a restaurant for her meals; that way of living is more expensive, but Madame de Grangeville had never chosen to take the trouble to calculate, or to pay any heed to her expenses; so long as she had had a regular income, she had thought of nothing but satisfying her fancies,

her most trifling desires, without stopping to think whether her means were sufficient for her innumerable whims; people who have no idea of order when they are young, rarely change when they are older; with them things go as best they can; they never think of the morrow. Such people are very agreeable in society and are generally considered very generous; they have nothing of their own and everyone exclaims:

"Ah! what an excellent heart!"

I consider that only those persons have a good heart who give what they themselves possess, and who, before everything, pay their creditors and do not run into debt. If you make a present to a friend, if you open your purse to obsequious flatterers who surround you, you inflict a real injury on your tailor whom you do not pay, on the restaurant keeper whom you put off from day to day by giving him small sums on account; it is not with your money that you are generous, but with that of your creditors. There are people who distribute alms after becoming bankrupt, and who pose as benefactors of mankind. There are such people who have great reputations for kindness of heart, for whom I have very little esteem! If you scratch the surface, you soon come to the rock.

As Madame de Grangeville could not afford to keep both a lady's maid and a cook, she had dismissed the latter, whom it would have been more sensible to keep; unfortunately, she could not do without a lady's maid; she would gladly have kept her cook as well, but the latter had become tired of buying food on credit at the dealers', who also were tired of supplying goods without being paid.

When Madame Roc, that was the cook's name, went to her mistress to ask for money, she would throw herself back on her couch and hold a phial of smelling salts to her nose, crying:

"Oh! Madame Roc, have you come to talk about money again? Leave me in peace, I beg you. I have an attack of vapors already, and you will give me an attack of hysteria."

"But, madame, for dinner——"

"Don't bother me about dinner; do what you choose; I give you *carte blanche*!"

"*Carte blanche* isn't money, and they all want money; I can't say to the butcher: 'I have *carte blanche* to pay for your fillet.'"

"Mon Dieu! how you tire me! how you make my head ache!"

"But, madame, if I shouldn't get any dinner for you, would you like that?"

"Heavens! how you annoy me, how intolerable you are! Go away, I tell you again, and leave me!"

This little scene, which is of frequent occurrence in Paris, will give an idea of the sort of person that the Baronne de Grangeville was. When the cook had been dismissed, matters arranged themselves better with the lady's maid; she, being accustomed to flatter her mistresses in order to obtain a dress or a scarf, knew a thousand tricks to deceive creditors, to put them off the scent and send them away; and that was just the sort of lady's maid that Madame de Grangeville needed.

However, everything has an end, the patience of creditors no less than the confidence of dealers. Discovering a little late that she was likely to find herself in a very critical situation, after squandering a part of her principal, she sold what little she had left, and with the proceeds took it into her head to gamble on the Bourse. That was as good a way as another; it was a matter of luck, and she could still dream of wealth; for people who are devoid of order, it is a masterstroke to be able to rely on chance.

One morning, Madame de Grangeville, who had just risen and taken her chocolate *à la vanille*, told Lizida, her maid, to go out and buy a newspaper which had the quotations of railroad and manufacturing stocks.

The maid hastened to obey her mistress; the latter looked at herself in a mirror, as she tried on a very fashionable cap which she had worn only three times, but which did not rejuvenate her as much as she wished.

"Here is the paper, madame," said Lizida, eyeing her mistress's cap, which she coveted; "I inquired about the Mouzaïas; hasn't madame some Mouzaïa stocks?"

"Yes, I have twenty shares; my last hope is in that."

"What are the Mouzaïas, madame? a sugar factory?"

"Alas! no, it isn't sugar. I believe it's a copper mine in Algeria; I don't know exactly, but it doesn't make any difference; a friend of mine doubled her money six months ago by buying shares in it; and I hope to double mine; but thus far I haven't had any luck.—Do you think my cap is becoming, Lizida?"

"Mon Dieu, madame, it's strange—but if you want my opinion——"

"To be sure, when I ask for it."

"Well! madame, who is always so pretty—I don't know how it is, but with that cap madame has a stern, serious look."

"Say at once that it makes me older, for that is what you don't dare to say."

"Oh! it isn't that; madame can't look old; that is impossible; but madame has a less animated, less coquettish air—that's it, less coquettish."

Madame de Grangeville snatched off her cap and threw it on a chair, crying:

"You are quite right, Lizida; this cap certainly does make me a frightful object."

"Oh! frightful! As if madame could be frightful when—when she is so pretty!"

"Hush, child; take the cap; I give it to you, it's yours, do what you choose with it."

"Madame is too good; but I wouldn't want madame to think——"

"I tell you to take that cap, I never want to hear of it again. Go and get me the little blue one that I wore before I bought that one."

Mademoiselle Lizida ran from the room to fetch the cap which her mistress asked for, and handed it to her; then she made haste to take to her own room the cap for which the baroness had paid thirty-five francs and which she had worn but three times, saying to herself:

"I knew very well that I should get it! Oh! it is a perfect beauty! It makes me look like an angel, and I will wear it on Sunday to go to the Château des Fleurs to dance.—How lovely it is!"

Then she returned to her mistress, who had put on the blue cap, and cried:

"Oh! how lovely madame is in that! madame is only twenty-five years old,—not a day more. Ah! if I was a man,

how madly in love I should be with madame!"

"Hush, you mad girl! It's a fact that this cap is very becoming to me."

"Madame, you must have another one just like it made at once."

"Yes, that is what I intend to do, when I am in funds.—Let me look at the newspaper, the quotations; I don't understand them very well."

"Madame, I was told that the Mouzaïas had gone up."

"Really? Oh! if only that were true! for I bought twenty shares at par, and they have fallen to forty-eight francs. Let me see,—a rise of fifty centimes! That is magnificent!"

"Then madame has not made anything?"

"If I should sell now, I shouldn't get back a thousand francs of the two thousand that I invested; I should lose more than half!"

"Then you mustn't sell, madame!"

"I mustn't sell, but I must have money. I have promised to go to Nogent, to visit those Glumeaus, who are to have a family party, with theatricals."

"The Glumeaus! Who on earth are they? Retired grocers?"

"No, they are—Faith, I don't know what they used to do, nor do I care. If I had to inquire about such things as that, should I ever go into society? But they are excellent people; one enjoys oneself at their house; it is just like being at home. The company is a little mixed there perhaps, but isn't it so everywhere? I met at Monsieur Glumeau's a person whom I used to know, before I was married."

"Ah! it must have been a long while ago then!"

Mademoiselle Lizida had no sooner made this remark than she saw that she had put her foot in it; she made haste to add:

"When I said a long time, I said something very foolish; I spoke without thinking, for after all, I have no idea whether madame was married long ago, any more than I know how long madame has been a widow. Sometimes one is widowed right away. A husband doesn't always last a year."

"Oh! my poor Lizida, there are many other things that you don't know, and that would surprise you greatly if I should tell you them!"

Mademoiselle Lizida, who was inquisitive like all lady's maids, seeing that her mistress was in one of those moods when one longs to disclose one's secrets, to confide the most private mysteries which a woman always tires of keeping to herself, employed at first her usual tactics to make herself agreeable to her mistress.

"Mon Dieu! how very becoming that little blue cap is to madame! It gives her such a charming air! But then, madame always has that."

"Oh! there are days when one looks better than on others; everybody is like that; to-day certainly seems to be one of my good days."

"It would seem then that madame was married very young?"

"Yes, very young; I was seventeen years old, not more."

"What a sweet little bride madame must have been!"

"Yes, everybody admired me!"

"And madame's husband, the Baron de Grangeville, was he young? Was he a fine-looking man?"

"Why yes, my husband was a fine man, very good-looking, with a somewhat serious expression.—Would you believe, my dear child, that I was mad over that man?"

"Pray, madame, why not? There are wives who adore their husbands; it isn't very common, but such things are seen."

"Yes, I adored him—the first year after our marriage."

"Ah! only the first year?"

"Men are agreeable for such a short time!"

"Oh! how true that is!—And madame's husband became like the others, no doubt, surly, moody, fault-finding. There are some men who refuse their wives everything, even a cashmere shawl; and everybody knows that a woman who goes into good society cannot do without a cashmere shawl! The idea of such a thing! what would she look like?"

"My husband found no fault with my taste for dress; besides, I had my own money; I brought him twelve thousand francs a year when I married him."

"Well! if with that amount the wife was not the mistress, it would be funny!"

"But he had nearly twenty thousand francs a year."

"Then you must have lived very handsomely! Ah! your maid must have been very lucky! madame is so noble, so generous! madame was born to be waited upon; anyone can see that at once."

"But my husband became jealous, so jealous that he made himself ridiculous!"

"Ah! that is another fault of these men! to be jealous! and what good does it do them, I ask you? None at all, except to bore their wives! and when a woman is bored, why, bless my soul, she seeks some sort of distraction! I say, madame, as monsieur le baron had become so jealous, it seems to me that you should not have been very sorry to be left a widow.—Dear me! what lovely pink cheeks madame has to-day!"

Madame de Grangeville smiled at herself in the mirror which stood before her; then, throwing herself back in an armchair, she said with a little sigh:

"Ah! you don't know all, Lizida. What I am going to tell you will surprise you tremendously! but you must be very discreet, and never mention it to anyone!"

"Madame must know me, she knows that I am not a chatterbox; I would rather be chopped in pieces than betray a secret."

"Well, my dear, I am not a widow."

"Oho! is it possible? Madame's husband is still alive?"

"Yes, and what is more, I know from someone who has met him lately that he is living in Paris at this moment."

"Well, that is news indeed; the Baron de Grangeville is alive!"

"Not the Baron de Grangeville, for that isn't his name; I did not choose to bear his name any longer."

"I understand; so madame is not really a baroness then?"

"I was a countess, Lizida, which is much better; for my husband is a count!"

"Oh! excuse me, madame, excuse me! madame la comtesse! Ah! 'madame la comtesse'! how lovely it is to say that! will you allow me to call you that, madame?"

"No, you would become accustomed to it; besides, I don't want that title any more, it would remind me of a time that I wish to forget."

"Oh! of course, since madame was so unhappy with her husband, that she was obliged to leave him—after many years, no doubt."

"Why, no; we had been married hardly three years when we separated."

"Only three years! That isn't very long! Was he very unkind from the beginning, that husband of yours?"

"Yes, he began to be very—very ridiculous at once!"

"Madame had no children?"

"No, I had none."

"That is very lucky, for sometimes there is a dispute as to who shall have the children, or who shall not have them; whereas, when there are none, it's: 'Adieu, bonsoir; we can't live together any longer, let us part!'—Isn't that the way it's done, madame?"

"Not quite so easy as that when you wish to separate according to law, and that is what we did, Monsieur de—my husband having his separate property and I mine, we both took our own."

"Ah! but if your husband should die, madame, would you inherit from him?"

"No indeed, I should not get a sou."

"How unjust that is! Just think of that! A poor little woman gives herself to a man who makes her unhappy, and if he dies, she doesn't inherit! And monsieur le comte, your husband, has at least twenty thousand francs a year, you say?"

"Oh! in more than nineteen years that have passed, it seems that he has doubled his fortune at least, in undertakings, speculations."

"What! nineteen years madame has left her husband?"

Madame de Grangeville made a gesture of irritation, and the maid made haste to add:

"No, no, that is not possible; madame made a mistake; doubtless madame meant to say nine years."

"Yes, you are right, I did make a mistake; it is much less. However, what does it matter? It is of no use to think about that any more."

"I beg pardon, madame,—don't be offended at what I am going to say; it is an idea that came into my head, and I submit it to you."

"Go on; you know very well that I never am angry."

"Well, since madame's former husband is so rich, and madame finds herself annoyed, besieged by those demons of creditors, as we have been for some time—suppose madame should send to monsieur le comte and ask him to let her have a few thousand-franc notes—would he refuse them?"

"O Lizida! that is impossible!"

"Why so? Just let madame tell me her husband's name and address, and I will willingly undertake the errand."

"It is impossible, Lizida, because I don't choose to do it, because I shall never apply to the count. No, I would prefer to be deprived of everything, rather than let him know my position. Besides, he would reply: 'You had your property, madame. You should have kept it.'"

"Kept it! kept it! That is very easy to say; but madame has such a kind heart, she is so noble, so generous—madame has too noble a mind to know how to calculate. Pshaw! it is only the petty bourgeois who do that!"

"But they are wise, perhaps!"

"To think that madame is not a widow! I cannot get over it. So that is the reason that madame does not marry. See how wicked it is to forbid divorce!"

"If only those infernal Mouzaïas would go back to the price I paid for them! I absolutely must have some money; I am going to Nogent in four days; they are going to have theatricals, there'll be a great many people there, and I must have another bonnet; mine is no longer fresh enough."

"It is true that it is beginning to be unworthy of madame; and madame is always so well dressed that everybody always admires her costume!"

"Yes, I used to be one of the women who were famous for their taste in dress; I set the fashion."

"Madame might set the fashion again if she would."

"Say rather if I could, my dear Lizida! But listen—someone rang; if it is Monsieur de Merval, you will let him come in; he is the person whom I met at the Glumeaus'."

"But if it's an *Englishman*—"

"A creditor! Mon Dieu! you know well enough what you must say to them, for you are used to receiving those fellows."

"Oh yes, madame, I will get around him."

The lady's maid went to the door. Madame de Grangeville took her place anew before her dressing-table, and arranged her cap and her hair. To try to attract, to appear young, was in her a desire so identified with her nature, that she would go to look at herself in her mirror before allowing a chimney sweep to enter her room.

But no one appeared; she heard only the sound of voices in the reception room. It lasted some time, and Madame de Grangeville, who divined what was happening, threw herself back in her chair and began to look over the newspaper as if what were going on in her reception room did not concern her.

After some little time the outer door closed and Mademoiselle Lizida reappeared, crying:

"Heavens! how unendurable those people are getting to be! They have no manners at all; I thought that it would never end."

"Who was it?"

"Mon Dieu! it was that idiot of a grocer opposite, who has taken it into his head to come himself now."

"The grocer! what on earth can I owe to a grocer? I don't eat here, that is to say, I send out for everything."

"To be sure, no cooking is done in madame's apartment, but I make her chocolate; and then candles,—madame uses a great many of them; and I have to have oil for the lamps, and then sugar—we can't get along without sugar—and tea, and coffee—I take coffee in the morning. And then soap, and matches, and I don't know what; there's no end to the things, although we seem not to need anything.—In fact, he demands a total of ninety-six francs!"

