ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS, VOLUME 4 OF 6

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Сю Э. Ж.

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CHAPTER I
RIGOLETTE'S FIRST SORROW

Rigolette's apartment was still in all its extreme nicety; the large silver watch placed over the mantelpiece, in a small boxwood stand, denoted the hour of four. The severe cold weather having ceased, the thrifty little needlewoman had not lighted her stove.

From the window, a corner of blue sky was scarcely perceptible over the masses of irregularly built roofs, garrets, and tall chimneys, which bounded the horizon on the other side of the street. Suddenly a sunbeam, which, as it were, wandered for a moment between two high gables, came for an instant to purple with its bright rays the windows of the young girl's chamber.

Rigolette was at work, seated by her window; and the soft shadow of her charming profile stood out from the transparent light of the glass as a cameo of rosy whiteness on a silver ground. Brilliant hues played on her jet black hair, twisted in a knot at the back of her head, and shaded with a warm amber colour the ivory of her industrious little fingers, which plied the needle with incomparable activity. The long folds of her brown gown, confined at the waist by the bands of her green apron, half concealed her straw-seated chair, and her pretty feet rested on the edge of a stool before her.

Like a rich lord, who sometimes amuses himself in hiding the walls of a cottage beneath splendid hangings, the setting sun for a moment lighted up this little chamber with a thousand dazzling fires, throwing his golden tints on the curtains of gray and green stuff, and making the walnut-tree furniture glisten with brightness, and the dry-rubbed floor look like heated copper; whilst it encircled in a wire-work of gold the grisette's bird-cage. But, alas! in spite of the exciting splendour of this sun-ray, the two canaries (male and female) flitted about uneasily, and, contrary to their usual habit, did not sing a note. This was because, contrary to her usual habit, Rigolette did not sing. The three never warbled without one another; almost invariably the cheerful and matin song of the latter called forth that of the birds, who, more lazy, did not leave their nests as early as their mistress. Then there were rivalries, – contentions of clear, sonorous, pearly, silvery notes, in which the birds had not always the advantage.

Rigolette did not sing, because, for the first time in her life, she experienced a sorrow. Up to this time, the sight of the misery of the Morels had often affected her; but such sights are too familiar to the poorer classes to cause them any very lasting melancholy. After having, almost every day, succoured these unfortunates as far as was in her power, sincerely wept with and for them, the young girl felt herself at the same time moved and satisfied, – moved by their misfortunes, and satisfied at having shown herself pitiful. But this was not a sorrow. Rigolette's natural gaiety soon regained its empire; and then, without egotism, but by a simple fact of comparison, she found herself so happy in her little chamber, after leaving the horrible den of the Morels, that her momentary sadness speedily disappeared.

This lightness of impression was so little affected by personal feeling, that, by a mode of extremely delicate reasoning, the grisette considered it almost a duty to aid those more unhappy than herself, that she might thus unscrupulously enjoy an existence so very precarious and entirely dependent on her labour, but which, compared with the fearful distress of the lapidary's family, appeared to her almost luxurious.

"In order to sing without compunction, when we have near us persons so much to be pitied," she said, naïvely, "we must have been as charitable to them as possible."

Before we inform our reader the cause of Rigolette's first sorrow, we are desirous to assure him, or her, completely as to the virtue of this young girl. We are sorry to use the word virtue, – a serious, pompous, solemn word, which almost always brings with it ideas of painful sacrifice, of painful struggle against the passions, of austere meditations on the final close of all things here below. Such was not the virtue of Rigolette. She had neither deeply struggled nor meditated; she had worked, and laughed, and sung. Her prudence, as she called it, when speaking frankly and sincerely to Rodolph, was with her a question of time, – she had not the leisure to be in love. Particularly lively, industrious, and orderly, order, work, and gaiety had often, unknown to herself, defended, sustained, saved her.

It may be deemed, perchance, that this morality is light, frivolous, casual; but of what consequence is the cause, so that the effect endures? Of what consequence are the directions of the roots of a plant, provided the flower blooms pure, expanded, and full of perfume?

Apropos of our utopianisms, as to the encouragement, help, and recompenses which society ought to grant to artisans remarkable for their eminent social qualities, we have alluded to that protection of virtue (one of the projects of the Emperor, by the way). Let us suppose this admirable idea realised. One of the real philanthropists whom the Emperor proposed to employ in searching after worth has discovered Rigolette. Abandoned without advice, without aid, exposed to all the perils of poverty, to all the seductions with which youth and beauty are surrounded, this charming girl has remained pure; her honest, hard-working life might serve for a model and example. Would not this young creature deserve, not a mere recompense, not succour only, but some impressive words of approbation and encouragement, which would give her a consciousness of her own worth, exalt her in her own eyes, and lay on her obligations for the future? At least she would know that she was followed by eyes full of solicitude and protection in the difficult path in which she is progressing with so much courage and serenity; she would know that, if one day the want of work or sickness threatened to destroy the equilibrium of the poor and occupied life, which depends solely on work and health, a slight help, due to her former deserts, would be given to her.

People, no doubt, will exclaim against the impossibility of this tutelary surveillance, which would surround persons particularly worthy of interest through their previous excellent lives. It seems to us that society has already resolved this problem. Has it not already imagined the superintendence of the police, for life or for a period, for the most useful purpose of constantly controlling the conduct of dangerous persons, noted for the infamy of their former lives? Why does not society exercise also a superintendence of moral charity?

But let us leave the lofty stilts of our utopianisms, and return to the cause of Rigolette's first sorrow.

With the exception of Germain, a well-behaved, open-hearted young man, the grisette's neighbours had all, at first, begun on terms of familiarity, believing her offers of good neighbourship were little flirtations; but these gentlemen had been compelled to admit, with as much astonishment as annoyance, that they found in Rigolette an amiable and mirthful companion for their Sunday excursions, a pleasant neighbour, and a kind-hearted creature, but not a mistress. Their surprise and their annoyance, at first very great, gradually gave way before the frank and even temper of the grisette; and then, as she had sagaciously said to Rodolph, her neighbours were proud on Sundays to have on their arms a pretty girl, who was an honour to them in every way (Rigolette was quite regardless of appearances), and who only cost them the share of the moderate pleasures, whose value was doubled by her presence and nice appearance. Besides, the dear girl was so easily contented! In her days of penury she dined well and gaily off a morsel of warm cake, which she nibbled with all the might of her little white teeth; after which, she amused herself so much with a walk on the boulevards or in the arcades.

If our readers feel but little sympathy with Rigolette, they will at least confess that a person must be very absurd, or very cruel, to refuse once a week these simple amusements to so delightful

a creature, who, besides having no right to be jealous, never prevented her cavaliers from consoling themselves for her cruelty by flirtations with other damsels.

François Germain alone never founded any vain hopes on the familiarity of the young girl, but, either from instinct of heart or delicacy of mind, he guessed from the first day how very agreeable the singular companionship of Rigolette might be made.

What might be imagined happened, and Germain fell passionately in love with his neighbour, without daring to say a word to her of his love.

Far from imitating his predecessors, who, convinced of the vanity of their pursuit, had consoled themselves with other loves, without being on that account the less on good terms with their neighbour, Germain had most supremely enjoyed his intimacy with the young girl, passing with her not only his Sunday but every evening when he was not engaged. During these long hours Rigolette was, as usual, merry and laughing; Germain tender, attentive, serious, and often somewhat sad. This sadness was his only drawback, for his manners, naturally good, were not to be compared with the foppery of M. Girandeau, the commercial traveller, alias bagman, or with the noisy eccentricities of Cabrion; but M. Girandeau by his unending loquacity, and the painter by his equally interminable fun, took the lead of Germain, whose quiet composure rather astonished his little neighbour, the grisette.

Rigolette then had not, as yet, testified any decided preference for any one of her beaux; but as she was by no means deficient in judgment, she soon discovered that Germain alone united all the qualities requisite for making a reasonable woman happy.

Having stated all these facts, we will inquire why Rigolette was sad, and why neither she nor her birds sang. Her oval and fresh-looking face was rather pale; her large black eyes, usually gay and brilliant, were slightly dulled and veiled; whilst her whole look bespoke unusual fatigue. She had been working nearly all the night; from time to time she looked sorrowfully at a letter which lay open on a table near her. This letter had been addressed to her by Germain, and contained as follows:

"Prison of the Conciergerie.

"Mademoiselle: – The place from which I address you will sufficiently prove to you the extent of my misfortune, – I am locked up as a robber. I am guilty in the eyes of all the world, and yet I am bold enough to write to you! It is because it would, indeed, be dreadful to me to believe that you consider me as a degraded criminal. I beseech you not to condemn me until you have perused this letter. If you discard me, that will be the final blow, and will indeed overwhelm me. I will tell you all that has passed. For some time I had left the Rue du Temple, but I knew through poor Louise that the Morel family, in whom you and I took such deep interest, were daily more and more wretched. Alas, my pity for these poor people has been my destruction! I do not repent it, but my fate is very cruel. Last night I had stayed very late at M. Ferrand's, occupied with business of importance. In the room in which I was at work was a bureau, in which my employer shut up every day the work I had done. This evening he appeared much disturbed and troubled, and said to me, 'Do not leave until these accounts are finished, and then put them in the bureau, the key of which I will leave with you;' and then he left the room. When my work was done I opened the drawer to put it away, when, mechanically, my eyes were attracted by an open letter, on which I read the name of Jérome Morel, the lapidary. I confess that, seeing that it referred to this unfortunate man, I had the indiscretion to read this letter; and I learnt that the artisan was to be arrested next day on an overdue bill of thirteen hundred francs, at the suit of M. Ferrand, who, under an assumed name, had imprisoned him. This information was from an agent employed by M. Ferrand. I knew enough of the situation of the Morel family to be aware of the terrible blow which the imprisonment of their only support must inflict upon them,

and I was equally distressed and indignant. Unfortunately I saw in the same drawer an open box, with two thousand francs in gold in it. At this moment I heard Louise coming up the stairs, and without reflecting on the seriousness of my offence, but profiting by the opportunity which chance offered, I took thirteen hundred francs, went to her in the passage, and put the money in her hand, saying, 'They are going to arrest your father to-morrow at daybreak, for thirteen hundred francs, – here they are. Save him, but do not say that the money comes from me. M. Ferrand is a bad man.' You see, mademoiselle, my intention was good, but my conduct culpable. I conceal nothing from you, but this is my excuse. By dint of saving for a long time I had realised, and placed with a banker, the sum of fifteen hundred francs, but the cashier of the banker never came to the office before noon. Morel was to be arrested at daybreak, and therefore it was necessary that she should have the money so as to pay it in good time; if not, even if I could have gone in the day to release him from prison, still he would be arrested and carried off in presence of his wife, whom such a blow must have killed. Besides, the heavy costs of the writ would have been added to the expenses of the lapidary. You will understand, I dare say, that all these new misfortunes would not have befallen me if I had been able to restore the thirteen hundred francs I had taken back again to the bureau before M. Ferrand discovered anything; unfortunately, I fell into that mistake. I left M. Ferrand's, and was no longer under the impression of indignation and pity which had impelled me to the step. I began to reflect upon all the dangers of my position. A thousand fears then came to assail me. I knew the notary's severity, and he might come after I left and search in his bureau and discover the theft; for in his eyes – in the eyes of the world – it is a theft. These thoughts overwhelmed me, and, late as it was, I ran to the banker's to supplicate him to give me my money instantly. I should have found an excuse for this urgent request, and then I should have returned to M. Ferrand and replaced the money I had taken. By an unlucky chance, the banker had gone to Belleville for two days, to his country-house, where he was engaged in some plantations. Everything seemed to conspire against me. I waited for daybreak with intense anxiety, and hastened to Belleville, – the banker had just left for Paris. I returned, saw him, obtained my money, hastened to M. Ferrand; everything was discovered. But this is only a portion of my misfortunes. The notary at once accused me of having robbed him of fifteen thousand francs in bank-notes, which, he declared, were in the drawer of the bureau, with the two thousand francs in gold. This was a base accusation, – an infamous lie! I confess myself guilty of the first abstraction, but, by all that is most sacred in the world, I swear to you, mademoiselle, that I am innocent of the second. I never saw a bank-note in the drawer. There were only two thousand francs in gold, from which I took the thirteen hundred francs I have mentioned. This is the truth, mademoiselle. I am under this terrible accusation, and yet I affirm that you ought to know me incapable of a lie. But will you, – do you believe me? Alas, as M. Ferrand said, 'he who has taken a small sum may equally have taken a large amount, and his word does not deserve belief.' I have always seen you so good and devoted to the unhappy, mademoiselle, and I know you are so frank and liberal-minded, that your heart will guide you in the just appreciation of the truth, I hope. I do not ask any more. Give credit to my words, and you will find in me as much to pity as to blame; for, I repeat to you, my intention was good, and circumstances impossible to foresee have destroyed me. Oh, Mlle. Rigolette, I am very unhappy! If you knew in the midst of what a set of persons I am doomed to exist until my trial is over! Yesterday they took me to a place which they call the dépôt of the prefecture of

