

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME XVII

BROTHER JACQUES



THE JEFFERSON PRESS

BOSTON

NEW YORK

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THE REPENTANT HUSBAND

Jacques no longer had the strength to spurn him; Edouard approached Adeline and threw himself at her feet, placing his head against the ground, and sobbing piteously.

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I

A WEDDING PARTY AT THE CADRAN-BLEU.—THE MURVILLE FAMILY

It is midnight; whence come these joyful shouts, these bursts of laughter, these outcries, this music, this singing, this uproar? Pause a moment on the boulevard, in front of the Cadran-Bleu; follow the example of those folk who look on at all the wedding parties, all the banquets, which take place at the restaurants on Boulevard du Temple, by walking in front of the windows, or in the roadway, and who enjoy comfortably the spectacle of a ladies' chain, a waltz, or a chocolate cream,—at the risk, however, of being jostled by passers-by, splashed by carriages and insulted by drivers. But at midnight the idlers, the loiterers, or the loungers—whichever you may choose to call them—have returned home; nothing remains in front of the door of the Cadran-Bleu except cabs or private carriages, according as the guests choose to assume an air of greater or less importance; but that is the hour at which the tableau becomes more interesting, more varied, more animated; for not until then do the guests begin to become really acquainted.

But, you will ask me, what is the occasion of this assemblage at the Cadran-Bleu? Is it a birthday party, an anniversary, or a banquet of some society? Better than any of these; it is a wedding party.

A wedding party! What a world of reflections those words arouse! To how many thoughts, hopes, and memories they give rise! How fast they make the young girl's heart beat, who sighs for the moment to come when she will be the heroine of that great day, when she will carry that pretty white bouquet, that wreath of orange blossoms, the symbols of modesty and of maidenhood, which have unhappily lied to more than one husband who has never boasted about it, and for a good reason! But how the thought of that ceremony saddens the young wife, but a few years married, who already has ceased to know happiness except in her memory! She trembles for the lot of the poor child who is pledging herself! She remembers the day of her own wedding, the ardor and zealous attentions of her husband; she compares that day with those that have followed, and realizes how much confidence can be placed in the vows of man.

But let us leave such reflections. Let us enter the Cadran-Bleu, and make the

acquaintance of the principal persons at this function, whom, probably, we shall have occasion to see more than once in the course of this narrative, unless it happens that this chapter has no connection with the plot, which is quite possible; we read many chapters of that sort.

Edouard Murville was twenty-five years of age; he was of medium stature but well-proportioned; his face was attractive, his voice soft, his manners distinguished. He had all the social talents, played moderately well on the violin, sang with expression, and danced gracefully; his language was well-chosen, he was accustomed to society, and he knew how to enter and leave a salon, which, be it said in passing, is not so easy as one might think. What! I hear my readers say, does this fellow suppose that we do not know how to walk, to enter a room, and to bow gracefully? God forbid that I should express such a judgment upon the nation which dances best! But there are degrees in everything, and it is upon those degrees that I base my judgment. A very clever, but slightly sarcastic woman, beside whom I was sitting not long ago, in the salon of a banker, favored me with some of her observations, which in general are very just.

“Come,” she said, “let us examine together the people who come into this salon; I will wager that I can guess their dispositions, their humor, by the way in which they enter.—See that tall lady passing through the crowd, not deigning to notice anybody with even so much as a nod! Now she is sitting down in front of the fireplace, she places her feet upon the screen, and installs herself in the best place, without looking to see whether she is in the way of the people behind her or not. What do you think of that woman?”

“That she is very pretentious and desires to display her fine dress.”

“That is not all,—add that she is a fool. A clever woman has a thousand ways of attracting attention without assuming ridiculous airs; and when she desires to create a sensation, she goes about it skilfully at least, and does not look with disdain upon people who are dressed in an old-fashioned way, or whose toilet is slightly careless.—But what is that noise in the reception room? Has some virtuoso arrived? Has a sideboard been knocked over? The master of the house is hurrying in that direction, and we shall soon know what the matter is. Ah! I recognize that voice. It is Monsieur J——. Listen; you can easily hear him from here.”

“Ah! my dear friend! I am terribly distressed to arrive so late! Upon my honor, I am covered with confusion! I don’t know whether I ought to come in! I am dressed like a thief! I must hide in some corner!”

“Well,” said my neighbor to me, “what do you think of this gentleman, who does not want to be seen, and who so declares in such a loud voice that he makes

everybody in the salon turn his head?—Ah! he has made up his mind to come in, nevertheless.”

I expected to see a young dandy, but I saw a man of between forty and fifty, with a light wig, come forward with a mincing step, bowing to right and to left and smiling almost agreeably.

“Who on earth is this man?” I asked my neighbor.

“Monsieur J—— is the universal man; he knows all Paris, he belongs to all the clubs, especially those where they have music. He plays three or four instruments; there is no amateur concert where he does not take part; nor is there an artiste who does not know him. You have had an opportunity of judging, by his method of entering this room, that his happiness consists in making a sensation; I do not draw from that fact a very favorable augury of his talents; for, as you know, merit is not in the habit of seeking a brilliant light. Mediocrity, on the contrary, makes a great deal of noise, thrusts itself forward, insists upon pervading everything, and always succeeds in dazzling fools.

“But I see a new face, that of a young man; he at least makes no noise; he comes in so softly that one can hardly hear him, he half bows, stands near the door, then creeps along the wall, and finally seizes a chair, upon which he seats himself very quickly, and from which he will not stir throughout the evening, I promise you. Poor fellow, he twists his mouth, winks and blinks, and does not know what to do with his hands. I will wager that he thinks that all the women are looking at him and discussing him. I have noticed, that as a general rule, timidity, yes, even awkwardness, often results from excessive self-consciousness: the fear of seeming ridiculous, or of not wearing a sufficiently fascinating expression, imparts that embarrassment to the bearing, that almost comical expression to the face; if you wish to convince yourself of it, examine on the stage some *jeune premier* who is rather good-looking, and who would act well, perhaps, if he were not engrossed entirely by his wig, his cravat, his attitude, and the effect which his face is likely to produce in the hall.”

My neighbor continued her observations; and I would gladly communicate them to you, reader, were it not that I am beginning to notice that you opened this volume, not to hear me talk with her, but to learn of the adventures of Brother Jacques.—A thousand pardons for taking you to a banker’s salon. I return to the Cadran-Bleu.

You know now that the marriage of Edouard Murville is being celebrated there, that the bridegroom is twenty-five years old and a very good-looking fellow. But you do not yet know his wife, and I must hasten to repair my neglect in that respect; for she is lovely, sweet, attractive, and virtuous; it would be

impossible to make her acquaintance too soon.

Adeline Germeuil was eighteen years old, and she possessed all those qualities which charm at first sight and attach one thereafter: beautiful eyes, fine teeth, graceful manners, a fresh complexion, wit unsullied by ill-temper, gaiety without coquetry, charm without affectation, modesty without timidity. She knew that she was pretty, but did not think that for that reason all men ought to do homage to her; she loved pleasure but did not make that her sole occupation. In short, she was a woman such as it is very pleasant to meet, especially when one is a bachelor.

Adeline was devoted to Edouard, to whom she had given preference over several much more advantageous offers, for Edouard's only fortune was the place which he occupied in one of the government departments, while Adeline had about fifteen thousand francs a year. But Mademoiselle Germeuil had no ambition, she considered happiness to consist in delights of the heart, and not in more or less wealth. Moreover, with fifteen thousand francs a year, one can live without privation, especially when one is the wife of a man of orderly habits, who knows how to regulate his household expenses. Now Murville seemed such a man, he seemed to have all the estimable qualities, and he carried the day.

Mademoiselle Germeuil had no parent but her mother, a most estimable woman, who adored her daughter and was never willing to thwart her desires. However, it was her duty to look after Adeline's future welfare; and so, as soon as she discovered her daughter's love for Edouard Murville, she made haste to seek information concerning the young man's moral character, and concerning his family.

She found that he was born of well-to-do parents; that his father had followed the profession of the law with honor, but that several successive failures had reduced the family to the strict necessities of life. Edouard and Jacques were Monsieur Murville's only children. Jacques was a year younger than Edouard; but Madame Murville had not divided her affections equally between her two sons. Edouard was the favorite. A circumstance, apparently most trivial, had influenced Madame Murville's sentiments; she had little intellect and a great deal of vanity; so that she was certain to set great store by all the petty, puerile things which are of such great weight in society. When she first became enceinte, she put her mind on the rack, to think what name she should give to her child. Her desire was to find a name which should be at once graceful, pleasant to the ear and distinguished; after long discussions and profound reflections, she decided upon Edouard for a boy, or Célénie for a girl, Monsieur Murville having left her entirely free to decide that question.

The first-born was a boy, and he received the name of Edouard, with all his mother's affection. When she became enceinte again, she did not doubt for an instant that she should bring into the world a pretty little Célénie; the birth of a daughter would have filled her cup to overflowing. But after long suffering, she brought into the world a bouncing boy.

It will be understood that this one was not so warmly received as the first. Moreover, they had not had the slightest expectation of a boy, and they had not decided what name he should bear. But this time any previous deliberation upon that subject would have been wasted, for Monsieur Murville informed his wife that a friend of his desired to be his son's godfather. This friend was very rich and they were under some obligation to him, so that they could not refuse him as godfather. So he held the child at the altar, and to the great scandal of Madame Murville, gave him the name of Jacques.

In truth, although Jacques is as good a name as another, it is not very melodious, and it offended the delicate ear of Madame Murville, who maintained that it was a name fit for a footman, a Savoyard, a messenger, and that it was a shame to call her son by it. In vain did her husband try to make her listen to reason, and recite to her again and again the history of Scotland, where the throne had been occupied by many Jacqueses. Madame Murville could never pronounce that name without a sigh.

However, there was no way to change it, for the godfather, who was naturally called Jacques also, and who came often to see his godson, would have been deeply offended to hear him called by any other name.

So the little fellow remained Jacques, to the great distress of Madame Murville. As for Edouard, whether from a spirit of mischief on his part, or because the name pleased him, he called Brother Jacques every moment during the day; and when he had done anything naughty, he always shifted it to Brother Jacques's shoulders.

The two brothers were entirely different in disposition; Edouard placid, well-behaved, obliging, was glad to pass his day by his mother's side; Jacques, noisy, boisterous, quick-tempered, could not keep still, and never went anywhere without turning everything upside down.

Edouard learned readily what was told him; Jacques would throw his books and pens into the fire, and make a hoop or a wooden sword.

Finally, at sixteen, Edouard went into company with his parents; he had already learned to listen to conversation and to smile pleasantly at a pretty woman. At fifteen, Jacques left his parents' roof, and disappeared, leaving no

letter behind, nothing to indicate his plans, or the purpose of his departure. They made all possible investigation and search; they put his description in the newspapers, but they never learned what had become of him; they waited for news of him, but none ever came.

Monsieur Murville was deeply grieved at the flight of the hare-brained young man; even Madame Murville herself realized that she was a mother, and that a boy might be named Jacques and still be her son; she repented of her unjust prejudice, she reproached herself for it, but it was too late. The unfortunate name had had its effect; it had closed to Jacques his mother's heart; it drew upon him the mockery of his brother; and perhaps all these causes combined had driven the young man from the home of his parents. Who knows? There is so much tossing to and fro in life!

"I caught the measles recently," said a young man to me yesterday, "because a man who makes shoes for a young lady friend of mine broke his spectacles."

"What connection is there?" said I, "between your measles and a shoemaker's spectacles?"

"It was like this, my dear fellow; the lady in question had given me her word to sing with me that evening at the house of one of our acquaintances. But she expected some pretty cherry slippers in the morning, to wear with a dress of that color; the shoemaker in question had broken his spectacles on the day that he took her measure, so that he brought her some slippers, which, though they were lovely, were too small. However, she could not resist the desire to try them on; they hurt a great deal, but the shoemaker assured her that they would be all right after she had worn them a while. Ladies think a great deal about having a small foot. She limped a little when she left the house; when she was on the boulevard, in the presence of some of her acquaintances, she did not wish to seem to be limping, so she exerted herself to walk lightly; but the foot became inflamed and swollen; she suffered horribly, and was obliged to return home. There she threw the infernal slippers aside, and examined her feet; they were raw and swollen, and she could not hope to go out for a week. I, knowing nothing about this, went to our rendezvous, expecting to employ my evening singing. I did not find the lady; the mistress of the house was alone; she is very agreeable, but she is forty years old. The time dragged terribly, I became impatient, and after waiting for an hour, I went out, having no idea where I should go. I passed a theatre, went in mechanically, and solely to kill time, for I knew the plays by heart. I saw a pretty face, and instinctively took a seat beside it; I said a few words and she answered; she seemed fond of talking, and I was very glad to find an opportunity to amuse myself. At last the play came to an end and I offered my pretty talker my arm.

After some slight parley she accepted; I escorted my fair conquest to her home and did not leave her until I had obtained permission to call upon her. I did not fail to do so the next day. In a word, I soon became an intimate friend, and in one of my visits I caught the measles, which the lady had, unknown to me. So you see, if the shoemaker hadn't broken his spectacles, it wouldn't have happened."

My young friend was right: the most important events are often caused by the most simple distractions, the most trivial circumstances. As for my hero, there is no doubt that his baptismal name exerted an influence over his whole destiny. How many men have owed to the splendors of a famous name, which their ancestors have transmitted to them, a degree of consideration which would never have been accorded their individuality! Happy is the man who is able to make his own name famous, and to transmit it to posterity with glory. But happier perhaps is he who lives unknown, and whose name will never arouse hatred or envy!

Now you know the Murville family; it remains for me to tell you of the death of Edouard's father and mother, who followed each other to the tomb after a short interval, carrying with them their regret as to the fate of their son Jacques; and they enjoined upon Edouard to forgive him his escapade in their name, if he should ever find him.

Edouard was left master of his actions. He was twenty-two years old, and had a place worth two thousand francs a year; he could live respectably by behaving himself. He loved pleasure; but society, music, the theatre, offered him pleasures which cost him little; it never occurred to him to gamble. He was fond of ladies' society; but he was not bad-looking and had no reason to complain of their severity. He allowed himself to be led astray easily, and had not sufficient strength of character; but luckily for him, he was not intimate with men of dissolute habits. In a word, he could not be cited as a model to be followed, but on the other hand, he had no very great faults.

So that Madame Germeuil readily decided to give her Adeline to Edouard Murville.

"This young man will make my daughter happy," she said to herself; "he has not much strength of character; very good! then my dear child will be the mistress, and households where the wives rule are often the best conducted."

And that is why there was a wedding party at the Cadran-Bleu.

II

GREAT EVENTS CAUSED BY A JIG AND A SNUFF BOX

“How pretty she is! What a fine figure she has! What charm and freshness!” said the young men, and even the fathers, to one another, as they watched the bride and followed her every motion when she danced. “Ah! what a lucky fellow that Edouard is!”

Such was the general opinion.

Edouard heard all this; he was in fact as happy as a man can be when he is on the point of becoming entirely happy. To conceal his desires, his impatience, he skipped and danced about, and did not keep still one minute. From time to time he went into the corridor to consult his watch; it was still too early—not for him! but he must spare his wife’s blushes; and what would the company say; what would his wife’s mother say? Well! he must wait; oh! how long that day had been! Poor husband and wife! It is the brightest day in all your lives, and yet you wish that it were already passed! Man is never content.

“The bridegroom looks to be very much in love!” said all the married ladies; the unmarried ones did not say so, but they thought it.

“Ah! Monsieur Volenville, that is the way you looked at me twenty-two years ago,” said, with a sigh, to her husband, a lady of forty-five, overladen with rouge, flowers, laces and ribbons, who sat in a corner of the ball-room, where she had been waiting in vain since dinner for a partner to present himself. Monsieur Volenville, formerly a frequent attendant at the balls at Sceaux, and now an auctioneer in the Marais, did not answer his wife, but took a pinch of snuff and went into the next room to watch a game of *écarté*.

Madame Volenville testily changed her place, which she had done already several times. She placed herself between two young women, hoping apparently that that side of the room would be invited in a body, and that she would thus be included in the dancers. But her hope was disappointed once more; she saw young men coming toward her, she nodded her head gracefully, smiled, and put out her foot, which was not unshapely. They approached; but oh, woe! they addressed themselves to her right or to her left, and seemed to pay no attention to her and her soft glances and her pretty foot.

It is really most unpleasant to be a wall-flower, and Madame Volenville, not

knowing what method to employ to attract a partner, deliberated whether to show the lower part of her leg; it had formerly performed miracles, and it would be as well to try its power, as the foot produced no effect.

She decided to do it; the lower part of the calf was about to be shown as modestly as possible, when suddenly there was a loud call for a fourth couple to fill up a quadrille. There were no more ladies remaining; some had left the party, and all the rest were on the floor. A young man, well-curved and well-perfumed, glanced about the ball-room; he spied the auctioneer's wife, resigned himself to his fate, and walked gravely toward her to ask her to dance. Madame Volenville did not give the young man time to finish his invitation; she rose, darted toward him, seized his hand, and squeezed it so that she almost made him cry out. Our dandy jumped back; he concluded that the poor woman was subject to hysterical attacks; he gazed at her uneasily, not knowing what course to pursue; but Madame Volenville gave him little time for reflection: she dragged him roughly away toward the incomplete quadrille; she took her place, bowed to her partner, and led him through the cat's tail and the ladies' chain, before he had recovered from his bewilderment.

The heroic and free-and-easy manner of Madame Volenville's dancing created a sensation; a confused murmur ran through the salon and the young men left the card-table for the place where our auctioneeres was performing. She considered this eagerness to watch her very flattering, and was enchanted by it; she danced with redoubled fire and animation, and tried to electrify her partner, who did not seem to share her vivacity; flushing with rage when he saw the circle which had formed about him, and heard the sarcastic compliments which the young men addressed to him, and the spiteful remarks of the young women, he bit his lips, clenched his fists, and would have given all that he possessed to have the quadrille come to a close. But Madame Volenville left him but little time to himself; she was almost always in the air; she insisted upon balancing, or going forward and back, all the time, despite the remonstrances of her partner, who said to her until he was hoarse:

“It isn't our turn, madame; in a minute; that figure is finished; pray stop!”

But Madame Volenville was started, and she was determined to make up to herself for five hours of waiting; and when by chance she did pause for a second, her glance rested complacently upon the large crowd which surrounded her; and as with her handkerchief she wiped away the drops of perspiration which stood on her brow, her eyes seemed to say to the throng:

“You didn't expect to see such dancing as this, eh? Another time, perhaps you will ask me!”

Meanwhile the torture of Belcour—that was the name of Madame Volenville’s partner—was approaching its end; the quadrille was almost finished; already they had thrice performed the famous *chassez les huit*; once more, and all would have been over, when a young notary’s clerk, a mischievous joker, who loved a laugh, like most of his fellows, conceived the idea of running to the orchestra, and asking for a jig in the name of the whole company. The musicians at a wedding party never refuse any request, and they began to play a jig at the moment that Belcour bowed to Madame Volenville and attempted to slink away.

The voice of Orpheus imploring the gods of the infernal regions did not produce so much effect upon Pluto as the strains of the violins and the air of the jig produced upon Madame Volenville.

“Monsieur! monsieur! it isn’t over yet,” she cried to Belcour, who was walking away. He pretended not to hear, and was already near the door of the salon, when Madame Volenville ran after him, caught him and arrested his steps.

“Monsieur, what are you doing? Don’t you hear the violins? Ah! what a pretty tune! it’s a jig; come quickly!”

“A thousand pardons, madame, but I thought——”

“It is a jig, monsieur, and I love that dance to madness!”

“Madame, I do not feel very well, and——”

“You shall see my English steps; it was while dancing the jig that I used to make so many conquests.”

“Madame, I would like a breath of fresh air——”

“And indeed that I fascinated—I attracted my husband, at the ball at Sceaux.”

“But, madame——”

In vain did Belcour seek to resist; Madame Volenville would not let him go, but dragged him toward the dance, paying no heed to his excuses. Seeing that a longer discussion would intensify the absurdity of his position, he yielded at last and returned to the quadrille. The crowd of curious onlookers hastily stood aside to make room for the couple upon whom all eyes were fixed.

The signal was given and everyone started off, the men to the right, then the ladies, Madame Volenville among the first. With what ardor she ran to the other men and swung them round as on a pivot! The perspiration rolled down her cheeks, and streaked her rouge; two of her *mouches* fell from her temple to a spot below the ear; her curls became loosened, her wreath of roses was detached and took the place of a collar; but none of those things was capable of stopping her: in an instant she had made the circuit of the quadrille and had returned to

her place. Belcour was no longer there. He had taken advantage of the confusion occasioned by the figure, to steal away. But Madame Volenville must have a partner, and she took the first one who came to hand; it was an old attorney in a hammer wig, who happened to be standing opposite her. The excellent man had joined the crowd, impelled by curiosity; he had forced his way to the front and was gazing enviously at a pretty little breast of twenty years, as white and fresh and solid as a rock, that belonged to a pretty dancer. The old attorney remarked, with the lecherous gaze of a connoisseur, that the exertion of dancing scarcely shook the two lovely globes; he was amazed thereat, because it was a long while since he had seen anything of the sort at a ball, whether fancy dress, public, in fashionable or middle-class society, or even at open air fêtes. Overjoyed by his discovery, and to manifest his satisfaction to the pretty dancer, he displayed the tip of his tongue and smiled pleasantly; a method adopted by old rakes to declare their passion without words.

But the pretty dancer paid no heed to the attorney and his grimaces, and he, tired of showing his tongue without obtaining a glance, was deliberating whether, during a moment of crowding and confusion, he might venture to take her hand, when Madame Volenville, with the rapidity of a bomb, arrived between him and the young lady he was admiring, and began to execute her English steps, accompanied by an alluring simper.

The old libertine gazed with a bewildered air at the flushed, disfigured face, the disordered headdress and the limp form of Madame Volenville; he tried to retreat; but she took both his hands, whirled him about and made him jump into the air.

“Madame, I don’t know this!” cried the attorney, struggling to free himself.

“Come on, all the same, monsieur! I must have a partner!”

“Stop this, madame; I never waltzed in my life!”

“This isn’t a waltz, monsieur; it’s a jig.”

“Stop, madame, I beg! I am dizzy; I shall fall!”

“You dance like an angel!”

Madame Volenville was a very devil; she considered herself still as fascinating as at twenty; she was persuaded that her steps, her graces, her vivacity and her little mincing ways were calculated to fascinate everybody; she did not realize that years entirely change the aspect of things. That which is charming at twenty becomes affectation at forty; the frivolity natural to youth seems folly in maturer years, and the little simpering expressions which we forgive on a childish face, later are mere absurdities and sometimes downright

grimaces.

It is possible, nevertheless, for a woman of mature years to please; but she does not succeed in so doing by aping the manners of youth. Nothing can be more agreeable to the eye, more calculated to attract favorable notice, than a mother dancing without any affectation of youthful graces, opposite her daughter; nothing more absurd than an old coquette, with her hair dressed as if she were sixteen, trying to rival girls of that age in agility.

Madame Volenville was, as you see, an indefatigable dancer; she strove to infect her partner with the ardor that animated her; but the old attorney, red as a cherry, rolled his eyes wildly, unable to distinguish objects; everything about him was going round and round; the jig, the heat and his wrath combined to make him helplessly dizzy. He held his face as far from his partner's as possible; but, to put the finishing touch to his discomfiture, his wig came off, fell to the floor, where it was trampled under foot by the dancers, and the attorney's head was revealed to the eyes of the guests, as bare as one's hand.

This last mishap, adding tenfold to the old fellow's rage, gave him the strength to break loose from his partner; he pushed her away with great force. Madame Volenville fell into the lap of a stout clerk, who was sitting peacefully on a bench at the end of the room, running over in his mind with keen enjoyment the names of all the dishes he had eaten at dinner.

The corpulent party uttered a sharp exclamation when Madame Volenville landed on him; he swore that he was being suffocated; but she did not stir, because no woman in good society ought to fall upon anyone without swooning. Monsieur Tourte—that was the clerk's name—called for help, while Monsieur Robineau—our attorney—loudly demanded his wig, which he sought in vain in every corner of the room, but could not find, because the young notary's clerk had obtained possession of it first and had thrown it out of the window onto the boulevard, where it fell on the nose of a cab-driver, who was looking at the sky to see if it was likely to rain the next day.

Meanwhile Edouard and Madame Germeuil strove to restore tranquillity and to bring order out of chaos. Adeline, for her part, could not help laughing, with all the other young women, at Madame Volenville's attitude, Monsieur Tourte's face and Monsieur Robineau's fury.

Monsieur Volenville finally left his game of *écarté*, went to get a carafe of water, and approached his wife, whom he did not recognize, so great was the havoc wrought upon her dress and her face. After taking his pinch of snuff, he relieved his wife of her wreath of roses and began to slap her hands, while Madame Germeuil held a phial of salts under her nose. But nothing availed,

nothing had any effect on the benumbed senses of the formidable dancer. Madame Germeuil was at her wit's end. Monsieur Tourte swore that he would bite Madame Volenville in the arm or somewhere else, if somebody did not instantly remove the burden that was suffocating him, and the auctioneer resorted to his snuff-box in quest of ideas.

At that moment Monsieur Robineau was rushing about the ball-room in the guise of a cherub, and feeling angrily under the furniture and even under people's feet, in search of his wig. He drew near the group surrounding the auctioneer's unconscious wife; he spied something gray under the bench that supported his late partner and the stout clerk. Instantly he darted forward, pushed aside Monsieur Volenville, who was in front of him, threw himself on his hands and knees, and put his hand between the auctioneer's legs to grasp the object which he believed to be his dear wig.

Monsieur Robineau's manoeuvre was executed so suddenly that Monsieur Volenville lost his balance; as he was stooping forward, he fell almost upon his wife, and the snuff-box, which he had just opened, emptied itself entirely into his loving better half's nose and mouth.

This accident recalled Madame Volenville to life; she sneezed five times in rapid succession, rubbed her eyes, opened her mouth, swallowed a large quantity of snuff, made such horrible faces that they put to flight her husband and all the other persons who were near her, squirmed about and spat violently into the face of Monsieur Robineau, who at that moment withdrew his hand from under the bench and rose, swearing like the damned—who swear a great deal in this world, to say nothing of what they will do when they are roasting in hell like pork pies.

And why did Monsieur Robineau swear? Why, reader? Because, instead of putting his hand on his wig, which, as you know, was reposing on the boulevard, the unlucky attorney had seized the tail of a cat, which, vexed at being pulled so violently by a sensitive part, had, in accordance with the custom of its kind, buried its claws in the cruel hand that had grasped it.

“It is very unpleasant to be unlucky!” said a worthy bourgeois of the Marais the other evening at a performance of *La Pie Voleuse*, as he wept over the misfortunes of Palaiseau's little maid-servant. To interpret what I presume to be that gentleman's meaning, I will say that it is very painful to experience so many misfortunes as Monsieur Robineau did in one evening. When one has danced against one's will and has lost one's wig; when one has been clawed on the hands and has been spat upon, one is quite justified in being angry. The poor attorney was so angry that he turned yellow, red and white, almost at the same instant; in his frenzy, he had no idea what he was doing, and, regardless of sex,

was about to assault Madame Volenville, when some of the guests interposed between him and the person whom he justly regarded as the cause of all his misfortunes.

They had much difficulty in pacifying Monsieur Robineau and in making him understand that madame had expectorated without malicious intent. Edouard succeeded at last in calming him a little; and while he wiped his face, the young bridegroom took from his pocket a dainty silk handkerchief, which he offered the attorney to put over his head. Monsieur Robineau accepted it, covered his head with the handkerchief, and placed his round hat on top; which gave him the appearance of a Spanish rebel, or a bandolero, or a guerilla, or battueca; or, if you prefer, of one of those little dogs, dressed in human garb, which ride majestically along the boulevard in baskets borne by a learned donkey.

The attorney left the salon without paying his respects to the ladies, and without kissing the bride; he hurried from the Cadran-Bleu, but as he passed the waiters and scullions from the restaurant he could not help hearing their laughter and jests. He did not take a cab, because he lived on Rue du Perche; and when he reached home, he went to bed, cursing waltzes and jigs, and calculating what a new wig would cost him.

As for Madame Volenville, of whom Monsieur Tourte finally succeeded in ridding himself, it was most essential to induce her to leave the ball-room, for the snuff which she had swallowed produced a most unpleasant effect on her stomach. The expectoration became more frequent, and began to change to hiccoughs and symptoms of nausea, that presaged an accident which one is never desirous to witness, and which, moreover, it is prudent to avert in a room where people are dancing.

So the poor woman was taken away, almost carried, from the scene of her exploits. When she passed a mirror, she thought that she would die of chagrin, or swoon again; in truth, her snuff-besmeared face, her dishevelled hair, her disordered clothing, were well adapted to drive to despair a woman with pretensions; and we have seen that Madame Volenville possessed rather a large supply for her years.

They looked for her husband, and had some difficulty in inducing him to go to his wife, upon whom he insisted that someone had put a mask. At last they were placed in a cab, which took them home, where, if you please, we will leave them, to return to the newly-married pair.

Terpsichore had banished cruel Discord, who, since the nuptials of Peleus and Thetis, to which, foolishly enough, she was not bidden, has adopted the habit of coming unexpectedly to sow confusion in marriage festivities; that was

the reason, I presume, that she deigned to attend the bourgeois wedding at the Cadran-Bleu; for it is said that a couple can never escape a visit from the ill-omened goddess; and if she does not appear on the first day, she makes up for it during the year.

But let us leave Terpsichore, Discord and all mythology; let us abandon metaphors and figures of speech; let us leave to the authors of octavo romances, flowers, cascades, the moon, the stars, and above all, those poetical inversions of language which tell you at the end of a sentence what the hero meant to say at the beginning; those delightful détours, whereby a father will say: “At last toward me stepped forth my daughter;” instead of saying simply: “My daughter stepped toward me;” which, in my judgment, would be much more clear, but which would resemble the ordinary way of talking in the world, in society; a vulgar jargon, which should not be employed by persons who live in underground dungeons without breaking their necks, or who constantly scale perpendicular cliffs without being tired when they reach the top.

Moreover, will our lovely women, our *petites-mâîtresses* extol a novel to the clouds, if the hero does not speak another language than that of their husbands and lovers?—”Bah! that is a book for the servants’ hall!” they will say, as they disdainfully cast aside a novel which is neither English, nor German, nor romantic! “It is an insufferable sort of work! forbidden words are used in it! I find the word *cuckold* there! Mon Dieu! it is shocking! But our newspaper critic will belabor that author soundly for us!”

And in fact the critic reads the work and considers it revoltingly immoral! The author’s cynicism, his obscenity are beyond words! he uses the word *cuckold* when he finds it necessary! Did anyone ever hear of such indecency?—To be sure, Molière often used the same word, and some others even stronger, in several of his works; but what a difference! one must be very careful not to print in a novel what one may say on the stage before a large audience!—Make your inversions, ye novelists; go back to the Syntax; adopt a style *ad usum tyronum linguæ Latinæ*; monopolize mythology, astronomy, mineralogy, ornithology, zoology, aye, even conchology; mingle with it all a little ancient and sacred history, much about dreams and ghosts, minstrels, druids, or hermits, according to the scene of your plot; indulge in sonorous phrases, which used to be called fustian, and you will surely have a fashionable success! Some ladies will faint when they are reading you, others after they read you; there will even be some who will not understand you; but you will appear all the nobler to them! To be unintelligible is to be sublime in your kind. Great geniuses wrap themselves in mystery.—Ask Cagliostro rather,—he ought not to be dead, as he was a sorcerer,

—or Lord Byron, or Mademoiselle Lenormand.

As for you, young authors, who claim to be simple and natural, who seek to arouse laughter or interest with events which may happen any day before our eyes, and who describe them for us in such wise as to be readily understood, away with you to oblivion! or go to see *George Dandin* and *Le Malade Imaginaire*; those plays are worthy of you; but you will never be read by our vaporish ladies, and you will not cause the hundred mouths of Renown to sound.

Despite all this, we have the unfortunate habit of writing as we should speak, and we shall continue so to do; you are at liberty, reader, to drop us here and now if our method does not suit you.

So the dancing continued at the Cadran-Bleu; but the fête drew toward its close, to the great satisfaction of Edouard, and doubtless of Adeline, who blushed and smiled whenever her fond husband glanced at her.

At last the clock struck the hour to retire; Madame Germeuil herself took her daughter away; they entered a carriage, drove off, and in due time arrived at Boulevard Montmartre, where the young couple were to live, and with them the dear mamma, who did not wish to part from her Adeline, who, she hoped, would close her eyes.

A dainty apartment was all arranged. Madame Germeuil embraced her daughter lovingly, then went to her own room, not without a sigh. That was quite natural; the rights of a mother cease when those of a husband begin! But what do rights matter when hearts remain the same? Nature and love easily find lodgment in a sensitive heart, and have no power over a cold and selfish one. Men make the laws, but the feelings are not to be commanded.

Luckily for Edouard, the charming Adeline loved him because he pleased her, and not simply because the Church ordered her to love him. That is why, when she was alone with her husband, she threw herself into his arms without a tear; that is why she did not make a great fuss about allowing herself to be undressed, and why she was so soon in bed; and lastly, that is why we shall say no more about it.

III

DUFRESNE

While our young husband and wife abandoned themselves to the unrestrained enjoyment of their mutual love and indulged the legitimate passion they felt; while Adeline readily yielded to her new situation, as young wives do, let us leave them and make the acquaintance of a person whom we shall meet again in the course of this narrative.

Among the crowd which had surrounded Madame Volenville and Monsieur Robineau, and had laughed at the misfortunes of the auctioneer's wife and the attorney, there was one man who had remained indifferent to the pranks of the other guests and had taken no part in the jests of the young clerk and the tricks resorted to in order to prolong the famous quadrille.

This man seemed to be not more than twenty-eight or thirty years old; he was tall and well-shaped; his features were regular, and would have been handsome if his eyes had been less shifty; but his vague glance, to which he sought to give an expression of benevolence, inspired neither friendship nor confidence; and the smile which sometimes played about his lips seemed rather bitter than amiable.

Dufresne—such was this young man's name—had been brought to Edouard Murville's wedding by a stout lady with three daughters, who had for a long time been in the habit of taking half a dozen young men to all the parties which she attended with her young ladies. Madame Devaux liked to entertain a great deal of company, especially young men; and her motive was easily divined: when one has three daughters, and no dowry to give them, one does not find husbands for them by keeping them always in their room; they must be introduced into society, and must wait until chance inspires a very sincere little passion which ends in marriage.

Unfortunately, sincere passions are more infrequent in society than in English novels; and often, in their search for husbands, the young ladies meet gay deceivers instead, who are strong on the passions, but weak in virtue! But still, something must be risked in order to catch a husband.

So it was that Madame Devaux had received Dufresne, who had been introduced to her by a friend of one of her neighbors; and as he was young and

rather good-looking, she had included him in the list of the men whom she proposed to take to Edouard's wedding, in order that her young ladies might not lack partners.

Dufresne knew neither the bridegroom nor his wife; but it often happens at a large party that one does not know the host; and now that our French receptions are adopting the style of English *routs*, and are becoming mere mobs, no one pays any heed to his neighbor, and it not infrequently happens that you leave those noisy functions without even saluting the host or the hostess.

Madame Devaux had made a mistake, however, in relying upon Dufresne to dance with her daughters. He cared little for dancing; he made haste to pay his debt by inviting each of the Devaux girls to dance once; but after that, he contented himself with the rôle of simple spectator, taking the precaution to go into the card room when the quadrilles were not full. He cast his eyes over all the guests in the salons, but they rested most frequently upon Edouard and Adeline; the sight of the husband and wife seemed to attract all his attention; he followed their movements; watched their slightest actions, and seemed to be trying to read the inmost thoughts of their hearts. When Adeline smiled fondly at her husband, Dufresne, standing a few steps away, observed that smile, and his eyes eagerly followed its development.

"Really, mamma," said Cleopatra, the oldest of the daughters, to Madame Devaux, "we won't take Monsieur Dufresne to a ball again; just see how he acts! he doesn't dance! he looks like a bear!"

"That is true, my child! If he would only come and sit down by us and talk and pretend to be polite!"

"Oh, yes! why, he doesn't pay the slightest attention to us! I should like to know what he is doing in that corner, near Madame Germeuil!"

"He certainly is not agreeable, and I shall not take him to Monsieur Verdure's the day after to-morrow, where there is to be music, and perhaps a collation. I will take little Godard; he is rather stupid, but at all events he will dance as long as anybody wants him to."

"Yes, and he is always on hand to give us something to drink."

"By the way, Cleopatra, who will go home with us to-night?"

"Why, I don't know. Two of our gentlemen have gone away already; one had a headache, and the other wanted to go to bed early because he had an appointment for to-morrow morning. But we must have someone."

"Never fear, I will hide Monsieur Dufresne's hat, and he won't go away without us, I promise you; that would be too much,—to be taken to a party by

ladies, and let them go home alone!”

“You know very well, mamma, that it wouldn’t be the first time that such a thing had happened to us.”

“Never mind, Cleopatra, it won’t be so to-night, and Monsieur Dufresne will pay for the cab.”

While the ladies were conversing, Dufresne continued his observations. He had noticed that Madame Germeuil was on very intimate terms with a young widow named Madame Dolban; thereafter this Madame Dolban became the object of Dufresne’s attentions, and he easily succeeded in making her acquaintance; for the widow was not at all pretty, and the homage of an attractive man was certain to seem all the more flattering to her because she rarely received anything of the sort.

When Dufresne wished to go, he fell into the trap which Madame Devaux had set for him: he did not find his hat until the moment when the mother and her three daughters were ready to go. It was impossible for him to avoid the duty. Moreover, Madame Dolban had refused his escort; but she had given him permission to call and pay her his respects, and that was all that he wanted. So the young man performed with sufficient good grace the service which was expected of him; he packed the Devaux family into a cab, seated himself on the front seat between Cleopatra and Césarine, and they started for Rue des Martyrs.

On the way, Dufresne was compelled to undergo a constant fire of epigrams discharged by the three girls against men who are not attentive, who do not do as other men do, who have wretched taste, who speak to ugly women and neglect pretty ones; and a thousand other sarcasms inspired by the irritation which it had caused them to see him devote himself to Madame Dolban.

Dufresne listened to all this very calmly, or, to speak more accurately, I believe that he did not listen to it at all; but he cared very little what the people thought who were chattering by his side, and his mind was too much preoccupied to heed the prattling of the three young women.

At last they reached the Rue des Martyrs. Dufresne left the Devaux family at their door; he received with a bow the curtsy of the mother, the cold salutation of Cleopatra, the curt good-evening of Césarine and the stifled sigh of Cornélie.

IV

PROJECTS OF BLISS

Adeline woke in Edouard's arms; the young wife felt like an entirely different person by her husband's side; one night of love is enough to establish a pleasing confidence, a loving intimacy, and to banish that feeling of awe, of timidity which naught but sensual enjoyment can dispel.

What delightful plans for the future, what a charming existence of unbroken happiness one devises, when, in the arms of the object of one's affection, one abandons oneself without reserve to all the illusions which embellish the imagination of two young lovers.

Adeline, sweet, sensitive, and loving, was certain that she would always be happy so long as her Edouard loved her, and that her Edouard would always love her; she had no doubt of it, nor had he. It is not when a man has experienced for the first time all the joys of love in the arms of his wife, that he thinks upon the possibility of changing. Then he is sincere, he really feels all that he says, and doubtless he would keep all his promises, if the same joys could always cause the same pleasures.

It seems, in those moments of expansiveness which follow the manifestations of love, that the husband and wife were really born for each other. They have the same tastes, the same thoughts, the same desires; what one does, the other approves; the husband was just about to propose what the young wife has planned, they mutually divine each other's thoughts, and it seems to them perfectly natural that they should have but one mind and but one will. Blessed concord! you would bestow the most perfect happiness, if you might only last forever!

"And so, my dear love," said Edouard, kissing his wife's pretty little hands, "we will pass the winter in Paris, and four months of warm weather in the country."

"Yes, my dear, that is agreed."

"But shall I keep my place in the department? That would prevent me from leaving the city."

"You must not keep it! What is the use? We have fifteen thousand francs a year; is that not enough to be happy?"

“Oh! it is more than we need.”

“Besides, your place would keep you away from me all day and I don’t want that!”

“Dear Adeline, but your mother—what will she say if I give up my place?”

“Mamma has but one desire—to make me happy; she will approve our plans, for she has no more ambition than we have.”

“All right, then it is decided; I send in my resignation to-morrow.”

“Yes, dear.”

“And we will buy a small country house, simple, but in good taste, where we will live with your mother. Where shall we buy?”

“Where you please, my dear.”

“No, it is for you to decide.”

“You know that I am always of your opinion.”

“Very well, then we will visit the suburbs, we will read the advertisements, we will consult mamma.”

“That is right, my dear.”

“Shall we entertain much?”

“As you please, my dear.”

“My dear love, that is for you to decide.”

“Very well! then we will receive very few people, for company would prevent us from being together, from going to walk and to drive alone; and I feel that that would annoy me terribly!”

“How sweet you are!”

“We will receive just a few friends; mamma’s, for example.”

“Exactly. In the morning we will walk in the garden—for we must have a garden, mustn’t we?”

“Oh! yes, my dear! A big garden, with lots of shade,—and thickets!”

“Ah! you are already thinking of the thickets!”

“Does that offend you, monsieur?”

Edouard’s only reply was to kiss his wife, press her to his heart, receive her soft caresses, and—the conversation was interrupted for several minutes.

“So we will have a big garden with dense thickets,” said Edouard when they renewed the conversation.

“Yes, my dear,” replied Adeline, smiling, and lowering her eyes, still

glistening with pleasure. "In the evening, we will walk about the neighborhood, and dance with the village people; or, if the weather is bad, we will play cards with some of the neighbors. Do you like that prospect?"

"Yes, my dear love, very much."

The doting Adeline was always of her husband's opinion; Edouard refused to have a will of his own; and they were so in accord that they vied with each other in seeing who should not be the master, and should not rule the house.

The young people had reached a very interesting article in the matter of conjugal happiness: they were thinking of the children they would have, of the education they would give them and of the professions which they would advise them to embrace, when there was a gentle tap at the door of their chamber. It was Madame Germeuil, come to embrace her daughter and to enjoy the happiness which she read in her eyes. A pleasant sight for a mother,—which reminded her of the same period in her own life.

Adeline blushed as she kissed her mother; the good woman informed them that breakfast was awaiting them, and breakfast is a very essential affair. The bride ate little; she was too preoccupied to have any appetite; the new ideas which thronged through her brain were enough to banish every other thought; but it was very different with the groom—he did not eat, he devoured! An additional proof this that men are less affectionate than women, since the same cause does not produce the same result.

During breakfast, the young people spoke to Madame Germeuil of their plans. The mother made a slight grimace when they told her that Edouard proposed to give up his place. She attempted to make some objections; she essayed to prove what a mistake that would be for Murville, who hoped to be promoted and to become a chief of bureau some day. The young man said nothing; perhaps he felt in his inmost heart that his mother-in-law was right; but Adeline entreated her mother with such grace, she kissed her so lovingly, and drew such a touching picture of the happiness they would all three enjoy, if they need never part; she praised so adroitly the pleasures of the country, their scheme of life, and all the attractions with which they would embellish her existence, that Madame Germeuil had not the courage to resist her daughter's entreaties, and the plan was adopted.

"But," said Madame Germeuil, "Edouard cannot remain idle. Idleness is a very dangerous business, and one which often leads us to do foolish things, which would never have occurred to us if we had been occupied."

"Oh! never fear, mamma! Edouard will always have occupation! I myself

will undertake to provide him with it! In the first place, all the details of our affairs;—he will have to look after the management of our little fortune; and then the care of our little country house, the time in my company and the walks we shall take——”

“But, my dear love, one cannot walk all the time.”

“Of course not! but then we will rest, or work in the garden. And our children, to whom you do not give a thought; shall we not have to bring them up, to look after their education, to guide their first steps?”

“Ah! you are thinking already of your children?”

“Yes, mamma; they come into our plans.”

“What a mad creature you are, my dear Adeline!”

“No, mamma; on the contrary, you will see that I shall be very sensible, and my husband too.”

Madame Germeuil did not seem altogether convinced of the wisdom of her daughter’s plans; but she proposed to keep constant watch upon the conduct of her two children, and she knew that Adeline, always given to building castles in Spain, would be the first to abandon her errors, if she should ever commit any. As to Edouard, he would do whatever they wished, so that it was only a question of giving him good advice, and of not following the example of his wife, who always agreed with him.

After breakfast they discussed the question where they would live. They had sent out for a copy of the *Petites-Affiches*; Adeline passed the paper to her husband, and Madame Germeuil was trying to remember in which direction the air was likely to be most healthy, when Murville uttered a cry of surprise and jumped up from his chair.

“What is it, my dear?” asked Adeline, amazed by her husband’s excitement.

“It is the very place,” said Edouard, still reading the paper; “at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, the house looking on the fields, two floors, a large garden, a summer-house, a courtyard, an iron fence——”

“Well, my dear, is that what nearly made you upset the breakfast table?”

“Oh! my dear love! oh! my dear mamma—that house——”

“Do you know it?”

“Do I know it! It belonged to my father, and I passed a great part of my youth there.”

“Is it possible?”

“Misfortune compelled us to sell it, but I have always regretted it.”

“Why, my dear, you never mentioned it to us.”

“I didn’t know that it was for sale now.”

“It is settled, my dear, let us not look any farther; we have found what we want, the house where you passed a large part of your childhood! Dear Edouard! Oh! how we shall enjoy living there!—You agree, mamma, do you not?”

“Why, my child, if the house is not too dear——”

“Oh! it can’t be too dear; it is Edouard’s house; we shall be so happy there!”

“Villeneuve-Saint-Georges—yes, I believe that the air is very good there!”

“Certainly it’s delicious; let us start at once, dear.”

“But it is already late, my child, for you did not get up early; and if we should wait until to-morrow——”

“To-morrow! and suppose the house should be sold to-day? Ah! I should never get over it; nor Edouard either; he says nothing, but he too is crazy to start.”

“Very well, my children, since it will give you so much pleasure; but it is four leagues from here!”

“We have a good country cabriolet, and the horse has been resting for a fortnight; he will take us there very fast.”

“Where shall we dine?”

“At Villeneuve-Saint-Georges; there are some very good restaurants there, aren’t there, my dear?”

“Why, yes. Oh! we shall have no difficulty about getting dinner there.”

“And it will be dark when we come back.—You know, Adeline, that I don’t like to drive after dark.”

“Oh! Edouard will drive, mamma; you know what a prudent driver he is. Besides, the road is magnificent; isn’t it, my dear?”

“Why, yes; at all events, it was ten years ago.”

“You see, mamma, that there is no danger. Oh! say that you will go!”

“I must do whatever you want!”

“How good you are! I will run and put on my hat.”

Adeline ran to her dressing-room, Edouard told old Raymond, their servant, to put the horse in the cabriolet. Madame Germeuil prepared for the drive, and Marie, the maid-servant of the new household, was grieved to learn that they would not taste the dainty dinner which she had prepared for the day after the wedding.

The young wife was ready first; a woman takes little time over her toilet when she is certain to please; doubtless that is why old coquettes pass two hours in front of the mirror. Adeline wore a simple muslin dress, with a belt about the shapeliest waist imaginable; a straw hat, not overladen with feathers and flowers, and a light shawl thrown carelessly over her shoulders; in that unpretentious costume Adeline was charming; everything about her was attractive; every feature was instinct with love and happiness; and pleasure makes a pretty woman even prettier.

Edouard gazed at his wife in rapture, and Madame Germeuil looked upon her daughter with pride; Adeline kissed them both and took her mother's hand to make her go downstairs at once; the young woman was eager to be gone, and to see the country house where her Edouard was brought up. He was no less desirous to revisit the scenes which had witnessed his childish sports. At last the mother was seated on the back seat of the carriage, with Adeline by her side; Edouard took the reins, and they started for Villeneuve-Saint-Georges.

V

THE FACE WITH MOUSTACHES

Edouard drove the horse at a fast pace, and they reached the village in a short time. When they had passed through the main street, and turned in the direction of the country, they discovered the house which they were anxious to see; thereupon Adeline leaped for joy, and took off her hat so that she could see better; Edouard urged the horse more eagerly, and Madame Germeuil shrieked, saying that they would be overturned.

At last the cabriolet stopped in front of the gate which gave admission to the courtyard.

“This is the place, this is the very place,” said Edouard, leaping to the ground; “oh! there is no mistake. I recognize the gate, the courtyard, and even this bell. It’s the same one that was here in my time. And there is the sign saying that the house is for sale.”

While he was examining with emotion the outside of the house, Adeline assisted her mother from the carriage; they fastened the horse, and then entered the courtyard, for the gate was not locked.

“Oh! how I shall enjoy myself here!” said Adeline, glancing about with a satisfied expression; “isn’t this house fascinating, mamma?”

“But, one moment, my child; we have seen nothing as yet.”

A tall peasant came out of a room on the ground floor, followed by an enormous dog.

“What do you want?” he said, scrutinizing them surlily enough.

“We want to see this house,” Edouard replied.

“All right,” muttered the concierge between his teeth; “come with me, and I will take you to my master.”

Edouard, with his wife and Madame Germeuil, followed their conductor, who ascended a staircase and showed them into a dining-room on the first floor, where he left them, to go to summon his master.

Soon a shrill little voice arose in the room which the concierge had entered, and our travellers heard this colloquy:

“What do you want of me, Pierre?”

“Some one has come to buy the house, monsieur.”

“Have you come again to disturb me to no purpose, and to bring me some boorish fellow, as you did just now?”

“Oh! no, monsieur! these folks look like swells!”

“That devilish fellow put me into a terrible temper! I shall be sick, I am sure!”

“I tell you, monsieur, that these folks have a cabriolet.”

“Oh! that’s different! I’ll go and speak to them.”

Madame Germeuil and her children were wondering what they should think of what they had heard, when the door of the adjoining room opened, and a short, thin, yellow, wrinkled man, in dressing gown and nightcap appeared and saluted his visitors with an air which he tried in vain to make amiable.

“We wish to examine this house,” said Edouard; “not that I do not know it very well; but these ladies would be very glad to see it.”

“It is very strange,” said the little man, glancing at the concierge; “everybody knows my house!—And is it your purpose to buy it?”

“Why, to be sure, if the price suits us.”

“In that case, I will show you around myself.”

“What an original creature!” whispered Adeline to her husband; “I will bet that it is some old money-lender, who went into retirement here, and can’t resist the desire to do business in the capital again.”

They went over the house from the ground floor to the attic; the little man spared them nothing, and Edouard, who was very glad to see his former home once more, listened patiently to all the details which the old fellow gave them concerning the advantages of his abode.

From time to time, our young man glanced at his wife and smiled.

“Yes,” he said as he entered each room, “I recognize this room, this closet, these wardrobes.”

Thereupon the old gentleman would glance at his servant and smile in his turn: they seemed to understand each other.

“So you used to live here, did you, monsieur?” the master of the house asked him.

“Yes, monsieur, yes, I passed a large part of my youth here.”

“This is mighty queer!” muttered the concierge.

“This is surprising!” said the little proprietor to himself.

Madame Germeuil considered the house convenient and the air good. Adeline was enchanted. Edouard asked permission to inspect the garden; the little man apologized for not accompanying them, for he was tired already; he asked them to follow the concierge, and the young people were not at all sorry to be rid of him for a moment.

The peasant walked ahead; Madame Germeuil followed him, and Adeline and Edouard brought up the rear, hand in hand. Edouard called his wife's attention to all the spots which reminded him of some period of his life.

"This is the place," said Edouard, "where I used to read with my father; it was on this path that my Brother Jacques used to like to run about and climb these fine apricot trees."

"Poor Brother Jacques! you have never heard from him?"

"No! Oh! he died in some foreign country! Otherwise he would have returned, he would have tried to see our parents again."

"That," said Madame Germeuil, "is what comes of not watching over children! Perhaps he came to a bad end."

Edouard made no reply; the memory of his brother always made him sad and thoughtful; he was almost persuaded that poor Brother Jacques was no more, and perhaps his self-esteem preferred to nourish that idea, in order to banish those which suggested that Jacques might be wandering about, wretched and debased. It was especially since his marriage with Adeline that Edouard had often thought with dread of meeting his brother amid the multitude of unfortunate wretches; he thought that that might injure him in the estimation of Madame Germeuil; and whenever a beggar of about his brother's age stopped in front of Edouard, he felt the blood rise to his cheeks and he walked rapidly away, without glancing at the poor devil who begged of him, for fear of recognizing his Brother Jacques in him. And yet Edouard was not heartless; he would have shrunk from turning his back upon his brother, and he dreaded to find him in a degraded condition. That is how men are constituted; their infernal self-esteem often stifles the most generous sentiments; a man blushes for his brother, or his sister! Indeed, there are some who blush for their father or mother; such people apparently think that they are not sufficiently estimable in themselves to do without a genealogical tree.

But let us return to our young bride and groom, who investigated every nook and corner of the garden, and smiled and squeezed each other's hands as they passed a dark grotto, or a dense clump of shrubbery. The concierge stopped for a moment to buckle his dog's collar; Madame Germeuil and her children walked

on. They reached the end of the garden, on that side which adjoined the open country and was surrounded by a very high wall; but an opening had been made for the convenience of the tenants, and the gate which closed that opening was covered with boards, so that people who were passing could not look into the garden.

But these boards were half rotten and had fallen away in places; and when the visitors passed the gate, they saw a man's face against the iron bars, gazing earnestly into the garden, through a place where the boards were broken.

Madame Germeuil could not restrain a cry of surprise; Adeline was conscious of a secret thrill of emotion, and Edouard himself was moved at the sight of that face which he did not expect to find there.

The features of the man who was gazing into the garden were in fact calculated to cause a sort of terror at a first glance; black eyes, an olive-brown complexion, heavy moustaches, and a scar which started from the left eyebrow and extended across the forehead, all these imparted to the face a savage aspect which did not prepossess one in favor of the man who bore it.

"Ah! mon Dieu! what on earth is that?" said Madame Germeuil, suddenly stopping.

"Why, it is a man who is amusing himself looking through this gate," replied Edouard, gazing at the stranger, who did not move but continued to examine the garden.

"I am almost afraid," said Adeline under her breath.

"Almost, my dear child! you are very lucky! For my own part, I admit that I do not feel comfortable yet."

As Madame Germeuil spoke, she walked away from the gate and moved closer to her son-in-law.

"What children you are, mesdames! What is there surprising in the fact that a man as he passes a garden which looks like a fine one should amuse himself by examining it for a moment? We have done that twenty times!"

"Yes, no doubt. But we haven't faces with moustaches like that, well calculated to make any one shudder! Just look! he doesn't move in the least! He doesn't seem to pay the slightest attention to us."

At that moment the concierge joined the party. As he approached the gate opening into the fields, he saw the face which had frightened the ladies. Thereupon he made a very pronounced grimace, and muttered:

"Still here! so that infernal man won't go away, it seems!"

The stranger looked up at the concierge, and the ladies read in the glance that he cast at the peasant an expression of wrath and contempt. Then, after examining for a moment the other persons in the garden, he drew back his head from the bars and disappeared.

“I would like right well to know who that man is,” said Adeline, looking at her husband.

“Faith! I augur no good for him,” said Madame Germeuil, who breathed more freely since the face had withdrawn from the gate.

“That man looked as if he had evil intentions, did he not, Edouard?”

“Oh! my dear mamma, I don’t go as far as you do! If we had seen the whole man, perhaps his face would have seemed less strange than it did above those old boards.”

“My husband is right, mamma; I think that the way in which we look at things depends upon the situation in which they strike our eyes at first. A man clothed in rags often arouses our suspicions; if he should appear before us well-dressed, we should have no feeling of dread at his aspect. Darkness, silence, moonlight, and the shadows thrown upon objects, all these conditions change our way of seeing things and make our imagination work very rapidly.”

“You may say whatever you please, my dear girl, but that face was not the face of a man looking into a garden from mere curiosity.”

“That may be, but I should have liked to see this stranger’s figure.”

“Parbleu!” said the concierge, “you wouldn’t have seen anything very fine, I assure you.”

“Do you know that man?” asked Adeline quickly.

“I don’t know him, but I have seen him once before this morning; he looks to me like a scamp who is prowling round about the village to commit some deviltry. But he better not come back here, or I will set my dog on him!”

“And you don’t know what he wants in the village?”

“Faith! I don’t care. So long as he don’t come to the house, that’s all I ask.”

As they were in front of the house at that moment, and as the proprietor was waiting for them in his doorway, Adeline did not prolong her conversation with the concierge.

“Well! what do you think of these gardens?” the old man asked Adeline.

“Oh! they are very pretty, monsieur; and they will suit us, will they not, mamma?”

“Yes, yes, perhaps they will suit us.”

Since Mamma Germeuil had seen at the end of the garden that face which seemed to her of ill augury, she did not find so many attractions about the house, and seemed less delighted with its situation. But as her children were so intensely eager to purchase it, and as she realized how childish her own repugnance was, she did not oppose the conclusion of the bargain.

The little man tried at first to impose upon the strangers; but when they proposed to pay cash, he consented to take off something from the price, and the bargain was concluded. In his delight, the proprietor invited the ladies to come in and rest, and even went so far as to offer them a glass of wine and water. But they had no desire to become better acquainted with the old miser; moreover, the ladies were hungry, and they had only time to go to the notary's office before dinner.

The little old man did not insist upon their stopping at his house; he took off his nightcap, sent the concierge to fetch an old, shabby, felt hat, which he carried under his arm in order to preserve it longer; he put on a coat once nut-colored, but of which no one could possibly divine the color now, and did not forget the bill-headed cane, upon which he leaned the more heavily, because he thought that by using a support for part of his weight, he would save the soles of his shoes.

They went to the office of the local notary; he received the details of the bargain, and promised to have the deed ready in due form in twenty-four hours. Edouard agreed to return to the village on the following day with the purchase money, and Monsieur Renâré,—such was the proprietor's name,—agreed to be punctual and to turn over the keys of the house. Everything being settled, they separated, each party well pleased with his bargain.

VI

A DINNER PARTY IN THE COUNTRY

“Now let us think about dinner,” said Edouard, as he and the ladies left the notary’s, “and let us try to find the best restaurant in the place.”

“We ought to have asked Monsieur Renâré that, my dear.”

“No indeed! I am sure that the old miser goes to the vilest wine-shop, in order to dine the cheaper. But I see yonder a very good-looking house—it is a wine-shop and restaurant,—the *Epée Couronnée*, ‘wedding and other parties.’—What do you say to that, mesdames?”

“Very good; let us go to the *Epée Couronnée*.”

They entered the country restaurant; the outer walls were adorned with hams, pies, turkeys, chickens, game, and bunches of asparagus; but as a rule the kitchen of a village restaurant never contains more than one fourth of what is painted on the front wall; and even so, the ovens are often cold.

When our Parisians entered the common room of the *Epée Couronnée*, the proprietor, who was also chief cook, was occupied in shaving, his little scullion was playing with a cup-and-ball, the mistress of the house was knitting, and the two girls who did the heavy work were washing and ironing.

“The deuce!” said Edouard in an undertone, “this doesn’t indicate a very well-heated oven! However, in war we must do as soldiers do!”

“Yes, my dear; besides, appetite is a very good cook.”

At sight of two fashionably-dressed ladies, escorted by a fine gentleman, and of a cabriolet in front of the door, everybody in the restaurant was up in arms. The proprietor threw razor and shaving-mug aside; he partly wiped his face, and came forward, half shaved, to meet the newcomers, to whom he made repeated bows. His wife hastily dropped her knitting and rolled it up, as she made a curtsy, and placed it on a table on which the girls were ironing; whereupon Goton, one of the servants, who then had in her hand a very hot iron, looked up to examine the fine ladies who were coming in, and placed the iron on her mistress’s hand, thinking that she was ironing an apron.

Her mistress uttered a piercing cry when she felt the burn; she jumped back and overturned the tub; the little scullion, in his fright, concealed his cup-and-ball in a saucepan, and the ladies recoiled, in order not to walk in soap-suds, with

which the floor was flooded.

The host confounded himself in apologies, trying at the same time to pacify his wife.

“A thousand pardons, mesdames and monsieur; pray walk in.—Hush, wife! it won’t amount to anything; I do much worse things to myself every day.—We have everything that you can possibly desire, mesdames; the kitchen is well stocked.—It was that idiot of a Goton, who never looks to see what she is doing. Put some potato on it, wife.—But step in, mesdames, and select a bedroom or a private dining-room, whichever you please.”

The ladies were in no hurry to enter, because they did not want to wet their feet. At last one of the maids brought a long board, which they used as a bridge to pass into another room; they made the passage, laughing heartily, and looked forward to much enjoyment at an inn where their arrival had already caused such a sensation.

“Well, monsieur le traiteur, what can you give us?” Murville asked the cook, who followed them, boasting of his talent in serving a dinner promptly.

“Why, monsieur, I can give you a rabbit stew which will please you.”

“Parbleu! Rabbit stew is never missing in these places! But we don’t care much for it; have you any cutlets?”

“Yes, monsieur, I can easily get some.”

“And a fowl?”

“I have one which should be excellent.”

“Fresh eggs?”

“Oh! as to eggs, I don’t have any but fresh ones.”

“Well, that is all that we want; with lettuce and some of your best wine we shall dine very well, shall we not, mesdames?”

“Yes, but don’t keep us waiting, for we are positively starving.”

“Never fear, mesdames, it will take but a moment.”

Master Bonneau returned to his staff.

“Look alive,” he said, tying his handkerchief around his waist, which he only did on great occasions; “look alive, wife and girls, we have swells to feed, and we have nothing except the regulation rabbit stew, which unfortunately they don’t want, and that infernal fowl which I roasted a week ago for a Jew who ate nothing but fresh pork, and which I haven’t been able to do anything with since; I hope that it is going to be eaten at last. Goton, put it on the spit again; that will be the fifth time, I believe; but never mind, I will make a gravy with the juice of

that beef à la mode, and it will be delicious.”

“Mon Dieu! what a horrible burn! This is the seventh potato that I have scraped on it.”

“Parbleu! you give me a happy idea: these grated potatoes are all cooked, put ’em aside, wife, and I will make a soufflé for our guests. You, Fanfan, run to the butcher and get some cutlets, and you, Marianne, go and buy some eggs, and come back and pick some lettuce. By the way, light me a candle, as quick as possible, and give me some wax, so that I can put seals on my bottles; that makes people think that the wine is better.”

Everyone set about executing Master Bonneau’s orders, while he lighted his fires and turned up his sleeves with an important air, in order to heat water for the eggs; Goton put the unlucky fowl on the spit, praying heaven that it might be the last time; Marianne brought eggs and went out into the garden to pluck lettuce; and Madame Bonneau grated potato after potato, which she placed upon her burn, and then carefully collected in a plate, as her husband had directed, because a clever cook makes use of everything.

But Fanfan returned from the butcher’s with sad news: “there were no cutlets, because the mayor had bought the last that morning; but if they could wait a while, the shop-boy, who had gone to sharpen his knives, would come back, and they would kill a sheep.”

“The devil! this is mighty unpleasant,” said Master Bonneau, as he put his eggs in the water; “well, I must go and consult with the company.”

The host entered the room where the ladies and the young man were beginning to get impatient for their dinner, while they laughed over the scene which their unexpected arrival had caused.

“Well, are we going to dine?” said Edouard when he caught sight of their host.

“Instantly, monsieur.”

“Your instants are very long, monsieur le traiteur.”

“I came to get your opinion on the cutlets.”

“What’s that?”

“There aren’t any just now at the butcher’s; but the man is coming back, and he is going to kill a sheep; so if you will take a turn in the garden until they are cooked——”

“Parbleu! we should have to wait a long while! A pleasant suggestion that! We didn’t come here to inspect your bed of lettuce.”

“Come, come, my dear, don’t get excited,” said Adeline, laughing at the placidity of their host, and the irritation of Edouard, “we will do without cutlets.”

“May I replace that dish with an excellent rabbit stew?”

“Give us whatever you please, but give us something at least.”

“You shall be served instantly.”

Master Bonneau was well pleased to give them rabbit stew; it was the dish in which he most excelled, for he had had twenty years’ practice in making good ones. He seized the saucepan containing the remnants of two rabbits, and placed it over the fire; then after covering it, he instructed Fanfan to watch it, and went to carry the fresh eggs to his guests.

“You see, mesdames, that I am prompt,” he said as he gracefully placed the eggs on the table. “By the way, I thought that a soufflé of potatoes and orange blossoms would not displease the company.”

“What, monsieur, do you make soufflés at the Epée Couronnée?”

“Yes, monsieur, and a good sort too, I flatter myself.”

“Then you are an expert?”

“Why, monsieur, when one has learned the profession at Paris, at the Boisseau Fleuri, one is equal to anything.”

“Oho! that makes a difference! If you are a graduate of the Boisseau Fleuri, we are surprised at nothing, and we await your soufflés with confidence.”

Bonneau retired, all puffed up with the compliments they had paid him. The ladies tried to crumble their bread into their eggs, but it was impossible; they were cooked so hard that they had to make up their minds to remove the shells and eat them from their hands. Adeline shouted with laughter, Madame Germeuil shook her head, and Edouard announced that to cap the climax the eggs smelled of straw.

“This does not give me a very pleasant anticipation of the soufflés,” said the mother, placing her egg on the table.

“Well, madame, let us still hope! Great men, you know, pay no heed to small matters, and the pupil of the Boisseau Fleuri may well not know how to cook eggs.”

Bonneau entered the room, carrying in his two hands an enormous dish of rabbit stew, which he placed in front of Edouard.

“Monsieur le traiteur, for a man equal to anything, you made rather a failure of our eggs; they are boiled hard and smell of straw.”

