

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE MYSTERIES OF
PARIS, VOLUME 1 OF 6

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	15
CHAPTER IV	23
CHAPTER V	29
CHAPTER VI	33
CHAPTER VII	37
CHAPTER VIII	40
CHAPTER IX	45
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	47

Eugène Sue

The Mysteries of Paris, Volume 1 of 6

CHAPTER I

THE TAPIS-FRANC.¹

It was on a cold and rainy night, towards the end of October, 1838, that a tall and powerful man, with an old broad-brimmed straw hat upon his head, and clad in a blue cotton carter's frock, which hung loosely over trousers of the same material, crossed the Pont au Change, and darted with a hasty step into the Cité, that labyrinth of obscure, narrow, and winding streets which extends from the Palais de Justice to Notre Dame.

Although limited in space, and carefully watched, this quarter serves as the lurking-place, or rendezvous, of a vast number of the very dregs of society in Paris, who flock to the *tapis-franc*. This word, in the slang of theft and murder, signifies a drinking-shop of the lowest class. A returned convict, who, in this foul phraseology, is called an "ogre," or a woman in the same degraded state, who is termed an "ogress," generally keep such "cribs," frequented by the refuse of the Parisian population; freed felons, thieves, and assassins are there familiar guests. If a crime is committed, it is here, in this filthy sewer, that the police throws its cast-net, and rarely fails to catch the criminals it seeks to take.

On the night in question, the wind howled fiercely in the dark and dirty gullies of the Cité; the blinking and uncertain light of the lamps which swung to and fro in the sudden gusts were dimly reflected in pools of black slush, which flowed abundantly in the midst of the filthy pavement.

The murky-coloured houses, which were lighted within by a few panes of glass in the worm-eaten casements, overhung each other so closely that the eaves of each almost touched its opposite neighbour, so narrow were the streets. Dark and noisome alleys led to staircases still more black and foul, and so perpendicular that they could hardly be ascended by the help of a cord fixed to the dank and humid walls by holdfasts of iron.

Stalls of charcoal-sellers, fruit-sellers, or venders of refuse meat occupied the ground floor of some of these wretched abodes. Notwithstanding the small value of their commodities, the fronts of nearly all these shops were protected by strong bars of iron, – a proof that the shopkeepers knew and dreaded the gentry who infested the vicinity.

The man of whom we have spoken, having entered the Rue aux Fêves, which is in the centre of the Cité, slackened his pace: he felt he was on his own soil. The night was dark, and strong gusts of wind, mingled with rain, dashed against the walls. Ten o'clock struck by the distant dial of the Palais de Justice. Women were huddled together under the vaulted arches, deep and dark, like caverns; some hummed popular airs in a low key; others conversed together in whispers; whilst some, dumb and motionless, looked on mechanically at the wet, which fell and flowed in torrents. The man in the carter's frock, stopping suddenly before one of these creatures, silent and sad as she gazed, seized her by the arm, and said, "Ha! good evening, La Goualeuse."²

The girl receded, saying, in a faint and fearful tone, "Good evening, Chourineur."³ Don't hurt me."

This man, a liberated convict, had been so named at the hulks.

"Now I have you," said the fellow; "you must pay me the glass of 'tape' (*eau d'aff*), or I'll make you dance without music," he added, with a hoarse and brutal laugh.

¹ *Tapis-franc*: literally, a "free carpet;" a low haunt equivalent to what in English slang is termed "a boozing ken."

² Sweet-throated: in reference to the tone of her voice.

³ One who strikes with the knife; the stabber, or slasher.

"Oh, Heaven! I have no money," replied Goualeuse, trembling from head to foot, for this man was the dread of the district.

"If you're stumped, the ogress of the *tapis-franc* will give you tick for your pretty face."

"She won't; I already owe her for the clothes I'm wearing."

"What, you want to shirk it?" shouted the Chourineur, darting after La Goualeuse, who had hid herself in a gully as murky as midnight.

"Now, then, my lady, I've got you!" said the vagabond, after groping about for a few moments, and grasping in one of his coarse and powerful hands a slim and delicate wrist; "and now for the dance I promised you."

"No, it is *you* who shall dance!" was uttered by a masculine and deep voice.

"A man! Is't you, Bras Rouge? Speak, why don't you? and don't squeeze so hard. I am here in the entrance to your 'ken,' and you it must be."

"'Tis not Bras Rouge!" said the voice.

"Oh! isn't it? Well, then, if it is not a friend, why, here goes at you," exclaimed the Chourineur. "But whose bit of a hand is it I have got hold of? It must be a woman's!"

"It is the fellow to this," responded the voice.

And under the delicate skin of this hand, which grasped his throat with sudden ferocity, the Chourineur felt himself held by nerves of iron. The Goualeuse, who had sought refuge in this alley, and lightly ascended a few steps, paused for an instant, and said to her unknown defender, "Thanks, sir, for having taken my part. The Chourineur said he would strike me because I could not pay for his glass of brandy; but I think he only jested. Now I am safe, pray let him go. Take care of yourself, for he is the Chourineur."

"If he be the Chourineur, I am a bully boy who never knuckles down," exclaimed the unknown.

All was then silent for a moment, and then were heard for several seconds, in the midst of the pitchy darkness, sounds of a fierce struggle.

"Who the devil is this?" then said the ruffian, making a desperate effort to free himself from his adversary, whose extraordinary power astonished him. "Now, then, now you shall pay both for La Goualeuse and yourself!" he shouted, grinding his teeth.

"Pay! yes, I will pay you, but it shall be with my fists; and it shall be cash in full," replied the unknown.

"If," said the Chourineur, in a stifled voice, "you do but let go my neckcloth, I will bite your nose off."

"My nose is too small, my lad, and you haven't light enough to see it."

"Come under the 'hanging glim'⁴ there."

"That I will," replied the unknown, "for then we may look into the whites of each other's eyes."

He then made a desperate rush at the Chourineur, whom he still held by the throat, and forced him to the end of the alley, and then thrust him violently into the street, which was but dimly lighted by the suspended street-lamp. The bandit stumbled; but, rapidly recovering his feet, he threw himself furiously upon the unknown, whose slim and graceful form appeared to belie the possession of the irresistible strength he had displayed. After a struggle of a few minutes, the Chourineur, although of athletic build, and a first-rate champion in a species of pugilism vulgarly termed the *savate*, found that he had got what they call his master. The unknown threw him twice with immense dexterity, by what is called, in wrestling, the leg-pass, or crook. Unwilling, however, to acknowledge the superiority of his adversary, the Chourineur, boiling with rage, returned again to the charge. Then the defender of La Goualeuse, suddenly altering his mode of attack, rained on the head and face of the bandit a shower of blows with his closed fist, as hard and heavy as if stricken by a steel gauntlet. These blows, worthy of the admiration of Jem Belcher, Dutch Sam, Tom Cribb, or any other celebrated English

⁴ Under the lamp, called *reverbère*.

pugilist, were so entirely different from the system of the *savate*, that the Chourineur dropped like an ox on the pavement, exclaiming, as he fell, "I'm floored!" (*Mon linge est lavé!*)

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* Have pity on him!" exclaimed La Goualeuse, who, during the contest, had ventured on the threshold of the alley, adding, with an air of astonishment, "But who are you, then? Except the Schoolmaster and Skeleton, there is no one, from the Rue Saint Eloi to Notre Dame, who can stand against the Chourineur. I thank you very, very much, sir, for, indeed, I fear that, without your aid, he would have beaten me."

The unknown, instead of replying, listened with much attention to the voice of this girl. Perhaps a tone more gentle, sweet, and silvery never fell on human ear. He endeavoured to examine the features of La Goualeuse; but the night was too dark, and the beams of the street-lamp too flickering and feeble. After remaining for some minutes quite motionless, the Chourineur shook his legs and arms, and then partly rose from the ground.

"Pray be on your guard!" exclaimed the Goualeuse, retreating again into the dark passage, and taking her champion by the arm; "take care, or he will have his revenge on you."

"Don't be frightened, my child; if he has not had enough, I have more ready for him."

The brigand heard these words.

"Thanks," he murmured; "I'm half throttled, and one eye is closed, – that is quite enough for one day. Some other time, perhaps, when we may meet again –"

"What! not content yet, – grumbling still?" said the unknown, with a menacing tone.

"No, no, – not at all; I do not grumble in the least. You have regularly served me out, – you are a lad of mettle," said the Chourineur, in a coarse tone, but still with that sort of deference which physical superiority always finds in persons of his grade. "You are the better man, that's clear. Well, except the Skeleton, who seems to have bones of iron, he is so thin and powerful, and the Schoolmaster, who could eat three Herculesees for his breakfast, no man living could boast of having put his foot on my neck."

"Well, and what then?"

"Why, now I have found my master, that's all; you will find yours some day sooner or later, – everybody does. One thing, however, is certain; now that you are a better man than the Chourineur, you may 'go your length' in the Cité. All the women will be your slaves; ogres and ogresses will give you credit, if it is only for fear; you may be a king in your way! But who and what are you? You 'patter flash' like a family man! If you are a 'prig' I'll have nothing to do with you. I have used the knife, it is true, because, when the blood comes into my eyes, I see *red*, and I must strike, in spite of myself; but I have paid for my slashing, by going to the hulks for fifteen years. My time is up, and I am free from surveillance. I can now live in the capital, without fear of the 'beaks;' and I have never prigged, – have I, La Goualeuse?"

"No, he was never a thief," said the girl.

"Come along, then, and let us have a glass of something together, and I'll tell you who I am," said the unknown. "Come, don't let us bear malice."

"Bear malice! Devil a bit! You are master, – I confess it. You do know how to handle your fists; I never knew anything like it. Thunder and lightning! how your thumps fell on my sconce, – I never felt anything like it. Yours is a new game, and you must teach it to me."

"I will recommence whenever you like."

"Not on me, though, thank ye, – not on me," exclaimed the Chourineur, laughing; "your blows fell as if from a sledge-hammer; I am still giddy from them. But do you know Bras Rouge, in whose passage you were?"

"Bras Rouge?" said the unknown, who appeared disagreeably surprised at the question; adding, however, with an indifferent air, "I do not know Bras Rouge. Is he the only person who inhabits this abode? It rained in torrents, and I took shelter in the alley. You meant to beat this poor girl, and I have thrashed you, – that's all."

"You're right; I have nothing to do with your affairs. Bras Rouge has a room here, but does not occupy it often. He is usually at his *estaminet* in the Champs Elysées. But what's the good of talking about him?" Then turning to the Goualeuse, "On my word, you are a good wench, and I would not have beaten you; you know I would not harm a child, – it was only my joke. Never mind; it was very good of you not to set on this friend of yours against me when I was down, and at his mercy. Come and drink with us; he pays for all. By the way, my trump," said he to the unknown, "what say you, instead of going to tipple, shall we go and have a crust for supper with the ogress at the White Rabbit? It is a *tapis-franc*."

"With all my heart. I will pay for the supper. You'll come with us, Goualeuse?" inquired the unknown.

"Thanks, sir," she replied, "but, after having seen your struggle, it has made my heart beat so that I have no appetite."

"Pooh! pooh! one shoulder of mutton pokes the other down," said the Chourineur; "the cookery at the White Rabbit is first-rate."

The three personages then, in perfect amity, bent their steps together towards the tavern.

During the contest between the Chourineur and the unknown, a charcoal-seller, of huge size, ensconced in another passage, had contemplated with much anxiety the progress of the combat, but without attempting to offer the slightest assistance to either antagonist. When the unknown, the Chourineur, and the Goualeuse proceeded to the public-house, the charcoal-man followed them.

The beaten man and the Goualeuse first entered the *tapis-franc*; the unknown was following, when the charcoal-man accosted him, and said, in a low voice, in the German language, and in a most respectful tone of remonstrance, "Pray, your highness, be on your guard."

The unknown shrugged his shoulders, and rejoined his new companion. The charcoal-dealer did not leave the door of the cabaret, but listened attentively, and gazed from time to time through a small hole which had been accidentally made in the thick coat of whitening, with which the windows of such haunts as these are usually covered on the inside.

CHAPTER II

THE OGRESS

The White Rabbit is situated in the centre of the Rue aux Fèves. This tavern occupies the ground floor of a lofty house, the front of which is formed by two windows, which are styled "a guillotine." Hanging from the front of the door leading to a dark and arched passage, was an oblong lamp, on the cracked panes of which were written, in red letters, "Nightly Lodgings Here."

The Chourineur, the unknown, and the Goualeuse entered into a large but low apartment, with the ceiling smoked, and crossed by black rafters, just visible by the flickering light of a miserable suspended lamp. The cracked walls, formerly covered with plaster, were now ornamented in places with coarse drawings, or sentences of flash and obscenity.

The floor, composed of earth beaten together with saltpetre, was thick with dirt; an armful of straw – an apology for a carpet – was placed at the foot of the ogress's counter, which was at the right hand of the door, just beneath the dim lantern.

On each side of this room there were six tables, one end of each of which was nailed to the wall, as well as the benches on either side of them. At the farther end was a door leading to a kitchen; on the right, near the counter, was a passage which led into a den where persons slept for the night at three halfpence a head.

A few words will describe the ogress and her guests. The lady was called Mother Ponisse; her triple trade consisted in letting furnished apartments, keeping a public-house, and *lending* clothes to the miserable creatures who infest these foul streets.

The ogress was about forty years of age, bulky, fat, and heavy. She had a full colour, and strong symptoms of a beard. Her deep voice, her enormous arms, and coarse hands betokened uncommon strength. She wore on her cap a large red and yellow handkerchief; a shawl of rabbit-skin was crossed over her bosom, and tied behind; her woollen gown fell upon black wooden shoes, scorched almost black by the small stove at which she warmed her feet; and, to crown her beauty, she had a copper complexion, which the use of strong liquors had materially tended to heighten.

The counter, covered with lead, was decked with jugs with iron hoops, and various pewter measures. In an open cupboard, fastened to the wall, there were several flasks of glass, so fashioned as to represent the pedestrian figure of the Emperor. These bottles contained sundry cordials, red and green in colour, and known by the names of "Drops for the Brave," "Ratafia of the Column," etc., etc.

A large black cat, with green eyes, was sitting near the ogress, and seemed the familiar demon of the place. Then, in strange contrast, a holy branch of boxwood, bought at church by the ogress, was suspended at the back of an old cuckoo clock.

Two marvellously ill-favoured fellows, with unshaven beards, and their garb all in tatters, hardly tasted of the pitcher of wine before them, and conversed together in low voices, and with uneasy aspect. One of the two, very pale and livid, pulled, from time to time, his shabby skull-cap over his brows, and concealed as much as possible his left hand, and, even when compelled to use it, he did so with caution.

Further on there was a young man, hardly sixteen years of age, with beardless chin, and a countenance wan, wrinkled, and heavy, his eye dull, and his long black hair straggling down his neck. This youthful rake, the emblem of precocious vice, was smoking a short black pipe. His back was resting against the wall, and his two hands were in the pockets of his blouse, and his legs stretched along the bench. He did not cease smoking for a moment, unless it was to drink from a cannikin of brandy placed before him.

