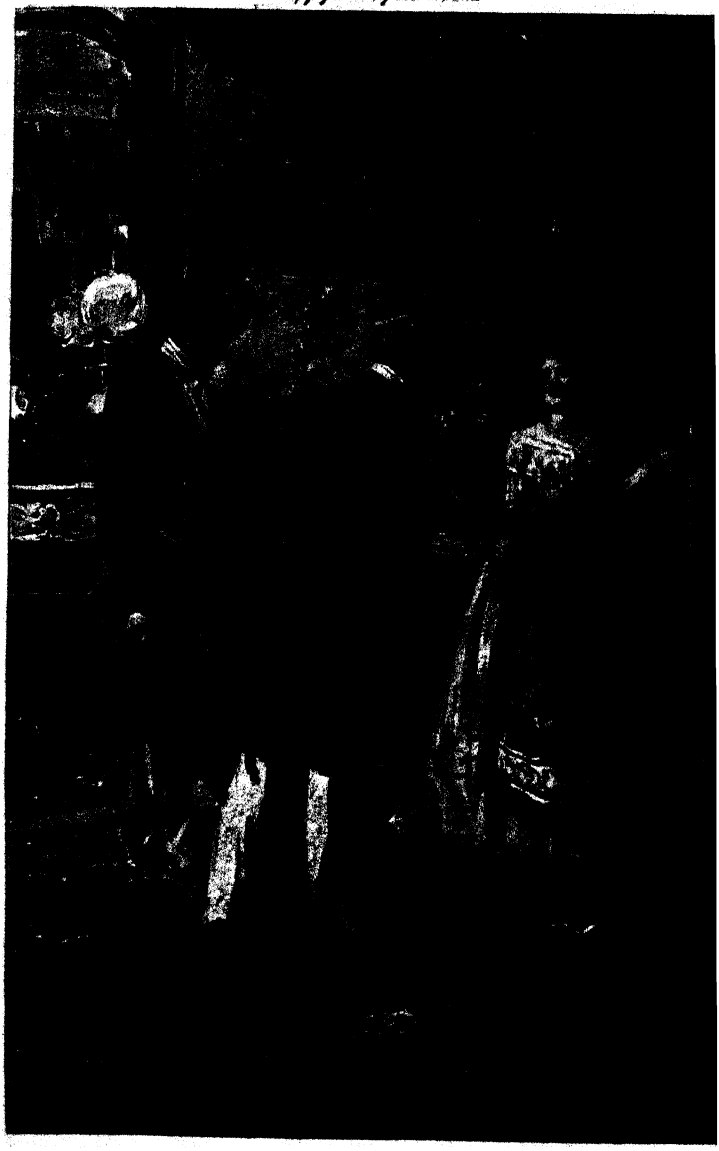
The Masterpieces

of

Charles-Paul de Kock

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MADAME BALDIMER INVOLVES HER SUITORS

"It is very late, messieurs," she said; "I am going to bed, and I bid you good-night!"

The two men rose to salute her.

THE MASTERPIECES OF

CHARLES-PAUL DE KOCK

Sans-Cravate; or, The Messengers

TRANSLATED BY

GEORGE BURNHAM IVES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

WITH FOUR PHOTOGRAVURES

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SANS-CRAVATE;

OR,

THE MESSENGERS

I

THE IDLERS.—BOULEVARD DES ITALIENS

Three young men, arm in arm, were walking, or, to speak more accurately, loitering, along Boulevard des Italiens, looking to right and left, scrutinizing the women at close quarters, especially when they were pretty; commenting aloud on the face of one and the bearing of another, interspersing their reflections with jests, puns, foolish remarks, and bursts of laughter; and, lastly, smoking cigars, an accomplishment which is now indispensable to the young men of fashion whose ordinary promenade is the Boulevard de la Chaussée d'Antin.

It is a little world in itself that frequents Boulevard des Italiens, a fashionable, aristocratic, eccentric boulevard, where, none the less, many of the promenaders affect manners, dress, and language which remind us forcibly of Diogenes. Each portion of a large city has its quarters, with their habitués and their residents, whose dress, language, and manners have their own peculiar characteristics. Thus, there is a marked difference between the costume of an annuitant of the Marais and that of the ex-young man of the Chaussée d'Antin; between the dress of a grande dame of Faubourg Saint-Germain and that of a bourgeois housewife of the Cité; between the grisette of Rue Saint-Jacques and her of

Place Bréda, who has lately taken the name of lorette. Of course, the residents of one quarter do not remain altogether on their own territory, and they may sometimes be met with in a neighboring section. But, even then, a practised eye never makes a mistake; it recognizes the strangers at once, and does not confound them with the natives of the quarter. In vain do the former try to assume the bearing and manners of the latter—the natural instincts, when we try to drive them away, return at a gallop, and it would be as difficult for a government clerk who lives on Rue Saint-Antoine to resemble a clerk in a banking house on Rue Laffite, as for a siren of Place Maubert to copy the manners of a young lady of Faubourg Saint-Honoré.

Boulevard des Italiens is no ordinary promenade; it deserves the attention of the observer; indeed, it is worthy of a chapter in the history of Paris, for it has changed its name more than once in accordance with political exigencies.

At the time of the Revolution of '89, this segment of the boulevards was called Coblentz, and it retained that name under the Empire. Not until 1815, at the time of the Second Restoration, did it exchange the name of Coblentz for that of Gand. The former name recalled the place of rendezvous of the *émigrés* of the Revolution; the other, the second return of Louis XVIII. The French have always loved to bring politics into the most trivial things; they have brought it into their ballads and into the names of flowers; so they could consistently give a political tinge to the name of a fashionable promenade. But the great majority of the ladies who resort to Boulevard des Italiens in search of conquests put no politics in their smiles; they are cosmopolites, for they have been

known to dart glances impartially at republicans and legitimists, at old soldiers of the Empire and favorites of the Restoration; it has been observed, however, that they affect more particularly the partisans of the *juste-milieu.*

But do not believe that all the ladies who occupy the chairs along the boulevard of a pleasant evening go thither to make conquests! The very best society was often to be seen on Boulevard Coblentz, and later on Boulevard de Gand; and may be seen sometimes, but more rarely, on Boulevard des Italiens.

People go there to discuss the new ballet at the Opéra, the last performance at the Bouffes, the reception of Madame la Comtesse Blank, and the ball recently given by the richest banker of the quarter. Some meet there by appointment; some pay visits there. You will see young men approach a party of ladies, stop before their chairs, salute them and pay them compliments as they would do in a salon; and, after a few moments' conversation, take leave of them and continue their stroll, stopping again, perhaps, a little farther on, to speak to others of their acquaintances.

Some years ago, it was the fashion to make a careful toilet before going to Boulevard de Gand; the ladies would exhibit a new style of head-dress, the men were all fashionably dressed; when one of them appeared with a coat of a new cut, the fashion was instantly adopted by the dandies of the capital.

Other times, other manners! It is no longer the fashion to dress for a stroll on Boulevard des Italiens. Now that the cigar has invaded that quarter, and most of the men smoke, the most fashionable young men seem to affect a simple, even severe, costume, which makes them resemble

the Puritans, as their beards remind one of the young noblemen of the time of François I.

Let us return to our three idlers.

The one in the middle, who was not more than twenty-two years of age, was above medium height; he was well built, slender, easy and graceful in his bearing, and wore with much grace a morning costume, whose cut betrayed the hand of an ultra-fashionable tailor. He wore patent-leather boots, and carried in his hand a pretty little switch, the head of which was a beautiful bit of chased silver. The young man's face did not clash with the attractions of his dress and bearing. He was dark, and his large black eyes emitted an incessant gleam, wherein wit, mockery, fun, and sometimes emotion and sentiment, shone in turn. An irreproachable nose, a well-shaped mouth, supplied with teeth so white as to justify a feeling of pride therein; an oval face, with thin black whiskers and a small moustache connecting them;—such was young Albert Vermoncey; one could not justly deny him the title of a comely youth.

On his left arm leaned a young man who was apparently some years older than the fascinating Albert, but who was also one of the lions, or, if you prefer, beaux, of the day. But his bearing lacked the grace wherein lay his companion's charm. He was taller and stouter, but there was stiffness in his gait, and affectation in the way he carried his head on one side, and in the way he wore his hat over his ear. The difference in the faces of the two was even more marked; taken separately, the features of this second member of the party were not bad, but the whole effect was far from pleasant. The color of his eyes was uncertain; and then, too, he kept the lids lowered, and rarely looked at the person with whom he was talking. Lastly, his face commonly wore a sarcastic expression,

which was sometimes insulting; one would have said that he was always inclined to pick a quarrel with someone. This young man's name was Célestin de Valnoir.

The individual who walked at Albert's right, but not on his arm, was of about his age, but much shorter, and possessed of a very pronounced embonpoint. His hair, which had a reddish tinge, curled naturally and fell in abundance on each side of his face, which was round and fresh and rosy, but a little too fat. He had attractive features: eyes almost round, but of a very clear blue; a small aquiline nose, which seemed to point to an Israelitish origin; red lips and very handsome teeth, and a dimple in the middle of his chin. All these combined to make a very attractive, chubby angel's face, which lacked character only, for its expression very rarely varied; it was that of a person who is overjoyed to be in the world. It required some very serious cause to banish his stereotyped smile; but it disappeared when he thought that he had lost his handkerchief or a piece of money. At such times an extraordinary revolution took place in his features: his nose increased in size, his mouth contracted, his eyes seemed to be on the point of starting from their orbits; in fact, he became so ugly that he was almost unrecognizable.

This third idler was dressed with more pretension than taste; he had a huge scarfpin, with a cameo; a heavy hair chain, which he wore about his neck, fell over his waistcoat and held a little square monocle, which he put in his right eye from time to time. Add to these a very fine Malacca joint, with an enormous gold or gilt head, which he often held by the middle and twirled in the air, and you have a fair portrait of Tobie Pigeonnier. His baptismal name often led people to think that he was

born in the Jewish religion; but whenever he was questioned on the subject, he seemed to take offence at the suggestion that he was a descendant of Jacob.

Let us listen to the conversation of these young gentlemen; that is the best way of making acquaintance with people.

Albert Vermoncey was telling his two friends an anecdote which seemed to amuse them mightily:

"Yes, messieurs; it was at Madame Baldimer's last reception. You know whom I mean? that American who has made such a sensation in Paris, because she is very beautiful, very bright, and very original."

"And who is supposed to be very rich," said Célestin.

"Well, isn't she?" queried Tobie Pigeonnier, rubbing his nose with the head of his cane.

"Why, people are beginning to doubt it; she gives very few big dinners now."

"If she gives many small ones, that amounts to the same thing."

"What a stupid creature you are, Tobie! Pray let me finish my story. Madame Plays was there with her husband. Good God! what a husband! he ought to serve as a model for them all."

"Because his wife has given him a pair of horns that wouldn't pass under Porte Saint-Denis?"

"Oho!" said Tobie, laughing uproariously; "do you mean to say that poor Monsieur Plays is a stag?"

"I say, Célestin, to think that Tobie didn't know that! Where have you been, my dear fellow—to the Marquesas Islands? to the kingdom of Lahore?"

"As if Tobie knew anything! When a man has passed his youth on Rue Beaubourg, he is bound to be far behind the times."

"Oh! I have lived on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins more than three years now."

"Look, messieurs! see this coming toward us, with the little lilac hat and the pink dress. I rather like the looks of it. Here's a chance to shoot off your monocle, Tobie; especially as the wind makes the lady's dress cling close to her thighs, and we are going before the wind."

"She isn't pretty," said Célestin, as the person with the lilac hat passed them.

"Gad! Célestin, you shouted that in her ears; I'll bet that she heard you."

"Well, suppose she did? aren't opinions free? I say, Tobie; speaking of Rue Beaubourg, I thought that nobody but Jews lived there."

"That's a fable, you see, as I lived there."

"That's no reason. You may be of that religion yourself."

"I have told you many times that I am a Lutheran, of Polish descent. I don't know why you insist on calling me a Jew."

"Well, suppose you were a Jew," said Albert; "what harm would it do you? Aren't there men of merit, men of genius, in all religions? and in respect to the arts, fortune, and talents, the Jewish nation is one of the most richly endowed at this moment. We are not living in the barbarous times when the people loved of God were so badly treated, when the children of Israel were compelled to wear a distinguishing mark on their clothes and their hats."

"It was a yellow mark," said Célestin, with a sneer.

"Yes; and now that color has become so fashionable that a yellow mark would not be distinctive at all. Ah! there's a young actress from the Variétés. Whom is she with to-day?"

"With an Englishman who is in a fair way to ruin himself for her. It won't take long; she makes her adorers strike a fast pace."

"She is right; she is the fashion now, and she is making the most of it. It doesn't last long in Paris."

"But it seems to me that I could mention several ladies of her stamp who have been the fashion for fifteen years at least. What a pile of money they have fricasseed, eh?"

"Do you know, I like the word *fricasseed;* it's a fact that they spend it with all sorts of sauce."

"If only they had the sense to put some of it by; then they wouldn't be obliged to end as box openers, after cutting a brilliant figure on the stage."

"Put money by! that's a reflection quite worthy of Tobie! What I can't understand is, how he ever made up his mind to buy such a big pin, with a cameo. How much did your cameo cost, Tobie? and your cane must have cost a lot, too. Damnation! what a swell! he denies himself nothing!"

"True," said Célestin; "but it would be well to know if it's all real gold."

Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier blushed to the end of his nose; but he affected to laugh heartily, and replied:

"Ah! Monsieur de Valnoir, how unkind of you! When you find me wearing anything that isn't of the first quality, you will be very sharp. I care for nothing, of any sort, that is not really choice. It's the same with my linen—I must always have the very finest. The shirt I am wearing cost me seventy-five francs."

"Have you many dozens of that sort?"

"Why, yes; I like to have a lot of linen; I was brought up to that habit. My mother had five or six large wardrobes filled with sheets—all fine Holland. When I go into

partnership with my aunt, I shall deny myself nothing; I shall have only the finest damask on my table——"

"Have you an aunt in business?"

"Yes; she sells all sorts of goods on commission. It's a big establishment: twelve clerks and eight travelling men. She promised long ago to put me at the head of it; and if it hadn't been for some escapades of mine, she'd have done it before now."

Célestin began to whistle between his teeth, and Albert, who had not been listening to Tobie for several minutes, suddenly exclaimed:

"Isn't that Madame Baldimer in that little *citadine?*"

Albert's two companions thereupon looked into the street, and Célestin, after glancing at a carriage which was passing, replied:

"Yes, that is she."

"Was she alone?"

"I think not; I thought that I caught a glimpse of a moustache beside her face."

Albert's face became clouded; he looked after the *citadine*, which was already some distance away, then stopped and seemed to hesitate as to what he should do next.

"Well! what's the matter with you?" said Célestin, looking at his friend as if he would have liked to read his inmost thoughts; "do you think of following that carriage?"

Albert tried to smile, as he replied:

"The fact is that I am curious to know—— This Madame Baldimer is a great flirt, but she has no lover, so far as anyone knows; she allows everybody to pay court to her, and seems inclined to make sport of her adorers."

"Why is anyone foolish enough to pay court to her?"

"Why, because she is lovely."

"There's no lack of lovely women in Paris."

"Nor in the suburbs," said Tobie. "I knew one at Nanterre. Such a love of a woman!"

"Did she sell cakes?"

"Ah! you joker! cakes! She was a woman of very high position."

"Did she live on a hill?"

"She had a villa, monsieur, a magnificent villa."

"At Nanterre? That is strange; I never happened to see any fine houses there."

"It wasn't just at Nanterre, but in the neighborhood."

Albert Vermoncey was lost in thought; he walked very slowly, and turned his head from time to time to see if he could still see the carriage.

Monsieur Célestin, who, without seeming to do so, closely watched his companion's movements, said, after a moment, dwelling significantly upon his words:

"A carriage is a very convenient thing, especially in Paris, where you can always be certain of finding one with blinds. If you have a secret errand to do, if you don't know where to meet your lover for a little chat—why, you step into a *citadine*, you join the person in question at the appointed place, she enters with you, you close the windows and lower the blinds; and then—go where you choose, driver, you are hired by the hour!—Drive through the most crowded streets of Paris, pass as close as you please to a husband, or a rival—he will see nothing. Sometimes, indeed, he will be the first to smile when he sees a hermetically closed carriage, and will say: 'That probably conceals some intrigue.'—Oh, yes! a carriage is a great convenience, I say again."

"It is, and it is not," said young Tobie, affecting a cunning expression; "because—— Still, if all the streets in Paris were paved with wood, it would be all right."

"Madame Baldimer did not hide," said Albert; "the blinds of her carriage were not lowered."

"Perhaps they are now," murmured Célestin.

Albert clenched his hands as if he had had a spasm of pain.

"I say, my dear Albert," said Tobie, after trying, but in vain, to fix his little glass in his right eye, "are you in love with this Madame Baldimer, that you seem inclined to follow her carriage?"

"I, in love with her? upon my word! Do you suppose that I am idiotic enough to fall in love with a woman again? I love them when they are pretty; but it lasts just so long as is necessary to triumph over them; that is quite enough. Mon Dieu! that is the best way to succeed with women. But if you really love them, you become melancholy, jealous, a bore to your friends; and your fair one no longer listens to you, and, what is worse, deceives you. Madame Baldimer is very beautiful; I have been attentive to her, as to many others."

"Yes," rejoined Tobie, sucking the gold head of his cane; "that is our business, to pay court to the ladies. Ah! if I should write my adventures—I had an idea of doing it once; but it would have taken too long; I hadn't the time, and the current forced me along."

"Did Madame Baldimer listen to you favorably?" asked Célestin, with a satirical glance at his friend.

"Why, not less so than to others. I have already told you that she plays the coquette with everybody and listens to no one."

"I should say that the gentleman who was with her in the *citadine* just now might think differently."

Albert frowned and tapped his boot with his switch, as he replied:

"You say that there was a man with her; I saw no one."

"Because your sight is not good, apparently."

"Ah! there's Désilly, the illustrious Désilly."

Two young men who were just passing our three idlers stopped in front of them. One of the two, who wore a broad-brimmed hat with a pointed crown, and had a beard a sapper might have envied, shook hands with Albert and Célestin in turn, saying:

"How are you, boys! we are out for a stroll. I tell you, this is something like! Who will give me a cigar? I've just finished mine."

Albert took from his pocket a dainty cigar case of Italian straw, and offered it to the two new-comers, each of whom took a cigar and lighted it from Albert's and Célestin's; meanwhile, Tobie whispered in Albert's ear:

"Is that the artist Désilly, who draws such amusing, clever caricatures in the paper?"

"Himself."

"Désilly," said Célestin, "you promised to show me the collection of your latest caricatures, which I want to send to Bordeaux. When would you like me to come?"

"My boys, don't ask me anything at this moment; I have a love affair on hand, and it is impossible for me to think of anything else. It may last a week, perhaps two, but it surely won't go over a month; then I shall be at your service. Adieu!"

And the artist went off with his friend.

"He has a love affair on hand," said Monsieur Tobie; "and it seems to engage his attention to the exclusion of everything else."

"Yes; but he knows the measure of his sentiments, and he never makes a mistake. He is wiser than those

men who when they are attacked by a new passion imagine that it will last forever!"

"Do they think that, nowadays?" said Tobie, toying carelessly with his hair chain. "By the way, Albert hasn't finished his story of Madame Plays, whose husband is a second Acteon. I demand the rest of the story, or my money back."

"Yes, yes, the rest of the story," said Célestin.

Albert resumed his narrative, but with much less animation, and as if he were doing it solely to oblige.

"Well, messieurs; Madame Plays was at Madame Baldimer's dance. The company was slightly mixed, as you can understand. A foreigner who has lived in Paris only a year cannot know very many people; and when she chooses to give receptions and balls, she must necessarily accept with confidence such guests as are presented to her; and her confidence is often misplaced."

"Sapristi! you are as verbose as a lawyer to-day, Albert."

"Madame Plays was superb; she is somewhat massive, as you know, but a very beautiful woman. Tall Saint-Clair, who was there, did not lose sight of her, and made eyes at her—Gad! it was enough to make one burst with laughter. Madame Plays responded, for lack of something better to do. She is a woman who must always have occupation. All of a sudden, it came into my head to rob that idiotic Saint-Clair of his conquest. I had never before given a thought to Madame Plays, although I had frequently met her in society. I had no sooner conceived the project, than I set to work. Supper had just been served; I seated myself beside the emotional Herminie—that is her name—and overwhelmed her with little attentions, interspersed with tender words.

Ah! if you knew what success I had! it went so quickly that I was almost frightened. She went so far as to tell me that I had done very wrong not to declare myself sooner."

"Peste! the lady regretted the time she had lost. And Saint-Clair?"

"Oh! he was in an extraordinary state: as he was unable to obtain a seat beside his passion, he stood behind her at first; then, when he found that she didn't answer him, or pay any attention to him, he went off in a rage and sat at the other end of the table, where he began to eat and drink with a sort of frenzy; indeed, I think that he ended by getting a little tipsy, for, when we returned to the salon to dance, he was sitting in a corner, beside Monsieur Plays, and some people declared that he wept while he was talking with him. I should not be at all surprised if he had confided to him his chagrin at having failed to make him a cuckold."

"That would be charming. But the husband replied, no doubt: 'Never fear, my friend; somebody else will.'"

"I invited my conquest to dance. What a hussy she is! In the first place, she didn't spare the madeira and the champagne; but she's not like Saint-Clair, they didn't make her feel inclined to cry; on the contrary, she danced with such vigor, such enthusiasm! it was impossible to stop her. As we were all decidedly gay, somebody proposed dancing the cancan—the real thing. The superb Herminie dances it as well as a grisette from La Chaumière, and much more boldly than the lorettes at the Bal Saint-Georges. Gad! you ought to have seen us! We were truly admirable. The other women in the quadrille soon gave up their places, but Madame Plays kept on, with myself and six other men, three of whom danced

as women. There was a great ring around us. Upon my word, it was a curious sight. I fancied that I heard somebody whisper that my partner had imbibed too much madeira and champagne, but I believe her to be quite capable of doing anything under heaven without the aid of liquor."

"And Madame Baldimer?"

"She didn't dance, but she laughed heartily."

"There is no need of asking you if that intrigue came to a successful end?"

"Oh! it was so easy. I assure you that conquests like that are not at all interesting, and there is so little difficulty about them that they do not even flatter our vanity. That happened a fortnight ago, and my only desire now is to rid myself of the passionate Herminie. Mon Dieu! that reminds me that I have an appointment with her for this evening. Messieurs, which of you would like to go in my place? I will turn over my conquest to him, with all my heart."

"Thanks," said Célestin, blowing a mouthful of smoke into the face of an old woman who was passing; "Madame Plays doesn't tempt me. She is too heavy for me."

"Why, I should say that you were strong enough to carry her," said Pigeonnier; "you have the build of an athlete, a gladiator. I am sure that you could easily carry a bag of flour that weighs three hundred and twenty-five."

"And because you suppose that I can carry a bag of flour, you suggest that I become Madame Plays's lover! The comparison is most flattering to the lady! What brilliant ideas that devil of a Tobie has!"

II

THE FLOWER GIRL

At that moment a young woman, with her head enveloped in a silk handkerchief, from beneath which long locks of chestnut hair emerged and hung in corkscrew curls on both sides of her face, approached the young men and accosted them with rather a brazen-faced air, thrusting divers bunches of violets almost into their faces.

"Messieurs, buy a bouquet of me, be the first to buy; you'll bring me luck."

"Aha! it's Bastringuette," said Albert, smiling at the girl, whose pale, thin face, eyes circled with black, and hoarse voice, suggested a very fatiguing profession.

"Come, buy of me; you always have some lady to give flowers to! you're a good customer!"

"You strike me at a bad time, my poor girl; my love affairs are too prosperous at this moment, I don't need to be gallant."

"I say, Bastringuette, what sort of business are you doing, that you have those black rings round your eyes, and look so fagged out?" said Monsieur Célestin, taking the flower girl by the chin. She had large brown eyes surmounted by heavy eyebrows, a large but well-shaped mouth, and would still have been a seductive person had she but a little fresher color and a less brazen expression.

"I do what I want! What odds is it to you who never buy anything of me?"

"Because I don't need to give bouquets to gain my ends, it is fair to suppose."

"Come, take away your paws! I don't wear anything false, I don't need to be felt of!—And you, my little love, won't you buy something of me? With such a face and style, you ought to have mistresses on every street, and even on the boulevards!"

This complimentary speech was addressed to Tobie Pigeonnier; he seemed to be exceedingly flattered by it, and, to manifest his satisfaction, rested his nose on each bunch of violets on her tray in turn, saying:

"She's very amusing, very clever, this flower girl! She has a pair of eyes—what pistols! how she fires 'em at you point-blank!"

"Well, my dear boy, are you going to confine yourself to putting your nose on all the bouquets? Thanks! You may sprinkle 'em, but that's not the kind of dampness that keeps 'em fresh. Come, buy this bunch!"

"No, I have no victims to sacrifice to-day; unless you would like to be one—eh, hussy?"

"Stop that! You're too puffy for me! I don't like wax figures; I should be afraid you'd melt in my arms!"

Albert and Célestin roared with laughter at the wry face which Tobie made when he received this compliment from the flower girl. Having tried once more to place his glass in his right eye, he cast a disdainful glance at Mademoiselle Bastringuette, saying:

"You are like your flowers, my dear; when one looks at you too close, he sees that he would be cheated."

"*Dame!* that's not like you! one has only to glance at you to be satisfied that he gets nothing for his money."

Tobie's two friends laughed louder than ever; and he concluded to try to laugh with them, saying:

"The devil! we're dealing with a good fighter! I fancy I shall not have the last word with her."

"Not the last word nor anything else, my little fat man. *Dame!* all the pleasure we poor girls have is with our tongue! We must make the most of it, for it don't cost anything."

"Take care! The tongue is the best and the worst part of us. Æsop said that."

"I don't know the gentleman; but mine seems to be a good one, for it don't wear out at all. It ain't like your waistcoat; see, monsieur, it's giving out under the arms!"

And Mademoiselle Bastringuette, whose eyes detected the most carefully hidden secrets of a man's toilet, pointed out to Tobie's friends a place in his silk waistcoat, which, although it was almost hidden by his coat, she had discovered. There was a rent large enough to show the sleeve of his shirt, which was of a coarse and yellow linen vastly different from that of the front.

The stout young man made haste to button his coat.

"I must have torn it when I put it on," he said. "My tailor always makes the armholes too small! and then, *crac!* an accident."

"Oh! no, monsieur; that wasn't an accident! it's pretty well worn out on that side. See, it's like my dress! There's some attic windows for you!"

As she spoke, Mademoiselle Bastringuette lifted her arms and showed two great holes in her dress, under her armpits.

"I hope you'll believe that I've got another one to put on, though," she continued, with a smile. "Bah! what do I care! it won't hinder my selling my violets! And even if someone does see my skin! There's no harm done, after all. I haven't got a turkey's skin, like lots of women that have fine dresses and a dirty lining."

"She's very original; indeed, she's quite—original, is this girl," said Tobie, who was very glad that she had ceased to talk about his waistcoat; "she amuses me mightily."

"Why," said Albert, "didn't you know her before?"

"This is the first time I ever saw her."

"For a man who has lived in the Chaussée d'Antin for three years, that is very surprising. Everybody about here knows Bastringuette, the flower girl who sells violets on Boulevard des Italiens."

"I seldom buy flowers; their odor makes me ill."

"Yes, I sell violets when there are any," said Bastringuette; "but when they're all gone, I sell other things —oranges, nuts, green peas, lettuce. There's always something to sell, at all seasons, and that's why they call us *marchandes des quatre saisons.*"

"It seems to me that your lover doesn't keep you very handsomely," observed Célestin, with a mocking glance at the girl.

"My lover! *dame!* I don't know how he does it, but he never has a sou; and he's little better off for clothes than I am; luckily, love don't need a new coat to keep warm."

"Are you still with Sans-Cravate?" asked Albert, taking the largest bunch of violets on the girl's tray.

"To be sure. Oh! we poor girls aren't like the great ladies; we don't change our bill of fare every day."

"What! is that ne'er-do-well of a Sans-Cravate your lover?" said Célestin. "I don't congratulate you, my poor Bastringuette! The fellow often beats you, I suppose, doesn't he?"

"Beat me!" cried the girl, contracting her heavy eyebrows. "When a man beats me, it will be because I

have no teeth left to eat his eyes out, and no nails to tear his nose. You think that a man beats his mistress, just because he's a messenger! Oh, yes! that's all very nice, but it ain't our style. We ain't brutes, just because we belong to the common people. It's much more likely to be you who amuse yourself striking women! The men who wear jackets ain't always the meanest curs. There are some vile hearts under fine coats."

Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir seemed far from pleased by this apostrophe; he bit his lip, and there was something very like a threat in the look he gave the girl; but she sustained it without the slightest evidence of emotion.

Tobie, enchanted to find that she paid no further attention to him, and that somebody else was now the object of her sarcasms, twirled his cane like a drum-major, and laughed aloud, swaying from side to side as if he were on a tight-rope.

"And then," continued Bastringuette, rearranging her bouquets, "why should you say that Sans-Cravate is a ne'er-do-well? What has he ever done to be called that? because he's a bit noisy and quick-tempered and quarrelsome? because he gets a little tight, now and then? A great crime, that! That's what you call doing wrong! A man works, then enjoys himself—is that any more than fair? And all the fine things he's done—no one ever speaks of them, because he don't crow about 'em himself!"

"Oho! so Monsieur Sans-Cravate does fine things, does he?" sneered Célestin. "I've never read of any of them in the newspapers."

"The newspapers! they're great authority! Run by people who lie from New Year's Day to Saint-Sylvestre, and make up a lot of stories without any head or tail,

that would drive you crazy if you believed 'em all. That's what happened to my poor mother. She didn't know any better than to stuff her head full of what a lot of papers said. She read 'em in the concierge's room, at all the neighbors', and at the grocer's, and she used to say to us every day: 'Things are going wrong, children; the people are very discontented; there'll be an upset before long, for a body won't be able to sneeze without having to pay a tax to the government, and that will make it very expensive for people with colds in their heads. Bread will go to thirty sous a loaf, and we shan't be able to go out next winter without being murdered, and perhaps worse.'—'Well, then, mother,' I'd say, 'we'll just stay in the house, and eat potatoes if we can't get bread.'—But all that stuff turned her brain, I tell you; she died in six months; and the doctor himself said: 'Your mother died of indigestion caused by *canards* [ducks],' and the nonsense they stuff the newspapers with is canards. But here I am chattering like a magpie, and that don't sell my flowers."

"Here," said Albert, handing the girl a five-franc piece, "this is for the bunch of violets, which I will keep; for it wouldn't be fair to have made you talk all this time for nothing."

"Ah! thanks, my little darling! you're a nice boy, you are; that makes up for some of those who ain't!"

And Bastringuette went her way along the boulevard, crying:

"Buy flowers, messieurs and mesdames! buy some pretty violets! The spring has come; buy flowers for your ladies!"

"She's no fool," said Albert, looking after her as she walked away; "she is very amusing, and quick at repartee."

"That is to say," rejoined Célestin, "she is one of those people who say whatever comes into their head; and as there may happen to be an occasional witty remark in the midst of a mass of nonsense, it's the fashion to say that such people are very bright. That girl is exceedingly impertinent, and that's the extent of her wit, in my opinion."

"Messieurs," said Albert, "our meeting with Bastringuette interrupted our conversation, which was very interesting, however. We were speaking of Madame Plays, and I proposed to turn over to one of you my appointment for this evening. Are there no takers?"

"Do you make that proposition seriously?" said young Tobie Pigeonnier, patting the gold head of his cane.

"Most seriously, I assure you! I have never been in love with Madame Plays; I paid court to her, purely as a joke, to play a trick on Saint-Clair; but my one desire now is to break with my fair conquest."

"Really, Madame Plays is very attractive!" rejoined Monsieur Tobie, throwing away the end of his cigar; "she's a very fine woman, her face is extremely pretty; and then, you see, I have a penchant for plump women."

"In that case, you would be served to your taste," said Célestin.

"But to take your place at a rendezvous; how the devil can that be arranged?"

"Nothing easier," said Albert. "I am to be at the flower market on Boulevard de la Madeleine—near the church, you know—at half-past eight this evening."

"I know the place very well; I often walk there on market days. Some very distinguished women come there—women in carriages; I have noticed that the flowers were only a pretext, and that they came there for other things than orange blossoms and camellias."

BASTRINGUETTE AND THE IDLERS

At that moment a young woman, with her head enveloped in a silk handkerchief, . . . approached the young men and accosted them with rather a brazen-faced air, thrusting divers bunches of violets almost into their faces.

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"Very good; Madame Plays will be there. I will give you a little note for her, in which I will say that some unexpected business may detain me a little while, but that I send her one of my friends, whose discretion is unquestionable, and who will escort her to a place where I will join her as soon as I possibly can. With that note, you will go to the rendezvous in my place, you will hand the note to Madame Plays, and take her where you choose, pretending that it is a place selected by me, and that you are to stay with her, for company, until I come. I fail to appear, the lady is furious with me, and you console her. Faith! it seems to me that that will go of itself."

"It's an intrigue all cut and dried for you," said Célestin.

Tobie shook his head; the scheme evidently pleased him, but he seemed to feel that it required reflection.

"Do you think Madame Plays will accept my escort?" he asked; "won't she be angry when she sees that you have let me into the secret of your intrigue with her?"

"Don't be alarmed, my dear Tobie; I know the person I am sending you to; of course, I wouldn't do this with all women; but I know Madame Plays; she's a jade who snaps her fingers at what people may say, and is proud of her conquests. The fair Herminie is almost a man in petticoats."

"The devil! I hope that that is true only with respect to her moral qualities."

"Never fear; physically, she is superbly feminine. Her husband pays no sort of heed to what she does. Indeed, she leads him by the nose. If she should tell him that the obelisk of Luxor had made her a mother, he would believe it, or would pretend to; if she takes a fancy to you, the affair is done."

"Oh! in that case, I have some chance of success. I accept; faith! yes, I accept; I will try the experiment; he who sows, reaps. Sapristi! no one can deny that we are sad rakes; I have several mistresses already, but the fair Plays tempts me."

"I give you my word that she is a very agreeable woman—pretty face, well built, solid as a rock! in short, everything that can tempt an amateur. If I had nothing else in my head just now, I would not have left her so quickly.—So it's a bargain. Now, I must give you the note you are to hand her. It is exactly like giving a letter of recommendation."

Little Tobie was enchanted; he laughed aloud, he walked with a swagger, and twirled his cane; in the extravagance of his delight, he seemed disposed to leap and turn somersaults on the boulevard; so that Célestin said to him:

"I say, young Pigeonnier, just calm down a bit; anyone would think, to see your insane joy, that you had never had a love affair."

"Oho! I have no lack of them, I assure you; I have my choice every day; but this will be such an amusing experience! Ha! ha! ha! to take another man's place! ha! ha! it is delicious!"

"There is nothing commoner than that; it's an old opéra-comique idea. Now, messieurs, I propose that we dine together. We have begun the day well, we must finish it as well. We will dine at the Maison-Dorée. Mouillot and Balivan will dine with us; they are two good fellows, as you know, and we shall find them at the Passage des Panoramas at half-past five; I have an appointment with them. Tobie does not meet his charmer until eight; so that he will have plenty of time to dine.

Then we will have a little game of bouillotte at the restaurant, and Tobie will come back and tell us the result of his adventure."

"Good! I agree!" cried Albert; "especially as I have had hard luck lately at bouillotte. That Mouillot is a lucky devil; he always wins, and he owes me a terrible revenge.—Well, Tobie, doesn't the plan suit you? You often say: 'We must dine together, and have a little spree;' but when we try to fix a day, you never can. Here is a good chance, it seems to me. My dear fellow, if you want to succeed with Madame Plays, I warn you that you must act a little cavalierly."

Tobie seemed to hesitate for a moment, but at last he struck the ground with his cane and cried:

"Well, I accept! yes, let us dine together, and make the day complete! feasting! cards! women! that's my idea of life! Ah! what libertines we are!"

"Now, messieurs," said Albert, "we will step into the café on Passage de l'Opéra, and I will write the note for Madame Plays; and I have another letter to write and send off before dinner."

"And so have I," said Célestin.

"And I," said Tobie; "I have an important errand to be done."

"Let us go, then."

The three young men entered the café at the corner of the boulevard and the Passage de l'Opéra, and ordered writing materials, together with three glasses of madeira. Each of the three wrote very busily. Albert let his pen run over the paper, but it seemed not to travel fast enough to express the thoughts which thronged the mind of him who guided it. Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir wrote more slowly, but, from the expression of his

face, it was evident that he was carefully considering his words. As for Tobie Pigeonnier, he wrote the least rapidly of the three, either because his ideas did not come readily, or because his subject was a difficult one to treat; he scratched his forehead, looked up at the ceiling, wrote two words, stopped, ran his hand through his hair, and began again; his letter caused him much toil, but he did not confine himself to a single one; after sealing the first, he at once began another. Albert and Célestin, who had finished theirs long before, said to him:

"Well, Pigeonnier, how many letters are you writing? will this be a long one?"

"One moment, messieurs; let me finish this one, I beg; it is very important. You see, in order to dine with you, I have to miss two most seductive appointments. The poor little women! they will be in despair, but, at all events, I shall not keep them waiting for me in the cold. Just a word of love, and I shall have finished."

"Parbleu! that's not hard to find. Put *yours for life*, and let it go at that."

"That is too common; I am going to write something different."

Monsieur Tobie finished his correspondence at last. Albert paid the waiter, and the three young men rose and left the café.

"The next thing is to send my letters," said Tobie.

"Oh! I have my regular messenger—Sans-Cravate," said Albert; "he is always at the corner of Rue du Helder, close by; let us go there."

"For my part," said Célestin, "I employ his comrade, Jean Ficelle; he's a very intelligent fellow. There's a third one, whose name is Paul, I think, who stands with them; he will do Tobie's errand."

"All right, messieurs," said Pigeonnier. "Let us go and find our messengers. By the way—how about my letter for the fair Herminie?"

"Faith! I forgot to write it; but we have time enough, I'll write it at the restaurant; we must hurry, it's five o'clock now."

III

THE MESSENGERS

On Rue du Helder, near the boulevard, in front of a handsome house, three street messengers had their regular stand.

On the afternoon of which we are writing, all three were at their post. One lay at full length on his *crochets*, which he had placed on the ground, horizontally, in such wise as to form a sort of cot-bed; it was rather narrow, but its occupant had become so accustomed to it that he had no difficulty in maintaining his place, and never fell over the side.

Another was sitting on a stone bench against the house. He was smoking a pipe, and had in his hands a disgustingly greasy and dirty pack of cards, with which he was apparently practising the false cut and divers other tricks of that sort.

The third messenger was on his feet, leaning against the wall, with his eyes fixed on the topmost floor of a high building almost opposite.

The man lying on the *crochets* seemed to be in the prime of life; he was of medium height, but the breadth

of his shoulders and the size of the muscles in his sinewy limbs pointed him out as a man with whom it would be dangerous to quarrel. His face was frank and good-humored; his small, light blue eyes expressed recklessness and merriment; his nose was rather large, and sometimes red at the end; his full lips denoted a kindly and obliging disposition; and his abundant light hair, which blew about at the pleasure of the wind, surmounted a high forehead, wherein the brain must have had ample room to exercise its faculties.

He was dressed like most messengers,—a jacket and loose trousers; but he wore no neckerchief; his shirt, fastened by a button, disclosed a neck much whiter than one would have supposed from the color of his hands and face. The invariable habit of wearing nothing about his neck at any season of the year, even when the cold was most severe, was responsible for the sobriquet of *Sans-Cravate*, which had come to be the only name by which the messenger was known to the persons who employed him, and even to most of his friends.

The person seated on the stone bench, who seemed intent upon his cards, was short, and heavily pock-marked; his hair was dark brown and very thick, and hung low over a narrow forehead; the man's face indicated intelligence and cunning, and the evil expression of his gray eyes seemed to forbid the judgment we are accustomed to form of a person with a low forehead. A small nose, much too retroussé, tightly closed lips, and a protruding chin, made of Monsieur Jean Ficelle a decidedly ugly individual, and one who would by no means inspire the confidence which we like to feel in a messenger, unless his unusual mobility of feature were successful in deceiving those who tried to read his thoughts.

The third messenger, who stood against the wall, with his eyes constantly fixed on the attics of the opposite house, was a tall, slender young man of graceful figure; although he also wore loose trousers and a jacket, there was in his bearing an indefinable something, which, while perhaps it could not be called refinement, distinguished it from the vulgar slouchiness of his companions; and as, generally speaking, a person's face almost always fulfils the promise of his bearing, so this young man, whose features were regular and attractive, had not the usual expression of those of his calling. A high, well-shaped forehead; beautiful black hair, brushed aside with a lack of coquetry that was not without charm; brown eyes, with a tender and melancholy expression; a mouth of an ordinary type, supplied with handsome teeth; an oval face, almost always pale, but indicative of a delicate constitution rather than of ill health—such was that one of the three messengers who was known as Paul, and who, in truth, seemed but ill adapted for his trade.

"If Bastringuette hasn't sold her violets, I shall have a chance to sup in my mind's eye to-day. Business is dull, but the appetite keeps right along. *Crédié!* what a lot of rooms there are to let in my belly! and unfurnished lodgings in my stomach! How the devil am I to furnish it all?

"'Dip your bread, Marie, dip your bread,
Dip your bread in clear water!'

We'll sing that song for our supper, and we shan't be troubled with indigestion. But Bastringuette don't like that tune—nor do I, for that matter."

It was Sans-Cravate who made these reflections aloud, as he turned over on his *crochets*. After a moment's silence, he continued:

"If a fellow hadn't his cutty to comfort him when his pocket's empty, how he would curse his destiny! Bah! what's the odds! Am I going to have an attack of the dismals? am I going to join the ranks of the snivellers? Never! It don't bring in a sou to be sad; and then, as another song says, which I like much better:

"'Courage! courage!
One's friends are always by!'

Isn't that so, boys? Well! don't all answer at once; I shouldn't know you if you did."

As he spoke, Sans-Cravate turned and looked at his comrades. He shrugged his shoulders when he saw Jean Ficelle playing with his cards, and muttered:

"The deuce! there's Jean Ficelle practising his tricks! Cards are his vocation. But damn me if I ever play piquet with you again! Infernal Ficelle! * you are too well named."

The person addressed paid no attention, he was so engrossed by his cards. Thereupon Sans-Cravate turned to Paul and said, with a smile:

"Ah! this is a bird of another color. 'Tis love, love, love, that makes the world go round! And here's a young spark as has laid in a good stock of it. Well, Paul, even if you give yourself a stiff neck standing like that, with your head in the air, you won't succeed in opening the windows on the fourth floor, if Mademoiselle Dumanchon, the dressmaker, wants 'em to stay shut. Mademoiselle Dumanchon don't let her girls go out to walk the streets; indeed, she has plenty of work, because, they say, she knows her business. She makes dresses that give a bust to women without any, and that hide the

* *Ficelle*, literally, "packthread": vulgarly, a "trick," or a "trickster."

hips of those who have too much. That's genuine talent! I am surprised that she lives on the fourth floor; to be sure, lodgings in this quarter are pretty high.—Come, Paul, tell me, haven't you seen your little girl to-day?"

The young messenger who was looking in the air turned to Sans-Cravate and replied:

"My little girl? What do you mean? I don't understand you."

"Oh, well! if we're going to play the stupid, if we have secrets from our friends—that's a different matter, and you'd better say so. Do you suppose I don't know that you're in love with one of the dressmaker's apprentices, a pretty little thing named Elina, who takes short, quick steps when she passes us, which doesn't prevent her casting a sly glance in your direction?"

"Really, Sans-Cravate! do you think she looks at me when she passes?"

"You don't see her yourself, I suppose, you fox?"

"Oh! I assure you, Sans-Cravate, that I have never said a word to that young woman which could make her suspect that I dare to think of her. I think her very pretty, that is true; and then, she is so pleasant and so courteous when she gives me an errand to do! There are so many people who treat us messengers as if we were brutes or savages!"

"When anybody takes that tone with me, I pay him back in his own coin. If people are decent, I am amiable; if they're insolent, then I'm brutal! and be damned to 'em!"

"But when one is obliged to work for his living, he must work for everybody."

"Not at all! I choose my patrons. Indeed, I very often fold my arms."

"Several times Mademoiselle Elina has taken me with her to carry boxes, and she always talks to me so kindly—— Ah! it makes me forget that I am only a poor messenger."

"In short, you are in love with the girl; that's the whole story."

"Oh, no! Sans-Cravate, you're mistaken; and, anyway, what good would it do me to love that charming creature? Can a man of my class, one of the common people, presume to raise his eyes to someone who will not come down to his level?"

"Look you, a man always presumes, and does his reasoning afterward. And then, it don't seem to me that a dressmaker's apprentice is such a very great personage; and, even if you are a messenger, aren't you as good a man as another? If a duchess would have me, I'd adore her, duchess and all.—Great God! if Bastringuette should hear me, she'd make me go without tobacco."

"Yes," said Paul, with a sigh, "a messenger's trade requires that he be an honest man. I don't blush for my calling, I assure you. And yet, there was a time when I was justified in hoping that I might occupy a higher station. A most excellent man, happening to see me, when I was ten years old, in the charitable institution where I was brought up, took a fancy to me and offered to take charge of me, as he needed someone to do errands for him. Monsieur Desroches was a respectable tradesman, and his proposition was thankfully accepted. I left that refuge of the unfortunate, where I had passed my childhood, and went to live with my new patron, in the Marais. As he was satisfied with the zeal and promptitude with which I did the errands he gave me to do, Monsieur Desroches had me taught to read and write

and cipher, and employed me in his office; and every day he would give me a friendly tap on the shoulder, and say: 'You're doing well, Paul; keep on, and you'll make your way.'"

"Good! He was what I call a fine old cove! And that's how it is that you know so much, and that you're so much better set up than the rest of us. Well, why didn't you stay with that fine old fellow? I suppose you played some prank or other. *Dame!* boys will be boys!"

"Oh, no! not that at all! I would never have left good Monsieur Desroches. But after I had lived with him eight years, he and his wife treating me like their own child, my benefactor was utterly ruined by a bad failure; and the poor man died of grief, because he was compelled to ask for time to pay his notes."

"Sapristi! you ought to have kept some of that man's seed. His kind are not common in the market."

"I was eighteen years old at that time. I tried to find a place, to get into some business house; but I couldn't find anything. However, I had to earn money, for one must live; so I soon made up my mind: I bought a pair of *crochets* and started in as a messenger."

"And you did well. There is no foolish trade, as one of the old troubadours said! But how did you happen to come into this quarter instead of staying in the Marais, where you were known?"

"That was just the reason. People there had seen me every day, dressed—I might almost say, fashionably, and I didn't care to have them see me in this jacket. For, I tell you, Sans-Cravate, although you may set your mind on making the best of it, there are times when you can't help remembering the past."

"I understand your feeling, especially as I myself—— Mine is another kind; but the idea's the same. I mean that I sometimes think of my father, and my poor mother, and my sister Adeline, or Liline, as I call her—such a pretty creature she is. Ah! I might have stayed with them all, in our little village in Auvergne. My father often said to me: 'Stay with us, Étienne (they didn't call me *Sans-Cravate* there), stay with us and take care of my little farm. We have enough to live on. What are you going to do in Paris?'—But, damnation! my feet itched; I couldn't stay still. I said to my father: 'Let me go; I mean to make my fortune, and bring back a big marriage portion for Liline.'—So he let me go, and it's amazing how I pile up the money! I never have a sou! I tell you, Paul, when I think of that, I am ashamed of myself; I would give myself a good thrashing, if I could."

"Don't get excited, my dear Sans-Cravate; if your father has enough to live on, of course he doesn't count on you."

"I went to see them two years and a half ago; I knew it would please father, and I myself was glad enough to see 'em all and give 'em a kiss. I had succeeded in saving thirty francs, and I said to myself: 'With thirty francs and a good stick, I can walk home as comfortably as you please.' So I started; but Jean Ficelle started with me, and the second day my money was all gone. However, I got there after a while. I saw my sister, who was fifteen then—I am six years older than she is; she is almighty pretty, and such fine manners and language! There's a Madame de Clermont, who has taken a fancy to her and often sends for her to go and visit her. Then my poor father is left all alone in the village. But he says: 'I can't

interfere with what that lady chooses to do for my child's good.'—He hoped I would stay with him, but I couldn't. When a man has had a taste of this rascally Paris, can he make up his mind to live in a village?—I said to my father: 'I am in a fair way to get rich; I must go back to Paris, or else I shall miss my opportunity; I will come back when I have money enough.'—And off I went; and when I got here, my trousers were torn so that you could see my posterior; and at the barrier, they thought I was trying to smuggle, and ran after me, singing out: 'What are you hiding there?'—'I'm hiding nothing,' says I; 'on the contrary, I'm showing too much; collect a duty on it, if you choose.'—And—— Well, you don't seem to be listening. So much for talking to a lover; it's the same as talking to yourself."

While Sans-Cravate was speaking, Paul had turned his eyes toward the dressmaker's windows again, and seemed, in fact, to have ceased to listen to his comrade. But at that moment the third messenger, who had not spoken, uttered a grunt of satisfaction and jumped up from the bench, crying:

"I have it, I have done it; oh! I have it as neat as you please!"

"What is it that you have, Jean Ficelle?" asked Sans-Cravate.

The person addressed raised his head and replied, with a disdainful glance at his comrades:

"Oh! something that I can use to take greenhorns in."

"Another new game, I'll bet; for you're a very devil of a gambler!"

"Well, why not? Games of chance are tabooed in Paris, but the sharks and blacklegs in good society find a way to play, all the same. They have secret meetings,

where they can ruin themselves as nice as you please, on the pretence of having a little dance."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! I know everything. Well, then, why shouldn't the small fry, the less select society, have the same chance? But they go about it more openly. The men who run games of chance set them up in the open air, all ready to cut stakes at sight of a policeman or a detective. You don't know anything about it, you fellows; you are greenhorns. Just listen to me a minute, for your instruction."

"A nice kind of instruction we are likely to get from you, I fancy."

"But it's always a help, even if it's only to keep you from being taken in by sharpers.—Come, Sans-Cravate, come and sit down with me."

Sans-Cravate concluded to take his seat on the stone bench, beside Jean Ficelle, who continued, with the important air of one who considers himself much more intelligent than those to whom he speaks:

"Near the barriers, under the arches of the bridges, on the outer boulevards, and in the neighborhood of the wine market, are the places where you will usually find the men in blouses and plain caps who are called *croupiers*, which means: men who run a game. In the summertime, if you should go and look under the arches of the bridge over the canal near Pont d'Austerlitz, you would see a number of games in full blast. You see groups of men—first, the *croupiers* and their confederates (for wherever there's games of chance, there's confederates); then, peasants, countrymen, and workmen with their loaves under their arms; these are the pigeons, who let themselves be plucked by the bait of a possible gain."

"What a lot this Jean Ficelle knows!—You seem to have made a study of it!"

"In my own interest, in order not to be a pigeon! They play *biribi*, *table-basse*, *jarretières*, *trois noix*, and sometimes *loto;* but the first three are played most. The game of *jarretières*, you know, consists in sticking a pin into the edge of a piece of cloth. The man who runs the game always uses the skirt of his frock-coat. If I had one on, I'd show you how it's done. He lifts up one corner, presses it very tight, and holds it out to you in such a way that to stick a pin into the edge seems to be the simplest thing in the world."

"Well?"

"But not much; because the *croupier*, when he picks up the hem of his coat, is smart enough to turn it under; so that you always stick your pin into the middle of the cloth when you think you're sticking it into the edge."

"I'd stick it into his ugly mug!—And *table-basse*, what's that?"

"You see a little table with a lot of little, numbered holes. They hand you a dicebox, with some balls; you throw the balls on the table at random, and they roll into the holes; then they add up the numbers and give you the prize corresponding to the total. The big prizes are never won; you never get the silver watch, the piece of plate, or the drinking cup, that they show to entice you; but a flint and steel, or a save-all—that's all your twenty sous ever wins."

"Very pretty, indeed! a choice lot they must be! But what did you mean just now when you sung out: 'I've got it! I know how it's done!'"

"Oh! that's the most popular of all the games—*biribi*."

"*Biribi?*"

"I'll show you that; you play it with just three cards, see; and one of 'em's *biribi*. Look, the ace of hearts! Now, to win, all you have to do is guess where *biribi* is. But the *croupier's* skill consists in always showing you the under card, and that is always *biribi;* then he moves his cards this way and that, and you think you can follow it with your eyes. Like this: now, follow the ace of hearts, follow it carefully; do you know which of the three it is now?"

Sans-Cravate, who had kept his eyes on the cards, placed his hand on one of them, saying:

"This is the ace of hearts."

"How much do you bet?"

"A glass of beer."

"Done!"

Jean Ficelle turned the card and showed his wondering comrade that it was not *biribi*.

Sans-Cravate was stupefied. Jean Ficelle repeated the trick twice, and won two more glasses of beer.

"Are you a sorcerer?" cried the other.

"Oh, no! But you don't see that, when I move the cards about, I always throw the one that's on top, although I make believe to throw the one on the bottom. That's how they gull the peasant, who thinks he hasn't taken his eyes off *biribi*. But if by any chance the pigeon guesses right, just when he's going to put his hand on the card which is really *biribi*, a confederate, who is always on hand, says to him: 'Not that one, my man; the other one, to the left. I am sure of it, and, to prove it, I'll bet a hundred sous.' The peasant is persuaded by the confederate's confidence, he takes up the card on which the other has bet five francs, and he is *smoked*.—I say there, you man of sighs, come and play *biribi* with us a while."

Paul glanced at the cards and shook his head.

"I don't care for card playing," he said.

"We must kill time, especially when we've nothing to do. Come and play for a glass of beer—that won't ruin you."

"I don't want to play."

"Humph! what a poor cuss that fellow is!" said Jean Ficelle, turning back to Sans-Cravate. "He'll never spend a sou with his friends. I don't call that being a man, myself."

"Paul is more sensible, wiser, than we are; he saves his money and he does well."

"Saves his money—hum! I don't feel so sure what he does with his money; he gets mighty little good out of it. He's pale as an egg, and his jacket's all patched at the elbows. *Dame!* perhaps he spends it all to seduce his girl. Women aren't to be caught with nothing but sighs. They like to have money spent on 'em—dress-makers, especially. They say that they have to have dinners and theatre tickets and jewelry. Little Elina probably spends it all for him. She has the look of a sly little coquette——"

On hearing Elina's name, Paul ran up to Jean Ficelle, seized his left arm, and shook it roughly.

"What's that you say?" he exclaimed. "You dare to talk about Mademoiselle Elina! If I am not mistaken, you had the effrontery to make remarks about that young lady! Be careful, Jean! I am not ill-tempered; but if you should be unlucky enough to insult her, why, I would stamp on you as I do on these cards!"

"Let alone of me, I say! Will you let alone of me? Stupid fool—to walk on my cards!"

"A terrible calamity! A fine business for a messenger, isn't it? to learn thieves' and blacklegs' tricks, to study

ways of cheating other people! Instead of handling cards so skilfully, you would do much better to mend your *crochets* and your saw. But you prefer to play cards!"

"Ah, ça! isn't it about time for the fellow to stop? What airs he puts on! and why, I should like to know! A miserable foundling, with no father nor mother—and he undertakes to preach to other people! Go and hunt up your parents—that would be a better business for you."

