

NOVELS

BY

Paul de Kock

VOLUME XI

MY NEIGHBOR RAYMOND

PRINTED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH

GEORGE BARRIE'S SONS

THE JEFFERSON PRESS

BOSTON

NEW YORK

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MY NEIGHBOR RAYMOND ***

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*RAYMOND SURPRISES DORSAN
AND NICETTE*

I was determined that he should not, at all events, have time to scrutinize the girl; I fumbled hastily in my pocket for my key, but it was entangled in my handkerchief.

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CONTENTS

I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXV, XXXVI.

MY NEIGHBOR RAYMOND

I

THE GRISETTE

I was strolling along the boulevards one Saturday evening. I was alone, and in a meditative mood; contrary to my usual custom, I was indulging in some rather serious reflections on the world and its people, on the past and the present, on the mind and the body, on the soul, on thought, chance, fate, and destiny. I believe, indeed, that I was on the point of turning my attention to the moon, which was just appearing, and in which I already saw mountains, lakes, and forests,—for with a little determination one may see in the moon whatever one pleases,—when, as I was gazing at the sky, I suddenly collided with a person going in the opposite direction, whom I had not previously noticed.

“Look where you’re going, monsieur; you’re very awkward!” at once remarked a soft, sweet voice, which not even anger deprived of its charm. I have always had a weakness for pleasant voices; so I instantly descended from the regions to which I had mounted only for lack of something better to do, and looked at the person who had addressed me.

It was a girl of sixteen to eighteen years, with a little cap tied under her chin, a calico dress, and a modest apron of black mohair. She had every appearance of a young workgirl who had just finished her day’s work and was on her way home. I made haste to look at her face: a charming face, on my word! Bright, mischievous eyes, a tiny nose, fine teeth, black hair, and a most attractive ensemble; an expressive face, too, and a certain charming grace in her bearing. I was forced to confess that I saw no such pretty things in the moon.

The girl had under her arm a pasteboard box, which I had unwittingly jostled; she refastened the string with which it was tied, and seemed to apprehend that the contents had suffered from my awkwardness. I lost no time in apologizing.

“Really, mademoiselle, I am terribly distressed—it was very awkward of me.”

“It is certain, monsieur, that if you had looked in front of you this wouldn’t have happened.”

“I trust that I have not hurt you?”

“Me? oh, no! But I’m afraid that my flowers are crumpled; however, I will fix them all right at home.”

“Ah!” said I to myself; “she’s a flowermaker; as a general rule, the young ladies who follow that trade are not Lucretias; let us see if I cannot scrape acquaintance with her.”

She replaced her box under her arm, and went her way. I walked by her side, saying nothing at first. I have always been rather stupid about beginning gallant interviews; luckily, when one has once made a start, the thing goes of itself. However, from time to time I ventured a word or two:

“Mademoiselle walks very fast. Won’t you take my arm? I should be delighted to escort you. May I not be permitted to see you again? Do you go to the theatre often? I could send you tickets, if you chose. Pray be careful; you will surely slip!” and other polite phrases of that sort, the conventional thing in nocturnal meetings.

To all this I obtained no reply save:

“Yes, monsieur;” “no, monsieur;” “leave me, I beg you!” “you are wasting your time;” “don’t follow me.”

Sometimes she made no reply at all, but tossed her head impatiently, and crossed to the other side of the boulevard. But I crossed in her wake; and after a few moments of silence, I risked another remark, giving to my voice the most tender and sentimental inflection conceivable.

But I began to realize that my chance acquaintance was shyer than I had at first supposed, and that I might very well have nothing to show for my long walk, my little speeches, and my sidelong glances. However, her resistance augmented my desires; I remembered how foolish I felt one evening when, thinking that I had fallen in with an innocent maid, my charmer, when we arrived at her door, invited me to go up to her room; and I beg my readers to believe that I knew too much to accept. But appearances are so deceptive in Paris! the shrewdest connoisseurs allow themselves to be cozened; now, I ought to be a connoisseur, for I have seen a good deal of the world; and yet, I frequently allow myself to be taken in.

I made these reflections as I followed my pretty flower girl. She led me a devilish long way; we walked the whole length of Boulevards Montmartre, Poissonnière, Bonne-Nouvelle; we passed all the small theatres. “She lives in the Marais,” I thought; “that is plain.” We went through Rue Chariot, Rue de Bretagne, Vieille Rue du Temple. We went on and on; luckily, the weather was fine, and I knew that she must stop sooner or later. Yes, and she would probably shut the door in my face; but what did I care? After all, I was simply killing time; I had not known what to do with myself, and I had suddenly found an

objective point for my stroll. To be sure, such an objective point is within the reach of everyone in Paris; and it is easy to provide one's self with occupation by following the first saucy face one chances to meet. Indeed, I know many men who do nothing else, and who neglect their business to do it. Above all, I notice a large number of government clerks, who, instead of attending to their duties, are constantly hunting grisettes, on the pretext of going out to buy lunch; to be sure, they go out without their hats, and run about the city as if they were simply making neighborly calls; which is very comforting for the departments, as they are always sure that their clerks are not lost.

But it is not my business to censure the conduct of other people; indeed, that would be a most inopportune thing to do, inasmuch as I am in the very act of setting a bad example; for, a moment ago, I was meditating upon the instability of human affairs, and now I am giving chase to a petticoat that covers the most fragile, the weakest, the most deceitful, but also the most seductive, most alluring, most enchanting creature that Nature has created! I was losing my head, my imagination was hard at work, and yet I saw only a foot—a dainty one, 'tis true—and the beginning of a leg clothed in a modest black woollen stocking. Ah! if I might only have seen the garter! Faith! all things considered, it is much better to follow a girl, at the risk of having a door shut in your face, than to try to read the moon, and to weary one's brain with metaphysics, astronomy, physiology, and metoposcopy; the deeper one delves into the vague and the abstract, the less clearly one discovers the goal and the proof; but, turn your attention to a saucy face, and you know at once what you wish to accomplish; and in the company of a pretty woman it is easy to discover the system of nature.

For several minutes I had said nothing to my young working girl; I was piqued by her persistent silence; I had even slackened my pace, so that she might think that I had ceased to follow her. But, although I was some twenty yards distant, I did not lose sight of her. She stopped, and so did I. She was speaking to someone; I walked toward them. The someone was a young man. I bit my lips in vexation; but I tried to distinguish what they were saying, and I overheard the following dialogue:

“Good-evening, Mademoiselle Caroline!”

“Good-evening, Monsieur Jules!”

“You are going home very late.”

“We have lots of work, especially on Saturday; and then I had a box to carry to Rue Richelieu; that is what makes me so late.”

“What have you got in this box?”

“A pretty bunch of roses to wear in my cap to-morrow. I made it myself; it’s very stylish, as you’ll see. A clumsy fellow ran into me on the boulevard, and nearly made me drop it.”

At that, I slunk into the passageway in front of which I had stopped.

“There are some people who never pay any attention to anything when they’re walking.”

“I fancy this man was a student; he was looking at the sky.”

“Did he ask your pardon?”

“Oh, yes!—But I must leave you; my aunt’s waiting for me, and she’ll give me a scolding.”

“I should be very sorry to be the cause of anything unpleasant happening to you. We shall see each other to-morrow, shan’t we?”

“Yes, yes; unless my aunt isn’t willing that I should dance any more. She’s so cross! Have you got tickets for Tivoli?”

“Yes, mademoiselle, for four; I will call for you.”

“Early, Monsieur Jules.”

“Oh, never fear! But don’t you forget we’re to dance the first contradance together.”

“I never forget such things!”

“Adieu, Mademoiselle Caroline!”

“Adieu, Monsieur Jules!”

Monsieur Jules drew nearer to her, and the girl offered her cheek. I heard a kiss. Parbleu! it was well worth while going all the way to Rue des Rosiers to see that!

The young man walked away, singing; the girl went a few steps farther, then entered a passageway, of which she closed the door behind her, and I was left standing in the gutter.

That Jules was evidently her lover; yes, he had every appearance of a lover, albeit an honorable one, for I was certain that he kissed nothing but her cheek; moreover, his conversation did not suggest a seducer. To-morrow, Sunday, they were going to Tivoli, with the aunt, no doubt, as he had tickets for four. Well, it was evident that I should have nothing to show for my walk. It was not the first time, but it was a pity; for she was pretty, very pretty! I examined the house with care. One can never tell—chance may serve one at some time. The street was dark, the moon being behind a cloud, and I could not make out the number. But that was of no importance, for I could recognize the passageway, the sharp

corner, and the awning.

“What the devil! Pray be careful what you’re doing! You just missed throwing that on me!”

An inmate of my charmer’s house had opened his window and emptied a vessel into the street, just as I was trying to distinguish the color of the wall. Luckily, I escaped with a few splashes; but the incident abated my curiosity, and I left Rue des Rosiers, wiping my coat tails with my handkerchief.

II

THE PETITE-MAÎTRESSE

It was not late when I returned to the boulevard; the performances at the small theatres were not yet at an end. A dozen ticket speculators ran to meet me, offering to sell me checks.

“There’s one more act, monsieur,” they shouted in my ears; “it’s the best of all; you’ll see the duel with a sword and an axe, the fire, and the ballet. It’s a play that draws all Paris. You can go to any part of the theatre.”

Unable to resist such urgent solicitations, I bought a check which entitled me to admission to any part of the theatre; but they would only allow me to go into the pit, or to walk around the corridor. I chose the latter alternative; as there was but one act to be played, I could see well enough; and then, the things that happen in the auditorium are often more amusing than those that happen on the stage. I am rather fond of examining faces, and there are generally some comical ones in attendance upon melodramas; the theatres at which that class of play is given are, as a general rule, frequented by the common people and the middle class, who do not know what it is to conceal their feelings, and who consequently abandon themselves unreservedly to all the emotion aroused by a scene of love or of remorse.

“Ah! the cur! ah! the blackguard!” exclaimed my nearest neighbor whenever the tyrant appeared; “he’ll get his finish before long.”

I glanced at the speaker; I judged from his hands and his general aspect that he was a tanner; his eyes were brighter than those of the actor who played the traitor and against whom he vociferated loudly at every instant. In front of me, as I stood behind the seats, I noticed a laundress who sobbed bitterly as she listened to the story of the princess’s misfortunes, and a small boy who crouched under the bench to avoid seeing the duel.

“How these good people are enjoying themselves!” I thought; “they are not surfeited with the theatre; they are absorbed by what is taking place on the stage; they don’t lose a single word, and for the next week they will think of nothing but what they have seen to-night. I will go up to the first tier of boxes; there is more style there, but less enjoyment.”

Through a glass door I caught sight of a most attractive face; I gave the box opener the requisite amount of money, and entered the box, determined to do my

utmost to make up for the time I had wasted with Mademoiselle Caroline.

The lady, who had seemed a charming creature seen through the glass, was less charming at close range. However, she was not unattractive; she had style, brilliancy, and dash. She was still young; I saw at once that she was inclined to flirt, and that the appearance of a young man in her box would divert her for a moment.

You will understand, reader, that I was a young man; I believe that I have not yet told you so. Later, I will tell you who I am, and what talents, what attractive and estimable qualities, I possess; it will not take long.

A gentleman was seated beside the lady in question; he had a commonplace face, but was fashionably dressed and had distinguished manners. Was he her husband? I was inclined to think so, for they hardly spoke to each other.

I regretted that I had only about half an act to see; with more time, I might have been able to enter into conversation, to make myself agreeable, to begin an acquaintance. It seemed to me that I made a favorable impression; she bestowed divers very soft glances on me; she was seated so that she could look at me without being seen by her companion. The ladies are so accustomed to that sort of thing, and so expert at it!

“Ah!” I thought; “if ever I marry, I will always sit behind my wife; for then — Even so; but if somebody else sits beside her, can I prevent the feet and knees from doing as they will? It is most embarrassing.”

“This play isn’t so bad,” said the lady at last, to her neighbor; “the acting here is not at all amiss.”

“Yes, yes;” nothing but yes. Ah! he was surely her husband. I listened intently, for she was evidently speaking for my benefit.

“I was horribly bored last night at the Français; Mars didn’t act. Aren’t we going to the Opéra to-morrow? There’s to be an extra performance.”

“As you please.”

“After all, it’s too hot for enjoyment at the theatre. If there wasn’t always such a medley in the public gardens on Sunday, I would rather go there than shut myself up in a theatre. What’s your idea?”

“It makes no difference to me.”

The lady made an impatient gesture. The gentleman did not notice it, but moved nearer the front of the box. I rose to look at the scenery, and my hand happened to come in contact with the lady’s arm, but she did not move.

“These theatres are wretchedly ventilated; there’s a very unpleasant odor

here," she said, after a moment.

I thought of my coat tails, which, in truth, smelt anything but sweet. I could not help smiling, but I instantly offered her a smelling bottle. She accepted it, and when she returned it did not seem offended because I pressed the hand with which she presented it to me.

At that moment the curtain fell.

"The devil!" I muttered to myself; "what a shame! I came too late. Mademoiselle Caroline is responsible for it. But what am I saying? If it had not been for her, I should still be on Boulevard Montmartre, gazing at the stars; it was because I followed her that I came in here to see the last act; and by running after a grisette I have fallen in with a *petite-maîtresse* who perhaps is inferior to the grisette! How one thing leads to another! It was because something was thrown on my coat that this lady complained of the unpleasant odor, and that I offered her my smelling bottle and squeezed her hand. After this, who will tell me that there is no such thing as fate? If I should make this gentleman a cuckold, it would certainly be the fault of Mademoiselle Caroline, who refused to listen to me."

We left the box. I assisted my neighbor to climb over the benches, which were stationary for the convenience of the public. But the husband took her arm, and I was obliged to fall behind.

"Shall I follow, or shall I not follow?"—Such was the question I asked myself as I descended the staircase. After what had happened to me so short a time before, I ought to have kept quiet the rest of the evening; but I was twenty-four years old, I loved the fair sex passionately; moreover, my last mistress had just proved unfaithful to me,—indeed, it was that fact which was responsible for my melancholy meditations,—and a young man who has a strong flavor of sentiment in his makeup cannot exist without a passion. Unquestionably I was

We were no sooner on the boulevard than they crossed the sidewalk to the curbstone.

"Aha!" I said to myself; "they are going to take a carriage; I'll just listen to what they tell the driver, and in that way I can learn the address without putting myself to any trouble."

But it was decreed that I should be disappointed again in my plans. They walked to a dainty vis-à-vis and called *André*; a footman ran to them, opened the door, and assisted monsieur and madame to enter.

My self-esteem received a still sharper prick; a woman who had a carriage of

her own! Here was a conquest that merited the expenditure of some little time and trouble. I determined to follow madame's carriage—not on foot; that would be too fatiguing! it might do if she were in a cab; but with private horses—why, I should have inflammation of the lungs! I spied a cabriolet, which was just what I wanted. The other carriage was driving away, so I lost no time.

“Hi, *cocher!*”

“Get in, monsieur.”

“I am in.”

“Where are we going, bourgeois?”

“Follow that carriage just ahead of us, and you shall have a good *pourboire.*”

The rascal did not need it; I saw that he was already tipsy. I wished then that I had taken another, but it was too late to change. He lashed his emaciated horse with all his strength; the infernal beast broke into a gallop of desperation, and sometimes outstripped the private carriage.

“Look out!” I said to my driver; “don't whip it so hard; let's not have an accident.”

“Don't you be afraid, bourgeois, I know my business; you see, I haven't been driving a cab twenty years without finding out what driving means. You're with some friends in the green fiacre yonder; very good! I propose to have you get there ahead of 'em.”

“But I did not tell you that I was with anybody; I want you to follow that carriage; if you pass it, how can you follow it?”

“I tell you, bourgeois, that they're a-following us; I'll show 'em that my horse is worth two of theirs. When Belotte's waked up, there's no stopping her.”

“Morbleu! you go too fast! We have passed the carriage; where is it now?”

“Ah! they're trying to catch up with us; but the coachman's mad. I'm driving you all right, bourgeois.”

“But stop—stop, I tell you!”

“Have we got there?”

“Yes, yes! we've got there.”

“Damme! you see, Belotte's got her second wind, and she's a good one to go, I tell you. Ho! ho! here you are, master. Where shall I knock?”

“Nowhere.”

“Ha! ha! not a sign of a fiacre anywhere! Didn't I tell you that you'd arrive ahead of the others? You see, it's a whim of mine to pass everything on the road.”

I alighted from the cabriolet and looked all about; no sign of a carriage; we had lost it. I was frantic; and I had to listen to the appeals of my drunken driver, who wanted his *pourboire*. I was tempted to break his whip over his back; but I restrained myself and adopted the quickest method, which was to pay him and dismiss him.

“When you want a good driver and a good horse, bourgeois, I’m your man, you see; you’ll always find me on Place Taitbout, near Torchoni’s—in the swell quarter. Ask for François; I’m as well known as the clown.”

“All right; I’ll remember.”

The villain drove away at last, and I was left alone in a street which was entirely unfamiliar to me. It was getting late, and, as I had no desire to pass the night walking the streets, I tried to discover my whereabouts! After walking some distance I found myself at a spot which I recognized; I was on Rue des Martyrs, near the Montmartre barrier. Luckily, I lived on Rue Saint-Florentin, and to get there I had simply to walk down the hill. So I started, reflecting as I walked. It was a fitting occasion for reflection, and I had plenty of time. But my reverie was again interrupted by outcries. As the Quartier des Porcherons is not frequented by the most select society, and as I was nowise inclined to seek a third adventure at the Grand Salon, I quickened my pace, in order to avoid unpleasant encounters.

But the noise continued; I heard cries and oaths and blows. Women were calling for the police, the magistrate, and all the constituted authorities of the quarter; men were pushing and striking one another and throwing one another into the gutter. Windows were thrown open, and heads appeared enveloped in nightcaps; they listened and laughed and conversed from window to window, asking what the trouble was; but they refrained from going down into the street, because it is not prudent to meddle in a quarrel after dark.

The open windows and the faces surmounted by nightcaps reminded me of my little mishap on Rue des Rosiers. I no longer walked, but flew! fancying that I was pursued by fatality. But I heard someone running behind me; I turned into a street to the right; the footsteps followed me. At last I stopped to recover my breath, and in a moment my pursuer overtook me and grasped my arm.

III

THE FLOWER GIRL

“O monsieur! save me! take me with you! protect me from that horrible Beauvisage, who swore he’d take me away from anyone. Just hear how he’s beating Cadet Finemouche, who’s a good fighter himself! My sister was no fool; she skipped as soon as the fists began to play, and left me to carry the whole thing on my back; and perhaps she’ll go and tell my mother bad stories about me! I haven’t anybody but you to help me, monsieur; if you won’t, I’m a lost girl.”

While my waylayer recited her story, pausing only to wipe away the tears with the back of her hand, I looked at my new acquaintance and tried to distinguish her features by the dim light of a street lamp.

Her language and her dress speedily informed me what manner of person I had to deal with: a loose red gown, caught in at the waist with a black velvet scarf; a round cap with a broad lace border; a colored neckerchief, tied in front, with a large cross *à la* Jeannette resting upon it. Mistake in this instance was impossible: it was perfectly evident that I had before me a *marchande à éventaire*,^[A] or one of those hucksters whose booths surround the cemetery of the Innocents.

[A] That is to say, a huckster, or peddler, who goes from place to place with her wares displayed on a tray hung from her shoulders.

My first thought was to see if she was pretty; I found that she was very good-looking indeed. Her eyes, although filled with tears, had a sincere, innocent expression which made her interesting at first sight; her little pout, her grieved air, were softened now and then by a smile addressed to me; and that smile, which the most accomplished coquette could not have made more attractive, disclosed two rows of the whitest teeth, unspoiled by enamel, coral, and all the powders of the perfumer.

However, despite my new acquaintance’s beauty, I was very reluctant to retain her arm, which she had passed through mine. Surely, with such charming features, she could not deal in fish or meat. I was morally certain that she sold flowers; but I did not choose to take a flower girl for my mistress; at the most, I might, if a favorable opportunity offered, indulge in a whim, a fancy. But I was not in luck that evening, and I did not propose to try any more experiments. I

determined to rid myself of the girl.

As gently as possible, I detached the arm that was passed through mine; then I assumed a cold expression and said:

“I am very sorry that I am unable to do what you wish; but I do not know you; the dispute between Monsieur Beauvisage and Cadet Finemouche doesn’t concern me. Your sister ran away, and you had better do the same. Your mother may think what she pleases, it is all one to me. It is after twelve o’clock; I have been walking about the streets long enough, and I am going home to bed.”

“What, monsieur! you refuse! you are going to leave me! Think of refusing to go a little out of your way to help a poor girl who is in trouble because of an accident that might happen to anybody. I tell you again that my mother is quite capable of not letting me in if I go home without somebody to answer for me who can swear that I am innocent.”

“And you expect me to swear to that, do you?”

“Pardine! would that skin your tongue? Besides, you’re a fine gentleman, a swell; she won’t dare to fly into a temper before you, and she’ll listen to me. But if I go home alone—what a row! Oh! mon Dieu! how unlucky I am! I didn’t want to go to the Grand Salon at all; I was afraid of something like this.”

And thereupon the tears and sobs began afresh, and she stamped with her little feet. Perhaps her mother would tear out her hair; that would be too bad, for it formed a most becoming frame for that frank, artless countenance. My heart is not made of stone; I was touched by the girl’s distress, and I said to myself: “If, instead of this jacket, she were dressed in silk or even in merino, if she wore a dainty bonnet instead of this round cap, and a pretty locket instead of a cross *à la* Jeannette, I would long ago have offered my services with great zeal; I would play the gallant and make myself as agreeable as possible; I would cut myself in two to obtain a hearing, and I would regard it as a favor if she would allow me to offer her my arm. And shall this modest costume make me cruel, unfeeling? Shall I refuse to do a trivial favor, which she implores with tears in her eyes? Ah! that would be bad, very bad!”—I had been following a grisette and a *grande dame*, who perhaps were not worth so much notice as this poor child; I had passed the evening making a fool of myself, and I could certainly devote an hour to a worthy action. I determined to escort my flower girl to her home.

You see, reader, that I sometimes have good impulses; to be sure, the girl pleased me much. “All women seem to please you,” perhaps you will say. True, reader; all the pretty ones; and I venture to say that you are like me.

I drew nearer to my pretty fugitive. She was sitting on a stone, holding a

corner of her apron to her eyes, and sobbing.

“Mademoiselle.”

“Mon—monsieur.”

“What is your name?”

“Ni-Ni-i-cette, monsieur.”

“Well, my little Nicette, have courage; stop crying, and take my arm. I will take you home to your mother.”

“Real—Really?”

She jumped for joy; indeed, I believe that she was on the point of embracing me; but she contented herself with taking my arm, which she pressed very close in hers, saying:

“Ah! I was sure that you wouldn’t leave me in such a pickle. I’m a good girl, monsieur; the whole quarter will tell you that Nicette’s reputation’s as clear as spring water. But my mother is so ugly! and then my sister’s jealous because she says I make soft eyes at Finemouche.”

“You can tell me all about it on the way. Where are we going?”

“Oh, dear! it’s quite a little distance. I have a stand at the Croix-Rouge, and I live on Rue Sainte-Marguerite, where my mother keeps a fruit shop.”

From Faubourg Montmartre to the Croix-Rouge! that was enough to kill a man! If only I could find a fiacre! I believe that I would even have taken François’s cabriolet, at the risk of having Belotte take the bit in her teeth; but no carriage of any sort passed us. I had no choice but to make the best of it; so I took Nicette by the arm and forced her to quicken her pace.

“You are a peddler, Nicette,” I said; “what do you sell?”

“Bouquets, monsieur; and they’re always fresh, I flatter myself.”

She was a flower girl; I was sure of it. The certainty restored my courage to some extent, and made the journey seem less long. I should not have been flattered to act as escort to a fishwoman; and yet, when it is a matter of rendering a service, should one be influenced by such petty considerations? But what can you do? that infernal self-esteem is forever putting itself forward. Moreover, I am no better than other men; perhaps I am not so good; you may judge for yourselves.

“Ah! you sell bouquets, do you?”

“Yes, monsieur; and when you want a nice one, come and see me; I will always have some ready for you, day or night.”

“Thanks.—But how does it happen that, living in Faubourg Saint-Germain,

you go to a dance near the Montmartre barrier? I should suppose that you could find balls enough in your own neighborhood.”

“I’ll tell you how that happens. My sister Fanchon has a lover, Finemouche, a brewer, a fine-looking, dark fellow, that all the girls in the quarter are mad over. My mother says that he’s a ne’er-do-well, and don’t want Fanchon to listen to him; but Fanchon’s crazy over him, and she tries all sorts of ways to be with him, on condition that he won’t make love to her except with honest motives. This morning she agreed to come to Montmartre at dusk, sentimentally, to have a drink of milk. But she had to make up her mind to take me; mother wouldn’t have let her go alone. We said we were going to see an aunt of ours, who sells oranges on the boulevard; that was a trick of Fanchon’s. I went with her against my will, especially as Finemouche sometimes gives me a look, that I don’t pay any attention to—on the word of an honest girl!—When we got to Montmartre we found the brewer, who treated us both to a donkey ride. After riding round for two hours, I said it was time to turn our toes toward home; but Finemouche says: ‘Let’s rest a few minutes at the Grand Salon—long enough to eat a salad and have a waltz.’—I didn’t want to accept; but my sister likes waltzing and salad, and I had to let her have her way. So we went to the Grand Salon. Fanchon danced with Finemouche; so far, everything went well enough. But, as luck would have it, in comes Beauvisage, a fellow who works in a pork shop on our street. He’s another fellow who makes love to all the girls, and who’s taken it into his head to have a passion for me.”

“You don’t seem to lack adorers, Nicette.”

“I have one or two, but it ain’t my fault. God knows, I always receive ’em with my fists closed. But these men! the crueller you are, the more they hang on! I have shown Monsieur Beauvisage that I don’t like his attentions; I always throw his presents in his face; but it don’t make any difference: just as sure as I leave my stand for a minute, when I come back I find a sausage among my roses, or a pig’s foot on my footwarmer. Why, the other day, my birthday, he actually came to wish me many happy returns, with a white pudding, and truffled at that! But all that don’t touch my heart; I told him that I wouldn’t have him, before all the old gossips of the quarter; and I threw his pudding in his face. He went away in a rage, swearing that he’d kidnap me. So you can imagine that I shivered with fright when I saw him come into the Grand Salon, especially as I know what a hot-headed fellow he is.—Would you believe, monsieur, he had the cheek to ask me to dance, just as if nothing had happened! I refused him flat, because I ain’t two-faced. He tried to force me to dance; Finemouche came running up and ordered him to let me alone instantly, at which he held me all the tighter. Cadet

handled him so rough that they went out to fight. My sister Fanchon blamed me, because it made her mad to have her lover fight for me. But the worst of it all is that Finemouche, who had drunk a good deal with his salad, was beaten by Beauvisage. Fanchon ran off as soon as she saw her lover on the ground; I tried to do the same, but my tormentor ran after me. At last I caught sight of you, monsieur, and that gave me courage; I was sure you'd protect me; I grabbed your arm, and that's all."

Nicette's story interested me; and the thing that pleased me most was that she seemed to be virtuous and had no lover.—"What difference did that make to you?" you will say; "as you were a young man in society, of course you would not make love to a flower girl." True; I had no such purpose; and yet, I became conscious that for some moments I had been pressing the girl's arm more tenderly than before. But it was because I was distraught.

"Do you think my mother will beat me, monsieur?"

"I don't see why she should be angry; you have done nothing wrong."

"Oh! in the first place, we shouldn't have gone to the Grand Salon."

"That was your sister's fault."

"Yes, but she'll say it was mine. And then, I'll tell you something. My mother's inclined to favor Beauvisage, who shuts her eyes with galantine and never comes to the house without a chitterling eight inches long. Mother's crazy over chitterlings, and she'd like to have me marry the pork man, so that she could always have a pig's pudding on hand. But I have always refused to hear with that ear, and since then they all look crosswise at me at home. So they'll lay the quarrel and the whole row on my shoulders. Oh! mon Dieu! I shall be beaten, I am sure!"

"Poor Nicette! I promise you that I will speak to your mother in your behalf."

"Oh! I beg you to! You see, she's quite capable of not letting me in, and making me spend the night in the street! That miserable Beauvisage! he's the cause of it all! I'd rather jump into the river than be his wife!"

"Can you say as much about Finemouche?"

"Yes, monsieur; I want a husband to my taste, and I don't like any of those jokers."

"Then you have no lover?"

"No, monsieur."

"But, at your age, one ought to love."

"Oh! I'm in no hurry. But we're almost there, monsieur, we're almost there."

Ah! how my heart thumps!”

I felt that she was really trembling, and, to encourage her, I took one of her hands and pressed it. She made no resistance, she was thinking of nothing but her mother.

At last we reached Rue Sainte-Marguerite; Nicette dared not go any farther.

“There’s the place, monsieur,” she said; “that house next to the porte cochère.”

“Well, let us go there.”

“Oh! wait just a minute, till I can breathe!”

“Why are you so frightened? Am I not here?”

“Pardine! perhaps mother won’t even let you in!”

“We will make her listen to reason.”

“That will be hard.”

“Your sister is more to blame than you.”

“Yes, but she’s fond of my sister, and she don’t like me.”

“Well, we haven’t come all this distance not to try our luck.”

“That is true, monsieur. Come on, let’s go to the house.”

We arrived in front of Madame Jérôme’s shop; I had learned from Nicette that that was her mother’s name. Everything was tightly closed and perfectly still; no light could be seen inside the house.

“Does your mother sleep in the shop?”

“Yes, monsieur; at the back.”

“We must knock.”

“Oh! if only my sister hasn’t got home!”

“Let’s knock, in any event.”

I knocked, for Nicette had not the requisite courage; there was no reply.

“She sleeps very soundly,” I said to the girl.

“Oh, no, monsieur! that means that she don’t intend to let me in.”

“Parbleu! she’ll have to answer.”

I knocked again; we heard a movement inside, then someone approached the door, and a hoarse voice demanded:

“Who’s that knocking at this time of night?”

“It’s me, mother.”

“Ah! it’s you, is it, you shameless hussy! and you think I’ll let you in after

midnight, when you've been setting men to fighting and turning a whole quarter upside down! Off with you this minute, and don't ever let me see you again!"

"Mother! please let me in; my sister has deceived you."

"No, no; I know the whole story. You're a cursed little pig-headed fool! Ah! you don't choose to be a pork man's wife, don't you? All right! go and walk the streets; we'll see if you have pig's pudding to eat every day!"

Nicette wept. I thought that it was time for me to intervene in the quarrel.

"Madame," I called through the door, in a voice which I tried to make imposing, "your daughter has done no wrong; you are scolding her most unjustly; and if you leave her in the street, you will expose her to the risk of doing what you will regret."

I waited for a reply; none was forthcoming, but I heard someone removing the iron bars, as if to open the shop. I went up to Nicette.

"You see," said I, "my voice and my remonstrance have produced some effect. I was certain that I could pacify your mother. Come, dry your tears; she is coming, and I promise you that I will make her listen to reason, and that she won't leave you to sleep in the street."

Nicette listened, but she still doubted my ability to obtain her pardon. Meanwhile, the noise continued, and the door did, in fact, open. Madame Jérôme appeared on the threshold, wearing a dressing jacket and a nightcap. I stepped forward to intercede for the girl, who dared not stir; I was about to begin a sentence which I thought well adapted to touch a mother's heart, but Madame Jérôme did not give me time.

"So you're the man," she cried, "who brings this boldface home, and undertakes to preach to me and to teach me how to manage my daughters! Take that to pay you for your trouble!"

As she spoke, the fruit seller dealt me a buffet that sent me reeling toward the other side of the street; then she drew back into her shop and slammed the door in our faces.

IV

MY NEIGHBOR RAYMOND

For five minutes I did not say a word to Nicette. Madame Jérôme's blow had cooled my zeal in the girl's cause very materially. I could not forbear reflecting upon the various events of the evening, and I seemed to detect therein a fatality which made me pay dearly for all my attempts at seduction.

For following a working girl, the tip of whose finger I had not been allowed to squeeze, I had been spattered with filth on Rue des Rosiers; for playing the gallant and making myself agreeable to a *petite-maîtresse* who bestowed divers exceedingly soft glances upon me, I had fallen in with an infernal cab driver, who had driven me to a strange quarter of the city, a long way from my own home; and lastly, for consenting to act as the protector of a young flower girl, whom I undertook to reconcile with her mother, I had received a well-aimed blow on the head. This last catastrophe seemed to me rank injustice on the part of Providence; for to take Nicette home to Madame Jérôme was a very kind action. What nonsense it is to talk about a benefaction never being wasted! But my cheek began to burn less hotly, and my ill humor became less pronounced. It was not Nicette's fault that I had received that blow. I determined to make the best of my predicament and to console the poor child, whose distress was much augmented by this last accident.

"You are right, Nicette; your mother is very unkind."

"Oh, yes, monsieur! What did I tell you? I am awful sorry for what happened to you; but if you hadn't been there, I should have been beaten much worse than that."

"In that case, it is clear that all is for the best."

"My mother's very quick!"

"That is true."

"She has a light hand."

"I found it rather heavy!"

"She cuffs me for a *yes* or a *no*; but it's worse than ever, since I refused Beauvisage. Ah! I am very unhappy! It wouldn't take much to make me jump into the Canal de l'Ourcq."

"Come, come, be calm; the most urgent thing now is to find out where you

can go to pass the night, as your mother really refuses to admit you. Have you any relations in this quarter?"

"Mon Dieu! no, not a soul; I have an aunt in Faubourg Saint-Denis; but she wouldn't take me in—she'd be too much afraid of having a row with my mother."

"Madame Jérôme is a general terror, I see."

"Alas! yes."

"Where will you sleep, then?"

"At your house, monsieur, with your permission; or else in the street."

There was in Nicette's suggestion such childlike innocence, or such shameless effrontery, that I could not restrain a start of surprise. It is difficult to believe in the innocence and naïveté of a flower girl. And yet, in her language there was something so sincere, so persuasive; and on the other hand, her eyes, whose expression was so soft and tender when they were not bathed in tears, her little retroussé nose, the way in which she had seized my arm, and, lastly, this barefaced proposal to pass the night in a young man's apartment—all these things threw my mind into a state of uncertainty to which I tried in vain to put an end.

However, I was obliged to make up my mind. Nicette was gazing at me, awaiting my answer; her eyes implored me. My heart was weak.

"Come with me," I said at last.

"Ah! monsieur, how good you are! how I thank you!"

Again she took possession of my arm, and we started for Rue Saint-Florentin. This time we made the journey in silence. I was musing upon the singularity of the adventure that had happened to me. The idea of my taking a street corner huckster home with me, to sleep in my rooms! And remember, reader, that I lived on Rue Saint-Florentin, near the Tuileries; you will divine, from that detail, that I was something of a swell, but a swell who followed grisettes. Oh! it was simply as a pastime. I was not in the least conceited, I beg you to believe; and if an impulse which I could not control drew me constantly toward the fair sex, and led me to overlook rank and social station, I may say with Boileau:

“’Twas destiny’s fault!”

But I was not one of those persons, either, who defy all the proprieties; I did not wish to be looked upon, in the house in which I lived, as a man who consorted with the first woman he chanced to meet; and in that house, as everywhere, there were malicious tongues! I had, in particular, a certain neighbor. Ah!——

It was necessary, therefore, to keep Nicette out of sight. I hoped that that would be an easy matter, so far as going in was concerned. It was at least one o’clock in the morning, and my concierge would be in bed; when that was the case, if anyone knocked, she simply inquired, from her bed: “Who’s that?” and then pulled the cord, without disturbing herself further. So that Nicette could go up to my room unseen. But as to her going away the next day! Madame Dupont, my concierge, was inquisitive and talkative; she was like all concierges—I need say no more. The whole household would hear of the adventure; I should be unmercifully laughed at; it would be known in society. It was most embarrassing; but I could not leave Nicette in the street. Poor child! the watch would find her and take her to the police station, as a vagrant! And I honestly believed that she was a respectable girl; I almost believed that she was innocent; however, that would appear in due time.

We crossed the bridges, followed the quays, and at last drew near our destination. Nicette did not walk so rapidly as at first; she was tired out by her evening’s work; and I—well, I leave it to you to guess!

“Here we are!” I said at last.

“I’m glad of it; for I’m awful tired.”

“And I, too, I assure you. I must knock.”

“Oh! what a beautiful street! and what a fine house!”

“You mustn’t make any noise when we go upstairs, Nicette; you mustn’t speak!”

“No, monsieur, never fear; I don’t want to wake anybody up.”

“Sh! The door is open.”

Madame Dupont asked who was there; I replied, and we entered the house; the hall light was out and it was very dark; that was what I wanted.

“Give me your hand,” I whispered to Nicette, “and let me lead you; but, above all things, no noise.”

“All right, monsieur.”

I led her to the staircase, which we ascended as softly as possible. I wished with all my heart that we were safely in my rooms. If anyone should open a door, I could not conceal Nicette; I had not even a cloak to throw over her, for it was summer.

I lived on the fourth floor; to obtain a desirable bachelor's apartment on Rue Saint-Florentin, one had to pay a dear price, even if it were very high. On the same landing with me lived a curious mortal of some thirty-six to forty years, whose face would have been insignificant but for the fact that his absurd airs and pretensions made it comical. He was of medium height, and strove to assume an agile and sprightly gait and bearing, despite an embonpoint which became more pronounced every day. He had four thousand francs a year, which left him free to devote himself to the business of other people. Moreover, he was poet, painter, musician; combining all the talents, as he said and believed, but in reality a butt for the ridicule of both men and women, especially the latter; but he insinuated himself everywhere, none the less, attended every party, every ball, every concert; because in society everybody is popular who arouses laughter, whether it be by his wit or by his absurdities.

We had just arrived at my landing, when Monsieur Raymond suddenly opened his door and appeared before us in his shirt and cotton nightcap, with a candle in one hand, and a key in the other.

I did not know whether to step forward or to turn back. Monsieur Raymond stared with all his eyes, and Nicette laughed aloud.

I was determined that he should not, at all events, have time to scrutinize the girl; I fumbled hastily in my pocket for my key, but it was entangled in my handkerchief; I could not get it out, I could not find the lock; the more I tried to hurry, the less I succeeded; it seemed that the devil was taking a hand!

Monsieur Raymond, observing my embarrassment, walked toward me with a mischievous smile and held his light under my nose, saying:

“Allow me to give you some light, neighbor; you can't see, you are at one side of the lock.”

I would gladly have given him the blow that Madame Jérôme had given me! but I realized that I must restrain myself; so I thanked him, unlocked my door, and entered, pushing Nicette before me. I closed the door, paying no heed to Monsieur Raymond's offer to light my candle for me.

But suddenly an idea came into my mind; I took a candle, opened my door again, and ran after Raymond, seizing him by his shirt just as he was entering a certain place. I put my finger to my lips, with a mysterious air.

“What’s the matter?” queried Raymond, extricating his shirt from my hand.

“Don’t mention the fact that you saw Agathe with me to-night.”

“A—Agathe! What do you say? Why, you are joking!”

“We have just come from a masquerade; she disguised herself for it, and _____”

“Do you mean to say that there are masquerade balls in July?”

“There are if anyone chooses to give one; this was for somebody’s birthday.”

“But that girl——”

“She is well disguised, isn’t she? I’ll bet that you didn’t recognize her at the first glance. The costume—the rouge—they change one’s whole appearance.”

“Faith! I confess that I didn’t see even the slightest resemblance.”

“I rely on your discretion. To-morrow I will tell you what my motive is; you will laugh with me at the adventure. Au revoir, neighbor; good-night! Allow me to light my candle, now.”

“Much pleasure to you, Monsieur Dorsan!”

I left Raymond and returned to my room. My neighbor was not fully persuaded that it was Agathe whom he had seen; but I had at least, by my stratagem, reserved for myself an answer to his gossip; and if he should talk, I could easily persuade people that he was asleep and had not seen things as they were.

“But,” you will say, “by that falsehood you destroyed another woman’s reputation. Who is this Agathe whom you put forward so inconsiderately?”

This Agathe is my last mistress, with whom I had broken only a short time before; she is a milliner, very lively, very alluring, and very wanton! She had sometimes done me the honor to come to me to ask hospitality for the night; my neighbor had often seen her going in and out of my room, so that once more or less would do her no harm. Her reputation was in no danger, as you see.

Now that I have told you about Mademoiselle Agathe, with whom Monsieur Raymond did not know that I had fallen out, not being in my confidence, I return to Nicette, who is in my apartment, waiting for me. It was half-past one in the morning; but there is time for a great deal between that hour and daybreak! My heart beat fast! Faith! I had no idea what the night would bring to pass.

V

WHAT THE NIGHT BROUGHT TO PASS

“What a funny man that is!” said Nicette, as I entered the room with a light. “When I saw that figure, in his shirt, that neckerchief tied with a lover’s knot, that big nose, and those surprised eyes, I couldn’t keep from laughing.”

“I must confess, Mademoiselle Nicette, that you cause me a lot of trouble!”

“Do I, monsieur? Oh! I am so sorry!”

“But here we are in my rooms at last, God be praised! I don’t quite know, though, how you are to go out!”

“Pardine! through the door, as I came.”

“That’s easy for you to say! However, we will see, when to-morrow comes.”

Nicette looked about her. She examined my apartment, my furniture; she followed me into each room; I had only three, by the way: a small reception room, a bedroom, and a study where I worked, or read, or played the piano, or did whatever else I chose.

“Sit down and rest,” I said.

“Oh! in a moment, monsieur; you see——”

She glanced at my couch and my easy-chairs; she seemed to be afraid to go near them. I could not help smiling at her embarrassment.

“Doesn’t the apartment please you?” I inquired.

“Oh! yes, indeed, monsieur! but it’s all so fine and so shiny! I’m afraid of spoiling something.”

“You need not be afraid.”

I led her to the couch, and almost forced her to sit down by my side.

“I am alone, you see, Nicette; you have come to a bachelor’s quarters.”

“Oh! I don’t care about that, monsieur; at any rate, I didn’t have any choice.”

“Then you’re not afraid to pass the night with me?”

“No, monsieur; I see that you’re an honorable man, and that I needn’t be afraid of anything in your rooms.”

“Oho! she sees that I am an honorable man!” said I to myself; “in that case, I must have a very captivating countenance. However, I am not ill-looking; some

women say that I am rather handsome; and this girl isn't afraid to pass the night with a good-looking bachelor! Perhaps she thinks me ugly."

These reflections annoyed me; while making them, I looked at Nicette more closely than I had hitherto been able to do. She was really very good-looking; a face at once piquant and sweet, and with some character—absolutely unlike what we ordinarily find in a flower girl: she had the freshness and charm of her flowers, and she was the daughter of a fruit peddler, of Mother Jérôme! There are such odd contrasts in nature; however, I could but acknowledge that chance had been very favorable to me this time. I began to be quite reconciled to my evening's entertainment; I forgot the grisette and the *petite-maîtresse*, to think solely of the charming face at my side.

As I gazed at the girl, I had moved nearer to her; I softly passed my arm about her waist; and the more favorable the examination, the more tightly I pressed the red gown.

Nicette did not speak, but she seemed agitated; her bosom rose and fell more frequently, her respiration became shorter; she kept her eyes on the floor. Suddenly she extricated herself from my embrace, rose, and asked me, in a trembling voice, where she was to pass the night.

That question embarrassed me; I admit that I had not yet thought of that. I glanced at Nicette; her lovely eyes were still fastened on the floor. Was she afraid to meet mine? Did she love me already? and—— Nonsense! that infernal self-esteem of mine was off at a gallop!

"We have time enough to think about that, Nicette. Do you feel sleepy?"

"Oh, no! it ain't that, monsieur."

"Ah! so there's another reason, is there?"

"I don't want to be in your way; you told me you was tired, too."

"That has all passed away; I have forgotten it."

"Never mind, monsieur; show me where I can pass the night. I'll go into one of the other rooms. I shall be very comfortable on a chair, and——"

"Pass the night on a chair! Nonsense! you mustn't think of such a thing!"

"Oh, yes! I ain't hard to suit, monsieur."

"No matter; I shan't consent to that. But sit down, Nicette, there's no hurry now. Come and sit down. Are you afraid to sit beside me?"

"No, monsieur."

But she took her seat at the other end of the couch. Her blushing face and her confusion betrayed a part of her sensations. I myself was embarrassed—think of

it! with a flower girl! Indeed, it was just because she was a flower girl that I didn't know where to begin. I give you my word, reader, that I should have made much more rapid progress with a *grande dame* or a *grisette*.

"Do you know, Nicette, that you are charming?"

"I have been told so, monsieur."

"You must have many men making love to you?"

"Oh! there's some that try to fool me when they come to buy flowers of me; but I don't listen to 'em."

"Why do you think that they are trying to fool you?"

"Oh! because they're swells—like you."

"So, if I should mention the word *love* to you, you would think——"

"That you was making fun of me. Pardi! that's plain enough!"

That beginning was not of good augury. No matter, I continued the attack, moving gradually nearer the girl.

"I swear to you, Nicette, that I never make fun of anyone!"

"All men say that!"

"Besides, you are quite pretty enough to arouse a genuine passion."

"Yes, a passion of a fortnight! Oh! I ain't to be caught in that trap."

"On my honor, you are too pretty for a flower girl."

"Bah! you are joking."

"If you chose, Nicette, you could find something better to do than that."

"No, monsieur, no; I don't want to sell anything but bouquets. Oh! I ain't vain. I refused Beauvisage, who's got money, and who'd have given me calico dresses, caps *à la glaneuse*, and gilt chains; but all those things didn't tempt me. When I don't like a person, nothing can make me change my mind."

She was not covetous; so that it was necessary to win her regard in order to obtain anything from her. I determined to win her regard. But I have this disadvantage when I try to make myself agreeable: I never know what I am saying; that was why I sat for ten minutes without speaking a word to Nicette, contenting myself with frequent profound sighs and an occasional cough, to revive the conversation. But Nicette was very innocent, or perhaps she meant to laugh at me when she said with great sang-froid:

"Have you got a bad cold, monsieur?"

I blushed at my idiocy; the idea of being so doltish and timid with a flower seller! Really, I hardly recognized myself.

And the better to recognize myself, I put my arms about Nicette and tried to draw her into my lap.

“Let go of me, monsieur; let go, I beg you!”

“Why, what harm are we doing, Nicette?”

“I don’t want you to squeeze me so tight.”

“One kiss, and I’ll let you go.”

“Just one, all right.”

Her consent was necessary, for she was very well able to defend herself; she was strong and could make a skilful use of her hands and knees; and as I was not accustomed to contests of that sort, in which our society ladies give us little practice, I began to think that I should find it difficult to triumph over the girl.

She gave me permission to kiss her, and I made the most of it; trusting in my promise, she allowed me to take that coveted kiss, and offered me her fresh, rosy cheek, still graced with the down of youth and innocence.

But I desired a still greater privilege; I longed to steal from a lovely pair of lips a far sweeter kiss. Nicette tried, but too late, to prevent me. I took one, I took a thousand. Ah! how sweet were those kisses that I imprinted on Nicette’s lips! Saint-Preux found Julie’s bitter; but I have never detected a trace of bitterness in a pretty woman’s kisses; to be sure, I am no Saint-Preux, thank heaven!

A consuming flame coursed through my veins. Nicette shared my emotion; I could tell by the expression of her eyes, by the quivering of her whole frame. I sought to take advantage of her confusion to venture still further; but she repulsed me, she tore herself from my arms, rushed to the door, and was already on the landing, when I overtook her and caught her by her skirt.

“Where in heaven’s name are you going, Nicette?”

“I am going away, monsieur.”

“What’s that?”

“Yes, monsieur, I am going away; I see now that I mustn’t pass the night here in your rooms; I wouldn’t have believed that you’d take advantage of my trouble to—— But since I made a mistake, I’m going away.”

“Stop, for heaven’s sake! Where would you go?”

“Oh! I don’t know about that; but it don’t make any difference! I see that I’d be safer in the street than alone here with you.”

I felt that I deserved that reproach. The girl was virtuous; she had placed herself under my protection without distrust; she had asked me for hospitality, and I was about to take advantage of her helpless plight, to seduce her! That was

contemptible behavior. But I may say, in my own justification, that I did not know Nicette, and that, for all the artless simplicity of her language, a young girl who suggests to a man that she pass the night under his roof certainly lays herself open to suspicion, especially in Paris, where innocent young maids are so rare.

She still held the door ajar, and I did not relax my grasp of her skirt. I looked in her face, and saw great tears rolling down her cheeks. Poor child! it was I who caused them to fall! She seemed prettier to me than ever; I was tempted to throw myself at her feet and beg her to forgive me. But what! I, on my knees before a street peddler! Do not be alarmed: I did not offend the proprieties to that extent.

“I beg you to remain, Nicette,” I said, at last.

“No, monsieur; I made a mistake about you; I must go.”

“Listen to me; in the first place, you can’t go away from the house alone; at this time of night the concierge opens the door only to those who give their names.”

“Oh! but I remember your name; it’s Dorsan.”

“It isn’t enough to give my name; she would know that it wasn’t my voice.”

“All right; then I’ll stay in the courtyard till morning.”

“Excellent; everybody will see you; and think of the remarks and tittle-tattle of all the cooks of the quarter! It’s bad enough that that infernal Raymond should have seen you. Come back to my rooms, Nicette; I promise, yes, I swear, to behave myself and not to torment you.”

She hesitated; she looked into my face, and doubtless my eyes told her all that was taking place in my mind; for she closed the door of the landing, and smiled at me, saying:

“I believe you, and I’ll stay.”

In my joy I was going to kiss her again; but I checked myself, and I did well: oaths amount to so little!

“But, monsieur,” she said, “we can’t pass the night sitting in your big easy-chair.”

She was quite right; that would have been too dangerous.

“You will sleep in my bed,” I replied, “and I will pass the night on the sofa in my study. No objections, mademoiselle; I insist upon it. You will be at liberty to double-lock my study door; you can go to sleep without the slightest fear. Does that suit you?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

We went back into my bedroom; I lighted another candle, and carried the couch into my study, with Nicette's assistance. I confess that that operation was a painful one to me. However, it was done at last.

"Now you may go to bed and sleep in peace. Good-night, Nicette!"

"Good-night, monsieur!"

I took my candle and retired to my study, closing the door behind me. There we were, in our respective quarters. I blew out the candle and threw myself on the couch. If only I could sleep; time passes so quickly then! And yet, we sleep about a third part of our lives! and we are always glad to plunge into that oblivion, albeit we stand in fear of death, which is simply a never-ending sleep, during which it is certain that one is not disturbed by bad dreams!

Sleep, indeed! In vain did I stretch myself out, and twist and turn in every direction. I could not sleep; it was impossible. I concluded to resign myself to the inevitable, and I began to recall the incidents of my extraordinary evening; I thought of Caroline, of the charming woman at the theatre, of that infernal cabman. I tried to put Nicette out of my thoughts; but she constantly returned; I strove in vain to banish her. The idea that she was close at hand, within a few feet of me, that only a thin partition separated me from her—that idea haunted me! When I thought that I might be beside her, that I might hold her in my arms and give her her first lessons in love and pleasure—then I lost my head, my blood boiled. Only Nicette's consent was needed to make us happy, and she would not give it! To be sure, that same happiness might have results most embarrassing to her.

I had the fidgets in my legs. I rose and paced the floor, but very softly; perhaps she was asleep, and I would not wake her. Poor child! she had had trouble enough during the evening, and I was afraid that still greater trouble was in store for her; for if her mother persisted in her refusal to take her in, what would she do? Until that moment, I had not given a thought to her future.

But I had not heard the key turn in the lock; therefore, she had not locked herself in. That was strange; evidently she relied on my oath. What imprudence, to believe in a young man's promises!

Was she asleep or not? that was what tormented me. For half an hour I stood close against the door, turning first one ear, then the other, and listening intently; but I could hear nothing. I looked through the keyhole; there was a light in the room; was it from caution, or forgetfulness?

But she had not locked the door. Ah! perhaps she had locked it without my hearing it. It was very easy to satisfy myself on that point. I turned the knob very

gently, and the door opened. I stopped, fearing that I had made a noise. But I heard nothing. If I could see her for a moment asleep, see her in bed—for there, and only there can one judge a woman's beauty fairly. I leaned forward; the candle stood on the commode, at some little distance from the bed. I stepped into the room, holding my breath, and stood by her side. She was not undressed; I might have guessed as much. I turned to walk away. Ah! those miserable shoes! they squeaked, and Nicette awoke. I determined to change my shoemaker.

“Do you want anything, monsieur?” she asked.

“No; that is to say, yes, I—I was looking for a book; but I have found it.”

I returned quickly to my study, feeling that I must have cut a sorry figure. The door was closed, and I was not tempted to open it again. Ah! how long that night seemed to me! The day came at last!

VI

MADemoiselle AGATHE

It was long after daybreak. People were already going and coming in the house, and I had not yet ventured to wake Nicette. She was sleeping so soundly! and the preceding day had been a day of tempest, after which rest was essential. But I heard a movement at last; she rose, opened the door, and came toward me, smiling.

“Monsieur, will you allow me to kiss you?”

I understood: that was my reward for my continence during the night, and it was well worth it. She kissed me with evident pleasure, and I began to feel the enjoyment that one is likely to feel when one has no occasion for self-reproach.

“Now, Nicette, let us talk seriously; but, no, let us breakfast first of all; we can talk quite as well at table. You must feel the need of something to eat, do you not?”

“Yes, monsieur, I should like some breakfast right well.”

“I always keep something on hand for unexpected guests.”

“Tell me where everything is, monsieur, and I’ll set the table.”

“On the sideboard yonder, and in the drawers.”

“All right, all right!”

She ran to fetch what we required. In two minutes the table was set. I admired Nicette’s grace and activity; a little maid-servant like that, I thought, would suit me infinitely better than my concierge, Madame Dupont, who took care of my rooms. But, apropos of Madame Dupont, suppose she should appear? We had time enough, however; for it was only seven o’clock, and the concierge, knowing that I was a little inclined to be lazy, never came up before eight. So that we could breakfast at our ease.

“Let us talk a little, Nicette. I am interested in your future; you cannot doubt that.”

“You have proved it, monsieur.”

“What are you going to do when you leave me?”

“Go back to my mother.”

“That is quite right; but suppose she still refuses to let you in?”

“I will try to find work; I will go out to service, if I must; perhaps I shall be able to get in somewhere.”

“Undoubtedly; but who can say what sort of people you will encounter, and what hands you will fall into? Young and pretty as you are, you will find it harder than others might to get a suitable place, if, as I assume, you mean to remain virtuous.”

“Oh! indeed I do mean to remain virtuous, monsieur.”

“I know what men are; they are almost all libertines; marriage puts no curb on their passions. Wherever you take service, your masters will make you some unequivocal proposals, and will maltreat you if you reject them.”

“Then I will leave the house; I’ll hire myself out to a single lady.”

“Old maids are exacting, and keep their young servants in close confinement, for fear that they may walk the streets and make acquaintances. Young women receive much company, and will set you a dangerous example.”

“How good you talk this morning!”

“Don’t wonder at that; a drunkard is a connoisseur in wine, a welcher in horses, a painter in pictures, a libertine in methods of seduction. For the very reason that I am not virtuous, I am better able than another to warn you of the risks you are about to run. Experience teaches. You did not yield to me, and I desire to preserve you for the future. Don’t be grateful to me for it; very likely, it is simply a matter of self-esteem on my part, for I feel that it would be distressing to me to see the profanation of a flower that I have failed to pluck. You understand me, don’t you, Nicette?”

“Yes, yes, monsieur! I’m no prude, and I know what you mean! But don’t be afraid! How could I give another what I refused you?”

She said this with evident feeling and sincerity. Clearly she liked me; I could not doubt it; she was all the more praiseworthy for having resisted me.

“After all, my dear girl, I don’t see why you shouldn’t continue to sell flowers; it is better suited to you than domestic service.”

“That is true, monsieur, but——”

“I understand you. Here, Nicette, take this purse; you may accept it without a blush, for it is not the price of your dishonor. I am simply doing you a favor, lending you a little money, if you like that better.”

“Oh! monsieur, money—from a young man! What will people think of that?”

“You must not say from whom you got it.”

“When a girl suddenly has money in her possession, people think, they

imagine that——”

“Let the gossips chatter, and force them to hold their tongues by the way you behave.”

“My mother——”

“A mother who refuses to support her child has no right to demand an account of her actions.”

“But this purse—you are giving me too much, monsieur.”

“The purse contains only three hundred francs; I won it two days ago at *écarté*. Really, Nicette, if you knew how easily money is lost at cards, you would be less grateful to me for this trifle.”

“A trifle! three hundred francs! enough to set me up in business! Why, monsieur, it’s a treasure!”

“Yes, to you who know the full value of money, and use it judiciously. But things are valuable only so long as they are in their proper place.”

“All this means, I suppose, that you are very rich?”

“It means that, having been brought up in affluence, accustomed to gratify all my whims, I am not familiar enough with the value of money. This three hundred francs that I offer you, I should probably lose at cards without a pang; so take the money, Nicette; you can give it back to me, if the day ever comes when I need it.”

“Oh, yes! whenever you want it, monsieur; everything I have will always be at your service.”

“I don’t doubt it, my dear friend; so that business is settled.”

“Yes, monsieur; if my mother sends me away, I’ll hire a small room, I’ll buy flowers; I’ll be saving and orderly, and perhaps some day I’ll get where I can have a nice little shop of my own.”

“Then you will marry according to your taste, and you’ll be happy.”

“Perhaps so! but let’s not talk about that, monsieur.”

“Well! time flies; it’s nearly eight o’clock, and you must go, Nicette.”

“Yes, monsieur, that is true; whenever you say the word. But I—is——”

“What do you want to say?”

“Shan’t I see you again?”

“Yes, indeed; I hope to see you often. If you move to another quarter, you must leave your new address with my concierge.”

“Very well, monsieur; I won’t fail.”

The child was in evident distress; she turned her face away to conceal her tears. Could it be that she was sorry to leave me? What nonsense! We had known each other only since the night before! And yet, I too was unhappy at parting from her.

She was certain to meet one or more servants on the stairs; but what was she to do? there was no other way out. She promised to go down very rapidly, and to hurry under the porte cochère.

I kissed her affectionately—too affectionately for a man who had given her three hundred francs; it was too much like taking compensation for the gift.

I opened the door leading to the landing, and stood aside to let Nicette go out first, when a roar of laughter made me look up. That fiendish Raymond's door was open, and he stood inside with a young woman; that young woman was Agathe!

It was a contemptible trick. I recognized Raymond's prying curiosity and Agathe's spirit of mischief. They were on the watch for me, no doubt; possibly they had been on sentry-go since daybreak. But how did it happen that Agathe was there? She had never spoken to Raymond. I swore that he should pay me for his perfidy.

Nicette looked at me, trying to read in my eyes whether she should go forward or back. It was useless to pretend any longer; perhaps, indeed, if there were any further delay, Monsieur Raymond would succeed in collecting a large part of the household on my landing. So I pushed Nicette toward the stairs.

“Adieu, Monsieur Dorsan!” she said sadly.

“Adieu, adieu, my child! I hope that your mother—— I will see—you shall hear—perhaps we may—adieu!”

I had no idea what I was saying; anger and vexation impeded my utterance. But Nicette, who was moved by but one sentiment,—regret at leaving me,—wiped the tears from her eyes with a corner of her apron.

“Ha! ha! this is really sentimental!” laughed Mademoiselle Agathe, as she watched the girl go downstairs; “what! tears and sighs! Ha! ha! it's enough to make one die of laughing! But I should be much obliged to you, monsieur, if you would tell me how it happened that I was at a ball with you last night, and disguised, without knowing anything about it. Well! why don't you speak? don't you hear me?”

My attention was engrossed by another object. My eyes were fastened on my neighbor, and my steadfast gaze evidently embarrassed him; for, in a moment, I saw that he turned as red as fire; he began to shift about in his confusion, tried to

smile, and at last returned to his own room, taking care to lock the door.

“Ah! Monsieur Raymond, I owe you one for this! we shall meet again!” I said, walking toward his door. Then I turned to answer Mademoiselle Agathe, but she had entered my apartment; and as she was perfectly familiar with the locality, I found her in my little study, nonchalantly reclining on the sofa.

“Do tell me, Eugène, what all this means? Mon Dieu! how things are changed about! the couch in the study; the bed partly tumbled; the remains of a breakfast. What happened here last night?”

“Nothing, I assure you.”

“Oh! nothing out of the ordinary course, I understand that. But this couch puzzles me. Tell me about it, Eugène, my little Eugène. Because you are no longer my lover is no reason why we shouldn't be friends.”

You are aware, reader, that Mademoiselle Agathe is the milliner with whom I had fallen out because I discovered that she was unfaithful to me. In fact, it was my vexation on her account that had led me to indulge in those melancholy reflections during my stroll along the boulevard on the preceding evening. But since then my susceptible heart had experienced so many new sensations, that the memory of Agathe's treachery had vanished altogether; I had ceased to regret her, consequently I was no longer angry with her. I realized that she was justified in joking me about my serious air, which was not at all consistent with our former liaison, and which might have led one to think that I expected to find a Penelope in a young milliner. So I assumed a more cheerful demeanor, and questioned her in my turn.

“How did you happen to be there on my landing, talking with Raymond, whom you could never endure?”

“But this couch—this couch here in the study?”

“You shall know all about it, but answer me first.”

“Oh! I've no objection; I went into the country yesterday with Gerville—you know, the young government clerk who lives on the floor below.”

“Yes, my successor, in fact.”

“Your successor, call him so. We returned late; I was very tired, and——”

“You passed the night with him; that's a matter of course, and perfectly natural, in my opinion. Well?”

“Why, I had to go away this morning. At half-past six, I crept softly downstairs and was just passing through the porte cochère, when I saw Raymond standing guard at the corner. He scrutinized me, and smiled slyly.—‘On my

word,' he said, 'I didn't believe it was you; you were perfectly disguised; the fishwoman's costume is very becoming to you, and yet it changes you amazingly. I'd have sworn that Monsieur Dorsan was lying to me.'—I listened, without understanding a word; but your name and what he said aroused my curiosity. I suspected some mistake, so I forced Raymond to tell me all he knew; I haven't stopped laughing at it yet. Raymond was delighted when he found out that it wasn't I who was with you. I asked him if he was certain that your new victim was still in the house. He said he was; for he had passed most of the night on the landing, and had gone on duty at the porte cochère at daybreak. So I came up with him, to make the tableau more interesting; and we waited at least an hour, until it was your good pleasure to open your door. We would have stayed there till night, I assure you, rather than not satisfy our mutual curiosity."

"Gad! what a fellow that Raymond is! An old woman couldn't have done better."

"Well, I've told my story; now it's your turn."

"What do you want me to tell you? You saw a girl leave my rooms, eh?"

"Yes, she was very pretty; a face that takes your eye; rather a large mouth. But that costume! What, Monsieur Eugène! you, a dandy of dandies, caught by a round cap! Why, I no longer recognize you!"

"For what I propose to do, mademoiselle, the question of cap or hat is of no consequence at all."

"Of course, you don't propose to do anything, because you have done enough."

"You are mistaken, Agathe. That is an honest, virtuous girl; she is nothing to me, and never will be."

"What's that? Oh! it's as plain as a pikestaff: she came here to sleep, so as not to be afraid of the dark; that's all!—"

"Go and see if they're coming, Jean!"

"I realize that appearances are against us; and yet nothing can be more true than what I tell you. The explanation as to the couch being in the study is that she slept in my bedroom, and I slept here."

"For ten minutes, very likely; but after that you joined her."

"No; I swear that I did not."

"You'd never have been donkey enough to stay here."

"I understand that, in your eyes, virtue and innocence are the merest folly."

“Ah! you are not polite, monsieur. But as I have never known you to be either virtuous or innocent, I may be permitted to express surprise at your virtuous qualities, which are entirely unfamiliar to me.”

“I am not trying to make myself out any better than I am, and I confess to you frankly that I attempted to triumph over this girl; but her resistance was so natural, her tears so genuine, her entreaties so touching, that I was really deeply moved and almost repented of what I had tried to do.”

“That is magnificent; and I presume that the virtuous and innocent orange girl came to your rooms in order that her resistance might be the better appreciated. —Ha! ha! what a fairy tale!”

“You may believe what you choose. It is none the less true that Nicette is virtuous and that she isn’t an orange girl.”

“Oh! pardon me, monsieur, if I have unintentionally slighted your charmer. Mademoiselle Nicette probably sells herring at the Marché des Innocents?”

“No, mademoiselle; she sells nothing but flowers.”

“Flowers! Why, that is superb! Ah! so she’s a flower girl! I am no longer surprised at your consideration for her.”

“She certainly deserves more consideration than many women who wear fashionable bonnets.”

“Or who make them, eh?”

“The argument is even stronger as to them.”

“Monsieur is vexed because I venture to doubt the virtuous morals of a girl who comes, very innocently no doubt, to sleep with a young man, who has himself turned Cato in twenty-four hours! Look you, Eugène, I don’t care what you say, it isn’t possible.”

“I shall say nothing more, because I attach no value to your opinion.”

“Again! No matter, let’s make peace; and I will believe, if it will give you pleasure, that your friend was the Maid of Orleans.”

Mademoiselle Agathe came to me and kissed me; she was almost on my knees; she embraced me very lovingly, and I believe that it rested with me to betray my successor, but I had no desire so to do. My mind was still full of Nicette; I was angry with the woman who refused to believe in her innocence and virtue, and who made sport of my heroic behavior. When one has had to make such a mighty effort to do a good deed, the person who seeks to rob us of our satisfaction therein is always unwelcome. So that I received Mademoiselle Agathe’s caress very coolly.

At that, the young milliner took offence in her turn, although she loved me no more than I loved her; probably she had never loved me; but in many people self-esteem takes the place of love and, of itself alone, gives birth to jealousy. Agathe put on her shawl, which she had laid aside when she came in, tied her bonnet strings, and gave me a courtesy accompanied by a smile in which she tried to cast an expression of irony, but in which anger and vexation were clearly marked.

“Adieu, monsieur! I understand that the events of last night must have fatigued you; you need rest, and a little solitude; I leave you to dream at your leisure of the brilliant conquest which will furnish you with constant enjoyment from this time on! I beg you to be good enough to give my address to Mademoiselle *de* Nicette; I shall be delighted to have her custom, in case she should think of changing her style of dress; unless, however, you intend to take her under your protection in that modest gown. I can understand that, to a sensitive and loving heart, the round cap of virtue is preferable to the toque of frivolity.”

And Mademoiselle Agathe took her leave, humming:

““When one knows how to love and please,
What else need one desire?””

VII

A WORD ABOUT MYSELF

Agathe had been gone for a long while, and I was still in my study, thinking of the past evening and night. Somebody opened the door of my apartment: it was my concierge, Madame Dupont, coming to put my room to rights, as usual. As she came in, the good soul did not fail to glance at everything within range; and a woman will see more at a glance than we men can see in fifteen minutes.

Fool that I was! I had forgotten to put the couch where it belonged! that wretched Agathe was responsible for that! But when all was said and done, I was master in my own apartment; I could arrange my furniture as I pleased. I was not in the habit of talking with my concierge, and Madame Dupont knew it. Nevertheless, I noticed that she hovered about me and tried to enter into conversation.

“It looks as though ‘twill be a lovely day; that’s very lucky, seeing it’s Sunday; there are so many people who don’t have any other day for an outing!”

“Yes,” I assented, “it is very fortunate.”

