

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

MONT ORIOL OR A
ROMANCE OF AUVERGNE

Ги д. Мопассан

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Romance of Auvergne**

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Mont Oriol or A Romance of Auvergne / A Novel

CHAPTER I. THE SPA

The first bathers, the early risers, who had already been at the water, were walking slowly, in pairs or alone, under the huge trees along the stream which rushes down the gorges of Enval.

Others arrived from the village, and entered the establishment in a hurried fashion. It was a spacious building, the ground floor being reserved for thermal treatment, while the first story served as a casino, *café*, and billiard-room. Since Doctor Bonnefille had discovered in the heart of Enval the great spring, baptized by him the Bonnefille Spring, some proprietors of the country and the surrounding neighborhood, timid speculators, had decided to erect in the midst of this superb glen of Auvergne, savage and gay withal, planted with walnut and giant chestnut trees, a vast house for every kind of use, serving equally for the purpose of cure and of pleasure, in which mineral waters, douches, and baths were sold below, and beer, liqueurs, and music above.

A portion of the ravine along the stream had been inclosed, to constitute the park indispensable to every spa; and three walks had been made, one nearly straight, and the other two zigzag. At the end of the first gushed out an artificial spring detached from the parent spring, and bubbling into a great basin of cement, sheltered by a straw roof, under the care of an impassive woman, whom everyone called "Marie" in a familiar sort of way. This calm Auvergnat, who wore a little cap always as white as snow, and a big apron, perfectly clean at all times, which concealed her working-dress, rose up slowly as soon as she saw a bather coming along the road in her direction.

The bather would smile with a melancholy air, drink the water, and return her the glass, saying, "Thanks, Marie." Then he would turn on his heel and walk away. And Marie sat down again on her straw chair to wait for the next comer.

They were not, however, very numerous. The Enval station had just been six years open for invalids, and scarcely could count more patients at the end of these six years than it had at the start. About fifty had come there, attracted more than anything else by the beauty of the district, by the charm of this little village lost under enormous trees, whose twisted trunks seemed as big as the houses, and by the reputation of the gorges at the end of this strange glen which opened on the great plain of Auvergne and ended abruptly at the foot of the high mountain bristling with craters of unknown age – a savage and magnificent crevasse, full of rocks fallen or threatening, from which rushed a stream that cascaded over giant stones, forming a little lake in front of each.

This thermal station had been brought to birth as they all are, with a pamphlet on the spring by Doctor Bonnefille. He opened with a eulogistic description, in a majestic and sentimental style, of the Alpine seductions of the neighborhood. He selected only adjectives which convey a vague sense of delightfulness and enjoyment – those which produce effect without committing the writer to any material statement. All the surroundings were picturesque, filled with splendid sites or landscapes whose graceful outlines aroused soft emotions. All the promenades in the vicinity possessed a remarkable originality, such as would strike the imagination of artists and tourists. Then abruptly, without any transition, he plunged into the therapeutic qualities of the Bonnefille Spring, bicarbonate, sodium, mixed, lithineous, ferruginous, *et cetera, et cetera*, capable of curing every disease. He had, moreover, enumerated them under this heading: Chronic affections or acute specially associated with Enval. And the list of affections associated with Enval was long – long and varied, consoling for

invalids of every kind. The pamphlet concluded with some information of practical utility, the cost of lodgings, commodities, and hotels – for three hotels had sprung up simultaneously with the casino-medical establishment. These were the Hotel Splendid, quite new, built on the slope of the glen looking down on the baths; the Thermal Hotel, an old inn with a new coat of plaster; and the Hotel Vidaillet, formed very simply by the purchase of three adjoining houses, which had been altered so as to convert them into one.

Then, all at once, two new doctors had installed themselves in the locality one morning, without anyone well knowing how they came, for at spas doctors seem to dart up out of the springs, like gas-jets. These were Doctor Honorat, a native of Auvergne, and Doctor Latonne, of Paris. A fierce antagonism soon burst out between Doctor Latonne and Doctor Bonnefille, while Doctor Honorat, a big, clean-shaven man, smiling and pliant, stretched forth his right hand to the first, and his left hand to the second, and remained on good terms with both. But Doctor Bonnefille was master of the situation, with his title of Inspector of the Waters and of the thermal establishment of Enval-les-Bains.

This title was his strength and the establishment his chattel. There he spent his days, and even his nights, it was said. A hundred times, in the morning, he would go from his house which was quite near in the village to his consultation-study fixed at the right-hand side facing the entrance to the thermal baths. Lying in wait there, like a spider in his web, he watched the comings and goings of the invalids, inspecting his own patients with a severe eye and those of the other doctors with a look of fury. He questioned everybody almost in the style of a ship's captain, and he struck terror into newcomers, unless it happened that he made them smile.

This day, as he arrived with rapid steps, which made the big flaps of his old frock coat fly up like a pair of wings, he was stopped suddenly by a voice exclaiming: "Doctor!"

He turned round. His thin face, full of big ugly wrinkles, and looking quite black at the end with a grizzled beard rarely cut, made an effort to smile; and he took off the tall silk hat, shabby, stained, and greasy, that covered his thick pepper-and-salt head of hair – "pepper and soiled, as his rival, Doctor Latonne, put it. Then he advanced a step, made a bow, and murmured:

"Good morning, Marquis – are you quite well this morning?"

The Marquis de Ravenel, a little man well preserved, stretched out his hand to the doctor, as he replied:

"Very well, doctor, very well, or, at least, not ill. I am always suffering from my kidneys; but indeed I am better, much better; and I am as yet only at my tenth bath. Last year I did not obtain the effect until the sixteenth, you recollect?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"But it is not about this I want to talk to you. My daughter has arrived this morning, and I wish to have a chat with you about her case first of all, because my son-in-law, William Andermatt, the banker – "

"Yes, I know."

"My son-in-law has a letter of recommendation addressed to Doctor Latonne. As for me, I have no confidence except in you, and I beg of you to have the kindness to come up to the hotel before – you understand? I prefer to say things to you candidly. Are you free at the present moment?"

Doctor Bonnefille had put on his hat again, and looked excited and troubled. He answered at once:

"Yes, I shall be free immediately. Do you wish me to accompany you?"

"Why, certainly."

And, turning their backs on the establishment, they directed their steps up a circular walk leading to the door of the Hotel Splendid, built on the slope of the mountain so as to offer a view of it to travelers.

They made their way to the drawing-room in the first story adjoining the apartments occupied by the Ravenel and Andermatt families, and the Marquis left the doctor by himself while he went to look for his daughter.

He came back with her presently. She was a fair young woman, small, pale, very pretty, whose features seemed like those of a child, while her blue eyes, boldly fixed, cast on people a resolute look that gave an alluring impression of firmness and a peculiar charm to this refined and fascinating creature. There was not much the matter with her – vague languors, sadnesses, bursts of tears without apparent cause, angry fits for which there seemed no season, and lastly anæmia. She craved above all for a child, which had been vainly looked forward to since her marriage, more than two years before.

Doctor Bonnefille declared that the waters of Enval would be effectual, and proceeded forthwith to write a prescription. The doctor's prescriptions had always the formidable aspect of an indictment. On a big white sheet of paper such as schoolboys use, his directions exhibited themselves in numerous paragraphs of two or three lines each, in an irregular handwriting, bristling with letters resembling spikes. And the potions, the pills, the powders, which were to be taken fasting in the morning, at midday, and in the evening, followed in ferocious-looking characters. One of these prescriptions might read:

"Inasmuch as M. X. is affected with a chronic malady, incurable and mortal, he will take, first, sulphate of quinine, which will render him deaf, and will make him lose his memory; secondly, bromide of potassium, which will destroy his stomach, weaken all his faculties, cover him with pimples, and make his breath foul; thirdly, salicylate of soda, whose curative effects have not yet been proved, but which seems to lead to a terrible and speedy death the patient treated by this remedy. And concurrently, chloral, which causes insanity, and belladonna, which attacks the eyes; all vegetable solutions and all mineral compositions which corrupt the blood, corrode the organs, consume the bones, and destroy by medicine those whom disease has spared."

For a long time he went on writing on the front page and on the back, then signed it just as a judge might have signed a death-sentence.

The young woman, seated opposite to him, stared at him with an inclination to laugh that made the corners of her lips rise up.

When, with a low bow, he had taken himself off, she snatched up the paper blackened with ink, rolled it up into a ball, and flung it into the fire. Then, breaking into a hearty laugh, said:

"Oh! father, where did you discover this fossil? Why, he looks for all the world like an old-clothesman. Oh! how clever of you to dig up a physician that might have lived before the Revolution! Oh! how funny he is, aye, and dirty – ah, yes! dirty – I believe really he has stained my penholder."

The door opened, and M. Andermatt's voice was heard saying, "Come in, doctor."

And Doctor Latonne appeared. Erect, slender, circumspect, comparatively young, attired in a fashionable morning-coat, and holding in his hand the high silk hat which distinguishes the practicing doctor in the greater part of the thermal stations of Auvergne, the physician from Paris, without beard or mustache, resembled an actor who had retired into the country.

The Marquis, confounded, did not know what to say or do, while his daughter put her handkerchief to her mouth to keep herself from bursting out laughing in the newcomer's face. He bowed with an air of self-confidence, and at a sign from the young woman took a seat.

M. Andermatt, who followed him, minutely detailed for him his wife's condition, her illnesses, together with their accompanying symptoms, the opinions of the physicians consulted in Paris, and then his own opinion based on special grounds which he explained in technical language.

He was a man still quite youthful, a Jew, who devoted himself to financial transactions. He entered into all sorts of speculations, and displayed in all matters of business a subtlety of intellect, a rapidity of penetration, and a soundness of judgment that were perfectly marvelous. A little too stout already for his figure, which was not tall, chubby, bald, with an infantile expression, fat hands, and short thighs, he looked much too greasy to be quite healthy, and spoke with amazing facility.

By means of tact he had been able to form an alliance with the daughter of the Marquis de Ravenel with a view to extending his speculations into a sphere to which he did not belong. The Marquis, besides, possessed an income of about thirty thousand francs, and had only two children; but, when M. Andermatt married, though scarcely thirty years of age, he owned already five or six millions, and had sown enough to bring him in a harvest of ten or twelve. M. de Ravenel, a man of weak, irresolute, shifting, and undecided character, at first angrily repulsed the overtures made to him with respect to this union, and was indignant at the thought of seeing his daughter allied to an Israelite. Then, after six months' resistance, he gave way, under the pressure of accumulated wealth, on the condition that the children should be brought up in the Catholic religion.

But they waited for a long time and no offspring was yet announced. It was then that the Marquis, enchanted for the past two years with the waters of Enval, recalled to mind the fact that Doctor Bonnefille's pamphlet also promised the cure for sterility.

Accordingly, he sent for his daughter, whom his son-in-law accompanied, in order to install her and to intrust her, acting on the advice of his Paris physician, to the care of Doctor Latonne. Therefore, Andermatt, since his arrival, had gone to look for this practitioner, and went on enumerating the symptoms which presented themselves in his wife's case. He finished by mentioning how much he had been pained at finding his hopes of paternity unrealized.

Doctor Latonne allowed him to go on to the end; then, turning toward the young woman: "Have you anything to add, Madame?"

She replied gravely: "No, Monsieur, nothing at all."

He went on: "In that case, I will trouble you to take off your traveling-dress and your corset, and to put on a simple white dressing-gown, all white."

She was astonished; he rapidly explained his system: "Good heavens, Madame, it is very simple. Formerly, the belief was that all diseases came from a poison in the blood or from an organic cause; to-day, we simply assume that, in many cases, and, above all, in your particular case, the uncertain ailments from which you suffer, and even certain serious troubles, very serious, mortal, may proceed only from the fact that some organ or other, having taken, under influences easy to determine, an abnormal development, to the detriment of the neighboring organs, destroys all the harmony, all the equilibrium of the human body, modifies or arrests its functions, and obstructs the play of all the other organs. A swelling of the stomach may be sufficient to make us believe in a disease of the heart, which, impeded in its movements, becomes violent, irregular, sometimes even intermittent. The dilatation of the liver or of certain glands may cause ravages which unobservant physicians attribute to a thousand different causes. Therefore, the first thing that we should do is to ascertain whether all the organs of a patient have their true compass and their normal position, for a very little thing is enough to upset a person's health. I am going, then, Madame, if you will allow me, to examine you with great care, and to mark out on your dressing-gown the limits, the dimensions, and the positions of your organs."

