HONORÉ DE BALZAC

COUSIN BETTY

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Cousin Betty

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Cousin Betty:

Содержание

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DEDICATION

To Don Michele Angelo Cajetani, Prince of Teano.

It is neither to the Roman Prince, nor to the representative of the illustrious house of Cajetani, which has given more than one Pope to the Christian Church, that I dedicate this short portion of a long history; it is to the learned commentator of Dante.

It was you who led me to understand the marvelous framework of ideas on which the great Italian poet built his poem, the only work which the moderns can place by that of Homer. Till I heard you, the Divine Comedy was to me a vast enigma to which none had found the clue – the commentators least of all. Thus, to understand Dante is to be as great as he; but every form of greatness is familiar to you.

A French savant could make a reputation, earn a professor's chair, and a dozen decorations, by publishing in a dogmatic volume the improvised lecture by which you lent enchantment to one of those evenings which are rest after seeing Rome. You do not know, perhaps, that most of our professors live on Germany, on England, on the East, or on the North, as an insect lives on a tree; and, like

the insect, become an integral part of it, borrowing their merit from that of what they feed on. Now, Italy hitherto has not yet been worked out in public lectures. No one will ever give me credit for my literary honesty. Merely by plundering you I might have been as learned as three Schlegels in one, whereas I mean to remain a humble Doctor of the Faculty of Social Medicine, a veterinary surgeon for incurable maladies. Were it only to lay a token of gratitude at the feet of my cicerone, I would fain add your illustrious name to those of Porcia, of San-Severino, of Pareto, of di Negro, and of Belgiojoso, who will represent in this "Human Comedy" the close and constant alliance between Italy and France, to which Bandello did honor in the same way in the sixteenth century – Bandello, the bishop and author of some strange tales indeed, who left us the splendid collection of romances whence Shakespeare derived many of his plots and even complete characters, word for word.

The two sketches I dedicate to you are the two eternal aspects of one and the same fact. Homo duplex, said the great Buffon: why not add Res duplex? Everything has two sides, even virtue. Hence Moliere always shows us both sides of every human problem; and Diderot, imitating him, once wrote, "This is not a mere tale" – in what is perhaps Diderot's masterpiece, where he shows us the beautiful picture of Mademoiselle de Lachaux sacrificed by Gardanne, side by side with that of a perfect lover dying for his mistress.

In the same way, these two romances form a pair, like twins of opposite sexes. This is a literary vagary to which a

writer may for once give way, especially as part of a work in which I am endeavoring to depict every form that can serve as a garb to mind.

Most human quarrels arise from the fact that both wise men and dunces exist who are so constituted as to be incapable of seeing more than one side of any fact or idea, while each asserts that the side he sees is the only true and right one. Thus it is written in the Holy Book, "God will deliver the world over to divisions." I must confess that this passage of Scripture alone should persuade the Papal See to give you the control of the two Chambers to carry out the text which found its commentary in 1814, in the decree of Louis XVIII.

May your wit and the poetry that is in you extend a protecting hand over these two histories of "The Poor Relations"

Of your affectionate humble servant,

DE BALZAC.

PARIS, August-September, 1846.

COUSIN BETTY

One day, about the middle of July 1838, one of the carriages, then lately introduced to Paris cabstands, and known as *Milords*, was driving down the Rue de l'Universite, conveying a stout man of middle height in the uniform of a captain of the National Guard.

Among the Paris crowd, who are supposed to be so clever, there are some men who fancy themselves infinitely more attractive in uniform than in their ordinary clothes, and who attribute to women so depraved a taste that they believe they will be favorably impressed by the aspect of a busby and of military accoutrements.

The countenance of this Captain of the Second Company beamed with a self-satisfaction that added splendor to his ruddy and somewhat chubby face. The halo of glory that a fortune made in business gives to a retired tradesman sat on his brow, and stamped him as one of the elect of Paris – at least a retired deputy-mayor of his quarter of the town. And you may be sure that the ribbon of the Legion of Honor was not missing from his breast, gallantly padded *a la Prussienne*. Proudly seated in one corner of the *milord*, this splendid person let his gaze wander over the passers-by, who, in Paris, often thus meet an ingratiating smile meant for sweet eyes that are absent.

The vehicle stopped in the part of the street between the

Rue de Bellechasse and the Rue de Bourgogne, at the door of a large, newly-build house, standing on part of the court-yard of an ancient mansion that had a garden. The old house remained in its original state, beyond the courtyard curtailed by half its extent.

Only from the way in which the officer accepted the assistance of the coachman to help him out, it was plain that he was past fifty. There are certain movements so undisguisedly heavy that they are as tell-tale as a register of birth. The captain put on his lemon-colored right-hand glove, and, without any question to the gatekeeper, went up the outer steps to the ground of the new house with a look that proclaimed, "She is mine!"

The *concierges* of Paris have sharp eyes; they do not stop visitors who wear an order, have a blue uniform, and walk ponderously; in short, they know a rich man when they see him.

This ground floor was entirely occupied by Monsieur le Baron Hulot d'Ervy, Commissary General under the Republic, retired army contractor, and at the present time at the head of one of the most important departments of the War Office, Councillor of State, officer of the Legion of Honor, and so forth.

This Baron Hulot had taken the name of d'Ervy – the place of his birth – to distinguish him from his brother, the famous General Hulot, Colonel of the Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, created by the Emperor Comte de Forzheim after the campaign of 1809. The Count, the elder brother, being responsible for his junior, had, with paternal care, placed him in the commissariat, where, thanks to the services of the two brothers, the Baron

deserved and won Napoleon's good graces. After 1807, Baron Hulot was Commissary General for the army in Spain.

Having rung the bell, the citizen-captain made strenuous efforts to pull his coat into place, for it had rucked up as much at the back as in front, pushed out of shape by the working of a piriform stomach. Being admitted as soon as the servant in livery saw him, the important and imposing personage followed the man, who opened the door of the drawing-room, announcing:

"Monsieur Crevel."

On hearing the name, singularly appropriate to the figure of the man who bore it, a tall, fair woman, evidently young-looking for her age, rose as if she had received an electric shock.

"Hortense, my darling, go into the garden with your Cousin Betty," she said hastily to her daughter, who was working at some embroidery at her mother's side.

After curtseying prettily to the captain, Mademoiselle Hortense went out by a glass door, taking with her a withered-looking spinster, who looked older than the Baroness, though she was five years younger.

"They are settling your marriage," said Cousin Betty in the girl's ear, without seeming at all offended at the way in which the Baroness had dismissed them, counting her almost as zero.

The cousin's dress might, at need, have explained this free-and-easy demeanor. The old maid wore a merino gown of a dark plum color, of which the cut and trimming dated from the year of the Restoration; a little worked collar, worth perhaps

three francs; and a common straw hat with blue satin ribbons edged with straw plait, such as the old-clothes buyers wear at market. On looking down at her kid shoes, made, it was evident, by the veriest cobbler, a stranger would have hesitated to recognize Cousin Betty as a member of the family, for she looked exactly like a journeywoman sempstress. But she did not leave the room without bestowing a little friendly nod on Monsieur Crevel, to which that gentleman responded by a look of mutual understanding.

"You are coming to us to-morrow, I hope, Mademoiselle Fischer?" said he.

"You have no company?" asked Cousin Betty.

"My children and yourself, no one else," replied the visitor.

"Very well," replied she; "depend on me."

"And here am I, madame, at your orders," said the citizen-captain, bowing again to Madame Hulot.

He gave such a look at Madame Hulot as Tartuffe casts at Elmire – when a provincial actor plays the part and thinks it necessary to emphasize its meaning – at Poitiers, or at Coutances.

"If you will come into this room with me, we shall be more conveniently placed for talking business than we are in this room," said Madame Hulot, going to an adjoining room, which, as the apartment was arranged, served as a cardroom.

It was divided by a slight partition from a boudoir looking out on the garden, and Madame Hulot left her visitor to himself for a minute, for she thought it wise to shut the window and the door

of the boudoir, so that no one should get in and listen. She even took the precaution of shutting the glass door of the drawing-room, smiling on her daughter and her cousin, whom she saw seated in an old summer-house at the end of the garden. As she came back she left the cardroom door open, so as to hear if any one should open that of the drawing-room to come in.

As she came and went, the Baroness, seen by nobody, allowed her face to betray all her thoughts, and any one who could have seen her would have been shocked to see her agitation. But when she finally came back from the glass door of the drawing-room, as she entered the cardroom, her face was hidden behind the impenetrable reserve which every woman, even the most candid, seems to have at her command.

During all these preparations – odd, to say the least – the National Guardsman studied the furniture of the room in which he found himself. As he noted the silk curtains, once red, now faded to dull purple by the sunshine, and frayed in the pleats by long wear; the carpet, from which the hues had faded; the discolored gilding of the furniture; and the silk seats, discolored in patches, and wearing into strips – expressions of scorn, satisfaction, and hope dawned in succession without disguise on his stupid tradesman's face. He looked at himself in the glass over an old clock of the Empire, and was contemplating the general effect, when the rustle of her silk skirt announced the Baroness. He at once struck at attitude.

After dropping on to a sofa, which had been a very handsome

one in the year 1809, the Baroness, pointing to an armchair with the arms ending in bronze sphinxes' heads, while the paint was peeling from the wood, which showed through in many places, signed to Crevel to be seated.

"All the precautions you are taking, madame, would seem full of promise to a – "

"To a lover," said she, interrupting him.

"The word is too feeble," said he, placing his right hand on his heart, and rolling his eyes in a way which almost always makes a woman laugh when she, in cold blood, sees such a look. "A lover! A lover? Say a man bewitched – "

"Listen, Monsieur Crevel," said the Baroness, too anxious to be able to laugh, "you are fifty – ten years younger than Monsieur Hulot, I know; but at my age a woman's follies ought to be justified by beauty, youth, fame, superior merit – some one of the splendid qualities which can dazzle us to the point of making us forget all else – even at our age. Though you may have fifty thousand francs a year, your age counterbalances your fortune; thus you have nothing whatever of what a woman looks for – "

"But love!" said the officer, rising and coming forward. "Such love as – "

"No, monsieur, such obstinacy!" said the Baroness, interrupting him to put an end to his absurdity.

"Yes, obstinacy," said he, "and love; but something stronger still – a claim – "

"A claim!" cried Madame Hulot, rising sublime with scorn,

defiance, and indignation. “But,” she went on, “this will bring us to no issues; I did not ask you to come here to discuss the matter which led to your banishment in spite of the connection between our families – ”

“I had fancied so.”

“What! still?” cried she. “Do you not see, monsieur, by the entire ease and freedom with which I can speak of lovers and love, of everything least creditable to a woman, that I am perfectly secure in my own virtue? I fear nothing – not even to shut myself in alone with you. Is that the conduct of a weak woman? You know full well why I begged you to come.”

“No, madame,” replied Crevel, with an assumption of great coldness. He pursed up his lips, and again struck an attitude.

“Well, I will be brief, to shorten our common discomfort,” said the Baroness, looking at Crevel.

Crevel made an ironical bow, in which a man who knew the race would have recognized the graces of a bagman.

“Our son married your daughter – ”

“And if it were to do again – ” said Crevel.

“It would not be done at all, I suspect,” said the baroness hastily. “However, you have nothing to complain of. My son is not only one of the leading pleaders of Paris, but for the last year he has sat as Deputy, and his maiden speech was brilliant enough to lead us to suppose that ere long he will be in office. Victorin has twice been called upon to report on important measures; and he might even now, if he chose, be made Attorney-General in

the Court of Appeal. So, if you mean to say that your son-in-law has no fortune – ”

“Worse than that, madame, a son-in-law whom I am obliged to maintain,” replied Crevel. “Of the five hundred thousand francs that formed my daughter’s marriage portion, two hundred thousand have vanished – God knows how! – in paying the young gentleman’s debts, in furnishing his house splendaciously – a house costing five hundred thousand francs, and bringing in scarcely fifteen thousand, since he occupies the larger part of it, while he owes two hundred and sixty thousand francs of the purchase-money. The rent he gets barely pays the interest on the debt. I have had to give my daughter twenty thousand francs this year to help her to make both ends meet. And then my son-in-law, who was making thirty thousand francs a year at the Assizes, I am told, is going to throw that up for the Chamber – ”

“This, again, Monsieur Crevel, is beside the mark; we are wandering from the point. Still, to dispose of it finally, it may be said that if my son gets into office, if he has you made an officer of the Legion of Honor and councillor of the municipality of Paris, you, as a retired perfumer, will not have much to complain of – ”

“Ah! there we are again, madame! Yes, I am a tradesman, a shopkeeper, a retail dealer in almond-paste, eau-de-Portugal, and hair-oil, and was only too much honored when my only daughter was married to the son of Monsieur le Baron Hulot d’Ervy – my daughter will be a Baroness! This is Regency, Louis XV.,

(Eil-de-boeuf – quite tip-top! – very good.) I love Celestine as a man loves his only child – so well indeed, that, to preserve her from having either brother or sister, I resigned myself to all the privations of a widower – in Paris, and in the prime of life, madame. But you must understand that, in spite of this extravagant affection for my daughter, I do not intend to reduce my fortune for the sake of your son, whose expenses are not wholly accounted for – in my eyes, as an old man of business."

"Monsieur, you may at this day see in the Ministry of Commerce Monsieur Popinot, formerly a druggist in the Rue des Lombards – "

"And a friend of mine, madame," said the ex-perfumer. "For I, Celestin Crevel, foreman once to old Cesar Birotteau, brought up the said Cesar Birotteau's stock; and he was Popinot's father-in-law. Why, that very Popinot was no more than a shopman in the establishment, and he is the first to remind me of it; for he is not proud, to do him justice, to men in a good position with an income of sixty thousand francs in the funds."

"Well then, monsieur, the notions you term 'Regency' are quite out of date at a time when a man is taken at his personal worth; and that is what you did when you married your daughter to my son."

"But you do not know how the marriage was brought about!" cried Crevel. "Oh, that cursed bachelor life! But for my misconduct, my Celestine might at this day be Vicomtesse Popinot!"

"Once more have done with recriminations over accomplished facts," said the Baroness anxiously. "Let us rather discuss the complaints I have found on your strange behavior. My daughter Hortense had a chance of marrying; the match depended entirely on you; I believed you felt some sentiments of generosity; I thought you would do justice to a woman who has never had a thought in her heart for any man but her husband, that you would have understood how necessary it is for her not to receive a man who may compromise her, and that for the honor of the family with which you are allied you would have been eager to promote Hortense's settlement with Monsieur le Conseiller Lebas. – And it is you, monsieur, you have hindered the marriage."

"Madame," said the ex-perfumer, "I acted the part of an honest man. I was asked whether the two hundred thousand francs to be settled on Mademoiselle Hortense would be forthcoming. I replied exactly in these words: 'I would not answer for it. My son-in-law, to whom the Hulots had promised the same sum, was in debt; and I believe that if Monsieur Hulot d'Ervy were to die to-morrow, his widow would have nothing to live on.' – There, fair lady."

"And would you have said as much, monsieur," asked Madame Hulot, looking Crevel steadily in the face, "if I had been false to my duty?"

"I should not be in a position to say it, dearest Adeline," cried this singular adorer, interrupting the Baroness, "for you would have found the amount in my pocket-book."

And adding action to word, the fat guardsman knelt down on one knee and kissed Madame Hulot's hand, seeing that his speech had filled her with speechless horror, which he took for hesitancy.

"What, buy my daughter's fortune at the cost of – ? Rise, monsieur – or I ring the bell."

Crevel rose with great difficulty. This fact made him so furious that he again struck his favorite attitude. Most men have some habitual position by which they fancy that they show to the best advantage the good points bestowed on them by nature. This attitude in Crevel consisted in crossing his arms like Napoleon, his head showing three-quarters face, and his eyes fixed on the horizon, as the painter has shown the Emperor in his portrait.

"To be faithful," he began, with well-acted indignation, "so faithful to a liber – "

"To a husband who is worthy of such fidelity," Madame Hulot put in, to hinder Crevel from saying a word she did not choose to hear.

"Come, madame; you wrote to bid me here, you ask the reasons for my conduct, you drive me to extremities with your imperial airs, your scorn, and your contempt! Any one might think I was a Negro. But I repeat it, and you may believe me, I have a right to – to make love to you, for – But no; I love you well enough to hold my tongue."

"You may speak, monsieur. In a few days I shall be eight-and-forty; I am no prude; I can hear whatever you can say."

"Then will you give me your word of honor as an honest woman – for you are, alas for me! an honest woman – never to mention my name or to say that it was I who betrayed the secret?"

"If that is the condition on which you speak, I will swear never to tell any one from whom I heard the horrors you propose to tell me, not even my husband."

"I should think not indeed, for only you and he are concerned."

Madame Hulot turned pale.

"Oh, if you still really love Hulot, it will distress you. Shall I say no more?"

"Speak, monsieur; for by your account you wish to justify in my eyes the extraordinary declarations you have chosen to make me, and your persistency in tormenting a woman of my age, whose only wish is to see her daughter married, and then – to die in peace – "

"You see; you are unhappy."

"I, monsieur?"

"Yes, beautiful, noble creature!" cried Crevel. "You have indeed been too wretched!"

"Monsieur, be silent and go – or speak to me as you ought."

"Do you know, madame, how Master Hulot and I first made acquaintance? – At our mistresses', madame."

"Oh, monsieur!"

"Yes, madame, at our mistresses'," Crevel repeated in a melodramatic tone, and leaving his position to wave his right hand.

"Well, and what then?" said the Baroness coolly, to Crevel's great amazement.

Such mean seducers cannot understand a great soul.

"I, a widower five years since," Crevel began, in the tone of a man who has a story to tell, "and not wishing to marry again for the sake of the daughter I adore, not choosing either to cultivate any such connection in my own establishment, though I had at the time a very pretty lady-accountant. I set up, 'on her own account,' as they say, a little sempstress of fifteen – really a miracle of beauty, with whom I fell desperately in love. And in fact, madame, I asked an aunt of my own, my mother's sister, whom I sent for from the country, to live with the sweet creature and keep an eye on her, that she might behave as well as might be in this rather – what shall I say – shady? – no, delicate position.

"The child, whose talent for music was striking, had masters, she was educated – I had to give her something to do. Besides, I wished to be at once her father, her benefactor, and – well, out with it – her lover; to kill two birds with one stone, a good action and a sweetheart. For five years I was very happy. The girl had one of those voices that make the fortune of a theatre; I can only describe her by saying that she is a Duprez in petticoats. It cost me two thousand francs a year only to cultivate her talent as a singer. She made me music-mad; I took a box at the opera for her and for my daughter, and went there alternate evenings with Celestine or Josepha."

"What, the famous singer?"

"Yes, madame," said Crevel with pride, "the famous Josepha owes everything to me. – At last, in 1834, when the child was twenty, believing that I had attached her to me for ever, and being very weak where she was concerned, I thought I would give her a little amusement, and I introduced her to a pretty little actress, Jenny Cadine, whose life had been somewhat like her own. This actress also owed everything to a protector who had brought her up in leading-strings. That protector was Baron Hulot."

"I know that," said the Baroness, in a calm voice without the least agitation.

"Bless me!" cried Crevel, more and more astounded. "Well! But do you know that your monster of a husband took Jenny Cadine in hand at the age of thirteen?"

"What then?" said the Baroness.

"As Jenny Cadine and Josepha were both aged twenty when they first met," the ex-tradesman went on, "the Baron had been playing the part of Louis XV. to Mademoiselle de Romans ever since 1826, and you were twelve years younger then – "

"I had my reasons, monsieur, for leaving Monsieur Hulot his liberty."

"That falsehood, madame, will surely be enough to wipe out every sin you have ever committed, and to open to you the gates of Paradise," replied Crevel, with a knowing air that brought the color to the Baroness' cheeks. "Sublime and adored woman, tell that to those who will believe it, but not to old Crevel, who has, I may tell you, feasted too often as one of four with your rascally

husband not to know what your high merits are! Many a time has he blamed himself when half tipsy as he has expatiated on your perfections. Oh, I know you well! – A libertine might hesitate between you and a girl of twenty. I do not hesitate – "

"Monsieur!"

"Well, I say no more. But you must know, saintly and noble woman, that a husband under certain circumstances will tell things about his wife to his mistress that will mightily amuse her."

Tears of shame hanging to Madame Hulot's long lashes checked the National Guardsman. He stopped short, and forgot his attitude.

"To proceed," said he. "We became intimate, the Baron and I, through the two hussies. The Baron, like all bad lots, is very pleasant, a thoroughly jolly good fellow. Yes, he took my fancy, the old rascal. He could be so funny! – Well, enough of those reminiscences. We got to be like brothers. The scoundrel – quite Regency in his notions – tried indeed to deprave me altogether, preached Saint-Simonism as to women, and all sorts of lordly ideas; but, you see, I was fond enough of my girl to have married her, only I was afraid of having children.

"Then between two old daddies, such friends as – as we were, what more natural than that we should think of our children marrying each other? – Three months after his son had married my Celestine, Hulot – I don't know how I can utter the wretch's name! he has cheated us both, madame – well, the villain did me out of my little Josepha. The scoundrel knew that he was

supplanted in the heart of Jenny Cadine by a young lawyer and by an artist – only two of them! – for the girl had more and more of a howling success, and he stole my sweet little girl, a perfect darling – but you must have seen her at the opera; he got her an engagement there. Your husband is not so well behaved as I am. I am ruled as straight as a sheet of music-paper. He had dropped a good deal of money on Jenny Cadine, who must have cost him near on thirty thousand francs a year. Well, I can only tell you that he is ruining himself outright for Josepha.