police. I cannot tell you what I felt when, after having gone up a dark staircase, I reached a door with an iron wicket, which was opened and soon closed upon me. I was so troubled in my mind that I could not, at first, distinguish anything. A hot and fetid air came upon me, and I heard a loud noise of voices mingled with sinister laughs, angry exclamations, and depraved songs. I remained motionless at the door for awhile, looking at the stone flooring of the apartment, and neither daring to advance nor lift up my eyes, thinking that everybody was looking at me. They were not, however, thinking of me; for a prisoner more or less does not at all disturb these men. At last I ventured to look up, and, oh, what horrid countenances! What ragged wretches! What dirty and bespattered garments! All the exterior marks of misery and vice! There were forty or fifty seated, standing, or lying on benches secured to the wall, – vagrants, robbers, assassins, and all who had been apprehended during the night and day. When they perceived me I found a sad consolation in seeing that they did not recognise me as belonging or known to them. Some of them looked at me with an insulting and derisive air, and then began to talk amongst themselves in a low tone, and in some horrible jargon, not one word of which did I understand. After a short time one of the most brutal amongst them came, and, slapping me on the shoulder, asked me for money to pay my footing. I gave them some silver, hoping thus to purchase repose; but it was not enough, and they demanded more, which I refused. Then several of them surrounded me and assailed me with threats and imprecations, and were proceeding to extremities, when, fortunately for me, a turnkey entered, who had been attracted by the noise. I complained to him, and he insisted on their restoring to me the money I had given them already, adding that, if I liked to pay a small fee, I should go to what is called the pistole; that is, be in a cell to myself. I accepted the offer gratefully, and left these ruffians in the midst of their loud menaces for the future; 'for,' said they, 'we are sure to meet again, when I could not get away from them.' The turnkey conducted me to a cell, where I passed the rest of the night. It is from here that I now write to you, Mlle. Rigolette. Directly after my examination I shall be taken to another prison, called La Force, where I expect to meet many of my companions in the station-house. The turnkey, interested by my grief and tears, has promised me to forward this letter to you, although such kindnesses are strictly forbidden. I ask, Mlle. Rigolette, a last service of your friendship, if, indeed, you do not blush now for such an intimacy. In case you will kindly grant my request, it is this: With this letter you will receive a small key, and a line for the porter of the house I live in, Boulevard St. Denis, No. 11. I inform him that you will act as if it were myself with respect to everything that belongs to me, and that he is to attend to your instructions. He will take you to my room, and you will have the goodness to open my *secrétaire* with the key I send you herewith. In this you will find a large packet containing different papers, which I beg of you to take care of for me. One of them was intended for you, as you will see by the address; others have been written of you, in happier days. Do not be angry. I did not think they would ever come to your knowledge. I beg you, also, to take the small sum of money which is in this drawer, as well as a satin bag, which contains a small orange silk handkerchief, which you wore when we used to go out on Sundays, and which you gave me on the day I quitted the Rue du Temple. I should wish that, excepting a little linen which you will be so good as send to me at La Force, you would sell the furniture and things I possess; for, whether acquitted or found guilty, I must of necessity be obliged to quit Paris. Where shall I go? What are my resources? God only knows. Madame Bouvard, the saleswoman of the Temple, who

has already sold and bought for me many things, will perhaps take all the furniture, etc., at once. She is a very fair-dealing woman, and this would save you a great deal of trouble, for I know how precious your time is. I have paid my rent in advance, and I have, therefore, only to ask you to give a small present to the porter. Excuse, mademoiselle, the trouble of these details; but you are the only person in the world to whom I dare and can address myself. I might, perhaps, have asked one of M. Ferrand's clerks to do this service for me, as we were on friendly terms, but I feared his curiosity as to certain papers. Several concern you, as I have said, and others relate to the sad events in my life. Ah, believe me, Mlle. Rigolette, if you grant me this last favour, this last proof of former regard, it will be my only consolation under the great affliction in which I am plunged; and, in spite of all, I hope you will not refuse me. I also beg of you to give me permission to write to you sometimes. It will be so consoling, so comforting to me, to be able to pour out my heavy sorrows into a kind heart. Alas, I am alone in the world, – no one takes the slightest interest in me! This isolation was before most painful to me. Think what it must be now! And yet I am honest, and have the consciousness of never having injured any one, and of always having, at the peril of my life, testified my aversion for what is wicked and wrong; as you will see by the papers, which I pray of you to take care of, and which you may read. But when I say this, who will believe me? M. Ferrand is respected by all the world; his reputation for probity is long established; he has a just cause of accusation against me, and he will crush me. I resign myself at once to my fate. Now, Mlle. Rigolette, if you do believe me, you will not, I hope, feel any contempt for me, but pity me; and you will, perhaps, carry your generosity so far as to come one day, – some Sunday (alas, what recollections that word brings up!) – some Sunday, to see me in the reception-room of my prison. But no, no; I never could dare to see you in such a place! Yet you are so good, so kind, that – if – I am compelled to break off this letter and send it to you at once, with the key, and a line for the porter, which I write in great haste. The turnkey has come to tell me that I am going directly before the magistrate. Adieu, adieu, Mlle. Rigolette! Do not discard me, for my hope is in you, and in you only!
"François Germain.

"P. S. – If you reply, address your letter to me at the prison of La Force."

We may now divine the cause of Rigolette's first sorrow.

Her excellent heart was deeply wounded at a misfortune of which she had no suspicion until that moment. She believed unhesitatingly in the entire veracity of the statement of Germain, the unfortunate son of the Schoolmaster.

Not very strait-laced, she thought her old neighbour exaggerated his fault immensely. To save the unhappy father of a family, he had momentarily appropriated a sum which he thought he could instantly refund. This action, in the grisette's eyes, was but generous.

By one of those contradictions common to women, and especially to women of her class, this young girl, who until then had not felt for Germain more than her other neighbours, but a kind and mirthful friendship, now experienced for him a decided preference. As soon as she knew that he was unfortunate, unjustly accused, and a prisoner, his remembrance effaced that of all his former rivals. Yet Rigolette did not all at once feel intense love, but a warm and sincere affection, full of pity and determined devotion, – a sentiment which was the more new with her in consequence of the better sensations it brought with it.

Such was the moral position of Rigolette when Rodolph entered her chamber, having first rapped very discreetly at the door.

"Good morning, neighbour," said Rodolph to Rigolette; "do not let me disturb you."

"Not at all, neighbour. On the contrary, I am delighted to see you, for I have had something to vex me dreadfully."

"Why, in truth, you look very pale, and appear as though you had been weeping."

"Indeed, I have been weeping, and for a good reason. Poor Germain! There – read!" And Rigolette handed the letter of the prisoner to Rodolph. "Is not that enough to break one's heart? You told me you took an interest in him, – now's the time to prove it!" she added, whilst Rodolph was attentively reading the letter. "Is that wicked old M. Ferrand at war with all the world? First he attacked that poor Louise, and now he assails Germain. Oh, I am not ill-natured; but if some great harm happened to this notary, I should really be glad! To accuse such an honest young man of having stolen fifteen thousand francs from him! Germain, too! He who was honesty itself! And such a steady, serious young man; and so sad, too! Oh, he is indeed to be pitied, in the midst of all these wretches in his prison! Ah, M. Rodolph, from to-day I begin to see that life is not all *couleur-de-rose*."

"And what do you propose to do, my little neighbour?"

"What do I mean to do? Why, of course, all that Germain asks of me, and as quickly as possible. I should have been gone before now, but for this work, which is required in great haste, and which I must take instantly to the Rue St. Honoré, on my way to Germain's room, where I am going to get the papers he speaks of. I have passed part of the night at work, that I might be forward. I shall have so many things to do besides my usual work that I must be excessively methodical. In the first place, Madame Morel is very anxious that I should see Louise in prison. That will be a hard task, but I shall try to do it. Unfortunately, I do not know to whom I should address myself."

"I had thought of that."

"You, neighbour?"

"Here is an order."

"How fortunate! Can't you procure me also an order for the prison of poor, unhappy Germain? He would be so delighted!"

"I will also find you the means of seeing Germain."

"Oh, thank you, M. Rodolph."

"You will not be afraid, then, of going to his prison?"

"Certainly not; although my heart will beat very violently the first time. But that's nothing. When Germain was free, was he not always ready to anticipate all my wishes, and take me to the theatre, for a walk, or read to me of an evening? Well, and now he is in trouble, it is my turn. A poor little mouse like me cannot do much, I know that well enough; but all I can do I will do, that he may rely upon. He shall find that I am a sincere friend. But, M. Rodolph, there is one thing which pains me, and that is that he should doubt me, – that he should suppose me capable of despising him! I! – and for what, I should like to know? That old notary accuses him of robbery. I know it is not true. Germain's letter has proved to me that he is innocent, even if I had thought him guilty. You have only to see him, and you would feel certain that he is incapable of a bad action. A person must be as wicked as M. Ferrand to assert such atrocious falsehoods."

"Bravo, neighbour; I like your indignation."

"Oh, how I wish I were a man, that I might go to this notary and say to him, 'Oh, you say that Germain has robbed you, do you? Well, then, that's for you! And that he cannot steal from you, at all events?' And thump – thump – thump, I would beat him till I couldn't stand over him."

"You administer justice very expeditiously," said Rodolph, smiling.

"Because it makes my blood boil. And, as Germain says in his letter, all the world will side with his employer, because he is rich and looked up to, whilst Germain is poor and unprotected, unless you will come to his assistance, M. Rodolph, – you who know such benevolent persons. Do not you think that something could be done?"

"He must await his sentence. Once acquitted, as I believe he will be, he will not want for proofs of the interest taken in him. But listen, neighbour; for I know I may rely on your discretion."

"Oh, yes, M. Rodolph, I never blab."

"Well, then, no one must know – not even Germain himself – that he has friends who are watching over him, – for he has friends."

"Really!"

"Very powerful and devoted."

"It would give him much courage to know that."

"Unquestionably; but perhaps he might not keep it to himself. Then M. Ferrand, alarmed, would be on his guard, – his suspicions would be aroused; and, as he is very cunning, it would become very difficult to catch him, which would be most annoying; for not only must Germain's innocence be made clear, but his denouncer must be unmasked."

"I understand, M. Rodolph."

"It is the same with Louise; and I bring you this order to see her, that you may beg of her not to tell any person what she disclosed to me. She will know what that means."

"I understand, M. Rodolph."

"In a word, let Louise beware of complaining in prison of her master's wickedness. This is most important. But she must conceal nothing from the barrister who will come from me to talk with her as to the grounds of her defence. Be sure you tell her all this."

"Make yourself easy, neighbour, I will forget nothing; I have an excellent memory. But, when we talk of goodness, it is you who are so good and kind. If any one is in trouble, then you come directly."

"I have told you, my good little neighbour, that I am but a poor clerk; but when I meet with good persons who deserve protection, I instantly tell a benevolent individual who has entire confidence in me, and they are helped at once. That's all I do in the matter."

"And where are you lodging, now you have given up your chamber to the Morels?"

"I live in a furnished lodging."

"Oh, how I should hate that! To be where all the world has been before you, it is as if everybody had been in your place."

"I am only there at nights, and then – "

"I understand, – it is less disagreeable. Yet I shouldn't like it, M. Rodolph. My home made me so happy, I had got into such a quiet way of living, that I did not think it was possible I should ever know a sorrow. And yet, you see – But no, I cannot describe to you the blow which Germain's misfortune has brought upon me. I have seen the Morels, and others beside, who were very much to be pitied certainly. But, at best, misery is misery; and amongst poor folk, who look for it, it does not surprise them, and they help one another as well as they can. To-day it is one, to-morrow it is another. As for oneself, what with courage and good spirit, one extricates oneself. But to see a poor young man, honest and good, who has been your friend for a long time, – to see him accused of robbery, and imprisoned and huddled up with criminals! – ah, really, M. Rodolph, I cannot get over that; it is a misfortune I had never thought of, and it quite upsets me."

"Courage, courage! Your spirits will return when your friend is acquitted."

"Oh, yes, he must be acquitted. The judges have only to read his letter to me, and that would be enough, – would it not, M. Rodolph?"

"Really, this letter has all the appearance of truth. You must let me have a copy of it, for it will be necessary for Germain's defence."

"Certainly, M. Rodolph. If I did not write such a scrawl, in spite of the lessons which good Germain gave me, I would offer to copy it myself; but my writing is so large, so crooked, and has so many, many faults."

"I will only ask you to trust the letter with me until to-morrow morning."

"There it is; but you will take great care of it, I hope. I have burnt all the notes which M. Cabrion and M. Girandeau wrote me in the beginning of our acquaintance, with flaming hearts and doves at the top of the paper, when they thought I was to be caught by their tricks and cajoleries; but this poor letter of Germain's I will keep carefully, as well as the others, if he writes me any more; for they, you know, M. Rodolph, will show in my favour that he has asked these small services, – won't they, M. Rodolph?"

"Most assuredly; and they will prove that you are the best little friend any one can desire. But, now I think of it, instead of going alone to Germain's room, shall I accompany you?"

"With pleasure, neighbour. The night is coming on, and, in the evening, I do not like to be alone in the streets; besides that, I have my work to carry nearly as far as the Palais Royal. But perhaps it will fatigue and annoy you to go so far?"

"Not at all. We will have a coach."

"Really! Oh, how pleased I should be to go in a coach if I had not so much to make me melancholy! And I really must be melancholy, for this is the first day since I have been here that I have not sung during the day. My birds are really quite astonished. Poor little dears! They cannot make it out. Two or three times Papa Crétu has piped a little to try me; I endeavoured to answer him, but, after a minute or two, I began to cry. Ramonette then began; but I could not answer one any better than the other."

"What singular names you have given your birds: Papa Crétu and Ramonette!"

"Why, M. Rodolph, my birds are the joy of my solitude, – my best friends; and I have given them the names of the worthy couple who were the joy of my childhood, and were also my best friends, not forgetting that, to complete the resemblance, Papa Crétu and Ramonette were gay, and sang like birds."

"Ah, now, yes, I remember, your adopted parents were called so."

"Yes, neighbour, they are ridiculous names for birds, I know; but that concerns no one but myself. And besides, it was in this very point that Germain showed his good heart."

"In what way?"

"Why, M. Girandeau and M. Cabrion – especially M. Cabrion – were always making their jokes on the names of my birds. To call a canary Papa Crétu! There never was such nonsense as M. Cabrion made of it, and his jests were endless. If it was a cock bird, he said, 'Why, that would be well enough to call him Crétu. As to Ramonette, that's well enough for a hen canary, for it resembles Ramona.' In fact, he quite wore my patience out, and for two Sundays I would not go out with him in order to teach him a lesson; and I told him very seriously, that if he began his tricks, which annoyed me so much, we should never go out together again."

"What a bold resolve!"

"Yes, it was really a sacrifice on my part, M. Rodolph, for I was always looking forward with delight to my Sundays, and I was very much tried by being kept in all alone in such beautiful weather. But that's nothing. I preferred sacrificing my Sundays to hearing M. Cabrion continue to make ridicule of those whom I respected. Certainly, after that, but for the idea I attached to them, I should have preferred giving my birds other names; and, you must know, there is one name which I adore, – it is Colibri.[1] I did not change, because I never will call those birds by any other name than Crétu and Ramonette; if I did, I should seem to make a sacrifice, that I forgot my good, adopted parents, – don't you think so, M. Rodolph?"

"You are right a thousand times over. And Germain did not turn these names into a jest, eh?"

