

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE MYSTERIES OF
PARIS, VOLUME 5 OF 6

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Eugène Sue

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CHAPTER I

THE PRESENTATION

A few days after the murder of Madame Séraphin, the death of the Chouette, and the arrest of the gang of desperadoes taken by surprise at Bras-Rouge's house, Rodolph paid another visit to the house in the Rue du Temple.

We have already observed that, with the view of practising artifice for artifice with Jacques Ferrand, discovering his hidden crimes, obliging him to repair them, and inflicting condign punishment should the guilty wretch, either by skill or hypocrisy, continue to evade the just punishment of the laws, Rodolph had sent to fetch from one of the prisons in Germany a young and beautiful creole, the unworthy wife of the negro David. This female, lovely in person as depraved in mind, as fascinating as dangerous, had reached Paris the preceding evening, and had received the most minute instructions from Baron de Graün.

The reader will recollect that in the last interview between Rodolph and Madame Pipelet, the latter having very cleverly managed to propose Cecily to Madame Séraphin, as a servant to the notary in place of Louise Morel, her proposition had been so well received that the *femme de charge* had promised to speak to Jacques Ferrand on the subject; and this she had done, in terms most flattering to Cecily, the very morning of the day on which she (Madame Séraphin) had been drowned at the Isle du Ravageur.

The motive for Rodolph's visit was, therefore, to inquire the result of Cecily's introduction. To his great astonishment, he found, on entering the lodge, that although eleven o'clock in the morning had struck by all the neighbouring dials, Pipelet had not yet risen, while Anastasie was standing beside his bed, offering him some sort of drink.

As Alfred, whose forehead and eyes were entirely concealed beneath his huge cotton nightcap, did not reply to his wife's inquiries, she concluded he slept, and therefore closed the curtains of his bed. Turning around, she perceived Rodolph, and, as usual, gave him a military salute, by lifting the back of her left hand up to her wig.

"Ah, my king of lodgers! Service to you! How are you? As for me, I'm upset – bewildered – stupefied. Pretty doings have there been in the house since you was here. And my poor Alfred, – obliged to keep his bed ever since yesterday!"

"Why, what has happened?"

"Positively, don't you guess? Still going on in the old way with that monster of a painter, who is more bitter than ever against Alfred. He has quite muddled his brains, till I declare I don't know what to do with him."

"Cabrion again?"

"Oh, *he'll* never leave off."

"He must be the very devil!"

"Really, M. Rodolph, I shall very soon think so; for he always knows the very instant I quit the house. Scarcely is my back turned, than there he is, in the twinkling of an eye, worrying and tormenting my poor old dear of a husband, who is as helpless and frightened as a babby. Only last night, when I had just stepped out as far as M. Ferrand's the notary's – Ah, there's pretty work there, too!"

"But Cecily?" said Rodolph, with some little impatience. "I called to know – "

"Hold hard, my king of lodgers! Don't be in such a hurry, or you'll put me out. And I've such a deal to tell you, I don't know when I shall have done; and if once I'm interrupted in a story, I never know when to begin again."

"There now, go on as fast as you can; I'm listening."

"Well, then, first and foremost, what do you think has happened in the house? Ah, you'll never guess, so I'll tell you. Only imagine, old Mother Burette's being taken up!"

"What, the female pawnbroker?"

"Oh, Lord, she seems to have had a curious mixture of trades: for besides being a money-lender, she was a receiver of stolen goods, a melter of gold and silver, a fortune-teller, a cheat, a dealer in second-hand clothes, and any sort of contraband articles. The worst of the story is that M. Bras-Rouge, her old sweetheart and our principal lodger, is also arrested. I tell you the house is thoroughly upset with these strange doings."

"Arrested! Bras-Rouge arrested?"

"That he was, I can promise you. Why, even his mischievous little imp of a son – the lame boy we call Tortillard – has also been locked up. They say that lots of murders have been planned and managed at his house, which was the well-known resort of a gang of ruffians; that the Chouette, one of Mother Burette's most particular friends, has been strangled; and that, if assistance had not arrived in time, Mother Mathieu, the dealer in precious stones for whom Morel worked, would also have been murdered. Come, I think there's a pretty penn'orth of news for you, – and cheap, too, at the price!"

"Bras-Rouge arrested and the Chouette dead!" murmured Rodolph to himself, in deep astonishment at the tidings. "Well, the vile old hag deserved her fate, and poor Fleur-de-Marie is at least avenged!"

"So that is the state of things here," continued Anastasie. "As for M. Cabrion and his devil's tricks, I'll tell you all about it. Oh, you never knew such a bold howdacious willin as he is! But you shall hear, – I'll go straight on with my story. But there never, – no, there never was his feller for inperence! So when Mother Burette was took up, and we heard how that M. Bras-Rouge, our principal lodger, was quodded also, I says to my old boy, 'Alfred, darling,' says I, 'you must toddle off to the landlord and let him know as M. Bras-Rouge is in the stone jug.' Well, Alfred goes; but in about two hours' time back he comes – in such a state! – such a state! White as a sheet and puffing like an ox!"

"Why, what was the matter?"

"I'm a-going to tell you. I suppose, M. Rodolph, you recollect the high wall about ten steps from here? Well, my poor, dear, darling husband was going along thinking of nothing, when, quite by chance, he just looked upon this wall. And what do you think he saw written in great staring letters with a piece of charcoal? – why, 'Pipelet and Cabrion!' – the two names joined together by a sort of true-lover's knot. (Ah, it is that true-lover's knot which sticks so tight in the gizzard of my poor old chick!) That sight rather upset him; but still he tried to act like a man and not mind it. So on he went. But hardly had he proceeded ten steps farther when, on the principal entrance to the Temple, there again were the same hateful words, 'Pipelet and Cabrion,' united as before! Still he walked on; but at every turn he saw the same detestable writing on the walls, doors, and even shutters of houses! Everywhere Pipelet and Cabrion danced before his eyes, for ever bound in the same tender tie of love or friendship! My poor dear Alfred's head began to turn around, and his eyes to grow dizzy; all sorts of horrid objects seemed to meet him and laugh him to scorn. He fancied the very people in the streets were laughing at him. So, quite confused and ashamed, he pulled his hat over his face, and took the road towards the Boulevards, believing that the scamp Cabrion would have confined his abominations to the Rue du Temple. But no – not he! All along the Boulevards, wherever a blank spot remained or a place could be found to hold the words, had he written 'Pipelet and Cabrion!' – sometimes adding, 'till death!' At last my poor dear man arrived at the house of the landlord, but so bewildered and stupefied that, after hammering and stammering and bodgering about without being able to utter a clear sentence, the landlord, having tried for nearly half an hour to bring him

sufficiently to his senses to say what had made him come to his house, got quite in a passion, and called him a stupid old fool, and told him to go home and send his wife or somebody who could speak common sense. Well, poor dear Alfred left as he was ordered, thinking, at any rate, he would return by a different road, so as to escape those dreadful words that had so overcome him going. Do you believe he could get rid of them, though? No; there they were, large as life, scrawled upon every place, and united by the lover's band as before."

"What, Pipelet and Cabrion still written along the walls?"

"Precisely so, my king of lodgers. The end of it was that my poor darling came home to me regularly brain-struck, talked in the wildest and most desperate way of leaving France, exiling himself for ever, and no one knows what. Well, I persuaded him to tell me all that had happened; then I did my best to quiet him, and persuade him not to worry himself about such a beggar as that Cabrion; and when I found he had grown a little calmer, I left him, and went to take Cecily to the notary's, before I proceeded on to the landlord to finish poor Alfred's message. Now, perhaps, you think I've done? But I haven't, though. No; I had hardly quitted the place, than that abominable Cabrion, who must have watched me out, sent a couple of impudent great creatures, who pursued Alfred with the most determined villainy. Oh, bless you, it makes my very hair stand on end when I think of it! I'll tell you all about their proceedings another time; let me first finish about the notary. Well, off I started with Cecily in a hackney-coach, – as you told me to do, you know. She was dressed in her pretty costume of a German peasant; for having only just arrived, she had not had time to procure any other, which I was to explain to M. Ferrand, and beg of him to excuse. You may believe me or not, just as you please, my king of lodgers, but though I have seen some pretty girls in my time, – myself, for instance, – yet I never saw one (not even myself) comparable to Cecily. And then she has such a way of using those wicked black eyes of hers! She throws into them a look – a look – that seems – to mean – I know not what – only they seem to pierce you through, and make you feel so strange; I never saw such eyes in my life! Why, there's my poor, dear, darling Alfred, whose virtue has never been suspected; well, the first time that she fixed her looks on him, the dear fellow turned as red as a carrot, and nothing in the world could have induced him to gaze in her face a second time. I'm sure for more than an hour afterwards he kept fidgeting about in his chair, as though he were sitting upon nettles. He told me afterwards he could not account for it, but that somehow the look Cecily bestowed on him seemed to bring to his thoughts all the dreadful stories that shameless Bradamanti used to tell about the female savages, and which used to make my poor dear simpleton of an Alfred blush to his very fingers' ends."

"But I want to hear what passed at the notary's. Never mind Alfred's modesty just now, but tell me."

"I was just going, M. Rodolph. It was just seven o'clock in the evening when we arrived at M. Ferrand's, and I told the porter to let his master know that Madame Pipelet was there with the young woman she had spoke to Madame Séraphin about, and by whose orders she had brought her. Upon which the porter heaved a deep sigh, and asked me if I knew what had happened to Madame Séraphin? I told him, 'No; I hadn't heard of anything being the matter with her.' Ah, M. Rodolph, prepare for another strange event, – a most astounding circumstance!"

"What can it be?"

"Why, Madame Séraphin was drowned while on a party of pleasure to which she had gone with her relations."

"Drowned, and on a party of pleasure in the winter?" exclaimed Rodolph, much surprised.

"Yes, drowned, M. Rodolph. For my part I must say that I was more astonished than distressed at the news; for since that affair of poor Louise, who was taken to prison entirely through her information, I downright hated Madame Séraphin. So when I heard what had befallen her, all I did was to say to myself, 'Oh, she's drowned, is she, – drowned? Well, I don't mean to make myself ill with crying, that's very sure. I sha'n't die of grief, – that's my disposition.'"

"And M. Ferrand?"

"The porter said at first he did not think I could see his master, and begged me to wait in his lodge while he went to see. But he almost directly came back to fetch me. We crossed the courtyard, and entered an apartment on the ground floor, where a single miserable candle was twinkling its best to light it, but without success. The notary was sitting beside the fireplace, and on the hearth a few smouldering ashes still sent out a small degree of warmth. But such a wretched hole I never saw! It was my first view of M. Ferrand. Oh, my stars, what a downright ugly fellow he is! Such a man as he might have offered to make me Queen of Arabia before I would have played Alfred false."

"And tell me, did the notary appear much struck with Cecily when she entered?"

"Why, how can any one tell what he thinks while he keeps those great green spectacles on? Besides, a godly saint such as he passes for has no business to know whether a woman is handsome or ugly. However, when we both walked into the room and stood before him, he gave quite a spring up from his seat. Most likely, he was astonished at Cecily's dress, for she looked for all the world (only a hundred thousand times better) like one of those 'buy-a-broom' girls with her short petticoats and her handsome legs set off by her blue stockings with red clocks. My conscience, what a leg she has! Such a slender ankle! – and then, oh, such a calf! With a foot as small and delicate as an opera dancer's. I can tell you that the notary seemed almost speechless with surprise, after he had looked at her through his green specs from head to toe."