He had put down his hat on a chair, and he spoke in a facile manner. His large mouth, in opening and closing, made two deep hollows in his shaven cheeks, which gave him a certain ecclesiastical air.

Andermatt, delighted, exclaimed: "Capital, capital! That is very clever, very ingenious, very new, very modern."

"Very modern" in his mouth was the height of admiration.

The young woman, highly amused, rose and passed into her own apartment. She came back, after the lapse of a few minutes, in a white dressing-gown.

The physician made her lie down on a sofa, then, drawing from his pocket a pencil with three points, a black, a red, and a blue, he commenced to auscultate and to tap his new patient, riddling the dressing-gown all over with little dots of color by way of noting each observation.

She resembled, after a quarter of an hour of this work, a map indicating continents, seas, capes, rivers, kingdoms, and cities, and bearing the names of all these terrestrial divisions, for the doctor wrote on every line of demarcation two or three Latin words intelligible to himself alone.

Now, when he had listened to all the internal sounds in Madame Andermatt's body, and tapped on all the parts of her person that were irritated or hollow-sounding, he drew forth from his pocket a notebook of red leather with gold threads to fasten it, divided in alphabetical order, consulted the index, opened it, and wrote: "Observation 6347. – Madame A – , 21 years."

Then, collecting from her head to her feet the colored notes on her dressing-gown, and reading them as an Egyptologist deciphers hieroglyphics, he entered them in the notebook.

He observed, when he had finished: "Nothing disquieting, nothing abnormal, save a slight, a very slight deviation, which some thirty acidulated baths will cure. You will take furthermore three half-glasses of water each morning before noon. Nothing else. I will come back to see you in four or five days." Then he rose, bowed, and went out with such promptitude that everyone remained stupefied at it. This abrupt style of departure was a part of his mannerism, his tact, his special stamp. He considered it very good form, and thought it made a great impression on the patient.

Madame Andermatt ran to look at herself in the glass, and, shaking all over with a joyous burst of childlike laughter, said:

"Oh! how amusing they are, how droll they are! Tell me, is there not one more left of them? I want to see him immediately! Will, go and find him for me! We must have the third one here – I want to see him."

Her husband, surprised, asked:

"How, a third, a third what?"

The Marquis deemed it advisable to explain, while offering excuses, for he was a little afraid of his son-in-law. He related, therefore, how Doctor Bonnefille had come to see himself, and how he had introduced him to Christiane, in order to ascertain his opinion, as he had great confidence in the experience of the old physician, who was a native of the district, and who had discovered the spring.

Andermatt shrugged his shoulders, and declared that Doctor Latonne alone would take care of his wife, so that the Marquis, very uneasy, began to reflect on the best course to take in order to arrange matters without offending his irascible physician.

Christiane asked: "Is Gontran here?" This was her brother.

Her father replied: "Yes, for the past four days, with a friend of his of whom he has often spoken, M. Paul Bretigny. They are making a tour together in Auvergne. They have come from Mont Doré and from Bourboule, and will be setting out for Cantal at the end of next week."

Then he asked the young woman whether she desired to rest till luncheon after the night in the train; but she had slept perfectly in the sleeping car, and only required an hour for her toilette, after which she wished to visit the village and the establishment.

Her father and her husband went back to their rooms to wait till she was ready. She soon came out to call them, and they descended together. She grew enthusiastic at first sight over the aspect of the village, built in the middle of a wood in a deep valley, which seemed hemmed in on every side by chestnut-trees lofty as mountains. These could be seen everywhere, springing up just as they chanced to have shot forth here and there in a century, in front of doorways, in the courtyards, in the streets. Then, again, there were fountains everywhere made of a great black stone standing upright pierced with a small aperture, through which dashed a streamlet of clear water that whirled about in a circle before it fell into the trough. A fresh odor of grass and of stables floated over those masses of verdure; and they saw the peasant women of Auvergne standing in front of their dwellings, spinning at their distaffs with lively movements of their fingers the black wool attached to their girdles. Their short petticoats showed their thin ankles covered with blue stockings, and the bodies of their dresses fastened over their shoulders with straps left exposed the linen sleeves of their chemises, out of which stretched their hard, dry arms and bony hands.

But, suddenly, a queer lilting kind of music burst on the promenaders' ears. It was like a barrel-organ with piping sounds, a barrel-organ used up, broken-winded, invalided.

Christiane exclaimed: "What is that?"

Her father began to laugh: "It is the orchestra of the Casino. It takes four of them to make that noise."

And he led her up to a red bill affixed to a corner of a farmhouse, on which appeared in black letters:

CASINO OF ENVAL

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF M. PETRUS MARTEL,

OF THE ODÉON

Saturday, 6th of July

GRAND CONCERT

**organized by the *Maestro*, Saint Landri, second
grand prize winner at the Conservatoire**

The piano will be presided over by M. Javel, grand laureate of the Conservatoire

Flute, M. Noirot, laureate of the Conservatoire

Double-bass, M. Nicordi, laureate of the Royal Academy of Brussels

After the Concert, grand representation of

Lost in the Forest,

a Comedy in one act, by M. Pointellet

Characters:

Pierre de Lapointe	M. Petrus Martel, of the Odéon.
Oscar Léveillé	M. Pettrivelle, of the Vaudeville.
Jean	M. Lapalme, of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux.
Philippine	Mademoiselle Odélin, of the Odéon.

**During the representation, the Orchestra will be
likewise conducted by the *Maestro*, Saint Landri**

Christiane read this aloud, laughed, and was astonished.

Her father went on: "Oh! they will amuse you. Come and look at them."

They turned to the right, and entered the park. The bathers promenaded gravely, slowly, along the three walks. They drank their glasses of water, and then went away. Some of them, seated on benches, traced lines in the sand with the ends of their walking-sticks or their umbrellas. They did not talk, seemed not to think, scarcely to live, enervated, paralyzed by the *ennui* of the thermal station. Only the odd music of the orchestra broke the sweet silence as it leaped into the air, coming one knew not whence, produced one knew not how, passing under the foliage and appearing to stir up these melancholy walkers.

A voice cried: "Christiane!"

She turned round. It was her brother. He rushed toward her, embraced her, and, having pressed Andermatt's hand, took his sister by the arm, and drew her along with him, leaving his father and his brother-in-law in the rear.

They chatted. He was a tall, well-made young fellow, prone to laughter like her, light-hearted as the Marquis, indifferent to events, but always on the lookout for a thousand francs.

"I thought you were asleep," said he. "But for that I would have come to embrace you. And then Paul carried me off this morning to the château of Tournol."

"Who is Paul? Oh, yes, your friend!"

"Paul Bretigny. It is true you don't know him. He is taking a bath at the present moment."

"He is a patient, then?"

"No, but he is curing himself, all the same. He is trying to get over a love episode."

"And so he's taking acidulated baths – they're called acidulated, are they not? – in order to restore himself."

"Yes. He's doing all I told him to do. Oh! he has been hit hard. He's a violent youth, terrible, and has been at death's door. He wanted to kill himself, too. It was an actress – a well-known actress. He was madly in love with her. And then she was not faithful to him, do you see? The result was a frightful drama. So I brought him away. He's going on better now, but he's still thinking about it."

She smiled for a moment, then, becoming grave, she returned:

"It will amuse me to see him."

For her, however, this thing, "Love," did not mean very much. She sometimes bestowed a thought on it, just as you think, when you are poor, now and then of a pearl necklace, of a diadem of brilliants, with a desire awakened in you for this thing – possible though far away. This fancy would come to her after reading some novel to kill time, without attaching to it, beyond that, any special importance. She had never dreamed about it much, having been born with a happy soul, tranquil and contented, and, although now two years and a half married, she had not yet awakened out of that sleep in which innocent young girls live, that sleep of the heart, of the mind, and of the senses, which, with some women, lasts until death. For her life was simple and good, without complications. She had never looked for the causes or the hidden meaning of things. She had lived on from day to day, slept soundly, dressed with taste, laughed, and felt satisfied. What more could she have asked for?

When Andermatt had been introduced to her as her future husband, she refused to wed him at first with a childish indignation at the idea of becoming the wife of a Jew. Her father and her brother, sharing her repugnance, replied with her and like her by formally declining the offer. Andermatt disappeared, acted as if he were dead, but, at the end of three months, had lent Gontran more than twenty thousand francs; and the Marquis, for other reasons, was beginning to change his opinion.

In the first place, he always on principle yielded when one persisted, through sheer egotistical desire not to be disturbed. His daughter used to say of him: "All papa's ideas are jumbled up together"; and this was true. Without opinions, without beliefs, he had only enthusiasms, which varied every moment. At one time, he would attach himself, with a transitory and poetic exaltation, to the old traditions of his race, and would long for a king, but an intellectual king, liberal, enlightened, marching along with the age. At another time, after he had read a book by Michelet or some democratic thinker, he would become a passionate advocate of human equality, of modern ideas, of the claims of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering. He believed in everything, just as each thing harmonized with his passing moods; and, when his old friend, Madame Icardon, who, connected as she was with many Israelites, desired the marriage of Christiane and Andermatt, and began to preach in favor of it, she knew full well the kind of arguments with which she should attack him.

She pointed out to him that the Jewish race had arrived at the hour of vengeance. It had been a race crushed down as the French people had been before the Revolution, and was now going to oppress others by the power of gold. The Marquis, devoid of religious faith, but convinced that the idea of God was rather a legislative idea, which had more effect in keeping the foolish, the ignorant, and the timid in the right path than the simple notion of Justice, regarded dogmas with a respectful indifference, and held in equal and sincere esteem Confucius, Mohammed, and Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the fact that the latter was crucified did not at all present itself as an original wrongdoing but as a gross, political blunder. In consequence it only required a few weeks to make him admire the toil, hidden, incessant, and all-powerful, of the persecuted Jews everywhere. And, viewing with different eyes their brilliant triumph, he looked upon it as a just reparation for the indignities that so long had been heaped upon them. He saw them masters of kings, who are the masters of the people – sustaining thrones or allowing them to collapse, able to make a nation bankrupt as one might a wine-merchant, proud in the presence of princes who had grown humble, and casting their impure gold into the half-open purses of the most Catholic sovereigns, who thanked them by conferring on them titles of nobility and lines of railway. So he consented to the marriage of William Andermatt with Christiane de Ravenel.

As for Christiane, under the unconscious pressure of Madame Icardon, her mother's old companion, who had become her intimate adviser since the Marquise's death, a pressure to which was added that of her father and the interested indifference of her brother, she consented to marry this big, overrich youth, who was not ugly but scarcely pleased her, just as she would have consented to spend a summer in a disagreeable country.

She found him a good fellow, kind, not stupid, nice in intimate relations; but she frequently laughed at him along with Gontran, whose gratitude was of the perfidious order.

He would say to her: "Your husband is rosier and balder than ever. He looks like a sickly flower, or a sucking pig with its hair shaved off. Where does he get these colors?"

She would reply: "I assure you I have nothing to do with it. There are days when I feel inclined to paste him on a box of sugar-plums."

But they had arrived in front of the baths. Two men were seated on straw chairs with their backs to the wall, smoking their pipes, one at each side of the door.

Said Gontran: "Look, here are two good types. Watch the fellow at the right, the hunchback with the Greek cap! That's Père Printemps, an ex-jailer from Riom, who has become the guardian, almost the manager, of the Enval establishment. For him nothing is changed, and he governs the invalids just as he did his prisoners in former days. The bathers are always prisoners, their bathing-boxes are cells, the douche-room a black-hole, and the place where Doctor Bonnefille practices his stomach-washings with the aid of the Baraduc sounding-line a chamber of mysterious torture. He does not salute any of the men on the strength of the principle that all convicts are contemptible beings. He treats women with much more consideration, upon my honor – a consideration mingled with astonishment, for he had none of them under his control in the prison of Riom. That retreat

being destined for males only, he has not yet got accustomed to talking to members of the fair sex. The other fellow is the cashier. I defy you to make him write your name. You are just going to see."

And Gontran, addressing the man at the left, slowly said:

"Monsieur Seminois, this is my sister, Madame Andermatt, who wants to subscribe for a dozen baths."

The cashier, very tall, very thin, with a poor appearance, rose up, went into his office, which exactly faced the study of the medical inspector, opened his book, and asked:

"What name?"

"Andermatt."

"What did you say?"

"Andermatt."

"How do you spell it?"

"A-n-d-e-r-m-a-t-t."

"All right."

And he slowly wrote it down. When he had finished, Gontran asked:

"Would you kindly read over my sister's name?"

"Yes, Monsieur! Madame Anterpat."

Christiane laughed till the tears came into her eyes, paid for her tickets, and then asked:

"What is it that one hears up there?"

