

Cousin Betty

by
Honoré de Balzac

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COUSIN BETTE.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE DOES NOT PASSION LURK?

ABOUT the middle of July, 1838, one of those hackney carriages lately put into circulation along the streets of Paris and called *milords* was making its way through the rue de l'Université, carrying a fat man of medium height, dressed in the uniform of a captain of the National Guard.

Among Parisians, who are thought to be so witty and wise, we may find some who fancy they are infinitely more attractive in uniform than in their ordinary clothes, and who attribute so depraved a taste to the fair sex that they imagine women are favorably impressed by a bear-skin cap and a military equipment.

The countenance of this captain, who belonged to the second legion, wore an air of satisfaction with himself which heightened the brilliancy of his ruddy complexion and his somewhat puffy cheeks. A halo of contentment, such as wealth acquired in business is apt to place around the head of a retired shopkeeper, made it easy to guess that he was one of the elect of Paris, an assistant-mayor of his arrondissement at the very least. As may be supposed, therefore, the ribbon of the Legion of honor was not absent from his portly breast, which protruded with all the swagger of a Prussian officer. Sitting proudly erect in a corner of the *milord*, this decorated being let his eyes rove among the pedestrians on the sidewalk, who, in fact, often come in for smiles which are really intended for beautiful absent faces.

The *milord* drew up in that section of the street which lies between the rue de Bellechasse and the rue de Bourgogne, before the door of a large house lately built on part of the courtyard of an old mansion with a garden. The old building had been allowed to remain, and it stood in its primitive condition at the farther end of the courtyard, now reduced in space by half its width.

Judging by the way the captain accepted the assistance of the coachman in getting out of the vehicle, an observer would have recognized a man over fifty years of age. There are certain physical actions whose undisguised heaviness has the indiscretion of a certificate of baptism. The captain drew a yellow glove on his right hand, and, without making any inquiry at the porter's lodge, walked towards the portico of the house with an air that plainly said, "She is mine!" The Parisian porter has a knowledgeable eye; he never stops a man wearing the ribbon of the Legion, dressed in blue, and ponderous of step; he knows the signs of riches far too well.

The ground-floor apartment was occupied by Monsieur le Baron Hulot d'Ervy, paymaster under the republic, formerly commissary-general of the army, and at the present time head of the most important department in the ministry of war, State councilor, grand officer of the Legion of honor, etc. This Baron Hulot had lately taken the name of d'Ervy, the place of his birth, to distinguish him from his brother, the celebrated General Hulot, colonel of the grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, whom the Emperor created Comte de Forzheim after the campaign of 1809. The elder brother, the count, taking charge of his younger brother, placed him with fatherly prudence in an office at the ministry of war, where, thanks to their double service, the younger, Baron Hulot, obtained and deserved the favor of the Emperor. In 1807 he was made commissary-general of the armies of Spain.

After ringing the bell, the bourgeois captain made desperate efforts to pull his coat into place; for that garment was as much wrinkled before as behind, under the displacing action of a pear-shaped stomach. Admitted as soon as a servant in livery had caught sight of him, this important and imposing personage followed the footman, who announced as he opened the door of a salon:—

“Monsieur Crevel!”

Hearing the name—admirably adapted to the appearance of the man who bore it—a tall, blond woman, very well preserved, seemed to undergo an electric shock and rose immediate.

“Hortense, my angel, go into the garden with your cousin Bette,” she said hurriedly to a young lady who was sitting by her, busy with some embroidery.

Bowing graciously to the captain, Mademoiselle Hortense Hulot disappeared through a glass door, taking with her a lean old maid who seemed older than the baroness, though she was in fact five years younger.

“It must be something about your marriage,” whispered Bette to Hortense, without seeming at all offended by the manner in which Madame Hulot had sent them away, evidently considering her as of no account. The apparel of this cousin might at a pinch explain the want of ceremony.

The old maid wore a merino dress the color of dried raisins, of a peculiar cut made with pipings which dated from the Restoration, a worked collar worth perhaps three francs, a straw bonnet of sewn braid trimmed with blue satin ribbon edged with straw, such as can be seen on the old-clothes women in the markets. A glance at her shoes, whose make betrayed a dealer of the lowest order, would have led a stranger to hesitate before bowing to cousin Bette as a member of the family; in fact, her appearance was that of a dressmaker employed by the day. Nevertheless, the old maid made a friendly little bow to Monsieur

Crevel before she left the room, to which that personage replied by a sign full of meaning.

“You will come to-morrow, will you not?” he said.

“Are you sure there will be no Company?” asked Bette.

“My children and yourself, that will be all,” replied the visitor.

“Very good, then you may rely on seeing me,” she said as she left the room.

“Madame, I am here, at your orders,” said the militia captain, again bowing to the baroness and casting upon her a glance such as Tartuffe bestows on Elmire when some provincial actor thinks it necessary to explain the part to a Poitiers or Grenoble audience.

“If you will follow me, monsieur, we shall be more at our ease in discussing matters here than in the salon,” said Madame Hulot, leading the way to an adjoining parlor which in the present arrangement of the house was used as a cardroom.

This room was separated by a slight partition from a boudoir which had a window opening on the garden, and Madame Hulot left Monsieur Crevel alone for a few moments, thinking it wise to shut the window and the door of the boudoir lest any one should attempt to overhear them. She also took the precaution to shut the glass door of the large salon, smiling as she did so at her daughter and cousin who were settling themselves in an old kiosk at the further end of the garden. On returning she was careful to leave the door of the cardroom open, so that she might hear the opening of the salon door in case any one entered that room. As she went and came on these errands the baroness, conscious that she was under no eye for the moment, allowed her face to tell her thoughts; and any one who had seen her then would have felt something akin to terror at the agitation she betrayed. But as she came through the door between the salon and the cardroom she veiled her face with that impenetrable reserve which all women, even the most candid, seem able to call up at will.

During the time occupied by these preparations, which were, to say the least, singular, the militia captain looked about him at the furniture of the room in which he sat. As he noticed the silk curtains, formerly red, now faded into purple by the action of the sun, and worn along the edges of each fold; the carpet from which the colors had vanished; the defaced furniture with its tarnished gilding and silk coverings stained and spotted and worn into strips, expressions of contempt, self-satisfaction, and assurance succeeded each other artlessly on the flat features of the parvenu merchant. He looked at himself in the mirror over the top of an old Empire clock, and was engaged in taking stock of his own person when the rustle of a silk dress announced the return of the baroness; he at once recovered position.

After seating herself on a little sofa, which must have been very handsome as far back as 1809, the baroness pointed to a chair, the

arms of which ended in heads of sphinxes lacquered in bronze—the surface of which had peeled off in several places leaving the wood bare—and made a sign to Crevel to be seated.

“The precautions which you are taking, madam, are naturally a delightful augury to a—“

“—lover,” she said, interrupting him.

“The word is feeble,” he replied, placing his right hand upon his heart, and rolling his eyes in a manner which would have made any woman laugh if she had seen their expression with a mind at ease. “Lover! lover! say, rather, one bewitched!”

CHAPTER II.

SHAMEFUL DISCLOSURES.

“Listen to me, Monsieur Crevel,” said the baroness, too serious to laugh; “you are fifty years old—ten years younger than Monsieur Hulot, I admit; but the follies of a woman of my age must find their justification in youth, beauty, celebrity, personal merit, or some one of those distinctions which dazzle her so much as to make her forget everything, even her own age. You may have an income of fifty thousand francs, but your years counterbalance your fortune; and of all else that a woman requires you have nothing—”

“Except love,” exclaimed the captain, rising and coming towards her; “a love which—”

“No, monsieur, obstinacy!” said the baroness, interrupting him to put an end to his absurdity.

“Yes, the obstinacy of love,” he replied, “and something better still, rights—”

“Rights!” exclaimed Madame Hulot, dilating with contempt, defiance, and indignation. “But,” she resumed, “if we continue in this tone there will be no end to it. I did not ask you to come here to talk of a matter which has already banished you from this house in spite of the connection between our families.”

“I believed you did—”

“You persist?” she said. “Can you not see, monsieur, by the light and easy manner with which I speak of love and lovers and all that is most perilous for a woman to discuss, that I am perfectly confident in myself and my own virtue? I fear nothing; not even misconception for being shut in with you here. Is that the conduct of a yielding woman? You know perfectly well why I have sent for you.”

“No, I do not, madame,” replied Crevel. He bit his lips, and resumed an attitude.

“Well, I will be brief, and shorten our mutual annoyance,” said the baroness looking straight at him.

Crevel made an ironical bow in which a tradesman would have recognized the air and graces of a quondam commercial traveller.

“Our son married your daughter—”

“And if it were to do over again—” said Crevel.

“It would not be done at all,” she continued hastily. “I dare say not. But you have nothing to complain of. My son is not only one of the first lawyers in Paris, but he is now a deputy, and his opening career in the Chamber is brilliant enough to lead one to expect that he will some day be in the ministry. Victorin has been twice appointed to draft important measures, and he could now be, if he chose, attorney-general of the Court of Appeals.

Therefore when you give me to understand that you have a son-in-law without prospects—”

“A son-in-law whom I am obliged to support,” retorted Crevel, “is even worse, madame. Of the five hundred thousand francs which constituted my daughter’s marriage portion, two hundred thousand have already disappeared, the Lord knows where!—to pay your son’s debts, to furnish his house gorgeously; a house, by the bye, worth five hundred thousand francs, which brings him in a rental of barely fifteen thousand, because he chooses to occupy the best part of it. Besides, he still owes two hundred and forty thousand francs of the purchase money; the rental he gets hardly covers the interest of the debt. This year I have been obliged to give my daughter something like twenty thousand francs to enable her to make both ends meet. And my son-in-law, who formerly earned thirty thousand francs by his profession, is now neglecting the Palais de Justice for the Chamber of Deputies.”

“All this, Monsieur Crevel, is quite beside our present business and leads away from it. But to end what we are saying—if my son enters the ministry and obtains your appointment as officer of the Legion of honor and councilor of the municipality, you—the late perfumer—will have nothing to complain of.”

“Ha, there it is, madame! I’m a perfumer, a shopkeeper, a retail vender of almond-paste, *eau de Portugal*, cephalic oil, and I ought to feel greatly honored by the marriage of my only daughter to the son of Monsieur le Baron Hulot d’Ervy; my daughter will be a baroness—yes, yes, that’s regency, Louis XV., *ceil-de-boeuf*, and all the rest of it! I love Célestine as any man would love an only daughter. I love her so much that to avoid giving her a brother or a sister I have borne all the inconveniences of being a widower in Paris—and in the vigor of my age, madame. But let me tell you that in spite of this immoderate love for my daughter I shall not impair my property for the sake of your son, whose expenditures are by no means clear to me—to me, an old business man, madame.”

“Monsieur, there is another business man at this very moment in the ministry of commerce—Monsieur Popinot, formerly a druggist in the rue des Lombards.”

“And my very good friend,” said the ex-perfumer; “for I, Célestin Crevel, formerly head-clerk of Monsieur César Birotteau, I bought the business of the said Birotteau, father-in-law of Popinot, who was a mere underling in that establishment. In fact, it is he who often reminds me of it; for, to do him justice, he is not proud with men of good position and an income of sixty thousand francs.”

“Well, monsieur, the ideas which you choose to qualify by the term ‘regency’ are certainly out of date at a time when men are

judged by their personal merits; and it was by those you judged in marrying your daughter to my son.”

“You never knew how that marriage came about!” cried Crevel. “Cursed life of a bachelor! if it hadn’t been for my dissipations Célestine would be Vicomtesse Popinot at this moment!”

“Once more, do not let us recriminate about matters past and gone,” said the baroness gravely. “I wish to speak to you on a subject about which your strange conduct gives me cause for complaint. My daughter Hortense might have married well; the marriage depended wholly on you; I believed you were actuated by generous sentiments; I thought you would have done justice to a woman who has no feeling in her heart except for her husband, and would have spared her the necessity of receiving a man whose attentions compromise her; in short, I fully expected you would endeavor, for the honor of the family to which you are allied, to further my daughter’s marriage with Monsieur Lebas—and yet it is you, monsieur, who have prevented it!”

“Madame,” replied the ex-perfumer, “I have acted as an honest man. I was asked if the two hundred thousand francs of Mademoiselle Hortense’s marriage portion would undoubtedly be paid. I answered verbatim as follows: ‘I cannot guarantee it; my son-in-law, to whom the Hulots gave the same sum at the time of his marriage, had debts; and I believe that if Monsieur Hulot d’Ervy died to-morrow, his widow wouldn’t have the wherewithal to buy bread.’ That’s what I said, my lady.”

“Would you have said it,” demanded Madame Hulot, looking fixedly at Crevel, “if I had forgotten my duty to my husband—”

“I should have had no right to say it, dear Adeline,” cried this remarkable lover, cutting short her words; “in fact, you could then have taken the *dot* out of my purse.”

Adding deeds to words the portly Crevel dropped on one knee and kissed Madame Hulot’s hand, mistaking her silent horror at his speech for hesitation.

“Buy my daughter’s happiness at the price of— Rise, monsieur, or I ring for the servants.”

The ex-perfumer rose with some difficulty. That very circumstance made him furious as he once more fell into position. Nearly every man cherishes an attitude which sets off, as he thinks, the personal advantages with which nature has gifted him. In Crevel this attitude consisted in crossing his arms like Napoleon, putting his head at a three-quarter profile, and casting his glance, as the painters show in their portraits of the Emperor, to the far horizon.

“The idea,” he cried, with well acted anger, “of her keeping her silly faith in a libert—”

“—in a husband, monsieur, who is worthy of it,” said Madame Hulot, interrupting Crevel before he could get out a word she did not choose to hear.

“Now look here, madame; you have written to me to come here, you ask the reasons of my conduct, you drive me to extremities with your empress airs, your disdain, your—your—contempt. Any one would think I was a negro! I repeat what I said, and you may believe me, I have the right to make love to you—because—but no, I love you well enough to hold my tongue.”

“You can speak out, monsieur: I am all but forty-eight years old and not absurdly prudish: I can listen to what you have to say.”

“Well, will you give me your word as an honest woman—for you are, so much the worse for me, an honest woman—that you will never divulge my name, and never say that I have told you this secret?”

“If that is your condition, I will swear to tell no one, not even my husband, the name of the person from whom I have heard the enormities you are about to tell me.”

“It concerns you and your husband—”

Madame Hulot turned pale.

“Ha! if you still love that Hulot, I shall hurt your feelings. Would you rather I held my tongue?”

“Speak, monsieur; since you wish to explain the extraordinary declarations you persist in making to me, and the annoyance you cause a woman of my age whose sole desire is to marry her daughter and then—die in peace.”

“There! you admit you are very unhappy.”

“I, monsieur?”

“Yes, beautiful and noble creature,” cried Crevel; “you have suffered too much.”

“Monsieur, be silent and leave the room; or else speak in a proper manner.”

“Do you know, madame, how and where it is that Monsieur Hulot and I are intimate?—among our mistresses, madame.”

“Oh, monsieur—”

“Among our mistresses.” repeated Crevel in a melodramatic tone—abandoning his attitude to make a flourish with his right hand.

“Well, what then, monsieur?” said the baroness quietly, to Crevel’s utter bewilderment.

Seducers with petty motives never understand a noble soul.

“I, who am a widower for the last five years,” resumed Crevel, in the tone of a man about to relate a history, “not wishing, in the interests of my daughter whom I idolize, to remarry, and not willing to have questionable connections in my own house—though indeed I had a very pretty *dame de comptoir*—I set up, as they say, in a house of her own, a little sewing-girl, fifteen years of age and

wonderfully pretty, with whom, to tell you the truth, madame, I became desperately in love. I sent for my own aunt, the sister of my mother; I brought her from my birthplace to live with this charming little creature and keep her as virtuous as possible under the—the—what shall I say?—illicit circumstances. The little girl, whose musical vocation was evident, had masters, and lots of education was put into her—in fact I was obliged to keep her occupied. Besides, I wished to be her father, her benefactor, and not to mince words, her lover all at once; to kill two birds with one stone, to do a good action and keep a little friend. Well, I was happy for five years. The child had one of those voices which make the fortune of a theatre; I can't describe it better than to say she was Duprez in petticoats. It cost me two thousand francs a year solely to make a singer of her. She made me *fanatico* about music; I took a box at the opera for her and another for my daughter, and I went alternately one night with Célestine and the next with Josépha—”

“Josépha! the famous singer?”

“Yes, madame,” replied Crevel, puffing with self-conceit, “the celebrated Josépha owes everything to me. At last, when the little thing had got to be twenty years old, and I felt she was attached to me for life, I wanted, out of the kindness of my heart, to give her a little amusement. So I introduced her to a pretty little actress named Jenny Cadine, whose career had a certain likeness to her own. This actress had a protector, a man who had brought her up from childhood with great care. It was your husband, Baron Hulot—”

“I know all that, monsieur,” said the baroness in a calm and equable tone of voice.

“Ah, bah!” cried Crevel, more and more taken aback. “But do you know that your monster of a husband has *protected* Jenny Cadine ever since she was thirteen years old?”

“Well, monsieur, what next?” said Madame Hulot.

“As Jenny Cadine,” resumed the ex-perfumer, “and Josépha were both twenty before they knew each other, the baron played the part of Louis XV. with Mademoiselle de Romans; and you were twelve years younger than you are now.”

“Monsieur, I have my own reasons for giving Monsieur Hulot his liberty.”

“That falsehood, madame, will doubtless wipe out your sins and open to you the gates of Paradise,” said Crevel with a shrewd glance that brought the color into her cheeks. “Tell it, adored and saintly woman, to others, but not to an old fox like me who have had too many little suppers in company with your scoundrel of a husband not to know your true value. I have often heard him when half-drunk burst forth about your perfections and reproach

himself. Oh, I know you well; you are an angel. Between you and a girl of twenty a libertine might hesitate—I do not.”

“Monsieur!”

“Well, I’ll say no more. But you ought to be told, saint of a woman, that husbands when they are drunk tell a great many things about their wives to their mistresses, who shriek with laughter—”

Tears of shame rolled from Madame Hulot’s beautiful eyes and stopped the militia captain in the full tide of his remarks; he even forgot his attitude.

“I resume,” he said presently. “We are cronies, the baron and I, through these girls. The baron, like all vicious men, is extremely amiable, a downright good fellow. Oh, I liked him, the rogue! He had ways—but there, there, a truce to recollections; we were like brothers. The scamp, with his regency ideas, tried to make me as bad as himself; he preached Saint-Simonism in the matter of women, tried to give me the notions of a great lord, of an aristocrat dyed in the wool; but you see, I really loved my little Josépha and would have married her if I hadn’t been afraid of children to injure Célestine’s interests. Between two old papas, friends—and we were such friends!—don’t you think it was very natural that we should think of marrying our respective children? Three months after the marriage of my Célestine to your son, Hulot—I don’t know how I can utter the villain’s name, for he has deceived us both, madame!—well, the wretch carried off my little Josépha. He knew he was supplanted by a councilor of state, and also by an artist, in the good graces of Jenny Cadine (whose successes were really stupendous); and so he took away from me my poor little mistress, a love of a woman—but you have often seen her at the Italian opera, where he got her a situation on the strength of his name. Your husband is not as good a manager as I, who keep accounts and rule my expenses as regular as a sheet of music-paper. Jenny Cadine made a hole in his means, for she cost him very nearly thirty thousand francs a year, but now—and you had better know it—he is ruining himself for Josépha. Josépha, madame, is a Jewess; her name is Mirah, the anagram of Hiram, a Hebrew sign by which she can, if necessary, be identified; for I made inquiries and found she was the natural daughter of a rich German Jew, a banker, who had abandoned her. The theatre, and above all, the advice and instruction of Jenny Cadine, Madame Schontz, Malaga, Carabine, and others, have taught her how to make the most of old men; and the little thing whom I had been keeping in a decent and not costly fashion has now developed the instinct of the early Jews for gew-gaws and jewels and the golden calf. The celebrated singer, eager after money, wants to be rich, and very rich. But she is extremely careful not to lose a penny of what is spent on her. She began by trying her hand on Monsieur

Hulot, and she plucked him, oh, didn't she pluck him! picked him clean, as you might say The luckless fellow has tried to make head against a Keller and the Marquis d'Esgrignon, both madly in love with Josépha, not to speak of all the unknown idolators; but now he is going to find himself cut out and sent adrift by that little duke so powerfully rich who patronizes art—what's his name?—a dwarf—ah! the Duke d'Hérouville. The little man is determined to have Josépha all to himself; everybody is talking of it, but your husband has not yet found it out; the lover, like the husband, is the last man to get at the facts. Now don't you see my rights? Your husband, my dear lady, has deprived me of my happiness, of the only happiness I have had since my widowerhood. Yes, if I hadn't had the misfortune to meet that old driveller, I should still have Josépha; for, don't you see, I should never have put her on the stage; she'd have remained in obscurity, virtuous after a fashion, and mine only. Oh, if you had seen her eight years ago!—slender and lithe, with the golden skin, as they say, of Andalusian, black hair shining like satin, an eye that darted lightning through its brown lashes; the elegance of a duchess in her gestures, the modesty of a poor girl, the simplicity of an honest one, and the grace of a young doe! It is your husband's fault that all this prettiness, this purity, has turned into a regular wolf-trap, a decoy, a snare—the queen of impurity, for that's what they call her.”

The ex-perfumer actually wiped his eyes in which were a few tears. The sincerity of his grief roused Madame Hulot from the reverie into which she had fallen.

“I ask you, madame, how is it possible at fifty-two years of age to get another such treasure? At that time of life love costs thirty thousand francs a year—I know the sum through your husband—but I love Célestine too well to ruin her. When I saw you at the first evening party to which you invited us, I could not comprehend how that scoundrel of a Hulot could take up with a Jenny Cadine. You are like an empress; in my eyes you are only thirty; you seem to me young; you are beautiful. On my word of honor, I was smitten that very first day, and I said to myself: ‘If I didn't have my little Josépha, and that old Hulot abandons his wife, she would fit me like a glove.’— Ah, beg pardon; the shop does sometimes get the better of me! and that is one reason why I have never aspired to be a legislator. So, when I found how basely the baron had deceived me—for between such old fellows our mistresses should have been sacred—I swore that I would take his wife away from him. That's justice. The baron can't complain; I can act with impunity. You turned me out of your house like a mangy cur at the first words I uttered about the state of my heart. That redoubled my love, my obstinacy if you like it better, and you will certainly be mine.”

“How?”

“I don’t know how; but so it will be. Let me tell you, madame, that an old fool of a perfumer—a retired perfumer—who has only one idea in his head is much stronger than a clever man who has a thousand. I’m crazy about you; and, besides, you are my revenge—it is just as if I had two loves! You see I speak openly, like a determined man, as I am. You may say, if you please, ‘I will never be yours!’ I answer, coolly, that I am playing above-board, and you will be mine in a given time. You may be fifty years old before that time comes, but some day you will be my mistress. I expect anything and everything through your husband’s—”

Madame Hulot cast such an agonized look of terror on the vulgar computer of her fate that he stopped short, thinking she might lose her senses.

“You forced me to say this; you have insulted me with your contempt; you have defied me, and now I have spoken out,” he said, feeling it necessary to defend the brutality of his last words.

“Oh, my daughter, my daughter!” cried the poor woman, in a feeble voice.

“Ah, I know no pity!” resumed Crevel. “The day when Josépha was taken from me I was like a tigress deprived of her cubs—I was like you, as you are at this moment. Your daughter! why, she is the means by which I shall win you! You can’t marry her without my help! Mademoiselle Hortense is very handsome, but she must have a *dot*.”

“Alas! yes,” said the baroness, wiping her eyes.

“Well, then, go and ask your baron for ten thousand francs a year,” said Crevel, resuming his attitude.

He waited a moment like a singer who counts a bar.

“If he had them he would give them to some girl who will replace Josépha,” he said, taking up the score. “Can he be stopped in his present career? No, he is too fond of women—there ought to be a medium in all things, as our present king says. Besides, vanity counts for something. He is a handsome man, and he would take the bed from under you to serve his pleasures. Why, everything is going to pieces here already! Since I have known you, you have never been able to renew the furniture of your salon. The slits in these stuffs actually vomit the word ‘needy.’ What prospective son-in-law wouldn’t be scared by such ill-concealed proofs of the worst of all poverty—that of decayed gentlefolks? I have been a shopkeeper, and I *know*. There’s nothing like the shop-keeping eye for seeing real riches and detecting counterfeits. You haven’t a penny!” he added in a low voice; “it shows everywhere, even in your footman’s coat. Do you wish me to reveal certain awful secrets which are hidden from you?”

“Monsieur,” said Madame Hulot, whose handkerchief was wet with tears, “say no more.”

“Well, my son-in-law gives his father money; and that is what I started to tell you in the beginning of our conversation about your son. But I am looking after Célestine’s interests; you may be easy on that score.”

“Oh, if I could only marry my daughter and die!” said the miserable woman, losing her self-command.

“Well, I offer you the means,” said Crevel.

Madame Hulot looked at him with a gleam of hope, which changed the expression of her face so rapidly that the sight of it alone ought to have moved Crevel to compunction, and forced him to abandon his preposterous pursuit.

CHAPTER III.

THE LIFE OF A NOBLE WOMAN.

“You will be beautiful ten years hence,” said Crevel, resuming his position. “Accept me, and Mademoiselle Hortense shall marry at once. Hulot gives me the right, as I have just told you, to drive a straight bargain; he’ll not object. For the last three years I have been saving money; my little distractions have all been economical. I have three hundred thousand francs laid by, outside of my real property they are yours—”

“Leave my house, monsieur, and never let me see you again!” exclaimed Madame Hulot. “If you had not compelled me to ask the meaning of your base conduct in the matter of my daughter’s proposed marriage—yes, base,” she repeated, in reply to Crevel’s gesture; “why do you allow such animosities to injure a poor girl, a beautiful, innocent creature?—if it were not for this cruel necessity which wrings my mother’s-heart you should never have spoken to me again; you should never have re-entered these doors. Thirty-two years of wifely honor and loyalty are not destroyed by the attacks of a Monsieur Crevel—”

“Ex-perfumer, successor to César Birotteau at the ‘Queen of Roses,’ rue Saint-Honoré,” said Crevel, jokingly; “formerly assistant-mayor, captain of the National Guard, chevalier of the Legion of honor, precisely like my predecessor.”

“Monsieur,” said the baroness, “if my husband, after twenty years of constancy, has grown weary of his wife, it concerns me, and only me; and observe, monsieur, that he has carefully concealed his infidelities, for I was not aware that he had succeeded you in the heart of Mademoiselle Josépha.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Crevel, “only by dint of money, madame; that little nightingale has cost him over a hundred thousand francs in the last two years. Ha! ha! there’s more behind it all, if you did but know it.”

“Enough, Monsieur Crevel, let me hear no more! I shall not renounce, for your sake, the happiness a mother feels in folding her children to her heart without remorse of conscience; in knowing that her family respect and love her. I shall yield my soul to God without a stain.”

“Amen!” said Crevel, with the devilish bitterness that comes out upon the faces of men when they are checked anew in such attempts. “You don’t yet know what poverty is in its last stages—shame, dishonor. I have done my best to enlighten you. I wished to save both you and your daughter. Well, you can spell out the modern parable of the prodigal father to its last letter if you like—But your tears and your pride do touch me,” he added, sitting down again. “It is dreadful to see the woman we love in affliction.

All that I can promise you, dear Adeline, is to do nothing against your interests, nor against your husband; but, remember, you must never send anyone to me for information. That's all I have to say."

"What am I to do?" exclaimed Madame Hulot. Till then Madame Hulot had bravely borne the triple torture this conversation had inflicted on her heart; she suffered as a woman, as a mother, as a wife. In fact, so long as her son's father-in-law had been overbearing and aggressive, she felt strengthened by the resistance she made to the brutality of the ex-shopkeeper; but the good-natured kindness which he now showed in the midst of his exasperation as a rebuffed lover, as a humiliated national guard, relaxed the fibres which were strung to their utmost pitch. She wrung her hands and burst into tears, falling into a state of such abject depression that she allowed Crevel, now on his knees, to kiss her hands.

"My God! what will become of me!" she said, wiping her tears. "Can a mother coldly see a daughter perish before her very eyes? What will be the fate of so glorious a creature, guarded by her chaste life beside her mother as much as by the innate purity of her nature? There are days when she wanders alone in the garden, sad and disturbed without knowing why; I see the tears in her eyes—"

"She is twenty-one years old," said Crevel.

"Must I put her into a convent?" exclaimed the baroness. "At such crises religion is powerless against nature, and girls who are piously brought up have been known to go insane. Rise, monsieur; do you not see that all is at an end between us? that I feel a horror of you? that you have just cast down and destroyed a mother's last hope?—"

"What if I raise it again?" he said.

Madame Hulot looked at Crevel with a frenzied expression that touched him; but he drove the pity from his heart, recollecting her words, "I feel a horror for you." Virtue is always a little too much of one thing; it does not see the shades and the variations of temperament among which it might tack and steer out of a false position.

"In these days there is no marrying a girl as handsome as Mademoiselle Hortense without a dowry," said Crevel, resuming his starched manner. "Your daughter is one of those beauties who frighten men; she is like a thorough-bred horse, which requires such costly care that buyers are scarce. How can a man go a-foot with such a woman on his arm? Everybody would stare at him, and follow him, and want his wife. That sort of thing is dreadful to a man who doesn't care to fight a host of lovers; for, after all, only one of them can be killed. In the situation in which you find yourself, madame, there are but three ways in which you can marry your daughter: either by my help—and that you don't choose to

take—or to some old man of sixty, very rich, without children, who wants an heir—difficult to find, but you may meet with him; old men are apt to take a Josépha or a Jenny Cadine, and sometimes they do the same thing legitimately. If I didn't have my Célestine and our two grandchildren to look after, I'd marry Hortense myself. That's your second chance; the third is the easiest."

Madame Hulot raised her head and looked eagerly at the perfumer.

"Paris is a place where all men of talent and energy, who grow like mushrooms in the soil of France, turn up sooner or later; it swarms with homeless, half-starved geniuses, plucky fellows, capable of anything, even of making their fortune. Well, such men—your humble servant was one of them in his day, and knew many others. What was du Tillet, what was Popinot twenty years ago? They were paddling round that little shop of Papa Birotteau's, without any other capital than the ambition to get on, which in my opinion is the best capital of all. Money capital can be spent and wasted, but moral capital can't. Look at me; what did I have? The wish to succeed and the courage to do so. Du Tillet ranks to-day with the highest people in the land. Little Popinot, the richest druggist in the rue des Lombards, became a deputy, and is now a minister. Well, as I was saying, one of these free lances, stock-broker, artist, author, is the only kind of man in Paris who is willing to marry a handsome girl without a penny; they are all courageous fellows. Anselme Popinot married Mademoiselle Birotteau without expecting a farthing of dowry. Such men are cracked; they believe in love, just as they believe in their own faculties and their own success. Find one of them and get him in love with your daughter, and he'll marry her without a thought of the future. You must admit that, enemy as you think me, I am not wanting in generosity; for this advice is against my own interests."

"Ah, Monsieur Crevel, if you would only be my friend, and give up those ridiculous ideas—"

"Ridiculous? Madame, do not undervalue yourself in that way. I love you, and some day you will certainly be mine. I intend to say to Hulot, 'You took Josépha away from me; I have got your wife.' It is the old law of retaliation. I shall pursue that purpose, unless you become extremely ugly. I shall succeed; and I'll tell you why," he added, resuming his attitude and gazing fixedly at Madame Hulot. Then after a pause he continued: —

"You will not find either a rich old man or a young lover for your daughter, because you love her too well to deliver her over to the mercies of an old libertine, and because you will never bring yourself—you, Baronne Hulot, sister-in-law of the commander of the grenadiers of the Old Guard—to take a man of talent wherever you can find him. Such a man may be a mere workman, like many a millionaire to-day who was a mechanic ten years ago, a

foreman, an overseer in a manufactory. And so, seeing that your daughter, hopeless of marriage, is likely to do something that will disgrace her, you will say to yourself, 'Better that I be dishonored; and if Monsieur Crevel will keep the secret, I will earn my daughter's dowry—two hundred thousand francs—by ten years' attachment to that ex-perfumer.' I annoy you; and what I say is profoundly immoral, isn't it? But if you were eaten up by an irresistible passion, you would find as many reasons to yield as a woman who is really in love. Well, you'll see; your daughter's future will put these capitulations of conscience into your mind."

"Hortense has an uncle—"

"Who? old Fischer? His affairs are in a bad way; and that again is the fault of Baron Hulot, whose rake gets into every strong-box within his reach—"

"I mean Comte Hulot."

"Oh, your husband, madame, has already made mincemeat of his brother's savings; they have gone to furnish his siren's house. Come, now, do you mean to let me go without a word of hope?"

"Adieu, monsieur. You will soon get over a passion for a woman of my age, and learn Christian principles. God protect the sorrowful!"

The baroness rose to compel the captain to retire, forcing him thus into the large salon.

"Is it proper that the beautiful Madame Hulot should live in such a wretchedly furnished place?" he said, looking round him, and pointing to an old lamp, a chandelier with the gilding defaced, the white seams of the carpet, in short, to the tatters of opulence, which made the fine old salon in white, red, and gold a skeleton reminder of imperial glory.

"Virtue shines within it, monsieur. I have no desire to obtain a gorgeous home by making the beauty which you say is mine a wolf-trap, the decoy of a Jewess worshipping the golden calf!"

The captain bit his lips as he recognized the words he had lately used to condemn the grasping avarice of Josépha.

"And for whose sake are you so perseveringly faithful?" he demanded. By this time the baroness had led him to the outer door of the salon. "For a libertine!" he added, with the sneer of a virtuous millionaire.

"If he were, monsieur, my constancy would have some merit, that is all."

She left the captain with a bow such as a woman gives to a man she is well rid of, and turned away too quickly to see him strike his attitude for the last time. She opened all the doors which she had closed and did not notice the menacing gesture with which Crevel left the room. She walked proudly, nobly, like a martyr in the Coliseum; but her strength was gone and, as she reached her

boudoir, she let herself fall upon the sofa like a woman on the verge of exhaustion, though her eyes were fixed on the ruined kiosk where Hortense was chattering with her cousin Bette.

From the first days of her marriage to the present time Madame Hulot had loved her husband just as Josephine had finally loved Napoleon—with an admiring love, a maternal love, a servile love. Though she was ignorant of the details Crevel had just given her, she nevertheless knew perfectly well that for the last twenty years Baron Hulot was constantly unfaithful to her; but she had drawn a leaden veil over her eyes and wept in silence; never a word of reproach escaped her. In return for this angelic sweetness she had won the veneration of her husband, who regarded her with a species of religious worship. The affection of a wife for her husband, the respect in which she holds him, are contagious in a family. Hortense thought her father a model of conjugal love. As for Hulot the son, brought up in admiration of the baron, who was publicly looked upon as one of the giants who seconded Napoleon, he was well aware that he owed his position to the name, the station, and the reputation of his father; moreover, still influenced by the impressions of his childhood, he held his father in awe. Had he suspected the irregularities which Crevel now revealed he was too respectful to complain of them; he might even have excused them with such reasons as men give for these misdemeanors, seen from their own point of view.

It now becomes necessary to explain the extraordinary devotion of this beautiful and noble woman; and we must give the history of her life in a few words.

From a village situated on the extreme confines of Lorraine, at the foot of the Vosges mountains, three brothers of the name of Fischer, common laborers, drawn under the republican conscription, started for the Army of the Rhine.

In 1799 the second of these brothers, André, widower and father of Madame Hulot, left his daughter to the care of his elder brother, Pierre Fischer, disabled from active service by wounds received in 1797, and made a few limited trips on the military transports; an employment which he owed to the influence of the paymaster of the forces, Baron Hulot d'Ervy. By a very natural accident, Hulot, when he came to Strasburg, saw the Fischer family. Adeline's father and his younger brother were by that time purveyors of forage in Alsace.

Adeline, then sixteen years of age, might be compared with the famous Madame du Barry, like herself a daughter of Lorraine. She was one of those perfect, overwhelming beauties, of the type of Madame Tallien, whom Nature manufactures with especial care, bestowing upon them her choicest gifts—distinction, nobility of bearing, grace, delicacy, elegance, a rare skin, and a complexion compounded on that mysterious palette where chance has mixed

the colors. Beautiful women of this type resemble each other. Bianca Capello, whose portrait is Bronzino's masterpiece, the Venus of Jean Goujon, the original of which was the famous Diane de Poitiers, Signora Olympia, whose picture is in the Doria gallery, in short, Ninon, Madame du Bany, Madame Tallien, Mademoiselle Georges, Madame Recamier—all such women, who remain beautiful in spite of years, passions, or lives of excessive dissipation, bear a strong likeness to each other in their figures, their structure, and the points of their beauty; which leads to a belief that in the ocean of generative forces there flows an aphrodisiac current whence all these goddesses emerge, daughters of the same salt wave.

Adeline Fischer, one of the loveliest of the divine tribe, could boast the glorious characteristics, the serpentine lines, the blue-veined tissues of these queen-born women. Her golden hair, the like of which our Mother Eve obtained from the hand of God, her form, worthy of an empress with its air of grandeur, the august outlines of her noble profile, combined with the modesty of a village girl, arrested the attention of men who remained rapt in admiration before her like amateurs in presence of a Raphael. Meeting her thus, Baron Hulot made Mademoiselle Adeline Fischer his wife by civil marriage, to the great astonishment of all the other Fischers, who had been brought up to hold their superiors in reverence.

The eldest, Pierre Fischer, a soldier of 1792, severely wounded in the attack on Wissembourg, worshipped Napoleon and everything relating to the grand army. André and Johann spoke with great respect of the paymaster-general, Hulot, a favorite of the Emperor and one, moreover, to whom they owed their advancement; for the baron, struck with their honesty and intelligence, had promoted them from the victualling-trains of the army and put them at the head of a commissariat department. Here the Fischer brothers did good service during the campaign of 1804. When peace was proclaimed, Hulot got them a position of purveyors of forage in Alsace, without knowing that he himself would be sent to Strasburg some months later, to prepare for the campaign of 1806.

To a young peasant-girl such a marriage was like an Assumption. The beautiful Adeline passed, without any transition period, from the mud of her native village to the paradise of the imperial court. It was about this time that Monsieur Hulot, one of the most faithful, honest, and active of his corps, was made a baron, placed near the Emperor, and appointed to the Imperial Guard. The beautiful village girl, out of love for her husband, whom she idolized, had the courage to have herself educated. The paymaster-general was, as a man, a replica of Adeline as a woman. He belonged to the elect few of handsome men. Tall, well-made,

fair, with blue eyes of a sparkling fire and play that was irresistible, and an elegant figure, he was observable even among the d'Orsays, the Forbins, the Ouvrards, in short, the battalion of the fine men of the empire. A conqueror of women, and imbued with the ideas of the Directory concerning them, his career of gallantry was arrested for a considerable time by his conjugal attachment.