"As much as that for trifles?"

"Yes, madame. I tell you the sugar goes fast, when one drinks tea!"

"Well, I will pay him when I have money."

"That's what I told him; but would you believe, madame, that he had the face to reply: 'Your mistress has money enough to hire cabs, for she goes out in them often enough; she ought to have some to pay her grocer!'"

"What a shocking thing! Why, it is disgusting! The idea! I must stop to think before taking a cab, because of a miserable creditor!"

"Yes, madame, things have got to that point. That is the result of our revolutions."

"Lizida, you will get nothing more at that man's shop, I forbid you!"

"Oh! madame has no need to forbid me, there's no danger of my going there again; besides, he wouldn't let me have anything more on credit! He says that if he doesn't get his money in two days he'll go before the justice of the peace."

"All right! let him go before his justice of the peace! I won't go myself, that's all.—How unfortunate it is to have to do with such people!—Heavens!—someone else is ringing; can it be that that clown has come back?"

"This time I will take my broom, and if it's the grocer again, I will sweep his legs out from under him!"

Mademoiselle Lizida went out in a rage. Madame de Grangeville listened, this time with some little emotion; but she heard no voices, it was evidently not a creditor. The maid reappeared with a very different expression.

"Monsieur de Merval asks if he may present his respects to madame la baronne?"

"Yes, to be sure; show him in."

And the baroness made haste to cast another glance at the mirror, to arrange her hair and to assume a gracious attitude in her easy-chair.

Monsieur de Merval was ushered into the room; he entered with the exquisite courtesy which distinguished him, and took a chair near Madame de Grangeville, who said to him with her most engaging smile:

"I am very glad that you remembered the promise that you gave me at Monsieur Glumeau's. I did not rely very much upon it."

"Why so, madame? Do you think that I also was not delighted to meet again, to see once more, a person who carried me back to the pleasant days of my youth—in memory, to be sure; but those memories are too agreeable ever to be effaced entirely."

"Dear Armand!—I beg pardon, will you permit me still to call you so?"

"It is a token of friendship for which I thank you."

"I was unmarried when I knew you; we used to meet often at parties; then you came to my uncle's house."

"Yes, madame, yes, the evenings at your uncle's were delightful; you did the honors with such grace; so that we rated ourselves as very fortunate when we were on the list of your guests."

"Yes, we used to have music and singing. Do you remember little Dumesnil, how false she sang?"

"I remember especially that you sang like an angel. We used to dance, too, quite often."

"Yes, while the sober people played whist or bouillotte. You waltzed divinely, Armand; you were our best waltzer."

"True, the waltz was my specialty."

"And you never were able to make tall Adèle Brillange dance in time; do you remember her—rather a pretty blonde?"

"Really, I hardly remember her. Just remember that that was fully twenty-three or twenty-four years ago!"

Madame de Grangeville bit her lips, not at all pleased to find that her old acquaintance remembered dates so well.

"Do you still waltz, Monsieur de Merval?"

"Oh! that is all over, madame; I have had my day."

"Bless my soul! to hear you, one would think that we belonged to the age of Louis XV!"

"No one would think so to look at you, madame; time has stood still for you."

This compliment restored the serenity of Madame de Grangeville's expression, and she replied, simpering a little:

"Ah! you are always agreeable; would that I were back in those happy days! Tell me, Armand, if I remember aright, you used to pay court to me then,—yes, you were very attentive to me."

Monsieur de Merval seemed decidedly embarrassed; he glanced about the salon and replied at last:

"I don't deny it, madame, but I remember also that as soon as the Comte de Brévanne was introduced to you, discovering that his love was welcomed with enthusiasm, I thought only of making an honorable retreat; and I was wise, as the count became your husband."

"Yes, he became my husband."

"It was a love match, was it not, madame?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! is it possible to say, when one is so young? One always imagines that one is in love, but one does not even know what love is. You must have been very much surprised to learn that I was no longer living with Monsieur de Brévanne?"

"Yes, madame; and yet such things happen rather often."

"Look you, Armand, I am sorry that I didn't marry you; we should never have parted."

Monsieur de Merval shook his head slightly and answered with a smile:

"No one knows, no one knows!"

Madame de Grangeville blushed, then assumed a serious air.

"You may perhaps believe all the slanders that Monsieur de Brévanne no doubt spread about me?"

"I knew nothing, heard nothing, madame. Monsieur de Brévanne is too well-bred a man to say anything which could possibly injure your reputation."

"Oh! when a man is jealous, monsieur, when he fancies himself betrayed, he is sometimes so absurd!"

Monsieur de Merval made no reply, but continued to look about the salon, and seemed painfully affected by the lack of harmony in the furniture.

"Yes," said Madame de Grangeville after a long pause, "women are always the victims; that is their fate; the men make the laws for us, and we are the weaker party in every respect; we must needs endure the harsh treatment, the violent scenes, the sarcasms of those gentlemen. I tell you, Armand, that all the fault is on the men's part; I know it, poor abandoned wife that I am!"

Monsieur de Merval, who seemed far from convinced by the lamentations of his old acquaintance, rejoined:

"And Monsieur de Roncherolle, what have you done with him, madame? He was a very amiable, very gallant gentleman, who had great success with the ladies. A good-looking fellow, a hard drinker, and of a courage proof against any test; he had everything that a man needs to succeed."

The face of the abandoned wife had undergone a complete transformation; her lips were compressed, her brow was wrinkled, her eyes assumed a vague expression, and she retorted in a decidedly curt tone:

"Why do you apply to me for news of Monsieur de Roncherolle? What reason have you to think that I can tell you anything about him?"

"Really, madame, I had no idea of offending you by asking you that question; but a good friend of mine who met you thirteen or fourteen years ago in the Pyrenees, at the Baths of Bagnères, I believe, told me then that you were travelling with Roncherolle; that was what made me think that perhaps you still kept up some relations with him."

Madame de Grangeville was disconcerted.

"Oh! yes," she stammered, "that is true; I did meet Monsieur de Roncherolle when I was travelling in the Pyrenees, and we travelled together for some little time. Well, Monsieur de Merval, do you see any harm in that? After all, wasn't I at liberty to travel with whomever I pleased, since I had already been separated from my husband for several years?"

"I have already had the honor to tell you, madame, that I see no harm anywhere; I simply repeated what I have heard, as we were talking of our old acquaintances, that is all.—And in your financial affairs, I most sincerely hope that you have not suffered, madame? You had an independent fortune, I believe?"

"Yes, that is true, I had a fortune—I had one."

"What! have you had the misfortune to suffer from somebody's bankruptcy?"

"Why, yes, I think so; and then, you know, women are so stupid about managing their property."

"But when it is simply a matter of receiving income, one does not need a business agent for that."

The bell rang again. The baroness started, and Monsieur de Merval took his hat, saying:

"Somebody has come to visit you, madame, and I will take my leave."

"Why no, don't go yet, I beg you; it is no visitor, I expect no one; no one ever comes to see me now!"

The poor woman said this in such a melancholy tone that Monsieur de Merval was touched; he replaced his hat on the chair, and his eyes rested again on various parts of the furniture, which clearly betrayed the lamentable plight of their owner. As he passed these objects in review, in order to conceal what was in his mind, he began to talk about the Glumeau family; but soon a hoarse voice arose in the reception room and dominated Lizida's, although she did her utmost to drown it.

Thereupon Madame de Grangeville also tried to talk very loud, so that her visitor should not hear the altercation which was taking place in her reception room. She even tried to laugh.

"Oh, yes! ha! ha! ha! that party that those good people gave was very comical; there were such amusing faces there! They put me at the table beside an old gentleman who looked like an owl. Ha! ha! ha!"

But the noise in the reception room did not cease, and Madame de Grangeville laughed on the wrong side of her mouth. Monsieur de Merval, while doing his best not to listen, could not, unless he had stuffed his ears, help hearing a stentorian voice shout:

"I won't go away! I want my money! I said to my wife: 'They'll send you to the devil with your bill; I'm going myself!—*Fichtre!* I won't go away without the money!"

Monsieur de Merval, who had been pensive and preoccupied for several minutes, suddenly said to his old friend:

"Mon Dieu! how thoughtless I am, madame! I knew that I had something else to say to you, but while we were

talking I forgot it; it is a mere trifle, an old debt that I desire to pay, if you will allow me."

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

"This is how it is: the last time that I was with Monsieur de Brévanne, a very long time ago, we played cards, and I lost five hundred francs to him on credit, for I had no money with me. After that, I tried in vain to find the count; he had left Paris suddenly. Now, as I have found his wife to-day, I ask permission to cancel a debt which troubles me. If you will allow me to hand you that amount, you will do me a favor."

Madame de Grangeville blushed slightly as she replied:

"But I don't know whether I ought to accept; Monsieur de Brévanne and I no longer have any property in common."

"Oh! I don't go into all those details," replied Monsieur de Merval, as he took from his wallet a five-hundred-franc note and laid it on the table. "I am only paying an old debt which I had on my conscience, and surely an old friend like you would not prevent me from accomplishing that duty.—Adieu, madame, I am obliged to leave you; pray receive the homage of my respect."

Monsieur de Merval kissed the baroness's hand and hurried out of the room; as he passed through the reception room, he saw a man pacing the floor with his hat on his head, paying no heed to Mademoiselle Lizida's entreaties.

This personage stared in an impertinent fashion at the gentleman going out; but Monsieur de Merval paid little heed to him; he was pleased to have put his old friend in a position to get rid of her visitor.

Madame de Grangeville had not been deceived by the little fable invented by Monsieur de Merval in order to oblige her; she had said to herself:

"That was very nice on his part; it was a very delicate proceeding; but after all, he is rich; he guessed that I needed money, and he has lent me some; it's a simple matter.—Lizida! Lizida!"

The lady's maid hurried into the room, and was stupefied when her mistress handed her a bank note.

"Here, my dear, go out and change this!"

"O madame! five hundred francs! How lovely!"

"Who is that wretched creature outside?"

"Your dressmaker's husband; he demands the total of the bill, one hundred and twenty-three francs!"

"Take him with you, and pay him."

"The whole amount?"

"There's no help for it; his wife works beautifully, and I always need her. Go, and bring back a coupé when you come; I will go out to buy a hat."

"Yes, madame.—By the way, what about the grocer opposite?"

"What do we owe him?"

"Ninety-six francs."

"Give him ten francs on account, that is quite enough."

XVIII

THE HOUSE AT NOGENT.—THE REHEARSAL

Everything was made ready at Monsieur Glumeau's country house for the festivities which he had announced long before to his friends and acquaintances. The day was fixed, the invitations issued. They had invited four times as many people as the house could hold; but in default of the house there was a garden, and over and above the garden there was a wood of about two acres; the guests who could not find room in the house had their choice between the wood and the garden; in the country there is always some way to arrange matters.

Monsieur Glumeau's country house was nevertheless quite large and very well arranged. The garden was attractive and well filled with flowers; but the most attractive part of the whole estate was the little wood. Unfortunately it did not adjoin the garden; it was separated from it by a narrow path, not more than ten feet wide, which was open to the public. But the garden gate was opposite the gate leading into the wood, and the path was so quickly crossed that the separation was hardly noticeable. The one thing that the estate lacked was water; but pending the time when a river should appear, Monsieur Glumeau had had made behind his theatre a small basin, of about the capacity of two casks, in which one might at need have taken a foot bath.

It was in this little wood, enclosed by trellis work, which was supported by stone posts at intervals, that Monsieur Glumeau had conceived the idea of building a small theatre. The stage was supplied with all the accessories: wings, flies, arches, and drop curtain. But when the action of the play took place in a forest, instead of using a rear curtain, they simply used the wings, and the wood itself formed natural scenery, and afforded a lovely prospect which it is impossible to have in the city, even at the grand opera.

The theatre was covered with a board roof, which sheltered the scenery and the actors from possible storms. But as there was no auditorium, as the spectators simply sat or stood under the trees, in front of the drop curtain, it was most important for them that the weather should be fine, for rain would very speedily drive the audience away and leave the auditorium empty.

The friends who had accepted parts in the plays that were to be given came twice a week to pass the day with Glumeau, in order to rehearse.

Very often the time passed away and there was no rehearsal; the men played billiards or bouillotte, the women went out to ride, with or without donkeys; sometimes someone sat at the piano and sang. They dined very late and remained at the table a long while. When they left it, they had not the slightest desire to study their parts; but they began to dance a polka or a waltz; thus it was that almost all the rehearsals were held, but they enjoyed themselves, so that the desired result was attained.

But when they realized that the great day was near at hand, they began to say to themselves: "We really must

rehearse.”—Monsieur Glumeau, who had been very well for some time, was in a charming mood and fluttered from one to another, looking at his feet; he gave counsel and advice to everyone, and insisted that they should introduce spoken pantomime in the plays and dancing in the pantomime; he transformed everything into a ballet.

The performance decided upon consisted of *Ceil et Nez*, a farce in one act, with three characters, to be played by Madame Dufournelle, young Astianax, and Monsieur Mangeot.

This piece, being easy to rehearse, and having almost no *mise-en-scène*, was almost learned; young Astianax declared that it would go as if it were on wheels, and that it was not necessary to give any more thought to it.

The second play was also a farce: *Il y a plus d'un Ane à la Foire*.—In this there were seven characters, four men and three women; the men's parts were entrusted to Messieurs Glumeau, Mangeot, Astianax and Kingerie; the actresses were Mesdemoiselles Eolinde, Polymnie and Mangeot.

Monsieur Glumeau had the most important part, that of Pincette, created with much success by Serres at the Folies-Dramatiques. It was very long, and Monsieur Glumeau had decided that it was quite useless to try to drive it into his head, where he was certain that he could never succeed in introducing it; but he relied on the prompter to supplement his memory, and proposed to replace such parts of the dialogue as he did not know by pantomime and dancing.

But it was for the third play that they reserved all the striking effects, all the surprises, all the finest scenery and most amazing costumes that they had. This play was *Roderic et Cunégonde*, or *L'Ermite de Montmartre*, or *La Forteresse de Moulinos*, or *Le Revenant de la Galerie de l'Ouest*, an excellent parody of melodramas, in four tableaux, *larded*, as the book says, with dancing, fighting, manœuvring, conflagrations and destruction.