The other inmates of the *tapis-franc*, men and women, presented no remarkable characteristics. There was the ferocious or embruted face, – the vulgar and licentious mirth; but from time to time

there was a deep and dull silence. Such were the guests of the *tapis-franc* when the unknown, the Chourineur, and the Goualeuse entered.

These three persons play such important parts in our recital, that we must put them in relief.

The Chourineur was a man of lofty stature and athletic make, with hair of a pale brown, nearly white; thick eyebrows, and enormous whiskers of deep red. The sun's rays, misery, and the severe toil of the galleys had bronzed his skin to that deep and olive hue which is peculiar to convicts. In spite of his horrible nickname, his features did not express ferocity, but a sort of coarse familiarity and irrepressible audacity. We have said already that the Chourineur was clothed in trousers and frock of blue cotton, and on his head he had one of those large straw hats usually worn by workmen in timber-yards, and barge-emptiers.

The Goualeuse was, perhaps, about sixteen and a half years old. A forehead, of the purest and whitest, surmounted a face of perfect oval and angel-like expression; a fringe of eyelids, so long that they curled slightly, half veiled her large blue eyes, which had a melancholy expression. The down of early youth graced cheeks lightly coloured with a scarlet tinge. Her small and rosy mouth, which hardly ever smiled, her nose, straight, and delicately chiselled, her rounded chin, had, in their combined expression, a nobility and a sweetness such as we can only find in the most beautiful of Raphael's portraits. On each side of her fair temples was a band of hair, of the most splendid auburn hue, which descended in luxuriant ringlets half way down her cheeks, and was then turned back behind the ear, a portion of which – ivory shaded with carnation – was thus visible, and was then lost under the close folds of a large cotton handkerchief, with blue checks, tied, as it is called, *en marmotte*. Her graceful neck, of dazzling whiteness, was encircled by a small necklace of grains of coral. Her gown, of brown stuff, though much too large, could not conceal a charming form, supple and round as a cane; a worn-out small orange-coloured shawl, with green fringe, was crossed over her bosom.

The lovely voice of the Goualeuse had made a strong impression on her unknown defender, and, in sooth, that voice, so gentle, so deliciously modulated and harmonious, had an attraction so irresistible that the horde of villains and abandoned women, in the midst of whom this unfortunate girl lived, often begged her to sing, and listened to her with rapture.

The Goualeuse had another name, given, doubtless, to the maiden sweetness of her countenance, – she was also called Fleur-de-Marie.

The defender of La Goualeuse (we shall call the unknown Rodolph) appeared about thirty-six years of age; his figure, tall, graceful, and admirably proportioned, yet did not betoken the astonishing vigour which he had displayed in his rencounter with the Chourineur.

It would have been difficult to assign a decided character to the physiognomy of Rodolph. Certain wrinkles in his forehead betokened a man of meditation; and yet the firm expression of his mouth, the dignified and bold carriage of the head, assured us of the man of action, whose physical strength and presence of mind would always command an ascendancy over the multitude.

In his struggle with the Chourineur, Rodolph had neither betrayed anger nor hatred. Confident in his own strength, his address, and agility, he had only shown a contempt for the brute beast which he subdued.

We will finish this bodily picture of Rodolph by saying that his features, regularly handsome, seemed too beautiful for a man. His eyes were large, and of a deep hazel, his nose aquiline, his chin rather projecting, his hair bright chestnut, of the same shade as his eyebrows, which were strongly arched, and his small moustache, which was fine and silky. Thanks to the manners and the language which he assumed with so much ease, Rodolph was exactly like the other guests of the ogress. Round his graceful neck, as elegantly modelled as that of the Indian Bacchus, he wore a black cravat, carelessly tied, the ends of which fell on the collar of his blue blouse. A double row of nails decorated his heavy shoes, and, except that his hands were of most aristocratic shape, nothing distinguished him from the other guests of the *tapis-franc*; though, in a moral sense, his resolute air, and what we may term his bold serenity, placed an immense distance between them.

On entering the *tapis-franc*, the Chourineur, laying one of his heavy hands on the shoulders of Rodolph, cried, "Hail the conqueror of the Chourineur! Yes, my boys, this springald has floored me; and if any young gentleman wishes to have his ribs smashed, or his 'nob in Chancery,' even including the Schoolmaster and the Skeleton, here is their man; I will answer for him, and back him!"

At these words, all present, from the ogress to the lowest ruffian of the *tapis-franc*, contemplated the victor of the Chourineur with respect and fear. Some, moving their glasses and jugs to the end of the table at which they were seated, offered Rodolph a seat, if he were inclined to sit near them; others approached the Chourineur, and asked him, in a low voice, for the particulars of this unknown, who had made his entrance into their world in so striking a manner.

Then the ogress, accosting Rodolph with one of her most gracious smiles, – a thing unheard of, and almost deemed fabulous, in the annals of the White Rabbit, – rose from the bar to take the orders of her guest, and know what he desired to have for the refreshment of his party, – an attention which she did not evince either to the Schoolmaster or the Skeleton, two fearful ruffians, who made even the Chourineur tremble.

One of the men with the villainous aspect, whom we have before described as being very pale, hiding his left hand, and continually pulling his cap over his brows, leaned towards the ogress, who was carefully wiping the table where Rodolph had taken his seat, and said to her, in a hoarse tone, "Hasn't the Gros-Boiteux been here to-day?"

"No," said Mother Ponisse.

"Nor yesterday?"

"Yes, he came yesterday."

"Was Calebasse with him, – the daughter of Martial, who was guillotined? You know whom I mean, – the Martials of the Ile de Ravageur?"

"What! do you take me for a spy, with your questions? Do you think I watch my customers?" said the ogress, in a brutal tone.

"I have an appointment to-night with the Gros-Boiteux and the Schoolmaster," replied the fellow; "we have some business together."

"That's your affair, – a set of ruffians, as you are, altogether."

"Ruffians!" said the man, much incensed; "it is such ruffians you get your living by."

"Will you hold your jaw?" said the Amazon, with a threatening gesture, and lifting, as she spoke, the pitcher she held in her hand.

The man resumed his place, grumbling as he did so.

"The Gros-Boiteux has, perhaps, stayed to give that young fellow Germain, who lives in the Rue du Temple, his gruel," said he, to his companion.

"What, do they mean to *do* for him?"

"No, not quite, but to make him more careful in future. It appears he has 'blown the gaff' in the job at Nantes, so Bras Rouge declares."

"Why, that is Gros-Boiteux's affair; he has only just left prison, and has his hands full already."

Fleur-de-Marie had followed the Chourineur into the tavern of the ogress, and he, responding to a nod given to him by the young scamp with the jaded aspect, said, "Ah, Barbillon! what, pulling away at the old stuff?"

"Yes; I would rather fast, and go barefoot any day, than be without my drops for my throttle, and the weed for my pipe," said the rascal, in a thick, low, hoarse voice, without moving from his seat, and puffing out volumes of tobacco-smoke.

"Good evening, Fleur-de-Marie," said the ogress, looking with a prying eye on the clothes of the poor girl, – clothes which she had lent her. After her scrutiny, she said, in a tone of coarse satisfaction, "It's really a pleasure – so it is – to lend one's good clothes to you; you are as clean as a kitten, or else I would never have trusted you with that shawl. Such a beauty as that orange one is, I would never have trusted it to such gals as Tourneuse and Boulotte; but I have taken every care *on* you ever since

you came here six weeks ago; and, if the truth must be said, there is not a tidier nor more nicer girl than you in all the Cité; that there ain't; though you be al'ays so sad like, and too particular."

The Goualeuse sighed, turned her head, and said nothing.

"Why, mother," said Rodolph to the old hag, "you have got some holy boxwood, I see, over your cuckoo," and he pointed with his finger to the consecrated bough behind the old clock.

"Why, you heathen, would you have us live like dogs?" replied the ogress. Then addressing Fleur-de-Marie, she added, "Come, now, Goualeuse, tip us one of your pretty little ditties" (*goualantes*).

"Supper, supper first, Mother Ponisse," said the Chourineur.

"Well, my lad of wax, what can I do for you?" said the ogress to Rodolph, whose good-will she was desirous to conciliate, and whose support she might, perchance, require.

"Ask the Chourineur; he orders, I pay."

"Well, then," said the ogress, turning to the bandit, "what will you have for supper, you 'bad lot?'"

"Two quarts of the best wine, at twelve sous, three crusts of wheaten bread, and a harlequin,"⁵ said the Chourineur, after considering for a few moments what he should order.

"Ah! you are a dainty dog, I know, and as fond as ever of them harlequins."

"Well, now, Goualeuse," said the Chourineur, "are you hungry?"

"No, Chourineur."

"Would you like anything better than a harlequin, my lass?" said Rodolph.

"No, I thank you; I have no appetite."

"Come, now," said the Chourineur, with a brutal grin, "look my master in the face like a jolly wench. You have no objection, I suppose?"

The poor girl blushed, and did not look at Rodolph. A few moments afterwards, and the ogress herself placed on the table a pitcher of wine, bread, and a harlequin, of which we will not attempt to give an idea to the reader, but which appeared most relishing to the Chourineur; for he exclaimed, "*Dieu de Dieu!* what a dish! What a glorious dish! It is a regular omnibus; there is something in it to everybody's taste. Those who like fat can have it; so can they who like lean; as well as those who prefer sugar, and those who choose pepper. There's tender bits of chicken, biscuit, sausage, tarts, mutton-bones, pastry crust, fried fish, vegetables, woodcock's heads, cheese, and salad. Come, eat, Goualeuse, eat; it is so capital! You have been to a wedding breakfast somewhere this morning."

"No more than on other mornings. I ate this morning, as usual, my ha'porth of milk, and my ha'porth of bread."

The entrance of another personage into the cabaret interrupted all conversation for a moment, and everybody turned his head in the direction of the newcomer, who was a middle-aged man, active and powerful, wearing a loose coat and cap. He was evidently quite at home in the *tapis-franc*, and, in language familiar to all the guests, requested to be supplied with supper. He was so placed that he could observe the two ill-looking scoundrels who had asked after Gros-Boiteux and the Schoolmaster. He did not take his eyes off them; but in consequence of their position, they could not see that they were the objects of such marked and constant attention.

The conversation, momentarily interrupted, was resumed. In spite of his natural audacity, the Chourineur showed a deference for Rodolph, and abstained from familiarity.

"By Jove," said he to Rodolph, "although I have smarted for it, yet I am very glad to have met with you."

"What! because you relish the harlequin?"

⁵ A "harlequin" is a collection of odds and ends of fish, flesh, and fowl, after they come from table, which the Parisian, providing for the class to which the Chourineur belongs, finds a profitable and popular composition.

"Why, may be so; but more because I am all on the fret to see you 'serve out' the Schoolmaster. To see him who has always crowed over me, crowed over in his turn would do me good."

"Do you suppose, then, that for your amusement I mean to spring at the Schoolmaster, and pin him like a bull-dog?"

"No, but he'll have at you in a moment, when he learns that you are a better man than he," replied the Chourineur, rubbing his hands.

"Well, I have coin enough left to pay him in full," said Rodolph, in a careless tone; "but it is horrible weather: what say you to a cup of brandy with sugar in it?"

"That's the ticket!" said the Chourineur.

"And, that we may be better acquainted, we will tell each other who we are," added Rodolph.

"The Albinos called the Chourineur a freed convict, worker at the wood that floats at St. Paul's Quay; frozen in the winter, scorched in the summer, from twelve to fifteen hours a day in the water; half man, half frog; that's my description," said Rodolph's companion, making him a military salute with his left hand. "Well, now, and you, my master, this is your first appearance in the Cité. I don't mean anything to offend; but you entered head foremost against my skull, and beating the drum on my carcass. By all that's ugly, what a rattling you made, especially with these blows with which you doubled me up! I never can forget them – thick as buttons – what a torrent! But you have some trade besides 'polishing off' the Chourineur?"

"I am a fan-painter, and my name is Rodolph."

"A fan-painter! Ah! that's the reason, then, that your hands are so white," added the Chourineur. "If all your fellow workmen are like you, there must be a tidy lot of you. But, as you are a workman, what brings you to a *tapis-franc* in the Cité, where there are only prigs, cracksmen or freed convicts like myself, and who only come here because we cannot go elsewhere? This is no place for you. Honest mechanics have their coffee-shops, and don't talk slang."

"I come here because I like good company."

"Gammon!" said the Chourineur, shaking his head with an air of doubt. "I found you in the passage of Bras Rouge. Well, man, never mind. You say you don't know him?"

"What do you mean with all your nonsense about your Bras Rouge? Let him go to the –"

"Stay, master of mine. You, perhaps, distrust me; but you are wrong, and if you like I will tell you my history; but that is on condition that you teach me how to give those precious thumps which settled my business so quickly. What say you?"

"I agree, Chourineur; tell me your story, and Goualeuse will also tell hers."

"Very well," replied the Chourineur; "it is not weather to turn a mangy cur out-of-doors, and it will be an amusement. Do you agree, Goualeuse?"

"Oh, certainly; but my story is a very short one," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"And you will have to tell us your history, comrade Rodolph," added the Chourineur.

"Well, then, I'll begin."

"Fan-painter!" said Goualeuse, "what a very pretty trade!"

"And how much can you earn if you stick close to work?" inquired the Chourineur.

"I work by the piece," responded Rodolph; "my good days are worth three francs, sometimes four, in summer, when the days are long."

"And you are idle sometimes, you rascal?"

"Yes, as long as I have money, though I do not waste it. First, I pay ten sous for my night's lodging."

"Your pardon, monseigneur; you sleep, then, at ten sous, do you?" said the Chourineur, raising his hand to his cap.

The word monseigneur, spoken ironically by the Chourineur, caused an almost imperceptible smile on the lips of Rodolph, who replied, "Oh, I like to be clean and comfortable."

"Here's a peer of the realm for you! a man with mines of wealth!" exclaimed the Chourineur; "he pays ten sous for his bed!"

"Well, then," continued Rodolph, "four sous for tobacco; that makes fourteen sous; four sous for breakfast, eighteen; fifteen sous for dinner; one or two sous for brandy; that all comes to about thirty-four or thirty-five sous a day. I have no occasion to work all the week, and so the rest of the time I amuse myself."

"And your family?" said the Goualeuse.

"Dead," replied Rodolph.

"Who were your friends?" asked the Goualeuse.

"Dealers in old clothes and marine stores under the pillars of the market-place."

"How did you spend what they left you?" inquired the Chourineur.

"I was very young, and my guardian sold the stock; and, when I came of age, he brought me in his debtor for thirty francs; that was my inheritance."

"And who is now your employer?" the Chourineur demanded.

"His name is Gauthier, in the Rue des Bourdonnais, a beast – brute – thief – miser! He would almost as soon lose the sight of an eye as pay his workmen. Now this is as true a description as I can give you of him; so let's have done with him. I learned my trade under him from the time when I was fifteen years of age; I have a good number in the Conscription, and my name is Rodolph Durand. My history is told."

