

THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS  
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BY  
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## CHAPTER I

### RIGOLETTE'S FIRST SORROW

Rigolette's apartment was still in all its extreme nicety; the large silver watch placed over the mantelpiece, in a small boxwood stand, denoted the hour of four. The severe cold weather having ceased, the thrifty little needlewoman had not lighted her stove.

From the window, a corner of blue sky was scarcely perceptible over the masses of irregularly built roofs, garrets, and tall chimneys, which bounded the horizon on the other side of the street. Suddenly a sunbeam, which, as it were, wandered for a moment between two high gables, came for an instant to purple with its bright rays the windows of the young girl's chamber.

Rigolette was at work, seated by her window; and the soft shadow of her charming profile stood out from the transparent light of the glass as a cameo of rosy whiteness on a silver ground. Brilliant hues played on her jet black hair, twisted in a knot at the back of her head, and shaded with a warm amber colour the ivory of her industrious little fingers, which plied the needle with incomparable activity. The long folds of her brown gown, confined at the waist by the bands of her green apron, half concealed her straw-seated chair, and her pretty feet rested on the edge of a stool before her.

Like a rich lord, who sometimes amuses himself in hiding the walls of a cottage beneath splendid hangings, the setting sun for a moment lighted up this little chamber with a thousand dazzling fires, throwing his golden tints on the curtains of gray and green stuff, and making the walnut-tree furniture glisten with brightness, and the dry-rubbed floor look like heated copper; whilst it encircled in a wire-work of gold the grisette's bird-cage. But, alas! in spite of the exciting splendour of this sun-ray, the two canaries (male and female) flitted about uneasily, and, contrary to their usual habit, did not sing a note. This was because, contrary to her usual habit, Rigolette did not sing. The three never warbled without one another; almost invariably the cheerful and matin song of the latter called forth that of the birds, who, more lazy, did not leave their nests as early as their mistress. Then there were rivalries,—contentions of clear, sonorous, pearly, silvery notes, in which the birds had not always the advantage.

Rigolette did not sing, because, for the first time in her life, she experienced a sorrow. Up to this time, the sight of the misery of the Morels had often affected her; but such sights are too familiar to the poorer classes to cause them any very lasting melancholy. After having, almost every day, succoured these unfortunates as far as was in her power, sincerely wept with and for them, the young girl felt herself at the same time moved and satisfied,—moved by their misfortunes, and satisfied at having shown herself pitiful. But this was not a sorrow. Rigolette's natural gaiety soon regained its empire; and then, without egotism, but by a simple fact of comparison, she found herself so happy in her little chamber, after leaving the horrible den of the Morels, that her momentary sadness speedily disappeared.

This lightness of impression was so little affected by personal feeling, that, by a mode of extremely delicate reasoning, the grisette considered it almost a duty to aid those more unhappy than herself, that she might thus unscrupulously enjoy an existence so very precarious and entirely dependent on her labour, but which, compared with the fearful distress of the lapidary's family, appeared to her almost luxurious.

"In order to sing without compunction, when we have near us persons so much to be pitied," she said, naïvely, "we must have been as charitable to them as possible."

Before we inform our reader the cause of Rigolette's first sorrow, we are desirous to assure him, or her, completely as to the virtue of this young girl. We are sorry to use the word virtue,—a serious, pompous, solemn word, which almost always brings with it ideas of painful sacrifice, of painful struggle against the passions, of austere meditations on the final close of all things here below. Such was not the virtue of Rigolette. She had neither deeply struggled nor meditated; she had worked, and laughed, and sung. Her prudence, as she called it, when speaking frankly and sincerely to Rodolph, was with her a question of time,—she had not the leisure to be in love. Particularly lively, industrious, and orderly, order, work, and gaiety had often, unknown to herself, defended, sustained, saved her.

It may be deemed, perchance, that this morality is light, frivolous, casual; but of what consequence is the cause, so that the effect endures? Of what consequence are the directions of the roots of a plant, provided the flower blooms pure, expanded, and full of perfume?

Apropos of our utopianisms, as to the encouragement, help, and recompenses which society ought to grant to artisans remarkable for their eminent social qualities, we have alluded to that protection of virtue (one of

the projects of the Emperor, by the way). Let us suppose this admirable idea realised. One of the real philanthropists whom the Emperor proposed to employ in searching after worth has discovered Rigolette. Abandoned without advice, without aid, exposed to all the perils of poverty, to all the seductions with which youth and beauty are surrounded, this charming girl has remained pure; her honest, hard-working life might serve for a model and example. Would not this young creature deserve, not a mere recompense, not succour only, but some impressive words of approbation and encouragement, which would give her a consciousness of her own worth, exalt her in her own eyes, and lay on her obligations for the future? At least she would know that she was followed by eyes full of solicitude and protection in the difficult path in which she is progressing with so much courage and serenity; she would know that, if one day the want of work or sickness threatened to destroy the equilibrium of the poor and occupied life, which depends solely on work and health, a slight help, due to her former deserts, would be given to her.

People, no doubt, will exclaim against the impossibility of this tutelary surveillance, which would surround persons particularly worthy of interest through their previous excellent lives. It seems to us that society has already resolved this problem. Has it not already imagined the superintendence of the police, for life or for a period, for the most useful purpose of constantly controlling the conduct of dangerous persons, noted for the infamy of their former lives? Why does not society exercise also a superintendence of moral charity?

But let us leave the lofty stilts of our utopianisms, and return to the cause of Rigolette's first sorrow.

With the exception of Germain, a well-behaved, open-hearted young man, the grisette's neighbours had all, at first, begun on terms of familiarity, believing her offers of good neighbourship were little flirtations; but these gentlemen had been compelled to admit, with as much astonishment as annoyance, that they found in Rigolette an amiable and mirthful companion for their Sunday excursions, a pleasant neighbour, and a kind-hearted creature, but not a mistress. Their surprise and their annoyance, at first very great, gradually gave way before the frank and even temper of the grisette; and then, as she had sagaciously said to Rodolph, her neighbours were proud on Sundays to have on their arms a pretty girl, who was an honour to them in every way (Rigolette was quite regardless of appearances), and who only cost them the share of the moderate pleasures, whose value was doubled by her presence and nice appearance. Besides, the dear girl was so easily contented! In her days of penury she dined well and gaily off a

morsel of warm cake, which she nibbled with all the might of her little white teeth; after which, she amused herself so much with a walk on the boulevards or in the arcades.

If our readers feel but little sympathy with Rigolette, they will at least confess that a person must be very absurd, or very cruel, to refuse once a week these simple amusements to so delightful a creature, who, besides having no right to be jealous, never prevented her cavaliers from consoling themselves for her cruelty by flirtations with other damsels.

François Germain alone never founded any vain hopes on the familiarity of the young girl, but, either from instinct of heart or delicacy of mind, he guessed from the first day how very agreeable the singular companionship of Rigolette might be made.

What might be imagined happened, and Germain fell passionately in love with his neighbour, without daring to say a word to her of his love.

Far from imitating his predecessors, who, convinced of the vanity of their pursuit, had consoled themselves with other loves, without being on that account the less on good terms with their neighbour, Germain had most supremely enjoyed his intimacy with the young girl, passing with her not only his Sunday but every evening when he was not engaged. During these long hours Rigolette was, as usual, merry and laughing; Germain tender, attentive, serious, and often somewhat sad. This sadness was his only drawback, for his manners, naturally good, were not to be compared with the foppery of M. Girandeaup, the commercial traveller, alias bagman, or with the noisy eccentricities of Cabrion; but M. Girandeaup by his unending loquacity, and the painter by his equally interminable fun, took the lead of Germain, whose quiet composure rather astonished his little neighbour, the grisette.

Rigolette then had not, as yet, testified any decided preference for any one of her beaux; but as she was by no means deficient in judgment, she soon discovered that Germain alone united all the qualities requisite for making a reasonable woman happy.

Having stated all these facts, we will inquire why Rigolette was sad, and why neither she nor her birds sang. Her oval and fresh-looking face was rather pale; her large black eyes, usually gay and brilliant, were slightly dulled and veiled; whilst her whole look bespoke unusual fatigue. She had been working nearly all the night; from time to time she looked sorrowfully at a

letter which lay open on a table near her. This letter had been addressed to her by Germain, and contained as follows:

"PRISON OF THE CONCIERGERIE.

"MADEMOISELLE:—The place from which I address you will sufficiently prove to you the extent of my misfortune,—I am locked up as a robber. I am guilty in the eyes of all the world, and yet I am bold enough to write to you! It is because it would, indeed, be dreadful to me to believe that you consider me as a degraded criminal. I beseech you not to condemn me until you have perused this letter. If you discard me, that will be the final blow, and will indeed overwhelm me. I will tell you all that has passed. For some time I had left the Rue du Temple, but I knew through poor Louise that the Morel family, in whom you and I took such deep interest, were daily more and more wretched. Alas, my pity for these poor people has been my destruction! I do not repent it, but my fate is very cruel. Last night I had stayed very late at M. Ferrand's, occupied with business of importance. In the room in which I was at work was a bureau, in which my employer shut up every day the work I had done. This evening he appeared much disturbed and troubled, and said to me, 'Do not leave until these accounts are finished, and then put them in the bureau, the key of which I will leave with you;' and then he left the room. When my work was done I opened the drawer to put it away, when, mechanically, my eyes were attracted by an open letter, on which I read the name of Jérôme Morel, the lapidary. I confess that, seeing that it referred to this unfortunate man, I had the indiscretion to read this letter; and I learnt that the artisan was to be arrested next day on an overdue bill of thirteen hundred francs, at the suit of M. Ferrand, who, under an assumed name, had imprisoned him. This information was from an agent employed by M. Ferrand. I knew enough of the situation of the Morel family to be aware of the terrible blow which the imprisonment of their only support must inflict upon them, and I was equally distressed and indignant. Unfortunately I saw in the same drawer an open box, with two thousand francs in gold in it. At this moment I heard Louise coming up the stairs, and without reflecting on the seriousness of my offence, but profiting by the opportunity which chance offered, I took thirteen hundred francs, went to her in the passage, and put the money in her hand, saying, 'They are going to arrest your father to-morrow at daybreak, for thirteen hundred francs,—here they are. Save him, but do not say that the money comes from me. M. Ferrand is a bad man.' You see, mademoiselle, my intention was good, but my conduct culpable. I conceal nothing from you, but this is my excuse. By dint of saving for a long time I had realised, and placed with a banker, the sum of fifteen hundred francs, but the cashier of the banker never came to the office before noon. Morel was to be arrested at daybreak, and therefore it

was necessary that she should have the money so as to pay it in good time; if not, even if I could have gone in the day to release him from prison, still he would be arrested and carried off in presence of his wife, whom such a blow must have killed. Besides, the heavy costs of the writ would have been added to the expenses of the lapidary. You will understand, I dare say, that all these new misfortunes would not have befallen me if I had been able to restore the thirteen hundred francs I had taken back again to the bureau before M. Ferrand discovered anything; unfortunately, I fell into that mistake. I left M. Ferrand's, and was no longer under the impression of indignation and pity which had impelled me to the step. I began to reflect upon all the dangers of my position. A thousand fears then came to assail me. I knew the notary's severity, and he might come after I left and search in his bureau and discover the theft; for in his eyes—in the eyes of the world—it is a theft. These thoughts overwhelmed me, and, late as it was, I ran to the banker's to supplicate him to give me my money instantly. I should have found an excuse for this urgent request, and then I should have returned to M. Ferrand and replaced the money I had taken. By an unlucky chance, the banker had gone to Belleville for two days, to his country-house, where he was engaged in some plantations. Everything seemed to conspire against me. I waited for daybreak with intense anxiety, and hastened to Belleville,—the banker had just left for Paris. I returned, saw him, obtained my money, hastened to M. Ferrand; everything was discovered. But this is only a portion of my misfortunes. The notary at once accused me of having robbed him of fifteen thousand francs in bank-notes, which, he declared, were in the drawer of the bureau, with the two thousand francs in gold. This was a base accusation,—an infamous lie! I confess myself guilty of the first abstraction, but, by all that is most sacred in the world, I swear to you, mademoiselle, that I am innocent of the second. I never saw a bank-note in the drawer. There were only two thousand francs in gold, from which I took the thirteen hundred francs I have mentioned. This is the truth, mademoiselle. I am under this terrible accusation, and yet I affirm that you ought to know me incapable of a lie. But will you,—do you believe me? Alas, as M. Ferrand said, 'he who has taken a small sum may equally have taken a large amount, and his word does not deserve belief.' I have always seen you so good and devoted to the unhappy, mademoiselle, and I know you are so frank and liberal-minded, that your heart will guide you in the just appreciation of the truth, I hope. I do not ask any more. Give credit to my words, and you will find in me as much to pity as to blame; for, I repeat to you, my intention was good, and circumstances impossible to foresee have destroyed me. Oh, Mlle. Rigolette, I am very unhappy! If you knew in the midst of what a set of persons I am doomed to exist until my trial is over! Yesterday they took me to a place which they call the dépôt of the prefecture of police. I cannot tell you what I felt when, after having gone up a dark

staircase, I reached a door with an iron wicket, which was opened and soon closed upon me. I was so troubled in my mind that I could not, at first, distinguish anything. A hot and fetid air came upon me, and I heard a loud noise of voices mingled with sinister laughs, angry exclamations, and depraved songs. I remained motionless at the door for awhile, looking at the stone flooring of the apartment, and neither daring to advance nor lift up my eyes, thinking that everybody was looking at me. They were not, however, thinking of me; for a prisoner more or less does not at all disturb these men. At last I ventured to look up, and, oh, what horrid countenances! What ragged wretches! What dirty and bespattered garments! All the exterior marks of misery and vice! There were forty or fifty seated, standing, or lying on benches secured to the wall,—vagrants, robbers, assassins, and all who had been apprehended during the night and day. When they perceived me I found a sad consolation in seeing that they did not recognise me as belonging or known to them. Some of them looked at me with an insulting and derisive air, and then began to talk amongst themselves in a low tone, and in some horrible jargon, not one word of which did I understand. After a short time one of the most brutal amongst them came, and, slapping me on the shoulder, asked me for money to pay my footing. I gave them some silver, hoping thus to purchase repose; but it was not enough, and they demanded more, which I refused. Then several of them surrounded me and assailed me with threats and imprecations, and were proceeding to extremities, when, fortunately for me, a turnkey entered, who had been attracted by the noise. I complained to him, and he insisted on their restoring to me the money I had given them already, adding that, if I liked to pay a small fee, I should go to what is called the pistole; that is, be in a cell to myself. I accepted the offer gratefully, and left these ruffians in the midst of their loud menaces for the future; 'for,' said they, 'we are sure to meet again, when I could not get away from them.' The turnkey conducted me to a cell, where I passed the rest of the night. It is from here that I now write to you, Mlle. Rigolette. Directly after my examination I shall be taken to another prison, called La Force, where I expect to meet many of my companions in the station-house. The turnkey, interested by my grief and tears, has promised me to forward this letter to you, although such kindnesses are strictly forbidden. I ask, Mlle. Rigolette, a last service of your friendship, if, indeed, you do not blush now for such an intimacy. In case you will kindly grant my request, it is this: With this letter you will receive a small key, and a line for the porter of the house I live in, Boulevard St. Denis, No. 11. I inform him that you will act as if it were myself with respect to everything that belongs to me, and that he is to attend to your instructions. He will take you to my room, and you will have the goodness to open my secrétaire with the key I send you herewith. In this you will find a large packet containing different papers, which I beg of you to take care of



for me. One of them was intended for you, as you will see by the address; others have been written of you, in happier days. Do not be angry. I did not think they would ever come to your knowledge. I beg you, also, to take the small sum of money which is in this drawer, as well as a satin bag, which contains a small orange silk handkerchief, which you wore when we used to go out on Sundays, and which you gave me on the day I quitted the Rue du Temple. I should wish that, excepting a little linen which you will be so good as send to me at La Force, you would sell the furniture and things I possess; for, whether acquitted or found guilty, I must of necessity be obliged to quit Paris. Where shall I go? What are my resources? God only knows. Madame Bouvard, the saleswoman of the Temple, who has already sold and bought for me many things, will perhaps take all the furniture, etc., at once. She is a very fair-dealing woman, and this would save you a great deal of trouble, for I know how precious your time is. I have paid my rent in advance, and I have, therefore, only to ask you to give a small present to the porter. Excuse, mademoiselle, the trouble of these details; but you are the only person in the world to whom I dare and can address myself. I might, perhaps, have asked one of M. Ferrand's clerks to do this service for me, as we were on friendly terms, but I feared his curiosity as to certain papers. Several concern you, as I have said, and others relate to the sad events in my life. Ah, believe me, Mlle. Rigolette, if you grant me this last favour, this last proof of former regard, it will be my only consolation under the great affliction in which I am plunged; and, in spite of all, I hope you will not refuse me. I also beg of you to give me permission to write to you sometimes. It will be so consoling, so comforting to me, to be able to pour out my heavy sorrows into a kind heart. Alas, I am alone in the world,—no one takes the slightest interest in me! This isolation was before most painful to me. Think what it must be now! And yet I am honest, and have the consciousness of never having injured any one, and of always having, at the peril of my life, testified my aversion for what is wicked and wrong; as you will see by the papers, which I pray of you to take care of, and which you may read. But when I say this, who will believe me? M. Ferrand is respected by all the world; his reputation for probity is long established; he has a just cause of accusation against me, and he will crush me. I resign myself at once to my fate. Now, Mlle. Rigolette, if you do believe me, you will not, I hope, feel any contempt for me, but pity me; and you will, perhaps, carry your generosity so far as to come one day,—some Sunday (alas, what recollections that word brings up!)—some Sunday, to see me in the reception-room of my prison. But no, no; I never could dare to see you in such a place! Yet you are so good, so kind, that—if—I am compelled to break off this letter and send it to you at once, with the key, and a line for the porter, which I write in great haste. The turnkey has come to tell me that I am going directly before the

magistrate. Adieu, adieu, Mlle. Rigolette! Do not discard me, for my hope is in you, and in you only!

"FRANÇOIS GERMAIN.

"P. S.—If you reply, address your letter to me at the prison of La Force."

We may now divine the cause of Rigolette's first sorrow.

Her excellent heart was deeply wounded at a misfortune of which she had no suspicion until that moment. She believed unhesitatingly in the entire veracity of the statement of Germain, the unfortunate son of the Schoolmaster.

Not very strait-laced, she thought her old neighbour exaggerated his fault immensely. To save the unhappy father of a family, he had momentarily appropriated a sum which he thought he could instantly refund. This action, in the grisette's eyes, was but generous.

By one of those contradictions common to women, and especially to women of her class, this young girl, who until then had not felt for Germain more than her other neighbours, but a kind and mirthful friendship, now experienced for him a decided preference. As soon as she knew that he was unfortunate, unjustly accused, and a prisoner, his remembrance effaced that of all his former rivals. Yet Rigolette did not all at once feel intense love, but a warm and sincere affection, full of pity and determined devotion,—a sentiment which was the more new with her in consequence of the better sensations it brought with it.

Such was the moral position of Rigolette when Rodolph entered her chamber, having first rapped very discreetly at the door.

"Good morning, neighbour," said Rodolph to Rigolette; "do not let me disturb you."

"Not at all, neighbour. On the contrary, I am delighted to see you, for I have had something to vex me dreadfully."

"Why, in truth, you look very pale, and appear as though you had been weeping."

"Indeed, I have been weeping, and for a good reason. Poor Germain! There—read!" And Rigolette handed the letter of the prisoner to Rodolph. "Is not that enough to break one's heart? You told me you took an interest in him,—

now's the time to prove it!" she added, whilst Rodolph was attentively reading the letter. "Is that wicked old M. Ferrand at war with all the world? First he attacked that poor Louise, and now he assails Germain. Oh, I am not ill-natured; but if some great harm happened to this notary, I should really be glad! To accuse such an honest young man of having stolen fifteen thousand francs from him! Germain, too! He who was honesty itself! And such a steady, serious young man; and so sad, too! Oh, he is indeed to be pitied, in the midst of all these wretches in his prison! Ah, M. Rodolph, from to-day I begin to see that life is not all couleur-de-rose."

"And what do you propose to do, my little neighbour?"

"What do I mean to do? Why, of course, all that Germain asks of me, and as quickly as possible. I should have been gone before now, but for this work, which is required in great haste, and which I must take instantly to the Rue St. Honoré, on my way to Germain's room, where I am going to get the papers he speaks of. I have passed part of the night at work, that I might be forward. I shall have so many things to do besides my usual work that I must be excessively methodical. In the first place, Madame Morel is very anxious that I should see Louise in prison. That will be a hard task, but I shall try to do it. Unfortunately, I do not know to whom I should address myself."

"I had thought of that."

"You, neighbour?"

"Here is an order."

"How fortunate! Can't you procure me also an order for the prison of poor, unhappy Germain? He would be so delighted!"

"I will also find you the means of seeing Germain."

"Oh, thank you, M. Rodolph."

"You will not be afraid, then, of going to his prison?"

"Certainly not; although my heart will beat very violently the first time. But that's nothing. When Germain was free, was he not always ready to anticipate all my wishes, and take me to the theatre, for a walk, or read to me of an evening? Well, and now he is in trouble, it is my turn. A poor little mouse like me cannot do much, I know that well enough; but all I can do I will do, that he may rely upon. He shall find that I am a sincere friend. But,

M. Rodolph, there is one thing which pains me, and that is that he should doubt me,—that he should suppose me capable of despising him! I!—and for what, I should like to know? That old notary accuses him of robbery. I know it is not true. Germain's letter has proved to me that he is innocent, even if I had thought him guilty. You have only to see him, and you would feel certain that he is incapable of a bad action. A person must be as wicked as M. Ferrand to assert such atrocious falsehoods."

"Bravo, neighbour; I like your indignation."

"Oh, how I wish I were a man, that I might go to this notary and say to him, 'Oh, you say that Germain has robbed you, do you? Well, then, that's for you! And that he cannot steal from you, at all events?' And thump—thump—thump, I would beat him till I couldn't stand over him."

"You administer justice very expeditiously," said Rodolph, smiling.

"Because it makes my blood boil. And, as Germain says in his letter, all the world will side with his employer, because he is rich and looked up to, whilst Germain is poor and unprotected, unless you will come to his assistance, M. Rodolph,—you who know such benevolent persons. Do not you think that something could be done?"

"He must await his sentence. Once acquitted, as I believe he will be, he will not want for proofs of the interest taken in him. But listen, neighbour; for I know I may rely on your discretion."

"Oh, yes, M. Rodolph, I never blab."

"Well, then, no one must know—not even Germain himself—that he has friends who are watching over him,—for he has friends."

"Really!"

"Very powerful and devoted."

"It would give him much courage to know that."

"Unquestionably; but perhaps he might not keep it to himself. Then M. Ferrand, alarmed, would be on his guard,—his suspicions would be aroused; and, as he is very cunning, it would become very difficult to catch him, which would be most annoying; for not only must Germain's innocence be made clear, but his denouncer must be unmasked."

"I understand, M. Rodolph."

"It is the same with Louise; and I bring you this order to see her, that you may beg of her not to tell any person what she disclosed to me. She will know what that means."

"I understand, M. Rodolph."

"In a word, let Louise beware of complaining in prison of her master's wickedness. This is most important. But she must conceal nothing from the barrister who will come from me to talk with her as to the grounds of her defence. Be sure you tell her all this."

"Make yourself easy, neighbour, I will forget nothing; I have an excellent memory. But, when we talk of goodness, it is you who are so good and kind. If any one is in trouble, then you come directly."

"I have told you, my good little neighbour, that I am but a poor clerk; but when I meet with good persons who deserve protection, I instantly tell a benevolent individual who has entire confidence in me, and they are helped at once. That's all I do in the matter."

"And where are you lodging, now you have given up your chamber to the Morels?"

"I live in a furnished lodging."

"Oh, how I should hate that! To be where all the world has been before you, it is as if everybody had been in your place."

"I am only there at nights, and then—"

"I understand,—it is less disagreeable. Yet I shouldn't like it, M. Rodolph. My home made me so happy, I had got into such a quiet way of living, that I did not think it was possible I should ever know a sorrow. And yet, you see—But no, I cannot describe to you the blow which Germain's misfortune has brought upon me. I have seen the Morels, and others beside, who were very much to be pitied certainly. But, at best, misery is misery; and amongst poor folk, who look for it, it does not surprise them, and they help one another as well as they can. To-day it is one, to-morrow it is another. As for oneself, what with courage and good spirit, one extricates oneself. But to see a poor young man, honest and good, who has been your friend for a long time,—to see him accused of robbery, and imprisoned and huddled up with

criminals!—ah, really, M. Rodolph, I cannot get over that; it is a misfortune I had never thought of, and it quite upsets me."

"Courage, courage! Your spirits will return when your friend is acquitted."

"Oh, yes, he must be acquitted. The judges have only to read his letter to me, and that would be enough,—would it not, M. Rodolph?"

"Really, this letter has all the appearance of truth. You must let me have a copy of it, for it will be necessary for Germain's defence."

"Certainly, M. Rodolph. If I did not write such a scrawl, in spite of the lessons which good Germain gave me, I would offer to copy it myself; but my writing is so large, so crooked, and has so many, many faults."

"I will only ask you to trust the letter with me until to-morrow morning."

"There it is; but you will take great care of it, I hope. I have burnt all the notes which M. Cabrion and M. Girandeau wrote me in the beginning of our acquaintance, with flaming hearts and doves at the top of the paper, when they thought I was to be caught by their tricks and cajoleries; but this poor letter of Germain's I will keep carefully, as well as the others, if he writes me any more; for they, you know, M. Rodolph, will show in my favour that he has asked these small services,—won't they, M. Rodolph?"

"Most assuredly; and they will prove that you are the best little friend any one can desire. But, now I think of it, instead of going alone to Germain's room, shall I accompany you?"

"With pleasure, neighbour. The night is coming on, and, in the evening, I do not like to be alone in the streets; besides that, I have my work to carry nearly as far as the Palais Royal. But perhaps it will fatigue and annoy you to go so far?"

"Not at all. We will have a coach."

"Really! Oh, how pleased I should be to go in a coach if I had not so much to make me melancholy! And I really must be melancholy, for this is the first day since I have been here that I have not sung during the day. My birds are really quite astonished. Poor little dears! They cannot make it out. Two or three times Papa Crétu has piped a little to try me; I endeavoured to answer him, but, after a minute or two, I began to cry. Ramonette then began; but I could not answer one any better than the other."

"What singular names you have given your birds: Papa Crétu and Ramonette!"

"Why, M. Rodolph, my birds are the joy of my solitude,—my best friends; and I have given them the names of the worthy couple who were the joy of my childhood, and were also my best friends, not forgetting that, to complete the resemblance, Papa Crétu and Ramonette were gay, and sang like birds."

"Ah, now, yes, I remember, your adopted parents were called so."

"Yes, neighbour, they are ridiculous names for birds, I know; but that concerns no one but myself. And besides, it was in this very point that Germain showed his good heart."

"In what way?"

"Why, M. Girandeau and M. Cabrion—especially M. Cabrion—were always making their jokes on the names of my birds. To call a canary Papa Crétu! There never was such nonsense as M. Cabrion made of it, and his jests were endless. If it was a cock bird, he said, 'Why, that would be well enough to call him Crétu. As to Ramonette, that's well enough for a hen canary, for it resembles Ramona.' In fact, he quite wore my patience out, and for two Sundays I would not go out with him in order to teach him a lesson; and I told him very seriously, that if he began his tricks, which annoyed me so much, we should never go out together again."

"What a bold resolve!"

"Yes, it was really a sacrifice on my part, M. Rodolph, for I was always looking forward with delight to my Sundays, and I was very much tried by being kept in all alone in such beautiful weather. But that's nothing. I preferred sacrificing my Sundays to hearing M. Cabrion continue to make ridicule of those whom I respected. Certainly, after that, but for the idea I attached to them, I should have preferred giving my birds other names; and, you must know, there is one name which I adore,—it is Colibri. I did not change, because I never will call those birds by any other name than Crétu and Ramonette; if I did, I should seem to make a sacrifice, that I forgot my good, adopted parents,—don't you think so, M. Rodolph?"

"You are right a thousand times over. And Germain did not turn these names into a jest, eh?"

"On the contrary, the first time he heard them he thought them droll, like every one else, and that was natural enough. But when I explained to him

my reasons, as I had many times explained them to M. Cabrion, tears started to his eyes. From that time I said to myself, M. Germain is very kind-hearted, and there is nothing to be said against him, but his weeping so. And so, you see, M. Rodolph, my reproaching him with his sadness has made me unhappy now. Then I could not understand why any one was melancholy, but now I understand it but too well. But now my packet is completed, and my work is ready for delivery. Will you hand me my shawl, neighbour? It is not cold enough to take a cloak, is it?"

"We shall go and return in a coach."

"True; we shall go and return very quickly, and that will be so much gained."

"But, now I think of it, what are you to do? Your work will suffer from your visits to the prison."

"Oh, no, no; I have made my calculations. In the first place, I have my Sundays to myself, so I shall go and see Louise and Germain on those days; that will serve me for a walk and a change. Then, in the week, I shall go again to the prison once or twice. Each time will occupy me three good hours, won't it? Well, to manage this comfortably, I shall work an hour more every day, and go to bed at twelve o'clock instead of eleven o'clock; that will be a clear gain of seven or eight hours a week, which I can employ in going to see Louise and Germain. You see I am richer than I appear," added Rigolette, with a smile.

"And you have no fear that you will be overfatigued?"

"Bah! Not at all; I shall manage it. And, besides, it can't last for ever."

"Here is your shawl, neighbour."

"Fasten it; and mind you don't prick me."

"Ah, the pin is bent."

"Well, then, clumsy, take another then,—from the pincushion. Ah, I forgot! Will you do me a great favour, neighbour?"

"Command me, neighbour."

"Mend me a good pen, with a broad nib, so that when I return I may write to poor Germain, and tell him I have executed all his commissions. He will



have my letter to-morrow morning in the prison, and that will give him pleasure."

"Where are your pens?"

"There,—on the table; the knife is in the drawer. Wait until I light my taper, for it begins to grow dusk."

"Yes, I shall see better how to mend the pen."

"And I how to tie my cap."

Rigolette lighted a lucifer-match, and lighted a wax-end in a small bright candlestick.

"The deuce,—a wax-light! Why, neighbour, what extravagance!"

"Oh, what I burn costs but a very small trifle more than a candle, and it's so much cleaner!"

"Not much dearer?"

"Indeed, they are not! I buy these wax-ends by the pound, and a half a pound lasts nearly a year."

"But," said Rodolph, who was mending the pen very carefully, whilst the grisette was tying on her cap before the glass, "I do not see any preparations for your dinner."

"I have not the least appetite. I took a cup of milk this morning, and I shall take another this evening, with a small piece of bread, and that will be enough for me."

"Then you will not take a dinner with me quietly after we have been to Germain's?"

"Thank you, neighbour; but I am not in spirits,—my heart is too heavy,—another time with pleasure. But the evening when poor Germain leaves his prison, I invite myself, and afterwards you shall take me to the theatre. Is that a bargain?"

"It is, neighbour; and I assure you I will not forget the engagement. But you refuse me this to-day?"

"Yes, M. Rodolph. I should be a very dull companion, without saying a word about the time it would occupy me; for, you see, at this moment, I really cannot afford to be idle, or waste one single quarter of an hour."

"Then, for to-day I renounce the pleasure."

"There is my parcel, neighbour. Now go out first, and I will lock the door."

"Here's a capital pen for you; and now for the parcel."

"Mind you don't rumple it; it is pout-de-soie, and soon creases. Hold it in your hand,—carefully,—there, in that way; that's it. Now go, and I will show you a light."

And Rodolph descended the staircase, followed by Rigolette.

At the moment when the two neighbours were passing by the door of the porter's lodge they saw M. Pipelet, who, with his arms hanging down, was advancing towards them from the bottom of the passage, holding in one hand the sign which announced his Partnership of Friendship with Cabrion, and in the other the portrait of the confounded painter. Alfred's despair was so overwhelming that his chin touched his breast, so that the wide crown of his bell-shaped hat was easily seen. Seeing him thus, with his head lowered, coming towards Rodolph and Rigolette, he might have been compared to a ram, or a brave Breton, preparing for combat.

Anastasie soon appeared on the threshold of the lodge, and exclaimed, at her husband's appearance:

"Well, dearest old boy, here you are! And what did the commissary say to you? Alfred, Alfred, mind what you're doing, or you'll poke your head against my king of lodgers. Excuse him, M. Rodolph. It is that vagabond of a Cabrion, who uses him worse and worse. He'll certainly turn my dear old darling into a donkey! Alfred, love, speak to me!"

At this voice, so dear to his heart, M. Pipelet raised his head. His features were impressed with a bitter agony.

"What did the commissary say to you?" inquired Anastasie.

"Anastasie, we must collect the few things we possess, embrace our friends, pack up our trunk, and expatriate ourselves from Paris,—from France,—from my beautiful France; for now, assured of impunity, the monster is

capable of pursuing me everywhere, throughout the length and breadth of the departments of the kingdom."

"What, the commissary?"

"The commissary," exclaimed M. Pipelet, with fierce indignation,—"the commissary laughed in my teeth!"

"At you,—a man of mature age, with an air so respectable that you would appear as silly as a goose if one did not know your virtues?"

"Well, notwithstanding that, when I had respectfully deposed in his presence my mass of complaints and vexations against that infernal Cabrion, the magistrate, after having looked and laughed—yes, laughed, and, I may add, laughed indecorously—at the sign and the portrait which I brought with me as corroborative testimony,—the magistrate replied, 'My good fellow, this Cabrion is a wag,—a practical joker. But pay no attention to his pleasantries. I advise you to laugh at him, and heartily, too, for really there is ample cause to do so.' 'To laugh at it, sir-r-r!' I exclaimed,—'to laugh at it, when grief consumes me,—when this scamp poisons my very existence; he placards me, and will drive me out of my wits. I demand that they imprison, exile the monster,—at least from my street!' At these words the commissary smiled, and politely pointed to the door. I understood the magistrate, sighed, and—and—here I am!"

"Good-for-nothing magistrate!" exclaimed Madame Pipelet.

"It is all over, Anastasie,—all is ended,—hope ceases. There's no justice in France; I am really atrociously sacrificed."

And, by way of peroration, M. Pipelet dashed the sign and portrait to the farther end of the passage with all his force. Rodolph and Rigolette had in the shade smiled at M. Pipelet's despair. After having said a few words of consolation to Alfred, whom Anastasie was trying to calm as well as she could, the king of lodgers left the house in the Rue du Temple with Rigolette, and they both got into a coach to go to François Germain's.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WILL

François Germain resided No. 11 Boulevard St. Denis. It may not be amiss to recall to the reader, who has probably forgotten the circumstance, that Madame Mathieu, the diamond-matcher, whose name has been already mentioned as the person for whom Morel the lapidary worked, lodged in the same house as Germain. During the long ride from the Rue du Temple to the Rue St. Honoré, where dwelt the dressmaker for whom Rigolette worked, Rodolph had ample opportunities of more fully appreciating the fine natural disposition of his companion. Like all instinctively noble and devoted characters, she appeared utterly unconscious of the delicacy and generosity of her conduct, all she said and did seeming to her as the most simple and matter-of-course thing possible.

Nothing would have been more easy than for Rodolph to provide liberally both for Rigolette's present and future wants, and thus to have enabled her to carry her consoling attentions to Louise and Germain, without grieving over the loss of that time which was necessarily taken from her work,—her sole dependence; but the prince was unwilling to diminish the value of the grisette's devotion by removing all the difficulties, and, although firmly resolved to bestow a rich reward on the rare and beautiful qualities he hourly discovered in her, he determined to follow her to the termination of this new and interesting trial. It is scarcely necessary to say that, had the health of the young girl appeared to suffer in the smallest degree from the increase of labour she so courageously imposed on herself, in order to dedicate a portion of each week to the unhappy daughter of the lapidary and the son of the Schoolmaster, Rodolph would instantaneously have stepped forward to her aid; and he continued to study with equal pleasure and emotion the workings of a nature so naturally disposed to view everything on its sunny side, so full of internal happiness, and so little accustomed to sorrow that occasionally she would smile, and seem the mirthful creature nature had made her, spite of all the grief by which she was surrounded.

At the end of about an hour, the fiacre, returning from the Rue St. Honoré, stopped before a modest, unpretending sort of house, situated No. 11 Boulevard St. Denis. Rodolph assisted Rigolette to alight. The young sempstress then proceeded to the porter's lodge, where she communicated Germain's intentions, without forgetting the promised gratuity.

Owing to the extreme amenity of his disposition, the son of the Schoolmaster was unusually beloved, and the confrère of M. Pipelet was

deeply grieved to learn that so quiet and well-conducted a lodger was about to quit the house, and to that purpose the worthy porter warmly expressed himself. Having obtained a light, Rigolette proceeded to rejoin her companion, having first arranged with the porter that he should not follow her up-stairs till a time she indicated should have elapsed, and then merely to receive his final orders. The chamber occupied by Germain was situated on the fourth floor. When they reached the door, Rigolette handed the key to Rodolph, saying:

"Here, will you open the door? My hand trembles so violently, I cannot do it. I fear you will laugh at me. But, when I think that poor Germain will never more enter this room, I seem as though I were about to pass the threshold of a chamber of death."

"Come, come, my good neighbour, try and exert yourself; you must not indulge such thoughts as these."

"I know it is wrong; but, indeed, I cannot help it." And here Rigolette tried to dry up the tears with which her eyes were filled.

Without being equally affected as his companion, Rodolph still experienced a deep and painful emotion as he penetrated into this humble abode. Well aware of the detestable pertinacity with which the accomplices of the Schoolmaster pursued, and were possibly still pursuing, Germain, he pictured to himself the many hours the unfortunate youth was constrained to pass in this cheerless solitude. Rigolette placed the light on the table. Nothing could possibly be more simple than the fittings-up of the apartment itself. Its sole furniture consisted of a small bed, a chest of drawers, a walnut-tree bureau, four rush-bottomed chairs, and a table; white calico curtains hung from the windows and around the bed. The only ornament the mantelpiece presented was a water-bottle and glass. The bed was made; but, by the impression left on it, it would seem that Germain had thrown himself on it without undressing on the night previous to his arrest.

"Poor fellow!" said Rigolette, sadly, as she examined each minute detail of the interior of the apartment; "it is very easy to see I was not near him. His room is tidy, to be sure, but not as neat as it ought to be. Everything is covered with dust. The curtains are smoke-dried, the windows want cleaning, and the floor is not kept as it should be. Oh, dear, what a difference! The Rue du Temple was not a better room, but it had a much more cheerful look, because everything was kept so bright and clean,—like in my apartment!"

"Because in the Rue du Temple he had the benefit of your advice and assistance."

"Oh, pray look here!" cried Rigolette, pointing to the bed. "Only see,—the poor fellow never went to bed at all the last night he was here! How uneasy he must have been! See, he has left his handkerchief on his pillow, quite wet with his tears! I can see that plainly enough." Then, taking up the handkerchief, she added, "Germain has kept a small, orange-coloured silk cravat I gave him once during our happy days. I have a great mind to keep this handkerchief in remembrance of his misfortune. Do you think he would be angry?"

"On the contrary, he would but be too much delighted with such a mark of your affection."

"Ah, but we must not indulge in such thoughts now; let us attend to more serious matters. I will make up a parcel of linen from the contents of those drawers, ready to take to the prison, and Mother Bouvard, whom I will send to-morrow, will see to the rest; but first of all I will open the bureau, in order to get out the papers and money Germain wished me to take charge of."

"But, now I think of it, Louise Morel gave me back yesterday the thirteen hundred francs in gold she received from Germain, to pay the lapidary's debt, which I had already discharged. I have this money about me; it justly belongs to Germain, since he repaid the notary what he withdrew from the cash-box. I will place it in your hands, in order that you may add it to the sum entrusted to your care."

"Just as you like, M. Rodolph, although really I should prefer not having so large a sum in my possession, really there are so many dishonest people nowadays! As for papers, that's quite another thing; I'll willingly take charge of as many papers as you please, but money is such a dangerous thing!"

"Perhaps you are right; then I tell you what we will do—eh, neighbour? I will be banker, and undertake the responsibility of guarding this money. Should Germain require anything, you can let me know; I will leave you my address, and whatever you send for shall be punctually and faithfully sent."

"Oh, dear, yes, that will be very much better! How good of you to offer, for I could not have ventured to propose such a thing to you! So that is settled; I will beg of you, also, to take whatever this furniture sells for. And now let us see about the papers," continued Rigolette, opening the bureau and pulling out several drawers. "Ah, I dare say this is it! See what a large packet! But,

oh, good gracious, M. Rodolph, do pray look what mournful words these are written on the outside!"

And here Rigolette, in a faltering voice, read as follows:

"In the event of my dying by either a violent or natural death, I request whoever may open this bureau to carry these papers to Mlle. Rigolette, dressmaker, No. 17 Rue du Temple.' Do you think, M. Rodolph, that I may break the seals of the envelope?"

"Undoubtedly; does not Germain expressly say that among the papers you will find a letter particularly addressed to yourself?"

The agitated girl broke the seals which secured the outward cover, and from it fell a quantity of papers, one of which, bearing the superscription of Mlle. Rigolette, contained these words:

"MADEMOISELLE:—When this letter reaches your hands, I shall be no more, if, as I fear, I should perish by a violent death, through falling into a snare similar to that from which I lately escaped. A few particulars herein enclosed, and entitled 'Notes on My Life,' may serve to discover my murderers."

"Ah, M. Rodolph," cried Rigolette, interrupting herself, "I am no longer astonished poor Germain was so melancholy! How very dreadful to be continually pursued by such ideas!"

"He must, indeed, have suffered deeply; but, trust me, his worst misfortunes are over."

"Alas, M. Rodolph, I trust it may prove so! Still, to be in prison, and accused of theft!"

"Make yourself quite easy about him; his innocence once proved, instead of returning to his former seclusion and loneliness, he will regain his friends. You, first and foremost, and then a dearly loved mother, from whom he has been separated from his childhood."

"His mother! Has he, then, still a mother?"

"He has, but she has long believed him lost to her for ever. Imagine her delight at seeing him again, cleared from the unworthy charge now brought against him. You see I was right in saying that his greatest troubles were over; do not mention his mother to him. I entrust you with the secret,

because you take so generous an interest in the fate of Germain that it is but due to your devotedness that you should be tranquillised as to his future fate."

"Oh, thank you, M. Rodolph! I promise you to guard the secret as carefully as you could do."

Rigolette then proceeded with the perusal of Germain's letter; it continued thus:

"Should you deign, mademoiselle, to cast your eyes over these notes, you will find that I have been unfortunate all my life, always unhappy, except during the hours I have passed with you; you will find sentiments I should never have ventured to express by words fully revealed in a sort of memorandum, entitled "My Only Days of Happiness." Nearly every evening, after quitting you, I thus poured forth the cheering thoughts with which your affection inspired me, and which only sweetened the bitterness of a cup full even to overflowing. That which was but friendship in you, was, in my breast, the purest, the sincerest love; but of that love I have never spoken. No, I reserved its full disclosure till the moment should arrive when I could be but as an object of your sorrowing recollection. No, never would I have sought to involve you in a destiny as thoroughly miserable as my own. But, when your eye peruses these pages, there will be nothing to fear from the power of my ill-starred fate. I shall have been your faithful friend, your adoring lover, but I shall no longer be dangerous to your future happiness in either sense. I have but one last wish and desire, and I trust that you will kindly accomplish it. I have witnessed the noble courage with which you labour day by day, as well as the care and management requisite to make your hard-earned gain suffice for your moderate wants. Often have I shuddered at the bare idea of your being reduced by illness (brought on, probably, by overattention to your work) to a state too frightful to dwell upon. And it is no small consolation to me to believe it in my power to spare you, not only a considerable share of personal inconvenience, but also to preserve you from evils your unsuspecting nature dreams not of.'

"What does that last part mean, M. Rodolph?" asked Rigolette, much surprised.

"Proceed with the letter; we shall see by and by."

Rigolette thus resumed:



"I know upon how little you can live, and of what service even a small sum would be to you in any case of emergency. I am very poor myself, but still, by dint of rigid economy, I have managed to save fifteen hundred francs, which are placed in the hands of a banker; it is all I am worth in the world, but by my will, which you will find with this, I have ventured to bequeath it to you; and I trust you will not refuse to accept this last proof of the sincere affection of a friend and brother, from whom death will have separated you when this meets your eye.'

"Oh, M. Rodolph," cried Rigolette, bursting into tears, "this is too much! Kind, good Germain, thus to consider my future welfare! What an excellent heart he must have!"

"Worthy and noble-minded young man!" rejoined Rodolph, with deep emotion. "But calm yourself, my good girl. Thank God, Germain is still living! And, by anticipating the perusal of his last wishes, you will at least have learned how sincerely he loved you,—nay, still loves you!"

"And only to think," said Rigolette, drying up her tears, "that I should never once have suspected it! When first I knew M. Girandeu and M. Cabrion, they were always talking to me of their violent love, and flames, and darts, and such stuff; but finding I took no notice of them, they left off wearying me with such nonsense. Now, on the contrary, Germain never named love to me. When I proposed to him that we should be good friends, he accepted the offer as frankly as it was made, and ever after that we were always excellent companions and neighbours; but—now I don't mind telling you, M. Rodolph, that I was not sorry Germain never talked to me in the same silly strain."

"But still it astonished you, did it not?"

"Why, M. Rodolph, I ascribed it to his melancholy, and I fancied his low spirits prevented his joking like the others."

"And you felt angry with him, did you not, for always being so sad?"

"No," said the grisette, ingenuously; "no, I excused him, because it was the only fault he had. But now that I have read his kind and feeling letter, I cannot forgive myself for ever having blamed him even for that one thing."

"In the first place," said Rodolph, smiling, "you find that he had many and just causes for his sadness; and secondly, that, spite of his melancholy, he did love you deeply and sincerely."

"To be sure; and it seems a thing to be proud of, to be loved by so excellent a young man!"

"Whose love you will, no doubt, return one of these days?"

"I don't know about that, M. Rodolph, though it is very likely, for poor Germain is so much to be pitied. I can imagine myself in his place. Suppose, just when I fancied myself despised and forsaken by all the world, some one whom I loved very dearly should evince for me more regard than I had ventured to hope for, don't you think it would make me very happy?" Then, after a short silence, Rigolette continued, with a sigh, "On the other hand, we are both so poor that, perhaps, it would be very imprudent. Ah, well, M. Rodolph, I must not think of such things. Perhaps, too, I deceive myself. One thing, however, is quite sure, and that is, that so long as Germain remains in prison I will do all in my power for him. It will be time enough when he has regained his liberty for me to determine whether 'tis love or friendship I feel for him. Until then it would only torment me needlessly to try to make up my mind what I had better do. But it is getting late, M. Rodolph. Will you have the goodness to collect all those papers, while I make up a parcel of linen? Ah, I forgot the little bag containing the little orange-coloured cravat I gave him. No doubt it is here—in this drawer. Oh, yes, this is it. Oh, see, what a pretty bag! How nicely embroidered! Poor Germain! I declare he has kept such a trifle as this little handkerchief with as much care as though it had been some holy relic. I well remember the last time I had it around my throat; and when I gave it to him, poor fellow, how very pleased he was!"

At this moment some one knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" inquired Rodolph.

"Want to speak to Ma'am Mathieu," replied a harsh, hoarse voice, and in a tone which is peculiar to the lowest orders. (Madame Mathieu was the matcher of precious stones to whom we have before referred.)

This voice, whose accent was peculiar, awoke some vague recollections in Rodolph's breast; and, desirous of elucidating them, he took the light, and went himself to open the door. He found himself confronted by a man who was one of the frequenters of the tapis-franc of the ogress, and recognised him instantly, so deeply was the print of vice stamped upon him, so completely marked on his beardless and youthful features. It was Barbillon.

Barbillon, the pretended hackney-coachman, who had driven the Schoolmaster and the Chouette to the hollow way of Bouqueval,—Barbillon, the assassin of the husband of the unhappy milkwoman, who had set the labourers of the farm at Arnouville on against La Goualeuse. Whether this wretch had forgotten Rodolph's face, which he had never seen but once at the tapis-franc of the ogress, or that the change of dress prevented him from recognising the Chourineur's conqueror, he did not evince the slightest surprise at his appearance.

"What do you want?" inquired Rodolph.

"Here's a letter for Ma'am Mathieu, and I must give it to her myself," was Barbillon's reply.

"She does not live here,—it's opposite," said Rodolph.

"Thank ye, master. They told me the left-hand door; but I've mistook."

Rodolph did not recollect the name of the diamond-matcher, which Morel the lapidary had only mentioned once or twice, and thus had no motive for interesting himself in the female to whom Barbillon came with his message; but yet, although ignorant of the ruffian's crimes, his face was so decidedly repulsive that he remained at the threshold of the door, curious to see the person to whom Barbillon brought the letter.

Barbillon had scarcely knocked at the door opposite to Germain's, than it opened, and the jewel-matcher, a stout woman of about fifty, appeared with a candle in her hand.

"Ma'am Mathieu?" inquired Barbillon.

"That's me, my man."

"Here's a letter, and I waits for an answer."

And Barbillon made a step forward to enter the doorway, but the woman made him a sign to remain where he was, and unsealed the letter, which she read by the light of the candle she held, and then replied with an air of satisfaction:

"Say it's all right, my man, and I will bring what is required. I will be there at the same hour as usual. My respects to the lady."

"Yes, missus. Please to remember the porter!"

"Oh, you must ask them as sent you; they are richer than I am." And she shut the door.

Rodolph returned to Germain's room, when he saw Barbillon run quickly down the staircase. The ruffian found on the boulevard a man of low-lived, brutal appearance, waiting for him in front of a shop. Although the passers-by could hear (it is true they could not comprehend), Barbillon appeared so delighted that he could not help saying to his companion:

"Come and 'lush a drain of red tape,' Nicholas; the old mot swallows the bait, hook and all. She'll show at the Chouette's. Old Mother Martial will lend a hand to peel her of the swag, and a'terwards we can box the 'cold meat' in your 'barkey.'"

And the two robbers, after having exchanged these words in their own slang, went towards the Rue St. Denis.

Some minutes afterwards Rigolette and Rodolph left Germain's, got into the hackney-coach, and reached the Rue du Temple.

The coach stopped.

At the moment when the door opened, Rodolph recognised by the light of the dram-shop lamps his faithful Murphy, who was waiting for him at the door of the entrance.

The squire's presence always announced some serious and sudden event, for it was he alone who knew at all times where to find the prince.

"What's the matter?" inquired Rodolph, quickly, whilst Rigolette was collecting several things out of the vehicle.

"A terrible circumstance, monseigneur!"

"Speak, in heaven's name!"

"M. the Marquis d'Harville—"

"You alarm me!"

"Had several friends to breakfast with him this morning. He was in high spirits, had never been more joyous, when a fatal imprudence—"

"Pray come to the point—pray!"

"And playing with a pistol, which he did not believe to be loaded—"

"Wounded himself seriously."

"Monseigneur!"

"Well?"

"Something dreadful!"

"What do you mean?"

"He is dead!"

"D'Harville! Ah, how horrible!" exclaimed Rodolph, in a tone so agonised that Rigolette, who was at the moment quitting the coach with the parcels, said:

"Alas! what ails you, M. Rodolph?"

"Some very distressing information I have just told my friend, mademoiselle," said Murphy to the young girl, for the prince was so overcome that he could not reply.

"Is it, then, some dreadful misfortune?" said Rigolette, trembling all over.

"Very dreadful, indeed!" replied the squire.

"Yes, most awful!" said Rodolph, after a few moment's silence; then recollecting Rigolette, he said to her, "Excuse me, my dear neighbour, if I do not go up to your room with you. To-morrow I will send you my address, and an order to go to see Germain in his prison. I will soon see you again."

"Ah, M. Rodolph, I assure you that I share in the grief you now experience! I thank you very much for having accompanied me; but I shall soon see you again, sha'n't I?"

"Yes, my child, very soon."

"Good evening, M. Rodolph," added Rigolette, and then disappeared down the passage with the various things she had brought away from Germain's room.

The prince and Murphy got into the hackney-coach, which took them to the Rue Plumet. Rodolph immediately wrote the following note to Clémence:

"MADAME:—I have this instant learned the sudden blow which has struck you, and deprived me of one of my best friends. I forbear any attempt to portray my horror and my regret. Yet I must mention to you certain circumstances unconnected with this cruel event. I have just learned that your stepmother, who has been, no doubt, in Paris for several days, returns this evening to Normandy, taking with her Polidori. No doubt but this fact will convince you of the peril which threatens your father; and pray allow me to give you some advice, which I think requisite. After the appalling event of this morning, every one must but too easily conceive your anxiety to quit Paris for some time; go, therefore, go at once, to Aubiers, so that you may arrive there before your stepmother, or, at least, as soon as she. Make yourself easy, madame, for I shall watch at a distance, as well as close, the abominable projects of your stepmother. Adieu, madame; I write these few lines to you in great haste. My heart is lacerated when I remember yesterday evening, when I left him,—him,—more tranquil and more happy than he had been for a very long time.

"Believe, madame, in my deep and lasting devotion,

"RODOLPH."

Following the prince's advice, three hours after she had received this letter, Madame d'Harville, accompanied by her daughter, was on the road to Normandy. A post-chaise, despatched from Rodolph's mansion, followed in the same route. Unfortunately, in the troubled state into which this complication of events and the hurry of her departure had driven her, Clémence had forgotten to inform the prince that she had met Fleur-de-Marie at St. Lazare.

Our readers may, perhaps, remember that, on the previous evening, the Chouette had been menacing Madame Séraphin, and threatening to unfold the whole history of La Goualeuse's existence, affirming that she knew (and she spoke truth) where the young girl then was. The reader may also recollect that, after this conversation, the notary, Jacques Ferrand, dreading the disclosure of his criminal course, believed that he had a strong motive for effecting the disappearance of La Goualeuse, whose existence, once known, would compromise him fatally. He had, in consequence, written to Bradamanti, one of his accomplices, to come to him that they might together arrange a fresh plot, of which Fleur-de-Marie was to be the victim. Bradamanti, occupied by the no less pressing interests of Madame d'Harville's stepmother, who had her own sinister motives for taking the charlatan with her to M. d'Orbigny, finding it, no doubt, more profitable to

serve his ancient female ally, did not attend to the notary's appointment, but set out for Normandy without seeing Madame Séraphin.

The storm was gathering over the head of Jacques Ferrand. During the day the Chouette had returned to reiterate her threats; and to prove that they were not vain, she declared to the notary that the little girl, formerly abandoned by Madame Séraphin, was then a prisoner in St. Lazare, under the name of La Goualeuse; and that if he did not give ten thousand francs (400l.) in three days, this young girl would receive the papers which belonged to her, and which would instruct her that she had been confided in her infancy to the care of Jacques Ferrand. According to his custom, the notary denied all boldly, and drove the Chouette away as an impudent liar, although he was perfectly convinced, and greatly alarmed at the dangerous drift of her threats. Thanks to his numerous connections, the notary found means to ascertain that very day (during the conversation of Fleur-de-Marie and Madame d'Harville) that La Goualeuse was actually a prisoner in St. Lazare, and so marked for her good conduct that they were expecting her discharge every moment. Thus informed, Jacques Ferrand, having determined on his deadly scheme, felt that, in order to carry it into execution, Bradamanti's help was more than ever indispensable; and thereon came Madame Séraphin's vain attempts to see the doctor. Having at length heard, in the evening, of the departure of the charlatan, the notary, driven to act by the imminence of his fears and danger, recalled to mind the Martial family, those freshwater pirates established near the bridge of Asnières, with whom Bradamanti had proposed to place Louise, in order to get rid of her undetected. Having absolutely need of an accomplice to carry out his deadly purposes against Fleur-de-Marie, the notary took every precaution not to be compromised in case a fresh crime should be committed; and, the day after Bradamanti's departure for Normandy, Madame Séraphin went with all speed to the Martials.

## CHAPTER III

### L'ILE DU RAVAGEUR

The following scenes took place during the evening of the day in which Madame Séraphin, in compliance with Jacques Ferrand the notary's orders, went to the Martials, the freshwater pirates established at the point of a small islet of the Seine, not far from the bridge of Asnières.

