

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE MYSTERIES OF
PARIS, VOLUME 6 OF 6

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Eugène Sue

The Mysteries of Paris, Volume 6 of 6

CHAPTER I

PUNISHMENT

We will again conduct the reader into the study of Jacques Ferrand. Availing ourselves of the loquacity of the clerks, we shall endeavour, through their instrumentality, to narrate the events that had occurred since the disappearance of Cecily.

"A hundred sous to ten, if his present state continues, that in less than a month our governor will go off with a pop."

"The fact is, since Cecily left, he is only skin and bones."

"And now he takes to the priests again more than ever."

"The curé of the parish is a most respectable man, and I overheard him say yesterday, to another priest who accompanied him, 'It is admirable! M. Jacques Ferrand is the personification of charity.'"

"Well, then, when the curé declares a thing one must credit it; and yet to believe that the governor is charitable is almost beyond my belief."

"Remember the forty sous for our breakfast."

"Yes, but then the head clerk says that three days ago the governor realised a large sum in the funds, and that he is about to sell his business."

"Well, no doubt he has the means to retire."

"He has speculated on the Bourse, and gained lots of money."

"What astonishes me is this friend who follows him like his shadow."

"Yes, he does not leave M. Ferrand for a moment; they eat together, and seem as if they were inseparable."

"It seems to me as if I had seen this intruder somewhere!"

"Have you not remarked that every two hours there comes a man with large light moustaches, with a military air, who inquires for the intruder of the porter? This friend then goes down-stairs, discourses for a moment with the hero with moustaches, after which the military gent turns on his heel, goes away, and returns two hours afterwards."

"Yes, I have remarked it. It appears to me that, as I go and come, I see in the street men who appear to be watching the house."

"Perhaps the head clerk knows more of this than we do. By the way, where is he?"

"At the house of the Countess Macgregor, who has been assassinated, and is now despaired of. They sent for the governor to-day, but the head clerk was despatched in his stead."

"He has plenty in his hands, then, for I suppose he will fill Germain's place as cashier."

"Talking of Germain, an odd thing has occurred. The governor, in order to free him from prison, has declared that he made a mistake in his accounts, and that he has found the money he accused Germain of taking."

"I do not see anything odd in that, – it is but justice. I was sure that Germain was incapable of theft."

"Ah, here's a coach, gents!" said Chalamel, looking out of the window; "it is not a spicy turn-out like that of the famous vicomte, the gay Saint-Remy, but a hack concern."

"Who is coming out of it?"

"Only the curé, – a very worthy man he is, too."

"Silence! Some one comes in! To your work, my boys!"

And all the clerks, leaning over their desks, began to scrawl away with much apparent industry, and as if their attention had not been taken off their business for a single instant.

The pale features of the priest expressed at once a gentle melancholy combined with an air of intelligence and venerable serenity. A small black cap covered the crown of his head, while his long gray locks hung down over the collar of his greatcoat. Let us merely add to this hasty sketch, that owing to the worthy priest's implicit confidence in the words and actions of others, he was, and ever had been, completely blinded by the deep and well-practised hypocrisy of Jacques Ferrand.

"Is your worthy employer in his room, my children?" inquired the curé.

"Yes, M. l'Abbé, he is," answered Chalamel, as, rising respectfully, he opened the door of an adjoining study, and waited for the priest to enter.

Hearing loud voices in the apartment, and unwilling to overhear words not intended for his ears, the abbé walked rapidly forwards, and tapped briskly at the door.

"Come in," said a voice with a strong Italian accent; and, entering, the priest found himself in the presence of Polidori and Jacques Ferrand.

The clerks did not appear to have erred in calculating upon the approaching end of their employer. He was, indeed, scarcely to be recognised. Spite of the almost spectral thinness and pallor of his sharpened features, a deep red fever-spot burned and scorched upon his projecting cheek-bones; a sort of incessant tremor, amounting occasionally to convulsive spasms and starts, shook his attenuated frame. His coarse but wasted hands seemed parched with feverish heat, while his bloodshot eyes were shrouded from view by the large green glasses he wore. Altogether his face was a fearful index of the internal ravages of a fast consuming disease.

The physiognomy of Polidori offered a strong contrast to that of the notary. Nothing could express a more bitter irony, a more biting contempt, than the features of this hardened villain, surrounded as they were by a mass of red hair, slightly mingled with gray, hanging in wild disorder over his pale, wrinkled brow, and partially hiding his sharp, penetrating eyes, which, green and transparent as the stone known as the *aqua marine*, were placed very close to his hooked nose, and imparted a still more sinister character to the look of sarcastic malevolence that dwelt on his thin, compressed lips. Such was Polidori, as, attired in a suit of entire black, he sat beside the desk of Jacques Ferrand. At the sight of the priest both rose.

"And how do you find yourself, my good M. Ferrand?" inquired the abbé, in a tone of deep solicitude; "let me hope you are better."

"Much the same as you last saw me, M. l'Abbé," replied the notary. "No sleep, no rest, and constantly devoured by fever; but God's will be done!"

"Alas, M. l'Abbé!" interposed Polidori, "my poor friend is no better; but what a blessed spirit he is in! What resignation! Finding no other relief from his suffering than in doing good!"

"Have the goodness to cease these praises, which I am far from meriting," said the notary, in a short, dry tone, as though struggling hard to restrain his feelings of rage and resentment; "to the Lord alone belongs the right of judging what is good and what evil, – I am but a miserable sinner!"

"We are all sinners," replied the abbé, mildly; "but all have not the extreme charity by which you are distinguished, my worthy friend. Few, indeed, like you, are capable of weaning their affections from their earthly goods, that they may be employed only as a means of leading a more Christianlike life. Are you still determined upon retiring from your profession, the better to devote yourself to religious duties?"

"I disposed of my practice a day or two ago, for a large and handsome sum. This money, united with other property, will enable me to found the institution I was speaking to you of, and of which I have entirely sketched out the plan. I am about to lay it before you, and to ask your assistance in improving it where necessary."

"My noble-minded friend," exclaimed the abbé, with the deepest and holiest admiration, "how naturally and unostentatiously you do these things! Ah, well might I say there were but few who resembled you; and upon the heads of such too many blessings can scarcely be prayed for and wished."

"Few persons, like my friend Jacques here," said Polidori, with an ironical smile, which wholly escaped the abbé, "are fortunate enough to possess both piety and riches, charity and discrimination as to the right channel into which to pour their wealth, in order that it may work well for the good of their soul."

At this repetition of sarcastic eulogium, the notary's hand became clenched with internal emotion, while, through his spectacles, he darted a look of deadly hatred on Polidori.

"Do you perceive, M. l'Abbé," said the dear friend of Jacques Ferrand, hastily, "he has these convulsive twitchings of the limbs continually? – and yet he will not have any advice. He really makes me quite wretched to see him, as it were, killing himself! Nay, my excellent friend, spite of those displeased looks, I will persist in declaring, in the presence of M. l'Abbé, that you are destroying yourself by refusing all succour as you do."

As Polidori uttered these words, a convulsive shudder shook the notary's whole frame; but in another instant he had regained the mastery over himself, and was calm as before. A less simple-minded man than the abbé might have perceived, both during this conversation and in that which followed, a something unnatural in the language and forced actions of Jacques Ferrand, for it is scarcely necessary to state that his present proceedings were dictated to him by a will and authority he was powerless to resist, and that it was by the command of Rodolph the wretched man was compelled to adopt words and conduct diametrically the reverse of his own sentiments or inclinations. And so it was that, when sore pressed, the notary seemed half inclined to resist the arbitrary and invisible power he found himself obliged to obey. But a glance at Polidori soon put an end to his indecision, and, restraining all his rage and impotent fury, Jacques Ferrand forbore any further manifestation of futile rage, and bent beneath the yoke he could neither shake off nor break.

"Alas, M. l'Abbé!" resumed Polidori, as though taking an infernal pleasure in thus torturing the miserable notary, "my poor friend wholly neglects his health. Let me entreat of you to join your request to mine, that he will be more careful of his precious self, if not for himself or his friends, at least for the sake of the poor and needy, whose hope and support he is."

"Enough! Enough!" murmured the notary, in a deep, guttural voice.

"No," said the priest, much moved, "'tis not enough! You can never be reminded too frequently that you belong not to yourself, and that you are to blame for neglecting your health. During the ten years I have known you I cannot recollect your ever being ill before the present time, but really the last month has so changed you that you are scarcely like the same person. And I am the more struck with the alteration in your appearance, since for some little time I have not seen you. You may recollect that when you sent for me the other day, I could not conceal my surprise on finding you so changed; during the short space of time that has elapsed since that visit, I find you even more rapidly altered for the worse. You are visibly wasting away, and occasion us all very serious uneasiness. I therefore most earnestly entreat of you to consider and attend to your health."

"Believe me, M. l'Abbé, I feel most grateful for the kind interest you express, but that I cannot bring myself to believe my situation as dangerous as you do."

"Nay," said Polidori, "since you are thus obstinate, M. l'Abbé shall know all. He greatly loves, esteems, and honours you; but how will those feelings be increased when he learns the real cause of your languishing condition, with the fresh claims your additional merits give you to his regard and veneration!"

"M. l'Abbé," said the notary, impatiently, "I sent to beg your company that I might confer with you on a matter of importance, and not to take up your time in listening to the absurd and exaggerated eulogiums of my friend!"

"You know, Jacques," said Polidori, fixing a piercing glance of fearful meaning on the notary, "that it is useless attempting to escape from me, and that you must hear all I have got to say."

The person so addressed cast down his eyes, and durst not reply. Polidori continued:

"You may probably have remarked, M. l'Abbé, that the first symptoms of our friend's illness manifested themselves in a sort of nervous attack, which followed the abominable scandal raised by the affair of Louise Morel, while in his service."

A sort of aguish shivering ran over the notary.

"Is it possible that you, sir, are acquainted with that unfortunate girl's story?" inquired the priest, greatly astonished. "I imagined you had only been in Paris a few days."

"And you were correctly informed; but my good friend Jacques told me all about it, as a man would relate such a circumstance to his friend and physician, since he attributed the nervous shock under which he is now labouring to the excessive indignation awakened in his mind by the discovery of his servant's crime. But that is not all. My poor friend's sympathies have been still more painfully awakened by a fresh blow, which, as you perceive, has had a very serious effect on his health. An old and faithful servant, attached to him by many years of well-requited service – "

"You allude to the untimely end of Madame Séraphin, I presume," said the curé, interrupting Polidori. "I heard of the melancholy affair; she was drowned, I believe, from some carelessness or imprudence manifested by her while making one in a party of pleasure. I can quite understand the distress such a circumstance must have occasioned M. Ferrand, whose kind heart would be unable to forget that she who was thus snatched from life had, for ten long years, been his faithful, zealous domestic; far from blaming such regrets, I think them but natural, and reflecting as much honour on the survivor as the deceased."

"M. l'Abbé," said the notary, "let me beseech of you to cease commending my virtues; you confuse – you make me really uncomfortable."

