

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE MYSTERIES OF
PARIS, VOLUME 2 OF 6

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Eugène Sue

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CHAPTER I

THE BALL

Belonging to one of the first families in France, still young, and with a face that would have been agreeable had it not been for the almost ridiculous and disproportionate length of his nose, M. de Lucenay joined to a restless love of constant motion the habit of talking and laughing fearfully loud upon subjects quite at variance with good taste or polished manners, and throwing himself into attitudes so abrupt and awkward that it was only by recalling who he was, that his being found in the midst of the most distinguished societies in Paris could be accounted for, or a reason assigned for tolerating his gestures and language; for both of which he had now, by dint of long practice and adherence, acquired a sort of free license or impunity. He was shunned like the plague, although not deficient in a certain description of wit, which told here and there amid the indescribable confusion of remarkable phraseology which he allowed himself the use of; in fact, he was one of those unintentional instruments of vengeance one would always like to employ in the wholesale chastisement of persons who have rendered themselves either ridiculous or abhorrent.

The Duchess de Lucenay, one of the most agreeable, and, at the same time, most fashionable women in Paris (spite of her having numbered thirty summers), had more than once furnished matter of conversation among the scandal-dealers of Paris; but her errors, whatever they were supposed to be, were pardoned, in consideration of the heavy drawback of such a partner as M. de Lucenay.

Another feature in the character of this latter-named individual was a singular affectation of the most absurd and unknown expressions, relative to imaginary complaints and ridiculous infirmities he amused himself in supposing you suffered from, and concerning which he would make earnest inquiries, in a loud voice, and in the immediate presence of a hundred persons. But possessed of first-rate courage, and always ready to take the consequences of his disagreeable jokes, M. de Lucenay had been concerned in various affairs of honour arising out of them, with varied success; coming off sometimes victor, sometimes vanquished, without being in any way cured of his unpleasant and annoying tricks.

All this premised, we will ask the reader to imagine the loud, harsh voice of the personage we have been describing, shouting from the distance at which he first recognised Madame d'Harville and Sarah:

"Holla! holla! who is that out there? Come, who is it? Let's see. What! the prettiest woman at the ball sitting out here, away from everybody! I can't have this; it is high time I returned from the other end of the world to put a stop to such doings as this. I tell you what, marquise, if you persist in thus concealing yourself from general view, and cheating people from looking at you, I will set up a cry of fire! fire! that shall bring every one out of the ballroom, around you."

And then, by way of terminating his discourse, M. de Lucenay threw himself almost on his back beside the two ladies, crossed his left leg over his right thigh, and held his foot in his hand.

"You have soon returned from Constantinople, my lord," observed Madame d'Harville, fancying it was necessary to say something, and, at the same time, drawing away from her unpleasant neighbour with ill-concealed impatience.

"Ah, that is just what my wife said! 'Already back, my lord?' exclaimed she, when she saw me alight from my travelling-carriage; 'Why, bless me, I did not expect you so soon!' And, do you know, instead of flying to my arms, as if the surprise had delighted her, she turned quite sulky, and refused

to appear with me at this, my first ball since my return! And, upon my soul, I declare her staying away has caused a far greater sensation than my presence, – droll, isn't it? 'Pon my life, I declare I can't make it out. When she is with me, nobody pays the least attention to me; but when I entered the room alone to-night, such a crowd came humming and buzzing around me, all calling out at once, 'Where is Madame de Lucenay? Is not she coming this evening? Oh, dear, what a disappointment! How vexatious! How disagreeable!' etc., etc. And then, marquise, when I come where you are, and expect, after returning all the way from Constantinople, you will be overjoyed to see me, you look upon me as if I were a dog running amidst an interesting game of ninepins; and yet, for all I see, I am just as agreeable as other people."

"And it would have been so easy for you to have continued agreeable – in the East," added Madame d'Harville, slightly smiling.

"Stop abroad, you mean, I suppose; yes, I dare say. I tell you I could not, and I would not; and it is not quite what I like, to hear you say so!" exclaimed M. de Lucenay, uncrossing his legs, and beating the crown of his hat after the fashion of a tambourine.

"Well, for heaven's sake, my lord, be still, and do not call out so very loudly," said Madame d'Harville, angrily, "or really you will compel me to change my place."

"Change your place! Ah, to be sure! You want to take my arm, and walk about the gallery a little; come along, then, I'm ready."

"Walk with you! Certainly not! And pray let me beg of you not to meddle with that bouquet – and have the goodness not to touch the fan either; you will only break it, as you always do."

"Oh, bless you! talking of breaking fans, I am unlucky. Did my wife ever show you a magnificent Chinese fan, given to her by Madame de Vaudémont? Well, I broke that!" And, having delivered himself of these comforting words, M. de Lucenay again threw himself back on the divan he had been lounging on, but, with his accustomed gaucherie, contrived to pitch himself over the back of it, on to the ground, grasping in his hand a quantity of the floating wreaths of climbing plants which depended from the boughs of the trees under which the party was sitting, and which he had been, for some time, amusing himself with essaying to catch, as, moved by the light breeze admitted into the place, they undulated gracefully over his head. The suddenness of his fall brought down, not only those he held, but the parent stems belonging to them; and poor De Lucenay was so covered by the mass of foliage thus unexpectedly obtained, that, ere he could thoroughly disengage himself from their circling tendrils, he presented the appearance of some monarch of May-day crowned with his leafy diadem. So whimsical an appearance as he presented drew down roars of deafening, stunning laughter; much to the annoyance of Madame d'Harville, who would quickly have got out of the vicinity of so awkward and unpleasant a person had she not perceived M. Charles Robert (the commandant of Madame Pipelet's accounts) advancing from the other end of the gallery; and, unwilling to appear as though going to meet him, she once more resumed her seat beside M. de Lucenay.

"I say, Lady Macgregor," vociferated the incorrigible De Lucenay, "didn't I look preciously like a wild man of the woods, or the god Pan, or a sylvan, or a naiad, or some of those savage creatures, with that green wreath round my head? Oh, but talking of savages," added he, abruptly approaching Sarah, "Lady Macgregor, I must tell you a most outrageously indecent story. Just imagine that at Otaheite –"

"My lord duke –" interrupted Sarah, in a tone of freezing rebuke.

"Just as you like, – you are not obliged to hear my story if you don't like it; you are the loser, that's all. Ah! I see Madame de Fonbonne out there; I shall keep it for her; she is a dear, kind creature, and will be delighted to hear it; so I'll save it for her."

Madame de Fonbonne was a fat little woman, of about fifty years of age, very pretending, and very ridiculous. Her fat double chin rested on her equally fat throat; and she was continually talking, with upturned eyes, of her tender, her sensitive soul; the languor of her soul; the craving of her soul; the aspirations of her soul. To these disadvantages, she added the additional one of being particularly

ill-dressed, upon the present occasion, in a horrible-looking copper-coloured turban, with a sprinkling of green flowers over it.

"Yes," again asserted De Lucenay, in his loudest voice, "that charming anecdote shall be told to Madame de Fonbonne."

"May I be permitted, my lord duke, to inquire the subject of your conversation?" said the lady thus apostrophised, who, hearing her name mentioned, immediately commenced her usual mincing, bridling attempts to draw up her chubby self, but, failing in the effort, fell back upon the easier manœuvre of "rolling up the whites of her eyes," as it is commonly called.

"It refers, madame, to a most horribly indecent, revolting, and strange story."

"Heaven bless me! and who dares – oh, dear me, who would venture – "

"I would, madame. I can answer for the truth of the anecdote, and that it would make a stick or a stone blush to hear it; but, as I am aware how dearly you love such stories, I will relate it to you. You must know, then, that in Otaheite – "

"My lord," exclaimed the indignant lady, turning up her eyes with indignant horror, "it really is surprising you can allow yourself to – "

"Now for those unkind looks you shall not hear my pretty story either, though I had been reserving it for you. And, now I look at you, I can but wonder that you, so celebrated for the taste and good style of your dress, should have put that wretched thing on your head for a turban, but which looks more like an old copper baking-dish spotted all over with verdigris." So saying, the duke, as if charmed with his own wit, burst into a loud and long peal of laughter.

"If, my lord," exclaimed the enraged lady, "you merely returned from the East to resume your offensive jokes, which are tolerated because you are supposed to be only half in your senses, all who know you are bound to hope you intend to return as quickly as you came;" saying which she arose, and majestically waddled away.

"I tell you what, Lady Macgregor, if I don't take devilish good care, I shall let fly at that stupid old prude and pull her old stew-pan off her head," said M. de Lucenay, thrusting his hands deep down into his pockets as if to prevent their committing the retaliating mischief he contemplated. "But no," said he, after a pause, "I won't hurt the 'sensitive soul,' poor innocent thing! Ha! ha! ha! Besides, think of her being an orphan at her tender age!" And renewed peals of laughter announced that the imagination of the duke had again found a fresh fund of amusement in some reminiscence of Madame de Fonbonne; which, however, soon gave place to an expression of surprise, as the figure of the commandant, sauntering towards them, caught his eye.

"Holla!" cried he, "there's M. Charles Robert. I met him last summer at the German baths; he is a deuced fine fellow, – sings like a swan. Now, marquise, I'll show you some fun, – just see how I'll bother him. Would you like me to introduce him to you?"

"Be quiet, if you can," said Sarah, turning her back most unceremoniously upon M. de Lucenay, "and let us alone, I beg."

As M. Charles Robert, while affecting to be solely occupied in admiring the rare plants on either side of him, continued to advance, M. de Lucenay had cleverly contrived to get possession of Sarah's *flacon d'esprit*, and was deeply and silently engaged in the interesting employment of demolishing the stopper of the trinket.

Still M. Charles Robert kept on his gradual approach to the party he was, in reality, making the object of his visit. His figure was tall and finely proportioned; his features boasted the most faultless regularity; his dress was in the first style of modern elegance; yet his countenance, his whole person, were destitute of grace, or that *distingué* air which is more to be coveted than mere beauty, whether of face or figure; his movements were stiff and constrained, and his hands and feet large and coarse. As he approached Madame d'Harville his insipid and insignificant countenance assumed, all at once, an expression of the deepest melancholy, too sudden to be genuine; nevertheless he acted the part as closely to nature as might be. M. Robert had the air of a man so thoroughly wretched, so oppressed by

a multitude of sorrows, that as he came up to Madame d'Harville she could not help recalling to mind the fearful mention made by Sarah touching the violence to which grief such as his might drive him.

"How are you? How are you, my dear sir?" exclaimed the Duke de Lucenay, interrupting the further approach of the commandant. "I have not had the pleasure of seeing you since we met at the spas of – . But what the devil ails you, – are you ill?"

Hereupon M. Charles Robert assumed a languid and sentimental air, and, casting a melancholy look towards Madame d'Harville, replied, in a tone of deep depression:

"Indeed, my lord, I am very far from being well."

"God bless me! Why, what is the matter with you? Ah! I suppose that confounded plaguy cough still sticks to you," said M. de Lucenay, with an appearance of the most serious interest in the inquiry.

At this ridiculous question, M. Charles Robert stood for a moment as though struck dumb with astonishment, but, quickly recovering himself, said, while his face crimsoned, and his voice trembled with rage, in a short, firm voice, to M. de Lucenay:

"Since you express so much uneasiness respecting my health, my lord, I trust you will not fail calling to-morrow to know how I am."

"Upon my life and soul, my dear sir, I – but most certainly I will send," said the duke, with a haughty bow to M. Charles Robert, who, coolly returning it, walked away.

"The best of the joke is," said M. de Lucenay, throwing himself again by the side of Sarah, "that our tall friend there had no more of a spitting complaint than the great Turk himself, – unless, indeed, I stumbled upon the truth without knowing it. Well, he might have that complaint for anything I know or care. What do you think, Lady Macgregor, – did that great, tall fellow look, to you, as though he were suffering from *la pituite*?"¹

Sarah's only reply was an indignant rising from her seat, and hasty removal from the vicinage of the annoying Duke de Lucenay.

All this had passed with the rapidity of thought. Sarah had experienced considerable difficulty in restraining her inclination to indulge in a hearty fit of laughter at the absurd question put by the Duke de Lucenay to the commandant; but Madame d'Harville had painfully sympathised with the feelings of a man so ridiculously interrogated in the presence of the woman he loved. Then, horror-struck as the probable consequences of the duke's jest rose to her mind, led away by her dread of the duel which might arise out of it, and still further instigated by a feeling of deep pity for one who seemed to her misled imagination as marked out for every venomous shaft of envy, malice, and revenge, Clémence rose abruptly from her seat, took the arm of Sarah, overtook M. Charles Robert, who was boiling over with rage, and whispered to him, as she passed:

"To-morrow, at one o'clock, I will be there."

Then, regaining the gallery with the countess, she immediately quitted the ball.

Rodolph, in appearing at this fête, besides fulfilling a duty imposed on him by his exalted rank and place in society, was further influenced by the earnest desire to ascertain how far his suspicions, as regarded Madame d'Harville, were well founded, and if she were, indeed, the heroine of Madame Pipelet's account. After quitting the winter garden with the Countess de – , he had, in vain, traversed the various salons in the hopes of meeting Madame d'Harville alone. He was returning to the hothouse when, being momentarily delayed at the top of the stairs, he was witness to the rapid scene between Madame d'Harville and M. Charles Robert after the joke played off by the Duke de Lucenay. The significant glances exchanged between Clémence and the commandant struck Rodolph powerfully, and impressed him with the firm conviction that this tall and prepossessing individual was the mysterious lodger of the Rue du Temple. Wishing for still further confirmation of the idea, he returned to the gallery. A waltz was about to commence, and in the course of a few minutes he saw M. Charles Robert standing in the doorway, evidently revelling in the satisfaction of his own ideas;

¹ A sort of viscous, phlegmy complaint.

enjoying, in the first place, the recollection of his own retort to M. de Lucenay (for M. Charles Robert, spite of his egregious folly and vanity, was by no means destitute of bravery), and, secondly, revelling in the triumph of thus obtaining a voluntary assignation with Madame d'Harville for the morrow; and something assured him that this time she would be punctual. Rodolph sought for Murphy.

"Do you see that fair young man," said he, "standing in the midst of that group out there?"

"You mean the tall individual who seems so much amused with his own thoughts, do you not? Yes, yes, I see him."

"Endeavour to get sufficiently near to him to be enabled to whisper, so that he alone can catch the words, while you carefully avoid allowing him to see the person who utters them, this sentence, 'You are late, my angel!'"