Paul lowered his eyes at the word *foundling*, and his face assumed an expression of profound sadness; he released his hold on Jean's arm, and, stepping back to the wall, stood leaning against it without speaking a word.

But Sans-Cravate, who knew that nothing wounded Paul so deeply as to be reminded that he had been abandoned by his parents, and who saw the sorrowful expression of his face, rose abruptly and shook his clenched fist under Jean Ficelle's nose, saying:

"You're a miserable cur! and if your nose wasn't so turned-up already that I can see your brain, I'd turn it up a little more for you. You know that the poor fellow is unhappy because he knows nothing about his family; but it isn't any crime, and it's better to have no family at all than to come of low-lived stock! But it hurts him when anyone speaks of it; and you remind him of it on purpose! It was a mean, dirty trick! I have a good mind to thrash you. Come, try a little bout with me; I'll give you a good dust bath, to cool you off."

Sans-Cravate had already seized Jean about the waist; but Paul hastened to intervene, and forced Sans-Cravate to release his hold.

"I don't want you to fight my battles," he said. "When I choose to teach Jean a lesson, I can do it myself all right. A man is always strong when he is not afraid. When he called me a foundling, he said no more than the truth, and I have no right to thrash him for that. But let him beware how he insults Mademoiselle Elina, or makes such remarks as he made just now about dressmakers—for then he would have a chance to see what my arm weighs."

Jean Ficelle eyed Paul contemptuously, and muttered, with a shrug:

"Yes, he's about as strong as a flea; he can't carry a commode upstairs!"

But a glance from Sans-Cravate made him change his tone on the instant, and he added, with an affectation of good humor:

"But why does he throw my cards on the ground? if it amuses me to play *biribi*, ain't I at liberty to do it? *Vive la charte!* When all's said and done, Sans-Cravate, you owe me three glasses of beer; are you going to pay them?"

"With what, I wonder? I wouldn't ask anything better than to rinse my gullet, for I'm dried up with thirst; but I haven't a *monaco!*"

Thereupon Jean Ficelle went up to Sans-Cravate, and whispered in his ear, with a glance at Paul:

"Borrow a little tin of him; you're a friend of his, and friends always lend to each other. If I had any, it would be at your service; but I'm as strapped as you are."

"Paul has no more than the rest of us," replied Sans-Cravate, in an undertone; "I saw him breakfasting this morning on an old dry crust and a glass of cocoa! When a man eats a meal like that, it means that he ain't lined with gold."

"But what does he do with his money, then? for he earns more than we do; his luck is indecent. As all the women of the quarter think he's good-looking, they always choose him to do their errands; the windfalls pass us by, and are all for him. So he must have money, for he never spends any; he always refuses to play cards, or drink, or go to the wine shop. I tell you again, he's a mean cuss, who saves up his money, like the miser he is!"

"There you go again! Jean Ficelle, you're spoiling for a thrashing. Paul is my friend, and I like him; let him do what he pleases with his money, it's none of our business. One thing I'm sure of is that he's a fine fellow, for I saw him one evening run after a gentleman and give him back a twenty-franc piece he'd given him by mistake for twenty sous. I'm not sure you'd do as much, Biribi."

"Bah! who knows! You're stuck on that greenhorn; and yet, if I chose to be mean, I could tell you some things about him that would open your eyes; but you see things crooked——"

"What are you talking about? More nonsense, I'll bet."

Jean Ficelle pretended to hesitate and to reflect as to whether he should say anything more, but at that moment three young men turned into Rue du Helder from the boulevard and walked toward the messengers.

"Ah! here come customers!" cried Sans-Cravate; "I shall have some supper to-night!"

IV

DIVERS COMMISSIONS

Albert, Célestin, and Tobie walked toward the messengers, while Sans-Cravate went forward to meet Albert, who employed him regularly and always paid him handsomely; so that the young Auvergnat felt a strong liking for the young man, whose free and easy manners and fascinating air pleased him mightily.

"There's a young man who knows what's what, who amuses himself and enjoys life!" he would exclaim. "*Crédiè!* if I had his figure and his money, that's the kind of a life I'd like to lead! Three or four mistresses at once! that must be rather pleasant and amusing! a fellow would have no time to be bored."

So it was that Sans-Cravate listened with a smile on his lips and with interest and attention to what Albert said after leading him aside:

"Take this letter and carry it to Madame Baldimer, Rue Neuve-Vivienne; the address is on the envelope. I think that she is not at home; but if by any chance she is, you will ask for an answer; if not, go there again, about eight o'clock, to get the answer; and bring it to me at the Maison-Dorée restaurant, where I shall be at that time."

"Very good, monsieur. By the way, can I go up to the lady's apartment?"

"Yes, yes. You need take no precautions; there's no father, or husband, or aunt. And, Sans-Cravate, go to

my house also, on Rue Caumartin, and ask the concierge if there are any letters for me; if there are, he'll give them to you, for he knows you; and you will bring them to me at the same place."

"Very good, monsieur; I understand."

Albert placed a five-franc piece in Sans-Cravate's hand, and left him.

Meanwhile, Célestin de Valnoir had taken Jean Ficelle, who was his favorite messenger, aside and handed him a letter, saying in a very low tone, after looking about to make sure that nobody could hear:

"Carry this note to Madame Baldimer—the lady to whose house I have sent you several times."

"Yes, monsieur, I know; I will go upstairs, as usual, and ask for Mamzelle Rosa, the lady's-maid, saying that I come from you."

"Exactly. And if Madame Baldimer is not at home, Rosa will tell you where you can find her; go there, and bring me the lady's answer at the Maison-Dorée restaurant, where I shall dine. I will speak to the waiter, and he will let me know when you arrive."

"Very good, monsieur."

"By the way, it is possible that the gentleman who has just employed your comrade Sans-Cravate may be sending him also to Madame Baldimer's. As he must not know that I am sending you there, be prudent; let Sans-Cravate go first, and don't go in until he has come out."

"Never fear; I didn't get the sobriquet of Ficelle for nothing. He shall not know where I am going."

"Very well."

Célestin turned his back on the messenger, and joined Albert, who had returned to the boulevard.

Tobie Pigeonnier, meanwhile, had led Paul under a porte cochère, and there, after making sure that he was so far away from his two friends that they could not hear him, he said to the messenger:

"My boy, are you clever, faithful, and intelligent?"

Paul gazed in surprise at the little fellow who asked him the question with an air of mystery, as if he were about to admit him to the secret of a conspiracy.

"As to being faithful, monsieur," he replied, "it is my duty; I should be doubly guilty in my calling, if I betrayed the confidence of those who are good enough to employ me. At all events, monsieur, I am well known in the quarter, and you can inquire about me. As to my cleverness and intelligence, I have, as a general rule, had no difficulty in carrying out my instructions."

"Good, very good. I see that you are not too dull; you are the man for me, for I detest dull-witted people. Listen to me with the closest attention; stay—let us go a little farther; I have reasons for not wanting those gentlemen to hear what I have to say to you. There—let us stop in this corner. You will go—— By the way, what is your name?"

"Paul, monsieur."

"Paul; very good. You will go to the Temple, Paul, to the Temple Market—you know—where they sell clothing and linen for both sexes, and footwear too."

"I know the place, monsieur."

"You will go into the market, near the rotunda, where the stalls are,—they are called *ayons*,—to the part occupied by the milliners."

"Does monsieur mean the dealers in old hats?"

"Old hats!—why, they sell new ones too, and wreaths of flowers, almost new, and ladies' caps—in fact, all the

pretty gewgaws that women always dote on. You will ask for Madame Abraham—she is well known—she is one of the largest dealers in the place."

"Madame Abraham; very well, monsieur."

"You will hand her this letter. Do you know how to read?"

Paul could not restrain a faint smile as he replied:

"Oh! yes, monsieur; very well."

"So much the better; I am very glad, because, in that case, you won't make any blunder."

But as he was not fully convinced that the messenger had told him the truth, Monsieur Tobie held up the letter he was about to give him, and said:

"What does that say?"

"*To Madame Agar Abraham, wholesale milliner, Marché du Temple.*"

"That's right, that's quite right; you read perfectly. You will give this letter, then, to Madame Abraham, and she will hand you some money for me; I have funds invested in her business. You will take the money, and—and——"

At that point, Tobie, seeing that a gentleman and lady were passing, raised his voice almost to a shout, and threw his head back and his chest forward:

"You will bring it to me at the Maison-Dorée, where I dine to-night. I dine at the Maison-Dorée; it is my favorite restaurant. You will ask the waiter for Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier. I am very well known at the Maison-Dorée."

"I understand, monsieur."

The people who were passing being out of earshot, the stout youth continued in an undertone:

"One moment, Paul; that is not all. If by any chance—for we must provide for everything—if Madame Abraham

should not give you any money for me—merchants are sometimes a little short—if, I say, Madame Abraham should give you nothing for me, then, and only then, you will go to the house where I live, on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins—the address is on this other letter, and you know how to read. You will go there and give this letter to my concierge, Madame Pluchonneau,—the name is on the envelope,—and tell her you will wait for an answer. You may be obliged to wait some time, for I have told my concierge to do an errand for me. But you will wait in her lodge, she has a very fine lodge. Then my concierge, when she returns, will hand you some money, which you will bring to the Maison-Dorée."

"Very good, monsieur."

"You are sure that you understand, messenger? If you receive money from Madame Abraham, who will doubtless hand you with it a memorandum of the amount, then it will not be necessary to go to my house, and you will bring back the letter for Madame Pluchonneau. But if you get nothing at the Temple, then go to Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins."

"I understand perfectly, monsieur."

"Off with you, young Paul! You can send word to me by the waiter; don't give me my answer before those other gentlemen. Secrecy, above all things!"

"Very good, monsieur."

"Go! I will give you a handsome *pourboire*."

And Tobie Pigeonnier returned to the boulevard and joined his friends, who shouted to him when he came in sight:

"Come on! What a long while it takes you to send a message to your charmers!"

"Here I am, messieurs. Oh! a man has to show some consideration. Let us be fickle, if you will, but we must not forget to be gallant; that is my nature."

While the young men walked away, the messengers came together again. Sans-Cravate held up the five-franc piece he had received, crying:

"Paid in advance! a cart-wheel! what do you think of that! There's a generous young man for you! I would fight for him."

"But you probably have got to go a long way for him," said Jean Ficelle, with affected indifference.

"Oh, no! nothing at all. First to Rue Neuve-Vivienne —only two steps; then to his house on Rue Caumartin, and from there to the Maison-Dorée. It's all right in the quarter."

Jean Ficelle's eyes twinkled when he learned that Sans-Cravate was going to Rue Neuve-Vivienne, and he made haste to say:

"I have got to go much farther than that—Faubourg Saint-Honoré—and I ain't paid in advance."

"And I, too," said Paul, placing his *crochets* behind a porte-cochère, "have got a long way to go, and I'm afraid it will take a long while."

"Where are you going?" asked Jean Ficelle.

"The gentleman who employed me told me not to talk; so it doesn't seem to me that I ought to tell where he sends me."

"Bah! you sneak!" muttered Jean, with a shrug.

"Well, my friends," said Sans-Cravate, as he donned his fur cap, "the day ends well. I don't know whether you'll be paid as generously as me; but, at all events, I'll treat; let's have supper together to-night at my regular little wine shop on Rue Saint-Lazare. Does that hit you?"

"It does me," replied Jean Ficelle; "we'll meet there to-night, then; it's agreed."

"I can't," said Paul; "I have business this evening; I must go to see a certain person, a long way from here, and——"

"Nonsense, Paul! I won't listen to such reasons as that; you can attend to your business to-morrow. I want you to have supper with us. I've invited you two or three times, and you always refuse. *Crédié!* if you don't come to-night, I shall think you're proud, and afraid of lowering yourself by sitting at the same table with me."

"Proud! proud of what, for God's sake?" muttered Jean, in so low a tone that Paul could not hear him. The latter hesitated a moment before replying:

"Oh! Sans-Cravate, you surely can't think that I am proud. Am I not a messenger, like you?"

"Very well, then; you'll come, that's settled. I must be off and do my errands. By the way, friends, if one of you sees Bastringuette before I do, just tell her where we sup. If we should feast without her, I should be a dead man to-morrow."

As he spoke, Sans-Cravate started off along the boulevard. Jean Ficelle waited a short time, then took the same direction, muttering:

"To be afraid that a woman will scold you, and not dare to treat yourself without her! that must be pleasant, on my word! And he calls himself a man! I call him a milksop. The real men aren't those who strike the hardest—but the sly dogs who know how to make dupes."

Monsieur Jean Ficelle had left the stand and Paul was about to follow his example, after a parting glance at the

house in which the dressmaker lived, when a young woman with fair hair, blue eyes, and smiling red lips came out through the porte cochère, and, having nimbly crossed the gutter, walked toward the young messenger. She wore a coarse linen dress, and a black apron fastened about her waist by a silk cord; on her head was a very simple cap, unadorned with flowers or ribbons; but the simplicity of her costume did not prevent people from noticing her and, in many cases, from turning to glance after her; for her face was very pleasant to look upon, her figure perfectly proportioned, her carriage graceful, her gait light and springy; in a word, there was in her whole aspect that indefinable something which at once attracts and captivates the eye: a fortunate gift of nature, which carries with it all other gifts in the case of the women who possess it. I say *women*, because, in general, the *something* in question applies to women rather than to men. It is that indefinable something which compels us to submit to the empire of two eyes which do not need to be very large or very beautiful to lead us captive; it is enough if they have that *something*. O ye who possess it, envy not the regular beauties, the Greek or Roman profiles, the correct and faultlessly proportioned features, of your rivals! If you are not of those women whom men admire, you are of those whom they desire, and that is much better.

When he saw the girl coming toward him, Paul stood as if rooted to the spot; he could not go away. He quickly removed his cap, and at the same time lowered his eyes with a timid air, as if he dared not presume to salute the young dressmaker, but desired to manifest his respect for her.

But Elina stopped in front of him and said, with an amiable smile:

"Good-evening, Monsieur Paul! I am very glad to find you."

"Can I be of service to you in any way, mademoiselle? Pray speak; I am at your disposition, day and night, whenever you choose. I am so happy when you are good enough to employ me!"

As he spoke, Paul raised his eyes until they rested on the girl's face, who seemed not at all displeased; but in an instant, as if he repented of his temerity, he hung his head and sighed.

"You are always so obliging, Monsieur Paul, that I thought of you for—listen, it is this: I live with my aunt, Madame Vardeine, who has taken care of me since my parents died; she says that I owe her a great deal of money, although my father left me a little something—fifteen thousand francs, I believe; that isn't a fortune, but still it's enough to live on, and one can be very comfortable with that, if one has a trade too; isn't that so?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; with orderly habits and hard work, one may become rich with that amount of money."

"Do you really think so? It must be very nice to be rich! Well, as I was saying, my aunt is forever telling me that she does everything for me, that I cost her a great deal, that I spend much more than my money brings in—for she is my guardian. But, oh! Monsieur Paul, if you knew what she gives me for my breakfast and dinner, you would say that it was none too much! Luckily, I'm not a glutton, whatever she may say. Ten sous for breakfast and dinner—can one be a glutton with that?"

"No, indeed, mademoiselle. But it is very wrong of your aunt to give you so little for your food. Your money must certainly bring in seven hundred francs a year—which would give you about thirty-nine sous a

day to spend. So if she gives you only ten sous for your board, she keeps twenty-nine for your lodging."

"Oh! I think you must be mistaken, Monsieur Paul; my aunt says that my money brings in barely twenty sous a day,—that's a long way from thirty-nine,—and that she has to use some of her own to clothe me."

"I am not mistaken, mademoiselle. I know how to reckon, for I haven't always been a messenger. For eight years, I was employed in a merchant's office, and I worked over figures and accounts all day."

"Really, Monsieur Paul? Ah! I thought—— You don't look like a messenger—like the others. You talk well, and you don't swear. Were you obliged to take up this business?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; my benefactor died, and I had not a sou. As I couldn't find a place, I thought it was better to be a messenger than to idle away my time and live, as so many do, at others' expense."

"You are quite right. After all, there is nothing despicable in being a messenger; you're not a servant, as the girls in our workroom are so fond of calling you. Oh! they say that to make me furious, because I always stand up for you."

"Stand up for me? You say that you sometimes talk about me in your workroom?"

Mademoiselle Elina blushed as she replied:

"Oh!—that is to say—we talk about messengers in general—and as we have employed you several times—— But I stand chattering here, when I came down to buy something at the linen draper's, and I haven't told you yet what I wanted to ask you. My aunt says that I talk too much. As far as that goes, perhaps she is right; it's such fun to talk—not with everybody, of course, but

with people who—listen to you—and—that is to say—— Mon Dieu! it seems to me that I am getting all mixed up, and don't know what I am saying."

Paul ventured to glance at the pretty dressmaker once more. Her face wore such a comical expression, as she twisted a corner of her apron in her hands, that the young man smiled involuntarily, and his smile was reflected on Elina's lips; for between two persons who are sympathetic a smile is like a train of powder: the spark is hardly applied at one end before it reaches the other.

"I wanted to ask you, Monsieur Paul, if you could come and help me move to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; with great pleasure."

"You must come very early, so that it can be all done before it is time for me to go to my work."

"I will come as early as you wish, mademoiselle. Where are you going to move?"

"Oh! in the same house. We live on Rue Taitbout, you know—for you have sometimes been kind enough to carry my bundles home for me, because, you said, they were too heavy for a young girl."

"It was a very great pleasure to me, mademoiselle. I am so happy when you deign to permit me—when I can —when I have the honor——"

Paul stopped, for he found that he too was getting confused; but Elina did not seem surprised; on the contrary, was it not natural that he should have the same experience that she had had a moment before? should not the same causes always produce the same effects?

"You see, Monsieur Paul, my aunt has found another apartment on the same floor, the fourth, which isn't so dear, and where she says we shall be quite as comfortable. She herself certainly will be, for she has a room

as large as her other one, with a splendid fireplace. But it isn't the same with me; where we are now, I have a little room opening on the little hallway. It's pretty small; just big enough for my bed, a commode that was my mother's, two chairs, and a little table covered with red leather, which father used for a desk. Those things are all that I have that belonged to my parents, and I think a great deal of them. Well! where we're going to-morrow, there's nothing for me but a little box of a place, which was once part of a dark room used as a hall; and I never shall be able to get my commode and table into it. But my aunt declares that I shall be better off, that I shall be warmer, and that it's very healthy to sleep in a loft."

"Your aunt is very blameworthy, mademoiselle, to make you sleep in a loft, for it is very unhealthy, I say. You have the right to demand a room for yourself. She must be very miserly. If you like, I will speak to her, and make her understand that she mustn't treat you so cruelly, that you are not a burden to her, far from it, but——"

"Oh! no, no, Monsieur Paul; if my aunt knew that I had dared to complain of her, she would be angry and would scold me. No, you mustn't say anything to her. After all, what difference does it make if I haven't a room of my own? I am at home so little; I go away at eight in the morning to my work, and I don't leave the work-room till nine at night, sometimes later, when there's a press of work. So you see I am hardly ever in my room except to sleep, and at my age one can sleep soundly anywhere. And then, my aunt isn't really unkind, only she always thinks of herself first. Oh! she never thinks of depriving herself of anything, either for her breakfast

or her dinner; but she says that a young girl ought to be economical and abstemious; she is quite right, too, and I assure you that with my ten sous I have all I need to eat. Indeed, there are some days when I don't spend it all; I keep a little for the next day, and then I have a feast. Mon Dieu! how I rattle on! My mistress will tell me I have been gone too long. It is a question of helping me to move, Monsieur Paul. As we are going to stay on the same floor, my aunt told me to get the concierge to help me, as he and I could move everything. But he is very old, and I'm afraid he isn't strong enough to move the things with me; so, if you can come——"

"Certainly, mademoiselle; I will move everything, never fear; there will be no need for you to tire yourself."

"Oh! I expect to help you. Well, then, Monsieur Paul, until to-morrow morning! come early, won't you?"

"Before daybreak, if you wish, mademoiselle."

"Oh, no! it is light before five o'clock now; if you can come at half-past five or quarter to six, that will be quite early enough."

"Very well, mademoiselle; I will be prompt."

"By the way, you must knock softly, so as not to wake my aunt; for she gets up very late. We can move everything except her bed."

"We won't make any noise, mademoiselle."

"Adieu, Monsieur Paul! Oh, dear! now I don't know what I was going to buy at the linen draper's; in talking with you, I have entirely forgotten."

"Thread, perhaps—or ribbon—or needles?"

"No, no. Oh! what a head I have! Never mind; I'll go back and say they hadn't any. Then madame will say that it's taken me a long time to find that out."

"Don't you want me to go up to Madame Dumanchon's, mademoiselle? I'll tell her that you have forgotten what color you were to buy, or how much."

"Oh, no! for then they would know that I have been talking to you; and the girls are always making fun of me now, because——"

"Because you are kind enough to employ me in preference to others?"

"Yes; and then, I—I said that you were above your calling. And I was right too, as you were in a merchant's employ for a long while; but still, they are so unkind! Well, it can't be helped; I must go back. I will admit that I have forgotten what I came out for, and I shall be scolded; but that's a small matter."

The girl turned and walked dolefully back toward the house opposite, and was just passing through the door, when she suddenly jumped for joy and ran back across the street, saying to Paul as she passed him:

"Whalebones, small, thin whalebones, to put in the back of a dress, I remember now. Adieu, until to-morrow!"

Paul looked after her until she turned into the boulevard; and even when he could no longer see her, he continued to gaze in that direction, as if it prolonged his happiness. But in a moment he exclaimed:

"Mon Dieu! I have forgotten that young gentleman's errands!"

He was about to start and make up for the time he had lost, when he felt a hand upon his arm. He turned and found that it was the flower girl who was detaining him.

"Let me go, Bastringuette, let me go!" he said; "I am in a great hurry; I have some errands to do."

"In a hurry, are you? I say! you didn't seem to be a minute ago, for you've been having a nice little chin

with the little dressmaker. She plays a pretty game with her mouth, she does. You seem to have had lots of things to tell her, flatterer!"

"It's just because I have been talking so long that I am behindhand. By the way, Bastringuette, Sans-Cravate expects you to sup with him to-night at his wine shop on Rue Saint-Lazare. He means to treat everybody."

"Shall you be in the crowd?"

"Why—perhaps so."

"I want you to be—if not, I won't go. Monster! who knows that I love him, that I am cracked over his shape, and still he won't honor me with a look, while he talks yards at a time with little hussies of dressmakers!"

"I am not in the habit of making eyes at my friends' mistresses, Bastringuette; and Sans-Cravate is my friend."

"I don't care a hang; I haven't sworn to love the same man and no one else all my life. That would be too monotonous; it's all right for the swells to take that kind of oaths and then break 'em. I prefer to act on the square, and I wouldn't hesitate to say before Sans-Cravate that I am stuck on you."

"You are mad. Let me go, I insist!"

Paul succeeded in releasing his jacket from the flower girl's grasp, and ran off at full speed; while Bastringuette crushed one of her bunches of violets, muttering:

"That's what comes of loving such beasts! Well, it don't make any difference; the more he resists me, the more I love him. That's my nature! we can't make ourselves over."

V

CLOSER ACQUAINTANCE

Before returning to the three young men who were about to enter the Passage des Panoramas, let us say a few words with regard to them: it is always well to know the people with whom one has to do.

Albert Vermoncey, whose external aspect was so captivating, had not reached his twenty-second birthday, and yet he was leading the most wildly dissipated life that a man can lead in Paris. Spoiled prematurely by his success with the fair sex, he deemed himself in duty bound to deceive all the women with whom he had dealings, to have several mistresses at the same time, to keep ballet dancers, to seduce simple bourgeoises, to make sport of grandes dames, and to amuse himself with grisettes.

To lead such an existence, one must have wealth, or high office, or unlimited credit. Albert had no office; he had completed the course of study for the bar, and called himself an advocate. There is nothing more advantageous to a man in Paris than to have studied for the bar; he may do nothing, and still he has a profession. That is why young men of good family, as a general rule, are very desirous to study law. But, in order to cut a brilliant figure in that position, it is necessary to have wealth in addition; for it is not the fashion to retain an advocate who tries no causes, unless he becomes a business agent, in which case he assumes the pompous title of *jurisconsult*, and has a *cabinet*. Knowledge of the law

is a great advantage to a business agent, because he is then in a position to handle business of all sorts. When he knows the *Code*, the *Digest*, and the *Authentiques*, he can undertake proceedings for separation, look after inheritances, adoptions, and prosecutions; and those things do not interfere with his writing vaudevilles or melodramas in his leisure moments. I should be much embarrassed to mention anything that a man cannot do when he has studied law.

But Albert had no *cabinet*, nor did he try causes; he had never been to the Palais de Justice, and he thought of nothing but enjoying himself; it is plain, therefore, that he was wealthy, or that his parents were,—which is not altogether the same thing, although young men sometimes overlook the distinction.

Albert's father was a man somewhat over forty years of age, who had once been very handsome, and presumably had had his day of success with the ladies. However, before he reached the age at which men are accustomed to reform (when they reform at all), Monsieur Vermoncey had renounced all worldly pleasures, as the result of a succession of cruel disasters which robbed him of all that he held dearest.

Monsieur Vermoncey, whose only possession was his comely face, married early in life a young woman of large wealth, and from that time fortune smiled upon him. He plunged into speculation, was continuously lucky, and soon found himself in possession of an income of twenty thousand francs.

In his home, as in affairs, destiny seemed favorable to him. His wife was amiable and gentle; he had married her solely for her fortune, but he soon found that she deserved to be loved for herself, and, unlike those

husbands who are all fire and flame at first and then turn to ice, he proceeded from indifference to love.

Four children were born of the marriage, at brief intervals. Albert was the oldest, and he had two brothers and a sister. Monsieur Vermoncey was happy, and proud of his numerous family; he was as good a father as husband.

But that state of affairs was too happy to last; perfect happiness seems to be contrary to the designs of Nature, for she speedily sends something to disturb it. Perhaps it is to afford some compensation to the unfortunate by showing them that suffering spares the greatest no more than the smallest, the wealthiest no more than the poorest; to prevent them from envying too keenly those in exalted station, and to impress it upon them that sometimes under the humblest roof are to be found those inestimable blessings, those joys of the heart, which all the gold of Peru cannot buy.

The oldest child was but ten years old when Monsieur Vermoncey lost his wife; this calamity was soon followed by the death of his youngest son; two years later, his daughter also was taken from him; finally, Albert's last brother followed his mother to the grave. So that, of his large family, only one son remained to fill the places of all whom he had lost.

These events had caused Monsieur Vermoncey the most profound grief, which was always reflected on his features. His wife's death caused him a very bitter pang, and the loss of each succeeding child intensified his sorrow beyond words. He would often sit for hours at a time, crushed to the earth by his thoughts; and when he raised his eyes, they bore an expression of melancholy resignation which could not fail to touch the hardest heart.

All his affection was concentrated on Albert, his only remaining child. It is not surprising, therefore, that the young man had found in his father a boundless store of indulgence, upon which he relied to obtain forgiveness for his excesses.

However, Monsieur Vermoncey did not carry his weakness so far that he did not see his son's failings; he had urged him to lead a more orderly life; sometimes, even, he had tried to impart a tinge of severity to his advice; but his intense affection for his son soon carried the day; moreover, Albert always promised to mend his ways, and his father was only too glad to believe him.

Unfortunately for Albert, he had become intimate with one of those men who trade on the weaknesses of others, and who, not having means enough to lead a life of dissipation, and lacking the talent to procure it, attach themselves to those who are possessed of wealth, find a way to make themselves necessary to them, to take part in all their follies, to be included in all their parties of pleasure; so that they are able to lead a most agreeable existence with a very modest income, or even if they have not a sou. Paris swarms with such men. They are not thieves, strictly speaking, for they do not rob you; they are not mere *intrigants*, for they have a name and some position in society; but they are shrewd fellows, who risk nothing and make the most of everything.

Monsieur Célestin Valnoir, who called himself *De* Valnoir in order to obtain greater consideration, was an individual of this type. He had wormed himself into Albert's friendship, as men worm themselves into the friendship of those who own châteaux or large estates, or anything else that is worth preying upon. He had not a sou, and he was supposed to have at least fifteen

thousand francs a year; he was the son of a butcher in the suburbs, and was believed to be of noble birth; he had no knowledge of music or of drawing, but posed as a master of all such subjects; in fact, he had received very little education, and he was looked upon as a profound scholar. But, on the other hand, he had certain qualities which, in society, often replace all others: an imperturbable self-assurance, and the art of turning the most trivial circumstances to his advantage.

Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier was one of a very poor and very large family, and had sworn to make his fortune. To that end, at the age of eight he walked about the streets picking up pins, which he sold when he had obtained a certain quantity. Impressed by his business instincts, one of his uncles had taken charge of him and made him his clerk, with no wages beyond his board and lodging; still the young man succeeded in saving money, which seems a difficult task, when he earned none; but he sold his uncle's old clothes, which were the only perquisites of his position. In order to make those perquisites more valuable, by advancing the time when his patron's garments should be turned over to him, he often passed a large part of the night rubbing them with pumice stone, so that the cloth soon became as thin as paper and began to give way on all sides. But one morning, when the uncle happened to rise earlier than usual, he found his nephew engaged in polishing the back of his coat, and instantly turned him out of doors.

Tobie thereupon risked his little hoard in a speculation. A friend of his had just opened a pastry-cook's shop. *Galette* was just becoming fashionable in Paris; several large fortunes owed their origin to the fondness of the Parisians for that delicacy. Pigeonnier risked his

funds, and at the end of a year he withdrew ten times as much. Thereupon, finding himself in a position to cut a figure in the world, Tobie became a dealer in chestnuts, on commission; but, despite his business ability, he made much less money than when he was the pastry-cook's partner; moreover, vanity had taken possession of him, and he had said to himself, like many another: "To become rich, it is necessary to appear rich; water flows to the river; consequently, in order to make money, I must act as if I already had a lot of it."—That is why young Tobie took so much pains with his dress, and affected the manners and habits of a wealthy dandy. To be sure, only the fronts of his shirts were of fine linen; the rest was of a very coarse, cheap quality; the head of his cane was hollow, his eyeglass German silver, his pin paste; but they all looked like the real thing. Furthermore, Pigeonnier never lost an opportunity to say:

"I dined at Véry's. I am going to breakfast at Véfour's. I sup to-night at the Maison-Dorée. I was at the Opéra last night. I am going to the Français to-night. I mean to go to the Bouffes to-morrow."

Whereas, in fact, Tobie Pigeonnier usually slipped into the most modest restaurants, except when he dined at home on a loaf of bread and a piece of Italian cheese; which did not prevent him from going to walk afterward in the garden of the Palais-Royal, with a toothpick in his mouth, and saying to all his acquaintances, as he unbuttoned two or three buttons of his waistcoat:

"On my word, I believe I ate too much dinner; I am suffocating. They treat you very well at Douix's. But it's foolish to eat so much. I am a shameful glutton!"

And if he went to the theatre, it was only to take his stand under the peristyle just as the curtain fell, in order

to hear what was said of the play; and when he did venture to buy a ticket, it was only because he could get it extremely cheap, there being only a scene or two to be played.

We have said enough to make it clear that he was very far from having as many mistresses as he claimed to have. Although he was rather a good-looking youth, especially in the eyes of those persons who like noses shaped like a parrot's beak, he rarely ventured to embark upon a love affair; because, as a general rule, such affairs require, first of all, that one should have money in one's pocket. A young man without a sou may inspire a passion, form a liaison, have a mistress who really loves him; and under such circumstances he is entitled to flatter himself that he is loved on his own account; but he cannot change mistresses very often—in short, he can hardly be what we call a man *à bonnes fortunes.* That is a calling which requires a constant expenditure of money and of health. Tobie asked nothing better than to spend the latter, but preferred to hoard his money.

When his fashionable friends proposed to him to join a party of pleasure, or to dine with them, he always found some pretext for refusing; but this time, the hope of making a conquest of Madame Plays overcame his usual reserve; for in that lady's acquaintance he foresaw many opportunities to advance his fortunes. Monsieur Plays was a commission merchant, and might offer him frequent opportunities to make profitable investments. All these considerations combined had induced Tobie to accept Albert's proposition; and although he was very short of money, he had decided also to be one of the dinner party at the Maison-Dorée.

Now, let us join the three young men in the Passage des Panoramas, where they were waiting for the two others whom Célestin had arranged to meet there.

"There's always a crowd in this passage," said Albert. "In summer, people walk through; in winter, they come here to walk, because the boulevards are muddy. If it rains, they come here for shelter; if the sun is very hot, they come here for shade; so that there's always a crowd here."

"Let's look at the statuettes. You told us, Tobie, didn't you, that somebody was making a caricature of you?"

"Not a caricature, but a bust, life size."

"That won't be so amusing."

"Have we got to wait for Mouillot and Balivan, I wonder! Mouillot is never on time."

"Oh! it isn't half-past five yet."

"Let's look at the new songs."

"That is to say, the new lithographs; for a song doesn't sell nowadays, you know, unless it has some pretty picture on the cover."

"That's not very flattering for the music."

"But it's a good thing for the artists. Brûlé's shop, Frère's successor, is always full of fascinating things of that sort. Look! there are some beautiful *albums*. I refer to the binding."

Tobie was standing in an ecstasy of admiration before a manikin in front of a draper's shop.

"Is that your bust you are gazing at?" asked Célestin, laughingly.

"You seem inclined to jest, messieurs; but I would like to resemble this manikin. I mean, in the way he's dressed. Just see how beautifully that frock-coat fits his

back! It must be delightful to be dressed like that! I would gladly pay sixty francs for a coat that squeezed my waist that way."

"You can be squeezed for less than that. But you may set your mind at rest, young Pigeonnier; I assure you that you look a good deal like a manikin."

Tobie glanced at Célestin with an expression that said: "You would be very glad to look like me!"

At that moment, Albert halted in front of a cap and ribbon shop, in which he spied two rather attractive young women behind the counter. He exchanged meaning glances with one of them, while the mistress of the shop was trying caps on a decidedly plain person who had just come in, and who found none of them to her taste, because she could not make up her mind that any one of them made her pretty.

As the throng about them became more dense, Tobie took his companions by the arm, saying:

"If you stand still like this, messieurs, look out for your pockets. The Passage des Panoramas is very pretty, very brilliant, and much frequented; but I must warn you that it is one of the places where the greatest number of thefts is committed every day. When an honest bourgeois stops in front of Susse's shop, or in front of Marquis's wonderful *postiches*, if he doesn't keep his hands on his fob and his pockets all the time, he is sure to find himself minus watch, purse, handkerchief, and snuffbox. Between six and nine at night, when the promenaders are most numerous, the thefts are most frequent; at that time, you see in these galleries numbers of men in blouses and caps, who certainly have no business in this quarter, and who wouldn't walk in this passage unless they carried on a criminal industry here."

"You are right, Tobie; and I can see at this moment some gentlemen with faces in which I should have very little confidence. Come, Albert, come—are you still in love with that shopgirl? Ah! I see our friends —and Dupétrain is with them! Good! we shall have some sport. He always has some extraordinary story to tell."

"Who is Monsieur Dupétrain?" inquired Tobie.

"Don't you know Dupétrain? Well, upon my word! All Paris knows him. He's a very good fellow—who is constantly having wonderful adventures. He's a frantic adept of magnetism. He'll put you to sleep, and make you walk in your sleep, if you like. Come, messieurs; come, I say!"

Three young men, walking arm in arm, halted in front of Albert and his companions. They greeted one another with smiles, exchanging handshakes and puffs of tobacco smoke.

The new-comers were: first, Mouillot, head clerk in a business house; a tall, fair-haired, red-cheeked youth, with an amiable, jovial face, whose appearance pointed him out at once as a bon vivant.

Next, Balivan, portrait painter; a typical artist's face, with unusual features, which could in all sincerity be called ugly, and a bearing in harmony with his features. He held himself sidewise, with his head sunk on one shoulder; he had a jerky walk, one leg always lagging behind; and he waved his arms about in space, so that at a distance they resembled the wings of a windmill. But, with all that, his face had much character and expression; his forehead was that of a man who thinks, and in his eyes there shone the fire of intelligence, which, in a man, excuses ugliness and often triumphs over beauty.

Balivan had genuine artistic talent, which is never a disadvantage; but he was extremely lazy, a not infrequent trait among artists; in addition, he was very heedless, always making blunders, and extraordinarily absent-minded.

The third of the party was he whom Célestin called Dupétrain. He was a man between thirty and forty, with a square, bony face, and yellow skin, extremely ugly at first sight, and even more so when examined closely. His broad nose lay flat on his cheeks, like a negro's; his enormous mouth became a veritable cavern when he spoke, because, in order to give greater weight to his words, he articulated every syllable with a painstaking care that was very disagreeable to his hearers. His head was adorned with a forest of hair, which he always wore very long, and which gave him some resemblance to a lion; his small, sunken, glassy eyes seemed to be engaged in a constant effort to fascinate or at least to magnetize you. Such was the individual who answered to the name of Dupétrain.

"Ah! here's Pigeonnier!" exclaimed Mouillot, bringing his hand down on the corpulent youth's shoulder. "Does he dine with us?"

"Yes, messieurs; I am to have that pleasure."

"Famous! the man we can never get—who's always engaged."

"I have given up everything to-day to join you."

"But he doesn't tell you all. There's another affair—but, no! we will speak of that at dinner—without mentioning the lady's name, of course; for we must be discreet—eh, Tobie?"

"Where do we dine?"

"At the Maison-Dorée."

VI

A STAG DINNER PARTY

The young men established themselves in one of the pleasant salons of the restaurant. Mouillot called for pen and ink to prepare the menu, and Tobie whispered to Albert:

"We mustn't forget my letter for Madame Plays."

"True," replied Albert.—"Waiter, some note paper."

"Do you propose to order the dinner, too?" said Mouillot. "Can't you trust me to do it in style?"

"To be sure; I am going to write something else."

"A billet-doux, eh? Oh! for heaven's sake, let the women alone! We are here to eat and laugh."

"This is how it is, messieurs. There's——"

"Oh! my dear fellow," cried Tobie, hurrying to Albert's side, "let's not compromise anybody! we agreed to be close-mouthed!"

"So long as he doesn't mention the lady's name," said Célestin, "I don't see why he can't tell the story."

"Surely I can. I am turning over one of my mistresses to Tobie, messieurs,—assuming, of course, that she is willing to accept him as a substitute."

"You can't be certain of that," laughed Mouillot; "for he hasn't the figure."

"Do you say you've been drawn in the conscription?" inquired Balivan, who had not heard the beginning of the conversation.

"No, no; I have bought a substitute.—Come, Albert, write my letter; for I am afraid we shall hardly be in the mood for writing after dinner."

"I am sending Tobie to an assignation in my place," said Albert, "and I am going to give him a letter of introduction."

"Well, you can write your letter while I am writing the order for dinner. It will give you inspiration. Here come the writing materials."

Albert sat down opposite Mouillot, each of them took a pen; and while one sought words to write to his mistress, the other looked over the bill of fare.

Albert began, reading aloud as he wrote:

"Charming creature!"

Mouillot in like manner announced each dish that he selected.

"*Potage aux bistres.*"

"You know how dearly I love you."

"For three—that will be enough."

"Your image is always before me."

"Calf's head *en tortue.*"

"When I see you, I instantly become——"

"*Andouillette de Troyes.*"

"Drunk with joy."

"With salmon."

"But I am detained at this moment by urgent business, dear heart."

"Truffled turkey."

"To save you the annoyance of waiting for me at our rendezvous——"

"Lobster——"

"I send one of my intimate friends."

"As fresh as possible."

"You can trust him absolutely."

"If it smells, we shall send it back."

"He will escort you to a place we have agreed on——"

"Asparagus——"

"And will stay with you till I come."

"With white sauce."

"I will join you as soon as I possibly can."

"Sweets, dessert, champagne."

"I send you by him a thousand assurances of my love."

"Serve everything hot."

"With such a letter of recommendation, it seems to me that you ought to receive a warm welcome," said Albert, as he signed his name.

"I call that a well-diversified little dinner, messieurs," said Mouillot, handing the order to the waiter.

As for Tobie, he thanked Albert and carefully pocketed the missive that was to open the way for him to a piquant intrigue.

"Above all things, serve the dinner promptly, and without interruption," he called to the waiter.

"Mon Dieu! why are we in such a hurry?" said the artist, who had already seated himself at the table and was blowing his nose in his napkin, which he mistook for his handkerchief. "For my part, I like to sit a long while at dinner."

"So do I; but I have an assignation for this evening."

"Well, upon my word! there's Balivan using his napkin for a handkerchief! That's the beginning of his freaks. We shall see some amusing sights, if he goes on."

"My napkin! Faith, that's true! I am always doing that; and the worst of it is that I did it not long ago at a grand dinner, at a banker's house, where there were

marquises and deputies. Suddenly I saw that everybody was looking at me with a curious expression. Imagine my confusion, when a very pretty woman, who was sitting beside me, said in a most amiable tone: 'Of course, you are doing that for a wager, monsieur?'—'What, madame?'—'Using your napkin as a handkerchief.'—Then, of course, I realized my blunder; and what do you suppose I did, in my embarrassment? I put the napkin in my pocket! Luckily, everybody began to laugh, for they saw how absent-minded I was."

"Meanwhile," said Mouillot, "I request as a favor that I may not be seated next to Balivan, because absent-minded people are very unpleasant neighbors at table.—You ask him to pass the olives, and he'll pour water in your wine. If you want bread, he'll pass you the pepper. It's a constant succession of disappointments."

"Have you ever been magnetized?" inquired Monsieur Dupétrain, fixing his glassy stare on the painter.

"Oh! go to the devil with your magnetism! As if I took any stock in it!"

"Take any stock in it! Why, my dear fellow, don't you know that the power of magnetism is absolutely proved? that the most distinguished people are the most fervent adepts of Mesmer? that ladies of the highest social position go to the magnetizers now to be put to sleep, as they used to go to be mesmerized?"

"Parbleu! that's a convincing authority to appeal to! Women—who adore anything that promises a novel kind of sensation, and who seek pleasure instead of truth."

"But I'll wager, Balivan, that I can put you to sleep, incredulous as you are!"

"Put me to sleep! That is very possible; but it would be much harder to wake me."

"I say, messieurs, aren't you ready to stop talking magnetism?" cried Mouillot; "I supposed that we dined together to enjoy ourselves. For heaven's sake, Dupétrain, don't put us to sleep yet! Later, if you choose.—To the table, my friends!"

They took their seats, Tobie among the first. He examined the tableware, the hors-d'œuvre, the glasses of different sizes placed in front of each guest, and an ecstatic expression lighted up his face. From the way that he ate and drank, and lingered lovingly over every mouthful, one could divine that he was perfectly content, and that his thoughts took this turn:

"As I am here, I must make the most of it. If I spend money, at all events it will be of some benefit to me."

"Aren't we going to have any madeira?" said Célestin, after finishing his soup.

"I should say so! What do you take us for?" replied Mouillot.

"Yes, yes! madeira!" cried Pigeonnier. "When I am in the vein, I don't deny myself anything."

"Waiter! some madeira!"

"It is here, messieurs; what wine will you have next?"

"Beaune première, to begin with. After that, we will see."

"That's right!" said Tobie, gulping down the madeira. "Beaune première, the best there is! Is anything too good for us? Pass me the olives. Pass me the anchovies. Pass me the tunny."

"The devil! you might as well say pass me everything! How little Tobie pitches in! Be careful, my dear fellow; it isn't prudent to have your stomach too full when you are going straight away to an assignation."

"Oh! I have room enough. I'd like some madeira."

"Monsieur has a full, round face, which doesn't indicate a very nervous man," said Dupétrain, looking at Tobie; "but I'll bet that I can put him to sleep."

"Dupétrain," cried Mouillot, "you will be fined five francs every time that you mention magnetism during dinner."

"Oho! we're forbidden to speak now, are we?"

"Tell us something amusing—we would like that.—But you don't say anything, Albert! Have you an unrequited passion in your heart?"

"I, a passion! *Fichtre!* no—but I—— By the way, waiter, I expect a messenger. Let me know when anyone asks for me."

"The same with me," said Célestin.

"And me," cried Tobie, stuffing a handful of olives into his pocket; "let me know, waiter—for it's very important. I am Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier. A messenger will ask for me."

"Do you propose to put all the olives in your pocket, Tobie?"

"I like them pocketed,* messieurs; they're much better."

"Yes," laughed Célestin, "and then, you have some the next day."

"Ah! they are better pocketed, are they?" said the artist. "Then I must try some."

And as the radishes were passed to Balivan a moment later, he seized a handful and put them in his pocket.

The first courses were discussed with great zest by the young men; but when the truffled turkey arrived, their enthusiasm had abated in some degree; Tobie alone

* *Pochetées*—that is, mellowed in the pocket.

seemed as hungry as ever, and filled his plate with truffles, crying:

"On my word, one can dine mighty well here!"

"You don't seem to be sure of yourself, Pigeonnier," said Albert, with a smile.

"Peste!" said Mouillot; "how you do work your oven!"

"Well, for all that," interposed Dupétrain, "I'll bet that I can put monsieur to sleep."

"Five francs, Dupétrain!"

"Give me some beaune, Balivan. Damnation! I knew it; he's mixed it with madeira! Would you like me to give you an idea of that fellow's absent-mindedness, messieurs? Not long ago, I went to see him during the day; his servant said: 'Monsieur is taking a bath; he sent out for one, and he's in it now.'—'Well,' I said, 'that needn't prevent my speaking to him. Men aren't afraid to look at one another in the water.'—So I went into the room where my gentleman was bathing. What did I see? Balivan, fully dressed, and with his boots on, seated in his bath and quietly reading a newspaper, absolutely unconscious that there was anything peculiar in his method of bathing."

"Ha! ha! ha! that is too much; we might say, like your fair neighbor at dinner: it was a bet, wasn't it, Balivan?"

"No, messieurs," the artist calmly replied; "I give you my word that I hadn't noticed what I was doing. If they had brought me my bath in decent season, it wouldn't have happened. But when I found that it didn't come, I went out; when I came back, it was all ready; I was in a hurry, so I just glanced at the clock, took the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, and jumped in. That infernal

newspaper was at the bottom of it; for I was reading a very interesting case, and all I remember now is that the water seemed very heavy."

"You may be a somnambulist," said Dupétrain; "very likely you were asleep when you got into the bath."

"Asleep! damnation! I tell you, I had just been out to do an errand; I was in a great hurry, for I hadn't had my breakfast, and I got into the bath without thinking of undressing."

During this conversation, young Tobie, determined to waste no time, had slipped into his napkin a large part of the truffles that were on his plate, and, having wiped them carefully, stuffed them into his pocket. Then he said:

"Just pass me the turkey again, messieurs; I would like a few of the truffles with this chicken."

"I say, Pigeonnier, this is too much; you mean to outdo yourself, my dear fellow, to leave Albert in the shade!"

"Tudieu! what an appetite!" cried Mouillot. "That blade ought to pay for two; he beats us all."

"You see, messieurs, I am very fond of truffles."

"So we perceive."

Albert consulted his watch, and said, with an impatient gesture:

"Why doesn't that messenger come?"

"Neither of them has come yet."

"Have you been sending bouquets to your fair ones, messieurs?" queried Mouillot; "that reminds me of an experience I had with a blockhead of a messenger. My mistress at that time was a very attractive woman, an amiable little creature of about twenty-two, who seemed barely eighteen. She was married, and an old aunt of

her husband lived with her and was supposed to keep an eye on her, because they knew she was a little giddy. So that we had to act cautiously. My charmer had asked me to send her a bouquet, because she was going to a ball, to which I also was going. During the day, I bought a lovely bouquet at Mademoiselle Prévot's, then took a cab, and told the driver to take me to the faubourg where my mistress lived. I got out at the corner of a street, two or three hundred yards from her house, and looked about for a messenger. At last I spied one; he was a man fifty years old or more, very dirty, and with the general aspect of a drunkard, but still the probabilities were that he knew his business. I beckoned to him and led him into a doorway. He tried to look cunning when he saw that he was to carry a bouquet. I pointed out the house, and told him the number, then said: 'There's no concierge; you must go to the rear of the courtyard, where there is only one little door, at which you will ring. If the door is opened by a man, or by an old woman, you will say simply: "Here's the bouquet madame ordered of a flower girl, to be sent to her," and then come away without another word; but if it's a young woman, then you will say to her: "Here is the bouquet, madame; the gentleman who sent it is at the corner of the street yonder," and listen carefully to what she tells you to say to me. I will wait here for you. You understand! no blundering!'—My messenger assumed his sly expression once more, and replied: 'Never fear, monsieur; this isn't the first time I've carried a bouquet.'—And off he went with mine. I followed him with my eyes. I wasn't very easy in my mind, for the fellow looked so stupid that I was afraid of some blunder. To begin with, I saw that he passed the house, although I had pointed it out to him plainly

enough; however, after going beyond it, he turned back and found it; he went in, and I waited. After several minutes, which seemed painfully long to me, my man came back with a self-satisfied air.—'Well,' I said, 'to whom did you give it?'—'Two children, nine or ten years old, opened the door, monsieur; one was a little girl, and the other a boy. "My little friends," I says to them; "here's a bouquet somebody gave me for your mother; will you go and tell her?"'—'Great God!' I cried; 'did I tell you that the lady had children? Well?'—'Then, monsieur, a lady came.'—'Young and pretty?'—'Not bad-looking, monsieur, according to my ideas.'—'It must have been the old woman, then; what did you say to her?'—'I says: "Madame, here's a bouquet that the flower girl hopes you'll accept; it will give her great pleasure."—"What flower girl?" says the lady. "I haven't ordered any bouquet. Where is the flower girl's stand?" —"Faith! madame, the young man didn't tell me; but it's paid for; my orders are not to take any money."'—'The devil take you!' cried I, as I dismissed him; 'I shall know you again, and I'll never send you to carry another bouquet.'—And, as it turned out, that brute was the cause of a terrible scene between my little lady and her husband, which led to a rupture between us. Moral: good messengers are rare in Paris. They try to show so much intelligence that, if you hand them an unaddressed letter, and say: 'You are to take this letter,'—they begin by grabbing it and running off; and you have to call them back to tell them where to carry it."

"I have another charge to make, messieurs," said Célestin. "Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier is stuffing truffles into his pocket. I'm not surprised that they disappear from his plate so fast."

"Mon Dieu! just because I've taken two or three.—Come, waiter! The lobster—and the asparagus. Hot! hot!"

"At what time do you go to your rendezvous?" asked Balivan.

"Half-past eight."

"You have time enough."

"None too much; you see, I should like some dessert too."

"Oh! I see that you don't propose to abandon your share of anything."

"When a man has a good stomach, he ought to make use of it. If you play bouillotte this evening, I'll come back and join you."

"If we play!" cried Mouillot; "I rather think so—eh, Albert?"

"Oh, yes! I want my revenge."

"Bouillotte to the death!" said Balivan, absent-mindedly eating asparagus at the wrong end.

"And afterward, messieurs," said Dupétrain, "I will magnetize you all."

"Oh! he'll drive us mad with his nonsense! I say, Dupétrain, do you magnetize your mistresses, when you have any?"

"Certainly; I put myself in communication with them at once."

"He communicates his magnetic fluid to them."

"And as they confess, in the somnambulistic state, that they deceive him, that vexes him, and he goes off and puts others to sleep."

"Laugh as much as you please, messieurs!" rejoined Dupétrain, assuming a solemn expression and resting his elbows on the table; "but if I should tell you all the

extraordinary things that have been disclosed to me by the power of magnetism, you would shudder from head to foot."

"*Fichtre!*" exclaimed Tobie, returning to the lobster. "Faith! they give you a good dinner here.—Is this story of yours very interesting?"

"Well, well!" said Albert; "here's Tobie burning with the desire to shudder from head to foot!"

"I'll tell you a single incident," replied Dupétrain, delighted to find that Tobie paid some attention to what he said.—"A young woman, whose husband was travelling——"

At that moment, the waiter opened the door of the salon and said:

"A messenger is here, asking for Monsieur Célestin de Valnoir."

"Very well," said Célestin, rising; "I'll go and speak to him."

He left the room and found Jean Ficelle waiting on the landing; he beckoned to the messenger, who said in an undertone:

"First of all, my comrade Sans-Cravate went to the same house that I did. I let him go first, as you told me; then I waited till he came out, before I went in."

"Very good. And he didn't see you?"

"It was impossible. The lady wasn't in, but I found the maid, Mamzelle Rosa, who told me where her mistress was—on Rue d'Angoulême, Boulevard du Temple, calling on one of her friends. I went there and found her, and gave her your letter. She read it, and then gave me this answer for monsieur."

With that, Jean Ficelle handed Célestin a letter. He tore it open, hurried to a gas jet to read it, and seemed

satisfied with its contents. Having put it in his pocket, he took out a two-franc piece and handed it to the messenger, saying:

"Here, this is for you."

Jean Ficelle made a wry face as he took the coin, and muttered:

"Only that much for going to Rue Neuve-Vivienne, then to Rue d'Angoulême, and coming back here; it ain't very fat pay."

"You rascal! I'll wager that the lady to whom you gave my letter paid you, and paid you handsomely too; so that I really ought not to give you anything."

"Monsieur is too shrewd," replied Jean Ficelle, with a half-smile; "there's no way of being sharp with him."

"Off with you! keep your mouth shut, and I'll employ you again; when you're paid at both ends, it seems to me that you ought to be satisfied."

"He's a skinflint, all the same!" muttered the messenger, as he went away.

Célestin returned to his friends.

"The reply is evidently satisfactory," said Mouillot, scrutinizing his face. "His eyes have the proud gleam of a victor already. Is your Dulcinea very pretty?"

"Oh! messieurs, it isn't what you imagine. It's important business."

"Are you going to marry?"

"No. It's some business on the Bourse. A little money to invest."

"Oho! if you're going to be a millionaire, then you can afford to lose at bouillotte.—The champagne frappé, waiter. Now is the time!"

"Messieurs," said Dupétrain, with his elbows still on the table, "I was about to tell you a very curious

anecdote.—A young woman, whose husband was travelling, desired to know whether, when he was away from her——"

"Silence! No more stories! here comes the champagne!—Well, Albert, why don't you drink? You are not in good spirits."

"Because my messenger doesn't come," replied the young dandy, with a sigh which he extinguished in a glass of champagne.

"Nor mine, either," said Tobie; "but I don't care! he'll come in time. Meanwhile, let us drink and laugh and sing! Champagne till we drop! They treat you mighty well here."

"Yes, you seem to be getting along very well," said the artist, with a smile.

"Spare yourself, Pigeonnier, my boy; or else you'll make a fiasco, in spite of your letter of recommendation."

"I! why I could drink champagne all day without getting drunk; I am so used to it!"

Again the waiter appeared, and said:

"There's a messenger for Monsieur Albert Vermoncey."

"Ah! it's for me this time!" exclaimed the young man, springing to his feet. "I am coming! I am coming!"

In a second he had left the room and joined Sans-Cravate, who came to meet him, holding three letters in one hand and a single one in the other, and who said, almost without stopping for breath:

"I did just what monsieur told me: first, to the lady's house on Rue Neuve-Vivienne. Not in; I left the letter. Then to monsieur's house, Rue Caumartin. The concierge gave me these three letters. They smell good; you'd think you had your nose on Bastringuette's tray. And then I went back just now to Rue Neuve-Vivienne,

and they gave me this letter for monsieur. That smells good, too."

"A letter from her! Oh! give it to me, give it to me!"

"Here's all of them; first, the three the concierge gave me."