"Josepha, madame, is a Jewess. Her name is Mirah, the anagram of Hiram, an Israelite mark that stamps her, for she was a foundling picked up in Germany, and the inquiries I have made prove that she is the illegitimate child of a rich Jew banker. The life of the theatre, and, above all, the teaching of Jenny Cadine, Madame Schontz, Malaga, and Carabine, as to the way to treat an old man, have developed, in the child whom I had kept in a respectable and not too expensive way of life, all the native Hebrew instinct for gold and jewels – for the golden calf.

"So this famous singer, hungering for plunder, now wants to be rich, very rich. She tried her 'prentice hand on Baron Hulot, and soon plucked him bare – plucked him, ay, and singed him to the skin. The miserable man, after trying to vie with one of the Kellers and with the Marquis d'Esgrignon, both perfectly mad about Josepha, to say nothing of unknown worshipers, is about to see her carried off by that very rich Duke, who is such a patron of the arts. Oh, what is his name? – a dwarf. – Ah, the

Duc d'Herouville. This fine gentleman insists on having Josepha for his very own, and all that set are talking about it; the Baron knows nothing of it as yet; for it is the same in the Thirteenth Arrondissement as in every other: the lover, like the husband, is last to get the news.

"Now, do you understand my claim? Your husband, dear lady, has robbed me of my joy in life, the only happiness I have known since I became a widower. Yes, if I had not been so unlucky as to come across that old rip, Josepha would still be mine; for I, you know, should never have placed her on the stage. She would have lived obscure, well conducted, and mine. Oh! if you could but have seen her eight years ago, slight and wiry, with the golden skin of an Andalusian, as they say, black hair as shiny as satin, an eye that flashed lightning under long brown lashes, the style of a duchess in every movement, the modesty of a dependent, decent grace, and the pretty ways of a wild fawn. And by that Hulot's doing all this charm and purity has been degraded to a man-trap, a money-box for five-franc pieces! The girl is the Queen of Trollops; and nowadays she humbugs every one – she who knew nothing, not even that word."

At this stage the retired perfumer wiped his eyes, which were full of tears. The sincerity of his grief touched Madame Hulot, and roused her from the meditation into which she had sunk.

"Tell me, madame, is a man of fifty-two likely to find such another jewel? At my age love costs thirty thousand francs a year. It is through your husband's experience that I know the price, and

I love Celestine too truly to be her ruin. When I saw you, at the first evening party you gave in our honor, I wondered how that scoundrel Hulot could keep a Jenny Cadine – you had the manner of an Empress. You do not look thirty," he went on. "To me, madame, you look young, and you are beautiful. On my word of honor, that evening I was struck to the heart. I said to myself, 'If I had not Josepha, since old Hulot neglects his wife, she would fit me like a glove.' Forgive me – it is a reminiscence of my old business. The perfumer will crop up now and then, and that is what keeps me from standing to be elected deputy.

"And then, when I was so abominably deceived by the Baron, for really between old rips like us our friend's mistress should be sacred, I swore I would have his wife. It is but justice. The Baron could say nothing; we are certain of impunity. You showed me the door like a mangy dog at the first words I uttered as to the state of my feelings; you only made my passion – my obstinacy, if you will – twice as strong, and you shall be mine."

"Indeed; how?"

"I do not know; but it will come to pass. You see, madame, an idiot of a perfumer – retired from business – who has but one idea in his head, is stronger than a clever fellow who has a thousand. I am smitten with you, and you are the means of my revenge; it is like being in love twice over. I am speaking to you quite frankly, as a man who knows what he means. I speak coldly to you, just as you do to me, when you say, 'I never will be yours,' In fact, as they say, I play the game with the cards on the table.

Yes, you shall be mine, sooner or later; if you were fifty, you should still be my mistress. And it will be; for I expect anything from your husband!"

Madame Hulot looked at this vulgar intriguer with such a fixed stare of terror, that he thought she had gone mad, and he stopped.

"You insisted on it, you heaped me with scorn, you defied me – and I have spoken," said he, feeling that he must justify the ferocity of his last words.

"Oh, my daughter, my daughter," moaned the Baroness in a voice like a dying woman's.

"Oh! I have forgotten all else," Crevel went on. "The day when I was robbed of Josepha I was like a tigress robbed of her cubs; in short, as you see me now. – Your daughter? Yes, I regard her as the means of winning you. Yes, I put a spoke in her marriage – and you will not get her married without my help! Handsome as Mademoiselle Hortense is, she needs a fortune – "

"Alas! yes," said the Baroness, wiping her eyes.

"Well, just ask your husband for ten thousand francs," said Crevel, striking his attitude once more. He waited a minute, like an actor who has made a point.

"If he had the money, he would give it to the woman who will take Josepha's place," he went on, emphasizing his tones. "Does a man ever pull up on the road he has taken? In the first place, he is too sweet on women. There is a happy medium in all things, as our King has told us. And then his vanity is implicated! He is a

handsome man! – He would bring you all to ruin for his pleasure; in fact, you are already on the highroad to the workhouse. Why, look, never since I set foot in your house have you been able to do up your drawing-room furniture. 'Hard up' is the word shouted by every slit in the stuff. Where will you find a son-in-law who would not turn his back in horror of the ill-concealed evidence of the most cruel misery there is – that of people in decent society? I have kept shop, and I know. There is no eye so quick as that of the Paris tradesman to detect real wealth from its sham. – You have no money," he said, in a lower voice. "It is written everywhere, even on your man-servant's coat.

"Would you like me to disclose any more hideous mysteries that are kept from you?"

"Monsieur," cried Madame Hulot, whose handkerchief was wet through with her tears, "enough, enough!"

"My son-in-law, I tell you, gives his father money, and this is what I particularly wanted to come to when I began by speaking of your son's expenses. But I keep an eye on my daughter's interests, be easy."

"Oh, if I could but see my daughter married, and die!" cried the poor woman, quite losing her head.

"Well, then, this is the way," said the ex-perfumer.

Madame Hulot looked at Crevel with a hopeful expression, which so completely changed her countenance, that this alone ought to have touched the man's feelings and have led him to abandon his monstrous schemes.

"You will still be handsome ten years hence," Crevel went on, with his arms folded; "be kind to me, and Mademoiselle Hulot will marry. Hulot has given me the right, as I have explained to you, to put the matter crudely, and he will not be angry. In three years I have saved the interest on my capital, for my dissipations have been restricted. I have three hundred thousand francs in the bank over and above my invested fortune – they are yours – "

"Go," said Madame Hulot. "Go, monsieur, and never let me see you again. But for the necessity in which you placed me to learn the secret of your cowardly conduct with regard to the match I had planned for Hortense – yes, cowardly!" she repeated, in answer to a gesture from Crevel. "How can you load a poor girl, a pretty, innocent creature, with such a weight of enmity? But for the necessity that goaded me as a mother, you would never have spoken to me again, never again have come within my doors. Thirty-two years of an honorable and loyal life shall not be swept away by a blow from Monsieur Crevel – "

"The retired perfumer, successor to Cesar Birotteau at the *Queen of the Roses*, Rue Saint-Honore," added Crevel, in mocking tones. "Deputy-mayor, captain in the National Guard, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor – exactly what my predecessor was!"

"Monsieur," said the Baroness, "if, after twenty years of constancy, Monsieur Hulot is tired of his wife, that is nobody's concern but mine. As you see, he has kept his infidelity a mystery, for I did not know that he had succeeded you in the

affections of Mademoiselle Josepha – ”

“Oh, it has cost him a pretty penny, madame. His singing-bird has cost him more than a hundred thousand francs in these two years. Ah, ha! you have not seen the end of it!”

“Have done with all this, Monsieur Crevel. I will not, for your sake, forego the happiness a mother knows who can embrace her children without a single pang of remorse in her heart, who sees herself respected and loved by her family; and I will give up my soul to God unspotted – ”

“Amen!” exclaimed Crevel, with the diabolical rage that embitters the face of these pretenders when they fail for the second time in such an attempt. “You do not yet know the latter end of poverty – shame, disgrace. – I have tried to warn you; I would have saved you, you and your daughter. Well, you must study the modern parable of the *Prodigal Father* from A to Z. Your tears and your pride move me deeply,” said Crevel, seating himself, “for it is frightful to see the woman one loves weeping. All I can promise you, dear Adeline, is to do nothing against your interests or your husband’s. Only never send to me for information. That is all.”

“What is to be done?” cried Madame Hulot.

Up to now the Baroness had bravely faced the threefold torment which this explanation inflicted on her; for she was wounded as a woman, as a mother, and as a wife. In fact, so long as her son’s father-in-law was insolent and offensive, she had found the strength in her resistance to the aggressive tradesman;

but the sort of good-nature he showed, in spite of his exasperation as a mortified adorer and as a humiliated National Guardsman, broke down her nerve, strung to the point of snapping. She wrung her hands, melted into tears, and was in a state of such helpless dejection, that she allowed Crevel to kneel at her feet, kissing her hands.

"Good God! what will become of us!" she went on, wiping away her tears. "Can a mother sit still and see her child pine away before her eyes? What is to be the fate of that splendid creature, as strong in her pure life under her mother's care as she is by every gift of nature? There are days when she wanders round the garden, out of spirits without knowing why; I find her with tears in her eyes – "

"She is one-and-twenty," said Crevel.

"Must I place her in a convent?" asked the Baroness. "But in such cases religion is impotent to subdue nature, and the most piously trained girls lose their head! – Get up, pray, monsieur; do you not understand that everything is final between us? that I look upon you with horror? that you have crushed a mother's last hopes – "

"But if I were to restore them," asked he.

Madame Hulot looked at Crevel with a frenzied expression that really touched him. But he drove pity back to the depths of his heart; she had said, "I look upon you with horror."

Virtue is always a little too rigid; it overlooks the shades and instincts by help of which we are able to tack when in a false

position.

"So handsome a girl as Mademoiselle Hortense does not find a husband nowadays if she is penniless," Crevel remarked, resuming his starchiest manner. "Your daughter is one of those beauties who rather alarm intending husbands; like a thoroughbred horse, which is too expensive to keep up to find a ready purchaser. If you go out walking with such a woman on your arm, every one will turn to look at you, and follow and covet his neighbor's wife. Such success is a source of much uneasiness to men who do not want to be killing lovers; for, after all, no man kills more than one. In the position in which you find yourself there are just three ways of getting your daughter married: Either by my help – and you will have none of it! That is one. – Or by finding some old man of sixty, very rich, childless, and anxious to have children; that is difficult, still such men are to be met with. Many old men take up with a Josepha, a Jenny Cadine, why should not one be found who is ready to make a fool of himself under legal formalities? If it were not for Celestine and our two grandchildren, I would marry Hortense myself. That is two. – The last way is the easiest – "

Madame Hulot raised her head, and looked uneasily at the ex-perfumer.

"Paris is a town whither every man of energy – and they sprout like saplings on French soil – comes to meet his kind; talent swarms here without hearth or home, and energy equal to anything, even to making a fortune. Well, these youngsters – your

humble servant was such a one in his time, and how many he has known! What had du Tillet or Popinot twenty years since? They were both pottering round in Daddy Birotteau's shop, with not a penny of capital but their determination to get on, which, in my opinion, is the best capital a man can have. Money may be eaten through, but you don't eat through your determination. Why, what had I? The will to get on, and plenty of pluck. At this day du Tillet is a match for the greatest folks; little Popinot, the richest druggist of the Rue des Lombards, became a deputy, now he is in office. – Well, one of these free lances, as we say on the stock market, of the pen, or of the brush, is the only man in Paris who would marry a penniless beauty, for they have courage enough for anything. Monsieur Popinot married Mademoiselle Birotteau without asking for a farthing. Those men are madmen, to be sure! They trust in love as they trust in good luck and brains! – Find a man of energy who will fall in love with your daughter, and he will marry without a thought of money. You must confess that by way of an enemy I am not ungenerous, for this advice is against my own interests."

"Oh, Monsieur Crevel, if you would indeed be my friend and give up your ridiculous notions – "

"Ridiculous? Madame, do not run yourself down. Look at yourself – I love you, and you will come to be mine. The day will come when I shall say to Hulot, 'You took Josepha, I have taken your wife!'

"It is the old law of tit-for-tat! And I will persevere till I have

attained my end, unless you should become extremely ugly. – I shall succeed; and I will tell you why," he went on, resuming his attitude, and looking at Madame Hulot. "You will not meet with such an old man, or such a young lover," he said after a pause, "because you love your daughter too well to hand her over to the manoeuvres of an old libertine, and because you – the Baronne Hulot, sister of the old Lieutenant-General who commanded the veteran Grenadiers of the Old Guard – will not condescend to take a man of spirit wherever you may find him; for he might be a mere craftsman, as many a millionaire of to-day was ten years ago, a working artisan, or the foreman of a factory.

"And then, when you see the girl, urged by her twenty years, capable of dishonoring you all, you will say to yourself, 'It will be better that I should fall! If Monsieur Crevel will but keep my secret, I will earn my daughter's portion – two hundred thousand francs for ten years' attachment to that old gloveseller – old Crevel!' – I disgust you no doubt, and what I am saying is horribly immoral, you think? But if you happened to have been bitten by an overwhelming passion, you would find a thousand arguments in favor of yielding – as women do when they are in love. – Yes, and Hortense's interests will suggest to your feelings such terms of surrendering your conscience – "

"Hortense has still an uncle."

"What! Old Fischer? He is winding up his concerns, and that again is the Baron's fault; his rake is dragged over every till within his reach."

"Comte Hulot – "

"Oh, madame, your husband has already made thin air of the old General's savings. He spent them in furnishing his singer's rooms. – Now, come; am I to go without a hope?"

"Good-bye, monsieur. A man easily gets over a passion for a woman of my age, and you will fall back on Christian principles. God takes care of the wretched – "

The Baroness rose to oblige the captain to retreat, and drove him back into the drawing-room.

"Ought the beautiful Madame Hulot to be living amid such squalor?" said he, and he pointed to an old lamp, a chandelier bereft of its gilding, the threadbare carpet, the very rags of wealth which made the large room, with its red, white, and gold, look like a corpse of Imperial festivities.

"Monsieur, virtue shines on it all. I have no wish to owe a handsome abode to having made of the beauty you are pleased to ascribe to me a *man-trap* and *a money-box for five-franc pieces*!"

The captain bit his lips as he recognized the words he had used to vilify Josepha's avarice.

"And for whom are you so magnanimous?" said he. By this time the baroness had got her rejected admirer as far as the door. – "For a libertine!" said he, with a lofty grimace of virtue and superior wealth.

"If you are right, my constancy has some merit, monsieur. That is all."

After bowing to the officer as a woman bows to dismiss an

importune visitor, she turned away too quickly to see him once more fold his arms. She unlocked the doors she had closed, and did not see the threatening gesture which was Crevel's parting greeting. She walked with a proud, defiant step, like a martyr to the Coliseum, but her strength was exhausted; she sank on the sofa in her blue room, as if she were ready to faint, and sat there with her eyes fixed on the tumble-down summer-house, where her daughter was gossiping with Cousin Betty.

From the first days of her married life to the present time the Baroness had loved her husband, as Josephine in the end had loved Napoleon, with an admiring, maternal, and cowardly devotion. Though ignorant of the details given her by Crevel, she knew that for twenty years past Baron Hulot been anything rather than a faithful husband; but she had sealed her eyes with lead, she had wept in silence, and no word of reproach had ever escaped her. In return for this angelic sweetness, she had won her husband's veneration and something approaching to worship from all who were about her.

A wife's affection for her husband and the respect she pays him are infectious in a family. Hortense believed her father to be a perfect model of conjugal affection; as to their son, brought up to admire the Baron, whom everybody regarded as one of the giants who so effectually backed Napoleon, he knew that he owed his advancement to his father's name, position, and credit; and besides, the impressions of childhood exert an enduring influence. He still was afraid of his father; and if he had

suspected the misdeeds revealed by Crevel, as he was too much overawed by him to find fault, he would have found excuses in the view every man takes of such matters.

It now will be necessary to give the reasons for the extraordinary self-devotion of a good and beautiful woman; and this, in a few words, is her past history.

Three brothers, simple laboring men, named Fischer, and living in a village situated on the furthest frontier of Lorraine, were compelled by the Republican conscription to set out with the so-called army of the Rhine.

In 1799 the second brother, Andre, a widower, and Madame Hulot's father, left his daughter to the care of his elder brother, Pierre Fischer, disabled from service by a wound received in 1797, and made a small private venture in the military transport service, an opening he owed to the favor of Hulot d'Ervy, who was high in the commissariat. By a very obvious chance Hulot, coming to Strasbourg, saw the Fischer family. Adeline's father and his younger brother were at that time contractors for forage in the province of Alsace.

Adeline, then sixteen years of age, might be compared with the famous Madame du Barry, like her, a daughter of Lorraine. She was one of those perfect and striking beauties – a woman like Madame Tallien, finished with peculiar care by Nature, who bestows on them all her choicest gifts – distinction, dignity, grace, refinement, elegance, flesh of a superior texture, and a complexion mingled in the unknown laboratory where good

luck presides. These beautiful creatures all have something in common: Bianca Capella, whose portrait is one of Bronzino's masterpieces; Jean Goujon's Venus, painted from the famous Diane de Poitiers; Signora Olympia, whose picture adorns the Doria gallery; Ninon, Madame du Barry, Madame Tallien, Mademoiselle Georges, Madame Recamier. – all these women who preserved their beauty in spite of years, of passion, and of their life of excess and pleasure, have in figure, frame, and in the character of their beauty certain striking resemblances, enough to make one believe that there is in the ocean of generations an Aphrodisian current whence every such Venus is born, all daughters of the same salt wave.

Adeline Fischer, one of the loveliest of this race of goddesses, had the splendid type, the flowing lines, the exquisite texture of a woman born a queen. The fair hair that our mother Eve received from the hand of God, the form of an Empress, an air of grandeur, and an august line of profile, with her rural modesty, made every man pause in delight as she passed, like amateurs in front of a Raphael; in short, having once seen her, the Commissariat officer made Mademoiselle Adeline Fischer his wife as quickly as the law would permit, to the great astonishment of the Fischers, who had all been brought up in the fear of their betters.

The eldest, a soldier of 1792, severely wounded in the attack on the lines at Wissembourg, adored the Emperor Napoleon and everything that had to do with the *Grande Armee*. Andre and

Johann spoke with respect of Commissary Hulot, the Emperor's protege, to whom indeed they owed their prosperity; for Hulot d'Ervy, finding them intelligent and honest, had taken them from the army provision wagons to place them in charge of a government contract needing despatch. The brothers Fischer had done further service during the campaign of 1804. At the peace Hulot had secured for them the contract for forage from Alsace, not knowing that he would presently be sent to Strasbourg to prepare for the campaign of 1806.

This marriage was like an Assumption to the young peasant girl. The beautiful Adeline was translated at once from the mire of her village to the paradise of the Imperial Court; for the contractor, one of the most conscientious and hard-working of the Commissariat staff, was made a Baron, obtained a place near the Emperor, and was attached to the Imperial Guard. The handsome rustic bravely set to work to educate herself for love of her husband, for she was simply crazy about him; and, indeed, the Commissariat office was as a man a perfect match for Adeline as a woman. He was one of the picked corps of fine men. Tall, well-built, fair, with beautiful blue eyes full of irresistible fire and life, his elegant appearance made him remarkable by the side of d'Orsay, Forbin, Ouvrard; in short, in the battalion of fine men that surrounded the Emperor. A conquering "buck," and holding the ideas of the Directoire with regard to women, his career of gallantry was interrupted for some long time by his conjugal affection.

To Adeline the Baron was from the first a sort of god who could do no wrong. To him she owed everything: fortune – she had a carriage, a fine house, every luxury of the day; happiness – he was devoted to her in the face of the world; a title, for she was a Baroness; fame, for she was spoken of as the beautiful Madame Hulot – and in Paris! Finally, she had the honor of refusing the Emperor's advances, for Napoleon made her a present of a diamond necklace, and always remembered her, asking now and again, "And is the beautiful Madame Hulot still a model of virtue?" in the tone of a man who might have taken his revenge on one who should have triumphed where he had failed.

So it needs no great intuition to discern what were the motives in a simple, guileless, and noble soul for the fanaticism of Madame Hulot's love. Having fully persuaded herself that her husband could do her no wrong, she made herself in the depths of her heart the humble, abject, and blindfold slave of the man who had made her. It must be noted, too, that she was gifted with great good sense – the good sense of the people, which made her education sound. In society she spoke little, and never spoke evil of any one; she did not try to shine; she thought out many things, listened well, and formed herself on the model of the best-conducted women of good birth.

In 1815 Hulot followed the lead of the Prince de Wissembourg, his intimate friend, and became one of the officers who organized the improvised troops whose rout brought the Napoleonic cycle to a close at Waterloo. In 1816 the Baron

was one of the men best hated by the Feltre administration, and was not reinstated in the Commissariat till 1823, when he was needed for the Spanish war. In 1830 he took office as the fourth wheel of the coach, at the time of the levies, a sort of conscription made by Louis Philippe on the old Napoleonic soldiery. From the time when the younger branch ascended the throne, having taken an active part in bringing that about, he was regarded as an indispensable authority at the War Office. He had already won his Marshal's baton, and the King could do no more for him unless by making him minister or a peer of France.