The squire gazed at Rodolph with a perplexed air.

"My lord, do you seriously wish me to do this?"

"Seriously, my dear Murphy, I do; and should he hastily turn around when you have spoken, assume that incomparable air of perfect nonchalance for which you are so justly celebrated, so as to prevent his being able to fix upon you as the person who has spoken."

"Depend upon my perfect obedience, my lord, although I am far from having the slightest idea of your intention in assigning to me such a task."

Before the conclusion of the waltz, the worthy Murphy had contrived to place himself immediately behind M. Charles Robert, while Rodolph, posted in a situation most advantageous for watching the effect of this experiment, carefully observed Murphy's movements. In a minute, M. Charles Robert turned suddenly around, as though struck with astonishment and wonder. The immovable squire stirred not a feature; and certainly Murphy's tall, portly figure, bald head, and grave, composed countenance, appeared the least likely of any in the room to be those of a man taking part in such a trick; and, indeed, it was evident, from the continued gaze of the commandant in every other part of the space they stood in, that M. Charles Robert was far from suspecting his respectable, middle-aged neighbour of giving utterance to a phrase so disagreeably recalling the *quid pro quo* of which Madame Pipelet had been alike the cause and the heroine. The waltz concluded, Murphy rejoined Rodolph.

"Well, my lord," said he, "that smart young gentleman jumped as though he had trodden on a hornet's nest. The words I uttered appeared to have the effect of magic on him."

"They were so far magical, my dear Murphy, as they assisted me to discover a circumstance I was most anxious to find out."

Conviction thus painfully obtained, Rodolph could only deplore the dangerous position in which Madame d'Harville had placed herself, and which seemed to him fraught with fresh evils, from a vague presentiment of Sarah's being either a sharer or a confidant in the transaction, and with this discovery came the fresh pain of believing that he had now found out the source of M. d'Harville's secret sorrow; the man he so highly esteemed, and for whom he felt a brother's regard, was pining in silence over the misconduct of a wife he so tenderly loved, yet who, in spite of her many charming qualities, could sacrifice her own and her husband's happiness for the sake of an object so every way unworthy. Master of so important a secret, yet incapable of betraying it, unable to devise any plan to open the eyes of Madame d'Harville, who seemed rather to yield to than resist her unlicensed passion for her lover, Rodolph found himself obliged to remain a passive witness to the utter ruin of a woman he had so passionately adored with as much silence as devotion; nay, whom, spite of his best efforts, he still loved. He was roused from these reflections by M. de Graün.

"If your royal highness," said the baron, bowing, "will deign to grant me a brief interview in one of the lower rooms, which is now quite devoid of company, I shall have the honour to lay before you the particulars you desired me to collect."

Rodolph signed to M. de Graün to conduct him to the place named, when the baron proceeded with his recital, as follows:

"The only duchess to whose name the initials 'N.' and 'L.' can possibly belong is Madame de Lucenay, whose maiden name was Normant. Her grace is not here this evening. I have just seen M. de Lucenay, her husband, who, it seems, left Paris five months ago, with the expressed intention of travelling in the East during the next year or two, but has unexpectedly returned within the last day or two."

It may be recollected that, during Rodolph's visit to the Rue du Temple, he picked up, on the landing-place adjoining the door of the charlatan dentist's apartments, a cambric handkerchief, richly embroidered and trimmed with costly lace, and bearing in the corner a ducal coronet with the initials "N. L." It will also be borne in mind that this elegant indication of high rank was wetted with the bitter tears of its noble owner. In pursuance of his instructions, but in total ignorance of the circumstances suggesting them, M. de Graün had inquired the name of every duchess then in Paris, and gleaned the information now repeated to Rodolph, and which the latter perfectly comprehended. He had no reason for interesting himself in the fate of Madame de Lucenay; but he could not reflect without a shudder that, if it were really she who visited the pretended doctor (but who, he felt assured, was no other than the infamous Polidori), this wretch, having possessed himself of her real name and address through the agency of Tortillard, might make a fearful use of a secret which placed the duchess so completely in his power.

"Chance is a strange thing, my lord, is it not?" resumed M. de Graün.

"It is; but how does it apply to the present case?"

"Why, at the very instant that M. de Grangeneuve was giving me these facts concerning M. and Madame de Lucenay, and was adding, rather ill-naturedly, that the unlooked-for return of the duke must have proved particularly disagreeable, not only to the duchess but to the Viscount de Saint-Remy, one of the most elegant and fashionable men in Paris, his excellency the ambassador came up and inquired whether your royal highness would permit him to present the viscount to you, as, having just been appointed on the legation to Gerolstein, he would be happy to avail himself of the present opportunity of paying his court to your highness."

An expression of impatience escaped Rodolph, who exclaimed:

"Nothing could have been less agreeable to me. However, it is impossible to refuse. Let the count know, therefore, that I am ready to receive M. de Saint-Remy."

Rodolph knew too well how to support his princely dignity to allow his feelings to interfere with the courtesy and affability required on the present occasion; added to which, the world gave M. de Saint-Remy as a favoured lover to the Duchess de Lucenay, and this circumstance greatly excited the curiosity of Rodolph.

The Viscount de Saint-Remy, conducted by the Count de —, now approached. He was an exceedingly handsome young man, of about twenty-five years of age, tall and slender, with the most *distingué* air and prepossessing physiognomy; his olive complexion had that rich, soft glow of amber cast over its transparent surface, so remarkable in the paintings of Murillo; his glossy black hair, parted over his left temple, was worn smooth over his forehead, and fell in light and easy curls down the sides of his face, almost concealing the pale, well-shaped ear. The deep, dark eyelash contrasted well with the clear eye it shaded, the crystal of which was tinged with that blue cast which bestows so much and such charming expression to the Indian eye. By a singular caprice of nature, the thick, silky moustache which graced his lip was the only ornament of a similar description visible on his countenance, the chin and cheeks being smooth as those of a young maiden. Perhaps it might be vanity which dictated the narrow black satin cravat placed so low as to reveal the perfect contour of a throat which, for whiteness and symmetrical roundness, might have furnished a model for the artist's studio. The long ends of his cravat were confined by a single pearl, inestimable for its size, the beauty of its shape, and the splendour of its colour, — so vivid, that an opal could scarcely have rivalled its continued prismatic changes. The perfect taste, and exquisite style of M. de Saint-Remy harmonised well with the magnificent simplicity of this jewel.

Once seen, the face and figure of M. de Saint-Remy was never forgotten, so entirely did it differ from the usual style of *élégants*. He spared no expense in procuring the most faultless turnout, and his carriages and horses were everywhere cited as models of taste and correct judgment. He played high, but skilfully; while the annual amount of his betting-book was never less than from two to three thousand louis. The costly elegance of his mansion, in the Rue de Chaillot, was everywhere spoken of and admired. There he gave the most exquisite dinner-parties. The highest play followed, and the hospitable host would lose large and heavy sums with the most perfect indifference, though it was known that his fortune had been dissipated long ago. All the viscount's property had been derived from his mother; while his father lived in utter seclusion in the wilds of Anjou, upon an income of the most slender description.

By way of accounting for the unbounded expenditure of M. de Saint-Remy, many among the envious or ill-natured referred, as Sarah had done, to the large fortune of the Duchess de Lucenay; but they forgot that, setting aside the infamy of the idea, M. de Lucenay would naturally direct the disposal of his wife's property, and that M. de Saint-Remy's annual expenses were at least two hundred thousand francs. Suspicions were entertained of his being deeply indebted to imprudent money-lenders; for Saint-Remy had no further inheritance to look forward to. Others, again, spoke of his great successes on the turf, and hinted, in an undertone, dark stories of training-grounds, and jockeys bribed by him to make the horses against which he had betted largely lose; but by far the greater number of the crowd by which Saint-Remy was surrounded was content to eat his dinners, and occasionally to win his rouleaux, without troubling themselves with conjectures as to how the one was provided, and where the other came from.

By birth and education he was fully entitled to the rank he occupied in the fashionable world; he was lively, witty, brave, a most amusing companion, obliging and complaisant to the wishes of others; he gave first-rate bachelor dinners, and afterwards took every bet that was offered him. What more was required to secure his popularity? He was an universal favourite with the fair sex, and could boast the most unvaried success in all his love affairs; he was young, handsome, gallant, and unsparingly munificent upon all occasions where opportunities occurred of marking his devotion towards the high-bred females with whom he associated in the *grande monde*; in a word, thanks to the general infatuation he excited, the air of mystery thrown over the source of the Pactolus from which he derived his golden supplies rather embellished him with a certain mysterious charm, which seemed but to add to his attractions. Sometimes it would be said, with a careless smile, "What a fellow that Saint-Remy is: he must have discovered the philosopher's stone to be able to go the pace he does." And when it was known that he had caused himself to be attached to the legation of France to the court of Gerolstein, there were not wanting voices to assert that it was a "devilish good way of making an honourable retreat." Such was M. de Saint-Remy.

"Allow me," said the Count de —, presenting M. de Saint-Remy, "to introduce to your royal highness the Viscount de Saint-Remy, attached to the embassy of Gerolstein."

The viscount bowed profoundly, saying:

"May I trust your royal highness will deign to pardon my impatience in requesting the honour of this introduction during the present evening? I am, perhaps, unduly hasty in my wishes to secure a gratification I have so long aspired to."

"It will give me much pleasure, my lord, to welcome you to Gerolstein. Do you propose going thither immediately?"

"Your royal highness being in Paris diminishes very materially my desire to do so."

"I fear the peaceful contrast of our German courts will scarcely assort with a life of Parisian fashion, such as you have always been accustomed to."

"Permit me to assure your royal highness that the gracious kindness you have now shown me, and which it shall be my study to merit a continuance of in Gerolstein, would of itself far outweigh any attractions Paris may have had for me."

"It will not be my fault, my lord, should you see cause to alter your sentiments when at Gerolstein."

A slight inclination of Rodolph's head announced that the presentation was concluded, upon which the viscount bowed and retired. The prince, a practised physiognomist, was subject to involuntary likes and dislikes upon the first interview with an individual, and these impulses were in his case almost invariably borne out by after-circumstances. His first sensation after the exchange of the very few words we have related between himself and Saint-Remy was an unaccountable feeling of repugnance and aversion for the gay and fascinating young man; to his eye, the handsome features wore a sinister look, and danger seemed to lurk even in his honeyed words and smooth, polished manner.

We shall hereafter meet M. de Saint-Remy under circumstances differing widely and fearfully from the splendour of the position he occupied at his first interview with Rodolph. It will then be seen how far these presentiments were ill or well founded.

The presentation over, Rodolph, in deep meditation upon the singular rencontres effected by the hand of chance, bent his steps towards the winter garden. It was now the hour of supper, and the rooms were nearly deserted. The most retired spot in the hothouse was at the end of a clump of trees placed against the corner of a wall, and an enormous banana, covered with climbing plants, effectually concealed a small side door, masked by the trellis, and conducting to the banquetting-hall by a long corridor. This door, which was scarcely a yard distant from the tree above mentioned, had been left temporarily ajar. Sheltered by this verdant screen, Rodolph seated himself, and was soon lost in a profound reverie, when the sound of a well-known voice, pronouncing his name, made Rodolph start. It was Sarah, who, seated with her brother Tom on the other side of the clump of trees which effectually hid Rodolph from their view, was conversing with him in the English language. The prince listened attentively, and the following dialogue ensued:

"The marquise has just gone to show herself for a few minutes at Baron de Nerval's ball," said Sarah; "she has luckily quitted this place without once having an opportunity of exchanging a word with Rodolph, who has been looking everywhere for her. I still dread the influence he possesses over her, even unknown to herself, – an influence it has cost me so much labour and difficulty to combat, and partly to destroy. However, to-morrow will rid me of any further fears of a rival who, if not effectually destroyed, might so powerfully derange and overthrow my plans. Listen to me, brother, for it is of serious matters I would speak to you. To-morrow witnesses the eternal ruin of my hated rival."

"You are mistaken, Sarah," answered Tom's well-remembered voice; "Rodolph never loved the marquise; of that I am certain; your jealous fears mislead you."

"It is time," returned Sarah, "that I enlightened you on this subject. Many things occurred during your last journey, and as it is necessary to take decisive steps even earlier than I had expected, – nay, this very night, – so soon as we quit this place, it becomes indispensably necessary we should take serious counsel together. Happily we are now quite alone, for the gay butterflies of the night have found fresh attraction around the supper-tables. Now, then, brother, give your close and undivided attention to what I am about to say."

"Proceed, I am all impatience."

"Well, before Clémence d'Harville met Rodolph, I feel assured the passion of love was wholly unknown to her, for what reason I have never been able to discover. She entertains the most invincible repugnance and aversion towards her husband, who perfectly adores her. There is some deep mystery in this part of the business I have never succeeded in fathoming. A thousand new and delightful emotions sprang up in the breast of Clémence after she became acquainted with Rodolph; but I stifled her growing love by the most frightful disclosures, or rather ingeniously invented calumnies, concerning the prince. Still, the void in her heart required an object to fill it, and chance having thrown M. Charles Robert in her way during a morning call she was making at my house, she appeared struck with his appearance, much after the manner in which we are attracted by a fine

picture. Unfortunately, however, this man is as silly as he is handsome, though he certainly has a very prepossessing *tout ensemble*. I praised him enthusiastically to Madame d'Harville, exalted the nobleness of his sentiments, the elevation of his mind, and, as I knew her weak side, I worked upon her sympathy and pity, by representing him as loaded with every trouble and affliction unrelenting fate could heap upon a devoted but most innocent head. I directed M. Robert to assume a melancholy and sentimental air; to utter only deep sighs, and to preserve a gloomy and unbroken silence in the presence of Madame d'Harville. He carefully pursued the path marked out by me, and, thanks to his vocal skill, his fine person and the constant expression of silent suffering, so far engaged the interest of Madame d'Harville, that, ere long, she transferred to my handsome friend the warm and sympathising regard Rodolph had first awakened. Do you comprehend me thus far?"

"Perfectly; proceed."