"And who, then, shall speak of them as they deserve?" asked Polidori, with feigned affection. "Will you? Oh, no! But, M. l'Abbé, you shall have a fresh opportunity of praising him as he deserves. Listen! You are, perhaps, ignorant that Jacques took a third servant, to replace Louise Morel and Madame Séraphin? If you are not aware of that fact, you have still to learn all his goodness towards poor Cecily; for that was the name of the new domestic, M. l'Abbé."

Involuntarily the notary sprung from his seat, and with eyes glaring with rage and madness, even in spite of the glasses he wore, he cried, while a deep, fiery glow overspread his before livid countenance:

"Silence! I command! I insist! I forbid another word on this subject!"

"Come, come!" said the abbé, soothingly, "compose yourself. It seems there is still some generous action I have not yet been told of. I really must plead guilty to admiring the candour of your friend, however his love of truth may offend your modesty. I was not acquainted with the servant you alluded to, as, unfortunately, just about the time she entered the service of our worthy M. Ferrand, he became so overwhelmed with cares and business as to be obliged temporarily to interrupt our frequent friendly meetings."

"That was merely a pretext to conceal the fresh act of goodness he meditated, M. l'Abbé, and, at the risk of paining his modesty, I am determined you shall know all about it," said Polidori, with a malignant smile, while Jacques Ferrand, in mute rage, leaned his elbows on his desk, while he concealed his face with his hands. "Imagine, then, M. l'Abbé," resumed Polidori, feigning to address himself to the curé, but at each phrase contriving to direct an ironical glance towards Jacques Ferrand, "imagine that my kind-hearted friend here found his new domestic possessed of the purest and rarest qualifications, the most perfect modesty, with the gentleness and piety of an angel; nor was this all. The quick penetration of my friend Jacques soon discovered that the female in question (who, by the way, was both young and beautiful) had never been accustomed to a servant's life, and that, to

the most austere virtue, she added great and varied information, with first-rate talents, which had received the highest cultivation."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the abbé, much interested in the recital. "I was not aware of this. But what ails you, my good M. Ferrand? You seem ill and disturbed!"

"A slight headache," answered the notary, wiping the cold, clammy drops from his brow, for the restraint he imposed upon himself was most severe, – "nothing more! It will soon pass off."

Polidori shrugged up his shoulders, smiled maliciously, and said:

"Observe, M. l'Abbé, that Jacques is always seized with the same symptoms directly any of his good actions are brought forward. But never mind, – I am determined that his light shall no longer be hid under a bushel, and it is my firm intention to reveal all his hidden charities. But first let me go on with the history of his generous exertions in favour of Cecily, who, on her side, had quickly discovered the excellency of Jacques's heart, and, when questioned by him touching the past, she candidly confessed that, left a stranger and wholly destitute in a foreign land, by the imprudence of her husband, she considered herself particularly fortunate in being able to obtain a shelter under so sanctified a roof as M. Ferrand's as a most singular interposition of Providence. The sight of so much misfortune, united to so much heavenly resignation, banished all hesitation from the mind of Jacques, and he wrote to the birthplace of the unfortunate girl for further information respecting her. The reply to his inquiries was most satisfactory, as well as confirmatory of all the young person had previously stated. Then, assured of rightly dispensing his benevolence, Jacques bestowed the most paternal kindness on Cecily, whom he sent back to her own country, with a sum of money to support her till better days should dawn, or she be enabled to obtain some suitable employment. Now I will not utter one word in Jacques's praise for doing all this, – let the facts speak for themselves."

"Excellent! Most excellent!" exclaimed the deeply affected curé.

"M. l'Abbé," said Jacques Ferrand, in a hoarse and abrupt tone, "I do not desire to take up your valuable time in discoursing of myself, but of the project respecting which I requested your presence, and for the furtherance of which I wished to obtain your valuable concurrence."

"I can well understand that the praises so justly bestowed on you by your friend are painful to one of your extreme modesty; let us, then, merely speak of your good works as though you were not the author of them. But, first of all, let me give an account of my own proceedings in the matters you confided to me. According to your desire, I have deposited the sum of one hundred thousand crowns in the Bank of France, in my own name, with the intention of employing that amount in the act of restitution of which you are the medium, and which I am to effect. You preferred the money being lodged in the bank, although, in my opinion, it would have been in equal safety with you."

"And in so doing, M. l'Abbé, I only acted in concurrence with the wishes of the person making this restitution for the sake of his conscience. His request to me was to place the sum mentioned by you in your hands, and to entreat of you to forward it to the widow lady, Madame Fermont, whose maiden name was Renneville (the notary's voice trembled as he pronounced these two names), whenever that person should present herself to you. I fully substantiate her claims."

"Be assured," replied the priest, "I will with pleasure discharge the trust committed to me."

"But that is not the only matter in which your assistance is solicited."

"So much the better, if the others resemble this, for, without seeking the motives which dictate it, a voluntary restitution is always calculated to excite a deep interest; these rigid decrees of an awakened conscience are always the harbingers of a deep and sincere repentance, and such an expiation cannot fail to bring forth good fruits."

"True, M. l'Abbé, the soul must indeed be in a perilous state when such a sum as one hundred thousand crowns is voluntarily refunded. For my part, I confess to having felt more inquisitive on the subject than yourself; but what chance had my curiosity against the firm and unshaken discretion of my friend Jacques? I am, therefore, still in ignorance of the name of the individual who thus restores such immense wealth for their conscience' sake."

"But," continued Polidori, eyeing Jacques Ferrand with a keen, significant glance, "you will hear to what an extent are carried the generous scruples of the author of this restitution; and, to tell the truth, I strongly suspect that our right-minded friend here was the first to awaken the slumbering feelings of the guilty person, as well as to point out the surest and fittest way of tranquillising them."

"How so?" inquired the priest.

"What do you mean?" asked the notary.

"Why, remember the Morels, those honest, deserving people."

"True, true!" interposed Jacques Ferrand, in a hasty tone, "I had forgotten them."

"Imagine, M. l'Abbé, that the author of this restitution, doubtless influenced by Jacques, not contented with the restitution of this large sum, wishes also – But my worthy friend shall speak for himself – I will not deprive him of the pleasure of relating so fine an action."

"Pray let me hear all about it, my dear M. Ferrand," said the priest.

"You are aware," replied Jacques Ferrand, with affected sympathy, strangely mingled with the deep repugnance he entertained at being compelled to play a part so opposite to his inclinations, and which betrayed itself in the alteration his voice and manner exhibited, even in spite of all his attempts to be on his guard, – "you are aware, I say, M. l'Abbé, that the misconduct of that unhappy girl, Louise Morel, took so deep an effect on her father as to deprive him of his senses, and to reduce his numerous family to the very verge of destitution, thus bereft of their sole support and prop. Happily Providence interposed in their behalf, and the person whose voluntary restitution you have so kindly undertaken to arrange, not satisfied with this step, believed his abuse of confidence required still further expiation, and, therefore, inquired of me if I knew any genuine case of real and unmerited distress. I immediately thought of the Morel family, and recommended them so warmly that the unknown personage begged me to hand over to you (as I shall do) the necessary funds for purchasing an annuity of eighty pounds a year for the joint lives of Morel, his wife, and children."

"Truly," said the abbé, "such conduct is beyond my poor praise. Most gladly will I add this commission to the former; still permit me to express my surprise that you were not yourself selected to arrange an affair of this nature, the proceedings of which must be so much more familiar to you than to me."

"The reason for your being preferred, M. l'Abbé, was because the individual in question believed that his expiatory acts would go forth even in greater sanctity if they passed through hands as pure and pious as your own."

"Then be it so! And I will at once proceed to arrange for an annuity to Morel, the worthy but unfortunate parent of Louise. Still I am inclined to think, with your friend, that you are not altogether a stranger to the motives which dictated this additional expiation."

"Nay, M. l'Abbé, let me beg of you to believe that all I did was to recommend the Morel family as a deserving case upon which to exercise charitable sympathy; I had no further share in the good work," said Jacques Ferrand.

"Now, then," said Polidori, "you are next to be gratified, M. l'Abbé, with seeing to what an extent my worthy friend there has carried his philanthropic views, as manifested in the foundation of such an establishment as that we have already discussed. He will read to you the plan definitely decided on. The necessary money for its endowment is ready, and all is prepared for immediate action; but since yesterday a doubt has crossed his mind, and if he does not like to state it himself I will do so for him."

"There is no occasion for your taking that trouble," said Jacques, who seemed to find a relief in talking himself rather than be compelled to sit in silence and listen to the ironical praises of his accomplice. "The fact is this, M. l'Abbé, I have reflected upon our purposed undertaking, and it occurs to me that it would be more in accordance with a right spirit of humility and Christian meekness if the projected establishment were instituted in your name, and not in mine."

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed the abbé, "such humility is exaggerated beyond all reasonable scruples. You may fairly pride yourself upon having originated so noble a charity, and it becomes your just right, as well as your duty, to give it your own name."

"Pardon me for insisting in this instance on having my own way. I have thought the matter well over, and am resolved upon preserving a strict *incognito* as to being the founder of the undertaking. I therefore venture to hope you will do me the favour to act for me, and carry the scheme into execution, selecting the various functionaries requisite for its several departments. I merely desire to have the nomination of the chief clerk and one of the doorkeepers. To this kindness you must add the most inviolable secrecy as regards myself."

"Independently of the pleasure it would afford me to coöperate in such a work as yours, my duty to my fellow creatures would not permit me to do otherwise than accede to your wishes; you may therefore reckon upon me in every way you desire."

"Then, with your permission, M. l'Abbé, my friend will read you the plan he has decided on adopting."

"Perhaps," said Jacques Ferrand, bitterly, "you will spare me the fatigue of reading it, by taking that office on yourself? You will oblige me by so doing, will you not?"

"By no means!" answered Polidori. "The pure philanthropy which dictated the scheme will sound far better from your lips than mine."

"Enough!" interrupted the notary; "I will read it myself."

Polidori, so long the accomplice of Jacques Ferrand, and consequently well acquainted with the black catalogue of his crimes, could not restrain a fiendish smile as he saw the notary compelled in his own despite to read aloud and adopt as his own the words and sentiments so arbitrarily dictated by Rodolph.

"ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BANK FOR WORKMEN OUT OF EMPLOY

"We are instructed to 'Love one another!' These divine words contain the germ of all charities. They have inspired the humble founder of this institution. Limited as to the means of action, the founder has desired at least to enable as many as possible to participate in what he offers. In the first place, he addresses himself to the honest, hard-working workmen, burdened with families, whom the want of employment frequently reduces to the most cruel extremities. It is not a degrading alms which he offers to his brethren, but a gratuitous loan he begs them to accept. And he hopes that this loan may frequently prevent them from involving their future by distressing loans, which they are forced to make in order to await a return of work, their only resource for a family of whom they are the sole support. As a guarantee of this loan he only requires from his brethren an undertaking on honour, and a keeping of the word pledged. He invests a sum producing an annual income of twelve thousand francs, and to this amount loans of twenty to forty francs, without interest, will be advanced to married men out of work. These loans will only be made to workmen or workwomen with certificates of good conduct given by the last employer, who will mention the cause and date of the suspension from labour. These loans to be repaid monthly by one-sixths' or one-tenths', at the option of the borrower, beginning from the day when he again procures employment. He must sign a simple engagement, on his honour, to return the loan at the periods fixed. This engagement must be also signed by two fellow workmen as guarantees, in order to develop and extend by their conjunction the sacredness of the promise sworn to. The workman and his two sureties who do not return the sum borrowed must never again have another

loan, having forfeited his sacred engagement, and, especially, having deprived so many of his brethren of the advantage he has enjoyed, as the sum he has not repaid is for ever lost to the Bank for the Poor. The sums lent being, on the contrary, scrupulously repaid, the loans will augment from year to year. Not to degrade man by a loan, not to encourage idleness by an unprofitable gift, to increase the sentiments of honour and probity natural to the labouring classes, to come paternally to the aid of the workman, who, already living with difficulty from day to day, owing to the insufficiency of wages, cannot, when work stops, suspend the wants of himself and family because his labour is suspended, – these are the thoughts which have presided over this institution. May His Holy Name who has said 'Love one another!' be alone glorified!"

"Ah, sir," exclaimed the abbé, "what a charitable idea! Now I understand your emotion on reading these lines of such touching simplicity."

In truth, as he concluded the reading, the voice of Jacques Ferrand had faltered, his patience and courage were at an end; but, watched by Polidori, he dared not infringe Rodolph's slightest order.

"M. l'Abbé, is not Jacques's idea excellent?" asked Polidori.

"Ah, sir, I, who know all the wretchedness of the city, can more easily comprehend of what importance may be for poor workmen out of employ a loan which may seem so trifling to the happy in this world! Ah, what good may be done if persons but knew that with thirty or forty francs, which would be scrupulously repaid, if without interest, they might often save the future, and sometimes the honour of a family, whom the want of work places in the grasp of misery and want!"

"Jacques values your praises, Monsieur l'Abbé," replied Polidori. "And you will have still more to say to him when you hear of his institution of a gratuitous Mont-de-Piété (pawnbroking establishment), for Jacques has not forgotten this, but made it an adjunct to his Bank for the Poor."

"Can it be true?" exclaimed the priest, clasping his hands in admiration.

The notary contrived to read with a rapid voice the other details, which referred to loans to workmen whose labour was suspended by fatigue or illness, and his intention to establish a Bank for the Poor producing twenty-five thousand francs a year for advances on pledges, which were never to go beyond ten francs for each pledge, without any charges for interest. The management and office of the loans in the Bank for the Poor was to be in the Rue du Temple, Number 17, in a house bought for the purpose. An income of ten thousand francs a year was to be devoted to the costs and management of the Bank for the Poor, whose manager was to be —

Polidori here interrupted the notary, and said to the priest:

"You will see, sir, by the choice of the manager, that Jacques knows how to repair an involuntary error. You know that by a mistake, which he deeply deplures, he had falsely accused his cashier of embezzling a sum which he afterwards found. Well, it is this honest fellow, François Germain by name, that Jacques has named as manager of the institution, with four thousand francs a year salary. Is it not admirable, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"Nothing now can astonish me, or rather nothing ever astonished me so much before," the priest replied; "the fervent piety, the virtues of our worthy friend, could only have such a result sooner or later. To devote his whole fortune to so admirable an institution is most excellent!"

"More than a million of francs (40,000*l.*), M. l'Abbé," said Polidori; "more than a million, amassed by order, economy, and probity! And there were so many wretches who accused Jacques of avarice! By what they said, his business brings him in fifty or sixty thousand francs a year, and yet he leads a life of privations!"

"To that I would reply," said the abbé, with enthusiasm, "that during fifteen years he lived like a beggar, in order one day to console those in distress most gloriously."

"But be at least proud and joyful at the good you do," cried Polidori, addressing Jacques Ferrand, who, gloomy, beaten, and with his eye fixed, seemed absorbed in painful meditation.

"Alas!" said the abbé, in a tone of sorrow, "it is not in this world that one receives the recompense of so many virtues! There is a higher ambition."

"Jacques," said Polidori, lightly touching the notary's shoulder, "finish reading your prospectus."

The notary started, passed his hand across his forehead, and addressing himself to the priest, "Your pardon, M. l'Abbé," said he, "but I was lost in thought; I felt myself involuntarily carried away by the idea of how immensely the funds of this 'Bank for the Poor' might be augmented if the sums lent out were, when repaid, allowed to accumulate only for a year. At the end of four years, the institution would be in a condition to afford loans, either wholly gratuitously, or upon security, to the amount of fifty thousand crowns! Enormous! And I am delighted to find it so," continued he, as he reflected, with concealed rage, on the value of the sacrifice he was compelled to make. He then added, "A revenue of ten thousand francs will be secured for the expenses and management of the 'Bank for unemployed Workmen,' whose perpetual director shall be François Germain; and the housekeeper, the present porter in the place, an individual named Pipelet. M. l'Abbé Dumont, in whose hands the necessary funds for carrying out the undertaking will be placed, will establish a board of superintendence, composed of the magistrate of the district and other legal functionaries, in addition to all such influential personages whose patronage and support may be likely to advance the interests of the 'Poor Man's Bank;' for the founder would esteem himself more than paid for the little he has done, should his example induce other charitable persons to come forward in aid of his work."

"The opening of 'the bank' will be duly announced by every channel calculated to give publicity."

"In conclusion, the founder has only to disclaim any desire to attract notoriety or draw down applause, his sole motive being an earnest wish to reëcho the divine precept of 'Love ye one another!'"

The notary had now concluded; and without making any reply to the congratulations of the abbé, he proceeded to furnish him with the cash and notes requisite for the very considerable outlay required in carrying out the institution just described, and purchasing the annuity for Morel; after which he said, "Let me hope, M. l'Abbé, that you will not refuse the fresh mission confided to your charity. There is, indeed, a stranger, one Sir Walter Murphy, who has given me the benefit of his advice in drawing up the plan I have lately read to you, who will in some degree relieve you of the entire burden of this affair; and this very day he purposes conversing with you on the best means of bringing our schemes to bear, as well as to place himself at your disposal whenever he can render you the slightest service. To him you may speak freely and without any reserve, but to all others I pray of you to preserve the strictest secrecy as regards myself."

"You may rely on me. But you are surely ill! Tell me, my excellent friend, is it bodily or mental pain that thus blanches your cheek? Are you ill?"

"Somewhat indisposed, M. l'Abbé; the fatigue of reading that long paper, added to the emotions called up by your gratifying praises, have combined to overcome me; and, indeed, I have been a great sufferer during the last few days. Pray excuse me," said Jacques Ferrand, as he threw himself back languidly in his chair; "I do not apprehend any serious consequences from my present weakness, but must own I do feel quite exhausted."

"Perhaps," said the priest, kindly, "your best plan would be to retire to bed, and allow your physician to see you."

"I am a physician, M. l'Abbé," said Polidori; "the condition of my friend Jacques requires the greatest care, and I shall immediately do my best to relieve his present symptoms."

The notary shuddered.

"Well, well," said the curé, "let us hope that a little rest is all you require to set you to rights! I will now take my leave; but first let me give you an acknowledgment for the money I have received."

While the priest was writing the receipt, a look wholly impossible to describe passed between Jacques Ferrand and Polidori.

"Come, come," said the priest, as he handed the paper he had written to Jacques Ferrand, "be of good cheer! Depend upon it, it will be long ere so faithful and devout a servant is suffered to quit a life so usefully and religiously employed. I will come again to-morrow, and inquire how you are. Adieu, monsieur! Farewell, my good, my holy, and excellent friend!"

And with these words the priest quitted the apartment, leaving Jacques Ferrand and Polidori alone there. No sooner was the door closed than a fearful imprecation burst from the lips of Jacques Ferrand, whose rage and despair, so long and forcibly repressed, now broke forth with redoubled fury. Breathless and excited, he continued, with wild and haggard looks, to pace to and fro like a furious tiger going the length of his chain, and then again retracing his infuriated march; while Polidori, preserving the most imperturbable look and manner, gazed on him with insulting calmness.

"Damnation!" exclaimed Jacques Ferrand, at last, in a voice of concentrated wrath and violence; "the idea of my fortune being thus swallowed up in founding these humbugging philanthropic institutions, and to be obliged to give away my riches in such absurdities as building banks for other people! Your master must be the fiend himself to torture a man as he is doing me!"

"I have no master," replied Polidori, coldly; "only, like yourself, I have a judge whose decrees there is no escaping!"

"But thus blindly and idiotically to follow the most trifling order of this man!" continued Jacques Ferrand, with redoubled rage. "To compel me, constrain me, to the very actions most galling and hateful to me!"

"Nay, you have your chance between obedience and the scaffold!"

"And to think that there should be no way to escape this accursed domination! To be obliged to part with such a sum as that I lately handed over to that old proser, – a million sterling! The very extent of all my earthly possessions are now this house and about one hundred thousand francs. What more can he want with me?"

"Oh, but you have not done yet! The prince has learned, through Badinot, that your man of straw, 'Petit Jean,' was only your own assumed title, under which you made so many usurious loans to the Count de Remy, whom you so roughly took to task for his forgeries. The sums repaid by Saint-Remy were supplied him by a lady of high rank; and you may, very probably, be called upon to make a second restitution in that case, as well as the former; however, you may escape that in consequence of the fear entertained of wounding the delicacy of the noble lender, were the facts brought before the public."

"And fixed, chained here!"

"As firmly as though bound by an iron cable!"

"With such a wretch as you for my gaoler!"

"Why, it is the prince's system to punish crime by crime, – the guilty by the hand of his accomplice. So how can you object to me?"

"Oh, rage!"

"But, unhappily, powerless rage; for until he sends me his orders to permit you to leave this house, I shall follow you like your shadow! I, like yourself, have placed my head in danger of falling on the scaffold; and should I fail to perform my prescribed task of gaoler, there it would quickly fall. So that, you perceive, my integrity as your keeper is necessarily incorruptible. And as for our both attempting to free ourselves by flight, that is wholly impossible. Not a step could we take without immediately falling into the hands of those who, day and night, keep vigilant watch around and at each door of this house."

"Death and fury! I know it."

"Then resign yourself to what is inevitable; for if even flight were practicable, what would it do for our ultimate safety? We should be hunted down by the officers of justice, and speedily overtaken, with certain death before us; while, on the contrary, by your submitting and my superintending your obedience, we are quite sure to keep our heads on our shoulders."

"Do not exasperate me by this cool irony, or – "

"Well, go on – or what? Oh, bless you, I am not afraid of you or your anger; but I know you too well not to adopt every precaution. I am well armed, I can tell you; and though you may have possessed yourself of the celebrated poisoned stiletto carried by Cecily, it would not be worth your while to try its power on me. You are aware that I am obliged, every two hours, to send to him who has a right to demand it a bulletin of your precious health! Should I not present myself with the required document, murder would be suspected, and you be taken into custody. But I wrong you in supposing you capable of such a crime. Is it likely that, after sacrificing more than a million of money to save your life, you would place it in danger for the poor satisfaction of avenging yourself on me by taking my life? No, no! You are not quite such a fool as that, at any rate!"