This play, the action of which takes place wherever you choose, allows the most fanciful costumes to be used. Wooden swords and daggers had been made, with which the combats were to be fought. Chambourdin, who was very intimate with several dramatic artists, had promised to bring the costumes; the non-speaking parts were to be represented by the gardener and his family and anyone else who chose. The élite of the troupe took part in this play: Mademoiselle Eolinde played Cunégonde, her brother, Roderic, and Monsieur Glumeau took the part of the tyrant Sacripandos; the leader of the brigands, Détroussandos, was entrusted to a young druggist of most promising talent, named Fourriette, who insisted upon always rehearsing his fights with the wooden swords. Monsieur Mangeot represented the hermit; the part of the valet Malinot fell as of right to young Kingerie. In order to have a second female part, they had transformed Petit-Colas into Petite-Colette, and Mademoiselle Polymnie had accepted this bit of a part, because of the costume. There was also a child's part. The son of Pichet the gardener, a little boy of five, who never blew his nose, but whose parents had promised to do it for him on that day, was employed to represent the son of Roderic and Cunégonde. His father the gardener had undertaken to teach him the few words of which his part consisted; he beat it into his head with an accompaniment of kicks, which gave the little fellow small taste for the theatre. Lastly, the three speaking robbers in the play were to be acted by Chambourdin and two of his friends. As each rôle would be but four lines, it was hoped that those gentlemen would succeed in learning them.

The great day had arrived; the weather was fine and promised a magnificent day and evening, which were quite indispensable for the success of the party. At daybreak everybody was up at Monsieur Glumeau's country house. Buxom Lolotte, although she did not act, was one of those who had most to do; as mistress of the house, she must overlook everything, see to it that everything needed for the play was provided, and attend to the preparations for the ball which was to follow it, and for the supper which was to follow the ball. For there is no such thing as a successful party without a supper; this principle is so fully admitted that those persons who entertain you without offering you that refecton should be classed among people who do not know how to entertain.

Those who were to take part in the play were to arrive early, for it was felt that there should be another rehearsal, because there are innumerable things, innumerable details of the *mise-en-scène*, which one does not notice until the moment of the performance; it is then a little late to rehearse them, but the zeal of the actors makes up for the lack of time.

Monsieur Glumeau had risen as light as a feather, he was not conscious of the slightest ailment, and he continued to dance through his rôles; frequently confusing that of the tyrant Sacripandos with that of Pincette in the farce. But, after all, it was probable that the audience would not detect that confusion. As he was hurrying to the wood, to cast an eye over his stage, he met his wife, who was returning from a visit to the best caterer in the neighborhood.

“Well, my dear love, we are lucky, we are going to have splendid weather, weather which seems to have been made for us.”

“Yes, thank God! it is fine; but I can't do any more; I am fagged out already; I doubt if I shall be able to stand up to-night.”

“Why fatigue yourself so? Haven't you your maid, and the gardener and his wife to do whatever you want?”

“Oh, yes! that would be very nice; things would go splendidly this evening if I trusted to those people! The gardener's wife is so stupid, she has already broken three lamp chimneys and a globe! Her husband is a little drunk already; if he keeps on he will be in fine condition to-night!”

“Don't worry, I will speak to him. But what have you left to do? The supper is to consist almost entirely of cold dishes; you arranged all that in advance, and the caterer knows what he is to send.”

“And the dinner, monsieur—isn't it necessary to think of that, too?”

“The dinner? Oh! there will only be our intimate friends, and there is no need of ceremony about that.”

“No ceremony, if you please, but there will be at least fourteen or fifteen of us, and it seems to me that we need something for that number!”

“I have difficulty in remembering my song to the tune of *Le Maçon*: ‘Je vais la revoir! Ha! ha!’—Never mind, I will execute a pirouette.—I say, Lolotte, I look pretty well, don't I? Isn't my complexion clear?”

“Yes, you are magnificent.—By the way, my dear, I forgot to tell you that I have invited that gentleman who owns the fine estate on the other side of our woods.”

“Who? Monsieur Malberg? that man who never speaks to anybody, who never walks where there is likely to be anybody; in short, who lives in his country house like a wolf, never seeing any of his neighbors?”

“I know very well that the people about here say all that; but people are so spiteful, so evil-tongued in these

country places! They make a pumpkin of a walnut. This much is certain, that that gentleman has always been very courteous to us; he always bows first when we meet; and he has a very distinguished manner."

"Why do you say that?"

"Why, his whole air, and his dress; and then he employs a mulatto, and that is very distinguished!"

"It doesn't cost any more than other servants.—'Je vais la revoir! Ha! ha!'"

"And yesterday, during the day, I happened to meet him in the narrow path, and as he stood aside very politely to let me pass, I said to him: 'Monsieur, we are to have some theatricals to-morrow in our little theatre in these woods; if it would give you any pleasure to come to look on, we should be flattered to have you in our audience.'—He bowed and replied: 'You do me much honor, madame, and I shall try to take advantage of your kind invitation.'"

"Oh! he said that, did he? But he won't come."

"Perhaps not, but I have an idea that he will."

"After all, you did well; there is always room in our theatre, and the larger the audience we have, the more they electrify the actors.—'Je vais la revoir! Ha! ha!'—Tell me what comes next."

"How do you suppose I know? You should learn your part."

"Thanks! Tire out my brain and give myself a fever—I'm no such fool; if I don't know it, I'll say the first thing that comes into my head.—But Astianax and Eolinde,—where are they?"

"They are learning their parts, and it isn't possible to get near them!"

About noon, the actors began to arrive. There were Dufournelle and his wife; the husband carried an enormous bundle, for the ladies all brought their stage costumes and their ball dresses. Next, Mademoiselle Polymnie appeared with her father, Monsieur Camuzard, who also carried a bundle; then Monsieur Mangeot and his sister, each of them with a bundle.

"Why have you brought so many things," said Glumeau, "since Chambourdin promised the costumes?"

"Oh, yes! catch us relying on Monsieur Chambourdin!" said Madame Dufournelle; "I have made my own costume; I have the part of a cook, and I have borrowed my servant's cap."

Monsieur Camuzard, who was annoyed because no part had been given to him, kept repeating:

"You will be very lucky if someone does not fail you when it's time to begin. On such an occasion as this, accidents always happen, sudden indispositions, just as they do at the theatre. I offered to take part, but they didn't want me."

"But you are to prompt, you know, Monsieur Camuzard; you prompt so well!"

"I am willing to prompt one play, but not three; that is too tiresome."

"I will prompt as many as you please," said stout Dufournelle; "don't be afraid, I am solidly built, and my breath won't give out."

Monsieur Camuzard, seeing that the post of prompter was about to escape him, hastily rejoined:

"After all, when I have got started, it won't be any more trouble to prompt all three plays."

"Let's rehearse, my friends, let's rehearse, let's not lose any more time," said Monsieur Glumeau. "The two short pieces go well enough, but *Roderic et Cunégonde* doesn't go well at all. There is so much stage play. Astianax, go and get the wooden swords, so that we may rehearse the fights also."

"Do you expect much company this evening?" asked Madame Dufournelle.

"Well, I should say so! A most select audience; I have invited more than a hundred people, more or less; journalists, artists; I don't count the people of the village and the neighborhood, who come to see the play. When I don't allow them to enter, they raise the devil; they besiege the place and break down my trellis."

"They represent the audience in the upper gallery in the theatres in Paris; they are often the best judges of the performance."

"Astianax, did you ask your neighbor, Monsieur Jéricourt, to come?"

"Yes, papa, and he will bring one of his friends, a young man you would take for a tailor's model, he is so well dressed: Monsieur Arthur de Saint-Alfred—no, I am wrong, it is Alfred de Saint-Arthur."

"Saint-Arthur! Alfred! that gentleman must be a humbug!"

"I assure you, madame, that he is a very good-looking fellow; at the theatre he never sits anywhere but in the proscenium boxes!"

"As he never sits anywhere but in the proscenium," said Dufournelle, "he is necessarily a young man of very high station."

"Let's rehearse, my friends, let us rehearse."

"But we are not all here yet, young Kingerie and Monsieur Fourriette the druggist are still missing."

"I d—d—don't want to f—f—fight with Monsieur F—F—Fourriette!" said Mademoiselle Eolinde; "he always hits me on the f—f—fingers with his sword."

"The trouble is that he puts too much action into his part; these druggists are generally very warm, especially as they are almost always from the South. Why is it that the South supplies more druggists and more apothecaries than the North? That is a question I have often asked myself. What do you say upon that point, messieurs?"

"It seems to me easy enough to understand," said Monsieur Dufournelle. "It's because sun dials are always placed in the south."

"Oh! excellent! excellent!"

"I don't understand the joke," said Monsieur Camuzard, blowing his nose.

At last, Messieurs Kingerie and Fourriette appeared on the road; the first, as awkward as ever, began by upsetting a box of cactus which stood in a path where there was much more room than he required. As for the druggist, a dark-haired, very good-looking youth, he was all curled and perfumed, and made eyes at all the ladies, to whom he did not fail to offer pastilles which he had made himself.

"Take care, madame, take care," said Dufournelle, "it is very imprudent to accept monsieur's pastilles; you don't know what he may have put in them! He is quite capable of giving you something that will make you fall in love with

him."

"If I knew that secret, I should not fail to make use of it," said Monsieur Fourriette, still offering his box and smiling at the ladies.

"Well! I don't care, I will take the risk!" said Mademoiselle Mangeot, putting her fingers in the bonbonnière.

"It seems to me," said Mademoiselle Dufournelle in an undertone, "that she isn't the one who is taking the risk at this moment!—Well, I will take the risk myself."

"Let's rehearse, my friends, let's rehearse; just see how the time is passing; let us go to the theatre at once, we are all here."

"All except the three robbers with speaking parts."

"We will omit that scene."

"And the child,—we must have the child, we must make sure that he knows his part."

"Astianax, go and fetch little Codinde, the gardener's son."

"Here's the gardener himself coming this way; he looks as if he wanted to speak to you."

"The deuce! the fellow looks to me as if he had already had a touch of sunstroke."

Monsieur Pichet, the gardener, was in fact approaching the company, and as he was quite conscious of the fact that his legs wavered under him, he was walking very slowly to maintain his equilibrium, and was trying hard to keep his head back and his body upright.

"Pichet, go and get little Codinde, your son," said Monsieur Glumeau; "we want him for the rehearsal; go at once."

Instead of obeying his master and fetching Codinde, the gardener tried to straighten himself up, and answered in a thick voice:

"It's impossible, monsieur; it's impossible! Codinde is just what I wanted to talk to monsieur about."

"Can it be that anything has happened to him?"

"An attack of indigestion has happened to him; we thought he was going to choke to death; he was purple."

"The devil take you! Why do you stuff your son so's to make him sick?"

"It wasn't us, monsieur; the little glutton stuffs himself. As there's a celebration going on in the house, he must have found lots of things to eat; bless my soul! children, you know, they ain't reasonable."

"And then, too, you set him such an excellent example!"

"Why, monsieur—I haven't eaten as much as your thumb to-day, saving your presence."

"No, but you have drunk enough to make up for it."

"I've drunk very moderate; besides, wine never upsets me, I'm so used to it."

"So, Pichet, your son won't be in condition to act to-night?"

"You had better not rely on him; the little rascal has the fever and it don't leave him a minute; it's constantly going and coming."

"Well, we are in a fix; and it's too late now to teach anybody else Codinde's part!"

"Monsieur, if you say so, I can take my boy's part well enough; I know it, because I've been saying it to him all day."

"You, Pichet,—you take the child's part?"

"Why," said Dufournelle, "in a play that is a parody of the melodramas, it seems to me that it will be even funnier to see the part played by a tall fellow like him."

"Is that your opinion? Then I have no objection.—Can we rely on you, Pichet?"

"Don't I tell you that I know the part? The child is hidden, the robbers come, and when he sees that they are going to kill his father, he rushes at them like a kid."

"That's right, and he says to the robbers: 'Messieurs, in pity's name, don't hurt papa!'—Will you remember that sentence?"

"Yes, monsieur, I tell you I know it."

"Then go and rest; don't drink any more before this evening, and be presentable when the time comes for the play."

"Monsieur will be satisfied with me."

The gardener walked away, as proud as a peacock to play the part of a child, and the amateurs hurried to the theatre, where they tried to rehearse as well as possible; but while trying the combat with swords, which brought the play to an end, young Kingerie, playing the part of Malinot, and finding much difficulty in learning the *four blows* which his adversary, Astianax, did his utmost to teach him, unexpectedly invented a fifth blow which landed on the nose of the son of the family.

Astianax shrieked, thinking that his nose was cut off. The others crowded about him and reassured him; he had suffered nothing worse than a swollen nose and a slight cut upon it. Fourriette made haste to bathe the wounded organ, and thought that with the aid of a compress, which he urged the wounded youth to wear until evening, the nose would resume its normal shape. But young Kingerie was strictly enjoined not to use his sword even for practice.

The dinner hour arrived, and with it four scene shifters from one of the Parisian theatres, whom Glumeau had hired to work the scenery on his stage. They were looking for the theatre.

"What, have you hired men from the theatre?" cried Dufournelle; "why, we would have set the scenes; we would have acted as scene shifters."

"Oh, yes!" said Eolinde, "it's very nice indeed when friends manage all those things. We trusted it to them once, and they never succeeded in setting the stage, except the wings representing a cavern and the background of a salon; and they couldn't light but two lamps, because they had broken all the others."

"What worries me is that Chambourdin doesn't appear. What shall we do?" said Glumeau, looking at his feet. "I relied upon him, and I have no chevalier's costume."

"And he promised me, for the part of Roderic, the costume of Robin Hood," said Astianax.

"Ah! you should do as I do, messieurs," said the druggist, "and arrange your own costume for yourselves. I have transformed myself into an Italian bandit, and you must tell me what you think of him."

"Does the action of the play take place in Italy?"

"I don't know; but what difference does it make, as long as the costume is pretty?"

"Here he is!" cried Mademoiselle Eolinde; "a cabriolet is stopping at the gate, and there's a big bundle in it. It's Monsieur Chambourdin."

"Yes, it is he; good! everything is all right," said Glumeau; "he is more prompt than usual."

Chambourdin appeared with an enormous bundle of costumes; there were helmets, cuirasses, tunics, long boots, wigs, doublets, small clothes, in short, enough to disguise the whole troupe. They all cheered, and carried Chambourdin in triumph; they even proposed to embrace him, but he exclaimed that he preferred to dine. Thereupon they hastened to the table, but stout Dufournelle remarked that there was no need to hurry, because the audience was not likely to come early, and because by eating too hastily the actors ran the risk of suffocating on the stage.