"Madame d'Harville and Robert met only upon terms of intimacy at my house; to draw them more effectually together I projected devoting three mornings in the week to music, and my mournful ally sighed softly as the breath of evening while turning over the leaves of the music, ventured to utter a few impassioned words, and even to slip two or three billets among the pieces he copied out for the marquise to practise at home. I own I was more fearful of his epistolary efforts than even his powers of speech; but a woman always looks indulgently upon the first declaration of love she receives; so far, therefore, the written nonsense of my silly pupil did no harm, for, in obedience to my advice, his *billets doux* were very laconic. The great point was to obtain a rendezvous, and this was no easy matter, for Clémence's principles were stronger than her love; or, rather, her passion was not sufficiently deep to induce her to sacrifice those principles. Unknown, even to herself, the image of Rodolph still filled her heart, and seemed in a manner to preserve her from yielding to her weak fancy for M. Charles Robert, – a fancy, as I well knew, far more imaginary than real; but, led on by my continual and exaggerated praises of this brainless Apollo, whom I persisted in describing as suffering under the daily increase of every imaginary evil I could invent, Clémence, vanquished by the deep despair of her dejected adorer, consented one day, more from pity than love, to grant him the rendezvous so long desired."

"Did she, then, make you her confidant?"

"She confessed to me her regard for M. Charles Robert, – nothing more; neither did I seek to learn more; it would have annoyed and vexed her. But, as for him, boiling over with love, or, rather, intoxicated with pride, he came voluntarily to impart his good fortune, without, however, entrusting me either with the time or place of the intended meeting."

"How, then, did you know it?"

"Why, Karl, by my order, hovered about the door of M. Robert during the following day from an early hour; nothing, however, transpired till the next day, when our love-stricken youth proceeded in a *fiacre* to an obscure part of the town, and finally alighted before a mean-looking house in the Rue du Temple; there he remained for an hour and a half, when he came out and walked away. Karl waited a long while to see whether any person followed M. Charles Robert out of the house; but no one came. The marquise had evidently failed in her appointment. This was confirmed to me on the morrow, when the lover came to pour out all his rage and disappointment. I advised him to assume even an increase of wretchedness and despair. The plan succeeded; the pity of Clémence was again excited; a fresh assignation was wrung from her, but which she failed to keep equally with the former; the third and last rendezvous, however, produced more decided effects, Madame d'Harville positively going as far as the door of the house I have specified as the appointed place; then, repenting so rash a step, returned home without having even quitted the humble *fiacre* in which she rode. You may judge by all these capricious changes of purpose how this woman struggles to be free. And wherefore? Why, because (and hence arises my bitter, deadly hatred to Clémence d'Harville) because the recollection of Rodolph still lingers in her heart, and, with pertinacious love she shrinks from aught that she fancies breathes of preference for another; thus shielding herself from harm or danger

beneath his worshipped image. Now this very night the marquise has made a fresh assignation with M. Charles Robert for to-morrow, and this time I doubt not her punctuality; the Duke de Lucenay has so grossly ridiculed this young man that, carried away by pity for the humiliation of her admirer, the marquise has granted that to compassion he would not else have obtained. But this time, I feel persuaded she will keep her word, and be punctual to the appointed time and hour."

"And how do you propose to act?"

"M. Charles Robert is so perfectly unable to comprehend the delicacy of feeling which this evening dictated the marquise's resolution of meeting him, that he is safe to rush with vulgar eagerness to the rendezvous, and this will effectually ruin his plans, for pity alone has instigated Clémence to take this compromising step. No love, – no infatuation has hurried her into a measure so fatal to her future resolution. I know every turn of her mind; and I am confident she will keep her appointment solely from a courageous idea of generous devotion, but with a firm resolve not for one instant to forget her duties as a wife and mother. Now the coarse, vulgar mind of M. Charles Robert is sure to take the fullest advantage of the marquise's concession in his favour. Clémence will detest him from that instant; and the illusion once destroyed which has bound herself and Charles Robert in bonds of imaginary sympathy, she will fall again beneath the influence of her love for Rodolph, which I am certain still nestles in her heart."

"Well?"

"Well! I would have her for ever lost to Rodolph, whose high sense of honour and deep friendship for M. d'Harville I feel perfectly sure would not have proved equal to preventing his returning the love of Clémence; but I will so manage things that he shall henceforward look upon her with loathing and disgust, as the guilty partner in a crime committed without his participation. No, no! I know my man. He might pardon the offence, but never the being excluded from his share in it."

"Then do you propose apprising the husband of all that is going on, so that the prince should learn the disgraceful circumstances from the publicity the affair would obtain?"

"I do. And the thing is so much the easier to accomplish as, from what fell from Clémence to-night, I can learn that the marquis has vague and undefined suspicions, without knowing on whom to fix them. It is now midnight; we shall almost directly leave the ball, I will set you down at the first café we meet with, whence you shall write M. d'Harville a minute account of his wife's love affair, with the projected assignation of to-morrow, with the time and place where it is arranged to take place. Oh! but I forgot, I didn't state that the place of meeting is No. 17 Rue du Temple. And the time, to-morrow at one o'clock. The marquis is already jealous of Clémence; well, he will by this information surprise her under most suspicious circumstances; the rest follows as a matter of course."

"But this is a most abominable mode of action," said Seyton, coldly.

"What! my trusty and well-behaved brother and colleague growing scrupulous?" said Sarah, sarcastically. "This will never do; suppose my modes of action are odious, – so be it. I trample on all and every thing that interferes with my designs, – agreed. I do – I shall, till I have secured my purpose. But let me ask you, Who thought of scruples when my destruction was aimed at? Who thought of me or my feelings, let me ask you? How have I been treated?"

"Say no more, sister, – say no more, – here is my hand, and you may safely reckon upon my firm participation in all that concerns you, even to writing the letter to M. d'Harville. But still I say, and repeat, such conduct is horrible!"

"Never mind sermonising, but say, do you consent fully and entirely to what I wish you, or do you not? Ay, or nay?"

"Since it must be so, M. d'Harville shall this night be fully instructed as to all his wife's proceedings, – but – what is that? I fancied I heard some one on the other side of this thicket, – there was a rustling of leaves and branches," said Seyton, interrupting himself, and speaking to Sarah in a low and suppressed voice.

"For heaven's sake," cried Sarah, uneasily, "don't stop to talk about it, but quick! and examine the other side of this place!"

Seyton rose, – made the tour of the clump of trees, – but saw no one.

Rodolph had just disappeared by the side door, of which we have before spoken.

"I must have made a mistake," said Seyton, returning; "there is no appearance of any persons but ourselves being in this place."

"I thought there could not possibly be."

"Now, then, Sarah, hear what I have got to say on the subject of Madame d'Harville, who, I feel quite satisfied, you make an object of unnecessary apprehension, as far as it would be possible for her to interfere with your schemes. The prince, moreover, has certain principles nothing would induce him to infringe. I am infinitely more alarmed, and with greater justice, too, as to what can have been his intentions in conducting that young girl to his farm at Bouqueval, five or six weeks ago. He is constant in his superintendence of her health and comfort; is having her well educated, and, moreover, has been several times to see her. Now we are altogether ignorant who she is or where she came from; she seems, however, to belong only to the humbler ranks of society; still, the exquisite style of her beauty, the fact of the prince having worn the disguise he did when escorting her to the farm, the increasing interest he seems to take in her welfare, all go to prove that his regard for her is of no common description. I have, therefore, in this affair anticipated your wishes; but to remove this greater, and, as I believe, more serious obstacle to our plans, the utmost circumspection was requisite to obtain information respecting the lives and habits of these mysterious occupants of the farm, and particularly concerning the girl herself. I have been fortunate enough to learn nearly sufficient to point out what is to be done the moment for action has arrived. A most singular chance threw that horrid old woman in my way, to whom, as you remember, I once gave my address, which she it seems has carefully preserved. Her connection with such persons as the robber who attacked us during our late visit to the Cité will powerfully assist us. All is provided for and preconsidered, – there can be no proof against us, – and, besides, if, as seems evident, this young creature belongs to the humblest class of society it is not very probable she will hesitate between our offers and the splendid prospect she may, perchance, picture to herself, for the prince, I have ascertained, has preserved a strict incognito towards her. But to-morrow shall decide the question otherwise, – we shall see, – we shall see."

"And these two obstacles overcome, then, Tom, for our grand project."

"There are many, and serious obstacles in the way; still, they may be overcome."

"And would it not be a lucky chance if we should bring it to pass at the very moment when Rodolph would be writhing under the double misery occasioned by the disclosure of Madame d'Harville's conduct, and the disappearance of the creature for whom he chooses to evince so deep an interest? Would not that be an auspicious moment to persuade him that the daughter, whose loss he daily more and more deplores, still lives? And then –"

"Silence, sister," interrupted Seyton, "I hear the steps of the guests from the supper-table, returning to resume the ball. Since you deem it expedient to apprise the Marquis d'Harville of the morrow's rendezvous, let us depart; it is past midnight."

"The lateness of the hour in which the anonymous information will reach M. d'Harville, will but tend still more to impress him with an idea of its importance."

And with these words Tom and Sarah quitted the splendid ball of the ambassador of the court of – .

CHAPTER II

THE RENDEZVOUS

Determined at all risks to warn Madame d'Harville of the danger she was incurring, Rodolph had quitted the winter garden without waiting to hear the remainder of the conversation between Sarah and her brother, thus remaining ignorant of their designs against Fleur-de-Marie, and of the extreme peril which threatened the poor girl. But, spite of his earnest desire to apprise the marquise of the plot laid against her peace and honour, he was unable to carry his design into execution, for Madame d'Harville, unable to bear up longer after the trying events of the evening, had abandoned her original intention of visiting the entertainment given by Madame de Nerval and gone direct home.

This contretemps ruined his hopes. Nearly the whole of the company present at the ambassadress's ball had been invited to that of Madame de Nerval's, and Rodolph drove rapidly thither, taking with him M. de Graün, to whom he gave instructions to look for Madame d'Harville among the guests, and to acquaint her that the prince, having something of the utmost consequence to communicate to her without the least delay, would walk onwards to the Hôtel d'Harville, and await her return home, when he would say a few words at the carriage-door while her servants were attending to the opening of the entrance-gates.

After much time spent in fruitless endeavours to find Madame d'Harville, De Graün was compelled to return with the account of his ill success. This failure made Rodolph despair of being able, now, to save the marquise from impending ruin; his first thought had been to warn her of the treachery intended, and so prevent the statement of Sarah, which he had no means of keeping from the hands of M. d'Harville, from obtaining the slightest credence. Alas! it was now too late. The infamous epistle dictated by the Countess Macgregor had reached the Marquis d'Harville shortly after midnight on the night in question.

It was morning; and M. d'Harville continued slowly to pace his sleeping-apartment, the bed of which gave no indication of having been used during the night, though the silken counterpane hung in fragments, evidently proving that some powerful and devastating storm had possessed the mind of its owner.

The chamber in question was furnished with elegant simplicity, its only ornaments consisting of a stand of modern arms and a range of shelves furnished with a well-chosen collection of books. Yet a sudden frenzy, or the hand of ungovernable rage, had reduced the quiet elegance which ordinarily reigned to a scene of frantic disorder. Chairs, tables, broken and upset; the carpet strewn with fragments of the crystal lamp kept burning through the night; the wax-lights and gilded chandelier which had contained them, lying around, gave manifest evidence of a fearful scene.

M. d'Harville was about thirty years of age, with a fine, manly countenance, whose usual expression was mild and prepossessing, but now contracted, haggard, and livid. He had not changed his dress since the preceding evening; his throat was bare, his waistcoat thrown open, and on the torn and rumpled cambric of his shirt-front were drops of blood. His rich, dark hair, which generally fell in curls around his face, now hung in tangled wildness over his pale countenance. Wholly buried in the misery of his own thoughts, with folded arms, drooping head, and fixed, bloodshot eyes, M. d'Harville continued to pace his chamber; then, stopping opposite his fireplace, in which, spite of the almost unendurable severity of the frost of the past night, the fire had been allowed to expire, he took from the marble mantelpiece the following brief note, which he continued to read over and over with the most eager attention by the wan, pale light of the cold glimmer of an early winter morning:

"To-morrow, at one o'clock, your wife has appointed to meet her favoured lover. Go to the Rue du Temple, No. 17, and you will obtain every requisite confirmation of this intelligence.

"From one who pities you."

Whilst reading these words, perused, with such deep anguish and sickness of heart, so many times through the long midnight hours, the blue, cold lips of M. d'Harville appeared convulsively to spell each syllable of this fatal *billet*.

At this moment the chamber door opened and a servant entered; the man who now made his appearance was old, even gray-headed, but the expression of his countenance was frank and honest. The noise of the man entering disturbed not the marquis from his bitter contemplations; he merely turned his head without altering his position, but still grasped the letter in his clenched hands.

"What do you want?" inquired he, sternly, of the servant.

The man, instead of answering, continued to gaze with an air of painful surprise at the disordered state of the room; then, regarding his master more attentively, exclaimed:

"Blood on your clothes! My lord, my lord! How is this? You have hurt yourself, – and all alone, too; why, my lord, did you not summon me, as of old, when these attacks came on?"

"Begone!"

"I entreat your lordship's pardon, but your fire is out, – the cold is intense, – indeed, I must remind your lordship that after your late – your –"

"Will you be silent? Leave me I say!"

"Pray do not be angry, my lord," replied the trembling valet; "but, if your lordship pleases to recollect, you appointed M. Doublet to be here to-day at half past ten, and he is now waiting with the notary."

"Quite proper," said the marquis, with a bitter smile; "when a man is rich he ought, he should look carefully to his affairs. Fortune is a fine thing, – a very fine thing; or would be if it could but purchase happiness." Then, resuming a cold and collected manner, he added:

"Show M. Doublet into my study."

"I have done so, my lord marquis."

"Then give me my clothes, – quick, I am in haste; I shall be going out shortly. I –"

"But if your lordship would only –"

"Do as I desire you, Joseph," said M. d'Harville, in a more gentle tone; then added, "Is your lady stirring yet?"

"I have not yet heard her ladyship's bell, my lord marquis."

"Let me know when she rings."

"I will, my lord."

"Heaven and earth, man, how slow you are!" exclaimed M. d'Harville, whose raging thoughts almost chafed him into madness; "summon Philip to assist you; you will keep me all day."

"My lord, please to allow me to set matters a little straight first," replied Joseph, sorrowfully; "I would much rather no one but myself witnessed the state of your chamber, or they would wonder, and talk about it, because they could not understand what had taken place during the night, my lord."

"And if they were to find out, it would be a most shocking affair, – would it not?" asked M. d'Harville, in a tone of gloomy irony.

"Thank God, my lord, not a soul in the house has the least suspicion of it!"