“As for the straw, monsieur, you must know that I don’t make the eggs

myself, that depends entirely on the hens; as for the way they were cooked, that is entirely the fault of the water; I leave the eggs in the water five minutes; if the watch loses time while the eggs are in the water, the best cook might be deceived.”

“True, you are right; luckily there are no eggs in a rabbit stew, and it isn’t cooked by the minute.”

“So you must tell me what you think of it; I will go now and make sure that your fowl is cooked to a turn.”

Bonneau left the room, carrying his hard boiled eggs, which no one had touched, and which he proceeded to cut up and place on the salad, so that they would be paid for twice over; that was a clear gain; and in order that there might not be any further complaint of their smelling of the straw, the host took from his sideboard a certain oil, the taste of which was bound to predominate.

“Well,” said Edouard, as he prepared to serve the ladies, “as we absolutely must eat rabbit stew, let us see if this one does our host credit. But what the deuce is there in it? It is a string. Can it be that the pupil of the Boisseau Fleuri puts whole rabbits into his stew? This is attached to something, and I don’t see the end of it. Parbleu! we shall get the pieces that are tied, later. But what is this I see? Look, mesdames—is it a thigh, or a head? These rabbits are most peculiarly constructed.”

“Oh! bless my soul!” said Adeline, examining what Edouard had on his fork, “it’s a cup-and-ball!”

The young woman dropped her fork, laughing like mad; Edouard did the same, and even Madame Germeuil could not keep a straight face, at sight of the toy which her son-in-law had found in the stew.

The reader will remember that at the time of the arrival of the fashionable guests from Paris, everything was in confusion in the restaurant; the scullion was playing with a cup-and-ball; when his mistress burned herself and upset the tub of water, Fanfan was alarmed, and fearing to be scolded by his master and mistress, had thrust his cup-and-ball into the first saucepan that he saw. It happened to be the one containing the rabbit stew, into which the scullion had put his toy. When Master Bonneau took the saucepan later, he covered it without looking in; then the little fellow had watched and stirred the stew, without a suspicion of what was in it; he was very far from thinking that he was cooking his own cup-and-ball.

“Aha!” said the host, “it seems that our friends are satisfied; I was sure that that rabbit stew would restore their good humor. So much the better! the result

will be that the fowl will pass the more readily. We must make haste and serve it with the salad. Goton, give me the bottle of oil. That's it. Have you put the eggs on yet? on the top of the salad? Good! that's very good. This meal will bring us in enough to last a week."

Our man returned to the dining-room, where they had made up their minds to laugh instead of dining. He placed the fowl on the table and stood silent, with the air of a man who expects a compliment.

"On my word, monsieur le traiteur," said Edouard, trying to keep a sober face, "you treat us very strangely! What kind of a thing is a fricassée of cup-and-ball?"

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"That we never had such a thing before, Monsieur Bonneau, and that we don't like it."

"But what does it mean?"

"Look, monsieur, is this rabbit?"

Master Bonneau was thunderstruck when he saw the cup-and-ball covered with gravy.

"Here," said Adeline, "take away your rabbit stew; what we found in it has taken away all desire to taste it."

"Madame, I am really distressed at what I see! But you must realize that it is not my fault. If rabbits eat cups-and-balls——"

"Ah! this is too much; and if your fowl is no better than the rest, we shall have to go elsewhere to dine."

The host left the room, without waiting to hear any more; he rushed back to the kitchen, crimson with rage, and began to pull Fanfan's ears, to teach him to put cups-and-balls in his stews.

"What on earth is the matter, my dear?" Madame Bonneau asked her husband, as she brought him the plate containing the remedy for burns.

"What's the matter? What's the matter? This little scamp is forever doing foolish things! He stuffs all sorts of trash into my stews; the other day I found two corks in a chowder; luckily it was for drunkards who took them for mushrooms; but to-day we have some people who are very particular, and he is responsible for their not tasting my rabbit stew; and that too, just at the moment when I carried them that unlucky fowl! The little scamp is as dirty as if he were employed in some low cook-shop! Wife, scrape your burn carefully, you still have some potato on it. Well! I must repair my reputation with the soufflé."

While Bonneau labored over the soufflé, Edouard was trying to carve the fowl, and Madame Germeuil seasoned the salad. But in vain did the young man turn and return the old turkey; it was all dried up, because it had been on the fire so much, and the knife was powerless to pierce it.

“I must give it up,” said Edouard, pushing the dish away.

“It is impossible to eat this oil,” said Madame Germeuil, who had just tasted the salad.

“Evidently we shan’t dine to-day,” said Adeline.

“Faith, mesdames,” said Edouard, rising from the table, “I don’t think it worth while to wait for the potato soufflé, in which we should undoubtedly find pieces of fish. Put on your shawls and bonnets while I go and say a word to the restaurant keeper, who really seems to have intended to make sport of us.”

“But pray don’t lose your temper, my dear! Remember that the wisest way is to laugh at everything that has happened; is it not, mamma?”

“Yes, my daughter; but still we ought not to pay for such a dinner as this.”

Edouard left the room and went toward the kitchen. As he was about to enter the common room, the voice of one of the servants reached his ear; he heard the word soufflé, and stopped by the glass door, curious to learn the subject of their discussion; there he overheard the following conversation:

“I tell you, Marianne, I wouldn’t eat that stuff that our master’s making now, not even if he would pay me for doing it.”

“Then you’re very hard to suit! That’s a delicacy that he’s making.”

“A pretty kind of delicacy! and it will taste nice!”

“Oh! you mustn’t be so particular as that! If you should see the bread now, why that’s different! They often have the dough in other places than in their hands! But it cooks all the same! And the wine! Bless my soul! An uncle of mine is a wine dresser, and he has boils on his rump, but that don’t prevent him from getting into the vats as naked as God made him, and his wine is good, too.”

“You can say whatever you please, Goton, I don’t see wine made nor bread either; but I did see the potatoes grated on the mistress’s hands, and she don’t wash them every day; and I say that a cake made with them wouldn’t take my fancy at all.”

Edouard knew enough; he entered the room abruptly; the two servants were struck dumb, and allowed him to go on to the kitchen, where he found Master Bonneau thickening his soufflé with molasses.

Our young man gave the portable oven a kick and sent the entremets into the

garden for the pigeons to eat. The proprietor stared at him with an air of dismay.

“What is the matter with monsieur? Why is he so angry?”

“Ah! you miserable pothouse keeper! You make soufflé of potatoes that have been put on your wife’s burned hands!”

“What do you mean, monsieur?”

“You understand me perfectly; you deserve to have me give you a thrashing.”

“Monsieur, I haven’t an idea——”

“We are going now, but I shall return to this neighborhood; and I shall remember Master Bonneau, pupil of the Boisseau Fleuri, who supplies wedding and other parties at the Epée Couronnée.”

With that, Edouard left his host and rejoined the ladies, who were prepared to leave the dining-room.

“Let us go, mesdames,” said Edouard, “let us leave this house at once! and consider yourselves fortunate that you did not eat the soufflé.”

“Why, what was the matter with it?”

“I will tell you about it later; the most important thing now is to leave the house of this infernal poisoner.”

Edouard took Adeline’s hand, Madame Germeuil followed them, and they were about to leave the inn, when the proprietor ran after them and stopped them.

“One moment, mesdames and monsieur,” said Master Bonneau, pushing his cotton cap to the back of his head, “one moment, if you please; it seems to me that before leaving a restaurant you ought to pay for your dinner.”

“Our dinner! Parbleu! monsieur le traiteur, you will be decidedly clever if you prove to us that we have dined!”

“I served all that you ordered, monsieur; if you didn’t eat it, that’s none of my business!”

“You are laughing at us, Monsieur Bonneau, when you say that you served all that we ordered; we ordered soft boiled eggs, you gave them to us hard; we ordered cutlets, you served us a rabbit stew with a cup-and-ball in it; for wine you gave us vinegar, lamp oil to dress the salad, a fowl which I would defy an Englishman to carve, and a soufflé made of—Ah! take my advice, monsieur le traiteur, and don’t be ugly, or I will have you punished for a dangerous man, and have your restaurant closed.”

“My restaurant!” said Bonneau, bursting with rage; “indeed! we will see about that! Pay me at once the amount of this bill, forty francs and fifteen

centimes, or I will take you before the mayor.”

Edouard’s only reply was to take the bill and throw it into the wine-dealer’s face. Thereupon he made a terrible uproar and the whole village flocked to the spot.

“These folks from Paris refuse to pay for their dinner,” said the rabble, always ready to take sides against people from the city; “they come in a cabriolet, and they haven’t got a sou in their pockets!”

Our young bride and groom laughed at what they heard and made ready to go before the mayor. Mamma Germeuil followed them into the cabriolet; all the peasants surrounded Master Bonneau, who marched at their head, with Fanfan beside him, carrying the famous fowl on a platter, because Edouard had insisted that it should be submitted to the examination of experts. The procession passed through the village thus, and on its way to the mayor’s office, was momentarily increased by the curious folk of the village, to whom that event was a piece of good fortune.

At last they reached the mayor’s house and requested to speak with him.

“He hasn’t time to listen to you now,” said the servant; “he is just going to sit down to dinner.”

“But he must judge our dispute,” said Bonneau.

“And he must judge this fowl,” said Edouard with a laugh.

“Oho! there’s a fowl in it, is there?” said the servant; “oh, well! that makes a difference; I will go and tell monsieur that it is about a fowl, and that he must attend to it.”

The servant went to her master, and explained the matter so fully that the mayor, understanding nothing about it, decided at last to leave his guests for a moment, and to go to his audience room.

In those days, the mayor of the village was not a genius; he had just had a summer-house built at the foot of his garden; and as he was delighted with that little building, the idea of which he himself had conceived, and which he seemed to fear that people would think that he had seen somewhere else, he had caused to be written over the door: “This Summer-House was Built Here.”

Profound silence reigned in the assemblage when the mayor appeared.

“Where is the fowl which is the subject of dispute?” he asked gravely.

“Monsieur le maire, it isn’t a fowl simply, it is a dinner that they refuse to pay me for,” said Master Bonneau, stepping forward.

“A dinner! That’s a matter of some consequence! Did they eat it?”

“No, monsieur,” said Edouard, “and you see in this fowl a specimen of it.”

“Examine the bill, monsieur le maire, and you will see that it is perfectly fair.”

“Let us see the bill—fresh eggs——”

“They were hard.”

“Never mind, he who breaks the glasses pays for them; consequently he who breaks the eggs ought to pay for them.”

“Rabbit stew——”

“We found a cup-and-ball in it.”

“That doesn’t concern the rabbits. Besides, cup-and-ball isn’t capable of turning the sauce sour.—Let us go on: a capon——”

“Here it is, monsieur le maire; just feel it and smell it.”

The mayor motioned to Fanfan to approach; but the little scullion, abashed at the sight of so many people, held the plate forward with a trembling hand, and the fowl rolled on the floor.

The so-called capon made a sound like that of a child’s drum when it falls to the ground.

“Oho! it seems a little dry,” said the mayor, examining it.

“That’s because it was brought here in the sun,” said Bonneau; “that burned it just a bit.”

“Pardieu! I have my friend the notary here, who is a connoisseur in capons, so his wife tells me. I will get him to give me his opinion.”

The mayor opened the door, and called the notary, who was dining with him, to come and pass judgment on the capon. Edouard and his wife were beginning to lose patience; they divined from what the judge had already said to them that they would have to pay the rascally inn-keeper; and that worthy also anticipated a victory; he stared at them insolently, then turned with a smile toward the peasants, who were eagerly awaiting the moment when they could make sport of the fine gentleman and fine ladies from Paris, which is a great source of enjoyment to peasants.

But the notary appeared; he looked at Edouard and his wife, and recognized them as the purchasers of Monsieur Renâre’s house; and instead of looking at the fowl which Bonneau thrust under his nose, he saluted Murville and his companion most humbly.

“What! do you know monsieur and madame?” asked the mayor in amazement.

“I have that honor; monsieur has bought my neighbor Renâre’s estate, and pays cash for it. The deeds are being made in my office.”

The notary’s words changed the whole aspect of the affair. The mayor became extremely polite to Edouard and his wife; he begged them to come into his salon a moment and rest; and then, turning with a stern expression toward Master Bonneau, who did not know which way to turn, he cried angrily:

“You are a scoundrel! You are a knave! You dare to demand payment for a dinner which was not eaten! You serve dried-up fowls, rotten eggs, and ask forty francs for them.”

“But, monsieur le maire——”

“Hold your tongue, or I will make you pay a fine; I know that you mix drugs with your wine, and that you steal all the cats to make rabbit stew; but take care, Master Bonneau,—you will be held responsible for the first plump cat that disappears.”

The inn-keeper retired, covered with confusion, and storming under his breath at the arrival of the notary, who had made the mayor turn about like a weathercock. He drove Fanfan before him, returned to the inn with the wretched fowl in his hand, and in order that everyone might share his ill-humor, he announced that they would have the capon for supper.

The mayor, learning that Edouard and his wife had not dined, absolutely insisted that they should dine with him; he, himself, offered to fetch Madame Germeuil, who had remained in the cabriolet; but the young people declined, declaring that they were expected in Paris early and that they could not delay their departure any longer.

So they separated, the mayor protesting that he should have great pleasure in becoming better acquainted with his constituents, and our young people thanking him for the zeal he had shown in their behalf after the notary’s arrival.

The peasants were still in front of the mayor’s house when Edouard and Adeline came out; they stood aside to let them pass; some even ran to the carriage to tell Madame Germeuil; and one and all bowed most humbly when they drove away. And yet they were the very same persons upon whom the clowns had heaped insolent epithets, and at whom they had been poking fun a moment before; but they did not know then that the mayor would treat them courteously. Men are the same everywhere.

VII

IN WHICH WE SEE THE MAN WITH MOUSTACHES ONCE MORE

They reached Paris famished, as you may imagine. They ordered dinner at once. The servants made all possible haste, jostled one another in order to move faster, and by jostling and colliding with one another, took one thing instead of something else, overturned the sauces, let one dish burn, and served another cold; in a word, they did everything wrong, which often happens when people try to make too much haste.

The servants had ceased to expect their masters to dinner; old Raymond could not understand why they returned hungry; it gave him a very bad impression of the place where they had been, and the cook was very sorry that she had not divined their condition. But our travellers found everything delicious; Master Bonneau's cooking was still foremost in their thoughts.

On the day following this memorable excursion, Adeline was too tired to accompany Edouard to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, and as they had given their word to Monsieur Renâré, the young wife was obliged to consent to let her husband go alone.

Murville promised to be absent only a short time; he intended to return to dinner.

"Take care," said Madame Germeuil, "and don't have any unpleasant experiences."

"I will wager, mamma, that you are still thinking of that face with the moustaches that we saw at the end of the garden."

"Yes, I don't deny it; indeed I will confess, my children, that I dreamed of it all night."

"That is not surprising; when something has excited us intensely during the day, our imagination sees the same thing in a dream. But that does not mean that we should conceive dismal presentiments from the fact."

"Really, mamma, you will make me unhappy," said Adeline; "I begin to wish already that Edouard were home again."

"And yet one must be very childish to be afraid without any reason! Come,

off with you, my dear, and return quickly; above all things, do not dine at the Epée Couronnée!”

Edouard kissed Madame Germeuil’s hand; he embraced his wife, as people embrace on the day after their wedding, when they have found the first night all that they hoped, or when they think that they have found it so, which is the same thing, and which happens to many people who know nothing about it, and who consider themselves very shrewd.

He arrived in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, and alighted from the carriage in front of the house which was soon to belong to him.

“Is Monsieur Renâré in?” he asked the concierge.

“He is already at the notary’s, monsieur.”

“The deuce! what promptitude! I must not keep him waiting.”

Murville left the cabriolet in the courtyard, and walked to the notary’s. The deeds were ready, and Monsieur Renâré was impatiently awaiting the arrival of the purchaser; for, having learned the night before of the episode at the Epée Couronnée, he had begun to feel some anxiety concerning the bargain; but Edouard’s presence, and especially the sight of a wallet stuffed with good bank notes, restored all his tranquillity.

The deeds were signed, the price paid, and Monsieur Renâré smilingly presented the keys of the house to Edouard.

“You are the owner now, monsieur; from this moment you can do as you please with your house and everything that it contains, as I have sold it to you furnished.”

“I thank you, monsieur, but you may take all the time that you please to make your preparations for departure. I do not wish to embarrass you in any way.”

“Oh! my preparations will very soon be made, monsieur. I simply have a little bundle to pack, and I can carry it under my arm.”

“Then you already have another house in view?”

“Why,” said the notary, “Monsieur Renâré has six houses in Paris, and three more in the suburbs; so he is not likely to be at a loss.”

“Six houses in Paris,” thought Edouard, “and he wears a patched coat and a broken hat! And he is a bachelor, too! and he has no heirs! Does the man think that he is never going to die?”

Our young man bowed to the old miser and left the notary’s office. He returned to his newly-acquired property. The concierge was waiting in the courtyard, and seemed to have some question to ask him. Edouard guessed the

cause of his embarrassment.

“This house is now mine,” he said to the peasant; “here is the deed stating that I am the owner of it. However, Monsieur Renâré will soon inform you of it himself.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt it, monsieur.”

“Are you attached to Monsieur Renâré?”

“No, monsieur, I ain’t attached to anything but the house, and if monsieur doesn’t keep me, I shall be out of work.”

“Very well, I will keep you! I do not mean to discharge anybody; from this moment you are in my employ.”

“Very good, monsieur, I will try to satisfy you.”

Edouard was not greatly pleased with the peasant. He seemed brusque and rough, and had lived so long with Renâré that he had acquired an air of distrust, that made itself manifest in all his acts. But Edouard did not desire, on returning to occupy the home of his parents, to create a bad impression on the people in the village.

As it was still early, and Edouard had finished his business at the notary’s sooner than he expected, he could not resist the temptation to inspect his property; he ordered the concierge to give him the key of the gate at the end of the garden, and left him beside his cabriolet.

When we know that an estate belongs to us, we are likely to scrutinize every part of it closely. Edouard noticed that Monsieur Renâré had planted cabbages and lettuces in all the beds intended for flowers; he had cut down the beautiful acacias, which, to be sure, produced nothing but shade, and had replaced them by fruit trees. Instead of box as a border for the paths, he had planted parsley and nasturtiums; and as he entered a clump of shrubbery, which formerly was bright with lilacs and roses, Edouard smelled nothing but the odor of chevril and onion.

“We shall have to make many changes,” said Edouard to himself, laughing at the former owner’s parsimony; “but in a week everything will be as it was, with the exception of the acacias, on which I used to have a swing; but I have passed the age when I could enjoy it so much.”

He was then at the end of the garden; he approached the gate, saying to himself:

“It seems that that appalling face which frightened the ladies so does not show itself every day;” and he was on the point of putting the key into the lock, when the face with moustaches appeared above the broken plank, exactly on a level with the eyes.

Edouard stopped; he felt that his heart was beating violently; but he soon recovered himself.

“What do you want?” he asked the stranger; “and why are you continually behind this gate, with your eyes fixed upon the garden?”

“I want nothing,” the stranger replied, in a loud voice and with an abrupt manner. “I am looking at this garden because I choose to, and I look at it through this gate, because they would not permit me to walk about inside.”

“If that is what you wish, you may gratify yourself now. Come in, monsieur; there is nothing now to prevent you.”

As he spoke, Edouard, who was curious to see the whole of the stranger’s face, opened the gate leading into the fields.

The stranger seemed surprised at Edouard’s invitation; however, as soon as the gate was opened, he did not wait to be asked a second time, but entered the garden. Murville was then able to contemplate him at his ease. He saw a man of tall stature, dressed in an old blue frock-coat, buttoned to the chin, who wore black gaiters and a dilapidated three-cornered hat, which he carried in his hand.

As he examined this singular individual, whose pale face, long beard and neglected dress seemed to indicate misfortune and want, Edouard remembered his mother-in-law’s suspicions, and a feeling of distrust entered his mind.

The stranger walked about the garden, pausing from time to time in front of a clump of shrubs or an old tree, and apparently forgetting that there was some one with him.

“Parbleu!” said Edouard to himself, “I propose to have something to show for my good-nature; I must find out who this man is, and why he planted himself behind the little gate. I must take the first step, and as he says nothing, I must begin the conversation; he will have to answer me.”

The stranger had seated himself upon a mound of turf, from which the front of the house could be seen. Edouard approached and sat down beside him.

“Oh! I beg your pardon, monsieur,” said the stranger, as if suddenly arousing himself from his abstraction, “I have not thought yet to thank you for your kindness. But I was in such a hurry to see this place again!”

“Oh! there is no harm done.”

“Are you the son of the owner of this house?”

“No.”

“So much the better for you.”

“Why so?”

“Because he is an old money-lender, an impertinent fellow; and so is his concierge, to whom I was strongly tempted to administer a thrashing, in order to teach him how to behave!”

“What have they done to you?”

“I came to this village for the express purpose of seeing this house. I arrived here yesterday, utterly tired out; I entered the courtyard, and sat down on a stone bench to rest. The concierge came to me, and asked me what I was there for. I told him that I wanted to see the garden. He asked me if I intended to buy the house. That question was an impertinence in itself, for I don’t look like a person with money to invest.”

“That is true,” thought Edouard.

“When he learned that I had come here for another reason, he ordered me to leave; I asked him again to let me walk about this garden for a moment; he called his master; an old Jew appeared, and the two together tried to turn me out! Ten thousand thunders! Turn me out! me—a—But, no! I forgot that I am one no longer! All the same, if it hadn’t been that my memories restrained me, I would have thrashed master and servant. I didn’t do it, however, and as I was able only to look at the place from a distance, I took my stand behind that gate where you saw me yesterday.”

“I am very glad that I have been able to atone for the discourtesy of the concierge, and that I found you again to-day at the same place.”

“Faith! it’s a mere chance! If I were not waiting for a comrade, whom I agreed to meet in this village, I certainly should not have stayed here.”

“Ah! you are waiting for a comrade?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

Edouard was silent for a moment; he seemed to be reflecting upon what the stranger had said; the latter resumed the conversation.

“Excuse me, monsieur, if I question you in my turn; but how does it happen that the old villain of a proprietor has intrusted the keys of his garden to you?”

“This house no longer belongs to Monsieur Renâré; he has sold it to me this very day.”

“Sold it! Pardieu! I am delighted to hear that. I was distressed to see this house in the clutches of that Arab!”

“You seem to be very fond of this house?”

“I well may be, as I passed a large part of my youth here.”

“You?”

“I.”

Edouard looked more closely at the stranger; vague suspicions, a secret presentiment made his heart leap. He observed that the stranger was young and that it seemed to be fatigue simply that had wasted his sun-burned features; he desired, yet dreaded to learn more.

“Yes, monsieur,” continued the stranger after a moment’s silence, “I have lived in this house. Indeed I was partly brought up here. At that time I was with my parents, and the future looked very bright to me. I had a kind father, I had a brother! I left them all! And I well deserve what is happening to me now!”

“Are your parents dead?” asked Edouard in a broken voice, gazing at the man whom he already feared that he recognized.

“Yes, monsieur, they are dead,—perhaps of the sorrow that I caused them! My mother did not love me very much; but my father was devoted to me! And I shall never see him again! Oh! this accursed temper of mine, that has made me do so many foolish things!”

“And your brother?”

“My brother is still alive, so I learned at Paris; he has just married, I was told. The person who told me was not then able to give me his address, but is to give it to me to-morrow; then I shall go to see him. Poor Edouard, he will be greatly surprised to see me! I will bet that he thinks that I am dead!”

Edouard did not reply; he lowered his eyes, uncertain as to what course he ought to adopt, and not daring to admit to himself that it was his brother whom he had found.

Jacques,—for it was he in very truth,—Jacques had relapsed into meditation; with one hand he fondled his long moustaches, and with the other rubbed his forehead as if he wished to clear up his ideas. Edouard stood motionless and silent; his eyes turned sometimes upon the friend of his childhood, but the shabby coat, the old gaiters, and above all, the long beard, checked the impulse of his heart which bade him throw himself into his brother’s arms without stopping to consider his dress, or without wondering what his position might be.

Suddenly an idea seemed to strike Jacques’s mind, and he turned to Edouard, and said abruptly:

“It isn’t impossible that you may know my brother; you seem to belong to fashionable society, and you usually live in Paris, do you not?”

“I do.”

“Perhaps you may have heard of Edouard Murville?”

“Yes—I—I know him.”

“You know my brother?”

“I am Edouard Murville.”

Edouard said these words in such a low tone that no one but Jacques could have heard them; but he was listening closely, and before his brother had finished his sentence, he had thrown himself on his neck, and pressed him in his arms.

Edouard submitted to the embrace with very good grace; but the infernal moustaches still disturbed him; he did not feel at his ease, and he did not know whether he ought to rejoice or to be sorry that he had found his brother.

“I say, why didn’t you tell me your name sooner?” said Jacques, after embracing Edouard again; “didn’t you guess who I was?”

“Yes, but I wanted to be certain.”

“And you—you seem to be rich and happy?”

“I—yes.”

“You are married; and where is your wife? I shall be delighted to know her.”

“My wife——”

Edouard paused; the thought of Adeline, of Madame Germeuil, the suspicions which the latter had conceived the night before, when she saw the face with moustaches; the brusque manners, and the more than careless garb of Jacques, which was in such striking contrast to his own, all this tormented the spirit of the young bridegroom, who, at the best weak and irresolute, tried in vain to harmonize his self-esteem and the sentiments which the sight of his brother awoke in him.

“What the devil are you thinking about?” asked Jacques, taking Edouard’s arm.

“Oh! I was reflecting; it is late, and I must go back to Paris. Important business demands my presence there.”

Jacques made no reply, but his brow darkened, and he walked a few steps away from his brother.

“What are you doing now, Jacques?”

“Nothing,” said Jacques, as he scrutinized Edouard with more attention.

“Nothing? Then what are your means of existence?”

“Up to this time I have never asked anyone for anything.”

“However, you do not seem to be very well off.”

“I am not, that is a fact!”

“What an idea, to wear such moustaches! You don’t expect to see my wife, with those on your face, I fancy?”

“My moustaches will stay where they are; if your wife is a prude and the sight of me frightens her, never fear! she won’t see me very often!”

“You misunderstand me, that isn’t what I meant. But I must leave you; I am expected in Paris; I do not ask you to come with me now—indeed you are expecting to meet someone in this village, I believe.”

“Yes, I am expecting a comrade, a *friend*.”

Jacques emphasized the last word and cast a meaning glance at his brother.

“Well, I must leave you,” said Edouard, after a moment’s hesitation; “we shall meet again soon, I hope. Meanwhile, here, take this.”

As he spoke, Edouard drew from his pocket his purse, which contained about ten louis, and offered it with a trembling hand to his brother; but Jacques proudly pushed Edouard’s hand away, pulled his hat over his eyes, put his hand quickly to the collar of his coat, and seemed to contemplate baring his breast; but he checked himself and said to Edouard in a cold tone:

“Keep your money; I didn’t come here to ask alms of you, and I do not propose to become an object of your compassion; I thought that I had found a brother, but I made a mistake. I do not seem to you worthy to be received into your house; my dress and my face frighten you; that is enough; adieu, you will see me no more.”

Jacques cast an angry glance at his brother, and strode from the garden through the little barred gate, that had remained open.

Edouard, like all irresolute people, stood for a moment without moving, with his eyes fixed upon the gate through which his brother had left the garden. At last his natural feelings carried the day, he ran to the gate, went into the fields, and shouted at the top of his voice:

“Jacques, Brother Jacques!”

But it was too late; Jacques had disappeared, he was already far away, and his brother’s shouts did not reach his ears.

Edouard returned sadly to the garden; he paused in the gateway, and looked out into the fields once more, and as he could see no one, decided at last to close the gate.

“Oh! he will come again,” he said to himself; “he is a hot-headed fellow, who loses his temper in an instant. However, I didn’t mean to insult him; I offered

him money, because he seemed in great need of it, and I don't see why he took offence at that. I gave him to understand that his dress, his aspect, would be out of place in a salon. Was I so very wrong? Can I conscientiously present to my wife and my mother-in-law a man who looks like an escaped convict, at the best? It would be enough to make a man die of shame—and that too on the very morrow of my marriage! With the money I offered him he might have dressed decently; but no! he will not shave his moustaches! Faith, he may do as he pleases; I did what it was my duty to do.”

Edouard strove to convince himself that he had not done wrong; he did not admit that his cold and constrained manner might well have humiliated his brother; but a secret voice arose in the depths of his heart and reproached him for his unkindness. Dissatisfied with himself and disturbed concerning the outcome of that adventure, Edouard returned to his cabriolet and drove away from the village, without giving the concierge any orders.

When he entered Paris, he was still uncertain as to what he should do. At last he decided not to mention the encounter to his wife and his mother-in-law, thinking that it would be time enough to introduce them to his brother when he should call. When he arrived, his Adeline ran to meet him, scolded him fondly because he had been away so long, and asked him about his journey.

“It is all finished,” said Edouard; “the deeds are passed and the pretty house is ours now.”

“And you had no unpleasant meetings?” asked Adeline with a smile.

“I—no—as you see.”

“And you did not see that terrible face with the moustaches again?” asked Madame Germeuil.

“No, I did not see him again.”

“I am glad of it, for that man really looked like the leader of a band of robbers, and for my part I have no sort of desire to see him again, I assure you.”

Edouard blushed; his brother had the appearance of a highwayman! That thought troubled him; he believed that they would guess his secret, and he dared not raise his eyes. But his wife's caresses dispelled his disquietude to some extent.

“What on earth is the matter, my dear?” asked Adeline; “you seem very pensive and preoccupied to-night.”

“Nothing is the matter, my dear love; the bore of being away from you so long has been my only unhappiness.”

“Dear Edouard! May you always think the same, for then you will never

leave me.—By the way, when do we start for our country house?”

“Oh! in a week.”

“A week! That is a very long while!”

“We must give the former owner time to pack up.”

“Ah, yes! that is true, my dear.”

Edouard did not tell the truth; another reason caused him to delay his return to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. That reason he dared not communicate to Adeline; and after forty-eight hours of married life, after their mutual promises of absolute and reciprocal confidence, behold he already had a secret from his wife!

VIII

WE MUST NOT JUDGE BY APPEARANCES

Let us leave Edouard and his wife for awhile, and return to Brother Jacques, with whom we must become better acquainted.

After his abrupt departure from the garden, Jacques had struck across the fields, and had walked for a long while without paying any heed to the road he was following; his only object was to get away from his brother, whose manners and language had wounded him to the heart. From time to time Jacques muttered a few words; he raised his eyes, stamped violently on the ground and seemed intensely excited. Having arrived in a lovely valley, shaded by ancient walnut trees, Jacques felt the need of rest; he looked about him as if to make sure that no one was following him; everything was calm and peaceful. The peasants working in the fields were the only living things that enlivened the landscape. Jacques lay down at the foot of a tree, and reviewed in his memory the conversation which he had just had with Edouard.

“Because I look as if I were unfortunate, he treats me with contempt! Because I wear moustaches, he dares not introduce me to his wife! He offers me money, and does not ask me to live with him! Is that the way a man should treat his brother? Why that contemptuous air? Have I dishonored my father’s name? If my manners are rough, my speech is frank and my conscience clear. I may be poor and unfortunate, but never, no, never, will I commit an action for which I would need to blush. I have done foolish things,—youthful escapades, it is true; but I have no shameful offences to reproach myself with, and this that I have here, on my breast, should guarantee me against all reproach, by commanding me never to deserve it.”

Thereupon Jacques opened his coat and gazed proudly at the cross of the Legion of Honor, pinned to an old military jacket which he wore underneath. That reward of his valor was his sole consolation; and yet Jacques had concealed the decoration, because he had been for several days past forced to seek hospitality from peasants, who were not always hospitable, and Jacques did not wish to show his cross at the risk of humiliation. He was right; a man who wears a symbol of merit should not be an object of compassion to other people.

Jacques had his eyes fixed upon his decoration; he was thinking of the day

when his colonel had pinned it on his breast; he remembered the battles in which he had taken part, his mind returned to the battlefield, and he saw himself surrounded by his comrades, and marching eagerly against the enemy; the memory of those glorious days revived his depressed spirit, and he forgot his sorrows and his brother's coldness.

At that moment, a young man, dressed very much like Jacques, but whose bright and animated face denoted neither depression nor poverty, came down a hill leading into the valley, whistling a military march, and marking time with a switch on the gooseberry bushes and lilacs which lined the road.

On arriving in the valley, the traveller stopped and looked about in all directions.

“What the deuce! not an inn! not a poor little wine-shop even! I wonder if I have gone astray? I don't see any sign of a village, and I'm as thirsty as one possessed. But no matter! Forward!”

And he began to sing:

“I saw Jeanneton
And her pretty little foot
I even saw her——”

“Ah! there's someone at last. I say, my friend!”

The traveller's words were addressed to Jacques, who raised his eyes and recognized his faithful comrade; he ran toward him, exclaiming:

“Ah! it is you, is it, my dear Sans-Souci?”

“Why, it's comrade Jacques! Pardieu! I couldn't have better luck; wait till I lie down beside you in the shade of your walnut; I would rather be in the shade of a cask of burgundy; but however, one must accommodate oneself to everything.”

“Still the same, Sans-Souci! still cheerful, and fond of good living!”

“Oh! as for that, I shan't change; cheerfulness is the wealth of poor devils like us. You know that I used to sing when we were going into battle! They—let me see—what do they call that?”

“Disbanded.”

“Yes, that's it,—they disbanded us; and instead of being soldiers, here we are civilians again! Well, we must make the best of it; besides, we have always behaved well, and if there is any need to defend the country again some day, why then, forward march!”

“Yes, but how are we to live meanwhile?”

“Like other people, by working.”

“My poor Sans-Souci! there are some people that live on the fat of the land without ever turning their hand; and others, with the best will in the world to work, can’t find any way to earn their living.”

“Bah! you always look at the dark side. Didn’t your journey turn out well? You came into this region for some purpose.”

“Oh! I found more than I expected.”

“And you are not satisfied?”

“I have no reason to be. I just saw my brother, and he received me like a beggar.”

“Your brother is a wild Indian, whom I would beat with the flat of my sword if I still had one.”

“My dress, my face, and my long moustaches—he didn’t like any of them.”

“That’s a great pity! Didn’t he see that token of your valor?”

“No, it was out of sight, and I am very glad of it; my brother isn’t capable of appreciating what I have here, and I propose to make him blush for his treatment of me some day.”

“So your brother is a rich man?”

“Yes, yes.”

“A swell?”

“Yes.”

“So you have a family, have you?”

“To be sure.”

“Ah! that’s something I haven’t got. I never knew father or mother. I am a natural child; and it doesn’t prevent me from going my way with my head up, because my ancestors’ brats don’t look at me; and besides that, in the days of our first parents, there wasn’t any notaries, and that doesn’t prevent the descendants of Cain from being very well thought of in the world. In fact our sergeant, who could talk very well when he wasn’t tight, told me that love children made their way better than other children; and on that subject quoted a long list of names that I won’t undertake to repeat, because I’ve forgotten them.—But let’s return to your business. You never mentioned your family or your adventures to me; we knew each other in the regiment, and we made several campaigns together; we both had the jaundice in Spain, and frozen feet in Russia; and I say that such things are very good at cementing friendship; you won the cross and I didn’t—

that's the only difference between us; but you well earned it; you saved the colonel's life. But, the excellent man! that didn't prevent his being killed the next day; it was unlucky that you couldn't always be on hand.—Well, after a great many things had happened, they disbanded us! That's a pity, for perhaps we might have become marshals of France. In order to comfort each other, we stayed together, except that you came alone to this village, while I went to a place nearby to look after a little brunette, whom I courted long ago and who swore a bullet-proof fidelity to me!”

“Well, did you find your brunette?”

“Pardieu, yes! Oh! I tell you that there's some analogy between our destinies: while your brother was receiving you so cordially, my sweetheart came to me with three children she had had during my absence, and another half way along. You can imagine that there was nothing to say to that. My first impulse was to give her a good thrashing, but I reflected that the poor child might well have thought me dead and that calmed me down. I kissed my faithless one, and while her children were splashing in the mud with the ducks, and her husband cutting wood, we made peace; in fact, we did better than that, for I mean to have something to do with the fourth, which she began while waiting for me; so we parted good friends and I came off!”

“Poor Sans-Souci! Women are no better than men, but men are simply less skilful at concealing their falseness! I have learned to know the world, I tell you, and I ought to have guessed what sort of welcome my brother would have given me. But one always hopes, and that is where one makes a mistake.”

“Come, tell me your adventures; we are in the open air, no one can hear us, and no one will disturb us; and while I listen to you, I will rest and smoke a cigar.”

“Well! all right; I will tell you what has happened to me since I was fifteen years old, for that was the time that I began my cruising.”

Jacques unbuttoned his coat, leaned back against the tree and made ready to relate his adventures to his comrade; while he, having taken a flint and steel from his pocket and lighted a cigar, gravely placed it in his mouth, in order to listen to his companion's narrative with twofold enjoyment.

IX

BROTHER JACQUES'S ADVENTURES

I left my father's house at fifteen. My mother did not seem to care much for me, and she never mentioned my name except with repugnance. But I remember a stout old fellow with a pleasant face, who used to come to our house sometimes and who always called me Jacques with all the strength of his lungs. I believe indeed, that that old fellow was my godfather and that his name too was Jacques. This much is certain, that he seemed to be very fond of me and that whenever he came to see me he gave me toys or bonbons. But in spite of my godfather's kindness, my father's caresses and my love for my brother, I was horribly bored at home. I could not keep still a minute. I had no taste for study, and as I thought of nothing but travelling round the world and fighting, I did not see the necessity of learning Latin and mathematics. Ah! my dear Sans-Souci, I have paid already for those errors of my youth, and I have learned at my own expense that education is always of great service, no matter in what situation we may find ourselves. If I had had some education I should not have remained a simple private; and even if my good conduct had raised me to the rank of captain, it is always disagreeable when one goes into the society of one's superiors never to be able to open one's mouth without the fear of making some horrible slip, and of setting other people laughing at you. But let us return to our subject: I started off one fine morning without trumpet or drum, or without thinking in which direction I should go. I had one louis in my pocket, which I had received a few days before from my godfather, and I imagined that such a sum would never be exhausted.

After walking for a very long time, I stopped in a village in front of a wine shop. I went in and ordered dinner, with the assurance of a government messenger. I was well treated; I had an open, honest face, and I jingled my money as I hopped about the kitchen and uncovered all the dishes in order to select what I wanted. The host watched me laughingly and let me do as I chose. He served a good dinner and gave me white wine and red wine. A little hunchback, who was dining at a table near me, examined me closely. He tried to enter into conversation with me and find out where I came from and where I was going; but as I have never liked inquisitive people and as the little hunchback's remarks displeased me, I looked at him without answering, or whistled and sang

while he was talking.

When I was well filled, I asked the host how much he wanted; the rascal asked me fifteen francs for my dinner. I made a wry face; but I paid the bill and left the inn, reflecting that my louis, which was to last forever, would not suffice to pay for a second meal, if I chose to continue to play the nobleman.

The place where I had dined and which I had taken for a village was Saint-Germain; I asked the way to the forest and resumed my journey, stopping only to jump ditches, and to belabor donkeys that I happened to pass.

As I was entering Poissy, I heard a horse trotting behind me; I stopped and recognized my hunchback, who was riding a raw-boned little horse, which he was obliged to strike constantly with the spur and the whip; else the animal would have stopped every few steps. He ceased to crack his whip when he was beside me, and contented himself with a walk, in order to remain at my side. He tried to enter into conversation, and as I was beginning to be tired then, and the croup of a horse, however thin the beast might be, seemed to me a very agreeable seat, I displayed less pride, and talked with the hunchback.

“Where are you going at this rate, my dear boy?” he asked me.

“Why, I don’t exactly know. I mean to travel, to see the country and enjoy myself.”

“Have you no parents?”

“Oh, yes! But they are in Paris and want me to pass my time in reading and writing; I got tired of that and I came away.”

“I understand; a piece of folly! a youthful escapade! Oh! I know what it is. That’s about all one sees now.—But have you much money for your travels?”

“I have nine francs.”

“Nine francs! Hum! you’ll have to eat wild cow.”^[A]

[A] *Manger de la vache enragée*: i.e., to endure hunger and privation.

“What do you mean with your cow? I ate chicken and eels and pigeons and ducks.”

“Yes, but you spent fifteen francs, and with the nine you’ve left, you can’t eat three more meals like that.”

I made no reply, but I realized that the hunchback was right; and yet, as I had a will of my own, and as I was accustomed to make up my mind quickly, I looked at the little man with a decided air, and said to him after a moment:

“All right! I will eat cow.”

“I see that you have pluck,” he said; “but still, when a man can find a chance

to live well while travelling, it isn't to be despised; and I can supply you with the means."

"You can?"

"Yes, myself."

"How so?"

"I will tell you. But so that you can listen to me at your ease and not get more tired, wouldn't you like to get up here behind me?"

"Oh! I ask nothing better."

Delighted by my new travelling companion's proposition, I jumped recklessly on the poor horse's back; I slipped, grasped the little man's hump, fell, and dragged him with me, and we both rolled in the road; but luckily his placid steed did not stir.

My new acquaintance rose good-humoredly enough, and simply advised me to be less eager in the future, because we might not always fall so softly. I promised. My hunchback put his foot in the stirrup. I too mounted, but with more precaution; and when we were firmly seated on our saddle and he had, by dint of blows, induced his nag to walk on, he resumed his discourse, which I had interrupted so abruptly.

"My dear boy, everyone in this world tries to make money and earn a fortune, that is, unless he is born rich; and still, we see millionaires thinking of nothing but speculation, capitalists engaged in large undertakings in order to double their wealth; and nobles seeking alliances which may add to the splendor of their family. I, who am neither a noble nor a capitalist nor even a merchant, and have no hope of becoming any one of them, I tried for a long time to think of some means by which I could, if not make a fortune, at least live at my ease. I soon found that means. With intelligence one soon learns to know men. I travelled; I studied men's tastes and characters. I saw that, with a little address, poor mortals are easily deceived; all that is necessary is to take them on their weak side, which one can easily divine when one has tact and penetration, as I have."

"Ah! so you have tact and penetration?" I said to my companion, as I buried in the flanks of our steed some pins which I had discovered on the portmanteau that was between us.

"Yes, my dear boy, I flatter myself that I have."

"Then, why is your horse going so fast now?"

"Because I keep my whip snapping, and he knows that he is soon going to have his supper."

“That is true; I see that you have tact.—Well, go on, I am listening.”

“So then, it was by flattering men’s passions that I found a way to live at my ease; moreover, I instructed myself in botany, medicine, chemistry, and even in anatomy too; and with my knowledge I have not only composed remedies for all diseases but also philters to arouse love, hatred, jealousy, and to make well people sick; it is in this last art that I am particularly proficient.”

“Ah! I understand now. No doubt you sell vulneraries too, like that tall, red man that I used to see in Paris on the squares and street-corners. People called him a charlatan, I believe.”

At the name charlatan, my companion leaped in the saddle in such a way that he nearly threw us both off; luckily I clung firmly to him, and we got off with merely a fright.

“My dear boy,” he said when he had become a little calmer, “I forgive you the name of charlatan. You don’t know me yet; indeed I admit that there is a little charlatanism in my business, and that three-quarters of my remedies and my philters do not produce the effect that is expected of them; but we make mistakes in medicine as we do in everything else. We take cathartics and make ourselves sick; we have a toothache, and we take an elixir which spoils all our teeth; we try to obtain a position which we are not able to fill; we go into maritime speculations which a sudden storm destroys; we think that we have intelligence when we have not the intelligence to succeed, which is the most important of all; we determine to be prudent and we make fools of ourselves; we desire happiness, and we marry and have a wife and children who often cause us untold anxiety!—In short, my little man, people have made mistakes in all lines, and it is great luck when things turn out as we had anticipated, or hoped.”

“Look here, monsieur,” I said to my little hunchback, whose chatter was beginning to weary me, “what do you expect to do with me, after all is said and done?”

“This: when I stop in a village or small town, I cannot make myself sufficiently well known alone; I need an assistant, to go about the town to deliver prospectuses, and to answer for me when I am busy, and make a memorandum of the questions that people want to ask me.”

“But I don’t choose to be your assistant, as I don’t want to learn anything.”

“I understand that very well, my friend. Oh! I don’t propose to drive you crazy with fatiguing work. I will have you make pills, that’s all.”

“Pills?”

“Yes, pills of all sizes and of all colors. Never fear, it won’t be hard; but that

isn't all."

"What else shall I do?"

"You must be able to sleep when you choose, and to play the sleep-walker when you please."

"Oh! as to sleeping, I can do that all right!"

"When you are asleep, you must answer the questions that are asked you."

"How do you expect me to answer questions when I am asleep?"

"Why, you will pretend to be asleep, my boy; I will explain all that to you. Oh! that is one of the principal branches of my business."

"When you put people to sleep?"

"No, but when I make sleep-walkers talk, and when I make them give remedies to sick people."

"One moment; I am willing to sleep, but I am not willing to give remedies or take them.—Indeed, I have been whipped at home for refusing."

"Oh! you don't understand; when I say remedies, I mean medicines to take _____"

"Yes, with a syringe; I know all about that!"

"I tell you that you don't know what I am talking about. You will talk while pretending to be asleep; I will teach you your lesson beforehand, and you will answer the questions asked by invalids or curiosity seekers."

"Well, I don't understand at all."

"Pardieu! I can believe that; nor do those people who question the somnambulists; and that is just wherein the charm of it lies; if they knew what to think about it, it would no longer be possible to earn one's living with magnetism and somnambulism. But will you be my assistant and help me with my business, or not? I will feed you well, I will dress you suitably, and you will see the country, for I never stay long in the same place."

"And all I shall have to do for that is to make pills and sleep?"

"Not another thing!"

"Then, it's agreed, I will go with you."

So I became the little hunchback's assistant. We reached a village that night. My patron went to the best inn, and ordered a very good supper. It seemed to me very pleasant to travel on horseback, without having to worry about my meals. Moreover, I was always at liberty to leave my companion when I chose, and that reason was enough to make me enjoy myself with him; the certainty of being free gives a charm to existence and makes the most trivial incidents enjoyable;

bondage, on the contrary, throws a tinge of gloom over all our actions; it causes us to shun pleasure; it takes away all the joy of love, it deprives the heart of all its strength and the imagination of all its vivacity.

This that I am saying, Sans-Souci, is not my own; it is a sentence which my godfather repeated to me often, and which I remembered easily because it harmonized with my taste.

When I awoke the next morning, my hunchback, whose name was Graograicus—a name which he had probably manufactured for himself, and which no one could pronounce without making a wry face, which made it altogether impressive—my little hunchback, as I said, suggested giving me a lesson in somnambulism, which we were to practise in the first place of any importance in which we might stop. I accepted his proposition. He made me sit down, told me to stare at vacancy as if I were looking at nothing, and taught me to sleep with my eyes open; but, as that tired my eyes, he allowed me to close them when we only had peasants or poor devils to cure.

Then came the matter of philters; my companion was out of them, and it was necessary to prepare more. While I was cleaning a dozen or more four-ounce phials, which were to contain the charms, Master Graograicus went out to purchase plants, roots, and such other ingredients as he needed in the manufacture of the philters. He lighted a fire, and borrowed from our host all the bowls that he had; and our bedroom, where everything was turned topsy-turvy, began, in my companion's language, to be a workshop of chemistry and magic.

“Look here,” I said to my hunchback, while he was pulverizing burdock, and I was rolling cinnamon, “what are you going to use these things for that you are making? I am willing to be your assistant, but only on condition that you teach me your mysteries.”

“You shall know, my boy; we must not have any secrets from each other. I am now making a philter to arouse love; it is not very difficult to make, for all I need is tonics, alcohol and stimulants. I boil cinnamon, cloves, vanilla, pepper, sugar and brandy together. When a person has swallowed that mixture, that person becomes very amorous; and as soon as he or she who has administered my philter is with the object of his or her love, he finds that the charm operates and has no doubt that I am a magician. Furthermore, this little drug has the property of ruining the teeth; teeth are not ruined without pain, and as the toothache is commonly called love-sickness, as soon as it is known that the person who takes the philter has pains in his teeth, it is presumed that he has fallen in love. I sell a great deal of this philter, especially to ladies; we will lay in a good stock of it.

“Let us go on to the next one, which arouses jealousy. Ah! I confess that it cost me long study and profound reflection, but I believe that I have solved the problem successfully. In the first place, what gives rise to jealousy? The suspicions which one conceives concerning the fidelity of the object of one’s love. Now, these suspicions have a cause, for there is no effect without a cause; to be sure, a person is sometimes jealous without cause, but much more frequently with a cause; so I said to myself:

“‘By making one lover unfaithful, I shall necessarily make the other one jealous; but how am I to make unfaithful the one who does not take my drugs?’—Ah! that, my little man, was where a stroke of genius was required. That is something a fool would never have discovered, and which I did discover, without the help of any treatises upon medicine. I compounded this philter of corrosive sublimate and herbs that have an effect upon the skin. This compound has the property of making the eyes dull, the complexion leaden and the nose drawn; it brings out a humor, and the skin is covered with pimples and pustules of all sizes,—while it makes the breath fit to kill flies at ten yards. So you see that the man or woman who frequents the person who has taken my philter readily becomes unfaithful, while the one who has taken it becomes as jealous as a demon; and the effect lasts through life; for, let him do what he pleases, he can never again succeed in making himself attractive and in inspiring love.—Well! what do you say to that? What deep thought, what a thorough acquaintance with the passions and their effects! But see what the world is: I sell much less of this philter than of the others; indeed it rarely happens that the same person takes it twice.

“As for this last, for which I am pulverizing this burdock, it serves to arouse anger, hatred, ill-humor, and it never fails to produce its effect; it is a compound of manna, rhubarb, vinegar, turpentine, and cacao, to which I add this burdock to form a syrup. This little charm, at once emollient and astringent, produces the colic and sick headache; now, when one has a pain in the head and the stomach at the same time, he is certain not to be in a good humor; he easily loses his temper, and feels a grudge against the whole world, especially when the pains are constantly on the increase. It seems to me that that is rather prettily reasoned out, and that nothing less than my tact and my penetration would have sufficed to find the means of arousing so many different passions.”

I listened to my companion with attention, and when he had finished, I asked him if he expected to try his philters upon me; he said that he had no such purpose, and that assurance restored my good humor, for I would not have consented at any price to taste Master Graograicus’s charms.

“It only remains for me now,” he said, “to teach you to make pills; that is very easy; I make them with the soft part of bread, and roll them in different powders to give them different colors.”

“And what are they used for?”

“To cure all diseases.”

“What! you cure diseases with bread?”

“I sometimes cure them, for many diseases exist in the imagination only, and when the patient believes that he is taking an infallible remedy, he is easily persuaded that it is doing him good, and it is that persuasion that cures him, and not my pills. But at all events they can’t do any harm and that is always something. I sell large quantities of them to nurses and old women.”

X

A LESSON IN MAGNETISM

Thus I was made acquainted with all my companion's secrets; he required me to promise not to betray him, and I solemnly swore. But I did not swear that I would not amuse myself at the expense of the idiots who might consult him; and that was what I secretly determined to do; for, although I was only fifteen years old, I was resolute, courageous, stubborn and reasonably mischievous.

The village in which we passed the night seemed unlikely to afford my hunchback an opportunity to put forth his talents and sell his drugs, so we prepared to leave it. But my crafty companion succeeded none the less in inducing our host's wife to purchase secretly a box of pills to prevent her hair from turning white and her teeth from turning black.

We set out on our travels once more, carrying our fortune tied to our saddle. The weather was not propitious. We encountered a furious storm and when we reached the small town which was destined to ring with the fame of our talents, we were in such a pitiable condition that we were more likely to be taken for wretched mountebanks than for learned doctors.

However, we betook ourselves to the best inn in the place. At first the inn-keeper paid no attention to us, and did not put himself out to receive us; but when my companion ordered one of the finest suites and a splendid repast, he scrutinized us with a hesitating expression which was eloquent of his doubts concerning the state of our finances. My crafty hunchback tossed a number of crowns on the table, and requested the host to take out a week's rent of the apartment in advance.

This method of beginning operations completely changed the ideas of the inn-keeper, who concluded that he had to deal with noblemen travelling incognito. We were given rooms on the first floor and served on the minute.

"Monsieur l'aubergiste," said my companion to our host, as we took our seats at the table, "you don't know who I am; I am going to make myself known to you for the good of this town. Be good enough to inform the inhabitants that they have the privilege of entertaining within their walls, but for only a week, the celebrated Graograicus, physician-in-chief to the Emperor of China, magnetizer to the favorite sultana of the Sultan of Damascus, physician by letters patent to

the court of the King of Morocco, chemist to the Grand Vizier of Constantinople, and astrologer to the Hetman of the Cossacks. Tell them also that I have with me temporarily the little somnambulist, the most famous, the most extraordinary that has ever appeared on the face of the globe. He is a young man of thirty years, who looks less than fifteen, because he has passed half of his life asleep. This strange young man, born on the banks of the Indus, knows all languages—not to speak them, it is true, but he understands them better than you and I do. In his sleep he discovers your disease, its cause, its effects, the pains that you feel, the periods of recurrence, and points out the remedies you should take, even for future sicknesses. He has had the honor of putting himself to sleep before counts, marquises, dukes, and even royal highnesses. He has effected, sleeping all the while, cures that would have passed for miracles under the reign of the great Solomon, and even under that of King Dagobert. He has cured an Englishman of the spleen, a German baroness of a cutaneous disease, and her husband of the gout; a young dancer of hatred for men, and an old woman of her love for her dog; a courtier of the habit of bending his back, and a courtesan of a peculiar habit of wriggling; an annuitant of a weakness of the stomach, and a Prussian of indigestion; an author of a buzzing in his ears, and a musician of a weakness in his legs; a bailiff of rheumatism in the loins and an attorney of itching fingers; a lawyer of a defect in his speech, and a singer of defective respiration; a coquette of her vapors, and an old libertine of his asthma; a pacha with three tails, of his inability to secure offspring, and a muleteer of his too bountiful gifts in this direction; a dissolute husband of the habit of sowing good grain on stony ground, and an Italian of the habit of whipping small boys; and many other people, whom I will not name, because it would take too long, and also because we are not mere charlatans, who simply try to throw dust in people's eyes.—This little prospectus, which I will beg you to distribute, will suffice to give the inhabitants of this town an idea of our learning. Here, monsieur l'aubergiste, take these, and believe.”

The host listened with wide-open eyes to this harangue of the little hunchback, delivered with extraordinary emphasis and assurance; he took the prospectuses with a respectful bow, assured us of his devotion, tried to pronounce my companion's name, failed, made a grimace, took off his cap, and backed out of our room.

When he had gone, I asked my companion if I was the somnambulist, thirty years old, who had cured so many people.

“Yes, my dear boy,” he replied; “don't be surprised at anything; I will answer for everything. You told me to call you Jacques, but that name is too far within

the reach of everybody; when we have visitors, I shall call you nothing but Tatouos—don't forget.—I am going to take a walk about the town and make a few memoranda; while I am gone, amuse yourself arranging my philters in this cupboard, and making a few boxes of pills; I will return very soon.”

I was left alone, but, instead of making pills, I amused myself eating the cacao, cinnamon and other ingredients used in compounding the so-called charms. I also inspected the valise, which my companion had left open; I found a long, black gown, a false nose, a scratch wig and a flaxen beard. I was busily engaged in the examination of these different objects, when someone tapped softly at our door.

“Come in,” I said, without moving. The door opened very gently and a young brunette of some twenty years entered our apartment. She was one of the servants of the inn, and, like most of her class, she was very inquisitive and passably wanton. She had heard her master exclaim on leaving our room that he had as guests in his inn the two most extraordinary men in the universe: a scholar, who treated Frenchmen like the Chinese, and a somnambulist thirty years old, who looked like a child of twelve, and who could put the widest awake people to sleep. When she heard that, Clairette had resolved to be the first one to be put to sleep, to see what effect it would produce on her; and, presuming that when we became well known, it would be more difficult to obtain an audience, she had made haste to come up to our room, on the pretext of asking whether we wanted anything.

The girl came forward on tiptoe, like a person moved by fear and curiosity at the same time. She stopped within two steps of me and looked at me with close attention. I looked at her in my turn, and found her most attractive. I had never yet thought about women; indeed, I had never before been alone with a young girl. The presence of that one, her close scrutiny of me, and the pleasant expression of her face,—all those things excited me greatly, and I was conscious of a feeling which I had never known before.

We were both silent for some time; Clairette broke the silence:

“What, monsieur!” she said, staring with all her eyes, “what! are you thirty years old?”

“Yes, mademoiselle,” I replied at once, recalling what my companion had told me, and thinking that that falsehood might lead to some amusing adventures. Moreover, as you must know, a young man of fifteen is always well pleased to appear older and more mature than he is; whereas at thirty, he regrets that he is not fifteen still.

“Bless my soul! why, I can’t get over it! Thirty years old! You don’t look half of it!”

And Clairette examined me more closely; I made no objection and tried to play the exquisite.

“You must have some secret, monsieur, to keep you from growing old?”

“Yes, mademoiselle; and I have many others too.”

“Oh! if you could only tell me that one, monsieur! I’d be so pleased, so happy—to look young forever! Ah! how delightful that would be! I promise you that I won’t tell your secret. You see, I wouldn’t want the other girls in town to stay young too! ’twould take away all the pleasure.—Monsieur, will you be kind enough to—I say—if you will, you can ask me for all you choose!”

The young servant seemed, in very truth, predisposed in my favor; I already felt innumerable desires surging in my heart; but I dared not make them known as yet; I was very green, but I felt a longing to cease to be, and I wished to receive my first instructions from Clairette.

However, when you pretend to be thirty years old, you don’t want to appear to be an ignoramus; and, in order to avoid talking and acting awkwardly, I held my peace and did nothing but look at Clairette.

The girl, amazed by my silence, was afraid that she had said too much; however, the desire to remain young tormented her so that she soon renewed her questions.

“They say you’re a somnambulist, monsieur?”

“Yes, I am.”

“And that you put everybody to sleep?”

“I put those people to sleep who believe in my skill.”

“Oh! I believe in it absolutely, monsieur! and if you would put me to sleep—Perhaps that is what gives the young look?”

“Why, yes, that’s the beginning of it.”

“Oh! begin me, monsieur, please! it will be so much done! Please, while we’re alone and you’ve got time——”

“What do you want?”

“To be put to sleep, monsieur. See, I’m all ready.”

I was terribly embarrassed; I didn’t know how to go to work to play the sorcerer, and I bitterly regretted that I had not asked my little hunchback for fuller details as to that matter. However, as I did not desire to be cruel any longer to young Clairette, who appeared to me in such charming fashion, I said to

myself: “Parbleu! I’m not any more stupid than my hunchback; he hasn’t taught me his way of putting people to sleep, so I’ll invent a way of my own, and perhaps mine will be just as good as his.”

“All right, I consent,” I said to Clairette, “I’ll give you a lesson; but it will only be just to give you a little bit of an idea; we’ll do more another time.”

“Oh! just as you say, monsieur.”

The young woman was so pleased with what I had agreed to do for her, that she jumped about the room like a mad girl.

“First of all, sit down,” I said, trying to assume a very serious expression.

“Where shall I sit, monsieur?”

“Why, here—on a chair by my side.”

“Here I am, monsieur.”

“Give me your hand.”

“Oh! both of ’em, if you want.”

I took both her hands and squeezed them hard; I felt a pleasant warmth run through my whole being; I was so happy that I dared not stir for fear of breaking the charm that intoxicated my senses; my eyes were fixed on Clairette’s, and their tender languor aroused my first love. Instead of giving the girl a lesson, I felt that she could teach me a thousand things. I trembled, I blushed and turned pale in quick succession; never was a sorcerer so timid; but I had forgotten my rôle, and Clairette had unconsciously assumed it.

“It’s mighty funny,” said the girl when I had been squeezing her hand for five minutes, “it don’t make me a bit sleepy.”

“Wait, wait. It doesn’t work at once. Now you must shut your eyes.”

“Bless me! shut ’em tight?”

“Yes, that is absolutely necessary.”

“All right—now I can’t see a thing.”

As Clairette was no longer looking at me, I became less timid, and after contemplating at leisure a lovely bosom, from which I had put the neckerchief partly aside, I ventured to steal a kiss from the lips of my pretty pupil. Instantly an unknown flame set my heart on fire, I found in those kisses an unfamiliar sensation of bliss, I could not take enough of them, and Clairette made no objection, but murmured brokenly:

“Ah! why—this is funny—it don’t make me sleepy—a single bit.”

I don’t know how that first lesson would have ended, had not my companion suddenly entered the room, just as I embraced Clairette. His presence confused

me so that I reached the other end of the room in one bound. Clairette seemed less embarrassed than I was; she remained in her chair, glancing from me to the little hunchback, like a person awaiting the result of an experiment.

“What are you doing, my dear Tatouos?” said the crafty hunchback with a smile, for he easily guessed the cause of my confusion.

“Why, I—I was trying to put this girl to sleep.”

“Ah! you were going on to that, were you?—But, as you know, there are some indispensable preliminaries, and besides this is not a propitious hour. Take my advice, and postpone your lesson in magnetism until another time.”

As he said this, my companion made signs to me which I understood perfectly; then he went to Clairette, who was still sitting quietly in her chair.

“My dear child, I am glad to see that you desire to obtain instruction, and that you have faith in our skill. Never fear, we will teach you much more than you imagine—especially Signor Tatouos, who is extremely well versed in his art, and whose one aim is to make proselytes. But the moment has not arrived. Your master wants you in the kitchen; your fricassees may burn; our supper would be the worse for it, and I should be very sorry; for I have a good appetite, and I don’t like curdled sauces and overdone meat. Go, my dear girl,—to-morrow we shall begin our grand experiments! And if you are the sort of person that I hope you shall be initiated into our mysteries! In a word, to-morrow you shall sleep and you shall see the light.”

I am not sure that Clairette fully understood my companion’s meaning, but she made a profound reverence and left the room. As she passed me, she shot a glance at me that completely turned my head. Unable longer to resist my feeling for her, and heedless of what my companion might say, I followed her into the corridor.

“If you want me to teach you all I know,” I said to her in an undertone, “tell me where your room is; I will come to see you to-night.”

“Oh! I don’t ask anything better. Look—you go up these stairs, and up at the very top, the small door to the right; anyway, I’ll leave it open a little.”

“Good!”

“But you will show me how to keep young?”

“Never fear.”

Clairette left me and I returned to my companion. As you see, love had already made me inventive; I was determined to leave no stone unturned to possess Clairette, and yet I was only fifteen and a few months; but a resolute will, an ardent temperament and robust health impelled me to embark upon an

adventurous career before the usual age.

XI

JACQUES PUTS CLAIRETTE TO SLEEP AND ACCOMPLISHES MARVELS

When I returned to my travelling companion, I expected a severe reprimand for my inconsiderate conduct with the young maid-servant, and I had determined to reply that I would remain with him only on condition of doing as I chose; but I was agreeably surprised to see him laugh and come forward gayly to meet me.

“It seems to me, my young friend,” he said slyly, “that you are already disposed to work on your own account. Peste! you are beginning rather young! However, I do not propose to interfere with you in anything; indeed, I am neither your father nor your guardian, and you wouldn’t listen to me if I should preach virtue to you. Allow me simply to give you some advice dictated by prudence and by our mutual interest.”

“I am listening.”

“I am a man of great tact; and I believe that you are in love with the girl who was here just now.”

“Indeed? you didn’t need any great tact to discover that.”

“But it’s essential to find out whether she likes you.”

“Why shouldn’t she?”

“You are so young!”

“She thinks I am thirty.”

“True! I had forgotten that. Then you must try to enlist her in our interest; you understand, my dear Jacques, that to have a great success in a town, I must make, or find, accomplices.”

“What! can’t you do without them? You are not very clever, so far as I can see.”

“My little Jacques, you are just beginning your pranks and your travels; you don’t know the world as yet; if you had studied it as I have, you would know that even the most cunning people often require the help of others to succeed; and that is what I call complicity. The tradesmen enter into agreements with one another, in order to get better prices for their wares; the steward makes a bargain with the tradesmen about paying their bills; the courtiers put their heads together

to flatter the prince and conceal the truth from him; the young dandy plots with a dancer at the Opéra to ruin a farmer-general; the doctor has an understanding with the druggist, the tailor with the dealer in cloth, the dressmaker with the lady's maid, the author with the *claqueurs*, who also have an understanding with one another about selling the tickets they receive for applauding; stockbrokers make agreements to raise and lower quotations, cabals to ruin the sale of a work by a man who is not of their coteries, musicians to play badly the music of a confrère, actors to prevent the production of a play in which they do not act; and wives have a most excellent understanding with their husbands' friends. All this, my dear boy, is complicity. Need you be surprised then, that a sleight-of-hand man, a manipulator of goblets, requires accomplices?—So much the worse for the idiots who allow themselves to be tricked! or rather, so much the better; for if there were no illusion, there would be very little enjoyment.—As for myself, I require to know beforehand who the people are who come to consult me; for you understand that I am no more of a sorcerer than other men. In order that you, while playing the somnambulist, may divine the pains that people are feeling, as well as those that they have felt, I must teach you your lesson in advance. That won't prevent our making cures, please God! but we must impose on the multitude; and men are so constituted that the marvelous delights and always will delight them. Now then, this little servant seems to me very sly and very wide awake, and we must make her our accomplice; you will give her love, and I money. With the two, we shall be very unlucky or very bungling if we do not enlist her in our cause.”

I was overjoyed by my companion's proposition; to give love to Clairette was my only thought, my only desire! But, as the little hunchback constantly enjoined prudence upon me, and requested me to do nothing without consulting him, I did not mention my appointment with the young servant; he might have considered it too abrupt, too sudden, and not for anything in the world would I have missed my first rendezvous.