Despite this advice, the ladies did hurry, and left the gentlemen at the table, in order to try on their costumes. The men took advantage of their absence to drink harder and to give their tongues greater liberty. Dufournelle, who had no part, made the champagne corks pop, saying:

"Come, messieurs, this will give you self-possession, verve! If you're a little tipsy, you'll act much better!"

Young Kingerie, who realized the necessity of overcoming his usual timidity, drank several glasses of champagne in rapid succession, and soon his eyes began to start from his head. Monsieur Camuzard drank in order to prompt better; little Astianax, who for some time past had affected very dissolute manners, proposed toasts to the dancers at the Porte-Saint-Martin and to the bareback riders at the Hippodrome. Chambourdin drank to whatever anyone suggested. Monsieur Mangeot drank to the success of the performance. Monsieur Glumeau proposed his own health; and stout Dufournelle, saying nothing, drank four times as much as the others.

But while drinking and laughing and talking, these gentlemen forgot the time; and suddenly little Astianax exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! here are people coming already!"

XIX

A PLAY IN THE WOODS

It was midsummer, when the days were longest; and so, although it was nearly eight o'clock, the gardens were not yet dark, and they could see outside the gate a large number of persons who had come to see the performance. The ladies were in full dress, because they knew that after the play there would be dancing; the men too had taken pains with their costumes; for while saying to themselves: "In the country there is no ceremony," they were quite as anxious to please there as in the city.

"The devil! the devil!" said Chambourdin, ogling the ladies who arrived. "Why, some of them are passably good-looking. Who is that brunette, with high color and her hair dressed *à la Fontange*? She has a saucy little air which attracts me immensely. Is she a product of the neighborhood?"

"Yes, she belongs here, or at all events she has property here."

"Has she a husband?"

"She has one who is three times her age."

"Then, it's about the same as if she hadn't any!"

"She is very gay, very fond of laughing; she rides and fences and dances admirably."

"Sapristi! why on earth didn't you give her a part in the play, Monsieur Glumeau? I should have been delighted to fence with her, to try the *four blows* with her."

Monsieur Glumeau was no longer there; he had gone to receive his guests; but little Astianax, made exceedingly loquacious by the champagne, replied:

"My mother and sister aren't very fond of Madame Boutillon—that is the pretty brunette's name; they say that her manner with men is too free."

"Oh! of course! that's just like the women; when one of them happens to be a little more lively, a little less prudish, and doesn't pick her expressions, but says frankly what she thinks, why she is voted bad form at once! she is too free! I snap my fingers at it; I like them that way myself, and I will look after the little Boutillon!"

"Ah! here is Miaulard, messieurs."

"Good-evening, Miaulard; are you still hoarse?"

"I am getting better, much better."

"The deuce you say! you seem hardly able to speak to-day."

"Yes, but the last time I couldn't speak at all."

"Ah! here is the baroness, messieurs, the famous Baroness de—de—what's her name?"

"De Grangeville.—What a beautiful dress!"

"What style! that woman must have been extremely pretty once."

"Ah! here is my friend Jéricourt, the literary man, with Monsieur Alfred de Saint-Arthur."

Astianax ran to meet his friend, who was already looking about with a mocking air at the gardens and at the people whom he saw in them.

"Good-evening, my dear neighbor; it is very kind of you to have remembered my invitation."

"I should have been very sorry not to accept it, my dear Astianax; I am told that there is always much entertainment at your house, and that the supper is always excellent.—By the way, allow me to introduce my friend,

Monsieur de Saint-Arthur."

"Highly flattered, monsieur; I have had the honor of seeing you with monsieur."

"True, we met on the boulevard."

"At the booth of a pretty flower girl."

"Yes, I am not ashamed to say that I am one of her admirers."

"I was, but she has fallen infernally in my esteem, since that day—you remember the occasion, Monsieur Jéricourt?"

"Oh! very well, indeed; but after all, why should that make any difference to you? The flower girl is none the less pretty."

"Of course not! But, you see, I thought that she was innocence personified."

"Oh! oh!" cried the dandified Saint-Arthur, trying to stuff the head of his cane into his nose, "the idea of a flower girl being a model of virtue! That would be the eighth wonder of the world.—But where is your theatre, monsieur?"

"You will see it in a moment.—But I see my mother and sister; I will introduce you, messieurs."

"That long bean-pole is his sister," whispered Saint-Arthur in Jéricourt's ear.

"Yes, my dear fellow, and I don't advise you to give her your arm, you would look like her doll!"

"Never fear, I haven't any desire to do it. What a pity that Zizi isn't with us! I see that there will be plenty to laugh at here. How she would enjoy it! I fancy that we shall find their comedy decidedly ridiculous! But what are they going to do with all the chairs they are taking out of the garden? Are they moving?"

"Those are the seats being taken to the theatre," said Madame Glumeau, graciously saluting the two gentlemen, who, although they had just arrived, were already busily engaged in making sport of whatever they saw; "seats for the spectators, I mean. It would be very kind of you, messieurs, to help a little, to take a few chairs into the wood."

"What an astonishing woman!" murmured the dandified Saint-Arthur, turning to Jéricourt; "as if we came here to carry chairs!"

"Come, come, Alfred, be decent, or I won't take you into the country again. Look about; there are some very pretty women here, and I sacrifice myself,—I am going to carry some chairs."

The garden began to fill with guests, some from Paris, others who lived in the neighborhood. The darkness was coming on, and the semi-obscurity added to the charm of the occasion. Some ladies, by chance or by design, had wandered away from their husbands, whom they were careful not to find again; but gallant cavaliers zealously offered their arms, to assist them in their search.

Chambourdin did not fail to take advantage of the opportunity to approach Madame Boutillon; the pretty little brunette had lost no time in losing her husband very soon after her arrival, and the bald young man hastened to offer her his arm, saying:

"You are looking for monsieur your husband? accept my arm, madame, and I'll guide you; I know the house."

"Oh! I am not looking for my husband at all, monsieur," replied the little lady, laughing; "I am not afraid that he will get lost."

"Ah! that makes a difference; pray come into the woods, madame; I will take you to the theatre and find you a seat."

"With pleasure, monsieur."

At that moment, Madame Glumeau walked toward the gate with a large number of ladies, exclaiming:

"Come to the woods, messieurs, everybody to the theatre; we must take seats, for it will begin very soon."

The company followed Madame Glumeau to the enclosure facing the stage. All the seats were very soon occupied, but most of the men took their places behind, and leaned against the trees. The creaking of the trellis work which enclosed the auditorium indicated that there was also an audience outside, which proposed to enjoy the spectacle although uninvited.

The male actors dressed in the billiard room, the ladies in the house. As they were about to begin, they discovered that various indispensable accessories were lacking; thereupon there was much running from the theatre to the house, and from the house to the theatre; one saw nothing but people hurrying back and forth, shouting:

"The basket! we must have a basket!"

"And the letter for Monsieur Astianax!"

"And a table! we must have a table, and a cloth on it!"

"We want a stove,—where's the stove?"

"There isn't one; take an empty cask, that will represent a stove well enough!"

"We must have a pie! there's a supper in the play."

"Take an empty flower pot, that will do very well for the pie."

"We want a bottle of champagne."

"There's a bottle of Seltzer behind the first wing; that will pop like champagne."

All these incidents delayed the rising of the curtain; but the audience did not grumble, they laughed and found amusement in all that they saw. At last an amateur musician armed with a violin, and another carrying a clarinet in his arms like a baby, took their seats in front of the stage.

As for the prompter, there being no hole under the stage for him, he stood behind the drop curtain.

"This theatre in the midst of a forest is really very pretty!" said Madame de Grangeville, who was seated beside Madame Glumeau.

"Oh! you will see how pretty it is, madame la baronne, when the curtain rises; we have some lovely scenery: a Pompadour salon, painted by Monsieur Devoir; it is perfectly lovely."

"What plays are they going to give us?"

"They begin with *Ceil et Nez*, a little farce acted by Madame Dufournelle, my son and Monsieur Mangeot.—But it is very strange,—look about as I will, I don't see Madame Boutillon; and yet I am very sure that she came with her husband."

"Who is Madame Boutillon?"

"She is a young lady who lives here in summer, as we do; she had on a very original, very pretty dress."

"If she has on a pretty dress, it isn't possible that she has hidden herself; she must be somewhere here."

"But no, I can't see her."

"Hush! they are beginning."

The three knocks were given. The amateur with the violin started off and played the overture to *Fra Diavolo*; the clarinet started a few measures later, and played the overture to *Jeune Henri*; the two men played thus for some time, seeing who could go the faster, persuaded that they would finally overtake each other and play together. The audience opened their ears in amazement, but the wiser ones stuffed theirs.

"Sapristi! what on earth are they playing?" murmured a native, looking at his neighbor, who answered in an undertone:

"I don't know, but it's a terrible mixture."

At last the violin stopped, but the clarinet went on.

"We are not playing the same thing, that isn't right!" cried the violinist, waving his bow.

The clarinet refused to listen; he went on with his *Jeune Henri*. Luckily the curtain rose, the actors came on the stage; but as the clarinet kept on, they were obliged to rush upon him and snatch his instrument away.

The little farce would have gone very well if Madame Dufournelle had laughed less, and if Monsieur Mangeot had looked less often at the prompter, which, by the way, did him no good, because Monsieur Camuzard, who filled that post, having drunk too freely of the champagne, found his mouth so dry that he could hardly speak, and passed his time turning over the play-book, and saying to the actor who was waiting for his lines:

"Wait till I find the place; I can't find it; we have time enough; they won't ask for their money back!"

Luckily the actors did not follow this advice, and despite the prompter, the first play, which was very amusing, came to an end amid the applause of the spectators.

As soon as the first play was at an end, Madame Glumeau rose, in order to make further search for Madame Boutillon, whose husband was chatting tranquilly with a group of men who had gathered on the outskirts of the audience.

"As her husband is there, the lady must also be in the audience, unless she has gone on the stage; she is quite capable of it."

"I say! look at that lady sitting on the branch of a tree!" cried the clarinet at that moment to his neighbor the violin. "There's an idea for you! if the branch should break, we should see some fine things."

"That is she! that is Madame Boutillon!" said Madame Glumeau, looking at the person who had deemed it advisable to adopt that position.

Chambourdin, who had taken the little brunette's arm on the pretext of finding her a good place to see the play, had in fact led her into the wood, of which he knew every nook and corner; but instead of taking her toward the stage, he had taken her in the opposite direction, and had soon found himself with Madame Boutillon in the deserted paths, where they could hardly see their hands before their faces, for lanterns had been placed only in the paths leading to the theatre.

The little brunette, noticing somewhat tardily that her guide was not taking her toward the company, and that he held her arm as if he proposed to waltz with her, chose to stop, saying:

"Where on earth are you taking me, monsieur? I can hardly see anything here."

"That makes no difference, madame; don't be afraid I'll lose my way; I'm like a cat, I can see in the dark."

"But I am not like a cat, monsieur, and I prefer to walk where it is light; we did not take the path leading to the theatre."

"We shall arrive there all the same this way; all the paths lead there."

"This must be the longest one."

"With you, madame, the longest will always be the shortest."

"That is very polite of you; but don't hold me like that, I beg."

"Suppose we should waltz a bit?"

"You are mad! the idea of waltzing when we can't see!"

"That makes no difference; on the contrary, you get less dizzy."

"Really, monsieur, you have some very original ideas; but I want to see the play, and you will be responsible, monsieur, for my not finding a seat."

"As for that, madame, I will undertake to give you one of the best places.—Come, madame."

"Oh! you shall not lead me astray again, monsieur; that isn't the way to go, this is the way."

The little brunette chose the right road this time, and refusing to listen to Chambourdin, she arrived in front of the stage at last; but as she had anticipated, all the chairs were occupied.

"Well! what did I tell you, monsieur? Come, show me that excellent seat which you reserved for me."

"This way, madame; I will show you."

And Chambourdin led the young lady to an enormous chestnut, the branches of which reached out a long way, forming a thousand odd figures.

"See, madame, do you want a really good seat? Look at this tree; this first branch, which is very low, will afford you a chair, yes, an armchair, for the branches behind seem placed there expressly for a support. As for the strength of the branch, you need have no fear, it would bear fifteen people like you. From there, you will overlook everybody, and will have an infinitely better view than all the ladies in the chairs. Will you allow me to put you up there, madame? Nothing could be easier; I will make a step for you."

Madame Boutillon roared with laughter at the suggestion of her escort; but as she was a very original person herself, and as she was especially fond of making herself as whimsical as possible, she accepted the suggestion and replied:

"All right, monsieur, give me a back, and let me climb up to my box."

The young man at once obeyed, offering his hands and his shoulders. That method of climbing a tree was slightly risqué for a lady, and all the men who witnessed the scene envied the opportunity of the one who acted as Madame Boutillon's ladder; but she mounted so rapidly, and turned about in the tree with such aplomb, that everybody applauded her ascent. Chambourdin remained standing near the pretty brunette, who used his shoulders as a bench to rest her feet upon; and not for anything on earth would he have abandoned his position.

Madame Glumeau, who had turned toward the chestnut tree, called to Madame Boutillon:

"Mon Dieu, madame! what on earth are you doing there? What an idea to climb up into that tree!"

"I did it to have a good view of the play, madame; all the seats below were taken, and I love to have a good place."

"For heaven's sake, come down, Madame Boutillon! I will give you my chair, and find another. Come, you can't stay up in the air."

"Why not, pray? I don't see that I am in anybody's way; and as I am perfectly comfortable, I propose to stay here."

"She is an extraordinary creature!" said Madame Glumeau, turning to the people near her. "She always wants to do differently from others!"

"If that lady desires to put herself in evidence," said Madame de Grangeville, "it seems to me that she couldn't have a better place."

The mistress of the house left her seat for a moment, and approached the group of which Monsieur Boutillon was one; she made her way to the old gentleman's side and said to him:

"Monsieur Boutillon, do look at your wife, sitting on the branch of a tree! I am afraid some accident will happen to her. Tell her to get down. I have begged her to but she won't listen to me."

"What! what! Is that my wife up there?" replied the husband, looking into the air. "Oh! that doesn't surprise me; she has always been fond of climbing trees; she's a regular squirrel, is Zéphirine! She is strong, and yet she is very light. One day, at a village fête, she insisted upon climbing a greased pole. She put on trousers, and she would have reached the prize, if they hadn't torn, so that she had to come down! We had a good laugh over it!"

"But Monsieur Boutillon, if madame should fall,—it isn't probable that she has put on trousers to come here to dance."

"No matter! never fear, I'll answer for everything."