"On the contrary, the first time he heard them he thought them droll, like every one else, and that was natural enough. But when I explained to him my reasons, as I had many times explained them to M. Cabrion, tears started to his eyes. From that time I said to myself, M. Germain is very kind-

[1] Colibri is a celebrated chanson of Béranger, the especial poet of grisettes. —*English Translator*.

hearted, and there is nothing to be said against him, but his weeping so. And so, you see, M. Rodolph, my reproaching him with his sadness has made me unhappy now. Then I could not understand why any one was melancholy, but now I understand it but too well. But now my packet is completed, and my work is ready for delivery. Will you hand me my shawl, neighbour? It is not cold enough to take a cloak, is it?"

"We shall go and return in a coach."

"True; we shall go and return very quickly, and that will be so much gained."

"But, now I think of it, what are you to do? Your work will suffer from your visits to the prison."

"Oh, no, no; I have made my calculations. In the first place, I have my Sundays to myself, so I shall go and see Louise and Germain on those days; that will serve me for a walk and a change. Then, in the week, I shall go again to the prison once or twice. Each time will occupy me three good hours, won't it? Well, to manage this comfortably, I shall work an hour more every day, and go to bed at twelve o'clock instead of eleven o'clock; that will be a clear gain of seven or eight hours a week, which I can employ in going to see Louise and Germain. You see I am richer than I appear," added Rigolette, with a smile.

"And you have no fear that you will be overfatigued?"

"Bah! Not at all; I shall manage it. And, besides, it can't last for ever."

"Here is your shawl, neighbour."

"Fasten it; and mind you don't prick me."

"Ah, the pin is bent."

"Well, then, clumsy, take another then, – from the pincushion. Ah, I forgot! Will you do me a great favour, neighbour?"

"Command me, neighbour."

"Mend me a good pen, with a broad nib, so that when I return I may write to poor Germain, and tell him I have executed all his commissions. He will have my letter to-morrow morning in the prison, and that will give him pleasure."

"Where are your pens?"

"There, – on the table; the knife is in the drawer. Wait until I light my taper, for it begins to grow dusk."

"Yes, I shall see better how to mend the pen."

"And I how to tie my cap."

Rigolette lighted a lucifer-match, and lighted a wax-end in a small bright candlestick.

"The deuce, – a wax-light! Why, neighbour, what extravagance!"

"Oh, what I burn costs but a very small trifle more than a candle, and it's so much cleaner!"

"Not much dearer?"

"Indeed, they are not! I buy these wax-ends by the pound, and a half a pound lasts nearly a year."

"But," said Rodolph, who was mending the pen very carefully, whilst the grisette was tying on her cap before the glass, "I do not see any preparations for your dinner."

"I have not the least appetite. I took a cup of milk this morning, and I shall take another this evening, with a small piece of bread, and that will be enough for me."

"Then you will not take a dinner with me quietly after we have been to Germain's?"

"Thank you, neighbour; but I am not in spirits, – my heart is too heavy, – another time with pleasure. But the evening when poor Germain leaves his prison, I invite myself, and afterwards you shall take me to the theatre. Is that a bargain?"

"It is, neighbour; and I assure you I will not forget the engagement. But you refuse me this to-day?"

"Yes, M. Rodolph. I should be a very dull companion, without saying a word about the time it would occupy me; for, you see, at this moment, I really cannot afford to be idle, or waste one single quarter of an hour."

"Then, for to-day I renounce the pleasure."

"There is my parcel, neighbour. Now go out first, and I will lock the door."

"Here's a capital pen for you; and now for the parcel."

"Mind you don't rumple it; it is *pout-de-soie*, and soon creases. Hold it in your hand, – carefully, – there, in that way; that's it. Now go, and I will show you a light."

And Rodolph descended the staircase, followed by Rigolette.

At the moment when the two neighbours were passing by the door of the porter's lodge they saw M. Pipelet, who, with his arms hanging down, was advancing towards them from the bottom of the passage, holding in one hand the sign which announced his Partnership of Friendship with Cabrion, and in the other the portrait of the confounded painter. Alfred's despair was so overwhelming that his chin touched his breast, so that the wide crown of his bell-shaped hat was easily seen. Seeing him thus, with his head lowered, coming towards Rodolph and Rigolette, he might have been compared to a ram, or a brave Breton, preparing for combat.

Anastasie soon appeared on the threshold of the lodge, and exclaimed, at her husband's appearance:

"Well, dearest old boy, here you are! And what did the commissary say to you? Alfred, Alfred, mind what you're doing, or you'll poke your head against my king of lodgers. Excuse him, M. Rodolph. It is that vagabond of a Cabrion, who uses him worse and worse. He'll certainly turn my dear old darling into a donkey! Alfred, love, speak to me!"

At this voice, so dear to his heart, M. Pipelet raised his head. His features were impressed with a bitter agony.

"What did the commissary say to you?" inquired Anastasie.

"Anastasie, we must collect the few things we possess, embrace our friends, pack up our trunk, and expatriate ourselves from Paris, – from France, – from my beautiful France; for now, assured of impunity, the monster is capable of pursuing me everywhere, throughout the length and breadth of the departments of the kingdom."

"What, the commissary?"

"The commissary," exclaimed M. Pipelet, with fierce indignation, – "the commissary laughed in my teeth!"

"At you, – a man of mature age, with an air so respectable that you would appear as silly as a goose if one did not know your virtues?"

"Well, notwithstanding that, when I had respectfully deposed in his presence my mass of complaints and vexations against that infernal Cabrion, the magistrate, after having looked and laughed – yes, laughed, and, I may add, laughed indecorously – at the sign and the portrait which I brought with me as corroborative testimony, – the magistrate replied, 'My good fellow, this Cabrion is a wag, – a practical joker. But pay no attention to his pleasantries. I advise you to laugh at him, and heartily, too, for really there is ample cause to do so.' 'To laugh at it, sir-r-r!' I exclaimed, – 'to laugh at it, when grief consumes me, – when this scamp poisons my very existence; he placards me, and will drive me out of my wits. I demand that they imprison, exile the monster, – at least from my street!' At these words the commissary smiled, and politely pointed to the door. I understood the magistrate, sighed, and – and – here I am!"

"Good-for-nothing magistrate!" exclaimed Madame Pipelet.

"It is all over, Anastasie, – all is ended, – hope ceases. There's no justice in France; I am really atrociously sacrificed."

And, by way of peroration, M. Pipelet dashed the sign and portrait to the farther end of the passage with all his force. Rodolph and Rigolette had in the shade smiled at M. Pipelet's despair. After having said a few words of consolation to Alfred, whom Anastasie was trying to calm as well as she could, the king of lodgers left the house in the Rue du Temple with Rigolette, and they both got into a coach to go to François Germain's.

CHAPTER II
THE WILL

François Germain resided No. 11 Boulevard St. Denis. It may not be amiss to recall to the reader, who has probably forgotten the circumstance, that Madame Mathieu, the diamond-matcher, whose name has been already mentioned as the person for whom Morel the lapidary worked, lodged in the same house as Germain. During the long ride from the Rue du Temple to the Rue St. Honoré, where dwelt the dressmaker for whom Rigolette worked, Rodolph had ample opportunities of more fully appreciating the fine natural disposition of his companion. Like all instinctively noble and devoted characters, she appeared utterly unconscious of the delicacy and generosity of her conduct, all she said and did seeming to her as the most simple and matter-of-course thing possible.

Nothing would have been more easy than for Rodolph to provide liberally both for Rigolette's present and future wants, and thus to have enabled her to carry her consoling attentions to Louise and Germain, without grieving over the loss of that time which was necessarily taken from her work, – her sole dependence; but the prince was unwilling to diminish the value of the grisette's devotion by removing all the difficulties, and, although firmly resolved to bestow a rich reward on the rare and beautiful qualities he hourly discovered in her, he determined to follow her to the termination of this new and interesting trial. It is scarcely necessary to say that, had the health of the young girl appeared to suffer in the smallest degree from the increase of labour she so courageously imposed on herself, in order to dedicate a portion of each week to the unhappy daughter of the lapidary and the son of the Schoolmaster, Rodolph would instantaneously have stepped forward to her aid; and he continued to study with equal pleasure and emotion the workings of a nature so naturally disposed to view everything on its sunny side, so full of internal happiness, and so little accustomed to sorrow that occasionally she would smile, and seem the mirthful creature nature had made her, spite of all the grief by which she was surrounded.

At the end of about an hour, the *fiacre*, returning from the Rue St. Honoré, stopped before a modest, unpretending sort of house, situated No. 11 Boulevard St. Denis. Rodolph assisted Rigolette to alight. The young sempstress then proceeded to the porter's lodge, where she communicated Germain's intentions, without forgetting the promised gratuity.

Owing to the extreme amenity of his disposition, the son of the Schoolmaster was unusually beloved, and the *confrère* of M. Pipelet was deeply grieved to learn that so quiet and well-conducted a lodger was about to quit the house, and to that purpose the worthy porter warmly expressed himself. Having obtained a light, Rigolette proceeded to rejoin her companion, having first arranged with the porter that he should not follow her up-stairs till a time she indicated should have elapsed, and then merely to receive his final orders. The chamber occupied by Germain was situated on the fourth floor. When they reached the door, Rigolette handed the key to Rodolph, saying:

"Here, will you open the door? My hand trembles so violently, I cannot do it. I fear you will laugh at me. But, when I think that poor Germain will never more enter this room, I seem as though I were about to pass the threshold of a chamber of death."

"Come, come, my good neighbour, try and exert yourself; you must not indulge such thoughts as these."

"I know it is wrong; but, indeed, I cannot help it." And here Rigolette tried to dry up the tears with which her eyes were filled.

Without being equally affected as his companion, Rodolph still experienced a deep and painful emotion as he penetrated into this humble abode. Well aware of the detestable pertinacity with which the accomplices of the Schoolmaster pursued, and were possibly still pursuing, Germain, he pictured to himself the many hours the unfortunate youth was constrained to pass in this cheerless solitude.

Rigolette placed the light on the table. Nothing could possibly be more simple than the fittings-up of the apartment itself. Its sole furniture consisted of a small bed, a chest of drawers, a walnut-tree bureau, four rush-bottomed chairs, and a table; white calico curtains hung from the windows and around the bed. The only ornament the mantelpiece presented was a water-bottle and glass. The bed was made; but, by the impression left on it, it would seem that Germain had thrown himself on it without undressing on the night previous to his arrest.

"Poor fellow!" said Rigolette, sadly, as she examined each minute detail of the interior of the apartment; "it is very easy to see I was not near him. His room is tidy, to be sure, but not as neat as it ought to be. Everything is covered with dust. The curtains are smoke-dried, the windows want cleaning, and the floor is not kept as it should be. Oh, dear, what a difference! The Rue du Temple was not a better room, but it had a much more cheerful look, because everything was kept so bright and clean, – like in my apartment!"

"Because in the Rue du Temple he had the benefit of your advice and assistance."

"Oh, pray look here!" cried Rigolette, pointing to the bed. "Only see, – the poor fellow never went to bed at all the last night he was here! How uneasy he must have been! See, he has left his handkerchief on his pillow, quite wet with his tears! I can see that plainly enough." Then, taking up the handkerchief, she added, "Germain has kept a small, orange-coloured silk cravat I gave him once during our happy days. I have a great mind to keep this handkerchief in remembrance of his misfortune. Do you think he would be angry?"

"On the contrary, he would but be too much delighted with such a mark of your affection."

"Ah, but we must not indulge in such thoughts now; let us attend to more serious matters. I will make up a parcel of linen from the contents of those drawers, ready to take to the prison, and Mother Bouvard, whom I will send to-morrow, will see to the rest; but first of all I will open the bureau, in order to get out the papers and money Germain wished me to take charge of."

"But, now I think of it, Louise Morel gave me back yesterday the thirteen hundred francs in gold she received from Germain, to pay the lapidary's debt, which I had already discharged. I have this money about me; it justly belongs to Germain, since he repaid the notary what he withdrew from the cash-box. I will place it in your hands, in order that you may add it to the sum entrusted to your care."

"Just as you like, M. Rodolph, although really I should prefer not having so large a sum in my possession, really there are so many dishonest people nowadays! As for papers, that's quite another thing; I'll willingly take charge of as many papers as you please, but money is such a dangerous thing!"

"Perhaps you are right; then I tell you what we will do – eh, neighbour? I will be banker, and undertake the responsibility of guarding this money. Should Germain require anything, you can let me know; I will leave you my address, and whatever you send for shall be punctually and faithfully sent."

"Oh, dear, yes, that will be very much better! How good of you to offer, for I could not have ventured to propose such a thing to you! So that is settled; I will beg of you, also, to take whatever this furniture sells for. And now let us see about the papers," continued Rigolette, opening the bureau and pulling out several drawers. "Ah, I dare say this is it! See what a large packet! But, oh, good gracious, M. Rodolph, do pray look what mournful words these are written on the outside!"

And here Rigolette, in a faltering voice, read as follows:

"'In the event of my dying by either a violent or natural death, I request whoever may open this bureau to carry these papers to Mlle. Rigolette, dressmaker, No. 17 Rue du Temple.' Do you think, M. Rodolph, that I may break the seals of the envelope?"

"Undoubtedly; does not Germain expressly say that among the papers you will find a letter particularly addressed to yourself?"

The agitated girl broke the seals which secured the outward cover, and from it fell a quantity of papers, one of which, bearing the superscription of Mlle. Rigolette, contained these words:

"Mademoiselle: – When this letter reaches your hands, I shall be no more, if, as I fear, I should perish by a violent death, through falling into a snare similar to that

from which I lately escaped. A few particulars herein enclosed, and entitled 'Notes on My Life,' may serve to discover my murderers."

"Ah, M. Rodolph," cried Rigolette, interrupting herself, "I am no longer astonished poor Germain was so melancholy! How very dreadful to be continually pursued by such ideas!"

"He must, indeed, have suffered deeply; but, trust me, his worst misfortunes are over."

"Alas, M. Rodolph, I trust it may prove so! Still, to be in prison, and accused of theft!"

"Make yourself quite easy about him; his innocence once proved, instead of returning to his former seclusion and loneliness, he will regain his friends. You, first and foremost, and then a dearly loved mother, from whom he has been separated from his childhood."

"His mother! Has he, then, still a mother?"

"He has, but she has long believed him lost to her for ever. Imagine her delight at seeing him again, cleared from the unworthy charge now brought against him. You see I was right in saying that his greatest troubles were over; do not mention his mother to him. I entrust you with the secret, because you take so generous an interest in the fate of Germain that it is but due to your devotedness that you should be tranquillised as to his future fate."