From 1818 till 1823, having no official occupation, Baron Hulot had gone on active service to womankind. Madame Hulot dated her Hector's first infidelities from the grand *finale* of the Empire. Thus, for twelve years the Baroness had filled the part in her household of *prima donna assoluta*, without a rival. She still could boast of the old-fashioned, inveterate affection which husbands feel for wives who are resigned to be gentle and virtuous helpmates; she knew that if she had a rival, that rival would not subsist for two hours under a word of reproof from herself; but she shut her eyes, she stopped her ears, she would know nothing of her husband's proceedings outside his home. In short, she treated her Hector as a mother treats a spoilt child.

Three years before the conversation reported above, Hortense, at the Theatre des Varietes, had recognized her father in a lower tier stage-box with Jenny Cadine, and had exclaimed:

"There is papa!"

"You are mistaken, my darling; he is at the Marshal's," the Baroness replied.

She too had seen Jenny Cadine; but instead of feeling a pang when she saw how pretty she was, she said to herself, "That rascal Hector must think himself very lucky."

She suffered nevertheless; she gave herself up in secret to rages of torment; but as soon as she saw Hector, she always remembered her twelve years of perfect happiness, and could not find it in her to utter a word of complaint. She would have been glad if the Baron would have taken her into his confidence; but she never dared to let him see that she knew of his kicking over the traces, out of respect for her husband. Such an excess of delicacy is never met with but in those grand creatures, daughters of the soil, whose instinct it is to take blows without ever returning them; the blood of the early martyrs still lives in their veins. Well-born women, their husbands' equals, feel the impulse to annoy them, to mark the points of their tolerance, like points at billiards, by some stinging word, partly in the spirit of diabolical malice, and to secure the upper hand or the right of turning the tables.

The Baroness had an ardent admirer in her brother-in-law, Lieutenant-General Hulot, the venerable Colonel of the Grenadiers of the Imperial Infantry Guard, who was to have a Marshal's baton in his old age. This veteran, after having served from 1830 to 1834 as Commandant of the military division, including the departments of Brittany, the scene of his exploits

in 1799 and 1800, had come to settle in Paris near his brother, for whom he had a fatherly affection.

This old soldier's heart was in sympathy with his sister-in-law; he admired her as the noblest and saintliest of her sex. He had never married, because he hoped to find a second Adeline, though he had vainly sought for her through twenty campaigns in as many lands. To maintain her place in the esteem of this blameless and spotless old republican – of whom Napoleon had said, "That brave old Hulot is the most obstinate republican, but he will never be false to me" – Adeline would have endured griefs even greater than those that had just come upon her. But the old soldier, seventy-two years of age, battered by thirty campaigns, and wounded for the twenty-seventh time at Waterloo, was Adeline's admirer, and not a "protector." The poor old Count, among other infirmities, could only hear through a speaking trumpet.

So long as Baron Hulot d'Ervy was a fine man, his flirtations did not damage his fortune; but when a man is fifty, the Graces claim payment. At that age love becomes vice; insensate vanities come into play. Thus, at about that time, Adeline saw that her husband was incredibly particular about his dress; he dyed his hair and whiskers, and wore a belt and stays. He was determined to remain handsome at any cost. This care of his person, a weakness he had once mercilessly mocked at, was carried out in the minutest details.

At last Adeline perceived that the Pactolus poured out before

the Baron's mistresses had its source in her pocket. In eight years he had dissipated a considerable amount of money; and so effectually, that, on his son's marriage two years previously, the Baron had been compelled to explain to his wife that his pay constituted their whole income.

"What shall we come to?" asked Adeline.

"Be quite easy," said the official, "I will leave the whole of my salary in your hands, and I will make a fortune for Hortense, and some savings for the future, in business."

The wife's deep belief in her husband's power and superior talents, in his capabilities and character, had, in fact, for the moment allayed her anxiety.

What the Baroness' reflections and tears were after Crevel's departure may now be clearly imagined. The poor woman had for two years past known that she was at the bottom of a pit, but she had fancied herself alone in it. How her son's marriage had been finally arranged she had not known; she had known nothing of Hector's connection with the grasping Jewess; and, above all, she hoped that no one in the world knew anything of her troubles. Now, if Crevel went about so ready to talk of the Baron's excesses, Hector's reputation would suffer. She could see, under the angry ex-perfumer's coarse harangue, the odious gossip behind the scenes which led to her son's marriage. Two reprobate hussies had been the priestesses of this union planned at some orgy amid the degrading familiarities of two tipsy old sinners.

"And has he forgotten Hortense!" she wondered.

"But he sees her every day; will he try to find her a husband among his good-for-nothing sluts?"

At this moment it was the mother that spoke rather than the wife, for she saw Hortense laughing with her Cousin Betty – the reckless laughter of heedless youth; and she knew that such hysterical laughter was quite as distressing a symptom as the tearful reverie of solitary walks in the garden.

Hortense was like her mother, with golden hair that waved naturally, and was amazingly long and thick. Her skin had the lustre of mother-of-pearl. She was visibly the offspring of a true marriage, of a pure and noble love in its prime. There was a passionate vitality in her countenance, a brilliancy of feature, a full fount of youth, a fresh vigor and abundance of health, which radiated from her with electric flashes. Hortense invited the eye.

When her eye, of deep ultramarine blue, liquid with the moisture of innocent youth, rested on a passer-by, he was involuntarily thrilled. Nor did a single freckle mar her skin, such as those with which many a white and golden maid pays toll for her milky whiteness. Tall, round without being fat, with a slender dignity as noble as her mother's, she really deserved the name of goddess, of which old authors were so lavish. In fact, those who saw Hortense in the street could hardly restrain the exclamation, "What a beautiful girl!"

She was so genuinely innocent, that she could say to her mother:

"What do they mean, mamma, by calling me a beautiful girl when I am with you? Are not you much handsomer than I am?"

And, in point of fact, at seven-and-forty the Baroness might have been preferred to her daughter by amateurs of sunset beauty; for she had not yet lost any of her charms, by one of those phenomena which are especially rare in Paris, where Ninon was regarded as scandalous, simply because she thus seemed to enjoy such an unfair advantage over the plainer women of the seventeenth century.

Thinking of her daughter brought her back to the father; she saw him sinking by degrees, day after day, down to the social mire, and even dismissed some day from his appointment. The idea of her idol's fall, with a vague vision of the disasters prophesied by Crevel, was such a terror to the poor woman, that she became rapt in the contemplation like an ecstatic.

Cousin Betty, from time to time, as she chatted with Hortense, looked round to see when they might return to the drawing-room; but her young cousin was pelting her with questions, and at the moment when the Baroness opened the glass door she did not happen to be looking.

Lisbeth Fischer, though the daughter of the eldest of the three brothers, was five years younger than Madame Hulot; she was far from being as handsome as her cousin, and had been desperately jealous of Adeline. Jealousy was the fundamental passion of this character, marked by eccentricities – a word invented by the English to describe the craziness not of the asylum, but of

respectable households. A native of the Vosges, a peasant in the fullest sense of the word, lean, brown, with shining black hair and thick eyebrows joining in a tuft, with long, strong arms, thick feet, and some moles on her narrow simian face – such is a brief description of the elderly virgin.

The family, living all under one roof, had sacrificed the common-looking girl to the beauty, the bitter fruit to the splendid flower. Lisbeth worked in the fields, while her cousin was indulged; and one day, when they were alone together, she had tried to destroy Adeline's nose, a truly Greek nose, which the old mothers admired. Though she was beaten for this misdeed, she persisted nevertheless in tearing the favorite's gowns and crumpling her collars.

At the time of Adeline's wonderful marriage, Lisbeth had bowed to fate, as Napoleon's brothers and sisters bowed before the splendor of the throne and the force of authority.

Adeline, who was extremely sweet and kind, remembered Lisbeth when she found herself in Paris, and invited her there in 1809, intending to rescue her from poverty by finding her a husband. But seeing that it was impossible to marry the girl out of hand, with her black eyes and sooty brows, unable, too, to read or write, the Baron began by apprenticing her to a business; he placed her as a learner with the embroiderers to the Imperial Court, the well-known Pons Brothers.

Lisbeth, called Betty for short, having learned to embroider in gold and silver, and possessing all the energy of a mountain

race, had determination enough to learn to read, write, and keep accounts; for her cousin the Baron had pointed out the necessity for these accomplishments if she hoped to set up in business as an embroiderer.

She was bent on making a fortune; in two years she was another creature. In 1811 the peasant woman had become a very presentable, skilled, and intelligent forewoman.

Her department, that of gold and silver lace-work, as it is called, included epaulettes, sword-knots, aiguillettes; in short, the immense mass of glittering ornaments that sparkled on the rich uniforms of the French army and civil officials. The Emperor, a true Italian in his love of dress, had overlaid the coats of all his servants with silver and gold, and the Empire included a hundred and thirty-three Departments. These ornaments, usually supplied to tailors who were solvent and wealthy paymasters, were a very secure branch of trade.

Just when Cousin Betty, the best hand in the house of Pons Brothers, where she was forewoman of the embroidery department, might have set up in business on her own account, the Empire collapsed. The olive-branch of peace held out by the Bourbons did not reassure Lisbeth; she feared a diminution of this branch of trade, since henceforth there were to be but eighty-six Departments to plunder, instead of a hundred and thirty-three, to say nothing of the immense reduction of the army. Utterly scared by the ups and downs of industry, she refused the Baron's offers of help, and he thought she must be mad. She

confirmed this opinion by quarreling with Monsieur Rivet, who bought the business of Pons Brothers, and with whom the Baron wished to place her in partnership; she would be no more than a workwoman. Thus the Fischer family had relapsed into the precarious mediocrity from which Baron Hulot had raised it.

The three brothers Fischer, who had been ruined by the abdication at Fontainebleau, in despair joined the irregular troops in 1815. The eldest, Lisbeth's father, was killed. Adeline's father, sentenced to death by court-martial, fled to Germany, and died at Treves in 1820. Johann, the youngest, came to Paris, a petitioner to the queen of the family, who was said to dine off gold and silver plate, and never to be seen at a party but with diamonds in her hair as big as hazel-nuts, given to her by the Emperor.

Johann Fischer, then aged forty-three, obtained from Baron Hulot a capital of ten thousand francs with which to start a small business as forage-dealer at Versailles, under the patronage of the War Office, through the influence of the friends still in office, of the late Commissary-General.

These family catastrophes, Baron Hulot's dismissal, and the knowledge that he was a mere cipher in that immense stir of men and interests and things which makes Paris at once a paradise and a hell, quite quelled Lisbeth Fischer. She gave up all idea of rivalry and comparison with her cousin after feeling her great superiority; but envy still lurked in her heart, like a plague-germ that may hatch and devastate a city if the fatal bale of wool is

opened in which it is concealed.

Now and again, indeed, she said to herself:

"Adeline and I are the same flesh and blood, our fathers were brothers – and she is in a mansion, while I am in a garret."

But every New Year Lisbeth had presents from the Baron and Baroness; the Baron, who was always good to her, paid for her firewood in the winter; old General Hulot had her to dinner once a week; and there was always a cover laid for her at her cousin's table. They laughed at her no doubt, but they never were ashamed to own her. In short, they had made her independent in Paris, where she lived as she pleased.

The old maid had, in fact, a terror of any kind of tie. Her cousin had offered her a room in her own house – Lisbeth suspected the halter of domestic servitude; several times the Baron had found a solution of the difficult problem of her marriage; but though tempted in the first instance, she would presently decline, fearing lest she should be scorned for her want of education, her general ignorance, and her poverty; finally, when the Baroness suggested that she should live with their uncle Johann, and keep house for him, instead of the upper servant, who must cost him dear, Lisbeth replied that that was the very last way she should think of marrying.

Lisbeth Fischer had the sort of strangeness in her ideas which is often noticeable in characters that have developed late, in savages, who think much and speak little. Her peasant's wit had acquired a good deal of Parisian asperity from hearing the

talk of workshops and mixing with workmen and workwomen. She, whose character had a marked resemblance to that of the Corsicans, worked upon without fruition by the instincts of a strong nature, would have liked to be the protectress of a weak man; but, as a result of living in the capital, the capital had altered her superficially. Parisian polish became rust on this coarsely tempered soul. Gifted with a cunning which had become unfathomable, as it always does in those whose celibacy is genuine, with the originality and sharpness with which she clothed her ideas, in any other position she would have been formidable. Full of spite, she was capable of bringing discord into the most united family.

In early days, when she indulged in certain secret hopes which she confided to none, she took to wearing stays, and dressing in the fashion, and so shone in splendor for a short time, that the Baron thought her marriageable. Lisbeth at that stage was the piquante brunette of old-fashioned novels. Her piercing glance, her olive skin, her reed-like figure, might invite a half-pay major; but she was satisfied, she would say laughing, with her own admiration.

And, indeed, she found her life pleasant enough when she had freed it from practical anxieties, for she dined out every evening after working hard from sunrise. Thus she had only her rent and her midday meal to provide for; she had most of her clothes given her, and a variety of very acceptable stores, such as coffee, sugar, wine, and so forth.

In 1837, after living for twenty-seven years, half maintained by the Hulots and her Uncle Fischer, Cousin Betty, resigned to being nobody, allowed herself to be treated so. She herself refused to appear at any grand dinners, preferring the family party, where she held her own and was spared all slights to her pride.

Wherever she went – at General Hulot's, at Crevel's, at the house of the young Hulots, or at Rivet's (Pons' successor, with whom she made up her quarrel, and who made much of her), and at the Baroness' table – she was treated as one of the family; in fact, she managed to make friends of the servants by making them an occasional small present, and always gossiping with them for a few minutes before going into the drawing-room. This familiarity, by which she uncompromisingly put herself on their level, conciliated their servile good-nature, which is indispensable to a parasite. "She is a good, steady woman," was everybody's verdict.

Her willingness to oblige, which knew no bounds when it was not demanded of her, was indeed, like her assumed bluntness, a necessity of her position. She had at length understood what her life must be, seeing that she was at everybody's mercy; and needing to please everybody, she would laugh with young people, who liked her for a sort of wheedling flattery which always wins them; guessing and taking part with their fancies, she would make herself their spokeswoman, and they thought her a delightful *confidante*, since she had no right to find fault with them.

Her absolute secrecy also won her the confidence of their seniors; for, like Ninon, she had certain manly qualities. As a rule, our confidence is given to those below rather than above us. We employ our inferiors rather than our betters in secret transactions, and they thus become the recipients of our inmost thoughts, and look on at our meditations; Richelieu thought he had achieved success when he was admitted to the Council. This penniless woman was supposed to be so dependent on every one about her, that she seemed doomed to perfect silence. She herself called herself the Family Confessional.

The Baroness only, remembering her ill-usage in childhood by the cousin who, though younger, was stronger than herself, never wholly trusted her. Besides, out of sheer modesty, she would never have told her domestic sorrows to any one but God.

It may here be well to add that the Baron's house preserved all its magnificence in the eyes of Lisbeth Fischer, who was not struck, as the parvenu perfumer had been, with the penury stamped on the shabby chairs, the dirty hangings, and the ripped silk. The furniture we live with is in some sort like our own person; seeing ourselves every day, we end, like the Baron, by thinking ourselves but little altered, and still youthful, when others see that our head is covered with chinchilla, our forehead scarred with circumflex accents, our stomach assuming the rotundity of a pumpkin. So these rooms, always blazing in Betty's eyes with the Bengal fire of Imperial victory, were to her perennially splendid.

As time went on, Lisbeth had contracted some rather strange old-maidish habits. For instance, instead of following the fashions, she expected the fashion to accept her ways and yield to her always out-of-date notions. When the Baroness gave her a pretty new bonnet, or a gown in the fashion of the day, Betty remade it completely at home, and spoilt it by producing a dress of the style of the Empire or of her old Lorraine costume. A thirty-franc bonnet came out a rag, and the gown a disgrace. On this point, Lisbeth was as obstinate as a mule; she would please no one but herself and believed herself charming; whereas this assimilative process – harmonious, no doubt, in so far as that it stamped her for an old maid from head to foot – made her so ridiculous, that, with the best will in the world, no one could admit her on any smart occasion.

This refractory, capricious, and independent spirit, and the inexplicable wild shyness of the woman for whom the Baron had four times found a match – an employe in his office, a retired major, an army contractor, and a half-pay captain – while she had refused an army lacemaker, who had since made his fortune, had won her the name of the Nanny Goat, which the Baron gave her in jest. But this nickname only met the peculiarities that lay on the surface, the eccentricities which each of us displays to his neighbors in social life. This woman, who, if closely studied, would have shown the most savage traits of the peasant class, was still the girl who had clawed her cousin's nose, and who, if she had not been trained to reason, would perhaps have killed her in

a fit of jealousy.

It was only her knowledge of the laws and of the world that enabled her to control the swift instinct with which country folk, like wild men, reduce impulse to action. In this alone, perhaps, lies the difference between natural and civilized man. The savage has only impulse; the civilized man has impulses and ideas. And in the savage the brain retains, as we may say, but few impressions, it is wholly at the mercy of the feeling that rushes in upon it; while in the civilized man, ideas sink into the heart and change it; he has a thousand interests and many feelings, where the savage has but one at a time. This is the cause of the transient ascendency of a child over its parents, which ceases as soon as it is satisfied; in the man who is still one with nature, this contrast is constant. Cousin Betty, a savage of Lorraine, somewhat treacherous too, was of this class of natures, which are commoner among the lower orders than is supposed, accounting for the conduct of the populace during revolutions.

At the time when this *Drama* opens, if Cousin Betty would have allowed herself to be dressed like other people; if, like the women of Paris, she had been accustomed to wear each fashion in its turn, she would have been presentable and acceptable, but she preserved the stiffness of a stick. Now a woman devoid of all the graces, in Paris simply does not exist. The fine but hard eyes, the severe features, the Calabrian fixity of complexion which made Lisbeth like a figure by Giotto, and of which a true Parisian would have taken advantage, above all, her strange way

of dressing, gave her such an extraordinary appearance that she sometimes looked like one of those monkeys in petticoats taken about by little Savoyards. As she was well known in the houses connected by family which she frequented, and restricted her social efforts to that little circle, as she liked her own home, her singularities no longer astonished anybody; and out of doors they were lost in the immense stir of Paris street-life, where only pretty women are ever looked at.

Hortense's laughter was at this moment caused by a victory won over her Cousin Lisbeth's perversity; she had just wrung from her an avowal she had been hoping for these three years past. However secretive an old maid may be, there is one sentiment which will always avail to make her break her fast from words, and that is her vanity. For the last three years, Hortense, having become very inquisitive on such matters, had pestered her cousin with questions, which, however, bore the stamp of perfect innocence. She wanted to know why her cousin had never married. Hortense, who knew of the five offers that she had refused, had constructed her little romance; she supposed that Lisbeth had had a passionate attachment, and a war of banter was the result. Hortense would talk of "We young girls!" when speaking of herself and her cousin.

Cousin Betty had on several occasions answered in the same tone – "And who says I have not a lover?" So Cousin Betty's lover, real or fictitious, became a subject of mild jesting. At last, after two years of this petty warfare, the last time Lisbeth had

come to the house Hortense's first question had been:

"And how is your lover?"

"Pretty well, thank you," was the answer. "He is rather ailing, poor young man."

"He has delicate health?" asked the Baroness, laughing.

"I should think so! He is fair. A sooty thing like me can love none but a fair man with a color like the moon."

"But who is he? What does he do?" asked Hortense. "Is he a prince?"

"A prince of artisans, as I am queen of the bobbin. Is a poor woman like me likely to find a lover in a man with a fine house and money in the funds, or in a duke of the realm, or some Prince Charming out of a fairy tale?"

"Oh, I should so much like to see him!" cried Hortense, smiling.

"To see what a man can be like who can love the Nanny Goat?" retorted Lisbeth.

"He must be some monster of an old clerk, with a goat's beard!" Hortense said to her mother.

"Well, then, you are quite mistaken, mademoiselle."

"Then you mean that you really have a lover?" Hortense exclaimed in triumph.

"As sure as you have not!" retorted Lisbeth, nettled.

"But if you have a lover, why don't you marry him, Lisbeth?" said the Baroness, shaking her head at her daughter. "We have been hearing rumors about him these three years. You have had

time to study him; and if he has been faithful so long, you should not persist in a delay which must be hard upon him. After all, it is a matter of conscience; and if he is young, it is time to take a brevet of dignity."

Cousin Betty had fixed her gaze on Adeline, and seeing that she was jesting, she replied:

"It would be marrying hunger and thirst; he is a workman, I am a workwoman. If we had children, they would be workmen. – No, no; we love each other spiritually; it is less expensive."

"Why do you keep him in hiding?" Hortense asked.

"He wears a round jacket," replied the old maid, laughing.

"You truly love him?" the Baroness inquired.

"I believe you! I love him for his own sake, the dear cherub. For four years his home has been in my heart."

"Well, then, if you love him for himself," said the Baroness gravely, "and if he really exists, you are treating him criminally. You do not know how to love truly."

"We all know that from our birth," said Lisbeth.

"No, there are women who love and yet are selfish, and that is your case."

Cousin Betty's head fell, and her glance would have made any one shiver who had seen it; but her eyes were on her reel of thread.