"If the husband answers for everything, madame," observed Jéricourt with a mocking expression, "it seems to me that you have no right to worry!"

"Let's go and stand by the chestnut tree, Jéricourt," said little Saint-Arthur, leading his literary friend away.

"Ah! my dear Alfred, you are a sad rake! you want to see the foliage upside down!—Well, I will let you take me where you will."

As she returned to her seat, Madame Glumeau saw her son rush into the woods with an air of dismay, crying:

"Miaulard! Miaulard! where's Miaulard?"

"What's the matter, Astianax? you look all upset. What do you want of Monsieur Miaulard?"

"Why, we want him to take Kingerie's place. Just as we were ready to begin *Il y a plus d'un Ane à la Foire*, we noticed that Kingerie wasn't on the stage; we called him and hunted everywhere for him; at last Dufournelle heard groaning from the direction of the pond; he ran there and found that Kingerie had fallen in. It seems that he had remained at the billiard room to dress, and discovered that he was late; thereupon he started to run, and didn't remember that there was a small pond in the woods; so he fell into it."

"Upon my word! did he do it on purpose? A pond that isn't ten feet in circumference! Did he find a way to drown himself in it, too?"

"No, he couldn't have done it if he had wanted to; there isn't three feet of water; but the champagne he had drunk—everything together made him sick; he is in no state to act, and Miaulard must take his place.—Tell the audience to be patient.—Miaulard! Miaulard!"

Madame Glumeau returned to her seat and informed the company of the accident that had happened to one of the amateur actors, and requested indulgence for the one who was to take his place. This little speech at an end, the mistress of the house was on the point of resuming her seat, when she saw a gentleman standing against a tree a little apart from the company, and apparently engaged in passing in review the assembled guests.

"Ah! I was very certain that he would come, myself," said Madame Glumeau, sitting down beside Madame de Grangeville. "It's a great favor that he does us, for hitherto he has refused every invitation; he hasn't been anywhere."

"Of whom are you speaking, madame?"

"Of one of our neighbors, named Monsieur Malberg, who owns a fine estate near ours, and who has the reputation of living like a bear, of never seeing anybody. But he makes a very good appearance, none the less."

"Where is this bear of yours?"

"Over yonder, at the right. Turn a little and you can see him at your ease; he isn't looking this way now."

Madame de Grangeville followed the indication that Madame Glumeau had given her and soon she saw Monsieur Malberg, who was quite alone, evidently determined to hold himself aloof from the assemblage, at which he was looking as if he were seeking someone there.

The baroness's eyes rested upon him; she seemed unable to remove them, and as she gazed at him, her features altered, her face became ghastly pale, and her whole person betrayed the most profound agitation. Madame Glumeau did not observe her neighbor's confusion, because she was talking with the violin and the clarinet players, who proposed to play something to beguile the tedium of the intermission; but, luckily for the audience, the signal was given and the second play soon began.

Madame Glumeau gently nudged her neighbor, who was still looking toward the right, and said:

"They've begun, they've begun. You'll see my husband act now, he has a very important part; he is splendid in

it; he cuts a thousand capers. My daughter and my son act also, and the play is very well mounted!"

Madame de Grangeville did not seem to hear what Madame Glumeau said, for she continued to look toward the right, apparently paying no attention to the stage; but suddenly she turned her head and resumed her former position; it was because Monsieur Malberg had looked in her direction and she had not dared to meet his glance.

The second farce was *enlevé*, as they say on the stage. The substitution of Miaulard for young Kingerie did not injure the play in the least. The former being extremely hoarse, nobody heard him speak, which made it unnecessary for him to know his part. But it was noticed that Monsieur Glumeau, who had danced his part through three-fourths of the play, was much less animated toward the end.

After the farce, as they expected a long intermission, to prepare the scenery for the important play and to give the actors time to change their costumes, there was a general movement among the audience. The men went to walk in the woods, to smoke their cigars, the ladies gathered in groups to chat, and some of them also walked away under the trees, where they were frequently heard laughing heartily,—for what reason, nobody knew.

"This idea of a theatre in the woods is very original," said Jéricourt to his friend Alfred; "really I did not imagine that it would be so amusing. Come, Saint-Arthur, let us take a turn around the theatre to look at it all at close quarters. Do you intend to stay planted by this chestnut tree? Why, my dear fellow, it would do no good for you to shake the tree, the lady won't fall like a plum; besides, she has a cavalier at her feet, who doesn't seem inclined to lose sight of her."

"But suppose I should climb the tree myself?"

"Ah! that would be one way of approaching the lady, it is true; but reserve that until a little later, wait until the last play begins."

The little dandy allowed his friend to lead him on the stage, where they did not find a single actress, those ladies having gone to dress; but by way of compensation, they saw the young druggist in the costume of Détroussandos, chief of bandits, who was rehearsing his part, his battles, his manœuvres, with Miaulard, the latter having undertaken also the rôle of Malinot, which the unfortunate Kingerie was to have played in *Roderic et Cunégonde*.

Monsieur Fourriette's costume consisted simply of flesh-colored tights, over which he had drawn a very short pair of red and black bathing drawers, a jacket, a belt, and a broad-brimmed gray hat with the brim turned down.

"The deuce! there's a brigand who proposes to show how he is built," said Jéricourt.

"Is not my costume pretty, messieurs?" asked the druggist, addressing the two young men, whom he recognized as persons to whom he had several times sold pills and other preparations.

"Ah! it's Monsieur Fourriette; I didn't recognize you. So you are to act in the next play, are you?"

"Yes, messieurs, I take the part of Détroussandos, the brigand; I am rather well dressed, eh?"

"In other words, you are not dressed at all; your costume is exceedingly indecent."

"In what respect, pray? I have on tights——"

"Yes, but so tight one wouldn't think you wore any."

"So much the better; at all events, I have drawers——"

"Which don't reach half way down your thighs."

"Messieurs, I love accuracy in everything; this is the true costume of the Italian brigand."

"It is lucky that you are not to act in the Creation of the World; you would be capable of representing Adam in the costume of that day."

"Faith! it would be more exact."

"I like to think that you will have a cloak at least."

"Yes, I have one, but I shan't put it on; I shall simply carry it on my arm."

"You evidently mean to make conquests."

"Why not? I saw a little lady just now up in a tree—*fichtre!* messieurs, such a pretty brunette! such a lovely bird!—Come, Monsieur Miaulard, let's rehearse our fight with swords. One, two, up; three, four, down!"

"I say, messieurs, it isn't certain that we shall give the play, after all," said Monsieur Mangeot, appearing in his hermit's costume, with a huge piece of cotton batting pasted to his chin, which imitated a white beard to perfection.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"What has happened?"

"Has some other actor fallen into the pond?"

"I insist upon it's being emptied at once, so that we shan't have any more of that."

"No, messieurs, it isn't that, no one has fallen into the pond; only Kingerie was capable of such a masterpiece as that; but Monsieur Glumeau is complaining, and says that he doesn't know if he will be able to act."

"Bah! what's the matter with him now?"

"You probably noticed that when he was playing Pincette just now, he was in delightfully high spirits at first, and did nothing but jump and pirouette; he sang all his lines, standing on his toes; he was a regular zephyr. But toward the end, as he attempted to pirouette from one end of the stage to the other, although it isn't very large, it seems that he caught a stitch in his side; he must have twisted himself, or strained some nerve, or perhaps much less than that; but you know Monsieur Glumeau—he thinks he's dying on the slightest provocation. Ever since then he has been very anxious, he goes limping about, holding his side; he wants to be rubbed every minute, and he's afraid of inflammation."

"Well, why don't they give his part to Chambourdin?"

"Chambourdin! We can't even count on him to play one of the robbers. He is standing almost under the skirts of a lady who is seated on the branch of a tree. Just now I called out to him: 'Come and put on your robber's costume!' and he answered: 'I am here at madame's orders, and bayonets won't make me leave.'"

"Sapristi! we must give the play all the same!" cried the druggist, who was most anxious to exhibit himself in tights; "doesn't monsieur feel able to take the part impromptu?"

The druggist addressed this question to little Saint-Arthur. The young dandy, always keenly desirous to produce a sensation, was attracted by the suggestion and exclaimed:

"Do I wear a handsome costume?"

"You dress as you please."

"Pardieu! in that case, I like the idea, and I accept; but, as I shan't have time to learn the part, I will act in pantomime."

"An excellent idea,—as good as that of giving *La Dame Blanche* without music."

"What do you mean, Saint-Arthur, are you really going to act?" asked Jéricourt.

"Yes, yes; I have an idea of a costume that will leave Fourriette's in the shade! I am going to cover myself with leaves."

But at that moment they heard young Miaulard shouting:

"Victory! here comes Monsieur Glumeau in his tyrant's costume, messieurs; that means that he will act."

"See how he hobbles along and leans over on one side!"

"That won't do any harm in his part; he will suggest Ligier in *Richard the Third*, at a distance."

Monsieur Glumeau came on the stage, saying in a most affecting manner:

"Ah! my friends, I don't know whether I shall be able to play; this infernal pain doesn't leave me; it's terrible!"

"It isn't anything, Monsieur Glumeau—a strained muscle."

"Or perhaps it's only wind, a gust of wind that has lodged there."

"Do you think so? Ten thousand bombs! if I only knew that!"

"I am not at all anxious to stand beside him!" muttered Miaulard, walking away.

"Everybody's ready," said little Astianax, muffled up in a cuirass and buckler and helmet, and brandishing a lance which was twice as long as himself. "Where is my sister, where is Cunégonde?"

"Here I am!" cried Mademoiselle Eolinde, dressed as a Malabar widow. "I have my p—p—part at the end of my f—f—fingers."

"Let us begin then."

"One moment!" said Monsieur Glumeau; "before we begin, I want to drink a glass of anise water; someone has gone to fetch it for me."

"What is going to happen, great heavens? what is going to happen?" exclaimed Miaulard, walking still farther away from Monsieur Glumeau.

At last, in place of anise water, they brought Monsieur Glumeau some anisette; he drank two small glasses of it and consented that the play should begin. The signal was given. The amateur musicians executed a polka which would pass very well for the overture to a melodrama. The curtain rose, and applause burst forth on all sides; the audience was delighted with the scenery; no curtain had been hung at the rear, and the veritable forest, lighted here and there, produced a magical effect. And then the odd costumes of the actors heightened the enthusiasm of the audience. The hermit's cotton beard, the chevalier's helmet, the vizor of which persisted in falling over young Astianax's nose, the wooden swords and daggers, everything, even to the dragging gait and foolish expression of the tyrant, combined to enchant the spectators; but when the young druggist appeared as Détroussandos, when he strode across the stage with his tights surmounted by drawers, bursts of laughter arose in every direction, and the little lady who was seated on the branch of a tree was seized with such a paroxysm of hilarity that several times, as she squirmed about, she almost fell; luckily Chambourdin was still in his place, ready to restore equilibrium over his head.

The play proceeded amid general applause and hilarity, until the scene between the child and the robbers who proposed to kill Roderic. The gardener was said to be at his post; and in fact Master Pichet had not forgotten that he was to take his son's place; but instead of remaining sober as he had been urged to do, the gardener had considered, on the other hand, that in order to act with spirit, and to avoid any feeling of timidity before the audience, it would not be a bad idea to get a little tipsy; and what the peasant called getting a little tipsy, was drinking so much that he could hardly stand on his legs. In that condition Monsieur Pichet had gone upon the stage, and had hidden himself behind the trees from which he was supposed to keep an eye upon the robbers.

"Don't forget your lines," said Eolinde: "'Oh! for heaven's sake, messieurs, don't hurt papa!'"

"Oh! I know the lines! Don't you be afraid, mamzelle, I don't know anything else!"

Meanwhile, the famous scene was reached; Détroussandos and two robbers held their swords over Roderic's head, and the child did not appear to prevent them from striking.

"The child! the child! *sapredié!* send on the child!" exclaimed Astianax in an undertone.

"What on earth is that brute doing?" muttered Fourriette, still holding his sword in the air; "is he going to leave us like this for long?"

The gardener did not appear, because when he was once seated behind the trees, he had instantly fallen asleep; stout Dufournelle, who was prompting and who heard him snore, ran to him and shook him roughly by the arm, shouting:

"It's your turn! it's time for you to go on! wake up, corbleu!"

The gardener, waking with a start, rubbed his eyes, sprang to his feet, ran on the stage, and threw himself into the midst of the robbers, exclaiming:

"Ah! you villains! you loafers! you mean to beat our young master, do you? Just wait a bit, and I'll show all three of you something! You'll see how I do it!"

And with that, falling upon the druggist and the two young men dressed as robbers, the gardener began to distribute fisticuffs and kicks which were not included in the action of the play; the three actors, who did not anticipate that attack, began to shout and yell, and ended by returning the gardener the blows that they received; this combat, which the audience supposed to be feigned, was greeted with unanimous applause, and Monsieur Boutillon cried:

"Faith, I have often been to the theatre, but I must confess that I never saw such a good imitation of a fist fight as this!"

A SILENT INTERVIEW

Suddenly there was a cry of: "It's raining, here comes the storm!" among the spectators; instantly all the ladies, fearing for the welfare of their dresses, rose in haste and ran toward the house. Madame Glumeau, while regretting that they could not wait for the end of the play, abandoned her place, saying to the ladies who were near her:

"Come, follow me; I will show you the shortest way, and we shall soon be at the house."

The general movement that took place among the spectators put an end to the combat which was in progress on the stage. Monsieur Glumeau ordered his gardener to go home to bed, and he suggested to the actors that they should follow the example of the audience and return to the house. The young druggist declared that the shower would not last, and that they might finish the play; but no one listened to him, they all ran toward the gate leading from the wood. Madame Boutillon said to Chambourdin:

"Help me down."

"Drop," replied the advocate.

The little brunette followed his injunctions so closely that for some moments Chambourdin was unable to extricate his head, which was covered by the lady's skirts. But when his head reappeared, he had such a triumphant expression that one would have thought that his hair had grown. Like everybody else, in a moment he disappeared with Madame Boutillon, and the little wood which a few minutes before rang with shouts of laughter and the merry quips of a numerous company, would have been entirely deserted, had not two persons remained without stirring in the places that they occupied, apparently regardless of the storm and not thinking of following the departing crowd.