"Doubtless, as you say, he was struck by the whimsicality of Cecily's costume."

"Well, maybe so; however, I felt that the critical moment had arrived, and began to feel rather queer; fortunately, just as my courage began to fail me, M. Rodolph, I recollected a maxim I learned from you, and that got me safe through my difficulty."

"What maxim do you mean, – I don't remember teaching you any?"

"Don't you know? – 'It is always enough for one to wish, for the other to refuse; or, for one to desire, for the other to be unwilling.' 'So,' said I to myself, 'here goes to rid my king of lodgers of his German niece, and to burthen the hard-hearted master of poor Louise with her. Now, then, for a good piece of shamming;' and, without giving the notary breathing time, I began by saying, in a polite and insinuating tone, 'I hope, sir, you'll excuse my niece being dressed as she is, but she has only just arrived, and has brought nothing with her but the costume of her country; and I am sure it don't lay in my power to provide her with others; and, besides, it would not be worth while, since we have merely called to thank you for having allowed Madame Séraphin to say you would see Cecily, in consequence of the favourable character I had given her. Still, sir, I don't think, after all, she would suit you.'"

"Capital, Madame Pipelet; go on."

"'And why so?' inquired the notary, who had established himself by the warmest corner of the fire, and seemed to be looking very attentively at us from over his green spectacles, 'why should you suppose your niece not likely to suit me?' 'Because, sir, Cecily is already quite homesick; she has only been here three days and yet she wants to go back; and so, she says, she will, too, if she is obliged to beg her way, or sing songs and sell little brooms, like the rest of her countrywomen.' 'But bless me!' answered M. Ferrand, 'do you, who are her principal relation, mean to allow of that?' 'I don't see how I am to hinder her, sir,' said I. 'Certainly, I am the nearest relation she has, for the poor thing is an orphan, as I told good Madame Séraphin; but then she is twenty years of age, and, of course, mistress of her own actions.' 'Stuff and nonsense!' interrupted he, quite impatiently; 'don't tell me about being her own mistress; at her time of life she is bound to obey her relations, and take their advice in all things.' Upon which Cecily began to cry and to creep up to me, all of a tremble, as if she was quite afraid of the notary."

"And what said Jacques Ferrand further?"

"Oh, he kept muttering in a grumbling tone, 'A young creature at that age left to her own guidance! Why, it would be the ruin of her! And, as for begging her way back to Germany – a pretty idea! And you mean to call yourself her aunt, and say that you would sanction such conduct?' 'All

right,' says I to myself; 'you are falling into the trap as neat as ninepence, you miserly old hunks, and if I do not saddle you with Cecily, my name is not what it is!' 'Yes,' cried I, in a discontented voice, 'I'm her aunt, sure enough, and worse luck to me for having such an encumbrance; I have difficulty enough to earn my bread, without having a great overgrown girl like that, to take it out of my mouth; and I would much rather she went back to her own country than stop here to be a burthen to me. The deuce take people who can't manage to maintain their own children, but just send them for others to work for and keep without even so much as paying their travelling expenses!' And then, as if Cecily were up to my schemes, and desirous of playing into my hands, she burst out into such a fit of crying and sobbing as quite touched the notary, who began in a sniffling, whining tone, as though preaching a sermon, 'Let me tell you that you are accountable before Providence for the charge he has entrusted to your care and keeping, and you are answerable for any false step this poor girl may take. Now I am willing to join you in a charitable action; and if your niece will promise me to be honest, industrious, virtuous, pious, and, above all, never upon any occasion to desire to leave the house, I will take pity on her, and receive her into my service.' 'No, no!' said Cecily, crying more violently than ever, 'I don't want to stop here with this gentleman; I wish to go back to my home; and I will, too!'"

"Ah, ah," thought Rodolph, "her dangerous falsehood has not deserted her, – the depraved creature has, evidently, fully comprehended the instructions she received from Baron de Graün." Then, speaking aloud, the prince continued, "Did Cecily's resistance appear to displease M. Jacques Ferrand?"

"Yes, M. Rodolph, it seemed to make him as savage as could be, and he muttered something between his teeth I could not make out. Then he said, abruptly, 'It is not what you would prefer, young woman, but what is most suitable and creditable that is to be considered. Providence will never forsake you, so long as you conduct yourself respectably and virtuously, and carefully attend to your religious duties. You will be here in a family as pious as it is strict in all such matters; and if your aunt has any real regard for your welfare, she will take advantage of my offer. Your wages will be trifling at first, but hereafter I may be induced to increase them should your good behaviour render you deserving of encouragement.' 'Bravo!' thinks I to myself, 'I've regularly hooked the miser, and fixed him with Cecily as right as a trivet. Why, you old curmudgeon! You old skinflint! You miserable, hard-hearted old hypocrite! You know very well that Séraphin was your slave for years, and yet you seem to have forgotten her death, and the dreadful manner of it, as much as though nothing had happened.' Then I said out loud, 'No doubt, sir, yours is a very good place, and one as many would be thankful to have, but if this girl is so homesick, what am I to do?' 'Oh, take no notice of it,' replied the notary, 'and it will soon wear away. But make up your minds, – just say one way or the other; if you decide upon your niece entering my service, bring her here to-morrow evening at the same hour you came to-night; and my porter will show her about the premises, and also explain her work to her. As for her wages, I shall begin with twenty francs a month and her food.' 'Oh, sir, I hope you will make it twenty-five francs, – twenty is really too little!' 'No, no, not at present; by and by perhaps I may, if I am satisfied. One thing, however, I must impress upon you, and that is, that your niece will never go beyond these walls, neither will she be allowed to receive any visitors.' 'Bless your heart, sir! Who could come to see her? Why, she does not know a single soul in Paris, except myself, and I am obliged to stay at home to mind my lodge. I have been terribly put about to come out this evening, so you will see nothing of me; and as for my niece, she will be as great a stranger to me as though she was in her own country; and the best way to prevent her going out will be to make her wear the costume of her country, – she could not venture in the streets dressed in that manner.' 'You are quite right,' replied the notary; 'it is, besides, always respectable to wear the dress of our own country; your niece shall, therefore, continue to dress as she now is.' 'Come, my girl,' said I to Cecily, who, with her head hanging down, and her finger in the corner of her mouth, was keeping up a continual weeping, 'come, make up your mind. A good place with a worthy master is not to be found every day; so, if you choose to refuse it, do, but don't look to me for any further support; I'll have nothing

to do with you, I can tell you!' Upon which Cecily, swelling as though her heart would burst, replied, sobbing, 'Very well, then, if aunt was so particular, she should stay, but only on condition that, if she did not find herself comfortable, she might come away at the end of a fortnight.' 'Don't be alarmed,' answered the notary, 'I shall not force you to stop against your will. I can promise you there are too many young persons would be thankful to have my situation; but I pity your position as an orphan, and, therefore, give you the preference. There, take your earnest money; and let your aunt bring you here about this time to-morrow evening.' Cecily was too busy crying to take the two francs' piece the old starvemouse offered, so I took it for her. We made our courtesies and came away."

"You have managed admirably, Madame Pipelet; and I do not forget my promise; here is what I promised you, if you managed to get this girl taken off my hands."

"Wait till to-morrow before you give it me, my king of lodgers!" cried Madame Pipelet, putting back the money Rodolph offered her; "perhaps, when I go to take Cecily this evening, M. Ferrand may have changed his mind."

"Not he, depend upon it! But where is she?"

"In the small room adjoining the apartments of the commandant; she will not stir out after the orders you gave. She seems mild and gentle as a lamb; but then, her eyes! Oh, dear! It is difficult to fancy her either one or the other, when one looks at those – Talking of the commandant, what a plotting, mysterious person he is! Would you believe it? When he came here to superintend the packing up of his furniture, he told me that if any letters came addressed to 'Madame Vincent,' they were for him, and that I was to send them to the Rue Mondine, No. 5. The idea of the pretty creature having his letters addressed as if for a female! What a conceited jackanapes he is! But the best of it was, he asked me what had become of his wood! 'Your wood?' said I, 'why don't you ask after your forest when you are about it?' Oh, I said it so flat and plain! A mean, grasping hound, to trouble himself to ask after two pitiful loads of wood, – his wood, indeed! 'What has become of your wood?' repeated I, still working him on, till he got quite white with passion, 'why, I burnt it to keep your things from the damp, which would otherwise have made mushrooms grow upon your fine embroidered cap, and the mildew from rotting your smart, glittering *robe de chambre*, which you must love so dearly, because you have put it on so many times when you were fool enough to wait for those who never meant to come, but were only laughing at you, – like the lady who made believe she was going to pay you a visit, and then passed your door, though you had set it wide open to show yourself decked in all your finery. Your wood, indeed! I like that! You poor squeeze-penny of a commandant, – enough to disgust one with men altogether."

A deep, plaintive groan, something between a grunt and a sigh, from the bed on which Alfred reposed, here interrupted Madame Pipelet.

"Ah, there's the old duck beginning to stir; he will not be long before he wakes now. Will you excuse me, my king of lodgers?"

"Certainly; but I have yet some particulars to inquire of you."

"Oh, very well," answered Madame Pipelet. Then going up to her husband, she drew back the curtains, saying, "How are you by this time, my old chick? Look! there's M. Rodolph, who has heard all about this fresh villainy of Cabrion's, and is as sorry about it as can be."

"Ah, M. Rodolph," murmured Alfred, languidly turning his head towards the announced visitor, "this time the monster has struck at my heart; I shall quit this bed no more. I am now the object of all the placards of this vast city; my name is blazoned upon every wall in Paris, linked with that of a wretch unworthy of mention. Yes, *môssieur*, there you may see 'Pipelet and Cabrion,' bound together by an enormous band of union. Yes, I – I – the injured Pipelet – united in bonds of seeming amity and intimacy with that fellow Cabrion! Oh, *môssieur*, pity me! My name joined with his in the eyes of all the dwellers of this great capital, – the leading city of Europe!"

"Ah, M. Rodolph knows all about that; but he has yet to be told of your yesterday's adventures with those two singular women, or whatever they were."

"Alas, monsieur," sighed Alfred, in a mournful voice, "he reserved his master-stroke of wickedness and fiendish malice till the last. This, however, passes all bounds, and human patience can bear no more!"

"Come, my dear M. Pipelet, calm yourself, and endeavour to relate this fresh annoyance to me."

"All that he has hitherto done to vex and insult me is as nothing compared to his last malignant scheme to break my heart and ruin my peace. But now the shameless monster has gone the full extent of fiendish provocation. I know not whether I have the power of describing to you the scene of last night; when I attempt to speak, shame, confusion, and outraged modesty seem to deprive me of voice and breath."