"No one suspects it," repeated M. d'Harville, despondingly; "no one, – that's well, for her at least; well, let us hope to keep the secret."

And, while Joseph was occupying himself in repairing the havoc in his master's apartment, D'Harville walked up to the stage of arms we before mentioned, examined them with an expression of deep interest, then, turning towards Joseph, with a sinister smile, said:

"I hope you have not omitted to clean the guns which are placed at the top of the stand, – I mean those in my hunting-case."

"I had not your lordship's orders to do so," replied the astonished servant.

"You had, sir, and have neglected them!"

"I humbly assure you, my lord – "

"They must be in a fine state!"

"Your lordship will please to bear in mind that it is scarcely a month since they were regularly repaired and put in order for use by the gunsmith."

"Never mind! As soon as I am dressed reach down my shooting-case; I will examine the guns myself. I may very possibly go out shooting either to-morrow or next day."

"I will reach them down directly, my lord."

The chamber being by this time replaced in its ordinary state, a second *valet de chambre* was summoned to assist Joseph.

His toilet concluded, M. d'Harville repaired to his study, where the steward (M. Doublet) and his lawyer's clerk were awaiting him.

"We have brought the agreement that my lord marquis may hear it read over," said the bowing clerk; "my lord will then only have to sign it, and the affair is concluded."

"Have you perused it, M. Doublet?"

"I have, my lord, attentively."

"In that case I will affix my signature at once."

The necessary forms completed, the clerk withdrew, when M. Doublet, rubbing his hands, and looking triumphantly, exclaimed:

"Now, then, by this last addition to your lordship's estates, your manorial property cannot be less than a hundred and twenty-six thousand francs per annum, in round numbers. And permit me to say, my lord marquis, that a rent-roll of a hundred and twenty-six thousand francs per annum is of no common occurrence nowadays."

"I am a happy man, am I not, M. Doublet? A hundred and twenty-six thousand livres per annum! Surely the man owning such an income must be blessed indeed, – sorrow or care cannot reach him through so golden a shield!"

"And that is wholly independent of my lord's funded property, amounting at least to two millions more; or reckoning – "

"Exactly; I know what you would say; without reckoning my other blessings and comforts."

"Why, heaven be praised, your lordship is as rich in all earthly blessings as in revenue. Not a precious gift but it has been largely bestowed upon you; ay, and such as even money will not buy: youth, uninterrupted health, the power of enjoying every happiness, amongst which, or, rather, at the head of which," said M. Doublet, gracefully smiling, and gallantly bowing, "place that of being the husband of so sweet a lady as Madame la Marquise, and the parent of a lovely little girl, who might be mistaken for a cherubim."

M. d'Harville cast a look of gloomy mistrust on the poor steward; who, revelling in his own ecstasy at seeing the princely rent-roll committed to his charge, exceeding all others in magnificent amount, was far from perceiving the scowling brow of his master, thus congratulated on being the happiest man alive, when, to his own view, a verier wretch, or more complete bankrupt in happiness existed not. Striking M. Doublet familiarly on the shoulder, and breaking into a wild, ironical laugh, M. d'Harville rejoined:

"Then you think that with an income of two hundred and sixty thousand livres, a wife like mine, and a daughter resembling a cherubim, a man has nothing more to wish for?"

"Nay, my lord," replied the steward, with honest zeal, "you have still to wish for the blessing of lengthened days, that you may be spared to see mademoiselle married as happily as yourself. Ah,

my lord, I may not hope to see it, but I should be thankful to witness you and my honoured lady surrounded by your grandchildren, – ay, and great-grandchildren too, – why not?"

"Excellent, M. Doublet! A regular Baucis and Philemon idea. You have always a capital illustration to your ideas."

"You are too good to me, my lord. Has your lordship any further orders for me?"

"None. Stay, though; what cash have you in hand?"

"Twenty-nine thousand three hundred and odd francs for current expenses, my lord marquis; but there is a heavy sum at the bank belonging to this quarter's income."

"Well, bring me twenty thousand francs in gold, and, should I have gone out, give them to Joseph for me."

"Does your lordship wish for them this morning?"

"I do."

"Within an hour the gold shall be here. You have nothing else to say to me, my lord?"

"No, M. Doublet."

"A hundred and twenty-six thousand francs per annum, wholly unincumbered," repeated the steward, as he was about to quit the room; "this is a glorious day for me to see; I almost feared at one time that we should not secure this desirable property. Your lordship's most humble servant, I take my leave."

"Good morning, M. Doublet."

As the door closed upon the steward, M. d'Harville, overcome with the mental agony he had repressed thus far, threw himself into an armchair, leaned his elbows on the desk before which he sat, and covering his face with his hands, for the first time since receiving the fatal *billet*, gave vent to a flood of hot, burning tears.

"Cruel mockery of fate!" cried he, at length, "to have made me rich, but to have given me only shame and dishonour to place within the gilded frame: the perjury of Clémence, the disgrace which will descend upon my innocent child. Can I suffer this? Or shall I for the sake of her unoffending offspring spare the guilty mother from the opprobrium of an exposure?" Then rising suddenly from his seat, with sparkling eyes and clenched teeth he cried, in a deep, determined voice, "No, no! Blood, blood! The fearful protection from laughter and derision. Ah, full well I can now comprehend her coldness, her antipathy, wretched, wretched woman!" Then, stopping all at once, as though melted by some tender recollection, he resumed, in a hoarse tone, "Aversion! Alas! too well I know its cause. I inspire her with loathing, with disgust!" Then, after a lengthened silence, he cried, in a voice broken by sighs, "Yet, was it my fault or my misfortune? Should she have wronged me thus for a calamity beyond my power to avert? Surely I am a more fitting object for her pity than scorn and hatred." Again rekindling into his excited feelings, he reiterated, "Nothing but blood – the blood of both – can wash out this guilty stain! Doubtless he, the favoured lover, has been informed why she flies her husband's arms."

This latter thought redoubled the fury of the marquis. He elevated his tightly compressed hands towards heaven, as though invoking its vengeance; then, passing his burning fingers over his eyes as he recollected the necessity that existed for concealing his emotion from the servants of his establishment, he returned to his sleeping-apartment with an appearance of perfect tranquillity. There he found Joseph.

"Well, in what state are the guns?"

"In perfect order. Please to examine them, my lord."

"I came for the purpose of so doing. Has your lady yet rung?"

"I do not know, my lord."

"Then inquire."

Directly the servant had quitted the room, M. d'Harville hastily took from the gun-case a small powder-flask, some balls and caps; then, locking the case, put the key in his pocket. Then going to

the stand of arms, he took from it a pair of moderate-sized Manton's pistols, loaded them, and placed them without difficulty in the pockets of his morning wrapper. Joseph returned with the intimation that Madame d'Harville was in her dressing-room.

"Has your lady ordered her carriage?"

"My lord, I heard Mlle. Juliette say to the head-coachman, when he came to inquire her ladyship's orders for the day, that, 'as it was cold, dry walking, if her ladyship went out at all, she would prefer going on foot.'"

"Very well. Stay, – I forgot. I shall not go out hunting before to-morrow, or probably, next day. Desire Williams to look the small travelling-britcska carefully over. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord; it shall be attended to. Will not your lordship require a stick?"

"No. Pray tell me, is there not a hackney coach-stand near here?"

"Quite close, my lord, – in the Rue de Lille."

After a moment's hesitation, the marquis continued: "Go and inquire of Mlle. Juliette whether Madame d'Harville can see me for a few minutes." Joseph obeyed.

"Yes," murmured the marquis, "I will see the cause of all my misery, – my disgrace. I will contemplate the guilty mask beneath which the impure heart conceals its adulterous designs. I will listen to the false lips that speak the words of innocence, while deep dishonour lurks in the candid smile, – a smile that seemed to me as that of an angel. Yet 'tis an appalling spectacle to watch the words, the looks, of one who, breathing only the sentiments of a chaste wife and mother, is about to sully your name with one of those deep, deadly stains which can only be washed out in blood. Fool that I am to give her the chance of again bewildering my senses! She will look at me with her accustomed sweetness and candour; greet me (all guilty as she is) with the same pure smile she bestows upon her child, as, kneeling at her lap, it lisps its early prayer. That look, – those eyes, mirrors of the soul, – the more modest and pure the glance" (D'Harville shuddered with contempt) "the greater must be the innate corruption and falsehood! Alas! she has proved herself a consummate dissembler; and I – I – have been the veriest dupe! Only let me consider with what sentiments must that woman look upon me, if just previous to her meeting with her favoured lover I pay her my accustomed visit, and express my usual devotion and love for her, – the young, the virtuous wife, the tender, sensible, and devoted mother, as until this wretched moment I would have died to prove her. Can I, dare I, trust myself in her presence, with the knowledge of her being but too impatient for the arrival of that blessed hour which conveys her to her guilty rendezvous and infamous paramour? Oh, Clémence, Clémence, you in whom all my hopes and fondest affections were placed, is this a just return? No! no! no!" again repeated M. d'Harville, with rapidly returning excitement. "False, treacherous woman! I will not see you! I will not trust my ears to your feigned words! Nor you, my child. At the sight of your innocent countenance I should unman myself, and compromise my just revenge."

Quitting his apartment, M. d'Harville, instead of repairing to those of the marquise, contented himself with leaving a message for her through Mlle. Juliette, to the effect that he wished a short conversation with Madame d'Harville, but that being obliged to go out just then, he should be glad, if it assorted with Madame la Marquise's perfect convenience, to breakfast with her at twelve o'clock.

"And so," said the unhappy M. d'Harville, "fancying that after twelve o'clock I shall be safe at home, she will consider herself more at liberty to follow out her own plans."

He then repaired to the coach-stand contiguous to his mansion, and summoned a vehicle from the ranks.

"Now, coachee," said he, affecting to disguise his rank, "what's o'clock?"

"All right, master," said the man, drawing up to the side of the footway, "where am I to drive to? Let's have a right understanding, and a look at the clock. Why, it's as close on half-after eleven as may be."

"Now, then, drive to the corner of the Rue St. Dominique, and wait at the end of the garden wall which runs along there; do you understand?"

"Yes, yes, – I know."

M. d'Harville then drew down the blinds of the *fiacre*; the coachman drove on, and soon arrived opposite the Hôtel d'Harville, from which point of observation it was impossible for any person to enter or quit the house without the marquis having a full view of them. One o'clock was the hour fixed in the note; and with his eyes riveted on the entrance-gates of the mansion, the marquis waited in painful suspense, absorbed in a whirl of fearful thoughts and maddening conjectures. Time stole on imperceptibly; twelve o'clock reverberated from the dome of St. Thomas Aquinas, when the door opened slowly at the Hôtel d'Harville, and Madame d'Harville herself came timidly forth.

"Already?" exclaimed the unhappy husband; "how punctual she is! She fears to keep him waiting," cried the marquis, with a mixture of irony and savage rage.

The cold was excessive; the pavement hard and dry. Clémence was dressed in a black velvet bonnet, covered with a veil of the same colour, and a thickly wadded pelisse of dark ruby satin, a large shawl of dark blue cashmere fell to the very hem of her pelisse, which she lightly and gracefully held up while crossing the street. Thanks to this movement, the taper foot and graceful ankle of Madame d'Harville, cased in an exquisitely fitting boot of black satin, were exposed to view.

It was strange, that amid the painful and bewildering ideas that crowded the brain of D'Harville, he should have found one thought to waste upon the beauty of his wife's foot; but so it was; and at the moment that was about to separate them for ever, to his eager gaze that fairy foot and well-turned ankle had never looked so charming; and then, as by a rapid train of thought he recalled the matchless loveliness of his wife, and, as he had ever believed till now, her purity, her mental graces, he groaned aloud as he remembered that another was preferred to him, and that the light figure that glided on before his fixed gaze, was but the hollow spectre of fallen goodness, a lost, degraded creature, hastening to steep her husband and infant in irremediable disgrace, for the indulging of a base and guilty passion. Even in that wretched moment he felt how dearly, how exclusively he had loved her; and for the first time during the blow which had fallen on him, he knew that he mourned the lovely woman almost equally with the virtuous mother and chaste wife. A cry of rage and mingled fury escaped him, as he pictured the rapture of her meeting with the lover of her choice; and a sharp, darting pain quivered through his heart as he remembered that Clémence, with all her youth and beauty, her countless charms, both of body and mind, was lost to him for ever.

Hitherto his passionate grief had been unminged by any alloy of self. He had bewailed the sanctity of the marriage-vow trampled under foot, the abandonment of all sworn and sacred duties; but his sufferings of rage, jealousy, and regret almost overpowered him, and with much difficulty was he able to command his voice sufficiently to say to the coachman, while partially drawing up the blind:

"Do you see that lady in the blue shawl and black bonnet walking along by the wall?"

"Yes, yes! I see her safe enough."

"Well, then, go slowly along, and keep up with her. Should she go to the coach-stand I had you from, pull up; and when she has got into a *fiacre*, follow it wherever it goes."

"All right, – I understand! Now this is what I call a good joke!"

M. d'Harville had conjectured rightly. Madame d'Harville repaired directly to the coach-stand, and beckoning a *fiacre* off the stand, instantly got in, and drove off, closely followed by the vehicle containing her husband.

They had proceeded but a very short distance, when the coachman took the road to the church of St. Thomas Aquinas, and, to the surprise of M. d'Harville, pulled up directly in front.

"What is this for? What are you about?"

"Why, master, the lady you told me to follow has just alighted here, and a smart, tidy leg and foot of her own she has got. Her dress somehow caught; so, you see, I couldn't help having a peep, nohow. This is downright good fun though, this is!"

A thousand varied thoughts agitated M. d'Harville. One minute he fancied that his wife, fearing pursuit, had taken this step to escape detection; then hope whispered that the letter which had given

him so much uneasiness, might after all be only an infamous calumny; for if guilty, what could be gained by this false assumption of piety? Would it not be a species of sacrilegious mockery? At this suggestion a bright ray of hope shot across the troubled mind of M. d'Harville, arising from the striking contrast between Clémence's present occupation and the crime alleged as her motive for quitting her home. Alas! this consolatory illusion was speedily destroyed. Leaning in at the open window the coachman observed:

"I say, master, that nice little woman you are after has got back into her coach."

"Then follow quickly."

"I'm off! Now this is what I call downright good fun. Capital; hang me if it ain't!"