“Ah! monsieur has moved his furniture, I see. Does monsieur mean to leave this couch in his study?”

“No; you may put it back where it belongs; I’ll help you.”

“I see; monsieur has been trying an experiment?”

“Yes, it was an experiment.”

“That’s like my daughter, who’s forever moving her son’s cradle from one place to another. Last night, she put it beside the bed; but my son-in-law wouldn’t have it there, because the child’s nearly four years old, and it is embarrassing for a husband and wife, when—— Why, your bed’s hardly tumbled at all, monsieur!”

“I suppose that I didn’t move much.”

“Monsieur has already breakfasted, apparently? Monsieur was hungry earlier to-day than usual.”

I made no reply, but dressed to go out, being impatient to leave the house. Madame Dupont stooped and picked up something, which she brought to me with a mischievous air.

“Here’s a little cross *à la* Jeannette, monsieur, that I just found beside your bed.”

“Ah! give it to me, Madame Dupont, give it to me; I know what it is, I bought it yesterday. I have got to send it to someone; it’s to go into the country, to our farmer’s daughter.”

“It’s a pretty little cross; but I shouldn’t think it was new.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Madame Dupont.”

And I hastily put the cross in my pocket, to hide it from the glances of that accursed concierge, who, finding that I no longer replied to her, talked on all alone, in order to keep the conversation alive.

“They say the girl was very pretty, and that she was crying! That’s a strange thing.”

“What girl are you talking about?”

“A little thing—a sort of—faith! I don’t know just what she was, for I didn’t see her. To be sure, she passed my lodge, but she went by so quick! brrr! like a bomb!”

“Who told you anything about her?”

“Madame Martin, Madame Bertin’s cook, who saw her when she went downstairs to get her milk.”

“Where did the girl come from?”

“Oh!—I—they—that is—I don’t know anything about it, monsieur.”

The tone in which Madame Dupont told me that she knew nothing satisfied me that she did know a great deal. Raymond had probably tattled to Madame Martin, and she to the concierge. And then the couch, and the gilt cross: I had certainly become the byword of the whole house! Madame Bertin would undoubtedly be the first one to hear about it, and Madame Bertin was the mother of two pretty daughters, whose esteem I was most anxious to retain. And yet it was a generous action, a sublime action when performed by a young man, which was likely to injure me in the opinion of many people. Ah! how untrustworthy are appearances!

I was about to put an end to the chatter of my concierge by leaving my lodgings, when she detained me.

“By the way, monsieur, I beg your pardon—I quite forgot—I have something for you.”

“What is it, pray?”

“I had entirely forgotten it; that girl is on my brain. It’s a letter.”

“A letter! who gave it to you?”

“The postman, monsieur; he brought it last night; you’d gone out, and when you came home it was very late and I was in bed; for I couldn’t even see you, and that’s how it was that——”

“Morableu! Madame Dupont, give me the letter, and spare me your reflections!”

“Here it is, monsieur.”

I recognized the postmark and the handwriting: it was from my sister, my dear Amélie. But that reminds me that I ought to have told you before this who I am, where I come from, and what my business is. I confess that it never occurred to me; indeed, I should have been quite capable of going on to the end without giving you any further information, and my adventures would have been none the less simple in your eyes; for as I have not to tell of mysteries, murders, abductions, substitution of children,—which always produces an excellent effect,—promenades in the galleries of the West, visits to subterranean caverns, moonlight visions, encounters in murky caves, etc., etc., I shall have nothing to explain or disentangle for my dénouement, and shall be constrained, in all probability, to end as simply as I began.

“But,” you will say, “it is always well to know with whom one is dealing; in fact, it is customary to begin with that.”—That is true; but I care little about doing as others do, and, moreover, it seems to me that these never-ending stories of births and family anecdotes are not adapted to afford you much amusement; for that reason, I shall be very brief.

My name is Eugène Dorsan; I am of a Parisian family; my father was a king’s attorney [*procureur*]; they say *avoué* now, a title which lends itself less readily to pleasantry. However, my father was a very honorable man, so I have always been told, and I have never doubted it. He earned a great deal of money, to his credit be it said; but he died young, wherein he made a mistake; especially as his death was the result of overwork. My mother was left a widow with two children: my sister Amélie, my senior by a year, and your humble servant. Madame Dorsan was rich; she was in a position to marry again, but she preferred to retain her freedom; she was wise both on her own account and on ours; for, in my opinion, marriage, while a most excellent thing, should be used in moderation.

My sister and I received a good education. We made the most of it, especially my sister, who is naturally amiable, kindly, and gentle, and whose only aim was to satisfy her teachers, and to demonstrate to her mother her affection and her

obedience. For my part, I am no phoenix, but I have no glaring faults. My predominant passion is the love which women arouse in me; but as that passion could not develop in my childhood, it did not impede my progress.

My mother had bought a beautiful country estate near Melun, and we spent the summer there. Our childhood and youth passed away without accident or trouble, without any important occurrences, and, I may say also, without sorrow or tribulation. Indeed, what sources of affliction can one encounter before the age of fifteen, when one is surrounded by wealthy and generous kindred?

How I pity the poor wretches reared in poverty by parents whom misfortune often makes stern and unfeeling! Even in the days of innocence, they know the afflictions of maturity; what a pitiable apprenticeship to life!

At the age of sixteen my sister married a young man of twenty-four, a steady, orderly youth and a tremendous worker, who owned a cotton mill at Melun. Three years after the wedding, our mother died. She had economized in the interest of her children, and she left us ten thousand a year each. Amélie, now Madame Déneterre, and her husband took up their abode in our country house; and I returned to Paris, partly to seek diversion from my grief at my mother's death, and partly to complete my acquaintance with the world.

Six years had passed since then, and I had become so attached to the seductive capital that I spent only six weeks, in the summer, with my sister. I had not yet been to her that year, and I assumed that that was why she was writing to me. That dear sister of mine, knowing that I was not over-virtuous, was exceedingly anxious that I should marry, in the hope that that would put an end to my follies; and every summer I found at her house a new young woman, very pretty and sweet and well bred, possessed of abundant talents and attractions and a very respectable dowry. She was presented to me without affectation, but I knew what was in the air. But, despite the attentions of her parents, the eloquent sermons from my sister on the joys of wedded life, and the sighs and sidelong glances of the young lady herself, I took my leave at the end of six weeks without making a declaration.

"Patience!" my sister would say to her husband; "next year, I'll find one who will turn his head, I'll wager."

"So be it!" Déneterre would reply tranquilly; "we'll put it off till next year."

Now, let us read my sister's letter:

“MY DEAR EUGÈNE:

“It is the last of July, and you haven’t come to see us yet; can it be that life in Paris has made you entirely forgetful of the relations who love you and think constantly of you and your future?——”

My future! Oh, yes! that means another marriage on the carpet. What a mania it is of Amélie’s! always trying to induce me to marry! It is worse than the conventional guardian of comedy. But let us go on:

“It seems to me that you must be tired of those numerous conquests, of those gallant adventures, of those women who have no other guide than pleasure, and who forget you as quickly as they adore you.——”

Aha! sarcasm! You are mistaken, my dear sister; I am not tired of making conquests; those that I make are not all so simple as you think, said I to myself. But in the provinces people are even more spiteful, more evil-tongued than in Paris; and since my sister has left the capital, she takes it upon herself to lecture me. But at heart she is kindness itself! I cannot be angry with her for constantly thinking of me. But where was I?

“As quickly as they adore you. I often hear of you from people who come here from Paris; I know that you are more heedless than ever, that you think of nothing but your pleasures, that you deceive all your mistresses, that they pay you back in your own coin.——”

How well she divines the truth! it is astonishing!

“We never hear of any sensible action on your part.——”

Ah! my dear sister, if you had known the story of the night I had just passed! And people slander me, and call me a libertine!—But you were very, very pretty, Nicette! and I was really entitled to great credit for my self-restraint.

“I trust, however, that you are not incorrigible. Come to us very soon. We have pretty women here, too; they are modest and virtuous, and I should suppose that that would give them an additional attraction.——”

Oh, of course! very pretty women! stiff, affected, prudish, or simpering! And such costumes! In a word, genuine provincials—I need say no more. As for their virtue, it is possible that—but it is not safe to trust to appearances, as I know better than most; for I would have sworn that Nicette was a little wanton.

“My husband sends a memorandum of a few errands he would like you to do for him. He is organizing grand fishing parties for your visit, and I look forward with delight to the prospect of embracing you.

“AMÉLIE DÉNETERRE.”

I determined to go to Melun—in a few days. There were several business matters that I must first attend to. Moreover, I should be very glad to know what Nicette was going to do; I was deeply interested in that young woman, and I did not propose to lose sight of her.

I left my apartment and was going downstairs; but I could not resist my desire to speak to my neighbor Raymond. I wished to thank him for his discretion. I rang at his door; no one answered, but I heard a noise within. I rang again, and that time the bellrope remained in my hand. He did not open the door. I felt sure that he had bored a hole in his door and had seen that it was I. No matter: he could not always avoid me; meanwhile, that he might know that it was I who had broken his bellrope, I tied it to my own.

I went downstairs at last; and on the first floor I met Madame Bertin and her two daughters, going to mass.

I bowed; they returned my bow, but with a frigid air very different from the amiable greeting they were accustomed to bestow on me. The two young ladies stood aside without raising their eyes, and the mother’s face wore a glacial expression that made me afraid to speak to her.

“This is the result of the infernal chatter of Raymond and Madame Martin and the concierge,” I thought; “these ladies know that Nicette passed the night in my rooms; that is to say, the mamma knows it, and that is why she ordered her daughters to pass me without raising their eyes, without smiling, and, above all, without speaking to me.”

But you will tell me, the milliner also used to pass the night in your rooms. Ah! that was very different. Agathe was dressed like everybody else, and nobody noticed her; moreover, there were several people in the house for whom she made hats; and no one ever knew certainly whom she was going to see. So that I was able to retain Madame Bertin’s good graces, and was admitted to her society, when Mademoiselle Agathe honored me with her favors. And now I was tabooed because Nicette, the pretty flower girl, had passed the night in my rooms. And you know how it all came about. But the world is made that way; it judges by the exterior before it knows what is within. Be whatever you choose, but observe the proprieties; save appearances, and you will be received everywhere.

These reflections made me angry. I left the house, cursing those people who see everything in the same light and refuse to depart from the narrow circle that custom has marked out. I paced the streets angrily, I dined angrily, I drank my coffee angrily, and my frame of mind had not changed when, finding myself at the foot of the Champs-Élysées, I sat down in a chair, the back of which was against a large tree.

VIII

THE MAGIC LANTERN

I had been sitting against the tree for some time; the darkness had dispersed some of the saunterers; and those who remained plunged deeper into the cross paths, seeking, as it seemed, by preference the darkest and least-frequented spots. Doubtless they had their reasons for that. I do not know precisely what I was thinking about, when I heard heavy steps approach and stop behind me. I turned and saw a man carrying what we call a magic lantern. He set his apparatus down against the tree; he had not seen me, or did not notice me. He lighted his lantern to exhibit his pictures, whereupon I at once thought of Florian's monkey; the reminiscence made me laugh, and I prepared to listen to the owner of the lantern, although I feared that the comparison would be unfavorable to him.

I heard him mutter between his teeth as he arranged his lights:

“Ah! the hussy! the rascal! where has she been these three hours, since she left me on the pretext of going to feed the brat? She's playing some game on me. If it wasn't a show day, how quickly I'd drop the whole business!—Never mind, Madame Trousquin, I'll find a way to solve my doubts; and if I see anything crooked, there'll be a sharp and effective reckoning!”

The poor man was evidently jealous; he swore and stamped and glared from side to side, but Madame Trousquin did not appear. By way of compensation, the gleam of the magic lantern attracted a girl and a young soldier, the latter of whom took his seat close beside the former, bidding the showman to close the curtain around them. He enveloped them in an old blue or gray sheet,—it was impossible to distinguish the color,—and I could not help thinking that a magic lantern may be at times a very great convenience.

Père Trousquin began his performance, interrupting himself frequently to swear at his wife, who did not return; and I listened attentively, although I could see nothing, not being under the curtain; but I had an idea that the spectators for whom the pictures were being explained were not looking at them.

“First of all, messieurs and mesdames, you see the sun, the moon, the stars, and the little fishes. Farther on, the products of the soil, such as trees, vegetables, animals, caves, waterfalls, rattlesnakes. Pray examine Monsieur Sun, whom you can't look at because he's so bright; and Madame Moon, who is full because

she's in her first quarter. See those stars, how fast they travel, as if the devil was carrying 'em off!—Three hours to put Fifi to bed! Ah! the slut! how I'll make her dance to-night!—See Venus, glistening like a pinchbeck pin! See the shepherd's star! The shepherd Tircis, I suppose, seeing what his reputation is. And there's the Three Kings, who are always together. And the Chariot, that travels like those you see in the mountains of Russia. And Mercury and Jupiter. And the Virgin and the Twins. And the Bull and the Goat. Anybody can understand about them. Do you see the Scales? Do you see the Scorpion?—a wicked beast he is! All these, messieurs and mesdames, are planets that determine the nervous *infections* of the people born under their *affluence*. The planet Venus is for wanton women, the Shepherd for good-looking youths, the Three Kings for heroes, the Chariot for coachmen, Jupiter for roistering blades, Mercury for apothecaries, the Virgin for little girls, and the Goat for many worthy gentlemen whom you know. Observe, messieurs and mesdames, in the middle of that great black cloud, full of stars, between the Bear and the Ram, you'll see a big, hairy comet, with a tail longer than a fox's. That brilliant meteor has in all ages announced the end of the world; with its tail or its head it is capable of overturning our globe, which is held in place only by a thread, and broiling us all like chestnuts."

At this point, a movement under the curtain led me to surmise that the comet had aroused great curiosity.

"One moment, messieurs and mesdames, and you'll see what you will see."

Père Trousin pulled a cord to change the picture, and, after several very emphatic oaths, resumed his explanation, not changing his voice a quarter of a tone.

"This, messieurs and mesdames, shows you the interior of the palace of the great Kin-Kin-Li-King, Emperor of China and King of all the Pekins. You perceive him seated in his beautiful gilt armchair of state, in full ceremonial costume, surrounded by learned mandarins and national guardsmen. He is giving a public audience and receiving petitions from all the Chinese of the suburbs. Observe, in a corner, that father leaning on his daughter and a bamboo stick; he has come to demand justice upon a seducer who has made that poor innocent creature the mother of five little children, and who feeds them on blows alone. See, messieurs, how the ill-fated father's features gleam with wrath and indignation; read the sorrow, pain, and repentance in the girl's eyes. That man just to the left, wrapped in a brown cloak, with only his nose visible, is the seducer, awaiting his condemnation. See how pale and cadaverous his face is, how hollow his eyes, and how tremulous his gait; well he knows that he will not

be let off cheap. Farther on, in the background——”

A stout female appeared at this juncture, panting for breath, and interrupted the explanation of the picture. I presumed that it was Madame Trousquin, and the dialogue that ensued between her and the owner of the lantern proved to me that my conjecture was well founded.

MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN.

Ah! here you are at last, you cursed street walker!—Farther away, in the background—(*To his wife.*) You’ll pay me for this, that’s all I’ve got to say to you!—Farther away, in the background, that wretched creature whom the guards are taking away, and who is struggling and writhing as if he had the colic, is a deserter, who has just deserted and was going to the enemy’s camp on treason bent; his business will soon be settled; he’ll be shot and then hung.

MADAME TROUSQUIN. (*during her husband’s explanation.*)

Hoity-toity! what are you making so much noise about? Didn’t I have to put Fifi to bed and make the soup? And I’d like to know if it ain’t a good, long walk from the Champs-Élysées to Rue Jean-Pain-Mollet!

MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN.

You lie, I tell you; you went off at five o’clock, and here it is nine. Where in the devil have you been? Pull the cord.

Madame Trousquin placed on a stool a bowl which she had under her apron, then assumed her post on that side of the lantern from which the change of pictures was operated.

MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN.

This, messieurs and mesdames, represents a view of Athens, in Greece.—(*To his wife.*) Put my soup on the charcoal and tell me where you’ve been.

MADAME TROUSQUIN.

Why, I’ve been at home, I tell you, you jealous fool! I met Angélique and talked with her a minute. Have you much of an audience?

MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN.

Observe the beauty of the sky and water. Observe the palaces, the columns and temples, built by the Romans; note those magnificent statues, of which but few fragments remain. See that circus, in which they used to hold bull fights, to train the young men to be strong.—(*To his wife.*) I’m satisfied that you’ve been gallivanting with Grugeon.—See, in the distance, the famous Partiates fighting

with their fists like Englishmen, and playing the game of Siam with a large roulette table.—(*To his wife.*) He asked you to take a glass of beer in a private room.—That handsome young man you see at the right is Alcibiades, with Socrates, his teacher, who is teaching him things he don't know.

While I listened I saw the curtain move more violently, and I heard the girl say in an undertone:

“Oh! how stupid! Ah! how stupid! I tell you I won't!”

Père Trousin motioned to his wife to pull the cord, and resumed his harangue.

“This, messieurs and mesdames, is taken from mythology; it is the magnificent Judgment of Solomon, called the Wise, who is preparing to carve a little child, exactly as if it was a pie. Observe the consternation of the little one as he awaits his fate, with his legs in the air; observe the fiendish glee of that shrewish stepmother, who looks on, dry-eyed, as if someone was going to give her a slice of rabbit; but observe the grief of the real mother, who seeks to turn aside the cleaver which already threatens the innocent child's navel.”

THE YOUNG WOMAN (*under the curtain*).

Ah! the villain! ah! the villain! he keeps right on. What a stupid!

MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN.

Don't be alarmed, there won't be any cutting done; nature is about to speak.—(*To his wife.*) Give me my soup; I'm hungry.—The mighty Solomon, looking at the two mothers with Argus eyes, says to himself—(*To his wife.*) In God's name, why don't you get through with the onions?—“This child cannot have two mothers; if it was two fathers, that might be, such things have been seen.”—(*To his wife.*) You know something about that.—“Now, there's a snake in the grass here; the real mother's affection manifests itself by a deluge of tears; but this other vixen of a mother, who's as placid as Baptiste,”—(*To his wife.*) It smells as if it was burned.—“has no maternal entrails; so the case is decided!”—Pull the cord.—“This, messieurs and mesdames, represents King David doing battle with the giant Goliath, the terror of the Philistines.”—(*To his wife.*) Why don't you look and see if it's right?—See with what force David hurls the stone that lays the giant in the dust.

MADAME TROUSQUIN. (*looking over the lantern*).

This ain't the one; you're showing 'em the Battle of Marengo now.

MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN. MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN.

As I was saying, messieurs and mesdames, you see the famous Battle of Marengo, won by the French troops.—(*To his wife.*) You always put in too many carrots.

MADAME TROUSQUIN.

You don't say! you want to choose your vegetables, do you? You're getting to be very particular. How much have you made to-day?

MONSIEUR TROUSQUIN.

Eighteen sous.—Note the gunners and the cuirassiers; see how the sabres play, while the cannonballs meet in mid air and the shells spread fire and blood on all sides; see the hussars, the dragoons, the trumpets, and the drums! hear the shrieks of the dead and dying, the moans of the wounded and vanquished. See that young soldier on the right, defending his flag with his teeth, because both his arms have been cut off; and at the left, that officer who has three dead horses upon him, and who forgets that he is suffocating while he takes aim at the enemy's general. See the dust, the flame, the smoke, the carnage, and the corpses that embellish the picture. The action is superb, you see; the battle waxes hotter and more furious——

At this point, the explanation was interrupted by an unforeseen catastrophe: the young woman and the soldier, who were evidently taking the liveliest interest in the battle,—for I kept hearing exclamations from the damsel and energetic monosyllables from her companion,—not content with moving the curtain, threw themselves violently against the magic lantern, at the most critical point of the Battle of Marengo. The shock was so violent that the ambulatory theatre could not sustain it; it fell backward, and the spectators fell upon it, while the manager of the establishment was thrown to the ground with his bowl of soup, and Madame Trousquin was entangled by the cords that she held in each hand.

I was left standing alone in the midst of the devastation, for my great tree preserved me from all peril. What a grotesque picture was presented to my eyes! Solomon and the great Kin-Kin-Li-King were lying in a heap with the gardens of the Luxembourg and of Athens; the sun no longer shone, the moon was covered with oil, the comet shorn of its tail. Père Trousquin was struggling under his broken lantern, still holding in his hand the handle of his bowl; and the young woman had fallen in a posture that disclosed beauty which would have put to shame the most perfect moon that ever graced a magic lantern. The young soldier's head was in Père Trousquin's bowl; his face was covered by carrots and onions; he seemed to be caught in such a way that he could not extricate

himself from the trap. As for Mère Trousin, she had fallen gracefully; her cords had held her up, and the curtain of the lantern concealed what might have caused her modesty to blush. However, as those who are least hurt always make the most noise, Madame Trousin's shrieks were simply deafening; her husband uttered the most frightful oaths, and the young woman groaned plaintively. The soldier alone made no outcry; I believe that he found the soup and vegetables to his liking. All the idlers in the neighborhood were attracted to the broken lantern by the uproar, the shrieks and oaths; and I was surrounded in an instant by a crowd of people who came from I don't know where; for a moment before I could not see a soul on the Champs-Élysées. My retreat was cut off; I could not make my way out of the crowd; but I was not sorry to see how it would end. After shouting and swearing to their heart's content, the unfortunates tried to extricate themselves from the tangle they were in: the soldier succeeded in uncovering his face, the girl rose and arranged her skirts. Mère Trousin disentangled herself from her cords, the magic lantern was lifted from the ground, and Père Trousin struggled to his feet. The soldier tried to slink away with his companion; but he could not elude the owner of the lantern, who insisted that he should pay for the damages.

"My glasses are smashed," said Père Trousin; "you've spoiled my sun and moon, you've broken my Judgment of Solomon and my Chinese palace, and ruined my views of Greece; you've got to pay me for all that."

"Go to the devil!" said the soldier, repairing the disorder of his costume as best he could. "I won't pay you for anything at all. What do I care for your Chinese and your Solomon! your sun and moon look just like the night lights you buy for a sou; and as for your fat, just put it in your lamps."

"You broke my lantern, and you've got to pay me for it."

"You're an old drunkard; if your lantern wasn't firm on its legs, it's no fault of mine."

"You tumbled against it during the Battle of Marengo."

"You threw it over, yourself, trying to imitate cannon."

"You made me break my bowl."

"You're responsible for my tearing my breeches."

"Besides, my lantern is a moral and respectable show, and I don't propose to have it used for——"

"I say! stop that, or I'll cut out your tongue!"

The soldier put his hand to his sword; the crowd instantly made a backward movement, the girl clung to her friend's arm, and Mère Trousin pulled her

husband out of range, taking the stool for a buckler. The two adversaries measured each other with their eyes for several minutes, without moving. The soldier gave no sign of paying, and Père Trousquin did not seem to be in a mood to let him go away until he had remunerated him for his losses. Thereupon I concluded that there was but one way to adjust the affair without bloodshed. The magic lantern episode had amused me, and had entirely dispelled my ill humor; it was no more than fair that I should act as mediator in the dispute. I alone had remained near the combatants; for the bystanders held themselves respectfully aloof from the sword and the stool. I felt in my pocket and took out two five-franc pieces, which I tossed upon the damaged lantern.

“There,” said I to the proprietor, “is the means to restore your palaces and your planets; but take my advice, and another time don’t fasten your curtain so closely round your audience. Children’s theatres are frequented now by people of all ages; if you don’t believe me, ask Séraphin, who receives *petite-mâitresses* at his show, because of the darkness in the hall during his arabesque fires.”

Père Trousquin stared with all his eyes; his wife pounced on the two coins, and the soldier was allowed to go his way with his companion; which he did not do without bowing to me most respectfully.

I too walked away, and turned into Rue de Rivoli. I looked at my watch; it was only nine o’clock, and I have never been fond of going to bed early, especially when I am in the mood for amusing myself. As the scene of the magic lantern had put me in that mood, I determined to encourage such a desirable disposition.

How was I to amuse myself? There are thousands of ways in Paris, you will say; but, in the matter of pleasure, you must never promise yourself too much, if you wish to have a little. In a large assembly, for six agreeable people you will find twenty bores; in a small party, your friends may have business affairs that annoy them; the ladies, sick headaches or the vapors; and you often pass a very dull hour where you looked forward to much entertainment. The wisest plan, therefore, is not to count upon anything. But I remembered that there was a grand fête at Tivoli. It was nine o’clock; if I took a cab, I should arrive just at the height of the evening.

IX

TIVOLI

A lovely spot, that Tivoli Garden! When I stepped within its gates, it seemed to me that I entered one of those enchanted sojourns so splendidly described in the *Thousand and One Nights*. The music, the illuminations, the sports of all sorts, the fireworks—everything combined to dazzle the eyes and excite the imagination. What a pity it seemed when a vulgar face and a fishwoman's costume marred the beauty of the picture and reminded me that I was in a public garden, where any decently dressed person could enter on payment of three francs twelve sous!

Before I had taken twenty steps in the garden, I had seen many things. What beautiful avenues! How those garlands of fire burst on the sight! Yonder, people gathered in crowds, gazed at one another, scrutinized costumes, and sought acquaintances: it was the Boulevard de Gand of Tivoli. Farther on, the lights became less frequent; an occasional lamp guided your steps without betraying you. The couples were more widely scattered; they no longer went about to exhibit themselves; some, indeed, seemed to try to evade observation, to desire darkness and mystery. Happy thickets! how often have you sheltered love and pleasure! how many kisses have been given and received under cover of your dense foliage! Ah! if you could speak!—But I seemed to hear voices close at hand; I had thoughtlessly turned my steps in the direction of those solitary thickets, where I, being alone, had nothing to hope for. As I circled a clump of shrubs, I saw something white on the grass; a gentleman and a lady were there, discussing some very weighty and secret matter no doubt, for I thought that they were whispering to each other. But my presence disturbed them; the lady, with a little shriek, pushed her companion away; whereupon I walked quickly in another direction. What pleasure can there be in interfering with that of other people?

I determined to go back to the crowd, to leave those thickets, where it almost angered me to be alone. Once more I was in the bright light. I heard the rumbling of cars; I was near the mountains which all the women ascend—the *grande dame* and the working girl, the milliner and the modest laundress, the kept woman and the little schoolgirl. What delight they all seem to take in the descent! And yet, the resistance of the air disarranges their hair, loosens their

hats, and blows their curls all about; but they submit to that sacrifice for the pleasure of going like the wind for twenty seconds. Keen enjoyment is depicted on all the faces in the cars; only an occasional Englishman retains his gravity during the trip.

I was alone, so I did not make the ascent; it seemed to me that to enjoy that pastime you must be seated beside a woman whom you like; then you may put your arm about a slender waist and press a shapely figure; as you fly down the incline, you may venture much; for you are sure of not being repulsed, your companion being so bewildered by the rapidity of the descent that she has not time to be angry.

All pleasures turn to the advantage of love. What pleasure is not increased twofold by the presence of the loved one? In the dance, on the cars, under the thickets, there must be two to be happy; without a woman, how can one abandon one's self to the most delicious sensations, the most loving outpourings of the heart? Only through her do we know that we have a heart. But enough of these ideas, to which the garden gave rise! I walked across several squares, attracted by music; it was a singer. Ah! I did not stop there; if I had, Tivoli would have ceased to be a place of enchantment.

Suddenly my eyes fell upon a number of armchairs swinging in the air and travelling round and round, with ladies seated in them; it was a Russian swing. Why did all the men walk in that direction and stand, with their noses in the air and a smile on their faces, watching the chairs turn? Ah! I saw that the wind lifted the ladies' skirts more or less, so that one could catch a glimpse of a leg and sometimes of a knee. The game seemed to amuse the performers as much as the spectators. The ladies apparently did not realize what it was that absorbed the attention of the gentlemen, and did not hear the wanton jests in which most of the latter indulged; for they continued to fly through the air, laughing like madcaps. But the machine stopped; it was time to alight. I remained, in order to see the ladies at closer quarters. Mon Dieu! messieurs, you surely did not need to give yourselves a crick in the neck to catch a glimpse of an ankle! So far as I could judge, you might have obtained a sight of a great deal more, without much trouble. I quitted the Russian swing for Bobèche's performance, and found an enormous crowd in front of the stage. I looked about in vain for a chair; I could not find one that was unoccupied. So I was compelled to remain standing. I sidled in among the elect, and I saw something, at all events, even if I did not see Bobèche; I saw the evident enjoyment of all the young men who, like myself, were standing. And yet they could not see anything; but they were with ladies who stood on chairs, and they supported them, to guard against accident; their

arms were passed around the ladies' skirts, and the ladies leaned on their shoulders. I could understand how pleasant that must be. But I saw one lady who seemed on the point of falling. Why did nobody support her? Because she was a matron. But a becurled and befrizzled young woman, who would have been pretty had not her costume been so absurd for a public garden, hurried to the elderly lady's side.

"Wait, mamma," she said; "I'll put my chair behind yours, and then you can lean on me; I'll hold you up."

The mother consented to this arrangement, and the young woman remounted her chair, which she placed behind her mamma's; but I noticed that she had somebody to support her; a tall, light-haired youngster kept his eyes on her all the time; he stationed himself close beside her, looked at her, and made signs to her. The young woman looked at nothing but Bobèche; and as she explained the performance to her mother, she took a little note from her glove and dropped it into the young man's hand, without the slightest confusion or affectation, and without interrupting her conversation. Really, our young ladies display a fascinating grace in all that they do; the world is progressing toward perfection.

The tall youth crumpled the note in his hand; he longed to read it at once, but he dared not. I was amused by his impatience; I was curious to see what he would do. But an elderly couple arrived, dragging their chairs after them; the woman planted herself directly in front of me, almost resting against my face, while her husband deprived me of what little view I had by standing beside her.

I could endure it no longer; to induce me to remain with my head on a level with the waists of all that multitude, I felt that something deeply interesting was necessary. I was not at all desirous to maintain my juxtaposition to the enormous circumference which obscured my vision. So I extricated myself, not without difficulty, from the chairs and legs and dresses that surrounded me. When I was outside the circle, I stopped to breathe a bit; it is good to inhale the fresh air when one has seen Bobèche, even out of doors.

I followed a noble avenue of lindens which led to the large tract of grass set aside for swings and seesaws and blind-man's-buff and the Egyptian bird, and a thousand other things, of which the prettiest are those one does not see. I heard ladies' voices imploring their escorts not to go so fast; while the latter, to display their strength and skill, made all the play they could with their loins and knees, at the risk of making their companions in the swings swoon from fright: that was a new way to make one's self agreeable, I thought.

I heard the voice of lamentation near by. It was a small boy of twelve or thirteen years, who wanted to seesaw with a tall lout of eighteen at least. No

sooner had the latter gone to the ground on his end of the plank which served as a tilt, than the little fellow at the other end received a violent shock that threw him over the little iron bar behind which stood those awaiting their turn. The poor child fell; luckily, it was on the soft turf, and he was not hurt; but he limped away, while the tall zany plumed himself on the shaking-up he had given him. A very pretty game is this seesawing; but I should advise those who indulge in it to have the ground matted; for I know by experience that falls are frequent and dangerous.

But what was that report? It brought me involuntarily to a standstill. Was I near a display of fireworks? No; the Egyptian bird had just been set off. How proud the man seemed who had done the trick! To be sure, it was only the eleventh time that he had fired. A stout party seized the wire. I recognized him: it was Raymond. I should have been astonished not to fall in with him, for the fellow was everywhere.

“I’ll bet,” he said in a bantering tone to the man who had just fired, taking pains to raise his voice in order to attract attention, “I’ll bet, my dear fellow [he knows everybody], that I release the spring in three shots.”

“I’ll bet you don’t; it isn’t so easy as you seem to think.”

“Easy! easy! if it was easy, there’d be no merit in it. I have an absolutely accurate eye. Come, I’ll bet you an ice.”

“That you do it in three trials?”

“Yes; in fact, I’m certain that I shan’t have to try three times.”

“I’ll take your bet.”

“All right; now you’ll see.”

I halted, feeling perfectly certain, for my part, that my neighbor would make a fool of himself in some way. The man who managed the machine was reloading the iron box to which the spring was attached.

“Get out of the way!” cried Raymond, impatient to display his skill, and raising the bird as high in the air as his arms allowed.

The box was closed and the man stepped aside; Raymond threw the bird with such accuracy that the piece of iron, after following a zigzag course, struck six inches from the target. My neighbor was not discouraged, but threw the bird again—with no better success.

“It’s all out of equilibrium,” he cried; “the wire’s crooked, it isn’t my fault.”

“This is your last shot.”

“Oh! this one will do the business.”

Raymond took aim for at least three minutes; at last the bird flew through the air. It finished its flight; but there was no report.

“I’ve won! I’ve won!” cried Raymond’s adversary; “you owe me an ice.”

“Oh! I don’t know whether you’ve won or not; that depends. I am sure that the bird’s beak moved the spring, and the reason it didn’t go off must be that the powder’s damp.”

“You’re trying to crawl out of it! you’ve lost, and you owe me an ice!”

“Well! I demand my revenge!”

“Oh! that’s fair enough; I agree. That will make two ices instead of one.”

“We’ll see about that. I say, my man, just go and overhaul the spring; I’m sure there’s something out of order that prevented the thing from going off.”

To please his customer, the man opened the box and examined it. Meanwhile, my neighbor had taken the bird; and, annoyed at having lost his first bet, he scrutinized the iron beak, measured it with his eye, and tried to make sure that the bird was perfectly balanced, lifting it carefully by the two wings.

“I see what the matter is, I see what it is,” he said confidently; “if I had examined it like this before, I shouldn’t have missed a shot. You must hold the bird very lightly, with the tips of your fingers, and throw it without any jerk.”

As he spoke, Monsieur Raymond threw the bird, which struck the head of the unfortunate man who was looking to see if the spring was in perfect order. The poor man was seriously wounded; he fell to the ground with horrible yells, and everybody ran toward him. Monsieur Raymond took advantage of the confusion to escape. He forced a passage through the crowd, pushing everybody aside with his arms and elbows; he leaped over chairs, ran like a madman through the groups seated on the grass, tripped over the legs of a *petite-maitresse* who was chatting unconcernedly with a young officer, fell heavily upon her, and with his stomach crushed a bust that luckily was made of tulle. The lady shrieked, in order to make people think that it was her flesh that was flattened out; and the officer sprang to his feet, in a rage at the disappearance of charms which he had believed to be genuine. He seized a chair and pursued Raymond, who was already far away; for fear lent him wings.

I amused myself by following my neighbor, who had lost his hat in the scuffle. I saw him running on and getting into fresh difficulty every minute; he ran into a swing, collided with the wooden horses, overturned two girls who were dancing in a little open space, knocked over all the tubs of shrubs that came in his way, and finally, to elude his pursuers, rushed out into the main avenue, hoping to lose himself in the crowd. But as he passed under a garland of colored

lanterns, which was not far enough from the ground and hung down a little at the sides, Monsieur Raymond, trying to outstrip everybody, became entangled in the illuminations; the rope broke, and all the little colored lanterns fell on the promenaders, who, in an instant, were smeared with oil. The ladies uttered heartrending shrieks when they saw their toques, their feathers, and their gowns dripping with lamp oil; nor were the young men less enraged, for their coats and waistcoats and frills were all ruined, and diffused an execrable odor. Once more Raymond found himself the object of general animadversion, and the poor devil, panting for breath, was obliged to continue his flight. He leaped over a hedge, in order to get away from the avenue more quickly; he did not know where to go; and he finally entered the enclosure set apart for the fireworks, despite the shouts of an old pensioner who told him that he could not go there. He rushed through the bombs, mortars, rockets, pinwheels, and Roman candles, while the pensioner shouted for the gendarmes to come to arrest a man who was smashing everything he saw and seemed determined to prevent the pyrotechnic display that was in preparation. The police arrived; Raymond had barely time to hurl himself through a transparency, which he burst with his head; at last he disappeared. Tranquillity was restored; the damage that my neighbor had done was repaired as far as possible; and I returned toward the centre of activity, laughing at Raymond's mishaps, which had afforded me abundant satisfaction for his petty mischief-making that morning.

"Faith!" I said to myself, as I walked toward the dancing enclosure; "if I had come to Tivoli for no other purpose than to witness Raymond's prowess, my evening would have been a great success. But I am in a lucky vein; perhaps fate has other meetings in store for me."

I paused near a juggler's booth; the crowd was as large as in front of Bobèche's; but there was somewhat less confusion. Most of the spectators were seated, and I succeeded, although I was in the last row, in seeing a part of what was going on; the man did tricks with cards, stole rings, and changed a glass of wine into a bouquet. All this delighted the audience, who made no attempt to detect his confederates, and pretended not to see the preparations which are essential for tricks performed *without preparation*.

"He's a magician!" said a little man, opening his eyes to their fullest extent and looking stupidly about him. "Faith! I can't understand it, can you, wife?"

"Oh! I want to see for myself," replied the little man's better half; and she motioned to the juggler that she wanted to draw a card. He approached, chattering in Italian, German, and English, the result being an utterly incomprehensible jargon which completely enchanted the audience.

The lady drew an eight of spades, which she then replaced in the pack and shuffled the cards; but our magician was certain of guessing the card, because the pack he offered her contained eights of spades and nothing else; and while he bewildered his hearers by his constant jabbering, he slipped his hand behind the little man, who, when another trick was being performed, was suddenly requested to rise, and was stupefied to find under him the card that his wife had drawn.

I walked away from the sleight-of-hand booth; but, happening to put my hand in my pocket, I failed to find my handkerchief. That trick was better than any of the juggler's; it had been done very adroitly; luckily, I was not wearing my watch seal.

Behold me at last before the enclosure consecrated to the dance. But it was no longer good form to dance in the public gardens; only at village fêtes did our young Parisian exquisites condescend to execute a balance and a ladies' chain in the open air. Here, none but hucksters, petty bourgeois, and grisettes dare to abandon themselves to the joys of the dance; they know nothing of conventions, of good form; they want to enjoy themselves, and they are so happy when dancing! their pleasure is depicted on their faces! they hop and skip with such hearty good will! By the faces of the fair damsels who were watching the dancers I could see that good form is sometimes very ill-humored; but they avenged themselves by criticising those who defied convention. They sneered and laughed at the others, and made unkind remarks; good form and propriety never forbid that. They ridiculed everything that they could not do; they spoke slightingly of what in their hearts they loved: it was the fable of the fox and the grapes again.

But the spectators were most numerous around one particular quadrille; the dancers were surrounded by a triple row. I was certain that there must be some unusually pretty face there, or some particularly absurd costume. I approached and succeeded in forcing my way to the front. I looked at one of the dancers: she had an insignificant face and a commonplace dress; she could not be the object of such universal curiosity.

“She is mighty pretty.”

“Oh! you wait till you see how gracefully she dances!”

These remarks were made by two young men who stood near me. Thereupon I glanced over the different performers in the quadrille, and my eyes soon rested on a young woman wearing a little cap with a bunch of roses on it.

I admired the young woman's piquant face; her eyes were animated by the

excitement of dancing; her enjoyment made her bosom rise and fall more rapidly, and the flattering murmur that arose on all sides brought a vivid flush to her cheeks. What woman is insensible to praise? Did you ever meet one who was, reader? If so, I advise you to register her name on your tablets.

But, as I scrutinized the pretty dancer, a sudden reminiscence flashed through my mind: those features, that figure, the bunch of roses, and the plan of coming to Tivoli. Unquestionably it was Mademoiselle Caroline; it was my little flowermaker of the preceding evening. Thoughtless fool that I was! I had forgotten her, and had been strolling about the garden without trying to find her! But since chance had brought me into her presence, I determined to make the most of it, and, good form or not, to try to obtain a dance with her, so that I might speak with her.

But suppose that anybody who knew me should see me dancing at Tivoli! I felt brave enough to defy the criticism and mockery of the young men and the pleasantry of the ladies; and as I contemplated Caroline's seductive features, I said to myself, with Rousseau: "I must be happy! 'tis man's first need!"—Now, to be happy, it was necessary first of all that I should dance with Caroline.

X

THE FIREWORKS.—THE FORTUNE TELLER.—THE SILHOUETTE STUDIO

The contradance came to an end, and the men escorted their partners to their seats. I followed my little flowermaker with my eyes, and saw her take her seat beside a plainly dressed old woman, evidently her aunt. Her partner remained by her side; he was the Jules of the preceding evening. In due time, another girl came up with her partner and sat beside Caroline; this completed the party, which, as I remembered, was to consist of four persons.

I walked back and forth in the neighborhood of Mademoiselle Caroline and her friends for a long while; I passed before the group and stared at the pretty creature; but she paid no attention to me. I saw that I must make up my mind to invite her to dance, but I had difficulty in doing it; for I felt that I should look like a petty shop-clerk who was in the habit of going to Tivoli to dance on Sundays. While I was making these reflections, the orchestra played the prelude; that decided me, and I walked toward the young women. But just as I was on the point of delivering my invitation, the pretty flowermaker rose and gave her hand to a young man, who had got the start of me, and who led her out to dance. I had arrived too late; so much for listening to my absurd self-esteem! However, I swore that I would not be behindhand for the next contradance; and for fear of being defrauded again, I hastened to the quadrille in which Mademoiselle Caroline was performing, and then and there engaged her for the next one. She accepted, and I was overjoyed; I stood near her, mingling my words of praise with those of several other young men; and while her partner was executing the *avant deux*, I complimented her on her bunch of roses and apologized for my awkwardness of the previous evening. At that, she looked up at me and smiled, and took more notice of me; I had reason to believe that her scrutiny did not result to my disadvantage. From time to time, I ventured a word or two to the effect that I had come to Tivoli solely in the hope of meeting her; she did not reply, but I saw that she listened; if she were ever so little of a coquette, I felt sure of making my way! And she was, she must be; for all women are. The dance at an end, I impatiently awaited the following one, when I should be able to talk with Caroline, and it would be easy for me to find out how far I might hope. In the briefest interview I can generally tell what manner of person I have to do with, and I rarely make a mistake; not that I believe all that they say to me,

but I divine how much hope they are willing to give me. Women, being more expansive than men, have a certain *laissez aller* which says a great deal to one who is accustomed to deal with them. When they have wit, a mere hint discloses it; when they have nothing but jargon, they murder you with it; when they have nothing to say, there is no possibility of mistake. Montaigne said: "Style makes the man;" I think that he might well have said also: "Conversation makes the woman;" but I beg his pardon for presuming to express my opinion in conjunction with his.

Mademoiselle Caroline was escorted to her seat. While waiting for the next contradance, which would furnish me with the means of judging her more accurately, I strolled through the thickets that surrounded the dancing enclosure. I preferred not to remain like a noodle beside the little flowermaker, nor to parade up and down in front of her. But the moment drew near when I might hope to squeeze her tiny fingers and press her hand tenderly in mine. Give me the dance for lovers! you can boldly reveal your secret sentiments, you can declare them without speaking a word. I am inclined to think that that is why the young women have so great a fondness for that exercise and enjoy themselves so heartily at balls. How many avowals have been made and reciprocated while forming a ladies' chain or a trenise! and despite their active surveillance, their mammas are powerless to prevent that.

But the time passed; I strolled back toward my partner. Mon Dieu! what a noise! what an uproar! what confusion in the garden! The first bomb had just been fired, and everybody was running toward the great central square, dragging their chairs, or carrying them in their arms.

"The fireworks! the fireworks!" people shouted on all sides.

What a rush! In heaven's name, had they never seen fireworks before in their lives? How they pushed and jostled and fought, to pass one another! What a hurly-burly! But what had become of Caroline? I hurried to the dancing enclosure—it was deserted; everybody had abandoned it for the fireworks. Where my pretty grisette had been sitting, I saw two men fighting for a chair, pulling it in opposite directions; each of them finally carried away half, which must have been exceedingly useful. I was not in luck with Mademoiselle Caroline; she disappeared at the moment that I was going to join her. However, I did not lose all hope; I assumed that she had gone to see the fireworks, and I determined to try to find her there.

I walked in the direction that the crowd had taken; but at the sight of that moving mass, one half of which concealed the other,—for some had climbed upon the chairs, while others clung to the frames,—I felt that it would be absurd

to look for anyone there. So I resigned myself to wait until the display was over; perhaps the dancing would be renewed then, and I should see her again. Meanwhile, I walked around the outskirts of the crowd, and saw almost as much of the fireworks as those who stood on their chairs. I also observed several couples, who, instead of joining the crowd, went in the opposite direction and concealed themselves in the obscure shrubbery; they evidently had not come to Tivoli for the fireworks; but I am convinced, none the less, that they had been waiting impatiently for them to begin, and that the display would afford them as much pleasure as those who waited for it with their noses in the air.

There was a set piece representing Ixion crushed by the thunderbolts of Jupiter; and I heard a gentleman explaining it to his family, while he supported his wife and held up his little girl, who shrieked at every explosion.

“Who’s that tall man in a red cloak riding horseback on a bird?” inquired the child.

“That’s Jupiter, my dear, on a bird-of-paradise.”

“And what’s that stick he’s shaking in his hand?”

“That’s his thunderbolt to whip men who aren’t good.”

“Oh! yes; like my school teacher’s switch.”

“Who was this Ixion, my dear?” queried his better half.

“A Roman, I believe. Wait and let me think. Oh, yes! he’s the one that wanted to drive Jupiter’s chariot. He’ll be struck by lightning, as you’ll see.”

“What does that mean, my dear?”

“That means that he’ll be thrown into that big hole, which is hell, and once there——”

“Oh, yes! I understand; then he’ll be struck by lightning; quite right, too.”

“Oh! oh! oh! I’m afraid!” cried a little boy, who had hidden under the chairs.

“Hush, Octave! if you squirm so, you’ll make us fall. I won’t bring you to Tivoli again; you’re too big a coward. For shame! a big boy, nine years old, who plays with my national guardsman’s cap all day long, and don’t dare to look at a rocket!”

At that moment a mortar burst with a great noise, and Octave gave a leap which overturned his mother’s chair; she fell, dragging with her her husband and daughter, the latter of whom tried to save herself by clinging to a gentleman’s coat; which coat, being decidedly old, could not stand the strain; the skirt remained in the child’s hand, and the owner began to shout *thief!* thinking that somebody had stolen his handkerchief, and unable to find even his pocket. At

the same instant there was a more deafening and more prolonged report; innumerable bursts of flame darted in all directions, twisting and writhing like serpents, dazzling the eye and filling the garden momentarily with a magical, supernatural brilliancy, as if the whole expanse were on fire; but the noise, the glare, and the false daylight lasted but a moment; a few rocket sticks, cartridges, and the débris of bombs fell in the garden, and in many instances upon the sightseers, spreading terror and confusion among them. I saw one lady whose hat was burned, another whose shawl was riddled with little holes made by the sparks from a rocket; and it seemed to me that that was paying rather dear for the pleasure of witnessing a display of fireworks. I turned away, well pleased not to have received a splash from the pyrotechnic drama, but greatly surprised that I had not seen my neighbor Raymond in some transparency; for, having lost sight of him among the preparations for the display, I expected to see him appear during the final discharge.

I returned to the dancing enclosure. My invited partner was not there; I was compelled, therefore, to abandon all hope of finding Caroline. I watched the throng of honest bourgeois, who, as soon as the last of the fireworks was discharged, set off for their firesides, content with their evening's enjoyment, which was to last them throughout the week. I strolled at random along the avenues, where the colored lanterns were beginning to flicker and grow dim. Suddenly I heard a little bell, and, although the hearty laughter of some young people near by, the whispering of the ladies, and the distant sound of the dance dispelled all possible illusion touching the reality of the hermitage, I went up none the less to the abode of the so-called sorcerer, who, with the assistance of a long beard, a wand, a pointed hat, a gray frock, and a horn three feet long, undertook to tell fortunes at a very moderate price.

Young girls have always had a great fondness for having their fortunes told. Those who are inexperienced are consumed with the longing to know whether a handsome dark young man or a pretty blond will come soon to tell them something; those who are not novices are anxious to be informed as to the fidelity of their lovers, and at the same time to know whether other men are in love with them; the pretty ones know that they will make conquests, the ill-favored delude themselves concerning their charms; desire arouses hope in all, and all are content. I was agreeably surprised to see my young flowermaker awaiting her turn to have her fortune told. I walked toward her; she saw me and blushed; that was a good sign. But her aunt and Monsieur Jules were close by; I could not speak to her. An idea came into my mind while the soothsayer was finishing his séance with the young woman who was with Caroline. I took out

my tablets,—a forehanded man always carries them,—withdrew to a lamp post, and with a lead pencil scrawled a most passionate and appealing declaration, which was utterly devoid of sense, but would flatter the girl, I felt sure.

Then I rejoined the curious onlookers, taking care to get close to the soothsayer. Caroline had taken her friend's place, and the magic horn was already applied to her ear, when I pulled the sorcerer's frock; I pointed to my note, on which I had laid a five-franc piece. He put out his hand and grasped it; those fellows readily understand one's meaning. All this was done without attracting the attention of the bystanders. Mademoiselle Caroline was told a thousand pleasant things, no doubt, for she laughed like a madwoman; at times she seemed perturbed and surprised, and glanced furtively at me. I was sure that the soothsayer was talking about me; that knave knew his business; I heartily commend him to the sex. At last he took the girl's hand and handed her her horoscope, slipping my note into her hand at the same time, and bidding her to postpone reading it until she went to bed. It seemed to me that Mademoiselle Caroline understood, for she thrust the paper into her bosom before joining her aunt.

At last she went away with her whole party, and I did not follow her. I had an idea that my hermit could tell me all that I wanted to know; for he had spoken to her in an undertone, and she had replied many times by the medium of the horn.

My man came to me and led me into his hermitage, where he dashed into the subject at once, without waiting for me to question him.

“Her name's Caroline.”

“I know it.”

“She makes flowers.”

“I know that too.”

“She's eighteen years old.”

“So I should think.”

“She hasn't any lover.”

“So I hoped.”

“She means to remain virtuous.”

“I doubt it.”

“She has noticed you.”

“I think it likely.”

“She is attracted to you.”

“I am glad to hear it.”

“She works on Rue Sainte-Apolline, from eight in the morning till eight in the evening.”

“That is all I want to know.”

I rewarded the invaluable soothsayer and returned to the garden, which was beginning to be deserted. I walked in the direction of the exit, enchanted to know at last where I could find Mademoiselle Caroline.

As I passed before a silhouette booth, I imagined that I heard a voice which was not unfamiliar to me. I stopped. People were disputing in the small oiled-paper studio, and I recognized my neighbor Raymond’s voice. What in the devil was he doing there? I listened; the maker of silhouettes said:

“It’s half-past eleven, monsieur; everybody’s gone, and I must shut up shop, too.”

“One more silhouette, my friend, and I’ll go.”

“You’ve been here in my studio more than two hours, monsieur; I have cut you out seventeen times already.”

“Well, this will make eighteen. Oh! I can’t have too many portraits; I shall find places enough for them! everybody’s asking me for one.”

“I tell you that I must close my shop, monsieur.”

“Close it, if you choose; I’ll stay inside; I don’t propose to go yet.”

“You will go, monsieur.”

“One more silhouette!”

“No, monsieur, you can’t have it.”

I could not restrain a roar of laughter, aroused by the desperate decision of Raymond, who, in his fear of being arrested for all the stupid things he had done during the evening, had sought shelter in the silhouette booth, which he was absolutely determined not to abandon. But my laughter caused great perturbation in my neighbor’s soul.

“Hark!” he said to the painter with scissors; “didn’t you hear? There’s somebody close by. You told me the garden was empty.”

“Pay me, monsieur, and be off; or I’ll go and fetch the guard to put you out.”

The threat of the guard made Raymond shudder; he realized that he must leave the friendly shelter of the booth; but before venturing into the garden, he thrust his head out of the door, to see if anyone was on the watch for him. The first person he saw was your humble servant, whose inclination to laugh was vastly increased at sight of the pale and discomposed features of his neighbor. Raymond was uncertain whether he had better hide again or not, when he saw

me; but he made the best of the meeting, and, being certain that I would not impose upon his unfortunate plight, he clung to me as to the anchor of salvation.

“My dear Monsieur Dorsan, how delighted I am to meet you! If you knew all that has happened to me to-night in this infernal garden!”

“Oh! I know! it’s made noise enough.”

“Mon Dieu! do they mean to arrest me?”

“Why, it’s very possible. The man that you hurt is in a very bad way; the young men whose coats you ruined are collected at the gate; the damage you did in the garden amounts to considerable, and——”

“Oh! what an unlucky devil!”—And Raymond rushed back into the silhouette booth, despite the remonstrances of the proprietor, who seized him by the coat and tried to put him out.

“Save me, neighbor, I have no hope except in you!”

“Very well, I’ll do it; although you played me a most contemptible trick last night.”

“Oh! I promise you—I swear—it was mere chance. I will contradict all that I said, if that will gratify you; I will say that the girl slept with me.”

“No, no; if you please, Monsieur Raymond, you will be careful never to mention her.—But let us begin by leaving this silhouette emporium. Follow me.”

“I am with you, my dear neighbor.—Give me my portraits; how much are they?”

“Seventeen, at forty sous, makes just thirty-four francs, monsieur.”

“The devil! that’s rather dear!”

“It’s the regular price.”

“Come, come,” I said to Raymond, whose lugubrious face was not worth thirty-four francs at that moment; “you can make a lot of your friends happy with them; that’s some little compensation.”

Raymond paid, with a sigh, and seized my arm, imploring me to protect him.

“I ask nothing better,” said I; “but you must appreciate the fact that I can’t stand my ground alone against half a hundred young men who are waiting for you at the gate, and are to all appearance determined to make it bad for you.”

“Yes, yes, I can see that; but I can’t pass the night here; I have no hat, and I should certainly take cold; and to-morrow night I am to sing the aria from *Joconde* at a musical party.”

“This is very embarrassing. Do you want to risk going out at the gate?”

“No, indeed! These young men, when they get excited, are very brutal.”

“I see but one way, then, and that is to climb over the wall.”

“But suppose I am taken for a thief?”

“Never fear; I have a scheme in my head. Come!”

We took the darkest paths. Raymond followed me in fear and trembling. I led him to the wall on Rue de Clichy, and bade him sit on the ground behind a clump of trees.

“Stay here; I’ll go out of the gate and come around to the opposite side of the wall on Rue de Clichy. When there seems to be an opportune moment for you to climb over without risk, I will give the signal.”

“What signal?”

“I will clap my hands twice.”

“Agreed. The wall’s rather high; but still, rather than be beaten to a jelly—I can’t hesitate.”

“Adieu! patience; don’t make a noise, don’t stir, but wait for the signal.”

“Oh! I won’t fail. You couldn’t lend me your hat, could you?”

“Impossible; I have to sing in a duet to-morrow.”

“Then I’ll put my handkerchief over my head.”

“That will be very wise.”

“By the way, if they question you at the gate, you must say that I’ve gone.”

“That goes without saying.”

“Don’t leave me too long.”

“Of course, I shan’t suggest your showing yourself while I see anybody prowling about.”

“Dear Dorsan! I am tremendously obliged to you.”

“Adieu! I go to keep watch for you.”

I took my leave of Raymond, laughing inwardly at his plight and his poltroonery. At last I left the garden; it was high time, for they were just going to close the gates. As I passed, I glanced down Rue de Clichy, where my neighbor supposed that I was doing sentry duty in his behalf; and I strolled leisurely homeward, leaving dear Raymond to wait for my signal. His conduct of the preceding evening merited that little retaliation; moreover, the most speedy revenge is always the best.

XI

BY MOONLIGHT

I pursued my homeward way, congratulating myself on my little game, and laughing at the thought of Raymond's fright and of the figure he must cut waiting for me to rescue him. But soon my mind reverted to a more agreeable subject. I thought of the charming Caroline. I had no doubt that she had read my note, and on the morrow I would go to her shop and find out how far I might hope. A not very moral scheme, I agree! I proposed to try to seduce a girl, in order to gratify a caprice that would last only a moment. But what would you have? I have some grievous faults; I believe that unmarried men were put into the world to make love to girls. Those girls who desire to remain virtuous should do as Nicette did—refuse to allow themselves to be seduced.

Musing thus, I reached my abode. It had seemed a short walk to me. To be sure, the weather was magnificent; the moon was quite as fine as on the preceding night; but my thoughts were not upon the firmament. I was on the point of knocking, when a person who was sitting on the bench near the porte cochère rose quickly and came toward me.

“Ah! here you are, Monsieur Dorsan; I was waiting for you.”

I recognized my little flower girl, whom the sight of Mademoiselle Caroline had banished from my memory. She had not forgotten me; she was waiting for me in the street! and it was nearly twelve o'clock!

“How long have you been here, Nicette?”

“Since nine o'clock, monsieur.”

“Why did you wait so long for me?”

“Oh! monsieur, please forgive me, but I couldn't stand it; I wanted to thank you again, and tell you what I have done with my money.”

“My dear girl, that wasn't necessary; I am sure that you are behaving as you ought.”

“Don't you like it because I waited for you, monsieur? If you don't, I'll go away——”

I knew by the sound of her voice that she was ready to weep. Had I spoken harshly to her? She was going away with a heavy heart, but I took her hand and detained her. She heaved a deep sigh. Poor Nicette! could it be for me? If so, I

pitied her. In truth, I did not deserve to be loved by a sensitive, faithful heart; and yet, I wanted women to adore me and to be faithful to me: reconcile the two, if you can.

“Come, my dear Nicette, tell me all you have done since last night?”

“Won’t it bore you, monsieur?”

“No, of course not; don’t you know that I am interested in everything that concerns you?”

“Oh, monsieur! if you—but here goes: in the first place, I went home to my mother’s, because, after all, she is my mother, and, although she turned me out of doors, I still owe her respect.”

“That is true; you did very well. How did Madame Jérôme receive you?”

“Very badly, monsieur! oh! very badly! She didn’t so much as ask me where I’d passed the night. But she proposed to me again to marry Beauvisage, and said that then she’d forgive what she called my *caravanes*.^[A] Has there been any *caravanes* between you and me, monsieur?”

[A] In French slang, “love adventures.”

“Certainly not; and then?”

“Oh! I refused; because, when it comes to marriage, I’m obstinate, too. Then she beat me again, and that time you wasn’t there to stop her.”

I could not restrain a smile at the artless way in which Nicette reminded me of the blow I had received in her behalf; but I was distressed by Madame Jérôme’s hard-heartedness: to think of turning her daughter out of doors, beating her, and abandoning her, utterly without resource, at the age when the simplest and often the only means of support are to be found in prostitution! Ah! there are mothers unworthy of the name!

“Well, Nicette?”

“Well, monsieur, I packed up my clothes and left the house, without seeing my sister, who didn’t dare to show her face before me. I says to myself: ‘I mustn’t whine about it; I haven’t done anything to be sorry for. I refused the pork man, that’s true; but when it’s a matter of a girl’s whole life, surely she has a right to do as she pleases.’—So I went off with my little bundle. I don’t know how it happened, but after walking a while I found myself in your street. I looked round for a booth, and found one over yonder, close by, on Rue Saint-Honoré, near the boulevard. I bought a bed and a chair; that’s all I need. Tomorrow, I’ll get a table for my bouquets; as to the flowers, I know where to get them. I’ll set up a stand on the corner of the street, on the boulevard; and when you want a bouquet, monsieur, I shall be there, close by your house; and it will

be easy enough for you to let me know. Have I done well, monsieur?"

Nicette had finished speaking, but I still listened. I was touched by her attachment. She had wanted to be near me, I could see that; and there was something so simple and ingenuous in the way she told me about it, that it seemed that in acting thus she had simply done her duty.

"You don't say anything, monsieur; is it because you're angry at my leaving my old quarter to come—to this one? If that's it, why, I'll look for another room to-morrow; I'll go far away, ever so far, and you'll never find me in your path again!"

"What do you say? I, angry because you are near me? It's very wrong of you to say that, Nicette! I thought that I had shown you how deep an interest I take in you."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, Monsieur Dorsan, I beg your pardon; perhaps I ought to have asked your permission—for you are my patron."

"Hush! what a child you are! I am very glad that you live in this quarter. I shall see you often, and always with pleasure."

"Oh! monsieur, and so shall I. But I won't take the liberty again to wait for you at your door. I only did it to-day because I wanted to tell you what I'd done, and to let you know where I am now."

"Don't apologize, my dear girl; I am so glad to see you! Ah! Nicette, what a cruel, yet delicious, night I passed so near you! I shall never forget it as long as I live. I know that I shouldn't have so much courage another time."

"Let's not say anything more about that, Monsieur Dorsan. I must go home, for it's very late, and I'm keeping you from your sleep again. To be sure, this is the last time it will happen."

"Dear Nicette, your alluring charms, your graces, and your delightful frankness, will always be with me in that room, where I should be glad to see you again."

"Oh! don't say that, I beg of you, Monsieur Dorsan. I'm too far away from you—a poor flower girl!"

"Ah! Nicette; if you chose——"

"Adieu, Monsieur Dorsan! adieu!"

She said *adieu*, but she did not go. I held one of her hands; she repelled me and drew me toward her at the same time. My eyes were fixed upon hers; we said nothing; but if my porte cochère had been open, I believe that Nicette would have gone with me again. A sudden outcry aroused us from that pleasant

situation. A man ran along the street, shouting *thief!* Nicette withdrew her hand, bade me a very affectionate good-night, and fled. I tried to detain her, but she was already far away.

I knocked at my door and was just about to enter, when the man whom I had seen running toward us, all alone, and whom I had taken for a drunken man, rushed through the porte cochère and fell headlong in the courtyard, crying:

“Safe at last!”

I recognized Raymond’s voice; I was curious to learn the end of his adventures. The concierge, hearing the uproar, arrived on the scene with a light, and we saw Raymond, his trousers torn from waistband to knee, lying at full length in the courtyard, gasping with fatigue, and trying to recover his breath.

“Mon Dieu!” cried Madame Dupont; “what has happened to you, Monsieur Raymond? a pretty mess you’re in!”

“What! is it you?” said I, in my turn; “why did you leave Tivoli without waiting for my signal?”

“Oh, yes! I fancy I should have had to wait a long while for your signal!”

“You’re too impatient.”

“I had been crouching in that corner for an hour, when I saw some men making the rounds of the garden. Faith! that gave me a fright, and I determined to scale the wall. But I was in such a hurry that I got caught on some broken glass; I tore my trousers and cut the base of my spine. On Rue du Mont-Blanc, I was insulted by some drunken men; indeed, I think they meant to rob me; but I ran off, shouting for help, and here I am in port, God be praised! But I shall remember Tivoli!”

“You must bathe your back in warm water, monsieur,” said Madame Dupont.

“Yes, I’ll do that in the morning.”

“You saved your silhouettes, I hope?” said I.

“I believe I lost some of them when I dropped from the wall.”

“The devil! that’s a pity! they’ll testify against you, and it will be easy to recognize that profile of yours. I advise you to wear a false nose and spectacles for a fortnight or so.”

My neighbor, who knew very well that I was making sport of him, took his candle and tramped upstairs without a word to me. When we were on our landing, I nodded to him, with a smile, and entered my lodgings alone, where I slept soundly. Nights follow but do not resemble one another: that is what all women say a fortnight after marriage.

XII

VEXATIONS

My first thought when I woke was of my two young women. I cannot say whether Nicette or Caroline first presented herself to my imagination; I know that I was attracted by both of them. But Nicette was an honest girl and desired to remain so; thus far I had acted honorably with her; I determined not to try to ruin what I had done. I would be her friend, were it only for the sake of experimenting upon a novel sentiment toward a woman.

As to Mademoiselle Caroline, I had formed a different estimate of her: I did not believe her to be a novice; her little innocent air with Monsieur Jules did not impose on me; she was on the lookout for a husband, but she did not love that poor fellow; if she did love him, would she listen with a smile to all the insipid nonsense that I whispered to her? if she loved him, would she dance with other men? Mademoiselle Caroline was a great coquette, and, in my judgment, decidedly shrewd. And yet, she had treated me cavalierly enough when I followed her on the street; to be sure, she was cross because I had rumbled the finery she had prepared for the following day, which was at that moment much more interesting than a new conquest, since it might be worth a great many to her. But I should soon know what to expect.

At noon I betook myself to the shop that my sorcerer had indicated. He had not deceived me: among a number of saucy faces, I recognized my charming dancer. The young women all lowered their eyes at sight of a young man; but they all scrutinized me furtively. Caroline recognized me; I could tell that by a certain embarrassment, by her evident longing to look at me, and by the assiduity with which she attacked her work, the better to conceal her confusion. It was necessary that I should pretend to have visited the shop for some purpose: I asked for flowers, wreaths, trimmings; they were all shown to me, but it was a man who was obliging enough to spread before my eyes all the treasures of the establishment, and the young women did not stir.

That did not meet my desires, but I realized that I could not remain there all day. I bought fifty francs' worth of artificial flowers, for which I paid cash; and I left my address, asking that they might be sent to me during the day, as I was to leave for the country in the morning. The man promised, and I left the shop. Caroline must have understood me; but would she come? that remained to be

seen.

I returned home, informed my concierge that I expected some parcels I had just bought, and that the messenger was to bring them up to my room. I went up myself, and fretted and fumed like all young men awaiting their first assignation, like all young women whose mammas keep them in the house when they are burning to go out. An hour passed, and no one came. Another hour had nearly elapsed, and I was on the point of going back to the shop, when my doorbell rang. I reached the door with one bound and threw it open; there stood Monsieur Raymond, laden with an enormous pasteboard box.

“What do you want, Monsieur Raymond?”

“My respects to you, neighbor!”

“But what brings you to my door, pray?”

“I will explain. Allow me to come in and put down this box.”

And, without awaiting my reply, he entered my reception room and seated himself on a chair. I remained standing in front of him, hoping that that would make him cut his visit short.

“Excuse me if I make myself at home; but my back is still painful. That wall was devilish high.”

“What do you want of me? I beg you to tell me, for I am in a great hurry.”

“Here goes: in the first place, I wanted to make my peace with you, because neighbors ought not to quarrel.”

“Bless my soul! I have no desire to quarrel.”

“I’m very glad of that; then that’s all at an end. I was on the watch for an opportunity to come here to speak to you; the opportunity came, and I grasped it. Somebody rang at my door just now and asked for you.”

“What’s that? just now? Who was it?”

“A girl—very pretty, too; but not so pretty as the one the other night.”

“A girl! what did she want? pray go on!”

“She brought this box for you, and said there was no message.”

“Well! where is she? what did you say?”

“I took charge of the box, telling her that you had gone out, so that I might have the pleasure of delivering it myself and making my peace with you.”

“Great God! is it possible? Must you always meddle in other people’s business, just to drive me mad? I’ll stake my head it was she!”

I opened the box, while Raymond stared at me in amazement; he did not

know which way to turn, seeing the gleam of anger in my eyes when he expected thanks. I found all the flowers I had bought, and, in my rage, I kicked the box away. The bouquets and trimmings flew through the air, and a garland à *la jardinière* lighted on Raymond's brow; he dared not remove it, because my outburst of wrath had stupefied him.

After storming about and crumpling and mutilating my flowers, I threw myself into a chair and my eyes fell upon my neighbor. At that sight my anger vanished; it was impossible for me to keep a serious face when I saw Raymond crowned with paper flowers and glancing about him in terror. I roared with laughter; that reassured him, and he followed my example, but his laughter was of that forced variety which resembles a grimace, and not that inextinguishable merriment in which the gods indulge when Vulcan fills their glasses.

“Vulcan to find involved in this debate,
The gentle reader'd scarce anticipate.”