To Adeline the baron was, from the start, a species of divinity who could do no wrong; she owed everything to him—fortune, mansion, carriage, all the luxury of those luxurious days; happiness, for she was publicly adored; a title, that of baroness; and celebrity, for she became known as “the beautiful Madame Hulot;” she even had the honor of declining the homage of the Emperor, who presented her with a rivièrè of diamonds, and continued to take notice of her, saying from time to time, “That beautiful Madame Hulot, is she still virtuous?”—as if he were ready to revenge himself on any man who triumphed where he had failed.

It does not, therefore, require much intelligence to perceive in a simple, candid, beautiful soul like that of Madame Hulot the springs of the fanaticism which she mingled with her love. Assuring herself perpetually that her husband could be guilty of no wrong toward her, she became in her inward being the humble, blind, devoted servant of her creator. It is to be remarked, however, that she was gifted with sound good sense; that good common-sense of the people, which made her education a solid matter. In society she spoke little, said no evil of any one, and never sought to shine; she reflected about everything and listened intelligently, forming herself on the model of the worthiest and best bred women.

In 1815 Hulot followed the example of an intimate friend, the Prince de Wissembourg, and was one of those who organized the impromptu army whose defeat at Waterloo ended the Napoleonic era. In 1816 the baron became a thorn in the side of the Feltre ministry, and was only reinstated in the commissariat department in 1823, when the government wanted his services for the war in Spain. In 1830, at the time when Louis Philippe levied a species of conscription among the former Napoleonic troops, he became quartermaster-general. After the accession of the younger branch, of which he was an able supporter, he remained an indispensable officer of the ministry of war. He had, moreover, obtained his marshal's-baton, so that the king could do no more for him, short of making him minister or peer of France.

Deprived of his usual occupations from 1818 to 1823, Baron Hulot took to active service around women. Madame Hulot dated her Hector's first infidelities to the period of the empire's grand finale. Up to that time—that is, for twelve years—she had been undisputed *prima donna assoluta* of their home. She still enjoyed

the inveterate habitual affection which husbands always bestow on wives who resign themselves to the role of gentle and virtuous companions; she knew that no rival could hold her own for two hours against a single word of complaint on her part; but she closed her eyes, stopped her ears, and tried to ignore her husband's conduct outside of his own home. She treated her Hector at last very much as a mother treats a spoiled child. Three years before the conversation just related, Hortense had recognized her father in a proscenium box at the Variétés in company with Jenny Cadine, and exclaimed: "See, there's papa!" "You are mistaken, my darling," said her mother; "he is with the marshal." The baroness had seen her rival plainly enough, but instead of undergoing a pang at the sight of her beauty, she said to herself, "That scamp of a Hector must be happy." Nevertheless she did suffer, and gave way secretly at times to frightful anger; but as soon as Hector entered her presence she remembered only her twelve years of unalloyed happiness, and lost all power to articulate complaints. She would have liked him to make her his confidante; but she never dared, out of respect for his character, to let him know that she was aware of his follies. Such excess of delicacy is only met with among the beauteous daughters of the people, who know how to bear a blow without returning it; in their veins the blood of the martyrs still lingers. Well-born women, the equals of their husbands, feel the need of irritating them, of marking their tolerance of wrong, just as we mark a score at billiards, by cutting words spoken in a spirit of diabolical vengeance, intended to assert either their superiority or their right to go and do likewise.

The baroness had a devoted admirer in her brother-in-law, Lieutenant-general Hulot, the venerable commander of the foot grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, to whom a marshal's-baton had been granted in his latter years. The old man, after commanding from 1830 to 1834 the military division which comprised the Breton departments, the scene of his exploits in 1799 and 1800, had come to end his days in Paris near his brother, for whom he never ceased to feel the affection of a father. The heart of the old soldier sympathized with that of his sister-in-law; he admired her as the noblest, saintliest of her sex. He never married, because he longed for a second Adeline, seeking her vainly in many lands and through many campaigns. The desire not to fall in the estimation of the old hero, the man without reproach or stain, of whom Napoleon had said, "That fine Hulot is the most obstinate of republicans, but he will never betray me," would of itself have led Adeline to endure even greater sufferings than those which she underwent. But the old general, now seventy-two years of age, broken by thirty campaigns, wounded for the twenty-seventh time at Waterloo, though he was the object of Adeline's admiration

was, nevertheless, no protection to her. The poor count, among other infirmities, could hear nothing except through a trumpet.

As long as Baron Hulot d'Ervy remained young and handsome, his love affairs did little harm to his fortune; but at fifty years of age, the graces must be reckoned with. At that age love in elderly men changes to vice, mingled, moreover, with insensate vanity. About this period of his life Adeline began to notice in her husband an extreme attention to his dress; he dyed his hair and his whiskers, and buckled himself into belts and corsets. He was resolved to remain handsome at any cost. This cultivation of his person, a weakness he had formerly ridiculed in others, made him even finical. Adeline at last perceived that the Pactolus which flowed among the Baron's mistresses took its rise from her. During the last eight years a considerable fortune had been squandered, and so radically made away with that about the time young Hulot had married Crevel's daughter, the Baron had been forced to admit to his wife that his salary and emoluments were all that remained to them. "Where will all this lead us?" was her answer. "Don't be uneasy," said the councilor of State; "I will give you all my emoluments, and I will provide for the marriage of Hortense and our own future by undertaking certain matters of business." The wife's unshaken faith in the power and high value of her husband's character and capacity calmed her temporary uneasiness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHARACTER OF AN OLD MAID; ORIGINAL, AND YET NOT AS UNCOMMON AS ONE MIGHT THINK.

The nature of Madame Hulot's reflections and the cause of her tears, after Crevel's departure, can easily be conceived by the help of the foregoing explanations. The poor woman had known for the last two years that she was in the depths of an abyss; but she thought she was the sole victim. She was ignorant of the terms on which her son's marriage had been brought about; she did not know of Hector's relation to the grasping Josépha; and above all, she had hoped that no one on earth suspected her sorrows. If Crevel talked with levity of the baron's irregularities, she was aware that Hector must fall in public estimation. She saw, through the coarse talk of the irritated ex-perfumer, the odious collusion of the two men to which the marriage of her son was due. Two abandoned women were the priestesses of that hymen, planned in some orgie amid the degrading familiarities of a pair of drunken old men! "He forgot Hortense," she said to herself. "Can it be that he will find her a husband in the society of those reprobate women?" The mother, stronger than the wife, spoke in these words as her eyes rested on Hortense, laughing, with her cousin Bette, the eager laugh of thoughtless girlhood, and she felt that those nervous sounds were as terrible an indication of the girl's feelings as her tearful reveries in the solitude of the garden.

Hortense resembled her mother; but she had golden hair whose natural curl and profusion were really wonderful. The lustre of her skin was like mother-of-pearl. She was evidently the fruit of an honest marriage, of a pure and noble love in its fullest strength, shown in a passionate action of the whole countenance, a gayety in every feature, a spirit of youth, a freshness of life, a richness of health which vibrated about her, and sent forth electric currents. Hortense attracted the eye. When her own eyes—of an ultra-marine blue, floating in that fluid that comes of innocence—rested on some passer-by he quivered involuntarily. Not a single red blemish—the penalty these golden blondes so often pay for their milk-white skins—marred her complexion. Tall, plump, without being fat, with a graceful figure, whose dignity equalled that of her mother, she merited the epithet of "goddess" so lavishly bestowed by old-fashioned writers. Persons who met her in the street could scarce restrain the exclamation—"Good heavens! what a beautiful girl!" She herself was so truly guileless that she would turn and say to her mother, "How can they call me beautiful when you are with me? you are so much handsomer

than I." In fact, though the baroness was forty-seven years old, admirers of the setting sun did prefer her to her daughter; for she had, to use the language of her sex lost none of her *advantages*, thanks to one of those rare phenomena, especially rare in Paris, which made Ninon the successful rival of three generations.

Thinking of her daughter, the mother's thoughts reverted to the father; she saw him sliding day by day, little by little, into the social slough—possibly dismissed at last from the ministry. The idea of the fall of her idol, accompanied by vague visions of the sorrows which Crevel had prophesied, was so terrible to the poor woman that she lost consciousness in a species of painful ecstasy.

Her cousin Bette, who was talking with Hortense, looked from time to time toward the house to see if they might return to the salon; but her young companion was teasing her with questions at the moment when the baroness opened the glass door, and she did not perceive the action.

Lisbeth Fischer, five years younger than Madame Hulot, though she was the daughter of the elder brother, was far from being as beautiful as her cousin, and she had long been prodigiously jealous of her. Jealousy was in fact the basis of a character full of eccentricity (a word invented by Englishmen to designate the follies, not of the people, but of the upper classes). A peasant woman of the department of the Vosges in the fullest meaning of that term, thin, dark-hued, with gleaming black hair, thick eyebrows meeting in a tuft, arms of great power and length, thick feet, and a few warts on the long, simian face—such is a concise portrait of this spinster cousin.

The family of the two brothers, who lived together, sacrificed the plain daughter to the pretty daughter, the bitter fruit to the dazzling flower. Lisbeth worked while Adeline was petted and indulged; and there came a day when the former, alone with Adeline, tried to disfigure the latter's nose—a true Grecian nose, the admiration of old women. Though whipped for this particular misdeed, she never could be prevented from tearing the dresses and spoiling the collars of the petted darling.

After the astounding marriage of her cousin, Lisbeth bowed before that superior destiny, just as the brothers and sisters of Napoleon bowed before the grandeur of a throne and the might of authority. Adeline, always good and tender, bethought herself of Lisbeth after she reached Paris, and invited her there in 1809, intending to get her married and save her from future poverty. Finding it a slower matter than they expected to marry off a girl with black eyes and beetling brows, who was unable either to read or write, Baron Hulot began by giving her a trade; he apprenticed Lisbeth to the famous Pons brothers, embroiderers to the imperial court.

Cousin Lisbeth, called “Bette” for short, became henceforth a worker of gold and silver lace. Energetic, like all mountaineers, she had the courage to be taught to read, write, and cipher, for the baron proved to her the need of those accomplishments if she was ever to have an establishment of her own in the trade. She resolved to make her fortune; and in two years she actually metamorphosed herself. In 1811 the peasant woman of Lorraine was a rather pleasing, capable, and intelligent forewoman in a prosperous house.

This business, called the gold-and-silver lace-trade, comprised the making of epaulets, aiguillettes, sword-knots—in short, all that enormous quantity of brilliant things which glittered on the uniforms of the French army, and the coats of civilians during the empire. The Emperor, a true Italian lover of costume, required gold and silver embroidery on every seam of his servants’ clothes, and his empire extended over one hundred and thirty-three departments. To furnish these embroideries to the tailors—a wealthy and sure-paying body of tradesmen—or to the grand dignitaries themselves, was a safe business.

At the very moment when Lisbeth Fischer, the best workwoman of the Pons establishment, where she superintended the manufactory, was about to start in business for herself, the fall of the empire occurred. The olive-branch of peace in the hands of the Bourbons frightened Bette. She feared the trade would succumb now that there were only eighty-four departments instead of a hundred and thirty-three to supply, not to speak of the enormous reduction of the army, consequently of uniforms. Terrified at the prospect, she refused the offers of the baron to set her up in business; for which perversity he thought her crazy. She still further justified that opinion by quarrelling with Monsieur Rivet, purchaser for the Pons establishment, with whom the baron wished her to form a partnership. The matter ended by her becoming once more a mere journey woman.

The Fischer family had by this time fallen back into the condition of precarious poverty from which Baron Hulot had lifted them. Ruined by the catastrophe of Fontainebleau, the three Fischer brothers served as a forlorn hope with the *franc-tireurs* of 1815. The eldest, father of Lisbeth, was killed. Adeline’s father, condemned to death by court-martial, fled to Germany and died at Trèves in 1820. The younger brother, Johann, came to Paris and implored the assistance of the queen of the family; who, it was said, dined off silver and gold, and never appeared in company without diamonds on her head and throat as big as filberts, given to her, so the story went, by the Emperor. Johann Fischer, then forty-three years of age, received from Baron Hulot the sum of ten thousand francs to start a small forage business for the army at Versailles: to obtain this concession the baron employed some

secret influence which he still possessed with friends in the ministry of war.

These family misfortunes, the loss of Baron Hulot's official position, the certainty that she could be of no account in the vast turmoil of men, events, and interests in Paris, cowed Lisbeth Fischer. Thenceforth she gave up all idea of competition with her beautiful cousin, whose many superiorities she inwardly acknowledged; but envy lurked in her breast, as a germ of the plague lurks in a bale of woollen stuffs only to burst forth and ravage a city when the bale is opened. From time to time she said to herself, "Adeline and I are of the same blood; our fathers were brothers; yet she lives in a mansion, I in a garret." Nevertheless she accepted presents from the baron and Madame Hulot on her birthday and at the New-Year; the baron, who was always good to her, supplied her with winter fuel: old General Hulot invited her to dinner one day in the week, and her place was laid at her cousin's table every day in the year. They all made fun of her, but they were not ashamed of her. They had given her an independent position in the great city, where she lived as she pleased.

The woman herself dreaded any species of yoke. Adeline offered her a home in her house; Bette at once rebelled at the halter of obligation. Many a time the baron tried to solve the difficult problem of marrying her; but though she yielded to the first advances, she refused each proposal, fearing to be slighted for her want of education, her ignorance, and the lack of dowry. When the baroness proposed that she should live with their uncle and keep his house, instead of his being saddled with an expensive housekeeper, she replied that she certainly should never marry in that way.

In all her ideas cousin Bette was an oddity—like other natures that develop late, especially savages, who think much and speak little. Her peasant mind had acquired from the talk of the workrooms and the companionship of both male and female workpeople a strong tinge of Parisian sarcasm. This woman, whose character bore a marked resemblance to that of Corsicans, and who was uselessly goaded by the instincts of a powerful nature, would have loved to protect a feeble man; and yet, as a result of living in the great capital, the capital had changed her on the surface. Parisian polish created rust upon that powerfully tempered spirit. Gifted with a shrewdness now become fundamental, as it does in all persons vowed to real celibacy, she would, owing to the pungent turn she gave to her ideas, have seemed a person to be feared in any other situation than the one she was in. Malicious in heart, she was capable of setting the most united family by the ears.

In her earlier days, when she cherished a few hopes, the secret of which she told to no one, she made up her mind to wear corsets and follow the fashions; it was then that she appeared with a passing resplendence which made the baron think she might be marriageable. For a time she became the piquante brunette of the old-fashioned French novel. Her piercing glance, her olive skin, and reed-like waist might have tempted some half-pay major; but she was satisfied, as she laughingly declared, with her own admiration. She ended by being really contented with her life; curtailing most of its material cares by dining every evening with friends, after working at her trade since sunrise. She had only her breakfast and her lodging to provide; friends supplied her with clothing and money and many acceptable provisions, such as sugar, wine, etc.

In 1837, cousin Bette, after living in Paris for twenty-seven years, partly at the expense of the Hulots and her uncle Fischer, resigned herself to the fact that she was a nobody and allowed people to treat her as they pleased. She refused to be present at dinner-parties, preferring the family gatherings where she herself could be of consequence; thus avoiding the sufferings of self-love. Wherever she thus went, whether to the houses of old General Hulot, Crevel, young Hulot, and Rivet (who had succeeded to the Pons business and with whom she had become reconciled and who now showed her much hospitality), or to that of her cousin, Madame Hulot, she was received as one of the family. She knew how to propitiate the servants with little fees given from time to time, and by exchanging a few words with them before entering the salon. This familiarity, by which she frankly put herself on a level with the domestics, won their backstairs good-will, an essential gain to parasites. "That's a kind, good creature!" was the verdict everybody passed upon her. Her obliging helpfulness, which was boundless if no one exacted it, as well as her specious good-humor, was a necessity of her position. She ended by considering her life at the mercy of everybody; wishing to please everybody she laughed and chattered with the young people, to whom she made herself acceptable by a fondling manner which always attracts them; she guessed and furthered their wishes and even interpreted them, and was the best of all confidantes because she had no authority to find fault. Her absolute discretion won the confidence of older persons, for she possessed, like Ninon, some of the qualities of a man. As a general thing people usually make confidences to those beneath them rather than to those above them; they employ their inferiors far more than their superiors in secret matters; such persons consequently become the sharers of their hidden thoughts; they are called into private discussions; even Richelieu thought himself sure of power when he was allowed to be present at a council of state. This poor old maid was

thought to be so dependent on every one about her that she was to all intents and purposes a deaf-mute. She even nicknamed herself "the family confessional." Madame Hulot alone, remembering the harsh treatment she had herself received in childhood from this cousin so much stronger though younger than she, felt a certain distrust of her and made her no confidences. But in any case, the baroness, from a sense of decency, would have confided her domestic miseries to none but God himself.

Perhaps it is well to state here that the Hulot mansion still retained its splendor in the eyes of cousin Bette, who was not struck, like the parvenu ex-perfumer by the poverty bursting from the moth-eaten covers, the stained curtains and the ragged stuffs. The furniture we live with is in some respects like ourselves. By dint of seeing our own persons daily we end, as the baron did, by thinking we are little changed and still young while others note that our heads are turning to the color of chinchilla, that circumflex accents are coming out upon our foreheads, and pumpkin-like projections on our stomachs. The mansion therefore continued to shine in the old maid's eyes with the Bengal lights of imperial victories.

In course of time cousin Bette contracted certain peculiarities of old-maidism. For example, instead of following the fashions, she made them conform to her own habits, and yield to many of her old-fashioned predilections. If the baroness gave her a pretty bonnet or a dress of the newest cut, Bette at once remade it after her own ideas, in some fashion which recalled the empire and her former Lorraine costume. A thirty-franc bonnet became a nondescript covering, the pretty dress a wisp of odds and ends. In such matters Bette was obstinate as a mule—she was resolved to please herself and considered the result charming; but the real truth was that this curious assimilation, though it harmonized with her nature and made her from head to foot a regular old maid, made her also so ridiculous that few, even with kindest intentions, were willing to receive her in their houses on gala days.

The restive, independent, wilful spirit, and the inexplicable untamability of this woman, for whom the baron had four times found a husband (a clerk in his ministry, a major, a purveyor, and a retired captain), and who had refused a dealer in the gold-lace trade, who afterwards became wealthy, fully accounted for the nickname of "Nanny-goat" which the baron bestowed upon her. And yet the name only answered to the external oddities of her behavior, to those surface exhibitions which we make to each other in our social state. This woman, if carefully observed, would have betrayed the ferocious side of the peasant class; she was still the child who longed to tear the nose from her cousin's face, and, if she had not acquired a stock of common-sense, might even now kill her in a paroxysm of jealousy. It was only through her

acquired knowledge of life and of the laws that she was able to control those rapid impulses by which the people of isolated regions and savages pass from feeling to action. Possibly the whole difference between the natural man and the civilized man lies here. The savage has feelings only; the civilized being has feelings and ideas. Therefore among savages the brain receives, as it were, few imprints; it is wholly in the grasp of the feeling that invades it. But in civilized man ideas descend upon the heart and transform it; he is possessed by many interests, many feelings, whereas the savage has but one idea, one feeling, at a time. That is the cause of the momentary power of the child over its parents—a power which ceases as soon as the child's desire is satisfied; but in the man who lives close to nature that cause is continuous. Cousin Bette, the Lorraine savage, more or less treacherous, belonged to the category of such natures, who are not so uncommon among the masses as people think for—a fact which goes far to explain their conduct in revolutions.

If, at the particular time when this history begins, cousin Bette had chosen to dress in the fashion—if she had, like other Parisian women, lent herself to the changing modes—she might have been presentable and even acceptable; but she was now as rigid and unyielding as a pole. Without the charm of grace woman may be said not to exist in Paris. And thus it was that the abundant black hair, the handsome hard eyes, the firm lines of the face, the Calabrian sallowness of the skin which made cousin Bette an embodiment of Giotto's women, and out of which a true Parisian would have made capital, above all, her strange attire gave her so odd an appearance that she sometimes looked like a dressed-up monkey, such as the little savoyards carry about on their organs. As she was well known in the various houses united by family ties to which she confined her social evolutions, and was also fond of her own home, her singularities offended no one, and passed unnoticed in the vortex of Parisian streets, where no woman is looked at unless she is pretty.

Hortense was laughing at having got the better of her cousin Bette's obstinacy and wrung from her an avowal she had been seeking for three years. However sly an old maid may be, there is one sentiment which will always make her open her lips—namely, vanity. For three years past Hortense, who was extremely curious on a certain point, had assailed her cousin with questions which showed her own perfect innocence; she wanted to know why her cousin had never married. Hortense knew the history of the five rejected suitors, and had built up a little romance of her own, believing that Bette was secretly in love; and out of this belief a war of jokes had arisen. Hortense would say, "We young girls," referring to herself and her cousin. Bette sometimes replied in a jesting tone, "Who told you I had a lover?" Cousin Bette's lover,

real or pretended, became thenceforth the subject of much friendly teasing. At the end of two years Hortense said one day as usual, "How is your lover?"

"Pretty well," answered Bette; "he suffers a good deal sometimes—poor young man!"

"Ah! is he delicate?" asked Madame Hulot, laughing.

"Yes, indeed; he is a blonde. A brown girl like me couldn't love a man unless he were as fair as the moon."

"But who is he? What does he do?" said Hortense; "is he a prince?"

"Prince of the lathe, just as I am queen of the bobbins," answered Bette. "A poor girl can't be loved now-a-days by the lord of a castle rolling in money, or a duke, or a peer, or a Prince Charming as it is in your fairy-tales."

"Oh, how I should like to see him!" cried Hortense.

"And find out what sort of fellow he is who can love an old nanny-goat like me," declared Bette.

"He must be some queer clerk with a goatee!" said Hortense, looking at her mother.

"That's as true as that you have no lover!" said Bette, with an offended air.

"Well, if you have one, Bette, why don't you marry him?" asked Madame Hulot, making a sign to her daughter. "For the last three years you have been talking about him; you have certainly had time to study him, and if he continues faithful you ought not to keep him waiting any longer. It is a matter of conscience; besides, if he is young, it is well to get a staff for his old age."

Bette looked fixedly at the baroness, and seeing that she spoke in jest answered: "Then I should marry hunger and thirst. He is a workman and I am a workwoman; if we had children they'd be work-people. No, no, our souls love each other; that doesn't cost anything."

"Why do you hide him?" asked Hortense.

"Because he lives in his shirt-sleeves," answered Bette, laughing.

"Do you love him?" asked Madame Hulot.

"Ah, I should think so! I love him for himself, the cherub! It is now four years since I took him into my heart."

"Well, if you really love him for himself," said Madame Hulot, gravely, "that is, if he really exists, you do very wrong towards him. You don't know what it is to love."

"We are all born to know that business!" cried Bette.

"No; there are some women who love and who stay selfish through it all; and that's your case," said the baroness.

Bette lowered her head at this, and the glance of her eye would have made whoever received it shudder; but it fell on her knitting.

“If you bring the lover (if there is a lover) here, Hector may be able to find him a situation, and put him in the way to get on,” resumed Madame Hulot.

“That’s impossible!” answered Bette.

“Why so?”

“He’s a Pole—a sort of refugee.”

“A conspirator!” exclaimed Hortense. “Oh, you happy woman! Has he had adventures?”

“Yes; he fought for Poland. He was professor in a college where the rebellion first broke out among the collegians, and, as he owed his appointment to the Grand-duke Constantine, he has no chance of being pardoned.”

“Professor of what?”

“The fine arts.”

“Did he come to Paris after the defeat?”

“He crossed Germany on foot in 1833.”

“Poor young man! how old is he?”

“He was twenty-four at the time of the rebellion; he is barely twenty-nine now.”

“Fifteen years younger than you!” said Madame Hulot.

“How does he support himself?” asked Hortense.

“By his talents.”

“Does he give lessons?”

“No,” answered Bette; “he receives them—and hard ones, too.”

“What is his Christian name? Is it pretty?”

“Wenceslas.”

“What an imagination old maids have!” cried the baroness.

“To hear you talk, Lisbeth, one would think you believed what you are saying.”

All three began to laugh. Hortense sang, “Wenceslas, idol of my soul!” instead of “Oh, Matilde!” and a truce was declared.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG MAID AND THE OLD ONE.

“You young girls,” said cousin Bette, on the occasion of their next meeting, “think no one is ever loved but yourselves.”

“Well,” answered Hortense, “prove to me that Wenceslas is not a myth, and I’ll give you my yellow cashmere shawl.”

“He is a count.”

“All Poles are counts.”

“He is not exactly a Pole; he comes from Li— Lith—”

“Do you mean Lithuania?”

“No.”

“Livonia?”

“Yes, that’s it.”

“Tell me his name.”

“How do I know whether you can keep a secret?”

“Oh, cousin, I’ll be as mute as—”

“A fish?”

“As a fish.”

“By your eternal salvation?”

“By my eternal salvation.”

“No, that won’t do—by all your earthly happiness?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, his name is Wenceslas Steinbock.”

“That’s the name of one of Charles the Twelfth’s generals.”

“His great uncle. His father went to live in Livonia after the death of the king of Sweden; but he lost all his property during the campaign of 1812, and died leaving the poor boy, then eight years old, without resources. The Grand-duke Constantine took him under his protection, on account of the name of Steinbock, and sent him to school.”

“I won’t go back on my word,” said Hortense. “Prove his existence, and the shawl is yours; it is the very color for your brown skin.”

“Promise you will keep my secret.”

“I’ll give you mine in exchange.”

“Well, the next time I come I’ll bring the proof with me.”

“But the proof must be the lover himself,” said Hortense.

Cousin Bette, a victim, ever since her arrival in Paris, to a longing for cashmere shawls, was fascinated by the thought of possessing this particular yellow camel’s-hair, given by the baron to his wife in 1808, and according to the custom of certain families passed over to the daughter in 1830. During the last ten years the

shawl had grown the worse for wear, but still the precious fabric, always carefully laid away in a sandal-wood box, seemed, like Madame Hulot's furniture, to keep its freshness in the eyes of the old maid. Therefore, on the day in which our story opens she had brought a birthday present in her bag for the baroness, which was also to be a means of proving to Hortense the existence of the mysterious lover.

The present a silver seal cut with three figures entwined in garlands and bearing up a globe. They represented Faith, Hope, and Charity. Their feet rested on monsters who were writhing and rending each other, among them the symbolic serpent. In 1846, after the immense stride in the art of Benvenuto Cellini taken by Mademoiselle de Fauveau, Wagner, Jeanest, Froment-Meurice, and the carvers in wood like Liénard, this little masterpiece might have passed unnoticed; but at the time of which we write a young girl able to judge of jewelry was naturally enchanted as she examined the seal which Bette placed in her hand with the remark, "There, what do you think of that?" The little figures belonged, in design, drapery, and action, to the school of Raphael; in execution they recalled the work of the Florentine bronze school created by Donatello, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Benvenuto Cellini, John of Bologna, etc. The French renaissance never contorted more misshapen monsters than those which symbolized evil passions. The palms and ferns, the reeds and rushes, that draped the Virtues were disposed and grouped with a witching charm disheartening to workers of the craft. A fillet held the three heads lightly bound together, and on the background space between them were engraved the letter W, a chamois, and the word *fecit*.

"Who did it?" asked Hortense.

"My lover, of course," answered Bette. "There's ten months' labor in it. I earn more at making sword-knots. He tells me that 'Steinbock' means in German a rock-deer or chamois. That's the way he signs his work. Ah, I shall have your shawl!"

"Why so?"

"Could I buy such a gem as that? Impossible; consequently it was given to me. Who is likely to make such a present? A lover, of course."

Hortense, with a wariness that would have frightened Lisbeth Fischer if she had noticed it, was careful not to express all the admiration that she felt; but in truth she had just received that shock of delight which comes to souls that are open to the beautiful when they behold a faultless, perfect, and unexpected masterpiece.

"It is really lovely," she said.

"Yes, it is lovely," said the old maid; "but I prefer the orange cashmere. Well, little one, my lover spends all his time working

on such things. Since he came to Paris he has made three or four little knick-knacks of that kind, and there's the whole result of four years' study and labor. He apprenticed himself at a foundry to learn casting, and then at a jeweller's—bah! every penny he had went that way. But he tells me he shall be rich and famous in a few months."

"Then you really do see him?"

"Do you think I am making it all up? I have told you the truth in joke."

"And he loves you?" asked Hortense, eagerly.

"He adores me," answered her cousin, speaking seriously. "The fact is, my pet, he has only known those pale, insipid women of the North; a dark, young, supple girl like me has warmed him up. But say nothing about it; you promised me that."

"You will treat him like all the five others," said Hortense, maliciously, as she looked at the seal.

"Six, if you please; I left one behind me in Lorraine who would get me the moon to-day if I cried for it."

"This one does better still; he gives you the sun."

"But I can't turn it into money. One must have a great estate before the shining of the sun will bring us any profit."

These little jokes, followed by nonsense that can be easily guessed at, caused the laughter which redoubled Madame Hulot's distress; it forced her to compare her daughter's future with her present light-heartedness as the girl gave way to the gayety of her years.

"But if he gives you a gem that has cost him six months' labor, he must be under some great obligation to you," insisted Hortense; for the treasure in her hand caused her sundry reflections.

"You want to know too much," answered Bette. "However, listen; I'll let you into the scheme—"

"With your lover?"

"Ah! you want to see him! But don't you know that an old maid, like your cousin Bette, who has hidden a lover for five years can hide him still. No, no; let me alone. I've neither cat nor canary-bird, nor dog nor parrot. An old nanny like me must have some little bit of a thing to love, or to tease. Well, I've taken a Pole."

"Has he a moustache?"

"Long as that," said Bette, holding up a mesh of gold thread.

She always brought her embroideiy and worked while waiting for dinner.

"If you ask me so many questions you will never find out anything. You are only twenty-two years old, and you gossip more than I do at forty-two—I might say forty-three."

"Well, I'm dumb; I'll listen," said Hortense.

“My lover has made a bronze group ten inches high,” continued cousin Bette. “It represents Samson conquering a lion. he buried it and got it discolored and rusty till it looks to be as old as Samson himself. This master-piece is in the window of one of those bric-à-brac dealers whose shops are on the place du Carrousel quite close to my lodging. If your father, who knows Monsieur Popinot, the minister of commerce and agriculture, and the Comte de Rastignac, would speak to either of them about it, and call it a beautiful antique which he noticed in passing, my lover’s fortune would be made by the mere mention of the trumpery bit of brass; I am told the great people think more of such things now than of sword-knots. My poor boy declares that if they take the thing for an antique they will pay any price for it. If one of the ministers were to buy the group, Wenceslas could come forward and prove that he made it himself, and be carried in triumph! Oh, he fancies he can mount the pinnacle of fame! he’s proud, that young man, as proud as two new-made counts.”

“A second edition of Michael Angelo; but, for a lover, he seems to have kept his senses,” remarked Hortense. “How much does he ask for it?”

“Fifteen hundred francs. The dealer won’t let it go for less because he has to make his commission.”

“Papa is steward of the King’s household just at present,” said Hortense. “He meets the two ministers every day at the Chamber, and I’ll see that he does what you want. You shall be a rich woman, Madame la Comtesse de Steinbock.”

“No, never; my man is too lazy; he spends whole weeks twisting red wax and doing nothing. He is always at the Louvre or the Bibliothèque, turning over prints and making sketches. He is an idler.”

The two cousins continued to joke and chatter; but Hortense laughed a forced laugh, for she was suddenly seized by a feeling which comes to all young girls—love for something unknown, love in its vague state, when thoughts begin to gather about a shape which chance has flung in its way, like the frost-flowers which the breeze designs upon a window pane. For the last few months Hortense had played with the idea of Bette’s fantastic lover, pretending that he was a real being because she believed, as did her mother, in the confirmed celibacy of their cousin; and now, for the last week, the phantom had become a Comte Wenceslas Steinbock; the vision had a certificate of baptism; the misty figure solidified into a young man thirty years of age. The seal which she held in her hand, an Annunciation, as it were, of genius breaking forth like light, had the power of a talisman. Hortense felt so happy that she began to believe in the truth of the story; her blood stirred, and she laughed idiotically with a desire to divert her cousin’s observation.

"I think I saw mamma open the door of the salon, cousin Bette," she said; "let us go and see if Monsieur Crevel has gone. Poor mamma has been sad for two days; that marriage they were talking of must be broken off."

"Bah! it can be brought on again. It was—I may tell you this much—with a lawyer of the supreme court. Should you like to be Madame la présidente? If it depends on Monsieur Crevel, he will tell me something about it, and I shall know what hope there is."

"Cousin, leave the seal with me," said Hortense. "I won't show it to mamma; her birthday is a month hence, and I will give it back to you before then."

"No, give it me now; it must have a case."

"But I want to show it to papa, so that he may know what he is talking about when he mentions the Samson to the ministers; people in authority are so afraid of compromising themselves."

"Well, don't show it to your mother, that's all I ask; if she knew that I really had a lover she would make fun of me," replied Bette.

"I promise you I won't."

The two cousins reached the door of the boudoir just as Madame Hulot fainted, and Hortense's cry of terror brought her to her senses. Bette ran for salts; when she returned she found mother and daughter in each other's arms, the mother soothing the daughter's fears, and saying—

"It is nothing, nothing; only a nervous attack. Here comes your father," she added, recognizing the baron's way of ringing the bell. "Be sure you do not tell him of this."

Adeline rose to meet her husband, intending to take him into the garden while waiting for dinner, and there speak to him of the ruptured marriage, compel him to talk of the future, and try to give him a little advice.

Baron Hector Hulot appeared in a parliamentary and Napoleonic attire. It was easy to recognize the men formerly attached to the empire by their military carriage, their blue coats and gilt buttons buttoned to the throat, their black silk neckcloths, and an authoritative step and manner contracted from the habit of despotic command required by the rapidly changing circumstances in which they lived. It must be owned that there was nothing of the old man about the baron; his eyesight was still so good that he could read without spectacles; his handsome oval face, framed with whiskers (alas, too black!), had a healthy skin marbled with red and showing a sanguine temperament; his stomach, carefully belted in, attained, in the words of Brillat-Savarin, to the majestic. A marked air of aristocracy and much affability were the outward disguise of the libertine with whom Crevel had shared so many little suppers. He was one of the men whose eyes glisten on catching sight of a pretty woman, men who

smile at all beauties, even those they pass in the streets and may never meet again.

“Have you been speaking, dear?” said Adeline, noticing his anxious brow.

“No,” replied Hector; “but I am worn out listening to others for two hours without coming to a vote. They battle with words, and their speeches are like charges of cavalry which never scatter the enemy. Talk is substituted for action; and that can’t please men who are accustomed to advance, as I told the maréchal just now when I came away. But I have been bored enough on the bench of ministers; come, let’s be gay here! Good evening, Nanny-goat; how are you, little kid?”

He took his daughter by the neck, kissed her, teased her, put her on his knee, and laid her head upon his shoulder to feel the golden hair across his cheek.

“He is tired and bored,” thought Madame Hulot, “and I shall have to worry him still more; I will wait. Shall you stay at home to-night?” she said aloud.

“No, my dear. After dinner I am obliged to go out. If this were not the day when my brother and cousin Bette dine here you would not have seen me at all!”

The baroness picked up the newspaper, looked at the theatre-list, and laid it down again after reading the programme for *Robert le Diable* at the opera. Josépha, who had left the Italian for the French opera, was to sing the part of Alice. This pantomime did not escape the baron, who looked fixedly at his wife. Adeline lowered her eyes, and went into the garden, where he followed her.

“Come, Adeline, what is it?” he said, taking her round the waist and pressing her to him. “Don’t you know I love you better than—”

“Jenny Cadine and Josépha?” she said boldly, interrupting him.

“Who told you that?” said the baron, releasing her and stepping back two paces.

“An anonymous letter, which I have burned, and which told me also that our daughter’s marriage is defeated because our circumstances are so embarrassed. Your wife, my dear Hector, would never have said a word; she knew your liaison with Jenny Cadine. Did she ever complain? But the mother of Hortense must tell you the truth—”

Hulot, after a terrible moment of suspense for his wife, the beating of whose heart could be distinctly heard, unfolded his arms, threw them round her, pressed her to his heart, kissed her on the forehead and said, with the ardor of enthusiasm, “Adeline, you are an angel, and I am a wretch!”

“No, no!” cried the baroness, putting her hand upon his lips to prevent his saying evil of himself.

“Yes, I have not a penny to give Hortense; and I am very unhappy. Now that you open your heart to me, I can pour into it all the troubles that are choking mine. Your uncle Fischer is embarrassed, and it is through me. I got him to endorse a bill for twenty-five thousand francs—and all for a woman who deceives me, who makes fun of me when my back is turned, who calls me an old *dyed cat*! Oh, it is horrible, horrible that vice should cost more than the support of a family—and yet it is irresistible! I might promise you at this moment never to see that abominable Jewish woman again, but if she wrote me a single line I should go, just as we followed the Emperor under fire.”

“Don’t worry yourself, Hector,” said the poor, distressed woman, forgetting her daughter at sight of her husband’s tears. “I have my diamonds; take them and save my uncle at all hazards!”

“Your diamonds are scarcely worth twenty thousand francs, and that is not enough to save old Fischer. Keep them for Hortense; I will consult the *maréchal* to-morrow.”

“Poor dear!” cried the baroness, taking her Hector’s hands and kissing them.

The scene was a homily. Adeline offered her diamonds, the father gave them to Hortense; the wife thought his sacrifice sublime, and was powerless.

“He is master; all here is his. He leaves me those diamonds; he is divine.”

Such was the inward thought of the woman, who perhaps gained more by her gentleness than she could have done by an outburst of jealous anger.