The vehicle reached the Quais, the Hôtel de Ville, the Rue St. Avoys, and, at last, Rue du Temple.

"I say," said the coachman, turning round to speak to M. d'Harville from his seat, "master, just look. My mate, there, has stopped at No. 17; we are about at 13. Shall I stop here or go on to 17?"

"Stop here."

"I say, – look'ee, – you'll lose your pretty lady. She has gone into the alley leading to No. 17."

"Open the door."

"I'm coming, sir."

And quickly following the steps of his wife, M. d'Harville entered the obscure passage up which she had disappeared. Madame d'Harville, however, had so far the start as to have entered the house previously.

Attracted by the most devouring curiosity, Madame Pipelet, with her melancholy Alfred and her friend the oyster-woman, were huddled close together on the sill at the lodge door. The staircase was so dark that a person just emerging from the daylight into the gloom of the passage could not discern a single step of it; and Madame d'Harville, agitated and almost sinking with apprehension, found herself constrained to apply to Madame Pipelet for further advice how to proceed, saying, in a low, tremulous voice:

"Which way must I turn, madame, to find the staircase of the house?"

"Stop, if you please. Pray, whom do you want?"

"I wish to go to the apartments of M. Charles, madame."

"Monsieur who?" repeated the old woman, feigning not to have heard her, but in reality to afford sufficient leisure to her husband and her friend thoroughly to scrutinise the unhappy woman's countenance, even through the folds of her thick veil.

"M. Charles, madame," repeated Clémence, in a low, trembling tone, and bending down her head, so as to escape the rude and insolent examination to which her features were subjected.

"Ah! M. Charles; very well; you should have spoken so that one could hear you. Well, my pretty dear, if you want M. Charles, – and a good-looking fellow he is as ever won a woman's heart, – go straight on, and the door will stare you in the face. Eh! eh! eh!" laughed out the old woman, shaking her fat sides with spiteful glee, "it seems he has not waited for nothing this time. Success to love and love-makings, and a merry end to it!"

The marquise, ready to sink with confusion, began slowly to grope her way up the dingy staircase.

"I say," bawled out the old shell-fish woman, "our commandant knows what he is about, don't he? Leave him alone to choose a pretty girl. His marm is a regular swell, ain't she?"

Had it not been requisite for her to run the gauntlet of the trio who occupied the entrance-door, Madame d'Harville, ready to sink with shame and terror, would gladly have retraced her steps. She made another effort, and at last reached the landing-place, where, to her unutterable consternation and surprise, she saw Rodolph waiting, impatiently, her arrival. Instantly flying to meet her, he hastily placed a purse in her hand, saying, in a hurried manner:

"Your husband knows all, and is now following your very steps."

At this instant, the sharp tones of Madame Pipelet were heard crying out, "Where are you going to, sir?"

"'Tis he!" exclaimed Rodolph, and then, almost forcing Madame d'Harville up the second staircase, he added, in a rapid manner, "make all haste to the very top of the house; on the fifth floor you will find a wretched family, named Morel. Remember your sole business in coming hither was to relieve their distress."

"I tell you, sir," screamed Madame Pipelet, "that unless you tell me your name, you shall trample over me, as they walked over our brave men at Waterloo, before I let you pass."

Having, from the entrance to the alley, observed Madame d'Harville stop to speak to the portress, the marquis had likewise prepared himself to pass through some sort of questioning.

"I belong to the lady who just now entered," said the marquis.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Madame Pipelet, looking the picture of wonderment, "why, that, of course, is a satisfactory answer. You can pass on, if you please."

Hearing an unusual stir, M. Charles Robert had set the door of his apartments ajar, and Rodolph, unwilling to be recognised by M. d'Harville, whose quick, searching eye might have detected him, spite of the murkiness of the staircase, hearing him rapidly ascending the stairs, just as he reached the landing-place, dashed into the chamber of the astonished commandant, locking the door after him. M. Charles Robert, magnificently attired in his *robe de chambre* of scarlet damask with orange-coloured stripes, and Greek cap of embroidered velvet, was struck with astonishment at the unexpected appearance of Rodolph, whom he had not seen the preceding evening at the embassy, and who was upon the present occasion very plainly dressed.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" asked he at length, assuming a tone of killing haughtiness.

"Be silent!" replied Rodolph; and there was that in his voice and manner that Charles Robert obeyed, even in spite of his own determination to strike terror into the bold invader of his private moments.

A violent and continued noise, as of some heavy substance falling from one stair to the other, resounded through the dull silence of the gloomy staircase.

"Unhappy man! He has murdered her!" exclaimed Rodolph.

"Murdered!" ejaculated M. Charles Robert, turning very pale; "for the love of Heaven, what is all this about?"

But, without heeding his inquiry, Rodolph partially opened the door, and discovered little Tortillard half rolling, half limping, down the stairs, holding in his hand the red silk purse Rodolph had just given to Madame d'Harville. Tortillard, with another scrambling shuffle, disappeared at the bottom of the last flight of stairs. The light step of Madame d'Harville, and the heavier tread of her husband, as he continued his pursuit of her from one story to another, could be distinctly heard. Somewhat relieved of his worst fears, yet unable to make out by what chance the purse so recently committed to Madame d'Harville's hands should have been transferred to those of Tortillard, Rodolph said, authoritatively, to M. Robert:

"Do not think of quitting your apartments for the next hour, I request!"

"Upon my life and soul, that is a pretty thing to say to a gentleman in his own house," replied M. Robert in an impatient and wrathful tone. "I ask you, again, what is the meaning of all this? Who the devil are you, sir? And how dare you dictate to me, a gentleman?"

"M. d'Harville is informed of everything, – has followed his wife to your very door, – and is now pursuing her to the upper part of the house."

"God bless me! Here's a situation!" exclaimed Charles Robert, with an appearance of utter consternation. "But what is to be done? What is the use of her going up-stairs? And how will she manage to get down again unobserved?"

"Remain where you are, neither speak nor move until the portress comes to you," rejoined Rodolph, who hastened to give his final instructions to Madame Pipelet, leaving the commandant a prey to the most alarming apprehensions.

"Well! well!" cried Madame Pipelet, her face radiant with chuckling exultation; "there's rare sport going on! The lady who came to visit my fine gentleman on the first floor has been followed by another gentleman, who seems rather in a passion, – the husband of that silly young creature, I make no doubt. Directly the truth flashed across me, I tells him to go straight up; for, thinks I, he'll be sure to murder our commandant. That'll make a deal of talk in the neighbourhood; and folks will come crowding to see the house, just as they did at No. 36 after the man was killed there. Lord! I wonder the fighting has not begun yet. I have been listening to hear them set to; but I can't catch the least sound."

"My dear Madame Pipelet, will you do me a great favour?" said Rodolph, putting five louis into her hand. "When this lady comes down-stairs, ask her how she found the poor Morels. Tell her she has performed an act of real charity in coming to see them, according to her promise, the last time she called to inquire respecting them."

Madame Pipelet looked first at the money and then at Rodolph, with an air of petrified astonishment.

"What am I to do with this money?" inquired she, at length; "do you give it to me? Ah, I see! This handsome lady, then, does not come altogether for the commandant?"

"The gentleman who followed her was her husband, as you justly supposed; but, being warned in time, the poor lady went straight on to the Morels, as though her only business here was to afford them succour. Now do you understand!"

"I should think I did, – clear as noonday. 'A nod is as good as a wink,' as the old woman said. I know! You want me to help you cheat the husband? Lord bless you! I'm up to all those things, – quick as lightning, silent as the grave! Go along with you! I'm a regular good hand at keeping husbands in the dark; you might fancy I'd been used to it all my life. But tell me – "

The huge hat of M. Pipelet was here observed sending its dark shadow across the floor of the lodge.

"Anastasie," said Alfred, gravely, "you are like M. César Bradamanti; you have no respect for anything or anybody. And let me tell you that there are subjects that should never be made the subject of a jest, even amongst the most familiar acquaintances."

"Nonsense, my old darling. Don't stand there rolling up your eyes, and looking about as wise as a pig in a pound. You know well enough I was only joking; you know well enough that no living soul beneath the canopy of heaven can ever say I gave him a liberty. But that'll do; so let's talk of this good gentleman's business. Suppose I do go out of my usual way to save this young lady, I'm sure I do it solely to oblige our new lodger, who, for his generosity, may well deserve to be called the king of lodgers." Then, turning towards Rodolph, she added, "You shall see how cleverly I will go to work. Just hide yourself there in that corner behind the curtain. Quick, – quick! I hear them coming."

Rodolph had scarcely time to conceal himself ere M. and Madame d'Harville descended the stairs. The features of the marquis shone with happiness, mingled with a confused and astonished expression, while the countenance of his wife, as she hung on his arm, looked calm but pale.

"Well, my good lady," cried Madame Pipelet, going out of her lodge to address her, as she descended the last stair, "how did you find the poor creatures, – I mean the Morels? Ah, I doubt not, such a sight made your heart ache? God knows your charity was well bestowed! I told you the other day, when you called to inquire about them, what a state of starvation and misery they were in. Be assured, kind lady, these poor things are fit objects of your bounty; you will never have to regret coming to this out-of-the-way place to examine into their case. They really are deserving all your kindness, – don't you think so, Alfred?"

Alfred, the strictness of whose ideas touching a due regard for all conjugal duties made him revolt at the thoughts of helping to deceive a husband, replied only by a sort of grumbling sound, as vague as discordant.

"Please to excuse my husband, madame," resumed Madame Pipelet; "he has got the cramp in his stomach, and cannot speak loud enough to be understood, or he would tell you as well as myself that the poor people you have so fortunately relieved will pray of the Almighty, night and day, to bless and reward you, my worthy lady."

M. d'Harville gazed on his wife with feelings approaching to adoration, as he exclaimed, "Angel of goodness, how has base slander dared to disturb your heavenly work!"

"An angel!" repeated Madame Pipelet; "that she is, and one of the very best heaven could send. There is not a better."

"Let us return home, I entreat!" said Madame d'Harville, who was suffering acutely under the restraint she had put upon herself since entering the house, and, now that the necessity for exertion was over, found her strength rapidly forsaking her.

"Instantly," replied the marquis.

At the instant of their emerging into the open air from the obscurity of the alley, M. d'Harville, observing the pale looks of his wife, said, tenderly:

"Ah, Clémence, I have deep cause to solicit your pity and forgiveness."

"Alas! my lord," said the marquise, sighing deeply, "which of us has not need of pardon?"

Rodolph quitted his hiding-place, deeply ruminating upon so terrible a scene, thus intermingled with absurdity and coarseness, and pondering over the curious termination to a drama, the commencement of which had called forth such different passions.

"Well, now," exclaimed Madame Pipelet, "you must say I played my part well. Didn't I send that donkey of a husband home with longer ears than he came out with? Lord bless you! he'll put his wife under a glass case, and worship her from this day forward. Poor, dear gentleman! I really could not help feeling sorry for him. Oh! but about your furniture, M. Rodolph; it has not come yet."

"I am now going to see about it. By the by, you had better go and inform the commandant that he may venture out."

"True; I'll go and let the caged bird out. But what stuff and nonsense for him to hire apartments of no more use to him than they are to the King of Prussia! He is a fine fellow, he is, with his paltry twelve francs a month. This is the fourth time he has been made a fool of."

Rodolph quitted the house, and Madame Pipelet, turning to her husband, said, with a chuckling laugh, "Now, Alfred, the commandant's turn has come; now for it! I mean to have a jolly good laugh at my gentleman, – up and dressed for nothing."

Arrived at the apartments of M. Charles Robert, the portress rang the bell; the door was opened by the commandant himself.

"Commandant," said Anastasie, giving him a military salute, by placing the back of her little fat hand against the front of her wig, "I have come to set you free. Your friends have gone away arm in arm, happy as doves, under your very nose. Well, you are out of a nice mess, thanks to M. Rodolph. You ought to stand something very handsome to him for all he has done upon the present occasion."

"Then this slim individual with the moustachios is called M. Rodolph, is he?"

"Exactly so; neither more nor less."

"And who and what is the fellow?"

"Fellow, indeed!" cried Madame Pipelet, in a wrathful voice; "he is as good as other men, – better than some I could mention. Why, he is a travelling clerk, but the very king of lodgers; for, though he has only one room, he does not haggle and beat folks down, – not he. Why, he gave me six francs for doing for him, – six francs, mind, I say, without a word. Think of that! – without ever offering me a sou less. Oh, he is a lodger! I wish other people were at all like him!"

"There, there, that's enough; take the key."

"Shall I light the fire to-morrow, commandant?"

"No!"

"Next day?"

"No, no! Don't bother me."

"I say, commandant, if you recollect, I warned you that you would have your trouble for your pains."

M. Charles Robert threw a glance at his grinning tormentor that spoke of annihilation at least, and, dashing furiously by her, quitted the house, wondering much how a mere clerk should have become acquainted with his assignation with the Marquise d'Harville.

As the commandant left the alley, Tortillard came hobbling along.

"Well, what do you want?" said Madame Pipelet.

"Has the Borgnesse been to call upon me?" asked the young scamp, without attending to the porteress's question.

"The Chouette? No, you ugly monster! What should she come for?"

"Why, to take me with her into the country, to be sure," said Tortillard, swinging on the lodge gate.

"And what does your master say to it?"

"Oh, father managed all that. He sent this morning to M. Bradamanti, to ask him to give me leave to go in the country, – the country, – the country," sang or rather screamed the amiable scion of M. Bras Rouge, beating time most melodiously on the window-panes.

"Will you leave off, you young rascal, or are you going to break my window? Oh, here comes a coach!"

"Oh! oh! oh!" shrieked the urchin; "it is my dear Chouette! Oh, how nice the ride in a coach!"

And, looking through the window, they saw reflected upon the red blind of the opposite glass the hideous profile of the Borgnesse. She beckoned to Tortillard, who ran out to her. The coachman descended from his box, and opened the door; Tortillard sprang into the vehicle, which instantly drove off.

Another person beside the Chouette was in the carriage. In the farther corner, and wrapped in an old cloak with a furred collar, his features shrouded by a black silk cap pulled down over his brows, sat the Schoolmaster. His inflamed lids formed a horrible contrast with the white globeless space beneath; and this fearful spectacle was rendered still more hideous by the action of the severe cold upon his seamed and frightful countenance.

"Now, small boy, squat yourself down on the pins of my man; you'll serve to keep him warm," said the Borgnesse to Tortillard, who crouched like a dog close to the feet of the Schoolmaster and the Chouette.

