CHAMBERS ROBERT WILLIAM

IN THE QUARTER

Robert Chambers

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Содержание

Robert W. Chambers
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One

One evening in May, 1888, the Café des Écoles was even more crowded and more noisy than usual. The marble-topped tables were wet with beer and the din was appalling. Someone shouted to make himself heard.

``Any more news from the Salon?''

``Yes,'' said Elliott, ``Thaxton's in with a number three. Rhodes is out and takes it hard. Clifford's out too, and takes it – ''

A voice began to chant:

Je n'sais comment faire,
  Comment concillier
Ma maitresse et mon père,
  Le Code et Bullier.

``Drop it! Oh, drop it!'' growled Rhodes, and sent a handful of billiard chalk at the singer.

Mr Clifford returned a volley of the Café spoons, and continued:

Mais c'que je trouve de plus bête,
  C'est qu' i' faut financer
Avec ma belle galette,
  J'aimerai mieux m'amuser.

Several other voices took up the refrain, lamenting the difficulty of reconciling their filial duties with balls at Bullier's, and protesting that they would rather amuse themselves than consider financial questions. Rhodes sipped his curaçoa sulkily.

``The longer I live in the Latin Quarter,'' he said to his neighbor, ``the less certain I feel about a place of future punishment. It would be so tame after this.'' Then, reverting to his grievance, he added, ``The slaughter this year at the Salon is awful.''

Reginald Gethryn stirred nervously but did not speak.

``Have a game, Rex?'' called Clifford, waving a cue.

Gethryn shook his head, and reaching for a soiled copy of the *Figaro,* glanced listlessly over its contents. He sighed and turned his paper impatiently. Rhodes echoed the sigh.

``What's at the theaters?''

``Same as last week, excepting at the Gaieté. They've put on `La Belle Hélène' there.''

``Oh! Belle Hélène!'' cried Clifford.

Tzing! la! la! Tzing! la! la!
  C'est avec ces dames qu' Oreste
Fait danser l'argent de Papa!

Rhodes began to growl again.

``I shouldn't think you'd feel like gibbering that rot tonight.''

Clifford smiled sweetly and patted him on the head. ``Tzing! la! la! My shot, Elliott?''

``Tzing! la! la!'' laughed Thaxton, ``That's Clifford's biography in three words.''

Clifford repeated the refrain and winked impudently at the pretty bookkeeper behind her railing. She, alas! returned it with a blush.

Gethryn rose restlessly and went over to another table where a man, young, but older than himself, sat, looking comfortable.

``Braith,'' he began, trying to speak indifferently, ``any news of my fate?''

The other man finished his beer and then answered carelessly, ``No.'' But catching sight of Gethryn's face he added, with a laugh:

``Look here, Rex, you've got to stop this moping.''

``I'm not moping,'' said Rex, coloring up.

``What do you call it, then?'' Braith spoke with some sharpness, but continued kindly, ``You know I've been through it all. Ten years ago, when I sent in my first picture, I confess to you I suffered the torments of the damned until – ''

``Until?''

``Until they sent me my card. The color was green.''

``But I thought a green card meant `not admitted.'''

``It does. I received three in three years.''

``Do you mean you were thrown out three years in succession?''

Braith knocked the ashes out of his pipe. ``I gave up smoking for those three years.''

``You?''

Braith filled his pipe tenderly. ``I was very poor,'' he said.

``If I had half your sand!'' sighed Rex.

``You have, and something more that the rest of us have not. But you are very young yet.''

This time Gethryn colored with surprise and pleasure. In all their long and close friendship Braith had never before given him any other encouragement than a cool, ``Go ahead!''

He continued: ``Your curse thus far has been want of steady application, and moreover you're too easily scared. No matter what happens this time, no knocking under!''

``Oh, I'm not going to knock under. No more is Clifford, it seems,'' Rex added with a laugh, as Clifford threw down his cue and took a step of the devil's quadrille.

``Oh! Elliott!'' he crowed, ``what's the matter with you?''

Elliott turned and punched a sleepy waiter in the ribs.

``Emile – two bocks!''

The waiter jumped up and rubbed his eyes. ``What is it, monsieur?'' he snapped.

Elliott repeated the order and they strolled off toward a table. As Clifford came lounging by, Carleton said, ``I hear you lead with a number one at the Salon.''

``Right, I'm the first to be fired.''

``He's calm now,'' said Elliott, ``but you should have seen him yesterday when the green card came.''

``Well, yes. I discoursed a little in several languages.''

``After he had used up his English profanity, he called the Jury names in French, German and Spanish. The German stuck, but came out at last like a cork out of a bottle – ''

``Or a bung out of a barrel.''

``These comparisons are as offensive as they are unjust,'' said Clifford.

``Quite so,'' said Braith. ``Here's the waiter with your beer.''

``What number did you get, Braith?'' asked Rhodes, who couldn't keep his mind off the subject and made no pretense of trying.

``Three,'' answered Braith.

There was a howl, and all began to talk at once.

``There's justice for you!'' ``No justice for Americans!'' ``Serves us right for our tariff!'' ``Are Frenchmen going to give us all the advantages of their schools and honors besides while we do all we can to keep their pictures out of our markets?''

``No, we don't, either! Tariff only keeps out the sweepings of the studios – ''

``If there were no duty on pictures the States would be flooded with trash.''

``Take it off!'' cried one.

``Make it higher!'' shouted another.

``Idiots!'' growled Rhodes. ``Let 'em flood the country with bad work as well as good. It will educate the people, and the day will come when all good work will stand an equal chance – be it French or be it American.''

``True,'' said Clifford, ``Let's all have a bock. Where's Rex?''

But Gethryn had slipped out in the confusion. Quitting the Café des Écoles, he sauntered across the street, and turning through the Rue de Vaugirard, entered the rue Monsieur le Prince. He crossed the dim courtyard of his hôtel, and taking a key and a candle from the lodge of the Concierge, started to mount the six flights to his bedroom and studio. He felt irritable and fagged, and it did not make matters better when he found, on reaching his own door, that he had taken the wrong key. Nor did it ease his mind to fling the key over the banisters into the silent stone hallway below. He leaned sulkily over the railing and listened to it ring and clink down into the darkness, and then, with a brief but vigorous word, he turned and forced in his door with a crash. Two bull pups which had flown at him with portentous growls and yelps of menace now gamboled idiotically about him, writhing with anticipation of caresses, and a gray and scarlet parrot, rudely awakened, launched forth upon a musical effort resembling the song of a rusty cart-wheel.

``Oh, you infernal bird!'' murmured the master, lighting his candle with one hand and fondling the pups with the other. ``There, there, puppies, run away!'' he added, rolling the ecstatic pups into a sort of dog divan, where they curled themselves down at last and subsided with squirms and wriggles, gurgling affection.

Gethryn lighted a lamp and then a cigarette. Then, blowing out the candle, he sat down with a sigh. His eyes fell on the parrot. It annoyed him that the parrot should immediately turn over and look at him upside down. It also annoyed him that ``Satan,'' an evil-looking raven, was evidently preparing to descend from his perch and worry ``Mrs Gummidge.''

``Mrs Gummidge'' was the name Clifford had given to a large sad-eyed white tabby who now lay dozing upon a panther skin.

``Satan!'' said Gethryn. The bird checked his sinister preparations and eyed his master. ``Don't,'' said the young man.

Satan weighed his chances and came to the conclusion that he could swoop down, nip Mrs Gummidge, and get back to his bust of Pallas without being caught. He tried it, but his master was too quick for him, and foiled, he lay sullenly in Gethryn's hands, his two long claws projecting helplessly between the brown fists of his master.

``Oh, you fiend!'' muttered Rex, taking him toward a wicker basket, which he hated. ``Solitary confinement for you, my boy.''

``Double, double, toil and trouble,'' croaked the parrot.

Gethryn started nervously and shut him inside the cage, a regal gilt structure with ``Shakespeare'' printed over the door. Then, replacing the agitated Gummidge on her panther skin, he sat down once more and lighted another cigarette.

His picture. He could think of nothing else. It was a serious matter with Gethryn. Admitted to the Salon meant three more years' study in Paris. Failure, and back he must go to New York.