Gontran took her arm in his. Two angry voices reached their ears on the stairs. They went up, opened a door, and saw a large coffee-room with a billiard table in the center. Two men in their shirt-sleeves at opposite sides of the billiard-table, each with a cue in his hand, were furiously abusing one another.

"Eighteen!"

"Seventeen!"

"I tell you I'm eighteen."

"That's not true – you're only seventeen!"

It was the director of the Casino, M. Petrus Martel of the Odéon, who was playing his ordinary game with the comedian of his company, M. Lapalme of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux.

Petrus Martel, whose stomach, stout and inactive, swayed underneath his shirt above a pair of pantaloons fastened anyhow, after having been a strolling player in various places, had undertaken the directorship of the Casino of Enval, and spent his days in drinking the allowances intended for the bathers. He wore an immense mustache like a dragoon, which was steeped from morning till night in the froth of bocks and the sticky syrup of liqueurs, and he had aroused in the old comedian whom he had enlisted in his service an immoderate passion for billiards.

As soon as they got up in the morning, they proceeded to play a game, insulted and threatened one another, expunged the record, began over again, scarcely gave themselves time for breakfast, and could not tolerate two clients coming to drive them away from their green cloth.

They soon put everyone to flight, and did not find this sort of existence unpleasant, though Petrus Martel always found himself at the end of the season in a bankrupt condition.

The female attendant, overwhelmed, would have to look on all day at this endless game, listen to the interminable discussion, and carry from morning till night glasses of beer or half-glasses of brandy to the two indefatigable players.

But Gontran carried off his sister: "Come into the park. 'Tis fresher."

At the end of the establishment they suddenly perceived the orchestra under a Chinese *kiosque*. A fair-haired young man, frantically playing the violin, was conducting with movements of his head. His hair was shaking from one side to the other in the effort to keep time, and his entire torso bent forward and rose up again, swaying from left to right, like the stick of the leader of an orchestra. Facing him sat three strange-looking musicians. This was the *maestro*, Saint Landri.

He and his assistants – a pianist, whose instrument, mounted on rollers, was wheeled each morning from the vestibule of the baths to the *kiosque*; an enormous flautist, who presented the appearance of sucking a match while tickling it with his big swollen fingers, and a double-bass of consumptive aspect – produced with much fatigue this perfect imitation of a bad barrel-organ, which had astonished Christiane in the village street.

As she stopped to look at them, a gentleman saluted her brother.

"Good day, my dear Count."

"Good day, doctor."

And Gontran introduced them: "My sister – Doctor Honorat."

She could scarcely restrain her merriment at the sight of this third physician. The latter bowed and made some complimentary remark.

"I hope that Madame is not an invalid?"

"Yes – slightly."

He did not go farther with the matter, and changed the subject.

"You are aware, my dear Count, that you will shortly have one of the most interesting spectacles that could await you on your arrival in this district."

"What is it, pray, doctor?"

"Père Oriol is going to blast his hill. This is of no consequence to you, but for us it is a big event."

And he proceeded to explain. "Père Oriol – the richest peasant in this part of the country – he is known to be worth over fifty thousand francs a year – owns all the vineyards along the plain up to the outlet of Enval. Now, just as you go out from the village at the division of the valley, rises a little mountain, or rather a high knoll, and on this knoll are the best vineyards of Père Oriol. In the midst of two of them, facing the road, at two paces from the stream, stands a gigantic stone, an elevation which has impeded the cultivation and put into the shade one entire side of the field, on which it looks down. For six years, Père Oriol has every week been announcing that he was going to blast his hill; but he has never made up his mind about it.

"Every time a country boy went to be a soldier, the old man would say to him: 'When you're coming home on furlough, bring me some powder for this rock of mine.' And all the young soldiers would bring back in their knapsacks some powder that they stole for Père Oriol's rock. He has a chest full of this powder, and yet the hill has not been blasted. At last, for a week past, he has been noticed scooping out the stone, with his son, big Jacques, surnamed Colosse, which in Auvergne is pronounced 'Coloche.' This very morning they filled with powder the empty belly of the enormous rock; then they stopped up the mouth of it, only letting in the fuse bought at the tobacconist's. In two hours' time they will set fire to it. Then, five or ten minutes afterward, it will go off, for the end of the fuse is pretty long."

Christiane was interested in this narrative, amused already at the idea of this explosion, finding here again a childish sport that pleased her simple heart. They had now reached the end of the park.

"Where do you go now?" she said.

Doctor Honorat replied: "To the End of the World, Madame; that is to say, into a gorge that has no outlet and which is celebrated in Auvergne. It is one of the loveliest natural curiosities in the district."

But a bell rang behind them. Gontran cried:

"Look here! breakfast-time already!"

They turned back. A tall, young man came up to meet them.

Gontran said: "My dear Christiane, let me introduce to you M. Paul Bretigny." Then, to his friend: "This is my sister, my dear boy."

She thought him ugly. He had black hair, close-cropped and straight, big, round eyes, with an expression that was almost hard, a head also quite round, very strong, one of those heads that make you think of cannon-balls, herculean shoulders; a rather savage expression, heavy and brutish. But

from his jacket, from his linen, from his skin perhaps, came a very subtle perfume, with which the young woman was not familiar, and she asked herself:

"I wonder what odor that is?"

He said to her: "You arrived this morning, Madame?" His voice was a little hollow.

She replied: "Yes, Monsieur."

But Gontran saw the Marquis and Andermatt making signals to them to come in quickly to breakfast.

Doctor Honorat took leave of them, asking as he left whether they really meant to go and see the hill blasted. Christiane declared that she would go; and, leaning on her brother's arm, she murmured as she dragged him along toward the hotel:

"I am as hungry as a wolf. I shall be very much ashamed to eat as much as I feel inclined before your friend."

CHAPTER II. THE DISCOVERY

The breakfast was long, as the meals usually are at a *table d'hôte*. Christiane, who was not familiar with all the faces of those present, chatted with her father and her brother. Then she went up to her room to take a rest till the time for blasting the rock.

She was ready long before the hour fixed, and made the others start along with her so that they might not miss the explosion. Just outside the village, at the opening of the glen, stood, as they had heard, a high knoll, almost a mountain, which they proceeded to climb under a burning sun, following a little path through the vine-trees. When they reached the summit the young woman uttered a cry of astonishment at the sight of the immense horizon displayed before her eyes. In front of her stretched a limitless plain, which immediately gave her soul the sensation of an ocean. This plain, overhung by a veil of light blue vapor, extended as far as the most distant mountain-ridges, which were scarcely perceptible, some fifty or sixty kilometers away. And under the transparent haze of delicate fineness, which floated above this vast stretch, could be distinguished towns, villages, woods, vast yellow squares of ripe crops, vast green squares of herbage, factories with long, red chimneys and blackened steeples and sharp-pointed structures, with the solidified lava of dead volcanoes.

"Turn around," said her brother.

She turned around. And behind she saw the mountain, the huge mountain indented with craters. This was the entrance to the foundation on which Enval stood, a great expanse of greenness in which one could scarcely trace the hidden gash of the gorge. The trees in a waving mass scaled the high slope as far as the first crater and shut out the view of those beyond. But, as they were exactly on the line that separated the plains from the mountain, the latter stretched to the left toward Clermont-Ferrand, and, wandering away, unrolled over the blue sky their strange mutilated tops, like monstrous blotches – extinct volcanoes, dead volcanoes. And yonder – over yonder, between two peaks – could be seen another, higher still, more distant still, round and majestic, and bearing on its highest pinnacle something of fantastic shape resembling a ruin. This was the Puy de Dome, the king of the mountains of Auvergne, strong and unwieldy, wearing on its head, like a crown placed thereon by the mightiest of peoples, the remains of a Roman temple.

Christiane exclaimed: "Oh! how happy I shall be here!"

And she felt herself happy already, penetrated by that sense of well-being which takes possession of the flesh and the heart, makes you breathe with ease, and renders you sprightly and active when you find yourself in a spot which enchants your eyes, charms and cheers you, seems to have been awaiting you, a spot for which you feel that you were born.

Some one called out to her: "Madame, Madame!" And, at some distance away, she saw Doctor Honorat, recognizable by his big hat. He rushed across to them, and conducted the family toward the opposite side of the hill, over a grassy slope beside a grove of young trees, where already some thirty persons were waiting, strangers and peasants mingled together.

Beneath their feet, the steep hillside descended toward the Riom road, overshadowed by willows that sheltered the shallow river; and in the midst of a vineyard at the edge of this stream rose a sharp-pointed rock before which two men on bended knees seemed to be praying. This was the scene of action.

The Oriols, father and son, were attaching the fuse. On the road, a crowd of curious spectators had stationed themselves, with a line of people lower down in front, among whom village brats were scampering about.

Doctor Honorat chose a convenient place for Christiane to sit down, and there she waited with a beating heart, as if she were going to see the entire population blown up along with the rock.

The Marquis, Andermatt, and Paul Bretigny lay down on the grass at the young woman's side, while Gontran remained standing. He said, in a bantering tone:

"My dear doctor, you must be much less busy than your brother-practitioners, who apparently have not an hour to spare to attend this little *fête*?"

Honorat replied in a good-humored tone:

"I am not less busy; only my patients occupy less of my time. And again I prefer to amuse my patients rather than to physic them."

He had a quiet manner which greatly pleased Gontran. Other persons now arrived, fellow-guests at the *table d'hôte*— the ladies Paille, two widows, mother and daughter; the Monecus, father and daughter; and a very small, fat, man, who was puffing like a boiler that had burst, M. Aubry-Pasteur, an ex-engineer of mines, who had made a fortune in Russia.

M. Pasteur and the Marquis were on intimate terms. He seated himself with much difficulty after some preparatory movements, circumspect and cautious, which considerably amused Christiane. Gontran sauntered away from them, in order to have a look at the other persons whom curiosity had attracted toward the knoll.

Paul Bretigny pointed out to Christiane Andermatt the views, of which they could catch glimpses in the distance. First of all, Riom made a red patch with its row of tiles along the plain; then Ennezat, Maringues, Lezoux, a heap of villages scarcely distinguishable, which only broke the wide expanse of verdure with a somber indentation here and there, and, further down, away down below, at the base of the mountains, he pretended that he could trace out Thiers.

He said, in an animated fashion: "Look, look! Just in front of my finger, exactly in front of my finger. For my part, I can see it quite distinctly."

She could see nothing, but she was not surprised at his power of vision, for he looked like a bird of prey, with his round, piercing eyes, which appeared to be as powerful as telescopes. He went on:

"The Allier flows in front of us, in the middle of that plain, but it is impossible to perceive it. It is very far off, thirty kilometers from here."

She scarcely took the trouble to glance toward the place which he indicated, for she had riveted her eyes on the rock and given it her entire attention. She was saying to herself that presently this enormous stone would no longer exist, that it would disappear in powder, and she felt herself seized with a vague pity for the stone, the pity which a little girl would feel for a broken plaything. It had been there so long, this stone; and then it was imposing – it had a picturesque look. The two men, who had by this time risen, were heaping up pebbles at the foot of it, and digging with the rapid movements of peasants working hurriedly.

The crowd gathered along the road, increasing every moment, had pushed forward to get a better view. The brats brushed against the two diggers, and kept rushing and capering round them like young animals in a state of delight; and from the elevated point at which Christiane was sitting, these people looked quite small, a crowd of insects, an anthill in confusion.

The buzz of voices ascended, now slight, scarcely noticeable, then more lively, a confused mixture of cries and human movements, but scattered through the air, evaporated already – a dust of sounds, as it were. On the knoll likewise the crowd was swelling in numbers, incessantly arriving from the village, and covering up the slope which looked down on the condemned rock.

They were distinguished from each other, as they gathered together, according to their hotels, their classes, their castes. The most clamorous portion of the assemblage was that of the actors and musicians, presided over and generaled by the conductor, Petrus Martel of the Odéon, who, under the circumstances, had given up his incessant game of billiards.

With a Panama flapping over his forehead, a black alpaca jacket covering his shoulders and allowing his big stomach to protrude in a semicircle, for he considered a waistcoat useless in the open country, the actor, with his thick mustache, assumed the airs of a commander-in-chief, and pointed out, explained, and criticised all the movements of the two Oriols. His subordinates, the comedian

Lapalme, the young premier Petitnivelle, and the musicians, the *maestro* Saint Landri, the pianist Javel, the huge flautist Noirot, the double-bass Nicordi, gathered round him to listen. In front of them were seated three women, sheltered by three parasols, a white, a red, and a blue, which, under the sun of two o'clock, formed a strange and dazzling French flag. These were Mademoiselle Odelin, the young actress; her mother, – a mother that she had hired out, as Gontran put it, – and the female attendant of the coffee-room, three ladies who were habitual companions. The arrangement of these three parasols so as to suit the national colors was an invention of Petrus Martel, who, having noticed at the commencement of the season the blue and the white in the hands of the ladies Odelin, had made a present of the red to the coffee-room attendant.