"If you would introduce your so-called lover to us, Hector might find him employment, or put him in a position to make money."

"That is out of the question," said Cousin Betty.

"And why?"

"He is a sort of Pole – a refugee – "

"A conspirator?" cried Hortense. "What luck for you! – Has he had any adventures?"

"He has fought for Poland. He was a professor in the school where the students began the rebellion; and as he had been placed there by the Grand Duke Constantine, he has no hope of mercy – "

"A professor of what?"

"Of fine arts."

"And he came to Paris when the rebellion was quelled?"

"In 1833. He came through Germany on foot."

"Poor young man! And how old is he?"

"He was just four-and-twenty when the insurrection broke out – he is twenty-nine now."

"Fifteen years your junior," said the Baroness.

"And what does he live on?" asked Hortense.

"His talent."

"Oh, he gives lessons?"

"No," said Cousin Betty; "he gets them, and hard ones too!"

"And his Christian name – is it a pretty name?"

"Wenceslas."

"What a wonderful imagination you old maids have!" exclaimed the Baroness. "To hear you talk, Lisbeth, one might really believe you."

"You see, mamma, he is a Pole, and so accustomed to the knout that Lisbeth reminds him of the joys of his native land."

They all three laughed, and Hortense sang *Wenceslas! idole de mon ame!* instead of *O Mathilde*.

Then for a few minutes there was a truce.

"These children," said Cousin Betty, looking at Hortense as she went up to her, "fancy that no one but themselves can have lovers."

"Listen," Hortense replied, finding herself alone with her cousin, "if you prove to me that Wenceslas is not a pure invention, I will give you my yellow cashmere shawl."

"He is a Count."

"Every Pole is a Count!"

"But he is not a Pole; he comes from Liva – Litha – "

"Lithuania?"

"No."

"Livonia?"

"Yes, that's it!"

"But what is his name?"

"I wonder if you are capable of keeping a secret."

"Cousin Betty, I will be as mute! – "

"As a fish?"

"As a fish."

"By your life eternal?"

"By my life eternal!"

"No, by your happiness in this world?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, his name is Wenceslas Steinbock."

"One of Charles XII.'s Generals was named Steinbock."

"He was his grand-uncle. His own father settled in Livonia after the death of the King of Sweden; but he lost all his fortune during the campaign of 1812, and died, leaving the poor boy at the age of eight without a penny. The Grand Duke Constantine, for the honor of the name of Steinbock, took him under his protection and sent him to school."

"I will not break my word," Hortense replied; "prove his existence, and you shall have the yellow shawl. The color is most becoming to dark skins."

"And you will keep my secret?"

"And tell you mine."

"Well, then, the next time I come you shall have the proof."

"But the proof will be the lover," said Hortense.

Cousin Betty, who, since her first arrival in Paris, had been bitten by a mania for shawls, was bewitched by the idea of owning the yellow cashmere given to his wife by the Baron in 1808, and handed down from mother to daughter after the manner of some families in 1830. The shawl had been a good deal worn ten years ago; but the costly object, now always kept in its sandal-wood box, seemed to the old maid ever new, like the drawing-room furniture. So she brought in her handbag a present for the Baroness' birthday, by which she proposed to prove the existence of her romantic lover.

This present was a silver seal formed of three little figures back to back, wreathed with foliage, and supporting the Globe. They represented Faith, Hope, and Charity; their feet rested on monsters rending each other, among them the symbolical serpent. In 1846, now that such immense strides have been made in the art of which Benvenuto Cellini was the master, by Mademoiselle de Fauveau, Wagner, Jeanest, Froment-Meurice, and wood-carvers like Lienard, this little masterpiece would amaze nobody; but at that time a girl who understood the silversmith's art stood astonished as she held the seal which Lisbeth put into her hands, saying:

"There! what do you think of that?"

In design, attitude, and drapery the figures were of the school of Raphael; but the execution was in the style of the Florentine metal workers – the school created by Donatello, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Benvenuto Cellini, John of Bologna, and others. The French masters of the Renaissance had never invented more strangely twining monsters than these that symbolized the evil passions. The palms, ferns, reeds, and foliage that wreathed the Virtues showed a style, a taste, a handling that might have driven a practised craftsman to despair; a scroll floated above the three figures; and on its surface, between the heads, were a W, a chamois, and the word *fecit*.

"Who carved this?" asked Hortense.

"Well, just my lover," replied Lisbeth. "There are ten months' work in it; I could earn more at making sword-knots. – He told

me that Steinbock means a rock goat, a chamois, in German. And he intends to mark all his work in that way. – Ah, ha! I shall have the shawl."

"What for?"

"Do you suppose I could buy such a thing, or order it? Impossible! Well, then, it must have been given to me. And who would make me such a present? A lover!"

Hortense, with an artfulness that would have frightened Lisbeth Fischer if she had detected it, took care not to express all her admiration, though she was full of the delight which every soul that is open to a sense of beauty must feel on seeing a faultless piece of work – perfect and unexpected.

"On my word," said she, "it is very pretty."

"Yes, it is pretty," said her cousin; "but I like an orange-colored shawl better. – Well, child, my lover spends his time in doing such work as that. Since he came to Paris he has turned out three or four little trifles in that style, and that is the fruit of four years' study and toil. He has served as apprentice to founders, metal-casters, and goldsmiths. – There he has paid away thousands and hundreds of francs. And my gentleman tells me that in a few months now he will be famous and rich – "

"Then you often see him?"

"Bless me, do you think it is all a fable? I told you truth in jest."

"And he is in love with you?" asked Hortense eagerly.

"He adores me," replied Lisbeth very seriously. "You see,

child, he had never seen any women but the washed out, pale things they all are in the north, and a slender, brown, youthful thing like me warmed his heart. – But, mum; you promised, you know!"

"And he will fare like the five others," said the girl ironically, as she looked at the seal.

"Six others, miss. I left one in Lorraine, who, to this day, would fetch the moon down for me."

"This one does better than that," said Hortense; "he has brought down the sun."

"Where can that be turned into money?" asked her cousin. "It takes wide lands to benefit by the sunshine."

These witticisms, fired in quick retort, and leading to the sort of giddy play that may be imagined, had given cause for the laughter which had added to the Baroness' troubles by making her compare her daughter's future lot with the present, when she was free to indulge the light-heartedness of youth.

"But to give you a gem which cost him six months of work, he must be under some great obligations to you?" said Hortense, in whom the silver seal had suggested very serious reflections.

"Oh, you want to know too much at once!" said her cousin. "But, listen, I will let you into a little plot."

"Is your lover in it too?"

"Oh, ho! you want so much to see him! But, as you may suppose, an old maid like Cousin Betty, who had managed to keep a lover for five years, keeps him well hidden. – Now, just

let me alone. You see, I have neither cat nor canary, neither dog nor a parrot, and the old Nanny Goat wanted something to pet and tease – so I treated myself to a Polish Count."

"Has he a moustache?"

"As long as that," said Lisbeth, holding up her shuttle filled with gold thread. She always took her lace-work with her, and worked till dinner was served.

"If you ask too many questions, you will be told nothing," she went on. "You are but two-and-twenty, and you chatter more than I do though I am forty-two – not to say forty-three."

"I am listening; I am a wooden image," said Hortense.

"My lover has finished a bronze group ten inches high," Lisbeth went on. "It represents Samson slaying a lion, and he has kept it buried till it is so rusty that you might believe it to be as old as Samson himself. This fine piece is shown at the shop of one of the old curiosity sellers on the Place du Carrousel, near my lodgings. Now, your father knows Monsieur Popinot, the Minister of Commerce and Agriculture, and the Comte de Rastignac, and if he would mention the group to them as a fine antique he had seen by chance! It seems that such things take the fancy of your grand folks, who don't care so much about gold lace, and that my man's fortune would be made if one of them would buy or even look at the wretched piece of metal. The poor fellow is sure that it might be mistaken for old work, and that the rubbish is worth a great deal of money. And then, if one of the ministers should purchase the group, he would go to pay his

respects, and prove that he was the maker, and be almost carried in triumph! Oh! he believes he has reached the pinnacle; poor young man, and he is as proud as two newly-made Counts."

"Michael Angelo over again; but, for a lover, he has kept his head on his shoulders!" said Hortense. "And how much does he want for it?"

"Fifteen hundred francs. The dealer will not let it go for less, since he must take his commission."

"Papa is in the King's household just now," said Hortense. "He sees those two ministers every day at the Chamber, and he will do the thing – I undertake that. You will be a rich woman, Madame la Comtesse de Steinbock."

"No, the boy is too lazy; for whole weeks he sits twiddling with bits of red wax, and nothing comes of it. Why, he spends all his days at the Louvre and the Library, looking at prints and sketching things. He is an idler!"

The cousins chatted and giggled; Hortense laughing a forced laugh, for she was invaded by a kind of love which every girl has gone through – the love of the unknown, love in its vaguest form, when every thought is accreted round some form which is suggested by a chance word, as the efflorescence of hoar-frost gathers about a straw that the wind has blown against the window-sill.

For the past ten months she had made a reality of her cousin's imaginary romance, believing, like her mother, that Lisbeth would never marry; and now, within a week, this visionary

being had become Comte Wenceslas Steinbock, the dream had a certificate of birth, the wraith had solidified into a young man of thirty. The seal she held in her hand – a sort of Annunciation in which genius shone like an immanent light – had the powers of a talisman. Hortense felt such a surge of happiness, that she almost doubted whether the tale were true; there was a ferment in her blood, and she laughed wildly to deceive her cousin.

"But I think the drawing-room door is open," said Lisbeth; "let us go and see if Monsieur Crevel is gone."

"Mamma has been very much out of spirits these two days. I suppose the marriage under discussion has come to nothing!"

"Oh, it may come on again. He is – I may tell you so much – a Councillor of the Supreme Court. How would you like to be Madame la Presidente? If Monsieur Crevel has a finger in it, he will tell me about it if I ask him. I shall know by to-morrow if there is any hope."

"Leave the seal with me," said Hortense; "I will not show it – mamma's birthday is not for a month yet; I will give it to you that morning."

"No, no. Give it back to me; it must have a case."

"But I will let papa see it, that he may know what he is talking about to the ministers, for men in authority must be careful what they say," urged the girl.

"Well, do not show it to your mother – that is all I ask; for if she believed I had a lover, she would make game of me."

"I promise."

The cousins reached the drawing-room just as the Baroness turned faint. Her daughter's cry of alarm recalled her to herself. Lisbeth went off to fetch some salts. When she came back, she found the mother and daughter in each other's arms, the Baroness soothing her daughter's fears, and saying:

"It was nothing; a little nervous attack. – There is your father," she added, recognizing the Baron's way of ringing the bell. "Say not a word to him."

Adeline rose and went to meet her husband, intending to take him into the garden and talk to him till dinner should be served of the difficulties about the proposed match, getting him to come to some decision as to the future, and trying to hint at some warning advice.

Baron Hector Hulot came in, in a dress at once lawyer-like and Napoleonic, for Imperial men – men who had been attached to the Emperor – were easily distinguishable by their military deportment, their blue coats with gilt buttons, buttoned to the chin, their black silk stock, and an authoritative demeanor acquired from a habit of command in circumstances requiring despotic rapidity. There was nothing of the old man in the Baron, it must be admitted; his sight was still so good, that he could read without spectacles; his handsome oval face, framed in whiskers that were indeed too black, showed a brilliant complexion, ruddy with the veins that characterize a sanguine temperament; and his stomach, kept in order by a belt, had not exceeded the limits of "the majestic," as Brillat-Savarin says. A fine aristocratic air and

great affability served to conceal the libertine with whom Crevel had had such high times. He was one of those men whose eyes always light up at the sight of a pretty woman, even of such as merely pass by, never to be seen again.

"Have you been speaking, my dear?" asked Adeline, seeing him with an anxious brow.

"No," replied Hector, "but I am worn out with hearing others speak for two hours without coming to a vote. They carry on a war of words, in which their speeches are like a cavalry charge which has no effect on the enemy. Talk has taken the place of action, which goes very much against the grain with men who are accustomed to marching orders, as I said to the Marshal when I left him. However, I have enough of being bored on the ministers' bench; here I may play. – How do, la Chevre! – Good morning, little kid," and he took his daughter round the neck, kissed her, and made her sit on his knee, resting her head on his shoulder, that he might feel her soft golden hair against his cheek.

"He is tired and worried," said his wife to herself. "I shall only worry him more. – I will wait. – Are you going to be at home this evening?" she asked him.

"No, children. After dinner I must go out. If it had not been the day when Lisbeth and the children and my brother come to dinner, you would not have seen me at all."

The Baroness took up the newspaper, looked down the list of theatres, and laid it down again when she had seen that Robert *le Diable* was to be given at the Opera. Josepha, who had left the

Italian Opera six months since for the French Opera, was to take the part of Alice.

This little pantomime did not escape the Baron, who looked hard at his wife. Adeline cast down her eyes and went out into the garden; her husband followed her.

"Come, what is it, Adeline?" said he, putting his arm round her waist and pressing her to his side. "Do not you know that I love you more than – "

"More than Jenny Cadine or Josepha!" said she, boldly interrupting him.

"Who put that into your head?" exclaimed the Baron, releasing his wife, and starting back a step or two.

"I got an anonymous letter, which I burnt at once, in which I was told, my dear, that the reason Hortense's marriage was broken off was the poverty of our circumstances. Your wife, my dear Hector, would never have said a word; she knew of your connection with Jenny Cadine, and did she ever complain? – But as the mother of Hortense, I am bound to speak the truth."

Hulot, after a short silence, which was terrible to his wife, whose heart beat loud enough to be heard, opened his arms, clasped her to his heart, kissed her forehead, and said with the vehemence of enthusiasm:

"Adeline, you are an angel, and I am a wretch – "

"No, no," cried the Baroness, hastily laying her hand upon his lips to hinder him from speaking evil of himself.

"Yes, for I have not at this moment a sou to give to Hortense,

and I am most unhappy. But since you open your heart to me, I may pour into it the trouble that is crushing me. – Your Uncle Fischer is in difficulties, and it is I who dragged him there, for he has accepted bills for me to the amount of twenty-five thousand francs! And all for a woman who deceives me, who laughs at me behind my back, and calls me an old dyed Tom. It is frightful! A vice which costs me more than it would to maintain a family! – And I cannot resist! – I would promise you here and now never to see that abominable Jewess again; but if she wrote me two lines, I should go to her, as we marched into fire under the Emperor."

"Do not be so distressed," cried the poor woman in despair, but forgetting her daughter as she saw the tears in her husband's eyes. "There are my diamonds; whatever happens, save my uncle."

"Your diamonds are worth scarcely twenty thousand francs nowadays. That would not be enough for old Fischer, so keep them for Hortense; I will see the Marshal to-morrow."

"My poor dear!" said the Baroness, taking her Hector's hands and kissing them.

This was all the scolding he got. Adeline sacrificed her jewels, the father made them a present to Hortense, she regarded this as a sublime action, and she was helpless.

"He is the master; he could take everything, and he leaves me my diamonds; he is divine!"

This was the current of her thoughts; and indeed the wife had gained more by her sweetness than another perhaps could have

achieved by a fit of angry jealousy.

The moralist cannot deny that, as a rule, well-bred though very wicked men are far more attractive and lovable than virtuous men; having crimes to atone for, they crave indulgence by anticipation, by being lenient to the shortcomings of those who judge them, and they are thought most kind. Though there are no doubt some charming people among the virtuous, Virtue considers itself fair enough, unadorned, to be at no pains to please; and then all really virtuous persons, for the hypocrites do not count, have some slight doubts as to their position; they believe that they are cheated in the bargain of life on the whole, and they indulge in acid comments after the fashion of those who think themselves unappreciated.

Hence the Baron, who accused himself of ruining his family, displayed all his charm of wit and his most seductive graces for the benefit of his wife, for his children, and his Cousin Lisbeth.

Then, when his son arrived with Celestine, Crevel's daughter, who was nursing the infant Hulot, he was delightful to his daughter-in-law, loading her with compliments – a treat to which Celestine's vanity was little accustomed for no moneyed bride more commonplace or more utterly insignificant was ever seen. The grandfather took the baby from her, kissed it, declared it was a beauty and a darling; he spoke to it in baby language, prophesied that it would grow to be taller than himself, insinuated compliments for his son's benefit, and restored the child to the Normandy nurse who had charge of it. Celestine, on her part,

gave the Baroness a look, as much as to say, "What a delightful man!" and she naturally took her father-in-law's part against her father.

After thus playing the charming father-in-law and the indulgent grandpapa, the Baron took his son into the garden, and laid before him a variety of observations full of good sense as to the attitude to be taken up by the Chamber on a certain ticklish question which had that morning come under discussion. The young lawyer was struck with admiration for the depth of his father's insight, touched by his cordiality, and especially by the deferential tone which seemed to place the two men on a footing of equality.

Monsieur Hulot *junior* was in every respect the young Frenchman, as he has been moulded by the Revolution of 1830; his mind infatuated with politics, respectful of his own hopes, and concealing them under an affectation of gravity, very envious of successful men, making sententiousness do the duty of witty rejoinders – the gems of the French language – with a high sense of importance, and mistaking arrogance for dignity.

Such men are walking coffins, each containing a Frenchman of the past; now and again the Frenchman wakes up and kicks against his English-made casing; but ambition stifles him, and he submits to be smothered. The coffin is always covered with black cloth.

"Ah, here is my brother!" said Baron Hulot, going to meet the Count at the drawing-room door.

Having greeted the probable successor of the late Marshal Montcornet, he led him forward by the arm with every show of affection and respect.

The older man, a member of the Chamber of Peers, but excused from attendance on account of his deafness, had a handsome head, chilled by age, but with enough gray hair still to be marked in a circle by the pressure of his hat. He was short, square, and shrunken, but carried his hale old age with a free-and-easy air; and as he was full of excessive activity, which had now no purpose, he divided his time between reading and taking exercise. In a drawing-room he devoted his attention to waiting on the wishes of the ladies.

"You are very merry here," said he, seeing that the Baron shed a spirit of animation on the little family gathering. "And yet Hortense is not married," he added, noticing a trace of melancholy on his sister-in-law's countenance.

"That will come all in good time," Lisbeth shouted in his ear in a formidable voice.

"So there you are, you wretched seedling that could never blossom," said he, laughing.

The hero of Forzheim rather liked Cousin Betty, for there were certain points of resemblance between them. A man of the ranks, without any education, his courage had been the sole mainspring of his military promotion, and sound sense had taken the place of brilliancy. Of the highest honor and clean-handed, he was ending a noble life in full contentment in the centre of his

family, which claimed all his affections, and without a suspicion of his brother's still undiscovered misconduct. No one enjoyed more than he the pleasing sight of this family party, where there never was the smallest disagreement, for the brothers and sisters were all equally attached, Celestine having been at once accepted as one of the family. But the worthy little Count wondered now and then why Monsieur Crevel never joined the party. "Papa is in the country," Celestine shouted, and it was explained to him that the ex-perfumer was away from home.

This perfect union of all her family made Madame Hulot say to herself, "This, after all, is the best kind of happiness, and who can deprive us of it?"

The General, on seeing his favorite Adeline the object of her husband's attentions, laughed so much about it that the Baron, fearing to seem ridiculous, transferred his gallantries to his daughter-in-law, who at these family dinners was always the object of his flattery and kind care, for he hoped to win Crevel back through her, and make him forego his resentment.

Any one seeing this domestic scene would have found it hard to believe that the father was at his wits' end, the mother in despair, the son anxious beyond words as to his father's future fate, and the daughter on the point of robbing her cousin of her lover.

At seven o'clock the Baron, seeing his brother, his son, the Baroness, and Hortense all engaged at whist, went off to applaud his mistress at the Opera, taking with him Lisbeth Fischer, who

lived in the Rue du Doyenne, and who always made an excuse of the solitude of that deserted quarter to take herself off as soon as dinner was over. Parisians will all admit that the old maid's prudence was but rational.

The existence of the maze of houses under the wing of the old Louvre is one of those protests against obvious good sense which Frenchmen love, that Europe may reassure itself as to the quantum of brains they are known to have, and not be too much alarmed. Perhaps without knowing it, this reveals some profound political idea.

It will surely not be a work of supererogation to describe this part of Paris as it is even now, when we could hardly expect its survival; and our grandsons, who will no doubt see the Louvre finished, may refuse to believe that such a relic of barbarism should have survived for six-and-thirty years in the heart of Paris and in the face of the palace where three dynasties of kings have received, during those thirty-six years, the elite of France and of Europe.

Between the little gate leading to the Bridge of the Carrousel and the Rue du Musee, every one having come to Paris, were it but for a few days, must have seen a dozen of houses with a decayed frontage where the dejected owners have attempted no repairs, the remains of an old block of buildings of which the destruction was begun at the time when Napoleon determined to complete the Louvre. This street, and the blind alley known as the Impasse du Doyenne, are the only passages into this gloomy and

forsaken block, inhabited perhaps by ghosts, for there never is anybody to be seen. The pavement is much below the footway of the Rue du Musee, on a level with that of the Rue Froidmanteau. Thus, half sunken by the raising of the soil, these houses are also wrapped in the perpetual shadow cast by the lofty buildings of the Louvre, darkened on that side by the northern blast. Darkness, silence, an icy chill, and the cavernous depth of the soil combine to make these houses a kind of crypt, tombs of the living. As we drive in a hackney cab past this dead-alive spot, and chance to look down the little Rue du Doyenne, a shudder freezes the soul, and we wonder who can lie there, and what things may be done there at night, at an hour when the alley is a cut-throat pit, and the vices of Paris run riot there under the cloak of night. This question, frightful in itself, becomes appalling when we note that these dwelling-houses are shut in on the side towards the Rue de Richelieu by marshy ground, by a sea of tumbled paving-stones between them and the Tuileries, by little garden-plots and suspicious-looking hovels on the side of the great galleries, and by a desert of building-stone and old rubbish on the side towards the old Louvre. Henri III. and his favorites in search of their trunk-hose, and Marguerite's lovers in search of their heads, must dance sarabands by moonlight in this wilderness overlooked by the roof of a chapel still standing there as if to prove that the Catholic religion – so deeply rooted in France – survives all else.