The personal income of Reginald Gethryn amounted to the magnificent sum of two hundred and fifty dollars. To this, his aunt, Miss Celestia Gethryn, added nine hundred and fifty dollars more. This gave him a sum of twelve hundred dollars a year to live on and study in Paris. It was not a large

sum, but it was princely when compared to the amount on which many a talented fellow subsists, spending his best years in a foul atmosphere of paint and tobacco, ill fed, ill clothed, scarcely warmed at all, often sick in mind and body, attaining his first scant measure of success just as his overtaxed powers give way.

Gethryn's aunt, his only surviving relative, had recently written him one of her ponderous letters. He took it from his pocket and began to read it again, for the fourth time.

> You have now been in Paris three years, and as yet I have seen no results. You should be earning your own living, but instead you are still dependent upon me. You are welcome to all the assistance I can give you, in reason, but I expect that you will have something to show for all the money I expend upon you. Why are you not making a handsome income and a splendid reputation, like Mr Spinder?

The artist named was thirty-five and had been in Paris fifteen years. Gethryn was twenty-two and had been studying three years.

> Why are you not doing beautiful things, like Mr Mousely? I'm told he gets a thousand dollars for a little sketch.

Rex groaned. Mr Mousely could neither draw nor paint, but he made stories of babies' deathbeds on squares of canvas with china angels solidly suspended from the ceiling of the nursery, pointing upward, and he gave them titles out of the hymnbook, which caused them to be bought with eagerness by all the members of the congregation to which his family belonged.

The letter proceeded:

> I am told by many reliable persons that three years abroad is more than enough for a thorough art education. If no results are attained at the end of that time, there is only one of two conclusions to be drawn. Either you have no talent, or you are wasting your time. I shall wait until the next Salon before I come to a decision. If then you have a picture accepted and if it shows no trace of the immorality which is rife in Paris, I will continue your allowance for three years more; this, however, on condition that you have a picture in the Salon each year. If you fail again this year, I shall insist upon your coming home at once.

Why Gethryn should want to read this letter four times, when one perusal of it had been more than enough, no one, least of all himself, could have told. He sat now crushing it in is hand, tasting all the bitterness that is stored up for a sensitive artist tied by fate to an omniscient Philistine who feeds his body with bread and his soul with instruction about art and behavior.

Presently he mastered the black mood which came near being too much for him, his face cleared and he leaned back, quietly smoking. From the rug rose a muffled rumbling where Mrs Gummidge dozed in peace. The clock ticked sharply. A mouse dropped silently from the window curtain and scuttled away unmarked.

The pups lay in a soft heap. The parrot no longer hung head downward, but rested in his cage in a normal position, one eye fixed steadily on Gethryn, the other sheathed in a bluish-white eyelid, every wrinkle of which spoke scorn of men and things.

For some time Gethryn had been half-conscious of a piano sounding on the floor below. It suddenly struck him now that the apartment under his, which had been long vacant, must have found an occupant.

``Idiots!'' he grumbled. ``Playing at midnight! That will have to stop. Singing too! We'll see about that!''

The singing continued, a girl's voice, only passably trained, but certainly fresh and sweet.

Gethryn began to listen, reluctantly and ungraciously. There was a pause. ``Now she's going to stop. It's time,'' he muttered. But the piano began again – a short prelude which he knew, and the voice was soon in the midst of the Dream Song from ``La Belle Hélène.''

Gethryn rose and walked to his window, threw it open and leaned out. An April night, soft and delicious. The air was heavy with perfume from the pink and white chestnut blossoms. The roof dripped with moisture. Far down in the dark court the gas-jets flickered and flared. From the distance came the softened rumble of a midnight cab, which, drawing nearer and nearer and passing the hôtel with a rollicking rattle of wheels and laughing voices, died away on the smooth pavement by the Luxembourg Gardens. The voice had stopped capriciously in the middle of the song. Gethryn turned back into the room whistling the air. His eye fell on Satan sitting behind his bars in crumpled malice.

``Poor old chap,'' laughed the master, ``want to come out and hop around a bit? Here, Gummidge, we'll remove temptation out of his way,'' and he lifted the docile tabby, who increased the timbre of her song to an ecstatic squeal at his touch, and opening his bedroom door, gently deposited her on his softest blankets. He then reinstated the raven on his bust of Pallas, and Satan watched him from thence warily as he fussed about the studio, sorting brushes, scraping a neglected palette, taking down a dressing gown, drawing on a pair of easy slippers, opening his door and depositing his boots outside. When he returned the music had begun again.

``What on earth does she mean by singing at a quarter to one o'clock?'' he thought, and went once more to the window. ``Why – that is really beautiful.''

Oui! c'est un rêve, Oui! c'est un rêve doux d'amour.
La nuit lui prête son mystère,
Il doit finir – il doit finir avec le jour.

The song of Hélène ceased. Gethryn leaned out and gazed down at the lighted windows under his. Suddenly the light went out. He heard someone open the window, and straining his eyes, could just discern the dim outline of a head and shoulders, unmistakably those of a girl. She had perched herself on the windowsill. Presently she began to hum the air, then to sing it softly. Gethryn waited until the words came again:

Oui, c'est un rêve –

and then struck in with a very sweet baritone:

Oui, c'est un rêve –

She never moved, but her voice swelled out fresh and clear in answer to his, and a really charming duet came to a delightful finish. Then she looked up. Gethryn was reckless now.

``Shall it be, then, only a dream?'' he laughed. Was it his fate that made him lean out and whisper, ``Is it, then, only a dream, Hélène?''

There was nothing but the rustling of the chestnut branches to answer his folly. Not another sound. He was half inclined to shut his window and go in, well satisfied with the silence and beginning to feel sleepy. All at once from below came a faint laugh, and as he leaned out he caught the words:

``Paris, Hélène bids you good night!''

``Ah, Belle Hélène!'' – he began, but was cut short by the violent opening of a window opposite.

``Bon dieu de bon dieu!'' howled an injured gentleman. ``To sleep is impossible, tas d'imbeciles! – ''

And Hélène's window closed with a snap.

Two

The day broke hot and stifling. The first sunbeams which chased the fog from bridge and street also drove the mists from the cool thickets of the Luxembourg Garden, and revealed groups of dragoons picketed in the shrubbery.

``Dragoons in the Luxembourg!'' cried the gamins to each other. ``What for?''

But even the gamins did not know – yet.

At the great Ateliers of Messieurs Bouguereau and Lefebvre the first day of the week is the busiest – and so, this being Monday, the studios were crowded.

The heat was suffocating. The walls, smeared with the refuse of a hundred palettes, fairly sizzled as they gave off a sickly odor of paint and turpentine. Only two poses had been completed, but the tired models stood or sat, glistening with perspiration. The men drew and painted, many of them stripped to the waist. The air was heavy with tobacco smoke and the respiration of some two hundred students of half as many nationalities.

``Dieu! quel chaleur!'' gasped a fat little Frenchman, mopping his clipped head and breathing hard.

``Clifford,'' he inquired in English, ``ees eet zat you haf a so great – a – heat chez vous?''

Clifford glanced up from his easel. ``Heat in New York? My dear Deschamps, this is nothing.''

The other eyed him suspiciously.

``You know New York is the capital of Galveston?'' said Clifford, slapping on a brush full of color and leaning back to look at it.

The Frenchman didn't know, but he nodded.

``Well, that's very far south. We suffer – yes, we suffer, but our poor poultry suffer more.''

``Ze – ze pooltree? Wat eez zat?''

Clifford explained.

``In summer the fire engines are detailed to throw water on the hens to keep their feathers from singeing. Singeing spoils the flavor.''

The Frenchman growled.

``One of our national institutions is the `Hen's Mutual Fire Insurance Company,' supported by the Government,'' added Clifford.

Deschamps snorted.

``That is why,'' put in Rhodes, lazily dabbing at his canvas, ``why we seldom have omelets – the eggs are so apt to be laid fried.''

``How, zen, does eet make ze chicken?'' spluttered the Frenchman, his wrath rising.

``Our chickens are also – '' a torrent of bad language from Monsieur Deschamps, and a howl of execration from all the rest, silenced Clifford.

``It's too hot for that sort of thing,'' pleaded Elliott.

``Idiot!'' muttered the Frenchman, shooting ominous glances at the bland youth, who saw nothing.

``C'est l'heure,'' cried a dozen voices, and the tired model stretched his cramped limbs. Clifford rose, dropped a piece of charcoal down on his neighbor's neck, and stepping across Thaxton's easel, walked over to Gethryn.