The Father Martial had died, like his own father, on the scaffold, leaving a widow, four sons, and two daughters. The second of these sons was already condemned to the galleys for life, and of the rest of this numerous family there remained in the Ile du Ravageur (a name which was popularly given to this place; why, we will hereafter explain) the Mother Martial; three sons, the eldest (La Louve's lover) twenty-five years of age, the next twenty, and the youngest twelve; two girls, one eighteen years of age, the second nine.

The examples of such families, in whom there is perpetuated a sort of fearful inheritance of crime, are but too frequent. And this must be so. Let us repeat, unceasingly, society thinks of punishing, but never of preventing, crime. A criminal is sentenced to the galleys for life; another is executed. These felons will leave young families; does society take any care or heed of these orphans,—these orphans, whom it has made so, by visiting their father with a civil death, or cutting off his head? Does it substitute any careful or preserving guardianship after the removal of him whom the law has declared to be unworthy, infamous,—after the removal of him whom the law has put to death? No; "the poison dies with the beast," says society. It is deceived; the poison of corruption is so subtle, so corrosive, so contagious, that it becomes almost invariably hereditary; but, if counteracted in time, it would never be incurable. Strange contradiction! Dissection proves that a man dies of a malady that may be transmitted, and then, by precautionary measures, his descendants are preserved from the affection of which he has been the victim. Let the same facts be produced in the moral order of things; let it be demonstrated that a criminal almost always bequeaths to his son the germ of a precocious depravity. Will society do for the safety of this young soul what the doctor does for the body, when it is a question of contending against hereditary vitiation? No; instead of curing this unhappy creature, we leave him to be gangrened, even to death; and then, in the same way as the people believe the son of the executioner to be an executioner, perforce, also, they will believe the son of a criminal also a criminal. And then we consider that the result of an inheritance inexorably fatal, which is really a corruption caused by the egotistical neglect of society. Thus, if, in spite of the evil mark on his name, the orphan, whom the law



has made so, remains, by chance, industrious and honest, a barbarous prejudice will still reflect on him his father's offences; and thus subjected to undeserved reprobation, he will scarcely find employment. And, instead of coming to his aid, to save him from discouragement, despair, and, above all, the dangerous resentments of injustice, which sometimes drive the most generous disposition to revolt to ill, society will say:

"Let him go wrong if he will,—we shall watch him. Have we not gaolers, turnkeys, and executioners?"

Thus for him who (and it is as rare as it is meritorious) preserves himself pure in spite of the worst examples, is there any support, any encouragement? Thus for him who, plunged from his birth in a focus of domestic depravity, is vitiated quite young, what hope is there of cure?

"Yes, yes, I will cure him, the orphan I have made," replies society; "but in my own way,—by and by. To extirpate the smallpox, to cut out the imposthume, it must come to a head."

A criminal desires to speak.

"Prisons and galleys, they are my hospitals. In incurable cases there is the executioner. As to the cure of my orphan," adds society, "I will reflect upon it. Let the germ of hereditary corruption ripen; let it increase; let it extend its ravages far and wide. When our man shall be rotten to the heart, when crime oozes out of him at every pore, when a robbery or desperate murder shall have placed him at the same bar of infamy at which his father stood, then we will cure this inheritor of crime,—as we cured his progenitor. At the galleys or on the scaffold the son will find his father's seat still warm."

Society thus reasons; and it is astonished, and indignant, and frightened, to see how robberies and murders are handed down so fatally from generation to generation.

The dark picture which is now to follow—The Freshwater Pirates—is intended to display what the inheritance of evil in a family may be when society does not come legally or officially to preserve the unfortunate victims of the law from the terrible consequences of the sentence executed against the father.

The ancestor of the Martial family who first established himself on this islet, on payment of a moderate rent, was a ravageur (a river-scavenger). The ravageurs, as well as the débardeurs and déchireurs of boats, remain nearly the whole of the day plunged in water up to the waist in the exercise of their

trade. The débardeurs bring ashore the floating wood. The déchireurs break up the rafts which have brought the wood. Equally aquatic as these other two occupations, the business of a ravageur is different. Going into the water as far as possible, the ravageur, or mud-lark, draws up, by aid of a long drag, the river sand from beneath the mud; then, collecting it in large wooden bowls, he washes it like a person washing for gold dust, and extracts from it metallic particles of all kinds,—iron, copper, lead, tin, pewter, brass,—the results of the relics of all sorts of utensils. The ravageurs, indeed, often find in the sand fragments of gold and silver jewelry, brought into the Seine either by the sewers which are washed by the stream, or by the masses of snow or ice collected in the streets, and which are cast into the river. We do not know by what tradition or custom these persons, usually honest and industrious, are called by a name so formidable. Martial, the father, the first inhabitant of this islet, being a ravageur (and a sad exception to his comrades), the inhabitants of the river's banks called it the Ile du Ravageur.

The dwelling of these freshwater pirates was placed at the southern end of the island. In daytime there was visible, on a sign-board over the door:

"AU RENDEZVOUS DES RAVAGEURS.

GOOD WINE, GOOD EELS, AND FRIED FISH.

BOATS LET BY THE DAY OR HOUR."

We thus see that the head of this depraved family added to his visible or hidden pursuits those of a public-house keeper, fisherman, and letter of boats. The felon's widow continued to keep the house, and reprobates, vagrants, escaped convicts, wandering wild-beast showmen, and scamps of every description came there to pass Sundays and other days not marked with a red letter in the calendar, in parties of pleasure. Martial (La Louve's lover), the eldest son of the family, the least guilty of all the family, was a river poacher, and now and then, as a real champion, and for money paid, took the part of the weak against the strong. One of his brothers, Nicholas, the intended accomplice of Barbillon in the murder of the jewel-matcher, was in appearance a ravageur, but really a freshwater pirate in the Seine and its banks. François, the youngest son of the executed felon, rowed visitors who wished to go on the river in a boat. We have alluded to Ambroise Martial, condemned to the galleys for burglary at night with attempt to murder. The eldest daughter, nicknamed Calabash (Calebasse), helped her mother in the kitchen, and waited on the company. Her sister,

Amandine, nine years of age, was also employed in the house according to her years and strength.

At the period in question it was a dull night out of doors; heavy, gray, opaque clouds, driven by the wind, showed here and there in the midst of their openings a few patches of dark blue spotted with stars. The outline of the islet, bordered by high and ragged poplars, was strongly and darkly defined in the clear haze of the sky and in the white transparency of the river. The house, with its irregular gables, was completely buried in the shade; two windows in the ground floor only were lighted, and these windows showed a deep red light, which was reflected like long trails of fire in the little ripples which washed the landing-place close to the house. The chains of the boats which were moored there made a continual clashing, that mingled unpleasantly with the gusts of the wind in the branches of the poplars, and the hoarse murmurs of the main stream.

A portion of the family was assembled in the kitchen of the house. This was a large low-roofed apartment. Facing the door were two windows, under which a long stove extended. To the left hand there was a high chimney; on the right a staircase leading to the upper story. At the side of this staircase was the entrance to a large room, containing several tables for the use of the guests at the cabaret. The light of a lamp, joined to the flame of the fire, was strongly reflected by a number of saucepans and other copper utensils suspended against the wall, or ranged on shelves with a quantity of earthenware; and a large table stood in the middle of the kitchen. The felon's widow, with three of her children, was seated in the corner near the fireplace.

This woman, tall and meagre, seemed about five and forty years of age. She was dressed in black, with a mourning handkerchief tied about her head, concealing her hair, and surrounding her flat, livid, and wrinkled brows; her nose was long and straight; her cheek-bones prominent; her cheeks furrowed; her complexion bilious and sallow; the corners of her mouth, always curved downwards, rendered still harsher the expression of her countenance, as chilling, sinister, and immovable as a marble mask. Her gray eyebrows surmounted her dull blue eyes.

The felon's widow was employed with needlework, as well as her two daughters. The eldest girl was tall and forbidding like her mother, with her features, calm, harsh, and repulsive, her thin nose, her ill-formed mouth, and her pale look. Her yellow complexion, which resembled a ripe quince, had procured for her the name of Calabash (Calebasse). She was not in

mourning, but wore a brown gown, whilst a cap of black tulle did not conceal two bands of scanty hair of dull and dingy light brown.

François, the youngest of the Martial sons, was sitting on a low stool repairing an aldrel, a thin-meshed net forbidden to be used on the Seine. In spite of the tan of his features, this boy seemed in perfect health; a forest of red hair covered his head; his face was round, his lips thick, his forehead projecting, his eyes quick and piercing. He was not like his mother or his elder sister, but had a subdued and sly look, as from time to time, through the thick mass of hair that fell over his eyes, he threw a stealthy and fearful glance at his mother, or exchanged a look of intelligence and affection with his little sister, Amandine.

The latter was seated beside her brother, and was occupied, not in marking, but in unmarking, some linen stolen on the previous evening. She was nine years old, and was as like her brother as her sister was like her mother. Her features, without being more regular, were less coarse than those of François. Although covered with freckles, her complexion was remarkably clear, her lips thick and red, her hair also red, but silky, and her eyes, though small, were of a clear bright blue. When Amandine's look met that of her brother, she turned a glance towards the door, and then François replied by sigh; after which, calling his sister's attention by a slight gesture, he counted with the end of his needle ten loops of the net. This was meant to imply, in the symbolical language of children, that their brother Martial would not return until ten o'clock that evening.

Seeing these two women so silent and ill-looking, and the two poor little mute, frightened, uneasy children, we might suppose they were two executioners and two victims. Calabash, perceiving that Amandine had ceased from her occupation for a moment, said, in a harsh tone:

"Come, haven't you done taking the mark out of that shirt?"

The little girl bowed her head without making any reply, and, by the aid of her fingers and scissors, hastily finished taking out the red cotton threads which marked the letters in the linen.

After a few minutes Amandine, addressing the widow timidly, showed her the shirt, and said:

"Mother, I have done it."

Without making any reply, the widow threw her another piece of linen. The child did not catch it quickly enough, and it fell on the ground. Her tall

sister gave her, with her hand as hard as wood, a sharp slap on the arm, saying:

"You stupid brat!"

Amandine resumed her seat, and set to work actively, after having exchanged with her brother a glance of her eye, into which a tear had started.

The same silence continued to reign in the kitchen. Without, the wind still moaned and dashed about the sign in front of the house. This dismal creaking, and the dull boiling of a pot placed over the fire, were the only sounds that were heard. The two children observed, with secret fright, that their mother did not speak. Although she was habitually taciturn, this complete silence, and a certain drawing in of the lips, announced to them that the widow was in what they called her white passion, that is to say, was a prey to concentrated irritation.

The fire was going out for want of fuel.

"François, a log," said Calabash.

The young mender of forbidden nets looked into a nook beside the chimney, and replied:

"There are no more there."

"Then go to the wood-pile," said Calabash.

François murmured some unintelligible words, but did not stir.

"Do you hear me, François?" inquired Calabash, harshly.

The felon's widow laid on her knees a towel she was also unmarking, and looked at her son. He had lowered his head, but he guessed he felt, if we may use the expression, the fierce look his mother cast upon him, and, fearful of encountering her dreaded countenance, the boy remained without stirring.

"I say, are you deaf, François?" said Calabash, in an irritated tone. "Mother, you see!"

The tall sister seemed to be happy in finding fault with the two children, and to seek for them the punishment which the widow pitilessly inflicted.

Amandine, without being observed, gently touched her brother's elbow, to make him quietly do what Calabash desired. François did not stir. The elder sister still looked at her mother as demanding the punishment of the offender, and the widow understood her. With her long lean finger she pointed to a stick of stout and pliant willow placed in a recess near the chimney. Calabash stooped forward, took up this staff of chastisement, and handed it to her mother. François had seen his mother's gesture, and, rising suddenly, sprung out of the reach of the threatening stick.

"Do you want mother to break your back?" exclaimed Calabash.

The widow, still holding the willow stick in her hand, pinching her pale lips together more and more, looked at François with a fixed eye, but without uttering a syllable. By the slight tremor of Amandine's hands, with her head bent downwards, and the redness which suddenly overspread her neck, it was easy to see that the child, although habituated to such scenes, was alarmed at the fate that threatened her brother, who had taken refuge in a corner of the kitchen, and seemed frightened and irritated.

"Mind yourself, mother's going to begin, and then it will be too late!" said the tall sister.

"I don't care!" replied François, turning pale. "I'd rather be beaten as I was the day before yesterday, than—go to the wood-pile—and at night—again."

"And why?" asked Calabash, impatiently.

"I am—afraid of the wood-pile—I—" answered the boy, shuddering as he spoke.

"Afraid—you stupid! And of what?"

François shook his head, but did not reply.

"Will you answer? What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know. But I am frightened."

"Why, you've been there a hundred times, and last night, too."

"I won't go there any more."

"Mother's going to begin."

"So much the worse for me," exclaimed the lad. "But she may beat me, kill me, and I'll not go near the wood-pile—not at night."

"Once more—why not?" inquired Calabash.

"Why, because—"

"Because—?"

"Because there's some one—"

"There's some one—"

"Buried there!" said François, with a shudder.

The felon's widow, in spite of her impassiveness, could not repress a sudden start; her daughter did the same. It seemed as though the two women were struck with an electric shock.

"Some one buried by the wood-pile?" said Calabash, shrugging her shoulders.

"I tell you that just now, whilst I was piling up some wood, I saw in a dark corner near the wood-pile a dead man's bone; it was sticking a little way out of the ground where it was damp, just by the corner," added François.

"Do you hear him, mother? Why, the boy's a fool!" said Calabash, making a signal to the widow. "They are mutton-bones I put there for washing-lye."

"It was not a mutton-bone," replied the boy, with alarm, "it was a dead person's bones,—a dead man's bones. I saw quite plainly a foot that stuck out of the ground."

"And, of course, you told your brother, your dear friend Martial, of your grand discovery, didn't you?" asked Calabash, with brutal irony.

François made no reply.

"Nasty little spy!" said Calabash, savagely; "because he is as cowardly as a cur, and would as soon see us scragged, as our father was scragged before us."

"If you call me a spy, I'll tell my brother Martial everything!" said François, much enraged. "I haven't told him yet, for I haven't seen him since; but, when he comes here this evening, I'll—"

The child could not finish; his mother came up to him, calm and inexorable as ever. Although she habitually stooped a little, her figure was still tall for a woman. Holding the willow wand in one hand, with the other the widow took her son by the arm, and, in spite of alarm, resistance, prayers, and tears of the child, she dragged him after her, and made him ascend the staircase at the further end of the kitchen. After a moment's interval, there was heard heavy trampling, mingled with cries and sobs. Some minutes afterwards this noise ceased. A door shut violently; the felon's widow descended. Then, as impassive as ever, she put the stick in its usual place, seated herself close to the fireplace, and resumed her occupation, without saying a word.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE FRESHWATER PIRATE

After a silence of several minutes, the criminal's widow said to her daughter:

"Go and get some wood; we will set the wood-pile to rights when Nicholas and Martial return home this evening."

"Martial! Do you mean to tell him also that—"

"The wood, I say!" repeated the widow, abruptly interrupting her daughter, who, accustomed to yield to the imperious and iron rule of her mother, lighted a lantern, and went out.

During the preceding scene, Amandine, deeply disquieted concerning the fate of François, whom she tenderly loved, had not ventured either to lift up her eyes, or dry her tears, which fell, drop by drop, on to her lap. Her sobs, which she dared not give utterance to, almost suffocated her, and she strove even to repress the fearful beatings of her heart. Blinded by her fast gathering tears, she sought to conceal her emotion by endeavouring to pick the mark from the chemise given to her, but, from the nervous trembling of her hand, she ran the scissors into her finger sufficiently deep to cause considerable effusion of blood; but the poor child thought much less of the pain she experienced than of the certain punishment which awaited her for staining the linen with her blood. Happily for her, the widow was too deeply absorbed in profound reflection to take any notice of what had occurred. Calabash now returned, bearing a basket filled with wood. To the inquiring look of her mother, she returned an affirmative nod of the head, which was intended to acquaint her with the fact of the dead man's foot being actually above the ground. The widow compressed her lips, and continued the work she was occupied upon; the only difference perceptible in her being that she plied her needle with increased rapidity. Calabash, meanwhile, renewed the fire, superintended the state of the cookery progressing in the saucepan beside the hearth, and then resumed her seat near her mother.

"Nicholas is not here yet," said she to her parent. "It is to be hoped that the old woman who this morning engaged him to meet a gentleman from Bradamanti has not led him into any scrape. She had such a very offhand way with her; she would neither give any explanation as to the nature of the business Nicholas was wanted for, nor tell her name, or where she came from."

The widow shrugged her shoulders.

"You do not consider Nicholas is in any danger, I see, mother. And, after all, I dare say you are quite right! The old woman desired him to be on the Quai de Billy, opposite the landing-place, about seven o'clock in the evening, and wait there for a person who wished to speak with him, and who would utter the word 'Bradamanti' as a sort of countersign. Certainly there is nothing very perilous in doing so much. No doubt Nicholas is late from having to-day found, as he did yesterday, something on the road. Look at this capital linen which he contrived to filch from a boat, in which a laundress had just left it!" So saying, she pointed to one of the pieces of linen Amandine was endeavouring to pick the mark out of. Then, addressing the child, she said, "What do folks mean when they talk of filching?"

"I believe," answered the frightened child, without venturing to look up, "it means taking things that are not ours."

"Oh, you little fool! It means stealing, not taking. Do you understand?—stealing!"

"Thank you, sister!"

"And when one can steal as cleverly as Nicholas, there is no need to want for anything. Look at that linen he filched yesterday; how comfortably it set us all up; and that, too, with no other trouble than just taking out the marks; isn't it true, mother?" added Calabash, with a burst of laughter, which displayed her decayed and irregular teeth, yellow and jaundiced as her complexion.

The widow received this pleasantry with cold indifference.

"Talking of fitting ourselves up without any expense," continued Calabash, "it strikes me we might possibly do so at another shop. You know quite well that an old man has come, within the last few days, to live in the country-house belonging to M. Griffon, the doctor of the hospital at Paris. I mean that lone house about a hundred steps from the river's side, just opposite the lime-kilns,—eh, mother? You understand me, don't you?"

The widow bowed her head, in token of assent.

"Well, Nicholas was saying yesterday that it was very likely a good job might be made out of it," pursued Calabash. "Now I have ascertained, this very morning, that there is good booty to be found there. The best way will be to send Amandine to watch the place a little; no one will take notice of a child like her; and she could pretend to be just playing about, and amusing herself; all the time she can take notice of everything, and will be able to tell

us all she sees or hears. Do you hear what I say?" added Calabash, roughly addressing Amandine.

"Yes, sister," answered the trembling child; "I will be sure to do as you wish me."

"Yes, that is what you always say; but you never do more than promise, you little slink! That time that I desired you to take a five-franc piece out of the grocer's till at Asnières, while I managed to keep the man occupied at the other end of the shop, you did not choose to obey me; and yet you might have done it so easily; no one ever mistrusts a child. Pray what was your reason for not doing as you were bid?"

"Because, sister, my heart failed me, and I was afraid."

"And yet, the other day, you took a handkerchief out of the peddler's pack, when the man was selling his goods inside the public-house. Pray did he find it out, you silly thing?"

"Oh, but, sister, you know the handkerchief was for you, not me; and you made me do it. Besides, it was not money."

"What difference does that make?"

"Oh, why, taking a handkerchief is not half so wicked as stealing money!"

"Upon my word," said Calabash, contemptuously, "these are mighty fine notions! I suppose it is Martial stuffs your head with all this rubbish. I suppose you will run open-mouthed to tell him every word we have said,—eh, little spy? But Lord bless you! We are not afraid of you or Martial either; you can neither eat us nor drink us, that is one good thing." Then, addressing herself to the widow, Calabash continued, "I tell you what, mother, that fellow will get himself into no good by trying to rule, and domineer, and lay down the law here, as he does; both Nicholas and myself are determined not to submit to it. He sets both Amandine and François against everything either you or I order them to do. Do you think this can last much longer?"

"No!" said the mother, in a harsh, abrupt voice.

"Ever since his Louve has been sent to St. Lazare, Martial has gone on like a madman, savage as a bear with every one. Pray is it our fault? Can we help his sweetheart being put in prison? Only let her show her face here when

she comes out, and I'll serve her in such a way she sha'n't forget one while! I'll match her! I'll—"

Here the widow, who had been buried in profound reflection, suddenly interrupted her daughter by saying:

"You think something profitable might be got out of the old fellow who lives in the doctor's house, do you not?"

"Yes, mother!"

"He looks poor and shabby as any common beggar!"

"And, for all that, he is a nobleman."

"A nobleman?"

"True as you're alive! And, what's more, he carries a purse full of gold, spite of his always going into Paris, and returning, on foot, leaning on an old stick, just for all the world like a poor wretch that had not a sou in the world."

"How do you know that he has gold?"

"A little while ago I was at the post-office at Asnières, to inquire whether there was any letter for us from Toulon—"

At these words, which recalled the circumstance of her son's confinement in the galleys, the brows of the widow were contracted with a dark frown, while a half repressed sigh escaped her lips. Unheeding these signs of perturbation, Calabash proceeded:

"I was waiting my turn, when the old man who lives at the doctor's house entered the office. I knew him again directly, by his white hair and beard, his dark complexion, and thick black eyebrows. He does not look like one that would be easily managed, I can tell you; and, spite of his age, he has the appearance of a determined old fool that would die sooner than yield. He walked straight up to the postmistress. 'Pray,' said he, 'have you any letters from Angers for M. le Comte de Remy?' 'Yes,' replied the woman, 'here is one.' 'Then it is for me,' said the old man; 'here is my passport.' While the postmistress was examining it, he drew out a green silk purse, to pay the postage; and, I promise you, one end was stuffed with gold till it looked as large as an egg. I know it was gold, for I saw the bright, yellow pieces shining through the meshes of the purse; and I am quite certain there must

have been at least forty or fifty louis in it!" cried Calabash, her eyes glowing with a covetous eagerness to possess herself of such a treasure. "And only to think," continued she, "of a person, with all that money in his pocket, going about like an old beggar! No doubt he is some old miser, too rich to be able to count his hoards. One good thing, mother, we know his name; that may assist us in gaining admittance into the house. As soon as Amandine can find out for us whether he has any servants or not—"

A loud barking of dogs here interrupted Calabash.

"Listen, mother," cried she; "no doubt the dogs hear the sound of a boat approaching; it must be either Martial or Nicholas."

At the mention of Martial's name, the features of Amandine expressed a sort of troubled joy. After waiting for some minutes, during which the anxious looks of the impatient child were fixed on the door, she saw, to her extreme regret, Nicholas, the future accomplice of Barbillion, make his appearance. The physiognomy of the youth was at once ignoble and ferocious; small in figure, short in stature, and mean in appearance, no one would have deemed him a likely person to pursue the dangerous and criminal path he trod. Unhappily, a sort of wild, savage energy supplied the place of that physical force in which the hardened youth was deficient. Over his blue loose frock he wore a kind of vest, without sleeves, made of goatskin, covered with long brown hair. As he entered, he threw on the ground a lump of copper, which he had with difficulty carried on his shoulder.

"A famous good night I have made of it, mother!" said he, in a hoarse and hollow voice, after he had freed himself from his burden. "Look there! There's a prize. Well, I've got three more lumps of copper, quite as big as that, in my boat, a bundle of clothes, and a case filled with something, I know not what, for I did not waste my time in opening it. Perhaps I have been robbed on my way home; we shall see."

"And the man you were to meet on the Quai de Billy?" inquired Calabash, while the widow regarded her son in silence.

The only reply made by the young man consisted in his plunging his hand into the pocket of his trousers, and jingling a quantity of silver.

"Did you take all that from him?" cried Calabash.

"No, I didn't; he shelled out two hundred francs of his own accord; and he will fork out eight hundred more as soon as I have—But that's enough; let's, first of all, unload my boat; we can jabber afterwards. Is not Martial here?"

"No," said his sister.

"So much the better; we will put away the swag before he sees it; leastways, if he can be kept from knowing about it."

"What! Are you afraid of him, you coward?" asked Calabash, provokingly.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders significantly; then replied:

"Afraid of him? No, I should rather think not! But I have a strong suspicion he means to sell us,—that is my only fear; as for any other sort of dread, my weazen-slicer (knife) has rather too keen an edge for that!"

"Ah, when he is not here, you are full of boast and brag; but only let him show his face, and you are quiet as a mouse!"

This reproach seemed quite thrown away upon Nicholas, who, affecting not to have heard it, exclaimed:

"Come, come! Let's unload the boat at once. Where is François, mother? He could help us a good deal."

"Mother has locked him up, after having preciousy flogged him; and, I can tell you, he will have to go to bed without any supper."

"Well and good as far as that goes; but still, he might lend a hand in unloading the boat,—eh, mother? Because, then myself and Calabash could fetch all in at once."

The widow raised her hand, and pointed with her finger towards the ceiling. Her daughter perfectly comprehended the signal, and departed at once to fetch François.

The countenance of the widow Martial had become less cloudy since the arrival of Nicholas, whom she greatly preferred to Calabash, but by no means entertaining for him the affection she felt for her Toulon son, as she designated him; for the maternal love of this ferocious woman appeared to increase in proportion to the criminality of her offspring. This perverse preference will serve to account for the widow's indifference towards her two younger children, neither of whom exhibited any disposition to evil, as well as her perfect hatred of Martial, her eldest son, who, although not leading an altogether irreproachable life, might still have passed for a perfectly honest and well-conducted person if placed in comparison with Nicholas, Calabash, or his brother, the felon at Toulon.

"Which road did you take to-night?" inquired the widow of her son.

"Why, as I returned from the Quai de Billy, where, you know, I had to go to meet the gentleman who appointed to see me there, I spied a barge moored alongside the quay; it was as dark as pitch. 'Halloa!' says I, 'no light in the cabin? No doubt,' says I, 'all hands are ashore. I'll just go on board, and have a look; if I meet any one, it's easy to ask for a bit of string, and make up a fudge about wanting to splice my oar.' So up the side I climbs, and ventures into the cabin. Not a soul was there; so I began collecting all I could find: clothes, a great box, and, on the deck, four quintals of copper. So, you may guess, I was obliged to make two journeys. The vessel was loaded with copper and iron; but here comes François and Calabash. Now, then, let's be off to the boat. Here, you young un, you Amandine! Look sharp, and make yourself useful; you can carry the clothes; we must get new things, you know, before we can throw aside our old ones."

Left alone, the widow busied herself in preparations for the family supper. She placed on the table bottles, glasses, earthenware, plates, with forks and spoons of silver; and, by the time this occupation was completed, her offspring returned heavily laden.

Little François staggered beneath the weight of copper which he carried on his shoulders, and Amandine was almost buried beneath the mass of stolen garments which she bore on her head, while Nicholas and Calabash brought in between them a wooden case, on the top of which lay the fourth lump of copper.

"The case,—the case!" cried Calabash, with savage eagerness. "Come, let's rip it open, and know what's in it."

The lumps of copper were flung on the ground. Nicholas took the heavy hatchet he carried in his belt, and introduced its strong iron head between the lid and the box which he had set down in the middle of the kitchen, and endeavoured with all his strength to force it open. The red and flickering light of the fire illumined this scene of pillage, while, from without, the loud gusts of the night wind increased in violence.

Nicholas, meanwhile, attired in his goatskin vest, stooped over the box, and essayed with all his might to wrench off the top, breaking out into the most horrible and blasphemous expressions, as he found the solidity of the fastenings resist all his endeavours to arrive at a knowledge of its contents; and Calabash, her eyes inflamed by covetousness, her cheeks flushed by the excitement of plunder, knelt down beside the case, on which she leaned her

utmost weight, in order to give more power to the action of the lever employed by Nicholas. The widow, separated from the group by the table, on the other side of which she was standing, in her eagerness to behold the spoils, threw herself almost across the table, the better to gaze on the booty; her longing eyes sparkled with eagerness to learn the value of it. And finally—though unhappily, too true to human nature—the two children, whose naturally good inclinations had so often triumphed over the sea of vice and domestic corruption by which they were surrounded, even they, forgetting at once both their fears and their scruples, were alike infected by the same fatal curiosity.

Huddling close to each other, their eyes glittering with excitement, the breathing short and quick, François and Amandine seemed of all the party most impatient to ascertain the contents of the case, and the most irritated and out of patience with the slow progress made by Nicholas in his attempts to break it open. At length the lid yielded to the powerful and repeated blows dealt on it by the vigorous arm of the young man, and as its fragments fell on the ground a loud, exulting cry rose from the joyful and almost breathless group, who, joining in one wild mass, from the mother to the little girl, rushed forward, and with savage haste threw themselves on the opened box, which, forwarded, doubtless, by some house in Paris to a fashionable draper and mercer residing near the banks of the river, contained a large assortment of the different materials employed in female attire.

"Nicholas has not done amiss!" cried Calabash, unfolding a piece of mousseline-de-laine.

"No, faith!" returned the plunderer, opening, in his turn, a parcel of silk handkerchiefs; "I shall manage to pay myself for my trouble."

"Levantine, I declare!" cried the widow, dipping into the box, and drawing forth a rich silk. "Ah, that is a thing that fetches a price as readily as a loaf of bread."

"Oh, Bras Rouge's receiver, who lives in the Rue du Temple, will buy all the finery, and be glad of it. And Father Micou, the man who lets furnished lodgings in the Quartier St. Honoré, will take the rest of the swag."

"Amandine," whispered François to his little sister, "what a beautiful cravat one of those handsome silk handkerchiefs Nicholas is holding in his hand would make, wouldn't it?"



"Oh, yes; and what a sweet pretty marmotte it would make for me!" replied the child, in rapture at the very idea.

"Well, it must be confessed, Nicholas," said Calabash, "that it was a lucky thought of yours to go on board that barge,—famous! Look, here are shawls, too! How many, I wonder? One, two, three. And just see here, mother! This one is real Bourre de Soie."

"Mother Burette would give at least five hundred francs for the lot," said the widow, after closely examining each article.

"Then, I'll be sworn," answered Nicholas, "if she'll give that, the things are worth at least fifteen hundred francs. But, as the old saying is, 'The receiver's as bad as the thief.' Never mind; so much the worse for us! I'm no hand at splitting differences; and I shall be quite flat enough this time to let Mother Burette have it all her own way, and Father Micou also, for the matter of that; but then, to be sure, he is a friend."

"I don't care for that, he'd cheat you as soon as another; I'm up to the old dealer in marine stores. But then these rascally receivers know we cannot do without them," continued Calabash, putting on one of the shawls, and folding it around her, "and so they take advantage of it."

"There is nothing else," said Nicholas, coming to the bottom of the box.

"Now, let us put everything away," said the widow.

"I shall keep this shawl for myself," exclaimed Calabash.

"Oh, you will, will you?" cried Nicholas, roughly; "that depends whether I choose to let you or not. You are always laying your clutches on something or other; you are Madame Free-and-Easy!"

"You are so mighty particular yourself—about taking whatever you have a fancy to, arn't you?"

"Ah, that's as different as different can be! I filch at the risk of my life; and if I had happened to have been nabbed on board the barge, you would not have been trounced for it."

"La! Well, don't make such a fuss,—take your shawl! I'm sure I don't want it; I was only joking about it," continued Calabash, flinging the shawl back into the box; "but you never can stand the least bit of fun."

"Oh, I don't speak because of the shawl; I am not stingy enough to squabble about a trumpery shawl. One more or less would make no difference in the price Mother Burette would give for the things; she buys in the lump, you know," continued Nicholas; "only I consider that, instead of calling out you should keep the shawl, it would have been more decent to have asked me to give it you. There—there it is—keep it—you may have it; keep it, I say, or else I'll just fling it into the fire to make the pot boil."

These words entirely appeased Calabash, who forthwith accepted the shawl without further scruple.

Nicholas appeared seized with a sudden fit of generosity, for, ripping off the fag end from one of the pieces of silk, he contrived to separate two silk handkerchiefs, which he threw to Amandine and François, who had been contemplating them with longing looks, saying:

"There! that's for you brats; just a little taste to give you a relish for priggish; it's a thing you'll take to more kindly if it's made agreeable to you. And now, get off to bed. Come, look sharp, I've got a deal to say to mother. There—you shall have some supper brought up-stairs to you."

The delighted children clapped their hands with joy, and triumphantly waved the stolen handkerchiefs which had just been presented to them.

"What do you say now, you little stupid?" said Calabash to them; "will you ever go and be persuaded by Martial again? Did he ever give you beautiful silk handkerchiefs like those, I should be glad to know?"

François and Amandine looked at each other, then hung down their heads, and made no answer.

"Answer, can't you?" persisted Calabash, roughly. "I ask you whether you ever received such presents from Martial?"

"No," answered François, gazing with intense delight on his bright red silk handkerchief, "Brother Martial never gives us anything."

To which Amandine replied, in a low yet firm voice:

"Ah, François, that is because Martial has nothing to give anybody."

"He might have as much as other people if he chose to steal it, mightn't he, François?" said Nicholas, brutally.

"Yes, brother," replied François. Then, as if glad to quit the subject, he resumed his ecstatic contemplation of his handkerchief, saying:

"Oh, what a real beauty it is! What a fine cravat it will make for Sundays, won't it?"

"That it will," answered Amandine. "And just see, François, how charming I shall look with my sweet pretty handkerchief tied around my head,—so, brother."

"What a rage the little children at the lime-kilns will be in when they see you pass by!" said Calabash, fixing her malignant glances on the poor children to ascertain whether they comprehended the full and spiteful meaning of her words,—the hateful creature seeking, by the aid of vanity, to stifle the last breathings of virtue within their young minds. "The brats at the lime-kilns," continued she, "will look like beggar children beside you, and be ready to burst with envy and jealousy at seeing you two looking like a little lady and gentleman with your pretty silk handkerchiefs."

"So they will," cried François. "Ah, and I like my new cravat ever so much the better, Sister Calabash, now you have told me that the children at the kilns will be so mad with me for being smarter than they; don't you, Amandine?"

"No, François, I don't find that makes any difference. But I am quite glad I have got such a nice new pretty marmotte as that will make, all the same."

"Go along with you, you little mean-spirited thing!" cried Calabash, disdainfully; "you have not a grain of proper pride in you." Then, snatching from the table a morsel of bread and cheese, she thrust them into the children's hands, saying, "Now, get off to bed,—there is a lanthorn; take care you don't set fire to anything, and be sure to put it out before you go to sleep."

"And hark ye," added Nicholas, "remember that if you dare to say one word to Martial of the box, the copper, or the clothes, I'll make you dance upon red-hot iron; and, besides that, your pretty silk handkerchiefs shall be taken from you."

After the departure of the children, Nicholas and his sister concealed the box, with its contents, the clothes, and lumps of copper, in a sort of cellar below the kitchen, the entrance to which was by a low flight of steps not far from the fireplace.

"That'll do!" cried the hardened youth. "And now, mother, give us a glass of your very best brandy; none of your poor, every-day stuff, but some of the real right sort, and plenty of it. Faith! I think I've earned a right to eat and to drink whatever you happen to have put by for grand occasions. Come, Calabash, look sharp, and let's have supper. Never mind Martial, he may amuse himself with picking the bones we may leave; they are good enough for him. Now, then, for a bit of gossip over the affair of the individual I went to meet on the Quai de Billy, because that little job must be settled at once if I mean to pouch the money he promised me. I'll tell you all about it, mother, from beginning to end. But first give me something to moisten my throat. Give me some drink, I say! Devilish hard to be obliged to ask so many times, considering what I have done for you all to-day! I tell you I can stand treat, if that's what you are waiting for."

And here Nicholas again jingled the five-franc pieces he had in his pocket; then flinging his goatskin waistcoat and black woollen cap into a distant part of the room, he seated himself at table before a huge dish of ragout made of mutton, a piece of cold veal, and a salad. As soon as Calabash had brought wine and brandy, the widow, still gloomy and imperturbable, took her place at one side of the table, having Nicholas on her right hand and her daughter on her left; the other side of the table had been destined for Martial and the two younger children. Nicholas then drew from his pocket a long and wide Spanish knife, with a horn handle and a trenchant blade. Contemplating this murderous weapon with a sort of savage pleasure, he said to the widow:

"There's my bread-earner,—what an edge it has! Talking of bread, mother, just hand me some of that beside you."

"And talking of knives, too," replied Calabash, "François has found out—you know what—in the wood-pile!"

"What do you mean?" asked Nicholas, not understanding her.

"Why, he saw—one of the feet!"

"Phew!" whistled Nicholas; "what, of the man?"

"Yes," answered the widow, concisely, at the same time placing a large slice of meat on her son's plate.

"That's droll enough," returned the young ruffian; "I'm sure the hole was dug deep enough; but I suppose the ground has sunk in a good deal."

"It must all be thrown into the river to-night," said the widow.

"That is the surest way to get rid of further bother," said Nicholas.

"Yes," chimed in Calabash, "throw it in the river, with a heavy stone fastened to it, with part of an old boat-chain."

"We are not quite such fools as that either," returned Nicholas, pouring out for himself a brimming glass of wine. Then, holding the bottle up, he said, addressing the widow: "Come, mother, let's touch glasses, and drink to each other. You seem a cup too low, and it will cheer you up."

The widow drew back her glass, shook her head, and said to her son:

"Tell me of the man you met on the Quai de Billy."

"Why, this is it," said Nicholas, without ceasing to eat and drink: "When I got to the landing-place, I fastened my boat, and went up the steps of the quay as the clock was striking seven at the military bakehouse at Chaillot. You could not see four yards before you, but I walked up and down by the parapet wall for a quarter of an hour, when I heard footsteps moving softly behind me. I stopped, and a man, completely wrapped up in a mantle, approached me, coughing as he advanced. As I paused, he paused; and all I could make out of him was that his cloak hid his nose, and his hat fell over his eyes."

We will inform our readers that this mysterious personage was Jacques Ferrand, the notary, who, anxious to get rid of Fleur-de-Marie, had, that same morning, despatched Madame Séraphin to the Martials, whom he hoped to find the ready instruments of his fresh crime.

"'Bradamanti,' said the man to me," continued Nicholas; "that was the password agreed upon by the old woman, that I might know my man. 'Ravageur,' says I, as was agreed. 'Is your name Martial?' he asked. 'Yes, master.' 'A woman was at your isle to-day: what did she say to you?' 'That you wished to speak to me on the part of M. Bradamanti.' 'You have a boat?' 'We have four, that's our number: boatmen and ravageurs, from father to son, at your service.' 'This is what I want you to do if you are not afraid—' 'Afraid of what, master?' 'Of seeing a person accidentally drowned. Only you must assist with the accident. Do you understand?' 'Perfectly, master; we must make some individual have a draught of the Seine, as if by accident? I'll do it; only, as the dish to be dressed is a dainty one, why, the seasoning will cost rather dear.' 'How much for two?' 'For two? What! are there two persons who are to have a mess of broth in the river?' 'Yes.' 'Five hundred

francs a head, master; that's not too dear.' 'Agreed, for a thousand francs.' 'Money down, master?' 'Two hundred francs now, and the rest afterwards.' 'Then you doubt me, master?' 'No; you may pocket the two hundred francs, without completing the bargain.' 'And you may say, after it's done, "Don't you wish you may get it?"' 'That as may be; but does it suit you? yes or no. Two hundred francs down, and on the evening of the day after to-morrow, here, at nine o'clock, I will give you the eight hundred francs.' 'And who will inform you that I have done the trick with these two persons?' 'I shall know; that is my affair. Is it a bargain?' 'Yes, master.' 'Here are two hundred francs. Now listen to me; you will know again the old woman who was at your house this morning?' 'Yes, master.' 'To-morrow, or next day at latest, you will see her come, about four o'clock in the evening, on the bank in face of your island with a young fair girl. The old woman will make a signal to you by waving her handkerchief.' 'Yes, master.' 'What time does it take to go from the bank-side to your island?' 'Twenty minutes, quite.' 'Your boats are flat-bottomed?' 'Flat as your hand, master.' 'Then you must make, very skilfully, a sort of large hole in the bottom of one of these boats, so that, when you open it, the water may flow in rapidly. Do you understand?' 'Quite well, master; how clever you are! I have by me a worn-out old boat, half rotten, that I was going to break up, but it will just do for this one more voyage.' 'You will then leave the island with this boat, with the hole prepared; let a good boat follow you, conducted by some one of your family. Go to the shore, accost the old woman and the fair young girl, and take them on board the boat with the hole in it; then go back towards your island; but, when you are at some distance from the bank, pretend to stoop for some purpose, open the hole, and leap into the other boat, whilst the old woman and the fair young girl—' 'Drink out of the same cup,—that's it,—eh, master?' 'But are you sure you will not be interrupted? Suppose some customers should come to your house?' 'There is no fear, master. At this time, and especially in winter, no one comes, it is our dead time of year; and, if they come, that would not be troublesome; on the contrary, they are all good friends.' 'Very well. Besides, you in no way compromise yourselves; the boat will be supposed to have sunk from old age, and the old woman who brings the young girl will disappear with her. In order to be quite assured that they are drowned (by accident, mind! quite by accident), you can, if they rise to the surface, or if they cling to the boat, appear to do all in your power to assist them, and—' 'Help them—to sink again! Good, master!' 'It will be requisite that the passage be made after sunset, in order that it may be quite dark when they fall into the water.' 'No, master; for if one does not see clear, how shall we know if the two women swallow their doses at one gulp, or want a second?' 'True; and, therefore, the accident will take place before sunset.' 'All right, master; but the old woman has no suspicion, has she?' 'Not the slightest. When she arrives, she will whisper to you: "The

young girl is to be drowned; a little while before you sink the boat, make me a signal, that I may be ready to escape with you." You will reply to the old woman in such a way as to avoid all suspicion.' 'So that she may suppose the young 'un only is going to swallow the dose?' 'But which she will drink as well as the fair girl.' 'It's "downily" arranged, master.' 'But mind the old woman has not the slightest suspicion.' 'Be easy on that score, master; she will be done as nicely as possible.' 'Well, then, good luck to you, my lad! If I am satisfied, perhaps I shall give you another job.' 'At your service, master.' Then," said the ruffian, in conclusion, "I left the man in the cloak, and 'prigged the swag' I've just brought in."

We may glean from Nicholas's recital that the notary was desirous, by a twofold crime, of getting rid at once of Fleur-de-Marie and Madame Séraphin, by causing the latter to fall into the snare which she thought was only spread for the Goualeuse. It is hardly necessary to repeat that, justly alarmed lest the Chouette should inform Fleur-de-Marie at any moment that she had been abandoned by Madame Séraphin, Jacques Ferrand believed he had a paramount interest in getting rid of this young girl, whose claims might mortally injure him both in his fortune and in his reputation. As to Madame Séraphin, the notary, by sacrificing her, got rid of one of his accomplices (Bradamanti was the other), who might ruin him, whilst they ruined themselves, it is true; but Jacques Ferrand believed that the grave would keep his secrets better than any personal interests.

The felon's widow and Calabash had listened attentively to Nicholas, who had not paused except to swallow large quantities of wine, and then he began to talk with considerable excitement.

"That is not all," he continued. "I have begun another affair with the Chouette and Barbillon of the Rue aux Fèves. It is a capital job, well planted; and if it does not miss fire, it will bring plenty of fish to net, and no mistake. It is to clean out a jewel-matcher, who has sometimes as much as fifty thousand francs in jewelry in her basket."

"Fifty thousand francs!" cried the mother and daughter, whose eyes sparkled with cupidity.

"Yes—quite. Bras Rouge is in it with us. He yesterday opened upon the woman with a letter which we carried to her—Barbillon and I—at her house, Boulevard St. Denis. He's an out-and-outer, Bras Rouge is! As he appears—and, I believe, is—well-to-do, nobody mistrusts him. To make the jewel-matcher bite he has already sold her a diamond worth four hundred francs. She'll not be afraid to come towards nightfall to his cabaret in the Champs

Elysées. We shall be concealed there. Calabash may come with us, and take care of my boat along the side of the Seine. If we are obliged to carry her off, dead or alive, that will be a convenient conveyance, and one that leaves no traces. There's a plan for you! That beggar Bras Rouge is nothing but a good 'un!"

"I have always distrusted Bras Rouge," said the widow. "After that affair of the Rue Montmartre your brother Ambroise was sent to Toulon, and Bras Rouge was set at liberty."

"Because he's so downy there's no proofs against him. But betray others?—never!"

The widow shook her head, as if she were only half convinced of Bras Rouge's probity. After a few moments' reflection she said:

"I like much better that affair of the Quai de Billy for to-morrow or next day evening,—the drowning the two women. But Martial will be in the way as usual."

"Will not the devil's thunder ever rid us of him?" exclaimed Nicholas, half drunk, and striking his long knife savagely on the table.

"I have told mother that we had enough of him, and that we could not go on in this way," said Calabash. "As long as he is here we can do nothing with the children."

"I tell you that he is capable of one day denouncing us,—the villain!" said Nicholas. "You see, mother, if you would have believed me," he added, with a savage and significant air, "all would have been settled!"

"There are other means—"

"This is the best!" said the ruffian.

"Now? No!" replied the widow, with a tone so decided that Nicholas was silent, overcome by the influence of his mother, whom he knew to be as criminal, as wicked, but still more determined than himself.

The widow added, "To-morrow he will quit the island for ever."

"How?" inquired Nicholas and Calabash at the same time.



"When he comes in pick a quarrel with him,—but boldly, mind,—out to his face, as you have never yet dared to do. Come to blows, if necessary. He is powerful, but you will be two, for I will help you. Mind, no steel,—no blood! Let him be beaten, but not wounded."

"And what then, mother?" asked Nicholas.

"We shall then explain afterwards. We will tell him to leave the island next day; if not, that the scenes of the night before will occur over and over again. I know him; these perpetual squabbles disgust him; until now we have let him be too quiet."

"But he is as obstinate as a mule, and is likely enough to insist upon staying, because of the children," observed Calabash.

"He's a regular hound; but a row don't frighten him," said Nicholas.

"One? No!" said the widow. "But every day—day by day—it is hell in earth, and he will give way."

"Suppose he don't?"

"Then I have another sure means to make him go away,—this very night or to-morrow at farthest," replied the widow, with a singular smile.

"Really, mother!"

"Yes, but I prefer rather to annoy him with a row; and, if that don't do, why, then, it must be the other way."

"And if the other way does not succeed, either, mother?" said Nicholas.

"There is one which always succeeds," replied the widow.

Suddenly the door opened, and Martial entered. It blew so strong without that they had not heard the barkings of the dogs at the return of the first-born son of the felon's widow.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MOTHER AND SON

Unaware of the evil designs of his family, Martial entered the kitchen slowly.

Some few words let fall by La Louve in her conversation with Fleur-de-Marie have already acquainted the reader with the singular existence of this man. Endowed with excellent natural instincts, incapable of an action positively base or wicked, Martial did not, however, lead a regular life: he poached on the water; but his strength and his boldness inspired so much fear that the keepers of the river shut their eyes on this irregularity.

To this illegal occupation Martial joined another that was equally illicit. A redoubtable champion, he willingly undertook—and more from excess of courage, from love of the thing, than for gain—to avenge in pugilistic or single-stick encounters those victims who had been overcome by too powerful opponents.

We should add that Martial was very particular in the selection of those causes which he pleaded by strength of fist, and usually took the part of the weak against the strong.

La Louve's lover was very much like François and Amandine. He was of middle height, stout, and broad-shouldered; his thick red hair, cropped short, came in five points over his open brow; his close, harsh, short beard, his broad, bluff cheeks, his projecting nose, flattened at the extremity, his blue and bold eyes, gave to his masculine features a singularly resolute expression.

He was covered with an old glazed hat; and, despite the cold, he had only a worn-out blouse over his vest, and a pair of velveteen trousers, which had seen considerable service. He held in his hand a very thick, knotted stick, which he put down beside him near the dresser.

A large dog, half terrier, half hound, with crooked legs and a black hide, marked with bright red, came in with Martial, but he remained close to the door, not daring to approach the fire, nor the guests who were sitting at table, experience having proved to old Miraut (that was the name of Martial's poaching companion) that he, as well as his master, did not possess much of the sympathy of the family.

"Where are the children?" were Martial's first words, as he sat down to table.

"Where they ought to be," replied Calabash, surlily.

"Where are the children, mother?" said Martial again, without taking the slightest notice of his sister's reply.

"Gone to bed," replied the widow, in a harsh tone.

"Haven't they had their supper, mother?"

"What's that to you?" exclaimed Nicholas, brutally, after having swallowed a large glass of wine to increase his courage, for his brother's disposition and strength had a very strong effect on him.

Martial, as indifferent to the attacks of Nicholas as to those of Calabash, then said to his mother, "I'm sorry the children are gone to bed so soon."

"So much the worse," responded the widow.

"Yes, so much the worse; for I like to have them beside me when I am at supper."

"And we, because they were troublesome and annoyed us, have sent them off," cried Nicholas; "and if you don't like it, why, you can go after them."

Martial, astonished, looked steadfastly at his brother. Then, as if convinced of the futility of a quarrel, he shrugged his shoulders, cut off a slice of bread and a piece of meat.

The dog had come up towards Nicholas, although keeping at a very respectful distance; and the ruffian, irritated at the disdain with which his brother treated him, and hoping to wear out his patience by ill-using his dog, gave Miraut a savage kick, which made the poor brute howl fearfully. Martial turned red, clasped in his hand the knife he held, and struck violently on the table with the handle; but, again controlling himself, he called the dog to him, saying, quietly, "Here, Miraut!" The hound came, and crouched at his master's feet.

This composure quite upset Nicholas's plans, who was desirous of pushing his brother to extremities, in order to produce an explosion. So he added, "I hate dogs—I do; and I won't have this dog remain here." Martial's only reply was to pour out a glass of wine, and drink it off slowly. Exchanging a rapid glance with Nicholas, the widow encouraged him by a signal to continue his hostilities towards Martial, hoping, as we have said, that a violent quarrel would arise that would lead to a rupture and complete separation.

Nicholas, then, taking up the willow stick which the widow had used to beat François, went up to the dog, and, striking him sharply, said, "Get out, you brute, Miraut!"

Up to this time Nicholas had often shown himself sulkily offensive towards Martial, but he had never dared to provoke him with so much audacity and perseverance. La Louve's lover, thinking they were desirous of driving him to extremities for some secret motive, quelled every impulse of temper.

At the cry of the beaten dog, Martial rose, opened the door of the kitchen, made the dog go out, and then returned, and went on with his supper. This incredible patience, so little in harmony with Martial's usual demeanour, puzzled and nonplussed his aggressors, who looked at each other with amazement. He, affecting to appear wholly unconscious of what was passing around him, ate away with great appetite, keeping profound silence.

"Calabash, take the wine away," said the widow to her daughter.

She hastened to comply, when Martial said, "Stay, I haven't done my supper."

"So much the worse," said the widow, taking the bottle away herself.

"Oh, that's another thing!" answered La Louve's lover. And pouring out a large glass of water, he drank it, smacking his tongue, and exclaiming, "Capital water!"

This excessive calmness irritated the burning anger of Nicholas, already heated by copious libations; but still he hesitated at making a direct attack, well knowing the vast power of his brother. Suddenly he cried out, as if delighted at the idea, "Martial, you were quite right to turn the dog out. It is a good habit to begin to give way, for you have but to wait a bit, and you will see us kick your sweetheart out just as we have driven away your dog."

"Oh, yes; for if La Louve is impudent enough to come to the island when she leaves gaol," added Calabash, who quite understood Nicholas's motive, "I'll serve her out."

"And I'll give her a dip in the mud by the hovel at the end of the island," continued Nicholas; "and, if she gets out, I'll give her a few rattlers over the nob with my wooden shoe, the——"

This insult addressed to La Louve, whom he loved with savage ardour, triumphed over the pacific resolutions of Martial; he frowned, and the blood

mounted to his cheeks, whilst the veins in his brow swelled and distended like cords. Still, he had so much control over himself as to say to Nicholas, in a voice slightly altered by his repressed wrath:

"Take care of yourself! You are trying to pick a quarrel, and you will find a bone to pick that will be too tough for you."

"A bone for me to pick?"

"Yes; and I'll thrash you more soundly than I did last time."

"What! Nicholas," said Calabash, with a sardonic grin, "did Martial thrash you? Did you hear that, mother? I'm not astonished that Nicholas is so afraid of him."

"He walloped me, because, like a coward, he took me off my guard," exclaimed Nicholas, turning pale with rage.

"You lie! You attacked me unexpectedly; I knocked you flat, and then showed you mercy. But if you talk of my mistress,—I say, mind you, of my mistress,—this time I look it over,—you shall carry my marks for many a long day."

"And suppose I choose to talk of La Louve?" inquired Calabash.

"Why, I'll pull your ears to put you on your guard; and if you begin again, why, so will I."

"And suppose I speak of her?" said the widow, slowly.

"You?"

"Yes,—I!"

"You?" said Martial, making a violent effort over himself; "you?"

"You'll beat me, too, I suppose,—won't you?"

"No; but, if you speak to me unkindly of La Louve, I'll give Nicholas a hiding he shall long remember. So now, mind! It is his affair as well as yours."

"You?" exclaimed the ruffian, rising, and drawing his dangerous Spanish knife; "you give me a hiding?"

The Brigand dashed at his brother.

Original Etching by Adrian Marcel.

"Nicholas, no steel!" cried the widow, quickly, leaving her seat, and trying to seize her son's arm; but he, drunk with wine and passion, repulsed his mother savagely, and rushed at his brother.

Martial receded rapidly, laid hold of the thick, knotted stick which he had put down by the dresser, as he entered, and betook himself to the defensive.

"Nicholas, no steel!" repeated the widow.

"Let him alone!" cried Calabash, taking up the ravageur's hatchet.

Nicholas, still brandishing his formidable knife, watched for a moment when he could spring on his brother.

"I tell you," he exclaimed, "you and your trollop, La Louve, that I'll slash your eyes out; and here goes to begin! Help, mother! Help, Calabash! Let's make cold meat of the scamp; he's been in our way too long already!" And, believing the moment favourable for his attack, the brigand dashed at his brother with his uplifted knife.

Martial, who was a dexterous cudgeller, retreated a pace rapidly, raising his stick, which, as quick as lightning, cut a figure of eight, and fell so heavily on the right forearm of Nicholas that he, seized with a sudden and overpowering pain, dropped his trenchant weapon.

"Villain, you have broken my arm!" he shouted, grasping with his left hand the right arm, which hung useless by his side.

"No; for I felt my stick rebound!" replied Martial, kicking, as he spoke, the knife underneath the dresser.

Then, taking advantage of the pain which Nicholas was suffering, he seized him by the collar, and thrust him violently backwards, until he had reached the door of the little cellar we have alluded to, which he opened with one hand, whilst, with the other, he thrust his brother into it, and locked him in, all stupefied as he was with this sudden attack.

Then, turning round upon the two women, he seized Calabash by the shoulders, and, in spite of her resistance, her shrieks, and a blow from the

hatchet, which cut his head slightly, he shut her up in the lower room of the cabaret, which communicated with the kitchen.

Then addressing the widow, who was still stupefied with this manœuvre, as skilful as it was sudden, Martial said to her, calmly, "Now, mother, you and I are alone."

"Yes, we are alone," replied the widow, and her usually immobile features became excited, her sallow skin grew red, a gloomy fire lighted up her dull eye, whilst anger and hate gave to her countenance a terrible expression. "Yes, we two are alone now!" she repeated, in a menacing voice. "I have waited for this moment; and at length you shall know all that I have on my mind."

"And I will tell you all I have on my mind."

"If you live to be a hundred years old, I tell you you shall remember this night."

"I shall remember it, unquestionably. My brother and sister have tried to murder me, and you have done nothing to prevent them. But come, let me hear what you have against me?"

"What have I?"

"Yes."

"Since your father's death you have acted nothing but a coward's part."

"I?"

"Yes, a coward's! Instead of remaining with us to support us, you went off to Rambouillet, to poach in the woods with that man who sells game whom you knew at Bercy."

"If I had remained here, I should have been at the galleys like Ambroise, or on the point of going there like Nicholas. I would not be a robber like the rest, and that is the cause of your hatred."

"And what track are you following now? You steal game, you steal fish,—thefts without danger,—a coward's thefts!"

"Fish, like game, is no man's property. To-day belongs to one, to-morrow to another. It is his who can take it. I don't steal. As to being a coward—"

"Why, you fight—and for money—men who are weaker than yourself."

"Because they have beaten men weaker than themselves."