Master Graograicus proceeded to tell me the result of his walk about the town; he was already familiar with the gossip, the intrigues, recent events, the appointments about to be made, the diseases most in vogue, the persons to be treated with consideration, the marriages soon to take place and those which were broken off,—in a word, everything of present interest to the bigwigs of the place. Give me a small town for a place to learn all the news in a short time! to be informed, all one needs to do is to stop a moment at the baker's, the hair-dresser's and the fruit-woman's.

My companion had a great knack at remembering everything that could

possibly be useful to him; his memory was almost always accurate; it supplied the place of learning, as in many people it supplies the place of wit.

Our supper was served. The host came first himself, to lay the cloth and take our orders. Clairette appeared finally; she seemed less confident than on the occasion of her first visit; she kept her eyes on the floor, and paid no heed to my meaning glances and the little hunchback's sly smile. I was on pins and needles; I was afraid that she had changed her mind and her determination. I was a novice in amorous intrigue, and I did not know that a woman never conceals her wishes so effectively as at the moment that they are about to be fulfilled.

She left the room, and I did what I could to hasten the supper; but my companion, who was not in love, abandoned himself with keen delight to the pleasures of the table. I had no choice but to watch him linger over each dish, and to listen to his jests concerning my lack of appetite. He was very far, however, from suspecting the real cause of my preoccupation.

The supper came to an end at last, and we went into our bedroom, where there were two beds side by side. I made haste to jump into mine, placing my trousers at my feet, that I might find them more readily. After making the tour of the room a dozen times, and arranging his philters and pill boxes, until my nerves fairly tingled with impatience, my companion finally decided to go to bed. I awaited that moment as the signal for my happiness, for I knew that he would be sound asleep as soon as he was in bed.

At last that instant so ardently desired arrived. My comrade was in bed; I made certain that he was snoring. I rose, slipped into my trousers, and, not taking the time to put on my shoes, I hurried to the door, opened it very softly, and stood on the landing.

I felt my way upstairs, making no noise, in my bare feet, and holding my breath, I was so afraid of giving the alarm to the people in the house, and of seeing that unfamiliar felicity which I burned to know elude my grasp. At last I reached the appointed place at the top of the stairs; I heard a faint cough and my heart told me that I was near Clairette. I found a door ajar, and by the light of a night lamp, I saw the little servant awaiting me.

The girl wore nothing but a short petticoat and a jacket, evidently assuming that an elaborate toilet was not necessary in the mysteries of somnambulism; but no woman had ever seemed to me so bewitching, nor had I ever seen a woman look at me in such an expressive fashion.

"I was waiting for you," she said; "let's go right on with the lesson your companion interrupted so unpleasantly; I am anxious to know how you are going

to make me young!”

“You don’t need to be made young,” I said; “all you need is to stay just as you are now.”

“Yes, that’s what I meant. Let’s make haste. See, I’ll sit down and shut my eyes as I did before.”

And without waiting for my reply, Clairette sat down on the foot of her bed, doubtless because the only chair in the room did not seem to her strong enough to stand our experiment in magnetism. I was careful not to urge my pupil to do otherwise, and I went at once and took my place by her side. I was too excited then to be timid; and Clairette, with her eyes still closed, contented herself with saying:

“Oh! is that the way? is that what makes a person young? Why, Pierre and Jérôme have taught me as much already!”

I had repeated my experiment several times and had fallen asleep in Clairette’s arms, when a great noise woke us both. The uproar seemed to come from the room beneath; we distinguished a confused murmur of voices, among others that of the inn-keeper, calling Clairette and shouting for a light.

What was I to do? If the inn-keeper himself should come upstairs, where was I to hide? There was nothing in Clairette’s room large enough to hide me from her master’s eyes. The young woman pushed me from the room and begged me to save her from the anger of her employer, who did not propose that the servants in his inn should have weaknesses for others than himself.

While she blew out her lamp and made a pretence of striking a light, I went downstairs with no very clear idea what I was going to say. I had no sooner reached the floor below than someone came to me, grasped my arm and whispered in my ear:

“Play the sleep-walker; I had an attack of indigestion, I took our host’s bedroom for the cabinet, and a tureen containing soup-stock for a night vessel. Don’t be alarmed, I will get you out of the scrape.”

I recognized the voice of my companion, and I at once recovered my courage. The inn-keeper, irritated because no light was brought, went up himself to Clairette’s room, where she was still striking the flint without using tinder—an infallible method of striking fire without striking a light. At last our host came down again with two lighted candles; he was on the point of entering his room, when he saw me walking about the corridor, in my shirt, with solemn tread, carrying my trousers under my arm, as I had not had time to put them on.

“What does this mean?” he demanded, gazing at me with an expression of

surprise mingled with alarm; “what are you doing here, monsieur? who are you looking for, at this time of night? Was it you who came into my room and woke me up, with a dull noise that sounded like a drum, and filled the room with an infernal smell? Answer me!”

I was careful not to reply and continued to walk slowly along the corridor; the inn-keeper followed me with his two candles, and Pierre and Jérôme, the two men-servants, attracted by the noise, awaited with curiosity the upshot of the adventure. At last a groan came from the inn-keeper’s bedroom.

“Ah! there’s someone in my room!” he cried, turning pale; “come here, you fellows, and go on ahead.”

He pushed Pierre and Jérôme before him, and they entered the room where my companion was, leaving me in the corridor. Soon I heard our host’s voice, who seemed very wroth with Master Graograicus. I concluded that it was time to make peace between them, and with that end in view I stalked solemnly into the room where they were quarrelling.

At my appearance the hubbub ceased.

“Hush! silence! attention!” said my companion in a low tone; “it’s Tatouos, in a somnambulistic state. I will put him in communication with myself, and you’ll see that he will tell you all I have done to-night.”

The little hunchback came to me at once. He passed his hands in front of my face several times, put his forefinger on the end of my nose, in order, he said, to establish communication, and began his questions:

“What have I had to-night?”

“Pains in the stomach.”

“And then?”

“Nausea.”

“And then?”

“Colic.”

“There! what did I tell you just now?” cried my companion, turning toward the stupefied audience. “But let’s go on; this is nothing; I’ll wager that he will tell you everything I did.—What caused my trouble?”

“Indigestion.”

“And the indigestion?”

“From eating too much supper.”

“Surprising! prodigious!” said the host, crowding between his two servants.

“Hush!” said my companion; “don’t break the spell.—Then what did I do?”

“You got up.”

“With what purpose?”

“With the purpose of going to a certain place.”

“Did I take a light?”

“No, you had none.”

“How did I walk?”

“Feeling your way.”

“You hear him, messieurs; I felt my way because I had no light; he doesn’t make a mistake as to a single detail.—Let’s go on: where did I go?”

“Out into the corridor; you forgot that you had been told that it was the door at the left; you turned to the right and came into this room.”

“Exactly,—and then?”

“You found a soup-tureen, and you used it for——”

“Better and better!”

“The noise woke our host; he yelled and went out to get out a light, and meanwhile you hid the tureen under the bed.”

“Exactly. Look and see if he is mistaken in a single point!”

The servants did in fact find the tureen, which they soon returned to its place, holding their noses. The host was stupefied; but his spoiled soup-stock made him rather sulky, for he expected to make soup with it for a whole week. My companion, seeing what disturbed him, came back to me.

“What has it been my intention to do, since I discovered my mistake?”

“To give our host twelve francs as compensation for this accident.”

“Parbleu! exactly! Twelve francs! I told you so a moment ago, my dear host, to appease your wrath.”

“No, monsieur, I assure you that you never mentioned it.”

“No? Well, I had it on the tip of my tongue. Now you are satisfied, I hope, and I can wake our young man.”

He came to me and pinched the end of my little finger. I shook my head and rubbed my eyes, like a person just waking, and naturally asked what I was doing there.

My companion glanced at the people of the inn; they were so surprised by all that they had seen and heard, that they stared at me as at a supernatural being.

“Now let’s go back to bed,” said the crafty hunchback. “Until to-morrow, messieurs; I promise you that you will see many more wonderful things, if you

allow us to make our experiments in peace.”

My companion took my arm and we returned to our room, leaving the innkeeper and his servants assuring one another that all that they had just seen had really happened.

XII

MARVELOUS EXPERIMENTS OF THE LITTLE HUNCHBACK

When we were closeted in our room, my companion threw himself into my arms and embraced me joyfully.

“My boy, I am delighted with you,” he said; “you played your rôle like an angel! You are an invaluable fellow, and our fortune is made. To-night’s adventure will create a sensation.”

We went to bed well pleased with the way in which we had extricated ourselves from a bad scrape. I fell asleep thinking of Clairette, of her charms, of the pleasure I owed to her, of those I hoped still to enjoy; and my companion, reckoning what his first séance would be worth to him in a town where his reputation had obtained such a favorable start.

The little hunchback was not mistaken in his belief that the adventure of the night would bring us a crowd of curiosity seekers. The servants of the inn had risen early, in order to lose no time in telling all that they had seen and heard. The hair-dressers, the bakers, the grocers were the first to be informed; but that was quite enough to make it certain that the whole town would soon know what we were capable of doing. An adventure becomes so magnified by passing from mouth to mouth that we sometimes have difficulty in recognizing things that have happened to ourselves, when we hear others tell them. Everyone takes delight in adding some strange or marvelous detail, in outbidding his neighbor; thus it is that a brook becomes a rushing torrent, that a child who recites a complimentary poem without a mistake is a prodigy, that a juggler is a magician, that a man who has a soprano voice is a eunuch, that the man whose love is all for his country is a suspicious person in the eyes of him who loves only his own interest, and that a comet announces the end of the world.

The maid-servant, when she went to buy her ounce of coffee, learned from the grocer’s clerk that there were two most extraordinary men at the Tête-Noire inn, who were endowed with the power to tell you what you had done and what you meant to do.

“Pardieu! I must go and tell my mistress that,” said the maid as she left the shop; “she went to walk with her cousin the other night, and she don’t want her

husband to know it; I'll tell her not to go and let those sorcerers get scent of it."

"What's the news?" the old bachelor asked the barber, as he took his seat in the chair and put on his towel.

"What news, Monsieur Sauvageon! Peste! we have some very peculiar, very interesting people in town!"

"Tell me about them, my friend; go on!"

"Those two strangers, those doctors who arrived at the Tête-Noire last night, have been making experiments already."

"Indeed?"

"It's an absolute fact; I got it from Jérôme, the servant at the inn, who saw it and heard it."

"The devil."

"The somnambulist began his nocturnal expeditions last night."

"Nocturnal expeditions at night! Are these somnambulists nyctalopes?"

"Yes, monsieur, they're nycta—What do you call it, Monsieur Sauvageon?"

"Nyctalopes, my friend."

"They're nyctalopes, for sure.—What does nyctalopes mean?"

"It means that they see in the dark."

"Oh! I understand! they're like cats; in fact, somnambulists are as smart as cats in the dark.—But to return to this one at the Tête-Noire, you must know that he tells everything anybody's done; and last night he discovered something that was hidden from all eyes!"

"I understand! he discovered some intrigue."^[B]

[B] *Le pot aux roses*; lit. the jar of roses.

“Well, not exactly that! His companion had a pain in the night—he was doubled up with colic caused by his supper.”

“And perhaps by some badly prepared dish, or a half-scoured saucepan; for the entertainment is not first-class at the Tête-Noire; I once ate a *fricandeau* there that lay on my stomach three days, because it was seasoned with nutmeg, which always makes me ill. Nutmeg in a fricandeau! You must agree that that is perfectly horrible!”

“True, that inn doesn’t deserve its reputation; for at my sister’s wedding party, which was held there——”

“Your sister? which one, pray?”

“The one who married Lagripe, the sub-prefect’s indoor man—you know? the little man with blue eyes and a red nose?”

“Oh, yes! the father of the child the little sempstress opposite had.”

“Oh! as to that, I don’t believe a word of it! It’s all made up by evil-tongued gossips.”

“Look out, my friend, you are cutting me.”

“That’s nothing; it was a bit of straw on your cheek, that caught the razor.—You must know that if Lagripe had got the sempstress with child, my sister wouldn’t have married him.”

“Why not, pray? Between ourselves, my good fellow, your sister——”

“What’s that? what do you mean, Monsieur Sauvageon?”

“All right, my friend. Give me a bit of powder, and let us return to the somnambulist.—You were saying that he cured his companion’s colic last night?”

“I don’t say that he cured him; but I tell you that he discovered the most hidden things, among others a soup-tureen that was under the landlord’s bed.”

“And which someone had probably stolen and hidden there until the time came to carry it away.”

“That is quite possible; but this much is certain, that he told everything that was in the tureen!”

“Peste! that is rather strong! Did Jérôme tell you what the tureen contained?”

“Certainly; it contained the supper of the magician, the doctor, the hunchback one.”

“That is beyond me! To pilfer a supper, and then have it found in its natural

state, after eating it—I confess that that is a most remarkable trick!”

“But, Monsieur Sauvageon, I didn’t say that the supper was in its natural state; on the contrary, it was the result of the colic that was found!”

“Morbleu! my man, why didn’t you say so? You keep me here two hours about the—Put on a little *pommade à la vanille*.”

And, as our old bachelor was shaved and combed, the hair-dresser left him, to repeat his story to another of his customers, taking care to change it or add something to it. It is delightful to many people to have a piece of news to tell, and to make comments thereon.

But, talking of anecdotes, master author, you are terribly loquacious, and you seem to take pleasure in listening to all the tittle-tattle of a small town. Surely Brother Jacques did not repeat to Sans-Souci the old bachelor’s conversation with his barber, or the maid-servant’s with the grocer’s clerk. How could he have known about them?

True, reader; I plead guilty; I will try not to intrude my own remarks again in our soldier’s narrative of his adventures; and to begin with, I will allow him to resume at once.

We had no sooner risen and rung for our breakfast, than the host entered our room, holding in his hand a large sheet of paper, which he presented to my companion.

“Messieurs,” he said, bowing to the ground, “here is a list of the people who wish to consult you this evening, and who have entered their names here.”

“Very well—give it to me. Have you written the names, titles, age and occupation of each one?”

“They are all there, monsieur.”

“Very good. Leave us, and send your servant Clairette to us for a moment; I have some orders to give her relative to my *séance* this evening.”

The host bowed with the respect of a Chinaman passing a mandarin, and left the room, promising to send the girl to us at once.

My companion scanned the list; it was quite long and promised numerous proselytes. The little hunchback was reading it aloud and indulging in preliminary conjectures concerning the names, when Clairette entered the room.

The girl seemed rather embarrassed. She kept her eyes on the floor and her hands wrapped in her apron. For my part, I was as red as fire, and I did not know what to say. Clairette’s presence caused a revolution in my whole being; I was honestly in love with her; I felt a genuine passion for her; and after the proofs of

affection which she had given me during the night, I believed that she loved me sincerely. I think that if I had been told then that I must marry the little servant, or else give her up forever, I should not have hesitated to give her my hand! And what I felt, I will wager that many young men have felt like me. One loves so earnestly the first time!—Ah! my dear Sans-Souci, I was very young then and very green! But I have learned since that the more experience one acquires, the less pleasure one has.

My companion locked the door. No curious person must overhear our conversation with Clairette. Then he returned to us and opened the interview with a roar of laughter, which made me open my eyes in amazement, while Clairette dropped the corners of her apron.

“My friends, you are still rather unsophisticated,” he said at last; “you, my dear Jacques, who are in love with a girl who will have forgotten you tomorrow; and you, my little Clairette, who believe in witchcraft, and imagine that a person can look young all her life. We are no more magicians than other men are, my dear girl; but you must help us to impose on the fools who contend for the pleasure of consulting us. You must do whatever we want, first, because that will give you an opportunity to make fun of lots of people, which is always pleasant; and secondly, because we will pay you handsomely—I with money, and this young man with love; and if you should refuse to help us, you would deprive yourself of a large number of little perquisites that are not often to be had in a small town.”

This speech put us all at our ease. Clairette, who saw that the little hunchback was acquainted with everything, smilingly accepted a double louis which he slipped into her hand, and asked nothing better than to act as our confederate. Everything being arranged, Master Graograicus took up his list, requested me to write down the girl’s replies, so that we might not make any mistakes, and began his examination, to which Clairette replied as well as she could.

“Annette-Suzanne-Estelle Guignard, thirty-six years of age?”

“She lies; she’s forty-five at least. She’s an old maid, who’d like to be married on any terms; but no one will have her; in the first place, because she’s lame; and then because she chews tobacco.”

“Enough.—Antoine-Nicolas La Giraudière, forty years of age, clerk in the mayor’s office?”

“He’s a fat fellow, as round as a ball; they say that he’s not likely to set the North River on fire; perhaps he wants to consult you about giving him a little wit.”

“Impossible! People always think that they have enough.”

“Oh! wait a minute: his wife has already had four girls, and she’s furious because she hasn’t got any boys.”

“That’s it; I understand. He wants me to tell him a way to make boys.—Next. Romuald-César-Hercule de La Souche, Marquis de Vieux-Buissons, seventy-five years old, former Grand Huntsman, former light horseman, former page, former—Parbleu! he needn’t have taken the trouble to put ‘former’ before all his titles! I presume that he doesn’t ride or hunt any more. What can he want of me?”

“He has just bought a small estate in the suburbs; he is having a dispute with his vassals; he claims that they’re rabbits——”

“Rabbits! his vassals?”

“No—wait a minute; I made a mistake, it’s stags—*cerfs*.”

“Ah! very good, I understand what you mean—*serfs*.”

“And then, whenever there’s a marriage among ’em, he insists on having the bride come and pass an hour alone with him, and bless me! the peasants don’t take to that! The result is he’s always quarrelling with ’em.”

“That’s all right; I know enough about him.—Angélique Prudhomme, Madame Jolicœur, thirty-two years of age, laundress to all the notables of the town. The deuce! what an honor!”

“Ah! she’s a hussy, I tell you, is Madame Jolicœur! She keeps the town talking about her. She launders for the officers in the garrison and goes to balls with ’em.”

“Is she pretty?”

“Oh! so-so.—A saucy face, and a bold way—like a cuirassier! She’s already been the means of setting more than twelve people by the ears, and only a little while ago, on the town holiday, she waltzed with the drum-major, who quarrelled with a sapper because she’d made an appointment with the sapper to take a walk in the labyrinth. That would have been a serious matter, if Monsieur Jolicœur hadn’t turned up! But he’s good-natured; he made peace between the drum-major and the sapper, swearing to the latter that his wife didn’t intend to break her word to him, and that it was pure forgetfulness on her part.”

“That husband knows how to live.—Let’s go on. Cunégonde-Aline Trouillard, forty-four years old and keeps a very popular café.”

“Ah! that’s the lemonade woman! She’s always having the vapors and sick headaches and—in short, she always thinks she’s sick and passes her time taking

medicine instead of staying at her desk.”

“She must be a very valuable woman to the druggists!”

“Her husband tries to be smart, to play the chemist; he makes coffee out of asparagus seed and sugar out of turnips. I’m sure that he’ll come to consult you too.”

I continued to make memoranda of Clairette’s answers, and we had almost exhausted the list, when there was a knock at our door. I answered the knock; it was our landlord, who had come to inform us that the mayor wished to see us, and that he expected us at his office. We could not decline that invitation. My companion donned his best coat and lent me a pair of black silk knee-breeches that reached to my heels, the little hunchback having purchased them at secondhand from a great poet, who had them from an actor at one of the boulevard theatres, who had them from a member of the Academy who was paying court to a ballet dancer, at whose rooms he had left them.

We started, somewhat disturbed concerning the results of our visit. However, my companion, who was very quick-witted, hoped to find a way out of the dilemma. We arrived at the mayor’s abode and were ushered into his study. We saw a short, lean man, whose eyes sparkled with intelligence and animation. From the first questions that he asked us, my companion saw that he had to do with a redoubtable party. The mayor was a scholar; he was thoroughly acquainted with several abstract sciences, among others, medicine, chemistry, botany and astronomy. In his presence, my poor little hunchback lost his loquacity and his presumption. The mayor, perceiving our embarrassment, chose to put an end to it.

“I have no intention of preventing you from earning your living,” he said, with a smile; “far from it! You practise magnetism, I understand, and cure all diseases by its means; that is very well. I sincerely desire the welfare of my constituents, I am especially earnest in trying to cure them of those absurd prejudices, those ancient superstitions, to which men are only too much inclined. Magic, witchcraft, magnetism, somnambulism are certain to present many attractions to lovers of the marvelous. I know that it is vain to combat the opinions of mankind; there is but one means to cure them, and that is to allow them to be duped themselves. That is why I am glad to have charlatans come to this town. It is always an additional lesson to the inhabitants, for sorcerers never leave a place without making dupes. So I give you permission to magnetize my people.”

The mayor’s remarks were not complimentary to us; however, my companion bowed low as he thanked him for his kindness.

“Doubtless,” said the mayor, “you have some remedy that you sell *gratis*—as the custom is. Let me see what it is.”

The hunchback immediately handed him one of his boxes of pills. The mayor took one and threw it into a small vessel, where it was decomposed. He scrutinized the bread for a moment, then returned the box and said with a smile:

“Go, messieurs, and sell lots of them; they are not dangerous.”

Thus ended that visit. We returned to our inn, well pleased that we had not shown monsieur le maire our philters and charms.

At last the hour for our public *séance* arrived. My companion had given me all necessary instructions, and made me rehearse my part several times. He assumed the regulation costume: the black gown, which makes thin persons taller, and adds to the deformities of the misshapen, and in which the little hunchback looked exactly like a sorcerer or magician, who should never be built like an ordinary mortal; in addition, the venerable beard and the conventional tall cap—such was the costume of Master Graograicus.

As for me, he dressed me in a sort of red tunic studded with yellow stars, which he had made out of an old coverlet bought at the Temple in Paris; which tunic was supposed to have come to me from the Great Mogul. He also insisted upon putting on my head a turban of his own make; but as I considered it unbecoming, and as Clairette was to see me in my grand costume, I refused to wear the turban, and my colleague was obliged to consent to let me brush my hair back *à la* Charles XII; that did not go very well with the tunic, but great geniuses do not bother about such trifles.

The salon of our suite was prepared for the mysterious things which were about to take place before everybody. A tub filled with water, an iron ring, a wand of the same metal, easy-chairs for the clients, plain chairs for the aspirants, benches for the mere onlookers, and a single lamp, which diffused only a dim light through the room; such were our arrangements.

As soon as my companion had told the host that the people might come in, a crowd rushed into the room. Some came forward confidently, others with a frightened air, the great majority impelled by curiosity; but at all events we had a large number, and that was the essential thing.

When they had all entered and had taken such places as they could find; when the first whisperings had subsided and we had been stared at sufficiently, Master Graograicus saluted the assemblage with much dignity, and, having no low bench, he mounted a foot-warmer in order that everybody might see him; then he began the usual harangue.

“Messieurs, mesdames and mesdemoiselles—that is, if there are any in the room—you know, or do not know, that there is in nature a material principle thus far unknown, which acts upon the nerves. If you know it, I am telling you nothing new; if you do not know it, I will proceed to explain. We say then that there is a principle, and we start from that; by means of this principle, and in accordance with special mechanical laws, there is a reciprocal influence between animate bodies, the earth, and the heavenly bodies; consequently there are manifested in animals—observe this, messieurs,—in animals, and especially in man, properties analogous to those of the magnet. It is this animal magnetism which I have discovered the secret of applying to diseases, and it is by this method that I claim to cure them all. The magnetic influence may be transmitted and propagated by other bodies. That subtle matter penetrates walls, doors, glass, metals, without losing any perceptible portion of its power; it may be accumulated, concentrated, and transmitted through water; it is also propagated, communicated and intensified by bran; in short, its power has no limits; and all this that I am telling you, I did not invent; I am simply repeating what such learned men as Mesmer, Derlon and others would say now if they were not dead.”

The audience listened in the most profound silence; the young men stared with all their eyes, the young ladies smiled, the old men shook their heads, the matrons exchanged glances, and no one dared to tell his neighbor that he did not understand a word of the new thaumaturgist’s explanation. He noticed this, and continued:

“I see, messieurs and mesdames, that I have convinced you; therefore I will develop my arguments no farther. I must add, however, before beginning my experiments, that there are bodies which are not sensitive to animal magnetism, and which even have a property diametrically opposed thereto, by means of which they destroy its efficiency in other bodies. I flatter myself that we shall find none of those unfortunate persons here; but I thought it my duty to warn you, in case it should happen. Raise your minds, if possible, to the level of the sublime discovery which now occupies our attention. This is no charlatanism; it is evidence, it is power, it is the secret influence at work; it is——”

At this point in his harangue, the foot-warmer broke, and the orator measured his length on the floor; but he instantly sprang to his feet and cried, addressing his hearers with renewed vigor:

“Messieurs, I thought that I should conclude with an experiment; while talking to you just now, I magnetized this foot-warmer with my left foot, and I was certain of reducing it to powder! As you see, I have succeeded!”

A tempest of applause burst forth from all parts of the room.

“You see,” whispered my companion to me, “the man of intellect turns everything to account, by never losing his head.”

The time for the experiments to begin had arrived; and as effrontery is more readily imparted than magnetism, I was awaiting impatiently, in my easy-chair, an opportunity to display my skill.

Madame Jolicœur came first, despite the representations of the Marquis de Vieux-Buissons, who maintained that a man of his rank should take precedence over everybody else. But the laundress was not the woman to give way to anyone; moreover, she was young and pretty, the marquis old, ugly and crabbed; so that Madame Jolicœur had the first chance.

The great magnetizer took her by the hand and led her around the tub, then made her sit down, and magnetized her with the end of his wand. The young woman did not seem inclined to sleep.

“I will put you in communication with my somnambulist,” he said. The laundress looked at me and smiled; she did not seem to dislike the idea of being put in communication with me.

I knew my rôle; I had taken notes concerning Madame Jolicœur.

“We must take the bull by the horns,” my companion whispered to me, “for this woman is quite capable of making fun of us.”

The laundress was seated facing me; she was enjoined to be silent and to allow herself to be touched, which she did with much good humor; but she laughed slyly while I held her hand, and I heard her mutter while pretending to be asleep:

“Oh! mon Dieu! how stupid this is! The sapper told me that they’d try some flim-flam game on me!”

I at once proclaimed aloud all that Clairette had told us concerning the laundress’s love-affairs. I forgot nothing, neither the drum-major, nor the waltz, nor the assignation, nor its consequences. At my first words, the company began to laugh, Madame Jolicœur was covered with confusion, and before I had finished my speech, the laundress had left her seat, elbowed her way through the crowd and rushed from the inn, swearing that we were sorcerers.

This first experiment left no doubt in anyone’s mind concerning the virtue of magnetism; so that Monsieur le Marquis de Vieux-Buissons stalked solemnly toward us, and, in an almost courteous tone, requested my confrère to put him in communication with me at once.

The usual preliminaries concluded, the following dialogue took place

between us two:

“Who am I?”

“A most high and mighty seigneur in your ancient château, of which but one wing remains; that is why you have recently purchased another small seignior in the neighborhood.”

“That is true; but what do I wish to do now?”

“You wish that your vassals should be submissive, trembling and fearful in your presence, like lambs before a lion; you wish to be the master of their destinies; you wish that they should give you their fairest and best—what they have earned by the sweat of their brow; and in addition to all that, you wish that they should pay you.”

“That is very true.”

“You would that maidens should not change their state without your permission.”

“That is the truth.”

“And as you are no longer capable of effecting this, you would, on the wedding day, put your old bare leg into the bed of the young virgin, who will shriek and weep at the sight of her lord’s calf, a result which will do great honor to him, as he is very glad now to frighten his vassals with that, since he can arouse no other sentiment. In short, you wish to revive the rights of *jambage*, *cuissage*, *marquette* and *prélibation*, as they existed in the good old days of chivalry, when a knight always rode with lance in rest, fighting when neither would yield to the other, on a narrow road where two could not pass; fighting when the man whom he met refused to declare aloud that his lady was the fairest, although he had never seen her; fighting with dwarfs—there were dwarfs in those days—and with giants who carried off young maidens, and who, despite their enormous clubs—for a giant never went abroad without one—allowed themselves to be run through like manikins by the first knight who appeared on the scene!”

“That’s it, that’s it exactly! I mean to have a dwarf at the door of my dovecote, and to kill the first giant who appears on my land, where one has never yet been seen.”

“Very well, monsieur le marquis, buy some of Master Graograicus’s pills, take them in large quantities and often; they will make you young, vigorous, active and lusty; your white hair will turn black again, your figure will become straight, your wrinkles will disappear, your cheeks will fill out, your color will come back and your teeth will grow again. I will guarantee that, when this

transformation has taken place, your vassals will do whatever you wish, and especially that the girls will no longer avoid you.”

The marquis, delighted by my replies, took twelve boxes of the pills and paid for them without haggling. He put some in every pocket; he swallowed half a dozen at once, and started for home, with head erect and a sparkling eye, and feeling ten years younger already.

After the marquis, Aline-Cunégonde Trouillard came forward; there was no need of preliminaries or of harangues to induce Madame Trouillard to believe in magnetism; the poor woman had such sensitive nerves that she fell into a trance as soon as my companion touched her with the end of his wand. In my interview with her I said recklessly whatever came into my head; she had all the diseases that I mentioned, she felt all the symptoms that I suggested to her. What a windfall to charlatans such weak-minded creatures are! Madame Trouillard filled her reticule with pills and went away, after subscribing to all our séances, public and private.

We were awaiting Estelle Guignard, whose name was on our list, when a sturdy fellow, in wooden shoes and a blue blouse, forced his way through the crowd and approached us. I had no answers prepared for this new arrival, so I let him address my companion, who looked about for Clairette, hoping to obtain from her some indispensable information; but the girl, thinking that we had no further need of her, had gone down to the kitchen; so that we had to proceed without a confederate. My colleague hoped to extricate himself from the difficulty easily, especially as he had to do with a peasant. He walked up to the man, who was staring with a surprised expression into the mysterious tub; and trying to assume a more imposing air than ever, he began to question him.

“Who are you?”

“Pardine! you’d ought to know well enough, as you’re a sorcerer.”

“Of course I know; but as I ask you, of course I must have secret reasons for doing so. Answer then, without tergiversation.”

“Without tergi—without terger—What are you talking about?”

“I ask you your name.”

“My name’s like my brother’s, Eustache Nicole.”

“What do you do?”

“Why, I work in the fields, or else I drive folks’ wagons when there’s stuff to carry.”

“Why have you come here?”

“What! why, I’ve come like the rest of ’em! to see what a sorcerer looks like.”

“Who told you that I was a sorcerer?”

“The barber did, when I got clipped at his place this morning; and as there ain’t been no sorcerers in these parts for a long time, I stayed in town on purpose to see you.”

“Do you want to be magnetized?”

“Magne—What do you mean by that?”

“Do you want me to put the secret agent at work on you?”

“Pardi! I don’t care what you put to work!”

“Well, what do you wish to know?”

“Oh! well! lots o’ things!—You mean to say that you can’t guess ’em?”

“Yes, indeed; and first of all I am going to magnetize you.”

“All right, I’m willing; will it cost me much?”

“I charge nothing for that.”

“If that’s so, then you must be a sorcerer sure enough, if you do your business without having your hand greased!”

My little hunchback seated the peasant in a great easy-chair, then touched him several times with the magic wand; but the clown let him keep on, and seemed to be not in the slightest degree under the charm. Thereupon my companion began to pass his fingers very lightly over his eyes, in order to communicate the magnetic fluid to him. The peasant said nothing, but contented himself with turning his chair from time to time and rubbing his eyes. I felt a strong desire to laugh when I saw the pains that my poor comrade was taking, perspiring profusely in his efforts to magnetize Eustache Nicole.

At last the peasant seemed quieter; he ceased to move and rub his eyes.

“The charm is working,” said Master Graograicus in an undertone, as he continued his labors; “this fellow has given me a lot of trouble! but I have succeeded at last! As you see, he is entering the somnambulistic state; before long he will speak.”

But, instead of speaking, the peasant, who had really fallen asleep, gave passage to so prolonged a sound that the most dauntless magnetizer would not have had the courage to continue. My hunchback jumped back, holding his nose. I roared with laughter and the whole audience followed suit.

That sudden noise awoke our peasant; he rose and asked if the experiment was at an end.

“You are a boor,” said my companion angrily; “you have failed in respect to the whole company, and you are not worthy to be magnetized.”

The peasant was not long-suffering; he lost his temper, declared that we were making fools of the poor people and that we were no more sorcerers than he was. At that, Master Graograicus attempted to expel the insolent villain who cast a doubt upon his learning. He pushed him with his wand. The angry peasant turned and seized my illustrious magnetizer by the beard. The hunchback cried out, the spectators came forward; the women called for help, the wiser sort contented themselves with laughing, and the partisans of magnetism rushed to the assistance of the poor sorcerer. He was fighting with Monsieur Nicole, who would not relax his grasp on the beard. In their struggles they approached the tub; they stumbled over it and both fell in, face down. Water cools and allays the passions. The peasant, on withdrawing his head from the tub, released his opponent’s beard and quietly left the room. My companion, who was thoroughly drenched, felt that he was no longer in a condition to make proselytes, and he declared the séance adjourned.

XIII

EFFECTS OF THE PHILTERS.—BROTHER JACQUES LEAVES HIS COMPANION

Despite the unpleasant conclusion of our first séance in magnetism, we did a very good business at the Tête-Noire. Clairette gave us all the information that we desired, and to avoid a repetition of the Eustache Nicole episode, we admitted only those persons who had entered their names beforehand.

But the public curiosity abated, and the effects of our pills did not always correspond to the expectations of the purchasers. Moreover, I began to be less in love with Clairette; I had surprised her several times being rejuvenated by Pierre and Jérôme, and that had taken away all the illusion of a first love. So that I was not disappointed when my companion suggested that we should go away.

For six months we lived in that same way, remaining a longer or shorter time in one place according to the number of dupes we made there. That worked very well; but we did not always find accomplices, and then we were likely to make serious mistakes. One day I told a money-lender that he didn't care for money, a drunkard that he didn't like wine, a gambler that he didn't care for cards, and a bachelor that his wife was false to him; you can imagine, Sans-Souci, that we did not make a brilliant success in that town.

I began to be tired of that kind of life; I had informed my companion that I wished to leave him, but he always strove to keep me. But one day I resolved to give my love of mischief a free rein and to play some trick on him that would take away all desire on his part to have me for a partner.

We were in a small town where we were performing miracles. Magnetism and somnambulism seemed to have turned everyone's head; people fought for the privilege of consulting us first, of obtaining private conferences. I could not fill the orders for pills, and even the charms were selling very well. It was in that place that I determined to try an experiment of my own invention on the fools who applied to us.

An old advocate had been paying court for some time to a coquette of uncertain age, who refused to respond to his flame, but did not cease to listen to his tender declarations. The lady was crafty, she was well pleased to inspire passions, and she was afraid of losing her influence over her adorer if she

yielded to his desires. They both came to consult us: the advocate to learn how to soften the heart of his charmer, and she, how to retain the charms that made so many men wretched. My companion promised Monsieur Gérard—that was the old suitor's name—a philter that would make the coldest woman amorous; and he promised Madame Dubelair a charm that would shelter hers from the ravages of time.

In the same house with Madame Dubelair lived the deputy mayor of the town. Monsieur Rose was an excellent man; but his wife complained of one great failing in him; he was not enough in love with her, and was not in the slightest degree jealous. So Madame Rose also came to consult us as to the means she could employ to put an end to her husband's indifference. To make a husband amorous of his wife after fifteen years of wedlock was rather difficult. Nevertheless my companion promised Madame Rose a philter with a marvelous power of causing jealousy, and the dear soul went away, overjoyed to know that she might still hope to drive her husband frantic.

My hunchback made haste to compound the philters, and gave them to me to carry to their addresses, instructing me to collect the pay for them. On the way I reflected how amusing it would be to change the destination of the little phials.

“Parbleu!” I said to myself, “I am going to see what will happen! I will give Madame Rose, instead of the charm for jealousy, the one to make a person amorous; to Monsieur Gérard the one to arouse anger, and to Madame Dubelair the one for jealousy; the results cannot fail to be comical.”

I instantly put my plan into execution; I delivered the phials to the three persons concerned, assuring them of their miraculous effect; then I returned to the inn and impatiently awaited the result of my prank.

Monsieur Gérard had solicited and obtained from Madame Dubelair permission to lunch with her *en tête-à-tête*. I had carried him the alluring charm early in the morning, and he thought that it would not be a bad idea for him to take part of it before calling upon his inamorata, in order to give himself resolution and audacity. Madame Dubelair had lost no time in tasting the marvelous phial, which was to make her charms impervious to time; and Madame Rose had poured a large part of hers into the chocolate that her husband drank every morning.

You know, my dear Sans-Souci, what my master's drugs were compounded of, and how he had figured out their inevitable effect. Imagine therefore the events that occurred during that memorable evening! Monsieur Gérard betook himself to his adored one's abode; on the way, he felt slight colicky pains; his head was burning hot. He supposed that the charm was working and he hastened

to Madame Dubelair's. He found her reclining negligently in a long chair. But imagine his surprise! His charming friend was unrecognizable; her nose was red and swollen, her skin tightly drawn; several blotches embellished her brow.

"How do you think I look this evening, Monsieur Gérard?" she asked with a sly smile; "I am sure that you find me changed."

"In truth, madame," replied the poor advocate, holding his hands to his abdomen and making diabolical faces as he spoke, "I do find you changed. You are ill, no doubt."

"Ill, monsieur! ill! when you yourself are writhing and twisting in such an extraordinary way!"

"Madame, I admit, that for a minute or two——"

"My mirror, Fifine; I wish to know if I look sick, as monsieur thinks."

Poor Gérard could stand it no longer; the philter was working; colic and headache appeared. The maid brought Madame Dubelair her mirror. The coquette looked at herself and began to shriek horribly; she broke the mirror, she had an attack of hysterics, and her poor lover implored Fifine to give him the key to his mistress's closet. The girl, who was mischievous and sly, like most soubrettes, roared with laughter when she saw Monsieur Gérard's plight; and to make the confusion complete, Madame Rose rushed in, crying that she was betrayed, dishonored; that her husband was a monster who gave her no children but had just debauched his concierge. Our amorous philter had raised the deuce with Monsieur Rose; the poor man had gone home, hoping to find his wife there; she had hidden in order to make him jealous, and the dear husband, finding nobody but his concierge at hand, had made her the victim of the flames that consumed him.

The cries of Madame Rose, who was frantic with rage, of the concierge, who pretended to be, of Madame Dubelair, who was trying to tear off her nose, of Monsieur Gérard, who was holding his stomach, and of Monsieur Rose, who was weeping over his own perversity, soon attracted the whole quarter. The neighbors hurried to the spot, asked questions, pushed and crowded, gave Madame Rose orange-flower water, the concierge cologne, Madame Dubelair ether, Monsieur Gérard an enema, and Monsieur Rose extract of water lily.

When the first outcries had subsided, an attempt was made to ascertain the cause of so many untoward events. It was clear that there must be some witchcraft underneath. Madame Dubelair swore that she had never in her whole life had a pimple on her nose or anywhere else, Monsieur Gérard never ate too much, and Madame Rose, despite her wrath, admitted that her husband was not

the man to pinch a woman's knee unless he had been made tipsy. Thus these extraordinary events must have had some hidden cause. They remembered the philters; they confided in one another; and the result was that the little hunchback was voted a sorcerer, a magician, a charlatan, an impostor worthy of hell-fire. But, pending the time when he should go to hell, they considered that it was necessary to put him in prison, in order to prevent him from repeating his infamous incantations.

Rose, the deputy, went to the mayor and explained the affair to him; he obtained an order for the culprit's arrest. On his side, the advocate assembled all the notables of the town; they shared his wrath and considered that the scoundrel who gave one of the long robe the colic could not be punished too severely. Madame Dubelair and Madame Rose stirred up all the women; Madame Dubelair especially had to say no more than this: "A man who can make the nose red and the complexion lead-color is a villain who deserves the halter!"—As for the philter of which Monsieur Rose had drunk, all the ladies begged for a few drops of it for their private use, thinking that, when thus divided, it could not fail to produce very pleasant results.

These events had taken time; it was daybreak when they started for our lodgings to arrest us. I say us, for I am quite sure that I should have shared my companion's fate. But since the preceding day I had been on the alert, walking about the town, watching all that took place, listening to what people said; in short, I learned that they were coming to arrest us, and I did not deem it prudent to wait until that time. While my companion was asleep, I made a little bundle of everything belonging to me, and of the money I had earned with him, being careful to take no more than was really mine; then, wishing my little hunchback much good fortune, I left our lodgings, leaving him to get out of the scrape as he could.

I have no idea what happened to him, for I never saw him again; but as sorcerers are no longer hanged, since it has been discovered that there are no such things, I am very sure that my poor charlatan got off with a few months in prison.

XIV

END OF JACQUES'S ADVENTURES

I had about thirty louis in my purse; for selling pills made of bread is a very good business; you make few advances and never sell on credit, which proves that there is nothing that has not some value. You can imagine, my dear Sans-Souci, that my only idea was to enjoy myself thoroughly, and that is what I did in several towns where I stopped; but the adventure that happened to me in Brussels put an end to my enjoyment.

I had been living at an inn two days, and I passed my time like all idlers or strangers, eating much, drinking a great deal, and walking about without any definite object, but going into all the public places, and visiting everything that seemed likely to be at all interesting to me.

On the second day, having gone to the theatre, I found myself beside a young man of respectable exterior. He seemed to be three or four years older than myself and to be thoroughly acquainted with society. We talked together, and he told me at once that he was from Lyon, and was travelling for pleasure and to escape from a marriage which his parents wished to force upon him. His confidence invited mine; so I in my turn told him all my adventures, the narrative of which seemed to interest him greatly.

In a word, by virtue of this similarity of tastes and of temperament, we became friends. Bréville—that was my new acquaintance's name—invited me to dine with him on the following day, at one of the best restaurants, and I accepted very gladly; for it is a great pleasure, when one arrives in a town, to find some one with whom one can form an intimacy.

My new friend entertained me handsomely; we lived on the fat of the land; we walked and drove, and went to the theatre and to all the cafés. Bréville seemed to know the city very well for a stranger; he took me to all the tap-rooms and public places; I commented upon it laughingly to him and complimented him on the facility with which he remembered the way to all the places of amusement. To make a long story short, after doing the city one night, visiting cafés and frail ladies, we found ourselves at one o'clock one morning in the street, drunk with punch, liqueurs, porter, whiskey and faro.

I could hardly hold myself erect, and I was most desirous to be in my bed, to

which I would have liked to be transported by some kind genie, for I felt that my legs were but a feeble support to me. Bréville seemed less affected than myself, but he too complained of fatigue. The street lamps gave a very dim light. For an hour I had been urging my companion to take me home; but in vain did we walk through streets and squares, I could not discover my inn.

At last my guide admitted that he had lost the way and that we were very far from my lodging; but by way of compensation we were very near his, where he offered me a bed. As you may imagine, I accepted without hesitation. I was no longer able to walk, I could hardly see where I was going,—the inevitable result of the numerous forms of dissipation in which we had indulged.

Bréville knocked at a door leading into a dark passageway. An old woman admitted us. I hastened, or rather was carried, up a dirty winding staircase, and at last I found myself in an almost unfurnished chamber, which at any other time would not have given me a very brilliant idea of the situation of my new acquaintance; but at that time I thought of nothing but sleep, and in two minutes I was lying on a wretched bed and sleeping soundly.

Whether it was the effect of the punch, or of the strong liqueurs, I passed a very restless night; I did not wake however and it was not until late in the morning that a violent shaking made me open my eyes.

“I say, my friend! wake up! You have been sleeping a long time, and it ain’t good for you!”

Such were the words that first fell upon my ears. I opened my eyes to their fullest extent, looked about me, and made no reply, for the picture before me left me uncertain as to whether I was really wide awake.

Imagine my surprise, my dear Sans-Souci; instead of finding myself in a bedroom and in the bed on which I had lain down the night before, I found myself stretched out on a stone bench, in a sort of square, without coat or hat, and with nothing on but my shirt, trousers and waistcoat, and surrounded by a number of messengers who were gazing at me with curiosity.

“Come, come, comrade,” said one of them; “come to yourself; you must have had a good supper last night, and drunk a great deal! That makes you sleep sound; I know how it is! And the morning after, you are as stupid as a fool; you don’t know where the deuce your memory has gone to! But it comes back little by little!”

The fellow’s words recalled all my folly of the night before. An impulse as swift as thought led me to feel my pockets and my fob. Alas! they were empty; and like most young men, I had been ass enough to carry all that I possessed

about me. I was the dupe of a swindler. In vain did I ask the men about me where Bréville lived; no one knew him. I looked to see if I could recognize the house to which the traitor had taken me; I saw nothing that resembled it.

I rose, with rage and shame in my heart; if at that moment I had caught sight of the scoundrel who had swindled me, I don't know what I might have done! But, as you may imagine, he did not show himself. I asked the way to my inn, and returned thither sadly enough. But what was I to do? What would become of me? I had not a sou, and I was dressed like a beggar. After playing the grand seigneur, after gratifying one's every wish, to be reduced to ask alms! What a horrible comedown! How bitterly I then regretted my little hunchback and our séances in magnetism! If only I had been able to begin that trade alone, I should have felt better. But I had not even the means to buy what was required to make pills, and I realized that a somnambulist who had neither coat nor stockings could never put anybody to sleep.

However, I was fully decided to die rather than to beg my living, and it was in that frame of mind that I reached the inn, which I had left the night before in such a different plight. I entered the room where the guests were breakfasting. No one recognized me and the waiters were about to turn me out, when I told them of my melancholy adventures.

The inn-keeper expressed sympathy for me, but did not invite me to return to my room, where I had left a few effects which were hardly sufficient to pay my bill. I stood motionless in the midst of the guests; I said nothing more, but tears rolled down my cheeks and my very silence must have been eloquent.

"Well, young man, what are you going to do now?" asked a voice, which at that moment went straight to my heart. I turned my head and saw two soldiers breakfasting at a table near me.

"Alas! monsieur," I answered, addressing the one who seemed to look at me with interest, "I have no idea. I have nothing left."

"Nothing left! a man always has something left when he is a stout-hearted fellow and has done nothing disgraceful. Come, sit down here and breakfast with us and pluck up your courage, morbleu! No one ought to despair at your age."

These words restored all my good humor; I did not wait to be asked again, and I ate my full share of a slice of ham and a piece of cheese, which composed the breakfast of the two soldiers. When my hunger was somewhat abated, the one who seemed superior in rank addressed me again:

"My boy, you left your parents to make a fool of yourself; the first mistake. You formed intimacies with villains; second mistake. And you allowed yourself

to be robbed; third mistake. However, your mistakes are excusable; but look out—after being a dupe, one sometimes becomes a knave. That is what happens only too often to the reckless youngsters, who, like yourself, find themselves without money on the day after a debauch. Then they give way to their passions, to their inclinations for dissipation and idleness; then they resort to low tricks to obtain their living; and at last they become guilty, although they began by simply being reckless. You are on the way, young man, and you must take a stand; you won't get a dinner by walking about with your arms folded, nor a pair of breeches by looking at the stars, when there are any. Have you a trade?"

"No, monsieur."

"In that case, enlist. Take the musket and carry it with honor. You are young, tall and well-built; be brave, obedient to your superiors, and I will guarantee that you will make your way."

This proposition gave me so much pleasure that I leaped for joy on my chair, and in trying to embrace my protector, I overturned the table, upon which luckily there was nothing left.

My eagerness pleased the sergeant and his comrade. They led me away instantly and took me to their captain, who, after eyeing me from head to foot with a glance, received me into his company, where I always did my duty with honor, I venture to say.

Now, my dear Sans-Souci, you know all my adventures; I will not mention those which happened to me in the regiment, and which you shared with me. Indeed, they are common to all brave soldiers: love-affairs, battles, disputes, reconciliations, feasting, starving, victories, and defeats.—Those are what always make up a soldier's history.

Years passed; but I had not forgotten my family; I confess, however, that I did not want to return to them except with an honorable rank; I had the hope of obtaining it, and this decoration already made my heart beat more peaceably, when suddenly events changed their aspect. Relegated to the civilian class, I thought that an honorable and gallant soldier could not make his parents blush, and I went to Paris to find them. There I learned of their death! That was a cruel blow! But the icy welcome, the cold and contemptuous tone of my brother, put the finishing touch to the laceration of my heart! It is all over, Sans-Souci, he will never see me again, the ingrate; he will never hear my name again!

Thus did Jacques bring to a close the story of his adventures, and a tear glistened in his eye during the last portion of his narrative; that tear was for his brother, whom he still loved, despite the way in which he had received him.

It was dark; Jacques's story had taken longer than he had at first supposed it would, and Sans-Souci had listened to it with so much interest that he had not realized that the dinner hour had long since passed. But when his comrade had finished, he rose, shook his head, and tapped his stomach, as he glanced at his companion.

"Have you told me the whole, comrade?"

"Yes."

"Well then, forward!"

"What for? Where do you mean to go?"

"No matter where, so long as it is some place where there is something to eat."

"Ah! you're hungry, are you?"

"Yes, ten thousand cartridges! And terribly hungry too! My stomach doesn't thrive on adventures. Still, yours have amused me very much; but since you stopped talking, I feel that I need something solid."

"Do you want me to begin again?"

"No, no! I want you to come with me."

"But where shall we go?"

"Come on; forward!"

Jacques and his comrade started across the fields. They could not see very clearly and they did not know which direction to take. Jacques did not say a word, Sans-Souci sang and swore alternately, frequently cursing the hedges and bushes which barred their path. At last, after walking for an hour, they spied a light.

"Forward toward the light!" said Sans-Souci, doubling his pace; "they must give us some supper."

"Have you any money, Sans-Souci?"

"Not a sou; and you?"

"No more than you."

"No matter, let us go on all the same."

They approached the building from which the light came; it seemed to be large enough for a farm-house, but it was too dark to distinguish objects plainly. Sans-Souci felt his way forward and began to knock with all the strength of his feet and hands at the first door that he found. In vain did Jacques urge him to make less noise; Sans-Souci was dying of hunger, and he listened to nothing but his stomach, which shouted as loud as himself.

At last two dogs that were prowling about the yard answered the uproar that he made; their barking awoke the cows, which began to low, and the donkeys, which began to bray; there was an infernal hurly-burly, in the midst of which the voice of a woman, who had come to a window, had difficulty in making itself heard.

“Who’s that? What do you want? answer!”

“Ah! ten thousand cannonades! I am not mistaken; it’s her, it’s my brunette! —Didn’t I tell you, Jacques, that we should get a supper; we are at her farm. Open, my duck, open quick! Love and hunger bring me back to you!”

“What? can it be him?”

“Yes, yes! It is him, it’s me, it’s us, in fact! Come, Louise, put on the necessary skirt, and come and let us in. But try to make your beasts quiet, for we can’t hear ourselves talk here!”

The farmer’s wife left the window to come down to admit them, and thereupon Sans-Souci informed Jacques that they were at the abode of the unfaithful sweetheart of whom he had spoken that morning, and who was at heart very kind, very sentimental,—she had given him proofs of it that morning, —very obliging, and that she made her husband a cuckold solely because of her temperament.

“But this husband,” said Jacques; “he is the master in his own house, and _____”

“No; in the first place, Louise is the mistress; in the second place, he’s a good fellow. Oh! she told me all about it this morning; she wanted me then to pass some time at the farm, as a distant relative of hers, just back from the army. I didn’t accept, because I had promised to join you, and your friendship goes ahead of everything; but so long as you are here, and we are our own masters, faith! it’s a good wind that blows us to my old flame’s house—Hush! here’s the lady herself!”

Louise did in fact open the door at that moment; she seemed surprised at sight of Jacques.

“This is my friend, let me introduce him to you,” said Sans-Souci; “he is a fine fellow, a good comrade, whom I don’t ever mean to leave.”

“Oh, well, then it’s all right, he’s our friend too. By the way, my husband’s asleep, but it don’t make any difference,—don’t forget that you’re my cousin, Sans-Souci.”

“All right, that’s agreed; now let’s be off to the kitchen.”

“I will make you an omelet with pork.”

“That will be fine! But are you alone?”

“Our farm boy’s to be married the day after to-morrow, and bless my soul! he is sleeping all he can beforehand.”

“That’s a good idea.—Give me the frying-pan.”

In a short time the supper was prepared, and Sans-Souci and Jacques did full honor to it; Louise watched them, and laughed at the thought of her husband’s surprise when he should find that two strangers had slept in his house.

“I am going to put you into the little cheese room. It is close by, and you can go into it without going through our room and waking up my man. We will tell him all about it to-morrow.”

Louise was very particular that they should not wake her husband; she guided the two newcomers to a small room where the cheeses which they made were placed on boards along the wall. They did not diffuse a very pleasant odor through the room, but two soldiers are not particular. Jacques threw himself on the bed and slept soundly; Sans-Souci complained that the cheeses disturbed him, and he went out to take the air or for some other purpose; but the night passed very comfortably, and the farmer did not wake inopportunately.

The next day everybody was up early. Farmer Guillot opened his eyes at his wife’s story, when she told him about a cousin of hers having arrived during the night with one of his comrades. Guillot made haste to embrace his cousin and his friend; he welcomed them cordially, drank with them, found them exceedingly pleasant companions, and took them to see his farm, his hens, his oxen, his wheat and his hay. Our soldiers declared everything first-class and splendidly kept up; they complimented the farmer, and they were soon the best friends in the world.

Jacques loved the country, the meadows, the woods, and work in the fields. Sans-Souci loved the farmer’s wife and her cooking. In the evening, Jacques told Guillot about his battles, his sieges and his adventures. The farmer opened his eyes and held his breath; even Sans-Souci kept quiet and shared the pleasure of the peasants, which he prolonged by adding the story of his own experiences. Their adventures entertained the peasants to such a degree that they went more cheerfully to the fields in the morning, when the two soldiers had promised them a story for the evening.

The people of the village requested as a favor to be allowed to come and listen to Louise’s cousin and his comrade; and as formality and ceremony are unknown in the country, the great living-room of the farm-house was crowded

with villagers as soon as the work of the day was finished. The old woman brought her flax and her spinning-wheel, the housekeeper plied her needle, the maiden bound up the sheaves; in one corner a young peasant sifted his horse's grain; in another, the old man drank his ale, while the laborer smoked his pipe, leaning on a barrel; the children crawled about on the floor or played with Sans-Souci's moustache, while Louise prepared the soup, Guillot sorted out grains, and one and all had their eyes fixed upon Jacques, listening attentively to his description of a battle. When the affair became hot and Jacques grew animated, the faces of the listeners expressed anxiety, dread, terror; the old woman stopped her spinning-wheel, the laborer took his pipe from his mouth, the old man forgot his glass, the young man ceased to shake his sifter, and everyone, with head stretched forward and mouth wide open, awaited the result of the battle before resuming his former occupation.

A week passed thus with great rapidity. Our two companions, who did not choose to pay for the farmer's hospitality with stories alone, went out in the morning to assist the peasants in their work. Jacques went with Guillot to the fields, and plowed and dug with great strength and good-will. At first the farmer had set his face against his working, but Jacques had insisted, and in a very short time had become very skilful. As for Sans-Souci, he preferred to remain in the house. Louise undertook to supply him with work and she kept him busy. She was a very capable woman, and a hand never lacked work with her; whether it was in the attic, or in the cellar, or in the garden, or in the kitchen, she found some way to employ him always.

After some time, the farm-hand who had married went to live in his cottage with his wife. Guillot was in need of some one to take his place; the farm was an extensive one, and its dependencies considerable, and the farmer felt that Jacques and Sans-Souci would be none too many to help him work it. He dared not make the proposition to the two men, but Louise, who was anxious to keep them, undertook to arrange the affair. At the first words which she said, Jacques joyfully embraced the farmer's wife.

"I was afraid," he said, "of being a burden to you, but you offer me the means of earning my living honorably and I accept with gratitude. I will be a farm-hand, and I promise you that Sans-Souci will follow my example. We have both been soldiers, but whether one carries the musket or guides the plough, he is still serving his country, is he not?"

Thus everything was arranged to the perfect satisfaction of everyone. Jacques devoted himself completely to his new occupation; sometimes, in the midst of his toil, the thought of his brother came to his mind, and then his features would

become clouded, his hand rest on the spade, and his eyes turn toward the road to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. But he instantly banished his melancholy thoughts, and resumed his work with renewed zeal, striving to banish Edouard's image from his heart.

XV

FOUR MONTHS OF MARRIED LIFE.—NEW PLANS

Edouard, his wife and Mamma Germeuil were settled in the pretty house at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. Edouard, who had not mentioned his brother, had trembled with apprehension as he drew near the village, and he was even more agitated when he stepped inside his parents' former abode. He thought every instant that he should meet his brother, and on the day of his arrival he absolutely refused to walk in the garden. However, he had fully decided to welcome Jacques cordially and to present him to his wife's family; but while forming this resolution, he was conscious of an embarrassment, a vague dread, which aroused a secret dissatisfaction in his heart.

On the second day after his arrival in the country, he privately questioned the concierge of his house:

“Has anybody been here in my absence? Have you seen that stranger again, that man who was forever standing at the foot of the garden?”

“No, monsieur, no, I haven't seen him again, and no one has been here to see you.”

Edouard began to breathe more freely, and became more cheerful with the ladies. Time passed, and the face with moustaches did not reappear. Madame Germeuil sometimes referred to it, laughingly, with no suspicion of the distress which she caused her son-in-law; but they finally forgot the episode altogether, and Edouard recovered his tranquillity.

Adeline's heart had not changed; still sentimental and emotional, she loved her husband with idolatry, she was happy so long as he was with her, and so long as she could read in his eyes the same sentiments, the same love, the same happiness. She carried in her bosom a pledge of Edouard's love; that was a new subject of delight, of hopes, of projects for the future. Engrossed by that happiness, Adeline was less thoughtless, less vivacious.

They had little company in the country, but Edouard was still in love with his wife, and he was not at all bored. Sometimes, however, the evenings seemed rather long to him; Madame Germeuil's game of piquet was endless, and the excursions about the neighborhood impressed him as being slightly monotonous. But Adeline's caresses were still pleasant to him, and her kisses as sweet as ever.

One fine day a carriage stopped in front of Edouard's house, and two ladies and a gentleman alighted and entered the courtyard. The concierge asked the strangers' names in order to announce them to the ladies, who were in the garden. But they desired to surprise the Murville family and one of the two ladies who seemed to be in command, at once walked toward the garden, beckoning to her friends to follow her.

At last they discovered Madame Germeuil and Adeline, who rose in surprise and ran to meet Madame Dolban.

"What! is it you, my dear love? How kind of you to come!"

"I wanted to surprise you; I have been promising myself this pleasure for a long time, for I am passionately fond of the country. I have brought my little cousin with me; and as we required an escort, I have taken the liberty of bringing Monsieur Dufresne, who is delighted to present his respects to you."

Monsieur Dufresne bowed low to the ladies, and Mamma Germeuil assured Madame Dolban that anybody whom she might bring would always be welcome.

"But monsieur is not a stranger to you," continued Madame Dolban; "he was at my dear Adeline's wedding; it was Madame Devaux who introduced him to you."

"Indeed I believe that I remember," said Madame Germeuil; "but on such days one is so busy that one may be pardoned for not noticing all the young people. You know too, how many strange things happened that evening! Poor Madame de Volenville, and Monsieur Robineau!"

"Oh! don't speak of them, my dear love, or I shall die of laughter.—But where is Murville?"

"He is somewhere in the neighborhood; he will soon return home; meanwhile, come into the house and rest yourselves."

They went to the salon; Dufresne offered Madame Germeuil his hand, and Adeline escorted Madame Dolban and her cousin. Edouard soon returned. He seemed agreeably surprised to find company. No matter how much a man may be in love, the most delightful tête-à-têtes become tiresome after a while; so that a coquette is very careful to be sparing of them, interrupting them sometimes in order that they may be more eagerly desired afterwards. But Adeline was not a coquette.

Let us return to our company. Madame Dolban was still a young woman; she was not pretty, but her face had character, and she had that quality which in society is called ease of manner, and plenty of small talk.

Little Jenny was a girl of eighteen, very sweet and simple-mannered, and

trained to be silent when her cousin was talking. As for Dufresne, we know him already; imperfectly to be sure, but the sequel will enable us to judge him better.

It was at Adeline's wedding that he had made Madame Dolban's acquaintance. Had he fallen in love with her? That seemed rather improbable; however, he had acted like a very passionate lover; paying the most assiduous court to the widow, he had easily triumphed over her. Madame Dolban was not a prude, but she made a point of concealing her feelings, in order to be received more willingly in circles where morality and decency are held in esteem, and Madame Germeuil's house was one of the small number of which that could be said.

Dufresne had acquired absolute empire over the mind of Madame Dolban, who loved him passionately and who would have sacrificed everything for him. She had soon discovered that that young man, who claimed to be a business agent, broker, commission merchant, and tradesman, and who assumed all sorts of titles according to circumstances, was in reality nothing more than a knight of industry, having no trade, no office, and no perceptible means of livelihood.

A prudent woman would have broken with such a character; Madame Dolban had not the moral courage; on the contrary, she devoted herself absolutely to him, opened her purse to him, and allowed him to become absolute master in her house; and Dufresne used his friend's small fortune without the slightest hesitation, assuring her that he was about to make a bold stroke in business, and that he would very soon treble her capital.

Impelled by some unknown motive, Dufresne often inquired about Adeline and her husband. At last, he expressed one day a desire to go to their place in the country. Madame Dolban instantly made her preparations to go; she took her little cousin, in order to dispel any suspicion of a too close intimacy with a young man whom she wished to introduce to Madame Germeuil.

Dufresne was bright, he was accustomed to society, and could be entertaining when he chose to be; and in the visit to the young husband and wife he did whatever he considered most likely to attract the whole family. Attentive, zealous, even gallant with Madame Germeuil,—for he knew that gallantry has a fascination even for mothers,—he was agreeable, reserved and respectful to Adeline; but it was with Edouard especially that he put forth all the resources of his wit, in order to obtain Murville's entire confidence; and he at once applied himself to the study of his disposition, and to finding out his tastes and sounding his sentiments.

Everything assumed a festive appearance in the household at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. Three additional persons cause much change in a house. They

sang and played, drove, hunted and fished. The time passed very quickly to Edouard, who longed for company. But it seemed long to Adeline, who was unable to find a moment in the day to be alone with her husband.

On the third day after her arrival, Madame Dolban talked about returning to Paris. Edouard insisted on keeping his guests a few days longer. He could not do without Dufresne. They went hunting together, and drove in the morning before the ladies were up. Murville was delighted with his new friend; wit, merriment, an even disposition, and a similarity of tastes made Dufresne's presence a necessity to him, as his friendship was a delight.

Adeline could not be jealous of this new intimacy; and yet she felt a secret pain when she saw that her own affection did not fill her husband's heart sufficiently to exclude every other sentiment. Love is often selfish and even friendship offends it; anything which for a moment attracts the loved one seems a theft to that exacting god. But this excess of love is always excusable, and it does not seem a burden except when it ceases to be shared.

Madame Dolban and her friends took leave of the young couple at last. Adeline was pleased, for she was about to be alone with Edouard once more; she could talk to him without reserve as to the future, of the education of their children, and of all the family joys which were in store for them. Murville was sorry to see their guests go; but he was careful to urge Dufresne to come often to see him, and to pass at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges all the time that his business left him at leisure.

In the evening, Adeline took her husband's arm and led him into the garden; she told him how delighted she felt at being alone with him; she pressed his hands lovingly in hers; and she fixed her lovely eyes, filled with love, upon him. But Edouard was distraught and preoccupied; while replying to his wife, he seemed to be thinking of something else than what he said. Adeline noticed it; she sighed and the walk came to an end much earlier than usual.

The next day when they met at breakfast, Edouard spoke of Dufresne and of the pleasure it had afforded him to make his acquaintance. He was a charming man, full of intelligence and talent, who could not fail to succeed and make a handsome fortune.

"But, my dear," said Adeline, "it seems to me that you can hardly know that gentleman as yet."

"I myself," said Madame Germeuil, "think Monsieur Dufresne a most agreeable man; he is pleasant in company, and then, too, Madame Dolban has known him a long time, no doubt. But after all, my dear Edouard, you never

spoke to him until within a week, for we cannot count the day of your wedding; you were too busy to pay any attention to him then.”

“Oh, yes,” said Adeline, with a sigh, “that day he thought of nothing but me.”

“Really, mesdames, you talk rather strangely; does it require so very long, pray, to know a person and to form a judgment upon him? For my own part, two days are enough for me; besides, what interest could Dufresne have in putting on a false face with us? He has no need of our services, and you know that in the world we are constantly guided by our own interests; but aside from that, why should he put himself out? Dufresne has money, he is in business.”

“What business?”

“Oh! business on the Bourse, commerce, speculation; in short, very extensive business, according to what he tells me.”

“Has he an office, or any place? Is he a solicitor—a business agent?”

“No! no! But a man need not have any of those things now, to make his way. Moreover, mesdames, allow me to tell you that you know nothing about it.”

“Upon my word, my dear, you are very amiable! Why do you think that we are not so well able as men to decide what may be useful to us?”

“Because you are not brought up to do it.”

“My dear,” said Madame Germeuil, “education supplies neither intellect nor judgment. Believe me, a woman may give very good advice, and men are almost always wrong to despise it. The only advice that I can give you myself is not to form too rashly an intimacy with a man whom you have known only a week. Friendship should not be given so readily.”

“But Edouard is naturally so kind, so easy-going——”

“Oh! I know how to value people. I promise you that Dufresne’s friendship will be very valuable to me.”

“How so?”