Quite close to them, another group excited interest and observation, that of the chefs and scullions of the hotels, to the number of eight, for there was a war of rivalry between the kitchen-folk, who had attired themselves in linen jackets to make an impression on the bystanders, extending even to the scullery-maids. Standing all in a group they let the crude light of day fall on their flat white caps, presenting, at the same time, the appearance of fantastic staff-officers of lancers and a deputation of cooks.

The Marquis asked Doctor Honorat: "Where do all these people come from? I never would have imagined Enval was so thickly populated!"

"Oh! they come from all parts, from Chatel-Guyon, from Tournol, from La Roche-Pradière, from Saint-Hippolyte. For this affair has been talked of a long time in the country, and then Père Oriol is a celebrity, an important personage on account of his influence and his wealth, besides a true Auvergnat, remaining still a peasant, working himself, hoarding, piling up gold on gold, intelligent, full of ideas and plans for his children's future."

Gontran came back, excited, his eyes sparkling.

He said, in a low tone: "Paul, Paul, pray come along with me; I'm going to show you two pretty girls; yes, indeed, nice girls, you know!"

The other raised his head, and replied: "My dear fellow, I'm in very good quarters here; I'll not budge."

"You're wrong. They are charming!" Then, in a louder tone: "But the doctor is going to tell me who they are. Two little girls of eighteen or nineteen, rustic ladies, oddly dressed, with black silk dresses that have close-fitting sleeves, some kind of uniform dresses, convent-gowns – two brunettes – "

Doctor Honorat interrupted him: "That's enough. They are Père Oriol's daughters, two pretty young girls indeed, educated at the Benedictine Convent at Clermont, and sure to make very good matches. They are two types, but simply types of our race, of the fine race of women of Auvergne, Marquis. I will show you these two little lasses – "

Gontran here slyly interposed: "You are the medical adviser of the Oriol family, doctor?"

The other appreciated this sly question, and simply responded with a "By Jove, I am!" uttered in a tone of the utmost good-humor.

The young man went on: "How did you come to win the confidence of this rich patient?"

"By ordering him to drink a great deal of good wine." And he told a number of anecdotes about the Oriols. Moreover, he was distantly related to them, and had known them for a considerable time. The old fellow, the father, quite an original, was very proud of his wine; and above all he had one vine-garden, the produce of which was reserved for the use of the family, solely for the family and their guests. In certain years they happened to empty the casks filled with the growth of this aristocratic vineyard, but in other years they scarcely succeeded in doing so. About the month of May or June, when the father saw that it would be hard to drink all that was still left, he would proceed to encourage his big son, Colosse, and would repeat: "Come on, son, we must finish it." Then they would go on pouring down their throats pints of red wine from morning till night. Twenty times during every meal, the old chap would say in a grave tone, while he held the jug over his son's glass: "We must

finish it." And, as all this liquor with its mixture of alcohol heated his blood and prevented him from sleeping, he would rise up in the middle of the night, draw on his breeches, light a lantern, wake up Colosse, and off they would go to the cellar, after snatching a crust of bread each out of the cupboard, in order to steep it in their glasses, filled up again and again out of the same cask. Then, when they had swallowed so much wine that they could feel it rolling about in their stomachs, the father would tap the resounding wood of the cask to find out whether the level of the liquor had gone down.

The Marquis asked: "Are these the same people that are working at the hillock?"

"Yes, yes, exactly."

Just at that moment the two men hurried off with giant strides from the rock charged with powder, and all the crowd that surrounded them down below began to run away like a retreating army. They fled in the direction of Riom and Enval, leaving behind them by itself the huge rock on the top of the hillock covered with thin grass and pebbles, for it divided the vineyard into two sections, and its immediate surroundings had not been grubbed up yet.

The crowd assembled on the slope above, now as dense as that below, waited in trembling expectancy; and the loud voice of Petrus Martel exclaimed:

"Attention! the fuse is lit!"

Christiane shivered at the thought of what was about to happen, but the doctor murmured behind her back:

"Ho! if they left there all the fuse I saw them buying, we'll have ten minutes of it!"

All eyes were fixed on the stone, and suddenly a dog, a little black dog, a kind of pug, was seen approaching it. He ran round it, began smelling, and no doubt, discovered a suspicious odor, for he commenced yelping as loudly as ever he could, his paws stiff, the hair on his back standing on end, his tail sticking out, and his ears erect.

A burst of laughter came from the spectators, a cruel burst of laughter; people expressed a hope that he would not keep riveted to the spot up to the time of the blast. Then voices called out to him to make him come back; some men whistled to him; they tried to hit him with stones to prevent him from going on the whole way. But the pug did not budge an inch, and kept barking furiously at the rock.

Christiane began to tremble. A horrible fear of seeing the animal disemboweled took possession of her; all her enjoyment was at an end. She cried repeatedly, with nerves unstrung, stammering, vibrating all over with anguish:

"Oh! good heavens! Oh! good heavens! it will be killed. I don't want to look at it! I don't want to look at it! I will not wait to see it! Come away!"

Paul Bretigny, who had been sitting by her side, arose, and, without saying one word, began to descend toward the hillock with all the speed of which his long legs were capable.

Cries of terror escaped from many lips; a panic agitated the crowd; and the pug, seeing this big man coming toward him, took refuge behind the rock. Paul pursued him; the dog ran off to the other side; and, for a minute or two, they kept rushing round the stone, now to right, now to left, as if they were playing a game of hide and seek. Seeing at last that he could not overtake the animal, the young man proceeded to reascend the slope, and the dog, seized once more with fury, renewed his barking.

Vociferations of anger greeted the return of the imprudent youth, who was quite out of breath, for people do not forgive those who excite terror in their breasts. Christiane was suffocating with emotion, her two hands pressed against her palpitating heart. She had lost her head so completely that she sobbed: "At least you are not hurt?" while Gontran cried angrily:

"He is mad, that idiot; he never does anything but tomfooleries of this kind. I never met a greater donkey!"

But the soil was now shaking; it rose in air. A formidable detonation made the entire country all around vibrate, and for a full minute thundered over the mountain, while all the echoes repeated it, like so many cannon-shots.

Christiane saw nothing but a shower of stones falling, and a high column of light clay sinking in a heap. And immediately afterward the crowd from above rushed down like a wave, uttering wild shouts. The battalion of kitchen-drudges came racing down in the direction of the knoll, leaving behind them the regiment of theatrical performers, who descended more slowly, with Petrus Martel at their head. The three parasols forming a tricolor were nearly carried away in this descent.

And all ran, men, women, peasants, and villagers. They could be seen falling, getting up again, starting on afresh, while in long procession the two streams of people, which had till now been kept back by fear, rolled along so as to knock against one another and get mixed up on the very spot where the explosion had taken place.

"Let us wait a while," said the Marquis, "till all this curiosity is satisfied, so that we may go and look in our turn."

The engineer, M. Aubry-Pasteur, who had just arisen with very great difficulty, replied:

"For my part, I am going back to the village by the footpaths. There is nothing further to keep me here."

He shook hands, bowed, and went away.

Doctor Honorat had disappeared. The party talked about him, and the Marquis said to his son:

"You have only known him three days, and all the time you have been laughing at him. You will end by offending him."

But Gontran shrugged his shoulders: "Oh! he's a wise man, a good sceptic, that doctor. I tell you in reply that he will not bother himself. When we are both alone together, he laughs at all the world and everything, commencing with his patients and his waters. I will give you a free thermal course if you ever see him annoyed by my nonsense."

Meanwhile, there was considerable agitation further down around the site of the vanished hillock. The enormous crowd, swelling, rising up, and sinking down like billows, broke out into exclamations, manifestly swayed by some emotion, some astonishing occurrence which nobody had foreseen. Andermatt, ever eager and inquisitive, was repeating:

"What is the matter with them now? What can be the matter with them?"

Gontran announced that he was going to find out, and walked off. Christiane, who had now sunk into a state of indifference, was reflecting that if the igniting substance had been only a little shorter, it would have been sufficient to have caused the death of their foolish companion or led to his being mutilated by the blasting of the rock, and all because she was afraid of a dog losing its life. She could not help thinking that he must, indeed, be very violent and passionate – this man – to expose himself to such a risk in this way without any good reason for it – simply owing to the fact that a woman who was a stranger to him had given expression to a desire.

People could be observed running along the road toward the village. The Marquis now asked, in his turn: "What is the matter with them?" And Andermatt, unable to stand it any longer, began to run down the side of the hill. Gontran, from below, made a sign to him to come on.

Paul Bretigny asked: "Will you take my arm, Madame?" She took his arm, which seemed to her as immovable as iron, and, as her feet glided along the warm grass, she leaned on it as she would have leaned on a baluster with a sense of absolute security. Gontran, who had just come back after making inquiries, exclaimed: "It is a spring. The explosion has made a spring gush out!"

And they fell in with the crowd. Then, the two young men, Paul and Gontran, moving on in front, scattered the spectators by jostling against them, and without paying any heed to their gruntings, opened a way for Christiane and her father. They walked through a chaos of sharp stones, broken, and blackened with powder, and arrived in front of a hole full of muddy water which bubbled up and then flowed away toward the river over the feet of the bystanders. Andermatt was there already, having effected a passage through the multitude by insinuating ways peculiar to himself, as Gontran used to say, and was watching with rapt attention the water escaping through the broken soil.

Doctor Honorat, facing him at the opposite side of the hole, was observing him with an air of mingled surprise and boredom.

Andermatt said to him: "It might be desirable to taste it; it is perhaps a mineral spring."

The physician returned: "No doubt it is mineral. There are any number of mineral waters here. There will soon be more springs than invalids."

The other in reply said: "But it is necessary to taste it."

The physician displayed little or no interest in the matter: "It is necessary at least to wait till we see whether it is clean."

And everyone wanted to see. Those in the second row pushed those in front almost into the muddy water. A child fell in, and caused a laugh. The Oriols, father and son, were there, contemplating gravely this unexpected phenomenon, not knowing yet what they ought to think about it. The father was a spare man, with a long, thin frame, and a bony head – the hard head of a beardless peasant; and the son, taller still, a giant, thin also, and wearing a mustache, had the look at the same time of a trooper and a vinedresser.

The bubblings of the water appeared to increase, its volume to grow larger, and it was beginning to get clearer. A movement took place among the people, and Doctor Latonne appeared with a glass in his hand. He perspired, panted, and stood quite stupefied at the sight of his brother-physician, Doctor Honorat, with one foot planted at the side of the newly discovered spring, like a general who has been the first to enter a fortress.

He asked, breathlessly: "Have you tasted it?"

"No, I am waiting to see whether 'tis clear."

Then Doctor Latonne thrust his glass into it, and drank with that solemnity of visage which experts assume when tasting wines. After that, he exclaimed, "Excellent!" which in no way compromised him, and extending the glass toward his rival said: "Do you wish to taste it?"

But Doctor Honorat, decidedly, had no love for mineral waters, for he smilingly replied:

"Many thanks! 'Tis quite sufficient that you have appreciated it. I know the taste of them."

He did know the taste of them all, and he appreciated it, too, though in quite a different fashion. Then, turning toward Père Oriol said:

"'Tisn't as good as your excellent vine-growth."

The old man was flattered. Christiane had seen enough, and wanted to go away. Her brother and Paul once more forced a path for her through the populace. She followed them, leaning on her father's arm. Suddenly she slipped and was near falling, and glancing down at her feet she saw that she had stepped on a piece of bleeding flesh, covered with black hairs and sticky with mud. It was a portion of the pug-dog, who had been mangled by the explosion and trampled underfoot by the crowd. She felt a choking sensation, and was so much moved that she could not restrain her tears. And she murmured, as she dried her eyes with her handkerchief: "Poor little animal! poor little animal!"

She wanted to know nothing more about it. She wished to go back, to shut herself up in her room. That day, which had begun so pleasantly, had ended sadly for her. Was it an omen? Her heart, shriveling up, beat with violent palpitations. They were now alone on the road, and in front of them they saw a tall hat and the two skirts of a frock-coat flapping like wings. It was Doctor Bonnefille, who had been the last to hear the news, and who was now rushing to the spot, glass in hand, like Doctor Latonne.