"A coward's trade,—a coward's trade!"

"Why, there are more honest pursuits, it is true. But it is not for you to tell me this!"

"Then why did you not take up with those honest trades, instead of coming here skulking and feeding out of my saucepans?"

"I give you the fish I catch, and what money I have. It isn't much, but it's enough; and I don't cost you anything. I have tried to be a locksmith to earn more; but when one has from one's infancy led a vagabond life on the river and in the woods, it is impossible to confine oneself to one spot. It is a settled thing, and one's life is decided. And then," added Martial, with a gloomy air, "I have always preferred living alone on the water or in the forest. There no one questions me; whilst elsewhere men twit me about my father, who was (can I deny it?) guillotined,—of my brother, a galley-slave,—of my sister, a thief!"

"And what do you say of your mother?"

"I say—"

"What?"

"I say she is dead."

"You do right; it is as if I were, for I renounce you, dastard! Your brother is at the galleys; your grandfather and your father finished their lives daringly on the scaffold, mocking the priest and the executioner! Instead of avenging them you tremble!"

"Avenging them?"

"Yes, by showing yourself a real Martial, spitting at the headsman's knife and the red cassock, and ending like father, mother, brother, sister—"

Accustomed as he was to the savage excitement of his mother, Martial could not forbear shuddering. The countenance of the widow as she uttered the last words was fearful. She continued, with increasing wrath:



"Oh, coward! and even worse than coward! You wish to be honest! Honest? Why, won't you ever be despised, repulsed, as the son of an assassin or the brother of a felon? But you, instead of rousing your revenge and wrath, this makes you frightened! Instead of biting, you run away! When they guillotined your father, you left us,—coward! And you knew we could not leave the island to go into the city, because they call after us, and pelt us with stones, like mad dogs. Oh, they shall pay for it, I can tell you,—they shall pay for it!"

"A man?—ten men would not make me afraid! But to be called after by all the world as the son and brother of criminals! Well, I could not endure it. I preferred going into the woods and poaching with Pierre, who sells game."

"Why didn't you remain in the woods?"

"I returned because I got into trouble with a keeper, and besides on the children's account, because they are of an age to take to evil from example."

"And what is that to you?"

"To me? Why, I will not allow them to become depraved like Ambroise, Nicholas, and Calabash."

"Indeed!"

"And if they were left with you, then they would not fail to become so. I went apprentice to try and gain a livelihood, so that I might take them into my own care and leave the island with the children; but in Paris everything was known, and it was always, 'You son of the guillotined!' or, 'You brother of the felon!' I had battles daily, and I grew tired of it."

"But you didn't grow tired of being honest,—that answered so well! Instead of having the pluck to come to us, and do as we do,—as the children will do, in spite of you,—yes, in spite of you! You think to cajole them with your preaching! But we are always here. François is already one of us, or nearly. Let the occasion serve, and he'll be one of the band."

"I tell you, no!"

"You will see,—yes! I know what I say. He has vice in him; but you spoil him. As to Amandine, as soon as she is fifteen she will begin on her own account! Ah, they throw stones at us! Ah, they pursue us like mad dogs! They shall see what our family is made of! Except you, dastard; for here you are the only one who brings down shame upon us!"

"That's a pity!"

"And as you may be spoiled amongst us, why, to-morrow you shall leave this place, and never return to it."

Martial looked at his mother with surprise, then, after a moment's silence, said, "Was it for this that you tried to get up a quarrel with me at supper?"

"Yes, to show you what you might expect if you would stay here in spite of us,—a hell upon earth,—I tell you, a hell! Every day a quarrel and blows—struggles. And we shall not be alone as we were this, evening; we shall have friends who will help us. And you will not hold out for a week."

"Do you think to frighten me?"

"I only tell you what will happen."

"I don't heed it. I shall stay!"

"You will stay?"

"Yes."

"In spite of us?"

"In spite of you, of Calabash, of Nicholas, and all blackguards like him."

"Really, you make me laugh."

From the lips of this woman, with her repulsive and ferocious look, these words were horrible.

"I tell you I will remain here until I find the means of gaining my livelihood elsewhere with the children. Alone, I should not long be unemployed, for I could return to the woods; but, on their account, I may be some time in finding what I am seeking for. In the meanwhile, here I remain."

"Oh, you remain until the moment when you can take away the children?"

"Exactly as you say."

"Take away the children?"

"When I say to them 'Come!' they will come; and quickly too, I promise you."

The widow shrugged her shoulders, and replied:

"Listen! I told you a short time since that, even if you were to live for a hundred years, you should recollect this night. I will explain those words. But, before I do so, have you quite made up your mind?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! A thousand times over, yes!"

"In a little while, however, you will say 'No! No! No! A thousand times, no!' Listen to me attentively! Do you know the trade your brother follows?"

"I have my suspicions; but I do not wish to know."

"You shall know. He steals!"

"So much the worse for him!"

"And for you!"

"For me?"

"He commits robberies at night, with forcible entry,—burglary; a case of the galleys. We receive what he plunders. If we are discovered, we shall be sentenced to the same punishment as he is, as receivers, and you too. They will sweep away the whole family, and the children will be turned out into the streets, where they will learn the trade of their father and grandfather as well as here."

"I apprehended as a receiver,—as your accomplice? Where's the proofs?"

"No one knows how you live. You are vagabondising on the water; you have the reputation of a bad fellow; you dwell with us, and who will believe that you are ignorant of our thefts and receivings?"

"I will prove the contrary."

"We will accuse you as our accomplice."

"Accuse me! And why?"

"To pay you off for staying amongst us against our will."

"Just now you tried to make me frightened in one way, now you are trying another tack. But it won't do. I will prove that I never robbed. I remain."

"Ah! You remain? Listen then, again! Do you remember last year a person who passed the Christmas night here?"

"Christmas night?" said Martial, trying to recall his memory.

"Try and remember,—try!"

"I do not recollect."

"Don't you recollect that Bras Rouge brought here in the evening a well-dressed man, who was desirous of concealing himself?"

"Yes, now I remember. I went up to bed and left him taking his supper with you. He passed the night here, and, before daybreak, Nicholas took him to St. Ouen."

"You are sure Nicholas took him to St. Ouen?"

"You told me so next morning."

"On Christmas night you were here?"

"Yes; and what of that?"

"Why, that night this man, who had a good deal of money about him, was murdered in this house."

"Mur—! He! Here?"

"And robbed and buried by the little wood-pile."

"It is not true!" cried Martial, becoming pale with horror, and unable to believe in this fresh crime of his family. "You mean to frighten me. Once more, it is not true?"

"Ask François what he saw this morning in the wood-pile."

"François! And what did he see?"

"A man's foot sticking out of the ground. Take a lantern; go and convince your eyes!"

"No," said Martial, wiping his brow, which had burst forth in a cold sweat. "No, I do not believe you. You say it to—"

"To prove to you that, if you remain here in spite of us, you risk every moment being apprehended as an accomplice in robbery and murder. You were here on Christmas night, and we shall declare that you helped us to do this job. How will you prove the contrary?"

"Merciless wretch!" said Martial, hiding his face in his hands.

"Now will you go?" said the widow, with a devilish smile.

Martial was overwhelmed. He, unfortunately, could not doubt what his mother had said to him. The wandering life he led, his dwelling with so criminal a family, must induce the most horrible suspicions of him, and these suspicions would be converted into certainty in the eyes of justice, if his mother, brother, and sister declared him to be their accomplice. The widow was rejoiced at the depression of her son:

"You have one means of getting out of the difficulty: denounce us!"

"I ought, but I will not; and you know that right well."

"That is why I have told you all this. Now, will you go?"

Martial, wishing to soften this hag, said to her, in a subdued voice:

"Mother, I do not believe you are capable of this murder!"

"As you please; but go!"

"I will go on one condition."

"No condition at all!"

"You shall put the children apprentices somewhere in the country."

"They shall remain here!"

"But, mother, when you have made them like Nicholas, Calabash, Ambroise, my father,—what good will that be to you?"

"To make good 'jobs' by their assistance. We are not too many now. Calabash will remain here with me to keep the cabaret. Nicholas is alone. Once properly instructed, François and Amandine will help him. They have already been pelted with stones,—young as they are,—and they must revenge themselves!"

"Mother, you love Calabash and Nicholas, don't you?"

"Well, if I do, what then?"

"Suppose the children imitate them, and their crimes are detected?"

"Well, what then?"

"They will come to the scaffold, like my father."

"What then? What then?"

"And does not their probable fate make you tremble?"

"That fate will be mine, neither better nor worse. I rob, they rob; I kill, they kill. Whoever takes the mother will take the young ones; we will not leave each other. If our heads fall, theirs will fall in the same basket, and we shall all take leave at once! We will not retreat! You are the only coward in the family, and we drive you from us!"

"But the children,—the children!"

"The children will grow up, and, but for you, they would have been quite formed already. François is almost ready, and, when you are gone, Amandine will make up for lost time."

"Mother, I entreat of you, consent to having the children sent away from here, and put in apprenticeship at a distance."

"I tell you that they are in apprenticeship here!"

The felon's widow uttered these last words so immovably that Martial lost all hope of mollifying this soul of bronze.

"Since it is so," he replied, "hear me in my turn, mother,—I remain!"

"Ha! ha!"

"Not in this house. I shall be assassinated by Nicholas, or poisoned by Calabash. But, as I have no means of lodging elsewhere, I and the children will occupy the hovel at the end of the island; the door of that is strong, and I will make it still more secure. Once there, I will barricade myself, and, with my gun, my stick, and my dog, I am afraid of no one. To-morrow morning I will take the children with me. During the day they will be with me, either in

my boat or elsewhere; and, at night, they shall sleep near me in the hovel. We can live on the fish I catch until I find some means of placing them, and find it I will."

"Oh! That's it, is it?"

"Neither you, nor my brother, nor Calabash can prevent this, can you? If your robberies and murders are discovered during my abode on the island, so much the worse; but I'll chance it. I will declare that I came back and remained here in consequence of the children, to prevent them from becoming infamous. They will decide. The children shall not remain another day in this abode; and I defy you and your gang to drive me from this island!"

The widow knew Martial's resolution, and the children, who loved their eldest brother as much as they feared her, would certainly follow him unhesitatingly whenever and wherever he called them. As to himself, well armed and most determined, always on his guard, in his boat during the day, and secure and barricaded in the hovel on the island at night, he had nothing to fear from the malevolence of his family.

Martial's project, then, might be realised in every particular; but the widow had many reasons for preventing its execution. In the first place, as honest work-people sometimes consider the number of their children as wealth, in consequence of the services which they derive from them, the widow relied on Amandine and François to assist her in her atrocities. Then, what she had said of her desire to avenge her husband and son was true. Certain beings, nurtured, matured, hardened in crime, enter into open revolt, into war of extermination, against society, and believe that, lay fresh crimes, they shall avenge themselves for the just penalties which have been exacted from them and those belonging to them. Then, too, the sinister designs of Nicholas against Fleur-de-Marie, and afterwards against the jewel-matcher, might be thwarted by Martial's presence.

The widow had hoped to effect an immediate separation between herself and Martial, either by keeping up and aiding Nicholas's quarrel, or by disclosing to him that, if he obstinately persisted in remaining in the island, he ran the risk of being suspected as an accomplice in many crimes.

As cunning as she was penetrating, the widow, perceiving that she had failed, saw that she must have recourse to treachery to entrap her son in her bloody snare, and she therefore replied, after a lengthened pause, with assumed bitterness:

"I see your plan. You will not inform against us yourself, but you will contrive that the children shall do so."

"I?"

"They know now that there is a man buried here; they know that Nicholas has robbed. Once apprenticed they would talk, we should be apprehended, and we should all suffer,—you with us. That is what would happen if I listened to you, and allowed you to place the children elsewhere. Yet you say you do not wish us any harm? I do not ask you to love me; but do not hasten the hour of our apprehension!"

The milder tone of the widow made Martial believe that his threats had produced a salutary effect on her, and he fell into the fearful snare.

"I know the children," he replied; "and I am sure that, in desiring them to say nothing, not a word will they say. Besides, in one way or another, I shall be always with them, and I will answer for their silence."

"Can we answer for the chatter of children, especially in Paris, where people are so curious and so gossiping? It is as much that they should not betray us, as that they should assist us in our plans, that I desire to keep them here."

"Don't they go sometimes to the villages, and even to Paris? Who could prevent them from talking if they were inclined to talk? If they were a long way off, why, so much the better; for what they would then say would do us no harm."

"A long way off,—and where?" inquired the widow, looking steadfastly at her son.

"Let me take them away,—where is no consequence to you."

"How will you and they live?"

"My old master, the locksmith, is a worthy man, and I will tell him as much as he need know, and, perhaps, he will lend me something for the sake of the children; with that I will go and apprentice them a long way off. We will leave in two days, and you will hear no more of us."

"No, no! I prefer their remaining with me. I shall then be perfectly sure of them."



"Then I will take up my quarters in the hovel on the island until something turns up. I have a way and a will of my own, and you know it."

"Yes, I know it. Oh, how I wish you were a thousand miles away! Why didn't you remain in your woods?"

"I offer to rid you of myself and the children."

"What! Would you leave La Louve here, whom you love so much?" asked the widow, suddenly.

"That's my affair. I know what I shall do. I have my plans."

"If I let you take away Amandine and François, will you never again set foot in Paris?"

"Before three days have passed, we shall have departed, and be as dead to you."

"I prefer that to having you here, and always distrusting you and them. So, since I must give way, take them, and be off as quickly as possible, and never let me see you more!"

"Agreed!"

"Agreed! Give me the key of the cellar, that I may let Nicholas out!"

"No; let him sleep his liquor off, and I'll give you the key to-morrow morning."

"And Calabash?"

"Ah, that's another affair! Let her out when I have gone. I can't bear the sight of her."

"Go, and may hell confound you!"

"That's your farewell, mother?"

"Yes."

"Fortunately your last!" said Martial.

"My last!" responded the widow.

Her son lighted a candle, then opened the kitchen door, whistled to his dog, who ran in, quite delighted at being admitted, and followed his master to the upper story of the house.

"Go,—your business is settled!" muttered the widow, shaking her clenched hand at her son, as he went up the stairs; "but it is your own act."

Then, by Calabash's assistance, who brought her a bundle of false keys, the widow unlocked the cellar door where Nicholas was, and set him at liberty.

## CHAPTER VI

### FRANÇOIS AND AMANDINE

François and Amandine slept in a room immediately over the kitchen, and at the end of a passage which communicated with several other apartments that were used as "company rooms" for the guests who frequented the cabaret. After having eaten their frugal supper, instead of putting out their lantern, as the widow had ordered them, the two children watched, leaving their door ajar, for their brother Martial's passing on his way to his own chamber.

Placed on a crippled stool, the lantern shed its dull beams through the transparent horn. Walls of plaster, with here and there brown deal boards, a flock-bed for François, a little old child's bed, much too short, for Amandine, a pile of broken chairs and dismembered benches, mementoes of the turbulent visitors to the cabaret of the Isle du Ravageur,—such was the interior of this dog-hole.

Amandine, seated at the edge of the bed, was trying how to dress her head en marmotte, with the stolen silk handkerchief, the gift of her brother Nicholas. François was on his knees, holding up a piece of broken glass to his sister, who, with her head half turned, was employed in spreading out the large rosette which she had made in tying the two ends of the kerchief together. Wonder-struck at this head-dress, François for an instant neglected to present the bit of glass in such a way that her face could be reflected in it.

"Lift the looking-glass higher," said Amandine; "I can't see myself at all now! There, that's it,—that'll do! Hold it so a minute! Now I've done it! Well, look! How have I done my head?"

"Oh, capitally,—excellently! What a handsome rosette! You'll make me just such a one for my cravat, won't you?"

"Yes, directly. But let me walk up and down a little. You can go before me—backwards—holding the glass up, just in that way. There—so! I can then see myself as I walk."

François then went through this difficult manœuvre to the great satisfaction of Amandine, who strutted up and down in all her pride and dignity, under the large bow of her head attire.

Very simple and unsophisticated under any other circumstances, this coquetry became guilt when displayed in reference to the produce of a robbery of which François and Amandine were not ignorant. Another proof of the frightful facility with which children, however well disposed, become corrupted almost imperceptibly when they are continually immersed in a criminal atmosphere.

Then, the sole mentor of these unfortunate children, their brother Martial, was by no means irreproachable himself, as we have already said. Incapable, it is true, of a theft or a murder, still he led a vagabond and ill-regulated life. Undoubtedly his mind revolted at the crimes of his family. He loved these two children very fondly, and protected them from ill-treatment, endeavouring to withdraw them from the pernicious influences of the family; but not taking his stand on the foundations of rigorous and sound morality, his advice was but an ineffective safeguard to these children. They refused to commit certain bad actions, not from honest sentiments, but in order to obey Martial, whom they loved, and to disobey their mother, whom they dreaded and hated.

As to ideas of right and wrong, they had none, familiarised as they were with the infamous examples which they had every day under their eyes; for, as we have said, this country cabaret, haunted by the refuse of the lowest order, was the theatre of most disgraceful orgies and most disgusting debaucheries; and Martial, opposed as he was to thefts and murders, appeared perfectly indifferent to these infamous saturnalia.

It may be supposed, therefore, that the instincts of morality in these children were doubtful and precarious, especially those of François, who had reached that dangerous time of life when the mind pauses, and, oscillating between good and evil, might be in a moment lost or saved.

"How well you look in that handkerchief, sister!" said François; "it is very pretty. When we go to play on the shore by the chalk-burner's lime-kiln you must dress yourself in this manner, to make the children jealous who pelt us with stones and call us little guillotines. And I shall put on my nice red cravat, and we will say to them, 'Never mind, you haven't such pretty silk handkerchiefs as we have!'"

"But, I say, François," said Amandine, after a moment's reflection, "if they knew that the handkerchiefs we wear were stolen, they would call us little thieves."

"Well, and what should we care if they did call us little thieves?"

"Why, not at all, if it were not true. But now—"

"Since Nicholas gave us these handkerchiefs, we didn't steal them!"

"No; but he took them out of a barge; and Brother Martial says no one ought to steal."

"But, as Nicholas states, that is no affair of ours."

"Do you think so, François?"

"Of course I do."

"Still, it seems to me that I would rather the person who really owns them had given them to us. What do you say, François?"

"Oh, it's all one to me! They were given to us, and so they're ours."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Why, yes—yes; make yourself easy about that."

"So much the better, then, for we are not doing what Brother Martial forbids, and we have such nice handkerchiefs!"

"But, Amandine, if he had known the other day that Calabash had made you take the plaid handkerchief from the peddler's pack whilst his back was turned?"

"Oh, François, don't talk about it; I have been so very sorry. But I was really forced to do it, for my sister pinched me until the blood came, and looked at me so—oh, in such a way! And yet my heart failed me twice, and I thought I never could do it. The peddler didn't find it out; yet, if they had caught me, François, I should have been sent to prison."

"But you weren't caught; so it's just the same as if you had not stolen."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"And in prison how unhappy we must be."

"On the contrary—"

"How do you mean on the contrary?"

"Why, you know the fat cripple who lodges at Father Micou's, the man who buys all Nicholas's things, and keeps a lodging-house in the Passage de la Brasserie?"

"A fat cripple?"

"Why, yes, who came here the end of last autumn from Father Micou, with a man who had monkeys and two women."

"Ah, yes, a stout, lame man, who spent such a deal of money."

"I believe you; he paid for everybody. Don't you recollect the rows on the water when I pulled them, and the man with the monkeys brought his organ, that they might have music in the boat?"

"Yes; and in the evening the beautiful fireworks they let off, François?"

"And the fat cripple was not stingy, either. He gave me ten sous for myself. He drank nothing but our best wine, and they had chickens at every meal. He spent full eighty francs."

"So much as that, François?"

"Oh, yes!"

"How rich he must be!"

"Not at all. What he spent was money he had gained in prison, from which he had just come."

"Gained all that money in prison?"

"Yes; he said he had seven hundred francs beside, and that, when that was all gone, he should try another good 'job;' and if he were taken, he didn't care, because he should go back to his jolly 'pals in the Stone Jug,' as he said."

"Then he wasn't afraid of prison, François?"

"On the contrary; he told Calabash that they were a party of friends and merry-makers all together; and that he had never had a better bed and better food than when he was in prison. Good meat four times a week, fire all the

winter, and a lump of money when he left it; whilst there are fools of honest workmen who are starving with cold and hunger, for want of work."

"Are you sure he said that, François,—the stout lame man?"

"I heard him, for I was rowing him in the punt whilst he told his story to Calabash and the two women, who said that it was the same thing in the female prisons they had just left."

"But then, François, it can't be so bad to steal, if people are so well off in prison."

"Oh, the deuce! I don't know. Here it is only Brother Martial who says it is wrong to steal; perhaps he is wrong."

"Never mind if he is, François. We ought to believe him, for he loves us so much!"

"Yes, he loves us; and, when he is by, there is no fear of our being beaten. If he had been here this evening, our mother would not have thrashed me so. An old beast! How savage she is! Oh, how I hate her—hate her! And how I wish I was grown up, that I might pay her back the thumps she gives us, especially to you, who can't bear them as well as I can."

"Oh, François, hold your tongue; it quite frightens me to hear you say that you would beat mother!" cried the poor little child, weeping, and throwing her arms around her brother's neck, and kissing him affectionately.

"It's quite true, though," answered François, extricating himself gently from Amandine. "Why are my mother and Calabash always so savage to us?"

"I do not know," replied Amandine, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. "It is, perhaps, because they sent Brother Ambroise to the galleys, and guillotined our father, that they are unjust towards us."

"Is that our fault?"

"Oh, no! But what would you have?"

"Ma foi! If I am always to have beatings,—always, always, at last I should rather steal, as they do, I should. What do I gain by not being a thief?"

"Ah, what would Martial say to that?"

"Ah, but for him, I should have said yes a long time ago, for I am tired of being thumped for ever; why, this evening, my mother was more savage than ever; she was like a fury! It was pitch dark. She didn't say a word; and I felt nothing but her clammy hand holding me by the scruff of my neck, whilst with the other she beat me; and whilst she did so, her eyes seemed to glare in the dark."

"Poor François! for only having said you saw a dead man's bone by the wood-pile."

"Yes, a foot that was sticking out of the ground," said François, shuddering with fright; "I am quite sure of it."

"Perhaps there was a burying-ground there once."

"Perhaps; but then, why did mother say she'd be the death of me, if I said a word about the bone to our Brother Martial? I rather think it is some one who has been killed in a quarrel, and that they have buried him there, that no one might know anything about it."

"You are right; for don't you remember that such a thing did nearly happen once?"

"When?"

"Don't you remember once when M. Barbillon wounded with a knife that tall man, who is so very thin, that he showed himself for money?"

"Oh, the walking skeleton, as they call him? Yes; and mother came and separated them; if she hadn't, I think Barbillon would have killed the tall, thin man. Did you see how Barbillon foamed at the mouth? and his eyes seemed ready to start from his head. Oh, he does not mind who he cuts and slashes with his knife,—he's such a headstrong, passionate fellow!"

"So young and so wicked, François?"

"Tortillard is much younger, and he would be quite as wicked as he, if he were strong enough."

"Oh, yes, he's very, very wicked! The other day he beat me, because I would not play with him."

"He beat you, did he? Then, the first time he comes—"



"No, no, François; it was only in jest."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"Very well, then, for, if not—But I don't know how he manages, the scamp! But he always has so much money. He's so lucky! When he came herewith the Chouette, he showed us pieces of gold of twenty francs; and didn't he look knowing as he said, 'Oh, you might have the same, if you were not such little muffs!'"

"Muffs?"

"Yes; in slang that means fools, simpletons."

"Yes, to be sure."

"Forty francs in gold! What a many fine things I could buy with that! Couldn't you, Amandine?"

"That I could."

"What should you buy?"

"Let's see," said the little girl, bending her head, and meditating. "I should first buy Brother Martial a good thick outside coat, that would keep him warm in his boat."

"But for yourself,—for yourself."

"I should like a crucifixion, like those image-sellers had on Sunday, you know, under the church porch at Asnières."

"Yes; and, now I think of it, we must not tell mother or Calabash that we went into a church."

"To be sure, for she has always forbidden us to go into a church. What a pity! For church is such a nice place inside, isn't it, François?"

"Yes; and what beautiful silver candlesticks!"

"And the picture of the holy Virgin, how kind she looks!"

"And did you look at the fine lamps, and the handsome cloth on the large table at the bottom, when the priest was saying mass with his two friends, dressed like himself, and who gave him water and wine?"

"Tell me, François, do you remember last year, at the Fête-Dieu, when we saw from here the little communicants, with their white veils, pass over the bridge?"

"What nice nosegays they had!"

"How they sang in a soft tone, holding the ribands of their banners!"

"And how the silver lace of their banners shone in the sunshine! What a deal of money it must have cost!"

"Oh, how beautiful it was! Wasn't it, François?"

"I believe you! And the communicants with their bows of white satin on the arm, and their wax candles, with red velvet and gold on the part by which they hold them."

"And the little boys had their banners, too, hadn't they, François? Ah, François, how I was thumped that day for asking our mother why we did not go in the procession, like the other children!"

"And it was then she forbade us from ever going into a church when we should go into the town, or to Paris; 'Unless it was to rob the poor-box, or the pockets of the people who were hearing mass,' Calabash said, grinning, and showing her nasty yellow teeth. Oh, what a bad thing she is!"

"Oh, and as for that, they should kill me before I would rob in a church; and you, too, François?"

"There, or anywhere; what difference does it make, when once one has made up one's mind?"

"Why, I don't know; but I should be so frightened, I could never do it."

"Because of the priests?"

"No; but because of the portrait of the holy Virgin, who seems so kind and good."

"What consequence is a portrait? It won't eat or drink, you silly child!"

"That's very true; but then I really couldn't. It is not my fault."

"Talking of priests, Amandine, do you remember that day when Nicholas gave me two such hard boxes on the ear, because he saw me make a bow to the curate, who passed on the bank? I had seen everybody salute him, and so I saluted him; I didn't think I was doing any wrong."

"Yes; but then, you know, Brother Martial said, as Nicholas did, that there was no occasion to salute the priests."

At this moment François and Amandine heard footsteps in the passage. Martial was going to his chamber, without any mistrust, after his conversation with his mother, believing that Nicholas was safely locked up until the next morning. Seeing a ray of light coming from out the closet in which the children slept, Martial came into the room. They both ran to him, and he embraced them affectionately.

"What! Not in bed yet, little gossips?"

"No, brother, we waited until you came, that we might see you, and wish you good night," said Amandine.

"And then we heard you speaking very loud below, as if there were a quarrel," added François.

"Yes," said Martial, "I had some dispute with Nicholas, but it was nothing. Besides, I am glad to see you awake, as I have some good news for you."

"For us, brother?"

"Should you like to go away from here, and come with me a long way off?"

"Oh, yes, brother!"

"Yes, brother!"

"Well, then, in two or three days we shall all three leave the island."

"Oh, how delightful!" exclaimed Amandine, clapping her hands with joy.

"And where shall we go to?" inquired François.

"You will see, Mr. Inquisitive; no matter; but where you will learn a good trade, which will enable you to earn your living, be sure of that."

"Then I sha'n't go fishing with you any more, brother?"

"No, my boy, you will be put apprentice to a carpenter or locksmith. You are strong and handy, and with a good heart; and working hard, at the end of a year you may already have earned something. But you don't seem to like it: why, what ails you now?"

"Why, brother,—I—"

"Come, come! Speak out."

"Why, I'd rather not leave you, but stay with you, and fish, and mend your nets, than go and learn a trade."

"Really?"

"Why, to be shut up in a workshop all day is so very dull; and then it must be so tiresome to be an apprentice."

Martial shrugged his shoulders.

"So, then, you would rather be an idler, a scamp, a vagabond,—eh?" said he, in a stern voice; "and then, perhaps, a thief?"

"No, brother; but I should like to live with you elsewhere, as we live here, that's all."

"Yes, that's it; eat, drink, sleep, and amuse yourself with fishing, like an independent gentleman,—eh?"

"Yes, I should like it."

"Very likely; but you must prefer something else. You see, my poor dear lad, that it is quite time I took you away from here; for, without perceiving it, you have become as idle as the rest. My mother was right,—I fear you have vice in you. And you, Amandine, shouldn't you like to learn some business?"

"Oh, yes, brother; I should like very much to learn anything rather than stay here. I should dearly like to go with you and François."

"But what have you got on your head, my child?" inquired Martial, observing Amandine's very fine head-dress.

"A handkerchief that Nicholas gave me."

"And he gave me one, too," said François, with an air of pride.

"And where did these handkerchiefs come from? I should be very much surprised to learn that Nicholas bought them to make you a present of."

The two children lowered their eyes, and made no reply. After a second, François said, with a resolute air, "Nicholas gave them to us. We do not know where they came from, do we, Amandine?"

"No, no, brother," replied Amandine, stammering, and turning very red, not daring to look Martial in the face.

"Don't tell lies," said Martial, harshly.

"We don't tell lies," replied François, doggedly.

"Amandine, my child, tell the truth," said Martial, mildly.

"Well, then, to tell the whole truth," replied Amandine, timidly, "these fine handkerchiefs came out of a box of things that Nicholas brought in this evening in his boat."

"And which he had stolen?"

"I think so, brother,—out of a barge."

"So then, François, you lie?" said Martial.

The boy bent down his head, but made no reply.

"Give me this handkerchief, Amandine; and yours, too, François."

The little girl took off her head-dress, gave a last look at the large bow, which was not untied, and gave the handkerchief to Martial, repressing a sigh of regret. François drew his slowly out of his pocket, and then gave it to his brother, as his sister had done.

"To-morrow morning," he said, "I will return these handkerchiefs to Nicholas. You ought not to have taken them, children. To profit by a robbery is as if one robbed oneself."

"It is a pity those handkerchiefs were so pretty!" said François.

"When you have learned a trade, and earn money by your work, you will buy some as good. Go to bed, my dears,—it is very late."

"You are not angry, brother?" said Amandine, timidly.

"No, no, my love, it is not your fault. You live with ill-disposed persons, and you do as they do unconsciously. When you are with honest persons, you will do as they do; and you'll soon be with such, or the devil's in it. So now, good night!"

"Good night, brother!"

Martial kissed the children. They were now alone.

"What's the matter with you, François,—you seem very sorrowful!" said Amandine.

"Why, brother has taken my nice handkerchief; and besides, didn't you hear what he said?"

"What?"

"He means to take us with him, and put us apprentice."

"And ain't you glad?"

"Ma foi, no!"

"Would you rather stay here and be beaten every day?"

"Why, if I am beaten I am not made to work. I am all day in the boat, fishing, or playing, or waiting on the customers, who sometimes give me something, as the stout lame man did. It is much more amusing than to be from morning till night shut up in a workshop working like a dog."

"But didn't you understand? Why, brother said that if we remained here longer we should become evil-disposed."

"Ah! bah! That's all one to me, since the other children call us already little thieves,—little guillotines! And then to work is too tiresome!"

"But here they are always beating us, brother!"

"They beat us because we listen to Martial more than to any one else."

"Oh, he is so kind to us!"

"Yes, he is kind,—very kind,—I don't say he ain't; and I am very fond of him. No one dares to be unkind to us when he is by. He takes us out with him,—that's true; but that's all; he never gives us anything."

"Why, he has nothing. What he gains he gives our mother to pay for his eating, drinking, and lodging."

"Nicholas has something. You may be sure if we attend to what he and mother say, they would not make our lives so uncomfortable, but give us pretty things, as they did to-day. They would not distrust us, and we should have money like Tortillard."

"But we must steal for that; and how that would grieve dear, good Martial!"

"Well, so much the worse!"

"Oh, François! And then we should be taken up and put into prison."

"To be in a prison or shut up in a workshop all day is the same thing. Besides, the Gros-Boiteux says they amuse themselves very much in prison."

"But how sorry Martial would be; only think of that! And then it is on our account that he returned here, and remains with us! For himself only he would not have any difficulty, but could go again and be a poacher in the woods which he is so very fond of."

"Oh, if he'll take us with him into the woods," said François, "that would be better than anything else. I should be with him I am so fond of, and should not work at any business that would tire me."

The conversation of François and Amandine was interrupted. Some one outside double-locked their door.

"They have fastened us in," said François.

"Oh, what can it be for, brother? What are they going to do to us?"

"It is Martial, perhaps."

"Listen, listen,—how his dog barks!" said Amandine, listening.

After a few minutes, François added:

"It sounds as if some one were knocking at his door with a hammer. Perhaps they want to force it open!"

"Yes; but how the dog barks still!"

"Listen, François! It is as if they were nailing something. Oh, dear, oh, dear, how frightened I am! What are they doing to our brother? And how the dog howls still!"

"Amandine, I hear nothing now," said François, going towards the door.

The two children held their breath, and listened anxiously.

"They are coming from my brother's room," said François, in a low voice; "I hear them walking in the passage."

"Let us throw ourselves on our beds; mother would kill us if she found us out of bed," said Amandine, terrified.

"No," said François, still listening; "they have just passed by our door, and are running down the staircase."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, what can it be?"

"Ah, now they are opening the kitchen door."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, yes; I know the sound."

"Martial's dog is still howling," said Amandine, listening. Suddenly she exclaimed, "François, our brother calls us."

"Martial?"

"Yes; don't you hear him? Don't you hear him now?"

And at this moment, in spite of the thickness of the two closed doors, the powerful voice of Martial, who called to the children from his room, reached them.

"Indeed, we can't go to him; we are locked in," said Amandine. "They must be doing something wrong to him, as he calls us."



"Oh, as to that, if I could hinder them," exclaimed François, resolutely, "I would, even if they were to cut me to pieces!"

"But our brother does not know that they have double-locked our door, and he will believe that we would not go to his help. Call out to him that we are locked in, François."

The lad was just going to do as his sister bade him, when a violent blow was struck outside the shutter of the window of the room in which the two children were.

"They are coming in by the window to kill us!" cried Amandine, and, in her fright, she threw herself on her bed and hid her head between her hands.

François remained motionless, although he shared his sister's terror. However, after the violent blow we have mentioned, the shutter was not opened, and the most profound silence reigned throughout the house. Martial had ceased calling to the children.

A little assured, and excited by intense curiosity, François ventured to open the window a little way, and tried to look out through the leaves of the blind.

"Mind, brother!" said Amandine, in a low voice, and sitting up when she heard François open the shutter.

"Can you see anything?" she added.

"No, the night is too dark."

"Don't you hear anything?"

"No, the wind is too high."

"Come in, then; come in."

"Oh, now I see something!"

"What?"

"The light of a lantern, which moves backwards and forwards."

"Who's carrying it?"

"I can only see the light. Ah, she comes nearer,—she is speaking!"

"Who?"

"Listen,—listen! It is Calabash."

"What does she say?"

"She says the ladder must be fixed securely."

"Oh, it was then in taking away the high ladder that was placed against our shutter that they made that noise just now."

"I don't hear anything now."

"What have they done with the ladder?"

"I can't see it now."

"Can you hear anything?"

"No."

"François, perhaps they are going to use it to enter our Brother Martial's room by the window!"

"Very likely."

"If you could open our window a little more you might see."

"I am afraid."

"Only a little bit."

"Oh, no, no! If mother saw us!"

"It is so dark, there is no danger."

François, much against his will, did as his sister requested, and pushing the shutter back, looked out.

"Well, brother?" said Amandine, surmounting her fears, and approaching François on tiptoe.

"By the gleam of the lantern," said he, "I see Calabash, who is holding the foot of the ladder, which is resting against Martial's window."

"Well?"

"Nicholas is going up the ladder with his axe in his hand. I see it glitter."

"Ah, you are not in bed, then, but watching us!" exclaimed the widow, addressing François and his sister from outside. As she was returning to the kitchen she saw the light, which escaped through the open window.

The unfortunate children had neglected putting out the lantern.

"I am coming," added the widow, in a terrible voice; "I am coming to you, you little spies!"

Such were the events which passed in the Isle du Ravageur on the evening of the day before that on which Madame Séraphin was to take Fleur-de-Marie thither.

## CHAPTER VII

### A LODGING-HOUSE

The Passage de la Brasserie, a dark street, narrow, and but little known, although situated in the centre of Paris, runs at one end into the Rue Traversière St. Honoré, and at the other into the Cour St. Guillaume.

Towards the middle of this damp thoroughfare, muddy, dark, and unwholesome, and where the sun but rarely penetrates, there was a furnished house (commonly called a garni, lodging-house, in consequence of the low price of the apartments). On a miserable piece of paper might be read, "Chambers and small rooms furnished." To the right hand, in a dark alley, was the door of a store, not less obscure, in which constantly resided the principal tenant of this garni.

Father Micou was ostensibly a dealer in old metal ("marine stores"), but secretly purchased and received stolen metal, iron, lead, brass, and tin. When we mention that Father Micou was connected in business and friendship with the Martial family, we give a tolerable idea of his morality. The tie that binds—the sort of affiliation, the mysterious communion, which connects—the malefactors of Paris, is at once curious and fearful. The common prisons are the great centres whence flow, and to which reflow, incessantly those waves of corruption which gradually gain on the capital, and leave there such pernicious waifs and strays.

Father Micou was a stout man, about fifty years of age, with a mean and cunning countenance, a mulberry nose, and wine-flushed cheeks. He wore a fur cap and an old green long-skirted coat. Over his small stove, near which he was standing, there was a board fastened to the wall, and bearing a row of figures, to which were affixed the keys of the chambers of the absent lodgers. The panes of glass in the door which opened on to the street were so painted that from the outside no one could see what was going on within.

The whole of this extensive store was very dark. From the damp walls there hung rusty chains of all sizes; and the floor was strewn with iron and other metals. Three blows struck at the door in a particular way attracted the attention of the landlord, huckster, receiver.

"Come in!" he cried.

It was Nicholas, the son of the felon's widow. He was very pale, his features looked even more evil than they did on the previous evening, and yet he

feigned a kind of overgaiety during the following conversation. (This scene takes place on the day after his quarrel with. Martial.)

"Ah, is it you, my fine fellow?" said Micou, cordially.

"Yes, Father Micou, I have come to see you on a trifle of business."

"Then shut the door,—shut the door."

"My dog and cart are there outside with the stuff."

"What do you bring me, double tripe (sheet lead)?"

"No, Father Micou."

"What is it, scrapings? but no, you're too downy now, you've left off work. Perhaps it is a bit of hard (iron)?"

"No, Daddy Micou, it's some flap (sheet copper). There must be, at least, a hundred and fifty pounds weight, as much as my dog could stagger along with."

"Go and fetch the flap, and let's weigh it."

"You must lend a hand, daddy, for I've hurt my arm."

And, at the recollection of his contest with his brother Martial, the ruffian's features expressed, at once, the resentment of hatred and savage joy, as if his vengeance were already satisfied.

"What's the matter with your arm, my man?"

"Nothing,—only a sprain."

"You must heat an iron in the fire, and plunge it red-hot into the water, then put your arm in the water as hot as you can bear it. It is an iron-dealer's remedy, but none the worse for that."

"Thank ye, Father Micou."

"Go and fetch the flap, and I'll come and help you, idle-bones."

At twice the copper was brought out of the cart, drawn by an enormous dog, and conveyed into the shop.

"That cart of yours is a good idea," said the worthy Micou, as he adjusted the wooden frames of an enormous pair of scales that hung from a beam in the ceiling.

"Yes; when I've anything to bring, I put my dog and cart into the punt, and harness them as we come along. A hackney-coach might, perhaps, tell a tale, but my dog never chatters."

"And they're all pretty well at home,—eh?" inquired the receiver, weighing the copper; "mother and sister, both pretty bobbish?"

"Yes, Father Micou."

"And the little uns?"

"Yes, the little uns, too. And your nephew, André, where is he?"

"Don't mention him; he was out on a spree yesterday. Barbillon and Gros-Boiteux brought him back this morning. He is out for a walk now towards the General Post-office in the Rue St. Jacques Rousseau. And your brother, Martial, is he just such a rum un as ever?"

"Ma foi! I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"No," replied Nicholas, assuming an indifferent air; "we have seen nothing of him for the last two days. Perhaps he's gone poaching in the woods again; unless his boat, which was very, very old, has sunk in the river, with him in it."

"At which you would not be dreadfully affected, you bad lot, for you can't bear your brother, I know."

"True; we have strange likes and dislikes. How many pounds of metal d'ye make?"

"You're right to a hair, just a hundred and fifty pounds, my lad."

"And you owe me—"

"Just thirty francs."

"Thirty francs! when copper is twenty sous a pound? Thirty francs!"

"Say thirty-five francs, and there's an end of the matter, or go to the devil with you! you, and your copper, and your dog, and your cart."

"But, Father Micou, you are really chiselling me down; that's not the right thing by no means."

"If you'll tell me how you came by your copper, I'll give you fifteen sous a pound for it."

"That's the old strain. You are all alike, a regular lot of cheats. How can you bear to 'do' your friends in this way? But that's not all; if I swap with you for some things, you ought to give me good measure."

"To a hair's turn. What do you want? Chains and hooks for your punts?"

"No, I want four or five sheets of stout iron, as if to line shutters with."

"I've just the thing, a quarter of an inch thick; a pistol-ball wouldn't go through it."

"Just what I want."

"What size?"

"Why, altogether about seven or eight feet square."

"Good, and what else?"

"Three bars of iron, from three to four feet long, and two inches square."

"I have just broken up an iron wicket; nothing can be better for you. What next?"

"Two strong hinges and a latch, so that I can open or shut an opening two feet square when I wish."

"A trap, you mean?"

"No, a valve."

"I don't understand what you can want with a valve."

"Never you mind; I know what I want."

"That's all right; you have only to choose; there's a heap of hinges. What's the next thing?"

"That's all."

"And not much, either."

"Get it all ready, Father Micou, and I'll take it as I come back; for I've got some other places to call at."

"With your cart? Why, you dog, I saw a bundle underneath. What, some little trifle you have taken from the world's wardrobe? Ah, you sly rogue!"

"Just as you say, Father Micou; but you don't deal in such things. Don't keep me waiting for the iron goods, for I must be back at the island before noon."

"I'll be ready. It is only eight, and, if you are not going far, come back in an hour, and you shall find everything prepared,—money and goods. Won't you take a drain?"

"Thank ye, I won't say no, for I think you owe it me."

Father Micou took from an old closet a bottle of brandy, a cracked glass, and a cup without a handle, and filled them.

"Here's to you, Daddy Micou!"

"And to you likewise, my boy, and the ladies at home!"

"Thank ye. And the lodging-house goes on well, eh?"

"Middling,—middling. I have always some lodgers for whom I am always fearing a visit from the commissary; but they pay in proportion."

"How d'ye mean?"

"Why, are you stupid? I sometimes lodge as I buy, and don't ask them for their passport, any more than I ask you for your bill of parcels."

"Good; but to them you let as dear as you have bought cheaply of me."

"I must look out. I have a cousin who has a handsome furnished house in the Rue St. Honoré. His wife is a milliner in a large way, and employs,



perhaps, twenty needlewomen, either in the house, or having the work at home."

"I say, old boy, I dare say there's some pretty uns among 'em?"

"I believe you. There's two or three that I have seen bring home work sometimes,—my eyes, ain't they pretty, though? One little one in particular, who works at home, and is always a-laughing, and they calls her Rigolette, oh, my pippin, what a pity one ain't twenty years old all over again!"

"Halloa, daddy, how you are going it!"

"Oh, it's all right, my boy,—all right!"

"'Walker!' old boy. And you say your cousin—"

"Does uncommon well with his house, and, as it is the same number as that of the little Rigolette—"

"What, again?"

"Oh, it's all right and proper."

"'Walker!'"

"He won't have any lodgers but those who have passports and papers; but if any come who haven't got 'em, he sends me those customers."

"And they pays accordingly?"

"In course."

"But they are all in our line who haven't got their riglar papers?"

"By no manner of means! Why, very lately, my cousin sent me a customer,—devil burn me if I can make him out! Another drain?"

"Just one; the liquor's good. Here's t'ye again, Daddy Micou!"

"Here's to you again, my covey! I was saying that the other day my cousin sent me a customer whom I can't make out. Imagine a mother and daughter, who looked very queer and uncommon seedy; they had their whole kit in a pocket-handkerchief. Well, there warn't much to be expected out of this, for they had no papers, and they lodge by the fortnight; yet,

since they've been here, they haven't moved any more than a dormouse. No men come to see them; and yet they're not bad-looking, if they weren't so thin and pale, particularly the daughter, about sixteen,—with such a pair of black eyes,—oh, such eyes!"

"Halloa, dad! You're off again. What do these women do?"

"I tell you I don't know; they must be respectable, and yet, as they receive letters without any address, it looks queer."

"What do you mean?"

"They sent, this morning, my nephew André to the Poste-Restante to inquire for a letter addressed to 'Madame X. Z.' The letter was expected from Normandy, from a town called Aubiers. They wrote that down on paper, so that André might get the letter by giving these particulars. You see, it does not look quite the thing for women to take the name of 'X.' and 'Z.' And yet they never have any male visitors."

"They won't pay you."

"Oh, my fine fellow, they don't catch an old bird like me with chaff. They took a room without a fireplace, and I made them pay the twenty francs down for the fortnight. They are, perhaps, ill, for they have not been down for the last two days. It is not indigestion that ails them, for I don't think they have cooked anything since they came here."

"If you had all such customers, Father Micou—"

"Oh, they go and come. If I lodge people without passports, why, I also have different people. I have now two travelling gents, a postman, the leader of the band at the Café des Aveugles, and a lady of fortune,—all most respectable persons, such as save the reputation of a house, if the commissary is inclined to look a little too closely into things; they are not night-lodgers, but tenants of the broad sunshine."

"When it comes into your alley, Father Micou."

"You're a wag. Another drain, yes, just one more."

"Well, it must be my last, for then I must cut. By the way, doesn't Robin, the Gros-Boiteux, lodge here still?"

"Yes, up-stairs, on the same landing as the mother and daughter. He's pretty nearly run through his money he earned in gaol."

"I say, mind your eye,—he's outlawed."

"I know it, but I can't get rid of him. I think he's got something in hand, for little Tortillard came here the other night along with Barbillon. I'm afraid he'll do something to my lodgers, so, when his fortnight is up, I shall bundle him, telling him his room is taken for an ambassador, or the husband of Madame Saint-Ildefonse, my independent lady."

"An independent lady?"

"I believe you! Three rooms and a cabinet in the front,—nothing less,—newly furnished, to say nothing of an attic for her servant. Eighty francs a month, and paid in advance by her uncle, to whom she gives one of her spare rooms when he comes up from the country. But I believe his country-house is about the Rue Vivienne, or the Rue St. Honoré."

"I twig! She's independent because the old fellow pays."

"Hush! Here's her maid."

A middle-aged woman, wearing a white apron of very doubtful cleanliness, entered the dealer's warehouse.

"What can I do for you, Madame Charles?"

"Father Micou, is your nephew within?"

"He has gone to the post-office; but I expect him in immediately."

"M. Badinot wishes him to take this letter to its address instantly. There's no answer, but it is in great haste."

"In a quarter of an hour he will be on his way thither, madame."

"He must make great haste."

"He shall, be assured."

The servant went away.

"Is she the maid of one of your lodgers, Father Micou?"

"She is the *bonne* of my independent lady, Madame Saint-Ildefonse. But M. Badinot is her uncle; he came from the country yesterday," said the respectable Micou, who was looking at the letter, and then added, reading the address, "Look, now, what grand acquaintances! Why, I told you they were high folks; he writes to a viscount."

"Oh, bah!"

"See here, then, 'To Monsieur the Vicomte de Saint-Remy, Rue de Chaillot. In great haste. Private.' I hope, when we lodge independent persons who have uncles who write to viscounts, we may allow some few of our other lodgers higher up in the house to be without passports, eh?"

"I believe you. Well, then, Father Micou, we shall soon be back. I shall fasten my dog and cart to your door, and carry what I have; so be ready with the goods and the money, so that I may cut at once."

"I'll be ready. Four good iron plates, each two feet square, three bars of iron two feet long, and two hinges for your valve. This valve seems very odd to me; but it's no affair of mine. Is that all?"

"Yes, and my money?"

"Oh, you shall have your money. But now I look at you in the light—now I get a good view of you—"

"Well?"

"I don't know—but you seem as if something was the matter."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"Oh, nonsense! If anything ails me it is that I'm hungry."

"You're hungry? Like enough; but it rather looks as if you wanted to appear very lively, whilst all the while there's something that worries you; and it must be something, for it ain't a trifle that puts you out."

"I tell you you're mistaken, Father Micou," said Nicholas, shuddering.

"Why, you quite tremble!"

"It's my arm that pains me."

"Well, don't forget my prescription, that will cure you."

"Thank ye, I'll soon be back." And the ruffian went on his way.

The receiver, after having concealed the lumps of copper behind his counter, occupied himself in collecting the various things which Nicholas had requested, when another individual entered his shop. It was a man about fifty years of age, with a keen, sagacious face, a thick pair of gray whiskers, and gold spectacles. He was extremely well dressed; the wide sleeves of his brown paletot, with black velvet cuffs, showing his hands covered with thin coloured kid gloves, and his boots bore evidence of having been on the previous evening highly polished.

It was M. Badinot, the independent lady's uncle, that Madame Saint-Ildefonse, whose social position formed the pride and security of Père Micou. The reader may, perchance, recollect that M. Badinot, the former attorney, struck off that respectable list, then a Chevalier d'Industrie, and agent in equivocal matters, was the spy of Baron de Graün, and had given that diplomatist many and very precise particulars as to many personages connected with this tale.

"Madame Charles has just given you a letter to send?" said M. Badinot, to the dealer in et ceteras.

"Yes, sir; my nephew I expect every moment, and he shall go directly."

"No, give me the letter again, I have changed my mind. I shall go myself to the Comte de Saint-Remy," said M. Badinot, pronouncing this aristocratic name very emphatically, and with much importance.

"Here's the letter, sir; have you any other commission?"

"No, Père Micou," said M. Badinot, with a protecting air, "but I have something to scold you about."

"Me, sir?"

"Very much, indeed."

"About what, sir?"

"Why, Madame de Saint-Ildefonse pays very expensively for your first floor. My niece is a lodger to whom the greatest respect ought to be paid; she came highly recommended to your house, and, having a great aversion to the noise of carriages, she hoped she should be here as if she were in the country."

"So she is; it is quite like a village here. You ought to know, sir,—you who live in the country,—this is a real village."

"A village! Very like, indeed! Why, there is always such an infernal din in the house."

"Still, it is impossible to find a quieter house. Above the lady, there is the leader of the band at the Café des Aveugles, and a gentleman traveller; over that, another traveller; over that—"

"I am not alluding to those persons; they are very quiet, and appear very respectable. My niece has no fault to find with them; but in the fourth, there is a stout lame man, whom Madame de Saint-Ildefonse met yesterday tipsy on the stairs; he was shrieking like a savage, and she nearly had a fit, she was so much alarmed. If you think that, with such lodgers, your house resembles a village—"

"Sir, I assure you I only wait the opportunity to turn this stout lame man out-of-doors; he has paid his last fortnight in advance, otherwise I should already have turned him out."

"You should not have taken in such a lodger."

"But, except him, I hope madame has nothing to complain of. There is a twopenny postman, who is the cream of honest fellows, and overhead, beside the chamber of the stout lame man, a lady and daughter, who do not move any more than dormice."

"I repeat, Madame de Saint-Ildefonse only complains of this stout lame man, who is the nightmare of the house; and I warn you that, if you keep such a fellow in your house, you will find all your respectable lodgers leave you."

"I will send him away, you may be assured. I have no wish to keep him."

"You will only do what's right, for else your house will be forsaken."

"Which will not answer my purpose at all; so, sir, consider the stout lame man as gone, for he has only four more days to stay here."

"Which is four days too many; but it is your affair. At the first outbreak, my niece leaves your house."

"Be assured, sir—"

"It is all for your own interest,—and look to it, for I am not a man of many words," said M. Badinot, with a patronising air, and he went out.

Need we say that this female and her young daughter, who lived so lonely, were the two victims of the notary's cupidity? We will now conduct the reader to the miserable retreat in which they lived.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE VICTIMS OF MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

Let the reader picture to himself a small chamber on the fourth floor of the wretched house in the Passage de la Brasserie. Scarcely could the faint glimmers of early morn force their pale rays through the narrow casements forming the only window to this small apartment; the three panes of glass that apology for a window contained were cracked and almost the colour of horn, a dingy and torn yellow paper adhered in some places to the walls, while from each corner of the cracked ceiling hung long and thick cobwebs; and to complete the appearance of wretchedness so evident in this forlorn spot, the flooring was broken away, and, in many places, displayed the beams which supported it, as well as the lath and plaster forming the ceiling of the room beneath. A deal table, a chair, an old trunk, without hinges or lock, a truckle-bed, with a wooden headboard, covered by a thin mattress, coarse sheets of unbleached cloth, and an old rug,—such was the entire furniture of this wretched chamber.

On the chair sat the Baroness de Fermont, and in the bed reposed her daughter, Claire de Fermont. Such were the names of these two victims of the villainy of Jacques Ferrand. Possessing but one bed, the mother and child took it by turns to sleep. Too much uneasiness and too many bitter cares prevented Madame de Fermont from enjoying the blessing of repose; but her daughter's young and elastic nature easily yielded to the natural impulse which made her willingly seek in short slumbers a temporary respite from the misery by which she was surrounded during her waking hours. At the present moment she was sleeping peacefully.

Nothing could be imagined more touchingly affecting than the picture of misery imposed by the avarice of the notary on two females hitherto accustomed to every comfort, and surrounded in their native city by that respect which is ever felt for honourable and honoured families.

Madame de Fermont was about six and thirty years of age, with a countenance at once expressive of gentleness and intelligence, mingled with an indescribably noble and majestic air. Her features, which had once boasted extreme beauty, were now pale and careworn; her dark hair was separated on her forehead, and formed two thick, lustrous bandeaux, which, after shading her pallid countenance, were twisted in with her back hair, whose tresses the hand of sorrow had already mingled with gray. Dressed in an old shabby black dress, patched and pieced in various places, Madame



de Fermont, her head supported by her hand, was surveying her child with looks of ineffable tenderness.

Claire was but sixteen years of age, and her gentle and innocent countenance, thin and sorrowful as that of her mother, looked still more pallid as contrasted with the coarse, unbleached linen which covered her bolster, filled only with sawdust. The once brilliant complexion of the poor girl had sickened beneath the privations she endured; and, as she slept, the long, dark lashes which fringed her large and lustrous eyes stood out almost unnaturally upon her sunken cheek; the once fresh and rosy lips were now dry, cracked, and colourless, yet, half opened as they were, they displayed the faultless regularity of her pearly teeth.

The harsh contact of the rough linen which covered her bed had caused a temporary redness about the neck, shoulders, and arms of the poor girl, whose fine and delicate skin was marbled and spotted by the friction both of the miserable sheets and rug. A sensation of uneasiness and discomfort seemed to pervade even her slumbers; for the clearly defined eyebrows, occasionally contracted, as though the sleeper were under the influence of an uneasy dream, and the pained expression observable on the features, foretold the deadly nature of the disease at work within.

Madame de Fermont had long ceased to find relief in tears, but, like her suffering daughter, she found that weakness, languor, and dejection, which is ever the precursor of severe illness, rapidly and daily increasing; but, unwilling to alarm Claire, and wishing, if possible, even to conceal the frightful truth from herself, the wretched mother struggled against the first approaches of her malady, while, from a similar feeling of devotion and affection, Claire sought to hide from her parent the extreme suffering she herself experienced.

To attempt to describe the tortures endured by the tender mother, as, during the greater part of the night, she watched her slumbering child, her thoughts alternately dwelling on the past, the present, and the future, would be to paint the sharpest, bitterest, wildest agony that ever crossed the brain of a loving and despairing mother; to give alternately her reminiscences of bygone happiness, her shuddering dread of impending evil, her fearful anticipations, her bitter regrets, and utter despondency, mingled with bursts of frenzied rage against the author of all her sorrows, vain supplications, eager, earnest prayers, ending at last fearfully and dreadfully in openly expressed mistrust of the omnipotence and justice of the Great Being who could thus remain insensible to the cry which arose from a mother's

breaking heart, to that holy plea whose sound should reach the throne of grace,—“Pity, pity, for my child!”