A moralist cannot deny that persons who are well-bred and very vicious are often more agreeable than virtuous persons. Having sins to redeem, they bid for indulgence by being facile and forbearing with their judges, and thus they pass for excellent human beings. Though there are many charming people among the virtuous, virtue considers herself so beautiful that she may dispense with the cultivation of charm; moreover persons who are really virtuous (we must eliminate hypocrites) are always slightly doubtful of their position; they are apt to think themselves worsted in the great bargain of life, and give vent to sharp speeches after the manner of those who fancy themselves undervalued. The baron, knowing he was to blame for the ruin of his family, now displayed all the resources of his mind and his seductive graces to his wife, his children, and his cousin Bette. When his son and Célestine Crevel (who was nursing a little Hulot) arrived for the family dinner, he was all attention to his daughter-in-law, and fed her with compliments—a form of nourishment to which Célestine’s vanity was not accustomed, for no heiress of the

people was ever more commonplace or more utterly insignificant. The grandfather took the baby, kissed it, called it charming and delicious, talked baby-talk, prophesied that the little puppet would be a greater man than he, and slipped in a few flatteries for his son, young Hulot, as he returned the infant to the arms of its stout Norman nurse. Célestine exchanged a glance with the baroness, which meant "What a charming man!" Is it any wonder that she defended her father-in-law against the accusations of her own parent?

After playing the agreeable father-in-law and the idolizing grandfather, the baron took his son into the garden to give him some sensible advice about the position he ought to take in the Chamber on the following day, when a certain delicate matter was to be brought up. The young lawyer, filled with admiration for his father's deep-sighted judgment, was touched by his tone of friendly confidence, above all by the sort of deference with which he seemed desirous to put his son on a level with himself.

Hulot the younger was a fair specimen of the young men manufactured by the revolution of 1830—minds infatuated with politics, solicitous about their own expectations, but hiding them under a false show of political earnestness, very jealous of men whose reputations are made, enunciating phrases, but never those incisive sayings which are the diamonds of French speech, conventional in deportment, and mistaking arrogance for dignity. These men are the perambulating coffins which contain the Frenchmen of other days; the Frenchman within stirs every now and then and beats against his British casket; but ambition checks him, and he consents to be smothered. This coffin, we may remark, is always covered with black cloth.

"Ah! here's my brother," said Baron Hulot, advancing to the door of the salon to meet the count.

After embracing the probable successor of the late Maréchal Montcornet, he led him forward by the arm with every sign of affection and respect.

This peer of France, who was excused from attending the sessions of his Chamber on account of deafness, had a noble head, calmed by years, and covered with gray hair, still sufficiently abundant to show the pressure of his hat. Short, stocky, and yet spare, he carried his green old age with a sprightly air, and as he retained all his activity, though condemned by his deafness to an idle life, he spent his time in reading and in walking about. His simple habits and principles could be guessed from the pure tones of his face, his free carriage and manner, and his straight-forward talk on sensible matters. He never spoke of war or of his own campaigns; he was too great to make any claim to greatness. In a salon he confined himself to the quiet part of continually observing and anticipating the wishes of women.

“You are all very gay,” he said, noticing the animation which the baron’s presence caused in the family circle. “Hortense is not yet married,” he added, observing traces of distress on his sister-in-law’s countenance.

“That will happen soon enough,” screamed Bette in his ear with a startling voice.

“Ah! there you are, naughty girl who is determined to die an old maid!” he answered, laughing.

The hero of Forzheim was rather fond of Bette, for there were certain likenesses between the two. Without education, springing as he did from the people, his bravery had been the sole architect of his military fortune, and his sound common-sense had stood him in place of intellect. Full of a sense of honor and pure in deed, he was now ending a noble life, in the midst of a family where all his affections centred, and where no suspicion of his brother’s secret misdoings reached him. No one enjoyed more than he the lovely spectacle of domestic union, where no contention ever rose and the brothers and sisters loved each other with an equal affection—for Célestine was looked upon as one of the family, a fact which made the kindly little count inquire from time to time why her father did not make his appearance.

“My father has gone into the country,” cried Célestine in his ear.

This genuine affection and family union made Madame Hulot reflect deeply. “It is the surest of all happinesses,” she thought; “what can take it from us?”

When the old general noticed the attentions which his favorite Adeline received from her husband, he made so many little jests that the baron, afraid of ridicule, turned his gallantry to his daughter-in-law, who at these family dinners was always the special object of his flattery and devotion; for he hoped through her to keep old Crevel in good humor and mollify his resentment. Any one looking in upon this family scene would have found it difficult to believe that the father was well-nigh ruined, the mother in despair, the son in the depths of anxiety as to his father’s future, and the daughter devising in her heart how to steal a lover from her cousin.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH PRETTY WOMEN ARE SEEN TO FLUTTER BEFORE LIBERTINES, JUST AS DUPES PUT THEMSELVES IN THE WAY OF SWINDLERS.

About seven o'clock, or as soon as the baron saw his brother, wife, son, and daughter sitting down to whist, he departed to applaud his mistress at the opera, taking with him his cousin Bette, who lived in the rue du Doyenné, and always made the loneliness of that locality an excuse to get away early after dinner. All Parisians will admit that the old maid's precaution was reasonable.

The retention of the block of houses which still exists along the side of the old Louvre is one of those protests against common-sense which Frenchmen persist in making, apparently that Europe may feel easy as to the real measure of their intelligence, and cease to fear it. Perhaps we have some great political motive, unknown to ourselves, in this retention. It is therefore not a digression to describe this corner of the Paris of the present-day; in after years no one will be able to imagine it, and our nephews, who will doubtless see the Louvre completed, may refuse to believe that such a piece of barbarism existed for thirty-six years in the heart of Paris, under the windows of a palace where three dynasties received, during those thirty-six years, the *élite* of France and of Europe. Everyone who comes to Paris for no more than a few days must notice between the iron gate which leads to the pont du Carrousel and the rue du Musée, a dozen houses with tumble-down walls, whose owners, considering them worthless, are unwilling to repair them, but allow them to stand as the last remnant of a former neighborhood pulled down under Napoleon's orders when he determined to complete the Louvre. The street and cul-de-sac, called Doyenné, are the only roadways through this dark and deserted cluster of buildings, whose inhabitants are probably phantoms, for no one is ever seen there. The roadbed, which is much lower than the *chaussée* of the rue du Musée, is on a level with that of the rue Froidmanteau. The houses, for this reason half-buried, are still further sunken in the perpetual shadow cast by the upper galleries of the Louvre, blackened on this side by the action of the north wind. The gloom, the silence, the icy air, the cavernous depression of the soil, all combine to make the area of these houses a sort of crypt, in which each building is a living tomb. If we pass through this half-defunct quarter in a cab, and look up the blind alley which opens on the street, our minds shiver; we ask ourselves who can possibly live *here*, and whether, if we passed at night, we should

see the alley swarming with cut-throats, and all the vices of Paris mantled in darkness giving themselves full swing. This idea, alarming in itself, becomes terrifying when we notice that these strange houses are circled by a marsh on the side of the rue de Richelieu, by a paved desert towards the Tuileries, by little gardens and treacherous-looking sheds under the galleries of the Louvre, and by long stretches of broken stone left from the pulling down of former houses on the side of the old Louvre. Hemy III. and his minions searching for their hose, the lovers of Marguerite searching for their heads, must dance many a saraband by the light of the moon in these deserted places, still overlooked by a chapel which remains standing as if to prove that the Catholic religion, perennial in France, survives all else. For forty years the Louvre has cried aloud through the jaws of those broken walls, those yawning windows, "Pluck these warts from my face!" But, no doubt, some utility has been discovered in this cut-throat region—the usefulness, perhaps, of symbolizing in the heart of Paris the close alliance between squalor and splendor which characterizes the queen of capitals. And so these chill ruins (in whose bosom the newspaper of the legitimists has acquired the disease of which it is now dying), these wretched hovels of the rue du Musée, with the fence of boards inclosing them on one side, will probably have a longer and more prosperous existence than the three dynasties who have looked down upon them.

After 1823 the low rents in these houses, doomed to eventual disappearance, had led Lisbeth Fischer to take up her abode in one of them, in spite of the necessity imposed upon her by the character of the neighborhood of getting home before dark. This necessity chimed in with the village custom, which she still retained, of going to bed and getting up with the sun—a custom which ensures to country folk a notable economy in fuel and lights. She lived in one of the houses to which the pulling down of the famous mansion once occupied by Cambacérès opened a view of the whole space.

Just as Baron Hulot left his wife's cousin at the door of this house with the words, "Adieu, cousin," a tiny, graceful, pretty young woman, dressed with much elegance and diffusing a fashionable perfume, passed between the carriage and the wall, as if about to enter the house. The lady exchanged a glance with the baron without the least premeditation, and solely for the purpose of seeing the cousin of the other tenant; but the baron felt the keen sensation common to Parisians when they meet a pretty woman who realizes, as the entomologists say, their *desiderata*. With wise deliberation he began to put on his gloves before re-entering the carriage, so as to recover his equanimity and be able to watch the young woman, whose dress was charmingly supported

and swayed by something better than those hideous and fraudulent under-petticoats of crinoline.

“There’s a pretty little woman,” he said to himself, “whose happiness I would gladly make, for I’m sure she could make mine.”

When the unknown lady reached the landing of the stairway of the main building on the street, she looked back at the *porte cochère* from the corner of her eye, without exactly turning round, and saw the baron nailed to the spot by admiration, desire, and curiosity. Such attraction is a flower whose perfume all Parisian women inhale with delight when it comes in their way. Some women who are truly attached to their duty, virtuous and pretty women, come home dissatisfied if they have not gathered their little bouquet of admiration during their walks abroad.

The young lady went quickly upstairs. Presently the window of room on the second floor opened and the same woman showed herself, but accompanied by a gentleman whose bald head and somewhat severe eye proclaimed a husband.

“Are not they clever and sly, those women!” thought the baron; “she is showing me where she lives. That’s a little too strong—especially in this neighborhood. I must take care what I’m about.” He looked up when he got back into the cab, whereupon the man and wife withdrew quickly, as if the baron’s face had produced the mythological effect of Medusa’s head upon them.

“One would think they knew me!” thought Hulot. “If they do, that explains it all.”

When the cab had driven up to the level of the rue du Musée, the baron leaned forward once more to see the object of his admiration, and found that she had returned to the open window. Apparently ashamed at being caught, she drew back quickly. “Never mind,” thought the baron, “I’ll find out who she is from Bette.”

The appearance of the councilor of state had produced, as we shall see, a deep impression on the couple.

“Why, that’s Baron Hulot, at the head of the department in which my office is!” cried the husband as he left the window.

“Well then, Marneffe, the old maid on the third floor on the other side of the court-yard, who lives with that young man, is his cousin. How odd, that we should only find it out to-day, and by mere chance!”

“Mademoiselle Fischer living with a young man!” exclaimed the husband. “Servants’ gossip! don’t talk so heedlessly of a councilor’s cousin—cousin of a man who makes the sun to shine and the rain to rain at the ministry. Come to dinner; I’ve been waiting for you since four o’clock.”

This very pretty little woman, Madame Marneffe, natural daughter of the Comte de Montcornet, one of Napoleon’s most

famous generals, was married on the strength of a *dot* of twenty thousand francs, to an under-clerk in the War Office. The influence of the illustrious lieutenant-general, a marshal of France during the last six months of his life, helped the quill-driver to the unhopèd-for position of head-clerk of his department; but unfortunately, at the very moment when he was about to be appointed sub-director, the marshal's death cut short his hopes and those of his wife. The slender means of the Sieur Marneffe—for the dowry of Mademoiselle Valérie Fortin had already melted away, partly in payment of his own debts, partly in the acquisition of such things as a bachelor needs for the setting up of a home, but more particularly through the extravagance of the pretty wife, accustomed in her mother's house to luxuries she was unwilling to forego—obliged the pair to practise economy in the matter of rent. The situation of the rue du Doyenné, not far from the ministry of war and the centres of Parisian life, presented attractions to Monsieur and Madame Marneffe, who for the last four years had lived in the same house with Mademoiselle Fischer.

Jean Paul Stanislas Marneffe belonged to a certain type of Parisian employè which escapes downright brutishness through a species of power which comes of degradation. This little thin man, with scanty hair and beard, a blanched, etiolated worn-out rather than wrinkled, eyelids rimmed with red and hidden by spectacles, mean and shuffling in gait and still more mean in manner and bearing, embodied the type which we all imagine of a man brought into the police courts for offences against morality.

The suite of rooms occupied by this household—a specimen of many Parisian homes—wore the deceitful appearance of sham luxury which may be seen in such households. In the salon the faded cotton-velvet of the furniture covering, the plaster statuettes pretending to be bronze, the clumsy chandelier painted in flat color, with its cups of blown glass, the carpet, whose cheap quality appeared in the cotton threads put in by the manufacturer and visible to the naked eye at the first wear—in short, everything, down to the very curtains which taught the truth that woollen damask keeps its glory only three years, proclaimed the family poverty as plainly as a ragged beggar stationed at a church-door.

The dining-room, ill-kept by a single servant, had the sickening aspect of such rooms in a country inn, where everything is greasy and unclean.

Monsieur Marneffe's bedroom, resembling that of a student, furnished with a bachelor's bed and other articles as faded and worn as himself, and cleaned only once a week—a horrible bedroom, where everything lay littered about, and old slippers hung on chairs with haircloth coverings whose pattern was traced out in dust—betrayed a man to whom his home was a matter of

indifference; who lived abroad in gambling-houses and cafes and elsewhere.

Madame's bedroom, on the other hand, was an exception to the shameful neglect which degraded all the other rooms of the establishment where the curtains were yellow with smoke and dust, and the child of the family, evidently left to himself, strewed his play-things on the floor. Valérie's bedroom and dressing-room, placed in the wing of the house, elegantly hung with chintz, and furnished in ebonized woods and a moquette carpet, were redolent of a pretty woman, one, let us admit, of the kept-mistress type. On the velvet drapery of the mantle-shelf stood a clock of the fashion of the period. *Jardinières* of Chinese porcelain, a little *dunkerque* well furnished, the bed, toilet-table and wardrobe with mirror door, a tête-à-tête sofa, and a variety- of knick-knacks and other trumpery testified to the caprices and refinements of fashion.

Though the whole was of a third-class order of elegance and wealth, and bore the date of a three years' luxury, a dandy would have found nothing to complain of, unless it were a certain stamp of bourgeoisie. An expert in social science would have detected the existence of a lover in several costly gewgaws which come only of such demi-gods, unseen, and yet ever near married women of the Marneffe type.

The dinner which awaited husband, wife, and child—a dinner kept back since four in the afternoon—was enough to explain the financial crisis of the family, for the dinner-table is the surest thermometer of prosperity in such Parisian households. Bean soup and a bit of veal, with potatoes deluged with browned water called gravy, a dish of haricot beans, and another of cherries of poor quality, served and eaten on chipped dishes and plates, with miserable forks and spoons of German silver. Was that a proper repast for a pretty woman? The baron would have wept had he seen it. The cloudy decanters did not conceal the horrid color of the wine bought by the quart from the casks of some corner wine-shop. The napkins had been used a week. In short, everything bespoke poverty without dignity, and the indifference of the wife and of the husband for the decencies of family life. The most ordinary observer would have felt as he beheld them that the pair had reached the fatal moment when sheer necessity of existence was driving them to seek some lucky method of swindling for a living.

The first words said by Valérie to her husband will explain the delay in the dinner hour.

“Samanon won't take your notes for less than fifty per cent, and he requires you to assign over your salary.”

Poverty, secret as yet in case of the director at the War department—who had, moreover, a salary of twenty-five thousand

francs, not to mention perquisites, to fall back upon—had reached its last phase with the subordinate.

“Have you snared the baron?” said the husband, looking at the wife.

“I hope so,” she answered, not horrified at the expression.

“What’s to become of us?” continued Marneffe. “The landlord will seize everything to-morrow morning. The idea of your father dying without a will! I swear those empire fellows think themselves as immortal as their emperor.”

“Poor papa!” she said; “he had no child but me, and he loved me. The countess must have burned his will. It isn’t likety that he forgot me; he was always giving us three or four thousand francs at a time.”

“We owe four quarters’ rent—fifteen hundred francs. Is our furniture worth as much?—that is the question, as Shakespeare says.”

“Well, adieu, my dear,” said Valérie, who had only swallowed a couple of mouthfuls of the veal, from which the cook had extracted all the juice in behalf of a brave soldier just returned from Algiers; “for great ills heroic remedies.”

“Valérie, where are you going?” cried Marneffe, stopping his wife on her way to the door.

“To see the landlord,” she answered, arranging her curls at a glass. “As for you, why don’t you try to captivate the old maid, if she is really your chief’s cousin?”

The ignorance of the various lodgers in the same house about each other is one of those perennial facts which show almost better than any other the hurly-burly of Parisian life. It is, however, quite easy to understand how a clerk going early to his office, returning only for his dinner and spending his evenings elsewhere, and a wife devoted to the amusements of Paris, should know little or nothing of the life of an old maid lodging on the third floor of the rear building across the court, especially when the latter had the regular habits of Mademoiselle Fischer.

Lisbeth, being the earliest riser in the house, fetched her milk, bread, and charcoal without exchanging a word with any one; she went to bed with the sun; she received neither visits nor letters, and had no acquaintances in the neighborhood. Hers was one of those nameless, entomological existences such as turn up from time to time in certain houses, where at the end of three or four years you find that an old gentleman is living on the fourth floor who knew Voltaire, Pilastre du Rosier, Beaujon, Marcel, Molé, Sophie Arnould, Franklin, and Robespierre. The gossip that Madame Marneffe repeated of Lisbeth Fischer she had chanced to hear solely by reason of the isolation of the neighborhood and the intimacy which their poverty established between themselves and the porter of the house, whose good-will was too necessary to

them not to be carefully kept up. Now the pride and mute reserve of the old maid had given rise, on the part of the porter and his wife, to the exaggerated respect and cold civility which always denote a spirit of discontent in our subordinates. Porters are, moreover, apt to think themselves in the premises, as they say in the courts, on equal terms with a lodger who pays a rent of two hundred and fifty francs. The tale told by Bette to her little cousin Hortense being true, it is easy to see how the porter's wife when gossiping with the Marneffes should calumniate Mademoiselle Fischer by merely relating it.

When Bette took her candlestick from the worthy Madame Olivier, the said porter's wife, she stepped forward to see if the window of the attic above her own room was lighted up. At this hour in the month of July the rooms on the courtyard were so dark that the old maid was unable to go to bed without a candle.

"Don't be uneasy; Monsieur Steinbock is at home; he hasn't even left the house," said the woman, jocosely, to Mademoiselle Fischer.

Bette made no reply. She retained her peasant habits so far as to scorn the gossip of persons out of her own range of intercourse; like peasants, who know nothing beyond the boundaries of their own village, she cared only for the opinion of the little social circle in which she revolved. Consequently she went boldly up, not to her own rooms, but to the attic—for the following reason: when the dessert was served at the Hulots' she had put a quantity of fruits and sweetmeats into her bag, intending, as usual, to give them to her lover, precisely as an old maid gives a tidbit to a dog.

She found the hero of her cousin's imagination working by the gleam of a little lamp, the light of which was increased by falling through a glass globe filled with water—a pale, fair young man, sitting at a sort of workman's-bench covered with carving and modelling tools, red wax, rough-hewn pedestals and castings in brass; dressed in a blouse and holding in his hand a little group done in modelling wax, at which he was gazing with the absorption of a poet in travail.

"Here, Wenceslas, see what I have brought you," she said, putting her handkerchief on the corner of the bench.

Then she took the fruits and sweetmeats carefully from her bag.

"You are very kind, mademoiselle," said the poor exile, in a melancholy voice.

"They'll do you good, my poor boy. You heat your blood working as you do; you never were born for such a trade."

Wenceslas Steinbock looked at her in surprise.

"Come, eat," she said roughly, "instead of gazing at me as if I were one of your figures that please you."

The surprise of the young man came to an end on receiving this cuff, as it were, of words. He recognized his female mentor whose tenderness always surprised him, so harshly was she in the habit of speaking to him. Though Steinbock was twenty-nine years old, he seemed, like blondes of a certain type, to be five or six years younger; and this appearance of youth, whose freshness had faded under the toil and penury of exile, contrasting with the hard, stern face of his companion, might have led an observer to fancy that Nature had been mistaken when she bestowed their sexes. He rose from his seat and threw himself upon an old Louis XV. sofa covered in yellow Utrecht velvet, seeming to wish for rest. The old maid took a Reine-Claude plum and gently offered it to him.

“Thank you,” he said, taking the fruit.

“Are you tired?” she asked, giving him another.

“Not tired with work, but tired of life,” he answered.

“What an idea!” she exclaimed sharply. “Haven’t you a guardian angel watching over you?” she added, as she gave him the sweetmeats and watched while he ate them. “You see I thought of you this evening.”

“I know,” he replied, with a look that was half-caressing, half-plaintive, “that without you I should never have lived to this day; but, my dear mademoiselle, artists need some excitement of mind—”

“Ah, there we have it!” she cried, interrupting him as she put her hands on her hips and fixed her flashing eyes on his face. “You want to go and lose your health in wicked places, like so many other workmen who end by dying in a hospital! No, no; make your fortune first, and when you have plenty of money in the Funds you can amuse yourself, my lad! Then you will have the wherewithal to pay for doctors and pleasure both, you young libertine!”

On receiving this broadside, accompanied with a glance which sent a magnetic fluid through his being, Wenceslas Steinbock bowed his head. If the most confirmed and venomous tattler had seen this opening of their interview he would have owned the falsity of the scandal told by the Oliviers to the Marneffes apropos of Mademoiselle Fischer. Everything in the personal relation of the pair, their tones, gestures, and glances, proved the purity of their intercourse. The old maid displayed the tenderness of a rough but real motherhood. The young man submitted, like a respectful son, to maternal tyranny. This odd alliance seemed the result of a powerful will acting incessantly on a weak nature, on that peculiar Slav indifference which, while it bestows heroic courage on a battle-field, gives the race a strange fitfulness of conduct, a moral inconsistency and laxity, the causes of which should be studied by physiologists, who are to the science of politics what entomologists are to agriculture.

“What if I die before I am rich?” asked Wenceslas, sadly.

“Die!” cried the spinster; “oh, I sha’n’t let you die. I have life enough for two; I’ll infuse some of my blood into you, if necessary.”

As he heard her vehement and impulsive exclamation the tears came into Steinbock’s eyes.

“Don’t be sad, my little Wenceslas,” said Lisbeth, much moved. “Let me tell you something—my cousin Hortense thought your seal very pretty. You’ll see, I’ll help you to sell that bronze group of yours, and you can pay me and do as you like and be a free man! Come, laugh!”

“I can never repay you, mademoiselle,” said the poor fellow.

“Why not?” asked the Vosges peasant-woman, taking her *protégé’s* part against herself.

“Because you have not only fed and lodged and saved me from miseiy, but you have given me life; you have created me such as I am; you have often been harsh, you have made me suffer—”

“I!” exclaimed the old maid. “Now, don’t begin your nonsense about poetry and art, and don’t crack your fingers and stretch your arms, declaiming about the ideal and all your Northern stuff. The ideal can’t hold a candle to the real, and the real is—I! You think you have ideas in your brain? well, what good are they? I, too, have ideas. What’s the good of having things in your soul or your brain if you can’t make any use of them? People who have ideas never get on in this world as well as those who have none, provided they bestir themselves. Instead of thinking about your fancies you ought to work. What have you done since I went out?”

“What did your pretty cousin say?”

“Who told you she was pretty?” demanded Bette, in a tone irate with tigerish jealousy.

“Why, you did.”

“Yes, just to see how you would take it! So you want to be running after petticoats, do you? If you are fond of women, go and make them out of brass, for you can’t have any other loves for some time to come—specially not my cousin, my young friend! she is not game for your gun. Such a girl as that must have a man with sixty thousand francs a year—in fact, they have got him—Goodness! there’s your bed not made! she exclaimed, looking through the door of the adjoining room; “poor fellow! how I have neglected you!”

And the vigorous creature pulled off her mantle, bonnet, and gloves, and set to work like a servant to make the humble little bed of the artist. This mixture of rough, even rude treatment with flashes of kindness may explain the empire which Lisbeth wielded over a man whom she held to be a thing of her own. Does not life control us by its alternations of good and evil? If Wenceslas had encountered Madame Marneffe instead of Lisbeth Fischer, he

would have found an indulgent and complying protectress, who would have led him into miry and dishonorable ways, where he would soon have lost himself. Assuredly he would never have worked, and the artist soul within him would never have burst forth. Therefore, while he fretted against the harsh exactions of the old maid, his reason told him to prefer the iron arm that held him in a vise to the idle and perilous existence which several of his compatriots were leading.

Here follows an account of the circumstance to which was owing this curious marriage of female energy and masculine weakness—a species of contradiction which is rather frequent, they say, in Poland.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF A SPIDER WITH TOO BIG A FLY IN HER NET.

In 1833 Mademoiselle Fischer, who sometimes worked at night when she had a great deal on hand to do, noticed, about one o'clock in the morning, a strong smell of carbonic acid, and heard what seemed to be the groans of a dying person. The fumes of gas and the sounds came from the attic above the two rooms in which she lodged, and she concluded that a young man who had lately hired the garret, which had been unoccupied for the last three years, was committing suicide. She ran up quickly, burst in the door by her Lorraine strength applied as a ram, and found the lodger rolling on his flock-bed in the agonies of death. She extinguished the brazier, the air rushed in from the open door, and the man's life was saved; then, when Lisbeth had put him to bed like a patient, and he had fallen naturally to sleep, she discovered the cause of his would-be suicide in the absolute nakedness of the two garret rooms, where there was literally nothing but a wretched table, a flock-bed, and two chairs.

On the table lay a paper with the following writing, which she read:—

I am Comte Wenceslas Steinbock, born at Prelie in Livonia.

No one is to blame for my death; the reasons for my suicide are in the words of Kosciusko, *Finis Poloniz*.

The great-nephew of Charles the Twelfth's brave general cannot beg his bread. My feeble health forbade my entering the army, and I came yesterday to the last of the hundred dollars which I brought from Dresden. I leave twenty-five francs in the drawer of this table to pay the rent now due to my landlord.

Having no relations, my death is of interest to no one. I beg my fellow-countrymen not to charge it to the French government. I have not made myself known as a refugee; I have asked nothing; I have met no other exile; no one in Paris knows of my existence.

I die in the Christian faith. May God forgive the last of the Steinbocks.

Wenceslas.

Mademoiselle Fischer, deeply touched by the honesty of the dying man, opened the drawer and saw the pile of five-franc pieces.

"Poor young man!" she exclaimed. "No one in all the world to care for him!"

She went back to her own room, fetched her work, and returned to the attic to watch beside the exile. His astonishment when he waked at seeing a woman near his pillow may be imagined; he fancied he was still dreaming. While she sat beside him making shoulder-knots the old maid was inwardly pledging herself to protect the youth, whom she admired as he lay there

sleeping. When the young count was fully awake she reassured him, and questioned him as to what he could do to gain a livelihood. Wenceslas, after relating his history, added that he owed his situation as professor in a college to his acknowledged vocation for art; that he had always felt within him an impulse toward sculpture; but the length of time required for such studies seemed too great for a penniless man, and he was now too feeble in health to undertake the manual labor preparatory to the art. All this was Greek to Lisbeth Fischer. She answered that Paris was full of opportunities, and that a man willing to work could always make a living; courageous folks, she said, would never perish if they had a certain stock of patience.

“I am only a poor girl—a peasant—and yet I have managed to make myself independent,” she said in conclusion. “Listen to me; I have laid by a little money, and if you are really willing to work I will lend you, month by month, as much as you need to live upon—but to live strictly; no racketing, no dissipations, mind you! You can dine in Paris for twenty-five sous a day, and I’ll make your breakfast every day when I make my own. Moreover, I’ll furnish your rooms and pay whatever it costs you to learn a trade. You can give me a receipt in due form for all the moneys I spend upon you, and when you are rich you will repay me. But if you don’t work I shall consider that the bargain is off, and I shall abandon you.”

“Ah!” cried the poor fellow, still under the anguish of his struggle with death, “exiles of all lands do well to yearn for Paris, as the souls in purgatory long for heaven. What a nation is France!—where succor and generous souls are found even in a garret like this! You shall be my all, my benefactress, and I will be your slave. Be my friend,” he continued, with one of these caressing gestures common among Poles, which, rather unjustly, lay them open to the charge of servility.

“I’m too jealous; I should make you very unhappy; but I’ll willingly be a sort of comrade to you,” answered Lisbeth.

“Oh! if you only knew with what passion I prayed for some being, were it even a tyrant, with whom to have some intercourse, when I was struggling alone in the void of this great city,” said Wenceslas. “I even longed for Siberia, to which the Emperor would send me if I returned to my own country! Yes, be my Providence! I will work, I will be a better man than ever before—though I never was a bad one.”

“Will you do all that I tell you to do?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Well then, I adopt you,” she cried, gayly. “Behold me with a son just risen from his coffin. We will begin at once; I shall go and make my preparations. You are to dress yourself, and come down

and share my breakfast when I knock on the ceiling with the handle of my broom.”

The next day Mademoiselle Fischer questioned all the manufacturers to whom she carried her work as to the business of sculpture. By dint of asking, she succeeded in discovering the establishment of Florent and Chanor, where fine bronzes and elegant silver services are cast and engraved. She took Steinbock to the place and introduced him as a sculptor’s apprentice, a term which seemed to him sufficiently odd. It appeared that the firm executed designs of the best artists, but allowed none to be copied. However, the obstinate persistency of the old maid succeeded in getting her *protégé* a place as designer of decorations. Steinbock rapidly acquired the faculty and modelled new forms, a work for which he showed a vocation. Five months after serving out his apprenticeship he made the acquaintance of the famous Stidmann, chief sculptor of the Florent establishment, who agreed to give him lessons. At the end of two years Wenceslas knew more of the business than his master; but before the close of another half-year the old maid’s savings, slowly amassed little by little during sixteen years, were all spent. Two thousand five hundred francs in gold, a sum she had meant to invest in an annuity, were now represented by what?—the note of hand of a Pole! It thus happened that Lisbeth, at the time our story begins, was again toiling as she did in her youth to meet the costs of supporting her exile. When at last she realized that she had nothing in hand but a bit of paper instead of her gold, she lost her self-sufficiency, and went off to consult Monsieur Rivet, who for the last fifteen years had been the adviser and friend of his first and most capable workwoman. On learning of the affair, Monsieur and Madame Rivet scolded Lisbeth, declared her crazy, anathematized all exiles whose plots and conspiracies to recover nationality threatened the prosperity of commerce and the preservation of peace at any price, and they urged the old maid to obtain what is called in business security.

“The only security you can get from that fellow is his liberty,” said Monsieur Rivet (Monsieur Achille Rivet was a judge in one of the commercial courts); “and that’s no joke for a foreigner. A Frenchman stays five years in a debtor’s prison, and then he gets out —without paying his debts, it is true, for nothing compels him but his conscience, which is sure not to trouble him; but a foreigner never gets out of prison. Give me that note of hand; endorse it over to my bookkeeper; he will get it protested, and sue you both. He will then get a warrant for your arrest for debt, and when these formalities are all complied with he will give you a secret release. By taking this course your interests combine, and you hold a loaded pistol to your Pole’s head.”

The old maid followed this advice, and told her *protégé* to feel no uneasiness about the legal process, as it was taken solely to give security to a money-lender who agreed to lend them a certain sum. This ingenious evasion was due to the inventive genius of the commercial judge. The guileless artist, confiding blindly in his benefactress, lit his pipe with the stamped papers; for he smoked, like all men who have griefs or energies to lull. One fine day Monsieur Rivet showed Mademoiselle Fischer a document, remarking:—

“Wenceslas Steinbock is in your power, bound hand and foot so securely that you can put him in Clichy for the rest of his life whenever you please.”

That upright judge in the courts of commerce felt the inward satisfaction which must surely result from the consciousness of having done an evil good deed. Beneficence has so many ways of proceeding in Paris that this strange remark is to be taken as expressing one of its various actions. The Pole once caught in the meshes of commercial law, the next thing was to come down on him for payment; for the sensible Rivet considered the man a swindler. Honor, heart, and poetry were, according to him, the cloak of dishonesty in business. Rivet went, in the interests, he said, of that poor Mademoiselle Fischer who had been fooled by a Pole, to the wealthy manufacturers by whom Steinbock was employed. It so happened that Stidmann—who, together with the remarkable artists in gold and silver work already named, had brought French art to a perfection which enabled it to compete with the Florentines and the renaissance—was in Chanor’s private office when the manufacturer of gold lace appeared, to make inquiries about “a certain Steinbock, a Polish refugee.”

“Whom are you calling ‘a certain Steinbock?’” cried Stidmann, sarcastically. “You can’t surely mean a young Livonian who has been a pupil of mine? Let me tell you, sir, that he is a great artist. People say I think myself a devil in art. Well, that poor fellow, though he doesn’t yet know his power, is a god of it.”

“Ha! though you speak rather cavalierly to a man who has the honor to be a judge of the commercial courts—”

“Your servant, consul,” retorted Stidmann, bringing his hand to his forehead in military salute.

“I am glad to hear what you say. So you think that young man can earn money?”

“Of course he can,” said old Chanor; “but he must work. He could have earned a good deal by this time if he had stayed with us. But the trouble is, artists have a horror of control.”

“They have a true sense of their own dignity and value,” said Stidmann. “I don’t blame Wenceslas for working alone and trying to make himself a name and a great career—they are his due; but it was a serious loss to me when he left me.”

“Well, well!” cried Rivet; “such are the pretensions of young men just out of their college shell. But you had better begin by earning money, and look after glory later.”

“It spoils the fingers to be picking up five-franc pieces,” retorted Stidmann. “Fame will bring us money.”

“There’s no help for it,” said Chanor to Rivet; “they won’t be tied.”

“They break the halter if they are,” cried Stidmann.

“These gentlemen,” said Chanor, looking at Stidmann, “are as full of fancies as they are of talent. They are lavishly extravagant; they run after mistresses; they fling their money about; they have no time to work; they neglect their orders; and the consequence is that we have to employ journeymen who can’t compare with them, but who grow rich: then they complain of the hard times—whereas, if they applied themselves to work they would have heaps of money—”

“You remind me, old man,” said Stidmann, “of that publisher, before the Revolution, who said: ‘Ah! if I could only keep Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau in myr loft without a penny of their own, and put their breeches under lock and key, they only write me famous little books which would make my fortune.’ Yes, if works of art could be cast like nails, you shopkeepers could make them. Give me my thousand francs, and hold your tongue!”

The worthy Rivet went home rejoicing over poor Mademoiselle Fischer, who dined at his house every Monday, and was there to greet him.

“If you can make him work,” he said, “you will have been more lucky than wise, and you will get back your money, capital and interest. That Pole has genius; he can earn a living; but lock up his boots and his trousers; don’t let him go to the Chaumière nor anywhere near Notre-Dame de Lorette; hold a tight hand over him. If you don’t take care your sculptor will lounge away his life. You know what artists mean by *flâner*. Well, that’s what he’ll do—all sorts of horrors, I don’t know what. I’ve just seen a thousand-franc note go in a day.”

This episode had a terrible influence on the domestic life of Bette and Wenceslas. Henceforth the benefactress steeped the bread of the exile in the wormwood of reproaches whenever she thought her money in danger of disappearing; and she thought so often. The kind parent became a stepmother; she scolded and harried the unfortunate son, blamed him for working too slowly, and for choosing so difficult a profession; she could not realize that the models in red wax, the figurines, the bits of decorations, and trial designs, were of the slightest value. Then again, sorry for her sharpness, she tried to efface the recollection of it by little kindnesses and attentions. The poor young fellow, shuddering from a sense of his dependence on a Megæra, languishing under

the dominion of a peasant woman, was only too delighted to get the petting of a motherly solicitude won solely by the physical and material charm about him. He was like a woman who forgives the ill-usage of a week in return for the caresses of a momentary peace-making. Mademoiselle Fischer thus acquired absolute sway over the young man's spirit. The love of power latent in the soul of the old maid developed rapidly. She could satisfy her pride and her need of action; for had she not a human being of her own—one to order, scold, flatter, and make happy without the fear of rivalry? The good and the evil of her character were equally brought out. If she sometimes tortured the poor artist, at other times she showed a delicacy which had the grace of a wild flower. She delighted to see that he wanted for nothing; she would willingly have given her life for his; Wenceslas was sure of it. At the first word of kindness the poor fellow, like all noble natures, forgot the defects and the cruelties of his tyrant—who had, moreover, told him the story of her life as an excuse for her savage temper—and remembered only her benefactions.

One day, exasperated that Wenceslas had loitered away his time in the streets instead of working, Bette made him a scene.

"You belong to me!" she said. "If you are an honest man you should try to return what you owe me as soon as possible."

The young nobleman, in whom the blood of the Steinbocks began to rise, turned pale.

"Good God!" she cried, "before long we shall have nothing to live upon but the thirty sous a day which I earn—I, a poor woman!"

The poverty-stricken pair, excited by the duel of words, grew more and more irritated with each other, until at last the poor artist reproached his benefactress for the first time, and asked her why she had saved him from death only to make him lead the life of a galley slave—worse, he said, than annihilation, where at least he could have peace; and he threatened to escape.

"Escape! run away" she cried. "Ah, Monsieur Rivet was right!"

And she explained, chapter and verse, how in less than twenty-four hours she could put him in prison for the rest of his days. The blow felled him. He sank into a gloomy revery and dead silence. The next night Lisbeth, suspecting another attempt at suicide, went up to the garret and offered her pensioner the legal papers and a receipt in full.

"Here, my poor lad, take them and forgive me!" she said, with moistened eyes. "Be happy; leave me. I torment you; but say that you will sometimes think of the poor girl who put you in the way to earn a living. You yourself are the cause of all my evil tempers! I could die; but if I did, what would become of you? It is not for myself that I am so impatient for you to make things that are fit to sell. I don't want my money for myself, you may believe me! But

I'm afraid of your idleness, which you call revery. I dread those fancies of yours, on which you waste your time gazing at the sky; and I do want you to acquire the habit of labor."

This was said with tears and tone and glance and attitude that overcame the noble heart of the artist; he caught his benefactress to his breast, and kissed her.

"Keep those papers!" he cried, gayly. "Why should you put me in Clichy? Am I not imprisoned here in the bonds of gratitude?"

This episode of their private life, which took place about six months earlier than the date of our story, led Wenceslas to produce three works of art: one was the seal which Hortense had kept; another, the group in the antiquary's shop; and the third, an admirable clock, which he was just finishing.

This clock represented the Hours, charmingly embodied in twelve female figures, linked in a dance so wild and rapid that three Cupids, starting from a tangle of fruit and flowers, could only catch the torn fragment of a chlamys left by the Hour of midnight in the grasp of the boldest of the Loves. The group rested on a round support, finely decorated with fantastic, writhing creatures. The timepiece was held in a monstrous mouth, opened by a yawn. Each Hour carried a symbol, delightfully imagined as characterizing her special occupation.