For forty years now has the Louvre been crying out by every gap in these damaged walls, by every yawning window, "Rid

me of these warts upon my face!" This cutthroat lane has no doubt been regarded as useful, and has been thought necessary as symbolizing in the heart of Paris the intimate connection between poverty and the splendor that is characteristic of the queen of cities. And indeed these chill ruins, among which the Legitimist newspaper contracted the disease it is dying of – the abominable hovels of the Rue du Musee, and the hoarding appropriated by the shop stalls that flourish there – will perhaps live longer and more prosperously than three successive dynasties.

In 1823 the low rents in these already condemned houses had tempted Lisbeth Fischer to settle there, notwithstanding the necessity imposed upon her by the state of the neighborhood to get home before nightfall. This necessity, however, was in accordance with the country habits she retained, of rising and going to bed with the sun, an arrangement which saves country folk considerable sums in lights and fuel. She lived in one of the houses which, since the demolition of the famous Hotel Cambaceres, command a view of the square.

Just as Baron Hulot set his wife's cousin down at the door of this house, saying, "Good-night, Cousin," an elegant-looking woman, young, small, slender, pretty, beautifully dressed, and redolent of some delicate perfume, passed between the wall and the carriage to go in. This lady, without any premeditation, glanced up at the Baron merely to see the lodger's cousin, and the libertine at once felt the swift impression which all Parisians

know on meeting a pretty woman, realizing, as entomologists have it, their *desiderata*; so he waited to put on one of his gloves with judicious deliberation before getting into the carriage again, to give himself an excuse for allowing his eye to follow the young woman, whose skirts were pleasingly set out by something else than these odious and delusive crinoline bustles.

"That," said he to himself, "is a nice little person whose happiness I should like to provide for, as she would certainly secure mine."

When the unknown fair had gone into the hall at the foot of the stairs going up to the front rooms, she glanced at the gate out of the corner of her eye without precisely looking round, and she could see the Baron riveted to the spot in admiration, consumed by curiosity and desire. This is to every Parisian woman a sort of flower which she smells at with delight, if she meets it on her way. Nay, certain women, though faithful to their duties, pretty, and virtuous, come home much put out if they have failed to cull such a posy in the course of their walk.

The lady ran upstairs, and in a moment a window on the second floor was thrown open, and she appeared at it, but accompanied by a man whose baldhead and somewhat scowling looks announced him as her husband.

"If they aren't sharp and ingenious, the cunning jades!" thought the Baron. "She does that to show me where she lives. But this is getting rather warm, especially for this part of Paris. We must mind what we are at."

As he got into the *milord*, he looked up, and the lady and the husband hastily vanished, as though the Baron's face had affected them like the mythological head of Medusa.

"It would seem that they know me," thought the Baron. "That would account for everything."

As the carriage went up the Rue du Musee, he leaned forward to see the lady again, and in fact she was again at the window. Ashamed of being caught gazing at the hood under which her admirer was sitting, the unknown started back at once.

"Nanny shall tell me who it is," said the Baron to himself.

The sight of the Government official had, as will be seen, made a deep impression on this couple.

"Why, it is Baron Hulot, the chief of the department to which my office belongs!" exclaimed the husband as he left the window.

"Well, Marneffe, the old maid on the third floor at the back of the courtyard, who lives with that young man, is his cousin. Is it not odd that we should never have known that till to-day, and now find it out by chance?"

"Mademoiselle Fischer living with a young man?" repeated the husband. "That is porter's gossip; do not speak so lightly of the cousin of a Councillor of State who can blow hot and cold in the office as he pleases. Now, come to dinner; I have been waiting for you since four o'clock."

Pretty – very pretty – Madame Marneffe, the natural daughter of Comte Montcornet, one of Napoleon's most famous officers, had, on the strength of a marriage portion of twenty thousand

francs, found a husband in an inferior official at the War Office. Through the interest of the famous lieutenant-general – made marshal of France six months before his death – this quill-driver had risen to unhoped-for dignity as head-clerk of his office; but just as he was to be promoted to be deputy-chief, the marshal's death had cut off Marneffe's ambitions and his wife's at the root. The very small salary enjoyed by Sieur Marneffe had compelled the couple to economize in the matter of rent; for in his hands Mademoiselle Valerie Fortin's fortune had already melted away – partly in paying his debts, and partly in the purchase of necessaries for furnishing a house, but chiefly in gratifying the requirements of a pretty young wife, accustomed in her mother's house to luxuries she did not choose to dispense with. The situation of the Rue du Doyenne, within easy distance of the War Office, and the gay part of Paris, smiled on Monsieur and Madame Marneffe, and for the last four years they had dwelt under the same roof as Lisbeth Fischer.

Monsieur Jean-Paul-Stanislas Marneffe was one of the class of employes who escape sheer brutishness by the kind of power that comes of depravity. The small, lean creature, with thin hair and a starved beard, an unwholesome pasty face, worn rather than wrinkled, with red-lidded eyes harnessed with spectacles, shuffling in his gait, and yet meaner in his appearance, realized the type of man that any one would conceive of as likely to be placed in the dock for an offence against decency.

The rooms inhabited by this couple had the illusory

appearance of sham luxury seen in many Paris homes, and typical of a certain class of household. In the drawing-room, the furniture covered with shabby cotton velvet, the plaster statuettes pretending to be Florentine bronze, the clumsy cast chandelier merely lacquered, with cheap glass saucers, the carpet, whose small cost was accounted for in advancing life by the quality of cotton used in the manufacture, now visible to the naked eye, – everything, down to the curtains, which plainly showed that worsted damask has not three years of prime, proclaimed poverty as loudly as a beggar in rags at a church door.

The dining-room, badly kept by a single servant, had the sickening aspect of a country inn; everything looked greasy and unclean.

Monsieur's room, very like a schoolboy's, furnished with the bed and fittings remaining from his bachelor days, as shabby and worn as he was, dusted perhaps once a week – that horrible room where everything was in a litter, with old socks hanging over the horsehair-seated chairs, the pattern outlined in dust, was that of a man to whom home is a matter of indifference, who lives out of doors, gambling in cafes or elsewhere.

Madame's room was an exception to the squalid slovenliness that disgraced the living rooms, where the curtains were yellow with smoke and dust, and where the child, evidently left to himself, littered every spot with his toys. Valerie's room and dressing-room were situated in the part of the house which, on one side of the courtyard, joined the front half, looking

out on the street, to the wing forming the inner side of the court backing against the adjoining property. Handsomely hung with chintz, furnished with rosewood, and thickly carpeted, they proclaimed themselves as belonging to a pretty woman – and indeed suggested the kept mistress. A clock in the fashionable style stood on the velvet-covered mantelpiece. There was a nicely fitted cabinet, and the Chinese flower-stands were handsomely filled. The bed, the toilet-table, the wardrobe with its mirror, the little sofa, and all the lady's frippery bore the stamp of fashion or caprice. Though everything was quite third-rate as to elegance or quality, and nothing was absolutely newer than three years old, a dandy would have had no fault to find but that the taste of all this luxury was commonplace. Art, and the distinction that comes of the choice of things that taste assimilates, was entirely wanting. A doctor of social science would have detected a lover in two or three specimens of costly trumpery, which could only have come there through that demi-god – always absent, but always present if the lady is married.

The dinner, four hours behind time, to which the husband, wife, and child sat down, betrayed the financial straits in which the household found itself, for the table is the surest thermometer for gauging the income of a Parisian family. Vegetable soup made with the water haricot beans had been boiled in, a piece of stewed veal and potatoes sodden with water by way of gravy, a dish of haricot beans, and cheap cherries, served and eaten in cracked plates and dishes, with the dull-looking and dull-sounding forks

of German silver – was this a banquet worthy of this pretty young woman? The Baron would have wept could he have seen it. The dingy decanters could not disguise the vile hue of wine bought by the pint at the nearest wineshop. The table-napkins had seen a week's use. In short, everything betrayed undignified penury, and the equal indifference of the husband and wife to the decencies of home. The most superficial observer on seeing them would have said that these two beings had come to the stage when the necessity of living had prepared them for any kind of dishonor that might bring luck to them. Valerie's first words to her husband will explain the delay that had postponed the dinner by the not disinterested devotion of the cook.

"Samanon will only take your bills at fifty per cent, and insists on a lien on your salary as security."

So poverty, still unconfessed in the house of the superior official, and hidden under a stipend of twenty-four thousand francs, irrespective of presents, had reached its lowest stage in that of the clerk.

"You have caught on with the chief," said the man, looking at his wife.

"I rather think so," replied she, understanding the full meaning of his slang expression.

"What is to become of us?" Marneffe went on. "The landlord will be down on us to-morrow. And to think of your father dying without making a will! On my honor, those men of the Empire all think themselves as immortal as their Emperor."

"Poor father!" said she. "I was his only child, and he was very fond of me. The Countess probably burned the will. How could he forget me when he used to give us as much as three or four thousand-franc notes at once, from time to time?"

"We owe four quarters' rent, fifteen hundred francs. Is the furniture worth so much? *That is the question*, as Shakespeare says."

"Now, good-bye, ducky!" said Valerie, who had only eaten a few mouthfuls of the veal, from which the maid had extracted all the gravy for a brave soldier just home from Algiers. "Great evils demand heroic remedies."

"Valerie, where are you off to?" cried Marneffe, standing between his wife and the door.

"I am going to see the landlord," she replied, arranging her ringlets under her smart bonnet. "You had better try to make friends with that old maid, if she really is your chief's cousin."

The ignorance in which the dwellers under one roof can exist as to the social position of their fellow-lodgers is a permanent fact which, as much as any other, shows what the rush of Paris life is. Still, it is easily conceivable that a clerk who goes early every morning to his office, comes home only to dinner, and spends every evening out, and a woman swallowed up in a round of pleasures, should know nothing of an old maid living on the third floor beyond the courtyard of the house they dwell in, especially when she lives as Mademoiselle Fischer did.

Up in the morning before any one else, Lisbeth went out to buy

her bread, milk, and live charcoal, never speaking to any one, and she went to bed with the sun; she never had a letter or a visitor, nor chatted with her neighbors. Here was one of those anonymous, entomological existences such as are to be met with in many large tenements where, at the end of four years, you unexpectedly learn that up on the fourth floor there is an old man lodging who knew Voltaire, Pilatre de Rozier, Beaujon, Marcel, Mole, Sophie Arnould, Franklin, and Robespierre. What Monsieur and Madame Marneffe had just said concerning Lisbeth Fischer they had come to know, in consequence, partly, of the loneliness of the neighborhood, and of the alliance, to which their necessities had led, between them and the doorkeepers, whose goodwill was too important to them not to have been carefully encouraged.

Now, the old maid's pride, silence, and reserve had engendered in the porter and his wife the exaggerated respect and cold civility which betray the unconfessed annoyance of an inferior. Also, the porter thought himself in all essentials the equal of any lodger whose rent was no more than two hundred and fifty francs. Cousin Betty's confidences to Hortense were true; and it is evident that the porter's wife might be very likely to slander Mademoiselle Fischer in her intimate gossip with the Marneffes, while only intending to tell tales.

When Lisbeth had taken her candle from the hands of worthy Madame Olivier the portress, she looked up to see whether the windows of the garret over her own rooms were lighted up. At that hour, even in July, it was so dark within the courtyard that

the old maid could not get to bed without a light.

"Oh, you may be quite easy, Monsieur Steinbock is in his room. He has not been out even," said Madame Olivier, with meaning.

Lisbeth made no reply. She was still a peasant, in so far that she was indifferent to the gossip of persons unconnected with her. Just as a peasant sees nothing beyond his village, she cared for nobody's opinion outside the little circle in which she lived. So she boldly went up, not to her own room, but to the garret; and this is why. At dessert she had filled her bag with fruit and sweets for her lover, and she went to give them to him, exactly as an old lady brings home a biscuit for her dog.

She found the hero of Hortense's dreams working by the light of a small lamp, of which the light was intensified by the use of a bottle of water as a lens – a pale young man, seated at a workman's bench covered with a modeler's tools, wax, chisels, rough-hewn stone, and bronze castings; he wore a blouse, and had in his hand a little group in red wax, which he gazed at like a poet absorbed in his labors.

"Here, Wenceslas, see what I have brought you," said she, laying her handkerchief on a corner of the table; then she carefully took the sweetmeats and fruit out of her bag.

"You are very kind, mademoiselle," replied the exile in melancholy tones.

"It will do you good, poor boy. You get feverish by working so hard; you were not born to such a rough life."

Wenceslas Steinbock looked at her with a bewildered air.

"Eat – come, eat," said she sharply, "instead of looking at me as you do at one of your images when you are satisfied with it."

On being thus smacked with words, the young man seemed less puzzled, for this, indeed, was the female Mentor whose tender moods were always a surprise to him, so much more accustomed was he to be scolded.

Though Steinbock was nine-and-twenty, like many fair men, he looked five or six years younger; and seeing his youth, though its freshness had faded under the fatigue and stress of life in exile, by the side of that dry, hard face, it seemed as though Nature had blundered in the distribution of sex. He rose and threw himself into a deep chair of Louis XV. pattern, covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, as if to rest himself. The old maid took a greengage and offered it to him.

"Thank you," said he, taking the plum.

"Are you tired?" said she, giving him another.

"I am not tired with work, but tired of life," said he.

"What absurd notions you have!" she exclaimed with some annoyance. "Have you not had a good genius to keep an eye on you?" she said, offering him the sweetmeats, and watching him with pleasure as he ate them all. "You see, I thought of you when dining with my cousin."

"I know," said he, with a look at Lisbeth that was at once affectionate and plaintive, "but for you I should long since have ceased to live. But, my dear lady, artists require relaxation – "

"Ah! there we come to the point!" cried she, interrupting him, her hands on her hips, and her flashing eyes fixed on him. "You want to go wasting your health in the vile resorts of Paris, like so many artisans, who end by dying in the workhouse. No, no, make a fortune, and then, when you have money in the funds, you may amuse yourself, child; then you will have enough to pay for the doctor and for your pleasure, libertine that you are."

Wenceslas Steinbock, on receiving this broadside, with an accompaniment of looks that pierced him like a magnetic flame, bent his head. The most malignant slanderer on seeing this scene would at once have understood that the hints thrown out by the Oliviers were false. Everything in this couple, their tone, manner, and way of looking at each other, proved the purity of their private live. The old maid showed the affection of rough but very genuine maternal feeling; the young man submitted, as a respectful son yields to the tyranny of a mother. The strange alliance seemed to be the outcome of a strong will acting constantly on a weak character, on the fluid nature peculiar to the Slavs, which, while it does not hinder them from showing heroic courage in battle, gives them an amazing incoherency of conduct, a moral softness of which physiologists ought to try to detect the causes, since physiologists are to political life what entomologists are to agriculture.

"But if I die before I am rich?" said Wenceslas dolefully.

"Die!" cried she. "Oh, I will not let you die. I have life enough for both, and I would have my blood injected into your veins if

necessary."

Tears rose to Steinbock's eyes as he heard her vehement and artless speech.

"Do not be unhappy, my little Wenceslas," said Lisbeth with feeling. "My cousin Hortense thought your seal quite pretty, I am sure; and I will manage to sell your bronze group, you will see; you will have paid me off, you will be able to do as you please, you will soon be free. Come, smile a little!"

"I can never repay you, mademoiselle," said the exile.

"And why not?" asked the peasant woman, taking the Livonian's part against herself.

"Because you not only fed me, lodged me, cared for me in my poverty, but you also gave me strength. You have made me what I am; you have often been stern, you have made me very unhappy – "

"I?" said the old maid. "Are you going to pour out all your nonsense once more about poetry and the arts, and to crack your fingers and stretch your arms while you spout about the ideal, and beauty, and all your northern madness? – Beauty is not to compare with solid pudding – and what am I! – You have ideas in your brain? What is the use of them? I too have ideas. What is the good of all the fine things you may have in your soul if you can make no use of them? Those who have ideas do not get so far as those who have none, if they don't know which way to go.

"Instead of thinking over your ideas you must work. – Now, what have you done while I was out?"

"What did your pretty cousin say?"

"Who told you she was pretty?" asked Lisbeth sharply, in a tone hollow with tiger-like jealousy.

"Why, you did."

"That was only to see your face. Do you want to go trotting after petticoats? You who are so fond of women, well, make them in bronze. Let us see a cast of your desires, for you will have to do without the ladies for some little time yet, and certainly without my cousin, my good fellow. She is not game for your bag; that young lady wants a man with sixty thousand francs a year – and has found him!

"Why, your bed is not made!" she exclaimed, looking into the adjoining room. "Poor dear boy, I quite forgot you!"

The sturdy woman pulled off her gloves, her cape and bonnet, and remade the artist's little camp bed as briskly as any housemaid. This mixture of abruptness, of roughness even, with real kindness, perhaps accounts for the ascendency Lisbeth had acquired over the man whom she regarded as her personal property. Is not our attachment to life based on its alternations of good and evil?

If the Livonian had happened to meet Madame Marneffe instead of Lisbeth Fischer, he would have found a protectress whose complaisance must have led him into some boggy or discreditable path, where he would have been lost. He would certainly never have worked, nor the artist have been hatched out. Thus, while he deplored the old maid's grasping avarice, his

reason bid him prefer her iron hand to the life of idleness and peril led by many of his fellow-countrymen.

This was the incident that had given rise to the coalition of female energy and masculine feebleness – a contrast in union said not to be uncommon in Poland.

In 1833 Mademoiselle Fischer, who sometimes worked into the night when business was good, at about one o'clock one morning perceived a strong smell of carbonic acid gas, and heard the groans of a dying man. The fumes and the gasping came from a garret over the two rooms forming her dwelling, and she supposed that a young man who had but lately come to lodge in this attic – which had been vacant for three years – was committing suicide. She ran upstairs, broke in the door by a push with her peasant strength, and found the lodger writhing on a camp-bed in the convulsions of death. She extinguished the brazier; the door was open, the air rushed in, and the exile was saved. Then, when Lisbeth had put him to bed like a patient, and he was asleep, she could detect the motives of his suicide in the destitution of the rooms, where there was nothing whatever but a wretched table, the camp-bed, and two chairs.

On the table lay a document, which she read:

> "I am Count Wenceslas Steinbock, born at Prelia, in Livonia.
>
> "No one is to be accused of my death; my reasons for killing myself are, in the words of Kosciusko, *Finis Polonioe*!

“The grand-nephew of a valiant General under Charles XII. could not beg. My weakly constitution forbids my taking military service, and I yesterday saw the last of the hundred thalers which I had brought with me from Dresden to Paris. I have left twenty-five francs in the drawer of this table to pay the rent I owe to the landlord.

“My parents being dead, my death will affect nobody. I desire that my countrymen will not blame the French Government. I have never registered myself as a refugee, and I have asked for nothing; I have met none of my fellow-exiles; no one in Paris knows of my existence.

“I am dying in Christian beliefs. May God forgive the last of the Steinbocks!

Mademoiselle Fischer, deeply touched by the dying man's honesty, opened the drawer and found the five five-franc pieces to pay his rent.

"Poor young man!" cried she. "And with no one in the world to care about him!"

She went downstairs to fetch her work, and sat stitching in the garret, watching over the Livonian gentleman.

When he awoke his astonishment may be imagined on finding a woman sitting by his bed; it was like the prolongation of a dream. As she sat there, covering aiguillettes with gold thread, the old maid had resolved to take charge of the poor youth whom she admired as he lay sleeping.

As soon as the young Count was fully awake, Lisbeth talked to give him courage, and questioned him to find out how he might make a living. Wenceslas, after telling his story, added that he owed his position to his acknowledged talent for the fine arts. He had always had a preference for sculpture; the necessary time for study had, however, seemed to him too long for a man without money; and at this moment he was far too weak to do any hard manual labor or undertake an important work in sculpture. All this was Greek to Lisbeth Fischer. She replied to the unhappy man that Paris offered so many openings that any man with will and courage might find a living there. A man of spirit need never

perish if he had a certain stock of endurance.

"I am but a poor girl myself, a peasant, and I have managed to make myself independent," said she in conclusion. "If you will work in earnest, I have saved a little money, and I will lend you, month by month, enough to live upon; but to live frugally, and not to play ducks and drakes with or squander in the streets. You can dine in Paris for twenty-five sous a day, and I will get you your breakfast with mine every day. I will furnish your rooms and pay for such teaching as you may think necessary. You shall give me formal acknowledgment for the money I may lay out for you, and when you are rich you shall repay me all. But if you do not work, I shall not regard myself as in any way pledged to you, and I shall leave you to your fate."