“How cold she is!” cried the poor mother, lightly touching with her icy hand the equally chill arm of her child; “how very, very cold! and scarcely an hour ago just as hot! Alas, ’tis the cruel fever which has seized upon her! Happily the dear creature is as yet unconscious of her malady! Gracious heaven, she is becoming cold as death itself! What shall I do to bring warmth to her poor frame? The bed-coverings are so slight! A good thought! I will throw my old shawl over her. But no, no! I dare not remove it from the door over which I have hung it, lest those men so brutally intoxicated should endeavour, as they did yesterday, to look into the room through the disjointed panels or openings in the framework.

“What a horrible place we have got into! Oh, if I had but known by what description of persons it was inhabited before I paid the fortnight in advance! Certainly, we would not have remained here. But, alas, I knew it not; and when we have no vouchers for our respectability, it is so difficult to obtain furnished lodgings. Who could ever have thought I should have been at a loss,—I who quitted Angers in my own carriage, deeming it unfit my daughter should travel by any public conveyance? How could I have imagined that I should experience any difficulty in obtaining every requisite testimonial of my honour and honesty?”

Then bursting into a fit of anger, she exclaimed, “’Tis too, too hard, that because this unprincipled, hard-hearted notary chooses to strip us of all our possessions, I have no means of punishing him! Yes; had I money I might sue him legally for his misconduct. But would not that be to bring obloquy and contempt on the memory of my good, my noble-minded brother; to have it publicly proclaimed that he consummated his ruin by taking away his own life, after having squandered my fortune and that of my child; to hear him accused of reducing us to want and wretchedness? Oh, never,—never! Still, however dear and sacred is the memory of a brother, should not the welfare of my child be equally so?

“And wherefore, too, should I give rise to useless tales of family misery, unprovided as I am with any proofs against the notary? Oh, it is, indeed, a cruel,—a most cruel case. Sometimes, too, when irritated, goaded by my reflections almost to madness, I find myself indulging in bitter complaints against my brother, and think his conduct more culpable than even the notary’s, as though it were any alleviation of my woes to have two names to execrate instead of one. But quickly do I blush at my own base and unworthy suspicions of one so good, so honourable, so noble-minded as my

poor brother! This infamous notary knows not all the fearful consequences of his dishonesty. He fancies he has but taken from us our worldly goods, while he has plunged a dagger in the hearts of two innocent, unoffending victims, condemned by his villainy to die by inches. Alas, I dare not breathe into the ear of my poor child the full extent of my fears, lest her young mind should be unable to support the blow!

"But I am ill,—very, very ill; a burning fever is in my veins; and 'tis only with the greatest energy and resolution I contrive to resist its approaches. But too certainly do I feel aware that the germs of a possibly mortal disease are in me. I am aware of its gaining ground hourly. My throat is parched, my head burns and throbs with racking pains. These symptoms are even more dangerous than I am willing to own even to myself. Merciful God! If I were to be ill,—seriously, fatally ill,—if I should die! But no, no!" almost shrieked Madame Fermont, with wild excitement; "I cannot,—I will not die! To leave Claire at sixteen years of age, alone, and without resource, in the midst of Paris! Impossible! Oh, no, I am not ill; I have mistaken the effects of sorrow, cold, and want of rest, for the precursory symptoms of illness. Any person similarly placed would have experienced the same. It is nothing, nothing worth noticing. There must be no weakness on my part. 'Tis by yielding to such dismal anticipations that one becomes really attacked by the very malady we dread. And besides, I have not time to be ill. Oh, no! On the contrary, I must immediately exert myself to find employment for Claire and myself, since the wretch who gave us the prints to colour has dared to—"

After a short silence, Madame de Fermont, leaving her last sentence unfinished, indignantly added:

"Horrible idea! To ask the shame of my child in return for the work he doles out to us, and to harshly withdraw it because I will not suffer my poor Claire to go to his house unaccompanied, and work there during the evening alone with him! Possibly I may succeed in obtaining work elsewhere, either in plain or ornamental needlework. Yet it is so very difficult when we are known to no one; and very recently I tried in vain. Persons are afraid of entrusting their materials to those who live in such wretched lodgings as ours. And yet I dare not venture upon others more creditable; for what would become of us were the small sum we possess once exhausted? What could we do? We should be utterly penniless; as destitute as the veriest beggar that ever walked the earth.

"And then to think I once was among the richest and wealthiest! Oh, let me not think of what has been; such considerations serve but to increase the already excited state of my brain. It will madden me to recollect the past;

and I am wrong—oh, very wrong—thus to dwell on ideas that sadden and depress instead of raising and invigorating my enfeebled mind. Had I gone on thus weakly indulging regrets, I might, indeed, have fallen ill,—for I am by no means so at present. No, no," continued the unfortunate parent, placing her fingers upon the wrist of her left hand, "my fever has left me,—my pulse beats tranquilly."

Alas! the quick, irregular, and hurried pulsation perceptible beneath the parched yet icy skin allowed not of such flattering hopes; and, after pausing in deep and heartfelt wretchedness for a short space, the unhappy Madame de Fermont thus continued:

"Wherefore, O God of Mercies, thus visit with thine anger two wretched and helpless creatures, utterly unconscious of having merited thy displeasure? What has been the crime that has thus drawn down such heavy punishments upon our heads? Was not my child a model of innocent piety, as her father was of honour? Have I not ever scrupulously fulfilled my duties both as wife and mother? Why, then, permit us to become the victims of a vile, ignoble wretch,—my sweet, my innocent child more especially? Oh, when I remember that, but for the nefarious conduct of this notary, the rising dawn of my daughter's existence would have been clear and unclouded, I can scarcely restrain my tears. But for his base treachery we should now be in our own home, without further care or sorrow than such as arose from the painful and unhappy circumstances attending the death of my poor brother. In two or three years' time I should have begun to think of marrying my sweet Claire, that is, if I could have found any one worthy of so good, so pure-minded, and so lovely a creature as herself. Who would not have rejoiced in obtaining such a bride? And further, after having merely reserved to myself a trifling annuity, sufficient to have enabled me to live somewhere in the neighbourhood, I intended, on her marriage, to bestow on her the whole of my remaining possessions, amounting to at least one hundred thousand crowns; for I should have been enabled to lay by something. And, when a lovely and beautiful young creature, like my Claire, gifted with all the advantages of a superior education, can, in addition, boast of a dowry of more than one hundred thousand crowns—"

Then, as she again returned to the realities of her present position, altogether overcome by the painful contrast, Madame de Fermont exclaimed, almost frantically:

"Still, it is not to be supposed that, because the notary so wills it, I shall sit tamely by and see my only and beloved child reduced to the most abject misery, entitled as she is to a life of the most unalloyed felicity. If I can

obtain no redress from the laws of my country, I will not permit the infamous conduct of this man to escape unpunished. For if I am driven to desperation, if I find no means of extricating my daughter and myself from the deplorable condition to which the villainy of this man has brought us, I cannot answer for myself, or what I may do. I may be driven by madness to retaliate on this man, even by taking his life. And what if I did, after all I have endured, after all the scalding tears he has caused me to shed, who could blame me? At least I should be secure of the pity and sympathy of all mothers who loved their children as I do my Claire. Yes; but, then, what would be her position,—left alone, friendless, unexperienced, and destitute? Oh, no, no, that is my principal dread; therefore do I fear to die.

"And for that same reason dare I not harm the traitor who has wrought our ruin. What would become of her at sixteen?—pure and spotless as an angel, 'tis true. But then she is so surpassingly lovely; and want, desolation, cold, and misery are fearful things to oppose alone and unaided. How fearful a conflict might be presented to one of her tender years, and into how terrible an abyss might she not fall? Oh, want,—fatal word! As I trace it, a crowd of sickening images rise before me, and distract my senses. Destitution, dreadful as it is to all, is still more formidable to those who have lived surrounded not only with every comfort, but even luxury. One thing I cannot pardon myself for, and that is that, in the face of all these overwhelming trials, I have not yet been able to subdue my unfortunate pride; and I feel persuaded that nothing but the sight of my child, actually perishing before my eyes for want of bread, could induce me to beg. How weak, how selfish and cowardly! Still—"

Then, as her thoughts wandered to the source of all her present sufferings and anguish, she mournfully continued:

"The notary has reduced me to a state of beggary; I must, therefore, yield to the stern necessity of my situation. There must be an end of all delicacy as well as scruples. They might have been well enough in bygone days; but my duty is now to stretch forth my hand to solicit charitable aid for both my daughter and myself. And if I fail in procuring work, I must make up my mind to implore the charity of my fellow creatures, since the roguery of the notary has left me no alternative. Doubtless in that, as in other trades, there is an art, an expertness to be acquired, and which experience alone can bestow. Never mind," continued she, with a sort of feverish wildness, "one must learn one's craft, and only practice can make perfect. Surely mine must be a tale to move even the most unfeeling. I have to tell of misfortunes alike severe and unmerited,—of an angelic child, but sixteen years of age, exposed to every evil of life. But then it requires a practised hand to set forth

all these qualifications, so as best to excite sympathy and compassion. No matter; I shall manage it, I feel quite sure. And, after all," exclaimed the half-distracted woman, with a gloomy smile, "what have I so much to complain of? Fortune is perishable and precarious; and the notary will, at least, if he has taken my money, have compelled me to adopt a trade."

For several minutes Madame de Fermont remained absorbed in her reflections, then resumed more calmly:

"I have frequently thought of inquiring for some situation. What I seem to covet is just such a place as a female has here who is servant to a lady living on the first floor. Had I that situation I might probably receive wages sufficient to maintain Claire; and I might even, through the intervention of the mistress I served, be enabled to obtain occupation for my daughter, who then would remain here. Neither should I be obliged to quit her. Oh, what joy, could it be so arranged! But no, no, that would be happiness too great for me to expect; it would seem like a dream. And then, again, if I obtained the place, the poor woman now occupying it must be turned away. Possibly she is as poor and destitute as ourselves. Well, what if she be? No scruple has arisen to save us from being stripped of our all, and my child's preservation outweighs all fastidious notions of delicacy in my breast. The only difficulty consists in obtaining an introduction to the lady on the first floor, and contriving to dispossess the servant of a place which would be to me the very perfection of ease and comfort."

Several loud and hasty knocks at the door startled Madame de Fermont, and made her daughter spring up with a sudden cry.

"For heaven's sake, dear mother," asked poor Claire, trembling with fear, "what is the matter?" And then, without giving her agitated parent time to recover herself, the terrified girl threw her arms around her mother's neck, as if she sought for safety in that fond, maternal bosom, while Madame de Fermont, pressing her child almost convulsively to her breast, gazed with terror at the door.

"Mamma, mamma," again moaned Claire, "what was that noise that awoke me? And why do you seem so much alarmed?"

"I know not, my child, what it was. But calm yourself, there is nothing to fear; some one merely knocked at the door,—possibly to bring us a letter from the post-office."

At this moment the worm-eaten door shook and rattled beneath the blows dealt against it by some powerful fist.

"Who is there?" inquired Madame de Fermont, in a trembling tone.

A harsh, coarse, and vulgar voice replied, "Holloa, there! What, are you so deaf there's no making you hear? Holloa, I say, open your door; and let's have a look at you. Hip, hip, holloa! Come, sharp's the word; I'm in a hurry."

"I know you not," exclaimed Madame de Fermont, striving to command herself sufficiently to speak with a steady voice; "what is it you seek here?"

"Not know me? Why, I'm your opposite neighbour and fellow lodger, Robin. I want a light for my pipe. Come, cut about. Whoop, holloa! Don't go to sleep again, or I must come in and wake you."

"Merciful heavens!" whispered the mother to her daughter, "'tis that lame man, who is nearly always intoxicated."

"Now, then, are you going to give me a light? Because, I tell you fairly, one I will have if I knock your rickety old door to pieces."

"I have no light to give you."

"Oh, bother and nonsense! If you have no candle burning you must have the means of lighting one. Nobody is without a few lucifer matches, be they ever so poor. Do you or do you not choose to give me a light?"

"I beg of you to go away."

"You don't choose to open your door, then? Once,—twice,—mind, I will have it."

"I request you to quit my door immediately, or I will call for assistance."

"Once,—twice,—thrice,—you will not? Well, then, here goes! Now I'll smash your old timbers, into morsels too small for you to pick up. Hu!—hu!—hallo! Well done! Bravo!"

And suiting the action to the word, the ruffian assailed the door so furiously that he quickly drove it in, the miserable lock with which it was furnished having speedily broken to pieces.

The two women shrieked loudly; Madame de Fermont, in spite of her weakness, rushed forward to meet the ruffian at the moment when he was entering the room, and stopped him.

"Sir, this is most shameful; you must not enter here," exclaimed the unhappy mother, keeping the door closed as well as she could. "I will call for help." And she shuddered at the sight of this man, with his hideous and drunken countenance.

"What's all this? What's all this?" said he. "Oughtn't neighbours to be obliging? You ought to have opened; I shouldn't have broken anything."

Then with the stupid obstinacy of intoxication, he added, reeling on his tottering legs:

"I wanted to come in, and I will come in; and I won't go out until I've lighted my pipe."

"I have neither fire nor matches. In heaven's name, sir, do go away."

"That's not true. You tell me that I may not see the little girl who's in bed. Yesterday you stopped up all the holes in the door. She's a pretty chick, and I should like to see her. So mind, or I shall hurt you if you don't let me enter quietly. I tell you I will see the little girl in her bed, and I will light my pipe, or I'll smash everything before me, and you into the bargain."

"Help, help, help!" exclaimed Madame de Fermont, who felt the door yielding before the broad shoulders of the Gros-Boiteux.

Alarmed by her cries, the man retreated a step; and clenching his fist at Madame de Fermont, he said:

"You shall pay me for this, mind. I will come back to-night and wring your tongue out, and then you can't squall out."

And the Gros-Boiteux, as he was called at the Isle du Ravageur, went down the staircase, uttering horrible threats.

Madame de Fermont, fearing that he might return, and seeing that the lock was broken, dragged the table across the room, in order to barricade it. Claire had been so alarmed, so agitated, at this horrible scene, that she had fallen on her bed almost senseless, and overcome by a nervous attack. Her mother, forgetting her own fears, ran to her, embraced her, gave her a little



water to drink, and by her caresses and attentions revived her. When she saw her gradually recovering she said to her:

"Calm yourself; don't be alarmed, my dearest child, this wicked man has gone." Then the unfortunate mother exclaimed, in a tone of indescribable indignation and grief, "And it is that notary who is the first cause of all our sufferings."

Claire looked about her with as much astonishment as fear.

"Take courage, my child," said Madame de Fermont, embracing her tenderly; "the wretch has gone."

"Oh, mamma, if he should come back again! You see, though you cried so loud for help, no one came. Oh, pray let us leave this house, or I shall die with fear!"

"How you tremble; you are quite in a fever."

"No, no," said the young girl, to reassure her mother, "it is nothing—only fright,—and that will soon pass away. And you,—how do you feel? Give me your hands. Oh, how they burn! It is, indeed, you who are suffering; and you try to conceal it from me!"

"Don't think so; I feel better than I did. It is only the fright that man caused me which makes me so. I was sleeping soundly in my chair, and only awoke when you did."

"Yet, mamma, your poor eyes look so red and inflamed!"

"Why, you see, my dear, one does not sleep so refreshingly in a chair."

"And you really do not suffer?"

"No, no, I assure you. And you?"

"Nor I either. I only tremble with fear. Pray, mamma, let us leave this house!"

"And where shall we go to? You know what trouble we had to find this miserable chamber; for, unfortunately, we have no papers,—and, besides, we have paid a fortnight in advance. They will not return our money; and we have so very, very little left, that we must take all possible care of it."

"Perhaps M. de Saint-Remy will answer you in a day or two."

"I cannot hope for that. It is so long since I wrote to him."

"He cannot have received your letter. Why did not you write to him again? From here to Angers is not so far, and we should soon have his answer."

"My poor child, you know how much that has cost me already!"

"But there's no risk; and he is so good in spite of his roughness. Wasn't he one of the oldest friends of my father? And then he is a relation of ours."

"But he is poor himself,—his fortune is very small. Perhaps he does not reply to us that he may avoid the pain of a refusal."

"But he may not have received your letter, mamma!"

"And if he has received it, my dear,—one of two things, either he is himself in too painful a position to come to our aid, or he feels no interest in us. What, then, is the use of exposing ourselves to a refusal or humiliation?"

"Come, come, courage, mamma; we have still a hope left. Perhaps this very morning will bring us a kind answer."

"From M. d'Orbigny?"

"Yes; the letter of which you had made the rough copy was so simple and touching. It showed our miserable condition so naturally that he will have pity on us. Really, I don't know why, but something tells me you are wrong to despair of him."

"He has so little motive for taking any interest in us. It is true he formerly knew your father, and I have often heard my poor brother speak of M. d'Orbigny as a man with whom he was on good terms before the latter left Paris to retire into the country with his young wife."

"It is that which makes me hope. He has a young wife, and she will be compassionate. And then in the country one can do so much good. He will take you, I should think, as a housekeeper, and I could work in the needle-room. Then M. d'Orbigny is very rich, and in a great house there is always so much to do."

"Yes; but we have so little claim on his kind interest!"

"We are so unfortunate!"

"It is true that is a claim in the eyes of charitably disposed persons."

"Let us hope that M. d'Orbigny and his wife are so."

"Then if we do not have any or an unfavorable answer from him, I will overcome my false shame, and write to the Duchesse de Lucenay."

"The lady of whom M. de Saint-Remy has spoken so often, and whose kindness and generosity he so much, praised?"

"The same,—daughter of the Prince de Noirmont. He knew her when she was very young, and treated her almost always as if she were his own child, for he was on terms of the closest intimacy with the prince. Madame de Lucenay must have many acquaintances, and, no doubt, could easily find situations for us."

"No doubt, mamma. But I understand your delicacy; you do not know her, whilst, at least, my father and my uncle both knew a little of M. d'Orbigny."

"Well, but in case Madame de Lucenay cannot do anything for us, I have still another resource."

"What is that, mamma?"

"A very poor one,—a very weak hope, perhaps. But why should I not try it? M. de Saint-Remy's son is—"

"Has M. de Saint-Remy a son?" exclaimed Claire, interrupting her mother with great astonishment.

"Yes, my dear, he has a son."

"Yet he never spoke of him when he used to come to Angers."

"True, and, for reasons which you cannot understand, M. de Saint-Remy, having quitted Paris fifteen years ago, has not seen his son since that period."

"Fifteen years without seeing his father! Is that possible?"

"Alas, yes! As you see, the son of M. de Saint-Remy, being very much sought after in society, and very rich—"

"Very rich, whilst his father is poor?"

"All young M. de Saint-Remy's wealth came from his mother."

"What of that,—how could he leave his father?"

"His father would not accept anything from him."

"Why?"

"That is a question to which I cannot reply, my dear child; but I have heard it said by my poor brother that this young man was reputed vastly generous. Young and generous, he ought to be good. Learning from me that my husband had been his father's intimate friend, perhaps he will interest himself in trying to find us work or employment. He has such high and extensive connections, that this would be no trouble to him."

"And then, perhaps, too, we could learn from him if M. de Saint-Remy, his father, had not quitted Angers before you wrote to him: that would account for his silence."

"I think, my dear, that M. de Saint-Remy has not kept up any connection with—Still, we cannot but try."

"Unless M. d'Orbigny replies to you favourably, and I repeat, I don't know why, but I have hopes, in spite of myself."

"It is now many days, my dear, since I wrote to him, telling him all the causes of our misfortunes, and yet to this time we have no reply,—none. A letter put in the post before four o'clock in the evening reaches Aubiers next morning, and thus we might have had his answer five days ago."

"Perhaps, before he replies, he is considering in what way he can best be useful to us."

"May Heaven hear thee, my child!"

"It appears to me plain enough, mamma, if he could not do anything for us, he could have written at once, and said so."

"Unless he will do nothing."

"Oh, mamma, is that possible? to refuse to answer us, and leave us in hope for four days—eight days, perhaps; for when one is miserable we always hope."

"Alas, my child, there is sometimes so much indifference for the miseries persons have never known!"

"But your letter—"

"My letter cannot give him any idea of our actual disquietude, our constant sufferings; my letter will not depict to him our unhappy life, our constant humiliations, our existence in this horrid house,—the fright we have but this instant experienced. My letter will not describe the horrible future which is in store for us, if—But, my love, do not let us talk of that. You tremble,—you are cold."

"No, mamma, don't mind me; but tell me, suppose all fails us, the little money we have in the box is spent,—is it possible that, in a city as rich as Paris, we shall both die of hunger and misery—for want of work, and because a wicked man has taken from you all you had in the world?"

"Oh, be silent, my unfortunate child!"

"But really, mamma, is it possible?"

"Alas!"

"But God, who knows all, who can do all, will he abandon us, who have never offended him?"

"I entreat you, my dearest girl, do not give way to these distressing ideas. I would prefer seeing you hope, without great reason, either. Come, come, comfort me rather with your consoling ideas; I am but too apt to be discouraged, as you well know."

"Yes, yes, let us hope, that is best. No doubt the porter's nephew will return to-day from the Poste-Restante with a letter. Another errand to pay out of your little stock, and through my fault. If I had not been so weak yesterday and to-day we should have gone to the post-office ourselves, as we did the day before yesterday; but you will not leave me here alone and go yourself."

"How could I, my dear? Only think, just now, that horrid man who burst open the door! Suppose you had been alone?"

"Oh, mamma, pray don't talk of it; it quite frightens me only to think of it."

At this moment some one knocked suddenly at the door.

"Heaven, it is he again!" exclaimed Madame de Fermont, still under her first fears; and she pushed the table against the door with all her strength. Her fears ceased when she heard the voice of Father Micou:

"Madame, my nephew, André, has come from the Poste-Restante. He has brought a letter with an 'X' and a 'Z.' It comes a long way; there are eight sous for postage, and commission makes twenty sous."

"Mamma, a letter from the country,—we are saved! It is from M. de Saint-Remy or M. d'Orbigny. Poor mother! You will not suffer any more; you will no longer be uneasy about me, you will be so happy! God is just! God is good!" exclaimed the young girl, and a ray of hope lighted up her mild and lovely face.

"Oh, sir, thank you; give it to me quickly!" said Madame de Fermont, moving the table as well as she could, and half opening the door.

"Twenty sous," said the man, giving her the anxiously desired letter.

"I will pay you, sir."

"Oh, madame, there's no hurry, I am going up higher; in ten minutes I shall be down again, and can call for the money as I pass."

"The letter is from Normandy, with the postmark of 'Les Aubiers.' It is from Madame d'Orbigny!" exclaimed Madame de Fermont, examining the address, "To Madame X. Z., Poste-Restante, à Paris."

"Well, mamma, am I right? Oh, how my heart beats!"

"Our good or bad fate is in it," said Madame de Fermont; and twice her trembling hand was extended to break the seal; she had not courage.

How can we describe the terrible agony to which they are a prey who, like Madame de Fermont, expect a letter which brings them either hope or despair? The burning, fevered excitement of the player whose last pieces of gold are hazarded on a card, and who, breathless, with inflamed eye, awaits for a decisive cast which brings his ruin or his fortune,—this emotion, violent as it is, may perhaps give some idea of the painful anguish of which we speak. In a second the soul is elevated to the most radiant hope or

relapses into the most mortal discouragement. According as he hopes to be aided, or fears to be refused, the unhappy wretch suffers in turn emotions of a most contrary nature,—unutterable feelings of happiness and gratitude to the generous heart which pities his miserable condition—bitter and intense resentment against selfish indifference!

When it is a question of deserving sufferers, those who give often would perhaps give always, and those who always refuse would perhaps give frequently, if they knew or saw that the hope of benevolent aid or the fear of a haughty refusal—that their decision, indeed—can excite all that is distressing or encouraging in the hearts of their petitioners.

"What weakness!" said Madame de Fermont, with a deep sigh, seating herself by her daughter; "once again, my poor Claire, our destiny is in this envelope; I burn with anxiety to know its contents, and yet I dare not read it. If it be a refusal, alas, it will be soon enough!"

"And if it be a promise of assistance, then, mamma—If this poor little letter contain consoling words, which shall assure us for the future, by promising us a humble employment in the establishment of M. d'Orbigny, every moment lost is a moment of happiness lost,—is it not?"

"Yes, my love; but on the other hand—"

"No, mamma, you are mistaken; I told you that M. d'Orbigny had only delayed so long that he might mention something certain to you. Let me see the letter, mamma. I am sure I can guess if it is good or bad by the writing. And I am sure," said Claire, looking at the letter, "that it is a kind and generous hand, accustomed to execute benevolence towards those who suffer."

"I entreat you, Claire, not to give way to vain hopes; for, if you do, I shall not have the courage to open the letter."

"My dear mother, without opening it, I can tell you almost word for word what it contains. Listen: 'Madame,—Your fate and that of your daughter are so worthy of interest, that I beg you will come to me, in case you should like to undertake the superintendence of my house.'"

"Pray, my dearest, I beseech you, do not give way to vain hopes; the disappointment would be terrible!" said Madame de Fermont, taking the letter.

"Come, dear mamma," said Claire, smiling, and excited by one of those feelings of certainty so natural to her age, "give me the letter; I have courage to read it!"

"No," said Madame de Fermont, "I will read it! It is from the Comtesse d'Orbigny."

"So much the better," replied Claire.

"We shall see." And Madame de Fermont read as follows in a trembling voice:

"MADAME:—M. the Comte d'Orbigny, who has been a great invalid for some time, could not reply to you during my absence—"

"You see, mamma, it was no one's fault."

"Listen, listen!"

"On arriving from Paris this morning, I hasten to write to you, madame, after having discussed your letter with M. d'Orbigny. He recollects but very indistinctly the intimacy you allude to as having subsisted between him and your brother. As to the name of your husband, madame, it is not unknown to M. d'Orbigny; but he cannot recall to mind under what circumstances he has heard it. The spoliation of which you so unhesitatingly accuse M. Jacques Ferrand, whom we have the happiness to call our solicitor, is, in the eyes of M. d'Orbigny, a cruel calumny, whose effects you have by no means calculated upon. My husband, as well as myself, madame, know and admire the extreme probity of the respectable and pious individual whom you so blindly assail; and I am compelled to tell you, madame, that M. d'Orbigny, whilst he regrets the painful situation in which you are placed, and the real cause of which it is not his business to find out, feels it impossible to afford you the assistance requested. Accept, madame, with the expression of M. d'Orbigny's regrets, my best compliments.

"COMTESSE D'ORBIGNY."

The mother and daughter looked at each other perfectly stupefied, and incapable of uttering a word. Father Micou rapped at the door, and said:

"Madame, may I come in for the postage and commission? It's twenty sous."

"Ah, true, such good news is worth a sum on which we exist for two days," said Madame de Fermont, with a bitter smile, laying the letter down on her



daughter's bed, and going towards an old trunk without a lock, to which she stooped down and opened. "We are robbed!" exclaimed the unhappy woman, with alarm. "Nothing—not a sou left!" she added, in a mournful voice; and, overwhelmed, she supported herself on the trunk.

"What do you say, mamma,—the bag with the money in it?"

But Madame de Fermont, rising suddenly, opened the room door, and, addressing the receiver, who was on the landing-place:

"Sir," she said, whilst her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks were flushed with indignation and alarm, "I had a bag of silver in this trunk; it was stolen from me, no doubt, the day before yesterday, when I went out for an hour with my daughter. The money must be restored, I tell you,—you are responsible for it!"

"You've been robbed! That's false, I know. My house is respectable," said the fellow, in an insolent and brutal tone; "you only say that in order not to pay me my postage and commission."

"I tell you, sir, that this money was all I possessed in the world; it has been stolen from me, and I must have it found and restored, or I will lodge an information. Oh, I will conceal nothing—I will respect nothing—I tell you!"

"Very fine, indeed! You who have got no papers. Go and lay your information,—go at once. Why don't you? I defy you, I do!"

The wretched woman was thunderstruck. She could not go out and leave her daughter alone, confined to her bed as she was by the fright the Gros-Boiteux had occasioned her in the morning, and particularly after the threats with which the receiver of stolen goods had menaced her. He added:

"This is a fudge! You'd as much a bag of silver there as a bag of gold. Will you pay me for the letter,—will you or won't you? Well, it's just the same to me. When you go by my door, I'll snatch off your old black shawl from your shoulders. It's a precious shabby one; but I daresay I can make twenty sous out of it."

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Madame de Fermont, bursting into tears, "I beseech you have pity upon us! This small sum is all we possess, my daughter and I, and, that stolen, we have nothing left—nothing—I say nothing, but—to die of starvation!"

"What can I do? If it's true that you have been robbed, and of silver, too (which appears to me very unlikely), why, the silver has been melted long since, rely on it."

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

"The chap who did the trick was not so soft, rely on it, as to mark the pieces, and keep 'em here, to lead to his own detection. Supposing it's any one in the house, which I don't believe (for, as I was a-saying this morning to the uncle of the lady on the first floor, this is really a village), if any one has robbed you, it is a pity. You may lay a hundred informations, but you won't recover a centime. You won't do any good by that, I tell you, and you may believe me. Well, but I say—" exclaimed the receiver, stopping short, and seeing Madame de Fermont stagger. "What's the matter? How pale you are! Mademoiselle, your mother's taken ill!" added Micou, just advancing in time to catch the unhappy mother, who, overcome by this last shock, felt her senses forsake her,—the forced energy which had supported her so long failed before this fresh blow.

"Mother, dear, oh, what ails you?" exclaimed Claire, still in her bed.

The receiver, still vigorous in spite of his fifty years, seized with a momentary feeling of pity, took Madame de Fermont in his arms, pushed the door open with his knee, and, entering the chamber, said:

"Your pardon, mademoiselle, for entering whilst you are in bed, but I was obliged to bring in your mother; she has fainted, but it won't last long."

On seeing the man enter, Claire shrieked loudly, and the unhappy girl hid herself as well as she could under the bedclothes. The huckster seated Madame de Fermont in a chair beside the bed, and then went out, leaving the door ajar, for the Gros-Boiteux had broken the lock.

One hour after this last shock, the violent malady which had so long hung over and threatened Madame de Fermont had developed itself. A prey to a burning fever and to fearful delirium, the unhappy woman was placed beside her daughter, who, horror-struck, aghast, alone, and almost as ill as her mother, had neither money nor recourse, and was in an agony of fear every moment lest the ruffian who lodged on the same floor should enter the apartment.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RUE DE CHAILLOT

We will precede M. Badinot by some hours, as in haste he proceeded from the Passage de la Brasserie to the Vicomte de Saint-Remy. The latter, as we have said, lived in the Rue de Chaillot, and occupied a delightful small house, built between the court and the garden in this quarter, so solitary, although so close to the Champs Elysées, the most fashionable promenade in Paris.

It is useless to enumerate the advantages which M. de Saint-Remy, who was decidedly a man à bonnes fortunes, derived from the position of a residence so sagaciously selected. We will only say that a gentleman (or a lady) could enter very privately by a small door in the large garden which opened into a back lane absolutely deserted, communicating from the Rue Marboeuf to the Rue de Chaillot. By wonderful chance, one of the finest nursery-grounds in Paris having also in this quiet passage a way out that was little frequented, the mysterious visitors of M. de Saint-Remy, in case of a surprise or sudden rencontre, were armed with a most plausible and bucolical excuse for their visit to the lonely alley: they were there (they might say if they pleased) to choose some rare flowers from the celebrated gardener who was so renowned for the beauty of his conservatories. The visitors need only thus tell half falsehoods; for the vicomte, plentifully imbued with all the tastes of most costly luxuries, had a delightful greenhouse, which extended along the side of the alley we have alluded to. The small private door opened on this delightful winter garden, which terminated in a boudoir (forgive the superannuated expression), which was on the ground floor of the house.

We may say, therefore, without metaphor, that a female who passed this dangerous threshold, to enter M. de Saint-Remy's house, ran to her ruin through a flowery path; for, in the winter particularly, this lonely alley was bordered with real bushes of bright and perfumed flowers. Madame de Lucenay, jealous as a woman deeply in love always is, had demanded the key of this small door.

If we dwell somewhat on the general aspect of this dwelling, it is that it reflected (if we may be allowed the expression) one of those degrading existences which from day to day become happily more rare, but which it may be as well to note down as one of the peculiarities of the epoch.

The interior of M. de Saint-Remy's house presented (viewed in this light) a curious appearance, or rather the house was separated into two distinct

zones,—the ground floor, where he received his female visitors; the first story, where he received his gambling companions or his dinner or hunting associates; in a word, what he called his friends. Thus on the ground floor was a bedchamber, which was nothing but gold, mirrors, flowers, satin, and lace; then a small music-room, in which was a harp and piano (M. de Saint-Remy was an excellent musician); a cabinet of pictures; and then the boudoir, which communicated with the conservatory; a dining-room for two persons, who were served and passed away the dishes and plates by a turning window; a bath-room, a model of luxury and Oriental refinement; and, close at hand, a small library, a portion of which was arranged after the catalogue of that which La Mettrie had collected for Frederic the Great. Such was this apartment.

It would be unavailing to say that all these rooms, furnished with exquisite taste, and with a Sardanapalian luxury, had as ornaments Watteaus little known; Bouchers never engraved; wanton subjects, formerly purchased at enormous prices. There were, besides, groups modelled in terra-cotta, by Clodien, and here and there, on plinths of jasper or antique breccia, some rare copies, in white marble, of the most jovial and lovely bacchanals of the Secret Museum of Naples.

Add to this, in summer there were in perspective the green recesses of a well-planted garden, lonely, replete with flowers and birds, watered by a small and sparkling fountain, which, before it spread itself on the verdant turf, fell from a black and shaggy rock, scintillated like a strip of silver gauze, and dashed into a clear basin like mother-of-pearl, where beautiful white swans wantoned with grace and freedom.

Then, when the mild and serene night came on, what shade, what perfume, what silence, was there in those odorous clumps, whose thick foliage served as a dais for the rustic seats formed of reeds and Indian mats.

During the winter, on the contrary, except the glass door which opened to the hothouse, all was kept close shut. The transparent silk of the blinds, the net lace of the curtains, made the daylight still more mysterious. On all the pieces of furniture large tufts of exotic plants seemed to put forth their large flowers, resplendent with gold and enamel.

In order to do the honours of this temple, which seemed raised to antique Love, or the denuded divinities of Greece, behold a man, young, handsome, elegant, and distinguished,—by turns witty and tender, romantic or libertine; now jesting and gay to folly, now full of charm and grace; an excellent musician, gifted with one of those impassioned, vibrating voices

which women cannot hear without experiencing a deep impression, almost physical,—in fact, a man essentially made for love,—such was the vicomte. In Athens, no doubt, he would have been admired, exalted, deified, as was Alcibiades; in our days, and at the period of which we write, the vicomte was nothing more than a base forger, a contemptible swindler.

The first story of M. de Saint-Remy's house was exceedingly masculine in its whole appearance. It was there he received his many friends, all of whom were of the very highest society. There was nothing effeminate, nothing coquettish. The furniture was plain, but elegant, the ornaments being first-rate weapons of all sorts, pictures of race-horses, who had won for the vicomte a great number of magnificent gold and silver vases, which were placed on the tables and sideboards.

The smoking-room and play-room were closed by a cheerful dining-room, where eight persons (the number to which the guests were rigidly confined when there was a first-class dinner) had often appreciated the excellence of the cook, and the no less high merit of the wine of the vicomte, before they faced him at some high game of whist for five or six hundred louis, or shook the noisy dice-box at infernal hazard or roulette.

These two widely opposite shades of M. de Saint-Remy disclosed, the reader will follow us into the regions below, to the very comfortable apartment of Edwards Patterson, the master of the horse of M. de Saint-Remy, who had invited M. Boyer to breakfast. A very pretty English maid-servant having withdrawn after she had brought in the silver teapot, these two worthies remained alone.

Edwards was about forty years of age, and never did more skilful or stouter coachman make a seat groan under his most imposing rotundity; never did powdered wig enclose a more rubicund visage; and never did a more knowing and competent driver hold in his four fingers and thumb the reins of a four-in-hand. As good a judge of a horse as Tattersal (and in his youth he had been as good a trainer as the old and celebrated Chiffney), Edwards had been to the vicomte a most excellent coachman, and a man perfectly capable of superintending the training of race-horses on which he had betted heavily.

When he did not assume his sumptuous brown and silver livery on the emblazoned hammercloth of his box, Edwards very much resembled an honest English farmer; and it is under this aspect that we shall present him to the reader, adding, at the same time, that beneath this round and red visage there lurked all the pitiless and devilish cunning of the horse-dealer.

M. Boyer, his guest, the confidential servant of the vicomte, was a tall, thin man, with gray, smooth hair, bald forehead, cunning glance, with a countenance calm, discreet, and reserved. He expressed himself in somewhat choice phraseology, with polite, easy manners; he was tolerably well informed, his political opinions being legitimist, and he could take his part as first violin in an amateur quartette. From time to time, and with the best air in the world, he took a pinch of snuff from a gold snuff-box, set around with fine pearls, after which he negligently shook with the back of his hand (as white and carefully attended to as his master's) the particles of snuff from the frill of his fine Holland shirt.

"Do you know, my dear Edwards," said Boyer, "that your maid, Betty, really does your meals in a very fair manner! Ma foi! now and then one gets tired of high living."

"The fact is that Betty is a very good girl," said Edwards, who spoke very good French. "I shall take her with me into my establishment, if I make up my mind to set up in housekeeping; and on this point, since we are alone, my dear Boyer, let us talk of business matters which you know as well as I do."

"Why, yes, tolerably," said Boyer, modestly taking a pinch of snuff, "one learns them so naturally, when they are the affairs of others that occupy us."

"I want your advice on a very important point, and that's the reason I have begged you to come and take a cup of tea with me."

"I'm at your service, my dear Edwards."

"You know that, besides the race-horses, I had an agreement with M. le Vicomte to the complete providing of his stable, horses, and men, that is to say, eight horses and five or six grooms and boys, for twenty-four thousand francs (nine thousand guineas) a year, including my wages."

"That was moderate enough."

"For four years M. le Vicomte paid me very regularly; but about the middle of last year he said to me, 'Edwards, I owe you about twenty-four thousand francs. What value, at the lowest, do you set on my horses and carriages?' 'Monsieur le Vicomte, the eight horses ought to fetch three thousand francs (120l.) each, one with another, and that would make (and it's true, Boyer, for the pair of phaeton horses cost five hundred guineas) exactly twenty-four thousand francs for the horses. As to the carriages, there are four, let us

say, for twelve thousand francs; that, added to the twenty-four thousand francs for the horses, makes thirty-six thousand francs.' 'Well,' replied the vicomte, 'buy the whole of me at that price, on condition that for the twelve thousand francs which you will owe me, paid as it were in advance, you shall keep and place at my disposal horses, servants, and carriages for six months.'"

"And you very wisely acceded to the proposal, Edwards? It was a golden gain to you."

"No doubt. In another fortnight the six months will have expired, and I become proprietor of the horses and carriages."

"Nothing plainer. The agreement was drawn up by M. Badinot, the vicomte's man of business, what do you want with my advice?"

"What should I do? To sell the horses and carriages in consequence of M. le Vicomte's departure? All would sell well, as he is known as one of the first judges in Paris; or ought I to set up as a horse-dealer with my stud, which would make a capital beginning? What is your opinion—your advice?"

"I advise you to do what I shall do myself."

"In what way?"

"I am in the same position as yourself."

"You?"

"M. le Vicomte detests details. When I entered in his service I had, by savings and inheritance, sixty thousand francs (2,400l.). I paid the expenses of the house as you did of the stables; and every year M. le Vicomte paid me without examining my account. At nearly the same time as yourself I found myself out of pocket about twenty thousand francs on my own account, and, to the tradespeople, sixty thousand francs. Then M. le Vicomte made me the same proposition as to yourself, in order to reimburse me. I was to sell the furniture of the house, including the plate, which is very handsome, very fine paintings, etc., the whole estimated at a hundred and forty thousand francs (5,600l.). There were eighty thousand francs to pay, and there remained sixty thousand francs which I was to disburse until they were quite exhausted, in the expenses of the table, the servants' wages, etc., and in nothing else. These were the terms of the agreement."

"Because on that outlay you have a profit."

"As a matter of course; for I made all the agreements with the tradespeople, whom I shall not pay until after the sale," said Boyer, taking a huge pinch of snuff; "so that at the end of this month—"

"The furniture is yours, as the horses and carriages are mine."

"Precisely so. M. le Vicomte has gained by this, by living for the last few months as he likes to live, en grand seigneur,—and that in the very teeth of his creditors; for furniture, plate, horses, carriages, which had all been paid for ready money when he came of age, have now become the property of yourself and myself."

"And so M. le Vicomte is really ruined?"

"In five years."

"And M. le Vicomte inherited—"

"Only a miserable million (40,000*l.*), ready money," said M. Boyer, with a disdainful air, and taking a pinch of snuff. "Add to this two hundred thousand francs of debts (8,000*l.*), about—that's pretty well! It was, therefore, to tell you, my dear Edwards, that I had an intention of letting this house, so admirably furnished as it is, to some English family, linen, glass, china, silver, conservatory. Some of your country-people would pay a good rent for it?"

"Unquestionably. Why don't you do so?"

"Why, there's considerable risk, and so I make up my mind to sell the whole at once. M. le Vicomte is also known as a connoisseur in first-class furniture and objects of art, so that anything that he has selected will always fetch double its value, and I am safe to realise a large sum. Do as I do, Edwards, and realise—realise. Don't risk your profits in speculation. You, first coachman of M. le Vicomte de Saint-Remy,—why, there'll be a competition for you. And yesterday I just heard of a minor who has recently been emancipated, a cousin of Madame la Duchesse de Lucenay, the young Duc de Montbrison, who has just arrived from Italy with his tutor, and is forming his establishment. Two hundred and fifty thousand livres of income (10,000*l.*) from land, my dear Edwards, two hundred and fifty thousand livres a year,—just entering into life,—twenty years of age only,—with all the illusions of simple confidence, and all the desires of expenditure,—prodigal as a prince. I know the steward; and I tell you, in confidence, he has all but concluded with me as first valet de chambre. He patronises me,—the fool!"



And M. Boyer shrugged his shoulders, whilst he inhaled another large pinch of snuff.

"You hope to get rid of him?"

"Parbleu, he is a jackanapes,—an ass! He places me there as if he ought not to have any fears of me. Before two months I shall be in his place."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand livres a year in land!" replied Edwards, reflecting; "and a young man! It is a good house?"

"I tell you there is everything to make a man comfortable. I will speak to my protector for you," said M. Boyer, with irony. "Take the place; it is a fortune which has roots to it, and one may hold on by it for a long time. It is not like the unfortunate million of M. le Vicomte, a snowball, and nothing else,—a ray of a Parisian sun, and that's all. I soon saw that I should only be a bird of passage here. It's a pity, for the establishment did us credit; and, to the last moment, I will serve M. le Vicomte with the respect and esteem due to him."

"Ma foi, my dear Boyer, I thank you, and accept your proposition. And, now I think of it, suppose I were to propose the stud of M. le Vicomte to this young duke! It is all ready, and known and admired all over Paris."

"True, you may make a profitable affair of it."

"And you, why don't you propose to him this house so admirably fitted up in every way? What could he find better?"

"Bravo! Edwards, you are a man of sense decidedly; you have suggested a most excellent idea. We must ask the vicomte; he is such a good master that he will not refuse to speak for us to the young duke. He may say that, as he is going on the legation of Gerolstein, to which he is attached, he wishes to get rid of his whole establishment. Let us see. One hundred and sixty thousand francs for the house furnished, twenty thousand francs for plate and pictures, fifty thousand francs for stable and carriages, that makes two hundred and thirty thousand francs; and it is a bargain for a young man who wishes to be set up at once in the first style."

"And the horses!"

"And the capital table! Gallefroi, his cook, will leave a hundred times better off than when he came here first. M. le Vicomte has given him capital instruction,—has regularly refined him!"

"They say, too, that M. le Vicomte is such a capital player?"

"Admirable! Gaining large sums with even more indifference than he loses them! And yet I never saw any one lose with better taste!"

"And the women, Boyer,—the women! Ah, you could tell a tale! You have the sole entrée to the apartments of the ground floor—"

"I have my secrets as you have yours, my dear fellow."

"Mine?"

"When M. le Vicomte ran his horses, had you not your confidences? I will not attack the honesty of the jockeys of your opponents; but there were reports—"

"Hush, my dear Boyer, a gentleman never compromises the reputation of a jockey who is against him, and has the weakness to listen—"

"Then a gallant never compromises the reputation of a woman who has been kind to him. So, I say, let's keep our secrets, or, rather, the secrets of M. le Vicomte, my dear Edwards."

"Ah, good! What will he do now?"

"He is going to Germany in a good travelling carriage, with seven or eight thousand francs, which he knows when to lay his hand upon. Oh, I have no fears for the vicomte! He is one of those personages who always fall on their feet, as they say."

"And he has no future expectancies?"

"None; for his father has nothing but just enough to live upon."

"His father?"

"Certainly."

"M. le Vicomte's father is not dead?"

"He was not dead five or six months ago when M. le Vicomte wrote to him for some family papers."

"But we never see him here?"

"For reasons good. For fifteen years he has resided in the country at Angers."

"But M. le Vicomte never visits him?"

"His father?"

"Yes."

"Never—never!"

"Have they quarrelled, then?"

"What I am going to tell you is no secret, for I have it from the old man of business of M. the Prince de Noirmont."

"Father of Madame de Lucenay?" said Edwards, with a knowing glance at Boyer, who, appearing not to understand him, replied coolly:

"Madame la Duchesse de Lucenay is the daughter of M. the Prince de Noirmont. The father of M. le Vicomte was bosom friend of the prince. Madame la Duchesse was then very young, and M. de Saint-Remy, senior, who was very fond of her, treated her as if she were his own child. I learnt these details from Simon, the prince's man of business; and I may speak unhesitatingly, for the adventure I am about to narrate to you was, at the time, the talk of all Paris. In spite of his sixty years, the father of M. le Vicomte is a man of iron disposition, with the courage of a lion, of probity which I call almost fabulous. He had scarcely any property of his own, and had married the vicomte's mother for love. She was a young person of good fortune, possessing about a million of francs, at the melting of which we have had the honour to be present." And M. Boyer bowed. Edwards imitated him.

"The marriage was a very happy one, until the moment when the father of M. le Vicomte found—accidentally, as they say—some letters, which proved that, during one of his absences three or four years after his marriage, his wife had had an attachment for a certain Polish count."

"That often happens to these Poles. When I was at the Marquis de Senneval's, the marquise, a regular she-devil—"

"My dear Edwards," interrupted M. Boyer, "you should learn the alliances of our great families before you speak, or you will sadly blunder."

"How?"

"Madame la Marquise de Senneval is sister of M. le Duc de Montbrison, into whose establishment you wish to enter."

"Ah, the devil!"

"Judge of the effect if you had spoken thus of her before tattling people! You would not have remained in the house twenty-four hours."

"True, Boyer; I must endeavour to 'get up' my peerage."

"I resume. The father of M. le Vicomte discovered, after twelve or fifteen years of a marriage very happy until then, that he had this Polish count to complain of. Fortunately, or unfortunately, M. le Vicomte was born nine months after his father, or rather M. le Comte de Saint-Remy, had returned from this unpropitious journey, so that he could not be certain, in spite of the greatest probabilities, whether or not M. le Vicomte could fairly charge him with paternity. However, the comte separated instantly from his wife, would not touch a stiver of the fortune she had brought him, and returned into the country with about eighty thousand francs which he possessed of his own. But you have yet to learn the rancour of this diabolical character. Although the outrage had been perpetrated fifteen years when he detected it, the father of M. le Vicomte, accompanied by M. de Fermont, one of his relatives, sought out this Polonese seducer, and found him at Venice, after having sought for him during eighteen months in every city in Europe."

"What determination!"

"A demon's rancour, I say, my dear Edwards! At Venice there was a ferocious duel, in which the Pole was killed. All passed off honourably; but they tell me that, when the father of M. le Vicomte saw the Pole fall at his feet mortally wounded, he exhibited such ferocious joy that his relative, M. de Fermont, was obliged to take him away from the place of combat; the comte wishing, as he declared, to see his enemy die before his eyes."

"What a man! What a man!"

"The comte returned to Paris, saw his wife, told her he had killed the Pole, and went back into the country. Since that time he never saw her or her son, and resided at Angers, where he lived, as they say, like a regular old wolf, with what was left of his eighty thousand francs, which had been sweated down not a little, as you may suppose, by his chase after the Pole. At Angers he saw no one, unless it were the wife and daughter of his

relative, M. de Fermont, who has been dead some years now. Besides, it was an unfortunate family, for the brother of Madame de Fermont blew his brains out some months ago."

"And the mother of M. le Vicomte?"

"He lost her a long time ago; that's the reason that, when he attained his majority, M. le Vicomte came into his mother's fortune. So, you see, my dear Edwards, that, as to inheritance, the vicomte has nothing, or almost less than nothing, to expect from his father."

"Who, moreover, detests him."

He exhibited such ferocious joy.

Original Etching by Mercier.

"He never would see him after the discovery in question, being fully persuaded, no doubt, that he is the son of the Pole."

The conversation of these two personages was interrupted by a gigantic footman, elaborately powdered, although it was scarcely eleven o'clock.

"M. Boyer, M. le Vicomte has rung his bell twice," said the giant.

Boyer appeared immensely distressed at having apparently been inattentive to his duty, rose hastily, and followed the footman with as much haste and respect as if he had not been himself, in his proper person, the proprietor of his master's house.

## CHAPTER X

### THE COMTE DE SAINT-REMY

It was about two hours after Boyer had left Edwards to go to M. de Saint-Remy, when the father of the latter knocked at the door of the house in the Rue de Chaillot.

M. de Saint-Remy, senior, was a tall man, still active and vigorous in spite of his age. The extreme darkness of his complexion contrasted singularly with the peculiar whiteness of his beard and hair; his thick eyebrows still remained black, and half covered his piercing eyes deeply sunk in his head. Although from a kind of misanthropic feeling he wore clothes which were extremely shabby, yet there was in his entire appearance something so calm and dignified as to inspire general respect.

The door of his son's house opened, and he went in.

A porter in dress livery of brown and silver, with his hair carefully powdered, and dressed in silk stockings, appeared on the threshold of an elegant lodge, which resembled the smoky cave of the Pipelets as much as does the tub of a stocking-darner the splendid shop of a fashionable dressmaker.

"M. de Saint-Remy?" said the comte, in an abrupt tone.

The porter, instead of replying, scrutinised with impertinent curiosity the white beard, the threadbare frock coat, and the napless hat of the unknown, who held a stout cane in his hand.

"M. de Saint-Remy?" again said the comte, impatiently, and much irritated at the insolent demeanour of the porter.

"M. le Vicomte is not at home."

So saying, the co-mate of M. Pipelet opened the door, and, with a significant gesture, invited the unknown to retire.

"I will wait for him," said the comte, and he moved forward.

"Holloa! Come, I say, my friend, that's not the way people enter other people's houses!" exclaimed the porter, running after the comte, and taking him by the arm.

"What, fellow!" replied the old man, with a threatening air, and lifting his cane, "dare you to lay your hands on me?"

"I dare do more than that if you do not be off quickly. I tell you the vicomte is not within; so now go away, will you?"

At this moment Boyer, attracted by the sound of contending voices, appeared on the steps which led to the house.

"What is the meaning of this noise?" he inquired.

"M. Boyer, it is this man, who will go into the house, although I have told him that M. le Vicomte is not within."

"Hold your tongue!" said the comte. And then addressing Boyer, who had come towards them, "I wish to see my son. He is out, and therefore I will wait for him."

We have already said that Boyer was neither ignorant of the existence nor the misanthropy of his master's father; and being, moreover, a physiognomist, he did not for a moment doubt the comte's identity, but, bowing respectfully, replied:

"If M. le Comte will follow me, I will conduct him—"

"Very well!" said M. de Saint-Remy, who followed Boyer, to the extreme amazement of the porter.

Preceded by the valet de chambre, the comte reached the first story, and followed his guide across the small sitting-room of Florestan de Saint-Remy (we shall in future call the viscount by his baptismal name to distinguish him more easily from his father) until they reached a small antechamber communicating with the sitting-room, and sitting immediately over the boudoir on the ground floor.

"M. le Vicomte was obliged to go out this morning," said Boyer. "If M. le Comte will be so kind as to wait a little for him, he will not be long before he comes in." And the valet de chambre quitted the apartment.

Left alone, the count looked about him with entire indifference; but suddenly he started, his face became animated, his cheeks grew purple, and anger agitated his features. His eyes had lighted on the portrait of his wife, the mother of Florestan de Saint-Remy! He folded his arms across his

breast, bowed his head, as if to escape this sight, and strode rapidly up and down the room.

"This is strange!" he said. "That woman is dead—I killed her lover—and yet my wound is as deep, as sensitive, as the first day I received it; my thirst of vengeance is not yet quenched; my savage misanthropy, which has all but entirely isolated me from the world, has left me alone, and in constant contemplation of the thought of my injury. Yes; for the death of the accomplice of this infamy has avenged the outrage, but not effaced its memory from my remembrance. Oh, yes! I feel that what renders my hatred inextinguishable is the thought that, for fifteen years, I was a dupe; that for fifteen years I treated with respect and esteem a wretched woman who had infamously betrayed me; that I have loved her son—the son of crime—as if he had indeed been my own child; for the aversion with which Florestan now inspires me proves but too clearly that he is the offspring of adultery! And yet I have not the absolute conviction of his illegitimacy: it is just possible that he is still my child! And sometimes that thought is agony to me! If he were indeed my son! Then my abandonment of him, the coldness I have always testified towards him, my constant refusals to see him, are unpardonable. But, after all, he is rich, young, happy; and of what use should I be to him? Yes; but then, perchance, his tenderness might have soothed the bitter anguish which his mother has caused me!"

After a moment of deep reflection the comte shrugged his shoulders and continued:

"Still these foolish suppositions, weak as useless, which revive all my suffering! Let me be a man, and overcome the absurd and painful emotion which I experience when I think that I am again about to see him whom, for ten years, I have loved with the most mad idolatry,—whom I have loved as my son; he—he—the son of the man whose blood I saw flow with such intense joy! And they would not let me be present at his last agony,—at his death! Ah, they know not what it was to have been stricken as deeply as I was! Then, too, to think that my name—always honoured and respected—should have been so often mentioned with scoff and derision, as is always mentioned that of a wronged husband! To think that my name—a name of which I had always been so proud—should now belong to a man whose father's heart I could have plucked out! Ah, I only wonder I do not go mad when I think of it!"

M. de Saint-Remy continued walking up and down in great agitation, and mechanically lifted up the curtain which separated the apartment in which



he was from Florestan's private sitting-room, and advanced several strides into that chamber.

He had disappeared for the moment, when a small door hidden in the hangings of the wall opened softly, and Madame de Lucenay, wrapped in a large green cashmere shawl, having a very plain black velvet bonnet on, entered the salon, which the comte had but that instant quitted.

It is necessary to offer some explanation of this unexpected visit.

Florestan de Saint-Remy on the previous evening made an appointment with the duchess for the next morning. She having, as we have said, a key of the little gate in the narrow lane, had, as usual, entered by the conservatory, relying on finding Florestan on the ground floor boudoir; but, not finding him there, she believed (as had before occurred) that the vicomte was engaged in his cabinet.

A secret staircase led from the boudoir to the story above. Madame de Lucenay went up without hesitation, supposing that M. de Saint-Remy had given orders, as usual, to be denied to everybody. Unluckily, a threatening call from M. Badinot had compelled Florestan to go out hastily, and he had forgotten his rendezvous with Madame de Lucenay. She, not seeing any person, was about to enter the cabinet, when the curtain was thrown on one side, and the duchess found herself confronted with Florestan's father.

She could not repress a shriek.

"Clotilde!" exclaimed the comte, greatly astonished.

Intimately acquainted with the Prince de Noirmont, father of Madame de Lucenay, M. de Saint-Remy had known her from her childhood, and, during her girlhood, calling her, as he now did, by her baptismal name. The duchess, motionless with surprise, continued gazing on the old man with his white beard and mean attire, whose features she could not recall to mind.

"You, Clotilde!" repeated the comte, in an accent of painful reproach; "you here, in my son's house!"

These last words confirmed the vague reminiscence of Madame de Lucenay, who then recognised Florestan's father, and said:

"M. de Saint-Remy?"