``Rex, have you heard the latest?''

``No.''

``The Ministry has fallen again, and the Place de la Concorde is filled with people yelling, A bas la Republique! Vive le General Boulanger!''

Gethryn looked serious. Clifford went on, speaking low.

``I saw a troop of cavalry going over this morning, and old Forain told me just now that the regiments at Versailles were ready to move at a minute's notice.''

``I suppose things are lively across the river,'' said Gethryn.

``Exactly, and we're all going over to see the fun. You'll come?''

``Oh, I'll come. Hello! here's Rhodes; tell him.''

Rhodes knew. Ministry fallen. Mob at it some more. Been fired on by the soldiers once. Pont Neuf and the Arc guarded by cannon. Carleton came hurrying up.

``The French students are loose and raising Cain. We're going to assist at the show. Come along.''

``No,'' growled Braith, and looked hard at Rex.

``Oh, come along! We're all going,'' said Carleton, ``Elliott, Gethryn, the Colossus, Thaxton, Clifford.''

Braith turned sharply to Rex. ``Yes, going to get your heads smashed by a bullet or carved by a saber. What for? What business is it of yours?''

``Braith thinks he looks like a Prussian and is afraid,'' mused Clifford.

``Come on, won't you, Braith?'' said Gethryn.

``Are you going?''

``Why not?'' said the other, uneasily, ``and why won't you?''

``No French mob for me,'' answered Braith, quietly. ``You fellows had better keep away. You don't know what you may get into. I saw the siege, and the man who was in Paris in '71 has seen enough.''

``Oh, this is nothing serious,'' urged Clifford. ``If they fire I shall leg it; so will the lordly Reginald; so will we all.''

Braith dug his hands into the pockets of his velveteens, and shook his head.

``No,'' he said, ``I've got some work to do. So have you, Rex.''

``Come on, we're off,'' shouted Thaxton from the stairway.

Clifford seized Gethryn's arm, Elliott and Rhodes crowded on behind. A small earthquake shock followed as the crowd of students launched itself down the stairs.

``Braith doesn't approve of my cutting the atelier so often,'' said Gethryn, ``and he's right. I ought to have stayed.''

``Reggy going to back out?'' cooed Clifford.

``No,'' said Rex. ``Here's Rhodes with a cab.''

``It's too hot to walk,'' gasped Rhodes. ``I secured this. It was all I could get. Pile in.''

Rex sprang up beside the driver.

``Allons!'' he cried, ``to the Obelisk!''

``But, monsieur – '' expostulated the cabby, ``it is today the revolution. I dare not.''

``Go on, I tell you,'' roared Rhodes. ``Clifford, take his reins away if he refuses.''

Clifford made a snatch at them, but was repulsed by the indignant cabby.

``Go on, do you hear?'' shouted the Colossus. The cabman looked at Gethryn.

``Go on!'' laughed Rex, ``there is no danger.''

Jehu lifted his shoulders to the level of his shiny hat, and giving the reins a jerk, muttered, ``Crazy English! – Heu – heu – Cocotte!''

In twenty minutes they had arrived at the bridge opposite the Palais Bourbon.

``By Jove!'' said Gethryn, ``look at that crowd! The Place de la Concorde is black with them!''

The cab stopped with a jolt. Half a dozen policemen stepped into the street. Two seized the horses' heads.

``The bridge is forbidden to vehicles, gentlemen,'' they said, courteously. ``To cross, one must descend.''

Clifford began to argue, but Elliott stopped him.

``It's only a step,'' said he, paying the relieved cabby. ``Come ahead!''

In a moment they were across the bridge and pushing into the crowd, single file.

``What a lot of troops and police!'' said Elliott, panting as he elbowed his way through the dense masses. ``I tell you, the mob are bent on mischief.''

The Place de la Concorde was packed and jammed with struggling, surging humanity. Pushed and crowded up to the second fountain, clinging in bunches to the Obelisk, overrunning the first fountain, and covering the pedestals of the ``Cities of France,'' it heaved, shifted, undulated like clusters of swarming ants.

In the open space about the second fountain was the Prefect of the Seine, surrounded by a staff of officers. He looked worn and anxious as he stood mopping the perspiration from his neck and glancing nervously at his men, who were slowly and gently rolling back the mob. On the bridge a battalion of red-legged soldiers lounged, leaning on their rifles. To the right were long lines of cavalry in shining helmets and cuirasses. The men sat motionless in their saddles, their armor striking white fire in the fierce glow of the midday sun. Ever and anon the faint flutter of a distant bugle announced the approach of more regiments.

Among the shrubbery of the Gardens, a glimmer of orange and blue betrayed the lurking presence of the Guards. Down the endless vistas of the double and quadruple rows of trees stretching out to the Arc, and up the Cour la Reine, long lines of scarlet were moving toward the central point, the Place de la Concorde. The horses of a squadron of hussars pawed and champed across the avenue, the men, in their pale blue jackets, presenting a cool relief to the universal glare. The Champs Elysees was deserted, excepting by troops. Not a civilian was to be seen on the bridge. In front of the Madeleine three points of fire blazed and winked in the sun. They were three cannon.

Suddenly, over by the Obelisk, began a hoarse murmur, confused and dull at first, but growing louder, until it swelled into a deafening roar. ``Long live Boulanger!'' ``Down with Ferry!'' ``Long live the Republic!'' As the great wave of sound rose over the crowd and broke sullenly against the somber masses of the Palace of the Bourbons, a thin, shrill cry from the extreme right answered, ``Vive la Commune!'' Elliott laughed nervously.

``They'll charge those howling Belleville anarchists!''

Clifford began, in pure deviltry, to whistle the Carmagnole.

``Do you want to get us all into hot water?'' whispered Thaxton.

``Monsieur is of the Commune?'' inquired a little man, suavely.

And, the devil still prompting Clifford, he answered: ``Because I whistled the Carmagnole? Bah!''

The man scowled.

``Look here, my friend,'' said Clifford, ``my political principles are yours, and I will be happy to drink at your expense.''

The other Americans exchanged looks, and Elliott tried to check Clifford's folly before it was too late.

``Espion!'' muttered the Frenchman, adding, a little louder, ``Sale Allemand!''

Gethryn looked up startled.

``Keep cool,'' whispered Thaxton; ``if they think we're Germans we're done for.''

Carleton glanced nervously about. ``How they stare,'' he whispered. ``Their eyes pop out of their heads as if they saw Bismarck.''

There was an ominous movement among the throng.

``Vive l'Anarchie! A bas les Prussiens!'' yelled a beetle-browed Italian. ``A bas les etrangers!''

``My friend,'' said Clifford, pleasantly, ``you've got a very vile accent yourself.''

``You're a Prussian!'' screamed the man.

Every one was now looking at them. Gethryn began to fume.

``I'll thrash that cur if he says Prussian again,'' said he.

``You'll keep quiet, that's what you'll do,'' growled Thaxton, looking anxiously at Rhodes.

``Yes, you will!'' said the Colossus, very pale.

``Pig of a Prussian!'' shouted a fearful-looking hag, planting herself in front of Clifford with arms akimbo and head thrust forward. ``Pig of a Prussian spy!''

She glanced at her supporters, who promptly applauded.

``Ah–h–h!'' she screamed, her little green eyes shining like a tiger's – ``Spy! German spy!''

``Madam,'' said Clifford, politely, ``go and wash yourself.''

``Hold your cursed tongue, Clifford!'' whispered Thaxton. ``Do you want to be torn to pieces?''

Suddenly a man behind Gethryn sprang at his back, and then, amazed and terrified at his own daring, yelled lustily for help. Gethryn shook him off as he would a fly, but the last remnant of self-control went at the same time, and, wheeling, he planted a blow square in the fellow's neck. The man fell like an ox. In an instant the mob was upon them. Thaxton received a heavy kick in the ribs, which sent him reeling against Carleton. Clifford knocked two men down in as many blows, and, springing back, stood guard over Thaxton until he could struggle to his feet again. Elliott got a sounding thwack on the nose, which he neatly returned, adding one on the eye for interest. Gethryn and Carleton fought back to back. Rhodes began by half strangling a son of the Commune and then flung him bodily among his howling compatriots.

``Good Heavens,'' gasped Rhodes, ``we can't keep this up!'' And raising his voice, he cried with all the force of his lungs, ``Help! This way, police!'' A shot answered him, and a man, clapping his hands to his face, tilted heavily forward, the blood spurting between his fingers.