"Now, then, my coves," said the driver, "on we go to the 'ken' at Bouqueval, don't we, La Chouette? You shall see whether I can 'tool a drag' or not."

"And keep your pads on the move, my fine fellow; for we must get hold of the girl to-night."

"All right, my blind un; we'll go the pace."

"Shall I give you a hint?" said the Schoolmaster.

"What about?"

"Why, cut it fine as you pass by the 'nabs' at the barrier; the meeting might lead to disagreeable recollections. It is not every old acquaintance it is worth while to renew our friendship with. You have been wanted at the barriers for some time."

"I'll keep my weather-eye open," replied the driver, getting on his box.

It needs scarcely be told, after this specimen of slang, that the coachman was a robber, one of the Schoolmaster's worthy associates. The vehicle then quitted the Rue du Temple.

Two hours afterwards, towards the closing of a winter's day, the vehicle containing the Chouette, the Schoolmaster, and Tortillard, stopped before a wooden cross, marking out the sunken

and lonely road which conducted to the farm at Bouqueval, where the Goualeuse remained under the kind protection of Madame Georges.

CHAPTER III

AN IDYL

The hour of five had just struck from the church clock of the little village of Bouqueval; the cold was intense, the sky clear, the sun, sinking slowly behind the vast leafless woods which crowned the heights of Ecoeu, cast a purple hue over the horizon, and sent its faint, sloping rays across the extensive plains, white and hard with winter's frost.

In the country each season has its own distinctive features, its own peculiar charm; at times the dazzling snow changes the whole scene into immense landscapes of purest alabaster, exhibiting their spotless beauties to the reddish gray of the sky. Then may be seen in the glimmer of twilight, either ascending or descending the hill, a benighted farmer returning to his habitation; his horse, cloak, and hat, are covered with the falling snow. Bitter is the cold, biting the north wind, dark and gloomy the approaching night; but what cares he? There, amid those leafless trees, he sees the bright taper burning in the window of his cheerful home; while from the tall chimney a column of dark smoke rolls upwards through the flaky shower that descends, and speaks to the toil-worn farmer of a blazing hearth and humble meal prepared by kind affection to welcome him after the fatigues of his journey. Then the rustic gossip by the fireside, on which the fagot burns and crackles, and a peaceful, comfortable night's rest, amid the whistling of the winds, and the barking of the various dogs at the different farms scattered around, with the answering cry from the distant watch-dog.

Daylight opens upon a scene of fairy-land. Surely the tiny elves have been celebrating some grand fête, and have left some of their adornments behind them, for on each branch hang long spiracles of crystal, glittering in the rays of a winter's sun with all the prismatic brilliancy of the diamond. The damp, rich soil of the arable land is laid down in furrows, where hides the timid hare in her form, or the speckled partridge runs merrily. Here and there is heard the melancholy tinkling of the sheep-bell hanging from the neck of some important leader of the numerous flocks scattered over the verdant heights and turfy valleys of the neighbourhood; while, carefully wrapped in his dark gray cloak, the shepherd, seated under shelter of those knotted trunks and interlaced branches, chants his cheerful lay, while his fingers are busily employed weaving a basket of rushes.

Occasionally a more animated scene presents itself; distant echo gives out the faint sound of the hunting-horn, and the cry of hounds; suddenly a frightened deer bursts from the neighbouring forest, stands for a few seconds in terrified alarm upon the frozen plain, then darts onward, and is quickly lost amid the thickets on the opposite side. The trampling of horses, the barking of dogs, are rapidly brought nearer by the breeze; and now, in their turn, a pack of dogs with brown and tawny-spotted skins issue from the brushwood from which the frightened deer but just now came; they run eagerly over the sterile ground, the fallow fields, with noses closely pointed to the ground they pursue with loud cries the traces left by the flying deer. At their heels come the hunters in their scarlet coats, bending over the necks of their swift steeds; they encourage their dogs by their voices mingled with the notes of the horn. Swift as lightning the brilliant cortège passes on; the noise decreases; by degrees all is still; dogs, horses, and huntsmen are lost in the tangled mazes of the forest, where the frightened stag had sought and found a hiding-place. Then peace and calm resumed their reign; and the profound stillness of these vast plains was interrupted only by the monotonous song of the shepherd.

These sights, – these rustic views abounded in the environs of the village of Bouqueval, which, spite of its proximity to Paris, was situated in a sort of desert, to which there was no approach except by cross-roads. Concealed during the summer among the trees, like a nest amid the sheltering foliage, the farm which had become the home of the poor Goualeuse was now utterly bereft of its leafy screen, and entirely exposed to view. The course of the little river, now quite frozen over, resembled a long silver riband stretched along the ever verdant meadows, through which a number of fine cows were

leisurely wending their way to their stable. Brought home by the approach of night, flocks of pigeons were successively arriving, and perching on the peaked roof of the dove-house; while the immense walnut-tree, that during the summer afforded an umbrageous screen both to the farmhouse and its numerous out-buildings, stripped of its rich foliage, exhibited only bare branches, through which could plainly be discerned the tiled roof of the one, and the thatched tops of the others, overgrown with patches of moss of mingled green and dingy brown.

A heavy cart, drawn by three strong, sturdy horses, with long, thick manes and shining coats, with blue collars ornamented with bells and tassels of red worsted, was bringing in a load of wheat from a neighbouring rick. This ponderous machine entered the courtyard by the large gate, while immense flocks of sheep were pressing eagerly round the side entrances; both men and beasts appeared impatient to escape from the severity of the cold, and to enjoy the comfort of repose. The horses neighed joyously at the sight of their stable, the sheep bleated their satisfaction at returning to their warm folds, while the hungry labourers cast a longing look towards the kitchen windows, from which streamed forth pleasant promise of a warm and savoury meal.

The whole of the exterior arrangements of the farm were indicative of the most scrupulous order, neatness, and exactitude. Instead of being covered with dirt and dust, scattered about, and exposed to the inclemency of the season, the carts, rollers, harrows, etc., with every agricultural implement (and some were of the last and best invention), were placed, well cleaned and painted, under a vast shed, where the carters were accustomed to arrange their cart-harness with the most symmetrical attention to order and method. Large, clean, and well laid out, the court-yard had none of those huge dung-heaps, those stagnant pools of filthy water, which deface the finest establishments of La Beauce or La Brie.

The poultry-yard, surrounded by a green trellising, received and shut in all the feathered tribe, who after wandering in the fields all day, returned home by a small door left open till all were collected, when it was carefully closed and secured. Without dwelling too minutely upon every detail, we shall merely observe, that in all respects this farm passed most justly in the environs for a model farm, as much for the excellency of the method by which it was conducted, and the abundant crops it produced, as for the respectability and correct mode of life which distinguished the various labourers employed there, who were soon ranked among the most creditable and efficient workmen of the place.

The cause of all this prosperity shall be spoken of hereafter. Meanwhile we will conduct the reader to the trellised gate of the poultry-yard, which, for the rustic elegance of its perches and poultry-houses, was noways inferior to the farm itself; while through the centre flowed a small stream of clear, limpid water, the bed of which was laid down with smooth pebbles, carefully cleansed from any obstructing substance.

A sudden stir arose among the winged inhabitants of this charming spot; the fowls flew fluttering and cackling from their perches, the turkeys gabbled, the guinea-fowls screamed, and the pigeons, forsaking their elevated position on the summit of the dove-house, descended to the sandy surface of the yard, and stood cooing and caressing each other with every manifestation of joy. The arrival of Fleur-de-Marie had occasioned all these ecstatic delights.

A more charming model than the Goualeuse could not have been desired by Greuze or Watteau, had her cheeks possessed a little more *rondeur* or been visited by a brighter tinge; but, spite of their delicate paleness, the expression of her features, the *tout ensemble* of her figure, and the gracefulness of her attitude would have rendered her worthy of exercising the crayons of even the celebrated artists we have alluded to.

The small round cap of Fleur-de-Marie displayed her fair forehead and light, braided hair, in common with all the young girls in the environs of Paris; above this cap, but still exposing the crown and ears, she wore a large red cotton handkerchief, folded smoothly, and pinned behind her head; while the long ends waving gracefully over her shoulders formed a costume which, for graceful effect, might be envied by the tasteful *coiffeurs* of Italy or Switzerland. A handkerchief of snow-white linen,

crossed over her bosom, was half concealed by the high and spreading front of her coarse cloth apron. A jacket of blue woollen cloth with tight sleeves displayed her slender figure, and descended half way down her thick skirt of dark-striped fustian; white cotton stockings and tied shoes, partly covered by sabots, furnished with a leather strap for the instep, completed this costume of rustic simplicity, to which the natural grace of Fleur-de-Marie lent an inexpressible charm.

Holding in one hand the two corners of her apron, with the other she distributed handfuls of grain among the winged crowd by which she was surrounded. One beautiful pigeon of a silvery whiteness, with beak and feet of a rich purple colour, more presuming or more indulged than the rest, after having flown several times around Fleur-de-Marie, at length alighted on her shoulder; the young girl, as though well used to these familiarities, continued, wholly undisturbed, to throw out continued supplies of grain; but, half turning her head till its perfect outline alone was visible, she gently raised her head, and smilingly offered her small rosy lips to meet those of her fond, caressing friend. The last rays of the setting sun shed a pale golden light over this innocent picture.

While the Goualeuse was thus occupied with her rural cares, Madame Georges and the Abbé Laporte, curé of Bouqueval, sitting by the fireside in the neat little parlour of the farm, were conversing on the one constant theme, – Fleur-de-Marie. The old curé, with a pensive, thoughtful air, his head bent downwards, and his elbows leaning on his knees, mechanically stretched his two trembling hands before the fire. Madame Georges, laying aside the needlework on which she had been occupied, kept an anxious eye on the abbé, as though eagerly waiting for some observation from him. After a moment's silence:

"Yes," said he, "you are right, Madame Georges; it will be better for M. Rodolph to question Marie, for she is so filled with deep gratitude and devotion to him, that she will probably reveal to him what she persists in concealing from us."

"Then, since you agree with me, M. le Curé, I will write, this very evening, to the address he left with me, – the Allée des Veuves."

"Poor child," sighed the kind old man, "she ought to have been so happy here! What secret grief can thus be preying on her mind?"

"Her unhappiness is too deeply fixed to be removed even by her earnest and passionate application to study."

"And yet she has made a most rapid and extraordinary progress since she has been under our care, has she not?"

"She has, indeed; already she can read and write with the utmost fluency, and is already sufficiently advanced in arithmetic to assist me in keeping my farm accounts; and then the dear child is so active and industrious, and really affords me so much assistance as both surprises me and moves me to tears. You know that, spite of my repeated remonstrances, she persisted in working so hard, that I became quite alarmed lest such toil should seriously affect her health."

"I am thankful to hear from you," resumed the worthy curé, "that your negro doctor has fully quieted your apprehensions respecting the cough your young friend suffered from; he says it is merely temporary, and gives no reason for uneasiness."

"Oh, that kind, excellent M. David! He really appeared to feel the same interest in the poor girl that we did who know her sad story. She is universally beloved and respected by all on the farm; though that is not surprising, as, thanks to the generous and elevated views of M. Rodolph, all the persons employed on it are selected for their good sense and excellent conduct, from all parts of the kingdom; but were it not so, – were they of the common herd of vulgar-minded labourers, they could not help feeling the influence of Marie's angelic sweetness, and timid, graceful manner, as though she were always deprecating anger, or beseeching pardon for some involuntary fault. Unfortunate being! as though she alone were to blame."

After remaining for several minutes buried in reflection, the abbé resumed:

"Did you not tell me that this deep dejection of Marie's might be dated from the time when Madame Dubreuil, who rents under the Duke de Lucenay, paid her a visit during the feast of the Holy Ghost?"

"Yes, M. le Curé, I did. And yet Madame Dubreuil and her daughter Clara (a perfect model of candour and goodness) were as much taken with our dear child as every one else who approaches her; and both of them lavished on her every mark of the most affectionate regard. You know that we pass the Sunday alternately at each other's house; but it invariably happens that, when we return from our Sunday excursion to Arnouville, where Madame Dubreuil and her daughter reside, the melancholy of my dear Marie seems augmented, and her spirits more depressed than ever. I cannot comprehend why this should be, when Madame Dubreuil treats her like a second daughter, and the sweet Clara loves her with the tender affection of a sister."

"In truth, Madame Georges, it is a fearful mystery; what can occasion all this hidden sorrow, when here she need not have a single care? The difference between her present and past life must be as great as that which exists between heaven and the abode of the damned. Surely, hers is not an ungrateful disposition?"

"She ungrateful! Oh, no, M. le Curé! her sensitive and affectionate nature magnifies the slightest service rendered her, and she appears as though her gratitude could never be sufficiently evinced. There is, too, in her every thought an instinctive delicacy and fineness of feeling wholly incompatible with ingratitude, which could never be harboured in so noble a nature as that of my charge. Dear Marie, how anxious does she seem to earn the bread she eats, and how eagerly she strives to compensate the hospitality shown her, by every exertion she can make, or service she can render! And, then, except on Sunday, when I make it a point she should dress herself with more regard to appearance to accompany me to church, she will only wear the coarse, humble garments worn by our young peasant girls; and yet there is in her such an air of native superiority, so natural a grace, that one would not desire to see her otherwise attired, would they, M. le Curé?"

"Ah, mother's pride! Beware!" said the old priest, smiling.

At these words, tears filled the eyes of Madame Georges; she thought of her long-lost child, and of his possible destiny.

"Come, come, dear friend, cheer up! Look upon our dear Marie as sent by a gracious Providence to occupy your maternal affections until the blessed moment when he shall restore you your son; and, besides, you have a sacred duty to perform towards this child of your adoption. Are you not her baptismal godmother? And, believe me, when that office is worthily discharged, it almost equals that of a mother. As for M. Rodolph, he has discharged his obligation of godfather by anticipation, for, in snatching her from the abyss of crime into which her misfortunes and her helplessness had cast her, he may be said to have caused her immortal existence to begin."

"Doubtless the poor thing has never received the sacrament of our holy church. Do you think, M. le Curé, she is now sufficiently acquainted with its sanctified purposes to be admitted to a participation of it?"

"I will take an opportunity of learning her sentiments on the subject as we walk back to the rectory. I shall then apprise her that the holy ceremony will take place probably in about a fortnight from hence."