"Ah!" cried the poor fellow, still smarting from the bitterness of his first struggle with death, "exiles from every land may well stretch out their hands to France, as the souls in Purgatory do to Paradise. In what other country is such help to be found, and generous hearts even in such a garret as this? You will be everything to me, my beloved benefactress; I am your slave! Be my sweetheart," he added, with one of the caressing gestures familiar to the Poles, for which they are unjustly accused of servility.

"Oh, no; I am too jealous, I should make you unhappy; but I will gladly be a sort of comrade," replied Lisbeth.

"Ah, if only you knew how I longed for some fellow-creature, even a tyrant, who would have something to say to me when I was

struggling in the vast solitude of Paris!" exclaimed Wenceslas. "I regretted Siberia, whither I should be sent by the Emperor if I went home. – Be my Providence! – I will work; I will be a better man than I am, though I am not such a bad fellow!"

"Will you do whatever I bid you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I will adopt you as my child," said she lightly. "Here I am with a son risen from the grave. Come! we will begin at once. I will go out and get what I want; you can dress, and come down to breakfast with me when I knock on the ceiling with the broomstick."

That day, Mademoiselle Fischer made some inquiries, at the houses to which she carried her work home, as to the business of a sculptor. By dint of many questions she ended by hearing of the studio kept by Florent and Chanor, a house that made a special business of casting and finishing decorative bronzes and handsome silver plate. Thither she went with Steinbock, recommending him as an apprentice in sculpture, an idea that was regarded as too eccentric. Their business was to copy the works of the greatest artists, but they did not teach the craft. The old maid's persistent obstinacy so far succeeded that Steinbock was taken on to design ornament. He very soon learned to model ornament, and invented novelties; he had a gift for it.

Five months after he was out of his apprenticeship as a finisher, he made acquaintance with Stidmann, the famous head of Florent's studios. Within twenty months Wenceslas was ahead

of his master; but in thirty months the old maid's savings of sixteen years had melted entirely. Two thousand five hundred francs in gold! – a sum with which she had intended to purchase an annuity; and what was there to show for it? A Pole's receipt! And at this moment Lisbeth was working as hard as in her young days to supply the needs of her Livonian.

When she found herself the possessor of a piece of paper instead of her gold louis, she lost her head, and went to consult Monsieur Rivet, who for fifteen years had been his clever head-worker's friend and counselor. On hearing her story, Monsieur and Madame Rivet scolded Lisbeth, told her she was crazy, abused all refugees whose plots for reconstructing their nation compromised the prosperity of the country and the maintenance of peace; and they urged Lisbeth to find what in trade is called security.

"The only hold you have over this fellow is on his liberty," observed Monsieur Rivet.

Monsieur Achille Rivet was assessor at the Tribunal of Commerce.

"Imprisonment is no joke for a foreigner," said he. "A Frenchman remains five years in prison and comes out, free of his debts to be sure, for he is thenceforth bound only by his conscience, and that never troubles him; but a foreigner never comes out. – Give me your promissory note; my bookkeeper will take it up; he will get it protested; you will both be prosecuted and both be condemned to imprisonment in default of payment;

then, when everything is in due form, you must sign a declaration. By doing this your interest will be accumulating, and you will have a pistol always primed to fire at your Pole!"

The old maid allowed these legal steps to be taken, telling her protege not to be uneasy, as the proceedings were merely to afford a guarantee to a money-lender who agreed to advance them certain sums. This subterfuge was due to the inventive genius of Monsieur Rivet. The guileless artist, blindly trusting to his benefactress, lighted his pipe with the stamped paper, for he smoked as all men do who have sorrows or energies that need soothing.

One fine day Monsieur Rivet showed Mademoiselle Fischer a schedule, and said to her:

"Here you have Wenceslas Steinbock bound hand and foot, and so effectually, that within twenty-four hours you can have him snug in Clichy for the rest of his days."

This worthy and honest judge at the Chamber of Commerce experienced that day the satisfaction that must come of having done a malignant good action. Beneficence has so many aspects in Paris that this contradictory expression really represents one of them. The Livonian being fairly entangled in the toils of commercial procedure, the point was to obtain payment; for the illustrious tradesman looked on Wenceslas as a swindler. Feeling, sincerity, poetry, were in his eyes mere folly in business matters.

So Rivet went off to see, in behalf of that poor Mademoiselle Fischer, who, as he said, had been "done" by the Pole, the rich

manufacturers for whom Steinbock had worked. It happened that Stidmann – who, with the help of these distinguished masters of the goldsmiths' art, was raising French work to the perfection it has now reached, allowing it to hold its own against Florence and the Renaissance – Stidmann was in Chanor's private room when the army lace manufacturer called to make inquiries as to "One Steinbock, a Polish refugee."

"Whom do you call 'One Steinbock'? Do you mean a young Livonian who was a pupil of mine?" cried Stidmann ironically. "I may tell you, monsieur, that he is a very great artist. It is said of me that I believe myself to be the Devil. Well, that poor fellow does not know that he is capable of becoming a god."

"Indeed," said Rivet, well pleased. And then he added, "Though you take a rather cavalier tone with a man who has the honor to be an Assessor on the Tribunal of Commerce of the Department of the Seine."

"Your pardon, Consul!" said Stidmann, with a military salute.

"I am delighted," the Assessor went on, "to hear what you say. The man may make money then?"

"Certainly," said Chanor; "but he must work. He would have a tidy sum by now if he had stayed with us. What is to be done? Artists have a horror of not being free."

"They have a proper sense of their value and dignity," replied Stidmann. "I do not blame Wenceslas for walking alone, trying to make a name, and to become a great man; he had a right to do so! But he was a great loss to me when he left."

"That, you see," exclaimed Rivet, "is what all young students aim at as soon as they are hatched out of the school-egg. Begin by saving money, I say, and seek glory afterwards."

"It spoils your touch to be picking up coin," said Stidmann. "It is Glory's business to bring us wealth."

"And, after all," said Chanor to Rivet, "you cannot tether them."

"They would eat the halter," replied Stidmann.

"All these gentlemen have as much caprice as talent," said Chanor, looking at Stidmann. "They spend no end of money; they keep their girls, they throw coin out of window, and then they have no time to work. They neglect their orders; we have to employ workmen who are very inferior, but who grow rich; and then they complain of the hard times, while, if they were but steady, they might have piles of gold."

"You old Lumignon," said Stidmann, "you remind me of the publisher before the Revolution who said – 'If only I could keep Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau very poor in my backshed, and lock up their breeches in a cupboard, what a lot of nice little books they would write to make my fortune.' – If works of art could be hammered out like nails, workmen would make them. – Give me a thousand francs, and don't talk nonsense."

Worthy Monsieur Rivet went home, delighted for poor Mademoiselle Fischer, who dined with him every Monday, and whom he found waiting for him.

"If you can only make him work," said he, "you will have more

luck than wisdom; you will be repaid, interest, capital, and costs. This Pole has talent, he can make a living; but lock up his trousers and his shoes, do not let him go to the *Chaumiere* or the parish of Notre-Dame de Lorette, keep him in leading-strings. If you do not take such precautions, your artist will take to loafing, and if you only knew what these artists mean by loafing! Shocking! Why, I have just heard that they will spend a thousand-franc note in a day!"

This episode had a fatal influence on the home-life of Wenceslas and Lisbeth. The benefactress flavored the exile's bread with the wormwood of reproof, now that she saw her money in danger, and often believed it to be lost. From a kind mother she became a stepmother; she took the poor boy to task, she nagged him, scolded him for working too slowly, and blamed him for having chosen so difficult a profession. She could not believe that those models in red wax – little figures and sketches for ornamental work – could be of any value. Before long, vexed with herself for her severity, she would try to efface the tears by her care and attention.

Then the poor young man, after groaning to think that he was dependent on this shrew and under the thumb of a peasant of the Vosges, was bewitched by her coaxing ways and by a maternal affection that attached itself solely to the physical and material side of life. He was like a woman who forgives a week of ill-usage for the sake of a kiss and a brief reconciliation.

Thus Mademoiselle Fischer obtained complete power over his

mind. The love of dominion that lay as a germ in the old maid's heart developed rapidly. She could now satisfy her pride and her craving for action; had she not a creature belonging to her, to be schooled, scolded, flattered, and made happy, without any fear of a rival? Thus the good and bad sides of her nature alike found play. If she sometimes victimized the poor artist, she had, on the other hand, delicate impulses like the grace of wild flowers; it was a joy to her to provide for all his wants; she would have given her life for him, and Wenceslas knew it. Like every noble soul, the poor fellow forgot the bad points, the defects of the woman who had told him the story of her life as an excuse for her rough ways, and he remembered only the benefits she had done him.

One day, exasperated with Wenceslas for having gone out walking instead of sitting at work, she made a great scene.

"You belong to me," said she. "If you were an honest man, you would try to repay me the money you owe as soon as possible."

The gentleman, in whose veins the blood of the Steinbocks was fired, turned pale.

"Bless me," she went on, "we soon shall have nothing to live on but the thirty sous I earn – a poor work-woman!"

The two penniless creatures, worked up by their own war of words, grew vehement; and for the first time the unhappy artist reproached his benefactress for having rescued him from death only to make him lead the life of a galley slave, worse than the bottomless void, where at least, said he, he would have found rest. And he talked of flight.

"Flight!" cried Lisbeth. "Ah, Monsieur Rivet was right."

And she clearly explained to the Pole that within twenty-four hours he might be clapped into prison for the rest of his days. It was a crushing blow. Steinbock sank into deep melancholy and total silence.

In the course of the following night, Lisbeth hearing overhead some preparations for suicide, went up to her pensioner's room, and gave him the schedule and a formal release.

"Here, dear child, forgive me," she said with tears in her eyes. "Be happy; leave me! I am too cruel to you; only tell me that you will sometimes remember the poor girl who has enabled you to make a living. – What can I say? You are the cause of my ill-humor. I might die; where would you be without me? That is the reason of my being impatient to see you do some salable work. I do not want my money back for myself, I assure you! I am only frightened at your idleness, which you call meditation; at your ideas, which take up so many hours when you sit gazing at the sky; I want you to get into habits of industry."

All this was said with an emphasis, a look, and tears that moved the high-minded artist; he clasped his benefactress to his heart and kissed her forehead.

"Keep these pieces," said he with a sort of cheerfulness. "Why should you send me to Clichy? Am I not a prisoner here out of gratitude?"

This episode of their secret domestic life had occurred six months previously, and had led to Steinbock's producing three

finished works: the seal in Hortense's possession, the group he had placed with the curiosity dealer, and a beautiful clock to which he was putting the last touches, screwing in the last rivets.

This clock represented the twelve Hours, charmingly personified by twelve female figures whirling round in so mad and swift a dance that three little Loves perched on a pile of fruit and flowers could not stop one of them; only the torn skirts of Midnight remained in the hand of the most daring cherub. The group stood on an admirably treated base, ornamented with grotesque beasts. The hours were told by a monstrous mouth that opened to yawn, and each Hour bore some ingeniously appropriate symbol characteristic of the various occupations of the day.

It is now easy to understand the extraordinary attachment of Mademoiselle Fischer for her Livonian; she wanted him to be happy, and she saw him pining, fading away in his attic. The causes of this wretched state of affairs may be easily imagined. The peasant woman watched this son of the North with the affection of a mother, with the jealousy of a wife, and the spirit of a dragon; hence she managed to put every kind of folly or dissipation out of his power by leaving him destitute of money. She longed to keep her victim and companion for herself alone, well conducted perforce, and she had no conception of the cruelty of this senseless wish, since she, for her own part, was accustomed to every privation. She loved Steinbock well enough not to marry him, and too much to give him up to any other

woman; she could not resign herself to be no more than a mother to him, though she saw that she was mad to think of playing the other part.

These contradictions, this ferocious jealousy, and the joy of having a man to herself, all agitated her old maid's heart beyond measure. Really in love as she had been for four years, she cherished the foolish hope of prolonging this impossible and aimless way of life in which her persistence would only be the ruin of the man she thought of as her child. This contest between her instincts and her reason made her unjust and tyrannical. She wreaked on the young man her vengeance for her own lot in being neither young, rich, nor handsome; then, after each fit of rage, recognizing herself wrong, she stooped to unlimited humility, infinite tenderness. She never could sacrifice to her idol till she had asserted her power by blows of the axe. In fact, it was the converse of Shakespeare's *Tempest*– Caliban ruling Ariel and Prospero.

As to the poor youth himself, high-minded, meditative, and inclined to be lazy, the desert that his protectress made in his soul might be seen in his eyes, as in those of a caged lion. The penal servitude forced on him by Lisbeth did not fulfil the cravings of his heart. His weariness became a physical malady, and he was dying without daring to ask, or knowing where to procure, the price of some little necessary dissipation. On some days of special energy, when a feeling of utter ill-luck added to his exasperation, he would look at Lisbeth as a thirsty traveler on a

sandy shore must look at the bitter sea-water.

These harsh fruits of indigence, and this isolation in the midst of Paris, Lisbeth relished with delight. And besides, she foresaw that the first passion would rob her of her slave. Sometimes she even blamed herself because her own tyranny and reproaches had compelled the poetic youth to become so great an artist of delicate work, and she had thus given him the means of casting her off.

On the day after, these three lives, so differently but so utterly wretched – that of a mother in despair, that of the Marneffe household, and that of the unhappy exile – were all to be influenced by Hortense's guileless passion, and by the strange outcome of the Baron's luckless passion for Josepha.

Just as Hulot was going into the opera-house, he was stopped by the darkened appearance of the building and of the Rue le Peletier, where there were no gendarmes, no lights, no theatre-servants, no barrier to regulate the crowd. He looked up at the announcement-board, and beheld a strip of white paper, on which was printed the solemn notice:

"CLOSED ON ACCOUNT OF ILLNESS."

He rushed off to Josepha's lodgings in the Rue Chauchat; for, like all the singers, she lived close at hand.

"Whom do you want, sir?" asked the porter, to the Baron's great astonishment.

"Have you forgotten me?" said Hulot, much puzzled.

"On the contrary, sir, it is because I have the honor to remember you that I ask you, Where are you going?"

A mortal chill fell upon the Baron.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"If you go up to Mademoiselle Mirah's rooms, Monsieur le Baron, you will find Mademoiselle Heloise Brisetout there – and Monsieur Bixiou, Monsieur Leon de Lora, Monsieur Lousteau, Monsieur de Vernisset, Monsieur Stidmann; and ladies smelling of patchouli – holding a housewarming."

"Then, where – where is – ?"

"Mademoiselle Mirah? – I don't know that I ought to tell you."

The Baron slipped two five-franc pieces into the porter's hand.

"Well, she is now in the Rue de la Ville l'Eveque, in a fine house, given to her, they say, by the Duc d'Herouville," replied the man in a whisper.

Having ascertained the number of the house, Monsieur Hulot called a *milord* and drove to one of those pretty modern houses

with double doors, where everything, from the gaslight at the entrance, proclaims luxury.

The Baron, in his blue cloth coat, white neckcloth, nankeen trousers, patent leather boots, and stiffly starched shirt-frill, was supposed to be a guest, though a late arrival, by the janitor of this new Eden. His alacrity of manner and quick step justified this opinion.

The porter rang a bell, and a footman appeared in the hall. This man, as new as the house, admitted the visitor, who said to him in an imperious tone, and with a lordly gesture:

"Take in this card to Mademoiselle Josepha."

The victim mechanically looked round the room in which he found himself – an anteroom full of choice flowers and of furniture that must have cost twenty thousand francs. The servant, on his return, begged monsieur to wait in the drawing-room till the company came to their coffee.

Though the Baron had been familiar with Imperial luxury, which was undoubtedly prodigious, while its productions, though not durable in kind, had nevertheless cost enormous sums, he stood dazzled, dumfounded, in this drawing-room with three windows looking out on a garden like fairyland, one of those gardens that are created in a month with a made soil and transplanted shrubs, while the grass seems as if it must be made to grow by some chemical process. He admired not only the decoration, the gilding, the carving, in the most expensive Pompadour style, as it is called, and the magnificent brocades,

all of which any enriched tradesman could have procured for money; but he also noted such treasures as only princes can select and find, can pay for and give away; two pictures by Greuze, two by Watteau, two heads by Vandyck, two landscapes by Ruysdael, and two by le Guaspre, a Rembrandt, a Holbein, a Murillo, and a Titian, two paintings, by Teniers, and a pair by Metzu, a Van Huysum, and an Abraham Mignon – in short, two hundred thousand francs' worth of pictures superbly framed. The gilding was worth almost as much as the paintings.

"Ah, ha! Now you understand, my good man?" said Josepha.

She had stolen in on tiptoe through a noiseless door, over Persian carpets, and came upon her adorer, standing lost in amazement – in the stupid amazement when a man's ears tingle so loudly that he hears nothing but that fatal knell.

The words "my good man," spoken to an official of such high importance, so perfectly exemplified the audacity with which these creatures pour contempt on the loftiest, that the Baron was nailed to the spot. Josepha, in white and yellow, was so beautifully dressed for the banquet, that amid all this lavish magnificence she still shone like a rare jewel.

"Isn't this really fine?" said she. "The Duke has spent all the money on it that he got out of floating a company, of which the shares all sold at a premium. He is no fool, is my little Duke. There is nothing like a man who has been a grandee in his time for turning coals into gold. Just before dinner the notary brought me the title-deeds to sign and the bills receipted! – They are

all a first-class set in there – d'Esgrignon, Rastignac, Maxime, Lenoncourt, Verneuil, Laginski, Rochefide, la Palferine, and from among the bankers Nucingen and du Tillet, with Antonia, Malaga, Carabine, and la Schontz; and they all feel for you deeply. – Yes, old boy, and they hope you will join them, but on condition that you forthwith drink up to two bottles full of Hungarian wine, Champagne, or Cape, just to bring you up to their mark. – My dear fellow, we are all so much *on* here, that it was necessary to close the Opera. The manager is as drunk as a cornet-a-piston; he is hiccuping already."

"Oh, Josepha! – " cried the Baron.

"Now, can anything be more absurd than explanations?" she broke in with a smile. "Look here; can you stand six hundred thousand francs which this house and furniture cost? Can you give me a bond to the tune of thirty thousand francs a year, which is what the Duke has just given me in a packet of common sugared almonds from the grocer's? – a pretty notion that – "

"What an atrocity!" cried Hulot, who in his fury would have given his wife's diamonds to stand in the Duc d'Herouville's shoes for twenty-four hours.

"Atrocity is my trade," said she. "So that is how you take it? Well, why don't you float a company? Goodness me! my poor dyed Tom, you ought to be grateful to me; I have thrown you over just when you would have spent on me your widow's fortune, your daughter's portion. – What, tears! The Empire is a thing of the past – I hail the coming Empire!"

She struck a tragic attitude, and exclaimed:

"They call you Hulot! Nay, I know you not – "

And she went into the other room.

Through the door, left ajar, there came, like a lightning-flash, a streak of light with an accompaniment of the crescendo of the orgy and the fragrance of a banquet of the choicest description.

The singer peeped through the partly open door, and seeing Hulot transfixed as if he had been a bronze image, she came one step forward into the room.

"Monsieur," said she, "I have handed over the rubbish in the Rue Chauchat to Bixiou's little Heloise Brisetout. If you wish to claim your cotton nightcap, your bootjack, your belt, and your wax dye, I have stipulated for their return."

This insolent banter made the Baron leave the room as precipitately as Lot departed from Gomorrah, but he did not look back like Mrs. Lot.

Hulot went home, striding along in a fury, and talking to himself; he found his family still playing the game of whist at two sous a point, at which he left them. On seeing her husband return, poor Adeline imagined something dreadful, some dishonor; she gave her cards to Hortense, and led Hector away into the very room where, only five hours since, Crevel had foretold her the utmost disgrace of poverty.

"What is the matter?" she said, terrified.

"Oh, forgive me – but let me tell you all these horrors." And for ten minutes he poured out his wrath.

"But, my dear," said the unhappy woman, with heroic courage, "these creatures do not know what love means – such pure and devoted love as you deserve. How could you, so clear-sighted as you are, dream of competing with millions?"

"Dearest Adeline!" cried the Baron, clasping her to his heart.

The Baroness' words had shed balm on the bleeding wounds to his vanity.

"To be sure, take away the Duc d'Herouville's fortune, and she could not hesitate between us!" said the Baron.

"My dear," said Adeline with a final effort, "if you positively must have mistresses, why do you not seek them, like Crevel, among women who are less extravagant, and of a class that can for a time be content with little? We should all gain by that arrangement. – I understand your need – but I do not understand that vanity – "

"Oh, what a kind and perfect wife you are!" cried he. "I am an old lunatic, I do not deserve to have such a wife!"

"I am simply the Josephine of my Napoleon," she replied, with a touch of melancholy.

"Josephine was not to compare with you!" said he. "Come; I will play a game of whist with my brother and the children. I must try my hand at the business of a family man; I must get Hortense a husband, and bury the libertine."

His frankness so greatly touched poor Adeline, that she said:

"The creature has no taste to prefer any man in the world to my Hector. Oh, I would not give you up for all the gold on earth.

How can any woman throw you over who is so happy as to be loved by you?"

The look with which the Baron rewarded his wife's fanaticism confirmed her in her opinion that gentleness and docility were a woman's strongest weapons.

But in this she was mistaken. The noblest sentiments, carried to an excess, can produce mischief as great as do the worst vices. Bonaparte was made Emperor for having fired on the people, at a stone's throw from the spot where Louis XVI. lost his throne and his head because he would not allow a certain Monsieur Sauce to be hurt.