"Oh, misery, misery! Endless and inextricable! Whichever way I turn, I see nothing but death or disgrace! My curse be on you – on all mankind!"

"Your misanthropy, then, exceeds your philanthropy; for while the former embraces the whole world, the latter merely relates to a small part of Paris."

"Go on, go on, monster! Mock as you will!"

"Would you rather I should overwhelm you with reproaches? Whose fault is it but yours that we are placed in our present position? Why would you persist in hanging to that letter of mine relative to the murder I assisted you in, which gained you one hundred thousand crowns, although you contrived to make it appear the man had fallen by his own hand? Why, I say, did you keep that letter of mine suspended around your neck, as though it had been a holy relic, instead of the confession of a crime?"

"Why, you contemptible being! Why, because having handed over to you fifty thousand francs for your share and assistance in the deed, I exacted from you that letter containing an admission of your participation in the affair, in order that I might have that security for your playing me fair; for with that document in existence, to betray me would have been to denounce yourself. That letter was the security, both for my life and fortune. Now are you answered as to my reasons for keeping it so carefully about me?"

"I see! It was skilfully devised on your part, for by betraying you I gained nothing but the certainty of perishing with you on the same scaffold; and yet your cleverness has ruined us, while mine has assured our safety, up to the present moment."

"Great safety, certainly, if our present situation is taken into consideration!"

"Who could foresee the turn things have taken? But according to the ordinary course of events, our crime would have remained for ever under the same veil of concealment my management had thrown over it."

"Your management?"

"Even so! Why, do you not recollect that, after we had killed the man, you were for merely counterfeiting his writing, in order to despatch a letter as if from himself to his sister, stating his intention of committing suicide in consequence of having utterly ruined himself by losses at play? You believed it a great stroke of policy not to make any mention, in this letter, of the money entrusted to your charge. This was absurd because the sister, being aware of the deposit left in your hands, would be sure to claim it; it was wiser to take the contrary path, and make mention, as we did, of the money deposited with you; so that, should any suspicions arise as to the manner in which the murdered man met his death, you would be the very last on whom suspicion could fall; for how could it be supposed for an instant that you would first kill a man to obtain possession of the treasure placed under your care, and then write to inform the sister of the fact of the money having been lodged with you? And what was the consequence of this skilful suggestion on my part? Every one believed the dead man had destroyed himself. Your high reputation for probity enabled you successfully to deny the circumstance of any such sum of money as that claimed ever having been placed in your hands; and the general impression was, that the unprincipled brother had first dissipated his sister's fortune, and then committed suicide."

"But what does all this matter now, since the crime is discovered?"

"And who is to be thanked for its discovery? Is it my fault if my letter has become a sort of two-edged sword? Why were you so weak, so silly, as to surrender so formidable a weapon to – that infernal Cecily?"

"Silence!" exclaimed Jacques Ferrand, with a fearful expression of countenance; "name her not!"

"With all my heart! I don't want to bring on an attack of epilepsy. You see plainly enough that, as regards the common course of ordinary justice, our mutual precautions were quite sufficient to ensure our safety; but he who now holds us in his formidable power goes to work differently; he believes that cutting off the heads of criminals is not a sufficient reparation for the wrongs they have done. With the proofs he has against us, he might give you and myself up to the laws of our country; but what would be got by that? Merely a couple of dead bodies, to help to enrich the churchyard."

"True, true! This prince, devil, or demon – whichever he is – requires tears, groans, wringings of the heart, ere he is satisfied. And yet 'tis strange he should work so much woe for me, who know him not, neither have ever done him the least harm. Why, then, is he so bitter against me?"

"In the first place, because he professes to sympathise with the sufferings of other men, whom he calls, simply enough, his brethren; and, secondly, because he knows those you have injured, and he punishes you according to his ideas."

"But what right has he to exercise any such power over me?"

"Why, look you, Jacques! Between ourselves it is not worth while to question the right of a man who might legally consign us to a scaffold. But what would be the result? Your two only relations are both dead; consequently government would profit by your wealth, to the injury of those you have wronged. On the other hand, by making your fortune the price of your life, Morel (the father of the unhappy girl you dishonoured), with his numerous family, may be placed beyond the reach of want; Madame de Fermont, the sister of the pretended self-murderer, Renneville, will get back her one hundred thousand crowns; Germain, falsely accused by you of robbery, will be reinstated in life, and placed at the head of the 'Bank for distressed Workmen,' which you are compelled to found and endow as an expiation for your many offences against society. And, candidly looking at the thing in the same point of view as he who now holds us in his clutches, it must be owned that, though mankind would have gained nothing by your death, they will be considerably advantaged by your life."

"And this it is excites my rage, that forms my greatest torture!"

"The prince knows that as well as you do. And what is he going to do with us, after all? I know not. He promised us our lives, if we would blindly comply with all his orders; but if he should not consider our past offences sufficiently expiated, he will find means to make death itself preferable a thousand times to the existence he grants us. You don't know him. When he believes himself called upon to be stern, no executioner can be more inexorable and un pitying to the criminal his hand must deprive of life. He must have had some fiend at his elbow, to discover what I went into Normandy for. However, he has more than one demon at his command; for that Cecily, whom may the descending lightning strike to the earth – "

"Again I say, silence! Name her not! Utter not the word Cecily!"

"I tell you I wish that every curse may light upon her! And have I not good reason for hating one who has placed us in our present situation? But for her, our heads would be safe on our shoulders, and likely to remain so. To what has your besotted passion for that creature brought us!"

Instead of breaking out into a fresh rage, Jacques Ferrand replied, with the most extreme dejection, "Do you know the person you are speaking of? Tell me, have you ever seen her?"

"Never; but I am aware she is reported to be very beautiful."

"Beautiful!" exclaimed the notary, emphatically; then, with an expression of bitter despair, he added, "Cease to speak of that you know not. What I did you would have done if similarly tempted."

"What, endanger my life for the love of a woman?"

"For such a one as Cecily; and I tell you candidly I would do the same thing again, for the same hopes as then led me on."

"By all the devils in hell," cried Polidori, in utter amazement, "he is bewitched!"

"Hearken to me," resumed the notary, in a low, calm tone, occasionally rendered more energetic by the bursts of uncontrollable despair which possessed his mind. "Listen! You know how much I love gold, as well as all I have ventured to acquire it. To count over in my thoughts the sums I possessed, to see them doubled by my avarice, to know myself master of immense wealth, was at once my joy, my happiness; to possess, not for the sake of expending or enjoying, but to hoard, to gloat over, was my life, my delight. A month ago, had I been told to choose between my fortune and my head, I should certainly have sacrificed the latter to save the former."

"But what would be the use of possessing all this wealth, if you must die?"

"The ecstasy of dying in the consciousness of its possession; to enjoy till the last moment the dear delightful feeling of being the owner of those riches for which you have braved everything, privations, disgrace, infamy, the scaffold itself, to be able to say, even as you lay your head on the fatal block, 'Those vast treasures are mine!' Oh, death is far sweeter than to endure the living agonies I suffer at seeing the riches accumulated with so much pain, difficulties, and dangers torn from me! Dreadful, dreadful! 'Tis not dying daily, but each minute in the day; and this dreadful state of misery may be protracted for years! Oh, how greatly should I prefer being struck down by that sudden and rapid death that carries you off ere one fragment of your beloved riches is taken from you! For still, with your dying breath, you might sigh forth, 'Those treasures are mine, – all, all mine! None but me can or dare approach them!'"

Polidori gazed on his accomplice with profound astonishment. "I do not understand you," said he, at last; "if such be the case, why have you obeyed the commands of him whose denunciation of you would bring you to a scaffold? Why, if life be so horrible to you, have you chosen to accept it at his hands, and pay the heavy price you are doing for it?"

"Because," answered the notary, in a voice that sunk so low as to be scarcely audible, "because death brings forgetfulness – annihilation – and then, too, Cecily –"

"What!" said Polidori, "do you still hope?"

"No," said the notary, "I possess –"

"What?"

"The fond impassioned remembrance of her."

"But what folly is this when you are sure never to see her more, and when she has brought you to a scaffold!"

"That matters not; I love her even more ardently, more frantically than ever!" exclaimed Jacques Ferrand, amid a torrent of sighs and sobs that contrasted strongly with the previous gloomy dejection of his last remark. "Yes," continued he, with fearful wildness, "I love her too well to be willing to die, while I can feast my senses upon the recollection only of that night – that memorable night in which I saw her so lovely, so loving, so fascinating! Never is her image, as I then beheld her, absent from my brain; waking or sleeping, she is ever before me, decked in all the intoxicating beauty that was displayed to my impassioned gaze! Still do her large, lustrous eyes seem to dart forth their fiery glances, and I almost fancy I can feel her warm breath on my cheek, while her clear, melodious voice seems ringing its full sounds into my ear with promises of bliss, alas, never to be mine! Yet, though to live thus is torturing – horrible – yet would I prefer it to the apathy, the still nothingness of the grave. No, no, no; let me live, poor, wretched, despised, – a branded galley-slave, if you will, – but give me yet the means of doting in secret on the recollection of this wonderful being; whether she be fiend or angel, yet does she engross my every thought!"

"Jacques," said Polidori, in a voice and manner contrasting strongly with his habitual tone of cool, provoking sarcasm, "I have witnessed almost every description of bodily and mental suffering, but certainly nothing that equalled what you endure. He who holds us in his power could not have

devised more cruel torture than that you are compelled to endure. You are condemned to live, to await death through a vista of long, wasting torments, for your description of your feelings fully explains to me the many alarming symptoms I have observed in you from day to day, and of which I have hitherto vainly sought to find the cause."

"But the symptoms you speak of as alarming are nothing but exhaustion, a sort of reaction of the bodily and mental powers; do you not think so? Tell me! I am not surely in any danger of dying?"

"There is no immediate danger, but your situation is precarious; and there are some thoughts you must cease to dwell on – nay, banish from your memory – or your danger is imminent."

"I will do whatever you bid me, so that my life be preserved, – for I will not die. Oh, let priests talk of the sufferings of the damned, but what are their tortures compared to mine? Tormented alike by passion and avarice, I have two open wounds rankling in my heart, each occasioning mortal agony. The loss of my fortune is dreadful, but the fear of death is even still more so. I have desired to live; and though my existence may probably be but one protracted scene of endless wretchedness, it is preferable to death and annihilation; for it would be the termination of my fatal happiness, – the power of recalling each word and look of Cecily!"

"You have at least one vast consolation," said Polidori, resuming his accustomed *sang-froid*, "in the recollection of the good actions by which you have sought to expiate your crimes!"