And Sans-Cravate handed Albert the letters he held in his left hand. But the young man crumpled them up together and thrust them into his pocket; then, hurriedly breaking the seal of the other one, which the messenger had in his right hand, he stepped aside to read it unobserved, while Sans-Cravate whistled a *cachucha* between his teeth.

Albert had no sooner made himself acquainted with the contents of Madame Baldimer's reply to his letter, than his face assumed an expression of the most intense pleasure; he felt in his pocket and took out two five-franc pieces, which he put in Sans-Cravate's hand, saying:

"Here, Sans-Cravate; I am happy, and I want you to be happy, too."

"Ah! thanks, bourgeois. *Crédié!* it's a pleasure to work for you; you're very free with your cash. I am always at your service—day or night—no matter what time; whenever you need me, I'll be ready. And if you should be short of the needful, I'd work for you all the same; because, you see, when I once get attached to people, it isn't just selfishness that makes me work for them—it's the heart—it's——"

"All right, my good fellow, thanks! Some day, perhaps, I shall put your zeal to the proof. Go and enjoy yourself. I must return to my friends."

"Oh! yes, we are going to have rather a choice little spree!" cried Sans-Cravate, as he went downstairs four at a time. "Bastringuette will have a chance to let

herself go; she's so fond of good things to eat! Three cart-wheels to spend: a tricycle! nothing less, by God!"

While Sans-Cravate left the restaurant, singing at the top of his voice, Albert returned to his place at the table.

"Give me something to drink!" he cried; "champagne! let us play cards and get drunk! I am in the mood now to do whatever you choose."

"It seems that all the replies are favorable," said Mouillot.

"Oh! very favorable!" rejoined Albert; "I make no secret of the fact that there was a woman who was inclined to play the prude with me, and with whom, of course, I was more in love than ever. But I have obtained an assignation—a tête-à-tête, at last."

"Oho! it's all settled, then."

"An assignation for this evening?" queried Célestin, with an indifferent air.

"No, not until to-morrow. So I can pass the evening, and the night too, with you. I am entirely at your service."

"So much the better; we will have a hot game."

"I shall win, for I am in a lucky vein."

"That's not certain; lucky in love doesn't mean lucky at cards; the proverb says just the opposite."

"For my part, I believe that luck in one brings luck in the other. So look out for yourselves to-night."

"Messieurs," said Dupétrain, with his elbows on the table, and glaring at each of his companions in turn, in order to attract their attention, "I think that the time has come——"

"To put us to sleep?" cried Balivan.

"No; but to tell you about that extraordinary occurrence that I started to tell you a moment ago."

"I say, messieurs," said Mouillot; "we may as well let him tell his story; if we don't, he won't give us a moment's peace this evening.—Go on, Dupétrain; but if it lasts too long, you won't be allowed to finish it."

"Oh! messieurs, I am sure that the anecdote won't seem long to you; it's too interesting for that.—A young woman had a husband, who was travelling——"

"You have already told us that three times."

"This young woman was very desirous to know whether her husband, while he was away from her——"

"A messenger wants to speak to Monsieur Pigeonnier," said the waiter, at the door.

All the young men roared with laughter at the expression of Dupétrain's face when he was interrupted for the third time at the beginning of his story. But Tobie left the table, saying:

"Excuse me a moment. Don't go on without me. I am coming right back."

Paul was waiting for Tobie; he seemed very tired, and the perspiration was still streaming from his face. But Monsieur Pigeonnier began by saying to him:

"It has taken you a very long time; you are very late; if I was a messenger, I would move quicker than this."

"It's not my fault, monsieur," Paul replied. "I went first to the Marché du Temple, to see Madame Agar Abraham."

"Speak lower, messenger, lower! Come to the foot of the stairs; there are too many people passing here."

They went downstairs, and Tobie led Paul into the farthest corner of the courtyard.

"Now, go on," he said; "I am listening."

"I handed monsieur's letter to Madame Abraham."

"Very good; where's the money she gave you?"

"She gave me no money for monsieur; but after reading the letter, she cried: 'My nephew is trying to make a fool of me! does he suppose that I am going to support him in his extravagance? I won't lend him another sou! not another liard! and if he don't pay what he owes me——'"

"All right! all right! that's enough! Madame Agar was jesting; in the first place, I am not her nephew, but that's a favorite term of hers that she applies to everybody; she even calls some of her lady customers her nephews. I'll go and give her a lecture, to teach her not to be so familiar.—Then you went to my concierge, Madame Pluchonneau, who made haste to do what I wanted?"

"She didn't make any too much haste, monsieur. In the first place, she cried: 'If monsieur thinks I like doing such errands as this—carrying his coat to the Mont-de-Piété——'"

"Hush! hush! not so loud! Those concierges are so infernally insolent. It's very warm in my room, the sun shines into it all day; I don't need to keep my winter clothes through the summer, for the moths to eat; and then, I have so many clothes, I really don't know where to keep them. Well?"

"Well, monsieur, your concierge went on with her dinner and didn't show the slightest zeal."

"I'll have my landlord discharge her."

"When she had finished her dinner, she went up to your room.—'If monsieur sends to the Mont-de-Piété so often,' she said, 'I don't know what he'll have left to cover his backside.'"

"Backside! she didn't use that word, I trust?"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; I have repeated exactly what she said."

"She'll pay dear for that. She shall not do my chamber work any more—I mean, she shan't help my valet with my cooking. But let us skip these details; they are eating the dessert without me."

"At last, monsieur, your concierge did your errand. She was gone a very long time; that's why I could not return any sooner, as you told me to wait."

"True."

"She came back in a very ill humor, and gave me this for monsieur."

And Paul handed Tobie two five-franc pieces and one of two francs.

"Twelve francs!" he cried. "What does this mean? twelve francs for a superb silk-lined paletot, with a velvet collar! Messenger, she must have given you more than this."

Paul repressed with difficulty an angry retort, and handed Tobie a slip of paper, saying:

"No, monsieur; there wasn't any more money, but she gave me this paper with it, which will prove that I have handed you all that I received."

The paper was the Mont-de-Piété ticket. Tobie read it, and muttered:

"The Arabs! twelve francs! only twelve francs for a luxurious garment which cost me a hundred and nineteen! However, I won't let them keep it long, to teach them—— All right, my boy, all right!"

And Monsieur Pigeonnier started to go away without paying the messenger. He thought better of it, however, went back to Paul, and put a ten-sou piece in his hand.

"Here, my boy," he said; "here's your money."

Paul glanced at the ten-sou piece, and could not refrain from saying:

"What, monsieur! this is all you give me for more than three hours?"

"Three hours! three hours! it isn't my fault if you make a job last forever."

"But, monsieur——"

"I never give less than ten sous for an errand, and never more; it's quite enough."

"I did two errands for monsieur; I went first to the Temple, and——"

"Well, well, all right! here—for God's sake, don't whine!"

Tobie reluctantly took four sous more from his pocket and gave them to Paul, then ran quickly up the stairs; while the young messenger, evidently confused and humiliated by the way in which he had been treated, walked slowly away from the Maison-Dorée.

Tobie instantly resumed his seat at the table, and, to make up for lost time, stuffed himself with biscuit, fruit, preserves and confections; but, although he did full honor to the dessert, his face, when he rejoined his friends, was very far from expressing the lively satisfaction depicted on Albert's and Célestin's after their interviews with their respective messengers.

"This time," said Mouillot, "I fancy that the reply was not so agreeable as on the two preceding occasions. Young Tobie does not appear perfectly content. She no longer loves him!"

"I beg your pardon," replied Tobie, filling his glass with champagne; "on the contrary, she loves me too well."

"It's very strange, but one would swear that you were annoyed. Don't lie about it: your charmer has given you your walking ticket."

"Not at all! but she's a horribly jealous creature, with whom I was to dine to-day. I broke my engagement in order to join you, and she writes me that it is plain that I no longer love her, and that she's going to take poison; that alarms me a little, because she's quite capable of doing as she says."

"Nonsense! you must have read it wrong; it's fish [*poisson*] that she's going to take. Show us her letter."

"Impossible, messieurs! I must respect her reputation."

"I say! you're putting figs and raisins in your pockets now; do you like them pocketed, too?"

"Oh! I was absent-minded; that devil of a woman! Why need she disturb my enjoyment! Basta! I won't think any more about her. Another love awaits me! Give me something to drink!"

Monsieur Dupétrain, who had been coughing persistently for several minutes to attract the others' attention, replaced his elbows on the table, and began:

"Messieurs, as the three messengers you were expecting have all come at last and brought replies to your messages, and as you will not be called away again, I think that this is an opportune time to tell you my somnambulistic anecdote."

The young men prepared to listen; and Mouillot drew his watch, saying:

"I am going to see how long your story lasts; I warn you that I give you only ten minutes. Look, Dupétrain, you see that it's eight twenty-five."

Monsieur Dupétrain did not look at the watch, for he was already off.

"A young woman, the wife of a man who was on a journey——"

But at that moment, Albert, as if he suddenly recalled the plan he had formed, cried:

"Eight twenty-five! Well, Tobie, what about your appointment for half-past eight? You have no time to spare, for the lady is not very patient."

Tobie sprang to his feet, delighted to have an opportunity to leave in a hurry; without losing an instant, he threw down his napkin and seized his hat.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried; "that is true; and I had forgotten it for the moment. I must run. Excuse me, messieurs, but it is an adventure which I should be very sorry to miss.—Pay for me, Albert; I haven't time to wait for the bill."

"Very well! Will you come back this evening, to tell us the result of the interview?"

"To be sure; and to play a game of bouillotte with you. Will you be here?"

"No," said Mouillot; "if we want to make a night of it, we had better go to Balivan's; we shall be more at liberty there."

"My studio is at your service, messieurs; with pipes of all sizes, from all countries."

"All right; then I will join you at Monsieur Balivan's."

"You know my address? Rue Taitbout."

"I know, I know! Au revoir!—By the way, Monsieur Dupétrain, please don't tell your story till I come back."

Dupétrain made no reply; he had taken his head in his hands and was fascinating his plate. The young men laughed heartily, and Tobie disappeared.

VII

MADAME PLAYS.—THE SHOWMEN

Madame Plays was a woman of some twenty-five or thirty years, who looked her full age, because she had a large and powerfully built frame, and features in harmony therewith. But although women of that stamp seem to attain at an early age the summer of their existence, they have the satisfaction of retaining the aspect of that season when they are well advanced in their autumn; that is a compensation which may fairly be considered an advantage.

Madame was a fine figure of a woman; not too tall, but perhaps somewhat overdeveloped in the way of embonpoint; her outlines were still graceful, however, and her broad, well-rounded hips showed that she did not need to resort to artifice to imitate nature. A foot of medium size, with a gracefully arched instep, a stout but well-proportioned leg, a pretty arm, a soft, plump hand, with those taper fingers that seem destined to touch none but pleasant things—so much for the body. A face of a decidedly rustic type, but fresh and attractive; a large nose, a large mouth with pretty teeth, brown eyes which promised many things, and eyebrows which promised still more—so much for the features.

As for her mind, no one ever mentioned it; it was regarded as absent. She was all material and sensual; but she had had the tact to choose a husband well suited to her. A man of forty years, stupid as an owl, but in vigorous health; quite capable, when his wife was not

otherwise provided, of fulfilling all the duties imposed upon him by his marital office, and deeming himself very fortunate when madame deigned to permit him to enter upon those duties. In a word, she led him by the nose, deceived him every day, and did not allow him to dine out without her permission.

A single incident will suffice to elucidate Monsieur Plays's character.

One day, one of his intimate friends met him a few steps from his home. When he accosted him, he noticed that Monsieur Plays, who was usually perfectly calm and placid, seemed somewhat excited, and that his eyes were rolling from side to side with an unaccustomed expression.

"I was coming to see you, Plays," said his friend; "but what's the matter with you, pray? you seem rather excited."

Monsieur Plays wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and replied:

"Faith! I have good reason; just listen. I went home just now, unexpectedly, it is true, for I wanted to tell my wife that I have a box for the Bouffes; I opened her bedroom door, without knocking, and I found her—I found her—with one of my cousins—in a position—there was no mistake about it—you understand, don't you?"

"Oh! yes, I understand perfectly. Well, didn't you do anything?"

"Yes. I went out again and slammed the door with all my might! They must have seen that I didn't like it."

And the adventure had no other consequences, except that when he next appeared before his wife Monsieur Plays had a sheepish look, as if he were ashamed of the way he had ventured to slam the door.

Such was Herminie Plays's husband. He did a large commission business and made a great deal of money; which was very necessary in his household, as madame spent an enormous amount for her dress and her pleasures.

It was half-past eight o'clock. The weather was fair and warm, for it was still summer; but the daylight was beginning to fade, and one had to be very near a person to distinguish his features plainly.

There was a large throng in the neighborhood of the flower market of the Chaussée d'Antin—that is to say, beside the Madeleine. There were not many flowers left; still there were enough to content the modest purchasers who came late in order to pay less.

For ten minutes, a woman dressed in the height of fashion had been walking back and forth in front of the rosebushes, myrtles, and orange-trees; sometimes she walked on the outer edge of the sidewalk, to avoid the people who were examining the shrubs; but her glances ranged over the whole market and its neighborhood; not a man passed without her looking closely at him to make sure that it was not he for whom she was waiting; you have already divined that the woman was Herminie Plays. There was an impatient gleam in her eyes, for a rendezvous of this sort was something to which she was not accustomed; and if Monsieur Albert Vermoncey had not been a very fascinating young man, it is probable that she would already have left the place.

Suddenly a short, stout young man came toward her, walking as rapidly as his little legs would allow. She saw him coming, but she was about to turn her head away, for he was not the young man she was expecting, when he halted in front of her and raised his hat, saying:

"It is surely Madame Plays to whom I have the honor of wishing a good-evening?"

"Yes, monsieur. Ah! it is Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier! I did not recognize you at first—it is getting quite dark."

"I recognized you at once, madame; but you have one of those figures which it is impossible to mistake, and which attract one's eye instantly."

"You are too gallant, monsieur; but I beg your pardon—I am looking for somebody, and I am afraid——"

"Do not look for him, it is useless; he will not come—at least, not at this moment."

"What! what do you mean?"

"That I come from Albert Vermoncey, my intimate friend, who is prevented by important business from joining you just yet."

"What do you say? he has told you—why, that is very indiscreet on Monsieur Albert's part. Really, men are a hundred times more garrulous than women!"

"That is true! O mon Dieu! how true it is!"

"I trust that you do not believe——"

"I believe only that Albert is very fortunate when he is with you."

"That is too kind of you! but what did he tell you to say to me?"

"To offer a thousand excuses—and then, to escort you to a place where he will join us—a little later."

"Ah! he will join us—and he has sent you to keep me company?"

"If you will be good enough to accept the substitution."

"This seems to me rather inconsiderate on Monsieur Albert's part. I don't know if I ought to believe you."

"Here's a letter which he gave me for you, so that you might have full confidence in me."

Madame Plays took the letter, opened it, recognized Albert's signature, and tried to read it; but it was too dark, so she folded the letter and put it in her bosom, saying:

"I will read it later; but I see that Albert did really send you to me. What a harebrained performance! it is characteristic of him! Well, where are we to wait for him?"

"I will escort you. Will you deign to accept my arm?"

"I must. Oh! this is too absurd; but I can't help laughing at the idea. Ha! ha! what a madman that Albert is!"

Madame Plays took Tobie's arm, and leaned heavily upon it, because it tired her to walk; but her cavalier did not complain; he mistook for a tender pressure what was simply the result of the lady's embonpoint, and, in his turn, he began thus early to press amorously to his side the arm that was passed through his.

Pigeonnier led Madame Plays toward the Champs-Élysées. He knew that he would find in that direction an abundance of restaurants with private dining-rooms. It was so late, that the lady had surely dined; and he was not sorry for that, because he would have to regale her with ices or punch only, which were much less expensive; he had already considered all these little details. He preferred not to spend the twelve francs he had obtained on his coat, for he wanted to keep something with which to play bouillotte, hoping to win enough at that game to pay for his share of the dinner.

"Are you taking me to the Circus?" asked Madame Plays, when she saw that they were going toward the Champs-Élysées.

"No. That isn't where Albert is to meet us, but at a nice little restaurant over yonder."

"A restaurant! but I have dined!"

"Really—you have dined? Ah! that's a pity; however, we can take something all the same."

"You act as if you weren't certain of the place where Albert is to meet us."

"I beg your pardon—look—that is the place."

"What! under that mountebank's tent?"

"No; behind it—that café. Yes, that's the place."

Tobie led his charge into a sort of café, and told the waiter who came forward to meet them to show them to one of the private rooms on the first floor. Madame Plays did not seem at all alarmed when she heard her escort ask for a private room. She was afraid of nothing; indeed, she was strong enough to check any enterprise which did not please her. So she followed with an assured step as the waiter led them upstairs, then through a passageway, and opened the door of a small room looking on the Champs-Élysées.

"What can I offer you?" inquired Tobie of his charming companion; "ices, punch?"

"I will take an ice."

"Very good.—Waiter, some ices."

As the waiter left the room, Madame Plays exclaimed:

"Why don't you tell him that a gentleman will come and ask for us?"

"Ah! yes, to be sure."

And Pigeonnier ran out of the room, overtook the waiter in the hall, and said to him:

"Don't bring any biscuits or macaroons or cakes with the ices; madame doesn't like any of those things; nothing but ices, you understand."

"We always serve them with ices," replied the waiter, with an offended air; "but you're not obliged to eat them."

"Yes; but I tell you it isn't worth while to serve them."

"Very well, monsieur."

The corpulent young man danced back to the room in which he had left his charge, who had removed her hat and shawl.

"Excellent," said Tobie to himself; "she is making herself at home; she made no fuss about coming to a private room, so I conclude that the affair will go of itself."

"What can we see from here, I wonder?" said Madame Plays, walking to the window.

"Oh! nothing attractive," said Tobie, who preferred that the window should remain closed. "We are right above those travelling showmen, who have set up their booth close to the house, and exhibit bears and panthers and other monsters, I believe. If I were the proprietor of this restaurant, it seems to me that I wouldn't have them so near."

"Why not?" said his fair companion, with a smile; "everybody must live, must they not?"

"Everybody, yes, but not monsters. On my word, I detest monsters—but I idolize beauty."

As Tobie concluded this sentence, he took Madame Plays's hand and imprinted a kiss upon it; the charming creature allowed her hand to be kissed without objection.

The waiter brought the ices; as he placed them on the table, he looked with amazement at the lady who did not like biscuits; he spent a long time arranging the

ices and spoons, and when he had finished he did not leave the room; so that Pigeonnier was obliged to say to him:

"That's all right; when I want anything, I will ring."

The waiter departed at last, and Tobie seated himself beside Madame Plays, placed an ice in front of her, and said:

"I trust that you will not be like this to me."

"What do you mean? flavored with vanilla?"

"No, no; I meant that—if you would not be like ice to me——"

"Indeed! Is that what Albert told you to say to me?"

"Oh! but you know—when one's friends are not by—and one has a burning heart—and one finds one's self beside such a charming woman——"

The waiter suddenly opened the door and said:

"I didn't bring any biscuits or macaroons, because madame doesn't want any."

"What! who told you I didn't want any?" demanded Madame Plays.

"Why, monsieur——"

Tobie's face became purple; he glared savagely at the waiter, and interrupted him with:

"What's that you say? what nonsense is this? I said: 'If your biscuits aren't fresh, I don't want any; if your macaroons are old, keep them.'—I do not wish to offer madame anything that is not—worthy of her."

"But, monsieur—just now, out in the hall, why—that wasn't——"

"If you don't hear straight, it isn't my fault. Go! we have heard enough; leave us."

The waiter made no reply, but glanced at Tobie with a cunning expression, as he left the room.

"That waiter is an idiot," said Tobie, eating his ice; "he made me lose the thread of my discourse."

"So Albert is detained by important business? a rendezvous with some other woman, perhaps? Doubtless you know all about it, as he confides his most profound secrets to you. All men are villains when they are together."

"One thing is certain—that I am very happy; and as for his confidence, I would willingly abuse it."

"Upon my word, that is very pretty!"

"Listen; if I had the good fortune to be in favor with so lovely a woman as you, I wouldn't send a friend to stay with her during my absence."

"It is true that that indicates——"

"Vast self-conceit, or perfect indifference."

"Ha! ha! how you abuse your friend!"

"The absent are always in the wrong; that proverb will be true as long as the world lasts."

"Do you think so? Perhaps I don't agree with you."

"Oh, yes! oh, yes! do agree with me! When one has eyes that——"

Again the waiter opened the door, and entered the room with two dishes, one filled with biscuits, the other with macaroons.

"There! they are perfectly fresh," he said, as he put them on the table. "Taste them. They were baked yesterday."

Madame Plays burst out laughing, for Tobie's eyes were like pistols; however, he dared not say anything, and the waiter was about to leave the room, when Madame Plays, having finished her vanilla ice, called him back.

"Waiter, bring me a fruit ice; what fruits have you?"

"We have strawberry, madame—and vanilla."

"I know you have vanilla, as I have just eaten one. But I ask you what fruit ices you have."

"We have strawberry, madame—and vanilla."

"I understand—you have nothing else."

"I beg pardon, madame; we have mixed ices too."

"What flavors?"

"Strawberry and vanilla."

"Bring me a strawberry, then.—And you, monsieur, won't you take a strawberry ice?"

This question was addressed to Tobie, who did his utmost to look pleased as he replied:

"Oh, no! I never eat more than one ice, myself. I shouldn't dream of doing it. I have noticed that if you eat more than one, they are likely to do you a lot of harm; they give you cramps in the stomach."

"Oh! I could eat a dozen; I could eat them all day, without the least bad effect."

"The devil!" thought Tobie; "it's lucky they haven't anything but strawberry and vanilla."

The waiter went out and soon returned with the strawberry ice. Again he busied himself arranging the plates and glasses and spoons, but he left the room at last. Madame Plays attacked the strawberry ice, tasting also the macaroons and biscuits.

"The cost is climbing up," said Tobie to himself; "this woman eats a great deal. If I don't divert her attention by making love to her, both dishes will soon be empty. I have heard it said that women must always have one sense at work. Let's try to give her something else to think about."

He drew his chair nearer to Madame Plays, looked her in the eyes, and heaved a tremendous sigh. The fair

creature, who was of a very jolly disposition, exclaimed, with a smile:

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Tobie, what's the matter with you? You make eyes at me, and breathe so hard!"

"Ah! madame—I see that Albert did very wrong to send me to you."

"How so? do you repent of having conferred a favor on your friend?"

"But if that favor deprives me of my repose, my happiness, my peace of mind!"

"Ha! ha! you are joking. How is your repose endangered, pray?"

At that moment, the showman, standing directly beneath the window of the room occupied by Tobie and his charge, began to announce the performance by tapping with a stick on a huge picture placed beside the entrance of the booth. His voice was so shrill and penetrating that it was impossible for persons in the private rooms not to hear every word he said, even when they paid no attention; and the following dialogue between the young man and his fair companion was necessarily interrupted by the mountebank's periods:

TOBIE (*trying to take Madame Plays's hand*).

You ask me how my repose is endangered. Is it possible that you have not divined! Great God!

THE SHOWMAN.

The show is about to begin, messieurs and mesdames; it is about to begin.

MADAME PLAYS.

Let alone my hand! you are sitting very close to me.

THE SHOWMAN.

Now is the time! the time has come! the show is about to begin!

TOBIE.

Ah! I would like to be even closer. I would like——

THE SHOWMAN.

Come in! come in! buy your tickets! there won't be enough for everybody!

MADAME PLAYS.

That fellow is insufferable with his yelling!

TOBIE.

Oh! I am not listening to him. I think only of you, whom I adore. Ah! if I could obtain a little corner in your heart!

THE SHOWMAN.

There are seats for six sous, four sous, and some for two sous, for the convenience of the public.

MADAME PLAYS.

But, Monsieur Tobie, really I was very far from expecting this! My heart does not give itself so quickly; and to win it——

THE SHOWMAN.

Military men are admitted for half-price, and may keep on their spurs.

TOBIE.

Ah! if it were necessary to love you like Orlando Furioso, I am capable of it. My love is boundless.

THE SHOWMAN.

It is a wonderful, astounding, miraculous exhibition.

MADAME PLAYS.

But how long have you loved me? It seems to have taken you all of a sudden! I can hardly credit it. Pray, what is there about me that attracts you so?

THE SHOWMAN.

Curiosities such as were never seen in any part of the world.

TOBIE.

What is there about you, madame! You ask me that? Why, in my eyes, you are a divinity!

THE SHOWMAN.

An ostrich with a neck as long as a giraffe, who shows his tongue when you don't ask him to.

MADAME PLAYS.

Hush! you say as much to many other women, I am sure. Tell me, Monsieur Pigeonnier, how many mistresses have you?

THE SHOWMAN.

Three panthers, which perform all sorts of tricks.

TOBIE.

Mistresses! I have none! and if I had the good fortune to please you, you would be to me——

THE SHOWMAN.

A real camel, which is absolutely tireless, and stays on its back whole days at a time.

MADAME PLAYS.

Mon Dieu! how tiresome that man is! hasn't he nearly done? (*She nibbles a biscuit.*)

THE SHOWMAN.

This is the hour for feeding the animals.

TOBIE.

Oh! let me kiss that soft, white hand, let me caress that shapely arm.

THE SHOWMAN.

This is the hour when the male camel plays all sorts of tricks on his mate.

MADAME PLAYS.

That clown sets my nerves on edge. What an idea to bring me here! Albert isn't very considerate in his choice of a rendezvous. Oh! Monsieur Pigeonnier, stop that; I won't allow you to touch my knees in that way.

THE SHOWMAN.

Buy your tickets!

TOBIE (*trying to put his arm round Madame Plays's waist*).

What a graceful figure; you remind me of Venus.

THE SHOWMAN.

There is still room inside; if you are pleased with the show, tell all your friends and acquaintances.

MADAME PLAYS.

Well, well! what are you doing, Monsieur Tobie? such presumption!

THE SHOWMAN.

The curtain will rise in a moment, and you will see what you will see!

At this point, Madame Plays rose with an impatient gesture, crying:

"Oh! I cannot stand it any longer! such things as that clown says! they are too hateful to listen to!"

"He has finished; yes, he certainly has finished his announcement; that noise means that the people are going into the booth."

The booming of a bass-drum and several blasts of a bugle followed the conclusion of the showman's speech. A few greenhorns and idlers entered the booth; but most of the spectators walked away, being well aware that what one sees at the door of such spectacles is always much more amusing than the exhibition inside.

Tobie took Madame Plays by the hand and led her back to her seat, for he was eager to renew the conversation, which was just becoming interesting. The fair dame made no objection, but said, as she resumed her seat:

"Albert doesn't come, and his behavior begins to have a very strange look."

Pigeonnier threw himself at her feet, crying:

"Even so! if he doesn't come, that is an additional reason for you to forget him, to take your revenge, to yield to me."

Madame Plays seemed to hesitate, and somewhat abated her severity toward the young man at her feet; but, as she was arranging her collar, her hand came in contact with the letter she had placed in her bosom. She took it out, saying:

"By the way, I couldn't see to read Albert's letter, on the boulevard. Let us see what he says, and in what terms he recommends you to me. After that, I will decide whether I ought to listen to you."

"Read it! read it!" cried Tobie, thinking that Albert's letter could not fail to have an effect favorable to himself.

Madame Plays read the letter to herself; but as she read on, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shot fire, and her face assumed an expression of the most intense indignation. To understand this change, we must remember that the heedless Albert had written his letter while his friend Mouillot was preparing the menu for their dinner. With no suspicion of what he was doing, but thinking that he was writing only the sentences which came into his mind, he had interspersed some of the dishes which Mouillot mentioned aloud for the behoof of the company; the result was an epistle thus conceived:

"Charming creature, you know how dearly I love you. —For three, that will be enough. Your image is constantly before me.—Calf's head *en tortue*. To save you the annoyance of waiting for me at our rendezvous, I send one of my intimate friends—perfectly fresh. He will stay with you—with white sauce."

Madame Plays did not choose to read any further; she crumpled the note in her hands, threw it on the floor, sprang quickly to her feet, glaring at Tobie with an expression he was utterly unable to understand, and said to him in a voice that trembled with anger:

"Do you know the contents of this letter, monsieur?"

"Do I know it! Why, certainly, dear lady; I dictated part of it to my friend."

"Ah! you dictated it, did you? Then you and your friend are a pair of low-lived curs!"

With that, Madame Plays dealt Tobie a blow that nailed him to his place in utter stupefaction; then, seizing her

hat and shawl, which she hardly took time to put on, the wrathful beauty rushed from the room, not deigning to bestow a glance on the person she left there.

Poor Pigeonnier did not stir for several minutes, he was so paralyzed by what had happened to him. At last, he rose and began to pace the floor, crying:

"Ah! this is too much! a blow, because I handed her a letter of recommendation; a blow, when, just before, she had let me touch her knee, and—— It is inconceivable! And, with all the rest, I am out of pocket.—Waiter! waiter!"

The waiter appeared; the expression of his face was even more ironical than before. Tobie had four francs fifty centimes to pay. He paid it, sighing profoundly, and saying to himself:

"If only I can win it back at bouillotte!"

At that moment the showman began again, tapping the canvas with his stick:

"Walk in, messieurs, mesdames; you will see what you will see. Buy your tickets! if you are not satisfied, you'll get your money back."

"The devil take you!" muttered Tobie, as he left the room. "I am not at all satisfied; I have spent money recklessly to-day, and I shan't get it back!"

VIII

THE WINE SHOP.—SCENES AMONG THE COMMON PEOPLE

On the first floor of a wine shop on Rue Saint-Lazare was a room containing several tables; the room was reached by a staircase, which started from the shop itself and ended almost in the middle of the room in question, which was frequented by drinkers who desired to be more at their ease than was possible below.

The room was ordinarily occupied by workmen, loafers, and an occasional peddler. The workmen, after a laborious day, came to the wine shop to take a modest meal and to rest their tired limbs; the others, after idling the greater part of the day, came thither to spend a large part of the night in the same occupation.

Those who had done no work, and consequently had earned nothing, generally spent the most money. Economy is almost always the companion of toil; dissipation, of idleness.

A journeyman mason sat at one of the tables, eating with evident enjoyment a piece of cheese, washed down with a mug of wine; the tempting invitations of his comrades were powerless to induce him to spend another sou, for he was determined to save money and not remain a mere journeyman all his days.

Near by sat a carpenter, with a red nose, bloated face, and eyes blinking with the vapors of wine; he had already emptied several bottles, and, instead of going home to his waiting family, was all ready to drink some more, inviting

his acquaintances and even strangers to join him, in order to find an excuse for further tippling, aye, to spend the last sou of the wages he had just received, and for which his wife was waiting in order to buy bread for their children.

At another table was a man about fifty years of age, with gray hair and enormous whiskers, whose costume indicated no special profession. His chin was buried in a piece of ticking, which served him as a cravat; he wore a coat, but it was torn and patched and much too short for him; trousers whose color was no longer distinguishable, fastened behind with strings instead of buckles. On his head was a round hat, if the name can properly be given to a piece of felt torn in several places, and with only a few small fragments of brim. But all this did not prevent the individual in question from carrying his head erect, scrutinizing everybody who came in, drumming on the table with his knife by way of accompaniment to the songs he sang under his breath, and, in a word, making as much noise as many parties produced, although his repast consisted of only a glass of beer and a piece of bread.

Among the tables surrounded by customers, there was one at which a supper was being served that aroused the envy of most of the other occupants of the room: it was the table occupied by Sans-Cravate, his mistress, and the other two messengers.

The flower girl was seated beside Sans-Cravate, who ate, drank, laughed, talked, sang, and served his guests with food and drink—all without a moment's rest; at times, indeed, he succeeded in doing several things at once.

Mademoiselle Bastringuette did not seem to share her lover's merry humor; she ate heartily, but spoke very little. From time to time, she fixed her eyes on Paul,

who sat opposite her; but he always avoided meeting them, the result being that he kept his own eyes on his plate much of the time.

Jean Ficelle sat opposite Sans-Cravate; he did honor to the supper, and handled his knife and fork with great dexterity; but that did not prevent his glancing constantly to right and left, and seeing everything that took place in the room.

"Who wants some rabbit—a little more of the *gibelotte?*" said Sans-Cravate, helping himself from an enormous dish, in which the party had already made a considerable breach. "No one speaks, so I help myself."

"Give me just a bit," said Jean Ficelle, passing his plate.

"That's right!" cried Sans-Cravate, as he helped his comrade; "you're all right, you are! You never lag behind at table. But Paul—what a sluggard! he don't eat, he hardly drinks;—are you sick, my boy?"

"No, indeed," Paul replied, with a smile; "but I am not very hungry."

"Monsieur has something on his mind, and that fills the stomach at the same time!" muttered Bastringuette, sucking a bone.

"Never mind," rejoined Sans-Cravate; "I don't propose to scold him, as long as he came, although he don't seem to be enjoying himself any too much with us."

"*Dame!* we aint in the dressmaking line, you know," said Bastringuette, in a sarcastic tone; "we don't help dress the swells, we don't spend the day in rooms with waxed and polished floors!"

"Do I?" said Paul, glancing sternly at Bastringuette.

"No; but you're acquainted with people that put on airs and wear gloves! Upon my word," continued Bastringuette, with a sigh, "I've a right good mind to change

my trade. I'm not going to sell flowers any more; I'm going to fly higher."

"And sell oranges, eh?" said Sans-Cravate.

"Bah! better than that."

"Herrings, then?"

"What a fool! I tell him I'm going to rise in the world, and he wants me to lower myself to herring! I'm going to be a trousers maker, and save up money; save up money to buy a shop with. I sew well enough now, and I've always had a liking for trousers; that's not surprising, as my mother used to sell 'em under the pillars in the Market."

"Well, don't you worry, sun of my heart; if I often have days like to-day, I'll soon have enough nuggets to buy you a well-stocked shop."

"Oh, yes!" retorted Bastringuette, with a shrug; "all I've got to do is depend on you! it's surprising how you save money; you don't even know how to make people pay what they owe you——"

"What's that? does anyone owe you money?" cried Jean Ficelle, gazing at Sans-Cravate in amazement. "Do you mean to say you've got funds invested? have you had a legacy without telling a friend anything about it? Pass me some more rabbit, then."

"No, no! do you pay any attention to what Bastringuette says? she's talking about some people that I helped to move. There was mighty little to move, and it didn't tire me much; and then, I'd sawed half a cord of wood and done a few errands, so that they owed me six or seven francs, perhaps—a magnificent sum!"

"Oh, yes! it's always like that," rejoined the girl. "Look you—it was last winter; freezing cold, but bright sunlight, and I'd had an idea for a long time that I'd like

to go by the railroad to Corbeil, and then take a walk in the forest of Fontainebleau, where they say there's snakes—and I'm very curious to see one, yes, and a big one, too; I've never been afraid of the beasts. So I says to Sans-Cravate: 'You're going to take me to Fontainebleau on the railroad, and we'll have a little spree down there in the country, on the grass; it'll be a little cold, but all the more fun for that; I like to eat and drink on the grass. It's a long time since I've been in the country, and it'll do me good.'—Sans-Cravate felt in his pocket, and found he had only five francs. I says: 'That's a little scant to do things up brown on the grass; we ought to have at least twice that. Let's see if there ain't some way of getting some more cash.'—At that, he says: 'I've got some customers that owe me something; among others that family that lives on the fifth in Rue des Martyrs, that I moved six months ago.'—'Well,' I says, 'if you wait any longer, they'll be moving again, and without your help this time. Go and get your money; a poor messenger has the right to ask for what's owing him, after six months.'—And I urged him so that he decided to go there, but what do you suppose he did?"

"Smashed everything to make 'em pay him," said Jean Ficelle; "at least, that's what I'd have done."

"Oh! no, you wouldn't," said Sans-Cravate; "if you'd seen the poverty of those poor people, you'd have done just what I did, for you couldn't have helped being touched. When I went into their room—they lived up under the eaves—it was near six o'clock in the morning; I found the man and his wife still in bed. They had old towels round their heads for nightcaps, that made 'em look like Turks. They had no bedclothes but an old

quilt all full of holes, so they'd piled all their clothes on the bed—old dresses, a pair of trousers, and even old boots! all that to keep 'em warm! And then, in a recess, there was the child's bed—a pretty, red-cheeked little boy, two or three years old—I say, the bed, but it wasn't one! Guess what the child was lying in—an old muff, with hardly any fur left on it; they had stuffed the little fellow into that, and then taken out the drawer of a commode and put him in it for a bed. When he saw me come in, the man said: 'My dear friend, if you have come for what I owe you, I shall have to ask you to be kind enough to wait a little longer; for I've been out of work for a fortnight. We lie in bed as long as possible, because we haven't got anything to make a fire, and what is worse is that I don't know just now what we're going to breakfast on to-day!'—I'd just like to know if I could ask those people for money! I tried to comfort 'em a little, and then I went away."

"That's very well, but he don't tell you the whole story," cried Bastringuette; "he not only didn't ask 'em for what was owing him, but he left on that poor man's mantelpiece the only five-franc piece he owned; so, instead of bringing back twice what he had, so that we could have some fun, he came back without a sou!"

Paul seized Sans-Cravate's hand and shook it warmly, crying:

"Ah! that was fine, Sans-Cravate! that was a fine thing you did! you have a warm heart, you're a good fellow!"

"Oh! *pardi!* what a fuss over nothing!" rejoined the messenger, filling his glass; "of course, that little fellow in the muff had to have some breakfast! My credit's good at the wine shop, you see, so I could wait."

"If all creditors acted like that," muttered Jean Ficelle, "trade would be pretty bad.—I say, Laboussole, if your creditors gave you five francs, that would suit you down to the ground, eh?"

This apostrophe was addressed to the individual with the striped cravat, who had long since finished his beer, but was still chewing his bread and beating the table with his knife as if he were playing a drum. He thrust out his chin toward his interlocutor, and replied with a sprightly air:

"I should be a millionaire! as it is, I'm strapped. What do you expect? you see that every day! and I've known what it is to eat roast veal and lettuce, and to drink all the wine I wanted. We all have our ups and downs [*bas*]."

"But he hasn't any stockings [*bas*], just now," murmured Bastringuette, after a glance at Laboussole; "that fellow looks to me like an old pickpocket."

"Not at all," said Jean Ficelle; "he's a man who used to have great talent in his line. But, you see, he has had hard luck."

"What was his line?"

"He was an inspector at the Market."

"The devil! that's a good place; why did he lose it?"

"Oh! they put up a dirty game on him—stuffed fish and chickens in his pockets, and then said he stole 'em—a low-down trick, I say! One day, when he had a salmon in one pocket and a turkey in another, they had the cheek to arrest him and dismiss him for it."

"Couldn't the man tell when he had fish about him?" said Bastringuette.

"Apparently not; there's so much of it at the Market that you walk on it."

"All the same, his innocence looks to me almighty muddy! What does he do now?"

"He sells tickets for the *Belle-en-Cuisse* ball, on Rue des Martyrs, near the barrier. But when there's no ball, he's *smoked*, and that's the case to-day."

"I say, old boy, won't you have a drink with us?" said Sans-Cravate, raising his glass toward Laboussole, who accepted the invitation as soon as he understood it, and brought his glass to the messengers' table, saying:

"I never refuse a drink of wine."

Bastringuette made an angry gesture, and muttered between her teeth:

"What a stupid fool that Sans-Cravate is! As if we wanted that old fossil! But as soon as he has a shiner or two, he's for treating everybody he sees; so he don't keep 'em long!"

Paul seemed no better pleased than Bastringuette to be at the same table with the ex-inspector, and he moved his chair away from that gentleman's, who thereupon seized the opportunity to move close to the table; and drawing toward him the dish of rabbit, in which only the head remained, he began to lap it with his tongue, humming:

"'When a man knows how to love and please,
What other blessing does he need?'"

"Well, I think we'll have a little dessert," said Sans-Cravate; "we mustn't stop at rabbit stew.—Come, Bastringuette, what do you want for dessert?"

"Sausage with garlic," replied the girl.

"Agreed!—Here, waiter! four sausages with garlic, and see that they're spiced in the good old style—no, five, for Laboussole will take care of one—eh, old boy?"

"I never refused a sausage," replied that individual, continuing his perquisitions into every cavity of the rabbit's head.

"Good God! you're eating the eyes!" cried Jean Ficelle, who was watching Laboussole at work.

"I'd eat yours, if you was stewed. I'm very fond of that tidbit."

The sausages were brought. Each guest took one, except Paul, who declared that he was not hungry. Whereupon Jean Ficelle assumed his bantering air, and remarked:

"They ain't sweet enough for him."

And Bastringuette added:

"Perhaps his skirt cutter don't like the taste of garlic!"

"I say, comrade, you don't keep up your end!" cried Sans-Cravate, forcing Paul to let him fill his glass. "Don't you enjoy being with your friends?"

"There's no doubt about it," said Jean Ficelle; "Paul's acting damned queer. Anyone would say that it made him sore to be at the wine shop with us."

"Why do you attribute such thoughts to me?" rejoined Paul; "am I any different from you two? What am I but a messenger, like you? As for the wine shop, as I come here very seldom, it's not surprising that I don't seem so much at home as you."

"You say you don't come to the wine shop often?" cried Laboussole, eating his sausage with great zest. "You make a mistake, young man; the wine shop's the only place where one can enjoy life. It's the rendezvous of good company. I'd like never to leave it, myself!"

Paul made no reply, but turned his back on Laboussole, while Jean added maliciously:

"*Dame!* a man don't go to the wine shop when he can play the swell! and I'm told that friend Paul has been seen now and then in a fine rig, with a hat instead of a cap."

"Oho!" cried Sans-Cravate, emptying his glass; "how's that, comrade, do you play the swell now and then?"

"It's all a mistake," murmured Paul, evidently annoyed by the question.

"I've got good eyes, myself," said Laboussole, tilting his remnant of a hat over one ear. "Yes, I saw our friend, not more than a week ago, in the Marais, and he was dressed a good deal like a wholesale grocer."

"Aha! aha!" said Bastringuette, fastening her great black eyes on Paul's face; "are you a prince disguised as a messenger? It seems to me that I've heard some such fairy tale as that. If that's so, and you want to make my fortune, don't be bashful—I'll accept."

"I am nothing more than I appear to be," replied Paul, with a sigh; "but I have good eyes, too, and I saw monsieur in front of a game of chance under Pont d'Austerlitz."

The ex-inspector was evidently embarrassed, and tried to pull his hat over his eyes; he glanced at Jean Ficelle and rejoined in a hoarse voice:

"That may be! What is there surprising in that? A man goes out for a stroll, and stops in front of any show he sees. That's the way we sail down the river of life."

"Come, let's drink and sing!" cried Sans-Cravate. "What's the odds how a man's dressed, or where he walks? Ain't we our own masters? ain't liberty as much for one man as another?"

"That's my opinion," replied Laboussole, holding out his glass, the contents of which he swallowed with the facility of an Englishman drinking champagne. "You're what I call a man, you are, Sans-Cravate! and I'm your friend from this minute."

"I don't doubt it!" muttered Bastringuette; "he's anybody's friend who'll treat him—eh, Paul? Well, Cupid, why don't you answer, instead of looking at the floor like a girl? Don't you know it's indecent not to look at a woman when she speaks to you?"

Paul seemed not to hear, and made no reply. As for Sans-Cravate, the frequent bumpers he had drunk were beginning to excite his brain and becloud his eyes. He did not notice the glances that his mistress bestowed upon her vis-à-vis; but Jean Ficelle, who saw everything, smiled malignantly as he muttered between his teeth, though loudly enough for Sans-Cravate to hear:

"What infernal traitors women are! If I had a mistress, I'd never take her into company, unless there was nobody else there."

"Well," observed the shabbily clad guest, attacking the sausage Paul had refused, "business don't seem to be very bad, my friends, for your life is watered with wine."

"I had a good evening," said Sans-Cravate; "fifteen francs for one errand!"

"Peste! is it a duke and peer that you work for, my friend?"

"No; but a young man who lives well! *Bigre!* that's the kind of a spark I like. He's open-handed, I tell you!"

"He ain't like mine," said Jean Ficelle; "he flung me a paltry two-franc piece for trotting about more than two hours."

"Mine gave me even less than that," said Paul; "and yet I had to wait a long while in several places."

"Ah! my patron's the boy for me," continued Sans-Cravate; "he's a jolly fellow, and a good one, too! He

enjoys himself and wants other people to do the same. Yes, he's a good fellow; let's drink to the health of Monsieur Albert Vermoncey."

"That's the talk! Here's to him!"

"Well, Paul, aren't you going to drink?"

"I'm not thirsty."

"Does that prevent your drinking? Come on!"

"No; I've no desire to get drunk."

"Bah! what a soft-head! You're not a man, then; you're an old woman! As if a man ever refused to drink with friends!"

"No, no," said Jean Ficelle, who was doing his best to set Sans-Cravate against his young comrade; "he insults us."

"A man never refuses to drink," said Monsieur Laboussole, touching his glass to Paul's; but the young messenger took his glass and threw it on the floor, saying:

"I don't choose to drink with you, I say!"

The man with the shapeless hat seemed to view this rebuff with indifference, and contented himself with the retort:

"Young man, he who breaks glasses—you know the rest, don't you?"

But Sans-Cravate, inflamed by the wine he had drunk, sprang to his feet, crying:

"*Sacrédié!* I don't like such manners myself, and if it had been anybody else—— But you'd better not do it again, or——"

"Well, what?" cried Bastringuette, rising also, and planting herself in front of Sans-Cravate; "are we going to kick up a row? If we are, why, I'll make more noise than you! Who ever heard of getting mad with a friend

because he didn't want to drink? Ain't Paul his own master? For my part, I say he's quite right not to get drunk like you people! When you're drunk, you're just like brutes, you're good for nothing but fighting; and if you think anybody loves you, why, you're damnably mistaken!"

"See how she takes his part!" exclaimed Jean Ficelle; "if you was in love with the man, it wouldn't be any worse."

"If I'm in love with anyone," retorted Bastringuette, "it ain't with you, that's sure!"

Sans-Cravate, who was getting more and more excited, and whose jealousy was beginning to blaze under the influence of Jean Ficelle's hints and malicious remarks, seized the girl's arm, as she stood beside him, and shook her roughly.

"It seems to me, also," he cried, "that you take up my comrade's defence much too warmly! Do you know, I don't like that. Does it mean that you're inclined to play tricks on me?"

Bastringuette, with a violent wrench, released her arm from the hand that held it; and snatching a plate from the table, held it over Sans-Cravate's head, as if to strike him with it. Her face was pale, her eyebrows drew together, her eyes flashed fire. There was in her wrath something which embellished her features and almost imparted distinction to them; everyone was impressed, and Sans-Cravate stood perfectly still, apparently resigned to receive the threatened blow.

"I ought to break this plate over your head," said Bastringuette; "yes, that I ought, to teach you to shake my arm like that! If I still loved you, I'd do it; but as I don't love you any more, I forgive you."

As she spoke, she put the plate back on the table. Sans-Cravate glanced at her with a disturbed expression, and said in a faltering tone:

"Ah! you don't love me any more?"

"No," rejoined Bastringuette, dwelling upon every word. "I am outspoken. I don't propose to play tricks on you, as you seem to fear. But from this moment I am not your mistress; I take back my liberty."

"What! do you mean it?"

"Oh! I don't make any mystery of it, you see; I say it right out before everybody."

"But——"

"But what? We ain't bound together in such a way that we can't separate. Would you rather have me do like the women in society? stay with you, when I don't love you, and deceive you all day? That ain't my style."

"If you don't love me any more, then you must love somebody else!"

"*Pardi!* that's easy to guess!" muttered Jean Ficelle.

"No matter who I love! it's none of your business! Love whoever you please! I don't care a hair of monsieur's whiskers!"

And the tall girl pointed to Laboussole, who smiled and caressed his whiskers, saying:

"All women don't talk that way."

"Ah! so that's how it is!" cried Sans-Cravate, emptying his glass; while Bastringuette resumed her seat at the table, apparently much calmer. "All right! as you choose! To the devil with love, and women! Let's have a drink, my friends; let's have a drink!"

"But it's late," said Paul; "I hear them closing downstairs. Aren't we going now, Sans-Cravate?"

"Go, if you choose—I am going to stay, with my friends, with my true friends!" retorted Sans-Cravate, glaring angrily at the young man.

"No; you are going with me; you have had enough to drink; you mustn't get drunk!"

"What business is it of yours, if it suits me to get drunk? I'm my own master, too. I haven't any woman now to bother me, and bore me to death. *Crédié!* how I will make things hum now!"

"That will be very pretty!" murmured Bastringuette. "He'll do some fine things. For my part, I don't want anything more to do with men who make beasts of themselves with drink! I prefer a sober lover—they're more refined in their love making."

"Drink! drink! more wine, waiter!" cried Sans-Cravate, *determined to befuddle himself still more, in order to avoid manifesting his chagrin over his rupture with his mistress.*

"That's the talk!" said Jean Ficelle. "Sound men never sulk! Let the maggoty ones go! we can do without 'em!"

"O my friends!" cried Laboussole, in a sentimental tone, "when we are so comfortable together, we mustn't think of separating; let's stay here a week—what do you say? Good! we will!"

Paul leaned over toward Bastringuette, and said in an undertone:

"You are responsible for Sans-Cravate's getting drunk. He is drinking to forget the grief you have caused him by telling him that you meant to leave him! and it may result in some catastrophe."

"What do I care? I'm done with him. I don't love him any more; I love somebody else, and that somebody else is you."

Paul drew back without replying. At that moment, they heard roars of laughter in another part of the room, where the red-nosed carpenter, surrounded by drinkers, was saying:

"Yes. I'll bet I can do it. Yes, I say, I'll bet I can, and that nobody else'll do it after me. Bah! you're a pack of cowards, you don't dare to bet!"

"Ah! there's Cagnoux up to his tricks!" said Jean Ficelle; "challenging everybody, as usual."

Sans-Cravate left his place and walked to the carpenter's table.

"What is it you're going to do that the others won't do?" he asked. "That's a pretty good one! Do you think there's no cocks here of your size, Cagnoux?"

"That's so," muttered Laboussole, emptying all the bottles into his glass; "yes, we're up to anything, we are! you'd better not defy us."

The carpenter, who was completely drunk, succeeded in getting on his feet, nevertheless; and trying hard to stand without staggering, raised an enormous glass and said:

"You see this glass, don't you? holds a pint. Just fill it with brandy, and I'll empty it at one draught; there ain't one of you smart enough to do as much."

"Parbleu! that's a wonderful thing," cried Sans-Cravate; "to drink that glassful of brandy; that ain't very hard."

"Sans-Cravate is quite capable of trying it," said Jean Ficelle, who also had left his seat, to join the bystanders. "Yes, I know him; he'll do it. If I hadn't a pain in the stomach, I'd do it myself."

"I'll bet six quarts for the company that I'll drink that glassful of brandy at one draught, without stopping for breath; do you take me, old Cagnoux?"

"Done!" replied the carpenter; "shake."

Sans-Cravate stepped forward to take the hand that Cagnoux held out; but that worthy, being unable to keep his legs any longer, fell back on his chair, and the messenger's hand struck him on top of the head and knocked his old cap over his nose. This episode was greeted with shouts of laughter. The carpenter laughed with the rest, and, having extricated himself from his cap, exclaimed:

"Bring the brandy, and, if he loses, I'll make the same bet."

Thereupon Paul rose, and, paying no heed to Bastringuette, who asked him if he would not go away with her, ran to Sans-Cravate and grasped his hand.

"Sans-Cravate, surely you're not going to take that bet. You are not going to be crazy enough to drink that enormous glassful of brandy!"

"Why not, I'd like to know?" rejoined the messenger, withdrawing his hand. "If I choose to do it, is it any of your business? Go and court Bastringuette, and leave us in peace!"

"You know very well that I am not in love with your mistress."

"Oh! she ain't my mistress any more; it's all one to me whether she's yours or not."

The tone in which Sans-Cravate spoke indicated that he was not so indifferent as he claimed to be with respect to the flower girl's becoming Paul's mistress; but the younger man tried to take his comrade's hand again, saying:

"Come, come, let's not say anything more about Bastringuette! Your quarrel with her is none of my business; and, besides, you'll make it up to-morrow. But I beg you not to drink that enormous quantity of brandy; it is very dangerous; it may kill you!"

"Bah! and if it does, I don't care!"

"The bet is taken! it's too late to back out," said Jean Ficelle, rubbing his hands.

"Yes, a bet's a sacred thing," observed Monsieur Laboussole, who had at last decided to leave the table, on which there was nothing more to drink, and join the crowd around Sans-Cravate and Cagnoux. "I don't know anything more sacred than a bet! Once I bet that I'd eat a tremendous great fried carp, with all its bones. When I'd put down about three-quarters of it, I found I was strangling; but I'd made the bet, so I kept on. I tore my throat with a bone, and it was sore for six months; but I won the bet, which was ten sous, and my honor was safe!"

The waiter appeared with a huge measure of brandy; while he was filling the mammoth glass, Paul went up to Sans-Cravate once more, and said to him:

"I am less excited than the others, and I am your friend; for heaven's sake, listen to me!"

"You're not my friend any more; besides, you broke your glass rather than drink with me—I haven't forgotten that."

"It wasn't you that I didn't want to drink with; it was Laboussole, and you'll see later whether I was right or not."

At that moment, there was a general cry of:

"The glass is full! Come, Sans-Cravate, now's the time to show what you're made of!"

"Here I am!" replied the messenger, roughly shaking himself clear of Paul's grasp and approaching the table on which stood the subject of the wager.

But Paul was too quick for him; he ran to the table, reached it first, and with the back of his hand knocked the glass to the floor, where it broke in a thousand pieces, and the brandy ran in all directions.

The young messenger's act was followed by a growl of dissatisfaction and menace. Some of the bystanders seemed to be dazed by the bare idea that a man could make up his mind to waste such an enormous quantity of the precious liquid; and Monsieur Laboussole, heedless of the danger of staining his trousers, instantly dropped on all fours, and, putting his tongue to the boards, tried to lap up a part of it.

But Sans-Cravate, beside himself with rage and crazy with drink, rushed at Paul and seized him around the waist, saying in a threatening tone:

"That's an insult! You meant to keep me from winning my bet, but you've got to give me satisfaction! We are going to fight, do you hear? Look out for yourself, for I shall strike hard!"

"Yes, yes!" shouted Jean Ficelle; "he insulted Sans-Cravate, he insulted Cagnoux, he insulted all of us, by breaking that glass. He must have a licking! we must give him a lesson! that will teach him to behave better in a wine shop."

And Monsieur Laboussole, still lapping the brandy on the floor, added in a voice half stifled by his attitude:

"We must beat him; or else make him pay for twice the quantity of brandy for the company."

Thereupon Bastringuette stepped into the midst of the men who surrounded the young messenger, and, planting herself in front of him, cried:

"Is the whole lot of you going to take sides against him? That's brave of you—a dozen against one! I tell you not to lay a finger on him, or I'll scratch all your eyes out!"

But Sans-Cravate pushed the girl aside with a turn of his wrist.

"He ain't going to fight any twelve men, but just me alone," he said.—"Come on, are you ready?"

"No," replied Paul, who had remained perfectly calm amid all the uproar, "no, I won't fight with you."

"Then you're a coward!"

"I am not a coward. Let any other man come forward, and I'll agree to fight with him; but not with you, Sans-Cravate, for you're out of your head now, and to-morrow you'll be sorry that you struck your friend."

"Ah! he's crawling! he's crawling!" cried Jean Ficelle. "He wants to make us think Sans-Cravate has drunk too much."

"I am the one you made a fool of by breaking that glass, and you've got to fight with me!" repeated Sans-Cravate. "*Crédié!* come on, and have done with it, or I'll knock you down!"