On the following morning, Hortense, who had slept with the seal under her pillow, so as to have it close to her all night, dressed very early, and sent to beg her father to join her in the garden as soon as he should be down.

By about half-past nine, the father, acceding to his daughter's petition, gave her his arm for a walk, and they went along the quays by the Pont Royal to the Place du Carrousel.

"Let us look into the shop windows, papa," said Hortense, as they went through the little gate to cross the wide square.

"What – here?" said her father, laughing at her.

"We are supposed to have come to see the pictures, and over there" – and she pointed to the stalls in front of the houses at a right angle to the Rue du Doyenne – "look! there are dealers in curiosities and pictures – "

"Your cousin lives there."

"I know it, but she must not see us."

"And what do you want to do?" said the Baron, who, finding himself within thirty yards of Madame Marneffe's windows, suddenly remembered her.

Hortense had dragged her father in front of one of the shops forming the angle of a block of houses built along the front of the Old Louvre, and facing the Hotel de Nantes. She went into this shop; her father stood outside, absorbed in gazing at the windows of the pretty little lady, who, the evening before, had left her image stamped on the old beau's heart, as if to alleviate the wound he was so soon to receive; and he could not help putting his wife's sage advice into practice.

"I will fall back on a simple little citizen's wife," said he to himself, recalling Madame Marneffe's adorable graces. "Such a woman as that will soon make me forget that grasping Josepha."

Now, this was what was happening at the same moment outside and inside the curiosity shop.

As he fixed his eyes on the windows of his new *belle*, the Baron saw the husband, who, while brushing his coat with his own hands, was apparently on the lookout, expecting to see some one on the square. Fearing lest he should be seen, and subsequently recognized, the amorous Baron turned his back on the Rue du Doyenne, or rather stood at three-quarters' face, as it were, so as to be able to glance round from time to time. This manoeuvre brought him face to face with Madame Marneffe, who, coming up from the quay, was doubling the promontory of houses to go

home.

Valerie was evidently startled as she met the Baron's astonished eye, and she responded with a prudish dropping of her eyelids.

"A pretty woman," exclaimed he, "for whom a man would do many foolish things."

"Indeed, monsieur?" said she, turning suddenly, like a woman who has just come to some vehement decision, "you are Monsieur le Baron Hulot, I believe?"

The Baron, more and more bewildered, bowed assent.

"Then, as chance has twice made our eyes meet, and I am so fortunate as to have interested or puzzled you, I may tell you that, instead of doing anything foolish, you ought to do justice. – My husband's fate rests with you."

"And how may that be?" asked the gallant Baron.

"He is employed in your department in the War Office, under Monsieur Lebrun, in Monsieur Coquet's room," said she with a smile.

"I am quite disposed, Madame – Madame – ?"

"Madame Marneffe."

"Dear little Madame Marneffe, to do injustice for your sake. – I have a cousin living in your house; I will go to see her one day soon – as soon as possible; bring your petition to me in her rooms."

"Pardon my boldness, Monsieur le Baron; you must understand that if I dare to address you thus, it is because I have

no friend to protect me – ”

“Ah, ha!”

“Monsieur, you misunderstand me,” said she, lowering her eyelids.

Hulot felt as if the sun had disappeared.

“I am at my wits’ end, but I am an honest woman!” she went on. “About six months ago my only protector died, Marshal Montcornet – ”

“Ah! You are his daughter?”

“Yes, monsieur; but he never acknowledged me.”

“That was that he might leave you part of his fortune.”

“He left me nothing; he made no will.”

“Indeed! Poor little woman! The Marshal died suddenly of apoplexy. But, come, madame, hope for the best. The State must do something for the daughter of one of the Chevalier Bayards of the Empire.”

Madame Marneffe bowed gracefully and went off, as proud of her success as the Baron was of his.

“Where the devil has she been so early?” thought he watching the flow of her skirts, to which she contrived to impart a somewhat exaggerated grace. “She looks too tired to have just come from a bath, and her husband is waiting for her. It is strange, and puzzles me altogether.”

Madame Marneffe having vanished within, the Baron wondered what his daughter was doing in the shop. As he went in, still staring at Madame Marneffe’s windows, he ran against

a young man with a pale brow and sparkling gray eyes, wearing a summer coat of black merino, coarse drill trousers, and tan shoes, with gaiters, rushing away headlong; he saw him run to the house in the Rue du Doyenne, into which he went.

Hortense, on going into the shop, had at once recognized the famous group, conspicuously placed on a table in the middle and in front of the door. Even without the circumstances to which she owed her knowledge of this masterpiece, it would probably have struck her by the peculiar power which we must call the *brio*– the *go*– of great works; and the girl herself might in Italy have been taken as a model for the personification of *Brio*.

Not every work by a man of genius has in the same degree that brilliancy, that glory which is at once patent even to the most ignoble beholder. Thus, certain pictures by Raphael, such as the famous *Transfiguration*, the *Madonna di Foligno*, and the frescoes of the *Stanze* in the Vatican, do not at first captivate our admiration, as do the *Violin-player* in the Sciarra Palace, the portraits of the Doria family, and the *Vision of Ezekiel* in the Pitti Gallery, the *Christ bearing His Cross* in the Borghese collection, and the *Marriage of the Virgin* in the Brera at Milan. The *Saint John the Baptist* of the Tribuna, and *Saint Luke painting the Virgin's portrait* in the Accademia at Rome, have not the charm of the *Portrait of Leo X.*, and of the *Virgin* at Dresden.

And yet they are all of equal merit. Nay, more. The *Stanze*, the *Transfiguration*, the panels, and the three easel pictures in the Vatican are in the highest degree perfect and sublime. But they

demand a stress of attention, even from the most accomplished beholder, and serious study, to be fully understood; while the *Violin-player*, the *Marriage of the Virgin*, and the *Vision of Ezekiel* go straight to the heart through the portal of sight, and make their home there. It is a pleasure to receive them thus without an effort; if it is not the highest phase of art, it is the happiest. This fact proves that, in the begetting of works of art, there is as much chance in the character of the offspring as there is in a family of children; that some will be happily graced, born beautiful, and costing their mothers little suffering, creatures on whom everything smiles, and with whom everything succeeds; in short, genius, like love, has its fairer blossoms.

This *brio*, an Italian word which the French have begun to use, is characteristic of youthful work. It is the fruit of an impetus and fire of early talent – an impetus which is met with again later in some happy hours; but this particular *brio* no longer comes from the artist's heart; instead of his flinging it into his work as a volcano flings up its fires, it comes to him from outside, inspired by circumstances, by love, or rivalry, often by hatred, and more often still by the imperious need of glory to be lived up to.

This group by Wenceslas was to his later works what the *Marriage of the Virgin* is to the great mass of Raphael's, the first step of a gifted artist taken with the inimitable grace, the eagerness, and delightful overflowingness of a child, whose strength is concealed under the pink-and-white flesh full of dimples which seem to echo to a mother's laughter. Prince

Eugene is said to have paid four hundred thousand francs for this picture, which would be worth a million to any nation that owned no picture by Raphael, but no one would give that sum for the finest of the frescoes, though their value is far greater as works of art.

Hortense restrained her admiration, for she reflected on the amount of her girlish savings; she assumed an air of indifference, and said to the dealer:

"What is the price of that?"

"Fifteen hundred francs," replied the man, sending a glance of intelligence to a young man seated on a stool in the corner.

The young man himself gazed in a stupefaction at Monsieur Hulot's living masterpiece. Hortense, forewarned, at once identified him as the artist, from the color that flushed a face pale with endurance; she saw the spark lighted up in his gray eyes by her question; she looked on the thin, drawn features, like those of a monk consumed by asceticism; she loved the red, well-formed mouth, the delicate chin, and the Pole's silky chestnut hair.

"If it were twelve hundred," said she, "I would beg you to send it to me."

"It is antique, mademoiselle," the dealer remarked, thinking, like all his fraternity, that, having uttered this *ne plus ultra* of bric-a-brac, there was no more to be said.

"Excuse me, monsieur," she replied very quietly, "it was made this year; I came expressly to beg you, if my price is accepted, to send the artist to see us, as it might be possible to procure him

some important commissions."

"And if he is to have the twelve hundred francs, what am I to get? I am the dealer," said the man, with candid good-humor.

"To be sure!" replied the girl, with a slight curl of disdain.

"Oh! mademoiselle, take it; I will make terms with the dealer," cried the Livonian, beside himself.

Fascinated by Hortense's wonderful beauty and the love of art she displayed, he added:

"I am the sculptor of the group, and for ten days I have come here three times a day to see if anybody would recognize its merit and bargain for it. You are my first admirer – take it!"

"Come, then, monsieur, with the dealer, an hour hence. – Here is my father's card," replied Hortense.

Then, seeing the shopkeeper go into a back room to wrap the group in a piece of linen rag, she added in a low voice, to the great astonishment of the artist, who thought he must be dreaming:

"For the benefit of your future prospects, Monsieur Wenceslas, do not mention the name of the purchaser to Mademoiselle Fischer, for she is our cousin."

The word cousin dazzled the artist's mind; he had a glimpse of Paradise whence this daughter of Eve had come to him. He had dreamed of the beautiful girl of whom Lisbeth had told him, as Hortense had dreamed of her cousin's lover; and, as she had entered the shop —

"Ah!" thought he, "if she could but be like this!"

The look that passed between the lovers may be imagined; it

was a flame, for virtuous lovers have no hypocrisies.

"Well, what the deuce are you doing here?" her father asked her.

"I have been spending twelve hundred francs that I had saved. Come." And she took her father's arm.

"Twelve hundred francs?" he repeated.

"To be exact, thirteen hundred; you will lend me the odd hundred?"

"And on what, in such a place, could you spend so much?"

"Ah! that is the question!" replied the happy girl. "If I have got a husband, he is not dear at the money."

"A husband! In that shop, my child?"

"Listen, dear little father; would you forbid my marrying a great artist?"

"No, my dear. A great artist in these days is a prince without a title – he has glory and fortune, the two chief social advantages – next to virtue," he added, in a smug tone.

"Oh, of course!" said Hortense. "And what do you think of sculpture?"

"It is very poor business," replied Hulot, shaking his head. "It needs high patronage as well as great talent, for Government is the only purchaser. It is an art with no demand nowadays, where there are no princely houses, no great fortunes, no entailed mansions, no hereditary estates. Only small pictures and small figures can find a place; the arts are endangered by this need of small things."

"But if a great artist could find a demand?" said Hortense.

"That indeed would solve the problem."

"Or had some one to back him?"

"That would be even better."

"If he were of noble birth?"

"Pooh!"

"A Count."

"And a sculptor?"

"He has no money."

"And so he counts on that of Mademoiselle Hortense Hulot?" said the Baron ironically, with an inquisitorial look into his daughter's eyes.

"This great artist, a Count and a sculptor, has just seen your daughter for the first time in his life, and for the space of five minutes, Monsieur le Baron," Hortense calmly replied. "Yesterday, you must know, dear little father, while you were at the Chamber, mamma had a fainting fit. This, which she ascribed to a nervous attack, was the result of some worry that had to do with the failure of my marriage, for she told me that to get rid of me – "

"She is too fond of you to have used an expression – "

"So unparliamentary!" Hortense put in with a laugh. "No, she did not use those words; but I know that a girl old enough to marry and who does not find a husband is a heavy cross for respectable parents to bear. – Well, she thinks that if a man of energy and talent could be found, who would be satisfied with

thirty thousand francs for my marriage portion, we might all be happy. In fact, she thought it advisable to prepare me for the modesty of my future lot, and to hinder me from indulging in too fervid dreams. – Which evidently meant an end to the intended marriage, and no settlements for me!"

"Your mother is a very good woman, noble, admirable!" replied the father, deeply humiliated, though not sorry to hear this confession.

"She told me yesterday that she had your permission to sell her diamonds so as to give me something to marry on; but I should like her to keep her jewels, and to find a husband myself. I think I have found the man, the possible husband, answering to mamma's prospectus – "

"There? – in the Place du Carrousel? – and in one morning?"

"Oh, papa, the mischief lies deeper!" said she archly.

"Well, come, my child, tell the whole story to your good old father," said he persuasively, and concealing his uneasiness.

Under promise of absolute secrecy, Hortense repeated the upshot of her various conversations with her Cousin Betty. Then, when they got home, she showed the much-talked-of-seal to her father in evidence of the sagacity of her views. The father, in the depth of his heart, wondered at the skill and acumen of girls who act on instinct, discerning the simplicity of the scheme which her idealized love had suggested in the course of a single night to his guileless daughter.

"You will see the masterpiece I have just bought; it is to

be brought home, and that dear Wenceslas is to come with the dealer. – The man who made that group ought to make a fortune; only use your influence to get him an order for a statue, and rooms at the Institut – "

"How you run on!" cried her father. "Why, if you had your own way, you would be man and wife within the legal period – in eleven days – "

"Must we wait so long?" said she, laughing. "But I fell in love with him in five minutes, as you fell in love with mamma at first sight. And he loves me as if we had known each other for two years. Yes," she said in reply to her father's look, "I read ten volumes of love in his eyes. And will not you and mamma accept him as my husband when you see that he is a man of genius? Sculpture is the greatest of the Arts," she cried, clapping her hands and jumping. "I will tell you everything – "

"What, is there more to come?" asked her father, smiling.

The child's complete and effervescent innocence had restored her father's peace of mind.

"A confession of the first importance," said she. "I loved him without knowing him; and, for the last hour, since seeing him, I am crazy about him."

"A little too crazy!" said the Baron, who was enjoying the sight of this guileless passion.

"Do not punish me for confiding in you," replied she. "It is so delightful to say to my father's heart, 'I love him! I am so happy in loving him!' – You will see my Wenceslas! His brow is so sad.

The sun of genius shines in his gray eyes – and what an air he has! What do you think of Livonia? Is it a fine country? – The idea of Cousin Betty's marrying that young fellow! She might be his mother. It would be murder! I am quite jealous of all she has ever done for him. But I don't think my marriage will please her."

"See, my darling, we must hide nothing from your mother."

"I should have to show her the seal, and I promised not to betray Cousin Lisbeth, who is afraid, she says, of mamma's laughing at her," said Hortense.

"You have scruples about the seal, and none about robbing your cousin of her lover."

"I promised about the seal – I made no promise about the sculptor."

This adventure, patriarchal in its simplicity, came admirably *a propos* to the unconfessed poverty of the family; the Baron, while praising his daughter for her candor, explained to her that she must now leave matters to the discretion of her parents.

"You understand, my child, that it is not your part to ascertain whether your cousin's lover is a Count, if he has all his papers properly certified, and if his conduct is a guarantee for his respectability. – As for your cousin, she refused five offers when she was twenty years younger; that will prove no obstacle, I undertake to say."

"Listen to me, papa; if you really wish to see me married, never say a word to Lisbeth about it till just before the contract is signed. I have been catechizing her about this business for the last

six months! Well, there is something about her quite inexplicable – ”

“What?” said her father, puzzled.

“Well, she looks evil when I say too much, even in joke, about her lover. Make inquiries, but leave me to row my own boat. My confidence ought to reassure you.”

“The Lord said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto Me.’ You are one of those who have come back again,” replied the Baron with a touch of irony.

After breakfast the dealer was announced, and the artist with his group. The sudden flush that reddened her daughter’s face at once made the Baroness suspicious and then watchful, and the girl’s confusion and the light in her eyes soon betrayed the mystery so badly guarded in her simple heart.

Count Steinbock, dressed in black, struck the Baron as a very gentlemanly young man.

“Would you undertake a bronze statue?” he asked, as he held up the group.

After admiring it on trust, he passed it on to his wife, who knew nothing about sculpture.

“It is beautiful, isn’t it, mamma?” said Hortense in her mother’ ear.

“A statue! Monsieur, it is less difficult to execute a statue than to make a clock like this, which my friend here has been kind enough to bring,” said the artist in reply.

The dealer was placing on the dining-room sideboard the wax

model of the twelve Hours that the Loves were trying to delay.

"Leave the clock with me," said the Baron, astounded at the beauty of the sketch. "I should like to show it to the Ministers of the Interior and of Commerce."

"Who is the young man in whom you take so much interest?" the Baroness asked her daughter.

"An artist who could afford to execute this model could get a hundred thousand francs for it," said the curiosity-dealer, putting on a knowing and mysterious look as he saw that the artist and the girl were interchanging glances. "He would only need to sell twenty copies at eight thousand francs each – for the materials would cost about a thousand crowns for each example. But if each copy were numbered and the mould destroyed, it would certainly be possible to meet with twenty amateurs only too glad to possess a replica of such a work."

"A hundred thousand francs!" cried Steinbock, looking from the dealer to Hortense, the Baron, and the Baroness.

"Yes, a hundred thousand francs," repeated the dealer. "If I were rich enough, I would buy it of you myself for twenty thousand francs; for by destroying the mould it would become a valuable property. But one of the princes ought to pay thirty or forty thousand francs for such a work to ornament his drawing-room. No man has ever succeeded in making a clock satisfactory alike to the vulgar and to the connoisseur, and this one, sir, solves the difficulty."

"This is for yourself, monsieur," said Hortense, giving six gold

pieces to the dealer.

"Never breath a word of this visit to any one living," said the artist to his friend, at the door. "If you should be asked where we sold the group, mention the Duc d'Herouville, the famous collector in the Rue de Varenne."

The dealer nodded assent.

"And your name?" said Hulot to the artist when he came back.

"Count Steinbock."

"Have you the papers that prove your identity?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Baron. They are in Russian and in German, but not legalized."

"Do you feel equal to undertaking a statue nine feet high?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, then, if the persons whom I shall consult are satisfied with your work, I can secure you the commission for the statue of Marshal Montcornet, which is to be erected on his monument at Pere-Lachaise. The Minister of War and the old officers of the Imperial Guard have subscribed a sum large enough to enable us to select our artist."

"Oh, monsieur, it will make my fortune!" exclaimed Steinbock, overpowered by so much happiness at once.

"Be easy," replied the Baron graciously. "If the two ministers to whom I propose to show your group and this sketch in wax are delighted with these two pieces, your prospects of a fortune are good."

Hortense hugged her father's arm so tightly as to hurt him.

"Bring me your papers, and say nothing of your hopes to anybody, not even to our old Cousin Betty."

"Lisbeth?" said Madame Hulot, at last understanding the end of all this, though unable to guess the means.

"I could give proof of my skill by making a bust of the Baroness," added Wenceslas.

The artist, struck by Madame Hulot's beauty, was comparing the mother and daughter.

"Indeed, monsieur, life may smile upon you," said the Baron, quite charmed by Count Steinbock's refined and elegant manner. "You will find out that in Paris no man is clever for nothing, and that persevering toil always finds its reward here."

Hortense, with a blush, held out to the young man a pretty Algerine purse containing sixty gold pieces. The artist, with something still of a gentleman's pride, responded with a mounting color easy enough to interpret.

"This, perhaps, is the first money your works have brought you?" said Adeline.

"Yes, madame – my works of art. It is not the first-fruits of my labor, for I have been a workman."

"Well, we must hope my daughter's money will bring you good luck," said she.

"And take it without scruple," added the Baron, seeing that Wenceslas held the purse in his hand instead of pocketing it. "The sum will be repaid by some rich man, a prince perhaps, who will offer it with interest to possess so fine a work."

"Oh, I want it too much myself, papa, to give it up to anybody in the world, even a royal prince!"

"I can make a far prettier thing than that for you, mademoiselle."

"But it would not be this one," replied she; and then, as if ashamed of having said too much, she ran out into the garden.

"Then I shall break the mould and the model as soon as I go home," said Steinbock.

"Fetch me your papers, and you will hear of me before long, if you are equal to what I expect of you, monsieur."

The artist on this could but take leave. After bowing to Madame Hulot and Hortense, who came in from the garden on purpose, he went off to walk in the Tuileries, not bearing – not daring – to return to his attic, where his tyrant would pelt him with questions and wring his secret from him.

Hortense's adorer conceived of groups and statues by the hundred; he felt strong enough to hew the marble himself, like Canova, who was also a feeble man, and nearly died of it. He was transfigured by Hortense, who was to him inspiration made visible.

"Now then," said the Baroness to her daughter, "what does all this mean?"

"Well, dear mamma, you have just seen Cousin Lisbeth's lover, who now, I hope, is mine. But shut your eyes, know nothing. Good Heavens! I was to keep it all from you, and I cannot help telling you everything – "

"Good-bye, children!" said the Baron, kissing his wife and daughter; "I shall perhaps go to call on the Nanny, and from her I shall hear a great deal about our young man."

"Papa, be cautious!" said Hortense.

"Oh! little girl!" cried the Baroness when Hortense had poured out her poem, of which the morning's adventure was the last canto, "dear little girl, Artlessness will always be the artfulest puss on earth!"

Genuine passions have an unerring instinct. Set a greedy man before a dish of fruit and he will make no mistake, but take the choicest even without seeing it. In the same way, if you allow a girl who is well brought up to choose a husband for herself, if she is in a position to meet the man of her heart, rarely will she blunder. The act of nature in such cases is known as love at first sight; and in love, first sight is practically second sight.

The Baroness' satisfaction, though disguised under maternal dignity, was as great as her daughter's; for, of the three ways of marrying Hortense of which Crevel had spoken, the best, as she opined, was about to be realized. And she regarded this little drama as an answer by Providence to her fervent prayers.