"Now it's your turn, Goualeuse," said the Chourineur; "I keep my history till last, as a *bonne bouche*."

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF LA GOUALEUSE

"Let us begin at the beginning," said the Chourineur.

"Yes; your parents?" added Rodolph.

"I never knew them," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"The deuce!" said the Chourineur. "Well, that is odd, Goualeuse! you and I are of the same family."

"What! you, too, Chourineur?"

"An orphan of the streets of Paris like you, my girl."

"Then who brought you up, Goualeuse?" asked Rodolph.

"I don't know, sir. As far back as I can remember – I was, I think, about six or seven years old – I was with an old one-eyed woman, whom they call the Chouette,⁶ because she had a hooked nose, a green eye quite round, and was like an owl with one eye out."

"Ha! ha! ha! I think I see her, the old night-bird!" shouted the Chourineur, laughing.

"The one-eyed woman," resumed Fleur-de-Marie, "made me sell barley-sugar in the evenings on the Pont Neuf; but that was only an excuse for asking charity; and when I did not bring her in at least ten sous, the Chouette beat me instead of giving me any supper."

"Are you sure the woman was not your mother?" inquired Rodolph.

"Quite sure; for she often scolded me for being fatherless and motherless, and said she picked me up one day in the street."

"So," said the Chourineur, "you had a dance instead of a meal, if you did not pick up ten sous?"

"Yes. And after that I went to lie down on some straw spread on the ground; when I was cold – very cold."

"I do not doubt it, for the feather of beans (straw) is a very cold sort of stuff," said the Chourineur. "A dung-heap is twice as good; but then people don't like your smell, and say, 'Oh, the blackguard! where has he been?'"

This remark made Rodolph smile, whilst Fleur-de-Marie thus continued: "Next day the one-eyed woman gave me a similar allowance for breakfast as for supper, and sent me to Montfauçon to get some worms to bait for fish; for in the daytime the Chouette kept her stall for selling fishing-lines, near the bridge of Notre Dame. For a child of seven years of age, who is half dead with hunger and cold, it is a long way from the Rue de la Mortellerie to Montfauçon."

"But exercise has made you grow as straight as an arrow, my girl; you have no reason to complain of that," said the Chourineur, striking a light for his pipe.

"Well," said the Goualeuse, "I returned very, very tired; then, at noon, the Chouette gave me a little bit of bread."

"Ah, eating so little has kept your figure as fine as a needle, girl; you must not find fault with that," said Chourineur, puffing out a cloud of tobacco-smoke. "But what ails you, comrade – I mean, Master Rodolph? You seem quite down like; are you sorry for the girl and her miseries? Ah, we all have, and have had, our miseries!"

"Yes, but not such miseries as mine, Chourineur," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"What! not I, Goualeuse? Why, my lass, you were a queen to me! At least, when you were little you slept on straw and ate bread; I passed my most comfortable nights in the lime-kilns at Clichy, like a regular vagabond; I fed on cabbage-stumps and other refuse vegetables, which I picked up when and where I could; but very often, as it was so far to the lime-kilns at Clichy, and I was tired after

⁶ The Screech-owl.

my work, I slept under the large stones at the Louvre; and then, in winter, I had white sheets, – that is, whenever the snow fell."

"A man is stronger; but a poor little girl – " said Fleur-de-Marie. "And yet, with all that, I was as plump as a skylark."

"What! you remember that, eh?"

"To be sure I do. When the Chouette beat me I fell always at the first blow; then she stamped upon me, screaming out, 'Ah, the nasty little brute! she hasn't a farden's worth of strength, – she can't stand even two thumps!' And then she called me Pegriotte (little thief). I never had any other name, – that was my baptismal name."

"Like me. I had the baptism of a dog in a ditch, and they called me 'Fellow,' or 'You, sir,' or 'Albino.' It is really surprising, my wench, how much we resemble each other!" said the Chourineur.

"That's true, – in our misery," said Fleur-de-Marie, who addressed herself to the Chourineur almost always, feeling, in spite of herself, a sort of shame at the presence of Rodolph, hardly venturing to raise her eyes to him, although in appearance he belonged to that class with whom she ordinarily lived.

"And when you had fetched the worms for the Chouette, what did you do?" inquired the Chourineur.

"Why, she made me beg until night; then, in the evening, she went to sell fried fish on the Pont Neuf. Oh, dear! at that time it was a long while to wait for my morsel of bread; and if I dared to ask the Chouette for something to eat, she beat me and said, 'Get ten sous, and then you shall have your supper.' Then I, being very hungry, and as she hurt me very much, cried with a very full heart and sore body. The Chouette tied my little basket of barley-sugar round my neck, and stationed me on the Pont Neuf, where, in winter, I was frozen to death. Yet sometimes, in spite of myself, I slept as I stood, – but not long; for the Chouette kicked me until I awoke. I remained on the bridge till eleven o'clock, my stock of barley-sugar hanging round my neck, and often crying heartily. The passengers, touched by my tears, sometimes gave me a sou; and then I gained ten and sometimes fifteen sous, which I gave to the Chouette, who searched me all over, and even looked in my mouth, to see if I had kept back anything."

"Well, fifteen sous was a good haul for a little bird like you."

"It was. And then the one-eyed woman seeing that – "

"With her one eye?" said the Chourineur, laughing.

"Of course, because she had but one. Well, then, she finding that when I cried I got most money, always beat me severely before she put me on the bridge."

"Brutal, but cunning."

"Well, at last I got hardened to blows; and as the Chouette got in a passion when I did not cry, why I, to be revenged upon her, the more she thumped me the more I laughed, although the tears came into my eyes with the pain."

"But, poor Goualeuse, did not the sticks of barley-sugar make you long for them?"

"Ah, yes, Chourineur; but I never tasted them. It was my ambition, and my ambition ruined me. One day, returning from Montfauçon, some little boys beat me and stole my basket. I came back, well knowing what was in store for me; and I had a shower of thumps and no bread. In the evening, before going to the bridge, the Chouette, savage because I had not brought in anything the evening before, instead of beating me as usual to make me cry, made me bleed by pulling my hair from the sides of the temples, where it is most tender."

"*Tonnerre!* that was coming it too strong," said the bandit, striking his fist heavily on the table, and frowning sternly. "To beat a child is no such great thing, but to ill-use one so – Heaven and earth!"

Rodolph had listened attentively to the recital of Fleur-de-Marie, and now looked at the Chourineur with astonishment: the display of such feeling quite surprised him.

"What ails you, Chourineur?" he inquired.

"What ails me? Ails me? Why, have you no feeling? That devil's dam of a Chouette who so brutally used this girl! Are you as hard as your own fists?"

"Go on, my girl," said Rodolph to Fleur-de-Marie, without appearing to notice the Chourineur's appeal.

"I have told you how the Chouette ill-used me to make me cry. I was then sent on to the bridge with my barley-sugar. The one-eyed was at her usual spot, and from time to time shook her doubled fist at me. However, as I had not broken my fast since the night before, and as I was very hungry, at the risk of putting the Chouette in a passion, I took a piece of barley-sugar, and began to eat it."

"Well done, girl!"

"I ate another piece – "

"Bravo! go it, my hearties!"

"I found it so good, not from daintiness, but real hunger. But then a woman, who sold oranges, cried out to the one-eyed woman, 'Look ye there, Chouette; Pegriotte is eating the barley-sugar!'"

"Oh, thunder and lightning!" said the Chourineur; "that would enrage her, – make her in a passion! Poor little mouse, what a fright you were in when the Chouette saw you! – eh?"

"How did you get out of that affair, poor Goualeuse?" asked Rodolph, with as much interest as the Chourineur.

"Why, it was a serious matter to me, – but that was afterwards; for the Chouette, although boiling over with rage at seeing me devour the barley-sugar, could not leave her stove, for the fish was frying."

"Ha! ha! ha! True, true, – that was a difficult position for her," said the Chourineur, laughing heartily.

"At a distance, the Chouette threatened me with her long iron fork; but when her fish was cooked, she came towards me. I had only collected three sous, and I had eaten six sous' worth. She did not say a word, but took me by the hand and dragged me away with her. At this moment, I do not know how it was that I did not die on the spot with fright. I remember it as well as if it was this very moment, – it was very near to New Year's day, and there were a great many shops on the Pont Neuf, all filled with toys, and I had been looking at them all the evening with the greatest delight, – beautiful dolls, little furnished houses, – you know how very amusing such things are for a child."

"You had never had any playthings, had you, Goualeuse?" asked the Chourineur.

"I? *Mon Dieu!* who was there to give me any playthings?" said the girl, in a sad tone. "Well, the evening passed. Although it was in the depth of winter, I only had on a little cotton gown, no stockings, no shift, and with wooden shoes on my feet: that was not enough to stifle me with heat, was it? Well, when the old woman took my hand, I burst out into a perspiration from head to foot. What frightened me most was, that, instead of swearing and storming as usual, she only kept on grumbling between her teeth. She never let go my hand, but made me walk so fast – so very fast – that I was obliged to run to keep up with her, and in running I had lost one of my wooden shoes; and as I did not dare to say so, I followed her with one foot naked on the bare stones. When we reached home it was covered with blood."

"A one-eyed old devil's kin!" said the Chourineur, again thumping the table in his anger. "It makes my heart quite cold to think of the poor little thing trotting along beside that cursed old brute, with her poor little foot all bloody!"

"We lived in a garret in the Rue de la Montellerie; beside the entrance to our alley there was a dram-shop, and there the Chouette went in, still dragging me by the hand. She then had a half pint of brandy at the bar."

"The deuce! Why, I could not drink that without being quite fuddled!"

"It was her usual quantity; perhaps that was the reason why she beat me of an evening. Well, at last we got up into our cock-loft; the Chouette double-locked the door; I threw myself on my knees, and asked her pardon for having eaten the barley-sugar. She did not answer me, but I heard her

mumbling to herself, as she walked about the room, 'What shall I do this evening to this little thief, who has eaten all that barley-sugar? Ah, I see!' And she looked at me maliciously with her one green eye. I was still on my knees, when she suddenly went to a shelf and took down a pair of pincers."

"Pincers!" exclaimed the Chourineur.

"Yes, pincers."

"What for?"

"To strike you?" inquired Rodolph.

"To pinch you?" said the Chourineur.

"No, no," answered the poor girl, trembling at the very recollection.

"To pull out your hair?"

"No; to take out one of my teeth."

The Chourineur uttered a blasphemous oath, accompanied with such furious imprecations that all the guests in the *tapis-franc* looked at him with astonishment.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" asked Rodolph.

"The matter! the matter! I'll skin her alive, that infernal old hag, if I can catch her! Where is she? Tell me, where is she? Let me find her, and I'll throttle the old – "

"And did she really take out your tooth, my poor child, – that wretched monster in woman's shape?" demanded Rodolph, whilst the Chourineur was venting his rage in a volley of the most violent reproaches.

"Yes, sir; but not at the first pull. How I suffered! She held me with my head between her knees, where she held it as if in a vice. Then, half with her pincers, half with her fingers, she pulled out my tooth, and then said, 'Now I will pull out one every day, Pegriotte; and when you have not a tooth left I will throw you into the river, and the fish shall eat you.'"

"The old devil! To break and pull out a poor child's teeth in that way!" exclaimed the Chourineur, with redoubled fury.

"And how did you escape her then?" inquired Rodolph of the Goualeuse.

"Next day, instead of going to Montfauçon, I went on the side of the Champs Elysées, so frightened was I of being drowned by the Chouette. I would have run to the end of the world, rather than be again in the Chouette's hands. After walking and walking, I fairly lost myself; I had not begged a farthing, and the more I thought the more frightened did I become. At night I hid myself in a timber-yard, under some piles of wood. As I was very little, I was able to creep under an old door and hide myself amongst a heap of logs. I was so hungry that I tried to gnaw a piece of the bark, but I could not bite it, – it was too hard. At length I fell asleep. In the morning, hearing a noise, I hid myself still further back in the wood-pile. It was tolerably warm, and, if I had had something to eat, I could not have been better off for the winter."

"Like me in the lime-kiln."

"I did not dare to quit the timber-yard, for I fancied that the Chouette would seek for me everywhere, to pull out my teeth and drown me, and that she would be sure to catch me if I stirred from where I was."

"Stay, do not mention that old beast's name again, – it makes the blood come into my eyes! The fact is, that you have known misery, – bitter, bitter misery. Poor little mite! how sorry I am that I threatened to beat you just now, and frightened you. As I am a man, I did not mean to do it."

"Why, would you not have beaten me? I have no one to defend me."

"That's the very reason, because you are not like the others, – because you have no one to take your part, – that I would not have beaten you. When I say no one, I do not mean our comrade Rodolph; but his coming was a chance, and he certainly did give me my full allowance when we met."

"Go on, my child," said Rodolph. "How did you get away from the timber-yard?"

"Next day, about noon, I heard a great dog barking under the wood-pile. I listened, and the bark came nearer and nearer; then a deep voice exclaimed, 'My dog barks, – somebody is hid in the

yard!' 'They are thieves,' said another voice; and the men then began to encourage the dog, and cry, 'Find 'em! find 'em, lad!' The dog ran to me, and, for fear of being bitten, I began to cry out with all my might and main. 'Hark!' said one of them; 'I hear the cry of a child.' They called back the dog; I came out from the pile of wood, and saw a gentleman and a man in a blouse. 'Ah, you little thief! what are you doing in my timber-yard?' said the gentleman, in a cross tone. I put my hands together and said, 'Don't hurt me, pray. I have had nothing to eat for two days, and I've run away from the Chouette, who pulled out my tooth, and said she would throw me over to the fishes. Not knowing where to sleep, I was passing before your door, and I slept for the night amongst these logs, under this heap, not thinking I hurt anybody.'

"I'm not to be gammoned by you, you little hussy! You came to steal my logs. Go and call the watch," said the timber-merchant to his man."

"Ah, the old vagabond! The old reprobate! Call the watch! Why didn't he send for the artillery?" said the Chourineur. "Steal his logs, and you only eight years old! What an old ass!"

"Not true, sir," his man replied. "Steal your logs, master! How can she do that? She is not so big as the smallest piece!" 'You are right,' replied the timber-merchant; 'but if she does not come for herself, she does for others. Thieves have a parcel of children, whom they send to pry about and hide themselves to open the doors of houses. She must be taken to the commissary, and mind she does not escape.'"

"Upon my life, this timber-merchant was more of a log than any log in his own yard," said the Chourineur.