Then a terrible cry arose, a din in which the Americans caught the clanging of steel and the neighing of horses. A man was hurled violently against Gethryn, who, losing in turn his balance, staggered and fell. Rising to his knees, he saw a great foam-covered horse rearing almost over him, and a red-faced rider in steel helmet and tossing plume slashing furiously among the crowd. Next moment he was dragged to his feet and back into the flying mob.

``Look out,'' panted Thaxton, ``the cavalry – they've charged – run!'' Gethryn glanced over his shoulder. All along the edge of the frantic, panic-stricken crowd the gleaming crests of the cavalry surged and dashed like a huge wave of steel.

Cries, groans, and curses rose and were drowned in the thunder of the charging horses and the clashing of weapons.

``Spy!'' screamed a voice in his ear. Gethryn turned, but the fellow was legging it for safety.

Suddenly he saw a woman who, pushed and crowded by the mob, stumbled and fell. In a moment he was by her side, bent over to raise her, was hurled upon his face, rose blinded by dust and half-stunned, but dragging her to her feet with him.

Swept onward by the rush, knocked this way and that, he still managed to support the dazed woman, and by degrees succeeded in controlling his own course, which he bent toward the Obelisk. As he neared the goal of comparative safety, exhausted, he suffered himself and the woman to be carried on by the rush. Then a blinding flash split the air in front, and the crash of musketry almost in his face hurled him back.

Men threw up their hands and sank in a heap or spun round and pitched headlong. For a moment he swayed in the drifting smoke. A blast of hot, sickening air enveloped him. Then a dull red cloud seemed to settle slowly, crushing, grinding him into the earth.

Three

When Gethryn unclosed his eyes the dazzling sunlight almost blinded him. A thousand grotesque figures danced before him, a hot red vapor seemed to envelop him. He felt a dull pain in his ears and a numb sensation about the legs. Gradually he recalled the scene that had just passed; the flying crowd lashed by that pitiless iron scourge; the cruel panic; the mad, suffocating rush; and then that crash of thunder which had crushed him.

He lay quite still, not offering to move. A strange languor seemed to weigh down his very heart. The air reeked with powder smoke. Not a breath was stirring.

Presently the numbness in his knees changed to a hot, pricking throb. He tried to move his legs, but found he could not. Then a sudden thought sent the blood with a rush to his heart. Perhaps he no longer had any legs! He remembered to have heard of legless men whose phantom members caused them many uncomfortable sensations. He certainly had a dull pain where his legs belonged, but the question was, had he legs also? The doubt was too much, and with a faint cry he struggled to rise.

``The devil!'' exclaimed a voice close to his head, and a pair of startled eyes met his own. `` *The* devil!'' repeated the owner of the eyes, as if to a apostrophize some particular one. He was a bird-like little fellow, with thin canary-colored hair and eyebrows and colorless eyes, and he was seated upon a campstool about two feet from Gethryn's head.

He blinked at Gethryn. ``These Frenchmen,'' said he, ``have as many lives as a cat.''

``Thanks!'' said Gethryn, smiling faintly.

``An Englishman! The devil!'' shouted the pale-eyed man, hopping in haste from his campstool and dropping a well-thumbed sketching-block as he did so.

``Don't be an ass,'' suggested Gethryn; ``you'd much better help me to get up.''

``Look here,'' cried the other, ``how was I to know you were not done for?''

``What's the matter with me?'' said Gethryn. ``Are my – my legs gone?''

The little man glanced at Gethryn's shoes.

No, they're all there, unless you originally had more than the normal number – in fact I'm afraid – I think you're all right.

Gethryn stared at him.

``And what the devil am I to do with this sketch?'' he continued, kicking the fallen block. ``I've been at it for an hour. It isn't half bad, you know. I was going to call it `Love in Death.' It was for the *London Illustrated Mirror.*''

Gethryn lay quite still. He had decided the little fellow was mad.

``Dead in each other's arms!'' continued the stranger, sentimentally. ``She so fair – he so brave – ''

Gethryn sprang up impatiently, but only a little way. Something held him down and he fell back.

``Do you want to get up?'' asked the stranger.

``I should rather think so.''

The other bent down and placed his hands under Gethryn's arms, and – half helped, half by his own impatient efforts – Rex sat up, leaning against the other man. A sharp twinge shot through the numbness of his legs, and his eyes, seeking the cause, fell upon the body of a woman. She lay across his knees, apparently dead. Rex remembered her now for the first time.

``Lift her,'' he said weakly.

The little man with some difficulty succeeded in moving the body; then Gethryn, putting one arm around the other's neck, struggled up. He was stiff, and toppled about a little, but before long he was pretty steady on his feet.

``The woman,'' he said, ``perhaps she is not dead.''

``Dead she is,'' said the Artist of the *Mirror* cheerfully, gathering up his pencils, which lay scattered on the steps of the pedestal. He leaned over the little heap of crumpled clothing.

``Shot, I fancy,'' he muttered.

Gethryn, feeling his strength returning and the circulation restored to his limbs, went over to the place where she lay.

``Have you a flask?'' he asked. The little Artist eyed him suspiciously.

``Are you a newspaperman?''

``No, an art student.''

``Nothing to do with newspapers?''

``No.''

``I don't drink,'' said the queer little person.

``I never said you did,'' said Gethryn. ``Have you a flask, or haven't you?''

The stranger slowly produced one, and poured a few drops into his pink palm.

``We may as well try,'' he said, and began to chafe her forehead. ``Here, take the whiskey – let it trickle, so, between her teeth. Don't spill any more than you can help,'' he added.

``Has she been shot?'' asked Gethryn.

``Crushed, maybe.''

``Poor little thing, look at her roll of music!'' said Gethryn, wiping a few drops of blood from her pallid face, and glancing compassionately at the helpless, dust-covered figure.

``I'm afraid it's no use – ''

``Give her some more whiskey, quick!'' interrupted the stranger.

Gethryn tremblingly poured a few more drops between the parted lips. A faint color came into her temples. She moved, shivered from head to foot, and then, with a half-choked sob, opened her eyes.

``Mon Dieu, comme je souffre!''

``Where do you suffer?'' said Gethryn gently.

``The arm; I think it is broken.''

Gethryn stood up and looked about for help. The Place was nearly deserted. The blue-jacketed hussars were still standing over by the Avenue, and an occasional heavy, red-faced cuirassier walked his sweating horse slowly up and down the square. A few policemen lounged against the river wall, chatting with the sentries, and far down the dusty Rue Royale, the cannon winked and blinked before the Church of the Madeleine.

The rumble of wheels caused him to turn. A clumsy, blue-covered wagon drew up at the second fountain. It was a military ambulance. A red-capped trooper sprang down jingling from one of the horses, and was joined by two others who had followed the ambulance and who also dismounted. Then the three approached a group of policemen who were lifting something from the pavement. At the same moment he heard voices beside him, and turning, found that the girl had risen and was sitting on the campstool, her head leaning against the little stranger's shoulder.

An officer stood looking down at her. His boots were spotless. The band of purple on his red and gold cap showed that he was a surgeon.

``Can we be of any assistance to madame?'' he inquired.

``I was looking for a cab,'' said Gethryn, ``but perhaps she is not strong enough to be taken to her home.''

A frightened look came into the girl's face and she glanced anxiously at the ambulance. The surgeon knelt quietly beside her.

``Madame is not seriously hurt,'' he said, after a rapid examination. ``The right arm is a little strained, but it will be nothing, I assure you, Madame; a matter of a few days, that is all.''

He rose and stood brushing the knees of his trousers with his handkerchief. ``Monsieur is a foreigner?''

Gethryn smiled. ``The accent?''

``On the contrary, I assure you, Monsieur,'' cried the officer with more politeness than truth. He eyed the ambulance. ``The people of Paris have learned a lesson today,'' he said.

A trooper clattered up, leading an officer's horse, and dismounted, saluting. The young surgeon glanced at his watch.

``Picard,'' he said, ``stop a closed cab and send it here.''

The trooper wheeled his horse and galloped away across the square, and the officer turned to the others.

``Madame, I trust, will soon recover,'' he said courteously. ``Madame, messieurs, I have the honor to salute you.'' And with many a clink and jingle, he sprang into the saddle and clattered away in the wake of the slowly moving ambulance.