"Oh, thank you, M. Rodolph! I promise you to guard the secret as carefully as you could do."

Rigolette then proceeded with the perusal of Germain's letter; it continued thus:

"'Should you deign, mademoiselle, to cast your eyes over these notes, you will find that I have been unfortunate all my life, always unhappy, except during the hours I have passed with you; you will find sentiments I should never have ventured to express by words fully revealed in a sort of memorandum, entitled "My Only Days of Happiness." Nearly every evening, after quitting you, I thus poured forth the cheering thoughts with which your affection inspired me, and which only sweetened the bitterness of a cup full even to overflowing. That which was but friendship in you, was, in my breast, the purest, the sincerest love; but of that love I have never spoken. No, I reserved its full disclosure till the moment should arrive when I could be but as an object of your sorrowing recollection. No, never would I have sought to involve you in a destiny as thoroughly miserable as my own. But, when your eye peruses these pages, there will be nothing to fear from the power of my ill-starred fate. I shall have been your faithful friend, your adoring lover, but I shall no longer be dangerous to your future happiness in either sense. I have but one last wish and desire, and I trust that you will kindly accomplish it. I have witnessed the noble courage with which you labour day by day, as well as the care and management requisite to make your hard-earned gain suffice for your moderate wants. Often have I shuddered at the bare idea of your being reduced by illness (brought on, probably, by overattention to your work) to a state too frightful to dwell upon. And it is no small consolation to me to believe it in my power to spare you, not only a considerable share of personal inconvenience, but also to preserve you from evils your unsuspicious nature dreams not of.'

"What does that last part mean, M. Rodolph?" asked Rigolette, much surprised.

"Proceed with the letter; we shall see by and by."

Rigolette thus resumed:

"'I know upon how little you can live, and of what service even a small sum would be to you in any case of emergency. I am very poor myself, but still, by dint of rigid economy, I have managed to save fifteen hundred francs, which are placed in the hands of a banker; it is all I am worth in the world, but by my will, which you will find with this, I have ventured to bequeath it to you; and I trust you will not

refuse to accept this last proof of the sincere affection of a friend and brother, from whom death will have separated you when this meets your eye.'

"Oh, M. Rodolph," cried Rigolette, bursting into tears, "this is too much! Kind, good Germain, thus to consider my future welfare! What an excellent heart he must have!"

"Worthy and noble-minded young man!" rejoined Rodolph, with deep emotion. "But calm yourself, my good girl. Thank God, Germain is still living! And, by anticipating the perusal of his last wishes, you will at least have learned how sincerely he loved you, – nay, still loves you!"

"And only to think," said Rigolette, drying up her tears, "that I should never once have suspected it! When first I knew M. Girandeau and M. Cabrion, they were always talking to me of their violent love, and flames, and darts, and such stuff; but finding I took no notice of them, they left off wearying me with such nonsense. Now, on the contrary, Germain never named love to me. When I proposed to him that we should be good friends, he accepted the offer as frankly as it was made, and ever after that we were always excellent companions and neighbours; but – now I don't mind telling you, M. Rodolph, that I was not sorry Germain never talked to me in the same silly strain."

"But still it astonished you, did it not?"

"Why, M. Rodolph, I ascribed it to his melancholy, and I fancied his low spirits prevented his joking like the others."

"And you felt angry with him, did you not, for always being so sad?"

"No," said the grisette, ingenuously; "no, I excused him, because it was the only fault he had. But now that I have read his kind and feeling letter, I cannot forgive myself for ever having blamed him even for that one thing."

"In the first place," said Rodolph, smiling, "you find that he had many and just causes for his sadness; and secondly, that, spite of his melancholy, he did love you deeply and sincerely."

"To be sure; and it seems a thing to be proud of, to be loved by so excellent a young man!"

"Whose love you will, no doubt, return one of these days?"

"I don't know about that, M. Rodolph, though it is very likely, for poor Germain is so much to be pitied. I can imagine myself in his place. Suppose, just when I fancied myself despised and forsaken by all the world, some one whom I loved very dearly should evince for me more regard than I had ventured to hope for, don't you think it would make me very happy?" Then, after a short silence, Rigolette continued, with a sigh, "On the other hand, we are both so poor that, perhaps, it would be very imprudent. Ah, well, M. Rodolph, I must not think of such things. Perhaps, too, I deceive myself. One thing, however, is quite sure, and that is, that so long as Germain remains in prison I will do all in my power for him. It will be time enough when he has regained his liberty for me to determine whether 'tis love or friendship I feel for him. Until then it would only torment me needlessly to try to make up my mind what I had better do. But it is getting late, M. Rodolph. Will you have the goodness to collect all those papers, while I make up a parcel of linen? Ah, I forgot the little bag containing the little orange-coloured cravat I gave him. No doubt it is here – in this drawer. Oh, yes, this is it. Oh, see, what a pretty bag! How nicely embroidered! Poor Germain! I declare he has kept such a trifle as this little handkerchief with as much care as though it had been some holy relic. I well remember the last time I had it around my throat; and when I gave it to him, poor fellow, how very pleased he was!"

At this moment some one knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" inquired Rodolph.

"Want to speak to Ma'am Mathieu," replied a harsh, hoarse voice, and in a tone which is peculiar to the lowest orders. (Madame Mathieu was the matcher of precious stones to whom we have before referred.)

This voice, whose accent was peculiar, awoke some vague recollections in Rodolph's breast; and, desirous of elucidating them, he took the light, and went himself to open the door. He found himself confronted by a man who was one of the frequenters of the *tapis-franc* of the ogress, and

recognised him instantly, so deeply was the print of vice stamped upon him, so completely marked on his beardless and youthful features. It was Barbillon.

Barbillon, the pretended hackney-coachman, who had driven the Schoolmaster and the Chouette to the hollow way of Bouqueval, – Barbillon, the assassin of the husband of the unhappy milkwoman, who had set the labourers of the farm at Arnouville on against La Goualeuse. Whether this wretch had forgotten Rodolph's face, which he had never seen but once at the *tapis-franc* of the ogress, or that the change of dress prevented him from recognising the Chourineur's conqueror, he did not evince the slightest surprise at his appearance.

"What do you want?" inquired Rodolph.

"Here's a letter for Ma'am Mathieu, and I must give it to her myself," was Barbillon's reply.

"She does not live here, – it's opposite," said Rodolph.

"Thank ye, master. They told me the left-hand door; but I've mistook."

Rodolph did not recollect the name of the diamond-matcher, which Morel the lapidary had only mentioned once or twice, and thus had no motive for interesting himself in the female to whom Barbillon came with his message; but yet, although ignorant of the ruffian's crimes, his face was so decidedly repulsive that he remained at the threshold of the door, curious to see the person to whom Barbillon brought the letter.

Barbillon had scarcely knocked at the door opposite to Germain's, than it opened, and the jewel-matcher, a stout woman of about fifty, appeared with a candle in her hand.

"Ma'am Mathieu?" inquired Barbillon.

"That's me, my man."

"Here's a letter, and I waits for an answer."

And Barbillon made a step forward to enter the doorway, but the woman made him a sign to remain where he was, and unsealed the letter, which she read by the light of the candle she held, and then replied with an air of satisfaction:

"Say it's all right, my man, and I will bring what is required. I will be there at the same hour as usual. My respects to the lady."

"Yes, missus. Please to remember the porter!"

"Oh, you must ask them as sent you; they are richer than I am." And she shut the door.

Rodolph returned to Germain's room, when he saw Barbillon run quickly down the staircase. The ruffian found on the boulevard a man of low-lived, brutal appearance, waiting for him in front of a shop. Although the passers-by could hear (it is true they could not comprehend), Barbillon appeared so delighted that he could not help saying to his companion:

"Come and 'lush a drain of red tape,' Nicholas; the old mot swallows the bait, hook and all. She'll show at the Chouette's. Old Mother Martial will lend a hand to peel her of the swag, and a'terwards we can box the 'cold meat' in your 'barkey.'"[2]

"Let's mizzle,[3] then; for I must get back to Asnières early, or else my brother Martial will smell summut."

And the two robbers, after having exchanged these words in their own slang, went towards the Rue St. Denis.

Some minutes afterwards Rigolette and Rodolph left Germain's, got into the hackney-coach, and reached the Rue du Temple.

The coach stopped.

At the moment when the door opened, Rodolph recognised by the light of the dram-shop lamps his faithful Murphy, who was waiting for him at the door of the entrance.

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[2] "Come and let's have some brandy together, Nicholas. The old woman falls easily into the snare. She will come to the Chouette's; Mother Martial will help us to take her jewels from her forcibly, and then we can remove the dead body away in your boat."

[3] "Let's be quick, then."

The squire's presence always announced some serious and sudden event, for it was he alone who knew at all times where to find the prince.

"What's the matter?" inquired Rodolph, quickly, whilst Rigolette was collecting several things out of the vehicle.

"A terrible circumstance, monseigneur!"

"Speak, in heaven's name!"

"M. the Marquis d'Harville – "

"You alarm me!"

"Had several friends to breakfast with him this morning. He was in high spirits, had never been more joyous, when a fatal imprudence – "

"Pray come to the point – pray!"

"And playing with a pistol, which he did not believe to be loaded – "

"Wounded himself seriously."

"Monseigneur!"

"Well?"

"Something dreadful!"

"What do you mean?"

"He is dead!"

"D'Harville! Ah, how horrible!" exclaimed Rodolph, in a tone so agonised that Rigolette, who was at the moment quitting the coach with the parcels, said:

"Alas! what ails you, M. Rodolph?"

"Some very distressing information I have just told my friend, mademoiselle," said Murphy to the young girl, for the prince was so overcome that he could not reply.

"Is it, then, some dreadful misfortune?" said Rigolette, trembling all over.

"Very dreadful, indeed!" replied the squire.

"Yes, most awful!" said Rodolph, after a few moment's silence; then recollecting Rigolette, he said to her, "Excuse me, my dear neighbour, if I do not go up to your room with you. To-morrow I will send you my address, and an order to go to see Germain in his prison. I will soon see you again."

"Ah, M. Rodolph, I assure you that I share in the grief you now experience! I thank you very much for having accompanied me; but I shall soon see you again, sha'n't I?"

"Yes, my child, very soon."

"Good evening, M. Rodolph," added Rigolette, and then disappeared down the passage with the various things she had brought away from Germain's room.

The prince and Murphy got into the hackney-coach, which took them to the Rue Plumet. Rodolph immediately wrote the following note to Clémence:

> "Madame: – I have this instant learned the sudden blow which has struck you, and deprived me of one of my best friends. I forbear any attempt to portray my horror and my regret. Yet I must mention to you certain circumstances unconnected with this cruel event. I have just learned that your stepmother, who has been, no doubt, in Paris for several days, returns this evening to Normandy, taking with her Polidori. No doubt but this fact will convince you of the peril which threatens your father; and pray allow me to give you some advice, which I think requisite. After the appalling event of this morning, every one must but too easily conceive your anxiety to quit Paris for some time; go, therefore, go at once, to Aubiers, so that you may arrive there before your stepmother, or, at least, as soon as she. Make yourself easy, madame, for I shall watch at a distance, as well as close, the abominable projects of your stepmother. Adieu, madame; I write these few lines to you in great haste. My heart is lacerated when I remember yesterday evening, when I left him, – him, – more tranquil and more happy than he had been for a very long time.

"Believe, madame, in my deep and lasting devotion,
"Rodolph."

Following the prince's advice, three hours after she had received this letter, Madame d'Harville, accompanied by her daughter, was on the road to Normandy. A post-chaise, despatched from Rodolph's mansion, followed in the same route. Unfortunately, in the troubled state into which this complication of events and the hurry of her departure had driven her, Clémence had forgotten to inform the prince that she had met Fleur-de-Marie at St. Lazare.

Our readers may, perhaps, remember that, on the previous evening, the Chouette had been menacing Madame Séraphin, and threatening to unfold the whole history of La Goualeuse's existence, affirming that she knew (and she spoke truth) where the young girl then was. The reader may also recollect that, after this conversation, the notary, Jacques Ferrand, dreading the disclosure of his criminal course, believed that he had a strong motive for effecting the disappearance of La Goualeuse, whose existence, once known, would compromise him fatally. He had, in consequence, written to Bradamanti, one of his accomplices, to come to him that they might together arrange a fresh plot, of which Fleur-de-Marie was to be the victim. Bradamanti, occupied by the no less pressing interests of Madame d'Harville's stepmother, who had her own sinister motives for taking the charlatan with her to M. d'Orbigny, finding it, no doubt, more profitable to serve his ancient female ally, did not attend to the notary's appointment, but set out for Normandy without seeing Madame Séraphin.

The storm was gathering over the head of Jacques Ferrand. During the day the Chouette had returned to reiterate her threats; and to prove that they were not vain, she declared to the notary that the little girl, formerly abandoned by Madame Séraphin, was then a prisoner in St. Lazare, under the name of La Goualeuse; and that if he did not give ten thousand francs (400*l.*) in three days, this young girl would receive the papers which belonged to her, and which would instruct her that she had been confided in her infancy to the care of Jacques Ferrand. According to his custom, the notary denied all boldly, and drove the Chouette away as an impudent liar, although he was perfectly convinced, and greatly alarmed at the dangerous drift of her threats. Thanks to his numerous connections, the notary found means to ascertain that very day (during the conversation of Fleur-de-Marie and Madame d'Harville) that La Goualeuse was actually a prisoner in St. Lazare, and so marked for her good conduct that they were expecting her discharge every moment. Thus informed, Jacques Ferrand, having determined on his deadly scheme, felt that, in order to carry it into execution, Bradamanti's help was more than ever indispensable; and thereon came Madame Séraphin's vain attempts to see the doctor. Having at length heard, in the evening, of the departure of the charlatan, the notary, driven to act by the imminence of his fears and danger, recalled to mind the Martial family, those freshwater pirates established near the bridge of Asnières, with whom Bradamanti had proposed to place Louise, in order to get rid of her undetected. Having absolutely need of an accomplice to carry out his deadly purposes against Fleur-de-Marie, the notary took every precaution not to be compromised in case a fresh crime should be committed; and, the day after Bradamanti's departure for Normandy, Madame Séraphin went with all speed to the Martials.