“Parbleu! I mean to do as he does; and to increase our fortune, I too will go into business. I feel, moreover, that a man cannot live without having something to do. When we are in Paris, I can’t walk about from morning till night; I shall neither go hunting nor fishing.”

“That is just what I told you when you insisted on leaving your place,” said Mamma Germeuil; “but then you didn’t listen to me.”

“Oh! my dear mamma, if I had remained twenty years nailed to an office stool, what would that have led me to? To be a deputy chief perhaps, a year or two before being retired on a pension. A noble prospect! Instead of that, I may become very wealthy some day.”

“What, Edouard, have you become ambitious now?”

“I am not ambitious, my dear Adeline; but suppose I were? our family may be increased, and there is no law against a man’s thinking about the welfare of his children.”

“Of course not! of course not!” said Madame Germeuil; “but sometimes, by insisting upon running about after vain chimeras, you lose what you have for certain.”

“Oh! never fear, madame, I shall not run after chimeras. I shall act only upon

certainty; I shall advance only a very little; and besides, Dufresne will give me good advice.”

Thus ended this conversation. Edouard left the house to meditate upon his new plans for acquiring wealth; Madame Germeuil returned sadly to her bedroom, and Adeline went out to muse alone in the garden.

XVI

RETURN TO PARIS.—THE BUSINESS AGENT

A few days later, Monsieur Dufresne paid another visit to the family in the country. Edouard received him like an old friend, Madame Germeuil courteously, and Adeline rather coldly. The newcomer talked much of his affairs, of his speculations, of his extensive schemes. All this charmed and dazzled Murville, who was already crazy to start on the career which his friend was to open to him, and who, hurt by his mother-in-law's lack of confidence in this method of making his way, was keenly desirous to prove to her the absurdity of her fears.

Despite all that Edouard could say, Dufresne stayed but one day with him. His time was all occupied and his interests recalled him to Paris. But the season was advancing; they could not remain longer among the fields, which were already losing their verdure. It was the end of October, and they had been in the country nearly six months. Edouard looked forward with delight to the moment for returning to Paris. Adeline reproached him gently; Madame Germeuil said nothing, but she was already apprehensive for the future, and everything had not turned out as she had hoped when she gave her daughter's hand to Murville. The latter was of a weak, irresolute character, and yet Adeline did whatever he desired.

"Ah!" thought the good lady, "my daughter is too loving, too emotional. She is not the wife that Edouard needed. She knows how to do nothing but embrace and sigh; and if he ever chooses to make a fool of himself, she will never have the strength to resist! Let us hope that he will not do it."

They returned to Paris. Then Edouard set about realizing the plans that he had formed. Every day he went to the Bourse and to the cafés where business men gathered; he did not go into any business at once, but he listened, walked about, talked and made acquaintances. Dufresne was often present, and he had promised his friend to let him in for a share in his brilliant speculations. Moreover, when business was not brisk, such people passed their time agreeably, laughing, telling one another the news of the day, talking about theatres, balls, fashions, concerts and love-affairs. The course of the stock market did not prevent them from being thoroughly posted as to the course of literature, music and dancing. While negotiating bills of exchange on Vienna or London, they

enquired the name of the actress who was to play in the new piece; they undertook to sell shares and to hire a box at the Bouffons; they extolled the honesty of this or that tradesman, and the eccentricity of Lord Byron; the punctuality of a commission merchant, and the pirouettes of Paul; they knew the cause of the latest failure, and the plot of the melodrama which was then the rage; they knew what had happened at the last ball given by a banker, and in his wife's curtained box at the theatre. In fact, they knew everything, for they discussed all subjects. At all these gatherings they declared war and peace, and settled the course of the weather; they divided, reunited, and enlarged empires with the end of a cane or switch; they knew the secrets of the cabinets of all the powers of Europe!—yet when they returned home to their wives, they did not notice everything that had taken place during their absence.

Adeline sighed for the happy days that she had passed in the country immediately after her marriage. However, her husband still loved her; she did not doubt it; but she saw him less frequently, and when he was with her, he no longer, as formerly, talked of love, of constancy, of conjugal happiness, but he assured her that he would soon be engaged in extensive affairs, speculations, in which he would make large profits.

“But what need have we of so much money, my dear?” said Adeline, throwing her arms about her husband; “I am soon to be a mother, that is to me the greatest of all joys; with your love I desire no other——”

“My dear love, what you say is very pretty; I share your sentiments, but I see farther than you do. Never fear, we shall be very happy some day.”

“Ah! my dear, never so happy, never more happy than I have been; before you knew Dufresne, you thought of nobody but me!”

“Well, now you are going to talk about Dufresne, are you? You don't like him; you have taken a grudge against him. What has he done to cause this? He gives me good advice, and he is pushing me along the road to wealth; I don't see in that any reason for detesting him!”

“I detest nobody.”

“But you receive him coldly, and Madame Dolban too.”

“I receive him as I do everybody.”

“Oh! no doubt; you would like to live like a bear, and never see any company.”

“I have not said that; but formerly I was enough for you, and you didn't need company to be happy in your home.”

“Pshaw! now you are crying! tears are no argument! how childish you are!

you know perfectly well that I love you, that I love nobody but you!”

“Oh! I won’t cry any more, my dear. If it pleases you, I will see a great deal of company.”

“Oh! I don’t say that; we will see if my plans succeed. Dufresne tells me that it would not be a bad idea for me to give evening parties, punches, with a violin and an écarté table. But don’t mention this yet to your mother,—she is so peculiar!”

“I won’t say anything, my dear.”

Edouard went out to his business, and Adeline remained alone. Thereupon, she gave free vent to her tears, for she could not conceal the fact from herself, that her husband was not the same. Still he loved her tenderly, he was not unfaithful; why then should she be disturbed by a change which was only natural and which nothing could prevent? Eight months of wedded life had not diminished Adeline’s affection. Her love was still as ardent, as exclusive, her caresses as warm and passionate; but a man’s heart needs a respite in its affections; it is unable to love a long while with the same passion; it beats violently and then stops; it blazes and then grows cold; it is a fire which does not burn with equal intensity; a trifle is sufficient to extinguish or rekindle it.

The young wife said all this to herself to console herself; above all, she determined to conceal her grief from her mother; but she could not change with respect to Dufresne; that man aroused in her a feeling of repulsion, which her heart could not explain. And yet he was agreeable, courteous to her; he had never ceased to be respectful in his attentions: at what then could she take offence? She had no idea, but she did not like him, and her glance caused him an embarrassment and confusion which were not natural; she fancied that she detected in him a sort of constraint which she could not define. When she appeared, Dufresne seemed ill at ease, and he left the room if Madame Dolban were present; if chance caused him to be left alone with his friend’s wife, he had nothing to say; but at such times, his eyes followed Adeline’s every movement, and they wore an expression which she could not endure.

Several days after the conversation he had had with his wife, Edouard returned home with a triumphant air; his face was radiant, his eyes gleamed with pleasure.

“What’s the matter, son-in-law, what has happened to you?” said Mamma Germeuil; “you seem very happy.”

“In truth, I am, and I have good reason to be.”

“Of course you will let us share your joy, my dear.”

“Yes, mesdames, you will cease now, I hope, to say that I delude myself with chimeras; by the luckiest chance I have recently become acquainted with a rich foreigner, who proposes to settle in France. He was looking for a large, pleasant house, all furnished, in one of the best quarters of the city; I found one for him; he looked at it, was delighted with it, bought it, and gives me six thousand francs for my trouble; and the seller gives me as much more for my commission. Well! isn’t that rather pleasant? Twelve thousand francs earned in a moment.”

“True, son-in-law, but you have been running about for three months to reach that moment!”

“Twelve thousand francs! That is well worth taking a little trouble for!”

“That is true, but such affairs must be rare.”

“I shall find others.”

“They will not all be so fortunate.”

“Oh! if a man earned twelve thousand francs every day, he would be too lucky.”

“In this matter, you do not seem to have needed Dufresne’s assistance?”

“Oh! he will put me in the way of more profitable ones yet. But in order to do a good business, I must have an office. You must understand that when my clients come to see me, I can’t receive them in a salon or a bedroom. I must have an office well stocked with boxes. That makes an impression; and as it is impossible to have a suitable place here, we must move.”

“What! do you mean to leave these lodgings, son-in-law?”

“Ah! my dear! this is where our hands were united by mamma. It was here that Hymen fulfilled our wishes, and I have been so happy here!”

“My dear love, one is happy anywhere when one is rich. We will take a much handsomer apartment. This salon is too small.”

“It is large enough to receive our friends.”

“Yes, but friends are not the only ones to be received; we have acquaintances too.”

“Son-in-law, don’t you think that you are undertaking an establishment beyond your means?”

“Madame, I wish to make my fortune; that is a very praiseworthy ambition, it seems to me; why should I not try what thousands of others have tried successfully? Have I less merit, less talents than my predecessors? I propose to prove the contrary to your satisfaction. Who is this manufacturer, whose name is in every mouth, whose wealth is immense and his credit unlimited? He came to

Paris without a sou; he simply knew how to write and make figures; he entered, as a petty clerk, the establishment of which to-day he is the owner; but he was ambitious, he worked hard, and everything succeeded with him. This financier, who is engaged in such enormous operations on the Bourse, arrived from his village, asking hospitality at the taverns along the road, sleeping on straw, and eating nothing but bread, lucky when he had enough of that to satisfy his appetite. He stopped at Paris on Place du Péron, hesitating whether he should ask alms or should jump into the river. A tradesman happened to notice him and gave him a letter to carry; the promptness and zeal which he displayed in doing the errand interested people in his favor. Every one selected him for his messenger; he soon succeeded in saving some money, and speculated on his own account; the movement of stocks was favorable to him; and to make a long story short, he has become a millionaire. I could cite you a hundred similar examples; and since one may become something from nothing, it seems to me that it is much easier to become rich when one already has something in hand.”

“When one has nothing, son-in-law, one does not risk ruining oneself.”

“Oh! only the fools ruin themselves, madame!”

“It is better to be a fool than a knave, and many people have made their fortunes only at the expense of those of other people.”

“I trust, madame, that you do not consider me capable of enriching myself in that way?”

“No, of course not! But before everything else one should be orderly and economical. By this means the financier and manufacturer whom you mentioned just now have grown rich, and not by giving extravagant receptions and balls.”

“Other times, other methods, madame; to-day, men do business and seek enjoyment at the same time. They negotiate a sale while drinking punch, and sign a deed at a bouillotte or an écarté table, and buy consols while dancing a quadrille. Well, I see no harm in all that. It is what is called carrying on business gayly.”

“Yes, monsieur, but not substantially.—For my own part, I shall not choose for my banker the one who gives the most beautiful parties; and if it is your purpose to leave this lodging in order to live in that way, I warn you that I shall not live with you.”

Edouard made no reply to his mother-in-law, but took his hat and went out in a very ill humor, storming against women who insist upon meddling in business of which they understand nothing. Madame Germeuil remained with her daughter.

“Oh! mamma,” said Adeline, throwing herself into her mother’s arms, “don’t be angry with Edouard. Alas! It is I alone who am guilty. It was I who urged him to leave the place he had. But could I have anticipated? It is that Dufresne, it is his advice which turns my husband’s head.”

“My dear Adeline, in the early days of your married life, you should have taken possession of your husband’s mind, and accustomed him to do what you wanted; at that time it would have been very easy for you, but you did just the opposite.”

“I simply tried to please him, and we had but one will then! But soon I am going to be a mother. Ah! how impatiently I await that moment! I am sure that his child’s caresses will make Edouard forget all his schemes of wealth and grandeur.”

“May you say true!”

The term marked by nature approached. Edouard realized that that was no time to change his abode, so he said no more of his plans, and Adeline thought that he had abandoned them. Soon she brought into the world a pretty little girl, a faithful image of her mother’s charms. Edouard desired that Dufresne should be his child’s godfather, but Madame Germeuil refused him as an associate; so it was necessary to give way, and to take in his place an old annuitant, most upright, orderly and methodical, who gave the godmother three boxes of bonbons and two pairs of gloves, and promised to dine every week with the young mother, in order to learn how his goddaughter was coming on.

Edouard did not say a word, but he awaited his wife’s entire recovery before putting his plans into execution; and he secretly hoped that Madame Germeuil would persist in her refusal to change her lodgings, in order that he might no longer have beneath his roof a mother-in-law whose advice and reproaches were beginning to be distasteful to him.

Adeline was engrossed by the joy of being a mother; she nursed her child, in spite of all that Edouard could say to prove that that was not done in good society; but in that matter Adeline resisted her husband, the mother-love carried the day, and that new sentiment abated in some degree the force of the sentiment which hitherto had reigned despotically in her heart.

For some time Madame Dolban had been a less frequent visitor at the Murville house; Adeline and her mother did not know the reason, but they were not sorry to be less often in the company of Dufresne, who ordinarily accompanied Madame Dolban. They thought that if he saw him less often, Edouard would pay less heed to the new dreams of wealth which had been

suggested to him by that young man.

The ladies were mistaken; Dufresne was very careful not to neglect Murville, with whose character he was now perfectly acquainted. He knew all that he could hope to gain by his acquaintance. He had, moreover, extensive projects. Which events will soon place us in a position to judge, no doubt. But like a clever man, Dufresne waited until the propitious moment came to carry out his plans. He saw that Madame Germeuil did not like him; the presence of Adeline's mother interfered with his designs; so he tried shrewdly to sow discord between her and her son-in-law; he found a way of separating them, by suggesting to Edouard to find a larger apartment in order to give handsome parties. The two friends met everyday, and passed a large part of the morning together; and when Murville left the house at night, it was to go to other houses where Dufresne had agreed to meet him. Edouard could not do without his friend, he was unwilling to do anything without consulting him, to undertake anything until he had seen him. But if his wife gave him advice, if his mother-in-law ventured to make a remonstrance, Edouard lost his temper, flew into a rage, and insisted that he was the master, whereas he was simply the plaything of the man who had the art to flatter his tastes. A curious character! naturally weak, unreasonably obstinate, intending to be firm and not to allow himself to be guided by others, Edouard abandoned himself to the will of the man who secretly advised him to be persevering and determined in his plans, because he was well aware that that was the way to speak to a weak man who in his eyes was simply a mass of ductile matter, to which he could give whatever shape he chose.

Adeline did not suffer from the new duties to which she devoted herself; on the contrary, her features seemed even lovelier, her eyes more melting, her bearing more graceful; she was fascinating when she held her child in her arms, and when she went out in the morning to give her a breath of air. Another than Murville would have considered Adeline improved; but a husband rarely makes such observations, he sees only the contrary. In default of him, others notice his wife's beauty, admire what he does not see, praise what he has ceased to praise, and rave over what he neglects; that is something that husbands do not think about, that they do not trouble themselves about at all, and yet it is the thing which plays them such cruel tricks.

One man observed what Edouard no longer observed; he followed Adeline, without her knowledge, he admired her charms, he divined those which he could not see and devoured with his eyes all that he could see. A violent passion had assumed the mastery of him; he was simply waiting for a favorable moment to try to induce her to share his passion. However, there was very little hope that he

could win her love, and he knew it. Adeline was virtue personified; she was absolutely devoted to her husband and to her child. But there was no obstacle, no barrier, that the man who adored her had not resolved to overturn. Nothing can check the impetuous torrent swelled by heavy rains; nothing could discourage his love if we may thus name the unbridled desires, the delirium, the jealousy that for a long time had filled his heart. He had decided to attempt everything, to undertake everything, to dare everything, in order to triumph over Adeline; his passion, long concealed, was only the more violent on that account; the fire which devoured him was likely to consume everything when it should break forth. But who was this mysterious man, whose love thus far had remained a secret? You know him, reader, and I will wager that you have already guessed his name.

Edouard, who had plunged deeper than ever into business, of which he understood nothing, but which seemed to him all the more attractive on that account,—Edouard hired a handsome house, a fashionable carriage, bought magnificent furniture of the latest style, furnished a very elaborate office, with shelves on all sides, on which were pasteboard boxes, empty to be sure, but soon to contain the documents relating to the transactions which could not fail to come to his hands in a multitude. Pending their arrival, our man hired a clerk, who passed his time reading the *Gazette* and cutting quill pens.

Adeline was installed in her new abode. She looked at everything, sighed and held her peace. Madame Germeuil, on the contrary, burst forth into reproaches, and had a violent scene with her son-in-law. She predicted that he would ruin himself. Edouard was vexed and lost his temper, and a rupture followed. Madame Germeuil left her son-in-law's house, swearing never to see him again; she refused to be moved by her daughter's tears, tears for which the good woman blamed herself in the depths of her heart; she realized that it would have been better to give her daughter to a man of firm but sensible character than to a weak, irresolute creature, who had not enough intelligence to admit his failings, and too much obstinacy to repair them. But the harm was done.

After Madame Germeuil's departure there was another scene between the husband and the wife; for Adeline could not forbear to scold her husband in her turn, and she begged him to go after her mother and bring her back. He was obstinate; he persisted in refusing to attempt a reconciliation, and he informed his wife that he was determined to do as he chose, that all remonstrance would be fruitless thenceforth and would not change his line of conduct, in which he did not propose to be guided by women.

Thus the splendid abode of the new business agent was christened by tears;

but Murville no longer paid any heed to such trifles; he had matters of great importance in his head. Dufresne was to put him in the way of earning fifty thousand francs with a wealthy shipowner who had just arrived in Paris and was seeking investments for his money, with which he did not know what to do. In order to become acquainted with that invaluable man, it was necessary to give an evening party, a ball, to which he would be brought by a third person. The ball was decided upon; and in accordance with his friend's advice, Edouard made the most elaborate preparations for a function which was to give him an established position in society. To be sure, the expenses of that function would be enormous. The twelve thousand francs earned some time before were largely spent; he had had to encroach upon his income to buy the furniture and to decorate his house; but all that was nothing at all; in order to reap, one must sow,—that was Dufresne's maxim. And his example proved that it worked well with him; never had he seemed more fortunate, more magnificent, more at his ease. He had a cabriolet, a groom, and such diamonds! Therefore he must be doing an excellent business.

XVII

A GRAND PARTY.—A DECLARATION OF LOVE

“My dear love,” said Edouard to his wife, one morning, “I am going to give a party to-morrow—a ball; you must prepare to do the honors.”

“You are going to give a party—to whom, pray? Can it be that you are reconciled with mamma?”

“Who is talking about your mother? She is a woman who insists upon meddling in affairs which she does not understand, and who, because her tastes lead her to live in a narrow circle, wishes also to prevent us from going out of it. You must agree that that is utterly absurd. However, when I have fifty thousand francs a year, I fancy that she will forgive me for not listening to her advice.”

“That will not be very soon, I take it!”

“Sooner than you think, madame, and I act accordingly.”

“And is that the reason that you are giving a party?”

“Exactly.”

“Whom do you expect to have?”

“Oh! never fear, we shall have lots of people. In the first place, we must, for it is the fashion now; if one is not crowded and pushed about in a salon, he does not think that he has enjoyed himself.”

“Oh! what nonsense, my dear! Who told you that?”

“It is not nonsense, madame. I go into society while you are taking care of your daughter.”

“Oh! I am well aware that you no longer stay with me.”

“That is necessary; I must show myself in society; that is the place where a man makes acquaintances.”

“Disastrous ones, sometimes!”

“Oh! mon Dieu! I am not a child; I know with whom I am dealing! Why, to hear you and your mother talk, anyone would think that I am not capable of taking care of myself.

“I never said that, my dear; but I cannot help regretting the time when I alone was sufficient for your enjoyment; then you passed all your time with me,—you did not go into society.—Well! were you not happy?”

“To be sure I was.”

“Then why have you changed your mode of life?”

“Why? why? That is a strange question to ask me! a man cannot always be making love to his wife, can he?”

“Oh! I have discovered that! But I did not expect to learn it after only a year of married life.”

“Well, well! are you going to begin your reproaches again? Women are never reasonable.”

“I am not reproaching you, my dear; give parties, as that gives you pleasure; I shall never object.”

“You are a love; you are not obstinate like your mother; and I tell you again that this is all for our good. So make the necessary preparations. I have already ordered and arranged everything, and all that you will have to do will be to see that my orders are carried out.”

“Very well. But what shall I say to people whom I do not know?”

“Oh! don’t let that trouble you! You just bow and smile to every one. With your grace and your wit you will always be fascinating.”

“I would like to be fascinating to you alone.”

“Do you mean that I am unfaithful to you? I am really so good——”

“That some day you will be laughed at for it.”

“Never fear, I love you only.—I am going to send a few more invitations; prepare for our party.”

Edouard kissed his wife and left her. Adeline, in order to please him, inquired about what was to be done on the following day; she was alarmed at the magnitude of the expense, but it was too late to oppose it. After giving her orders, the young wife went to see her mother. It was on Madame Germeuil’s bosom that she poured out her grief, though she concealed much of it, in order not to make her mother more bitter against her husband.

“Oh!” said Adeline, “so long as he is faithful to me, I shall have nothing to complain of. I can forgive him everything except indifference, which I absolutely could not endure.”

The next day, at daybreak, everything was in confusion in the Murville establishment. The servants could not attend to the innumerable preparations which were under way on every side; workmen came to put carpets and chandeliers in place and vases of flowers along the stair-rails. The mirror-maker’s apprentices, upholsterers, florists and decorators filled the salons, and

got in the way of the footmen and other servants. Soon the caterers arrived, the pastry cooks and the ice dealer's men, who took possession of the servants' quarters and began the decoration of the sideboards, which were to be furnished in the evening in the most sumptuous way, and to offer everything which could fascinate the eyes, the nose and the palate at once. Adeline attempted to pass through several rooms to her husband's office; she was bewildered by the uproar, the shouts, the tumult; she could not recognize her own apartments. At last she spied Edouard walking about the salons, and watching with a self-satisfied air the preparations for the party.

"Well, my dear love," he said to his wife as soon as he caught sight of her, "what do you think of all this?"

"That I do not understand how anyone can take so much trouble to entertain people whom one does not know, and who feel no obligation for the pains which one takes to treat them so handsomely."

"But, my dear love, you must remember that a man does all this for his reputation's sake. Parbleu! I care nothing at all for the people whom I entertain; I am not at all anxious for their friendship, but I am anxious that people should say in society: 'Monsieur Murville's party was delightful, nothing was lacking; and everything was in the very best style. That function must have cost a tremendous sum!'—You will agree that that will do me credit; people will assume that I have a considerable fortune, and that I have more business than I desire.—Be sure to dress handsomely, and wear your diamonds; they are not so fine as I wish they were, but before long I hope to make you a present of a superb string of them."

"My dear, you know perfectly well that I do not want anything of that kind; your love alone——"

"It is getting late; go and dress."

The time fixed for the party arrived; between nine and ten o'clock, the carriages and the pedestrians—for some people always come on foot, even to the largest balls—the courtyard of Murville's house in swarms. They crowded under the porte cochère; the coachmen insulted one another and disputed for precedence; the young women, wrapped in their pelisses or cloaks, jumped lightly to the landing, and waited, one for her mother, another for her husband, to take her up to the salons. The officious young man mounted the stairs gracefully, his body enveloped in an ample cloak lined with crimson velvet, which concealed almost the whole of his face, leaving only the end of his nose visible; he offered his hand to a young lady whose fear of the horses standing in the courtyard had separated her from her escort. The young gallant in the cloak saw only a pair of very expressive eyes and a few curls, for all the rest was concealed

under the hood of a pelisse; but he saw enough to divine lovely features and the form of a nymph. He gently pressed the hand which she entrusted to him; he engaged his fair unknown for the first quadrille, and his hopes were aroused before he had even entered the reception room. That room was crowded; in one corner the ladies arranged their dresses, gave a last glance to their finery, which had become rumpled in the carriage; farther on, in a less brilliantly lighted spot, a number of economical bank clerks took slippers from their pockets and put them on in place of their shoes, which they carefully wrapped in large pieces of paper with their gaiters, and placed them under some heavy piece of furniture which was not likely to be moved. After effecting this slight change of costume, they carefully pulled their ruffs from their waistcoats, retied their cravats, passed their hands through their hair, rumpling it or smoothing it according as their style of beauty required, and then, drawing themselves up proudly, entered the salon with an air of impertinence and conceit which was calculated to persuade all the other guests that they had come in a tilbury.

The salon was already filled with women of all ages; for by the face only, not by the dress, could the mother be distinguished from the daughter, the aunt from the niece. The men strolled about, eyeglass in hand, and despite that little accessory, almost put their noses into the ladies' faces, as they stopped in front of them, making wry faces when one was not to their liking; while the ladies themselves smiled at them instead of spitting in their faces as their insolent manner of staring at them well deserved. Soon the crowd became so large that one could hardly move. That was the delightful moment; a young exquisite halted in front of a girl seated beside her mother, and made the most indecent gestures, which the poor child avoided only by keeping her own eyes constantly on the floor, which prevented her from enjoying the spectacle of the ball; but the young man was persistent; he did not stir from in front of her, and had the effrontery to interpret in his favor the blush which covered the brow of her whom he deigned to notice. A few steps away, another young exquisite pointed out to four or five of his friends a pretty woman whose husband stood nearby; he told them in confidence that she had been his mistress for a week; his friends congratulated him, and asked him for details concerning the lady's secret charms and her way of making love; he replied, laughing heartily, and gesticulating like one possessed, which could not fail to attract every eye, and to arouse the curiosity of those who did not hear him. Luckily the husband was of the latter number; but he desired to know what was being said, so he approached and enquired:

“What are you laughing at so loudly, gentlemen?”

“Oh! it was nothing, a joke he was telling us.”

“Some rascality, I will wager; you are sad rakes!”

“You will find out later what it was.”

And the young men dispersed, laughing louder than ever; the husband laughed with them; he did not know why, but he wanted to seem to be informed.

The signal to begin the dance was given, and an excellent orchestra, directed by Collinet, played several delightful quadrilles, which invited one to dance; fascinating tunes, selected from the masterpieces of the great masters, are now used as the theme and motif of a *poule*, a *trénis*, or a *pantalon*. How can one resist the temptation, when one has the opportunity to execute a pirouette, a *balancé*, or an *entre-chat* to passages from Rossini, Mozart, or Boieldieu? The ear is no less charmed by the method of execution; modern quadrilles are little concerts for wind and stringed instruments; it requires talent to play them. We have left to the poor blind men such tunes as the Monaco, the Périgourdine and the Furstemberg; we need artistes to play the quadrilles of Weber, Collinet, Rubner, etc.

There was little room; the guests trod on one another's feet, and jostled one another; but they danced, and that was the essential thing; what joy for the young woman who desires to display her charms, and for the woman on the decline who flatters herself that she is still very light on her feet!

Those who were not attracted by the dancing and the music took their places at an *écarté* table; there they abandoned themselves to their passion for gambling, awaiting a favorable stroke of luck; they tried to fathom the play of their opponents, to read upon their faces what cards they had in their hands. They forgot their wives or their daughters; and very frequently those ladies in the salon forgot those who were at the *écarté* table.

The bets opened and soon became very considerable; young men, who should have paid no heed to aught except the ladies and the dance, waited anxiously to see if their adversary would turn a king; their blood boiled; the sight of gold, the hope of winning, led them on; and more than one, who walked away from the tables with empty pockets, would refuse the next day to give money to his tailor or his bootmaker; while our economical friends of the shoes and the gaiters, who had allowed themselves to be led astray by example, observed to one another as they took off their slippers, that they would have done better to hire a cab than to bet or play *écarté*.

Others had recourse to the sideboard for consolation and stuffed themselves with pastry and refreshments; the greatest glutton took the most delicate

sweetmeats, on the pretext that he was taking them to the ladies. What horrible waste there is in such mobs! Plates overturned, one dish cast aside to take another, of which three-quarters is left; the creams that the guests snatch from one another; the bonbons that disappear before one has time to take one;—such is the ordinary course of collations at large parties; the sideboard is always being pillaged, and the young men who surround it act as if they had eaten nothing for a week. What an extraordinary way for people in good society to behave!

Adeline tried to discover some acquaintance amid the crowd and the tumult; but most of the faces were unknown to her. Weary of listening to insipid or exaggerated compliments, addressed to her by men whom she did not know, and disgusted at being stared at through the eyeglasses of these men, the young woman seized a moment when everybody was busy according to his or her taste, to go to her room, to make sure that her daughter was asleep, and to enjoy, by embracing her, the only pleasure that that evening could afford her.

To reach the room where her little Ermance was in bed, Adeline was obliged to leave her guests altogether, for she had determined that her child should not be awakened by the noise; she passed through several half-lighted rooms and finally reached her daughter's side; she paused by the cradle and gazed at Ermance, who was sleeping peacefully. With her mind more at ease, Adeline was going back to her guests; but, as she entered a dimly-lighted boudoir which adjoined her daughter's bedroom, she saw some one gliding along the wall. A feeling of alarm took possession of her.

“Who is there?” she said instantly.

“Don't be afraid, madame; I am distressed to have taken you so by surprise.”

Adeline recovered herself, for she recognized Dufresne's voice, and asked: “What are you seeking here?”

“The noise and heat of the salon made me feel uncomfortable; I was very glad to be able to come away and rest for a moment.”

Adeline went into the next room for a lamp, and brought it into the room where Dufresne had remained; he followed her every movement with his eyes, and seemed intensely agitated.

“If you are not feeling well, I will go and bring you something.”

“Oh, no! stay, madame, I beg you; your presence is a hundred times more beneficial to me.”

Dufresne had taken Adeline's hand; she, amazed by the extraordinary tone and by the fire with which he addressed her, did not know what reply to make, but stood before him sorely embarrassed. Dufresne squeezed violently the hand

that he held in his. Adeline withdrew it at once in dismay, and started to leave the room, but he stood in front of her and stopped her.

“What do you want of me?” she said to him, her voice trembling with a feeling of terror she could not explain.

“That you should listen to me, madame, that you should deign to listen to me.”

“What have you to say to me, pray, that demands so much mystery? We might talk quite as well in the salon.”

“No, madame, no,—here. Ah! for a long while I have been postponing this moment; but I feel that it is impossible for me to conceal longer the passion which consumes me; no, I am no longer able to see you, to contemplate so many charms, without giving expression to the ardor which devours me.”

“What are you saying to me, monsieur?”

“That I love you, that I adore you, lovely Adeline, and that you must be mine!”

“Merciful heaven! What do I hear?”

“Learn all at last; know that from the first moment that I saw you, you have been the object of all my thoughts, of all my desires, the goal of all my acts; I became intimate with Madame Dolban only to obtain an opportunity to be introduced at your house; that hope and the hope of winning your favor some day alone prevented me from committing some foolish extravagance between the day of your wedding and the day when I was introduced to you. But how I suffered then, concealing from everyone the flame which consumed me! and what torments have I not endured when I have seen you lavishing upon my fortunate rival all those caresses which he received with indifference, whereas a single one would have been the height of felicity to me.”

“This is too much, monsieur; I have restrained my indignation, but I shall no longer be able to do so, if I listen to you any more.”

“Your indignation! Wherein do I deserve it?”

“To call my husband your rival, and in return for his friendship to try to win his wife—such conduct is shocking!”

“Such conduct is very common, and it only seems shocking to you because you do not share my sentiments; for, if you loved me, instead of being a monster, I should be an unhappy wretch consumed by an insurmountable passion, suffering for a long while and concealing his agony from every eye, even before her who is the cause of it. Such conduct then would not seem criminal to you; so much love and constancy would arouse your pity at least, and you would accord

it to me, madame, you would listen to me without anger, and perhaps a gentler sentiment would plead my cause in your heart, and would help me to obtain the reward of all my attentions. That, madame, is what you should consider. I adore you—that is my crime; it will cease to be a crime if you share my passion; success insures forgiveness for the most audacious enterprises, and I shall be guilty only if you hate me.”

“Your speeches, monsieur, will never justify you in my eyes. I might excuse your love, but not your hope of inducing me to share it. A person is not master of his heart, I believe, but he is master of his conduct, and yours is unworthy of a decent man——”

“Madame——”

“Never speak to me again of your love; only on that condition do I agree to forget this conversation and to refrain from repeating it to my husband.”

“Your husband! He wouldn’t believe you.”

“What do you say?”

“No, madame, he would never believe anything that you might say against me. Do you suppose that I have not provided against everything? I have obtained such control over your husband’s mind that he no longer sees except through my eyes, no longer acts except by my will; in fact, he is a machine, whose movements I govern at my pleasure. But tremble, if you reject my suit, for the power which I shall exert over the weak-minded Edouard! You will learn then to know me, and you will repent your unjust pride; but it will be too late, for my hatred will be as active as my love is violent.”

“Abominable man! I feel that the horror that you have inspired in me has increased twofold, but I defy your threats, and I forbid you to come into my presence again.”

Dufresne’s face expressed rage and irony at once; his nerves contracted, a bitter smile played about his lips, while his eyes darted flashes of fire. Adeline, in terror, tried to fly; he stopped her, threw his muscular arms about her, pressed her violently to his breast, and placed his burning lips upon his victim’s heaving breast; he was about to proceed to the last excess, but the young woman uttered a piercing shriek; people hurried to the spot, the sound of footsteps drew near. Dufresne opened a window looking on the garden, jumped out and disappeared.

Several servants and young men entered the room; they gathered about Adeline and inquired the cause of her alarm. Her eyes wandered distractedly about; the sight of the open window recalled all that had passed, and she realized the necessity of concealing her emotion.

“What’s the matter, madame, what has happened to you?” was asked on all sides.

“I don’t know,” she said, trying to calm her agitation, “I did not feel very well, the heat made me uncomfortable. I came to this room to obtain a breath of fresh air; but as I opened that window, a fit of dizziness—I tried to call for help, and I had not the strength.”

The explanation seemed very plausible; they urged Madame Murville not to return to the salon, where the intense heat might make her ill again. Adeline had no idea of doing so; she would have been unable to endure Dufresne’s presence. So she withdrew to her apartments, requesting somebody to apologize for her to the rest of the company.

She asked her maid to tell Edouard that she wished to see him as soon as he was at liberty. The servant delivered the message. But Murville paid little heed to it. He had just lost forty louis at *écarté* to an exceedingly pretty young woman, who bestowed very expressive glances upon him, smiling at him and showing the loveliest teeth in the world; and, accidentally, no doubt, allowed her little foot to rest upon his, and her knee to remain between his legs. How could he help allowing himself to be beaten by so attractive a player? She pouted so sweetly when he refused to give her cards that it was impossible to resist her. Edouard felt that he was subjugated; but imagine his sensations when she asked him to wipe the perspiration from a very white back, which was moist from dancing! He performed the service with trembling fingers; she thanked him with a pressure of the hand, and invited him to come to see her and to take his revenge for the game of *écarté*.

At five in the morning, they danced the regulation quadrille to close the ball. They laughed and mixed the figures up and tired themselves out; they made much noise and much dust; and then they took their leave, one carrying away an old hat in place of the new one he had had when he came, and which he could not find; another, minus the pretty cane which he had taken pains to place in a dark corner; very fortunate when the mackintosh or overcoat or cloak had not been changed.

Advice to young men who frequent large parties: Do not carry valuable canes, and wear nothing better than an old hat to leave in the reception room, unless you choose to keep it in your hand all the time, as many people do nowadays to avoid the slight vexation which we have just mentioned.

Edouard, with a full heart and an empty purse, went to his room, engrossed by the pretty woman with whom he had played *écarté*, and without a thought for his own wife, who had long been waiting for him in vain.

XVIII

FOLLY.—BLINDNESS.—WEAKNESS

Adeline had risen during the night, being anxious concerning her husband; but on learning that he had gone to his apartment very late, she decided not to disturb his rest, and waited until he should be awake to tell him what had taken place in the evening between herself and Dufresne, whom she hoped to make known to him as he really was.

Edouard woke and went downstairs to breakfast. Adeline was waiting for him; she reproached him gently for his indifference of the night before; but he hardly listened to her; he was distraught, preoccupied, and complained of a violent headache which he hoped to get rid of by going out. Adeline detained him, informing him that she had something of great importance to say. Amazed by his wife's tone, Edouard instinctively resumed his seat and requested her to hurry because business required his attention. The servants were dismissed and Adeline repeated to her husband her conversation with Dufresne on the previous evening.

Edouard listened at first with indifference; but soon displeasure and impatience were depicted upon his face.

"Well, my dear," said Adeline, after she had told him everything, "what do you think now of your sincere friend?"

"I think—I think that you make a crime of a trifle, and a matter of importance of something that amounts to nothing."

"What! my dear——"

"Certainly; a declaration to a woman! *mon Dieu!* is that such a rare thing, for heaven's sake, a thing for which it is necessary to make so much fuss? Every day pretty women receive declarations addressed to them in jest, to which they attach no more importance than they deserve. But you take fright at a word! a simple compliment seems to you an attempt at seduction! you shouldn't take things so! But I know you: you don't like—more than that, you detest Dufresne. For a long time you have been trying to ruin him in my estimation, and you seize this pretext for accomplishing your purpose; but I warn you, madame, that you will not succeed."

"Is it possible, monsieur? do you accuse me, do you suspect me of being

capable of deceiving you?”

“Or of being deceived? How do you know that Dufresne did not talk all that nonsense to you to make sport of you, and to be revenged for your hatred, which he perceives very plainly?”

“Was it for that purpose too that he tried to carry his audacity so far as to kiss me?”

“Kiss you! Well, I admit that he was wrong to kiss you against your will, and I shall scold him for it. But a kiss is not a thing which should irritate you to this point!”

“You do not intend then, monsieur, to cease to receive Monsieur Dufresne in your house?”

“Most assuredly, madame, I do not intend to make myself unhappy, to make myself ridiculous, and to cause people to point their fingers at me as a jealous husband, simply because somebody ventured to embrace you in jest! That would be utterly absurd! But calm yourself, I will forbid Dufresne to mention his passion to you again!”

“What, Edouard, you laugh! You think so little of what I have told you?”

“I do what it is my duty to do, and I know how to behave.”

“Alas! you no longer love me, I see. Formerly you were more jealous.”

“One may love without being jealous; and besides—but it is getting late, and I have business that I must attend to.”

“What about that rich shipowner for whom you gave the party?”

“He was not able to come.”

“So all your expense was useless?”

“Useless! No, indeed; I was very warmly congratulated on my party. It will do me a great deal of good in the sequel, and I am delighted that I gave it.—I must leave you, for I have not a moment of my own.”

Edouard hurried away to Dufresne. That gentleman seemed a little disturbed at sight of him, but he soon recovered himself; it was not to talk about what his wife had told him that Murville was so eager to be with him, but to talk about the lovely woman with whom he had played *écarté* the night before, to find out who she was and what position she held in society; in a word, it was to dilate without reserve upon desires and hopes which he did not shrink from disclosing to his friend.

Dufresne gratified Edouard’s curiosity by informing him that Madame de Gérán was the widow of a general, that she was absolutely her own mistress, that

she had some means but possessed the art of spending money rapidly, because she was exceedingly fond of pleasure. Dufresne took pains to add that many men paid court to the young widow, but that she received their homage with indifference, treated love as a joke and made sport of the flames she kindled, and that her conquest seemed to be difficult of accomplishment.

All that he learned added to Edouard's newly-born passion. What joy to carry off the palm from so many rivals,—and Madame de Géran had looked at him and treated him in such a way as to justify him in forming hopes. The fact was that she had turned his head; and Dufresne, who had no difficulty in reading the weak and fickle Murville's heart, seized the opportunity to broach the subject of his interview with Adeline, taking pains to represent the thing as a mere pleasantry, which he did not expect would be so severely reprehended.

“Yes, yes, I know,” said Edouard; “my wife spoke to me about it this morning.”

“Ah! she told you——”

“That you were a monster, a villain, a false friend!”

“Indeed!”

“And much more too! for I warn you that she is furiously angry with you. But never fear—I will pacify her; she will see that she took the thing in the wrong way when she learns that you mentioned it first.”

“I am truly sorry that I amused myself by—But after all, your wife is a very strange woman!”

“It's her mother, Madame Germeuil, who has stuffed her head with romantic ideas.”

“Certainly no one would ever think that she was educated in Paris.”

“Oh! she will have to form herself in good society. Would you believe that she expressed a purpose not to receive you again?”

“If my presence is unpleasant to Madame Murville, I shall be careful to avoid her.”

“Nonsense! that is just what I don't propose to have, or I shall be angry with you. I mean that you shall come to the house more than ever; that is my desire and it must suffice. Are you not friendly enough to me to overlook my wife's eccentric character?”

“Oh! my attachment to you has no bounds!”

“Dear Dufresne!—Look you, to prove how much confidence I have in you, and how little heed I pay to my wife's fairy tales, I am going to confide a secret

to you, and I rely on your friendship to help me in the matter.”

“I am entirely devoted to you—speak.”

“My friend, I love, I adore, I am mad over Madame de Gérard.”

“Is it possible? Why, you have only known her since last night.”

“That is long enough to make me love her.—What would you have—we cannot control those things. It’s a caprice, a weakness, whatever you choose to call it! But I have lost my head.”

“You, Murville—such a reasonable man! and married, too!”

“Oh! my dear fellow, are married men any more virtuous than bachelors? You know very well that the contrary is true; a man can’t stick to his wife forever.”

“If your wife should think as you do!”

“Oh! so far as that is concerned, I am not alarmed; my wife is virtue personified, and she does no more than her duty; for a woman—that’s a very different matter.”

“As to the consequences, yes; but morally, and even according to the law of nature, I consider that the fault is absolutely identical.”

“You are joking! At all events, aren’t the consequences everything? Is the absurdity of it the same? Will any one ever laugh at a wife whose husband has mistresses? No, nothing is ever said then, because it is considered a very common occurrence; but if a wife makes her husband a cuckold——”

“That is a very common occurrence too.”

“For all that, people laugh at the poor husband and point their fingers at him!—Besides, what harm can come of the husband’s infidelity? None at all. The fair ones who have yielded to him won’t go about boasting of it! With a woman it is just the opposite; her lovers always ruin her reputation, either by their words, or by their actions, which never escape the eyes of curiosity and calumny. In fact, a woman who finds her husband in another woman’s arms can only complain and weep; while a man who surprises his wife in *flagrante delicto* has a right to punish the culprit; so you see, my dear fellow, that the offence is not the same, as the punishment is different.”

“I see that it was we men who made the laws, and that we treated ourselves very well.”

“Are you going to preach to me too? Really, Dufresne, you are almost as savagely virtuous as my wife.”

“No, my dear fellow, you don’t know me yet. But before assisting you, I

wanted to find out whether you had fully weighed the consequences of this intrigue.”

“I have weighed and calculated everything. I love Madame de Gérán, and I wish to be loved in return. I feel that there is no sacrifice of which I am not capable to attain my object. Do you understand?”

“Oh! very well. Since your mind is made up, I will second you; but of course you won’t reproach me for leading you on.”

“No, no! On the contrary, I beg you to assist me, and to help me to conceal this intrigue from my wife’s eyes.”

“Don’t be alarmed—leave all that to me. I will answer for all. When will you call on Madame de Gérán?”

“This evening. They play cards there, of course?”

“Yes, and for rather high stakes.”

“The devil! The fact is that I haven’t any money. That party drained me dry.”

“It is very easy to obtain some. Consols are at a very high premium. Sell. They cannot fail to drop before long; then, as we shall have speculated in something else, and you will probably be in funds, you can buy in again. You see, it is a good thing to do from a business standpoint.”

“True, you are right. But the consols are in my wife’s name.”

“Can’t you get her to sign by telling her that you are engaged in a magnificent operation?”

“Oh, yes! she will sign, I am sure; she’ll sign whatever I want her to.”

“Take advantage of her compliant disposition to sell your consols; I tell you again, they are on the point of falling, and in a few days you will be able to buy the same amount with much less money. If it will be any more convenient for you, I will see to the business for you.”

“You will confer a great favor on me, for I am still rather a bungler in business, and but for you I should often be embarrassed.”

“Don’t be afraid. Act boldly. I assure you that your party last night added immensely to your credit. If you needed thirty thousand francs, you could easily obtain them.”

“You delight me. I will go back to my wife. Wait for me at the café; I will be there very soon with the papers in question.”

“I will go there. Be on your guard with your wife.”

“Do you take me for a child?—I won’t say adieu, my dear Dufresne.”

Edouard hastened home and went up to Adeline’s apartment, where he found

her with her child in her arms. At sight of her husband, who was not accustomed to come home during the day, a soothing hope made her heart beat fast; she thought that it was love that led him back to her, and a smile of happiness embellished her lovely features.

Edouard was speechless in her presence; he was embarrassed, he was conscious of a painful sensation; he felt that he was guilty toward her, but he did not choose to admit it even to himself.

“Is it you, my dear?” said Adeline in the sweetest of tones; “how happy I am when I see you! It happens so rarely now!—Come and kiss your daughter.”

Edouard walked mechanically toward them and kissed the child with a distraught air, heedless of her infantile graces. He stood like one in a dream, unable to decide how to broach the subject that had brought him there.

“You seem distressed,” said Adeline; “is anything troubling you? For heaven’s sake, let me share your trouble—you have no more loving, more sincere friend than your wife.”

“I know it, my dear Adeline, but nothing is troubling me. No, I am preoccupied, because I am thinking of a very important transaction in which I shall make a great deal of money.”

“Always schemes, speculations—and never love, repose and happiness!”

“Oh! when we are rich—why, then—But I have a request to make of you; I want to ask you to sign a paper—it has to do with an operation that will be very profitable.”

“Are you certain of that, my dear?”

“Yes, perfectly certain; it was——”

Edouard was going to say that it was Dufresne who gave him that assurance, but he reflected that that would not be the best way to convince his wife, and he checked himself. Having taken from his desk all the papers that he required, he drew up a document by which his wife assented to the transfer of her consols, and with a trembling hand presented the pen to Adeline. She, trustful and submissive, signed the paper which he put before her, without even reading it.

“That is all right,” said Murville as he put the papers in his pocket. “Now I must hurry to the Bourse, to conclude this important affair.”

He kissed Adeline and hurried from the room. She realized that it was not to see her that he had come home; but her heart made excuses for him; she believed him to be entirely engrossed by business.

“He loves nobody but me,” she said to herself; “that is the main thing. I must

forgive this love of work, and this perfectly natural desire to enrich his wife and children.”

Poor Adeline! she did not know what use her husband proposed to make of the money that he was in such haste to obtain.

XIX

IT WAS NOT HER FAULT

Edouard returned in triumph to Dufresne; he was the possessor of a considerable sum of which he could dispose as he pleased, for his wife would never ask him for an accounting, and his mother-in-law had ceased to meddle in his affairs. Dufresne was awaiting Murville impatiently; he was afraid that Adeline would make some objections. But when he saw the precious papers, a smile of satisfaction played about his lips; a sentiment which he tried to dissemble gave to his face a peculiar expression which would have attracted the attention of anybody but Edouard; but he did not give Dufresne time to speak; he urged him to go at once and obtain the funds, and Dufresne made haste to gratify him, fearing that he might change his mind.

Adeline waited in vain for her husband to return; the day passed and he did not come. She thought that he had probably been invited to dine by some of his new acquaintances; she tried to reconcile herself to it; but what grieved her most was her husband's blindness with respect to Dufresne, and the indifference with which he had listened to her story of the outrageous conduct of the man whom he considered his friend. Dufresne's threats recurred to Adeline's memory; she thought of her husband's weakness of will, and she could not help shuddering as she reflected that her happiness, her repose, and her child's, perhaps, were in the hands of a wicked man, who seemed to be capable of going all lengths to gratify his passions.

It was nine o'clock in the evening; Adeline, absorbed in her reflections, was sadly awaiting her husband's return, when she heard a loud knock at the street door. Soon she heard someone coming upstairs—it was Edouard, of course. She ran to open the door; but it was not he; one of her servants appeared, bringing a letter which a stranger had just left at the door with an urgent request that it be handed to madame at once. The stranger had gone away without waiting for a reply. The servant handed the letter to his mistress and left the room.

Adeline broke the seal; the writing was unfamiliar to her; it seemed the work of a weak and tremulous hand; the letter was signed by Madame Dolban.

“What can she have to write to me?” thought Adeline; “let me see.”

“Madame:

“I am very ill; I have been unable to leave my room for a long while, but I am unwilling to delay any longer to give you some most important advice. I am responsible for all the harm, and it is my place to try to repair it. I brought a man named Dufresne to your house. Alas! how bitterly I repent it! but at that time I believed him to be incapable of doing anything indelicate even. A deplorable passion had long made me blind, but now it is no longer possible for me to doubt the ghastly truth. This Dufresne is a miserable wretch, capable of every villainy. I have only too many proofs of the infamy of his conduct. He has robbed me of all that I possessed, but my regret for my money is less than my shame at having been his dupe. Gambling, debauchery, all sorts of vice are familiar to him, and he has the art to conceal his shocking passions. I dare not tell you what I know—but break off instantly the intimacy he has formed with your husband, or fear the worst for him from the advice of a monster to whom nothing is sacred.

“WIDOW DOLBAN.”

Adeline shuddered; her heart was oppressed by secret terror; she read the fatal letter once more, then raised her lovely tear-bedewed eyes heavenward.

“So this is the man on whose account Edouard fell out with my mother! this is the sort of man that his adviser, his best friend, is! O heaven! what misery I foresee in the future! but how am I to avert it? My husband no longer listens to me; he spurns my advice, he is deaf to my prayers. But he could not be deaf to my tears. No, Edouard is not hard-hearted; he loves me still, he will not spurn his Adeline. I will implore him, in our child’s name, to cease to see a man who will lead him on to ruin. This letter will be a sufficient proof, I trust; he will open his eyes and sever all relations with him who has already caused me so much unhappiness.”

These reflections allayed Adeline’s distress in some measure; fully determined to show her husband, as soon as he should return, the letter that she had received, she decided to sit up for him. He could not be much longer, it was already quite late, and all she needed was a little courage. Poor woman! if she had known how her husband was occupied, while she, melancholy and pensive, devoured in silence the torments of anxiety and jealousy! You who try to read the future,—how you would deserve to be pitied if your eyes could pierce space, and if your ears always heard the truth! Illusion was invented for the happiness of mortals; it does them almost as much good as hope.

The young woman tried to beguile the time by making plans for the future. She rejoiced in the approach of the season of fine weather; soon they might return to the pretty little place in the country. She had been so happy there in the

early days of her married life that she looked forward to finding there once more the happiness that she had not found in Paris. Edouard would accompany her; he would have forgotten all his plans, have given up the business that tormented him, and have broken entirely with the perfidious Dufresne. Then nothing could disturb their felicity. Her mother would return to live with them; little Ermance would grow up and be educated under her parents' eyes, learning to love and respect them. What a delightful future! How short the time would seem! how well it would be employed!

Adeline's heart thrilled with the pleasure caused by the delicious tableau which her imagination had conjured up. But the clock struck; she glanced at it and sighed; the image of happiness vanished, the melancholy reality returned!

Thus do the unfortunate try to deceive their suffering, to conceal their grief from themselves. He who has lost a beloved sweetheart has her image constantly in his thoughts; he sees her, speaks to her, lives again with her in the past; he hears her voice, her sweet accents, her loving confession which makes his heart beat fast with bliss; he recalls those delicious interviews of which love bore the whole burden; he fancies that he holds his loved one's hands in his; he seeks her burning lips from which he once stole the sweetest of kisses—but the illusion vanishes; she is no longer there! Ah! what a ghastly void! what a cruel return to life!

Adeline was agitated by all these gleams of hope and fear; twenty times she went to her daughter's cradle, then returned to her place at the window and listened anxiously, intently, for the faintest sound; but only the rumbling of an occasional carriage broke the silence of the night. Each time that she heard that noise, Adeline's heart beat faster. It was her husband returning home; yes, it was he—the carriage was coming nearer; but it passed on, it did not stop.

Adeline had watched many hours pass; the cold of the night and the weariness caused by her lonely vigil benumbed her senses. Despite her desire to wait for her husband, she felt that she could no longer resist the drowsiness that oppressed her. She decided at last to go to bed; but she placed Madame Dolban's letter on her night table, so that she might have it at hand in order to be able to show it to her husband as soon as she saw him. From that priceless letter she anticipated peace of mind and happiness. She lighted the night lamp that she used every night. She went to bed at last—regretfully—and still tried to fight against sleep; but fatigue triumphed over anxiety; her eyelids drooped, she fell into a deep sleep.

Adeline had been asleep an hour; a loud noise, caused by the fall of a chair, awoke her with a start; she opened her eyes, but could see nothing. Her lamp

was out; she made a movement to rise, but an arm passed about her body kept her in bed and two kisses closed her mouth. Adeline knew that her husband alone had a key to her room, that no other than he could enter there at night; so that it was Edouard who had returned and was in her arms.

“Oh! my dear,” she said, “I sat up for you a long, long while; I was so anxious to see you and speak to you. If you knew! I have had a letter from Madame Dolban, poor woman! she is very unhappy! You will find that I was not mistaken about Dufresne—the monster! It is he who has ruined her; he has every failing, every vice. My dear Edouard, I implore you, do not continue your intimacy with that man—he will be your ruin! You won’t tell me any more that my ideas are chimeras. The letter is here, on my night table; if the lamp had not gone out, I would read it to you now.”

Adeline was on the point of rising to light the lamp, but love detained her in her bed. The most loving caresses, the most ardent kisses were lavished upon her; she had recovered her husband; she yielded to his desires, she abandoned herself to his love, shared the intense ardor with which he was inflamed; her past sorrows were nothing more than a dream which the most blissful ecstasy dispelled.

Pleasure is always followed by desire to rest; drunk with love and joy, Adeline fell asleep in the arms of him who had shared her delirium. A ray of light was shining through the window when she opened her eyes; her heart was still palpitating with the pleasure she had enjoyed. She turned her head to look at her sleeping husband. A shriek of horror escaped her; she trembled, she could hardly breathe, her eyes assumed a glassy stare, her heart ceased to beat. It was Dufresne who was by her side; it was his breast upon which her head had rested; it was he upon whom she had lavished her caresses; it was in his arms that she had tasted the ecstasy, the transports of love.

The young woman’s shriek awoke Dufresne; he looked at Adeline, and a treacherous smile, an expression of savage joy, gleamed in the eyes that he fastened upon his victim. She seemed bereft of the power to act; she was completely crushed. Dufresne determined to make the most of the little time that remained; he moved nearer to her and attempted to renew his hateful caresses. Adeline came to life again; she recovered her strength, pushed the monster away with all her might, leaped out of bed and wrapped her dress about her; and her resolute and haughty expression seemed to defy him to commit a fresh outrage.

Dufresne stopped, gazed at her a moment in silence, then said with a sneering laugh:

“What, madame! more resistance—more affectation of prudery? Really, you

must agree that, after what has taken place between us during the night, this is mere childishness. Your pride is sadly misplaced now! Come, take my advice; let us make peace. I assure you that your husband shall know nothing about it. A little more or a little less will make him no more of a cuckold! Indeed, I may as well tell you that he too is in the arms of another; so you will have nothing to reproach yourself for.”

Dufresne walked toward Adeline, and she recoiled from him in horror. He reached her side and attempted to satisfy his desires again. Adeline struggled; she seemed endowed with fresh strength, and her voice, calling Edouard’s name, rang through the apartment. Dufresne stopped and released her; he realized that the young woman’s shrieks might be heard; the servants might come, and that would upset all his plans. So that he had no choice but to leave Adeline; but fierce anger blazed in the glances that he cast at her. He ran to the table, seized Madame Dolban’s letter and brandished it in the face of the woman who defied his wrath and defeated his renewed attempts to outrage her.

“Here it is,” he said with an ironical smile; “here is the document of which you hoped to make such good use. You despise, you spurn my love; tremble before the effects of my hatred and of the revenge I will have for your contempt. Adieu! I take with me Madame Dolban’s letter; she will not write you any more.”

XX

THE PASSIONS TRAVEL FAST WHEN ONE DOES NOT RESIST THEM

Edouard had received from Dufresne the sum of one hundred thousand francs; that amount was only one-half of the proceeds of the sale of the consols; but Dufresne, who was very glad of an opportunity to retain the other half, told Edouard that he had not sold them all, because he hoped to dispose of the rest within a few days at a better price; and the credulous Murville, trusting absolutely in the good faith of the man whom he believed to be his friend, told him to complete the transaction whenever he thought best.

Engrossed by his new passion for Madame de Gérard, Edouard betook himself to the lovely widow's abode, neglecting for her his wife, his child and his home. He found her whose charms excited his imagination, alone. The soi-disant widow was in her boudoir; it was a great favor, to begin with, to be admitted to a tête-à-tête with her. The coquette knew how to put forth all her graces, to make the most of all her advantages, in order to complete the conquest of the young business agent; she accomplished her object with ease; weak people allow themselves to be beguiled so readily! A smile, a glance makes them amorous; and in that respect strong-minded folk often resemble their weaker brothers. A clever woman, who is not in love, artfully delays her surrender; not until she is certain of commanding, of governing her victim, does she accord her favors. With a roué, a libertine, Madame de Gérard would have obtained little influence; but with a man who has never loved any woman but his wife, a coquette is sure to make rapid progress. That is why a wise woman should preferably marry a man who has sown his wild oats, for he, at least, is on his guard against seduction.

It is very certain that for a woman to make a man love her it is not always necessary that she should love him, but simply that she should pretend to. True love makes one timid, awkward, bungling, imprudent; how, with all these failings, can one be attractive? When one truly loves, one loses all one's attractions. When a girl—observe that I mean an innocent girl—sees the man she loves enter the salon where she is surrounded by people, she instantly becomes embarrassed, pensive, distraught; the blood rises to her cheeks; speak to her and she answers incoherently; she dares not raise her eyes for fear of attracting

attention; she trembles lest someone may guess what she wants; it seems to her that all eyes are fastened on her, and that everyone knows her secret. If two persons speak in low tones, she fancies that they are talking about her. The slightest thing adds to her confusion. If she is musical and is escorted to the piano, her fingers get in one another's way and cannot touch the keys correctly. Does she sing? her voice trembles, she is afraid of putting too much meaning into the words which refer to love. Does she dance? she is afraid to dance with the man she adores; she despairs in secret if he dances with another.—Poor child! if you were not in love, or if he were not there you would recover your charm, your good spirits; you would flirt perhaps, but you would be much more attractive; and your kind girl friends would not laugh among themselves at your awkwardness and your stupidity.

In the case of a young man it is even worse, for the timidity and embarrassment which take possession of a young woman always give her a certain air of innocence and candor, which induces one to excuse her awkwardness. But a lovelorn man who sits and sulks in a corner of the salon if the woman he loves does not look at him fondly enough, who sighs without speaking when he is seated beside his charmer; who does not know what to say when an opportunity presents itself to declare his flame: such a man, it must be confessed, is far from attractive; he is laughed at in society, and she who is the cause of his blunders is often the first to make fun of him. Whereas a giddy youngster, who is not in love, who has no feeling; who takes pleasure in tormenting women, who turns sentiment into ridicule and constancy into a subject of derision—a ne'er-do-well, in a word—easily makes himself master of a heart and triumphs in a day over her for whom the shrinking and sensitive lover has sighed in vain for many years! To be sure, the ne'er-do-well is very lively, very pushing, very enterprising in a tête-à-tête! while the poor lover—The old song is quite right:

“Ah! how stupid is the man who's in love!”

But I see many ladies fly into a rage with me and exclaim:

“What, monsieur l'auteur, you advise men not to love us sincerely? Why, that is frightful! You have outrageous principles!”

Calm yourselves, mesdames, for heaven's sake! it must be that I did not explain my meaning clearly; I do advise men not to love you awkwardly, foolishly,—that is all; therein you yourselves will agree that I am right. A lover who can do nothing but sigh is a very uninteresting creature. I would have men make love to you with spirit and wit, when they have any; with gayety, because that adds to the charms of love; with ardor, because that does not displease you,

and because life is not everlasting, and when two people suit each other, I do not see the necessity of waiting a century before telling each other so; seeing that it is as well to be happy to-day as to-morrow.

But let us drop the metaphysics of love, and return to Edouard, who was very much in love with a woman who had never been in love with anybody, and who was not likely to begin with him, whom she desired to make her slave, and whom, for that reason, she did not propose to love; for we do not put chains on the person we love, but we wear them together.

A rich and passionate young man like Edouard was a windfall to Madame de Géran, who, whatever Dufresne might say, was not so cruel as she chose to appear. If Edouard had taken the trouble to make inquiries concerning the young widow, he would have learned that his divinity had a more than equivocal reputation; that she had had intimate liaisons with a great Russian noble, a stout baronet, a contractor and a dealer in cashmere shawls; that her house was the rendezvous of young rakes, schemers and gamblers; and lastly, that no one had ever found at the Ministry of War the name of the general whose widow she claimed to be.

Edouard knew nothing of all this. He believed that he possessed a woman who gave herself to him by virtue of the bond of sympathy that drew them together; he was as proud as a peacock over a triumph which twenty other men had won before him; and he went into ecstasies over charms which he considered far superior to his wife's; for a mistress always has a softer skin, a firmer breast and a smaller foot than a wife; which is not true three-fourths of the time; but the wives take their revenge by allowing connoisseurs to admire them.

So Edouard passed the day caressing the soft skin, the firm breast and the tiny foot of Madame de Géran, who allowed him to do as he chose because she could not resist the force of her love and the voice of her heart; at all events, that is what she told him as she received his caresses. Time passes very swiftly in such pleasant occupation. Edouard entirely forgot his house and his business. He knew that night had arrived only by the appearance of a dozen or more persons, habitués of the fascinating widow's house, who came there every evening to play cards.

Edouard would have taken his leave, but Madame de Géran objected; she desired to keep him all the evening; moreover she owed him his revenge at *écarté*. Edouard remained and took his seat at a card table opposite his beloved, who played *écarté* with bewitching grace, as he had good reason to know.

Dufresne appeared at Madame de Géran's during the evening; he seemed surprised to find his friend there. Edouard was then playing with a man whom he

did not know. His dear widow had abandoned the game because she played with extraordinary good luck, and did not choose, she said, to take advantage of Murville's unlucky vein. He was no more fortunate however with the little man who had taken her seat; he lost constantly, but would not stop playing, because he hoped to recoup.

Dufresne stood facing Edouard and scrutinized him in silence. A secret satisfaction was reflected on his features; he detected in his friend all the symptoms of a passion which, when once fully aroused, would know no bounds. At sight of Murville's discomposed face, his swollen veins, his heavy breathing, it was easy to judge of the effect that the game produced on him. But, recalling the fact that the imprudent young man was the bearer of a considerable sum, and as he did not propose that it should pass into the hands of another, Dufresne went to Edouard and advised him in an undertone not to play any more. But his advice was not heeded; Murville was already experiencing the ascendancy of the fatal passion to which he had yielded; moreover, obstinacy and vanity prevented him from leaving the field.

"At all events," said Dufresne, "if you insist on continuing to play, give me your wallet and what it still contains; you have enough money in front of you, especially as you are playing in hard luck; do not take the risk of losing such a large amount in one evening."

From anybody else the counsel would not have been listened to; but Dufresne had acquired such empire over Murville that he unhesitatingly handed him his wallet, from which he had already taken several bank notes.

"Here," he said in a broken voice, trying to conceal the keen emotion caused by the loss of his money, "take it. And here is the key to my apartment; go there and wait for me."

Dufresne did not wait to have this suggestion repeated. He went to Murville's during the evening; but the servants were so accustomed to seeing him that they paid no attention to him. He waited for Edouard far into the night, alone in his room; and at last, when he found that he did not return, he conceived the audacious scheme of stealing into Adeline's bedroom when she was asleep. It was easy for him to do, as he had noticed where the key was kept; and we have seen how he carried out his undertaking.

As for Edouard, luck was not favorable to him. He lost all the money that he had retained, and three thousand francs more on credit. To console him, Madame de Géran kept him alone to supper. She assured him that Chevalier Desfleurets, who had won his money, was a most honorable man who would give him his revenge whenever he wished and that, as luck must turn in the end, he might

expect to recover his losses sooner or later. Such convincing arguments caused Edouard to forget the petty loss he had sustained. He passed the night with his fair enslaver, who intoxicated him with love and pleasure; and it was very late when he fell asleep in her arms. He woke the next morning, poorer by ten thousand francs; that was rather a high price to pay for the favors he had obtained; but love does not calculate.

XXI

THE ROULETTE TABLE

Adeline remained for a long time crushed beneath the burden of her suffering; and several hours after Dufresne's departure, she was still sitting, half naked, in a corner of her room, having to cover her only the clothes which she had hurriedly seized, and which she still held pressed against her breast.

It was broad daylight; the servants were going and coming in the house. Adeline arose at last and dressed herself mechanically; then sank back on the chair she had left; she no longer had any plans, desires, or hopes; she suffered, but she had ceased to think.

There came a light tap at her door; she roused herself from her depression, recalled what had happened, and awoke once more to the consciousness of her misery. She started to open the door, but paused near the threshold, detained by a sudden thought: suppose it were her husband! She felt that she could not endure his glance! she thought that he would read her shame upon her brow! Poor Adeline! you were not guilty and yet you trembled. What a contrast to what we see every day in society!

She heard a voice; it was her maid's, asking her mistress if she might come in. Adeline took courage and opened the door.

"I beg pardon, madame," said the servant, "but I was anxious about your health; it is very late, but you have not rung for me and you did not come down to breakfast."

"Is it late, Marie? Has Monsieur Murville come in?"

"Yes, madame, monsieur came in a little while ago; he went to his room for a moment, then went right away again."

"He has gone out, you say?"

"Yes, madame."

Adeline breathed more freely; she felt less agitated; for now she dreaded the presence of the man for whom she had waited impatiently a few hours before.

Marie glanced at her mistress; she saw that she was pale and changed, and she sighed and pitied her; she thought that her husband's conduct was the cause of Madame Murville's grief. Servants are the first to criticise their masters'

conduct; they see everything, nothing escapes them; no man is a hero to his valet, and very few husbands are faithful in their servants' eyes.

"Was madame sick in the night?" asked Marie at last in an undertone.