At the corner of the Rue Royale, Gethryn saw the trooper stop a cab and point to the Obelisk. He went over and asked the canary-colored stranger, ``Will you take her home, or shall I?''

``Why, you, of course; you brought her here.''

``No, I didn't. I never saw her until I noticed her being pushed about by the crowd.'' He caught the girl's eye and colored furiously, hoping she did not suspect the nature of their discussion. Before her helplessness it seemed so brutal.

The cab drew up before the Obelisk and a gruff voice cried, ``V'la! M'ssieurs! – 'dames!''

``Put your arm on my shoulder – so,'' said Gethryn, and the two men raised her gently. Once in the cab, she sank back, looking limp and white. Gethryn turned sharply to the other man.

``Shall I go?''

``Rather,'' replied the little stranger, pleasantly.

Opening his coat in haste, he produced a square of pasteboard. ``My card,'' he said, offering one to Gethryn, who bowed and fumbled in his pockets. As usual, his card-case was in another coat.

``I'm sorry I have none,'' he said at length, ``but my name is Reginald Gethryn, and I shall give myself the pleasure of calling to thank you for – ''

``For nothing,'' laughed the other, ``excepting for the sketch, which you may have when you come to see me.''

``Thanks, and au revoir,'' glancing at the card. ``Au revoir, Mr Bulfinch.''

He was giving the signal to the cabby when his new acquaintance stopped him.

``You're quite sure – you – er – don't know any newspapermen?''

``Quite.''

``All right – all right – and – er – just don't mention about my having a flask, if you do meet any of them. I – er – keep it for others. I don't drink.''

``Certainly not,'' began Gethryn, but Mr T. Hoppley Bulfinch had seized his campstool and trotted away across the square.

Gethryn leaned into the cab.

``Will you give me your address?'' he asked gently.

``Rue Monsieur le Prince – 430 – '' she whispered. ``Do you know where it is?''

``Yes,'' said Gethryn. It was his own number.

``Rue Monsieur le Prince 430'', he repeated to the driver, and stepping in, softly shut the door.

Four

Rain was falling steadily. The sparrows huddled under the eaves, or hopped disconsolately along the windowsills, uttering short, ill-tempered chirps. The wind was rising, blowing in quick, sharp gusts and sweeping the forest of rain spears, rank upon rank, in mad dashes against the glass-roofed studio.

Gethryn, curled up in a corner of his sofa, listlessly watched the showers of pink and white blossoms which whirled and eddied down from the rocking chestnuts, falling into the windy court in little heaps. One or two stiff-legged flies crawled rheumatically along the window glass, only to fall on their backs and lie there buzzing.

The two bull pups had silently watched the antics of these maudlin creatures, but their interest changed to indignation when one sodden insect attempted a final ascent and fell noisily upon the floor under their very noses. Then they rose as one dog and leaped madly upon the intruder, or meant to; but being pups, and uncertain in their estimation of distances, they brought up with startled yelps against the wall. Gethryn took them in his arms, where they found consolation in chewing the buttons off his coat. The parrot had driven the raven nearly crazy by turning upside down and staring at him for fifteen minutes of insulting silence. Mrs Gummidge was engaged in a matronly and sedate toilet, interrupting herself now and then to bestow a critical glance upon the parrot. She heartily approved of his attitude toward the raven, and although the old cynic cared nothing for Mrs Gummidge's opinion, he found a sour satisfaction in warning her of her enemy's hostile intentions. This he always did with a croak, causing Mrs Gummidge to look up just in time, and the raven to hop back disconcerted.

The rain beat a constant tattoo on the roof, and this, mingling with the drowsy purr of the cat, who was now marching to and fro with tail erect in front of Gethryn, exercised a soothing influence, and presently a snore so shocked the parrot that he felt obliged to relieve his mind by a series of intricate gymnastics upon his perch.

Gethryn was roused by a violent hammering on his door. The room had grown dark, and night had come on while he slept.

``All right – coming,'' he shouted, groping his way across the room. Slipping the bolt, he opened the door and looked out, but could see nothing in the dark hallway. Then he felt himself seized and hugged and dragged back into his studio, where he was treated to a heavy slap on the shoulder. Then someone struck a match and presently, by the light of a candle, he saw Clifford and Elliott, and farther back in the shade another form which he thought he knew.

Clifford began, ``Here you are! We thought you were dead – killed through my infernal fooling.'' He turned very red, and stammered, ``Tell him, Elliott.''

``Why, you see,'' said Elliott, ``we've been hunting for you high and low since the fight yesterday afternoon. Clifford was nearly crazy. He said it was his fault. We went to the Morgue and then to the hospitals, and finally to the police – '' A knock interrupted him, and a policeman appeared at the door.

Clifford looked sheepish.

``The young gentleman who is missing – this is his room?'' inquired the policeman.

``Oh, he's found – he's all right,'' said Clifford, hurriedly. The officer stared.

``Here he is,'' said Elliott, pointing to Rex.

The man transferred his stare to Gethryn, but did not offer to move.

``I am the supposed deceased,'' laughed Rex, with a little bow.

``But how am I to know?'' said the officer.

``Why, here I am.''

``But,'' said the man, suspiciously, ``I want to know how I am to know?''

``Nonsense,'' said Elliott, laughing.

``But, Monsieur,'' expostulated the officer, politely.

``This is Reginald Gethryn, artist, I tell you!''

The policeman shrugged his shoulders. He was noncommittal and very polite.

``Messieurs,'' he said, ``my orders are to lock up this room.''

``But it's my room, I can't spare my room,'' laughed Gethryn. ``From whom did you take your orders?''

``From Monsieur the Prefect of the Seine.''

``Oh, it is all right, then,'' said Gethryn. ``Take a seat.''

He went to his desk, wrote a hasty note, and then called the man. ``Read that, if you please, Monsieur Sergeant de Ville.''

The man's eyes grew round. ``Certainly, Monsieur, I will take the note to the Prefect,'' he said; ``Monsieur will pardon the intrusion.''

``Don't mention it,'' said Rex, smiling, and slipped a franc into his big red fist. The officer pocketed it with a demure ``Merci, Monsieur,'' and presently the clank of his bayonet died away on the stairs.

``Well,'' said Elliott, ``you're found.'' Clifford was beginning again with self-reproaches and self-abasement, but Rex broke in: ``You fellows are awfully good – I do assure you I appreciate it. But I wasn't in any more danger than the rest of you. What about Thaxton and the Colossus and Carleton?'' He grew anxious as he named them.

``We all got off with no trouble at all, only we missed you – and then the troops fired, and they chased us over the bridge and scattered us in the Quarter, and we all drifted one by one into the Café des Écoles. And then you didn't come, and we waited till after dinner, and finally came here to find your door locked – ''

``Oh!'' burst out Clifford, ``I tell you, Rex – damn it! I will express my feelings!''

``No, you won't,'' said Rex; ``drop 'em, old boy, don't express 'em. Here we are – that's enough, isn't it, Shakespeare?''

The bird had climbed to Gethryn's shoulder and was cocking his eye fondly at Clifford. They were dear friends. Once he had walked up Clifford's arm and had grabbed him by the ear, for which Clifford, more in sorrow than in anger, soaked him in cold water. Since that, their mutual understanding had been perfect.

``Where are you going to, you old fiend?'' said Clifford, tickling the parrot's throat.

``Hell!'' shrieked the bird.

``Good Heavens! I never taught him that,'' said Gethryn.

Clifford smiled, without committing himself.

``But where were you, Rex?'' asked Elliott.

Rex flushed. ``Hullo,'' cried Clifford, ``here's Reginald blushing. If I didn't know him better I'd swear there's a woman in it.'' The dark figure at the end of the room rose and walked swiftly over, and Rex saw that it was Braith, as he had supposed.

``I swear I forgot him,'' laughed Elliott. ``What a queer bird you are, Braith, squatting over there as silent as a stuffed owl!''

``He has been walking his legs off after you,'' began Clifford, but Braith cut him short with a brusque –

``Where were you, Rex?''

Gethryn winced. ``I'd rather – I think'' – he began, slowly –

``Excuse me – it's not my business,'' growled Braith, throwing himself into a seat and beginning to rub Mrs Gummidge the wrong way. ``Confound the cat!'' he added, examining some red parallel lines which suddenly decorated the back of his hand.