“Well,” said Monsieur Raymond at last, still trying to smile, “your angry fit seems to have passed over?”

“I must make the best of it.”

“Aren't you satisfied with the goods they sent you?”

“Much I care for the goods, Monsieur Raymond! you will compel me to move.”

“I, neighbor? Why so, pray?”

“Because you seem to be stationed beside me here to thwart all my plans, to drive me mad with rage!”

“I don't understand.”

“Why, in heaven's name, when people ring at your door by mistake, don't you send them to me? Why do you say that I'm not at home when I am? Why did you undertake to deliver this box, when I desired to speak to the person who brought it?”

“My dear neighbor, I am distressed—I was entirely ignorant——”

“I beg you, Monsieur Raymond, as a favor, not to meddle in my affairs any more, or we shall have a serious falling-out! You have quite enough other occupation in the house, listening to the gossip of the cooks, keeping an eye on the women, playing the spy on the girls, and mixing yourself up in family rows, without disturbing yourself concerning my conduct.”

“I assure you, neighbor, that someone has been slandering me to you. I am

incapable—I love a jest, that’s the whole of it; but I never gossip. In the first place, I am not talkative. If I were, I might tell you that the lady on the first floor has two lovers; that her husband keeps a mistress; that Monsieur Gérard, on the second, is in a bad way in business, and that I’ve seen summonses for him in the concierge’s hands; that Madame Bertin gives evening parties in order to get husbands for her daughters; that her cook makes a handsome commission on her provisions; that the cook at the rear of the courtyard has a lover she carries soup to; that Gerville the government clerk is running into debt and doesn’t answer the bell when his creditors ring; and a thousand other things. But it’s none of my business; I have quite enough to do to attend to my own affairs, without bothering my head about other people’s. I took this box, thinking that I was doing you a favor, and because I wanted an opportunity to make myself useful to you. It made you angry, and I won’t do it again. After this, I’ll send away people who want to speak to you, even when you’re not in. I salute you, neighbor!”

“By the way, one other word, if you please. What sort of looking girl was it who brought the box?”

“Why, very good-looking—that is to say, attractive.”

“How tall?”

“Medium.”

“Dark hair?”

“Yes; dark or chestnut-colored.”

“Black eyes?”

“Yes; that is to say, dark gray.”

“Ah! it was she!”

“Who is she?”

“That doesn’t concern you, Monsieur Raymond.”

“True; I asked the question inadvertently. Adieu!—By the way, are you going to Madame Vauvert’s to-night? There’s to be a grand party, a concert, and perhaps dancing. I fancy there’ll be lots of people there. I am going to sing the aria from *Joconde*. Monsieur Vauvert sent me word that he should have a young woman who plays finely on the guitar, and a gentleman who sings in Italian like a Bouffon.”

“A most alluring prospect.”

“I believe Madame Bertin is going, with her young ladies. The younger one is studying a piece that she’s to play on the piano. But time flies, and I have a lot of errands to do.—Au revoir, neighbor! I promised Vauvert to bring him a ‘cello

and a second violin to complete his quartette. I must go and drum up my performers.”

He went away at last. The infernal fellow was responsible for my failure to see Caroline; for I had no doubt that it was she who had brought my box. What was I to do next? If I went again to the shop, what should I say? I had no idea; but I did not propose to have my rooms filled with artificial flowers to no purpose. I returned to Rue Sainte-Apolline.

The proprietor was out; so much the better. I complained and stormed because my flowers had not been sent. A girl rose and declared that she had left them at my rooms. It was not Caroline; therefore, it was not she who had come. I became calmer and shifted the blame onto my neighbor's shoulders. The forewoman scolded the girl. I bought some more wreaths, pretending that I had forgotten to buy them on my first visit; and I asked to have them sent with me. This time Caroline was selected to be the messenger. At last I was to have an opportunity to speak to her freely, to be alone with her!

“One moment!” I said to myself; “I haven't reached that point yet; I must not be too sure beforehand; one is so often disappointed!”

Mademoiselle Caroline walked with her eyes bent on the ground, and I remained at a respectful distance; but when we were a few steps from the shop, I put her into a cab, which took us to my domicile. She hesitated at first about entering the cab, but I urged her; she consented at last, and then she had no choice but to listen to all that love impelled me to say, if I may give the name of *love* to the caprice that had occupied my thoughts since the preceding night.

But obstacles give added value to the most trifling fancy, and sometimes transform a simple caprice into a deep-rooted sentiment. The difficulty which I had encountered in obtaining an interview with Caroline caused me to find a greater charm in her company; my words had more fire, more eloquence; and so little is required to convince a girl whose heart is already half vanquished.

Everything, therefore, led me to hope for the most perfect success. In time the cab stopped, we alighted, and Mademoiselle Caroline handed me my box, refusing to go up to my rooms. In vain did I promise, aye, swear to be good; I was powerless to overcome the flowermaker's obstinacy; all that I could obtain was an appointment on the boulevard for the following evening.

She left me, and I entered the house alone. I could not help thinking of the difference between Mademoiselle Caroline's conduct and Nicette's. The little flower girl, who had known me but a few minutes, herself proposed to come to my apartment at midnight; while the grisette, having an excuse for going there,

was afraid to venture in broad daylight. What was I to conclude? That one realized the danger more fully than the other? No. Nicette realized it; but she simply did not think of it; she trusted me. That Caroline was more virtuous than Nicette was impossible; indeed, I feared the contrary, and that there might be the same difference in their respective morals as in the flowers they dealt in.

I must, in any event, wait until the time appointed for our meeting. I determined to go that evening to Madame Vauvert's; not to hear Raymond sing the *Joconde* aria, but because there was generally a collection of original creatures there that amused me, to say nothing of the master and mistress of the house, who are well worth a chapter to themselves.

XIII

AN AMATEUR CONCERT

In Paris there are parties for all tastes, all social ranks, all professions, all shades of opinion; in a word, for all classes.

A young man with tact and breeding may go everywhere; nothing is so easy as to obtain admission to the enormous parties, the gorgeous fêtes and balls, which are so popular that people go thither in crowds and do not see one another. The master and mistress of the house do not know the names of half the men who crowd their salons. In the best society it is customary for an invited guest to introduce whomsoever he may choose, without asking permission. The newcomer salutes the host and his wife; they exchange the conventional phrases, smiling at each other most amicably; that is all that is necessary; and one may then proceed to play cards, dance, and regale one's self, without paying any further attention to the master of the house.

It is not so easy to obtain admission to what are called *bourgeois* parties. There the host, being a little more particular than the banker or marquis of the Chaussée d'Antin, likes to know the people who come to his house. When one young man introduces another to him, he inquires his name, his profession, and his character; indeed, there are some who carry their absurd prejudices so far as to turn a cold shoulder to young men whose too free and easy manners do not please them. But this extreme severity of morals is found only in the Marais or in the heart of Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Between the first society and the bourgeoisie, between etiquette and license, there are the delightful circles, distinguished by amiable freedom of manner, artless gayety, and a pleasant intimacy; these are generally to be found among artists. The arts go hand in hand; genuine talents are not jealous of one another; they esteem, seek out, and appreciate one another; that is why we find among them wit without malice, jesting without bitterness, rivalry without envy, merit without arrogance, and wealth without display.

Next come the strange, abnormal parties, which are made up from all the others. The people who give them do not know how to receive company; but they insist upon having company all the time, because it is good form to give soirées, and in these days no one is willing to lag behind his neighbor. For my part, I am in the habit of going only where I am invited by the host himself; I do

not like to be introduced by another guest, unless it be at one of those crushes to which one goes as one would go to the theatre; and one may stay away from a second one without being taxed with discourtesy, because there is no danger of having been noticed at the first.

The function of Monsieur and Madame Vauvert may be placed in the last category. The master of the house fancied that he was a musician, but he had never in his life been able to beat a measure in three time, or to observe a minim rest or a crotchet rest, although he used his feet, his head, and his hands. He thrummed a little on the guitar; and when he had succeeded in accompanying some little ballad, without falling in with a minim rest or a crotchet one on the way, he was the happiest of men. Add to this an enduring passion for the fair sex, to which he paid assiduous court, despite his wife, a nose always smeared with snuff, soiled clothes and frills, strong breath and shifty eyes, a figure of medium height and a body that was always trembling, and you will have an idea of Monsieur Vauvert, who was a very good fellow in spite of his trifling faults, and whose greatest crime was not to be virtuous and orderly at forty-five. Gayety is of all ages, but libertinage is a different matter.

“If there’s a time for folly,
So there’s a time for sense.”

And I trust that at forty I shall be as virtuous as I now am the opposite. But let us come to Madame Vauvert.

She must once have been good-looking; the trouble was that she insisted upon continuing to be so. Her complexion was still fresh and ruddy, even when she was ill; which tempted unkind tongues to say that she made it herself. She was not familiar with the manners of good society, but by way of compensation she had a vast deal of curiosity and an extraordinary talent for setting people by the ears, while seeming never to speak ill of anyone; she also had a very pronounced penchant for good-looking youths and for chocolate.

Still, Madame Vauvert’s parties were very entertaining, because there was not the slightest restraint, everyone did what he chose, and one was certain of meeting a lot of original people and of seeing some new faces at every party. Most of those who appeared there simply passed on and off, as in a magic lantern; those whose only aim was to be amused went again and again. I was one of the latter; so Vauvert had come to call me his dear friend, while his charming spouse always greeted me with a most gracious little smile.

As Monsieur Vauvert was only a government clerk, he did not live on the

first floor; but on his reception evenings he caused candle ends to be placed along the staircase, so that the artists and amateurs might not break their noses before reaching the third floor above the entresol. He had no servant, but he had a nephew some fourteen or fifteen years old, who was junior clerk to a notary; a sly, mischievous youngster, whom his dear uncle tried to make useful on his festal days, which displeased the young man, who on those occasions always returned home later than usual from the notary's, in order not to be at the service of his uncle and aunt. It was nearly ten o'clock when I arrived at Monsieur Vauvert's; the company rarely assembled before that hour, for the petty bourgeois try to mimic the nobility, and think it good form to arrive very late at a party. Musicians, whether amateurs or professionals, love to keep people waiting; and I believe that, in due time, evening parties will not begin until the next morning.

I rang. The door was opened by Madame Vauvert; whence I concluded that the young nephew had not yet returned.

"Ah! here you are, my little Dorsan; it's very good of you to come; we shall have a lot of people to-night."

"You *will* have? Do you mean to say that your guests haven't arrived yet?"

"Some of them are late; but it's early yet."

"Not very."

"We have a tall young lady from the Conservatoire, who has a magnificent voice."

"The deuce!"

"And a lady who plays the 'cello."

"Great heaven! why, here it's as it is at Nicolet's: always worse and worse!"

"Ha! ha! what a funny fellow!"

"What music have you had already?"

"Nothing yet."

"What! nothing? and it's ten o'clock! For whom are you waiting to begin your concert?"

"Little Martin hasn't come yet, to play the piano accompaniments."

"Isn't his sister here?"

"Yes, but she won't play to-night; she's sick; she's having one of her nervous attacks."

"Ah, yes! that's quite natural. But where's your husband?"

"He's gone out to get a 'cello part and to borrow a second violin, so that we

can have a quartette.”

“It seems to me that it would have been well to set about it a little sooner.”

“Why, the poor man’s been running his legs off ever since dinner. He had to fetch Madame Rosemonde and her daughter, then go to the musical instrument maker’s for a double bass, then send for Mademoiselle Luquet’s harp, then go to make sure that Monsieur Crachini could come; in fact, there’s no end to what he’s had to do!”

“I can see that he has had his hands full.”

“And that little rascal of a Friquet doesn’t come home! I hope his uncle will give him a good trouncing to-night. But come in, my dear fellow.”

Our conversation was held in a narrow passage leading on one side to the dining room, which did duty as bedroom and dressing room, and on the other to the salon. I entered this last-named apartment, where the regular habitués and the newcomers were assembled. Everyone was wondering what the host and hostess could be doing, that no one had seen them; everyone was calling for them, and asking why the music could not begin; but not one of the singers was willing to sing first, and the instrumentalists seemed no better disposed.

“It seems to me that things aren’t likely to go very well to-night,” said a short, pockmarked man, who waddled up to me, smiling maliciously, whose nose was hidden by his bulging cheeks, and whose eyes one sought in vain behind his spectacles. “Almost ten o’clock, and nothing doing; you must agree that it’s disrespectful to the company! Poor Vauvert! passing his evening scouring the neighborhood for instruments and scores! It’s amusing enough! There are not two houses like this in Paris.”

“That is just why it’s so priceless. But aren’t you going to sing to-night?”

“Yes; I’ve brought my song from *Jean de Paris*; it’s called the *Princesse de Navarre*.”

“I seem to remember that you sang that to us at the last reception.”

“So I did; but I haven’t had time to learn anything else; and then, you know, it’s such a fine thing!—

“‘Tis the *Princesse de Navarre* whom I annou—ou—
ounce!’

Gad! how pretty it is!”

“Yes, when Martin sings it, it’s delightful. Shall we have much singing to-night?”

“Oh! we shall have some sport. Raymond is to sing the aria from *Joconde*; that tall girl yonder is to sing the inevitable song from *Montano et Stéphanie*; the pupil from the Conservatoire has brought a song, too; and Monsieur Crachini will obligingly deafen us with a romanza or two. Then Chamonin and his friend are to make an attempt at a duo from the Bouffes. That’s enough, I hope! God grant that Gripaille doesn’t take his guitar to accompany us! if he does, we are lost.”

As the chubby-faced little man finished speaking, Gripaille accosted him, and was greeted with:

“Well, my dear Gripaille, aren’t we to have the pleasure of hearing you? Come, bring out your guitar; these ladies are dying for some of your chords.”

Gripaille, who considered himself the first guitarist in Paris, replied, casting a seductive leer upon the ladies who surrounded us:

“What the devil do you expect me to sing you? I don’t know anything! I’ve got a cold, too; and then, Vauvert’s guitar is such a wretched instrument! a regular chestnut stove! it’s impossible to play on it.”

“With such talent as yours, one can play on anything,” observed a little old woman, throwing herself back in her chair and clasping her hands ecstatically, while tears of pleasure started from her eyes. “Mon Dieu! what blissful moments I owe to you! Music produces such an effect on me—such an effect! you can’t form any idea of it; my nerves are so sensitive, I abandon myself so utterly to the melody! Take your guitar, enchanter! take it and make me dream! You remind me of a handsome traveller who played the guitar under my windows when I was young!”

The chubby-faced gentleman and I turned away, to avoid laughing in the face of the old woman, from whom Gripaille had great difficulty in extricating himself. Old age is certainly most worthy of respect; but it is hard to keep a serious face before such old idiots, who fall into a trance during a ballad or an *adagio*.

I saw the old man who usually played the ‘cello part look at his watch, and heard him mutter between his teeth:

“This is very disagreeable! I must be at home at eleven o’clock, and we are wasting all this time doing nothing; and I’ve been here since seven! They were laughing at me when they told me that they were going to begin early, and that there would be a full quartette here; but they won’t catch me again.”

At last Monsieur Vauvert appeared, panting, almost breathless, drenched with perspiration, and bending beneath the burden of a tenor violin and several

portfolios of music.

“Here I am! here I am!” he exclaimed, bustling into the room with an air of great bewilderment; “I’ve had hard work collecting all the parts, but I’ve succeeded at last.”

“You must have been diverting yourself between whiles,” said Madame Vauvert, pursing her lips.

“Oh, yes! parbleu! that’s very likely; diverting myself, indeed! I’m bathed in perspiration!—You can begin the quartette, messieurs.”

“Let’s begin, let’s begin!” said Monsieur Pattier, the ‘cello player; “we have very little time.—But have you brought my score?”

“Yes, yes! there it is on the stand.”

“Come, messieurs, let’s tune up.”

The amateurs who formed the quartette tried to bring their instruments in tune with one another. Meanwhile, the guests took their places to listen; sat down when they could find chairs. The ladies were already yawning; the bare announcement of a quartette gave them the vapors; to distract their thoughts, they chatted with the men who stood behind their chairs. They whispered and laughed and made fun of everybody, especially of the performers; the moment when music is being performed is always selected by the listeners to make the most noise.

At last the intrepid amateurs were in tune and took their places at their desks. The old ‘cello player had put his little shade of green paper round his candle, so that the light should not hurt his eyes; the tenor violinist had put on his spectacles; the second violin put an ounce of rosin on his bow; and the first violin adjusted his cravat so that his instrument should not rumple his collar.

All these preliminaries being completed,—during which Vauvert tried to bring the assemblage to order by many a prolonged *hush!*—the first violin raised his bow and stamped on the floor, glancing from one to another of his colleagues.

“Are we ready?” he said at last, with a determined air.

“Oh! I’ve been ready two hours!” retorted Monsieur Pattier, with an angry shrug.

“One moment, messieurs,” said the second violin; “my first string is loose; it’s a new string; I must tighten it.”

The tenor seized the opportunity to play over a passage that seemed rather difficult, and the ‘cellist consoled himself with a pinch of snuff.

“Now I’m ready,” said the second violin.

“That’s very fortunate.—Attention, messieurs, if you please; we will play the *allegro* rather slowly, and the *adagio* somewhat quickly; that produces a better effect.”

“As you please; it’s your place to beat time.”

The signal was given; the first violin started, and the others straggled after, as usual. Although I paid little attention to the quartette, it seemed to me to be even worse than ordinarily.

“The villains have sworn to flay us alive!” said one of my neighbors.

“That isn’t right! that isn’t right!” cried the first violin, stopping short.

“I don’t see why it didn’t go well enough,” observed the tenor.

“No, no! there was something that was all wrong.”

“Where was it?”

“Where? I can’t say exactly.”

“Well, *I* didn’t miss a note,” said the second violin.

“Nor I.”

“Nor I.”

“Come, messieurs, let us begin again.”

“All right, but see that you beat time properly.”

“I should say that I beat time loud enough.”

“To be sure you do,” said Madame Vauvert; “and the person who lives underneath said she would complain to the landlord.”

They began to play again; but it went no better, although the first violin writhed and gesticulated like one possessed; the company began to laugh, and the performers stopped.

“It certainly doesn’t go right,” said Monsieur Longuet, the first violin and conductor. “There must be mistakes somewhere; let me see the ‘cello score. What does this mean? you’re playing in *B* flat and we in *D*! Parbleu! I’m not surprised.”

“I’m playing just what you told me to,” rejoined old Pattier, scarlet with anger; “the first quartette in the first portfolio.”

“True; how the devil does it happen? Let’s look at the title. What do I see? Mozart’s quartette! and we are playing one of Pleyel’s! Ha! ha! that’s a good one!”

Everybody laughed at the episode; Monsieur Pattier alone was furious over

the mistake, for which Vauvert was responsible, and which resulted in preventing the performance of the quartette. He rushed up to the master of the house, who had just seated himself in a corner of the salon beside a young brunette on whom he was bestowing meaning glances.

“How’s this, Monsieur Vauvert? You tell me that you have brought the score that was missing, and you give me the bass of a Mozart quartette when we are to play one of Pleyel’s!”

“I thought I heard you mention Mozart.”

“You thought! a man doesn’t make such mistakes as that!”

“Well! I’ll go and change it.”

“No, no, it’s no use; almost eleven o’clock; a pretty time to go out after music! I shan’t forget this trick.”

Père Pattier went away, muttering savagely; nobody paid any attention to him. Madame Vauvert scolded her husband for his blunder, and the company congratulated themselves on their escape from the quartette; while the tenor, who was determined not to be squelched, persisted in trying the brilliant passages of his part. Neighbor Raymond had just arrived, with his favorite piece under his arm. I noticed several new faces, and I was looking about for Madame Bertin and her daughters, who seldom came to Monsieur Vauvert’s, whose decidedly mixed society was ill suited to well-bred young ladies, when I heard the confused murmur that announces the arrival of a new personage.

I looked toward the door of the salon. A very stylishly dressed lady was being escorted into the room by Vauvert, on whose arm she leaned, and whose soiled linen, snuffy nose, and awkward manner were in striking contrast to the grace, the refinement, and the elegant manners of the lady, for whom he tried to find a seat in his salon, where vacant chairs were as scarce as at Tivoli. I spied one by the fireplace, upon which a huge cat lay asleep; I threw the cat to the floor, and presented the chair to the newcomer, who thanked me as she accepted it. Thereupon I examined her more closely, and recognized the lady whom I had seen at the theatre two nights before, and whose carriage I had made a vain attempt to follow. I was fully convinced that it was she when I saw in the doorway the man who accompanied her on that occasion.

Decidedly that Saturday evening was destined to mark an epoch in my life; for chance had thrown in my way all the persons who had then attracted my attention. I was Nicette’s friend, I hoped to be Caroline’s lover, and as for this other lady, whose name I did not know as yet, I was ready to bet that we should become better acquainted.

Neighbor Raymond, who lost no time when he hoped to win applause, had already approached the piano and was looking about for someone to accompany him. But Monsieur Gripaille, seeing that no one asked him to sing, or paid any attention to him, ran and seized the guitar, seated himself in the centre of the salon, and prepared to begin. Singing is always the most popular part of a concert, especially a concert of amateurs, where those who play upon any instrument are rarely good enough players or good enough musicians to give pleasure to their audience. A quartette entertains none but those who take part in it; a sonata on the piano makes people yawn; airs with variations for the harp are always twice too long, and pieces for the guitar always fall flat after other instruments. Only for singing, therefore, does the audience at such affairs care to cease its conversation; a pleasant voice never wearies the attention or the ears.

But Monsieur Gripaille had not a pleasant voice—far from it; it was a continual medley of falsetto, shrill notes, and transitions of an octave, the whole accompanied by the thrumming of his thumb on the bass chord of the guitar, while he shook his head from side to side to add to his personal charms. However, the airs he sang were sometimes tuneful, the words amusing, and his performance diverted the company for a moment. But as he always sang the same things, we knew them by heart; and when he once had the guitar in his hands, it was impossible to make him put it down; after the ballad came a rondeau, after the rondeau a comic song, after the comic song another ballad, and so on. I was not bored, because I was talking with the new arrival, who seemed vastly astonished at all that she saw, and very glad to find me there; for she recognized me, and I saw that my presence was not disagreeable to her.

But soon I heard neighbor Raymond and the man with spectacles objurgating Gripaille because he did not stop singing.

“It’s horrible! it’s murderous! it’s enough to put you to sleep!” said Raymond; “he’ll never stop!”

“Oh! when he once has his guitar, we are lost! there’s nothing to do but let him sing.”

“And he doesn’t want anyone to make a sound, either; not even to speak. See! he’s glancing angrily in this direction now, because we’re talking.”

“I don’t care if he is; it’s altogether too much; tunes that he’s sung to us twenty times!”

“He says that he wrote them.”

“He lies; I’ve seen them printed under another name.”

“Great God! I believe he’s beginning another one. That fellow ought to be

forbidden to enter a salon.”

“Faith, yes! let’s call Vauvert, and tell him to make him shut up.”

“He wouldn’t dare.”

“I’ll tell you; we must have some young lady escorted to the piano; perhaps that will compel Gripaille to give up his place.”

The two men ran after Vauvert, who was in the utmost perplexity, for he did not know how to request his friend Gripaille to cease to entertain the company. At last, a tall, stout young woman consented to sing; young Martin arrived to play the accompaniments, and they were escorted to the piano. Gripaille pretended not to see what was going on, and played the prelude to his sixth comic song; but the noise in the dressing room, where a party of young men had assembled who could not find room in the salon, forced the guitarist to abandon the contest; he rose very ill-humoredly, despite the faint forced applause, and for lack of something better to do sat down in front of the little old woman, who had been partly in a trance and partly in heaven throughout his singing.

“Come,” she said to Gripaille, as he approached, “come, let me embrace you! You have enchanted me—exalted me to the skies—that is the word! Come, I entreat you!”

The wretched guitarist was compelled to submit; he embraced the old lady with a good grace; admirers are rare, and one has to pay dear for them.

My neighbor spied me and came to me with outstretched hand; but he halted in front of my fair unknown, to whom he made a sweeping bow. The devil of a fellow seemed to know everybody. I listened to their conversation.

“Whom do I see? Madame de Marsan! by what chance? Really, this is a happiness I did not expect! To what are we indebted for this pleasant surprise?”

“Monsieur de Marsan meets Monsieur Vauvert sometimes at the department, and Monsieur Vauvert has been urging him for a long time to come to his concerts; so to-day we decided to come;—but I confess,” she said, turning to me, “that I did not expect all that I see.”

“We will try, madame, to give you so much pleasure that you will not regret your evening.”

Thereupon my neighbor ran to the piano, doubtless to preëempt the place next to the tall young lady. But the little chubby-faced man had anticipated him, and I foresaw that we could not escape the *Princesse de Navarre*.

While the young woman was singing her air from *Montano et Stéphanie*, being forced to give up my chair to a damsel who was looking about in vain for a seat, I went for a breath of air to the dressing room, where a number of young

men had taken refuge, driven from the salon by the shrill cries of the singer. At that moment the doorbell rang; Vauvert opened the door, and little Friquet appeared. I expected a scene between the uncle and the nephew, and I waited to hear.

“Where have you been, you rascal?” demanded Vauvert, trying to assume an imposing air.

“Why, uncle, I have been—I have been at the office.”

“At your office, until eleven o’clock at night!”

“Yes, uncle.”

“You don’t expect to make us believe that, I hope?”

“Why not, uncle?”

“Because I know that you leave it every night at nine o’clock.”

“The head clerk gave me some errands to do, uncle; that is what made me so late.”

“Errands! I know how you do errands! I’ve been hearing about you, young scoundrel that you are!”

“In the first place, uncle, I am not a scoundrel.”

“Your head clerk told me that the day before yesterday morning, while they were waiting for a very urgent paper that they’d sent you to have signed, he found you sitting coolly under Pont des Arts, fishing.”

“Me, uncle, me! My word, what a lie!”

“He has the face to deny it, when I have proofs of the fact!”

“Proofs? what proofs?”

“Look, Monsieur Friquet, here’s a package of hooks that I found in your coat pocket. Well! what do you say to that?”

“That doesn’t prove anything, uncle; I didn’t buy those hooks for myself.”

“For whom did you buy them, then?”

“For my brother, who means to go fishing in the Canal de l’Ourcq on Sunday.”

“You’re the most shameless liar I know. I’ll bet that you bought a theatre check to-night, and that you’ve been to see the end of some play.”

“You know perfectly well that I haven’t got any money, uncle.”

“Oh! you always have money to go to the theatre and to stuff yourself. Come, monsieur, fill the glasses and pass them round to the ladies.”

“That’s it!” muttered the little nephew, turning angrily on his heel; “as soon

as I get home, I have to be uncle's servant, they'd better get a negro. And then, the first thing in the morning, aunt sends me to get her milk and her fuel, and lights for her cat."

"You seem to be arguing the matter!" said Madame Vauvert, pinching Friquet's arm; "there! that's to teach you to grumble."

"Ow! how mean to pinch me like that, aunt! I shall be black and blue for a week."

"So much the better!"

"Mon Dieu! how ugly she is!" muttered Friquet; and I saw him, for consolation, take a slice of cake out of his pocket and swallow it in three mouthfuls.

But the shrill sounds had ceased; the tall young lady was no longer singing. The little chubby-faced man took her place; he was determined to sing his air from *Jean de Paris*, and we had to resign ourselves. While he struggled to hold out his notes, coughing at every ritornelle to make us believe that he had a cold, I saw the other singers look at each other, make signs, yawn, and compress their lips. In truth, amateurs are more unkind than professionals, and they who are in great need of indulgence for themselves are always ready to tear others to tatters. They think to conceal their own mediocrity by calling attention to their neighbor's lack of talent; self-esteem, which blinds us to our own defects, impels us to seek out with avidity the faults of others, as if we were the gainers thereby! What folly! Because Monsieur So-and-So sings false, does that give you a fine voice? because he plays the violin badly, are you the better performer on the piano? because another is ugly, awkward, and ridiculous, are you any handsomer, more graceful, and more agreeable? Of course not; but it is always pleasant to see people at whom one can poke fun, and whom we believe to be less abundantly endowed by Nature than we. Remember that Roquelaure joyously threw himself on the neck of a man who seemed to him even uglier than himself. But, monsieur, what a difference! Roquelaure sacrificed his self-esteem; but you, had you been in his place, would have made sport of the man he embraced, and, turning to look in a mirror, would have deemed yourself handsome, I vow.

The *Princesse de Navarre* being duly executed, the little man made the circuit of the salon, trying to pick up a word of praise, even from those whom he had so recently declared to be ignorant of music; for praise is always pleasant. Everybody told him that he had sung very well; that was inevitable; we were well bred, which means that we had ceased to be frank. I alone ventured to observe that he seemed to have a cold; he turned as red as a turkey cock, and his

nose vanished completely.

“That is so,” he said at last; “I have a very bad cold; it embarrassed me a great deal.”

“Why did you sing, then?”

“Oh! people urged me so hard!”

And I had seen him dispute with Raymond for the opportunity! What strange creatures men are! But, hush! my neighbor was going to sing; that deserved attention. But, no; two other men anticipated him; they sang an Italian duet, I believe; but it was difficult to understand the veritable hotchpotch they made at the piano: one shook his head to mark time, as a bear dances behind the bars of his cage; the other, who was evidently very short-sighted, kept his nose glued to the music. The young man who acted as accompanist tried in vain to make them sing together: it was impossible.

“You’re behind,” said one.

“That’s because I skipped a line.”

“Well, go on!”

“You go too fast; you hurry me. I never saw the music before, and to sing Italian at sight is devilish hard.”

I was sure that he had been studying his part for a fortnight. Despite their efforts, they were obliged to leave the duet half sung.

“We will sing it the next time,” said Monsieur Chamonin; “we shall be surer of ourselves then, for the piece needs to be carefully studied. Rossini is very chromatic.”

“That’s so,” said Vauvert, stuffing his nose with snuff, a part of which remained on his shirt front; “it’s a pity you didn’t finish it, for I thought it was very pretty.”

“We’ll go and hear it once more at the Bouffons.”

“They had better stay there,” said Gripaille, in an undertone, delighted by their misadventure.

“For my part, I don’t care for Italian,” said Madame Vauvert. “I never can hear anything but *tchi and tcha*; and it doesn’t amuse me in the least.”

“Oh! what blasphemy, madame! not like Rossini!”

“Who’s Rossini, uncle?” inquired the youthful clerk, who had stolen into the salon. “Seems to me I’ve seen that name, in *Don Quixote*.”

“The idiot, to mistake *Rosinante for Rossini*! Go and wash the glasses, booby, and don’t mix in the conversation again.”

At last my neighbor was at the piano, and had opened his mouth to an enormous width to inform us that he had “long wandered o’er the world.” But at that moment we heard the notes of a ‘cello, and Vauvert appeared with a music stand, which he placed in the centre of the salon.

“What on earth are you doing there?” shouted Raymond; “don’t you see that I am singing?”

“Madame Witcheritche is going to play her solo on the ‘cello.”

“In a few minutes; I am singing now, I tell you. Madame Witcheritche can play afterward.”

“No, she wants to play now, because it’s getting late.”

And paying no heed to the mutterings of Raymond, who, in his wrath, overturned the candlestick on the piano, Vauvert arranged the music stand, then went to usher in the German virtuoso, whom I had not previously noticed. She was a very handsome woman, very fair and somewhat insipid, like most German women, but well built and graceful; she held the ‘cello between her legs with astonishing ease, and seemed not at all abashed. She played easily and with excellent taste; and I saw by the long faces of the members of the quartette that they had not expected to encounter in one of the other sex a musical talent in presence of which they could no longer hope to shine.

I heard a voice at my ear incessantly repeating:

“Gut, gut, sehr gut; tudge lidely, holt te pow firm; lidely on te shtrings!”

I turned and saw a hideous face looking first at the performer, then at the company, making grimaces for tokens of approval, and rolling about a pair of eyes that reminded me of Brunet’s in the *Désespoir de Jocrisse*. The owner of that extraordinary countenance was a tall man in a threadbare green coat, of vulgar aspect, and with pretentious airs which made him even more ridiculous.

“Who is that individual?” I asked one of my neighbors.

“That’s the husband of the lady playing the ‘cello.”

“What! such a disgusting face approach that charming head! What an outrage! It reminds me of a Satyr beside a Hebe.”

“Still, the lady seems to be fond of her husband.”

“It’s easy to see that she’s a foreigner. What does this husband of hers do?”

“Nothing; he’s a baron.”

“A baron! I should never have suspected it; he looks more like a cobbler. But in Germany everybody’s a baron, just as in Russia all the soldiers have decorations; it doesn’t mean anything.”

Monsieur le Baron de Witcheritche, who, as he rolled his eyes about, had doubtless observed that I was looking at him, came to me as soon as his wife had finished, and began to converse with a smiling face. I have observed that the Germans smile a great deal when they are talking. I regretted that it was not courteous to laugh in a person's face, for Monsieur le Baron de Witcheritche was very amusing to look at, especially when he wished to make himself agreeable. I wondered what he wanted of me.

"I'll pet tat monsir is ein egsberd on te 'cello. Monsir is ein much gut blayer himself, hein?"

"I, monsieur? you are mistaken; I do not play at all."

"Oh! you vish not to admit it; I can tivine all at once te innermost thoughts of bersons py tare faces."

"The deuce! you are very fortunate, Monsieur le Baron de Witcheritche!"

"I haf shtudy te human heard; I am most egsberd in physsionomique."

"What do you say, monsieur le baron?"

"I say I am ein egsberd in physsionomique."

"I don't understand at all."

"In physsionomique."

"Oh! you mean physiognomy."

Monsieur le baron turned on his heel, without a smile. The best way to rid one's self of a foreigner is to pretend not to understand him.

Meanwhile my little dialogue with Monsieur de Witcheritche had caused me to miss Monsieur Crachini's romanza. I was sorry, for he always combined with his singing an expressive pantomime which made it doubly interesting. While various other amateurs entertained the company, I looked about for Raymond; for being unable to find a seat beside Madame de Marsan, I was anxious to obtain some information concerning her, and my neighbor was the very man to give me that.

He was not in the salon. I went into the smaller room, where my entrance brought to an abrupt close a whispered conversation between Vauvert and a fair-haired lady who had been in the dining room an hour, looking for her shawl amid a multitude of bonnets, mantles, and shawls which were tossed pell-mell on the bed of the host and hostess.

"Are you leaving us already?" said Vauvert, in a melting voice, glancing behind him to see if his wife was coming.

"Yes, it's very late; I must go home."

“My nephew will escort you.—Friquet! Friquet!”

Friquet appeared, and swore between his teeth at having to escort the blonde lady; he spent an interminable time looking for his hat and exclaiming in the lady’s ears that it was a nuisance to go out so late and go home with everybody. His uncle pulled his ears, and I joined Raymond, who was exhaling his vexation at the dressing room window.

“Aren’t you going to sing, neighbor?”

“Is it possible to do anything here, I should like to know? Did you ever see such confusion? such disorder? I don’t know where I am! I’ve told Vauvert a hundred times to draw up a programme and paste it on a mirror; then everything would go off in an orderly way. But, no; he won’t listen to anything! he amuses himself pinching and squeezing such little girls as he can find in the corners, instead of attending to his concert.”

“It is certainly true that it might be managed better.”

“The idea of giving us a concerto for the ‘cello that there’s no end to; just to grate on our ears! And then, I don’t care what you may say, a woman who plays the ‘cello is always absurd! It reminds me of a man darning stockings; and madame la baronne would do much better to stay at home and darn hers than execute *staccatos* and *arpeggios*.”

“What do you say? a baroness darn stockings?”

“Oh! nonsense! a pretty baron he makes! I saw him the other day on Boulevard du Temple, buying apples at a sou a bag; and he was haggling too! He bought sausage by the yard for his dinner; and someone who’s been at his house told me that they gave him gooseberries for refreshment! But this Vauvert’s a star! he tries to make us believe that he entertains princes, ambassadors perhaps! whereas his house is a veritable Noah’s Ark.”

“By the way, you seem to know Madame de Marsan?”

“Madame de Marsan? yes, to be sure; I go to her parties. She’s a fine woman, rather a flirt, as you must have seen; but she has wit and good breeding and style; she’s a woman who calls herself twenty-eight, and is really thirty-two. She is known to have had several passions; but as she doesn’t advertise them and is always regardful of decorum, there’s nothing to say: morals before everything. The husband is a good sort of fellow, very sharp, they say, when his own interests are concerned. He’s in business; but he’s not one of those poor devils who run about for a fortnight to discount a note which will be worth a commission of seven or eight francs to them; or one of those who offer you with an air of mystery houses that are advertised in the *Petits-Affiches*. This fellow

knows what he's about, and makes a lot of money. He has a fine country house, beyond Saint-Denis, in which madame has had a pretty little theatre arranged; in fact, I am to act there very soon. She's a valuable acquaintance; for there's lots of fun at her house. I myself have been there twice, and I know that they think a great deal of me. If you choose, my dear fellow, I'll take you there; if introduced by me, you will be warmly welcomed."

"Thanks; but, as you know, I don't like to be presented in that way."

Raymond left me, to return to the piano; he had not lost all hope of getting himself heard. I knew all that I wanted to know concerning Madame de Marsan. I returned to the salon. I had reason to believe that the lady was questioning my neighbor about me, and I knew that I need not be afraid of losing her good opinion through Raymond's description of me, for he was one of those men who like to pretend that they have none but the most desirable acquaintances. I was in comfortable circumstances, and he had probably represented me as very wealthy; I was born of respectable parents, and he had probably placed me in one of the oldest families in France; and so on. To be sure, Madame de Marsan might have been told that I was fickle, inconstant, treacherous; but those failings never do a man any harm with the ladies.

A selection had just been performed on the harp; the performer had made but one mistake, had had to tune her instrument but twice, and had broken but four strings; we had no cause of complaint. Raymond had left Madame de Marsan, to find an accompanist, and threatened, if he failed in his quest, to accompany himself; by dint of hunting, urging, and entreating, he succeeded in bringing young Martin to the piano; he began to cough and expectorate, changed the position of the candles, ordered the windows to be closed, and struck an attitude supposed to represent *Joconde*. But a murmur arose on all sides; the young women ran to Monsieur Vauvert, the young men surrounded his wife; they had been promised a contradance; it was almost twelve o'clock, and if it was postponed any longer there would be no dancing. The hosts acceded to the prayers of their younger guests.

"We are going to dance!" shouted Vauvert, as the court bailiff cries: "Silence, please!"

Instantly everything was in a ferment in the salon; the young men hastened to engage partners, the chairs were moved away to make room, and the guests who did not dance were requested to retire to the corners.

Raymond stood at the piano with his mouth open; he thought that he must be mistaken; he could not believe his eyes; I believe that he was actually going to begin his aria; but instead of the prelude from *Joconde*, young Martin struck up a

figure of Pantalón. My neighbor could not digest this final blow; he seized his music in a hand which shook with wrath, and, thrusting it under his arm, rushed across the salon like a madman, colliding with the dancers, and receiving kicks from the young men who were in the act of balancing to partners; I am convinced, however, that he did not feel them.

“Monsieur Raymond is going away in a rage,” observed a lady to Madame Vauvert, with a laugh; a lady whose hair was dressed *à la Ninon*, but had lost its curl and was floating in the air in long wisps, although she had taken the precaution not to remove her curl papers until she was on the staircase.

“Bah! I don’t care for that,” replied Madame Vauvert; “he bores us to death with his songs, and with the poetry he insists on reading to us; it’s always the same thing!”

At that moment, Raymond, whom I supposed to have left the house, appeared at the door of the salon and called out angrily:

“My hat, Madame Vauvert, I want my hat, where is it? It’s a lamentable fact that one can never find one’s things in your house.”

“Pardi! your hat isn’t lost.—Mon Dieu! I don’t see my cat! I put her on a chair by the fireplace. Why did anyone move her—poor Moumoute? The door of the landing is often open; she’s gone out, and she’ll be stolen!—Moumoute! Moumoute!”

The dancing continued, no heed being paid to Madame Vauvert’s lamentations and Raymond’s demands; the dancers were determined to compensate themselves, by a moment’s enjoyment, for several hours of ennui; and those who were afraid that their turn might not come took the precaution to move back the hands of the clock while Vauvert’s back was turned and his wife was looking for her cat.

I invited Madame de Marsan, and after much ceremony she consented to dance with me.

“What an extraordinary house!” she said to me.

“I find it delightful, since I have met you here.”

“But as it is probable that you will not meet me here again, and as I desire to see you again, I trust, monsieur, that you will do me the honor of coming to listen to a little music at my house.”

I accepted, as may be imagined; and after the dance was over, I prowled about the husband, with whom I entered into conversation. I talked of speculation, houses, châteaux, and the stock market with him; I took pains, without ostentation, to mention my name, to speak of my family and my means.

In any other house, I should not have done so; but in such a mixed assemblage, I was not anxious that he should place me on a level with people, who, although very estimable no doubt, were nothing more than that; and in the opinion of many men that is not sufficient distinction. On the whole, I was satisfied that Monsieur de Marsan found me rather agreeable; it is so easy to catch people by the sensitive spot—that is to say, when they have one.

When young women begin to dance, it is much the same as when a poet begins to recite his verses: there is no reason why they should ever stop. But Madame Vauvert, thinking that they were making too much noise, and afraid of angering her landlord, had already said several times:

“This will be the last.”

But the last never came to an end.

Friquet, who had returned in high dudgeon because he had been obliged to escort a lady home, stole behind the dancers and looked at the clock; then he hastened to inform his uncle that the hands had been set back, so that they marked only twelve o'clock when it was nearly one. Vauvert consulted his watch, saw that his nephew was right, and concluded that it was incumbent on him to show some resolution, and that his dignity required him to turn his guests out of doors at once.

He immediately extinguished the lamps in the four corners of the salon, leaving only a few candles lighted; and the young men were about to extinguish them as well, and thus make the scene more amusing, when Vauvert took possession of them and harangued the company thus:

“I have already told you that it is time to go; my wife is indisposed, and I am surprised that anyone should continue to dance against our wishes.”

This courteous speech made everybody laugh, and they hurried into the dressing room to prepare for departure. But there the confusion and disorder reached their climax. The ladies called for their shawls, mantles, bonnets, and slippers; the singers demanded their music or their instruments; they made mistakes, and many could not find what they wanted; the young men hovered about the ladies, on the pretext of assisting them, but really because such crushes are most propitious to lovers and amateurs. One tied a ribbon, another put on an overshoe, another held a little foot while the slipper was being removed. Amid the tumult, mothers called their daughters, husbands their wives, brothers their sisters. But those ladies were far too busy to answer. They were whispering, squeezing hands, making appointments, arranging other meetings; in truth, the moment of departure is not that at which the guests enjoy themselves least.

I tried to save Madame de Marsan the trouble of looking for her shawl in that crowd; I went into the bedroom, and succeeded, not without difficulty, in reaching the bed, on which the bonnets and wraps were piled; my hand, seeking a shawl, came in contact with a firm and well-rounded form, which I was not seeking, but which I embraced as a matter of habit, and because I thought that it belonged to a lady with whom I was very intimate. But the lady, who was

stooping over the bed, and whose back only could I see, turned suddenly. Horror! it was not she whom I thought! I proceeded to entangle myself in apologies, but she gave me a most tender and amiable smile, which seemed to invite me to continue. Faith! I admit that I should not have expected it on the part of the lady in question, who, in the salon, played the prude, the straitlaced, stern moralist. Trust appearances, who will! I have already said that I never would; but a great many people say that, and still allow themselves to be deceived.

At last everyone had succeeded in finding what he or she sought. Friquet, who was anxious to go to bed, had been standing a long while on the landing, candle in hand, ready to light us downstairs. As for the master and mistress of the house, they had manifested clearly enough their desire to see the last of us; so we started down. It was quite a little procession; everyone took the hand of his favorite and descended the stairs, laughing heartily over the evening's entertainment. The young men were very noisy, because Vauvert had urged them to be silent on account of his neighbors. On the second floor, a young man upset the candlestick that Friquet carried, and we found ourselves in utter darkness.

We all roared with laughter. The mammas scolded the perpetrator of the mischief, the young ladies did the same, but I have reason to believe that many of them were not very angry.

"Idiot! he's always doing such things!" Vauvert shouted at his nephew from the top of the stairs.

"I didn't do it, uncle," replied the clerk; "somebody knocked my candle out of my hand on purpose."

"I not undershtand vy tay do amuse temselves py making us near fall town and may pe hurt ourselves," muttered the Baron de Witcheritche, whom I believed to be very jealous of his wife, and who was made uneasy by the darkness.

"Holt tidt to te rail, my tear," said the baroness, in a flutelike little voice, "and tague care ov my Shtradifarius."

"Your Shtradifarius is chust te ting tat makes me frightened."

We went down carefully and very softly. I held Madame de Marsan's hand, and I did not complain of the darkness; but the little clerk, who had relighted his candle at the porter's lodge, returned with his light just as we reached the lowest stair. I noticed then some changes in the order of departure; some mantles awry, some faces very much excited, and many eyes fastened on the ground, doubtless because the light made them smart; but I do not mean to suggest any

implications unfavorable to the virtue of the ladies in question, married or single.

The moment to say farewell had arrived. I saw diverse poor fellows who lived near the Palais-Royal doomed to act as escort to feminine families from the heart of the Marais. I saw young ladies manoeuvre to take the arms of their chosen friends; I saw many a wife sigh as she took her husband's arm. I should have seen much else, no doubt, if it had not been dark. But Madame de Marsan and her husband were in their carriage; and he, learning that I lived on Rue Saint-Florentin, obligingly offered me a seat. I accepted without hesitation. Decidedly Monsieur de Marsan was a most agreeable man.

"There's no one else!" Friquet shouted to the concierge, as he closed the porte cochère.

"That's very lucky," replied the concierge, closing his door. "Past one o'clock. Your uncle will have notice to quit, I promise you. He makes a great show, gives evening parties, and keeps people up all night, and all for nothing! When a man wants to cut such capers, he should have a house to himself."

XIV

THE BOUQUET

In the carriage we talked of Monsieur Vauvert's soirée musicale. Madame de Marsan laughed about it a good deal; Monsieur de Marsan shrugged his shoulders, and said that the mania for making a show was pervading all classes of society; that it seemed to be no longer possible for people to enjoy themselves *en famille*; that everybody was struggling to leave the sphere in which destiny had placed him; that men were becoming more eager for dissipation every day; that, to satisfy this imperious craving, the mechanic sacrificed his week's wages, the workingman his savings, the tradesman his stock in trade, the clerk three-fourths of his salary; hence embarrassment, borrowing, debts, failures. His conclusion was that a man should reckon up his income before giving dinners, receptions, and balls.

"I should not suppose that Monsieur Vauvert's receptions were likely to ruin him," said Madame de Marsan.

"It seems so to you, madame, because you have noticed simply the general effect of the affair, which, I agree, was not very splendid at first glance; but for an under clerk those lamps, the candles on the music stands, the hired piano, the music and the instruments that they sent out for, and, lastly, the modest refreshments—all those things, madame, are as extravagant for a government clerk at eighteen hundred francs, as a magnificent function, where everything is provided in profusion, is for a wealthy banker. The difference between the banker and the clerk is that people go about praising the former's party, which they are proud of having attended, while they make fun of the clerk's soirée, to which they go for the sole purpose of sneering at those who put themselves out to make people laugh at their expense."

Monsieur de Marsan was right; there was a husband who spoke with profound wisdom. I approved what he said: first, because I agreed with him; secondly, because I had my reasons for always being of his opinion.

Monsieur de Marsan lived near the beginning of Faubourg Saint-Honoré; I could not repress my desire to laugh when I learned his address, because it reminded me of that infernal cabman who had taken me to the farther end of Faubourg Montmartre on the night when I attempted to follow the carriage; but I instantly attributed my merriment to a memory of the concert, and, as we all

retained some very comical ones, that seemed perfectly natural. They set me down on Rue Saint-Florentin, after inviting me to their house to listen, not to a concert, but to a little music; there is a great difference between the two, for I had to admit that I had heard no music at Monsieur Vauvert's concert of amateurs.

Standing at my door, I thought of my new acquaintance; I dared not as yet say my conquest, but I secretly flattered myself that she soon would be. Meanwhile, I had not forgotten the charming Caroline, who had given me an appointment for the next day. My imagination had abundant food for reverie: what a wellspring of pleasure the future had in store for me! I could see nothing but roses, and my mind, enchanted, sought to communicate its enthusiasm to my heart, which did what it could to find something for itself in all that was going on. I went upstairs without a light; for it was very late, and Madame Dupont extinguished her lamp at midnight. I started to open my door; but as I was putting the key in the lock, my hand came in contact with something—leaves—flowers—why, someone had put a bouquet there! Ah! I knew who had done it!—I entered my room; I soon procured a light and could look at my bouquet. It was beautiful! orange blossoms, a rose or two, some carnations, and all surrounded by pansies; the bouquet was tied with a small white bow.—“Dear Nicette!” I thought; “so you still think of me! you are not ungrateful! Ah, no! you have a warm heart and you are virtuous! What a pity that, with those two priceless qualities, you were born in obscure station! Not that I believe that your equals are incapable of appreciating your virtues, but that I can do no more than admire them. You will be a treasure to others, but you can be nothing to me; I must seek such a treasure in high life; there are some there, no doubt, but they are not all so seductive as you.”

How had she succeeded in leaving that bouquet at my keyhole? If it had not been so late, I should have gone down and questioned my concierge; but I had no choice but to wait till morning. Raymond, who saw everything, had undoubtedly seen the bouquet; but perhaps—he was so engrossed by his aria from *Joconde*!

I longed for the morning to come, that I might question Madame Dupont. I could not tire of smelling Nicette's bouquet and gazing at it in admiration. I looked at the pansies.—“Ah!” I said to myself; “I understand: it was gratitude that prompted the gift. Poor child! she loves her benefactor; that is natural enough; but she is so pretty that she will soon be besieged by lovers, her heart will speak, and she will forget me. That is the way such affairs always end.”—I carefully placed my bouquet in water and went to bed. I passed in review the

events of the day. Madame de Marsan and Caroline played a large part therein; they were both coquettes—in a different way, to be sure, but it was coquetry all the same. Alas! all the women I had known were coquettes, and I did not honestly believe that any one of them had loved me; at all events, it had been only for a moment. What does a sentiment amount to that has the duration of a mere caprice, and that does not resist the slightest trial? And my sister insisted that I should marry! Why should I hope to find in a wife what I had failed to find in a mistress? Of course, the indissoluble bond, children, duties, the opinion of society, might prevent my wife from being unfaithful to me; but all those things would not revive her love when it was once extinct.

“I will not marry,” said I to myself; “I will make the most of life.”—And yet it had seemed to me for some time, amid all my follies, that I was not perfectly happy. Although fickle, I was sentimental; my heart was constantly looking about for something to attach itself to; it was not its fault that it did not find a heart to respond to it. Of late, I had met none but perfidious, unfaithful women; I used always to take the initiative in the inevitable separation, but the later ones had not given me time; to be sure, I had been foolish enough to put them to the test. I determined to be wiser in future, to take women for what they were, and to thank fortune when I chanced to fall on my feet.

Who could say? Perhaps Caroline would love me; perhaps Madame de Marsan would be less coquettish in due time; perhaps the young flowermaker was really virtuous. As for the adventures which Raymond attributed to Madame de Marsan, my neighbor was so evil-tongued that I could not place any reliance on what he said.

I lulled myself to sleep with thoughts of my various inamoratas; but, for some unknown reason, the memory of Nicette was always involved in my schemes and my hopes. I concluded that it was the smell of her bouquet that kept her so constantly in my thoughts; but the orange blossoms were so sweet, that I was unwilling to take them out of my bedroom. What a charming little attention, to bring me that bouquet and to place it so that I could not enter my room without taking hold of it! Ah! if women are coquettish and deceitful, they alone are capable of such forethought, such amiable attentions, of that delicacy of feeling which enables them to discover, even in the most trifling circumstance, a means of giving an additional proof of their love or their friendship. I went to sleep; but how did it happen that I dreamed neither of Caroline nor of Madame de Marsan? It was Nicette whom I saw in my dreams, it was she who engaged all my thoughts. Doubtless the odor of the orange blossoms continued to remind me of her, even in my sleep.

XV

THE DINNER PARTY

I was still sleeping when Madame Dupont came to arrange my room. I began at once to question her, for I was anxious to know if she had seen Nicette.

“Did anyone call to see me last evening, Madame Dupont?”

“No, monsieur; no one.”

“You saw no one come upstairs to my rooms?”

“You know very well, monsieur, that I wouldn’t have let anybody come up, knowing that you were out.”

It was very strange! how had she succeeded in eluding the concierge’s eyes? She was determined that no one should see her bringing the nosegay; she thought that it might offend me, and her gift acquired the greater value in my eyes on that account. To divert my mind from such thoughts, I recalled the errands my brother-in-law desired me to do. I went out, leaving Madame Dupont to place in a box all the artificial flowers that were strewn about my floor; but I told her not to touch the bouquet, which was on the mantel. It was a fertile source of conjectures for my concierge.

My day was fully occupied by the commissions to be executed in various government offices, whence Déneterre, who was about to build and desired to consummate various enterprises, hoped to obtain information and support. I was not sorry to have something to do; the time passed more rapidly. Do not believe, however, that I was accustomed to spend my days in absolute idleness; no, I was devoted to the fine arts, especially poetry and music; and I turned my attention to them with ardor, when my love-making folly left me the requisite leisure; but I admit that I had neglected them shamefully for some time past.

It was time to think about dinner. I did not forget that I had an appointment for the evening on Boulevard Bondy, near the Château d’Eau. In order to be in the neighborhood, I thought that, instead of dining at the Palais-Royal as usual, it would be an excellent idea to dine on the boulevards, where the small theatres are; then I should be close at hand for the evening. I bent my steps, therefore, toward the Marais.

When I was on Boulevard du Temple, I had only too great a number of restaurants to choose from. I knew them all; I was not *en partie fine*; so that I

had no occasion to think of anything except which was the best, without looking about for the most convenient and most secluded private dining rooms. I decided in favor of the Cadran-Bleu; the prices were high there, but ordinarily one could get a good dinner. I walked in that direction and was just passing the Jardin Turc, when I saw a gentleman in front of me with a lady on his arm. Raymond's figure was too easily recognizable for me to mistake it. It was certainly he: his gait, his huge calves, his gestures—yes, it was he. As for the lady, her face was hidden under an enormous bonnet; but it seemed to me that I knew her as well. My neighbor was talking with great earnestness, and I noticed that he pressed her arm to his side; he had every appearance of being *en bonne fortune*. I was curious to know where they were going; and I was determined to obtain a glimpse, if possible, of the charmer's face, unseen by Raymond; for, as I have said, her figure was not unfamiliar to me. But they crossed the boulevard and entered a restaurant on the corner of Rue d'Angoulême—the Méridien; I remembered that the waiters there were young women, and that it was a very comfortable place; at least, it was so some years before. Why should I not follow my neighbor? Perhaps chance would give me a glimpse of his companion; and Raymond does so much boasting about his mistresses, who, according to him, are always princesses and of rare beauty, that I was not sorry to have an opportunity to see one of those marvels of creation.

I left the Cadran-Bleu at my right, and, resigned to the prospect of dining less satisfactorily, entered the Méridien and asked for a private room. I was taken to it by a waitress. We passed a room where I heard Raymond's voice, and I told my conductress to give me the adjoining one. The partition between me and the room which Raymond and his flame occupied was so thin that I could hear their voices when they did not speak in undertones. I left my door open, too; and as theirs was not closed, for their table was being laid, I could catch from time to time a portion of what my neighbor said; for he had the unfortunate habit of speaking very loud—a habit contracted in order to attract attention to himself, and retained even in his incognito. Judging from what I heard, he was putting himself out to please his guest, whose tastes he constantly consulted in ordering the dinner. I heard him read the bill of fare to her three times; she had much difficulty in making up her mind; she didn't like anything; she wasn't hungry; it made no difference to her; but she asked for a thousand things that were not on the bill. I readily concluded, from her affectations and fussing, that my neighbor had not made a very distinguished conquest; indeed, one would have said that she was making fun of him and that it amused her to annoy him. I was convinced that he would have nothing to show for his dinner.

Every time that I heard the woman's voice it recalled confused memories. Yes, I was sure that I knew her, but I could not tell who she was; I had known so many that I might be pardoned for confusing them in my memory; and then, I caught only a few detached words. No matter! I was determined to see her, and I would find a way!

It seemed that Raymond decided at last to order the dinner himself, for I heard nothing more from him. The lady hummed a comic-opera air; that voice was certainly familiar to me.

I heard the bell, and the waitress appeared. Raymond gave her the card and ordered dinner at once, and the girl went downstairs. The lady expressed a wish for some fromage fouetté, which my neighbor had not ordered, and he ran after the girl to add it to his order. As he passed my room, the door of which I had been careful to leave ajar, he glanced in and saw me.

"What do I see? my dear friend Dorsan!"

"Himself, Monsieur Raymond. What on earth are you doing here?"

He entered the room with an air of mystery, walking on tiptoe, and pointed, with a smile, to the adjoining room.

"I am in there," he said, trying to speak in an undertone; "next door."

"Oho!"

"With—someone."

"Ah! I understand! an amourette, a *partie fine*!"

"Exactly."

"You're a terrible fellow. They accuse me of being fickle, a deceiver, but I am sure that you're a hundred times worse than I."

"I won't deny that I'm rather given to changing!"

"And the lady?"

"Oh! charming, delicious! a regular swell, with her carriage and livery! We are here incog."

"So I imagine."

"She has granted me to-day a favor she has refused a thousand other men."

"What a lucky dog you are! You arouse my curiosity; might I not see her?"

"Oh! impossible, my dear fellow, impossible! she's a woman who is most particular about her reputation. If she knew that I had talked about her to one of my friends, she would be deadly angry with me and would never forgive me."

"Very good, I'll say no more about it; I see that it would be no kindness to

you. I congratulate you, none the less, on such a brilliant conquest.”

“It’s worth what it costs, that’s true. You know that in the matter of women I am rather particular; I don’t take up with the first comer; I insist on good form and style.”

I thought that Monsieur Raymond was trying to be sarcastic.

“Above all things, I like to subdue those who are cruel,” he continued; “with them there are at least some merit and firmness—you understand. But I wager that my charmer is getting impatient; adieu, neighbor! love and pleasure call me.”

“Don’t keep them waiting.”

Raymond left my room, his bosom swelling with delight at being seen *en bonne fortune*, and returned to his own, closing the door behind him. All that he had said increased my curiosity; I was convinced that he had been telling me fables, as usual. I gave no credit to his tales of great ladies; and I could see him cudgelling his brains for lies while he was talking to me; indeed, he seemed to go more into detail than his custom was, the better to pull the wool over my eyes.—You were not sly enough to catch me, my dear Raymond! it was because you had happened to see me with a flower girl that you put on so many airs and hurled epigrams at me; but I had a shrewd idea that your great swell was not worth my humble Nicette.

My window looked on the boulevard, and, while I waited for my soup, I opened the sash to enjoy the prospect. I was not *en partie fine*, consequently had no desire for a subdued light. I observed that my neighbor’s blinds were not lowered, and my conclusion was strengthened that Raymond’s affairs had not progressed very far.

As I watched the passers-by, I saw a young man whom I knew stop in front of our restaurant. It was the same Gerville who lived in our house, and with whom Mademoiselle Agathe passed the memorable night when I offered hospitality to Nicette. What was he doing there? He stopped and looked this way and that, as if he were expecting or seeking someone.

The window in my neighbors’ Good! perhaps the lady would come there for a breath of air and I could see her face. But what was the matter? I heard an exclamation, and the window was suddenly closed; something extraordinary must have happened. In truth, I seemed to be becoming almost as inquisitive as Raymond.

I walked away from the window; a warm discussion was in progress in the next room. Faith! they could do what they chose! I proposed to dine, for I was

hungry. At that very moment the waitress appeared with my soup. But what a racket! Raymond suddenly rushed out of his room and into mine, pale, haggard, trembling, and in his haste jostled the servant and caused her to spill my soup on the floor.

“Oh! mon Dieu! what a mess, monsieur!” exclaimed the girl, picking up her tureen. “You have made me burn myself awfully—all that hot soup on my foot! I know that I shall have big blisters there!”

“It’s all right, my girl; I’ll pay for your soup.”

“And what about my apron, which is ruined, and my leg?”

“I’ll pay you for everything!” Raymond replied, with no idea what he was saying; and he pushed the girl out of the room and carefully closed the door.

“Well, well! what in the devil’s the matter with you, Monsieur Raymond? you look as if you’d had a fright!”

“Ah! my dear friend, I have good reason to!—something has happened—a circumstance—I am in a terrible plight. Wait till I look out of the window; but first be good enough to draw the curtain so that he can’t see me.”

“Are you going mad, neighbor?”

Raymond did not answer me; he went to the window and looked out, taking care to conceal himself behind the curtain, and putting his head out with the utmost precaution. I saw that he became paler than ever.

“He’s there,” he said at last.

“Who, pray?”

“Gerville.”

“Oh, yes! so he is. But what difference does that make to you?”

“It makes a great difference to me. Don’t you know that he is horribly jealous and quite capable of going to terrible lengths?”

“What of it?”

“Understand that he’s here on my account. I am sure that he is watching for me; and he has some reason to, for I am with his mistress.”

“What! can it possibly be Mademoiselle Agathe whom you chose to transform into a lady with a carriage and livery of her own?”

“What would you have, my dear fellow? I did it in order to disguise her better, to spare her reputation.”

“Oh! so far as that goes, you may take my word that she has nothing to fear. Ha! ha! ha! Monsieur Raymond, what you must have are cruel creatures, women of a certain style!”

“You may jest about it later, my friend, but save me now, I implore you; my only hope is in you to extricate me from the frightful position I am in.”

“For heaven’s sake, explain yourself!”

“Gerville will come into this house, I am perfectly sure. Somebody must have told him that I am here. Be obliging enough to take my place for a moment, and give me yours in this room; I will leave my door open, he will see that I am alone, and his suspicions will vanish.”

“But why don’t you lock yourself in with your inamorata? he won’t break down your door.”

“He is quite capable of it! or else he would wait for me on the boulevard; and if I should go out with Agathe, you can judge for yourself what a scandalous scene there would be. Furthermore, we live in the same house, you know; and if he has discovered anything, how shall I ever dare to go home? He’s just the man to lie in wait for me on the stairs at night.”

“Then why in the devil did you meddle with his mistress?”

“What can you expect? a moment of folly. It was that morning I waited with her on our landing that it took me.”

“Ah, yes! the morning you both played the spy on me.”

“Oh! great God! he has come in!” cried Raymond, who had glanced out on the boulevard; “save me, my friend—in pity’s name! Go—I’ll join you later.”

Giving me no time to reply, Raymond jammed my hat over my ears, dragged and pushed me out of my private room, and locked himself in. I made no resistance, and without any idea as yet as to what I proposed to do for my neighbor, whose most distinctive quality courage certainly was not, I entered the room where Agathe was. She uttered a cry of surprise when she saw me.

“Mon Dieu! it’s Eugène! Is it you? is it really you?”

“Why, to be sure it’s I, sacrificing myself to save poor Raymond, who’s in such a fright that it will make him ill.”

“Ha! ha! ha! I can’t get over it!”

“Hush! he’s in there; he can hear you laugh, and I fancy that he would take it ill of you just at this moment.”

“Really! what do I care for that? Ha! ha! ha! Do you think that I’m in love with Raymond, I should like to know? Oh! he is much too stupid, really! and he tries to play the Lovelace! I couldn’t stand it any longer! When I opened the window and saw Gerville on the boulevard, I gave a shriek and stepped back into the room as quick as I could; for I don’t want Gerville to see me with

Raymond. Not that he's jealous, but he might not like it. Do you know what I did? It came into my head to tell my old idiot that Gerville is fiendishly jealous, and that he had been suspicious of him ever since he learned that we spent two hours together on the landing, and that I was certain that he was on the boulevard for the sole purpose of watching us. The more I said, the more frightened my adorer became, for he has even more affection for his own person than for mine. And when I added that Gerville was quite capable of stabbing him,—ha! ha! the poor man took his hat, and is running still, I fancy. Ha! ha! ha! but it's very kind of him to send me such an agreeable companion. Meanwhile, I would like to know what has become of Gerville; I think that he was just waiting for one of his friends."

"Hush! somebody is coming upstairs. Raymond is opening his door; let's listen. Gerville is speaking."

We put our ears close to the door, which we very softly opened an inch or two, and overheard the following conversation:

"Ah! it's neighbor Raymond."

"Himself, at your service. How are you?"

"Very well. How's this? are you dining alone in a private room?"

"Yes; I have something on my mind, some important business, and I was glad not to be disturbed."

"In that case, I'll leave you. I am waiting for somebody who agreed to meet me on the boulevard here; but he's late, and I am going to dine. Good-day, neighbor; and a good appetite!"

"Your servant!"

Gerville closed the door of Raymond's room and went into another, passing ours as he did so.

"Well, mademoiselle," I said to Agathe, "choose; to which of these gentlemen will you give the preference?"

"Oh! I have a delicious idea!"

"Some crazy scheme, I'll be bound, for you think of no other kind."

"This will be unique. Help me, my dear Eugène, I beg you."

Without another word to me, Agathe began to stride up and down the room; she pushed the chairs about, threw some of them down, and, amid the uproar, cried out from time to time:

"Don't be angry with me, my friend! I assure you that you are mistaken. I give you my word that I haven't seen Raymond; that I don't care for him! Ask

Dorsan; he invited me to dinner, because he was expecting a lady.”

I began to understand Agathe’s plan; she proposed to make Raymond think that Gerville was with us. To second her, I also made noise enough for two, and attempted now and then to imitate Gerville’s voice. We stopped at last, tired out by our comedy; Agathe made me a sign which I understood; I left the room, the door of which she locked behind me, and stole on tiptoe into Raymond’s, where I found him shivering and half dead with terror in front of a beefsteak with potatoes. I locked the door before approaching him, and put a finger to my lips; we had the aspect of two conspirators. Raymond spoke so low at this time that I could hardly hear him.

“He’s in there,” I said, pointing to the next room.

“Oh! I know it only too well; I heard him. But how did it happen?”

“We thought he had gone downstairs, and we opened our door; but he was on the watch; he saw Agathe and came in. Then there was a terrible scene, for he suspected that she came here with you; I’m not the one of whom he is jealous.”

“Parbleu! I know only too well that it’s I. I saw plainly enough just now that he didn’t believe what I told him. He had doubts; perhaps he saw us coming along the boulevard.”

“That is quite possible; you are so infernally imprudent! When you arrange such a party as this, you should take a cab, and enter the restaurant by the rear door.”

“That’s so; you are right; we ought to have come in from behind! but I promise you that I’ll go out that way.”

“He thought at first that I was in your confidence, that I was here solely to help you. In fact, I am exposing myself to some risk in your behalf.”

“Ah! my dear Dorsan! never while I live shall I forget what I owe to you!”

“However, things are beginning to calm down. Agathe has succeeded in making him listen to reason; she told him that she came here for no other purpose than to watch him; she’s playing the jealous lover now.”

“Oh! that’s delicious! charming! these women always find a way out of everything!”

“I should prefer to let them dine alone; but he won’t listen to it. I left the room on the pretext of ordering dinner.”

“It’s all ordered, my dear friend; and I shall take good care to pay for it. I don’t mean to put you to any expense, when you are sacrificing yourself to help me.”

“As you please; I’ll give the word to the waitress, and we will dine.”

“Go, my noble-hearted friend; tell her to be sure not to mention me.”

“Never fear.”