"No, no, I haven't been sick," replied Adeline, blushing; then she hid her face in her handkerchief and tried to restrain her sobs.

"Pardi!" rejoined the kind-hearted Marie, "madame does very wrong to grieve like this. Mon Dieu! husbands all act the same way; they seem to have a sort of rage for doing the town! You can't keep them from it. But they get over it; and madame is so good that——"

"Leave me."

The domestic was about to go away, but Adeline recalled her.

"Marie, did anybody come to the house last night?"

"Did anybody come—last night!" and the maid looked at her mistress in amazement, for she could not understand her question.

"Yes, did you hear anyone knock? Was there any noise?"

"If anybody knocked at night, it couldn't be anybody but monsieur, but he did not come in; we were not disturbed, thank God! And everybody slept soundly; that isn't surprising after the hurly-burly of the night before last; we were tired out."

Adeline dismissed her maid, feeling a little more tranquil; she was certain at all events that her dishonor was a secret; she went to her little Ermance; she took her in her arms, and sought consolation with her; a voice within told her that she was not to blame; she felt that it was true, and recovered a little courage. Intent alone constitutes the crime, and Adeline felt the most violent hatred for Dufresne; she nourished that sentiment with delight; it seemed to her that the more horror she felt for him, the less guilty she was in her own eyes.

But a crushing thought came to her mind; she remembered Dufresne's last words: Edouard loved another woman. It was in the arms of a woman that he had passed that wretched night; he had come home and had not thought of seeking her; it was all over; he had forgotten her, he was unfaithful. That certainty filled the cup of poor Adeline's despair; it took away her last hope of happiness.

Still bewildered by the day and night that he had passed, Edouard had left Madame de Géran's house to return home; but a sense of shame, a secret feeling of remorse prevented him from going to his wife. In vain does a man make excuses for himself, unless he has long been addicted to all forms of excess, and accustomed to defy public opinion—he does not commit a culpable act without feeling an inward dissatisfaction, without hearing the reproofs of his conscience.

Edouard was still too unused to the paths of vice not to feel the remorse which follows a first sin. A night passed away from home, his wife neglected, a large sum of money lost at play in two days! What fruitful subjects for reflections! Edouard did as most men do who have just committed some foolish act; instead of determining to be more prudent and more orderly in the future, he sought to forget himself, and abandoned himself more ardently than ever to his passions; like those poor wretches who drown themselves for fear the world's end is at hand.

With Dufresne, Edouard was sure of finding distraction. So it was to his lodgings that he betook himself. Dufresne was alone, absorbed in deep thought. For the first time Murville began to use the familiar form of address; he felt more at his ease with him since he had ceased to be happy in his own family. He shared Dufresne's principles and his way of looking at things to the full, so that all ceremony was naturally banished between two friends so closely united. Edouard threw himself into a chair and looked at Dufresne, who waited for him to speak first.

"Here I am, my dear fellow; I expected to find you at my house."

"I went there last evening; but as you didn't return and I was tired of waiting, I came away."

"Faith! it is quite as well that you did. You would have waited in vain. I passed the night at Madame de Géran's. You understand me?"

"Yes, perfectly. I congratulate you; you could not be more fortunate. That woman adores you!"

"Oh! she is mad over me!—that's the word; she didn't want me to leave her this morning; I had difficulty in tearing myself from her arms."

"Be careful; Madame de Géran has intense passions, a fiery brain, an exalted imagination! She is capable of dogging your steps all the time."

"You enchant me! I like such women!"

"But suppose your wife should discover it?"

"Bah! she is such an indolent creature! Her way of loving doesn't resemble Madame de Géran's in the least."

"If I dared give you some advice——"

"Speak; but no more of the formal mode of address between us, my dear Dufresne. Let us banish ceremony."

"With all my heart."

"You were saying——"

“If you take my advice, you will send your wife into the country, in order to be more free.”

“Parbleu! that is an excellent idea of yours! In truth, she talks to me every day about the fields and meadows and green grass. I will send her to pasture, and I will remain in Paris.”

“But you don’t mention your game of cards with Chevalier Desfleurets; did you recoup your losses?”

“No; on the contrary, I played in the most extraordinary luck; I lost continually.—By the way, that reminds me that I owe him three thousand francs, and that I promised to give them to him this morning.”

“Gambling debts are sacred; you must pay up.”

“That is what I propose to do. I made an appointment with him at the Palais-Royal, at number 9; does he live there?”

“Ha! ha! ha! how ignorant you are, my dear Murville! Don’t you know that number nine is an *academy*, a roulette establishment?”

“What! the chevalier frequents a roulette establishment?”

“Why not? You will see the most fashionable people there; many nobles who try their hardest to win the money of plebeians, and worthy bourgeois, who are delighted to play with a chevalier or a viscount; but always the utmost decency and good-breeding; no disturbance! I assure you that more than one society gambler might take lessons in deportment at the academy; people lose their money there without whining; they swear only under their breath; in short, everything there is most agreeable.”

“Parbleu! I am curious to see the place; but I thought that a business man ought not to show himself in such places; I have been told that it was very injurious to the reputation.”

“You have been misinformed; and the proof is that you will see many merchants, business agents, brokers, commission merchants there; it is a very respectable assemblage; the rendezvous of soldiers, foreigners, and great noblemen travelling incognito; and the police see to it that none of the riffraff gets in; they leave number 113 to the workmen, the apprentices, and the petty tradesmen, because those good people must enjoy themselves also; but number 9 is almost as respectable as Frascati’s.”

“According to that, I may go there without fear.”

“You cannot fail to find Desfleurets there; he is there from the time it opens till the dinner hour, and indeed he does not always go out for dinner. He sits at the green table, pricking cards. For ten years he has been seeking a *martingale*

certain to make his fortune; and he declares that he will have it before long, and then he will tell it to all his acquaintances. If one could find that, on my word, it would be delightful; one would no longer need to worry about anything; we would enjoy ourselves and lead the gayest lives imaginable.”

“Do you think that it is possible?”

“Why, certainly! More extraordinary things have been seen; examples are plentiful. Look you, between ourselves, I know more than twenty people, who hold an excellent position in society, who spend a great deal of money, follow the fashions, deny themselves nothing, and who live solely by gambling; listen to a favorite author:

“’Tis play brings many lives of ease—
As hosts of cabbies, chairmen; add to these
The lombard keen, with faded gems supplied
Which every day sees on new fingers tried,
And Gascons loud who sup at game-house board,
Unribboned knights, and misses all ignored
Who, save for lansquenet and gains quite sly,
Their virtue weak would market far from high!”

“You surprise me; I would not have believed it, for it is always a matter of chance.”

“Oh! my dear fellow, there is no such thing as chance for the man who chooses to reason coolly, to reckon the chances, the series of numbers and the probabilities. However, what I am saying is not meant to induce you to play; you are not lucky, and you had much better hold on to something solid.”

“By the way, what about business?”

“Absolute stagnation; we must wait.”

“All right. Ah! my dear Dufresne, if you should find a reliable martingale, what sport we would have while my wife is in the country!”

“Nonsense! take my advice and think no more about that! It is mere folly, a delusion.—I must leave you.”

“We shall meet this evening.”

“Where?”

“Parbleu! at Madame de Géran’s.”

Dufresne and Edouard parted; the former perfectly certain of the effect which his remarks had produced upon the feeble brain of Adeline’s husband, and the

latter dreaming only of roulette and martingales, and already forming the most extravagant projects.

It was in this frame of mind that Edouard sought the place mentioned by the chevalier; he entered and walked through several rooms, until at last he reached one where a number of gamblers were assembled around a roulette table. He felt the blood mount to his cheeks, and he tried to conceal his embarrassment and to assume the air of an habitué of the game. Chevalier Desfleurets spied him; he rose, and ran toward him, and forgot to prick his card, he was in such haste to receive the three thousand francs. Edouard at once paid his debt; the chevalier was delighted with his debtor's promptitude, and he invited him to sit down for a moment beside him. Edouard hesitated; he looked uneasily about him, fearing to meet someone whom he knew. He did in fact see several business agents whom he had met with Dufresne, and some other persons who had come to his party. But they all seemed wholly engrossed by the green cloth, and paid no attention to him. The chevalier led him, he allowed himself to be led, and in a moment he was seated at the roulette table.

Desfleurets took up his cards and began to prick again, after having inquired of a tall, lean man in a nut-colored coat, what numbers had come out. The tall man glanced angrily at him, coughed, spat, blew his nose, made a grimace, clenched his fists, and did not reply.

"He is a crank," said the chevalier to Edouard, in an undertone; "he pricks his card three hours before risking his five-franc piece, and he almost always waits too long. He was watching the red zero, and I will wager that it came out before he bet on it. That man will never know the way to gamble; he is too much of a coward!"

Edouard looked on and listened with astonishment to what was taking place before him for the first time; for before his marriage he had never chosen to enter a gambling house, being prudent enough then to distrust his own weakness. It is only when one is certain not to yield to temptation, when one experiences for games of chance the horror which they should inspire in every sensible man, that one can safely enter a gambling hell. What a vast field for watching and studying the effects of that deplorable passion! The result of one's reflections is melancholy, but it teaches a useful lesson, and a gambling house is the best place for a young man to correct himself of that fatal taste, if, instead of abandoning himself to the passion that leads him thither, he could examine coolly what is taking place about him.

What vertigo has seized upon those unhappy wretches, who crowd about the table and devour with their eyes the heaps of silver and gold, and the bank notes

spread out before the croupiers? They do not see that all that money is there only to allure them, to lead them on; they say to themselves: "This one wins, that one goes away with his pockets full; why should not we be as fortunate as they?"— Ah! even if they should, would the money won in a gambling hell ever serve to enrich a family, to support a wife; to endow a daughter, to help the unfortunate? No, the gambler's heart is hard and unfeeling, his mind is sordid and debased by the passion which dominates it. If they win to-day, they will play again to-morrow, until they can no longer procure aught to satisfy the insatiable greed which draws them to the fatal table. If they return home with their pockets filled with gold, do not imagine that they will be more generous with their families. Their wives are ill-clad, their children lack everything, creditors besiege their door; but they will give nothing, they will pay nobody, they will laugh at the threats of those whose wages they hold back, and will be indifferent to the voice of nature. Soon they will lose the money that a lucky chance caused them to win, and then woe to the poor creatures that surround them! it is upon them that they vent their rage, which they do not dare to display before strangers. It is in their own homes that they abandon themselves to anger, to brutality, even to the last excesses. They must have money; they seize upon everything that can still produce it; their children's last garments are sold, the result of a day's work disappears in a second upon a color or a number. Then they glare darkly about them, despair is depicted upon all their features; they gaze in frenzy at that gold which they cannot possess, and at the croupiers, who observe their despair with the coldest indifference. Then the guiltiest desires and the basest villainy torment their frantic imagination; they covet their neighbors' money; they put out their hand toward it, and often, impelled by the cruel passion which destroys their wits, they commit the most shameful crimes. Such examples are only too common; gambling has three results, but they are inevitable: it leads either to suicide, to the poor-house or to the stool of repentance.

Edouard did not indulge in these reflections, unfortunately for him. He watched the game, and after he had mastered its principles, he placed a twenty-franc piece on the red; that color came out nine times in succession; and as Edouard had left his stake each time, he won in five minutes ten thousand two hundred and forty francs. Chevalier Desfleurets, leaping up and down on his chair in amazement at the sight of such extraordinary good-fortune, advised Murville in a whisper to stop there for the time, because, according to the probabilities and the prickings on his card, the black could not fail to come out next. The chevalier was very pleased to see the young man win, for he expected to meet him at Madame de Gérans', and as he played very badly at écarté and

paid very promptly, it was very satisfactory to know that he was in funds.

Edouard did not care about probabilities, but he was conscious of a great void in his stomach; for the occupation with which his new conquest had provided him all night made him feel the necessity of renewing his strength. So he rose and left the table, promising the chevalier to play with him that evening.

At that moment the ball stopped in a compartment, and, contrary to Desfleurets's expectations, it rested on the red. Edouard was terribly vexed that he had left the game so soon, but he promised to make up for it at the first opportunity. The tall man in the nut-colored coat, who had overheard the advice which the chevalier had given Edouard, uttered a vulgar oath when he saw the red come out; whereat Murville was slightly astonished, in view of the fact that Dufresne had emphasized the extreme good breeding which prevailed in that establishment; but he stuffed his gold in his pockets none the less, and left the place, radiant because of his good luck.

He turned his steps homeward; on the way he thought of his wife; she must be very anxious, and very angry with him; she had not seen him since the day before. He felt greatly embarrassed about speaking to her, but he decided to go to her, and, after taking his money to his office, where he found his clerk asleep over the *Moniteur*, Edouard went up to his wife's apartment.

Despite the indifference which Edouard had felt for his wife for some time past, he was moved when he saw the change which had taken place in her whole person since the day before. Adeline was pale and depressed; her swollen, red eyes were still full of tears; every feature bore the mark of the most intense suffering. Edouard had no doubt that his long absence was the cause of his wife's grief; so he approached her and tried to find some excuses to palliate his conduct.

"Perhaps you sat up for me last night; no doubt you were anxious; but I was detained against my will at a party where there was card playing; I was winning, and I could not decently leave."

"You are the master of your actions, monsieur," replied Adeline, without looking up at her husband; "you would be very foolish to put yourself out for me."

Edouard did not expect to find such submission; he dreaded reproaches, complaints and tears; but Adeline did not say another word; she seemed resigned, she sighed and held her peace. This behavior produced more effect on her husband's heart than outcries and remonstrances; he felt touched; he was on the point of falling at his wife's feet and asking her pardon for his misdeed; but

Madame de Géran's image presented itself to his mind and changed all his sensations; he repelled a sentimentality too vulgar for a man of fashion, and returned to his new plans.

"Madame, you have expressed a wish to return to the country; the summer is advancing and you must take advantage of it. Moreover, I believe that it will be an excellent thing for our child. I advise you to start at once. I cannot go with you now, for some important matters keep me in Paris; but I hope to come to see you often."

"Very well, monsieur; I will make all necessary preparations for going away and for my stay in the country, where I shall remain until I receive your orders to return."

"On my honor," said Edouard to himself, "my wife is charming! such obedience! It is altogether extraordinary."

He took Adeline's hand and pressed it lightly; and paying no heed to the trembling of that once cherished hand, he imprinted a very cold kiss upon it, and hurried away with the rapidity of a schoolboy when he hears the bell ring for recess.

"He wants me to go away," said Adeline to herself when she was alone; "my presence embarrasses him. Well, we will go. What does it matter to me now in what part of the world I live, since I shall find happiness nowhere? I have lost my husband's love, I have lost honor and repose of mind; I will go away and conceal my melancholy existence; for my daughter's sake only do I desire to preserve it, and I will devote it entirely to her. Poor child! What would become of you if you should lose me?"

Adeline embraced her daughter; only by reminding herself that she was a mother could she succeed in reviving her vanishing courage. She made preparations for her departure for Villeneuve-Saint-Georges; she would have been glad to induce her mother to accompany her; but Mamma Germeuil cared very little for the country; she had her own habits, her acquaintances in Paris, and old age always grows selfish; she felt that she had but few pleasures left to enjoy, and she did not care to sacrifice any of them.

A week was sufficient for Adeline to prepare all that was necessary for her and her daughter in the country. At the end of that time, during which she caught a glimpse of her husband at rare intervals, she prepared to start. But before taking her leave, she determined to make a last effort, not to recover her husband's love, for she well knew that that sentiment cannot be commanded, but to show him Dufresne as he really was. Edouard did not listen to her and refused

to believe her when she mentioned the villain who was leading him on to his ruin; but Adeline thought of Madame Dolban; she thought that she would not refuse to write Murville another letter, wherein she would describe in detail the wickedness of the man whom he called his friend.

It was for Edouard's honor and his good name that Adeline took this last step, which could not restore her happiness but would reassure her concerning the future of her husband.

The young wife went at once to Madame Dolban's house and asked the concierge if she could see her.

"You come too late, madame," the man replied; "Madame Dolban died three days ago!"

"She is dead! Why, she wrote to me only nine days ago!"

"Oh! mon Dieu! that's the way things go in this world! A severe attack of fever, and then nervous collapse, and I don't know what else. It carried her off right away."

"All is lost," said Adeline as she turned away; "there is no hope now of convincing Edouard. Dufresne triumphs. He will drag him to his destruction!"

Discouraged by this fresh disappointment, the griefstricken Adeline made haste to leave Paris; she started with her daughter for Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, and as she sat in the carriage, with none but her child to witness her grief, she thought of the difference between that journey and the journey of the preceding year, and she wept over the rapidity with which her happiness had vanished.

XXII

THE SCHEMERS.—THE GAMBLERS.—THE SWINDLERS

Rid of his wife's presence, the sight of whom was still disturbing to his conscience, Edouard abandoned himself without restraint to Dufresne's advice, to his love for Madame de Géran, and to his passion for gambling.

Dufresne had kept half of the sum produced by the sale of the consols. He had always intended to appropriate a portion of Edouard's fortune, upon whose purse he had already been drawing for some time, because, as he said, business was not good. But Dufresne added to all his other vices that of gambling, and the sum that he kept was speedily lost in the gulf in which he had, in a very short time, squandered Madame Dolban's fortune.

Edouard passed a large part of his days in the academies, and his nights with Madame de Géran, at whose house there was gambling of the wildest sort. People reasonably well dressed, but whose faces denoted the vilest sort of characters, resorted every evening to the house of the general's widow, where they were certain to find Monsieur Murville and some other dupes, over whom the schemers and kept women disputed.

But Madame de Géran did not lose sight of her lover; she did not propose that her slave should escape her; she was an adept at working all the springs of coquetry; all sorts of stratagems, all methods were employed to bewilder and blind a man who believed himself to be adored, and who made every conceivable sacrifice to gratify the wishes of his mistress.

Madame de Géran led her lovers a rapid pace: cards, theatres, dinners, drives, select parties, dresses, shawls, jewels, suppers, love, caresses!—only with the aid of all these could one rely even upon ostensible fidelity from her. But it must be confessed too, that amid all these diversions, Edouard had not a moment to himself; he did not even find time to be bored; and that is rarely the case when one is surfeited with everything.

But luck had ceased to be favorable to him. After winning at roulette several times in succession, he experienced the inconstancy of fortune and lost considerable sums. Instead of stopping, he persisted obstinately in going on; that is the inevitable result of a first gain, which acts as a bait to people who are beginning to frequent gambling hells; so that the bankers watch with a smile the

gambler who goes out with his pockets full of gold, feeling very sure that the next day the unfortunate wretch will lose twice what he has won.

“S’il est quelque joueur qui vive de son gain,
On en voit tous les jours mille mourir de faim.”^[C]

[C]

If some gamblers there be who live by their gains,
We see thousands who but starve for their pains.

After trying trente-et-un, dice and roulette, and after losing twenty thousand francs in an hour, the last remnant of the sum which Dufresne had handed him before his wife’s departure, Edouard returned to his house, gloomy and anxious; he scolded his servants and talked roughly to everybody without reason; but he felt the need of venting a part of his ill-humor upon his people. He entered his office, where he found the clerk asleep on his desk; he shook him roughly.

“What are you doing here? Is this the way you attend to your work?”

The young man yawned, stretched his arms, rubbed his eyes, and gazed at his employer, who was pacing the floor of the office.

“Well! do you hear me, monsieur? Why aren’t you at work?”

“Why, monsieur, you know very well that I haven’t any.”

“Why aren’t you writing circulars for the provinces?”

“Monsieur knows too that we sent several of his circulars to the same people, and they haven’t answered.”

“You’re a fool! You don’t know how to manage an affair. And what about that house that someone wanted to buy?”

“Monsieur, the person came three times to obtain information, but he didn’t find you.”

“You ought to have given it to him!”

“But, monsieur, I knew nothing about it.”

“And that investment that someone wanted to make?”

“The person made two appointments with you that you didn’t keep.”

“For heaven’s sake, do these people think that I am at their orders?”

“They say that you should be prompt.”

“Hold your tongue! You are an insolent fellow! I have no need of a fellow who sleeps on my desk. I discharge you.”

“Monsieur will please pay me my wages first.”

“Your wages! You earn them by sleeping.”

“Monsieur, it isn't my fault that there isn't anything to do in your office; pay me and——”

“I'll pay you; leave me.”

Edouard was well aware that he had nothing with which to pay his clerk; he opened the desk, examined all the drawers, and found nothing. He relied upon the sum which Dufresne still had in his hands, and determined to see him and urge him to sell at once at any price; he absolutely must have money. Fatigued and discomfited by his sitting at the gaming table, he did not wish to go out before he had changed his clothes, and he decided to send someone at once to summon Dufresne. He rang and called his servant, but no one replied. The servants had become unaccustomed to seeing their master since Adeline had left the house; Edouard sometimes passed several nights in succession away; the servants no longer observed any restraint, and spent their time amusing themselves. Faithful Marie, the only honest one of them all, had left the house after her mistress's departure.

Edouard left his office and went over the house; he found the kitchen empty, but the cellar door was open; he went down and found his concierge drinking his wine with the cook. The servants were dumfounded at the appearance of their master. He swore and stormed and seized the concierge by the ear, while he administered a kick to the cook.

“Monsieur,” stammered the half-tipsy concierge, “you don't eat in the house any more, and we came here to find out whether the wine was getting spoiled.”

Edouard drove the servants before him, left the cellar, and returned to the first floor. Thinking that he heard a noise in his wife's dressing room, he entered suddenly and found his valet deeply engrossed in close intercourse with the wife of the concierge, a rather attractive young woman, who loved love as much as her husband loved wine.

“Morbleu!” cried Edouard, “what a household! what disorder! Do you think that I will put up with this, you curs? I discharge you all!”

“As monsieur pleases,” rejoined the valet, with perfect unconcern, as he attended to his costume, while the concierge's wife held her hands over her breast and did her utmost to shield herself further from the observation to which her dear friend had exposed her, “just pay us our wages, and we'll go.”

Edouard left the room in a passion, and shut himself into his office. Since his wife's departure, he had not given a sou to his servants, for he had never had money enough to provide for his own expenses, and now he was compelled to retain wretches who robbed him, and turned everything upside down in his

house. But he reflected that Dufresne would supply him with the means to extricate himself from embarrassment; he was about to go in search of him when Dufresne himself entered the office, with an air of desperation.

“Ah! you come most opportunely,” cried Edouard; “I was anxious to see you, my dear fellow! I must have money! I must have some this very day!”

“That will be rather hard,” replied Dufresne in a gloomy voice.

“What! haven’t you the consols?”

“I have come to tell you of a terrible calamity: the man in whose hands I had placed them, as well as the blank power of attorney——”

“Well?”

“He has sold them, but he has gone off with the money.”

“Gone off?”

“Yes, he has disappeared; it is impossible to find out anything about him.”

Edouard was thunderstruck. He threw himself into a chair in despair.

“I am ruined! I have lost everything!”

“Ruined! what nonsense! when a man has credit and acquaintances! Come, be yourself; I give you my word that I will repair this disaster. Trust to my zeal, my friend; I made the mistake through my over-confidence; I propose to get you out of the scrape.”

“But how?”

“There are a thousand ways.”

“Remember that I haven’t a sou, and that I need money every moment, especially with Madame de Géran, from whom I desire to conceal this disaster.”

“You will be very wise, although I am convinced that she adores you.”

“I have promised her a lovely cashmere shawl, which she is very anxious to have.”

“You shall give it to her.—Here, sign this.”

“What is it?”

“Notes to my order for twenty thousand francs.”

“But I don’t owe you anything.”

“Of course not; and this is simply to raise money. That is called ‘flying kites.’”

“Ah! is it allowable?”

“Allowable! parbleu! we don’t ask permission to do it.”

“But it’s rather a delicate matter to——”

“Ha! ha! you make me laugh with your scruples. After all, you will pay them, so what right will anyone have to say anything?”

“And you hope to discount them?”

“I am very sure of it; you are thought to be rich, you have an expensive establishment, and your party did you much good. Never fear; I will bring you the money to-morrow, and all you will need is a streak of luck to win twice what you have lost to-day.”

“That infernal roulette,—a long series of odd numbers!”

“Oh! that was mere luck! It doesn’t happen twice. That devil of a chevalier has found an infallible martingale, he says; but it requires funds to start it.”

“Perhaps we shall not have enough.”

“Oh! I have resources. But sign quickly, and I will go and attend to discounting your notes.”

Edouard signed notes amounting to twenty thousand francs; and to divert his thoughts, went to see his mistress. She pouted a little when she found that he had not brought the shawl that she coveted, but he promised it for the next day, and she became charmingly amiable once more; she scolded her devoted friend for his solemn and distraught air; he apologized by saying that he was engrossed by an affair of great importance, and she kissed him and fondled him and caressed him. A man who is engaged in great speculations, and who is generous—what an invaluable treasure to preserve!

The regular company soon arrived. If it was far from select, it was numerous, at all events: ruined marquises, nobles without a château, landed proprietors without property, knights of industry, business agents like Edouard, all gamblers or schemers, and some young men of good family who had nothing left to lose, and some idiots who fancied themselves in the best society—such in the main were the male guests. The ladies were worthy of these gentlemen: old *intrigantes*, panders, kept women, or those who wished to be, habitués of the gambling hells to which the fair sex is admitted; such was the assemblage at Madame de Géran’s, where they affected decent behavior, grand airs, refined manners, and severely scrupulous language, which soon became obscene, when the passions of these ladies and gentlemen were so far excited as to make them forget their costumes and the rank which they were supposed to occupy.

Madame de Géran gave a punch: that is a shrewd way of exciting the gamblers’ brains, and of making the women seem attractive to them. The imagination heated by liquor attributes charms to superannuated and withered

beauties. The glasses circulate, heads become confused, the stakes increase in amount, the heat is stifling, the ladies remove their neckerchiefs; the eye of a connoisseur standing behind the chair of a fair gambler rests upon a breast which a pitiless corset strives to keep at a predetermined height; if he looks behind, he sees reasonably white shoulders, a perfectly bare back, and his wandering vision easily divines the little that is concealed. How deny the siren who turns and borrows twenty-five louis, with a glance full of meaning touching the mode of payment; whereupon you proceed to take an instalment by sitting down beside your fascinating debtor, and doing whatever you choose; for she offers no resistance; and thus it is that acquaintances are made at large parties. Edouard did not admire the breasts and backs of the ladies, because he was completely subjugated by a single one; but he took his seat at a table after borrowing thirty louis of his mistress, because, he said, he had forgotten to bring money. She readily lent it to him, being certain he would return it with interest the next day.

A certain Marquis de Monclair, an intimate friend of the Chevalier Desfleurets, suggested to Edouard a game of *écarté*; they took their places and Desfleurets took his stand behind Edouard, with the purpose, he said, of bringing him luck. But Murville lost every game; the thirty louis which he had borrowed were soon gone; then his opponent willingly played with him on credit, because he was aware how promptly he always paid.

Madame de Gérán caused the punch to circulate with profusion; she herself drank several glasses in order to do the honors of her reception with more grace. Everyone seemed very much engrossed, either by the cards or by gallantry; the ordinary reserve was replaced by uproar; the guests generally forgot themselves; artificial modesty gave place to somewhat indecorous hilarity on the part of the ladies, oaths were heard in one direction, loud laughter in another; there was quarrelling and teasing; the card players disputed over the game, there was love-making on sofas, and the result was a most varied and animated tableau, wherein each actor had his own private interest to subserve.

Madame de Gérán herself seemed greatly heated, although she was not playing; she approached Edouard's table for a moment, saw that he was absorbed with his game, and left the salon, to cool off.

Edouard was unable to win a single game; rage and despair were rampant in his heart; he already owed fifteen thousand francs to the marquis, and constantly doubled his stake, hoping to make up his losses; but his expectations were always disappointed. Pale, trembling, wild-eyed, he no longer knew what he was doing; his hands were clenched, his nerves were on edge, and he could hardly breathe.

“I will play you for the fifteen thousand francs at one stake,” he said at last to his adversary, in a trembling voice.

“I agree,” replied the marquis; “I am a bold player, as you see; in truth, I am terribly distressed to see you lose so constantly.”

Edouard made no reply; he was intent upon the game that was about to begin; his eyes were unswervingly fixed upon the cards which were to decide his fate; there were no other witnesses than Desfleurets, who still stood behind Edouard, and an old *intrigante*, who was very intimate with the marquis and was deeply interested in his play. All the other guests were engaged at other tables.

The game began; when the marquis already had three points, he turned a king. Edouard, incensed by such uninterrupted good fortune, turned suddenly to complain to Desfleurets; he discovered him, with other cards, showing to his adversary, behind his back, what he had in his hand. The chevalier tried to conceal his cards, but Edouard did not give him time; he snatched them from his hands, realized the rascality of which he had been the victim, overturned the table and informed the marquis that he should not pay him. The marquis, accustomed to such scenes, did not lose his head, but demanded his money. Edouard called him a swindler; his adversary seized a chair and threatened him, while the chevalier picked up a number of louis which had fallen to the floor. The old woman shrieked, and Murville seized a candle-stick which he threw at his creditor’s head. The marquis received the candle in the face, and lost an eye and part of his nose; he uttered fearful shrieks, and everybody sprang to his feet; the women fled, some men did the same, and the swindlers, being in force, surrounded Murville and threatened to beat him. At that moment Dufresne entered the room, and realized Edouard’s danger at a glance; quick to make the most of circumstances, he forced his way to his side, pushing everybody out of his way; he shouted louder than all the rest, and, making a sign to Edouard to leave the salon, said that he would undertake to settle the affair, and promised the marquis that he should receive the value of his face, which was not likely to be a large sum. Dufresne had a tone and manner which imposed upon those gentry; they became calmer, and Murville, feeling that he was in a hopeless minority, went out of the salon, leaving Dufresne to represent him.

In order to console himself in some degree for this misadventure, Edouard looked about for Madame de Géran; she was not in the salon; he passed through the reception rooms without finding her; she had evidently gone to her bedroom, which was above. He rushed hurriedly up the stairs; they were not lighted; but he knew the way. He opened the dressing-room door and saw a light shining beneath the door leading into the boudoir; the key was in the lock, he entered

abruptly; but imagine his sensations when he saw his dear mistress lying on a couch in company with her groom, in a situation which clearly denoted the sort of refreshment that had been provided.

Edouard stood like a statue for several minutes, unable to believe his eyes; the groom, a tall youth of eighteen, strong, lusty and well-built, but as stupid as an ass, whose physical advantages he possessed, had been selected by Madame de Gérán for her private delectation, and he performed his duties with zeal and promptitude. He was always ready whenever his mistress sent for him and gave him the preconcerted signal; and she had had no occasion to do aught but praise his excellent conduct and his services, which were frequently in demand. But we must say also that Charlot had been only two months in Madame de Gérán's service, where the food was excellent, but where the grooms were very quickly worn out.

The punch had produced its effect on the nerves of the petite-maîtresse; she had felt the need of being refreshed; and after making sure that Murville was engaged in a serious game, which she thought unlikely to come to an end so soon, she had passed through the anteroom, where Charlot was, with her little finger at her ear; the groom, knowing what that meant, had followed close at his mistress's heels, and we have seen what happened.

The boudoir was a long way from the salon; they had heard only a part of the tumult, to which indeed they were well accustomed. Charlot had paused a moment to listen, however; but his mistress, whose attention was not distracted, and who was intent upon her own affairs, had said lovingly:

“Go on, imbecile! What do you care for that? Let them fight.”

Edouard's abrupt entrance did not disturb the groom; presuming that it was one of the gamblers who had been disputing below, and remembering what his mistress had said to him a moment before, Charlot continued his work without turning his head. As for Madame de Gérán, seeing that it was no longer possible to deceive Edouard, she made the best of it, at the same time ignoring the interruption.

But Murville's wrath, held in check a few seconds by his extreme surprise, soon burst forth with fury; he seized a fire-shovel and dealt Charlot several blows. The groom yelled that he was being murdered; Madame de Gérán shrieked and Edouard shouted as loud as they did, and, weary of striking Charlot, threw the shovel at madame's mirror.

The mirror was shattered and fell to the floor in splinters. Edouard swore and stormed, completely beside himself. Charlot wept, pressing his battered body;

Madame de Géran called for help, because she was afraid for her other furniture and even for herself; in her terror she suddenly pushed the groom away and he rolled over against a washstand which he overturned; whereupon sponges, phials, essences and the bowl and pitcher fell on the floor; and at the uproar, the shrieks, the tears and the crashing of glass, a large proportion of the guests hurried to the scene and entered the boudoir.

They all expressed much surprise at sight of Madame de Géran in such great excitement, of the groom, in such unusual appearance, sprawling on the floor amid the débris of the mirror, the bowl and the phials, and of Edouard, who stalked amid the ruins with flashing eyes, as Achilles stalked about the ramparts of Troy, and seemed inclined to deluge everything with blood and fire.

They inquired what had happened, pushing, jostling, and asking questions, and by dint of trying to restore tranquillity, increased the confusion. The Marquis de Monclair held his handkerchief to his face, to preserve the remains of his nose; he swore that Murville was a madman who ought to be shut up. Desfleurets followed him, still holding in his hand a pack of cards with which he was preparing some private *coup*. He put in his pockets the phials and sponges that he found within reach, taking advantage of the confusion to restock his toilet table. A number of old coquettes gathered about Charlot, whose youth and other attractions interested them greatly. They examined the injuries and prescribed remedies. The young men assisted Madame de Géran to restore her composure; those who had retained the most self-possession tried to pacify Murville and insisted that explanations should precede fighting. The mistress of the house vouchsafed no other explanation than to demand the value of her mirror and toilet articles. Edouard called her a hussy and held everybody at arm's length. Dufresne, who was always on hand in emergencies, pulled Edouard by the coat-tail and forced him to quit the boudoir, sorely against his will, leaving the others to laugh or cry as their private interests might dictate.

“You are a child!” said Dufresne when they were in the street; “why did you make such a row?”

“Why? why? Don't you know that I have been betrayed, shamefully deceived, by that woman, who as I thought adored me? And for whom? for a servant!”

“Bless my soul! is that a reason for turning a house upside down? You must learn to take things philosophically. A man doesn't smash furniture for such a trifle. You will find a thousand other women who will adore you—for your money.”

“After all the sacrifices I have made for her!”

“Oh! it’s unpleasant, I agree! But, my dear fellow, the money one gives to a woman is always thrown away!—Look you, the most unfortunate feature in all this is your trouble with Monclair. I was obliged to give him a large part of the proceeds of your notes, to induce him not to show his face to a justice of the peace; that would have led to investigations, to law suits and expenses, which one should always avoid.—Peste! do you know that you are a terrible fellow?—Cutting one man’s nose off and hammering another man’s rump! If I should leave you to yourself, you’d get into a fine mess! Luckily, I am always on hand to cool you down. But this evening has cost you a great deal.”

“And so that money that I have been counting on——”

“Oh! never fear, you shall have it; you must make more notes; and besides, the luck will change; no one is unlucky all the time; there are ways of arranging with fortune.”

“There are?”

“Yes, yes; you shall know them later. But it is beginning to be light, and it’s time to go to bed. Come home with me; to-morrow we will think about our affairs.”

Dufresne led Edouard away; and he, bewildered, crushed, desperate on account of his late experiences, was already afraid to cast a glance behind, or to face what the future had in store for him.

XXIII

VIEW OF THE INTERIOR OF A GAMBLING HOUSE

“Look here, we must see about settling your affairs now,” said Dufresne, as he rose after the stormy night at Madame de Gérans. “You must make more notes for about fifteen thousand francs, and I will try to discount them. I confess, however, that it is more difficult than I thought. People are none too anxious to have our signatures. They are becoming more exacting. Only a few Jews will take them, and they demand fifty per cent. What do you say to that?”

“That traitress, to betray me for a lackey!”

“What! you are still thinking of your faithless one! What folly!”

“If I could revenge myself!”

“The best revenge is to spend money freely, to live magnificently; then she will regret you. So you see that you still need money. I am going out to obtain some. Meanwhile, do not allow yourself to give way to melancholy, and throw off this languor, which will lead to nothing good. Go and take a turn at the card tables. That is where you will recover your nerve and your ideas.”

“I haven’t a sou; what sort of figure should I cut there?”

“You must think up some method of winning. Au revoir; I am going to get some money.”

Dufresne went out and Murville went home. He found a letter from his wife there; it was the sixth she had written him since she had gone to the country, but Edouard had never replied. He had read the first ones; they contained Adeline’s wishes for his welfare, entreaties that he would take care of his health, but not a word of love; Adeline no longer dared to mention hers. To speak of one’s affection to a faithless lover is like speaking of colors to a blind man, of music to a deaf man, of manners to a savage.

Edouard had ceased to read his wife’s letters, because he did not know what to reply. His heart said nothing, and his conscience said too much. He hardened the one, and did not listen to the other. The season was advanced; he was afraid that Adeline would talk of returning, and he felt that her presence would embarrass him more than ever. He desired to conceal from her the condition of his affairs, which confirmed only too fully the fears that his wife and his mother-in-law had manifested.

On entering his apartments, the business agent was greatly surprised to find bailiffs proceeding to levy upon his furniture.

“What does this mean,” cried Edouard; “who has sent you to my house?”

“Monsieur,” replied a little man in black, “the owner of the house, of which you don’t pay the rent.”

“You ought to have warned me.”

“Summonses have been sent to you.”

“I did not read them.”

“That isn’t my fault.”

“I don’t know the forms of procedure.”

“What! monsieur is joking—a business agent!”

“I am not one now.”

“That doesn’t concern us.”

Edouard left the officers of the law and went up to his office; the clerk was not there. He examined his papers, but he had no knowledge whatever of his business. He tossed the boxes angrily into the middle of the room. He went downstairs and called his servants; they had gone. The concierge alone remained, and he answered Edouard insolently, because he saw that he was ruined.

Murville left his home and walked slowly toward the Palais-Royal, having no idea what course to pursue, or how to rid himself of the bailiffs. He waited for Dufresne, in order to consult him; he arrived at last; he seemed content, and announced that he had obtained some money. Edouard revived at that news, and told Dufresne what was taking place at his house.

“Faith,” said Dufresne, “if you take my advice, you will let them go ahead and sell a lot of furniture which is of no use to you now; you don’t need such an establishment, as you are living the life of a bachelor; it is sleeping property, and we turn it to some use.”

“But if my wife should return——”

“Bah! she prefers the country; and besides, don’t you know that in Paris, with plenty of money, one can find in an hour’s time, a house and furniture and servants?”

“That is true; but you advised me to live luxuriously.”

“We will hire some magnificently furnished lodgings.”

“But my reputation——”

“Never fear, it is making progress. Make your fortune and let the fools talk—that is the essential thing.”

“Yes, but I am very far from making my fortune!”

“Because you go about it in the wrong way.”

“I do whatever you tell me.”

“Oh, no! you still have a false delicacy, which does you harm, and which you must get rid of. But come to a restaurant; let us drink some champagne and madeira, and snap our fingers at whatever may happen.”

Edouard allowed himself to be led away; he abandoned himself like a blind man to Dufresne’s advice; he followed the torrent which drew him on; and those people who had seen him at the time of his marriage had difficulty in recognizing him, so great a change had been wrought in him by debauchery and gambling.

What an existence is that of a gambler! Never a moment’s repose or tranquillity! It seems that a permanent fever acts constantly on his organs; his eyes are hollow and rimmed with red; his complexion pale and seamed by lack of sleep; his cheeks sunken, all his features drawn; his dress soiled and in disorder; his gait jerky or uncertain; feverish anxiety can be read in his eyes; if he smiles, it is with bitterness; it seems that cheerfulness is a stranger to his mind, which is incessantly excited by the thirst for gold, by the eagerness for gain, by the anxiety of the gaming table.

Such had Edouard become; who could recognize now the young man who, engrossed by his good fortune and his love, proudly led his charming bride to the altar? Now his features are worn, the expression of his face is changed, his very voice is not recognizable, for amid the passions and agonies of suspense which he endures every day, his transports of despair and rage, his oaths and imprecations have made his accents threatening or hoarse; his conversation bears the imprint of the society which he frequents; not in gambling hells, with swindlers or abandoned women, does one acquire the tone of refined society; one loses in such company all courtesy, all modesty, all restraint. Edouard had acquired the habit of shouting, swearing, flying into a rage on all occasions; his manners, his bearing, his principles, were like those of the models which he had constantly under his eyes. A virtuous, upright, reasonable man has much difficulty in resisting the influence of an evil companion; what then is likely to become of a weak man, enslaved by his passions, who is surrounded by none but the offscourings of society?

The winter arrived; Edouard received no more letters from his wife. He did

not know that Dufresne received them for him and returned them to Adeline as from her husband. The first notes had been paid with the money arising from the sale of the furniture; but the second ones were about to mature, and the two inseparables had no more money. In vain did Murville, who no longer blushed to put out his hand to borrow in every direction, go at night, with the small sums he had succeeded in obtaining, to take his seat at the fatal green cloth; in vain did he too try to calculate, and to make combinations by pricking cards, or forming martingales; nothing succeeded. He saw the money that he had deposited with trembling hand upon a number, pass to the banker's pile; the fatal rake swept from him the sum which he had hoped to quadruple; he had nothing left, he turned his eyes in all directions, seeking some acquaintance from whom he could borrow again, but he saw no one; a gambler has no friends. Edouard left number 9, and hurried through the galleries of the Palais-Royal, entering each academy in search of Dufresne or some other; he found no one who was willing to lend him. He arrived at number 113, which he had never entered as yet. He saw the poor mechanic who goes thither, trembling with anticipation, to risk the fruit of his day's labor; he leaves the place with empty pockets, and returns to his home, where his wife with her children is waiting for the return of her husband, to go out to buy something for her little family's supper; but he brings nothing, the poor children will go to bed without food, and the unhappy wife will wet her pillow with her tears, because her husband has been to the gambling house.

And this tradesman, whom people believe to be engrossed by his business,— what does he do in this den of iniquity? he squanders his fortune, his reputation, his honor, the property of his correspondents; he has to pay on the morrow notes which he has signed, and he resorts to the roulette table in search of the funds. His gaze is fixed on the color which he hopes to see come forth, and every time that luck betrays his hopes, his hand, concealed in his coat, tears his clothing and rends his breast. But he feels nothing, his sensations are concentrated on the little ball which is to decide his fate.

This young man, of respectable exterior and decently dressed, who acts as if he wished to hide, because he is still sensitive to shame, comes hither to venture, at the game of chance, a sum which the banker by whom he is employed has intrusted to him to be taken to a notary. Luck betrays him, he has lost all! And yet he remains there; he cannot as yet credit his crime, his misfortune! What will he do upon leaving that vile den, where he has left honor behind? His family is poor, but honorable; he cannot make up his mind to bring dishonor upon it, to endure his father's reproaches; despair takes possession of his soul, and he sees but one means to avoid the future which terrifies him. He goes forth, he walks

hurriedly in the direction of the river, he arrives there, and puts an end to his existence by leaping into the waves! And a man who might have followed a happy and honorable career, a man who should have assured the happiness of his family, commits suicide at twenty years of age because he has been to the gambling house.

Such pictures are only too true; we have examples of them every day; when will these abodes of crime cease to be tolerated?

Edouard should have profited by the lessons which he had before his eyes; instead of that, he took his seat at the game of *biribi*; he still had ten sous in his pocket; and he hastened to risk them on the table where the last farthing is extorted from the poor wretches who resort to it.

He had been at the table but a moment, seated among people who resembled beggars, when Dufresne appeared and motioned to him to follow him.

“I have good news for you,” he said with a joyful air; “in the first place, your mother-in-law died last night of an attack of apoplexy.”

“Is it possible?”

“It was a young fellow employed here, who lives in her house, who just told me. Moreover, I have obtained the money on your notes, on condition that you give a mortgage on your house at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges.”

“My house—but——”

“Come, come; don’t raise objections! In any event, with what little money you get from your mother-in-law, you will be able to pay your notes and redeem your house. You see that everything is turning out for the best. Oh! if only I had thought of your country house before! But now you are in funds, that is the essential thing; all that you will need, to obtain what Madame Germeuil has left, is a power of attorney from your wife.”

“How am I to get it? I shall never dare to tell her of her mother’s death; she will be desperate!”

“Very well; I will undertake to do it. If you wish, I will go to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges in your place, and I will tell your wife the news with all possible precaution.”

“You will do me a great favor. Tell her also that I have not forgotten her, that I expect to go to see her very soon.”

“Yes, I know all that I must say to her; rely upon my zeal and my friendship.”

This arrangement being concluded, Dufresne urged Edouard to make haste to provide him with the necessary papers, that he might go to Adeline, whom he

was burning to see again. As for Edouard, having pledged his country house, the last shelter of his family, and having obtained the proceeds of his notes, he abandoned himself anew to the frantic passion which dominated him.

XXIV

KIND HEARTS.—GRATITUDE

Adeline was still at the pretty country house. She had arrived there very unhappy and melancholy; but in due time the peaceful country, and the first caresses of her daughter, brought a little repose to her soul; she became resigned to her fate. In the early days after her arrival, she still hoped that Edouard would join her, that he would weary of the false pleasures to which he had abandoned himself, and would open his eyes concerning the people who surrounded him; but she speedily lost this last hope. She wrote to her husband, but he did not reply; she received news from Paris through her mother, and that news was most distressing; she learned in what excesses the man whom she still loved was indulging; she shuddered as she thought of Edouard's weakness and Dufresne's vengeance. She wrote again, but her letters were returned to her unopened. This last mark of indifference and contempt cut Adeline to the quick; she waited in silence, and without a complaint, for the man whose joy she had once been, to remember the bonds which attached him to her.

As she was walking in the country one day, with her little Ermance in her arms, Adeline, absorbed by her thoughts, did not notice that she had gone farther than usual; but at last fatigue compelled her to stop; she looked about her: not recognizing her surroundings, and fearing that she would lose her way if she should attempt to return, she bent her steps toward a farm house, which she saw at some distance, in order to ask her way, and to obtain a guide if that were necessary.

She soon arrived at Guillot's, for it was his farm which she had seen. Louise was in front of her door, driving the ducks and fowls into their coops; Sans-Souci was in the yard, piling bundles of hay. The children were wallowing in the mud according to their custom, with the geese and the chickens.

This picture brought a smile to Adeline's lips. She regretted that she had not been born in a village, where the days are all alike, monotonous perhaps, but at all events free from trouble and bitterness.

The farmer's wife cordially invited the young lady to enter the house. She took little Ermance in her arms and dandled her, while answering the questions of Adeline, who learned that she was more than two leagues from her home, and

who, touched by the frank and hearty welcome of the villagers, consented to rest for a few moments, and to share the repast prepared for the men about to return from their work.

The clock struck six; that was the time when the people at the farm assembled to partake gayly of their simple but substantial meal, seasoned always by appetite.

Guillot appeared, bringing wood according to his custom. Sans-Souci entered the living room humming a ballad, and Jacques deposited in a corner the instruments of toil. The farmer examined the young lady with the stupid expression which was habitual with him; Jacques bowed and took his seat without paying much attention to Adeline, while she, as she glanced at the newcomers, tried to remember an incident long ago dispelled from her memory.

They took their places at the table; Jacques was seated beside Adeline, who was surprised by his courtesy, by his frank manners, and by his gentleness with the children. From time to time she cast a glance at that stern face, adorned with heavy moustaches, and bearing the scars of several wounds. Jacques did not notice the young lady's scrutiny; it was impossible for him to recognize her whom he had seen but once, through the gate of a garden, and to whom he had paid little heed. But as she gazed at Jacques's face and especially at his enormous moustaches, Adeline remembered the place where she had seen him, and she could not restrain an exclamation of surprise.

"What! can it be you, monsieur? Ah! I knew that I had seen you before."

"Does madame refer to me?" said Jacques in amazement.

"Yes, monsieur, it is surely you; I am certain now."

"Do you know my comrade, madame?" said Sans-Souci; "if you do, you know a fine, honest fellow."

"I don't doubt it, and yet monsieur frightened me terribly."

"Frightened you, madame; I am very sorry; but how could I have done it?"

"Do you remember a certain day when you went to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, about sixteen months ago? You stood for a long time at the gate of a garden; that barred gate, partly covered with boards, made it impossible to see anything from the garden except your face, and I confess that your eyes, your scars and your moustaches frightened me terribly."

"What!" said Jacques, after examining Adeline with interest, "you were in that garden?"

"Yes, monsieur, it is the garden of my house. But at that time, I was visiting it for the first time with my mother and my husband."

Jacques made no reply; he became gloomy and thoughtful; he passed his hand across his forehead, toyed with his moustaches, and uttered a profound sigh.

“Well,” said Guillot, after drinking a large glass of wine, “that shows that it don’t make any difference, and although a face may be or not,—and I say that it ain’t always a moustache behind a gate that does it; for you see, that when a person is frightened at things like that—why that’s how it is——”

“That’s all right, my man,” said the farmer’s wife, cutting short Guillot’s eloquence; “but if madame had seen that cross of honor on our friend Jacques’s stomach, I guess she wouldn’t have been afraid.”

“Oh!” said Adeline, “I don’t need to see it now, to realize my mistake. But what can you expect? his strange position—for women are timid, you know, and that face with moustaches, appearing all alone at the end of the garden——”

“Oh, yes! that’s so,” rejoined Guillot; “it ain’t surprising, and I think that I’d have been afraid myself; because the surprise, behind the gate, and moustaches, in a garden—a body can’t help himself.”

“Hold your tongue, my man! You’re a coward! Ain’t it a shame, cousin?”

“Ten thousand bayonets!” said Sans-Souci; “if robbers attacked the farm house, I promise you that I would make ’em turn to the right about and march!”

“Is your husband still at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges?” asked Jacques of Adeline, after a moment’s silence.

“No, he has been in Paris for a long while.”

The young woman seemed so sad after she had said this that Jacques regretted his question. The more he looked at his brother’s wife, the more he felt drawn toward her and disposed to love her; he did not doubt that Edouard had said nothing of his meeting with him.

“She would not have turned me away,” he said to himself; “with such gentleness in the features and the voice, a person cannot have a hard and unfeeling heart. Edouard alone is guilty. But I will not tell her; I should distress her to no purpose; and, besides, I have no intention of going near the ingrate who spurned me.”

It was growing dark; Adeline could not remain at the farm; everyone offered to escort her, but she selected Jacques, to show him that she harbored no unpleasant memories against him. He was secretly flattered by the preference. He took little Ermance on one arm and offered the other to the young woman, who bade the people at the farm adieu, and, delighted by their cordial welcome, promised to go again to see them.

They walked in silence at first. From time to time Jacques embraced pretty Ermance, who was only eight months old, but who smiled at the honest soldier, and passed her little hand over his moustaches.

“I am very sorry to give you so much trouble,” said Adeline, “but I did not think that I had gone so far.”

“Madame, it is a pleasure to me.”

“That child must tire you.”

“Tire me! No! ten thousand cannons!—Ah! I beg pardon; one should not swear before ladies.”

“It is very excusable in an old soldier.”

“You see, I am very fond of children; and this little one is really so pretty.”

“Ah me! she is my only consolation!” murmured Adeline.

Jacques could not hear, but he saw that she was sad, and he changed the subject.

“Madame will soon return to Paris, no doubt; it is late in the season, October is almost here.”

“No, I do not expect to leave the country yet; I may pass the winter here.”

“This is strange,” thought Jacques; “she remains in the country and her husband in the city; can it be that they do not live happily together?—In that case,” he said aloud, “I hope that we shall have the pleasure of seeing madame at the farm sometimes.”

“Yes, I look forward with pleasure to going there again. You are a relative of the farmer, I suppose?”

“No, madame, my comrade is their cousin, but I am only an old soldier, without family or acquaintances, whom they have been good enough to supply with work.”

“I am sure that they congratulate themselves upon it every day.—You are still young, you cannot have served very long?”

“I beg your pardon, I enlisted very early.”

“And on your return from the army you had no mother, no sister, to take care of you and to make you forget the fatigues of war?”

“No, madame. I have only one relative, and he treated me with so little affection! I am proud, I have a keen sense of honor, and I rejected assistance which was not offered by the heart, and which would have humiliated me.”

“That must have been some distant relative?”

“Yes, madame.”

“My husband has a brother. By the way, his name is Jacques as yours is. He left his family many years ago; he is dead, no doubt, but if he were still alive, if he should return—oh! I am very sure that Edouard would be overjoyed to see him.”

Jacques made no reply; but he turned his head aside to conceal a tear that dropped from his eyes.

At that moment they arrived at Murville’s house. Adeline urged Jacques to come in and rest for a few moments; but he declined; he was afraid of yielding to his emotions, and of betraying himself.

“At least,” said the young woman, “when you come to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, I hope that you will come to see me. I will show you the gardens which you saw only through the gate.”

“With pleasure, madame; and I urge you not to forget the farm.”

Adeline promised and Jacques went away, after casting a last glance at the house.

“That is a fine fellow,” said Adeline, as she entered the house, “and mamma and I judged him very unjustly. I am sure that that rough and stern exterior conceals a sensitive and honest heart. Ah! appearances are often deceitful!”

Some time after, Adeline went to the farm one morning, followed by her nurse, a stout country girl, who carried her child. The villagers received her joyfully; Adeline was so amiable, so sweet, so simple with the people at the farm, that they were quite at their ease with her. Guillot began sentences that never ended; Louise played with little Ermance; Sans-Souci swore that he had never seen such a lovely woman in the regiment, and Jacques manifested the greatest regard for the young woman, and the deepest interest; his attentions to Adeline were so considerate, his manners so respectful, that she did not know how to interpret his affecting yet mysterious conduct; but there was in Jacques’s eyes an expression at which no one could take offence; only interest and affection could be read in them, and her heart was moved by those same sentiments, although she could not understand them.

They all disputed for the honor of escorting the young lady home. Guillot would offer his arm, Louise insist on carrying the child, Jacques on acting as guide, and Sans-Souci on going before as skirmisher. But Adeline, in order to make none of them jealous, returned alone with her maid when it was not late, unless the weather was very fine; for in that case, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges was a pleasant walk, which they insisted upon taking with Madame Murville, who

was touched by the attachment which the peasants showed for her.

Several months passed in this way. Winter had come, the verdure had disappeared, the country was dismal. Adeline received no company. She was alone in her house with her maid and an old gardener, who had replaced the insolent concierge, dismissed by Adeline because she had learned that he turned the poor people and beggars harshly away when they begged a crust of bread at her door.

Adeline's only diversion was to go to the farm, when the weather was fine and the air not too sharp for her child. Jacques was conscious of a feeling of satisfaction as soon as he saw her; but he concealed a large part of his sensations, in order not to arouse the curiosity of the peasants. Sans-Souci was the only one who was in Jacques's confidence; he knew that Adeline was the wife of Jacques's brother; but he had sworn not to reveal the secret to anyone; and his oath could be relied upon, although privately he raged at his inability to inform Adeline of the bond between her and his friend. But Jacques insisted that it should be so. He had divined a part of his sister-in-law's griefs, and he did not wish to intensify them by telling her of Edouard's conduct toward him.

Meanwhile, they were very far from suspecting at the farm what was taking place in Paris. Intelligence arrived only too soon, to destroy such repose as Adeline still enjoyed. It was Dufresne who had taken it upon himself to wreck the peace of mind of the woman whose scorn he was unable to forgive.

One day, Adeline learned that a gentleman just from Paris desired to speak with her; she went to the salon where the stranger was, and shuddered with horror when she saw Dufresne, seated in an easy-chair, and placidly awaiting her arrival.

"You here, monsieur!" she said, striving to recover her courage; "I did not suppose that you would dare to appear in my presence again!"

"I beg pardon, madame," Dufresne replied in a hypocritical tone; "I hoped time would lessen your hatred."

"Never, monsieur; you know too well that your outrages can never be effaced from my memory! Make haste to tell me what brings you here."

"I am going to cause you distress again; but your husband's orders——"

"Speak; I am prepared for anything."

"Your mother, you know, of course——"

"My mother! Oh heaven! It cannot be that she is sick? But she wrote me only a short time ago."

"An attack of apoplexy, a blood vessel——"

“Great God! she is dead, and I did not see her in her last moments!”

Adeline fell upon a chair, utterly crushed; two streams of tears flowed from her eyes, and her sobs, her grief, would have moved the most insensible of mortals; but gentle sentiments were not made for Dufresne’s heart; he was only moved by the passions which degrade mankind. He contemplated in silence the despair of a young and lovely woman, whose unhappiness was his work; he listened to her sighs, he seemed to count her sobs, and far from feeling the slightest twinge of repentance, he deliberated upon the fresh torments which he proposed to inflict on her.

Dufresne’s presence intensified Adeline’s grief; before him she could not even weep freely and think solely of her mother; she tried to summon a little courage in order to dismiss the contemptible man who fed upon her suffering.

“Was your only purpose in coming here to tell me of the cruel loss I have suffered?” she said, rising and trying to restrain her sobs.

“Madame, the property which Madame Germeuil left must be administered; I feared that it would be painful to you to attend to these details which are indeed your husband’s concern, but we require your signature, and I have brought the papers.”

“Oh! give them to me, give them to me! I will sign anything; I consent to give up everything! But at least let my retirement no longer be disturbed by your presence!”

As she spoke, Adeline seized the papers which Dufresne handed her, she signed them all blindly, and handed them back to him, and was turning away, but he grasped her with violence by the arm, just as she was about to leave the salon.

“One moment, madame; you are in a great hurry to leave me. For my own part, I propose to recompense myself for the time I have passed without seeing you; besides, I have news of your husband for you.”

A cruel smile gleamed in Dufresne’s eyes; Adeline shuddered and tried to escape.

“Do not detain me,” she cried, “or I shall find a way to punish your audacity.”

“Oh! don’t be so proud, my lovely Adeline! Do you suppose that I have not taken my precautions? Your gardener is busy at the end of the garden, your maid has gone down to her kitchen, where she cannot hear you; for I know this house perfectly. You will stay here because I wish it; you will listen to me, and then we will see.”

“Villain! do not think to frighten me; the hatred which you inspire in me will double my strength.”

“Ah! so you hate me still; you refuse to be reasonable? I am of better composition; I would forget your insults if you would consent to love me at last. But beware; my patience will wear out, and then I shall be capable of anything.”

“O mon Dieu! must I listen to such infamous words?”

“Come, no temper! you cannot love your husband any longer, for he abandons you, forgets you, ruins you, consorts with prostitutes and haunts gambling houses. He is now almost as much of a rake as of a gambler, and that is not saying little; he will bring you to the gutter!—But I will give you riches; nothing will cost too much that will gratify your desires. Open your eyes! and see if I am not the equal of your imbecile Edouard! You are silent? Good,—I see that you realize the justice of my words.—Let us make peace.”

Dufresne walked toward Adeline; she uttered a piercing shriek.

“What! still the same harsh treatment? Oh! I will not make this journey for nothing; I must have a kiss.”

“Monster! I would rather die!”

“Oh, no! one doesn’t die for so small a matter.”

In vain did the unhappy woman try to flee, the villain held her fast; he was about to sully with his impure breath the lips of beauty, when a loud noise was heard, and in another instant Jacques entered the salon, followed by Sans-Souci.

Dufresne had not had time to leave the room; the struggle that Adeline had sustained had exhausted her strength; she could only falter these words:

“Deliver me, save me from this monster!” then she fell unconscious to the floor.

Jacques ran to Adeline, shaking his fist at Dufresne. The latter tried to go out, but Sans-Souci barred his passage, crying:

“One moment, comrade; you have failed in respect to this young lady, and you don’t get off like this.”

“You are wrong,” replied Dufresne, doing his utmost to conceal the perturbation which had seized him at sight of Jacques. “This lady is subject to attacks of hysteria; I hurried here in response to her cries; I came to help her. Let me go for her servants.”

Sans-Souci was hesitating, he did not know what to think; but Jacques, struck by Dufresne’s voice, had turned and was examining him carefully; he soon recognized him and shouted to Sans-Souci:

“Stop that villain; don’t let him escape; it is Bréville,—that scoundrel who robbed me at Brussels! Ten thousand cartridges! he has got to pay me for that!”

“Aha! my comrade,” said Sans-Souci, “you didn’t expect to be recognized! It is disagreeable, I agree; but you have got to dance. Forward!”

Dufresne saw that it was impossible to escape by stratagem; his only resource was in flight. Jacques was still busy over Adeline, who had not recovered her senses; therefore there was only Sans-Souci to stop him; but Dufresne was stout and strong, Sans-Souci small and thin. He at once made up his mind; he rushed upon his adversary, whirled him about, threw him down before he had time to realize what was happening, and leaping over him, opened the door and descended the stairs four at a time. But Louise had accompanied Jacques and Sans-Souci to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges; they had come to invite Madame Murville to be one of a small party, which they were preparing for Guillot’s birthday. On entering the courtyard and not finding the gardener, the farmer’s wife had gone to the kitchen to learn where madame was; and Jacques and his companion were waiting at the foot of the stairs when they heard shrieks and hastened up to Adeline’s assistance.

In his flight Dufresne encountered Louise, who was going up to the salon; he roughly pushed her aside, she stumbled and fell between his legs. While he was trying to disentangle himself, Sans-Souci, who had risen, and who was frantic at being worsted by the villain, ran up, armed with his knotted stick; he overtook Dufresne, and bestowed upon his head and shoulders a perfect hailstorm of blows, which he had not time to ward off. Thereupon he ran toward the garden, with Sans-Souci in pursuit; but Dufresne, who knew all the windings, succeeded in eluding his enemy. Coming to a wall along which there ran a trellis, he climbed over, jumped down into the fields, and fled toward Paris, cursing his misadventure.

Sans-Souci returned to the house when he found that the man he was looking for had escaped. Adeline had recovered consciousness, thanks to the attentions of Jacques, who had not left her. She opened her eyes, and saw Jacques at her feet and the farmer’s wife at her side.

“Ah! my friends,” she said, in a voice trembling with emotion, “without you I should have been lost!”

“The villain!” said Jacques; “oh! I have known him for a long time; he robbed me once; I will tell you about that, madame.”

“Ah! the rascal!” said the farmer’s wife in her turn; “he threw me head over heels just as if I was a dog; but Sans-Souci gave him a fine beating, I tell you!

You couldn't see the stick!"

At that moment Sans-Souci returned with an air of vexation.

"Well," said Jacques, "did you stop him?"

"No; I don't know how he did it, but I lost sight of him in the garden, which he seems to know. For my part, I didn't know which way to turn; but no matter, he got a trouncing. If madame wishes, I will beat up the fields and search the village."

"No, it is no use," said Adeline; "I thank you for your zeal; but we will let the villain go; I flatter myself that he will never dare to show his face here again."

"Didn't he steal anything, madame?" said Jacques.

"No, he came here about some business, to get some information; then he dared to speak to me of love; and flying into a rage at my contempt, he was about to proceed to the last extremity, when you arrived."

"The monster! Ah! if I find him——"

"Pardi! what a miserable scamp! To think of falling in love with a sweet, pretty woman like Madame Murville! I wouldn't let him touch the end of my finger!"

"He had better not think of touching anything of yours, or of looking at madame," said Sans-Souci; "or by the battle of Austerlitz, the hilt of my sword will serve him for a watch chain."

Tranquillity was restored; but Adeline, sorely distressed by the loss of her mother, and by what the treacherous Dufresne had told her of Edouard, refused to go to Guillot's party, to the great disappointment of the people at the farm. In vain did Louise and her companions try to shake her resolution; they could obtain no promise; they had to return, sadly enough, without Madame Murville, and to leave her a prey to the sorrow with which she seemed overwhelmed.

Jacques and Sans-Souci offered to pass the night in the house, in order to defend her against any new enterprises on the part of the villain who had escaped them; but Adeline would not consent; she thanked them, assuring them that she had nothing more to fear; but urged them to come often to see her.

The people from the farm took their leave regretfully, and Jacques registered an inward vow to watch over his brother's wife.

THE LOTTERY OFFICE

“How does it happen that I am ruined, while I see other men win all the time? Shall I never be able to find a way to grow rich rapidly?”

Thus did Edouard commune with himself on the day of Dufresne’s departure for Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. He came out of an academy—a decent method of designating a gambling hell,—where he had lost a large part of the sum he had borrowed on his house. He strode angrily along the streets of Paris; he dreamed of cards, of martingales, of series, of *parolis*, and of all those unlucky combinations which constantly perturb the brain of a gambler. A noisy burst of music, the booming of a bass drum, the strains of two clarinets and a pair of cymbals, roused him from his reverie; he raised his eyes with the intention of walking away from the musicians, whose uproar tired him, and saw that he was in front of a lottery office. The music which he heard was produced by one of those travelling bands which, for a forty-sou piece given them by the keeper of the office, raise an infernal tumult before the door and attract all the gossips of the neighborhood to the “lucky office” where the list of *ambes*, *ternes*, and even *quaternes*, said to have been won, is hung at the door with an exact statement of the result of the lottery; the whole embellished with pink and blue ribbons like the sweetmeats in a confectioner’s window.

Edouard stopped instinctively, and like all the rest, gazed at the seductive list. Seventy-five thousand francs won with twenty sous! That was very enticing! To be sure, the winner had had a *quaterne*; that is very rare; but still it has been seen, and one man’s chance is as good as another’s.

“Ah! neighbor, what a fine drawing!” said a fish dealer to a fruit woman, who stood near Edouard, copying the result of the lottery; “11, 20, 44, 19, 76.—I ought to be as rich as a queen to-day. Here, for more than a year I have been following up a *dry terne* on the first three numbers that come out; the day before yesterday was the last day. I was waiting for Thomas, who works at La Vallée; he was going to bring me a goose stuffed with chestnuts for our supper, with some sixteen-sou wine from Eustache’s at the Barreaux Verts, which has a fine bouquet! It was my idea to have a nice little supper in a private room—that brings luck—and to take my ticket when we went home to bed.—But not a bit of it. Thomas kept me cooling my heels, waiting for him. I got tired of it and went

to his garret, and he had colic in the loins from dancing too much on Sunday at the *Rabbits*. I had to stay and nurse him, the closing time passed and I forgot my *dry terne* while I was giving him injections.”