"How gratefully she will receive such an information; her religious feelings are the strongest I have ever met with."

"Alas, poor thing! she has deep and heavy expiation to make for the errors of her past life."

"Nay, M. l'Abbé, consider. Abandoned so young, without resource, without friends, almost without a knowledge of good or evil, plunged involuntarily into the very vortex of crime, what was there to prevent her from falling the bitter sacrifice she has been?"

"The clear, moral sense of right and wrong implanted by the Creator in every breast should have withheld her; and, besides, we have no evidence of her having even sought to escape from the

horrible fate into which she had fallen. Is there no friendly hand to be found in Paris to listen to the cries of suffering virtue? Is charity so rare, so hard to obtain in that large city?"

"Let us hope not, M. l'Abbé; but how to discover it is the difficulty. Ere arriving at the knowledge of one kind, commiserating Christian, think of the refusals, the rebukes, the denials to be endured. And, then, in such a case as our poor Marie's, it was no passing temporary aid that could avail her, but the steady, continued patronage and support, the being placed in the way to earn an honest livelihood. Many tender and pitying mothers would have succoured her had they known her sad case, I doubt not, but it was first requisite to secure the happiness of knowing where to meet with them. Trust me, I, too, have known want and misery. But for one of those providential chances which, alas! too late, threw poor Marie in the way of M. Rodolph, – but for one of those casualties, the wretched and destitute, most commonly repulsed with rude denial on their first applications, believe pity irretrievably lost, and, pressed by hunger, fierce, clamorous hunger, often seek in vice that relief they despair to obtain from commiseration."

At this moment the Goualeuse entered the parlour.

"Where have you been, my dear child?" inquired Madame Georges, anxiously.

"Visiting the fruit-house, madame, after having shut up the hen-houses and gates of the poultry-yard. All the fruit has kept excellently, – all but those I ran away with and ate."

"Now, Marie, why take all this fatigue upon yourself? You should have left all this tiring work to Claudine; I fear you have quite tired yourself."

"No, no! dear Madame Georges; I wouldn't let Claudine help me for the world. I take so much delight in my fruit-house, – the smell of the beautiful ripe fruit is so delicious."

"M. le Curé," said Madame Georges, "you must go some day and see Marie's fruit-house. You can scarcely imagine the taste with which she has arranged it; each different variety of fruit is separated by rows of grapes, and the grapes are again divided off by strips of moss."

"Oh, yes, M. le Curé; pray do come and see it," said the Goualeuse, innocently; "I am sure you would be pleased with it. You would be surprised what a pretty contrast the moss makes to the bright rosy apples or the rich golden pears. There are some such lovely waxen apples, quite a pure red and white; and really, as they lie surrounded by the soft green moss, I cannot help thinking of the heads of little cherubim just peeping out from the glorious clouds of heaven," added the delighted Goualeuse, speaking with all the enthusiasm of an artist of the work of her creation.

The curé looked at Madame Georges, then smilingly replied to Fleur-de-Marie:

"I have already admired the dairy over which you preside, my child, and can venture to declare it perfect in its way; the most particular dairy-woman might envy you the perfection to which you have brought it. Ere long, I promise myself the pleasure of visiting your fruit-house, and passing a similar compliment on your skill in arrangement. You shall then introduce me to those charming rosy apples and delicious golden pears, as well as to the little cherubim pippins so prettily peeping from their mossy beds. But see! the sun has already set; you will scarcely have sufficient time to conduct me back to the rectory-house and return before dark. Come, my child, fetch your cloak, and let us be gone; or, now I think of it, do you remain at home this cold bitter night, and let one of the farm servants go home with me."

"Oh, M. le Curé," replied the kind Madame Georges, "Marie will be quite wretched if she is not allowed to accompany you; she so much enjoys the happiness of escorting you home every evening."

"Indeed, Monsieur le Curé," added the Goualeuse, timidly raising her large blue eyes to the priest's countenance, "I shall fear you are displeased with me if you do not permit me to accompany you as usual."

"Well, then, my dear child, wrap yourself up very warm, and let us go."

Fleur-de-Marie hastily threw over her shoulders a sort of cloak of coarse white cloth, edged with black velvet, and with a large hood, to be drawn at pleasure over the head. Thus equipped, she eagerly offered her arm to her venerable friend.

"Happily," said he, in taking it, "the distance is but trifling, and the road both good and safe to pass at all hours."

"As it is somewhat later to-night than usual," said Madame Georges, "will you have one of the farm-people to return with you, Marie?"

"Do you take me for a coward?" said Marie, playfully. "I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion, madame. No, pray do not let any one be called away on my account. It is not a quarter of an hour's walk from here to the rectory. I shall be back long before dark."

"Well, as you like. I merely thought it would be company for you; for as to fearing, thank heaven, there is no cause. Loose vagabond people, likely to interrupt your progress, are wholly unknown here."

"And, were I not equally sure of the absence of all danger, I would not accept this dear child's arm," added the curé, "useful as, I confess, I find it."

And, leaning on Fleur-de-Marie, who regulated her light step to suit the slow and laboured pace of the old man, the two friends quitted the farm.

A few minutes' walk brought the Goualeuse and the priest close to the hollow road in which the Schoolmaster, the Chouette, and Tortillard, were lying in ambush.

CHAPTER IV THE AMBUSCADE

The church and parsonage of Bouqueval were placed on the side of a hill covered with chestnut-trees, and commanded an entire view of the village. Fleur-de-Marie and the abbé reached a winding path which led to the clergyman's home, crossing the sunken road by which the hill was intersected diagonally. The Chouette, the Schoolmaster, and Tortillard, concealed in one of the hollows of the road, saw the priest and Fleur-de-Marie descend into the ravine, and leave it again by a steep declivity. The features of the young girl being hidden under the hood of her cloak, the Chouette did not recognise her old victim.

"Silence, my old boy," said the old harridan to the Schoolmaster; "the young 'mot' and the 'black slug' are just crossing the path. I know her by the description which the tall man in black gave us; a country appearance, neither tall nor short; a petticoat shot with brown, and a woollen mantle with a black border. She walks every day with a 'devil-dodger' to his 'crib,' and returns alone. When she come back, which she will do presently by the end of the road, we must spring upon her and carry her off to the coach."

"If she cries for help," replied the Schoolmaster, "they will hear her at the farm, if, as you say, the out-buildings are visible from here; for you – you can see," he added, in a sullen tone.

"Oh, yes, we can see the buildings from here quite plainly," said Tortillard. "It is only a minute ago that I climbed to the top of the bank, and, lying down on my belly, I could hear a carter who was talking to his horses in the yard there."

"I'll tell you, then, what we must do," said the Schoolmaster, after a moment's silence. "Let Tortillard have the watch at the entrance to the path. When he sees the young girl returning, let him go and meet her, saying that he is the son of a poor old woman who has hurt herself by falling down the hollow road, and beg the girl to come to her assistance."

"I'm up to you, *fourline*; the poor old woman is your darling Chouette. You're 'wide-awake!' My man, you are always the king of the 'downy ones' (*têtards*). What must I do afterwards?"

"Conceal yourself in the hollow way on the side where Barbillion is waiting with the coach. I will be at hand. When Tortillard has brought the wench to you in the middle of the ravine, leave off whimpering and spring upon her, put one 'mauley' round her 'squeeze,' and the other into her 'patter-box,' and 'grab' her 'red rag' to prevent her from squeaking."

"I know, I know, *fourline*; as we did with the woman at the canal of St. Martin, when we gave her cold water for supper (drowned her), after having 'prigged' her 'negress' (the parcel wrapped in black oil-skin) which she had under her arm, – the same 'dodge,' isn't it?"

"Yes, precisely. But mind, grab the girl tight whilst Tortillard comes and fetches me. We three will then bundle her up in my cloak, carry her to Barbillion's coach, from thence to the plain of St. Denis, where the man in black will await us."

"That's the way to do business, my *fourline*; you are without an equal! If I could, I would let off a firework on your head, and illuminate you with the colours of Saint Charlot, the patron of 'scragmen.' Do you see, you urchin? If you would be an 'out-and-outer,' make my husband your model," said the Chouette, boastingly to Tortillard. Then, addressing the Schoolmaster, "By the way, do you know that Barbillion is in an awful 'funk' (fright)? He thinks that he shall be had up before the 'beaks' on a swinging matter."

"Why?"

"The other day, returning from Mother Martial's, the widow of the man who was scragged, and who keeps the boozing-ken in the Ile du Ravageur, Barbillion, the Gros-Boiteux, and the Skeleton had a row with the husband of the milkwoman who comes every morning from the country in a little

cart drawn by a donkey, to sell her milk in the Cité, at the corner of the Rue de la Vieille-Draperie, close to the ogress's of the 'White Rabbit,' and they 'walked into him with their slashers' (killed him with their knives)."

The son of Bras Rouge, who did not understand slang, listened to the Chouette with a sort of disappointed curiosity.

"You would like to know, little man, what we are saying, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. You were talking of Mother Martial, who is at the Ile du Ravageur, near Asnières. I know her very well, and her daughter Calebasse and François and Amandine, who are about as old as I am, and who are made to bear everybody's snubs and thumps in the house. But when you talked of 'walking into (*buter*) any one,' that's slang, I know."

"It is; and, if you're a very good chap, I'll teach you to 'patter flash.' You're just the age when it may be very useful to you. Would you like to learn, my precious lambkin?"

"I rather think I should, too, and no mistake; and I would rather live with you than with my old cheat of a mountebank, pounding his drugs. If I knew where he hides his 'rat-poison for men,' I'd put some in his soup, and then that would settle the quarrel between us."

The Chouette laughed heartily, and said to Tortillard, drawing him towards her:

"Come, chick, and kiss his mammy. What a droll boy it is – a darling! But, my manikin, how didst know that he had 'rat-poison for men'?"

"Why, 'cause I heard him say so one day when I was hid in the cupboard in the room where he keeps his bottles, his brass machines, and where he mixes his stuffs together."

"What did you hear him say?" asked the Chouette.

"I heard him say to a gentleman that he gave a powder to, in a paper, 'When you are tired of life, take this in three doses, and you will sleep without sickness or sorrow.'"

"Who was the gentleman?" asked the Schoolmaster.

"Oh, a very handsome gentleman with black moustachios, and a face as pretty as a girl's. He came another time; and then, when he left, I followed him, by M. Bradamanti's order, to find out where he perched. The fine gentleman went into the Rue de Chaillot, and entered a very grand house. My master said to me, 'No matter where this gentleman goes, follow and wait for him at the door. If he comes out again, still keep your eye on him, until he does not come out of the place where he enters, and that will prove that he lives there. Then Tortillard, my boy, twist (*tortille*) yourself about to find out his name, or I will twist your ears in a way that will astonish you.'"

"Well?"

"Well, I did twist myself about, and found out his name."

"How did you manage it?" inquired the Schoolmaster.

"Why, so. I'm not a fool; so I went to the porter at the house in the Rue de Chaillot, where this gentleman had gone in and not come out again. The porter had his hair finely powdered, with a fine brown coat with a yellow collar trimmed with silver. So I says to him, 'Good gentleman, I have come to ask for a hundred sous which the gentleman of the house has promised me for having found his dog and brought it back to him – a little black dog called Trumpet; and the gentleman with dark features, with black moustachios, a white riding-coat, and light blue pantaloons, told me he lived at No. 11 Rue de Chaillot, and that his name was Dupont.' 'The gentleman you're talking of is my master, and his name is the Viscount de St. Remy, and we have no dog here but yourself, you young scamp; so "cut your stick," or I'll make you remember coming here, and trying to do me out of a hundred sous,' says the porter to me; and he gave me a kick as he said it. But I didn't mind that," added Tortillard most philosophically, "for I found out the name of the handsome young gentleman with black moustachios, who came to my master's to buy the 'rat-poison for men' who are tired of living. He is called the Viscount de St. Remy, – my – my – St. Remy," added the son of Bras Rouge, humming the last words, as was his usual habit.

"Clever little darling – I could eat him up alive!" said the Chouette, embracing Tortillard. "Never was such a knowing fellow. He deserves that I should be his mother, the dear rascal does."

And the hag embraced Tortillard with an absurd affectation. The son of Bras Rouge, touched by this proof of affection, and desirous of showing his gratitude, eagerly answered:

"Only you tell me what to do, and you shall see how I'll do it."

"Will you, though? Well, then, you sha'n't repent doing so."

"Oh, I should like always to stay with you!"

"If you behave well, we may see about that. You sha'n't leave us if you are a good boy."

"Yes," said the Schoolmaster, "you shall lead me about like a poor blind man, and say you are my son. We will get into houses in this way, and then – ten thousand slaughters!" added the assassin with enthusiasm; "the Chouette will assist us in making lucky hits. I will then teach that devil of a Rodolph, who blinded me, that I am not yet quite done for. He took away my eyesight, but he could not, did not remove my bent for mischief. I would be the head, Tortillard the eyes, and you the hand, – eh, Chouette? You will help me in this, won't you?"

"Am I not with you to gallows and rope, *fourline*? Didn't I, when I left the hospital, and learnt that you had sent the 'yokel' from St. Mandé to ask for me at the ogress's – didn't I run to you at the village directly, telling those chawbacons of labourers that I was your *rib*?"

These words of the "one-eyed's" reminded the Schoolmaster of an unpleasant affair, and, altering his tone and language with the Chouette, he said, in a surly tone:

"Yes, I was getting tired of being all by myself with these honest people. After a month I could not stand it any longer; I was frightened. So then I thought of trying to find you out; and a nice thing I did for myself," he added, in a tone of increasing anger; "for the day after you arrived I was robbed of the rest of the money which that devil in the Allée des Veuves had given me. Yes, some one stole my belt full of gold whilst I was asleep. It was only you who could have done it; and so now I am at your mercy. Whenever I think of it, I can hardly restrain myself from killing you on the spot – you cursed old robber, you!" and he stepped towards the old woman.

"Look out for yourself, if you try to do any harm to the Chouette!" cried Tortillard.

"I will smash you both – you and she – base vipers as you are!" cried the ruffian, enraged; and, hearing the boy mumbling near him, he aimed at him so violent a blow with his fist, as must have killed him if it had struck him. Tortillard, as much to revenge himself as the Chouette, picked up a stone, took aim, and struck the Schoolmaster on the forehead. The blow was not dangerous, but very painful. The brigand grew furious with passion, raging like a wounded bull, and, rushing forward swiftly and at random, stumbled.