It is now easy to explain the nature of the extraordinary attachment which Mademoiselle Fischer had conceived for her Pole. She wished him happy, but she saw him fading and perishing day by day in his garret. The secret springs of this terrible situation are not hard to understand. The Southern peasant woman watched this son of the North with the tenderness of a mother, the jealousy of a woman, and the keenness of a dragon. She managed to debar him from every possible dissipation or excess by depriving him of money. Her intention was to keep her victim and companion to herself, virtuous by the force of her own will; and she was unable to understand the barbarity of this mad desire, for she was accustomed in her own person to every form of habitual privation. She loved Steinbock well enough not to marry him, and too well to yield him to another woman; she could not resign herself to be no more to him than a mother, and yet she saw the folly of even thinking of another love. These contradictions, her ferocious jealousy, her joy in the possession of a man of her own, kept her in a state of perpetual agitation. Deeply in love for the last four years, she clung to the mad hope of continuing indefinitely this abortive and inconsistent way of life, though such dogged persistency could only be the ruin of the man she called her son. This struggle between her instincts and her common-sense made her unjust and tyrannical. She revenged herself on the young man for her lack of

youth and beauty and wealth; and then, after each exhibition of vengeance, she admitted in her heart that she was to blame, and humbled herself with infinite tenderness to his service. But such sacrifices to her idol never entered her mind until after she had written her power upon him as with a knife. It was Shakspeare's *Tempest* reversed—Caliban master of Ariel and of Prospero. As to the unhappy youth of noble thought, meditative nature, and a disposition to laziness, he showed in his eyes, like the caged lions in the *Jardin des Plantes*, the arid desert which his protectress was making of his soul. The hard labor she exacted of him could not fill the needs of his being. His weariness of spirit became a physical malady; he was dying of it, without being able to obtain the means or the opportunity for the pleasure and the distraction that he needed. On certain days of vigorous impulse, when a more than usual sense of his misery increased his exasperation, he looked at Bette as a thirsty traveller crossing the desert looks at a pool of brackish water. These Dead Sea fruits of poverty and isolation in the midst of the great city were sweet to the taste of Lisbethi Fischer. She foresaw with terror that the first approach of passion would deprive her of her slave. Sometimes, when she saw that she had given him the means to do without her, she regretted that her tyranny and her reproaches had driven the poet to become a great sculptor of little things.

The day after this opening of our story, the three households we have now described, all so diversely and yet so truly wretched,—that of the mother in her despair, that of the *Marneffes*, and that of the hapless exile—were each to be affected by an artless passion on the part of Hortense, and by the strange termination which the baron was about to give to his unfortunate love for Josépha.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROMANCE OF THE FATHER AND THAT OF THE DAUGHTER.

As Baron Hulot d'Ervy approached the Opera-house he was struck by the gloomy aspect of the temple of the rue Lepelletier, where neither gendarmes nor lights nor attendants nor the usual queue of people were to be seen. He looked at the posters and there beheld a white strip on which appeared the sacramental words, "No performance, on account of indisposition."

He rushed at once to Josépha, who lived, like all other opera-singers, in the environs of Paris, rue Cauchat.

"Monsieur! why are you here?" asked the porter, to the baron's great astonishment.

"Don't you know me?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes, it is precisely because I do know monsieur that I ask why he is here."

A deathly shudder seized the baron.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"If Monsieur le baron goes up to Mademoiselle Mirah's apartment he will find no one but Mademoiselle Héloïse Brisetout, Monsieur Bixiou, Monsieur Léon de Lora, Monsieur Lousteau, Monsieur de Vernisset, Monsieur Stidmann, and a lot of women smelling of patchouli, who are making a night of it."

"Yes, but where is—"

"Mademoiselle Mirah?—I don't know that I ought to tell you."

The baron slipped ten francs into the man's hand.

"Well, she has gone to live in the rue de la Ville-l'Évêque, in a house given to her, so they say, by the Duc d'Hèrouville," whispered the porter.

After asking the number of the house the baron took a *milord* and drove to one of those pretty modern residences with double doors, where, from the very gas-lamp on the threshold, luxury predominated.

The baron, dressed in his usual blue cloth, with white cravat and waistcoat, nankeen trousers, varnished boots, and plenty of starch in his shirt-frill, seemed to the eyes of the porter of this second Eden a tardy guest. His imposing step and bearing justified that opinion.

When the porter rang the bell a footman appeared on the portico of the house. The latter, new to the place like the porter himself, allowed the baron to enter, and received the card which the latter gave him saying, with imperious tone and gesture,

"Take that card to Mademoiselle Josépha."

The victim looked mechanically round the salon in which he found himself—a reception-room filled with rare plants, the furniture of which must have cost many thousand francs. The footman, re-entering, begged Monsieur le baron to come into the drawing-room and wait until the company left the dinner-table.

The baron was well accustomed to the luxury of the empire, which was certainly amazing—for though its fashions and productions were not likely to last they were none the less madly expensive—yet even he was dazzled and dumbfounded when he entered the salon, whose three windows opened on a fairy-like garden, one of those gardens made in a month with artificial soil and transplanted flowers, whose grass-plats seem the result of some chemical process. He not only admired the choice elegance of the decorations, of the carvings done in the most costly fashion of the style called Pompadour, the gildings, and the marvellous fabrics, which, after all, the first grocer who had made his fortune could order and obtain with money, but he appreciated still more the treasures of art which princes alone have the faculty to find, to choose, to purchase, and bestow: two pictures by Greuze, two of Watteau, two heads by Van Dyke, two landscapes by Ruysdael, two by Guaspre, a Rembrandt, a Holbein, a Murillo and a Titian, two Teniers, a Metzsu, a Van Huysum, and an Abraham Mignon—in short, a collection of paintings worth two hundred thousand francs, all admirably framed. The settings were almost as costly as the pictures.

“Ah! you understand it now, old fellow!” said Josépha.

Coming in on tiptoe through a noiseless door and across a thick Persian rug, she caught her lover in that state of blank stupefaction when the ears pulsate and ring, and nought is heard but the knell of disaster.

The words “old fellow,” addressed to a man of such importance in the government, and well suited to show the audacity with which such creatures flout the highest authority, nailed the baron to the spot. Josépha, arrayed in white and yellow, was so bejewelled for the fete that she shone amid the surrounding luxury like the rarest gem of all.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” she continued. “The duke has spent all his dividends from a certain joint stock company upon this room. He’s no fool, my little duke! It is only the lords of the olden time who know how to turn coal into gold. Before dinner his notary brought me the deed of the house and a receipt for the purchase-money. A lot of distinguished men are in there—d’Esgrignon, Rastignac, Maxime, Lenoncourt, Verneuil, Laginski, Rochefide, La Palférine; and as for bankers, there’s Nucingen and du Tillet, with Antonia, Malaga, Carabine, and la Schontz. They all pity your ill-luck. Yes, my old man, you are invited to join them, but on condition that you immediately drink down the total of two bottles

of champagne, sherry, and Hungarian wine so as to get up to their level at once. We are all so tight that there couldn't be any performance at the opera. My director is in there, as drunk as a fiddler—"

"Oh, Josépha!" cried the baron.

"Come, don't let's have a stupid explanation," she cried, laughing. "Are you worth the six hundred thousand francs of this house and furniture? Can you give me a share in the Funds which brings in thirty thousand francs a year, such as the duke gave me this morning in a bag of sugar-plums?—pretty idea, wasn't it?"

"What depravity!" said the statesman, who at that moment would gladly have given his wife's diamonds to oust the Duc d'Hérouville for twenty-four hours.

"It's my nature," she replied. "So this is how you are going to take it? Why don't *you* get up stock companies? Good gracious! you ought to thank me, old dyed cat; I leave you just in time to prevent you from squandering your whole property, your daughter's *dot*, and—ah, what? you're crying! The empire is over! I bow to the new reign."

She struck an attitude, declaiming, "they call you Hulot, but I know you not," and left the room.

As the door opened to let her pass, a blaze of light flashed out with the culminating noises of the orgy and the odors of a regal feast.

The Jewess looked back from the doorway and seeing Hulot rooted to the spot as if he were made of stone, she returned into the room and said:—

"Monsieur, I have made over the rubbish in the rue Cauchat to that little Héloïse Brisetout and her Bixiou. If you want your night-cap, your corsets, your bootjack, and the wax for your moustache, send to Héloïse; I stipulated that you were to have them."

This odious taunt sent the baron from the room, like Lot from Gomorrah, without looking round like the wife. He went home rapidly, talking to himself as though he were crazy, and found the family just as he had left them, calmly playing whist. When Adeline saw her husband she was certain some horrible disaster had happened—possibly something dishonorable. Giving her cards to Hortense she led Hector into the same little salon where, a few hours earlier, Crevel had predicted the shameful results of their poverty.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, Adeline, forgive me! Let me tell you the infamous thing!"—and for ten minutes he gave loose to his anger.

"But, my friend," said the poor woman, heroically, "such women know nothing of love—of the pure, devoted love which you

deserve. How can you—you who are so clear-sighted—expect to succeed against a million?”

“Dear Adeline!” cried the baron, seizing his wife and pressing her to his heart.

The baroness had shed a balm upon the bleeding wounds of his self-love.

“Certainly, if the Duc d’Hérrouville were deprived of his money *she* couldn’t hesitate between us,” he remarked.

“My friend,” said Adeline, making a last effort, “if you must have mistresses, why not take them, like Crevel, from women of a class who do not cost money, and are satisfied with very little? It would be so much better for your family. I can conceive of your necessity, but I do not understand these wounds to your self-love.”

“Dear, good woman that you are!” he cried. “I am an old fool! I don’t deserve such an angel.”

“I am the Josephine of my Napoleon!” she said, with a tinge of sadness.

“Josephine was not your equal,” he said. “Come, I’ll go and play whist with my brother and children. I must take up my duty as the father of a family, marry Hortense, and cease to play the libertine.”

His placable good-nature touched poor Adeline so much that she said: “That creature has shocking taste to prefer any man, no matter who, to my Hector! Ah! I could never leave you for all the gold in the land! How could I when I have had the happiness of being loved by you?”

The look with which the baron rewarded his wife’s devotion confirmed her in the belief that gentleness and submission were a wife’s best weapons. She deceived herself. Noble sentiments pushed to an extreme produce results similar to those of great vices. Bonaparte became emperor because he shot down the populace ten feet from the place where Louis XVI. lost his head and the monarchy for not shedding the blood of a Monsieur Sauce.

On the morrow Hortense, who had put the seal under her pillow so as not to be separated from it during the night, dressed early, and asked her father to come into the garden as soon as he was up.

About half-past nine the baron, condescending to his daughter’s request, gave her his arm, and together they walked along the quays by the pont Royal to the place du Carrousel.

“Let us walk as if we were lounging, papa,” said Hortense, as they passed through the iron gate of the vast open space.

“Lounging here!” cried her father, laughing.

“We shall be thought to be going to the Museum; and down there,” she added, pointing to the wooden shops built against the

walls of the houses which stand at a right angle to the rue du Doyenné, "are a number of bric-à-brac shops and picture-dealers."

"Your cousin Bette lives over there."

"I know that; but I don't want her to see us."

"What are you aiming for?" said the baron, suddenly aware that he was within thirty feet of the window where he had seen Madame Marneffe.

Hortense led her father to the front of a shop standing at the angle of the cluster of houses, and just opposite to the Hôtel de Nantes. She then entered the shop itself, leaving her father employed in looking up at the windows of the pretty little woman who, as if to soothe the coming wound, had taken the old fop's fancy the night before. He could not help thinking of his wife's advice.

"I might fall back on a little bourgeoisie," he said to himself, as he remembered the charms of Madame Marneffe. "That little woman might make me forget the grasping Josépha."

The following scenes now occurred outside and inside of the shop.

The baron, looking up at the windows of his new fancy, saw the husband brushing his overcoat himself, evidently on the watch, as though he expected to see some one in the street. Fearing to be seen and recognized, the baron turned his back to the rue du Doyenné, but still in a way to cast a glance over his shoulder from time to time. This action brought him almost face to face with Madame Marneffe, who, coming from the direction of the quays, turned the corner of the building to reach her own door. Valérie felt a commotion within her when she met the baron's surprised glance, to which she replied with a prudish look.

"Pretty creature!" exclaimed the baron, "for whom one might commit a dozen follies."

"Ah, monsieur!" she answered, turning towards him like a woman who decides upon a sudden action, "you are Monsieur le Baron Hulot, are you not?"

The baron, more and more surprised, made a sign in the affirmative.

"Well, since chance has twice brought our eyes together, and I have the happiness to excite your curiosity, or to interest you, I will tell you that instead of committing follies for me you ought rather to do us justice. My husband's fate depends on you!"

"How so?" said the baron, gallantly.

"He is a clerk of your department at the war-office, in the section of Monsieur Lebrun, and in the office of Monsieur Coquet," she replied, smiling.

"I am ready, Madame—Madame—"

"Madame Marneffe."

"I am very ready, my dear Madame Marneffe, to do any justice or injustice for the sake of your pretty eyes. My cousin lives in your house; I'll go and see her one of these days—in fact, as soon as possible—and then you can bring me your request."

"Forgive my boldness, Monsieur le baron; but you will understand why I have dared to address you when I say that I am unprotected."

"Ha!"

"You misunderstand me, monsieur!" she said, lowering her eyes.

The baron thought the sun was disappearing.

"I am in the depths of despair; but I am an honest woman," she continued. "I lost my only protector six months ago, the Maréchal Montcornet."

"Are you his daughter?"

"Yes, monsieur; but he never acknowledged me."

"So as to leave you part of his property?"

"He left me nothing; no will was found."

"Poor little woman! I remember the maréchal died suddenly of apoplexy. Well, we must hope, madame, that something can be done for the daughter of one of the Bayards of the empire."

Madame Marneffe bowed gracefully, as proud of her success as the baron was of his.

"Where the devil has she been this morning," thought Hulot, as he analyzed the undulating movement of the dress to which she imparted a grace that was perhaps slightly exaggerated. "Her face is so tired that she can't have been bathing; and there's her husband watching for her. It is puzzling, and needs thinking over."

As soon as Madame Marneffe had entered the house it occurred to the baron to wonder what his daughter was doing in the shop. Entering the doorway, but still glancing towards Madame Marneffe's windows, he ran against a young man with a pale brow and sparkling gray eyes, dressed in a summer overcoat of black merino, trousers of coarse linen, and shoes covered with yellow leather gaiters, who was clashing out like one possessed. Looking after him, the baron noticed that he entered the house of Madame Marneffe.

Hortense, when she glided into the shop, had instantly seen the famous bronze of which she was in search, standing on a table in the centre of the room on a line with the door. Even without the circumstances under which she had heard of it, this rare production would assuredly have attracted the young girl by what we must call the *brio* of great works, for she herself might have been taken in Italy for an embodiment of "*il Brio*."

All works of genius have not, in a like degree, this fire, this splendor of life, instantly visible to all eyes, even those of the ignorant. Certain pictures of Raphael, such as the celebrated

Transfiguration, the Madonna of Foligno, the frescos in the Stanze of the Vatican, do not command the same instant admiration as the Violin Player in the Sciarra gallery, the portraits of the Doni, and the Vision of Ezekiel at the Pitti, the Bearing of the Cross in the Borghese collection, and the Marriage of the Virgin in the Bréra museum at Milan. The pictures of St. John the Baptist in the tribune, of St. Luke painting the Virgin, in the Academy of Rome, have not the charm of the portrait of Leo X. and the Dresden Madonna. Yet all are equally wonderful. More than that, the frescos of the Stanze, the Transfiguration, the Gems, and the three easel pictures of the Vatican, are the highest expression of sublime perfection. But these masterpieces require, from even the most cultivated admirer, a strained attention and careful study before they are understood in all their parts; while, on the contrary, the Violinist, the Vision of Ezekiel, and the Marriage of the Virgin take immediate possession of the heart through the double door of the eyes; we delight in them without effort; they are not the climax of art, but they are its happiness. This fact proves that the same congenital uncertainties attend the generation of works of art as may be seen in families where children fortunately gifted are born beautiful and cause no suffering to their mothers—all things smile upon them, and for them all succeeds; in short, there are flowers of genius as well as flowers of love.

Brio, that untranslatable Italian word now coming into use among us, expresses the spirit of the earliest work, the fruit of the impetuous and daring fire of youthful genius; an impetuosity sometimes recovered in after hours of happy toil, but then its *brio* no longer comes from the heart of the artist; instead of flinging it forth from his own bosom as a volcano belches fire, he owes its inspiration to circumstances, to love, to rivalry, often to hatred, oftener still to the necessity of maintaining his fame.

Wenceslas's little group was to the exile's coming work what the Marriage of the Virgin is to the completed whole of Raphael's paintings, namely, the first step of genius—made with inimitable grace, with the eager buoyancy of childhood and its abounding joyousness, with its hidden power, hidden beneath the white and rosy flesh whose dimples are, as it were, the echoes of a mother's smile. It is said that Prince Eugène paid four hundred thousand francs for that picture, which would be worth a million to a nation which owned no Raphaels; yet no one would give that sum for the finest of the frescos, whose value, nevertheless, is higher to art.

Hortense, with due thought for the limited resources of her girlish purse, restrained her admiration and assumed a little air of indifference as she asked the price of the group.

"Fifteen hundred francs," answered the dealer, casting a glance at a young man sitting on a stool in a corner of the shop. The latter became stupid with admiration on beholding the living

masterpiece of Baron Hulot. Hortense, thus informed of his presence, recognized the artist by the color which suddenly flushed a face made pallid by suffering; she saw the gray eyes sparkle as she asked her question; she looked in the thin, drawn face, like that of a monk sunken in asceticism, and she adored the well-cut rosy lips, the delicate chin, the abundant chestnut hair worn in locks after the fashion of the Slavs.

“If it were only twelve hundred francs,” she said, “I should tell you to send it home.”

“It is an antique, mademoiselle,” replied the dealer, who, like the rest of his fraternity, thought the term expressed the *ne plus ultra* of bric-à-brac.

“Pardon me, monsieur, it was made this very year,” she replied, quietly; “and I have come here expressly to ask that, in case you agree to my price, you will send the artist to see us; we may be able to procure some important commissions for him.”

“If the twelve hundred francs go to him what will there be for me? I’m a dealer, you know,” said the man, good-naturedly.

“Ah, true!” uttered the young lady, in a slight tone of contempt.

“Mademoiselle, take it! I will arrange with the dealer,” cried Wenceslas, beside himself with delight.

Fascinated by her glorious beauty and the love of art which was manifest within her, he added:—

“I am the maker of that group; for the last ten days I have come here three times a day to see if any one would recognize its merits and offer to buy it. You are my first admirer; take it!”

“Come to my house, monsieur, an hour hence with the dealer; here is my father’s card,” replied Hortense.

Then as the dealer went into another room to wrap the group in a linen cloth, she added in a low voice, to the great astonishment of the artist, who began to think he was dreaming: “For the sake of your future interests, Monsieur Wenceslas, do not show that card to any one; do not tell the name of your purchaser to Mademoiselle Fischer—she is our cousin.”

The words “our cousin” sent a blinding flash of light into the mind of the artist; he saw the gates of Paradise, and Eve within them. He had dreamed of Lisbeth’s beautiful cousin, just as Hortense had dreamed of her cousin’s lover, and when the young girl entered the shop the thought had occurred to him, “Would she were like her!” We can fancy the glance they now exchanged; it flamed—for innocent love has no hypocrisy.

“Well, what are you about in here?” asked her father as he entered, after encountering the flying artist.

“I have spent all my savings, twelve hundred francs; come!”

She took her father’s arm as he repeated her words, “Twelve hundred francs!”

“Thirteen hundred in fact; but you must lend me the difference.”

“And how—in such a shop—could you possibly spend all that?”

“Ah!” said the girl in a happy voice, “but if I have found a husband it is not too dear.”

“A husband! in this shop?”

“Papa, dear! you wouldn’t object to my marrying a great artist?”

“No, certainly not. A great artist in these days is a prince without a title. He represents fame and fortune, the greatest social advantages—after virtue,” he added in a pious tone.

“Of course,” assented Hortense. “What do you think of sculpture?”

“A very bad business,” said Hulot, shaking his head. “It needs immense influence over and above genius; for government is really the only purchaser. It is an art without openings; in these days there are no great lords, no great fortunes, no entailed property, no eldest sons. The best of us have only houseroom for little pictures and little groups—in fact, the arts are in danger of becoming *little*.”

“What if a great artist were to make his own openings?” urged Hortense.

“That would solve the difficulty.”

“Suppose he obtained influence?”

“Better still.”

“And was born noble?”

“Nonsense!”

“A count.”

“What, a sculptor?”

“He has no money.”

“And he seeks that of Mademoiselle Hortense Hulot?” said her father, teasing her, but darting an inquisitorial look into her eyes.

“This great artist, count, and sculptor has just seen your daughter for the first time in his life, and for only five minutes, monsieur le baron,” said Hortense, coolly. “Now, listen, my dear little papa—yesterday, while you were at the Chamber, mamma fainted away. She said it was a nervous attack, but I know it came from some disappointment about my marriage; for she told me that in order to get me off your hands—”

“I am quite sure she never used any such expression.”

“It isn’t parliamentary,” said Hortense, laughing; “no, she did not say that; but I know that a daughter who ought to be married and isn’t married is a heavy burden for kind good parents to bear. Well, she thinks that if some man of talent and energy could be found who would be satisfied with a *dot* of thirty thousand francs we might all be happy. In fact, she has been trying to prepare me

for the humbleness of my future lot, and to keep me from forming great expectations; that means that I have no *dot* and the marriage is broken off.”

“Your mother is a good and noble woman,” said the father, deeply humiliated, yet pleased by his daughter’s confidence, and thankful to have obtained it.

“Yesterday,” continued Hortense, “she told me that you had allowed her to sell her diamonds for the purpose of marrying me; but I prefer that she should keep them, and that I should myself find a husband. Do you know, I think I have found the very man who answers to mamma’s requirements.”

“What, there! in the place du Carrousel! in one morning?” exclaimed her father.

“Oh, papa, the roots of the evil run further back,” she said significantly.

“Well, my little girl, tell it all to your old papa,” he said in a coaxing tone, trying to hide his uneasiness.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH CHANCE, CONSTRUCTING A ROMANCE, CARRIES MATTERS ALONG SO SMOOTHLY THAT THE SMOOTHNESS CANNOT LAST.

Under promise of absolute secrecy, Hortense told her father the purport of her conversations with Bette. When they reached home she showed him the famous seal in proof of her own sagacity. The baron in his inward soul admired the wonderful cleverness of young girls stirred by instinct, when he perceived the excellence of the plan which an imaginary love had suggested in a single night to his innocent daughter.

"You shall see the masterpiece which I have just purchased," she said. "They are to bring it at once and Wenceslas is coming with it. The artist of such a group must inevitably make his fortune; but I want you to use your influence and get him an order for a statue, and a place in the Institute."

"What next?" cried her father. "If I don't take care you will be married as soon as the banns can be published—in eleven days!"

"Must we wait eleven days?" she answered, laughing. "Why, in five minutes I loved him, just as you loved mamma on first seeing her, and he loves me as if we had known each other two years. Yes," she said in reply to her father's gesture, "I read ten volumes of love in his eyes. I know you and mamma will accept him as my husband as soon as he has proved himself a man of genius. Sculpture is the first of arts!" she cried, clapping her hands and skipping about the room. "Come, I'll tell you the whole truth."

"What! is there anything more?" asked her father, smiling.

Her perfect innocence, and its guileless chatter, had reassured the baron.

"A confession of the utmost importance!" she answered. "I loved him before I knew him; but I am distractedly in love for the last hour since I saw him!"

"Distracted! I should say so," replied the baron, charmed with the spectacle of such artless passion.

"Don't punish me for my confidence!" she cried. "It is so sweet to tell my dear papa that I love, I love! and I am happy in loving! You shall see my Wenceslas," she continued—"a brow full of melancholy, gray eyes shining with the sun of genius, and so distinguished in manner! Tell me, is Livonia a fine county? The idea of cousin Bette marrying such a man when she is old enough to be his mother! It would be murder! But I am so jealous of what

she has done for him! I don't think she will view the marriage with satisfaction."

"Now, my darling, you must not conceal anything from your mother," said the baron.

"Then I must show her the seal; and I promised cousin Bette not to betray her story to mamma, who, she says, will make fun of it," said Hortense.

"You are delicately honorable about the seal, and yet you are going to steal a lover from your cousin!"

"I gave a promise about the seal, but none about its maker."

This little episode, patriarchal in its simplicity, chimed in well with the secret necessities of the family; the baron, therefore, while praising his daughter for her frankness, told her that in future she must leave the management of the affair in the hands of her parents.

"You understand, my little daughter, that you yourself cannot ascertain whether your cousin's lover is really a count, whether his papers are regular, and his conduct satisfactory. As to your cousin, she refused five offers when she was twenty years younger; she is no obstacle. I'll take it upon myself to settle that."

"Now, papa, if you wish to see me married, don't speak of our lover to cousin Bette until the marriage contract is to be signed. I have been questioning her on this subject for the last six months, and I can tell you there is something inexplicable about her."

"What is it?" asked her father, puzzled.

"Well, her look is dangerous when I go too far about her lover, though it is only in joke. Make your inquiries, if you like, but leave me to row my own boat. My frankness ought to satisfy you."

"Our Lord said, 'suffer little children to come unto me;' you are one of those who turned and came back again!" answered the baron, in a slight tone of ridicule.

After breakfast the dealer was announced, together with the artist and the work of art. The vivid color which overspread the girl's face made the baroness uneasy, and then suspicious, until at last her daughter's confusion of manner and the warmth of her glances betrayed to the mother's eye the existence of a mystery which the young heart was little able to conceal.

Count Steinbock, dressed in black, seemed to the baron a very distinguished young man.

"Could you make a statue in bronze?" he said to him, examining the little group.

After admiring it with the air of a connoisseur he passed it to his wife, who knew nothing of art.

"Isn't it beautiful, mamma?" whispered Hortense.

"A statue! Monsieur le baron, that is not so difficult as the composition of a clock like this," replied the artist to the baron's

question, pointing to a model in wax of the Twelve Hours eluding the grasp of the Loves, which the dealer had taken the precaution to bring with him, and was now displaying on the sideboard in the dining-room.

“Leave this model with me!” said the baron, amazed at the beauty of the work. “I wish to show it to the ministers of the Interior and of Commerce.”

“Who is this young man who seems to interest you so much?” asked the baroness of her daughter.

“An artist able to put such a model into execution could make a hundred thousand francs by it,” said the dealer, assuming a knowing and mysterious air as soon as he saw a mutual understanding in the eyes of the artist and the young lady. “He need sell only twenty copies at eight thousand francs apiece—for each copy will cost a thousand crowns to execute; but if he numbers the copies and destroys the model, twenty-four amateurs will easily be found anxious to be the only possessors of a work like that.”

“A hundred thousand francs!” cried Steinbock, looking at Hortense, the dealer, the baron, and the baroness, each in turn.

“Yes, a hundred thousand francs!” repeated the man; “and if I were rich enough I’d buy it of you myself, for if the model is destroyed it will become a valuable property. Some prince or other would give thirty or forty thousand francs for such a treasure to adorn his salon. Art has never yet produced a clock which satisfies both the middle classes and the connoisseurs, and this of Monsieur Steinbock is the solution of the difficulty.”

“These are for you, monsieur,” said Hortense, giving six napoleons to the dealer, who withdrew.

“Do not mention this visit to any one,” said the artist to the merchant, following him to the door. “If any one asks you where the group has gone, say to the Duc d’Hérouville, the famous amateur who lives in the rue de Varennes.” The man nodded assent.

“May I ask your name?” said the baron to the count, as he re-entered the room.

“Comte de Steinbock.”

“Have you papers to prove it?”

“Yes, Monsieur le baron, in the Russian and German languages; but they are not legalized.”

“You think you are capable of making a statue nine feet high?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Well, if the personages I am about to consult are satisfied with these specimens of your work, I can obtain for you an order to make the statue of Maréchal Montcornet, which is about to be erected over his tomb in Père-la-chaise. The minister of War and

the old officers of the Imperial Guard give a large sum towards it, so that we may control the choice of the artist."

"Oh, monsieur, it would make my fortune!" cried Steinbock, overwhelmed by so many aspects of happiness.

"Then you may feel easy," answered the baron, graciously; "if the two ministers to whom I shall show your group and this wax model are pleased with your work, your future is safe."

Hortense squeezed her father's arm till it ached.

"Bring me your papers, and say nothing of your hopes to any one—not even to our old cousin Bette."

"Lisbeth!" exclaimed Madame Hulot, suddenly comprehending the beginning and end of the matter, though not its intermediate history.

"I could prove to you my capacity by making a bust of Madame la baronne," said Wenceslas.

Struck with Madame Hulot's great beauty, the artist had been comparing mother and daughter.

"Well, monsieur, life will soon open brightly for you," said the baron, quite captivated with the elegant and distinguished air of the young count. "You will find out that genius cannot long remain hidden in Paris, where all labor gets its just reward."

Hortense, blushing, presented the young man with a pretty Algerine purse containing sixty pieces of gold. The artist, touched in his pride of nobility, echoed the color of her cheeks with a flush of mortification on his own which it was easy to understand.

"Perhaps it is the first money you have ever received for your works," said the baroness, kindly.

"Yes, madame; the first for my works of art, but not the first for my labor. I have worked as a journeyman."

"Well, let us hope that my daughter's money may bring you happiness," answered Madame Hulot.

"Take it without scruple," said the baron, seeing that Wenceslas held the purse undecidedly in his hand without putting it in his pocket. "We shall certainly recover the amount from some great lord—a prince perhaps—who will pay us more than we have given you for the possession of your beautiful masterpiece."

"Ah, papa, I value it too much ever to part with it to any one—even to one of the royal princes," exclaimed Hortense.

"I will make mademoiselle another and prettier group."

"But it would not be this one," she answered, softly. Then, as if ashamed of having said so much, she went into the garden.

"I shall destroy the model when I get home," said Steinbock.

"Well, bring me your papers, and you shall soon hear from me if these works fulfil the expectations which I have formed of them, monsieur," said the baron.

On this the artist felt obliged to take his leave. After bowing to Madame Hulot and Hortense, who returned from the garden

expressly to receive that bow, he went to walk in the Tuileries, not daring—in fact, not able—to return to his garret, where his tyrant would assault him with questions and wrench his secret from his breast. As he walked along, the lover designed in fancy a dozen groups; he felt within him the power of chiselling marble like Canova, who once in a like extremity came near perishing. Wenceslas was transfigured by Hortense, who became for him a visible and tangible inspiration.

“Now,” said the baroness to her daughter, “tell me what all this means.”

“Well, my dear mamma, you have just seen cousin Bette’s lover, who is, I hope, henceforth mine. But shut your eyes and pretend you don’t see. There! I, who meant to hide everything from you, am just on the point of telling it all!”

“Good-by, my dears,” said the baron, kissing his wife and daughter. “I think I’ll go and see the Nanny-goat, and find out something about the young man.”

“Be prudent, papa,” cautioned Hortense.

“My daughter,” cried the baroness, after listening to the young girl’s poem, whose last strophe was the incident of the morning, “my dear little daughter, the worst deceiver upon this earth is, and ever will be, artless innocence.”

True passions have an instinct. Put a dish of fruit before a gourmand, and he will choose the best unerringly, without looking at it; leave a well-bred young girl to select a husband, and if she is in a position to have the man she chooses, she is seldom mistaken. Nature is infallible. The action of nature in this respect is called love at first sight. In love, first sight is neither more nor less than second sight.

The satisfaction of the baroness, though concealed by her maternal dignity, was equal to that of her daughter; for, of the three ways of marrying Hortense pointed out by Crevel, the best, to her mind, seemed to have come about. In this event she saw an answer to her fervent prayers.

Mademoiselle Fischer’s galley-slave, compelled after a while to go home, had the happy thought of hiding his lover’s joy beneath the legitimate joy of the artist rejoicing in his first success.

“Victory! My group is sold to the Duc d’Hérouville!” he cried, flinging the sixty gold pieces on the old maid’s table.

We may be sure he had hidden next his heart the purse in which Hortense gave them.

“Well,” said Lisbeth, “that’s fortunate; for I was getting worn out with work. You see, my dear child, money comes in so slowly from the business you insisted on choosing—this is the first time you have earned a penny in all the five years you’ve plodded at it! This sum is barely enough to pay me back what you have cost me since you gave me that note of yours in exchange for all my

savings. But never mind," she added, counting the gold, "this money will all be spent on you. It will make us comfortable for a year; and meantime you will be able to pay me off and get a good sum for yourself, if you keep on at this rate."

Seeing that the deception was successful, Wenceslas went on to tell Bette various tales about the Duc d'Hérouville.

"I shall make you wear black—that's the fashion—and get you a new supply of linen; for you must dress better if you go among such people," answered Bette. "And you need better rooms—larger and more suitable than this horrible garret. I'll furnish them properly. How gay you are!" she added, examining Wenceslas. "Why, you are no longer the same man!"

"They told me my group was a masterpiece."

"So much the better; now make others," said the hard, practical spinster, incapable of understanding the happiness of his triumph or his joy in the creation of beauty. "Don't think about what is already sold, but make something else fit to sell. You spent two hundred francs in money, not counting your time and labor, on that horrid Samson, and the clock will cost more than two thousand to execute. If you take my advice, you'll finish off those two little boys crowning the little girl with harebells—that will please the Parisians. Meantime I'll go round to Monsieur Graff, the tailor, on my way to Monsieur Crevel's. Go up to your own room, and he will send and measure you."

The next day the baron, by this time in love with Madame Marneffe, paid a visit to his cousin, who was a good deal surprised on finding him at the door when she opened it, as he had never before appeared in those regions. She at once thought, "Can Hortense be envious of my lover?" Crevel had told her, the evening before, of the rupture of the proposed marriage.

"Why, cousin, you here? This is the first time in your life that you have come to see me, and I am sure it is not for the sake of my pretty eyes!"

"Pretty! that is true!" replied the baron. "They are the handsomest eyes I ever saw!"

"What has brought you? I am ashamed to receive you in such a hovel."

The first of the two rooms which Bette occupied served as a salon, dining-room, kitchen, and workroom. The furniture was that of well-to-do working-folks: chairs of walnut wood with straw bottoms; a small dining-table, also of walnut; a work-table; colored engravings in black wooden frames; little muslin curtains at the window, and a large walnut wardrobe. The tiled floor was well polished; everything in the room shone with cleanliness, without a grain of dust, and yet it was cold and cheerless—a true picture after Terburg, with nothing lacking, not even the gray tints reproduced

by a wall-paper once blue and now faded to the color of flax. As to the bedroom, no one had ever penetrated thither.

The baron took in everything at a glance, saw the sign-manual of commonness everywhere, from the stove of cast-iron down to the household utensils, and his stomach actually turned as he said to himself, "This is virtue!"

"Why am I here?" he said aloud. "You are too clever a girl not to end by guessing why, so I had better tell you at once," he cried, sitting down by the window and pushing back a corner of the muslin curtain. "There's a very pretty little woman in this house."

"Madame Marneffe. Oh, now I understand!" she said; "but how about Josépha?"

"Alas, cousin, there's no longer a Josépha. She has turned me off like a footman."

"And you propose to—" said his cousin, looking at him with the dignity of a prude offended ten minutes too soon.

"As Madame Marneffe is a very well-bred woman, and the wife of a government clerk, it won't compromise you to receive her here," said the baron. "I want you to be neighborly. Oh! you will like it. She will be very polite to the cousin of a director of the War department."

Just then the rustle of a dress was heard on the staircase, and the tread of a little boot. The sound, ceased at the landing. After knocking twice at the door, Madame Marneffe appeared.

"Forgive me this irruption, mademoiselle," she said; "but I did not find you yesterday, when I came to pay you a little visit. We are neighbors; and if I had known you were cousin to a councilor of state, I should have asked you long ago to employ your-influence with him in our behalf. I have just seen Monsieur le directeur enter your apartment, and I have taken the liberty to call; for my husband, Monsieur le baron," she added, turning to Hulot, "has told me that a report upon the employes in the department is to be sent in to-morrow."

She seemed to be agitated and to catch her breath. It is true that she had really run up the stairs.

"You need not offer me a petition, fair lady," replied the baron. "It is I who ask the favor of visiting you."

"Certainty, if mademoiselle will permit, pray come," said Madame Marneffe.

"Go, cousin; I will rejoin you," said Bette, discreetly.

The wily Parisian woman had counted so surely on this visit and on the intentions of the baron that she had not only made a toilet appropriate to such an interview, but she had also decorated her apartment. Flowers, bought on credit, filled the room. Marneffe himself had helped his wife to clean the furniture and polish up the various little knick-knacks—cleansing, brushing, and

dusting everything, Valérie wished to appear in a bower of freshness which should please *Monsieur le directeur*, and please sufficiently to enable her to be stern, and hold the sugar-plum aloft as with a child—in short, to employ the resources of modern tactics. She judged Hulot rightly. Let a Parisian woman once degrade herself, and she can overturn a ministry.

This hero of the empire, filled with the notions of the empire, knew little of the ways of modern love, with its new-fangled scruples, and the various sophistries invented since 1830, by which “poor feeble woman” has come to look upon herself as the victim of her lover’s wishes, as the sister of charity who binds his wound, as an angel of devotion and self-sacrifice. This new art of love expends a vast quantity of pious words on the devil’s work. Passion is a martyr; its votaries aspire to the ideal, to the infinite, and each side seeks to become better and purer through love. All these fine phrases are a pretext to put more ardor into love’s practice, more fury into its catastrophes. Such hypocrisy—the special symptom of our time—has gangrened gallantry. The man and the woman consider themselves angels, and act like devils if they can. Love in Hulot’s palmy days had no time to analyze itself between two campaigns, and in 1809 it rushed to victory like the empire itself. After the Restoration, the handsome baron, returning to the conquest of women only, had in the first instance consoled a few of his former loves, now eclipsed like the extinguished stars of the political firmament, and after that, growing an old man, he allowed himself to be captured by the Jenny Cadines and Joséphas.

Madame Marneffe had pointed her guns with reference to the director’s antecedents, which her husband told her at full length, having obtained his information at the war office. The comedy of modern sentiment might, Valérie thought, have the charm of novelty for such a man; and the trial that she made of it on this occasion answered, let us here say, to her expectations.

CHAPTER X.

SOCIAL COMPACT BETWEEN EASY VIRTUE AND JEALOUS CELIBACY—SIGNED, BUT NOT RECORDED.