“Poor Françoise! that was hard luck.—Well! my poor dead man might have had pains in his belly—that wouldn’t ‘a’ made me forget my tickets! For the last ten years I’ve always paid my rent with number 20; it went a little by the date this time, but I got it all the same—I put my counterpane up the spout to do it. You see, I’d rather have sold my chemise than dropped it, for I was bound to have it.”

“Do you know any of those that won the big prize?”

“Why, the dry goods dealer’s cook. Three numbers taken out of the wheel at random!”

“That’s what I call luck!”

“Oh! it ain’t to be wondered at; she dreamed that her master used the soup-kettle for a chamber.”

“Then it was sure money! I’m down on my luck; I’ve never been able to dream of nasty things.”

“Oh! as for me, I often used to dream some in my late husband’s time.”

Edouard turned away, forcing a passage through the crowd in front of the office. As he walked along he thought of the numbers that had come out. It was not so quick a way of getting rich as roulette, the chances were less favorable; but the results, when one is lucky, are much more advantageous, as one may win a large sum with a modest coin.

He passed the day thinking about the lottery, and the next morning he decided to tempt fortune in that new manner. He entered the first office that he saw; and he had not to go far, for lottery offices are more numerous than poor relief offices.

It was ten o’clock in the morning. It was the last day of a foreign lottery. The office was full, the crowd was so great that one could hardly enter, and it was necessary to take one’s place at the end of a long line in order to exchange one’s money for some slips of paper.

Edouard decided to wait. He glanced at the crowd that surrounded him. It was composed almost entirely of people of the lower classes—street hawkers, cooks, menders of lace, cobblers, messengers, rag-pickers.

It is not that the upper classes do not try their luck in the lottery; but fashionable people send others to buy tickets for them, and the bourgeois, who are ashamed of what they do, enter only by the private door.

Edouard held his nose, for that assemblage of ladies and gentlemen exhaled an odor anything but agreeable; and the muddy boots of the Savoyard, the fish-woman's herring, the rag-picker's bag, the cobbler's wax, and the cook's whiting formed a combination of smells which would disgust a grenadier. But the purchasers of lottery tickets are engrossed by their calculations and they smell nothing.

While awaiting their turn, the habitués form groups and confide their dreams and ideas to one another. Everyone talks at once; but in that respect everyone is wise; it is a veritable babel, despite the remonstrances of the mistress of the place, who shouts every five minutes, as they do in court:

“Silence in the corner. Pray be quiet, mesdames, you can't hear yourself think!”

Edouard, not being accustomed to it, was bewildered by the chatter of the gossips, who talked on without stopping; but wealth cannot be bought too dearly, and he made the best of it, and even determined to profit by what he overheard.

“My girl,” said an old hag covered with rags, to another who held her chafing-dish under her arm; “I saw a gray spider behind my bed this morning before breakfast.”

“Pardi!” replied the other—“spiders! I see 'em every day at home!”

“No matter, they bring luck; I'm going to put a crown on 9, 30 and 51; I'm sure they won't all draw blanks.”

And the poor creature, who wore no stockings and whose skirt was full of holes, took a crown from her pocket to put on her spider. To those who believe firmly in dreams, numbers cease to be numbers, and become the objects they have seen in their dreams, all of which are represented by particular numbers, as set forth in the books of dreams, the *Petit Cagliostro*, the *Aveugle du Bonheur*, and a thousand nice little works of about the same value, which the ticket buyers know by heart. The keeper of the office, who knew her trade, and, when the customer was worth the trouble, could make calculations on the mists of the Seine, told them what numbers to take, when they described their dreams to her.

“Monsieur, give me my oxen,” said an oyster woman, presenting her thirty-sou piece.

“Monsieur, put twenty-four sous on a white cat for me.”

“My aunt's dressing jacket, monsieur.”

“My little woman, some anchovies, in the first drawing.”

“Give me a *terne* on artichokes.”

“My child, I saw horses trotting round my room all night, just as if it was a stable.”

“What color were they?” inquired the agent, with the most comical gravity.

“Bless me! wait a minute—I believe they were dappled—no, they were black.”

“That’s 24.—Were they harnessed?”

“I should say so!”

“That’s 23.—Did they run fast?”

“Like the Circus!”

“That’s 72.”

“All right! arrange ’em right for me. With such a dream as that, I can’t fail to have a carriage to ride in.”

“I had a funnier dream than that! I was in a country where there was cows that danced with shepherds and shepherdesses, and houses built of gingerbread.”

“The deuce you say! You could get fat by licking the walls.”

“Let her go on, saucebox.”

“And I was rowing on a river where the water was boiling and bubbling like a soup-kettle.”

“And you caught fish all cooked, eh?”

“Hold your tongue, you magpie!—At last I saw a palace on the other side of the river, come up out of the ground the way they do at the Funambules; the roof was made of diamonds, the walls of gold, the windows of silver and the door of rubies.”

“The devil! that must ‘a’ made your gingerbread houses look mean.”

“When I sees that, I tells my boatman—and a fine young man he was—I tells him to take me to the palace; and would you believe that he asks me to let him make a fool of me as pay for my passage. I said no, sharp, but he didn’t listen to me; he just threw me into the bottom of his boat—and the rascal overpowered me, my dears!”

“Well! so that’s your fine dream! All that just to come to the climax! It was your man, of course; while you was asleep, he——”

“Oh, yes, indeed! Why, not since Saint-Fiacre’s Eve, six months ago——”

“Oho! so you’ve had a row, have you?”

“Why, once he made me swallow truffles for the King of Prussia, and since then, when he comes to me—not if I know it!”

“Well, you’re wrong; yes, you’re wrong! refuse and you’re left to muse. He’ll just take your property somewhere else. Don’t be a fool; once those dogs have found another kennel, there’s no way to bring ’em back; it’s all over!”

“I believe you’re right, Bérénice; I’ll rub a sponge over it next Sunday.”

“And you’ll do well.”

“You’re very good, mesdames,” said a cook, stuffing into her basket the fowl she had just bought, which, from its odor, might have been taken for game, “you’re very good, but my master’s waiting for his chocolate; he wants to go out early and I ain’t lighted my fire yet.—Quick, madame, my regular number; here’s thirty-six sous—please hurry up.”

The cook took her ticket and returned to her master, making figures on the way: the fowl had cost her fifty sous; by calling it eighty-six sous, she would get her ticket for nothing, which was very pleasant. To be sure, her master would eat a tainted fowl instead of a delicate bird; but one must have one’s little perquisites, and what was the use of being a cordon bleu if one did not make something out of the marketing?

“The *considérés* are very old combinations,” said a little man who had been gazing at the list for three-quarters of an hour; “they’re excellent to play by extracts.”

“See,” said another, “notice that the 6 is a prisoner; it will soon come out.”

“The 2 has come, that brings the 20.”

“The 39 in a hundred and three drawings—it’s an ingot of gold! Zeros haven’t done anything for a long while.”

“That’s true; I’ll bet that they’ll come in a *terne* or an *ambe*.”

“How often the forties come out! If I’d followed my first idea, I’d have had an *ambe* at Strasbourg; I must tell you that, when my wife dreams that she’s had a child, the 44 comes out—that never fails. Well! she dreamed that the other night. I’ve got a dog that I’ve taught to draw numbers out of a bag; he’s beginning to do it very well with his paw. He drew out 46, and I was going to put it with my wife’s dream; we thought about it all day, and she wanted to put

instead of it the number of her birthday which was very near; and what do you suppose?—my dog's number came out with her dream!—I wouldn't sell that beast for three hundred francs."

"I'm shrewder than you, my dear man," said an old candy woman; "I've got a talisman."

"A talisman!"

"Yes, it's a fact; a fortune-teller told me the secret."

"What is it?" shouted all the gossips at once.

"A bit of clean parchment, with letters written on it with my blood."

"Mon Dieu! that's worse than the play at the Ambigu.—Tell us, what do your letters say?"

"Faith! I don't know; they're Hebrew, so she said."

"Look out, Javotte! don't trust it; it may be an invention of the devil, and then you'll go straight to hell with your talisman."

"Bah! I ain't afraid, and I won't let go of my little parchment. I'm a philosopher!"

"What a fool she is with her talisman!" said the gossips, when Javotte had gone. "It beats the devil what luck it brings her! She owes everybody in the quarter, and she can't pay.—But it's almost market time, and I haven't put out my goods."

"And I ought by now to be at the Fontaine des Innocents!"

"Bless my soul! you remind me that my children ain't up yet, and I'm sure they're squalling, the little brats! and their gruel has been on the fire ever since eight o'clock."

"It'll be well cooked!"

"I'm off; good-day, neighbor."

"See you soon; we shall have the list if the sun shines."

Amid this mob, pushed by one, pulled by another, deafened by them all, Edouard waited for three-quarters of an hour for his turn to come. At last he reached the desk; all that he had heard about *considérés*, prisoners and lucky numbers was running in his head; but as he had no idea what to choose, he put twenty francs on the first numbers that occurred to him, and left the office with hope in his pocket.

On the street he met many individuals most shabbily clad, who offered him fifty louis in gold for twelve sous. These gentlemen and ladies apparently disdained for themselves the fortune that they proposed to sell to the passers-by

at such a bargain. But Murville declined their offers. He had in his pocket what he wanted. He was already building castles in Spain, for his numbers were excellent—so the agent told him—and could not fail to draw something. He was about to be released from embarrassment; he could live in style, and keep the prettiest, aye, and the most expensive women, which would drive Madame de Géran frantic. In short, he would deny himself nothing.

But the sun shone; at three o'clock the list was posted outside the offices; Edouard, who had been pacing back and forth impatiently in front of the one at which he had bought his ticket, eagerly drew near; he looked at the list and saw that he had drawn nothing.

XXVI

THE KIND FRIENDS AND WHAT RESULTED

Dufresne left the village behind him, with rage in his heart and his head filled with schemes of revenge. It was no longer the hope of seeing Adeline share his brutal passion that tormented him; he felt that that was impossible now; only by the most infamous craft had he succeeded in gratifying his lust; and Adeline was no less virtuous than before. In vain had he hoped, by that method, to change the sentiments of Edouard's wife; she detested him more than ever. What did he propose to do? Was she not unhappy enough? She wept for a fault which she had not committed; she had lost the affection of her husband; she would soon find herself reduced to penury! What other blows could he deal her?

Dufresne's advice was not needed any longer to lure Edouard to the gaming table; the unhappy wretch did not pass a single day without visiting one or more of the gambling hells in which the capital abounds. He sought there to forget his plight, by plunging deeper and deeper into the abyss. The proceeds of his last notes went to join his fortune, which had been divided among Madame de Géran, roulette, trente-et-un, prostitutes and swindlers. What was he to do now, to procure the means to gratify his depraved tastes? The maturity of his notes was approaching; he could not pay them, his country house would be sold, his wife and child would have no roof to cover their heads, no resource except in him; but it was not that that preoccupied him; he thought of himself alone, and if he desired to procure money, it was not to relieve his family. No, he no longer remembered the sacred bonds which united him to an amiable and lovely wife. The cards caused him to forget entirely that he was a husband and father.

Forced to leave the apartment which he occupied alone in a handsome house, he went to Dufresne and took up his abode with him. The latter had been anxious for some days after his return from the country; he was afraid that Jacques would pursue him to Paris, and, in order to avoid his search, he changed his name, and urged his companion to do the same. Dufresne called himself Courval, and Edouard, Monbrun. It was under these names that they hired lodgings, in a wretched lodging house in Faubourg Saint-Jacques, having no other associates than blacklegs and men without means, who like Dufresne had reasons of their own for avoiding the daylight.

Three weeks after Madame Germeuil's death, what she had left was already

spent, and they were compelled to have recourse every day to all sorts of expedients to obtain means of subsistence.

One evening, when Dufresne and Edouard had remained at home, having no money to gamble, and cudgeling their brains to think of a way of procuring some, there was a knock at their door, and one Lampin, a consummate scamp, worthy to be Dufresne's intimate friend, entered their room with a joyous air, and with four bottles under his arm.

"Oho! is that you, Lampin?" said Dufresne, as he opened the door to his friend, and made certain signs to which the other replied without being detected by Edouard, who was absorbed in his thoughts.

"Yes, messieurs, it's me. Come, come, comrade Monbrun, come, stop your dreaming! I have brought something to brighten you up."

"What's that?"

"Wine, brandy and rum."

"The deuce it is! so you are in funds, are you?"

"Faith, I won ten francs at *biribi*, and I have come to drink 'em up with my friends."

"That's right, Lampin, you're a good fellow. You have come just in time to cheer us up, for we were as dismal as empty pockets, Monbrun and I."

"Let's have a drink first; that will set you up, and then we will talk."

The four bottles were placed on a table; the gentlemen took their places at it, and the glasses were filled and emptied rapidly.

"We haven't a sou, Lampin, and that's a wretched disease."

"Bah! because you are fools!—Here's your health."

"What do you mean by that, Jean-Fesse?"

"I mean that if I had your talents, and especially Monbrun's, I wouldn't be where you are now, but I would have my bread well buttered."

"What do you mean?" asked Edouard, pouring out a glass of brandy; "explain yourself."

"Anybody can understand that, my son; I tell you again that if I knew how to handle a pen as you do, I would speculate on a large scale! But you're scared to death!"

"We have speculated enough, but it hasn't succeeded with us."

"But that's not what I'm talking about, youngster. Let's take a drink, messieurs; it's good stuff, at all events."

“Tell us, Lampin, what you would have done to——”

“Ah! I’m a blade, I am; I would risk the job! But I write like a cat.”

“But what is it that you’d write?”

“That depends—sometimes one thing, sometimes another.—Look here, here’s a note that a friend entrusted to me; it is the proceeds of his father’s property, which is to be paid him here in Paris, because he means to enjoy himself with us.”

“What is it?”

“A note for twelve hundred francs, accepted by a famous banker of Paris. Oh! it’s good, anyone would discount it for you on the instant; my colleague knows a man who lives in the suburbs of Paris, and who proposed to give him *rocks* for his paper.—Well, my boy, make one like it, and you can get that discounted too.”

“What? What do you say? Counterfeit this note?”

“Oh, no, not counterfeit it, for instead of twelve hundred francs I would make it twelve thousand; it’s just an imitation. Here’s your health.”

“Why, you villain! that’s forgery!”

“No, it ain’t forgery; it’s a note that we put in circulation; it ain’t forgery; is it, Dufresne? In all this, the banker is the only one that’s fooled; but those rascals are rich enough to make us a little present.”

“In fact,” said Dufresne, “it isn’t exactly a forgery; we create a note, that’s all, and we make someone else pay it.”

“That’s just it, my boy, it’s only a little joke.—Oh! you understand such games, you do; but Monbrun is a little dull.”

“No, no, I understand very well, messieurs; but I cannot consent to resort to such methods. I disapprove of your plan.”

“Is that so? Well, you’ll never get ahead, my man, and you’ll die of hunger, like the fleas in winter!”

“It is true that we have no resources,” said Dufresne; “no linen, no clothes except those we have on!”

“That’s very fine! Just reflect that you have everything to gain and nothing to lose.”

“What about honor?” said Edouard in a weak voice.

“Honor! Pardi! I rather guess yours has been roaming the country for a long while; as for Dufresne, he’s like me, never had any, for fear of losing it.”

“This rascal of a Lampin is always joking! Let’s have a drink, messieurs.”

“Remember, too, that with the twelve thousand francs you will get, you can make up all your losses. I have discovered a sure way of winning; you only need three hundred louis to catch a thousand.”

“Really?”

“On my word as an honest man; I will teach you my scheme, and we will share the profits.”

“That is really attractive,” said Dufresne, examining the note closely, while Lampin filled Edouard’s glass with rum, and he began to lose command of his wits.

“You say, Lampin, that you know a man who would discount your friend’s note?”

“Yes, he knows that it is all right. It can’t look suspicious to him, I tell you; he will think that the inheritance was larger, that’s all.”

“True,” said Dufresne; “who will ever know about it? It is a secret between ourselves.”

“And our conscience?” faltered Edouard.

“Oh! damn! What an ass he is with his conscience! Do you think you’re talking to small boys?”

“The most essential thing,” continued Dufresne, “is to succeed. For my part, if Monbrun will write the body of the note, I will look after the signature, and I will take the whole thing on myself.”

“Well! what have you got to say to that, booby? Are you going to make more fuss? You hear, he takes the whole thing on himself; I should say that that was acting like a friend?”

“What! Dufresne, would you——”

“Faith, I see no other way of extricating ourselves from poverty; I tell you again, it will not put you forward in any way!”

“Are you sure of it?”

“Bah! What’s the matter with you, Nicodemus, when he tells you that you won’t be put forward? Look here, colleagues, I happen to have on me a blank note, all stamped; just cut a quill, Dufresne, and let’s amuse ourselves by making different kinds of letters.”

“My hand trembles, messieurs,” said Edouard; “I shall never be able to write.”

“Go on, go on! that’s just right! Ah! how rich I should be if I had been able to do as much! But my education was rather neglected.”

“Suppose we should be arrested, identified as the authors of——”

“Bah! it is impossible; and if you should be, you would get off with a few months in prison; and you are very well off there, you enjoy yourself and make acquaintances.”

Edouard, led astray by the talk of the villains who were with him, and having long since lost all sense of delicacy in the haunts of vice and debauchery, crossed the narrow space which still separated him from the miserable wretches who are at odds with the laws; he choked back the last cry of his conscience, and committed the most shameful of crimes.

The note was written, Dufresne exerted himself to counterfeit the signatures, and succeeded perfectly, whereat Edouard alone was surprised. They invented endorsers; the unhappy Murville, who allowed himself to be led wherever they would, disguised his handwriting and wrote on the back of the note the names that they gave him.

Lampin was overjoyed, and for greater safety proposed to carry the note to the man who had agreed to discount the one for twelve hundred francs, and who lived in a small town not far from Paris. This plan was agreed upon: Dufresne was to accompany Lampin, because those gentry did not trust him sufficiently to leave their note in his hands; and Edouard, who was less bold than they, was to await at Paris the result of the affair.

Everything being arranged, they drank again, Edouard to deaden his conscience more completely, the others for conviviality's sake. They formed plans for the use of their future wealth, and ended by falling asleep with their elbows on the table.

Edouard, who had drunk more, and who was less able to stand excessive indulgence in wine and liqueurs than the others, did not wake until eight o'clock in the morning. The first thought that came to his mind was that of the dishonorable act he had committed the night before. He shuddered, for he realized the full extent of his crime; he looked for Dufresne, to urge him to destroy the false note; but Dufresne was not there, he had gone away early with Lampin, anticipating remorse on Edouard's part, and by his own absence making it impossible for him to retrace his steps.

Edouard left his room, and went out into the street with no definite object. But he sought some distraction from the anxiety which beset him. Already he was afraid of being recognized as a criminal. He glanced about him fearfully; if anyone looked hard at him as he passed, he blushed, became confused, and fancied that he was about to be arrested; he tried in vain to overcome his terror

and his weakness, but he could not succeed, and he already cursed money obtained at so high a price.

At a street corner, he heard a cry; someone uttered his name. He quickened his pace, not daring to look back; but someone ran after him, overtook him and grasped his arm; he trembled, the cold perspiration stood on his brow; he raised his eyes and saw his wife and daughter before him.

“Is it really you? I have found you at last!” said Adeline; “oh! I have been looking for you for a long, long while.”

“You frightened me,” said Edouard, greatly surprised by this meeting. “But why are you here? Why did you leave the country?”

“Your creditors have turned me out of the house I was living in; it no longer belongs to you. Some time ago the notary warned me that your fortune was impaired; that such property as you possessed was subject to numerous mortgages.”

“I know all that, madame; spare me your useless complaints and reproaches.”

“I don’t propose to make any complaints or reproaches; and yet—Oh! my dear, how changed you are!”

“I have been sick.”

“Why not have written to me? I would have come and nursed you.”

“I needed nobody.”

“And this is the way you treat her whom you have reduced to want! I have lost my mother, and I no longer have a husband! Chance alone is responsible for my meeting you; I have asked for you in all the places where you have lived, but no one has been able to give me any news of you. For a fortnight I have been here; I was losing hope when at last I caught sight of you, dear Edouard; and this is the way you speak to me; and you don’t even kiss your daughter!”

“Do you want me to make a show of myself to the passers-by?”

“How can the sight of a father kissing his child be absurd, in the eyes of decent people? But let us go in somewhere, into a café.”

“I haven’t any time.”

“Where do you live now?”

“A long way from here; I was in very straitened circumstances, and Dufresne took me in to lodge with him.”

“You live with Dufresne? A villain who has already been guilty of all sorts of crimes!”

“Hold your tongue, and don’t bore me with your preaching! I do what I

choose and I see whom I choose; I give you leave to do the same.”

“What a tone, and what manners!” said Adeline to herself, as she examined Edouard; “but no matter, I must make one last attempt.—Monsieur,” she said aloud, “if it is want that forces you to remain with that scoundrel who deceives you, come and live with me; let us leave this city, which would recall painful memories to you, and come with me to some lonely place in the country; I have nothing, but I will work, I will work nights if necessary, and I will provide means of subsistence for us. In a poor cottage we may still be happy, if we endure adversity with courage, and Heaven, moved by our resignation, will perhaps take pity on us. You will find the repose which eludes you, and I shall find my husband. In pity’s name, do not refuse me; come, I implore you; leave this town, with its treacherous counselors and dangerous acquaintances, or beware lest you become a criminal.”

Edouard was moved; his heart was agitated by pity and remorse, and he looked at his daughter for the first time.

“Well,” he said to Adeline, “I will see; if I can arrange my affairs, I will go with you.”

“What detains you now?”

“A single thing, but a most important one; I must find out—where are you staying now?”

“At a hotel in Faubourg Saint-Antoine; see, here is my address.”

“Give it to me; to-morrow I will go to see you.”

“Do you promise?”

“Yes; until to-morrow. Adieu, I leave you.”

Edouard hurried away, and Adeline returned to her hotel, passing from hope to fear and from fear to hope. She knew her husband, she knew how little she could rely upon his promises, so that she awaited the morrow with anxiety. But on the morrow Dufresne and Lampin returned with money. The discounter had fallen into the trap; he had thought that he had recognized the banker’s signature. Those men led Edouard away; they abandoned themselves anew to the pleasures of the table and the gambling house. They made Murville drunk; they put his remorse and his scruples to silence; they laughed at his fears; and Adeline, instead of seeing him whom she expected, received in the morning a note containing only these words:

“Do not try to see me again, do not hope that I will go with you to bury myself in a cottage; that sort of thing does not suit me. Leave Paris without me;

this is the last command that you will receive from your husband, who leaves you entirely at liberty to do whatever you please.”

Adeline bathed the letter in her tears.

“You have no father now,” she said to little Ermance; “poor child, what will your lot be? Let us leave this city, let us follow my husband’s last orders. Let us go back to the honest villagers; at the farm they will not spurn me. I shall not blush to ask them for work. O mother! If you were still alive, I should find comfort in your arms. If only I had followed your advice! Perhaps Edouard then—but it’s too late! At all events, you never knew the full extent of my sorrow.”

Adeline sold all that she thought unlikely to be of use to her in the situation which she was about to occupy. No more jewels, no more flowers, no superfluous wardrobe; in a simple dress and a straw hat tied with a modest ribbon, with her daughter on one arm and a small bundle on the other,—thus did Madame Murville set out for Guillot’s farm.

XXVII

ADELINE FINDS A PROTECTOR

The farmer's family were in despair at Madame Murville's flight. Since the day that Dufresne had been driven from the village, Adeline, buried in the most profound melancholy, had not left her home; she took no diversion whatever, and the solicitations of the peasants had failed to induce her to emerge from her retirement.

Jacques did not know what to think of his brother's conduct. He easily guessed that he made his wife unhappy; but he was still far from suspecting the extent of his misbehavior! Edouard's brother dared not question Adeline, but she read in his eyes his sympathy with her distress, and her grateful heart rewarded the honest laborer with the most sincere friendship. Every two days Jacques went to the village to enquire for Madame Murville's health. One morning when he rang as usual at the courtyard gate, the old gardener answered the bell, with tears in his eyes.

"What's the matter, Père Forêt, what has happened to Madame Murville now?" Jacques asked anxiously; "can it be that that scamp of the other day has come again?"

"Ah! my dear monsieur, more than one scamp has come to-day! And they have turned my mistress out of doors!"

"Turned her out! That isn't possible, ten thousand dead men!"

"It is true, however."

"What were they? brigands, robbers?"

"No, no, monsieur, they were bailiffs, creditors, what do I know? They showed madame some papers, and told her that she wasn't in her own house any longer. Poor woman! she cried, but she didn't make any answer; she just did her clothes up in a bundle, took her daughter in her arms, and left."

"Left! She has gone away? Is it possible? The villain! he has reduced her to destitution!"

"Monsieur Jacques, I tell you there was a lot of them. Look, here's the placard; this house is for sale now, and they left me here, so that there might be some one to show it to people."

“Do you know where Madame Murville has gone?”

“Bless me! she took the Paris road.”

“She has gone to join him.”

“Yes, no doubt she has gone to her husband; but look you, between ourselves, they say that he is a regular good-for-nothing; that he raises the devil at Paris; and you must agree, Monsieur Jacques, that when one has a pretty, good, young wife like madame—For, bless my soul, she is virtue and goodness personified! And then a child, which will be its mother’s portrait; well, I say, when a man has all that, and forgets them all the year round, it ain’t right, and it don’t speak well for him.”

Jacques, having taken his leave of the gardener, cast a last glance at the house and walked sadly away from the village. A thousand plans passed through his mind; he thought of going to Paris to look for Adeline; he thought of speaking to his brother, reproaching him for his evil conduct, and making him ashamed of the destitution in which he had left his wife; with his mind filled with such thoughts as these, he arrived at the farm. His friends there questioned him; they grieved with him, but still they hoped that Madame Murville would come to see them. Sans-Souci shared that hope; he encouraged his comrade, and urged him to wait a few days before taking any steps.

Jacques’s patience was beginning to be exhausted; he was on the point of leaving the farm and going to Paris, when one morning the joyous outcry of the children announced some good news. It was Adeline, who appeared at the farm with her little Ermance.

Everybody ran to meet her; they surrounded her, pressed against her, embraced her, and manifested the most sincere joy. Adeline, deeply moved by the attachment of the peasants, found that she could still feel a sensation of pleasure.

“Ah!” she said to them, “I have not lost all, since I still have sincere friends.”

Jacques did not know what he was doing; he seized Adeline’s hands, kissed them, swore, cried, stamped, and turned away to hide his tears. Sans-Souci, overjoyed by Adeline’s return, and by the pleasure which his comrade felt, leaped and gambled about among the hens and the ducks, and played with all the children; which he did only in moments of good humor.

“My friends,” said Adeline to the people of the farm, as they crowded about her, “I am no longer what I was; unfortunate events have deprived me of my fortune, and I have nothing now but courage to endure this reverse, and my conscience, which tells me that I did not deserve it. I must work now, to earn my

living and to bring up my child; you made me welcome when I was rich; you will not turn me away now that I am poor; and I come to you confidently, to beg you to give me work. Oh! do not refuse me! On no other terms will I consent to remain here.”

While Adeline was speaking, profound emotion was depicted on the features of those who surrounded her; Louise could not restrain her tears; Guillot, with wide-open mouth and eyes fastened upon Madame Murville, heaved profound sighs every moment, and Sans-Souci twisted his moustaches and passed his hand over his eyes.

But Jacques, more deeply moved, more touched than they, at sight of the resignation of a lovely woman, who came to bury herself in a farm-house, renouncing all the pleasures of the capital and all the customs of aristocratic society, without uttering a word of reproach against the man who was responsible for her misfortunes,—honest Jacques could not restrain himself; he pushed away Louise and Guillot, who stood beside Adeline, and, shaking the young woman’s arm violently, as she gazed at him in amazement:

“No, sacrebleu!” he cried; “you shall not work, you shall not risk your health, you shall not roughen that soft skin by labor beyond your strength; I will take it upon myself to look after the support of you and your child. I will take care of you, I will watch over you both; and morbleu! so long as there is a drop of blood in my veins, I shall find a way to do my duty.”

“What do you say, Jacques? your duty?”

“Yes, madame, yes, my duty; my brother has ruined your life, and the least that I can do will be to devote my life to you, and to try to repair his villainy.”

“Is it possible? You are——”

“Jacques Murville, the boy who began his travels at fifteen, giving way to quick passions, and to his desire to see the world; and I confess, between ourselves, groaning in secret at his mother’s coldness, and jealous of the caresses which were lavished upon his brother and unjustly denied to him. But none the less I possessed a heart, sensitive in the matter of honor, from which I have never departed, even in the midst of my youthful follies.—That is my story; embrace me; I feel that I am worthy of your affection, and you can bestow it upon me without blushing.”

Adeline embraced Jacques warmly; she felt the keenest joy in meeting her husband’s brother, and the peasants exclaimed aloud in surprise, while Sans-Souci shouted at the top of his lungs as he rubbed his hands:

“I knew it! I knew it! but my comrade closed my mouth and I wouldn’t have

said a word for all of the great Sultan's pipes!"

"But why conceal from me so long the bond that unites us?" Adeline asked Jacques; "did you doubt it would please me to embrace my husband's brother?"

"No," replied Jacques, somewhat embarrassed, "no; but I wanted first of all to know you better; people sometimes blush for their relations."

"Ah! my friend, when a man wears this symbol of honor, can he conceive such fears?"

"Ten thousand bombs! that's what I have been killing myself telling him every day," said Sans-Souci; "but he is a little pig-headed, is my friend; when he gets a thing into his head, he won't let it go again."

"You have found me now that I can be useful to you; that is all that is necessary. Let us embrace again, and look upon me as your brother, as the father of this poor child; since he who ought to cherish her, and to adore you, has not a heart like other men; since he is unworthy to—Well, well! you want me to hold my tongue; you love him still, I see. Well! I am done; we won't talk about him any more, and we will try to forget him."

"Oh! if he had seen you," said Adeline; "if he had found his brother, perhaps your advice——"

"If he had seen me!—But I must let that drop.—Let us forget an ingrate, who is not worthy of a single one of the tears you shed for him."

"Yes, yes, let's be merry and joyful," said Guillot; "morgué! we mustn't be groaning all the time; that makes a body stupid as a fool. Let's sit down at the table, and to-night Brother Jacques will tell us about one of his battles, to amuse us. That's amusing, I tell you! When I have been listening to him, I dream about battles all night long, I take my wife's rump for a battery of artillery, and her legs for a battalion of infantry; and I think I hear the cannon."

"Hold your tongue, my man."

After the meal, they set about making the preparations required by Adeline's presence at the farm. Louise arranged for her a small room looking on the fields; she tried to make it as pleasant as possible, by carrying thither such pretty things as she could find in the house. In vain did Adeline try to prevent her; when Louise had determined upon anything, that thing must be done; she refused to listen to the young woman when she implored her to look upon her as nothing but a poor peasant woman; the farmer's wife desired to make Madame Murville forget her change of fortune, by redoubling her efforts to serve her with zeal and affection. Jacques did not thank the farmer's wife, but he took her hands and pressed them fondly every time that she did anything for his sister, and Sans-

Souci cried, bringing his hand down upon Guillot's back:

"Morbleu! you have a fine wife, cousin! She manages things right well!"

"That's so," said Guillot; "that's why I don't meddle with anything, not even with the children. Well, well, morgué, they come along well, all the same!"

Thus Adeline became an inmate of the farm house; she worked rapidly with the needle, and Louise was obliged to allow her to employ her whole day, either in sewing or spinning. Jacques felt that his strength was increased twofold since his brother's wife and his little niece were with him. He alone was worth three farm hands; having become expert in the labor of the farm, he added to the farmer's income by the pains that he took with everything which he did. Sans-Souci for his part imitated his comrade; he would have been ashamed to remain idle while the others employed their time to such good purpose. So that everything went well at the farm; Guillot and his wife scolded Adeline because she worked too much, and forbade Jacques to do so large a share of the work. But no heed was paid to them, and they had the agreeable certainty that they were not a burden to the worthy peasants.

Several months passed thus, without bringing any change in the situation of the people at the farm. Adeline would have been content with her lot, if she could sometimes have heard from her husband; for she still loved the man who had wrecked her life, and the memory of Edouard constantly disturbed her repose. "What is he doing now?" she would ask herself each day; and the thought that Dufresne was with him added to her unhappiness and redoubled her anxiety. Often she formed the plan of going to Paris to make inquiries concerning her husband's conduct; but she was afraid of offending Jacques, who, being bitterly angry with his brother, did not wish to hear his name mentioned, and had begged Adeline never to talk to him about Edouard.

Jacques feigned an indifference which he was far from feeling. In secret he thought of his brother, and he would have given anything in the world to know that he had repented of his errors, and to have him return and beg for a forgiveness which was already accorded him.

So Adeline and Jacques concealed from each other the thoughts that engrossed them, because each of them feared to distress the other by renewing the memory of his or her grief. Sans-Souci was the confidant of them both; Guillot sometimes had errands to be done in Paris, either to sell his grain, or to buy things that were needed at the farm; it was always Sans-Souci who was sent, because Jacques refused to go, lest he should meet his brother. But every time that Sans-Souci was to pay a visit to the capital, Adeline took him aside and begged him to ascertain what her husband was doing; Jacques dared not give the

same commission to his comrade, but he would overtake Sans-Souci a little way from the farm, stop him a moment and say in an undertone:

“If you learn anything unpleasant about the man who has forgotten us, remember to hold your tongue, sacrebleu! If you breathe a word of it to my sister, you are no longer my friend.”

And Sans-Souci would depart, charged with this twofold commission; but he always returned without learning anything. As Edouard had changed his name, no one could tell him what had become of him.

XXVIII

THE AUDACIOUS VILLAIN.—THE COWARD.—THE DRUNKARD

Fortune seemed to smile anew upon the wretches who, to obtain money, had been false to honor and had defied all the laws of society; it was a fresh temptation, which impelled them toward crime and prevented them from turning back. The first success seems to warrant impunity for the future; the guilty man grows bolder, and one who enters in fear and trembling the path of vice soon casts aside all shame and seeks to surpass those who have led him on to dishonor.

The gaming table, to which Edouard abandoned himself more madly than ever, had ceased to be unfavorable to him; he won constantly, and the wretch congratulated himself upon having found an expedient to restore his fortune. Dufresne and Lampin taught him all the methods employed by blacklegs to play, without risk of loss, with such gulls as would play with them. Then the worthy trio would laugh among themselves at the expense of the dupes they had ruined, and each of them tried to invent some more rascally trick, in order to outdo his comrades.

Lampin lived with his two friends; Dufresne had convinced Edouard that it was not safe to break with him. Moreover, Lampin was endowed with an imagination fertile in stratagems and in skilful devices; he was a great help to swindlers.

When fortune had been favorable, or they had found some new dupe, they thought only of enjoying themselves. They would take to their rooms some of those women who go everywhere, and who, for money, sell themselves to the mason, the pensioner, the banker, or the bootblack, indiscriminately. Such women alone were suitable companions for men who took part in the most horrible orgies, the most unbridled debauchery.

One evening, when they were waiting for Lampin before taking their seats at the table, he arrived laughing, and hastened to inform his friends, as a very amusing piece of news, that a certain note had been declared a forgery, and that the discounter was out of pocket to the amount of the note. Edouard was horrified and turned pale; Dufresne reassured him by declaring that they could

never be discovered; they had changed their names and abode since then, and no one could recognize them; there were no proofs to be produced against them. Lampin alone might be sought for; but he was so accomplished in changing his face and his whole person, that he snapped his fingers at the police.

Edouard was not reassured; however, he tried to divert his thoughts and to drive away his fears. Two young women, frequent guests of these gentlemen, arrived opportunely to enliven the company.

“Parbleu,” said Lampin, “Véronique-la-Blonde must tell us some amusing story; she always knows the most interesting news; that will brace up our friend Bellecour—this was Edouard’s new name—who is rather in the dumps to-night.”

“Oh! I am not just in the mood for fooling,” replied Véronique, with a sigh; “I am sort of upside down myself to-day.”

“It seems to me that you ought to be used to that.”

“Oh! don’t talk a lot of nonsense. Really, my heart is terribly sore.”

“The deuce you say! Have you had trouble with the beaks?”

“No, it ain’t that; but I’ve got a friend who’s mixed up in a bad piece of business, and that troubles me.”

“What business is it? Tell us; perhaps we can help her out of it.”

“Oh, no! The law has got its hand on her, and yet the poor child is as innocent as you and me.”

“The devil! that’s saying a good deal; but tell us what it’s all about.”

“You must know that my friend, who has only been in the business a little while, was formerly a servant, a lady’s maid in several houses; among others she worked for a widow lady who died a little while ago. Well, would you believe that they have taken it into their heads, in the quarter, that that lady was poisoned! That report came to the ears of the authorities; they dug up the dead woman, and it seems that the doctors say the same thing as the neighbors. So they looked into the matter, and they’ve arrested my friend, because she worked for the lady at that time; but the poor child is as pure as this glass of wine, I swear.”

Dufresne listened attentively to Véronique’s story, while Lampin toyed with the other young woman, and Edouard, who had relapsed into his reflections concerning a forgery of which he knew that he was guilty, had thrown himself into an easy-chair in a corner of the room, paying no heed to a story which did not interest him in the least.

“This affair seems to me to be a most remarkable one,” said Dufresne, drawing his chair nearer to Véronique’s; “but what is your friend’s name?”

“Suzanne; she is a good child, on my honor, and incapable of tearing a hair from anybody’s head, I don’t care whose.”

At the name of Suzanne, Dufresne showed signs of perturbation. But instantly recovering himself, he glanced about the room, saw that Murville was not listening, and that Lampin was busy; and he continued to question Véronique.

“It seems to me that your Suzanne will have difficulty in getting out of the scrape, if, as you say, this lady had no other servant than her?”

“Oh! that don’t make any difference; Suzanne suspects who it was that did the job.”

“Really?”

“Yes, my friend. A young man, a friend of the widow, her lover, used to come to see her; he was a gambler, a rascal, a sharper.”

“All right! all right! I understand!—Well?”

“The poor woman ruined herself for the good-for-nothing!—Wait a minute, I know her name—Madame Dou—Dol———”

“No matter! no matter!” said Dufresne, abruptly interrupting Véronique, “I don’t need to know her name.”

“That’s so, that don’t make any difference about the business. However, this lady was mad over her lover, who didn’t care anything for her and robbed her all he could. It seems that they had a row toward the end, and that the monster must have poisoned her to revenge himself because she proposed to tell about all his goings-on.”

“That is very probable.”

“Ah! men are vile dogs nowadays. They kill a woman as quick as a fly!”

“What does your Suzanne intend to do?”

“Oh! she has already told the police all this, so that they can get track of the criminal, who is now I don’t know where.”

“That is very wise, and I hope they will discover the truth.”

Dufresne said these last words in an undertone. Despite the assurance which he affected, the discomposure of his features betrayed the sensations that agitated him.

The evening came to an end earlier than usual. Edouard was anxious, and Dufresne also seemed greatly excited. They sent the two young women away.

Lampin, who alone had retained his good spirits, poured out bumper after bumper for his friends, making fun of their gloom. Edouard drank to forget himself, but Dufresne was not inclined to bear them company, and Lampin got tipsy alone, trying in vain to make his companions laugh.

“Come, come, my boys, this won’t work,” he said, filling the glasses; “you’re as solemn to-night as gallows-birds! I forgive Bellecour, who is only a chicken-hearted fellow anyway! But you over there—Vermontre—Courval—Dufresne—or whatever you choose to call yourself——”

“Hold your tongue, you idiot!” cried Dufresne angrily; “I forbid you to call me by that last name now!”

“You forbid me! Well, upon my soul! what a savage look! You used to call yourself that, when you lived with that poor Dolban, who thought you really loved her, and who——”

“Hold your tongue, I say, you sot!”

“Sot! ah! it sounds well for you to call me a sot, when you slept under the table last night! and when you drink punch like a hole in the ground! But never mind, I don’t quarrel with my friends, and we are friends, after all. It is plain enough that you are both out of temper; Edouard on account of that scrap of paper which worries him so, and you—Oh! as to you, I don’t know what the matter is; it must be some martingale that didn’t work, or some friend that took you in, or else it’s—But I say, what was that Véronique was telling you, about her poisoning, and her widow, and the lover who wasn’t her lover? Do you know that’s as like your intimacy with old Dolban as one drop of water is like another! If it was you—Ha! ha! you’re quite capable of such a game!”

“For heaven’s sake, go to bed, Lampin; you see that Edouard is asleep already, and you will wake him up with your laughter.”

“Well! what’s the harm if I should wake him? The deuce! You’re terribly careful of him to-night! But I propose to laugh, to laugh and drink; and I don’t propose to go to bed, do you understand? I feel in the mood for raising the deuce! I’m sorry I let our girls go; I’m just the man to deal with ’em.—Tra la la la.”

“Do you mean that you don’t propose to go to bed at all to-night?”

“I will go to bed when I please, you fox. Oh! I see that you’re in an ugly mood, I tell you. You are keeping something from us; Véronique’s story dried you up altogether, my poor Dufresne!”

“You villain, will you hold your tongue?” cried Dufresne, seizing Lampin by the throat; he struggled, stepped back and almost fell upon Edouard, who had

fallen asleep in a corner of the room, and who, being awakened with a start, glanced about him in terror, crying:

“Here they are! here they are! they have come to arrest me!”

“To arrest you,” said Dufresne; “who, for God’s sake?”

“Ha! ha! what fools you are!” cried Lampin, rising and trying to maintain his equilibrium; “one of them is dreaming and the other one doesn’t see it!”

“Ah! it was only a dream,” said Edouard, passing his hand across his brow.

“Why, yes! you are a couple of babies; but, my boy, don’t take it into your head to grasp my windpipe again, or I shall lose my temper for good and all.”

“It’s getting late, messieurs,” said Dufresne; “I’m tired and I’m going to lie down!”

“Well, go! Our friend here will keep me company and finish up this bottle of rum.”

“No, I’m going to bed too; my head is in a whirl already.”

“Go to the devil! I will drink all by myself.”

“Once more, Lampin, don’t make so much noise; it may annoy the neighbors.”

“Let the neighbors go to grass! I don’t care a hang, and I’ll make more noise than ever.—Tra la la.”

Lampin sang at the top of his voice, as he drank a large glass of rum. Edouard and Dufresne had taken candles, to go to their bedroom, when there came three very loud knocks at the street door.

Dufresne started back in dismay, Edouard listened, trembling from head to foot, and Lampin threw himself on a couch.

“Somebody’s knocking,” said Edouard, looking at Dufresne.

“Yes, I heard it.”

“Well! so did I; I ain’t deaf, and they knocked loud enough anyway, but what difference does it make to us? We don’t expect anybody, for it’s nearly three o’clock in the morning; unless it’s our lady friends come back to rock us to sleep.”

“Hush! somebody is opening the door, I think.”

“Somebody must open the door to let them in! In a furnished lodging house, especially one of this kind, don’t people come in at all hours of the night? However, come what may, I snap my fingers at it, and I propose to keep on drinking.”

“I don’t hear anything more,” said Dufresne; “it evidently wasn’t for us.”

Edouard put his ear to the door opening on the landing, and listened attentively. Lampin resumed his singing, and tried to put to his lips a glass which his hand was no longer strong enough to raise. Suddenly Edouard seemed to become more excited.

“What is it?” Dufresne asked in an undertone.

“I hear several voices whispering; the noise is coming nearer—yes, they are coming up these stairs. Ah! there is no more doubt; they are coming to arrest us,—we are discovered!”

“Silence! what imprudence!” said Dufresne, trying to overcome his own alarm; “if they are really coming here, let us not lose our heads, and be careful what you say; above all things, do not call me Dufresne.”

“I don’t know where I am,” said Edouard, whose terror redoubled as the noise drew nearer.

“Well! I—I don’t know what my name is, myself,” said Lampin, dropping his glass; “but I tell you that they don’t want us.”

At that moment there was a ring at the door on the landing. Edouard fell, almost lifeless, on a chair; Dufresne remained standing in the middle of the room, motioning to the others not to stir. Soon there was another ring, accompanied by violent knocking.

“There’s no one here,” cried Lampin; “go to the devil!”

“Damn!” said Dufresne, “we must open the door now.—Who’s there?”

“Open, messieurs, or we shall be obliged to break in the door.”

“Break away, my friend!” said Lampin; “it’s all one to me! The house ain’t mine.”

Dufresne, seeing that there was no way to avoid it, decided to open the door, after motioning to the others to be prudent; but Lampin could no longer see, and Murville had lost his head completely.

Several gendarmes and a sergeant entered the apartment. At sight of them Dufresne turned pale. Edouard uttered a cry of alarm, and Lampin rolled from his chair to the floor.

“You must come with us, monsieur,” said the sergeant, addressing Dufresne. He tried to put a bold face upon the matter and asked insolently by what right they came to disturb his rest.

“Yes, by what right do you disturb respectable people in their pleasures?” stammered Lampin; “why, I will answer for my friend, body for body!”

“Your guarantee is of no value; we know you, Master Lampin.”

“Well, then you have a pleasant acquaintance, I flatter myself.”

“You must come with us, too.”

“I? Ah! that will be rather hard; I wouldn’t walk a step for a bowl of punch; judge whether I will go to prison.”

“As for monsieur,” said the sergeant, turning to Edouard, “I have no orders to arrest him, but I advise him to select his acquaintances more wisely.”

Edouard stood in a corner of the room, trembling, and with downcast eyes. He did not hear what was said to him, he was so thoroughly convinced that they were going to take him away that he fancied himself already confined in a dungeon, and had decided to confess his crime, in the hope that his outspokenness would move his judges to pity.

Dufresne was furious to find that he was to be arrested and that Edouard would not accompany him to prison.

“You have made a mistake, messieurs,” said he; “I have done nothing to be arrested for.”

“You are Dufresne, who lived with Madame Dolban?”

“You are mistaken, my name is Vermontré.”

“Oh! that’s the truth,” said Lampin, trying to stand up without the help of the gendarmes; “it’s at least two months that he’s been calling himself that.”

“It’s of no use for you to try to deny it. The police have been watching you for a long while, and when we heard of the murder of which you are accused, it was not difficult for us to find you, despite all the false names you have assumed.”

“Murder! murder!” exclaimed Lampin; “one moment, messieurs, I haven’t got anything to do with that. I thought that you came about the matter of the scrap of paper, which is only a trifle. But a murder! Damnation! let us understand each other. I am as white as snow, and Fluet, who’s over there in the corner, will tell you as much. We only worked on the writings, we two.”

“On the writings?”

“Yes; when I say we—why it was La Valeur, who stands shaking over there, that did most of it; but he writes mighty well! Ah! that was a good job! And the old Jew tumbled into it; so that we’ve eaten and drunk the stuff all up. If you would like to join us, I’m your man.”

The sergeant listened attentively, and Edouard’s terror, combined with Lampin’s fragments of sentences, led him to guess that those gentry were the

authors of some rascality of a different sort from the affair which had brought him thither. The crime committed upon Madame Dolban was the occasion of that midnight visit, undertaken because they wished to make sure of Dufresne; the forgery had only been discovered the day before, and the police had not yet found the tracks of the culprits.

“After what I have heard, you will have to come with us too, monsieur,” said the sergeant to Edouard; “if you are innocent, it will be easy for you to clear your skirts.”

“Oh! I will confess everything,” said Edouard, allowing the gendarmes to lay hold of him.

“Well! you’re nothing but a fool, on the faith of Lampin! For my part, I won’t confess anything.—Come, my friends, carry me, if you want me to go with you.”

They dragged away Dufresne, who tried to resist. Edouard, on the contrary, allowed himself to be led away without uttering a word. As for Lampin, they were obliged to carry him; for he could not stand on his legs. The three men passed the rest of the night in prison.

Taken the next morning before an examining magistrate, in order to undergo a preliminary examination, Edouard trembled and stammered, but he had not the courage to deny his crime; in vain did Lampin, now thoroughly sober, impress upon him the importance of the replies he was to make, and teach him his lesson; Edouard promised him to be steadfast and to follow his advice; but in the magistrate’s presence the miserable wretch lost courage, and did not know what he said.

Edouard was confined with Lampin at La Force, until judgment should be pronounced upon him for the forgery. Dufresne was not with them; being accused of having poisoned Madame Dolban, he was to be tried before his two friends, and he had been taken to the Conciergerie.

Edouard, who had not taken the precaution to supply himself with money, was confined with Lampin in a pestilential room, in the midst of a multitude of wretches, all arrested for theft or offences of that nature. He slept upon a handful of straw, and his food was that supplied by the prison to those awaiting trial. Lampin gaily made the best of it; he sang and shouted and played the devil with the outcasts who surrounded him. But Edouard had not the courage of crime; he felt remorse and regret in the depths of his soul. He wept at night on the stone which served him as a bed, and his tears were a source of jest and witticisms to the miserable creatures confined with him.

During the day the prisoners were allowed to walk in a large courtyard;

Edouard did not go with them, in order that he might be alone for a few moments, and at all events lament at liberty. He saw no one from outside; he had no friends; his companions in dissipation did not come to visit him in prison; and yet the other prisoners, who were no better than he, received visits every day and were not deserted by their worthy comrades. But Edouard bore the reputation among them of a weak and pusillanimous creature; men of that description are good for nothing; the slightest reverse discourages them, and cowards are as much despised by criminals as they are ignored by respectable people.

The memory of Adeline and her daughter recurred to Edouard's mind; it is when we are unhappy that we remember those who truly love us. He had spurned his wife and child, and had abandoned them without taking pains to ascertain whether the unfortunate creatures could find means of subsistence; but he felt sure that Adeline would hasten to his side, to comfort him, and to mingle her tears with his, if she knew that he was in prison. Despite all the injury that he had done her, he knew enough not to doubt the warmth of her heart.

One day, Lampin approached Murville, and his joyous air seemed to announce good news.

"Are we pardoned?" Edouard at once asked him.

"Pardoned! oh, no! we needn't expect that. Besides, you jackass, you made our affair so clear, that unless they are blind, they can't help convicting us. Ah! if you had been another kind of man; if you had simply recited your lesson, we would have mixed the whole thing up so that they wouldn't have seen anything but smoke; but you chatter like a magpie."

"Do you forget that it was your fault that I was arrested? It was you who put those officers on the track."

"Oh! my boy, that's different; I was drunk, like a good fellow; I drank for you too, and in wine, as the proverb says,—*in vino*—the truth.—But after all, that isn't what I wanted to talk about: our friend Dufresne is luckier than we are."

"Have they given him his liberty?"

"Oh, no! but he has taken it. In other words, he has escaped from prison with two other prisoners. Bless my soul! my son, what a fellow that Dufresne is! He is a solid rascal, I tell you, and not soft like you. I will bet that he would set the prison on fire rather than stay there. When a man is like that, he don't lack friends. Dufresne found acquaintances there; he has escaped, and he has done well; for they say that he is certain to be sentenced to death."

"To death! Why, what has he done?"

“What has he done? Well, well! that’s a good one, that is. Have you just come out of a rat-hole? Do you mean to say that you don’t know why they pinched him?”

“I thought it was on account of that miserable note,—for the same reason that they took us.”

“Oh, no! it’s something better than that. But I do remember now, that fright acted on you like wine; you didn’t know what was going on. Let me tell you that Dufresne is accused of poisoning a certain Madame Dolban, with whom he used to live.”

“Great God! the monster!”

“It seems that his case is serious; he will be sentenced to death in default; but you understand that he won’t return to these diggings, to be caught. We shan’t see him again; I am sorry for that, for he is a smart fellow; it’s a pity that he went too far.”

“And we?”

“We are to be transferred to the Conciergerie before long, to be tried. That’s the place, my man, where you will need firmness and eloquence. If you weep there as you do here, it’s all over; we shall take a sea voyage in the service of the government.”

“You villain! is it possible?”

“Hush, they’re listening to us; enough said.”

While the wretched Edouard was in the throes of all the anguish of terror and remorse, and, surrounded by vile criminals who plumed themselves upon their crimes and their depravity, found himself the object of their contempt, so that not one of them addressed a word of compassion to him or deigned to sympathize with his sufferings, Adeline passed peaceful days at Guillot’s farm. She watched the growth of her daughter, who was already beginning to lisp a few words which only a mother could understand. Jacques, still overflowing with zeal and courage, insisted upon doing the hardest work; he did more than two farm hands, and to him toil was a pleasure. At night he returned to Adeline; he took his little niece on his knees, and danced her up and down to the refrain of a military ballad. Everybody loved Brother Jacques; for that is what he was called in the village after he was known to be Madame Murville’s brother-in-law; and the peasants were proud to have under their humble roof a woman like Adeline, and a fine fellow like Jacques.

But that peaceful life could not endure; a certain trip of Sans-Souci’s to Paris was destined to cause a great change. Jacques’s excellent comrade set out one

day for the great city, intrusted as usual with secret commissions from Adeline and her brother-in-law, both of whom, although without communicating with each other, had the same thought, the same desire, and burned to know what Edouard was doing.

Hitherto Sans-Souci had been unable to obtain any information, but an unlucky chance led this time to his meeting a friend whom he had not seen for a very long time. This friend, after practising divers trades, had become a messenger at the Conciergerie. He was employed by those prisoners who were still allowed to communicate with the outside world. Sans-Souci mentioned the name of Edouard Murville; his friend informed him that he was in the prison, and that his sentence was to be pronounced on the following day.

“In prison!” cried Sans-Souci; “my brave comrade’s brother! Ten thousand cartridges! this will be a sad blow to Jacques.”

The messenger, seeing that Sans-Souci was deeply interested in Edouard, regretted having said so much.

“But why is he in prison?” asked Sans-Souci anxiously; “what has he done? Speak! tell me. Is it for debt?”

“Yes, yes; I believe it’s about a note,” replied the messenger, hesitating, and resolved not to disclose the truth; and he tried, but in vain, to change the subject.

“Morbleu! his brother—her husband—in prison! Poor little woman! Poor fellow!”

“Don’t say anything about it to them, my friend, don’t mention it to them. I am sorry myself that I told you this distressing news.”

“You are right, I will hold my tongue, I won’t say anything. After all, they can’t help it. That Edouard is a bad fellow! So much the worse for him.”

“Oh, yes! he is a very bad fellow, and they will do well to forget him.”

“Yes, of course, we can think that, we fellows; but a wife, a brother, they have hearts, you see, and when it’s a question of someone you love, the heart always drives you on.—Good-bye, old man; I am going back to the farm, very sorry that I met you, although it isn’t your fault. My heart is heavy, and the trouble is that I am too stupid to make-believe.”

Sans-Souci left his friend and returned to the farm. Adeline and Jacques questioned him according to their custom, and Sans-Souci replied that he knew no more than at other times; but in vain did he try to dissemble; his sadness betrayed him; his embarrassment, when Adeline spoke to him of Edouard, aroused her suspicions; a woman easily divines our secret thoughts. Edouard’s wife, convinced that Sans-Souci was concealing from her something unpleasant

about her husband, was constantly at his heels; she urged him, she implored him to tell her all.

For two days the honest soldier's courage held good against Adeline's prayers. But he reflected upon the plight of Edouard, whom he believed to be in prison for debt; he thought that his wife might have acquaintances in Paris, through whom she could probably alleviate Edouard's situation. Edouard had been guilty; but perhaps misfortune would have matured his character. And it was not right to deprive him of help and encouragement. These reflections caused Sans-Souci to decide to conceal no longer from Adeline what he knew. The opportunity soon presented itself; the next day the young woman entreated him again to tell her what her husband was doing; Sans-Souci surrendered, on condition that she would not mention it to Jacques, by whom he feared to be scolded. Adeline promised, and then he told her all that he had learned in Paris.

As soon as Adeline heard that her husband was in prison, she made up her mind what course to pursue; she left Sans-Souci, went to her chamber, collected a few jewels, the last remnant of her past fortune, made a little bundle of her clothes, and after writing on a sheet of paper that they must not be disturbed by her absence, she took her little Ermance in her arms and secretly left the farm house, resolved to leave no stone unturned to obtain her husband's freedom, or to share his captivity.

It was then nine o'clock in the morning; Jacques was in the fields, and the peasants were occupied in different directions. Adeline was on the Paris road before the people at the farm had discovered her departure.

XXIX

THE PLACE DU PALAIS

Adeline did not know as yet what method she should employ to obtain access to her husband; she had formed no plan; she had no idea what steps she must take in order to speak with a prisoner; a single thought filled her mind: her Edouard was unhappy, he was languishing in prison, deprived of all consolation. For Adeline knew the world, she had shrewd suspicions that those people who crowded about Edouard in his prosperity would have abandoned him in his distress. Who then would wipe away the poor prisoner's tears, if not his wife and his daughter? To be sure, he had cast them aside; he had formerly avoided their caresses. But when the man we love is crushed beneath the weight of misfortune, a generous soul never remembers his wrongdoing.

Sans-Souci had mentioned the Conciergerie; so it was to the Conciergerie she must go. Adeline believed that her prayers, her tears, and the sight of her child, would move the jailers; she had no doubt that they would allow her to see her husband. That hope redoubled her courage. After walking to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, carrying little Ermance, who was not yet a year-and-a-half old, Adeline at last fell in with one of those wretched carriages which take Parisians into the suburbs, and to the open-air festivals. For a modest sum the driver agreed to take the young woman and her child, and headed his nags toward Paris.

There was a single other traveller in the carriage with Adeline; it was an old man of about seventy years, but with a pleasant face, and an open, kindly expression which inspired confidence and respect. His dress indicated wealth without ostentation, and his manners, while they were not those of fashionable society, denoted familiarity with good company.

Adeline bowed to her travelling companion and seated herself beside him, without speaking.

The old gentleman scrutinized her at first with attention, then with interest. Adeline had such a noble and appealing countenance that it was impossible to look upon her without being prepossessed in her favor, and without desiring to know her better.

Little Ermance was on her mother's knees; her childish graces fascinated the old man, who gave her bonbons and bestowed some caresses upon her. Adeline

thanked the old gentleman for his kindness, smiled at her daughter, then relapsed into her reflections.

The traveller tried to engage the young woman in conversation; but her replies were so short, she seemed so preoccupied, that her companion feared to intrude. He said no more, but he noticed Adeline's melancholy, he heard her sighs, and he saw that her lovely eyes were constantly turned toward Paris, and often wet with tears. He dared not try to divert her thoughts from her trouble, but he pitied her in silence.

Adeline found the journey very long; the wretched horses went at their ordinary pace, nothing on earth could have induced them to gallop. Sometimes, Adeline, giving way to her impatience, was on the point of alighting from the vehicle, in the hope that she would reach Paris sooner on foot. But she would have to carry little Ermance, and her strength was not equal to her courage. So she remained in the carriage and reflected that each turn of the wheels brought her nearer to her husband.

The old gentleman looked at his watch, and at that Adeline addressed him:

"Monsieur, would you kindly tell me what time it is?"

"Almost one o'clock, madame."

"Are we still far from Paris?"

"Why, no, only a short league; in three-quarters of an hour you will be there."

"In three-quarters of an hour! Oh! how slowly the time goes!"

"I see that madame has some important business calling her to Paris?"

"Yes, monsieur, oh, yes! I long to be there!"

"Of course madame has friends there? If not, if I could be of any service to madame——"

Adeline made no reply; she did not hear her companion; she was once more absorbed in thought, she was with her husband.

The old gentleman profited nothing by his offer of his services; but far from taking offence, he felt all the deeper interest in the young woman, who seemed beset by such profound sorrow.

At last they reached Paris, and the carriage stopped. Adeline alighted hastily, took her child in her arms, and paid the driver; then she bowed to her companion, and disappeared before the old gentleman had had time to put his foot on the little stool which a street urchin had placed on the ground to help him to alight from the vehicle.

"Poor young woman!" said the old man, looking in the direction in which

Adeline had disappeared; “how she runs! how excited she seems! dear me! I hope that she will not learn any bad news.”

Adeline went as fast as it is possible to go when one has a child in one’s arms. She asked the way to the Conciergerie; it was pointed out to her, and she hurried on without stopping. Love and anxiety redoubled her strength; she drew near at last; she saw a square—it was that in front of the Palais de Justice.

That square was surrounded by people; the crowd was so dense that one could hardly walk.

“And I must pass through,” said Adeline sadly to herself; “well, as there is no other road, I must make one last effort and try to force my way through.”

But why had so many people assembled there? Was it a fête-day, some public rejoicing? Had some charlatan established his travelling booth there? Was that multitude attracted by singers or jugglers, with their music or their tricks? No, it was none of those things; our Parisian idlers would show less interest, if it were a matter of pleasant diversion only. It was an execution which was to take place; several miserable wretches were to be branded, and exposed to public view upon the fatal stool of repentance; and it was to gaze on that spectacle, distressing to mankind, that those children, those young maidens, those old men, hastened thither so eagerly! Are you surprised to hear it? Do you not know that La Grève is crowded, that the windows which look on the square are rented, when a criminal is to undergo capital punishment there? And whom do we see gloat with the greatest avidity over these ghastly spectacles? Women, young women, whose faces are instinct with gentleness and sensitiveness.—What takes place in the depths of the human heart, if this excess of stoicism is to be found in a weak and timid sex?

But let us do justice to those who shun such abhorrent spectacles, and who cannot endure to look upon an execution. Adeline was one of these; she did not know what was about to happen on the square, and she paid no attention to the cries of the mob that surrounded her.

“Here they come! here they come!” cried the people; “ah! just wait and see what faces they will make in a minute, when they feel the red hot iron!”

Adeline tried to cross the square, but she could not do it; the crowd either forced her back or dragged her in the opposite direction; thus, without intention, she found herself quite near the gendarmes who surrounded the culprits. She raised her eyes, and saw the miserable wretches, marked with the brand of infamy. She instantly looked away, she preferred not to see that horrid spectacle. At that moment a piteous cry arose; it came from one of the wretches who had

just been branded. That cry went to Adeline's heart, it revolutionized all her senses; she heard it constantly, for she had recognized the griefstricken tone. A sentiment which she could not control caused her to turn her eyes toward the culprits. A man, still young, but pale, downcast, disfigured, was bound upon the stool in front of her. Adeline gazed at him. She could not fail to recognize him. The miserable wretch's eyes met hers. It was Edouard, it was her husband, who had been cast out from society, and whom she found upon the stool of repentance.

A shriek of horror escaped from the young woman's lips. The criminal dropped his head on his breast, and Adeline, beside herself, bereft of her senses, succumbed at last to the violence of her grief, and fell unconscious to the ground, still pressing her child to her bosom with a convulsive movement.

XXX

GOODMAN GERVAL

The French, especially the lower classes, have this merit, that they pass readily from one sensation to another; after witnessing an execution, they will stop in front of a Punch and Judy show; they laugh and weep with amazing rapidity; and the same man who has just pushed his neighbor roughly aside because he prevented him from seeing a criminal led to the gallows, will eagerly raise and succor the unfortunate mortal whom destitution or some accident causes to fall at his feet.

The gossips and the young girls who crowded Place du Palais forgot the pleasant spectacle they had come to see, and turned their attention to the young woman who lay unconscious on the ground.

Adeline and her child were carried to the nearest café, and there everything that could be done was done for the poor mother. Everybody formed his or her own conjectures concerning the incident.

“Perhaps it was the crowd, or the heat, which was too much for this pretty young lady,” said some. Others thought with more reason that the stranger’s trouble seemed to be too serious to have been caused by so simple a matter.

“Perhaps,” they said, “she saw among those poor devils someone she once knew and loved.”

While they all tried to guess the cause of the accident, little Ermance uttered piercing shrieks, and although she was too young to appreciate her misfortune, she wept bitterly none the less because her mother did not kiss her.

They succeeded at last in restoring the young woman to consciousness. The unhappy creature! Did they do her a service thereby? Everybody waited with curiosity to see what she would say; but Adeline gazed about her with expressionless eyes; then, taking her daughter in her arms, as if she wished to protect her from some peril, she started to leave the café without uttering a word.

This extraordinary behavior surprised all those who were present.

“Why do you go away so soon, madame?” said one kindhearted old woman, taking Adeline’s arm; “you must rest a little longer, and recover your wits entirely.”

“Oh! I must go, I must go and join him,” Adeline replied, looking toward the

street; “he is there waiting for me; he motioned for me to rescue him from that place, to take off those chains. I can still hear his voice; yes, he is calling me. Listen, don’t you hear? He is groaning—ah! that heartrending cry! Poor fellow! How they are hurting him!”

Adeline fell motionless on a chair; her eyes turned away in horror from a spectacle which she seemed to have constantly in her mind. All those who stood about her shed tears; they saw that she had lost her reason; one and all pitied the unfortunate creature and tried to restore peace to her mind; but to no purpose did they offer her such comfort as they could; Adeline did not hear them, she recognized no one but her daughter, and persisted in her purpose to fly with her.

What were they to do? How could they find out who the family or the kindred of the poor woman were? Her dress did not indicate wealth; the bundle of clothes, containing in addition to her garments the jewels that she had taken away, was not found by Adeline’s side when they picked her up; doubtless some spectator, observing in anticipation the place that he was likely to occupy some day, had found a way to abstract Adeline’s property. So she seemed to be without means, and as with many people, emotion is always sterile, they were already talking of taking the poor woman to a refuge, and her child to the Foundling Hospital, when the arrival of a new personage suspended their plans.

An old man entered the café and enquired the cause of the gathering. Everyone tried to tell him the story. The stranger walked in, forcing his way through the curious crowd of spectators who surrounded the unfortunate young woman; he approached Adeline, and uttered a cry of surprise when he recognized the person with whom he had travelled from Villeneuve-Saint-Georges to Paris.