M. Pipelet, having managed with some difficulty to raise himself in his bed, modestly buttoned his flannel waistcoat up to his throat, and began in the following terms:

"My wife had just gone out, absorbed in the bitter reflections arising from the sight of my name so disgracefully prostituted on every wall in Paris; I sought to while away my solitary hours by attending to the new soling of a boot twenty times commenced and as often abandoned, – thanks to the unceasing persecutions of my pitiless persecutor. Well, sir, I was sitting at a table with the boot on my arm, though my thoughts were far otherwise engaged, when I saw the lodge door open and a female enter. The person who had just come in was wrapped in a large hooded cloak, and, without thinking any harm, I civilly rose from my seat, and put my hand to my hat. Then I observed another female, also attired in a similar cloak, with a large hood, enter the lodge and shut the door after her. Although somewhat astonished at the familiarity of such a proceeding, and the silence maintained by both the women, I rose a second time from my chair, and a second time I lifted my hand to my hat. And then, sir, – but no, no, I can never finish the recital; my wounded modesty chokes my utterance."

"Come, come, old pet," said Madame Pipelet, encouragingly, "get on with your story; we are all men here."

"Well, then," stammered forth Alfred, his face becoming scarlet as the fullest blown peony, "then their mantles fell to the ground. And what do you think I saw? Why, a couple of sirens, or nymphs, or witches of one kind or the other, with no sort of clothing except a petticoat made of leaves, while a wreath of similar descriptions decorated their heads. And then the two advanced towards me with outstretched arms, as though inviting me to throw myself into them."

"Oh, the impudent sluts!" exclaimed Anastasie.

"Their impure advances disgusted me," continued Alfred, animated with a chaste indignation; "and, in conformity with a habit which has ever attended the most critical moments of my life, I remained still and motionless on my chair. Then, profiting by my surprise and stupor, the two sirens came gently forward to a sort of low music, turning and twisting and extending their arms and legs in all directions. I became petrified, as though changed to stone; I waited their approach in silent agony. They came nearer and nearer, till at last they wrapped me tight in their arms."

"Did they, though?" cried Anastasie. "Oh, the hussies! I only wish I had been there with my broomstick; I'd have taught them how to come hopping and skipping, and holding out their arms for an innocent, virtuous, married man to tumble into, – I would, the bold-faced beggars!"

"When I felt myself in a manner half stifled between them, I gave myself up for lost. My blood retreated from my heart, – I felt as if struck with death; when one of the sirens – a great, fair girl, and the boldest of the two – leaned upon my shoulder, took off my hat, and, still slowly dancing and whirling around me, left me bald-headed and defenceless. Then the other one, accompanying the action with all sorts of attitudes and singular dances, and waving of the arms, draws out a pair of scissors she must have hid somewhere, – for I'm quite sure she had no pockets, – came close behind me, and grasping with one hand all my remaining hair, snipped it all off with one cut of her huge scissors; yes, all, – every lock, – every hair I had to cover my poor old head; dancing, and wheeling, and balancing, first on one foot, then on the other, swaying out legs and arms in all sorts of stage-struck ways; then joining voices, the pair of audacious spirits began singing, "Tis for Cabrion, –

for Cabrion; we take your locks for Cabrion, – your dear friend Cabrion!' Whilst the second voice repeated in a louder strain, 'Your head is shorn for Cabrion, – for Cabrion, your friend!'"

After a pause, interrupted by repeated sighs and groans, Alfred resumed:

"During this impudent spoliation I once ventured to raise my eyes, and then I saw flat against the windows of the lodge the detestable countenance of Cabrion, with his large beard and pointed-crowned hat. He was laughing, too, – laughing with all his might. Oh, how I shuddered at the horrible vision! To escape from so harrowing a sight I closed my eyes. When I opened them again all had disappeared, and I found myself seated on my chair, bald-headed and completely disfigured for life. You see, monsieur, that, by dint of obstinacy, impudence, and cunning, Cabrion has at length effected his fell design. But by what fearful, what diabolical means, has he succeeded! He wishes the world to believe he is my accepted friend; began by sticking up a notice here in my immediate neighbourhood to the effect that he and I had entered into a treaty of friendship! Then, not content with so infamous an assertion, he has caused my name, in conjunction with his own, to be displayed on every wall in Paris, binding them together with an enormous band of union, so that at this moment the whole of this vast capital is impressed with the most perfect belief of my close intimacy with this scoundrel. Then he desired locks of my hair, and he has every hair off my head, – no doubt with the view, the guilty view, of exhibiting them as proofs of our sworn friendship. Thanks to the merciless exaction of his bold-faced dancing women, my last lock is stolen. So now, monsieur, you see plainly there is nothing left for me but to quit France, – my lovely and beloved France, – in whose dear bosom I had hoped to live and die!"

And with these pathetic words Alfred clasped his hands, closed his eyes, and threw himself back upon his bed.

"Oh, nonsense, you old duck!" cried Anastasie. "On the contrary, now the villain has gained his point and stolen your hair, he will let you alone for the future. He has no further cause to disturb and torment you."

"Let me alone?" exclaimed M. Pipelet, with a convulsive spring upwards. "Oh, you know him not; he is insatiable. True, he has got the hair he so much desired to obtain; but who can say what he may further require of me?"

The appearance of Rigolette at the entrance to the lodge put a stop to the lamentations of M. Pipelet.

"Stay where you are, mademoiselle!" cried he, faithful to his habitual chaste delicacy. "Pray don't think of coming in, for I am undressed and in bed!" So saying, he covered himself up almost to his eyes, while Rigolette, surprised and bewildered, remained at the threshold of the door.

"Oh, my pretty neighbour," said Rodolph, pitying her confusion, "I was just coming up to speak with you. Can you wait for me one minute?" Then addressing Anastasie, he said, "Pray let nothing prevent your taking Cecily to Jacques Ferrand's this evening."

"Make yourself perfectly easy, my king of lodgers; at seven o'clock precisely she shall be duly placed there. Now that Morel's wife is able to get about, I will ask her to mind the lodge for me while I am away; for, bless you, Alfred would not stay by himself, – not for a 'varsal crown!"

The bright freshness of Rigolette's complexion was daily fading away, while her once round, dimpled cheek had sunk and given place to a pale, careworn countenance, the usually gay, mirthful expression of which had changed into a grave, thoughtful cast, more serious and mournful still since her meeting with Fleur-de-Marie at the gate of St. Lazare.

"I am so glad to see you," said Rigolette to Rodolph, when they were at a convenient distance from the lodge of Madame Pipelet. "I have so much to say to you; I have, indeed."

"Well, then, first of all, tell me of yourself and your health. Let me look at this pretty face, and see whether it is as gay and blooming as usual. No, indeed. I declare you have grown quite pale and thin; I am sure you work too hard."

"Oh, no, indeed, M. Rodolph, it is not that. On the contrary, my work does me good; it hinders me from thinking too much, for I am obliged to attend to what I am about. But it is grief, M. Rodolph, and nothing else, that has altered me so much. And how can I help it? Every time I see that poor Germain, I grieve more and more."

"He is still as desponding as ever, then?"

"Oh, worse than ever, M. Rodolph. And what is the most distressing is, that, whatever I try to do to cheer him up, takes quite the contrary effect; it seems as though a spell hung over me!" And here the large, dark eyes of Rigolette were filled with tears.

"How do you know, my dear neighbour?"

"Why, only yesterday I went to see him, and to take him a book he was desirous of having; it was a romance we read together when we lived happily as near neighbours and dear friends. Well, directly he saw the book, he burst into tears; but that did not astonish me, – it seemed natural enough. Poor fellow! I dare say it brought back to his recollection those happy evenings when he used to sit beside the fire in my nice, pretty little room; while now he was in a horrid prison, the companion of vile and wicked men, who only jeered at his melancholy. Poor, dear Germain! It is very, very hard!"

"Take courage, my dear friend," said Rodolph. "When Germain quits his prison, and his innocence is proved, he will find his mother and many dear friends, in whose society, as well as in yours, he will soon forget his present sufferings, as well as the hard trials he has undergone."

"That's all very pleasant when it arrives, but that won't stop his tormenting himself till it does. But that is not all, neither."

"What other uneasiness has he?"

"Why, he being the only innocent man among all the bad people there, they are always annoying and behaving ill to him, because he will not join in their idle and vicious amusements. The head turnkey, who is a very good sort of man, advised me to recommend Germain, for his own sake, not to keep himself at quite such a distance from his companions, but to try and familiarise himself with these bad men. However, it is no use trying; he cannot bring himself to endure their company or conversation. And I am constantly tormented with the dread that some of these days they will do him some harm out of spite."

Then all at once interrupting herself, and drying her tears, Rigolette resumed:

"But, dear me, how selfish I am! I keep talking of my own concerns without ever recollecting to speak to you about the Goualeuse."

"The Goualeuse!" exclaimed Rodolph, with surprise.

"I met her the day before yesterday, when I went to see Louise at St. Lazare."

"The Goualeuse?"

"Yes, indeed, M. Rodolph."

"At St. Lazare?"

"She was leaving the prison in company with an elderly female."

"It cannot be," exclaimed Rodolph, in extreme astonishment; "you must be mistaken."

"I assure you it was herself, M. Rodolph."

"You really must be in error."

"Oh, no, I was not mistaken; although she was dressed as a country girl I recollected her again directly. She looked beautiful as ever, though pale; and she had just the same melancholy look she used to have."

"How very strange that she should be in Paris without my having heard of it! I can scarcely credit it. And what had she been doing at St. Lazare?"

"I suppose, like myself, she had been to see some one confined there; but I had not time to ask her many questions, for the person who was with her seemed so very cross, and to be in such a hurry! Then it seems you know the Goualeuse as well as myself, M. Rodolph?"

"I do, certainly."

"Oh, then, that settles the matter! And it must have been of you she spoke."

"Of me?"

"Yes, indeed, M. Rodolph. For, you see, I was just mentioning to her what had happened to poor Louise and Germain, – both so good, yet so persecuted by that wicked Jacques Ferrand, – taking care to do as you bid me, and not say a word of your being interested in their welfare so then the Goualeuse told me if a generous person she knew were once acquainted with their hard fate, and how little they deserved it, he would be sure to assist them. And then I asked her the name of the person she alluded to, and she named you, M. Rodolph."

"Oh, then, it was her, sure enough."

"You can't imagine how much surprised we both were at this discovery, either of resemblance or name; and before we parted we agreed to let each other know whether our M. Rodolph was one and the same. And it seems you are the very identical Rodolph both of La Goualeuse and myself. Are you not, neighbour?"

"I believe so; and I can, at least, assure you I take the greatest possible interest in the fate of this poor girl, – still I am much surprised to find, by what you say, that she is in Paris. And so great is my astonishment that, had you not so faithfully related your interview, I should have persisted in believing you were mistaken. But I must say good-bye for the present, – what you tell me respecting La Goualeuse obliges me to quit you. Be as careful as ever in not mentioning to any one that there are certain unknown friends watching over the welfare both of Louise and Germain, who will come forward at a right moment and see them safe through their troubles; it is more essential than ever that strict secrecy should be kept on this point. By the way, how are the Morel family getting on?"

"Oh, extremely well, M. Rodolph. The mother has quite got about again, and the children are daily improving. Ah, the whole family owe their life and happiness to you! You are so good and so generous to them."

"And how is poor Morel himself? Does he get any better?"