Thanks to her sentimental and romantic manœuvres, Valérie, without committing herself in any way, obtained the appointment as sub-director and the cross of the Legion of honor for her husband.

This little triumph was not attained without certain dinners at the Rocher de Cancale, theatre parties, and a variety of trifling gifts, such as shawls, scarfs, dresses, and jewelry. The apartment in the rue du Doyenné did not please the lady, and the baron conspired to furnish another magnificently in a charming modern house in the rue Vanneau.

Monsieur Marneffe obtained leave of absence for two weeks, to be taken within a month, for the purpose of attending to his private affairs in the country, together with a gift of money, with which he privately intended to travel in Switzerland and study the fair sex.

Though Baron Hulot was much taken up with his new charmer, he did not neglect his prospective son-in-law. The minister of commerce, Comte Popinot, loved art. Hulot induced him to give two thousand francs for a copy of the Samson group, on condition that the the cast should be destroyed and that no copies but his own and Mademoiselle Hulot's should exist. The group excited the admiration of a prince of the blood, who was then shown the model of the clock, and ordered it; but as he wished only one copy to be made, he was willing to pay thirty thousand francs. Artists were consulted, among them Stidmann, and they all declared that the author of such works was competent to make a statue. Thereupon the Maréchal Prince of Wissembourg, minister of war, and chairman of the committee having in hand the erection of the statue to Maréchal Montcornet, held a consultation with his colleagues, which resulted in an order for its execution being given to Steinbock. Comte Eugene de Rastignac, then under-secretary of state, wanting a specimen of an artist whose fame increased amid the plaudits of his rivals, obtained from Steinbock the charming group of two little boys crowning a little girl, and promised him a studio at the marble works of the government, situated, as we all know, at the Gros-Caillou.

In short, Wenceslas attained success, but success such as it is in Paris—that is, frenzied, overwhelming, likely to crush the man whose loins and shoulders are not powerful enough to bear it, which, by the way, often happens. The newspapers and magazines discussed Wenceslas Steinbock, although no rumor of these articles ever reached either Bette or himself. Every day, as soon as Mademoiselle Fischer departed for her dinner, Wenceslas went to the Hulots', where he spent two or three hours, except on the day when the old maid dined there. This state of things lasted some little time.

The baron satisfied as to Steinbock's artistic merit and social position, the baroness pleased with his nature and principles, Hortense, proud of her sanctioned love and the fame of her lover, now spoke openly of the marriage. The family happiness was at its height when a piece of indiscretion on the part of Madame Marneffe imperilled everything.

Lisbeth, whom the baron endeavored to ally with Madame Marneffe, so as to keep a private eye upon the household, had already dined with Valérie, who, on her side, wanted an ear in the Hulot family, and therefore made much of the old maid. Valérie invited Bette to a house-warming in the new apartment whenever the time came to install herself. The spinster, delighted to find another house where she could get a dinner, and captivated with Madame Marneffe, was very affectionate to her new friend. Of all those among whom she revolved no one had done as much for her. Indeed, Madame Marneffe, full of attentions to Mademoiselle Fischer, held, so to speak, the same position towards her which she herself held towards the baroness, Rivet, Crevel, and others with whom she dined. The Marneffes had excited the commiseration of cousin Bette by letting her see the absolute wretchedness of their home, heightening it with a tale of moving incidents: ungrateful friends; illness; a mother (Madame Fortin) from whom they concealed their poverty, allowing her to die under the belief that she was still wealthy, thanks to almost superhuman sacrifices and concealments on their part, etc.

"Poor people!" she said to her cousin Hulot; "you are quite right to take an interest in them. They deserve it for their courage and their goodness. But I don't see how they can live on the salary of even a sub-director, because they have been forced to go into debt since Maréchal Montcornet died. What an outrage in the government, to expect an employe of the war office to live in Paris, with a wife and children, on two thousand four hundred francs a year!"

A young woman who showed Bette all the signs of friendship—who told her all while consulting her, flattering her, asking her advice and seeming to follow it—became in a very short time dearer to the eccentric old maid than any of her relations.

On the other hand, the baron, admiring in Madame Marneffe a propriety of conduct, education, and manners not possessed by Jenny Cadine or Josépha or any of their friends, fell in love with her in a month with an old man's passion—that insensate passion which nevertheless seems outwardly reasonable. She was never guilty of reckless jesting, nor excess, nor mad extravagance, nor depravity, nor contempt of social decency, nor that complete independence of all restraint which in the actress and the singer had been his ruin. He escaped also the rapacity of such creatures—a craving comparable only to the thirst of devils.

Madame Marneffe, now become his friend and confidante, made many difficulties before she would accept his gifts.

“You shall give us what you please in places and perquisites—in short, whatever you can obtain for us from the government; but do not seek to degrade a woman whom you say you love,” said Valérie. “If you do, I shall no longer believe your professions; and I love to believe you,” she added, with the glance of a Saint Theresa appealing to heaven.

Each gift was now a fortress to carry—a conscience to violate. The poor baron manoeuvred to be allowed to offer some trifle—costly, of course—and congratulated himself in having met with a species of virtue which seemed the realization of his dreams. In this primitive household the baron felt he was as much a god as he was at home. Monsieur Marneffe seemed a thousand leagues from suspecting that Jupiter meditated a descent in a golden shower upon his wife, and he made himself the lackey of his revered chief.

Madame Marneffe, twenty-three years of age, a simple, timid bourgeoisie, a flower hidden in the rue du Doyenné, must of course be ignorant of the depravity and licentious wickedness for which the baron now felt such unutterable disgust; he had never before known the charms of reluctant virtue which the timid Valérie now made him enjoy, in the words of the old song, “to the end of the stream.”

Matters standing thus between Hector and Valérie, the reader will not be surprised to learn that the latter soon heard from her adorer of the approaching marriage of his daughter to the great artist Steinbock. Between a lover who has gained no rights and a woman who makes difficulties there are many oral and moral struggles in which language often betrays the inward thought, just as a foil in a fencing lesson has all the eager activity of the sword. Wise men should recollect and imitate at such times Monsieur de Turenne. The baron let fall—in reply to a tender remark of Valérie, who had more than once exclaimed, “I cannot conceive how a woman can give herself to a man who is not wholly hers”—that the approaching marriage of his daughter would give him

more liberty of action. He swore that love was over between Madame Hulot and himself for many years.

“But they say she is so beautiful!” objected Madame Marneffe; “I need proofs of what you say.”

“You shall have them,” cried the baron, delighted that Valérie seemed willing to compromise herself.

“But how? You must never abandon me,” said the siren.

Hector was then obliged to reveal his plans about the house in the rue Vanneau to prove to his Valérie that he meant to give her that half of life which belongs to a legitimate wife, reckoning the existence of civilized man to be equally divided into day and night. He spoke of separating decently from his wife, as soon as their daughter was married, by the simple expedient of leaving her; the baroness would pass her time with Hortense and the younger Hulots. He was sure, he said, of his wife’s obedience—“and then, my angel, my life, my true home will be in the rue Vanneau.”

“How coolly you dispose of me!” said Madame Marneffe; “and how about my husband?”

“That vagabond?”

“Ah, yes—compared with you!” she answered, smiling.

Madame Marneffe was desperately eager to see young Steinbock after hearing the baron’s account of him; perhaps she desired to get an art treasure out of him while they were still under the same roof. Her curiosity so displeased the baron, however, that she was forced to swear she would never look at him; and yet, although she received a pretty little tea-set in old Sèvres as a reward for this sacrifice, she kept the wish at the bottom of her heart as if written in a note-book. So one day when she had invited Bette to take coffee in her bedroom she started the old maid on the subject of her lover, hoping to discover a way of seeing him without risk.

“Dearest,” she said—for “dear” and “dearest” were the terms by which they mutually addressed each other—“why have you never presented your lover to me? Don’t you know that he is now celebrated?”

“Celebrated! he?”

“Why, people talk of nothing else!”

“Nonsense!” cried Lisbeth.

“He is going to make a statue of my father, and I could be very helpful about it; for Madame Montcornet cannot lend him, as I can, a miniature by Sain, an admirable portrait taken in 1809, before the campaign of Wagram, and given to my poor mother—the young and handsome Montcornet, in short.”

Sain and Augustin held the sceptre of miniature painting under the empire.

“Do you mean to say, dear, that *he* is to make a statue?” demanded Lisbeth.

“Nine feet high, ordered by the ministry of war. Bless me! where do you keep yourself that you don’t know that? Why, the government is going to give the Comte de Steinbock an atelier and a lodging at the marble-works at the Gros-Caillou; quite likely your Pole may be made director of them—a place worth two thousand francs a year is not to be sneezed at.”

“How do you happen to know all that when I know nothing?” said Lisbeth at last, recovering from her amazement.

“My dear little cousin Bette,” said Madame Marneffe, affectionately, “are you capable of devoted friendship, under all trials? Shall we be like sisters? Will you swear to have no secrets from me if I have none from you?—to be my spy, just as I’ll be yours? Above all, will you promise that you will never sell me to my husband nor to Monsieur Hulot, and that you will never reveal I told you that—”

Madame Marneffe stopped short in her persuasive speech, for Bette actually frightened her. The face of the Lorraine peasant-woman was terrible. Her keen black eyes were fixed, like those of tigers; the whole countenance was such as we attribute to a pythoness. She clinched her teeth to keep them from chattering, and a horrible convulsion shook her limbs. One clawlike hand was thrust beneath her cap to clutch the hair and support her head, suddenly grown too heavy. She was on fire. The smoke of the conflagration which raged within her seemed to issue from her wrinkles as though they were crevices torn open by volcanic eruption. The sight was awful.

“Well, why do you stop?” she said, in a hollow voice. “I will be to you all that I was to him. I would have given him my blood!

“Then you love him?”

“As my son.”

“Ah!” said Madame Marneffe, with a sigh of relief, “if that is how you love him you will soon have the happiness of seeing him happy.”

Lisbeth replied by a quick movement of her head, like that of one demented.

“He marries your little cousin next month.”

“Hortense?” cried the old maid, rising to her feet and striking her forehead.

“Good heavens! then you do love him? that young man!” exclaimed Madame Marneffe.

“Valérie, I am bound to you for life and death henceforth,” said Mademoiselle Fischer, “Yes, if you have attachments I will regard them as sacred; your vices shall be virtues to me, for I need them—yes, your vices,” she repeated.

“Are you his mistress?” cried Valérie.

“No, I sought to be his mother.”

“Then I can’t understand it,” returned Valérie. “If you are neither jilted nor deceived you ought to be very glad to have him make a fine marriage—his career is made. However, in any case, the affair is all over with you, you may be sure of that. Your artist goes to Madame Hulot’s every day as soon as you start to dine out.”

“Adeline!” said Lisbeth to herself. “Oh, Adeline! you shall pay dear for this. I will make you uglier than I!”

“Why, you are as pale as death!” cried Valérie. “Something is the matter! Oh, how stupid I have been! Of course the mother and daughter feared you would put obstacles in the way of the marriage, and that is why they concealed it. But if you don’t live with that young man, my dearest, the whole affair is as dark to me as the heart of my husband.”

“Oh, you don’t know, you!” said Lisbeth—“you can’t know what this manœuvre is to me! It is my deathblow! Ah, what stabs my soul has borne! You do not know that from the moment I could first feel I have been sacrificed to Adeline. I was clothed like a scullion, and she as a lady. I dug the garden, I peeled the vegetables, while her ten fingers never stirred unless to tie her ribbons. She married the baron and came here to shine at the Emperor’s court, and I stayed in my village till 1809, waiting four years for a suitable husband. The Hulots brought me to Paris, but only to make a workwoman of me, and to find clerks, or captains no better than porters, to marry me. For twenty-six years I have had nothing but their leavings; and now, when I possessed, as they tell in the Scriptures, a single pet lamb of my own which was all my joy, the rich Hulots, with flocks and herds of their own, steal him from me, with never a word! without a warning! Adeline has filched my happiness! Adeline! Adeline! I’ll see you in the mud, down deeper than I! Hortense, whom I loved, has tricked me! The baron—no, it is not possible. Tell me again, some things may be true—”

“Be calm, dearest.”

“Valérie, dear love, I will be calm,” said the strange creature, sitting down again. “One thing can quiet me—proof, give me proof.”

“Your cousin Hortense possesses the Samson group, and here is a lithograph of it published in a magazine; she spent all her savings on it, and it is the baron who, in the interest of his future son-in-law, has brought Comte Steinbock into notice and obtained the order from the ministry.”

“Water!—water!” moaned Lisbeth, after casting her eyes on lithograph, at the foot of which were the words “Group belonging to Mademoiselle Hulot d’Ervy.” “Water! my head is burning, I am going mad!”

Madame Marneffe brought the water, and Bette, taking off her cap, pulled down her black hair and put her head in the basin which her new friend held for her. She bathed her forehead again and again, and slowly the inflammation subsided. After this immersion her self-command returned.

“Don’t say a word of all this,” she said to Madame Marneffe, wiping her hair. “See! I am quite calm, I can forget it all and think of something else.”

“She will be in a lunatic asylum to-morrow, that’s certain,” thought Valérie, watching her.

“Nothing can be done,” resumed Lisbeth. “You see, my angel, I must be silent and bow my head and march to my grave as the waters flow to the sea. What could such as I do? I would gladly grind them to powder—Adeline, her daughter, the baron; but what can a poor relation do against a rich family? It is the old story of the earthen pot against the iron pot.”

“Yes, you are right,” answered Valérie; “the only thing to be done is to rake as much hay as you can into your own manger. That’s life as it is in Paris.”

“And I shall be dead before long,” cried Lisbeth, “if I lose the child that I was a mother to, and with whom I expected to spend my life—”

Tears were in her eyes and she stopped short. This emotion in a woman of fire and brimstone made Madame Marneffe shudder.

“Well, I have gained *you!*” said Lisbeth, taking Valérie’s hand; “it is a great comfort in the midst of my sorrow. We will love each other. Why need we part? I should never stand in your way, for no one will ever love me—me! The men who offered to marry me only wanted my cousin’s influence. To be conscious of the vigor to do great things, to scale the walls of paradise, and to have to spend it in a struggle for bread and water and rags and a garret!—ah, it is martyrdom! it has withered me!”

She paused abruptly and darted a black look into the depths of Madame Marneffe’s blue eyes, which made that pretty creature feel as if a steel blade had gone through her bosom.

“What’s the good of talking?” said Bette, as if blaming herself. “Ah! I never said so much as this before to any one—Ill deeds come home to roost,” she added after a pause. “Yes, you are right; let’s sharpen our teeth, and rake all the hay we can into the manger.”

“That’s wise,” said Madame Marneffe, who was frightened by the scene, and no longer remembered that she had made the remark. “I am sure it is, my dear. Life is short, and we must get the most we can out of it, and use others to our own advantage. I have come to that, young as I am. I was brought up a spoiled child; my father married for ambition, and threw me off after making me his idol and bringing me up as if I were the daughter

of a queen! Poor mamma, who fed me on dreams, died of grief when I married a mere clerk with a salary of twelve hundred francs—a cold, worn-out libertine, thirty-nine years old, as corrupt as the galleys, who saw in me just what you say others saw in you, a means of influence. Well, I have ended by thinking that infamous man the best of husbands. He prefers the vile creatures at the corners of the streets, and leaves me at liberty. If he spends all his salary on himself he never asks me how I make my money—”

She stopped short, like a woman who feels the rush of confidence is carrying her too far. Warned by the attention with which Lisbeth listened to her, she began to think she had better be more sure of her before trusting all secrets to her keeping.

“See, my dearest, what confidence I put in you,” she said.

To which remark Bette responded by a sign that was completely reassuring.

Oaths taken by the eyes and by a motion of the head are sometimes more solemn and binding than those sworn in the courts.

CHAPTER XI.

TRANSFORMATION OF COUSIN BETTE.

“I have all the externals of virtue,” said Madame Marneffe, laying her hand in that of Lisbeth, as if to accept her pledge. “I am a married woman and my own mistress to such a degree that if Marneffe has a fancy to speak to me in the morning and finds my door locked he goes away without a word. He loves his child about as much as I love those marble urchins playing at the feet of the Rivers in the Tuileries. If I don’t come home to dinner he dines with my maid—for the maid is devoted to him—and after dinner he goes out and never comes in till the middle of the night. Unfortunately, for the last year I have not had a maid, which means in plain language that I am a widow. I have never had but one love, one happiness. He was a rich Brazilian, who went away a year ago—it was a great error. He returned to Brazil, intending to sell his property and come back to live in France. If he ever returns, what will he find me! Bah! it’s his fault—not mine. Why did he stay away so long? Perhaps he was shipwrecked, like my virtue.”

“Adieu, dearest,” said Lisbeth, abruptly! “we will never part. I love you and value you; I am yours. The baron teases me to go and live in your new house, rue Vanneau. I did not wish to, because I saw the self-interested motive of that new benefit.”

“Ah! you were to watch me! Yes, I know that,” said Madame Marneffe.

“Of course; that was the motive of his generosity,” replied Lisbeth. “Half the benefits that are bestowed in Paris are speculations, just as half the ungrateful acts are deeds of vengeance. People treat poor relations as they do rats when they give them a scrap of lard. I shall accept the baron’s offer, for this house is now intolerable to me. Ha, ha! you and I have sense enough to hold our tongues about all that might injure us, and say whatever *it is best* to say; therefore, let our compact be—friendship, and no indiscretion.”

“So be it!” cried Madame Marneffe joyfully, delighted to obtain a respectable intimate, a confidante, a species of virtuous aunt. “Do you know that the baron is doing great things in the rue Vanneau?”

“I believe you!” said Lisbeth. “He has spent thirty thousand francs on it already. I don’t know where he got them, for Josépha, that Jewish singer, bled him at every pore. Oh! you have fallen on your feet!” she added. “The baron would steal for a woman who holds his heart in such satiny white hands as yours.”

“Well,” returned Madame Marneffe, with the liberality of such women, which really comes of indifference, “take what you like,

dearest, out of this room to fit up your new lodging—that bureau, that wardrobe with the mirror, the carpet, the hangings—any thing you like.”

Bette’s eyes dilated with joy; she dared not believe in such a gift.

“You do more for me by one act than all my rich relations in thirty years,” she cried. “They never even asked if I had any furniture. When the baron paid me his first visit, a few weeks ago, he threw the glance of a rich man at my poverty. Well, thank you, dearest. I will repay you some day; you shall know how, later.”

Valérie accompanied Bette to the head of the stairs, where the two women kissed each other.

“She smells poor,” thought the pretty woman when alone. “I sha’n’t kiss her often. But it is well to be cautious, and keep on good terms with her; she can be very useful to me, and even help to make my fortune.”

Like a true Parisian, Madame Marneffe abhorred trouble. She had the indolence of a cat, which never runs or jumps unless with an object. To her mind life ought to be all pleasure, but pleasure without trouble. She loved flowers, provided they were brought to her. She had no idea of going to the theatre without a box to herself and a carriage to take her there. These extravagant tastes came from her mother, who was kept by General Montcornet, during his visits to Paris, in the utmost luxury, and who for twenty years had seen the world at her feet, until—naturally a spendthrift—she had run through her share of a luxury which, after the fall of Napoleon, became merely traditional. The great men of the empire equalled in extravagance the great lords of former times. Under the Restoration, the nobility, remembering how they had been robbed and ill-used, became, with one or two exceptions, economical, judicious, and thrifty—in fact, bourgeois, and no longer magnificent. Since then, the events of 1830 only consummated those of 1793. In future, France may have great names, but she will never again have great families, unless certain political changes now impossible to conceive should arise. All things at the present day bear the stamp of personality. The wealth of the wisest is in the form of annuities. Family in its past meaning exists no longer.

The cruel grasp of poverty which gripped Valérie on the day when, as Marneffe said, she “snared” Hulot, was the cause which led that young woman to make her beauty the means of fortune. For some time past she had felt the need of a devoted friend to take the place of her mother—one in whom she could confide much that must be hidden from a waiting-maid, and who could act, think, go and come at her behest—a familiar, in short, who would agree to take an unequal share in their mutual life. She had guessed quite as soon as Lisbeth the reasons of the baron’s wish to

create an intimacy between them. Guided by the unerring cleverness of the Parisian woman, who spends hours stretched on a sofa turning the lantern of her observation into the dark corners of the minds, the feelings, and the intrigues about her, she had conceived the idea of making herself the accomplice of the spy who was to be placed over her. In all probability her fatal indiscretion in the matter of Hortense and Wenceslas was premeditated; she had fathomed the true character of the woman's intense nature mastered by an empty passion, and wished to attach it to herself. The conversation was like the stone which a traveller casts into a gulf to measure its depth: and Madame Marneffe was frightened when she found an Iago and a Richard III. combined in this strange creature, outwardly so powerless, so humble, and so little to be feared.

For a moment Bette had become her natural self; for a moment the savage Corsican nature, bursting the slender bonds that restrained it, recovered its threatening attitude, like a tree escaping from the hands that drag it down as they gather its ripe fruit.

The fulness, perfection, and rapidity of conception in virgin natures must strike an observer of social life with admiration. Virginity, like all other anomalies, has special resources and an all-pervading grandeur. Life, when its forces are economized, takes on a quality of resistance and of incalculable endurance in the virgin nature. The brain is enriched in its entirety by the reserve force of its faculties. When chaste persons need to use their bodies or their souls, whether they are called upon for thought or action, they are conscious of a spring in their muscles, a knowledge infused into their intellects, a demoniacal power—the black magic of Will.

From this point of view the Virgin Mary, if we consider her for a moment as a symbol only, eclipses by her grandeur all the other, Hindoo, Egyptian, and Greek, types. Virginity, mother of great things—*magna parens rerum*—holds the key of higher worlds in her white fingers; and this grand and lofty exception is worthy of the honor which the Church bestows upon her.

For a moment, then, cousin Bette became the red Indian, whose dissimulation is impenetrable, whose pursuit cannot be escaped, whose rapid judgments are based on the unerring perfection of his organs. She was Hatred and Vengeance personified, uncompromising and without quarter, as they are in Italy, in Spain, and in the East. These two passions, instinct with love and friendship pushed to their utmost expression, are known only in the lands which the sun irradiates. Lisbeth, however, was a daughter of Lorraine—in other words, born for intrigue and dissimulation.

She did not play the latter part of her role out of her own head, as we shall see. Profoundly ignorant of the world about her, she supposed that jails were what children imagine them, and she confounded solitary confinement with ordinary imprisonment.

When she left Madame Marneffe she went straight to Monsieur Rivet, and found him in his office.

“Well, Monsieur Rivet,” she said, after slipping the bolt of his door, “you were right. Poles—scoundrels! men without faith or decency!”

“Men who want to set Europe on fire,” said the pacific Rivet; “who want to ruin commerce and merchants for the sake of a country which they tell me is full of bogs and Jews, not to speak of Cossacks and serfs—species of wild beasts falsely classed as human beings. Those Poles misunderstand the age. We are no longer barbarians. War, my dear lady, is a thing of the past; it went out with the kings. Our period is the triumph of commerce, of the industry and sagacity which created Holland. Yes,” he continued, working himself up, “this is an epoch when the masses will obtain all by the legal development of their liberties, by the pacific working of constitutional institutions. That’s what these Poles ignore and I hope— But what were you saying, my dear?” he added, interrupting himself as he saw by his workwoman’s manner that the science of politics was not in her mind.

“Here are those papers,” returned Bette. “If I don’t mean to lose my three thousand two hundred and ten francs, I must put that scoundrel in prison.”

“I told you so,” said the oracle of the quartier Saint-Denis.

The establishment of Rivet, successor of Pons Brothers, was still in the rue des Mauvaises-Paroles, in the old Langeais mansion, built by the illustrious family of that name in the days when the great lords gathered around the Louvre.

“And for that reason I have been blessing you as I came along,” answered Lisbeth.

“If he suspects nothing, you can put him under lock and key by four o’clock in the morning,” said the judge, consulting his almanac as to the hour of sunrise; “but not until the day after tomorrow,” he added, “because you can’t imprison a man without notifying him that a writ is to be issued for his arrest.

“What a stupid law!” said Bette. “Of course the debtor runs away.”

“He has the right to,” replied the judge, smiling; “and therefore the best way is—”

“As for that, I’ll take the notification to him myself,” said Bette, interrupting him, “and tell him I have been forced to borrow money, and that the lender insists on this formality. I know my man. He won’t even unfold the paper; he’ll light his pipe with it.”

“Ha! pretty good, pretty good, Mademoiselle Fischer! Well, take it easy; the affair is as good as settled. But stop one moment; it isn’t enough to lock up a man. People don’t indulge in that judicial luxury except to get back their money. Who is to pay you?”

“Those who pay him.”

“Ah, yes; I forgot that the ministry of war has ordered a monument for one of our clients. This house has furnished many a uniform to General Montcornet—he blackened them so fast in cannon-smoke. Ah, what a brave fellow he was!—and he paid *recta*”

A marshal of France may have saved his emperor and his country, but his highest praise from the lips of commerce will ever be that he “paid *recta*?”

“Well, then, Saturday, Monsieur Rivet, you can be ready to take him. By the way, I am leaving the rue du Doyenné to live in the rue Vanneau.”

“You are right. I was always sorry to see you in that hole of a place, which, in spite of my repugnance to everything that looks like opposition, I make bold to say disgraces—yes, disgraces the Louvre and the place du Carrousel. I worship Louis Philippe; he is my idol—the august and perfect representative of the class on which he has founded his dynasty; and I shall never forget what he did for gold lace by re-establishing the National Guard.”

“When I hear you talk like that,” said Lisbeth, “I wonder they have never made you a deputy.”

“They fear my devotion to the dynasty,” replied Rivet. “My political enemies are those of the king. Ah, what a noble nature! what a fine family! In short,” he added, continuing his declamation, “he is my ideal of manners and customs, economy, morals, everything! But the completion of the Louvre is one of the conditions on which we gave him his crown; and I do admit that the civil list, to which we put no fixed limit, has left the heart of Paris in a most distressing condition. It is precisely because I am myself a *juste milieu* that I desire to see the middle of Paris in a better state. That quarter makes me shudder. You might be murdered there any day—Well, so your Monsieur Crevel is appointed major of his legion? I hope we shall have the furnishing of his epaulets.”

“I dine there to-day, and I will send him to you.”

Lisbeth believed she could still hold the exile within her clutches by cutting off his communications with the outer world. If he no longer produced works of art he would be forgotten, like a man buried in a cave where she alone could go and see him. Thus thinking, she enjoyed two days’ happiness in the hope and expectation of dealing the baroness and Hortense a fatal blow.

To reach the liouse of Monsieur Crevel, which was in the rue des Saussayes, she went by way of the pout du Carrousel, the quai Voltaire, the quai d'Orsay, the rue Bellechasse, the rue de l'Université, the pont de la Concorde, and the avenue Marigny. This illogical route was dictated by the logic of the passions, always extremely antagonistic to legs. While Bette was going along the quays she walked slowly, with her eyes fixed on the right bank of the Seine. Her reasonings were justified. She had left Wenceslas dressing himself, and she was sure that as soon as he felt he was safe from observation he would take the shortest way to the Hulots'. In fact, just as she was lingering along by the parapet of the quai Voltaire, gazing eagerly across the river, she spied the artist as he came through the gateway of the Tuileries to cross by the pont Royal. There she came up with the faithless one, and followed him unseen—for lovers seldom look back—to Madame Hulot's house, where she saw him enter like one in the habit of doing so.

This final proof, confirming as it did Madame Marneffe's revelations, drove Lisbeth beside herself. She reached Crevel's house in the state of mental exasperation which leads to murder, and found the newly appointed major waiting for her and for his children, Monsieur and Madame Hulot junior.

Célestin Crevel is so artless and true a representative of the Parisian parvenu that it is scarcely proper to enter the house of this fortunate successor of César Birotteau without an introduction. Célestin Crevel is indeed a world in himself, and as such he deserves, more than Rivet, the honor of having his portrait painted, not to speak of his importance in this domestic drama.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF MONSIEUR CREVEL.

Have you ever remarked how in childhood, or at the beginning of social life, we create for ourselves, often unknowingly, a model to be followed?: The clerk of a bank when he enters his master's salon dreams of possessing one like it. If he makes his fortune twenty years later, it is not the luxury of the time that he will set up in his home, but the old-fashioned luxury that formerly fascinated him. No one has any conception of the absurdities due to this retrospective envy, just as we are ignorant of the follies due to secret rivalries, which drive men to imitate a type they make for themselves and to spend their vitality in becoming shadows. Crevel was assistant-mayor because his predecessor had been one; he was major of his legion because he envied Birotteau's epaulets. Struck by the marvellous improvements effected by the architect Grindot at the moment when the former master of the "Queen of Roses" was on the top of the wheel, Crevel "didn't count his pennies," as he said, when it was a question of furnishing his apartment. He had gone, eyes shut and purse open, to Grindot, an architect who by that time was absolutely forgotten. It is impossible to know how long extinct glory survives through such belated admirations.

Grindot produced for the thousandth time his white and gold salon hung with red damask. His favorite ebonized woods, carted, as the carvings of his day were done, without delicacy, were now, since the exposition of the products of industry, reduced to be the pride of provincial households. The candelabras, sconces, fenders, chandeliers, clocks, etc., belonged to a tasteless and barren period. A round table, stationed in the middle of the salon, had a marble top inlaid with scraps of all the Italian and antique marbles to be had in Rome, where they manufacture these mineralogical slabs (not unlike the pattern sheets of tailors), which were the admiration of the bourgeoisie of Crevel's circle. Portraits of the late Madame Crevel, Crevel himself, his daughter and son-in-law, by Pierre Grassou, a painter of renown among Crevel's class of people (and to whom the ex-perfumer owed the absurdity of his Byronic attitude), decorated the walls where they were hung in pairs. Their frames, which cost a thousand francs each, were in keeping with the rest of the costly decorations in the cafe style, which would have made a true artist wince.

Wealth has never lost the slightest chance to prove its stupidity. We might have had ten Venices in Paris by this time if retired merchants had possessed that instinct for great things which distinguishes the Italians. It is only lately that a Milanese shop-keeper bequeathed a hundred thousand francs to the

Duomo for the regilding of the colossal figure of the Virgin which surmounts the cupola. Canova, in his will, orders his brother to build a church costing four millions, and his brother adds something of his own. A Parisian bourgeois (and they all, like Rivet, have a love for their city) would never think of supplying the bells which have always been lacking to the towers of Notre-Dame. Consider the large sums received by the government from estates to which there are no heirs. Our rulers might complete the embellishment of Paris with the moneys spent during the last fifteen years, by men like Crevel, on such nonsense as stucco mouldings, gilt pottery, and sham statues.

At the further end of the salon was a very magnificent study, furnished with tables and cabinets done in imitation of Boule.

The bedroom, hung with chintz, also opened into the salon. Mahogany in all its glory reigned in the dining-room, where paintings of Swiss views, richly framed, adorned the panels of the wall. Old Crevel, who indulged a dream of travelling in Switzerland, liked to possess that land in pictures in preparation for the happy moment when he should see it in reality.

Crevel, assistant-mayor and captain of the National Guard, decorated with the Legion of honor, had, as we have seen, reproduced all the grandeurs of his unfortunate predecessor. Just where the one had fallen under the Restoration, this other, totally insignificant, had risen—not by any strange freak of fortune, but by force of circumstances. In revolutions, as in storms at sea, treasures go to the bottom, the flimsier and less valuable matters float. César Birotteau, royalist, in favor at court, and exciting envy, became an object of attack to the middle-class opposition; whereas his successor, Crevel, was the embodiment of the same middle class triumphant.

The ex-perfumer's apartment, renting for three thousand francs and fairly bursting with the splendid vulgar things which money buys, was on the first floor of an old mansion standing between courtyard and garden. All within was kept in as perfect order as the coleoptera of an entomologist, for Crevel seldom lived there.

This sumptuous abode was the legal domicile of the ambitious major. The service was performed by a cook and a valet only. Crevel hired two extra servants and had the dinner sent in by Chevet when he feasted his political friends whom he wanted to dazzle, or whenever he entertained his family. His actual existence, formerly passed with Mademoiselle Héloïse Brisetout in the rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, was now transferred, as we have seen, to the rue Cauchat. Every morning the retired merchant (all retired shop-keepers call themselves retired merchants) spent two hours in the rue des Saussayes to look after his business, and gave the rest of his time to Zaïre, greatly to

Zaire's annoyance. Orosmane-Crevel had made a settled bargain with Mademoiselle Héloïse; she owed him five hundred francs' worth of happiness per month, without credit. Besides this, Crevel paid for his dinner and all extras. This primary contract—he made her besides a number of presents—seemed economical to the ex-lover of the now celebrated Josépha. He remarked to his friends apropos of the arrangement, that it was better to hire a carriage at so much a month than to keep a stable of your own. Nevertheless, if we remember the speech of the porter of the rue Cauchat to Baron Hulot, we may believe that Crevel did not escape the costs of groom and coachman.

Crevel had, as we have seen, turned his extreme love for his daughter to the profit of his vices. The immorality of his life was justified by the highest family reasons, and the ex-perfumer actually covered such an existence with a varnish of worthy motives. He posed for a man of broad views, generous, without pettiness of ideas, a lord in small matters—and all for the trifling sum of twelve or fifteen hundred francs a month. At the Bourse Crevel was held to be superior to his epoch, and all the more because he was a *bon vivant*.

In all this Crevel felt he had gone ahead of his predecessor Birotteau by a hundred strides.

"Well," he said sharply, as soon as he saw Bette, "so you are going to marry Mademoiselle Hulot to a young count you have been bringing up for her under your petticoat?"

"It seems to annoy you," answered Lisbeth, fixing her penetrating eyes on Crevel. "What interest have you in opposing my cousin's marriage? I am told you prevented her marrying the son of Monsieur Lebas."

"You are a good girl, and very discreet," said Crevel. "Now do you suppose I will ever forgive old Hulot for the crime of depriving me of Josépha? and above all, for having made an honest girl, whom I meant to marry in my old age, a worthless hussy, a stage-player, an opera singer? Never! never!"

"He's a good fellow, though," said Bette.

"Good-natured—very good-natured—too good-natured," returned Crevel. "I don't wish him ill; but I mean to have my revenge, and I shall take it. That's a fixed idea in my mind."

"Is it on that account that you never come to see Madame Hulot now?"

"Perhaps it is."

"Ha! ha! were you paying court to my cousin?" said Lisbeth, smiling. "I thought so."

"She treated me like a dog—worse than a dog—like a lackey, or, I might say, a political prisoner. But I shall succeed," he said, closing his fist and striking his brow with it.

“Poor man! It will be rather hard if he finds his wife defrauding him, now that his mistress has packed him off.”

“Josépha!” cried Crevel. “Has Josépha left him? deserted him? sent him about his business? Bravo, Josépha! Ah, Josépha, you’ve avenged me! I’ll send you a pearl for each ear, my ex-darling! But I don’t know anything about all this, because, after seeing you that day when Adeline sent for me, I went to stay with my friend Lebas at Corbeil, and I have only just returned. Héloïse moved heaven and earth to get me into the country. I knew the meaning of her tricks; she wanted to have a house-warming in the rue Cauchat with all those artists and vagabonds and literary fellows, and without me. I’ve been tricked; but I’ll forgive it, for Héloïse is so amusing. She’s an embryo Déjazet. Isn’t she funny? Here’s a note I found here on my return:—

OLD FELLOW—I have set up my tent in the rue Cauchat, and friends have made it as good as new—I took care of that. All’s well. Come when you like. Hagar awaits her Abraham.

Héloïse will tell me the news. She has got her Bohemia at her fingers’ ends.”

“But my cousin took Josépha’s treachery very well,” said Bette.

“Not possible?” exclaimed Crevel, stopping short in his walk, which resembled the swing of a pendulum.

“Monsieur Hulot is no longer young,” observed Bette, malicious.

“I know him. We are all alike under certain circumstances. Hulot can’t do without an attachment. He is even capable of returning to his wife,” muttered Crevel to himself; “she’d be a novelty to him; and then—adieu to my vengeance. Mademoiselle Fischer, you could—ah, you are laughing! You suspect something!”

“I am laughing at the ideas in your mind,” answered Lisbeth. “Yes, my cousin is still beautiful enough to inspire a passion. I should love her myself if I were a man.”

“He who has drunk will drink!” cried Crevel, sententiously. “You are not telling me the whole truth. The baron has found a consolation.”

Lisbeth nodded her head in the affirmative.

“Ah! he’s lucky if he can replace Josépha in a day,” continued Crevel, bitterly. “But I’m not surprised; he told me one night at supper that when he was young he always kept three mistresses—the one he was thinking of leaving, the reigning deity, and a third to whom he paid court with an eye to the future. Ah! he’s lucky to be a handsome man. Cousin Bette, I’d give—that is, I’d gladly spend—fifty thousand francs to get hold of that fine gentleman’s mistress, and show him that an old fellow with a pot-belly and a

bald head won't let his lady be whistled away from him with impunity."

"My situation," answered Bette, "obliges me to hear all and know nothing. You can talk to me without fear; I never repeat a word of what people confide in me. Why do you want me to break that rule? No one would ever trust me again."

"I know that," said Crevel; "you are the pearl of old maids. But there are such things as exceptions. Tell me, doesn't the family give you an income?"

"My pride," she said, "would not allow me to live at any one's expense."

"Ah! if you would only help me to revenge myself," continued the ex-perfumer, "I'd put ten thousand francs into an annuity for you. Cousin, tell me who has taken Josépha's place, and you shall have enough to pay your rent, your little breakfast, and the good coffee you are so fond of; you shall buy pure Mocha, if you like—hey? Ah! pure Mocha is so nice!"

"I don't care so much for the ten thousand francs—though it would give me nearly five hundred francs a year—as I do for absolute secrecy," said Lisbeth. "Don't you see, my dear Monsieur Crevel, the baron is very good to me? He is going to pay my rent."

"Yes, and for how long, do you suppose? The idea of counting on that!" cried Crevel. "Where will he get the money?"

"That I don't know. But he is spending at least thirty thousand francs in furnishing a house for the lady."

"A lady! What, a woman in society? The scamp, what luck! There's no one can equal him for that!"

"A married woman, very well-bred," remarked Bette.

"Really?" cried Crevel, opening his eye at the magic words "well-bred."

"Yes," answered Bette; "full of talent, musical, twenty-three years old, with a pretty, artless face, a dazzling skin, the teeth of a young puppy, eyes like stars, a splendid brow, and feet—such little feet I never saw the like!"

"And her ears?" cried Crevel, sharply stimulated by this catalogue of beauties.

"Ears fit to model."