“It is really she!” he cried; and little Ermance held out her arms to him with a smile; for she recognized the man who had given her bonbons but a few hours before.

Thereupon the old man became an interesting character to the crowd, who were most eager to learn the poor mother’s story. They all plied the old gentleman with questions, and he, annoyed and wearied by their importunities, sent for a carriage, and after learning from the keeper of the café exactly what had happened to the young stranger, he put Adeline and her child into the cab, and thus removed them from the scrutiny of the curiosity seekers.

Adeline had fallen into a state of listless prostration. She allowed herself to be taken away, without uttering a word; she seemed to pay no heed to what was taking place about her, and even her daughter no longer engaged her attention.

Monsieur Gerval—such was the old man’s name—gazed at the young woman with deep emotion; he could not as yet believe that she whom he had seen in the morning, sad, it is true, but in the full enjoyment of her senses, could so soon be deprived of her reason. He lost himself in conjectures as to the cause of that strange occurrence.

The cab stopped in front of a handsome, furnished lodging house. It was where Monsieur Gerval stopped when he was in Paris. He was well known in the house, and everyone treated him with the regard which his years and his character deserved.

He caused Adeline and her daughter to alight and took them to his hostess.

“Look you, madame,” he said, “here is a stranger whom I beg you to take care of until further orders.”

“Ah! mon Dieu! how pretty she is! But what a melancholy expression! what an air of depression!—Can’t she speak, Monsieur Gerval?”

“She is ill; she has undergone some great misfortune; they say even that her mind——”

“Merciful heaven! what a pity!”

“I hope that with the best care, we shall succeed in calming her excitement. I commend this unfortunate woman and her child to you.”

“Never fear, Monsieur Gerval, she shall have everything she needs.—Another unfortunate of whom you have taken charge, I see.”

“What would you have, my dear hostess; a man must needs make himself useful when he can. I have no children, and I am growing old; what good would all my wealth do me, if I did not assist the unfortunate? Moreover, it is a source of enjoyment to myself. I am like Florian’s man: ‘I often do good for the pleasure of it.’”

“Ah! if all the rich men thought as you do, Monsieur Gerval!”

“Tell me, madame, has my old Dupré come in?”

“Yes, monsieur, he is waiting for you in your room.”

“I will go up to him. Look after this young woman, I beg you, and see that she lacks nothing.”

“Rely upon me, monsieur.”

Worthy Monsieur Gerval went up to his apartment, where he found his old servant Dupré impatiently awaiting his master’s return.

“Ah! here you are, monsieur; I was anxious because you stayed away so long. Have you had a pleasant journey? Have you learned anything?”

“No, my friend; the house where the Murville family used to live is now for sale. I was told that one Edouard Murville lived there for some time with his wife, but no one knows what has become of them. And you, Dupré?”

“I have found out nothing more, monsieur. Your old friends are dead; and their children are nobody knows where. Several people did mention a Murville, who was a business agent, then a swindler, and all-in-all a thoroughly bad fellow. But no one was able or willing to tell me what has become of him. Perhaps he may have been the younger of the two sons, the one who ran away from his father’s house at fifteen; such an escapade as that promises nothing good for the future.”

“I should be very sorry if it were so; I would have liked—but I see that I have returned too late. My travels kept me away from Paris ten years, and it was only within a year that, on retiring from business, I was able to return to this city. But what changes ten years have produced! My friends—to be sure they were quite old when I went away—my friends are dead or else they have disappeared. That depresses me, Dupré; there is nothing left for me in this city but memories. I think we will leave it, and go back to my little place in the Vosges to live; I propose to end my life there.—But let us drop this subject; I have something to tell you, for my journey has not been altogether without fruit; it has made me acquainted with a very interesting young woman, who seems most unfortunate too.”

“Indeed! Where did monsieur meet her?”

“We returned to Paris in the same carriage; for notwithstanding your advice, I made the trip in one of those miserable cabriolets.”

“Oh! the idea of subjecting yourself to such a jolting! That is unreasonable!”

“Nonsense! nonsense! I’m perfectly well, and I congratulate myself that I did not take your advice, as I travelled with a poor woman, whom I found afterward by chance in a most melancholy plight.”

Monsieur Gerval told the servant what had happened to him, and the chance which had led to his finding the traveller again in a café, just as those present were talking of taking her to a refuge. Dupré, whose heart was as soft as his master’s, was very impatient to see the young woman and her pretty little girl; he followed his master, who asked to be taken to the room which had been given to Adeline.

Edouard’s wife was pacing the floor excitedly, while little Ermance was lying in an armchair. The entrance of Monsieur Gerval and Dupré caused Adeline a moment’s terror; she ran to her daughter and seemed to be afraid that it was their

intention to take her away from her.

“Don’t be alarmed, madame,” said the old man gently, as he approached her; “it is a friend who has come to comfort you. Tell me your troubles; I shall be able to lighten them, I hope.”

“What a crowd there is about me!” said Adeline, glancing wildly about; “what a multitude of people! Why this gathering? Ah! I will not, no, I will not stop on this square. They have come here to gaze on those poor wretches. Let me go! But I cannot; the cruel crowd forces me back. Ah! I must close my eyes, and not look! He is there, close to me!”

She fell upon a chair and put her hands before her face.

“Poor woman!” said Dupré; “some horrible thing must have happened to her. Do you know, monsieur, that it seems to me that this unfortunate creature belongs to a good family? Her clothes are very simple, almost like a peasant’s; but for all that, I will bet that this woman is no peasant.”

“Why, of course not; I can see that as well as you. But how are we to find out who she is? If this child could talk better——”

“The little girl is waking up, monsieur; give her some bonbons and try to make out the name she mentions.”

Gerval went to Ermance and kissed her; the child recognized him and went to him of her own accord. He gave her bonbons, danced her on his knees, and she lisped the name of Jacques; for it was Jacques who played with her and danced with her every evening.

“One would say that she knows you, monsieur,” said Dupré to his master; “I believe it is Jacques she says; just listen.”

“Poor child; it is true. Perhaps that is her father’s name. Let us try to find out if that is really the name she is lisping; if it is, her mother knows it without any question.”

The old man walked toward Adeline, uttering the name of Jacques in a loud voice. The young woman instantly arose and repeated the name.

“Good! she understood us,” whispered Dupré.

“You are looking for Jacques,” said Adeline to Monsieur Gerval; “oh! in pity’s name, do not tell him this horrible secret; let him always remain ignorant of his shame! Poor Jacques! he would die of grief. Oh! promise me that you will say nothing to him.”

Honest Gerval promised, and Dupré sadly shook his head.

“It is of no use,” he said to his master, “there is no hope.—But what is your

plan?”

“We must make all possible investigations. You, Dupré, will go to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, and inquire about all the Jacqueses there are in the village; in short, you will try to find out something. If we cannot discover anything then, I will see what——”

“Ah! I am very sure, my dear master, that you won’t abandon this young woman and this poor child.”

“No, Dupré, no, I shall not abandon them. But it is late and I am tired. I am going to bed, and to-morrow we will begin our search.”

Having once more commended Adeline and her daughter to the people of the house, honest Gerval retired.

During the night as during the day, Adeline was intensely excited at times, talking incoherently, and sometimes in a state of the most complete prostration, seeming to see nothing of what took place about her. They observed, however, that any noise, the sound of a loud voice, or the faintest cry, made her jump, and threw her into the wildest delirium.

The next day a doctor summoned by Monsieur Gerval came to see the unhappy young woman, but all his skill could accomplish nothing more than to calm her a little; he thought that a tranquil existence would make the alarming outbursts of her mania less frequent. But he gave little hope of the restoration of her reason, as he knew nothing of the cause which had led to its being unseated.

Dupré went to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges and inquired concerning all the Jacqueses in the neighborhood. Only two peasants bore that name, and they had no idea what he meant by his questions about the young woman and her daughter. Dupré was unable to learn anything, and he returned to his master.

Monsieur Gerval had made no further progress in his investigations in Paris; the newspapers did not mention the disappearance of a young woman and her daughter from their home, and he could obtain no information concerning the name and family of his protégées.

Ten days passed, and Adeline was still in the same condition. Her prostration was less frequently disturbed by violent outbreaks; but when by chance a cry reached her ear, her delirium became terrible to see, and her condition was horrifying. Only her daughter’s voice never acted unfavorably upon her; that voice always went to the heart of the poor mother, who never mistook her child’s accents.

“My dear Dupré,” said Monsieur Gerval to his servant, at the end of those ten days, “I see that we must abandon the hope of ever finding out who this

interesting young woman is. I have made up my mind what to do, my friend: I have determined to take these unfortunate creatures with me. As you know, I am going to retire to my estate in the Vosges. That solitary place, surrounded by woods, is best suited to our poor invalid. That is the doctor's opinion, and we must be guided by it; and at all events nothing will disturb the tranquillity which the poor creature requires. We will look to it that she hears no cries there. We will bring up her daughter; Catherine, who is so fond of children, will look after the poor child, and the innocent darling's caresses will pay me for what I do for her mother.—Well, what do you think of my plan, Dupré?”

“It delights me, monsieur, and I recognize yourself in it. Always kind and always doing good! You give all you have to the unfortunate.”

“That is my pleasure; I have no family, the unfortunate are my children. As you know, I came to Paris with the hope of learning something of a certain little boy whom I loved in his infancy, and who besides is entitled to my protection. But faith, as I can't find him, this little girl shall take his place. From this moment I adopt her; I take charge of her mother, and I thank Providence for selecting me to be their protector.”

The next day honest Gerval put his plan into execution: he bought a large and commodious berlin, placed in it everything that the young woman and her daughter would need on the journey; and then, having left his address with the landlady, so that she might write to him in case she should learn anything concerning the strangers, the protector of Adeline and Ermance left Paris with them and his old servant, for the country residence where he proposed to end his days in peace.

XXXI

JACQUES AND SANS-SOUCI

While honest Gerval's carriage bore Adeline and her daughter toward the north of France, what were Jacques's thoughts concerning the sudden disappearance of the two persons whom he loved best? In order to ascertain, let us return to the farm.

On his return from the fields, surprised to find that Adeline and her daughter, who were always the first to reward his labors with a caress, did not come to meet him, Jacques looked about for his sister. Disturbed to find that she was not in the living room, he asked Louise if she were not well.

"I hope nothing's the matter with her," said the farmer's wife, "but I haven't seen her all day; you know sometimes she likes to stay by herself in her room, and I don't dare to disturb her. But she ought to be with us before this."

"I will go and look for her," said Jacques; and he hurried up to Adeline's room.

The peasants also began to fear that Adeline was ill. Sans-Souci said nothing, but he was more anxious than the rest, for he remembered what he had told Adeline that morning, and he suspected that she had done something on impulse. They all impatiently awaited Jacques's return. He came down at last, but grief and melancholy were expressed on his features, his eyes were moist and his brow was dark.

"What has happened?" cried the peasants.

"She has gone, she has left us," said Jacques, pacing the floor, raising his eyes to the ceiling, clenching his fists, and pausing now and then to stamp the floor violently.

"She has gone!" repeated the whole family sadly.

"Oh! that ain't possible," said Guillot.

"Here, read this;" and Jacques threw down in front of the farmer the paper that Adeline had left. Guillot took it and gazed at it earnestly for some moments.

"Well!" said Sans-Souci, walking toward him, "what does she say?"

"You see, I don't know how to read," replied Guillot, still staring at the paper. Sans-Souci snatched it from his hands and read it aloud.

“You see she tells us not to be worried about her absence,” said Louise; “she will come back soon, I’m sure.”

“Oh! so far as that goes, I will answer for it too,” said Guillot; “she wouldn’t leave us without saying good-bye to us, that’s sure!”

Sans-Souci agreed with the peasants, and he tried to comfort his friend.

“But where has she gone?” said Jacques. “Why this sudden departure? She didn’t seem to have any idea of it yesterday; and for a young woman, weak as she is, to travel with a child that has to be carried—She will make herself sick. Ah! she must have had some news from Paris. Ten thousand bayonets! If I knew that anything had been kept from me——”

As he said this, Jacques’s eyes turned toward Sans-Souci, who looked at the floor, twisted his moustache and utterly failed to conceal his embarrassment.

“Come, come, Brother Jacques, let us wait before we lose hope,” said the farmer’s wife, urging the honest plowman to go to bed; “perhaps she will be back to-morrow.”

“Yes,” said Guillot, “and we will have a famous soup to celebrate, and we will drink some of last year’s wine, which is beginning to be just right.”

Sans-Souci dared not say anything; he was afraid of becoming confused and betraying himself; his comrade’s glances closed his mouth.

“I will wait a few days,” said Jacques; “but if she doesn’t come back, then I will go to find her, even if I have to go to the end of the world.”

They parted for the night sadly enough. Several days passed, and Adeline did not return. All pleasure and peace of mind had vanished from the farm; Jacques neglected his work, Guillot his fields, the farmer’s wife her household duties; Sans-Souci neglected the farmer’s wife, and everybody was unhappy. No more ballads, merry meals, amusing stories, or descriptions of battles. Sans-Souci was losing hope of Adeline’s return; he bitterly repented having told her of her husband, and he hovered about Jacques, but dared not confess the truth to him.

On the eighth day Jacques announced that he was going to start out in search of his sister. Sans-Souci decided then to speak; he took his comrade aside and began by tearing out a handful of hair, and heaving a profound sigh.

“What is the meaning of all this groaning?” asked Jacques; “speak, and stop your nonsense.”

“Look you, comrade, I am an infernal brute! I am corked up like the barrel of Guillot’s gun, and yet I did everything for the best.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am the cause of your dear sister’s leaving the farm.”

“You! you villain!”

“If you don’t forgive me, I’ll put five pounds of lead between my eyebrows.”

“Nonsense! Speak, I implore you.”

“I found out that your brother was in prison; I didn’t dare to tell you and I didn’t mean to tell his wife either; but she urged me so hard, and you know that women do whatever they want to with me, especially the ones that I respect; and then I thought that she might comfort her husband a little.”

“And do you think that I have an iron heart? My brother is unfortunate, that ends it; I forget the way he received me; I too must comfort him.”

“Poor Jacques! I was sure of it.”

“And yet you kept your mouth shut, you idiot, and you left me consumed with anxiety—Poor woman! Perhaps she is with him!”

“Parbleu! there’s no doubt of that!”

“Is he in prison in Paris?”

“Yes—wait—he is at the Conciergerie.”

“He must have spent and sold everything, and his creditors had him arrested!—Ah! if I were rich, brother, how happy I would be to be of some use to you! But fate has willed it otherwise.—No matter; I can at least prove to you that you still have a friend.—Sans-Souci, I am going to Paris.”

“So am I; morbleu! I will go with you; I don’t propose to leave you.”

“Very well. We won’t say anything to the peasants about my brother’s imprisonment; those excellent people would be quite capable of insisting upon doing still more to assist us, and we must not accept it; they have done enough for us already.”

“You are always right. I agree with you; let us go and say good-bye to them; forward!”

Jacques and Sans-Souci embraced the peasants and told them that they were going to look for Adeline; then they started for Paris, where they arrived that afternoon.

“You know the way,” said Jacques to his comrade; “take me to the prison. I will ask to speak to the commander, the captain, the governor; in fact, to speak to everybody, if necessary; this honorable decoration will serve as my safe-conduct.”

“Look you, I don’t know the prison any better than you do, but I’ll take you to my old friend, who is the messenger to the prisoners; he will tell us how we

must go to work to see your brother.”

“Very well, let us speak to your friend; I trust that we may find him.”

“Yes,” said Sans-Souci; “I see him now, over yonder.”

They quickened their pace and accosted the messenger, who recognized his friend, and shook hands with him, asking him what brought him to Paris.

“Let us sit down on this stone bench and talk,” said Sans-Souci; “this is my comrade, a fine fellow——”

“He has some scars and a bit of ribbon which say enough.—Can I help you in any way, messieurs?”

“Yes, we have come on important business—we want to see a prisoner. You know, that Edouard Murville, whom you mentioned to me the last time I saw you; well, my comrade is his brother.”

“You are his brother?” said the messenger, looking at Jacques with compassion. “I am sorry for you.”

“I am not the one to be sorry for,” said Jacques; “he is the one, since he is unfortunate; for he has not been guilty of any dishonorable act, I trust?”

“What have you come here for?” said the messenger, without answering Jacques’s question.

“Morableu! we have come to see my brother; his wife and child have been here already to console him.”

“No woman has been here to see him, I assure you; in fact, no woman has attempted to see him.”

“Is it possible?”

“It would be useless now to try to see him, for—he is no longer at the Conciergerie.”

“He isn’t there? Where is he then?”

“Why, why—I cannot—tell you exactly.”

“What! Damnation! Can’t I find out where my brother is?”

“Come, come, my poor Jacques, don’t be discouraged,” said Sans-Souci; “my friend isn’t well posted; we will try to find out something more.”

“I tell you again, messieurs, that Edouard Murville is no longer in this prison, and that he must have left Paris before this. Adieu, my good Jacques, take my advice and return to your village; do not try to learn anything more, and forget a brother who is altogether unworthy of you.”

The messenger, deeply moved, pressed Jacques’s hand, and turned away

from the friends, after saying this.

Jacques stood in deep thought; his brow darkened, his glance became more stern. Sans-Souci also was silent; he began to fear that it was not simply for debt that his comrade's brother had been arrested. The two honest fellows dared not communicate their thoughts to each other, and the darkness surprised them seated on the stone bench and lost in their reflections.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Sans-Souci at last; "we are sitting here like two lost sentinels; but we must make up our minds to something."

"Let us hunt for Adeline and her child," said Jacques, in a gloomy voice, "and forget Edouard. I am beginning to fear that the wretch—let us look for Adeline; she will never make me blush."

"Oh! for her I would rush into the hottest fire."

"Poor woman! poor little Ermance! Where are they now? Perhaps her grief at learning that her husband—oh! why did you tell her that, Sans-Souci?"

"Don't mention it. I would to God that you would use my tongue for a cartridge."

"There is no rest for me until I know what has become of them. Let us search Paris and enquire at every house if necessary; and if we don't find them in this city, let us search the whole of France, towns, hamlets, villages."

"Corbleu! yes, we will go to the devil if necessary! But we will find them, comrade, we will find them, I tell you that."

Jacques and his companion took rooms at a poor inn; they were on foot with the dawn, and scoured every quarter of the city, enquiring everywhere for Adeline and her child; but no one could give them any information concerning the young woman whom they sought. The sight of unfortunate people is so common that little attention is paid to them. However, sometimes the abode of some poor mother was pointed out to them; they would visit her, and find that she was not the object of their search.

On the eleventh day after their arrival in Paris, Jacques and Sans-Souci were walking on the boulevard, always thinking of Adeline and cudgeling their brains to divine what could have become of her.

Suddenly the people on the sidewalk pressed toward the driveway, seemingly awaiting some curious sight.

"What is going by?" Sans-Souci asked a workman who had stopped near him.

"It's the chain of convicts, starting from Bicêtre to go to the galleys at

Toulon," was the reply. "See, here, here's the wagon coming now; we shall see them in a minute."

"It is hardly worth while to crowd so to see a parcel of villains," said Sans-Souci.

"They ask for alms on the road."

"If they had any pluck, they would ask to be shot.—Come, Jacques, let's not stay here; I haven't any pity for those fellows."

"I want to stay," said Jacques with emotion; "I want to see them."

The vehicle came forward slowly, and Jacques, impelled by a secret presentiment, drew very near, and took a few sous from his pocket. Soon the convicts were before him; they held out their crime-stained hands, imploring the pity of the passers-by. Jacques scrutinized them closely, and noticed one who did not imitate his companions in infamy, but who tried on the contrary to avoid the eyes of the crowd; but the villain with whom he was shackled was one of those who displayed the most effrontery; he jerked him violently, and that movement afforded Jacques an opportunity to see the poor wretch's features; it seemed to him that he recognized his brother. The cold sweat stood on his forehead; and with a movement swifter than thought, he put his hand to his buttonhole and removed his decoration, which he instantly thrust into his breast.

The wagon had gone on, and Jacques followed it with his eyes. Sans-Souci pulled his arm.

"Come," he said to him; "how in the devil can you take any pleasure in looking at those beggars?—But what's the matter with you? Your face is all distorted."

"Ah! I am ruined, Sans-Souci! dishonored!"

"You, dishonored! that is impossible; do be reasonable."

"My brother——"

"Well?"

Jacques dared not utter the fatal words; but with his hand he pointed to the chain of convicts, who could still be seen in the distance.

"It wasn't he, my friend, you made a mistake."

"Ah! would to God I had! But no, it was no mistake; and the words of that kindhearted messenger, his compassionate air as he spoke to me and shook my hand.—There is no more doubt; I understand everything now."

"Well! even if your brother is a miserable villain, is it your fault? Did you fight for your country any the less, and thrash its enemies? And have the scars

vanished from your face and your breast? Ten thousand million citadels! Who could ever blush for having known you? I will make the man swallow ten inches of my sword!”

“Ah! my name is sullied, my friend. O father! if you knew!”

“Your father is dead; if he was alive, your glory would console him for your brother’s shame.”

“No, Sans-Souci, consolation for such a calamity is impossible. There is but one thing left for me to do, and that is to overtake those wretched creatures, to find some way to approach the man whom I can no longer call my brother, and to blow his brains out, and then do the same by myself.”

“That’s a very pretty scheme of yours. But you won’t carry it out. You will remember that you have a sister, for that dear Adeline loves you like a brother; you will remember little Ermance, whom you danced on your knees; you will not deprive those poor creatures of the last friend who is left to them; you will forget your grief in order to allay theirs, and with them you will feel that you have not lost everything.—But we shall find them, comrade; we will search every corner of the earth; how do you know that they are not at the farm now, or in some poor cabin where they need our help? and you would leave this world when there are unfortunate mortals here who rely upon you? No, sacrebleu! that shall not be! You surrender, you are touched. Come, Jacques, be brave in grief as you were under fire, and forward march!”

Jacques allowed himself to be persuaded by his comrade, who took advantage of that circumstance to induce him to leave a city where they had lost all hope of discovering Adeline; and they returned to the farm, still flattering themselves that they would find the young fugitive there.

But that last hope was soon destroyed; the sadness of the peasants left them in no doubt. Jacques insisted upon starting off again at once in search of Adeline and her child, and only with great difficulty did they persuade him to remain one night at the farm. They saw that Brother Jacques was gloomy and melancholy since he had been in Paris; but the peasants attributed his gloom to the non-success of his search.

Sans-Souci made all their preparations for a journey which he thought with good reason would be likely to last a long while. Louise was greatly grieved to have her cousin go away, but she realized that he ought not to abandon his friend. The farmer’s wife thrust a well-filled purse into the bag of each of the travellers. It was simply their wages for all the time that they had worked at the farm; but she dared not offer it to them, for she knew that the method that she

employed was the best one to avoid a refusal. Kindhearted folk are always shrewd and clever, when it is a question of doing a kind act.

At dawn Jacques was up. Sans-Souci soon joined him. He appeared with his bag over his shoulder, and a stout staff in his hand, and said to his comrade:

“Whenever you are ready, forward march!”

The two friends were about to start. The farmer and his family came forward weeping, to bid them adieu. The children, who had long been accustomed to play with Jacques’s moustaches and to roll on the grass with Sans-Souci, clung to the legs of both travellers, and would not let them go. Louise held a corner of her apron to her eyes, and her sighs said much more than her words. Guillot was no less sorrowful than the rest.

“I say! I’m going to be left alone with my wife, am I?” he said; “what a stupid time I shall have!—Here, comrade Jacques, let me give you a little present for your journey; it may be of some use to you; for you don’t know where you may be.”

As he spoke, Guillot handed Jacques a pair of small pocket pistols.

“I bought them second-hand in the village not long ago, of an old soldier; my idea was to give ’em to you on your birthday, but so long as you’re going away, why take ’em now.”

Jacques thanked the honest farmer and accepted his present; then, after embracing everybody, he set forth with Sans-Souci, swearing not to return to the farm without Adeline, and to take no rest until he had found her.

XXXII

THE GALLEY SLAVES

Jacques was not mistaken when he thought he saw his brother among the convicts. The unhappy Edouard had undergone his punishment for the crime which he had allowed himself to be led into committing. His sentence condemned him to twenty years hard labor, to be branded and exposed to public view.

Lampin, who had already been in prison for theft, was sentenced to the galleys for life. In vain did he repeat to Edouard his lesson, and urge him to deny everything; Edouard had not enough strength of character to form a resolution. He contradicted himself, betrayed himself, and allowed himself to be easily convicted of his crime. The miserable wretch recognized his wife and child at the moment that he was branded with the mark of infamy. He saw Adeline fall unconscious before him; that heartrending picture was long present in his mind; the image of a woman who adored him and whose life he had wrecked, the sight of a child whom he condemned to the shame of not being able to mention her father without a shudder, and the memory of the happiness he had once enjoyed in his home,—all these overwhelmed the unhappy felon and made him feel more keenly the horror of his situation.

Remorse gnawed at Edouard's heart, and led him, so far as he was able, to avoid the society of the other prisoners, who laughed at his grief and sneered at his cowardice. A hundred times the poor wretch formed a plan to put an end to his existence, but only in fear and trembling did he invent methods which his weak character instantly spurned. In this frame of mind Murville made the journey from Bicêtre to Toulon, without observing that his brother gave alms to his companions as they passed through Paris.

Lampin was always the same; at the galleys he retained his recklessness and gayety; shame was to him nothing more than an empty word, and he strove every day to lift Edouard above what he called prejudice.

The penitent culprit never receives useful advice in the society of galley slaves. For one criminal who knows the pangs of remorse, how many are there who become hardened in crime and take pleasure in corrupting entirely those whom sincere repentance might have led back into the paths of virtue!

The image of Adeline and her daughter gradually faded from Edouard's mind, and gave way to the schemes of which his companions talked to him day after day. He banished a remorse which they proved to be useless, in order to invent some plan of escape; and after six months of imprisonment, distaste for life was replaced in his mind by an ardent longing for liberty.

A bold scheme was formed. Even at the galleys, prisoners find a way of establishing relations with those of their friends who are momentarily enjoying their freedom; and these latter brave everything to serve their comrades, because they know that they are likely at any day to demand a similar service from them.

It was Lampin who supervised the execution of the plot. Forced to be sober, he was in full possession of his wits. The day, the moment arrived. A keeper, who had been bribed, left a door unlocked; the convicts, supplied with files, removed their fetters; they assembled at midnight, killed three watchmen, and made their way into a yard, the wall of which was easily scaled by men accustomed to climb walls. Lampin went up first; Edouard followed him, clinging to the chain which his companion still had attached to his feet; several convicts had thus passed over the wall and jumped into the ditch which was on the other side. But musket shots were heard, the alarm was given, the garrison was under arms, soldiers ran to the walls and fired at the prisoners. Several fell dead, others surrendered, the revolt was put down; but it was some time before they could ascertain the number of those who had escaped.

Lampin and Edouard had heard the report of shots. They succeeded in getting out of the ditch, but where should they go? How could they make their escape quickly enough? Already soldiers were scouring the city and the harbor; soon they would fall into their hands. Edouard was in despair, and Lampin was cudgeling his brains, swearing that they should not take him alive. But at that moment they heard the sound of bells on a horse, and soon an open wagon, loaded with vegetables and driven by a young peasant, passed them. The peasant was seated in the front of the wagon, fast asleep, with his reins lying on the back of the horse, which followed at a slow pace its accustomed road.

“Do as I do,” said Lampin, running after the wagon. “We are saved.”

He climbed up behind, made a great hole in the peas, cabbages and carrots, and climbed into it, followed by Edouard, leaving hardly enough space to give them air. The peasant turned, rubbed his eyes, and saw nothing, for he was still half asleep; and he was preparing to snore louder than ever, when some soldiers passed the wagon.

“Did you meet anyone, my friend?” asked the sergeant of the peasant.

“No, no, no one, messieurs, no one but donkeys, wagons and people from our place.”

“Be on the lookout; some convicts have escaped; if you see any of them, call for help and notice which way they go.”

The soldiers passed on. The peasant lay down again, mumbling between his teeth:

“Oh, yes! I think I see myself watching convicts! I would much rather dream about my dear Manette; anyway I ain’t afraid of them; those fellows don’t amuse themselves stealing cabbages and carrots.”

“We are saved!” said Edouard to his companion, in an undertone.

“Not yet,” said Lampin; “this peasant is taking his vegetables to market, and if he should uncover us, I don’t believe he would take us for two bunches of onions.”

“What are we to do then?”

“Parbleu! we must take to the fields; but let’s wait until this rascal snores well; it won’t be long, as he is thinking of his dear Manette.”

In fact, the peasant was soon sound asleep. Thereupon Lampin put one hand out from under the vegetables, seized the rein, and pulled the horse to the other side of the road. The beast knew but two roads, the one to market and the one to his stable. When he was jerked violently away from the former, he supposed that his master was going home, so he turned back toward the village without hesitation.

“Well, we are safe now,” said Edouard, softly putting his head out from under the vegetables which covered him, and seeing nothing but trees and fields about him,—no houses.

“You always think that you are safe, you idiot,” said Lampin, “but we are not out of danger yet; we have just left Toulon; this peasant is taking us to his village, where we shall be pinched.”

“We must get out of the wagon and hide.”

“A fine thing to do! hide! Where, I should like to know? In the trees, like parrots? We must gain ground first, and with these chains on our feet, we shan’t go far.”

“We will file them.”

“Have we got the time? Come, let’s make a bold stroke; we are in a sunken road, and I don’t see any houses, and—first of all, get down, quick.”

“And then?”

“Get down, I tell you, and stop the horse quietly; meanwhile I will begin by searching our driver.”

Edouard got down from the wagon. Lampin drew in the reins, and the horse stopped.

“We must unharness him, and escape on him,” said Lampin; “let’s make haste.”

As he spoke, he searched the peasant’s pockets and took possession of his knife and a few pieces of money. Edouard, being very awkward and unskilled in the art of unharnessing a horse, called Lampin to his assistance. He seemed to be meditating a new plan as he looked at the peasant’s clothes.

“I am in mortal terror that he will wake,” said Edouard.

“If he wakes, he is a dead man,” said Lampin, as he hastily alighted and unfastened the straps that held the horse in the shafts. But the peasant was so accustomed to the movement of the wagon that he woke a few moments after it stopped.

“Go on, go on, I say!” he said, rubbing his eyes.

“We are lost!” whispered Edouard. Lampin did not reply, but he darted toward the wagon, and as the hapless peasant started to rise, he buried his knife in his breast.

The man uttered but one feeble cry. Edouard was horrorstruck.

“You wretch! what have you done?” he said with a shudder.

“What was necessary,” said Lampin; “the worst of it now is that I can’t take his clothes, which are drenched with blood; I must be content with the hat and the blouse.”

As he said this, the villain stripped his victim, put on his blouse, and hastily mounted the horse; then he turned toward Edouard, who had not yet recovered from his stupor.

“Now, my boy,” he said, “get out of it how you can.”

And he at once pricked his horse with the point of his knife, and disappeared, leaving Edouard beside the unfortunate man whom his companion had murdered.

XXXIII

THE WOOD-CUTTER AND THE ROBBERS

The night was drawing toward its close. Edouard was still beside the wagon, dismayed by Lampin's flight, and so disturbed by all that had happened to him within a few hours that he had no idea what he had better do.

The unfortunate peasant still breathed; from time to time he uttered feeble groans. Edouard could not decide whether he ought to help him or to take to flight. He wavered and hesitated and the first rays of dawn found him in that condition. Glancing at himself, he shuddered at sight of his coat, which at once identified him as an escaped convict; and he trembled lest he should be taken for the murderer of the peasant. That thought froze his blood with terror; the sight of the peasant was horrible to him, and he walked away as rapidly as his strength permitted, until he reached a small tract of woodland, where he hoped to elude pursuit.

His first care was to file his fetters and throw them away; but he could not rid himself of his costume also, and he realized that he could not show himself without risk of being arrested. That thought drove him to frenzy for an instant. He regretted that he had not stripped the peasant entirely.

Day broke, and the peasants began to go to their work. Edouard plunged into the wood, picked figs and olives and climbed into a tree to await the return of night.

But how long that day was! and how many times did he shudder with apprehension as he saw peasants come into the wood and sit down to rest not far from the tree in which he was hiding! He heard them talking about the poor wagoner's murder.

"It was a convict who did the job," said the peasants; "a number of them escaped last night from the galleys at Toulon, but they're on their tracks, and they can't fail to take them soon."

Edouard realized only too well the difficulty he would have in escaping, and he abandoned himself to despair. The night arrived at last; he descended from his protecting tree and resumed his journey. Every time that the faintest noise reached his ear, he stopped and buried himself in the thickest bushes. His face and hands were torn by thorns and brambles; but he did not feel the pain; he

would have been glad to hide in the bowels of the earth. He walked as fast as his strength permitted, picking up fruit of which he retained some for the following day, stopping only in the most solitary places, and hiding during the day in the top of some densely-leaved tree.

On the fourth day, toward morning, he passed a small cottage surrounded by a garden; he cast a glance over the wall in the hope of discovering fruit; but what was his joy when he saw linen and clothes hanging on lines; the idea of taking possession of them and getting rid of his convict's costume, at once occurred to his mind; the thought of theft no longer frightened him; he justified it by his plight. Only a half ruined wall, four feet high, separated him from the priceless garments; for the first time, he did not stop to consider the danger. He climbed the wall, took whatever he needed, and made his escape without the slightest twinge of remorse; for what he had done seemed to him a mere trifle to what he had seen done.

Having reached a dense wood, he removed his accusing costume and donned the clothes which he had stolen. Thereupon, being a little more at ease in his mind, and thinking that he must already be very far from Toulon, he set forth again, determined to ask hospitality for the night of some peasant, and hoping that they would give him a crust of bread, which seemed to him a priceless treasure capable of restoring his strength. As he did not choose, however, to take the risk of entering a village, where he feared to meet gendarmes who were in pursuit of him, he decided to knock at the door of an isolated cabin, surrounded by dense woods.

A peasant answered his knock and asked him what he could do for him.

"A great deal," said Edouard; "I am an unfortunate man, worn out with fatigue and hunger; allow me to pass the night in your house, and you will save my life."

"It's a fact," said the peasant, scrutinizing him with attention, "you seem very tired and very sick. But who are you? For a body must know who he takes in."

"I am—I am an unfortunate deserter; I trust my secret to you; don't betray me!"

"A deserter—the devil! It isn't right to desert! But I'm not capable of betraying you; come, come in, and you can tell me why you deserted."

Edouard entered the cabin, conscious of a keen sense of delight in being once more under a roof.

"Look you," said the peasant, "I'll give you half of what I have got and that won't be very good; but you hadn't ought to be hard to suit. I'm a poor wood-

cutter; I ain't rich, I live from day to day, but I am glad to share my supper and my bed with you. I've got some bread and some cheese and the remains of a bottle of wine, and we'll finish it. My bed ain't bad; it's the best thing in my house, and I'll bet you won't wake up. Come, my friend, tell me your adventures. I have been in the army myself; yes, I used to be a soldier, and I flatter myself that I didn't desert; I'd like to know what reason you had for doing such a miserable thing as that."

Edouard invented a fable, which he told the wood-cutter, who listened with attention.

The strangeness of Edouard's story, the improbability of his adventures, his embarrassment when his host asked him for details concerning his regiment and the place where they had been in garrison, all tended to arouse the wood-cutter's suspicions, and he began to fear that he had been duped by some vagabond.

However, as he owned nothing that was likely to tempt cupidity, the peasant shared his supper with Edouard none the less; then he invited him to undress and go to bed. Edouard accepted this invitation with a good heart; he had taken off his jacket and was about to remove his waistcoat, when a sudden reflection stopped him, and he stood before the wood-cutter, speechless with confusion.

"Well, have you got over wanting to go to bed?" said the peasant, noticing Edouard's sudden terror.

"I beg pardon; I am going—I am going to lie down."

"It seems to me that you started to undress yourself, and now you stand there as if you didn't know what to do."

"Oh! the fact is, I thought better of it; it will be wiser for me to stay dressed, so that I can get ready quicker to go away in the morning."

"As you please! suit yourself."

Edouard threw himself on the bed, and the wood-cutter did the same; but not with the purpose of going to sleep; he was secretly anxious, for he was afraid that he had offered shelter to a scoundrel, and he was trying to think how he could set his doubts at rest.

The miserable wretch, who was overdone with fatigue, and who had not slept on so soft a couch for a weary while, soon yielded to the sleep that took possession of him. The wood-cutter, who had pretended to do the same, rose softly as soon as he was certain that the stranger whom he had made welcome was asleep.

He left the room, and struck a light in a small cave. He lighted a lamp, took his gun, and noiselessly returned to the small room where Edouard lay. The

unhappy man's sleep was disturbed and restless; he struggled and twisted violently on his couch, and broken sentences escaped from his lips; the wood-cutter listened and distinctly heard these words:

"On the road—in the middle of the night—he was murdered—take off these irons, relieve me of these chains which prevent me from escaping."

"Murdered!" echoed the peasant between his teeth. "Damnation! I have taken in a highway robber! And that scoundrel is sleeping on an honest man's bed! Who knows that he hasn't made an appointment with all his gang at my house? Indeed, they say that the neighborhood has been infested with robbers for some time. Perhaps they mean to take possession of my cabin and turn it into one of their dens. The devil! if I was sure of it, I'd begin by getting rid of this fellow, while he is alone. But let me see; I must try to verify this suspicion of mine."

The wood-cutter walked toward Edouard; with great care he slit the back of the unfortunate convict's waistcoat, put aside the portion which covered the shoulder, and held his lamp to it, concealing with the other hand the rays of light which might have fallen on the stranger's eyes. Holding his breath, he put his head forward and with a shudder of horror saw the fatal brand.

"I wasn't mistaken," said the wood-cutter, setting his lamp down on the hearth and cocking his gun. "He is a villain, but by all the devils, he shan't stay in my house any longer! Even if I have to run the risk of other dangers, I will drive this rascal out of my cabin."

He returned to the bed and pushed Edouard roughly with the butt of his gun. The convict woke, sat up in bed and gazed in terror at his host, who was aiming the gun at him, and whose eyes were blazing with anger.

"Leave my house this minute!" cried the wood-cutter in a loud voice, with his gun still leveled at Edouard; "clear out! and don't think of coming back, or I will blow your brains out."

"What's the matter? why this outbreak?" said Edouard, gazing about him in surprise. "Am I no longer in the cabin where I was made welcome? Are you the man who deigned to share your food and your bed with an unfortunate fellow-creature? And now you turn me out! What have I done to be treated like this?"

"You know well enough, you villain; go and join your comrades on the highroads, go and rob and murder travellers; but you will find no shelter under my roof."

"You are mistaken, monsieur, you are wrong; I swear to you, I am not a robber, I am not capable of evil designs!"

"Indeed! and perhaps you're an honest man? What about that mark that you

bear? Was it for your brave acts that you were decorated like that?"

"Great God!" said Edouard, putting his hand to his waistcoat and discovering that it was cut; "what—you dared——"

"I wanted to make sure what you were; your conduct aroused my suspicion and I had to see if I was right. Come, you can see that your talk and your stories won't deceive me any longer. Come now, off with you, I can't sleep with a man like you."

"Unhappy wretch that I am," said Edouard, leaving the bed and beating his brow, "I have no resources left; I am lost, cast out by the whole world. Obligated to shun society, which spurns me, reduced to the necessity of living in the darkness, this infamous mark drives me to crime; only among brigands can I find shelter now; only by committing new crimes can I prolong my existence! The road of repentance is closed to me; I have no choice but to be a criminal!"

As he spoke, he threw himself on the ground and writhed in despair at the wood-cutter's feet. The latter was moved for a moment, when he saw the mental distress of the wretch before him; he laid down his gun, and would perhaps have yielded to compassion, when two whistles rang out and were repeated loudly in different parts of the forest.

Instantly the wood-cutter's suspicion and rage revived in full force. He had no doubt that the signal that he had heard was that of the brigands come to join their comrade. He took his gun again; Edouard tried once more to implore his compassion; he approached his host, raising his hands in entreaty; but the wood-cutter, mistaking the meaning of the miserable wretch, whom he deemed capable of murdering him, stepped back and pulled the trigger.

The gun was discharged! being badly aimed, the murderous bullet did not strike its victim, but whistled over his shoulder as he knelt on the floor, and buried itself in the wall. Thereupon rage and despair revived Edouard's courage; he determined to sell his life dearly; he seized an axe which he saw in a corner of the cabin, and as his host returned toward him to strike him with the butt of his gun, he dealt him a blow in the head which stretched him lifeless at his feet. The wood-cutter fell without uttering a sound; his blood spurted upon Edouard, who was horrified to find himself covered with it.

At the same moment the door of the cabin was broken in; four men, clothed with rags, but armed to the teeth and wearing hideous masks, appeared in the doorway and put their heads into the room, gazing for some moments in surprise at the spectacle which met their eyes.

"Oho!" said the one who seemed to be their chief, "it seems to me that

strange things are happening here, and that we have comrades in the neighborhood. Thunder and guns! Here's a fellow who looks to me as if he had done a good job!"

Edouard was standing motionless in the middle of the room, still holding in his hand the bloody axe with which he had struck down the wood-cutter.

The brigands entered the room. The leader scrutinized Edouard and uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight.

"It is he!" he cried at last; "it is really he! Look at him, comrade,—you should recognize him too."

"Parbleu! yes, it's our friend; come, Murville, embrace your old acquaintances, your faithful companions in pleasure and adversity."

Edouard heard voices which were familiar to him; he raised his eyes and saw Lampin before him; but he did not recognize the other brigand, whose voice had caught his attention. The latter took his hand and shook it violently; Edouard looked at him again, and sought upon the horribly mutilated face features which were not unknown to him.

"What," said Lampin; "don't you recognize Dufresne, our old friend?"

"Dufresne!" cried Edouard; "is it possible?"

"Yes, Murville, it is himself," said Dufresne, untying a number of bands which disfigured his face by representing scars, and taking off a plaster which concealed one eye and a part of his forehead, as well as a beard which covered his chin and his upper lip. "I'm delighted that you don't recognize me, for that demonstrates my talent for disguising myself; and that's something, especially when one has a death sentence hanging over him. But you, my rascal, you seem to have limbered up a little since we met. The devil! this does you credit."

"Comrades," said Lampin, who had been prowling about the cabin, "there's nothing of any good to us here; the shot we heard may bring people in this direction, whom we should not be pleased to meet. Take my advice and let us quit this hovel and go back into the woods; we can talk more safely there."

Lampin's advice being adjudged prudent, the robbers left the cabin, taking with them Edouard, who had hardly recovered from his surprise and could not believe that he had found Dufresne again in the person of the chief of a band of outlaws.

After walking for some time through the thickest part of the forest, the robbers stopped in a clearing; they built a fire, produced provisions which they spread on the grass, and having prepared their weapons in case of surprise, they seated themselves about the flame, which alone lighted their meal.

“I don’t know,” said Dufresne, gazing at Edouard with savage joy, “what presentiment led me to hope that we should be united some day. In fact, I have always acted with that end in view; isn’t that so, Lampin?”

Lampin was eating ravenously, and according to his custom, drinking even more ravenously; he contented himself with a glance at Edouard, accompanied by a laugh. Edouard observed his new companions, uncertain as yet if he ought to congratulate himself upon meeting them.

“How does it happen that I meet you with Lampin in this forest?” he asked Dufresne at last; “what has led you to embrace such a dangerous life?”

“What’s that? what other sort of life do you expect a man to embrace when he is outlawed from society, as we are? You’re not going to play the innocent, are you, you who have just killed a poor wood-cutter, whose death was of no benefit to you?”

“I did nothing but defend myself; that man had fired at me and was threatening me again; I had to parry his blows.”

“The deuce, comrade, you have a pretty way of parrying!—But no matter, let us return to ourselves. You must know that I have been sentenced to death; luckily I didn’t wait for my sentence before escaping from prison, thanks to these two faithful friends whom I had helped long ago. We could not appear in the daylight; so we selected the woods and the highways to carry on our trade; a man must do something. A little while ago, we stopped a traveller who was riding through these woods, and I recognized Lampin, who asked nothing better than to join us. You must join us too, my dear Murville, for there is nothing else for you to do; you ought to be enchanted to have met us.”

“Yes, yes,” said Lampin, “and I am sure that you no longer bear me a grudge for leaving you with the wagoner at midnight. What can you expect, my boy? I saw that the horse wasn’t worth much; he would never have been able to gallop with two men on his back, and I gave myself the preference; that was natural enough.”

“What a miserable life!” said Edouard, glancing about; “to live in the woods, in the darkness, to dread being arrested every minute, to risk one’s life for a few gold pieces!”

“Deuce take it, my little man,” said Lampin; “I agree that it was livelier when we danced with Véronique-la-Blonde, beating time on her flanks, and drinking madeira or champagne; but, you see, we all have our ups and our downs.”

“Muster up your courage, my dear Murville,” said Dufresne; “we may be rich yet, and enjoy life under another sky. Meanwhile, I don’t propose any longer to confine myself to living in the woods, and waiting for a poor traveller now and then; besides, four or five men are not enough to form a formidable band, equal to stopping well-loaded vehicles. But I have more extensive projects, and as I possess the talent of making myself unrecognizable, when necessary, I hope that when my comrades are thoroughly saturated with my lessons, we shall be able to try some bold stroke,—either breaking into some wealthy man’s house, or assuming title and rank, according to circumstances.”

“Ah! he’s a sly fox! he knows a lot! I would like right well to know the man who educated him!”

“I can satisfy you, my friends, by telling you the story of my youth; it will not take long and it will amuse you. Moreover, Murville will derive some profit from it; there are some things in it which concern him, and I have no need now of standing on ceremony with him.”

“Tell on, tell on,” said Lampin; “meanwhile, we will drink; in fact, there’s nothing better for us to do in this infernal wood, where we have drawn blank for two nights. Come, comrades, let us start up the fire and drink quietly.”

The robbers rekindled the fire, took a bottle each, and gathered about their leader; while Edouard, with his head resting in his hands, waited in gloomy silence for Dufresne to begin his story.

XXXIV

DUFRESNE'S STORY

I was born in a small village in the neighborhood of Rennes. My father, who had been rich and highly esteemed, was completely ruined by the loss of a lawsuit which a cousin of his brought against him. Reduced to poverty and having no friends, he was obliged to accept a place as game-keeper to an old nobleman who cared more for his game than for his vassals, and would not forgive the death of a rabbit or a partridge killed on his land.

My father, embittered by misfortune, cherished in the depths of his heart a longing to be revenged upon the man who had stolen his property from him. He lived in a small cabin in the midst of the woods; he took me there and kept me with him. I was six years old when my father retired into that solitude. I was bold, enterprising, brave, wilful, and even then determined in my resolutions. The almost savage life which I led for several years did not help to soften my nature. I constantly roamed about the forests, and climbed mountains and steep cliffs; I leaped torrents and ravines; and when I returned home to my father, he would rehearse the story of his misfortune; he taught me to curse men whose injustice had revolted his heart; he urged me to distrust the whole world, and never to rely upon the equity or gratitude of my fellowmen; and to prove what he said, he told me of the services he had rendered when he was rich, all of which had been repaid with ingratitude; he told me of the unjust lawsuit which he had lost only through fraud and bad faith; and finally made me swear to avenge him upon the man who had ruined him.

My father's words readily found a lodging in my memory. Perhaps other advice might have led me to protect and defend those whom I swore to despise and to hate; but first impressions are all-powerful upon an inexperienced mind, and the independence of my tastes inclined me to crush without examination all the obstacles which thwarted my desires.

An episode which I witnessed served to intensify my aversion for mankind. I was then thirteen years old, and I had just taken a lesson in reading from my father; for he had told me that education was essential to my best interests, and that reason alone had induced me to learn something. I was walking in the woods when I heard two shots very near me. I ran in the direction from which the reports came, and I saw two young men, who had been arrested because they

were hunting in the nobleman's forest.

One was a well-dressed young man, of aristocratic manners and bearing; the other was a poor peasant, covered with rags and apparently in the last stages of want. The first had killed a kid, the other a rabbit, and yet the young man from the city was laughing and singing among the keepers, while the peasant, pale-faced and trembling, had hardly strength enough to stand.

Curious to learn the sequel of the affair, I followed the crowd to the château; the nobleman was absent at the time, but his steward took his place; he had full power and represented his master; so the two prisoners were taken before the steward. I mingled with the crowd and succeeded thus in making my way into a large hall, to which the poachers were taken first. The steward arrived; when he saw the young man from the city, he realized that he had not, as usual, to deal with country bumpkins who were accustomed to tremble before him. He dismissed everybody, in order to question the fine gentleman in private. But I, instead of going out with the others, concealed myself under a table covered with a cloth, and heard very distinctly the following conversation:

“Monsieur, I am distressed to be obliged to act harshly,” said the steward in a wheedling tone, “but my master is very strict, and his orders are absolute.”

“Bah! old fox, you are joking, I fancy, with your orders,” said the young man, laughing at the steward; “understand that I am a young man of family, and that if you do not set me at liberty instantly, I will cut off your ears at the first opportunity.”

“Monsieur, this is a very strange tone, and I cannot allow——”

“Look you, old Arab, I see what you want! You are the steward, that tells the whole story; take this purse; there are fifteen louis in it; that is more than all your master's kids are worth.”

As he spoke, the young man took from his pocket a purse, which the steward accepted without hesitation. Then, opening a little secret door, he said in an undertone:

“Go down this way into the garden; then turn to the right and you can go out through another gate that leads into the fields. I am endangering myself for you, but you have such engaging manners!”

The young huntsman did not wait to hear any more; he was already in the garden. The steward carefully locked the small door, then rang for a servant and ordered him to bring the other poacher before him.

They brought in the peasant, and the steward was left alone with him.

“Why do you hunt?” he asked the peasant, in a harsh voice and a sharp tone

which bore no resemblance to that which he had assumed with the other prisoner.

“My good monsieur,” said the poor man, falling on his knees, “pray forgive me; it is the first time and I swear that it shall be the last.”

“These rascals always say the same thing!”

“I ain’t a rascal, but a poor devil with a wife and five children, and I can’t support ’em.”

“Well, you knave, why do you have children?”

“Well! monsieur l’intendant, that’s the only pleasure a man can get without money.”

“As if clowns like you ought to have any pleasure! Work, you dog, work; that’s your lot.”

“I haven’t got any work, and I earn so little, so little, that it’s hardly enough to keep us alive!”

“Because you eat like ogres!”

“I don’t ever eat enough, so’s to have some to give to the little ones.”

“Your little ones! your little ones! These rascals starve the whole province with their little ones!”

“Pardi! monsieur l’intendant, your master raises more than fifty dogs, and it seems to me that I can raise four or five children.”

“Fancy this wretch daring to compare his disgusting young ones with monseigneur’s greyhounds! Come, no arguing, you were caught poaching, your case is clear, and the theft is proved. You will be lashed, fined, and imprisoned!”

“Oh! mercy, monsieur! it was only a rabbit!”

“A rabbit, you scoundrel! a rabbit! Do you know what a rabbit is? Monseigneur preserves rabbits; I must avenge the one that you killed.”

“Morgué! if it was for monsieur’s table——”

“That’s a very different matter; it would be too happy to enter its master’s mouth; but you are a poacher.”

“Have pity on my wife and children, monsieur l’intendant! We are so poor! there ain’t a sou in our house!”

“You deserve to be hanged! Off with you, to prison, and to-morrow the lash.”

The steward rang, the servants appeared, and the peasant was taken away despite his prayers and his tears.

I had remained under the table, where I was fairly choking with indignation;

when everybody had gone, I jumped out of the window and ran home, to tell my father all that I had heard. My story did not surprise him. It was only one proof more of the injustice and the barbarity of men. For my own part, I had my plan. I knew that the nobleman was to return next day, and I proposed to assure the punishment of the rascally steward.

And so at daybreak I started for the château. When I arrived there, I saw the unfortunate peasant in the courtyard being pitilessly beaten by the servants, while the nobleman watched the spectacle from the balcony, giving biscuit to his Danish hound and sugar to his greyhound.

“I am going to avenge you, goodman,” I said, as I passed the peasant; and I at once ran up the stairs four at a time and entered monseigneur’s apartments before the servants had had time to announce me. The steward was with his master, counting out money; I ran and threw myself at monseigneur’s feet; but in my eagerness I trod upon the paw of one of his favorites. The hound began to yelp and his master cast an angry glance at me, asking why I had been allowed access to him. Before anyone could reply, I began my story and told, almost without stopping for breath, all that I had heard the day before between the steward and the aristocratic huntsman.

The old nobleman seemed a little surprised to learn that another poacher had been arrested; but the steward, who quivered with anger while I was speaking, made haste to tell his master that the young man was a marquis, and that he had thought that he ought not to detain him.

“A marquis,” said the nobleman, taking a pinch of snuff, “a marquis! The devil! that’s so—of course we could not have him beaten; so the peasant must pay for both.”

“That is what I thought, monseigneur.”

“And you did well; send away this boy, who was awkward enough to tread on Castor’s paw.”

The steward did not wait for the order to be repeated; he took me by the arm; and I went unresistingly, unable to understand why monseigneur had not been angry with the rascally servant. On the way, the steward gave me a number of blows, and as many kicks; that was the only reward which I received at the château.

I returned home in a frenzy of rage, revolving in my brain a thousand schemes of revenge. My father, who then realized to what excess my animosity might lead me, tried, but in vain, to pacify me.

The next morning, a message from the steward informed my father that he

was no longer monseigneur's game-keeper. That was a result of my action of the day before; he suspected as much, but did not reproach me. We left our cabin with no idea of what was to become of us. As for me, my father's misfortune confirmed me in a plan which I had conceived and which I was eager to execute.

During the night, while my father slept at the foot of a tree, I stole away with a dark lantern and the gun which he always carried with him.

I hurried in the direction of monseigneur's château. When I arrived there, I made piles of sticks, and set fire to the four corners of the château, taking pains, lest the fire should not burn quickly enough, to throw blazing brands on the roofs of all the buildings, with particular attention to the stables.

I soon had the pleasure of seeing that my revenge was complete; the fire caught in several places and spread rapidly to all the wings of the château. They sounded the tocsin, the villagers hastened to the spot, and several of them had the complaisance to throw themselves into the flames, to save a nobleman who took pleasure in having them beaten. Amid the confusion and the tumult, I made my way to the private apartments and found the steward trying to escape, with a little casket which he held against his breast. I took my stand in front of him and said, aiming my gun at him:

"Look you, this is to teach you to strike me and kick me!"

I fired, and he fell dead at my feet. I threw my gun away, took possession of the casket, and leaping from a window with my usual agility, I fled from the château, which soon presented nothing but a pile of ruins.

I made haste to return to the place where I had left my father. I was proud of my revenge and overjoyed to possess a casket which I presumed to be full of gold. I had always noticed that with gold one could procure everything and make one's escape from all dangers.

But what was my surprise not to find my father, whom I supposed to be still sleeping at the foot of the tree! In vain did I search the whole neighborhood, calling him at the top of my voice; I had to go on to another village, uncertain what had become of him. Being uneasy concerning my treasure, I buried it at the foot of an old oak, after taking out a few pieces of gold of which the casket was full.

I went to bed at a small inn, thinking justly enough that a child would not be suspected of setting fire to the château. In fact, little attention was paid to me; everyone was talking about the terrible calamity that had happened to the nobleman. Everyone formed conjectures of his own, but during the day a peasant came in and said that the guilty party was arrested; he was, so he stated, a former

game-keeper in monseigneur's service; he had been discharged, and was bitterly incensed against the steward, whom he presumed to be responsible for his disgrace. He had set the fire in order to obtain access to his enemy more easily, for they had found the latter, killed by a rifle shot, and had recognized the weapon as belonging to the game-keeper.

On hearing that story, I had no doubt that my father had been arrested in my place; I trembled for him, and having determined to sacrifice myself to save him, I at once left the inn and started for the village to which he was to have been taken. I did not stop an instant on the road, for I felt that minutes were precious; I reached the public square of the village at last, and saw my father hanging on a gallows.

I abandoned myself, not to grief, for that was not the sensation that I felt, but to frenzied rage. I would have been glad to be able to set fire to the village and burn all the inhabitants at once.

At night, I took down my father's body; I had the strength to carry it into the forest, where I dug a grave for it; I swore, over his lifeless remains, to avenge his death and his misfortune upon all mankind, and never to love those who had unjustly ruined him and put him to death, although innocent.

I went to get my precious casket, and I left the country. Thanks to the treasure which I possessed, I was able to gratify all my tastes and procure myself all sorts of pleasure. I lived thus for five years, abandoning myself to all the passions which age had developed within me; I loved wine, cards and women, and so long as I had money, I denied myself nothing; but my treasure could not last long with the life I was leading. At the age of eighteen, I saw the bottom of my treasure chest; but, far from mourning over that event, I rejoiced at the thought that the time had come to keep the oath I had taken over my father's grave.

So I devoted my whole time to making dupes, and that was not difficult for me; in the best society, to which, thanks to my wealth, I had succeeded in introducing myself, I had learned good manners; I had, furthermore, the talent of disguising my features and of changing my voice when that was necessary; add to that, wit, audacity, resolution, and eloquence, and you may judge what triumphs were in store for me.

Under the name of Bréville, I knew at Brussels a certain Jacques Murville, who had run away from home. He was your brother, my poor Edouard, and I was clever enough to strip him of all that he possessed. In Paris, assuming a different name, I was present at your marriage; the name of Murville caught my attention; I made inquiries, I learned that you had a brother, and it seemed to me a good joke to appropriate the fortune of the older brother after spending the

money of the younger. But another thought took my heart by storm when I saw your wife. Adeline's beauty and charms fascinated me; I fell madly in love with her, and I swore to resort to every means to possess her.

First of all, it was necessary to obtain access to your house; I succeeded; then I found a way to sow discord in your family, by leading you on gently to your ruin, which was the goal of all my plans. I discovered your inclination for gambling; after that it was not hard for me to lead you into all imaginable sorts of folly. I desired to enrich myself at your expense, but the infernal cards were never favorable to me. I forced you on toward crime, because your wife had spurned me, and I was determined to revenge myself upon you for all her contempt. In short, you were simply a machine, which I handled at my pleasure.

After having tried all methods to overcome Adeline's resistance, I had recourse to stratagem, and I succeeded one night in making my way to her apartment and in sharing her bed.—You shudder! Oh! my poor Edouard, your wife deceived no one but herself! you had a very dragon of virtue! When she saw who I was, she manifested more detestation of me than ever, but I had the certainty of having ruined her happiness for all time.

Now you know me; learn to judge men, at your own expense. As for me, who have seen everywhere nothing but falseness, cupidity, ingratitude, injustice, selfishness, ambition, jealousy; and who have always sacrificed worldly prejudices to my passions,—I should view with indifference my position as a leader of robbers, if I were able to gratify all my tastes in this sort of life. But whatever the position that I occupy, whatever the profession that I embrace, I shall keep the oath sworn over my father's grave; I shall continue to abhor men; and I would destroy even you, if you were not, like myself, born for the misfortune of mankind, according to the vulgar expression.

Dufresne concluded his narrative, and the robbers seemed proud of having such a miscreant to command them. Edouard, appalled by what he had heard, shuddered at the memory of all that he had done through the advice of a monster who had sworn his destruction, and who coolly told him of his own dishonor. But it was too late to look back, especially with Edouard's weak and reckless nature. He felt that he hated Dufresne, but he had not the strength to leave him.

Vice debases and degrades men. Edouard, while he realized the horror of his situation, had not sufficient energy to try to escape from it.

The dawn was beginning to whiten the mountain peaks, and to make its way into the clearings of the forest. The robbers extinguished the fire and placed the remains of their provisions in their wallet.

“Comrades,” said Dufresne, “we must leave this neighborhood, we are making nothing here. So let us start; but in the first town of any size near which we pass, the boldest of us must go and buy some clothes which will give us the appearance of respectable people, for believe me, it is the same with our trade as with all others: to be successful, we must throw dust in people’s eyes; and with our torn jackets and trousers we shall never be able to leave these woods, but shall remain miserable vagabonds all our lives.”

Dufresne’s words were like an oracle to his companions, so they prepared to follow his advice, and resumed their journey, carefully avoiding frequented roads by day. Dufresne guided the little troop; Lampin sang and drank as he walked, while the other two bandits dreamed of crimes they might commit, and Edouard tried to decide whether he should fly from his companions or remain with them.

THE HOUSE IN THE VOSGES

A long chain of mountains, covered with forests, separates Alsace and Franche-Comté from Lorraine, and extends as far as the Ardennes. It was among these mountains, called the Vosges, that the excellent Monsieur Gerval's estate was situated, and it was there that he took the ill-fated creatures whom he had resolved to protect.

Monsieur Gerval's house was simple, but convenient: a pretty courtyard, surrounded by a strong fence, led to the ground floor, where there were only two windows looking out of doors; but these windows were barred, and supplied in addition with very thick shutters, a necessary precaution in an isolated house in the woods. The first floor looked upon the courtyard and also upon a large garden behind the house, enclosed by a very high wall. The house was on a slope of a hill, not far from a narrow road leading to the commune of Montigny. And its picturesque situation, its isolation from other houses, and the unbroken calm that reigned all about, seemed to stamp that simple retreat as the abode of repose and peace.

Monsieur Gerval's household consisted of Dupré, whom we already know; of Catherine, who performed the duties of cook,—an old woman somewhat talkative, but faithful, obliging, kindhearted, and deeply attached to her master; and lastly, of a young peasant named Lucas, who was gardener, indoor man, and messenger.

Throughout the neighborhood, within a radius of many leagues, the name of Gerval was revered and pronounced with emotion by the unfortunate ones upon whom the good man constantly lavished benefactions. He had not always occupied his house in the woods; often the exigencies of his business had kept him away for a long time; but at such times Dupré and Catherine, who knew their master's heart, continued his beneficent work, so that the poor could hardly notice the absence of their protector.

The peasants, when they learned that Monsieur Gerval had gone to Paris, were afraid that he would not return to them; Catherine herself shared that feeling, for she knew that her master wished to see some old friends whom he had been obliged to neglect for a long time, and to whom he was very much

attached. But a letter from Monsieur Gerval brought joy to the people of the Vosges; they learned that they were to see their friend, their staff, their father, once more; that he was to return among them, never to leave them again. This news soon became known throughout the neighborhood; the people hurried to Catherine to ascertain if it were true, and she read to each one her master's letter, announcing his arrival on a certain day.

That day arrived and everything was in confusion in the house, to celebrate the goodman's return. Lucas robbed his garden, to decorate the dining-room; Catherine surpassed herself in the repast which she prepared; the peasants from round about, and all the unfortunates whom the kindhearted Gerval had assisted, gathered at the cottage.

"He hasn't arrived yet," said the old servant, "but he cannot be long now."

They strung themselves out along the road, they went up to the hilltops, in order to descry the carriage sooner. They saw it at last; it was instantly surrounded, the old man's name passed from mouth to mouth, and the blessings of the poor celebrated the return of their wealthy benefactor.

Gerval shed tears of emotion when he saw the joy of the worthy folk who regarded him as their father.

"Ah! my friend," he said to Dupré, "how pleasant it is to be able to do good!"

The carriage entered the courtyard; the peasants uttered cries of joy.

"Hush! hush! my friends," said the old man as he alighted from his carriage; "do not give such loud expression to your joy; it pleases me, but it distresses an unhappy woman to whom the slightest noise is a danger."

As he spoke, Gerval helped Adeline out of the carriage, while Dupré lifted little Ermance in his arms.

Adeline glanced uneasily about; much noise always caused her to shrink in alarm; the sight of a number of people increased her excitement; she shuddered and tried to fly. Gerval was obliged to motion to the villagers to stand a little aside, before he could induce the unfortunate young woman to enter the house.

They gazed at Adeline with interest, and joy gave way to sadness when they realized her condition.

"Poor woman!" was heard on all sides; "what can have deprived her of her reason? And that little girl! how beautiful she will be some day! They are two more unfortunates, whom Monsieur Gerval has taken under his protection."

"My children," said Catherine, "as soon as I learn this young stranger's story, I will tell it to you, I promise you; and I shall know it soon, for my master keeps nothing from me."

Unfortunately for Catherine, her master knew no more than she upon that subject. To satisfy his old servant's curiosity, Monsieur Gerval told her how he had made Adeline's acquaintance, and the deplorable state in which he had found her afterward. The servant uttered exclamations of surprise during her master's narrative, but she declared that she would be able to learn all the young woman's misfortunes little by little. Meanwhile, as she already felt drawn to love and cherish her child, she hastened to prepare one of the pleasantest rooms in the house for them.

Adeline was given a room on the ground floor, looking on the woods; the window was supplied with stout iron bars, and there was no danger that she would run away from the house in one of her fits of delirium. They left the child with her, for she seemed always to know her daughter, and often pressed her affectionately to her heart.

"Those are the only moments of happiness which she seems still to enjoy," said Monsieur Gerval; "let us not deprive her of them! and let us not rob the child of her mother's caresses!"

Catherine undertook with pleasure to take care of the invalid and her daughter. It was she who accompanied the young woman in her walks about the neighborhood, when the weather was fine; and Lucas was ordered to decorate Adeline's room with fresh flowers every morning. It was by dint of unremitting care and attention that Monsieur Gerval hoped to restore peace to the hapless woman's soul.

They knew little Ermance's name, because her mother had called her by it several times in her delirium; but they did not know the mother's name, and Monsieur Gerval had decided that she should be called Constance. That melodious name was approved by Catherine, who declared that the stranger's misfortunes must be due to love. So that was the name by which Adeline was called by the people at the house in the woods; but sometimes Lucas, and the peasants of the neighborhood, called her simply "the mad woman."