"I was taken to the commissary," resumed Goualeuse. "I accused myself of being a wanderer, and they sent me to prison. I was sent before the Tribunal, and sentenced, as a rogue and vagabond, to remain until I was sixteen years of age in a house of correction. I thank the judges much for their kindness; for in prison I had food, I was not beaten, and it was a paradise after the cock-loft of the Chouette. Then, in prison I learned to sew; but, sad to say, I was idle: I preferred singing to work, and particularly when I saw the sun shine. Ah, when the sun shone on the walls of the prison I could not help singing; and then, when I could sing, I seemed no longer to be a prisoner. It was after I began to sing so much that they called me Goualeuse, instead of Pegriotte. Well, when I was sixteen, I left the gaol. At the door, I found the ogress here, and two or three old women, who had come to see my fellow prisoners, and who had always told me that when I left the prison they would find work for me."

"Yes, yes, I see," said the Chourineur.

"My pretty little maid," said the ogress and her old companions, 'come and lodge with us; we will give you good clothes, and then you may amuse yourself.' I didn't like them, and refused, saying to myself, 'I know how to sew very well, and I have two hundred francs in hand. I have been eight years in prison, I should like to enjoy myself a bit, – that won't hurt anybody; work will come when the money is spent.' And so I began to spend my two hundred francs. Ah, that was my mistake," added Fleur-de-Marie, with a sigh. "I ought first to have got my work; but I hadn't a soul on earth to advise me. At sixteen, to be thrown on the city of Paris, as I was, one is so lonely; and what is done is done. I have done wrong, and I have suffered for it. I began then to spend my money: first, I bought flowers to put in my room, – I do love flowers! – then I bought a gown, a nice shawl, and I took a walk in the Bois de Boulogne, and I went to St. Germain, Vincennes, and other country places. Oh, how I love the country!"

"With a lover by your side, my girl?" asked the Chourineur.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* no! I like to be my own mistress. I had my little excursions with a friend who was in prison with me, – a good little girl as can be: they call her Rigolette, because she is always laughing."

"Rigolette! Rigolette! I don't know her," said the Chourineur, who appeared to be appealing to his memory.

"I didn't think you knew her. I am sure Rigolette was very well behaved in prison, and always so gay and so industrious, she took out with her when she left the prison at least four hundred francs that she had earned. And then she is so particular! – you should see her! When I say I had no one to advise me, I am wrong: I ought to have listened to her; for, after having had a week's amusement together, she said to me, 'Now we have had such a holiday, we ought to try for work, and not spend our money in waste.' I, who was so happy in the fields and the woods, – it was just at the end of spring, this year, – I answered, 'Oh, I must be idle a little longer, and then I will work hard.' Since that time I have not seen Rigolette, but I heard a few days since that she was living near the Temple, – that she was a famous needlewoman, and earned at least twenty-five sous a-day, and has a small workroom of her own; but now I could not for the world see her again, – I should die with shame if I met her."

"So, then, my poor girl," said Rodolph, "you spent your money in the country, – you like the country, do you?"

"Like it? I love it! Oh, what would I not give to live there? Rigolette, on the contrary, prefers Paris, and likes to walk on the Boulevards; but she is so nice and so kind, she went into the country only to please me."

"And you did not even leave yourself a few sous to live upon whilst you found work?" said the Chourineur.

"Yes, I had reserved about fifty francs; but it happened that I had for my washerwoman a woman called Lorraine, a poor thing, with none but the good God to protect her. She was then very near her confinement, and yet was obliged all day long to be with her hands and feet in her washing-tubs. She fell sick, and, not being able to work, applied for admittance to a lying-in hospital, but there was no room. She could not work, and her time was very near at hand, and she had not a son to pay for the bed in a garret, from which they drove her. Fortunately, she met one day, at the end of the Pont Notre-Dame, with Goubin's wife, who had been hiding for four days in a cellar of a house which was being pulled down behind the Hôtel Dieu – "

"But why was Goubin's wife hiding?"

"To escape from her husband, who threatened to kill her; and she only went out at night to buy some bread, and it was then she met with the poor Lorraine, ill, and hardly able to drag herself along, for she was expecting to be brought to bed every hour. Well, it seems this Goubin's wife took her to the cellar where she was hiding, – it was just a shelter, and no more. There she shared her bread and straw with the poor Lorraine, who was confined in this cellar of a poor little infant; her only covering and bed was straw! Well, it seems that Goubin's wife could not bear it, and so, going out at all risks, even of being killed by her husband, who was looking for her everywhere, she left the cellar in open day, and came to me. She knew I had still a little money left, and that I could assist her if I would; so, when Helmina had told me all about poor Lorraine, who was obliged to lie with her new-born babe on straw, I told her to bring them both to my room at once, and I would take a chamber for her next to mine. This I did; and, oh, how happy she was, poor Lorraine, when she found herself in a bed, with her babe beside her in a little couch which I had bought for her! Helmina and I nursed her until she was able to get about again, and then, with the rest of my money, I enabled her to return to her washing-tubs."

"And when all your money was spent on Lorraine and her infant, what did you do, my child?" inquired Rodolph.

"I looked out for work; but it was too late. I can sew very well, I have good courage, and thought that I had only to ask for work and get it. Ah! how I deceived myself! I went into a shop where they sell ready-made linen, and asked for employment, and as I would not tell a story, I said I had just left prison. They showed me the door, without making me any answer. I begged they would give me a trial, and they pushed me into the street as if I had been a thief. Then I remembered, too late, what Rigolette had told me. Little by little I sold my small stock of clothes and linen, and when all was gone they turned me out of my lodging. I had not tasted food for two days; I did not know where to sleep."

At this moment I met the ogress and one of her old women who knew where I lodged, and was always coming about me since I left prison. They told me they would find me work, and I believed them. I went with them, so exhausted for want of food that my senses were gone. They gave me brandy to drink, and – and – here I am!" said the unhappy creature, hiding her face in her hands.

"Have you lived a long time with the ogress, my poor girl?" asked Rodolph, in accents of the deepest compassion.

"Six weeks, sir," replied Goualeuse, shuddering as she spoke.

"I see, – I see," said the Chourineur; "I know you now as well as if I were your father and mother, and you had never left my lap. Well, well, this is a confession indeed!"

"It makes you sad, my girl, to tell the story of your life," said Rodolph.

"Alas! sir," replied Fleur-de-Marie, sorrowfully, "since I was born this is the first time it ever happened to me to recall all these things at once, and my tale is not a merry one."

"Well," said the Chourineur, ironically, "you are sorry, perhaps, that you are not a kitchen-wench in a cook-shop, or a servant to some old brutes who think of no one but themselves."

"Ah!" said Fleur-de-Marie, with a deep sigh, "to be quite happy, we must be quite virtuous."

"Oh, what is your little head about now?" exclaimed the Chourineur, with a loud burst of laughter. "Why not count your rosary in honour of your father and mother, whom you never knew?"

"My father and mother abandoned me in the street like a puppy that is one too many in the house; perhaps they had not enough to feed themselves," said Goualeuse, with bitterness. "I want nothing of them, – I complain of nothing, – but there are lots happier than mine."

"Yours! Why, what would you have? You are as handsome as a Venus, and yet only sixteen and a half; you sing like a nightingale, behave yourself very prettily, are called Fleur-de-Marie, and yet you complain! What will you say, I should like to know, when you will have a stove under your 'paddlers,' and a chinchilla boa, like the ogress?"

"Oh, I shall never be so old as she is."

"Perhaps you have a charm for never growing any older?"

"No; but I could not lead such a life. I have already a bad cough."

"Ah, I see you already in the 'cold-meat box.' Go along, you silly child, you!"

"Do you often have such thoughts as these, Goualeuse?" said Rodolph.

"Sometimes. You, perhaps, M. Rodolph, understand me. In the morning, when I go to buy my milk from the milkwoman at the corner of Rue de la Vieille-Draperie, with the sous which the ogress gives me, and see her go away in her little cart drawn by her donkey, I do envy her so, and I say to myself, 'She is going into the country, to the pure air, to her home and her family;' and then I return alone into the garret of the ogress, where you cannot see plainly even at noonday."

"Well, child, be good – laugh at your troubles – be good," said the Chourineur.

"Good! *mon Dieu!* and how do you mean be good? The clothes I wear belong to the ogress, and I am in debt to her for my board and lodging. I can't stir from her; she would have me taken up as a thief. I belong to her, and I must pay her."

When she had uttered these last words, the unhappy girl could not help shuddering, and a tear trembled in her long eyelashes.

"Well, but remain as you are, and do not compare yourself to a country milkwoman," said the Chourineur. "Are you taking leave of your senses? Only think, you may yet cut a figure in the capital, whilst the milkwoman must boil the pot for her brats, milk her cows, gather grass for her rabbits, and, perhaps, after all, get a black eye from her husband when he comes home from the pot-house. Why, it is really ridiculous to hear you talk of envying her."

The Goualeuse did not reply; her eye was fixed, her heart was full, and the expression of her face was painfully distressed. Rodolph had listened to the recital, made with so painful a frankness, with deep interest. Misery, destitution, ignorance of the world, had weighed down this wretched girl, cast at sixteen years of age on the wide world of Paris!

Rodolph involuntarily thought of a beloved child whom he had lost, – a girl, dead at six years of age, and who, had she survived, would have been, like Fleur-de-Marie, sixteen years and a half old. This recollection excited the more highly his solicitude for the unhappy creature whose narration he had just heard.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHOURINEUR'S HISTORY

The reader has not forgotten the two guests at the *tapis-franc* who were watched so closely by the third individual who had come into the cabaret. We have said that one of these fellows, who had on a Greek cap, and concealed his left hand with much care, asked the ogress if the Schoolmaster and Gros-Boiteux had not arrived.

During the story of the Goualeuse, which they could not overhear, they had been constantly talking in a very low tone, throwing occasional hurried glances at the door. He who wore the Greek cap said to his comrade, "The Gros-Boiteux does not 'show,' nor the Schoolmaster."

"Perhaps the Skeleton has 'done for him,' and made off with the 'swag.'"

"A precious 'go' that would be for us, who 'laid the plant,' and look out for our 'snacks,'" replied the other.

The newcomer, who observed the two men, was seated too far off to hear a word they said, but, after having cautiously consulted a small paper concealed at the bottom of his cap, he appeared satisfied with his remarks, rose from the table, and said to the ogress, who was sleeping at the bar, with her feet on the stove, and her great cat on her knee:

"I say, Mother Ponisse, I shall soon be back again; take care of my pitcher and my plate; I don't want any one to make free with them."

"Make yourself easy, my fine fellow," said Mother Ponisse; "if your plate and pitcher are empty, no one will touch them."

The newcomer laughed loudly at the joke of the ogress, and then slipped out, so that his departure was unnoticed. At that moment when this man retired, and before the door could be shut, Rodolph saw the charcoal-dealer, whose black face and tall form we have already alluded to, and he had just time to manifest to him, by an impatient gesture, how much he disliked his watchful attendance; but the charcoal-man did not appear to heed this in the least, and still kept hanging about the *tapis-franc*. The countenance of the Goualeuse became still more saddened; with her back to the wall, her head drooping on her bosom, her full blue eyes gazing mechanically about her, the unfortunate being seemed bowed down with the weight of her oppressive thoughts. Two or three times, having met Rodolph's fixed look, she turned away, unable to account to herself for the singular impression which the unknown had caused her. Weighed down and abashed at his presence, she almost regretted having made so candid a narrative to him of her unhappy life. The Chourineur, on the contrary, was quite in high spirits; he had devoured the whole harlequin without the least assistance; the wine and brandy had made him very communicative; the fact of his having found his master, as he called him, had been forgotten in the generous conduct of Rodolph; and he also detected so decided a physical superiority, that his humiliation had given way to a sentiment of admiration, mingled with fear and respect. This absence of rancour, and the savage pride with which he boasted of never having robbed, proved that the Chourineur was not as yet thoroughly hardened. This had not escaped the sagacity of Rodolph, and he awaited the man's recital with curiosity.

"Now, my boy," said he, "we are listening."

The Chourineur emptied his glass, and thus began:

"You, my poor girl, were at last taken to by the Chouette, whom the devil confound! You never had a shelter until the moment when you were imprisoned as a vagabond. I can never recollect having slept in what is called a bed before I was nineteen years of age, – a happy age! – and then I became a trooper."

"What, you have served, then, Chourineur?" said Rodolph.

"Three years; but you will hear all about it: the stones of the Louvre, the lime-kilns of Clichy, and the quarries of Montrouge, these were the hôtels of my youth. Then I had my house in Paris and in the country. Who but I – "

"And what was your trade?"

"Faith, master, I have a foggy recollection of having strolled about in my childhood with an old rag-picker, who almost thumped me to death; and it must be true, for I have never since met one of these old Cupids, with a wicker-work quiver, without a longing to pitch into him, – a proof that one of them must have thumped me when I was a child. My first employment was to help the knackers to cut the horses' throats at Montfauçon. I was about ten or twelve. When I began to slash (*chouriner*) these poor old beasts, it had quite an impression on me. At the month's end I thought no more about it; on the contrary, I began to like my trade. No one had his knife so sharpened and keen-edged as mine; and that made me rejoice in using it. When I had cut the animals' throats, they gave me for my trouble a piece of the thigh of some animal that had died of disease; for those that they slaughter are sold to the 'cag-mag' shops near the School of Medicine, who convert it into beef, mutton, veal, or game, according to the taste of purchasers. However, when I got to my morsel of horse's flesh, I was as happy as a king! I went with it into the lime-kiln like a wolf to his lair, and then, with the leave of the lime-burners, I made a glorious fry on the ashes. When the burners were not at work, I picked up some dry wood at Romainville, set light to it, and broiled my steak under the walls of the bone-house. The meat certainly was bloody, and almost raw, but that made a change."

"And your name? What did they call you?" asked Rodolph.

"I had hair much more flaxen than now, and the blood was always in my eyes, and so they called me the 'Albino.' The Albinos are the white rabbits amongst men; they have red eyes," added the Chourineur, in a grave tone, and, as it were, with a physiological parenthesis.

"And your relations? your family?"

"My relations? Oh! they lodge at the same number as the Goualeuse's. Place of my birth? Why, the first corner of no-matter-what street, either on the right or left-hand side of the way, and either going up or coming down the kennel."

"Then you have cursed your father and mother for having abandoned you?"

"Why, that would not have set my leg if I had broken it! No matter; though it's true they played me a scurvy trick in bringing me into the world. But I should not have complained if they had made me as beggars ought to be made; that is to say, without the sense of cold, hunger, or thirst. Beggars who don't like thieving would find it greatly to their advantage."

"You were cold, thirsty, hungry, Chourineur, and yet you did not steal?"

"No; and yet I was horribly wretched. It's a fact, that I have often gone with an empty bread-basket (fasted) for two days at a time: that was more than my share; but I never stole."

"For fear of a gaol?"

"Pooh!" said the Chourineur, shrugging his shoulders, and laughing loudly, "I should then not have stolen bread, for fear of getting my allowance, eh? An honest man, I was famishing; a thief, I should have been supported in prison, and right well, too! But I did not steal, because – because – why, because the idea of stealing never came across me; so that's all about it!"