``She won't stand rubbing the wrong way,'' said Rex, smiling uneasily.

``Like the rest of us,'' said Elliott.

``More fool he who tries it,'' said Braith, and looked at Gethryn with an affectionate smile that made him turn redder than before.

``Rex,'' began Clifford again, with that fine tact for which he was celebrated, ``own up! You spent last night warbling under the windows of Lisette.''

``Or Frisette,'' said Elliott, ``or Cosette.''

``Or Babette, Lisette, Frisette, Cosette, Babette!'' chanted the two young men in a sort of catch.

Braith so seldom swore, that the round oath with which he broke into their vocal exercises stopped them through sheer astonishment. But Clifford, determined on self-assertion and loving an argument, especially out of season, turned on Braith and began:

``Why should not Youth love?''

``Love! Bah!'' said Braith.

``Why Bah?'' he persisted, stimulated by the disgust of Braith. ``Now if a man – take Elliott, for example – ''

``Take yourself,'' cried the other.

``Well – myself, for example. Suppose when my hours of weary toil are over – returning to my lonely cell, I encounter the blue eyes of Ninette on the way, or the brown eyes of Cosette, or perhaps the black eyes of – ''

Braith stamped impatiently.

``Lisette,'' said Clifford, sweetly. ``Why should I not refresh my drooping spirits by adoring Lisette – Cos– ''

``Oh, come, you said that before,'' said Gethryn. ``You're getting to be a bore, Clifford.''

``You at least can no longer reproach me,'' said the other, with a quick look that increased Gethryn's embarrassment.

``Let him talk his talk of bewitching grisettes, and gay students,'' said Braith, more angry than Rex had ever seen him. ``He's never content except when he's dangling after some fool worse than himself. Damn this `Bohemian love' rot! I've been here longer than you have, Clifford,'' he said, suddenly softening and turning half apologetically to the latter, who nodded to intimate that he hadn't taken offense. ``I've seen all that shabby romance turn into such reality as you wouldn't like to face. I've seen promising lives go out in ruin and disgrace – here in this very street – in this very house – lives that started exactly on the lines that you are finding so mighty pleasant just now.''

Clifford was in danger of being silenced. That would never do.

``Papa Braith,'' he smiled, ``is it that you too have been through the mill? Shall I present your compliments to the miller? I'm going. Come, Elliott.''

Elliott took up his hat and followed.

``Braith,'' he said, ``we'll drink your health as we go through the mill.''

``Remember that the mill grinds slowly but surely,'' said Braith.

``He speaks in parables,'' laughed Clifford, halfway downstairs, and the two took up the catch they had improvised, singing, ``Lisette – Cosette – Ninette – '' in thirds more or less out of tune, until Gethryn shut the door on the last echoes that came up from the hall below.

Gethryn came back and sat down, and Braith took a seat beside him, but neither spoke. Braith had his pipe and Rex his cigarette.

When the former was ready, he began to speak. He could not conceal the effort it cost him, but that wore away after he had been talking a while.

``Rex,'' he began, ``when I say that we are friends, I mean, for my own part, that you are more to me than any man alive; and now I am going to tell you my story. Don't interrupt me. I have only just courage enough; if any of it oozes out, I may not be able to go on. Well, I have been through the mill. Clifford was right. They say it is a phase through which all men must pass. I say, must or not, if you pass through it you don't come out without a stain. You're never the same man after. Don't imagine I mean that I was brutally dissolute. I don't want you to think worse of me than I deserve. I kept a clean tongue in my head – always. So do you. I never got drunk – neither do you. I kept a distance between myself and the women whom those fellows were celebrating in song just now – so do you.

How much is due in both of us to principle, and how much to fastidiousness, Rex? I found out for myself at last, and perhaps your turn will not be long in coming. After avoiding entanglements for just three years – " He looked at Rex, who dropped his head – ``I gave in to a temptation as coarse, vulgar and silly as any I had ever despised. Why? Heaven knows. She was as vulgar a leech as ever fastened on a calf like myself. But I didn't think so then. I was wildly in love with her. She said she was madly in love with me." Braith made a grimace of such disgust that Rex would have laughed, only he saw in time that it was self-disgust which made Braith's mouth look so set and hard.

``I wanted to marry her. She wouldn't marry me. I was not rich, but what she said was: `One hates one's husband.' When I say vulgar, I don't mean she had vulgar manners. She was as pretty and trim and clever – as the rest of them. An artist, if he sees all that really exists, sometimes also sees things which have no existence at all. Of these were the qualities with which I invested her – the moral and mental correspondencies to her blonde skin and supple figure. She justified my perspicacity one day by leaving me for a loathsome little Jew. The last time I heard of her she had been turned out of a gambling hell in his company. His name is Emanuel Pick. Is not this a shabby romance? Is it not enough to make a self-respecting man hang his head – to know that he has once found pleasure in the society of the mistress of Mr Emanuel Pick?"

A long silence followed, during which the two men smoked, looking in opposite directions. At last Braith reached over and shook the ashes out of his pipe. Rex lighted a fresh cigarette at the same time, and their eyes met with a look of mutual confidence and goodwill. Braith spoke again, firmly this time.

``God keep you out of the mire, Rex; you're all right thus far. But it is my solemn belief that an affair of that kind would be your ruin as an artist; as a man."

``The Quarter doesn't regard things in that light," said Gethryn, trying hard to laugh off the weight that oppressed him.

``The Quarter is a law unto itself. Be a law unto yourself, Rex – Good night, old chap."

``Good night, Braith," said Gethryn slowly.

Five

Thirion's at six pm. Madame Thirion, neat and demure, sat behind her desk; her husband, in white linen apron and cap, scuttled back and forth shouting, ``Bon! Bon!'' to the orders that came down the call trumpet. The waiters flew crazily about, and cries went up for ``Pierre'' and ``Jean'' and ``green peas and fillet.''

The noise, smoke, laughter, shouting, rattle of dishes, the penetrating odor of burnt paper and French tobacco, all proclaimed the place a Latin Quarter restaurant. The English and Americans ate like civilized beings and howled like barbarians. The Germans, when they had napkins, tucked them under their chins. The Frenchmen – well! they often agreed with the hated Teuton in at least one thing; that knives were made to eat with. But which of the four nationalities exceeded the others in turbulence and bad language would be hard to say.

Clifford was eating his chop and staring at the blonde adjunct of a dapper little Frenchman.

``Clifford,'' said Carleton, ``stop that.''

``I'm mesmerizing her,'' said Clifford. ``It's a case of hypnotism.''

The girl, who had been staring back at Clifford, suddenly shrugged her shoulders, and turning to her companion, said aloud:

``How like a monkey, that foreigner!''

Clifford withdrew his eyes in a hurry, amid a roar of laughter from the others. He was glad when Braith's entrance caused a diversion.

``Hullo, Don Juan! I see you, Lothario! Drinking *again?*''

Braith took it all as a matter of course, but this time failed to return as good as they gave. He took a seat beside Gethryn and said in a low tone:

``I've just come from your house. There's a letter from the Salon in your box.''

Gethryn set down his wine untasted and reached for his hat.

``What's the matter, Reggy? Has Lisette gone back on you?'' asked Clifford, tenderly.

``It's the Salon,'' said Braith, as Gethryn went out with a hasty ``Good night.''

``Poor Reggy, how hard he takes it!'' sighed Clifford.

Gethryn hurried along the familiar streets with his heart in his boots sometimes, and sometimes in his mouth.

In his box was a letter and a note addressed in pencil. He snatched them both, and lighting a candle, mounted the stairs, unlocked his door and sank breathless upon the lounge. He tore open the first envelope. A bit of paper fell out. It was from Braith and said:

> I congratulate you either way. If you are successful I shall be as glad as you are. If not, I still congratulate you on the manly courage which you are going to show in turning defeat into victory.

``He's one in a million,'' thought Gethryn, and opened the other letter. It contained a folded paper and a card. The card was white. The paper read:

> You are admitted to the Salon with a No. 1. My compliments. J. Lefebvre

He ought to have been pleased, but instead he felt weak and giddy, and the pleasure was more like pain. He leaned against the table quite unstrung, his mind in a whirl. He got up and went to the window. Then he shook himself and walked over to his cabinet. Taking out a bunch of keys, he selected one and opened what Clifford called his ``cellar.''