The position was so plain and declaratory that the duchess, whose peculiar and resolute character is known to the reader, disdained to have recourse to falsehood, in order to account for her appearance there; and, relying on the really paternal affection which the comte had always testified for her, she said to him, with that air at once graceful, cordial, and decided, which was so peculiarly her own:

"Come, now, do not scold; you are my old, very old friend. Recollect you called me your dear little Clotilde at least twenty years ago."

"Yes, I called you so then; but—"

"I know beforehand all you would say: you know my motto, 'What is, is what will be.'"

"Oh, Clotilde!"

"Spare your reproaches, and let me rather express my extreme delight at seeing you again: your presence reminds me of so many things,—my poor dear father, in the first place, and then—heigho! my 'sweet fifteen!' Oh, how delightful it is to be fifteen!"

"It is because your father was my friend that—"

"Oh, yes," said the duchess, interrupting M. de Saint-Remy, "he was so very fond of you! You remember he always called you the man with the green ribands, and you always told him, 'You spoil Clotilde; mind, I tell you so;' and he replied, whilst he kissed me, 'I really do believe I spoil her, and I must make all haste and double my spoiling, for very soon the world will deprive me of her to spoil her in their turn.' Dear father! What a friend I lost!" and a tear started to the lovely eyes of Madame de Lucenay; then, extending her hand to M. de Saint-Remy, she said, in a faltering voice, "But indeed, in truth, I am happy, very happy, to see you again, you call up such precious remembrances,—memories so dear to my heart!"

The comte, although he had long been acquainted with her original and decisive disposition, was really amazed at the ease with which Clotilde reconciled herself to her exceedingly delicate position, which was no other than to meet her lover's father in her lover's house.

"If you have been in Paris for any time," continued Madame de Lucenay, "it is very naughty of you not to have come and seen me before this; for we should have had such long talks over the past; for you must know that I

have reached an age when there is an excessive pleasure in saying to old friends, 'Don't you remember!'"

Assuredly the duchess could not have discoursed with more confirmed tranquillity if she were receiving a morning visit at the Hôtel de Lucenay. M. de Saint-Remy could not prevent himself from saying with severity:

"Instead of talking of the past, it would be more fitting to discourse of the present. My son is expected every instant, and—"

"No," said Clotilde, interrupting him, "I have the key of the little door of the conservatory, and his arrival is always announced by a ring of the bell when he returns by the principal entrance; and at that sound I shall disappear as mysteriously as I arrived, and will leave you to all your pleasure, at again seeing Florestan. What a delightful surprise you will give him! For it is so long since you forsook him. Really, now I think of it, it is I who have to reproach you."

"Me? Reproach me?"

"Assuredly. What guide, what aid had he, when he entered on the world? whilst there are a thousand things for which a father's counsels are indispensable. So, really and truly, it is very wrong of you—"

Here Madame de Lucenay, yielding to the whimsicality of her character, could not help laughing most heartily, and saying to the comte:

"It must be owned that our position is at least an odd one, and that it is very funny that it should be I who am sermonising you."

"Why, it does seem very strange to me, I assure you; but I deserve neither your sermons nor your praises. I have come to my son's house, but not for my son's sake. At his age, he has not, or has no longer, any need of my advice."

"What do you mean?"

"You ought to know the reason for which I hold the world, and Paris, especially, in such horror," said the comte, with a painful and distressing expression; "and you may therefore believe that nothing but circumstances of the utmost importance could have induced me to leave Angers and have come hither—to this house. But I have been forced to overcome my repugnance, and have recourse to everybody who could aid or help me in a search which is most interesting to me."

"Oh, then," said Madame de Lucenay, with affectionate eagerness, "I beg you will make use of me; dispose of me in any way in which I can be useful to you. Do you want any interest? Because De Lucenay must have some degree of influence; for, the days when I go to dine with my great-aunt, De Montbrison, he entertains the deputies; and men don't do that without some motives; and the trouble ought to be recompensed by some contingent advantages, such as a certain amount of influence over persons, who, in their turn, have a great deal of interest. So, I repeat, if we can assist you, rely on us. Then there is my cousin, the young Duke de Montbrison, who, being a peer himself, is connected with all the young peers. If he can do anything, why, I am sure you have but to command him. In a word, dispose of me and mine. You know whether or not I deserve the title of a warm and devoted friend!"

"I know it well, and do not refuse your aid, although—"

"Come, my dear Alcestis, we know how the world wags, and let us act as if we did. Whether we are here or elsewhere, it is of little consequence, I imagine, as to the affair which interests you, and which now interests me very much because it is yours. Let us then talk of it, and tell me all I request of you."

So saying, the duchess approached the fireplace, leaned on the mantelpiece, and placed on the fender one of the prettiest feet in the world, which were, at the moment, somewhat chilled. With perfect tact Madame de Lucenay seized the opportunity of saying no more about the vicomte, and of engaging M. de Saint-Remy to talk of a subject to which he attached such great importance. Clotilde's conduct would have been very different in the presence of his mother, and to her she would have avowed with pleasure and pride how long he had been so dear to, so beloved by, her.

In spite of his strictness and surliness, M. de Saint-Remy yielded to the influence of the cavalier and cordial demeanour of this lady, whom he had seen and loved when a child, and he almost forgot that he was talking to the mistress of his son. Besides, how could he resist the contagion of example, while the subject of a position which was inexpressibly embarrassing did not seem disturbed, or even think she ought to be disturbed, by the difficulty of the situation in which she unexpectedly found herself?

"Perhaps you do not know, Clotilde," said the comte, "that I have been living at Angers for a very long time?"

"Yes, I know it."

"In spite of the solitude I sought, I had selected that city because one of my relations lived there,—M. de Fermont,—who, after the heavy blow that had smitten me, behaved to me like a brother. After having accompanied me to almost every city in Europe, where I hoped to meet with the man I desired to slay, he served me for second in the duel—"

"Yes, that terrible duel; my father told me all concerning it!" answered the duchess, in a sad tone of voice. "But, fortunately, Florestan is ignorant of that duel, as well as the cause that led to it."

"I wished to let him still respect his mother," replied the comte, stifling a sigh. He then continued: "Some years afterwards, M. de Fermont died at Angers in my arms, leaving a daughter and a wife, whom, in spite of my misanthropy, I was obliged to love, because nothing in the world could be more pure, more noble, than these two excellent creatures. I lived alone in a remote quarter of the city; but when my fits of black melancholy gave me some respite, I went to Madame de Fermont to talk with her and her daughter of him we had both lost. As whilst he was alive, so still I came to soothe and calm myself in that gentle friendship in whose bosom I had henceforth concentrated all my affections. The brother of Madame de Fermont dwelt in Paris, and managed all his sister's affairs after her husband's decease. He had placed about a hundred thousand crowns (12,000l.), which was all the widow's fortune, with a notary.

"After some time another and fearful shock affected Madame de Fermont. Her brother, M. de Renneville, killed himself about eight months ago. I did all in my power to comfort her. Her first sorrow somewhat abated, she went to Paris to arrange her affairs. After some time I learned that, by her orders, they were selling off the furniture she had in her small abode at Angers, and that the money was applied to the payment of a few little debts she had left there. This disturbed me, and, on inquiry, I learned that this unhappy lady and her daughter were in dire distress,—the victims, no doubt, of a bankruptcy. If Madame de Fermont could, in such straits, rely on any one, it was on me, and yet I never received any information or application from her. It was when I lost this acquaintance that was so delightful to me that I felt all its value. You cannot imagine my suffering and my uneasiness after the departure of Madame de Fermont and her daughter. Their father—husband—had been a brother to me, and I was resolved, therefore, to find them again, to learn how it was they had not addressed me in their ruin, poor as I was; and therefore I set out, leaving at Angers a person who, if anything was learned, would inform me instantly of the news."

"Well?"

"Yesterday a letter from Angers reached me,—they know nothing. When I reached Paris I began my researches. I went first to the old servant of Madame de Fermont's brother; then they told me she lived on the Quai of the Canal St. Martin."

"Well, that address—"

"Had been theirs; but they had moved, and where to was not known. Unfortunately, up to the present time, my researches have been useless. After a thousand vain attempts before I utterly despaired, I resolved to come here. Perhaps Madame de Fermont, who, from some inexplicable motive, has not asked from me aid or assistance, may have had recourse to my son as to the son of her husband's best friend. No doubt this hope has but very slight foundation; but I will not neglect any chance that may enable me to discover the poor woman and her child."

The Duchess de Lucenay, who had been listening to the comte with the utmost attention, said, suddenly:

"Really it would be very singular if these should be the same persons in whom Madame d'Harville takes so much interest."

"What persons?" inquired the comte.

"The widow of whom you speak is still young, is she not?—her face very striking?"

"Yes, but how do you know?"

"Her daughter, as lovely as an angel, and about sixteen at most?"

"Yes, yes."

"And her name is Claire?"

"Oh, for mercy's sake, say, where are they?"

"Alas! I know not."

"You know not?"

"I will tell you all I know. A lady of my acquaintance, Madame d'Harville, came to me to inquire whether or not I knew a widow lady whose daughter was named Claire, and whose brother had committed suicide. Madame

d'Harville inquired of me because she had seen these words, 'Write to Madame de Lucenay,' written at the bottom of a rough sketch of a letter which this unfortunate lady was writing to some stranger of whom she was asking assistance."

"She wished to write to you; and wherefore to you?"

"I cannot solve your question."

"But she knew you, it would seem," said M. de Saint-Remy, struck with a sudden idea.

"What mean you?"

"She had heard me speak of your father a hundred times, as well as of you and your generous and excellent heart. In her misfortune, it occurred to her to address you."

"That really does explain this."

"And Madame d'Harville—tell me, how did she get this sketch of a letter into her possession?"

"That I do not know; all I can say is, that, without knowing whither this poor mother and child had gone for refuge, she was, I believe, on the trace of them."

"Then I rely on you, Clotilde, to introduce me to Madame d'Harville. I must see her this very day."

"Impossible! Her husband has just been the victim of a most afflicting accident: a pistol which he did not know to be loaded went off in his hands, and he was killed on the spot."

"How horrible!"

"The marquise went instantly to pass the first months of her mourning with her father in Normandy."

"Clotilde, I beseech you, write to her to-day; ask her for all the information in her power, and, as she takes an interest in these poor women, say she cannot find a warmer auxiliary than myself; that my only desire is to find the widow of my friend, and share with her and her daughter the little I possess. They are now all my family."

"Ever the same, always generous and devoted! Rely on me. I will write to-day to Madame d'Harville. Where shall I address my answer?"

"To Asnières Poste-Restante."

"How odd! Why do you live there, and not in Paris?"

"I detest Paris, because of the recollections it excites in me!" said M. de Saint-Remy, with a gloomy air. "My old physician, Doctor Griffon, with whom I have kept up a correspondence, has a small house on the banks of the Seine, near Asnières, which he does not occupy in the winter; he offered it to me; it is almost close to Paris, and there I could be undisturbed, and find the solitude I desire. So I accepted it."

"I will then write to you at Asnières, and I can give you some information which may be useful to you, and which I had from Madame d'Harville. Madame de Fermont's ruin has been occasioned by the roguery of the notary in whose hands all your deceased relative's fortune was deposited. The notary denied that the money was ever placed in his hands."

"The scoundrel! And his name?"

"M. Jacques Ferrand," replied the duchess, without being able to conceal her inclination to laugh.

"How strange you are, Clotilde!" said the comte, surprised and annoyed; "nothing can be more serious, more sad than this, and yet you laugh."

In fact, Madame de Lucenay, at the recollection of the amorous declaration of the notary, had been unable to repress her hilarity.

"Pardon me, my dear sir," she replied, "but this notary is such a singular being, and they tell such odd stories about him; but, in truth, if his reputation as an honest man is not more deserved than his reputation as a religious man (and I declare that is hypocrisy) he is a great wretch."

"And he lives—"

"Rue du Sentier."

"I will call upon him. What you tell me confirms certain other suspicions."

"What suspicions?"



"From certain information as to the death of the brother of my poor friend, I should be almost tempted to believe that that unhappy man, instead of committing suicide, had been the victim of assassination."

"And what can make you suppose that?"

"Several reasons, which would be too long to detail to you now. I will leave you. Do not forget the promises of service which you have made me in your own and your husband's name."

"What, will you go without seeing Florestan?"

"You may suppose how painful this interview would be to me. I would brave it only in the hope of finding some information as to Madame de Fermont, being unwilling to neglect anything to discover her. Now, then, adieu!"

"Ah, you are pitiless!"

"Do you not know?"

"I know that your son was never in greater need of your advice."

"What, is he not rich—happy?"

"Yes, but he is ignorant of mankind. Blindly extravagant, because he is generous and confiding in everything, and everywhere and always free and noble, I fear people take advantage of his liberality. If you but knew the nobleness of his heart! I have never dared to preach to him on the subject of his expenditure and want of care: in the first place, because I am as inconsiderate as himself, and next, in the second place, for other reasons; whilst you, on the contrary—"

Madame de Lucenay could not finish. The voice of Florestan de Saint-Remy was heard. He entered hastily into the cabinet next to the room in which they were, and, after having shut the door suddenly, he said, in a broken voice, to some one who accompanied him:

"But it is impossible."

"I tell you again," replied the clear and sharp voice of M. Badinot, "I tell you again that, if not, why, in four hours you will be apprehended; for, if he has not the cash forthwith, our man will lodge his complaint with the king's attorney-general; and you know the result of a forgery like this,—the galleys, the galleys, my poor dear vicomte!"

## CHAPTER XI

### THE INTERVIEW

It is impossible to paint the look which Madame de Lucenay and the father of Florestan exchanged at these terrible words,—“The galleys, the galleys, my poor dear vicomte!” The comte became deadly pale, and leant on the back of an armchair, whilst his knees seemed to sink beneath him. His venerable and respected name,—his name dishonoured by the man whom he accused of being the fruit of adultery!

The first feeling over, the contracted features of the old man, a threatening gesture which he made as he advanced towards the adjoining apartment, betrayed a resolution so alarming that Madame de Lucenay seized his hand, and said, in an accent of the most perfect conviction:

“He is innocent; I will swear it. Listen in silence.”

The comte paused. He wished to believe what the duchess said to him, and she was entirely persuaded of Florestan's untarnished honour. To obtain fresh sacrifices from this woman, so blindly generous,—sacrifices which alone could save him from arrest,—and the prosecution of Jacques Ferrand, the vicomte had affirmed to Madame de Lucenay that, duped by a scoundrel from whom he had taken a forged bill in exchange, he ran the risk of being considered as the forger's accomplice, as having himself put this bill into circulation. Madame de Lucenay knew that the vicomte was imprudent, extravagant, reckless; but she never for an instant supposed him capable, not only of a base or an infamous action, but even of the slightest indiscretion. Twice lending him considerable sums under very trying circumstances, she had wished to render him a friendly service, the vicomte expressly accepting these loans under the condition that he should return them; for there were persons, he said, who owed him double that amount; and his style of living made it seem probable.

Besides, Madame de Lucenay, yielding to the impulse of her natural kindness, had only thought of how she could be useful to Florestan, without ever reflecting as to whether or not he would ever return the sums thus advanced. He said so, and she did not doubt him; for, otherwise, would he have accepted such large amounts? When, then, she thus answered for Florestan's honour, entreating the old comte to listen to his son's conversation, the duchess thought that it was a question of the breach of honour of which the vicomte had declared himself the victim, and that he must stand forth completely exonerated in the eyes of his father.

"Again I declare," continued Florestan, in a troubled voice, "this Petit-Jean is a scamp; he assured me that he had no other bills in his hands but those which I received from him yesterday and three days previously. I believed this one was still in circulation, and only due three months hence, in London, at the house of Adams and Company."

"Yes, yes," said the sarcastic voice of Badinot, "I know, my dear vicomte, that you had managed the affair very cleverly, so that your forgeries would not be detected until you were a long way off; but you tried to 'do' those who were more cunning than yourself."

"And you dare to say that to me, now, rogue as you are," exclaimed Florestan, furious with anger, "when was it not you yourself who brought me into contact with the person who negotiated these bills?"

"Now, my dear aristocrat," replied Badinot, coolly, "be cool! You very skilfully counterfeit commercial signatures; but, although they are so adroitly done, that is no reason why you should treat your friends with disagreeable familiarity; and, if you give way to unseemly fits of temper, I shall leave you, and then you may arrange this matter by yourself."

"And do you think it possible for a man to be calm in such a position as that in which I find myself? If what you say be true, if this charge be to-day preferred at the office of the attorney-general, I am lost!"

"It is really as I tell you, unless you have again recourse to your charming, blue-eyed Providence."

"Impossible!"

"Then make up your mind to the worst. It is a pity; it was the last bill; and for five and twenty thousand miserable francs (1,000l.) to go and take the air at Toulon is awkward, absurd, foolish! How could a clever fellow like you allow yourself to be thus taken aback?"

"What can I do? What can I do? Nothing here is my own, and I have not twenty louis in the world left."

"Your friends?"

"Why, I am in debt to every one who could lend me. Do you think else that I am such a fool as to have waited until to-day before I applied to them?"

"True; but, come, let us discuss the matter quietly; that is the best way of arriving at a reasonable conclusion. Just now, I wish to explain to you how you had been met by a party more clever than yourself, but you did not attend to me."

"Well, tell me now, if that will do any good."

"Let us recapitulate. You said to me two months since, 'I have bills on different banking-houses, at long dates, for a hundred and thirteen thousand francs (4,520l.), and, my dear Badinot, I wish you to find me the means of cashing them.'"

"Well, and then—"

"Listen: I asked you to let me see these bills; a certain something made me suspect that they were forged, although so admirably done. I did not suspect, it is true, that you were so expert in calligraphy; but, employing myself in looking after your fortune when you had no longer any fortune to look after, I found you were completely done up! I had arranged the deed by which your horses, your carriages, and the furniture of this house became the property of Boyer and Edwards. Thus, then, there was no wonder at my astonishment when I found you in possession of commercial securities to such a considerable amount, eh?"

"Never mind your astonishment, but come to the point."

"I am close upon it. I have enough experience or timidity not to be very anxious to mix myself up with affairs of this nature; I therefore advised you to consult a third party, who, no less clear-sighted than myself, suspected the trick you desired to play him."

"Impossible! He would not have discounted the bills if he had believed them forged."

"How much money down did you get for these hundred and thirteen thousand francs?"

"Twenty-five thousand francs in ready money, and the rest in small debts to collect."

"And how much of these small debts did you collect?"

"Nothing, as you very well know; they were fictitious; but still he risked twenty-five thousand francs."

"How green you are, my dear vicomte! Having my commission of a hundred louis to receive of you if the affair came off, I took very good care not to say a word to No. 3 as to the real state of your affairs. Thus he believed you entirely at your ease, and he, moreover, knew how you were adored by a certain great lady, immensely rich, who would not allow you to be left in any difficulties, and thus he was quite sure of recovering at least as much as he advanced. He ran a risk, certainly, of losing something, but he also ran a chance of gaining very considerably; and his calculation was correct, for, the other day, you counted out to him a hundred thousand francs, good and sound, in order to retire the bill for fifty-eight thousand francs; and, yesterday, thirty thousand francs for the second; for that he contented himself, it is true, with the actual amount. How you raised these thirty thousand francs yesterday, devil fetch me, if I can guess! But you are a wonderful fellow! You see, now, that, to wind up the account, if Petit-Jean forces you to pay the last bill of twenty-five thousand francs, he will have received from you a hundred and fifty-five thousand francs for the twenty-five thousand which he originally handed to you. So I was quite right when I said that you had met with a person even more clever than yourself."

"But why did he say that this last bill which he presents to-day was negotiated?"

"That you might not take the alarm, he told you also that, except that of fifty-eight thousand francs, the others were in circulation; the first being paid, yesterday comes the second, and to-day the third."

"Scoundrel!"

"Listen: every one for himself; but let us talk coolly. This must prove to you that Petit-Jean (and, between ourselves, I should not be astonished to find out that, in spite of his sanctity, Jacques Ferrand went snacks in the speculation), this must prove, I say, that Petit-Jean, led on by your first payments, speculates on this last bill, as he has speculated on the others, quite certain that your friends will not allow you to be handed over to a court of assizes. It is for you to see whether or not these friendships are yet drained dry, or if there are yet a few more drops to be squeezed out; for if, in three hours, the twenty-five thousand francs are not forthcoming, noble vicomte, you will be in the 'Stone Jug.'"

"Which you keep saying to me—"

"In order that you may thoroughly comprehend me, and agree, perhaps, to try and draw another feather from the wing of this generous duchess."

"I repeat, it is useless to think of such a thing. Any hope of finding twenty-five thousand francs in three hours, after the sacrifices she has already made, would be madness to expect."

"To please you, happy mortal, impossibilities would be attempted!"

"Oh, she has already tried impossibilities; for it was one to borrow a hundred thousand francs from her husband, and to succeed; but such phenomena are not expected twice in a lifetime. Now, my dear Badinot, up to this time you have had no cause to complain of me. I have always been generous. Try and obtain some delay from this wretch, Petit-Jean. You know very well I always find a way of recompensing those who serve me; and when once this last affair is got over I will try again, and you shall be satisfied."

"Petit-Jean is as inflexible as you are unreasonable."

"I!"

"Try once more to interest your generous friend in your sad fate. Devil take it! Why not tell her plump all about it; not, as you have already, that you have been the dupe of forgers, but that you are a forger yourself?"

"I will never make to her any such confession; it would be to shame myself for no advantage."

"Do you prefer, then, that she should learn the fact to-morrow by the Gazette des Tribunaux."

"I have three hours before me, and can fly."

"Where can you go without money? But look at the other side of the matter. This last forged bill retired, you will be again in a splendid position; you will only have a few debts. Come, promise me that you will again speak to your duchess. You are such a fellow for the women! You know how to make yourself interesting in spite of your errors; and, let the worst come to the worst, they will like you a little the worse, or not at all; but they will extricate you from your mess. Come, come, see your lovely and loving friend once more. I will run to Petit-Jean, and I feel sure I shall get a respite of an hour or two."

"Hell! Must I, then, drink the draught of shame to the very dregs?"

"Come, come, good luck; be tender, passionate, charming. I will run to Petit-Jean; you will find me there until three o'clock; later than that will be

useless; the attorney-general's office closes at four o'clock." And M. Badinot left the apartment.

When the door was closed, they heard Florestan exclaim in accents of the deepest despair: "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

During this conversation, which unveiled to the comte the infamy of his son, and to Madame de Lucenay the infamy of the man she had so blindly loved, both had remained motionless, scarcely breathing, beneath this fearful disclosure. It would be impossible to depict the mute eloquence of the agonising scene which took place between this young lady and the comte when he had no longer any possible doubt as to Florestan's crime. Extending his arms to the room in which his son was, the old man smiled with bitterest sarcasm, casting an overwhelming look on Madame de Lucenay, which seemed to say, "And this is the man for whom you have braved all shame,—made every sacrifice! This is he whom you have reproached me for abandoning?"

The duchess understood the reproach, and, bowing her head, she felt all the weight of her shame. The lesson was terrible. By degrees, however, a haughty indignation succeeded to the cruel anxiety which had contracted the features of Madame de Lucenay. The inexcusable faults of this lady were at least palliated by the sincerity and disinterestedness of her love, by the boldness of her devotion and the boundlessness of her generosity, by the frankness of her character, and by her inexorable aversion from all that was contemptible and base.

Still too young, too handsome, too recherché, to feel the humiliation of having been merely made a tool of, when once the feeling of love was suddenly crushed within her, this haughty and decided woman felt no longer hatred or anger, but instantaneously, and without any transition, a deadly disgust, an icy disdain, at once destroyed all that affection hitherto so strong. She was no longer the mistress, unworthily deceived by her lover, but the lady of high blood and rank detecting a man of her circle to be a swindler and a forger, and driving him forth. Supposing that there were even some extenuating circumstances for the ignominy of Florestan, Madame de Lucenay would not have admitted them; for, in her estimation, the man who crossed certain bounds of honour, whether from vice, weakness, or persuasion, no longer had an existence in her eyes, honourable demeanour being with her a question of existence or non-existence. The only painful feeling which the duchess experienced was excited by the terrible effect which this unexpected revelation produced on her old friend, the comte.

For some moments he seemed neither to see nor hear; his eyes were fixed, his head bowed, his arms hanging by his side, his face livid as death; whilst from time to time a convulsive sigh heaved his breast. With such a man, as resolute as energetic, such a condition was more alarming than the most violent transports of anger. Madame de Lucenay regarded him with great uneasiness.

"Courage, my dear friend," she said to him, in a low voice, "for you,—for me,—for this man,—I know what remains for me to do."

The old man looked steadfastly at her, and then, as if aroused from his stupor by a violent internal commotion, he raised his head, his features assumed a menacing appearance, and, forgetting that his son could hear him, he exclaimed:

"And I, too, for you,—for me,—and for this man,—I know what remains for me to do."

"Who is there?" inquired Florestan, surprised.

Madame de Lucenay, fearing to find herself in the vicomte's presence, disappeared by the little door, and descended the secret staircase. Florestan having again asked who was there, and receiving no reply, entered the salon. He found the comte there alone. The old man's long beard had so greatly altered him, and he was so miserably clad, that his son, who had not seen him for several years, not recognising him at the moment, advanced towards him with a menacing air.

"What are you doing there? Who are you?"

"The husband of that woman!" replied the comte, pointing to the picture of Madame de Saint-Remy.

"My father!" exclaimed Florestan, recoiling in alarm, as he recalled the features of the comte, so long forgotten.

Standing erect, with threatening air, angry look, his forehead scarlet, the comte looked down upon his son, who, with his head bent down, dared not raise his eyes towards him. Still, M. de Saint-Remy, for some motive, made a violent effort to remain calm, and conceal his real feelings and resentment.

"My father!" said Florestan, half choked. "You were there?"

"I was there."



"You heard, then?"

"All!"

"Ah!" cried the vicomte, in agony, and hiding his face in his hands.

There was a minute's silence. Florestan, at first as much astonished as annoyed at the unexpected appearance of his father, began to reflect upon what advantage he could derive from this incident.

"All is not lost," he said to himself; "my father's presence is a stroke of fate. He knows all; he will not have his name dishonoured. He is not rich, but he must possess more than twenty-five thousand francs. A little skill, and I may leave my duchess at peace, and be saved!" Then, giving to his handsome features an expression of grief and dejection, moistening his eye with the tears of repentance, assuming his most touching tone of voice, he exclaimed, clasping his hands with a gesture of despair:

"Ah, father, I am indeed wretched! After so many years,—to see you—at such a moment! I must appear to you most culpable; but deign to listen to me! I beseech you, allow me, not to justify myself, but to explain to you my conduct! Will you, my father?"

M. de Saint-Remy made no reply; his features remained rigid; but, seating himself, his chin leaning on the palm of his hand, he contemplated the vicomte in silence. Had Florestan known the motives which filled the mind of his father with fury and vengeance, alarmed by the apparent composure of the comte, he would not, doubtless, have tried to dupe him. But, ignorant of the suspicions respecting the legitimacy of his birth, and of his mother's lapse of virtue, he had no doubt of the success of his deceit, thinking his father, who was very proud of his name, was capable of making any sacrifice rather than allow it to be dishonoured.

"My father," resumed Florestan, timidly, "allow me to endeavour, not to exculpate myself, but to tell you by what a series of involuntary temptations I have done, in spite of myself,—such—an infamous action."

The vicomte took his father's silence for tacit consent, and continued:

"When I had the misfortune to lose my mother—my poor mother!—I was alone, without advice or support. Master of a considerable fortune, used to luxury from my cradle, it became to me a necessity. Ignorant how difficult it is to earn money, I was immeasurably prodigal. Unfortunately, my expenses, foolish as they were, were remarkable for their elegance. By my taste, I

eclipsed men ten times richer than myself. This first success intoxicated me, and I became a man of extravagance, as one becomes a man of arms, or a statesman. Yes, I liked luxury, not from vulgar ostentation, but I liked it as a painter loves his art. Like every artist, I was jealous of my work, and my work was to me luxury. I sacrificed everything to its perfection. I wished to have it beautiful and complete in everything, from my stable to my drawing-room, from my coat to my house. I wished my life to be the emblem of taste and elegance. In fact, as an artist, I sought the applause of the mob and the admiration of the élite. This success is rare, but I acquired it."

As he spake, Florestan's features gradually lost their hypocritical assumption, and his eyes kindled with enthusiasm. He looked in his father's face, and, thinking it was somewhat softened, continued:

"Oracle and regulator of the world, my praise or blame were law: I was quoted, copied, boasted of, admired, and that by the best circle in Paris, which is to say in Europe—in the world. The women participated in the general enthusiasm, and the loveliest contended for the pleasure of being invited to certain fêtes which I gave, and everywhere wonder was expressed at the incomparable elegance and taste displayed at these fêtes, which millionaires could not equal. In fine, I was the monarch of fashion. This word will tell you all, my father, if you comprehend it."

"I do comprehend it, and I am sure that at the galleys you will invent some refined elegance in your fashion of wearing your chain that will become the mode in your gang, and will be called à la Saint-Remy," said the old man, with cutting irony, adding, "and Saint-Remy,—that is my name!" And again he was silent.

Florestan had need of all his self-control to conceal the wound which this bitter sarcasm inflicted. He continued in a more humble tone:

"Alas! Father, it is not from pride that I revive the recollection of my success, for, I repeat to you, it is that success which has undone me. Sought, envied, and flattered, not by interested parasites, but by persons much superior in position to myself, I no longer calculated my fortune must be expended in a few years; that I did not heed. Could I renounce this favourite, dazzling life, in which pleasures succeeded pleasures, every kind of intoxication to every kind of enchantment? Ah, if you knew, father, what it is to be hailed as the hero of the day, to hear the murmur which greets your entrance into the salon, to hear the women say, 'That is he! There he is!'—oh, if you knew—"

"I know," said the old man, without moving from his attitude,—"I know. Yes, the other day, in a public place, there was a crowd; suddenly a murmur was heard, like that which greets you when you enter some place; then the women's eyes were all turned eagerly on a very handsome young man, just as they are turned towards you, and they pointed him out to one another, saying, 'That's he! There he is!' just as if they were directing attention to you."

"And this man, my father?"

"Was a forger they were conveying to gaol."

"Ah!" exclaimed Florestan, with concentrated rage. Then affecting the deepest affliction, he added, "My father, you are pitiless,—what shall I then say to you? I do not seek to deny my errors, I only desire to explain to you the fatal infatuation which has caused them. Well, then, even if you should overwhelm me still with your bitterest sarcasms, I will endeavour to go through with this confession,—I will endeavour to make you comprehend this feverish excitement which has destroyed me, because then, perchance, you may pity me,—yes, for there is pity for a madman, and I was mad! Shutting my eyes, I abandoned myself to the dazzling whirl into which I was drawn, and drew with me the most charming women, the most delightful men. How could I check myself? As easily say to the poet who exhausts himself, and whose genius preys upon his health, 'Pause in the midst of the inspiration which urges you!' No! He could not—I could not, abdicate the royalty which I exercised, and return shamed, ruined, and mocked at, into the unknown mob, giving this triumph to those who envied me, and whom, until then, I had defied, controlled, overpowered! No! No! I could not, voluntarily, at least.

"Then came the fatal day, when, for the first time, money failed me. I was surprised as much as if such a moment never could have arrived. Yet I had still my horses, my carriages, the furniture of this house. When my debts were paid there would, perhaps, still remain to me about sixty thousand francs. What could I do in such misery? It was then, father, that I made my first step in the path of disgrace; until this time I was honourable,—I had only spent what belonged to me, but then I began to incur debts which I had no chance of paying. I sold all I had to two of my domestics in order to pay my debt to them, and to be enabled to continue for six months longer, in spite of my creditors, to enjoy the luxury which intoxicated me.

"To supply my play debts and extravagant outlay I first borrowed of the Jews, then, to pay the Jews, of my friends, then, to pay my friends, of my

mistresses. These resources exhausted, there was another period of my life; from an honest man I became a gambler, but, as yet, I was not criminal—I still hesitated—I desired to take a violent resolution. I had proved in several duels that I did not fear death. I determined to kill myself!"

"Ah! Bah! Really?" said the comte, with fierce irony.

"You do not believe me, father?"

"It was too soon or too late!" replied the old man, still unmoved, and in the same attitude.

Florestan, believing that he had moved his father by speaking to him of his project for committing suicide, thought it necessary to increase the effect by a coup de théâtre. He opened a drawer, took from it a small bottle of greenish glass, and said to the comte, depositing it on the table:

"An Italian quack sold me this poison."

"And was this poison for yourself?" said the old man, still having his chin in the palm of his hand.

Florestan understood the force of the remark, his features expressed real indignation; for this time he spoke the truth. One day he took it into his head to kill himself,—an ephemeral fancy! Persons of his stamp are usually too cowardly to make up their minds calmly, and without witnesses, to the death which they face as a point of honour in a duel. He therefore exclaimed, with an accent of truth:

"I have fallen very low, but not so low as that. It was for myself that I reserved this poison."

"And then were afraid of it?" asked the comte, without changing his posture.

"I confess I recoiled before this trying extremity,—nothing was yet desperate. The persons to whom I owed money were rich and could wait. At my age, and with my connections, I hoped for a moment, if not to repair my fortunes, at least to acquire for myself an honourable position, an independence which would have supplied my present situation. Many of my friends, perhaps less qualified than myself, had made rapid progress in diplomacy. I had ambition. I had but to make it known, and I was attached to the legation to Gerolstein. Unfortunately, a few days after this nomination, a gaming debt, contracted with a man who detested me, placed me in a cruel dilemma. I had exhausted my last resources. A fatal idea flashed across my

mind. Believing that I was assured of impunity, I committed an infamous action. You see, my father, I conceal nothing from you. I avow the ignominy of my conduct,—I do not seek to extenuate anything. Two alternatives are now before me, and I am equally inclined to either. The one is to kill myself, and leave your name dishonoured; for if I do not pay this very day the twenty-five thousand francs, the accusation is made, and all is made public, and, dead or alive, I am disgraced. The second is to throw myself into your arms, father, to say to you, 'Save your son,—save your name from infamy;' and I swear to you to depart for Africa to-morrow, and die a soldier's death, or return to you completely restored in reputation. What I say to you, father, is true,—in face of the extremity which overwhelms me, I have no other resource. Decide: shall I die covered with shame, or, thanks to you, live to repair my fault? These are not the threats of a young man. I am twenty-five; I bear your name, and I have sufficient courage either to kill myself, or to become a soldier; for I will not go to the galleys."

Was about to embrace his father.

Etching by Marcel after the drawing by Frank T. Merrill.

The comte rose from his seat, saying:

"I do not desire to have my name dishonoured."

"Oh, my father!" exclaimed the vicomte, with warmth, and was about to embrace his father, when the old man, repressing his enthusiasm, said:

"You are expected until three o'clock at the man's house who has the forged bill?"

"Yes, father, and it is now two o'clock."

"Let us go into your cabinet; give me writing materials."

"They are here, father."

The comte sat down and wrote, with a firm hand:

"I undertake to pay this evening, at ten o'clock, the twenty-five thousand francs which my son owes.

"COMTE DE SAINT-REMY."

"Your creditor merely wants his money; my guarantee will obtain a further delay. Let him go to M. Dupont, the banker, at No. 7 in the Rue Richelieu, and he will assure him of the validity of this promise."

"Oh, my father! How can I ever—"

"Expect me this evening; at ten o'clock I will bring the money. Let your creditor be here."

"Yes, father, and the day after I will set out for Africa. You shall see that I am not ungrateful! Then, perhaps, when I am again restored to honour you will accept my thanks?"

"You owe me nothing. I have said that my name shall not be dishonoured again; nor shall it be," said M. de Saint-Remy, in reply, taking up his cane, and moving towards the door.

"My father, at least shake hands with me!" said Florestan.

"Here this evening at ten o'clock," said the comte, refusing his hand.

"Saved!" exclaimed Florestan, joyously,—"*saved!*" Then he continued, after a moment's reflection: "*Saved—almost—no matter—it is always so. Perhaps this evening I shall tell him of the other thing. He is in the vein, and will not allow a first sacrifice to become useless for lack of a second. Yet why should I tell him? Who will ever know it? Yet, if nothing should be discovered, I shall keep the money he will give me to pay this last debt. I had some work to move him. The bitterness of his sarcasms made me suspicious of his good resolution; but my threat of suicide, the fear of seeing his name dishonoured, decided him. That was the way to hit him. No doubt he is not so poor as he appears to be. But his arrival was indeed a godsend. Now, then, for the man of law!*"

He rang the bell, and M. Boyer appeared.

"How was it that you did not inform me that my father was here? Really, this is most negligent."

"Twice I endeavoured to address your lordship when you came in by the garden gate with M. Badinot, but your lordship made me a sign with your hand not to interrupt you. I did not venture to insist. I should be very much grieved if your lordship should impute negligence to me."

"Very well. Desire Edwards to harness Orion or Ploughboy in the cabriolet immediately."

M. Boyer made a respectful bow. As he was about to quit the room, some one knocked. He looked at the vicomte with an inquiring air.

"Come in!" said Florestan.

A second valet de chambre appeared, bearing in his hand a small silver-gilt waiter. M. Boyer took hold of the waiter with a kind of jealous haste, and presented it to the vicomte, who took from it a thick packet, sealed with black wax.

The two servants withdrew discreetly.

Florestan broke open the envelope. It contained twenty-five thousand francs in treasury bills, but not a word of writing.

"Decidedly," he exclaimed, in a joyful tone, "the day is propitious! Saved this time, and at this moment completely saved! I will run to the jeweller; and yet," he added, "perhaps—no—let us wait—he cannot have any suspicion of me. Twenty-five thousand francs is a pleasant sum to have by one! Pardieu! I was a fool ever to doubt the luck of my star; at the moment when it seemed most obscure, has it not burst forth more brilliant than ever? But where does this money come from? The writing of the address is unknown to me. Let me examine the seal,—the cipher. Yes, yes, I cannot mistake; an N and an L,—it is Clotilde! How could she know? And not a word,—that's strange! How very opportune, though! Ah, mon Dieu! now I remember. I had an appointment with her this morning. That Badinot's threats drove it out of my head. I forgot Clotilde. After having waited for me down-stairs, no doubt she went away; and this is, unquestionably, a delicate way of making me understand that she fears I may forget her through some pecuniary embarrassment. Yes, it is an indirect reproach that I have not applied to her as usual. Good Clotilde! Always the same,—generous as a queen! What a pity I was ever driven to ask her,—her still so handsome! I sometimes regret it, but I only did it in a direful extremity, and on sheer compulsion."

"Your lordship's cabriolet is at the door," said M. Boyer, on entering the room.

"Who brought this letter?" Florestan inquired.

"I do not know, my lord."

"Well, I will ask below. But tell me, was there no one in the ground floor?" asked the vicomte, looking significantly at Boyer.

"There is no one there now, my lord."

"I was not mistaken," thought Florestan; "Clotilde waited for me, and is now gone."

"If your lordship would have the goodness to grant me two minutes," said Boyer.

"Speak, but be quick!"

"Edwards and myself have learnt that the Duc de Montbrison is desirous of forming an establishment. If your lordship would but just be so kind to propose your own ready furnished, with the stable in first-rate order, it would be a most admirable opportunity for Edwards and myself to get the whole off our hands, and, perhaps, for your lordship a good reason for disposing of them."

"Pardieu! Boyer, you are right. As for me, I should prefer such an arrangement. I will see Montbrison, and speak to him. What are your terms?"

"Your lordship will easily understand that we are desirous of profiting as much as possible by your generosity."

"And turn your bargain to the best advantage? Nothing can be plainer! Let us see,—what's the price?"

"The whole, two hundred and sixty thousand francs (10,400l.), my lord."

"And you and Edwards will thus clear—"

"About forty thousand francs (1,600l.), my lord."

"A very nice sum! But so much the better, for, after all, I am very much satisfied with you, and, if I had to make my will, I should have bequeathed that sum to you and Edwards."

And the vicomte went out, first to call on his creditor, then on Madame de Lucenay, whom he did not suspect of having been present at his conversation with Badinot.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE SEARCH

The Hôtel de Lucenay was one of those royal residences of the Faubourg St. Germain, which the space employed, and, as it were, lost, make so vast. A modern house might, with ease, be contained in the limits devoted to the staircase of one of these palaces, and a whole quarter might be built in the extent they occupy.

About nine o'clock in the evening of this day the two vast folding-doors of this hôtel opened on the arrival of a magnificent chariot, which, after having taken a dashing turn in the spacious courtyard, stopped before the large covered flight of steps which led to the first antechamber. Whilst the hoofs of two powerful and high-couraged horses sounded on the echoing pavement, a gigantic footman opened the door, emblazoned with armorial bearings, and a young man alighted gracefully from this brilliant carriage, and no less gracefully walked up the five or six steps of the entrance. This young man was the Vicomte de Saint-Remy.

On leaving his creditor, who, satisfied with the undertaking of Florestan's father, had granted the required delay, and was to come and receive his money at ten o'clock in the Rue de Chaillot, M. de Saint-Remy had gone to Madame de Lucenay's, to thank her for the fresh service she had rendered him, and, not having seen the duchess during the morning, he came triumphant, certain of finding her in *prima sera*, the hour which she constantly reserved for him.

By the attention of the footmen in the antechamber, who hastened to open the glass door as soon as they saw Florestan's carriage, by the profoundly respectful air with which the rest of the livery all rose as the vicomte passed by, and by certain, yet almost imperceptible touches, it was evident that here was the second, or, rather, the real master of the house.

When the Duc de Lucenay returned home, with his umbrella in his hand and his feet protected by clumsy goloshes (he hated going out in a carriage in the daytime), the same domestic evolutions were gone through with similar respect; still, in the eyes of a keen observer, there was a vast difference between the reception accorded to the husband and that reserved for the lover.

A corresponding attention displayed itself in the footman's waiting-room when Florestan entered it, and one of the valets instantly arose to announce him to Madame de Lucenay.

The vicomte had never been more joyous, never felt himself more at his ease, more confident of himself, more assured of conquest. The victory he had obtained over his father in the morning, the fresh proof of attachment on the part of Madame de Lucenay, the joy at having escaped, as it were, by a miracle, from a terrible situation, his renewed confidence in his star, gave his handsome features an expression of boldness and good humour which rendered it still more captivating.

In fact, he had never felt himself more himself. And he was right. Never had his slender and graceful figure displayed a finer carriage, never had his look been more elevated, never had his pride been more deliciously tickled by the thought, "The great lady—the mistress of this palace is mine—is at my feet! This very morning she waited for me in my own house!"

Florestan had given way to these excessively vain-glorious reflections as he traversed three or four apartments, which led to a small room in which the duchess usually sat. A last look at himself in a glass which he passed completed the excellent opinion which Florestan had of himself. The valet de chambre opened the folding-doors of the salon, and announced, "Monsieur the Vicomte de Saint-Remy!"

It is impossible to paint the astonishment and indignation of the duchess. She believed the comte had not concealed from his son that she also had overheard all.

We have already said that, on discovering Florestan's infamy, Madame de Lucenay's love, suddenly quenched, had changed into the most frigid disdain. We have also said that, in the midst of her errors, her frailties, Madame de Lucenay had preserved pure and intact her feelings of rectitude, honour, and chivalric frankness, whose strength and requirements were excessively strong. She possessed the better qualities of her faults, the virtues of her vices.

Treating love as cavalierly as a man treats it, she pushed as far, nay, further, than a man, devotion, generosity, courage, and, above all, intense horror of all baseness. Madame de Lucenay, being about to go to a party in the evening, was, although without her diamonds, dressed with her accustomed taste and magnificence; and her splendid costume, the rouge she wore without attempt at concealment, like a court lady, up to her eyelids, her beauty, which was especially brilliant at candle-light, her figure of a goddess walking in the clouds, rendered still more striking that noble air which no one displayed to greater advantage than she did, and which she carried, if requisite, to a height of insolence that was overwhelming.

We know the haughty and resolute disposition of the duchess, and we may imagine her physiognomy, her look, when the vicomte, advancing towards her, conceited, smiling, confident, said, in a tone of love:

"Dearest Clotilde, how good you are! How you—"

The vicomte could not finish. The duchess was seated, and had not risen; but her gesture, her glance, betokened contempt, at once so calm and crushing that Florestan stopped short. He could not utter another word, nor advance another step. He had never before seen Madame de Lucenay under this aspect. He could not believe that it was the same woman, whom he had always found gentle, tender, and passionately submissive; for nothing is more humble, more timid, than a determined woman in the presence of the man whom she loves and who controls her.

His first surprise past, Florestan was ashamed of his weakness; his habitual audacity resumed its ascendancy, and, making a step towards Madame de Lucenay in order to take her hand, he said, in his most insinuating tone:

"Clotilde, what ails you? I never saw you look so lovely, and yet—"

"Really, this is too impudent!" exclaimed the duchess, recoiling with such disgust and hauteur that Florestan was again overcome with surprise.

Resuming some assurance, he said to her:

"Will you, at least, Clotilde, tell me the cause of this change, sudden, singular as it is? What have I done? How have I offended?"

Without making any reply, Madame de Lucenay looked at him, as is vulgarly said, from head to foot, with so insulting an expression that Florestan felt red with the anger which displayed itself upon his brow, and exclaimed:

"I am aware, madame, that it is thus you habitually break off. Is it a rupture that you now desire?"

"The question is singular!" said Madame de Lucenay, with a sarcastic laugh. "Learn, sir, that when a lackey robs me, I do not break with him, I turn him away."

"Madame!"

"Oh, a truce to this!" said the duchess, in a stern and peremptory tone. "Your presence disgusts me! Why are you here? Have you not had your money?"

"It is true, then, as I guessed, the twenty-five thousand francs—"

"Your last forgery is withdrawn, is it not? The honour of your family's name is saved,—that is well,—go!"

"Ah! believe me—"

"I very much regret that money, for it might have succoured so many honest families; but it was necessary to think of the shame to your father and to myself."

"So then, Clotilde, you know all? Ah, then, now nothing is left me but to die!" exclaimed Florestan, in a most pathetic and despairing tone.

A burst of derisive laughter from the duchess hailed this tragic exclamation, and she added, between two fits of fresh hilarity:

"I could never have believed infamy could appear so ridiculous!"

"Madame!" cried Florestan, his features contracted with rage.

The two folding-doors opened with a loud noise, and M. le Duc de Montbrison was announced.

In spite of his self-command, Florestan could scarcely repress the violence of his resentment, which any man more observing than the duke must certainly have perceived.

M. de Montbrison was scarcely eighteen years of age. Let our readers imagine a most engaging countenance, like that of a young girl, white and red, whose vermilion lips and downy chin were slightly shaded by a nascent beard. Let them add to this large brown eyes, as yet timid, but which in time would gleam like a falcon's, a figure as graceful as that of the duchess herself, and then, perhaps, they may have some idea of this young duke, the Cherubino as complete in idea as ever countess or waiting-maid decked in a woman's cap, after having remarked the ivory whiteness of his neck.

The vicomte had the weakness or the audacity to remain.

"How kind of you, Conrad, to think of me this evening!" said Madame de Lucenay, in a most affectionate voice, and extending her hand to the young duke, who was about to shake hands with his cousin, but Clotilde raised her hand a little, and said to him gaily:

"Kiss it, cousin,—you have your gloves on."

"Pardon me, my dear cousin," said the young man, as he applied his lips to the naked and charming hand that was offered to him.

"What are you going to do this evening, Conrad?" inquired Madame de Lucenay, without seeming to take the slightest notice in the world of Florestan.

"Nothing, cousin; when I leave you, I shall go to the club."

"Indeed you shall not; you shall accompany us, M. de Lucenay and me, to Madame de Senneval's; she gives a party, and has frequently asked me to introduce you to her."

"I shall be but too happy."

"Then, too, I must tell you frankly that I don't like to see you begin so early with your habits and tastes for clubs. You are possessed of everything necessary in order to be everywhere welcomed, and even sought after, in the world, and you ought, therefore, to mix with it as much as possible."

"Yes, you are right, cousin."

"And as I am on the footing of a grandmother with you, my dear Conrad, I am determined to exact a great deal from you. You are emancipated, it is true, but I believe you will want a guardian for a long time to come, and you must, therefore, consider me in that light."

"Most joyfully, happily, cousin!" said the young duke, emphatically.

It is impossible to describe the mute rage of Florestan, who was standing up, and leaning with his elbow on the mantelpiece. Neither the duke nor Clotilde paid the slightest attention to him. Knowing the rapidity with which Madame de Lucenay decided, he imagined she was pushing her boldness and contempt so far as to commence at once, and in his presence, a regular flirtation with the Duc de Montbrison.

It was not so. The duchess felt for her cousin nothing beyond a truly maternal affection, having almost seen him born. But the young duke was so handsome, and seemed so happy at the agreeable reception of his cousin, that the jealousy, or, rather, pride of Florestan was aroused. His heart writhed beneath the cruel wounds of envy, excited by Conrad de Montbrison, who, rich and handsome, was beginning so splendidly that life of pleasures, enjoyments, and fêtes, from which he, ruined, undone, despised, dishonoured, was expelled.

M. de Saint-Remy was brave with that bravery of the head, if we may so call it, which will urge a man, by anger or by vanity, to face a duel. But, vitiated and corrupted, he had not the courage of the heart which triumphs over bad inclinations, or which, at least, gives the energy which enables a man to escape infamy by a voluntary death. Furious at the bitter contempt of the duchess, believing he saw a successor in the young duke, M. de Saint-Remy resolved to confront Madame de Lucenay with all insolence, and, if need were, to seek a quarrel with Conrad.

The duchess, irritated at Florestan's audacity, did not look towards him, and M. de Montbrison, in his anxious attention to his cousin, forgetting something of his high breeding, had not saluted or spoken a word to the vicomte, with whom he was acquainted. The latter, advancing to Conrad, whose back was towards him, touched his arm lightly, and said, in a dry and ironical tone:

"Good evening, sir; a thousand pardons for not having observed you before."

M. de Montbrison, perceiving that he had really failed in politeness, turned around instantly, and said cordially to the vicomte:

"Really, sir, I am ashamed; but I hope that my cousin, who caused my forgetfulness, will be my excuse, and—"

"Conrad," interposed the duchess, immeasurably annoyed at Florestan's impudence, persisting as he did in remaining, as it were, to brave her,—  
"Conrad, that will do; make no apologies; it is not worth while."

M. de Montbrison, believing that his cousin was reproaching him in joke for being somewhat too formal, said, in a gay tone, to the vicomte, who was livid with rage:

"I will not say more, sir, since my cousin forbids me. You see her guardianship has begun."

"And will not stop when it begins, my dear sir, be assured of that. Thus, with this notice (which Madame la Duchesse will hasten to fulfil, I have no doubt)—with this notice, I say, I have it in my mind to make you a proposal."

"To me, sir?" said Conrad, beginning to take offence at the sardonic tone of Florestan.

"To you yourself. I leave in a few days for the legation to Gerolstein, to which I am attached. I wish, therefore, to get my house, completely furnished, and my stable, entirely arranged, off my hands; and you might find it a suitable arrangement;" and the vicomte insolently emphasised his last words, looking Madame de Lucenay full in the face. "It would be very piquant, would it not, Madame la Duchesse?"

"I do not understand you, sir," said M. de Montbrison, more and more astonished.

"I will tell you, Conrad, why you cannot accept the offer that is made you," said Clotilde.

"And why, Madame la Duchesse, cannot the duke accept my offer?"

"My dear Conrad, what is offered you for sale is already sold to others. So, you understand, you would have the inconvenience of being robbed just as if you were in a wood."

Florestan bit his lips with rage.

"Take care, madame!" he cried.

"What, threats! and here, sir?" exclaimed Conrad.

"Pooh, pooh! Conrad, pay no attention," said Madame de Lucenay, taking a lozenge from a sweetmeat box with the utmost composure; "a man of honour ought not and cannot have any future communication with that person. If he likes, I will tell you why."

A tremendous explosion would no doubt have occurred, when the two folding-doors again opened, and the Duc de Lucenay entered, noisily, violently, hurriedly, as was "his usual custom in the afternoon," as well as the forenoon.

"Ah, my dear! What, dressed already?" said he to his wife. "Why, how surprising! Quite astonishing! Good evening, Saint-Remy; good evening, Conrad. Ah, you see the most miserable of men; that is to say, I neither sleep nor eat, but am completely 'done up.' Can't reconcile myself to it. Poor D'Harville, what an event!" And M. de Lucenay threw himself back in a sort of small sofa with two backs, and, crossing his left knee over his right, took his foot in his hand, whilst he continued to utter the most distressing exclamations.

The excitement of Conrad and Florestan had time to calm down, without being perceived by M. de Lucenay, who was the least clear-sighted man in the world.

Madame de Lucenay, not from embarrassment, for she was never embarrassed, as we know, but because Florestan's presence was as disgusting as it was insupportable, said to the duke:

"We are ready to go as soon as you please. I am going to introduce Conrad to Madame de Senneval."

"No, no, no!" cried the duke, letting go his foot to seize one of the cushions, on which he struck violently with his two fists, to the great alarm of Clotilde, who, at the sudden cries of her husband, started from her chair.

"Monsieur, what ails you?" she inquired; "you frighten me exceedingly."

"No," replied the duke, thrusting the cushion from him, rising suddenly, and walking up and down with rapid strides and gesticulations, "I cannot get over the idea of the death of poor dear D'Harville; can you, Saint-Remy?"

"Indeed, it was a frightful event!" said the vicomte, who, with hatred and rage in his heart, kept his eye on M. de Montbrison; but this latter, after the last words of his cousin, turned away from a man so deeply degraded, not from want of feeling, but from pride.

"For goodness' sake, my lord," said the duchess to her husband, "do not regret the loss of M. d'Harville in so noisy and really so singular a manner. Ring, if you please for my carriage."

"Yes, it is really true," said M. de Lucenay, seizing the bell-rope, "really true that, three days ago, he was full of life and health, and, to-day, what remains of him? Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!"



These three last exclamations were accompanied by three such violent pulls that the bell-rope, which the duke held in his hand whilst he was gesticulating, broke away from the upper spring, fell on a candelabra filled with lighted wax candles, knocked two of them out of the sconces, one of which, falling on the mantelpiece, broke a lovely little cup of old Sèvres china; whilst the other, falling on the ground, rolled on a fur hearth rug, which took flame, but was soon extinguished under Conrad's foot.

At the same moment, two valets de chambre, summoned by the furious ringing, entered hastily, and found M. de Lucenay with the bell-rope in his hand, the duchess laughing heartily at this ridiculous fall of the wax lights, and M. de Montbrison sharing her mirth. M. de Saint-Remy alone did not laugh. M. de Lucenay, quite accustomed to such accidents, preserved his usual seriousness, and, throwing the bell-rope to one of the men, said:

"The duchess's carriage."

Clotilde, having somewhat recovered her composure, said:

"Really, my lord, there is no man in the world but yourself capable of exciting laughter at so lamentable an event."

"Lamentable! Say fearful. Why, now, only yesterday, I was recollecting how many persons in my own family I would rather should have died than poor D'Harville. First, there's my nephew, D'Emberval, who stutters so annoyingly; then there's your Aunt Mérinville, who is always talking about her nerves and her headache, and who always gobbles up every day, whilst she is waiting for dinner, a mess of broth like a porter's wife. Are you very fond of your Aunt Mérinville?"

"Really, my lord, have you lost your wits?" said the duchess, shrugging her shoulders.

"It's true enough, though," continued the duke; "one would give twenty indifferent persons for one friend; eh, Saint-Remy?"

"Unquestionably."

"It is the old story of the tailor over again. Do you know it, Conrad,—the story of the tailor?"

"No, cousin."

"You will understand the allegory at once. A tailor was going to be hanged; he was the only tailor in the village. What were the inhabitants to do? They said to the judge, 'Please your judgship, we have only one tailor, and we have three shoemakers; if it is all the same to you, please to hang one of the three shoemakers in the place of the tailor, for two shoemakers are enough.' Do you understand the allegory, Conrad?"

"Yes, cousin."

"And you, Saint-Remy?"

"Quite."

"Her grace's carriage!" said one of the servants.

"But, I say, why haven't you put on your diamonds?" asked M. de Lucenay, abruptly; "with that dress they would look remarkably well."

Saint-Remy shuddered.