The powerful messenger shook his fist at Paul, who remained unmoved and seemed to have determined not to avoid the blow; while all the men who stood about drew back to leave more room for the combatants, upon whom every eye was fixed.

But an unforeseen incident interrupted the scene. Heavy, measured steps were heard in the wine shop below, followed by the sound of muskets striking the floor; at the same instant, the waiter appeared at the top of the stairs, with a terror-stricken air, crying:

"The watch! here's the watch! they're coming up here!"

"The watch!" muttered several of the bystanders; "what are they doing here?"—"It isn't twelve o'clock."—"We have a right to drink."—"I won't go away, for one."

"They've come for something else," said the waiter; "there's two detectives with the soldiers; they've come to arrest someone, I suppose."

The workmen and the drunkards seemed but little affected by the news. But Monsieur Laboussole, who was still on all fours, crawled under a table, although there was no brandy there.

The soldiers and detectives came upstairs almost at the waiter's heels. They entered the room, leaving two soldiers to watch the stairway.

"Why in the devil do you come here and disturb us?" demanded Sans-Cravate. "We've no business with you. I'd like to know if we ain't at liberty to drink and sing, and quarrel a little too, if we want to?"

The detectives, who had already scrutinized everybody in the room, did not answer Sans-Cravate; but one of them went to the table under which the ex-inspector of the Market had taken refuge, and dragged him forth from his hiding-place by the legs.

"This is the gentleman we're looking for," he said.—"Come, up with you! you must go with us!"

"Messieurs," cried Laboussole, trying to bury his nose in his cravat, "this is a mistake, I assure you; I must be the victim of an unfortunate resemblance. I know more than twenty men who look like me."

"No, no, you're the man we want; come, off you go—and step lively!"

"What are you arresting this man for?" demanded Sans-Cravate; while Jean Ficelle pulled him by the jacket and whispered in his ear:

"Defend him! thrash the curs! you're strong enough."

"Because he's a thief!" replied the detective, pushing Laboussole toward the stairs.

Paul glanced at Sans-Cravate, who turned pale and neither moved nor spoke. The word *thief* had sobered him in an instant.

IX

A STUDIO PARTY.—A FETICH.—THE BURGUNDIAN

It is very disagreeable to be disappointed in one's expectations; but the disappointment is especially keen after an amorous rendezvous: you have dreamed of happiness in its most seductive form; your imagination has conceived the most touching pictures, the most gratifying situations. All these thoughts have heated your brain and your mind—when you have one—and your passions at least, in default of a mind; and when all your anticipations result in nothing at all, you beat a retreat in dire distress, like the crow in the fable. But if, instead of the kisses that you hoped to steal, you have received a blow, you are quite justified in being vexed and angry, as well as distressed.

It is said that a blow from a woman's hand does no harm; doubtless because, being often dealt in obedience to a hasty impulse, it is followed by repentance, and the recipient is accorded the privilege of earning another. But take a sharp, stinging blow, and nothing more. I doubt whether the fact that it was delivered by the loveliest of women and the prettiest hand would make it welcome to you.

You will say, perhaps, that Madame Plays had not given young Pigeonnier a rendezvous. True; but she had accepted his escort, she had consented to go to a private dining-room with him; and those concessions, in the judgment of discerning persons, would be tantamount

to giving her consent that he should take Albert's place in every respect.

The little fellow reflected profoundly, as he walked from the Champs-Élysées to Rue Taitbout; he walked very fast, for one rarely moves slowly when intensely excited.

"Can it be that Albert didn't write what he dictated to himself?" he thought. "I ought to have read his letter before delivering it. Can he have written some insulting thing about her? Was it a deliberate scheme to make a fool of me? *Fichtre!* if I knew that, he'd hear something more from me! I don't propose to be made a guy of!"

In his excitement, the young man brandished his beautiful gold-headed cane, as if he proposed to break somebody's head; and in his gesticulations he came within an ace of knocking off the hat of a respectable lady, its somewhat exaggerated brim happening to be directly under his cane as he imitated the exploits of a drum-major. Luckily, the ribbons tied under the lady's chin prevented the hat from falling, and it was simply thrown back on her shoulders. But the gentleman who was with the lady, and who was indignant that a passer-by should presume to knock his wife's hat off with a cane, walked up to Tobie, and said to him in a threatening tone:

"I say, monsieur, what sort of a performance is this? You threaten us with your cane! You nearly put my wife's eye out, and you knocked off her hat, which would have fallen into the street if it hadn't been for the ribbons!"

"Oh! monsieur, madame, a thousand pardons!" stammered Tobie; "I was so preoccupied—I didn't see you."

"What! are we dwarfs?"

"No, monsieur—far from it; you are very tall. But when a man is thinking about something else——"

"That's a fine reason! We were thinking of something else, too, monsieur. Do you suppose we were thinking of your cane? By heaven! if you had destroyed my wife's eye, you wouldn't have taken your own home with you!"

"I am sure of it, monsieur; I ask a thousand pardons."

"When you carry a cane, monsieur, you ought to know how to use it."

"It was because I thought that I was using it that I was gesticulating with it."

During this colloquy the lady had readjusted her hat; and she drew her husband away, saying:

"Come, my dear; as monsieur did it accidentally, let's accept his apologies."

"Accidentally! upon my word, it would be very pretty if he had intended to do it! By all the devils! if I believed that——"

And the gentleman, becoming more and more enraged as he became more convinced of his adversary's terror, began to grind his teeth and act as if he proposed to fall upon Tobie; but Tobie was already far away; he had taken to his heels, trying to thrust his cane into his pocket, as a means of avoiding any further disaster.

This incident calmed the young man's excitement.

"I cannot accuse Albert," he said to himself, as he reached the painter's door; "I have no proofs. I ought to have picked up the letter, when Madame Plays threw it on the floor. I'll go back to the café to-morrow and ask the waiter if he found it. Meanwhile, I won't be such a donkey as to tell what happened to me, for they would laugh at me unmercifully. On the contrary, I must make them think that my triumph was complete."

Balivan lived on Rue Taitbout, in the same house as young Elina and her aunt. His apartments were on the third floor; he had three small rooms, and a studio which was large enough for him, as he painted nothing but portraits.

Several times, as he was returning home, the young artist had met the little dressmaker going to her work; and he had been impressed by her beauty. Knowing that she was his neighbor, he had tried to form an acquaintance with her, and had proposed to paint her portrait, if she would be his model for a study which he intended to exhibit at the Salon. But Elina had declined his offers, and had always refused to enter the painter's studio. And yet, it is a very pleasant thing to have one's own portrait. How many women and girls allow themselves to be allured by such an offer, by the desire to see their faces at the Salon, and to have an opportunity to listen to the compliments certain to be lavished upon them. What joy to say to their companions in the workroom: "My portrait is at the Salon; I represent an Italian peasant—a Swiss peasant—and a wood nymph. The painter insisted on putting my face in all his pictures."—Elina, too, had been tempted; but she had resisted the temptation. To be sure, Balivan was very ugly.

The artist's studio was lighted by a lamp placed on the stove; its rays fell upon a full-length portrait of a very pretty woman in a ball dress, and upon the head of an old soldier, whose nose was not finished; scattered here and there, on the floor, or hung on the walls, were various canvases, in all stages of completion, from the merest sketch to the finished portrait. Some plaster busts, easels, a manikin in female dress, sketches, and several portraits

refused admission to the Salon, or by the persons for whom they were painted, and relegated by the artist to the darkest corners of the studio, combined to give a unique aspect to the apartment.

Four young men, seated around a table in the middle of the room, were enjoying with great zest the pleasures of bouillotte. On a small table, close at hand, stood an enormous salad bowl filled with blazing punch; and glasses, pipes, cigars, tobacco pouches, and even snuffboxes, were scattered over another small table of Chinese lacquer, which had momentarily deserted the artist's salon to embellish his studio.

When Tobie appeared, the card table was occupied by Albert, Célestin, Mouillot, and a young man, who was not of the dinner party at the Maison-Dorée, but had joined the band of roisterers when they left the restaurant, and had asked for nothing better than to pass the night with them at bouillotte.

This young man, who was the possessor of an insignificant and utterly expressionless face, had hair so light that it was almost white, and eyebrows of the same color, which gave him some resemblance to an albino; still, in spite of that, he might have been considered a good-looking fellow enough, if his manner had been less indolent; but he had about twelve thousand francs a year, which his family permitted him to consume in Paris; the result being that in society, and especially among the high livers, Monsieur Varinet's company was much sought after. Not that he was amiable and jovial in society: he was always cold and impassive, and not even wine had the power to enliven him; but he spent his money with the same indifference which he displayed in every other action of his life; and he would lose large sums at cards without any

sign of emotion. All his friends esteemed him highly on that account.

Gold and silver were scattered over the table, and the animated air of the players indicated that the game was beginning to be warm.

Balivan himself was filling the glasses with punch, and Dupétrain sat in front of the manikin dressed as a woman, which he seemed to be scrutinizing with care.

"Ah! here's Tobie! *Vive Tobie!*" cried the artist, as Pigeonnier entered the room. And, despite their absorbing interest in the game, the card players joined in the cry:

"Here's Tobie! Here's that Don Juan of a Tobie!"

The young man with white eyebrows was the only one who said nothing; he contented himself with saluting the new-comer, as one salutes a person with whom he is but slightly acquainted.

"Yes, messieurs, it's I," said Pigeonnier, wiping his forehead. "You are well started already, I see. I speak for a place."

"You can come in with Balivan," said Célestin. "There are six of us now; two will go out on the quarter-hour."

"And Monsieur Dupétrain?"

"Who ever heard of Dupétrain playing cards? Upon my soul, I believe he's trying to magnetize my manikin!"

"Well, Tobie," said Albert, "what news of our fair one? Are you content? Did she accept the substitution with a good grace?"

"I am perfectly content!" Pigeonnier replied, trying to assume a triumphant swagger. "She didn't seem at all angry over the adventure; she treated me very kindly."

"Good—I understand. So everything went as you wished, eh?"

"In other words, it is impossible for me to be happier than I have been."

"What did I tell you?"

"You're not attending to your game, Albert," said Célestin.

"Yes, I am. I have opened."

"I take all bets."

"Done!"

"You're stuck! I have *misty*." *

"What infernal luck! That makes four hundred francs I've lost already!—I say, Balivan, give me some punch, to drown my loss."

"Give me a cigar, Balivan."

"Balivan, you promised me your Moorish pipe; you are going to give it to me, aren't you?"

"Pass me your tobacco pouch, will you?"

"One moment, messieurs, I can't do everything; I'm going to call my lady's-maid, on condition that you treat her with respect.—Hallo, there, Crevette!"

"Is Crevette your servant's name?" inquired Tobie, helping himself to punch.

"Yes, she's a Burgundian; she had a name that I didn't fancy—it was Cateau! † You understand that, when I had a lady of fashion here, I couldn't say: 'Cateau, come and take off madame's shawl. Cateau, go and call a cab.' To talk constantly of Cateau before my models, too, was imprudent. So I asked my Burgundian for her family name, and she's a Crevette."

The Burgundian answered her master's summons. She was a robust young woman, with plump red cheeks, and

* *Mistigri*, *misti*, or *misty*: in the game of bouillotte, the knave of clubs.

† *Cateau*, an abbreviation of Catherine, used among the common people; vulgarly, a girl of slovenly habits and loose life.

enormous hands and arms of the hue of boiled lobster. She laughed readily enough at the somewhat décolleté jests which the young men addressed to her; but when their words were reinforced by gestures, the Burgundian made free use of her hands, and the lightest tap dealt by her was equivalent to a hard blow with the fist.

"Bring us something to drink, Crevette."

"Punch?" said the Burgundian.

"Beer for me, my chubby wench!—Isn't she fresh, though! and solid!"

"Come, come! down with your paws! I won't have you touching me!"

"Oh! what a calf she must have!—Crevette, show me your leg, just up to the garter, and I'll give you half of my winnings."

"No, I won't show you anything."

"Parbleu! that's a magnificent offer of his, to give you half of his winnings! he's lost ten napoleons already!"

Young Tobie, who had swallowed three glasses of punch in succession in order to attain the level of the rest of the company, softly approached the servant and seized her leg while her back was turned; but the Burgundian, without putting down her tray, instantly brought her elbow back against his nose, crying:

"Let that teach you to pinch me! I'm going to bed—I won't come into your studio again, monsieur; your friends are too enterprising."

Crevette vanished; Tobie put his hand to his nose and seated himself in a corner, muttering:

"I won't fool with her any more; there's no feeling in my nose."

"Poor Tobie! but he can't seem to get enough. He comes here fresh from a delicious tête-à-tête with a

charming woman, and he must needs begin at once on a servant! What an omnibus seducer!"

"What would he do, I wonder," said Balivan, "if he should see my little neighbor overhead?"

"You have a pretty neighbor, have you?" queried Albert.

"Charming! Seventeen years old at most, I judge; a fascinating figure! and a saucy, mischievous face—with innocence, grace, and modesty in her glance. Seriously, she's one of the prettiest grisettes I ever saw."

"Send for her!" cried the young men in chorus.

"Make her come down, Balivan."

"Shall I go up and fetch her?" asked Tobie, taking his hand from his nose, which was badly swollen by the blow he had received.

"I will magnetize her; she will enjoy that," said Dupétrain.

"No, messieurs," said Balivan, "there's no way of inducing her to come here. Parbleu! if it could be done, I'd ask nothing better. I have offered again and again to paint her portrait and give it to her—to paint her in any costume she chose."

"Even as Eve, if she wanted you to, eh?"

"All my offers have been declined. She's a virtuous young woman, it would seem. She lives with her aunt, and never goes out except to her work; she's a dressmaker."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Célestin; "she's a dressmaker, and you haven't triumphed over her, my dear fellow! Others may succeed better; and if I should take a hand——"

"Oh! you are such a superb creature, it's quite possible. Still, I doubt it."

"What do you want to bet?"

"Come, attend to your game, messieurs, for God's sake!" said Mouillot. "Sapristi! I have *misty*, and not one of you stands!"

"Monsieur had *brelan*, and he passed!" cried Tobie. "What a blunder!"

"Not at all. Do you think we're playing *brelan?*"

"You're not playing *brelan?* Why, aren't you playing bouillotte?"

"Yes, but the *brelan** is never played in bouillotte, nowadays. Where have you been, young Pigeonnier?"

"What do you play, then?"

"*Misty.*"

"What's *misty?*"

"The knave of clubs with two cards of the same color and same size; for instance, two red nines, or two black aces."

"Very well. And the *brelan* doesn't count, you say?"

"Not unless *misty* isn't out; in that case, it's good."

"And the *brelan carré?*"

"Oh! that's always good, and it beats *misty.*"

"The devil! I'm rather mixed up with all this; I'm afraid I shall make mistakes."

"Oh, no! you'll get hold of it in a minute."

Monsieur Dupétrain walked up to Tobie, who was standing by the card table, and said:

"While you're not playing, I can tell you the anecdote about magnetism that you were so curious to hear. After you left the dinner table, I didn't choose to tell it; I preferred to wait for you.—A young married woman, whose husband had just started on a journey——"

* There is, or was, a game called *brelan;* but the term was sometimes applied, in bouillotte, to a hand consisting of two aces and a king, when the other king of the same color was turned.

"Excuse me," said Tobie, "but I am studying *misty;* I don't quite understand this new way of playing bouillotte, and I shall be very glad not to make any mistakes. Besides, the quarter has struck, messieurs. Who goes out?"

"Mouillot and Célestin.—Come, messieurs, give up your seats."

"We'll just finish the *volante*, then we'll go."

"The *volante?*" exclaimed Tobie; "what in the deuce is that?"

"Each person puts in a chip when everyone passes, and you keep putting in one as long as they pass."

"The devil! that may mount up pretty high, messieurs! why, you are playing an infernal game!"

"Does it frighten you, Monsieur Tobie?"

"I don't say that. What's the stake?"

"Five francs."

The stout youth felt in his pocket, where he found only enough for one stake and half of another. However, he assumed a self-assured air as he took the seat vacated by Célestin, while the artist replaced the jovial Mouillot.

"Célestin has made his little pile!" laughed Albert.

"I? oh, no! I have made myself good, that's all!—Come, Balivan, to return to your pretty neighbor,—do you want to bet my portrait that I don't succeed in seducing her?"

"Yes. But let us understand each other: if I lose, I'll paint your portrait for nothing."

"Just so."

"But if I win?"

"Then I'll pay you for the portrait."

"Indeed! what a generous youth! Where do I gain anything in that, I wonder?"

"Messieurs," said Mouillot, "I'll bet something much more agreeable for the company. I'll bet that I get the little neighbor to come down here."

"Ah! that's something like."

"You said that she lived overhead, Balivan?"

"Yes."

"Very good! just give me a hammer; I'll demolish the ceiling, and then the fascinating grisette will fall through."

"Ha! ha! a famous method!"

Young Tobie, who had already lost his stake, and had taken money from the pool to make up the second one, was no longer in the mood for laughing.

"I say, messieurs," he cried, "just because you're not playing now, you prevent other people from playing. Leave us in peace, will you? I have lost a pile of money already. I keep making mistakes; I have *misty*, and don't see it."

"Bah! a pile of money! he's lost his stake once."

"Besides, my dear fellow, a man can't expect luck in everything. You have just come from a tête-à-tête in which a pretty woman has crowned you with myrtle! you can afford to lose your money."

Tobie bit his lips in vexation and made no reply.

"And then, too, he pinched Crevette's leg!" laughed Mouillot.

"And he has a swollen nose," added Célestin. "The fellow is lucky on all sides.—Some punch, messieurs?"

"With pleasure. I bet twenty francs."

"I take it," said Tobie.

"And I. Show down."

The hands were placed on the table. Monsieur Varinet, who had followed Tobie, had *misty;* but the stout

youth, who had three aces, pounced on the money, thinking that he had won. His white-eyebrowed antagonist checked him with the utmost coolness, saying:

"What are you doing? don't you see that I have *misty?*"

"And don't you see that I have three aces?"

"Your three aces amount to nothing, as we're not playing the *brelan.*"

"Oh! mon Dieu! I had quite forgotten that; I never thought of it! It's a mistake, messieurs; the hand ought to be thrown out."

"Not at all," said Albert; "you must pay attention; besides, you might have won with your three aces, if you hadn't run against a *misty.* Come, pay up, my dear fellow. Parbleu! you're not so badly off! you're less than thirty francs to the bad."

"Thirty francs fifty, and now I've lost my stake again! This is very fine!"

"Ingrate! after being so lucky in love, not to be willing to be unlucky at play."

"I don't see the necessity of losing all the time."

"Think of Madame Plays, and complain if you dare!"

Young Tobie made a wry face every time Madame Plays was mentioned, and he looked furtively at Albert, muttering between his teeth. After feeling in all his pockets, he feigned an air of astonishment, saying:

"Well, well! I haven't any more money."

"You must have discovered that before," suggested Balivan, "as you have already taken some from the pool."

"Ah! yes, of course.—Will you lend me three or four napoleons, Albert?"

"I would with the greatest pleasure," Albert replied; "but I am out more than five hundred francs myself, and I have had to borrow. Put up a fetich, that's the simplest

way—put a sou, a key, anything you please, in front of you, and call it worth any amount you choose."

"True, you are right; I'll put up a fetich."

Tobie felt in his pocket; he produced one of the olives he had stored there at dinner, and placed it in front of him, saying:

"That stands for five hundred francs!"

The painter roared with laughter.

"Rather high-priced olives!" he said.

"I'm not surprised that he filled his pockets with them; he must have taken at least ten thousand francs' worth," cried Mouillot. "Come, who wants some punch? I'll fill the glasses. By the way, I don't see our magnetizer. Where's Dupétrain? Has he gone?"

"Probably," said Balivan. "He never plays, and, seeing that there was no hope of telling us his story, perhaps he has gone home to bed, to try to put someone to sleep."

"What's your pretty neighbor's name?" inquired Célestin, stretching himself out on a couch.

"My neighbor? Wait a minute—I go the limit."

"I take it," said Tobie, rolling his eyes about in a high state of excitement. "I take all bets."

"All right."

Tobie showed a *misty;* but Balivan had a *brelan carré.*

"You told me just now that *brelans* didn't count!" cried the little fellow.

"True, except *brelans carrés;* they always beat everything."

"Well, then, I don't understand anything at all about it; it's enough to drive a man mad! I don't know what I am playing."

"Come, pay me. You're very lucky, for I bet almost nothing—only twenty-one francs."

DUPÉTRAIN FAILS TO MAGNETIZE CREVETTE

The Burgundian was furious; she seized her pitcher and held it up in the air.

"If you don't clear out of my room, I'll throw it at your heads!"



"A man can ruin himself with such luck. Here, change this for me; it stands for five hundred francs."

Tobie offered his olive; but Balivan shook his head.

"I haven't enough money to change it for you, you can see that for yourself. You owe me twenty-one francs."

A few moments later, Tobie lost fifteen francs to Monsieur Varinet, who had a heap of gold and silver in front of him. He offered him his fetich, saying:

"Oblige me by giving me the change for this; it will make it easier for me to pay."

Monsieur Varinet took the olive and placed it in front of him, and handed four hundred francs in gold and eighty-five in silver to Tobie, who seemed to take great pleasure in receiving the change for his olive, and, while pretending to arrange it in piles, seized the opportunity to slip several gold pieces into his pocket.

"You owe me twenty-one francs," said Balivan.

"Oh, yes! How the five hundred francs melts away! It will soon be gone."

"Oh! you have a good margin!"

"Isn't it time for us to give up our seats?"

"We don't go out next; it's Monsieur Varinet's turn and Albert's."

"Oh! I thought it was ours."

"Of course not, as we have just come in."

Tobie seemed very anxious now to leave the table; but he was obliged to remain, while Célestin and Mouillot took the places occupied by Albert and Varinet. The latter carefully bestowed the olive in his fob.

"I must make sure not to lose that," he said; "it's as good as a banknote. If I should take it into my head to eat it, it would be rather expensive."

"I've lost six hundred francs," said Albert; "but I don't care a damn; for I trust that the proverb will come true in my case as in Tobie's, and then I shall be lucky in love to-morrow! Ah! how I wish it were to-morrow! and it's only half-past twelve."

"Half-past twelve!" cried Tobie. "Mon Dieu! I said nothing to my concierge, and I'm horribly afraid I shan't be able to get in."

"You can pass the night here."

"Sleep away from home! No, indeed! Besides, I have an appointment at my rooms early to-morrow; and when I don't get a few hours' sleep, I'm always sick a week."

"What in the devil's the use of such a man as that!" said Mouillot; "for my part, I always sit up as long as anyone wants, I drink as much as anyone, and I make love as much as anyone; and I'm always well!"

Albert was walking about the studio; he paused in front of the different portraits of women, and said:

"What lucky dogs these painters are! When they have a pretty woman for a model, they have a right to look at her as often and as long as they please; to order her to smile; and to put her in whatever position they like best!"

"It's a very voluptuous profession!" said Tobie, glancing constantly at Balivan's watch, which had been placed on the table in order to regulate the coming-in and going-out of the different players.

"Well, messieurs, it seems to me your game is rather slow," said Varinet, walking up to the table.

"Parbleu! Tobie keeps passing with superb hands," cried Balivan. "It would seem that he doesn't want to resort to another olive."

"I am waiting for a lucky streak. Ah! now it's time for us to go out."

Pigeonnier hastily left his seat, and Balivan was obliged to do the same, but he did it unwillingly.

"We had at least half a minute more to stay," he said. "Tobie left too soon."

"Quarter to one!" cried the stout youth, with a glance at the clock. "Mon Dieu! Madame Pluchonneau, my concierge, is very hard of hearing."

Balivan seized Tobie's arm as he was edging toward the door while making a pretence of examining the pictures, and led him back to the punch table.

"Come and have a drink," he said.

"But I've drunk a great deal already."

"All the more reason. Will you smoke?"

"Yes, with pleasure, if you'll get me one of your foreign pipes."

"They're right here; I don't need to leave the studio; wait a moment, and I'll fill one for you."

Tobie, who had hoped that the painter would leave him, and had proposed to seize the opportunity to steal away unperceived, was obliged to remain; and he wandered about the studio with a very preoccupied air.

"There, smoke that, and tell me what you think of it," said the painter, offering the young man a narghile of enormous length. "That was Ali Pacha's pipe."

"The devil! suppose my smoking it should make me a savage beast like him! Never mind, I'll take the risk. But how am I to light it? it isn't at all easy, the bowl's so far away."

"You put a candle on the floor, and then hold the pipe to it."

"All right."

Tobie took one of the candles from the card table, and put it on the floor.

"I beg pardon, messieurs," he said; "but I want it to light Ali Pacha's pipe."

He had no sooner put the bowl of the pipe, the stem of which he held in his mouth, to the flame of the candle, than there was a loud report, like a pistol-shot, the pipe bowl burst, the candle was tipped over, a dense smoke filled the studio, fragments of pipe flew in all directions, and Tobie narrowly missed swallowing a piece of the stem, which stuck in his throat an instant after the report.

He fell backward to the floor. Everybody was dismayed for a moment, but, after the first fright, roars of laughter arose on all sides, except from the direction of Tobie, who was still gagged, as it were, by the fragment of pipe stem.

"What infernal kind of tobacco is that?" cried Mouillot.

"Balivan must have had a fit of abstraction," said Albert.

The artist put his hand to his head, and looked in the drawer from which he had taken what he supposed to be tobacco.

"Great God!" he exclaimed. "I see what the trouble is. My infernal pupils insisted on making cartridges this morning for a rifle I wanted to try; one of those that load at the breech. I didn't notice that I was taking powder instead of tobacco. Poor Tobie! I am terribly distressed. Well, well! what in the devil's the matter with him?"

Tobie could not speak, but he pointed to his mouth, which was wide open, and made up a pitiful face. They went hastily to his assistance, and with a small pair of pincers removed the piece of stem which had stuck between his tongue and his windpipe, like the sound-post of a violin.

"*Sacrédié!*" ejaculated Tobie, as soon as he could speak; "what an outrage! to give me a pipe filled with powder! That's a mighty poor joke, messieurs! it might have killed me! I think very highly of Ali Pacha's narghile!"

Balivan had much difficulty in pacifying the little man, and making him understand that when he filled the pipe he was thinking of something else, which prevented his noticing what he filled it with. Tobie was beginning to recover from his fright, and the game of bouillotte was in progress once more, when shrill cries were heard in the direction of the kitchen, and Balivan recognized his maid-servant's voice.

"Has Crevette also been trying to smoke one of Ali Pacha's pipes?" said Mouillot.

"Let us go and see what the trouble is!"

"Let us hasten to succor the Burgundian!"

All the young men hurried after Balivan, Tobie alone excepted; he took advantage of the confusion to leave the house, overjoyed to carry away the change for his olive.

Meanwhile, the painter had reached the kitchen, where he found no one; thence he passed into a small, dark room, where his servant slept, and there he discovered Mademoiselle Crevette, with no other clothing than the one garment which Englishwomen blush to name, holding the magnetizer Dupétrain down on the floor, and pounding him vigorously with her fist, shouting the while:

"Ah! you villain! just look at this joker! My faith! that was a fine idea of his! to come into my room while I was asleep, to do—I don't know what! Luckily, I was only asleep with one eye, and I stopped him just when

he'd made up his mind I was too warm, I suppose, for he was pulling off my bedclothes."

They succeeded, not without difficulty, in rescuing Dupétrain from the Burgundian, who would have liked to go on beating him; but when she realized that she was standing before all those young men in her chemise, she suddenly jumped back toward her bed; being, however, a little heavy for gymnastic exercises, she fell sidewise on the mattress, thus exposing the roundest part of her person to the assembled company.

"Bravo! magnificent!" they exclaimed, clapping their hands. "Come, Crevette, just one more jump! you do it so well! What a full moon! We shall have a fine day to-morrow!"

The Burgundian was furious; she seized her pitcher and held it up in the air.

"If you don't clear out of my room, I'll throw it at your heads!"

Balivan, who knew that she was quite capable of doing what she threatened, succeeded in pushing them all out of the room, and they returned to the studio.

"Aha! Monsieur Dupétrain," said Mouillot, "you are a sad rake, it seems."

"That's a very neat trick," said the painter; "we thought you had gone home, and you had stolen into my servant's room!"

"He wanted to magnetize her, no doubt."

"Messieurs," said Dupétrain, decidedly embarrassed, "I swear to you that this is nothing of any consequence, and that the Burgundian rustic misapprehended my intentions. For what did I propose to do? simply make an experiment in magnetism on that dull, brutish temperament. I said to myself: 'If I can succeed in putting that

countrywoman into a trance, what an extraordinary proof it will be of the power of my art!'"

"Yes; and he took off Crevette's bedclothes, so that he could see that dull temperament."

"Messieurs, to put myself in communication with a subject, it is necessary——"

"Enough! we don't want to hear any more. To the card table!"

"Why! someone is missing," said Mouillot.

"That's so. Tobie isn't here. Can he have gone away? It isn't possible."

They searched the studio, thinking that he had hidden, to play a trick on them; but they found that he had really gone.

"Oh! he'd been itching to go for a long while," said Balivan.

"Yes, ever since he changed his fetich."

"That's a very convenient dodge," observed Mouillot; "he had at least four hundred and fifty francs left of the change for his olive, and he's gone off with it.—Varinet, you have a fetich of very doubtful value."

Varinet calmly wrapped the olive in a piece of paper and put it back in his pocket.

"Do you think that that young man is capable of leaving this pledge in my hands?" he said. "I believe that he will come to my house to redeem it."

"Oh! he'll redeem it," said Albert; "I have no doubt of that."

But Célestin shook his head.

"Perhaps he will," he murmured; "but he's quite capable of forgetting his debt, and I fancy you'll have to remind him of it. Don't lose your fetich."

"For my part," said Mouillot, "I wouldn't give three francs for that olive."

The young men resumed their game, after saying good-night to Dupétrain, whom Balivan escorted to the landing, to make sure that he did not mistake his road and return to make another attempt to put his servant in a trance.

For an hour longer, the game was very brisk. At the end of that time, Albert, who had lost twelve hundred francs, threw himself on the couch, saying:

"I've had enough, messieurs; I am going to sleep here till daylight."

The other four young men continued the game for some time. At last, Célestin, who had won largely and had no desire to lose what he had won, pretended that he too was sleepy, and lay down on the divan. Mouillot, Balivan, and Varinet played on for a considerable time, until Balivan, having lost heavily, left the table, saying:

"I am going to bed."

"Now it's between us," said Mouillot to the young man with white eyebrows; "a *brûlot.*"

"What! can two play bouillotte?"

"Oh, yes! and it's very interesting. It's for the one whose turn it is to bet, to speak; if he sees nothing in his hand, he puts in a chip, and the other does the same. It's a game you can play a long while without saying a word, as you pass very often."

Varinet consented to play; but Mouillot, who was decidedly lucky at two-handed bouillotte, and who played a very shrewd game, soon won all his opponent's money; Varinet had nothing left but the olive, and he proposed to stake that; but Mouillot, who was not anxious to win it, preferred to follow the example of the others and

take a little nap. He lay down beside Célestin on the divan.

The young man with white eyebrows reclined in an easy-chair, and soon everybody was asleep in the artist's studio, where the most absolute quiet had succeeded the noisy outbursts of merriment engendered by the fumes of the punch.

X

THE LOFT

After the scene in the wine shop, the habitués had retired one after another, Paul among the first; but before he went away, he had glanced at Sans-Cravate with an expression which bore not the slightest trace of ill humor for the latter's threats; on the contrary, it seemed to suggest the hope that a hand would be offered as a sign of reconciliation. Sans-Cravate apparently hesitated for a moment; but Jean Ficelle whispered in his ear, and he turned away without a word to the young messenger.

Paul slept very little that night; because he was thinking, not of what had happened at the wine shop, but of what he had to do the next morning. The thought that he was going to see Elina, that he was going to pass some time with her, filled his heart with the keenest joy in anticipation. The girl's face was constantly before his eyes; to think about a woman whom one loves is much better than sleeping; waking dreams are often very sweet; for one shapes them according to his own pleasure;

while those which come to us during our sleep are not always rose-colored.

The clock had just struck half-past five, when Paul pulled the copper bell knob of the house in which Elina lived with her aunt. Nobody answered the bell, and the young man was obliged to ring twice more; for the concierges of the Chaussée d'Antin do not rise so early as their brethren of the Marais. The door was opened at last by an old fellow, who passed his head, swathed in several cotton nightcaps, through a little, round window, and asked in a wrathful tone:

"Who is it who has the effrontery to ring my bell at this time of day? Who do you want to see? No one's up?"

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Paul; "I am going up to Mademoiselle Elina's, to help her move; and she must be up, for she herself asked me to come at half-past five."

"Bah! this is interesting!" snarled the concierge. "Some of 'em are up at daybreak, others don't go to bed at all, but pass the night playing cards and raising the devil! It was outrageous, the way they acted last night; the noise they made in that dauber's studio. I wonder when they'll turn that fellow out of the house."

Paul did not stay to listen to the concierge's reflections; he had already started upstairs, and he soon reached the door of Madame Vardeine's apartment. He coughed softly, and the door was opened at once, for Elina was already up and waiting for him; perhaps, indeed, she had slept no more than he.

If, gentle reader, you are surprised that a young and pretty dressmaker should have a tender feeling for a mere messenger, you must remember that in Paul's manners

and language there was none of the coarseness generally characteristic of those of his calling; that he had received a good education, through the kindness of a generous benefactor; that he had performed the duties of clerk for a considerable time; and, lastly, that, although circumstances had forced him to resort to the *crochets* of a messenger, he had not chosen to adopt the habits of his confrères: that he did not frequent wine shops, to which his visit of the previous evening was his first, and that his language was still as refined and agreeable as his voice.

"Here I am, mademoiselle," said Paul, saluting the young woman awkwardly enough; for nothing makes a man so awkward as a first love, especially a man who does not make a business of seduction. It is not so with women: love almost always makes them more charming and attractive; by augmenting their desire to please, it heightens the charms they already possess and sometimes gives them others which had not previously been detected in them. "I have come too early, perhaps; did I wake you?"

"Oh, no! Monsieur Paul," the girl replied, with a pleasant smile. "I have been awake a long time, and was waiting for you. Come in, but don't make any noise, for my aunt is still asleep, and I should be very glad if she could find everything done when she wakes."

The messenger followed Elina into the apartment, and she showed him the little room which she occupied.

"That's all the furniture I have," she said; "a cot-bed, a walnut wardrobe, this little desk, and a chair; but I'm afraid it's too much for a loft. However, I should like to get it all in, if I could; for the wardrobe was my mother's and the little desk my father's, and with those two pieces it seems to me as if I wasn't quite an orphan—as if papa

and mamma were still here looking out for me. I think one is so fortunate to have something that used to belong to one's parents. Why, I wouldn't sell those two things for all the gold in the world! And yet, they're old and out of fashion; my aunt said once that the wardrobe wasn't good for anything but firewood. Oh! I was terribly angry that day! and my aunt has never said that again. Burn this wardrobe, in which my mother kept her dresses and all her clothes, and this desk that my father wrote on every day—never! never! And even if I should ever be rich, I should think just as much of them, and I would never part with them."

Tears stood in Elina's eyes when she finished. Paul looked at her with emotion, lovingly; she seemed to him prettier than ever, for laudable sentiments have a way of embellishing those who are inspired by them, whereas evil sentiments change and distort the prettiest face. Women do not regard their own interests when they are angry, sulky, or jealous.

"You are quite right, mademoiselle," said Paul, with a sigh; "you must be very happy to have something that comes from your parents."

"Have you lost yours, Monsieur Paul?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"A long while ago?"

"Yes."

"Didn't they leave you anything that had belonged to them?"

"No, mademoiselle—nothing."

"Mon Dieu! what an extraordinary resemblance there is between us! Both orphans; both hardly knew our parents—we are in the same situation."

"Oh! no, mademoiselle; you are much more fortunate!"

"Yes, of course; because I have this wardrobe and this little desk."

Paul made no reply, but turned his head away and wiped his eyes.

"What a stupid creature I am!" cried Elina; "to talk of things that make you sad! Come, let us go to work; we have none too much time. I have the key of our new lodgings; it's the door on the opposite side of the landing; I'll go and open it."

While the girl went to open the door, Paul took down the bed, being careful to make as little noise as possible; then he began to move the furniture into the new lodgings.

Elina pointed out a little loft, which was reached from a small, square room.

"That's my bedroom," she said. "It seems that I shan't have any too much light up there. However, my aunt says that one doesn't need to see in order to go to bed."

"Your aunt is far from kind to you, mademoiselle; and yet she cannot have any fault to find with you."

"Oh! Monsieur Paul, aunts don't think as one's—friends do. They always find some reason for scolding. Wait; there's a ladder to climb up to my new room; let me fix it firmly."

"Let me do that, mademoiselle."

The young man put the ladder in place and went up into the loft.

"Do you think it will hold all my furniture?" Elina called to him.

"Why, it's not so very small. But if you set up your bed, mademoiselle, there won't be room for your wardrobe and desk."

"In that case, we won't set it up; I don't care anything about it—it's my aunt's. I'd much rather sleep on the floor, and keep my father's and mother's furniture."

"But you won't be comfortable if you sleep on the floor."

"I shall be all right. I am not hard to suit, and I am perfectly content if my wardrobe and desk can be got in."

Paul did as she desired; he placed on the floor, in one corner of the loft, the two mattresses that were on her bed; then he went back and brought the walnut wardrobe and the little desk, and succeeded in finding room for them in the young girl's new apartment; she, meanwhile, remained at the foot of the ladder, clapping her hands and jumping for joy when she found that the loft would hold the two objects to which she was so much attached.

"They are all right," said Paul; "but, mademoiselle, there's no room for anything else, not even a chair."

"Oh! I don't care. I don't need any chair up there; I can sit on my bed. I must come up and see how you have arranged it."

And the pretty creature ran nimbly up the ladder into the loft, forgetting that Paul was still there. It is very imprudent for a young lady to be in a loft with a young man. It is much more dangerous when the young man is good-looking, and one is already inclined to like him.

But Elina did not think of all that. Luckily for her, Paul was honorable and shy. But the most virtuous heart may prove recreant when it is very much in love. Paul's beat violently when the girl climbed the ladder and entered that poor chamber, where it was not possible to stand upright. He had squatted in a corner, in order not to take up too much room, and he dared not stir.

"Oh! how nicely it's arranged!" exclaimed Elina, looking about; "there's room for everything; I shall have everything right at hand. Oh! how pleased I am!"

And the girl, forgetting that the place was very low, raised her head to thank Paul; but she struck the ceiling, then stumbled, and fell on the mattress with a little shriek.

Instantly Paul was on his knees by her side; he examined her head anxiously, saying:

"Mon Dieu! you must have hurt yourself terribly. I ought to have warned you. I will go and get some water, some liniment."

But Elina was smiling again, and she detained the young man.

"It is nothing," she said. "It made me dizzy, that's all; and that has gone now. I shall get out of it with a bump on my forehead. Dear me! I must accustom myself to my loft."

"Do let me fetch you something, mademoiselle."

"Why, no, I don't need anything, I tell you. Give me your hand."

She took Paul's hand and put it to her forehead.

"Can you feel anything?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; there'll be a swelling there."

"The girls will all laugh at me. I've heard that by pressing hard on the place you can prevent a swelling. Will you press on it, Monsieur Paul?"

"I am afraid of hurting you."

"No, no. Please press; don't be afraid."

The young man trembled in every limb as he pressed his hand against Elina's smooth, white forehead; her glossy fair hair was disarranged, and several curls fluttered about Paul's hand, increasing his emotion to such an extent that his hand suddenly slipped and rested on

the girl's heart instead of on her forehead. Elina made no objection; she had forgotten all about the blow she had dealt herself. The heart almost always acts as a *derivative*, to use a medical term: when it is well occupied, one is conscious of no pain elsewhere.

Paul no longer knew what he was doing.

"Forgive me for loving you, mademoiselle," he faltered, in a trembling voice; "I know that it is very presumptuous of me; I am not worthy of you, for I am only a poor messenger; but my love is stronger than my reason, it will last all my life. This confession has escaped me in spite of myself. Pray don't be angry; I will never mention it again!"

Elina did not seem at all offended; her cheeks were crimson, and she kept her eyes on the floor, as she faltered in her turn:

"I am not angry. It isn't a crime to love a person. Mon Dieu! Monsieur Paul, even before you told me—I don't know why, but I had thought—I had guessed that you loved me, and—and—it made me happy. I don't forbid you to mention it to me—far from it!"

"Ah! mademoiselle, how good you are! and how happy I should be, if—if——"

He dared not say: "If you loved me, too." But his eyes finished the sentence. Elina, who understood him as well as if he had said the words, replied artlessly:

"I thought that you had guessed, too."

Paul put her hands to his lips, and covered them with kisses.

"Ah! I am permitted to know the most perfect happiness!" he cried; "I envy no man on earth. To be loved by you—I dare not believe it! The thought will increase my courage tenfold. I will work harder than ever, so

that I can save money; and if I could offer you a comfortable existence; if I could save enough to have a little home of our own; if—— But, no, it is impossible; I can never hope for anything of the kind."

Paul's face became sad once more, and he looked away from Elina. But she took his hand and pressed it softly, saying:

"Well, well! why are you so sad, all of a sudden? I feel so happy! Do you think that I am ambitious, pray, and that I won't be content with whatever you can offer me? It is very bad of you to think that."

"No, mademoiselle; it isn't money that I am thinking of. I am very sure that you are like me, and that you don't care about that. But it is—it is—— Oh! mademoiselle, I will tell you everything, for I do not want to deceive you; and no matter what it costs me to make the confession, you shall know what I am; then you will see that I am not worthy of your love."

"Mon Dieu! what do you mean? You frighten me! Have you done anything wrong?"

"No, it's not that. But you said just now that our positions were the same, because we are both orphans. That is not true, mademoiselle; you have lost your parents, but you did know them; you know who they were, you remember your father's kisses. But I have no idea who my parents are. They may be living, but I do not know whether they are or not. They cast me out, spurned me from their arms. In a word, I am a wretched foundling."

"A foundling?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; I was left at the door where all the poor children are left whose parents cannot or, in some cases, do not choose to bring them up. There was

a paper on me, on which was written: *Paul de Saint-Cloud.* Saint-Cloud is probably where I was born. And on my forearm there was a little cross—which I still have, for it doesn't wear out;—was that mark placed there so that I might be found and identified some day? I hoped so for a long time. But now I have ceased to hope, for I am more than twenty-three years old, and I have never heard of my parents. During all the time I passed with Monsieur Desroches,—an excellent man, who took me from the charitable asylum when I was ten years old, and treated me like his own son,—he did all that he could to obtain some information which would help me to find my parents; but it all came to nothing; and when my benefactor saw me weeping with grief, because I could not embrace my father or mother, he would kiss me affectionately, and say: 'Don't grieve so, my boy; birth is a game of chance; those who come into the world with a name and rank and wealth all ready for them, often do not take the trouble to cultivate talents and estimable qualities, because they deem themselves sufficiently well equipped as they are; but he who begins his life without any of those advantages is compelled to behave well in order to obtain what he lacks. According to that, my boy, the advantage would seem to be with him who comes into the world without anything.' With such arguments, Monsieur Desroches comforted me and gave me courage. But I am a poor foundling none the less, with no name, no family, to offer you. That is what I felt bound to tell you, mademoiselle; for it is wrong to deceive anyone. That is what makes me think that I shall never be considered worthy to be your husband."

Elina had listened to the young messenger's story with the most profound interest; her eyes were filled with

tears when he finished, and she held out her hand, saying with the impulsive frankness that comes from the heart:

"Take my hand; I give it to you, and what you have told me will not prevent me from loving you; far from it; and since my parents are dead, it seems to me that I have the right to select a husband for myself."

Beside himself with joy, Paul seized the hand she offered him, and covered it with kisses, repeating the most fervent oaths.

"Just see how things change their aspect!" cried the girl, in her ingenuous delight; "this loft, which seemed such a dismal place to me at first, seems very attractive now, and I am sure that I shall like it very much; for I shall always remember that it was here that you first told me that you loved me."

Paul was about to reply with renewed protestations, when they heard a great burst of laughter close at hand. They stepped to the entrance to the loft, and saw three young men in the small room below that opened on the landing, standing at the foot of the ladder, clapping their hands, shouting *bravo*, and laughing uproariously.

The new-comers were Albert, Célestin, and Mouillot, whom we left asleep in Balivan's studio, and who, when they woke about six in the morning, began by laughing at the idea of their being in that place. Then they started to return to their respective abodes; but when they were on the landing, Célestin remembered the pretty neighbor.

"By the way," he said, "what about the little neighbor overhead! Parbleu! she must be at home still, and I won't go away without a look at her."

"Nor I, either," added tall Mouillot. "I want to decide whether she's as good-looking as Balivan claims.—Au revoir, Albert! Go on, if you're in a hurry."

"No; I still have some time to spare, and I also am curious to see the neighbor. I will go with you, messieurs."

"But how shall we get her to open the door?"

"That's a simple matter. We will knock, stamp heavily on the floor, and say in a deep voice: 'The water carrier, mamzelle.'—The water carriers always come early, and people open their doors for them, even when they're only half dressed. She'll open for us."

And the young men went upstairs, leaving Varinet still asleep, with his olive in his pocket.

When they reached the upper landing, they were surprised to find two open doors.

"It seems that we shall not have to play water carrier," they said. "Can it be that the pretty neighbor sleeps with her door open? That would indicate the confidence of innocence—or just the opposite. Which door shall we go in?"

"Let chance decide."

Chance led them into the small room below the loft. There their attention was attracted by the fervent protestations of love repeated by Paul and Elina, who did not hear them enter the room; for lovers, when they are swearing to adore each other, never hear anything else.

Thereupon the young men made their comments aloud.

"I should say that we had found a nest!" said Mouillot.

"Love in a loft! a genre picture," added Albert.

"And to think that Balivan extolled his neighbor's virtue!" observed Célestin. "I thought our artist was more sharp-witted than that; but it seems that he doesn't know all the colors yet."

The outburst of laughter followed, and warned the lovers at last that there was somebody close at hand.

Elina blushed to the whites of her eyes when she saw the young men; Paul quivered with wrath, and would have rushed down the ladder, but Célestin had just taken it away.

"Things seem to be progressing up there," said Mouillot; "we're beginning our day well."

"On my word, she is charming!" said Albert; "Balivan didn't deceive us."

"True, so far as her face goes."

"Why have you come here, messieurs? what do you want?" demanded Paul; "why do you presume to take away the ladder? Put it back at once!"

"Aha! the lover is losing his temper!" said Mouillot. "But, just consider—suppose we were evil-minded? We have you both in a cage up there—suppose we should go and tell the young lady's parents; what would you say?"

"That there is no harm, messieurs, in going into a loft when one is moving furniture there; and that is why I am here now with mademoiselle."

"Ah! not bad! not bad! and it was part of the moving to kiss her, I suppose; and to swear eternal love, young Lothario?"

"I kissed mademoiselle's hand only, monsieur. As to what I said to her, that doesn't concern you; you had no right to listen."

"Hoity-toity! then you should lock the doors, imprudent children that you are!"

"Why, God bless me! the lover is one of our messengers, Sans-Cravate's mate!"

"Yes, that is so! it was he who did Tobie's errands yesterday. Ah! young dressmaker! is it possible? you listen to a messenger? Why, you degrade yourself, girl;

your trade entitles you to look higher—especially with such lovely eyes!"

"Treat mademoiselle with respect, messieurs!" exclaimed Paul; "or I'll make you repent your insolence!"

"Do you, knave," retorted Célestin, "begin by holding your tongue; if not, you'll be whipped for your impertinence."

"We shall not put back the ladder except on several conditions," said Albert; "first, that the little dressmaker allow us to kiss her."

"I," said Mouillot, "demand that she measure me for a pair of drawers."

Elina made no reply; in her distress, she had taken refuge in the farthest corner of the loft, where she tried to avoid the glances of the young men. But Paul could not control his wrath; he jumped down into the room below, at the risk of injuring himself, rushed at Célestin, snatched the ladder from him with a powerful hand, and placed it against the entrance to the loft.

"Now, let anyone dare to take it away, and he will have to settle with me!"

The messenger had acted so rapidly and energetically that the young men were speechless for a moment. Then Célestin walked toward Paul, saying:

"Leave this room instantly! Gentlemen like us do not care to soil our hands with a fellow of your stamp; but if I had a cane, I'd break it over your shoulders."

Paul took his stand in front of Célestin and looked him straight in the eye, as he rejoined:

"Men like me, messengers though we are, are far above men of your stamp, who know no better than to insult an honest girl. If you do deem yourself my superior in the street, because I stand there to do your

errands, here, you are far below the poor man of the people; for he bears himself with honor, while your conduct is that of a scoundrel."

"Ah! this is too much!—Well, messieurs, won't you help me to thrash this wretch?"

Albert hesitated; one would have said that Paul's resolute bearing had made an impression on him, and that in his heart he felt that the young man was in the right. But Mouillot did not choose to disregard Célestin's appeal; he ran to the ladder, and Célestin tried to drag Paul from his position by pulling his arm; but the messenger pushed him away so violently that he stumbled over his friend Mouillot. However, they were preparing to renew their attack, when they heard a succession of piercing shrieks; and little Elina, seeing that Paul was going to fight, added her voice to the tumult, calling for help.

"Robbers! robbers!" a voice cried from the next apartment.

"Mon Dieu! it's my aunt who is being robbed!" said Elina. "Do go and see, Monsieur Paul!"

Paul was unwilling to move from the foot of the ladder and leave Elina exposed to the enterprises of the young men. But the appearance of an old woman, clad in nothing but a chemise and a camisole, with an old handkerchief, twisted into the shape of a turban, on her head, changed the whole aspect of affairs; it was Elina's aunt, who, regardless of the incompleteness of her costume, ran wildly about the room, shrieking:

"Robbers! there's a thief in my room! I saw him standing by my bed when I woke up! Arrest him, messieurs, I beg you! he's there still. I put myself under your protection."

And Madame Vardeine would have rushed into the arms of the young men; but they were cruel enough to shrink from the embraces of that lady in chemise and camisole, who at that moment concealed none of her charms.

Meanwhile, attracted by the shrieks of the old woman and the girl, the concierge had arrived upon the scene, carrying his broom in one hand and a newspaper in the other. He thrust his broom into the chamber first, as if he intended to remove the cobwebs; then entered himself, saying in a hoarse voice:

"Is anybody being killed here? What's all this row about? It's hardly daylight, and you're fighting already! I give you notice that I am going to tell the landlord, so that he'll turn you all out of doors."

The concierge's head, upon which he wore three or four woollen and cotton caps, one above another, and Madame Vardeine's, with her turban awry, were so comical to look at, that Mouillot and Albert roared with laughter. To add to the confusion, Varinet also appeared in the doorway.

"What are you all doing here?" he inquired.

At sight of the young man with the white eyebrows, Madame Vardeine gave a jump which shook her whole frame in a distressing way.

"There's my robber!" she cried; "that's the man I saw by my bed when I woke up; I know him by his eyebrows!"

"Mon Dieu, madame!" rejoined Varinet, calmly; "I beg that you will excuse me, but I was looking for these gentlemen; I heard them laughing, from the floor below; so I came up, found a door open, and entered your apartment with no idea where I was going."

Madame Vardeine did not seem convinced, and the concierge still held his broom in the air as if he proposed to sweep everybody out of the room. But the arrival of Balivan restored peace. The painter rescued his friends, guaranteeing that there were no thieves among them, and they decided at last to go away with him; but before taking their leave, each of them cast a parting glance at the loft, where Elina crouched, trembling from head to foot.

"She is charming," said Albert.

"I shall see her again," said Mouillot.

"Yes, yes," added Célestin; "and everyone will receive what he deserves for his conduct this morning."

Paul made no reply, but the glance with which he met Célestin's seemed to defy him, and to show how little heed he paid to his threats.

XI

IN THE MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE

It was eight o'clock in the morning; Sans-Cravate was in his usual place, not lying on his *crochets* this time, but seated on the end of them, with his elbows resting on his knees, and his head in his hands, looking about from time to time with a dissatisfied air. His eyes often sought out Paul's place, which was empty; then he clenched his fists, muttered some words between his teeth, and stamped on the ground impatiently.

Jean Ficelle was pacing back and forth, within a space of about twenty yards; constantly passing in front of his comrade, to whom he spoke now and then, while he took

huge bites from an enormous piece of bread and from a bologna sausage, alternately.

"Well, Sans-Cravate, you don't have anything to say this morning. Did our little spree last night tie up your tongue? You ain't sick, are you?"

"No, no! I've forgotten all about it; I'm all right."

"*Pardié*, you wasn't drunk, anyway! anybody who says you was drunk lies."

"I think myself that I had a little too much."

"Not a bit of it; you think that because you got into a dispute, and that heated you up. You could have drunk a lot more. Do you know, I'm very sorry you couldn't settle your bet with Père Cagnoux; that would have staggered the old boy. It was that snivelling Paul that spoiled it all. Hm! he was rather inclined to crawl. Refuse to fight! that's just what he did! I call him a poor cuss for friends to be seen with. Look you, a comparison: he's like a slater that's afraid to go up on the roof and is only willing to slate the ground floor."

"But he was willing to fight with the rest of you."

"Oh! yes! for what? mere brag! humbug! he knew well enough that challenging everybody was just the same as challenging nobody. You're the one that he insulted—and, whatever way you look at it, you're the one he owed reparation to. To refuse to drink with friends, and break their glasses! Thanks! that's too damned unceremonious!"

"Oh! now that my head's clear, that isn't what I bear him a grudge for. You see yourself that he was quite right to despise that Laboussole, as he's a thief; and I blush now to think that I drank with such a cur!"

"No, no, not at all! you're all wrong! You think Laboussole's a thief, just because they arrested him as a thief!—why, that's one of the law's spiteful tricks. A

man may be involved in a bad piece of business and not be a thief, for all that. I'm sure that Laboussole will come out as white as snow. Come and have a glass of beer. It's my treat."

"No, thanks; I ain't thirsty."

"Oh! you ain't hungry or thirsty to-day! Well, just as you please. But you see the little sneak don't dare to come here this morning; that proves that he has a feeling that he's in the wrong."

"That's true; it's almost nine o'clock, and Paul is almost always the first one here; he don't seem to come."

Jean Ficelle continued to walk back and forth; then stopped again in front of Sans-Cravate, saying with a mocking expression:

"*Dame!* perhaps his time was so well occupied last night that he's resting this morning—that's what's the matter!"

Sans-Cravate sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried, with a savage gesture.

"I mean—I mean—— Faith! you know well enough what I mean; and I'll bet I know who he's with now."

"With Bastringuette, you mean, don't you?"

"*Dame!* it seems to me that she didn't hesitate to show you that she preferred that popinjay to you. Women must have mighty little taste; such a fine fellow as you are! Why, you'd make three of Paul!"

"Oh! I'm not jealous of his good fortune," rejoined Sans-Cravate, struggling to appear calm; "let him go with Bastringuette, if he chooses! But last night I saw that he didn't go with her when we left the wine shop; he went away alone—and she—she waited to see if I was following her; then she went off alone, too."

"Bah! humbug! they met afterward. If we knew where Paul lived, we could go and see if he was at home. Do you know where he lives, Sans-Cravate?"

"No, I don't; he told me he lived Faubourg Montmartre way; but that's all."

"The devil! in a faubourg! it would be a nice job to find him! There's some mystery about that fellow; he's a queer fish."

"What difference does it make whether he's at home, or at her room? I don't care a hang! I'm done with Bastringuette."