CHAPTER III
L'ILE DU RAVAGEUR

The following scenes took place during the evening of the day in which Madame Séraphin, in compliance with Jacques Ferrand the notary's orders, went to the Martials, the freshwater pirates established at the point of a small islet of the Seine, not far from the bridge of Asnières.

The Father Martial had died, like his own father, on the scaffold, leaving a widow, four sons, and two daughters. The second of these sons was already condemned to the galleys for life, and of the rest of this numerous family there remained in the Ile du Ravageur (a name which was popularly given to this place; why, we will hereafter explain) the Mother Martial; three sons, the eldest (La Louve's lover) twenty-five years of age, the next twenty, and the youngest twelve; two girls, one eighteen years of age, the second nine.

The examples of such families, in whom there is perpetuated a sort of fearful inheritance of crime, are but too frequent. And this must be so. Let us repeat, unceasingly, society thinks of punishing, but never of preventing, crime. A criminal is sentenced to the galleys for life; another is executed. These felons will leave young families; does society take any care or heed of these orphans, – these orphans, whom it has made so, by visiting their father with a civil death, or cutting off his head? Does it substitute any careful or preserving guardianship after the removal of him whom the law has declared to be unworthy, infamous, – after the removal of him whom the law has put to death? No; "the poison dies with the beast," says society. It is deceived; the poison of corruption is so subtle, so corrosive, so contagious, that it becomes almost invariably hereditary; but, if counteracted in time, it would never be incurable. Strange contradiction! Dissection proves that a man dies of a malady that may be transmitted, and then, by precautionary measures, his descendants are preserved from the affection of which he has been the victim. Let the same facts be produced in the moral order of things; let it be demonstrated that a criminal almost always bequeaths to his son the germ of a precocious depravity. Will society do for the safety of this young soul what the doctor does for the body, when it is a question of contending against hereditary vitiation? No; instead of curing this unhappy creature, we leave him to be gangrened, even to death; and then, in the same way as the people believe the son of the executioner to be an executioner, perforce, also, they will believe the son of a criminal also a criminal. And then we consider that the result of an inheritance inexorably fatal, which is really a corruption caused by the egotistical neglect of society. Thus, if, in spite of the evil mark on his name, the orphan, whom the law has made so, remains, by chance, industrious and honest, a barbarous prejudice will still reflect on him his father's offences; and thus subjected to undeserved reprobation, he will scarcely find employment. And, instead of coming to his aid, to save him from discouragement, despair, and, above all, the dangerous resentments of injustice, which sometimes drive the most generous disposition to revolt to ill, society will say:

"Let him go wrong if he will, – we shall watch him. Have we not gaolers, turnkeys, and executioners?"

Thus for him who (and it is as rare as it is meritorious) preserves himself pure in spite of the worst examples, is there any support, any encouragement? Thus for him who, plunged from his birth in a focus of domestic depravity, is vitiated quite young, what hope is there of cure?

"Yes, yes, I will cure him, the orphan I have made," replies society; "but in my own way, – by and by. To extirpate the smallpox, to cut out the imposthume, it must come to a head."

A criminal desires to speak.

"Prisons and galleys, they are my hospitals. In incurable cases there is the executioner. As to the cure of my orphan," adds society, "I will reflect upon it. Let the germ of hereditary corruption ripen; let it increase; let it extend its ravages far and wide. When our man shall be rotten to the heart,

when crime oozes out of him at every pore, when a robbery or desperate murder shall have placed him at the same bar of infamy at which his father stood, then we will cure this inheritor of crime, – as we cured his progenitor. At the galleys or on the scaffold the son will find his father's seat still warm."

Society thus reasons; and it is astonished, and indignant, and frightened, to see how robberies and murders are handed down so fatally from generation to generation.

The dark picture which is now to follow – The Freshwater Pirates – is intended to display what the inheritance of evil in a family may be when society does not come legally or officially to preserve the unfortunate victims of the law from the terrible consequences of the sentence executed against the father.[4]

The ancestor of the Martial family who first established himself on this islet, on payment of a moderate rent, was a *ravageur* (a river-scavenger). The ravageurs, as well as the *débardeurs* and *déchireurs* of boats, remain nearly the whole of the day plunged in water up to the waist in the exercise of their trade. The *débardeurs* bring ashore the floating wood. The *déchireurs* break up the rafts which have brought the wood. Equally aquatic as these other two occupations, the business of a *ravageur* is different. Going into the water as far as possible, the *ravageur*, or mud-lark, draws up, by aid of a long drag, the river sand from beneath the mud; then, collecting it in large wooden bowls, he washes it like a person washing for gold dust, and extracts from it metallic particles of all kinds, – iron, copper,

[4] In proportion as we advance in this work, its moral aim is attacked with so much bitterness, and, as we think, with so much injustice, that we ask permission to dwell a little on the serious and honourable idea which hitherto has sustained and guided us. Many serious, delicate, and lofty minds, being desirous of encouraging us in our endeavours, and having forwarded to us the flattering testimonials of their approval, it is due, perhaps, to these known and unknown friends to reply over again to the blind accusations which have reached, we may say, even to the bosom of the legislative assembly. To proclaim the odious immorality of our work is to proclaim decidedly, it appears to us, the odiously immoral tendencies of the persons who honour us with the deepest sympathies. It is in the name of these sympathies, as well as in our own, that we shall endeavour to prove, by an example selected from amongst others, that this work is not altogether destitute of generous and practical ideas. We gave, some time back, the sketch of a model farm founded by Rodolph, in order to encourage, teach, and remunerate poor, honest, and industrious labourers. We add to this: Honest men who are unfortunate deserve, at least, as much interest as criminals; yet there are numerous associations intended for the patronage of young prisoners, or those discharged, but there is no society founded for the purpose of giving succour to poor young persons whose conduct has been invariably exemplary. So that it is absolutely necessary to have committed an offence to become qualified for these institutions, which are, unquestionably, most meritorious and salutary. And we make a peasant of the Bouqueval farm to say:"It is humane and charitable not to make the wicked desperate, but it is also requisite that the good should not be without hope. If a stout, sturdy, honest fellow, desirous of doing well, and of learning all he can, were to present himself at the farm for young ex-thieves, they would say to him, 'My lad, haven't you stolen some trifle, or been somewhat dissolute?' 'No!' 'Well, then, this is no place for you.'"This discordance of things had struck minds much superior to our own, and, thanks to them, what we considered as an utopianism was realised. Under the superintendence of one of the most distinguished and most honourable men of the age, M. le Comte Portalis, and under the able direction of a real philanthropist with a generous heart and an enlightened and practical mind, M. Allier, a society has been established for the purpose of succouring poor and honest persons of the Department of the Seine, and of employing them in agricultural colonies. This single and sole result is sufficient to affirm the moral idea of our work. We are very proud and very happy to have been met in the midst of our ideas, our wishes, and our hopes by the founders of this new work of charity; for we are one of the most obscure, but most convinced, propagators of these two great truths, – that it is the duty of society to prevent evil, and to encourage and recompense good, as much as in it lies.Whilst we are speaking of this new work of charity, whose just and moral idea ought to have a salutary and fruitful result, let us hope that its founders will perchance think of supplying another vacancy, by extending hereafter their tutelary patronage, or, at least, their solicitude, over young children whose fathers have been executed, or condemned to an infamous sentence involving civil death, and who, we will repeat, are made orphans by the act and operation of the law. Such of these unfortunate children as shall be already worthy of interest from their wholesome tendencies and their misery will still more deserve particular notice, in consequence of their painful, difficult, and dangerous position. Let us add: The family of a condemned criminal, almost always victims of cruel repulses, apply in vain for labour, and are compelled, in order to escape universal reprobation, to fly from the spot where they have hitherto found work. Then, exasperated and enraged by injustice, already branded as criminals, for faults of which they are innocent, frequently at the end of all honourable resource, these unfortunates would sink and die of famine if they remained honest. If they have, on the other hand, already undergone an almost inevitable corruption, ought we not to try and rescue them whilst there is yet time? The presence of these orphans of the law in the midst of other children protected by the society of whom we have spoken, would be, moreover, a useful example to all. It would show that if the guilty is unfailingly punished, his family lose nothing, but rather gain in the esteem of the world, if by dint of courage and virtues they achieve the reëstablishing of a tarnished name. Shall we say that the legislature desires to render the chastisement still more terrible by virtually striking the criminal father in the fortune of his innocent son? That would be barbarous, immoral, irrational. Is it not, on the contrary, of the highest moral consequence to prove to the people that there is no hereditary succession of evil; that the original stain is not ineffaceable?Let us venture to hope that these reflections will appear deserving of some attention from the new Society of Patronage. Unquestionably it is painful to think that the state never takes the initiative in these questions so vital and so deeply interesting to social organisation.

lead, tin, pewter, brass, – the results of the relics of all sorts of utensils. The *ravageurs*, indeed, often find in the sand fragments of gold and silver jewelry, brought into the Seine either by the sewers which are washed by the stream, or by the masses of snow or ice collected in the streets, and which are cast into the river. We do not know by what tradition or custom these persons, usually honest and industrious, are called by a name so formidable. Martial, the father, the first inhabitant of this islet, being a *ravageur* (and a sad exception to his comrades), the inhabitants of the river's banks called it the Ile du Ravageur.

The dwelling of these freshwater pirates was placed at the southern end of the island. In daytime there was visible, on a sign-board over the door:

"AU RENDEZVOUS DES RAVAGEURS

GOOD WINE, GOOD EELS, AND FRIED FISH

BOATS LET BY THE DAY OR HOUR."

We thus see that the head of this depraved family added to his visible or hidden pursuits those of a public-house keeper, fisherman, and letter of boats. The felon's widow continued to keep the house, and reprobates, vagrants, escaped convicts, wandering wild-beast showmen, and scamps of every description came there to pass Sundays and other days not marked with a red letter in the calendar, in parties of pleasure. Martial (La Louve's lover), the eldest son of the family, the least guilty of all the family, was a river poacher, and now and then, as a real champion, and for money paid, took the part of the weak against the strong. One of his brothers, Nicholas, the intended accomplice of Barbillon in the murder of the jewel-matcher, was in appearance a *ravageur*, but really a freshwater pirate in the Seine and its banks. François, the youngest son of the executed felon, rowed visitors who wished to go on the river in a boat. We have alluded to Ambroise Martial, condemned to the galleys for burglary at night with attempt to murder. The eldest daughter, nicknamed Calabash (*Calebasse*), helped her mother in the kitchen, and waited on the company. Her sister, Amandine, nine years of age, was also employed in the house according to her years and strength.

At the period in question it was a dull night out of doors; heavy, gray, opaque clouds, driven by the wind, showed here and there in the midst of their openings a few patches of dark blue spotted with stars. The outline of the islet, bordered by high and ragged poplars, was strongly and darkly defined in the clear haze of the sky and in the white transparency of the river. The house, with its irregular gables, was completely buried in the shade; two windows in the ground floor only were lighted, and these windows showed a deep red light, which was reflected like long trails of fire in the little ripples which washed the landing-place close to the house. The chains of the boats which were moored there made a continual clashing, that mingled unpleasantly with the gusts of the wind in the branches of the poplars, and the hoarse murmurs of the main stream.

A portion of the family was assembled in the kitchen of the house. This was a large low-roofed apartment. Facing the door were two windows, under which a long stove extended. To the left hand there was a high chimney; on the right a staircase leading to the upper story. At the side of this staircase was the entrance to a large room, containing several tables for the use of the guests at the cabaret. The light of a lamp, joined to the flame of the fire, was strongly reflected by a number of saucepans and other copper utensils suspended against the wall, or ranged on shelves with a quantity of earthenware; and a large table stood in the middle of the kitchen. The felon's widow, with three of her children, was seated in the corner near the fireplace.

This woman, tall and meagre, seemed about five and forty years of age. She was dressed in black, with a mourning handkerchief tied about her head, concealing her hair, and surrounding her flat, livid, and wrinkled brows; her nose was long and straight; her cheek-bones prominent; her cheeks furrowed; her complexion bilious and sallow; the corners of her mouth, always curved downwards, rendered still harsher the expression of her countenance, as chilling, sinister, and immovable as a marble mask. Her gray eyebrows surmounted her dull blue eyes.

The felon's widow was employed with needlework, as well as her two daughters. The eldest girl was tall and forbidding like her mother, with her features, calm, harsh, and repulsive, her thin nose, her ill-formed mouth, and her pale look. Her yellow complexion, which resembled a ripe quince, had procured for her the name of Calabash (*Calebasse*). She was not in mourning, but wore a brown gown, whilst a cap of black tulle did not conceal two bands of scanty hair of dull and dingy light brown.

François, the youngest of the Martial sons, was sitting on a low stool repairing an *aldrel*, a thin-meshed net forbidden to be used on the Seine. In spite of the tan of his features, this boy seemed in perfect health; a forest of red hair covered his head; his face was round, his lips thick, his forehead projecting, his eyes quick and piercing. He was not like his mother or his elder sister, but had a subdued and sly look, as from time to time, through the thick mass of hair that fell over his eyes, he threw a stealthy and fearful glance at his mother, or exchanged a look of intelligence and affection with his little sister, Amandine.

The latter was seated beside her brother, and was occupied, not in marking, but in unmarking, some linen stolen on the previous evening. She was nine years old, and was as like her brother as her sister was like her mother. Her features, without being more regular, were less coarse than those of François. Although covered with freckles, her complexion was remarkably clear, her lips thick and red, her hair also red, but silky, and her eyes, though small, were of a clear bright blue. When Amandine's look met that of her brother, she turned a glance towards the door, and then François replied by sigh; after which, calling his sister's attention by a slight gesture, he counted with the end of his needle ten loops of the net. This was meant to imply, in the symbolical language of children, that their brother Martial would not return until ten o'clock that evening.

Seeing these two women so silent and ill-looking, and the two poor little mute, frightened, uneasy children, we might suppose they were two executioners and two victims. Calabash, perceiving that Amandine had ceased from her occupation for a moment, said, in a harsh tone:

"Come, haven't you done taking the mark out of that shirt?"

The little girl bowed her head without making any reply, and, by the aid of her fingers and scissors, hastily finished taking out the red cotton threads which marked the letters in the linen.

After a few minutes Amandine, addressing the widow timidly, showed her the shirt, and said:

"Mother, I have done it."

Without making any reply, the widow threw her another piece of linen. The child did not catch it quickly enough, and it fell on the ground. Her tall sister gave her, with her hand as hard as wood, a sharp slap on the arm, saying:

"You stupid brat!"