“I have but one fear now.”

“What’s that?”

“Just now, with the idea of giving Agathe a surprise, I amused myself, while her back was turned, by slipping my picture into her reticule.”

“Your picture?”

“Yes; I mean one of my silhouettes, you know, which I had pasted on a pink card, with a border of little cupids. If Agathe should happen to drop that when she takes out her handkerchief; or, not knowing what it is, should take it into her head to look at it——”

“Peste! that would make a pretty row! Gerville would surely say then that I was in collusion with you to deceive him.”

“Try, my friend, try to prevent Agathe from blowing her nose!”

“I can’t promise that, but I’ll motion to her to blow it in her napkin; that cannot compromise you.”

“That’s the very thing.”

“Adieu! a longer absence might arouse suspicion.”

Once more I left Raymond, who locked himself into his room. I returned to Agathe. The waitress arrived with the dinner; she seemed surprised at the change of cavalier, but two or three words in her ear and a five-franc piece in her hand speedily retained her in our interest. She promised to tell the stout gentleman that there were three in our party, and thereupon she left us, overjoyed to be able to amuse herself at the expense of the man who had upset a tureen of soup on her feet.

“Now, let us dine,” said I, taking my seat at the table beside Agathe; “no one can deny that we have earned it. I hardly expected to dine with you, I admit.”

“Nor I! but impromptu pleasures are always the best.”

“A month ago we had already become reasonable and sedate in our tête-à-têtes.”

“I tell you, we did well to part; we are much better pleased to see each other.”

“Oh! I know that you are passionately fond of variety.”

“No, my friend, not so much of variety as of forbidden fruit; and when I think that Gerville is at our right, Raymond at our left, and that I have succeeded in

avoiding the necessity of eating in his company the dinner he ordered—ha! ha! ha!”

“Don’t laugh so loud!”

“Oh, yes! that will reassure him, don’t you see? he will think that Gerville’s in good humor.—Ha! ha! ha! it will bring back his appetite.”

Agathe was in the wildest spirits; she was compelled to hold her napkin over her mouth to stifle her outbursts of merriment; the pleasure of deceiving two men at once gave to her face an unfamiliar expression; she had never been so pretty in my eyes, I confess. She teased me, pinched me, caressed me, threw her arms about me. Ah! Mademoiselle Agathe, you were a perfidious creature, but most seductive! Moreover, for several days, I had been making love with my eyes alone, and I felt that it was incumbent on me to make our mystification of Raymond complete.—Ah! my poor neighbor! if you but knew what ardor Agathe showed in mystifying you!

But we heard someone coming upstairs; it was our waitress. That young woman had an abundance of tact and penetration; she turned the knob at least thrice before she opened our door. She brought the first course. I tasted the wine; it was Volnay, first quality. Gad! my neighbor was a connoisseur!

“Oh! you’ll have a fine dinner,” laughed the girl; “the gentleman didn’t forget anything: champagne, dessert, and the *coup de milieu!*”

“Aha! so we’re to have the *coup de milieu!*” said Agathe; “we musn’t forget that, my friend, do you hear?”

“Never fear.—By the way, my girl, did our neighbor question you?”

“Yes; I told him that madame was dining with two gentlemen; he seems a little easier in his mind.”

“That is good.”

We did full justice to Raymond’s dinner; it was dainty and toothsome. In a quiet moment, I asked Agathe to tell me how it happened that she had come there to dine in a private room with my neighbor, whom she did not like at all.

“I did it to have a better chance to make fun of him,” she replied. “Ever since the day we waited on your landing to see your little flower girl, Raymond has been pleased to make love to me. He pesters me with his declarations and his billets-doux, which I receive just to show them to the girls in the shop; and they make a lot of sport for us, for his style’s as ridiculous as his person. He had asked me twenty times for an assignation, when I happened to meet him to-day near Porte Saint-Denis. I was just going home; I had been to Gerville’s, but didn’t find him. Raymond urged me, begged me, to dine with him at a restaurant.

I refused at first; but the temptation to make a fool of him, to laugh at his expense, in short, to have some sport, led me to change my mind. Besides, you know what a heedless creature I am. I didn't expect to meet Gerville, for whom I care very little, however. So I accepted, and allowed myself to be conducted to a private room by poor Raymond, who believed that his triumph was assured, whereas I never had the slightest intention of granting him any favors."

"Here's to his health!"

"With all my heart."

"Is this the *coup de milieu*?"

"One moment! how fast you go! we haven't got to it yet. This vol-au-vent is delicious, and so is this filet sauté, with madeira and truffles."

"And this salmi of partridges, also with truffles. Ah! poor Raymond! do you see his game? he ordered truffles in everything!"

The waitress arrived with the rum and the next course.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Agathe; "truffles with champagne sauce! why, he'll kill us with 'em! What is our neighbor eating?"

"Chicken, with rice, madame."

"Good! that's very nourishing; give him some prunes for dessert; they're an emollient."

The girl left us. We enjoyed the truffles, the chicken, and the crabs, whose claws Agathe wanted to send to Raymond. We did not forget the *coup de milieu*; my companion thought a great deal of that, and so did I. With his dinner *de bonne fortune*, that philandering Raymond had put the devil into us; he evidently thought truffles a necessity in his *parties fines*! But, by sending me to take his place with Agathe, he had allotted me a terrific task!

"Avenge yourself," she kept saying to me, "avenge yourself, Eugène; you know that Raymond is responsible for our having seen your little vestal leave your rooms; you know, too, that he used to make remarks to the people in the house when I came to see you; you know that by his inquisitiveness and chattering he has made trouble between you and several women. Avenge yourself; still avenge yourself!"

What terrible creatures women are when it is a question of vengeance! Agathe still urged me, and yet my spleen was rapidly vanishing. Luckily, the girl brought the dessert. Champagne, fromage à la vanille, biscuits à la rose, gelée au marasquin, and Madame Amphoux's liqueur des Iles. I was lost! Raymond was determined to have my life!

“I would like to know what he’s doing now,” said Agathe; “just go and speak to him.”

I left the room, and she held the door ajar to listen; I coughed gently at Raymond’s door, which he instantly opened.

“Well! how far have you got?” he asked.

“Oh! everything is going along nicely, very nicely! we are eating dessert.”

“And Gerville?”

“Oh! he’s forgotten everything!”

“I was afraid that he would make a scene with Agathe. I thought I heard groans and sighs.”

“They were of repentance and love; and then, she still pretends to be jealous; but I see plainly enough that she is thinking only of you.”

“Oh! she adores me, my friend; I can’t doubt that.”

“Your dinner is delicious; you do things very well, Monsieur Raymond.”

“Yes, yes; I ordered it for a purpose! I expected to partake of it with her!”

“She knows that you ordered it, and she is just as much obliged to you. I can see in her eyes that she doesn’t eat a truffle without thinking of you.”

“Dear Agathe! But I hear laughter, it seems to me.”

“Yes, that is she. She laughs with her lips, to deceive him; but the fromage fouetté awaits me; adieu, my friend!”

“What! haven’t you drunk the champagne yet!”

“Not yet.”

“But you look rather heated.”

“It’s the *coup de milieu* that gives me that appearance.”

“Tell me, had I better go away before or after you?”

“Why, before—that would be the wiser way.”

“I’ll take a stroll in the garden of the Café Turc, in front of the pavilion that bears a crescent.”

“I can see it from here.”

“If by any chance Gerville should leave you, or if he should take Agathe away, join me there.”

“Agreed.”

“I will wait for you, then. Au revoir, my dear neighbor! I beg you to excuse me for giving you so much trouble. What you are doing for me to-day is an act

of genuine friendship. I have but one further request to make; keep an eye on my silhouette! motion to Agathe not to touch her handbag. Do this for me, my friend.”

“I have done it already.”

“No matter; do it again, for my peace of mind.”

“I will try; au revoir!”

I returned to Agathe, who laughed till the tears came. I had not as yet thought of mentioning the silhouette to her; that was the bouquet for dessert. My neighbor’s profile was pasted on a pink card, and we saw two lines written at the bottom. Poetry of Raymond’s composition: that should be a curiosity.

“My profile with these little Loves is surrounded,
Since I feel every day, love, for thee love unbounded.”

Ingenious, in very truth! worthy of Berthellemot! But as we noticed that one of the little Loves was standing on his nose, we concluded that it should read “I smell,” instead of “I feel.” Agathe proposed at first to stick my neighbor’s likeness on the mirror in our dining room; but she changed her mind. She put it carefully away, intending to have copies made of it, which she proposed to enclose in amorous circulars composed from Raymond’s billets-doux, and to send them to all the milliner’s apprentices of her acquaintance, taking care to write at the bottom the address of the original of the portrait.

The champagne finished what the stimulating dinner had begun; we were in the mood to say and do all sorts of foolish things. Agathe stuffed herself with sweetmeats and jelly; I drew the corks; the wine foamed and sparkled, and soon passed from our glasses to our lips; we no longer knew what we were saying, but we knew very well what we were doing! Agathe threw aside all restraint; and if Raymond was listening, surely he must have thought that we were fighting.

But the champagne, which effervesces when it is first poured out, will not effervesce again unless it is well shaken, and in due time refuses to effervesce at all. In like manner, readers, the volcanoes which have displayed the greatest activity become extinct! In like manner, readers of the gentler sex, those seductive fires which your lovely eyes emit, and to which you owe so many conquests, will die away. Everything has its day, alas! in nature; everything falls to ruin and decay; everything dies. It is the universal law; for that we are born, and each step in life is a step toward the grave; there is no possibility there of arranging compromises.

“Death hath rigors unexampled;
Vainly pray we to her;
The cruel creature stuffs her ears
And lets us shout at will.
The poor man in his thatch-roofed cottage
Is subject to her laws;
The guard who stands at the Louvre gates
Protects not kings from her.”

I cannot say how the champagne led me to this quotation; however, I am sure that you will not take it ill of me; these lines are never misplaced, and I would

like, indeed, to have been the author of them.

We had become virtuous then, in action at all events. I looked at my watch; almost eight o'clock! The deuce! and my rendezvous. The champagne had not entirely deprived me of memory, but I confess that Agathe was responsible for the loss of a large part of my zeal.

Raymond must have been on the watch at the Café Turc for a long while; as for Gerville, we had seen him leave the house more than an hour before; so that there was nothing to detain us. My companion donned her bonnet and shawl and tried to assume a demure and modest air, which she was unable to master, even by lowering her eyes. I did what I could to maintain a grave demeanor and a steady gait; that infernal champagne always did go to my head! However, we could safely show ourselves on the boulevard; we were only a little giddy.

We left the Méridien, where Raymond had paid for everything. The hostess and waitresses saluted us with smiling faces.

"Is there anything amusing in our looks?" I asked Agathe.

"No; but do you suppose that those people don't divine that we've been making a fool of Raymond? Perhaps they think he's my husband."

"Oh! that would be rather too much!"

"Bah! such things have been seen."

"Here we are at the Café Turc; shall we go in?"

"What for?"

"To relieve Raymond, who's doing sentry duty there."

"Let him stay there; I've no desire to be bored any more with his love; I have had enough of it. Everything has turned out as I wanted; but as such adventures never happen twice, I assure you that he will never inveigle me into a private dining room again."

"Poor Raymond! This *partie fine* will have been very profitable to him, won't it? But here's the Château d'Eau; someone is waiting for me here, and I must leave you."

"What! already?"

"Our play is ended, my dear girl; we can be of no further assistance to each other; let us not postpone our separation until ennui succeeds pleasure, and the fumes of the champagne have entirely vanished; we shall retain a pleasant memory of this meeting, at all events."

"Adieu, then, my dear Eugène! may we enjoy ourselves as much when we next meet!"

Agathe went her way, and I started to make the circuit of the Château d'Eau.

XVI

THE ROSE WITHOUT THORNS

Six times I had walked around the pond. From time to time I halted in front of the lions, which I contemplated from every point of view; then, for variety's sake, I listened to the splash of the water as it fell into the passage through which it flows back to the canals. All this was most entertaining, no doubt, and still I began to weary of it. The sentinel watched me closely; doubtless he began to look upon me as a suspicious character.

It grew dark, and I was on the point of going away, when I saw coming toward me a woman in a little cap. Was it she at last? I dared not flatter myself that it was; I had been mistaken so many times, for my eyesight is not very good; but she continued to approach me. Yes, it was really she. Caroline accosted me with a smiling face; she was not in her best clothes; but there was a certain daintiness in her costume: her cap was neatly tied, and her hair had been in curl papers all day, I would have sworn; a woman does not take so much pains for a man to whom she does not intend to listen. The girl seemed to me a sly minx enough! But although the champagne had made me even more reckless than usual, I was not inclined to offer my arm to a grisette, in a cap, within the walls of Paris.

"I was beginning to lose all hope of seeing you," I said.

"Why? it's only a quarter past eight, and I can't get away from my shop any earlier."

"Let us go for a stroll in the fields."

"In the fields? oh, no! it's too late. I can't be out later than nine; my aunt would scold me."

"That's a very tiresome aunt of yours. Let us go in somewhere."

"No, I don't want to. Oh! if I should be seen with you!"

I did not choose to tell her that I was no more anxious than she to exhibit myself on the boulevard with her, for, after all, there were some social conventions which I did not care to defy. She wore an apron and a cap, and that fact annoyed me greatly. Certainly I think no more of a milliner than of a flowermaker, but Agathe was dressed as a lady, and I could afford to offer her my arm; a bonnet and shawl make a vast difference in a woman; and that is one

of the petty foibles to which a young man has to submit when he goes into society, even though he despise them. If Nicette had met me at noon instead of at midnight, I certainly should not have escorted her to Madame Jérôme's on foot.

"Suppose we walk a little on Rue des Marais," said Caroline; "I am not so much afraid of being seen there."

"Very well."

That suggestion was most welcome to me. We went down the stairs, took the Passage du Wauxhall, and in a moment we were on Rue des Marais, a street most favorable for sentimental promenades. Mademoiselle Caroline seemed to know the best places.

The subject of our conversation may be divined: between two lovers, between a gallant and a coquette, between a pretty woman and a comely youth, between a young man and a grisette, the same subject is always discussed; they talk of love and nothing else. For centuries, love has formed the staple subject of conversation between man and woman; many observations must have been made thereupon, and still the theme is not exhausted. To be sure, everyone treats it in his own way, but the end in view is always the same, is it not?

The fumes of the champagne led me to discuss the subject rather cavalierly; Mademoiselle Caroline, who probably had not dined so sumptuously as I had, stood on her dignity. I could obtain nothing from her; she kept her aunt constantly to the fore, complaining of the severity with which she was treated; but as she had no means of providing for herself, she must needs submit to necessity.

I fancied that I could divine the girl's ambition; she loved liberty, referred with a sigh to the matter of bonnets and dresses, and seemed to be as sick of her aunt as of her shop. I afforded her a glimpse of a possible means of becoming free and happy; I dropped a word or two concerning a nicely furnished little room of which she would be mistress, where she could work as she chose, where, in short, everything would be subject to her wishes. It was all very alluring, and Mademoiselle Caroline listened very attentively; she did not reply in words, but she sighed and looked down. I talked of dresses, theatres, pleasure parties; she looked at me with a smile, and allowed me to steal a very affectionate kiss. I had found her weak side: the girl was disgusted with her present life; she longed to be her own mistress; in a word, she wanted to have a chamber of her own. Those little grisettes are all alike; that is what they all aspire to; as if when they once had lodgings of their own their fortunes were made. I saw that the flowermaker cherished that aspiration, and that until it was fulfilled she would accord me no favors. That denoted, not love exactly, but

foresight and shrewdness. What should I do? Faith! one more foolish thing. Caroline was fascinating; perhaps gratitude would attach her to me. Gratitude, because I desired to seduce her! you will say. I agree that it is hardly the fitting word, but observe that I gave her an opportunity to reflect at leisure.

“Caroline, does your aunt need you to support her?”

“No, monsieur; on the contrary, I am sure that she wouldn’t be at all sorry to have me provided for.”

“I understand. And you have no other relations?”

“No, monsieur.”

“And you two would part without regret?”

“Oh, yes, indeed! for we often quarrel; and if I had been able to have a room of my own, I’d have done it long ago.”

“In that case, you shall be in your own quarters to-morrow.”

“What, monsieur! do you mean it?”

She jumped for joy, then checked herself, because she thought that she ought not to let me see how delighted she was, but that it was incumbent on her to make some show of hesitation.

“But, monsieur, I don’t know whether I ought to accept.”

“What is there to prevent?”

“What will people say?”

“It seems to me that that ought not to worry you so much as your aunt; and as you are not afraid of making her angry, what do you care for what strangers may say?”

“That’s so, monsieur; it makes no difference at all to me; besides, several friends of mine have done it, and been no worse off for it.”

“Oh! there’s no lack of examples. And so, my dear girl, be all ready at this time to-morrow night. I will come here for you. Make up a little bundle of whatever you need most, and I will take you to your room.”

“Well, as you insist upon it, until to-morrow! I’ll be ready.”

“By the way, one more question. Who is that Monsieur Jules you were with at Tivoli?”

“Oh! he’s a very well-behaved young fellow, who takes me out to walk sometimes with my aunt.”

“I believe you; but even if he’s a hundred times more well-behaved than you say, you must promise me not to receive him at your room, and not to go to walk

with him any more.”

“Never fear; I know that I mustn’t do that, and I don’t mean to annoy you in any way.”

“You are a dear girl; so it’s decided, is it?”

“Yes; until to-morrow; it’s late and I must go.”

I took an earnest of our bargain from Caroline’s lips; and she hurried away, doubtless to prepare for the coming change in her situation.

So I had arranged to keep Mademoiselle Caroline! The word had an ill sound in my ears; in general, it is understood to refer to those old libertines, ugly, stupid, and infirm, whom fortune alone has favored, and who obtain by the power of gold favors which others often have obtained without effort. Those men are rarely loved, and are almost always deceived; I myself had taken enjoyment at their expense; and I was going to keep Caroline! No, I was going to establish her in lodgings, that was all; I might perhaps make her a little present now and then, but she must continue to work; I had no inclination to gratify all her whims; therefore, I was her lover, not her keeper.

We always endeavor to look at our own actions in the most favorable light; moreover, Caroline was really pretty; I had been sighing for her many days, and at last my hopes were to be fulfilled. I persuaded myself that she loved me, although I had detected nothing in her conduct to demonstrate it; but it is so pleasant to flatter one’s self that one has aroused that sentiment! She was a flirt, but I would steady her; she would see no one but me, go out with no one but me; she would do whatever I desired, and she would be faithful to me; that is the way I arranged matters in my mind.

The next morning I considered what I had to do; I had no time to lose. I dressed in haste, and as I closed my door I ran into Raymond, who was coming to pay me a visit, in his morning gown.

“Going out already?” he said.

“Yes, neighbor; I have a great deal to do to-day.”

“The devil! I wanted to talk with you.”

“You must wait until another time.”

“You didn’t join me yesterday at the Café Turc; I waited in the garden till ten o’clock.”

“I am very sorry. Adieu!”

“But I say, what about my picture? Has Agathe my picture?”

I had ceased to listen, and was at the foot of the stairs. I scoured the

neighborhood in search of a suitable room. I wanted one of which I could have immediate possession, and one that was not far from my own lodgings. I had not succeeded in finding what I desired,—they were all either too high up, or too dark, or too dirty,—and I was walking along with my nose in the air, looking for signs, when, as I paused in front of a porte cochère, I heard a faint cough near me. It seemed to me to be a simulated cough; I turned, and saw Nicette. I was within two yards of her stand and had no idea of it. Nicette looked at me, then lowered her eyes; she dared not bow to me or speak to me by daylight. Poor child! At that moment I remembered her bouquet, which I had entirely forgotten; I had never thanked her for her thoughtfulness. I walked up to her, and, as I selected a few flowers, told her in an undertone how deeply touched I was by her remembrance. She blushed with pleasure, and I walked away followed by her eyes.

At last I found what I wanted, on Rue Caumartin; two small rooms which were very neat and clean, very light, and could be occupied at once. It only remained to furnish them; and with plenty of money nothing is so easy. I hastened to an upholsterer's, bought all that I required, and had it sent to the house with me. In less than three hours the little suite was completely furnished. At first I intended to supply only what was strictly necessary, but my self-esteem interfered; I determined to give Caroline a pleasant surprise; she must have an easy-chair for resting, and a sofa for us two. A pretty woman must have plenty of mirrors; but, above all else, she must have a dressing table and a comfortable bed. She must have curtains to shield her from the gaze of her neighbors; and they must be lined, to lessen the glare of the sun; lastly, she must have a little clock, so that we should not forget the time while talking of love, and I did not expect to talk of anything else to Caroline. All these little details carried me much further than I had at first proposed; but I would try to economize in some other direction, and those were extraordinary expenses and of infrequent occurrence.

At last everything was ready; I had the keys of the apartment. There was no concierge in the house; that meant one less spy. But I must provide for everything; Caroline would come that evening to take up her abode in that quarter, which was unfamiliar to her; I must, at the very least, be prepared to offer her some supper; surely there was a restaurant in the neighborhood, and I would go at once to order a dainty repast. But had I thought of everything that required to be done before my mistress should take possession of her new abode? would she have everything she needed? I decided to place fifteen louis in the commode, with which she could provide for her immediate wants; for in the

first days of her changed position she would hardly feel like working, and that would be very excusable, a girl's head is so easily turned! But we become accustomed to everything, and it seemed to me that if my pretty flowermaker chose to be respectable and orderly, and to behave herself, she might be very happy.

I went to the restaurant and ordered a dainty supper for nine o'clock. Then I set about trying to kill time until evening; it was dinner time, but I was not hungry; no matter! I determined to dine, as that would give me some occupation. When I had dined, it was six o'clock; I had still two hours and a half before me, which would never end, I thought. I decided to take a walk; it occurred to me that I should not be sorry to meet Raymond, to divert my thoughts. So I went to Rue Vivienne, where the milliner's shop was in which Agathe was engaged; I was sure that Raymond would be prowling about the neighborhood.

As I drew near the shop, I saw a number of people collected about a paper pasted on the wall within a few yards of the door. I was not in the habit of stopping to read about lost dogs or other chattels; but I saw that everybody was laughing, and concluded that it was not one of those ordinary placards. I walked toward the crowd and listened:

"It's a good joke," said one.

"It's a most excellent trick," said another; "I'm sure it's a good likeness; I recognize that profile."

I pushed my way to the front, and—what did I see? Raymond's silhouette pasted on a great white sheet of paper, with these words written above in huge letters:

"Notice to ladies, young and old. The original of this portrait is looking for a lady of from fifteen to thirty-six years who is willing to accept a dinner in a private dining room."

I readily guessed the author of that piece of deviltry. Agathe and her shopmates were standing in the doorway, laughing till they cried to see the crowd in front of the silhouette and to hear the various remarks. I was moved to pity for poor Raymond; if I had dared, I would have removed his unlucky face, thus exposed to the laughter of the passers-by. To be sure, it was hardly possible to recognize it in that black profile; but my neighbor had a very peculiar cast of countenance; and the artist, unluckily for Raymond, had caught his likeness perfectly; indeed, he had had abundant time to practise, as Raymond had passed

the whole evening in his booth.

Among the spectators I noticed little Friquet, whom one could always be sure of finding in front of posters, caricature shops, cake sellers, street singers, and all sorts of open-air shows. The little fellow had recognized Raymond; he was holding his sides with laughter, and crying:

“I say! I know him! It’s Monsieur Raymond; he comes to my aunt’s house to sing! Oh! it’s he, sure enough! What a shame to paste him up there!”

And although he characterized it as a shame, the rascal kept repeating:

“I know him: it’s Monsieur Raymond, who comes to my aunt’s.”

I was about to walk away, when I turned and saw Raymond parading in front of Agathe’s shop, playing the dandy and ogling her with significant glances, to which she replied only with roars of laughter.

The poor devil was walking toward his portrait; if Friquet saw him, he was lost; the little clerk would not fail to make him known to the crowd. I determined to try to save him from that humiliation. I hastened toward him, took his arm, and tried to lead him away with me.

“Come, my dear Raymond, come; let’s take coffee together.”

“I can’t do it, my friend; I am here for a purpose, you see. I am watching Agathe; I want to speak to her.”

“You can speak to her later; come on with me.”

“No; this seems to me a favorable moment; she doesn’t take her eyes off me.”

The little traitress was, in truth, making the most ridiculous faces at him, for fear he would go away. Monsieur Raymond, who had never known her to look at him like that, and who saw that all the shopgirls had their eyes on him, was beside himself with delight; he swaggered along, leaning on his cane; to no purpose did I pull him by the arm, it was impossible to induce him to lose sight of the milliner’s shop. But he noticed the crowd assembled a few steps away.

“There’s something over yonder; let’s see what it is.”

“Pshaw! it isn’t worth while; an offer of a reward for a lost dog, or an advertisement of some new oil to prevent the hair from falling out or turning white.”

“I tell you, my dear fellow, those oils aren’t to be despised! For my part, I try every one that comes out; I must confess that they often give me a headache, but a man must risk something to retain his youth, you must agree. However, I don’t think that’s what they’re looking at; see how they’re all laughing! It must be something very amusing.”

“Don’t you know that in Paris the merest trifle is enough to collect a hundred people?”

“No matter; I want to see what it is; I like to laugh when I have an opportunity. I’ll come back in a minute and tell you about it.”

It was impossible to keep him away; he had already crossed the gutter with an agility of which I had not deemed him capable; and there he was in the crowd, forcing his way to the front with hands and elbows. The milliners did not lose sight of him. I too was anxious to witness the effect that his silhouette produced upon him. Just as he reached the wall and stood motionless in front of his likeness, unable to believe his eyes, the little clerk, who was still among the crowd, espied him, uttered an exclamation, and, overjoyed to be able to point him out to the bystanders, called out to him:

“That’s a picture of you, Monsieur Raymond; it looks just like you.”

And all the young men repeated with him:

“It’s Monsieur Raymond; he comes to my aunt’s!”

My neighbor pulled his hat over his eyes, so that one could see nothing but the tip of his nose; he tried to fly from the spot, and hurled himself among the loungers, who took the keenest delight in barring his path, bombarding him with jests and hootings. Raymond was beside himself; he pushed so hard that he succeeded in breaking out a path; and as he strode away, the laughter from the milliner’s shop completely broke his heart. He went like the wind; but his hat was so far over his eyes that he could not see where he was going, and he collided with a blind man led by a dog which carried a bowl in its mouth. The shock overturned the poor devil, who sat down on the sidewalk with an emphatic oath; the dog, seeing its master fall, dropped its bowl and sprang at Raymond; the blind man cried *thief!* because he heard his sous rolling on the ground; and Raymond swore because the dog was snapping at his legs. The crowd ran up to restore peace and put the beggar on his feet; but no one dared to approach him, because he was laying about him with his stick, thinking that he was belaboring the person who had thrown him down; while Raymond struggled with the dog, which had taken his leg as a substitute for the bowl and would not relax its grip.

At last, the blind man was raised to his feet, and they succeeded in replacing the bowl between the jaws of the faithful beast that had fought so valiantly for its master. As it was necessary to compensate the poor devil, who was rubbing his posteriors and demanding his money, my neighbor was compelled to put his hand in his pocket, while everybody shouted at him:

“Come, Monsieur Raymond, you must be generous; you shouldn’t rush

through the streets of Paris like a madman!”

To escape the crowd, which was becoming larger every moment, Raymond emptied his pockets; but the more he gave, the more the blind man complained of his bruises.

“These villains are never satisfied!” said my neighbor; “here’s twelve francs for your posterior, and thirty sous for the money you lost; I think that’s quite enough.”

“You have hurt me,” said the blind man, shouting like a deaf person; “I shan’t be able to walk for a week; you must make up to me what I shall lose by that.”

“Well, here’s twelve francs more.”

“That’s not enough, bourgeois.”

“What! that makes three francs a day, and still you’re not satisfied! Your trade seems to be a good one!”

“I’m a poor father of a family; I’ve got five children.”

“Why doesn’t your wife lead you, instead of trusting you to a dog?”

“My wife sings on Place Maubert, kind gentleman.”

“And your children?”

“My oldest, a boy, sings on Boulevard des Italiens; the second, a girl, sings on Rue du Grand-Hurlleur; the third, another girl, at Montparnasse; the fourth, a boy, on the Champs-Élysées; and the youngest boy is just beginning to sing on Rue du Petit-Lion. We all sing, kind gentleman.”

“Well! you’re a good one to complain! People who sing from morning till night, and won’t take three francs for a day’s receipts! I should like to know if there’s a family in Paris better off than that!”

The crowd laughed at my neighbor’s reflections. The blind man, who was inclined to be ugly, was threatened with having to go to exhibit his bruises to the magistrate, who had a regular tariff for bruised posteriors of all grades. As he had no desire to expose his hurts to the authorities, fearing a considerable abatement of his claims, he went his way with his dog, Raymond with an insult to nurse, and I with the silhouette, which I had torn down and pocketed.

The hour for me to meet Caroline had arrived. I took a cab and was driven to a point behind the Château d’Eau. There I alighted, and strolled along the boulevard, awaiting my young runaway. This time she soon appeared, with several boxes in her hand. She smiled as soon as she saw me; there was less restraint in her manner, more affection in her glance, than I had seen before. Ah!

I was sure now that I held sway in her heart.

I led her to the cab; we put the boxes in, then took our places side by side. I told the cabman to urge his horses, for I was impatient to arrive and enjoy her surprise. At last, after a rapid journey, during which she had allowed me to hold her in my arms and to tell her again and again that I would always love her, we reached Rue Caumartin and drew up in front of her new abode.

I opened the house door; I paid the cabman; Caroline gathered up her boxes, and I took her hand to lead her upstairs; for it was dark and we could hardly see. I was amazed that her hand did not tremble in mine. At the moment of such a tremendous change in her position she was not at all excited. She was a young woman of great strength of character—that was clear.

At last we were in her apartment; an old woman on the same landing gave us a light, and Caroline was able to examine her new quarters. She looked about with rapture; I could see her joy gleaming in her eyes.

“Oh! how pretty it is! how pretty it is!” she kept saying, again and again; and she sat down on the easy-chair, on the sofa, looked at herself in the mirror, examined her curtains, her commode, her clock, her table, her chairs. The bed was the only thing that she dared not examine. Was it from modesty?

“You are satisfied, then?” I said inquiringly, as I took her on my knees.

“Why, how could I help being? These rooms are charming; everything is so elegant, and nothing is lacking; I shall be just like any *comme il faut* woman.”

“And you think you will be happy here?”

“I feel already as if I could never go anywhere else.”

“I am delighted to have succeeded so well; everything here is yours.”

“Mine? really? You are too generous!”

“And if you don’t love me, you are at liberty to refuse to see me; I do not intend to put any price upon what I do.”

“Oh! what an idea! if I didn’t love you, would I have consented to come with you? would I accept anything from you?”

I allowed her to say no more; a kiss closed her mouth. The doorbell rang violently, and Caroline started up in alarm.

“Who can that be?” she asked.

I calmed her and opened the door.

It was the man from the restaurant, with the supper I had ordered; that sight restored Caroline’s gayety completely. We set the table; the basket was unloaded, the dishes placed on the table, the waiter dismissed. We were alone,

on our own premises, our own masters. I was not very hungry, but I was pleased to see that my companion did honor to the repast. She partook of everything and declared that everything was good.

“At all events,” I said to myself, “she hasn’t begun to play the *petite-maîtresse* yet; she doesn’t try to conceal her pleasure or her appetite.”

She admitted that she never had such a good supper at her aunt’s, and that she loved good things to eat, sweetmeats, and muscat wine. Thereupon I filled her glass with muscatel. I did not wish to make her tipsy; but a little “point,” I thought, would banish the last traces of ceremony that still held her gayety in check.

Caroline was bright; her conversation abounded in sallies and repartee—overabounded perhaps. I foresaw that she was likely to go far and to become a leader in her class. I could understand that she must have been bored to death on Rue des Rosiers; she secretly longed to shine upon a greater stage, because she had a presentiment of the triumph that awaited her. I determined to do my best not to encourage her taste for luxury, fine dresses, and extravagance; for it would be the devil’s own job to make her take a different road when she was fairly started.

But the clock struck eleven.

“Already!” said Caroline; “how the time flies!”

I was by her side, I held her in my arms, I rested my head on her shoulder; silence had followed our bursts of merriment, but silence expresses the emotion of the heart better than the noisy outbursts of folly.

“It is very late,” said Caroline, in an undertone.

“Must I go?” I said; “aren’t you your own mistress now?”

She lowered her eyes and made no reply; but did I need any other avowal than that? She defended herself very feebly; and I was such an expert lady’s-maid that in an instant she was in her night costume, if it may be called a costume. To be sure, I tore and broke whatever came in my way: strings, laces, and pins. Those were very trifling obstacles; luckily, fashion does not decree that our ladies must be clad in corselets of steel! but even so, love would find the defect in them. There was one pleasanter obstacle which I desired to find; but I am bound to confess that it did not exist. Ah! Mademoiselle Caroline, I might have suspected as much! But what does it matter, after all? Was she any less pretty on that account? No, to be sure; perhaps, indeed, it was that that gave to her face that expression of coquettish malice which fascinated me. But I could not help thinking that another man had obtained much more than I without

providing her with an apartment; however, for my encouragement, I recalled the ballad:

“The first step’s taken unreflecting.”

Not until the second does reflection take a hand; therefore, there is much more glory in inducing the second step than the first; I tried to persuade myself that that was so.

At all events, I had no choice but to make the best of it, as there was no remedy. If I had been her husband—why, then I should have done just the same; for it is quite enough to be persuaded yourself that you are a Georges Dandin; I see no need of proclaiming it from the housetops.

So I kept all these reflections to myself; I bestowed upon Caroline caresses which she returned with a vivacity and a force of sentiment of which I should not have deemed her capable, and which I certainly should not have found in an innocent; that was one source of consolation. She swore that she would continue to love me, that she would be happy with no one but me, that she did not want to see anybody else, that she would always be faithful to me and had no desire to win the love of any other man. I said about the same to her, and we fell asleep with these touching oaths of love on our lips.

When I awoke, it was broad daylight. Caroline was still asleep. It was only six o’clock, so I did not wake her; she must have been fatigued. I softly imprinted a kiss on lips which seemed to invite it even when asleep, and I left that bed where I had found in my inamorata’s arms all the delights of sensual pleasure, save only—but why think of that?

I dressed without making any noise, for I wanted to go away without waking her. I knew that very close companionship soon gives birth to satiety; therefore, I proposed not to see her too often, so that when we did meet we should enjoy ourselves more. Oh! I had had experience! When it is not used with care, there is nothing that becomes exhausted so quickly as love. And then, although Mademoiselle Caroline pleased me immensely, I had no idea of living with her altogether. When I was fully dressed, I glanced once more at my new friend, then crept from the room and closed the door very softly.

What a difference between Paris at six in the morning and the same Paris at six in the evening. What perfect tranquillity reigned in that quarter, which, a few hours later, would resound with the rumbling of calèches and tilburys, with the trampling of brilliantly attired equestrians, with the shouts of coachmen and footmen, with the uproar of tradesmen and foot passengers! A few milkwomen

alone gave life to the picture. I walked toward the boulevards. How cool it was! what a delicious hour for walking! I could not resist the desire to walk the length of the boulevards before the dust and tumult of the day had transformed them into the rendezvous of dandies and *petite-maîtresses*. I felt, too, that the air I was breathing did me good, that it tranquillized my mind; and I understood how one may at six in the morning repent of what one did at six in the evening.

But the shops began to open, the tradesmen took down their shutters, the concierges were sweeping down their steps, blinds were being raised, lazy folk were beginning to yawn and stretch their arms, working girls came out to buy their ounce of coffee, old bachelors their roll, maid-servants their beef stew, and old women their little pitcher of cream. The messenger went to the wine shop for his glass of wine, and the cabman for his glass of brandy, in order to begin the day aright! The peasant women, who had already done half their day's work, remounted their donkeys and returned to the fields; and I left the boulevards and went home.

Three-fourths of the tenants were still asleep. It was only half-past seven, and I met nobody but a few maid-servants. My neighbor was not awake as yet, I sincerely hoped. Poor Raymond! after his adventure of the preceding evening, I presumed that we must have a grand explanation. He must inevitably be in a rage with me; for I credited him with sufficient common sense to understand that the young women in the milliner's shop had deliberately made sport of him.

On reaching my door, I found something attached to the knob. It was a bouquet from Nicette, already a little withered; it had been there since the evening before, no doubt. The little flower girl did not forget me; and I, who might have gone to say good-morning to her at six o'clock, had not even thought of her. I very seldom passed her shop. And yet, Nicette was well worth going out of one's way to see; but for the last few days I had been so engrossed that I had had no time to think of my protégée; indeed, I had vowed not to think too much of her, and I believed that I should do well to keep my vow—for her sake especially. I wanted her to forget me, for I believed her to be very susceptible and quite capable of becoming deeply attached to the man she should chance to love.—“No,” I thought, “I will not go to see her; that is the wiser course. She will end by forgetting me.”—But I had a feeling that I should be very sorry if she did.

I detached the bouquet and entered my rooms; they too reminded me of Nicette and of the night we had passed together there. That night in no wise resembled the night which had just gone, and which had been marked by nothing that was abnormal in my experience. I had spent and expected to spend many

nights as pleasurable as the last. But those nights are very rare when a girl of sixteen, emotional and attractive, succeeds, while she beguiles us by her charms, in forcing us to respect her innocence.

I was not so happy as I should have been. Having become the possessor of an adorable woman,—for Caroline was truly adorable, and she lost nothing by being seen in a simple *négligé*,—what more could I desire? Ah! I had been deceived so often, that I was justified in being fearful. My new mistress was at least as coquettish as my previous ones had been, and that fact was not very reassuring. But why torment myself in anticipation? Moreover, I had promised myself to be impassive and to take things philosophically. Yes, I had made myself that promise, but I had not succeeded in keeping it; perhaps with time and a little more experience I might succeed. They say that one becomes wonted to everything, but in my opinion it is very hard to become wonted to anything that wounds our self-esteem.

Someone knocked; it was Madame Dupont with a letter.

“Give it to me, Madame Dupont.”

My concierge had a most amusing way of doing even the simplest things with an air of great importance and mystery. She handed me the paper, accompanying it with a reverence which meant a great number of things. Noticing that the letter was folded simply, not sealed, I concluded that she knew its contents; and judging from her manner, they must be of serious import.

“Who gave you this, Madame Dupont?”

“Monsieur Raymond.”

“My neighbor?”

“Yes, monsieur; and he told me to bring him your answer.”

“Let us see what he has to say.”

“MONSIEUR DORSAN:

“We must have a serious explanation with regard to the dinner of the day before yesterday. The matter cannot be settled elsewhere than in the Bois de Boulogne, where I shall expect you to-day between noon and one o’clock. I shall be alone; do you come alone. I believe you to be too honorable a man to fail to be on hand. I shall be near Porte Maillot.

“RAYMOND.”

I laughed like a madman when I read this epistle. Madame Dupont, whom Raymond doubtless had told that we were going to fight, seemed amazed at my hilarity, and asked me what answer she should give him.

“Go,” I said, “and assure my neighbor that I will be on hand promptly.”

My concierge, proud of her ambassadorship in a matter of such moment, made me the inevitable reverence and returned with my answer to Raymond, who was probably waiting in her lodge, swaggering gallantly before the gossips and housemaids, so that the whole household might know that he had an affair of honor on hand. I confess that I did not expect such a challenge from my neighbor. What weapons should I take? He did not mention the subject, and I had an idea that none would be needed; however, I concluded to put my pistols in my pocket. Who could say? perhaps I had judged Raymond ill. Moreover, madmen have their lucid moments, misers are sometimes extravagant, tyrants have paroxysms of kindness, coquettes moments of sincerity, rascals gleams of honesty; and cowards, too, may have their days of valor.

XVII

MY DUEL WITH MY NEIGHBOR

I went to the rendezvous at the appointed hour. The weather was fine, delightful for walking, and everybody was out of doors. I could not avoid the reflection that my neighbor had selected for our duel an hour when it was very hard not to be seen; I knew that he was very fond of putting himself in evidence, but it seemed to me that that was not an opportune occasion for so doing; he was evidently quite capable of choosing his ground in front of a guardhouse. However, I concluded to be patient and to await events before judging him.

When I arrived at Porte Maillot I did not see Raymond. It was not yet one o'clock, so I strolled about in the neighborhood. Little did I think that morning that I should go to the Bois de Boulogne before night, and alone. Caroline, I thought, must be surprised at my non-appearance. In truth, it did imply rather a lack of warmth; and if she were exacting, she would be justified in scolding me. But I knew a sure way to make peace with her; it is easy enough to find a way when love still exists; only in old liaisons, or between those who have been long married, do quarrels destroy love, because in such cases the methods of reconciliation are no longer the same.

At half-past one, no one had appeared. Could it be that my neighbor had deliberately sent me on a fool's errand; I realized that he was likely to require a vast deal of preparation before fighting a duel; but it seemed to me that he had had plenty of time since eight o'clock in the morning to make his little arrangements, and to go about to tell all his acquaintances that he had an affair of honor on hand. Could he have gone to warn the police? Such things had been done; but, no, it was he who had sent the challenge; I was doing him an injustice. Poor Raymond! the dinner episode was terrific, beyond question, and he must have been terribly incensed at me, especially if he believed me to be the author also of the ingenious trick of pasting his picture on the wall on Rue Vivienne. But why that rhodomontade of sending me a challenge by the concierge? if he had no intention of fighting, he should have come to see me at my rooms; I would have confessed my faults, while laughing at the affair, for I am not one of those men who refuse to atone for the foolish pranks they have committed except by cutting the throats of the persons they have offended. I consider that there is more glory in avowing one's fault frankly, and fighting afterward if the

avowal does not give satisfaction.

Almost two o'clock! I lost my patience; I was tired of walking; moreover, the weather had changed, and the sky was overcast; a storm seemed impending, and I had no desire to await it in the woods. The idlers had become fewer, the riders were digging their spurs into their horses' sides, the coachmen cracking their whips; everybody was hurrying back to the city. I determined to go with the rest. But who were the three men walking so fast toward the woods? I soon recognized the one who marched so proudly at their head: it was Raymond. He had brought two seconds, after telling me that he would come alone. But, no matter; doubtless he would be obliging enough to let me have one of them. I began to think that he had urged me not to bring one because he preferred to choose one for me.

As the three drew near, I recognized Raymond's seconds: one was Vauvert the melomaniac, the other Monsieur le Baron de Witcheritche. Parbleu! thought I, there is sport ahead! I had a strong suspicion that my neighbor was preparing some trick he had conceived. What in the devil had induced him to choose such seconds? Friquet only was lacking; I should not have been surprised to find him standing guard a short distance away, ready to summon the police at the first signal from his uncle.

All three were drenched with perspiration; and yet, they had had time enough to make the trip. Apparently, they had postponed their decision long enough to be sure of warming themselves up on the road. Raymond was as red as a turkey cock, Vauvert pale as a bride, and the baron made such fiendish grimaces that I could not tell just the color of his face. They seemed more at ease when they saw that I was alone. I very much regretted that I had not brought a second; I had an idea that by doing so I should have disarranged Raymond's plan.

They saluted me as soon as they caught sight of me; I returned their salutation, then went back into the woods I had just left.

"Where are you going? Wait, wait!" cried Vauvert, stammering and hardly able to speak at all, he was so excited. I pretended not to hear, and went farther into the woods.

Vauvert started to run after me; he overtook me and seized my hand, and I felt that he was trembling like a rabbit.

"Where on earth are you going, my dear fellow? why do you go so far into the woods? Don't you see that we're going to have a storm?"

"It seems to me that the affair that brings us here can hardly be adjusted on the highroad; it would be as sensible to choose Boulevard Saint-Denis for the

battlefield.”

“My friend, I hope that—at all events——”

“As for the storm, that needn’t disturb us; on the contrary, it will keep bystanders away.”

While I was talking with Vauvert, I heard my neighbor shouting in the distance:

“No adjustment, Monsieur Vauvert, no adjustment! I don’t propose to consent to any compromise; I am determined to fight!”

“You hear him!” said Vauvert; “he’s crazy. Oh! he’s a terrible fellow when he gets started. He has said everywhere that he proposed to have your life, or that you should have his.”

I could not help laughing at Raymond’s bluster; and I ventured to reassure poor Vauvert, who did not know which way to turn, having never been present at such a function. At last we were joined by my adversary and the Baron de Witcheritche, the latter of whom wore a three-cornered hat, eight inches high, cocked over his left ear, which gave him the aspect of a bully from the Rue Coquenard.

“Monsieur!” said Raymond, striding toward me with a warlike air, “I wrote you that I should come alone, and that was my intention; but, as I passed through the Palais-Royal, I met my friend Vauvert, who had come out to buy a roll for his second breakfast, and who, when he learned that I had an affair of honor with you, dropped everything to come with me, and——”

“That is to say,” interrupted Vauvert, “that you didn’t tell me that that was what was up, and that I didn’t find it out till we got to the barrier; for, when you saw me, you grabbed my arm and didn’t give me time to pay for my newspaper.”

Raymond pretended not to hear what Vauvert said, and continued:

“So I yielded to his urgent entreaties. Besides, he is as much your friend as mine, and his presence cannot be disagreeable to you. As for Monsieur le Baron de Witcheritche, we met him at the barrier, going out to dine in the country with his good wife. I thought it better to have two seconds than one, because then I could let you have one of them. Monsieur de Witcheritche consented to leave madame la baronne, who is waiting for him under the trees not far away. He will be my second then, and Monsieur Vauvert yours, if agreeable to you.”

Monsieur le baron, who had bowed every time that his name was mentioned, took his place beside Raymond, and Vauvert stood behind me.

“Monsieur Raymond,” said I, “it seems to me that we might very well settle

this affair between ourselves, without troubling these gentlemen. I am afraid that madame la baronne may get wet during our engagement, and Vauvert would be better off at his desk than here.”

“That is true enough,” said Vauvert, who asked nothing better than to go away; “I have a great deal of work to do to-day, and I’m afraid I shall be reproved by my deputy chief clerk.”

“Matame la paronne, she haf ov te shtorm no fear; she loaf mooch to see te lidening flashes,” said Monsieur de Witcheritche, smiling so expansively that his mouth seemed to reach from ear to ear.

“Well, since these gentlemen have been good enough to come,” said I, with a smile, “it must not be for nothing; so I accept Monsieur Vauvert for my second.”

Vauvert fell back with an air of dismay.

“Don’t be alarmed,” I said to him; “seconds rarely fight; if, however, I should fall, and you should choose to avenge me, it will be in your power.”

“I, my dear friend! I do not need to tell you how fond I am of you; and certainly—I wish the affair might be settled amicably. Friends ought not to fall out!—Monsieur de Witcheritche, we ought not to allow these gentlemen to fight.”

The baron seemed much more deeply interested in something that he had in his pocket than in our combat, and to no purpose did Vauvert, with tears in his eyes, strive frantically to make him understand that it was their duty to reconcile Raymond and myself. But my neighbor was obstinate.

“I intend to fight,” he said; “nobody shall insult me with impunity! I have seen Monsieur Gerville, and I know that he did not dine with you and Agathe; I need say no more! And my silhouette on the wall—that was a betrayal of confidence! You must give me satisfaction, Monsieur Dorsan; this affair will make a sensation.”

“Oh! bless my soul, neighbor, I am at your service! Let us get through with it, for it is going to rain, and I shall be distressed to have these gentlemen get wet, and especially madame la baronne, who is under the trees.”

“I am the insulted party; I have the choice of weapons.”

“That is true.”

“I am very skilful with the sword; I have taken lessons from the most expert teacher in Paris; but I will not fight with anything but pistols, because I don’t wish to make an unfair use of my advantages.”

“That is very generous on your part; I divined your purpose and brought

some pistols along.”

As I spoke, I took mine from my pocket; I saw that Raymond was disturbed and changed color; then he produced a pair of great holster pistols and showed them to me.

“That’s all right,” said I; “each of us will have his own pistols.”

“No, no! put yours back in your pocket; we must use mine. You understand what an advantage I should have in using one of my pistols against one of yours, which are two inches shorter.”

“Your behavior is truly noble. Very well, since you insist upon it.”

“I do, monsieur; besides, I have the choice of weapons, and I fight with none but my own.”

“Very well; let us call our friends to load them.”

I turned to look for Vauvert, who, as soon as we produced our pistols, had walked away in the direction of the highroad and could with difficulty be induced to come near us.

“The pistols are loaded,” said Raymond; “I always look after that in advance.”

“Ordinarily, my dear neighbor, that is the duty of the seconds.”

“Oh! but I don’t trust anybody but myself with that. Besides, my friend Witcheritche has examined them;—isn’t that so, monsieur le baron?”

The baron was busily engaged in wrapping in two thicknesses of paper some small Neufchâtel cheeses, which he seemed to fear would be dissolved in his pocket by the rain; so he replied to my adversary’s question only by a smile of assent. Everything that I saw tended to confirm my suspicions: Raymond’s valor was unnatural; his insistence upon using his own pistols, the pains he had taken to load them at home, certainly implied some trickery on his part, which I was determined. He handed me his pistols and asked me to choose one.

“How many paces apart shall we stand?” I asked.

“Why—about twenty-five.”

“Great God!” cried Vauvert; “why, that’s point-blank range. Forty paces, messieurs! that’s quite near enough when you’re hit!”

“No; let’s call it thirty; that’s the most I can consent to.—Monsieur de Witcheritche, come and measure the ground.”

Monsieur le baron regretfully parted from his cheeses, which he laid on the grass, taking care to put his hat over them, for the rain was beginning to fall violently. He came toward us; I took my place, and he measured thirty gigantic

paces, so that I could hardly see Raymond. As for my second, he was so afraid of being hit that he did not know where to go. He urged us to be very careful not to aim at the wrong man, and I reassured him. Monsieur de Witcheritche gave the signal by beating time, as if we were to play a Haydn quartette.

Raymond fired, and either the noise or downright terror felled Vauvert to the ground, where he lay with his face buried in the grass. I was not touched; I did not even hear the bullet whistle by my ears.

I suggested to my neighbor that we let it go at that.

“No, no, fire!” he cried.

“He is ein Zazar!” exclaimed the baron, in his admiration of Raymond’s courage.

I was desirous to ascertain the truth. My second still lay at full length on the ground; Monsieur de Witcheritche had thought it better to retire to a considerable distance, behind a clump of trees; my adversary turned his head aside, waiting for me to take aim, which I had no purpose of doing, although convinced that his weapons were not dangerous; but the baron’s cheeses were within two yards of me, and I discharged my pistol at them. The explosion blew the three-cornered hat away, and a multitude of scraps of paper adhered to the little Neufchâtel. While I was laughing over the end of my duel, Raymond came toward me with outstretched hand, shouting at a distance:

“It’s all settled, my friend; I am satisfied, embrace me!”

“What!” said I; “you don’t want another shot? I have pistols, too.”

“No, my dear fellow, let’s forget it all; embrace me, I beg you.”

“So be it; I will do whatever is agreeable to you.”

While my neighbor threw himself into my arms, the baron ran to his cheeses, and was like one turned to stone when he saw that they were all speckled with bits of paper.

“Mein jheese, tay shmell ov te bowder lige te teffel!” he said, putting his nose to them.

“A thousand pardons, monsieur le baron; but as I did not wish to fire at my friend Raymond, I aimed in this direction; the bullet must have gone through them.”

Raymond flushed to his ears; my ironical manner led him to fear that I had detected his little fraud; but I did not care to deprive him of the pleasure of being able to say everywhere that he had fought a duel. I ran to my second, who was still on the ground, and urged him to rise; he did not stir, and I saw that the poor

devil had swooned during our battle. I called Raymond to my assistance; he had a flask of strong aromatic vinegar in his pocket, with which we inundated Vauvert's face, and he finally came to himself. After feeling himself all over and making sure that he was not wounded, he tried to make us think that his swoon was caused by his affection for us both. We thanked him and set him on his legs; but we had to take an arm each to help him to walk; for he was in no condition to stand erect without our support.

Monsieur de Witcheritche put the remains of his cheeses in his pocket handkerchief, and we left the wood. The rain continued, but my second could not walk fast, so that we were compelled to endure it. Raymond was in the highest spirits; he was overjoyed by his day's experience. He knew Vauvert, and he was sure that his duel would soon be the absorbing topic of the whole company of amateur musicians, even if he himself should not take pains to spread it everywhere.

"You showed extraordinary courage, messieurs," said Vauvert, as we marched along; "such sang-froid! such calmness! that was true valor!"

"Oh! yez! yez! tese two chentlemens pe fery prave."

"Oh! my neighbor Raymond's not like other men; I am sure that he would fight the same way ten times a day."

Raymond bowed, but said nothing. I fancied that he realized that I knew how his pistols were loaded.

At last, we spied madame la baronne seated under a large tree; her husband ran to her and took her arm, and we walked toward the barrier.

"I haf mooch abbetide," said Madame de Witcheritche to her husband.

"Ve vill tine soon, matame."

The couple bowed to us and quickened their pace. I presumed that they were on the lookout for a restaurant; but I noticed that, all the way from the barrier, two huge dogs had been following monsieur le baron, who did all that he could to drive them away, but to no purpose.

"Do those two dogs belong to Monsieur le Baron de Witcheritche?" I asked Vauvert.

"No, I don't think so; I never saw at his place anything but poodles."

"It's strange," said Raymond; "he must have something in his pocket that attracts them."

I looked for a cab, but the rain had caused them all to be taken up. We had lost sight of Monsieur de Witcheritche and his wife, when we heard loud cries,

and soon saw the two dogs running for their lives, one with a bologna sausage, the other with a bit of salt pork in its mouth. The baron and baroness came running after them, crying:

“Shtop tief! shtop tief! Ach! te file peasts! tey haf shtole our tinner!”

Madame la baronne, being weaker than her husband, was obliged to stop, and told us how the two dogs had succeeded in extracting from monsieur le baron’s pocket the dinner she and her dear spouse, who had been a long time arranging that little outing for her, expected to eat in the country.

While we were consoling the poor woman, Monsieur de Witcheritche, who was not the man to abandon his sausage and his pork, kept on in pursuit of the dogs, at which he threw all the stones he could find on the road. He had already wounded one and compelled it to slacken its pace. Hoping to hit the other, which was just passing the barrier, he threw a great stone at it with all his force. But the stone was ill-aimed, and, instead of striking the dog, struck the customs clerk in the eye, as he was looking up at the sky to see if the storm were passing away.

The poor man fell, crying:

“I am dead!”

His comrades ran to him. One of the dogs, which was then passing the city limits, ran among the clerks’ legs and made them stagger. The second dog, trying to escape, was seized by monsieur le baron, who thought of nothing but his dinner and pursued his course, unmindful of anything else. He succeeded in catching the dog by the tail, and a battle ensued between him and the animal, which refused to give up the sausage. The soldiers from the neighboring post ran up in response to the outcries of the clerks. The vehicles of all kinds passing in or out were compelled to stop; the soldiers would allow no one to pass until they had found out what the matter was. A crowd gathered to see what was going on, and everyone put forward some conjecture.

“It’s an important prisoner whom they arrested just as he was leaving the city,” said one, “and it seems that he wounded the clerk who seized him.”

“No; they’ve just discovered some contraband goods in one of those wagons; it was being smuggled in.”

Amid the tumult, which was augmented by the barking of the dogs, the baron shouted triumphantly:

“I haf him! I haf him!” and he waved aloft the bologna sausage, which he had snatched from his enemy’s jaws; then, before the poor devil whose eye he had put out had recovered consciousness, Monsieur de Witcheritche slipped into the crowd and returned to his wife, leaving the clerks, soldiers, and bystanders

asking one another what it was all about. Madame la baronne had recovered her husband, Vauvert was in a condition to walk unaided, and Raymond began to play the dandy. I left the company and took a cab to return to Paris.

XVIII

A LITTLE DISSERTATION IN WHICH THERE IS NOTHING ENTERTAINING

When I arrived at Caroline's it was after five o'clock; my duel and its sequel had prolonged my absence, and she scolded me for going away without waking her, and said that she had been vexed at my delay. I would have preferred that she should have been bored, but I realized that she had had no leisure for that; there are so many thousand things to do in a new apartment, to say nothing of the indispensable purchases. She showed me a very modish bonnet that she had bought, and tried it on for me. It was a fascinating one; however, at twenty years, with a pretty face and a graceful figure, a woman might wear a sugar loaf on her head and she would still be good-looking. It seemed to me that I liked her better in her little cap than in a bonnet; but I concluded that I should get used to it.

The rest of the costume must necessarily correspond with the bonnet; that was in the regular order. I have always wondered at the importance which women attribute to all the gewgaws and trifles which are called dress! at the amount of thought and calculation they waste upon the best way of placing a flower or a ribbon! With what care they arrange a bit of trimming, a bouquet, a curl! All this is sometimes the result of several days' meditation! But let us not charge it to them as a crime: it is to seduce us that they array themselves; we should be very ungrateful to criticise what they do to please us.

Caroline had changed already; she wore her new garb with much ease of manner; she was no longer the grisette of Rue des Rosiers, but the *petite-maitresse* of the Chaussée d'Antin. Women form themselves in everything more rapidly than we do. Observe yonder villager: after three months in the city, he is still awkward, loutish, and embarrassed. But this little peasant girl left her home only a week ago, and already her parents would not recognize her; ere long she will not recognize her parents.

A fortnight had passed since Caroline's installation on Rue Caumartin. I saw her every day; I dare not say that it was love that I felt for her; certainly it was not a very impassioned love; but she still pleased me as much as ever. I believed that she loved me more than at the beginning of our liaison; at all events, she told me so.

Things had not turned out precisely as I had arranged, for she had ceased to go to her shop, and she could hardly be said to work in her room; but, by way of

compensation, she had acquired the manners of good society, the tone of a lady, and the general aspect of an *élégante*. It is true that I refused her nothing, although I frequently considered the project of reducing my expenses. But how can you refuse anything to a pretty woman who entreats you with a melting voice, and, while entreating you, looks at you in a certain way? As for myself, I confess that I have never had the strength to resist. It has been my misfortune, perhaps.

I began to discover that what I called gewgaws formed a very important item in the keeping of a woman. I ruined myself in trifles: every day it was a dress, a neckerchief, a hat, or a shawl! I do not know how Caroline went about it, but she invariably proved to me that it was the fashion, and, therefore, that it was necessary; I am too just to refuse a woman what is necessary. But my income was insufficient; I had borrowed; I was running in debt. What in heaven's name would happen if she should take it into her head to want the superfluous!

Every other day I found a bouquet at my door when I went home. My little Nicette did not forget me, and I never went to see her; if I chanced to pass her stand, I never thought of her being there and never glanced in her direction! And yet, every time that I found a bouquet, I determined that I would go to thank her; but Caroline gave me so much occupation that I never had a free moment; every day there was some new pleasure party; I never had the courage to refuse her; she knew a way to make me approve all her plans. Her graceful ways charmed me, her wit fascinated me, her merriment amused me; the hussy was so adroit in making the most of all the gifts she had received from nature!

One morning I received a note written in an unfamiliar hand. It was from Madame de Marsan, who reproached me good-naturedly for not keeping the promise I had made to attend her musical evenings, and invited me to a small party she was giving at her country house. I had almost forgotten Madame de Marsan, for I often forget a person who has set me on fire the night before; a very lucky thing for one who takes fire so easily; it proves that the heart has no share in the nonsense we call love. I determined to go to the party in question, for I did not propose that Mademoiselle Caroline should make me lose sight of all my acquaintances; I ought not to abandon good society because she could not go thither with me. The girl had already led me into too much folly! And there was my sister, whose letter I had not answered, and who expected me from day to day! I was not at all content with myself. But the torrent bore me on; I closed my eyes and let myself go.

Someone entered my room: it was my neighbor, whom I had not seen since the day of our famous duel. He had a shrewd suspicion that I was not taken in by

his false gallantry—I who had witnessed his abject terror on the day of the *partie fine*. I knew that he had made a great noise about his valor, prating of his duel to everybody he saw; but he had avoided meeting me in company; my presence would have embarrassed him in his narrative of our combat. I wondered what he wanted of me.

“Good-morning, my dear friend!” he began; “how goes the health this morning?”

“Why, I am inclined to think it goes too fast; I am going at a rapid pace.”

“You must be prudent, neighbor.”

“You’re a good one to talk about prudence, Monsieur Raymond! What are you doing with Agathe?”

“Oh! I don’t see her any more; that’s all over, we are parted forever! I don’t propose ever to be caught by one of those little hussies again; you spend an enormous amount of money, and sometimes you don’t make your expenses. And they don’t know how to appreciate a man; they don’t know the difference between a poet and a gudgeon! So long as you have money in your pocket, and can stuff them from morning till night with bonbons, sweetmeats, ices, and syrups, and tell them they’re adorable, take them to drive and to the theatre and to the country, and buy them all the fal-lals they happen to want, oh! bless my soul, then they’re satisfied. You may be as stupid as a goose, as coarse as a street porter, as conceited as an Italian virtuoso, yet you’re none the less delightful in the eyes of those girls.”

“There’s a great deal of truth in what you say, neighbor; but, as a general rule, it is adulation and flattery that spoil both men and women; if we didn’t kneel at their feet, they wouldn’t look down on us from such a height. Flatterers, courtiers, low-lived sycophants, creep in everywhere and sometimes corrupt the most happily endowed nature. Kings, unfortunately, are more encompassed than other men by this servile swarm, which constantly hums in their ears a concert of exaggerated and insipid praise; it is when men tremble that they stoop lower than at any other time. Louis XI had more courtiers than Louis XII, Charles IX more than Henri IV. Richelieu and Mazarin did not take a step without being surrounded by a multitude of courtiers; they were feared, people trembled before them, but humiliated themselves and scribbled verses in their honor. Sully and Colbert had their admirers, but they knew how to repel flattery; they were too great to surround themselves with people whom they despised. If too frequent adulation did not increase our vanity, if the familiar atmosphere of praise did not give us too great confidence in our own deserts, how many shortcomings would those heroes and great captains have escaped, who, under difficult

circumstances, have rejected the counsels of wisdom because they were accustomed only to the language of flattery, and deemed themselves invincible because a thousand voices had declared that they were, and because the man who has been exalted to the rank of a demigod does not readily decide to take the advice of his creatures! The pernicious effects of adulation date from a very early period: the serpent seduced the first woman by flattery. Almost always by the same means have women since then been seduced. Flattery destroyed Antiochus and Nebuchadnezzar, Semiramis and Mary Stuart, Cinq-Mars, Monmouth, Cleopatra, and Marion Delorme; Samson allowed his hair to be cut off while listening to the compliments of Delilah; Holofernes lost his head while listening to Judith's soft voice; Charles XII of Sweden, blinded by his victories, buried his army in the plains of Pultowa; the Maréchal de Villeroi, relying always on luck, insisted on joining battle at Ramillies. Excessive praise, by blinding us to our faults, causes us to remain in the path of mediocrity, when nature has given us faculties calculated to raise us above the vulgar; by tempting us to close our ears to the harsh counsels of truth, it leads us to mistake self-esteem for genius, vanity for merit, facility for talent. How many artists, even when they seek advice, refuse to receive anything but compliments! But they have been persuaded that all their works are masterpieces, that no defect can be found in them! And people who have attained that end no longer take the pains to study; everything that comes from their hands must necessarily be perfect. But civility demands that we must not always say what we think. Suppose a poet reads us some of his verses: if they are bad, you must not tell him so unless you are his friend; for you do not desire to be looked upon in society as an Alceste, forever growling about the vagaries and absurdities of everyone else; that rôle would raise up too many enemies to be endured, except on the stage. In society, we choose to overlook one another's failings rather than to set ourselves up as censors; mutual intercourse is pleasanter thus, and we find more pleasure in living for ourselves than in wasting our time trying to correct other people. But although courtesy may compel us to conceal what we think, it does not compel us to say what we do not think; when I listen to the reading of execrable poetry, I will hold my peace, but I won't say that it is charming; nay, more, I will try to summon courage to make some suggestions to the author. I can never make up my mind to say that a portrait resembles its subject, when I think it a wretched failure; I cannot tell a person that he sings true, when he has just been torturing my ears. With nascent talents, above all, we should be sparing of praise, even while we encourage them; flattery is responsible for very many such coming to naught, because it arrests the flight of a genius, which, deeming itself perfect already, no longer cares to take the trouble to acquire what it lacks. Doubtless a

father is excusable for considering his son a prodigy of beauty, wit, and talent; paternal love naturally misleads us; but let us at least keep our conviction to ourselves; let us not force strangers to go into ecstasies over the story of a mischievous trick, to listen in religious silence to a fable often directly at variance with common sense, and to gaze in admiration at a flat nose, turned-up chin, and inflamed eyes, which can never delight any glance but a father's. If there were fewer flatterers, how many men, who are simply unendurable now because they have been spoiled, would be ornaments of society! Let us reserve our enthusiasm for those poets and artists whose talents exalt them above all praise. Doubtless the contemporaries of Molière and Voltaire rendered to those sublime geniuses the homage they deserved; but one does not display his admiration for such men by insipid compliments and empty praise: great talents are proud of the applause of people of taste; they despise the base fawning of which fools are so vain.

“When Voltaire lived at Ferney, those travellers who, by virtue of their rank or their merit, could hope to gain access to him, never failed, even though they were obliged to go far out of their way, to visit the philosopher's retreat. Everyone was curious to see that extraordinary man, who astounded the whole universe by his genius. Men of intellect and of taste thought only of the pleasure that was in store for them; but the fools—and they too were anxious to converse with Voltaire—gave all their attention to the posture and expression they proposed to assume at sight of the philosopher, the better to manifest their admiration of him. Voltaire was affable with the former; but when a lady, on catching sight of the great poet, deemed it advisable to shriek and to swoon, the philosopher shrugged his shoulders and turned on his heel.

“Great geniuses are rare; great talents are affable and modest; they who might have acquired great talents but have failed inhale with delight the incense people are good enough to lavish on them. How can a young man whose voice is rather pleasant and nothing more fail to consider himself a Laïs or a Martin when people seem to be so infatuated with him? They urge him, entreat him, implore him to sing; all the women are in a flutter of excitement before hearing him; they belaud him to their neighbors in anticipation. ‘Delicious!’ ‘Divine!’ ‘Charming!’ are the only words that reach the ears of the virtuoso, who condescends at last to comply with the wishes of the assemblage, and, after all the inevitable monkey tricks, sings just passably a ballad of which it is well understood that he will not pronounce the words intelligibly; and he has hardly finished before the concert of praise begins anew, while the impartial auditor, who had been led to expect something very different, asks himself if he can believe his ears. Look you, my

dear neighbor, I confess that I have never been able to persuade myself to increase the crowd that hovers about these social prodigies, in whom I find nothing except inordinate self-esteem; or to swell the number of adorers of a woman of fashion, whose coquetry is carried to such a point that I blush for her and for those who surround her. Unquestionably, I am as fond of a pretty woman as any other man; I will be the first to do homage to her charms; but does that necessitate my exalting her to the skies at all times and seasons, and overwhelming her with compliments which, even if they are not extravagant, must none the less be tiresome to the person to whom they are addressed? Must it be that she cannot take a step without my praising her dress, her figure, her gait, her foot, her grace? Can she not smile without my going into ecstasies over her teeth, her mouth, and the expression of her eyes? Can she not utter a word without my extolling her wit, her shrewdness, her tact, her penetration, and the sweet tones of her voice? I may think it all, but I won't say it; I should be afraid of bringing a blush to her cheek. I know that I am considered far from gallant; that may injure me with some ladies, but I have neither the power nor the desire to change. If everybody did as I do, perhaps we should see less self-conceit and arrogance in men, less coquetry and caprice in women; they would take more trouble to be affable and agreeable, and everybody would be the gainer.—What do you think about it, neighbor?"