"Oh, dear, yes; I heard of him yesterday, he seems from time to time to have some lucid moments, and hopes are entertained of his madness being curable. So be of good heart, neighbour, take care of yourself, and good-bye for the present."

"But first tell me truly, are you quite sure you want for nothing? Are you still able to maintain yourself with the profits of your needle?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, M. Rodolph. I work rather later at night to make up for my lost time during the day. But it does not matter much, for if I go to bed I don't sleep."

"Poor, dear neighbour! Why, you have grown sadly out of spirits. I am afraid that Papa Crétu and Ramonette don't sing much, if they wait for you to set them the example."

"You are right enough, M. Rodolph, my birds have quite left off singing, as well as myself. Now I know you will laugh at me, but I'll tell you what I firmly think and believe, – the poor little creatures are aware that I am dull and out of spirits, and instead of singing and warbling as if their little throats would burst for joy when they see me, they just give a little gentle twitter, as though they would not disturb me for the world, but would be so glad to console me if they had the power. It is very stupid of me to fancy such things, is it not, M. Rodolph?"

"Not at all! And I am quite sure that your affectionate friends the birds have observed your being less happy than usual."

"Well, I'm sure I shouldn't wonder! The poor, dear things are so very clever," said Rigolette, innocently, delighted to find her own opinion as to the sagacity of her companions in solitude thus powerfully confirmed.

"Oh, I am quite sure about it, nothing is more intelligent than gratitude. But once more, good-bye, – I shall see you again soon, I hope, and by that time, I trust your pretty eyes will have grown brighter, your cheeks regained their usual roses, and your merry voice have recovered all its gaiety, till Papa Crétu and Ramonette will scarcely be able to keep up with you."

"Heaven grant you may prove a true prophet, M. Rodolph!" said Rigolette, heaving a deep sigh.
"But, good-bye, neighbour, don't let me keep you."

"Fare you well, for the present!"

Rodolph, wholly at a loss to understand why Madame Georges should have brought or sent Fleur-de-Marie to Paris without giving him the least intimation of her intention, hastened home for the purpose of despatching a special messenger to the farm at Bouqueval.

Just as he entered the Rue Plumet he observed a travelling carriage drawn up before the entrance of his hotel. The vehicle contained Murphy, who had that instant returned from Normandy, whither he had gone, as the reader is already aware, to counteract the base schemes of the stepmother of Madame d'Harville and her infamous confederate, Bradamanti.

CHAPTER II

MURPHY AND POLIDORI

Sir Walter Murphy's features were beaming with satisfaction. When he alighted from the carriage he gave a brace of pistols to one of the prince's servants, took off his long travelling coat, and, without giving himself time to change his clothes, followed Rodolph, who impatiently had preceded him to his apartment.

"Good news, monseigneur! Good news!" exclaimed the squire, when he was alone with Rodolph; "the wretches are unmasked, M. d'Orbigny is saved. You despatched me just in time; one hour later and another crime would have been committed."

"And Madame d'Harville?"

"Is overjoyed at having again acquired her father's affection; and full of happiness at having arrived, thanks to your advice, in time to snatch him from certain death."

"So, then, Polidori –"

"Was, in this instance, the worthy accomplice of Madame d'Harville's stepmother. But what a wretch is this stepmother! What *sang-froid*! What audacity! And this Polidori! Ah, monseigneur, you have frequently desired to thank me for what you call my proofs of devotion."

"I have always said proofs of friendship, my dear Murphy."

"Well, monseigneur, never – no, never – has this friendship been exposed to a severer trial than in this present case!" said the squire, with an air half serious, half pleasant.

"What mean you?"

"The disguises of the coalman, the peregrinations in the Cité, and all that sort of thing, they have been as nothing, actually nothing, when compared with the journey I have just made with that infernal Polidori."

"What do you mean? Polidori?"

"I have brought him back with me."

"With you?"

"With me: judge what company! During twelve hours side by side with the man I most despise and hate in the world, – I'd as soon travel with a serpent – any beast of antipathy!"

"And where is Polidori now?"

"In the house in the Allée des Veuves, under good and safe guard."

"Then he made no resistance to following you?"

"None. I offered him the choice between being apprehended at once by the French authorities, or being my prisoner in the Allée des Veuves, – he didn't hesitate for an instant."

"You are right; it is best to have him thus in our grasp. You are worth your weight in gold, my dear old Murphy. But tell me all about your journey; I am impatient to know how this shameless woman, and her equally shameless accomplice, were at last unmasked."

"Nothing could be more simple. I had only to follow the letter of your instructions in order to terrify and crush these wretches. Under these circumstances, monseigneur, you have served, as you always do, persons of worth, and punished the wicked, noble preserver that you are!"

"Sir Walter! Sir Walter! Do you recollect the flatteries of the Baron de Graün?" said Rodolph, smiling.

"Well, then, monseigneur, I will begin, – or, perhaps, you would prefer first reading this letter of the Marquise d'Harville's, which will inform you on every point that occurred previous to my arrival, which so completely confounded Polidori."

"A letter! Pray let me have it immediately."

Murphy gave the letter of the marquise to Rodolph, adding:

"As we had agreed, instead of accompanying Madame d'Harville to her father's, I alighted at a small inn quite close to the château, where I was to wait until the marquise sent for me."

Rodolph read what follows with tender and impatient solicitude:

"Monseigneur: – After all I owe you already, I now owe to you my father's life. I will allow facts to speak for themselves; they will say better than I can what fresh accumulations of gratitude to you I have added to those already amassed in my heart. Understanding all the importance of the advice you sent to me by Sir Walter Murphy, who overtook me on my way to Normandy a short distance from Paris, I travelled as speedily as possible to the Château des Aubiers. I know not why, but the countenances of the persons who received me appeared to me sinister. I did not see amongst them any one of the old servitors of our house; no one knew me. I was obliged to tell them my name.

"I learned that for several days my father had been suffering greatly, and that my stepmother had just brought a physician from Paris. I had no doubt but this was Doctor Polidori. Desirous of being immediately conducted to my father, I inquired for an old *valet de chambre* to whom he was much attached; he had quitted the château some time previously. This I learned from a house-steward who had shown me to my apartment, saying that he would inform my stepmother of my arrival. Was it illusion or suspicion? It seemed to me that my coming annoyed the people at the château where all was gloomy and sinister. In the bent of mind in which I was we seek to draw inferences from the slightest circumstances. I remarked in every part traces of disorder and neglect, as if it had been too much trouble to take care of a house which was so soon to be abandoned. My uneasiness – my anxiety increased at every moment.

"After having established my daughter and her governess in an apartment, I was about to proceed to my father, when my stepmother entered the apartment. In spite of her artfulness, in spite of the control which she ordinarily exercised over herself, she appeared alarmed at my sudden arrival. 'M. d'Orbigny does not expect your visit, madame,' she said to me, 'and he is suffering so much that a surprise may be fatal. I think it, therefore, best that he should not be told of your arrival, for he would be unable to account for it, and –'

"I did not allow her to finish. 'A terrible event has occurred, madame,' I said, 'M. d'Harville is dead, in consequence of a fatal imprudence. After so deplorable a result, I could no longer remain in Paris in my own house, and I have, therefore, come to my father's, in order to pass the first days of my mourning.'

"'A widow! Ah, that, indeed, is unexpected happiness!' exclaimed my stepmother, in a rage. From what you know, monseigneur, of the unhappy marriage which this woman had planned in order to avenge herself on me, you will comprehend the brutality of her remark.

"'It is because I fear you might be as unexpectedly happy as myself, madame, that I came here,' was my (perhaps imprudent) reply. 'I wish to see my father.'

"'That's impossible, at this moment!' she replied, turning very pale; 'the sight of you would cause a dangerous degree of excitement.'

"'If my father is so seriously ill,' I observed, 'why was I not informed of it?'

"'Such was M. d'Orbigny's will,' replied my stepmother.

"'I do not believe you, madame! and I shall go and assure myself of the truth,' I said, and turned towards the door of my chamber.

"'I tell you again that the unexpected sight of you may have a most prejudicial effect on your father!' she cried, coming before me so as to hinder my further

progress; 'I will not allow you to go into his room, until I have informed him of your arrival with all the care and precaution which his situation requires.'

"I was in a cruel perplexity, monseigneur. A sudden surprise might really be dangerous to my father, but this woman, – usually so calm, so self-possessed – seemed to me so overcome by my presence, I had so many reasons to doubt the sincerity of her solicitude for the health of him whom she had married from cupidity; and then, too, the presence of Doctor Polidori, the murderer of my mother, caused me altogether such extreme alarm that, believing my father's life menaced, I did not hesitate between the hope of saving him and the fear of causing him severe emotion. 'I will see my father, and that instantly!' I said to my stepmother. And although she tried to retain me by the arm, I went out of the room. Completely losing her presence of mind, this woman tried a second time, and almost by force, to prevent me from quitting the chamber. This incredible resistance increased my alarm, I disengaged myself from her grasp, and, knowing my father's apartment, I ran thither with all speed, and entered the room.

"Oh, monseigneur, during my life I never can forget that scene, and the picture presented to my eyes. My father, scarcely to be recognised, pale and meagre, with suffering depicted in every feature, his head reclining on a pillow, was lying extended on a large armchair. At the corner of the fireplace, standing close to him, was Doctor Polidori, just about to pour into a cup, which a nurse presented to him, some drops of a liquor contained in a small glass bottle which he held in his hand. His long red beard gave even a more than usually sinister appearance to his physiognomy. I entered so hastily that he gave a look of surprise at my stepmother, who followed me with hasty steps; and instead of handing to my father the draught he had prepared for him, he suddenly placed the phial on the mantelpiece. Guided by an instinct for which I am unable to account, my first movement was to seize the phial. Remarking instantly the surprise and alarm of my stepmother and Polidori, I congratulated myself on my promptitude. My father, amazed, seemed irritated at the sight of me. I expected this. Polidori darted at me a ferocious scowl, and, in spite of the presence of my father and the nurse, I feared the wretch, seeing his crime so nearly disclosed, would have recourse to violence with me. I felt the necessity of support at a moment so decisive; and ringing the bell, one of my father's servants came in, whom I requested to tell my *valet de chambre* (who had already been informed) to go and seek some things I had left at the little inn. Sir Walter Murphy was aware that, in order not to arouse my stepmother's suspicions, in case it should be necessary to give my orders in her presence, I should employ this means of requesting him to come to me. Such was the surprise of my father and stepmother, that the servant quitted the room before they could utter a word. I felt my courage then rise, for, in a few minutes, Sir Walter Murphy would be at my side.

"'What does all this mean?' said my father to me, in a voice feeble, but still angry and imperious. 'You here, Clémence without my sending for you? Then, scarcely arrived, you seize the phial containing the draught the doctor was about to give me. Will you explain this madness?'

"'Leave the room,' said my stepmother to the nurse. The woman obeyed. 'Compose yourself, my dear!' said my stepmother, addressing my father; 'you know how injurious the slightest emotion is to you. Since your daughter will come here in spite of you, and her presence is so disagreeable to you, give me your arm. I will lead you into the small salon, and then our good doctor will make Madame d'Harville comprehend how imprudent her conduct has been, to say the least of it.' And she

gave her accomplice a meaning look. I at once saw through my stepmother's design. She was desirous of leading my father away, and leaving me alone with Polidori, who, in this extreme case, no doubt, would have used force to obtain from me the phial which might supply so evident a proof of his criminal designs.