"For the one poor time we are going out together," continued the duke, "you might have done us the honour to wear your diamonds. The duchess's diamonds are particularly fine. Did you ever see them, Saint-Remy?"

"Yes, he knows them well enough!" said Clotilde; and then she added, "Your arm, Conrad."

M. de Lucenay followed the duchess with Saint-Remy, who could scarcely repress his anger.

"Aren't you coming with us to the Sennevals, Saint-Remy?" inquired M. de Lucenay.

"No, impossible," he replied, briefly.

"By the way, Saint-Remy, there's Madame de Senneval, too,—what, do I say one? There's two—whom I would willingly sacrifice, for her husband is also on my list."

"What list?"

"That of the people whom I should not have cared to see die, provided D'Harville had been left to us."

At the moment when they were in the anteroom, and M. de Montbrison was helping the duchess on with her mantle, M. de Lucenay, addressing his cousin, said to him:

"Since you are coming with us, Conrad, desire your carriage to follow ours; unless you will decide on coming, Saint-Remy, and then you shall take me, and I will tell you another story quite as good as that of the tailor."

"Thank you," said Saint-Remy, dryly, "I cannot accompany you."

"Well, then, good night, my dear fellow. Have you and my wife quarrelled, for she is getting into her carriage without saying a word to you?"

And at this moment, the duchess's berline having drawn up at the steps, she entered it.

"Now, cousin," said Conrad, waiting for M. de Lucenay with an air of deference.

"Get in! Get in!" said the duke, who had stopped a moment, and, from the door, was contemplating the elegant equipage of the vicomte. "Are those your grays, Saint-Remy?"

"Yes."

"And your jolly-looking Edwards! He's what I call a right sort of coachman. How well he has his horses in hand! To do justice, there is no one who, like Saint-Remy, does things in such devilish high style!"

"My dear fellow, Madame de Lucenay and your cousin are waiting for you," said M. de Saint-Remy, with bitterness.

"Pardieu! and that's true. What a forgetful rascal I am! Au revoir, Saint-Remy. Ah, I forgot," said the duke, stopping half way down the steps, "if you have nothing better to do, come and dine with us to-morrow. Lord Dudley has sent us some grouse from Scotland, and they are out-of-the-way things, you know. You'll come, won't you?" And the duke sprang into the carriage which contained his wife and Conrad.

Saint-Remy remained alone on the steps, and saw the carriage drive away. His own then drove up. He got into it, casting on that house which he had so often entered as master, and which now he so ignominiously quitted, a look of anger, hatred, and despair.

"Home!" he said, abruptly.

"To the hôtel!" said the footman to Edwards, as he closed the door.

We may imagine how bitter and desolating were Saint-Remy's thoughts as he returned to his house. At the moment when he reached it, Boyer, who awaited him at the portico, said to him:

"M. le Comte is above, and waits for M. le Vicomte."

"Very well."

"And there is also a man whom your lordship appointed at ten o'clock,—a M. Petit-Jean."

"Very well. Oh, what an evening party!" said Florestan, as he went up-stairs to see his father, whom he found in the salon on the first floor, the same room in which their meeting of the morning had taken place. "A thousand pardons, my father, that I was not awaiting you when you arrived; but I—"

"Is the man here who holds the forged bill?" inquired the comte, interrupting his son.

"Yes, father, he is below."

"Desire him to come up."

Florestan rang, and Boyer appeared.

"Desire M. Petit-Jean to come up."

"Yes, my lord," and Boyer withdrew.

"How good you are, father, to remember your kind promise!"

"I always remember what I promise."

"What gratitude do I owe you! How can I ever prove to you—"

"I will not have my name dishonoured! It shall not be!"

"It shall not be! No, it shall never be, I swear to you, my father!"

The comte looked strangely at his son, and repeated:

"No, it shall never be!" Then he added, with a sarcastic air, "You are a prophet."

"I read my resolution in my heart."

Florestan's father made no rejoinder. He walked up and down the room with his two hands thrust into the pockets of his long coat. He was very pale.

"M. Petit-Jean," said Boyer, introducing a man of a mean, sordid, and crafty look.

"Where is the bill?" inquired the comte.

"Here it is, sir," said Petit-Jean (Jacques Ferrand the notary's man of straw), handing the bill to the comte.

"Is this it?" said the latter, showing the bill to his son.

"Yes, father."

The comte took from his waistcoat pocket twenty-five notes of a thousand francs each, handed them to his son, and said:

"Pay!"

Florestan paid, and took the bill with a deep sigh of the utmost satisfaction. M. Petit-Jean put the notes carefully in an old pocket-book, made his bow, and retired. M. de Saint-Remy left the salon with him, whilst Florestan was very carefully tearing up the bill.

"At least Clotilde's twenty-five thousand francs are still in my pocket, and if nothing is revealed, that is a comfort. But how she treated me! But what can my father have to say to the man Petit-Jean?"

The noise of a door being double-locked made the vicomte start. His father returned to the room. His pallor had even increased.

"I fancied, father, I heard you lock the door of my cabinet?"

"Yes, I did."

"And why, my dear father?" asked Florestan, greatly amazed.

"I will tell you."

And the comte placed himself so that his son could not pass out by the secret staircase which led to the ground floor.

Florestan, greatly disquieted, now observed the sinister look of his father, and followed all his movements with mistrust. Without being able to account for it, he felt a vague alarm.

"What ails you, father?"

"This morning when you saw me, your only thought was, 'My father will not allow his name to be dishonoured; he will pay if I can but contrive to wheedle him by some feigned words of repentance.'"

"Can you indeed think—"

"Do not interrupt me. I have not been your dupe; you have neither shame, regret, nor remorse. You are vicious to the very core, you have never felt one honest aspiration, you have not robbed as long as you have been in possession of wherewithal to gratify your caprices,—that is what is called the probity of rich persons of your stamp. Then came the want of delicate feeling, then meannesses, then crime, then forgery. This is but the first period of your life,—it is bright and pure in comparison with that which would be yet to come."

"If I did not change my conduct, assuredly; but I shall change it, father, I have sworn to you."

"You will not change it."

"But—"

"You will not change it! Expelled from society in which you have hitherto lived, you would become very quickly criminal, like the wretches amongst whom you would be cast, a thief inevitably, and, if your need were, an assassin. That would be your future life."

"I an assassin?—I?"

"Yes, because you are a coward!"

"I have had duels, and have evinced—"

"I tell you, you are a coward! You have already preferred infamy to death. A day would come in which you would prefer the impunity for fresh crimes to

the life of another. This must not be,—I will not allow it. I have come in time, at least, to save my name from public dishonour hereafter. There must be an end to this."

"What do you mean, dearest father? How an end to this? What would you imply?" exclaimed Florestan, still more alarmed at the fearful expression and the increased pallor of his father's countenance.

Suddenly there was a violent blow struck on the cabinet door. Florestan made a motion to go and open it, in order to put an end to a scene which terrified him; but the comte seized him with a hand of iron, and held him fast.

"Who knocks?" inquired the comte.

"In the name of the law, open! Open!" said a voice.

"That forgery, then, was not the last," exclaimed the comte, in a low voice, and looking at his son with a terrible air.

"Yes, my father, I swear it!" exclaimed Florestan, endeavouring, but vainly, to extricate himself from the vigorous grasp of his father.

"In the name of the law, open!" repeated the voice.

"What is it you seek?" demanded the comte.

"I am a commissary of police, and I have come to make a search after a robbery of diamonds, of which M. de Saint-Remy is accused. M. Baudoin, a jeweller, has proofs. If you do not open, sir, I shall be compelled to force open the door."

"Already a thief! I was not then deceived," said the comte, in a low voice. "I came to kill you,—I have delayed too long."

"Kill me?"

"There is already too much dishonour on my name,—it must end. I have here two pistols; you must blow out your brains, or I will blow them out, and I will say that you killed yourself in despair in order to escape from shame."

And, with a fearful sang-froid, the comte drew a pistol from his pocket, and, with the hand that was free, presented it to his son, saying:

"Now an end to this, if, indeed, you are not a coward!"

After repeated and ineffectual attempts to free himself from the comte's hand, his son fell back aghast and livid with fear. He saw by the fearful look, the inexorable demeanour of his father, that he had no pity to expect from him.

"My father!" he exclaimed.

"You must die!"

"I repent!"

"It is too late. Hark! They are forcing in the door!"

"I will expiate my faults!"

"They are entering! Must I then kill you with my own hand?"

"Pardon!"

"The door gives way! You will then have it so!"

And the comte placed the muzzle of the weapon against Florestan's breast.

The noise without announced that the door of the cabinet could not long resist. The vicomte saw he was lost. A sudden and desperate resolution lighted up his countenance. He no longer struggled with his father, and he said to him, with equal firmness and resignation:

"You are right, my father! Give me the pistol! There is infamy enough on my name! The life in store for me is frightful, and is not worth the trouble of a struggle. Give me the pistol! You shall see if I am a coward!" and he put forth his hand to take the pistol. "But, at least, one word,—one single word of consolation,—pity,—farewell!" said Florestan; and his trembling lips, his paleness, his agitated features, all betokened the terrible emotion of this frightful moment.

"But what if he were, indeed, my son!" thought the comte, with terror, and hesitating to hand him the deadly instrument. "If he were my son I ought to hesitate before such a sacrifice."

A loud cracking of the cabinet door announced that it was being forced.



"My father, they are coming! Oh, now I feel that death is indeed a benefit. Yes, now I thank you! But, at least, your hand,—and forgive me!"

In spite of his sternness, the comte could not repress a shudder, as he said, in a voice of emotion:

"I forgive you."

"My father, the door opens; go to them, that, at least, they may not even suspect you. Besides, if they enter here, they will prevent me from completing,—adieu!"

The steps of several persons were heard in the next room. Florestan placed the muzzle of the pistol to his heart. It went off at the instant when the comte, to avoid the horrid sight, turned away his head, and rushed out of the salon, whose curtains closed upon him.

At the sound of this explosion, at the sight of the comte, pale and haggard, the commissary stopped short at the threshold of the door, making a sign to his agents to pause also.

Informed by Boyer that the vicomte was shut up with his father, the magistrate understood all, and respected his deep grief.

"Dead!" exclaimed the comte, hiding his face in his hands. "Dead!" he repeated in a tone of agony. "It was just,—better death than infamy! But it is horrible!"

"Sir," said the magistrate, sorrowfully, after a few minutes' silence, "spare yourself a painful spectacle,—leave the house. And now I have another duty to fulfil, even more painful than that which summoned me hither."

"You are quite right, sir," said M. de Saint-Remy; "as to the sufferer by this robbery, you will request him to call on M. Dupont, the banker."

"In the Rue Richelieu? He is very well known," replied the magistrate.

"What is the estimated value of the stolen diamonds?"

"About thirty thousand francs. The person who bought them, and by whom the fraud was detected, gave that amount for them to your son."

"I can still pay it, sir. Let the jeweller go to my banker the day after tomorrow, and I will have it all arranged."

The commissary bowed. The comte left the room.

After the departure of the latter, the magistrate, deeply affected by this unlooked-for scene, went slowly towards the salon, the curtains of which were closed. He moved them on one side with agitation.

"Nobody!" he exclaimed, amazed beyond measure, and looking around him, unable to see the least trace of the tragic event which he believed had just occurred.

Then, seeing a small door in the panel of the apartment, he went towards it. It was fastened in the side of the secret staircase.

"It was a trick, and he has escaped by this door!" he exclaimed, with vexation.

And in fact, the vicomte, having in his father's presence placed the pistol on his heart, had very dexterously fired it under his arm, and rapidly made off.

In spite of the most careful search throughout the house, they could not discover Florestan.

During the conversation with his father and the commissary, he had quickly gained the boudoir, then the conservatory, then the lone alley, and so to the Champs Elysées.

The picture of this ignoble degradation in opulence is a sad thing.

We are aware of it. But for want of warnings, the richer classes have also fatally their miseries, vices, crimes. Nothing is more frequent and more afflicting than those insensate, barren prodigalities which we have now described, and which always entail ruin, loss of consideration, baseness, or infamy. It is a deplorable, sad spectacle, just like contemplating a flourishing field of wheat destroyed by a herd of wild beasts. No doubt that inheritance, property, are, and ought to be, inviolable, sacred. Wealth acquired or transmitted ought to be able to shine with impunity and magnificently in the eyes of the poor and suffering masses. We must, too, see those frightful disproportions which exist between the millionaire Saint-Remy, and the artisan Morel. But, inasmuch as these inevitable disproportions are consecrated, protected by the law, so those who possess such wealth ought morally to be accountable to those who have only probity, resignation, courage, and desire to labour.

In the eyes of reason, human right, and even of a well-understood social interest, a great fortune should be a hereditary deposit, confided to prudent, firm, skilful, generous hands, which, entrusted at the same time to fructify and expend this fortune, know how to fertilise, vivify, and ameliorate all that should have the felicity to find themselves within the scope of its splendid and salutary rays.

And sometimes it is so, but the instances are very rare. How many young men, like Saint-Remy, masters at twenty of a large patrimony, spend it foolishly in idleness, in waste, in vice, for want of knowing how to employ their wealth more advantageously either for themselves or for the public. Others, alarmed at the instability of human affairs, save in the meanest manner. Thus there are those who, knowing that a fixed fortune always diminishes, give themselves up, fools or rogues, to that hazardous, immoral gaming, which the powers that be encourage and patronise.

How can it be otherwise? Who imparts to inexperienced youth that knowledge, that instruction, those rudiments of individual and social economy? No one.

The rich man is thrown into the heart of society with his riches, as the poor man with his poverty. No one takes any more care of the superfluities of the one than of the wants of the other. No one thinks any more of making the one moralise than the other. Ought not power to fulfil this great and noble task?

If, taking to its pity the miseries, the continually increasing troubles, of the still resigned workmen, repressing a rivalry injurious to all, and, addressing itself finally to the imminent question of the organisation of labour, it gave itself the salutary lesson of the association of capital and labour; and if there were an honourable, intelligent, equitable association, which should assure the well-doing of the artisan, without injuring the fortune of the rich, and which, establishing between the two classes the bonds of affection and gratitude, would for ever keep safeguard over the tranquillity of the state,—how powerful, then, would be the consequences of such a practical instruction!

Amongst the rich, who then would hesitate as to the dishonourable, disastrous chances of stock-jobbing, the gross pleasures of avarice, the foolish vanities of a ruinous dissipation; or, a means at once remunerative and beneficial, which would shed ease, morality, happiness, and joy, over scores of families?

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ADIEUX

The day after that on which the Comte de Saint-Remy had been so shamefully tricked by his son, a touching scene took place at St. Lazare at the hour of recreation amongst the prisoners.

On this day, during the walk of the other prisoners, Fleur-de-Marie was seated on a bench close to the fountain of the courtyard, which was already named "La Goualeuse's Bench." By a kind of taciturn agreement, the prisoners had entirely given up this seat to her, as she had evinced a marked preference for it,—for the young girl's influence had decidedly increased. La Goualeuse had selected this bench, situated close to the basin, because the small quantity of moss which velveted the margin of the reservoir reminded her of the verdure of the fields, as the clear water with which it was filled reminded her of the small river of Bouqueval. To the saddened gaze of a prisoner a tuft of grass is a meadow, a flower is a garden.

Relying on the kind promises of Madame d'Harville, Fleur-de-Marie had for two days expected her release from St. Lazare. Although she had no reason for being anxious about the delay in her discharge, the young girl, from her experience in misfortune, scarcely ventured to hope for a speedy liberation. Since her return amongst creatures whose appearance revived at each moment in her mind the incurable memory of her early disgrace, Fleur-de-Marie's sadness had become more and more overwhelming. This was not all. A new subject of trouble, distress, and almost alarm to her, had arisen from the impassioned excitement of her gratitude towards Rodolph.

It was strange, but she only fathomed the depth of the abyss into which she had been plunged, in order to measure the distance which separated her from him whose perfection appeared to her more than human, from this man whose goodness was so extreme, and his power so terrible to the wicked. In spite of the respect with which her adoration for him was imbued, sometimes, alas! Fleur-de-Marie feared to detect in this adoration the symptoms of love, but of a love as secret as it was deep, as chaste as it was secret, and as hopeless as it was chaste. The unhappy girl had not thought of reading this withering revelation in her heart until after her interview with Madame d'Harville, who was herself smitten with a love for Rodolph, of which he himself was ignorant.

After the departure and the promises of the marquise, Fleur-de-Marie should have been transported with joy on thinking of her friends at

Bouqueval, of Rodolph whom she was again about to see. But she was not. Her heart was painfully distressed, and to her memory occurred incessantly the severe language, the haughty scrutiny, the angry looks, of Madame d'Harville, as the poor prisoner had been excited to enthusiasm when alluding to her benefactor. By singular intuition La Goualeuse had thus detected a portion of Madame d'Harville's secret.

"The excess of my gratitude to M. Rodolph offended this young lady, so handsome and of such high rank," thought Fleur-de-Marie; "now I comprehend the severity of her words, they expressed a jealous disdain. She jealous of me! Then she must love him, and I must love, too—him? Yes, and my love must have betrayed itself in spite of me! Love him,—I—I—a creature fallen for ever, ungrateful and wretched as I am! Oh, if it were so, death were a hundred times preferable!"

Let us hasten to say that the unhappy girl, thus a martyr to her feelings, greatly exaggerated what she called her love.

To her profound gratitude towards Rodolph was united involuntary admiration of the gracefulness, strength, and manly beauty which distinguished him from other men. Nothing could be less gross, more pure, than this admiration; but it existed in full and active force, because physical beauty is always attractive. And then the voice of blood, so often denied, mute, unknown, or misinterpreted, is sometimes in full force, and these throbs of passionate tenderness which attracted Fleur-de-Marie towards Rodolph, and which so greatly startled her, because in her ignorance she misinterpreted their tendency, these feelings resulted from mysterious sympathies, as palpable, but as inexplicable, as the resemblance of features. In a word, Fleur-de-Marie, on learning that she was Rodolph's daughter, could have accounted to herself for the strong affection she had for him, and thus, completely enlightened on the point, she would have admired without a scruple her father's manly beauty.

Thus do we explain Fleur-de-Marie's dejection. Although she was every instant awaiting, according to Madame d'Harville's promise, her release from St. Lazare, Fleur-de-Marie, melancholy and pensive, was seated on her bench near the basin, looking with a kind of mechanical interest at the sports of some bold little birds who came to play on the margin of the stonework. She had ceased for an instant to work at a baby's nightgown, which she had just finished hemming. Need we say that this nightgown belonged to the lying-in clothes so generously offered to Mont Saint-Jean by the prisoners, through the kind intervention of Fleur-de-Marie? The poor misshapen protégée of La Goualeuse was sitting at her feet, working at a

small cap, and, from time to time, casting at her benefactress a look at once grateful, timid, and confiding, such a look as a dog throws at his master. The beauty, attraction, and delicious sweetness of Fleur-de-Marie had inspired this fallen creature with sentiments of the most profound respect.

There is always something holy and great in the aspirations of a heart, which, although degraded, yet feels for the first time sensations of gratitude; and, up to this time, no one had ever given Mont Saint-Jean the opportunity of even testifying whether or not she could comprehend the religious ardour of a sentiment so wholly unknown to her. After some moments Fleur-de-Marie shuddered slightly, wiped a tear from her eyes, and resumed her sewing with much activity.

"You will not then leave off your work even during the time for rest, my good angel?" said Mont Saint-Jean to La Goualeuse.

"I have not given you any money towards buying your lying-in clothes, and I must therefore furnish my part with my own work," replied the young girl.

"Your part! Why, but for you, instead of this good white linen, this nice warm wrapper for my child, I should have nothing but the rags they dragged in the mud of the yard. I am very grateful to my companions who have been so very kind to me; that's quite true! But you!—ah, you!—how can I tell you all I feel?" added the poor creature, hesitating, and greatly embarrassed how to express her thought. "There," she said, "there is the sun, is it not? That is the sun?"

"Yes, Mont Saint-Jean; I am attending to you," replied Fleur-de-Marie, stooping her lovely face towards the hideous countenance of her companion.

"Ah, you'll laugh at me," she replied, sorrowfully. "I want to say something, and I do not know how."

"Oh, yes, say it, Mont Saint-Jean!"

"How kind you look always," said the prisoner, looking at Fleur-de-Marie in a sort of ecstasy; "your eyes encourage me,—those kind eyes! Well, then, I will try and say what I wish: There is the sun, is it not? It is so warm, it lights up the prison, it is very pleasant to see and feel, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"But I have an idea,—the sun didn't make itself, and if we are grateful to it, why, there is greater reason still why—"

"Why we should be grateful to him who created it; that is what you mean, Mont Saint-Jean? You are right; and we ought to pray to, adore him,—he is God!"

"Yes, that is my idea!" exclaimed the prisoner, joyously. "That is it! I ought to be grateful to my companions, but I ought to pray to, adore you, Goualeuse, for it is you who made them so good to me, instead of being so unkind as they had been."

"It is God you should thank, Mont Saint-Jean, and not me."

"Yes, yes, yes, it is you, I see you; and it is you who did me such kindness, by yourself and others."

"But if I am as good as you say, Mont Saint-Jean, it is God who has made me so, and it is he, therefore, whom we ought to thank."

"Ah, indeed, it may be so since you say it!" replied the prisoner, whose mind was by no means decided; "and if you desire it, let it be so; as you please."

"Yes, my poor Mont Saint-Jean, pray to him constantly, that is the best way of proving to me that you love me a little."

"If I love you, Goualeuse? Don't you remember, then, what you said to those other prisoners to prevent them from beating me?—'It is not only her whom you beat, it is her child also!' Well, it is all the same as the way I love you; it is not only for myself that I love you, but also for my child."

"Thanks, thanks, Mont Saint-Jean, you please me exceedingly when you say that." And Fleur-de-Marie, much moved, extended her hand to her companion.

"What a pretty, little, fairy-like hand! How white and small!" said Mont Saint-Jean, receding as though she were afraid to touch it with her coarse and clumsy hands.

Yet, after a moment's hesitation, she respectfully applied her lips to the end of the slender fingers which Fleur-de-Marie extended to her, then, kneeling suddenly, she fixed on her an attentive, concentrated look.

"Come and sit here by me," said La Goualeuse.

"Oh, no, indeed; never, never!"

"Why not?"

"Respect discipline, as my brave Mont Saint-Jean used to say; soldiers together, officers together, each with his equals."

"You are crazy; there is no difference between us two."

"No difference! And you say that when I see you, as I do now, as handsome as a queen. Oh, what do you mean now? Leave me alone, on my knees, that I may look at you as I do now. Who knows, although I am a real monster, my child may perhaps resemble you? They say that sometimes happens from a look."

Then by a scruple of incredible delicacy in a creature of her position, fearing, perhaps, that she had humiliated or wounded Fleur-de-Marie by her strange desire, Mont Saint-Jean added, sorrowfully:

"No, no, I was only joking, Goualeuse; I never could allow myself to look at you with such an idea,—unless with your free consent. If my child is as ugly as I am, what shall I care? I sha'n't love it any the less, poor little, unhappy thing; it never asked to be born, as they say. And if it lives what will become of it?" she added, with a mournful and reflective air. "Alas, yes, what will become of us?"

La Goualeuse shuddered at these words. In fact, what was to become of the child of this miserable, degraded, abased, poor, despised creature?

"What a fate! What a future!"

"Do not think of that, Mont Saint-Jean," said Fleur-de-Marie; "let us hope that your child will find benevolent friends in its way."

"That chance never occurs twice, Goualeuse," replied Mont Saint-Jean, bitterly, and shaking her head. "I have met with you, that is a great chance; and then—no offence—I should much rather my child had had that good luck than myself, and that wish is all I can do for it!"

"Pray, pray, and God will hear you."

"Well, I will pray, if that is any pleasure to you, Goualeuse, for it may perhaps bring me good luck. Indeed, who could have thought, when La Louve beat me, and I was the butt of all the world, that I should meet with my little guardian angel, who with her pretty soft voice would be even



stronger than all the rest, and that La Louve who is so strong and so wicked—"

"Yes, but La Louve became very good to you as soon as she reflected that you were doubly to be pitied."

"Yes, that is very true, thanks to you; I shall never forget it. But, tell me, Goualeuse, why did she the other day request to have her quarters changed,—La Louve, she, who, in spite of her passionate temper, seemed unable to do without you?"

"She is rather wilful."

"How odd! A woman, who came this morning from the quarter of the prison where La Louve now is, says that she is wholly changed."

"How?"

"Instead of quarrelling and contending with everybody, she is sad, quite sad, and sits by herself, and if they speak to her she turns her back and makes no answer. It is really wonderful to see her quite still, who used always to be making such a riot; and then the woman says another thing, which I really cannot believe."

"And what is that?"

"Why, that she had seen La Louve crying; La Louve crying,—that's impossible!"

"Poor Louve! It was on my account she changed her quarters; I vexed her without intending it," said La Goualeuse, with a sigh.

"You vex any one, my good angel?"

At this moment, the inspectress, Madame Armand, entered the yard. After having looked for Fleur-de-Marie, she came towards her with a smiling and satisfied air.

"Good news, my child."

"What do you mean, madame?" said La Goualeuse, rising.

"Your friends have not forgotten you, they have obtained your discharge; the governor has just received the information."

"Can it be possible, madame? Ah, what happiness!"

Fleur-de-Marie's emotion was so violent that she turned pale, placed her hand on her heart, which throbbed violently, and fell back on the seat.

"Don't agitate yourself, my poor girl," said Madame Armand, kindly. "Fortunately these shocks are not dangerous."

"Ah, madame, what gratitude!"

"No doubt it is Madame d'Harville who has obtained your liberty. There is an elderly female charged to conduct you to the persons who are interested in you. Wait for me, I will return for you; I have some directions to give in the work-room."

It would be difficult to paint the expression of extreme desolation which overcast the features of Mont Saint-Jean, when she learned that her good angel, as she called La Goualeuse, was about to quit St. Lazare. This woman's grief was less caused by the fear of becoming again the ill-used butt of the prison, than by her anguish at seeing herself separated from the only being who had ever testified any interest in her.

Still seated at the foot of the bench, Mont Saint-Jean lifted both her hands to the sides of her matted and coarse hair, which projected in disorder from the sides of her old black cap, as if to tear them out; then this deep affliction gave way to dejection, and she drooped her head and remained mute and motionless, with her face hidden in her hands, and her elbows resting on her knees.

In spite of her joy at leaving the prison, Fleur-de-Marie could not help shuddering when she thought for an instant of the Chouette and the Schoolmaster, recollecting that these two monsters had made her swear never to inform her benefactors of her wretched fate. But these dispiriting thoughts were soon effaced from Fleur-de-Marie's mind before the hope of seeing Bouqueval once more, with Madame Georges and Rodolph, to whom she meant to intercede for La Louve and Martial. It even seemed to her that the warm feeling which she reproached herself for having of her benefactor, being no longer nourished by sadness and solitude, would be calmed down as soon as she resumed her rustic occupations, which she so much delighted in sharing with the good and simple inhabitants of the farm.

Astonished at the silence of her companion, a silence whose source she did not suspect, La Goualeuse touched her gently on the shoulder, saying to her:

"Mont Saint-Jean, as I am now free, can I be in any way useful to you?"

The prisoner trembled as she felt La Goualeuse's hand upon her, let her hands drop on her knees, and turned towards the young girl, her face streaming with tears. So bitter a grief overspread the features of Mont Saint-Jean that their ugliness had disappeared.

"What is the matter?" said La Goualeuse. "You are weeping!"

"You are going away!" murmured the poor prisoner, with a voice broken by sobs. "And I had never thought that you would go away, and that I should never see you more,—never, no, never!"

"I assure you that I shall always think of your good feeling towards me, Mont Saint-Jean."

"Oh, and to think how I loved you, when I was sitting there at your feet on the ground! It seemed as if I was saved,—that I had nothing more to fear! It was not for the blows which the other women may, perhaps, begin again to give me that I said that I have led a hard life; but it seemed to me that you were my good fortune, and would bring good luck to my child, just because you had pity on me. But, then, when one is used to be ill-treated, one is then more sensible than others to kindness." Then, interrupting herself, to burst again into a loud fit of sobs,—*"Well, well, it's done,—it's finished,—all over! And so it must be some day or other. I was wrong to think any otherwise. It's done—done—done!"*

"Courage! Courage! I will think of you, as you will remember me."

"Oh, as to that, they may tear me to pieces before they shall ever make me forget you! I may grow old,—as old as the streets,—but I shall always have your angel face before me. The first word I will teach my child shall be your name, Goualeuse; for but for you it would have perished with cold."

"Listen to me, Mont Saint-Jean!" said Fleur-de-Marie, deeply affected by the attachment of this unhappy woman. "I cannot promise to do anything for you, although I know some very charitable persons; but, for your child, it is a different thing; it is wholly innocent; and the persons of whom I speak will, perhaps, take charge of it, and bring it up, when you can resolve on parting from it."

"Part from it! Never, oh, never!" exclaimed Mont Saint-Jean, with excitement. "What would become of me now, when I have so built upon it?"

"But how will you bring it up? Boy or girl, it ought to be made honest; and for that—"

"It must eat honest bread. I know that, Goualeuse,—I believe it. It is my ambition; and I say so to myself every day. So, in leaving here, I will never put my foot under a bridge again. I will turn rag-picker, street-sweeper,—something honest; for I owe that, if not to myself, at least to my child, when I have the honour of having one," she added, with a sort of pride.

"And who will take care of your child whilst you are at work?" inquired the Goualeuse. "Will it not be better, if possible, as I hope it will be, to put it in the country with some worthy people, who will make a good country girl or a stout farmer's boy of it? You can come and see it from time to time; and one day you may, perhaps, find the means to live near it constantly. In the country, one lives on so little!"

"Yes, but to separate myself from it,—to separate myself from it! It would be my only joy,—I, who have nothing else in the world to love,—nothing that loves me!"

"You must think more of it than of yourself, my poor Mont Saint-Jean. In two or three days I will write to Madame Armand, and if the application I mean to make in favour of your child should succeed, you will have no occasion to say to it, as you said so painfully just now, 'Alas! What will become of it?'"

Madame Armand interrupted this conversation, and came to seek Fleur-de-Marie. After having again burst into sobs, and bathed with her despairing tears the young girl's hands, Mont Saint-Jean fell on the seat perfectly overcome, not even thinking of the promise which Fleur-de-Marie had just made with respect to her child.

"Poor creature!" said Madame Armand, as she quitted the yard, accompanied by Fleur-de-Marie, "her gratitude towards you gives me a better opinion of her."

Learning that La Goualeuse was discharged, the other prisoners, far from envying her this favour, displayed their delight. Some of them surrounded Fleur-de-Marie, and took leave of her with adieux full of cordiality, frankly congratulating her on her speedy release from prison.

"Well, I must say," said one, "this little fair girl has made us pass an agreeable moment, when we agreed to make up the basket of clothes for Mont Saint-Jean. That will be remembered at St. Lazare."

When Fleur-de-Marie had quitted the prison buildings, the inspectress said to her:

"Now, my dear child, go to the clothing-room, and leave your prison clothes. Put on your peasant girl's clothes, whose rustic simplicity suits you so well. Adieu! You will be happy, for you are going to be under the protection of good people, and leave these walls, never again to return to them. But I am really hardly reasonable," said Madame Armand, whose eyes were moistened with tears. "I really cannot conceal from you how much I am attached to you, my poor girl!" Then, seeing the tears in Fleur-de-Marie's eyes, the inspectress added, "But we must not sadden your departure thus."

"Ah, madame, is it not through your recommendation that this young lady to whom I owe my liberty has become interested in me?"

"Yes, and I am happy that I did so; my presentiments had not deceived me."

At this moment a clock struck.

"That is the hour of work; I must return to the rooms. Adieu! Once more adieu, my dear child!"

Madame Armand, as much affected as Fleur-de-Marie, embraced her tenderly, and then said to one of the women employed in the establishment:

"Take mademoiselle to the vestiary."

A quarter of an hour afterwards, Fleur-de-Marie, dressed like a peasant girl, as we have seen her at the farm at Bouqueval, entered the waiting-room, where Madame Séraphin was expecting her. The housekeeper of the notary, Jacques Ferrand, had come to seek the unhappy girl, and conduct her to the Isle du Ravageur.

## CHAPTER XIV

### RECOLLECTIONS

Jacques Ferrand had quickly and readily obtained the liberty of Fleur-de-Marie, which, indeed, only required a simple official order. Instructed by the Chouette of La Goualeuse being at St. Lazare, he had immediately applied to one of his clients, an honourable and influential man, saying that a young female who had once erred, but afterwards sincerely repented, being now confined in St. Lazare, was in danger of forgetting her good resolutions, in consequence of her association with the other prisoners. This young girl having been (added the notary) strongly recommended to him by persons of high respectability, who wanted to take care of her when she quitted the prison, he besought his client, in the name of religion, virtue, and the future return to goodness of the poor girl, to interest himself in obtaining her liberation. And, further to screen himself from all chance of future consequences, the notary most earnestly charged his client not to allow his name to transpire in the business on any account, as he was desirous of avoiding any mention of having been employed in the furtherance of so good and charitable a work.

This request, which was attributed to the unassuming modesty and benevolence of Jacques Ferrand, a man equally esteemed for his piety as for honour and probity, was strictly complied with, the liberation of Fleur-de-Marie being asked and obtained in the client's name alone; and by way of evincing a still greater regard for the shrinking delicacy of the notary's nature, the order for quitting the prison was sent under cover to Jacques Ferrand, that he might send it on to the parties interesting themselves for the young girl. And when Madame Séraphin presented the order to the directors of the prison, she stated herself to have been sent by the parties feeling a desire to save the young person it referred to.

From the favourable manner in which the matron of the prison had spoken to Madame d'Harville of Fleur-de-Marie, not a doubt existed as to its being to that lady La Goualeuse was indebted for her return to freedom. There was, therefore, no chance of the appearance of Madame Séraphin exciting any mistrust in the mind of her victim. Madame Séraphin could so well assume the look and manner of what is commonly styled "a nice motherly kind of person," that it required a more than ordinary share of penetration to discover a strong proportion of falsehood, deceit, and cunning behind the smooth glance or the hypocritical smile; but, spite of the hardened villainy with which she had shared so long and deeply in the nefarious practices of her employer, Madame Séraphin, old and hackneyed as she was, could not

view without emotion the exquisite loveliness of the being her own hand had surrendered, even as a child, to the cruel care of the Chouette, and whom she was now leading to an inevitable death.

"Well, my dear," cried Madame Séraphin, speaking in a tone of honeyed sweetness, as Fleur-de-Marie drew near, "I suppose you are very glad to get away from prison."

"Oh, yes, indeed, ma'am. I presume it is Madame d'Harville who has had the goodness to obtain my liberty for me?"

"You are not mistaken in your guess. But, come, we are already a little behindhand, and we have still some distance to go."

"We are going to Madame Georges at the farm at Bouqueval, are we not, madame?" cried La Goualeuse.

"Oh, yes, certainly, by all means!" answered the femme de charge, in order to avert all suspicion from the mind of her victim. "Yes, my dear, we are going into the country, as you say;" and then added, with a sort of good-humoured teasing, "But that is not all; before you see Madame Georges, a little surprise awaits you—Come, come, our coach is waiting below! Ah, how you will be astonished by and by! Come, then, let us go. Your most obedient servant, gentlemen!"

And, with a multitude of bows and salutations from Madame Séraphin to the registrar, his clerk, and all the various members of the establishment then and there assembled, she descended the stairs with La Goualeuse, followed by an officer, to command the opening of the gates through which they had to pass. The last had just closed behind them, and the two females found themselves beneath the vast porch which looks out upon the street of the Faubourg St. Denis, when they nearly ran against a young female, who appeared hurrying towards the prison, as though full of anxiety to visit one of its inmates. It was Rigolette, as pretty and light-footed as ever, her charming face set off by a simple yet becoming cap, tastefully ornamented with cherry-coloured riband; while her dark brown hair was laid in bright glossy bands down each clear and finely rounded cheek. She was wrapped in a plaid shawl, over which fell a snowy muslin collar, secured by a small knot of riband. On her arm she carried a straw basket; while, thanks to her light, careful way of picking her steps, her thick-soled boots were scarcely soiled; and yet the poor girl had walked far that day.

"Rigolette!" exclaimed Fleur-de-Marie, as she recognised her old prison companion, and the sharer in her rural excursions.

"La Goualeuse!" returned the grisette, and with one accord the two girls threw themselves into each other's arms.

Nothing more touchingly beautiful could be imagined than the contrast between these two young creatures, both so lovely, though differing so entirely from one another in appearance: the one exquisitely fair, with large, melancholy blue eyes, and an outline of feature of faultless purity, the pale, pensive, intellectual cast of the whole countenance reminding the observer of one of those sweet designs of a village maid by Greuze,—the same clear delicacy of complexion, the same ineffable mixture of graceful pensiveness and candid innocence; the other a sparkling brunette, with round rosy cheek and bright black eyes, set off by a laughing, dimpled face and mirthful air,—the very impersonation of youthful gaiety and light-heartedness, the rare and touching specimen of happy poverty, of contented labour, and honest industry!

After the first burst of their affectionate greetings had passed away, the two girls regarded each other with close and tender scrutiny. The features of Rigolette were radiant with the joy she experienced at this unexpected meeting; Fleur-de-Marie, on the contrary, felt humbled and confused at the sight of her early friend, which recalled but too vividly to her mind the few days of peaceful calm she had known previous to her first degradation.

"Dear, dear Goualeuse!" exclaimed the grisette, fixing her bright eyes with intense delight on her companion. "To think of meeting you at last, after so long an absence!"

"It is, indeed, a delightful surprise!" replied Fleur-de-Marie. "It is so very long since we have seen each other."

"Ah, but now," said Rigolette, for the first time remarking the rustic habiliments of La Goualeuse, "I can account for seeing nothing of you during the last six months,—you live in the country, I see?"

"Yes," answered Fleur-de-Marie, casting down her eyes, "I have done so for some time past."

"And I suppose that, like me, you have come to see some friend in this prison?"



"Yes," stammered poor Fleur-de-Marie, blushing up to her eyes with shame and confusion; "I was going—I mean I have just been seeing some one, and, of course, am now returning home."

"You live a good way out of Paris, I dare say? Ah, you dear, kind girl! It is just like you to come all this distance to perform a good action. Do you remember the poor lying-in woman to whom you gave, not only your mattress, with the necessary baby-clothes, but even what money you had left, and which we meant to have spent in a country excursion; for you were then crazy for the country, my pretty village maid?"

"And you, who cared nothing about it, how very good-natured and obliging of you to go thither, merely for the sake of pleasing me!"

"Well, but I pleased myself at the same time. Why, you, who were always inclined to be grave and serious, when once you got among the fields, or found yourself in the thick shade of a wood, oh, then, what a wild, overjoyed little madcap you became! Nobody would have fancied it the same person,—flying after the butterflies,—crowding your hands and apron with more flowers than either could hold. It made me quite delighted to see you! It was quite treat enough for a week to recollect all your happiness and enjoyment. But do let me have another look at you: how sweetly pretty you look in that nice little round cap! Yes, decidedly, you were cut out to be a country girl,—just as much as I was to be a Paris grisette. Well, I hope you are happy, since you have got the sort of line you prefer; and, certainly, after all, I cannot say I was so very much astonished at your never coming near me. 'Oh,' said I, 'that dear Goualeuse is not suited for Paris; she is a true wild flower, as the song says; and the air of great cities is not for them. So,' said I, 'my pretty, dear Goualeuse has found a place in some good honest family who live in the country.' And I was right, was I not, dear?"

"Yes," said Fleur-de-Marie, nearly sinking with confusion, "quite right."

"There is only one thing I have to reproach you for."

"Reproach me?" inquired Fleur-de-Marie, looking tearfully at her companion.

"Yes, you ought to have let me know before you went. You should have said 'good-bye,' if you were only leaving me at night to return in the morning; or, at any rate, you should have sent me word how you were going on."

"I—I—quitted Paris so suddenly," stammered out Fleur-de-Marie, becoming momentarily more and more embarrassed, "that, indeed—I—was not able—"

"Oh, I'm not at all angry! I don't speak of it to scold you! I am far too happy in meeting you unexpectedly; and, besides, I commend you for getting out of such a dangerous place as Paris, where it is so difficult to earn a quiet livelihood; for, you know, two poor friendless girls like you and me might be led into mischief, without thinking of, or intending, any harm. When there is no person to advise, it leaves one so very defenceless; and then come a parcel of deceitful, flattering men, with their false promises, when, perhaps, want and misery are staring you in the face. There, for instance, do you recollect that pretty girl called Julie?—and Rosine, who had such a beautiful fair skin, and such coal black eyes?"

"Oh, yes, I recollect them very well!"

"Then, my dear Goualeuse, you will be extremely sorry to hear that they were both led astray, seduced, and deserted, till at last, from one unfortunate step to another, they have become like the miserable creatures confined in this prison!"

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Fleur-de-Marie, hanging down her head, and blushing the deep blush of shame.

Rigolette, misinterpreting the real cause of her friend's exclamation, continued:

"I admit that their conduct is wrong, nay wicked; but then, you know, my dear Goualeuse, because you and I have been so fortunate as to preserve ourselves from harm,—you, because you have been living with good and virtuous people in the country, out of the reach of temptation; and I, because I had no time to waste in listening to a set of make-believe lovers; and also because I found greater pleasure in having a few birds, and in trying to get things a little comfortable and snug around me,—I say, it is not for you and me to be too severe with others; and God alone knows whether opportunity, deceit, and destitution may not have had much to do in causing the misery and disgrace of Julie and Rosine! And who can say whether, in their place, we might not have acted as they have done?"

"Alas!" cried Fleur-de-Marie, "I accuse them not; on the contrary, I pity them from my heart!"

"Come, come, my dear child!" interrupted Madame Séraphin, impatiently offering her arm to her victim, "you forget that I said we were already behind our time."

"Pray, madame, grant us a little more time," said Rigolette. "It is so very long since I saw my dear Goualeuse!"

"I should be glad to do so," replied Madame Séraphin, much annoyed at this meeting between the two friends; "but it is now three o'clock, and we have a long way to go. However, I will manage to allow you ten minutes longer gossip. So pray make the best of your time."

"And tell me, I pray, of yourself," said Fleur-de-Marie, affectionately pressing the hands of Rigolette between her own. "Are you still the same merry, light-hearted, and happy creature I always knew you?"

"I was happy and gay enough a few days ago; but now—"

"You sorrowful? I can hardly believe it."

"Ah, but indeed I am! Not that I am at all changed from what you always found me,—a regular Roger Bontemps,—one to whom nothing was a trouble. But then, you see, everybody is not like me; so that, when I see those I love unhappy, why, naturally, that makes me unhappy, too."

"Still the same kind, warm-hearted girl!"

"Why, who could help being grieved as I am? Just imagine my having come hither to visit a poor young creature,—a sort of neighbouring lodger in the house where I live,—as meek and mild as a lamb she was, poor thing! Well, she has been most shamefully and unjustly accused,—that she has; never mind of what just now! Her name is Louise Morel. She is the daughter of an honest and deserving man, a lapidary, who has gone mad in consequence of her being put in prison."

At the name of Louise Morel, one of the victims of the notary's villainy, Madame Séraphin started, and gazed earnestly at Rigolette. The features of the grisette were, however, perfectly unknown to her; nevertheless, from that instant, the femme de charge listened with an attentive ear to the conversation of the two girls.

"Poor thing," continued the Goualeuse; "how happy it must make her to find that you have not forgotten her in her misfortunes!"

"And that is not all; it really seems as though some spell hung over me! But, truly and positively, this is the second poor prisoner I have left my home to-day to visit! I have come a long way, and also from a prison,—but that was a place of confinement for men."

"You, Rigolette,—in a prison for men?"

"Yes, I have, indeed. I have a very dejected customer there, I can assure you. There,—you see my basket; it is divided in two parts, and each of my poor friends has an equal share in its contents. I have got some clean things here for poor Louise, and I have left a similar packet with Germain,—that is the name of my other poor captive. I cannot help feeling ready to cry when I think of our last interview. I know it will do no good, but still, for all that, the tears will come into my eyes."

"But what is it that distresses you so much?"

"Why, because, you see, poor Germain frets so much at being mixed up in his prison with the many bad characters that are there, that it has quite broken his spirits; he seems to have no taste, no relish for anything, has quite lost his appetite, and is wasting away daily. So, when I perceived the change, I said to myself: 'Oh, poor fellow, I see he eats nothing. I must make him something nice and delicate to tempt his appetite a little; he shall have one of those little dainties he used to be so fond of when he and I were next-room neighbours.' When I say dainties, of course I don't mean such as rich people expect by that name. No, no, my dish was merely some beautiful mealy potatoes, mashed with a little milk and sugar. Well, my dear Goualeuse, I prepared this for him, put it in a nice little china basin and took it to him in his prison, telling him I had brought him a little titbit he used once to be fond of, and which I hoped he would like as well as in former days. I told him I had prepared it entirely myself, hoping to make him relish it. But alas, no! What do you think?"

"Oh, what?"

"Why, instead of increasing his appetite, I only set him crying; for, when I displayed my poor attempts at cookery, he seemed to take no notice of anything but the basin, out of which he had been accustomed to see me take my milk when we supped together; and then he burst into tears, and, by way of making matters still better, I began to cry, too, although I tried all I could to restrain myself. You see how everything went against me. I had gone with the intention of enlivening his spirits, and, instead of that, there I was making him more melancholy than ever."

"Still, the tears he shed were, no doubt, sweet and consoling tears!"

"Oh, never mind what sort of tears they were, that was not the way I meant to have consoled him. But la! All this while I am talking to you of Germain

as if you knew him. He is an old acquaintance of mine, one of the best young men in the world, as timid and gentle as any young girl could be, and whom I loved as a friend and a brother."

"Oh, then, of course, his troubles became yours also."

"To be sure. But just let me show you what a good heart he must have. When I was coming away, I asked him as usual what orders he had for me, saying jokingly, by way of making him smile, that I was his little housekeeper, and that I should be very punctual and exact in fulfilling whatever commissions he gave me, in order to remain in his employ. So then he, trying to smile in his turn, asked me to bring him one of Walter Scott's romances, which he had formerly read to me while I worked,—that romance was called 'Ivan—' 'Ivanhoe,' that's it. I was so much amused with this book that Germain read it twice over to me. Poor Germain! How very, very kind and attentive he was!"

"I suppose he wished to keep it as a reminiscence of bygone days?"

"No doubt of it; for he bade me go to the library from whence we had had it, and to purchase the very same volumes that had so much entertained us, and which we had read together,—not merely to hire them,—yes, positively to buy them out and out; and you may imagine that was something of a sacrifice for him, for he is no richer than you or I."

"He must have a noble and excellent heart to have thought of it," said the Goualeuse, deeply touched.

"I declare you are as much affected by it as I was, my dear, kind Goualeuse! But then, you see, the more I felt ready to cry, the more I tried to laugh; for, to shed tears twice during a visit, intended to be so very cheering and enlivening as mine was, was rather too bad. So, to drive all those thoughts out of my head, I began to remind him of the amusing story of a Jew,—a person we read about in the romance I was telling you of. But the more I rattled away, and the greater nonsense I tried to talk, the faster the large round tears gathered in his eyes, and he kept looking at me with such an expression of misery as quite broke my heart. And so—and so—at last my voice quite failed me, and I could do nothing but mingle my sobs with his. He had not regained his composure when I left him, and I felt quite provoked with myself for my folly. 'If that is the way,' said I, 'that I comfort and cheer up poor Germain, I think I had better stay away!' Really, when I remember all the fine things I intended to have said and done, by way of

keeping up his spirits, I feel quite spiteful towards myself for having so completely failed."

At the name of Germain, another victim of the notary's unprincipled persecution, Madame Séraphin redoubled her before close attention.

"And what has this poor young man done to deserve being put in prison?" inquired Fleur-de-Marie.

"What has he done?" exclaimed Rigolette, whose grief became swallowed up in indignation; "why, he has had the misfortune to fall into the hands of a wicked old notary,—the same as persecutes poor Louise."

"Of her whom you have come to see?"

"To be sure; she lived as servant with this notary, and Germain was also with him as cashier. It is too long a story to tell you now, how or of what he unjustly accuses the poor fellow; but one thing is quite certain, and that is, that the wretch of a notary pursues these two unfortunate beings, who have never done him the least harm, with the most determined malice and hatred. However, never mind,—a little patience, 'every one in their turn,'—that's all." Rigolette uttered these last words with a peculiarity of manner and expression that created considerable uneasiness in the mind of Madame Séraphin. Instead, therefore, of preserving the distance she had hitherto observed, she at once joined in the conversation, saying to Fleur-de-Marie, with a kind and maternal air:

"My dear girl, it is really growing too late for us to wait any longer,—we must go; we are waited for, I assure you, with much anxiety. I am sorry to hurry you away, because I can well imagine how much you must be interested in what your friend is relating; for even I, who know nothing of the two young persons she refers to, cannot help feeling my very heart ache for their undeserved sufferings. Is it possible there can be people in the world as wicked as the notary you were mentioning? Pray, my dear mademoiselle, what may be the name of this bad man,—if I may make so bold as to ask?"

Although Rigolette entertained not the slightest suspicion of the sincerity of Madame Séraphin's affected sympathy, yet, recollecting how strictly Rodolph had enjoined her to observe the utmost secrecy respecting the protection he bestowed on both Germain and Louise, she regretted having been led away by her affectionate zeal for her friends to use such words,—*"Patience; every one has his turn!"*

"His name, madame, is Ferrand,—M. Jacques Ferrand, Notary," replied Rigolette, skilfully adding, by way of compensation for her indiscreet warmth, "and it is the more wicked and shameful of him to torment Louise and Germain as he does, because the poor things have not a friend upon earth but myself, and, God knows, it is little I can do besides wishing them well out of their troubles!"

"Dear me,—poor things!" observed Madame Séraphin. "Well, I'm sure I hoped it was otherwise when I heard you say, 'Patience; every one has their turn!' I supposed you reckoned for certain upon some powerful protector to defend these people against that dreadful notary."

"Alas, no, madame!" answered Rigolette, hoping to destroy any suspicion Madame Séraphin might still harbour; "such, I am sorry to say, is not the case. For who would be generous and disinterested enough to take the part of two poor creatures like my unfortunate friends against a rich and powerful man like M. Ferrand?"

"Oh, there are many good and noble-minded persons capable of performing so good an action," pursued Fleur-de-Marie, after a moment's consideration, and with ill-restrained excitement; "I myself know one to whom it is equally a duty and a pleasure to succour and assist all who are in need or difficulty,—one who is beloved and valued by all good persons, as he is dreaded and hated by the bad."

Rigolette gazed on the Goualeuse with deep astonishment, and was just on the point of asserting that she, too (alluding to Rodolph), knew some one capable of courageously espousing the cause of the weak against the strong; but, faithful to the injunctions of her neighbour (as she styled the prince), she contented herself with merely saying, "Really, do you indeed know anybody capable of generously coming forward in defence of poor oppressed individuals, such as we have been talking of?"

"Indeed, I do. And, although I have already to solicit his goodness in favour of others also in severe trouble, yet, I am quite sure that, did he but know of the undeserved misfortunes of Louise and Germain, he would both rescue them from misery and punish their wicked persecutor; for his goodness and justice are inexhaustible."

Madame Séraphin surveyed her victim with surprise. "This girl," said she, mentally, "might be even more dangerous than we thought for. And, even if I had been weak enough to feel inclined to pity her, what I have just heard

would have rendered the little 'accident,' which is to rid us of her, quite inevitable."

"Then, dear Goualeuse, since you have so valuable an acquaintance, I beseech of you to recommend poor Louise and Germain to his notice," said Rigolette, wisely considering that her two protégées would be all the better for obtaining two protectors instead of one. "And pray say that they do not in the least deserve their present wretched fate."

"Make yourself perfectly easy," returned Fleur-de-Marie; "I promise to try to interest M. Rodolph in favour of your poor friends."

"Who did you say?" exclaimed Rigolette, "M. Rodolph?"

"Yes," replied La Goualeuse; "do you know him?"

"M. Rodolph?" again repeated Rigolette, perfectly bewildered; "is he a travelling clerk?"

"I really don't know what he is. But why are you so much astonished?"

"Because I know a M. Rodolph!"

"Perhaps it is not the same."

"Well, describe yours. What is he like?"

"In the first place, he is young."

"So is mine."

"With a countenance full of nobleness and goodness."

"Precisely," exclaimed Rigolette, whose amazement increased. "Oh, it must be the very man! Is your M. Rodolph rather dark-complexioned, with a small moustache?"

"Yes, yes."

"Is he tall and thin, with a beautiful figure, and quite a fashionable, gentlemanly sort of air,—wonderfully so, considering he is but a clerk? Now, then, does your M. Rodolph answer to that description?"



"Perfectly," answered Fleur-de-Marie; "and I feel quite sure that we both mean the same. The only thing that puzzles me is your fancying he is a clerk."

"Oh, but I know he is. He told me so himself."

"And you know him intimately?"

"Why, he is my next-door neighbour."

"M. Rodolph is?"

"I mean next-room neighbour; because he occupies an apartment on the fourth floor, next to mine."

"He—M. Rodolph—lodges in the next room to you?"

"Why, yes. But what do you find so astonishing in a thing as simple as that? He only earns about fifteen or eighteen hundred francs a year, and, of course, he could not afford a more expensive lodging,—though, certainly, he does not strike me as being a very careful or economical person; for, bless his dear heart, he actually does not know the price of the clothes he wears."

"No, no, it cannot be the same M. Rodolph I am acquainted with," said Fleur-de-Marie, reflecting seriously; "oh, no, quite impossible!"

"I suppose yours is a pattern of order and exactness?"

"He of whom I spoke, I must tell you, Rigolette," said Fleur-de-Marie, with enthusiasm, "is all-powerful; his name is never pronounced but with love and veneration; there is something awe-inspiring in his very aspect, giving one the desire to kneel in his presence and offer humble respect to his goodness and greatness."

"Ah, then, it is no use trying the comparison any further, my dear Goualeuse; for my M. Rodolph is neither powerful, great, nor imposing. He is very good-natured and merry, and all that; but oh, bless you, as for being a person one would be likely to go on one's knees to, why, he is quite the reverse. He cares no more for ceremony than I do, and even promised me to come and help me clean my apartment and polish the floor. And then, instead of being awe-inspiring, he settled with me to take me out of a Sunday anywhere I liked to go. So that, you see, he can't be a very great person. But, bless you, what am I thinking of? It seems as if my heart were wholly engrossed by my Sunday pleasures, instead of recollecting these poor

creatures shut up and deprived of their liberty in a prison. Ah, poor dear Louise—and poor Germain, too! Until they are restored to freedom there is no happiness for me!"

For several minutes Fleur-de-Marie remained plunged in a deep reverie; she all at once recalled to her remembrance that, at her first interview with Rodolph, at the house of the ogress, his language and manners resembled those of the usual frequenters of the tapis-franc. Was it not, then, possible that he might be playing the part of the travelling clerk, for the sake of some scheme he had in view? The difficulty consisted in finding any probable cause for such a transformation. The grisette, who quickly perceived the thoughtful meditation in which Fleur-de-Marie was lost, said, kindly:

"Never mind puzzling your poor brains on the subject, my dear Goualeuse; we shall soon find out whether we both know the same M. Rodolph. When you see yours, speak of me to him; when I see mine, I will mention you; by these means we shall easily discover what conclusion to come to."

"Where do you live, Rigolette?"

"No. 17 Rue du Temple."

"Come!" said Madame Séraphin (who had attentively listened to all this conversation) to herself, "that is not a bad thing to know. This all-powerful and mysterious personage, M. Rodolph, who is, no doubt, passing himself off for a travelling clerk, occupies an apartment adjoining that of this young mantua-maker, who appears to me to know much more than she chooses to own to; and this defender of the oppressed, it seems, is lodging in the same house with Morel and Bradamanti. Well, well, if the grisette and the travelling clerk continue to meddle with what does not concern them, I shall know where to lay my hand upon them."

"As soon as ever I have spoken with M. Rodolph," said the Goualeuse, "I will write to you, and give you my address where to send your answer; but tell me yours over again, I am afraid of forgetting it."