"Little hands?"

"I tell you in one word that she's a jewel of a woman; virtuous, modest, full of delicacy—a fine nature, an angel, distinguished in every way. Her father was a marshal of France."

"Marshal of France!" shouted Crevel, giving a tremendous jump; "Good God! damnation! in the name of fortune! Oh, the rascal!—Excuse me, cousin, I am going crazy. I'd give a hundred thousand francs, I do believe—"

"But I tell you she is an honest woman, a virtuous woman; the baron has managed matters very well."

“He hasn’t a penny.”

“There’s a husband he has advanced.”

“Advanced where?” cried Crevel, with a sharp laugh.

“In his office already; and before long, if he is obliging, he will get the cross of the Legion of honor.”

“Government ought to take care whom they decorate, and not waste the cross on everybody,” said Crevel, with an air of political disgust. “What is there in that old cur, I should like to know? I think I’m as good as he,” he continued, looking in a mirror and assuming his attitude; “Héloïse often tells me (at a moment when women do not lie) that I am—wonderful.”

“Oh!” said Bette, “women like stout men; they are almost always kind. Between you and the baron I should choose you. Monsieur Hulot is witty, and he is a fine man with a good figure; but you, you are solid; and then—to tell you the honest truth—you seem to me the greater scamp of the two—”

“It is surprising how all women, even the pious ones, like that kind of man the best,” cried Crevel, catching Bette round the waist in his delight.

“The difficulty in this matter doesn’t lie there,” said Bette. “You can easily see that a woman with so many advantages wouldn’t be unfaithful to her protector for a trifle: it would cost you more than a hundred thousand francs, for the lady expects her husband to be at the head of a bureau in a couple of years. It was poverty that drove this poor little angel into the gulf.”

Crevel walked up and down the salon excitedly. “Does he love the woman?” he asked presently, when his desires, lashed by Lisbeth, had turned into a species of fury.

“Judge for yourself,” answered the old maid; “I don’t think he has obtained—*that*” clicking her thumbnail against one of her enormous white teeth, “and yet he has given her ten thousand francs’ worth of presents.”

“Oh! what a joke it would be,” cried Crevel, “if I had her first!”

“Goodness! I am very wrong to tell you these tales,” said Lisbeth, with a show of remorse.

“No; I am resolved to humiliate your family. Tomorrow I’ll buy you an annuity of six hundred francs in the Funds, but you must tell me all—the name and residence of the Duleinea. I’ll own to you that I never had a well-bred woman, and the height of my ambition is to know one. The houris of Mohammed are nothing in comparison with what I suppose a woman of the world to be. In short, she is my ideal, my folly—so great that Madame Hulot could never seem fifty years old to me,” he said, unaware of the keen intellect to which he was speaking. “Come, my dear Lisbeth, I am ready to sacrifice one hundred, two hundred thousand francs—Hush, here are my children, I see them crossing the courtyard. I give you my word that no one shall ever know what you tell me; in

fact, I don't want you to lose the baron's confidence, on the contrary. He must love the woman—that old granny!”

“He is crazy about her,” replied Bette. “He did not know where to find forty thousand francs for his daughter's *dot*, but he has already unearthed them for this new passion.”

“And do you think she loves him?” asked Crevel.

“What! at his age?” returned Bette.

“Oh! what a goose I am!” cried Crevel, “I, who let Héloïse have an artist, just as Henry IV. allowed Bellegarde to Gabrielle! Old age! old age!—Good evening, Célestine; how are you, my darling, you and your little one? Ah, here he is! I declare, he is going to look like me. Good evening, Hulot; are things going on well? I hear there's to be a marriage in the family before long.”

Célestine and her husband made, him a sign to be silent before Bette, and the daughter answered boldly, “A marriage? whose?” Crevel at once assumed a sly air as if to show that he repaired his indiscretion.

“Why, that of Hortense,” he said; “though it is not quite settled. I have just been staying with Lebas, and there was some little talk of Mademoiselle Popinot for his son—Come, dinner is ready.”

CHAPTER XIII.

LAST ATTEMPT OF CALIBAN OVER ARIEL.

By seven o'clock Lisbeth was on her way home in an omnibus, for she longed to see Wenceslas, who, she now knew, had duped her for the last three weeks, and for whom she was bringing as usual a bag full of fruit, selected by Crevel himself, whose affection for his cousin had suddenly redoubled. She ran up to the garret with a rapidity that took her breath away, and found the artist employed in finishing the decoration of a casket which he intended to offer to his dear Hortense. The edge of the cover was twined with hortensias, and little Cupids were playing among the foliage. To defray the cost of materials, the poor lover had carved two tall candelabra for Florent and Chanor, resigning to those dealers all rights in the beautiful work.

"You have been working too hard for the last few days, my dear friend," said Lisbeth, wiping his damp brow and kissing it. "Such exertion is dangerous in the month of August. Your health will suffer. See, here are some peaches and plums I have brought you from old Crevel's. Don't worry yourself about money. I have borrowed two thousand francs; and unless something unforeseen happens, you can repay me when you sell your clock. But I have my doubts about the lender, for he has just sent me this stamped paper."

And she placed the warning of arrest Rivet had already sent her under the sketch of Maréchal Montcornet.

"For whom are you doing that lovely thing?" she asked, taking up the branch of hortensias moulded in red wax, which Wenceslas had laid down while he ate the fruit.

"For a jeweller."

"What jeweller?"

"I don't know," said Wenceslas. "Stidmann asked me to twist the thing up for him; he is very much hurried."

"These are hortensias," she said in a hollow voice. "Why have you never done anything in wax for me? Was it so impossible to make *me* a ring, a casket—I don't care what—a keepsake!" she added, with a dreadful look at her victim, whose eyes, happily, were lowered. "Yet you say you love me."

"Can you doubt it, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, what an ardent 'mademoiselle'! Hear me! You have been my one thought ever since I found you dying here. When I saved your life you gave it to me. I have never reminded you of that engagement, but I made it binding on myself. I said, 'Since he has given himself to me, I swear to make him rich and happy.' Well, I have succeeded in making your fortune."

“How?” cried the poor fellow, overcome with joy, and too guileless to suspect a trap.

“I will tell you how,” resumed Bette.

Lisbeth could not deny herself the savage pleasure of watching Wenceslas as he looked at her with filial affection into which his love for Hortense interjected a certain ardor. Seeing, for the first time in all her life, the fires of passion in the eyes of a man, she fancied she had lighted them herself.

“Monsieur Crevel offers us a share of a hundred thousand francs in a joint-stock company, if you will marry me,” she said. “He has odd ideas, that old fellow. What do you say?” she added.

The artist, pale as death, looked at his benefactress with a lifeless eye that revealed his thoughts. He was silent, and seemed stupefied.

“No one ever told me so plainly that I am hideously ugly,” she said, with a bitter laugh.

“Mademoiselle,” answered Steinbock, “my benefactress can never be ugly in my eyes; I have the warmest affection for you, but I am only thirty and—”

“I am forty-three,” she interrupted. “My cousin Adeline, who is forty-eight, still inspires desperate passions; but she is beautiful—beautiful!”

“Fifteen years’ difference, mademoiselle! What sort of home could we make? For both our sakes, we ought, I think, to reflect. My gratitude is certainly equal to your benefactions. Besides, I shall repay your money in a few days.”

“My money!” she cried. “Oh, you treat me as if I were a heartless usurer.”

“Forgive me,” said Wenceslas, “but you speak of it so often—In short, *you* have created me; do not destroy me.”

“You wish to leave me—I see it plainly,” she said. “What has given you this strength of ingratitude—you who are made of wax yourself? Have I lost your confidence—I, your guardian angel—I, who have so often passed whole nights in working for you—I, who have spent the savings of all my life for your benefit, who for years have shared my bread, the bread of a poor working-woman, with you, and who gave you everything, even courage!—”

“Mademoiselle, enough! enough!” cried Wenceslas, falling on his knees and taking her hand. “Oh, say no more! In three days I will tell you all. Suffer me to be happy,” he said, kissing her hands. “I love, and I am loved.”

“Well, then, be happy, my son,” she said, raising him.

Then she kissed his forehead and hair with the frenzy of a man condemned to death, as he parts with all on his last morning.

“Ah, you are the noblest and best of women! You equal her I love!” cried the poor artist.

“I love you enough to tremble for your future,” she said, darkly. “Judas hung himself. All ingratitude is punished. You leave me, and you will never again do any work of value. Listen to me: without marriage—for I am an old maid, and I do not wish to stifle your youth, your poetry, as you call it, in arms that are as withered as the shoots of a grape-vine—but, without marriage, could we not live together? Reflect—I have the soul of business in me. With ten years’ toil I could amass a fortune, for my name is Thrift. Whereas, if you marry a young woman who costs money, you will spend all and only work to please her. Happiness gives nothing but memories. When I think of you I sit with hanging arms for hours together. Ah, Wenceslas, stay with me! There, there, I understand it all now! Yes, you shall have mistresses, pretty women like that little Marneffe, who wants to see you and who can give you pleasures you cannot have with me. You shall marry when I have amassed enough to give you thirty thousand francs a year.”

“You are an angel, mademoiselle, and I shall never forget this hour,” answered Wenceslas, wiping his tears.

“Ah, now you are all I ask, my dear,” she said, looking at him as though intoxicated.

Vanity is so all-powerful that Lisbeth believed she had triumphed. She had made a vast concession in offering Madame Marneffe. The strongest emotion of her life now took possession of her; she felt love for the first time inundating her heart. To gain another such hour she would have sold herself to the devil.

“I am engaged to be married,” answered Steinbock, “and I love a woman against whom no other woman can prevail. But you are, and ever will be, the mother whom I have lost.”

The words sent an avalanche of snow into the flaming crater. Lisbeth sat down, and gazed with gloomy eyes at that vision of youth, that high-born beauty, at the handsome brow, the fine hair, at all that roused within her the repressed instincts of a woman; and little tears, which dried instantly, forced themselves for a moment to her eyes.

“I do not curse you,” she said; “you are but a babe. May God protect you!”

She went downstairs and locked herself up in her apartment.

“She loves me,” said Wenceslas—“poor woman! How hotly eloquent she was! she is crazy.”

This last attempt of a hard and self-willed nature to keep that other image of beauty and charm for its own had so much of violence about it that it can be likened only to the savage vigor of a drowning man making a last effort to reach the shore.

On the next day but one, at half-past four o’clock in the morning, as Comte Steinbock was sleeping his deepest sleep, some one knocked at the door of the garret. He opened it and

saw two ill-dressed men, accompanied by a third whose coat proclaimed him a sheriff's officer.

"You are Monsieur Wenceslas, Comte de Steinbock?" said the latter.

"Yes."

"My name is Grasset, monsieur, successor to Monsieur Louchard, sheriff's officer."

"Well, what do you want of me?"

"I arrest you, monsieur; you must accompany us to Clichy. Be so good as to dress yourself. We have endeavored to spare your feelings,—I have not brought the municipal guard, and there is a carriage waiting below."

"Yes, we have done it comfortably," said one of the bailiffs, "and we count on your generosity."

Steinbock dressed, and was taken downstairs by the bailiffs, each holding an arm; he was put into the coach, and the driver started without orders, like a man who knew where to go. In less than half an hour the poor stranger was securely locked up, without having made an appeal, so great was his astonishment.

At ten o'clock, he was called down to the office of the prison to see Lisbeth, who, all in tears, gave him some money, telling him to live well, and get a room large enough to work in.

"My dear," she said, "don't speak of your arrast to any one; don't write it to a living soul; it would ruin your future. We must hide this disgrace. I shall soon get you released—I am going now to collect the money; don't be anxious. Write me what I shall bring you for your work. You shall be free soon or I shall die."

"Twice I owe my life to you!" he cried; "for I should lose more than my life if I were thought a scoundrel."

Lisbeth went away with a joyful heart; she hoped to break off the marriage with Hortense by keeping the exile under lock and key, and declaring that he had returned to Russia, pardoned by the exertions of a wife whom he had left there. To carry out this scheme she went to Madame Hulot's about three o'clock in the afternoon, though it was not the day on which she habitually dined there. But she longed to witness the tortures which her little cousin would undergo when the hour came for Wenceslas to arrive.

"Have you come to dinner, Bette?" said Madame Hulot, hiding her vexation.

"Yes."

"Then I will go and tell them to be punctual," said Hortense, "for you don't like waiting."

Hortense made a sign to her mother not to be anxious, for she meant to tell the footman to send away Monsieur Steinbock when he arrived; but the footman was out. Hortense was obliged to give her order to the chambermaid, and the chambermaid went upstairs to get her sewing before she went to the antechamber.

“Well, Hortense,” said Bette, when the young girl returned, “you never ask me now about my lover.”

“True enough, what is he doing?” said Hortense; “I see he has become celebrated. You ought to be satisfied,” she whispered in her cousin’s ear; “they* talk of nothing now but Monsieur Wenceslas Steinbock.”

“They talk too much,” answered Bette, aloud: “he is getting restless. I could charm him away from the dissipations of Paris, for I know my power over him; but it seems the Emperor Nicholas, wanting to keep such a fine artist in Russia, is going to pardon him.”

“Nonsense!” said the baroness.

“How did you hear that?” said Hortense, whose heart was seized with a sort of cramp.

“Why,” replied Bette, with devilish malice, “a person who has the best claim to him—his wife—wrote and told him so; he got the letter to-day, and wants to start at once. It is very foolish of him to leave France for Russia.”

Hortense glanced at her mother as her head drooped to one side; the baroness had barely time to catch her daughter before she fainted away, white as the lace about her neck.

“Lisbeth! you have killed her!” cried Madame Hulot. “You were born to be our misfortune!”

“How is it my fault?” exclaimed Bette, rising and assuming a threatening attitude, to which the baroness in her trouble paid no attention.

“I was wrong,” said Adeline, holding Hortense; “ring the bell, Bette.”

At this instant the door of the room opened; the two women turned their heads, and saw Wenceslas Steinbock, to whom the cook, in the absence of the chambermaid, had opened the front door.

“Hortense!” he cried, springing toward the three women.

He kissed his love on her forehead before the eyes of her mother, but so respectfully that the baroness made no objection. It was better than all the salts of England against the fainting fit. Hortense opened her eyes, saw Wenceslas, and her color returned. A moment later she was herself again.

“So this is what you were concealing from me?” said Bette, smiling at Wenceslas, and pretending to guess the truth from the evident confusion of her two cousins. “How came you to steal my lover?” she said to Hortense, leading her into the garden.

Hortense candidly related the whole story. Her father and mother, convinced, she said, that Bette had no idea of marrying, had authorized Comte Steinbock’s visits. But Hortense, like the Agnes of old, attributed to accident her purchase of the group and the first visit of the artist, who, she declared, was anxious to

ascertain the name of its owner. Steinbock soon joined the cousins and thanked Bette, privately, for so quickly delivering him. Lisbeth replied, jesuitically, that the creditor had made such vague promises that she only expected to release him on the following day, but she supposed the man had felt ashamed of the persecution and had taken the steps himself. She appeared pleased at the result, and congratulated Wenceslas on his happiness.

“Naughty boy!” she said to him aloud before Hortense and her mother, “if you had told me night before last that you loved my cousin Hortense and that she loved you, you would have saved me many tears. I thought you were going to abandon your old friend, your mentor, when, on the contrary, you are about to be my cousin. In future you are bound to me by ties, feeble it is true, but which suffice for the love I have sworn to you.”

She kissed Wenceslas on the forehead. Hortense flung herself into her cousin’s arms and burst into tears.

“I owe my happiness to you,” she said, “and I will never forget it.”

“Cousin Bette,” said the baroness, kissing Lisbeth, in her joy at the easy manner in which matters were settling themselves, “the baron and I have a debt to discharge toward you. Come and talk over matters in the garden,” she added, carrying her off.

So Lisbeth played, to all appearances, the part of guardian angel to the family; she felt herself an object of importance to Crevel, to Hulot, to Adeline, and to Hortense.

“We wish you not to work any longer,” began the baroness. “Let us suppose that you earn forty sous a day, not including Sundays, that makes six hundred francs a year. How much have you laid by?”

“Four thousand five hundred francs.”

“Poor cousin!” said the baroness, lifting her eyes to heaven as she thought of the toil and privations by which that sum had been accumulated through thirty years. Lisbeth, mistaking the meaning of the exclamation, saw in it the contemptuous pity of a parvenue, and her hatred acquired a fresh dose of gall at the very moment when Adeline was overcoming her distrust for her childhood’s tyrant.

“We will add ten thousand five hundred francs,” resumed Adeline, “and give you a life-interest in the whole, with reversion of the capital to Hortense. Thus you will get an income of six hundred francs secured to you.”

Lisbeth seemed at the summit of happiness. When she re-entered the salon, with her handkerchief at her eyes, apparently drying the tears of joy, Hortense told her of the favors which were being showered on Wenceslas, now the idol of the family.

When the baron entered the room the baroness had just formally addressed Steinbock as her son, and appointed that day

fortnight for the wedding, subject to her husband's approval. The whole family at once surrounded him, some to whisper these facts in his ear, others to embrace him.

"You have gone too far, madame," he said severely. "The marriage is not a certainty," he continued, with a look at Steinbock, who turned pale.

The luckless artist said to himself, "He has heard of my arrest."

"Come, children," said the baron, motioning Hortense and her lover into the garden.

He sat down with them on a bench in the kiosk, which was covered with lichen.

"Monsieur le comte, do you love my daughter as much as I loved her mother?" said the baron.

"More, monsieur," replied the artist.

"Her mother was the daughter of a peasant, and she hadn't a penny."

"Give me Mademoiselle Hortense such as she is, without a trousseau even."

"Absurd!" said the baron, smiling. "Hortense is the daughter of a councilor of state in the ministry of War, decorated with the grand cross of the Legion of honor, a brother of Comte Hulot of immortal glory, who will soon be a marshal of France! Besides, she has a dowry."

"It is true," said the happy lover, "that I seem to be ambitious, but if my dear Hortense were the daughter of a day-laborer, I should marry her all the same."

"That is what I wanted to know," said the baron. "Run away, Hortense, I want to talk to Monsieur le comte; you see now that he sincerely loves you."

"Oh, papa! I knew you were joking," cried the happy girl.

"My dear Steinbock," said the baron, with infinite grace of diction and charm of manner, as soon as he was alone with the artist, "I gave my son two hundred thousand francs when he married, and the poor lad has never asked for one penny of it, and he will never get one. My daughter's dowry is also two hundred thousand francs, which you must acknowledge to have received—"

"Yes, Monsieur le baron."

"How you catch me up!" said Hulot. "Have the goodness to listen. I do not expect from a son-in-law the generosity I have a right to claim from a son. My son knew what I could do and would do for his future. He will one day be a minister, and obtain his two hundred thousand francs readily. As for you, young man, it is another matter altogether. You will receive sixty thousand francs invested in the Funds at five per cent, in your wife's name. This will be charged with a small annuity for Lisbeth, but she won't live long; she is consumptive, as I happen to know; don't say

so, however, to any one; let the poor thing die in peace. My daughter will have an outfit costing twenty thousand francs; her mother puts six thousand francs' worth of her diamonds into it."

"Monsieur, you overwhelm me," said Steinbock, bewildered.

"As to the remaining hundred and twenty thousand francs—"

"Say no more, monsieur," cried the artist. "I wish my dear Hortense—"

"Will you listen to me, effervescent young man? As to the hundred and twenty thousand francs, I have not got them, but you will receive them—"

"Monsieur—"

"—from the government, in orders for statues which I pledge you my honor I will obtain for you. You already have an atelier at the marble-works. Exhibit a few fine statues and I will get you into the Institute. There is a great desire in high places to oblige my brother and me, and I hope to succeed in getting you certain work at Versailles which will secure at least a quarter of the sum. Then you will get orders from the municipality of Paris, and some from the Chamber of Peers—in short, you will have so much to do, my dear fellow, that you will be obliged to call in assistance. In that way I shall pay you the full amount. It is for you to say if a *dot* paid in that manner will satisfy you. Examine your own capabilities."

"I am capable of making my wife's fortune all alone, even if I had no such help," cried the brave artist.

"A man after my own heart!" exclaimed the baron. "Ah! that noble spirit of youth that fears nothing! I could have overthrown armies for the woman I loved. Well," he added, taking the young man's hand and stroking it, "you have my consent. Next Sunday we will sign the marriage contract, and the following Saturday— to the altar! It is my wife's birthday."

"All's well!" cried the baroness to her daughter, as they stood at the window. "Your father and your lover are embracing each other."

When Wenceslas reached home that evening he found an explanation of the enigma of his release. The porter gave him a large package which contained the papers relating to his debt and a receipt in full, accompanied by the following letter:—

MY DEAR Wenceslas—I went to your house at ten o'clock this morning, to take you to a royal highness who wants to see you. There I heard that certain brigands have carried you off to an isle of their own, called Clichy.

I went at once to find Léon de Lora and told him you couldn't get back short of four thousand francs, and that your future would be ruined if I could not take you to see the royal patron. Joseph Bridau, that man of genius once poor himself, who knows your story, happened luckily to be there. My son, between them, they made up the money! I went and paid that Bedouin who committed the crime of lèze-genius in locking you up. As I had to be at the Tuileries by twelve, I could not go and see you sniffing the air of freedom. You

are a gentleman; I have pledged my word for you to my two friends; but be sure you go and see them to-morrow.

Léon and Bridau don't wish you to pay them in money; they both want a group, and thereby they show their sense. That is what he thinks who wishes he could call himself your rival, but is only

Your comrade,

Stidmann.

P. S—I told the prince you would get back from a journey to-morrow, and he said "Very good, then to-morrow."

Wenceslas slept on a bed of roses without a crumpled leaf, spread for him by the halting goddess Favor, who steps more slowly for men of genius than Justice or even Fortune, because Jupiter has chosen not to bandage her eyes. Easily deceived by the wiles of charlatans, attracted by their trappings and their trumpets, she spends the time she ought to take in searching for men of merit hidden away in corners in gazing at such shows.

It is now necessary to explain how it came to pass that Baron Hulot was able to get together the amount of his daughter's dowry, and yet to meet the expenses of the delightful apartment in which he was about to install Madame Marneffe. His financial ideas bore the stamp of the genius that guides spendthrifts and reckless people through bogs and morasses where so many others perish. Nothing can better show the singular powers bestowed by vice; powers to which are owing the great deeds done from time to time by ambitious and licentious men—in fact, by all those who follow the devil.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH THE TAIL-END OF AN ORDINARY NOVEL APPEARS
IN THE VERY MIDDLE OF THIS TOO TRUE, RATHER
ANACREONTIC, AND TERRIBLY MORAL HISTORY.

On the morning of the preceding day an old man, Johann Fischer, in default of thirty thousand francs borrowed of him by his niece's husband, Baron Hulot, found himself compelled to make an assignment, unless the baron repaid him that day.

The worthy old man, with the white hairs of seventy winters on his head, had so blind a confidence in Hulot, who to the old Bonapartist was a ray of the Napoleonic sun, that he was walking with the bank-messenger quietly up and down the antechamber of the little ground-floor apartment, hired for eight hundred francs, where he carried on his divers enterprises in grain and forage.

"Marguerite has gone to get the money a few steps from here," he said to the messenger.

The man in gray with silver buttons knew the honesty of the old Alsatian so well that he was willing to go away without the thirty thousand francs, but the debtor insisted that he should wait, on the ground that it was not yet eight o'clock. Just then a cabriolet drove up; the old man sprang into the street, holding out his hand in perfect faith to Baron Hulot, who placed notes for thirty thousand francs in it.

"Drive three doors off from here and wait; I'll tell you why," said old Fischer. "Here, young man," he added, returning to the antechamber and counting out the money to the representative of the bank.

When the latter was fairly out of sight, Fischer called up the cab in which his august nephew, the late Emperor's right arm, sat waiting, and said, as he followed him into the house, "You don't want the Bank of France to know that you paid me that thirty thousand francs on a note endorsed by you. It is a good deal for a man like you to be willing even to sign it."

"Let us go and sit at the end of your garden," said Hulot. "You are sound?" he continued, seating himself under an arbor of grape-vines and looking the old man over as a dealer in human flesh looks at a substitute for the conscription.

"Sound for an annuity," answered the lean, vigorous, bright-eyed old man, in a lively tone.

"Do you suffer from heat?"

"No; on the contrary."

"What do you say to Africa?"

"A fine country! Frenchmen followed the Little Corporal over there."

"Well, for the safety of us all, you must go to Algiers."

“But my business here?”

“A clerk in the War office, just retired, will buy you out.”

“What am I to do in Algiers?”

“Furnish provisions for the army, grain and forage; I have your commission in my pocket. You can get your supplies in that country for seventy per cent less than the price you will receive for them.”

“How am I to get them?”

“By foraging, raiding, seizing them anywhere. Algiers (a country of which very little is known, though we’ve been there eight years) is full of all kinds of grain and forage. When these supplies belong to the Arabs we seize them under a variety of pretexts; when they belong to us the Arabs try to grab them. There is a great deal of fighting and struggling, and no one rightly knows how much is stolen on either side. In the open country there is no chance to count the bushels of wheat or the bales of hay as you do in the markets and the rue d’Enfer. Besides, the Arab sheiks, like our spahis, are fond of cash, and they’ll sell supplies at very low prices. The War Department requires a fixed quantity of provisions, and it estimates the price, not by their actual cost, but by the difficulty and clanger of procuring them. That’s Algiers from a victualler’s point of view. It will be a dozen years before we government folks see clear in the matter; meantime, individuals have good eyes. So you see, I send you out to make your fortune; but I put you there as Napoleon put a poor marshal on the throne of a kingdom where he wanted a finger in the pie. My dear Fischer, I am ruined. I must have a hundred thousand francs within a year.”

“I see no harm in getting them out of the Bedouins,” said Fischer, imperturbably. “We did that under the empire.”

“The purchaser of your business will come and see you this morning and pay you ten thousand francs down,” continued Hulot. “Won’t that be enough to get you to Africa?”

The old man nodded assent.

“As to the money you will want when you get there, don’t worry about that,” resumed the baron. “I want the rest of the purchase money here—”

“All is yours, my blood if necessary,” said the old man.

“Oh, don’t be alarmed,” cried Hulot, thinking his uncle more clear-sighted than he was; “as to the ways and means of getting your supplies, your honor is not in danger; everything depends on the military authorities; I have the appointing of them down there, and I am sure of them. Now, uncle Fischer, remember, this is a secret of life and death; I know you, I trust you, and I’ve spoken without circumlocution.”

“I’ll go,” said the old man; “and for how long?”

“Two years. You will make a hundred thousand francs of your own and live happy ever after in the Vosges.”

“It shall be as you wish; my honor is yours,” said the old man, tranquilly.

“Ah! there’s a man after my own heart!” cried the baron. “But you shall not start until you have seen your great-niece happily married. She will be a countess.”

But the raiding of Arabs, the ravaging of villages, and the sum paid by the war-clerk for Fischer’s business, could not all at once furnish the sixty thousand francs which the baron needed for his daughter’s *dot*, and the forty thousand which he was spending or intending to spend on Madame Marneffe. Besides, how and where had he obtained the thirty thousand francs he had just paid to old Fischer?

A few days earlier Hulot had insured his life for one hundred and fifty thousand francs for three years in two companies. With the policies, on which the premium was paid, in his pocket, he said to the banker Nucingen, baron and peer of France, with whom he was driving from the Chamber of Peers on their way to dinner:—

“Baron, I want seventy thousand francs, and I ask you to lend them to me. I’ll secure you by an assignment of my salary for three years; it is twenty-five thousand francs a year, and the total will therefore be seventy-five thousand. What do you say?”

“You may die.”

Hulot nodded.

“Yes,” he said, drawing a paper from his pocket, “and here’s a policy of insurance on my life for a hundred and fifty thousand francs, which shall be transferred to you to the amount of eighty thousand.”

“Subbose you lose your siduation?” said the millionaire baron, with his horrible German accent.

The non-millionnaire baron became thoughtful.

“Oh! I only make dat opjection to show you dat I run some dancher in gifting you dat sum. You moost be hard-up, for der pank has your zignadure.”

“I am just marrying my daughter,” said Hulot, “and I have no property—like other men who serve the government in these ungrateful days, when those five hundred bourgeois of the Chamber never think of rewarding patriotism and devotion as the Emperor did—”

“Nonzenze! you haf had Chosépha,” interrupted the banker; “dat egsplains all. Bedween ourselves, the Duc d’Hérrouville did you a great zervice in ztealing dat leech out of your burse.”

The transaction was accomplished by the help of a little usurer, named Vauvinet, one of those satellites of a great banking-house who lead the way for their rapacity, just as the pilot-fish is

said to precede a shark. This man promised Baron Hulot, for he was anxious to conciliate the favor of the government official, to give him at once thirty thousand francs in letters of exchange at ninety days' sight, promising to renew them four times, and not put them in circulation. The purchaser of Fischer's business was to pay forty thousand francs for it, and to receive an order to supply the forage needed in a department near Paris.

Such was the disgraceful entanglement into which a man, hitherto honest and one of the ablest supporters of the Napoleonic era, was drawn by his passions. Peculation and extortion were employed to pay for usury, usury to supply his lusts and marry his daughter. This science of prodigality, this toil after money were undertaken to appear superb in the eyes of Madame Marneffe, to be the Jupiter of a second-rate Danaë! No greater activity, intelligence, or courage was ever displayed in the honest pursuit of fortune than the baron now employed to plunge head foremost into a hornets'-nest. While attending to the affairs of his department he looked after the work-people, the upholsterers, and the smallest details of the rue Vanneau. With his mind absorbed in Madame Marneffe, he still went to the sessions of his Chamber, and was here, there, and everywhere, so that neither his family nor any one else was aware of what really preoccupied him.

Adeline, surprised to hear that her uncle Fischer was paid and to see a *dot* named in the marriage contract, was conscious of a certain uneasiness in the midst of her joy at her daughter's marriage, arranged apparently under honorable circumstances; but the evening before the wedding (appointed by the baron to coincide with the day on which Madame Marneffe was to take possession of her new apartment) Hector put an end to his wife's surprise and anxiety by the following marital announcement.

"Adeline," he said, "now that we have married our daughter all our anxieties on that head are over. The time has come for us to give up the world; for I shall only keep my situation three years longer, by which time I can retire on a pension. Meantime why should we spend so much money uselessly? This apartment costs six thousand francs a year, we keep four servants, and our costs of living are at least thirty thousand. Of course you wish me to fulfil my pledges?—well, I have assigned over my salary for the next three years to get the money to pay your uncle Fischer, and to provide for Hortense on her marriage—"

"Ah, you did right, dear friend," she cried, seizing his hands and kissing them.

His words had put an end to her fears.

"I must ask you to make a few little sacrifices," he continued, releasing his hands and laying a kiss on her brow. "I have found a handsome apartment in the rue Plumet, on the first floor, quite suitable, with elegantly carved woodwork, and costing only fifteen

hundred francs a month. You would need only one woman, and I can manage with one man.”

“Yes, Hector.”

“By living simply—though keeping up appearances of course—you needn’t spend more than six thousand francs a year, not counting my personal wants which I shall take upon myself to provide for.”

The generous woman threw her arms round his neck.

“What happiness to be able to prove my love for you!” she cried. “How wise, how full of resources you are!—”

“Once a week we will receive the family; on other days, you know, I seldom dine at home. You can very well dine twice a week with Victorine without compromising your dignity, and twice with Hortense; then, as I think I can make up my quarrel with Crevel, we can dine once a week with him; these five dinners and our family gathering at home will almost fill the week, without counting outside invitations—”

“I can economize,” said Adeline.

“Ah!” cried he, “you are the pearl of wives.”

“My good and precious Hector! I shall bless you with my last breath,” she answered, “for you have given my Hortense a happy future.”

This was how the home and support of the beautiful Madame Hulot began to dwindle; and it was, let us add, the first step in the total abandonment of the wife solemnly promised to the mistress.

Crevel, who was of course invited to the signing of the marriage contract behaved as though the scene with which this history opened had never taken place, and as if he had no cause of anger against Baron Hulot. Célestin Crevel was good-natured; he was always rather too much of an ex-perfumer, but he was now endeavoring to rise to the majestic in honor of his elevation as major of the Legion. He even talked of dancing at the wedding.

“Dear lady,” he said gracefully to Madame Hulot, “people in our position know how to forget; do not banish me from your home, and deign to embellish mine by dining there occasionally with our children. Do not fear; I will never again express the feelings which lie in the depths of my heart. I behaved like a fool; for I lose too much by forcing you to avoid me—”

“Monsieur, an honest woman has no ears for such speeches as those to which you allude. If you keep your word, you need not doubt the pleasure with which I shall welcome the end of a quarrel—always very painful in a family.”

“Well, old grumbler!” cried Baron Hulot, carrying Crevel forcibly into the garden. “You avoid me everywhere, even in my own house. Why should two amateurs of the fair sex quarrel about a petticoat? Bah; it is positively vulgar.”

“Monsieur, not being a handsome man like yourself, my powers of seduction do not enable me to repair my losses as easily as you appear to do—”

“Sarcasm, hey?” cried the baron.

“Allowable against conquerors when a man is vanquished.”

The conversation, begun on this tone, ended in a complete reconciliation; but Crevel, nevertheless, held firm to his private intentions of revenge.

Madame Marneffe wished to be invited to the marriage of Mademoiselle Hulot. To admit his future mistress into his wife’s salon the baron was obliged to ask all the clerks of his division and their wives. A grand ball thus became a necessity. Like a true housekeeper, Madame Hulot calculated that an evening party would cost less than a grand dinner and would enable them to receive more people. The marriage therefore made much noise in society.

The Maréchal Prince of Wissembourg and the Baron de Nucingen were the witnesses for the bride; Comte Eugène de Rastignac and Comte Popinot for Steinbock. After the latter grew famous the most illustrious members of the Polish emigration sought him out. The Council of State; the department of the government in which the baron was a director; and the army, wishing to honor the Comte de Forzheim, were all represented by distinguished members. At least two hundred invitations were solicited. We can therefore understand Madame Marneffe’s anxiety to appear in all her glory at such a party.

The baroness sold her diamonds for the furnishing of her daughter’s home, reserving only the finest for the wedding outfit. The sale brought twenty thousand francs, of which five thousand were spent on the trousseau—what were the remaining fifteen thousand for the furnishing of the new house, when we reflect upon the requirements of modern luxury? But Monsieur and Madame Hulot junior, Crevel and the Comte de Forzheim had severally made important presents; and the old uncle still held in reserve a large sum for the purchase of silver plate. Thanks to such help, the most exacting Parisian woman would be satisfied with the household of the new pair in the pretty apartment chosen in the rue Saint-Dominique near the esplanade of the Invalides. All was in keeping with the fresh young love of the young couple, so pure, so frank, so true on either side.

The great day arrived; and it was to be a great day for others beside Hortense and Wenceslas. Madame Marneffe, invited to be present at the marriage, intended to give a house-warming in the rue Vanneau on the morrow.

Is there any one who has not in the course of his life been present at a wedding ball? Every one can tax his memory and smile as he evokes recollections of those gayly dressed individuals

whose countenances are made gay to match their wedding garments. If any social fact ever proved the influence of environment it is the spectacle of a wedding fête. The smartness of some reacts so much on others that persons accustomed to wear appropriate clothing seem to belong to the category of those for whom a wedding is a marked event in their lives. Who does not remember the grave elderly men, so indifferent to the scene that they wear their ordinary' black coats; the old married people, whose faces betray a sad experience of the life the young ones are about to begin; the pleasures which effervesce, like the carbonic acid gas of champagne; the envious young girls, the married women preoccupied with their toilets, the poor relations whose scanty adornments contrast with those of the people in gold lace, the gourmands who think only of their supper, and the players with their minds on the card-table? Everybody is there—the rich and the poor, the envious and the envied, the philosophers and the fools—all grouped like plants in a basket round a central rare flower, the bride. A wedding ball is society in miniature.

At the liveliest moment of all Crevel took the baron by the arm, and whispered in his ear in the most natural manner in the world, "Bless my soul! what a pretty little woman that is in pink!—the one over there who is stabbing you with her eyes!"

"Who?"

"The wife of that sub-director you are pushing along, heaven knows how—Madame Marneffe."

"How do you know that?"

"Come, Hulot, I'll forgive all your wrongs to me if you will present me in her house, and I'll let you come to Héloïse Brisetout's. Everybody is asking who that charming creature is. Are you sure that none of your clerks whom I see here will tell how the appointment of her husband came about? Oh, you lucky scamp! She is worth a good many appointments. Come, let's be friends, Cinna."

"Better friends than ever," said the baron to the perfumer; "and I'll promise to do you a good turn. In less than a month I'll ask you to dinner with my little angel; for we have got to the angel point, old fellow. I advise you to do like me—give up the demons."

Cousin Bette, installed in a pretty little apartment on the third floor in the rue Vanneau, left the ball at ten o'clock, and came home to look at the two certificates of stock which were to yield her twelve hundred francs a year; the life-interest only being hers, Crevel's money reverting to Madame Hulot junior, and Adeline's to the Comtesse Steinbock. It is easy to guess how Crevel obtained the information about Madame Marneffe which he mentioned to the baron. Monsieur Marneffe being absent, no one knew this secret affair except cousin Bette, Hulot, and Valérie.

The baron had committed the great imprudence of presenting Madame Marneffe with a ball-dress far too elegant and costly for the wife of a sub-official; the other women were instantly jealous of her beauty and her clothes. Mutterings were heard behind the fans; for Marneffe's poverty was a matter of common talk among his fellow-clerks—in fact, the husband was begging for help at the very time when the baron fell in love with the wife. Moreover, Hector had not been able to conceal his delight at Valérie's social success. Elegant in appearance, quiet and demure in manner, she underwent that minute scrutiny which many women dread on their first entrance into society.

After putting his wife and daughter and son-in-law into a carriage, the baron managed to escape from the ball-room without being missed, leaving his son and daughter-in-law to play the part of hosts. He got into Madame Marneffe's carriage and went home with her to the rue Vanneau; but on the way he found her pensive and silent, almost sad.

"Does my happiness grieve you, Valérie?" he said, drawing her to him in the carriage.

"Ah, my friend, can you not understand that a poor woman must be sad at committing her first error, even though the shameful conduct of her husband may have freed her? Do you think I am without soul, without beliefs, without religion? You showed such indiscreet joy this evening—you have held me up in such an odious light—why, a collegian would have shown more decency than you! All those ladies tore me to pieces with their eyes and their tongues. There is no woman who does not care for her reputation; and you have destroyed mine. Ah, I am indeed yours! and nothing can now excuse my error but my fidelity. Monster!" she exclaimed, laughing, and letting him embrace her, "you knew very well what you were about. Madame Coquet, the wife of the head-director, sat down by me to admire my lace. 'It is English point,' she said; 'did it cost much, madame?' 'I really don't know,' I replied; 'it belonged to my mother; I am not rich enough to buy such things.'"