"Rail on! Mock my misery! Turn me on the hot coals on which my ill fortune has placed me! But you well know, mean and contemptible being that you are, how I hate, how I loathe all mankind, and that these forced expiations to which I am condemned only serve to increase my detestation of those who compel me to make them, and those who profit by them. By all that is sacred, it passes human malice to condemn me to live in endless misery, such as would dismay the stoutest nature, while my fellow creatures, as they are called, have all their griefs assuaged at the cost of my dearly prized treasures! Oh, that priest who but now quitted us, loading me with blessings while my heart seemed like one vast ocean of fiery gall and bitterness against himself and all mankind – oh, how I longed to plunge a dagger in his breast! 'Tis too much – too much for endurance!" cried he, pressing his clenched hands to his forehead; "my brain burns, my ideas become confused, I shall not be able much longer to resist these violent attacks of impotent, futile rage, – these unending tortures; and all through you, Cecily, – fatal, adored Cecily! Will you ever know all the agonies I have borne on your account, and will you still haunt me with that mocking smile? Cecily, Cecily! Back to the fiends from whom you sprung, and drive me not to destruction!"

All at once a hasty knock was heard at the door of the apartment. Polidori immediately opened it, and perceived the principal clerk in the notary's office, who, pale and much agitated, exclaimed, "I must speak with M. Ferrand directly!"

"Hush!" answered Polidori, in a low tone, as he came forth from the room and shut the door after him; "he is very ill just now, and cannot be disturbed on any account."

"Then do you, sir, who are M. Ferrand's best and most intimate friend, step forward to help and assist him; but come quickly, for there is not an instant to be lost!"

"What has happened?"

"By M. Ferrand's orders, I went to-day to the house of the Countess Macgregor, to say that he was unable to wait on her to-day, according to her request. This lady, who seems quite out of danger at present, sent for me to her chamber; when I went in, she exclaimed, in an angry, threatening manner, 'Go back to M. Ferrand, and say to him that if he is not here in half an hour, or at least before the close of the day, he shall be arrested for felony. The child he passed off as dead is still living; I know into whose hands he gave her up, and I also know where she is at this present minute.'"

"This lady must be out of her senses," cried Polidori, shrugging up his shoulders. "Poor thing!"

"I should have thought so myself, but for the confident manner in which the countess spoke."

"I have no doubt but that her illness has affected her head; and persons labouring under any delusion are always impressed with the most perfect conviction of the truth of their fancies."

"I ought also to state that, just as I was leaving the room, one of the countess's female attendants entered all in a hurry, and said, 'His highness will be here in an hour's time!'"

"You are sure you heard those words?" asked Polidori.

"Quite, quite sure, sir! And I remember it the more, because I immediately began wondering in my own mind what highness she could mean."

"It is quite clear," said Polidori, mentally, "she expects the prince; but how comes that about? What strange course of events can have induced him to visit one he ought never again to meet? I know not why, but I greatly mistrust this renewal of intimacy. Our position, bad as it is, may even be rendered still worse by it." Then, addressing himself to the clerk, he added, "Depend upon it there is nothing of any consequence in the message you have brought; 'tis merely the effects of a wandering imagination on the part of the countess; but, to prevent your feeling any uneasiness, I promise to acquaint M. Ferrand with it directly he is well enough to converse upon any matter of business."

We shall now conduct the reader to the house of the Countess Sarah Macgregor.

CHAPTER II

RODOLPH AND SARAH

A salutary crisis had occurred, which relieved the Countess Macgregor from the delirium and suffering under which, for several days, her life had been despaired of.

The day had begun to break when Sarah, seated in a large easy chair, and supported by her brother, Thomas Seyton, was looking at herself in a mirror which one of her women on her knees held up before her. This was in the apartment where La Chouette had made the attempt to murder.

The countess was as pale as marble, and her pallor made her dark eyes, hair, and eyebrows even more striking; and she was attired in a dressing-gown of white muslin. "Give me my bandeau of coral," she said to one of her women, in a voice which, although weak, was imperious and abrupt.

"Betty will fasten it on for you," said Seyton; "you will exhaust yourself; you are already very imprudent."

"The bandeau, – the bandeau!" repeated Sarah, impatiently, who took this jewel and arranged it on her brow. "Now fasten it, and leave me!" she said to the women.

The instant they were retiring, she said, "Let M. Ferrand be shown into the little blue salon." Then she added, with ill-dissembled pride, "As soon as his royal highness the Grand Duke of Gerolstein comes, let him be introduced instantly to this apartment."

"At length," said Sarah, as soon as she was alone with her brother, "at length I trust this crown – the dream of my life: the prediction is on the eve of fulfilment!"

"Sarah, calm your excitement!" said her brother to her; "yesterday your life was despaired of, and to be again disappointed would deal you a mortal blow!"

"You are right, Thomas; the fall would be fearful, for my hopes were never nearer realisation! Of this I feel assured, for it was my constant thought of profiting by the overwhelming revelation which this woman made me at the moment of her assassination that prevented me from sinking under my sufferings."

"Again, Sarah, let me counsel you to beware of such insensate dreams, – the awaking would be terrible!"

"Insensate dreams! What, when Rodolph learns that this young girl, who is now locked up in St. Lazare, and formerly confided to the notary, who has passed her off for dead, is our child! Do you suppose that –"

Seyton interrupted his sister. "I believe," he said, bitterly, "that princes place reasons of state, political conveniences, before natural duties."

"Do you then rely so little on my address?"

"The prince is no longer the ingenuous and impassioned youth whom you attracted and swayed in other days; that time is long ago, both for him and for you, sister."

Sarah shrugged her shoulders, and said, "Do you know why I was desirous of placing this bandeau of coral in my hair, – why I put on this white dress? It is because the first time Rodolph saw me at the court of Gerolstein I was dressed in white, and wore this very bandeau of coral in my hair."

"What!" said Seyton, "you would awake those remembrances? Do you not rather fear their influence?"

"I know Rodolph better than you do. No doubt my features, changed by time and sufferings, are no longer those of the young girl of sixteen, whom he so madly loved, – only loved, for I was his first love; and that love, unique in the life of man, always leaves ineffaceable traces in the heart. Thus, then, brother, trust me that the sight of this ornament will awaken in Rodolph not only the recollection of his love, but those of his youth also; and for men these souvenirs are always sweet and precious."

"But these sweet and precious souvenirs will be united with others so terrible: the sinister *dénouement* of your love, the detestable behaviour of the prince's father to you, your obstinate silence to Rodolph. After your marriage with the Count Macgregor, he demanded his daughter, then an infant, – your child, – of whose death, ten years since, you informed him so coldly in your letter. Do you forget that from that period the prince has felt nothing but contempt and hatred for you?"

"Pity has replaced his hatred. Since he has learned that I am dying, he has sent the Baron de Graün every day to inquire after me; and just now he has promised to come here; and that is an immense concession, brother."

"He believes you dying, – that you desire a last adieu, – and so he comes. You were wrong not to write to him of the discovery you are about to disclose to him."

"I know why I do so. This discovery will fill him with surprise, joy, and I shall be present to profit by his first burst of softened feeling. To-day or never he will say to me, 'A marriage must legitimise the birth of our child!' If he says so, his word is sacred, and then will the hope of my life be realised!"

"Yes, if he makes you the promise."

"And that he may do so, nothing must be neglected under these decisive circumstances. I know Rodolph; and once having found his daughter, he will overcome his aversion for me, and will not retreat from any sacrifice to assure her the most enviable lot, to make her as entirely happy as she has been until now wretched."

"However brilliant the destiny he may assure to your daughter, there is, between the reparation to her and the resolution to marry you in order to legitimise the birth of this child, a very wide abyss."

"Her father will pass over this abyss."

"But this unfortunate child has, perhaps, been so vitiated by the misery in which she has lived that the prince, instead of feeling attracted towards her – "

"What are you saying?" cried Sarah, interrupting her brother. "Is she not as handsome, as a young girl, as she was a lovely infant? Rodolph, without knowing her, was so deeply interested in her as to take charge of her future destiny, and sent her to his farm at Bouqueval, whence we carried her off."

"Yes, thanks to your obstinacy in desiring to break all the ties of the prince's affection, in the foolish hope of one day leading him back to yourself!"

"And yet, but for this foolish hope, I should not have discovered, at the price of my life, the secret of my daughter's existence. Is it not through this woman, who had carried her off from the farm, that I have learned the infamous deceit of the notary, Ferrand?"

"It would have been better to have awaited the young creature's coming out of prison, before you sent to request the Grand Duke to come here."

"Awaited! And do I know that the salutary crisis in which I now am will last until to-morrow? Perhaps I am but momentarily sustained by my ambition only."

"What proofs have you for the prince, and will he believe you?"

"He will believe me when he reads the commencement of, the disclosure which I wrote from the dictation of that woman who stabbed me, – a disclosure of which I have, fortunately, forgotten no circumstance. He will believe me when he reads your correspondence with Madame Séraphin and Jacques Ferrand, as to the supposed death of the child; he will believe me when he hears the confession of the notary, who, alarmed at my threats, will come here immediately; he will believe me when he sees the portrait of my daughter at six years of age, a portrait which the woman told me was still a striking resemblance. So many proofs will suffice to convince the prince that I speak the truth, and to decide him as to his first impulse, which will make me almost a queen. Oh, if it were but for a day, I could die content!"

At this moment a carriage was heard to enter the courtyard.

"It is he! It is Rodolph!" exclaimed Sarah.

Thomas Seyton drew a curtain hastily aside, and replied, "Yes, it is the prince; he is just alighting from the carriage."

"Leave me! This is the decisive moment!" said Sarah, with unshaken coolness; for a monstrous ambition, a pitiless selfishness, had always been and still was the only moving spring of this woman. Even in the almost miraculous reappearance of her daughter, she only saw a means of at last arriving at the one end and aim of her whole existence.

Seyton said to her, "I will tell the prince how your daughter, believed dead, was saved. This conversation would be too dangerous for you, – a too violent emotion would kill you; and after so long a separation, the sight of the prince, the recollection of bygone times –"

"Your hand, brother!" replied Sarah. Then, placing on her impassive heart Tom Seyton's hand, she added, with an icy smile, "Am I excited?"

"No, no; not even a hurried pulsation," said Seyton, amazed. "I know not what control you have over yourself; but at such a moment, when it is for a crown or a coffin you play, your calmness amazes me!"

"And wherefore, brother? Till now, you know, nothing has made my heart beat hastily; and it will only throb when I feel the sovereign crown upon my brow. I hear Rodolph – leave me!"

When Rodolph entered the apartment, his look expressed pity; but, seeing Sarah seated in her armchair, and, as it were, full dressed, he recoiled in surprise, and his features became gloomy and mistrustful. The countess, guessing his thoughts, said to him, in a low and faint voice, "You thought to find me dying! You came to receive my last adieu!"

"I have always considered the last wishes of the dead as sacred, but it appears now as if there were some sacrilegious deceit –"

"Be assured," said Sarah, interrupting Rodolph, "be assured that I have not deceived you! I believe that I have but very few hours to live. Pardon me a last display of coquetry! I wished to spare you the gloomy symptoms that usually attend the dying hour, and to die attired as I was the first time I saw you. Alas, after ten years of separation, I see you once again! Thanks, oh, thanks! But in your turn give thanks to God for having inspired you with the thought of hearing my last prayer! If you had refused me, I should have carried my secret with me to the grave, which will now cause the joy, the happiness of your life, – joy, mingled with some sadness, happiness, mingled with some tears, like all human felicity; but this felicity you would yet purchase at the price of half the remainder of your existence!"

"What do you mean?" asked the prince, with great amazement.