"You are right," said my father to my stepmother. 'Since I am thus pursued, even in my private apartments, without respect for my wishes, I will leave the place free to intruders.' And rising with difficulty, he took the arm that was offered to him by my stepmother, and went towards the salon.

"At this moment Polidori advanced towards me; but I went close up to my father and said to him, 'I will explain to you why I have arrived so suddenly, and what may appear strange in my conduct. I became yesterday a widow; and it was yesterday, father, that I learned your life was threatened.' He was walking very much bent, but at these words he stopped, threw himself erect, and looking at me with intense surprise, said:

"You are a widow? My life is threatened? What does all this mean?"

"And who dares threaten the life of M. d'Orbigny, madame?" asked my stepmother, most audaciously.

"Yes, who threatens it?" added Polidori.

"You, sir! – you, madame!" I replied.

"What horror!" exclaimed my stepmother, advancing a step towards me.

"What I assert I will prove, madame!" I replied.

"Such an accusation is most frightful!" cried my father.

"I will leave the house this very moment, since I am exposed to such shameful calumnies," said Doctor Polidori, with the apparent indignation of a man whose honour has been outraged. Beginning to feel the danger of his position, no doubt, he was desirous of effecting his escape. At the moment when he was trying to open the door, it opened, and he found himself face to face with Sir Walter Murphy."

Rodolph ceased reading, held out his hand to the squire, and said:

"Well done, my good old friend; your presence must have crushed the scoundrel!"

"That's precisely the word, monseigneur. He turned livid, receded a couple of paces, looking at me aghast; he seemed thunderstruck. To find me at the further extremity of Normandy, in such a moment, he must have thought he had a terrible dream. But go on, monseigneur; you will see that this infernal Comtesse d'Orbigny had her share of the overwhelming shame, thanks to what you told me as to her visit to the charlatan Bradamanti – Polidori – in the house in the Rue du Temple; for, after all, it was you who acted in this, I assure you, and you came in most happily and opportunely to the rescue on this occasion."

Rodolph smiled, and continued reading Madame d'Harville's letter:

"At the sight of Sir Walter Murphy, Polidori was panic-struck; my stepmother went on from one surprise to another; my father, agitated at this scene, weakened by his malady, was compelled to sit down in an armchair. Sir Walter double-locked the door by which he had entered; and placing himself before that which led to the next apartment, that Doctor Polidori might not escape, he said to my poor father, with a tone of the utmost respect, 'A thousand pardons, Monsieur le Comte, for the liberty I take, but an imperious necessity, dictated by your interest alone (and which you will speedily recognise), compels me to act thus. My name is Sir Walter Murphy, as this wretch can testify, who at the sight of me trembles in every limb. I am the private adviser of his royal highness Monseigneur the Grand Duke Regnant of Gerolstein.'

"'Quite true!' stammered forth Doctor Polidori, overcome with fright. 'But then, sir, what have you come here for? What seek you?'

"'Sir Walter Murphy,' I observed, addressing my father, 'is here with me to unmask the wretches whose victim you have so nearly been.' Then handing the phial to Sir Walter, I added, 'I was suddenly tempted to seize on this phial at the moment when Doctor Polidori was about to pour some drops of the liquor it contains into a draught he was about to offer to my father.'

"'A practitioner in the neighbouring village shall analyse before you the contents of this bottle, which I will deposit in your hands, M. le Comte; and if it is proved to contain a slow and sure poison,' said Sir Walter Murphy to my father, 'you cannot have any further doubt as to the dangers you have run, and which the tender care of your daughter will most happily have averted.'

"My poor father looked by turns at his wife, Doctor Polidori, and Sir Walter, with an air of doubt and anxiety; his features betrayed indescribable anguish. No doubt but he resisted with all his might increasing and terrible suspicions, fearing to be obliged to confess the infamy of my stepmother. At length, concealing his head in his hands, he exclaimed, 'Oh, this is, indeed, horrible! – impossible! Am I in a dream?'

"'No, it is no dream!' cried my stepmother, audaciously; 'nothing can be more real than this atrocious calumny, concerted beforehand to destroy an unhappy woman, whose only crime is that of consecrating her whole existence to you. Come, come, my dear, do not remain a moment longer here!' she continued, addressing my father; 'I do not suppose that your daughter will have the insolence to retain you here against your will.'

"'Yes, yes, let me go!' said my father, highly excited; 'all this is not true – cannot be true! I will not hear any more, my brain cannot endure it. Fearful misgivings would arise in my mind, which would embitter the few days I have still to live, and nothing could console me for so horrible a discovery.'

"My father seemed to suffer so much, to be so despairing that, at all hazards, I resolved on putting an end to this scene, which was so acutely trying for him. Sir Walter guessed my desire, but desirous of full and entire justice, he replied to my father, 'But a few words more, M. le Comte. You will, no doubt, suffer chagrin of a most painful kind, when you detect in the woman's conduct, whom you believe attached to you by gratitude, a system of most atrocious ingratitude, – in herself a hypocritical monster. But you will find your consolation in the affections of your daughter, who has never failed you.'

"'This passes all bounds!' cried my stepmother, with rage. 'And by what right, sir, and on what proofs, dare you to base such infamous calumnies? You say the phial contains poison? I deny it, and will deny it until you prove the contrary. And even supposing Doctor Polidori has by mistake confounded one medicine with another, is that a reason why you should dare to accuse me of having sought – desired to be his accomplice? Oh, no, no! I cannot go on! An idea so horrible is already a crime! Once again, sir, I defy you to say upon what proofs you and madame here dare rely to support this shameful calumny!' said my stepmother, with incredible audacity.

"'Yes, on what proofs?' exclaimed my poor father; 'the torture I undergo must have an end.'

"'I am not here, sir, without proofs, M. le Comte,' replied Sir Walter; 'and these proofs, the answer of this wretch shall supply to you instantly.' Then Sir Walter

spoke in German to Doctor Polidori, who seemed to have suddenly assumed a little assurance, but lost it as soon."

"What did you say to him?" inquired Rodolph of the squire, pausing from his perusal of the letter.

"A few significant words, monseigneur, something like this: 'You have escaped by flight from the sentence passed upon you by law and justice in the Grand Duchy; you live in the Rue du Temple, under the false name of Bradamanti; we know the infamous calling you pursue there. You poisoned the count's first wife. Three days since Madame d'Orbigny went to find you, in order to bring you here to poison her husband. His royal highness is in Paris, and has proofs of all I now aver. If you confess the truth in order to confound this wretched woman, you may hope, not for pardon, but for an amelioration of the punishment you deserve. You will accompany me to Paris, where I will deposit you in a safe place, until his royal highness decides on what shall be done with you. If not, one of two things: either his royal highness will demand and obtain your delivery up to him, or this very moment I will send for the nearest magistrate, this phial containing the poison shall be handed to him, you will be apprehended on the spot, and a search be made instantly at your domicile in the Rue du Temple; you know how utterly that must compromise you, and then the justice of the French courts will take its course. Choose therefore.' These disclosures, accusations, and threats, which he knew to be so well founded, succeeding each other thus rapidly, overwhelmed the scoundrel, who did not dream of my being so thoroughly informed. In the hope of diminishing his expected punishment, he did not hesitate to sacrifice his accomplice, and replied to me, 'Interrogate me, and I will disclose the whole truth as regards this woman.'"

"Capital! Excellent! my dear Murphy. I expected no less of you."

"During my conversation with Polidori, the features of Madame d'Harville's stepmother became greatly agitated. Although she did not understand German, she saw, by the increasing dejection of her accomplice, by his deprecating attitude, that I controlled him. In a state of fearful anxiety, she endeavoured to catch Polidori's glance, in order to inspire him with courage, or implore his discretion, but he carefully avoided looking towards her."

"And the count?"

"His agitation was inexpressible! With his clenched hands he grasped convulsively the arms of his chair, the perspiration stood on his brow, and he scarcely breathed, whilst his burning and fixed eyes never quitted mine; his agony was equal to his wife's. The remainder of Madame d'Harville's letter will tell you the conclusion of this painful scene, monseigneur."

Rodolph continued the perusal of Madame d'Harville's letter:

"After a conversation in German, which lasted for some minutes, between Sir Walter Murphy and Polidori, Sir Walter said to the latter, 'Now reply. Was it not madame,' and he looked towards my stepmother, 'who, during the illness of the count's first wife, introduced you to him as a physician?'

"'Yes, it was!' replied Polidori.

"'In order that you might serve the horrid projects of madame, were you not criminal enough to render mortal, by your deadly prescriptions, the malady of the Countess d'Orbigny, which was but slight in the first instance?'

"'Yes!' replied Polidori. My father heaved a painful sigh, raised both his hands to heaven, and let them fall perfectly overcome.

"'Lies and infamies!' cried my stepmother; 'it is all false, – a plot got up to destroy me!'

"'Silence, madame!' said Sir Walter Murphy, in an authoritative voice. Then continuing to address Polidori, 'Is it true that three days since madame was at your

residence in the Rue du Temple, No. 17, where you lived under the assumed name of Bradamanti?'

"That is true.'

"Did not madame propose to you to come here to assassinate the Comte d'Orbigny, as you had assassinated his wife?'

"Alas! I cannot deny it!' said Polidori.

"At this overwhelming revelation my father rose up, then, extending his arms to me, he exclaimed, in a broken voice, 'In the name of your unfortunate mother, pardon, pardon! I made her suffer much, but I swear to you I was a stranger to the crime which led her to the tomb!' and before I could prevent it, my father fell at my knees. When Sir Walter and I raised him he had fainted. I rang for the servants. Sir Walter took Polidori by the arm and led him out of the room with him, saying to my stepmother, 'Believe me, madame, it is best for you to leave this house within an hour, otherwise I will deliver you up to justice.' The wretched woman left the room in a state of rage and affright, which you will easily conceive. When my father recovered his senses, all that had occurred seemed to him a horrid dream. I was under the sad necessity of imparting to him my first suspicions as to my mother's premature death, suspicions which your knowledge of Doctor Polidori's earlier crimes had converted into certainty. I also told him how my stepmother had persecuted me to the time of my marriage, and what had been her object in making me marry M. d'Harville. In proportion as my father had shown himself weak with respect to this woman, so was he now pitiless towards her. He was desirous of handing Madame d'Orbigny over to the tribunals. I represented to him the horrible scandal of such a process, the publicity of which must be so distressing to him; and I induced him to allow her as much as was requisite for her to live upon. I had considerable difficulty in persuading my father to these terms, and he then wished me to dismiss her. This task was so painful that I requested Sir Walter to perform it for me, which he did."

"I consented with pleasure," interrupted Murphy.

"And what said this woman?"