"Oh, dear, how fortunate! I declare I have got one of my cards with me! I remember a person I work for asked me to leave her one, to give a friend who wished to employ me. So I brought it out for that purpose; but I will give it to you, and carry her one another time." And here Rigolette handed to Fleur-de-Marie a small card, on which was written, in beautiful text-hand, "Mademoiselle Rigolette, Dressmaker, 17 Rue du Temple." "There's a beauty!" continued the grisette. "Oh, isn't it nicely done? Better, a good deal,

than printing! Ah, poor dear Germain wrote me a number of cards long ago! Oh, he was so kind, so attentive! I don't know how it could have happened that I never found out half his good qualities till he became unfortunate; and now I continually reproach myself with having learned to love him so late."

"You love Germain, then?"

"Oh, yes, that I do! Why, you know, I must have some pretext for visiting him in prison. Am I not an odd sort of girl?" said Rigolette, choking a rising sigh, and smiling, like an April shower, amid the tears which glittered in her large dark eyes.

"You are good and generous-hearted, as you ever were!" said Fleur-de-Marie, tenderly pressing her friend's hands within her own.

Madame Séraphin had evidently learned all she cared to know, and feeling very little interest in any further disclosure of Rigolette's love for young Germain, hastily approaching Fleur-de-Marie, she abruptly said:

"Come, my dear child, do not keep me waiting another minute, I beg; it is very late, and I shall be scolded, as it is, for being so much behind my time; we have trifled away a good quarter of an hour, and must endeavour to make up for it."

"What a nasty cross old body that is!" said Rigolette, in a whisper, to Fleur-de-Marie. "I don't like the looks of her at all!" Then, speaking in a louder voice, she added, "Whenever you come to Paris, my dear Goualeuse, be sure to come and see me. I should be so delighted to have you all to myself for a whole day, to show you my little home and my birds; for I have got some, such sweet pretty ones! Oh, that is my chief indulgence and expense!"

"I will try to come and see you, but certainly I will write you. So good-bye, my dear, dear Rigolette! Adieu! Oh, if you only knew how happy I feel at having met with you again!"

"And, I am sure, so do I; but I trust we shall soon see each other again; and, besides, I am so impatient to know whether your M. Rodolph is the same as mine. Pray write to me very soon upon this subject, will you? Promise you will!"

"Indeed I will! Adieu, dear Rigolette!"

"Farewell, my very dear Goualeuse!"

And again the two poor girls, each striving to conceal their distress at parting, indulged in a long and affectionate embrace. Rigolette then turned away, to enter the prison for the purpose of visiting Louise, according to the kind permission obtained for her by Rodolph, while Fleur-de-Marie, with Madame Séraphin, got into the coach which was waiting for them. The coachman was instructed to proceed to Batignolles, and to stop at the barrier. A cross-road of inconsiderable length conducted from this spot almost directly to the borders of the Seine, not far from the Isle du Ravageur. Wholly unacquainted with the locality of Paris, Fleur-de-Marie was unable to detect that the vehicle did not take the road to the Barrier St. Denis; it was only when the coach stopped at Batignolles, and she was requested by Madame Séraphin to alight, that she said:

"It seems to me, madame, that we are not in the road to Bouqueval; and how shall we be able to walk from hence to the farm?"

"All that I can tell you, my dear child," answered the femme de charge, kindly, "is, that I am obeying their orders given me by your benefactors, and that you will pain them greatly if you keep your friends waiting."

"Oh, not for worlds would I be so presuming and ungrateful as to oppose their slightest wish!" exclaimed poor Fleur-de-Marie, with kindling warmth, "and I beseech you, madame, to pardon my seeming hesitation; but, since you plead the commands of my revered protectors, depend upon my following you blindly and silently whithersoever you are pleased to take me. Only tell me, is Madame Georges quite well?"

"Oh, in most excellent health and spirits!"

"And M. Rodolph?"

"Perfectly well, also."

"Then you know him? But, madame, when I was speaking to Rigolette concerning him just now, you did not seem to be acquainted with him; at least, you did not say so."

"Because, in pursuance with the directions given me, I affected to be ignorant of the person you alluded to."

"And did M. Rodolph, himself, give you those orders?"

"Why, what a dear, curious little thing this is!" said the femme de charge, smilingly; "I must mind what I am about, or, with her innocent ways of putting questions, she will find out all my secrets!"

"Indeed, madame, I am ashamed of seeming so inquisitive, but if you could only imagine how my heart beats with joy at the bare thoughts of seeing my beloved friends again, you would pardon me; but, as we have only to walk on to the place whither you are taking me, I shall soon be able to gratify my wishes, without tormenting you by further inquiries."

"To be sure you will, my dear, for I promise you that in a quarter of an hour we shall have reached the end of our journey."

The femme de charge, having now left behind the last houses in the village of Batignolles, conducted Fleur-de-Marie across a grassy road, bordered on each side by lofty walnut-trees. The day was warm and fine, the sky half covered by the rich purple clouds of the setting sun, which now cast its declining rays on the heights of the colombes, situated on the other side of the Seine. As Fleur-de-Marie approached the banks of the river, a delicate bloom tinged her pale cheeks, and she seemed to breathe with delight the pure fresh air that blew from the country. Indeed, so strongly was the look of happiness imprinted on her countenance, that even Madame Séraphin could not avoid noticing it.

"You seem full of joy, my dear child; I declare it is quite a pleasure to see you."

"Oh, yes, indeed, I am overflowing with gratitude and eagerness at the thoughts of seeing my dear Madame Georges so soon, and perhaps, too, M. Rodolph! I trust I may, for, besides my own happiness at beholding him, I want to speak to him in favour of several poor unfortunate persons I should be so glad to recommend to his kindness and protection. How, then, can I be sad when I have so many delightful things to look forward to? Oh, who could be unhappy, with such a prospect as mine? And see, too, how gay and beautiful the sky is, all covered with bright, golden clouds! And the dear soft green grass,—I think it seems greener than ever, spite of the season. And look—look out there! See, where the river flows behind those willow-trees! Oh, how wide and sparkling it seems; and, when the sun shines on it, it almost dazzles my eyes to gaze on it! It seems like a sheet of gold. Ah, I saw it shining in the same way in the basin of the prison a little while ago! God does not forget even the poor prisoners, but allows them to have a sight of his wondrous works. Though they are separated by high stone walls from their fellow creatures, the glorious sun shows them his golden face, and

sparkles and glitters upon the water there, the same as in the gardens of a king!" added Fleur-de-Marie, with pious gratitude. Then, incited by a reference to her captivity still more to appreciate the charms of liberty, she exclaimed, with a burst of innocent delight: "Oh, pray, madame, do look there, just in the middle of the river, at that pretty little island, bordered with willows and poplars, and that sweet little white house, almost close to the water's edge! How delicious it must be to live there in the summer, when all the leaves are on the trees and the birds sing so sweetly among the branches! Oh, how quiet and cool it must be in that nice place!"

"Well, really, now, my dear," said Madame Séraphin, with a grim smile, "it is singular enough your being so much struck with that little isle!"

"Why, madame?"

"Because it is there we are actually going to."

"Going to that island?"

"Yes; does that astonish you?"

"Rather so, madame."

"But suppose you found your friends there?"

"Oh, what do you mean?"

"Suppose, I say, you found all your friends had assembled there, to welcome you on your release from prison, should you not then be greatly surprised?"

"Oh, if it were but possible! My dear Madame Georges?—M. Rodolph?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I am just like a baby in your hands, and you turn and twist me just as you please; it is useless for me to try to conceal anything, for, with your little winning ways, you find out all secrets."

"Then I shall soon see them again? Dear madame, how can I ever thank you sufficiently for your goodness to a poor girl like me? Feel how my heart beats! It is all with joy and happiness!"

"Well, well, my love, be as wild with delight as you please, but pray do not hurry on so very fast. You forget, you little mad thing, that my old bones cannot run as fast as your nimble young feet."

"I beg your pardon, madame; but I cannot help being quite impatient to arrive where we are going."

"To be sure you cannot; don't fancy I mean to blame you for it; quite the contrary."

"The road slopes a little now, madame, and it is rather rough, too; will you accept of my arm to assist you down?"

"I never refuse a good offer, my dear; for I am somewhat infirm, as well as old, while you are young and active."

"Then pray lean all your weight on me, madame; don't be afraid of tiring me."

"Many thanks, my child! Your help was really very serviceable, for the descent is so extremely rapid just here. Now, then, we are once more on smooth, level ground."

"Oh, madame, can it, indeed, be true that I am about to meet my dear Madame Georges? I can scarcely persuade myself it is reality."

"A little patience,—another quarter of an hour, and then you will see whether it is true or false."

"But what puzzles me," said Fleur-de-Marie, after a moment's reflection, "is, why Madame Georges should have thought proper to meet me here, instead of at the farm."

"Still curious, my dear child, still wanting to know everybody's reasons."

"How very foolish and unreasonable I am, am I not, madame?" said Fleur-de-Marie, smiling.

"And, by way of punishing you, I have a great mind to tell you what the surprise is that your friends have prepared for you."

"For me, madame, a surprise?"

"Be quiet, you little chatterbox! You will make me reveal the secret, in spite of myself."

We shall now leave Madame Séraphin and her victim proceeding along the road which led to the river's side, while we precede them, by a few minutes, to the Isle du Ravageur.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE BOATS

During the night the appearance of the isle inhabited by the Martial family was very gloomy, but by the bright light of day nothing could be more smiling than this accursed spot. Bordered by willows and poplars, almost entirely covered with thick grass, in which wound several paths of yellow sand, the islet included a kitchen-garden and a good number of fruit-trees. In the midst of the orchard was to be seen the hovel, with the thatched roof, into which Martial had expressed his intention to retire with François and Amandine. On this side, the isle terminated at its point by a kind of stockade, formed of large piles, driven in to prevent the soil from wearing away.

In front of the house, and almost touching the landing-place, was a small harbour of green trellis-work, intended to support in summer-time the creeping shoots of the young vines and hops,—a cradle of verdure, beneath which were arranged tables for the visitors. At one end of the house, painted white and covered with tiles, a wood-house, with a loft over it, formed at the angle a small wing, much lower than the main body of the building. Almost precisely over this wing there appeared a window, with the shutters covered with iron plates, and strengthened without by two transverse iron bars attached to the wall by strong clamps.

Three boats were undulating in the water, fastened to posts at the landing-place. Seated in one of these boats, Nicholas was making sure that the valve he had introduced performed its part properly. Standing on a bench at the mouth of the harbour, Calabash, with her hands placed over her eyes so as to shade away the sun, was looking out in the direction in which Madame Séraphin and Fleur-de-Marie were to come to reach the isle.

"I don't see any one yet, old or young," said Calabash, getting off the bench and speaking to Nicholas. "It will be just as it was yesterday; we may as well wait for the King of Prussia. If these women do not come in half an hour, we can't wait any longer; Bras-Rouge's 'dodge' is much better, and he'll be waiting for us. The diamond-matcher is to be at his place in the Champs Elysées at five o'clock. We ought to be there before her; the Chouette said so this morning."

"You are right," replied Nicholas, leaving the boat. "May thunder smite the old devil's kin, who has given us all the trouble for nothing! The valve works capitally. It appears we shall only have one instead of two jobs."

"Besides, Bras-Rouge and Barbillon will want us; they can do nothing by their two selves."

"True, again; for, whilst the job is doing, Bras-Rouge must keep watch outside the cabaret, and Barbillon is not strong enough to drag the matcher into the cellar, for the old —— will fight for it, I know!"

"Didn't the Chouette say that, for a joke, she had got the Schoolmaster at 'school' in the cellar?"

"Not in this one; in another much deeper, and which is filled with water at spring-tides."

"How the Schoolmaster must rage and foam there in the cellar! There all alone, and blind, too!"

"That is no matter, for, if he saw as clear as ever, he could see nothing there; the cellar is as dark as an oven."

"Still, when he has done singing all the songs he knows, to pass away the time, his days must hang precious heavy on his hands."

"The Chouette says that he amuses himself with rat-hunting, and that the cellar is full of game."

"I say, Nicholas, talking of certain persons who must be tired, and fume, and fret," remarked Calabash, with a savage smile, and pointing to the window fastened up with the iron plates, "there is one there who must be ready to devour his own flesh and blood."

"Bah! He's asleep. Since the morning he hasn't stirred, and his dog is silent."

"Perhaps he has strangled him for food. For two days, they must both be desperate hungry and thirsty up there together."

"That is their affair. Martial may still last a long time in this way, if it amuses him. When it is done, why, we shall say he died of his complaint, and there'll be an end of that affair."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course I do. As mother went to Asnières this morning, she met Père Férot, the fisherman, and, as he was very much astonished at not having seen his friend Martial for the last two days, mother told him that Martial

was confined to his bed, and was so ill that his life was despaired of. Daddy Férot swallowed all, like so much honey; he'll tell everybody else, and when the thing's done and over, why, it'll all seem nat'ral enough."

"Yes, but he won't die directly; this way is a tedious one."

"What else is to be done? There was no way of doing otherwise. That devil of a Martial, when he's put up, is as full of mischief as the old one himself, and as strong as a bull; particularly when he suspects anything, it is dangerous to approach him; but, now his door is well nailed up on the outside, what can he do? His window is strongly fastened with iron, too."

"Why, he might have driven out the bars by cutting away the plaster with his knife, and he would have done it, only I got up the ladder, and chopped at his fingers with the bill-hook every time he tried to go to work."

"What a pleasant watch!" said the ruffian, with a chuckle; "it must have been vastly amusing!"

"Why, it was to give you time to come with the iron plates you went to get from Père Micou."

"What a rage the dear brother must have been in!"

"He ground his teeth like a lunatic. Two or three times he tried to drive me away from the iron bars with his stick, but then, as he had only one hand at liberty, he could not work and release the iron bars, which was what he was trying at."

"Fortunately, there's no fireplace in his room, and the door is solid, and his hands finely cut; if not, he would work his way through the floor."

"What! Through those heavy beams? No, no, there's no chance of his escaping; the shutters are covered with iron plates and strengthened with two bars of iron, the door is nailed up outside with large boat-nails three inches long. His coffin is more solid than if it were made of oak and lead."

"I say, though, when La Louve comes out of prison, and makes her way here, to see her man, as she calls him?"

"Well, we shall say, 'Look for him.'"

"By the way, do you know that, if mother had not shut up those young 'rips' of children, they would have gnawed their ways through the door, like young

rats, to free Martial? That little vagabond François is quite furious since he suspects we have packed away his tall brother."

"But, you know, they mustn't be left in the room up-stairs whilst we leave the island; the window is not barred, and they have only to drop down outside."

At this moment the attention of Nicholas and Calabash was attracted by the sound of cries and sobs which came from the house. They saw the door of the ground floor, which had been open until then, close violently, and a minute afterwards the pale and sinister countenance of Mère Martial appeared through the bars of the kitchen window. With her long lean arm the culprit's widow made a sign to her children to come to her.

"There's a row, I know; I'll bet that it is François, who's giving himself some airs again," said Nicholas. "That beggar Martial! But for him, this young scamp would be by himself. You keep a good look-out, and, if you see the two women coming, give me a call."

Whilst Calabash again mounted the bench, and looked out for the arrival of Séraphin and the Goualeuse, Nicholas entered the house. Little Amandine was on her knees in the centre of the kitchen, sobbing and asking pardon for her Brother François. Enraged and threatened, the lad, ensconced in one of the angles of the apartment, had Nicholas's hatchet in his hand, and appeared determined this time to offer the most desperate resistance to his mother's wishes. Impassive as usual, showing Nicholas the cellar, the widow made a sign to her son to shut François up there.

"I will never be shut up there!" cried the boy, in a determined tone. "You want to make us die of hunger, like Brother Martial."

The widow looked at Nicholas with an impatient air, as if to reproach him for not instantly executing her commands, as, with another imperious gesture, she pointed to François. Seeing his brother advance towards him, the young boy brandished the axe with a desperate air and cried:

"If you try to shut me up there, whether it is mother, brother, or Calabash, so much the worse. I shall strike, and the hatchet cuts."

Nicholas felt as the widow did the pressing necessity there was to prevent the two children from going to Martial's succour whilst the house was left to itself, as well as to put them out of the way of seeing the scenes which were about to pass, for their window looked onto the river in which they were about to drown Fleur-de-Marie. But Nicholas was as cowardly as he was

ferocious, and, afraid of receiving a blow from the dangerous hatchet with which his young brother was armed, hesitated to approach him. The widow, angry at his hesitation, pushed him towards François; but Nicholas, again retreating, exclaimed:

"But, mother, if he cuts me? You know I want all my arms and fingers at this time, and I feel still the thump that brute Martial gave me."

The widow shrugged her shoulders, and advanced towards François.

"Don't come near me, mother," shrieked the boy in a fury, "or you'll pay dear for all the beatings you have given me and Amandine!"

"Let 'em shut us up; don't strike mother!" cried Amandine, in fear.

At this moment Nicholas saw upon a chair a large blanket which he used to wrap his booty in at times, and, taking hold of and partly unfolding it, he threw it completely over François's head, who, in spite of his efforts, finding himself entangled under its folds, could not make use of his weapon. Nicholas then seized hold of him, and, with his mother's help, carried him into the cellar. Amandine had continued kneeling in the centre of the kitchen, and, as soon as she saw her brother overcome, she sprang up and, in spite of her fright, went to join him in the dark hole. The door was then double-locked on the brother and sister.

"It will still be that infernal Martial's fault, if these children behave in this outrageous manner to us," said Nicholas.

"Nothing has been heard in his room since this morning," said the widow, with a pensive air, and she shuddered, "nothing!"

"That's a sign, mother, that you were right to say to Père Férot, the fisherman at Asnières, that Martial had been so dangerously ill as to be confined to his bed for the last two days; for now, when all is known, it will not astonish anybody."

After a moment's silence, as and if she wished to escape a painful thought, the widow replied, suddenly:

"Didn't the Chouette come here whilst I was at Asnières?"

"Yes, mother."

"Why didn't she stay and accompany us to Bras-Rouge's? I mistrust her."

"Bah! You mistrust everybody, mother; you are always fancying they are going to play you some trick. To-day it is the Chouette, yesterday it was Bras-Rouge."

"Bras-Rouge is at liberty,—my son is at Toulon, yet they committed the same robbery."

"You are always saying this. Bras-Rouge escaped because he is as cunning as a fox—that's it; the Chouette did not stay, because she had an appointment at two o'clock, near the Observatory, with the tall man in black, at whose desire she has carried off this young country girl, by the help of the Schoolmaster and Tortillard; and Barbillon drove the hackney-coach which the tall man in black had hired for the job. So how, mother, do you suppose the Chouette would inform against us, when she tells us the 'jobs' she has in hand, and we do not tell her ours? for she knows nothing of this drowning job that is to come off directly. Be easy, mother; wolves don't eat each other, and this will be a good day's work; and when I recollect, too, that the jewel-matcher has often about her twenty to thirty thousand francs' worth of diamonds in her bag, and that, in less than two hours, we shall have her in Bras-Rouge's cellar! Thirty thousand francs' worth of diamonds, mother! Think of that!"

"And, whilst we lay hands on this woman, Bras-Rouge is to remain outside the cabaret?" inquired the widow, with an air of suspicion.

"Well, and where would you have him, I should like to know? If any one comes to his house, mustn't he be outside the door to answer them, and prevent them from entering the place whilst we are doing our 'job?'"

"Nicholas! Nicholas!" cried Calabash, at this moment from outside, "here come the two women!"

"Quick, quick, mother! Your shawl! I will land you on the other side, and that will be so much done," said Nicholas.

The widow had replaced her mourning head-dress with a high black cap, in which she now made her appearance. At the instigation of Nicholas, she wrapped herself in a large plaid shawl, with gray and white checks; and, after having carefully closed and secured the kitchen door, she placed the key behind one of the window-shutters on the ground-floor, and followed her son, who was hastily pursuing his way to the landing-place. Almost involuntarily, as she quitted the island, she cast a long and meditative look at Martial's window; and the train of thought to which it firmly nailed and

iron-bound exterior gave rise seemed, to judge by their effect, to be of a very mingled and complicated character, for she knitted her brows, pursed her lips, and then, after a sudden convulsive shudder, she murmured, in a low hesitating voice:

"It is his own fault—it is his own fault!"

"Nicholas, do you see them? Just down there, along the path,—a country girl and an old woman!" exclaimed Calabash, pointing to the other side of the river, where Madame Séraphin and Fleur-de-Marie were descending a narrow, winding path which passed by a high bank, on the top of which were the lime-kilns.

"Let us wait for the signal; don't let us spoil the job by too much haste," said Nicholas.

"What! Are you blind? Don't you recognise the stout woman who came the day before yesterday? Look at her orange shawl; and the little country girl, what a hurry she seems in! She's a good little thing, I know; and it's plain she has no idea of what is going to happen to her, or she wouldn't hasten on at that pace, I'm thinking."

"Yes, I recollect the stout woman now. It's all right, then—all right! Although they are so much behind the time I had almost given up the job as bad. But let us quite understand the thing, Calabash. I shall take the old woman and the young girl in the boat with a valve to it; you will follow me close on, stern to stern; and mind and row steadily, so that, with one spring, I may jump from one boat to the other, as soon as I have opened the pipe and the water begins to sink the boat."

"Don't be afraid about me, it is not the first time I've pulled a boat, is it?"

"I am not afraid of being drowned, you know I can swim; but, if I did not jump well into the other boat, why, the women, in their struggles against drowning, might catch hold of me and—much obliged to you, but I have no fancy for a bath with the two ladies."

"The old woman waves her handkerchief," said Calabash; "there they are on the bank."

"Come, come along, mother, let's push off," said Nicholas, unmooring. "Come you into the boat with the valve, then the two women will not have any fear; and you, Calabash, jump into t'other, and use your arms, my girl, and pull a good one. Ah, by the way, take the boat-hook and put it beside

you, it is as sharp as a lance, and it may be useful," added the ruffian, as he placed beside Calabash in the boat a long hook with a sharp iron point.

A few moments, and the two boats, one rowed by Nicholas and the other by Calabash, reached the shore where, for some moments, Madame Séraphin and Fleur-de-Marie had been waiting. Whilst Nicholas was fastening his boat to a post on the bank, Madame Séraphin approached him, and said, in a low and rapid tone:

"Say that Madame Georges is waiting for us at the island,—you understand?" And then, in a louder voice, she added, "We are rather late, my lad."

"Yes, my good lady, Madame Georges has been asking for you several times."

"You see, my dear young lady, Madame Georges is waiting for us," said Madame Séraphin, turning to Fleur-de-Marie, who, in spite of her confidence, had felt considerable repugnance at the sight of the sinister countenances of Calabash, Nicholas, and the widow; but the mention of Madame Georges reassured her, and she replied:

"I am just as impatient to see Madame Georges; fortunately, it is not a long way across."

"How delighted the dear lady will be!" said Madame Séraphin. Then, addressing Nicholas, "Now, then, my lad, bring your boat a little closer that we may get in." Adding, in an undertone, "The girl must be drowned, mind; if she comes up thrust her back again into the water."

"All right, ma'am; and don't be alarmed yourself, but, when I make you the signal, give me your hand, she'll then pass under all alone, for everything's ready, and you have nothing to fear," replied Nicholas, in a similar tone; and then, with savage brutality, unmoved by Fleur-de-Marie's youth and beauty, he put his hand out to her. The young girl leaned lightly on him and entered the boat.

"Now you, my good lady," said Nicholas to Madame Séraphin, offering her his hand in turn.

Was it presentiment, or mistrust, or only fear that she could not spring quickly enough out of the little bark in which Nicholas and the Goualeuse were, that made Jacques Ferrand's housekeeper say to Nicholas, shrinking back, "No, I'll go in the boat with mademoiselle?" And she took her seat by Calabash.



"Just as you please," said Nicholas, exchanging an expressive look with his sister as, with a vigorous thrust with his oar, he drove his boat from the bank.

His sister did the same directly Madame Séraphin was seated beside her. Standing, looking fixedly on the bank, indifferent to the scene, the widow, pensive and absorbed, fixed her look obstinately on Martial's window, which was discernible from the landing-place through the poplars. During this time the two boats, in the first of which were Nicholas and Fleur-de-Marie and in the other Calabash and Madame Séraphin, left the bank slowly.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE HAPPINESS OF MEETING

Before the reader is made acquainted with the dénouement of the drama then passing in Nicholas's boat, we shall beg leave to retrace our steps.

Shortly after Fleur-de-Marie had quitted St. Lazare in company of Madame Séraphin, La Louve also left that prison. Thanks to the recommendations of Madame Armand and the governor, who were desirous of recompensing her for her kindness towards Mont Saint-Jean, the few remaining days the beloved of Martial had still to remain in confinement were remitted her. A complete change had come over this hitherto depraved, degraded, and intractable being. Forever brooding over the description of the peaceful, wild, and retired life, so beautifully depicted by Fleur-de-Marie, La Louve entertained the utmost horror and disgust of her past life. To bury herself with Martial in the deep shades of some vast forest, such was her waking and dreaming thought,—the one fixed idea of her existence, against which all her former evil inclinations had in vain struggled when, separating herself from La Goualeuse, whose growing influence she feared, this singular creature had retired to another part of St. Lazare.

To complete this sincere though rapid conversion, still more assured by the ineffectual resistance attempted by the perverse and froward habits of her companion, Fleur-de-Marie, following the dictates of her own natural good sense, had thus reasoned:

"La Louve, a violent and determined creature, is passionately fond of Martial. She would, then, hail with delight the means of quitting the disgraceful life she now, for the first time, views with shame and disgust, for the purpose of entirely devoting herself to the rude, unpolished man whose taste she so entirely partakes of, and who seeks to hide himself from the world, as much from inclination as from a desire of escaping from the universal reprobation in which his family is viewed."

Assisted by these small materials, gleaned during her conversation with La Louve, Fleur-de-Marie, in giving a right direction to the unbridled passion and restraining the daring hardihood of the reckless creature, had positively converted a lost, wretched being into an honest woman; for what could the most virtuous of her sex have desired more than to bestow her undivided affections on the man of her choice, to dwell with him in the silence and solitude of woods, where hard labour, privations and poverty, would all be cheerfully borne and shared for his dear sake, to whom her heart was given?

And such was the constant, ardent prayer of La Louve. Relying on the assistance which Fleur-de-Marie had assured her of in the name of an unknown benefactor, La Louve determined to make her praiseworthy proposal to her lover, not, indeed, without the keen and bitter apprehension of being rejected by him, for La Goualeuse, while she brought her to blush for her past life, awakened her to a just sense also of her position as regarded Martial.

Once at liberty, La Louve thought only of seeing "her man," as she called him. He took exclusive possession of her mind; she had heard nothing of him for several days. In the hopes of meeting with him in the Isle du Ravageur, and with the determination of waiting there until he came, should she fail to find him at first, she paid the driver of a cabriolet liberally to conduct her with all speed to the bridge of Asnières, which she crossed about a quarter of an hour before Madame Séraphin and Fleur-de-Marie (they having walked from the barrier) had reached the banks of the river near the lime-kilns. As Martial did not present himself to ferry La Louve across to the Isle du Ravageur, she applied to an old fisherman, named Father Férot, who lived close by the bridge.

It was about four o'clock in the day when a cabriolet stopped at the entrance of a small street in the village of Asnières. La Louve leaped from it at one bound, threw a five-franc piece to the driver, and proceeded with all haste to the dwelling of old Férot, the ferryman. La Louve, no longer dressed in her prison garb, wore a gown of dark green merino, a red imitation of cashmere shawl with large, flaming pattern, and a net cap trimmed with riband; her thick, curly hair was scarcely smoothed out, her impatient longing to see Martial having rendered an ordinary attention to her toilet quite impossible. Any other female would, after so long a separation, have exerted her very utmost to appear becomingly adorned at her first interview with her lover; but La Louve knew little and cared less for all these coquettish arts, which ill accorded with her excitable nature. Her first, her predominating desire was to see "her man" as quickly as possible, and this impetuous wish was caused, not alone by the fervour of a love which, in minds as wild and unregulated as hers, sometimes leads on to madness, but also from a yearning to pour into the ear of Martial the virtuous resolutions she had formed, and to reveal to him the bright vista of happiness opened to both by her conversation with Fleur-de-Marie.

The flying steps of La Louve soon conducted her to the fisherman's cottage, and there, seated tranquilly before the door, she found Father Férot, an old, white-headed man, busily employed mending his nets. Even before she came close up to him, La Louve cried out:

"Quick, quick, Father Férot! Your boat! Your boat!"

"What! Is it you, my girl? Well, how are you? I have not seen you this long while."

"I know, I know; but where is your boat? and take me across to the isle as fast as you can row."

"My boat? Well to be sure! Now, how very unlucky! As if it was to be so. Bless you, my girl, it is quite out of my power to ferry you across to-day."

"But why? Why is it?"

"Why, you see, my son has taken my boat to go up to the boat-races held at St. Ouen. Bless your heart, I don't think there's a boat left all along the river's side."

"Distraction!" exclaimed La Louve, stamping her foot and clenching her hand. "Then all is lost; I shall not be able to see him!"

"Pon my honour and word, it's true, though," said old Férot. "I am extremely sorry I am unable to ferry you over, because, no doubt, by your going on so, he is very much worse."

"Who is much worse? Who?"

"Why, Martial!"

"Martial!" exclaimed La Louve, snatching the sleeve of old Férot's jacket, "My man ill?"

"Bless me! Did you not know it?"

"Martial? Do you mean Martial?"

"To be sure I do; but don't hold me so tight, you'll tear my blouse. Now be quiet, there's a good girl. I declare you frighten me, you stare about so wildly."

"Ill! Martial ill? And how long has he been so?"

"Oh, two or three days."

"Tis false! He would have written and told me of it, had it been so."

"Ah, but then, don't you see? He's been too bad to handle a pen."

"Too ill to write! And he is on the isle! Are you sure—quite sure he is there?"

"Why, I'll tell you. You must know, this morning, I meets the widow Martial. Now you are aware, my girl, that most, in general, when I notice her coming one way, I make it my business to go the other, for I am not particular fond of her,—I can't say I am. So then—"

"But my man—my man! Tell me of him!"

"Wait a bit,—I'm coming to him. So when I found I couldn't get away from the mother, and, to speak the honest truth, that woman makes me afraid to seem to slight her. She has a sort of an evil look about her, like one as could do you any manner of harm for only wishing for; I can't account for it, I don't know what it is, for I am not timorous by nature, but somehow the widow Martial does downright scare me. Well, says I, thinking just to say a few words and pass on, 'I haven't seen anything of your son Martial these last two or three days,' says I, 'I suppose he's not with you just now?' upon which she fixed her eyes upon me with such a look! 'Tis well they were not pistols, or they would have shot me, as folks say."

"You drive me wild! And then—and what said she?"

Father Férot was silent for a minute or two, and then added:

"Come, now, you are a right sort of a girl; if you will only promise me to be secret, I will tell you all I know."

"Concerning my man?"

"Ay, to be sure, for Martial is a good fellow, though somewhat thoughtless; and it would be a sore pity should any mischance befall him through that old wretch of a mother or his rascally brother!"

"But what is going on? What have his mother or brother done? And where is he, eh? Speak, I tell you! Speak!"

"Well, well, have a little patience! And, I say, do just let my blouse alone! Come, take your hands off, there's a good girl; if you keep interrupting me, and tear my clothes in this way, I shall never be able to finish my story, and you will know nothing at last."

"Oh, how you try my patience!" exclaimed La Louve, stamping her foot with intense passion.

"And you promise never to repeat a word of what I am about to tell you?"

"No, no, I never will!"

"Upon your word of honour?"

"Father Férot, you will drive me mad!"

"Oh, what a hot-headed girl it is! Well, now, then, this is what I have got to say; but, first and foremost, I must tell you that Martial is more than ever at variance with his family; and, if he were to get some foul play at their hands, I should not be at all surprised; and that makes me the more sorry my boat is not at hand to help you across the water, for, if you reckon upon either Nicholas or Calabash taking you over to the isle, why, you'll just find yourself disappointed, that's all."

"I know that as well as you do; but what did my man's mother tell you? He was in the isle, then, when he fell ill, was he not?"

"Don't you put me out so with your questions; let me tell my story my own way. This morning I says to the widow, 'Why,' says I, 'I have seen nothing of Martial these last two or three days. I mark his boat is still moored,—he don't seem to use it as usual; I suppose he's gone away a bit? Maybe he's in Paris upon his business?' Upon which the widow gave me, oh, such a devil's look! So says she, 'He's bad a-bed in the isle, and we don't look for him to get better!' 'Oh, oh!' says I to myself, 'that's it, is it? It's three days since—' Holla! stop, I say!" cried old Férot, interrupting himself; "where the deuce are you going? What is the girl after now?"

Believing the life of Martial in danger from the inhabitants of the isle, and unable longer to endure the twaddle of the old fisherman, La Louve rushed, half frantic with rage and fear, towards the banks of the Seine. Some topographical descriptions will be requisite for the perfect understanding of the ensuing scene.

The Isle du Ravageur was nearer to the left bank of the river than it was to the right, from which Fleur-de-Marie and Madame Séraphin had embarked. La Louve stood on the left bank. Without being extremely high, the surface of the isle completely prevented those on one side the river from seeing what was passing on the opposite bank; thus La Louve had been unable to witness the embarkation of La Goualeuse, while the Martial family had been

equally prevented from seeing La Louve, who, at that very instant, was rushing in wild desperation along the banks of the other side of the river.

Let us also recall to the reader, that the country-house belonging to Doctor Griffon, and temporarily occupied by the Count Saint-Remy was midway between the land and that part of the shore where La Louve arrived half wild with apprehension and impatience. Unconsciously she rushed past two individuals, who, struck with her excited manner and haggard looks, turned back to watch her proceedings. These two personages were the Count Saint-Remy and Doctor Griffon.

The first impulse of La Louve, upon learning the danger which threatened her lover, was to hurry towards the spot from whence the peril proceeded; but, as she reached the water's edge, she became painfully sensible of the difficulties that stood in the way of her reaching the opposite land. As the old fisherman had assured her, she well knew the folly of expecting any strangers to pass by, and none of the Martial family would take the trouble of rowing over to fetch her to the isle.

Heated and breathless, her eyes sparkling with eager excitement, she stopped opposite that point of the isle which, taking a sudden bend in this direction, was the nearest approach from the shore. Through the leafless branches of the willows and poplars, La Louve could see the roof of the very house where Martial perhaps lay dying.

At this distracting idea La Louve uttered a wild cry of desperation, then, snatching off her shawl and cap, she slipped out of her gown; and, undressed as she was to her petticoat, she threw herself intrepidly into the river, waded until she got out of her depth, and then, fearlessly striking out, she swam determinedly towards the isle, affording a strange spectacle of wild and desperate energy. At each fresh impulsion of the arms the long, thick hair of La Louve, unfastened by the violent exercise she was using, shook and waved about her head like the rich mane of a war-horse. But for the fixedness of her gaze, constantly riveted on the house which contained Martial, and the contraction of her features, drawn together by almost the convulsive agonies of fear and dreadful anticipation of arriving too late, the poacher's mistress might have been supposed to have been merely enjoying the cool refreshment of the water for her own sport and diversion, so boldly and freely did she swim.

Tattooed in remembrance of her lover, her white but sinewy arms, strong as those of a man, divided the waters with a stroke which sent the sparkling element in rushing streams of liquid pearls over her broad shoulders and

strong, expansive chest, resembling a block of half-submerged marble. All at once, from the other side of the isle, rose a cry of distress,—a cry of agony at once fearful and despairing. La Louve started, and suddenly stopped in her rapid course; then supporting herself with one hand, with the other she pushed back her thick, dripping hair, and listened. Again the cry was repeated, but more feebly, supplicatory, convulsive, and expiring; and then the most profound silence reigned around.

"'Tis Martial—'tis his cry! He calls me to his aid!" exclaimed La Louve, swimming with renewed vigour, for, in her excited state of mind, the voice which had rent the air, and sent a pang through her whole frame, seemed to her to be that of her lover.

The count and the doctor, whom La Louve had rushed so quickly by, were quite unable to overtake her in time to prevent her daring attempt; but both arrived immediately opposite the isle at the moment when those frightful cries were heard. Both stopped, as perfectly shocked and startled as La Louve had been. Observing the desperate energy with which she battled with the water, they exclaimed:

"The unfortunate creature means to drown herself!"

But their fears were vain. Martial's mistress swam like an otter, and, with a few more vigorous strokes, the intrepid creature had reached the land. She gained her feet, and, to assist her in climbing up the bank, she took hold of one of the stakes used as a sort of protecting stockade at the extremity of the isle, when at that instant, as partially in the water and holding on by one hand, she saw drifting along the form of a young female, dressed after the fashion of the country girls who come to Paris with their wares. The body floated slowly on with the current, which drove it against the piles, while the garments served to render it buoyant. To cling to one of the strongest stakes, and with the hand left free to snatch at the clothes of the female as it was passing, was the instantaneous impulse of La Louve,—an impulse executed as rapidly as conceived. In her extreme eagerness, however, she drew the unfortunate being she sought to save so suddenly and violently towards herself and within the small enclosure formed by the piles, that the body sunk completely under water, though here it was shallow enough to walk to land. Gifted with skill and strength far from common, La Louve raised La Goualeuse (for she it was, although not as yet recognised by her late friend), took her up in her powerful arms as though she had been a child, and laid her on the grassy banks of the isle.



"Courage! Courage!" shouted M. de Saint-Remy, from the opposite side, having, as well as Doctor Griffon, witnessed this bold deliverance. "We will make all haste to cross the bridge of Asnières, and bring a boat to your assistance."

After thus speaking, both the count and his companion proceeded as quickly as they were able in the direction of the bridge; but La Louve heard not the words addressed to her.

Let us again repeat, that, from the right bank of the Seine, on which Nicholas, Calabash, and their mother assembled after the commission of their atrocious crime, it was impossible, owing to its steepness, to observe what was passing on the opposite shore. Fleur-de-Marie, abruptly drawn by La Louve within the piles, having first sunk completely from the eyes of her murderers, was thus in safety from any further pursuit on their part, they believing that she had effectually perished.

A few instants after, the current, as it swept by, carried with it a second body, floating near to the surface of the water; but La Louve perceived it not. It was the corpse of Madame Séraphin, the notary's femme de charge. She, however, was perfectly dead.

It was as much the interest of Nicholas and Calabash as it was of Jacques Ferrand to remove so formidable a witness as well as sharer of their crime; seizing the opportunity, therefore, when the boat sunk with Fleur-de-Marie, to spring into that rowed by his sister, and in which was Madame Séraphin, he contrived to give the small vessel so great a shock as almost threw the femme de charge into the water, and, while struggling to recover herself, he managed to thrust her overboard, and then to finish her with his boat-hook.

Breathless and exhausted, La Louve, kneeling on the grass beside Fleur-de-Marie, tried to recover her strength, and, at the same time, to make out the features of her she had saved from certain death. Who can describe her surprise, her utter astonishment, as she recognised her late prison companion,—she who had exercised so beneficial an influence on her mind, and produced so complete a change in her conduct and ideas? In the first bewilderment of her feelings even Martial was forgotten.

"La Goualeuse!" exclaimed she, as, with head bent down, her hair dishevelled, her garments streaming with wet, she, kneeling, contemplated the unhappy girl stretched almost dying before her on the grass.

Pale, motionless, her half closed eyes vacant and senseless, her beautiful hair glued to her pallid brows, her lips blue and livid, her small, delicate hands stiff and cold, La Goualeuse might well have passed for dead to any but the watchful eye of affection.

"La Goualeuse!" again cried La Louve. "What a singular chance that I should have come hither to relate to my man all the good and harm she has done me with her words and promises, as well as the resolution I have taken, and to find the poor thing thus to give me the meeting! Poor girl! She is cold and dead. But, no, no!" exclaimed La Louve, stooping still more closely over Fleur-de-Marie, and, as she did so, finding a faint—indeed, almost imperceptible—breath escape her lips; "no, she lives! Merciful Father, she breathes! And 'tis I have snatched her from death! I, who never yet saved any one! Oh, how happy the thought makes me! My heart glows with a new delight. How thankful I feel that none but I saved her! Ha! but my man,—I must save him also. Perhaps he is even now in his death-throes—his mother and brother are even wretches enough to murder him! What shall I do? I cannot leave this poor creature here,—I will carry her to the widow's house. She must and she shall succour the poor Goualeuse and let me see Martial, or I will smash everything in my way. No mother, brother, or sister shall hinder me from going wherever my man is!"

And, springing up as she spoke, La Louve raised Fleur-de-Marie in her strong arms. Charged with this slender burthen, she hurried towards the house, never for a moment doubting that, spite of their hard and wicked natures, the widow and her daughter would bestow on Fleur-de-Marie every requisite care.

When Martial's mistress had reached that point of the isle from which both sides of the Seine were distinguishable, Nicholas, his mother, and Calabash had quitted the place, certain of the accomplishment of their double crime; they then repaired, in all haste, to the house of Bras-Rouge.

At this moment a man who, hidden in one of the recesses of the river concealed by the lime-kiln, had, without being seen himself, witnessed the whole progress of this horrible scene, also disappeared; believing, as well as the guilty perpetrators, that the fell deed had been fully achieved. This man was Jacques Ferrand.

One of Nicholas's boats was rocking to and fro, moored to a stake on the river's bank, just by where Madame Séraphin and La Goualeuse had embarked.

Scarcely had Jacques Ferrand quitted the lime-kiln to return to Paris than M. de Saint-Remy and Doctor Griffon hastily crossed the bridge of Asnières, for the purpose of reaching the isle; which they contemplated doing by means of Nicholas's boat, which they had discerned from afar.

To the extreme astonishment of La Louve, when she arrived at the house in the Isle du Ravageur, she found the door shut and fastened. Placing the still inanimate form of Fleur-de-Marie beneath the porch, she more closely examined the dwelling. The window of Martial's chamber was well known to her; what was her surprise to find the shutters belonging to it closed, and sheets of tin nailed over them, strongly secured from without by two bars of iron!

Suspecting a part of the cause of this, La Louve, in a loud, hoarse voice of mingled fury and deep tenderness, screamed out as loudly as she could:

"Martial! My man!"

No answer was returned.

Terrified at this silence, La Louve began pacing round and round the house like a wild beast who scents the spot whither her mate has been entrapped, and with deep roars and savage growls demands admittance to him.

Still pursuing her agitated search, La Louve kept shouting from time to time, "My man! Are you there, my man?" And in her desperate fury she shook and rattled the bars of the kitchen windows, beat against the walls, and knocked long and loudly at the door. All at once a dull, indistinct noise was heard from within the house. Eagerly and attentively La Louve listened; the noise, however, ceased.

"My man heard me! I must and will get in somehow, if I gnaw the door away with my teeth."

And again she reiterated her frantic cries and adjurations to Martial. Several faint blows struck inside the closed shutters of Martial's chamber replied to the yells and screams of La Louve.

"He is there!" cried she, suddenly stopping beneath the window of her lover. "He is there! I am sure of it; and if all other means fail I will strip off that tin with my nails, but I will wrench those shutters open!"

So saying, she glanced frantically around in search of something to aid her efforts to free her lover, when her eye caught sight of a ladder partly hanging

against one of the outside shutters of the sitting-room. Hastily pulling the shutter, the more quickly to disengage the ladder, the key of the outer door, left by the widow on the sill of the window, fell to the ground.

"Oh, if this be only the right key!" cried La Louve, trying it in the lock of the entrance door; "I can go straight up stairs to his chamber. Oh, it turns! It opens!" exclaimed La Louve, with delight; "and my man is saved!"

Once in the kitchen she was struck by the cries of the two children, who, shut up in the cellar, and hearing an unusual noise, called loudly for help. The widow, persuaded that no person would visit the isle or her dwelling, had contented herself with double-locking the door upon François and Amandine, leaving the key in the lock.

Released by La Louve, the two children hurried from the cellar to the kitchen.

"Oh, La Louve!" exclaimed François, "save our dear Brother Martial; they want him to die! For two days he has been shut up in his room!"

"They have not wounded him, have they?"

"No, no, I think not!"

"I have arrived just in time, it seems," cried La Louve, rushing towards the staircase, and hastily mounting the stairs. Then, suddenly stopping, she exclaimed, "Ah, but La Goualeuse! I quite forgot her. Amandine, my child, light a fire directly; and then do you and your brother fetch a poor, half-drowned girl you will find lying outside the door under the porch, and place her before the fire. She would have been quite dead, if I had not saved her. François, quick! Bring me a crowbar, a hatchet, an axe, anything, that I may break in the door that confines my man!"

"There is the cleaver we split wood with, but it is too heavy for you," said the lad, dragging forward an enormous chopper.

"Too heavy! I don't even feel it!" cried La Louve, swinging the ponderous weapon, which, at another time, she would have had much difficulty in lifting, as though it had been a feather.

Then, proceeding with hurried steps up-stairs, she called out to the children:

"Go and fetch the young girl I told you of, and place her by the fire."

And, with two bounds, La Louve reached the corridor, at the end of which was situated the apartment of Martial.

"Courage! Courage, my man! Your Louve is here!" cried she, and, lifting the cleaver with both hands, she dashed it furiously against the door.

"It is fastened on the outside," moaned Martial, in a feeble voice; "draw out the nails,—you cannot open it otherwise."

Throwing herself upon her knees in the passage, by the help of the edge of the cleaver, her nails, which she almost tore bleeding from their roots, and her fingers, which were lacerated and torn, La Louve contrived to extract the huge nails which fastened the door all around. At length her heroic exertions were crowned with success,—the door yielded to her efforts, and Martial, pale, bleeding, and almost exhausted, fell into the arms of his mistress.

"At last—I have you—I hold you—I press you to my heart!" exclaimed La Louve, as she received and tenderly pressed Martial in her arms, with a joy of possession that partook almost of savage energy. She supported, or, rather, carried him to a bench placed in the corridor. For several minutes Martial remained weak and haggard, endeavouring to recover from the violent surprise which had proved nearly too much for his exhausted strength. La Louve had come to the succour of her lover at the very instant when, worn-out and despairing, he felt himself dying,—less from want of food than air, which it was impossible to obtain in so small an apartment, unprovided with a chimney or any other outlet, and hermetically closed, thanks to the fiendish contrivance of Calabash, who had stopped even the most trifling crevices in the door and window with pieces of old rag.

Trembling with joy and apprehension, her eyes streaming with tears, La Louve, kneeling beside Martial, watched his slightest movements, and intently gazed on his features. The unfortunate youth seemed gradually to recover as his lungs inhaled a freer and more healthful atmosphere. After a few convulsive shudderings he raised his languid head, heaved a deep sigh, and, opening his eyes, looked eagerly around him.

"Martial! 'Tis I!—your Louve! How are you now?"

"Better!" replied he, in a feeble voice.

"Thank God! Will you have a little water or some vinegar?"

"No, no," replied Martial, speaking more naturally; "air, air! Oh, I want only air!"

At the risk of gashing the backs of her hands, La Louve drove them through the four panes of a window she could not have opened without first removing a large and heavy table.

"Now I breathe! I breathe freely! And my head seems quite relieved!" said Martial, entirely recovering his senses and voice.

Then, as if recalling for the first time the service his mistress had rendered him, he exclaimed, with a burst of ineffable gratitude:

"But for you, my brave Louve, I should soon have been dead!"

"Oh, never mind thinking of that! But tell me, how do you find yourself now?"

"Better—much better!"

"You are hungry, I doubt not?"

"No; I feel myself too weak for that. What I have suffered most cruelly from has been want of air. At last I felt suffocating, strangling, choking. Oh, it was dreadful!"

"But now?"

"I live again. I come forth from the very tomb itself; and that, too, thanks to you!"

"And these cuts upon your poor bleeding hands! For God's sake, what have they done to you?"

"Nicholas and Calabash, not daring to attack me openly a second time, fastened me up in my chamber to allow me to perish of hunger in it. I tried to prevent their nailing up my shutters, and my sister chopped my fingers with a hatchet."

"The monsters! They wished to make it appear that you had died of sickness. Your mother had spread the report of your being in a hopeless state. Your mother, my man,—your own mother!"

"Hold!" cried Martial, with bitterness; "mention her not." Then for the first time remarking the wet garments and singular state of La Louve's attire, he added, "But what has happened to you? Your hair is dripping wet; you have only your underclothes on; and they are drenched through."

"No matter, no matter what has happened to me, since you are saved. Oh, yes,—saved!"

"But explain to me how you became thus wet through."

"I knew you were in danger, and finding no boat—"

"You swam to my rescue?"

"I did. But your hands? Give them to me that I may heal them with my kisses! You are in pain, I fear? Oh, the monsters! And I not here to help you!"

"Oh, my brave Louve!" exclaimed Martial, enthusiastically; "bravest and best of all brave creatures!"

"Did not your hand trace on my arm 'Death to the cowardly?' See!" cried La Louve, showing her tattooed arm, on which these very words were indelibly engraved.

"Yes, you are bold and intrepid; but the cold has seized you,—you tremble!"

"Indeed, it is not with cold."

"Never mind,—go in there. You will find Calabash's cloak; wrap yourself well in it."

"But—"

"I insist!"

In an instant La Louve, who had quickly flown at her lover's second command, returned wrapped in a plaid mantle.

"To think you ran the risk of drowning yourself,—and all for me!" resumed Martial, gazing on her with enthusiastic delight.

"Oh, no, not altogether for you. A poor girl was nearly perishing in the river, and I saved her as I landed."

"Saved her also. And where is she?"

"Below with the children, who are taking care of her."

"And who is she?"

"Oh, dear, you can scarcely credit what a singular and lucky chance brought me to her rescue! She was one of my companions at St. Lazare,—a most extraordinary sort of girl. Oh, you don't half know—"

"How so?"

"Only conceive my both hating and loving her; for she had introduced happiness and death into my heart and thoughts."

"Who? This girl?"

"Yes; and all on your account."

"On mine?"

"Hark ye, Martial!" Then interrupting her proposed speech, La Louve continued, "No, no; I never, never can—"

"What?"

"I had a request to make to you, and for that purpose I came hither; because when I quitted Paris I knew nothing of your danger."

"Then speak,—pray do!"

"I dare not."

"Dare not,—after all you have done for me?"

"No; for then it would appear as though I claimed a right to be rewarded."

"A right to be rewarded? And have you not already earned that right? Do I not already owe you much? And did you not tend my sick bed with unfailing watchfulness, both night and day during my illness of the past year?"

"Are you not 'my man,—my own dear man?'"

"And for the reason that I am and ever shall be 'your man,' are you not bound to speak openly and candidly to me?"



"For ever, Martial?"

"Yes, for ever; as true as my name is Martial. I shall never care for any other woman in the world but you, my brave Louve. Never mind what you may have been, or what you may have done; that is nobody's affair but mine. I love you, and you love me; and, moreover, I owe you my life. But somehow, do you know, since you have been in prison I have not been like the same person. All sorts of fresh thoughts have come into my mind. I have thought it well over, and I have resolved that you shall no more be what you have been."

"What can you mean?"

"That I will never more quit you; neither will I part from François and Amandine."

"Your young sister and brother?"

"Yes; from this day forward I must be as a second father to these poor children. Don't you see, by imposing on myself fresh duties, I am compelled to alter and amend what is amiss in my way of conducting myself? But I consider it my positive task to take charge of these young things, or they will be made artful thieves. And the only way to save them is to take them from here."

"Where to?"

"That I know not; but certainly far from Paris."

"And me?"

"You? Why, of course, you go with me!"

"With you?" exclaimed La Louve, with joyful surprise,—she could not credit the reality of such happiness. "And shall I never again be parted from you?"

"No, my brave girl—never! You will help me to bring up my little sister and young brother. I know your heart. When I say to you, 'I greatly wish my poor little Amandine to grow up a virtuous and industrious woman. Just talk to her about it, and show her what to do,' I am quite sure and certain that you will be to her all the best mother could be to her own child."

"Oh, thanks, Martial,—thanks, thanks!"

"We shall live like honest workpeople. Never fear but we shall find work; for we will toil like slaves to content our employers; but, at least, these children will not be depraved and degraded beings like their parents. I shall not continually hear myself taunted with my father and brother's disgraceful end, neither shall I go through streets where you are known. But what is the matter,—what ails you?"

"Oh, Martial, I feel as though I should go mad."

"Mad!—for what?"

"For joy."

"And why should you go mad with joy?"

"Because—because,—it is too much—"

"What?"

"I mean that what you propose is too great happiness for one like me to hope for. Oh, indeed, indeed, it is more than I can bear! But who knows? Perhaps saving La Goualeuse has brought me good luck,—that's it, I am sure and certain."

"Still, I ask you, what is the matter, and why are you thus agitated?" exclaimed Martial.

"Oh, Martial, Martial, the very thing you have been proposing—"

"Well?"

"I was going to ask you."

"To quit Paris?"

"Yes," replied she, in a hurried tone; "and to try your consent to accompany you to the forests, where we should have a nice, neat little house, and children whom I should love as La Louve would the children of her man—or, if you would permit me," continued La Louve, in a faltering voice, "instead of calling you 'my man,' to say 'my husband?' For," added she, confusedly and rapidly, "for without that change, we should not obtain the place."

Martial, in his turn, regarded La Louve with deep astonishment, unable to comprehend her meaning.

"What place are you speaking of?" said he, at length.

"Of that of gamekeeper."

"That I should have?"

"Yes."

"And who would give it to me?"

"The protector of the young girl I saved."

"They do not know me."

"But I have told her all about you, and she will recommend us to her protector."

"And what have you told her about me?"

"Oh, Martial, can you not guess? Of what could I speak but of your goodness—and my love for you?"

"My excellent Louve!"

"And then, you know, being in prison together makes folks talk to each other, and open their hearts in the way of confidence. Besides which, there was something so gentle and engaging about this young creature, that I could not help feeling drawn towards her, even in spite of myself; for I very quickly discovered she was a very different person to such as you and I have been used to."

"And who is she?"

"I know not, neither can I guess; but certainly I never met with any one like her. Bless you, she can read the very thoughts of your heart, the same as if she were a fairy. I merely told her of my love for you, and she immediately interested herself in us. She made me feel ashamed of my past life; not by saying harsh and severe things,—you know very well that would not have done much good with me,—but by talking of the pleasures of a life passed in hard but peaceful labour, tranquilly within the quiet shades of deep forests, where you might be occupied according to your tastes and inclinations; only, instead of your being a poacher, she made you a gamekeeper, and in place of my being only your mistress, she pictured me as your true and lawful wife. And then we were to have fine, healthy children who ran joyfully

to meet you when you returned at night, followed by your faithful dogs, and carrying your gun on your shoulder. Then we all sat down so gay and happy, to eat our supper beneath the cool shade of the large trees that overhung our cottage door, while the fresh wind blew, and the moon peeped at us from amongst the thick branches, and the little ones prattled and you related to us all you had seen and done during the day, while wandering in the forests; until, at last, cheerful and contented, we retired to rest, to rise the following day, and with light hearts to recommence our labours. I cannot tell you how it was, but I listened and listened to these delightful pictures till I quite believed in their reality. I seemed bound by a spell when she spoke of happiness like this, though I tried ever so much against it. I always found it impossible to disbelieve that it would surely come to pass. Oh, but you have no idea how beautifully she described it all! I fancied I saw it—you—our children—our forest home. I rubbed my eyes, but it was ever before them, although a waking dream."

"Ah, yes!" said Martial, sighing; "that would, indeed, be a sweet and pleasant life! Without being bad at heart, poor François has been quite enough in the society of Calabash and Nicholas to make it far better he should dwell in the solitude of woods and forests, rather than be exposed to the further contamination of great towns. Amandine would help you in your household duties, and I should make a capital gamekeeper, from the very fact of my having been a poacher of some notoriety. I should have you for my housekeeper and companion, my good Louve; and then, as you know, we should have our children also. Bless their little hearts, I doubt not our having a fine flock about us! And what more could we wish for or desire? When once we got used to a forest life, it would seem as though we had always lived there; and fifty or a hundred years would glide away like a single day. But you must not talk to me of such happiness; it makes one so full of sadness and regrets that it cannot be realised. No, no, don't let us ever mention it again; because, don't you see, La Louve, it comes over one like—I should soon work myself up to madness if I allowed my thoughts to dwell on it."

"Ah, Martial, I let you go on because I thought I was quite as bad myself. I said just those very words to La Goualeuse."

"Did you, really?"

"I did, indeed. For, after listening to all these tales of enchantment, I said to her, 'What a pity, La Goualeuse, that these castles in the air, as you call them, are not true!' And what do you think, Martial," asked La Louve, her eyes flashing with joy, "what do you think she answered me?"