"Yes, Rodolph, if you had not come, this secret would have followed me to the tomb! That would have been my sole vengeance. And yet, no, no! I shall not have the courage. Although you have made me suffer deeply, I yet must have shared with you that supreme happiness which you, more blessed than myself, will, I hope, long enjoy!"

"Madame, what does this mean?"

"When you know, you will be able to comprehend my slowness in informing you, for you will view it as a miracle from heaven; but, strange to say, I, who with a word can cause you pleasure greater than you have ever experienced, I experience, although the minutes of my life are counted, I experience an indefinable satisfaction at prolonging your expectation. And then, I know your heart; and in spite of the fierceness of your character, I fear, without preparation, to reveal to you so incredible a discovery. The emotions of overwhelming joy have also their dangers."

"Your paleness increases, you can scarcely repress your violent agitation," said Rodolph; "all this indicates something grave and solemn."

"Grave and solemn!" replied Sarah, in an agitated voice; for, in spite of her habitual impassiveness, when she reflected on the immense effect of the disclosure she was about to make to Rodolph, she was more troubled than she believed possible; and, unable any longer to restrain herself, she exclaimed, "Rodolph, our daughter lives!"

"Our daughter!"

"Lives, I say!"

These words, the accents of truth in which they were pronounced, shook the prince to his very heart. "Our child!" he repeated, going hurriedly to the chair in which Sarah was, "our child – my daughter!"

"Is not dead, I have irresistible proof; I know where she is; to-morrow you shall see her."

"My daughter! My daughter!" repeated Rodolph, with amazement. "Can it be that she lives?" Then, suddenly reflecting on the improbability of such an event, and fearing to be the dupe of some fresh treachery on Sarah's part, he cried, "No, no, it is a dream! Impossible! I know your ambition – of what you are capable – and I see through the drift of this proposed treachery!"

"Yes, you say truly; I am capable of all – everything! Yes, I desired to abuse you; some days before the mortal blow was struck, I sought to find out some young girl that I might present to you as our daughter. After this confession, you will perhaps believe me, or, rather, you will be compelled to credit irresistible evidence. Yes, Rodolph, I repeat I desired to substitute a young and obscure girl for her whom we both deplore; but God willed that at the moment when I was arranging this sacrilegious bargain, I should be almost fatally stabbed!"

"You – at this moment!"

"God so willed it that they should propose to me to play the part of falsehood – imagine whom? Our daughter!"

"Are you delirious, in heaven's name?"

"Oh, no, I am not delirious! In this casket, containing some papers and a portrait, which will prove to you the truth of what I say, you will find a paper stained with my blood!"

"Your blood!"

"The woman who told me that our daughter was still living declared to me this disclosure when she stabbed me with her dagger."

"And who was she? How did she know?"

"It was she to whom the child was confided when very young, after she had been declared dead."

"But this woman? Can she be believed? How did you know her?"

"I tell you, Rodolph, that this is all fated – providential! Some months ago you snatched a young girl from misery, to send her to the country. Jealousy and hatred possessed me. I had her carried off by the woman of whom I have been speaking."

"And they took the poor girl to St. Lazare?"

"Where she is still."

"She is there no longer. Ah, you do not know, madame, the fearful evil you have occasioned me by snatching the unfortunate girl away from the retreat in which I had placed her; but – "

"The young girl is no longer at St. Lazare!" cried Sarah, with dismay; "ah, what fearful news is this!"

"A monster of avarice had an interest in her destruction. They have drowned her, madame! But answer! You say that – "

"My daughter!" exclaimed Sarah, interrupting Rodolph, and standing erect, as straight and motionless as a statue of marble.

"What does she say? Good heaven!" cried Rodolph.

"My daughter!" repeated Sarah, whose features became livid and frightful in their despair. "They have murdered my daughter!"

"The Goualeuse your daughter!" uttered Rodolph, retreating with horror.

"The Goualeuse! Yes, that was the name which the woman they call the Chouette used. Dead – dead!" repeated Sarah, still motionless, with her eyes fixed. "They have killed her!"

"Sarah!" said Rodolph, as pale and as fearful to look upon as the countess; "be calm, – recover yourself, – answer me! The Goualeuse, – the young girl whom you had carried off by the Chouette from Bouqueval, – was she our daughter?"

"Yes. And they have killed her!"

"Oh, no, no; you are mad! It cannot be! You do not know! No, no; you cannot tell how fearful this would be! Sarah, be firm, – speak to me calmly, – sit down, – compose yourself! There are often resemblances, appearances which deceive if we are inclined to believe what we desire. I do not reproach you; but explain yourself to me, tell me all the reasons which induced you to think this; for it cannot be, – no, no, it cannot be, – it is not so!"

After a moment's pause, the countess collected her thoughts, and said to Rodolph, in a faltering voice, "Learning your marriage, and thinking of marrying myself, I could not keep our child with me; she was then four years of age."

"But at that time I begged her of you with prayers, entreaties," cried Rodolph, in a heartrending tone, "and my letters were unanswered; the only one you wrote to me announced her death!"

"I was desirous of avenging myself of your contempt by refusing your child. It was shameful; but hear me! I feel my life ebbs from me; this last blow has overcome me!"

"No, no, I do not believe you; I will not believe you! The Goualeuse my daughter! Oh, *mon Dieu!* You would not have this so!"

"Listen to me! When she was four years old, my brother charged Madame Séraphin, the widow of an old servant, to bring the child up until she was old enough to go to school. The sum destined to support our child was deposited by my brother with a notary, celebrated for his honesty. The letters of this man and Madame Séraphin, addressed at the time to me and my brother, are there, in the casket. At the end of a year they wrote me word that my daughter's health was failing, – eight months afterwards that she was dead, and they sent the register of her decease. At this time Madame Séraphin had entered the service of Jacques Ferrand, after having given our daughter over to the Chouette, through the medium of a wretch who is now at the galleys at Rochefort. I was writing down all this when the Chouette stabbed me. This paper is there also, with a portrait of our daughter when four years of age. Examine all, – letters, declaration, portrait, – and you who have seen her, the unhappy child, will judge – "

These words exhausted Sarah, and she fell fainting into her armchair.

Rodolph was thunderstruck at this disclosure. There are misfortunes so unforeseen, so horrible, that we try not to believe them until the overwhelming evidence compels us. Rodolph, persuaded of the death of Fleur-de-Marie, had but one hope, – that of convincing himself that she was not his daughter. With a frightful calmness that alarmed Sarah, he approached the table, opened the casket, and began to read the letters, examining with scrupulous attention the papers which accompanied them.

These letters, bearing the postmark, and dated, written to Sarah and her brother by the notary and Madame Séraphin, related to the infancy of Fleur-de-Marie, and the investment of the money destined for her. Rodolph could not doubt the authenticity of this correspondence.

The Chouette's declaration was confirmed by the particulars collected at Rodolph's desire, in which a felon named Pierre Tournemine, then at Rochefort, was described as the individual who had received Fleur-de-Marie from the hands of Madame Séraphin, for the purpose of giving her up to the Chouette, – the relentless tormentor of her early years, – and whom she afterwards so unexpectedly recognised when in company with Rodolph at the *tapis-franc* of the ogress.

The attestation of the child's death was duly drawn up and attested, but Ferrand himself had confessed to Cecily that it had merely been employed to obtain possession of a considerable sum of money due to the unfortunate infant, whose decease it so falsely recorded, and who had subsequently been drowned by his order while crossing to the Isle du Ravageur.

It was, therefore, with appalling conviction Rodolph learnt at once the double facts of the Goualeuse being his long-lost daughter, and of her having perished by a violent death. Unfortunately, everything seemed to give greater certitude to his belief, and to render further doubt impossible. Ere the prince could bring himself to place implicit credence in the self-condemnation of Jacques Ferrand, as conveyed in the notes furnished by him to Cecily, he had made the closest inquiries at Asnières, and had ascertained that two females, one old, the other young, dressed in the garb of countrywomen, had been drowned while crossing the river to the Isle du Ravageur, and that Martial was openly accused of having committed this fresh crime.

Let us add, in conclusion, that, despite the utmost care and attention on the part of Doctor Griffon, Count de Saint-Remy, and La Louve, Fleur-de-Marie was long ere she could be pronounced out of danger, and then so extreme was her exhaustion, both of body and mind, that she had been unfit for the least conversation, and wholly unequal to making any effort to apprise Madame Georges of her situation.

This coincidence of circumstances left the prince without the smallest shadow of hope; but had such even remained, it was doomed to disappear before a last and fatal proof of the reality of his misfortune. He, for the first time, ventured to cast his eyes towards the miniature he had received. The blow fell with stunning conviction on his heart; for in the exquisitely beautiful features it revealed, rich in all the infantine loveliness ascribed to cherubic innocence, he recognised the striking portrait of Fleur-de-Marie, – her finely chiselled nose, the lofty forehead, with the small, delicately formed mouth, even then wearing an expression of sorrowing tenderness. Alas! Had not Madame Séraphin well accounted for this somewhat uncommon peculiarity in an infant's face by saying, in a letter written by her to Sarah, which Rodolph had just perused, "The child is continually inquiring for its mother, and seems to grieve very much at not seeing her." There were also those large, soft, blue eyes, "the colour of a blue-bell," as the Chouette observed to Sarah, upon recognising in this miniature the features of the unfortunate creature she had so ruthlessly tormented as Pegriotte, and as a young girl under the appellation of La Goualeuse. At the sight of this picture the violent and tumultuous emotions of the prince were lost amid a flood of mingled tears and sighs.

While Rodolph thus indulged his bitter grief, the countenance of Sarah become powerfully agitated; she saw the last hope which had hitherto sustained her of realising the ambitious dreams of her life fade away at the very moment when she had expected their full accomplishment.

All at once Rodolph raised his head, dashed away his tears, and, rising from his chair, advanced towards Sarah with folded arms and dignified, determined air. After silently gazing on her for some moments, he said:

"'Tis fair and right it should be so! I raised my sword against my father's life, and I am stricken through my own child! The parricide is worthily punished for his sin! Then, listen to me, madame! 'Tis fit you should learn in this agonising moment all the evils which have been brought about by your insatiate ambition, your unprincipled selfishness! Listen, then, heartless and unfeeling wife, base and unnatural mother!"

"Mercy, mercy! Rodolph, pity me, and spare me!"

"There is no pity, there can be no pardon for such as you, who coldly trafficked in a love pure and sincere as was mine, with the assumed pretext of sharing a passion generous and devoted as was my own for you. There can be no pity for her who excites the son against the father, no pardon for the unnatural parent who, instead of carefully watching over the infancy of her child, abandons it to the care of vile mercenaries, in order to satisfy her grasping avarice by a rich marriage, as you formerly gratified your inordinate ambition by espousing me. No! There is no mercy, pity, or pardon for one who, like yourself, first refuses my child to all my prayers and entreaties, and afterwards, by a series of profane and vile machinations, causes her death! May Heaven's curse light on you, as mine does, thou evil genius of myself and all belonging to me!"

"He has no relenting pity in his heart! He is deaf to all my appeals! Wretched woman that I am! Oh, leave me – leave me – I beseech!"