This reply, noble as it was in itself, but of the rectitude of which the Chourineur himself had no idea, perfectly astonished Rodolph. He felt that the poor fellow who had remained honest in the midst of the most cruel privations was to be respected twofold, since the punishment of the crime became a certain resource for him. Rodolph held out his hand to this ill-used savage of civilisation, whom misery had been unable wholly to corrupt. The Chourineur looked at his host in astonishment, – almost with respect; he hardly dared to touch the hand tendered to him. He felt impressed with some vague idea that there was a wide abyss between Rodolph and himself.

"'Tis well," said Rodolph to him, "you have heart and honour."

"Heart? honour? what, I? Come, now, don't chaff me," he replied, with surprise.

"To suffer misery and hunger rather than steal, is to have heart and honour," said Rodolph, gravely.

"Well, it may be," said the Chourineur, as if thinking, "it may be so."

"Does it astonish you?"

"It really does; for people don't usually say such things to me; they generally treat me as they would a mangy dog. It's odd, though, the effect what you say has on me. Heart! honour!" he repeated, with an air which was actually pensive.

"Well, what ails you?"

"I' faith, I don't know," replied the Chourineur, in a tone of emotion; "but these words, do you see, they quite make my heart beat; and I feel more flattered than if any one told me I was a 'better man' than either the Skeleton or the Schoolmaster. I never felt anything like it before. Be sure, though, that these words, and the blows of the fist at the end of my tussle, – you did lay 'em on like a good 'un, – not alluding to what you pay for the supper, and the words you have said – in a word," he exclaimed, bluntly, as if he could not find language to express his thoughts, "make sure that in life or death you may depend on the Chourineur."

Rodolph, unwilling to betray his emotion, replied in a tone as calm as he could assume, "How long did you go on as an amateur knacker?"

"Why, at first, I was quite sick of cutting up old worn-out horses, who could not even kick; but when I was about sixteen, and my voice began to get rough, it became a passion – a taste – a relish – a rage – with me to cut and slash. I did not care for anything but that; not even eating and drinking. You should have seen me in the middle of my work! Except an old pair of woollen trousers, I was quite naked. When, with my large and well-whetted knife in my hand, I had about me fifteen or twenty horses waiting their turn, by Jupiter! when I began to slaughter them, I don't know what possessed me, – I was like a fury. My ears had singing in them, and I saw everything *red*, – all was red; and I slashed, and slashed, and slashed, until my knife fell from my hands! Thunder! what happiness! Had I had millions, I could have paid them to have enjoyed my trade!"

"It is that which has given you the habit of stabbing," said Rodolph.

"Very likely; but when I was turned of sixteen, the passion became so strong that when I once began slashing, I became mad; I spoiled my work; yes, I spoiled the skins, because I slashed and cut them across and across; for I was so furious that I could not see clearly. At last they turned me out of the yard. I wanted employment with the butchers, for I have always liked that sort of business. Well, they quite looked down upon me; they despised me as a shoemaker does a cobbler. Then I had to seek my bread elsewhere, and I didn't find it very readily; and this was the time when my bread-basket was so often empty. At length I got employment in the quarries at Montrouge; but, at the end of two years, I was tired of going always around like a squirrel in his cage, and drawing stone for twenty sous a day. I was tall and strong, and so I enlisted in a regiment. They asked my name, my age, and my papers. My name? – the Albino. My age? – look at my beard. My papers? – here's the certificate of the master quarryman. As I was just the fellow for a grenadier, they took me."

"With your strength, courage, and taste for chopping and slashing, you ought, in war-time, to have been made an officer."

"Thunder and lightning! what do you say? What! to cut up English or Prussians! Why, that would have been better than to cut up old horses; but, worse luck, there was no war, but a great deal of discipline. An apprentice tries to hit his master a thump; well, if he be the weaker, why, he gets the worst of it; if he be the stronger, he has the best of it; he is turned out-of-doors, perhaps put into the cage, – and that is all. In the army it is quite a different thing. One day our sergeant had bullied me a good deal, to make me more attentive, – he was right, for I was very slow; I did not like a poke he gave me, and I kicked at him; he pushed me again, I returned his poke; he collared me, and I gave him a punch of the head. They fell on me, and then my blood was up in my eyes, and I was enraged in a moment. I had my knife in my hand – I belonged to the cookery – and I 'went it my hardest.' I

cut, slashed, – slashed, chopped, as if I was in the slaughter-house. I made 'cold meat' of the sergeant, wounded two soldiers, – it was a real shambles; I gave the three eleven wounds, – yes, eleven. Blood flowed, flowed everywhere, blood, as though we were in the bone-house, – I swam in it – "

The brigand lowered his head with a sombre, sullen air, and was silent.

"What are you thinking of, Chourineur?" asked Rodolph, with interest.

"Nothing," he replied, abruptly; and then, with an air of brutish carelessness, he added, "At length they handcuffed me, and brought me before the 'big wigs,' and I was cast for death."

"You escaped, however?"

"True; but I had fifteen years at the galleys instead of being 'scragged.' I forgot to tell you that whilst in the regiment I had saved two of my comrades from drowning in the Marne, when we were quartered at Milan. At another time, – you will laugh, and say I am amphibious either in fire or water when saving men or women, – at another time, being in garrison at Rouen, all the wooden houses in one quarter were on fire, and burning like so many matches. I am the lad for a fire, and so I went to the place in an instant. They told me that there was an old woman who was bedridden, and could not escape from her room, which was already in flames. I went towards it, and, by Jove! how it did burn; it reminded me of the lime-kilns in my happy days. However, I saved the old woman, although I had the very soles of my feet scorched. Thanks to my having done these things, and the cunning of my advocate, my sentence was changed, and, instead of being 'scragged,' I was only sent to the hulks for fifteen years. When I found that my life would be spared, and I was to go to the galleys, I would have jumped upon the babbling fool, and twisted his neck, at the moment when he came to wish me joy, and to tell me he had saved my life, and be hanged to him! only they prevented me."

"Were you sorry, then, to have your sentence commuted?"

"Yes; for those who sport with the knife, the headsman's steel is the proper fate; for those who steal, the 'darbies' to their heels: each his proper punishment. But to force you to live amongst galley-slaves, when you have a right to be guillotined out of hand, is infamous; and, besides, my life, when I first went to the Bagne, was rather queer; one don't kill a man, and soon forget it, you must know."

"You feel some remorse, then, Chourineur?"

"Remorse? No; for I have served my time," said the savage; "but at first, a night did not pass but I saw – like a nightmare – the sergeant and soldiers whom I had slashed and slaughtered; that is, they were not alone," added the brigand, in a voice of terror; "these were in tens, and dozens, and hundreds, and thousands, each waiting his turn, in a kind of slaughter-house, like the horses whose throats I used to cut at Montfauçon, awaiting each his turn. Then, then, I saw *red*, and began to cut and slash away on these men as I used formerly to do on the horses. The more, however, I chopped down the soldiers, the faster the ranks filled up with others; and as they died, they looked at one with an air so gentle, – so gentle, that I cursed myself for killing 'em; but I couldn't help it. That was not all. I never had a brother; and yet it seemed as if every one of those whom I killed was my brother, and I loved all of them. At last, when I could bear it no longer, I used to wake covered all over with sweat, as cold as melting snow."

"That was a horrid dream, Chourineur!"

"It was; yes. That dream, do you see, was enough to drive one mad or foolish; so, twice, I tried to kill myself, once by swallowing verdigris, and another time by trying to choke myself with my chain; but, confound it, I am as strong as a bull. The verdigris only made me thirsty; and as for the twist of the chain round my neck, why, that only gave me a natural cravat of a blue colour. Afterwards, the desire of life came back to me, nay nightmare ceased to torment me, and I did as others did."

"At the Bagne, you were in a good school for learning how to thief?"

"Yes, but it was not to my taste. The other 'prigs' bullied me; but I soon silenced them with a few thumps of my chain. It was in this way I first knew the Schoolmaster; and I must pay him the compliment due to his blows, – he paid me off as you did some little time ago."

"He is, then, a criminal who has served his time?"

"He was sentenced for life, but escaped."

"Escaped, and not denounced?"

"I'm not the man to denounce him. Besides, it would seem as if I were afraid of him."

"But how is it that the police do not detect him? Have they not got his description?"

"His description? Oh! yes, yes; but it is long since he has scraped out from his phiz what nature had placed there; now, none but the 'baker who puts the condemned in his oven' (the devil) could recognise him" (the Schoolmaster).

"What has he done to himself?"

"He began by destroying his nose, which was an ell long; he ate it off with vitriol."

"You jest."

"If he comes in this evening, you'll see. He had a nose like a parrot, and now it is as flat as in a death's head; to say nothing of his lips, which are as thick as your fist, and his face, which is as wrinkled as the waistcoat of a rag-picker."

"And so he is not recognised?"

"It is six months since he escaped from Rochefort, and the 'traps' have met him a hundred times without knowing him."

"Why was he at the Bagne?"

"For having been a forger, thief, and assassin. He is called the Schoolmaster because he wrote a splendid hand, and has had a good education."

"And is he much feared?"

"He will not be any longer, when you have given him such a licking as you gave me. Oh, by Jove, I am anxious to see it!"

"What does he do for a living?"

"He is associated with an old woman as bad as himself, and as deep as the 'old one;' but she is never seen, though he has told the ogress that some day or other he would bring his 'mot' (woman) with him."

"And this women helps him in his robberies?"

"Yes, and in his murders too. They say he brags of having already, with her assistance, 'done for' two or three persons; and, amongst others, three weeks ago, a cattle-dealer on the road to Poissy, whom they also robbed."

"He will be taken sooner or later."

"They must be very cunning, as well as powerful, to do that, for he always has under his blouse a brace of loaded pistols and a dagger. He says that Charlot (the executioner) waits for him, and he can only lose his head once, and so he will kill all he can kill to try and escape. Oh! he makes no mystery of it; and as he is twice as strong as you and I, they will have a tough job who take him."

"What did you do, Chourineur, when you left the Bagne?"

"I offered myself to the master-lighterman of the Quai St. Paul, and I get my livelihood there."

"But as you have never been a 'prig,' why do you live in the Cité?"

"Why, where else can I live? Who likes to be seen with a discharged criminal? I should be tired of always being alone, for I like company, and here I am with my equals. I have a bit of a row sometimes, and they fear me like fire in the Cité; but the police have nothing to say to me, except now and then for a 'shindy,' for which they give me, perhaps, twenty-four hours at the watch-house, and there's an end of that."

"What do you earn a day?"

"Thirty-five sous for taking in the river foot-baths, up to the stomach from twelve to fifteen hours a day, summer and winter; but let me be just, and tell the truth; so if, through having my toes in the water, I get the *grenouille*,⁷ I am allowed to break my arms in breaking up old vessels, and

⁷ A disease of the skin to which all who work in the water are liable.

unloading timber on my back. I begin as a beast of burden, and end like a fish's tail. When I lose my strength entirely, I shall take a rake and a wicker basket, like the old rag-picker whom I see in the recollections of my childhood."

"And yet you are not unhappy."

"There are worse than I am; and without my dreams of the sergeant and soldiers with their throats cut, – for I have the dream still sometimes, – I could quietly wait for the moment when I should drop down dead at the corner of some dunghill, like that at which I was born; but the dream – the dream – by heaven and earth! I don't like even to think of that," said the Chourineur, and he emptied his pipe at the corner of the table.

The Goualeuse had hardly listened to the Chourineur; she seemed wholly absorbed in a deep and melancholy reverie. Rodolph himself was pensive. A tragic incident occurred, which brought these three personages to a recollection of the spot in which they were.

CHAPTER V THE ARREST

The man who had gone out for a moment, after having requested the ogress to look after his jug and plate, soon returned, accompanied by a tall, brawny man, to whom he said, "It was a chance to meet in this way, old fellow! Come in, and let us have a glass together."

The Chourineur said, in a low voice, to Rodolph and the Goualeuse, pointing to the newcomer, "We shall have a row. He's a 'trap.' Look out for squalls."

The two ruffians, one of whom, with the Greek skull-cap pulled over his brows, had inquired several times for the Schoolmaster and the Gros-Boiteux, exchanged rapid glances of the eye, and, rising suddenly from the table, went towards the door; but the two police officers, uttering a peculiar note, seized them. A fierce struggle ensued. The door of the tavern opened, and all of the policemen dashed into the room, whilst, outside, were seen the muskets of the *gens-d'armes*. Taking advantage of the tumult, the charcoal-seller, of whom we have spoken, advanced to the threshold of the *tapis-franc*, and, meeting the eye of Rodolph, he put to his lips the forefinger of his right hand. Rodolph, with a gesture as rapid as it was imperious, desired him to go, and then turned his attention to the scene before him. The man with the Greek skull-cap shrieked with rage, and, half extended on a table, struggled so desperately, that three men could scarcely hold him. His companion, enfeebled, dejected, with livid aspect and pale lips, his lower jaw fallen, and shaking convulsively, made no resistance, but held out his hands to be encased by the handcuffs. The ogress, seated at her bar, and used to such scenes, remained motionless, with her hands in the pockets of her apron.

"What have these fellows done, my dear M. Narcisse Borel?" inquired she of one of the policemen whom she knew.

"Killed an old woman yesterday in the Rue St. Christophe, and robbed her chamber. Before she died, the poor old thing said that she had bitten one of her murderers in the hand. We had our eyes on these two scoundrels; and my comrade, having come to make sure of his men, why, we have made free to take them."

"How lucky they paid me beforehand for their pint!" said the ogress. "Won't you take a dram o' nothin' 'short,' M. Narcisse? Just a 'go' of 'Ratifi' of the Column."

"Thanks, Mother Ponisse, but I must make sure of my game; one fellow shows fight still."

The assassin in the Greek cap was furious with rage, and when they tried to get him into a hackney-coach which was waiting in the street, he resisted so stoutly that they were obliged to carry him. His accomplice, seized with a nervous tremor, could hardly support himself, and his blue lips trembled as though he were speaking. They threw him, helpless and unresisting, into the vehicle. Before he left the *tapis-franc*, the head officer looked attentively at the other guests assembled, and said to the Chourineur, in a tone almost kind:

"What, you here, you bad lot? Why, it is a long time since we heard anything of you. What, no more rows? Are you growing steady?"

"Steady as a stone figure. Why, you know that now I never break a head, even if I am begged to do so!"

"Oh, I don't think that would cost you much trouble, strong as you are."

"Yet here is my master," said the Chourineur, laying his hand on Rodolph's shoulder.

"Stay, I do not know him," said the *agent de police*, looking steadfastly at Rodolph.

"And I do not think we shall form an acquaintance now," replied he.

"I hope not, for your sake, my fine fellow," said the agent; then, turning to the ogress, "Good night, Mother Ponisse; your *tapis-franc* is a regular mouse-trap; this is the third assassin I have taken here."

"I hope it won't be the last, M. Narcisse; it is quite at your service," said the ogress, making a very insinuating nod with her head.