"Never mind," muttered Jean Ficelle, biting into his bread; "if a mate of mine took my mistress from under my nose, it wouldn't make any difference if I didn't love her—that wouldn't be the end of it."

"And do you suppose that I won't have my revenge?" shouted Sans-Cravate, giving free vent to his anger, and clenching his fists with a threatening air.

"Good!" said Jean Ficelle, patting the other's shoulder hypocritically; "that's more like you. You're still a man. I says to myself: 'It's mighty strange that a brick like Sans-Cravate stands being put upon without doing anything'; but I see that you have a plan; bravo! you're a man!"

At that moment, a short, thin individual, dressed in black, but not well dressed, stopped in front of the two messengers, and said to them:

"You two are the men I want; you're Sans-Cravate, aren't you; and you, Jean Ficelle?"

They assented, and the man in black continued:

"Then you'll be kind enough to come and see monsieur le commissaire."

Jean Ficelle was visibly disturbed by the mention of the magistrate, while Sans-Cravate asked:

"What the devil should we go to see monsieur le commissaire for? I've never been there, and I've no business to settle with him."

"Weren't you at the Petit Bacchus wine shop last night, when a certain Laboussole was arrested there? weren't you drinking with him?"

"Yes, but we didn't know him," Jean Ficelle made haste to reply.

"You can tell monsieur le commissaire what you know about him; he wants to question you. That's all I know; don't fail to come this morning."

"We will come, monsieur."

The little man went away. Jean Ficelle had become thoughtful, and Sans-Cravate knitted his brows, muttering:

"To have to go before the magistrate! Not three days ago, I was congratulating myself on never having had anything to do with him. I've had quarrels enough; I've often fought, but I've always fought fair. No man I ever whipped could complain of being tricked, and there was no need of going before a magistrate to settle our quarrels. And to-day—just because I drank with that Laboussole, a friend of yours,—and now you say that you don't know him, and again that he ain't a thief. Tell me the truth, do you know him, or not?"

"Good God! as if I was called on to compromise myself before the magistrate to help someone else!"

"But if that someone is your friend, if he's arrested unjustly, you'd be a coward if you didn't try to defend him."

"Parbleu! Laboussole's a fox; he will get out of it without any help. Come, Sans-Cravate, don't be ugly; after all, the most respectable people go before the magistrate; you see, we're only summoned as witnesses."

"*Sacrédié!* what do you expect to be summoned for? Let's go right away; I long to have it over with."

"All right, let's go."

"But I don't know where the magistrate lives; do you, Jean Ficelle?"

"Yes, it ain't very far from here; come, I'll show you the way."

"And Paul hasn't come yet; but perhaps we shall find him at the magistrate's, too."

The two messengers soon reached their destination.

There are four police magistrates for each arrondissement of Paris, which makes forty-eight for the whole city. That is none too large a number for such a huge, densely populated, turbulent city, where so many things happen every day.

A lantern suspended over the door indicates the magistrate's residence; his office is rarely a particularly attractive apartment; but there is no occasion for him to go to much expense for the benefit of the society he ordinarily receives there, and cleansing would be a useless luxury. Those who come thither are not even accustomed to wipe their feet on the mat—when there is one.

You enter the office, where the magistrate's clerk and secretary are usually to be found, although sometimes the latter official has his desk in another room. Then comes the magistrate's private office, to which everybody is not admitted.

Just as Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle arrived, a corporal and two soldiers brought in two women and a boy, the latter holding in his arms a small black dog, evidently a very young puppy.

One of the women was about fifty years of age; she was so enormous that she seemed not to be a human

being at all, but a shapeless mass, on top of which was a red, purple, scarlet face surmounted by a dirty bonnet with flying strings; she was a wine shop keeper.

The other woman was younger; she was thin and pale, and had not a pleasant face; but, at all events, she resembled a woman; she was dressed very modestly, and wore a cap and an apron.

The boy, who was about fourteen, could boast already of an enormous head and two puffy cheeks which concealed his nose; he resembled the bulky wine shop keeper, if anything could have resembled her. He was dressed in a blouse, with a small cap on his head; he wore shoes, but no stockings.

The party entered the magistrate's office, yelling, whining, and hurling insults at one another; and the corporal was compelled at times to exert his authority, to keep the two women from fighting.

A considerable crowd, entertained by the quarrel between the two, followed them to the magistrate's door, but were not allowed to go farther.

The magistrate left his private office, where he did not hear trivial matters, and, first of all, asked the corporal what the two women had done.

A corporal of the line is not always a born orator; this one put his hand to his shako, and answered:

"Faith!—the thing—well, you see, I don't know anything about it, but these two women made such a noise in the street—and then they hit each other—and there was this dog here—this little pup no bigger than my hand—then someone came after us to put a stop to it—and, *sapredië!* how they gave it each other on the way! but as for telling you which is in the right, monsieur le commissaire, I'll never try."

Having presented his report, the corporal stepped back. Thereupon the magistrate addressed the two women.

"Well, which of you is the complainant?"

They both spoke at once, and the boy chimed in as well.

"She's the one that's in the wrong, monsieur le commissaire."

"That ain't true, for she says I stole her dog."

"Of course, when I saw you."

"You lie!"

"And she kicked me in the fat of my leg, above the garter."

"And she pinched me so she tore my dress, and you can see the marks of her nails."

"Shut up, you saucy hussy! you ought to tell him that you're the cause——"

"Yes, monsieur le commissaire; she's the cause of it. I've never been here before—this is the first time, I can tell you that!"

The boy, who had the Limousin accent, and talked as if his mouth were full of paste, tried to put in a word:

"First—sure as I stand here—for I was carrying my—my basket, and I saw her!"

To add to the confusion, the dog began to yelp.

"Very good," said the magistrate, with a smile, for he saw that the affair was of no consequence. "I judge that a dog is the subject of your dispute. Well, we will follow Solomon's example, cut him in two, and give half to each of you."

"That's right!" cried the bulky mass, trying to laugh, until her enormous paunch seemed on the point of bursting. "There's no way but cutting him in two."

"The deuce! I should say that you are not the real mother."

"Oh! monsieur le commissaire, I was joking when I said that; but he's my dog. I've got witnesses, too."

"Oh, yes!" cried the thin woman; "and the very first man that came into your shop, when you said to him: 'Ain't that my dog?' answered: 'I never saw him.'"

"She lies! she lies! it is my dog. Everybody knows him; and then, he was with François, my son here;—come, François, make your deposition."

François opened his mouth and moved his lips a long while before he could find a word to say, his excitement had such a powerful effect on his mental faculties; at last, he muttered in a thick voice:

"First—sure as I stand here—as I was going along with my basket, I thought the dog was behind me—and she grabbed him, and run off with him!"

"That ain't true; he's lying, monsieur le commissaire. The dog was ahead of him—a long way ahead of him—when I saw the little creature, and I said: 'He hasn't got any master,' and I picked him up. If he was his, why didn't he say: 'That's my dog.' But he let me pick him up, and it wasn't till madame overtook him that he began to run after me and yell: 'Stop thief!'—What is there to prove that the dog belongs to them and not to me?"

The magistrate, having weighed these depositions in his mind, said to the boy in a grave tone:

"Put the dog on the floor, and let both of these ladies call him; I will give him to the one he follows."

François placed the little creature on the floor. The two women began to call him, lavishing the most affectionate words on him. The dog did not stir, and the affair became complicated. The two women recommenced

their billingsgate, the boy stuttered, the soldiers laughed, and the dog howled. Suddenly the thin woman began to take off her dress to show the marks of the pinching she had received; but the corpulent woman, divining her purpose, instantly raised her skirt, and, fearlessly exhibiting her leg above the garter, cried triumphantly:

"Look, monsieur le commissaire, look! it's blue, it's all blue, and it'll be all black to-morrow!"

It was blue, in fact; to be sure, the rest of the leg seemed to be about the same color; but the magistrate, who did not care to see any more, said to the other woman:

"That seems to be authentic; if you can't show as much, it's of no use for you to unbutton your dress."

The thin woman decided not to disrobe, but began to weep, mumbling:

"Let her keep the dog, for all I care! Mon Dieu! let her keep him! I don't want him! But she's a saucy slut, all the same; a person ain't to be called a thief because she picks up a dog in the street that has no owner!"

The cause was decided, and the magistrate rendered judgment. He awarded the dog to the stout woman, who took him in her arms and waddled triumphantly away with François, followed by her antagonist, muttering:

"Never mind! you shall pay me for this, dearer than you think!"

Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle stepped forward, but the magistrate motioned to them to sit down and wait, for he had many other cases to hear. In the office of a Parisian police magistrate the stage is seldom unoccupied.

Other soldiers, with a short, thickset woman at their head, who seemed disposed to command them, although they also had a corporal with them, brought in a small boy of ten or twelve years, wretchedly clad, or, to speak

more accurately, hardly clad at all. Ragged trousers revealed his bare legs, and a linen jacket, devoid of buttons, made no pretence of concealing a torn shirt, black with dirt, and a body blacker still. The little wretch, who, despite his miserable aspect, was stout and strong, had a mean face, and a hangdog glance, which seemed never to have looked at the sky.

This young thief, for the boy had previously been convicted of larceny, was now under arrest charged with stealing a loaf of bread; the thickset woman had the loaf under her arm; she explained to the magistrate that she was a fruit seller and dealt also in soldiers' bread, which she kept at the door of her shop; that the boy crept up to a table on which the bread was, and that another urchin, probably in league with the thief, ran against her and fell almost between her legs; while she helped him get up, his comrade seized a loaf and ran away with it. But she saw him in time; she ran after the little villain and caught him with the stolen loaf still in his possession; so that he could not deny his crime.

"Why did you steal this loaf?" the magistrate sternly asked the little thief, who had listened to the fruit seller's declaration as if it did not concern him, drumming on the clerk's desk with his fingers. He swayed from right to left, just like a bear, stuck out his lips, hung his head lower than ever, and at last mumbled something which could not be taken for words.

"Why did you steal this bread?" repeated the magistrate, more severely than before. "Come, answer; and speak up so that you can be heard."

Thereupon a low, drawling voice replied:

"'Cos I was hungry! I ain't had nothing to eat for two days."

"That is not true; you haven't the face of one who is starving; at all events, if you were hungry, you should have gone to a baker's shop and asked for bread; you wouldn't have been refused. But we know your ways; you stole this loaf of bread to sell again, and get three or four sous to gamble with on the boulevard or at the barrier; isn't that the truth?"

The little fellow again began to sway back and forth. He made a grimace which seemed to be intended for a smile, and said nothing.

"Are your parents living?" continued the magistrate.

"I dunno."

"What! you don't know whether you have a father and mother?"

"I ain't got no father, I don't think."

"And your mother?"

"She sells fried potatoes."

"Isn't she able to pay for your apprenticeship to some trade?"

"I don't want to work."

"You prefer to steal! you hope to be imprisoned with other little rascals of your sort, with whom you will become hopelessly bad. Where does your mother live?"

The little vagabond made no reply. The magistrate repeated his question.

"I won't tell you; I don't want her to claim me; I won't go back to her!"

"Then you will be taken to the préfecture, and from there to a house where you'll have to work."

Nothing that the magistrate could say seemed to move the young thief in the slightest degree; but when the secretary took his pen to write the report for the préfecture, the little rascal began to laugh, and muttered:

"V'là le griffon qui prend une voltigeante pour broder sur du mince." *

The soldiers led the offender away, and the fruit seller went off with her bread. This scene depressed Sans-Cravate; he glanced at his comrade, who seemed utterly unmoved by what he had seen and heard.

A well-dressed man, and of gentlemanly aspect, came forward and informed the magistrate that at No. 19 in the next street, on the third floor, at the rear of the court-yard, a gambling hell was being carried on clandestinely, under cover of a so-called reading-room. The gamblers were admitted by a secret door, and opening out of the reading-room was another room, in which roulette and *trente-et-un* were played. The magistrate was invited to visit the place, with his inspectors, about ten o'clock at night, when he would be sure to find the games in full operation; his informant would come to fetch him and act as his guide; he had succeeded in obtaining admission as a gambler.

This well-dressed, well-mannered man was simply a spy.

Next came a rather attractive young girl, of modest aspect, who was very near weeping as she asked the magistrate why he had summoned her to his office.

"Because you persist in keeping flower pots on your window ledge, mademoiselle, despite the municipal ordinance; and because, very lately, you spattered water on a lady who was passing. I shall be obliged to fine you."

"Mon Dieu! monsieur le commissaire, it's very strange that I could have spattered anybody, watering a small pot of pansies; for I'm always very careful when I water my flowers. Probably some neighbor below me threw the

* Substantially a repetition, in thieves' slang, of the clause beginning: "when the secretary——"

water out into the street, then the lady looked up and saw a flower pot at my window, and so thought it came from there."

"Still, mademoiselle, your flower pots may cause a serious accident."

"Oh! monsieur le commissaire, just a little pot of pansies!"

"If it should fall on anybody's head, mademoiselle, a pot of pansies might do as much damage as one of poppies. If you are so fond of flowers, why don't you put your pansies on something inside your room? You would enjoy them just as much—yes, more; and there would be no danger to your health, for the pansy has no odor."

The girl lowered her eyes, as she replied:

"That wouldn't be the same thing; if it was inside my room, he wouldn't see it!"

"*He* wouldn't see it? Ah! I understand: that pot of pansies is a signal to your lover, is it?"

"Yes, monsieur," faltered the girl, with a smile; "when it's on the ledge, he may come up; and if I happen to have company, I take it away, and he don't come up."

"Very good; he is able to come up very often, I judge, as the pot of pansies seems to be always in evidence; and thus the most innocent of flowers is made to serve the intrigues of lovers!"

"Oh! monsieur, my lover will marry me; I am perfectly sure of it."

"I trust so, mademoiselle; but you must put a wooden bar across your window, so that passers-by will not be in danger; only on that condition can I sanction the flower pot which you use to telegraph to your lover."

"What, monsieur! if I put a wooden rail, a bar, across, you will allow me to keep flowers at my window?"

"Yes; if you do that, you may keep as many there as you choose."

The girl fairly jumped for joy.

"Oh! what fun! I will put a rosebush and carnations with my pansies!"

"Mon Dieu! mademoiselle! will each of the three be a signal to a lover?"

"I'll put up a bar right away; and I'll keep three flower pots there, monsieur le commissaire; three flower pots!"

The girl left the office in a very joyous frame of mind. After her, came a woman who charged her husband with striking her with a skimmer; then a husband who wanted a separation from his wife, because she gave him nothing but onion soup for dinner every day; then a tenant who complained of his concierge, because he made him pass the night in the street, on the ground that it was after midnight when he came home; then a peddler whose tray had been upset; a milkwoman whose donkey had been wounded by a cabriolet; a cab that refused to move; a shop which did not close at midnight; a man who had tried to drown himself; a girl who was found dying of suffocation. Sometimes this sort of thing goes on from morning till night; and it not infrequently happens that the magistrate is roused from his sleep. A man needs to be made of iron to fill that post in Paris.

At length, having dismissed the last of the crowd that besieged him, the magistrate motioned to the messengers to follow him into his private office. Having closed his door, to ensure them against interruption, he seated himself at his desk, and addressed Sans-Cravate first.

"Are you the man called Sans-Cravate?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"This is the first time that you have been summoned to my office?"

"That is true, monsieur le commissaire."

"But you have the reputation, in the quarter, of being a noisy, quarrelsome fellow, and of drinking rather hard, too."

"Faith! monsieur le commissaire, it's possible that I like to enjoy myself, that I'm a little hot-headed, that I fight sometimes! It's in my blood, and I can't make myself over. But all that don't prevent a man from being honest, and I defy anyone to say that Sans-Cravate ever did him an injury."

"I know that you are an honest man, that your head alone is a little unruly; and because I am convinced of that, I wanted to speak to you privately, to give you some good advice. This is the first time you have been to my office, and I like to think that, if you follow my advice, it will be the last."

Jean Ficelle turned his head away, and muttered:

"On my word! a moral lecture! I should think we was at *Quart-d'Œil's* school!"

But Sans-Cravate listened humbly enough to the magistrate, who continued:

"The quickest, the most impulsive people are usually the easiest to lead. Beware of evil associates, Sans-Cravate, that's all; the man who obeys the first suggestions of his anger generally has a weak will; and there are rascals, who, by flattering your passions, sometimes lead you into bad ways."—As he said this, the magistrate glanced at Jean Ficelle, who affected to whistle through his teeth.—"Sans-Cravate, you were at the same table, last night, in a wine shop, with one Laboussole; where did you make that man's acquaintance?"

"Faith! monsieur le commissaire, I know him only by having met him at the Petit Bacchus, and, as Jean Ficelle called him his friend, I invited him to have a drink with us."

"I!" cried Jean Ficelle; "I didn't know him any more'n you did; just from meeting him at the wine shop. I called him *old fellow;* that's a term men often use to each other when they're drinking together; but I don't know him."

"You lie!" said the magistrate, gazing sternly at the messenger; "you do know that man; you know that he ran a game of chance, a *biribi*, under Pont d'Austerlitz; and you are suspected of having been his confederate."

"I, monsieur le commissaire! on my word! what a slander!"

"If I were certain of it, you would have ceased to be a messenger before this; for you would be likely to betray the confidence of the public.—As for you, Sans-Cravate, you see how dangerous it is to form intimacies with people you don't know. This Laboussole, in addition to the punishment he has earned for conducting games of chance, is also involved in a serious case of larceny; if you were often seen with such men, your reputation for honesty would suffer. That is what I wanted to say to you. We have too many rascals in Paris now, and it is almost always by frequenting their society that others are ruined. As you know nothing more about Laboussole, you may go."

"But, monsieur le commissaire," said Jean Ficelle, in a fawning tone, "we wasn't the only ones with Laboussole in the wine shop; our mate was there, too—Paul, a messenger who has a stand where we do; why don't you examine him too?"

"If we do not summon that young man before us, it is presumably because we do not deem it necessary. Our purpose in summoning Sans-Cravate was principally to

give him some good advice, and to urge him to distrust evil acquaintances. As for your young comrade, such advice to him is unnecessary. He is neither a drinking man, nor a quarrelsome man, nor a frequenter of wine shops; the best thing you could do would be to take him for a model. You may go now."

The two messengers left the magistrate's office. Sans-Cravate was pensive; he seemed to be reflecting upon what had been said to him; but his comrade, who feared the result of his reflections, exclaimed:

"Who ever heard of a magistrate having the cheek to give advice! For God's sake, ain't we old enough to know how to behave? what's all this talk about liberty, anyway? He'd better attend to making cabs move on, and leave us alone!"

"He seems to have a high opinion of Paul," said Sans-Cravate.

Jean Ficelle pursed up his lips, cast a sidelong glance at his companion, and rejoined:

"Do you know, that gives me a curious idea?"

"What is it?"

"That Paul may be a spy; and that it was him who had Laboussole arrested last night."

"Shut up, Jean Ficelle! don't insult our mate. It's an infernal shame for you to say that!"

"I may not be wrong; ain't there something queer in the way Paul acts? Didn't Laboussole say he'd met him all dressed up—like a regular swell?"

"You dare to tell me what Laboussole said—a thief!"

"What does that prove? A man may steal, and still have good eyes; indeed, he's all the more likely to; and then, one day, in the Marais, I thought myself that I recognized Paul in a man dressed like a rich bourgeois; I'm

sure now that I wasn't mistaken. If he disguises himself like that, he must have more trades than one. He's a sham messenger, and I go back to my idea: he's a spy!"

"Once more, Jean Ficelle, I forbid you to say such things!"

"But you can't keep me from thinking 'em; ideas are free, like opinions;—a man can't be prevented from having his own opinions and ideas!"

Sans-Cravate made no further reply. They arrived at their stand, but Paul was not there.

Jean Ficelle cast a bantering glance at his comrade, saying:

"He seems to be having a famous spree to-day, does the magistrate's pet!"

Again Sans-Cravate made no reply; but he clenched his fists, and it was evident that he had difficulty in restraining the feelings which agitated him.

More than an hour had passed, when Bastringuette appeared on the boulevard. She had no tray, and was dressed in her best clothes: cap with broad ribbons, merino shawl, and black silk apron. She glanced at the messengers out of the corner of her eye as she passed. Sans-Cravate quickly turned his head and walked away. But Jean Ficelle ran after the flower girl and accosted her:

"Ah! bless my soul! how natty we are! Where can we be going in such a rig? to a wedding, at the very least! it can't be less than that."

"*Dame!* perhaps that's what it is," retorted Bastringuette, assuming a very sportive air. "Perhaps I'm going to be married myself, nobody knows! Husbands are always on hand!"

She walked on without another word. Jean Ficelle returned to Sans-Cravate, glanced at him, and said nothing.

But Sans-Cravate could not contain himself; a moment later, he cried:

"What did she say? Where's she going? Why don't you speak?"

"She seemed to be as gay as a lark. She said that perhaps she was going to be married. You understand the riddle? She'll be married in the thirteenth arrondissement."*

Sans-Cravate hesitated a moment; then, having made up his mind what to do, he said:

"I mean to find out where she's going—to follow her. Are you coming with me?"

"To be sure! As if I would desert a friend! Besides, I don't feel like working to-day. Forward, guide left, march!"

The two messengers followed the boulevard in the direction taken by Bastringuette; they walked very fast, one looking to the right, the other to the left, but they did not see the person they desired to follow.

"Where the devil can she have gone?" said Sans-Cravate.

"It's very strange," rejoined Jean Ficelle, "unless she turned off the boulevard. Here we are at Porte Saint-Denis."

"Let's go on," said Sans-Cravate. "Bastringuette has a cousin who lives Rue Barbette way; perhaps she's gone to see her."

"In the Marais; ah! she has a cousin who lives in the Marais? How that fits in!"

"What's that? what do you mean?"

"Oh! nothing."

* As there were but twelve arrondissements in Paris, this expression was used to denote an illicit connection.

"I don't like hints, Jean Ficelle; speak out, sacrebleu!"

"Well, I mean that the Marais is where Paul's always seen when he's disguised as a swell; and Bastringuette comes along, dressed in tiptop style, and goes in that direction. *Dame!* if a fellow had an evil tongue, he might say that your mistress and our so-called comrade made assignations there—perhaps at the cousin's, who knows? There's such things as obliging cousins."

Sans-Cravate did not say a word, but he strode along the boulevards at such a pace that his companion was breathless with trying to keep up with him. Jean Ficelle suggested a brief halt, but, instead of complying, Sans-Cravate began to run.

"I think I see her over yonder," he shouted; "she turned into Rue du Temple; I must overtake her."

"Thunder and guns!" muttered Jean Ficelle, as he followed on; "my liver'll bust by the time we catch her."

XII

FATHER AND SON

In a very handsome house on Rue Caumartin, the windows of an apartment on the second floor were still brightly lighted, although it was after three o'clock in the morning.

In that fashionable quarter, it was a fair presumption that anybody who was still out of bed at that hour would be indulging in the pleasures of card playing, music, or dancing; that an evening party had been prolonged until that hour, and that the master or mistress of the house

took pride in having the dawn find their guests still under their roof.

But such a presumption would have been false in this instance. In a luxurious salon, where several candles were still burning, a man sat, alone, on the corner of a couch, his head bent forward; and, to judge by the expression of his features, by the melancholy look in his eyes, he had not passed the night in merrymaking.

He was a man of some forty-six years, of medium height and distinguished bearing. His grave, dignified face had been very handsome. His great blue eyes were still instinct with charm when he smiled; but that happened very rarely. His habitual pallor, the numerous lines on his forehead, were eloquent of sorrow, ennui, and heartache—of all those sentiments which bring premature old age to those who have come into the world with a sensitive soul, and of which selfish egotists have no knowledge; wherefore, they are able to retain their youth, freshness, and health much longer than the others. Heaven has done everything for the selfish man!

The man who sat there so late at night, alone, was Monsieur Vermoncey, Albert's father.

His eyes turned frequently toward a clock on the mantel. After every glance, he listened, as if hoping to hear the rumbling of a carriage or the sound of footsteps in the street, then threw his head back, saying to himself:

"He is enjoying himself, no doubt, with his friends—or his mistress. But he is using up his life too fast, he is ruining his health. Mon Dieu! and I have no one left but him—no one else! all my other children have followed their mother to the grave. If I should lose Albert, what would become of me? what can a man do on earth, when he has no one left to love?"

Monsieur Vermoncey seemed utterly overwhelmed; profound grief was depicted in his eyes, which he kept on the floor for a long while, as if melancholy memories of the past were blended with his present anxieties. He sighed at intervals, as he murmured:

"My wife, whom I loved so passionately! my children, whom I idolized! Ah! how men change! when I was Albert's age, how far I was from thinking that the most delicious joys are those that one knows in his own family, with his wife and children! But at twenty-two the heart is not as yet open to all sentiments; at that age, a man does not know what he wants, or whom he loves! He treats lightly the most serious things, and repents afterward—sometimes, when it is too late."

He rose and walked about the room a few times, then continued:

"I am foolish to be anxious. Albert is enjoying himself, that's all. I ought to have gone to bed long ago; but it is useless for me to try to sleep, when I know that he has not come in. His conduct for some time past has been very reprehensible. He spends his money foolishly, he makes undesirable acquaintances; but his heart is sound at bottom; he will become reasonable in time; I must not forget that I was young once."

As he made this reflection, Monsieur Vermoncey fixed his eyes on the floor again, his brow became clouded, and he put his hand to it several times as if he sought to brush away some painful memory.

Meanwhile, the sun had risen: he heard the rumbling of the milkwomen's carts, the heavy tread of the peasants returning from selling their vegetables at the market, the song of the early workman going to his work, and

the dialogues between the concierges as they swept their doorsteps.

Monsieur Vermoncey rang; in a few seconds a servant appeared, whose red face, half-closed eyes, and sluggish gait proved that he had not followed his master's example, and that he had with difficulty roused himself from sleep.

"Has my son come in, Florent?" inquired Monsieur Vermoncey, as if anxious to be convinced that he had not listened intently all night.

The servant replied, rubbing his eyes:

"I think not, monsieur; but I will go to his room and see; sometimes he doesn't wake me when he comes in."

"Ah, no! he has not come in!" said Monsieur Vermoncey to himself, nervously pacing the floor. "And it's after five o'clock. He doesn't usually pass the whole night away from home, without telling me. Probably some card party which lasted till morning.—Yes, I know that I am foolish to worry, but I cannot help it. A man endangers his life so recklessly sometimes! Intrigues with women are often dangerous! All husbands are not disposed to allow themselves to be betrayed, and say nothing. But it seems that the more obstacles there are to making a woman's acquaintance, the more determined we are to possess her."

"Monsieur Albert has not come home since yesterday," the servant reported.

"Very well, Florent. I am going to my room; but come and tell me as soon as my son comes in."

Monsieur Vermoncey went to his bedroom, where there were portraits of his wife, of Albert, and of the three children he had lost. He stood a long while in front of the picture of his wife. She had died when she was still

young and lovely, and she was so represented in the portrait. It would be a consolation to those who die when they are still in life's summertime to know that when we think of them we shall always recall them as being young and fair; and regret that they could not have enjoyed a long life, in which we fancy them growing old in years, perhaps, but never in appearance.

After gazing long at the features of his beloved and regretted wife, he turned his eyes sadly upon the portraits of his children. His eyes filled with tears as he looked at those he had lost; then he glanced at the portrait of Albert, which had been painted more recently, and was a perfect likeness; it seemed that he hoped to derive consolation and courage from the features of his only remaining child; but in a moment his eyes began to wander about the room, as if in search of still another portrait. At last he threw himself into a chair, and, resting his head on his hand, abandoned himself anew to his reflections.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when Albert returned to his father's house. It will be remembered that, after passing the night in the artist's studio, the young men had gone upstairs to see the pretty neighbor, whom they had surprised in the loft. So Albert had but just left his friends, when Florent hurried to Monsieur Vermoncey's room to tell him that his son had come home.

The father's downcast features were instantly lighted up with an expression of joy and happiness; his son's long absence had really disturbed him, but a single word put all his fears to flight. He rose hurriedly, intending to go at once to Albert, then checked himself, thinking that his son would be angry if he knew that he had not gone to bed. But the longing to embrace him carried the day, and he went to his son's room.

Albert's apartment was on the same floor as his father's; only the width of the hall separated them. The young man had just taken off his coat, waistcoat, and cravat, and was putting on a robe de chambre, when his father appeared.

"What! up already?" cried Albert.

Monsieur Vermoncey's only reply was to go to his son and embrace him; he, meanwhile, scrutinized his father closely, then said:

"I'll wager that you haven't been in bed; yes, I can tell by the tired look of your eyes; you have had no sleep, probably because I did not come home; you are quite capable of sitting up all night for me! Allow me to tell you that that is utterly absurd. Am I still a child? Am I not at liberty to stay at a house where I am enjoying myself, if I have an opportunity, or to play a game of cards with my friends? In a word, father, may I not venture to pass a night away from home, without your sitting up for me, like a schoolboy who is thought to be lost? I tell you again that it is very annoying to me!"

"I have not reproached you," said Monsieur Vermoncey, fixing his eyes upon Albert.

"No, you don't reproach me, but that makes no difference. Do you think that I can take any pleasure at a party that happens to last far into the night, if I know that you are sitting up for me, that you are anxious about me? Nothing of this sort would have happened if I had carried out my first idea. I wanted to live somewhere else; then you wouldn't know at what time I came home. I know very well that you don't interfere with my doing whatever I choose; but a man is always more at liberty living by himself, and it would be much better."

Monsieur Vermoncey replied, with a melancholy air, but with dignity:

"After all the misfortunes that have crushed me to the earth, I thought that I might venture to ask you to comply with my wishes in some slight measure. Having lost your mother, your brothers, and your sister, and having nothing but your presence to assist me to endure my grief, I thought that you would not seek to deprive me of it, but that you would feel how essential it was for me to be able to rest my eyes on one of my children, the only one heaven has deigned to leave me. In spite of that, I did not curtail your liberty at all, I claimed no right to pry into your acts—although, perhaps, a father is entitled to know what his son is doing. But as it seems that I have asked too much, that, in asking you to live in the same house with me, I demand too great a sacrifice, go, my son, leave this apartment; I will not seek to detain you, but I shall not cease, on that account, to love you as dearly as ever."

While his father was speaking, Albert's expression changed; it was easy to read in his eyes that his father's reproaches had reached his heart. Monsieur Vermoncey had hardly finished, when his son threw himself into his arms.

"I am wrong, father, I am wrong!" he cried; "I am a heedless fool! I don't know what I am saying! I say things that grieve you, who have always been so kind and generous and indulgent to me! Please forgive me! Forget all that I have said, and let there be no more question between us of living apart. I know that I should never be so happy anywhere else as with you. All these friends of mine—my companions in pleasure—I go with them because I have a good time with them; but I promise

you that I appreciate them at their real value. Come, embrace me. You are not angry with me any longer, are you?"

Monsieur Vermoncey replied by pressing his son to his heart. A loving word from one we love suffices to make us forget a thousand causes of complaint that have long been gathering. Moreover, indulgence is always to be preferred to severity, so long as the faults committed are not of those which should cause us to blush.

"No, my dear boy, I am not angry now," said Albert's father at last. "I am well aware that at your age it is natural to seek amusement, and I do not blame you for it. My affection takes alarm too easily, I agree; but what can you expect? I have had so much unhappiness! my heart has been so cruelly torn! Such wounds never heal entirely; they leave us in a constant state of anxiety concerning the little happiness heaven has left us. Let us say no more about it. If you are happy, that is all I want; especially if you deal frankly with your father, if you look upon him as the best of your friends—I do not mean of those friends whom you mentioned just now. By the way, among others, there is a Monsieur Célestin Valnoir, or *de* Valnoir, who is almost always with you. I don't like that young man; if he were simply a little wild—a high liver—that would be nothing; but I do not think that he's sincere."

"Faith! father, you may very well be right about it; however, I am inclined to call Célestin selfish rather than insincere. He's a delightful fellow in company, provided that you don't ask him to do anything for you! Moreover, he has the art of making himself useful, indispensable, in fact. He can order a dinner perfectly, he plays all kinds of games, and he talks on all

subjects with a cool self-possession which dazzles and fascinates one. He finds a way to make one do whatever he wants."

"Take care, my boy; you are naturally trustful and obliging. I know that you are constantly in this Célestin's company. I have told you many times that you should be more particular in the choice of your friends than of your mistresses. You seem to have been spending your money freely of late; but it is what came to you from your mother, and you are entitled to spend it as you choose. Come, confess that the funds are rather low just now."

Albert smiled and lowered his eyes.

"In truth, father—as you are so good at guessing, I will not try to hide it from you any longer. I have been foolish—very foolish. I have let myself go without reflection. I have been very unlucky at cards. Oh! I know that I am very foolish to play; it would be much better never to touch a card. I will reform. I won't play any more."

"So that now you haven't any money?"

"I haven't a sou! but I have no lack of resources, of acquaintances."

"That's it; you will apply to usurers, who will consummate your ruin, instead of coming frankly to your father."

"Because you have done so much for me already; I shrank from abusing your indulgence."

"Nonsense! so long as you love me, I never shall regret what I do for you. Besides, will not my fortune be yours some day? for you know that I shall never marry again. My only reason for not turning it all over to you now is that, as I am more prudent than you, I

prefer to keep it for you until a time when you yourself will be less thoughtless. Now, I look upon myself as your steward, I am managing your property."

"Oh! father, what do you mean? Are you not at liberty to dispose of your fortune?"

"For whose benefit would you have me dispose of it, if not for my son's? But the steward may presume, now and then, to preach a little; then he will have to turn to and make up the deficit. Here, my boy, take this wallet; you will find ten thousand francs in it; that will save you the trouble of applying to your companions in pleasure, who would refuse you, or to usurers, who, having to wait until my death for their money, would charge you a hundred per cent interest."

Albert was keenly touched by his father's kindness; he pushed away the hand that held the wallet, saying:

"You are too good, father; really, you are too good to me! But I will not take this money, I ought not to take it. You make so many sacrifices for me, and I am unworthy of them! I spend money so foolishly! No, it's too much; I will not accept it."

"I insist upon your taking it. I insist, do you hear? Am I not your father? do you refuse to obey me? If you do, then I shall be seriously angry."

Albert took the wallet, saying, as he embraced his father:

"Upon my word, you spoil me, as you did when I was a child."

"What would you have? it is my method. I have always thought that parents had better success by taking that course. I have an idea that, if I give you money to satisfy your whims, that very fact will lead you to spend it less heedlessly."

"Yes, you are right; I will make myself worthy of your indulgence."

"Enjoy yourself, be happy, and love me; that is all that I ask of you; and don't place too much dependence on your friend Célestin, who does not inspire me with confidence."

"I will follow your advice, father, I promise you."

"And I, for my part, promise to be more reasonable. I will not sit up for you any more; I will go to bed—do you understand? I will go to bed. But, I beg you, think of your health, and avoid dangerous intrigues, which sometimes lead to deplorable results. I will leave you now and get some sleep. It is understood that you are to come home when you please; hereafter, I will go to bed."

Monsieur Vermoncey left the room, and Albert threw himself on his couch.

"My father is the best of men," he thought; "but, after all, to do what he has done was perhaps the only way to make me behave myself. Yes, this kindness, which nothing wearies, and which leads him, instead of heaping reproaches on me, to pay the price of my follies again—this touching kindness makes me realize all the wickedness of my conduct much more keenly than sermons and harsh treatment would do. I have squandered all my mother's property in such a short time! I absolutely must reform, for I do not propose that my father shall straiten himself for me; and that is what will happen if I continue to lead the life I have been leading. For I know him; he could never bear to see me in embarrassed circumstances; he would subject himself to them, to extricate me. So it is definitely decided, I am to turn virtuous. First of all, I will not play cards any more;

then, I will not associate with Célestin quite so much; the more I think of it, the more I am inclined to believe that my father is not very far out of the way in his opinion of him. I have noticed several things—at all events, I will be on my guard. Now, I will think of nothing but my good fortune for to-day. Madame Baldimer has consented to receive me. Strange woman! I am dead in love with her. But is it really love that I feel for her? Let us see: if, instead of resisting me as she has done ever since I began to be attentive to her, she had yielded to me after a feeble resistance, would not my love have died out long ago? I don't know what to answer. It seems to me that it would not—and yet—on reflection—— But what's the use? Let us try at first to triumph. In this affair, at all events, my fortune is in no danger. Madame Baldimer is rich—that is to say, she seems to be. She is a widow, consequently her own mistress—no husband to deceive, or to stand in fear of. I am sure that my father himself would approve of this liaison."

Having passed some time in such reflections as these, Albert fell asleep on his couch. When he woke, it was nearly noon, and his appointment was for one o'clock. He dressed in haste, but with great care, because he desired to maintain his reputation as one of the leading dandies of the capital; then, when his costume was complete, he sallied forth, took a cab, and was driven to Madame Baldimer's house on Rue Neuve-Vivienne.

XIII

MADAME BALDIMER.—A FAN

Let us now make the acquaintance of this lady, with whom Albert was so madly in love, and with whom his friend Célestin maintained a correspondence of which he knew nothing.

Madame Baldimer was twenty-eight years of age. Although she was very beautiful, she appeared fully as old as that, because her features, faultless and regular as they were, were somewhat pronounced and stern; because there was in her expression a touch of masculinity, of intelligence superior to vulgar weaknesses, and the signs of a firm and resolute will.

Tall, with a superb figure, of lithe and graceful carriage—which is rare in very tall women;—great black eyes full of fire, hair as black as jet, a shapely mouth with perfect teeth, sometimes ironical in expression, sometimes scornful, and sometimes fascinating beyond words; a white skin slightly lacking in lustre, a beautiful arm, a lovely hand, but a very long, very broad, and very flat foot,—such was Madame Baldimer. She always wore extremely long dresses, in order to hide that portion of her person which did not harmonize with the beauty of her face and her body.

Madame Baldimer lived on Rue Neuve-Vivienne, in a suite of rooms worthy of a *petite-maîtresse* upon whom fortune has lavished its favors. There she had assembled everything that could gratify the taste of the most

exacting of women: furniture of priceless woods, bronzes, pictures, porcelain, statuettes, knickknacks, curiosities—nothing had been overlooked; Madame Baldimer's rooms contained all that the world could provide in the way of dainty, graceful, and sumptuous objects. It was a delicious haven of repose, where the feet rested on naught but soft carpets, where one breathed an atmosphere heavy with perfumes and flowers, where, in a word, it seemed that the aim had been to assemble whatever was best adapted to seduce the mind, the eye, and the senses.

It was not the first time that young Vermoncey had called upon Madame Baldimer; after meeting her in society, fascinated by her beauty, he had insistently craved the favor of being permitted to pay his court to her; and that favor had been granted with a readiness that led him to hope for the speedy triumph of his passion. But he had been disappointed; the lovely widow, who had appeared to be flattered at first by the effect her charms produced upon Albert, had received coldly enough the burning declaration which the young man was not slow in addressing to her; without absolutely spurning him, she had given him but little hope. Sometimes stern, sometimes merry, scornful or melancholy, Madame Baldimer's conduct toward Albert was that of a coquette who seeks to amuse herself at the expense of the man she has subjugated, or who does not feel sufficiently assured of her conquest, and, before surrendering, desires, by all possible means, to inflame and strengthen the sentiment she has inspired.

Discouraged, and at times disgusted by the non-success of his sighs, Albert swore to think no more of the fair American, which was the name by which Madame Baldimer was commonly designated in society. In his endeavor

to forget her, he ceased to go where he was likely to meet her, in society or at her favorite places of amusement. But just as his resolution was beginning to bear fruit, and his common sense to triumph over his passion, he was sure to meet Madame Baldimer somewhere, at the theatre perhaps, at a concert, or wherever he happened to walk. It seemed that some evil genius kept her informed of his most trivial acts, and sent her upon his traces, in order to make him forget his resolution. The lovely creature exerted every means of seduction in her power to bring back to her feet the man who was struggling to free himself from her empire; and when he saw Madame Baldimer again, Albert speedily forgot her coquetry, and returned to her side more in love than ever, and always flattering himself that he was to be more fortunate in his suit.

But for some time past, Albert's vexation at his failure to triumph over the fair American had been intensified by the torments of jealousy; for he was not the only man whom Madame Baldimer's charms had fascinated; and as she was a flirt, she welcomed the homage of several other young men with as much favor as his. Latterly, a wealthy foreigner, a Swede, had joined the ranks of her adorers; this gentleman, one Count Dahlborne, was exceedingly ugly; he was very tall and stiff, with large, glassy eyes, and a red beard and moustache which made his aspect almost repulsive, and were ill adapted to attract a *petite-maîtresse;* and yet, whether from eccentricity or caprice, Madame Baldimer had seemed for some little time to take more pleasure in the Swedish count's society than in that of any other aspirant to her favor.

Albert, angry beyond measure, had sworn once more to cease to think of that woman who made a plaything

of his love; and affairs were at that stage when, on the preceding evening, he and his friends had spied the fair American in a little *citadine*, driving along the boulevard. We have seen what followed. Unable to control the passion which dominated him, Albert wrote to Madame Baldimer, imploring her to accord him a tête-à-tête, and swearing that she would never see him again if she refused. The reply was laconic, but favorable. "Come at one o'clock to-morrow," said the note which he had received from the lovely widow, and which had made him so happy.

Let us accompany him now to the lady's abode, where he arrived at the hour mentioned in the note.

A maid ushered the young man into a small salon furnished with all the dainty coquetry of a boudoir. Enveloped in an ample blouse of white muslin, gathered about her waist by a gold cord, Madame Baldimer sat, or rather half reclined, on a divan. Her beautiful black hair was her only head-dress, but the novel and original fashion in which it was arranged, and the elegant simplicity of her dress, which heightened her charms—everything combined to impart to her person something which would have vanquished the most insensible of men, and Albert was very far from that.

At sight of the person she expected, and of whose passionate admiration of her beauty she was well aware, Madame Baldimer's eyes gleamed, and her face lighted up with a peculiar expression. Was it pleasure, love, or simple coquetry? One must needs have been a talented physiognomist to divine what was taking place in that woman's heart.

Albert bowed gracefully, and, at a sign from her, took his seat by her side.

"I trust that I shall hear no further complaints from you," said Madame Baldimer, with a smile; "I have given you this rendezvous—the tête-à-tête for which you asked me. Do you know that that is a very great favor?"

"Do you imagine, madame, that I am not profoundly conscious of its value; do you already repent of having afforded me so very great a pleasure?"

"I never repent of what I have done, for I always reflect before acting; and I realize all the consequences of what I accord, of what I promise."

"Then you give me leave to love you and to tell you so, to hope that you will share my sentiments? for all that is the natural consequence of this priceless interview which you have deigned to grant me."

"Oh! gently, gently, Monsieur Albert; you go too fast. Love me, if you will; I do not forbid you—far from it; but I must be absolutely certain of your love, I must be convinced that it is too great to recoil before any obstacle—any sacrifice—before I make up my mind to yield to it."

"Oh! madame, are you not certain of the power of your charms, of the boundless influence you exert over me? What proof must you have, in order to believe in my love? Speak, command!—I am prepared to obey."

Madame Baldimer gazed earnestly at Albert, but in that searching gaze there was no trace of tenderness, nothing to indicate that it came from the heart. The young man was almost frightened by the persistent stare of those two great black eyes; he would have preferred a little confusion and embarrassment, some slight emotion, a sigh—in a word, some one of those things which indicate that the moment of avowal, of surrender, is at hand;

and Madame Baldimer's expression conveyed no such indication.

"You have loved very often, have you not?" murmured the lovely widow at last.

"So I thought until I knew you, but I feel now that I never really loved before I saw you."

"Oh, yes! a man always says that to the last woman to whom he pays court. But I have been told that you have been guilty of a great many follies for your mistresses."

"Follies do not necessarily denote love."

"Sometimes they do. And suppose I wanted you to do something of the sort for me——"

"Why, I should be only too happy, if it were a means of making myself agreeable to you."

"Ah! you do not know me, you see. I am very peculiar. I want the man who loves me to gratify all my tastes, all my whims; to divine them himself; I do not understand the love that hesitates before a desire of the loved one. If I had been a man, I would have thrown myself into the water, into the flames, to prove my love for a woman! I would have defied all dangers, challenged all my rivals—in short, I would have turned the world upside down, aye, and committed crimes, if she had asked me to."

Albert, who was at a loss to understand the purport of her remarks, looked at her with a smile, saying:

"Have you some little crime you would like me to commit? or would you like me to jump into the water?"

Madame Baldimer pressed her lips together impatiently, as she replied:

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, what will you say next? I should be very sorry, indeed, if the slightest accident

should happen to you on my account. Really, I don't know why I said that. I don't always consider what I say."

"But you consider what is said to you, surely?" rejoined Albert, taking her hand.

She smiled, and seemed to reflect for a moment.

"Where do you live now?" she asked. "Is it true that you have moved?"

"No, madame; I am still in the same house."

"And you live with your father, I believe?"

"On the same landing."

"For a young man who likes to do foolish things, it must be a little burdensome sometimes to have such a neighbor."

"Oh! no, madame; I am my own master; I do what I choose; my father does not interfere with me in any way; he is so kind to me!"

"Ah! he loves you very dearly, does he?"

"Yes, I cannot doubt it. And it is quite natural, as I am the only one left of a numerous family."

"What! has he no other child?"

"I had two brothers and a sister—and I alone am left."

Madame Baldimer let her head fall upon her breast, and seemed lost in thought.

"But we are talking of very serious subjects," said Albert, after a pause; "whereas I had no purpose to speak of anything but my love. Tell me, do you not love me a little?"

Madame Baldimer made no reply, but she allowed her hand to be pressed, heaved a sigh, and turned her eyes away. The young man was overjoyed; he thought that his love was beginning to touch the heart that he burned to subjugate, and he was about to put to his lips the

hand that he held in his, when Madame Baldimer rose abruptly and began to pace the floor.

"Did you see Madame Plays at Count Dahlborne's last reception?" she asked, in a very vivacious tone. "She wore the sweetest cashmere; it fairly turned my head; so much so, that I dreamed of it, and I think of it all the time. There's one just like it at Delille's. They are the handsomest shawls there are in Paris to-day. I was tempted for a moment to buy it; but it costs too much; and one would be very foolish to yield to all one's fancies."

Albert was utterly disconcerted. At the very moment when he thought that she was about to respond to his loving protestations, she began to talk about cashmeres! That abrupt sally so bewildered him that he gazed at Madame Baldimer in blank amazement, and did not know what to reply.

She returned to her seat on the divan, and continued in a most amiable tone:

"Pardon me; here I am talking about clothes, now; I am very frivolous, am I not?"

"You are charming always—if only you would be a little more sentimental! When I speak of my love, you change the subject."

"Why, no—for that Madame Plays has been your mistress, has she not?"

"No, I give you my word of honor."

"Come, come, don't lie about it! As if one could not detect such things at once, however little one knows the world! Besides, Madame Plays made no secret of it—quite the contrary; that husband of hers is so obliging!"

"For heaven's sake, let us drop Madame Plays! I did not ask for a tête-à-tête with you, to talk about her!"

"I fancy not. But her shawl is so pretty—and I thought that someone said that you gave it to her."

"No, indeed! that is not true!"

"You won't admit it, of course—such a beautiful present! Were you so very much in love with that woman?"

"Once more, madame, I assure you that you are mistaken."

"Very well—it is possible; I am willing to believe you. But, oh! what a stunning shawl that is!"

Albert said nothing more. A thousand thoughts passed through his mind, and his brow began to darken. Madame Baldimer, noticing it, became more vivacious, more amiable, more tender, than ever; one would have said that she feared that the passion she had aroused might disappear, and that she was exerting herself to the utmost to prevent Albert's love from escaping her. He was altogether bewildered by the cajoleries which she lavished upon him; his hope that his flame was at last shared awoke to new life; indeed, Madame Baldimer's conduct fully justified that hope.

But at that moment the maid appeared in the doorway.

"Monsieur le Comte Dahlborne wishes to know if he may pay his respects to madame?" she said.

"Why, of course; show him in," replied Madame Baldimer, with an air of satisfaction; while Albert, whose features contracted when he heard the count's name, exclaimed angrily:

"What! you propose to receive that foreigner? And I hoped that I was to enjoy a tête-à-tête with you!"

"Have we not time enough to see each other again? The count was told that I was in; to refuse to receive him would be discourteous."

"Ah! madame, if you had taken any pleasure in hearing me speak of my love——"

"I do—but the world insists upon the observance of certain proprieties which we cannot disregard. Besides, this foreigner is so gallant——"

"Too gallant with you, in my opinion, and his frequent visits——"

"Hush, here he is!"

Count Dahlborne entered the salon, with the stiff, formal, pretentious air which he always maintained. He had several decorations in his buttonhole, and all the manners of a person of good breeding; but his long, surly face, even when he tried to be affable, seemed destined to put pleasure and love to flight. However, Madame Baldimer greeted him with a charming smile; he kissed her hand, bowed solemnly to Albert, and seated himself in an armchair, like a wooden man moved by springs.

"It is very good of you, monsieur le comte, to think of coming to see me," said the pretty widow, mincingly.

The Swede bowed, and replied with the utmost seriousness:

"Oh! I think of it all the time."

"You gentlemen who are in diplomacy, in politics, have very little time to give to the ladies; so that they should be highly flattered when it occurs to you to give a thought to them."

"Oh! I give many thoughts to them."

Albert could hardly restrain a smile at the Swede's phlegm and his laconic utterances, and he did not say a word, being curious to see if his conversation would continue in the same tone. But Madame Baldimer was too shrewd not to try to make the count talk more freely. She addressed him again.

"How did you like the last opéra-comique? We met there the night before last, you know."

"I don't remember it at all," replied Monsieur Dahlborne, after apparently trying to recall the incident.

"I should judge, then, that you didn't enjoy it very much."

The Swede made no reply, but felt in his coat pocket and produced a superb fan of some rare and valuable wood, beautifully carved, and enriched with inlaid work. He presented it to Madame Baldimer, saying:

"I broke yours at the theatre; will you allow me to replace it?"

The fair American took the fan and gazed at it with an enraptured expression.

"Oh! really, Monsieur Dahlborne," she cried, "this is too beautiful. I don't know whether I ought to accept it; it is simply magnificent! What workmanship! what exquisite finish! it is perfectly lovely! I cannot take it in exchange for the one I had."

"Then I will break this one too, if you give it back to me."

"Really, such gallantry—it puts all our Parisian gentlemen to the blush.—Look, Monsieur Vermoncey, isn't this a wonderfully lovely fan?"

Albert, whose face had worn a pronounced frown ever since the count presented the fan, barely glanced at it as he replied:

"I know very little about that sort of thing."

"It is impossible to imagine anything in better taste! Well, Monsieur Dahlborne, I will keep it; for it would really be too bad for you to break it."

"In that case, I am very glad that I broke the other," said the Swede, with a bow.

Albert found it difficult to restrain his vexation and anger; he could not keep his feet still, and seemed to be boiling on his chair. The pretty widow, who seemed to take great delight in the young man's jealousy and wrath, and who acted as if she desired to add to his misery, handed the fan to him again, saying:

"Pray look at it, monsieur, and admit that you have never seen anything so pretty and so refined."

This time the young man took the fan in his hands, held it up in the air, opened it as if to examine it more closely, then let it fall on the corner of his chair, whence it dropped to the floor. The dainty thing was too frail, too delicate, to resist that twofold fall, and it broke in several pieces.

Madame Baldimer gave a little shriek, which did not, however, indicate intense regret; indeed, it was possible that she expected that event and had looked forward to it. Count Dahlborne contented himself with picking up the pieces of the fan, which he coolly placed in his pocket.

"There are others," he said; "prettier ones than that, perhaps; I shall have the pleasure of bringing you one."

Albert's irritation increased apace; he flattered himself that by breaking the fan he would vex Madame Baldimer and anger the Swede—in short, he hoped for a scene, a quarrel; but the foreigner's imperturbable tranquillity disappointed his hope; he saw that his awkwardness—or malice, as they chose to take it—was thrown away.

Madame Baldimer addressed no reproach to him; she simply said:

"We all have our unlucky days."

Then she resumed her conversation with the count, who continued to answer as laconically as before; in fact,

she carried on the conversation practically alone, with an occasional ironical smile at her young adorer.

Albert paid no heed to what was being said, and he answered incoherently such remarks as were addressed to him; but he was determined not to abandon the field to the Swede, and not to go away so long as that gentleman stayed. For his part, the noble foreigner seemed not at all disposed to take his leave, although he did not appear to be enjoying himself overmuch.

Madame Baldimer probably divined the secret thoughts of her two suitors; and after entertaining them, as we have described, for some time, she herself rose and said:

"Excuse me for leaving you, messieurs; but I am going into the country for a few days, and I must make my toilet; you understand that, for a lady, that is too important a matter not to require a great deal of time."

The visitors understood that they must go. Both rose, and both took leave of the young woman. The Swede kissed her hand with much gravity; Albert contented himself with pressing it hard, saying under his breath:

"I hope to see you immediately after your return to Paris."

"I count upon it," replied Madame Baldimer, aloud. "I will write you as soon as I return."

The two rivals went downstairs together; on reaching the street, they saluted without a word.

Albert stood and looked after the count as he walked away, and was strongly tempted to go up to Madame Baldimer again; but he changed his mind and went home.

"To go back now," he said to himself, "would be a mistake. What should I say? I broke that fan; she saw that I did it in anger, and she didn't reprove me. But I must make that up to her. I have deprived her

of one present, so I owe her another. That cashmere she spoke about is very expensive, I suppose, but nó matter! It shall not be said that a Swede was more gallant than I. And yet—I don't know—but it seems to me that that woman doesn't love me;—and I thought that her acquaintance would cost me nothing! Ah! I hoped that she would be more amiable and less coquettish. I should do very well to forget Madame Baldimer—I know that. Why am I so bent upon triumphing over her? Oh! vanity, vanity!"

XIV

THE MARAIS.—A MYSTERY

Sans-Cravate had quickened his pace in order to reach Rue du Temple, into which he thought that he had seen Bastringuette turn. When he walked at his ordinary gait, he moved almost as rapidly as a cab; so that, as may be imagined, his double-quick step was likely to tire anybody who attempted to keep up with him.

Jean Ficelle was compelled to run, in order not to lose sight of his comrade. From time to time, he called out to him:

"Stop a minute, won't you! I can't keep up with you; do you want to see my spleen swell up like a balloon? *Sacrédié!* you ought to be a runner; I believe you could beat the horses on the Champ de Mars!"

Sans-Cravate reached Rue de la Corderie without catching another glimpse of the woman he had thought was Bastringuette. There he halted at last.

"It's mighty lucky," panted Jean Ficelle. "I was just going to give out; on my word, I was blowing like a cab horse!"

"I don't see that woman," said Sans-Cravate; "it's very strange! Where the devil has she gone to?"

"Was it really Bastringuette that you saw turn into this street? You ain't sure of it, are you?"

"No."

"What are we going to do now?"

"As long as we're in the Marais, let's go to Rue Barbette, where my traitor's cousin lives."

"All right, let's inspect the Marais, I'm willing; perhaps we may meet somebody else. But we don't need to run any more, that don't help us any. Let's walk along quiet now, arm in arm."

"Did I run just now?"

"Oh, no! of course not! not any faster than a steam engine. I'm willing to go with you and help you in your search; for I'm your friend—and when anyone insults you, d'ye see, it makes me madder than if it was me. Bless my soul! a friend's a friend—that's enough for me. But that's no reason for your breaking my wind. Besides, you know, you can find things out much better by going slow than by running like a bullet. Look you, I'll give you a comparison. Have you ever been on the railroad?"