Amandine resumed her seat, and set to work actively, after having exchanged with her brother a glance of her eye, into which a tear had started.

The same silence continued to reign in the kitchen. Without, the wind still moaned and dashed about the sign in front of the house. This dismal creaking, and the dull boiling of a pot placed over the fire, were the only sounds that were heard. The two children observed, with secret fright, that their mother did not speak. Although she was habitually taciturn, this complete silence, and a certain drawing in of the lips, announced to them that the widow was in what they called her white passion, that is to say, was a prey to concentrated irritation.

The fire was going out for want of fuel.

"François, a log," said Calabash.

The young mender of forbidden nets looked into a nook beside the chimney, and replied:

"There are no more there."

"Then go to the wood-pile," said Calabash.

François murmured some unintelligible words, but did not stir.

"Do you hear me, François?" inquired Calabash, harshly.

The felon's widow laid on her knees a towel she was also unmarking, and looked at her son. He had lowered his head, but he guessed he felt, if we may use the expression, the fierce look his mother cast upon him, and, fearful of encountering her dreaded countenance, the boy remained without stirring.

"I say, are you deaf, François?" said Calabash, in an irritated tone. "Mother, you see!"

The tall sister seemed to be happy in finding fault with the two children, and to seek for them the punishment which the widow pitilessly inflicted. Amandine, without being observed, gently touched her brother's elbow, to make him quietly do what Calabash desired. François did not stir. The elder sister still looked at her mother as demanding the punishment of the offender, and the widow understood her. With her long lean finger she pointed to a stick of stout and pliant willow placed in a recess near the chimney. Calabash stooped forward, took up this staff of chastisement, and handed it to her mother. François had seen his mother's gesture, and, rising suddenly, sprung out of the reach of the threatening stick.

"Do you want mother to break your back?" exclaimed Calabash.

The widow, still holding the willow stick in her hand, pinching her pale lips together more and more, looked at François with a fixed eye, but without uttering a syllable. By the slight tremor of Amandine's hands, with her head bent downwards, and the redness which suddenly overspread her neck, it was easy to see that the child, although habituated to such scenes, was alarmed at the fate that threatened her brother, who had taken refuge in a corner of the kitchen, and seemed frightened and irritated.

"Mind yourself, mother's going to begin, and then it will be too late!" said the tall sister.

"I don't care!" replied François, turning pale. "I'd rather be beaten as I was the day before yesterday, than – go to the wood-pile – and at night – again."

"And why?" asked Calabash, impatiently.

"I am – afraid of the wood-pile – I – " answered the boy, shuddering as he spoke.

"Afraid – you stupid! And of what?"

François shook his head, but did not reply.

"Will you answer? What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know. But I am frightened."

"Why, you've been there a hundred times, and last night, too."

"I won't go there any more."

"Mother's going to begin."

"So much the worse for me," exclaimed the lad. "But she may beat me, kill me, and I'll not go near the wood-pile – not at night."

"Once more – why not?" inquired Calabash.

"Why, because – "

"Because – ?"

"Because there's some one – "

"There's some one – "

"Buried there!" said François, with a shudder.

The felon's widow, in spite of her impassiveness, could not repress a sudden start; her daughter did the same. It seemed as though the two women were struck with an electric shock.

"Some one buried by the wood-pile?" said Calabash, shrugging her shoulders.

"I tell you that just now, whilst I was piling up some wood, I saw in a dark corner near the wood-pile a dead man's bone; it was sticking a little way out of the ground where it was damp, just by the corner," added François.

"Do you hear him, mother? Why, the boy's a fool!" said Calabash, making a signal to the widow. "They are mutton-bones I put there for washing-lye."

"It was not a mutton-bone," replied the boy, with alarm, "it was a dead person's bones, – a dead man's bones. I saw quite plainly a foot that stuck out of the ground."

"And, of course, you told your brother, your dear friend Martial, of your grand discovery, didn't you?" asked Calabash, with brutal irony.

François made no reply.

"Nasty little spy!" said Calabash, savagely; "because he is as cowardly as a cur, and would as soon see us scragged, as our father was scragged before us."

"If you call me a spy, I'll tell my brother Martial everything!" said François, much enraged. "I haven't told him yet, for I haven't seen him since; but, when he comes here this evening, I'll – "

The child could not finish; his mother came up to him, calm and inexorable as ever. Although she habitually stooped a little, her figure was still tall for a woman. Holding the willow wand in one hand, with the other the widow took her son by the arm, and, in spite of alarm, resistance, prayers, and tears of the child, she dragged him after her, and made him ascend the staircase at the further end of the kitchen. After a moment's interval, there was heard heavy trampling, mingled with cries and sobs. Some minutes afterwards this noise ceased. A door shut violently; the felon's widow descended. Then, as impassive as ever, she put the stick in its usual place, seated herself close to the fireplace, and resumed her occupation, without saying a word.

CHAPTER IV
THE FRESHWATER PIRATE

After a silence of several minutes, the criminal's widow said to her daughter:

"Go and get some wood; we will set the wood-pile to rights when Nicholas and Martial return home this evening."

"Martial! Do you mean to tell him also that – "

"The wood, I say!" repeated the widow, abruptly interrupting her daughter, who, accustomed to yield to the imperious and iron rule of her mother, lighted a lantern, and went out.

During the preceding scene, Amandine, deeply disquieted concerning the fate of François, whom she tenderly loved, had not ventured either to lift up her eyes, or dry her tears, which fell, drop by drop, on to her lap. Her sobs, which she dared not give utterance to, almost suffocated her, and she strove even to repress the fearful beatings of her heart. Blinded by her fast gathering tears, she sought to conceal her emotion by endeavouring to pick the mark from the chemise given to her, but, from the nervous trembling of her hand, she ran the scissors into her finger sufficiently deep to cause considerable effusion of blood; but the poor child thought much less of the pain she experienced than of the certain punishment which awaited her for staining the linen with her blood. Happily for her, the widow was too deeply absorbed in profound reflection to take any notice of what had occurred. Calabash now returned, bearing a basket filled with wood. To the inquiring look of her mother, she returned an affirmative nod of the head, which was intended to acquaint her with the fact of the dead man's foot being actually above the ground. The widow compressed her lips, and continued the work she was occupied upon; the only difference perceptible in her being that she plied her needle with increased rapidity. Calabash, meanwhile, renewed the fire, superintended the state of the cookery progressing in the saucepan beside the hearth, and then resumed her seat near her mother.

"Nicholas is not here yet," said she to her parent. "It is to be hoped that the old woman who this morning engaged him to meet a gentleman from Bradamanti has not led him into any scrape. She had such a very offhand way with her; she would neither give any explanation as to the nature of the business Nicholas was wanted for, nor tell her name, or where she came from."

The widow shrugged her shoulders.

"You do not consider Nicholas is in any danger, I see, mother. And, after all, I dare say you are quite right! The old woman desired him to be on the Quai de Billy, opposite the landing-place, about seven o'clock in the evening, and wait there for a person who wished to speak with him, and who would utter the word 'Bradamanti' as a sort of countersign. Certainly there is nothing very perilous in doing so much. No doubt Nicholas is late from having to-day found, as he did yesterday, something on the road. Look at this capital linen which he contrived to filch from a boat, in which a laundress had just left it!" So saying, she pointed to one of the pieces of linen Amandine was endeavouring to pick the mark out of. Then, addressing the child, she said, "What do folks mean when they talk of filching?"

"I believe," answered the frightened child, without venturing to look up, "it means taking things that are not ours."

"Oh, you little fool! It means stealing, not taking. Do you understand? – stealing!"

"Thank you, sister!"

"And when one can steal as cleverly as Nicholas, there is no need to want for anything. Look at that linen he filched yesterday; how comfortably it set us all up; and that, too, with no other trouble than just taking out the marks; isn't it true, mother?" added Calabash, with a burst of laughter, which displayed her decayed and irregular teeth, yellow and jaundiced as her complexion.

The widow received this pleasantry with cold indifference.

"Talking of fitting ourselves up without any expense," continued Calabash, "it strikes me we might possibly do so at another shop. You know quite well that an old man has come, within the last few days, to live in the country-house belonging to M. Griffon, the doctor of the hospital at Paris. I mean that lone house about a hundred steps from the river's side, just opposite the lime-kilns, – eh, mother? You understand me, don't you?"

The widow bowed her head, in token of assent.

"Well, Nicholas was saying yesterday that it was very likely a good job might be made out of it," pursued Calabash. "Now I have ascertained, this very morning, that there is good booty to be found there. The best way will be to send Amandine to watch the place a little; no one will take notice of a child like her; and she could pretend to be just playing about, and amusing herself; all the time she can take notice of everything, and will be able to tell us all she sees or hears. Do you hear what I say?" added Calabash, roughly addressing Amandine.

"Yes, sister," answered the trembling child; "I will be sure to do as you wish me."

"Yes, that is what you always say; but you never do more than promise, you little slink! That time that I desired you to take a five-franc piece out of the grocer's till at Asnières, while I managed to keep the man occupied at the other end of the shop, you did not choose to obey me; and yet you might have done it so easily; no one ever mistrusts a child. Pray what was your reason for not doing as you were bid?"

"Because, sister, my heart failed me, and I was afraid."

"And yet, the other day, you took a handkerchief out of the peddler's pack, when the man was selling his goods inside the public-house. Pray did he find it out, you silly thing?"

"Oh, but, sister, you know the handkerchief was for you, not me; and you made me do it. Besides, it was not money."

"What difference does that make?"

"Oh, why, taking a handkerchief is not half so wicked as stealing money!"

"Upon my word," said Calabash, contemptuously, "these are mighty fine notions! I suppose it is Martial stuffs your head with all this rubbish. I suppose you will run open-mouthed to tell him every word we have said, – eh, little spy? But Lord bless you! We are not afraid of you or Martial either; you can neither eat us nor drink us, that is one good thing." Then, addressing herself to the widow, Calabash continued, "I tell you what, mother, that fellow will get himself into no good by trying to rule, and domineer, and lay down the law here, as he does; both Nicholas and myself are determined not to submit to it. He sets both Amandine and François against everything either you or I order them to do. Do you think this can last much longer?"

"No!" said the mother, in a harsh, abrupt voice.

"Ever since his Louve has been sent to St. Lazare, Martial has gone on like a madman, savage as a bear with every one. Pray is it our fault? Can we help his sweetheart being put in prison? Only let her show her face here when she comes out, and I'll serve her in such a way she sha'n't forget one while! I'll match her! I'll – "

Here the widow, who had been buried in profound reflection, suddenly interrupted her daughter by saying:

"You think something profitable might be got out of the old fellow who lives in the doctor's house, do you not?"

"Yes, mother!"

"He looks poor and shabby as any common beggar!"

"And, for all that, he is a nobleman."

"A nobleman?"

"True as you're alive! And, what's more, he carries a purse full of gold, spite of his always going into Paris, and returning, on foot, leaning on an old stick, just for all the world like a poor wretch that had not a sou in the world."

"How do you know that he has gold?"

"A little while ago I was at the post-office at Asnières, to inquire whether there was any letter for us from Toulon – "

At these words, which recalled the circumstance of her son's confinement in the galleys, the brows of the widow were contracted with a dark frown, while a half repressed sigh escaped her lips. Unheeding these signs of perturbation, Calabash proceeded:

"I was waiting my turn, when the old man who lives at the doctor's house entered the office. I knew him again directly, by his white hair and beard, his dark complexion, and thick black eyebrows. He does not look like one that would be easily managed, I can tell you; and, spite of his age, he has the appearance of a determined old fool that would die sooner than yield. He walked straight up to the postmistress. 'Pray,' said he, 'have you any letters from Angers for M. le Comte de Remy?' 'Yes,' replied the woman, 'here is one.' 'Then it is for me,' said the old man; 'here is my passport.' While the postmistress was examining it, he drew out a green silk purse, to pay the postage; and, I promise you, one end was stuffed with gold till it looked as large as an egg. I know it was gold, for I saw the bright, yellow pieces shining through the meshes of the purse; and I am quite certain there must have been at least forty or fifty louis in it!" cried Calabash, her eyes glowing with a covetous eagerness to possess herself of such a treasure. "And only to think," continued she, "of a person, with all that money in his pocket, going about like an old beggar! No doubt he is some old miser, too rich to be able to count his hoards. One good thing, mother, we know his name; that may assist us in gaining admittance into the house. As soon as Amandine can find out for us whether he has any servants or not – "

A loud barking of dogs here interrupted Calabash.

"Listen, mother," cried she; "no doubt the dogs hear the sound of a boat approaching; it must be either Martial or Nicholas."

At the mention of Martial's name, the features of Amandine expressed a sort of troubled joy. After waiting for some minutes, during which the anxious looks of the impatient child were fixed on the door, she saw, to her extreme regret, Nicholas, the future accomplice of Barbillon, make his appearance. The physiognomy of the youth was at once ignoble and ferocious; small in figure, short in stature, and mean in appearance, no one would have deemed him a likely person to pursue the dangerous and criminal path he trod. Unhappily, a sort of wild, savage energy supplied the place of that physical force in which the hardened youth was deficient. Over his blue loose frock he wore a kind of vest, without sleeves, made of goatskin, covered with long brown hair. As he entered, he threw on the ground a lump of copper, which he had with difficulty carried on his shoulder.

"A famous good night I have made of it, mother!" said he, in a hoarse and hollow voice, after he had freed himself from his burden. "Look there! There's a prize. Well, I've got three more lumps of copper, quite as big as that, in my boat, a bundle of clothes, and a case filled with something, I know not what, for I did not waste my time in opening it. Perhaps I have been robbed on my way home; we shall see."

"And the man you were to meet on the Quai de Billy?" inquired Calabash, while the widow regarded her son in silence.

The only reply made by the young man consisted in his plunging his hand into the pocket of his trousers, and jingling a quantity of silver.

"Did you take all that from him?" cried Calabash.

"No, I didn't; he shelled out two hundred francs of his own accord; and he will fork out eight hundred more as soon as I have – But that's enough; let's, first of all, unload my boat; we can jabber afterwards. Is not Martial here?"

"No," said his sister.

"So much the better; we will put away the swag before he sees it; leastways, if he can be kept from knowing about it."

"What! Are you afraid of him, you coward?" asked Calabash, provokingly.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders significantly; then replied:

"Afraid of him? No, I should rather think not! But I have a strong suspicion he means to sell us, – that is my only fear; as for any other sort of dread, my weazen-slicer (knife) has rather too keen an edge for that!"