I saw that Raymond was not listening; he was examining the bunches of orange blossoms that adorned my mantel, and seemed to be puzzled by the old bouquets which I had collected on my commode, after taking out the flowers that would not live.

"You seem to be very fond of orange blossoms?" he said at last.

"Very."

"They have a very pleasant odor.—You must have twenty bunches of them here."

"I haven't counted them.—But will you do me the favor to tell me what brings you to my rooms this morning? for I presume that you came for some purpose."

"True; I forgot it while looking at these bouquets. I have received an invitation from Madame de Marsan for a party she is giving at her country house the day after to-morrow; I suppose you are going, and I came to suggest that we go together."

"With pleasure; you know the way and you can be my guide."

"With the greatest pleasure. By the way, how shall we go?"

“We will hire a cabriolet, and keep it, so that we can return when we choose.”

“That’s the idea. I thought at first of going in the saddle—I am very fond of riding; I have a very fine seat.”

“I have no doubt of your grace as a horseman; but we can’t go to a party at Madame de Marsan’s in top-boots, so we won’t go in the saddle.”

“True; I will undertake to provide a nice cabriolet; I know a liveryman. At what time shall we start?”

“At seven o’clock; we shall arrive at eight, which is the proper hour in the country.”

“That’s settled, then. I fancy we shall have some fun; I know the whole party, so I can tell you who’s who.”

“I thought you had been only twice to Madame de Marsan’s.”

“Oh! that doesn’t make any difference! once is enough for me to know everybody; I have a certain amount of tact, of penetration—it’s all a matter of habit. In case they should want to give a theatrical performance, I have an opera that I have just finished; I’ll read it to you on the road.”

“That will give me great pleasure.”

“I must take a look over it. Until Thursday, neighbor!”

“Until Thursday!”

Raymond left me, and I went to see Caroline. I found her at the window. For several days past she had spent much time there, especially when she was alone. Doubtless it was so that she could watch for my coming. It seemed to me that she was gayer, more amiable, more fascinating, than usual; pleasure gleamed in her eyes.

“Ah! she loves me,” I thought; “she loves me truly; she is grateful, she has a feeling heart; she is coquettish only to please me. Before forming a lasting attachment, she wanted to find someone worthy of her love; her heart chose me, and I am sure that she will be true to me. I knew that, with a little patience, I should find such a woman.”

XIX

THE TRIP TO THE COUNTRY

The day came when I was to go to Madame de Marsan's. I had told Caroline that she would not see me that evening, and she had seemed greatly disappointed, although we had had a little dispute the night before concerning a certain cashmere shawl, which I saw that she ardently coveted, and which I did not propose to give her. I had given her to understand, in fact, that she did not need a cashmere shawl to be charming; that she was more attractive to me in a simple and refined costume; and we had parted on the most friendly terms.

The clock struck seven; my toilet was completed. The concierge came to inform me that the cabriolet had arrived and was waiting in the courtyard. When it suited Raymond's convenience, we might start; but what in the deuce was he still doing in his room? I concluded to investigate.

I found my neighbor just putting on his breeches.

"What, Monsieur Raymond! haven't you got any further than that?"

"Oh! I'll be ready in a moment, I assure you."

"I'll bet that you won't be ready in half an hour."

"Pshaw! you'll see how quick I am! While you are waiting, amuse yourself by looking over my little water colors—my sketches; there are some very good little things there, as you'll see. If I had more time to myself, I'd go into oils and exhibit at the Salon, but I am never at liberty."

"I advise you to stick to water colors; yours are quite remarkable."

"Aren't they? There's true burlesque, originality for you; the Calot sort of thing. Do you notice that *Suzanna at the Bath*?"

"I thought it was a *Temptation of Saint Anthony*."

"Oh! that's because it isn't finished. And that little *Hop-o'-my-Thumb*—what do you say to that?"

"I thought it was *Bluebeard*."

"That's because he has on his seven-league boots."

"Come, come, neighbor! You haven't got into your breeches yet!"

"Ah! they're a delicate part of the costume, you know."

"But nothing but long trousers are worn now, even at balls."

“When a fellow has, as I have, a fine leg and a calf fit for a model, he isn’t sorry to show them.—Would you like to read my last verses, on the Marquise Désormeaux’s favorite dog?”

“No, thanks, much obliged!”

“They have made quite a sensation. All the ladies are saying, in a joking way, that they must have me to write their husbands’ epitaphs. The beginning is rather fine:

“‘O dog of nature, faithful animal!’”

“I’ve heard of a man of nature; but I confess that this is the first time I ever knew the epithet to be applied to a beast. So you think, my dear Raymond, that animals may be moral perverts, do you?”

“What’s that! why, don’t you see it every day? Look at the poor creatures that have to dance and bow and caper and jump through rings to the notes of the flageolet! They have received an education. The marchioness’s dog did everything she wanted him to; he snapped at everybody who went near his mistress, and he jumped on the table during dinner to eat out of the plates and dishes. That’s the natural instinct, and I maintain that ‘dog of nature’ is a very happy expression.”

“Come, come, Monsieur Raymond; drop your *dog* and finish dressing. If you spend so much time over every part of your costume, we shall not arrive before midnight.”

“I am at your service. I have got on my boots and breeches; but it seems to me there’s a crease on the left-hand side behind.”

“When you have your coat on, nobody will see it.”

“True; but in walking or dancing, the coat tails spread.”

“Well! what does this crease amount to? do you think that the company is going to keep its eye on your rump?”

“I tell you, a crease may make a great difference in a man’s looks; women notice everything.”

“The woman who takes any notice of such things must have her hands full at a large party!”

“It sets better now. Ah! my cravat.”

“That will be a long job.”

“Oh, no! I have made a study of that article of dress, and it goes all alone now. There! that’s it. Ought I to turn the ends up or down?”

“Turn them either way you choose; but try to make up your mind.”

“Well, I’ll pull ’em out straight. What do you think of that knot?”

“Beautiful! you are stunning!”

“*Stunning* is too strong a word; but I think that I look rather well; I’ve just got three pins to put in.”

“Great God! we shan’t get started at eight o’clock!”

“The devil! this is terribly embarrassing; I ought to have thought about it sooner.”

“What’s the matter? have you another engagement?”

“I don’t know whether I ought to put this turquoise above or below my emerald.”

“Morableu! Monsieur Raymond, my patience is exhausted; I am going to start without you.”

“Here I am! here I am, neighbor! Faith! I have put the turquoise above, no matter what happens.”

“That’s very fortunate.”

“Now, the coat—the hat—the gloves—and I’m all ready, you see.”

“Amazing! Let’s be off.”

“All right. Oh! I beg your pardon: I forgot a scented handkerchief.”

We left the room at last. When Raymond had closed his door, he discovered that he had not put his diamond ring on his little finger, so he went back to repair that omission. We went downstairs; but on the second landing, he failed to find his opera in his pocket, and went back for that. When we arrived in the courtyard, he remembered that he had not brought his favorite songs; and as he might be asked to sing, I must wait while he went to fetch them. I registered a vow never to travel again with Monsieur Raymond. At last, about a quarter past eight, we entered the cabriolet; then he discovered that he had not his eyeglass; but I was inexorable: I lashed the horse and we started. It was dark, so that Raymond could not read me his opera; but to make up to me for the deprivation, he proposed to tell me the plot. For more than an hour he prosed away about a Spanish princess and an Arabian prince, her lover, while I thought of Madame de Marsan, whom I was not at all sorry to see again, and whom I was surprised that I had neglected so long. When we reached Saint-Denis it was half-past nine; and I swore at Raymond, whose dilatoriness and absurd affectations would make us arrive at Madame de Marsan’s unconscionably late.

“Have we much farther to go?” I asked my neighbor, as we left Saint-Denis

behind.

“Why, no; about three-fourths of a league only.—I was saying that my princess, having been rescued from the burning palace, swoons at the end of the second act.—”

“You know the way, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes; drive on, I’ll show you.—When the curtain rises for the third act, the princess is in her lover’s camp, lying on a cannon.—”

“Have you been to this country house before?”

“Once; but that’s enough for me; I have such an accurate memory!—The soldiers are resting on their pikes—or their muskets, for I am not quite sure whether pikes were in use under King Ferdinand; but it makes no difference. The prince, having no desire to sleep——”

“I should say that we were told to go to the left.”

“No, no! straight ahead!—The prince, I say, is on his knees before the princess, who is still unconscious; and he sings her a superb air, *adagio* in *D* minor, to restore her.—I wrote the music, too. Can’t you see the tableau in your mind’s eye?”

“I see that if you don’t drop your *prince* and *princess* soon, we shall be in Montmorency, and that certainly isn’t on our road. I’m too good-natured, to sit here and listen to your nonsense. Here—as you are so certain we’re on the right road, just take the reins and drive.”

“Oh! I ask nothing better; I’ll stake my head that we’re not two hundred yards from Madame de Marsan’s.”

“But I don’t see any light.”

“Because it’s too dark a night.—This infernal horse has a mouth like iron.”

“You worry him too much.”

“Ah! I see something.—Where are we, my man?”

“Montmorency, monsieur,” replied our groom.

“Well! Monsieur Raymond, you want to see everything; you’re a very clever man!”

“Don’t be angry, my dear Dorsan; we’ll take this road to the left; I remember now that it leads straight to Madame de Marsan’s.”

“I think we should do as well to return to Paris; it looks like a storm.”

“What’s the odds? then they’ll have the party in the house.”

“The party! Parbleu! we may be there by eleven o’clock!”

“We shall be there at ten; I must whip this infernal beast.”

“Oh! I am beginning to be resigned; I am going to make the best of it.”

“They are longing for us to come, I am sure!—Go on, you villain, go on!”

“Say rather that they have forgotten all about us.”

“Oh! men like us aren’t so easily forgotten.—Go on, you wretched nag!”

“Look out! you’re whipping him too hard; he’s running away now.”

“Mon Dieu! that’s so; he’s got the bit in his teeth!”

“Hold him in! jerk the reins!”

“I can’t hold him, my friend; I am pulling as hard as I can. Mon Dieu! he’s turning into the fields; we are lost!”

“Oh! don’t be frightened; he’ll stop.—Get down, boy, and see if you can stop him.”

Our groom had already alighted, but he did not follow us, which made me think that he was hurt. Our steed galloped on, across fields and plowed lands and lanes. I took the reins from my companion, who was no longer in a condition to see anything, but trembled in every limb and shouted for help at the top of his voice. To put the finishing touch to our misfortunes, the storm broke with great violence: the clouds burst, the rain fell in torrents, and the wind blew with hurricane force in our faces. Our horse did not stop; I began to apprehend some serious accident; we were on a very steep hillside, and I expected every moment to be overturned with the carriage. Luckily, our frantic animal’s path was blocked by a mass of vines; he stopped short, but in struggling to extricate himself from the labyrinth of branches in which he was entangled he plunged about with such violence that he finally threw us out and fell with us.

“I am dead!” cried Raymond, as he fell. Before making sure of that fact, I tried to cut my way out of my prison, for the front of the cabriolet was blocked by vine poles. I succeeded at last in getting out. I was not hurt, not even a bruise. I thought myself very lucky to escape with nothing worse than a fright. Since it was written that I should not attend Madame de Marsan’s entertainment, I made the best of it and decided to endure as philosophically as possible the further misadventures into which Raymond was sure to lead me. I went to inquire into my companion’s condition. He was groaning pitifully; was he really hurt? If so, that would make our plight decidedly serious. I walked up to Raymond, who had fallen half out of the cabriolet, with his face against the ground. I shook his arm, and succeeded, not without difficulty, in making him raise his head. The rain had already formed pools, and the plowed earth had stuck to Raymond’s face. He told me in a feeble voice that he could hardly see.

“That’s nothing; turn your face toward the sky, and I’ll answer for it that the rain will very soon wash off the mud that covers your eyes.”

“You are right, my dear friend; I am well washed now, and I begin to see more distinctly. Ah! I breathe again!”

“Are you really hurt?”

“Wait till I feel myself; I’m sore all over, but I believe that I haven’t any serious wound.”

“That’s very fortunate!”

“Ah! my friend! what a terrible accident!”

“Whose fault is it?”

“Look you—I lashed the horse, because you were in a hurry to get there.”

“I advise you to put your crazy performances on my back!”

“Here we are in a pretty plight! and the rain coming down in sheets! It seems as if everything was in a conspiracy against us. Look! I even smashed my hat when I fell.”

“Parbleu! what do I care for your hat!”

“Look you, perhaps you care for my head, which is entirely unprotected. I am wet through, covered with mud, battered and crushed. What a cold I shall have! And my clothes! It was well worth while to dress! Open-work stockings; and see, there’s my shirt frill on that pole. Mon Dieu! it wouldn’t take much to knock me over!”

“Come, come, Raymond! damnation! be a man! You’re worse than a baby. We must get out of this somehow.”

“Where’s our groom?”

“I’m afraid the poor devil hurt himself when he jumped down, and I should be very much at a loss to know where to look for him.”

“If we could raise the carriage!”

“But one wheel came off when it went over.”

“The devil himself took a hand in the job.”

“I’m afraid the horse has hurt himself on these poles.—This pleasure party is like to cost us dear, neighbor.”

“Oh! you’re very lucky to be able to take it so calmly! For my part, I am crushed and furious at the same time!”

“Come with me; let’s try to find a house, some place of shelter at least; but let us notice carefully what direction we take. Are you coming?”

“Wait a minute, till I make a cap of my handkerchief, to protect me a little.”

We left the vineyard. I was obliged to take Raymond by the arm to get him to move along; he was trembling so that he was afraid of falling at every step. We walked for some ten minutes, constantly floundering in holes filled with water, which it was too dark for us to see. I swore and Raymond whined, anticipating an attack of pneumonia. At last we discovered a little cottage, and the light that shone through the windows indicated that the occupants were not in bed; for peasants are not in the habit of keeping candles lighted while they are asleep.

“We are saved!” cried Raymond; and he recovered the use of his legs to run toward the house. But I held him back, fearing that he would announce our presence in such a way as to prevent our being admitted. I myself knocked at the door of the cottage.

Peasants are rarely distrustful; the occupants of the cottage, being very poor, had no fear of thieves. They opened the door, and I saw a peasant woman in a large living room, surrounded by half a dozen children. I explained our mishap, while Raymond, who had already entered the room, peered into a great kettle to see what the peasants had for supper, then came back to me and informed me that we shouldn’t find much of anything in that house.

“What can I do for you, messieurs?” said the peasant, as she watched Raymond prying into every corner.

“Are we far from Montmorency?”

“No; a fourth of a league at most.”

“We don’t know the roads about here; be good enough to let us have your biggest boy for a guide; we will pay you.”

As I spoke, I gave the woman three francs, which instantly disposed her to make herself useful to us.

“That’s easy enough,” she said; “Julien, go with these gentlemen.—If you’re tired, I can let you have some donkeys.”

“We shall be very glad of them, for, first of all, we must find our groom, who must be somewhere in the neighborhood; and then we will try to rescue our horse, for he ought not to pass the night in the fields.”

“Come, Julien, get the donkeys out of the stable.—I ought to tell you that there’s no saddles for ’em.”

“No matter; they will be very useful to us all the same.”

The donkeys were produced, and I paid on the spot for their hire; I took a third one, for our groom, whom I hoped to find. Raymond hesitated a long while

before mounting his beast; he wanted saddle, stirrups, and pads; he claimed to be able to ride like Franconi, but he could not sit on a donkey. Tired to death by all his lamentations, I started off with the young peasant, who rode the third donkey, and set out to find the groom. Raymond, seeing that I had ceased to listen to him, decided to follow me, clinging with one hand to the tail and with the other to the mane of his steed. He urged the poor beast along in my wake, and we were in the fields once more.

I let my donkey take his own course. I called the groom at the top of my lungs, and my companions did the same. At last someone answered us; we rode in the direction of the voice and found our young man lying on the ground, under a tree. The poor devil had sprained his foot and could not walk. I put him on the peasant's donkey. It only remained for us to unharness our horse, whom we found on the ground beside the cabriolet. The rain had allayed the poor beast's ardor, and he finally allowed us to raise him to his feet. Our guide assured us that he was uninjured; he mounted him, took his place at our head, and the cavalcade set out for Montmorency.

All these details had taken time. It was after half-past eleven when we left our little carriage, which I commended to the young peasant's care; he promised to fetch a blacksmith to mend it at daybreak. We could have gone much faster but for Raymond; he compelled us to stop every few yards; his donkey refused to go, or else insisted on turning into another road; and he uttered heartrending cries when we did not wait for him. Luckily, the rain had ceased and it was a little less dark, so that we could see where we were going.

At midnight we caught sight of the first houses in Montmorency. Raymond gave a joyful cry, whereat his donkey was frightened and jumped, throwing its rider off into a muddy path, where he lost his shoes. As we were a little ahead, Raymond was obliged to pick himself up unassisted; the fear of losing us lent him strength, but his steed did not wait for him, and he ended his journey running after the beast, which he caught on the square just as we were dismounting. All the people of the inn had gone to bed, but we knocked until they answered. They were surprised that travellers should arrive so late; they would be far more surprised, I thought, when they saw the condition we were in, especially Raymond, whose last fall had plastered him with mud from head to foot. They admitted us, however, but, as I had foreseen, they were taken aback by our appearance. But I soon succeeded in telling my story. The landlord, seeing that he had to do with people of standing, apologized to us and hastened to show us to our rooms. They gave a room to our groom; the horse was taken to the stable, and the peasant went home with his donkeys.

I ordered a brisk fire made, to dry our clothes, and requested the host to serve whatever he had ready, for our misadventures had not taken away our appetites. We were served with a chicken, ham, salad, and fruit. While I took my place at the table, Raymond went into his bedroom, where he ordered another fire lighted, and asked the girl who waited on us to come to rub his back, so that he might avoid an illness. She was a robust peasant of some twenty years, not of the type to be afraid of a man. Still, Raymond's proposition struck her as rather peculiar; she looked at him with a smile and seemed to hesitate.

"Go with him," I said to her, "and don't be afraid; monsieur is thinking of nothing but his health, and I'll answer for his behavior."

While my companion was being rubbed, I did justice to the supper, and dried myself thoroughly in front of the fire. The bedroom door was not closed, and I could hear Raymond urging the servant on and complimenting her on her skill. The buxom damsel must have been tired, she had rubbed him so long, but Raymond seemed to enjoy it. Soon I concluded that the fire and the servant's ministrations had entirely restored my friend's animation, for he began to be enterprising, and I heard the girl exclaim that she would not stand it. And I had answered for his behavior! How can you trust anyone?

But the noise continued in the adjoining room; and at last the girl fled into the room where I was, roaring with laughter, and pursued by Monsieur Raymond in shirt and drawers and a pair of the innkeeper's slippers.

"Won't you keep quiet the rest of the night, Monsieur Raymond? Am I to have no peace with you?" said I.

"Oh! what eyes, my friend! Ah! the hussy, if she would!"

"Yes, but the trouble is I won't, Monsieur Insolent!"

"Come, Raymond, let the girl go to bed; it's late and this is no time to rouse the whole inn. I've no desire to get into any more trouble for your lovely eyes.— Leave us, my girl! we don't want anything more."

"I say, my dear, where's your room; do tell me where it is?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"Tell me, all the same, you sly minx, and you won't be sorry."

"Well, I sleep upstairs, at the end of the hall."

"Good; I understand."

The servant left us, and Raymond sat down at the table.

"I trust," said I, "that you don't propose to run after that girl? She's fooling you."

“No, no! I was joking, that’s all. She’s as solid as a rock!”

“She ought to know whether you are or not, for she rubbed you long enough.”

“Yes, indeed; the hussy knows!”

“It doesn’t seem to have disposed her in your favor.”

“Bah! didn’t she tell me where her room was?”

“Don’t you trust her.”

“Oh! I’ve no desire to go after her, as you can imagine; but, one thing is sure, and that is, that if I chose, I should have everything my own way.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Do you want to bet?”

“No; because you would indulge in some pleasant little performance which would make my night as agreeable as my evening has been; and I confess that I’ve had enough of that sort of thing for to-day. Good-night, Monsieur Raymond! I am going to bed, and I advise you to do the same.”

“Yes, neighbor, yes, I’ll do the same. Sleep well. Your servant!”

Raymond took his candle with an offended air and went to his room, locking the door behind him. I laughed at the crazy fellow’s pretensions and folly, and got into bed, where I soon fell asleep. A noise, the nature of which I could not determine, soon woke me. I listened, and called to Raymond, to find out if he were ill; he did not answer, and I heard nothing more, so I went to sleep again. I did not wake until eight o’clock; the sun was shining brightly into my room, indicating a lovely day. As I was at Montmorency, although against my will, I would at all events enjoy the delightful walks in the neighborhood and have a taste of the pleasures of the country before returning to Paris. Our cabriolet could not be repaired as yet, and we should have to wait for it.

While I was dressing, I called to Raymond and asked him if he wanted to take a walk before breakfast. He did not answer; apparently he was still asleep. But his door was ajar, and I seemed to remember that he had closed it the night before. I entered, and called him again:

“Come, come, lazybones! it’s late; wake up!”

No answer. I looked at his bed: he was not there. So he had risen earlier than I and gone out before me. I was turning away, when I saw Raymond’s coat, waistcoat, and breeches spread out on chairs, where he had put them to dry. What! he had gone out without coat or breeches? that was very strange! Thereupon, I remembered my neighbor’s schemes, his dallying with the servant,

and the wager he proposed when he was eating his supper. My uncertainty was at an end: Monsieur Raymond had set out to prove to me that he was not to be resisted; he had gone to lie with the stout damsel who had wiped him and rubbed him so thoroughly. But inn servants do not stay in bed until eight o'clock; the girl must have been up long before. Why had Raymond not returned to his bed? Did he want the whole household to know where he had passed the night? I did not see the point of that very clearly; however, I determined to ascertain the fact. I called and rang; the same servant appeared; her aspect was unchanged; she had a smile on her lips, her big eyes were wide open, and her manner alert and determined. She had anything but a bashful air; I supposed that she was probably accustomed to nocturnal visits. I looked at her and laughed.

“Did you call, monsieur?”

“Yes, my child.”

“What can I do for you?”

“How is our groom?”

“Oh! he’s all right, monsieur; they’ve put a compress on his foot.”

“And the carriage?”

“That don’t amount to much—only a matter of a couple of hours. But the man who owns the vineyard where you upset followed after the blacksmith; he wants his pay for the damage you did on his land; he says you pulled up more’n a dozen vines.”

“Good! we have got to pay him because we nearly killed ourselves on his poles; let him have a hundred sous.—By the way, my lass, tell me now what you’ve done with my friend?”

“With your friend?”

“Yes; the gentleman who came with me.”

“Oh! the man that lost his shoes, and that I had to rub so long!”

“Exactly.”

“Pardi! I haven’t done anything with him, and I wouldn’t have anything to do with him, although he was after me like a thirsty dog! Mon Dieu! what a fellow!”

“It’s no use to pretend, my dear; he slept with you; I don’t see any harm in that, but where in the devil is he now?”

“What’s that you say? he slept with me? Bless my soul! that’s a good one! It’s a lie, d’ye hear! I don’t sleep with anybody that don’t suit me, and your big baby didn’t suit me at all. Has he got the face to say that? Ah! I’d tear his eyes

out if I heard him!”

“It seems to me that when you tell him where your room is, you shouldn’t make so much noise because of what I’ve said to you.”

“My room! I told him where my room was! Good Lord! do you mean to tell me—— Ha! ha! ha!”

The servant, who had turned purple with wrath, suddenly began to roar with laughter. I waited a long while for that outburst of merriment to cease; the buxom creature held her sides, and was obliged to sit down before she could speak. She recovered herself at last.

“Let me tell you, monsieur, that the door I mentioned to your friend ain’t the door to my room at all, but it leads into a big room like a loft, where there’s a lot of sun and it’s always dry as a bone; that’s why the master picked it out to keep the fruits he’s going to preserve, such as pears and apples and grapes; and then provisions, such as bacon and ham and sausages!”

“Whatever you choose; but I suppose he keeps the room locked?”

“Yes, monsieur; but, for all that, he swore that things kept being stolen; and for the last few days, I don’t know whether it’s to catch the thieves or not, but I’ve noticed that the door was only latched.”

“And that is where you sent my companion?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“I don’t see what he can have been doing there all night. But he must be somewhere. Come, my girl, take me to your storeroom.”

“I’ll go and get the master, because we ain’t allowed to go there.”

“I don’t care for the prohibition; I must find my companion, who can’t have gone to visit the Hermitage or to walk in the valley, in his shirt and drawers.”

“That’s so; it ain’t the custom.”

Paying no heed to the servant, who went to tell her master, I left my room, ascended the stairs, and walked through a long corridor, at the end of which I saw a door. It was at some distance from the inhabited portion of the house; and I could understand that Raymond might easily have called without making himself heard. But why had he remained there? That is what I was determined to know. I pushed the door, which was not locked, and saw Raymond with one leg in a trap, sitting upon a pile of hams, where he had fallen asleep.

My arrival made him open his eyes. He held out his arms with an expression which I cannot describe.

“Ah! my friend! my savior! set me free, I implore you!”

“What in the devil are you doing here?”

“I am caught like a rat in a trap, as you see; I can’t budge. I’ve been here since one o’clock this morning; I shouted and called, but no one came, and I had to make the best of it. When I found that no one heard me, I sat down on the first thing I could find, and at last I fell asleep; but I ache in every limb. I shan’t forget Montmorency!”

I was sorely tempted to laugh, but Raymond’s long face aroused my pity. I was trying to release him from the trap, but to no purpose, when our host arrived with the servant. At sight of the latter, my poor companion made a horrible face, while the girl laughed till she cried.

“Aha! morgué! so I have caught my thief!” said the landlord, as soon as he caught sight of Raymond; but when he came nearer, he was greatly surprised to recognize the guest to whom he had lent his slippers. Raymond told a not improbable story of a trifling indisposition which surprised him in the night and compelled him to seek a certain place which he thought was upstairs; and in that way he had fallen into the trap set in the storeroom.

Our host apologized profusely. He alone knew the secret of the trap, and he hastened to release my companion. Raymond went to his room to dress; but he was in a savage humor and did not care to inspect the outskirts of Montmorency. He was afraid that the night he had passed on the hams, in his shirt, would give him the rheumatism, and he longed for the moment when we might start for Paris. I might have joked my neighbor on the hard luck that pursued him in his *bonnes fortunes*, but I was considerate and held my peace. I left him to rub his own shoulders, legs, and posteriors; and, after breakfasting, sallied forth alone to visit those delightful spots which Grétry and Jean-Jacques still adorn; for men of genius never wholly die. I will not describe scenes with which the reader is as familiar as myself; I should teach him nothing, and if I should make any blunders they would be detected; but if some day I visit a distant and desert country, if I see some Gothic château or some chapel tumbling to decay, I promise you a glowing description of it; for then I shall be able to say whatever comes into my head, without fear of contradiction.

Let us return to Raymond. He waited impatiently for my return from my walk. The cabriolet was mended, the horse harnessed, and we were at liberty to start. I helped in my two invalids, for Raymond was little better off than the groom; he could hardly move. I took my seat between them, and, after paying the innkeeper’s account, which included the slippers in which my companion returned to Paris, we started for the capital, where we arrived without accident, because I did not allow Monsieur Raymond to take the reins. On reaching our

abode, we dismissed the cabriolet and gave the groom something by way of compensation for his sprained foot, which would keep him in the house a few days. I paid everything and presented to my companion a statement of our expenses overnight, as follows:

	<i>F. C.</i>
For the cabriolet, which we kept one day longer than we intended	30 00
For the peasant woman and her son, who acted as our guide and helped us to pick up our horse	6 00
For the hire of three donkeys at midnight	9 00
For repairing the cabriolet	12 00
For injury to vines	5 00
For accommodation at the inn, lodging, supper, and breakfast	28 00
For slippers for Monsieur Raymond	2 50
For the servant who rubbed Monsieur Raymond	3 00
For fire on two hearths, a most unusual thing in inns	2 00
For the groom, who sprained his foot trying to stop our horse	20 00
Total	<u>117 50</u>

On examining the items of expense of our pleasure party, to which he might have added his costume, which was almost completely ruined, from the hat to the shoes, Raymond heaved a profound sigh, and he was rather long about taking from his purse the fifty-eight francs seventy-five centimes that he owed me. Our account being adjusted at last, we betook ourselves to our respective apartments.

XX

SUSPICIONS OF THE MIND.—APPREHENSIONS OF THE HEART

Thanks to my neighbor, I had not availed myself of Madame de Marsan's courteous invitation; but I proposed to go soon to make my excuses to her, and I would be careful to go alone; it seemed to me that that would be preferable in every way.

Doubtless Caroline was awaiting me impatiently; I must make haste to put an end to her anxiety. I had promised to return during the night; but unforeseen events—— It was after two o'clock in the afternoon, when I hastened to Rue Caumartin.

This time she was not at her window; but could I expect her to give herself a twist in the neck in order to see me a moment sooner? No! I was too sensible to demand that. I went upstairs and rang—no answer. She had gone out! She had probably got tired of waiting for me, and had gone out for a walk, perhaps to make some new purchases. There was nothing for me to do but to go away and return; but I concluded to ring once more. I did so, to no purpose. I went downstairs in an ill humor, because I was annoyed; nothing annoys one more than a postponed pleasure. I had no right to be angry because she had gone out; still, it seemed to me that she might have waited for me. I walked away, scratching my ear; indeed, I believe that I scratched my head. Was it a presentiment? Alas! I had never yet found a faithful woman! But I had vowed not to distress myself beforehand; that never does any good. I determined to do my best not to distress myself afterward either! I should be more certain of being happy.

As I turned into the boulevard, I saw her. What a costume for a morning walk! She caught sight of me and seemed embarrassed. She came toward me, however. We both smiled, but I believe that neither of us felt any inclination that way; it is so easy to distinguish a forced smile!

“Ah! here you are at last!”

“Yes: does that surprise you?”

“I didn't expect you so late.”

“I quite believe that you didn't expect me.”

“Have you just come from my rooms?”

“Yes; and you?”

“I have been for a little walk.”

“What a dress!”

“I don’t see anything uncommon about it.”

“Not in comparison with the one you wore on Rue des Rosiers?”

“You always have something unkind to say!”

“I don’t see what there is unkind in what I said.”

“I suppose you’d have me go out in cap and apron!”

“They wouldn’t be unbecoming to you.”

“But I have no desire to wear them.”

“Oh! I believe you!”

“To hear you, anyone would think that before you knew me I was a stupid, awkward country girl!”

“I am well aware that you were not an innocent maid.”

“Are we going to stay here on the boulevard all night? I am going home; are you coming with me?”

I hesitated; but I went with her. When we were in her apartment, Caroline joked me about my severe air. In truth, what right had I to reproach her? I was far from amiable sometimes, I knew; and a man who scolds and grumbles is seldom loved. True; but a man who is loved never appears to scold; he is always right. I kissed Caroline, and peace was made. We dined together, and I took her to the theatre; but although I did my best to amuse her, she did not seem to enjoy herself very much. She appeared to be distraught, preoccupied; I was almost tempted to find fault with her, but I restrained myself, for she would have said that I was always complaining! But if she had been as she used to be, I should have had no cause to complain. Ah! I say again, when a man ceases to be lovable, it means that he is no longer loved.

It was near midnight when I went home. A secret hope led me to grasp the knob hurriedly. No bouquet! and yet it was the day! Could Nicette have forgotten me? That would have caused me a pang, a very sharp pang. But what childish nonsense! How could I expect her to bring me flowers all the year round, when I did not condescend to go to her to bid her good-morning? In the depths of my heart, however, I was not indifferent to those tokens of her remembrance of me; I was touched by them, much more, perhaps, than I supposed; I realized it from the grief that I felt at her neglect; I had become so accustomed to that homage! It seemed to me that it was my due. Why should I

conceal it? I flattered myself that Nicette loved me; I believed her to be capable of constancy; and while I did not choose to abuse her love, I was not at all sorry to inspire it. I determined to investigate her conduct; I determined to see her, to speak to her. I would rise the next morning at six and prowl about the little flower girl's booth. What strange mortals we are! For a whole month I had neglected Nicette; and because I thought that she had forgotten me, I was consumed by a longing to see her again, to know what she was doing and what her sentiments were! Was it love, self-esteem, jealousy, vanity, or simple curiosity on my part? Call it what you please, it was as I have described it.

As for Caroline, I determined not to torment myself any more about her; she was either faithful or unfaithful; in the first case, I was wrong to suspect her; in the second, she deserved neither my love nor my regrets. That is a very fine dilemma which I propose to all jealous lovers, present and future. But they will reply that when a man is able to talk sensibly he is not in love. To that I have nothing to say, for I am inclined to think that it is true.

I was up at six o'clock. At that hour I was quite certain not to meet any acquaintances before whom I should blush to be seen speaking to a street peddler. I soon reached the place where Nicette was accustomed to display her wares. But I saw nothing; could it be that I was too early? had she moved to another quarter? I accosted a messenger whose stand was a few feet away; those fellows know everything.

"My friend, wasn't there a flower girl who used to stand in front of this house?"

"Yes, monsieur; she was here up to a week ago."

"And she no longer stands here?"

"Oh! she isn't very far off. Thirty yards or so farther along you'll see a little shop; that's where she is now."

"A shop, do you say?"

"Yes, monsieur; it isn't very big, but it's well arranged, all the same."

I turned to walk away—but perhaps that man could tell me something. Nicette had a shop; what was I to conclude from that? I trembled to think! Had some other man been more fortunate than I? had she listened to some other man? and did another possess that treasure which I might have obtained and which it had cost me such a struggle to respect?

I returned to the messenger, put some money in his hand, and began to question him.

"Do you know this flower girl?"

“Yes, monsieur, I know her—not very well, though, for she’s a bit proud; she don’t talk much to anybody but her customers; and even then you mustn’t say too much, or she’ll send you about your business. Oh! she’s a good girl, I tell you! She’s virtuous, and the virtuous ones are always noticed.”

The man’s praise of Nicette caused me the keenest delight; I should have been sorry to learn that I could no longer esteem her.

“You say that she’s virtuous, eh?”

“Yes, monsieur; we messengers know what’s what; and then, I see everything that goes on. It isn’t that Mamzelle Nicette lacks lovers. Oh! pardi! the whole quarter, if she chose! she’s so pretty! and she has a fine lot of customers. It’s hardly six weeks since she set up on this street; but the young men soon spied her, and there’s a whole mob of dandies that come to buy flowers, just to make love to her, you understand. But Mamzelle Nicette don’t sell anything but bouquets. I must do her that justice. She won’t listen to the swells any more than the footmen; and when some sly fellow orders flowers of her, to have her bring them to him, he gets caught, for she just sends them by the wigmaker’s little girl.”

I walked away, overjoyed by all that I had learned; in two bounds I was in front of Nicette’s shop. She was already arranging her jars of flowers on boards placed outside, in the street. When she saw me, she gave a cry of surprise, dropped the carnations she had in her hand, blushed scarlet, and could hardly stammer:

“What! is it you, monsieur?”

I smiled at her astonishment and entered her shop, where I seated myself on a stool and looked at her.—How pretty she was! Joy made her even prettier, and glistened in the look with which she met mine.

“Is it really you, Monsieur Dorsan, you, in my shop? Ah! I didn’t expect such a pleasure! I had stopped hoping for it!”

“Why so, Nicette?”

“Why—it is so long!”

“That is true. But I have things to do which make it impossible——”

“Oh! I believe you, monsieur. Besides, aren’t you your own master? and how can you give a thought to a girl who sells flowers?”

There was something so touching in the way she spoke, that I was deeply moved. How could I ever have forgotten such charm, such innocence, such susceptibility? I could not understand it.

She was still standing in front of me; I took her hand, and I believe that I was actually on the point of drawing her down on my knees. She made no resistance; she glanced anxiously about, but had not the strength to go away from me. What imprudence! what was I doing? We were in full sight of passers-by, and someone might come in at any minute. She had nothing but her reputation, and I was about to besmirch it! Poor child! she would sacrifice it to me, in her dread of displeasing me.

I dropped her hand and moved away from her, looking toward the street. She understood me, and thanked me with her eyes.

“So you were able to hire a shop, Nicette?”

“Yes, monsieur; I’ve made a lot since I’ve been in this quarter. I am economical and spend very little; I am sure that I can get along all right. I don’t think I did wrong, did I?”

“No; I know that you are behaving as well as possible.”

“You know it?”

“I have never doubted it. Your bouquets have shown me, moreover, what a grateful heart you have.”

“Oh! can I ever forget what you did for me?”

“Haven’t you made any acquaintances on this street?”

“No, monsieur; I don’t want to make any.”

“Aren’t you bored, being all alone?”

“How can I be bored? I always have something to think about?”

“What do you do in the evening?”

“I read, and I am learning to write.”

“Do you know how to write?”

“A little; before long I shall know how to write well, I hope. There’s an old gentleman who gives me lessons sometimes.”

“What need is there of your knowing any more than you do?”

“That’s true, monsieur; if you don’t want me to, I won’t learn any more.”

“Oh! I don’t say that. Study, Nicette, since you enjoy it; you weren’t born to sell flowers. But take my advice, and don’t try to rise above the condition in which fate has placed you; it rarely succeeds.”

“Oh! I’m not trying to do anything of the sort, monsieur; I’d just like to be not quite so stupid as I used to be.”

“My dear girl, you may be ignorant, but you can’t be stupid; you will always

be charming; your natural wit does not need the resources of education to attract esteem, any more than your charms need the help of art to win admiration. Ah! Nicette, be always as you are now, as I first saw you! Do not change!”

She listened to me in silence; her sweet glance approved all that I said; we understood each other so well! But impatient customers were already beginning to look at her flowers; I felt that I must go. I said adieu, but I continued to stand in front of her. It was impossible to take a kiss, I realized that; she divined my thought, and we both sighed. To part so coldly! Ah! if we had been in my room! I was certain that I had but to say the word, and she would come; but I refrained from saying it, for she would have been lost. I pressed her hand and fled. I felt that I must fly from her, in order not to adore her.

XXI

CONFIDENCE

As a fortunate change in our destiny reconciles us to life, as a lucky throw of the dice brings us nearer to wealth, as a noble deed reconciles the misanthrope to mankind, as the acceptance of a play calms the wrath of an author, as a bottle of old wine makes the drunkard forget his pledges, as a sunbeam causes the traces of the storm to disappear, so the sight of a pretty woman makes us forget our virtuous resolutions, her love banishes from our hearts the memory of our last mistress's perfidy, and her virtues reconcile us to women in general, whom we take a vow to shun whenever we are deceived, and whom we do not shun, because it is not in nature to do it.

Thus the sight of Nicette always led me to esteem her more highly. I reproached myself for sometimes speaking ill of a sex which contains models of sensibility, refinement, and sweetness, and which often redeems a weakness by a hundred estimable qualities. The result in this instance was that I thought I had done wrong to suspect Caroline, that nothing in her conduct ought to arouse my jealousy, and that, by reproaches and unfounded distrust, we often embitter a heart that we might have made ours forever.

I even went so far as to say to myself that it was my own fault that I had been deceived so often, and that I had invariably done the opposite of what one should do to retain a woman's love. We go very far with the syllogisms that we propound to ourselves. At the rate at which I was going on, I might have ended by satisfying myself that the infidelities of our female friends are simply the consequences of our behavior toward them, when I happened to pass Tortoni's just as Raymond went in with a man of some sixty years, with an awkward figure, and an inane, disagreeable face, who was obliged to use a cane to support his left leg, but whose costume denoted wealth and his manner a remnant of dandyism.

I was not at all anxious to sit down with them, despite Raymond's entreaties; he exclaimed at once that we must breakfast together. I pretended not to hear him, and took my place in a corner, at some distance from Raymond, of whom I had fought shy since our trip to Montmorency. But, as I drank my chocolate, I noticed that the conversation of the two gentlemen was very animated. I was convinced that the gouty old fellow was telling his friend about some amorous

affairs, which he took pains to vaunt in the highest terms so that he might still pose as a gay young rake. Would he not do better, I thought, to attend to his infirmities? He rose at last, and I supposed that Raymond would go with him; but, no: he remained behind and joined me at my table.

“Good-morning, my friend! Well! have we recovered from the fatigue of travel?”

“You are the one to answer that question. Thank heaven! I didn’t sleep on a pile of hams, with my leg caught like a plump lark!”

“Ah! the sly hussy! I admit that I looked a good deal like a sparrow; but I don’t feel it now, I rubbed myself so hard yesterday! I used up two bottles of cosmetic for the skin, and three phials of Ceylon oil; so that I have recovered all my elasticity this morning. Tell me, do you know that man who was with me just now?”

“No.”

“That was Monsieur de Grandmaison.”

“I never heard of him.”

“He’s a very rich man, enormously rich!”

“He’s enormously ugly!”

“He’s an ex-financier, contractor, promoter.”

“Yes, I understand.”

“He gives delightful balls.”

“Not for himself, surely.”

“Oh! he’s still quite a rake.”

“He doesn’t look it.”

“Because he drags his leg a little; but that doesn’t prevent his making conquests.”

“From buying them, you mean.”

“That’s what I mean; but it all comes to the same thing. Between ourselves, I admit that he didn’t invent gunpowder, and that his education is confined to the rules of subtraction and multiplication, which he understands perfectly. But still, for all that, he has the prettiest women in Paris.”

“That doesn’t speak well for the prettiest women in Paris.”

“He was telling me just now of a new intrigue he is on the point of consummating. Ha! ha! it’s most amusing! She’s a ravishing young beauty, and he is going to steal her from a young man.”

“Some kept woman.”

“It seems that the little one is worth her price, and that she hangs back; and then, too, the young man, who is jealous no doubt, keeps her very close. For all that, they’ve seen each other—at the window, in the first place; then, letters and propositions. Grandmaison, who knows how to manage such affairs, talked about cashmere shawls and diamonds! The little one’s a coquette, and it seems that her young lover keeps her on a bourgeois footing. The poor fellow will soon be plundered.”

I had a feeling of uneasiness, which as yet I dared not analyze; Raymond’s story, to which I had listened mechanically, interested me deeply at last; the words *window*, *cashmere shawls*, and *diamonds* aroused vague suspicions in my mind, which I blushed to harbor when I recalled Monsieur de Grandmaison’s age and appearance. My self-esteem refused to admit that such a rival could be preferred to me; but a secret voice told me that self-esteem often deceives us. I determined to ascertain the truth, and I proceeded to ask Raymond certain questions, which, I was sure, would prove to me that I was wrong to torment myself.

“Where does this Monsieur de Grandmaison live?”

“Rue Caumartin, in a magnificent house that he owns; it’s just at the end of the street, near the boulevard.”

I felt a shudder run through my whole body, my gorge rose, a weight descended on my breast—all in a second, and as the result of a mere word. I continued my questions, however, affecting the utmost tranquillity.

“And this young beauty?”

“Lives just opposite him, in a small house where there’s no concierge, on the second floor front. Grandmaison saw her first at her window; it’s a broad street, but he has an excellent glass that he had made to watch the ballets at the Opéra. It’s a little telescope; it brings everything right under your eyes, and you can imagine how pleasant it is, while a dancer is making a pirouette, to fasten it on _____”

“Well, go on: this young woman?”

“As I was saying, he assured himself with his glass that she was young, pretty, well built, and not faded. Oh! his glass is invaluable for that!”

“But the lover?”

“The lover doesn’t live with her. He goes very often to see her; but he doesn’t sit at the window, naturally; so that Grandmaison has only caught a glimpse of him, for she is careful to leave the window as soon as the young man arrives.”

“Well?”

“Well, everything is going as smoothly as possible. Grandmison took the little one to a closed box at the Opéra night before last, the lover being in the country.”

At that point, I could no longer control myself, and, entirely unconscious of what I was doing, I struck the table between my neighbor and myself such a violent blow that the cup of chocolate bounded up into his face as he leaned over the table to speak to me. The bulk of the liquid deluged Raymond’s waistcoat and shirt frill. He jumped back, startled by the gesture that had escaped me. Ashamed of having allowed my trouble, my wrath, my frenzy, to appear, I tried to recover myself; I composed my features and apologized. Raymond, uncertain whether he could safely approach me, asked for a glass of water to clean his face.

“Pardon! a thousand pardons! my dear Raymond, I don’t know what caught me then.—You were saying that, the day before yesterday——”

“You gave me a terrible fright. Are you subject to nervous spasms?”

“No, no! it was mere absent-mindedness.—You were saying——”

“The devil! you ought to look after that. Thanks to you, I have got to go home to change my waistcoat and shirt.”

“Oh! that’s nothing.—So, the night before last he took the young woman to a closed box at the Opéra, eh?”

“Yes, yes.—Is there any more on my face?”

“None at all; you look splendid. Go on.”

This compliment restored Raymond’s good humor; he tucked his frill out of sight and resumed the conversation.

“Yes, they were there, in a box——”

“So, it’s all over, is it?”

“Oh, no! not yet. The beauty hangs back, you understand, and Grandmison isn’t the man to push matters so fast—with his bad leg, he needs all the conveniences. Oh! if it had been one of us two, that would have been the end; we are sad rascals, you know!”

“But since then?”

“He saw the little one again yesterday morning, outside the walls. He promised to give her a magnificent cashmere shawl, genuine Turkish, to-night, if she’d take supper with him at his house; moreover, a complete apartment, a lady’s-maid, a carriage at her service, and a hundred louis a month, to say

nothing of presents, if she would agree to stay.”

“Well?”

“She has accepted.”

“She has accepted!”

I sprang to my feet so suddenly that Raymond recoiled and looked at me uneasily.

“Did it take you again, neighbor?”

“No, nothing’s the matter. Let us go out and get a breath of air.”

And I took Raymond’s arm and led him away. He followed me, making a wry face. Doubtless I pinched his arm without noticing it, for he begged me to let it alone; but I did not hear him.

“My dear Dorsan, your muscles keep contracting; let my arm alone, please.”

“Oh! these women! these women! But why do I feel this weight at my heart? for I do not love her.”

“Let me go, my friend, I entreat you!”

“Oh! it’s because it is cruel to be constantly deceived in this way! to be fooled again and again! and for whom, I ask you?”

“I don’t know what you ask me, but let me go; you hurt me; I shall be obliged to call for help.”

“But is it really she, after all? I must confound her.—Raymond!”

I turned toward my companion, and not until then did I notice his piteous expression and terrified eyes; I released his arm, and, becoming a little calmer, asked him what the matter was.

“The matter! Faith! you seem to have attacks of brain fever; you squeeze my arm so that you make me yell, and you utter exclamations that I don’t understand.”

“I was thinking about something that I’ll tell you of later. But let us go back to this intrigue of your friend: it interests me very much. Monsieur de Grandmison sups to-night with his new conquest?”

“Yes, to-night.”

“I am very curious to see this woman who you say is so pretty.”

“Faith! so am I, for I don’t know her any more than you do, and I am looking forward to seeing her.”

“What! you are to see her?”

“Certainly; I am invited to the supper, with five or six agreeable roués,

intimate friends of Grandmaison. As he is naturally a little stupid, when he has told a woman that he'd like—you understand—he can't think of anything else to say to her to amuse her; and as he desires to be sparing of his pleasures, because he's not so robust as you and I are, he reserves his ardor for the night; he always invites a number of friends to supper, in order to put his charmer in the right mood."

"A most excellent device, and very pleasant for his guests!"

"You must understand that we always get something out of it. These women, when they have a large stock of susceptibility, are never satisfied with Grandmaison, who's an invalid!"

"I understand: you are his friend and deputy."

"I am whatever anyone wants me to be! Oh! we have great sport at these little supper parties! we laugh like lunatics! The food is delicious and the wines exquisite! no constraint, no ceremony; we joke and sing and drink; and the jests, the puns, the remarks with a double meaning, the spicy anecdotes, the smutty couplets! There's a rolling fire of them; everybody talks at once, and nobody hears what the others say; it's delicious!"

"You make me regret that I am not one of you."

"Would you like to be, my dear fellow? Parbleu! if you would, I will venture to introduce you."

"Really! could you do it?"

"I can do anything I choose! you know very well that everything succeeds that I undertake."

"I had forgotten that. But this Monsieur de Grandmaison doesn't know me."

"What difference does that make? I know you, and that's enough! Introduced by Raymond, you will be welcome."

"Do you think that I might venture?"

"Why, of course! So long as a man is hilarious and tells amusing stories, he's sure of being well received at Grandmaison's; that's why he's so fond of me."

"Oh! if it's only a matter of providing amusement, I promise you some for this evening."

"You're our man; it's agreed, then. Meet me at the Café Anglais at ten o'clock; that's the hour of meeting."

"I will be there, I give you my word."

"But if you will accept my advice, you'll take a little orange-flower water to calm your nerves."

“Never fear! I shan’t have another attack.”

“Good-bye, then, until ten o’clock to-night!”

Raymond left me, and I reflected long upon all that I had learned. The woman was Caroline; I could not doubt it; and yet a feeble ray of hope still gleamed in the depths of my heart. I determined to go to her, but to conceal my feelings, and to try, if possible, to read her heart, to detect her treachery in her eyes. But, above all, I would be sensible, philosophical, and try to penetrate myself with the truth of these two lines:

“Let dandies rage, let fools cry lack-a-day;
The wise man, cozened, silent goes away.”

XXII

THE LITTLE SUPPER PARTY

I arrived at her apartment. My appearance did not seem to embarrass her; she greeted me with a smile and spoke to me as usual. Could it be that I had suspected her wrongfully? But she did not observe my agitation! The secret excitement which I strove to conceal would not have escaped the eyes of love! They see everything, divine everything! And Caroline asked me no questions, although I was on fire and talked at random; although I was momentarily on the point of exploding and could hardly refrain from outward manifestations of the torments I was undergoing!—No, she did not love me.

I told her that I intended to pass the day with her. I fancied that I could detect embarrassment in her glance; but she speedily recovered herself.

“You always give me pleasure by staying with me,” she said at last, in that soft voice which had fascinated me at our meeting on the boulevard. Ah! such voices are as deceitful as the others!

In vain did I try to compose my features and assume a cheerful air; I could not manage it. I felt as if something were choking me, suffocating me. I had had that feeling so often!—I went to the window, but instantly turned away; I must not run the risk of being recognized in the evening. Oh! what a tedious day it was! I put forward the dinner hour; never, I think, was a dinner so dreary to me! Caroline complained of a headache; but I did not complain. If I could only have made love to her! I tried; but her replies seemed commonplace beyond words to me. A conversation between two people who have ceased to love each other is woefully stupid.

I suggested that we go to the theatre. She declined; her headache was growing worse, and she felt very uncomfortable.

“Perfidious creature!” I said to myself; “I understand! Why not say to me frankly: ‘I no longer love you’? I should be less angry with you if you did that. But, no, falsehood and dissimulation must needs be added to inconstancy; you must always deceive us!”

“Would you like me to stay with you?” I asked, pretending to be anxious about her health.

“No, no, thanks! All I need is rest; I shall have forgotten all about it to-

morrow.”

She could not conceal the fright caused by my proposition, which would have upset all her plans. It was in my power to prevent their execution that evening by remaining with her; but what would the result be? I should simply postpone the catastrophe, and I should not have the pleasure of confounding her an hour or two hence! Ah! I had no desire to postpone that moment! I wished that it had already arrived. When we know that we are to undergo a painful trial, the moments that precede it are more cruel than those that follow it.

The clock struck eight; she went to bed, in order to try to sleep. That was the signal for me to retire. I bade her good-night. She came to me to kiss me; she pressed my hand, and her eyes were dry, her heart beat no faster!—I left the house; it was high time, for I was on the point of breaking out!

I was not sorry to have two hours before me previous to meeting Raymond. I had time to calm myself and to decide what course to pursue. I felt at once that the fresh air did me good. I have had that experience hundreds of times; an atmosphere more or less heavy has a great influence on our way of looking at things, especially when we are so unfortunate as to have excitable nerves. A little rain, a little wind, calms or arouses our passions; those which are natural are submissive to nature, and, thank heaven! I know no other passions and do not agree with those persons who declare that all passions are natural.

For my sake she left her aunt, her little Jules, and many others! Why should she not leave me as well? She had ceased to love me: that was not a crime. But she had deceived me: that, I believe, was what distressed me most; for it humiliates one to be deceived, especially when one is old enough one's self to deceive.

However, such a liaison is bound to end, a little sooner or later. What did it matter? I was no longer in love with her. That, I believe, was why I was so incensed with her. I was vexed because I had allowed her to anticipate me. Love forgives many things that self-esteem refuses to forgive.

If Nicette should deceive me! then, I felt that my grief would be a very different matter. I remembered how disturbed, how agitated, I was when I learned that she had taken a shop; and yet, I was only her friend. I tried to think of Nicette; that was the best remedy for Caroline's treatment of me.

I walked the whole length of the boulevards. I had had time to reason with myself, and I had fully decided upon my course of action. I realized what an idiot a man must be to torment himself over the treachery of a woman who has thrown others over for him. Indeed, how can one rely on the word of a person

who has no other guaranty to offer than previous infidelities.

I decided, therefore, to amuse myself at Mademoiselle Caroline's expense. That is the most satisfactory vengeance one can wreak on a woman who deceives one. Every vengeance which savors of hatred, jealousy, or anger denotes a lingering remnant of love; it is not real vengeance.

At ten o'clock I was at the Café Anglais. I ordered a glass of punch, pending Raymond's arrival. I did not propose to muddle my wits, but I desired to attain that degree of excitement which makes one less sensible of the folly of other people. My neighbor appeared, in the careful négligé of a lady killer. One would have thought, from his radiant expression, that he was the hero of the evening's festivities.

"We shall have great sport," he said, taking a seat by my side, and resting his elbow on the next table, regardless of the fact that he put it in the dish of rice and milk of an old habitué.

"What the devil, monsieur! be careful what you're doing!" said the old gentleman, putting down his newspaper. Raymond apologized profusely, and removed his thoroughly drenched elbow from the bowl with such vivacity that he rolled it onto the white trousers of a dandy who was reading the *Journal des Modes*.

The dandy made a great outcry, the old habitué scolded Raymond roundly, and I saw that his apologies would soon bring matters to a climax. As I did not propose that any fresh scrape should interfere with our going to Monsieur de Grandmaison's, I made haste to intervene, striving to pacify the two gentlemen and to restore peace. I succeeded at last, and, dreading some new mishap, I dragged Raymond out of the café.

"The evening seems to open inauspiciously," I said, as I led him toward Rue Caumartin.

"Pshaw! far from it! this incident promises sport. It wasn't my fault that that old politician stuck his rice right under my arm; he ought to have eaten it, instead of reading his newspaper; and then it wouldn't have happened.—But it's half-past ten; let's make haste; I'll bet they're waiting for us."

"For you, you mean."

"Oh! I wrote Grandmaison a line to tell him I should bring one of my friends; so he expects you."

We arrived at Rue Caumartin and entered a pretentious mansion; it was directly opposite Caroline's rooms. We ascended a superb staircase; we passed through several antechambers, lighted by globes suspended from the ceiling,

where half a dozen lackeys were yawning. Everything denoted opulence and ostentation. I had not all that to offer her. I had thought that I was doing a great deal for her: I had straitened myself and run into debt; and what had I to show for it?—Ah! I was not likely to forget my experience as a protector!

My heart beat fast as I drew near the little salon where the company awaited us; but I soon recovered my self-possession. We entered the room, where I saw four men, but the host was not among them.

“Ah! good-evening, my friends!” said Raymond, running from one to another of the guests to shake hands. “Allow me to present a friend of mine, a good fellow, who has a fancy to enjoy himself with us to-night.—But where’s Grandmaison?”

“In the boudoir; he’s taming his pet before supper.”

“Ah! to be sure! to be sure! they are making their final arrangements, perfecting their agreement. Have you seen her, messieurs?”

“Not yet. They say she’s charming!”

“Fascinating; and almost a novice!”

“The deuce! that’s a marvel!”

“So Grandmaison wishes us to be less indecent than usual.”

“Good! We’ll proceed by degrees, so as not to frighten her. But still, this little one must be trained, and, really, Grandmaison is not the man to do it!”

“Poor man! the utmost he can do will be to say a word or two to her—after supper.”

“He’s not a blunt talker, like Joconde.”

“No; but his wine is delicious.”

“And he has an excellent cook.”

“Upon my word, I have the greatest esteem for him!”

“For the cook?”

“No; for Grandmaison, you sorry joker!—Come, messieurs; no remarks with a double meaning; that’s forbidden to-day. Besides, I am for morals before everything!”

During this pleasant conversation, I amused myself by examining the four gentlemen. One, who was short, stout, and red-headed, contented himself with laughing at every sally of the others, but did not venture to add any of his own. He who talked most was a little man of some fifty years, who tried to outdo the younger men by assuming the airs of a rake and uttering all the obscenities that came into his head. A thin, pallid young man, whose hollow, lifeless eyes

betrayed his abuse of life, was stretched out in an easy-chair, and swayed to and fro as he addressed an occasional senseless rhapsody to the jocose Raymond, who was in his element. A tall, bulky individual, with large oxlike eyes and a nose that would have put a colocynth to shame, completed the circle, which, in my opinion, lacked only Monsieur le Baron de Witcheritche.

At last a door at the end of the room opened and Monsieur de Grandmaison appeared, dragging his leg after him. But he was alone.

“Where is she? where is she?” cried all the guests, with one voice.

“One moment! one moment, pray! you’ll see her in a moment. She is giving a little attention to her toilet. When I told her that she was to sup with some friends of mine, she didn’t want to appear in *négligé*; and then, too, I am not sorry to let her see all the presents I have for her. I left her with a lady’s-maid. A little patience and some punch—that will help us to wait for our supper.”

Raymond presented me to Monsieur de Grandmaison, who exhausted himself in commonplace felicitations upon my kindness in honoring his little party. I answered in fear and trembling, lest he should recognize me; but my apprehension soon vanished; I saw that Monsieur de Grandmaison needed his opera glass to distinguish objects.

An enormous bowl of punch was brought, and the gentlemen did it so much honor that I was very doubtful what their condition would be at supper. The tall man with the stupid face, whom the others called *milord*, did nothing but fill his glass and empty it; while the little red-headed fellow, whom I heard them call Zamorin, stuffed himself with macaroons, cake, and biscuits, to assist him to wait for the supper.

The old rake and the languid young man questioned Grandmaison concerning his new mistress’s features; and the host went into her charms in detail, promising to inform them more fully on the morrow.

“What shall we call her?” inquired Raymond.

“Her name is Madame Saint-Léon. A pretty name, isn’t it, messieurs?”

“Yes, very pretty. I think a great deal of the name myself.”

“Has she any children?”

“Idiot! didn’t I tell you that she was almost a novice?”

“True; but *almost* doesn’t mean that——”

“Nonsense! hold your tongue, Raymond; you insult innocence!” said Monsieur Rocambolle, the old rake. “I am sure that Grandmaison found this woman at Les Vertus.”

Enchanted by his jest, Monsieur Rocambolle turned, with a laugh, to the young man; who laughed with him, showing two or three discolored teeth, his only remaining ones.

Amid the general clatter, as I did not wish to seem bored in the agreeable company of these gentry, I said at random whatever came into my head; and sometimes, without any effort to that end, I had the pleasure of making the merry fellows laugh.

“Didn’t I tell you that he was a wag, a delightful fellow?” cried Raymond.

I was a delightful fellow! I swear that I had taken no pains to be delightful, but I fancy that my companions were not exacting.

Supper was announced, and Grandmaison looked at his watch.

“Three-quarters of an hour,” he said; “she must be ready; I will fetch her. Go into the supper room, and I will bring her to you there.”

He left the room, and Raymond, who was familiar with the locality, led us into a round, elegantly decorated room, in the centre of which was a table laden with everything calculated to flatter the sight, the smell, and the taste.

A handsome clock on a low white marble mantel marked within a few minutes of midnight.

“The devil!” exclaimed Monsieur Rocambolle; “almost twelve o’clock! We shall have mighty little time to enjoy ourselves.”

“Or to eat,” said Zamorin.

“Wait, wait, messieurs,” said Raymond, who always insisted upon finding a way to provide for everything; “I’ll set it back an hour.”

“Well said! well said!” cried all the others. “That devil of a Raymond is never at a loss! he’s as inventive as a girl.”

Overjoyed to display the resources of his imagination, Raymond ran to the clock, raised with startling rapidity the globe that covered it, moved back the hands, and set the regulator so far toward *slow* that, from the way in which he went about it, I concluded it would not be midnight for two hours. Our attention was diverted by Monsieur de Grandmaison’s voice, which announced the arrival of her whom all the guests awaited, but how much less impatiently than myself!

All eyes were turned toward the door by which she was to enter; I alone stood aside, in such a position that she would not see me at once. We heard the rustling of her gown, but at that moment there was a loud report in the room; Raymond had broken the mainspring of the clock; and to cover up his stupidity, he hurried away from the fireplace and ran to meet the beauty who was to be presented to

us.

She appeared at last, escorted by Monsieur de Grandmaison and by Raymond, who had taken possession of her other hand and was already pouring forth all the pretty things he was capable of saying. I saw her, and my heart beat more violently, my chest swelled. That was the last time that her presence ever produced any effect on me.

She was magnificently dressed: an emerald necklace gleamed on her breast, a very handsome comb and long earrings added to the splendor of her costume. She entered the room with downcast eyes, assuming a modest air almost exactly like that which deceived me the first time I saw her. That woman was able to do whatever she chose with her face.

“Now,” thought I, “let us see how she will endure a sight of me.”

She raised her eyes to the company at last; instantly a concert of praise and compliments burst forth. She was in truth very fair to look upon, and the gentlemen vied with one another in their efforts to find words enthusiastic enough to depict their ecstasy and enchantment. How happy she was at that moment! there was a flush on her brow, but it was a flush of pleasure, of pride, not of modesty.

“But where’s my friend?” cried Raymond, looking about for me. He spied me in the corner from which I was observing the scene, ran to me, seized my hand, and dragged me toward Caroline.

“Come on,” he said; “come, I say, and see the Three Graces! She’s Hebe, she’s Venus, she’s Psyche, she’s——”

Raymond was interrupted by a cry from Caroline. She glanced at me as I began to pay my respects to her, congratulating Monsieur de Grandmaison. She turned pale, stammered, tried to recover herself; but the shock was too sharp; she tottered, and fell upon her latest adorer. He, being then occupied in responding to his friends’ congratulations, received the young woman’s weight as he was about to take a pinch of snuff, to help him to make some witty response. The poor man was not strong enough to resist that unexpected blow; his left leg was always out of line, and Caroline’s weight causing the right one to bend, Monsieur de Grandmaison fell heavily, trying to grasp what was nearest him, which happened to be Monsieur Rocambolle’s thigh. He clung to that, which he supposed to be an integral part of the person, but his hand grasped nothing but the cotton wool with which the old libertine stuffed his breeches in order to improve his shape. The broadcloth split and tore, and Monsieur Rocambolle’s fictitious thigh remained in Monsieur de Grandmaison’s hand.

While Monsieur Rocambolle angrily reclaimed his cotton posterior, while the toothless youth threw himself upon a couch, laughing like a maniac, while Zamorin looked to see if the supper were growing cold, and while milord gazed from one to another of the company with eyes that seemed to be starting from his head, Raymond, wishing to repair the damage unassisted, rushed to the table in search of something to give the fainting woman. As he put out his hand for a carafe, he overturned a decanter of madeira, also a candelabrum, the candles in which fell upon a fromage glacé and went out. The decanter fell on Monsieur de Grandmaison's face, who swore that his nose was broken; while Zamorin, seeing the havoc Raymond was making on the supper table, called loudly for help. The servants hastened to the spot, but their presence served only to increase the confusion. Caroline was still unconscious, or pretended to be in order to conceal her embarrassment; Monsieur de Grandmaison continued to curse, Monsieur Rocambolle to shout, Zamorin to lament, and the young man to laugh; the Englishman tried to put a bottle or two of champagne in a safe place; and Raymond, in attempting to assist the young woman, to raise Grandmaison, and to restore order, overturned furniture, smashed bottles and plates, sent a chicken in one man's face, a pie into another's lap, and ended by falling upon a small table laden with liqueurs and brandied fruits.

What further business had I at Monsieur de Grandmaison's? My revenge was complete; the confusion was at its height; the scene of pleasure was transformed into a scene of uproar and distress; singing had given place to outcries, bonsmots to lamentations, drunkenness to wrath, merriment to gloom; in a word, Caroline had seen and recognized me, and the effect had surpassed my anticipations. I was satisfied; and leaving them all to extricate themselves from their plight as best they could, I left Monsieur de Grandmaison's house, thoroughly cured of the sentiment the young flowermaker had inspired in me.

XXIII

THE TWO VISITS.—THE LESSON IN HANDWRITING

On the following morning, at nine o'clock, my doorbell rang. I was still in bed, reviewing the events of the evening, and laughing at that which had been powerless hitherto to extort a smile from me, because a single sentiment had filled my mind and prevented me from considering the scene from its comic side. But now that my head was cool, my heart tranquil, and my mind no longer tormented by the anticipation of what was to happen, I thought of the different personages I had left at Monsieur de Grandmaison's house; I fancied that I could see them gathered about the lost supper, lost by the exertions of Monsieur Raymond; and I laughed all by myself, as if I were still in their midst.

If at that moment some inquisitive mortal, escorted by the *Diable Boiteux* or some other imp, had perched on the roof of my house and amused himself by watching me, he would have thought, no doubt, that I was temporarily insane. For my own part, I cannot see that it was any more extraordinary to laugh at those reminiscences than it would have been to weep at them; but we are never astonished to see a person shed tears; whereas, if you laugh all by yourself, you are looked upon as a madman or an idiot. Can it be that tears are more natural to man than laughter?

My concierge, who, as I believe I have already told you, did my housework every morning, opened my door and ushered in my neighbor Raymond, who, seeing that I was in a hilarious mood, thought that his presence was responsible for it, and stood for a moment uncertain whether to be angry or to join in my laughter. He prudently adopted the latter course, and approached my bed chuckling.

"Well, my dear fellow, it was a warm evening! Ha! ha! ha! You are still thinking about it, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I look to you for the details of the catastrophe."

"And I to you for an explanation."

"Do you want it in the Bois de Boulogne again?"

"No, no! Ah! you fox! the lovely Caroline had some reason for fainting when she saw you!"

"A perfectly natural reason: I am the young man whom Monsieur de

Grandmaison has replaced.”

“Is it possible? Gad! it was a unique situation! And to think that it was I who took you to the supper and introduced you to poor Grandmaison! Deuce take it! you never said a word, you did not give me your confidence, although I am devoted to you, heart and soul!”

“I wanted to arrange a surprise.”

“You succeeded mighty well!”

“Tell me how the evening ended?”

“Very dismally. There wasn’t any supper. The young woman insisted on retiring. Poor Grandmaison’s face was cut by a bottle of wine that fell on him, heaven knows how, and we had to leave them at liberty to go to bed. But I fancy the night passed very differently from what they anticipated. We parted in an execrable humor. Rocambolle was angry about his cotton padding, Zamorin regretted the supper, and the other the youthful beauty whom he hoped to seduce. I am the only one of the party who takes everything philosophically, as you know. But I confess that I was impatient to see you, to learn the cause of the catastrophe which disturbed the festivities. I came near waking you up last night, in order to find out earlier.”

“You did very well to let me sleep.”