Mademoiselle Fischer's galley slave, obliged at last to go home, thought he might hide his joy as a lover under his glee as an artist rejoicing over his first success.

"Victory! my group is sold to the Duc d'Herouville, who is going to give me some commissions," cried he, throwing the twelve hundred francs in gold on the table before the old maid.

He had, as may be supposed concealed Hortense's purse; it lay next to his heart.

"And a very good thing too," said Lisbeth. "I was working myself to death. You see, child, money comes in slowly in the business you have taken up, for this is the first you have earned, and you have been grinding at it for near on five years now. That money barely repays me for what you have cost me since I took your promissory note; that is all I have got by my savings. But be sure of one thing," she said, after counting the gold, "this money will all be spent on you. There is enough there to keep us going for a year. In a year you may now be able to pay your debt and have a snug little sum of your own, if you go on in the same way."

Wenceslas, finding his trick successful, expatiated on the Duc d'Herouville.

"I will fit you out in a black suit, and get you some new linen," said Lisbeth, "for you must appear presentably before your patrons; and then you must have a larger and better apartment than your horrible garret, and furnish it property. – You look so bright, you are not like the same creature," she added, gazing at Wenceslas.

"But my work is pronounced a masterpiece."

"Well, so much the better! Do some more," said the arid creature, who was nothing but practical, and incapable of understanding the joy of triumph or of beauty in Art. "Trouble your head no further about what you have sold; make something else to sell. You have spent two hundred francs in money, to

say nothing of your time and your labor, on that devil of a *Samson*. Your clock will cost you more than two thousand francs to execute. I tell you what, if you will listen to me, you will finish the two little boys crowning the little girl with cornflowers; that would just suit the Parisians. – I will go round to Monsieur Graff the tailor before going to Monsieur Crevel. – Go up now and leave me to dress."

Next day the Baron, perfectly crazy about Madame Marneffe, went to see Cousin Betty, who was considerably amazed on opening the door to see who her visitor was, for he had never called on her before. She at once said to herself, "Can it be that Hortense wants my lover?" – for she had heard the evening before, at Monsieur Crevel's, that the marriage with the Councillor of the Supreme Court was broken off.

"What, Cousin! you here? This is the first time you have ever been to see me, and it is certainly not for love of my fine eyes that you have come now."

"Fine eyes is the truth," said the Baron; "you have as fine eyes as I have ever seen – "

"Come, what are you here for? I really am ashamed to receive you in such a kennel."

The outer room of the two inhabited by Lisbeth served her as sitting-room, dining-room, kitchen, and workroom. The furniture was such as beseemed a well-to-do artisan – walnut-wood chairs with straw seats, a small walnut-wood dining table, a work table, some colored prints in black wooden frames, short

muslin curtains to the windows, the floor well polished and shining with cleanliness, not a speck of dust anywhere, but all cold and dingy, like a picture by Terburg in every particular, even to the gray tone given by a wall paper once blue and now faded to gray. As to the bedroom, no human being had ever penetrated its secrets.

The Baron took it all in at a glance, saw the sign-manual of commonness on every detail, from the cast-iron stove to the household utensils, and his gorge rose as he said to himself, "And *this* is virtue! – What am I here for?" said he aloud. "You are far too cunning not to guess, and I had better tell you plainly," cried he, sitting down and looking out across the courtyard through an opening he made in the puckered curtain. "There is a very pretty woman in the house – "

"Madame Marneffe! Now I understand!" she exclaimed, seeing it all. "But Josepha?"

"Alas, Cousin, Josepha is no more. I was turned out of doors like a discarded footman."

"And you would like…?" said Lisbeth, looking at the Baron with the dignity of a prude on her guard a quarter of an hour too soon.

"As Madame Marneffe is very much the lady, and the wife of an employe, you can meet her without compromising yourself," the Baron went on, "and I should like to see you neighborly. Oh! you need not be alarmed; she will have the greatest consideration for the cousin of her husband's chief."

At this moment the rustle of a gown was heard on the stairs and the footstep of a woman wearing the thinnest boots. The sound ceased on the landing. There was a tap at the door, and Madame Marneffe came in.

"Pray excuse me, mademoiselle, for thus intruding upon you, but I failed to find you yesterday when I came to call; we are near neighbors; and if I had known that you were related to Monsieur le Baron, I should long since have craved your kind interest with him. I saw him come in, so I took the liberty of coming across; for my husband, Monsieur le Baron, spoke to me of a report on the office clerks which is to be laid before the minister to-morrow."

She seemed quite agitated and nervous – but she had only run upstairs.

"You have no need to play the petitioner, fair lady," replied the Baron. "It is I who should ask the favor of seeing you."

"Very well, if mademoiselle allows it, pray come!" said Madame Marneffe.

"Yes – go, Cousin, I will join you," said Lisbeth judiciously.

The Parisienne had so confidently counted on the chief's visit and intelligence, that not only had she dressed herself for so important an interview – she had dressed her room. Early in the day it had been furnished with flowers purchased on credit. Marneffe had helped his wife to polish the furniture, down to the smallest objects, washing, brushing, and dusting everything. Valerie wished to be found in an atmosphere of sweetness, to attract the chief and to please him enough to have a right to be

cruel; to tantalize him as a child would, with all the tricks of fashionable tactics. She had gauged Hulot. Give a Paris woman at bay four-and-twenty hours, and she will overthrow a ministry.

The man of the Empire, accustomed to the ways to the Empire, was no doubt quite ignorant of the ways of modern love-making, of the scruples in vogue and the various styles of conversation invented since 1830, which led to the poor weak woman being regarded as the victim of her lover's desires – a Sister of Charity salving a wound, an angel sacrificing herself.

This modern art of love uses a vast amount of evangelical phrases in the service of the Devil. Passion is martyrdom. Both parties aspire to the Ideal, to the Infinite; love is to make them so much better. All these fine words are but a pretext for putting increased ardor into the practical side of it, more frenzy into a fall than of old. This hypocrisy, a characteristic of the times, is a gangrene in gallantry. The lovers are both angels, and they behave, if they can, like two devils.

Love had no time for such subtle analysis between two campaigns, and in 1809 its successes were as rapid as those of the Empire. So, under the Restoration, the handsome Baron, a lady's man once more, had begun by consoling some old friends now fallen from the political firmament, like extinguished stars, and then, as he grew old, was captured by Jenny Cadine and Josepha.

Madame Marneffe had placed her batteries after due study of the Baron's past life, which her husband had narrated in much detail, after picking up some information in the offices.

The comedy of modern sentiment might have the charm of novelty to the Baron; Valerie had made up her mind as to her scheme; and we may say the trial of her power that she made this morning answered her highest expectations. Thanks to her manoeuvres, sentimental, high-flown, and romantic, Valerie, without committing herself to any promises, obtained for her husband the appointment as deputy head of the office and the Cross of the Legion of Honor.

The campaign was not carried out without little dinners at the *Rocher de Cancale*, parties to the play, and gifts in the form of lace, scarves, gowns, and jewelry. The apartment in the Rue du Doyenne was not satisfactory; the Baron proposed to furnish another magnificently in a charming new house in the Rue Vanneau.

Monsieur Marneffe got a fortnight's leave, to be taken a month hence for urgent private affairs in the country, and a present in money; he promised himself that he would spend both in a little town in Switzerland, studying the fair sex.

While Monsieur Hulot thus devoted himself to the lady he was "protecting," he did not forget the young artist. Comte Popinot, Minister of Commerce, was a patron of Art; he paid two thousand francs for a copy of the *Samson* on condition that the mould should be broken, and that there should be no *Samson* but his and Mademoiselle Hulot's. The group was admired by a Prince, to whom the model sketch for the clock was also shown, and who ordered it; but that again was to be unique, and he

offered thirty thousand francs for it.

Artists who were consulted, and among them Stidmann, were of opinion that the man who had sketched those two models was capable of achieving a statue. The Marshal Prince de Wissembourg, Minister of War, and President of the Committee for the subscriptions to the monument of Marshal Montcornet, called a meeting, at which it was decided that the execution of the work should be placed in Steinbock's hands. The Comte de Rastignac, at that time Under-secretary of State, wished to possess a work by the artist, whose glory was waxing amid the acclamations of his rivals. Steinbock sold to him the charming group of two little boys crowning a little girl, and he promised to secure for the sculptor a studio attached to the Government marble-quarries, situated, as all the world knows, at Le Gros-Caillou.

This was a success, such success as is won in Paris, that is to say, stupendous success, that crushes those whose shoulders and loins are not strong enough to bear it – as, be it said, not unfrequently is the case. Count Wenceslas Steinbock was written about in all the newspapers and reviews without his having the least suspicion of it, any more than had Mademoiselle Fischer. Every day, as soon as Lisbeth had gone out to dinner, Wenceslas went to the Baroness' and spent an hour or two there, excepting on the evenings when Lisbeth dined with the Hulots.

This state of things lasted for several days.

The Baron, assured of Count Steinbock's titles and position;

the Baroness, pleased with his character and habits; Hortense, proud of her permitted love and of her suitor's fame, none of them hesitated to speak of the marriage; in short, the artist was in the seventh heaven, when an indiscretion on Madame Marneffe's part spoilt all.

And this was how.

Lisbeth, whom the Baron wished to see intimate with Madame Marneffe, that she might keep an eye on the couple, had already dined with Valerie; and she, on her part, anxious to have an ear in the Hulot house, made much of the old maid. It occurred to Valerie to invite Mademoiselle Fischer to a house-warming in the new apartments she was about to move into. Lisbeth, glad to have found another house to dine in, and bewitched by Madame Marneffe, had taken a great fancy to Valerie. Of all the persons she had made acquaintance with, no one had taken so much pains to please her. In fact, Madame Marneffe, full of attentions for Mademoiselle Fischer, found herself in the position towards Lisbeth that Lisbeth held towards the Baroness, Monsieur Rivet, Crevel, and the others who invited her to dinner.

The Marneffes had excited Lisbeth's compassion by allowing her to see the extreme poverty of the house, while varnishing it as usual with the fairest colors; their friends were under obligations to them and ungrateful; they had had much illness; Madame Fortin, her mother, had never known of their distress, and had died believing herself wealthy to the end, thanks to their superhuman efforts – and so forth.

"Poor people!" said she to her Cousin Hulot, "you are right to do what you can for them; they are so brave and so kind! They can hardly live on the thousand crowns he gets as deputy-head of the office, for they have got into debt since Marshal Montcornet's death. It is barbarity on the part of the Government to suppose that a clerk with a wife and family can live in Paris on two thousand four hundred francs a year."

And so, within a very short time, a young woman who affected regard for her, who told her everything, and consulted her, who flattered her, and seemed ready to yield to her guidance, had become dearer to the eccentric Cousin Lisbeth than all her relations.

The Baron, on his part, admiring in Madame Marneffe such propriety, education, and breeding as neither Jenny Cadine nor Josepha, nor any friend of theirs had to show, had fallen in love with her in a month, developing a senile passion, a senseless passion, which had an appearance of reason. In fact, he found here neither the banter, nor the orgies, nor the reckless expenditure, nor the depravity, nor the scorn of social decencies, nor the insolent independence which had brought him to grief alike with the actress and the singer. He was spared, too, the rapacity of the courtesan, like unto the thirst of dry sand.

Madame Marneffe, of whom he had made a friend and confidante, made the greatest difficulties over accepting any gift from him.

"Appointments, official presents, anything you can extract

from the Government; but do not begin by insulting a woman whom you profess to love," said Valerie. "If you do, I shall cease to believe you – and I like to believe you," she added, with a glance like Saint Theresa leering at heaven.

Every time he made her a present there was a fortress to be stormed, a conscience to be over-persuaded. The hapless Baron laid deep stratagems to offer her some trifle – costly, nevertheless – proud of having at last met with virtue and the realization of his dreams. In this primitive household, as he assured himself, he was the god as much as in his own. And Monsieur Marneffe seemed at a thousand leagues from suspecting that the Jupiter of his office intended to descend on his wife in a shower of gold; he was his august chief's humblest slave.

Madame Marneffe, twenty-three years of age, a pure and bashful middle-class wife, a blossom hidden in the Rue du Doyenne, could know nothing of the depravity and demoralizing harlotry which the Baron could no longer think of without disgust, for he had never known the charm of recalcitrant virtue, and the coy Valerie made him enjoy it to the utmost – all along the line, as the saying goes.

The question having come to this point between Hector and Valerie, it is not astonishing that Valerie should have heard from Hector the secret of the intended marriage between the great sculptor Steinbock and Hortense Hulot. Between a lover on his promotion and a lady who hesitates long before becoming his mistress, there are contests, uttered or unexpressed, in which a

word often betrays a thought; as, in fencing, the foils fly as briskly as the swords in duel. Then a prudent man follows the example of Monsieur de Turenne. Thus the Baron had hinted at the greater freedom his daughter's marriage would allow him, in reply to the tender Valerie, who more than once had exclaimed:

"I cannot imagine how a woman can go wrong for a man who is not wholly hers."

And a thousand times already the Baron had declared that for five-and-twenty years all had been at an end between Madame Hulot and himself.

"And they say she is so handsome!" replied Madame Marneffe. "I want proof."

"You shall have it," said the Baron, made happy by this demand, by which his Valerie committed herself.

Hector had then been compelled to reveal his plans, already being carried into effect in the Rue Vanneau, to prove to Valerie that he intended to devote to her that half of his life which belonged to his lawful wife, supposing that day and night equally divide the existence of civilized humanity. He spoke of decently deserting his wife, leaving her to herself as soon as Hortense should be married. The Baroness would then spend all her time with Hortense or the young Hulot couple; he was sure of her submission.

"And then, my angel, my true life, my real home will be in the Rue Vanneau."

"Bless me, how you dispose of me!" said Madame Marneffe.

"And my husband – "

"That rag!"

"To be sure, as compared with you so he is!" said she with a laugh.

Madame Marneffe, having heard Steinbock's history, was frantically eager to see the young Count; perhaps she wished to have some trifle of his work while they still lived under the same roof. This curiosity so seriously annoyed the Baron that Valerie swore to him that she would never even look at Wenceslas. But though she obtained, as the reward of her surrender of this wish, a little tea-service of old Sevres *pate tendre*, she kept her wish at the bottom of her heart, as if written on tablets.

So one day when she had begged "*my* Cousin Betty" to come to take coffee with her in her room, she opened on the subject of her lover, to know how she might see him without risk.

"My dear child," said she, for they called each my dear, "why have you never introduced your lover to me? Do you know that within a short time he has become famous?"

"He famous?"

"He is the one subject of conversation."

"Pooh!" cried Lisbeth.

"He is going to execute the statue of my father, and I could be of great use to him and help him to succeed in the work; for Madame Montcornet cannot lend him, as I can, a miniature by Sain, a beautiful thing done in 1809, before the Wagram Campaign, and given to my poor mother – Montcornet when he

was young and handsome."

Sain and Augustin between them held the sceptre of miniature painting under the Empire.

"He is going to make a statue, my dear, did you say?"

"Nine feet high – by the orders of the Minister of War. Why, where have you dropped from that I should tell you the news? Why, the Government is going to give Count Steinbock rooms and a studio at Le Gros-Caillou, the depot for marble; your Pole will be made the Director, I should not wonder, with two thousand francs a year and a ring on his finger."

"How do you know all this when I have heard nothing about it?" said Lisbeth at last, shaking off her amazement.

"Now, my dear little Cousin Betty," said Madame Marneffe, in an insinuating voice, "are you capable of devoted friendship, put to any test? Shall we henceforth be sisters? Will you swear to me never to have a secret from me any more than I from you – to act as my spy, as I will be yours? – Above all, will you pledge yourself never to betray me either to my husband or to Monsieur Hulot, and never reveal that it was I who told you – ?"

Madame Marneffe broke off in this spurring harangue; Lisbeth frightened her. The peasant-woman's face was terrible; her piercing black eyes had the glare of the tiger's; her face was like that we ascribe to a pythoness; she set her teeth to keep them from chattering, and her whole frame quivered convulsively. She had pushed her clenched fingers under her cap to clutch her hair and support her head, which felt too heavy; she was on fire. The

smoke of the flame that scorched her seemed to emanate from her wrinkles as from the crevasses rent by a volcanic eruption. It was a startling spectacle.

"Well, why do you stop?" she asked in a hollow voice. "I will be all to you that I have been to him. – Oh, I would have given him my life-blood!"

"You loved him then?"

"Like a child of my own!"

"Well, then," said Madame Marneffe, with a breath of relief, "if you only love him in that way, you will be very happy – for you wish him to be happy?"

Lisbeth replied by a nod as hasty as a madwoman's.

"He is to marry your Cousin Hortense in a month's time."

"Hortense!" shrieked the old maid, striking her forehead, and starting to her feet.

"Well, but then you were really in love with this young man?" asked Valerie.

"My dear, we are bound for life and death, you and I," said Mademoiselle Fischer. "Yes, if you have any love affairs, to me they are sacred. Your vices will be virtues in my eyes. – For I shall need your vices!"

"Then did you live with him?" asked Valerie.

"No; I meant to be a mother to him."

"I give it up. I cannot understand," said Valerie. "In that case you are neither betrayed nor cheated, and you ought to be very happy to see him so well married; he is now fairly afloat. And,

at any rate, your day is over. Our artist goes to Madame Hulot's every evening as soon as you go out to dinner."

"Adeline!" muttered Lisbeth. "Oh, Adeline, you shall pay for this! I will make you uglier than I am."

"You are as pale as death!" exclaimed Valerie. "There is something wrong? – Oh, what a fool I am! The mother and daughter must have suspected that you would raise some obstacles in the way of this affair since they have kept it from you," said Madame Marneffe. "But if you did not live with the young man, my dear, all this is a greater puzzle to me than my husband's feelings – "

"Ah, you don't know," said Lisbeth; "you have no idea of all their tricks. It is the last blow that kills. And how many such blows have I had to bruise my soul! You don't know that from the time when I could first feel, I have been victimized for Adeline. I was beaten, and she was petted; I was dressed like a scullion, and she had clothes like a lady's; I dug in the garden and cleaned the vegetables, and she – she never lifted a finger for anything but to make up some finery! – She married the Baron, she came to shine at the Emperor's Court, while I stayed in our village till 1809, waiting for four years for a suitable match; they brought me away, to be sure, but only to make me a work-woman, and to offer me clerks or captains like coalheavers for a husband! I have had their leavings for twenty-six years! – And now like the story in the Old Testament, the poor relation has one ewe-lamb which is all her joy, and the rich man who has flocks covets the ewe-

lamb and steals it – without warning, without asking. Adeline has meanly robbed me of my happiness! – Adeline! Adeline! I will see you in the mire, and sunk lower than myself! – And Hortense – I loved her, and she has cheated me. The Baron. – No, it is impossible. Tell me again what is really true of all this."

"Be calm, my dear child."

"Valerie, my darling, I will be calm," said the strange creature, sitting down again. "One thing only can restore me to reason; give me proofs."

"Your Cousin Hortense has the *Samson* group – here is a lithograph from it published in a review. She paid for it out of her pocket-money, and it is the Baron who, to benefit his future son-in-law, is pushing him, getting everything for him."

"Water! – water!" said Lisbeth, after glancing at the print, below which she read, "A group belonging to Mademoiselle Hulot d'Ervy." "Water! my head is burning, I am going mad!"

Madame Marneffe fetched some water. Lisbeth took off her cap, unfastened her black hair, and plunged her head into the basin her new friend held for her. She dipped her forehead into it several times, and checked the incipient inflammation. After this douche she completely recovered her self-command.

"Not a word," said she to Madame Marneffe as she wiped her face – "not a word of all this. – You see, I am quite calm; everything is forgotten. I am thinking of something very different."

"She will be in Charenton to-morrow, that is very certain,"

thought Madame Marneffe, looking at the old maid.

"What is to be done?" Lisbeth went on. "You see, my angel, there is nothing for it but to hold my tongue, bow my head, and drift to the grave, as all water runs to the river. What could I try to do? I should like to grind them all – Adeline, her daughter, and the Baron – all to dust! But what can a poor relation do against a rich family? It would be the story of the earthen pot and the iron pot."

"Yes; you are right," said Valerie. "You can only pull as much hay as you can to your side of the manger. That is all the upshot of life in Paris."

"Besides," said Lisbeth, "I shall soon die, I can tell you, if I lose that boy to whom I fancied I could always be a mother, and with whom I counted on living all my days – "

There were tears in her eyes, and she paused. Such emotion in this woman made of sulphur and flame, made Valerie shudder.

"Well, at any rate, I have found you," said Lisbeth, taking Valerie's hand, "that is some consolation in this dreadful trouble. – We shall be true friends; and why should we ever part? I shall never cross your track. No one will ever be in love with me! – Those who would have married me, would only have done it to secure my Cousin Hulot's interest. With energy enough to scale Paradise, to have to devote it to procuring bread and water, a few rags, and a garret! – That is martyrdom, my dear, and I have withered under it."

She broke off suddenly, and shot a black flash into Madame

Marneffe's blue eyes, a glance that pierced the pretty woman's soul, as the point of a dagger might have pierced her heart.

"And what is the use of talking?" she exclaimed in reproof to herself. "I never said so much before, believe me! The tables will be turned yet!" she added after a pause. "As you so wisely say, let us sharpen our teeth, and pull down all the hay we can get."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.