When he recognized the Marquis, he drew up.

"What is this I hear, Marquis? They tell me it is a spring – a mineral spring?"

"Yes, my dear doctor."

"Abundant?"

"Why, yes."

"Is it true that – that they are there?"

Gontran replied with an air of gravity: "Why, yes, certainly; Doctor Latonne has even made the analysis already."

Then Doctor Bonnefille began to run, while Christiane, a little tickled and enlivened by his face, said:

"Well, no, I am not going back yet to the hotel. Let us go and sit down in the park."

Andermatt had remained at the site of the knoll, watching the flowing of the water.

CHAPTER III. BARGAINING

The *table d'hôte* was noisy that evening at the Hotel Splendid. The blasting of the hillock and the discovery of the new spring gave a brisk impetus to conversation. The diners were not numerous, however, – a score all told, – people usually taciturn and quiet, patients who, after having vainly tried all the well-known waters, had now turned to the new stations. At the end of the table occupied by the Ravenels and the Andermatts were, first, the Monecus, a little man with white hair and face and his daughter, a very pale, big girl, who sometimes rose up and went out in the middle of a meal, leaving her plate half full; fat M. Aubry-Pasteur, the ex-engineer; the Chaufours, a family in black, who might be met every day in the walks of the park behind a little vehicle which carried their deformed child, and the ladies Paille, mother and daughter, both of them widows, big and strong, strong everywhere, before and behind. "You may easily see," said Gontran, "that they ate up their husbands; that's how their stomachs got affected." It was, indeed, for a stomach affection that they had come to the station.

Further on, a man of extremely red complexion, brick-colored, M. Riquier, whose digestion was also very indifferent, and then other persons with bad complexions, travelers of that mute class who usually enter the dining-rooms of hotels with slow steps, the wife in front, the husband behind, bow as soon as they have passed the door, and then take their seats with a timid and modest air.

All the other end of the table was empty, although the plates and the covers were laid there for the guests of the future.

Andermatt talked in an animated fashion. He had spent the afternoon chatting with Doctor Latonne, giving vent in a flood of words to vast schemes with reference to Enval. The doctor had enumerated to him, with burning conviction, the wonderful qualities of his water, far superior to those of Chatel-Guyon, whose reputation nevertheless had been definitely established for the last ten years. Then, at the right, they had that hole of a place, Royat, at the height of success, and at the left, that other hole, Chatel-Guyon, which had lately been set afloat. What could they not do with Enval, if they knew how to set about it properly?

He said, addressing the engineer: "Yes, Monsieur, there's where it all is, to know the way to set about it. It is all a matter of skill, of tact, of opportunism, and of audacity. In order to establish a spa, it is necessary to know how to launch it, nothing more, and in order to launch it, it is necessary to interest the great medical body of Paris in the matter. I, Monsieur, always succeed in what I undertake, because I always seek the practical method, the only one that should determine success in every particular case with which I occupy myself; and, as long as I have not discovered it, I do nothing – I wait. It is not enough to have the water, it is necessary to get people to drink it; and to get people to drink it, it is not enough to get it cried up as unrivaled in the newspapers and elsewhere; it is necessary to know how to get this discreetly said by the only men who have influence on the public that will drink it, on the invalids whom we require, on the peculiarly credulous public that pays for drugs – in short, by the physicians. You can only address a Court of Justice through the mouths of advocates; it will only hear them, and understands only them. So you can only address the patient through the doctors – he listens only to them."

The Marquis, who greatly admired the practical common sense of his son-in-law, exclaimed: "Ah! how true this is! Apart from this, my dear boy, you are unique for giving the right touch."

Andermatt, who was excited, went on: "There is a fortune to be made here. The country is admirable, the climate excellent. One thing alone disturbs my mind – would we have water enough for a large establishment? – for things that are only half done always miscarry. We would require a very large establishment, and consequently a great deal of water, enough of water to supply two

hundred baths at the same time, with a rapid and continuous current; and the new spring added to the old one, would not supply fifty, whatever Doctor Latonne may say about it – "

M. Aubry-Pasteur interrupted him. "Oh! as for water, I will give you as much as you want of it." Andermatt was stupefied. "You?"

"Yes, I. That astonishes you? Let me explain myself. Last year, I was here about the same time as this year, for I really find myself improved by the Enval baths. Now one morning, I lay asleep in my own room, when a stout gentleman arrived. He was the president of the governing body of the establishment. He was in a state of great agitation, and the cause of it was this: the Bonnefille Spring had lowered so much that there were some apprehensions lest it might entirely disappear. Knowing that I was a mining engineer, he had come to ask me if I could not find a means of saving the establishment.

"I accordingly set about studying the geological system of the country. You know that in each stratum of the soil original disturbances have led to different changes and conditions in the surface of the ground. The question, therefore, was to discover how the mineral water came – by what fissures – and what were the direction, the origin, and the nature of these fissures. I first inspected the establishment with great care, and, noticing in a corner an old disused pipe of a bath, I observed that it was already almost stopped up with limestone. Now the water, by depositing the salts which it contained on the coatings of the ducts, had rapidly led to an obstruction of the passage. It would inevitably happen likewise in the natural passages in the soil, this soil being granitic. So it was that the Bonnefille Spring had stopped up. Nothing more. It was necessary to get at it again farther on.

"Most people would have searched above its original point of egress. As for me, after a month of study, observation, and reasoning, I sought for and found it fifty meters lower down. And this was the explanation of the matter: I told you before that it was first necessary to determine the origin, nature, and direction of the fissures in the granite which enabled the water to spring forth. It was easy for me to satisfy myself that these fissures ran from the plain toward the mountain and not from the mountain toward the plain, inclined like a roof undoubtedly, in consequence of a depression of this plain which in breaking up had carried along with it the primitive buttresses of the mountains. Accordingly, the water, in place of descending, rose up again between the different interstices of the granitic layers. And I then discovered the cause of this unexpected phenomenon.

"Formerly the Limagne, that vast expanse of sandy and argillaceous soil, of which you can scarcely see the limits, was on a level with the first table-land of the mountains; but owing to the geological character of its lower portions, it subsided, so as to tear away the edge of the mountain, as I explained to you a moment ago. Now this immense sinking produced, at the point of separating the earth and the granite, an immense barrier of clay of great depth and impenetrable by liquids. And this is what happens: The mineral water comes from the beds of old volcanoes. That which comes from the greatest distance gets cooled on its way, and rises up perfectly cold like ordinary springs; that which comes from the volcanic beds that are nearer gushes up still warm, at varying degrees of heat, according to the distance of the subterranean fire.

"Here is the course it pursues. It is expelled from some unknown depths, up to the moment when it meets the clay barrier of the Limagne. Not being able to pass through it, and pushed on by enormous pressure, it seeks a vent. Finding then the inclined gaps of granite, it gets in there, and reascends to the point at which they reach the level of the soil. Then, resuming its original direction, it again proceeds to flow toward the plain along the ordinary bed of the streams. I may add that we do not see the hundredth part of the mineral waters of these glens. We can only discover those whose point of egress is open. As for the others, arriving as they do at the side of the fissures in the granite under a thick layer of vegetable and cultivated soil, they are lost in the earth, which absorbs them.

"From this I draw the conclusion: first, that to have the water, it is sufficient to search by following the inclination and the direction of the superimposed strips of granite; secondly, that in order to preserve it, it is enough to prevent the fissures from being stopped up by calcareous deposits,

that is to say, to maintain carefully the little artificial wells by digging; thirdly, that in order to obtain the adjoining spring, it is necessary to get at it by means of a practical sounding as far as the same fissure of granite below, and not above, it being well understood that you must place yourself at the side of the barrier of clay which forces the waters to reascend. From this point of view, the spring discovered to-day is admirably situated only some meters away from this barrier. If you want to set up a new establishment, it is here you should erect it."

When he ceased speaking, there was an interval of silence.

Andermatt, ravished, said merely: "That's it! When you see the curtain drawn, the entire mystery vanishes. You are a most valuable man, M. Aubry-Pasteur."

Besides him, the Marquis and Paul Bretigny alone had understood what he was talking about. Gontran had not heard a single word. The others, with their ears and mouths open, while the engineer was talking, were simply stupefied with amazement. The ladies Paille especially, being very religious women, asked themselves if this explanation of a phenomenon ordained by God and accomplished by mysterious means had not in it something profane. The mother thought she ought to say: "Providence is very wonderful." The ladies seated at the center of the table conveyed their approval by nods of the head, disturbed also by listening to these unintelligible remarks.

M. Riquier, the brick-colored man, observed: "They may well come from volcanoes or from the moon, these Enval waters – here have I been taking them ten days, and as yet I experience no effect from them!"

M. and Madame Chaufour protested in the name of their child, who was beginning to move the right leg, a thing that had not happened during the six years they had been nursing him.

Riquier replied: "That proves, by Jove, that we have not the same ailment; it doesn't prove that the Enval water cures affections of the stomach." He seemed in a rage, exasperated by this fresh, useless experiment.

But M. Monecu also spoke in the name of his daughter, declaring that for the last eight days she was beginning to be able to retain food without being obliged to go out at every meal. And his big daughter blushed, with her nose in her plate. The ladies Paille likewise thought they had improved.

Then Riquier was vexed, and abruptly turning toward the two women said:

"Your stomachs are affected, Mesdames."

They replied together: "Why, yes, Monsieur. We can digest nothing."

He nearly leaped out of his chair, stammering: "You – you! Why, 'tis enough to look at you. Your stomachs are affected, Mesdames. That is to say, you eat too much."

Madame Paille, the mother, became very angry, and she retorted: "As for you, Monsieur, there is no doubt about it, you exhibit certainly the appearance of persons whose stomachs are destroyed. It has been well said that good stomachs make nice men."

A very thin, old lady, whose name was not known, said authoritatively: "I am sure everyone would find the waters of Enval better if the hotel chef would only bear in mind a little that he is cooking for invalids. Truly, he sends us up things that it is impossible to digest."

And suddenly the entire table agreed on the point, and indignation was expressed against the hotel-keeper, who served them with crayfish, porksteaks, salt eels, cabbage, yes, cabbage and sausages, all the most indigestible kinds of food in the world for persons for whom Doctors Bonnefille, Latonne, and Honorat had prescribed only white meats, lean and tender, fresh vegetables, and milk diet.

Riquier was shaking with fury: "Why should not the physicians inspect the table at thermal stations without leaving such an important thing as the selection of nutriment to the judgment of a brute? Thus, every day, they give us hard eggs, anchovies, and ham as side-dishes – "

M. Monecu interrupted him: "Oh! excuse me! My daughter can digest nothing well except ham, which, moreover has been prescribed for her by Mas-Roussel and Remusot."

Riquier exclaimed: "Ham! ham! why, that's poison, Monsieur."

And an interminable argument arose, which each day was taken up afresh, as to the classification of foods. Milk itself was discussed with passionate warmth. Riquier could not drink a glass of claret and milk without immediately suffering from indigestion.

Aubry-Pasteur, in answer to his remarks, irritated in his turn, observed that people questioned the properties of things which he adored:

"Why, gracious goodness, Monsieur, if you were attacked with dyspepsia and I with gastralgia, we would require food as different as the glass of the spectacles that suits short-sighted and long-sighted people, both of whom, however, have diseased eyes."

He added: "For my part I begin to choke when I swallow a glass of red wine, and I believe there is nothing worse for man than wine. All water-drinkers live a hundred years, while we – "

Gontran replied with a laugh: "Faith, without wine and without marriage, I would find life monotonous enough."

The ladies Paille lowered their eyes. They drank a considerable quantity of Bordeaux of the best quality without any water in it, and their double widowhood seemed to indicate that they had applied the same treatment to their husbands, the daughter being twenty-two and the mother scarcely forty.

But Andermatt, usually so chatty, remained taciturn and thoughtful. He suddenly asked Gontran: "Do you know where the Oriols live?"

"Yes, their house was pointed out to me a little while ago."

"Could you bring me there after dinner?"

"Certainly. It will even give me pleasure to accompany you. I shall not be sorry to have another look at the two lassies."

And, as soon as dinner was over, they went off, while Christiane, who was tired, went up with the Marquis and Paul Bretigny to spend the rest of the day in the drawing-room.

It was still broad daylight, for they dine early at thermal stations.

Andermatt took his brother-in-law's arm.

"My dear Gontran, if this old man is reasonable, and if the analysis realizes Doctor Latonne's expectations, I am probably going to try a big stroke of business here – a spa. I am going to start a spa!"