After the departure of the police, the young vagabond with the haggard visage, who was smoking and drinking brandy, refilled his pipe, and said in a hoarse voice to the Chourineur:

"Didn't you 'twig' the 'cove' in the Greek cap? He's Boulotte's man. When I saw the traps walk in, I says to myself, says I, there's something up; and then, too, I saw him keep his hand always under the table."

"It's lucky for the Schoolmaster and Gros-Boiteux that they were not here," said the ogress; "Greek cap asked twice for him, and said they had business together; but I never turn 'nose' (informer) on any customer. If they take them, very well, – every one to his trade; but I never sell my friends. Oh, talk of the old gentleman, and you see his horns," added the hag, as at the moment a man and woman entered the cabaret; "here they are, – the Schoolmaster and his companion. Well, he was right not to show her, for I never see such an ugly creetur in my born days. She ought to be very much obliged to him for having taken up with such a face."

At the name of the Schoolmaster, a sort of shudder seemed to circulate amongst the guests of the *tapis-franc*. Rodolph, himself, in spite of his natural intrepidity, could not wholly subdue a slight emotion at the sight of this redoubtable ruffian, whom he contemplated for some seconds with a mixed feeling of curiosity and horror. The Chourineur had spoken truth when he said that the Schoolmaster was frightfully mutilated. Nothing can be imagined more horrible than the countenance of this man. His face was furrowed in all directions with deep, livid cicatrices; the corrosive action of the vitriol had puffed out his lips; the cartilages of his nose were divided, and two misshapen holes supplied the loss of nostrils. His gray eyes were bright, small, circular, and sparkled savagely; his forehead, as flat as a tiger's, was half hidden beneath a fur cap, with long yellow hair, looking like the crest of a monster.

The Schoolmaster was not more than five feet four or five; his head, which was disproportionately large, was buried between two shoulders, broad, powerful, and fleshy, displaying themselves even under the loose folds of his coarse cotton blouse; he had long, muscular arms, hands short, thick, and hairy to the very fingers' end, with legs somewhat bowed, whose enormous calves betokened his vast strength. This man presented, in fact, the exaggeration of what there is of short, thickset, and condensed, in the type of the Hercules Farnese. As to the expression of ferocity which suffused this hideous mask, and the restless, wild, and glaring look, more like a wild beast than a human being, it is impossible to describe them.

The woman who accompanied the Schoolmaster was old, and rather neatly dressed in a brown gown, with a plaid shawl, of red and black check, and a white bonnet. Rodolph saw her profile, and her green eye, hooked nose, skinny lips, peaked chin, and countenance at once wicked and cunning, reminded him involuntarily of La Chouette, that horrible old wretch who had made poor Fleur-de-Marie her victim. He was just on the point of saying this to the girl, when he saw her suddenly turn pale with fright, whilst looking at the hideous companion of the Schoolmaster, and seizing the arm of Rodolph with a trembling hand, the Goualeuse said, in a low voice:

"Oh, the Chouette! the Chouette! – the one-eyed woman!"

At this moment the Schoolmaster, after having exchanged a few words in an undertone with Barbillon, came slowly towards the table where Rodolph, the Goualeuse, and the Chourineur were sitting, and addressing himself to Fleur-de-Marie, in a hoarse voice, said:

"Ah, my pretty, fair miss, you must quit these two 'muffs,' and come with me."

The Goualeuse made no reply, but clung to Rodolph, her teeth chattering with fright.

"And I shall not be jealous of my man, my little *fourline*" (a pet word for assassin), added the Chouette, laughing loudly. She had not yet recognised in Goualeuse "Pegriotte," her old victim.

"Well, my little white face, dost hear me?" said the monster, advancing. "If thou dost not come, I'll poke your eye out, and make you a match for the Chouette. And thou with the moustache," he said to Rodolph, "if thou dost not stand from between me and the wench, I'll crack thy crown."

"Defend me! oh, defend me!" cried Fleur-de-Marie to Rodolph, clasping her hands. Then, reflecting that she was about to expose him to great danger, she added, in a low voice, "No, no, do not move, Mister Rodolph; if he comes nearer, I will cry out for help, and for fear of the disturbance, which may call in the police, the ogress will take my part."

"Don't be alarmed, my child," said Rodolph, looking calmly at the Schoolmaster; "you are beside me, – don't stir; and as this ill-looking scoundrel makes you as well as myself feel uncomfortable, I will kick him out."

"Thou?" said the Schoolmaster.

"I!" said Rodolph. And, in spite of the efforts of the Goualeuse, he rose from the table. Despite his hardihood, the Schoolmaster retreated a step, so threatening were the looks, so commanding the deportment, of Rodolph. There are peculiar glances of the eye which are irresistible, and certain celebrated duellists are said to owe their bloody triumphs to this fascinating glance, which unmans, paralyses, and destroys their adversaries. The Schoolmaster trembled, retreated a step, and, for once, distrustful of his giant strength, felt under his blouse for his long cut-and-thrust knife. A murder would have stained the *tapis-franc*, no doubt, if the Chouette, taking the Schoolmaster by the arm, had not screamed out:

"A minute, a minute, *fourline*, – let me say a word! You shall walk into these two 'muffs' all the same, presently."

The Schoolmaster looked at her with astonishment. For some minutes she had been looking at Fleur-de-Marie with fixed and increasing attention, as if trying to refresh her memory. At length no doubt remained, and she recognised the Goualeuse.

"Is it possible?" she cried, clasping her hands in astonishment. "It is Pegriotte, who stole my barley-sugar. But where do you come from? Is it the devil who sends you back?" and she shook her clenched hand at the young girl. "You won't come into my clutch again, eh? But be easy; if I do not pull out your teeth, I will have out of your eyes every tear in your body. Come, no airs and graces. You don't know what I mean. Why, I have found out the people who had the care of you before you were handed over to me. The Schoolmaster saw at the *Pré* (the galleys) the man who brought you to my 'crib' when you were a brat, and he has proofs that the people who had you first were 'gentry coves'" (rich people).

"My parents! Do you know them?" cried Fleur-de-Marie.

"Never mind whether I know them or not, you shall know nothing about it. The secret is mine and my *fourline*'s, and I will tear out his tongue rather than he shall blab it. What! it makes you snivel, does it, Pegriotte?"

"Oh, no," said Goualeuse, with a bitterness of accent; "*now* I do not care ever to know my parents."

Whilst La Chouette was speaking, the Schoolmaster had resumed his assurance, for, looking at Rodolph, he could not believe that a young man of slight and graceful make could for a moment cope with him, and, confident in his brutal force, he approached the defender of Goualeuse, and said to the Chouette, in an imperious voice:

"Hold your jaw! I'll tackle with this swell, and then the fair lady may think me more to her fancy than he is."

With one bound Rodolph leaped on the table.

"Take care of my plates!" shouted the ogress.

The Schoolmaster stood on his guard, his two hands in front, his chest advanced, firmly planted on his legs, and arched, as it were, on his brawny legs, which were like balusters of stone. At the moment when Rodolph was springing at him, the door of the *tapis-franc* opened with violence, and

the charcoal-man, of whom we have before spoken, and who was upwards of six feet high, dashed into the apartment, pushed the Schoolmaster on one side rudely, and coming up to Rodolph, said, in German, in his ear:

"Monseigneur, the countess and her brother – they are at the end of the street."

At these words Rodolph made an impatient and angry gesture, threw a louis d'or on the bar of the ogress, and made for the door in haste. The Schoolmaster attempted to arrest Rodolph's progress, but he, turning to him, gave him two or three rapid blows with his fists over the nose and eyes, and with such potent effect, that the beast staggered with very giddiness, and fell heavily against a table, which alone prevented his prostration on the floor.

"*Vive la Charte!* those are *my* blows, – I know them," cried the Chourineur; "two or three more lessons like that, and I shall know all about it."

Restored to himself after a few moments, the Schoolmaster darted off in pursuit of Rodolph, but he had disappeared with the charcoal-man in the dark labyrinth of the streets of the Cité, and the brigand found it useless to follow.

At the moment when the Schoolmaster had returned, foaming with rage, two persons, approaching from the opposite side to that by which Rodolph had disappeared, entered into the *tapis-franc*, hastily, and out of breath, as if they had been running far and fast. Their first impulse was to look around the room.

"How unfortunate!" said one of them; "he has gone, – another opportunity lost."

The two newcomers spoke in English. The Goualeuse, horror-struck at meeting with the Chouette, and dreading the threats of the Schoolmaster, took advantage of the tumult and confusion caused by the arrival of the two fresh guests in the *tapis-franc*, and, quietly gliding out by the half-opened door, left the cabaret.

CHAPTER VI

THOMAS SEYTON AND THE COUNTESS SARAH

The two persons who had just entered the *tapis-franc* were quite of another class from those who ordinarily frequented it. One, tall and erect, had hair almost white, black eyebrows and whiskers, a long and tanned face, with a stiff, formal air. His long frock coat was buttoned up to the throat, *à la militaire*. We shall call this individual Thomas Seyton. His companion was young, pale, and handsome, and appeared about thirty-one or two years of age. His hair, eyebrows, and eyes were of a deep black, which showed off the more fully the pure whiteness of his face. By his step, the smallness of his stature, and the delicacy of his features, it was easy to detect a woman in male habiliments. This female was the Countess Sarah Macgregor. We will hereafter inform our readers of the motives and events which had brought the countess and her brother into this cabaret of the Cité.

"Call for something to drink, Thomas, and ask the people here about *him*; perhaps they may give us some information," said Sarah, still speaking English.

The man with white hair and black eyebrows sat down at a table, whilst Sarah was wiping her forehead, and said to the ogress, in excellent French, "Madame, let us have something to drink, if you please."

The entrance of these two persons into the *tapis-franc* had excited universal attention. Their dress, their manners, all announced that they never frequented low drinking-shops, whilst, by their restless looks and disturbed countenances, it might be judged that some very powerful motives had led them hither. The Chourineur, the Schoolmaster, and the Chouette viewed them with increasing curiosity.

Startled by the appearance of such strange customers, the ogress shared in the general surprise. Thomas Seyton, a second time, and with an impatient tone, said, "We have called for something to drink, ma'am; pray let us have it."

Mother Ponisse, flattered by their courtesy of manner, left her bar, and, coming towards her new guests, leaned her arms on their table, and said, "Will you have a pint of wine in measure or a bottle?"

"A bottle of wine, glasses, and some water."

The ogress brought the supplies demanded, and Thomas Seyton threw her a five-franc piece, and refused the change which she offered to him.

"Keep it, my good woman, for yourself, and perhaps you will take a glass with us."

"You're uncommon purlite, sir," looking at the countess's brother with as much surprise as gratitude.

"But tell me, now," said he; "we had appointed to meet a friend in a cabaret in this street, and have, perhaps, mistaken the house in coming here."

"This is the 'White Rabbit,' at your service, sir."

"That's right enough, then," said Thomas, making a sign to Sarah; "yes, it was at the 'White Rabbit' that he was to give us the meeting."

"There are not two 'White Rabbits' in this street," said the ogress, with a toss of her head. "But what sort of a person was your friend?"

"Tall, slim, and with hair and moustaches of light chestnut," said Seyton.

"Exactly, exactly; that's the man who has just gone out. A charcoal-man, very tall and stout, came in and said a few words to him, and they left together."

"The very man we want to meet," said Tom.

"Were they alone here?" inquired Sarah.

"Why, the charcoal-man only came in for one moment; but your comrade supped here with the Chourineur and Goualeuse;" and with a nod of her head, the ogress pointed out the individual of the party who was left still in the cabaret.

Thomas and Sarah turned towards the Chourineur. After contemplating him for a few minutes, Sarah said, in English, to her companion, "Do you know this man?"

"No; Karl lost all trace of Rodolph at the entrance of these obscure streets. Seeing Murphy disguised as a charcoal-seller, keeping watch about this cabaret, and constantly peeping through the windows, he was afraid that something wrong was going on, and so came to warn us. Murphy, no doubt, recognised him."

During this conversation, held in a very low tone, and in a foreign tongue, the Schoolmaster said to the Chouette, looking at Tom and Sarah, "The swell has shelled out a 'bull' to the ogress. It is just twelve, rains and blows like the devil. When they leave the 'crib,' we will be on their 'lay,' and draw the 'flat' of his 'blunt.' As his 'mot' is with him, he'll hold his jaw."

If Tom and Sarah had heard this foul language, they would not have understood it, and would not have detected the plot against them.

"Be quiet, *fourline*," answered the Chouette; "if the 'cull' sings out for the 'traps,' I have my vitriol in my pocket, and will break the phial in his 'patter-box.' Nothing like a drink to keep children from crying," she added. "Tell me, darling, sha'n't we lay hands on Pegriotte the first time we meet with her? And only let me once get her to our place, and I'll rub her chops with my vitriol, and then my lady will no longer be proud of her fine skin."

"Well said, Chouette; I shall make you my wife some day or other," said the Schoolmaster; "you have no equal for skill and courage. On that night with the cattle-dealer, I had an opportunity of judging of you; and I said, 'Here's the wife for me; she works better than a man.'"

"And you said right, *fourline*; if the Skeleton had had a woman like me at his elbow, he would not have been nabbed with his gully in the dead man's weasand."

"He's done up, and now he will not leave the 'stone jug,' except to kiss the headsman's daughter, and be a head shorter."

"What strange language these people talk!" said Sarah, who had involuntarily heard the last few words of the conversation between the Schoolmaster and the Chouette. Then she added, pointing to the Chourineur, "If we ask this man some questions about Rodolph, perhaps he may be able to answer them."

"We can but try," replied Thomas, who said to the Chourineur, "Comrade, we expected to find in this cabaret a friend of ours; he supped with you, I find. Perhaps, as you know him, you will tell us which way he has gone?"

"I know him because he gave me a precious good hiding two hours ago, to prevent me from beating Goualeuse."

"And have you never seen him before?"

"Never; we met by chance in the alley which leads to Bras Rouge's house."

"Hostess, another bottle of the best," said Thomas Seyton.

Sarah and he had hardly moistened their lips, and their glasses were still full; but Mother Ponisse, doubtless anxious to pay proper respect to her own cellar, had frequently filled and emptied hers.

"And put it on the table where that gentleman sits, if he will permit," added Thomas, who, with Sarah, seated themselves beside the Chourineur, who was as much astonished as flattered by such politeness.

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette were talking over their own dark plans in low tones and "flash" language. The bottle being brought, and Sarah and her brother seated with the Chourineur and the ogress, who had considered a second invitation as superfluous, the conversation was resumed.

"You told us, my good fellow, that you met our comrade Rodolph in the house where Bras Rouge lives?" inquired Thomas Seyton, as he hob and nobbed with the Chourineur.

"Yes, my good fellow," replied he, as he emptied his glass at a gulp.

"What a singular name is Bras Rouge! What is this Bras Rouge?"

"*Il pastique la maltouze*" (smuggles), said the Chourineur, in a careless tone, and then added, "This is jolly good wine, Mother Ponisse!"

"If you think so, do not spare it, my fine fellow," said Seyton, and he filled the Chourineur's glass as he spoke.