"Madame d'Harville kindly solicited a pension of a hundred louis for this woman: this appeared to me not only kindness, but weakness; it was bad enough to allow her to escape from justice; and the count agreeing with me, it was arranged that we should give her in all twenty-five louis to maintain her until she should find some occupation. 'And to what occupation can I, the Countess d'Orbigny, turn?' she asked me, insolently. '*Ma foi!* that is your affair, – you may do as a nurse or housekeeper; but take my advice and seek some humbler, more obscure occupation, for if you have the daring to mention your name – a name which you owe to a crime – people will be astonished to see the Countess d'Orbigny reduced to such a condition; they will then begin to make inquiries, and you may judge what will be the result, if you are so indiscreet as to say one word of the past. Hide yourself, therefore, at a distance, – try and become forgotten; become Madame Pierre or Madame Jacques, and repent if you can.' 'And do you suppose, sir,' she said, having, no doubt, resolved on a piece of stage effect, 'do you suppose that I shall not sue for the advantage which my marriage settlement awards me?' 'Why, madame, nothing can be more just; it will be dishonourable of M. d'Orbigny not to execute his promises, and forget all you have done – and particularly all you wished to do towards him. Go to law – go to law! Try for justice, and, no doubt, it will right you with your husband.' A quarter of an hour after our conversation the wretch of a woman was on the road to the neighbouring town."

"You are right, it is painful to leave such an abandoned creature unpunished, but a law proceeding is impossible."

"I easily persuaded my father to leave Aubiers the same day," resumed Rodolph, continuing the perusal of Madame d'Harville's letter,

"as too many painful feelings were excited by his being where he was. His weak health will be benefited by a few days' change of air and scene, as the doctor saw, whom Polidori had succeeded, and for whom I sent from the neighbouring town. My father wished him to analyse the contents of the phial, without giving him any information as to what had passed. The doctor informed us that he must do this at home, and that in two hours we should know the result of his scrutiny; which was that several doses of this liquor, composed with devilish skill, would, within a certain time, cause death, without leaving any traces beyond those of an ordinary malady, which he mentioned. In a few hours, monseigneur, I go with my father and daughter to Fontainebleau, where we shall remain for some time; then my father wishes to return to Paris, but not to my house, for I could not reside there after the late appalling event. As I mentioned in the beginning of my letter, monseigneur, facts prove all I shall owe to your inexhaustible care and solicitude. Forewarned by you, aided by your advice, strong in the assistance of your excellent and high-couraged Sir Walter, I have been enabled to snatch my father from certain death, and am again assured of his love. Adieu, monseigneur, it is impossible for me to say more; my heart is too full, and I explain but faintly all I feel."

"D'Orbigny d'Harville."

"I open my letter to repair something I had, I regret to say, forgotten. According to your noble suggestion, I went to the prison of St. Lazare, to visit the poor women prisoners, and I found there an unhappy girl in whom you are interested. Her angelic mildness, her pious resignation, were the admiration of the respectable women who superintend the prisoners. To say that she is called La Goualeuse is to urge you to obtain her liberty instantly. The poor girl will tell you under what circumstances she was carried off from the asylum in which you had placed her, and was put in prison, where, at least, the candour and sweetness of her disposition have been appreciated. Permit me, also, to recall to you my two future protégées, the unhappy mother and daughter despoiled by the notary Ferrand, – where are they? I pray of you to try and discover them, so that, on my return to Paris, I may pay the debt I have contracted towards all unfortunate beings."

"What! Has La Goualeuse, then, left the Bouqueval farm?" inquired Murphy, as much astonished as Rodolph at this fresh discovery.

"Just now I was informed that she had been seen quitting St. Lazare," replied Rodolph. "I am quite bewildered on the subject; Madame Georges's silence surprises and disturbs me. Poor little Fleur-de-Marie, what fresh disasters can have befallen her? Send a man on horseback directly to the farm, and write to Madame Georges that I beg of her to come to Paris instantly. Request M. de Graün to procure for me a permission to visit St. Lazare. By what Madame d'Harville says to me, Fleur-de-Marie must be confined there. Yet, no," he added, "she cannot be there, for Rigolette saw her leave the prison with an aged woman. Could it be Madame Georges? If not, who could be the woman that accompanied La Goualeuse?"

"Patience, monseigneur; before the evening you will know all about it. Then to-morrow you can interrogate that vagabond Polidori, who has, he assures me, important disclosures to make, – but to you alone."

"This interview will be most odious to me!" said Rodolph, sorrowfully; "for I have never seen this man since the fatal day when I –"

Rodolph, unable to finish, hid his face in his hands.

"But, monseigneur, why accede to Polidori's request? Threaten him with the justice of the French law, or immediate surrender to your authority, and then he will reveal to me what he now declares he will only reveal to you."

"You are right, my worthy friend; for the presence of this wretch would make my terrible recollections even still more distressing, connected as they are with incurable griefs, – from my father's death to that of my daughter. I know not how it is, but as I advance in life the more I seem to miss that dear child. How I should have adored her! How very dear and precious to me she would have been, this offspring of my first love, of my earliest and purest beliefs – or, rather, my young illusions! I should have poured out on this innocent creature those treasures of affection of which her hateful mother is so unworthy; and it seems to me that, as I have dreamt, this child, by the beauty of her mind, the charm of her qualities, would have soothed and softened all my griefs, all these pangs of remorse, which are, alas, attached to her fatal birth."

"Monseigneur, I see with grief the increasing empire which these regrets, as vain as they are bitter, assume over your mind."

After some moments' silence, Rodolph said to Murphy:

"I will now make a confession to you, my old friend. I love – yes, I passionately love – a woman worthy of the noblest, the most devoted affection. Since my heart has again expanded to all the sweetness of love, since I am thus again affected by tender emotions, I feel more deeply than ever the loss of my daughter. I might have feared that an attachment of the heart would weaken the bitterness of my regrets. It is not so; all my loving qualities – my affections – are but the keener. I feel myself better, more charitable; and more than ever is it afflicting to me not to have my daughter to adore."

"Nothing more easily explained, monseigneur, – forgive me the comparison, – but, as certain men have a joyous and benevolent intoxication, so you have good and generous love."

"Still, my hatred of the wicked has become more intense; my aversion for Sarah increases, in proportion, no doubt, to the grief I experience at my daughter's death. I imagine to myself that that wretched mother must have neglected her, and that, when once her ambitious hopes were ruined by my marriage, the countess, in her pitiless selfishness, abandoned our daughter to mercenary hands, and, perhaps, my child died from actual neglect. It is my fault, also. I did not then think of the sacred duties which paternity imposes. When Sarah's real character was suddenly revealed to me, I ought instantly to have taken my daughter from her, and watched over her with love and anxiety. I ought to have foreseen that the countess would make but a very unnatural mother. It is my fault, – yes, indeed, my fault."

"Monseigneur, grief distracts you! Could you, after the sad event you know of, delay for a day the long journey imposed on you, as – "

"As an expiator! You are right, my friend," said Rodolph, greatly agitated.

"You have not heard anything of the Countess Sarah since my departure, monseigneur?"

"No; since those infamous plots which twice nearly destroyed Madame d'Harville, I have heard nothing of her. Her presence here is hateful to me, – oppresses me; it seems as though my evil demon was near me, and some new misfortune threatens me."

"Patience, patience, monseigneur! Fortunately Germany is forbidden ground to her, and Germany awaits us."

"Yes, we shall go very soon. At least, during my short residence in Paris, I shall have accomplished a sacred vow, and have made some steps in the meritorious path which an august and merciful will has traced for my redemption. As soon as Madame Georges's son is restored to her tender arms, free and innocent; as soon as Jacques Ferrand shall be convicted and punished for his crimes; as soon as I am assured of the good prosperity of all the honest and hard-working creatures who, by their resignation, courage, and probity, have deserved my interest, we will return to Germany, and then my journey will not have been wholly unfruitful."

"Particularly if you achieve the exposure of that abominable wretch, Jacques Ferrand, monseigneur, – the angular stone, the pivot on which turn so many crimes."

"Although the end justifies the means, and scruples with such a scoundrel are absurd, yet I sometimes regret that I have allowed Cecily to become an instrument in working out this just and avenging reparation."

"She ought to be here very shortly."

"She has arrived."

"Cecily?"

"Yes; I refused to see her. De Graün has given her ample instructions, and she has promised to comply with them."

"Will she keep that promise?"

"Why, everything conspires to make me think so. There is the hope of ameliorating her future condition, and the fear of being instantly sent back to Germany to prison; for De Graün will not lose sight of her, and the least defection on her part will cause her being handed over to justice."

"True, she comes here as an escaped criminal, and when we know the crimes that have led to her perpetual imprisonment, she would be at once surrendered to our demand."

"And then, even if it were not her interest to aid our schemes, the task which is assigned to her being one which can only be effected by stratagem, perfidy, and the most devilish seduction, Cecily must be (and the baron assures me she really is) overjoyed at such an opportunity for playing off those infernal advantages with which she is so liberally endowed."

"Is she as handsome as she was, monseigneur?"

"De Graün declares that she is more attractive than ever; he told me that he was really quite dazzled at her beauty, to which the Alsatian costume she had chosen gave even more piquancy. The glance of this devil in petticoats, he says, has still the same really magic expression."

"Why, monseigneur, I have never been what is called a dissipated fellow, a man without heart or conduct, but if at twenty years of age I had met with Cecily, even knowing her then to be as dangerous, as wicked as I do now, I assure you I would not have answered for myself, if I had been for any time exposed to the fire of her large, black, and brilliant eyes, sparkling in the centre of her pale and ardent countenance. Yes, by heaven! I dare not think of the extremities into which so fatal an amour might have urged me."

"I am not astonished, my dear Murphy, for I know this woman. Moreover, the baron was really frightened at the quickness with which Cecily understood – or, rather guessed – the part, at once inciting and platonic, which she was to play with the notary."

"But will she, think you, be introduced as easily as you wish, monseigneur, by the intervention of Madame Pipelet? Individuals like Jacques Ferrand are so suspicious."

"I had relied, with reason, on the sight of Cecily to overcome and dissipate the notary's distrust."

"What! Has he already seen her?"

"Yesterday. And from what Madame Pipelet told me, I have no doubt but he was fascinated by the creole, for he instantly took her into service."

"Then, monseigneur, the game is won, and ours."

"I hope so. A ferocious cupidity, a brutal passion, have impelled the injurer of Louise Morel to the most odious crimes. It is in his passion and his cupidity that he shall find the terrible punishment of his crimes, – a punishment which, moreover, shall not be without fruit for his victims, for you know the aim of all the Creole's wiles."

"Cecily! Cecily! Never did greater wickedness, never more dangerous corruption, never blacker soul have served for the accomplishment of a more strict morality, a more just result! And David, monseigneur, what does he say to this arrangement?"

"Approves of everything. At the pitch of contempt and horror which he has reached for this creature, he sees in her only the instrument of a just vengeance. 'If this accursed woman ever

could deserve any commiseration after all the ill she has done me,' he said to me, 'it would be by devoting herself to the remorseless punishment of this scoundrel, whose exterminating demon she may become.'"

A servant having knocked at the door, Murphy went out, but soon returned with two letters, only one of which was for Rodolph.

"A line from Madame Georges," he said, as he hastily perused it.

"Well, monseigneur, and La Goualeuse?"

"There can be no further doubt," exclaimed Rodolph, after having read, "there is some dark plot afoot. On the evening of the day when the poor girl disappeared from the farm, and at the instant when Madame Georges was about to inform me of this event, a man unknown to her, sent express and on horseback, came as from me to tell her that I was aware of the sudden disappearance of Fleur-de-Marie, and that in a few days I should take her back to the farm. In spite of this, Madame Georges, uneasy at my silence with respect to her protégée, cannot, as she says, resist the desire to hear how her dear daughter is, for so she calls her."