"Yes; I went to Saint-Germain once, with Bastringuette."

"Well, what did you see, what did you notice on the way?"

"How do you suppose a man can notice anything when he's going like the wind?"

"Exactly—that's what I'm coming at. That's like you—just now. How do you expect to see anything or

find out anything in the street, when you're running like a horse with the bit between his teeth?"

"I believe you're right; give me your arm, and we'll go slowly about our search in the Marais."

The Marais is the oldest quarter of Paris, next to the Cité; despite the numerous changes, enlargements, and improvements which have been made in the capital, the Marais has retained its primitive aspect more nearly than any other quarter. There we can still find a large number of the old houses and mansions occupied by our ancestors. It is not surprising, therefore, that, as we stroll through that quarter, our imagination carries us back several centuries, and our memory recalls all those deeds of the olden time with which our childhood was entertained.

For instance, if you have studied or read our history ever so little, you cannot pass through Rue des Tournelles without recalling the fact that one of the king's palaces once stood on that street; that Henri II caused lists to be constructed, reaching from the Bastille to the Palais des Tournelles, for the tourney in which he received his death wound; that it was in front of the Bastille that the celebrated duel took place in the year 1578, between Quélus, Livarot, and Maugiron on the one side, and Ribérac, Schomberg, and D'Entragues on the other. They fought at five o'clock in the morning; Maugiron and Schomberg, who were less than twenty years old, were killed on the spot; Ribérac and Quélus died of their wounds shortly after. At that time, the rage for duelling was carried to such a pitch that it not infrequently happened that a father acted as his son's second. Still, those were the days which are called, by common consent, the *good old time.*

If you walk through Rue Sainte-Avoye, you look for the Hôtel de Mesmes, where lived Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France, an illustrious old man, who was mortally wounded, at the age of seventy-four, at the battle of Saint-Denis, after unhorsing by a blow with the hilt of his sword (the blade had been broken during the battle) the man who summoned him to surrender.

Rue Barbette recalls Isabel of Bavaria, that queen whom France holds in no very kindly remembrance. She had a house there, which she called her *petit séjour.* It was thither that she generally retired during the paroxysms of the malady of her husband, Charles VI; a custom which does not speak highly for her wifely affection; a good bourgeoise would have stayed with her husband, to take care of him and nurse him. But she was a queen—and this happened in the good old time.

Pass through Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, and you will be conscious of a thrill of terror as you recall the murderous attack upon the Connétable de Clisson by Pierre de Craon. For it was on the corner of that street that the latter lay in hiding on the night of June 13, 1391. He was at the head of a number of cutthroats, lying in wait for him whose death he had sworn to compass. Although he had no other weapon than a small knife, the constable used it with such wonderful address and vigor that he did not die of his wounds.

If you visit Rue des Lions, your eyes will seek the buildings in which the king's lions were confined, and your memory will at once recall the adventure of the Chevalier de Lorges. While François I was amusing himself by watching his lions at play, a lady dropped her glove in the arena, and said to De Lorges:

"If you would have me believe in your love, go fetch my glove."

The chevalier went down into the arena, picked up the glove from the midst of the lions, returned to his place, threw the glove in the lady's face, and never spoke to her again. That, too, happened in the good old time. To-day, our ladies do not exact such proofs of affection; with us, gallantry is less savage, and we might even apply to it what someone has said of music: *Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.*

Close at hand is Rue des Nonaindières, formerly Rue des Nonains d'Hière, because the abbey of the village of Hière still owned several estates on that street. That was the abbey where the use of eggs was not permitted until the fourteenth century; before that time, they were considered too great a delicacy for nuns.

Then there is Rue Saint-Paul, which cannot fail to remind you of the famous mansion erected by Charles V. With its gardens, it occupied all the space between Rue Saint-Antoine and the river, from the city moat to the church of the parish of Saint-Paul. In those days, the houses in which kings dwelt were always flanked by huge towers, and the gardens planted with fruit trees and vines. Rue Beautrellis and Rue de la Cerisaye took their names respectively from a beautiful trellis and from a plantation of cherry trees, both of which were within the confines of the gardens of the Hôtel Saint-Paul. We have become more luxurious than our kings of the olden time, for now no petty banker will have anything but ornamental trees and shrubs in his park; he would blush to have you find a plum tree or an apricot tree there.

On Rue des Trois Pavillons, one's thoughts inevitably turn to the fair Diane de Poitiers, whom Henri II made

Duchesse de Valentinois. That street once bore her name, because she lived there; I cannot tell you why they rechristened it, but, for my part, I prefer the name of a pretty woman to Trois Pavillons.

Lastly, there is the Vieille Rue du Temple. Your heart contracts as you recall the assassination of the Duc d'Orléans on that street, one evening in the month of November, 1407, near a small house called the Image de Notre-Dame.

But we have dwelt long enough on the memories evoked by that ancient quarter. Although the Marais has retained down to the present day, in some of its streets, a part of its primitive aspect, it has undergone numerous changes; new, broad, and airy streets and elegant, even coquettish, houses have risen on the sites of the gloomy Gothic structures of our ancestors. As for the people of that quarter, they bear no resemblance whatever to the Parisians who lived in the Marais at the time of which we have been evoking the memory. Morals, customs, manners, everything is changed, and we may well congratulate our contemporaries that it is so; for, as we have seen, duels, murders, and ambuscades are the subjects of most of the legends that have come down to us. We may be less chivalrous, but, while we are no less brave, we are more light-hearted, more amiable, and much less treacherous than our forbears of the good old time.

To-day, the people of the Marais dress almost as well as those of the Chaussée d'Antin; there are no districts in Paris now that are behind the times in respect to fashions, but everybody cannot or does not choose to follow them. A dandy of Rue Saint-Louis may make as fine a show as he of Boulevard des Italiens, especially as there is nothing to prevent their having the same tailor.

We ought to say, however, that there is something more of the patriarchal rigidity of manners to be observed in the Marais than in other quarters of the capital. The people there close their shops a little earlier, and do not sit up quite so late as in the centre of the city; the young women are more submissive in their demeanor toward their parents, the young men do not as yet venture to appear in a salon when they exhale an odor of pipe or cigar. But these shades of difference are very slight, and, doubtless, will very soon blend with the general color.

The two messengers walked arm in arm. Sans-Cravate seemed deep in thought; he did not speak, but looked carefully on all sides, scrutinizing everybody who passed; he even tried to look into the shops; in every woman that he saw he fancied that he recognized Bastringuette, whom he had ceased to love, as he believed, but of whom he constantly thought. That is a very poor way of ceasing to love a person.

Jean Ficelle whistled and sang and smoked, and tried to enliven his comrade. But he barely replied, and often without rhyme or reason, which proved that he was not listening. Jean Ficelle tried frequently to stop him. When they passed a wine shop, he would say:

"Shan't we go in and take a glass? the glass of friendship! no one refuses that."

But Sans-Cravate refused; he walked on, saying:

"Later—in a minute—I don't want to drink now."

"You're getting to be a devilish queer kind of a friend," growled Jean Ficelle; "you make me travel all over Paris dry—do you want me to catch the pip, like a turkey?"

At last they reached Rue Barbette, and Sans-Cravate pointed out to his comrade a small fruit shop at some little distance.

"That's where Bastringuette's cousin lives."

"That one-eyed fruit stall?"

"To be sure, as she keeps it."

"Well, let's go in and see if your girl's there."

"I wouldn't like to have her think I'm watching her. Do you go by alone, and look in; the shop is very small, and you can easily see all the people that are in it; I'll wait here for you."

"All right. I'll be skirmisher."

He left Sans-Cravate standing at the entrance of a passageway, and walked toward the fruit stall at a mincing gait. He passed the shop twice, looking in both times, then returned to Sans-Cravate.

"There's no more Bastringuette than there is crabs in the fruit store," he said. "Your doll ain't there."

"Perhaps you didn't look closely."

"Oh! yes, I did; it ain't hard to do. There's nobody there except the proprietor, and an old woman who wants carrots, I fancy, for she was hauling 'em all over."

"I want to see for myself."

And Sans-Cravate walked toward the fruit stall, in his turn. Jean Ficelle followed him, still whistling. When they had passed the shop, Sans-Cravate stopped, and muttered with a distressed expression:

"She ain't there!"

"Pardieu! I knew it. I've got eyes like a falcon, I have. But I don't see what made you think Bastringuette was there. Your wench wouldn't have rigged herself out in her prettiest togs to go to a paltry shop where they sell burned onions and old Brie cheese. When a woman dresses up, it means that she's going to meet a man she wants to catch; you don't need to be a chemist to see that."

"Yes, yes, you are right."

"Oh! I know the world, my boy. Sometimes I don't say nothing, but I think a lot. But what's to hinder your going into the shop and asking if Bastringuette's been there to-day?"

"No; she'd find out that I'd been looking for her; she'd think that I care what she does. I won't do it."

"It seems to me, she wouldn't be far out of the way if she thought that."

"I tell you, I don't love her any more—I hate her; but I'd like to catch her with the other one, just so's to say: 'You're a pair of curs, and I despise you!'—and that's all. I tell you, Jean Ficelle, no woman will ever be anything to me after this; they're too treacherous; I won't have any more mistresses, I swear!"

"Don't swear—that's nonsense! Look you, I'll give you another comparison: when a woman has a pretty cat, she always says when she's patting him and kissing him: 'If I lose this one, I swear I'll never have another.' —But what happens? her cat dies or gets lost, and in a little while she's sure to get another one, and says just the same about him that she did about the first one. Now, you see, women say just the same thing about their lovers that they do about their cats. 'If this one leaves me, I'll never have another.'—And when their lover leaves 'em, they always take another, just as they do a cat. Well! when a man says: 'I won't have any more mistresses, because mine has played tricks on me,' it's just the same story."

"But I have some character, some strength of will!" cried Sans-Cravate; "and to prove that I don't mean to think of Bastringuette any more, I'm going to drink and gamble and enjoy myself—go on a spree with my friends."

"Well, well! good enough! that's what I call talking! Come along, I'll take you to the rendezvous of the *Francs-Lapins*. You'll find some friends there you can depend on. Have you got any cash?"

"Yes, I still have six or seven francs left of what Monsieur Albert gave me last night."

"We must spend 'em! Anyway, we can't do any more work to-day; it's too late, and you need amusement, and so do I. Forward—and as we go along, I'll teach you a drinking song that goes to the tune of *Partant pour la Syrie*, with an accompaniment of tongs beating a kettle; it has a fine effect at dessert."

Sans-Cravate took his companion's arm. It was evident that he was doing his utmost to overcome his chagrin and to appear hilarious. Jean Ficelle, who believed himself to be an excellent singer, had already begun the song with which he proposed to entertain his friend, when, as they turned out of Rue Barbette into Vieille Rue du Temple, a young man, who wore a round hat, and whose dress, while not fashionable, was that of a respectable bourgeois, walked rapidly by them. He seemed much preoccupied, and did not notice the two messengers. But they looked at him and recognized him, and Jean Ficelle triumphantly exclaimed:

"Well! what did I tell you? Was I mistaken? You've seen him yourself. That was Paul, dressed like a swell."

"Yes, it was him, that's sure! I can't get over it!"

"And do you see how proud he is when he's dressed up like that? he passed close to us, and pretended not to know us. What does it all mean? is that a messenger's dress? Anyone would swear he was a drummer. You see yourself that there's something crooked, some mystery."

Sans-Cravate was not listening, for he had run after Paul; although the younger man walked very rapidly, Sans-Cravate soon overtook and passed him; then, planting himself in front of him, he barred his passage, saying in a bantering tone which ill concealed his anger:

"Where are you going so fast? *Bigre!* seems to me, you're dressed mighty fine for a messenger who stands on the street corner to do errands."

Paul was thunderstruck when he recognized Sans-Cravate; but he strove to overcome his annoyance, and replied:

"I am not doing errands to-day, and when a man isn't working he is free to dress as he pleases."

"That may be! but, still, nobody ever meets us in such a rig, not even on Sunday."

"No," said Jean Ficelle, who had overtaken his two confrères, and joined in the conversation with a bantering leer; "no! we ain't so stylish as that! Gad! what a swell! Paul must have some other trade that pays better than ours, to wear such togs! And think how stingy he is with us, never willing to treat his friends to a glass!"

"I do what I choose! I am not accountable to anyone for my actions," retorted Paul, with an angry glance at Jean Ficelle; "I don't play the spy on other people, and I care mighty little what is thought of me by people who had better learn to behave themselves, first of all!"

With that, Paul hurried away, while the two messengers looked at each other with a disappointed expression.

"What an insolent brat he is, the little foundling!" cried Jean Ficelle; "don't that deserve a hiding—when a puppy without any father or mother puts on airs like that? He insulted you again."

"Me?" said Sans-Cravate, in surprise; "how did he insult me, I'd like to know?"

"Didn't you hear what he said: 'There are people who had better learn how to behave themselves before they spy on other people?'—He looked at you when he said that."

"I thought you was the one he was looking at."

"Oh, no! He spotted you."

"Well, one thing's certain, and that is that Paul isn't with Bastringuette, and that I was wrong to think they were together."

Sans-Cravate seemed less distressed; it was evident that his jealousy had partly disappeared. But Jean Ficelle rejoined, with a shrug:

"They ain't together now—that's true. But what is there to prove that they didn't separate just now? Perhaps Bastringuette ain't so far away. I have my ideas. See, I'll give you a comparison: it's like the way a cat insists on staying in a garret because he smells mice there; it's no use to try to drive him out——"

"*Sacrédié!* Jean Ficelle, you tire me with your comparisons! Come, let's go and see the *Francs-Lapins;* we are going to spree it a bit, you know. I'm all ready."

Instead of complying, Jean Ficelle pointed to a house with a passage, on the left, and said:

"That's where our fine gentleman came from; and perhaps we might be able to find out where he'd been."

"You think Paul came out of that house, you say?" said Sans-Cravate, walking in that direction.

"Yes, yes, I'm sure of it. I was looking straight ahead, and there was no one coming. And all of a sudden someone came out of that passage, and it was him."

Sans-Cravate stopped in front of the house, and finally decided to enter the passageway, which was rather dark,

with no sign of a concierge's quarters. Jean Ficelle followed his comrade, and, after examining the passage for a moment, they walked toward a dark, winding staircase at the rear.

"Shall we go up?" said Jean Ficelle.

"Where shall we go? Who shall we ask for?"

"*Dame!* I don't know. But we can act as if we'd made a mistake. We'll ask for a midwife for a woman who's in a great hurry for one. How's that for a game! Or we can ask if Monsieur Paul, ex-messenger, lives in the house."

"No, no!" cried Sans-Cravate, going back into the street. "After all, Paul was right when he said we ought not to play the spy on him, that he's free to do what he pleases. I have a feeling that it's a mean business to try to find out people's secrets. I don't like the job at all. Let's go."

Jean Ficelle said no more, but followed his comrade, in evident ill humor, turning his head every minute to look at the house they had just left. Suddenly he seized Sans-Cravate, who was a little ahead of him, by the arm, and exclaimed in a shrill voice:

"Look! there you have Paul's secret—coming out of that passageway. Ah! I'd have bet my life on it!"

Sans-Cravate turned, and saw Bastringuette come out of the house they had just left and turn into Rue Barbette. The tall girl walked quite slowly, and stopped for a moment to take out her handkerchief and wipe her eyes, as if she had been crying; then she walked on.

Sans-Cravate had ample time to examine her; there was no doubt that it was she. He even recognized the silk handkerchief she took from her pocket, for it was a present he had given her. He could not take his eyes

from his mistress; his face flushed, and his whole frame shook convulsively.

"It's her," he muttered; "in the same house with him. There's no mystery now—they were together, that's clear as day, the traitors! and, of course, to-day ain't the first time they've met there!"

He started to run after Bastringuette, who had not seen him; and Jean Ficelle, who hoped there would be a scene, rubbed his hands and smiled to himself. But his hope was soon crushed; Sans-Cravate stopped, making a mighty effort to restrain his passion, and retraced his steps.

"No," he said, "I won't go after her; for I might forget myself. When I'm angry, I don't know what I'm doing, and I might do some harm. No; let's go in the other direction!"

"Pardieu! suppose you did give her a beating—a jade that deceived you—I don't see where there'd be any great harm done! Why shouldn't you take that little satisfaction?"

But Sans-Cravate was not listening; he had walked away, and was already at some distance. Jean Ficelle finally decided to follow him, saying to himself:

"Never mind; he's out for good with his wench, and I'm quite sure the young fellow will get what he deserves, when there's a good chance. Then Sans-Cravate will consent to come and play a little game with his friends, and I'll fleece him at *table-basse* or *biribi*."

XV

THE DRESSMAKERS

Imagine eight young women assembled in a large room, called an *atelier** probably because it contains no furniture except a very broad and long table and some chairs.

On the table, which might be considered a counter as well, were scattered different fabrics—silk, linen, cotton, and muslin; there was a great number of small pieces, cut in different shapes; there were dresses just begun, others almost finished, others still in the piece; and there were ribbons, fringes, lace, and a multitude of the odds and ends used by dressmakers, who have the art of imparting grace and value to all such things; we men do very wrong to laugh at them, for they take so much pains with their work solely to please us; and if women were not coquettish, we should be the ones most taken in.

The eight girls were seated around the *travail*—that is the name now given to the large cutting table; it used to be called *établi*, but that word is now used only by working people; and you must remember that a dressmaker is not a workgirl, but an artist in dresses.

The young women were from fifteen to twenty-eight years of age, the average being about twenty-two. Some were very pretty, some exceedingly ugly, and some had faces of the type which does not attract attention, but which often pleases because it possesses what is commonly

* *Atelier*—usually, an artist's studio; also, workroom.

called *la beauté du diable*—that is to say, youth. If the devil always retains that element of beauty, he is a very fortunate fellow; and we know a great number of ladies, once beautiful, who would be well content to-day with the *beauté du diable*.

They were all sewing more or less busily, which fact did not prevent their talking. Some had their faces bent over their work, and took little part in the conversation; but there were several who talked constantly, who were unwilling to keep silent even when one of the others tried to tell something, and who, by talking very loudly, succeeded in making themselves heard above all the rest. At times, this produced a din of voices by no means pleasant to the ear; indeed, it was not unworthy of the name of *charivari*.

Young Elina was one of the eight; she was incontestably one of the prettiest of them, also one of those who spoke least; she was superior to her companions in every respect.

One of the others, whose ugliness was most noticeable, and whose duty it seemed to be to overlook the work, doubtless because she had no love affairs to distract her thoughts, was also one of those whose mouths were almost never closed. But a tall damsel of twenty-four, whose face was not without charm and intelligence, but who was open to the reproach of being somewhat too free in her speech and manner and expression, ran a close second to the forewoman. A stenographer would have had much difficulty in following those two when they were in a talking mood, so to speak; and they almost always were.

Now, let us listen to the conversation, and try, amid all that chaos, to discover its subject and purport.

"What have you done with the gray silk, Mademoiselle Laura?"

"It's under your nose, you big goose; your nose is so long, you could touch it with it."

Mademoiselle Laura was the tall young woman we have mentioned; as she worked and talked, she kept her hips in motion as if she were dancing the *cachucha*. The forewoman's name was Mademoiselle Frotard, and she who had asked for the silk was a stout girl whose intelligence seemed to have been entirely absorbed by her corpulence; her name was Julienne, but her companions took the liberty of calling her Julie, Jules, and sometimes *Potage*. She had an excellent disposition and never lost her temper.

"Who's got the pink satin?"

"That will be a handsome dress—satin and velvet. Is it for a duchess?"

"Oh, no! it's for an actress at the Opéra-Comique; they dress ever so much better than the great ladies."

"Speaking of the Opéra-Comique, they say that there's boxes there with salons; is that so, Mamzelle Laura?"

"Well, rather, nephew."

"Come, come, mesdemoiselles, we must work and not idle so; here's a wedding dress that must be done to-morrow; Madame Dumanchon has promised it."

"It seems to me, we work well enough, mademoiselle; we don't take our eyes off our work. What more do you expect us to do? We haven't got twenty fingers!"

"That's all right, Mademoiselle Augustine; do you think I don't see you laughing and looking at Euphémie, who can't do anything but laugh? Humph! how stupid it is to laugh all the time, at the least thing—and often without knowing why!"

"I never laugh without knowing what I'm laughing at, mademoiselle! You're mistaken; I know very well what I'm laughing at."

"Well, tell us what it was that amused you so just now."

"Just now? why, I looked up and saw Jujules gaping and trying to sneeze at the same time; and she made up such an absurd face! Ha! ha! ha! she looked exactly like the milkwoman's donkey at the corner of the street."

"I, look like a donkey!"

"Hush, Potage, you haven't got the floor! I belch it from you, as an ancient orator said."

"Oh! Mademoiselle Laura, for heaven's sake, be a little more decent in your language; you often say things that ought not be said in a workroom of young ladies; Madame Dumanchon don't like it, and she holds me responsible."

"What's that? what are you singing to us? You accuse me of being indecent just because I say: 'I belch it from you'! That's a little rough, on my word! if you read the least bit of history, you'd know that anecdote, which isn't the least bit immoral, Mademoiselle Frotard; and for all you're so squeamish to-day, I've heard you sometimes fire words at us—I don't know where you picked 'em up, but they were a little tough."

"I, fire words at you!—Oh! if I went to the Bal Saint-Georges, like you, I might learn some very pretty things; but I defy anyone to say they ever saw me in such places."

"It's just as well you don't go; what would you do there? you probably wouldn't be invited to dance! and that would make you sick. By the way, let me tell you that the Bal Saint-Georges is a very nice place; the company there's a very good sort, and I pride myself on being one of the most regular attendants at these

Ball-Clubs, as the wrinkled old *gentlemen* call 'em, who go there to dance the *anglaise* and other national jigs."

"Where's the piece of velvet I just put down here? Have any of you taken it, mesdemoiselles?"

"You've got it in your dress."

"So I have; great heaven! what was I thinking about?"

"Ha! ha! she sticks things in her bosom and then goes looking for 'em! She'll end by looking for her nose."

"And she won't find it; she's flat-nosed."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Good! there goes Euphémie again!"

"Bless my soul! how can I help laughing, when you say such silly things?"

"Look at Elina—she don't laugh, and she don't keep her tongue clacking; so she gets ahead with her skirt."

"Oh! Elina's preoccupied; she's been very pensive for some time; that's why she don't talk."

"I didn't suppose I was forbidden to think," rejoined little Elina gravely, and without raising her eyes.

"Of course not; thoughts are free, and they use their freedom! they're very lucky, our thoughts are; they can travel, they can run about the fields and go into whatever company they choose; while we have to sit here, planted on our chairs, and sew all day long! God! what fun! When shall I have a million a year, so that I can coddle myself and sleep and eat méringues all day? Oh! méringues—they're a high-toned delicacy, I tell you!"

"What are they made of?" asked stout Julienne, looking at Laura, who replied with the utmost seriousness:

"Preserved snails. The next time you go into a confectioner's, ask him for a snail méringue, and see how good it is!"

THE DRESSMAKERS' WORKROOM

The eight girls were seated around the travail . . . *Some were very pretty, some exceedingly ugly, and some had faces of the type which does not attract attention, but which often pleases because it possesses what is commonly called* la beauté du diable—*that is to say, youth.*

"Come, come, mesdemoiselles, we mustn't talk so much. Madame will soon be back, and this ball dress don't get on at all; and, you know, we still have two wedding dresses to finish this week."

"Two wedding dresses! Everybody seems to be getting married! I don't know why nobody marries me;—and you, Julienne, wouldn't you like to get married?"

"Me? oh, no, mademoiselle! on the contrary, I'd hate it."

"You would? Why, pray?"

"Because my cousin told me that when you're married you can't sleep alone any more; and I like to kick my legs about in bed, and I know it would bother me to have someone with me."

"Oh! what a simpleton you are, big Julienne! you sleep with your husband, and that don't prevent your kicking your legs about—not by any means!"

"How do you know that, Mamzelle Laura? Are you married?"

Mademoiselle Laura contented herself with an impatient gesture, muttering:

"Do let me finish; you disturb me when I am trying to make Turkish points. Oh! what a sigh Elina just gave! Haven't you finished moving, young dreamer?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; it was all done this morning."

"Ah! that's why you came later than usual?"

"I spoke to Mademoiselle Frotard about it."

"Who moved you? Was it Sans-Cravate, the Lovelace of the cooks of the neighborhood?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Then it must have been his mate—Jean Ficelle. He's a very clever youth. I sent him once to carry a letter to someone, on important business, and I saw that he

was full of intelligence.—Pass me the Scotch thread, Sophie."

"Oh! mesdemoiselles, you know very well that Elina has a messenger she always patronizes—one Paul, who puts on airs when we pass, which I consider altogether too cheeky; I propose to tell that young man of the people what I think of him some fine day!"

"Isn't a messenger as good as other men?" muttered little Elina, angrily. "Why hasn't he the right to look at us?"

"As good as other men! a messenger!" cried a young woman with an affected manner, a mocking smile, and a shrill voice; "fellows who live on street corners or in wine shops! Great God! if one of them should presume to stare at me very long, I'd soon show him his place."

"What nonsense!" said stout Julienne; "they're always in their place!"

"You see, I haven't any low tastes. I wouldn't go out with a man who didn't have gloves and trouser-straps!"

"Oho! she reminds me of that tall Hélène who used to work here, and had the brass to say to us: 'I don't go with any men but those that have red morocco boot tops; I don't have anything to say to a man who has black leather ones, because they don't go with patent-leather boots.'"

"I didn't know that honest men were canaille," retorted Elina, flushing with anger; "I thought no one was ever called by that name but villains and rascals."

"Hallo! here's Elina showing fight!" cried Laura; "*dame!* you attacked her on a sensitive spot. Bah! I've broken my needle; that's the fifth one to-day. That makes Euphémie laugh. It's very funny, ain't it?"

"Ha! ha! ha! five needles [*aiguilles*]! I thought she said five eels [*anguilles*]!"

"Oh! my dear, eels don't break; you can do whatever you please with eels—even to making a *matelote*."

"I know a song about 'em," said Julienne, "where it's said that eels are like young girls."

"The deuce! Potage has made me prick myself," rejoined Mademoiselle Laura; "she refers to something they sing at the Opéra-Comique:

"'Eels and young girls alike,
All's fish that comes to my net.'

There you have it; I heard it in *Mazaniello;* and that's a mighty fine opera, I tell you! I saw it at a theatre in the suburbs, where they had three supers to represent the Neapolitan populace in revolt; one of the three was a little old man of fifty or sixty, with a red cap, who kept running into the wings to turn up a lamp that threatened to go out, and finally took the lamp down altogether and held it in his hands during the grand final chorus, of which the words were:

"'Death, death to the tyrants!'

I believe. And when he was singing, as he was anxious to put spirit into it, he waved the lamp as if he was threatening the audience, so it seemed as if he intended to kill the tyrants with lamp oil. At last, right in the middle of the chorus, one of the three musicians who composed the orchestra stood up and shouted, as mad as you please: '*Sacrédié!* Monsieur Fiston, don't hold your arm out so far; you're throwing oil on me! My coat's all spotted! Is it the fashion now to sing in opera with a lamp in your hand?'—Mon Dieu! I never laughed so much in all my life!"

"What a lucky creature that Laura is! she goes to the theatre very often."

"Oh! I used to go much oftener. I had an acquaintance who stuffed me with tickets and all sorts of delicacies."

"A gentleman?"

"To be sure—and a very pretty fellow he was. I never saw a man wear his cravat so jauntily; he used to tie it in the most enticing rosette——"

"Mademoiselle Laura, you're beginning to say improper things again!"

"Pshaw! Mademoiselle Frotard, is there any law against my knowing a good-looking man? I believe I have a right to have known more than one; I'm twenty-four; I don't make any secret of my age, and I don't play the prude. I certainly don't claim to be a perfect innocent——"

"I'd like to see those boxes with salons; I shan't be happy till I've been in one."

"You must get your lover to take you, some day when he's in funds."

"My lover's never in funds; I don't know what he does with his money; he wouldn't treat me to a glass of cider! He pretends that he puts every sou in the savings bank against the time we get married."

"Believe that and drink water, my poor Sophie!—Pins, please."

"The large scissors."

"Here they are."

"However, he took me to the theatre once, because somebody'd given him the tickets. That day, I remember, we dined in my room, on very little, and I was very hungry at the theatre; it was a theatre on the boulevard, and the play was a long melodrama. At half-past eleven

we still had four acts to see. But in the play, where the scene was a farmhouse, and peasants coming home from work, all of a sudden they brought on a big wooden bowl and went to eating cabbage soup. It was real cabbage soup, I can tell you, and it was smoking hot and smelt awful good. Imagine the effect it produced on us, hungry as we were!—'I've a good mind to apply at once to be admitted to the chorus,' I says to Oscar; but he had already got up and opened the door of the box, where we were all alone, and called the opener; when she came, I heard him say: 'Madame, my wife's in a situation where it ain't safe to refuse her anything—a situation in which women are subject to the strangest whims and the most extraordinary desires; you understand what I mean—she's enceinte. Well, after a dinner fit for the angels, at Véry's, here she is acting like a madwoman because she smells the cabbage soup they're eating on the stage. She wants some of it, says she must have it, and threatens me with a plate of soup as offspring if I don't satisfy her craving. Isn't there some way of doing it, madame? there's no sacrifice I'm not capable of making to prevent my wife's giving me a cabbage for a son.'—The opener, hoping to be handsomely paid, replied: 'Never fear, monsieur; I'll just go down and tell 'em at the office, and they'll send word on to the stage; your wife shall have some cabbage soup, I promise you.' —'A thousand thanks, madame,' says Oscar. 'Please go and ask for a lot of it at once, for in her present condition, when we dine at a restaurant, my wife always eats soup enough for four, and it doesn't do her a bit of harm.'—The box opener went off, and Oscar came back to his seat. You can judge whether I wanted to laugh. 'Keep quiet,' says my lover, 'and try to look as if you

were in the condition I said you were; we are going to sup at the expense of the management; it won't hurt them, and it will give us great pleasure.'—And, sure enough, in a few minutes the opener came into the box with a pretty little soup tureen, a deep plate, and a spoon, which she offered me with a most amiable smile.—'Madame shall have all she wants,' she says; 'they've filled the tureen, so that madame can satisfy her craving.'—'You are a thousand times too good,' says Oscar; 'but I hope that you will be satisfied with me, too.'—With that, the woman bows to the ground, and goes off, shutting the door behind her. No sooner were we alone, than Oscar filled the plate for me, but kept the spoon and began to gulp down all that was left in the tureen; as there was only one spoon, I had to wait till he'd finished before I could eat my plateful; but the soup was fine, I assure you. When we had finished, Oscar called the box opener again, and gave her the tureen and plate and spoon.—'Would you believe that my wife would eat it all!' he says. 'It's incredible what feats a woman in her condition will perform!'—The opener said that she was delighted that I had satisfied my craving, and off she went again with the things we had given back to her. As soon as she was out of sight, my lover says to me: 'Put on your hat and shawl, and be all ready to go.'—Then he looked out in the corridor, but was flabbergasted to see our box opener sitting there in her chair; she had given the things to a lemonade boy to carry back to the stage. Oscar swore between his teeth, but as he was one of the kind that's never embarrassed, he says: 'Wait till the end of the next act.'—The act ended very soon; then he motioned to me to get up, I took his arm, and we went out of the box. I leaned on him as

if it was very hard for me to walk. As we passed the opener, Oscar says to her: 'What do you suppose it is now, madame? this wife of mine insists on having an ice. Gad! what strange ideas Nature has!'—'But, monsieur, you could just as well have had it brought to your box.'—'True, but I think it won't do my wife any harm to have a breath of air. Keep our seats for us, madame; is it a long intermission?'—'Not very, monsieur.'—'Come, then, my dear love; let's make haste, for I'm very much interested in the play, and I don't want to lose a scene. Be sure and keep our box for us, madame.'—With that, Oscar pulled me along, and we left the theatre, with not the slightest desire to return. The box opener didn't even get the price of the cricket she had pushed under my feet. And that's the only time my lover ever treated me."

Mademoiselle Sophie's anecdote greatly amused the young dressmaking apprentices. Mademoiselle Euphémie could not control her outbursts of laughter, and the corpulent Julienne cried:

"But it would have been much more convenient for eating, if they'd had a box with a salon. There must be plates and glasses in those boxes."

"They even have a kitchen at one side," said tall Laura, "with everything you need to roast a joint."

"Oh! what fun it must be to see a play and turn the spit at the same time!"

"Mon Dieu! how you do chatter to-day, mesdemoiselles! If this nonsense goes on, we shan't be able to deliver our orders."

"Talking don't prevent sewing, mademoiselle."

"We haven't any reason to be dismal," said the girl with the affected manners.—"By the way, mesdemoiselles, I saw our old comrade Léonie yesterday. She had the

arm of a man who didn't have any style at all—and who was dressed like a messenger!"

"Ah! some women have such vile taste!"

"They stoop so low!"

"There are some who wouldn't blush to love a bootblack."

"A messenger and a bootblack are the same thing."

"Do you think so, Euphémie?"

"To be sure; when you want to have your shoes polished, you go up to a messenger and put your foot on his *crochets*, and he's obliged to polish 'em right away."

"Indeed! but what if he don't have any polish?"

"That don't make any difference. Besides, those fellows always do have; they lend their things to each other."

"I must treat myself to a shine, then. Two sous is enough to pay, and I'll have my shoes shined by young Paul, the messenger who plays the swell."

Little Elina said nothing, but held her head still lower over her work; for her eyes were full of tears, she was choking with vexation and anger, and she did not want them to see her weep.

Luckily, Madame Dumanchon's arrival put an end to this conversation. When their mistress was present, the girls dared not talk or laugh or sing; they had to content themselves with looking at one another from time to time, and making signs or wry faces.

Elina left the workroom with a heavy heart and eyes still red with weeping.

"Mon Dieu! how spiteful those girls are!" she said to herself. "But what would they say if they knew that poor Paul, whom they sneer at so, is also a foundling? But all that doesn't prevent my loving him, for I'm sure that he's honest and good, and that he loves me. Oh!

his voice rang so true when he told me. And it seems to me that, for all his humble condition, he has better manners and expresses himself better than any of the men who come to speak to the girls sometimes."

To help her to forget the chagrin she had felt in the workroom, she hurried across the street to say good-night to Paul before returning to her aunt's. But her hope was disappointed: Paul was not in his place, and, having looked about to see if she could discover him anywhere, Elina sadly went home, flattering herself that she would have better luck the next day.

The next day came; Elina, who had slept very little and dreamed a great deal,—which seems, at first glance, a difficult feat, yet happens not infrequently,—descended from her loft, dressed with care, looked at herself in her mirror oftener than usual, to make sure that her hair was becomingly arranged, and left the house, saying in reply to her aunt, who asked her where she was going so early, that there was a press of work, and that Madame Dumanchon had urged them to come in good season.

"There ought not to be many people in the street as yet," thought Elina, as she went downstairs; "and we shall have time to talk a little. I am sure he's as anxious for a little talk as I am."

She walked rapidly from her home to the dressmaker's, and when she reached the corner of the boulevard glanced toward Paul's usual stand; but he was not there, and there were no *crochets* or jacket to indicate that he had been there.

"It seems that he is less eager to see me than I am to see him," murmured Elina, with a sigh. "But he may have business this morning, some errand a long way off—so that it isn't his fault that he isn't here. Oh, yes! that

must be it, for it isn't possible that he doesn't want to see me this morning."

Reflecting that it was still very early to go to her work, the girl walked some distance along the boulevard, then returned to the corner of Rue du Helder. Paul had not arrived, but his two comrades, Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle, were in their places.

Elina hesitated, walked away a few steps, then returned to the boulevard, saying to herself:

"But I haven't bought anything yet for my breakfast and dinner; still, I must live to-day, so I will go and buy something; meanwhile, he will come; as his comrades have arrived, he must be here soon."

She walked along the boulevard, going from one shop to another, hesitating between the pastry-cook and the grocer, between a loaf of bread and some *galette*, between honey and jam, in order to spend more time about it and to give Paul an opportunity to arrive. But she had to make up her mind at last. She returned to Rue du Helder with a portion of *galette*, which she had no desire to taste; but Paul was not in his place. She must needs resign herself to the necessity of going to her work without speaking to Paul, without even catching a glimpse of him.

All day long, her feet itched; she tried to invent pretexts for going out, she offered to do all the errands; but her zeal was unrewarded, she was not sent out; and the more eagerness she manifested, the more determined Mademoiselle Frotard seemed to be that she should not go. So that she was compelled to wait until evening.

As soon as the hour for ceasing work had come, she went away among the first; and when she reached the street, she gazed anxiously about. But her heart fell, her hope vanished; Paul was not there.

To be unable to see the person whom one loves best, to have no idea where he is, or what is the cause of his absence—is not that enough to make one exceedingly unhappy, and have we not all had that experience? Profound discouragement and gloom seize upon our hearts at such times, and it seems to us that all is lost, that our happy days have vanished, never to return.

In this frame of mind, Elina returned to her aunt's; she could find no hope elsewhere than in her little loft, because there everything spoke to her of Paul, because it was there that he had first told her that he loved her.

The next day, Elina rose as early, dressed even more quickly, and hastily left the house. She was no more fortunate than on the preceding day: the young messenger was not in his place; she loitered about and waited, to no purpose; nor did she see him that evening, when she left her work.

A week passed thus, a week which seemed endless to Elina, who was utterly unable to understand Paul's disappearance, and did not know what to think; but her heart was oppressed by anxiety and the keenest sorrow. At last, on the ninth day, when she arrived at Rue du Helder in the morning and looked in vain for Paul, the girl could no longer endure the tortures she was suffering, and accosted Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle, who were seated side by side.

"I wanted to speak to your comrade—Monsieur Paul," she said, in a trembling voice; "doesn't he stand here any more?"

"You can see for yourself," replied Sans-Cravate, with his usual gruffness, intensified by the anger he felt whenever he heard Paul's name.

Elina was going away, afraid to ask any further questions, when Jean Ficelle said to her, in a wheedling tone:

"If mademoiselle wanted someone to do an errand or carry a letter, or anything else, I am at her service, and I can do what's wanted as well as the one she asks for."

"I thank you," replied Elina, "but I didn't ask for Monsieur Paul, to do an errand; that is to say, it was about something I asked him to do; he was to bring me an answer—and I haven't seen him for a week."

"Sure enough, mamzelle; he hasn't been in his place for as long as that."

"And you don't know what keeps him away? Perhaps he is sick?"

Jean Ficelle replied, with a cunning smile:

"Oh, no! that ain't the reason he ain't here."

"It isn't? Why, do you know what the reason is?"

"*Dame!* we have our suspicions. In the first place, perhaps he ain't a messenger any longer; he had more than one trade."

"More than one trade? What do you mean?"

"Oh! there's something mysterious about it; he's a man of mystery, is your Monsieur Paul."

"I don't understand."

"The fellow didn't tell everything he did, you see; and then, there may be another reason. As the young joker has stolen Sans-Cravate's mistress, he's afraid of getting a licking, and dursn't come and stand beside him—see?"

"And he does well," muttered Sans-Cravate, clenching his fists; "for a man can't always control himself; and, *sacrédié!* he'd better look out! I've got a score to settle with him, all the more because he was my friend; and when you hate your friends, you hate 'em worse than you do anybody else."

Elina had turned very pale; she gazed at the two messengers in turn, but could not speak, for what she had heard seemed to have deprived her of strength and voice alike; not until several minutes had elapsed did she succeed in faltering:

"What! Monsieur Paul—has stolen—the mistress of—of—— Oh, no! no! that is impossible!"

"Impossible!" sneered Jean Ficelle. "Ah! my pretty creature, you don't know men yet, and you don't know what they're capable of. But we're sure of what we say; we caught the thief in the market, as the saying is. Look you, I'll give you a comparison——"

"No, monsieur, no! I don't care what you say!" replied the girl, paying no heed to Jean Ficelle's comparison; "I am perfectly sure that that isn't true!"

With that, Elina turned away, putting her handkerchief to her eyes to wipe away her tears; for she was profoundly afflicted, although she refused to believe that Paul was guilty.

Sans-Cravate looked after her with interest as she walked away.

"Poor girl!" he said; "she don't believe he's unfaithful; she still has confidence in him, she refuses to abandon it; that's a fine thing, I tell you."

And a gleam of serenity appeared on the messenger's brow as he asked himself if he were not doing wrong not to imitate the girl. But Jean Ficelle exclaimed:

"*Ouiche!* she has confidence in him, you say? Not much! It was self-esteem made her say that, but she ran off crying like a baby."

Sans-Cravate resumed his preoccupied air, and Jean Ficelle began to whistle.

XVI

THE HUNT FOR TOBIE

Albert desired to see the beautiful cashmere shawl belonging to Madame Plays, the mate to which Madame Baldimer was so desirous to own. But in order to see the shawl, it was necessary to see her who wore it, and the young man was not certain whether it would be well for him to call on Madame Plays; after the slightly unceremonious way in which he had ceased his relations with her, sending Tobie as his substitute, he had reason to fear that he might not be warmly welcomed; indeed, he was not at all certain that his messenger had been well received, for when Pigeonnier returned from his interview, Albert was losing money at bouillotte, and was somewhat heated by the punch, so that he had paid no attention to the little fellow's answers on the subject of his rendezvous.

Albert concluded that the best way to find out whether Tobie had fully taken his place in the heart of the superb Plays was to go and ask him. But to do that it was necessary to know his address. Tobie had said several times that he lived on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins; but that is a long street, and Albert felt no inclination to enter every house and ask for Monsieur Pigeonnier.

He was musing upon this subject on the day following his visit to Madame Baldimer, as he sauntered along the Boulevard des Italiens, as usual, with a cigar in his mouth,

when he spied his friend Célestin, who at once came to meet him and held out his hand.

"Good-morning! how are you?"

"Very well."

"And the love affairs?"

"Oh! not in bad shape."

"I'll bet that you have seen Madame Baldimer again."

"You would not lose. I saw her at her house yesterday; she had given me a rendezvous. My affair is progressing, and on her return from the country, where she has gone for a few days, I hope that your friend will have nothing more to wish for."

"Good! I congratulate you."

There was a touch of irony in Monsieur Célestin's felicitations of his friend. Albert paid little attention to it, because he was accustomed to Célestin's manner, which always suggested that he was laughing at the person to whom he was speaking. That is a very clever way of concealing one's lack of merit—to pose as a scoffer or a *blagueur*, which are much the same thing.

"I am very glad to see you; perhaps you can help me to find the person I want to see."

"If you are looking for a faithful woman, I should find it very hard to direct you to one; for I don't know any."

"No, not that; I simply want to know Tobie Pigeonnier's address."

"The deuce! that's almost as hard to find as the other. In the first place, is it quite certain that little Tobie has any address? I believe he contents himself with perching, like the birds; he lights now here, now there."

"Let's not joke; he told us that he lived on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins."

"True; but at what number?"

"Ah! that I don't know."

"It's very easy to say: 'I live on Rue de la Ferme-des-Mathurins, or Rue de la Paix, or Rue de Rivoli,'—when you confine yourself to that;—in that way, you can live in the most fashionable quarters of Paris. For my own part, I believe little Tobie has a nest in some closet on Rue du Pont-aux-Biches or Place du Chevalier-du-Guet. His hasty departure from our little party at Balivan's the night before last—after putting up a fetich for five hundred francs, that poor Varinet gave him change for—— Do you know, that looks rather shady to me. If he had lost the five hundred francs, it would be all right; you would say that it probably wasn't convenient for him to pay; but he lost only about fifty."

"Didn't he go to pay Varinet the next day?"

"I don't know, but I'll bet he didn't; however, we can soon find out, for there are Varinet and Balivan now, drinking chocolate at Tortoni's."

Albert and Célestin entered the café and accosted their friends, just as Balivan was dipping his cigar in the chocolate, thinking that it was a roll.

"Ah! here you are, you rakes!" cried Balivan; "have you been passing a night at the card table? What scandalous conduct! you are to blame for my not being able to do a stroke of work yesterday."

"But you are working hard to-day, Balivan. Upon my word, you are eating a fine cigar with your chocolate, instead of a roll!"

"Mon Dieu! so I am. Why do they make cigars of this shape? I took it for a *gaufre*,* and I adore *gaufres* in chocolate."

* A particular kind of roll.

"We came to ask you about young Tobie, messieurs. —Have you seen him since night before last, Monsieur Varinet?"

"Who in the devil is Monsieur Tobie?" queried the white-eyebrowed young man, in amazement.

"The individual of the fetich—the olive."

"Oh, yes! the man who put up an olive at five hundred francs."

"The same. Has he been to you to pay his debt and redeem his pledge?"

"No; and to prove it, I'll show you that I still have it in my purse."

Monsieur Varinet drew his purse and showed them the olive among some gold pieces; it had dried and had shrunk considerably.

"If you keep the thing much longer," said Balivan, "you'll have nothing left but the stone."

"Do you know Tobie's address, messieurs?" asked Albert.

"No," replied the painter; "if I knew it, I should have gone there before this to remind him of his fetich, which he has not redeemed. As it was at my rooms that he contracted that debt to Monsieur Varinet, whom he had never seen but once before, I consider it infernally ill-bred in him not to have paid up at once."

"Oh! I am not at all alarmed," said Varinet, calmly.

"But I must see this little Tobie," said Albert; "and I will not fail to remind him of his debt; for it would be exceedingly unpleasant for us to have Monsieur Varinet fall a victim to his confidence in a person whom he had reason to look upon as a friend of ours."

"What's all this? what friends are you talking about?" said the jovial Mouillot, as he joined the four young men

and shook hands with them. "I have just seen Dupétrain talking with a lady on Rue de Richelieu, messieurs; he had her backed up against a porte cochère, and, in my opinion, he was trying to magnetize her on the carriage stone."

"Ah! it's Mouillot!"

"How much did you win at bouillotte the night before last, Mouillot?"

"Six hundred and twenty francs; that's all."

"What a lucky dog he is! he always wins."

"Do you know Tobie's address, Mouillot?"

"Tobie's address? how should I know it? he never asks one to come and see him. When he invites his friends to breakfast, the mice will dance the cancan! By the way, has he redeemed his fetich?"

"No; Varinet hasn't seen him."

"Poor Varinet! that olive must be a little stale."

"So you don't know Monsieur Pigeonnier's address?"

"Not I."

"The first time that I had the honor of seeing the gentleman," said Varinet, swallowing a glass of water, "he told me that he was a commission merchant. If that is so, his name and address ought to be in the directory."

The other young men laughed heartily at Varinet's suggestion.

"Ha! ha! commission merchant!"

"That kind is never in the directory!"

"I'm not sure even that he's an unlicensed broker." *

"It's so easy in Paris to pretend to be what you are not!"

"There are many people who go so far as to assume names that don't belong to them."

* The word *marron*, in the original, has a significance here that cannot be well rendered in English. It means, variously: an interloper, a runaway, an unlicensed broker.

"And who often succeed in making dupes, under the shelter of an honorable name."

"What is there that is never stolen in Paris?"

Meanwhile, Monsieur Varinet, desiring to satisfy his mind on the subject, sent the waiter for a business directory; they consulted the bulky volume, but they sought in vain the name of Tobie Pigeonnier, and the tall young man with white eyebrows began to frown as he looked at his olive.

"Listen, messieurs," said Albert; "we must not allow Monsieur Varinet to fall a victim to his confidence in a person to whom he was introduced by us. I don't say that Tobie intends to deny his debt, nor do I think so; but, lest he forget it, I make this proposition—that we beat up Monsieur Pigeonnier, we four, who know the city pretty well. I will take the Chaussée d'Antin, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the Champs-Élysées."

"I, the Marais and the Palais-Royal quarter," said Balivan.

"I will look out for the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the boulevards," said Célestin.

"And I," cried Mouillot, "I go everywhere, in all directions, and I will take care of the rest. The first one who sees Tobie must capture him and take him to Varinet's house, or bring him here: this will be our general rendezvous. We will come here every morning to report the result of our search."

"Agreed; we will go Tobie-hunting."

"Tobie-hunting it is! Tally-ho!"

"But one suggestion, messieurs," said Mouillot; "I don't see why this hunt should interfere with our hunting grisettes also. How about your little neighbor, Balivan? She is really charming, do you know? What are you doing with her?"

"Oh! I assure you, messieurs, that young woman is very virtuous, and I don't advise you to think about her —it will be time thrown away."

"Virtuous!" repeated Célestin, with a shrug; "I thought you knew more than that about the sex, my dear artist! We found your little virtue in a dark loft, with a young rascal, who was holding her very tight—and for whom I have a rod in pickle; but he wasn't in his usual place this morning."

"Nonsense," said Albert; "you don't propose to fight with a messenger, I trust! and, after all, if he is her lover, he was quite right to defend the girl."

"Oho! here's Albert taking up the cudgels for the dressmaker! it's highly edifying.—I propose a wager, Mouillot: fifteen napoleons that I triumph first over that timid virtue."

"Done! I take the bet.—Are you in it, Albert?"

"No."

"Albert is too busily occupied elsewhere," said Célestin, in a mocking tone; "and, besides that, don't you see that he has set himself up as the defender of grisettes?"

"Messieurs," interposed Balivan, "I assure you that neither one of you will win. My neighbor won't listen to you."

"You'll see whether she will or not, artist. I will be persistent, I tell you; not so much on account of the girl, as to be revenged on that cur who played the insolent with us. He does our errands, and he dares to talk back to us! upon my word, it is sickening!"

The young men had left the café and were about to separate, when Bastringuette passed them on the boulevard, with her flowers.

"There's Bastringuette!" exclaimed Albert; "parbleu! she is always out of doors—she must help us in our hunt for Tobie."

"True, she can act as beater," said Mouillot.

The young men walked toward the flower girl, and halted in front of her. Bastringuette looked up at them.

"Mon Dieu!" she ejaculated; "what a bunch of customers to fall on me all at once! What luck for me! for I haven't sold anything to-day. Buy my flowers, messieurs; I have something to put in your buttonholes."

"Bastringuette," said Albert, "do you remember the young man who was with us the day before yesterday on the boulevard? the one who thrust his nose into all your bouquets to smell them better?"

"You mean a fat little fellow with a face that looked like a painting, and a small glass in one eye?"

"That's the man, you know him."

"Well, we are hunting him."

"Is he a stag?"

"Yes; we are even afraid that he's a kite!" *

"A kite! and you want to hitch something to his tail, so that he'll go up straighter."

"Ha! ha! ha! On the contrary, we're running after him to prevent his flying at all. If you see him, tell him a lady wants to see him at Tortoni's."

"No, no, messieurs; Tobie wouldn't believe that; he knows that ladies don't often go to Tortoni's, and that they wouldn't give him a rendezvous there; the best way would be to have Bastringuette tell our man that a lady, who wishes to see him alone, will expect him, at nine in the evening, at the—the—Pâté des Italiens.—You might even give him a handsome bouquet, and tell him

* *Cerf*, stag (in argot, cuckold); *cerf-volant*, kite (in argot, thief).

that the lady sent it to him. And when you have done it, just tell one of the waiters in the café, and he will inform us; we all go there every day."

"Bravo!" said Mouillot; "that's an excellent scheme; if our flower girl here sees Tobie and tells him that, he will surely fall into the trap, and we'll nab our man at the Pâté des Italiens."

"Well, Bastringuette, will you do what we want?"

"Why not?—that is, if I see the man."

"Oh! you will surely see him! But what's the trouble, Bastringuette? you don't seem in as good spirits as usual to-day; has there been any difficulty in our love affairs?"

The tall girl replaced her tray on her hip, with a sigh, and answered:

"My love affairs! Oh! they're all done with; they've gone to bed."

"What do you mean? Has Sans-Cravate been unfaithful to you?"

"Just the opposite; I tried to be to him."

"Bravo! good enough! that's frank, at all events! Agree, messieurs, that very few women who act like Bastringuette would answer as she did."

"Oh! bless my soul! I don't take four roads to get to a place. I don't know how to hide my passions. I didn't want to deceive Sans-Cravate, so I told him that I didn't love him any more."

"And he tried to force you to stay with him—to love him?"

"Not much! as if a man could force a woman to do such things when it don't suit her! You're pretty countrified still, if you think that. A woman ain't to be forced—I don't care how many keys and picklocks you have. When she don't choose to—good-day!"

"Well, then, why are you so dismal? is your new love affair going wrong already?"

"I tell you that I haven't got any love affair—that I don't propose to have any more!"

"But you say you tried to be unfaithful to Sans-Cravate?"

"That's all right! that's my business, my secret; it don't concern you! Are you my fathers and mothers, to cross-examine me like this?"

"Ha! ha! beware, messieurs, our ally is on the point of losing her temper."

"Here, Bastringuette," said Albert, tossing a five-franc piece on the girl's tray; "this is for keeping a sharp lookout for Tobie, and we promise you twice as much more if you send him to the rendezvous as we have agreed."

"All right, I'll try to earn it. Adieu, my little loves!"

Bastringuette walked away; and the young men separated, promising to meet in front of Tortoni's at the same hour the next day.

Albert did not fail to be at the rendezvous at the appointed time, and found Mouillot there.

"Célestin and Balivan will be here directly," said the latter; "there's nothing new; Bastringuette hasn't left any word at the café. Have you had any better luck?"

"No, I haven't succeeded in discovering the slightest trace of the quarry."

"Perhaps we shall be more fortunate to-morrow."

The next day brought no different result. On the fourth day, Balivan came running into Tortoni's just after his friends.

"I've seen him," he cried, "on Rue de Bondy, near Porte Saint-Martin. I recognized him perfectly, and I

am certain he saw me, too, for he turned purple and looked the other way."

"Well! you ran after him——"

"What did he say to you?"

"Did you take him to Varinet's?"

"Has he redeemed his olive?"

"Mon Dieu! my friends, I don't know how it happened; but I noticed at that moment that my cigar was out, and I stepped into a tobacco shop close by to get a light; it took only a minute, but when I returned to the street I looked in every direction—all in vain; I couldn't find Tobie again!"

"The devil take you!"

"Oh! that's just like Balivan! He catches sight of the man we've been hunting for four days, and, instead of grabbing him, he goes into a shop to light his cigar!"

"You ought to take yourself for your model! you'll never find such another."

"Faith! messieurs, I think perhaps you'd have done the same, if you had been in my place. An excellent pure Havana cigar! A fellow can't afford to let it get cold; it's like coffee, it must be taken hot. However, we're sure now that Tobie's in Paris, that's something."

"Why, who ever doubted it? But you won't be the one to make him pay Varinet."

The young men separated, a little discouraged. Two days later, Albert had made no further progress, and he knew that Madame Baldimer might return from the country at any moment. Being determined, however, to purchase the shawl she had praised so extravagantly, before she should return, Albert decided to call upon Madame Plays and brave her indignation.

Having made up his mind, he bent his steps toward her abode; but he took care to purchase a lovely bouquet en route; we must always be gallant, especially with a woman who has had a weakness for us.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon; that was the time of day when the superb Herminie held court in her boudoir and gave audience to those favored mortals who were privileged to enter that mysterious sanctuary.

Albert, who could fairly say: "Having been brought up in the harem, I know all its nooks and corners," passed the concierge, with his head in the air, walked directly to a small private staircase, went up to the first floor, stopped in front of a door, and knocked almost like a Freemason.

In a few seconds the door opened, and a lady's-maid, whose face was exceedingly ugly, but much more intellectual than her mistress's, uttered a cry of surprise when she saw Albert.

"Oh! monsieur," she said, "it's a long while since we've seen you here!"

"That is true, Lisa; I have been unable to come these last few days. But tell me, is your mistress visible? May I pay my respects to her?"