He stopped in the middle of the street, and seized his companion by both sides of his jacket.

"Ha! you don't understand, fellows like you, how amusing business is, not the business of merchants or traders, but big undertakings such as we go in for! Yes, my boy, when they are properly understood, we find in them everything that men care for – they cover, at the same time, politics, war, diplomacy, everything, everything! It is necessary to be always searching, finding, inventing, to understand everything, to foresee everything, to combine everything, to dare everything. The great battle to-day is being fought by means of money. For my part, I see in the hundred-sou pieces raw recruits in red breeches, in the twenty-franc pieces very glittering lieutenants, captains in the notes for a hundred francs, and in those for a thousand I see generals. And I fight, by heavens! I fight from morning till night against all the world, with all the world. And this is how to live, how to live on a big scale, just as the mighty lived in days of yore. We are the mighty of to-day – there you are – the only true mighty ones!

"Stop, look at that village, that poor village! I will make a town of it, yes, I will, a lovely town full of big hotels which will be filled with visitors, with elevators, with servants, with carriages, a crowd of rich folk served by a crowd of poor; and all this because it pleased me one evening to fight with Royat, which is at the right, with Chatel-Guyon, which is at the left, with Mont Doré, La Bourboule, Châteauneuf, Saint Nectaire, which are behind us, with Vichy, which is facing us. And I shall succeed because I have the means, the only means. I have seen it in one glance, just as a great general sees the weak side of an enemy. It is necessary too to know how to lead men, in our line of business, both to carry them along with us and to subjugate them.

"Good God! life becomes amusing when you can do such things. I have now three years of pleasure to look forward to with this town of mine. And then see what a chance it is to find this

engineer, who told us such interesting things at dinner, most interesting things, my dear fellow. It is as clear as day, my system. Thanks to it, I can smash the old company, without even having any necessity of buying it up."

He then resumed his walk, and they quietly went up the road to the left in the direction of Chatel-Guyon.

Gontran presently observed: "When I am walking by my brother-in-law's side, I feel that the same noise disturbs his brain as that heard in the gambling rooms at Monte Carlo – that noise of gold moved about, shuffled, drawn away, raked off, lost or gained."

Andermatt did, indeed, suggest the idea of a strange human machine, constructed only for the purpose of calculating and debating about money, and mentally manipulating it. Moreover, he exhibited much vanity about his special knowledge of the world, and plumed himself on his power of estimating at one glance of his eye the actual value of anything whatever. Accordingly, he might be seen, wherever he happened to be, every moment taking up an article, examining it, turning it round, and declaring: "This is worth so much."

His wife and his brother-in-law, diverted by this mania, used to amuse themselves by deceiving him, exhibiting to him queer pieces of furniture and asking him to estimate them; and when he remained perplexed, at the sight of their unexpected finds, they would both burst out laughing like fools. Sometimes also, in the street at Paris, Gontran would stop in front of a warehouse and force him to make a calculation of an entire shop-window, or perhaps of a horse with a jolting vehicle, or else again of a luggage-van laden with household goods.

One evening, while seated at his sister's dinner-table before fashionable guests, he called on William to tell him what would be the approximate value of the Obelisk; then, when the other happened to name some figure, he would put the same question as to the Solferino Bridge, and the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile. And he gravely concluded: "You might write a very interesting work on the valuation of the principal monuments of the globe." Andermatt never got angry, and fell in with all his pleasantries, like a superior man sure of himself.

Gontran having asked one day: "And I – how much am I worth?" William declined to answer; then, as his brother-in-law persisted, saying: "Look here! If I should be captured by brigands, how much would you give to release me?" he replied at last: "Well, well, my dear fellow, I would give a bill." And his smile said so much that the other, a little disconcerted, did not press the matter further.

Andermatt, besides, was fond of artistic objects, and having fine taste and appreciating such things thoroughly, he skillfully collected them with that bloodhound's scent which he carried into all commercial transactions.

They had arrived in front of a house of a middle-class type. Gontran stopped him and said: "Here it is." An iron knocker hung over a heavy oaken door; they knocked, and a lean servant-maid came to open it.

The banker asked: "Monsieur Oriol?"

The woman said: "Come in."

They entered a kitchen, a big farm-kitchen, in which a little fire was still burning under a pot; then they were ushered into another part of the house, where the Oriol family was assembled.

The father was asleep, seated on one chair with his feet on another. The son, with both elbows on the table, was reading the "Petit Journal" with the spasmodic efforts of a feeble intellect always wandering; and the two girls, in the recess of the same window, were working at the same piece of tapestry, having begun it one at each end.

They were the first to rise, both at the same moment, astonished at this unexpected visit; then, big Jacques raised his head, a head congested by the pressure of his brain; then, at last, Père Oriol waked up, and took down his long legs from the second chair one after the other.

The room was bare, with whitewashed walls, a stone flooring, and furniture consisting of straw seats, a mahogany chest of drawers, four engravings by Epinal with glass over them, and big white

curtains. They were all staring at each other, and the servant-maid, with her petticoat raised up to her knees, was waiting at the door, riveted to the spot by curiosity.

Andermatt introduced himself, mentioning his name as well as that of his brother-in-law, Count de Ravenel, made a low bow to the two young girls, bending his head with extreme politeness, and then calmly seated himself, adding:

"Monsieur Oriol, I came to talk to you about a matter of business. Moreover, I will not take four roads to explain myself. See here. You have just discovered a spring on your property. The analysis of this water is to be made in a few days. If it is of no value, you will understand that I will have nothing to do with it; if, on the contrary, it fulfills my anticipations, I propose to buy from you this piece of ground, and all the lands around it. Think on this. No other person but myself could make you such an offer. The old company is nearly bankrupt; it will not, therefore, have the least notion of building a new establishment, and the ill success of this enterprise will not encourage fresh attempts. Don't give me an answer to-day. Consult your family. When the analysis is known you will fix your price. If it suits me, I will say 'yes'; if it does not suit me, I will say 'no.' I never haggle for my part."

The peasant, a man of business in his own way, and sharp as anyone could be, courteously replied that he would see about it, that he felt honored, that he would think it over – and then he offered them a glass of wine.

Andermatt made no objection, and, as the day was declining, Oriol said to his daughters, who had resumed their work, with their eyes lowered over the piece of tapestry: "Let us have some light, girls."

They both got up together, passed into an adjoining room, then came back, one carrying two lighted wax-candles, the other four wineglasses without stems, glasses such as the poor use. The wax-candles were fresh looking and were garnished with red paper – placed, no doubt, by way of ornament on the young girl's mantelpiece.

Then, Colosse rose up; for only the male members of the family visited the cellar. Andermatt had an idea. "It would give me great pleasure to see your cellar. You are the principal vinedresser of the district, and it must be a very fine one."

Oriol, touched to the heart, hastened to conduct them, and, taking up one of the wax-candles, led the way. They had to pass through the kitchen again, then they got into a court where the remnant of daylight that was left enabled them to discern empty casks standing on end, big stones of giant granite in a corner pierced with a hole in the middle, like the wheels of some antique car of colossal size, a dismounted winepress with wooden screws, its brown divisions rendered smooth by wear and tear, and glittering suddenly in the light thrown by the candle on the shadows that surrounded it. Close to it, the working implements of polished steel on the ground had the glitter of arms used in warfare. All these things gradually grew more distinct, as the old man drew nearer to them with the candle in his hand, making a shade of the other.

Already they got the smell of the wine, the pounded grapes drained dry. They arrived in front of a door fastened with two locks. Oriol opened it, and quickly raising the candle above his head vaguely pointed toward a long succession of barrels standing in a row, and having on their swelling flanks a second line of smaller casks. He showed them first of all that this cellar, all on one floor, sank right into the mountain, then he explained the contents of its different casks, the ages, the nature of the various vine-crops, and their merits; then, having reached the supply reserved for the family, he caressed the cask with his hand just as one might rub the crupper of a favorite horse, and in a proud tone said:

"You are going to taste this. There's not a wine bottled equal to it – not one, either at Bordeaux or elsewhere."

For he possessed the intense passion of countrymen for wine kept in a cask.

Colosse followed him, carrying a jug, stooped down, turned the cock of the funnel, while his father cautiously held the light for him, as though he were accomplishing some difficult task requiring

minute attention. The candle's flame fell directly on their faces, the father's head like that of an old attorney, and the son's like that of a peasant soldier.

Andermatt murmured in Gontran's ear: "Hey, what a fine Teniers!"

The young man replied in a whisper: "I prefer the girls."

Then they went back into the house. It was necessary, it seemed, to drink this wine, to drink a great deal of it, in order to please the two Oriols.

The lassies had come across to the table where they continued their work as if there had been no visitors. Gontran kept incessantly staring at them, asking himself whether they were twins, so closely did they resemble one another. One of them, however, was plumper and smaller, while the other was more ladylike. Their hair, dark-brown rather than black, drawn over their temples in smooth bands, gleamed with every slight movement of their heads. They had the rather heavy jaw and forehead peculiar to the people of Auvergne, cheek-bones somewhat strongly marked, but charming mouths, ravishing eyes, with brows of rare neatness, and delightfully fresh complexions. One felt, on looking at them, that they had not been brought up in this house, but in a select boarding-school, in the convent to which the daughters of the aristocracy of Auvergne are sent, and that they had acquired there the well-bred manners of cultivated young ladies.

Meanwhile, Gontran, seized with disgust before this red glass in front of him, pressed Andermatt's foot to induce him to leave. At length he rose, and they both energetically grasped the hands of the two peasants; then they bowed once more ceremoniously, the young girls each responding with a slight nod, without again rising from their seats.

As soon as they had reached the village, Andermatt began talking again.

"Hey, my dear boy, what an odd family! How manifest here is the transition from people in good society. A son's services are required to cultivate the vine so as to save the wages of a laborer, – stupid economy, – however, he discharges this function, and is one of the people. As for the girls, they are like girls of the better class – almost quite so already. Let them only make good matches, and they would pass as well as any of the women of our own class, and even much better than most of them. I am as much gratified at seeing these people as a geologist would be at finding an animal of the tertiary period."

Gontran asked: "Which do you prefer?"

"Which? How, which? Which what?"

"Of the lassies?"

"Oh! upon my honor, I haven't an idea on the subject. I have not looked at them from the standpoint of comparison. But what difference can this make to you? You have no intention to carry off one of them?"

Gontran began to laugh: "Oh! no, but I am delighted to meet for once fresh women, really fresh, fresh as women never are with us. I like looking at them, just as you like looking at a Teniers. There is nothing pleases me so much as looking at a pretty girl, no matter where, no matter of what class. These are my objects of vertu. I don't collect them, but I admire them – I admire them passionately, artistically, my friend, in the spirit of a convinced and disinterested artist. What would you have? I love this! By the bye, could you lend me five thousand francs?"

The other stopped, and murmured an "Again!" energetically.

Gontran replied, with an air of simplicity: "Always!" Then they resumed their walk.

Andermatt then said: "What the devil do you do with the money?"

"I spend it."

"Yes, but you spend it to excess."

"My dear friend, I like spending money as much as you like making it. Do you understand?"

"Very fine, but you don't make it."

"That's true. I know it. One can't have everything. You know how to make it, and, upon my word, you don't at all know how to spend it. Money appears to you no use except to get interest on it."

I, on the other hand, don't know how to make it, but I know thoroughly how to spend it. It procures me a thousand things of which you don't know the name. We were cut out for brothers-in-law. We complete one another admirably."

Andermatt murmured: "What stuff! No, you sha'n't have five thousand francs, but I'll lend you fifteen hundred francs, because – because in a few days I shall, perhaps, have need of you."

Gontran rejoined: "Then I accept them on account." The other gave him a slap on the shoulder without saying anything by way of answer.

They reached the park, which was illuminated with lamps hung to the branches of the trees. The orchestra of the Casino was playing in slow time a classical piece that seemed to stagger along, full of breaks and silences, executed by the same four performers, exhausted with constant playing, morning and evening, in this solitude for the benefit of the leaves and the brook, with trying to produce the effect of twenty instruments, and tired also of never being fully paid at the end of the month. Petrus Martel always completed their remuneration, when it fell short, with hampers of wine or pints of liqueurs which the bathers might have left unconsumed.

Amid the noise of the concert could also be distinguished that of the billiard-table, the clicking of the balls and the voices calling out: "Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two."

Andermatt and Gontran went in. M. Aubry-Pasteur and Doctor Honorat, by themselves, were drinking their coffee, at the side facing the musicians. Petrus Martel and Lapalme were playing their game with desperation; and the female attendant woke up to ask:

"What do these gentlemen wish to take?"