"It is very strange, monseigneur."

"What could be the motive for carrying off Fleur-de-Marie?"

"Monseigneur!" said Murphy, suddenly, "the Countess Sarah is no stranger to this carrying off."

"Sarah! And what makes you think so?"

"Compare this event with her denunciations against Madame d'Harville."

"You are right!" cried Rodolph, struck with a sudden light, "it is evident – now I understand. Yes, constantly the one calculation. The countess persists in thinking that by breaking down all the affections which she supposes me to form, she will make me feel the necessity of attaching myself to her. This is as odious as it is absurd. Still, such unworthy persecution must be put a stop to. It is not only myself, but all that deserve respect, interest, and pity, that this woman assails. Send M. de Graün instantly and officially to the countess and let him say that I have the certain assurance that she has been instrumental in carrying off Fleur-de-Marie, and if she does not give me at once such information as is necessary for me to find the poor girl, I will show no mercy; and then M. de Graün will go to the law officers of the crown."

"According to Madame d'Harville's letter, La Goualeuse must be in St. Lazare."

"Yes, but Rigolette declares that she saw her free, and quit the prison. There is some mystery which I must clear up."

"I will instantly go and give the Baron de Graün your orders, monseigneur. But allow me to open this letter, which comes from my correspondent at Marseilles, to whom I had recommended the Chourineur, as he was to facilitate the passage of the poor devil to Algeria."

"Well, has he set sail?"

"Monseigneur, it is really singular!"

"What is it?"

"After having waited for a long time at Marseilles for a ship to convey him to Algeria, the Chourineur, who seemed every day more sad and serious, suddenly protested, on the very day fixed for his embarkation, that he should prefer returning to Paris."

"What a whim!"

"Although my correspondent had, as agreed, placed a considerable sum at the disposal of the Chourineur, he had only taken sufficient for his return to Paris, where he must shortly arrive."

"Then he will explain to us his change of resolution. But despatch De Graün immediately to the Countess Macgregor, and go yourself to St. Lazare, and inquire about Fleur-de-Marie."

After the lapse of an hour, the Baron de Graün returned from the Countess Sarah Macgregor's. In spite of his habitual and official *sang-froid*, the diplomatist seemed overwhelmed; the groom of the chambers had scarcely admitted him before Rodolph observed his paleness.

"Well, De Graün, what ails you? Have you seen the countess?"

"Your royal highness must prepare for very painful intelligence – so unexpected – the Countess Macgregor – "

"The countess, then, is dead?"

"No, but her life is despaired of; she has been stabbed with a stiletto."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Rodolph. "Who committed the crime?"

"That is not ascertained; the murder was accompanied with robbery; a large quantity of jewels have been stolen."

"And how is she now?"

"She has not recovered her senses yet; her brother is in despair."

"Send some one daily to make inquiries, my dear De Graün."

At this moment Murphy entered, having returned from St. Lazare.

"Sad news!" said Rodolph to him; "Sarah has been stabbed."

"Ah, monseigneur, though very guilty, one must still pity her."

"Yes, such a fearful end! And La Goualeuse?"

"Set at liberty by the intercession of Madame d'Harville."

"That is impossible! for Madame d'Harville entreats me to take the necessary steps for getting the poor, unhappy girl out of prison."

"Yet an elderly woman came to St. Lazare, bringing an order to set Fleur-de-Marie at liberty, and they both quitted the prison together."

"As Rigolette said. But this elderly woman, who can she be? The Countess Sarah alone can clear this up, and she is in no state to afford us particulars."

"But her brother, Tom Seyton, may throw some light on it, he has always been in his sister's confidence."

"His sister is dying, and if there is any fresh plot, he will not say a word. But," added Rodolph, "we must learn the name of the person who liberated Fleur-de-Marie, and then we shall arrive at something."

"True, monseigneur."

"Try, then, and find out this person, my dear De Graün; and if you do not succeed, put your M. Badinot on the scent."

"Your royal highness may rely on my zeal."

"Upon my word, monseigneur," said Murphy, "it is, perhaps, fortunate that the Chourineur returns to us, his services may be useful."

"You are right; and now I am impatient to see my brave preserver arrive in Paris, for I never can forget that I owe my life to him."

CHAPTER III

THE CLERK'S OFFICE

Several days had elapsed since Jacques Ferrand had taken Cecily into his service. We will conduct the reader (who already knows the place) into the notary's office, whilst his clerks are at breakfast. Unheard of, extravagant, wonderful thing! Instead of the meagre and repulsive broth brought each morning to these young men by the late Madame Séraphin, an enormous cold roast turkey, placed in a large box, was enthroned in the centre of one of the office-tables, flanked by two new loaves, a Dutch cheese, and three bottles of wine; an ancient leaden inkstand served to hold a mixture of pepper and salt. Each clerk, provided with a knife and a strong appetite, awaited the arrival of the head clerk with hungry impatience, without whom they could not, without a breach of etiquette, begin to breakfast. A revolution so radical in Jacques Ferrand's office bespoke some extraordinary domestic mutation. The following conversation may throw some light on this phenomenon:

"Here is a turkey who did not expect when he was ushered into life ever to appear on the breakfast-table of our governor's clerks."

"No more than the governor, when he was ushered into the life of a notary, expected to give his clerks a turkey for breakfast."

"But, at least, the turkey is ours!" said the junior fag of the office, with a greedy grin.

"Hop-the-Gutter, my friend, you forget yourself; this poultry is and must be a stranger to you."

"And, like a good Frenchman, you should have a wholesome hatred of the stranger."

"All that will come to your share may be his feet."

"Emblem of the velocity with which you run on the office errands."

"I thought I might at least have a right to the carcass to pick!" muttered Hop-the-Gutter.

"Perchance, as an excessive favour, but not as a right; just as with the Charter of 1814, which was but another carcass of liberty!" said the Mirabeau of the office.

"Talking of carcasses," observed one youth, with brutal insensibility, "may heaven receive the soul of Madame Séraphin! For since she was drowned in her water-party of pleasure, we are no longer condemned to eternal 'cag-mag.'"

"And, for a whole week, the governor, instead of giving us breakfast – "

"Allows us each two francs a day."

"It was that which made me say, 'Heaven receive the soul of Mother Séraphin!'"

"Talking of Madame Séraphin, who has seen the servant who has come in her place?"

"The Alsatian girl whom the portress of the house in which poor Louise lived brought one evening, as the porter told us?"

"Yes."

"*Parbleu!* It is quite impossible to get a glimpse of her; for the governor is more resolute than ever in preventing us from entering into the pavilion in the courtyard."

"And besides, as it is the porter who now cleans out the office, how can one see this damsel?"

"Well, I've seen her."

"You?"

"When I say I've seen her, I've seen her cap; such a rum cap!"

"Oh, pooh! What sort?"

"It was cherry-coloured velvet, I think; a kind of skull-cap like the 'buy-a-broom' girls wear."

"Like the Alsaciennes? Why, that's simple enough, as she is an Alsacienne!"

"I was passing across the yard the day before yesterday, and she was leaning with her back against one of the windows of the ground floor."

"What! The yard?"

"No, donkey, no, – the servant! The panes of the lower part are so dirty that I could not see much of the Alsacienne; but those in the middle of the window were not so grubby, and I saw her cherry-coloured cap and a profusion of curling hair as black as jet, for she had her head dressed *à la Titus*."

"I'm sure the governor has not seen even as much as that through his spectacles; for he is one who, as they say, if he were left alone with one woman on the earth, then the world would end."

"That is not astonishing. 'He laughs best who laughs last!' And the more so, as 'Punctuality is the politeness of monarchs!'"

"Jupiter! How stupid Chalamel is when he likes!"

"Deuce take it! Tell me where you go, and I'll tell you who you are!"

"Beautiful!"

"As for me, I think it is superstition which makes our governor more and more hoggish."

"And, perhaps, it is as a penitence that he gives us forty sous a day for our breakfast."

"He must, indeed, have taken leave of his senses."

"Or be ill."

"I have thought him very much bewildered these many days past."

"It is not that we see so much of him. He who, for our misery, was in his study at sunrise, and always at our backs, is now two days without even poking his nose into the office."

"That gives the head clerk so much to do."

"And we are obliged to die of hunger waiting for him this morning."

"What a change in the office!"

"How poor Germain would be astonished if any one told him, 'Only think, old fellow, of the governor giving us forty sous for our breakfast.' 'Pooh! Impossible!' 'Quite possible! And I, Chalamel, announce the fact in my own proper person.' 'What, you want to make me laugh?' 'Yes. Well, this is the way it came about. For the two or three days which followed the death of Madame Séraphin we had no breakfast at all; and, in one respect, that was an improvement, because it was less nasty, but, in another, our refection cost us money. Still we were patient, saying, 'The governor has no servant or housekeeper; as soon as he gets one we shall resume the filthy paste gruel.' No, by no means, my dear Germain; the governor has a servant, and yet our breakfast continued buried in the wave of oblivion. Then I was appointed as a deputation to inform the governor of the griefs of our stomachs. He was with the chief clerk. 'I will not feed you any longer in the morning,' he replied, in his harsh tone, and as if thinking of something else; 'my servant has no time to prepare your breakfast.' 'But, sir, it was agreed that you should find us in breakfasts.' 'Well, send for your breakfasts from some house, and I will pay for it. How much is sufficient, – forty sous each?' he added; all the time evidently thinking of something else, and saying forty sous as he would say twenty sous or a hundred sous. 'Yes, sir, forty sous will be sufficient,' cried I, catching the ball at the bound. 'Be it so; the head clerk will pay you and settle with me.' And so saying, the governor respectfully slammed the door in my face.' You must own, messieurs, that Germain would be most extraordinarily astonished at the liberality of the governor."

"Seriously, I think the governor is ill. For the last ten days he has scarcely been recognisable; his cheeks are so furrowed you could hide your fist in them."

"And so absent; you should just see him. The other day he lifted his spectacles to read a deed, and his eyes were as red and glaring as fiery coals."

"He was right. 'Short reckonings make long friends!'"

"Let me say a word. I will tell you, gentlemen, something very strange. I handed this deed to the governor, and it was topsy-turvy."

"The governor? How strange! What could he mean by topsy-turvying thus? Enough to choke him, unless, as you say, his habits are so completely altered."

"Oh, what a fellow you are, Chalamel! I say I gave him the deed wrong end up'ards."

"Wasn't he in a rage?"

"Not the slightest. He did not even notice it, but kept his great red eyes fixed upon it for at least ten minutes, and then handed me back the deed, saying, 'Very good!'"

"What, still topsy-turvy?"

"Yes."

"Then he couldn't have read it?"

"*Pardieu!* not unless he can read upside down."

"How odd!"

"The governor looked so dull and cross at the moment that I did not dare to say a word, and so I left him, just as if nothing had occurred."

"Well, four days ago I was in the head clerk's office; there came a client, then two or three clients with whom the governor had appointments. They got tired of waiting; and, at their request, I went and knocked at his study door. No answer; so in I went."