“Well, I must go, neighbor; but, I beg you, have a little more confidence in me another time! You know how close-mouthed I am; you can safely tell me anything! I always receive it under the seal of secrecy. I should have made an excellent inquisitor, or an *illuminé*! I love secrets. In the matter of secrets, I am absolutely impenetrable. For instance—I am a Freemason: have I ever divulged the secrets of the order?”

“You have told me that there weren’t any.”

“True, true; but I said that to deceive you the better. Adieu, neighbor!—By the way, do you know the news? They say that the Baron de Witcheritche wears horns. There’s a young musician who offered to show the baroness how to play the serpent; the husband consented, because it would be one more string to their bow, and it might be useful on occasion. Moreover, the baron thought that he would compose some little duets for the violin and the serpent, that he and his wife could perform in company. So the musician came every morning to give her lessons; but one fine day, Witcheritche, who was supposed to be in the country, returned home unexpectedly; he found the teacher’s method of instruction too progressive and the baroness too apt. It seems that Witcheritche wasn’t as fond of music as usual that day; for he shrieked and swore; his wife

wept, the musician skipped; in short, there was a scandalous scene. Little Friquet, whom I happened to meet the other day, told me about it; he had it from his aunt, who had it from Madame Bertin, who had it from Crachini, who had it from Gripaille, who had it from a young lady who lives in the house with Witcheritche. But I say that we shouldn't be too ready to believe rumors; we should go back to the fountain head. I am going to the baron's this morning; I shall see whether he is on cool terms with his wife, and I'll find a way to make him tell me everything, without seeming to do so, by just mentioning the serpent. Adieu! I have to finish a little vaudeville for which I have an order from Rue de Chartres."

"Have you had a play accepted at some theatre?"

"Why, I have had plays accepted everywhere."

"It's strange that they are never produced."

"Oh! I'll tell you why that is: when they are not produced at once, I withdraw them! I have a will of my own, you know. Withdrawn at once, if not produced as soon as I request it. It's like my pictures, my little water-colors, which I don't send to the Salon, for fear they'll be hung in a bad light. A man should have some pride; veritable talent is centred within itself, and there always comes a time when its envelope is pierced.—Adieu, neighbor! I'll give you a chance to dress."

"That man ought to be happy," I said to myself, thinking of Raymond; "he has no doubt of anything; he believes himself to be intellectual, talented, and handsome. If a woman doesn't listen to him, it's because she's afraid of loving him too well; if his poems are not printed, it's because the publishers are ignorant; if his plays are not accepted, a cabal of authors is responsible: his self-esteem does not allow him to look at things from any but a flattering point of view. I am convinced that he believes himself to be courageous, although he fought a duel with bulletless pistols; and that he would consider himself a soldier if he were in the band of the national lottery; just as he thinks he has a fine leg because he has fat calves, and beautiful hair because he's as woolly-headed as a negro. However, he is happy, and that's the main point. Happy people are not so rare as they are said to be; for there are many in the world who resemble neighbor Raymond."

If it had not been so late, I would have gone to see Nicette; to read in her eyes that sentiment so sweet, so affectionate, and, perhaps, so true, that I had never found in Mademoiselle Caroline's lovely eyes; I say *perhaps*, for I dared not trust anything or anybody.

On going out I unconsciously took the direction of Rue Caumartin, nor did I stop until I reached the corner of that street and the boulevard. It was all a matter of habit; habit is responsible for many things that we do. In fact, it is a sort of second nature, it binds us in default of love. How many people there are who have ceased to love each other, and who remain together from habit! I do not refer to those who are married; they cannot do otherwise.

In order to put an end the sooner to that habit, which could not be very deeply rooted, as my intimacy with Caroline had lasted only two months, I determined to call upon Madame de Marsan, with whom I recalled that I had been more or less in love. At all events, I owed her a visit for the invitation which she had sent me, and of which I had been unable to avail myself, thanks to my travelling companion.

She lived on Faubourg Saint-Honoré, I remembered, near the first street on the right; in any event, I could inquire; rich people are well known and are always easy to find; it is only the poor who are ashamed of their poverty whom no one knows; but then, it is so seldom that anyone seeks them. I bent my steps toward Faubourg Saint-Honoré and inquired for Monsieur de Marsan. Three or four persons eagerly showed me his house, pointed it out with their fingers. Evidently Monsieur de Marsan was a very wealthy man! everybody knew him or wished to appear to know him. Really, wealth is a fine thing!

His house was, in fact, of imposing aspect; less elegant, less ostentatious perhaps, than Monsieur de Grandmaison's; but I suspected that it was more productive, and to a man of calculating mind that advantage is certain to outweigh others. It was only twelve o'clock; might I see madame? It was very early for the first call on a pretty woman, especially one who has passed her thirtieth year. The further a lady recedes from her springtime, the more time she spends at her toilet, so that she cannot be visible very early. At fifteen, a girl appears just as she happens to be; at twenty, she receives callers in a simple *négligé*; at twenty-five, she poses before her mirror for some time before she appears; at thirty, she takes much pains with her toilet; at thirty-six—but that would carry us too far; let us pause at thirty-six.

The concierge told me to go up to the first floor, the left-hand door; that led to madame's apartment. Monsieur's offices were on the ground floor. I walked through several rooms, and found at last a young lady's-maid—who was not pretty, and with whom no man was likely to tarry when he was going to see her mistress. I asked for madame, gave my name, and the maid went to announce me. I waited only five minutes; that is not too long to wait to see a pretty woman, when so many wealthy fools, vulgar parvenus, and public officials have

the assurance to keep visitors waiting an hour before they condescend to show their inane faces.

“You may enter, monsieur,” said the lady’s-maid, and she ushered me into her mistress’s presence. This prompt reception seemed to me of favorable augury.

I found Madame de Marsan sitting on a causeuse in a pretty little room decorated in the daintiest style, where the light, being filtered through double curtains and blinds, was very soft. I spied a piano, a harp, and music. I have a great liking for women who are fond of music, and a greater for those who play or sing; it is a sure resource in idleness; and a woman who does nothing thinks too much.

Madame de Marsan received me with an amiable smile, in which I fancied that I could detect a shade of vexation. I attributed it to the absence of zeal on my part in calling upon her; and that course of action, which, however, was not premeditated, served me better than the most assiduous love-making would have done. She was piqued; she believed that she had surely subjugated me, and she had not seen me since. In truth, that must have seemed very strange to her after the way I had ogled her at the theatre and my conduct at Vauvert’s; it surprised myself, for I now thought her a hundred times prettier than Caroline.

She did not reproach me, however; but I made haste to apologize for having failed to avail myself of her invitation, and told her what had happened to Raymond and myself. The story of our adventures at Montmorency made Madame de Marsan laugh heartily; and merriment, by banishing the etiquette and formality of a first interview, permitted our minds to understand each other and our hearts to divine each other.

In order to prolong my visit, I urged Madame de Marsan to sing to me. She consented, and acquitted herself with a grace and good taste that fascinated me. She accompanied herself perfectly on the piano; in short, she was a thorough musician. How she must have suffered at Vauvert’s party!—But I realized that I must not unduly prolong the first interview. It is judicious to make people desire one’s presence, and not to be too lavish of one’s self at first, especially with women who are accustomed to homage and love-making; in fact, to being assiduously courted. Hitherto I had never had the art of concealing what I felt; perhaps I was boasting too soon, but I had determined to be on my guard in the future! My last adventure had revived all my grievances against a sex which I could not shun, but to which I would gladly have repaid a part of the torments it had caused me.

I took leave, therefore, of Madame de Marsan.

“Will you be as long again without letting me hear from you?” she asked, as I rose to go.

“No, madame; I shall take frequent advantage of the permission you accord me to come to see you and listen to your singing. I trust that you will not consider that I abuse it.”

“Be assured, monsieur, that I shall never complain of that. You love music, and we will sing together sometimes. I go out very little; and it will be very good of you to make one of our little circle.”

She was a charming woman. I am inclined to think that I say that every time my heart takes fire. But, no matter; I may as well repeat it, as the same sentiments were constantly renewed in my heart. What she had said to me could not have been more amiable. She could not see me too often—that was almost a declaration! I left her, with the most flattering hopes stirring in my breast, believing that I was adored already. To be sure, according to what Raymond had told me, it would not be her first weakness; he had spoken, I think, of three or four *inclinations*. But I refused to judge Madame de Marsan according to the remarks of my neighbor, who was a liar and a slanderer.

“I will go to her house this evening,” I thought. But, no; that would be altogether too soon! I had vowed never again to go so fast in an intrigue, but to try to learn first of all the character of the woman who attracted me, to avoid letting my sentiments appear until I was sure of hers; and lo! I had taken fire already! I wanted to obtain everything at once! Ah! I was incorrigible; I should never know how to spin out a genuine romance.

I determined not to go to Madame de Marsan’s again for two days. Meanwhile, I must have distraction; not that I was still thinking of Mademoiselle Caroline! so far as she was concerned, I was thoroughly cured; indeed, I had concluded that the wound was not very deep. However, if I were left to my own devices, my natural impatience would drive me to Madame de Marsan. But had I not always Nicette to oppose to ennui, sorrow, and, above all, new love affairs?—I would see her; but not yet, for it was only two o’clock. I should be seen talking with her, and that was what I did not want. I must wait until night; so I went home, thinking that I would try to straighten out my affairs a little before dinner.

I found there a letter from my sister. Poor Amélie! She complained that I had entirely forgotten her. In truth, it was now September, and I had not yet been to see her. If I could have gone for two or three days; but that was impossible! when I was once there, she would never let me go.—She wrote of a superb match she had found for me: sixteen years old, beauty, virtue, and fortune. I

agreed that the combination was dazzling, but it did not tempt me as yet; perhaps in two or three years—we would see. I made up my mind, however, to go to Amélie and her husband for a fortnight during the autumn; indeed, it was essential that I should do something to set my affairs in order, for my liaison with the flowermaker had disarranged them sadly. The deuce! at the rate things had been going, my income would soon have disappeared. I was much indebted to her for leaving me soon enough to prevent my ruining myself. With six months of strict economy, I should be able to pay my debts; for six months, therefore, I would abstain from those passions that cost so dear; Mademoiselle Caroline had proved that the women for whom we do the most are not the ones who love us best.

At nightfall, I went to see Nicette. Her shop was closed; but I saw a light through the glass over the door. I knocked softly, fearing to attract the attention of the neighbors. I had every appearance of a lover who is afraid of being seen.

“Who is there?” she asked.

“It’s I, Nicette; it’s——”

But I did not need to give my name; the door was already open and she was before me. I entered the shop, closing the door behind me; then paused to examine the girl, who was all alone amid the flowers and shrubs which filled the whole shop, save a small space where there were a table and a chair. The table was covered with paper, pens, and books; and a single candle lighted that little room, where the different flowers diffused a most agreeable odor.

She bade me sit beside her.

“How kind you are to come to see me, Monsieur Dorsan, and to think of me sometimes!”

“Don’t you think of me, Nicette?”

“Oh! all the time! but that’s no reason why—why—I mean, it’s very different!”

“What were you doing when I came?”

“I was writing, monsieur—learning my lesson.”

She blushed as she said it. I glanced at the table and saw several sheets of paper covered with large letters—a name written again and again—and that name, mine! Poor Nicette!

I looked at her; she blushed even more, and stammered, lowering her eyes:

“I beg your pardon, monsieur, for taking your name for a copy; but I thought that my benefactor’s name ought to be the first thing that I wrote.”

I took her hands and pressed them.

“Really, Nicette, I do not deserve so much friendship—if you knew me better!”

“Oh! I know you well enough by all that you have done for me.”

“Are you happy now?”

“Yes, monsieur; I can’t be more so.”

The tone in which she said that, and the melancholy expression of her face, gave me much food for thought.

“You seem to me much changed, Nicette.”

“How, monsieur?”

“You are pale, and a little thinner than you were.”

“But I am not sick.”

“Perhaps this smell of flowers——”

“Oh! I’ve been used to that a long time.”

“I miss in your manner that light-heartedness and vivacity that I noticed at the time of our first meeting.”

“Oh! a person can’t be always the same.”

“Still, if you have nothing to distress you——”

“No, monsieur, no, I haven’t anything.”

“Your eyes tell me the contrary. Dear Nicette, you have been crying.”

“No, monsieur; and even if I had—why, sometimes one cries without knowing why, and without being unhappy.”

We said nothing more. I did not choose to question her further, for I thought that I could guess what caused her distress. She did not look at me again; doubtless she was afraid that I would read her eyes. She was pensive and silent. Nor could I find anything to say. Her sadness had infected my heart. But the silence had a charm which we both enjoyed. However, I thought that I ought to try to divert her thoughts, and at the same time turn my own mind from reflections that were too hazardous. I went to the table and looked at the paper and the writing.

“You write well already, Nicette.”

“Not any too well yet, monsieur; but I hope, with time——”

“Do you still take lessons?”

“No, I haven’t any teacher now; he said things to me that I didn’t like; he didn’t want to give me the word I wanted for a copy; he always made me write:

Commencement, commonly, exactly; and I didn't see why I couldn't learn just as well by writing *Dorsan* as *commonly*, although it isn't so long. That made him angry, so I sent him away; I can get along without him. I know how to write the small letters too."

"Let me see."

"Oh! my hand would tremble before you, monsieur."

"Why so? I will give you a lesson."

"Will you, really?"

"Why, yes; to be sure."

She seated herself at the table; I placed a chair close beside hers, put my right arm about her, and guided her hand with mine; my face touched her hair; her whole body was against mine; I inhaled her sweet breath, and I could count the beating of her heart. Ah! what pleasure that lesson afforded me! Unconsciously, without premeditation, I made her write *I love you* again and again. My hand trembled as violently as the hand I was guiding. But a tear fell from her eyes. The pen dropped from our hands. I have no idea how it happened; but Nicette's pretty face was hidden against my breast, her two arms were about me, and mine pressed her fondly to my heart. At that moment I felt that even if Madame de Marsan, or any other woman, were present, I would not put Nicette's arms away.

We had been a long while in that position and did not think of changing it. Nicette was happy, and I—I must confess it—enjoyed a pleasure that I had never known before, a pleasure of which I had no conception, undisturbed by any desire for which I need blush. But, engrossed as I was by the present, I could not answer for the future; another caress might kindle a conflagration.

There came a loud knock at the door of the shop. Nicette started from my arms, and I looked at her with some disquietude.

"Who can have come to see you so late? You told me that you had no acquaintances."

"I don't know who it is; I don't expect anybody!"

Her eyes reassured me; they could not lie! But the knocking was repeated, and we distinguished these words:

"Open the door, open quick, Mamzelle Nicette! your mother's very sick and wants to see you."

Nicette ran to the door and recognized the daughter of one of Madame Jérôme's neighbors. The girl told her that her mother had had an apoplectic attack as the result of a violent quarrel with her daughter Fanchon; and feeling

very ill, she longed to see the child she had so unjustly turned out of doors. Nicette flew about the shop; in an instant she had taken off her apron and put on her cap.

“Adieu, adieu, Monsieur Dorsan!” she said, in a trembling voice, and with eyes filled with tears; “my mother is sick and I must forget everything.”

We left the shop; she took the little girl’s arm and dragged her away; the child could hardly keep pace with her. I soon lost sight of them.

Sweet girl! she possessed all the virtues, and I loved her better than I thought, more dearly than I had ever loved. The most convincing proof that I really loved her was that I had thus far respected her innocence; but I felt that I must avoid going to see her at night; to be alone with her would be too dangerous. If it had not been for that knocking—I do not know what might have happened.

I decided to return to Madame de Marsan, so as to turn my thoughts from Nicette; I must give my brain occupation, in order to allow my heart to become calmer. By that means I should at least provide myself with a pardonable motive for my new follies.

XXIV

THE BOURGEOIS COMEDY.—THE REHEARSAL

For several days my conduct was really most exemplary; I paid court to Madame de Marsan, concerning whom my neighbor had told me too much. I did not go again to see Nicette at night; and when I passed her shop during the day, I bade her good-morning without stopping. Her black dress told me of the loss she had sustained, but I did not ask her for any details of Madame Jérôme's death.

Madame de Marsan was a very agreeable, lively, coquettish person; I found several young men assiduously attentive to her, but had no idea whether they were more fortunate than I. I was not sufficiently enamored of her to be jealous; and yet, it annoyed me to see that swarm of admirers who so often forced themselves between her and myself. Twenty times I was tempted to cease to augment their number, but a secret hope whispered to me that I was the preferred one and that I should distance all my rivals.

Madame de Marsan's receptions were delightful: the company was select, the women were pretty, the men well bred; courtesy without affectation or reserve was the ordinary rule; we were lively and cheerful without ceasing to be decent, gallant without mawkishness; and if anyone did say something a little spiteful, it was said in the good-natured tone in which one may say anything with impunity. The music was excellent, without being pretentious; sometimes they played for high stakes, but you could never detect the faintest emotion on the faces of the players; in good society, people know how to lose their money with a charming grace.

The month of October was drawing near, and before the winter should come and open the season for balls Madame de Marsan proposed to give a party at her country house, at which there were to be some theatricals. I had been hearing of this function for a long while, and extensive preparations were being made therefor. The matter of the plays to be given was thoroughly discussed, and at last they fixed upon *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Fanchon la Vielleuse*. Madame de Marsan insisted that I should take part. I had never acted in anything but charades, but I could not refuse to do whatever she wished. I was cast for Lindor, and she for Rosine; I could not complain of that arrangement. The other parts were distributed, and Raymond was not forgotten; he was an invaluable man for bourgeois comedies. As for Monsieur de Marsan, he never took part in

theatricals. In large parties, husbands are of no use except to provide the money.

On the appointed day, Madame de Marsan went to her country house, where all the actors were to report a week before the performance, in order to have plenty of time to rehearse and arrange the stage business. Raymond, who had left me in peace for some time, came to me now every morning to urge me to hear him repeat the rôle of Bartholo; and as he was to appear in *Fanchon* also, in the part of the Abbé de Lattaignant, I must needs teach him the airs he had to sing; for, although he held himself out as a great musician, it took him a fortnight to learn a vaudeville couplet, even though he always had some score or other in his pocket.

“They’d have done much better to give some short new play instead of this interminable *Fanchon*,” my neighbor said to me every morning. “I’d have written one myself! indeed, I have some all written, which would be just the thing for amateurs!”

“You ought to suggest them.”

“Pshaw! there’s that Madame Saint-Marc, Madame de Marsan’s friend, who’s determined to play *Fanchon*, because, I suppose, she thinks she’s very pretty *en marmotte*. And that tall thin fellow who wants to play Sainte-Luce—we shall see how it goes. I myself could have played the officer much better than the abbé; the part’s better suited to my figure and style; however, I’m willing to take the other part to oblige; I sacrifice myself. I hope, however, that if we have time, before the fête, they’ll play my little opera, *Les Amants Protégés par Vénus*; there are only three short acts, but very spectacular. Listen, this is the first——”

“I’m studying my part.”

“Never mind, I want you to judge of the effect. The stage represents a magnificent country house, where preparations for the wedding of the lovers are in progress. The princess begins and says:

“Prince, ’tis here that we’re to be united.
How happy I am! how——”

I listened no longer; and although the fête was not to come off for ten days, I rid myself of Raymond by leaving Paris for Madame de Marsan’s country house, where I was not sorry to arrive in advance of the rest of the guests. I hoped there to find a more favorable opportunity; and opportunity is such a precious thing! Many people have owed their happiness to it; all that is necessary is to know enough to grasp it.

This time I had obtained such directions as were necessary to prevent my going astray, and in due time I arrived at Madame de Marsan’s estate. It was almost a little château; the situation was delightful, the surroundings beautiful; the gardens seemed quite extensive and very well kept, the apartments decorated with refined taste, and so well arranged that a large number of guests could easily be accommodated. But I postponed my examination of these details, being in haste to present my respects to the mistress of the house.

“Madame is alone,” said the maid; “none of the guests have arrived yet.”

I had hoped that that would be the case.

“And Monsieur de Marsan?”

“Oh! monsieur won’t come until the day of the party or the day before. He never meddles in such things.”

I could not have chosen my time better. I hastened to surprise her. The welcome I received satisfied me that she was flattered by my zeal.

“It is very good of you to come first,” she said; “we can rehearse a scene from *Le Barbier* together. Our parts are very long, you know, and, for my part, I have a very poor memory.”

“I will do whatever you please, madame.”

“Come first of all to look at our theatre. I am sure that you expect to find a cramped little place, where your head touches the flies, and the houses are smaller than the actors. Come, monsieur; I am determined that the sight of our playhouse shall arouse a spirit of emulation in you.”

She laughingly led me into the garden; the theatre was in the centre. It was large, convenient, and excellently arranged. The auditorium was tastefully decorated and would hold about three hundred people.

“Well, monsieur! what do you say to our theatre?”

“That it would put many provincial theatres to shame.”

“And we flatter ourselves, too, that we give better performances than one sees in the provinces. We do not shrink from anything: comedy, vaudeville, opéra-comique! We play everything except tragedy.”

“Why that exception?”

“You will agree that in the best amateur company at least half of the performers are good for nothing and provoke laughter, which in our theatre is never prohibited; but we noticed that the audience always laughed more at tragedies than at other plays; and as we could not mistake that for applause, we have ceased to play any but merry pieces; now, when we cause laughter we can persuade ourselves that it is a sign of approval. There is always some way of sparing one’s self-esteem, you see. At our last performance we had a most complete success! We gave *Porceaugnac*, with all the scenic accessories; nothing was forgotten; I fancy that we bought all the syringes in Montmorency. But it was charming, and it made a great sensation. It was spoken of in Paris; we even had an article in the paper. You will agree, monsieur, that our honor is involved now in maintaining our reputation.”

I promised Madame de Marsan to do my best to make myself worthy to appear upon her stage; and we left it, to stroll through the garden. It was almost a park; it was possible to lose one’s self there, and I hoped to take advantage of that fact. There was a little clump of trees, a grotto, a bridge, which lacked nothing but water, dense, bosky groves, shaded paths, turf that was always green, several pretty little elevations, a subterranean path, a cliff, a waterfall, and all the games that can be played in a garden. It was a delicious spot, into which it seemed to me that ennui could never find its way. Madame de Marsan gave me a small bedroom overlooking the fields. I should have been delighted with it, except that it was a long way from hers. I reproached her for it, and she answered with a jest. Patience! perhaps my turn would come.

Meanwhile, it was incumbent on me to learn my part. Madame de Marsan wished to rehearse some scenes that night, and she left me to study. No constraint, no etiquette in the country.

“Here,” she said, “everyone does what he pleases—rises in the morning, goes out to walk, stays in the house, goes away, returns, as his fancy bids him. So long as you are prompt at meals, and, above all, at rehearsals, you are absolutely your own master.”

I promised to conform to the established rules, and buried myself among the trees to study the rôle of Almaviva. But the thought that I was alone in that house with Madame de Marsan—for servants and workmen do not count—that thought made my mind wander. What! I was under the same roof with a pretty

woman, who allowed me to make love to her without apparent displeasure, who seemed indeed to manifest something more than interest in me—and I could be satisfied with anything less than a complete victory!—I saw that I had to do with an accomplished coquette, who perhaps pretended to be sensible to my attentions in order to keep me bound to her chariot for a longer time.

I looked forward to dining tête-à-tête with Madame de Marsan, but a tiresome neighbor came to call, and he dined with us. I had an idea that his presence was as disagreeable to her as to me, but, of course, she must seem to be delighted to see him. Luckily, at the table the neighbor talked for three; we were able to think of whatever was in our minds, and still the conversation did not languish. The old gentleman hardly gave himself time to breathe: he described his property to us in detail, from the main entrance to the garden wall; we knew just how many acres of land he had, and what his kitchen garden brought him in; how many trees he had planted, the number of his hens, how many eggs they laid in a week, what they were worth in the market, and a thousand other details no less interesting to us. But while he was talking, my eyes carried on a very different sort of conversation with Madame de Marsan. The neighbor, engrossed by his crops and his betterments, did not notice it. I discovered that loquacious people are sometimes very convenient. At last, about half-past seven, the neighbor concluded to go home, to see how many eggs his hens had laid during the day. He took his leave, and I was alone with Madame de Marsan. We went out for a walk in the garden; the verdure, the shadows, the silence, everything was conducive to tenderness. I tried to speak of love; the coquette replied only by repeating some of Rosine's lines. I continued, paying no heed to her. She rebuked me.

"That isn't right, monsieur," she said; "you haven't studied your part; you don't know a word of it."

"But, madame, I am not talking about our play."

"What's that, monsieur! didn't we agree to rehearse?"

"We have plenty of time."

"No; I have a bad memory."

"Then you refuse to listen to me?"

"On the contrary, but give me my cue."

"You have known a long while that I love you, that I adore you."

"I know that all that is in your part, but you ought to say it differently."

"I see, madame, that you take pleasure in tormenting me."

"Anger—passion—that's right! I assure you that you will act splendidly!"

What a woman! it was impossible to make her reply to the question that interested me. We returned to the salon; I was in an execrable humor. I rehearsed with the book in my hand, but I said my lines so badly that Madame de Marsan laughed at me incessantly. I left her and went to bed; I was almost tempted to remain no longer in that house. However, I did remain; but I cursed womankind, all of whom played fast and loose with me. The only one who combined all the estimable qualities, the only one who manifested genuine affection for me, was the very one of all who could neither be my wife nor my mistress.

The next day I decided to learn my rôle; perhaps that complaisance on my part would be considered worthy of recompense; at all events, as I was to act, I did not choose to make a more awkward appearance than the others; so I studied Count Almaviva. I went into the garden, my *Barbier de Séville* in my hand. I have always been able to learn easily when I chose; in less than four hours I was able to act almost the whole play. I said nothing at dinner; I wished to surprise Madame de Marsan, who asked me laughingly if I knew it as well as I did the previous evening. When it was dark, we went to the salon; she refused to rehearse in the garden, on the pretext that it was too cool there. Was that really her reason? She took her part; I did not need mine, as I knew it perfectly. We rehearsed our scenes; I acted with such vigor and earnestness, such truth to nature, that she was struck dumb. Now it was my turn to scold her; I was obliged to correct her, to show her what to do; but she was delighted with my talent, and did whatever I bade her—let me take her hand, squeeze it, kiss it, throw myself at her feet.

“What! is all this in the play?” she asked, deeply moved.

“Yes, madame, it’s all there.”

And, taking advantage of my position, of all the privileges that my rôle of stage lover gave me, I was in a fair way to make rapid progress, when we heard a commotion out of doors. In a moment the door of the salon opened and Raymond appeared.

“The devil take the man!” I muttered; “upon my word, he was born to be always in my way!”

Seeing me at Madame de Marsan’s feet, he whipped his part out of his pocket, and began to shout at the top of his lungs:

“Ah! malediction! that savage, piratical villain, Figaro! How can one leave his home one moment, and not be sure that on returning——’ Madame, I have the honor of presenting my respects; I am punctual, you see.—Good-evening, my dear Dorsan! Why on earth did you start off yesterday afternoon without me?”

I would gladly have come with you. Well! I know my lines already, you see. I have a superb memory! With the prompter's help, I am all right."

Madame de Marsan thanked Raymond for his promptitude and complimented him upon his ease. Her agitation had disappeared; we went on with our rehearsal, and she was engrossed by her part. My hopes were crushed again! Infernal Raymond!

The next day all the members of the troupe arrived; it was impossible to find a moment for a tête-à-tête; we were rehearsing from morning till night, and when *Fanchon*, in which Madame de Marsan did not appear, was being rehearsed, she had so many orders to give about costumes and the details of the fête, that I could not obtain the briefest interview with her. Alas! but for Raymond I should have been happy, I am sure; the auspicious moment had arrived; and he who would subdue a cruel fair must not allow such moments to escape him; they may recur with an emotional woman, but they are very rare with a coquette.

Raymond was in the seventh heaven: he was immersed in business to his ears; first of all, he had his two parts to learn, which was no small thing for him; then, Madame de Marsan had given him the general supervision of the scenery and the orchestra; moreover, as the young woman who was to play *Fanchon* was her intimate friend, and as the performance happened to come on her birthday, she requested him to compose a scene referring to that coincidence, to be added to the vaudeville which was to close the performance. Raymond sweated blood and water to produce that little impromptu. In the morning, as soon as I was awake, he came to tell me what he had done; he always had the beginning of his couplets, but he could not succeed in completing one; and he transferred that task to me, begging me to make use of him whenever I wished to celebrate anyone's birthday. After breakfast he hurried to the theatre, turned everything topsy-turvy, examined the scenery, and regretted that he had not the necessary time to arrange some new mechanism, because he would have liked to put a transformation scene in his little contribution; but, in default of demons—for Madame de Marsan would not hear of them, for fear of fire—and of nymphs,—an article not to be found in the neighborhood,—Raymond confined his efforts to having a wreath descend upon *Fanchon's* head; and he urged the gardener, who had charge of the machinery, to be sure to make a superb one, and to suspend it by a cord from one of the roof timbers on the day of the performance. Then my neighbor proposed to introduce two little Cupids, who, instead of appearing from a cloud, were to come up from the prompter's box—which was likely to produce more effect—and to present bouquets to all the actors and actresses on the stage.

The great day drew near; the rehearsals proceeded with great zeal and activity; everyone considered that his honor was at stake, and determined to outdo the others. How much occupation an amateur theatrical performance affords! what anxiety and toil! what a world of details! how much trouble people take! But, on the other hand, what joy to win applause! and one is certain of that in advance, even though one acts wretchedly. We all knew our parts, except Raymond, who stumbled through Bartholo's lines and could not remember a single one of Lattaignant's. The ladies scolded him, but his reply was always the same:

“With the prompter's help, you'll see how glibly I'll rattle it off.”

On the night before the performance we were to have a dress rehearsal on the stage, with all the lights. Raymond had not been seen since morning; at six o'clock, the hour appointed for the rehearsal, he had not come. We waited in vain; they searched the whole house, the garden, the wood; everybody was engaged in the search; the servants were sent around the neighborhood, with orders to bring Monsieur Raymond back, dead or alive. We could not begin without him; we were in despair, at our wits' end; for there was no one to take his place. How could anyone learn two long parts between night and morning? The ladies were on the point of weeping with indignation, when, about eight o'clock, Raymond at last appeared, drenched with perspiration, covered with dust, and leading by the hand two chubby, rosy-cheeked little boys, five or six years old, smeared with dirt and dressed in dirty, mud-stained blouses.

“Where have you been?” was the general cry; the ladies were for beginning operations by beating him.

“That's right!” said Raymond; “scold me savagely, when I have nearly killed myself finding two Cupids for you! I have been scouring the neighborhood ever since morning; I am sure that I have travelled a good ten leagues! But nothing but sulky faces, squint eyes, flat noses everywhere! At last I found what I wanted at Saint-Denis; but see how fresh and plump they are! they'll make two first-class Cupids.”

The aspect of the two little fellows, for whom Raymond had bought candy to bribe them, and who were smeared with it to the ears, soon allayed the wrath of the company.

“What about their mother?” asked Madame de Marsan.

“She's a dairywoman at Saint-Denis. She's overjoyed to have her children play two little Cupids, and she's coming to see them to-morrow; I promised her a place behind the rear curtain. Now, just have these little rascals cleaned up a

bit, and you'll see how pretty they are!"

The young lady who was to play Fanchon did not understand why Cupids were needed, not knowing that a little surprise was being prepared for her. Madame de Marsan tried to repair Raymond's indiscretion. The rehearsal went on and lasted until one in the morning, when, being thoroughly exhausted, we all went to bed, longing ardently for the morrow; and Raymond intrusted his two Cupids to the housekeeper, with instructions to cleanse them and make them get up early, so that he would have time to teach them what they had to do.

XXV

ALMAVIVA AND ROSINE.—A SCENE ADDED TO *LE BARBIER DE SÉVILLE*

The great day arrived. The ladies rose early; the thought of their costumes had kept them awake. The men, who are sometimes as coquettish as the ladies, were all absorbed by their costumes or their rôles. I was less engrossed by the great affair of the evening, because my passion for Madame de Marsan, intensified by the obstacles it had encountered, occupied my thoughts quite as much as the play. But the busiest of all was Raymond. He was out of bed at daybreak. He sought out the two little peasants, and tried to make them move gracefully, and to teach them a little stage business, while he told them what they would have to do in the evening. The children stared at him, jumped into the air when he told them to dance, fell on the ground when he tried to make them stand on one leg, and began to cry when he told them to smile. My neighbor took them to the gardener, now transformed into a scene shifter, and repeated the lesson to him. The gardener was a dull-witted lout, who knew nothing at all, but who chose to pretend to understand instantly whatever was said to him.

“Do you know what you have to do to-night, my friend?” Raymond asked him.

“Yes, monsieur.”

“First, the wreath of flowers——”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Which you are to lower on Fanchon’s head.”

“Fanchon’s—yes, monsieur.”

“You are to fasten it to a cord hanging from the beam; do you know whether there is one?”

“Oh! yes, monsieur; there was one for that gentleman with the syringes they acted the last time, that was so funny! Monsieur Pourceau—Pourceau—the man who wouldn’t take physic before people, you know.”

“Just so, my man, just so.—Well, when the wreath is all fixed, you must make a dozen fresh, pretty bouquets, and give them to these children, who will be dressed as Cupids.”

“Say! I know ’em; they’re Madeleine’s boys.”

“Pay attention to what I say.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“When they have the bouquets, you’ll take them to the prompter’s box.”

“Yes, monsieur, to the box, I understand.”

“And they are to go out on the stage when I clap twice with my hands.”

“Yes, monsieur, with your hands.”

“Don’t forget anything, my friend.”

“No, monsieur. Oh! you needn’t be afraid; I’m used to play-acting here!”

Raymond next betook himself, with the two children, to the costume room. He found no knit flesh-colored tights, because such costumes are rarely used by amateurs. He was obliged to be content with nankeen trousers, over which they were to wear their little white tunics: these, with the girdle, the band, the bow, and the quiver, should make the illusion complete. After urging the wig-maker, who had come from Montmorency for the occasion, to outdo himself in dressing the Cupids’ locks, Raymond forgot everything but his rôles, and set about learning them for the evening. A numerous and select party of guests had arrived from Paris, and they strolled about the house and gardens. Madame de Marsan, despite the necessary preparations for the play, did the honors of her house with no less grace than good breeding. Monsieur de Marsan did not arrive until a few moments before dinner on the day of the fête. He was detained in Paris by business on the Bourse; he knew that his wife was spending a lot of money, and he had to devote his attention to making an equal amount in order to maintain the equilibrium. In the evening, many of the people of the neighborhood, carefully selected from the most eligible, who had received invitations for the performance, were on hand promptly. Thus the auditorium was certain to be entirely filled, for the last rows of chairs were thrown open to some of the villagers. It is much more agreeable to act before a large audience; empty benches are never flattering to the actor, even at an amateur performance.

The hour to begin had arrived. Our little hall was full. Raymond kept looking through the hole in the curtain, to see where the ladies were sitting whom he proposed to ogle.

“Time to begin!”—Such was the cry of all who were ready; but everybody was not ready, and it seemed as if Raymond would never finish dressing. After each garment that he put on, he ran to look through the hole, with his jar of rouge in one hand and his rôle in the other.

“Hurry! hurry!” we shouted at him from all sides, and pushed him back toward his dressing room; then someone ran to Madame de Marsan’s room, to ask if Rosine was ready. The four amateurs who formed the orchestra had twice

played through the overture to *Richard Cœur de Lion*, which served as overture to *Le Barbier*. They were about to begin it a third time, because they had no other music with them; the audience began to lose patience and some faint murmurs were heard. But at last we were ready, and Raymond, who was the machinist, raised the curtain.

I knew my lines very well, and my feeling for Madame de Marsan, who looked prettier than ever in the costume of Rosine, imparted to my acting the warmth and genuineness which befit the rôle of a lover like Almaviva. The young man who played Figaro was spirited, good-looking, and daring. We played with great *verve*, our scenes went off excellently, and the audience was delighted. At the moment when Bartholo was to appear at the window with Rosine, Raymond, trying to raise the blind, jerked it so violently that it was detached and fell on the lamps which did duty as footlights; luckily, the sight of Madame de Marsan, who was delicious in her Spanish costume, covered Raymond's awkwardness. The first act went without a hitch. In the second, Raymond, whose memory was fatigued already, could not say a word without the prompter, and he stood in front of his box all the time, with his eyes fixed upon it and his ears strained to hear. Often the prompter had to repeat the words three times, Raymond meanwhile abusing him when he did not prompt, and telling him to be quiet when he did prompt him in some speech that he thought he knew. Thus he made of Bartholo a veritable Cassandra; but such an audience as ours could not fail to be indulgent; moreover, all the other rôles were well done; we entered into the spirit of our parts and filled the stage with animation. We were wildly applauded; and Raymond assumed his share of the applause, although he confused us terribly when he was on the stage with us.

The third act began with Raymond on the stage. He walked forward and took his stand in front of the prompter's box.

“What temper! what temper! [*To the prompter: Why don't you prompt me?*] She seemed appeased! Will someone tell me [*Don't prompt me.*]—will someone tell me who in the devil put it into her head to—to [*Prompt me, will you?*]—to refuse [*What's that? I don't hear you.*]—to refuse to take lessons from Don Basile. [*Don't prompt me!*] She knows that he is interfering about my marriage. Do everything in the world—do—do—[*What? what do I say next? What the devil! you don't know how to prompt at the right time!*]”

The audience concluded to laugh at our Bartholo; whereat Raymond rubbed his hands with a satisfied air, and, whenever he returned to the wings, exclaimed:

“How pleased they are! how it amuses them! No audience at the Français ever laughed so much!”

The play came to an end at last, in spite of Raymond, who did all that he could to prevent it; but Rosine's grace, Figaro's hilarity, and, lastly,—for one must do one's self justice,—the warmth, the passion, the ardor which gave life to my performance of *Almaviva* made the illusion complete; I obtained a brilliant triumph, and I read in Madame de Marsan's eyes the pleasure that my success afforded her.

Le Barbier at an end, the performance of *Fanchon* was hurried forward. All of the cast of the first play, with the exception of Madame de Marsan and myself, were to appear in the second. We two had plenty of time to change our costumes. All the dressing rooms opened on the garden; those of the ladies were separated from ours only by an avenue of lindens. Having resumed my civilian costume, I went out into the garden for a breath of air. The second play had begun long before, and everybody was on the stage or among the spectators. The solitude and tranquillity of the garden were in refreshing contrast to the clamor not far away. I was not sorry to be able to saunter there for a moment; but as I crossed the avenue of lindens, I saw a lady come from one of the dressing rooms opposite. I stopped; it was Madame de Marsan; it was my Rosine. She recognized me and came toward me.

“Where is Monsieur le Comte Almaviva going, pray?”

“I came out to enjoy this cool shade a moment; but I missed something: Almaviva cannot be happy without Rosine.”

“Rosine is not at all sure that she ought to go with you.”

“What! after consenting to allow yourself to be abducted?”

“In truth, I should play the cruel now with a bad grace; but remember that you swore to be true to me! to love me always, to love none but me!”

“Oh! I swear it again! I have no other desire than to repeat it every moment!”

“But where are you taking me? we seem to be going a long way. Why do you take the darkest paths? Why are we going in under these trees? It is too dark here!”

“Dear Rosine, what can you fear, with me?”

“Dear Lindor, I am ill at ease.”

“Did you not intrust yourself unreservedly to me?”

“Ah! I fear that I was not wise. What are you doing? Kissing me like this! Oh! that isn't in the play.”

“Do we refuse a kiss to the lover who is to be our husband?”

“Stop—Lindor—Dorsan—— Oh! this scene——”

“Dear Rosine, what is it but the natural sequel? ought it not to crown our love?”

Madame de Marsan tried in vain to resist; it was too late; I had entered too completely into the spirit of my rôle, and she had identified herself with hers. We added to *Le Barbier de Séville* the scene which the audience does not see, but which it may well divine after the union of Almaviva and Rosine. For some time the thicket had witnessed that charming scene, half lighted by the moon. The fervor with which we played our parts caused us to forget the world and the fête. I was determined that Almaviva should obtain as great a triumph in the thicket as on the stage, and Rosine was so prompt in response that I could not lag behind. We had not begun to think of the dénouement, when it was hastened by an unforeseen incident; but, to explain it, we must return to the theatre.

Fanchon was acted indifferently well; many of the actors, not knowing their parts, had skipped several scenes; Raymond had done the same with his lines; so that the play was soon done. Neither Madame de Marsan’s absence nor mine was noticed; the actors supposed that we were in the audience, the spectators, that we were behind the scenes.

The vaudeville being finished, Raymond arranged his little scene in honor of the lady who had played *Fanchon*, and whose birthday it was. Everyone sang his or her couplet, and Raymond called for Madame de Marsan and myself to sing ours. As he did not find us, and as the dénouement was at hand, he ran into the wings and seized the cord to which was attached the surprise that was to descend upon *Fanchon*’s head. He pulled it slightly, and the weight that he felt above set his mind at rest, convincing him that the gardener had not forgotten to attach the wreath.

The moment had come; the orchestra played

“What grace, what majesty!”

That was the signal for the wreath to descend. Raymond let the cord go; a sudden murmur ran through the hall, then bursts of laughter arose on all sides.

“Stop! stop!” someone called from the stage. Raymond put his head out from the wings to witness the tableau, and saw that, instead of a wreath of flowers, he had lowered a syringe on *Fanchon*’s head.

The confusion was at its height; the hall rang with laughter, while on the stage wrath at Raymond’s blundering folly was still predominant. The young lady who had played *Fanchon* was obliged to push the syringe away from her head. Raymond dropped the cord and ran out on the stage, crying:

“It wasn’t my fault; it’s Pourceaugnac’s syringe—and that idiot of a gardener forgot to take it off! It should have been a wreath. But we’ll make up for this.—Forward, Cupids!”

He gave the signal, the orchestra played Zéphire’s air from *Psyche*, and everybody waited impatiently for what was coming. Again Raymond clapped his hands.

“Come on, Cupids!” he cried; “come out, I say!”

But nothing came out of the prompter’s box. The audience, tired of waiting to no purpose, prepared to leave the hall, and the actors to vacate the stage. In vain did Raymond try to detain them, crying:

“They’re coming! they’ll appear in a minute! they must be putting on the bands!”

Nobody listened to him. In his rage he determined to find his Cupids, at all events; he jumped down into the prompter’s box, looked under the stage and in every corner of the building, but he did not succeed in finding them.

The two little fellows were dressed and ready two hours before it was time for them to appear. The gardener, bewildered by all the orders he had received, had entirely forgotten the wreath; but he had made some bouquets, which he gave to the children, then led them to the prompter’s box and said:

“Stay here; you’re to go on the stage when you’re called.”

The children waited quietly for half an hour; but they were tired by that time; they thought that they had been forgotten; and as they could enjoy themselves much more in the garden than under the stage, they left their bouquets there and went outside to play. In running about they approached the house, and saw on the ground floor, in a well-lighted room, a sideboard covered with innumerable delicacies, the bare sight of which made them open their mouths and lick their chops. They stopped, sighed, nudged each other, divined each other’s thought, and looked behind them in obedience to the natural instinct of the man who is about to do wrong. There was no one in sight; all the servants had deserted the house for the play.

“Oh! see the nice things, brother!” said the smaller of the two; “we never saw anything like ’em!”

“Oh! Fanfan, mustn’t that be sweet?”

“Say, Jean; just think—if we could eat some of it!”

“Look at them cakes!”

“There’s no one there; let’s climb in! Come on!”

They easily climbed in the ground-floor window; they ran to the sideboard, stuffed their mouths full, made aprons of their tunics, and filled them with fruit, meats, and cakes; lapped the cream that they could not carry away; dug their fingers into jars of preserves, and took refuge finally in the attic, to eat at their ease what they had filched.

While the little peasants were regaling themselves, Raymond was scouring the whole estate to find his Cupids. As he came out of the theatre, after a vain search, he met Monsieur de Marsan, who was looking for his wife, the company being surprised at her continued absence.

“Have you found them?” inquired Raymond.

“I don’t know where she is; people are asking for her; ordinarily, I am not called upon to interfere in anything.”

“Whom are you talking about?”

“My wife, who is not here to do the honors of the fête.”

“Parbleu! Madame de Marsan can’t be lost; she’ll turn up; but my two Cupids—I am more anxious about them; for I must give them back to their mother, who is not Venus; and she’ll break one of her little pitchers over my head if her brats are not found. Let us search the gardens together; the little rascals must be somewhere here.”

Monsieur de Marsan followed Raymond, hoping to find his wife rather than the two little fugitives. They walked through part of the garden, and Monsieur de Marsan proposed to return to his guests, feeling sure that his wife must be with them; but Raymond detained him, telling him that he, Marsan, was responsible for the Cupids, as they were lost on his premises. They drew near the swing, which was close to the clump of trees where I was playing my scene with Madame de Marsan.

“They are over in this direction,” said Raymond; “I hear the swing moving; I was sure that my little blackguards were amusing themselves.”

They reached the swing, but saw nothing.

“There’s no one here, you see,” said Monsieur de Marsan.

“It’s strange,” said Raymond; “I still hear the same noise. Why—it’s in this direction—in the thicket! What the devil are they doing there?”

Monsieur de Marsan went forward; Raymond followed him. The moon at that moment was much too bright! we were petrified.

“It’s Almaviva and Rosine!” said Raymond, jumping back. Monsieur de Marsan alone retained his presence of mind.

“Madame,” he said, calmly addressing his wife, “your guests are asking for you; you are needed for the festivities; you must try to arrange your business and your pleasures so that they will not interfere with each other.”

With that, he coolly turned on his heel and returned to the house. Madame de Marsan had fainted; Raymond stood like a statue. I rushed from the thicket, pushing him roughly aside, in an instant was at the courtyard, then on the Paris road, and reached the capital at two in the morning.

XXVI

WHERE WILL IT END?

After the adventure of the thicket, it was impossible for me to go again to Madame de Marsan's house, or to see her in public. So that we were obliged to cover our liaison with a veil of mystery. With many women that fact would have simply added to the charm; but I was afraid that with Madame de Marsan, who loved to be surrounded by adorers and by admiring homage, the impossibility of gratifying her vanity by her conquest of me would speedily abate her love. If we no longer met at her house, it was solely out of respect for the proprieties; for, as Raymond had witnessed the catastrophe, I had no doubt that it was known to everybody.

What surprised me most was that I had not seen him since that memorable evening: a week had passed, and I had not even met him on the stairs; doubtless he dreaded my wrath. He evidently kept out of sight when he heard me coming; for as we lived on the same landing and both went in and out several times during the day, we did not usually pass two days without meeting.

Madame de Marsan and I were in regular correspondence; we made appointments, we went into the country together, and sat in closed boxes at the theatre. I enjoyed her society more, seeing her only *en tête-à-tête*. There was no longer between us that swarm of young dandies who were constantly fluttering about her, and whose presence was far from agreeable to me; when we were alone, she could not play the coquette so successfully and amuse herself by tormenting me. So that, for my part, I was not at all sorry that we met as we did, but I was very much afraid that it was not the same with her. Already our correspondence was beginning to drag, our assignations were becoming less frequent; she constantly found something to prevent her meeting me: a reception, a ball, some festivity which she could not possibly avoid attending. I had no faith in her excuses, because I knew that her husband left her entirely at liberty to do as she chose. If she refused to keep an appointment with me, it was because she preferred to create a sensation at a ball or a concert; in a word, to make conquests, to surround herself with admirers and attentions, rather than to be alone with me. The conclusion to be drawn from that state of affairs was very simple: Madame de Marsan did not love me, had never loved me. She had smiled upon me solely from caprice; had given me hopes from coquetry; had

yielded by chance; and would leave me because she was bored.

One morning, opening my door suddenly, I saw Raymond going downstairs and caught him by his coat tail.

“Great heaven! I thought you were dead, Monsieur Raymond!” said I.

“Good-morning, my dear neighbor! It’s a fact—I haven’t seen you since the *Barbier de Séville*.”

“That is true; and I counted upon you to tell me how the festivities came to an end.”

“Oh! you must have heard all about it from——”

“From whom?”

“You know whom I mean. To tell the truth, I was afraid you were angry with me.”

“Why so?”

“Because I took her husband to the thicket.”

“Aha! so it was you who brought him there, was it?”

“That is to say, it was I and it wasn’t. He was looking for his wife, and I was looking for the Cupids, who were giving themselves indigestion in the attic; the little rascals nearly burst, and their mother declared it was my fault and wanted to tear my eyes out! I was in hard luck at that party!—But to return to your adventure—if you had let me into the secret of your liaison with Madame de Marsan, it wouldn’t have happened; on the contrary, I would have induced the husband to abandon the idea of looking for his wife! But there, as I am always saying to you, you won’t ever tell me anything! your reticence leads to surprises! in fact, you are responsible for my having to give up going to Monsieur de Marsan’s.”

“Why so?”

“Why so! it’s easy enough to see: the wife, knowing what—what I saw, receives me very coldly; and the husband’s another oddity. I wished to try to arrange matters; it was no easy task, but still, as it was night, and moonlight—and then, with a shrewd wit one can make anything look all right.”

“Well?”

“Well, when you had gone, I tried first to help Madame de Marsan, who had fainted, as I thought; but the moment I put my salts to her nose, she got up without help, threw the salts into my face, and ran off and locked herself in her room. When I saw that, I said to myself: ‘I must go to the husband and throw dust in his eyes.’—I went to the salon, and motioned to Monsieur de Marsan to

step out to speak to me; at first he was unwilling to leave the écarté table, but he finally made up his mind to it. I led him into a corner and said: ‘Monsieur, you mustn’t believe all you see, especially by moonlight, because the moon changes the aspect of things, and you may be misled. The scene they were rehearsing in the thicket was of my invention, and was to be played after the *Barbier*: it was a love scene, and in love scenes the actors sit very near together, on each other’s knees sometimes, take hold of hands, embrace—in fact, the more things they do, the more complete the illusion.’—That was rather clever, eh?”

“Very clever; and what reply did Monsieur de Marsan make?”

“He hardly let me finish; then he said in a very sharp tone: ‘Be good enough not to weary me with any more of your nonsense, and never to open your mouth again on that subject!’—And, with that, he turned on his heel. Faith! I confess that I call that very ill-mannered! I try to give a husband the matrimonial prism, and he receives me like a dog in a game of tenpins! you must agree that it was not very pleasant. To cap the climax, a moment later up comes the dairywoman with her two brats, who were purple in the face; they had just been found in an attic; and the impudent peasant began to abuse me, and promised me that, if they burst, her husband would summon me before the magistrate! As if it was my fault! Why, I told them to act the part of Cupid, not to stuff themselves with food!—Faith! when it came to that, I took my hat, and taking advantage of Figaro’s cabriolet—he was driving back to Paris—I turned my back on the fête, vowing that I would never again compose anacreontic scenes for peasants.”

My neighbor left me when he had finished his story. Despite the assurance that I had given him that I harbored no resentment against him on account of that incident, he seemed to me to retain in my presence a constrained, embarrassed air which was not usual with him. He had left me, whereas ordinarily I had hard work to get rid of him. I sought in vain a reason for this behavior, which was not natural in Raymond. However, it mattered little to me what maggot he had in his brain; it surprised me more than it interested me.

There was something that surprised and troubled me much more: for a long time I had received no bouquets from Nicette. At first, I thought that her mother’s death might have kept her busy for some days; but that had taken place more than six weeks before, and still I found nothing at my door! I had become so accustomed to those tokens of remembrance, that every evening, when I went home, I hastily put my hand to the doorknob; but I found nothing, and I said to myself sadly:

“She too has forgotten me! I might reproach her, but I do not want her to do from a sense of duty what I had thought was a pleasure to her.”

It was a long time since I had seen her; I woke too late in the morning; in the evening, I was either with Madame de Marsan, or some friend would drag me away to one of the parties which began to be more numerous with the approach of winter. Besides, I knew how dangerous it was to go to see her in the evening!—Meanwhile, my meetings with Madame de Marsan were daily becoming less frequent and more depressing; she was simply waiting for an excuse to break with me altogether; and I, from a spirit of contradiction, refused to furnish her with one.

For several days we had not met; but we had arranged to dine together on a certain day; it was almost like granting me a favor. We dined at the Cadrans-Bleu; the sight of the Méridien, just opposite, reminded me of the much livelier repast of which I had partaken with Mademoiselle Agathe; and I said to myself that the grisette, who deceives one openly, is a hundred times preferable to the *petite-maitresse* who clings to us when she does not love us. The dinner was a gloomy affair, despite my efforts to prolong it; at seven o'clock we had nothing more to say to each other. I suggested the theatre, but there was no play that attracted her; it was not the season for walking, and I did not know what to suggest, or how to amuse her. At last she began to complain of pain in the stomach and head, of the vapors, in short. She decided to go home and to bed early, and I applauded the idea, which was a great relief to us both. We left the restaurant; I was going to take her home in a cab, as usual, but she preferred to go on foot, thinking that the walk in the fresh air would do her good. It was dark, and we had no fear of unpleasant meetings. We walked along like a husband and wife of twenty years' standing, exchanging a word every five minutes. We reached Rue Saint-Honoré and should soon pass Nicette's little shop; but it would surely be closed, and I was very glad of it. As we drew near I saw that the shop was still open; the shrubs had not been taken inside. It was too late to turn back. Indeed, why should I turn back? Was I not at liberty to give my arm to whomever I chose? Yes; but still I hoped that she would not see me.

We reached the shop; Nicette was at her door; she saw me, and by some inexplicable whim Madame de Marsan chose to stop to examine her flowers.

"Here's a lovely orange tree," she said; "for a long time I have wanted one in my boudoir; I like this one very much; don't you think it pretty?"

"Yes, madame, very pretty."

I was embarrassed; I kept my eyes on the ground, avoiding Nicette's.

"I am afraid it's too large, though," continued Madame de Marsan. "Have you any others, my girl?—Well! why don't you answer?"

Nicette did not hear her; she had her eyes fixed on me, and doubtless her expression was very eloquent, for Madame de Marsan, greatly surprised, scrutinized her closely; her pretty face, her confusion, my emotion, my embarrassed manner, aroused in Madame de Marsan's mind suspicions, which undoubtedly went beyond the truth. Women divine very swiftly, and their imagination travels fast. Madame de Marsan no longer loved me, but she had the curiosity which no woman ever loses on that subject, and, in pure deviltry, she pretended to be very fond of me.

She entered the shop, leaning nonchalantly on my arm; she bestowed an amorous glance on me and addressed me in the familiar second person, which she had not done twenty times at the very outset of our liaison.

"What do you think of these trees, my dear fellow? tell me which you like, my dear Dorsan; I want to choose the one you like best."

Vexation and anger were suffocating me; I was hardly able to stammer a few disjointed words. I glanced at Nicette; I saw her turn pale and stagger; her eyes filled with tears; they seemed to say to me:

"She loves you! do you love her?"

Madame de Marsan saw it all; she smiled maliciously and watched Nicette closely.

"What's the matter with you, child?" she asked, in a contemptuous tone; "you seem very much excited."

"Nothing, madame, nothing's the matter," the poor girl replied, in a trembling voice, looking at Madame de Marsan and at me in turn.

"What's the price of this orange tree?"

"It's—it's—whatever you choose to give, madame; I don't care."

"What's that? you don't care? That's a strange answer!—What do you think, my dear Dorsan? Come, answer; I don't know what's the matter with you to-night, really!"

"When you are ready, madame, we will go."

"Ah! I see, monsieur; you have reasons for not wanting to stay in this place with me; my presence embarrasses you—and seems to grieve mademoiselle! Ha! ha! this is too good! to grieve this poor child!—that would be cruel beyond words! Come, monsieur, when you choose. But, I beg you, don't leave her in despair.—Adieu, my girl!"

She left the shop at last, and I followed her after glancing at Nicette. But she was crying and did not look at me.

When we were in the street, Madame de Marsan laughed as if she would die, and joked me about my amours and about the innocent flower girl. I made no reply, although I might have made some very mortifying remarks; we must be indulgent to the woman who has been weak for our sake. I left her at her door. I was in great haste to see Nicette again; I was determined now to tell her all my thoughts, all my sentiments; I proposed to conceal from her no longer the genuine passion which she had inspired, and which I had fought against to no purpose. She shared it; I could not doubt that. We would be happy together; yes, I would abandon myself thenceforth to the dictates of my heart, which told me that I must possess Nicette. The friendship between us was simply a pretext to conceal our love; we could not misunderstand each other! Why those fruitless efforts to overcome the sentiment that drew us toward each other? Why should cold prudence deprive us of happiness? Is love a crime, pray? and can that which makes us so happy make us guilty?

I ran, I flew—at last I stood before her shop; it was closed, and I could see no light within. I knocked: there was no reply. Was she asleep? No, no; I was sure that she would not be able to sleep. I knocked again—no reply! Where could she be? I passed an hour in front of her shop. I knocked again, but to no purpose. I was convinced that she was inside, but that she was determined not to admit me, that she was weeping and did not wish me to see her tears. Perhaps she feared that I would reproach her for her conduct before Madame de Marsan. Dear Nicette! Far be it from me to reprove your love.

“I will see her to-morrow,” I thought; “I will console her, and I shall easily triumph over the resolutions of the night! Since it must be, I will wait till to-morrow.”

XXVII

MY STAR PURSUES ME

I did not sleep; my mind was too disturbed, my heart too agitated for me to obtain any rest. All night long I formed plans, prudent, extravagant, and delicious. Nicette was always included in those charming visions of the future, which my imagination conceived so readily; I transformed her into a shepherdess, a great lady, a *demoiselle*; she and I were together in a palace, in a village, in a desert; but, wherever we were, we were happy. Ah! how sweet it is to dream waking dreams when one loves and believes one's self to be loved in return!

I rose at daybreak; I had twenty schemes in my head, and, as usual, I could not decide upon any one. First of all, I must see Nicette; that was the most important thing. My toilet was soon completed; I was sure that I always looked well to her.

I left my room; everybody was still asleep in the house, unless there was somebody who was very much in love. Madame Dupont, who had ceased to be amorous, kept me waiting a century before she pulled the cord of the porte cochère; at last she heard me knocking and shouting at her window, and I was free.

In less than five minutes I was in front of the shop; it was still closed. I was surprised; Nicette was usually such an early bird.

Should I wait? should I knock? I stood hesitating in the street, when a messenger passed. It was the same one I had questioned some time before; he recognized me, touched his hat as he passed, and took his seat some twenty yards away. I walked toward him, with no definite idea what I was going to do. The messenger, who was pleased with my conduct on the former occasion, hastened to offer me his services.

"I have nothing for you to do, my friend," I said, in a decidedly dismal tone, mechanically putting a five-franc piece in his hand.

He stared at me in amazement, and waited for me to speak before he ventured to put the coin in his pocket. I looked toward Nicette's shop and pointed at it.

"That flower girl is rather late about opening, it seems to me," I said.

"Oh! it's early yet; but still, she's been a bit lazylike for some time. Well,

well! it isn't surprising!"

"Why so?"

"When a woman gets love into her head!"

"How do you know? Who told you she was in love?"

"Oh! a man don't have to be very sharp to see that kind of thing! you see, I've been on this square twenty year, so I ought to know pretty well what's going on in the quarter."

"What do you know about this girl? What have you seen? Answer, and keep nothing back. Here, take this."

I felt in my pocket again and put more silver in the messenger's hand, whereat his amazement redoubled and he looked into my face for symptoms of insanity.

"You told me that this girl was virtuous and honest, and that she did not speak to anybody, because she preferred not to."

"That's true, monsieur, that's true. She's honest enough still; but when a girl's young, she may take a liking for someone, and——"

"Explain yourself more clearly! What makes you think that?"

"Pardi, monsieur! because I see the fellow come to see her."

So Nicette had deceived me! Nicette did not love me! No, I could not believe it. I determined to question the man further. I leaned against the post that adjoined his stone bench; I needed support, for I trembled at the thought of finding my misery confirmed.

"You say that you see someone come to her shop?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Since when?"

"Why, it was about three weeks ago that the man came prowling around here; at first he came in the morning, to buy flowers; then he came at night, just at dusk, and talked a little; then he stayed longer; and it's got so now that he comes almost every night and talks an hour or two with the pretty little flower girl. But I think everything's all straight as yet; the shop door's always open, and unless they meet somewhere else, which is possible enough, for women are sly, and it ain't safe to trust to virtuous airs!——"

"What does he look like?"

"Well, he ain't exactly a young man, perhaps about forty years old; nor he ain't very handsome, either; but as to his get-up, he's one of your sort, a man who looks as if he was somebody! And you can see that the little flower girl,

who put on airs with us poor folks, might have been flattered to make the conquest of a swell; that's probably what caught her!"

"And he comes every night?"

"Yes, monsieur, pretty near; he don't hardly ever miss a night now."

"That's enough."

I strode away from the messenger; the poor fellow had unsuspectingly torn my heart; at the very moment that I proposed to abandon myself without reserve to my love for Nicette; to turn my back on society of which I was weary, so that I might live with her and for her—at that moment, I lost her thus! She loved another, and I believed myself to be sure of her love! With that sweet delusion vanished the blissful future of my waking dreams that morning.

I was still in the street; I could not go away. At last the shop opened; Nicette appeared; she was pale and downcast; but I had never seen her when she was so pretty, I had never been so deeply in love with her.

The little traitor—with that innocent air! Alas! had I the right to complain? had she given me her troth? had I told her that I loved her?—But was it necessary to tell her so? It seemed to me that we understood each other so perfectly. We had both been deceived!

Should I speak to her? Of what use was it now? what could I say to her that would interest her? No; I would not see her or speak to her again; I would forget her!

I do not know how it happened; but, with the firm intention to avoid her, I had walked toward her; and I found myself in front of her shop, where I stopped, in spite of myself.

She came to meet me with an air of constraint; her eyes were red, as if she had wept much; what could be the cause of her distress? I did not know what to say, and I stood mute in front of her; she too was thoughtful.—And this was the interview in which the confidence and unreserve of love were to reign supreme!—Poor mortals! our plans are drawn on the sand.

"I came last night," I said at last, in a tone which I strove to render cold.

"Last night—yes, I saw you, with—with that lady."

"No, I mean a few minutes later—I came back and knocked."

"I was not here."

"I thought you never went out."

"I went out last night."

"You might have been at home, and have preferred not to let me in."

“Why so, monsieur?”

“Sometimes a person doesn’t like to be disturbed when she has company.”

“Company!”

“Yes, you understand me perfectly well; will you tell me again that you have no visitors? For the last three weeks, hasn’t a gentleman come to see you—almost every evening?”

She was embarrassed, she blushed. The messenger had not deceived me.

“Well, mademoiselle, you don’t answer. Is it the truth?”

“Yes, monsieur, it’s the truth.”

She admitted it! ah! I would have liked to have her deny it, I should have been so happy to believe her!—Further doubt was impossible! there was no more hope for me! I must go. I cast a last glance at her and left the shop abruptly, for I did not choose to let her see the suffering she caused me. She made a movement to detain me, then paused in her doorway, contenting herself with looking after me.

I resolved to think no more of her; she was no better than the rest!—In truth, I was unlucky in love! I had never yet fallen in with a faithful woman; they had all deceived me, betrayed me, played fast and loose with me; but all their perfidies had caused me less pain than I suffered because of Nicette’s inconstancy! She saw that I loved her; all women see that at a glance! She did everything to attract me! To think that one so young should be so skilled in feigning love and sensibility and gratitude! I could never again believe in anything or anybody.

But, before forgetting her entirely, I proposed to see the man who had replaced me in her heart, the man who had beguiled her, whom she loved! What a lucky dog he was! At that moment I would have given all that I possessed to be loved by Nicette.

I had been told that he went to see her every evening; I would see him that very day. There was a café almost opposite the shop, where I could wait unobserved, for I did not choose that the ungrateful girl should witness all the torments of my feeble heart.

I passed the day as best I could, and at five o’clock I betook myself to Rue Saint-Honoré. When I came in sight of her shop, I looked to see if she was in the doorway. She was not there, and I slipped into the café unseen by her. I took my seat at a table that touched the window, and ordered a half-bowl of punch, because it would naturally take me some time to drink it. The waiter made me repeat my order; no doubt he took me for an Englishman or a Fleming; but I cared little. I took up a newspaper to keep myself in countenance, and kept my

eyes fixed on the flower shop.

The time seems very long when one anticipates a pleasure, and still longer when one is suffering and in dread. Would the darkness never come! It was October, and should have been dark at six o'clock. Could it be that it was not yet six? I looked at the clock; it marked only half-past five; it was probably slow. I looked at my watch; twenty-five minutes past five! It was cruel! I tried to drink the punch that was before me, but it was impossible for me to swallow; I had not dined, but I had been suffocating since the morning.

At last the daylight faded. How was I to see what happened inside the shop? how was I to distinguish that man's features? I hoped that she would have a light. Sure enough, she came out with a light and began to carry in her flowers. What sadness, what depression in her whole aspect! She seated herself in the shop, beside the table, but she did not write! She sighed and glanced often into the street. She was expecting someone—and it was not I!

It was almost seven o'clock, and no one had appeared. Suppose he should not come? Should I be any happier then? Had she not agreed that morning that I knew the truth? And had her blush, her embarrassment, told me nothing?

A man appeared and entered the shop; he sat down beside her. Great God! did not my eyes deceive me? It was Raymond! Raymond with Nicette! Raymond her lover! No, no; that was impossible!

I rushed out of the café to make sure of the truth. Someone ran after me and stopped me. It was the waiter; I had forgotten to pay. I did not understand very well what he said, but I put three francs in his hand and he left me. The darkness allowed me to remain in the street unseen by Nicette, while I could see her plainly. It was in very truth Raymond whom I had seen, whom I saw. He was talking to her very earnestly, and she listened with attention. I read in her eyes the interest she took in what he was saying; she seemed more distressed than ever, she wept. He took her hand and squeezed it tenderly! She did not withdraw it! That lovely hand abandoned to Raymond! Ah! it was all over, I could no longer doubt my misfortune. I felt that I must fly while I still had strength to do so, and must never see her again! If only I could at the same time banish her image from my thoughts! But the idea that she loved Raymond crushed me, haunted me incessantly! So it was for Raymond's benefit that I had preserved intact that flower which it would have been so sweet to me to pluck! I respected her innocence, and this was my reward!

If some respectable young man, of obscure station like herself, had won her heart while seeking her hand, I might perhaps have consoled myself; at all events, I should have been proud of having kept her pure and worthy of his

vows. But that such a fellow as Raymond should triumph over Nicette! By what spell could he have fascinated her? He was neither young nor handsome; he was a stupid, vain, chattering bore! If there was anything lovable about him, I had never discovered it! And that was the man she preferred to me! Oh! these women!

I was no longer surprised at the embarrassment I had observed in Raymond's manner when we last met. The traitor! so that was why he avoided me. The fellow was my evil genius, in very truth! He knew that I knew Nicette; he knew, perhaps, that I loved her. If I had listened to nothing but my rage, I should have gone to him and insulted him. But how can one obtain satisfaction from a dastard? and would his death make Nicette what I formerly believed her to be? I would despise one and forget the other; that was the only course for me to pursue.

Once more I sought in repose oblivion of my suffering. What a different night from the last! Last night, forming delightful plans based upon love and constancy; to-night, cursing that sentiment and the woman who had inspired it! If the weariness caused by such tempests of emotion made me doze for a moment, my first thought, on reopening my eyes, was of all my blasted hopes.