"Your health, mate," said he, "and the health of your little friend, who – but mum. 'If my aunt was a man, she'd be my uncle,' as the proverb says. Ah! you sly rogue, I'm up to you!"

Sarah coloured slightly as her brother continued, "I did not quite understand what you meant about Bras Rouge. Rodolph came from his house, no doubt?"

"I told you that Bras Rouge *pastique la maltouze*."

Thomas regarded the Chourineur with an air of surprise.

"What do you mean by *pastique la mal*– What do you call it?"

"*Pastiquer la maltouze*. He smuggles, I suppose you would call it; but it seems you can't 'patter flash?'"

"My fine fellow, I don't understand one word you say."

"I see you can't talk slang like M. Rodolph."

"Slang?" said Thomas Seyton, looking at Sarah with an astonished air.

"Ah! you are yokels; but comrade Rodolph is an out-and-out pal, he is. Though only a fan-painter, yet he is as 'downy' in 'flash' as I am myself. Well, since you can't speak this very fine language, I tell you, in plain French, that Bras Rouge is a smuggler, and, besides that, has a small tavern in the Champs Elysées. I say, without breaking faith, that he is a smuggler, for he makes no secret of it, but owns it under the very nose of the custom-house officers. Find him out, though, if you can; Bras Rouge is a deep one."

"What could Rodolph want at the house of this man?" asked Sarah.

"Really, sir, or madam, which you please, I know nothing about anything, as true as I drink this glass of wine. I was chaffing to-night with the Goualeuse, who thought I was going to beat her, and she ran up Bras Rouge's alley, and I after her; it was as dark as the devil. Instead of hitting Goualeuse, however, I stumbled on Master Rodolph, who soon gave me better than I sent. Such thumps! and especially those infernal thwacks with his fist at last. My eyes! how hot and heavy they did fall! But he's promised to teach me, and to –"

"And Bras Rouge, what sort of a person is he?" asked Tom. "What goods does he sell?"

"Bras Rouge? Oh, by the Holy! he sells everything he is forbidden to sell, and does everything which it is forbidden to do. That's his line, ain't it, Mother Ponisse?"

"Oh! he's a boy with more than one string to his bow," answered the ogress. "He is, besides, principal occupier of a certain house in the Rue du Temple, – a rum sort of a house, to be sure; but mum," added she, fearing to have revealed too much.

"And what is the address of Bras Rouge in that street?" asked Seyton of the Chourineur.

"No. 13, sir."

"Perhaps we may learn something there," said Seyton, in a low voice, to his sister. "I will send Karl thither to-morrow."

"As you know M. Rodolph," said the Chourineur, "you may boast the acquaintance of a stout friend and a good fellow. If it had not been for the charcoal-man, he would have 'doubled up' the Schoolmaster, who is there in the corner with the Chouette. By the Lord! I can hardly contain myself, when I see that old hag, and know how she behaved to the Goualeuse, – but patience, 'a blow delayed is not a blow lost,' as the saying is."

The Hotel de Ville clock struck midnight; the lamp of the tavern only shed a dim and flickering light. Except the Chourineur and his two companions, the Schoolmaster, and the Screech-owl, all the guests of the *tapis-franc* had retired one after the other.

The Schoolmaster said, in an undertone, to the Chouette, "If we go and hide in the alley opposite, we shall see the swells come out, and know which road they take. If they turn to the left, we can double upon them at the turning of the Rue Saint Eloi; if to the right, we will wait for them by the ruins close to the tripe-market. There's a large hole close by, and I have a capital idea."

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette then went towards the door.

"You won't, then, take a 'drain' of nothin' to-night?" said the ogress.

"No, Mother Ponisse, we only came in to take shelter from the rain," said the Schoolmaster, as he and the Chouette went out.

CHAPTER VII

"YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE."

The noise which was made by the shutting of the door aroused Tom and Sarah from their reverie, and they rose, and, having thanked the Chourineur for the information he had given them, the fellow went out, the wind blowing very strongly, and the rain falling in torrents. The Schoolmaster and the Chouette, hidden in an alley opposite the *tapis-franc*, saw the Chourineur go down the street, in the direction of the street in which the house in ruins was situated. His steps, which were somewhat irregular, in consequence of the frequent libations of the evening, were soon unheard amidst the whistling of the storm and the sheets of rain which dashed against the walls. Sarah and Tom left the tavern in spite of the tempest, and took a contrary direction to the Chourineur.

"They're done for," said the Schoolmaster, in a low key, to the Chouette; "out with your vitriol, and mind your eye."

"Let us take off our shoes, and then they won't hear us as we follow," suggested the Chouette.

"You are right, – always right; let us tread like cats, my old darling."

The two monsters took off their shoes, and moved stealthily along, keeping in the shadows of the houses. By means of this stratagem they followed so closely, that, although within a few steps of Sarah and Tom, they did not hear them.

"Fortunately our hackney-coach is at the end of the street; the rain falls in torrents. Are you not cold, Sarah?"

"Perhaps we shall glean something from this smuggler, – this Bras Rouge," said Sarah, in a thoughtful tone, and not replying to her brother's inquiry.

He suddenly stopped, and said, "I have taken a wrong turning; I ought to have gone to the right when I left the tavern; we must pass by a house in ruins to reach the *fiacre*. We must turn back."

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette, who followed on the heels of their intended victims, retreated into the dark porch of a house close at hand, so that they might not be perceived by Tom and Sarah, who, in passing, almost touched them with their elbows.

"I am glad they have gone that way," said the Schoolmaster, "for if the 'cove' resists, I have my own idea."

Sarah and her brother, having again passed by the *tapis-franc*, arrived close to the dilapidated house, which was partly in ruins, and its opened cellars formed a kind of gulf, along which the street ran in that direction. In an instant, the Schoolmaster, with a leap resembling in strength and agility the spring of a tiger, seized Seyton with one hand by the throat, and exclaimed, "Your money, or I will fling you into this hole!"

Then the brigand, pushing Seyton backwards, shoved him off his balance, and with one hand held him suspended over the mouth of the deep excavation; whilst, with his other hand, he grasped the arm of Sarah, as if in a vice. Before Tom could make the slightest struggle, the Chouette had emptied his pockets with singular dexterity. Sarah did not utter a cry, nor try to resist; she only said, in a calm tone, "Give up your purse, brother;" and then accosting the robber, "We will make no noise; do not do us any injury."

The Chouette, having carefully searched the pockets of the two victims of this ambush, said to Sarah, "Let's see your hands, if you've got any rings. No," said the old brute, grumblingly, "no, not one ring. What a shame!"

Tom Seyton did not lose his presence of mind during this scene, rapidly and unexpectedly as it had occurred.

"Will you strike a bargain? My pocketbook contains papers quite useless to you; return it to me, and to-morrow I will give you twenty-five louis d'ors," said Tom to the Schoolmaster, whose hand relaxed something of its fierce gripe.

"Oh! ah! to lay a trap to catch us," replied the thief. "Be off, without looking behind you, and be thankful that you have escaped so well."

"One moment," said the Chouette; "if he behaves well, he shall have his pocketbook. There is a way." Then, addressing Thomas Seyton, "You know the plain of St. Denis?"

"I do."

"Do you know where St. Ouen is?"

"Yes."

"Opposite St. Ouen, at the end of the road of La Revolte, the plain is wide and open. Across the fields, one may see a long way. Come there to-morrow, quite alone, with your money in your hand; you will find me and the pocketbook ready. Hand me the cash, and I will hand you the pocketbook."

"But he'll trap you, Chouette."

"Oh, no, he won't; I'm up to him or any of his dodges. We can see a long way off. I have only one eye, but that is a piercer; and if the 'cove' comes with a companion, he won't find anybody; I shall have 'mizzled.'"

A sudden idea seemed to strike Sarah, and she said to the brigand, "Will you like to gain some money?"

"Yes."

"Did you see, in the cabaret we have just left – for I know you again – the man whom the charcoal-man came to seek?"

"A dandy with moustaches? Yes, I would have stuck it into the fellow, but he did not give me time. He stunned me with two blows of his fists, and upset me on the table, – for the first time that any man ever did so. Curses on him! but I will be revenged."

"He is the man I mean," said Sarah.

"He?" cried the Schoolmaster, "a thousand francs, and I'll kill him."

"Wretch! I do not seek his life," replied Sarah to the Schoolmaster.

"What, then, would you have?"

"Come to-morrow to the plain of St. Denis; you will there find my companion," she replied; "you will see that he is alone, and he will tell you what to do. I will not give you one thousand, but two thousand, francs, if you succeed."

"*Fourline*," said the Chouette, in a low tone, to the Schoolmaster, "there's 'blunt' to be had; these are a 'swell' lot, who want to be revenged on an enemy, and that enemy is the beggar that you wished to 'floor.' Let's go and meet him. I would go, if I were you. Fire and smoke! Old boy, it will pay for looking after."

"Well, my wife shall be there," said the Schoolmaster; "you will tell her what you want, and I shall see –"

"Be it so; to-morrow at one."

"At one o'clock."

"In the plain of St. Denis?"

"In the plain of St. Denis."

"Between St. Ouen and the road of La Revolte, at the end of the road?"

"Agreed."

"I will bring your pocketbook."

"And you shall have the five hundred francs I promised you, and we will agree in the other matter, if you are reasonable."

"Now, you go to the right, and we to the left hand. Do not follow us, or else –"

The Schoolmaster and the Chouette hurried off, whilst Tom and the countess went in the other direction, towards Notre Dame.

A concealed witness had been present at this transaction; it was the Chourineur, who had entered the cellars of the house to get shelter from the rain. The proposal which Sarah made to the brigand respecting Rodolph deeply interested the Chourineur, who, alarmed for the perils which appeared about to beset his new friend, regretted that he could not warn him of them. Perhaps his detestation of the Schoolmaster and the Chouette might have something to do with this feeling.

The Chourineur resolved to inform Rodolph of the danger which threatened him; but how? He had forgotten the address of the self-styled fan-painter. Perhaps Rodolph would never again come to the *tapis-franc*, and then how could he warn him? Whilst he was conning all this over in his mind, the Chourineur had mechanically followed Tom and Sarah, and saw them get into a coach which awaited them near Notre Dame.

The *fiacre* started. The Chourineur got up behind, and at one o'clock it stopped on the Boulevard de l'Observatoire, and Thomas and Sarah went down a narrow entrance, which was close at hand. The night was pitch dark, and the Chourineur, that he might know the next day the place where he then was, drew from his pocket his clasp-knife, and cut a deep notch in one of the trees at the corner of the entrance, and then returned to his resting-place, which was at a considerable distance.

For the first time for a very long while, the Chourineur enjoyed in his den a comfortable sleep, which was not once interrupted by the horrible vision of the "Sergeant's slaughter-house," as, in his coarse language, he styled it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WALK

On the day after the evening on which the various events we have described had passed, a bright autumnal sun shone from a pure sky; the darkness of the night had wholly disappeared. Although always shaded by the height of the houses, the disreputable neighbourhood into which the reader has followed us seemed less horrible when viewed in the light of open day.

Whether Rodolph no longer feared meeting with the two persons whom he had evaded the over-night, or did not care whether he faced them or not, about eleven o'clock in the morning he entered the Rue aux Fêves, and directed his steps towards the tavern of the ogress.

Rodolph was still in a workman's dress; but there was a decided neatness in his costume. His new blouse, open on his chest, showed a red woollen shirt, closed by several silver buttons; whilst the collar of another shirt, of white cotton, fell over a black silk cravat, loosely tied around his neck. From under his sky blue velvet cap, with a bright leather peak, several locks of chestnut hair were seen; and his boots, cleaned very brightly, and replacing the heavy iron shoes of the previous evening, showed off to advantage a well-formed foot, which seemed all the smaller from appearing out of a loose pantaloon of olive velveteen. The costume was well calculated to display the elegant shape and carriage of Rodolph, which combined so much grace, suppleness, and power. The ogress was airing herself at her door when Rodolph presented himself.

"Your servant, young man; you have come, no doubt, for your change of the twenty francs," she said, with some show of respect, not venturing to forget that the conqueror of the Chourineur had handed her a louis d'or the previous evening. "There is seventeen francs ten sous coming to you; but that's not all. There was somebody here asking after you last night, – a tall gent, well dressed, and with him a young woman in men's clothes. They drank my best wine along with the Chourineur."

"Oh, with the Chourineur, did they? And what could they have to say to him?"

"When I say they drank, I make a mistake; they only just sipped a drain or so, and – "

"But what did they say to the Chourineur?"

"Oh, they talked of all manner of things, – of Bras Rouge, and the rain, and fine weather."

"Do they know Bras Rouge?"

"Not by no means; the Chourineur told 'em all about him, and as how as you – "

"Well, well, that is not what I want to know."

"You want your change."

"Yes, and I want to take Goualeuse to pass the day in the country."

"Oh, that's impossible!"

"Why?"

"Why? Because she may never come back again. Her things belong to me, not including as she owes me a matter of ninety francs as a balance for her board and lodging, for the six weeks as she has lodged with me; and if I didn't know her to be as honest a gal as is, I should never let her go out of sight."

"Goualeuse owes you ninety francs?"

"Ninety francs ten sous; but what's that to you, my lad? Are you a-going to come 'my lord,' and pay it for her?"

"Yes," said Rodolph, throwing five louis on the ogress's bar, "and what's your price for the clothes she wears?"

The old hag, amazed, looked at the louis one after the other, with an air of much doubt and mistrust.

"What! do you think I have given you bad money? Send and get change for one of them; but make haste about it. I say, again, how much for the garments the poor girl is wearing?"

The ogress, divided between her desire to make a good harvest, her surprise to see a workman with so much money, the fear of being cheated, and the hopes of still greater gain, was silent for an instant, and then replied, "Oh, them things is well worth a hundred francs."

"What! those rags? Come, now, you shall keep the change from yesterday, and I'll give you another louis, and no more. If I give you all I have, I shall cheat the poor, who ought to get some alms out of me."

"Well, then, my fine fellow, I'll keep my things, and Goualeuse sha'n't go out. I have a right to sell my things for what I choose."

"May Lucifer one day fry you as you deserve! Here's your money; go and look for Goualeuse."

The ogress pocketed the gold, thinking that the workman had committed a robbery, or received a legacy, and then said, with a nasty leer, "Well, indeed! Why not go up-stairs, and find Goualeuse yourself; she'll be very glad to see you, for, on my life, she was much smitten with you yesterday?"

"Do you go and fetch her, and tell her I will take her into the country; that's all you need say; not a word about my having paid you her debt."

"Why not?"

"What's that to you?"

"Oh, nothing; it's no matter to me; I would rather that she still believed herself in my clutch – "

"Will you hold your tongue, and do as I bid you?"

"Oh, what a cross creetur you are! I pity anybody who is under you. Well, I'm going, I'm going;" and the ogress went up-stairs.

After a few minutes she came down again.

"Goualeuse would not believe me, and really turned quite crimson when she knew you were here; and when I told her that I would give her leave to pass the day in the country, I thought she would have gone crazy, – for the first time in her life she was inclined to throw her arms about my neck."