Monsieur Malberg, who up to that time had avoided society and had not accepted any invitations from his neighbors, had departed from his usual habit in going to Monsieur Glumeau's; but it will be remembered that he was very anxious to meet Monsieur de Roncherolle, of whose return to Paris he had been informed. The search made by Georget had led to no result, and Monsieur Malberg had said to himself:

"If I want to find him, to meet him anywhere, I shall not succeed by staying at home and avoiding society. Roncherolle used to love dissipation and conviviality, so that I must seek him in society."

The result of these reflections was his acceptance of his neighbor Glumeau's invitation. However, as he still found it difficult to lay aside his habits, we have seen that, instead of mingling with the guests, Monsieur Malberg had held himself a little aloof; but from his position he could easily scrutinize the whole company, especially the men, almost all of whom were standing behind the ladies; and he had satisfied himself that the man whom he sought was not there.

Thereupon, his eyes had wandered in the direction of the ladies; he could see only the backs of those who occupied the front rows of seats, and Madame de Grangeville was one of them; so that he was looking, without paying any particular attention to them, at the ladies of the company, who, however, were very handsomely dressed, when one of them, Madame de Grangeville, turned her head and looked in his direction. Monsieur Malberg was struck by that glance; a thousand memories awoke in his mind; but the lady turned her head away almost immediately, and he could not see her features. Impelled by curiosity, however, to know that person, a single glance from whom had so disturbed him, he had quietly left his place and had drawn nearer to the stage, without, however, mingling with the audience, until he was so placed that, without being seen, he could at his leisure examine the lady who was seated beside Madame Glumeau.

On scrutinizing the baroness closely, Monsieur Malberg had thought at first that he had made a mistake; nineteen years had caused so many changes! And all of us have a singular habit: if we are many years without seeing a woman, when we think of that woman, we always imagine her as she was when we saw her last. Instead of saying to ourselves: "Time must have marched with her; her beauty and charm and freshness must have undergone deplorable changes;" we always imagine that she is as we left her, because her image, her figure, her bearing charmed us so, and because the heart and the memory shrink from attributing age to the objects whose souvenir they cherish.

And so, while gazing attentively at Madame de Grangeville, Monsieur Malberg said to himself:

"No, I am mistaken, it isn't she, it cannot be the woman whose grace, whose fresh complexion and slender figure and light step everyone admired; and yet, those are her features; despite the deep wrinkles at the corners of her mouth, that is the lower part of her face; her eyes are black-ringed and swollen, but the expression is still the same, and it is that expression which has awakened all my memories. Her face is thinner, her hair has changed its color; there are wrinkles on her brow; and yet I cannot doubt it; it is she! yes, surely she! And, in truth, over nineteen years have passed since I saw her; but I had not thought that she could grow old!"

Monsieur Malberg could not remove his eyes from the baroness after that; he abandoned himself the more freely to that mute contemplation, because no one could observe it.

When the first drops of rain set the whole company in motion, Monsieur Malberg did not stir from his place; he still continued his observation, curious to see what the lady upon whom he kept his eyes fixed would do. She had remained as if glued to her chair; she had heard Madame Glumeau urge the guests to follow her, but she had paid no heed; having no fear whatever of the storm which everybody else seemed to dread, she remained in the woods, exposed to the rain; and when the whole company had fled toward the house, she was still there, not daring to turn her head in the direction in which she had seen her husband; for in Monsieur Malberg she had instantly recognized the Comte de Brévanne, whom she had married long before.

The part of the wood in which they were was still lighted by the lamps on the stage and by the lanterns placed at intervals in the enclosure reserved for the audience. But the rain had extinguished some of the lights, the wind swung the lanterns to and fro so that the light that remained was as uncertain as the weather, which, however, had not become so bad as they had feared; the rain, which had fallen at first with considerable violence, had already diminished, and the wind, which had aroused such terror, seemed also to have abated.

"Why does she stay there alone? Why didn't she follow all those people? What is the reason that she remains exposed to the rain? She is in a ball dress. Can she have seen me? No, I was standing aloof; and if she had seen me,

she would not have recognized me; time has passed for both of us alike, and I had to examine her a long time to be certain that it was she."

Such were the reflections of the man whom we now know to be the Comte de Brévanne, but whom we shall call Malberg more than once, because we have become accustomed to it.

The count, however, was mistaken in thinking that his wife had not recognized him; in the first place, ladies have a glance which carries much farther than ours; and then time, which had wrought such changes in her, seemed to have treated her husband with respect; in fact, as he had very strongly-marked features, and a face which had always been serious, even grave, he had seemed older than he really was when he might still have been ranked with young men; and so time had aged him less, and except for his hair, which had turned gray, and for some few deep wrinkles on his forehead, he had changed very little. So that Madame de Grangeville had recognized her husband in the person whom Madame Glumeau had pointed out as Monsieur Malberg; a single glance had sufficed to make her certain of the truth. Then she had sat a long while without turning her head; she hoped that her husband did not see her, and yet she was burning with the longing to know if he had seen her. As a woman is not in the habit of resisting curiosity, she turned her head once more in the direction where the count was; it was then that their eyes met; in despair because she had shown herself, and having no doubt that her husband had recognized her, Madame de Grangeville wished that she were a hundred leagues away; and yet, when she sat trembling in her chair and the other guests had left the wood, she was so perturbed that she had not strength to walk, and she was utterly at a loss what course to pursue.

Several minutes passed after all the others had gone. Nothing could be heard in the woods except the patter of the raindrops on the leaves. Madame de Grangeville gathered her shawl about her shoulders as if she were cold; she dared not turn her head to see if she were alone, and yet she said to herself:

"He must have gone away with the others; it isn't probable that he has remained here. Why should he? If he recognized me, as I think, he must have been all the more eager to go. Oh, yes! I am very sure that he has not gone to Monsieur Glumeau's house. What a fool I am to tremble like this! but I can't help it; I had so little expectation of this meeting, after so many years! It is strange! he has hardly changed at all; he still has the same serious look; he is still—Ah!"

As she spoke thus to herself, she slowly turned her head, to make sure that there was no one behind her, and she saw her husband standing motionless against a tree, with his eyes still fixed upon her.

Thereupon she felt her blood run cold, she was almost terrified. And yet there was nothing terrifying in the Comte de Brévanne's eyes; they expressed amazement rather than anger; but she upon whom they were fixed instantly turned her own away, feeling that she had not courage to endure their gaze.

"He is there, still there! he doesn't take his eyes from me!" said Madame de Grangeville to herself; not daring to move or to turn her head. "Mon Dieu! what can be his purpose? It seemed to me that he was glaring savagely at me!"

"She doesn't dare to move; no doubt I frighten her!" said the count to himself; "I will go away. I can understand that my presence is not likely to produce a pleasant impression upon her. I must go; she is not the one whom I sought here.—Great heaven! how she has changed!"

The count was preparing to go away, and had already taken several steps, when he heard a dull sound, resembling a prolonged groan, apparently very near the stage.

"Mon Dieu! what is that?" cried Madame de Grangeville.

The count stopped to listen; the same groan made itself heard again, even more distinctly.

Madame de Grangeville, terror-stricken, uttered a shriek, left her chair, and no longer fearing to look at her husband, turned her eyes in all directions, exclaiming:

"Mon Dieu! in pity's name, will no one come to help me?"

But her eyes sought in vain the Comte de Brévanne; he had disappeared under the trees, uncertain as to what he ought to do, but desirous to learn the cause of the strange noise he had heard.

At that moment, voices arose in the distance and came rapidly nearer. Little Astianax, jovial Chambourdin, young Miaulard and Beau Saint-Arthur were coming in search of the baroness; for when all the guests had assembled in the salon, that lady's absence had been noticed; and as Madame Glumeau declared that she had been in the woods, her failure to return caused apprehension that some accident had happened to her, and that the little pond had done further execution.

The four gentlemen entered the wood, shouting with all their strength:

"Madame de Grangeville!"

"Madame la baronne!—Are you here?—Has anything happened to you?"

"Answer, please!"

"This way, messieurs, this way; yes, I am here!" the lady made haste to reply, overjoyed by the arrival of the young men. "Come, come, messieurs! come! mon Dieu! how opportunely you arrive!"

"But, madame, how does it happen that you remained alone in the wood? You did not follow the crowd, the torrent—"

"No, messieurs, I didn't follow the other ladies at first, because I had lost my—my handkerchief; it is quite a fine one and I stopped to look for it."

"Oh! if we had known that, madame, we would have saved you the trouble. Did you find it?"

"Yes, I have it; but then, as I was about to leave this spot, I had a fright, I heard a noise that terrified me so that I was too weak to walk when you arrived."

"The deuce! what can it have been?"

"It isn't probable that there are robbers in our wood," said little Astianax.

"It would be strange, at least, that they should have selected the day when it was full of people to come here," said Chambourdin.

"Unless," said Miaulard, "they are robbers who are very fond of a play, and who were unable to resist the desire to see the fine performance going on here!"

"*Fichtre!* if I had acted!" muttered young Saint-Arthur.

"You are pleased to jest, messieurs, but I believe that I still hear the noise which frightened me just now.—Yes, there it is; listen."

The young men ceased to speak and did in fact hear the prolonged groan.

"Parbleu! we will find out what that is!" said Astianax, arming himself with a chair.

The others did the same, except Saint-Arthur, who deemed it prudent to return to the gate. Miaulard took down a lantern, and they went in the direction from which the noise came; they speedily discovered the gardener lying at the foot of a tree; he was asleep, but his sleep was greatly disturbed, for he groaned and muttered:

"Ah! the villains! In pity's name, don't hurt papa!—Here, take that, you!"

The young men returned to Madame de Grangeville, laughing heartily, and told her what had caused her terror.

"It's the actor who dealt blows in earnest," said Chambourdin. "He is so full of his subject, that even when sleeping off his wine, he fancies that he is acting still."

"Let us go back to the company and allay their anxiety," said Astianax, offering Madame de Grangeville his arm. "Come, madame; I trust that nothing more will interrupt the pleasures of the night."

"Faith," said Chambourdin, "we are all in excellent mood to enjoy ourselves, to dance. Even Monsieur Glumeau, who seemed not to feel well when he was playing his tyrant's rôle, is recovering all his agility and high spirits; he no longer has a stitch in his side."

"Yes, I noticed that," muttered Miaulard; "the anisette has produced its due effect."

The young men returned to the house with the lady they had found in the woods, and the Comte de Brévanne, who had been an invisible witness of all that had happened, returned home, still saying to himself:

"How she has changed!"

XXI

ON THE BOULEVARD

Since Monsieur Malberg had gone to live at Nogent-sur-Marne, Georget, having no errands to do for him, had plenty of time to see the pretty flower girl and to talk to her; when she scolded him because he did not work, the messenger would reply with a sigh:

"Bless me! mamzelle, it isn't my fault if no work comes to me! I certainly don't refuse any, and although I am very happy with you, I often regret that I don't earn more money during the day—not for myself, for I always have more than I need, but for my mother, whom I would like to make more comfortable."

Georget meant what he said, for when he saw his mother persist in sitting up late, in robbing herself of sleep in order to earn a few sous more, he thought of the happy life he might have provided for her, of that life, free from hard labor and from care, which would have been hers if he had accepted Monsieur Malberg's offer; and that thought often clouded his brow; as he gazed at the pretty flower girl, he sometimes blamed himself for loving her, because he felt that that love had been fatal to his love for his mother.

One morning, the young fellow waited in his usual place, looking in the direction of Violette's booth, from which she had been absent for some time. Georget was more melancholy than usual; in the first place because he could not see the object of all his thoughts, and secondly, because he had earned nothing as yet that morning, and his mother had had a very scanty supper the night before.

Soon he noticed a young man pacing back and forth in front of Violette's booth, and recognized in him the little fellow with the squint, whom he knew to be one of the flower girl's adorers. Monsieur Astianax was sauntering along the boulevard, with an enormous cigar in his mouth, which he was very proud to be smoking, and the smoke of which he seemed to take pleasure in blowing into the faces of the ladies who passed; a method of attracting attention which did not fail to be very agreeable.

Suddenly another young man, somewhat older, came toward little Glumeau; they met and stopped just in front of Georget, who, seated upon his stool, with his head in his hands, seemed to be asleep.

"Ah! it's young Astianax Glumeau!"

"Good-morning, Monsieur Chambourdin; so you are not at the Palais?"

"At the Palais! Why should I be, if you please, young man?"

"Why, to plead; I thought that an advocate——"

"I am an advocate only in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. I publish little articles there which I invent for the pleasure of the subscribers. I plead at my leisure, in my office, before my desk, and I am never called to order; that is the way I understand the advocate's profession. But you, my beardless youth, how does it happen that you are not in the country with papa and mamma? For I presume that your dear parents are still there? In such lovely weather, it is good luck to be in the shade and fresh air!"

"Yes, my parents are down at Nogent, and that is just the reason that you find me strolling on the boulevard! Ha! ha! when the parents are in the country I am my own master here; I do just what I choose!"

"Oh! I understand you, you young rascal; we have some little intrigues on the carpet. You are right, it is never too early to begin to make one's way in the world. If I had a son, I would say to him: 'Sow your wild oats early; in that way, you will have less to sow later.'—What do we need in order to be virtuous? experience; and to have experience, we must have lived! How is that for logic? Doesn't that smell of Cujas and Barthole?—And dear papa is well, I trust? The stitch in the side hasn't come back?"

"No, but he has a constant itching on the sole of his foot just now."

"Indeed! all he has to do is to scratch."

"It isn't very convenient to scratch the sole of your foot; you can't do it while you're walking. You know my father—it makes him anxious, he's afraid that it's some humor."

"Well, that's an idea! He has chilblains, that's all."

"I went to friend Fourriette, the druggist's; he's making something for father to put on his feet."

"An excellent way to bring on a disease where there isn't any.—But no matter, you gave us a delightful party! The play, although it wasn't finished—or perhaps because it wasn't finished—was very amusing. And the ball and the supper! *Fichtre!* we did go it!"

"I say, what about that young lady that you perched on a branch; it seemed to me that you were very attentive to her."

"Madame Boutillon? Oh, yes!"

"It's a pity that you fell when you were waltzing with her."

"I did it on purpose; it's a stratagem I invented, to make a woman become attached to me!"

"Why? because you throw her down while waltzing?"

"To be sure; when she feels herself falling, she clutches me, she clings to me, and squeezes me as tight as she can! Do you understand, young man, what intimate relations that brings about between us?"

"To be sure, that's true."

"Just try it, my dear fellow; take my advice, ask a lady to waltz, then fall with her; and tell me what you think of it."

"Shall I fall underneath or on top?"

"Underneath is more polite; but on top is more rakish."