Clifford knew and deplored the fact that Gethryn's ``cellar'' was no longer open to the public. Since the day when Rex returned from Julien's, tired and cross, to find a row of empty bottles on the floor and Clifford on the sofa conversing incoherently with himself, and had his questions interrupted

by a maudlin squawk from the parrot – also tipsy – since that day Gethryn had carried the key. He now produced a wine glass and a dusty bottle, filled the one from the other and emptied it three times in rapid succession. Then he took the glass to the washbasin and rinsed it with great slowness and precision. Then he sat down and tried to think. Number One meant a mention, perhaps a medal. He would telegraph his aunt tomorrow. Suddenly he felt a strong desire to tell someone. He would go and see Braith. No, Braith was in the evening class at the Beaux Arts; so were the others, excepting Clifford and Elliott, and they were at a ball across the river.

Whom could he see? He thought of the garçon. He would ring him up and give him a glass of wine. Alcide was a good fellow and stole very little. The clock struck eleven.

``No, he's gone to bed. Alcide, you've missed a glass of wine and a cigar, you early bird.''

His head was clear enough now. He realized his good fortune. He had never been so happy in his life. He called the pups and romped with them until an unlucky misstep sent Mrs Gummidge, with a shriek, to the top of the wardrobe, whence she glared at Gethryn and spit at the delighted raven.

The young man sat down fairly out of breath, but the pups still kept making charges at his legs and tumbled over themselves with barking. He gathered them up and carried them into his bedroom to their sleeping box. As he stooped to drop them in, there came a knock at his studio door. But when he hastened to open it, glad of company, there was no one there. Surprised, he turned back and saw on the floor before him a note. Picking it up, he took it to the lamp and read it. It was signed, ``Yvonne Descartes.''

When he had read it twice, he sat down to think. Presently he took something out of his waistcoat pocket and held it close to the light. It was a gold brooch in the shape of a fleur-de-lis. On the back was engraved ``Yvonne.'' He held it in his hand a while, and then, getting up, went slowly towards the door. He opened the door, closed it behind him and moved toward the stairs. Suddenly he started.

``Braith! Is that you?''

There was no answer. His voice sounded hollow in the tiled hallway.

``Braith,'' he said again. ``I thought I heard him say `Rex.''' But he kept on to the next floor and stopped before the door of the room which was directly under his own. He paused, hesitated, looking up at a ray of light which came out from a crack in the transom.

``It's too late,'' he muttered, and turned away irresolutely.

A clear voice called from within, ``Entrez donc, Monsieur.''

He opened the door and went in.

On a piano stood a shaded lamp, which threw a soft yellow light over everything. The first glance gave him a hasty impression of a white lace-covered bed and a dainty toilet table on which stood a pair of tall silver candlesticks; and then, as the soft voice spoke again, ``Will Monsieur be seated?'' he turned and confronted the girl whom he had helped in the Place de la Concorde. She lay in a cloud of fleecy wrappings on a lounge that was covered with a great white bearskin. Her blue eyes met Gethryn's, and he smiled faintly. She spoke again:

``Will Monsieur sit a little nearer? It is difficult to speak loudly – I have so little strength.''

Gethryn walked over to the sofa and half unconsciously sank down on the rug which fell on the floor by the invalid's side. He spoke as he would to a sick child.

``I am so very glad you are better. I inquired of the concierge and she told me.''

A slight color crept into the girl's face. ``You are so good. Ah! what should I have done – what can I say?'' She stopped; there were tears in her eyes.

``Please say nothing – please forget it.''

``Forget!'' Presently she continued, almost in a whisper, ``I had so much to say to you, and now you are really here, I can think of nothing, only that you saved me.''

``Mademoiselle – I beg!''

She lay silent a moment more; then she raised herself from the sofa and held out her hand. His hand and eyes met hers.

``I thank you,'' she said, ``I can never forget.'' Then she sank back among the white fluff of lace and fur. ``I only learned this morning,'' she went on, after a minute, `` *who* sat beside me all that night and bathed my arm, and gave me cooling drinks.''

Gethryn colored. ``There was no one else to take care of you. I sent for my friend, Doctor Ducrot, but he was out of town. Then Dr Bouvier promised to come, and didn't. The concierge was ill herself – I could not leave you alone. You know, you were a little out of your head with fright and fever. I really couldn't leave you to get on by yourself.''

``No,'' cried the girl, excitedly, ``you could not leave me after carrying me out of that terrible crowd; yourself hurt, exhausted, you sat by my side all night long.''

Gethryn laid his hand on her. ``Hélène,'' he said, half jesting, ``I did what anyone else would have done under the circumstances – and forgotten.''

She looked at him shyly. ``Don't forget,'' she said.

``I couldn't forget your face,'' he rashly answered, moved by the emotion she showed.

She brightened.

``Did you know me when you first saw me in the crowd?'' She expected him to say ``Yes.''

``No,'' he replied, ``I only saw you were a woman and in danger of your life.''

The brightness fell from her face. ``Then it was all the same to you who I was.''

He nodded. ``Yes – any woman, you know.''

``Old and dirty and ugly?''

His hand slipped from hers. ``And a woman – yes.''

She shrugged her pretty shoulders. ``Then I wish it had been someone else.''

``So do I, for your sake,'' he answered gravely.

She glanced at him, half frightened; then leaning swiftly toward him:

``Forgive me; I would not change places with a queen.''

``Nor I with any man!'' he cried gayly. ``Am I not Paris?''

``And I?''

``You are Hélène,'' he said, laughing. ``Let me see – Paris and Hélène would not have changed – ''

She interrupted him impatiently. ``Words! you do not mean them. Nor do I, either,'' she added, hastily. After that neither spoke for a while. Gethryn, half stretched on the big rug, idly twisting bits of it into curls, felt very comfortable, without troubling to ask himself what would come next. Presently she glanced up.

``Paris, do you want to smoke?''

``You don't think I would smoke in this dainty nest?''

``Please do, I like it. We are – we will be such very good friends. There are matches on that table in the silver box.''

He shook his head, laughing. ``You are too indulgent.''

``I am never indulgent, excepting to myself. But I have caprices and I generally die when they are not indulged. This is one. Please smoke.''

``Oh, in that case, with Hélène's permission.''

She laughed delightedly as he blew the rings of fragrant smoke far up to the ceiling. There was another long pause, then she began again:

``Paris, you speak French very well.''

He came from where he had been standing by the table and seated himself once more among the furs at her feet.

``Do I, Hélène?''

``Yes – but you sing it divinely.''

Gethryn began to hum the air of the dream song, smiling, ``Yes 'tis a dream – a dream of love,'' he repeated, but stopped.

Yvonne's temples and throat were crimson.

``Please open the window,'' she cried, ``it's so warm here.''

``Hélène, I think you are blushing,'' said he, mischievously.

She turned her head away from him. He rose and opened the window, leaning out a moment; his heart was beating violently. Presently he returned.

``It's one o'clock.''

No answer.

``Hélène, it's one o'clock in the morning.''

``Are you tired?'' she murmured.

``No.''

``Nor I – don't go.''

``But it's one o'clock.''

``Don't go yet.''

He sank down irresolutely on the rug again. ``I ought to go,'' he murmured.

``Are we to remain friends?''

``That is for Hélène to say.''

``And Hélène will leave it to Homer!''

``To whom?'' said Gethryn.

``Monsieur Homer,'' said the girl, faintly.

``But that was a tragedy.''

``But they were friends.''

``In a way. Yes, in a way.''

Gethryn tried to return to a light tone. ``They fell in love, I believe.'' No answer. ``Very well,'' said Gethryn, still trying to joke, ``I will carry you off in a boat, then.''

``To Troy – when?''

``No, to Meudon, when you are well. Do you like the country?''

``I love it,'' she said.

``Well, I'll take my easel and my paints along too.''

She looked at him seriously. ``You are an artist – I heard that from the concierge.''

``Yes,'' said Gethryn, ``I think I may claim the title tonight.''

And then he told her about the Salon. She listened and brightened with sympathy. Then she grew silent.

``Do you paint landscapes?''

``Figures,'' said the young man, shortly.

``From models?''

``Of course,'' he answered, still more drily.

``Draped,'' she persisted.

``No.''

``I hate models!'' she cried out, almost fiercely.

``They are not a pleasing set, as a rule,'' he admitted. ``But I know some decent ones.''