The peace that reigned in the house in the Vosges, the tranquil life that they led there, and the affectionate attentions lavished upon Adeline, seemed to bring a little repose to her mind; she caressed her daughter and often embraced her; she smiled at her benefactor and at all those about her; but only incoherent words came from her lips; and she would relapse almost immediately into a state of sombre melancholy from which nothing could arouse her. She passed part of the day in the garden, which was large and well cared for. Sometimes she plucked flowers and seemed to feel a moment's cheerfulness; but soon the smile disappeared from her pale features, and she would seat herself upon a bench of

turf and remain whole hours there without a sign of life.

“What a misfortune!” said honest Gerval, as he contemplated her, while playing with little Ermance, who already returned his caresses; “I am inclined to think that there is no hope of her recovery.”

“Why do you say that?” said Catherine; “we must never despair of anything. Patience, patience; perhaps a salutary crisis may come. Oh! if we only knew the cause of her trouble!”

“Parbleu! to be sure, that is what the doctor from Paris says; but that is just what we shall never know.”

“Pshaw! how can we tell? She talks sometimes. Look, she seems to be smiling now; she is watching her daughter play; she is much better to-day than usual, and I am going to question her.”

“Take care, Catherine, and don’t distress her.”

“Don’t be afraid, monsieur.”

Catherine walked toward the clump of shrubbery under which Adeline was sitting, and Gerval, Dupré and Lucas stood near by in order to hear the stranger’s replies.

“Madame,” said Catherine in her softest tone, “why do you grieve all the time? You are surrounded by people who love you; tell us your trouble, and we will try to comfort you.”

“Comfort me!” said Adeline, gazing at Catherine in amazement. “Oh! I am happy, very happy! I have no need of comfort. Edouard adores me; he has just sworn that he does; we are united again, and he will make me happy now, for he is not wicked!”

“But why did he leave you?”

“Leave me! No, he did not leave me; he is with me in the house where he lived in his youth; my mother, my daughter and his brother are with us. Oh! I don’t want him to go to Paris; he might meet—No! no! don’t let him go!”

“Take care, Catherine,” said Monsieur Gerval in an undertone; “her eyes are beginning to flash, her excitement is increasing; for heaven’s sake, don’t worry her any more.”

Catherine dared not disobey her master, but she burned to know more. Adeline did in fact seem intensely excited; she rose, walked about at random, and seemed inclined to fly. The old servant tried to quiet her.

“Let me alone,” said Adeline, shaking herself free, “let me fly! He is there, he is chasing me! see, look,—do you see him? He follows me everywhere; he has

sworn to ruin me; he dares still to talk to me of his love! The monster! Oh! in pity's name, do not let him come near me!"

She hurried away, ran to every corner of the garden, and did not stop until, exhausted and unable to endure her terror, she fell to the ground, unconscious and helpless.

They took her at once to her apartment, and their zealous attentions recalled her to life. Monsieur Gerval strictly forbade any questioning of her because it always intensified her disease.

"All right, monsieur," said Catherine; "but you see that we are certain now that she is married, that her husband has a brother, and that with all the rest there is some miserable fellow who makes love to her, and whom she is afraid of! Oh! I can guess the trouble easily enough! I'll bet that it's that same fellow who enticed the husband to Paris, where he forgot his wife and child! Pardi! that's sure to be the result. Oh! what a pity that I can't make her talk more! We should soon know everything."

But as the excellent woman did not wish to arouse the stranger's excitement, she dared not ask her questions. She often walked with Adeline in the woods about the house; one or the other of them carried Ermance; the old servant watched every movement of the young woman, she listened carefully to the words that fell from her mouth, put them together, and based conjectures upon them; but after three months, she knew no more than on the second day.

Once, however, an unforeseen event disturbed Adeline's monotonous life. She was walking with her daughter on a hillside a short distance from the village. Catherine followed her, admiring the graceful figure, the charming features and bearing of the unfortunate young woman, and saying to herself:

"That woman wasn't born in a cabin; her manners and her language show that she belongs in good society! And to think that we shall never know who she is! It's enough to drive one mad."

A young peasant had climbed a tree to steal a nest; his foot slipped, and a branch at which he grasped broke at the same time; he fell to the ground, wounded himself badly in the head, and uttered a lamentable cry.

That cry was heard by Adeline, who was then near the wounded man; she instantly stopped and began to tremble; terror was depicted upon her features, and her eyes sought the ground as if they feared to rest upon an object which horrified her; suddenly she took her child and fled through the woods. In vain did Catherine run after her, calling to her; Adeline's strength was redoubled, and Catherine's shouts augmented her frenzy; she climbed the steepest paths without

taking breath; she scarcely touched the ground; she rushed into the mountains and the old servant soon lost sight of her.

Catherine returned to her master in despair, and told him what had happened. Monsieur Gerval knew that all the peasants were devoted to him, and he sent Dupré and Lucas to beg them to search the whole district. The good people made haste to beat up the forest. Success crowned their zealous efforts; they found Adeline lying at the foot of a tree; fever had given place to exhaustion, and the fugitive had been unable to go farther.

They placed her on a litter hastily constructed of the branches of trees, and carried her and her daughter back to their benefactor's house. The old man dismissed the villagers, after lauding their zeal, and devoted his whole attention to pacifying the poor invalid, whom the young peasant's plaintive cry had cast into a more violent attack of delirium than any that she had had since her arrival in the Vosges.

In the throes of constantly returning terror, Adeline talked more than usual, and Catherine did not leave her side. But she shuddered at the broken phrases that the stranger uttered:

"Take him from that scaffold!" Adeline exclaimed again and again, putting her hands before her eyes. "In pity's name, do not give him to the executioners! They are going to kill him! I hear his voice! But no, that plaintive cry did not come from his mouth; that was another victim.—Oh! I cannot be mistaken, I recognize his tones; they always go to my heart!"

Catherine shed tears; Monsieur Gerval caught a glimpse of a ghastly mystery, and the old servant repeated to her master:

"A scaffold! executioners! Ah! that makes one shudder, monsieur!"

"No matter," said the kindhearted Gerval; "if the young woman's husband or relatives are criminals I will keep her none the less. She is not guilty, I am sure; she is only unfortunate!"

"Yes, monsieur; but the monsters who have brought her to this condition! they are very guilty; they deserve to be severely punished!"

"Yes, my poor Catherine; but we do not know them; let us leave to Providence the duty of avenging this unhappy creature, and let us not doubt its justice. It would be too horrible to think that the wicked may enjoy in peace the fruit of an evil deed, while the victim wastes her life away in tears and despair."

Monsieur Gerval summoned his servants again, and urged them to redouble their attention, in order to spare the young mother such dangerous emotion.

"No noise, no shouts in the neighborhood of her room! If you come together

to talk and laugh, which I do not wish to forbid you to do, let it be in some room at a distance from Constance's so that she cannot hear you. Above all, no more questions; for they lead to no good result."

"Oh! I am done, monsieur," said the old servant; "I have no desire to learn anything more now; it strikes me as altogether too painful a subject; and I should be terribly distressed to pain a woman whom I should like to see happy once more."

Thanks to these precautions, Adeline became calm once more, and everything went on in its accustomed order. Some time passed before they dared to let the invalid leave the house; and she no longer walked in the woods except under the escort of both Lucas and Catherine; and as soon as the peasants caught sight of her, knowing her condition and the orders that Monsieur Gerval had given, they quietly moved away from her path. If she approached, unperceived, a group of peasant girls, who were engaged in diverting themselves, their games, their dancing or singing were instantly suspended.

"It is the mad woman," they would whisper to one another; "let's not make any noise, for that makes her worse."

Time flew by without bringing any change in Adeline's condition; but her little Ermance grew rapidly and her features began to develop. Already her smile had the sweet expression of her mother's, and her affectionate heart seemed to have inherited Adeline's sensibility.

A year had passed since Monsieur Gerval had taken Adeline and her daughter under his roof. Pretty Ermance loved the old man as she would have loved her father. Her little white hands patted her protector's white hair, and he became more and more attached every day to the sweet child.

"You have no parents," he said to her one night, taking her on his knees. "Your mother is dead to you, poor child! Your father is dead too, no doubt, or else he has abandoned you, and does not deserve your love. I propose to assure your future; you shall be rich; and may you be happy and think sometimes of the old man who adopted you, but who will not live long enough to see you enjoy his gifts!"

The winter came and stripped the trees of their foliage and the earth of the verdure which embellished it. The woods were deserted, the birds had gone to seek shade and water beneath another sky. The snow, falling in great flakes on the mountains, lay in huge drifts among the Vosges, and made the roads difficult for pedestrians and impracticable for carriages. The evenings grew long, and the whistling of the wind made them melancholy and gloomy. The peasant, who was

forced to pass through the woods, made haste to reach his home, for fear of being overtaken by the darkness; he hurried along, blowing on his fingers, and his footprints in the snow often served to guide the traveller who had lost his way.

However, ennui did not find its way into honest Gerval's abode; all the inmates were able to employ their time profitably. The old man read, or attended to his business and wrote to his farmers. Dupré made up his accounts, and looked after the wants of the household; Catherine did the housework and the cooking, and Lucas looked after his garden and tried to protect his trees and his flowers from the rigors of the season. Adeline did not leave her room except in the morning, when she made the circuit of the garden a few times; she was rarely seen in the other parts of the house. As soon as night came, she withdrew to her room, sometimes taking her daughter with her; when, by any chance, she remained with her host in the evening, she sat beside Catherine, who told the child stories, while Gerval played a game of piquet or backgammon with Dupré, and Lucas spelled out in a great book a story of thieves or ghosts.

When a violent gust of wind made the windows creak, and blew against them the branches of the trees which stood near the house, Lucas, who was not courageous, but who loved to frighten himself by reading terrifying stories, would drop his book and look about him in dismay; the monotonous noise of the weathercock on the roof, the uniform beating of an iron hook against the wall, were so many subjects of alarm to the gardener.

Sometimes Adeline would break the silence, crying:

“There he is! I hear him!” and Lucas would jump from his chair, thinking that someone was really about to appear. Then Catherine would make fun of the gardener, his master would scold him for his cowardice, and Lucas, to restore his courage, would take his book and continue his ghost story.

XXXVI

THE TRUTH SOMETIMES SEEMS IMPROBABLE

The snow had fallen with more violence and in greater abundance than usual; the gusts of wind constantly snapped off branches of the trees and hurled them far away across the roads, which soon became impassable. The clock struck eight and it had long been dark.

Adeline, whom the roaring of the tempest made more melancholy than usual, had not left her room during the day. Catherine had brought Ermance downstairs and put her to bed beside her mother, who was sitting in a chair and refused to retire so early, despite the old servant's entreaties. The master of the house was playing his usual game with Dupré, and Lucas had just taken up his great book, when the bell at the gate rang loudly.

"Somebody is ringing," said Monsieur Gerval; "company so late as this, and in such weather!"

"It is very strange!" repeated Lucas.

"Shall I open the door, monsieur?" asked Dupré.

"Why, we must find out first who it is; it may be travellers who have got lost in the mountains and cannot go any farther, or some unfortunate creature whom the villagers have sent to me, as they sometimes do. I hear Catherine coming, she will tell us who it is."

Catherine had been to the door to look out, and she came up again to take her master's orders.

"Monsieur," she said, "it is three travellers, three peddlers, it would seem, for they have bales on their backs. They ask for shelter for to-night, as they cannot go on, because there are more than two feet of snow on the road. One of them is a poor old man who seems to suffer much from the cold. Shall I let them in?"

"Certainly, and we will do our best for them."

"But, monsieur," said Dupré, "three men, at night—that is rather imprudent!"

"Why so, Dupré? They are peddlers and one of them is old; what have we to fear? It is perfectly natural that they should seek shelter in bad weather; ought I to leave people to lose their way among these mountains, for fear of entertaining vagabonds? Ah! my friend, if it were necessary to read the hearts of those whom

one succors, one would do good too seldom! Go and let them in quickly, Catherine; do not leave these travellers at the gate any longer; and do you, Dupré, make a big fire so that they may dry themselves; and Lucas will prepare the small room which I always reserve for visitors.”

Catherine went down and opened the gate for the travellers, who overwhelmed her with thanks. The two younger ones held the old man by the arms, and only with great difficulty did they succeed in helping him up the staircase to the first floor, where the master of the house awaited them in the living-room.

“Welcome, messieurs,” said honest Gerval, inviting them to draw near the fire. “First of all, let us make this old gentleman comfortable; he seems completely exhausted.”

“Yes, monsieur,” said the aged stranger in a tremulous voice, “the cold has so affected me that, except for the help of my children, I should have remained on the road.”

“You will soon feel better, my good man. Messieurs, take off those bales, which are in your way, and I will send them to the room which you are to occupy.”

The peddlers deposited in a corner of the room several bundles which seemed to contain linens, handkerchiefs and muslin; Dupré, who was a little suspicious, walked to the bundles and examined them; one of the young men noticed his action, and made haste to open several of them and exhibit his wares to the old servant.

“If there’s anything that takes your fancy, say so, monsieur,” he said; “we will do our best to please you.”

“Thanks,” replied Dupré, seeing that his master appeared displeased by his inspection of the bundles; “we can see these things better to-morrow morning.”

The two peddlers returned to the old man, and sat down in front of the fire. Catherine brought a bottle of wine and glasses, and Lucas took up the bundles and carried them to the room on the second floor.

“Here is something that will warm you while your supper is preparing,” said Monsieur Gerval, filling the strangers’ glasses. “Drink, messieurs,—it is very good.”

“With pleasure,” said that one of the young men who had already spoken to Dupré. “An excellent thing is good wine! Here, father; here, Jean; your health, monsieur.”

“Are these your sons?” Monsieur Gerval asked the old man.

“Yes, monsieur, they are my support, the staff of my old age. This is Gervais, my oldest; he is always merry, always ready to laugh; and this is Jean, my youngest, he isn’t so light-hearted as his brother, he doesn’t speak much, but he is a steady fellow, a great worker and very economical. I love them both, for they are honest and incapable of deceiving anybody, and with those qualities a man is certain to make his way.”

“I congratulate you on having such children; but why do you go on the road with them at your age?”

“You see, monsieur, we’re going to Metz to set up in business; my boys are going to marry the daughters of a correspondent of theirs, and I am going to live with them.”

“That makes a difference; but was it chance that brought you to my house, or did the peasants point it out to you as a good place at which to pass the night?”

“Monsieur,” said Gervais, “we are not familiar with this neighborhood, and as we started out rather late, the darkness took us by surprise; that is why we sought shelter, especially on account of our father, who is too old to endure severe weather. But for him, we should never have been able to make up our minds to ask a gentleman for a night’s lodging, and we should have passed the night on the snow, my brother and I—shouldn’t we, Jean?”

“Yes,” said Jean in a low voice, and without removing his gaze from the fire.

“You would have done very wrong, messieurs,” said Monsieur Gerval, filling the strangers’ glasses; “I like to be useful to my fellowmen, and I will try to give you a comfortable night.”

“You live in a very isolated house,” said Gervais, emptying his glass; “aren’t you ever afraid of being victimized by robbers?”

“I have never been afraid of that; nothing has ever happened to me thus far.”

“Besides, there are enough of us here to defend ourselves,” said Dupré, drawing himself up; “and we have weapons, thank God!”

“Dupré, go and see if Catherine is getting supper ready.”

“Yes, monsieur, and I’ll go too and see if Madame Constance and her daughter want anything.”

Dupré did not go to Adeline’s room; but he was glad of an opportunity to let the strangers know that there were more people in the house, for he was not at all pleased to find that the strangers were going to pass the night there.

He went to the kitchen, and asked Catherine what she thought of the strangers.

“Faith! I think they’re honest folk; the old man seems very respectable.”

“For an old man who can hardly stand on his legs, he has very bright eyes! And his two sons! one of them looks very much like a regular ne’er-do-well; he always has a sneering laugh when he speaks, and he drinks—oh! he don’t leave any in his glass!”

“Indeed! that’s very surprising, isn’t it? A peddler!”

“And the other one,—such a sombre air! He never lifts his eyes; and so far the only word he has said is a single ‘yes,’ and he said it in such a lugubrious way! I don’t like those people.”

“Bah! you are too suspicious, my dear Dupré.”

“No, but I like to know my people.”

“Do we know this poor woman who has been living here for more than a year?”

“Oh! but what a difference! A young, beautiful, and interesting woman; why, her condition alone would make anyone pity her; and that child, such a sweet, pretty creature! You see, I know something about faces; and these peddlers—I tell you, Catherine, I shan’t sleep sound to-night.”

“And I shall sleep very well, I trust.”

“For all that, don’t forget to lock your door.”

“Well, upon my word! if you’re not just like Lucas! I must say that we have brave fellows here to defend us, if we should be attacked!”

“You are mistaken, Catherine; I am not a coward; but I realize that I am more than twenty years old. Oh! if I were only twenty, I wouldn’t be afraid of three men!”

“Let me get my supper ready, instead of making my ears ache with your nonsense.”

“Nonsense! Hum! that’s easy to say.—And what about our young woman,—won’t she come to supper?”

“You know very well that it isn’t her custom. She is asleep, I hope; I suppose you would like to wake her, wouldn’t you?”

“Catherine.”

“Well?”

“It seems to me that I hear a noise in the yard, near the gate.”

“It’s the wind waving the trees and shaking the windows. However, go and see.”

“Yes, I propose to make sure for myself, although you say that I am a coward.”

Dupré lighted a lantern, and made the circuit of the courtyard. Everything was in its accustomed order; the gate was securely locked; he stopped a moment to look through the bars, but the wind blew the snow into his face. While he was rubbing his eyes, a dull sound reached his ears, which seemed to come from the room on the ground floor which Adeline occupied.

“Poor woman! she isn’t asleep yet,” said Dupré to himself; “suppose I should go and find out if she wants anything? But monsieur doesn’t want her to be disturbed at night; he has forbidden it; so I’ll go upstairs again and watch the peddlers.”

The old servant met Lucas on the stairs; the gardener was laughing and singing, because he was always very cheerful when there was much company in the house.

“Have you arranged the bedroom for these strangers?” asked Dupré.

“Yes, and I’ve carried their bundles there; and the tall one wanted to give me a piece of money for my trouble, but I refused it.”

“You did well. For people who travel on foot, they’re very generous.”

“Oh! he has the look of a high liver, has that tall fellow with the red hair; he laughs and drinks and talks for the whole party. If we often had guests like him, there’d be a little more fun here, I tell you! But we haven’t got anybody but that poor woman; and a lunatic is never very gay, especially this one.”

“Humph! you don’t know how to judge people. I don’t say that these peddlers are scoundrels, but——”

“But what?”

“Lock your door tight to-night—do you hear, Lucas?”

“Yes, Monsieur Dupré, yes, I hear,” replied Lucas, whose hilarity suddenly vanished, and who became pale and perturbed, while Dupré returned slowly to his master’s presence.

The old man and Gervais were talking with Monsieur Gerval; the other young man replied only by monosyllables to the questions that were put to him.

“My brother is a little serious,” said tall Gervais to his host, in an undertone. “The trouble is, that he is jealous, he’s afraid that his sweetheart has forgotten him in the two years that he has been away, and that disturbs him.”

“I can understand that, but you don’t seem to have the same anxiety!”

“I? morbleu! woman never worried me! I’m a rake, I am! I snap my fingers at

them all, and I am capable of——”

“Hush, my son,” said the old man, interrupting him abruptly; “you talk a little too freely; excuse him, monsieur; you see he’s been a soldier.”

“Aha! you have been in the army, have you?”

“Yes, to be sure I have; and when there’s any fighting to be done, I am always on hand; eh, father?”

“Oh! to be sure! You are a wrong-headed youngster! anybody can see that!”

Catherine appeared and announced that supper was served in the next room.

“Let us adjourn to the table, messieurs,” said Monsieur Gerval, escorting the newcomers to the dining-room. They took their seats, the old peddler beside his host. Dupré, as a very old servant, who had become his master’s friend, always ate at his table; he took his place, but Monsieur Gerval noticed that there was another plate beside him.

“For whom is this place, Dupré?” asked Monsieur Gerval.

“It is for our young lady, monsieur, or for her daughter, if either of them should come.”

“You know very well, my friend, that they are asleep now; Constance isn’t in the habit of sitting up so late.”

“She isn’t asleep, monsieur, for I heard a noise in her room.”

The old man cast a glance at his two companions, then addressed his host:

“You have ladies in your house? If we prevent them from coming to the table, we will go up to our room at once.”

“No, indeed! I have only a young woman and a child. The poor mother, alas! is bereft of her reason. She is an unfortunate creature, who has a too loving heart.”

“I am sorry for her!”

“Let us drink to her health, messieurs,” said tall Gervais, filling his glass and his neighbor’s.

“That fellow doesn’t stand much on ceremony,” thought Dupré, as he glanced at the peddler, who took the bottle himself; “the devil! he would exhaust our cellar in short order.”

The old man glanced at his oldest son from time to time; he seemed displeased to see him drink so often, and reproached him for not being more temperate.

“You see, our host’s wine is delicious,” replied Gervais; “and you know that I am a good judge, father.”

“Do not spare it,” said Monsieur Gerval; “it will give you strength to continue your journey to-morrow.”

“With pleasure, my dear monsieur; I am inclined to crook my elbow a bit.”

Dupré made a wry face; it seemed to him that Monsieur Gervais used some very peculiar expressions, and the more he drank, the less reserve he manifested. Honest Gerval excused it, and was much amused by the joviality of the peddler, which did not seem to please the old man so much.

“Why don’t you drink, Jean?” said Gervais, nudging his neighbor; “you’re a sad fellow! And you, my dear and honored father; you make eyes at me that shine like salt cellars! Morbleu! I am the only one of the family that knows how to laugh; eh, monsieur?—Monsieur de Gerval, your health and your family’s and your lunatic’s; and yours, you old fox, who look at us as if we’d come from Arabia Petræa.—Here’s everybody’s health! I am not stingy!”

“Excuse him, monsieur,” the old man said to Dupré, “but when he has drunk a little, he doesn’t know what he says.”

Dupré frowned and made no reply.

“I don’t know what I say!” cried Gervais; “ah! ten thousand dogs! you think that, do you, my dear father? Well! you lie like the blockhead you are! Isn’t that so, Jean? isn’t he a blockhead?”

The old man rose in a rage.

“If it weren’t for the respect that I owe to our host,” he said, “I’d punish you for your insolence; but I take pity on the situation you’re in; come with me, and let us not keep monsieur from retiring any longer.”

“That’s so, that’s so, my dear father; I rather think I have been talking nonsense, and it’s more prudent to go to bed; meanwhile I ask you for your blessing.”

As he said this, Gervais approached the old man, who pushed him away, and bade Monsieur Gerval good-night, apologizing again for his oldest son’s conduct.

Lucas took candles and was about to escort the strangers to the room set apart for them, when they heard a noise in the courtyard. The peddlers expressed surprise and Dupré ran to the window to look out; he saw Adeline, dressed in a simple déshabillé, holding a light in her hand and walking excitedly through the drifts of snow in the courtyard.

“It is she, monsieur,” said Dupré to his master; “it’s very surprising that she has left her room so late.”

“Is that the poor woman?” asked the old man.

“Pardieu! I want to see the mad woman!” cried tall Gervais; “I am curious to know whether or not she is pretty.”

He ran at once to the window but Adeline had already returned to her room.

“Good-night, messieurs,” said Gerval to the strangers; “I will see you tomorrow before you leave.”

The peddlers went up to the second floor, Lucas left them a light, and hastened down to his room, which adjoined the kitchen, taking care to barricade the door, from top to bottom, as Dupré had advised.

The latter, left alone with his master, for the cook had already retired, communicated to Monsieur Gerval his observations on the subject of the strangers.

“You must agree, monsieur,” he said, “that that tall fellow has the look of a vagabond. His way of talking and of behaving, his lack of respect toward his father——”

“What do you expect? He had had a little too much to drink!”

“His peculiar expressions——”

“He has been in the army.”

“Oh! that isn’t the language of a soldier.—God grant, my dear master, that you do not repent the hospitality you have given to these people!”

“What are you afraid of?”

“I don’t know, but everything about them looks suspicious to me; even the silence of that other one, whose sinister expression does not indicate an honest heart.”

“Nonsense, Dupré! calm your excitement and go to bed. A night is soon passed.”

“Yes, when you sleep! but it is very long sometimes. What pleases me is that my room is next to yours; if you hear any noise, you will call me instantly, won’t you, monsieur?”

“Yes, my good Dupré; go now and don’t be frightened.”

Dupré left his master regretfully; the latter went to bed in perfect confidence, and soon forgot in sleep his old servant’s words.

Dupré’s room was on the first floor, adjoining Monsieur Gerval’s; but his door opened on the landing, from which one flight of stairs led up to the second floor and another down to the courtyard.

Tormented by an anxiety which he could not overcome, Dupré resolved to

keep awake, and to try to clear up his suspicions. He looked from his window at the strangers' apartment; the light was still burning.

"They have not gone to bed," he said; "if I only could hear them talking! I will try."

He left his room noiselessly, without a light, and went up to the second floor; he stopped at the door of the peddlers' room; but he remembered then that there was a small dressing-room between the hall and the bedroom, which made it impossible to hear what they said, from the landing. Dupré was about to go down again, when he remembered that the top of the chimney of the room where the strangers were was directly in front of the round window in the loft. He at once went up to the loft, walking with the utmost precaution. He opened the round window very softly, crawled out on his stomach, and placed his ear near the top of the flue; then, thanks to his nearness to the floor below, he easily heard the following conversation:

"You are incorrigible, Lampin; your infernal sottishness came near betraying us a hundred times."

"Bah! bah; what had we to fear, after all? There's nobody in the house but three old blockheads, a fool, a mad woman and a child! That's a very terrible lot, isn't it? If you had taken my advice, once we were in the house, we would have acted without disguise. For my part, I would look after the old Crœsus and his servant."

"It is much better to act without risk, and to be able to effect our retreat without disorder. You may be sure that, before bringing you here, I made inquiries about the people in the house. The owner is very rich, he helps everybody."

"Well, he must help us too, the old Crœsus!"

"He must have much money here; I know that he received remittances from his farmers a week ago. All that money must be in his room; we can easily get in there, take possession of the treasure, and escape through the mad woman's room; for the gate is very strong, and very securely fastened, and we should have much difficulty in forcing it."

"Very good! But I saw bars at the ground floor window looking on the woods. Is that the way that you propose to take us out, my most honored father?"

"You idiot! Do you suppose that I haven't thought of everything? Our comrades have orders to file the bars, and I told them that they could work without fear, as the woman who occupies the room would watch them without saying a word."

“Bravo! That is a most excellent idea; isn’t it, Edouard? Speak up, you infernal dreamer!”

“Yes, yes, the plan is well devised.”

“It is very lucky that it pleases you! If only that old steward who looked askance at us doesn’t disturb our arrangements.”

“Woe to him, if he should dare!—We will let our comrades in; then we shall be in force; and those who make trouble for us will soon be reduced to silence!”

“That’s the talk! strong measures.”

“Luckily I was moderate at table; if I had imitated you, Lampin, we should have betrayed ourselves.”

“What the devil! you played the old man so well that I nearly choked with laughter. But if I did drink, it only increased my courage; there is gold to be got here, and that gives me nerve, my colleagues. Let’s see, how do we distribute our functions?”

“We will let our friends in, in a few moments; we must give these old men time to get to sleep. We will leave Edouard on guard with the mad woman, to see that she doesn’t lock the door of her room in a fit of delirium; for that would cut off our retreat. Our comrades will stand guard, one over the gardener, the other over the cook; and you, Lampin, will go with me in search of the money.”

“That’s well arranged; this good fellow cannot complain of having a too dangerous post; to stay with a woman and a child, both asleep! What prowess!”

“Very true, but they mustn’t wake; if they should make the slightest sound—remember, Edouard, that our safety, our lives, are at stake.”

“All right, I understand.”

“And so do I,” said Dupré to himself, noiselessly withdrawing his head; “I know enough;—the villains! I was not mistaken! We have given hospitality to brigands! O my God! inspire me, so that I may save my master and that poor woman!”

The old servant crept along the roof and reëntered the loft. Despite all he could do to revive his spirits and his courage, his legs trembled, he could hardly hold himself erect, and his imagination, thrown into confusion by all that he had heard, saw nothing but scenes of blood and death. Dupré was sixty-five years old; at that age, a man is a long time coming to a decision; and in dangerous crises, the time that he loses in making up his mind as to what he shall do makes the danger more imminent.

Dupré felt his way through the loft. Should he wake his master or Lucas? But

the gardener did not wake easily, he would have to make much noise at his door, and in the silence of the night, the slightest sound would be heard by the robbers and would arouse their suspicions. Catherine was locked into her kitchen, and would be of no assistance to them. But it was the young woman's apartment through which the comrades of the brigands were to enter the house; it was most essential to close that entrance, after removing Constance and her daughter from the room.

This plan seemed the wisest to the old servant. He decided to go downstairs, but he trembled and shuddered as he placed his foot on the staircase. If the villains should come out of their room and meet him, he would be lost! He listened before venturing upon each step; at the slightest sound he stopped. He was about to pass the door of the second floor; but he heard voices and footsteps. The door was thrown open, and Dupré hurried back to the loft.

The pretended peddlers had heard a noise above their heads; the old man's heavy step had made the boards creak and had disturbed the silence of the night. Dufresne left the room first; he held a torch in one hand and a dagger in the other. Lampin followed, and they entered the loft just as the old servant was crawling under a bundle of straw.

"We are betrayed!" said Dufresne; "someone has been listening to us."

He instantly plunged his dagger into the old man's bosom, as he clasped his hands to implore mercy. Dupré expired without uttering a sound; his blood inundated the floor, and Lampin covered the ill-fated servant's body with straw.

"Let us go down," said Dufresne; "and as suspicion has been aroused, let us make haste to act!"

"What has happened?" asked Edouard, who had remained on the landing as a sentinel.

"Nothing," said Lampin; "only there is one less prying fool."

"Let us go at once to the mad woman's room; our friends should be at their post; let us not leave them any longer cooling their heels in the open air."

The brigands went down to the ground floor; the key was in the door of Adeline's room, and they entered. A lamp on the hearth half lighted the room, the window of which opened on the forest. The child's little bed was placed beside the mother's, the curtains of which were tightly drawn. Well assured that she who was in the bed was not awake to spy upon their acts, Dufresne went at once to open the shutters, and admitted his companions, who had remained by the window after sawing the bars.

"All goes well," said Dufresne; "let us leave these shutters open, and there

will be nothing to interfere with our flight. Edouard, remain here; above all things, no pity if she wakes.—You, my friends, come with me, and I will show you your posts; then Lampin and I will look after the rest.”

During Dufresne's speech, Lampin turned up his sleeves, drew his weapons, and examined the point of his dagger; a tigerish smile gleamed in his eyes, and his hideous face, animated by wine and the anticipation of pillage, seemed to bear with joy the impress of crime.

The four brigands departed from the room and Edouard was left alone. On the alert for the slightest noise, he walked constantly from the window to the bed; he listened to see whether anyone passed in the woods, then returned to put his ear to the curtains which concealed the young woman from him. His eyes turned toward the child's crib; she was not in it. Adeline, more excited than usual, and disturbed by the dull sound she had heard outside her shutters, had taken her daughter and laid her across her breast, when she threw herself fully dressed on her bed. Curious to see the mad woman, Edouard was about to put aside the curtain when a noise from the woods attracted his attention, and he returned to the window. He heard footsteps trampling over the dry branches and crunching the half-frozen snow. The noise drew near, and he heard voices. If they were gendarmes sent in pursuit of them, if they should see the window with the broken bars—Edouard trembled; he softly closed the shutters so that no one could see into the room. He hardly breathed. Despite his precautions, Adeline had waked; she abruptly opened her curtains, half rising.

“Is it you? is it you?” she cried in a loud voice.

“This miserable creature will betray us,” said Edouard to himself; “her voice will attract those travellers in this direction.—Well! I must do it!”

He ran to the bed, dagger in hand; he was about to strike, when he recognized his wife and child.

A cry of dismay, of horror, issued from the mouth of the miserable outcast, who dropped the murderous steel and stood motionless before the woman he had been about to strike. But that terrible cry had found an echo in Adeline's soul; she recognized her husband's voice; those same accents which had destroyed her reason once more revolutionized her whole being; she tried to collect her ideas; it was as if she were waking from a hideous dream; she saw Edouard, recognized him, and rushed into his arms with a cry of joy.

“Edouard! here, by my side!” cried Adeline, gazing at him lovingly. “My dear, how does it happen? Ah! I do not know what to think! My head is on fire!”

“Come,” said Edouard; “give me the child; let us fly, let us fly from this place, or you are lost.”

“Why should we fly? What danger threatens you? Have you not suffered enough? Does man's justice pursue you still?”

“Yes, yes; and you yourself are in danger from the rage of the brigands! Listen,—do you hear those shrieks in the house? They are murdering an old man without pity; come, I tell you, or they will kill you before my eyes! Oh! do not refuse me! I am a monster, a villain, but I long to save you.”

Adeline allowed herself to be led away by her husband; she took her child in her arms and was about to follow him, when the shutters were violently thrown open, while the bell at the gate rang loudly.

A man appeared in the window, and prepared to leap into the room, calling to his companion:

“Here’s a breach; this way, comrade, this way! There are villains in the citadel; let us go in and we’ll give them a hiding, ten thousand cartridges! Forward!”

At sight of the stranger, Edouard, bewildered and beside himself with fear, had no doubt that he had come to arrest him and his companions; seeking to avoid the punishment that awaited him, he dropped Adeline’s hand and pushed her away when she clung to him.

“You are saved,” he said; “let me alone, do not follow me; adieu, adieu forever!”

He rushed out through the door at the end of the room, reached the courtyard, succeeded in climbing over the gate and fled into the woods. At the same moment Jacques and Sans-Souci entered Adeline’s room by the window; she, exhausted by all the shocks to which her mind had been exposed, fell unconscious at the moment that her husband disappeared.

XXXVII

WHO GOODMAN GERVAL WAS

“Oh! what good fortune! Can I believe my eyes?” cried Jacques as he ran to the assistance of the unfortunate young woman whom he saw on the floor. “This woman—it is she, Sans-Souci! Come, come and look at her.”

“Why, yes! sacrebleu! It’s her! We’ve found her at last! Didn’t I tell you that a man should never despair of anything?”

“And her daughter,—see, there she is; yes, I recognize her too.”

“But when I opened those shutters, I thought I saw a man; he has escaped.—The devil! what a noise! Do you hear? somebody is calling for help! Stay with her, but give me one of your pistols.”

Jacques gave Sans-Souci one of his weapons; and he, with the pistol in one hand, and his stick in the other, rushed in the direction of the shrieks; he went up to the first floor, entered a room the door of which was broken down, and saw an old man on his knees, imploring the pity of a miscreant, while another miscreant laden with bags of money was preparing for flight. Sans-Souci discharged his pistol at Dufresne, who was on the point of striking Monsieur Gerval; the monster fell at the old man’s feet; his comrade threw down his bags and tried to escape; but Sans-Souci did not give him time; he overtook him on the stairway and dealt him such a lusty blow on the head that Lampin staggered, rolled down several stairs, struck his head against the wall, and expired, vomiting the most horrible imprecations.

“You are my savior! my liberator!” cried Monsieur Gerval; while Sans-Souci relieved him of the cords that bound him.

“It is true, my dear monsieur, that it was high time; but perhaps there are other brigands in your house, and I will complete my inspection.”

“I will go with you, I will go with you, monsieur,” said the old man; “I will be your guide. Alas! I do not see my faithful Dupré.”

At that moment they heard a pistol shot. Sans-Souci descended the stairs four at a time, and joined Jacques at the instant that he blew out the brains of one of the brigands who was trying to fly through Adeline’s room; while his comrades, being more prudent, escaped by the same road that Edouard had followed.

The report of firearms, the uproar and the shrieks had awakened Catherine

and Lucas; but only in obedience to their master's voice did they dare to leave their rooms. Then they went all together, with lights, to Adeline's room. She was just recovering her senses and was gazing with renewed surprise at Jacques, who stood by her.

"My brother, my friend, have I found you too?" she said at last; "I do not know if it is a dream, but so many events have succeeded one another! Just now Edouard was with me."

"Edouard! Come to yourself, be calm, my dear Adeline, and have no fear; the brigands are punished."

Adeline made no reply but her eyes still sought her husband.

"Victory!" cried Sans-Souci; "I killed two of them, for my part."

"We owe you our lives, gallant strangers," said Monsieur Gerval, approaching Jacques; "how can I ever pay my debt to you?"

"You have evidently taken care of my sister and my niece," Jacques answered the old man, "and I am still in your debt."

"His sister! his niece!" exclaimed the good man and his servants.

"First of all, let us finish inspecting the house," said Sans-Souci; "there may be some more of the scoundrels hidden in some corner."

"But Dupré doesn't appear! I am terribly afraid that he has fallen a victim to his zeal."

"Let us put our friends in a place of safety, and go and look!"

Monsieur Gerval, Adeline, her daughter and Catherine were taken to a room of which the door was securely fastened, and where they had nothing to fear; then Jacques and Sans-Souci began to inspect the house, guided by Lucas, who trembled like a leaf, but dared not refuse to accompany them. The name of Edouard, which Adeline had pronounced, was an enigma to Jacques, who dared not harbor the suspicions that came to his mind. They examined every part of the house without finding anybody, except the body of the unfortunate Dupré in the attic; after making sure that there was no sign of life about him, Sans-Souci, aided by Lucas, took him down to the ground floor, where the faithful servant's remains were destined to stay until the last rites should be performed over them.

While Sans-Souci and the gardener attended to this melancholy duty, Jacques entered Monsieur Gerval's apartment. A low groaning came from one corner of the room. Dufresne was still alive; but the wound that he had received was mortal and the villain struggled in vain against death. Jacques put his lantern to the dying man's face and an exclamation of surprise escaped him. Dufresne also recognized Edouard's brother; a horrible smile animated his almost lifeless eyes;

he mustered what little strength he had left, to speak for the last time.

“I am dying; but if you have killed all those who were with me, you have killed your brother. Tell his wife, tell that Adeline who despised me, that her husband, after escaping from the galleys, has become by my advice a robber and an assassin.”

Dufresne breathed his last after uttering these words, well content to have done someone an injury at the last moment of his life.

Jacques stood for some moments frozen with horror by the dead body of the man who had wrecked the happiness of his family. But, overcoming his dismay, he determined to make sure of the horrible truth; he descended the stairs, halted beside Lampin’s body and held the lantern to his face, shuddering with apprehension. It was not he! Jacques breathed a little more freely, and went down to the ground floor, where the man was whom he himself had killed; and although he was very sure that it was not his brother, he proceeded to satisfy himself beyond a doubt.

“Thank heaven!” he said after examining the brigand’s features, “my hand is not wet with my brother’s blood! He has escaped. God grant that we may never see him again! Let us forget a monster who dishonors us, and devote all our care to the two unfortunate creatures whom I have found again at last.”

But before returning to Adeline, Jacques carefully examined all the pockets of all the brigands, especially Dufresne’s, fearing that some paper relating to Edouard would be found upon them. He made sure that they had only weapons and money about them, and then in a more tranquil frame of mind returned to Adeline.

The occupants of the house had discovered with the most intense delight that the young woman had recovered her reason; and while a thorough search was being made in his house, Monsieur Gerval told Adeline how he had found her and taken care of her at Paris, then brought her to his estate in the country; and lastly, how long a time she had lived under his roof.

Adeline threw herself at her protector’s knees. She realized now all that she owed him, although honest Gerval, in his narrative, had spoken only of the pleasure it had given him to oblige her, passing lightly over all that he had done for her.

Adeline then inquired about the events of the preceding night. They told her that brigands had made their way into the house, and that except for the unexpected arrival of two travellers, one of whom appeared to be her brother, they would have been pillaged by the robbers.

She shuddered; she remembered how Edouard had appeared before her, his excitement, his terror at the appearance of the strangers; she dared not continue her questions, but she anxiously awaited Jacques's return. He appeared at last.

"Some of the villains have escaped," he said, approaching Adeline, upon whom he bestowed a glance of which she understood the meaning. "Those who were killed well deserve their fate."

"Morbleu!" said Sans-Souci; "they all well deserve to be broken on the wheel! I have only one regret, and that is that any of them got away."

"And my faithful Dupré," said Monsieur Gerval; "you tell me nothing of him."

"Alas, my dear monsieur, your old servant was, it seems, the first victim of those monsters; he is no more!"

"The villains! to murder an old man! Ah, me! if I had heeded his representations—poor Dupré, my imprudence was the cause of your death! I shall reproach myself for it always. This house has become hateful to me and I propose to leave it to-morrow!"

Monsieur Gerval shed tears over the fate of his old servant; Catherine mingled her tears with his, and one and all tried to console the good man, who blamed himself for the loss of his faithful companion.

The dawn surprised the inhabitants of the cottage in this situation. Monsieur Gerval consented to take a little rest, while Lucas went to notify the authorities of the neighboring village of the occurrences of the night. Catherine, by her master's orders, made preparations for their departure, and Adeline promised the old man to tell him before long the story of her misfortunes.

Jacques found an opportunity to be alone with Adeline. She burned to question him, but dared not break the silence. He divined her grief, her tremor, her most secret thoughts.

"Dufresne is no more," he said to her; "the scoundrel has at last received the reward of his crimes."

"Dufresne? What, was Dufresne among those robbers? Unhappy creature that I am! there is no doubt that he had led him on to the last stages of crime; Edouard was——"

"Silence! never let this horrible secret be known to any but ourselves," said Jacques in a low voice; "the miserable wretch has escaped; let him drag out his shameful existence in other lands; it is too late for him to repent, and his presence would be to me, yes, to yourself, the height of misery. Forget forever a man who did not deserve your love. Everything combines to make it your

bounden duty. The affection which one retains for a creature so vile, so wretched, is a weakness, a cowardice, unworthy of a noble and generous heart; live for your daughter, for me, for all those who love you, and days of peace and happiness will dawn again for us.”

Adeline threw herself into Jacques’s arms and wiped away the tears that flowed from her eyes.

“My friend,” she said to him, “I will follow your advice, and you will be content with me.”

The peasants of the neighborhood, who had learned of the melancholy events that had happened in the house of their benefactor, hastened to see him; and the stone over Dupré’s grave indicated the deplorable way in which the faithful servant had met his end.

Monsieur Gerval at last inquired the name of his preserver.

“My name is Jacques, monsieur,” said he, “formerly a soldier, now a farm hand.”

“Jacques,” said the old man, “I bear the same name as you. I gave it also to my godson, a little rascal who would be about your age now, and whom I have sought in vain in Paris.”

Jacques looked with more attention at him whose life he had saved; he seemed to recognize in his venerable face the features of a person who had always manifested the most affectionate interest in him in his youth. A thousand memories thronged his mind; he could hardly find strength to ask the good man his name, to which he had paid no attention in the excitement of the events of the night.

“My name is Gerval,” said the old man, scrutinizing him in his turn with evident emotion; “I used to be in business, and I had a large factory in Paris.”

“Is it possible? You are Jacques Gerval, my godfather, whom I used to love so dearly?”

Jacques leaped on the neck of the old man, who embraced him affectionately and shed tears of pleasure at finding his dear godson; while all the witnesses of the scene wept in sympathy.

“Ten thousand squadrons! how people keep finding each other!” said Sans-Souci; “this is a recognition that I didn’t expect, by a long way, nor you either, comrade.”

“My dear Jacques,” said Monsieur Gerval, “I have looked for you in all directions; I was crazy with longing to see you again. Your escapade of long ago caused me much pain, for I was innocently the cause of it. The name of Jacques

brought you ill luck, my poor godson; it had an influence over your whole life; your mother neglected you, your father dared not utter your name before her; I alone was kind to you, but that was not enough for your sensitive heart. You left your father's roof, and I swore to make up for the injustice of your parents if I could ever find you again. Here you are at last! I recognize you perfectly now! These scars have not changed the expression of your features. We will not part again, Jacques; you must close my eyes; you are my child, my only heir; from this moment my fortune is yours; make use of it to confer blessings upon all those whom you love."

Jacques embraced his old godfather once more; he could not credit his good fortune.

"Dear Adeline," he said at last, "if I am rich, you shall never know want again; that is the sweetest pleasure that I shall owe to wealth."

Adeline and Ermance were wrapped in the old man's arms in turn.

"So they are your sister and your niece?" he said to Jacques; "are you married?"

"No," he replied with some embarrassment; "they are my brother's wife and daughter."

"Your brother—why, that is so,—what has become of him?"

"He is no more. Alas! I no longer have a brother, and she has no husband."

"I see that your tears are flowing again, my friends; I have unintentionally renewed your grief; forgive me; perhaps the memory of Edouard is painful to you; but I know nothing about your misfortunes; tell me of them, and then I will try to make you forget them."

Jacques undertook to tell the old man a part of Adeline's sorrows, but he did not make known the whole of his brother's conduct, and Monsieur Gerval believed that Edouard had died at Paris in destitution, after abandoning his wife and child, and that it was the knowledge of her husband's unhappy end that had disturbed Adeline's reason.

The excellent old man felt more than ever inclined to love that young woman, a model for wives and mothers, and he was determined to become acquainted with the people at the farm, who had shown so much affection for Jacques and Adeline.

"That is very easy," said Sans-Souci; "if you want to make them all happy, you must go to the farm. Sacrebleu! when they see madame and my comrade again, I am sure that Louise and Guillot will be happier than they would if their house was a château."

“Let us go to the farm,” said honest Gerval; “let us all go there; the journey will do us good; it will divert my dear Adeline’s thoughts a little, and it will amuse her little Ermance. Jacques will be able to help in his turn the people who helped him in his need, and we, my poor Catherine, we will try, among the people at the farm, to think less of our old friend Dupré’s death.”

Monsieur Gerval’s plan made them all happy. Catherine was delighted to leave a house which reminded her of melancholy events, and in which she felt that she could never again sleep peacefully. Lucas asked his master’s permission to leave his garden, in order to be his servant; the old man consented and everybody prepared for departure.

The house in the Vosges was rented to peasants, who established an inn there, most acceptable to people who travelled through those mountains; Monsieur Gerval and his servants left the house, their hearts depressed by the memory of Dupré. Jacques and Adeline turned their eyes away from the spot which had witnessed Edouard’s infamy, and Sans-Souci looked back with pride at the apartment where he had saved an old man’s life and slain two villains.

XXXVIII

THE SMALL GATE IN THE GARDEN ONCE MORE

Sans-Souci rode beside the postilion, despite Monsieur Gerval's request that he should take a seat in the carriage; but he was fully determined to act as scout, fearing mishaps on account of the deep ruts and the wretched roads. His joy was so great at the thought of returning to the farm with Madame Murville, that he was unwilling to depend upon any other than himself to avert such accidents as might happen to them on the way.

During the journey, Jacques told his old godfather of the adventures of his youth; the story of the philters and the magnetism amused honest Gerval and extorted a smile from Adeline.

“What happy chance brought you to our house so opportunely, with your brave companion, to save us from the knives of the robbers?” old Catherine asked Jacques.

“A few days after my dear Adeline's departure,” said Jacques, “as she did not return to the farm, and as I feared, with good reason, that some unfortunate accident must have happened to her, I started off with Sans-Souci, determined to travel all over France if necessary, to find the mother and child. We went to Paris and stayed there several days, but all to no purpose; I could not learn anything as to the fate of those whom I sought. After going back to the farm to bid honest Guillot and his wife good-bye, we started off again, and we visited one after another all the provinces of France, stopping in the smallest towns, in the most modest hamlets, making the most minute inquiries everywhere, and always disappointed in our hopes. More than a year passed and our search had come to nothing. But Sans-Souci, whose good spirits never fail, sustained my courage and revived my hopes when he saw that my grief and my sadness increased. We at last turned our steps toward this province, with no expectation of being more fortunate here. After travelling through part of Franche-Comté, we entered the Vosges. As we were not afraid of robbers, we often travelled at night, and even more often slept on the ground, as we did not always find shelter on our road. Yesterday, however, the weather was so bad, and the snow had blocked the roads so completely, that we lost ourselves in the woods. I was numb with cold and almost exhausted, when Sans-Souci spied near at hand a fine looking house. I dared not ask hospitality, but Sans-Souci insisted upon

stopping; and we were still disputing, when we heard shrieks inside the house; then we no longer hesitated, but I rang violently at the gate. Sans-Souci discovered an open window on the ground floor, from which the bars had been removed, and we jumped into the room. Imagine my surprise and my joy when I found there the woman whom I had been looking for so long, and whom I should have left behind forever, if your cry had not drawn me into the house.”

“My dear Jacques, it was surely Providence that sent you to our help,” said Monsieur Gerval; “but the greatest miracle of all is that that event has restored our dear Adeline’s reason.”

“Well, monsieur, didn’t I tell you so?” said Catherine; “all that was needed was a violent shock, a crisis; and that is just what has happened.”

The journey was made without accident, and they arrived at Guillot’s farm. Jacques was conscious of a pleasant thrill of emotion as he passed the fields in which he had worked.

“Yonder,” he said to good Monsieur Gerval, “is the plow with which I turned up this ground, so often wet with my sweat.”

“My friend,” replied the old man, “never forget it even in the lap of prosperity, and the unfortunate will never apply to you in vain.”

A carriage drawn by four horses is a great event in a country town. The villagers, the farm hands, left their work, and the people from the farm drew near with curiosity to look at the travellers; but Sans-Souci’s joy had made itself heard already; he cracked his whip in such a way as to make the chickens fly a league, while the pigeons took refuge on the tallest chimneys.

“It’s us, it’s him, it’s her!” he shouted, as soon as he caught sight of Louise and Guillot; “give us a big feast, my friends,—cabbage soup and the light white wine! death to the rabbits and chickens!”

The villagers surrounded the carriage; Jacques, Adeline and Ermance were embraced, caressed, and made much of by everybody. Louise wept, Guillot swore aloud in his joy, and the old man was deeply moved by the sincere affection which they all manifested for his children; for that was what he called Jacques, Adeline and her daughter; and they escorted him in triumph to the farm, where everything was soon turned topsy-turvy to celebrate the return of those whom they had not expected to see again.

Amid the joy, the confusion, and the preparations for the feast, Sans-Souci ran from one to another, tried to help everybody, broke plates, upset saucepans, and exclaimed at every instant:

“You don’t know all; Jacques is rich now, and this excellent old man is his

godfather; we saved his life; we killed the rascals! I will tell you all about it.”

“I see,” said Guillot, “things seem to be going pretty well; but what about our friend Jacques’s brother?”

“Hush!” said Sans-Souci, putting his finger to his lips; “if you have the misfortune to speak of him, gayety will disappear, tears will come back, and your supper will be for the great Turk; so take my advice, and turn your tongue over for an hour in your mouth, rather than say another stupid word on that subject.”

“All right,” said Guillot, “I’ll chew my cud at the table before I speak.”

Life at the farm delighted Monsieur Gerval; he drove all about the neighborhood, admiring the charming sites and the fertile fields which surrounded him.

“Morgué, monsieur,” said Guillot, “if you knew how pretty it all is in summer! Bless my soul, you don’t see anything now! but if our fields are worth more, if our farm brings in more, we owe it all to our friend Jacques; in two years he did more and thought of more things than I could ever do in six; he’s worth three hands all by himself. It is a pity he’s rich now, for it robs me of a fine workman.”

“My dear Jacques,” said the old man, “you must love this country, these fields, which have witnessed your labors, and it would be cruel in me to take you away from here. We will settle in this neighborhood, my friend, and I leave it to you to purchase some suitable estate here-about; arrange it to suit yourself; I am too old to attend to business matters, and I rely upon you to make a wise choice.”

Jacques joyfully accepted the commission entrusted to him. He already had a plan in his head, and on the day following his arrival at the farm, impelled by a secret hope, he went early in the morning to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. Trembling with emotion, he approached his father’s house, that spot for which he had always sighed. His dearest wish was to pass the rest of his life in that house, which recalled memories which were both pleasant and painful.

When he reached the gate, he saw a placard pasted on the wall; he read: “This house for sale or rent.”

“It’s ours!” he cried. “I am going to live again in the house where I passed my childhood; I ran away from it at fifteen years of age, I shall return to it at thirty; God grant that I may never leave it again! Adeline, I am sure, will be delighted to return to it; it was here, she told me, that she passed the happiest days of her life; even if this place does remind her of a man she loved too well, at all events when they lived here he was still worthy of her.”

Jacques rang at the gate; no one answered, but a neighbor advised him to go to the notary's, which was almost opposite. The notary was the same man who had made the deeds for Edouard Murville four years before. The house, having fallen into the hands of creditors, had belonged to several owners in succession. The present owner almost never lived in it and was very desirous to get rid of it. Jacques inquired the price and promised to return the next day to conclude the bargain; he dared not do it without consulting Monsieur Gerval. He hastened back to the farm, and the old man saw by his pleased expression that he had found a house which suited him.

"You will recognize it," said Jacques, "for you often went there in the old days; it is the house that belonged to my father."

"And you didn't conclude the bargain? Well! well! I see that I must go myself and settle the business."

And the next morning the old man set out in his carriage with his dear godson. He drove to the notary's and purchased the estate in the name of Jacques, knowing that he did not intend to bear any other name; but honest Gerval asked no explanation of that resolution, because he guessed a part of Edouard's misconduct.

"Here, my boy," he said to Jacques, as he handed him the deed; "it is high time that I should make you a present, to recompense you for having given you such a wretched name. This estate is yours, and my little Jacques is at home in the house from which his name caused him to run away long ago."

Jacques embraced the old man, and they returned to the farm for Adeline and her daughter.

"Did I misjudge your heart," Jacques asked his sister-in-law, "in thinking that you would be glad to find yourself back in the dear old house at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges?"

"No, my friend," replied Adeline; "I have been too happy there not to wish to pass the rest of my life there; happy memories will sometimes mingle with my sad thoughts; I will banish from my mind all that he has done elsewhere than there, and I will try to remember only the days of his affection for me; then I shall at least be able to weep for him without blushing."

The Guillot family learned with delight that their friends were not to leave the country; for the road from Villeneuve-Saint-Georges to the farm was a pleasant walk, and they promised one another to take it often in the fine weather.

Four days after their arrival, our travellers started for the new abode in which they proposed to establish themselves. Adeline's eyes were wet with tears when

she stood once more in that house, when she saw again those gardens which had witnessed the first months of her married life—such pleasant months, which passed so quickly, never to return!

Catherine took possession of the kitchen, Lucas of the garden and of the post of concierge. Monsieur Gerval chose a room between Jacques and Adeline, whom he liked to have near him; and little Ermance remained with her mother, to cheer her by her prattle, to charm away her melancholy by her caresses, and to mingle some hopes with her memories.

Sans-Souci wished to resume his labors at the farm, but Monsieur Gerval and Jacques remonstrated.

“You saved my life,” said the old man, “and I don’t want you to leave me.”

“You shared my trials and my adversity,” said Jacques, “and you must share my fortune; everything is common between us.”

“Sacrebleu!” said Sans-Souci, passing his hand over his eyes, “these people do whatever they please with me. I will stay with you, that’s all right, but only on condition that I shall be at liberty to go to walk when you have company, and that I shan’t sit at table with Madame Adeline; for a man should be respectful to his superiors, and I am as stupid as a goose in society.”

“You shall go to walk as much as you please,” said the old man; “you shall hunt and fish, and smoke if that will give you pleasure; but you are going to sit at table with us, because a brave man is out of place nowhere.”

“All right, ten thousand cartridges! I see I must submit to that too.”

No more misadventures, no more storms, no more misfortunes; tranquil days had dawned at last for the family at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. Adeline’s unhappiness had become a gentle melancholy, which the graces and caresses of her daughter beguiled and made endurable. Little Ermance grew and improved; her features became sweet and attractive; her voice was as soft as her mother’s, and her sensitive and kindly heart never turned away the unfortunate. Jacques, proud of his niece, had lost a little of his brusque manner since he had lived in the bosom of his family. Sans-Souci still swore, and would have thrown himself into the fire for any of his friends. Old Gerval was made doubly happy at the sight of the good that he himself did, and that Jacques did. In short, one and all enjoyed a peaceable life, and the people at the farm were often visited by their friends from the village.

A single thing marred Sans-Souci’s happiness; it was that Jacques no longer wore the decoration that he had won on the battle-field.

“Why don’t you wear it any more?” he would say to him, when they were

alone; “what can prevent you? Morbleu! you act like a fool with your resolutions.”

“My brother disgraced our name.”

“Well! was it to you or your name that they gave the cross?”

“It’s out of respect for that honorable reward, that I deprive myself of the pleasure of wearing it.”

“But when you go by the name of Jacques simply——”

“That doesn’t matter; I know none the less that Edouard was a—Why, I tell you, that ghastly thought would make me blush for that symbol of honor; I shall never wear it again.”

“You are wrong.”

“That may be; I am and I shall always be a man of honor; but I have no pride left when I think of my brother’s shame.”

The tranquillity enjoyed by the family at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges was disturbed by a melancholy event which they still believed to be far away: honest Gerval fell sick and died, and the zealous care of all those who surrounded him was unavailing to save him.

“My children,” he said to them in his last moments, “I am sorry to leave you, but at all events my mind is at rest concerning your future. I hoped to live longer among you, but fate wills otherwise and I must submit. Think of me, but don’t weep.”

The old man left his whole fortune to Jacques and Adeline. He had thirty thousand francs a year, a large part of which was used in assisting the unfortunate. Old Catherine survived her master only a few months, and those two events caused deep sadness among the occupants of Jacques’s house for a long while.

But time is always successful in calming the bitterest regrets; it triumphs over everything; it is the Lethe wherein the memories of our troubles and our pleasures alike are drowned.

Years passed. Ermance was nine years old; she was Jacques’s delight, and her mother’s consolation. In order not to part with her, they caused teachers to come to the village to begin her education.

“Ten thousand carbines!” said Sans-Souci as he looked at the little girl; “that little face will turn a devilish lot of heads! Wit, beauty, charm, talent, a kind heart,—she will have everything, sacrebleu!”

“Yes,” said Jacques, “but she will never be able to mention her father.”

“Oh! mon Dieu! there are many people in the same plight; that won't prevent your niece from rousing passions.”

“Morbleu! those same passions are what cause most of the unhappiness of life; I would much prefer that she should not rouse any.”

“She won't ask your permission for that, comrade.”

Adeline was proud of her daughter, who, being blest with the most happy disposition, also made rapid progress in everything that she was taught.

“Dear Ermance!” her mother would say as she gazed at her, “may you be happier than your parents!”

At such times, Adeline would devote a moment's thought to Edouard, whom she believed to have died long since in destitution and despair. “Ah!” she would say sometimes to Jacques, when their eyes expressed the same thought, “if only I could think that he died repentant, I feel that I should have some slight consolation.”

Jacques would make no reply, but he would call Ermance and take her to Adeline, that the sight of her might dispel a painful memory. Jacques did not know that a mother always sees in her child the image of the man she has loved.

One lovely summer evening, Jacques was walking to and fro pensively at the end of the garden; Ermance, not very far from her uncle, was amusing herself by plucking flowers, and Adeline, seated a few steps away on the turf, looked on in silence at the graceful movements of her daughter. Suddenly Ermance, as she ran toward a clump of rose bushes, uttered a cry of alarm and stopped abruptly. Adeline ran to her daughter; Jacques also drew near, and they both inquired what had frightened her.

“Look, look!” replied the child, pointing to the end of the garden, “look, it is still there; that face frightened me.”

Jacques and Adeline looked in the direction indicated by Ermance, and saw behind the small gate covered with boards, in the same spot where the face with moustaches had appeared long ago, a man's face gazing into the garden.

“What a strange coincidence!” said Adeline, looking at Jacques; “do you remember, my friend, that at that same spot, ten years ago, you appeared before us?”

“That is true,” said Jacques; “yes, I remember very well.”

“We must excuse Ermance's alarm, for I remember that then you frightened me terribly! That man seems to be in trouble; come, my daughter, let us go and offer help to him, and don't be afraid any more; the unfortunate should inspire pity and not fear.”

As she spoke, Adeline and Ermance approached the gate. The features of the man who stood on the other side seemed to become animated; he gazed at the young woman and her daughter, then he turned his eyes upon Jacques, passed an arm through the gate, and seemed to implore their pity. Adeline had drawn near; she scrutinized the beggar, then uttered a piteous cry, and returned to Jacques, pale, distressed, trembling, and hardly able to speak.

“I don’t know whether it is a delusion,” she said, “but that man—it seems to me—yes—look—it is he, it is——”

She could say no more. Jacques ran to the little gate, he recognized his brother, and threw the gate open. Edouard entered the garden, clad in rags and tatters, overdone by fatigue and suffering, and presenting a perfect image of misery and desperation.

“Help me, save me!” he said, dragging himself toward Jacques, who scarcely dared believe his eyes; “for God’s sake, do not turn me away!”

“Oh! let’s go away, mamma, that man frightens me!” said Ermance, clinging to her mother. Adeline, standing as still as a statue, gazed at Edouard, while tears flowed from her eyes and fell on the child’s face.

“Unhappy wretch,” said Jacques at last, “why have you come here? Do you propose to pursue us everywhere? Must your infamy inevitably follow your family and make this child blush?”

“Ah!” said Edouard, throwing himself at Jacques’s feet, “I am a miserable wretch indeed! she even hides my child from me, she shields her from her father’s glance!”

Jacques no longer had the strength to spurn him; Edouard approached Adeline and threw himself at her feet, placing his head against the ground, and sobbing piteously. When she heard the unhappy man’s groans, Ermance turned and looked at him; terror yielded to pity.

“Oh! that poor man looks very unhappy, mamma,” she said to Adeline; “he causes me pain; let me help him to get up; I don’t feel afraid of him any more.”

Thereupon Edouard seized his daughter’s hand and pressed it affectionately in his, looking up at Adeline with an expression of which she understood the meaning.

“I forgive you,” she said to him; “oh! if you had offended no one but me! but your child, my daughter, she can never mention your name.”

Jacques checked Adeline, by putting a finger to his lips. At that moment Sans-Souci ran toward them, and manifested great surprise at finding a stranger in the garden.

“What do you want of us?” said Jacques; “why do you come upon us so suddenly? what has happened?”

“Faith! comrade, I came to tell you that some gendarmes are searching the village; they are looking for a vagabond whom they recognized only a league from here, and they propose to search this house soon. I confess that I told them that it wouldn’t be any use, but *sacrebleu!* I didn’t know that——”

“Hush! hold your tongue,” said Jacques, “and don’t say a word about what you see here. Go back to the house with the child and my sister.—Go, have no fear, I will answer for everything.—*Sans-Souci*, take my sister to the house; and above all, the most absolute silence.”

Sans-Souci promised, and walked a few steps away, tremendously surprised by all that he saw. Adeline was terrified by the risks that Edouard ran, but he himself implored her to abandon him to his unhappy fate. He pressed her hand to his heart, kissed his daughter’s hand, and turned away from them, while, at a sign from his comrade, *Sans-Souci* led Adeline and Ermance toward the house.

“They have gone and we are alone,” said Jacques to his brother, when Adeline was out of sight; “are you the man they are looking for?”

“Yes; a little way from here, in a wine shop I had entered to ask for help, a man who used to be a keeper at the galleys at Toulon, happened to be drinking at a table; he examined me closely, and I went out, afraid of being recognized; but I see now that it was too late; my fate is sealed; but I am less unhappy than I was; I have seen my daughter, my wife has forgiven me, and you—oh! I entreat you, brother, forgive me too!”

“Yes,” said Jacques, “I will forgive you; but you must—wretched man! do you know what the punishment is that awaits you? You must die upon the scaffold; and the scandal of your infamous death will make our shame eternal! Will you never have the courage to do anything but commit crimes? will you never be able to do what the honor of your wife and your child has made it your duty to do for a long while? You shudder, weak man! you await the executioner; remember that you cannot avoid falling into the hands of the law again! Great God! and you are not weary of a life dragged out in infamy and misery!”

“I understand you,” said Edouard; “be sure that death will be a blessing to me; but before going down into the grave, I wanted to let you know that I repent; now give me the means of escaping my punishment; I will hesitate no longer.”

Jacques motioned to Edouard to wait for him; he hurried to his study, took his pistols and returned to the garden. He saw his brother kneeling beside the small barred gate. He handed him the weapons with a firm hand and Edouard took

them.

“Now,” said Jacques, “come, unhappy man! let us embrace for the last time. Your brother pardons your crimes, and he will come every day to pray to Heaven on your grave.”

Edouard threw himself into his brother’s arms; they embraced a long while; but at last, Edouard walked a few steps away, a report rang out,—the miserable wretch had ceased to live.

Jacques went to his brother’s body, and summoning all his courage, although his tears fell rapidly, he hastily dug a grave at the foot of a willow tree near the little gate. Sans-Souci arrived and surprised his comrade in that melancholy occupation.

“Help me,” said Jacques, “it’s my brother.”

Sans-Souci tried to send his friend away and to perform that painful task alone; but Jacques would not consent; he was determined to pay the last duties to his brother. And not until the earth had concealed him from his sight did he consent to return to Adeline.

“Well,” she said, “what has become of him?”

“Have no further fear for him,” said Jacques; “he has escaped; and I give you my word that the law can never lay hold of him now.”

Adeline had faith in Jacques’s promise and looked on without apprehension when the gendarmes, a few hours later, searched the house, where of course they did not find Edouard.

After some time, Adeline noticed with surprise a tombstone which Jacques had caused to be erected under the willow at the end of the garden.

“For whom is this stone?” she asked him.

“For my unhappy brother,” Jacques replied.

“Is he dead?”

“Yes, he is no more; I am absolutely certain of it.”

“Alas! in what part of the earth did he end his days?”

“He is there,” said Jacques at last, pointing to the end of the garden, at the foot of the willow.

Adeline shuddered and dared to ask no more; but every day she took her daughter to pray over the poor beggar’s grave, and Ermance never knew that she was praying for her father.

And it was at the foot of the willow that Jacques buried his cross also.



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