Madame Marneffe had contrived to so bewitch the old beau of the empire that he really believed she was committing her first error, and that he himself inspired her with such love as to make her forget her duty. She told him Marneffe had virtually abandoned her three days after their marriage; from that time she had remained a virtuous young girl, perfectly content and happy, because she regarded marriage as an odious thing. The situation, she admitted, was a sad one.

"If love were the same as marriage!" she said, weeping.

These coquettish lies, which most women in Valérie's situation are in the habit of telling, dangled the roses of the seventh heaven before the baron's eyes.

Early in the morning, the baron, at the height of happiness, having found his Valérie the most innocent of young girls and the most consummate of demons, returned to relieve Monsieur and Madame Hulot junior of their duty as hosts. The dancers, mostly strangers to the family, who often take complete possession of a house on the occasion of a wedding, were still in the mazes of that wearisome dance called the “cotillion,” the players were still at the card-table, and old Crevel had won six thousand francs.

The newspapers of the following day contained this item:—

“The marriage of Monsieur le Comte de Steinbock and Mademoiselle Hortense Hulot, daughter of Baron Hulot d’Ervy, councilor of state, and director in the ministry of War, took place this morning at the church of Saint Thomas d’Aquin. The ceremony was witnessed by a large company, among them several of our artistic celebrities—Léon de Lora, Joseph Bridau, Stidmann, Bixiou; also the notabilities of the War office, and the most distinguished members of the Polish emigration, Comte Paz, Comte Laginski, etc.

“Monsieur le Comte Wenceslas de Steinbock is the great nephew of the celebrated general of Charles the Twelfth, king of Sweden. Having taken part in the Polish insurrection, the young count sought refuge in France, where the fame of his genius has naturalized him among us.”

Thus, in spite of Baron Hulot’s terrible financial straits, nothing that public opinion demands was wanting to the marriage of his daughter, not even the notoriety given by newspapers. The celebration was in every respect equal to that of the marriage of Hulot junior with Mademoiselle Crevel. This fête lessened the talk which was current about the councilor’s financial difficulties, and the *dot* given to his daughter explained the necessity he was under of borrowing money.

Here ends what may be called the introduction to this history. What has now been related is to the drama which completes it like the premises of a proposition or the argument of a Greek tragedy.

CHAPTER XV.

ASSETS OF THE FIRM BETTE AND VALÉRIE—MARNEFFE ACCOUNT.

When a Parisian married woman is determined to make merchandise of her beauty it does not follow that she makes her fortune. We sometimes meet remarkable women of brilliant intelligence in frightful poverty, ending in misery a life begun in pleasure; and the reason is that the intention of following a disgraceful life for the sake of its profits under the guise of an honest married woman is not all that is required. Vice does not win its triumphs easily; it so far resembles genius that it needs a concurrence of fortunate circumstances to bring it to a climax of success. Do away with the strange preceding phases, of the Revolution and the Emperor would never have existed; he would have been a second edition of Fabert. Venal beauty without adorers, without celebrity, without the badge of dishonor given by dissipated fortunes, is like Correggio in a garret—genius neglected and expiring. The Parisian Laïs must therefore find some man rich enough to pay her price. She must also maintain a constant and extreme elegance about her, for it is in fact her banner; she must have the manners of good-breeding to flatter a man's self-love, the wit of Sophie Arnould to rouse the apathy of opulence, and she must make each libertine desire her by seeming faithful to a single one, whose happiness then becomes the envy of all.

These conditions, which that class of women call their "chances," are difficult to realize, although Paris is a city of millionnaires, of men of leisure, idle, blasé, and full of caprices. Providence appears to have specially protected in this respect the homes of the lower middle classes, for whom such obstacles are greatly increased by the surroundings in which they revolve. Nevertheless, there is many a Madame Marneffe in Paris—enough to justify our making Valérie a type in this history of the manners and customs of France. Some women of this class are instigated by real passion as well as by poverty—like Madame Colleville, who was so long attached to one of the greatest orators of the Left, the banker Keller; others are led solely by vanity, like Madame de la Baudraye, who always continued semi-virtuous, notwithstanding her flight with Lousteau. Some are carried away by a love of dress; others by the impossibility of keeping up appearances on insufficient means. Perhaps we may say that the parsimony of the State and the Chambers has caused many such evils, and given birth to great corruptions. The world is filled at the present moment with pity for the condition of the working-classes. They are represented as throttled by the manufacturers; but the State is ten times more cruel than the most grasping capitalist. In the

matter of salaries it pushes economy to the verge of folly. If a man works well, employers will pay him for his work; but what does the State do for the vast crowd of its obscure and faithful toilers?

To leave the path of virtue is an inexcusable crime in a married woman; yet there are degrees of crime in the situation. Some women, far from being absolutely depraved, hide their errors and remain respectable in appearance, like the two we have just named; while others add to their crime the shamelessness of speculation. Madame Marneffe is the type of those ambitious married courtesans who from the start adopt depravity with all its consequences, and resolve to make their fortune while amusing themselves, without scruple as to the means employed. Such women usually have, like Madame Marneffe, decoys and accomplices in their husbands. These Machiavellis in petticoats are the most dangerous of their sex, and of all the evil species of Parisian woman they are the worst. Courtesans like the Joséphas, the Schontzes, the Malagas, and the Jenny Cadines bear on their person a frank advertisement of their trade, as luminous as the red lantern of prostitution or the argand lamps of a gambling hell. A man knows when he sees them that he is going to his ruin. But soft-spoken decency, the semblance of virtue, the hypocritical affectations of the married woman who lets nothing be seen but the common household wants, who apparently sets her face against imprudence, lead men to a ruin that has none of the excitements of show, and is all the more strange because the man, though he may excuse his folly, can never explain it to himself. It is a shameful account of extravagance and expense, without the joyous intoxications that make a man a spendthrift. The father of a family ruins himself without meretricious fame or the consolations of gratified vanity.

This allocution will strike like an arrow to the heart of many families. There are Madame Marneffes in all conditions of social life, even in the midst of courts; for Valérie is a sad reality, drawn from life in every detail. Unhappily, this portrait will cure no man's mania for angels with soft smiles, pensive glances, artless faces, and hearts that are money-bags.

About three years after the marriage of Hortense—that is, in 1841—Baron Hulot d'Ervy was supposed in the eyes of the world to have reformed, and yet Madame Marneffe was costing him twice as much as Josépha had ever done. Valérie, however, though always well dressed, affected the simple habits of a woman married to a government employe; she kept all her luxury for her own apartment and her personal adornment at home. She sacrificed her Parisian vanities to her dear Hector; but whenever she did go to the theatre it was always in a pretty new bonnet and a dress of the choicest elegance; the baron took her there in a carriage, and provided one of the best boxes.

The apartment in the rue Vanneau, which occupied the whole of the second floor of a large modern house standing between the courtyard and garden, had an air of the utmost respectability. Its luxury was nothing more than chintz hangings and handsome, convenient furniture. The bedroom, however, was exceptional, and displayed an extravagance dear to the Jenny Cadines and the Schontzes—lace curtains, cashmeres, brocatelle portières, chimney ornaments made from designs by Stidmann, a little étagère crowded with treasures—for Hulot did not choose to put his Valérie in a nest inferior in magnificence to the lair of gold and pearls of a Josépha. The two principal rooms—a dining-room and salon—were modestly furnished, the one in red damask, the other in carved oak. But at the end of six months, the baron, led away by the desire to have everything in keeping, added ephemeral luxury to this plain elegance, such as pieces of costly furniture and a silver dinner service costing twenty-four thousand francs.

In two years Madame Marneffe's house acquired the reputation of being very agreeable. Cards were played there. Valérie herself was held to be witty and amiable, and a rumor was spread, to justify the change in her mode of living, that a large legacy from her "natural father," Maréchal Montcornet, had been paid to her by a trusted agent with whom he had privately left it. With an eye to the future, Valérie added religious cant to social hypocrisy. Punctilious in her Sunday observances, she got the credit of piety. She collected money in church, became one of the almoners, carried the communion bread, and did some little good in the parish with Hector's money. Everything about her establishment was proper. Many persons spoke of the purity of her connection with the baron—an old man, they said, and one with a platonic liking for the bright spirit, the charming manners, and the conversation of Madame Marneffe, a liking like that of the late Louis XVIII. for a well-phrased note.

The baron always left the house with the rest of the company at midnight, and returned half an hour later. The preservation of the secret is thus explained: The porters of the house were Monsieur and Madame Olivier, who by the influence of the baron—a friend of the proprietor in search of a concierge—had passed from their humble and unproductive position in the rue du Doyenné to the more lucrative and pretentious lodge in the rue Vanneau. Now, Madame Olivier, formerly *lingère* in the household of Charles X., having, as she expressed it, fallen from that position with the legitimate branch, was the mother of three children. The eldest, an under-clerk in a notary's office, was the object of his parents' fervent adoration. This Benjamin, threatened by the conscription for the last five years, was just about to have his brilliant career cut short when Madame Marneffe got him exempted from military service by reason of a physical defect

such as the examiner of recruits can be made to discover when some official power whispers in his ear. Olivier—formerly groom in the stables of Charles X—and his spouse would henceforth have sacrificed all mankind on the altar of Baron Hulot and Madame Marneffe.

What could the world, ignorant of the episode of the Brazilian, Monsieur Montez de Montéjanos, say against this establishment? Nothing. Society is always friendly to the mistress of a salon where it can amuse itself. Madame Marneffe added to her other charms that of being supposed to possess occult powers. For this reason Claude Vignon, now secretary to the Maréchal Prince de Wissembourg, who aspired to belong to the Council of State in the capacity of master of petitions, became a constant visitor at her house. There were, besides, a good many deputies who lived well and played high. Madame Marneffe made up her social circle with judicious slowness and deliberation; sets were carefully formed among persons of like opinions and manners, all interested in maintaining the merits and charms of the mistress of the salon. Social cliquism—remember this axiom—is the Holy Alliance of Paris. Interests always end by dividing men; but their vices bind them together.

Three months after Madame Marneffe was established in the rue Vanneau she received Monsieur Crevel, now mayor of his arrondissement and officer of the Legion of honor. Crevel hesitated over his advancement for some time. It was necessary to give up that precious uniform of the National Guard in which he strutted at the Tuileries feeling himself as military as the Emperor; but ambition, tickled by Madame Marneffe, was stronger than vanity. Monsieur le maire now considered his relations with Mademoiselle Héloïse Brisetout incompatible with his political situation. In fact, some time before his accession to the throne of the mayoralty his gallantries had been wrapped in profound mystery. But he had, as the reader may now guess, paid for the right to take his revenge on the baron for the loss of Josépha, as often as he pleased, by an investment in the Funds yielding six thousand francs a year, placed in the name of Valérie Fortin, wife, separated as to property, of the Sieur Marneffe. Valérie, probably inheriting from her mother the particular genius of a kept mistress, had guessed at a glance the character of her grotesque adorer. The remark Crevel had let drop to Lisbeth, “I never had a well-bred woman,” which the latter repeated to her dearest Valérie, was largely discounted in the transaction by which Madame Marneffe got her six thousand francs in the Funds. Since then she had been careful not to let her prestige diminish in the eyes of the former commercial traveller of César Birotteau.

Crevel had made a marriage of convenience with the daughter of a miller of La Brie, an only daughter, whose inheritance really

made up three-fourths of his fortune; for retail dealers make their money less in their business than by such rustic connections. Very many farmers, millers, grain and provision dealers in the neighborhood of Paris dream of the glories behind a counter for their daughters, and see in some retail-shopkeeper, a jeweller, or money-changer a son-in-law more after their own hearts than notaries or lawyers, whose superior position makes them uneasy; they are afraid of being despised, later, by those leaders of the bourgeoisie. Madame Crevel, a rather ugly woman, very vulgar and very silly, and who died in good season, had never given her husband any other pleasures than those of paternity. At the beginning of his commercial career, Crevel, naturally a libertine, shackled by the duties of his position and restrained by poverty, had played the part of Tantalus. In "relations," to use his own expression, with the most distinguished women in Paris, who bought their perfumes at the "Queen of Roses," he took them out to their carriages with the obsequiousness of a shopkeeper, admiring their grace, their way of wearing their clothes, and all the unnamable charms of what is called race. To rise to the level of one of these fairies of social life was a desire conceived in youth and long buried within his soul. To win the favors of Madame Marneffe was to him not only the realization of his dream, but also the gratification of his pride, vanity, self-love, and vengeance, as we have seen. His ambition rose with success. He felt enormous delights of mind; and when the mind enjoys, and the heart echoes the enjoyment, pleasures are doubled. Madame Marneffe offered rare charms which Crevel had never hitherto suspected; Josépha and Héloïse never loved him, whereas Madame Marneffe thought it judicious to befool him on that point, for his purse appeared to be inexhaustible. The deceptions of venal love are often more charming than reality. True love is given to quarrels, like those of sparrows, which sometimes strike to the quick; but a quarrel in jest is only a sop thrown to the vanity of a dupe. He was constantly brought up against the virtuous reluctance of his Valérie, who played remorse and talked of what her father must think of her in the paradise of the brave. He was continually forced to vanquish a certain coldness over which the clever trickster made him believe that he had triumphed. She seemed to yield to the mad passion of the ex-shopkeeper and then, as if ashamed, she resumed, like an Englishwoman, the pride of a decent woman and the stiffness of virtue, crushing her Crevel with the weight of her dignity; for he was really taken in to suppose her virtuous. She possessed, moreover, special faculties for tenderness, which made her as indispensable to Crevel as to Hulot. Before the world she exhibited an enchanting union of simple and pensive modesty, irreproachable propriety of conduct, and wit enhanced by the charm and grace and manners of a Creole; but when it came to a

tête-à-tête she went far beyond a courtesan—she was droll, amusing, and fertile in new inventions. This contrast was delightful to an individual of the genus Crevel. He was flattered by believing himself the inspirer of the comedy; he thought it played for his sole benefit, and he laughed at the delightful hypocrisy of the actress.

Valérie had lately adapted the baron admirably to his present position. She made him show his age by one of those delicate flatteries which serve to show the diabolic cleverness of such women. In organizations long exempt from the inroads of age a moment comes when, like a besieged city which has long held out, the real weakness declares itself. Foreseeing the approaching decadence of the ex-imperial beau, Valérie saw fit to hasten it.

“Why do you pinch yourself in, old man?” she said six months after their clandestine and doubly adulterous marriage. “Do you intend to be faithless to me? *I* like you much better not laced up. Please sacrifice your artificial graces to my feelings. Do you think the two sous’ worth of varnish on your boots, or that india-rubber belt, and the buckram waistcoat, and the patch of false hair on your head, is what I love in you? Besides, the older you are the less I shall fear a rival.”

Believing as firmly in the divine friendship as in the love of Madame Marneffe, with whom he expected to end his days, the baron followed her advice, and ceased to dye his hair and beard. On receiving this touching acknowledgment of his Valérie’s jealousy, the handsome Hulot appeared one fine day with a blanched head. Madame Marneffe had no difficulty in persuading her dear Hector that she had already seen the white line formed by the growth of his hair a score of times.

“White hair is admirably becoming to your face,” she said, gazing at him; “it softens your features; you are infinitely handsomer; you are charming.”

The baron, once launched in this direction, cast off his leather waistcoat and corset, and got rid of his various straps. This done, his stomach dropped down and obesity declared itself. The oak became a round tower, and the heaviness of his movements was the more alarming because the baron grew unexpectedly old after assuming the part of Louis XH. His eyebrows remained black and dimly recalled the late handsome Hulot, just as a fragment of sculpture remains on feudal walls to show what the castle once was in its palmy days. This contrast made the glance of his eye, still keen and youthful, all the more singular, coming as it did from the withered face lately painted with the colors of Rubens, where certain scars and lengthened wrinkles now appeared, revealing the struggles of passion in rebellion against the verdict of nature. Hulot was henceforth one of those human ruins in which virility shows in hairy tufts on the nose, ears, fingers, producing the same

effect as the lichen on the well-nigh eternal monuments of the Eternal City.

It may be asked how Valérie contrived to keep Hulot and Crevel peaceably at her side when the vindictive major was longing for a startling triumph over Hulot. Without making any direct reply to a question which will be answered in the sequel, it may be said that Bette and Valérie had invented between them a stupendous machine whose powerful action aided this result. Marneffe, beholding his wife much embellished by the surroundings in which she now reigned, like the sun in the sidereal system, was made to appear to the eyes of others once more infatuated about her and consequently jealous. When this jealousy caused Monsieur Marneffe to put himself in the way, Valérie's favors became of course more precious. Marneffe, however, seemed to place confidence in his director, though it sometimes degenerated into a fawning compliance which was half ridiculous. The one who displeased him was invariably Crevel.

Marneffe, destroyed by debaucheries of every kind, had grown as hideous as an anatomical wax figure. Walking disease as he was, he nevertheless appeared in handsome coats, with his tottering laths of legs incased in elegant trousers, and his withered breast covered with spotless perfumed linen which concealed the fetid odors of his person. The hideousness of vice at its last gasp, and arrayed in the pink of fashion—for Valérie dressed Marneffe in keeping with her own fortune—horrified Crevel, who was unable to bear the look in the glazing eyes of the subdirector. Discovering the curious power with which Lisbeth and his wife had invested him, the scoundrel amused himself by employing it; he played it like an instrument; cards being the last resource of this soul, as worn-out as the body that held it, he plucked Crevel, who felt himself obliged, as he said, to “knock under” to the man he thought he was deceiving.

Seeing Crevel so submissive to the hideous and infamous mummy whose corruption he seemed to ignore, and hearing Valérie express the utmost contempt for the ex-perfumer, laughing at him as one laughs at a buffoon, the baron thought himself so safe from all rivalry that he constantly invited his successful rival to dinner.

Valérie, guarded by two passions standing sentinel beside her and by the semblance of a jealous husband, attracted all eyes, and excited all desires in the circle where she reigned. Thus it was that she had come in less than three years (all the while keeping up appearances) to realize the most difficult conditions of a courtesan's success, a success which the latter seldom attains even by the help of scandal, audacity, and the notoriety of her life in open day. Like a diamond exquisitely set by Chanor, Valérie's beauty, formerly buried in the rue du Doyenné, was now estimated above its actual

value, and she had several aspiring lovers; among them Claude Vignon, who secretly loved her.

This retrospective explanation, very necessary when we meet people after a lapse of three years, may be called the schedule of the Valérie account. Now for that of her associate, Lisbeth Fischer.

CHAPTER XVI.

ASSETS OF THE FIRM BETTE AND VALÉRIE—FISCHER ACCOUNT.

Cousin Bette's position in the Marneffe establishment was that of a poor relation combining the functions of companion and housekeeper; but she met with none of the humiliations which, as a general thing, are the lot of women unfortunate enough to be forced into accepting such anomalous positions. Lisbeth and Valérie presented the spectacle of one of those rare friendships and so little probable among women that Frenchmen, always too witty and wise, instantly ridicule them. The contrast between the hard and virile nature of the Lorraine peasant-woman and the soft Creole temperament of Valérie seemed to justify such scepticism. Madame Marneffe, however, had lately given proofs of her affection for her friend in a matrimonial matter, which was destined, as we shall see, to carry forward the old maid's revenge.

An immense change had taken place in Bette; Valérie, who had chosen to superintend her toilette, effected marvels. The strange creature, submitting to corsets, came out with a fine figure, smoothed her hair with bandoline, accepted her dresses just as they were delivered to her by the dress-maker, wore dainty boots and gray silk stockings; all of which were charged in Valerie's bills and paid for by whoever the said bills might happen to concern. Thus restored, though still clinging to the yellow cashmere, Bette would have been unrecognizable to those who had only known her three years earlier. Like a black diamond, the rarest of all diamonds, cut and polished by a skilful hand and placed in a setting that became it, she was appreciated by certain ambitious clerks who perceived her real value. Whoever saw Bette for the first time shuddered involuntarily at the aspect of barbaric poetry which Valérie contrived to impart to the old maid's person by the cultivation of her dress, and the art with which she framed the lean and olive face in heavy bandeaus of dark hair matching in color the brilliant eyes, and forced the inflexible figure into lines of symmetry. Bette, like a madonna of Cranach or Van Eyck, or some Byzantine virgin descending from her frame, had all the stiffness and angularity of those mysterious creations, cousins-german of Isis and the divinities cut in rock by the Egyptian sculptors. She was basalt, granite, porphyry, on two legs. Secure from want for the rest of her days, the poor relation was in fine good-humor, and brought gayety to all the tables where she dined. The baron paid the rent of her little apartment, furnished, as we know, from the leavings of Valérie's old bedroom. "Having begun life," Bette said, "as a half-starved nanny-goat, I am ending it *en lionne*." She still worked certain difficult bits of gold lace for Monsieur Rivet so as not to waste her time. There was little danger

of that, however, for she was, as we shall see, extremely busy; but she worked at her trade all the same because it is not in the nature of the French peasantry to lose the smallest chance of gain; in this respect they are like Jews.

Every day, at dawn, cousin Bette went to market accompanied by the cook. Her purpose was to make the household expenses, which were ruining Baron Hulot, a source of wealth to Valérie, who did in fact save a great deal of money out of them.

What mistress of a household since 1838 has not felt the fatal effects of those Socialist doctrines that are spread through the wage-classes by incendiary writers? In every home the plague of servants is the worst of all financial sores. With rare exceptions (which merit the Montyon prize) cooks are domestic robbers, hired robbers, for whom the government has amiably made itself the receiver of stolen goods; thus developing the tendency to theft already half-sanctioned among cooks by the well-worn jest on the "handle of the basket." Where these women once filched forty sous for their lottery tickets they now take fifty francs for the savings bank. And the starched puritans who amuse themselves by trying philanthropic experiments upon France believe they have improved the masses! Between the markets and the tables of their employers these robbers have set up a secret custom-house, and the whole municipality is not so keen in exacting its dues, as the cooks of Paris in illicitly collecting theirs. Besides the fifty per cent which they subtract from the provisions, they demand large bribes from the dealers. The latter, even the best of them, are afraid of this secret power; they pay what it asks without a word—carriage-makers, jewellers, tailors, each and all of them! If any one attempts to question these proceedings, the servants reply insolently, or pretend stunty; they make inquiries about the character of their masters, just as formerly the masters inquired about theirs. This evil, which seems to be reaching a climax and against which the courts are beginning to proceed (but in vain), will not disappear until a law is passed making servants' wages payable only on certificates, like those of workmen. The evil would then vanish as if by magic. Servants would be compelled to produce their book of certificates, and their employers would be equally compelled to write down the reasons why they are dismissed; the general demoralization would thus be effectually curbed. People in high places have little idea of the depravity of the lower classes in Paris; it almost equals their jealousy of those above them, a passion which is eating into their hearts. Statistics are silent as to the enormous number of workmen not more than twenty years old who marry cooks of forty and fifty who have thus enriched themselves by theft. We may well shudder in thinking of the results of such marriages from the triple view of criminality, bastardism of the race, and wretched homes. As to the purely

financial evil done by these domestic robbers, it is vast from a political point of view. The costs of living, thus doubled, deprive many families of superfluities. Superfluity, what is it?—half the commerce of nations, and the ease and elegance of life. Books and flowers are as necessary as bread to a great many persons.

Lisbeth, well aware of this open sore in Parisian households, intended to manage Valérie's household when she offered her assistance in that terrible scene in which they swore to live together as sisters. She therefore sent to her native Lorraine for a relation on her mother's side, a pious old maid of extreme honesty, who was formerly cook to the Bishop of Nancy. Fearing, however, that in spite of her ignorance of Paris ways, bad advice might ruin the loyalty of this treasure, Lisbeth made a practice of accompanying Mathurine to market, and tried to teach her the art of buying. To know the proper price of everything and thus secure the seller's respect, to choose the provisions in season (fish especially) when they are not too dear, to keep the run of the markets and buy cheap foreseeing a rise, these are household qualities absolutely essential to domestic economy in Paris. As Mathurine received very good wages and many presents she liked her place well enough to be glad to make bargains. So that for some time past she had rivaled Lisbeth, who thought her pupil sufficiently trained to release her from going to market except on the days when Valérie had company, which, we may add parenthetically, happened very often. The baron had begun by observing the strictest decorum; but his passion for Madame Marneffe became in a short time so eager and unsatisfied that he could scarcely bear to leave her. From dining at her house four times a week he grew to take that meal there every day. Six months after his daughter's marriage he began to pay two thousand francs a month for his board. Madame Marneffe invited the persons whom her dear Hector desired to meet. The table was always laid for six, and the baron was at liberty to bring three unexpected guests. Lisbeth's economy solved the extraordinary problem of keeping up this table luxuriously on one thousand francs a month, leaving the other thousand for Madame Marneffe. Valérie's dress being chiefly paid for by Crevel and the baron, she contrived to lay by another thousand a month from that source. And thus it happened that in three years that pure and artless little woman had laid by a snug sum of over a hundred and fifty thousand francs. She accumulated her dividends from the Funds, adding them to her monthly profits, increasing them still further by the enormous gains which Crevel obtained for her by investing the capital of "his little duchess" in lucky financial operations. Crevel had initiated Valérie in the slang of business and the nature of transactions at the Bourse, and like all Parisian women she was soon more skilful than her master. Lisbeth, who never spent a penny of her twelve

hundred francs, and whose board and lodging and clothes were all provided, so that she never even carried a purse of her own, had also laid by a little capital of five or six thousand francs, which Crevel was paternally nursing.

The baron's love and Crevel's love were nevertheless an oppressive burden for Valérie to carry. The day on which this tale begins the little woman, excited by some one of those events which occasionally ring in our ears like the bell which calls up a swarm of bees, had gone to Lisbeth's apartment to make her moan, with much volubility, after the fashion of women who soothe the lesser miseries of their life by smoking, as it were, with their tongues the cigarette of complaint.

"Lisbeth, my love! this morning, two hours of Crevel! it is enough to kill me! Oh! I wish you could take my place!"

"Unfortunately I can't," said Lisbeth, laughing; "I shall die a virgin."

"To belong to both those old men! There are times when I'm ashamed of myself—Ah! if my poor dear mother only saw me!"

"Are you taking me for Crevel?" said Lisbeth.

"Tell me, my dear little Bette, that you don't despise me."

"Ah! if I were as pretty as you I should have my adventures!" cried Lisbeth; "that's my answer."

"But *you* would have followed the dictates of your heart," said Madame Marneffe, sighing.

"Bah!" replied Lisbeth, "Marneffe is a corpse they've forgotten to bury, the baron is your husband, and Crevel your lover; you are only doing like other women."

"No, but that isn't it, my dearest; My sadness comes from something else, and you don't choose to understand me."

"Yes I do," cried the peasant-woman, "for the something else is part of my revenge. Don't be impatient; I am bringing it about."

"To love Wenceslas till I waste away, and yet never to see him!" exclaimed Valérie, stretching out her arms. "Hulot asked him to come and dine here and he refused! He does not know that I idolize him—the wretch! What's that wife of his? a pretty bit of flesh. Yes, she is handsome; but I—well, I feel it—I am something worse."

"Don't worry yourself, my little girl, he'll come," said Lisbeth, speaking like a nurse to a fractious child, "I shall manage it."

"But when?"

"This week perhaps."

"Give me a kiss."

The two women were really one; all Valérie's actions, even her caprices, her pleasures, her sulks, were discussed and adopted after mature deliberation between the pair.

Lisbeth, strangely excited by the wanton life of her friend, advised Valérie in all her actions, pursuing the thread of her own

vengeance with pitiless logic. Moreover, she adored the woman whom she had made her daughter, her friend, her love; she delighted in the soft Creole languor and obedience of this new idol; she chattered to her daily with more pleasure than she had ever derived from Wenceslas; they laughed together at their mutual devilry, at the folly of men, and counted up their growing gains and their respective fortunes. Lisbeth found in her schemes and in this new friendship a field for her native energy richer far than that which her crazy love for Wenceslas had given her. The enjoyments of hatred are the keenest and most powerful of all. Love is the gold and hatred is the iron of that mine of sentiments which lie deep within us. But beside all this, Lisbeth found delight in Valérie's beauty; that beauty in full glory which she adored as we adore something we do not possess, a beauty far more amenable than that of Wenceslas, which was always to a certain degree frigid and unfeeling.

At the end of three years Lisbeth was beginning to see the progress of the subterranean mine to which she was sacrificing her life and devoting her intellect. Bette thought and Madame Marneffe acted. Madame Marneffe was the axe, Bette the hand that wielded it, and the hand was striking down with rapid blows the family who grew more hateful to her day by day; for we hate even as we love, daily more and more. Love and hatred are passions that feed upon themselves, and of the two hatred lives longest. Love is limited by restricted powers; its forces are those of life and generosity; but hatred resembles death, or avarice; it is, if we may say so, an operative abstraction, acting outside of persons and events. Lisbeth had found the vocation that suited her and brought all her faculties into use; she was at the helm of events like the Jesuits, with a species of occult power. The regeneration of her person kept pace with this development of her inner being. Her face shone. She dreamed of becoming Madame la Maréchale Hulot.

The foregoing scene in which the two friends cruelly told each other their inmost thoughts, without the slightest circumlocution of language, took place one morning after Lisbeth had been to market to prepare for a choice dinner. Marneffe wanted to obtain Monsieur Coquet's place at the War office, and Valérie had invited that official, together with the virtuous Madame Coquet, hoping that the baron might negotiate his resignation that evening. Lisbeth was dressing to go to Madame Hulot's, where she expected to dine.

"Come back in time to pour out tea, my Bette," said Valérie.

"I will try to."

"Try to! you are not going to sleep with Adeline and drink in her tears while she sleeps, are you?"

“Ah, if I only could!” answered Lisbeth, laughing; “she is expiating her happiness and I am comforted. I remember my miserable childhood. Every one has his day, she has had hers; now she will be in the mud, and I—I shall be Comtesse de Forzheim!”

CHAPTER XVII.

ASSETS OF THE LEGITIMATE WIFE.

Lisbeth started for the rue Plumet, whither she went from time to time as we go to a theatre to feast our emotions.

The apartment which Hulot had selected for his wife contained a large antechamber, a salon, dining-room, bedroom, and dressing-room. The dining-room adjoined the salon. Two servants' rooms and a kitchen on the third floor completed the establishment, which was suitable for a councilor of state and a distinguished member of the War department. The house itself, the courtyard and staircase, were handsome. The baroness, compelled to furnish her salon, bedroom, and dining-room with the relics of her former splendor, had taken the best articles from the old apartment in the rue de l'Université. The poor woman loved those silent witnesses of her past happiness; to her they had an eloquence that was half consoling. She saw in the faded pattern of the carpets, scarcely visible to any eye but hers, the memory of other flowers of which they were the symbol.

"Whoever entered the vast antechamber, where a dozen chairs, a barometer, a large stove, and long curtains of white calico bordered with red recalled the barren waiting-room at a ministry, would have felt chilled to the heart at the thought of the blank solitude in which this woman lived. Grief, like pleasure, makes an atmosphere of its own. The first glance cast on a home reveals to an observing eye the reign of love or of despair. Adeline was usually to be found in a vast bedroom, furnished with the fine work of Jacob Desmalters in dappled mahogany, decorated, in the style of the empire, with bronzes whose effect contrives to be even colder than that of the brasses of Louis XVI. Those who loved her shuddered to see the lonely woman sitting in a Roman chair, before a work-table adorned with sphinxes, all her color gone, affecting a false gayety, yet retaining her dignity of manner, just as she preserved the gown of dark blue velvet which she wore when at home. The proud, courageous soul supported the outward body and maintained its beauty. By the close of the first year of her exile Madame Hulot had measured and accepted the full extent of her misfortune.

"In banishing me to this place," she said to herself, "my Hector has given me more than a simple peasant-woman had the right to expect. He requires me to live thus: his will be done! I am the Baroness Hulot, sister-in-law of a marshal of France; I have done no wrong; my children are both well married; I can await death, wrapped in the veil of a wife's honor—in the weeds of my lost happiness!"

The portrait of Hulot, painted by Robert Lefebvre in 1810, in the uniform of his rank in the Imperial Guard, hung above the work-table, where, on the announcement of a visitor, Adeline was wont to lock up a copy of the "Imitation of Christ," which she now read habitually. Pure and irreproachable, she listened like Magdalen for the voice of the Spirit in her wilderness.

"Marianne, my good girl," said Lisbeth to the cook, who opened the door, "how is my dear Adeline?"

"Apparently well, mademoiselle; but between ourselves, if she persists in going on as she does she will kill herself," whispered Marianne. "You must persuade her to live better. For the last few days madame has ordered me to give her two sous' worth of milk and a single roll for breakfast, and either a herring or a bit of cold veal for dinner. She has one pound of meat cooked to last a week—for the days on which she dines at home alone, I mean. She won't spend more than ten sous a day for her food. She is not reasonable. If I were to mention it to Monsieur le maréchal he might get angry with Monsieur le baron and disinherit him; but you, who are so kind and so clever, you'll know how to settle matters."

"Why don't you speak to the baron yourself?" asked Lisbeth.

"Ah, my dear lady, it is nearly a month since he was here—in fact, not since the last time you came. Besides, madame forbade me to ask money of monsieur, and threatened to dismiss me if I did. But oh! what trouble the poor, dear lady is in! This is the first time, monsieur has neglected her quite so long. Every time the porter's bell rings she runs to the window; for the last few days she has scarcely had strength to leave her chair. She sits and reads. When she goes to dine with Madame la comtesse she always says, 'Marianne, if monsieur comes, tell him I am at home, and send the porter after me at once; say I will pay him well.'"

"My poor cousin!" said Bette; "it breaks my heart! I speak of her to the baron every day; but what good does that do? He replies: 'You are right, Bette; I know I'm a villain. My wife is an angel, and I am a monster. I'll go to-morrow.' And that's the end of it. He stays with Madame Marneffe. That woman is ruining him; but he worships her; he can't live out of her sight. I do what I can. If I were not there, and if I didn't have Mathurine, the baron's expenses would be double what they are. He is so pressed for money that he might have blown his brains out before now if I had not looked after matters; and, Marianne, it would kill Adeline—I know that. I try to keep things together, and prevent the baron from squandering everything."

"Ah! that's what my poor mistress says. She knows her obligations to you," answered Marianne. "She told me once she had long misjudged you."

"Ha!" exclaimed Lisbeth. "Did she say anything else?"

“No, mademoiselle. If you want to give her pleasure, talk to her of monsieur. She thinks you so fortunate because you see him every day.”

“Is she alone?”

“No; the maréchal is there. He comes every day, and she always tells him she has seen Monsieur le baron in the morning, and that he won’t be in till late at night.”

“Is there a good dinner to-day?” inquired Bette.

Mariette hesitated, she evaded Bette’s glance, and at that moment the door of the salon opened and Maréchal Hulot came through the antechamber so hastily that he bowed to Bette without recognizing her, and as he did so he dropped some papers. Bette picked them up and ran to the stairway as if to return them, for it was useless to call to a deaf man; but she managed not to overtake him, and came back still holding the papers, on which she furtively read what follows, written in pencil:—

“MY DEAR BROTHER—My husband has given me the usual sum for my quarterly expenses; my daughter Hortense was in such need of money that I lent it all to her, though it was scarcely enough to relieve her embarrassment. Can you lend me a few hundred francs?—for I don’t want to ask more of Hector; I could not bear that he should blame me.”

“Ah!” thought Lisbeth, “she must be in great straits if her pride comes down to that.”

Lisbeth entered Adeline’s room, caught her in tears, and sprang to kiss her.

“Adeline, dear child, I know all,” said Bette. “See, the marshal dropped this paper, he was so troubled, he was in such a hurry. That wretched Hector has not given you any money since—”

“He pays it punctually,” said the baroness, “but Hortense needed some and—”

“—and you have nothing to buy a dinner with; I see it all,” said Bette, interrupting her. “Now I understand Mariette’s embarrassment when I asked her about it. Don’t be a child, Adeline; let me lend you my savings.”

“Thank you, my dear, good Bette,” answered Adeline, wiping away her tears. “This little trouble is only momentary; I have provided for the future. My expenses will only be twenty-four hundred francs a year in future, including rent, and I shall have that sum. But say nothing to Hector, Bette. Is he well?”

“Well? I should think so! as sound as the pont Neuf, and as gay as a lark. He thinks of nothing but that sorceress Valérie.”

Madame Hulot looked at a great silver fir-tree which stood within range of the window, and Lisbeth was unable to read the expression of her eyes.

“Did you remind him that this was the day we all dine together?” asked Adeline, presently.

“Yes, but Madame Marneffe gives a grand dinner at which she expects to get Coquet’s resignation, and he thinks that more important. Now, Adeline, listen to me; you know my rigid principles about independence. Your husband, my dear, will ruin you. I have tried to shield you from that woman, but she is utterly depraved, she can get things done by your husband that will end by disgracing your name.”

Adeline started as if a dagger had pierced her heart.

“My dear Adeline, I know it. Must I enlighten you? Well, at any rate, we ought to think of the future! The marshal is old, but he will live long; he has a fine salary, and his widow, when he dies, will have a pension of six thousand francs. With that sum I could and would maintain you all. Use your influence with him to make me his wife. It is not because I want to be Madame la maréchale that I have thought of this, but to get bread for you in the future. I see plainly that if you are giving Hortense all you have she must be in want.”

The marshal entered at this moment; the old soldier had done his errand so rapidly that he was mopping his forehead with a handkerchief.

“I have given two thousand francs to Mariette,” he whispered to his sister-in-law.

Adeline blushed to the roots of her hair. Tears hung on her eyelashes, which were still long, and she silently pressed the hand of the old man, whose face exhibited a joy like that of a happy lover.

“I was thinking, Adeline, of spending that very sum on a present for you; therefore, instead of returning it, you must choose whatever you would like best.”

He took the hand that Lisbeth held out to him, and kissed it, so absorbed was he in pleasant thoughts of what he had done.

“That is promising,” Adeline remarked to Lisbeth, smiling as much as she was now able to smile.

Just then young Hulot and his wife appeared.

“Does my brother dine at home?” asked the marshal in a curt tone.

Adeline took a pencil and wrote on a little square of paper:—

“I expect him; he promised to dine here to-day; if he does not come he is detained at the War office; he is overwhelmed with business.”