When I was dressed, I could not resist the longing to talk with Raymond. I promised myself to retain my self-control, to hold myself in check, and to conceal the state of my heart. I hastened across the landing and knocked and rang at his door. The concierge knew that he was at home; he was not in the habit of rising early; still he did not open the door. I rang again, and that time the bellrope remained in my hand. I heard sounds at last; I recognized his heavy tread, and soon his nasal tones greeted my ears.

"Who is it making such a row at my door before seven o'clock? It's outrageous to wake a man up like this!"

"It's I, neighbor; it's I, Dorsan; I want to talk with you."

For some seconds he did not reply, and when he did I knew by his voice that he was not gratified by my call.

"What! is it you, my dear neighbor?"

"Yes, it's I."

"What brings you here so early?"

"You shall learn; but first let me in; I don't like to talk through a door."

"I beg your pardon—you see, I'm in my nightshirt."

"Bah! what difference does it make to me, whether you're in your nightshirt, or naked, or fully dressed? I have no desire to examine your person. Open the

door! then you can go back to bed; that won't interfere with my talking to you."

"You see, I passed most of the night writing birthday rhymes; and I am still sleepy."

"Oh! morbleu! Monsieur Raymond, open the door, or I'll break it down!"

The tone in which I uttered the last words indicated a purpose to carry out my threat. He did not wait for me to repeat it, but opened the door, and, running back through his little reception room, jumped into bed, where he wrapped himself up in the bedclothes, leaving nothing exposed but his nose and his great eyes, which he turned from side to side with an air of uneasiness, not venturing to look at me. I followed; the first thing I saw on entering his bedroom was a dozen or more bunches of orange blossoms, like those Nicette used to leave at my door; they were symmetrically arranged on my neighbor's dressing table. That sight tore my heart, but I had promised myself to be philosophical, so I sat down beside Raymond's bed and tried to speak very calmly.

"How are you this morning, Monsieur Raymond?"

He gazed at me in amazement.

"Was it to inquire about my health that you broke my bellrope and threatened to break down my door?"

"Oh! you must know that that was a joke! I had a question I wanted to ask you.—You have some very pretty bouquets there; it seems that you too are fond of orange blossoms?"

"Yes, yes; I like their odor very much; it's good for the nerves, and I am very nervous, you know."

"There's a bond of sympathy between us, for these bouquets bear a surprising resemblance to those that adorn my bedroom—and for which you once expressed your admiration."

"Yes, that's true; indeed, I remember now that that was what gave me the idea of having some myself."

"And are your flower dealer and mine the same?"

He did not know what to say, and his head disappeared for a moment under the bedclothes.

"Well, neighbor?"

"Oh! I haven't any regular flower dealer; I go sometimes to one, sometimes to another."

"Come, come, Monsieur Raymond, why fence with me; is this the confidence of which you claim to set me an example? Are you afraid of making me angry?"

Don't be afraid; I ceased to think about little Nicette a long while ago."

At that, he took his whole head out from beneath the bedclothes, and looked at me with a surprised and pleased expression.

"What! do you mean it? you have ceased to think about the little flower girl?"

"I never thought about her!"

"Well! do you know, I almost suspected as much! Besides, we have Madame de Marsan, who must occupy a good deal of our attention!"

"Never mind Madame de Marsan; tell me about your intrigue with Nicette."

"Oh! it isn't a long story! I confess that I am madly in love with her! You know how pretty she is!"

"A saucy face!"

"The deuce! saucy! you call her saucy! you are hard to please."

"Well?"

"I go to make love to her almost every night. At first she was a little inclined to be wild; but I was so skilful at wheedling her, that now she can't get along without me, and I am sure that she adores me."

"Has she told you so?"

"Almost; besides, those things don't need to be told; they can be seen. I know women so well!"

"You are more fortunate than I. So you have triumphed?"

"Not altogether as yet; but it won't be long, I am getting ahead very fast. Look you, with women, just be assiduous, persistent, and agreeable, and you can be sure of victory! Oh! I'm a crafty dog, I am, a finished roué! A man must be that, to please the women. Sentiment, sighs, tender words, those were all right once; nowadays, at the first meeting, you inflame; at the second, you toy; at the third, you take a kiss—pinch the knee, squeeze her, and she is yours."

I could not restrain an angry movement.

"And this is the man she loves!" I said, rising abruptly.

Raymond, terrified by my action, had buried himself anew under the bedclothes.

"Do you still have nervous paroxysms?" he cried, without showing his face.

"No, no, I'm all right. Adieu, Monsieur Raymond! be happy; and, above all things, make Nicette happy."

With that, I left him, returned to my own room, and locked the door. There I could at least give free vent to the passions which agitated me, and which I had

had the strength to restrain in Raymond's presence. My heart was torn by love, jealousy, anger, and the most profound melancholy in turn. I tried to regain my self-control and to overcome a weakness at which I blushed; then I went out. For a week I courted the distractions of society and abandoned myself to what men call pleasure. But those things that once attracted me no longer had the slightest charm for me. I went to the theatre, to balls, concerts, the most brilliant parties; everywhere I was bored and discontented; wherever I went, I carried in the depths of my heart a melancholy, a depression which I could not overcome.

I was always delighted to go home; I was happier there; I sought new suffering in my memories; but that very suffering had a charm for me which I failed to find in society. But if I wished to forget *her*, I must needs leave those lodgings. How could I fail to think of her in that room, on that bed where she had slept! everything there reminded me of her and fed my love for her. I felt that I must go away; that I must leave Paris, where life had become unendurable to me. Distance, change of scene, and time, which, they say, triumphs over everything,—those were the remedies with which I must treat the insane passion that held sway in my heart. I would go to see my sister; she had ceased to expect me, but she would be none the less glad to see me; at all events, I should find there people who loved me. It seemed to me that that would do me good. My preparations were soon made. I locked the door of my lodgings, which I retained, although I was resolved never to occupy them again. I forbade Madame Dupont to let anyone enter except herself; she was to take care of them. I paid two quarters' rent in advance, and started for my sister's.

XXVIII

LIFE IN THE PROVINCES

I arrived in due time at the country estate where my sister ordinarily passed the whole year. From a distance I saw that the window shutters were closed. Could they be travelling? She surely would have written me. I rang the bell at the gateway; the gardener admitted me and informed me that Monsieur and Madame Déneterre had gone to Melun for the winter, and that they came into the country on fine Sundays only. As the city was only two or three miles distant, I set out on foot. It was beginning to be dark, but there was a moon. On the way, I tried to imagine what had induced my dear relations to change their mode of life. They used never to leave their country house; but they had been married a number of years, and they probably were beginning to find that they had not so much to say to each other. Then the winter evenings seemed long to them, I supposed, so it occurred to them to try passing them in town. That is the way such fine plans for the future always end! Is there anything on earth that is beyond the reach of the effects of time?

I came in sight of the first houses of Melun, a pretty little town, where I used to enjoy myself immensely in the old days; I should surely find it delightful, now that Paris was unendurable to me. This much was certain, that change of scene necessarily causes distraction, and distraction is the very best remedy for pains of the heart and mind. Besides, I was no Werther; I had no inclination to nourish my love and my sorrow in dense forests, or on the brink of a precipice. On the contrary, I was trying to cure myself; that is the most sensible course; less romantic, it is true, but more in accordance with nature; and I am all for the natural.

I inquired my sister's address. I walked through a part of the town, which would be its Faubourg Saint-Germain, and I soon found the Déneterre mansion. In the provinces a family generally occupies a whole house, whereas in Paris three families often live on the same floor. I confess that it is pleasanter to be alone in your house, to be able to do whatever you choose without fear of annoying your neighbors, to be spared the necessity of meeting repulsive faces, insolent servants, and snarling children on the stairs, to find no marks of a dog or cat on your doormat, when for cleanliness' sake you keep no animals yourself; and lastly, to be able to dismiss your concierge when he is disrespectful, whereas

in Paris you must bribe him, no matter how insolent he may be, at the risk of passing the night in the street or at the police station, because, in the company of your friends, you have forgotten to keep watch of the time. These are some notable advantages of the provinces over the capital.

My sister uttered a cry of surprise and delight when she saw me; she threw her arms round my neck and kissed me.

“Is it really you, dear Eugène?” she said. “In truth, I didn’t expect to see you before next spring. Ah! it’s very sweet of you to remember your best friends at last.”

I did not tell her that nothing but the desire to avoid Nicette had driven me from Paris; there was no need of that; besides, I preferred to be spared the comments of my dear Amélie, who was something of a gossip, which one is sure to be when one lives in the provinces, where there is not enough to do to keep people from meddling with their neighbors’ affairs.

My sister sent for her husband, who had gone to play billiards with some friends.

“So he no longer passes all his evenings at home?” I asked Amélie.

“Oh! my dear, the evenings are very long in winter, and one must do something. In the provinces, gambling is the general rule; one must needs conform to it and do as others do.”

“That is true; it is what I have always thought, and what I told you at the time of your marriage, when you were laying out a scheme of life which resembled nothing ever heard of. You told me that I was a heedless, foolish fellow, because I laughed at your plans of seclusion, and of the happiness you were to enjoy in solitude; and now you have abandoned that solitude!”

“Oh! only for the winter; for in winter the country is very dismal; you see nobody, you can’t walk or drive. Everybody flocks to the town, where they give receptions, play cards, dance sometimes—in short, enjoy themselves. That’s why we came. What would you have? we must do as others do.”

“Why, it seems perfectly natural to me. At all events, you are happy, aren’t you?”

“Yes, my dear, very happy! My husband is the best of men; a little obstinate, to be sure, and not always willing to listen to me when I prove to him that I am right. The result is that we dispute sometimes; but that’s nothing!”

“Oh, no! besides, we must do as others do, must we not?”

“You haven’t kissed my children yet, my two little boys; they are charming little fellows, perfect demons! But bright! you may judge for yourself.”

“Where are they?”

“They’re in bed; it’s nearly eight o’clock.”

“We mustn’t wake them.”

“No; you shall see them to-morrow. It’s more than a year since you came to see us—fifteen months at least! They have grown tremendously in that time! The older one is four now, and the younger three. You can tell us whom they look like.”

Déneterre’s appearance interrupted our conversation. My brother-in-law manifested great pleasure at my arrival; he embraced me with sincere cordiality, urged me to pass the winter with them at Melun, and I saw in his eyes that his heart agreed with his lips; I noticed simply that when he came in he had in his hands a billiard cue, which he stood in a corner. We talked business and the news of Paris for a moment. Déneterre was in good spirits; his cotton mill was prosperous, his business was in excellent shape, he hoped to be able to retire and live on his income in a few years.

While we were talking, Amélie went in and out, gave orders, had a room made ready for me, invited me to take something before supper.

“I never take supper,” I said.

“You must do it here, my dear; it’s one of the customs of the province, and it’s not disagreeable, I assure you.”

“All right; I’ll take supper when I am hungry.”

“Speaking of eating,” said Déneterre, “where are the children? Why don’t they come to kiss their uncle?”

“They’re in bed, my dear,” said Amélie.

“In bed, already! why, that’s ridiculous! You put them to bed too early.”

“Their health requires it.”

“Boys don’t need to sleep so much.”

“Boys who run about and play all day must need rest when night comes.”

“No matter; I want them to come to kiss their uncle.”

“They can do it just as well to-morrow morning.”

“To-morrow! to-morrow! that won’t be the same thing at all. I’m going to get them.”

“What! wake them up! upon my word! I would like to see you—just to make them sick.”

“You’re the one who makes them sick, making them sleep like dormice.”

“At this rate, I shan’t have anything to say about my own children.”

“They are boys; it’s my place to train them.”

“You don’t understand anything about it; besides, it isn’t my fault that they’re not girls.”

As I saw that the discussion was becoming warm, I made haste to change the subject by taking the billiard cue and handing it to Déneterre.

“Is this cue yours?”

“Yes; it’s a prize cue that I won at pool not long ago.”

“Ah! so you play pool, do you?”

“Every night; I am a very good hand at it.”

“Very well; go and finish your game. No ceremony between us, you know. Besides, I am tired and am going to bed.”

“Until to-morrow, then,” said Déneterre, taking his prize cue eagerly; “you must join us to-morrow, and you will see what progress I’ve made since last year, especially since I have been using a patent cue.”

Déneterre left us, and Amélie took me to my room, showing me on the way a large part of the house, and telling me in detail all that she had lately had done to it, and the further improvements that she had in view. I noticed in my sister’s conversation something of the tone of the old gentleman with whom I had dined at Madame de Marsan’s country house, and who dilated so complacently on the details of his barnyard and hencoop. But I began to understand that the story of the birth of a chicken and the education of a rabbit might be of great interest to people who had nothing else to do.

In the course of our conversation, I asked my sister if she often had disputes with her husband.

“Disputes!” she exclaimed, with a surprised look; “why, we never have any.”

“I thought that just now——”

“Oh! you call that a dispute! why, my dear boy, that was nothing at all; we have a hundred little arguments like that during the day; but they’re not disputes! You see, when two people live together, it’s very hard to be always of the same opinion.”

“I should think that it would be more agreeable.”

“But it’s impossible! Ah! my dear Eugène, anyone can see that you’re a bachelor! you know nothing at all about married life; but before long I hope that you will know all the joys of marriage, of which you have no conception now.”

“No; I agree that I have no conception of them.”

“Patience, it will come in time. Good-night, dear Eugène; until to-morrow!”

My sister left me, and I went to bed reflecting on the manner of life of which Amélie and her husband had just given me a specimen; and yet it was a delightful household, so everybody said. This much was certain—that my sister was virtuous, and true to her husband, and that Déneterre was very fond of his wife and children. Why, then, those frequent disputes?—I saw that my sister was right: I had undertaken to argue about conjugal happiness, and I did not know what it was. I concluded that the best thing I could do was to go to sleep.

The journey had tired me, but the sight of my sister and her husband had diverted my thoughts from my grief, for all troubles yield at last to time and to distraction. I fell asleep in a more tranquil frame of mind than I had known for a long while; and I should doubtless have slept well into the forenoon, if my dear nephews had not taken it upon themselves to wake me. At seven o’clock I heard a great noise in my room; I felt somebody pulling my leg and my arm; I opened my eyes and saw my sister’s two children, who had climbed on my bed and were amusing themselves by playing tricks and tumbling all over me. While I, still half asleep, gazed vacantly at them, I heard a roar of laughter behind me; I drew the curtain aside and discovered Déneterre seated a few feet from the bed and laughing at my surprise.

“Well!” he said; “here they are; what do you think of them?”

“Why, they are in excellent condition, so far as I can see.”

“Aren’t they fine boys?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Ah! I’ll make hearty little chaps of them, I tell you! They’re such merry, lively rascals!”

“So I see; just tell them not to pinch me so hard. Here’s one of them who won’t let go my calf.”

“It’s only play, my dear fellow. They wake me like this every morning. Tell me, is there any greater pleasure?”

“Yes, to a father, it must be perfectly charming; but to an uncle, you see, it hasn’t quite the same fascination.”

“Parbleu! it rests entirely with you to become acquainted with that pleasure; marry, and have children; they’ll caress you as these little fellows caress me.”

“Oh! I shall do it some day, no doubt.”

“Come, my hearties, kiss your uncle and let him dress.”

To prove their affection, the “hearties” threw themselves on my stomach,

seized my head, and, while kissing me, rubbed their faces clean and wiped their noses on my cheeks and nose; they tried to see which would kiss me the more. I was suffocating, I cried for mercy; their papa was forced to order them to desist, but they listened to him no more than to me, and kept on as before. Luckily, my sister arrived and the scene changed.

“What!” she exclaimed, striding angrily toward her husband; “you brought the children to their uncle before I had washed and dressed them and combed their hair?”

“Well! what of that, my dear love? must they be in their Sunday best to bid their uncle good-morning?”

“It isn’t a question of Sunday best; but I should have liked Eugène to see them first when they were decently clean; and when they have once begun to play, it isn’t possible to keep them looking decent. But you do everything without consulting me!”

“I assure you, my dear sister, that I consider them very nice as they are.”

“Come, young gentlemen, breakfast is waiting.”

The word *breakfast* caused my little rascals to decamp at once; they were soon off my bed, and I was able to rise.

It seemed to me that examples of wedded bliss succeeded each other rather swiftly under my sister’s roof. But I was inclined to think that, if I should marry, I should not take them as patterns in the matter of bringing up children. But I had arrived only the night before, and it was fair to wait before forming a final judgment.

I went downstairs and joined the family in the dining room. While we breakfasted, Amélie and her husband described their daily life to me. In the morning, business, housekeeping, and a walk when they had any time to themselves; in the evening, Déneterre went to the café to play pool, while his wife dressed to go out. Every evening in the week was taken: Monday, at the notary’s, a small and select party. The most notable of the townspeople met there. There was little card playing, but much political discussion, and one could learn there the news of all the cabinets in Europe; the interests of each of the powers were discussed, and the *Moniteur* was read aloud. Tuesdays, at the house of a retired merchant; he was a rich man and entertained handsomely: beer, cake, and sweetened water flavored with orange. The play was for very high stakes: boston for six *blancs*, and *écarté* for five sous; the bets sometimes went as high as seventy-five centimes! But all games were played there; whist and boston with great skill. No one called for six tricks unless he had eight, or stood unless

he held an *indépendance*; so that it was very unusual to see a *remise* in the course of the evening. Wednesdays, the evening was spent with the widow of the justice's clerk, who had four daughters to marry and no money to give them. There they played innocent games or acted charades or proverbs. In the first place, those games do not wear out cards, and require fewer candles; in the second place, the young men soon become well acquainted with the young ladies while playing such games. They talk and laugh together; and many a passion has had its birth in *crambo*, or the little box of *amourettes*. While whispering a *confidence*, one can easily put in a word of love; while pretending to sulk, one can say many things! That is the way more than one marriage is made; and when one has four daughters to look after, no means should be neglected. However, everything was all right at the widow's; the games were carried on with the strictest decorum, and blind-man's-buff seated was prohibited. Thursdays, the meetings were at an ex-councillor's. Everybody was not received there; only the cream of society. The guests were forbidden to talk politics, war, affairs of state, or newspaper rumors. There was no card playing, because that was a bad example for the young; there was no dancing, because madame la conseillère, who was old but coquettish, could never obtain a partner; there were no charades, because they disturb the orderly arrangement of a salon, and may result in marring the furniture and tearing curtains; there were no innocent games, because the councillor considered them indecorous; there were no refreshments, because well-bred people never need anything of the sort. With these restrictions, one could say and do whatever one chose, and, of course, enjoy one's self immensely. On Fridays they met at the house of an elector, whose wife, who was young and pretty, followed all the fashions of the capital. There you did whatever you chose; no restraint, no ceremony. Dancing was permitted, and singing, when anyone desired to sing. Sometimes there was instrumental music, because there was a piano. All sorts of games were played, from *loto* to chess; and you could risk a sou or a louis at your pleasure. Everybody said what came into his head; they laughed and joked and talked as they liked; opinions were free; almost all the newspapers were to be found there, and all sorts of refreshments were provided. It was after the style of the receptions in the *Chaussée d'Antin* at Paris.

On Saturdays—ah! that was the day when they all met at my sister's.

“You will see what fun we have,” she said to me; “such a noise, such *go*! You can't hear what anyone says, but we laugh, and everyone tries to be merrier than the rest. Why, sometimes the time passes so quickly, that they are still here at half-past ten!”

“Half-past ten in the morning?”

“Why, no! in the evening. Are you mad?”

“Do you call that late?”

“I should say so! the custom is to go home at ten o’clock precisely.”

“Great heaven! I am no longer surprised that your children wake you up at seven o’clock! But on Sundays?”

“Oh! on Sundays we meet at monsieur le maire’s. There are always a lot of people there. He has a billiard table, and, besides that, the young people dance. You can judge for yourself what fun we have. That, my dear Eugène, is the way we employ the week. As you see, there is some new pleasure every day, and we have no time to be bored.”

“You have no theatrical performances?”

“Very seldom; but we get along without them.”

“No concerts?”

“Why, what about those we give among ourselves? And then, in fine weather, there are the drives about the neighborhood, which are beautiful: the little forest of La Rochette, Trois-Moulins, and a thousand delicious spots. And fishing and hunting, and the news of the town; the little intrigues that everybody knows about after a week, the quarrels, the gossip, the comments, the fashions, which we think about here even more than they do in Paris; and the parties, dinners, baptisms, weddings; ah! the weddings above all! they give us something to talk about for a month!—Oh! you’ll see, my dear brother, that we have a much better time in the provinces than they do in Paris.”

My sister did not interrupt her enumeration of the pleasures of provincial life until she saw her husband giving coffee to the little boys, when a slight discussion ensued.

“Why do you give those children coffee? it won’t do them any good.”

“Bah!”

“It excites them.”

“Bah!”

“And then, they don’t sleep at night.”

“Bah! bah!”

“Oh! how you tire me with your *bah! bah!* I tell you, I don’t want them to drink it!”

“Just a drop.”

“It makes no difference.”

“It’s three-fourths milk.”

“If there were twice as much, it would make no difference.—Come here, messieurs, and don’t drink any more.”

“I want some more!”

“Here, my boy, drink this.”

“Will you obey me this minute!”

“Come, come, let them alone.”

“No, I don’t want them to drink it.”

And my sister seized the cup, her husband held fast to it, and the children squealed. Luckily, between them the cup was broken and the coffee spilled, which fact put an end to this scene of domestic bliss, to which I found it difficult to accustom myself. The day was employed in showing me the town and taking me to see my sister’s intimate acquaintances. I let her take me wherever she wished; I was so complaisant and docile that she was enchanted. She found me much more staid and reasonable than at my last visit.

After dinner, Déneterre took me to play a game of pool at his café; then we went home to get my sister to go to a reception. It was Thursday, unluckily for me. I had fallen upon the ex-councillor’s day, and I saw none but cold, forbidding faces, and stiff, formal figures. Fortunately, the guests did not arrive until half-past eight and left at a quarter to ten, so that the soirée lasted only an hour and a quarter; the first third was occupied in salutations and reverences, the second in exchanging commonplaces and nodding the head in assent, and the last in yawns, concealed with the hand, the handkerchief, or the snuffbox.

The next evening belonged to the elector; it compensated me to some extent for the boredom of the preceding one. I found there several pretty women and a little less formality and more merriment. In the course of a week I ran the whole gamut of receptions and knew the whole town. I was well received everywhere; I was rich and unmarried: that was more than was necessary to assure me a warm welcome.

I began to become accustomed to the conjugal discussions, and to the pranks of my nephews, who were little demons in very truth. I saw that, taking everything together, my sister and her husband were happy; in the finest weather of one’s life storms may arise; a picture must have shadows to bring out the lights. Their little quarrels did not prevent their loving each other, and their children’s defects were graces in their eyes. However, I hoped that, if I ever married, I should have fewer petty *discussions* with my wife, and I resolved to

bring up my children in an entirely different way; but perhaps I should have troubles which my sister and her husband had never known.

I had been in the province a fortnight. I cannot say that I enjoyed myself exactly, but at least I was not discontented. The novelty of the life, the original faces that I saw every night, my sister's affection and her husband's—all these served to divert my thoughts; time produced its inevitable effect, my melancholy disappeared, and I became what I used to be. However, I had not entirely forgotten Nicette; I felt that I still loved her; but when the thought of her came to my mind, I had the strength to put it aside, and I imposed silence on my heart.

I would have been glad to fall in love anew—were it only a caprice, one of those flames which used to set me on fire so quickly; perhaps that would cure me entirely. But long for it as I would, I could not compel any such feeling! I looked about me; I saw some good-looking women, some few faces formed to please; but I saw nobody who resembled Nicette.

XXIX

MADemoiselle Pélagie.—A SCHEME TO MARRY ME

My sister, who was really a most excellent woman,—due allowance being made for her tendency to be a little obstinate,—was overjoyed that I had ceased to speak of returning to Paris. She had no mercy on herself in her endeavors to procure for me what she called new pleasures every day. She would have been so delighted to induce me to settle at Melun! From time to time, she would ask my opinion concerning the young women I had seen the night before; she would dilate in great detail upon the virtues, talents, and amiable qualities of each one of them; then she would extol the pleasures of wedded life, the joy of having children, which, however, did not prevent her shrieking after her boys the next moment, and disputing with her husband; but it was understood that those were among the joys of wedded life. Ah! my dear sister! I saw what you were driving at! you had gone back to your favorite idea; you were determined, in short, that I should do as others did, for that was your constant refrain. And then, to negotiate the marriage of one's brother is an affair of such vast importance in a small town!—What an exhaustless source of interviews, confidential communications, visits, parties, new dresses—and, therefore, of pleasure!

For some time I did not allow myself to be tempted. However, I was beginning to believe that one might as well do as others do, especially when one has lost that desire to flutter about the fair sex, that longing for every pretty woman, which is so natural to young men. There was only one for whom I had had any longing, for many weeks past—but she had deceived me, so I must needs forget her as well as the rest.

I had noticed for several days that my sister seemed even more content than usual; I often saw her whispering with Déneterre, who in the end always did what she wanted him to. They extolled still more warmly the joys of wedlock, but they said nothing more about any of the young women I had already seen; they evidently had some new hope; no doubt, I should soon learn what was in the wind.

“I shall try to make myself look very nice to-night,” said Amélie one day. “You will go with me, won't you, dear Eugène? It's Madame Lépine's evening,—she was the elector's wife,—and they say there'll be a good many people there.”

“But I seem to see the same persons every time.”

“Ah! there’ll be some new faces for you to-night; Madame de Pontchartrain has returned from her place in the country, and she will be there.”

“Who is this Madame de Pontchartrain?”

“A most respectable person, who has an income of seven thousand francs and is seventy years old.”

Very respectable, no doubt; but I could not see why I should be especially interested in Madame de Pontchartrain. Doubtless I should learn the answer to the enigma in the evening.

After dinner madame set about dressing. I had thought that Parisian women were coquettes, but since I had lived in the provinces I had learned to do justice to the belles of the capital, who passed two hours less before their mirrors than the beauties of a small town. Déneterre went off to play pool, and I walked in the garden while my sister was dressing; for the first time I was vexed by her slowness; I was in a hurry to arrive at Madame Lépine’s—I, who ordinarily accompanied my sister solely to oblige her; but one sometimes has presentiments.

My sister was ready at last; Déneterre returned, and we started. We soon reached our destination; in a small town no two houses are far apart. We were announced in due form; for in the provinces you may not enter a salon in good society without being announced. I glanced around at the guests and saw no unfamiliar faces. I was almost angry; but while Madame Lépine was arranging the different games, I saw my sister go to her and heard her say:

“My brother won’t play cards to-night; don’t count on him for boston or reversis; he prefers the games.”

I had not said anything of the sort to her; what did it mean, that she took that step without consulting me? I was just on the point of demanding an explanation, when the servant announced:

“Madame de Pontchartrain and her niece.”

Aha! there was a niece! I began to understand. All eyes turned toward the door; I did like everybody else, and I saw a tall, thin, angular, yellow-skinned woman, who, despite her age, held herself very erect and seemed to have retained all the vivacity of youth; that was the aunt; let us say no more of her, but give our attention to the niece.

A flattering murmur ran about the salon as she entered. In truth, she was very pretty; of medium height, but well set up; and if she was a little stiff in her carriage, it was the result of her training. Her features were regular, complexion

rosy, hair very beautiful, and eyes very large; as for their color, I could not as yet discover it, for she kept them fixed on the floor.

While Madame Lépine went to meet Madame de Pontchartrain and her niece, and all the young women whispered together as they scrutinized the newcomer, in whom they were undoubtedly seeking defects which they would speedily find,—for women are very skilful in detecting at a glance anything disadvantageous to their rivals,—I noticed that my sister looked furtively at me, trying to read in my eyes the impression that Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain had produced on my heart.

Ah! my poor Amélie! my heart was perfectly calm!—calm, do I say? alas, no! it was not calm as yet, but it was not that young woman who excited it. I wished that it were; she was very pretty; she might well attract any man, and I should have been delighted to love her.

The niece's name was Pélégie; I heard her called so by her aunt, who had taken her seat at a whist table from which she would not stir until it was time to go home. She urged her niece to enjoy herself, to be less shy; Pélégie blushed, and replied very gently:

“Yes, aunt.”

The young woman seemed to be the personification of innocence.

Madame Lépine took possession of Mademoiselle Pélégie and led her to the circle formed for the games. I took my place by her side; I was curious to make the acquaintance of that young novice. I noticed that all the other young women watched me when they saw me place my chair beside Pélégie's; jealousy and spite were blazing in their eyes already! In the provinces, people are so quick to interpret the slightest action, the slightest indication of preference! But it mattered little to me what they thought; I was at liberty to do whatever I chose.

How uncharitable young women are to one another! Those who came regularly to the receptions enjoyed the bashfulness and embarrassment of the newcomer, and tried to intensify them by putting the most difficult questions to her in the games and making her do what was likely to confuse her most. I detected their petty malice, and I tried to put Mademoiselle Pélégie more at her ease. Once she attempted to thank me, and began a sentence the end of which I did not hear; but she raised her eyes an instant, and I was able to see that they were of a very tender shade of blue, and sweet in expression.

Madame Lépine, who was a very amiable person and did her best to entertain her guests, asked Madame de Pontchartrain if her niece was musical.

“Yes, madame,” the old aunt replied; “Pélégie sings, and accompanies herself

on the piano.”

Immediately all the young women begged Pélégie to sing them something. They hoped to find food for criticism. Pélégie demurred very awkwardly; she glanced at her aunt, who gave her a look which clearly signified *sing*; whereupon she rose; I escorted her to the piano and offered to accompany her.

“No, monsieur,” she said; “I will play my own accompaniment.”

Surely any other woman would have thanked me in a different way; but Pélégie was innocence itself, and I saw that she had not learned to embellish her speeches.

She sang us an old ballad in six stanzas. The subject was love; but no one would have suspected it from listening to Pélégie, who imparted absolutely no expression to her voice or to the instrument. Any Parisian girl, even when fresh from her boarding school, would have played and sung much better than that; she would have rolled her eyes gracefully, whereas this one did not lift them from the keys; she would have put some soul into the words of love, whereas this one repeated them as coldly as possible. The comparison at the first blush seemed unfavorable to Pélégie; but when I reflected that that which prevented her from performing more brilliantly proved her innocence and virtue, I considered that her awkwardness was entirely to her credit.

My sister was enraptured. She saw me sit beside Pélégie, speak to her often, escort her to the piano, and take her back to her chair. That was more than was necessary to indicate the birth of love; and, of course, it would naturally end in marriage.

The party came to an end; everybody took their leave; but Amélie found an opportunity to present me to the great-aunt, who honored me with an almost affable glance. As I went downstairs, I found myself beside Pélégie; I could not do otherwise than offer her my hand. She looked at her aunt; a glance authorized her to accept, and she held out her hand as awkwardly as possible. I was careful to touch only the tips of her fingers; I had fallen in with the manners and customs of the town. However, the ladies lived only a few steps away; so we soon reached their house, where we left them after the three conventional bows; I observed, by the way, that Pélégie was very proficient in the matter of courtesies.

When we reached home, Amélie turned the conversation upon Mademoiselle Pélégie; I expected it, and I let her talk with her husband. They vied with each other in extolling her to the skies.

“She’s a charming girl!”

“Upon my word, she’s the prettiest girl in Melun!”

“And so perfectly well bred!”

“Wonderfully so! a strict education; but what manners! what decorous behavior in company!”

“She is innocence personified.”

“She’s an excellent musician.”

“And no one would suspect it, because she makes no pretensions.”

“Her aunt has no other heir; she’s an excellent match!”

“The man who gets her won’t make a bad speculation!”

“And he can be sure of his wife’s virtue.”

Annoyed by my silence, my sister addressed herself to me at last.

“Well, Eugène, tell us what you think of Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain.”

“My dear girl, what do you expect me to add to your eulogies of her?”

“Aren’t you of our opinion?”

“Why, yes, pretty nearly.”

“Oh! you don’t choose to admit it, but I saw well enough that you thought her pretty.”

“Pretty; to be sure she is.”

“And well bred.”

“As to that, I think so, but——”

“In short, she pleased you, my dear brother?”

“Pleased me! oh! come now! I haven’t said anything to prove——”

“But I can’t see why it isn’t perfectly natural. Surely your lady friends in Paris can’t resemble the charming Pélagie?”

“Resemble her! Oh! as to that, I agree with you absolutely.”

Amélie seemed quite content; in vain did I tell her that she was mistaken; she was persuaded that I was in love with Pélagie. Déneterre kept repeating that it would be an excellent match; and as I could not make them stop talking, I adopted the expedient of going to bed.

For several days nothing unusual disturbed the even tenor of life under my sister’s roof. Every evening I went with her to some reception; for when I attempted to stay behind, she always found some way to make me do as she wished. So that I saw Mademoiselle Pélagie every evening, for she accompanied her aunt, who never failed to be on hand for her game of whist or reversis, which she even played in the morning, with three dowagers who had done nothing else

for fifteen years, and in whose eyes their game was of such importance that one wept when her king was trumped, and another fell ill because she had discarded the knave of hearts.

Pélagie took part in the minor games, but she continued to be as shy and embarrassed as on the first day I saw her. As she was very pretty, the other young ladies had no mercy on her. Some of the young lady killers of the town undertook to make to her the pretty, gallant speeches which men of wit no longer venture to use, because they are too trite. But the wit of the dandies of Melun seemed to make no impression on Pélagie's mind; she listened very coldly to their compliments, and made no other reply than a low bow. The young men, vexed to produce so little effect, went elsewhere to play the butterfly. I alone remained true to Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain, and I alone obtained from her replies not quite so laconic. To be sure, I paid her no embarrassing compliments, and placed myself on her level by talking with her of the simplest subjects. She seemed a little less timid with me; she began to raise her eyes when she answered me; and twice I fancied that she actually smiled at me. Decidedly I was a favored mortal.

The novelty of this method of making love amused and distracted me. My heart was still perfectly tranquil in Pélagie's presence; and yet, since I had known her I had thought less of Nicette. The young innocent filled my thoughts, and, while I had no love for her, I liked to be with her; her pretty face did no harm, but her shyness and her artlessness attracted me even more.

My sister had ceased to talk about her, but I saw she was well pleased. The great-aunt treated me very affably; she interrupted her game sometimes to inquire for my health; which fact indicated the extraordinary favor with which she regarded me. The young ladies, it must be said, no longer evinced the same interest in me, manifested much less pleasure at my arrival, and did not make me pay a forfeit at the kissing stage of their games; but as I attached no value to the privilege, I paid no heed to their indifference. The mammas whispered to one another as they looked at me, while the papas smiled slyly at me; everything indicated that a great event was expected; I was perhaps the only one who gave no thought at all to the subject with which the whole town was agog.

Déneterre was the first to open my eyes.

"When's the wedding to be?" he asked me one evening, rubbing his hands.

"What's that? what wedding?"

"Parbleu! yours!"

"Mine! with whom, pray?"

“With whom! with whom! Ah! you choose to be close-mouthed! But we have eyes, my dear fellow, and we know what to think.”

“But I believe I have eyes, too, and I have seen nothing to imply——”

“Come, come, my dear Eugène,” interposed my sister, “why pretend any longer with us, your best friends? You love Pélagic; what do I say? love her? you adore her; I am sure of it. The whole town knows it, too; it’s no longer a mystery.”

“Oho! the whole town knows that——”

“Yes, my dear. And the young woman has shown her preference for you; that also is very easy to see: moreover, no one should claim to cut you out. The aunt considers you a very suitable match; she knew our mother and she thinks a great deal of our family. When her niece is married, she will settle three thousand francs a year on her, and leave her the rest of her property at her death. It seems to me that that is not to be despised; with what you have now, you will be in comfortable circumstances, and you will make a charming couple. Tell me, when do you want me to go to ask for her hand?”

I listened to my sister, and I admit that I was greatly surprised by what I heard. However, on mature reflection, I realized that my conduct, which would never have been noticed at Paris, might well, in a small town, give rise to the conjectures which were relied upon to induce me to marry Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain.

Amélie and her husband told me so often and so earnestly that I loved Pélagic, that I began to think that they would end by making me believe it. And, after all, should I be so badly off if I married that young innocent? If I was not in love with her, perhaps I should be all the happier; moreover, I was well aware that I was incapable of a new love; the most that I could do was to stamp out that which still tormented me in spite of myself.

Beside the innocent Pélagic, I should pass placid days; she was bashful, virtuous, well bred; a husband would be able to mould her as he chose. Friendship, they say, is more durable than love; I would begin with friendship for my wife, so that I might love her the longer. I should not be jealous; I should have one less source of torment. I should have children, whom I would bring up on a very different plan from my sister’s. Finally, having a gentle, guileless, and taciturn wife, we should have none of those little discussions which Amélie called conjugal amenities, but which were in my eyes very unpleasant quarrels.

All these reflections produced a state of indecision, which my sister interpreted in accordance with her favorite idea. Persuaded that I loved Pélagic

secretly, that Pélégie adored me, and that our union would make me the happiest of husbands and ensure my future peace of mind, Amélie urged me, harassed me, persecuted me, to induce me to authorize her to ask for the hand of Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain. At every moment in the day she drew for me a new picture of the delights of wedded life. Déneterre did the same; in the first place, to please his wife, and, secondly, because he thought it would be a good match for me; to cap the climax, even messieurs my nephews had been taught their lesson, and every day, as they climbed on my knees or my shoulders, they would say:

“When are you going to invite us to the wedding, uncle?”

I am naturally weak, as you must have noticed; tired of being tormented from morning till night to marry, I saw that I must either make up my mind to do it or leave the town, where I was already pointed out as Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain’s future husband.

But if I returned to Paris, what should I do there, tired as I was of bachelor life, and conscious of a craving to love, to attach myself to someone, and to detach myself from her whom I had loved so dearly?—No, I would marry, I would adore my wife if possible, and pray that she would prove my rock of salvation.

The result of these reflections was that I said one day in response to my sister’s entreaties:

“Do whatever you choose.”

Amélie asked no further questions; she threw her arms around me, kissed me, and, giving me no chance to add a single word, flew to Madame de Pontchartrain’s to sue for Pélégie’s hand for her brother. In half an hour she returned with the answer, which was favorable.

“She gives her to you!” she cried from the foot of the stairs; “she is yours; everything is agreed upon and settled; to-morrow I will attend to publishing the banns.”

I considered that my sister had been a little too expeditious; it was impossible now to retract; the request had been made and granted, and I was bound!—What! I was going to marry Pélégie, whom I hardly knew? It seemed to me that it must all be a joke; I could not accustom myself to the idea of being Mademoiselle de Pontchartrain’s husband.

XXX

AN INTERVIEW WITH MY INTENDED

After my marriage was decided upon, I received permission to go alone to Madame de Pontchartrain's to pay court to Pélagie in her aunt's presence. In the evening, I sometimes escorted the ladies into society and took them home. It was not infinitely entertaining to me. I began to be weary of all that etiquette and ceremony, of all those provincial puerilities; but I determined that, when I was once married, I would go back to Paris and teach my wife another way to live.

Despite all the efforts my sister made to hasten what she called the instant of my happiness, I could not become Pélagie's husband in less than a month; and in that time I hoped to become better acquainted with my promised bride. To be sure, I saw her every evening; but it was always in company, playing parlor games, where everybody's eyes were fastened on us, trying to divine what two people who are to be married say to each other. Poor dears! in vain did you prick up your ears and stretch your necks, trying to catch our lightest words; you could not possibly hear anything to enlighten you upon that subject, because Mademoiselle Pélagie and I had never spoken of it.

It may seem surprising that a promised husband had not spoken of love and marriage to her to whom his troth was plighted; but I confess that I did not care to admit everybody to the secret of my thoughts, and in company it would have been very hard for me to say anything to Pélagie which would not be overheard by all the ears that were constantly on the alert about us. Moreover, how can one discuss an interesting subject while playing *La Sellette* or *Monsieur le Curé*? I hoped to be less constrained with her in the morning, but the aunt was always there; often, too, some acquaintance came to make a call. I could not see Pélagie alone for an instant; it was impossible to carry on a connected conversation with her, and I began to be impatient. It seemed to me very natural to make the acquaintance of one's wife before marriage; I felt sorely tempted to consign to the Evil One all that provincial etiquette which was so utterly devoid of sense. I decided to apply to my sister to obtain for me an interview with my intended.

"Amélie, I should be very glad to have a little conversation with Pélagie."

"Well, what prevents you, my dear? don't you see her every morning and evening, if you choose?"

"Yes, to be sure, I see her in the morning, but always in the presence of her

aunt and three or four old mummies who would deprive the most impassioned lover of all desire to make love. Besides, Pélégie is very shy; how can you expect her to describe her sentiments before people?"

"Why, my dear, you ought to divine them easily enough from the hints she lets fall."

"My dear girl, at the point we have reached I cannot be content with hints; I want something positive; in short, I want to know what sort of a person I have to do with."

"But you are allowed to talk freely enough, I should think."

"Ha! ha! that is delicious! but I tell you again, it isn't enough for me."

"In the evening, you always sit beside her; you can whisper to her and squeeze her hand."

"My poor Amélie, you make me laugh with your provincial privileges; a man has much greater ones in Paris with young women he isn't proposing to marry."

"So much the worse for the girls in Paris, brother."

"Or so much the better, for, after all, severity overdone is often harmful; when the principles of virtue are once engraved on a girl's mind, I don't see why she should not be allowed a reasonable degree of liberty; those who would make missteps would surely have done it later; but those who would always behave themselves, and would not abuse the privilege of listening to foolish talk, they, my dear Amélie, would bring with them, when they marry, a guarantee of their virtue; for you will agree that there is no great merit in being innocent when it is impossible to be anything else."

"Oh! what ideas you have about women, brother! It is easy to see that you have been spoiled in Paris."

"I have much less narrow ideas than yours as to the training of girls, sister; for example, I strongly approve the English method, by which they are allowed to do whatever they choose before marriage. In London, an unmarried girl goes out alone to call on her friends and acquaintances. She may go to a concert or theatre with a young man, without arousing the suspicion that he is her lover. She goes to balls without a mentor; and in society she may laugh and talk and lead the conversation, without being called to order by her parents. But when she is once married, there's a great difference; she must lead an orderly, quiet life, devoted entirely to the care of her household and her children; she goes out only with her husband, receives no men except in his presence, and at parties and receptions consorts with persons of her own sex, who, like herself, refrain from joining the men, whom they generally leave at table after dinner to drink and tell

stories. Well! do you think that such a very bad system? For my part, I am convinced that there are fewer deceived husbands in England than in France.”

“Bah! they are deceived there before marriage, that’s all the difference.”

“And here, after marriage.”

“Brother!”

“Oh! don’t be angry; I didn’t mean that for you.”

“Well! what is the point of your remarks?”

“I want you to procure me a tête-à-tête with Pélagie.”

“A tête-à-tête! do you mean it?”

“With my future bride, it will be perfectly proper!”

“But propriety—good morals!”

“Propriety and good morals cannot be offended.”

“But the custom!”

“Your customs are beginning to be very irksome to me; and if you don’t obtain me the interview I desire, I am quite capable of decamping some fine morning and leaving you with my intended and her aunt and all the gossip of the town on your hands!”

“Oh! mon Dieu! the reckless fellow! he makes me shudder!—Well, I’ll try to arrange it. After all, you’re to be married in a week, and—and—in fact—— But I have an idea: I will go to Madame de Pontchartrain and ask her permission to take her niece with me to make some purchases that are necessary for her wedding; she can’t refuse me; then I’ll bring Pélagie here, and you can talk to her at your leisure.”

“That’s a happy idea!”

“But I trust, my dear, that you will behave yourself, and——”

“Don’t be alarmed! Really, you have a very low opinion of me.”

“The fact that I am going to fetch your intended proves the contrary.”

My sister did, in fact, go to Madame de Pontchartrain’s. My threat of leaving Melun had made poor Amélie tremble; she had not even been willing to let me go to Paris to purchase the indispensable gifts; Déneterre had undertaken to do all that. I did not insist, for I might have fallen in with somebody in Paris who would have made me forget my marriage.

Amélie succeeded in her mission; she soon returned with Pélagie, who, on seeing me, blushed and courtesied as if I were a stranger.

“Here is my brother, who will be delighted to talk with you,” said Amélie, as

she led Pélégie into the house. "I have a thousand things to do, and I am compelled to leave you for a few minutes; but you will be united in a week, so I can see no great harm in leaving you together."

Amélie left us, and I was alone with my future wife at last. Pélégie seated herself at a considerable distance from me, so I began by placing my chair close to hers and taking possession of both her hands. I was glad to see that she made no effort to withdraw them. I gazed at her for several minutes; she kept her eyes fixed on the floor and said not a word. I concluded that if I did not begin the conversation we should sit in silence and without moving all day long; indeed, it was my place to begin.

"You know, mademoiselle, that we are to be married?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"In a week, I shall be your husband."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Does the prospect please you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then you love me a little?"

"Yes, monsieur."

That was not bad for a beginning. Still, I was anxious to obtain something besides that everlasting *yes, monsieur*.—I tried to go about it so as to make her reply less briefly.

"When you first saw me, did you pick me out from the rest, prefer me to other young men?"

Doubtless that question seemed embarrassing to her; it was some time before she answered, but at last I heard a *yes, monsieur*.

"Had your heart never spoken before you saw me?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

"What! do you mean that you have been in love before?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; I don't know anything about love."

"Why, you do now, don't you?"

"No, monsieur."

"Then you don't love me?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Would you prefer another to me?"

"I don't know, monsieur."

“Suppose you should be married to someone else, would you be sorry?”

“I don’t know, monsieur.”

“Then, why do you marry me?”

“I don’t know, monsieur.”

I nearly lost my patience; the woman would surely drive me mad with her gentleness. I began to be afraid that I had mistaken stupidity for innocence and awkwardness for timidity! But her hand trembled; probably she was afraid that she had angered me. I felt that I must control myself and not frighten her; that was not the way to attract her and win her confidence.

“Pélagie.”

“Monsieur.”

“My dear girl, when you are going to marry a man, you mustn’t call him *monsieur*.”

“What shall I say, then?”

“Call me your *dear*; I hope always to be that.”

“Yes, my dear.”

“Has your aunt brought you up very strictly?”

“Yes, my dear.”

“Don’t you ever receive any young men at your house?”

“No, my dear.”

“Do you like society?”

“Yes, my dear.”

“When we are married, what would you like to do?”

“Whatever you like, my dear.”

“Shall we remain here, or go to Paris to live?”

“Oh! I don’t care. But——”

“Well! go on, don’t be afraid to speak.”

“I think I should like Paris better.”

“In that case, I am delighted to agree with you.”

And I kissed her hand, to manifest a little affection. She hastily withdrew it.

“Pélagie, a promised husband may kiss his betrothed’s hand as much as he pleases.”

“Really?”

“I give you my word.”

Instantly she offered me both hands. Her docility was charming; it was something, at all events.

“Pélagie, what has your aunt ever said to you about me?”

“She told me I might listen to you.”

“And then?”

“That you had asked for my hand, and she had given it to you.”

“So she didn’t consult you beforehand?”

“No, my dear. What for?”

“Why, to know if you liked me.”

“Oh! it wasn’t worth while.”

“But it seems to me that if——”

“I am too well bred not to obey my aunt.”

“But if I had been old, ugly, and gouty?”

“That wouldn’t have made any difference.”

“You would have married me just the same?”

“Of course, if my aunt had said so.”

“Why, then you have no inclination for me?”

“What is an inclination?”

“What! has your aunt never told you that you must love your husband?”

“Oh, yes!”

“And be faithful to him?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Do whatever he wishes?”

“Oh, yes!”

“And never listen to other men?”

“Oh, yes!”

I could stand it no longer; I leaped from my chair. Pélagie, terribly frightened, rose also and looked at me. I paced the floor with long strides. But she came toward me.

“Have you hurt yourself?” she asked, opening her eyes to their fullest extent. I could not help smiling at her question. I put my arms around her and embraced her with considerable warmth; I was determined to try to animate her at any cost. At first she tried to release herself; but I told her that a future husband had the right to hold his intended in his arms.

“Oh! that makes a difference,” she said; and she ceased to resist.

“He may kiss you, too,” I said; and I proceeded to kiss her repeatedly, on her cheeks and her lips. She made no objection.—See how dangerous ignorance often is! there was an innocent with whom a man might do whatever he chose by means of false arguments.

But as I heard my sister I released Pélégie, who allowed herself to be kissed with charming docility. Indeed, I fancied that she was beginning to show some animation.

“Come,” said my sister, as she entered the room, “it’s time to go back to your aunt, my dear Pélégie; she might not like it if you should stay away any longer. You have had plenty of time to talk, and you will have still more when you’re married. Take your shawl and let us go.”

Pélégie took her shawl without a word, and prepared to go with my sister. I bade her adieu, whereupon she gave me a decidedly tender glance. I believed that my kisses had produced some effect on her heart, and that belief made me a little more hopeful of the future.

I realized now that my bride had no intelligence; perhaps I might have gone further; but I must needs make the best of it. I did not think that, in order to be happy, one must have a genius for a wife; bright women are generally very tiresome in their homes, and she who devotes her time to displaying the gifts she has received from nature very rarely thinks of taking care of her children and gratifying her husband. As soon as a woman believes herself to be more intelligent than her husband, she refuses to be governed by him. Moreover, I had had many liaisons with clever women, and the result had not been flattering to me. Agathe, Caroline, and Madame de Marsan were all bright. And Nicette? she was, too; and yet—— Well, it was very fortunate that my betrothed was not. I was well aware that there was a great distance between a genius and a blockhead, and that if pretentiousness is irksome, stupidity is even more so. But I hoped that marriage, which works so many metamorphoses, would succeed in forming Pélégie’s judgment. I had already fancied that I could see that my caresses had stirred her pulses. There is a time when nature seems benumbed; at such a time a crisis is necessary. Perhaps Pélégie’s heart and mind only needed that crisis to develop rapidly.

XXXI

I MARRY

The great day arrived when I was to utter that solemn yes which would bind me forever. Forever is a very long time—it is very short when one is happy!

At times melancholy thoughts oppressed me. I was not in love with the woman I was about to marry, and I felt that it was the absence of love that made us walk so carelessly toward the altar. Love, who charms the present and embellishes the future, is a god whose presence is most essential on the wedding day; he ought always to preside on such occasions. However, I proposed to do without him; indeed, I must, for whom could I love now? I should have ceased to think of *her*, but I still thought of her. She did not love me; and if she had loved me, could I have married her? It would have been madness; but is the madness which makes one happy so very blameworthy?

I felt tears in my eyes. Was that the proper way to begin that day? It was my last thought of her. Henceforth I would never think of the past. I must try to be light-hearted, to be amiable with Pélagie. Amiable! she would not notice it! But, no matter; I must forget myself.

My sister was the first who entered my room. I fancy that she noticed my depression; she kissed me and embraced me, and assured me that I should be very happy.

“God grant it!” I thought. “Thus far I have not been happy in love; perhaps I shall be in marriage.”

I overcame my weakness and was myself once more. Poor Amélie! she was so pleased when she saw me smile!

By the way, where were my wife and I to live? I had not given that matter a thought; but I was not at all disturbed, for my sister had undertaken to look out for everything, and she was not the woman to forget anything so important. However, I felt that I should be very glad to know where I was to take my better half that night.

“You haven’t told me yet, sister, where I am to live.”

“That goes without saying, my dear.”

“Nevertheless, you will have to tell me, for I can’t guess.”

“Has not Madame de Pontchartrain a magnificent house, of which she

occupies only one-half? You are to live there with your wife.”

“At her aunt’s? I don’t like that very much.”

“Don’t be disturbed; your suite is by itself, and a long way from hers; you need have nothing to say to each other, except when you please. I knew, of course, that you would like to be by yourself, and I have had everything arranged with that end in view.”

“All right.—By the way, has Pélégie received all the usual gifts?”

“Yes, my dear; have you forgotten that I showed them to you yesterday and told you Déneterre had spent three thousand francs out of the money you gave him?”

“True; it had gone out of my head.”

“Pélégie will be enchanted, I assure you. There’s a beautiful set of jewelry—and shawls—and dress materials.”

“Very good; so, then, there’s nothing for me to do to-day but to get married?”

“Mon Dieu! that’s all, my dear.”

“So much the better. What time is it to be?”

“At eleven o’clock you are to call for your wife and take her to the mayor’s office. We shall have two carriages; I have ordered them.”

“Two carriages! it seems to me that’s very few.”

“There are no more to be had in town.”

“That makes a difference.”

“But this evening we shall have several sedan chairs and Bath chairs.”

“Aha! so they have those things here?”

“To be sure; they are very convenient and much less dangerous than your horse vehicles, which always frighten me.”

“It is true that in a Bath chair the steed doesn’t take the bit in his teeth. And from the mayor’s office we go to the church?”

“Yes; at one o’clock.”

“And then?”

“Then we come back here, and chat until three.”

“Where is the wedding feast to be?”

“Here, my dear. At first Madame de Pontchartrain insisted on having it at her house, but I finally carried the day. We shall be much more free here, you know. We can laugh and sing and frolic.”

“I confess that I shall be delighted to be allowed to frolic. And the ball is to

be here also, I suppose?”

“Oh! no, my dear; the ball is to be at Madame de Pontchartrain’s; she has a superb salon, where three sets can dance a quadrille at once. Besides, it’s more proper at night to be where the bride can conveniently be put to bed!”

“What’s that? put the bride to bed? I fancy that that’s my business.”

“No, my dear; don’t you know that it’s the custom for the bride’s near relations to take her to the nuptial chamber and undress her and put her to bed?”

“You will do me the kindness to abridge all that ceremonial, which I consider utterly ridiculous, as much as you possibly can. It seems to me to be the bridegroom’s place to undress his wife and put her to bed—or to postpone putting her to bed if he and she please. They are entirely at liberty to suit themselves.”

“Oh! brother, think of what decency demands!”

“My dear girl, some people are so decent that they end by being indecent; just as some people are so bright that they end by making fools of themselves. Extremes meet; too great strictness breeds debauchery, just as extreme rigidity of morals often ends in their entire subversion. *Summum jus, summa injuria*. The savages who live in countries where they are not ruled by civilized man should have pure morals, since they follow the inspiration of nature; and yet that extreme purity which leads them to go naked and to conceal nothing from one another resembles a refinement of libertinage among us. Diogenes, who wanted to be a wise man, was nothing better than a fool; and Crates, who considered himself a philosopher, was simply disgusting; and how many writers there are who, by dint of trying to rise to the sublime, fall into bathos! and scholars who, while striving to be profound, are simply ludicrous! and actors who, in their efforts to be natural, appear absurd! and dancers who fall to the ground because they try to jump too high! The moral of all this is that we should seek a happy medium in everything, and that when a husband and wife have complied with the behests of the law and of religion they should be allowed to go to bed without having somebody else place them solemnly between two sheets; which, in my opinion, is better adapted to offend decency than to gratify it.”

“I am very sorry, my dear, but the custom——”

“I tell you, if I were in love with my wife, I would make short work of this custom! but let us say no more about it; I will submit to whatever you say.”

“Very well; dress yourself and come to breakfast.”

I felt that I must dress myself with care; the least one can do is to try to make himself presentable on his wedding day. Although Pélagie had said that she

would have married me just the same if I had been old and ugly, I liked to think that she would notice the difference. I was soon ready; unless he is a conceited fop, a man cannot spend much time over his toilet, and I did not, like Raymond, reflect for a quarter of an hour where I should place a pin or how I should arrange the ends of my cravat. Speaking of my neighbor, I regretted that he was not at Melun; he would have assumed the duties of best man, and would certainly have invented something new; but it would probably have resulted to my disadvantage, so perhaps it was as well that he was not there.

My nephews came jumping and prancing into my room, to tell me that breakfast was waiting; they were already in their gala costumes, and were so wild with delight that we could not hear ourselves talk. Happy age, when the least novelty, the slightest change in the daily habits, the idea of a party, a wedding, a grand dinner—of anything, in fact, that suggests confusion and disorder—causes intoxicating delight! We ought to retain longer the characteristics of childhood.

I found Déneterre in full dress. He came to me, embraced me, pressed my hand with a satisfied air, and said to me in a half solemn, half comical tone:

“Well! you’re one of us now!”

I looked at him with a smile, and stifled a sigh which would have been a rude answer to his congratulations.

“Come, let’s eat, and eat heartily!” said my brother-in-law, taking his seat at the table. “You need to lay in some strength to-day, my dear boy.”

So the chapter of jests had begun; but it was likely to be brief in a small place, where remarks with a double meaning were frowned upon. At all events, they might say what they pleased; I was determined to accept everything with a good grace. But I thought it well to follow Déneterre’s advice and eat heartily; that was the best thing for me to do until night.

“Let us hurry,” said Amélie; “it’s almost eleven; we mustn’t keep your wife waiting, dear Eugène.”

“Of course not; that would not be polite; I am ready to start.”

“Come, Déneterre, have you finished?”

“For heaven’s sake, give me time to swallow!”

“Oh! how long it takes you to do anything! Do put on the children’s hats!”

“What! are you going to take them to the mayor’s office?”

“Certainly.”

“That’s all folly; it won’t amuse them, and they’ll crowd the carriage; it’s

much better not to take them till we go to the church.”

“But I insist on their going now! Do you suppose that I dressed them up just to leave them at home?”

“But I tell you we can come back and get them in a little while.”

“And I tell you that I propose to take them now.”

“There won’t be any room for them.”

“You can hold them on your knees.”

“So that they can kick me and soil the ladies’ dresses!”

“They’ll keep quiet.”

“It would be something new!”

“Oh! how you tire me with your arguments!”

“You are a most obstinate creature!”

The clock struck eleven, and I put an end to the discussion by announcing that I was going; my sister and her husband did the same, and we took the little boys. I was very sure that that would be the result.

The two carriages were in front of the house; the coachmen wore white gloves and had huge bouquets. All the neighbors were at their doors or windows; a wedding in a small town is such a momentous event! it furnishes a subject of conversation for more than a week.

We took five minutes to go about as far as the length of one of the shorter boulevards in Paris; the horses were not used to coaches, and their drivers drove very slowly in order that they might seem to be starting on a journey. We arrived at last and were shown into the large salon, where the intimate friends and the distinguished personages invited to the first ceremony were assembled. I did not see my bride, and started to go in search of her; but I was detained; I could not be allowed to enter her bedroom yet.

“She’s coming,” said Madame de Pontchartrain; “be patient, my dear Dorsan, you will soon see her.”

I had no difficulty in being patient; still, I wished that it was all over. I was beginning to be deathly tired of the compliments everyone paid me, to which I soon ceased to be able to reply, because everyone said the same thing.

At last Pélégie appeared, escorted by her aunt and my sister. Her dress was magnificent, and her face even prettier than usual. The compliments began anew. I listened to them now with more pleasure; the presence of a pretty woman always suggests compliments to me, and I was not displeased by the admiration my bride aroused.

I hastened forward to take her hand; she kept her eyes fixed on the floor and seemed to have resolved not to raise them during the day. I led her toward the door and to the carriage, heedless of the remonstrances of her aunt and my sister, who called after us:

“That isn’t right! wait! wait! It isn’t your place to take her hand! You’re disarranging the programme!”

I cared not a whit for the programme. Madame de Pontchartrain almost lost her temper; my sister calmed her by attributing my heedlessness to my excessive love. We entered the carriages, which process took nearly ten minutes, because, in the first place, no one would get in first, and then no one would take the rear seat. I had to hold myself hard to refrain from pushing them all into the carriages—the ceremonious idiots, who stood an hour on the steps! Poor lovers, who marry in the provinces, how your tempers are tried! At last we were all seated. Déneterre was compelled to walk with the children, who had already torn the trimming of three dresses and stained several white satin shoes with mud. Really, the little rascals were most amusing!

We arrived at the mayor’s office. As there is seldom a line of people waiting to be married in provincial towns, we were not obliged to wait an hour for our turn. The ceremony was performed quickly enough, and I was married according to law; there was no drawing back.

To reach the church we had to repeat the same nonsense with respect to the carriages; it took even longer to arrange the order of march, for several people had joined us at the mayor’s office, and the procession was swelled by three sedan chairs and two Bath chairs. My wedding had stirred the town to its centre; the church was filled with people, and we could scarcely force our way through the crowd. Those who were not of the wedding party had come to criticise, those who were, to admire; and the idlers, loiterers, working girls, matrons, and old women, to say their say concerning the bride and groom.

Everybody knows what a marriage is, for it is easy to procure the pleasures of marriage in Paris. I will not therefore go into the details of mine; it resembled others as to form, and several times I heard some such words as:

“That’s a pretty couple; they are both very good-looking.”

A body always likes to hear such remarks.

At last the fatal *yes* was pronounced. Pélagie said it so low that nobody could have heard her; for my part, I showed much firmness. We had a sermon preached to us—a little long, perhaps, but very touching and moving. How can one fail to be moved when one is pledging one’s self for life?—I glanced at

Pélagie; she did not weep; her eyes were cast down, her manner was as reserved, her demeanor as modest as usual, and she showed no more than her ordinary emotion. That vexed me; it seemed to me that she should have wept.

At last all was over; I was married! We left the church between three rows of sightseers, and went to my sister's; we spent three-quarters of an hour in going the distance of a gunshot; to be sure, our procession was increased by about half of the town, and we had to return salutes and courtesies at every step.

When we reached the house, it was only half-past one, and we did not dine till three. What were we to do in the interval? That was the most difficult part of the whole day. Some old women proposed a game of boston or whist, but Madame de Pontchartrain thought that it would be a breach of etiquette to play cards on a wedding day morning; it is good form to do nothing; it is amusement enough to talk, sitting very straight for fear of rumpling one's gown.

Without asking our dear aunt's opinion, I went down into the garden with my wife. I wanted to entice her into some solitary path; not that I proposed to exert my marital rights already; but I wanted to try to read Pélagie's heart and find out what her present feelings were.—It was impossible to be alone; all the young women followed us; the inquisitive little hussies would not let us out of their sight. Two young married people afford so much food for thought! they are so pretty to look at—when they are pretty; and you know that we were.

I could do nothing more than take my wife's hand; I squeezed it tenderly—very tenderly—and she looked at me and smiled.—“The deuce!” thought I; “can it be that she understands that language?”

“You hurt my fingers,” she remarked mildly, withdrawing her hand.

It was enough to drive one to despair! I had no further desire to walk with her alone.

Luckily, the hour for the feast arrived. We betook ourselves, with the utmost formality, as before, to the dining room; we took our seats in the order demanded by convention. I was at one end of the table, my wife at the other; that was the best way to encourage harmony between us; and then, everyone knew that we should come together at last.

The greatest tranquillity reigned during the early courses; we sat very straight, watched one another, passed the dishes, ate, and declared everything divine, exquisite, delicious: that was substantially the whole of the conversation. I had no desire to enliven it; I was sober, yes, pensive. Sometimes I glanced at my wife; her eyes were constantly fixed on her plate. Madame de Pontchartrain's expressed the satisfaction she felt at the reserved demeanor of

the bride and groom; we certainly could not be charged with acting like two madcaps.

Upon examining the guests, I found that I had at my right a pretty, vivacious young blonde, with whom I had several times laughed and joked when we met in society, so far as laughter was permitted in the circles that we frequented. I began to talk with her by way of distraction, but she replied with marked coldness, reserve, and brevity. What did that mean? Mon Dieu! I had forgotten that I was now a *married man*. I was still inclined to play the gallant with young ladies, but I had lost my title of bachelor, which was worth a hundred times more in their eyes than all the pretty speeches I could make them as a Benedick.

However, I was determined to amuse myself at any price. I tried to eat; but I was not hungry.

“I will drink, then,” I said to myself; “but I must take care; a bridegroom should keep his head clear.”

The dessert came at last; our appetites were a little appeased; the wits of the party began to shine, the jokers to hazard a bonmot or two or a very sly remark; the young men tried to laugh, and the women did their utmost to consider it all very amusing. My sister was in ecstasies; she did her best to encourage this well-intended merriment. As for Déneterre, he was so busily engaged in carving, and in looking after the small table at which his children were sitting with six other children, that he had no time to put in a word.

The dessert and liqueurs increased the general hilarity to the highest point, augmented as it was by divers little pranks on the part of my nephews, who knocked over two piles of plates, broke three glasses, overturned sauce on several ladies' dresses, while coming to the large table to fetch for themselves things that were promised them but that did not arrive quickly enough to satisfy them. But they knew that on such a great day they had *carte blanche*, and they made the most of it. Everybody agreed that they were dear little fellows, even the ladies who would have to change their dresses. Their papa and mamma were enraptured, which was quite natural.

The signal was given, and we left the table.

“How is this?” I whispered to my sister; “no song?”

“You know very well that it isn't good form nowadays, my dear. Is there singing at the great weddings in Paris?”

“No; but there is at those where the guests enjoy themselves.”

“We stick to custom.”

“And the garter?”

“Fie! fie! we have done away with that; it was indecent!”

“Oh! it was indecent, was it? I see that I must not do at my wedding party or to my wife anything that the most rigid rules of chastity do not permit. I trust, however, that you have not suppressed anything else.”

“Oh! no, brother! besides, I am sure that to-day you have no desire to——”

“To what?”

“Why, to——”

“To what, in heaven’s name? Finish.”

“Why, a desire to—with your wife—— Oh! you know what I mean.”

“The deuce! surely you are joking, my dear girl? Do people no longer marry for that here? is that suppressed, too?”

“No, my dear, no! but a man generally leaves his wife in peace the first day. The poor child has been so excited!”

“Yes; it is astounding how excited she looks!”

“You must give her time to recover herself.”

“Go to the deuce, my dear Amélie, with all your nonsense! What is the meaning of all this affectation? as if it must not come to that at last! I don’t like this prudery which denotes dissimulation pure and simple. I know by experience that those who cry scandal the loudest are the ones who in secret have the least virtue. The modesty of rakes and kept women is much more easily shocked than that of virtuous men and decent women. Fans hide more prostitutes than virgins, and veils are worn from coquetry, not from modesty; in short, those who make so much fuss and hang back at first are the ones who jump the highest afterward.”

“Well, you are free to do as you please, brother.”

“That is very fortunate!”

Poor Amélie! how she had changed since she had been living in that paltry town! So this was the banquet at which we were to laugh so loud and have so much sport! For my own part—and I have been to many weddings—I confess that the merriest are those of honest folk who are not afraid of violating etiquette and the proprieties every moment. Commend me to the poor people for real enjoyment! But I realized that on this occasion I must say with the song:

“When we are beggars, then we’ll make merry!”

My wife disappeared. Ah, yes! to dress for the ball—that was it. I had

nothing to say against that custom; in any event, I should have been careful not to say it; I should have had all the young women about my ears. Two dresses, sometimes three—that was one of the pretty customs of that day.

We returned to Madame de Pontchartrain's for the ball. It was the first time that I had ever seen wedding festivities divided between two places; but I found that I learned many things at Melun.

We assembled in the salon, which was lighted by candelabra that must have done duty in the time of King Pepin le Bref. The guests invited for the ball arrived in a swarm; no one ever dreams of missing a fête in a small town. The bride appeared in her ball dress, which was in very good taste. I looked at her, but her eyes were still *in statu quo*. I ventured to say to her, under my breath:

“Do lift your eyes a little; you have such lovely eyes!”

“Aunt told me not to.”

That was all I could extort from her. I had nothing to say to that; it would have been ill-advised for me to play the master so soon.

The orchestra began to play; we had two violins and a clarinet; also a little fifer, to imitate Colinet; it was superb—at all events, it was the best that could be had in the town. They played contradances that I had never heard in Paris. I surmised that they were composed by the leader of the local orchestra; it was impossible to make the mistake of confusing them with those of Rubner, Weber, and Tolbecque.