The lady's-maid smiled faintly, as she replied:

"It is impossible, monsieur. Madame has the vapors; she cannot receive you."

"She can't receive me—me?"

"You, monsieur."

"But she never used to have the vapors for me."

"*Dame!* monsieur, she has them now."

"Very well; I understand, Lisa; this means that your mistress doesn't choose to receive me, and so she has given these orders."

The maid dared not admit that that was the truth; but she smiled, and put her finger to her lips. Albert was too well-bred to disregard such an order; he too laughed as his eye met the lady's-maid's, and he turned on his heel, saying with a tragicomic air:

"I have deserved my fate, and must submit to it."

But as he was about to leave the courtyard, he paused.

"Suppose I pay the husband a visit?" he said to himself. "Parbleu! I'll do it; he's just the boy to reconcile his wife and me, or at least to be of great service to me in this emergency. Let's see dear Monsieur Plays."

Albert took the main staircase this time; he asked a footman if Monsieur Plays was at his desk, and, receiving an affirmative reply, entered the merchant's office.

XVII

MONSIEUR PLAYS

The superb Herminie's husband was a little man, of middle age, neither handsome nor ugly, with a very red, babyish face, round eyes, wide open and prominent, red lips always wreathed in smiles; in a word, what might be called a happy face; and happy he was to the last degree.

When he saw young Vermoncey enter his office, Monsieur Plays's face assumed a curious expression; it was evident that he was embarrassed, and did not know how he ought to receive his visitor. This reception in no wise surprised Albert, for he knew that Monsieur Plays adapted his ideas to his wife's on every subject; one was sure

of a cordial welcome from the husband, so long as he was in madame's good books; but as soon as she looked coldly on anyone, or had trouble with one of her adorers, the dear husband dared not be friendly to the person from whom madame had withdrawn her favor. And as Monsieur Plays was one of those men who would like to be on good terms with the whole world, his wife's caprices sometimes caused him very great embarrassment.

"Madame Plays has been giving me a horrible name to her husband," thought Albert, noticing the stiff manner in which the merchant greeted him. And, determined to divert himself with the embarrassment of the unfortunate husband who turned a cold shoulder to the young men who ceased to pay court to his wife, he went up to Monsieur Plays, grasped his hand just as he was about to withdraw it, and shook it violently.

"Good-morning, my dear Monsieur Plays!" he cried. "I am delighted to find you. I have been meaning for a long time to come to see you. But time passes so quickly! This is the first moment I have been able to find for a week."

Monsieur Plays did not know what reply to make; he bowed, took his pen out of his mouth and put it back again, glanced timidly about the room, as if he feared that his wife would appear, and stammered at last:

"Monsieur Albert—certainly—very well—and you—— You are very kind. But, you see, I am working just now —I am doing something——"

Albert pretended not to understand the lack of cordiality in that reply; he threw himself into an easy-chair, and continued:

"And the pleasures, Monsieur Plays, how do the pleasures, the little love affairs, come on, eh? Aha! it seems

that you're a great lover of the sex, but you keep it dark! Oh! you have made many conquests, they say; I've heard of you in the foyer at the Opéra—yes, and in the wings too."

The merchant, who was highly flattered to be looked upon as a rake, smiled and rubbed his hands as he replied:

"No, really! you have heard of me at the Opéra?—and in the wings? But I have never been there; Madame Plays wouldn't allow it."

"I believe you, and she is right. But one may know some of these theatrical ladies without going there."

"No, no, I assure you! But, wait; I believe that a lady did ask me one day to pay a draft that had fifteen days to run, on the plea that she had to take a little journey; but I believe she told me she was a *marcheuse*."*

"You see! you acknowledge the corn, rake that you are!"

"What? Why, it never occurred to me that that lady was on the stage. She said she was a *marcheuse*, and I understood that she liked to take long walks."

"Oh! you joker! play the innocent, if you will; but you know perfectly well that that's what they call the supernumeraries at the Opéra."

"I give you my word that I had no idea of it. What do you say? there are *marcheuses* there?"

"Yes, monsieur; and they are a very popular class of lorettes."

"Then there ought to be *trotteuses*† there, too."

"Ha! ha! you're a sad rascal, Monsieur Plays! And the best part of it is that you conceal your game so perfectly."

* A female supernumerary in a ballet.

† Street walkers.

Monsieur Plays roared with laughter; he was overjoyed to have discounted a draft for a lady connected with the stage, who had mentioned him in the wings. But he suddenly remembered that his wife had told him that she would not receive Albert any more, that he was an exceedingly ill-bred young man, who had been shockingly rude to her in society; whereupon the poor husband became sober, repented of having laughed, and muttered, with a piteous glance at Albert:

"I don't know why I am laughing, for I have a great deal to do. I have some accounts to look over, and I am away behind. I have an endless amount of work on hand."

Before the young man could reply, a small door leading from the office to the private apartments was suddenly thrown open, and Madame Plays appeared.

The robust Herminie was in morning dress, but there was always something piquant, something seductive, in her costume as well as in her eyes. A figured dress, very high in the neck, entirely concealed her charms, but outlined them with an exactitude which produced a rather more startling effect than nudity; two globes, possibly a little large, but very well placed, proudly embellished her ample chest; a tightly laced waist and very pronounced hips served as a pedestal to that bust; and her somewhat dishevelled hair, with long corkscrew curls falling over her shoulders, formed an attractive setting for Madame Plays's face, to which her excitement and her angry glance, as she entered her husband's office, gave much animation.

Herminie manifested no surprise when she saw Albert; it was evident that she expected to find him there, but she hurled a glance at him with which she apparently

hoped to strike him to the earth. The young man withstood that awful glance as coolly as if he were provided with a lightning rod, and answered it with a low bow, while a faint smile lurked about the corners of his mouth.

Monsieur Plays was terrified when his wife appeared; he thought that she had heard him laughing with Albert, and he saw that she was angry; so he could not decide what to do, and, in his embarrassment, chewed his pen instead of simply holding it in his mouth.

"Ah! you have company, monsieur?" said Herminie, biting off her words, and looking from Albert to her husband; "I am sorry to interrupt your conversation, messieurs. Doubtless you have some very interesting things to say to each other. If I had dreamed that Monsieur Vermoncey was here, be sure that I should not have come."

"My dear love—we were saying—I don't know what. I didn't expect a visit from——"

"I called upon you first, madame," Albert interposed; "but I was told that you had the vapors, that I could not see you; so I came to ask your husband about your health, as I was anxious about it."

"Yes," murmured Monsieur Plays, spitting out a piece of his pen, "yes, Monsieur Albert came to——"

"Ah! so you are anxious about my health, monsieur! That is a surprise; I should never have guessed it. Ha! ha! admirable! You amuse yourself at a person's expense, you play a trick upon her—a shameful, outrageous jest of a sort you wouldn't dare try with a grisette—and then, a week afterward, you come here as if nothing had happened, with a cool, placid air! Oh! it makes me ill, it sets my nerves on edge; I would like to smash something!"

All this was emitted with remarkable volubility by the superb Herminie, as she paced the floor in intense excitement. Her husband drew back when she talked of smashing something, and faltered:

"I was busy working, going over my accounts, and——"

"All right, monsieur, all right! I don't ask you what you were doing. Well! what are you eating now? what's that you are twisting about between your teeth? Have you taken to chewing tobacco? that would be the last straw!"

"No, my dear love; I was just sucking my pen—for amusement."

"That's an odd stick of candy," said Albert, laughing.

Even Herminie could not restrain a smile; but she instantly resumed her wrathful expression, and turned her back to her husband to speak to Albert:

"I shall never forget that abominable letter! I would never have believed, monsieur, that you would write such things! It was in the vilest taste!"

"On my honor, madame, I do not know what you mean; I am not aware of having written a single word that could offend you."

"Oh! this is too much! to make such a statement as that! I am terribly sorry that I destroyed the insolent letter, but I know it by heart."

Monsieur Plays had returned to his desk, and was mumbling between his teeth:

"Five and six are eleven, and eight makes nineteen—and eight makes nineteen——"

"And then, it was so idiotic: 'your face is constantly before me, calf's head *en tortue*,'—isn't that very refined?—and—'I send you an intimate friend—perfectly

fresh.'—Ah! your friend was fresh, and no mistake! Such a little fool! and how I treated him!"

"What you say perplexes me entirely. I cannot understand it. There must be some mistake—you must have read some other letter."

"Oh, no! it was addressed to me all right!"

"Nineteen and twenty-four make forty-three; put down three and carry—and carry——"

"Be quiet, Monsieur Plays; you are insufferable with your addition! What do I care what you carry? Hold your tongue!"

Monsieur Plays subsided, with an air of consternation, nor did Albert say anything more; but he produced the lovely bouquet, which he had thus far held behind his back.

When Herminie saw it, her face softened, and it retained only a slight pouting expression as she said:

"Ah! you have a bouquet."

"Yes, madame; I intended to offer it to you when I called, but I was not fortunate enough to be admitted."

"It is very pretty."

Monsieur Plays walked timidly to Albert's side, and murmured:

"Your bouquet is charming; I was saying to myself: 'It smells very sweet here, and it can't be me.'"

"Will you condescend to accept it, madame?"

"I ought not to, for I am sure that it wasn't intended for me; but I am so fond of flowers! Well, give it to me."

She took the bouquet and held it to her nose.

"It is very sweet," she said; "it perfumes the whole room. But, no matter; I detest you, I will never forgive you while I live, I forbid you to come to my house any more."

"Oh! madame, the idea of bearing malice to such an extent as that! and for what? for a misunderstanding, a blunder perhaps, but in which you surely cannot believe that there was any intention to offend you. No, you will not be so cruel—you will allow me to continue to call upon you."

Herminie played with her bouquet without replying, but Monsieur Plays said smilingly to Albert, in an undertone:

"She'll allow you to; I am sure that she doesn't bear you any ill will now."

"Why do you interfere, Monsieur Plays? I don't know what you mean by meddling in my affairs! Keep quiet, I tell you again; this doesn't concern you!"

Monsieur Plays set about cutting a quill.

"Besides, I don't like people who have so many whims," continued Herminie, after a short pause. "If you pass a week without thinking of a person, why shouldn't you pass months? To what motive do I owe monsieur's call to-day?"

"I had a motive, madame," Albert replied, with a smile; "I have heard a great deal of a cashmere shawl which you wore at Count Dahlborne's reception; it is a marvel of beauty, it seems, and I have heard it extolled so highly that I am very desirous to see it. Will you not be kind enough to show it to me?"

Herminie thought that Albert resorted to that pretext in order not to make her husband jealous; for she was far from suspecting that the shawl was really what had brought her fickle lover back to her. The idea amused her, and she replied, with a laugh:

"Oho! so you came to see my cashmere! Well! I won't show it to you; if I did, I should have to admit

you to my boudoir, and I have sworn that you shall never put your foot there again."

"But we swear so many things! A pretty woman's oaths are written on sand, and the slightest breath effaces them."

"And what are men's oaths written on?"

"On brass.—Isn't it true, Monsieur Plays, that we men keep to our oaths?"

"Why, yes; such things have been known. I myself, for instance, swore that I would stop taking snuff when I married Madame Plays, because she doesn't like to hear people sneeze: well, I have kept my oath; to be sure, I still sneeze, but not so often."

While Monsieur Plays indulged in this reflection, his wife looked fixedly at Albert, and there was in her eyes an animation, a flame, which indicated something very different from anger. On his side, the young man bestowed a very tender glance on her, and said:

"Come, don't be cross with me any more, but promise to show it to me."

"No; I should have to admit you to my boudoir."

"I am so anxious to see it."

"Indeed! you want to see it, do you?" said Herminie, with a sly smile.

Monsieur Plays moved about on his chair, saying:

"Come, my dear love, as it will give him pleasure, do show it to him. Bless my soul, how good that bouquet smells!"

Herminie was touched; she smiled at the young man in a very significant way, and held out her hand to him.

"Oh! I am too weak," she cried; "you abuse my weakness—ah! Dieu! Well, give me your hand and escort me to my apartment. But I won't show it to you, I tell you!"

Albert took the hand that Madame Plays offered him, and, with a bow to her husband, left the room with her by the little door.

Monsieur Plays seemed overjoyed, and whispered in Albert's ear as he passed:

"I know her; I promise you that she'll show it to you."

XVIII

A SECRET PACT.—THE PÂTÉ DES ITALIENS

It was only nine o'clock in the morning, and Célestin de Valnoir was already ringing at Madame Baldimer's door. Rosa, her maid, answered the bell, and smiled at the young man as if she were expecting him.

"This is a very early hour for me to call on your mistress," said Célestin, assuming a presumptuous, self-sufficient air; "but I received a note from Madame Baldimer last evening, in which she informed me of her return to Paris and requested me to call this morning before nine; and I am always prompt at a rendezvous with a lovely woman."

"Yes, monsieur; madame expects you, for she told me to admit you as soon as you came."

"Madame Baldimer is still in bed, I suppose?"

"No, monsieur; madame got up early, because she expected you."

"Mon Dieu! that was no reason! I could have talked with her just as well in bed—indeed, I should have preferred that. But, no matter, take me to her."

The maid led Célestin through several rooms, and ushered him into her mistress's presence. Madame Baldimer was seated in a reclining chair, dressed in a velvet robe de chambre; her hair was dressed very simply and kept in place on top of her head by a sort of net; plainly, she was not yet dressed for the day, and was not at all anxious to make a favorable impression. None the less, she was extremely pretty in that négligé; but women are never more seductive than when we see them unadorned except by their natural charms; it very rarely happens, however, that they are willing to allow themselves to be seen in that condition.

Madame Baldimer greeted Célestin with a faint smile, and said, pointing to a chair near her own:

"You are on time; that is well done of you—I like that. Promptness is so rare in this world. Pray be seated."

"You should be certain, madame, of the zeal with which I always comply with your wishes; you are aware of my devotion to you; you know that there is nothing I would not do to please you. Love even leads me to betray friendship."

"Friendship!" echoed Madame Baldimer, and a sarcastic smile played about her lips; "oh, no! you are not betraying that, I assure you. Have you ever been Albert's friend?"

"To be sure, madame; we are very intimate."

"You men, when you have met once or twice at parties or dinners, when your dispositions have seemed congenial, when you have laughed at a good story told by someone you hardly know, instantly shake hands, adopt the familiar form of address, and suddenly become as intimate as if you had been thrown together for years; and you

imagine that you have gained a friend! But friendships formed so hastily are as hastily broken. They are not proof against any passion: vanity, self-esteem, selfish interests, love, soon put an end to the noble sentiments of which you have made so great a parade, and you are often amazed to find that all the annoyances, all the disappointments, all the vexations, you suffer are the work of those whom you call your friends. It's not the same with women, monsieur; they are not so free with their friendship as you are, but when they do give it, when they become attached to another person of their own sex, it is almost always for life."

"But it must be someone of their own sex!" laughed Célestin. "You admit that, yourself."

"I believe, monsieur, that there are women who are capable of loving a long time—yes, forever, the man who has shown himself worthy of their love. But as they generally have to do with ungrateful wretches who make a sport of seducing them, only to betray and abandon them, you must agree that they would be very foolish not to punish men sometimes for the wrong they so often do them."

"Mon Dieu! fair lady, I will agree to anything you please. I will say that men are villains, monsters, whatever you choose, provided only that you allow me to love you, and that you award me the prize due my devotion and my passion."

Monsieur Célestin took possession of a hand with which the pretty widow was toying with the folds of her gown, and attempted to put it to his lips; but Madame Baldimer snatched it away, and said sharply:

"Stop that, monsieur, I beg; we have not yet reached the point at which I owe you any recompense; and I am not the woman to pay in advance."

"But it seems to me that I have done all that we agreed upon. When I first met you in society some months ago, I experienced, as many other men did, the power of your charms; when I spoke to you of my love, you said—and these are your very words, I have not forgotten them: 'You are very intimate with young Albert Vermoncey, are you not? Well, keep me informed of everything that young man does, promise to do everything for me that I ask you to do, and I will reward your devotion.'—Isn't that what you said?"

"Exactly; not a word changed. When I first met you, monsieur, young Albert was already paying court to me; you very quickly joined the ranks, which was quite natural; Albert was your friend, so you naturally tried to supplant him. That sort of thing is always done among friends."

"But, madame——"

"Isn't that true, monsieur?"

"When love speaks louder than friendship——"

"Ha! ha! delicious! But, do you know, it was not worth while to interrupt me to say that. I formed my judgment of you on the spot, and I said to myself: 'I should like to amuse myself at the expense of young Vermoncey; I propose that he shall be my victim, that he shall learn that all women are not overjoyed to yield to him. Here's a gentleman who will second my projects to perfection; he is an intimate friend of Albert, and he is paying court to me because he sees that his friend is very much in love with me; so that I may be certain that he will ask nothing better than to assist me in setting snares for the man I propose to make a fool of.'—Thereupon I made my propositions to you, and you accepted them. And now, monsieur, it doesn't seem to me that you have any reason to reproach me."

Célestin, who had listened to Madame Baldimer, biting his lips from time to time with a dissatisfied air, leaned back in his chair and replied:

"But when is there to be an end of it all, madame? When will you cease to torment poor Albert—and when will you reward my love?"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, you are very inquisitive, in a very great hurry. I cannot tell you yet."

"You see, I sometimes say to myself—— Excuse my frankness, madame."

"Oh! speak freely; frankness from you will astonish but not offend me."

"I say to myself: 'Is it not possible that I myself am Madame Baldimer's dupe, while fancying that I am helping her to make a fool of Albert? She wants to know everything that my rival does; if he acts as if he had forgotten her, I give her that information, and she soon appears before him, he finds her wherever he goes, and he does not hold out long against the glances she fastens upon him. It seems to me that a woman who was in love with Albert would act in that very way, and it would be quite interesting if Madame Baldimer were amusing herself at my expense, while I am thinking that it is Albert she wants to make a fool of!'"

"Ah! you have thought that, have you, monsieur? Upon my word, that would be most original; and, to speak frankly, you deserve to be treated in that way."

"How so, madame?"

"But don't be alarmed, it is not so at all. I am not in love with Monsieur Albert. I, love him! on the contrary, I hate him!"

As she uttered these last words, Madame Baldimer's face glowed, and her eyes seemed to flash fire.

"You hate him!" repeated Célestin, in a doubting tone. "Hm! that is rather strange; a woman doesn't ordinarily hate a man who has never been her lover. I should like it better if Albert were indifferent to you. Indifference is further from love than hatred is."

"You may be perfectly sure, monsieur, that that young man's alleged passion for me will never be satisfied. But it is my pleasure that it shall not die out—on the contrary, that it shall become more and more ardent. Whether it is coquetry, hatred, caprice, or some other sentiment, that prompts my action—that is my secret, monsieur, and I do not choose to tell you anything more. Now, if you do not care to assist my designs any further, go, monsieur; it is useless for you to stay here any longer."

The lovely widow rose as she spoke, but Célestin seized her arm and forced her to resume her seat.

"Mon Dieu! madame, how quick you are! how prompt in forming your resolutions! Be calm, I implore you! there is no rupture in our relations; I am your slave, as always. Speak! command! I am at your service. Too happy to wear your chains, as I hope that some day my love will be crowned."

"Very good," rejoined Madame Baldimer, with a smile; "and now, answer me. I have been away ten days; what has Albert done during that time?"

"Am I to conceal nothing?"

"That was our agreement, as you know."

"He has seen Madame Plays again."

"Madame Plays—— Ah! very good; I can guess why."

"That woman has been his mistress; and when a man returns to a former mistress, it is very easy to guess why."

Madame Baldimer bestowed a glance on Célestin which signified: "You are no better than a fool!" but she contented herself with that pantomime, and said simply:

"What else?"

"He has called here several times to find out whether you had returned from the country."

"I know that; my concierge told me."

"Your absence has seemed very long to him—especially as you didn't tell him where you were going."

"Ah! he would have liked to know—and so would you, wouldn't you? But go on."

"Why, that's all."

"What! no new intrigues, no escapades, no card parties?"

"No, nothing—for the last few days we have been so virtuous!"

"No husbands deceived, no rivals to dread?"

"Nothing of the sort. There was a wager on the subject of a very pretty grisette, who is courted by a messenger; but Albert refused to go into it. Indeed, the thing isn't so easy as I thought at first. This very morning, I believed I had won my bet; my plans were carefully laid—the girl ought to have stepped into a very clever trap that I had laid for her. But, not at all; she avoided it! Those little grisettes sometimes have the presumption to insist on being virtuous. We should be very much to be pitied, if we hadn't the ladies of fashionable society to fall back on."

"Ah! that's an unkind fling of yours; but beware; there are some great flirts who may do as the grisettes do; one must not be sure of anything in this world. Let us return to what you were saying: a very pretty grisette, and a messenger for your rival. Do you know,

that would be very interesting! Messengers are not long-suffering, and they don't stand by and allow their loves to be taken from them with the complaisance and patience of the majority of our husbands in fashionable society. You really must involve Albert in this intrigue. He must fall in love with this grisette. If she is pretty, I see no great difficulty about it; and you are so clever, Monsieur Célestin, surely you can bring it about. Oh! it would be so amusing!"

Célestin was utterly unable to understand Madame Baldimer's purpose in urging him to do his utmost to make Albert fall in love with a pretty grisette.

"Well, monsieur, don't you hear me?" cried the fair American, irritated by the young man's silence.

"Yes, madame; yes, I hear you perfectly. But I confess that I don't understand you! and my brain is in a whirl when I try to divine your object. You do all that you can to turn Albert's head. If he seems to be a little less enamored of you, you redouble your fascinations and coquetries to bring him to your feet; and, lo! you insist now that your adorer shall fall in love with a pretty grisette, and scold me because my friend is not involved in a lot of other intrigues! I say again, all this is infernally hard to understand."

Madame Baldimer frowned, as she replied:

"But it isn't necessary that you should understand me, monsieur; it is enough, it seems to me, that it is my wish."

"I am very sorry, madame, but you should not do so much to inflame Albert's passion for yourself. He, who used to take fire at the mere sight of a woman, is indifferent now to the loveliest; and it is your fault."

"Really! Do you think that he loves me to that point?"

"I am afraid so, for his sake."

Madame Baldimer reflected a few moments, then rose, and said, with a gracious smile:

"Adieu, Monsieur de Valnoir! our interview has been very long, and I have nothing further to ask you."

"Shall I see you soon?"

"I think so; however, I will write, as before, when I have anything to ask you. I do not need to remind you that Albert must not know that you have seen me."

Célestin smiled and bowed, and stepped forward to take the fair American's hand; but she had already vanished.

"A strange woman!" muttered Célestin, looking around the room in surprise. "Gad! I have known a great many of them, but never one whose heart was so difficult to decipher as hers. Never mind; she is very beautiful, very refined, very fashionable, and it will be delicious to whisk her away from my dear friend Albert."

Célestin left the lovely widow's abode, and repaired to the boulevard, where he met Mouillot, who ran up to him, crying:

"Victory! he is ours! we have him, or at least we shall have him this evening!"

"Whom are you talking about?"

"Parbleu! little Tobie, the man of the fetich."

"The deuce! who found him?"

"Bastringuette, apparently; for she just left a message with a waiter at Tortoni's, who repeated it to me not a minute ago, that the young man we want will be at the Pâté des Italiens this evening."

"Ah! that is delicious; do the others know it?"

"No, as I have just learned of it. But I will undertake to tell Balivan, and you must let Albert know. Let us

all meet here to-night at eight. Tobie is to be on Place des Italiens at nine, and we must meet earlier than that."

"Very good; we will be there."

Bastringuette had, in fact, met Tobie the night before, quite late, on an unfrequented street; it was dark, and Monsieur Pigeonnier was walking very fast. But the flower girl had eyes which rivalled an eagle's, and she had easily recognized the man she had been asked to find.

Since the game of bouillotte in Balivan's studio, little Tobie, who had gone away with four hundred and fifty francs in his pocket, had not been fortunate in his speculations; he had flattered himself that he would be able to do a fine stroke of business with that money, to make some advantageous purchase, and thereby to redeem his olive before long. But, instead of that, a creditor, who had succeeded in finding him at home by dint of passing the night at his door, had compelled him, by the use of some exceedingly brutal arguments, to pay a long overdue note for three hundred and eighty francs.

So that Tobie was not in a position to redeem his fetich, and that is why he never appeared on the boulevards, why he shunned all the places where he was likely to meet any of the witnesses of his transaction with Varinet, and fled as soon as he caught sight of an acquaintance; for he would have been forced to confess that he had not the wherewithal to redeem his olive, which would have humiliated him beyond measure. If he could gain time, he hoped to be able to move his aunt, Madame Abraham, or at least to obtain an interest in some profitable transaction in which his commission would be large enough to enable him to settle with Varinet. Almost always, in unpleasant emergencies, we imagine that we are saved, as soon as we succeed in gaining time; we are

happy when we have much of it to spend, and we do not reflect that time is life, the only really valuable thing in this world; that one may regain fortune, honors, the favors of a fair lady! but that a day lost can never be recovered.

Hearing somebody running behind him in the street, little Tobie had a fright; but he recovered his courage when he heard a woman's voice calling:

"Why don't you stop, monsieur, when I say I want to speak to you? *fichtre!* if you make women run like this, they must have lots of fun with you!"

Tobie stopped, scrutinized Bastringuette, and demanded:

"What do you want of me?"

"I don't want anything, my little darling; you're too dainty for me. I don't like men with pink cheeks."

"Ah! I think I recognize you now; you're the girl who sells violets."

"When there is any, my little ducky."

"If you've been running after me to offer me flowers, you might have saved yourself the trouble."

"No, it isn't for that; I have a message for you."

"Who gave it to you?"

"A lady, and a very pretty lady too."

"A lady—what's her name?"

"She didn't tell me; and you don't suppose I asked her, do you? but she described you so that I couldn't make any mistake. She has something to say to you, and she'll be at the Pâté on Place des Italiens to-morrow night at nine o'clock."

"To-morrow night! at the Pâté!"

Tobie reflected for some time; he tried to think who the lady could be who wished to see him; and at last he thought of Madame Plays, who had left him so abruptly

on the Champs-Élysées; perhaps she knew the whole story of Albert's conduct now, and wished to revenge herself with him for her lover's faithlessness, and to compensate him for the outburst of temper to which she had given way when she left him.

"If Albert did write anything offensive in that letter," he thought, "she has probably learned that I had nothing to do with it; she is sorry that she treated me so badly, and means to treat me better now. I am less surprised, because, when I was making love to her, she seemed to be deeply touched; everything was going along finely, and, if it hadn't occurred to her to read that infernal letter, I should certainly have triumphed.—What sort of looking woman was it who gave you the message?" he asked Bastringuette.

"Oh! a very fine-looking woman."

"A little large, wasn't she?"

"Yes, monsieur, she's plump; but it's becoming to her."

"Light chestnut hair?"

"Very light—almost a blonde."

"That's it. A voice something like a man's?"

"Oh! a splendid voice; when she speaks, you'd think it was a hand organ. She ought to sing well, she had."

"There's no doubt about it—it was she!"

"Do you know who she is?"

"I think so; but I know so many of 'em, you see!"

"But you'll keep the appointment, won't you, monsieur?"

"Oh! to be sure!"

"So much the better; for it seems as if the lady was broiling to see you.—'If I'd known his address,' she says, 'I'd have written to him; but I don't know where he lives.'"

"That's true, she doesn't know it; and there are very few people who could tell her; I don't talk much about my address."

"Good-night, monsieur! my errand's done, and I'm going home to bed. Don't forget your appointment at the Pâté."

"Never fear."

Bastringuette turned on her heel, and Tobie did the same, saying to himself:

"It seems that she's paid. I'm not sorry, I like that way better;" and he went his way, building castles in Spain touching his liaison with the susceptible Plays.

Célestin called on Albert at midday, and found him gazing at a magnificent cashmere shawl that was spread out on a divan.

"What the devil are you doing?" inquired Monsieur de Valnoir.

"I am admiring this shawl, as you see; isn't it superb?"

"It is, indeed; but it seems as if I had seen it on somebody."

"You have seen its mate on Madame Plays."

"Ah! that's it. And what are you doing with this one? Are you in the way of giving your mistresses cashmere shawls?"

"Why not! If you should see this shawl on the fair American's shoulders, do you think that she would still laugh at my love?"

Célestin pressed his lips together, then replied:

"Oh, no! I should be compelled to believe, on the contrary, that you are a fortunate mortal. But it must have been very expensive!"

"Five thousand francs!"

"The deuce! it's a present worthy of a prince; but I don't believe she will accept it."

"And I am sure that she will."

"Has Madame Baldimer returned from the country?"

"Yes, last night; and look, do you see this little note?"

"By the perfume alone, I divine that it's from a woman."

"I have just received it; it's from the fair widow, and she expects me at ten this evening."

"At ten o'clock; she makes appointments for rather a late hour."

"So much the better; I will try to prolong the interview, and not leave her till to-morrow morning."

Célestin turned away to hide a grimace which he could not control; then he replied, in a very vivacious tone:

"Pending your love rendezvous, will you meet us this evening, a little before nine? We propose to nab Seigneur Pigeonnier, who thinks that a lady is to meet him on Place des Italiens."

"Oh! I will be there, of course. Poor Tobie! we must have a little fun at his expense; but afterward, if he can't pay, I'll lend him five hundred francs, so that he can settle with Monsieur Varinet."

"The devil! You are a good fellow. Are you in funds?"

"My father is so kind to me! he gives me money without being asked."

"Parbleu! he has nobody left but you; it's right that he should satisfy all your desires."

"But I have been spending too much money for some time past; I mean to reform."

"Is that why you pay five thousand francs for a shawl?"

"This will be my last folly."

"And you propose to lend Tobie five hundred francs?"

"I am so happy! I would like to be able to oblige all my friends."

"If I had suspected that," thought Célestin, "I would have invented a story to make him anxious to oblige me too.—Shall we dine together to-day?" he said aloud.

"It is impossible. I promised my father to dine with him. I have done it so seldom lately that he looks on it as a great favor, and he's too kind to me for me not to try to please him."

"You are becoming a model of filial respect!"

"Célestin," exclaimed Albert, in a very sharp tone, "I allow you to joke about whatever you choose, except my affection for my father; that is a sentiment which must be respected. It seems to me that it would be very unfortunate if there were nothing left in the world to respect."

"Oh! mon Dieu! don't lose your temper! I had no such purpose as you imagine. Until this evening! we shall expect you at the usual place."

It was not quite nine o'clock, but it had been dark for some time when the young men left Tortoni's café and bent their steps toward Place des Italiens. They had just started, when Mouillot said:

"One moment, messieurs! we have forgotten something. Here, take this."

And he gave each of his friends an olive.

"An olive!"

"What's this for?"

"Why, can't you guess? We are going to watch for Tobie, one at each corner of the square; and as soon as

we see him, we will all descend on him, each presenting our olive and demanding five hundred francs."

"Very good! splendid!"

"Poor Tobie! This experience will be enough to disgust him with olives, and I'll bet that he won't stuff his pockets with them again when he dines out."

They soon reached Place des Italiens, where they separated, each going to one corner. They agreed that, when Tobie appeared, they would wait until he reached the middle of the square, and then advance upon him at the same time, so that the four olives, accompanied by as many demands for five hundred francs, might be presented simultaneously.

Five minutes passed. Tobie did not appear. Five more minutes passed. The young men coughed loudly from time to time, as if to assure one another that they were still there. To while away the time, Albert thought of Madame Baldimer, whom he was to call upon very soon. He enjoyed in anticipation the pleasure he was about to afford her by presenting her with that shawl, which she coveted, and he hoped that his gallantry would be lovingly rewarded.

Célestin also thought about his relations with the lovely widow, saying to himself from time to time:

"Tobie will not come! he probably suspected something, or was afraid. We shall lose our olives."

Mouillot stamped impatiently, muttering:

"This is getting to be an infernal bore. I believe it's going to rain, too. The sell is on us, after all! Sacrebleu! messieurs! I say there! do you like this? For my part, I've had about enough."

Balivan was engrossed by the portrait of a woman which he was soon to begin, and he was wondering

whether he would paint it against a dark or a light background, in a salon or in a garden.

Several more minutes passed. A very fine rain began to fall. Albert, Célestin, and Mouillot were about to desert their posts, when shouts of: "Murder! police! help!" arose in the middle of the square.

The three young men ran toward the place from which the cries came, and found Balivan holding a short man by the arm.

"It's no use for you to yell," he was saying; "you owe me five hundred francs for this olive!"

"What in the devil are you doing, you fool?" cried Mouillot; "let the gentleman alone, will you! It isn't Tobie!"

The man whom Balivan had seized was a respectable bourgeois, who was loitering about in front of the Opéra-Comique, intending to buy a check and see the last play.

Balivan confounded himself in apologies. But the bourgeois, who had had a horrible fright, continued to shout. The soldiers who were on guard at the theatre came up, with several policemen, and a crowd soon assembled. The young men were surrounded, and the man whom Balivan had attacked pointed them out to the soldiers, saying in a voice rendered almost inaudible by terror:

"Arrest those four men. They're all thieves; they tried to rob me of five hundred francs, and I had only forty sous about me! This one threatened me; he tried to murder me with an olive. Arrest all four."

The young men tried to explain to the soldiers that it was all the result of a jest. But the officers took them away, saying:

"You may explain at the station."

"That miserable Tobie!" muttered Mouillot; "a nice mess he's got us into with his olives!"

"And my appointment!" thought Albert. "God grant they don't keep us long!"

"It is all Balivan's fault," said Célestin. "With his absent-mindedness, he was perfectly certain to make some blunder."

As for the young artist, he stalked along in the middle of the crowd, thinking:

"Yes, I will paint her with a country scene for a background."

XIX

THE QUARREL AND THE RECONCILIATION

On the day following that on which Elina had asked the messengers about Paul, he returned to his place with his *crochets*, wearing his jacket and cap; but his face was noticeably paler, his features more drawn, than before his prolonged absence.

The young messenger seated himself in his usual place, nodding to Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle, who were there before him. The former abruptly turned his head away when he saw Paul, and clenched his fists with an angry gesture; but Jean Ficelle, on the contrary, assumed his playful expression and walked to Paul's side.

"Hallo! hallo! here's the prodigal son back again! Yes, it's him, sure enough. Is it possible, Paul, that you've come back to sit alongside of us on a street corner? are you going to be a messenger?"

"I have never ceased to be one," replied Paul, looking earnestly at the house in which Elina worked.

"That's a good one! How about the time we met you dressed like a swell? I don't think you was doing errands much just then! You was on a spree, you know, and it seems to have lasted a long while! Ten days of it! Gad! that's a whole carnival, sure enough!"

"You are mistaken; I haven't been on a spree; you know perfectly well that it's not my custom."

"Not with us, that's true; but you play the nobleman with your mistresses, it seems. Oh! I can understand that when a man's been doing the handsome thing by his girl for ten days, he don't feel inclined to treat his friends to a glass. And then, you have so many girls at once! Ha! ha! you're a Don Jean, as they say in fashionable society. But you must take care that you don't get robbed yourself. Bless me! those things happen to everybody."

Paul shrugged his shoulders, and made no further reply to Jean Ficelle; but he went to Sans-Cravate, whose back was still turned to him, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Are you still angry with me?" he said. "Well, Sans-Cravate, you are all wrong; yes, you are wrong, for I have done nothing to make you angry. I love you still, for all your roughness and your hot temper, because I know that you have a good heart. I never gave you bad advice, and it seems to me that I deserve your confidence; but you prefer to listen to those who take you to the wine shop, with such people as that Laboussole."

Sans-Cravate turned his head little by little; at first, he was determined to pick a quarrel with Paul; but, as he listened to him, he felt that his anger subsided, in spite

of himself; and when he looked at him, when he saw his gentle, honest eyes looking into his, he could not control his emotion, his genuine affection for his young comrade stirred anew in the depths of his heart.

Paul divined what was taking place in Sans-Cravate's heart, and he held out his hand, saying:

"Oh! I know well enough that you are not a bad fellow! You cannot believe that I am Bastringuette's lover, since you know that I am in love with the young dressmaker who works in the house opposite—Mademoiselle Elina. And even if I weren't, as if I could ever give a thought to my friend's mistress! Somebody has spoken ill of me to you, and you listened because you had drunk a little too much; but now that you are cool, you must see that that was all nonsense. Come, give me your hand, and let us forget the past!"

Sans-Cravate put out his hand to grasp Paul's, but drew it back again, crying:

"Yes, *sacrédié!* it makes me unhappy to be at odds with you. I liked you, and I feel that I'd be glad to like you still. But it ain't a question of what anybody's told me about you, but of what I've seen with my own eyes. You say that you have nothing to do with Bastringuette, that you don't go with her; prove it, and I'm your friend. It ain't that I still care about Bastringuette, or want to make up with her; oh! there's no danger of that! but I just want to be sure that my friend hasn't gone back on me—played a trick on me, as they say; that's all."

"What do you want me to do? How can I prove it, if my word isn't enough?"

"Oh! it's easy enough: that day we met you dressed like a gentleman, on the corner of Rue Barbette, you came out of a house on Vieille Rue du Temple. Bastringuette

came out of the same house a few minutes after you; I saw her—do you hear! You say that you wasn't with her; that may be, although it looks bad! To clear the thing up, just you tell me who you'd been to see—where you'd been in that house. It will be easy for me to go and find out whether you're telling the truth; it won't take me long to walk there. Come, tell me; and if there hasn't been any fooling with my false wench, why, then I'll come back and open my arms to you; I'll beg your pardon, and hug you till I stifle you!"

Sans-Cravate's eyes were wet; it was clear that his most earnest desire was to be able to call Paul his friend once more, and he waited anxiously for his reply. But Paul hung his head, his face became serious, and he dropped the hand he was holding out to his comrade.

"I am sorry that I cannot satisfy you," he said; "but I cannot tell you what you ask. I tell you again that it was not Bastringuette whom I went to see in that house; if she did go there, it was probably a mere coincidence; but it is certain that she was no more looking for me than I was looking for her."

Jean Ficelle, who had softly drawn near and waited with manifest curiosity for Paul's reply, began to whistle the air of: *Go and see if they're coming, Jean, go and see if they're coming.*

"What's that!" rejoined Sans-Cravate, with an angry gesture; "you can't tell me who you went to see—who it is you know in that house! It seems to me there's no difficulty in doing that—and when a man ain't doing something crooked, he don't make such a mystery about it."

"Probably I have reasons for acting as I do."

"And you won't tell me your reasons?"

"It is impossible!"

Sans-Cravate stamped the ground angrily, and uttered an energetic oath.

"All right, then; all's over between us; I don't know you any more; you are no mate of mine; I forbid you to speak to me—do you hear? I forbid you; and if you should ever come within range of my eyes, with Bastringuette—not that I care a hang about her! I despise her! I hate her!—but, never mind; if I should see you with her, look out! I shan't always be patient, and you'd be likely to pass a bad quarter of an hour."

Paul made no reply, but took his *crochets* and carried them some fifty yards away, toward the house where Elina worked; and there he took his stand.

Jean Ficelle went up to Sans-Cravate, who pretended to look in the direction of the boulevard, and said:

"You did well to give that sneak his walking ticket! What a fool he looked when you asked him who he went to see; he couldn't answer. *Pardi!* I guess not; he'd have to own up that he'd done wrong. I'll give you a comparison: it's just the same as if you saw me opening your trunk, and you says: 'What are you looking in there for?' and I says: 'I can't tell you what I'm looking for;' and you says: 'Tell me!' and I——"

"All right! enough of that! you're never done with your comparisons, and they don't amuse me."

"That's all right! Look here, I'm going to suggest something better. The sight of your rival has put you in a bad humor—that's natural; if I had someone in front of me as had turned my girl away from me, I wouldn't be satisfied till I'd given him a good licking; that would be rather hard, to be sure, as I don't happen to have any girl just now. As I was saying, you're out of sorts, but you've got some chink. That fat woman who's owed

you a long while for moving her, and came and paid you this morning—you didn't expect that, so it's just the same as money found; and when you find money, you must spend it right away, or it'll bring you bad luck! So, let's not work to-day; let's go and take something. I know all the good places, you know; we'll just fold up our *crochets* and enjoy our youth. How does that strike you?"

Sans-Cravate hesitated.

"Not work to-day," he muttered, "in the middle of the week, when everybody's at work——"

"*Ouiche!* everybody—who feels like it! I'll show you a lot of good fellows to-day, who know how to enjoy themselves! Besides, can't a man take a good dinner once in a while, and loaf a bit if he feels like it? There's days when you can't help it. Anyway, it's getting late."

"Late! it's only half-past nine."

"Well, you see there's no business doing; we won't get anything to do to-day; it's the dead season; no one's doing anything."

"Drinking ain't the way to save money to send a marriage portion to my sister Liline."

"You've told me that your sister was pretty; and when a girl's pretty, she don't need a marriage portion; and then, ain't there a lady at Clermont who takes an interest in her, and has taken her into her family and given her an education?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, she'll find a husband for your sister, that's plain enough; so you don't need to worry about her."

"Poor Liline! I'm very fond of her; she's so pretty and gentle—as gentle as I am rough! I mean to go down into the country next spring, and see my sister and

my father; and perhaps I'll stay with them, for I have nothing at all to keep me in Paris now."

Sans-Cravate sighed profoundly as he spoke, and his eyes scanned the boulevards as if he were looking for someone.

"Well, that's all right; you can go home next spring, and I'll show you out of the city; if you want, I'll wait for you at the barrier till you come back; but at the present time, if you don't take a little pleasure, you'll be as yellow and dry as parchment; you've changed already, you're losing your fine color."

"Oh! I don't care about that now! there's nobody I want to please."

"Nobody knows! nobody knows! you mustn't get careless. A man ought to be handsome all the time, as he's made to seduce; that's all I know. A comparison: it's like a horse that's never curry-combed; his coat loses all its gloss."

"It's sure enough that there's twelve francs here," said Sans-Cravate, tapping his pocket, "that I didn't count on at all."

"We must squeeze 'em dry. You've got twelve francs and I've got fifteen sous; we'll put 'em together, and spree it till they're dead! What do you say?"

Sans-Cravate was still hesitating, when he turned and saw Paul with his eyes fastened on him; thereupon he sprang to his feet and kicked his *crochets* aside, crying:

"Yes, yes! let's go and enjoy ourselves; to the devil with work! you're right. And while that lasts, I shan't have to look at people I hate. Let's be off, Jean Ficelle! No more work as long as the money holds out!"

"Bravo! that's talking! I imagine I am listening to Solomon himself."

In another moment, Jean Ficelle had bestowed the *crochets* in their usual place, and the two messengers walked away arm in arm, Sans-Cravate without looking at Paul, while Jean Ficelle, on the contrary, ostentatiously cast a sneering glance at their young comrade.

"Poor Sans-Cravate!" said Paul to himself, when he saw the two men leave their stand and their work; "he lets Jean Ficelle entice him away, and perhaps he will end by becoming as much of a ne'er-do-well as his companion!"

But the young man soon turned his eyes once more on the neighboring porte cochère; he was sorely disappointed because Elina did not come out, and wondered what she could think of him, when she had failed to find him in his usual place for eleven days.

He kept his eyes fixed on the door of the house in which the little dressmaker worked, almost every minute of the day; if he went away to do an errand, his eyes turned instantly in that direction when he came back; and he waited and waited, hoping that his love would come out; but she did not appear.

At last the night came, and the hour at which the girls ceased their labors, unless they were detained by some unusual press of work. Paul had determined not to go away without seeing Elina, even if he had to pass the whole evening in the street.

But just before nine o'clock, Elina came out at last, and, although it was dark, her first glance was at Paul's usual stand; not seeing him there, she quickened her pace, when she heard a well-known voice behind her:

"How fast you go, mademoiselle!"

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur Paul? You almost frightened me; you see—I am—I am not used to seeing you now, and I thought you were not here."

"I have been here since morning; I hoped you would come out for a minute, but I had to wait until now. Ah! the day has seemed terribly long to me."

"Really, monsieur; but for the last eleven days I have been expecting to see you in your place. Every morning I came early, so as to have time to talk a little with you; but, no, monsieur was never here. I was foolish enough even to ask leave to go out during the day, thinking that you would be there, but I took all those steps for nothing. Of course, I was a great fool to think of—a person who wasn't thinking of me. When one is thinking of anybody, he doesn't let eleven days go by without a word."

Elina said all this very rapidly, as if she did not wish to give her anger time to cool. Paul listened, walking by her side, and replied with the accent that comes from the heart:

"Elina, can it be that you believe that I no longer love you?"

The girl slackened her pace, and her voice indicated that her anger had already begun to subside, as she answered:

"Yes, monsieur; I do believe it—I am very sure of it. Not to come for eleven days! not even to find some means to be there just for a moment, to say a word to me. Oh! that was very cruel."

"Why, do you suppose, mademoiselle, that the time has not seemed long to me? that I have not been miserable at being deprived of the happiness of seeing you and hearing your voice; you, whom I love so dearly, and who are in my thoughts every instant?"

Elina stopped altogether, and there was no trace of anger in her voice.

"Well, monsieur, if that is true, then what is the meaning of this long absence? what became of you for eleven days? it seems to me as if they were months!"

"Believe that some very powerful motive was necessary to keep me away from you."

"A motive—that is no answer. Tell me, where have you been, what have you been doing? I have been told that you are a very mysterious person, that you have several occupations—is that true? No; for you would have told me. I have been assured, also, that you had robbed your comrade Sans-Cravate of his—his—mistress."

"Oh! surely you did not believe that either, did you, mademoiselle? I, rob my comrade, my friend, of his mistress! for I am fond of Sans-Cravate, although he has the reputation of being hot-headed and quarrelsome. I have seen him give all he possessed, the proceeds of a whole day's work, to a poor woman who went by with two children in her arms, and dressed in rags. And the man who does that cannot be a bad man. I, take away his mistress! Is such a thing possible?"

"Ah! that is what I said when I was told of it: 'Is such a thing possible?' but they seemed to laugh at me because I refused to believe it."

"Who?"

"Your comrades."

"Have you spoken to them?"

"Mon Dieu, yes! I ought not to have done it, but I couldn't contain myself. When you didn't come, I said to myself that some accident must have happened to you, or else you were sick. Oh! I was awfully unhappy."

This time the girl's voice trembled, not with anger, but with sobs; and Paul, who was close beside her, took her hand and pressed it lovingly in his own, saying:

"How happy I am! you still love me! Ah! this moment makes me forget all my cares. To think that anyone should dare to say that I love any other woman! You do not believe it, Elina, you will never believe it! Poor messenger that I am, am I not fortunate enough to be loved by you? what more could I desire?"

"Yes, I believe that you love me. I won't be angry any more; it makes one too wretched to be angry with a person one loves. Look at me; I am willing to see your face now. Oh! it seems to me that you have grown paler, that you have changed, since I saw you. Have you been sick?"

"No; it's the vexation and disappointment I have suffered."

"You haven't told me yet what you were doing those eleven days."

"I have been with a person, a friend, who was very ill; he had nobody but me to take care of him, so I could not leave him."

"Oh! in that case, I am not angry with you any more. But you never mentioned this friend to me."

"Because I seldom see him—only when he needs me."

"You are not lying to me? you haven't taken anybody's mistress?"

"I have thought of nobody but you."

"Good! now I am happy again. I had so many things to tell you; but when two people are together, they don't think—that is to say, they think too much—well, I don't know how it happens, but I forget everything else."

"Dear Elina!"

"Oh! wait—I remember now. First of all, there's a young man—one of those who came and laughed at us, you remember, when we were in the loft."

"Yes, indeed, I remember; but which one?"

"He's tall, but not handsome, and he has a bold, impertinent manner."

"I see which you mean; it must be Monsieur Célestin."

"Well, I noticed several times that he followed me when I came out of Madame Dumanchon's at night, to go home; he walked very close to me, and spoke to me, said a lot of foolish things, I don't know what, for I didn't listen, I never once answered him, and I walked so fast, to avoid hearing him, that I assure you he had to run to keep up with me.—'If Monsieur Paul was here with me,' I said to myself, 'he wouldn't dare to follow me, and I shouldn't be afraid of this horrid man.'"

"Poor Elina! did that fellow dare to insult you?"

"I don't know whether he did or not, for I didn't listen to him. Once he tried to take my arm and stop me, but I released myself so quickly, and pushed him away so hard, that he stood as if he was dazed, in the middle of the street. Well, he didn't follow me any more, and I was very glad; but this morning——"

"This morning?"

"One of your comrades—not Sans-Cravate, but the other one——"

"Jean Ficelle?"

"Yes. As I came down from my aunt's lodgings, I found him at the door.—'Mademoiselle,' he said, 'my comrade Paul would like to speak to you; he's waiting for you at a little restaurant close by, at the end of the street; I'll show you the place.'"

"The villain!"

"That seemed very strange to me; however, as I had asked your comrades about you yesterday, I believed that he had seen you, and that you had asked him to give me

that message. So I followed this Jean Ficelle.—'Why don't Monsieur Paul come himself?' I asked him. 'What prevents him? is he sick?' But the man only answered, in a sort of wheedling tone: 'I don't know, mamzelle; but he asked me to tell you that he must speak to you, and I'm just doing his errand.' At last we arrived in front of a restaurant, and he said: 'This is the place; my comrade's expecting you; go right in, don't be afraid, and ask for Paul; and they'll take you where he is.'"

"Oh! what an infernal scoundrel that Jean Ficelle is! to second the scheme of a man who intended to outrage you! So that is what he meant to hint at this morning when he said that someone might rob me of the woman I loved. And I was so far from suspecting it! I didn't pay the slightest attention to his words.—But what happened next?"

"Well, I was about to go into the restaurant, when something, I don't know what, held me back. The girls in the workroom have often talked about places to which men had tried to entice them on one pretext or another. I said to myself: 'If Monsieur Paul is in here, it seems to me that it will be enough for me to send him word that I am here, and he will come out.' Jean Ficelle had disappeared, so I waited till a waiter passed the door, and said to him: 'Be kind enough to tell Monsieur Paul that I am waiting for him down here.' The waiter laughed, and told me I must go upstairs; but when he saw that I insisted on staying in the street, he said he would take my message; and in a moment I saw the same young man coming who had followed me so often. When I saw him, I cried out; he tried to hold me, but I was already a long way off, thanking heaven that I didn't go into the house."

Paul's blood fairly boiled with rage when he learned that Jean Ficelle had stooped to further the projects of a man who could have had no other purpose than to ruin Elina. If his comrade had been in his place at that moment, he would have made haste to demand an explanation of his conduct, and would have been very likely to remove any inclination on his part to act again as the agent of a seducer. But Jean Ficelle and Sans-Cravate had not reappeared since the morning; and Paul, to reassure Elina, was compelled to promise her that he would not seek a quarrel with his fellow messenger.

"There is no danger for me now," she said; "Jean Ficelle did what he was told to do, in order to earn money. Certainly it is very wrong to deceive a young girl, for, of course, he knew that it wasn't you who sent for me. But all messengers are not over particular. So much the worse for the dishonest ones! Despise that man, but don't quarrel with him; if you do, monsieur, I shall never tell you again what happens to me."

"Very well; I will obey you."

"That's right; and then, you must always be with me in the morning when I go to my work, and at night when I go home; be my protector, my guardian angel, and I am very sure that no one will try again to induce me to go into a restaurant."

"To be always with you—that is my dearest wish; but sometimes——"

"Your work—yes, I understand. But try to be always at liberty in the morning and evening. Isn't it enough to work all day?"

"And if anyone should send word to you to go to a strange house, never consent."

"Don't be afraid; I will remember the little restaurant. I wish you could have seen that man's face when he saw that I had escaped him. Oh! it would have made you laugh. Mon Dieu! it must be awfully late; we have been talking a long while."

"It seems to me as if it had been only a minute."

"Oh! don't think that it's a bore to me! far from it; but my aunt will want to know where I have been so late. Do you know what time it is, Monsieur Paul?"

"I haven't any watch, mademoiselle."

"Nor I; but we can look into the watchmaker's as we pass. Almost eleven, do you see? And I had so much more to say to you!"

"And so had I!"

"It must wait till to-morrow. Here I am at my door; adieu! till to-morrow!"

"Till to-morrow!"

"I'll try to remember all I had to say to you."

The lovers parted, regretting that they had not time to talk more. It is always so while love lasts; for even if they have nothing more to say, they still have the pleasure of looking at each other.

XX

TWO RIVALS

The clock had just struck eleven. Madame Baldimer, dressed with even more coquetry than usual, had been waiting a long while in her boudoir; impatience, uneasiness, and anger gleamed in her eyes. Again and again she rose, paced the floor excitedly, stopped to listen for the doorbell, then looked at her clock. For the third time she pulled a bellrope, and her maid appeared.

"Has no one come, Rosa?"

"No, madame."

"It is inconceivable! I wrote him to come at ten, and now it is eleven! He is always so eager, so prompt! I cannot understand it. If he had triumphed, I could conceive of his failing to keep an appointment; but so long as a man is not our conqueror, he is our slave. Can it be that Albert is not like other men?"

"Is it Monsieur Albert Vermoncey whom madame expects this evening?"

"To be sure."

"And if Monsieur le Comte Dahlborne should come also?"

"Well! you will admit him."

"Even if Monsieur Albert is here?"

"Mon Dieu! yes; how stupid you are!"

The maid left the room. Madame Baldimer threw herself on a divan, with her eyes still fixed on the clock; and as the hand circled the dial, her face assumed a

serious, sombre expression; one would have said that, with the speeding minutes, all the plans she had formed were vanishing in air.

At last, the bell rang. The fair widow drew herself up with an almost convulsive movement.

"Here he is!" she exclaimed, and her features assumed an expression of joy and triumph.

In another instant the door opened. The maid announced Monsieur Albert Vermoncey, and the young man darted joyously into the boudoir.

"Here I am at last!" he cried; "I have had a hard time of it, madame, and I did think that it would be impossible for me to-night to enjoy the pleasure of seeing you, and of this delightful interview which I desired so earnestly!"

"Mon Dieu! monsieur, what has happened to you, pray? I have been expecting you since ten o'clock. I had no sooner returned from the country than I hastened to let you know; I even did you the favor to say that I should expect you this evening. I thought that you would be very glad to see me again. But, instead of that, monsieur does not come. Perhaps I did wrong to write you—I have taken you from your pleasures——"

"Oh! do not say that. But pray listen to my story—it is very amusing, I assure you. I am just from the guardhouse."

"From the guardhouse! Why, what have you been doing?"

"It all grew out of a joke we intended to play on a certain young man; I and three of my friends were waiting for him on Place des Italiens. As he owes five hundred francs to a gentleman to whom he gave an olive as security,—it's a gambling debt,—we agreed that, as

soon as he appeared, we would all rush upon him, each of us presenting an olive and demanding five hundred francs. But one of my friends, who is naturally very absent-minded, made a mistake and pounced upon a respectable citizen, who was waiting to buy a check for the Opéra-Comique. He was frightened, and shouted *thief*. We ran up, and so did the guard; to cut it short, we were all four taken to the guardhouse at the theatre, and I fancy we should have been locked up for the night, had it not been for a staff officer, a friend of my father, who happened to pass. He answered for us, and then they consented to believe that we were not thieves, and they set us at liberty."

Madame Baldimer laughed heartily at Albert's adventure. Meanwhile, he took up a package which he had deposited on a table when he came in, and placed it on the lovely widow's knees.

"See," he said, "is not this what you expressed a wish to possess?"

Madame Baldimer removed the paper, which contained a magnificent cashmere shawl. Her face was radiant and she bestowed the sweetest of smiles on the young man, murmuring:

"Oh! but you are really too gallant; it is too beautiful, and a present of such value—— No; I cannot accept it."

"You accept a superb fan from Count Dahlborne!"