"Nay, you shall hear me out! Do you remember our last meeting, now seventeen years ago? You were unable longer to conceal the consequences of our secret marriage, which, like you, I believed indissoluble. I well knew the inflexible character of my father, as well as the political marriage he wished me to form; but braving alike his displeasure and its results, I boldly declared to him that you were my wife before God and man, and that ere long you would bring into the world a proof of our love. My father's rage was terrible; he refused to believe in our union. Such startling opposition to his will appeared to him impossible; and he threatened me with his heaviest displeasure if I presumed again to insult his ear by the mention of such folly. I then loved you with a passion bordering on madness. Led away by your wiles and artifices, I believed your cold, stony heart felt a reciprocity of tenderness for me, and I therefore unhesitatingly replied that I never would call any woman wife but yourself. At these words his fury knew no bounds. He heaped on you the most insulting epithets, exclaiming that the marriage I talked of was null and void, and that to punish you for your presumption in daring even to think of such a thing, he would have you publicly exposed in the pillory of the city. Yielding alike to the violence of my mad passion, and the impetuosity of my disposition, I presumed to forbid him, who was at once my parent and my sovereign, speaking thus disrespectfully of one I loved far beyond my own life, and I even went so far as to threaten him if he persisted in so doing. Exasperated at my conduct, my father struck me. Blinded by rage, I drew my sword, and threw myself on him with deadly fury. Happily the intervention of Murphy turned away the blow, and saved me from being as much a parricide in deed as I was in intention. Do you hear me, madame? A parricide! And in your defence!"

"Alas! I knew not this misfortune."

"In vain have I sought to expiate my crime. This blow to-day is sent by Heaven's avenging hand to repay my heavy crime."

"But have I not sufficiently suffered from the inveterate enmity of your father, who dissolved our marriage? Wherefore add to my misery by doubts of the sincerity of my affection for you?"

"Wherefore?" exclaimed Rodolph, darting on her looks of the most withering contempt. "Learn now my reasons, and cease to wonder at the loathing horror with which you inspire me. After the fatal scene in which I had threatened the life of my father, I surrendered my sword, and was kept in the closest confinement. Polidori, through whose instrumentality our union had been effected, was arrested; and he distinctly proved that our marriage had never been legally contracted, the minister, as well as the other persons concerned in its solemnisation, being merely creatures tutored and bribed by him; so that both you, your brother, and myself, were equally deceived. The more effectually to turn away my father's wrath from himself, Polidori did still more; he gave up one of your letters to your brother, which he had managed to intercept during a journey taken by Seyton."

"Heavens! Can it be possible?"

"Can you now account for my contempt and aversion towards you?"

"Too, too well!"

"In this letter you developed your ambitious projects with unblushing effrontery. Me you spoke of with the utmost indifference, treating me but as the blind instrument by which you should arrive at the princely station predicted for you. You expressed your opinion that my father had already lived long enough, – perhaps too long; and hinted at probabilities and possibilities too horrible to repeat!"

"Alas! All is now but too apparent. I am lost for ever!"

"And yet to protect you, I had even menaced my father's existence!"

"When he next visited me, and, without uttering one word of reproach, put into my hands your letter, every line of which more clearly revealed the black enormity of your nature, I could but kneel before him and entreat his pardon. But from that hour I have been a prey to the deepest, the most acute remorse. I immediately quitted Germany for the purpose of travelling, with the intent, if possible, of

expiating my guilt; and this self-imposed task I shall continue while I live. To reward the good, to punish the evil-doer, relieve those who suffer, penetrate into every hideous corner where vice holds her court, for the purpose of rescuing some unfortunate creatures from the destruction into which they have fallen, – such is the employment I have marked out for myself."

"It is a noble and holy task, – one worthy of being performed by you."

"If I speak of this sacred vow," said Rodolph, disdainfully, "it is not to draw down your approbation or praise. But hearken to what remains to be told; I have lately arrived in France, and I wished not to let my great purpose of continual expiatory acts stand still during my sojourn in this country. While I sought then to succour those of good reputation, who were in unmerited distress, I was also desirous of knowing that class of miserable beings who are beaten down, trampled under feet, and brutalised by want and wretchedness, well knowing that timely help, a few kind and encouraging words, may frequently have power to save a lost creature from the abyss into which he is falling. In order to be an eye-witness of the circumstances under which my work of expiation would be useful, I assumed the dress and appearance of those I wished to mix with. It was during one of these exploring adventures that I first encountered – " Then, as though shuddering at the idea of so terrible a disclosure, Rodolph, after a momentary hesitation, added, "No, no; I have not courage to finish the dreadful story!"

"For the love of heaven, tell me what horror have you now to unfold?"

"You will hear it but too soon! But," added he, with sarcastic bitterness, "you seem to take so lively an interest in past events that I cannot refrain from relating to you a few events which preceded my return to France. After passing some time in my travels, I returned to Germany, filled with a spirit of obedience to my father, by whose desire I espoused a princess of Prussia. During my absence you had been banished from the Grand Duchy. Subsequently, learning your marriage with Count Macgregor, I again entreated you to allow me to have my child. To this earnest request no answer was returned; nor could my strictest inquiries ever discover whither you had sent the unfortunate infant, for whom my father had made a handsome provision. About ten years ago I received a letter from you, stating that our child was dead. Would to God your information had been correct, and that she had indeed rendered up her innocent life at that tender age! I should then have been spared the deep, incurable anguish which must for ever embitter my life!"

"I cease now to wonder," said Sarah, in a feeble voice, "at the disgust and aversion with which I seem to have inspired you; and I feel, too surely, that I shall not survive this last blow. You are right; pride and ambition have been my ruin. Ignorant of the just causes you had to hate and despise me, my former hopes returned with greater force than ever. Our mutual widowhood inspired me with a still stronger belief in the prediction which promised me a crown; and when, by singular chance, I again found my daughter, it appeared to me as though the hand of Providence had bestowed this unhopèd-for good fortune on me to further my so long cherished plans. Yes, I will confess that I went so far as to persuade myself that, spite of the aversion you entertained for me, you would bestow on me your name, and that, out of regard for your child, you would accept me as your wife, if but to elevate her to the rank to which she is entitled."

"Then let your execrable ambition be satisfied, and punished as it deserves; for, spite of the abhorrence I now hold you in, I would, out of love for my child, or, rather, from a deep pity for its early sorrows, – I would, although firmly determined always to live apart from you, by a marriage which should have legitimised my daughter, have rendered her future lot as brilliant and exalted as her past life has been wretched."

"I had not, then, deceived myself? Oh, misery! To think it is now too late!"

"Oh, I am well aware it is not your child you regret, but the loss of that rank you have so eagerly and obstinately striven to obtain. May your unfeeling and disgraceful regrets pursue you to your grave!"

"Then they will not long torment me; for I feel I shall not long survive this final ending of all my ambitious schemes."

"But ere your existence closes, it is but fair and just you should be made aware what sort of life your poor deserted child's has been. Do you recollect the night on which you and your brother followed me into a den in the Cité?"

"Perfectly! But why this question? It freezes me with horror; your looks fill me with dread!"

"As you approached this low haunt of vice, you saw – did you not? – standing at the corners of the low streets with which that neighbourhood abounds, groups of poor, unfortunate, guilty creatures, who – who – But I cannot finish the dreadful tale!" cried Rodolph, concealing his face with his hands. "I dare not proceed; my own words affright me!"

"As they do me! What more have I to learn?"

"You saw them, I ask, – did you not?" resumed Rodolph, making a powerful struggle to overcome his emotion. "You observed these base and degraded creatures, the shame and disgrace of their own sex? But did you remark among them a young girl of about sixteen years of age, lovely as an angel, – a poor child, who, amid the infamy in which she had lived during the last few weeks, still retained a look so pure, so innocent, and good that even the ruffians by whom she was surrounded called her Fleur-de-Marie? Did you observe this, – this fair, this interesting being? Answer, – answer, – tender, exemplary mother!"

"No!" answered Sarah, almost mechanically; "I did not observe the young person you speak of." But the teeth rattled in Sarah's head as she spoke, and her whole frame seemed oppressed with a vague though fearful dread of coming evil.

"Indeed!" cried Rodolph, with a sardonic smile. "Indeed! I am surprised at that! Well, I did remark, and upon the following occasion. Listen attentively to what I am about to relate! During one of the exploring excursions I before spoke of, I found myself in the Cité, not far from the den to which you followed me. A man was just going to beat one of the unfortunate creatures who herd together there; I interposed, and saved her from his brutal rage. Now then, careful, kind, and anxious mother, tell me, if you can, whom it was I saved! Can you not guess? Speak! Say your heart whispers to you who was the miserable being I found in this sink of wickedness and pollution! You know, do you not, without my assistance?"

"No, no, – I cannot say! I beseech you to go – and leave me to my thoughts!"

"Then I will tell you who the wretched, trembling creature I thus saved from brutal violence was. Her name was Fleur-de-Marie!"

"Merciful powers!"

"And is it possible that you, most irreproachable of mothers, that you cannot divine who Fleur-de-Marie was?"

"Be merciful, and kill me; but torture me not thus!"

"She was your daughter – known as the Goualeuse!" cried Rodolph, with almost frantic violence. "Yes, the helpless girl I rescued from the hands of a felon was my own, my lost child! – the offspring of Rodolph of Gerolstein! Oh, there was in this meeting with a daughter I unconsciously saved a visible interposition of the hand of Providence! It brought a blessing to the man who had striven so earnestly to succour his fellow men, and it conveyed a well-merited chastisement for the impious wretch who had dared to aim at his father's life!"

"Alas!" murmured Sarah, falling back in her armchair, and concealing her face with her hands, "my destiny is accomplished! I die, carrying with me out of the world the curse both of God and man!"

"And when," continued Rodolph, with much difficulty restraining his resentment, and vainly striving to repress the sobs which from time to time interrupted his voice, "when I had released her from the ill-usage with which she was menaced, struck with the indescribable sweetness of her voice and manner, as well as by the angelic expression of her lovely countenance, I found it impossible to abandon the interest she excited in me. I led her on to tell me the history of her life, made up of

neglect, grief, and misery. With what simple eloquence did she express the yearnings of a heart that had never expanded into virtue beneath a mother's fostering care after a life of innocence, and how touchingly did she dwell on the the destitution which had led her where she was! Ah, madame, to have brought down your pride and haughtiness, you should have listened as I did while your daughter described her early years as passed in shivering beggary, soliciting charity in the streets all day, and at night, when the cold winter's wind pierced through the few rags she wore, creeping to her bed of straw strewn in the corner of a wretched garret; and when the horrible old hag who tortured her had exhausted every other means of inflicting pain on her, what do you think she did, madame? Why, wrenched out her teeth! And all this starving and desolation was experienced by your own child, while you were revelling in every sort of luxury, and indulging in ambitious dreams of sharing a crown!"

"Oh, that I could die, and so escape the direful agony I suffer!"