CHAPTER IV. A TEST AND AN AVOWAL

Père Oriol and his son had remained for a long time chatting after the girls had gone to bed. Stirred up and excited by Andermatt's proposal, they were considering how they could inflame his desire more effectually without compromising their own interests. Like the cautious, practically-minded peasants that they were, they weighed all the chances carefully, understanding very clearly that in a country in which mineral springs gushed out along all the streams, it was not advisable to repel by an exaggerated demand this unexpected enthusiast, the like of whom they might never find again. And at the same time it would not do either to leave entirely in his hands this spring, which might, some day, yield a flood of liquid money, Royat and Chatel-Guyon serving as a precedent for them.

Therefore, they asked themselves by what course of action they could kindle into frenzy the banker's ardor; they conjured up combinations of imaginary companies covering his offers, a succession of clumsy schemes, the defects of which they felt, without succeeding in inventing more ingenious ones. They slept badly; then, in the morning, the father, having awakened first, thought in his own mind that the spring might have disappeared during the night. It was possible, after all, that it might have gone as it had come, and re-entered the earth, so that it could not be brought back. He got up in a state of unrest, seized with avaricious fear, shook his son, and told him about his alarm; and big Colosse, dragging his legs out of his coarse sheets, dressed himself in order to go out with his father, to make sure about the matter.

In any case, they would put the field and the spring in proper trim themselves, would carry off the stones, and make it nice and clean, like an animal that they wanted to sell. So they took their picks and their spades, and started for the spot side by side with great, swinging strides.

They looked at nothing as they walked on, their minds being preoccupied with the business, replying with only a single word to the "Good morning" of the neighbors and friends whom they chanced to meet. When they reached the Riom road they began to get agitated, peering into the distance to see whether they could observe the water bubbling up and glittering in the morning sun. The road was empty, white, and dusty, the river running beside it sheltered by willow-trees. Beneath one of the trees Oriol suddenly noticed two feet, then, having advanced three steps further, he recognized Père Clovis seated at the edge of the road, with his crutches lying beside him on the grass.

This was an old paralytic, well known in the district, where for the last ten years he had prowled about on his supports of stout oak, as he said himself, like a poor man made of stone.

Formerly a poacher in the woods and streams, often arrested and imprisoned, he had got rheumatic pains by his long watchings stretched on the moist grass and by his nocturnal fishings in the rivers, through which he used to wade up to his middle in water. Now he whined, and crawled about, like a crab that had lost its claws. He stumped along, dragging his right leg after him like a piece of ragged cloth. But the boys of the neighborhood, who used in foggy weather to run after the girls or the hares, declared that they used to meet Père Clovis, swift-footed as a stag, and supple as an adder, under the bushes and in the glades, and that, in short, his rheumatism was only "a dodge on the gendarmes." Colosse, especially, insisted on maintaining that he had seen him, not once, but fifty times, straining his neck with his crutches under his arms.

And Père Oriol stopped in front of the old vagabond, his mind possessed by an idea which as yet was undefined, for the brain works slowly in the thick skulls of Auvergne. He said "Good morning" to him. The other responded "Good morning." Then they spoke about the weather, the ripening of the vine, and two or three other things; but, as Colosse had gone ahead, his father with long steps hastened to overtake him.

The spring was still flowing, clear by this time, and all the bottom of the hole was red, a fine, dark red, which had arisen from an abundant deposit of iron. The two men gazed at it with smiling faces, then they proceeded to clear the soil that surrounded it, and to carry off the stones of which they made a heap. And, having found the last remains of the dead dog, they buried them with jocose remarks. But all of a sudden Père Oriol let his spade fall. A roguish leer of delight and triumph wrinkled the corners of his leathery lips and the edges of his cunning eyes, and he said to his son: "Come on, till we see."

The other obeyed. They got on the road once more, and retraced their steps. Père Clovis was still toasting his limbs and his crutches in the sun.

Oriol, drawing up before him, asked: "Do you want to earn a hundred-franc piece?"

The other cautiously refrained from answering.

The peasant said: "Hey! a hundred francs?"

Thereupon the vagabond made up his mind, and murmured: "Of course, but what am I asked to do?"

"Well, father, here's what I want you to do."

And he explained to the other at great length with tricky circumlocutions, easily understood hints, and innumerable repetitions, that, if he would consent to take a bath for an hour every day from ten to eleven in a hole which they, Colosse and he, intended to dig at the side of the spring, and to be cured at the end of a month, they would give him a hundred francs in cash.

The paralytic listened with a stupid air, and then said: "Since all the drugs haven't been able to help me, 'tisn't your water that'll cure me."

But Colosse suddenly got into a passion. "Come, my old play-actor, you're talking rubbish. I know what your disease is – don't tell me about it! What were you doing on Monday last in the Comberombe wood at eleven o'clock at night?"

The old fellow promptly answered: "That's not true."

But Colosse, firing up: "Isn't it true, you old blackguard, that you jumped over the ditch to Jean Cannezat and that you made your way along the Paulin chasm?"

The other energetically repeated: "It is not true!"

"Isn't it true that I called out to you: 'Oho, Clovis, the gendarmes!' and that you turned up the Moulinet road?"

"No, it is not."

Big Jacques, raging, almost menacing, exclaimed: "Ah! it's not true! Well, old three paws, listen! The next time I see you there in the wood at night or else in the water, I'll take a grip of you, as my legs are rather longer than your own, and I'll tie you up to some tree till morning, when we'll go and take you away, the whole village together –"

Père Oriol stopped his son; then, in a very wheedling tone: "Listen, Clovis! you can easily do the thing. We prepare a bath for you, Coloche and myself. You come there every day for a month. For that I give you, not one hundred, but two hundred francs. And then, listen! if you're cured at the end of the month, it will mean five hundred francs more. Understand clearly, five hundred in ready money, and two hundred more – that makes seven hundred. Therefore you get two hundred for taking a bath for a month and five hundred more for the curing. And listen again! Suppose the pains come back. If this happens you in the autumn, there will be nothing more for us to do, for the water will have none the less produced its effect!"

The old fellow coolly replied: "In that case I'm quite willing. If it won't succeed, we'll always see it." And the three men pressed one another's hands to seal the bargain they had concluded. Then, the two Oriols returned to their spring, in order to dig the bath for Père Clovis.

They had been working at it for a quarter of an hour, when they heard voices on the road. It was Andermatt and Doctor Latonne. The two peasants winked at one another, and ceased digging the soil.

The banker came across to them, and grasped their hands; then the entire four proceeded to fix their eyes on the water without uttering a word. It stirred about like water set in movement above a big fire, threw out bubbles and steam, then it flowed away in the direction of the brook through a tiny gutter which it had already traced out. Oriol, with a smile of pride on his lips, said suddenly: "Hey, that's iron, isn't it?"

In fact the bottom was now all red, and even the little pebbles which it washed as it flowed along seemed covered with a sort of purple mold.

Doctor Latonne replied: "Yes, but that is nothing to the purpose. We would require to know its other qualities."

The peasant observed: "Coloche and myself first drank a glass of it yesterday evening, and it has already made our bodies feel fresh. Isn't that true, son?"

The big youth replied in a tone of conviction: "Sure enough, it was very refreshing."

Andermatt remained motionless, his feet on the edge of the hole. He turned toward the physician: "We would want nearly six times this volume of water for what I would wish to do, would we not?"

"Yes, nearly."

"Do you think that we'll be able to get it?"

"Oh! as for me, I know nothing about it."

"See here! The purchase of the grounds can only be definitely effected after the soundings. It would be necessary, first of all, to have a promise of sale drawn up by a notary, once the analysis is known, but not to take effect unless the consecutive soundings give the results hoped for."

Père Oriol became restless. He did not understand. Andermatt thereupon explained to him the insufficiency of only one spring, and demonstrated to him that he could not purchase unless he found others. But he could not search for these other springs till after the signature of a promise of sale.

The two peasants appeared forthwith to be convinced that their fields contained as many springs as vine-stalks. It would be sufficient to dig for them – they would see, they would see.

Andermatt said simply: "Yes, we shall see."

But Père Oriol dipped his fingers in the water, and remarked: "Why, 'tis hot enough to boil an egg, much hotter than the Bonnefille one!"

Latonne in his turn steeped his fingers in it, and realized that this was possible.

The peasant went on: "And then it has more taste and a better taste; it hasn't a false taste, like the other. Oh! this one, I'll answer for it, is good! I know the waters of the country for the fifty years that I've seen them flowing. I never seen a finer one than this, never, never!"

He remained silent for a few seconds, and then continued: "It is not in order to puff the water that I say this! – certainly not. I would like to make a trial of it before you, a fair trial, not what your chemists make, but a trial of it on a person who has a disease. I'll bet that it will cure a paralytic, this one, so hot is it and so good to taste – I'll make a bet on it!"

He appeared to be searching his brain, then cast a look at the tops of the neighboring mountains to see whether he could discover the paralytic that he required. Not having made the discovery, he lowered his eyes to the road.

Two hundred meters away from it, at the side of the road could be distinguished the two inert legs of the vagabond, whose body was hidden by the trunk of a willow tree.

Oriol placed his hand on his forehead as a shade, and said questioningly to his son: "That isn't Père Clovis over there still?"

Colosse laughingly replied: "Yes, yes. 'Tis he – he doesn't go as quick as a hare."

Then Oriol stepped over to Andermatt's side, and with an air of serious and deep conviction: "Look here, Monchieu! Listen to me. There's a paralytic over yonder, who is well known to the doctor, a genuine one, who hasn't been seen to make a single step for the last ten years. Isn't that so, doctor?"

Latonne returned: "Oh! if you cure that fellow, I would pay a franc a glass for your water!"

Then, turning toward Andermatt: "'Tis an old fellow suffering from rheumatic gout with a sort of spasmodic contraction of the left leg and a complete paralysis of the right; in fact, I believe, an incurable."

Oriol had allowed him to talk; he resumed in a deliberate fashion: "Well, doctor, would you like to make a trial of it on him for a month? I don't say that it will succeed, – I say nothing on the matter, – I only ask to have a trial made. Hold on! Coloche and myself are going to dig a hole for the stones – well, we'll make a hole for Cloviche; he'll remain an hour there every morning, and then we'll see – there! – we'll see."

The physician murmured: "You may try. I answer confidently that you will not succeed."

But Andermatt, beguiled by the prospect of an almost miraculous cure, gladly fell in with the peasant's suggestion; and the entire four directed their steps toward the vagabond, who, all this time, had been lying motionless in the sun. The old poacher, understanding the dodge, pretended to refuse, resisted for a long time, then allowed himself to be persuaded, on the condition that Andermatt would give him two francs a day for the hour which he would spend in the water.

So the matter was settled. It was even decided that, as soon as the hole was dug, Père Clovis should take his bath that very day. Andermatt would supply him with clothes to dress himself afterward, and the two Oriols would bring him a disused shepherd's hut, which was lying in their yard, so that the invalid might shut himself in there, and change his apparel.

Then the banker and the physician returned to the village. When they reached it, they parted, the doctor going to his own house for his consultations, and Andermatt hurrying to attend on his wife, who had to come to the establishment at half past nine o'clock.

She appeared almost immediately, dressed from head to foot in pink – with a pink hat, a pink parasol, and a pink complexion, she looked like an aurora, and she descended the steps of the hotel to avoid the turn of the road with the hopping movements of a bird, as it goes from stone to stone, without opening its wing. As soon as she saw her husband, she exclaimed:

"Oh! what a pretty country it is! I am quite delighted with it."

A few bathers wandering sadly through the little park in silence turned round as she passed by, and Petrus Martel, who was smoking his pipe in his shirt-sleeves at the window of the billiard-room, called to his chum, Lapalme, sitting in a corner before a glass of white wine, and said, smacking the roof of his mouth with his tongue:

"Deuce take it, there's something sweet!"

Christiane made her way into the establishment, bowed smilingly toward the cashier, who sat at the left of the entrance-door, and saluted the ex-jailer seated at the right with a "Good morning"; then, holding out a ticket to a bath-attendant dressed like the girl in the refreshment-room, followed her into a corridor facing the doors of the bath-rooms. The lady was shown into one of them, rather large, with bare walls, furnished with a chair, a glass, and a shoe-horn, while a large oval orifice, coated, like the floor, with yellow cement, served the purposes of a bath.

The woman turned a cock like those used for making the street-gutters flow, and the water gushed through a little round grated aperture at the bottom of the bath so that it was soon full to the brim, and its overflow was diverted through a furrow sunk into the wall.