There was plenty of dancing; and in that amusement the pleasure was not feigned, for youth loves to caper. The young men disputed with one another the privilege of dancing with the bride, who was always engaged for fourteen or fifteen quadrilles ahead. The groom's turn never comes on such occasions; but on his wedding day he is easily consoled, and a thing that would have distressed him terribly the day before makes no difference to him when he is married. How a title changes one's way of feeling and of looking at things!

I too danced; I was very glad to have that resource to occupy my time, and I was as persistent as my wife.

“Do take a little rest,” some young man would say to me; “you'll tire yourself out.”

But I paid no heed, for I thought less than they did of what I still had to do.

Toward the end of the evening, however, I danced with Pélagie; the ball had warmed her up a little: her cheeks were flushed and her bosom rose and fell more rapidly; she was really very pretty, and I ought to have deemed myself very lucky to possess so many charms. I began to look at my watch and to think

that the time passed very slowly.

But it was growing late, and many people had already taken leave. It was one o'clock in the morning! a big slice taken off the night. Madame de Pontchartrain made a sign to my sister, and they led my wife away. I divined the meaning of that, and I waited until I might be allowed to join Pélégie.

The ceremony seemed to me very long! Not until three-quarters of an hour had passed did Amélie return and motion to me that at last I was at liberty to go to my wife.

All the guests departed; I did the same; fleeing from the jests that bored me to death, I left the ballroom and bent my steps toward the wing which I was to occupy thenceforth.

I was directed to my bedroom; I had been careful to take a light, otherwise I should have broken my neck in some of the innumerable rooms of that old house, and the time would have been very ill chosen for an accident. I saw a light—that must be the place. I opened a door and entered a very handsome bedroom, furnished somewhat *à l'antique*, but provided with everything. Two wax candles were burning on the mantel; I recognized several articles of mine on a table, for my sister had taken pains to have all my wardrobe transported to my new abode. I was at home; so far, so good. To make sure of not being disturbed, I bolted the door, then walked toward the bed, the curtains of which were drawn—from bashfulness, of course.

I heard no sound. Could she be asleep already? or was she pretending to be? I drew the curtains aside, and I saw no one in the bed, which had not been disturbed.

What did that mean? I was certainly in my apartment—everything that I found there proved it. In that case, where could my wife be? Did it mean that we were to have a bedroom each? Why, of course; and that was why they hoped that I would leave my wife in peace. “The devil take them with their nonsensical customs!” thought I.—If I had only known it sooner! However, I wanted my wife; I was determined to have her, I must have her. I had not married a pretty doll who never opened her mouth and kept her eyes on the ground all day to be alone at night and occupy a separate bed; the least I could expect was some little compensation for the ennui I had suffered.—I would sleep with my wife—that was my resolution—even though I must turn the whole house upside down to attain that end.

I reflected first of all that my wife's room could not be far from mine. I concluded to try to find it, and to avoid making a noise if possible; for that

would cause scandal in the household of Madame de Pontchartrain, who thought perhaps that I had married her niece to obtain the right to make love to her at those innocent parlor games.

I looked about and discovered a door which I had not noticed at first. I took a candle, opened the door, and found myself in a fine salon. That was very well; I continued my inspection of my suite. There was a door facing me; where did that lead? Into a dining room. Another door opened into a passageway; I went on and found a toilet room freshly painted; all very pleasant, but not what I was looking for at that moment.

I returned to the salon. Whither did that other door lead? To my wife's room, no doubt; since I had been prowling about the salon as if I were playing hide-and-seek, I must have passed it many times. I tried to open it by turning the knob, but it resisted; it was locked on the inside. No more doubt: my wife was there, and had been advised to lock herself in. Ah! what sly creatures they were in that country!

I knocked—no answer. I knocked again, louder.

“Who is there?” someone asked at last; and I recognized Pélagie's voice.

“It's I, my dear love.”

“Oh! is it you, monsieur my husband?”

“Yes, my dear; come, let me in quickly.”

“What for?”

“Parbleu! I'll tell you in a minute. Open the door.”

“Oh! I can't!”

“You can't! what does that mean? that's decidedly new!”

“My aunt told me not to.”

“Your aunt doesn't know what she says. As she has been a widow thirty-three years, perhaps she has forgotten that husbands and wives sleep together.”

“Oh, yes! I know that you will sleep with me finally; but she told me that modesty requires me to postpone the time as long as possible.”

“And I tell you that we must sleep together at once; modesty has nothing more to do with our love; hymen has its rights, and you must listen to it now; the pleasures it permits should not alarm your modesty.”

“I don't understand all that.”

“I will make you understand it when I am with you. Open the door, I beg you. I can't begin to instruct you with this door between us.”

“I'm afraid that my aunt——”

“Look you, madame, I am your husband, after all; you swore this morning to be obedient and submissive to me, and you are violating your oaths already! Come, Pélégie, I beg you, let’s not begin with a quarrel; open the door at once; if you don’t, I’ll set the house on fire.”

“Oh! mon Dieu!”

She opened the door instantly; she was in her chemise and hurried back to hide herself in her bed; but it was easy for me to find her now. I still had a few obstacles to overcome; but they were not at all disagreeable; indeed, I should have been very much distressed if I had not encountered them! On this occasion the rose was not without thorns.

Let us draw the curtain over the mysteries of hymen, although they are one of Polichinelle’s secrets.

XXXII

RETURN TO PARIS

The first days of married life are called the honeymoon. But the only honey I enjoyed was a grand row with Madame de Pontchartrain on the day after my wedding, because she perceived by her heavy eyes, her gait, in fact, by a thousand symptoms which never escape a dowager's glance, that I had already plucked the rose of hymen. She went so far as to reproach me, to accuse me of immodesty, brutality, a purely animal passion, and declared that I wanted to kill her niece. It would have required the patience of a cherub to listen unmoved to such nonsense; and as I am no angel, I sent our aunt about her business; I forbade her to meddle in my affairs thereafter, and especially enjoined upon her to refrain from offering advice to my wife. Madame de Pontchartrain shrieked and stormed and raved; I withdrew to my apartment; and there we were at swords' point!

Old women are great talkers, and the dear aunt was spiteful and vindictive in addition. Instead of trying to forget that scene, she thought only of revenging herself for what she called my base conduct. On the next day, the whole town knew that I was a hot-tempered, ungentlemanly libertine, and that I had begun already to make my wife very unhappy.

However, my sister, who knew me and loved me, made haste to contradict all the rumors that the old aunt put in circulation to my discredit; she fell out with Madame de Pontchartrain, because she did not share her way of looking at things. In the town, some believed the aunt, others my sister; opinions were divided; it would almost have split the community into two hostile camps, except that they were generally agreed as to the main point, that is, the pleasure of making unkind remarks and the love of scandal.

I was very little disturbed by what the people of Melun thought and said of me, but I was deeply interested in my wife, and I was desirous that she should not agree with her aunt.

Pélagie found herself in an embarrassing position: her aunt told her not to listen to me, and I told her not to listen to her aunt, who did all that she could to induce her to come often to her apartments, while I did my best to prevent her going there. Madame de Pontchartrain told Pélagie that she ought to command, to force me to obey her—in a word, to be the mistress; while I tried to make her

understand that when a woman can do nothing but play parlor games, dance, embroider, and sing ballads, she ought to call in her husband to assist her in managing her household.

All this frequently threw my wife into a state of painful uncertainty. I had been her husband only a few days, and her aunt had been her mentor from infancy. She was afraid of her, and I should have been very sorry to arouse such a feeling with respect to myself. The result was that she obeyed her aunt rather than me; and that had already brought about several of those little *discussions* which I desired to avoid. If Pélégie had had any wit or judgment, she would have felt that her aunt was wrong. But, alas! she had nothing of the sort; and dullards are much harder to lead than bright people. I hoped that she would acquire those qualities, and that, having her eyes opened in regard to a certain matter, she would become less stupid with regard to others; but I was beginning to lose that hope.

There was one point, however, upon which we were in accord: that was our right to sleep together. As to that, Pélégie was entirely of my opinion; she no longer dreamed of having a separate bed, and was never tempted to lock her door. I would have bet that it would be so; these little innocents!—when they are once started, nothing will stop them!

I had no desire to remain at Melun; but before taking my wife to Paris, it was necessary that I should have lodgings prepared for her reception. I could not take her to my little bachelor apartment; it was not suitable for us, nor did I wish her to know anything about it.

To find suitable lodgings, have them furnished and put in order, and engage servants, would detain me in Paris at least a week; and if I should leave my wife in her aunt's power for a week, God only knew in what frame of mind I should find her when I returned! An hour passed with Madame de Pontchartrain always caused a quarrel between Pélégie and me. When she left her aunt, who had persuaded her that she ought not to listen to me, she made it her business to do just the opposite of what I told her, to tease me and make me angry; it was extremely difficult for me to bring her back to other ideas and to make her realize her errors. If she should pass a week without seeing me, it would be impossible for us to live together.

What was to be done? I did not propose to live in the province any longer; I was beginning to have my fill of it, and I felt that if I were obliged to live there I should die.

My sister saw my plight; and despite her desire to have me settle down in her vicinity, as she saw that I did not enjoy the pleasures of wedlock as I ought at

Melun, she offered to send Déneterre to Paris, to prepare an apartment for me. I accepted her offer gratefully; and my brother-in-law set off, with full instructions from me.

I prayed that he might return very soon. The time seemed terribly long to me. I was obliged to remain constantly with my wife; and to be always in the company of a person who has nothing to say, who often does not understand what you say to her—what torture!

At first I had hopes; the nights were some slight recompense; but hope soon vanished, and even the nights sometimes seemed wearisome to me. Ah! then I realized what a trivial thing mere beauty is! We become accustomed to everything, to an ugly face as well as a lovely one; but when, with the lovely face, we find no sustenance for the mind or heart; when a little mouth is mute or says only foolish things; when two great eyes have no expression; when the smile is always the same; when the voice expresses no feeling—then there is nothing to do but yawn and fall asleep beside that little chef-d’œuvre of nature.

But when we listen to some attractive person, who has the power to describe what she feels, whose eyes and voice are equally eloquent, who charms us by her thoughts and attracts us by her conversation, do we pay any heed to her ugliness? No, we forget it; more than that, it actually disappears, and the face that repelled us at first becomes agreeable to us.

“Are men of great minds ever ugly?”

Doubtless beauty combined with wit aids materially in seducing us; but if we can have only one of the two, I am sure that in marrying we should not set great store by externals. That one should take a pretty mistress, without bothering one’s head as to her mental powers, is perfectly natural; one can leave her as soon as she becomes a bore. But a wife! a companion for the rest of one’s life! what a difference! I know there are many husbands who spend less time with their wives than with their mistresses; but I am not speaking for their benefit. When I married, I intended to have a happy home, not to leave my wife and run after other women; and yet, as you will see, that was what I was obliged to do.

Déneterre had been away twelve days, and still he did not return. Madame de Pontchartrain, who knew that I proposed to take my wife to Paris, was more savage than ever; she tried every day to play some fresh trick on me; she watched for her niece as the cat watches for the mouse; and whenever she saw her, she inflamed her against me. All my time was occupied in defeating her little plots; we played *Guerre ouverte* in the house, and that afforded me a little

distraction.

By dint of slandering me, the old lady had come to believe a portion of her slanders; and if by chance I went to some reception, which very rarely happened, I was conscious that a confused, incessant muttering and whispering began as soon as I appeared. Some looked at me, others turned their heads away; the old dowagers and the mothers, who were hot partisans of Madame de Pontchartrain, lost no time in moving away from me; there were some who even made a gesture of alarm at my approach, as if I were plague-stricken.

I laughed at all this with the sensible, reasonable people; but they were not in the majority; besides, it is much easier to speak unkindly than kindly of a person; it would seem that faults are apparent to every eye, and that good qualities keep out of sight.

At last Déneterre returned. My apartment was waiting for me on Boulevard Montmartre; I could occupy it at once; everything was ready for my wife and myself, and our servants were engaged.

I did not propose to delay. I urged Pélagie to hurry with her trunks and boxes and bundles. She seconded me warmly enough; I believe that at heart she was not sorry to escape from her aunt's authority, and to see new places. And such places! Paris! the paradise of womankind! and the hell of—— Great heaven! I forgot that I was one myself!

It was all over; I had bid my sister, her husband, and my nephews adieu. Pélagie went to take leave of her aunt, for I would not have her fail in courtesy toward her. Madame de Pontchartrain refused to allow her niece to go; I was obliged to go after her. She declared that I had no right to take her away, and tried to detain her by force. I was compelled to abduct my wife; the old aunt pursued us to the front door and threatened to come to Paris after us. But I knew that she would not; people do not play boston in the morning there.

We started; and in my delight I kissed my wife! It was just six weeks since my wedding, and five months since I had left Paris.

At last I saw it again, that splendid city, and I exclaimed:

“Hail! city of uproar, and of mud and smoke!”

I prefer thy uproar to the gossip and scandal and petty malignity of the provinces; thy mud to the grass that grows in the untrodden streets of a small provincial town; and thy smoke to those solid pleasures—which I have failed to find elsewhere.

XXXIII

RAYMOND REAPPEARS

The new apartment, in which we installed ourselves at once, was large, convenient, and well arranged. I noticed that there was a room adjoining my study, where I could easily have a bed placed in case my wife should be indisposed and should prefer to sleep alone; for it is well to anticipate everything.

We had two servants, a maid and a cook; those were all that we needed. I had neither horses nor intrigues, consequently I had no occasion for the services of a Frontin or a Lafleur, who, having nothing to do, would be driven to emptying my wine cellar, seducing my maid-servants, and robbing me, to pass the time away.

During the first fortnight after our arrival in Paris, my wife did not give me a moment's rest; I had to take her everywhere: to drive, to the theatre, to concerts, to the monuments and curiosities of every sort. She compelled me to go all over the city with her in the mornings, being determined to become acquainted with every quarter. She was never weary of gazing in admiration at the Palais-Royal, and she would stand by the half-hour in front of milliners' and dry goods shops; she was in ecstasies, in the seventh heaven!—All the people, the noise, the vehicles, the beautiful dresses, the young men who, on the fashionable promenades and at the theatres, ogle women so respectfully and make such pretty grimaces to those who meet their approval—all these fascinated Madame Dorsan, who began to lift her eyes and even to flash some very innocent little glances therefrom. Oh! as for that, I was sure it would come.

I knew Paris by heart; I got a little tired of parading through the streets every day; still, a husband should be obliging. Thank heaven! the time came when there was nothing more to see unless we began over again; which my wife would not have been sorry to do; but I needed rest. Moreover, she discovered that a young wife could without impropriety go out alone in the morning; she knew our quarter very well, and I saw that she would make the most of the liberty I gave her.

At last I could breathe freely. I was tired to death of plays, driving, and questions; I was delighted to be alone. I had as yet had no time to visit my little apartment on Rue Saint-Florentin. If my wife had known that I had a bachelor

apartment, if her aunt had learned of it, I should have been adjudged guilty of carrying on secret intrigues. But I had no desire for anything of the sort; never again would I take any woman to my former lodgings. I wished that I had never taken one there.

There was one spot which I longed yet dreaded to pass. While escorting my wife about Paris, I had always managed to avoid taking her there. Why? I had no very clear idea; but I wanted to go there first alone; I should be more at liberty to stop; I should find my friend the messenger there, and perhaps I might—— But, no; I would not question him; what need had I to do it now?

My wife was asleep; it was only eight o'clock, and we did not breakfast until ten; I had time to go out for a moment. I proposed to visit my former lodgings; I walked in that direction, but it was also the direction in which Nicette lived. Passing through Rue Saint-Honoré, I had not the strength to resist the secret longing that impelled me toward the flower shop. I walked very fast at first, but the nearer I approached it, the more I slackened my pace. I did not intend to go in, nor did I intend to speak to her; but I felt that I would like to see her.

I saw the shrubs standing in front of the shop; I crossed the street in order not to be on the same side. If I should pass close to her, she might speak to me, and I knew that at the sound of her voice I should stop in spite of myself.

I made up my mind at last to pass, and I walked very quickly, just glancing across. But I did not see her; I saw a woman with an ordinary face—oh! not in the least like Nicette. Thereupon I crossed over and walked by the shop; she was not there. I turned, walked back, and stopped, pretending to examine the flowers. The woman came to me and asked:

“Does monsieur wish to buy something?”

“No, no!” I said, and walked away toward my messenger's stand; I was impatient to question him. But he was not there; I waited nearly an hour, and at last he came; he recognized me at once.

“Your servant, monsieur; if I'd known you was here—— It's a long time since I saw you, monsieur.”

“That is true; and during that time?”

“Bless me! there's been lots of changes; the pretty flower girl ain't there any more.”

“She isn't?”

“No, monsieur; she sold her stock to Mère Thomas, who you see yonder in her place.”

“She sold her stock?”

“Yes, monsieur, and sold it well, too; for it’s a good shop. But they say Mamzelle Nicette didn’t need it, because she’d made her fortune—come into money.”

“And where is she now?”

“Bless my soul! monsieur, I don’t know; she didn’t say where she was going, and we don’t never see her now.”

“And that man who used to come to see her every day?”

“Why! he kep’ on coming, but not so often toward the end.”

“Did he take her away?”

“I don’t know nothing about it, monsieur; but I’m inclined to think she sold her stock of her own accord.”

“When was that?”

“Why, near six weeks ago.”

“And you don’t know where she’s gone?”

“No, monsieur.”

I paid the messenger and walked away; it was useless to question him any further. Nicette had left her shop; what had become of her? what was she doing? was she living with Raymond? That seemed impossible. Could he have hired an apartment for her? I did not know what to think, but I hastened to Rue Saint-Florentin.

My concierge uttered a cry of surprise when she saw me.

“Ah! there you are, monsieur! We really thought you must be dead! Do you know you’ve been away almost six months?”

“I know it, Madame Dupont. Give me my keys, please.”

“In a minute, monsieur, in a minute. I’ve taken good care of your rooms, I’ve had your furniture beaten every month, and I’ve scrubbed and——”

“Oh! I’m not at all disturbed. By the way, does Monsieur Raymond still live on my landing?”

“No, monsieur, no; he’s left, and in his place——”

“Do you know his address?”

“Yes, monsieur; he left it here; he lives now on Rue Pinon, near the Opéra, No.—— Oh, dear! I’ve forgotten, but it will come to me. Here’s your keys, monsieur.”

“And that number, Madame Dupont?”

“It’s surprising; I knew it just the other day. But it ain’t a long street.”

“That’s very lucky.”

“Oh! wait a minute! I forgot, it was so long ago! I’ve got a letter for you; it’s been here six weeks.”

“A letter!”

“Yes. A young woman brought it.”

“A woman! give it to me, pray.”

“Here it is, monsieur.”

I took the letter and hastened upstairs to my room, to escape the concierge’s chatter. Once more I was in that dear apartment! how glad I was to be there! But the letter! It seemed to me that the writing—ah! I dared not hope—I broke the seal; it was she—Nicette—who had written to me!

“MONSIEUR:

“It’s a long time since you came to see me, and I didn’t know why you had abandoned me; you seemed to be angry the last time you spoke to me, and I thought you were angry with me, but I couldn’t guess why. To-day I have heard that you are married; I know that you can’t think of me any more, or speak to a flower girl. I take the liberty of writing to you only to say good-bye. I am going to sell my shop and go away to some place where I can be alone, not see anybody, and cry all I want to; for I am very unhappy, and I can’t get over it; it isn’t my fault. I have inherited a lot of money from my mother and an aunt who’s left me all she had, and I have more than enough to live on. But I don’t forget that I owe you everything, that you took pity on me when everybody else abandoned me, and saved me from want. I shall never forget it! Adieu, monsieur! I wish you every happiness in your home; may your wife make you happy! she must love you dearly! Adieu, my dear benefactor!

“NICETTE.”

I read the letter several times. I could not help putting my lips to the characters she had traced. Was that the language of a deceitful woman? And yet I saw—saw with my own eyes Raymond sitting beside her, holding her hands. I knew that he saw her every day; he himself told me so; but could I place any faith in what Raymond said? Ah! if I had not seen him with her!

But why torment myself so? Was she not lost to me forever? was I not married? It did not occur to me to be false to my wife, but I longed to know whether Nicette loved me! I resolved to find Raymond and to try to make him talk; that was not difficult, but to make him tell the truth was no easy task.

It was late, and as my wife might be disturbed by my absence I returned to her, but with the firm intention to visit my old lodgings again, and often.

I carefully folded Nicette’s letter and took it away with me when I left my bachelor apartment for my home.

Who could have told Nicette that I was married? My concierge did not know it; if she had, she would surely have mentioned it to me. It must have been Raymond. But how did he know? I was considering this question as I approached my house, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned and saw Raymond! Never, I must confess, had the sight of him afforded me so much pleasure.

“Well! here you are, my dear fellow!”

“Good-morning, Monsieur Raymond!”

“So you’re in Paris now, eh?”

“As you see.”

“Dear Dorsan! it seems a century since I saw you!”

“I assure you that I too am very glad to see you.”

“Really? such an excellent friend! By the way, accept my congratulations; I understand that you have made a magnificent marriage, that you have a divine wife!”

“Oho! you know that, do you?”

“Yes; one of my friends, who happened to be at Melun, told me; you must have met him in society—Monsieur Regnier?”

“Yes, I believe I do remember him.”

“Well! it was he who told me the whole story. Ah! I was almost angry with you.—‘What!’ I said to myself; ‘my dear Dorsan, my friend, is married, and doesn’t let me know! me, who am so interested in his welfare!’ Oh! it was very ill done of you!”

“You are too kind, really; but my wife is expecting me, and I cannot stay any longer. And yet, I should be glad to talk with you. Won’t you breakfast with me?”

“Won’t I!”

“I will introduce you to my wife.”

“I shall be enchanted to make her acquaintance.”

Raymond accompanied me home; he seemed delighted by the cordiality of my greeting, especially as it was so unusual. He did not suspect that my eager desire to talk with him was due to the fact that he alone could tell me about Nicette, where she was and what she was doing. But I felt that I must be prudent and not question him too abruptly; otherwise, he would divine my sentiments, and it was more necessary than ever that I should force them back into the depths of my heart.

When we reached the house, I found that my wife was not anxious about me, for she was breakfasting without me. I presented Raymond, who confounded himself in compliments and high-flown praise which must have bored Pélagie; but women of little intellect often attach the greatest value to compliments; with such women one can make one’s self most agreeable with commonplace remarks, and in that respect Raymond was well endowed.

The conversation, therefore, was confined to the pleasures of Paris, and the sensation that such a woman as my wife must cause in society; for Raymond

always came back to that; he could not understand how a woman who had always lived in the provinces could be so pretty and have such distinguished manners; he was inexhaustible, but I breakfasted without listening to him. As for Pélagie, having learned that she might smile at another man than her husband, she smiled at each of Raymond's compliments, which gave her a chance to show her teeth.

I saw that I could not mention Nicette that morning; my wife did not leave the room; so I must needs be patient.

"Where do you live?" I asked Raymond.

"Rue Pinon, No. 2. I have left my old lodgings; you had ceased to be my neighbor, and they had lost all their charm."

"I mean to come to see you."

"Oh! don't put yourself to that trouble; a bachelor is seldom at home; I will come to see you, with your permission, and pay my respects to madame now and then."

"You will gratify us."

"But I must leave you now; I have three appointments for this morning. I have so many acquaintances! and not a moment to myself! Adieu, my dear friend!—Madame, I lay at your feet the homage that your charms deserve."

And Raymond took his leave, well pleased with his last compliment. He was the same as ever.

"That gentleman is very pleasant," said Pélagie, when he had gone.

She thought him charming; I was sure that she would. That my wife should like Raymond did not surprise me; but Nicette!

I dared not call on Raymond the same day; but the next day I could wait no longer, and I went to see him. He was not in; he had already gone out.

"Does he live alone?" I asked the concierge.

"Yes, monsieur; all alone."

I went away; I would have liked to know more, but I was almost sure that Nicette did not live with him. I left my name with the concierge, so that Raymond might know that I had been to see him; that would bring him to my house, and perhaps I might be able to speak with him alone.

He did not fail to come the next day. He was extraordinarily touched by my kindness in calling on him. He promised to show his attachment for me by coming often to see me.

I paid little heed to all the pretty things he said to me; I was vexed because

my wife did not leave us. How could I find an opportunity to talk of Nicette? Parbleu! I would ask Raymond to dine; then I would suggest that we go to the theatre in the evening; after dinner my wife would go to dress, and she always spent at least three-quarters of an hour at her toilet; during that time—— Yes, that would do.

I invited Raymond to dine with us informally; he grasped my hand and squeezed it till he made me wince, so pleased was he with my kindness; I read in his eyes that he could not understand it. Certainly he must have found me considerably changed. Doubtless he concluded that it was the effect of marriage.

The dinner was fairly cheerful; Raymond's conversation never flagged. Formerly, I was bored to death by his chatter, but it was a distraction now; for I was not accustomed to hearing conversation, and I began to experience satisfaction when anyone relieved me from a tête-à-tête with my wife.

Everything happened as I had foreseen. I proposed the theatre; my proposition was accepted, my wife went off to dress, and I was alone with Raymond at last.

I led the conversation imperceptibly to his conquests.

"By the way," said I, "what did you do with the little flower girl?"

"Whom do you mean? little Nicette?"

"Yes, little Nicette, whom you used to go to make love to every evening."

"Oh! it's a long while since that was all over, and I have ceased to think of her! I have had so many others since!"

"She was your mistress, then?"

"Yes, for three or four days; and then I dropped her."

"Don't you see her now?"

"Never. I don't even know where she is, for she has left her shop. Oh! somebody keeps her now, I presume. That little creature had the most absurd pretensions! she wanted to play the lady, and that sickened me! When I want a *petite-maitresse*, I don't apply to a flower girl. Everyone should stay where she belongs.—By the way, speaking of *petites-maitresses*, let us speak of your wife. She is really beautiful! and so amiable, too! and she fairly sparkles with wit! I saw that at the first glance. Deuce take it! how lucky you are, my dear fellow!"

When he began to talk about my wife, I ceased to listen to him. I thought of what he had told me of Nicette; he declared that she had been his mistress! could it be true? Ah! if I had not seen him in her shop, I would have spurned the idea as a ghastly lie. So it was impossible to find out what had become of her!

Perhaps I should never see her again!

That thought saddened me, and I could not banish it from my mind. My wife returned, having completed her toilet. Raymond offered her his arm; I motioned to Pélégie to accept it, as it was not customary for a wife to take her husband's arm when another gentleman offered his. If I had been in love with my wife, I would have snapped my fingers at such a custom; but, on the contrary, I was delighted to be able to go by myself and dream undisturbed.

Raymond was enchanted to have on his arm a pretty woman who thought that everything that he said was charming. He went to the play with us, and carried the whole burden of the conversation. I did what I could to take part in it and to divert my thoughts; but, in spite of myself, I kept falling back upon my memories. Luckily, neither of them perceived it: my wife enjoyed the play and Raymond, and he was in ecstasies over what he said and what Pélégie replied.

When the play was over, we all went home. Ah! how I longed then for a separate room! but I dared not suggest it.

That day gave birth to a depression which I could not overcome. My wife said nothing, but I was very sure that she found Raymond much more attractive than me. What idiocy to bind one's self to a person whose sentiments have nothing in common with one's own! I said that to myself every day, and every day I spent a little less time with my wife. I left her to be amused by Raymond's conversation; and I went off to my little bachelor apartment, to think; often I wrote there, and read, and worked; I was so comfortable there! I let my thoughts stray back to happier days; to the days when I used to find bunches of orange blossoms hung at my door. Ah! how happy I might have been then! but I did not know enough to appreciate my good fortune. Not until those moments were past and gone forever did I realize all their worth! and when I left my little apartment to go back to the other, I regretted them more keenly than ever.

XXXIV

I SHOULD HAVE FORESEEN IT

Whether we are sad or merry, happy or wretched, rich or poor, the Fates spin the web of our days none the less. Mine was no longer of silk and gold; but still the days passed; they seemed longer to me than if I had been happy; that was all the difference, and therein people who are fond of life should find some compensation; for years of sorrow count double.

I had been married only a year, and I had already acquired all the ways of an old married man. I did not go out with my wife in the morning; she knew Paris as well as I did, and no longer needed my company; she went out to pay visits, to make purchases, or to walk; I either worked at home or went my own way. We almost always had someone to dinner, very frequently Raymond, who had become the friend of the family. It was not that I liked him any better than formerly; no, I did not look upon him as a friend in the least degree; but he had become necessary to me, he diverted my thoughts, he went about with my wife; he was always at our service if we needed him to take part in a game or to do an errand; he was really extremely obliging. Lastly, he had known Nicette, he was the only person with whom I could talk of her now and then; that reason alone was sufficient to lead me to seek his society. And yet, it was to him that I owed a part of my sorrow; but he had rendered me a service by showing Nicette to me as she really was. If she had listened to him, she must have listened to many others! In a word, his presence was often painful to me, and yet I constantly sought it—I always hoped that he would contradict what he had told me about her.

As for my wife, she could not do without Raymond; he was with her almost every evening, while I went to my little bachelor apartment. They played together; Raymond played the flute a little, and my wife the piano; they both sang also. Raymond was an inferior musician, and my wife was never in time; together, they considered themselves very fine. And then, Raymond had a supply of compliments and gallant phrases which delighted my wife, who had plenty of self-esteem and coquetry, and loved to be told that she turned all the men's heads and that she was as witty as a demon.

I confess that I had never been able to tell my wife that she had overmuch wit. Indeed, I had long since ceased to tell her that she was pretty; it seemed superfluous to me; I had told her so when I was courting her, and I could not

keep saying the same thing forever. Such talk seems to me most futile; a husband and wife ought to prove their love to each other without having to pay each other compliments. But Pélégie, who did not know what to reply when you talked to her on a subject of real interest, knew enough to smile at flattery; and Raymond declared that her smile said many things. If I attempted to talk sensibly with her, she yawned; thereupon I left her, only too glad when Raymond was there to take my place.

I was wrong, perhaps, in allowing my wife to do whatever she chose; but how would it have served me to put restraint upon her, to restrict her in the gratification of her tastes? It would have made us both unhappy. We married without love, and we were not made to live together. My wife was bored when alone with me, and I did not enjoy being with her. When I tried to talk sensibly to her, to urge her to give a little more time to her housekeeping instead of thinking solely of gewgaws and dress and pleasure, then Pélégie would weep and say that her aunt was justified in calling me a tyrant! What reply could I make to that?—none at all! I cannot bear to see a woman weep. If I had no love for my wife, I did not choose that she should have cause to complain of my treatment; so I allowed her to buy whatever gave her pleasure, and to go to all the balls and festivities to which she was invited. Pélégie spent on dresses, jewels, cabs, and trifles much more than she brought me; but I held my tongue, to avoid little *discussions*. I was determined to do my best to keep the peace, at all events.

Perhaps I should not have left her so often to listen to the whispering of dandies and the soft speeches of salon seducers; but, in truth, it was impossible for me to be jealous. Moreover, my mind was at ease on that score; Pélégie had been brought up very strictly; she was high-principled, and her manners were so modest and bashful! To be sure, she no longer kept her eyes on the floor, and even played the coquette a bit; but I was none the less confident of her fidelity. And then, too, the young men who paid court to her in society never came to my house; I seldom had any male guest except Raymond; and faith! if a man must torment himself in anticipation, his mind would never be at rest.

I hoped to have children; I would have loved them dearly; I would have looked after their education, and it would have been a great joy to me. But I had not had that satisfaction, and the greatest pleasure I knew was to go to my little apartment on Rue Saint-Florentin. There I seemed to be a different man; I fancied myself still a bachelor. In that house nobody knew that I was married; but I never slept there, and my concierge must have thought that I was leading a strange life; I paid her generously, however, and she indulged in no comments.

Indeed, who in the house had any reason to complain of me? I took nobody there, I made no noise, I spoke to nobody, and I did not even know who occupied Raymond's apartment on my landing.

For some time past, my wife had been going more frequently than ever to balls and parties which lasted far into the night. I am no foe to gayeties, but I was afraid that her excessive indulgence in them would injure her health. I reproved her mildly, and she answered sharply; a dispute arose, and madame, who had taken a tone which was entirely new to her, and which surprised me in a woman who had always seemed so timid,—in the modest Pélagie,—put an end to the discussion by announcing that she proposed to have a separate room, so that she might be more at liberty.

I asked nothing better. I had a bed put in the room adjoining my study, which was separated from my wife's bedroom by the salon, the reception room, and a small music room. I took possession of my new quarters that same evening. Raymond, being informed of the new arrangement, said that it was an excellent idea, and that it was all that we needed to make a most charming household.

Pélagie spent money freely; with the purpose of trying to put a curb on the follies she was beginning to commit, I began to go into society with her. It would still have been easy for me to form intrigues, to make conquests; for a young husband is as warmly greeted in Paris as a bachelor in the provinces; but I had no inclination for those liaisons of a moment, for those amourettes which do not touch the heart; I was faithful, but not amorous.

Raymond, too, was most constant in his pretended great friendship for us; often he was obliging enough to bring my wife home when I did not care to stay so late as she did; and as we no longer slept together, Madame Dorsan could come in whenever she pleased, and I know nothing about it. I ceased to say anything to her, for I noticed that she consistently did just the opposite of what I urged her to do.

Still, I was afraid that her lungs, which were delicate, would suffer from such constant late hours. The next time that she was to go to a ball, I advised her to stay at home; she would not listen to me. I decided to go with her and to try to induce her to go home early.

Raymond accompanied us to the festivity in question, which was very gorgeous and very largely attended. At midnight, satiated with dust and écarté, I urged my wife to retire.

“What, monsieur!” replied Pélagie; “go away at the very pleasantest part of the evening! Oh! I propose to stay till the end! You can go home to bed;

Monsieur Raymond will bring me home.”

What was one to say to a little woman who seemed so determined? I went up to Raymond, who anticipated my wishes.

“My dear fellow, go home if you’re tired; I’ll bring madame home.”

“Will you? very good; I shall be much obliged.”

I left the house, saying to myself:

“It’s a great mistake to laugh at us poor husbands; for, upon my word, anyone else in our place would do just as we do.”

I went home and to bed. I slept about three hours; then something, I know not what, awoke me; doubtless it was written that I should wake. I pressed the repeater of my watch: three o’clock. I thought that I would like to know if my wife was at home; ordinarily, I did not disturb myself about it, but she had a cold which made me anxious about her health; if she was not more careful of herself, it might become serious; and, although I did not love her, although she did not make me very happy, as I was more prudent than she, it was my duty to look after her health.

That idea prevented me from going to sleep again; it seemed to me that I should be more at ease if I were sure that she had come home. Why should I not go to her room to make sure? I had never done such a thing since we had slept apart; but my solicitude ought not to offend her; and besides, I could go there without waking her, and she would not even know that I had been to see her. I had a duplicate key to her bedroom, which I had had made when we slept together, so that I could go in without rousing her; for, in the early days of our marriage, she used to go to bed before I came home, and always locked herself in because she was afraid. I had forgotten to give her that key, which lay in my desk; and she had probably forgotten that I had it.

I rose and felt my way to the desk, for I kept no light in my room at night. I found the key, and stole softly from my room to go to my wife.

I walked noiselessly through the intervening rooms, I was careful not to make a sound; one would have thought that I was on my way to an assignation, but it was something very different. When I reached my wife’s door I saw a light through the keyhole.—“Good!” I said to myself; “she’s at home;” and I was about to creep away, when I fancied that I heard voices. With whom could she be talking? The servants were always in bed when we came home, as we had our own keys. I listened; I could not hear very distinctly; but it seemed to me that that voice—“Parbleu!” I thought; “that would be a strange thing!” A thousand ideas crowded into my mind. I slipped the key in the lock very softly, turned it

quickly, entered the room, and—saw Raymond in bed with my wife!

Surprise held me motionless for an instant. Raymond jumped out of bed and ran about the room like a madman; he could not find the door, although there were two. I came to myself and could not resist the temptation to give him a kick that sent him to the floor. But I soon regretted my imprudence. To make an uproar—a scandal—to let the whole household know that I was—I lacked only that!—I put Raymond on his feet, pushed him out of the room, threw his coat in his face, and even gave him a light, so that he might not break his neck on the stairs; it was impossible to be more polite than I was.

“Until to-morrow!” I said.

I imagined that he did not hear me; but, no matter; he had gone, and I returned to my wife.

She had remained in bed; she did not stir.

“As you may imagine,” I said to her, “I do not propose to publish this abroad; however, madame, I am not in the humor to continue to live with you; I may be willing to conceal your misconduct, but I do not choose to witness any more of it. Henceforth we will live apart, as divorces are no longer granted, and as we must remain united all our lives by the laws when we have ceased to be united by any sentiment. It is probable that the blame will be laid on me; people will say that I have deserted you after making you unhappy, for so they often judge the acts of others; but it matters little to me; I leave you everything here; you have your property, and I have mine; henceforth let there be nothing in common between us.”

Pélagie did not say a single word in reply; indeed, I am inclined to think that she fell asleep during my speech. I took a candle, closed her door, and returned to my own room. I intended to go to bed again; but I felt that I should not be able to sleep. No matter if a man be not in love or jealous, he cannot see such things as that and remain cool. Still, I was well content with the coolness I had displayed; except for the kick administered to Raymond, I had borne myself like a genuine philosopher; but I felt in the bottom of my heart that one is never a philosopher in respect to those things which concern self-esteem and honor. Honor! Ah! Figaro is right when he asks:

“Where in the devil has honor hidden itself?”

I decided to pack up my belongings; that would keep me busy, and I should be able to carry everything away at daybreak, and to leave forever that woman, to whom I had been married about eighteen months, and who had already made of me a—but one does not care to speak that word concerning one’s self,

although ready enough to apply it to others.

This, then, is the result of that happy marriage!—Ah! my dear sister, why did I hearken to you? Why did I marry a woman who did not love me—a woman who was not suited to me in any one respect! If we had been happy together, if I had enjoyed being with her, if I had not left her so much to her own resources, perhaps it would not have happened!

So that young innocent, that Agnès, that little simpleton, had betrayed me after only eighteen months! Perhaps it had been going on a long while already; and once more it was Raymond who—— But, in truth, I should have foreseen it; it was certain to happen.

“But,” I said to myself, “this will be your last escapade, Monsieur Raymond; to-morrow I will call upon you with a pair of pistols, which I will load myself.”

The day was beginning to break; I went down into the street, ordered a messenger to go to my room with me, gave him all my goods and chattels to carry, and bade adieu to my home. Thenceforth I would resume my bachelor life.

I had my bundles carried to my old apartment. Ah! how rejoiced I was that I had kept it! It was as if I had divined that I should return to it some day. Madame Dupont stared at my bundles.

“Does this mean that monsieur is going to sleep in his room now?” she asked slyly.

“Yes, Madame Dupont; after this I am going to live as I used to.”

That business completed, I took my weapons and went to Raymond’s apartment.

“Where are you going, monsieur?” inquired the concierge, when she saw me hurrying upstairs.

“To Monsieur Raymond’s.”

“Why, monsieur, didn’t you know that he’d gone away?”

“What’s that? gone away?”

“To be sure; he didn’t sleep here; he took his things away during the night, paid his quarter’s rent, and told me to sell his furniture, saying that he’d send someone for the money after a while. I don’t know what had happened to him, but he seemed so confused that at first I thought he’d gone mad; he was in such a hurry that he didn’t take time to pack the most necessary things. And then he rushed off without telling me where he was going.”

“The coward! Woe to him if I ever meet him! But he is quite capable of having left Paris!”

I left Raymond's concierge in open-mouthed amazement and returned to Rue Saint-Florentin, to arrange my little apartment with a view to resuming my former habits.

XXXV

MY NEIGHBOR

After a few days I recovered my tranquillity; even my spirits, which I had lost, seemed to return with me to my old lodgings; sometimes I fancied that I was still a bachelor; in truth, the best thing for me to do, now that I had no wife, was to forget that I was married.

As I had foreseen, I was the one at whom the stones were thrown; I received a letter from my sister, who informed me that it was a frightful thing to have deserted my wife; that we simply must be reconciled; that Madame de Pontchartrain was furious, and that Pélagie was constantly asking her for money. In reply, I wrote my sister an exact account of what had happened, begging her to keep it secret. I knew that she would not, but I did not care if the good people of Melun knew that I was a cuckold; I had no desire to go back there.

In my old lodgings I resumed my former mode of life, save for its follies, in which I no longer indulged; indeed, it was necessary for me to lead an orderly, economical life; for my dear wife was running through her fortune very rapidly, and I foresaw that she would soon have recourse to me, and that I should be obliged to make her an allowance.

I congratulated myself on the perfect tranquillity that I enjoyed in my house; I realized that Raymond was no longer my neighbor. I should have been glad to find him, however; but I searched Paris for him in vain; he must have left the city.

Apropos of neighbors, I began to wonder who lived on my landing. I had never seen anybody go in or out; it was clearly some person of very sedentary habits. I was not curious; still, one likes to know who lives so near one. Madame Dupont would tell me.

My concierge continued to do my housework; when she came one morning as usual, she was delighted to find me inclined to converse a little.

“I believe you told me, Madame Dupont, that the rooms Monsieur Raymond used to occupy are let?”

“Certainly they are, monsieur; they weren’t vacant a week; somebody hired ’em right away.”

“I never happen to see a living soul go in or out; I never hear a sound.”

“Oh! the tenant’s a very quiet party, never goes out, never has any callers; it’s all right, but I don’t believe she has a very exciting time.”

“It’s a woman, is it?”

“Yes, monsieur—and as to respectability and morals—oh! there’s nothing to be said.”

“Is she an old woman?”

“Not by any means, monsieur; she’s a young woman—very young.”

“Oho! and pretty?”

“Yes, very pretty—as well as I can see under the big bonnet she always wears.”

“What! a young and pretty woman living all alone? no lovers, no husband?”

“No one, I tell you! Oh! if anyone came, I should know it.”

“But she must go out sometimes?”

“In the morning, very early, to buy what she needs; you’re still asleep, that’s why you don’t meet her. After that, she never stirs from her room.”

“It’s very strange!”

“I’ve tried to talk with her now and then; but she won’t talk; it’s impossible to get two words out of her. However, as she behaves decently and pays on the dot, there’s nothing to be said. But it seems to me that people ought to be obliged to let you know who they are.”

I could not help smiling at my concierge’s reflection. What she had told me of my neighbor aroused my curiosity a little, and at first I felt a desire to know her; but why should I annoy the young woman? she did not like society; perhaps she had her reasons for avoiding it. I determined to respect her retirement.

I had ceased to go into society; I should have run the risk of meeting my wife or of being beset with disagreeable questions concerning the cause of our separation; in society, people are so indiscreet that they always ask, from preference, the most unpleasant questions, and I did not choose to afford them that pleasure.

I went to the play, to all the places where one is free from restraint. Sometimes I caught a glimpse of my wife in a carriage, or in a box at the theatre with two or three young men; it seemed that she had not regretted Raymond very deeply, and I was not surprised; she was not so constituted as to regret anyone. When I saw her in the distance, I hastened away in the opposite direction; and she did the same; that was the only thing in which we agreed.

I prayed that she might not have children now! I should have to be their

father, willy-nilly. How delightful it would be to be presented with a little family that I must support!

“You should have gone back to your wife,” someone will say; “then you could have believed that you were the father of your children.”

Thanks; I preferred to live in peace and receive such gifts as my wife chose to send me.

I had been a bachelor three months; that time had passed very rapidly, for ennui never found its way into my little apartment. I had resumed my books and my music;—music! so soothing to the heart, and so sympathetic with our joys and our sorrows! Every evening I sat down at my piano and passed two or three hours there; it seemed to me that Nicette was with me, that she was listening to me; I dreamed that she still loved me, that she had never loved anyone else, and I was happy while cajoling myself thus with chimeras; men are great children who cajole themselves all their lives.

Sometimes I forgot the hour; the quiet of the night inclines the heart to feed on illusions, and I abandoned myself to those illusions that fascinated me. No one in the house had complained because I played so late; there was no one above me but maid-servants, whom it did not keep from sleeping; below was an old annuitant, slightly deaf; so that there was nobody except my neighbor on the same landing who might be annoyed by it; but I had asked the concierge if she had said anything about it, and she said *no*. That woman was absolutely invisible; several times I had fancied that I heard her door open, and had gone out quickly; for I confess that I was curious to see her—but her door was already closed.

She might have passed me again and again, and I should not have noticed her; but nothing arouses curiosity so keenly as an air of mystery. I determined to rise very early some morning and try to see her. I made that resolve at night, but I fell asleep and forgot it. I was not the man to do sentry duty on the landing, or to stare through the keyhole ten or fifteen minutes; I left such methods to Raymond.

I heard nothing more from Melun, and for some time past I had not seen my wife; she left me in peace. I heard sometimes, from one of those officious friends whom one meets in spite of one’s self, try as one may to avoid them, that Madame Dorsan was no more prudent in her conduct, that she had the same mania for balls and dissipation, that her coquetry increased every day, and a thousand other bits of news no less agreeable. There were some who advised me to exert my rights and to apply for an order to have her confined. I thanked them and turned on my heel; I would swear that the very same people told Pélégie that

I was a tyrant, a bear, a wretch unworthy to be the husband of so pretty and interesting a woman, and that I ought to be put under guardianship.

In order to avoid meeting my wife, I frequently went into the country, not in the direction which fashion has made its own, but to those places where the worthy bourgeois and little grisettes go to amuse themselves; the little grisettes whom I used to follow! But I had grown wiser; marriage had *matured* my head considerably; I might say, had *embellished* it.

On a certain day I felt more content than usual with the world; I went out on horseback and rode farther than I was accustomed to do. Darkness overtook me at Vincennes; I urged my horse to a gallop, and returned to Paris in time to avoid a storm that reminded me of the evening at Montmorency.

After taking my horse to the stable, I returned home; I felt tired and needed rest. I could hardly drag myself up the stairs. I was about to open the door—but what was it that my hand touched? Could it be? I dared not believe it, and yet I held the bouquet in my hand. I put it to my nose, I inhaled its perfume with intoxicating joy. Yes, it was really a bouquet—in the same place where she used to put them. Ah! it surely was she who brought that one! who else could have made me that present? I hurried into the room; I could hardly wait to examine it. When I was inside and had struck a light, I gazed at that lovely bouquet and kissed it; it was of orange blossoms, the exact counterpart of those she used to bring me. Ah! it was she, of course, who sent it to me! But, in that case, she was in Paris! she still thought of me! she still loved me!

All these ideas chased one another through my brain; I looked to see if there was a note in the bouquet—nothing! I went to the door, I looked in the keyhole and on the floor—nothing! I had only the bouquet; but that was much! She must have been there; I flew downstairs to question Madame Dupont. I forgot my fatigue.

“Has anyone been here to see me?” I asked the concierge.

“No, monsieur.”

“What! no one has been to ask for me?—a young lady?”

“I give you my word, monsieur, that I haven’t seen anybody who asked for you, and I haven’t been away from my door.”

“Oh! you never see anything! you never used to see her before!”

“Who, monsieur?”

“Someone came, all the same, for I found this bouquet on my doorknob.”

“Well, well! that’s very funny; somebody must have made a mistake in the door.”

“Mistake! no, there’s no mistake; it was she who came.”

“She! who’s she?”

“Raise the latch, Madame Dupont.”

“What, monsieur! are you going out again now? Wait till the storm has passed; it’s raining bucketsful.”

“Open the door, I tell you!”

The concierge dared not make any further suggestions. I went out; I had no idea where I was going, but I was absolutely determined to find out something about Nicette, to learn where she was. I hurried along the street, looking all about me—no one! It was a terrible storm. I went to Rue Saint-Honoré, to her former shop; it seemed to me that I might learn something by going to the place where she used to live; but the shop was closed, tightly closed. I knocked—there was no reply. I entered the café opposite and asked the waiters if the former flower girl had returned to her shop. They stared at me, having no very clear idea what I was saying; I was so excited, and my rain-soaked clothes and muddy boots gave me such a wild aspect, that they took me for a lunatic, I doubt not. I left the café without obtaining any information. Where should I go next? I was still determined to find her.—Ah! perhaps where her mother used to live. It was a terribly long way, but I ran there without stopping. It was quite late; I could find nothing open but a grocery in the neighborhood of Mère Jérôme’s house. I went in and inquired; there I was at least more courteously treated than at the café, because the grocer was more accustomed to see drenched and muddy people. But I learned nothing; since Madame Jérôme’s death her daughters had not been seen in the quarter. So I must needs renounce all hope of learning what had become of her! But, no; I would hope on; she had sent me a bouquet, and perhaps she would return.

I went home sadly enough. I felt completely exhausted; my clothes were stuck to my body; I could hardly walk, but I looked in vain for a cab; it rained in torrents, and I did not meet a single one. I reached home at last. Madame Dupont was waiting for me; the poor woman was terrified when she saw the state I was in; she insisted on going upstairs to warm my bed, on my taking something hot; but I refused her attentions; I hoped that rest would restore me. When I entered my room, my teeth chattered violently and my legs trembled under me. I felt far from well; I crept into bed with Nicette’s bouquet on my heart; it seemed to me that that must cure me.

The next morning my concierge found me wildly delirious; I recognized nobody; my head was on fire, my mouth was parched; I was consumed by a

burning fever. Fatigue, the storm, the mental agitation of the preceding night, had all combined to make me seriously ill. In a few days I was at the door of the tomb.

Who was there to take care of me? who would nurse me? My relations were not in Paris. I had a wife, but she, instead of coming to my bedside, would have fled from me for fear of contagion; strangers had to take the place of kindred and friends.

For nine days I had no idea who was nursing me; I neither heard nor saw anything. Not until the end of that time was the crisis safely passed; I was saved, my delirium disappeared; all that I needed was good care, quiet, and rest.

I half opened my eyes and looked about me with difficulty, trying to collect my thoughts. I saw Madame Dupont by my side.

“Have I been delirious long?” I asked.

“Nine days, monsieur; oh! you’ve been very sick; you almost died! But, thank heaven! you’re saved; all you need now is patience and plenty of rest. I was sure you’d be sick. The idea of going out in such a storm! and all in a sweat, too! And when you came back, why, your eyes were starting out of your head! But young men will never listen to advice! And then, think of going to sleep with a nosegay under your nose! that’s very bad—very unhealthy!”

“What has been done with that bouquet?”

“It’s in the other room there; never fear, you’ll find it all right.”

“Who has nursed me since I have been sick?”

“I have, and—your neighbor.”

“My neighbor!”

“Yes, the lady on your landing. Oh! she has taken the best possible care of you. As soon as she heard you was sick, she insisted on being your nurse, and, my word! if she’d been nursing sick folks all her life, she couldn’t have done better.”

“Where is she? I would like to thank her.”

“Oh! you can thank her later. She’s just gone to her room. But here you are talking, and the doctor told us we mustn’t let you talk! Go to sleep, monsieur, go to sleep; it’ll do you good.”

Madame Dupont closed my curtains and refused to answer any more questions. I was at a loss to understand the unknown lady’s conduct; but I was not strong enough to reflect long; I fell asleep wishing that I might see her. Toward evening I woke. Someone was beside me. When I moved, the person

attempted to hurry away; but it was too late; my eyes had met hers, I had recognized her: it was Nicette.

I cried out, and she returned to me.

“Oh! in heaven’s name, speak to me!” I said; “so that I may be sure that it is you!”

“Yes, yes, it’s I, it’s your Nicette. Oh! Monsieur Dorsan, pray don’t talk any more; the doctor has strictly forbidden it. That’s the reason I didn’t want you to see me.”

“Dear Nicette! as if the sight of you was not more powerful than all their medicines! It is you! it is really you!”

I took her hands and pressed them and held them to my heart; I no longer had strength to speak. She tried to calm me, but she was as deeply moved as I was; the tears rolled down her cheeks and dropped on me; but how sweet they were to us both!

“So it was you, Nicette, who nursed me during my illness?”

“Wasn’t it my duty? Could I have trusted others to do it?”

“Then you were my neighbor?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Cruel girl! you concealed yourself from me!”

“I thought that the sight of me would not give you any pleasure.”

“You did not think that!”

“You are married.”

“But you see that I have ceased to live with my wife.”

“I didn’t dare show myself to you, for fear that would make you leave your lodgings.”

“What an idea! O Nicette!”

“But I couldn’t resist the longing to remind you of me; and that is why you found the bouquet.”

“Ah! it is to it that I am indebted for finding you. Nicette, don’t leave me again, I implore you!”

“Oh, no! I won’t leave you again, monsieur, as you allow me to stay. But, I beg of you, be calm, don’t talk any more, and take a little rest.”

I yielded to her entreaties; in truth, I did need to pull myself together. Nicette was with me, it was to her nursing that I owed my life! I had difficulty in realizing my happiness. Ah! how blissfully happy I was! and yet, some regret

was mingled with my joy, when I thought that Raymond—— But if that were not true, I should be too happy.

Every day my convalescence advanced a step; but I was not content unless Nicette was by my side; so she never left me. She seemed surprised by the feeling that I manifested for her; I saw in her eyes all the intoxicating joy that it caused her. It was plain, therefore, that she still loved me. Often I flattered myself that it was so, and then I abandoned myself to the affection that she aroused in me, I basked blissfully in the fire of her glances, I laid my head on her breast and inhaled her sweet breath. But when the image of Raymond appeared before me, all my happiness vanished, my heart swelled, and I moved away from Nicette.

She noticed these abrupt transitions from joy to gloom, these sudden changes in my manner toward her.

“Are you thinking of your wife?” she asked me one day, when I had moved away from her and sighed.

“No,” I said, gazing at her in distress; “I am thinking of Raymond.”

“Of Monsieur Raymond; and that makes you sigh?”

“Can you wonder at it? Did he not rob me of the greatest of blessings?”

“What do you mean? I don’t understand you.”

“Ah! Nicette, you loved him, and yet you say that you don’t understand me!”

“I—love him! Great God! who told you that?”

“I saw it; I know that he was your lover.”

“My lover! O heaven! then I am a most despicable creature in your eyes! And you believed that!”

Tears suffocated her; she could say no more. I ran to her, threw my arms about her, and covered her with kisses; the mere suspicion that Raymond had lied to me was perfect bliss.

“Nicette, dear Nicette, tell me how it all happened? I saw him in your shop; he held your hands—and you admitted it yourself.”

“Ah! could you believe that I loved anybody but you? I, who would give my life for you—who have never given a thought to anybody else since I first saw you! Oh! forgive me for loving you so much; perhaps it offends you, but I must tell you now the whole secret of my heart. When I lived in my shop, the only joy I had was to see you; every day I expected or hoped to see you pass; but it happened very seldom. I used to bring you bouquets as a pledge of my gratitude, and I would seize a moment when the concierge was out to run up and tie them

on your door. Sometimes I saw you go by with a lady on your arm. Then I used to cry, for I would say to myself: 'I shall never walk like that with him'—When I went a long while without seeing you, I used to long to know something about you, but I didn't dare go to your house to inquire. One day Monsieur Raymond stopped to buy some flowers of me; he looked at me very hard, recognized me, I suppose, and came again the next day. While he was looking at my flowers, he paid me compliments, but I didn't listen to him. Then he mentioned you, and I was very glad to listen to him. He noticed that, for every time he came he talked about you, and I always urged him to stay. He was the only person from whom I heard anything about you; what he said made me sad, and yet I wanted to hear it. He told me that you had twenty mistresses, that you loved all the women, and that you had made fun of me; then he showed me the bouquets I had carried to you, which he said you had given to him."

"The miserable cur! And you believed him, Nicette?"

"Alas! when I saw you come to buy flowers with that lady who—who called you her dear friend and looked at me with such a sneering expression, I thought he had told me the truth. That made me so unhappy that I couldn't stay at home; I went out and walked about the streets most of the night, hardly knowing what I did. It was while I was out that you came. The next morning, when you came again, you seemed to be very angry, and you left me very suddenly, you know; I wanted to call you back, but I didn't dare. That evening Monsieur Raymond came; he talked about you; I cried, and he tried to comfort me; he may have taken my hands in his, but if he did I didn't feel it; I was thinking only of you. He came again the next night, and then he wanted to talk about himself: he said that he adored me, and a lot of other things; but he said nothing more about you, and I wouldn't listen to him. I didn't let him in again; he wrote me a long love letter, calling me cruel and wicked. I have kept it to show you. At last he let me alone. I never saw you after that. I came to this house and learned that you had gone away, but had kept your apartment; that made me hope you would return. But one day Monsieur Raymond passed my shop, and, being delighted to make me unhappy, told me you were married. Alas! I should have expected it; I knew that there must be many other women who loved you; and yet, I became so miserable that I didn't have the courage to keep my shop; besides, I was rich enough to get along without it. I came to this house and found that the other apartment on your landing was empty, so I hired it on the spot. That brought me nearer to these rooms where I passed that night which changed the whole course of my life. But when you came back here to live, I didn't dare to let you see me, because I was afraid that the sight of me would not be pleasant to you.—That is

the truth; do you believe now that I have loved any man but you?"

When she had finished her story, Nicette went for Raymond's letter and brought it to me. I no longer needed it to induce me to believe her; but that final proof thoroughly convinced me that I had been deceived by appearances and by Raymond's lies.

Ah! how delicious was that moment when I found that Nicette was worthy of all my love! I hastened to tell her, in my turn, all that had happened to me, all that I had felt when I believed that she was Raymond's mistress. She wept with joy and love as she listened; she gazed into my face, took my hands, and held them to her heart.

"So you did love me," she said, "and you love me still! Ah! how happy I am!"

The story of my marriage and of Pélagie's conduct caused her the greatest surprise; she could not conceive how my wife could fail to love me. Dear Nicette! But for that miserable Raymond, I should still have been free! but the ties which bound me to Pélagie were broken by nature, if not by man.

"What!" she said; "are you not going back to your wife?"

"Never. That resolution was irrevocable before I found you; it can bring no blame upon you."

"And you really want me to stay with you?"

"Do I want you to! Could I live without you now?"

"Oh! how happy I am going to be, monsieur!"

"Dear Nicette! no more *monsieur*, no more formal address! I am your friend, your lover, and you are the whole world to me! Call me Eugène, your Eugène!"

The evening passed away in this blissful conversation.

"I must go to my room now," said Nicette; "it is time to go to sleep, and you need it."

"Oh! happiness has restored my health. But you are my nurse, and you must not leave me."

She blushed and looked at me; but she had not the strength to deny me anything.

"Dear Eugène," she said, "I am yours. This is surely the place where I owe the reward of your love."

Oh! unalloyed ecstasy of true love, I had never known you before! Never until that day did I really exist!

XXXVI

GREAT EVENTS.—CONCLUSION

A new dawn had risen for me; beside Nicette time fairly flew, and love alone remained. It seemed to me that I loved her more dearly every day. Sometimes the poor child feared that her happiness was only a dream. How keen our pleasures were! how sweet our intercourse! Nicette was no longer the poor flower girl whom I had known long before. Since she had known me, she had striven incessantly to leave behind her every trace of manners and mode of speech that might be unpleasant to me; she had struggled to acquire the indispensable knowledge that she lacked. During all the time that she had lived alone on my landing, she had devoted to study every instant that was not given to thoughts of me. The result was that she talked easily and expressed herself with facility; her manners were refined, her appearance simple, but modest; she did not hold herself perfectly stiff, or keep her eyes cast down, or assume the prudish airs which distinguished Pélagie—before she was my wife; but her demeanor was respectable, her glance sweet and expressive; her whole aspect was most attractive; and her heart—ah! her heart was a treasure!

Six months had passed like a day since I had found Nicette; our happiness would have been perfect but for her occasional fits of melancholy, the cause of which I divined.

“You are married,” she often said to me; “perhaps it is very wrong of me to live with you. Suppose that you should despise me some day.”

“Dear Nicette! drive away these thoughts, which my heart repels. Let the world think and say what it will! If it blames me, it is wrong. In good faith, which of the two deserves to be despised, the wife who deceives her husband, or the mistress who is true to her lover?”

But one morning, while we were breakfasting, there came a violent ring at my door. Nicette answered the bell and returned, followed by a woman whom I recognized: it was Justine, Pélagie’s maid.

My blood froze in my veins. Why had she come?

“Monsieur,” said Justine, “madame your wife is very sick; when she came home from a ball three days ago, she began to vomit blood; they think she can’t get well, and she wants to see you.”

Nicette turned pale; I saw her stagger, but she ran to fetch my hat.

“Go, my dear,” she said; “go at once; your wife is waiting for you. If necessary, stay with her, don’t come back! But try to save her life.”

I hurried after Justine and returned to that house which I had thought that I should never enter again. How everything was changed! What confusion everywhere! I found my way at last to my wife’s apartment and approached her bed; I could hardly recognize her. Was this that Pélagie who used to be so fresh and pretty?—I forgot her faults, and I was conscious of no feeling for her but pity.

She held out her hand.

“I wanted to see you before I died,” she said, in a faint voice. “Eugène, forgive my wrongdoing. I am punished for it, as you see. If I had listened to you, I should not be standing now on the edge of the grave.”

I tried to comfort her, to revive hope in her heart; but I could not; she knew too well that the mainspring of life was broken.

I took my place by her side. The day passed without bringing any change in her condition, but the night was terrible; and about five in the morning, Pélagie ceased to live.

I shed tears over the remains of a woman whose life was so brief and whose happiness was so deceptive.

Having completed the business to which this sad event required me to attend, and having paid my wife’s debts, I returned to Nicette.

“Well?” she said; “your wife?”

“She is no more!”

“Oh! my dear, let us weep over her fate! she might have been so happy if she had loved you!”

To divert my thoughts from that occurrence, I formed the plan of taking a journey with Nicette. That would complete her training; the sight of Switzerland and Italy is always profitable to those who can think and remember.

Nicette was ready to go with me; wherever she could be with me, she was perfectly happy; it mattered little to her under what sky or in what climate we were to pass our lives. To her I was the world, pleasure, happiness. Ah! Nicette! love me so always! If you should ever be false to me, then I should know that no one on earth is worthy of love or faith.

We started in a berlin which I had bought, so that we were free to halt wherever some monument should arouse our admiration, or some fact of history

our interest; that is the only agreeable and profitable way to travel.

We made the tour of Switzerland. I was anxious to show Nicette the splendors of Mont Cenis, and we stopped at an inn near the foot of the mountain. I observed that there was a great commotion in the house. I ordered a room, and the maid who showed us the way to it kept uttering exclamations.

“What has happened here, in heaven’s name?” I asked her; “you all seem much excited. You have guests here, I suppose?”

“Yes, monsieur, a party of foreigners arrived this morning, to climb the mountain; there are Englishmen and Frenchmen and Russians, a whole party of sightseers, in fact. But that isn’t what distresses us so. You see, monsieur, this morning before breakfast all these gentlemen were together, and they began to talk about tables d’hôte. One man said that he liked them because he ate very fast; another declared that he was a better eater than any of the rest, and that he’d eat six eggs before breakfast and, even then, eat faster than anyone; they laughed at him, so he bet ten louis, and an Englishman took the bet. The poor man ordered hard-boiled eggs; he ate them, and then began his breakfast; oh! he went at it in fine style, I tell you! and so he won his ten louis. But just after, he turned yellow, red, and blue; they had to put him to bed, and instead of climbing the mountain he’s likely to die on our hands.”

“It’s an Englishman, of course, who undertook that pretty trick?”

“No, monsieur; a Frenchman.”

“A Frenchman!”

“If you want to see him, everybody’s standing round his bed; everyone has some remedy to save his life.”

I was curious to see the fellow. I left Nicette and bade the girl show me to the dying man’s room. As I entered, he breathed his last, as a result of his wager. I glanced at his face, and recognized my neighbor Raymond.

Typographical errors corrected by the etext transcriber:

interrupting her conversations=> interrupting her conversation {pg 78}

which I was detemined=> which I was determined {pg 198}

even though one act wretchedly=> even though one acts wretchedly {pg 287}

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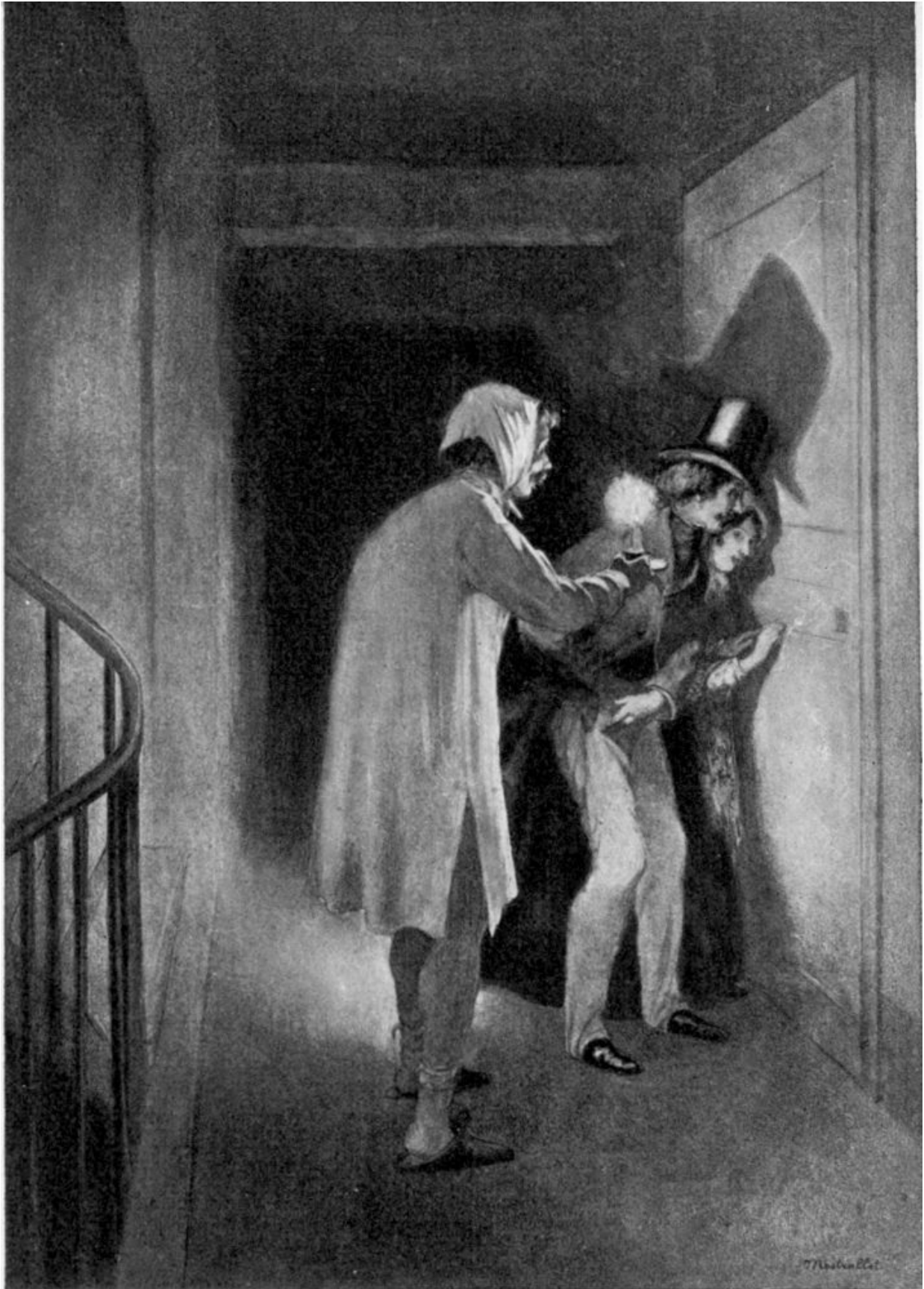
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