"I will remember that; and at the first ball I go to, if I see a lady who takes my eye, I will ask her to waltz."

"The rest will go all alone!"

"And that method served with Madame Boutillon?"

"Don't I tell you that it's infallible?"

"And you call on that lady now?"

"To be sure; I play cards with her husband; we play Pope Joan; he's very fond of it.—And you, little Astianax—whom are you looking for on the boulevard? are you expecting to meet some one?"

"Yes, I am expecting some one, who seems in no hurry to come."

"You have an appointment on the boulevard, at the flower market? That is very pleasant; you walk amid agreeable odors. Ladies often make their appointments at the flower market."

"No, I have no appointment; I came here because I am in love with a little flower girl; and very pretty she is! Ah! she beats Madame Boutillon, I tell you!"

"That is very possible! I never thought that Madame Boutillon could not be beaten.—Where does your lovely flower girl stand?"

"Over yonder, opposite us—that booth where there is no one just now. She has probably gone to carry a bouquet somewhere."

"How goes your love-affair? have you triumphed?"

"I have not triumphed yet——"

"So your flower girl is a model of virtue, an untamed beauty, is she?"

"A model of virtue! Oh! I thought so for a long while. When I found how cruel she was, I fancied that Violette—that is her name—I fancied that Violette was virtuous; but I was mistaken; I was a blockhead; the flower girl is not cruel with everybody, I have a proof of it. She does her work on the sly!"

Georget, who had not lost a word of the conversation between the two young men, sprang to his feet like a flash, and planting himself in front of Astianax, said to him, glaring at him with eyes inflamed by wrath:

"You lie! you insult Violette! just because she refuses to listen to you! But you are nothing but a slanderer, do you hear?"

Little Glumeau was thunderstruck; he rolled his eyes about in all directions, and utterly failed to understand that apostrophe which fell from the clouds upon him; but Chambourdin, who was perfectly calm, stepped between Astianax and Georget, and said to the latter:

"Why do you put your oar in, my boy? Who spoke to you? Why do you presume to interfere in our conversation? Are you a spy, that you busy yourself listening to us? The deuce! you are beginning that trade very young!"

"That's so," said Astianax, beginning to recover from his surprise; "what does this mean? whom is this little *voyou*, this blackguard, talking to?"

"Oh! don't insult me, monsieur, or I'll punch your head; I am a messenger, a respectable young man!"

"Once more," retorted Chambourdin, "we don't know you; why did you listen to what monsieur was saying to me?"

"Why did you stop and talk right in front of me? I should have had to stuff my ears to keep from hearing. Still, I didn't pay much attention to your words, until monsieur began to talk about Mademoiselle Violette the flower girl; then I listened with all my ears, it is true, because it interested me, because I know Mamzelle Violette, because I know that she's an honest girl, who doesn't listen to what men say to her, when they try to induce her to make a fool of herself; and you said that she wasn't cruel to everybody, that she wasn't virtuous, that she wasn't a model of virtue! You lied, and I couldn't listen to that without saying something, for I should have been a coward if I had heard you insult Violette without taking up her defence."

"It seems that this is another lover of the flower girl," said Chambourdin, turning toward Astianax to laugh; but the latter had turned as red as a rooster, and he said to Georget:

"I might send you to the devil; but I am willing to answer you. I didn't lie in what I said about the flower girl. No, I didn't lie, I said nothing that I'm not sure of. No, Mademoiselle Violette isn't virtuous; for girls who mean to remain virtuous aren't in the habit of calling on young men who live all alone."

"Do you mean to say that Violette has been to your house?"

"No, not to mine! but to the rooms of a young man who lives on the same landing that I do,—his door is just

opposite mine.—I say, Monsieur Chambourdin, it's Monsieur Jéricourt the author, who came to our party at Nogent with a friend of his, who was dressed so nicely——”

“That he looked like a tailor's manikin.—Oh! I remember those two gentlemen perfectly!”

Georget, who had turned pale at the mention of Jéricourt's name, said to Astianax:

“I too know the gentleman you speak of; I have seen him often enough come here and play the gallant with Mamzelle Violette; but she has never listened to him, and it was he who lied when he told you that she had been to his room.”

“He didn't need to tell me anything, because I saw,—do you hear?—because I saw the pretty flower girl come out of his room.”

“No, no! you made a mistake; it wasn't her, it couldn't have been!”

“I couldn't have made a mistake, for I know her perfectly well, and she passed close to me.”

“It wasn't her, I say.”

“Ah! this is too much! What if I should tell her so when she returns, in your presence—then would you believe me, young messenger?”

“You would dare to tell her that—her?”

“Why should I hesitate, as it's the truth?”

Georget seemed completely upset, he was pale and agitated, and did not know what to think.

“Come, come, my poor boy,” said Chambourdin, “I see that you too are daft over this flower girl, who is very fascinating, it seems; but after all, perhaps it's a great service that my young friend does you, by opening your eyes with respect to this girl. You credit her with all the virtues, because you are in love with her; that is easily understood, you are so young! but that is a common thing; oh! these women! they are very fragile! When five years more have passed over your head, I should like to hear what you say about them.”

Georget said nothing more, but Astianax exclaimed:

“The flower girl has returned to her place, and I am going to talk with her. Monsieur Chambourdin, come in that direction, as if by accident, and bring this fellow who doesn't choose to believe me; in a moment you will know if I have said anything other than the truth.”

“I have no objection,” said Chambourdin; “indeed I ask nothing better than to approach the flower girl; she is enchanting, and I believe that I am falling in love with her too!”

Little Astianax walked for some distance among the booths and shrubs, for it was flower market day on Boulevard Saint-Martin; then he approached Violette with an indifferent air and began to look at her flowers. The girl, recognizing the little man with the squint, acted as if she did not see him and kept on making a bouquet.

“All these flowers are lovely! they are all as fresh as you are!” said Astianax at last, vexed because the flower girl paid no attention to him.

“Does monsieur want another bouquet that speaks?” said Violette with a mischievous expression.

“No, mademoiselle; you see, I have found out that there is no need of that to make myself understood; it is much better to say myself what—what I have already said to you several times: that you are maddeningly beautiful, and that I adore you!”

“Dear me! I assure you, monsieur, that it tires me to hear the same thing over and over again.”

“Ah! it tires you, does it?” retorted the little man, assuming an impertinent tone. “Indeed! that's a great pity! But still I am not inclined to stop. Why should I lose courage? You are not so unkind as you choose to appear; as you have been sensible to the attentions of others, why should you not become so to me?”

“I don't know what you mean, monsieur, but once more I beg you not to talk this way to me.”

“Ah! don't pretend to be angry like this, my lovely flower girl; it won't go down with me again. Have you forgotten that I saw you coming out of Monsieur Jéricourt, my neighbor's? I live on his landing. Oh! you were tremendously agitated, and well ruffled when you left his room.”

“Monsieur! what you say is outrageous!”

“Outrageous! Do you mean to say that I lie? Will you dare to say that it isn't so?”

Chambourdin and Georget, who were only a few steps away, had overheard everything. The young messenger could no longer contain himself; he ran forward and stood in front of Violette, pale and trembling, with blazing eyes, and said to her in a broken voice:

“So it is true! so it is true, as you don't deny it!”

The flower girl, greatly surprised at Georget's sudden appearance in front of her, was embarrassed for a moment, and stammered at last:

“Well! if it was so, is that any reason for speaking to me like this?”

“The question is decided!” muttered Chambourdin, addressing Georget; “you see, my little innocent, that my friend did not lie!”

“Oh! it is frightful! I would never have believed it! And my mother, my poor mother, whom I sacrificed for her! The good Lord is punishing me for it.—Adieu, Mademoiselle Violette! I will never speak to you again!”

Having said this, Georget ran off like a mad man, and speedily disappeared.

Violette looked after him, and tears gathered in her eyes; she turned to young Astianax, and said to him simply:

“Are you quite satisfied with what you have done, monsieur?”

Astianax lowered one eye and raised the other, then took Chambourdin's arm, saying:

“Let us go.”

Chambourdin glanced once more at the girl, who tried to conceal her tears with her flowers, and he said to his companion:

“She isn't of the same style of beauty at all as Madame Boutillon, but she pleases me greatly, none the less.”

A BOTTLE OF ABSINTHE

Georget ran home to his mother without stopping, without drawing breath; he found her sewing, snatched her work from her hands, and threw it aside, saying:

"Drop that, mamma, don't work any more, don't tire your eyes any more; hereafter you will be able to enjoy yourself, to be happy, to walk about all day long. Oh, yes; you are going to be very happy, I tell you! Pack up your things quick, we're going away."

Honest Mère Brunoy gazed at her son in surprise, utterly unable to understand what he said; but his wild manner, his excitement, frightened her, and she exclaimed:

"What's the matter with you, Georget? what has happened to you, my boy? You're not in your usual condition."

"It's joy, mother; yes, it's pleasure, I tell you, good fortune; that upsets a man a little, but I shall get used to it; I will make the best of it and not think of her any more."

"You will make the best of your good fortune! you won't think of her any more! I don't understand at all! You talk of joy and of pleasure, and you have tears in your eyes, and you are as pale as death! Do you know that you don't look at all like a person who brings good news?"

"You're mistaken, mother, I am very happy; for I tell you again, you won't need to ruin your eyes any more, to wear yourself out working."

"How is that, my dear?"

"Because Monsieur Malberg—you know, that gentleman on the third floor who is so kind to us——"

"Yes, yes; well?"

"Well, we are going to his house in the country—both of us, mother, both of us. Yes, I will go with you and settle down there; I won't leave you any more; I won't come to Paris any more—never! never! oh! I have a horror of Paris!"

"What's that, my boy? Monsieur Malberg has offered you a place at his country house, too?"

"Why, yes, to be sure; I am to look after the workmen, to take care of his garden and plant it; there are eight acres of it—that's a pretty good-sized garden, eight acres! He told me that I should be at liberty to arrange it all as I pleased; and you, mother, you will have charge of the house, the linen, the furniture, the poultry yard; and he will give us a thousand francs a year for it."

"A thousand francs! Mon Dieu! why that is a fortune, my boy! It means that our future is provided for; you will not be a messenger any more. We won't spend the thousand francs; we will save up money to buy you a substitute when you are drafted! For that is what I am always thinking about.—And was it only just now that that generous man offered to employ you at his country house?"

"Just now—oh, no! It was a long time ago, mother. If you knew—but I won't keep it from you any more; you shall know what a bad son I have been; but you will forgive me, when you know the cause. Mon Dieu! it was too much for me!"

"You, a bad son, Georget; no, that is impossible; you do yourself an injustice, my child!"

"No, for all this comfort that I offer you to-day, Monsieur Malberg proposed to me some time ago, when I spoke to you about going to his country house; it depended only on me to go there then with you, and I did not tell you that, because then I could not make up my mind to leave Paris; for—mon Dieu!—for I was in love—there! that is what I had at the bottom of my heart, and did not dare to tell you!"

"Is it possible! you in love already! Why, you won't be eighteen for two months."

"Still I have been in love a long time."

"Poor boy! then that is the reason why some days you were so sad and other days so gay! Lovers always go to extremes!—And it's all over now, is it?"

"Oh, yes! it's all over, mother; I don't propose to think of her any more; I don't propose to see her, either, for if I should see her, I should treat her as she deserves; but that wouldn't do any good, that wouldn't prevent—what has happened. You see, mother, I believed that she was so virtuous, I would have gone into the fire for her, and she deceived me."

"Did she tell you that she loved you, my boy?"

"She didn't tell me so, except with her eyes,—at least it seemed to me that I could read it there. But I deceived myself, no doubt! However, let us not talk any more about her, mother, let us not talk any more about her. Pack up your things, take only what you need for a little while, and later I will come back and fetch the rest; the most important thing now is to go."

"But, my boy, our furniture, and these lodgings—we haven't given notice."

"Don't worry about all that, we will give it later. While you are getting ready, I will go and ask Baudoin, the concierge, if Monsieur Malberg is at his country house now."

Georget left his mother and ran quickly down to the concierge. Baudoin was keeping the lodge, for his wife had drunk so much the night before that she had been taken ill, and was not in condition to leave her bed.

"Monsieur Baudoin, could you tell me if Monsieur Malberg is at his house at Nogent now, or if he is living here?" Georget asked as he entered the concierge's lodge. That functionary, who was in very ill humor at being obliged to serve as his wife's nurse, swore like several carters and said as he poured water into a cup:

"Herb tea! I think I see myself making her herb tea, the miserable drunkard! Water is what she needs, to put out the fire that she keeps kindled in her insides!"

"Will you answer me, please, Monsieur Baudoin?"

"Ah! Monsieur Georget, you see a man sorely vexed, sorely humiliated by his social position. My wife is my shame, I am not afraid to say so; she behaves like the lowest of the low! Just fancy, monsieur, that one of the chief clerks in my department—you know that I am employed in a department?"

"Yes, you are an office boy."

"Boy! good God! I wish I was a boy! But it's true that they call us office boys although we are married; and the day before yesterday one of my superiors, who is satisfied with my intelligence, made me a present of a bottle of absinthe,—as an extra—genuine Swiss absinthe, a liqueur that I am very fond of. So I came home with my bottle, but I took pains to tear off the label, and to say to Hildegarde, whose vicious tastes I know too well: 'Don't touch this bottle, don't think of tasting what there is in it; it's Chinese opium, and it would put you to sleep right away; but you'd never wake up.'—'All right, that's enough,' said Hildegarde; 'but I don't see why you take it into your head to bring poison here.' At that I says to her: 'If I choose to do it, it's none of your business, as I'm the master.' Then she made some impertinent remark, I administered a healthy punishment, and we went to bed on it. Yesterday morning I started for my office as usual; I was delighted with my trick, and I said to myself that my absinthe was in no danger. Well, monsieur, I returned at night and what did I find? My bottle empty, no absinthe—Hildegarde had drunk it all, all, monsieur, and hadn't left me a drop! That is what I can never forgive—I didn't have a taste of it myself! As for my wife, you can judge what a state she was in, and when I undertook to reprove her, if she didn't have the cheek to answer: 'It's your fault, you villain, I poisoned myself on purpose; I wanted to get away from your hard treatment; but you lied—your poison doesn't put a body to sleep, and it ain't bad at all, and if there was any more, I'd take another drink.'

"That, Monsieur Georget, is what the wretched creature dared to say to me; and to-day she is on her back, she can't move, and I like to think that she'll never get over it!"

"Oh! that's a wicked thing to say, Monsieur Baudoin—to wish for your wife's death!"