"Well?"

"M. Jacques Ferrand had his arms crossed on his desk, and his bald and not overdilicate forehead leaning on his hands. He never stirred."

"Was he asleep?"

"I thought so, and went towards him: 'Sir, there are clients waiting with whom you have made appointments.' He didn't stir. 'Sir!' No answer. Then I touched his shoulder, and he bounced up as if the devil had bitten him. In his start his large green spectacles fell from his eyes on to his nose, and I saw – you'll never believe it – "

"Well, what?"

"Tears."

"Oh, what nonsense!"

"Quite true."

"What! the governor snivel? No, I won't have that."

"When that's the case why cockchafers will play the cornet-à-piston."

"And cocks and hens wear top-boots."

"Ta, ta, ta, ta; all your folly will not prevent my having seen what I did see as plain as I see you."

"Weeping?"

"Yes, weeping. And he was in such a precious rage at being surprised in this lachrymose mood that he adjusted his spectacles in great haste, and said to me, 'Get out – get out!' 'But, sir – ' 'Get out!' 'Three clients are waiting to whom you have given appointments, and – ' 'I have not time; let them go to the devil along with you!' Then he got up in a desperate rage to turn me out, but I didn't wait, but went and dismissed the clients, who were not by any means satisfied; but, for the honour of the office, I told them that the governor had the whooping-cough."

This interesting conversation was interrupted by the head clerk, who entered apparently quite overcome. His arrival was hailed by general acclamation, and all eyes were sympathetically turned towards the turkey with impatient anxiety.

"Without saying a word, seigneur, you have kept us waiting an infernally long while," said Chalamel.

"Take care! Another time our appetite will not remain so subordinate."

"Well, gents, it was no fault of mine. I have had much to annoy me, – more than you have. On my word and honour, the governor must be going mad."

"Didn't I say so?"

"But that need not prevent one eating."

"On the contrary."

"We can talk just as well with something in our mouths."

"We can talk better," cried Hop-the-Gutter; whilst Chalamel, dissecting the turkey, said to the head clerk:

"What makes you think that the governor is mad?"

"We have a right to suppose he is perfectly beside himself when he allows us forty sous a head for our daily breakfast."

"I confess that has surprised me as much as yourselves, gents. But that is nothing – absolutely nothing – to what has just now occurred."

"Really?"

"What! has the unhappy old gent become so decidedly lunatic that he insists on our dining at the Cadran Bleu every day at his expense?"

"Theatre in the evening?"

"Then coffee, with punch to follow?"

"And then – "

"Gents, laugh as much as you please; but the scene I have just witnessed is rather alarming than pleasant."

"Well, then, relate this scene to us."

"Yes, do. Don't mind your breakfast," observed Chalamel; "we are all ears."

"And jaws, my lads. I think I see you whilst I am talking working away with your teeth; and the turkey would be finished before my tale. By your leave, patience, and the story shall come in with the dessert."

Whether it was the spur of appetite or curiosity which incited the young men we will not decide, but they went through their gastronomic operation with such celerity that the moment for the head clerk's history came in no time. In order that they might not be surprised by their employer, they sent Hop-the-Gutter into the adjoining room as a sentinel, having liberally supplied him with the carcass and drumsticks of the bird.

The head clerk then said to his colleagues, "You must know, in the first place, the porter has been very uneasy, for he has frequently seen M. Ferrand, in spite of the cold and rain, pace the garden at night for a considerable time. Once he ventured to ask his master if he wanted anything; but he sent him about his business in such a manner that he has not again ventured to intrude himself."

"Perhaps the governor is a sleep-walker?"

"That is not probable. But, to continue; a short time since I wanted his signature to several papers. As I was turning the handle of his door, I thought I heard some one speaking. I stopped, and made out two or three repressed sounds, like stifled groans. After pausing an instant in fear, I opened the door, and saw the governor kneeling on the floor, his forehead buried in his hands, and his elbows resting on the seat of one of his old armchairs."

"Oh, it's all plain enough: he has turned pious, and was saying an extra prayer."

"Well, then, it was a strong prayer enough. I heard stifled groans, and every now and then he murmured between his teeth '*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*' like a despairing man. Then, – and this is very singular, – in a movement which he made as if to tear his breast with his nails, his shirt came partly open, and I saw on his hairy chest a small red pocketbook fastened around his neck by a steel chain. When I saw that I did not really know whether I ought to retreat or advance. I remained, however, very much embarrassed, when he rose and suddenly turned around, holding between his teeth an old check pocket-handkerchief; his spectacles were left on the chair. Let me say, gents, that I never in my life saw such a figure; he looked like one of the damned. I retreated really in alarm. Then he – "

"Seized you by the throat?"

"You are quite wrong. He looked at me first with a bewildered air; then letting fall his handkerchief, he threw himself into my arms, exclaiming, 'Oh, I am very unhappy!'"

"What a farce!"

"Well, but that did not prevent his voice – in spite of his death's-head look – from being so distressing, I may say so imploring – "

"Imploring! Come, come, no gammon! Why, there is no night-owl with a cold in her head which is not music to the governor's voice."

"That may be; but yet at this moment his voice was so plaintive that I was almost affected. 'Sir,' I said to him, believe me – 'Let me! – let me!' replied he, interrupting me. 'It is so consoling to be able to say to any one that we are suffering!' He evidently mistook me for some other person. You may suppose that when he thus addressed me I felt sure it was a mistake, or that he had a brain fever. I disengaged myself from him, saying, 'Sir, compose yourself, it is I!' Then he looked at me with a stupid air, and exclaimed, 'Who is it? Who's there? What do you want with me?' And he passed, at each question, his hand over his brow, as if to dispel the cloud which obscured his mind."

"Which obscured his mind! Capital! Well spoken! We'll get up a melodrama amongst us!

""Methinks a man with such a power of words,
Should try his hand at melodrama!""

"Chalamel, will you be quiet?"

"What could ail the governor?"

"*Ma foi!* How can I tell? But of this I'm sure, that when he recovers he'll sing to another tune, for he frowned terribly, and said to me sharply, without giving me time to reply, 'What did you come for? Have you been here long? Am I to be surrounded with spies? What did I say? Reply – answer!' *Ma foi!* he looked so savage that I replied, 'I heard nothing, sir; I only this moment entered.' 'You are not deceiving me?' 'No, sir.' 'Well, what do you want?' 'Some signatures, sir.' 'Give me the papers!' And then he signed and signed – without reading – half a dozen notarial deeds; he who never put his initials to a deed without spelling it over word by word, and twice over from one end to the other. I remarked that from time to time his hand relaxed in the middle of his signature, as if he were absorbed in some fixed idea; then he went on signing very quick, and, as it were, convulsively. When all were signed he told me to retire, and I heard him descend the small staircase which leads from his room to the courtyard."

"I still ask what can be the matter with him?"

"Gentlemen, it is perhaps Madame Séraphin whom he regrets."

"He? What, he regret any one?"

"Now I think of it, the porter said that the curé of Bonne Nouvelle and the vicar had called several times to see the governor, and he was denied to them. Is not that surprising? – they who almost lived here!"

"What puzzles me is to know what the workpeople are at."

"They have been working at the pavilion three days running."

"And one evening they brought furniture covered up with a carpet."

"Perhaps he feels remorse for having put Germain into prison?"

"Talking of Germain, he will have some fine recruits in his prison, poor fellow! For I read in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* that the band of robbers and assassins, whom they seized in the Champs Elysées, in one of the small underground public-houses, had been locked up in La Force."

"Poor Germain! What society for him!"

"Louise Morel, too, will have her share of the recruits; for in this gang, they say, there is a whole family of thieves."

"Then they will send the women to St. Lazare, where Louise is?"

"Perhaps it was some of that gang who stabbed the countess, one of the governor's clients. He has often sent me to inquire after the state of this countess, and seems much interested in her recovery."

"Did they let you enter the house and see the spot where the assassination was committed?"

"Oh, no! I could not go farther than the entrance; and the porter was not at all a person inclined to talk."

"Gents, gents, take your places; here's the gov'nor coming up!" shouted Hop-the-Gutter, coming into the office with the carcass still in his hand.

The young men instantly took their seats at their respective desks, over which they bent, handling their pens with great dexterity; whilst Hop-the-Gutter deposited his turkey's skeleton in a box filled with law papers.

Jacques Ferrand entered the room. His red hair, mingled with gray, escaping from beneath an old black silk cap, fell in disorder down each side of his temples. Some of the veins which marbled his head appeared injected with blood, whilst his face, his flat nose, his furrowed cheeks, were all of ghastly paleness. The expression of his look, concealed by his large green spectacles, could not be seen; but the great alteration in the man's features announced the ravages of a consuming passion.

He crossed the office slowly, without saying a word to one of the clerks, or without even appearing to notice that they were there; then went into the room in which the chief clerk was employed, traversed it as well as his own cabinet, and again instantly descended the small staircase which led to the courtyard.

Jacques Ferrand having left all the doors open behind him, the clerks had a right to be astonished at the strange demeanour of their employer, who had come up one staircase and gone down another without pausing for a moment in any of the apartments he had mechanically traversed.

CHAPTER IV

AVOID TEMPTATION!

It is night. Profound silence reigns in the pavilion inhabited by Jacques Ferrand, interrupted only at intervals by gusts of wind and the dashing of rain, which falls in torrents. These melancholy sounds seemed to render still more complete the solitude of this abode. In a sleeping-room in the first floor, very nicely and newly furnished, and covered with a thick carpet, a young female is standing up before a fireplace, in which there is a cheerful blaze. It is strange, but in the centre of the door, carefully bolted, and which is opposite to the bed, is a small glass door, five or six inches square, which opens from the outside. A small reflecting lamp casts a half shadow in this chamber, hung with garnet-coloured paper; the curtains of the bed and the window, as well as the cover of the large sofa, are of silk and woollen damask of the same colour. We are precise in the details of this demi-luxury so recently imported into the notary's residence, because it announces a complete revolution in the habits of Jacques Ferrand, who, until now, was of the most sordid avarice, and of Spartan disregard (especially as it concerned others) to everything that respected comfortable existence. It is on this garnet-coloured ground that was shadowed forth the figure of Cecily, which we will now attempt to paint.

Tall and graceful, the creole was in the full flower of her age. Her spreading shoulders and hips made her waist appear so singularly small that it seemed as if it could be easily spanned. As simple as it was coquettish, her Alsatian costume was of singular taste, somewhat theatrical, – but for that reason more capable of producing the effect she desired. Her bodice, of black cassimere, half open on her full bosom, was very long-waisted, with tight sleeves, plain back, and slightly embroidered with purple wool down the seams, perfected by a row of small cut silver buttons. A short petticoat, of orange merino, which seemed of vast fullness, descended little lower than the knee; her stockings were of scarlet, with blue clocks, as we see them in the drawings of the old Flemish painters, who so complacently show us the garters of their robust heroines.

No artist ever drew more perfect legs than were those of Cecily: symmetrical and slim beneath the swelling calf, they terminated in a small foot, quite at ease, and yet restrained in a small slipper of black morocco, with silver buckles. Cecily was looking into the glass over the mantelpiece. The slope of her bodice displayed her elegant and dimpled neck of dazzling but not transparent whiteness.

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