"There's a vast difference between a fan and this; people will say that I lead you on to do foolish things."

"Ah! I shall be only too happy to do them, if your love is the reward."

Madame Baldimer did not reply, but she allowed Albert to take her hand and cover it with kisses. He

tried to put his arm about her waist; but she gently repulsed him, saying:

"But how did you succeed in finding out that it was this very shawl that I wanted?"

"Didn't you tell me that it was like one that Madame Plays wore at one of Count Dahlborne's receptions?"

"Yes, I remember——"

"Well! I called on Madame Plays and asked her to show me the beautiful cashmere she wore that day."

"But I thought that you had quarrelled with that lady."

"I presented her with a bouquet, and she forgave me."

"Just for the bouquet?"

"Why, yes."

"Hm! I imagine that the shawl must have cost you something more."

"You are mistaken."

"Poor Herminie! if she knew that she owed your visit solely to your desire to give me a shawl like one of hers! Ha! ha! ha! she would be frantic! What traitors men are, aren't they?"

"We are driven to it sometimes."

"Ha! ha! I like to think of going to see her with this shawl over my shoulders—she was so proud of hers! she will be struck dumb."

Madame Baldimer continued to laugh. Albert tried to give a more sentimental turn to the conversation, and, as a woman is not usually cruel when she laughs, he tried to take advantage of her merriment to renew certain manœuvres which would, he hoped, lead him to a complete victory. But his adversary, laughing all the while, defended herself with a dexterity which did not indicate that her heart was disposed to surrender.

Albert was beginning to consider that Madame Baldimer prolonged his torment a little too far, when the doorbell rang again.

"Who can have come so late to call upon you?" cried Albert; "it is almost twelve o'clock, and I thought that you would receive nobody but me to-night."

"Really, I don't expect anybody, unless possibly it is Count Dahlborne. That man pesters me with his attentions. He has probably heard of my return, and he loses no time——"

"But a man doesn't call at this time of night, unless he is on very good terms with a woman!"

"Ah! monsieur, that suspicion——"

"Very well! if it's the count, send him away—don't receive him."

Before Madame Baldimer could reply, the maid announced Count Dahlborne, and the Swede instantly made his appearance.

Albert's features contracted. Madame Baldimer welcomed the count with an affable smile; and he, as cold and formal as ever, saluted her with his usual stiffness, imprinted a kiss on her hand, and sat down beside her, precisely as if Albert were not present.

The young man amused himself tearing his gloves, while his reflections took this turn:

"This must come to an end; I didn't give her a shawl that cost five thousand francs for the pleasure of seeing this man."

Madame Baldimer made one or two of the commonplace remarks which people employ to open a conversation.

The Swede replied with his usual brevity. Albert did not say a word.

At last, at a moment when nothing was being said, the count took a velvet case from his pocket, and handed it to Madame Baldimer, saying:

"Here is a trifle—to take the place of the fan; it isn't so breakable."

The widow opened the case, which contained a magnificent opera glass of most beautiful workmanship; she uttered a cry of admiration, and, taking the glass from the case, handed it to Albert, saying:

"Did you ever see anybody so gallant?"

"It looks very much as if this woman were making a fool of me!" said Albert to himself.

However, he restrained himself, and, merely glancing at the glass, cried with an affected enthusiasm which closely resembled mockery:

"Oh! it is magnificent! Great God! how beautiful it is! I would like right well to know where monsieur finds such beautiful things!"

The Swede bit his lips, but said nothing.

Madame Baldimer continued to extol the opera glass; and Albert, glancing at the shawl, which lay neglected on a chair, said to himself:

"God! what fools men are sometimes!"

But the conversation languished. Madame Baldimer made but a feeble effort to sustain it. The Swede said a word or two at once, never more than that; and Albert contented himself with ejaculating at intervals:

"Mon Dieu! what an opera glass! it is dazzling!"

Whereupon the count made an imperceptible grimace, and glanced furtively at the young man.

It was long after twelve o'clock. The gentlemen seemed no more disposed to give way to each other than on the day of the fan. Suddenly Madame Baldimer rose.

"It is very late, messieurs," she said; "I am going to bed, and I bid you good-night!"

The two men rose to salute her.

The lovely widow took occasion to whisper to Albert, as she asked him to hand her the shawl:

"That man is insufferable to me; try to rid me of him."

Albert simply bowed, without a word.

Then, as she passed the count, she said in his ear:

"That young man is always at my heels; pray find some way to relieve me of his presence."

The Swede, in his turn, made a low bow.

Thereupon she left the two gentlemen in the boudoir, each reflecting upon what she had just whispered to him. They glanced at each other from time to time—Albert with a mocking expression, the count with a slight frown.

After some minutes had passed thus, the Swede decided to speak first. He walked up to Albert, and said to him, still in a most ceremonious tone:

"It seems to me, monsieur, that you meant to be understood as making fun of the opera glass which I presented to Madame Baldimer."

"Faith! yes," the young man airily replied; "after all, monsieur, that's as good a motive as any! and I fancy that we both understand what we have in view."

"Perfectly, monsieur. At what hour to-morrow, if you please?"

"Oh! not too early, if it's all the same to you; for I am a little lazy about getting up in the morning."

"Very good—say ten o'clock?"

"Ten o'clock it is, at Porte Saint-Mandé; there are a number of very pleasant, solitary little nooks in that

neighborhood, and it's less common than the Bois de Boulogne. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Entirely so; and your weapons?"

"Whatever you choose."

"Pistols, then."

"Agreed."

"I shall have one second; I believe that one is sufficient, in this country?"

"We are at liberty to have two; but, as you say, one is enough."

"Until to-morrow, then!"

"Until to-morrow, monsieur le comte! and now, I believe that there is nothing further to detain us here."

The Swede bowed with an almost affable expression, and opened the door of the boudoir, pausing to allow Albert to go out first; but he would not. After a contest of politeness, the count finally went first, and they soon reached the foot of the staircase.

The concierge was asleep; before he opened the door, Albert produced a dainty cigar case from his pocket and took out a cigar, saying:

"I am in the habit of smoking every night before I go to bed."

"I am very much annoyed," said the count; "I have forgotten my case, and I also am fond of smoking when I go home at night."

"In that case, allow me to offer you a cigar, monsieur le comte," said Albert, offering the Swede his case. "I am sure you will like them; they are very good indeed."

Monsieur Dahlborne bowed, and took a cigar. Meanwhile, the concierge had opened the door, and Albert lighted his cigar at the lamp in the porch. When they

were in the street, noticing that his rival had no light, he offered the lighted end of his cigar, and the count lighted his by it; then they bowed again, with the utmost courtesy, repeating:

"Until to-morrow!"

"At ten o'clock."

"At Porte Saint-Mandé."

XXI

TOBIE AS CHEVALIER

Tobie left Bastringuette, convinced that the lady who desired to see him the next evening could be no other than she whom he had failed to triumph over on the Champs-Élysées. He determined to be very prompt at the rendezvous, and not to take his charmer to a private dining-room overlooking a mountebank's booth.

The young man passed the whole of the next day dressing and curling and perfuming himself.

"To-night," he thought, "the voluptuous Plays shall not escape me; indeed, as she herself has made the assignation, it is probable that it is not her intention to be too cruel. I shall have in her such a mistress as I desire. She is rich, and they say she is capable of doing insane things for a man she loves. Suppose she should be willing to redeem my olive from Varinet—why not?—until Aunt Abraham gives me an interest in her business. Faith! I feel disposed to be very amorous."

The night arrived in due time; Tobie, having become less timid since he had a love affair in prospect, left his

lodgings just at dusk. It was only half-past eight, and he was walking slowly in the direction of Place des Italiens, when, at the corner of Rue du Mont-Blanc, his attention was attracted by a lady crossing the street, whose figure resembled that of the person he expected to meet; quickening his pace a little, he soon overtook her, and found that it was, in truth, the sentimental Herminie. He at once approached her and offered his arm, saying:

"I was on my way to the rendezvous; you see how zealous I am, for it is not nine o'clock; but it seems that we are equally eager for the meeting."

Madame Plays started back, surprised to see a stranger offer her his arm; but in an instant she recognized Pigeonnier, and exclaimed:

"What! is it you, monsieur? Are you on your way again to replace your friend—that blackguard Albert? Ah! what a monster that fellow is! how I detest him!"

"Why, no, madame; I have come on my own account; I am on my way to the Pâté des Italiens, as you know."

"As I know? What difference does it make to me where you are going?"

"Why, don't you understand? I was going to the Pâté des Italiens, at the time you mentioned."

"Oh! you weary me with your *pâté*, monsieur! I don't understand a word you say."

"What, madame! wasn't it you who gave me a rendezvous for this evening, at nine o'clock?"

"A rendezvous! I! Why, you're mad, monsieur! I never gave you a rendezvous!"

Tobie was petrified; he saw that he had formed false hopes; but, determined to make the most of his meeting with Madame Plays, he rejoined:

"I was told that a pretty woman wished to see me. The description which was given me of the person was so seductive—I thought it was you—and notwithstanding the somewhat—er—savage way you treated me the last time I saw you, it made me very happy to think that I was going to see you again."

Madame Plays was never insensible to a compliment; she could not help laughing as she glanced at the short, stout youth; then she replied, with an irritated air:

"Oh! you're not the one I have a grudge against; but that monster, that ungrateful wretch! Can you conceive such a thing as his making a fool of me again?"

"Who, pray?"

"Why, Albert, monsieur—your friend Albert."

"Oh! Albert—it's so long since I saw him."

"Well, I have seen him again, I have had that happiness. I didn't want to receive him, I had given orders that he wasn't to be admitted—and if it hadn't been for that idiot of a Monsieur Plays!"

"I am very curious to hear the story."

"Very well; I will take your arm, and tell it to you."

"Ah! how kind you are!"

"And perhaps——"

"Perhaps—— Oh! please finish the sentence, divine creature——"

"First of all, I want to be revenged on Albert, I give you warning; and the man who should avenge me—oh! I don't know what I would not do for him!"

"O God! you have given me a glimpse of heaven, of Olympus! I will avenge you, I give you my word; yes, I will avenge you twice over; you will see what an avenger I am!"

"Enough! Bless my heart, what a libertine you are! You think at once of things that——"

"And what do you expect a man to think of when he's beside a pretty woman?—of roasting coffee?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes, I saw Albert four days ago; he called on me, and I refused to receive him. Then what does he do? He goes to see my husband, and makes himself at home in his office;—my husband is so foolishly good-natured! he made Albert welcome, and I went there, by chance, and found him there with a lovely bouquet. He made such repentant eyes at me, that I was kind-hearted enough to allow myself to be moved. In a word, I consented to let him go with me to my boudoir; there he said—some pleasant things—nothing to speak of—then begged me to show him the lovely cashmere shawl that I wore at Count Dahlborne's party. I yielded to that caprice, and monsieur went away, making an appointment with me for the next day, which he did not keep."

"That was abominable!"

"But that is not all. I have learned since that he has bought the only shawl like mine in Paris, probably to give it to some woman who was pleased with mine. So, you see, he came back to me solely to see my shawl; and, since then, I have written to him six times, and he has not come again, nor has he even deigned to write a word in reply!"

"Ah! such conduct is very blameworthy."

"Say rather that it is worthy of a street urchin."

"I dared not say it, but I thought so. And you, who deserve to be so madly adored! As for the letter of the other day, I had not read it; I handed it to you in all confidence. If I had known that it contained anything

offensive, you must be convinced that I would not have undertaken to deliver it."

"I believe you. But to come just to see the shawl, to buy one like it to give to some woman, to make an appointment with me and not keep it, and not to answer a single one of my letters—oh! that is too much, and I am an outraged woman! that is to say, monsieur, I must have blood! For lack of a better champion, I would have appealed to my husband; I would have worked him up to the point of fighting with Albert. Yes, he would have fought, for he does everything I want him to. But, all things considered, I prefer that he should not be the one to avenge me; that wouldn't be exciting enough; and as you offer yourself, I accept you."

Tobie was rather embarrassed; he was not expecting that Madame Plays would demand that he fight a duel with Albert; he did not suppose that she contemplated such a serious vengeance as that, and he feared that he had gone too far.

The lady observed his indecision, and at once continued:

"You hesitate! you are not worthy of a glance from me. Release my arm, monsieur, and do not speak to me, do not look at me again; I do not know you!"

"Why, no! no! I am not hesitating," cried Tobie, detaining the arm that was passed through his; "I will do whatever you wish; I will fight with Albert, since that will give you pleasure."

"Very well. You will kill him!"

"I can't promise to kill him outright, but I will do all that I possibly can."

"Well, you will wound him at least, and bring me one of his ears."

"Oho! do you really want one of his ears? It seems to me that I might bring you something better than that."

"I want some proof of your victory."

"Oh! I will bring you one, I promise you."

"Then you will be—my chevalier."

"Couldn't I be that at once; I only ask to be armed."

"When you have conquered Albert."

"Give me the kiss, at least."

"Can you think of such a thing, here, on the boulevard?"

"Let us take a cab; one can be created a chevalier very nicely in a cab; why, one of my friends was admitted into the Freemasons in a *citadine*."

"No, monsieur, no; I won't get into a cab with you now. You see, I know you; you are too enterprising; when you have avenged me, it will be a different matter. Then I shall feel bound to reward you."

"Ah! mon Dieu! how I wish that that time had come!"

"It depends entirely upon you whether it comes soon."

"It won't be long, I promise you. I will go in search of Albert, and you will have news of him very quickly. Either you will be avenged, or I will perish in the attempt!"

"Bravo! you are a man of spirit. Come and tell me the result of your duel—for you will be the victor, I have no doubt. You may come up to my boudoir by the narrow staircase on the right in the courtyard; it is on the first floor. Say to my maid: 'I am Tobie,' and you will be admitted."

"Ah! I shall swoon with joy on the threshold of your boudoir!"

"I should say that you would do much better to come in."

"I will come in, adorable creature! I will come in, and you will be obliged to turn me out!"

"And now, adieu! I must leave you; I am going to take a cab and pass the evening with one of my friends."

"And you won't allow me to go with you?"

"No. Adieu!"

Madame Plays hurried away, and Tobie, who had entirely forgotten the rendezvous on Place des Italiens, returned to his lodgings.

"Most assuredly I shall not fight with Albert," he said to himself; "I haven't the slightest inclination to do it. But I will tell him of my meeting with Madame Plays, as well as her proposition to me. Albert is a good fellow, he likes a joke, and he will help me to invent some way of making her think that we have fought. Oh, yes!—but my olive! However, it isn't Albert that I owe the money to, after all, and I'll tell him Varinet hasn't shown up."

Nine o'clock was just striking, the next morning, when Tobie called at the Vermoncey mansion and asked Albert's servant if his friend was visible. The servant ushered Tobie into the young man's bedroom, where he was still asleep.

"It's I, my dear Albert," said Tobie, speaking very loudly; "if you want to sleep some more, don't wake up; I will go away."

Albert woke, rubbed his eyes, recognized Tobie, and murmured sleepily:

"What! is it you, Tobie? where in the devil have you come from?"

"From home, of course."

"And why didn't you come last evening to Place des Italiens, where somebody was waiting for you?"

"Oho! how do you know that?"

"Parbleu! because it was Mouillot, Balivan, Célestin, and I who made the appointment with you through Bastringuette."

"Really?"

"We meant to play a practical joke on you, and we got ourselves arrested and put in the guardhouse!"

"Ha! ha! charming! delicious!"

The little man twisted himself about in an easy-chair, and laughed till he cried.

"But tell me why you have come to see me so early in the day? have you come to redeem your fetich? Perhaps you don't know Varinet's address?"

"I didn't come for that, my friend. I have another reason; I have a favor to ask of you."

"You want to borrow five hundred francs?"

"That isn't what I came for, but if you are willing to lend it to me, it would be very welcome just at this time."

"Well, why did you come and disturb my sleep?"

"In the first place, my friend, it's late, and I wouldn't have waked you if your servant hadn't told me that you had something on hand this morning."

"Great heaven!" cried Albert, hastily throwing off the bedclothes; "you remind me! what time is it, pray?"

"About a quarter past nine."

"I haven't a minute to lose, for I have a duel this morning at ten! Gad! I must make haste."

"What's that? you are going to fight a duel?" said Tobie, involuntarily recoiling from his friend, and concluding that Albert was aware of Madame Plays's hopes; "why, no, Albert; no, you mustn't fight; it isn't worth while—a burlesque duel is all that's necessary."

"What in the devil are you talking about? do you mean to say that you know the cause of my duel with Count Dahlborne?"

"Count Dahlborne? oho! you're going to fight with him, are you?"

"To be sure."

Tobie breathed more freely.

"No, I know nothing about that," he replied, running his hand through his hair; "I got it mixed up with something else. Imagine, if you please, that Madame Plays, whom I met last night, absolutely insists on my fighting with you."

"Oh! as to her, it's a different matter. Poor woman! What answer did you make?"

"I promised to kill you for her."

"Very good; listen—perhaps it can be arranged to suit you: if the count kills me, you must tell Madame Plays that you did it."

"Oh! the idea! Poor Albert! I should be so distressed! Are you really going to fight?"

"Most certainly I am. By the way, as you are on the spot, you must be my second; for I shall not have time to send for anybody else."

"Your second!"

"You don't mean to refuse, I trust?"

"You see, my dear fellow, if you should be wounded, I should be ill, I know."

"Nonsense! you must overcome such weaknesses as that; you shall be my second, and I'll lend you five hundred francs to redeem your olive; and I give you leave to tell Madame Plays that you have beaten me, wounded me, killed me—whatever you choose."

"I haven't the heart to refuse. I will sacrifice myself and be your second. Shall we breakfast?"

"I think not; but afterward, if I am the victor, there'll be nothing to prevent."

While they were talking, Albert had dressed; he took his box of pistols, sent for a cab, and entered it with Tobie, who was very pale and agitated. As they passed the Café de Paris, on the boulevard, Albert cried:

"Oh! mon Dieu! I have forgotten something!"

"What is it? Have you two duels on hand?"

"No, but if anything should happen to me—I haven't written a word of farewell to my father. I will step into this café, while you go and find a messenger for me—Sans-Cravate, if you can."

"Very well, my friend."

Albert alighted from the cab and went into the café to write his letter; meanwhile, Tobie turned back to the corner of Rue du Helder to find the messenger. Sans-Cravate and Jean Ficelle were not in their places, but he saw Paul and hurried to where he stood.

"You must come with me, my boy."

"Yes, monsieur."

"You will be given a letter to deliver."

"I will deliver it, monsieur."

"You are to carry it to—but my friend probably won't want it to be delivered at once. It's a very serious matter—a duel."

"Is it you who are going to fight, monsieur?"

"No; but I am to act as second, which is almost the same thing. The letter's for his father. Sapristi! this business upsets me so—it seems to me it would be much better if we could prevent this duel."

"How can that be done, monsieur?"

"I haven't any idea; but come."

Paul accompanied Tobie. Albert had written his letter, and was waiting by the cab.

"Hurry, hurry!" he shouted to Tobie, who did not quicken his pace. "It has just occurred to me that you can take this letter and give it to my father, if I am killed."

"Thanks; much obliged; a delightful commission that! No, indeed; give it to this fellow."

Albert handed Paul the letter, saying:

"Now, my friend, listen carefully to what I say. If you do not see me again within two hours, you will take this letter to my father, Monsieur Vermoncey, Rue Caumartin—the address is on the envelope; but not before two hours from this time! do you understand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Take this;—and now, Tobie, let us be off."

Albert entered the cab, but Tobie seized the opportunity to whisper in Paul's ear:

"Carry the letter at once; then his father, knowing that he is going to fight, may succeed in preventing the duel."

"Come on, Tobie! we have no time to waste."

"Here I am; I was just fixing my suspenders."

When the young men were in the cab, the driver, spurred on by Albert, lashed his horse, which started off at a rapid trot; and Paul was left standing on the boulevard, with the letter to Monsieur Vermoncey in his hand.

The young messenger considered what it was his duty to do. The sight of Albert recalled the adventure of the loft, Célestin's insolence, and his schemes to seduce Elina. For a moment, he was tempted to wait the prescribed two hours before delivering the letter. But such impulses, inspired by hatred, could not long exist in his heart.

"This Monsieur Albert isn't as vicious as the others," he thought; "he allows his friends to lead him into folly, just as Sans-Cravate allows Jean Ficelle to lead him. But I don't believe that he is bad at heart. And if he should be killed! Mon Dieu! I think I have heard that his father had no one left but him, that he had lost all his other children. Ah! I must at least try to save this one for him. I will deliver the letter at once."

Paul went to the address written on the letter. He did not know Albert's father, he had never seen him; and yet, the thought of his grief if his son should fall in this duel awoke the keenest interest in his heart.

"I would like to speak to Monsieur Vermoncey—the elder," said Paul to the concierge.

"Second floor, door at the left."

"Is he at home?"

"Yes; he never goes out so early."

The messenger ran hastily up the two flights of stairs, rang at the door, and said to the servant who answered the bell:

"I would like to speak to Monsieur Vermoncey."

"What do you want of him?"

"I have a letter for him."

"Give it to me; I will hand it to him."

"Oh! no, I must give it into his own hands."

"But monsieur is breakfasting. However, I'll go and tell him. Wait."

"But tell him that it is very urgent, most important."

The servant left Paul in the reception-room, frantic with impatience. At last the man returned, and ushered him into the room where Monsieur Vermoncey was breakfasting.

Albert's father looked up at the young man, who seemed to be profoundly agitated. Paul's interesting and

by no means ordinary face prepossessed everybody in his favor; Monsieur Vermoncey addressed him kindly:

"You wish to speak to me, my friend?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You have a letter for me, I understand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Give it to me."

"Oh! pardon me; but I must tell you first under what circumstances it was handed to me."

"Very well, go on. But you seem much excited, my friend; try to be calm. If you have come in behalf of some unfortunate person, I will try to grant his request."

"Oh! it isn't that, monsieur; this letter that I have brought is from monsieur your son."

"From my son?"

"Yes, monsieur; he handed it to me a few minutes ago, and said: 'If you don't see me again in two hours, take this letter to my father; but not before."

"What does it mean?"

"But his friend, the man who was with him, whispered to me: 'Go to Monsieur Vermoncey at once; there's to be a duel.'"

"A duel! O my God!"

Monsieur Vermoncey rose, took the letter from Paul's hand, and hastily ran his eyes over it.

"The unhappy boy!" he cried; "he says good-bye to me, asks me to forgive him for fighting. Ah! he must have determined to kill me too. But you say it was only a moment ago that Albert gave you this letter?"

"Yes, monsieur—out on the boulevard."

"Ah! then he shall not fight; I will stop this duel. O my God! my son, the last of my children! to lose him as well would be too horrible!"

Monsieur Vermoncey put on his hat and hastened downstairs, followed by Paul. When they were in the street, he looked anxiously at the messenger, and said:

"You know where this duel is to take place, do you not?"

"No, monsieur; they did not tell me that."

"What! his friend did not tell you?"

"No, I suppose he didn't think of it; and it didn't occur to me to ask him."

"What a misfortune! Where are we to go, then? where shall we find them?"

"One moment, monsieur; they were in a cab in front of the Café de Paris; they have not gone to the Bois de Boulogne, for the cab drove away rapidly in the direction of Porte Saint-Denis."

"Then they must be at Vincennes; yes, that must be the place. We will go there. Isn't that a cab yonder? just call it."

"Yes, monsieur."

Paul ran to call the cab; Monsieur Vermoncey stepped in, and said to the messenger:

"Come with me, my friend; you must help me in my search."

"Gladly, monsieur; but I will get up behind."

"No, no, come in here, with me; you understand my suffering, I can see that. You will help me to find my son, to prevent a ghastly calamity. Come quickly!"

Paul stepped into the cab and seated himself beside Monsieur Vermoncey, who said to the driver:

"Twenty francs, forty francs, as much money as you want, if we are at the Forest of Vincennes in half an hour!"

The driver urged his horses to a gallop.

XXII

THE DUEL AND ITS RESULTS.—A TOKEN OF VICTORY.—TOBIE'S REWARD

Albert and Tobie arrived at Porte Saint-Mandé as the clock struck ten. They alighted from their cab, and saw a carriage a few yards away.

"The count is ahead of me," said Albert; "but it's all right; we are in time. Yes, I see two gentlemen walking along the avenue yonder. Those are our adversaries. Come, Tobie, forward!"

"What do you say? *our* adversaries!" cried Pigeonnier, walking as if he had on three pairs of trousers; "I have no adversaries; I didn't come here to fight!"

"Yes, yes, that's all right, don't be alarmed. In old times, the seconds used to fight; and if you want to follow the example of the *raffinés*,—under Louis XIII, for instance, they sometimes fought six against six; those were pleasure parties, on my word!"

"A delicious kind of pleasure! I have no admiration for the manners of those days."

"Well, Tobie, come on, for heaven's sake! What the devil! are your trousers too tight for you? you act as if you couldn't walk!"

"Yes, they cut me; they hurt me terribly."

Count Dahlborne's second was a Swede, a friend of his, who was as tall and stiff as he; he had been in Paris only a few days, and did not understand French, his ability to speak that tongue being thus far limited to the phrases: *Oui, monsieur,* and *bien obligé.*

Albert went forward to meet his opponent, and they saluted each other with much courtesy.

"Allow me to present Monsieur de Mulberg," said the count, waving his hand toward his second.

Albert, assuming that it was a Swedish custom to introduce one's second, stepped back, and said, indicating Tobie, who persisted in remaining in the background:

"And I have the honor of presenting Monsieur Tobie Pigeonnier."

The salutations were repeated, and Monsieur de Mulberg walked up to Tobie and held out his hand, saying:

"*Bien obligé*,* monsieur!"

"What's that? it isn't worth while," rejoined Tobie, allowing his hand to be shaken with a decidedly ill grace.

Albert pointed to a path at the right, and said to the count:

"Let us go in this direction; we shall be able to find a place where we shall not be seen or disturbed."

They all followed Albert, Tobie still in the rear and walking as if he were very uncomfortable. Albert halted in an isolated open space, surrounded by dense bushes, saying:

"It seems to me that we shall be very comfortable here."

Count Dahlborne nodded his head in assent, and turned to his friend.

"Arrange the preliminaries with monsieur, Monsieur de Mulberg," he said.

Monsieur de Mulberg walked gravely to Tobie, and began to talk Swedish with him, offering his pistols. Tobie poked him in the stomach, and said:

"Look you! I believe you agree with me that this affair can be arranged. What is the difficulty? I'll bet that it's some foolish trifle."

* Much obliged.

Monsieur de Mulberg, who was a very ceremonious individual, was much offended because the little man presumed to poke him in the stomach. He frowned, uttered a violent oath, stamped on the ground, and handed Tobie a pistol, exclaiming:

"*Oui, monsieur, bien obligé.*"

Tobie hastily drew back, saying to his principal:

"How do you expect me to agree to anything with this gentleman? He talks some language I never heard before, and looks all the time as if he meant to fire at me."

"Look you, monsieur le comte," said Albert, "I fancy that we can arrange matters better than our seconds can. Let us stand thirty paces apart; we will each walk forward ten paces when your second claps his hands, and fire when we please. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Perfectly"

"I will take my place.—Tobie, count off thirty paces, starting from here."

Tobie acted as if he were uncertain whether he would do it or not; but he finally decided to do so, and made each of his paces twice the usual length.

"You want to fight, do you?" he said to himself; "and you don't think anything about breakfasting. All right! get it over at once! To think that that Monsieur Vermoncey doesn't come! The messenger probably didn't understand me."

The distance being marked off and the adversaries in their places, Monsieur de Mulberg clapped his hands, and Tobie lay flat on the ground, muttering:

"Nobody knows what may happen! Unskilful men have been known to shoot their seconds, but I don't suppose they'll aim at the ground."

The combatants walked forward two or three steps, then fired at almost the same instant. Albert received the bullet in his coat collar. But Count Dahlborne was less fortunate; he was shot in the left arm, near the shoulder, but did not fall.

"Are you wounded, monsieur le comte?" asked Albert, running up to him.

"Yes—in the arm—the shoulder, I believe. Oh! it's a trifle. I don't see why we should go any further. But you are a fine young fellow, and I consider it my duty to tell you what Madame Baldimer whispered to me last night when she left us."

"Ah! she said something to you, did she? And to me, too."

"She whispered these words in my ear: 'This young man is constantly at my heels; find some way to rid me of his presence.'"

Albert turned pale when he heard what his fair enslaver thought of him.

"I give you my word of honor that she said that to me," added the count.

"I believe you, especially as she said to me, speaking of you: 'That man is insufferable to me; try to rid me of him.'"

"She's a woman who isn't worth having two respectable men fight for her. I abandon the field to you, monsieur; I shall go no more to her house."

"Oh! my love has vanished, monsieur le comte; I mean to go there once more, simply to bid her farewell and tell her that I am no longer her dupe; then I shall never see her again."

During this conversation, Albert supported the count, while Monsieur de Mulberg went to fetch the carriage.

As for Tobie, immediately after the exchange of shots, he sprang to his feet and ran after Monsieur Dahlborne's second, crying:

"It won't amount to anything—a wound in the arm—it isn't dangerous."

But Monsieur de Mulberg, to whom it had seemed very strange that their opponent's second should throw himself flat on his stomach as the shots were fired, bestowed a wrathful glance upon him, and turned away, muttering:

"*Bien obligé*, monsieur."

"Go to the devil! You make me sick!" said Pigeonnier to himself, as he walked toward the cab. "One would say that he was angry because his friend isn't killed!"

Monsieur de Mulberg arrived with the carriage, and Albert assisted the count to get in; then they parted, with a shake of the hand.

Albert went to join Tobie, who was already in their cab.

"Well," exclaimed the latter, when his friend came in sight, "I trust that we are satisfied! Victors! and not a scratch! That is a very agreeable ending. We shall eat breakfast enough for four."

"Oh! I am indignant beyond words! I am furious!" said Albert, as he entered the cab.

"The deuce you are! I don't understand at all. Are you furious because you aren't wounded?"

"Bah! I am not talking about the duel! It's that woman I am thinking of! that woman who has mocked at me and my love! who hoped, perhaps, that I would be killed!"

"Oho! so it was on a woman's account that you fought. They have the very devil in them, these women, to insist upon it that we should all fight for them!"

"I am going to her now, to confound her.—Whip up your horse, driver; you may drop me at Rue Neuve-Vivienne.—Do you, Tobie, go at once and find that messenger, and get my letter. You will understand that it must not be delivered to my father, for it would cause him unnecessary anxiety."

Tobie made no reply. He recalled what he had told Paul to do, and wondered what the result would be.

"Oh! these women! these women!" cried Albert; "I am utterly unable to understand this one. What coquetry! what perfidy!"

"It's Madame Baldimer, isn't it?"

"Yes; it is she! Oh! I will tell the whole world of her shameful conduct! Our homage is not enough for her; she must have our blood!"

"Thanks! she shan't have mine; I wouldn't prick myself with a pin for her. But, by the way—what about our duel—concerning Madame Plays?"

"Tell her that you killed me."

"Killed you!"

"You can safely say that, as I am going to leave Paris for several months. I want to divert my thoughts; above all things, I want to forget that woman who has made a plaything of my affection. I shall start this very evening."

"All right; it's agreed that I have killed you, that you are dead. She will find out later that it isn't true; but what do I care? when she has once accorded me her favors, she can't take them back. Such things, when they're once given, aren't to be taken back. To be sure, although they give them away, they still have them; that is very agreeable for those who like to be generous."

The cab had reached Rue Neuve-Vivienne. Albert alighted in front of Madame Baldimer's house, and said to Tobie:

"Now, go at once and find the messenger, so that he won't carry the letter to my father."

"Yes, yes! I will go. But I say, Albert, you promised to lend me—you know—the money to redeem my olive."

"Oh, yes! Well, come to the house soon—this evening; I will give you the money."

"I won't fail. By the way, you will gratify me by not telling the other fellows that——"

Albert was not listening; he had hastened to the stairs, and he ran up without taking breath. When he reached Madame Baldimer's door, he rang. The maid opened the door.

"Your mistress—where is she? I must speak with her instantly. I absolutely must!"

The tone in which the young man spoke, his agitated manner, the pallor of his cheeks, alarmed the maid, who replied:

"Madame is at home, monsieur, and I would certainly tell her that you are here, but—at this moment—I don't dare to go in—because——"

"Because—well, go on."

"Because madame is not alone. There's a gentleman with her."

"A gentleman! What gentleman? It can't be Count Dahlborne, for I have just left him, and he is wounded."

"No, monsieur; it isn't Count Dahlborne."

"Well, then, who is it? Tell me, Rosa. Here, take this, and conceal nothing from me."

Albert resorted to the irresistible argument; he took several gold pieces from his pocket and put them in the

servant's hand, and thereby completely loosed her tongue; indeed, she had a tender regard for the young man, because he was an exceedingly comely youth, and with many women, especially young women, that, too, is an irresistible argument.

"Well, monsieur," replied Rosa, speaking very low, "madame is with that tall young man—one of your friends, I think, as I have met him sometimes walking with you."

"What! can it be Célestin?"

"That's the name—it is Monsieur Célestin."

"And he comes here? Madame Baldimer receives him?"

"Oh, yes! quite often, too."

"Is he her lover?"

"No, no! oh! as to that, I assure you that he isn't anything of the kind; not that he doesn't want to be, for he makes love to madame; but, between you and me, I think she's fooling him."

"He comes to see her! and he never told me!"

"*Pardi!* he'd be mighty careful not to, as he comes and tells madame everything you do; and, between you and me, I think that's all madame receives him for."

"The villain! can it be possible? play the spy on me!"

"And this morning, only a moment ago, I heard—because, you see, when I'm near the door, I can hear very well without listening; I have sharp ears—I heard Monsieur Célestin tell Madame Baldimer that you were to fight a duel this morning with Count Dahlborne; that he was watching last night in the street, and heard you say: 'Until to-morrow, at ten o'clock, at Porte Saint-Mandé.'"

"Ah! this is too much!"

And Albert rushed toward the salon, paying no heed to Rosa, who besought him not to betray her; he strode rapidly through two rooms to the boudoir, opened the door, and found himself in the presence of Madame Baldimer and his intimate friend Célestin.

The lovely widow was half reclining on a couch, listening to Monsieur Célestin, who sat on a chair a few feet away, apparently talking with much earnestness.

At sight of Albert, both were petrified; but in Célestin's case, it was simply regret at being surprised in Madame Baldimer's house; whereas, in her case, it was consternation and rage at the certainty that her hopes were crushed.

"It is I," said Albert, throwing himself into a chair; "I am sure that you did not expect me; madame flattered herself, no doubt, that Count Dahlborne had relieved her of my presence, as she begged him to do last night, after making a similar request of me, in a whisper, with respect to him."

The fair American turned ghastly pale, while Monsieur Célestin rose and took his hat.

"As it happens, my dear friend," he said, "I learned that you were to fight a duel this morning, and I came here to tell madame, because, knowing that she has a—most affectionate regard for you, I thought that—that she might perhaps prevent the meeting."

"Why don't you say, also, that it is because you are in the habit of coming here to report to madame everything I do, and that, abusing my confidence in you, you have been false to our friendship in the hope that that would serve your love."

Célestin bit his lips and lost something of his assurance.

"Oh! upon my word," he faltered, "what an idea! Someone has slandered me. I am not capable—— But

you probably have much to say to each other. I do not wish to disturb your tête-à-tête. Au revoir, Albert!—my respects, madame!"

And Célestin left the room, his departure being apparently unnoticed by the two persons he addressed.

Madame Baldimer kept her eyes fixed on the floor, and seemed to be absorbed by the emotion caused by Albert's unexpected arrival. He gazed earnestly at that woman whose beauty had set his heart on fire, and tried to find in the expression of her face something that betrayed the falseness of her heart.

After a prolonged scrutiny of her features, which led to no discovery, unless it were this—that a perfectly regular face affords much less scope than another for the observations of the moralist, Albert turned his eyes elsewhere, and chance willed that they should fall on Madame Baldimer's feet, which, at that moment, she had not remembered to keep out of sight, as she usually did.

We have already said that her foot was the fair American's weak point, and that, like the peacock, her pride did not attach to that part of her person, which, for that reason, she almost never showed.

Albert was amazed at the sight of that broad, flat foot, so entirely out of harmony with the lady's slender figure; and the longer he looked at it, the more conscious he became of a feeling of something like satisfaction, of well-being; his heart seemed to be relieved of a weight; his anger vanished, and he ended by laughing heartily, saying:

"Mon Dieu! I was mad! Gad! if I had only seen it sooner!"

Madame Baldimer looked up when she heard Albert laugh, and saw that his eyes were fastened on her feet. A deep flush overspread her face, she hurriedly rearranged

her dress, so that it covered even the soles of her shoes; but it was too late, the effect was wrought. Albert rose and bowed to the fair widow, saying in a mocking tone:

"On my honor, madame, if I had seen them sooner, I assure you that I would not have fought for you!"

Madame Baldimer's eyes gleamed with a furious expression difficult to describe. Having said this much,—and he could have wreaked no more cruel vengeance on a coquette,—Albert left the house and hurried to his own home.

At sight of him, the concierge uttered a joyful exclamation, which was echoed by one of his father's servants, who was in the courtyard.

"Well, what's the matter?" queried Albert; "why does my presence produce this effect on you?"

"Oh! monsieur, is it really you? What joy!"

"We were terribly afraid you were dead, monsieur——"

"That you had been killed in a duel——"

"Ah! how happy monsieur your father will be when he sees you—he was so anxious, so distressed, when he went away!"

"How did my father know that I had a duel for this morning? Who could have told him?"

"A messenger, who came with a letter; and we heard Monsieur Vermoncey say, when he was coming downstairs: 'If only I arrive in time to prevent this duel, and nothing has happened to my son!"

Albert was grieved that the affair should have come to his father's ears, for he was well aware of his great love for him, and he realized how anxious he must be at that moment; but he did not understand why the messenger had brought his letter, as Tobie should have found him in ample time to countermand the order.

"Where did he go to look for me?" asked Albert. "I didn't mention in my letter where we were to fight, and the messenger couldn't have known that."

The concierge and the servant had no idea; they could only tell what they knew: that Monsieur Vermoncey was very anxious, very much agitated; that he was talking to himself aloud when he came downstairs; that when he was in the street, he stopped, and, after talking a few seconds with the messenger, sent him to call a cab; and that, when it came, they both got in and drove away very fast.

Albert did not know what steps to take to find his father, for he feared that, while he was looking for him in one direction, Monsieur Vermoncey would be prosecuting his search in a diametrically opposite direction. However, as he could not remain at rest when he thought of the suffering he had caused his father, he sent for a cab, and had determined to scour the neighborhood of Vincennes and Saint-Mandé, when the servant, who was standing at the door, cried out:

"Here he is, monsieur! I know the cab, and I can see monsieur your father and the messenger inside. Here he is!"

A moment later, a cab did, in fact, stop in front of the house. Albert was in the street, making signs by which his father might recognize him. Monsieur Vermoncey uttered a joyful cry, and, leaping from the carriage, threw himself into his son's arms and held him to his heart for a long, long time. If you have ever thought that you had lost the object of your affection, the being who, more than any other, makes life dear to you, you will realize to the full the bliss of recovering him and holding him in your arms. You fear lest that bliss is only a lie, and you

feel that you must prolong it to the utmost in order to make sure that it is real.

Paul's eyes were wet with tears when he saw Albert in his father's arms. He, too, was happy that nothing had happened to the young man whose father was so devotedly attached to him. And yet, there was always a strain of sadness in his feelings when he saw a child caressed by its parents.

At last, Monsieur Vermoncey, being a little calmer, started to go upstairs with his son, and Paul was about to leave the house; but Albert's father, noticing it, said to him:

"Come, my friend; come upstairs with us."

The young messenger obeyed, and followed Monsieur Vermoncey and his son to their apartments.

There Albert tried to understand what had happened; he asked Paul why, instead of following his instructions, he had neglected to wait two hours before bringing to Monsieur Vermoncey the letter he had given him. The messenger told what Tobie had said to him, and Albert angrily stamped on the floor, crying:

"That Tobie must always put his foot in it; he is the cause of all your anxiety."

"This young man," said Monsieur Vermoncey, pointing to Paul, "having noticed that you drove along the boulevards toward Porte Saint-Antoine, I thought that your duel would probably take place at Vincennes. We drove there in a very short time. After appointing a place of meeting, we beat up the woods, I and this good fellow —who seconded me with a zeal which I cannot praise too highly! We met at the appointed place, tired out and no wiser than before. Being convinced that you were not to fight at Vincennes, I was about to start for

Romainville, when this young man advised me to inquire first at Saint-Mandé. There I learned that you had been seen, and that the duel had evidently taken place, for a wounded man had been taken away in a carriage, going at a very slow pace. But was it you, or was it your opponent? that, it was impossible for me to find out; so I decided to come back here, suffering torments of anxiety which you can well imagine. But here you are! I ought to reprove you, but I like to think that you will remember the torture I have suffered to-day, and that you will not subject me to such misery again."

While Albert promised his father to be more prudent in the future, Monsieur Vermoncey went to his secretary, took from it ten napoleons, and handed them to Paul.

"Here, my friend," he said, "accept this from me. What you have done for me to-day cannot be paid for, I know; for I have found in you what we often seek in vain among people who claim to be our friends: a man who understood my distress, who shared it, and who did everything in his power to relieve it. And it was not selfish interest that guided you; no, it was your heart alone; for I saw tears of joy fall from your eyes when you perceived my son in the distance. You are kind-hearted and susceptible to noble sentiments; you must be a worthy fellow and a blessing to your parents; take this as a souvenir of this day."

Paul was deeply moved and could hardly make out to say, in faltering tones:

"But this is too much, monsieur; I was paid beforehand—I do not want any more; I am so happy to have been useful to you."

Monsieur Vermoncey took the young man's hand, and, while pressing it affectionately, placed the money in it.

"Come, come! accept it as a favor to me; you will grieve me if you refuse. Take the money to your mother, so that she too may be happy to-day."

Paul lowered his eyes without replying, and Monsieur Vermoncey continued:

"By the way, my friend, where is your stand?"

"Rue du Helder, monsieur, at the corner of the boulevard. Monsieur your son knows me very well."

"Are you his regular messenger?"

"No, monsieur; but my comrade Sans-Cravate is; his stand is—not far from mine."

"That is true," said Albert; "and if I had found him this morning, I probably should have employed him to do my errand."

"Well," continued Monsieur Vermoncey, "hereafter I propose to employ no other messenger than you. What is your name?"

"Paul, monsieur."

"Very well, Paul, you understand, you are to be my messenger. You are not sorry, I trust, are you?"

"Far from it, monsieur; and I will do all that I can to deserve your confidence."

"I am sure of it, my friend; and now—au revoir!"

Paul bowed low and left the room, touched to the quick by the interest manifested by Monsieur Vermoncey, and with his heart filled with a strange joy, the cause of which he was at a loss to understand.

When Albert was alone with his father, he embraced him again.

"You were right," he cried, "perfectly right! when you told me that some love intrigues were very dangerous, that there were women who led us much further than we meant to go; and when you told me to distrust

my friend Célestin, whose manner did not attract you. Yes, father; you judged him fairly. My friend Célestin is a traitor, who deceived me and tried to rob me of the woman I was trying to overcome; and as for her,—as false as and even more treacherous than Célestin, as she had not love for an excuse,—she pretended to love me, gave me the most alluring hopes, and secretly requested a Swedish count, who was paying court to her, to rid her of me as soon as possible."

"What infernal perfidy! Can it be that women treat you so—young as you are, and amiable, and made to please!"

"Yes, father. But not all of them, luckily."

"Who is this woman, pray, whose heart is so black?"

"An American; or, at least, a person who has lately come from America; for I believe that she is a native-born Frenchwoman; an alleged widow,—very beautiful, I must admit,—who calls herself Madame Baldimer."

"Baldimer; I have never heard that name before."

"She has been in Paris only a year, and frequents a certain—rather eccentric social circle, which is not that which you frequent. Well, I had the good luck to inflict only a trifling wound on the Swedish count, with whom she had the cleverness to involve me in a duel—a most excellent gentleman, who, like myself, has sworn to have no more to do with Madame Baldimer. I have told my friend Célestin what I think of him. And now, father, to enable me to forget entirely this affair and the woman who caused it, let me travel a few months; it will do me good; it will force me to break these Parisian habits and intimacies, which are not all beneficial, as I have had a chance to find out. I shall return a new man, refreshed and sensible. You will let me go, won't you?"

"Yes, my dear boy; although it is painful to me to be deprived of your presence, I am not selfish enough to object to a journey which cannot fail to do you good. To leave Paris for some time will certainly be beneficial to you; and it will be to your advantage to see a little of the world. But you won't be away too long, will you?"

"Two or three months at most."

"Where do you mean to go?"

"I have no idea; I would like to have an opportunity to start at once."

"Mon Dieu! if you care to see Normandie, my doctor came to see me last night, and offered to take me there with him, without expense, in a comfortable post chaise which one of his patients has sent him. He starts to-day, at three o'clock."

"To-day, at three o'clock. Parbleu! that suits me exactly. As well Normandie as any other place. At all events, when I have had enough of it, I can go somewhere else. Quickly, father! give me a line to your doctor, telling him that he will have a travelling companion; meanwhile, I will make what preparations are indispensable, put some money in my pocket—and off we go!"

"You still have some money, I trust?"

"Oh! yes, father; of course, I haven't spent the ten thousand francs you gave me a few days ago."

Albert bit his lips as he spoke; the memory of the cashmere shawl made him sigh; but he soon banished the thought, and went to make his preparations for departure, while Monsieur Vermoncey wrote to his doctor.

While all this was happening, Tobie Pigeonnier had not remained inactive. On leaving Albert, he returned to Paul's stand; but the messenger was not there.

"What good would it do if I should wait for him? I told him to carry Monsieur Vermoncey his son's letter at once. It's too late now for me to tell him not to carry it. I did it with the best intentions. Papa Vermoncey must have received the letter a long while ago; he must think that his son is dead now, and probably he is in terrible distress, scurrying about the suburbs to find some trace of his child; it's a calamity, and I am very sorry; but, after all, when he sees his Albert again, he'll find out that he isn't dead, and he'll be consoled. So I don't need to worry any more about that affair. I must give a little thought to my own concerns now. Albert has given me leave to say that I fought a duel with him and killed him; that is delicious; he is going to travel for some time, my lie won't be discovered right away, and, before it is, my love will be crowned with its greenest myrtle. O superb Plays! thou shalt be mine! I quiver with joy at the thought. But before I call on her, I must go home and make a most careful toilet."

Tobie bent his steps toward his abode, but, before he arrived there, he recalled the fact that he had not breakfasted as he had hoped to do in the capacity of second in a duel; his stomach told him that he must satisfy its cravings before attending to anything else. He felt in his pocket, and exclaimed:

"*Fichtre!* I have fifteen francs with me, my whole fortune at this moment. Suppose I treat myself to a *déjeuner à la fourchette* of the right sort—why not? Albert is going to lend me five hundred francs—to redeem my olive; but, after all, I'm not obliged to go and redeem it to-day. The gentleman with white eyebrows, who is very rich, can afford to wait a few days more. Meanwhile, I'll go to see Aunt Abraham, with

my five hundred francs in my pocket, and I'll take care to jingle them so she will think I'm doing a big business, and then perhaps she'll make up her mind to give me an interest in her business. I'll breakfast at the Café Anglais. I'm hungry enough to treat myself handsomely."

And the little dandy, swaggering as if he had his cane, and all puffed up with the good fortune that he anticipated, entered the Café Anglais with his nose in the air, seated himself at a table, called the waiter in a loud voice, ordered oysters, kidneys, chicken *à la tartare*, and beaune première, with the assured air of a man who cares nothing for the expense and whose only thought is to breakfast bountifully. He was served promptly, he ate with zest, his appetite was even keener after the oysters, and became more imperative than ever after the kidneys. Tobie denied it nothing, until it was completely satisfied. Not until he had eaten for an hour and a half, almost without intermission, did he decide to stop. It was high time; his bill amounted to fourteen francs fifty centimes. He generously gave the waiter fifteen centimes, put the remaining seven sous in his pocket, and went to his lodgings, his brain excited by thoughts of love, and by the bottle of beaune he had consumed.

Tobie passed his clothes in review—an operation which required much less time than he could have wished. After a careful examination of his three waistcoats, his two pairs of trousers, and his only coat, he put on those which he judged to be in the best condition; then he curled and crimped and anointed himself, and saturated himself with eau de cologne; as he had no other perfume, he drenched his handkerchief with essence of lemon used to

remove stains; the result being that his concierge, when he passed, mistook him for a bowl of Roman punch.

Thus arrayed and anointed, young Pigeonnier repaired to Madame Plays's abode.

"She accepted me for her chevalier," he said to himself; "I will go and tell her that she is fully avenged. She will be delighted with me, and she will reward my valor by the sweetest caresses. By the way, what did I kill Albert with? With a pistol? no, that is too commonplace. With a sword—I like that better; it's more after the style of the chevaliers of old; I split his head open—no, I pierced his breast with a sword-thrust. Ah! here is her house; I must not forget the directions she gave me: the little staircase at the right; I am to go up to the first floor, and say: 'I am Tobie,' and I shall be admitted at once. But, mon Dieu! it just occurs to me; she told me to bring her a token of my victory; sapristi! I forgot all about that; what, in heaven's name, shall I take her for a token?"

Tobie walked back and forth in front of Madame Plays's house, scratching his head in his efforts to think what he could carry her in default of Albert's ears, which she herself had suggested. He searched his pockets, but could find only his handkerchief perfumed with lemon, and the seven sous remaining from his fifteen francs; there was nothing which could possibly be produced as a token of victory.

Tobie had almost determined to present himself without a token, when, as he looked about, he spied at some distance one of the enormous rolls, or *carrots*, which are commonly suspended over the doors of tobacco shops. It arrested the young man's attention, and an idea entered his mind, which he caught on the wing and clung to. He

walked rapidly to the tobacco shop, and arrived there still in possession of his idea, which he proceeded to put into execution.

The dealers in tobacco are almost all women, and Tobie said to the woman behind the counter:

"A cigar, madame, if you please."

"There they are, monsieur; take your choice."

"Oh! I want something better than those; I must have a very fine five-sou cigar; one can get a very fine cigar for five sous."

"Yes, monsieur; here are some; but if you want a still larger one, we make them for ten sous; they're magnificent—almost as big as carrots. Would monsieur like one for ten sous?"

"No, no! that's too big; this one will do very well."

Tobie selected a five-sou cigar, and had it carefully wrapped in paper, to the amazement of the dealer, because a man who buys one cigar ordinarily begins by lighting it. At last, armed with his cigar, which he placed in his pocket, he returned to Madame Plays's house.

"Now I am all right," he said to himself; "I have all I require, I have my token of victory. Albert almost always has a cigar in his mouth, and I'll say that I found this one in his pocket and took it. What a bright idea that was of mine! O suggestive carrot! how glad I am that I happened to see you!"

Tobie entered the house, stalked by the concierge, calling to him, with a superb air: "Madame Plays!" ascended the little staircase, rang, and said in a cajoling tone to the maid who opened the door:

"Be good enough to announce me to madame; she will receive me at once."

"What is monsieur's name?"

"Tobie. I am Tobie. Just say to your enchanting mistress: 'Madame, it is Tobie,' and she will understand."

The maid turned on her heel, muttering:

"Tobie! Tobie! that's a funny name. Seems to me, madame used to have a little dog of that name."

Madame Plays was before her mirror, trying a new way of arranging her hair on top of her head, which was supposed to make her look like a Spartan woman. Madame Plays was much inclined toward Greek styles; and ever since she had heard that the women of Sparta used to dance a dance called *Bibasis*, which consisted principally in kicking themselves behind with their heels, she had passed part of the day practising that dance.

"If there are idiots who say that it's nothing more than the cancan," she would say to herself, "I'll just answer: 'You are donkeys; it's the *Bibasis*, an old dance of the Greeks revived.'"

When her maid announced Tobie, she started.

"Tobie!" she exclaimed. "Oh! yes, to be sure! I had forgotten all about him. Let Tobie come in; let him come in at once!"

The maid ushered the young man into the room, and retired. When he entered the boudoir, Pigeonnier deemed it fitting to assume an air at once tender and melancholy; so he stepped forward and saluted Madame Plays with an expression bordering on the tragic.

"It's you, is it, monsieur?" she said. "But I remember, you were my chevalier. Well! what news do you bring me?"

Tobie struck an attitude, and replied:

"It is, in very truth, as your chevalier that I present myself, madame; you ordered me to avenge your wrongs by fighting with Albert, and I have obeyed you."

"Oho! indeed! you have fought a duel with him, have you?"

"Yes, madame."

"When was that?"

"This morning, at Saint-Mandé. A thousand witnesses can inform you that I went there with Albert."

"And what did you fight with?"

"Swords, madame."

"Well! what was the result?"

"I fulfilled your wishes to the utmost, madame; you wished me to kill Albert, and I have killed him—a sword-thrust in the breast; he died on the spot. I shed tears over my victory, I am not ashamed to admit it.—But as I placed my hand on the poor fellow's heart, to find out whether he still breathed, I felt this cigar in his pocket, and took it. You desired a token of my victory: this is the only one that I can offer you."

Madame Plays listened to Tobie with the air of one who could not believe what she heard; but when he had concluded, she rushed at him with a furious gesture and cried, snatching the cigar from his hand:

"You have killed him! Can it be possible? such a lovely boy! the only man I have ever loved! Yes, I was saying to myself this morning: 'I have never loved any man but him.'—And you had the villainy to kill him! and you come to tell me of it, you murderer!"

Tobie was utterly crushed.

"But, madame," he faltered, "I simply carried out your orders; you ordered me to avenge you."

"That is not true! I couldn't have said that. Or if I did, I was mad, and you shouldn't have paid any attention to it."

"But, madame——"

"To think of killing Albert! such a handsome brunette, and such lovely eyes! Take yourself out of my sight, monsieur—go instantly, or I won't answer for the effects of my anger. Go, I say, you monster, you villain!"

"What, madame! when I fought solely to avenge you——"

"Oh! what infamy! to say that it was I who—— Leave the room, monsieur!"

Seeing that Tobie did not stir, Madame Plays pushed him roughly toward the door. The little fellow, who was nearly overturned by the shock, clung to a chair, and could not make up his mind what to do. Meanwhile, the robust lady opened the door herself, and, while Pigeonnier's back was turned, kicked him with all her force.

"Oho! you refuse to go, do you?"

By that means, Tobie was at last ejected from the room, and the door was instantly closed and locked upon him. He flew into a rage in his turn, and muttered angrily as he descended the stairs:

"Sacredieu! this is too much! By heaven! I have had enough of that woman; a slap in the face the other day, and now a kick! What under heaven will it be the next time? So she is mad because I have killed Albert! She plays little Hermione, and treats me like Orestes. To be sure, Orestes didn't receive a kick in the rump; she has interpolated that.—So you mourn Albert's death, do you?—Very good! just to punish her, I won't tell her it isn't true. *Bigre!* what a love affair! I don't want any more of it, thanks!"

Holding his hand to the injured part, Tobie betook himself to Albert's house, to get the five hundred francs which he had promised to lend him, and which might well act as an antidote to the affront he had undergone.

But when he inquired for his friend, the servant said:

"Monsieur Albert started for Normandie half an hour ago."

"He has gone away, and left nothing for me?"

"No, monsieur."

Tobie was tempted to beat his brains out against the wall.

"This caps the climax," he said to himself, as he walked away; "I have two sous left! Perhaps I had better go and jingle them in Aunt Abraham's ear, to induce her to make me a partner in her business!"