Christiane, having left her chambermaid at the hotel, declined the attendant's services in undressing, and remained there alone, saying that if she required anything, she would ring, and would do the same when she wanted her linen.

She slowly disrobed, watching as she did so the almost invisible movement of the wave gently stirring on the clear surface of the basin. When she had divested herself of all her clothing she dipped her foot in, and the pleasant warm sensation mounted to her throat; then she plunged into the tepid water first one leg, and after it the other, and sat down in the midst of this caressing heat, in this transparent bath, in this spring, which flowed over her, around her, covering her body with tiny globules all along her legs, all along her arms, and also all over her breasts. She noticed with surprise

those particles of air innumerable and minute which clothed her from head to foot with an entire mail-suit of little pearls. And these pearls, so minute, flew off incessantly from her white flesh, and evaporated on the surface of the bath, driven on by others that sprung to life over her form. They sprung up over her skin, like light fruits incapable of being grasped yet charming, the fruits of this exquisite body rosy and fresh, which had generated those pearls in the water.

And Christiane felt herself so happy in it, so sweetly, so softly, so deliciously caressed and clasped by the restless wave, the living wave, the animated wave from the spring which gushed up from the depths of the basin under her legs and fled through the little opening toward the edge of the bath, that she would have liked to have remained there forever, without moving, almost without thinking. The sensation of a calm delight composed of rest and comfort, of tranquil dreamfulness, of health, of discreet joy, and silent gaiety, entered into her with the soothing warmth of this. And her spirit mused, vaguely lulled into repose by the gurgling of the overflow which was escaping – dreamed of what she would be doing by and by, of what she would be doing to-morrow, of promenades, of her father, of her husband, of her brother, and of that big boy who had made her feel slightly ill at ease since the adventure of the dog. She did not care for persons of violent tendencies.

No desire agitated her soul, calm as her heart in this grateful moist warmth, no desires save the shadowy hopes of a child, no desire of any other life, of emotion, or passion. She felt that it was well with her, and she was satisfied with the happiness of her lot.

She was suddenly startled – the door flew open; it was the Auvergnat carrying the linen. Twenty minutes had passed; it was already time for her to be dressed. It was almost a pang, almost a calamity, this awakening; she felt a longing to beg of the woman to give her a few minutes more; then she reflected that every day she would find again the same delight, and she regretfully left the bath to be wrapped in a white dressing-gown whose scorching heat felt somewhat unpleasant.

Just as she was going out, Doctor Bonnefille opened the door of his consultation-room and invited her to enter, bowing ceremoniously. He inquired about her health, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, took note of her appetite and her digestion, asked her how she slept, and then accompanied her to the door, repeating:

"Come, come, that's right, that's right. My respects, if you please, to your father, one of the most distinguished men that I have met in my career."

At last, she got away, bored by these undesirable attentions, and at the door she saw the Marquis chatting with Andermatt, Gontran, and Paul Bretigny. Her husband, in whose head every new idea was continually buzzing, like a fly in a bottle, was relating the story of the paralytic, and wanted to go back to see whether the vagabond was taking his bath. They were about to go with him to the spot in order to please him. But Christiane very gently detained her brother, and, when they were a short distance away from the others:

"Tell me now! I wanted to talk to you about your friend; I must say I don't much care for him. Explain to me exactly what he is like."

And Gontran, who had known Paul for many years, told her about this passionate nature, uncouth, sincere, and kindly by starts. He was, according to Gontran, a clever young fellow, whose wild spirit impetuously flung itself into every new idea. Yielding to every impulse, unable to control or to direct his passions, or to fight against his feelings with the aid of reason, or to govern his life by a system based on settled convictions, he obeyed the promptings of his heart, whether they were virtuous or vicious, the moment that any desire, any thought, any emotion whatever, agitated his excitable nature.

He had already fought seven duels, as ready to insult people as to become their friend. He had been madly in love with women of every class, adored them with the same transports from the working-girl whom he picked up in the corner of some store to the actress whom he carried off, yes, carried off, on the night of a first performance, just as she was stepping into a vehicle on her way

home, bearing her away in his arms in the midst of the astonished spectators, and pushing her into a carriage, which disappeared at a gallop before anyone could follow it or overtake it.

And Gontran concluded: "There you are! He is a good fellow, but a fool; very rich, moreover, and capable of anything, of anything at all, when he loses his head."

Christiane said: "What a strange perfume he carries about him! It is rather nice. What is it?"

Gontran answered: "I don't really know; he doesn't want to tell about it. I believe it comes from Russia. 'Tis the actress, his actress, she whom I cured him of this time, that gave it to him. Yes, indeed, it has a very pleasant odor."

They saw, on their way, a group of bathers and of peasants, for it was the custom every morning before breakfast to take a turn along the road.

Christiane and Gontran joined the Marquis, Andermatt, and Paul, and soon they beheld, in the place where the knoll had stood the day before, a queer-looking human head covered with a ragged felt hat, and wearing a big white beard, looking as if it had sprung up out of the ground, the head of a decapitated man, as it were, growing there like a plant. Around it, some vinedressers were looking on, amazed, impassive, the peasantry of Auvergne not being scoffers, while three tall gentlemen, visitors at second-class hotels, were laughing and joking.

Oriol and his son stood there contemplating the vagabond, who was steeped in his hole, sitting on a stone, with the water up to his chin. He might have been taken for a desperate criminal of olden times condemned to death for some unusual kind of sorcery; and he had not let go his crutches, which were by his sides in the water.

Andermatt kept repeating enthusiastically: "Bravo! bravo! there's an example which all the people in the country suffering from rheumatic pains should imitate."

And, bending toward the old man, he shouted at him as if he were deaf: "Do you feel well?"

The other, who seemed completely stupefied by this boiling water, replied: "It seems to me that I'm melting!"

But Père Oriol exclaimed: "The hotter it is, the more good it will do you."

A voice behind the Marquis said: "What is that?"

And M. Aubry-Pasteur, always puffing, stopped on his way back from his daily walk. Then Andermatt explained his experiment in curing. But the old man kept repeating: "Devil take it! how hot it is!" And he wanted to get out, asking some one to help him up. The banker succeeded eventually in calming him by promising him twenty sous more for each bath. The spectators formed a circle round the hole, in which the dirty, grayish rags were soaking wherewith this old body was covered.

A voice said: "Nice meat for broth! I wouldn't care to make soup of it!"

Another rejoined: "The meat would scarcely agree with me!"

But the Marquis observed that the bubbles of carbonic acid seemed more numerous, larger, and brighter in this new spring than in that of the baths.

The vagabond's rags were covered with them; and these bubbles rose to the surface in such abundance that the water appeared to be crossed by innumerable little chains, by an infinity of beads of exceedingly small, round diamonds, the strong midday sun making them as clear as brilliants.

Then Aubry-Pasteur burst out laughing: "Egad," said he, "I must tell you what they do at the establishment. You know they catch a spring like a bird in a kind of snare, or rather in a bell. That's what they call coaxing it. Now last year here is what happened to the spring that supplies the baths. The carbonic acid, lighter than water, was stored up to the top of the bell; then, when it was collected there in a very large quantity, it was driven back into the ducts, reascended in abundance into the baths, filled up the compartments, and all but suffocated the invalids. We have had three accidents in the course of three months. Then they consulted me again, and I invented a very simple apparatus consisting of two pipes which led off separately the liquid and the gas in the bell in order to combine them afresh immediately under the bath, and thus to reconstitute the water in its normal state while avoiding the dangerous excess of carbonic acid. But my apparatus would have cost a thousand francs.

Do you know what the custodian does then? I give you a thousand guesses to find out. He bores a hole in the bell to get rid of the gas, which flies out, you understand, so that they sell you acidulated baths without any acid, or so little acid that it is not worth much. Whereas here, why just look!"

Everybody became indignant. They no longer laughed, and they cast envious looks toward the paralytic. Every bather would gladly have seized a pickax to make another hole beside that of the vagabond. But Andermatt took the engineer's arm, and they went off chatting together. From time to time Aubry-Pasteur stopped, made a show of drawing lines with his walking-stick, indicating certain points, and the banker wrote down notes in a memorandum-book.

Christiane and Paul Bretigny entered into conversation. He told her about his journey to Auvergne, and all that he had seen and experienced. He loved the country, with those warm instincts of his, with which always mingled an element of animality. He had a sensual love of nature because it excited his blood, and made his nerves and organs quiver. He said: "For my part, Madame, it seems to me as if I were open, so that everything enters into me, everything passes through me, makes me weep or gnash my teeth. Look here! when I cast a glance at that hillside facing us, that vast expanse of green, that race of trees clambering up the mountain, I feel the entire wood in my eyes; it penetrates me, takes possession of me, runs through my whole frame; and it seems to me also that I am devouring it, that it fills my being – I become a wood myself!"

He laughed, while he told her this, strained his big, round eyes, now on the wood, now on Christiane; and she, surprised, astonished, but easily impressed, felt herself devoured also, like the wood, by his great avid glance.

Paul went on: "And if you only knew what delights I owe to my sense of smell. I drink in this air through my nostrils. I become intoxicated with it; I live in it, and I feel that there is within it everything – absolutely everything. What can be sweeter? It intoxicates one more than wine; wine intoxicates the mind, but perfume intoxicates the imagination. With perfume you taste the very essence, the pure essence of things and of the universe – you taste the flowers, the trees, the grass of the fields; you can even distinguish the soul of the dwellings of olden days which sleep in the old furniture, the old carpets, the old curtains. Listen! I am going to tell you something.

"Did you notice, when first you came here, a delicious odor, to which no other odor can be compared – so fine, so light, that it seems almost – how shall I express it? – an immaterial odor? You find it everywhere – you can seize it nowhere – you cannot discern where it comes from. Never, never has anything more divine than it arisen in my heart. Well, this is the odor of the vine in bloom. Ah! it has taken me four days to discover it. And is it not charming to think, Madame, that the vine-tree, which gives us wine, wine which only superior spirits can understand and relish, gives us, too, the most delicate and most exciting of perfumes, which only persons of the most refined sensibility can discover? And then do you recognize also the powerful smell of the chestnut-trees, the luscious savor of the acacias, the aroma of the mountains, and the grass, whose scent is so sweet, so sweet – sweeter than anyone imagines?"

She listened to these words of his in amazement, not that they were surprising so much as that they appeared so different in their nature from everything encompassing her every day. Her mind remained possessed, moved, and disturbed by them.

He kept talking uninterruptedly in a voice somewhat hollow but full of passion.

"And again, just think, do you not feel in the air, along the roads, when the day is hot, a slight savor of vanilla. Yes, am I not right? Well, that is – that is – but I dare not tell it to you!"

And now he broke into a great laugh, and waving his hand in front of him all of a sudden said: "Look there!"

A row of wagons laden with hay was coming up drawn by cows yoked in pairs. The slow-footed beasts, with their heads hung down, bent by the yoke, their horns fastened with pieces of wood, toiled painfully along; and under their skin, as it rose up and down, the bones of their legs could be seen moving. Before each team, a man in shirt-sleeves, waistcoat, and black hat, was walking with a switch

in his hand, directing the pace of the animals. From time to time the driver would turn round, and, without ever hitting, would barely touch the shoulder or the forehead of a cow who would blink her big, wandering eyes, and obey the motion of his arm.

Christiane and Paul drew up to let them pass.

He said to her: "Do you feel it?"

She was amazed: "What then? That is the smell of the stable."

"Yes, it is the smell of the stable; and all these cows going along the roads – for they use no horses in this part of the country – scatter on their way that odor of the stable, which, mingled with the fine dust, gives to the wind a savor of vanilla."

Christiane, somewhat disgusted, murmured: "Oh!"

He went on: "Excuse me, at that moment, I was analyzing it like a chemist. In any case, we are, Madame, in the most seductive country, the most delightful, the most restful, that I have ever seen – a country of the golden age. And the Limagne – oh! the Limagne! But I must not talk to you about it; I want to show it to you. You shall see for yourself."

The Marquis and Gontran came up to them. The Marquis passed his arm under that of his daughter, and, making her turn round and retrace her steps, in order to get back to the hotel for breakfast, he said:

"Listen, young people! this concerns you all three. William, who goes mad when an idea comes into his head, dreams of nothing any longer but of building this new town of his, and he wants to win over to him the Oriol family. He is, therefore, anxious that Christiane should make the acquaintance of the two young girls, in order to see if they are 'possible.' But it is not necessary that the father should suspect our ruse. So I have got an idea; it is to organize a charitable *fête*

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