"I don't know."

"Why," said she, 'only let Martial marry you, and give me your promise to live honestly and virtuously henceforward, and directly I quit the prison I will exert myself to get the place I have been speaking of for him.'"

"Get me a gamekeeper's place?"

"Yes; I declare to you, Martial, she said so."

"Oh, but as you say, that can be but a dream—a mere fancy. If, indeed, nothing were requisite for our obtaining the place but our being married, my good girl, that should be done to-morrow, if I had the means; though, from this very day and hour, I consider you as my true and lawful wife."

"Oh, Martial! I your lawful wife?"

"The only woman who shall ever bear that title. And, for the future, I wish you to call me 'husband;' for such I am in word and heart, as firmly and lastingly as though we had been before the maire."

"Oh, La Goualeuse was right. A woman feels so proud and happy to say 'My husband!' Oh, Martial, you shall see what a good, faithful, devoted wife I will be to you; how hard I will work! Oh, I shall be so delighted to labour for you!"

"And do you really think there is any chance of our getting this place?"

"If the poor dear Goualeuse deceives herself about it, it is that others deceive her; for she seemed quite sure of being able to fulfil her promises. And besides, when I was quitting the prison a little while ago, the inspectress told me that the protectors of La Goualeuse, who were people of rank and consequence, had removed her from confinement that very day. Now that proved her having powerful friends; so that she can keep her word to us if she likes."

"But," cried Martial, suddenly rising, "I don't know what we have been thinking of all this time!"

"Thinking about—what do you mean, Martial?"

"Why, the poor girl you saved from drowning is down-stairs—perhaps dying; and, instead of rendering her any assistance, we are attending to our own affairs up-stairs."

"Make yourself perfectly easy; François and Amandine are there watching her, and they would have come to call us had there been any danger or necessity. Still you are right; let us go to her. You must see her to whom we shall, perhaps, owe all our future happiness."

And Martial, supported by La Louve, descended to the lower part of the house. Before they have reached the kitchen, let us in a few words describe what had occurred there from the time when Fleur-de-Marie had been confided to the charge of the two children.

## CHAPTER XVII

### DOCTOR GRIFFON

François and Amandine had contrived to convey Fleur-de-Marie near the fire, when M. de Saint-Remy and Doctor Griffon, who had crossed the river in Nicholas's boat, entered the house. Whilst the children were making the fire burn up, Doctor Griffon bestowed on the young girl his utmost care.

"The poor girl cannot be more than seventeen at most!" exclaimed the count, who was looking on. "What do you think of her, doctor?"

"Her pulse is scarcely perceptible; but, strange to say, the skin of the face is not livid in the subject, as is usually the case in asphyxia from submersion," replied the doctor, with professional calmness, and contemplating Fleur-de-Marie with a deeply meditative air.

Doctor Griffon was a tall, thin man, pallid and completely bald, except two tufts of thin black hair, carefully brushed back on the poll, and flattened on the temples. His countenance, wrinkled and furrowed by the fatigues of study, was calm, intelligent, and reflective. Profoundly learned, of great experience, and a skilful practitioner, first surgeon at a civil hospital, where we shall again encounter him, Doctor Griffon had but one defect, that of completely abstracting himself from the patient, and only considering the disease. Young or old, rich or poor, was no matter,—he only thought of medical fact, more or less remarkable, which the subject presented. For him there was nothing but subjects.

"What a lovely face! How beautiful she is in spite of this frightful paleness!" said M. de Saint-Remy. "Did you ever see milder or more expressive features, my dear doctor? And so young—so young!"

"Age is no consequence," said the doctor, abruptly, "no more than the presence of water in the lungs, which was formerly thought fatal. It was a gross error, which the admirable experiments of Goodwin—the famous Goodwin—incontestably detected and exposed."

"But doctor—"

"But it is a fact," replied M. Griffon, absorbed by the love of his art. "To detect the presence of any foreign liquid in the lungs, Goodwin plunged some cats and dogs several times into tubs filled with ink for some seconds, taking them out alive, and then, after a time, dissected the animals. Well, he was convinced from the dissection that the ink had penetrated the lungs,

and that the presence of this liquid in the respiratory organs had not caused the death of the subject."

The count knew the doctor was a worthy creature at heart, but that his mad passion for science made him often appear harsh and cruel.

"Have you any hope?" inquired M. de Saint-Remy, impatiently.

"The extremities of the subject are very cold," said the doctor; "there is but very slight hope."

"Ah, poor child! To die at that age is indeed terrible!"

"Pupil fixed—dilated!" observed the doctor, impassive, and pushing up the frigid eyelid of Fleur-de-Marie with his forefinger.

"What a singular man!" exclaimed the comte, almost with indignation. "One would suppose you pitiless, and yet I have seen you watch by my bedside for nights together. Had I been your brother, you could not have been more generously devoted to me."

Doctor Griffon, still occupied in doing all that was requisite and possible for Fleur-de-Marie, replied to the comte without looking at him, and with imperturbable phlegm:

"Parbleu! Do you think one meets with an intermittent fever so wonderfully complicated as that you had! It was wonderful, my dear friend—astonishing! Stupor, delirium, muscular action of the tendons, syncopes,—that important fever combined the most varied symptoms. You were, indeed, affected by a partial and momentary attack of paralysis; and, if it had presented nothing else, why, your attack was entitled to all the attention in my power. You presented a magnificent study; and, truth to say, my dear friend, what I desire most in the world is to meet with such another glorious fever. But that is a piece of good fortune that never occurs twice!"

At this moment Martial descended, leaning on the arm of La Louve, who still retained over her wet clothes the plaid cloak which belonged to Calabash. Struck with the paleness of Martial, and remarking his hands covered with dried blood, the comte exclaimed, "Who is this man?"

"My husband!" replied La Louve, looking at Martial with an expression of happiness and noble pride impossible to describe.



"You have a good and intrepid wife, sir," said the comte to him. "I saw her save this unfortunate young girl with singular courage."

"Yes, sir, my wife is good and intrepid," replied Martial, with emphasis, and regarding La Louve with an air at once full of love and tenderness. "Yes, intrepid; for she has also come in time to save my life."

"Your life?" exclaimed the comte.

"Look at his hands—his poor hands!" said La Louve, wiping away the tears which softened the wild brightness of her eyes.

"Horrible!" cried the comte. "See, doctor, how his hands are hacked!"

Doctor Griffon, turning his head slightly, and looking over his shoulder at Martial's hands, said to him, "Open and shut your hand."

Martial did so with considerable pain. The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and continued his attentions to Fleur-de-Marie, saying merely, and as if with regret:

"There's nothing serious in those cuts,—there's no tendon injured. In a week the subject will be able to use his hands again."

"Then, sir, my husband will not be crippled?" said La Louve, with gratitude.

The doctor shook his head affirmatively.

"And La Goualeuse will recover—won't she, sir?" inquired La Louve. "Oh, she must live, for I and my husband owe her so much!" Then turning towards Martial, "Poor dear girl! There she is, as I told you,—she who will, perhaps, be the cause of our happiness; for it was she who gave me the idea of coming and saying to you all I have said. What a chance that I should save her—and here, too!"

"She is a providence," said Martial, struck by the beauty of La Goualeuse. "What an angel's face! Oh, she will recover, will she not, doctor?"

"I cannot say," replied the doctor. "But, in the first place, can she remain here? Will she have all necessary attention?"

"Here?" cried La Louve; "why, they commit murder here!"

"Silence—silence!" said Martial.

The comte and the doctor looked at La Louve with surprise.

"This house in the isle has a bad reputation hereabouts, and I am not astonished at it," observed the doctor, in a low tone, to M. de Saint-Remy.

"You have, then, been the victim of some violence?" observed the comte to Martial. "How did you come by those wounds?"

"They are nothing—nothing, sir. I had a quarrel—a struggle ensued, and I was wounded. But this young peasant girl cannot remain in this house," he added, with a gloomy air. "I cannot remain here myself—nor my wife, nor my brother, nor my sister, whom you see. We are going to leave the isle, never to return to it."

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed the two children.

"Then what are we to do?" said the doctor, looking at Fleur-de-Marie. "It is impossible to think of conveying the subject to Paris in her present state of prostration. But then my house is quite close at hand, my gardener's wife and her daughter are capital nurses; and since this asphyxia by submersion interests you, my dear Saint-Remy, why, you can watch over the necessary attentions, and I will come and see her every day."

"And you assume the harsh and pitiless man," exclaimed the comte, "when, as your proposal proves, you have one of the noblest hearts in the world!"

"If the subject sinks under it, as is possible, there will be an opportunity for a most interesting dissection, which will allow me to confirm once again Goodwin's assertions."

"How horridly you talk!" cried the comte.

"For those who know how to read, the dead body is a book in which they learn to save the lives of the diseased!" replied Dr. Griffon, stoically.

"At last, then, you do good?" said M. de Saint-Remy, with bitterness; "and that is important. What consequence is the cause provided that benefit results? Poor child! The more I look at her the more she interests me."

"And well does she deserve it, I can tell you, sir," observed La Louve, with excitement, and approaching him.

"Do you know her?" inquired the comte.

"Do I know her, sir? Why, it is to her I owe the happiness of my life; and I have not done for her half what she has done for me." And La Louve looked passionately towards her husband,—she no longer called him her man!

"And who is she?" asked M. de Saint-Remy.

"An angel, sir,—all that is good in this world. Yes; and although she is dressed as a country girl, there is no merchant's wife, no great lady, who can discourse as well as she can, with her sweet little voice just like music. She is a noble girl, I say,—full of courage and goodness."

"By what accident did she fall into the water?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Then she is not a peasant girl?" asked the comte.

"A peasant girl,—look at her small white hands, sir!"

"True," observed M. de Saint-Remy; "what a strange mystery! But her name—her family?"

"Come along," said the doctor, breaking into the conversation; "we must convey the subject into the boat."

Half an hour after this, Fleur-de-Marie, who had not yet recovered her senses, was in the doctor's abode, lying in a good bed, and maternally watched by M. Griffon's gardener's wife, to whom was added La Louve. The doctor promised M. de Saint-Remy, who was more and more interested in La Goualeuse, to return to see her again in the evening. Martial went to Paris with François and Amandine, La Louve being unwilling to quit Fleur-de-Marie before she had been pronounced out of danger.

The Isle du Ravageur remained deserted. We shall presently find its sinister inhabitants at Bras-Rouge's, where they were to be joined by the Chouette for the murder of the diamond-matcher. In the meantime we will conduct the reader to the rendezvous which Tom, Sarah's brother, had with the horrible hag, the Schoolmaster's accomplice.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PORTRAIT

Thomas Seyton, the brother of the Countess Sarah Macgregor, was walking impatiently on the boulevards near the Observatory, when he saw the Chouette arrive. The horrible beldame had on a white cap and her usual plaid shawl. The point of a stiletto, as round as a thick swan's quill, and very sharp, having perforated a hole at the bottom of her large straw basket which she carried on her arm, the extremity of this murderous weapon, which had belonged to the Schoolmaster, might be seen projecting. Thomas Seyton did not perceive that the Chouette was armed.

"It has just struck three by the Luxembourg," said the old woman. "Here I am, like the hand of the clock."

"Come," replied Thomas Seyton. And, preceding her, he crossed some open fields; and turning down a deserted alley near the Rue Cassini, he stopped half way down the lane, which was barred by a turnstile, opened a small door, motioned to the Chouette to follow him; and, after having advanced with her a few steps down a path overgrown by thick trees, he said, "Wait here," and disappeared.

"That is, if you don't keep me on the 'waiting lay' too long," responded the Chouette; "for I must be at Bras Rouge's at five o'clock to meet the Martials, and help silence the diamond-matcher. It's very well I have my 'gulley' (poniard). Oh, the vagabond, he has got his nose out of window!" added the hag, as she saw the point of the stiletto coming through the seam in the basket. And taking the weapon, which had a wooden handle, from the basket, she replaced it so that it was completely concealed. "This is fourline's tool," she continued, "and he has asked me for it so many times to kill the rats who came skipping about him in his cellar. Poor things! They have no one but the old blind man to divert them and keep them company. They ought not to be hurt if they play about a bit; and so I will not let him hurt the dears, and I keep his tool to myself. Besides, I shall soon want it for this woman, perhaps. Thirty thousand francs' worth of diamonds,—what a 'haul' for each of us! It'll be a good day's work, and not like that of the other day with that old notary whom I thought to squeeze. It was no use to threaten him if he would not 'stand some blunt' that I would lay information that it was his housekeeper who had sent La Goualeuse to me by Tournemine when she was a little brat. Nothing frightened the old brute, he called me an old hag, and shoved me out-of-doors. Well, well, I'll send an anonymous letter to these people at the farm where Pegriotte was, to inform

them that it was the notary who formerly abandoned her to me. Perhaps they know her family; and when she gets out of St. Lazare, why, the matter will get too hot for that old brute, Jacques Ferrand. Some one comes,—ah, it is the pale lady who was dressed in men's clothes at the tapis-franc of the ogress, and with the tall fellow who just left me, the same that the fourline and I robbed by the excavations near Notre-Dame," added the Chouette, as she saw Sarah appear at the extremity of the walk. "Here's another job for me, I see; and this little lady must have something to do with our having carried off La Goualeuse from the farm. If she pays well for another job of work, why, that will be 'the ticket.'"

As Sarah approached the Chouette, whom she saw again for the first time since their rencontre at the tapis-franc, her countenance expressed the disdain, the disgust, which persons of a certain rank feel when they come in contact with low wretches whom they take as tools or accomplices.

Thomas Seyton, who, until now, had actively served the criminal machinations of his sister, although he considered them as all but futile, had refused any longer to continue this contemptible part, consenting, nevertheless, for the first and last time to put his sister in communication with the Chouette, without himself interfering in the fresh projects they might plan. The countess, unable to win back Rodolph to her by breaking the bonds or the affections which she believed so dear to him, hoped, as we have seen, to render him the dupe of a base deceit, the success of which might realise the vision of this obstinate, ambitious, and cruel woman. Her design was to persuade Rodolph that their daughter was not dead, and to substitute an orphan for the child.

We know that Jacques Ferrand—having formally refused to participate in this plot in spite of Sarah's menaces—had resolved to make away with Fleur-de-Marie, as much from the fear of the Chouette's disclosure, as from fear of the obstinate persistence of the countess. But the latter had by no means abandoned her design, feeling persuaded that she should corrupt or intimidate the notary when she should be assured of having obtained a young girl capable of filling the character which she desired her to assume.

After a moment's silence Sarah said to the Chouette, "You are adroit, discreet, and resolute?"

"Adroit as a monkey, resolute as a bulldog, and mute as a fish; such is the Chouette, and such the devil made her; at your service if you want her,—and you do," replied the old wretch, quickly. "I hope we have managed well

with the young country wench who is now in St. Lazare for two good months."

"We are not talking of her, but of something else."

"Anything you please, my handsome lady, provided there's money at the end of what you mean to propose, and then we shall be as right as my fingers."

Sarah could not control a movement of disgust. "You must know," she resumed, "many people in the lower ranks of life,—persons who are in misfortune?"

"There are more of them than there are of millionaires; you may pick and choose. We have plentiful wretchedness in Paris."

"I want to meet with a poor orphan girl, and particularly if she lost her parents young. She must be good-looking, of gentle disposition, and not more than seventeen years of age."

The Chouette gazed at Sarah with amazement.

"Such an orphan girl must be by no means difficult to meet with," continued the countess; "there are so many foundling children!"

"Why, my good lady, you forget La Goualeuse. She is the very thing."

"Who is La Goualeuse?"

"The young thing we carried off from Bouqueval."

"We are not talking of her now, I tell you."

"But hear me, and be sure you pay me well for my advice. You want an orphan girl, as quiet as a lamb, as handsome as daylight, and who is only seventeen, you say?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, take La Goualeuse when she leaves St. Lazare; she is the very thing for you, as if we had made her on purpose. For she was about six years of age when that scamp, Jacques Ferrand (and it's now ten years ago), gave her to me with a thousand francs, in order to get rid of her,—that is to say, it was Tournemine, who is now at the galleys at Rochefort, who brought

her to me, saying there was no doubt she was some child they wanted to get rid of or pass off for dead."

"Jacques Ferrand, do you say?" exclaimed Sarah, in a voice so choked that the Chouette receded several paces. "The notary, Jacques Ferrand, gave you this child—and—?" She could not finish, her emotion was too violent; and with her two clasped hands extended towards the Chouette, she trembled convulsively, surprise and joy agitating her features.

"I don't know what it is that makes you so much in earnest, my good lady," replied the old hag; "but it is a very simple story. Ten years ago Tournemine, an old pal of mine, said to me: 'Have you a mind to take charge of a little girl that they want to get out of the way? No matter whether she slips her wind or not. There's a thousand francs for the job, and do what you like with the 'kinchin.'"

"Ten years ago?" cried Sarah.

"Ten years."

"A little fair girl?"

"A little fair girl."

"With blue eyes?"

"Blue eyes—as blue as blue bells."

"And it was she who was at the farm?"

"And we packed her up and carted her off to St. Lazare. I must say, though, that I didn't expect to find her—Pegriotte—in the country as I did, though."

"Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" exclaimed Sarah, falling on her knees, and elevating her hands and eyes to heaven, "Thy ways are inscrutable, and I bow down before thy providence! Oh, if such happiness be possible! But, no, I cannot yet believe it; it would be too fortunate! No!" Then rising suddenly she said to the Chouette, who was gazing at her with the utmost astonishment, "Follow me!" And Sarah walked before her with hasty steps.

At the end of the alley she ascended several steps that led by a glass door to a small room sumptuously furnished. At the moment when the Chouette was about to enter, Sarah made a sign to her to remain outside, and then rang the bell violently. A servant appeared.

"I am not at home to anybody, and let no one enter here,—no one, do you hear?"

The servant bowed and retired. Sarah, for the sake of greater security, pushed to the bolt. The Chouette heard the order given to the servant, and saw Sarah fasten the bolt. The countess then turning towards her, said: "Come in quickly, and shut the door."

The Chouette did as she was bidden.

Hastily opening a *secrétaire*, Sarah took from it an ebony coffer, which she placed on a writing-table in the centre of the room, and beckoned the Chouette towards her. The coffer was filled with small caskets lying one upon the other, and containing splendid jewelry. Sarah was in so much haste to arrive at the bottom of the coffer, that she hastily scattered over the table these jewel-cases, splendidly filled with necklaces, bracelets, tiaras of rubies, emeralds, and diamonds, which sparkled with a thousand fires.

The Chouette was dazzled. She was armed, was alone with the countess; escape was easy—certain. An infernal idea shot through the brain of this monster. But to put this new crime into execution it was necessary to extricate her stiletto from her basket, and approach Sarah without exciting her suspicions.

With the craft of the tiger-cat, who grovels along treacherously towards its prey, the beldame profited by the countess's preoccupation to move imperceptibly around the table which separated her from her victim. The Chouette had already begun her perfidious movement, when she was compelled suddenly to stop short. Sarah took a locket from the bottom of the box, leaned over the table, and, handing it to the Chouette with a trembling hand, said:

"Look at this portrait."

"It is Pegriotte!" exclaimed the Chouette, struck with the strong resemblance; "it is the little girl who was handed to me! I think I see her just as she was when Tournemine brought her to me. That's just like her long curling hair, which I cut off and sold directly, *ma foi*!"

"You recognise her; it is really she? Oh, I conjure you, do not deceive me—do not deceive me!"

"I tell you, my good lady, it is Pegriotte, as if I saw herself there," said the Chouette, trying to draw nearer to Sarah without being remarked. "And even



now she is very like this portrait; if you saw her you would be struck by the likeness."

Sarah had not uttered one cry of pain or alarm when she learned that her daughter had been for ten years leading a wretched existence, forsaken as she was. Not one feeling of remorse was there when she reflected that she herself had snatched her away disastrously from the peaceful retreat in which Rodolph had placed her. This unnatural mother did not eagerly question the Chouette with terrible anxiety as to the past life of the child. No! In her heart ambition had long since stifled every sentiment of maternal tenderness. It was not joy at again being restored to a lost daughter that transported her,—it was the hope of seeing at length realised the vain dream of her whole existence. Rodolph had felt deeply interested in this unfortunate girl, had protected her without knowing her; what would then be his feelings when he discovered that she was—his daughter? He was free—the countess was a widow! Sarah already saw the sovereign crown sparkling on her brow.

The Chouette, still stealing on with slow steps, had at length reached one end of the table, and had her stiletto perpendicularly in her basket, its handle on a level with the opening, and within her clutch. She was but a step or two from the countess.

"Do you know how to write?" inquired Sarah of her; and, pushing from her the casket and gems, she opened a blotting-book, which was by an inkstand.

"No, madame; I do not!" replied the Chouette, at all risks.

"I will write, then, at your dictation. Tell me all the circumstances of the abandonment of this little girl."

And Sarah, sitting in an armchair before the writing-table, took up a pen, and made a sign to the Chouette to come close to her. The old wretch's one eye sparkled. At last she was standing up, close to the seat on which Sarah was sitting, and, stooping over a table, was preparing to write.

"I will read aloud, and then," said the countess, "you can correct any mistakes."

"Yes, madame," replied the Chouette, narrowly watching every motion of Sarah; and she furtively introduced her hand into her basket, that she might be able to grasp the poniard without being observed.

The countess commenced writing.

"I declare that—"

Then interrupting herself, and turning towards the Chouette, who was at the moment touching the handle of her poniard, Sarah added:

"At what period was the child brought to you?"

"In the month of February, 1827."

"And by whom?" continued Sarah, turning towards the Chouette.

"By Pierre Tournemine, now at the galleys at Rochefort. It was Madame Séraphin, the notary's housekeeper, who brought the young girl to him."

The countess continued writing, and then read aloud:

"I declare that, in the month of February, 1827, a person named—"

The Chouette had drawn the poniard; already had she raised her arm to strike her victim between the shoulders; Sarah turned again. The Chouette, that she might not be off her guard, leaned her right hand, armed as it was, on the back of Sarah's armchair, and then stooped towards her, as if in attitude to reply to her question.

"Tell me again the name of the man who handed the child to you?" said the countess.

"Pierre Tournemine," repeated Sarah, as she wrote it down, "at this time at the galleys of Rochefort, brought me a child, which had been confided to him by the housekeeper of—"

The countess could not finish. The Chouette having got rid of her basket by allowing it to slide from her arm onto the floor, threw herself on the countess with equal fury and rapidity; and having grasped the back of her neck with her left hand, forced her face down on the table, and then with her right hand drove the stiletto in between her two shoulders.

This atrocious assassination was so promptly effected that the countess did not utter a cry—a moan. Still sitting, she remained with her head and the front of her body on the table. Her pen fell from her fingers.

"Just the very blow which fourline gave the little old man in the Rue du Roule!" said the monster. "One more who will never wag tongue again! Her account is settled!" And the Chouette, gathering up the jewels together, huddled them into her basket, not perceiving that her victim still breathed.

The murder and robbery effected, the horrid old devil opened the glass door, ran swiftly along the tree-covered path, went out by the small side door, and reached the lone tract of ground. Near the Observatory she took a hackney-coach, which drove her to Bras-Rouge's in the Champs Elysées.

The widow Martial, Nicholas, Calabash, and Barbillon had, as we know, an appointment with the Chouette in this den of infamy, in order to rob and murder the diamond-matcher.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE AGENT OF SAFETY

The reader already knows the Bleeding Heart in the Champs Elysées, near the Court de la Reine, in one of the deep ditches which, a few years since, were close to this promenade. The inhabitants of the Isle du Ravageur had not yet arrived.

After the departure of Bradamanti, who had, as we know, accompanied Madame d'Harville's stepmother into Normandy, Tortillard had returned to his father. Placed as a sentinel at the top of the staircase, the little cripple was to announce the arrival of the Martials by a certain cry, Bras-Rouge being at this moment in secret conference with an agent-de-sûreté named Narcisse Borel, whom the reader may perchance remember to have seen at the tapis-franc of the ogress, when he came there to arrest two miscreants accused of murder.

This agent, a man about forty years of age, was thickset and powerful, with a high colour, a keen, quick eye, his face entirely shaven, in order that he might better assume the various disguises necessary for his dangerous expeditions; for it was frequently necessary for him to unite the transformations of the actor to the courage and energy of the soldier, in order to seize on certain ruffians with whom he had to contend in cunning and determination. Narcisse Borel was, in a word, one of the most useful and most active instruments of that providence on a small scale which is modestly and commonly termed the police.

We will return to the conversation between Narcisse Borel and Bras-Rouge, which appeared to be very animated.

"Yes," said the agent of safety; "you are accused of profiting by your double-faced position, and of taking with impunity a share in the booty of a band of most dangerous malefactors, and then giving false information respecting them to the protective police. Take care, Bras-Rouge; for if you are detected no mercy will be shown you!"

"Alas! I know I am accused of this; and it is very distressing for me, my good M. Narcisse," replied Bras-Rouge, whilst his weasel's face assumed a hypocritical air of vexation. "But I hope that this day will at last do me justice, and my good faith will be recognised."

"That remains to be proved."

"How can I be distrusted—have I not given proofs? Was it I or was it not who, at the time, enabled you to apprehend Ambroise Martial, one of the most dangerous malefactors in Paris, in the very fact?"

"All this is very fine and good; but Ambroise was warned they were going to arrest him, and if I had not been earlier than the hour you told me of, he would have escaped."

"Do you think me capable, M. Narcisse, of having secretly told him of your coming?"

"I only know that I received from the scoundrel a pistol-shot aimed full at me, but which, fortunately, only grazed my arm."

"Why, to be sure, M. Narcisse, in your profession you must be occasionally exposed to such mistakes!"

"Ah, you call these mistakes, eh?"

"Certainly; for, no doubt, the wicked fellow intended to lodge the ball in your body."

"In the arm, body, or head, no matter, I don't complain of that; every profession has its disagreeables."

"And its pleasures, too, M. Narcisse, and its pleasures. For instance, when a man as cunning, as skilful, and as courageous as you, has been for a long time on the track of a gang of villains, whom he follows from quarter to quarter, from lurking-place to lurking-place, with a good bloodhound like your poor servant to command, Bras-Rouge, and, finally, marks them down and comes upon them in a trap from which not one of them can escape, why, then, you must say, M. Narcisse, that there is great pleasure in it,—the joy of a sportsman,—not including the service he renders to justice!" added the host of the Bleeding Heart, with a grave air.

"I should fully agree with you if the bloodhound were faithful, but I fear it is not."

"Ah, M. Narcisse, you think—"

"I think that, instead of putting us on the track, you amuse yourself with setting us on a false scent, and abuse the confidence placed in you. Every day you promise to aid us to lay hands on the gang, and that day never arrives."

"What if the day arrives to-day, M. Narcisse, as I am sure it will? What if I bring together in a parcel Barbillon, Nicholas Martial, the widow, her daughter, and the Chouette? Will that or will it not be a good sweep of the net? Will you then mistrust me any longer?"

"No; and you will have rendered a real service; for there are very strong presumptive facts against this gang,—suspicions almost assured, but, unfortunately, no proofs."

"So, then, a small fag-end of actual crime, which would allow of their being apprehended, would help amazingly to unravel the difficult skein,—eh, M. Narcisse?"

"Most decidedly. And you assure me that there has not been the slightest incitement on your part towards the coup which they are now going to attempt?"

"No, on my honour! It is the Chouette, who came to me to propose inveigling the diamond-matcher here when that infernal hag learned from my son that Morel, the lapidary, who lives in the Rue du Temple, was a workman in real stones, and not in false, and that Mother Mathieu had frequently considerable value about her person, I acceded to the proposition, and suggested to the Chouette that the Martials and Barbillon should join her, so that I might be able to put the whole party into your hands."

"And the Schoolmaster,—that fellow who is so dangerous, so powerful, and so ferocious, and who was always with the Chouette,—one of the frequenters of the tapis-franc?"

"The Schoolmaster?" said Bras-Rouge, feigning astonishment.

"Yes, a convict escaped from the galleys at Rochefort, Anselm Duresnel by name, sentenced for life. We know now that he disfigured himself on purpose, that he might not be recognised. Have you no trace of him?"

"None," replied Bras-Rouge, boldly, for he had his reasons for the lie, the Schoolmaster being at this very moment shut up in one of the cellars of the cabaret.

"There is every reason to believe that the Schoolmaster is the author of fresh murders. He would be an important capture."

"No one knows what has become of him for the last six weeks."

"And that's the reason you are reproached with having lost all trace of him."

"Always reproaches, M. Narcisse, always!"

"Not for want of ample cause! And how goes on the smuggling?"

"Is it not necessary that I should know something of all kinds of persons—smugglers as well as others—in order to put you on the scent? I disclosed to you that pipe to introduce liquids, established outside the Barrière du Trône, and coming into a house in the street."

"I know that," said Narcisse, interrupting Bras-Rouge; "but for one that you denounce, you allow ten to escape, and continue your traffic with impunity. I am sure you eat at two manglers, as the saying is."

"Oh, M. Narcisse, I am incapable of an appetite so dishonest!"

"That is not all: in the Rue du Temple, No. 17, there lives a woman named Burette, who lends money on deposit, who, they say, is a private receiver of stolen goods on your account."

"What would you have me do, M. Narcisse? The world is so slanderous,—says so many wicked things! Once again, I say, it is necessary for me to mix with as many rogues as possible, that I even seem one of themselves—so much the worse for them—in order that they may not have any suspicions; but it cuts me to the heart to imitate them,—cuts me to the heart. I must, indeed, be devoted to the service, to give myself up to such a thing as that."

"Poor, dear man! I pity you with all my soul!"

"You are laughing at me, M. Narcisse; but, if that was believed, why has there not been a search made at Mother Burette's and in my house?"

"You know well enough,—that we might not alarm the ruffians, whom, for so long a time, you have promised to deliver into our hands."

"And I am now about to deliver them, M. Narcisse; before an hour you will have them all handcuffed, and that without much trouble, for there are three women. As to Barbillon and Nicholas Martial, they are as savage as tigers, but as cowardly as pullets."

"Tigers or pullets," said Narcisse, half opening his long frock coat, and showing the butts of two pistols in the pockets of his trousers, "I have wherewithal here for them."

"You will do well to have two of your men with you, M. Narcisse. When they see themselves caught, the most cowardly sometimes show fight."

"I shall station two of my men in the small parlour at the entrance, by the side of the room into which you are to introduce the jewel-matcher. At the first cry, I shall appear at one door, and my two men at the other."

"You must be speedy, then, for I expect the gang here every moment, M. Narcisse."

"Very well, I will go at once and place my men, provided that all this is not another humbug."

The conversation was cut short by the peculiar whistle intended as a signal. Bras-Rouge looked out of a window to see whom it was that Tortillard announced.

"Ah, ha! It is the Chouette already. Well, do you believe me now, M. Narcisse?"

"Why, this looks something like; but it is not all. But we shall see. And now to station my men."

And the agent of safety disappeared at a side door.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE CHOUETTE

The precipitation of the Chouette's step, the fierce throbbings of a fever of rapine and murder which still animated her, had suffused her hideous features with a deep purple, whilst her green eye sparkled with savage joy. Tortillard followed her, hopping and skipping. At the moment when she descended the last steps of the stairs, Bras-Rouge's son, from pure mischief, put his foot on the long and dragging skirts of the Chouette's gown. This sudden stoppage made the old woman stumble, and, unable to catch hold of the baluster, she fell on her knees, her two hands extended, and dropping her precious basket, whence escaped a gold bracelet set with emeralds and pearls. The Chouette having, in her fall, somewhat excoriated her fingers, picked up the bracelet, which had not escaped the keen sight of Tortillard, and, recovering her feet, turned furiously to the little cripple, who approached her with a hypocritical air, saying to her:

"Oh, dear me! Did your foot slip?"

Without making any reply, the Chouette seized Tortillard by the hair, and, stooping to a level with his cheek, she bit it with such fury that the blood spurted out beneath her teeth. Strange, however, Tortillard, in spite of his usual vindictiveness, in spite of feeling such intense pain, did not utter a murmur or a cry. He only wiped his bleeding cheek, and said, with a forced laugh:

"I hope next time you will not kiss me so hard,—eh, La Chouette?"

"Wicked little brat! Why did you tread on my gown on purpose to make me fall?"

"Me? Oh! How could you think so? I swear I didn't do it on purpose, my dear Chouette! Don't think your little Tortillard would do you any harm; he loves you too well for that. You should never beat him, or scold him, or bite him, for he is as fond of you as if he were a poor little dog, and you were his mistress!" said the boy, in a gentle and insinuating tone.

Deceived by Tortillard's hypocrisy, the Chouette believed him, and replied:

"Well, well, if I was wrong to bite you, why, let it go for all the other times you have deserved it, you little villain! But, vive la joie! To-day I bear no malice. Where is your old rogue of a father?"

"In the house. Shall I go and find him for you?"

"No; are the Martials here?"

"Not yet."

"Then I have time to go down and visit fourline. I want to speak to old No-Eyes."

"Will you go into the Schoolmaster's cellar?" inquired Tortillard, scarcely concealing his diabolical delight.

"What's that to you?"

"To me?"

"Yes, you ask me the question with such an odd air."

"Because I was thinking of something odd."

"What?"

"Why, that you ought, at least, to have brought him a pack of cards to pass away his time," replied Tortillard, with a cunning look; "that would divert him a little; now he has nothing to play at but not to be bitten by the rats; and he always wins at that game, and after awhile it becomes tiresome."

The Chouette laughed heartily at Tortillard's wit, and said to the cripple:

"Love of a baby boy to his mammy! I do not know any chap who has more vice than this scamp. Go and get me a candle, that you may light me down to see fourline, and you can help me to open his door. You know that I can hardly push it by myself."

"Well, no, it is so very dark in the cellar," said Tortillard, shaking his head.

"What! What! You who are as wicked as devil to be a coward? I like to see that, indeed! Go directly, and tell your father that I shall be with him almost immediately; that I am with fourline; and that we are talking of putting up the banns for our marriage. He, he, he!" added the disgusting wretch, grinning. "So make haste, and you shall be bridesman, and, if you are a good boy, you shall have my garter."

Tortillard went, with a sulky air, to fetch a light. Whilst she was waiting for him, the Chouette, perfectly intoxicated with the success of her robbery, put her hand into her basket to feel the precious jewels it enclosed. It was for the purpose of temporarily concealing this treasure that she desired to descend into the Schoolmaster's cellar, and not, according to her habit, to enjoy the torments of her new victim.

We will presently explain why, with Bras-Rouge's connivance, the Chouette had immured the Schoolmaster in the very subterranean cave into which this miscreant had formerly precipitated Rodolph.

Tortillard, holding a light, now appeared at the door of the cabaret. The Chouette followed him into the lower room, in which opened the trap with the folding-doors, with which we are already acquainted. Bras-Rouge's son, sheltering the light in the hollow of his hand, and preceding the old woman, slowly descended a stone staircase, which led to a sharp declivity, at the end of which was the thick door of the cellar which had so nearly proved Rodolph's grave. When he reached the bottom of the staircase, Tortillard pretended to hesitate in following the Chouette.

"Well, now, you little vagabond, go on!" she said.

"Why, it is so dark; and you go so fast, Chouette! And, indeed, I'd rather go back again, and leave you the light."

"And then, foolish imp, how am I to open the cellar door by myself? Will you come on?"

"No, I am so frightened!"

"If I begin with you! Mind—"

"If you threaten me, I'll go back again!" and Tortillard retreated several paces.

"Well, listen to me, now,—be a good boy," said the Chouette, repressing her anger, "and I'll give you something."

"Well, what?" said Tortillard, coming up to her. "Speak to me so always, and I'll do anything you wish me, Mother Chouette."

"Come, come, I'm in a hurry!"

"Yes; but promise me that I may have some fun with the Schoolmaster."

"Another time; I haven't time to-day."

"Only a little bit,—just let me tease him for five minutes?"

"Another time; I tell you that I want to return up-stairs as quickly as possible."

"Why, then, do you want to open the door of his apartment?"

"That's no affair of yours. Come, now, have done with this. Perhaps the Martials are come by this time, and I must have some talk with them. So be a good boy, and you sha'n't be sorry for it. Come along."

"I must love you very much, Chouette, for you make me do just what you like," said Tortillard, slowly advancing.

The dim, wavering light of the candle, which but imperfectly lighted this gloomy way, reflected the black profile of this hideous brat on the slimy walls, which were full of crevices and reeking with damp. At the end of this passage, through the half obscurity, might be seen the low and crumbling arch of the entrance to the cellar, the thick door strengthened with iron bars, and, standing out in the shade, the red shawl and white cap of the Chouette.

By the united exertions of the two, the door opened harshly on its rusty hinges; a puff of humid vapour escaped from this den, as dark as midnight. The light, placed on the ground, threw its faint beams on the first steps of the stone staircase, the bottom of which was completely lost in the darkness. A cry, or, rather, a savage roar, came from the depths of the cave.

"Ah, there's fourline wishing his mamma good-morning!" said the Chouette, with a sneer.

And she descended several steps, in order to conceal her basket in some hole.

"I'm hungry!" exclaimed the Schoolmaster, in a voice that shook with rage; "do you wish to kill me like a mad dog?"

"What's the deary lovey hungry?" said the Chouette, with a laugh of mockery; "then smell its thumb."

There was a sound like that of a chain twisted violently; then a groan of mute, repressed passion.

"Take care! Take care, or you'll have a bump in your leg, as you had at Bouqueval farm, poor dear pa!" said Tortillard.

"He's right, the boy is,—keep yourself quiet, fourline," continued the hag; "the ring and chain are solid, old No-Eyes, for they came from Father Micou's, and he sells nothing but the best goods. It is your fault, too; why did you allow yourself to be bound whilst you were asleep? We only had then to put the ring and chain in this place, and bring you down here in the cool to preserve you, old darling."

"That's a pity! He'll grow mouldy," said Tortillard.

Again the clank of the chain was heard.

"He, he, fourline! Why, he's dancing like a cockchafer tied by the claw," said the beldame, "I think I see him!"

"Cockchafer, cockchafer, fly away home! Fly, fly, fly! Your husband is the Schoolmaster!" sung Tortillard.

This increased the Chouette's hilarity. Having deposited her basket in a hole formed by the lowering of the wall of the staircase, she stood erect, and said:

"You see, fourline—"

"He don't see," said Tortillard.

"The brat's right. Will you hear, fourline? There was no occasion, when we came away from the farm, to be such a booby as to turn compassionate, and prevent me from marking Pegriotte's face with my vitriol; and then, too, you talked of your conscience, which was getting troubled. I saw you were growing lily-livered, and meant to come the 'honest dodge;' and so, some of these odd-come-shortlies, you would have turned 'nose' (informer), and have 'made a meal' of us, old No-Eyes; and then—"

"Then old No-Eyes will make a meal of you, for he is hungry, Chouette," said Tortillard, suddenly, and with all his strength pushing the old woman by her back.

The Chouette fell forward with a horrible imprecation. She might have been distinctly heard as she rolled from the top to the bottom of the staircase.

"Bump, bump, bump, bump! There's the Chouette for you—there she is! Why don't you jump upon her, old buffer?" added Tortillard.

Then, seizing the basket from under the stone where he had seen the old woman place it, he scampered up the stairs, exclaiming, with a shout of savage joy:

"Here's a pull worth more than that you had before,—eh, Chouette? This time you won't bite me till the blood comes,—eh? Ah, you thought I bore no spite—much obliged—my cheek bleeds still!"

"Oh, I have her! I have her!" cried the Schoolmaster, from the depth of the cave.

"If you have her, old lad, I cry snacks," said Tortillard, with a laugh.

And he stopped on the top step of the stairs.

"Help!" shrieked the Chouette, in a strangling voice.

"Thanks, Tortillard!" said the Schoolmaster, "thanks. And, to reward you, you shall hear the night-bird (Chouette) shriek! Listen, boy,—listen to the bird of death!"

"Bravo! Here I am in the dress-boxes!" said Tortillard, seating himself on the top of the stairs.

As he said this, he raised the light to endeavour to see the fearful scene which was going on in the depths of the cavern; but the darkness was too thick, so faint a light could not disperse it: Bras-Rouge's son could not see anything. The struggle with the Schoolmaster and the Chouette was mute, deadly, without a word, without a cry; only from time to time was heard the hard breathing, or the stifled groan, which always accompanies violent and desperate efforts. Tortillard, seated on the step, began to stamp his feet with that cadence peculiar to an audience impatient to see the beginning of a play; then he uttered the cry so familiar to the frequenters of the gallery of the minor theatres:

"Music! Music! Play up! Up with the curtain!"

"Oh, now I have hold of you, as I desired," murmured the Schoolmaster, from the recess of the cellar; "and you were going—"

A desperate movement of the Chouette interrupted him; she struggled with all the energy which the fear of death inspires.

"Louder! Can't hear!" bawled Tortillard.

"It is in vain you try to gnaw my hand, I will hold you as I like," said the Schoolmaster. Then, having, no doubt, succeeded in keeping the Chouette down, he added, "That's it! Now listen—"

"Tortillard, call your father!" shrieked the Chouette, with a faltering, exhausted voice. "Help! Help!"

"Turn her out, the old thing! She won't let us hear," said the little cripple, with a shout of laughter; "put her out!"

The Chouette's cries were not audible from this cavern, low as it was. The wretched creature, seeing that there was no chance of help from Bras-Rouge's son, resolved to try a last effort.

"Tortillard, go and fetch help, and I will give you my basket; it is full of jewels. There it is, under a stone."

"How generous! Thank ye, madame. Why, haven't I got it already? Hark! Don't you hear how it rattles?" said Tortillard, shaking it. "But now, if you'll give us half a pound of gingerbread nuts, I'll go and fetch pa."

"Have pity on me, and I will—"

The Chouette was unable to conclude. Again there was a profound silence. The little cripple again began to beat time on the stone staircase on which he was seated, accompanying the noise of his feet with the repeated cry:

"Why don't you begin? Up with the curtain! Music! Music!"

"In this way, Chouette, you can no longer disturb me with your cries," said the Schoolmaster, after a few minutes, during which he had, no doubt, gagged the old woman. "You know very well," he continued, in a slow, hollow voice, "that I do not wish to end this all at once; torture for torture! You have made me suffer enough, and I must speak at length to you before I kill you,—yes, at length. It will be very terrible for you, agonising!"

"Come, no stuff and nonsense, old parson," said Tortillard, raising himself half up from his seat; "punish her, but don't do her any harm. You say you'll kill her,—that's only a hum; I am very fond of my Chouette; I have only lent her to you, and you must give her back again. Don't spoil her,—I won't have my Chouette spoiled,—if you do, I'll go and fetch pa!"

"Be quiet, and she shall only have what she deserves, a profitable lesson," said the Schoolmaster, in order to assure Tortillard, and for fear the cripple should go and fetch assistance.

"All right! Bravo! Now the play's going to begin!" said Bras-Rouge's son, who did not seriously believe that the Schoolmaster intended to kill the Chouette.

"Let us discourse a little, Chouette," continued the Schoolmaster, in a calm voice. "In the first place, you see, since that dream at the Bouqueval farm, which brought all my crimes before my eyes, since that dream, which did all but drive me mad,—which will drive me mad, for, in my solitude, in the deep isolation in which I live, all my thoughts dwell on this dream, in spite of myself,—a strange change has come over me; yes, I have a horror of my past ferocity. In the first place, I would not allow you to make a martyr of La Goualeuse, though that was nothing. Chaining me here in the cellar, making me suffer from cold and hunger, and detaining me for your wicked suggestions, you have left me to all the fear of my own reflections. Oh, you do not know what it is to be left alone,—always alone,—with a dark veil over your eyes, as the pitiless man said who punished me. Oh, it is horrid! It was in this very cavern that I flung him, in order to kill him; and this cavern is the place of my punishment, it may be my grave. I repeat that this is horrid! All that that man predicted to me has come to pass; he said to me, 'You have abused your strength,—you will be the plaything, the sport of the most weak.' And it has been so. He said to me, 'Henceforward separated from the exterior world, face to face with the eternal remembrance of your crimes, one day you will repent those crimes.' And that day has come; the loneliness has purified me; I could not have believed it possible. Another proof that I am perhaps less wicked than formerly, is that I feel inexpressible joy in holding you here, monster! Not to avenge myself, but to avenge your victims,—yes, I shall have accomplished a duty when, with my own hands, I shall have punished my accomplice. A voice says to me, that, if you had fallen into my power earlier, much blood, much blood would have been spared. I have now a horror of my past murders; and yet, is it not strange? It is without fear, it is even with security, that I am now about to perpetrate on you a fearful murder, with most fearful refinements. Say, say! Do you understand that?"

"Bravo! Well played, old No-Eyes! He gets on," exclaimed Tortillard, applauding. "It is really something to laugh at."

"To laugh at?" continued the Schoolmaster, in a hollow voice. "Keep still, Chouette; I must complete my explanation as to how I gradually came to repentance. This revelation will be hateful to you, heart of stone, and will prove to you also how remorseless I ought to be in the vengeance which I



should wreak on you in the name of our victims. I must be quick. My delight at grasping you thus makes my blood throb in my veins,—my temples beat with violence, just as when, by thinking of my dream, my reason wanders. Perhaps one of my crises will come on; but I shall have time to make the approaches of death frightful to you by compelling you to hear me."

"At him, Chouette!" cried Tortillard. "At him! And reply boldly! Why, you don't know your part. Tell the 'old one' to prompt you, my worthy elderly damsel."

"It is useless for you to struggle and bite me," said the Schoolmaster, after another pause. "You shall not escape me,—you have bitten my fingers to the bone; but I will pull your tongue out, if you stir. Let us continue our discourse. When I have been alone—alone in the night and silence—I have begun to experience fits of furious, impotent rage; and, for the first time, my senses wandered. Oh! though I was awake, I again dreamed the dream—you know—the dream. The little old man in the Rue du Roule, the drowned woman, the cattle-dealer, and you—soaring over these phantoms! I tell you it was horrible! I am blind, and my thoughts assume a form, a body, in order to represent to me incessantly, and in a visible, palpable manner, the features of my victims. I should not have dreamed this fearful vision, had not my mind, continually absorbed by the remembrance of my past crimes, been troubled with the same fantasies. Unquestionably, when one is deprived of sight, the ideas that beset us form themselves into images in the brain. Yet sometimes, by dint of viewing them with resigned terror, it would appear that these menacing spectres have pity on me,—they grow dim—fade away—vanish. Then I feel myself awakened from my horrid dream, but so weak—cast down—prostrated—that—would you believe it? ah, how you will laugh, Chouette!—that I weep! Do you hear? I weep! You don't laugh? Laugh! Laugh! Laugh, I say!"

The Chouette gave a dull and stifled groan.

"Louder," said Tortillard; "can't hear."

"Yes," continued the Schoolmaster, "I weep, for I suffer and rage in vain. I say to myself, 'To-morrow, next day, for ever, I shall be a prey to the same attacks of delirium and gloomy desolation. 'What a life! Oh, what a life! And I would not choose death rather than be buried alive in this abyss which incessantly pervades my thoughts! Blind, alone, and a prisoner,—what can relieve me from my remorse? Nothing, nothing! When the fantasies disappear for a moment, and do not pass and repass the black veil constantly before my eyes, there are other tortures,—other overwhelming

reflections. I say to myself, 'If I had remained an honest man, I should be at this moment free, tranquil, happy, beloved, and honoured by my connections, instead of being blind and chained in this dungeon at the mercy of my accomplices.' Alas! the regret of happiness lost from crime is the first step towards repentance; and when to repentance is joined an expiation of fearful severity,—an expiation which changes life into a long, sleepless night, filled with avenging hallucinations or despairing reflections,—perhaps then man's pardon succeeds to remorse and expiation."

"I say, old chap," exclaimed Tortillard, "you are borrowing a bit from M. Moissard's part! Come, no cribbing—gammon!"

The Schoolmaster did not hear Bras-Rouge's son.

"You are astonished to hear me speak thus, Chouette? If I had continued to imbrue myself either in bloody crimes or the fierce drunkenness of the life of the galleys, this salutary change would never have come over me I know full well. But alone, blind, stung with remorse, which eats into me, of what else could I think? Of new crimes,—how to commit them? Escape,—how to escape? And, if I escaped, whither should I go? What should I do with my liberty? No; I must henceforth live in eternal night, between the anguish of repentance and the fear of formidable apparitions which pursue me. Sometimes, however, a faint ray of hope comes to lighten the depth of my darkness, a moment of calm succeeds to my torments,—yes, for sometimes I am able to drive away the spectres which beset me by opposing to them the recollections of an honest and peaceable past, by ascending in thought to my youthful days, to my hours of infancy. Happily, the greatest wretches have, at least, some years of peace and innocence to oppose to their criminal and blood-stained years. None are born wicked; the most infamous have had the lovely candour of infancy,—have tasted the sweet joys of that delightful age. And thus, I again say, I sometimes find a bitter consolation in saying to myself, 'I am, at this hour, doomed to universal execration, but there was a time when I was beloved, protected, because I was inoffensive and good. Alas! I must, indeed, take refuge in the past, when I can, for it is there only that I can find calm.'"

As he uttered these last words, the tones of the Schoolmaster lost their harshness; this man of iron appeared deeply moved, and he added:

"But now the salutary influence of these thoughts is such that my fury is appeased; courage, power will fail me to punish you. No, it is not I who will shed your blood."

"Well said, old buck! So, you see, Chouette, it was only a lark," cried Tortillard, applauding.

"No, it is not I who will shed your blood," continued the Schoolmaster; "it would be a murder, excusable perhaps, but still a murder; and I have enough with three spectres; and then—who knows?—perhaps one day you will repent also?"

And, as he spake thus, the Schoolmaster had mechanically given the Chouette some liberty of movement. She took advantage of it to seize the stiletto which she had thrust into her stays after Sarah's murder, and aimed a violent blow with this weapon at the ruffian, in order to disengage herself from him. He uttered a cry of extreme pain.

The ferocity of his hatred, his vengeance, his rage, his bloody instincts, suddenly aroused and exasperated by this attack, now all burst forth suddenly, terribly, and carried with it his reason, already so strongly shaken by so many shocks.

"Ah, viper, I feel your teeth!" he exclaimed in a voice that shook with passion, and seizing, with all his might, the Chouette, who had thought thus to escape him. "You are in this dungeon, then?" he added, with an air of madness. "But I will crush the viper or screech-owl. No doubt you were waiting for the coming of the phantoms. Yes; for the blood beats in my temples,—? my ears ring,—my head turns—as when they are about to appear! Yes; I was not deceived; here they are,—they advance from the depths of darkness,—they advance! How pale they are; and their blood, how it flows,—red and smoking! It frightens you,—you struggle. Well, be still, you shall not see the phantoms,—no, you shall not see them. I have pity on you; I will make you blind. You shall be, like me,—eyeless!"

Here the Schoolmaster paused. The Chouette uttered a cry so horrible that Tortillard, alarmed, bounded off the step, and stood up. The horrid shrieks of the Chouette served to place the copestone on the fury of the Schoolmaster.

"Sing," he said, in a low voice, "sing, Chouette,—night-bird! Sing your song of death! You are happy; you do not see three phantoms of those we have assassinated,—the little old man in the Rue du Roule, the drowned woman, the cattle-dealer. I see them; they approach; they touch me. Ah, so cold,—so cold! Ah!"

The last gleam of sense of this unhappy wretch was lost in this cry of condemnation. He could no longer reason, but acted and roared like a wild beast, and only obeyed the savage instinct of destruction for destruction. A hurried trampling was now heard, interrupted frequently at intervals with a heavy sound, which appeared like a box of bones bounding against a stone, upon which it was intended to be broken. Sharp, convulsive shrieks, and a burst of hellish laughter accompanied each of these blows. Then there was a gasp of agony. Then—nothing.

Suddenly a distant noise of steps and voices reached the depths of the subterranean vault. Tortillard, frozen with terror by the fearful scene at which he had been present without seeing it, perceived several persons holding lights, who descended the staircase rapidly. In a moment the cave was full of agents of safety, led by Narcisse Borel. The Municipal Guards followed. Tortillard was seized on the first steps of the cellar, with the Chouette's basket still in his hand.

Narcisse Borel, with some of his men, descended into the Schoolmaster's cavern. They all paused, struck by the appalling sight. Chained by the leg to an enormous stone placed in the middle of the cave, the Schoolmaster, with his hair on end, his long beard, foaming mouth, was moving like a wild beast about his den, drawing after him by the two legs the dead carcase of the Chouette, whose head was horribly fractured. It required desperate exertions to snatch her from his grasp and manacle him. After a determined resistance they at length conveyed him into the low parlour of the cabaret, a large dark room, lighted by a solitary window. There, handcuffed and guarded, were Barbillon, Nicholas Martial, his mother and sister. They had been apprehended at the very moment when laying violent hands on the jewel-matcher to cut her throat. She was recovering herself in another room. Stretched on the ground, and hardly restrained by two men, the Schoolmaster, slightly wounded, but quite deranged, was roaring like a wild bull.

Barbillon, with his head hanging down, his face ghastly, lead-coloured, his lips colourless, eye fixed and savage, his long and straight hair falling on the collar of his blouse, torn in the struggle, was seated on a bench, his wrists, enclosed in handcuffs, resting on his knees. The juvenile appearance of this fellow (he was scarcely eighteen years of age), the regularity of his beardless features, already emaciated and withered, were rendered still more deplorable by the hideous stamp which debauchery and crime had imprinted on his physiognomy. Impassive, he did not say a word. It could not be determined whether this apparent insensibility was owing to stupor

or to a calm energy; his breathing was rapid, and, at times, he wiped away the perspiration from his pale brow with his fettered hands.

By his side was Calabash, whose cap had been torn off, and her yellowish hair, tied behind with a piece of tape, hung down in several scanty and tangled meshes. More savage than subdued, her thin and bilious cheeks were somewhat suffused, as she looked disdainfully at her brother, Nicholas, who was in a chair in front of her. Anticipating the fate that awaited him, this scoundrel was dejected. With drooping head and trembling knees he was overcome with fright; his teeth chattered convulsively, and he heaved heavy groans.

The Mother Martial, the only one unmoved, exhibited every proof that she had lost nothing of her accustomed audacity. With head erect, she looked unshrinkingly around her. However, at the sight of Bras-Rouge,—whom they brought into the low room, after having made him accompany the commissary and his clerk in the minute search they had made all over the place,—the widow's features contracted, in spite of herself, and her small and usually dull eyes lighted up like those of an infuriated viper; her pinched-up lips became livid, and she twisted her manacled arms. Then, as if sorry she had made this mute display of impotent rage, she subdued her emotion, and became cold and calm again.

Whilst the commissary and his clerk were writing their depositions, Narcisse Borel, rubbing his hands, cast a satisfied look on the important capture he had made, and which freed Paris from a band of dangerous criminals; but, confessing to himself how useful Bras-Rouge had really been in the affair, he could not help casting on him an expressive and grateful look.

Tortillard's father was to share until after trial the confinement and lot of those he had informed against, and, like them, he was handcuffed; and even more than them did he assume a trembling air of consternation, twisting his weasel's features with all his might, in order to give them a despairing expression, and heaving tremendous sighs. He embraced Tortillard, as if he should find some consolation in his paternal caresses.

The little cripple did not seem much moved by these marks of tenderness; he had just learned that, for a time, he would be moved off to the prison for young offenders.

"What a misery to have a dear child!" cried Bras-Rouge, pretending to be greatly affected. "It is we two who are most unfortunate, madame, for we shall be separated from our children."

The widow could no longer preserve her calmness; and having no doubt of Bras-Rouge's treachery, which she had foretold, she exclaimed:

"I was sure it was you who had sold my son at Toulon. There, Judas!" and she spat in his face. "You sell our heads! Well, they shall see the right sort of deaths,—deaths of true Martials!"

"Yes; we shan't shrink before the carline (guillotine)," added Calabash, with savage excitement.

The widow, glancing towards Nicholas, said to her daughter, with an air of unutterable contempt:

"That coward there will dishonour us on the scaffold!"

Some minutes afterwards the widow and Calabash, accompanied by two policemen, got into a hackney-coach to go to St. Lazare; Barbillon, Nicholas, and Bras Rouge were conveyed to La Force, whilst the Schoolmaster was conveyed to the Conciergerie, where there are cells for the reception of lunatics.

END OF VOLUME IV.