"Ah, when he is not here, you are full of boast and brag; but only let him show his face, and you are quiet as a mouse!"

This reproach seemed quite thrown away upon Nicholas, who, affecting not to have heard it, exclaimed:

"Come, come! Let's unload the boat at once. Where is François, mother? He could help us a good deal."

"Mother has locked him up, after having preciously flogged him; and, I can tell you, he will have to go to bed without any supper."

"Well and good as far as that goes; but still, he might lend a hand in unloading the boat, – eh, mother? Because, then myself and Calabash could fetch all in at once."

The widow raised her hand, and pointed with her finger towards the ceiling. Her daughter perfectly comprehended the signal, and departed at once to fetch François.

The countenance of the widow Martial had become less cloudy since the arrival of Nicholas, whom she greatly preferred to Calabash, but by no means entertaining for him the affection she felt for her Toulon son, as she designated him; for the maternal love of this ferocious woman appeared to increase in proportion to the criminality of her offspring. This perverse preference will serve to account for the widow's indifference towards her two younger children, neither of whom exhibited any disposition to evil, as well as her perfect hatred of Martial, her eldest son, who, although not leading an altogether irreproachable life, might still have passed for a perfectly honest and well-conducted person if placed in comparison with Nicholas, Calabash, or his brother, the felon at Toulon.

"Which road did you take to-night?" inquired the widow of her son.

"Why, as I returned from the Quai de Billy, where, you know, I had to go to meet the gentleman who appointed to see me there, I spied a barge moored alongside the quay; it was as dark as pitch. 'Halloa!' says I, 'no light in the cabin? No doubt,' says I, 'all hands are ashore. I'll just go on board, and have a look; if I meet any one, it's easy to ask for a bit of string, and make up a fudge about wanting to splice my oar.' So up the side I climbs, and ventures into the cabin. Not a soul was there; so I began collecting all I could find: clothes, a great box, and, on the deck, four quintals of copper. So, you may guess, I was obliged to make two journeys. The vessel was loaded with copper and iron; but here comes François and Calabash. Now, then, let's be off to the boat. Here, you young un, you Amandine! Look sharp, and make yourself useful; you can carry the clothes; we must get new things, you know, before we can throw aside our old ones."

Left alone, the widow busied herself in preparations for the family supper. She placed on the table bottles, glasses, earthenware, plates, with forks and spoons of silver; and, by the time this occupation was completed, her offspring returned heavily laden.

Little François staggered beneath the weight of copper which he carried on his shoulders, and Amandine was almost buried beneath the mass of stolen garments which she bore on her head, while Nicholas and Calabash brought in between them a wooden case, on the top of which lay the fourth lump of copper.

"The case, – the case!" cried Calabash, with savage eagerness. "Come, let's rip it open, and know what's in it."

The lumps of copper were flung on the ground. Nicholas took the heavy hatchet he carried in his belt, and introduced its strong iron head between the lid and the box which he had set down in the middle of the kitchen, and endeavoured with all his strength to force it open. The red and flickering light of the fire illumined this scene of pillage, while, from without, the loud gusts of the night wind increased in violence.

Nicholas, meanwhile, attired in his goatskin vest, stooped over the box, and essayed with all his might to wrench off the top, breaking out into the most horrible and blasphemous expressions, as he found the solidity of the fastenings resist all his endeavours to arrive at a knowledge of its contents; and Calabash, her eyes inflamed by covetousness, her cheeks flushed by the excitement of plunder, knelt down beside the case, on which she leaned her utmost weight, in order to give more power to the action of the lever employed by Nicholas. The widow, separated from the group by the table, on the other side of which she was standing, in her eagerness to behold the spoils, threw herself almost across the table, the better to gaze on the booty; her longing eyes sparkled with eagerness to learn the value of it. And finally – though unhappily, too true to human nature – the two children, whose naturally good inclinations had so often triumphed over the sea of vice and domestic corruption by which they were surrounded, even they, forgetting at once both their fears and their scruples, were alike infected by the same fatal curiosity.

Huddling close to each other, their eyes glittering with excitement, the breathing short and quick, François and Amandine seemed of all the party most impatient to ascertain the contents of the case, and the most irritated and out of patience with the slow progress made by Nicholas in his attempts to break it open. At length the lid yielded to the powerful and repeated blows dealt on it by the vigorous arm of the young man, and as its fragments fell on the ground a loud, exulting cry rose from the joyful and almost breathless group, who, joining in one wild mass, from the mother to the little girl, rushed forward, and with savage haste threw themselves on the opened box, which, forwarded, doubtless, by some house in Paris to a fashionable draper and mercer residing near the banks of the river, contained a large assortment of the different materials employed in female attire.

"Nicholas has not done amiss!" cried Calabash, unfolding a piece of mousseline-de-laine.

"No, faith!" returned the plunderer, opening, in his turn, a parcel of silk handkerchiefs; "I shall manage to pay myself for my trouble."

"Levantine, I declare!" cried the widow, dipping into the box, and drawing forth a rich silk. "Ah, that is a thing that fetches a price as readily as a loaf of bread."

"Oh, Bras Rouge's receiver, who lives in the Rue du Temple, will buy all the finery, and be glad of it. And Father Micou, the man who lets furnished lodgings in the Quartier St. Honoré, will take the rest of the swag."

"Amandine," whispered François to his little sister, "what a beautiful cravat one of those handsome silk handkerchiefs Nicholas is holding in his hand would make, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, yes; and what a sweet pretty *marmotte* it would make for me!" replied the child, in rapture at the very idea.

"Well, it must be confessed, Nicholas," said Calabash, "that it was a lucky thought of yours to go on board that barge, – famous! Look, here are shawls, too! How many, I wonder? One, two, three. And just see here, mother! This one is real Bourre de Soie."

"Mother Burette would give at least five hundred francs for the lot," said the widow, after closely examining each article.

"Then, I'll be sworn," answered Nicholas, "if she'll give that, the things are worth at least fifteen hundred francs. But, as the old saying is, 'The receiver's as bad as the thief.' Never mind; so much the worse for us! I'm no hand at splitting differences; and I shall be quite flat enough this time to let Mother Burette have it all her own way, and Father Micou also, for the matter of that; but then, to be sure, he is a friend."

"I don't care for that, he'd cheat you as soon as another; I'm up to the old dealer in marine stores. But then these rascally receivers know we cannot do without them," continued Calabash, putting on one of the shawls, and folding it around her, "and so they take advantage of it."

"There is nothing else," said Nicholas, coming to the bottom of the box.

"Now, let us put everything away," said the widow.

"I shall keep this shawl for myself," exclaimed Calabash.

"Oh, you will, will you?" cried Nicholas, roughly; "that depends whether I choose to let you or not. You are always laying your clutches on something or other; you are Madame Free-and-Easy!"

"You are so mighty particular yourself – about taking whatever you have a fancy to, arn't you?"

"Ah, that's as different as different can be! I filch at the risk of my life; and if I had happened to have been nabbed on board the barge, you would not have been trounced for it."

"La! Well, don't make such a fuss, – take your shawl! I'm sure I don't want it; I was only joking about it," continued Calabash, flinging the shawl back into the box; "but you never can stand the least bit of fun."

"Oh, I don't speak because of the shawl; I am not stingy enough to squabble about a trumpery shawl. One more or less would make no difference in the price Mother Burette would give for the things; she buys in the lump, you know," continued Nicholas; "only I consider that, instead of calling out you should keep the shawl, it would have been more decent to have asked me to give it you. There – there it is – keep it – you may have it; keep it, I say, or else I'll just fling it into the fire to make the pot boil."

These words entirely appeased Calabash, who forthwith accepted the shawl without further scruple.

Nicholas appeared seized with a sudden fit of generosity, for, ripping off the fag end from one of the pieces of silk, he contrived to separate two silk handkerchiefs, which he threw to Amandine and François, who had been contemplating them with longing looks, saying:

"There! that's for you brats; just a little taste to give you a relish for prigging; it's a thing you'll take to more kindly if it's made agreeable to you. And now, get off to bed. Come, look sharp, I've got a deal to say to mother. There – you shall have some supper brought up-stairs to you."

The delighted children clapped their hands with joy, and triumphantly waved the stolen handkerchiefs which had just been presented to them.

"What do you say now, you little stupids?" said Calabash to them; "will you ever go and be persuaded by Martial again? Did he ever give you beautiful silk handkerchiefs like those, I should be glad to know?"

François and Amandine looked at each other, then hung down their heads, and made no answer.

"Answer, can't you?" persisted Calabash, roughly. "I ask you whether you ever received such presents from Martial?"

"No," answered François, gazing with intense delight on his bright red silk handkerchief, "Brother Martial never gives us anything."

To which Amandine replied, in a low yet firm voice:

"Ah, François, that is because Martial has nothing to give anybody."

"He might have as much as other people if he chose to steal it, mightn't he, François?" said Nicholas, brutally.

"Yes, brother," replied François. Then, as if glad to quit the subject, he resumed his ecstatic contemplation of his handkerchief, saying:

"Oh, what a real beauty it is! What a fine cravat it will make for Sundays, won't it?"

"That it will," answered Amandine. "And just see, François, how charming I shall look with my sweet pretty handkerchief tied around my head, – so, brother."

"What a rage the little children at the lime-kilns will be in when they see you pass by!" said Calabash, fixing her malignant glances on the poor children to ascertain whether they comprehended the full and spiteful meaning of her words, – the hateful creature seeking, by the aid of vanity, to stifle the last breathings of virtue within their young minds. "The brats at the lime-kilns," continued she, "will look like beggar children beside you, and be ready to burst with envy and jealousy at seeing you two looking like a little lady and gentleman with your pretty silk handkerchiefs."

"So they will," cried François. "Ah, and I like my new cravat ever so much the better, Sister Calabash, now you have told me that the children at the kilns will be so mad with me for being smarter than they; don't you, Amandine?"

"No, François, I don't find that makes any difference. But I am quite glad I have got such a nice new pretty *marmotte* as that will make, all the same."

"Go along with you, you little mean-spirited thing!" cried Calabash, disdainfully; "you have not a grain of proper pride in you." Then, snatching from the table a morsel of bread and cheese, she thrust them into the children's hands, saying, "Now, get off to bed, – there is a lanthorn; take care you don't set fire to anything, and be sure to put it out before you go to sleep."

"And hark ye," added Nicholas, "remember that if you dare to say one word to Martial of the box, the copper, or the clothes, I'll make you dance upon red-hot iron; and, besides that, your pretty silk handkerchiefs shall be taken from you."

After the departure of the children, Nicholas and his sister concealed the box, with its contents, the clothes, and lumps of copper, in a sort of cellar below the kitchen, the entrance to which was by a low flight of steps not far from the fireplace.

"That'll do!" cried the hardened youth. "And now, mother, give us a glass of your very best brandy; none of your poor, every-day stuff, but some of the real right sort, and plenty of it. Faith! I think I've earned a right to eat and to drink whatever you happen to have put by for grand occasions. Come, Calabash, look sharp, and let's have supper. Never mind Martial, he may amuse himself with picking the bones we may leave; they are good enough for him. Now, then, for a bit of gossip over the affair of the individual I went to meet on the Quai de Billy, because that little job must be settled at once if I mean to pouch the money he promised me. I'll tell you all about it, mother, from beginning to end. But first give me something to moisten my throat. Give me some drink, I say! Devilish hard to be obliged to ask so many times, considering what I have done for you all to-day! I tell you I can stand treat, if that's what you are waiting for."

And here Nicholas again jingled the five-franc pieces he had in his pocket; then flinging his goatskin waistcoat and black woollen cap into a distant part of the room, he seated himself at table before a huge dish of ragout made of mutton, a piece of cold veal, and a salad. As soon as Calabash had brought wine and brandy, the widow, still gloomy and imperturbable, took her place at one side of the table, having Nicholas on her right hand and her daughter on her left; the other side of the table had been destined for Martial and the two younger children. Nicholas then drew from his pocket a long and wide Spanish knife, with a horn handle and a trenchant blade. Contemplating this murderous weapon with a sort of savage pleasure, he said to the widow:

"There's my bread-earner, – what an edge it has! Talking of bread, mother, just hand me some of that beside you."

"And talking of knives, too," replied Calabash, "François has found out – you know what – in the wood-pile!"

"What do you mean?" asked Nicholas, not understanding her.

"Why, he saw – one of the feet!"

"Phew!" whistled Nicholas; "what, of the man?"

"Yes," answered the widow, concisely, at the same time placing a large slice of meat on her son's plate.

"That's droll enough," returned the young ruffian; "I'm sure the hole was dug deep enough; but I suppose the ground has sunk in a good deal."

"It must all be thrown into the river to-night," said the widow.

"That is the surest way to get rid of further bother," said Nicholas.

"Yes," chimed in Calabash, "throw it in the river, with a heavy stone fastened to it, with part of an old boat-chain."

"We are not quite such fools as that either," returned Nicholas, pouring out for himself a brimming glass of wine. Then, holding the bottle up, he said, addressing the widow: "Come, mother, let's touch glasses, and drink to each other. You seem a cup too low, and it will cheer you up."

The widow drew back her glass, shook her head, and said to her son:

"Tell me of the man you met on the Quai de Billy."

"Why, this is it," said Nicholas, without ceasing to eat and drink: "When I got to the landing-place, I fastened my boat, and went up the steps of the quay as the clock was striking seven at the military bakehouse at Chaillot. You could not see four yards before you, but I walked up and down by the parapet wall for a quarter of an hour, when I heard footsteps moving softly behind me. I stopped, and a man, completely wrapped up in a mantle, approached me, coughing as he advanced. As I paused, he paused; and all I could make out of him was that his cloak hid his nose, and his hat fell over his eyes."

We will inform our readers that this mysterious personage was Jacques Ferrand, the notary, who, anxious to get rid of Fleur-de-Marie, had, that same morning, despatched Madame Séraphin to the Martials, whom he hoped to find the ready instruments of his fresh crime.