"That was her delight at leaving you."

Fleur-de-Marie entered at this moment, dressed as she was the over-night, with her gown of brown stuff, her little orange shawl tied behind her, and her handkerchief of red checks over her head, leaving only two thick bands of light hair visible. She blushed when she saw Rodolph, and looked down with a confused air.

"Would you like to pass the day in the country with me, my lass?" asked Rodolph.

"Very much, indeed, M. Rodolph," said Goualeuse, "since madame gives me leave."

"Yes, yes, you may go, my little duck, because you're such a good gal. Come and kiss me afore you go."

And the old beldam offered her bloated lips to Fleur-de-Marie. The poor girl, overcoming her disgust, bent her forehead to the ogress, but Rodolph, giving a sudden push with his elbow, shoved the hag back on her seat, took Fleur-de-Marie's arm, and left the *tapis-franc*, amidst the loud maledictions of Mother Ponisse.

"Mind, M. Rodolph," said Goualeuse; "the ogress will, perhaps, throw something at you, – she is very spiteful."

"Oh, don't heed her, my girl. But what's the matter with you? You seem embarrassed, sad. Are you sorry for having come out with me?"

"Oh, dear, no; but – but – you give me your arm!"

"Well, and what of that?"

"You are a workman, and some one may tell your master that they met you with me, and harm may come of it; masters do not like their workmen to be unsteady." And Goualeuse gently removed her arm from that of Rodolph, adding, "Go on by yourself; I will follow you to the barrier; when we are once in the fields I can walk with you."

"Do not be uneasy," said Rodolph, touched by the poor girl's consideration, and taking her arm again; "my master does not live in this quarter, and we shall find a coach on the Quai aux Fleurs."

"As you please, M. Rodolph; I only said so that you might not get into trouble."

"I am sure of that, and thank you very much. But tell me, is it all the same to you what part of the country we go into?"

"Yes, quite so, M. Rodolph, so that it be the country. It is so fine and it is so nice to breathe the open air! Do you know that I have not been farther than the flower-market for these six weeks? And now, if the ogress allows me to leave the Cité, she must have great confidence in me."

"And when you came here, was it to buy flowers?"

"Oh, no, I had no money; I only came to look at them, and breathe their beautiful smell. During the half-hour which the ogress allowed me to pass on the quay on market-days, I was so happy that I forgot everything else."

"And on returning to the ogress, and those filthy streets?"

"Oh, why, then I returned more sad than when I set out; but I wiped my eyes, that I might not be beaten for crying. Yet, at the market, what made me envious – oh, so envious! – was to see neat, clean little workwomen, who were going away so gaily with a beautiful pot of flowers in their hands."

"I am sure that if you had had but a few flowers in your own window, they would have kept you company."

"What you say is quite true, M. Rodolph. Only imagine, one day, on her birthday, the ogress, knowing my taste, gave me a little rose-tree. If you only knew how happy it made me, – I was never tired of looking at it, – my own rose-tree! I counted its leaves, its flowers; but the air of the Cité is bad, and it began to wither in two days. Then – but you'll laugh at me, M. Rodolph."

"No, no; go on."

"Well, then, I asked the ogress to let me go out, and take my rose-tree for a walk, as I would have taken a child out. Well, then, I carried it to the quay, thinking that to be with other flowers in the fresh and balmy air would do it good. I bathed its poor fading leaves in the clear waters of the fountain, and then to dry it I placed it for a full quarter of an hour in the sun. Dear little rose-tree! it never saw the sun in the Cité any more than I did, for in our street it never descends lower than the roof. At last I went back again, and I assure you, M. Rodolph, that, thanks to these walks, my rose-tree lived at least ten days longer than it would have done, had I not taken such pains with it."

"No doubt of it. But when it died, what a loss it must have been to you!"

"I cried heartily, for it grieved me very, very much; and you see, M. Rodolph, – for you know one loves flowers, although one hasn't any of one's own, – you see, I felt grateful to it, that dear rose-tree, for blooming so kindly for me, although I was so –"

Goualeuse bent her head, and blushed deeply.

"Unhappy child! With this feeling of your own position, you must often –"

"Have desired to end it, you mean, sir?" said Goualeuse, interrupting her companion. "Yes, yes, more than once. A month ago I looked over the parapet at the Seine; but then, when I looked at the flowers, and the sun, then I said, 'The river will be always there; I am but sixteen and a half, – who knows?'"

"When you said 'who knows,' you had hope?"

"Yes."

"And what did you hope?"

"To find some charitable soul who would get me work, so that I might be enabled to leave the ogress; and this hope comforted me. Then I said to myself, I am very wretched, but I have never injured anybody, and if I had any one to advise me I should not be as I am. This lightened my sorrow a little, though it had greatly increased at the loss of my rose-tree," added Goualeuse, with a sigh.

"Always so very sad."

"Yes; but look, here it is."

And Goualeuse took from her pocket a little bundle of wood trimmed very carefully, and tied with a rose-coloured bow.

"What, have you kept it?"

"I have, indeed; it is all I possess in the world."

"What, have you nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"This coral necklace?"

"Belongs to the ogress."

"And you have not a piece of riband, a cap, or handkerchief?"

"No, nothing, – nothing but the dead branches of my poor rose-tree; and that is why I love it so."

When Rodolph and Goualeuse had reached the Quai aux Fleurs, a coach was waiting there, into which Rodolph handed Goualeuse. He got in himself, saying to the driver:

"To St. Denis; I will tell you presently which road to take."

The coach went on. The sun was bright, and the sky cloudless, whilst the air, fresh and crisp, circulated freely through the open windows.

"Here is a woman's cloak!" said Goualeuse, remarking that she had seated herself on the garment without having at first noticed it.

"Yes, it is for you, my child; I brought it with me for fear you should be cold."

Little accustomed to such attention, the poor girl looked at Rodolph with surprise.

"*Mon Dieu!* M. Rodolph, how kind you are; I am really ashamed – "

"Because I am kind?"

"No; but you do not speak as you did yesterday; you appear quite another person."

"Tell me, then, Fleur-de-Marie, which do you like best, – the Rodolph of yesterday, or the Rodolph of to-day?"

"I like you better now; yet yesterday I seemed to be more your equal." Then, as if correcting herself, and fearing to have annoyed Rodolph, she said to him, "When I say your equal, M. Rodolph, I do not mean that I can ever be that."

"One thing in you astonishes me very much, Fleur-de-Marie."

"And what is that, M. Rodolph?"

"You appear to have forgotten that the Chouette said to you yesterday that she knew the persons who had brought you up."

"Oh! I have not forgotten it; I thought of it all night, and I cried bitterly; but I am sure it is not true; she invented this tale to make me unhappy."

"Yet the Chouette may know more than you think. If it were so, should you not be delighted to be restored to your parents?"

"Alas, sir! if my parents never loved me, what should I gain by discovering them? They would only see me and – But if they *did* ever love me, what shame I should bring on them! Perhaps I should kill them!"

"If your parents ever loved you, Fleur-de-Marie, they will pity, pardon, and still love you. If they have abandoned you, then, when they see the frightful destiny to which they have brought you, *their* shame and remorse will avenge you."

"What is the good of vengeance?"

"You are right; let us talk no more on the subject."

At this moment the carriage reached St. Ouen, where the road divides to St. Denis and the Revolte. In spite of the monotony of the landscape, Fleur-de-Marie was so delighted at seeing the fields, as she called them, that, forgetting the sad thoughts which the recollection of the Chouette had awakened in her, her lovely countenance grew radiant with delight. She leaned out of the window, clasping her hands, and crying:

"M. Rodolph, how happy I am! Grass! Fields! May I get out? It is so fine! I should so like to run in the meadows."

"Let us run, then, my child. Coachman, stop."

"What! You, too? Will you run, M. Rodolph?"

"I'm having a holiday."

"Oh! What pleasure!"

And Rodolph and Goualeuse, taking each other's hand, ran as fast as they could over a long piece of latter-grass, just mowed. It would be impossible to describe the leaps and exclamations of joy, the intense delight, of Fleur-de-Marie. Poor lamb! so long a prisoner, she inspired the free air with indescribable pleasure. She ran, returned, stopped, and then raced off again with renewed happiness. At the sight of the daisies and buttercups Goualeuse could not restrain her transport, – she did not leave one flower which she could gather. After having run about in this way for some time, she became rather tired, for she had lost the habit of exercise, and stopped to take breath, sitting down on the trunk of a fallen tree which was lying at the edge of a deep ditch.

The clear and white complexion of Fleur-de-Marie, generally rather pale, was now heightened by the brightest colour. Her large blue eyes sparkled brightly, her vermilion lips, partly opened to recover her breath, displayed two rows of liquid pearls; her bosom throbbed under her worn-out little orange shawl, and she placed one of her hands upon her heart, as if to restrain its quickened pulsation, whilst with the other hand she proffered to Rodolph the bouquet of field flowers which she had just gathered. Nothing could be more charming than the combination of innocence and pure joy which beamed on her expressive countenance. When Fleur-de-Marie could speak, she said to Rodolph, with an accent of supreme happiness and of gratitude, almost amounting to piety:

"How good is the great God to give us so fine a day!"

A tear came into Rodolph's eye when he heard this poor, forsaken, despised, lost creature utter a cry of happiness and deep gratitude to the Creator, because she enjoyed a ray of sunshine and the sight of a green field. He was roused from his reverie by an unexpected occurrence.

CHAPTER IX

THE SURPRISE

We have said that Goualeuse was sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, at the edge of a deep ditch. Suddenly a man, springing up from the bottom of this hollow, shook the rubbish from him under which he had concealed himself, and burst into a loud fit of laughter. Goualeuse turned around, screaming with alarm. It was the Chourineur.

"Don't be frightened, my girl," said the Chourineur, when he saw her extreme fear, and that she had sought protection from her companion. "Ah, Master Rodolph, here's a curious meeting, which I am sure neither you nor I expected." Then he added, in a serious tone, "Listen, master. People may say what they like, but there is something in the air, – there, up there, above our heads, very wonderful; which seems to say to a man, 'Go where I send you.' See how you two have been sent here. It is devilish wonderful!"

"What are you doing there?" said Rodolph, greatly surprised.

"I was on the lookout in a matter of yours, master; but, thunder and lightning! what a high joke that you should come at this particular moment into this very neighbourhood of my country-house! There's something in all this, – decidedly there is something."

"But again I ask you, what are you doing there?"

"All in good time, I'll tell you; only let me first look about me for a moment."

The Chourineur then ran towards the coach, which was some distance off, looked this way and that way over the plain with a keen and rapid glance, and then rejoined Rodolph, running quickly.

"Will you explain to me the meaning of all this?"

"Patience, patience, good master; one word more. What's o'clock?"

"Half past twelve," said Rodolph, looking at his watch.

"All right; we have time, then. The Chouette will not be here for the next half-hour."

"The Chouette!" cried Rodolph and the girl both at once.

"Yes, the Chouette; in two words, master, I'll tell you all. Yesterday, after you had left the *tapis-franc*, there came – "

"A tall man with a woman in man's attire, who asked for me; I know all about that, but then – "

"Then they paid for my liquor, and wanted to 'draw' me about you. I had nothing to tell them, because you had communicated nothing to me, except those fisticuffs which settled me. All I know is, that I learned something then which I shall not easily forget. But we are friends for life and death, Master Rodolph, though the devil burn me if I know why. I feel for you the regard which the bulldog feels for his master. It was after you told me that I had 'heart and honour;' but that's nothing, so there's an end of it. It is no use trying to account for it; so it is, and so let it be, if it's any good to you."

"Many thanks, my man; but go on."

"The tall man and the little lady in men's clothes, finding that they could get nothing out of me, left the ogress's, and so did I; they going towards the Palais de Justice, and I to Notre Dame. On reaching the end of the street I found it was raining pitchforks, points downward, – a complete deluge. There was an old house in ruins close at hand, and I said to myself, 'If this shower is to last all night, I shall sleep as well here as in my own "crib."' So I rolled myself into a sort of cave, where I was high and dry; my bed was an old beam, and my pillow a heap of lath and plaster, and there I slept like a king."

"Well, well, go on."

"We had drank together, Master Rodolph; I had drank, too, with the tall man and the little woman dressed in man's clothes, so you may believe my head was rather heavy, and, besides, nothing sends me off to sleep like a good fall of rain. I began then to snooze, but I had not been long asleep,

I think, when, aroused by a noise, I sat up and listened. I heard the Schoolmaster, who was talking in a friendly tone with somebody. I soon made out that he was parleying with the tall man who came into the *tapis-franc* with the little woman dressed in man's clothes."

"They in conference with the Schoolmaster and the Chouette?" said Rodolph, with amazement.

"With the Schoolmaster and the Chouette; and they agreed to meet again on the morrow."

"That's to-day!" said Rodolph.

"At one o'clock."

"This very moment!"

"Where the road branches off to St. Denis and La Revolte."

"This very spot!"

"Just as you say, Master Rodolph, on this very spot."

"The Schoolmaster! Oh, pray be on your guard, M. Rodolph," exclaimed Fleur-de-Marie.

"Don't be alarmed, my child, he won't come; it's only the Chouette."

"How could the man who, with the female in disguise, sought me at the *tapis-franc*, come into contact with these two wretches?" said Rodolph.

"I faith I don't know, and I think I only awoke at the end of the affair, for the tall man was talking of getting back his pocketbook, which the Chouette was to bring here in exchange for five hundred francs. I should say that the Schoolmaster had begun by robbing him, and that it was after that that they began to parley, and to come to friendly terms."

"It is very strange."

"*Mon Dieu!* it makes me quite frightened on your account, M. Rodolph," said Fleur-de-Marie.

"Master Rodolph is no chicken, girl; but as you say, there may be something working against him, and so I am here."

"Go on, my good fellow."

"The tall man and the little woman have promised two thousand francs to the Schoolmaster to do to you – I don't know what. The Chouette is to be here directly to return the pocketbook, and to know what is required from them, which she is to tell the Schoolmaster, who will undertake it."

Fleur-de-Marie started. Rodolph smiled disdainfully.

"Two thousand francs to do something to you, Master Rodolph; that makes me think that when I see a notice of a dog that has been lost (I don't mean to make a comparison), and the offer of a hundred francs reward for his discovery, I say to myself, 'Animal, if you were lost, no one would give a hundred farthings to find you.' Two thousand francs to do something to you! Who are you, then?"

"I'll tell you by and by."

"That's enough, master. When I heard this proposal, I said to myself, I must find out where these two dons live who want to set the Schoolmaster on the haunches of M. Rodolph; it may be serviceable. So when they had gone away, I got out of my hiding-place, and followed them quietly. I saw the tall man and little woman get into a coach near Notre Dame, and I got up behind, and we went on until we reached the Boulevard de l'Observatoire. It was as dark as the mouth of an oven, and I could not distinguish anything, so I cut a notch in a tree, that I might find out the place in the morning."

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