"It's for her good, as she will not mend her ways."

"But I beg you, tell me if Monsieur Malberg is at his country house or in Paris now?"

"Monsieur Malberg—why, I don't know myself; but wait, he must be in Paris, for I saw his blackamoor going upstairs just now; indeed I believe he was carrying a bottle in a wooden case—you know the kind of bottle I mean; what there is inside must be fine!"

Georget lowered his head sadly, saying to himself:

"If Monsieur Malberg is in Paris now, we can't go to his country house without his permission, without finding out whether he still wants us; but I would have liked to start to-day, for if I stay in Paris I can't do otherwise than go out on the boulevard."

"I say, Monsieur Georget," continued the concierge, "if you want, I'll go up to Monsieur Malberg's and I'll ask his yellow negro if his master is here."

"Oh! if you would have that kindness, Monsieur Baudoin, I should be very much obliged to you!"

"With pleasure. I am not sorry to leave the lodge for a minute. If that creature asks for drink, give her water; she don't like water and it's a punishment for her."

Baudoin went up to the third floor, and Georget remained in the lodge, absorbed, not in his thoughts, but in a single thought; for it was impossible for him to think of anything else than Violette's going to Monsieur Jéricourt's room. The concierge was absent a long time, but at last he came downstairs again, swearing as usual. "Ten thousand cursed names! how can a man take such animals as that into his service? They are brutes, and nothing else!"

"Well, Monsieur Baudoin, is Monsieur Malberg in Paris?"

"Just imagine, Monsieur Georget; I rang the bell upstairs,—I was very sure that there was someone there; however, it was a long while before anybody opened the door; I rang again and the black fellow appeared at last. 'Is your master here just now?' I asked him. That vagabond of a Ponceau began to laugh and showed all his teeth—I must admit that all colored men have extremely white teeth; probably it's the white that their skin lacks. I asked my question again, and the slave answered, shaking his head violently: 'No, no, no, master not here! Me here with Broubrou, Babo, and Zima; me come to fetch Zima!'—As I didn't understand what he meant with his Broubrou and his Babo, I said to him: 'But I didn't come to ask for you.'—With that he made a face at me and left me there, and went back into the salon. But I heard him talking and jabbering; you would have sworn that there were two people disputing. That is what makes me think that the negro lied when he said that his master wasn't in, for it couldn't be anybody else that I heard him talking to."

Georget, understanding only vaguely what Baudoin told him, concluded that he would do better to go up to Monsieur Malberg's himself, and learn what to expect. He wiped his eyes and left the lodge, without answering the concierge, who asked him if his wife Hildegarde was still breathing.

Pongo opened the door to the young messenger and leaped for joy when he saw him.

"Ah! Monsieur Georget! he nice boy, he come to see Pongo."

"My dear Pongo, Monsieur Malberg is the one I would like to see; it is he that I have business with; is he in Paris?"

"No, no, me tell concierge so. Big fool, he no understand; he stand there like a stick.—Master, he in the country, in the pretty house, at Nogent."

"He is at Nogent? Oh! I am glad of that, for then I can go there, I can take my mother there! Monsieur Malberg, who is so kind to us, offered me employment there long ago, and work for my mother; I refused then, but to-day I have decided to go; my mother is packing, and she must have finished by this time; but I don't know what road to take to go to Nogent; can you tell me, Monsieur Pongo?"

"You, go to Nogent? Then you come with me. Me going back right away to master with Mamzelle Zima, what we forgot. Poor Zima! Her not like not to be in the country. Oh! me very glad if you coming, Monsieur Georget! You will see what a pretty place it is! Lots of fruit, fine garden, pretty flowers! Carabi, he play a lot down there; he grow big like a ball! You go fetch your good mother, and we start right away! I beat Broubrou, Babo, and all the little rugs! Dem nice and clean now. Me all ready."

"I will go and bring my mother and our bundles."

"Oh! me go up with you, carry all that! The mother, her never carry nothing."

And the mulatto, without listening to Georget's thanks, went up with him to the attic and took possession so quickly of all the bundles prepared by Madame Brunoy, that she had no time to remonstrate; Pongo was downstairs before the good woman had closed her door.

The three travellers passed the concierge's lodge; Baudoin, who stood in the doorway, heaved a deep sigh as he

said to them:

"God forgive me! I believe the wretched Hildegarde will recover!"

XXIII

IN THE FRESH AIR

When they entered the charming little house at Nogent which belonged to the Comte de Brévanne, Georget's mother uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise. In truth, it was difficult for anyone who loves the country not to be overjoyed to live in such a lovely spot. The house, which was quite modern, had only two floors, and at the top a fine terrace, surrounded by vases filled with flowers. But each window had an artistically carved balcony, with railings of the finest workmanship.

In front of the house a beautiful lawn with a border of orange trees, afforded a pleasant relief to the eye. And on each side, broad paths of lindens afforded during the hottest weather a promenade where the sun was not allowed to penetrate.

Georget himself, despite the painful thoughts which oppressed his heart, could not remain indifferent to all the beauties which nature lavished about him. Those majestic trees, those flower-laden shrubs, that green lawn, the balmy air, everything appealed to his senses; he felt a sort of alleviation of his pain, his brow brightened, and for the first time since his departure from Paris, he looked with interest at his surroundings.

"What! are we going to live here?" cried Georget's mother. "Why, it isn't possible! it's too beautiful! This house is a regular château! I shall never dare to go into it."

"This not all," said Pongo; "you'll see the garden, the orchard, the kitchen garden, fine fruit, big cabbages, nice sweet little peas—we have everything! And then the poultry yard—little chickens, pigeons, ducks, turkeys! Oh! me like roast turkey!"

"This place is a kind of paradise on earth."

"Monsieur Pongo, it would be very kind of you to go to your master and tell him that we have come, and ask him if he still wants us; for perhaps he may have different ideas now."

"Oh, he want you! he want you! Me go tell him; look, me see him over there in the garden; me run and take him Mamzelle Zima, to make him pleased. Wait, wait!"

The mulatto left his travelling companions, to tell his master of their arrival. Georget remained with his mother, who continued to admire all that she saw, and walked along the paths with great caution, as if she were afraid of leaving her footprints there. But from time to time she glanced at her son, who had relapsed into reverie.

"I mustn't seem to notice his sadness," she said to herself; "it will pass away. At his age, it isn't possible that it will resist distractions, and we shall have enough of them here! A month from now I will wager that he won't give a thought to his love-affair in Paris!"

The Comte de Brévanne, notified by Pongo, soon appeared to receive the new arrivals; he greeted Madame Brunoy kindly, and she outdid herself in reverences; then he tapped Georget on the shoulder, and said to him:

"Well! so we have changed our mind, have we? We are willing to live somewhere else than in Paris now?"

Georget, who was deeply moved, and seemed constantly on the point of weeping, replied in a trembling voice:

"Oh, yes! I am very glad, monsieur, very happy now to come here to live with my mother; that is to say, if you care to take us both."

"Certainly, my boy, my intention is still the same; I take back nothing of what I said and I am very glad to have you settle in my house; I trust that you won't repent having come."

"O monsieur!" cried Mère Brunoy, with more reverences, "is it possible not to be happy here? It seems to me that I have grown ten years younger already since we have been here. Mon Dieu! such a lovely house! Monsieur may be sure I'll do my best to satisfy him."

"Yes," added Georget, struggling to master his emotion, "we will work all the time; in the first place, I wish to show monsieur that I am not a lazy fellow; I mean to employ my time better than in Paris, for in Paris I loafed sometimes, but that will not happen again; I shall never go back to Paris. Monsieur won't make me go there, will you, monsieur? You will allow me to stay here all the time, won't you?"

Monsieur de Brévanne, who had noticed Georget's excitement, smiled slightly as he replied:

"All right, my boy, we will talk about all those things hereafter; but go now with your mother and take possession of your quarters. Pongo will escort you.—Pongo! the small building at the left, near the entrance to the kitchen garden—that is where Madame Brunoy and her son are to live."

While Georget and his mother followed the mulatto, who went before them, dancing a sort of chika and singing: "Me going to see Carabi my friend! oh! he not naughty any more, he going to lick my nose!" the Comte de Brévanne entered one of the avenues lined with linden trees, and as he walked back and forth there, seemed buried in profound meditation. Within a few days, the mood of the man whom his neighbors called the Bear had changed considerably: Monsieur de Brévanne was still pensive, but his reverie was less gloomy, less forbidding than before; his brow had cleared, he avoided society less, and it even happened sometimes that he stopped to talk a moment with his neighbors. This abatement of his misanthropy dated from the day that he had seen his wife in Monsieur Glumeau's wood.

The count had been walking there for some time, when he spied Georget standing within a few feet of him, apparently afraid to interrupt his reverie.

"Ah! there you are, Georget. Have you seen your lodgings? Do you like them? Is your mother better?"

"Yes, monsieur, my mother is overjoyed, and so am I. Monsieur is too kind to us. Now that we are settled, I have come to ask monsieur what work I shall do to-day."

"To-day, my friend, you must rest, walk about the gardens and the house, and become acquainted with the

place; to-morrow we will talk about work. But first of all, Georget, tell me your trouble; for you are in trouble, I can see it in your eyes. Indeed, as you have already confided in me about your love-affair, I ought to know now how it happens that you have been able to make up your mind to leave your young flower girl, with whom you were so deeply in love. You could not endure the thought of passing a single day without seeing her, and now you are here, and you don't want to hear Paris mentioned! Poor boy! that girl who you said was so virtuous and honest, must have listened to some other man than you—isn't it true that that is the cause that has brought you here?"

"Mon Dieu! yes, monsieur, you have guessed the truth; at all events, I prefer that you should know everything, I prefer to tell you all my sorrow, for it is so hard always to have to restrain one's feelings! It stifles one! Oh! allow me to cry, monsieur; I don't dare to before my mother, but it won't offend you."

"Weep, my boy; at your age, tears come readily, and are a relief. You are not a man yet, you have not the strength to endure a woman's treachery; and even grown men are very weak sometimes in such cases!"

"Ah! who would ever have thought, monsieur, that Violette, who seemed never to listen to any gallant—and she has been to the rooms of one of them, the one that I was most jealous of! Ah! I was right to be jealous of him! a perfumed dandy, a lion, as they say!"

"But how do you know that she has been to his rooms?"

"From another one, who also is in love with Violette, and who saw her come out of this Monsieur Jéricourt's, who lives on his landing."

"And how do you know that he tells the truth, especially as the flower girl refused to listen to him?"

"Oh, monsieur! you may be sure that I didn't believe him either, that at first I called him a liar and an impostor; indeed I would have thrashed him if he hadn't proposed to repeat it all to Violette herself in our presence; he did it, monsieur; he spoke to her of her visit to his neighbor, the swell Monsieur Jéricourt, and Violette turned pale; and she couldn't find a word to defend herself, to contradict him!"

"In that case, my poor boy, you can no longer doubt her infidelity; or at least, if she had never given you any promise, her weakness for another. You have done well to leave Paris, and come here with your mother; by ceasing to see this girl, you will triumph over your love, and you will soon find someone else to bestow your affections upon. At your age, one loves so readily!"

"You think so, monsieur, but it seems to me that I shall never be able to love any other woman than Violette. However, I will try, I will do my utmost, and if I don't see her any more—for you won't send me to Paris, monsieur, will you?"

"No, my boy, no, that is agreed. Indeed, Pongo always goes when I need anything; and I myself go quite often; but never fear, I won't take you."

"So much the better, monsieur, and I thank you. Now I will walk about these lovely gardens with my mother, monsieur."

"Go, my friend, go."

Monsieur de Brévanne left his house and walked toward Monsieur Glumeau's, saying to himself:

"I have not been very polite to my neighbors; they invited me to their party, I saw their play, holding myself aloof, and then I disappeared without even going to pay my respects to them; as they cannot guess the motive that led me to act so, I must repair my discourtesy by going to call upon them."

The count had almost reached Monsieur Glumeau's house, when a gentleman who came from it, and walked toward him, stopped and uttered a cry of surprise at finding himself face to face with Monsieur de Brévanne. He in his turn examined the person who stood before him, then held out his hand, saying:

"I am not mistaken, it is Monsieur de Merval!"

"The Comte de Brévanne!" cried Monsieur de Merval, grasping the hand that was offered him. Then he added: "I beg pardon, but you have dropped that name, I believe?"

"Yes, they call me Malberg now; but to you I shall always be Brévanne. This is a meeting which I was far from expecting, but of which I am very glad. Are you coming from Monsieur Glumeau's?"

"Yes, I have been to apologize for not accepting an invitation which they sent me a fortnight ago, to a party that they gave."

"I know, I was at that party."

"You were at that party?"

"That surprises you, does it not? I am a neighbor of the Glumeaus; my place is only a few steps away; will you do me the honor to come there and rest a moment?"

"I should be glad, but you are going somewhere?"

"To my neighbor's; but that visit can be postponed, whereas our meeting is one of those happy chances which I wish to take advantage of to talk with you,—that is, if you have the time to listen to me?"

"I am entirely at your service."

"Come then."

The two gentlemen soon reached the charming house which had now two additional occupants. The count ushered Monsieur de Merval into a pretty salon on the ground floor, the windows of which looked on the Marne; and taking a seat beside him, he said in a tone at once melancholy and resigned:

"How many things have happened since we met! and how many times you must have heard my name! The thing that happened to me made a great deal of talk, more talk than I desired, I assure you! Tell me, Monsieur de Merval, what did you hear about it, and whom did you believe to be to blame in all that? For the world is often mistaken in its judgment!"

Monsieur de Merval felt somewhat embarrassed to answer; he faltered:

"Why, many contradictory things were said; however, if you desire my opinion, why, you are not the one whom I believed to be at fault!"

"You were right, but you should have guessed the truth, for you knew Lucienne Courtenay before I became her husband, fool that I was! I remember that I was jealous of you even after my marriage—of you, who always behaved

with the most absolute delicacy; and I was never jealous of the man who was destined to betray my friendship in the most dastardly way!—Monsieur de Merval, as chance has brought us together to-day, allow me to tell you exactly what happened to me, and what was the cause of my separation from my wife. I am very glad to confide the truth to the breast of an honest man. I should not have had the courage to tell you the story a short time ago; but an encounter that I had within a few days has strangely mitigated my suffering; I will tell you that later—I come now at once to the main story.”

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FLOWER GIRL OF THE CHÂTEAU D'EAU, V.1 (NOVELS OF PAUL DE KOCK VOLUME XV) ***

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