"'Bradamanti,' said the man to me," continued Nicholas; "that was the password agreed upon by the old woman, that I might know my man. 'Ravageur,' says I, as was agreed. 'Is your name Martial?' he asked. 'Yes, master.' 'A woman was at your isle to-day: what did she say to you?' 'That you wished to speak to me on the part of M. Bradamanti.' 'You have a boat?' 'We have four, that's our number: boatmen and ravageurs, from father to son, at your service.' 'This is what I want you to do if you are not afraid – ' 'Afraid of what, master?' 'Of seeing a person accidentally drowned. Only you must assist with the accident. Do you understand?' 'Perfectly, master; we must make some individual have a draught of the Seine, as if by accident? I'll do it; only, as the dish to be dressed is a dainty one, why, the seasoning will cost rather dear.' 'How much for two?' 'For two? What! are there two persons who are to have a mess of broth in the river?' 'Yes.' 'Five hundred francs a head, master; that's not too dear.' 'Agreed, for a thousand francs.' 'Money down, master?' 'Two hundred francs now, and the rest afterwards.' 'Then you doubt me, master?' 'No; you may pocket the two hundred francs, without completing the bargain.' 'And you may say, after it's done, "Don't you wish you may get it?"' 'That as may be; but does it suit you? yes or no. Two hundred francs down, and on the evening of the day after to-morrow, here, at nine o'clock, I will give you the eight hundred francs.' 'And who will inform you that I have done the trick with these two persons?' 'I shall know; that is my affair. Is it a bargain?' 'Yes, master.' 'Here are two hundred francs. Now listen to me; you will know again the old woman who was at your house this morning?' 'Yes, master.' 'To-morrow, or next day at latest, you will see her come, about four o'clock in the evening, on the bank in face of your island with a young fair girl. The old woman will make a signal to you by waving her handkerchief.' 'Yes, master.' 'What time does it take to go from the bank-side to your island?' 'Twenty minutes, quite.' 'Your boats are flat-bottomed?' 'Flat as your hand, master.' 'Then you must make, very skilfully, a sort of large hole in the bottom of one of these boats, so that, when you open it, the water may flow in rapidly. Do you understand?' 'Quite well, master; how clever you are! I have by me a worn-out old boat, half rotten, that I was going to break up, but it will just do for this one more voyage.' 'You will then leave the island with this boat, with the hole prepared; let a good boat follow you, conducted by some one of your family. Go to the shore, accost the old woman and the fair young girl, and take them on board the boat with the hole in it; then go back towards your island; but, when you are at some distance from the bank, pretend to stoop for some purpose, open the hole, and leap into the other boat, whilst the old woman and the fair young girl – ' 'Drink out of the same cup, – that's it, – eh, master?' 'But are you sure you will not be interrupted? Suppose some customers should come to your house?' 'There is no fear, master. At this time, and especially in winter, no one comes, it is our dead time of year; and, if they come, that would not be troublesome; on the contrary, they are all good friends.' 'Very well. Besides, you in no way compromise yourselves; the boat will be supposed to have sunk from old age,

and the old woman who brings the young girl will disappear with her. In order to be quite assured that they are drowned (by accident, mind! quite by accident), you can, if they rise to the surface, or if they cling to the boat, appear to do all in your power to assist them, and – ' 'Help them – to sink again! Good, master!' 'It will be requisite that the passage be made after sunset, in order that it may be quite dark when they fall into the water.' 'No, master; for if one does not see clear, how shall we know if the two women swallow their doses at one gulp, or want a second?' 'True; and, therefore, the accident will take place before sunset.' 'All right, master; but the old woman has no suspicion, has she?' 'Not the slightest. When she arrives, she will whisper to you: "The young girl is to be drowned; a little while before you sink the boat, make me a signal, that I may be ready to escape with you." You will reply to the old woman in such a way as to avoid all suspicion.' 'So that she may suppose the young 'un only is going to swallow the dose?' 'But which she will drink as well as the fair girl.' 'It's "downily" arranged, master.' 'But mind the old woman has not the slightest suspicion.' 'Be easy on that score, master; she will be done as nicely as possible.' 'Well, then, good luck to you, my lad! If I am satisfied, perhaps I shall give you another job.' 'At your service, master.' Then," said the ruffian, in conclusion, "I left the man in the cloak, and 'prigged the swag' I've just brought in."

We may glean from Nicholas's recital that the notary was desirous, by a twofold crime, of getting rid at once of Fleur-de-Marie and Madame Séraphin, by causing the latter to fall into the snare which she thought was only spread for the Goualeuse. It is hardly necessary to repeat that, justly alarmed lest the Chouette should inform Fleur-de-Marie at any moment that she had been abandoned by Madame Séraphin, Jacques Ferrand believed he had a paramount interest in getting rid of this young girl, whose claims might mortally injure him both in his fortune and in his reputation. As to Madame Séraphin, the notary, by sacrificing her, got rid of one of his accomplices (Bradamanti was the other), who might ruin him, whilst they ruined themselves, it is true; but Jacques Ferrand believed that the grave would keep his secrets better than any personal interests.

The felon's widow and Calabash had listened attentively to Nicholas, who had not paused except to swallow large quantities of wine, and then he began to talk with considerable excitement.

"That is not all," he continued. "I have begun another affair with the Chouette and Barbillon of the Rue aux Fêves. It is a capital job, well planted; and if it does not miss fire, it will bring plenty of fish to net, and no mistake. It is to clean out a jewel-matcher, who has sometimes as much as fifty thousand francs in jewelry in her basket."

"Fifty thousand francs!" cried the mother and daughter, whose eyes sparkled with cupidity.

"Yes – quite. Bras Rouge is in it with us. He yesterday opened upon the woman with a letter which we carried to her – Barbillon and I – at her house, Boulevard St. Denis. He's an out-and-outer, Bras Rouge is! As he appears – and, I believe, is – well-to-do, nobody mistrusts him. To make the jewel-matcher bite he has already sold her a diamond worth four hundred francs. She'll not be afraid to come towards nightfall to his cabaret in the Champs Elysées. We shall be concealed there. Calabash may come with us, and take care of my boat along the side of the Seine. If we are obliged to carry her off, dead or alive, that will be a convenient conveyance, and one that leaves no traces. There's a plan for you! That beggar Bras Rouge is nothing but a good 'un!"

"I have always distrusted Bras Rouge," said the widow. "After that affair of the Rue Montmartre your brother Ambroise was sent to Toulon, and Bras Rouge was set at liberty."

"Because he's so downy there's no proofs against him. But betray others? – never!"

The widow shook her head, as if she were only half convinced of Bras Rouge's probity. After a few moments' reflection she said:

"I like much better that affair of the Quai de Billy for to-morrow or next day evening, – the drowning the two women. But Martial will be in the way as usual."

"Will not the devil's thunder ever rid us of him?" exclaimed Nicholas, half drunk, and striking his long knife savagely on the table.

"I have told mother that we had enough of him, and that we could not go on in this way," said Calabash. "As long as he is here we can do nothing with the children."

"I tell you that he is capable of one day denouncing us, – the villain!" said Nicholas. "You see, mother, if you would have believed me," he added, with a savage and significant air, "all would have been settled!"

"There are other means – "

"This is the best!" said the ruffian.

"Now? No!" replied the widow, with a tone so decided that Nicholas was silent, overcome by the influence of his mother, whom he knew to be as criminal, as wicked, but still more determined than himself.

The widow added, "To-morrow he will quit the island for ever."

"How?" inquired Nicholas and Calabash at the same time.

"When he comes in pick a quarrel with him, – but boldly, mind, – out to his face, as you have never yet dared to do. Come to blows, if necessary. He is powerful, but you will be two, for I will help you. Mind, no steel, – no blood! Let him be beaten, but not wounded."

"And what then, mother?" asked Nicholas.

"We shall then explain afterwards. We will tell him to leave the island next day; if not, that the scenes of the night before will occur over and over again. I know him; these perpetual squabbles disgust him; until now we have let him be too quiet."

"But he is as obstinate as a mule, and is likely enough to insist upon staying, because of the children," observed Calabash.

"He's a regular hound; but a row don't frighten him," said Nicholas.

"One? No!" said the widow. "But every day – day by day – it is hell in earth, and he will give way."

"Suppose he don't?"

"Then I have another sure means to make him go away, – this very night or to-morrow at farthest," replied the widow, with a singular smile.

"Really, mother!"

"Yes, but I prefer rather to annoy him with a row; and, if that don't do, why, then, it must be the other way."

"And if the other way does not succeed, either, mother?" said Nicholas.

"There is one which always succeeds," replied the widow.

Suddenly the door opened, and Martial entered. It blew so strong without that they had not heard the barkings of the dogs at the return of the first-born son of the felon's widow.

CHAPTER V
THE MOTHER AND SON

Unaware of the evil designs of his family, Martial entered the kitchen slowly.

Some few words let fall by La Louve in her conversation with Fleur-de-Marie have already acquainted the reader with the singular existence of this man. Endowed with excellent natural instincts, incapable of an action positively base or wicked, Martial did not, however, lead a regular life: he poached on the water; but his strength and his boldness inspired so much fear that the keepers of the river shut their eyes on this irregularity.

To this illegal occupation Martial joined another that was equally illicit. A redoubtable champion, he willingly undertook – and more from excess of courage, from love of the thing, than for gain – to avenge in pugilistic or single-stick encounters those victims who had been overcome by too powerful opponents.

We should add that Martial was very particular in the selection of those causes which he pleaded by strength of fist, and usually took the part of the weak against the strong.

La Louve's lover was very much like François and Amandine. He was of middle height, stout, and broad-shouldered; his thick red hair, cropped short, came in five points over his open brow; his close, harsh, short beard, his broad, bluff cheeks, his projecting nose, flattened at the extremity, his blue and bold eyes, gave to his masculine features a singularly resolute expression.

He was covered with an old glazed hat; and, despite the cold, he had only a worn-out blouse over his vest, and a pair of velveteen trousers, which had seen considerable service. He held in his hand a very thick, knotted stick, which he put down beside him near the dresser.

A large dog, half terrier, half hound, with crooked legs and a black hide, marked with bright red, came in with Martial, but he remained close to the door, not daring to approach the fire, nor the guests who were sitting at table, experience having proved to old Miraut (that was the name of Martial's poaching companion) that he, as well as his master, did not possess much of the sympathy of the family.

"Where are the children?" were Martial's first words, as he sat down to table.

"Where they ought to be," replied Calabash, surlily.

"Where are the children, mother?" said Martial again, without taking the slightest notice of his sister's reply.

"Gone to bed," replied the widow, in a harsh tone.

"Haven't they had their supper, mother?"

"What's that to you?" exclaimed Nicholas, brutally, after having swallowed a large glass of wine to increase his courage, for his brother's disposition and strength had a very strong effect on him.

Martial, as indifferent to the attacks of Nicholas as to those of Calabash, then said to his mother, "I'm sorry the children are gone to bed so soon."

"So much the worse," responded the widow.

"Yes, so much the worse; for I like to have them beside me when I am at supper."

"And we, because they were troublesome and annoyed us, have sent them off," cried Nicholas; "and if you don't like it, why, you can go after them."

Martial, astonished, looked steadfastly at his brother. Then, as if convinced of the futility of a quarrel, he shrugged his shoulders, cut off a slice of bread and a piece of meat.

The dog had come up towards Nicholas, although keeping at a very respectful distance; and the ruffian, irritated at the disdain with which his brother treated him, and hoping to wear out his patience by ill-using his dog, gave Miraut a savage kick, which made the poor brute howl fearfully. Martial turned red, clasped in his hand the knife he held, and struck violently on the table with the

handle; but, again controlling himself, he called the dog to him, saying, quietly, "Here, Miraut!" The hound came, and crouched at his master's feet.

This composure quite upset Nicholas's plans, who was desirous of pushing his brother to extremities, in order to produce an explosion. So he added, "I hate dogs – I do; and I won't have this dog remain here." Martial's only reply was to pour out a glass of wine, and drink it off slowly. Exchanging a rapid glance with Nicholas, the widow encouraged him by a signal to continue his hostilities towards Martial, hoping, as we have said, that a violent quarrel would arise that would lead to a rupture and complete separation.

Nicholas, then, taking up the willow stick which the widow had used to beat François, went up to the dog, and, striking him sharply, said, "Get out, you brute, Miraut!"

Up to this time Nicholas had often shown himself sulkily offensive towards Martial, but he had never dared to provoke him with so much audacity and perseverance. La Louve's lover, thinking they were desirous of driving him to extremities for some secret motive, quelled every impulse of temper.

At the cry of the beaten dog, Martial rose, opened the door of the kitchen, made the dog go out, and then returned, and went on with his supper. This incredible patience, so little in harmony with Martial's usual demeanour, puzzled and nonplussed his aggressors, who looked at each other with amazement. He, affecting to appear wholly unconscious of what was passing around him, ate away with great appetite, keeping profound silence.

"Calabash, take the wine away," said the widow to her daughter.

She hastened to comply, when Martial said, "Stay, I haven't done my supper."

"So much the worse," said the widow, taking the bottle away herself.

"Oh, that's another thing!" answered La Louve's lover. And pouring out a large glass of water, he drank it, smacking his tongue, and exclaiming, "Capital water!"

This excessive calmness irritated the burning anger of Nicholas, already heated by copious libations; but still he hesitated at making a direct attack, well knowing the vast power of his brother. Suddenly he cried out, as if delighted at the idea, "Martial, you were quite right to turn the dog out. It is a good habit to begin to give way, for you have but to wait a bit, and you will see us kick your sweetheart out just as we have driven away your dog."

"Oh, yes; for if La Louve is impudent enough to come to the island when she leaves gaol," added Calabash, who quite understood Nicholas's motive, "I'll serve her out."

"And I'll give her a dip in the mud by the hovel at the end of the island," continued Nicholas; "and, if she gets out, I'll give her a few rattlers over the nob with my wooden shoe, the – "

This insult addressed to La Louve, whom he loved with savage ardour, triumphed over the pacific resolutions of Martial; he frowned, and the blood mounted to his cheeks, whilst the veins in his brow swelled and distended like cords. Still, he had so much control over himself as to say to Nicholas, in a voice slightly altered by his repressed wrath:

"Take care of yourself! You are trying to pick a quarrel, and you will find a bone to pick that will be too tough for you."

"A bone for me to pick?"

"Yes; and I'll thrash you more soundly than I did last time."

"What! Nicholas," said Calabash, with a sardonic grin, "did Martial thrash you? Did you hear that, mother? I'm not astonished that Nicholas is so afraid of him."

"He walloped me, because, like a coward, he took me off my guard," exclaimed Nicholas, turning pale with rage.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.