She shivered and shook her curly head. ``Some are very pretty, I suppose.''

``Some.''

``Do you know Sarah Brown?''

``Yes, I know Sarah.''

``Men go wild about her.''

``I never did.''

Yvonne was out of humor. ``Oh,'' she cried, petulantly, ``you are very cold – you Americans – like ice.''

``Because we don't run after Sarah?''

``Because you are a nation of business, and – ''

``And brains,'' said Gethryn, drily.

There was an uncomfortable pause. Gethryn looked at the girl. She lay with her face turned from him.

``Hélène!'' No answer. ``Yvonne – Mademoiselle!'' No answer. ``It's two o'clock.''

A slight impatient movement of the head.

``Good night.'' Gethryn rose. ``Good night,'' he repeated. He waited for a moment. ``Good night, Yvonne,'' he said, for the third time.

She turned slowly toward him, and as he looked down at her he felt a tenderness as for a sick child.

``Good night,'' he said once more, and, bending over her, gently laid the little gold clasp in her open hand. She looked at it in surprise; then suddenly she leaned swiftly toward him, rested a brief second against him, and then sank back again. The golden fleur-de-lis glittered over his heart.

``You will wear it?'' she whispered.

``Yes.''

``Then – good night.''

Half unconsciously he stooped and kissed her forehead; then went his way. And all that night one slept until the morning broke, and one saw morning break, then fell asleep.

Six

It was the first day of June. In the Luxembourg Gardens a soft breeze stirred the tender chestnut leaves, and blew sparkling ripples across the water in the Fountain of Marie de Medicis.

The modest little hothouse flowers had quite recovered from the shock of recent transplanting and were ambitiously pushing out long spikes and clusters of crimson, purple and gold, filling the air with spicy perfume, and drawing an occasional battered butterfly, gaunt and seedy, from his long winter's sleep, but still remembering the flowery days of last season's brilliant debut.

Through the fresh young leaves the sunshine fell, dappling the glades and thickets, bathing the gray walls of the Palais du Sénat, and almost warming into life the queer old statues of long departed royalty, which for so many years have looked down from the great terrace to the Palace of the King.

Through every gate the people drifted into the gardens, and the winding paths were dotted and crowded with brightly-colored, slowly-moving groups.

Here a half dozen meager, black-robed priests strolled silently amid the tender verdure; here a noisy crowd of children, gamboling awkwardly in the wake of a painted rubber ball, made day hideous with their yells.

Now a slovenly company of dragoons shuffled by, their big shapeless boots covered with dust, and their whalebone plumes hanging in straight points to the middle of their backs; now a group of strutting students and cocottes passed noisily, the girls in spotless spring plumage, the students vying with each other in the display of blinking eyeglasses, huge bunchy neckties, and sleek checked trousers. Policemen, trim little grisettes (for whatever is said to the contrary, the grisette is still extant in Paris), nurse girls with turbaned heads and ugly red streamers, wheeling ugly red babies; an occasional stray zouave or turco in curt Turkish jacket and white leggings; grave old gentlemen with white mustache and military step; gay, baggy gentlemen from St Cyr, looking like newly-painted wooden soldiers; students from the Ecole Polytechnique; students from the Lycée St Louis in blue and red; students from Julien's and the Beaux Arts with a plentiful sprinkling of berets and corduroy jackets; and group after group of jingling artillery officers in scarlet and black, or hussars and chasseurs in pale turquoise, strolled and idled up and down the terrace, or watched the toy yachts braving the furies of the great fountain.

Over by the playgrounds, the Polichinel nuisance drummed and squeaked to an appreciative audience of tender years. The ``Jeu de paume'' was also in full swing, a truly exasperating spectacle for a modern tennis player.

The old man who feeds the sparrows in the afternoon, and beats his wife at night, was intent on the former cheerful occupation, and smiled benevolently upon the little children who watched him, open mouthed. The numerous waterfowl – mallard, teal, red-head, and dusky – waddled and dived and fought the big mouse-colored pigeons for a share of the sparrow's crumbs.

A depraved and mongrel pointer, who had tugged at his chain in a wild endeavor to point the whole heterogeneous mass of feathered creatures from sparrow to swan, lost his head and howled dismally until dragged off by the lean-legged student who was attached to the other end of the chain.

Gethryn, sprawling on a bench in the sunshine, turned up his nose. Braith grunted scornfully.

A man passed in the crowd, stopped, stared, and then hastily advanced toward Gethryn.

``You?'' said Rex, smiling and shaking hands. ``Mr Clifford, this is Mr Bulfinch; Mr Braith,'' – but Mr Bulfinch was already bowing to Braith and offering his hand, though with a curious diminution of his first beaming cordiality. Braith's constraint was even more marked. He had turned quite white. Bulfinch and Gethryn, who had risen to receive him, remained standing side by side, stranded on the shoals of an awkward situation. The little *Mirror* man made a grab at a topic which he thought would float them off, and laid hold instead on one which upset them altogether.

``I hope Mrs Braith is well. She met you all right at Vienna?''

Braith bowed stiffly, without answering.

Rex gave him a quick look, and turning on his heel, said carelessly:

``I see you and Mr Braith are old acquaintances, so I won't scruple to leave you with him for a moment. Bring Mr Bulfinch over to the music stand, Braith.'' And smiling, as if he were assisting at a charming reunion, he led Clifford away. The latter turned, as he departed, an eye of delighted intelligence upon Braith.

To renew his acquaintance with Mr Bulfinch was the last thing Braith desired, but since the meeting had been thrust upon him he thanked Gethryn's tact for removing such a witness of it as Clifford would have been. He had no intention, however, of talking with the little *Mirror* man, and maintained a profound silence, smoking steadily. This conduct so irritated the other that he determined to force an explanation of the matter which seemed so distasteful to his ungracious companion. He certainly thought he had his own reasons for resenting the sight of Braith upon a high horse, and he resumed the conversation with all the jaunty ease which the calling of newspaper correspondent is said to cultivate.

``I hope Mrs Braith found no difficulty in meeting you in Vienna?''

``Madame was not my wife, and we did not meet in Vienna,'' said Braith shortly.

Bulfinch began to stare, and to feel a little less at ease.

``She told me – that is, her courier came to me and – ''

``Her courier? Mr Bulfinch, will you please explain what you are talking about?'' Braith turned square around and looked at him in a way that caused a still further diminution of his jauntiness and a proportionate increase of respect.

``Oh – I'll explain, if I know what you want explained. We were at Brindisi, were we not?''

``Yes.''

``On our way to Cairo?''

``Yes.''

``In the same hotel?''

``Yes.''

``But I had no acquaintance with madame, and had only exchanged a word or two with you, when you were suddenly summoned to Paris by a telegram.''

Braith bowed. He remembered well the false dispatch that had drawn him out of the way.

``Well, and when you left you told her you would be obliged to give up going to Cairo, and asked her to meet you in Vienna, whither you would have to go from Paris?''

``Oh, did I?''

``And you recommended a courier to her whom you knew very well, and in whom you had great confidence.''

``Ah! And what was that courier's name?''

``Emanuel Pick. I wasn't fond of Emanuel myself,'' with a sharp glance at Braith's eyes, ``but I supposed you knew something in his favor, or you would not have left – er – the lady in his charge.''

Braith was silent.

``I understood him to be your agent,'' said the little man, cautiously.

``He was not.''

``Oh!''

A long silence followed, during which Mr Bulfinch sought and found an explanation of several things. After a while he said musingly:

``I should like to meet Mr Pick again.''

``Why should *you* want to meet him?''

``I wish to wring his nose two hundred times, one for each franc I lent him.''

``How was that?'' said Braith, absently.

``It was this way. He came to me and told me what I have repeated to you, and that you desired madame to go on at once and wait for you in Vienna, which you expected to reach in a few days after her arrival. That you had bought tickets – one first class for madame, two second class for him and for her maid – before you left, and had told her you had placed plenty of money for the other expenses in her dressing case. But this morning, on looking for the money, none could be found. Madame was sure it had not been stolen. She thought you must have meant to put it there, and forgotten afterwards. If she only had a few francs, just to last as far as Naples! Madame was well known to the bankers on the Santa Lucia there! etc. Well, I'm not such an ass that I didn't first see madame and get her to confirm his statement. But when she did confirm it, with such a charming laugh – she was very pretty – I thought she was a lady and your wife – "

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.