"What, break your own back?" shouted the Chouette, laughing till she cried.

Despite the bloody ties which bound her to this monster, she saw how entirely, and with a sort of savage delight, this man, formerly so dreaded, and so proud of his giant strength, was reduced to impotence. The old wretch, by these feelings, justified that cold-blooded idea of La Rochefoucauld's, that "there is something in the misfortunes of our best friends which does not displease us." The disgusting brat, with his tawny cheeks and weasel face, enjoyed and participated in the mirth of the one-eyed hag. The Schoolmaster tripped again, and the urchin exclaimed:

"Open your peepers, old fellow; look about you. You are going the wrong way. What capers you are cutting! Can't you see your way? Why don't you wipe your eye-glasses?"

Unable to seize on the boy, the athletic murderer stopped, struck his foot violently on the ground, put his enormous and hairy fists to his eyes, and then uttered a sound which resembled the hoarse scream of a muzzled tiger.

"Got a bad cough, I'm afraid, old chap!" said Bras Rouge's brat. "You're hoarse, I'm afraid? I have some capital liquorice which a *gen-d'arme* gave me. P'raps you'd like to try it?" and, taking up a handful of sand, he threw it in the face of the ruffian.

Struck full in his countenance by this shower of gravel, the Schoolmaster suffered still more severely by this last attack than by the blow from the stone. Become pale, in spite of his livid and cicatrised features, he extended his two arms suddenly in the form of a cross, in a moment of inexpressible agony and despair, and, raising his frightful face to heaven, he cried, in a voice of deep suffering:

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

This involuntary appeal to divine mercy by a man stained by every crime, a bandit in whose presence but very recently the most resolute of his fellows trembled, appeared like an interposition of Providence.

"Ha! ha! ha!" said the Chouette, in a mocking tone; "look at the thief making the crucifix! You mistake your road, my man. It is the 'old one' you should call to your help."

"A knife! Oh, for a knife to kill myself! A knife! since all the world abandons me!" shrieked the wretch, gnawing his fists for very agony and rage.

"A knife! – there's one in your pocket, cut-throat, and with an edge, too. The little old man in the Rue du Roule, you know, one moonlight night, and the cattle-dealer in the Poissy road, could tell the 'moles' all about it. But if you want it, it's here."

The Schoolmaster, when thus instructed, changed the conversation, and replied, in a surly and threatening tone:

"The Chourineur was true; he did not rob, but had pity on me."

"Why did you say that I had 'prigged your blunt'?" inquired the Chouette, hardly able to restrain her laughter.

"It was only you who came into my room," said the miscreant. "I was robbed on the night of your arrival, and who else could I suspect? Those country people could not have done such a thing."

"Why should not country people steal as well as other folks? Is it because they drink milk and gather grass for their rabbits?"

"I don't know. I only know I'm robbed."

"And is that the fault of your own Chouette? What! suspect me? Do you think if I had got your belt that I should stay any longer with you. What a fool you are! Why, if I had chosen to 'pouch your blunt,' I could, of course; but, as true as I'm Chouette, you would have seen me again when the 'pewter' was spent, for I like you as well now with your eyes white, as I did – you rogue, you! Come, be decent, and leave off grinding your 'snags' in that way, or you'll break 'em."

"It's just as if he was a-cracking nuts," said Tortillard.

"Ha! ha! ha! what a droll baby it is! But quiet, now, quiet, my man of men; let him laugh, it is but an infant. You must own you have been unfair; for when the tall man in mourning, who looks like a mute at a funeral, said to me, 'A thousand francs are yours if you carry off this young girl from the farm at Bouqueval, and bring her to the spot in the Plain of St. Denis that I shall tell you,' say, cut-throat, didn't I directly tell you of the affair and agree to share with you, instead of choosing some 'pal' with his eyesight clear? Why, it's like making you a handsome present for doing nothing; for unless to bundle up the girl and carry her, with Tortillard's assistance, you would be of no more use to me than the fifth wheel to an omnibus. But never mind; for, although I could have robbed you if I would, I like, on the contrary, to do you service. I should wish you to owe everything to your darling Chouette – that's my way, that is. We must give two hundred 'bob' to Barbillion for driving the coach, and coming once before with the servant of the tall man in mourning, to look about the place and determine where we should hide ourselves whilst we waited for the young miss; and then we shall have eight hundred 'bob' between us. What do you say to that old boy? What! still angry with your old woman?"

"How do I know that you will give me a 'mag' when once the thing's done? Why! – I" – said the ruffian, in a tone of gloomy distrust.

"Why, if I like, I need not give you a dump, that's true enough; for you are on my gridiron, my lad, as I once had the Goualeuse; and so I will broil you to my own taste, till the 'old one' gets the cooking of my darling – ha! ha! ha! What, still sulky with your Chouette?" added the horrible woman, patting the shoulder of the ruffian, who stood mute and motionless.

"You are right," said he, with a sigh of concentrated rage; "it is my fate – mine – mine! At the mercy of a woman and child whom but lately I could have killed with a blow. Oh, if I were not afraid of dying!" said he, falling back against the bank.

"What! a coward! – you – you a coward!" said the Chouette, contemptuously. "Why, you'll be talking next of your conscience! What a precious farce! Well, if you haven't more pluck than that, I'll 'cut' and leave you."

"And that I cannot have my revenge of the man who in thus making a martyr of me has reduced me to the wretched situation in which I am!" screamed the Schoolmaster, in a renewal of fury. "I am afraid of death – yes, I own it, I am afraid. But if I were told, 'This man Rodolph is between your arms – your two arms – and now you shall both be flung into a pit,' I would say, 'Throw us, then, at once.' Yes, for then I should be safe not to relax my clutch, till we both reached the bottom together. I would fix my teeth in his face – his throat – his heart. I would tear him to pieces with my teeth – yes, my teeth; for I should be jealous of a knife!"

"Bravo, *fourline!* now you are my own dear love again. Calm yourself. We will find him again, that wretch of a Rodolph, and the Chourineur too. Come, pluck up, old man; we will yet work our will on them both. I say it, on both!"

"Well, then, you will not forsake me?" cried the brigand to the Chouette in a subdued tone, mingled, however, with distrust. "If you do leave me, what will become of me?"

"That's true. I say, *fourline*, what a joke if Tortillard and I were to 'mizzle' with the 'drag,' and leave you where you are – in the middle of the fields; and the night air begins to nip very sharp. I say, it would be a joke, old cutpurse, wouldn't it?"

At this threat the Schoolmaster shuddered, and, coming towards the Chouette, said tremulously, "No, no, you wouldn't do that, Chouette; nor you, Tortillard. It would be too bad, wouldn't it?"

"Ha! ha! ha! 'Too bad,' says he, the gentle dear! And the little old man in the Rue du Roule; and the cattle-dealer and the woman in Saint Martin's Canal; and the gentleman in the Allée des Veuves; they found you nice and amiable, I don't think – didn't they – with your 'larding-pin?' Why, then, in your turn, shouldn't you be left to such tender mercy as you have showed?"

"I'm in your power, don't abuse it," said the Schoolmaster. "Come, come, I confess I was wrong to suspect you. I was wrong to try and thump Tortillard; and, you see, I beg pardon; and of you too, Tortillard. Yes, I ask pardon of both."

"I will have you ask pardon on your knees for having tried to beat the Chouette," said Tortillard.

"You rum little beggar, how funny you are!" said the Chouette, laughing loudly; "but I should like to see what a 'guy' you will make of yourself. So on your knees, as if you were 'pattering' love to your old darling. Come, do it directly, or we will leave you; and I tell you that in half an hour it will be quite dark, though you don't look as if you thought so, old 'No-Eyes.'"

"Night or day, what's that to him?" said Tortillard, saucily. "The gentleman always has his shutters closed."

"Then here, on my knees, I humbly ask your pardon, Chouette; and yours also, Tortillard! Will not that content you?" said the robber, kneeling in the middle of the highway. "And now will you leave me?"

This strange group, enclosed by the embankment of the ravine, and lighted by the red glimmer of the twilight, was hideous to behold. In the middle of the road the Schoolmaster, on his knees, extended his large and coarse hands towards the one-eyed hag; his thick and matted hair, which his fright had dishevelled, left exposed his motionless, rigid, glassy, dead eyeballs – the very glance

of a corpse. Stooping deprecatingly his broad-spread shoulders, this Hercules kneels abjectly, and trembles at the feet of an old woman and a child!

The old hag herself, wrapped in a red-checked shawl, her head covered with an old cap of black lace, which allowed some locks of her grizzled hair to escape, looked down with an air of haughty contempt and domineering pride on the Schoolmaster. The bony, scorched, shrivelled, and livid countenance of the parrot-nosed old harridan expressed a savage and insulting joy; her small but fierce eye glistened like a burning coal; a sinister expression curled her lips, shaded with long straight hairs, and revealed three or four large, yellow, and decayed fangs.

Tortillard, clothed in a blouse with a leathern belt, standing on one leg, leaned on the Chouette's arm to keep himself upright. The bad expression and cunning look of this deformed imp, with a complexion as sallow as his hair, betokened at this moment his disposition – half fiend, half monkey. The shadow cast from the declivity of the ravine increased the horrid *tout ensemble* of the scene, which the increasing darkness half hid.

"Promise me, – oh, promise me – at least, not to forsake me!" repeated the Schoolmaster, frightened by the silence of the Chouette and Tortillard, who were enjoying his dismay. "Are you not here?" added the murderer, leaning forward to listen, and advancing his arms mechanically.

"Yes, my man, we are here; don't be frightened. Forsake you! leave my love! the man of my heart! No, I'd sooner be 'scragged'! Once for all, I will tell you why I will not forsake you. Listen, and profit. I have always liked to have some one in my grip – beast or Christian. Before I had Pegriotte (oh! that the 'old one' would return her to my clutch! for I have still my idea of scaling off her beauty with my bottle of vitriol) – before Pegriotte's turn, I had a brat who froze to death under my care. For that little job, I got six years in the 'Stone Jug.' Then I used to have little birds, which I used to tame, and then pluck 'em alive. Ha! ha! but that was troublesome work, for they did not last long. When I left the 'Jug,' the Goualeuse came to hand; but the little brat ran away before I had had half my fun out of her carcass. Well, then I had a dog, who had his little troubles as well as she had; and I cut off one of his hind feet and one of his four feet; and you never saw such a rum beggar as I made of him; I almost burst my sides with laughing at him!"

"I must serve a dog I know of, who bit me one day, in the same way," said the promising Master Tortillard.

"When I fell in again with you, my darling," continued the Chouette, "I was trying what I could do that was miserable with a cat. Well, now, at this moment, you, old boy, shall be my cat, my dog, my bird, my Pegriotte; you shall be anything to worry (*bête de souffrance*). Do you understand, my love? Instead of having a bird or a child to make miserable, I shall have, as it were, a wolf or a tiger. I think that's rather a bright idea; isn't it?"

"Hag! devil!" cried the Schoolmaster, rising in a desperate rage.

"What, my pet angry with his darling old deary? Well, if it must be so, it must. Have your own way; you have a right to it. Good night, blind sheep!"

"The field-gate is wide open, so walk alone, Mister No-eyes; and, if you toddle straight, you'll reach the right road somehow," said Tortillard, laughing heartily.

"Oh, that I could die! die! die!" said the Schoolmaster, writhing and twisting his arms about in agony.

At this moment, Tortillard, stooping to the ground, exclaimed, in a low voice:

"I hear footsteps in the path; let us hide; it is not the young miss, for they come the same way as she did."

On the instant, a stout peasant girl in the prime of youth, followed by a large shepherd's dog, carrying on her head an open basket, appeared, and followed the same path which the priest and the Goualeuse had taken. We will rejoin the two latter, leaving the three accomplices concealed in the hollow of the path.

CHAPTER V

THE RECTORY-HOUSE

The last rays of the sun were gradually disappearing behind the vast pile of the Château d'Ecouen and the woods which surrounded it. On all sides, until the sight lost them in the distance, were vast tracts of land lying in brown furrows hardened by the frost – an extensive desert, of which the hamlet of Bouqueval appeared to be the oasis. The sky, which was serenely glorious, was tinted by the sunset, and glowed with long lines of empurpled light, the certain token of wind and cold. These tints, which were at first of a deep red, became violet; then a bluish black, as the twilight grew more and more dark on the atmosphere. The crescent of the moon was as delicately and clearly defined as a silver ring, and began to shine beautifully in the midst of the blue and dimmed sky, where many stars already had appeared. The silence was profound; the hour most solemn. The curate stopped for a moment on the summit of the acclivity to enjoy the calm of this delicious evening. After some minutes' reflection, he extended his trembling hand towards the depths of the horizon, half veiled by the shadows of the evening, and said to Fleur-de-Marie, who was walking pensively beside him:

"Look, my child, at the vastness and extent to which we have no visible limit; we hear not the slightest sound. Say, does not this silence give us an idea of infinity and of eternity? I say this to you, Marie, because you are peculiarly sensitive of the beauties of creation. I have often been struck at the admiration, alike poetical and religious, with which they inspire you, – you, a poor prisoner so long deprived of them. Are you not, as I am, struck with the solemn tranquillity of the hour?"

The Goualeuse made no reply. The curé, regarding her with astonishment, found she was weeping.

"What ails you, my child?"

"My father, I am unhappy!"

"Unhappy! – you? – still unhappy!"

"I know it is ingratitude to complain of my lot after all that has been and is done for me; and yet – "

"And yet?"

"Father, I pray of you forgive my sorrows; their expression may offend my benefactors."

"Listen, Marie. We have often asked you the cause of these sorrows with which you are depressed, and which excite in your second mother the most serious uneasiness. You have avoided all reply, and we have respected your secret whilst we have been afflicted at not being able to solace your sorrows."

"Alas; good father, I dare not tell you what is passing in my mind. I have been moved, as you have been, at the sight of this calm and saddening evening. My heart is sorely afflicted, and I have wept."

"But what ails you, Marie? You know how we love you! Come, tell me all. You should; for I must tell you that the time is very close at hand when Madame Georges and M. Rodolph will present you at the baptismal font, and take upon themselves the engagement before God to protect you all the days of your life."

"M. Rodolph – he who has saved me?" cried Fleur-de-Marie, clasping her hands; "he will deign to give me this new proof of affection! Oh, indeed, my father, I can no longer conceal from you anything, lest I should, indeed, deserve to be called and thought an ingrate."

"An ingrate! How?"

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