"Nay you have more to hear! Escaping from the hands of the Chouette, wandering about, penniless and starving, at the tender age of only ten years she was taken up as a vagabond, and as such thrown into prison. And yet, madame, that period was the happiest your poor deserted child had ever known. And each night, though surrounded by her prison walls, she gratefully thanked God that she no longer suffered from hunger, thirst, or blows. It was in a prison she passed those years so precious to the well-being of a young female, those years over which a good and affectionate mother so carefully and anxiously watches. As her sixteenth year commenced, your daughter, instead of being surrounded by the tender solicitude of loving relatives, and enriched with all the gifts of education, had seen and known nothing more edifying or elevated than the brutal indifference of her gaolers. Yet this naturally pure-minded, beautiful, and ingenuous creature was at that dangerous moment sent forth from her safe asylum – a gaol – and left to wander unaided and unprotected in a world of which she knew so little! Unfortunate, deserted, friendless child!" continued Rodolph, giving free vent to the swelling sobs which had continually impeded his voice, "yours was, indeed, a bitter lot, thrown thus young and helpless amid the mire and pollution of a great city!

"Ah, madame!" cried he, addressing Sarah, "however cold, hard, and selfish your heart may be, you could not have refrained from weeping at the recital of your poor, neglected child's misery and privations! Poor, hapless girl! Sullied, but not corrupted; chaste in heart even amid the degradation into which she had fallen; for each word she uttered breathed the most unfeigned horror and disgust at the mode of life to which she was so fatally condemned. Oh, could you but have known what delicate thoughts, what noble, high-minded inspirations were betrayed in her every word and action! How good, how feeling, how innately charitable was her nature! For it was to relieve a degree of misery even greater than her own that she exhausted the small sum of money she had received on quitting her prison, and which, while it lasted, formed her only defence from the abyss of infamy into which she was afterwards plunged; for there came a time, – a hideous time, when, without employment, food, or shelter, some horrible women found her almost perishing from weakness and want of support. Under pretence of aiding her, they took her to their guilty haunts, administered intoxicating drugs, and – and – "

Rodolph could proceed no further. He uttered a distracting cry, and exclaimed, "And this was my child!"

"May Heaven's punishment be on me for what I have done!" said Sarah, hiding her face as though she feared to meet the light of day.

"Ay!" exclaimed Rodolph. "And it will assuredly cling to you all your life, and haunt even your dying pillow; for it is your neglect and abandonment of all a mother's most sacred duties which have led to all these horrors. Accursed may you ever be for your double wickedness towards your unoffending child! For even after I had succeeded in removing her from the guilt and pollution by which she was surrounded, and had placed her in a safe and peaceful asylum, you set your vile accomplices on to tear her thence! My curse be for ever on you! For it was owing to your causing her to be forcibly carried off which threw her back into the power of Jacques Ferrand."

As Rodolph pronounced this name he suddenly stopped and shuddered. The features of the prince assumed an expression of concentrated rage and hatred impossible to describe; mute and motionless he stood, as though crushed to the earth by the reflection that the murderer of his child was still in existence.

Spite of the increasing weakness of Sarah and the agitation caused by this interview with Rodolph, she was so much struck with his threatening aspect that she faintly exclaimed:

"In mercy say what fresh idea has taken possession of your mind?"

"No, no," responded Rodolph, as though speaking to himself; "till now I thought to spare this monster, believing a life of enforced charity would be to him one of never ending torment. Now I must revenge my infant child, delivered up by him to want and misery! I have to wash out the stain of my daughter's infamy, caused by his diabolical villainy and cupidity; and his blood alone will serve to wipe out that foul wrong! Yes, he dies – and by my hand!" And, with these words, the prince sprang forward to the door.

"Whither are you going?" cried Sarah, extending her supplicating hands towards Rodolph. "Oh, leave me not to die alone – "

"Alone? Oh, no! Fear not to die alone! The spectre of the innocent child, doomed by you to an early grave, will bear you company."

Exhausted and alarmed, Sarah uttered a scream, as though she really beheld the phantom of her child, exclaiming, "Forgive me! I am dying!"

"Die then, accursed woman!" shouted Rodolph, wild with fury. "Now I must have the life of your accomplice, for it was you who delivered your child to this monster!"

And hastening from the apartment, Rodolph ordered himself to be rapidly driven to the residence of Jacques Ferrand.

CHAPTER III

LOVE'S FRENZY

It was nightfall when Rodolph went to the notary's. The pavilion occupied by Jacques Ferrand was plunged in the deepest obscurity; the wind roared and the rain fell as it did on the terrible night when Cecily, before she quitted the notary's abode for ever, had excited the passions of that man to frenzy. Extended on his bed, feebly lighted up by a lamp, Jacques Ferrand was dressed in a black coat and waistcoat. One of the sleeves of his shirt was tucked up and spotted with blood; a ligature of red cloth, which was to be seen on his nervous arm, announced that he had been bled by Polidori, who, standing near his bed, leaned one hand on the couch, and seemed to watch his accomplice's features with uneasiness. Nothing could be more frightfully hideous than was Jacques Ferrand, whilst plunged in that somnolent torpor which usually succeeds violent crises. Of an ashy paleness, his face was bedewed with a cold sweat, and his closed eyelids were so swollen, so injected with blood, that they appeared like two red balls in the centre of his cadaverous countenance.

"Another such an attack and he is a dead man!" exclaimed Polidori, in a low voice. "All the writers on this subject have agreed that all who are attacked by this strange and frightful malady usually sink under it on the seventh day, and it is now six days since that infernal creole kindled the inextinguishable flame which is consuming this man." After some minutes of further meditation, Polidori left the bedside and walked slowly up and down the chamber.

The tempest was still raging without, and fell with such fury on this dilapidated house as to shake it to its centre. Despite his audacity and wickedness, Polidori was superstitious, and dark forebodings came over him; he felt an undefinable uneasiness. In order to dissipate his gloomy thoughts, he again examined Ferrand's features.

"Now," he said, leaning over him, "his eyelids are injected. It would seem as though his blood flowed thither and stagnated. No doubt his sight will now present, as his hearing did just now, some remarkable appearance! What agonies now they endure! How they vary! Oh," he added, with a bitter smile, "when nature determines on being cruel and playing the part of a tormentor, she defies all the efforts of man; and thus in this illness, caused by an erotic frenzy, she submits every sense to unheard-of, superhuman tortures."

The storm still howled without, and Polidori, throwing himself into an armchair, exclaimed, "What a night! What a night! Nothing could be worse for Jacques's present state. Yes," he continued, "the prince is pitiless, and it would have been a thousand times better for Ferrand to have allowed his head to fall upon a scaffold; better fire, the wheel, molten lead, which burns and eats into the flesh, than the miserable punishment he endures! As I see him suffer I begin to feel affright for my own fate! What will become of me? What is in reserve for me as the accomplice of Jacques? To be his gaoler will not suffice for the prince's vengeance. Perhaps a perpetual imprisonment in the prisons of Germany awaits me! But that is better than death! Yet I know that the prince's word is sacred! But I, who have so often violated all laws, human and divine, dare I invoke a sworn promise? Inasmuch as it was to my interest that Jacques should not escape, so will it be equally my interest to prolong his days. But his symptoms grow worse and worse; nothing but a miracle can save him. What is to be done? What is to be done?"

At this moment, a crash without, occasioned by the fall of a stack of chimneys, roused Jacques Ferrand, and he turned on his bed.

Polidori became more and more under the influence of the vague terror which had seized on him. "It is folly to believe in presentments," he said, in a troubled voice; "but the night seems to me very appalling!"

A heavy groan from the notary attracted Polidori's attention. "He is awaking from his torpor," he said, approaching his bed very quietly; "perhaps another crisis may ensue!"

"Polidori!" muttered Jacques Ferrand, still extended on the bed, and with his eyes closed. "Polidori, what noise was that?"

"A chimney that fell," replied Polidori, in a low voice, fearing to strike too loudly on the hearing of his accomplice. "A fearful tempest shakes the house to its foundation; it is a horrible night!"

The notary did not hear, and replied, turning away his head, "Polidori, you are not there, then?"

"Yes, yes, I am here," said Polidori, in a louder voice; "but I answered gently for fear of giving you pain."

"No; I hear you now without any pain such as I had just now, for then it seemed as if the least noise burst like thunder on my brain. And yet in the midst of it all, – of these horrible sufferings, – I distinguish the thrilling voice of Cecily, who was calling to me – "

"Still that infernal woman! But drive away these thoughts, – they will kill you."

"These thoughts are life to me, and, like my life, they resist all tortures."

"Madman that you are, it is these thoughts that cause your tortures! Your illness is your sensual frenzy, which has attained its utmost height. Once again, drive from your brain these thoughts or you will die."

"Drive away these thoughts!" cried Ferrand. "Oh, never, never! When my pains give me one moment's repose, Cecily, the demon whom I cherish and curse, rises before my eyes!"

"What incredible fury! It frightens me!"

"There, – now!" said the notary, with a harsh voice, and his eyes fixed on a dark corner of the room. "I see now the outline of an obscure and white form; there – there!" and he extended his hairy and bony finger in the direction of his sight. "There, – there she is!"

"Jacques, this is death to you!"

"Yes, I see her!" continued Ferrand, with his teeth clenched, and not replying to Polidori. "There she is! And how beautiful! How her black hair floats gracefully down her shoulders, and her small white teeth, shining between her half opened lips, – her lips so red and humid! What pearls! And how her black eyes sparkle and die! Cecily," he added, with inexpressible excitement, "I adore you!"

"Jacques, do not excite yourself with such visions!"

"It is not a vision."

"Mind, mind! Just now, you know, you imagined you heard this woman's love-songs, and your hearing was suddenly smitten with horrible agony. Mind, I say!"

"Leave me, – leave me! What is the use of hearing but to hear, of seeing but to see?"

"But the tortures which follow, miserable wretch!"

"I will brave them all for a deceit, as I have braved death for a reality; and to me this burning image is reality. Ah, Cecily, you are beautiful! Yet why torture me thus? Would you kill me? Ah, execrable fury, cease, – cease, or I will strangle thee!" cried the notary, in delirium.

"You kill yourself, unhappy man!" exclaimed Polidori, shaking the notary violently, in order to rouse him from his excitement. In vain; Jacques continued:

"Oh, beloved queen, demon of delight, never did I see – " The notary could not finish; he uttered a sudden cry of pain and threw himself back.

"What is it?" inquired Polidori, with astonishment.

"Put out that candle – it shines too brightly. I cannot endure it – it blinds me!"

"What!" said Polidori, more and more surprised. "There is but one lamp covered with its shade, and that shines very feebly."

"I tell you, the light increases here. Now, again – again! Oh, it is too much; it is intolerable!" added Jacques Ferrand, closing his eyes with an expression of increasing suffering.

"You are mad – the room is scarcely lighted. I tell you, open your eyes and you will see."

"Open my eyes! Why, I shall be blinded by torrents of burning light, with which this room is filled. Here! There! On all sides, there are rays of fire – millions of dazzling scintillations!" cried the notary, sitting up. And then again shrieking, he lifted both his hands to his eyes: "But I am blind; this burning fire is through my closed lids, – it burns – devours me! Ah, now my hands shield me a little! But put out the light, for it throws an infernal flame!"

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