She gave the paper to the marshal; it was her method of conversation with the old man, and a supply of little squares of paper with a pencil were always ready on her work-table.

“Yes, I know,” answered the marshal, “he has a great deal to attend to about Algiers.”

Hortense and Wenceslas now arrived; seeing the family assembled about her, the baroness glanced at the marshal with an expression whose meaning was lost on all but Lisbeth.

Happiness had greatly improved the artist, who was adored by his wife, and flattered by society. His face had filled out; his elegant figure set off the many advantages which blood bestows on a thorough-bred gentleman. His premature fame, and the misleading praises which society flings at an artist very much as we say good-day or speak of the weather, had given him that consciousness of his own merits which degenerates into conceit if real power leaves a man. The cross of the Legion of honor was in his eyes a crowning testimonial to the great genius which he believed himself to be.

After three years of marriage Hortense, in her relations with her husband, was very much what a dog is with his master; she replied to all his movements with a look which seemed a question; her eyes were ever on him as a miser looks at his gold; her admiring self-abnegation was touching to see. The advice and example of her mother were noticeable in all her ways. Her beauty, as great as ever, was now heightened, poetically, by the soft shadows of an inward grief.

As Lisbeth's eyes encountered her young cousin, she fancied that some hidden plaint, long contained, was about to burst the frail bonds of discretion. Ever since the days of the honeymoon Bette had been confident that the young household had too small an income to support so great a love.

Hortense, as she kissed her mother, exchanged with her, from mouth to ear and from heart to heart, a few words whose meaning was betrayed to Bette by the movement of their heads.

"Adeline is going to work, like me, for a living," thought Bette. "I will make her tell me what she means to do. Those pretty fingers have come at last, like mine, to hard labor."

At six o'clock the family went to dinner. The baron's plate was laid.

"Leave it," said the baroness to Mariette. "Monsieur is often late."

"My father is coming," said young Hulot to his mother. "He told me so as we left the Chamber."

Lisbeth, like a spider at the centre of her web, watched her victims. Knowing Hortense and Victorin from their birth, the faces of both were transparencies through which she could read their souls. From certain glances which Victorin cast furtively at his mother she felt certain that some misfortune was hanging over Adeline which her son hesitated to reveal. The young and already celebrated lawyer was seemingly depressed. His deep veneration for his mother was traceable in the gloom with which he looked at her. Hortense was evidently preoccupied with her own troubles;

Lisbeth knew that for the last fifteen days she had felt those first anxieties that poverty inflicts on upright people, especially on young women hitherto accustomed to prosperity who feel bound to conceal their uneasiness. From the first, Bette had felt quite certain that Adeline had not given her daughter the money. The scrupulous Adeline had therefore condescended to the specious falsehoods by which borrowers obtain loans.

The depression of the son and daughter and the profound sadness of the mother made the dinner a sad one. Three persons alone enlivened the scene—Lisbeth, Célestine, and Wenceslas. His wife's love had developed a Polish vivacity in the once melancholy artist—the vivacity of the Gascon nature, the good-natured liveliness which characterizes those Frenchmen of the North. The tone of his mind and the expression of his face revealed his belief in himself and his surroundings, and plainly showed that poor Hortense, faithful to the counsels of her mother, had hidden all her domestic troubles from him.

“You ought to be very grateful to your mother,” said Bette to her young cousin as they left the table, “for having got you out of trouble with that money she gave you.”

“Mamma!” exclaimed Hortense, astonished. “Oh, poor mamma! to whom I long to be able to give money! Bette, you don't know the truth. Well, I will tell you: I have a dreadful suspicion that mamma is working for her support.”

They were crossing the great salon, which was all in darkness, following Mariette, who carried the lamp from the dining-room to Adeline's bed-chamber. At this instant Victorin touched Lisbeth and Hortense on the arm. Understanding the significance of the act, they allowed Wenceslas, Célestine, the marshal, and the baroness to precede them into the bedroom, and drew back themselves into the embrasure of a window.

“What is the matter, Victorin?” asked Lisbeth. “I'll wager it is some disaster your father has caused.”

“Alas, yes,” answered Victorin. “A money-lender named Vauvinet has notes to the amount of sixty thousand francs signed by my father, and means to sue him. I tried to speak about this miserable business to my father to-day in the Chamber, but he would not understand me; he seemed to avoid me. Ought I to warn my mother?”

“No, no,” said Lisbeth; “she has too many troubles already. It would kill her. She must be spared. You don't know what a position she herself is in. If it hadn't been for your uncle you would have found no dinner here to-day.”

“Good God! Victorin, we are both selfish monsters!” said Hortense to her brother. “Lisbeth tells us what we ought to have guessed—”

Hortense could say no more; she put her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle a sob, and wept.

“I told Vauvinet to come and see me to-morrow morning,” continued Victorin. “But he won’t be satisfied with my endorsement. Such men want cash to float their transactions.”

“Let us sell our Funds,” said Lisbeth to Hortense.

“What good would that do?” said Victorin. “They only amount to fifteen or sixteen thousand francs, and sixty is needed.”

“Dear cousin!” cried Hortense, kissing Bette with the warmth of a pure heart.

“No, Lisbeth; keep your little fortune,” said Victorin, pressing her hand. “I will find out to-morrow exactly what the man is after, and then, if my wife consents, I will hinder—perhaps prevent—the suit. My father’s reputation assailed! It would be dreadful! What would be thought at the War office! His salary is assigned over to a creditor for three years, and the time does not expire till December; consequently that security is not available. Vauvinet has renewed the notes eleven times; and therefore just imagine what sums my father has paid as interest upon them! That gulf must be closed.”

“If Madame Marneffe would only leave him!” said Hortense, bitterly.

“God forbid!” said Victorin. “My father would go elsewhere, and perhaps spend more than he does now.”

What a change was this in the minds of children once so respectful, so trained by their mother to an absolute worship of their father! They judged him now.

“If it were not for me,” said Lisbeth, “your father would be even worse off than he is.”

“Let us go in,” said Hortense. “Mamma is so keen she will suspect something; and as our dear Lisbeth says, we must be cheerful.”

“Victorin, you don’t know where your father will drag you with his passion for women, if you endeavor to settle his money matters,” said Lisbeth. “Better think of getting future support by marrying me to the marshal. Speak to him about it to-night. I will go away early to leave you free.”

Victorin entered the bedroom.

“Well, my poor child,” whispered Bette to Hortense, “what do you intend to do?”

“Come and dine to-morrow, and we will talk of it,” answered Hortense. “I don’t know which way to turn. You, who have had such experience of the trials of life, you must advise me.”

While the assembled family endeavored to preach marriage to the marshal, and Lisbeth was returning to the rue Vanneau, an event happened of a kind which stimulates in women like Madame Marneffe the energies of vice by forcing them to display

all the resources of their depravity. Let us recognize, however, one unfailing fact: in Paris life is too busy for vicious persons to do evil from instinct; they defend themselves from attack by the help of vice—that is all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MILLIONS REDIVIVUS.

Madame Marneffe, whose salon was filled with worshippers, had just started the whist-tables when the footman, an old soldier enlisted by the baron, announced: "Monsieur le Baron Montez de Montejanos."

Valérie's heart underwent a violent commotion; but she sprang quickly to the door of the room, exclaiming, "My cousin!" When she reached the Brazilian she whispered hurriedly, "Be a relation, or all is over between us!"

"My dear cousin!" she continued, leading the newcomer to the fireplace, "is it possible you were not shipwrecked as they told me? I mourned you for three years—"

"Good evening, my dear friend," said Marneffe, giving his hand to the Brazilian, whose dress and demeanor was that of a true Brazilian millionaire.

Monsieur le Baron Henri Montez de Montejanos, endowed by equatorial climates with the color and form which we expect in a stage Othello, was sombre and really alarming to the eye—an effect purely plastic, for his gentle, tender nature predestined him for the machinations which feeble women practise upon strong men. The disdainful expression of his face, the muscular power shown by his well-knit frame, in fact all his signs of strength were displayed toward men only—a flattery addressed to women which the sex appreciates with such delight that a lover of this kind with his mistress on his arm has all the air of a triumphant matador. Superbly dressed in a blue coat with massive gold buttons, black trousers, elegant boots of irreproachable polish, and gloved in the last fashion, the new-comer nevertheless exhibited his Brazilian origin by an enormous diamond worth a hundred thousand francs which shone like a star on a blue silk cravat, framed by a white waistcoat half opened to show a shirt of exquisite fineness. His forehead, round and prominent like that of a faun (sign of obstinacy in the passions), was surmounted by a forest of jet-black hair, and beneath it glittered two clear, tawny eyes which suggested that the baron's mother might have been frightened before his birth by a leopard.

This splendid specimen of the Portuguese race in Brazil placed himself with his back against the corner of the fireplace in an attitude that betrayed a Parisian training. Hat in hand, with one arm resting on the velvet shelf, he leaned toward Madame Marneffe and talked in a low voice, paying little or no attention to what he considered the horribly common set of people who filled the salon in so inopportune a way.

This arrival, and the air and manner of the Brazilian awakened precisely the same sentiment of curiosity mingled with anguish in Crevel and in the baron. Both wore the same expression of face, each had the same presentiment. Their motions, inspired by mutual real passion, became so comical from the simultaneousness of their gymnastics that a smile crossed the faces of all who were clever enough to understand the revelation. Unluckily for himself, Crevel, always the shopkeeper though mayor of Paris, continued the attitude rather longer than the baron, who caught that involuntary revelation of Crevel's passion as it were on the wing. It was another arrow in the heart of the amorous old man, who resolved on the spot to have an explanation with Valérie.

"To-night," said Crevel to himself in the same spirit, arranging his cards, "I shall bring matters to a crisis."

"You led hearts," cried Marneffe, "but you have just refused them."

"Oh, excuse me," answered Crevel, picking up his cards. "That baron," he continued thinking to himself, "strikes me as interfering. Valérie may live with Hulot—that's part of my vengeance, and I know how to get rid of him—but a cousin! a baron too many!—I won't be made a fool of—I shall insist on knowing what sort of relation he really is."

That evening, by a piece of luck which happens only to pretty women, Valérie was charmingly dressed. Her white skin shone through the meshes of Venetian point whose russet tones brought out the ivory satin of her beautiful shoulders so characteristic of Parisian women, who acquire superb flesh (by what process is still unknown), and yet retain the elegance of their figures. She wore a robe of black velvet which seemed at times to be slipping from the shoulders, and her hair was arranged with lace and flowers. Her arms, which were round and dimpled, issued from short sleeves ruffled with falls of lace. She was like those fine fruits temptingly arranged on a pretty dish, whose juices eat into the steel of the knife that cuts them.

"Valérie," said the Brazilian in the young woman's ear, "I have come back faithful to you. My uncle is dead, and I am twice as rich as I was when I went away. I wish to live and die in Paris—near you, and for you!"

"Speak lower, Henri, for heaven's sake!"

"Bah! I must speak to you if I have to throw the whole company out of the window—especially after searching Paris for two days to find you. I can stay after they leave, can I not?"

Valérie smiled on her pretended cousin as she said: "Remember that you are the son of a sister of my mother, who married your father during Junot's campaign in Portugal."

“I, Montez de Montejanos, descendant of the conquerors of Brazil, do you ask me to lie!”

“Speak lower, or we must part.”

“Why?”

“Marneffe, like dying men who are possessed with a last fancy, has grown jealous—”

“That lackey!” said the Brazilian, who knew his Marneffe. “I will buy him off.”

How violent you are!”

“Ha! how did you get all this luxury?” cried the Brazilian, suddenly taking note of the elegant salon.

She laughed.

“What bad taste, Henri!” she said.

She had just caught two angry glances flaming with jealousy, which compelled her to look straight at her two victims writhing in pain. Crevel, who was playing against the baron and Monsieur Coquet, had Marneffe for a partner. The party were equally matched, because on either side the baron and Crevel had lost their heads, and made blunder after blunder. The two old men betrayed in a single moment the passion which Valérie had succeeded in making them hide for three years. One thing, however, she was unable to do; she could not extinguish in her eyes the joy of again seeing the man who had once stirred her heart, the object of her first passion. The rights of such happy mortals live as long as the woman who has once granted them.

In the midst of the three passions contending around her, one relying on the insolence of money, another on the rights of possession, and the third on youth, strength, wealth, and primary claims, Madame Marneffe continued calm and imperturbable, like General Bonaparte at the siege of Mantua, when he had two armies to deal with in blockading the place. Jealousy convulsing old Hulot’s face, made it as terrible as the late Maréchal Montcornet heading a charge of cavalry on the Russian lines. In his well-known capacity as a handsome man the baron had never felt the pangs of jealousy, just as Murat never knew fear. He was always certain of victory. His defeat in the matter of Josépha, the first defeat of his life, he attributed to her thirst for money; he said he was vanquished by a million, not by an abortion, alluding to the Duc d’Hérouville. But the philters and the vertigos that come of the mad passion now rushed over his heart in a moment. He turned from the whist-table to the chimney-piece with a movement à la Mirabeau, and when he laid down his cards to look fixedly at the Brazilian and Valérie, those about him felt some fear, mingled with curiosity, lest the anger now suppressed should burst forth violently. The spurious cousin looked down on the baron as if he were examining a Chinese image. The situation could not last without ending in a frightful outburst. Marneffe was afraid of

Hulot, for he dreaded the loss of his influence; dying men cling to life as the galley-slaves long for liberty. The man was determined to be head of his division at any cost. Very naturally alarmed at the pantomime of the two old men, he rose, whispered to his wife, and then, to the great astonishment of every one, Valérie went into her bedroom followed by her husband and the Brazilian.

“Did Madame Marneffe ever speak to you of that cousin?” asked Crevel of Baron Hulot.

“Never!” answered the baron, rising. “We have played enough for to-night,” he added. “I have lost two louis, and here they are.”

He threw the gold pieces on the table and sat down on the sofa with an air which the company interpreted as a sign that they should disperse. Monsieur and Madame Coquet after exchanging a few words with each other left the room, and Claude Vignon in despair followed them. These departures started the rest of the company, who felt they were in the way, and the baron and Crevel were presently left alone. They said nothing to each other. Hulot, forgetting Crevel’s presence, went on tiptoe to the door of the bedroom, but instantly made a sudden and prodigious jump backward as Monsieur Marneffe opened it and came out with a calm face, apparently much surprised to find only the two men.

“Where’s the tea?” he said.

“Where is Valérie?” asked the baron, furiously.

“My wife?” said Marneffe, “she has gone upstairs to your cousin’s apartment; she will be back presently.”

“Why has she left us in this way?”

“Why?” said Marneffe. “Because Mademoiselle Lisbeth has just returned from dining with your wife, and she was seized with indigestion; Mathurine came to get some tea for her from Valérie, who ran up to see what was the matter.”

“Where is that cousin?”

“He has gone.”

“Do you believe that?” asked the baron.

“I have just put him in his carriage,” said Marneffe, with a hideous smile.

The baron, considering Marneffe a cipher, left the room and went up to Lisbeth’s apartment. A thought darted through his brain, such as a heart inflamed by jealousy sometimes sends there. Marneffe’s depravity was well known to him, and he suddenly suspected an ignominious collusion between husband and wife.

“Where has everybody gone?” asked Marneffe, finding himself alone with Crevel.

“When the sun sets the birds roost,” said Crevel, “Madame Marneffe disappeared, her adorers likewise. Everybody has gone home. Let us play piquet,” he added, determined to remain.

The baron ran quickly upstairs to Bette’s apartment; but the door was locked, and the inquiries and answers took enough time

for two clever women to get up a scene of indigestion relieved by tea. Lisbeth was evidently suffering and Valérie was anxious, so anxious that she scarcely noticed the baron's furious entrance. Illness is a screen which women often set up between themselves and the wind of a quarrel. Hulot looked all round the room but could see no place in which to hide a Brazilian.

"Your indigestion, Bette, is a compliment to my wife's dinner," he said, looking pointedly at the old maid, who was perfectly well, though endeavoring to imitate certain convulsions.

"See how lucky it is that dear Bette lives in this house! If I had not got to her at once she might have been alarmingly ill," said Valérie.

"You look as if you thought there was nothing the matter with me," said Lisbeth addressing the baron; "it would be infamous if—"

"Why?" demanded the baron, "do you know what brings me here?" and he leered at the lock of the dressing-room door from which the key had been taken.

"Are you talking Greek?" said Madame Marneffe, with a heart-rending expression of tenderness and injured feeling.

"It is because of you—yes, actually your fault, my dear cousin, that I am in this state!" cried Bette, vehemently.

Her cry diverted the baron's attention and he gazed at her with amazement.

"You know that I am your friend," continued Lisbeth; "I live here, isn't that a proof of it? I have spent my last strength in taking care of your interests and those of our dear Valérie. Her household expenses cost ten times less than they would in any other house kept up in the same manner. If it were not for me, cousin, instead of paying two thousand francs a month, you would have to spend three or four thousand."

"I know all that," said the baron, impatiently. "Ton help us in more ways than one," he added significantly, approaching Madame Marneffe and taking her round the throat; "isn't that so, my little darling?"

"Upon my word," said Valérie, "I believe you are crazy."

"You can't doubt my attachment," cried Lisbeth; "but I also love my cousin, Adeline, and to-day I found her in tears. She has not seen you for a month. That's not right. You leave poor Adeline without means. Your daughter Hortense almost fainted away when she heard there would have been no dinner to-day if your brother had not lent Adeline some money. There was nothing but dry bread in your house this morning! Adeline has taken the heroic resolution to support herself. She said to me, 'I will do as you have done.' The words wrung my heart; I thought of what my cousin was in 1811 and what she now is in 1841! the shock stopped my digestion. I came home thinking I should feel better, but once here I am worse—"

“Valérie! you see what my devotion to you has brought me to!” said the baron. “It makes me guilty of domestic crimes.”

“Ah! I did well to remain single!” cried Bette, with savage joy. “You are a good and kind man, and Adeline is an angel, and this is the reward of blind devotion.”

“An old angel,” said Madame Marneffe, gently, with a glance half-tender, half-mocking at her Hector, who was still watching her as a detective watches a supposed criminal.

“Ah, poor woman!” said the baron; “I have not given her any money for nine months, and yet I can find plenty for you, Valérie—at what cost! You will never be loved as I love you, and in return what distress you cause me!”

“Distress?” she answered. “Is that what you call the happiness I confer upon you?”

“I don’t yet know what your relations have been with that sham cousin of whom you never told me,” said the baron, paying no attention to the phrases which Valérie interjected. “When he entered the room it was like a stab in my heart. Blinded as I have been I am not a blind man; I could read in your eyes and in his. Sparks flew from that monkey-face to yours and you looked—oh! you never gave me such a look, never! As for this mystery, Valérie, it shall be brought to light. You are the only woman who has made me feel the emotion of jealousy, therefore you need not be surprised at what I say— I perceive still another mystery, a secret which has burst its veil, and it seems to me infamous—”

“Go on! go on!” cried Valérie.

“Crevel, that mound of flesh and folly, loves you, and you receive his attentions so well that the fool has betrayed his passion before everybody.”

“That’s the third! have you found any more?” demanded Madame Marneffe.

“There may be more,” said the baron. “Suppose Monsieur Crevel does love me? a man has a right to do that. If I favored his passion it would be the act of a coquette or of a woman who wants more than you can give her. Well, either love me with all my faults or leave me. If you give me back my liberty neither you nor Monsieur Crevel shall ever enter my doors. I shall take my cousin so as not to lose the charming habits which you attribute to me. Adieu, Monsieur le baron Hulot.”

She rose; but the old man caught her by the arm and made her sit down again. He could not replace Valérie; she had become a more imperious necessity than even the common needs of life, and he felt he would rather remain in a state of uncertainty than obtain the slightest proof of her infidelity.

“My dear Valérie,” he said, “do you not see how I suffer? I only ask you to justify yourself—give me good reasons—”

“Well, go and wait for me downstairs; I don’t suppose you want to be present at what I have to do for your cousin.”

Hulot withdrew slowly.

“Old libertine!” cried Bette, as he left them, “you have not asked me about your children! What do you mean to do for Adeline? To-morrow I shall take her my poor savings.”

“A man owes his wife a support, at least,” said Madame Marneffe, smiling.

The baron, not offended by Lisbeth’s speech, which arraigned him as sharply as Josépha’s had done, went hastily away like one who wanted to avoid an inconvenient question.

The bolt once slipped behind him, the Brazilian was let out of the dressing-room where he was waiting; tears were in his eyes and his state of mind was pitiable to see. He had heard all.

CHAPTER XIX.

SCENES OF HIGH FEMININE COMEDY.

“You have ceased to love me, Henri; alas! I see it,” said Madame Marneffe, hiding her face in her handkerchief, and bursting into tears.

It was a cry of real love. The clamor of a woman’s distress is so persuasive that it wrings a pardon from the heart of every lover if she is young and pretty.’

“If you love me, why not give up everything for my sake?” demanded the Brazilian.

This child of transatlantic Nature, logical like all men bred in Nature’s bosom, took up the conversation at the point where he had left it, passing his arm around Valérie’s waist.

“You ask why?” she said, raising her head to look at him, and quelling him by a glance overflowing with love. “Because, my treasure, I am married; because we are in Paris and not on the pampas, not in the solitudes of America. My kind Henri, my first, my only love, listen to me! This husband of mine, a sub-director at the War office, wishes to be head of his department and an officer of the Legion of honor. Can I prevent him from being ambitious? Now, for exactly the same reason that he once left you and me free to follow our wishes (nearly four years ago, you cruel fellow!) he now compels me to take Hulot. I can’t get rid of that dreadful official—who puffs like a walrus and is sixty three years old, and hateful to me, and who has grown ten years older in the last three years—until the day when Marneffe is head of his department and officer of the Legion of honor—”

“What else is your husband to get?”

“Three thousand francs.”

“I’ll give him an annuity for that amount,” said Baron Montez. “Come, let us leave Paris and go—”

“Where?” said Valérie, with one of those pretty pouts by which women tease the men of whom they are sure. “Paris is the only city where it is possible to live happy. I care too much for our love to allow it to weaken by living alone with you in a desert. Hear me, Henri; you are the only man in all the universe whom I ever loved—write that on your tiger skull.”

Women always persuade the men whom they have turned to sheep that they are lions and tigers with iron wills.

“You must listen to me. Monsieur Marneffe hasn’t five years to live; he is rotten to the marrow of his bones; out of twelve months in the year he spends seven swallowing drugs; he is swathed in flannel: in short, the doctors say the scythe may cut him down at any moment; the slightest illness, one that could not harm a sound man, will be his death; his blood is corrupt, vitality

is attacked at its source. Some day, and it is not far off, I shall be a widow. Well, I, who am already asked in marriage by a man with sixty thousand francs a year, I, who can manage that man just as I can this bit of sugar, I declare to you that if you were poor like Hulot, leprous like Marneffe, and even if you were to beat me, it is you alone that I love and whose name I wish to bear. I am ready to give you every proof of love that you can ask—”

“Well then, to-night—”

“But, child of Rio, my beautiful leopard who has come to me from the virgin forests of Brazil,” she said, taking possession of his hand and fondling it, “respect the woman whom you wish to make your wife—Shall I be your wife, Henri?”

“Yes,” he said, conquered by the wild garrulity of her passion.

He knelt at her feet.

“Henri,” said Valérie, taking both his hands and looking fixedly into his eyes, “swear to me now, in presence of Lisbeth, my best and only friend, my sister, that you will marry me at the end of my year of widowhood.”

“I swear it!”

“That is not enough. Swear it by the ashes and the eternal salvation of your mother—swear it by the Virgin Mary and by your Christian hope.”

Valérie knew well that the Brazilian would keep that oath even though she were sunk in the deepest social degradation. He took the solemn vow, his brow almost touching her white bosom, his eyes spell-bound; he was drunk, drunk as a man is when he sees a beloved woman after long absence.

“Well then, be content. Respect your future wife. Don’t spend a farthing on me; I forbid it. Remain here in the front room, you can sleep on the little sofa; I will come back myself and tell you when you can come down. We will breakfast together, and you may leave at one o’clock as though you had been paying me a morning visit. There is nothing to fear; the porters are devoted to me. Now I must go down and pour out tea.”

She made a sign to Lisbeth, who accompanied her to the landing. There, Valérie whispered in the old maid’s ear.

“My blackamoor has come back too soon! I shall die if I don’t avenge you on Hortense.”

“Don’t be afraid, you dear little devil;” said Bette, kissing her on the forehead. “When love and vengeance run in couples they never miss their goal. I am to meet Hortense to-morrow; she is in great poverty. Wenceslas would kiss you a thousand times to get a thousand francs.”

When Hulot left Valérie he went down to the porter’s lodge and came suddenly on Madame Olivier.

“Madame Olivier?”

Hearing this imperative call and observing the gesture by which it was enforced, Madame Olivier came out of her den and followed the baron to a corner of the courtyard.

“Don’t you know that if any one can help your son to get a notary’s practice it is I? It is owing to me that he completed his law studies and got into a notary’s office at all.”

“Yes, monsieur le baron, and monsieur can count on our gratitude. There is never a day that I don’t pray to God for blessings on monsieur le baron.”

“Fewer words, my good woman,” said Hulot, “and more deeds.”

“What must we do?”

“A man came here to-night in a carriage. Do you know him?”

Madame Olivier had recognized Montez; in fact she could hardly have forgotten a man who slipped five francs into her hand every time he left the rue du Doyenné a little too early in the morning. If the baron had chanced on Olivier he might perhaps have learned the truth; but Olivier had gone to bed. Among the lower classes the woman is not only superior to the man, but she almost always rules him. Madame Olivier had long decided on her course in case their two benefactors quarrelled; she looked upon Madame Marneffe as the stronger of the two powers.

“Do I know him?” she said. “No—I never saw him before.”

“Nonsense; Madame Marneffe’s cousin must have gone to see her when she lived in the rue du Doyenné.”

“Oh! was it her cousin?” exclaimed Madame Olivier. “It may have been, for I did not see his face. I’ll pay attention, monsieur, next time—”

“He will come down by and by,” said the baron, hastily.

“But he has gone,” said Madame Olivier, who now understood the matter, “the carriage is not here.”

“Did you see him go?”

“Yes, and he said to the servant, ‘To the embassy.’”

Her tone, and the assurance she gave him, brought a sigh of relief from the baron’s breast; he took Madame Olivier’s hand and wrung it.

“Thank you, my dear Madame Olivier, but that’s not all; how about Monsieur Crevel?”

“Monsieur Crevel? What do you mean? I don’t understand,” answered Madame Olivier.

“He loves Madame Marneffe.”

“It isn’t possible, Monsieur le baron!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands.

“He loves Madame Marneffe,” repeated Hulot, imperatively. “How do they manage? I don’t know; but I mean to know, and so must you. If you can put me on the track of that intrigue your son is a notary!”

“Monsieur le baron, don’t let your blood boil that way,” answered Madame Olivier. “Madame loves you and only you; her waiting-maid knows that, and we often talk of it; she says you are the happiest of men, for you know Madame’s value. Ah! she’s perfection! She rises at ten o’clock every day; then she breakfasts—good; then it takes her an hour or more to dress; and that brings us to about two o’clock; after that she walks in the Tuileries in sight of everybody and comes home punctually at four o’clock—your hour for coming. Oh! it is all as regular as clock-work. She has no secrets from her maid, and Reine has none from me; she couldn’t have any, because of my son, with whom she’s in love. So you see that if Madame had any relations with Monsieur Crevel we should certainly know it.”

The baron returned to Madame Marneffe’s apartment with a beaming face, convinced that he was the only lover of that odious courtesan, as beautiful, as graceful and as deceitful as a siren.

Crevel and Marneffe were just beginning their second game of piquet. Crevel lost as men lose who are paying no attention to their play. Marneffe, who knew the causes of the mayor’s absent-mindedness, profited without scruple; he glanced at the cards to be taken, and “discarded” accordingly; then overlooking his adversary’s game he played sure. The stake was twenty sous, and he had thus stolen thirty francs before the baron re-entered the room.

“Well!” said Hulot, surprised to see the room empty, “are you alone? where are they all?”

“Your fine temper sent everybody flying,” replied Crevel.

“No, it was the arrival of my wife’s cousin,” said Marneffe. “The company thought that Valérie and Henri must have something to say to each other after three years’ absence, so they discreetly retired. If I had been here I should have kept them; but that would have been a pity, as it happened, for Lisbeth who always pours out tea, was taken ill—”

“Is she really ill?” interrupted Crevel.

“They said so,” replied Marneffe, with cynical indifference.

The mayor looked at the clock and estimated that the baron had been forty minutes with Valérie. His joyous manner incriminated him, together with Valérie and Lisbeth, in Crevel’s mind.

“I have just seen her; she suffers horribly, poor girl,” said Hulot.

“The sufferings of other people seem to please you,” replied Crevel, crossly; “you have come back with your face radiant. Is Lisbeth likely to die? Your daughter is to have her money, they say. I don’t know you again; you went out with a face like the Moor of Venice and you have come back looking like Saint-Preux—I should like to see Madame Marneffe’s face now.”

“What do you mean by that?” demanded Monsieur Marneffe, gathering up his cards and laying them before him.

The dim eyes of the decrepit creature lighted up; a faint color overspread the cold and flabby cheeks; he half-opened the black lips of his toothless mouth, from which oozed a white froth looking like chalk. The rage of the impotent man, whose life hung by a thread, and who risked nothing in a duel, while Crevel risked all, alarmed the mayor.

“I said,” answered Crevel, “that I should like to see Madame Marneffe’s face, and all the more because yours has a particularly disagreeable expression at this moment. On my word of honor, you are frightfully ugly, my dear Marneffe.”

“You are not polite.”

“A man who wins thirty francs in forty-five minutes never looks handsome to me.”

“Ah, if you had seen me seventeen years ago!” said the wreck.

“Were you fascinating?” retorted Crevel.

“That’s what ruined me. If I had managed matters as you have, I should be peer of France and mayor at this moment.”

“Yes,” said Crevel, sneering, “you have carried the war too far. I save up gold in the business, but you swallow its drugs.”

Crevel burst out laughing. Marneffe might seem to be angry about his wounded honor, but he always took such vulgar and insulting jokes amiably. They were the small change of conversation between himself and Crevel.

“Eve has cost me dear, I admit,” he replied; “but a short life and a merry one, that’s my motto.”

“I prefer mine long and happy,” replied Crevel.

At this moment Madame Marneffe came in, saw her husband playing cards with Crevel, and the baron sitting apart, all three alone in the salon. She guessed from a first glance at the municipal dignitary the thoughts that were agitating his breast, and she decided instantly on her course.

“Marneffe, dear!” she said, leaning on her husband’s shoulder and passing her pretty fingers over his sparse gray hairs as if to draw them together, “it is very late for you; you ought to be in bed; you know what the doctor said—if you want to live, you must take care; come, leave your piquet.”

“Let’s end at five points,” said Marneffe to Crevel.

“Very good; I have two already,” replied Crevel.

“How long will it take?” asked Valérie.

“Ten minutes.”

“It is already eleven o’clock,” she said. “Really, Monsieur Crevel, one would think you wanted to kill my husband. At any rate, make haste.”

The double meaning of the speech amused Crevel, Hulot, and even Marneffe himself. Valérie crossed the room to Hector.

“Go away now, my dearest,” she whispered, “and walk down the rue Vanneau; then come back when you see Crevel leave the house.”

“I would rather only leave the apartment and get back by the door into your dressing-room. You could tell Reine to open it for me.”

“Reine is upstairs taking care of Lisbeth.”

“Well, then, I’ll go up to Lisbeth’s apartment.”

Either way was perilous for Valérie, who, foreseeing that she must come to an explanation with Crevel, did not choose to have Hulot in her bedroom where he could overhear the conversation; and the Brazilian was upstairs.

“Upon my word, you men,” said Valérie, “when you get a notion into your heads would burn a house down to force an entrance. Lisbeth is not in a state, to have you up there. Are you afraid of getting rheumatism in the street? Come, go; or good-by to you.”

“Good-night, gentlemen,” said the baron aloud.

Touched in his vanity, the old man felt bound to prove that he could rival a young lover by awaiting the happy moment in the street.

Marneffe said good-night to his wife, whose hand he took with a show of tenderness. Valérie shook his in a manner that meant, “Help me to get rid of Crevel.”

“Good-night, Crevel,” said Marneffe, “I hope you won’t stay long with Valérie. I’m jealous—it has seized me late but it holds me fast—I shall come back presently and make sure you are gone.”

“We have business to discuss; but I shall not stay long,” said Crevel.

“Speak low—what do you want of me?” said Valérie, looking at Crevel with a haughty and contemptuous eye.

Meeting her glance, Crevel, who had rendered immense services to Valérie and was prepared to boast of them, became suddenly humble and submissive.

“That Brazilian—” he stopped short, struck dumb by the fixed and scornful look which she gave him.

“Go on,” she said.

“This cousin—”

“He is not my cousin,” she replied, “he is my cousin for the world and for Monsieur Marneffe. Supposing he were my lover, you have no right to say anything. A shopkeeper who buys a woman to revenge himself on another man is, in my opinion, beneath the man who buys for love. You were not in love with me; but you knew I was Baron Hulot’s mistress, and you bought me just as a man buys a pistol to kill his adversary. I wanted your money and I consented.”

“But you have not fulfilled the bargain,” said Crevel, with commercial keenness.

“Ah! you want Baron Hulot to know that you have carried off his mistress in revenge for Josépha. Nothing could better prove the baseness of your mind. You say you love a woman; you treat her like a duchess, and then you want to publicly disgrace her! My good friend, you are right—this woman here present is not the equal of Josépha; Josépha had the courage of her infamy, whereas I am a hypocrite who ought to be whipped in the market-place. Alas! Josépha is protected by her cleverness and by her money, but I—my only fortune is my honor; I am still a virtuous and respected bourgeoisie, but if you make a scandal about me what shall I become? If I had money I would not care; but, as it is, I have only about fifteen thousand francs a year—”

“You have a great deal more,” said Crevel. “Within the last two months I have doubled your investment in the Orleans railway.”

“Well, but no one is respected in Paris until he has fifty thousand francs a year. You can’t give me the equivalent of what I should lose in throwing over the baron. Do you ask what that is?—why, Marneffe’s appointment as head of the department; he would then have six thousand francs a year; he has been twenty seven years in the service, and in three more, if he lives as long, I should have a pension of fifteen hundred francs when he dies. You, whom I have overwhelmed with favors, with happiness, you are not willing to wait for your revenge!—and you call that love!” she cried.

“I may have begun by calculating on revenge,” said Crevel, “but I have ended by being your spaniel. You trample on my heart, you crush me, you dumfound me, and yet I love you as I never loved before. Valérie, I love you as much as I love Célestine. I am capable of anything for your sake. Say that instead of coming twice a week to the rue du Dauphin, you will come three times.”

“Is that all! really, you are getting youthful again.”

“Let me dismiss Hulot and humiliate him,” urged Crevel. “Get rid of him, promise you will not see that Brazilian; be mine only—you shall not repent it. In the first place I will give you eight thousand francs a year—an annuity only, but you shall have the capital if you are faithful to me for five years.”

“Always making bargains! a bourgeois never knows how to give. You want to keep up relays of love with dividends! Ah, shopkeeper! vender of hair-oils! you ticket everything with its price. Hector told me that the Duc d’Hérouville brought Josépha the certificate for her thirty thousand francs a year in a bag of sugarplums. I am worth six times as much as Josépha. Ah! to be loved!” she said, twisting her curls before the mirror. “Henri loves

me, he would kill you like a fly at a sign from me. Hulot loves me, and leaves his wife to want. But you, you who can be a good father and look after your family and yet have three hundred thousand francs laid by outside of your property with which you might do what you liked—”

“Valérie! I offer you half of it,” cried Crevel, falling on his knees.

“Are you still here?” cried Marneffe, entering in his dressing-gown. “What are you doing?”

“He is begging my pardon for an insulting speech,” said Valérie.

Crevel wished he could drop through a trap-door as they do at the theatre.

“Rise, my dear Crevel, you look too ridiculous,” said Marneffe, smiling. “I see by Valérie’s face that there is no danger for me.”

“Go to bed and sleep in peace,” said Madame Marneffe to her husband.

“Isn’t she clever?” thought Crevel; “she is adorable! how she got out of it!”

When Marneffe had disappeared, the mayor seized Valérie’s hands and kissed them, moistening them with tears.

“I will put it all in your name,” he said.

“Ah! that is love!” she whispered. “Well, love for love. Hulot is down below, waiting in the street. Poor old fellow, he expects me to put a light in my window to let him know when to come. I permit you to go and tell him you are the one I love; he will not believe you; then take him to the rue du Dauphin and give him proofs. I permit you, nay, I order you to do so. That walrus wears me out. Keep him in the rue du Dauphin all night, tear him with hot pincers, revenge yourself for Josépha. Hulot may die of it, but if so we shall save his wife and children from utter ruin. Madame Hulot is now working for her living!”

“Poor lady! it is shameful!” cried Crevel, his natural good feeling coming to the surface.

“If you love me, Célestin,” she whispered in his ear as her lips touched it, “keep him away, or I am lost. Marneffe suspects something, and Hector has the key of the porte-cochère and expects to return.”

Crevel pressed her in his arms and went away at the summit of happiness. Valérie lovingly accompanied him to the landing; then, as if magnetized, she followed him down the staircase.

“My Valérie! go back; do not compromise yourself before the porters—Go; my life, my fortune, my all is yours— Go back, my duchess!”

“Madame Olivier!” said Valérie, softly, as soon as the door closed on Crevel.

“Why, madame, you here?” said Madame Olivier, amazed.

“Run the upper and lower bolts, and don’t open the door to any one—no matter who.”

“Very well, madame.”

As soon as the bolts were drawn Madame Olivier recounted the attempt of the baron to corrupt her fidelity.

“You behaved like an angel, my dear Olivier,” replied Madame Marneffe, “but we must talk of all that to-morrow.”

Valérie ran up to the third story with the rapidity of an arrow from its bow, gave three little knocks on Lisbeth’s door, and then returned to her own apartment where she gave certain orders to Reine; no Parisian waiting-maid misses such an occasion as the return of a Montez from Brazil.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO BROTHERS OF THE GREAT CONFRATERNITY OF BROTHERHOODS.

“No, by heaven!” thought Crevel to himself, “none but women of the world can love like that. How she came down those stairs, her eyes blazing, fairly carried away! Josépha never— Josépha! mere scum! What did I say? *scum!* Heavens! suppose I were to let slip such a word at the Tuileries? No, if Valérie doesn’t train me I shall never be worth anything in society—I, who am so anxious to be a distinguished man! What a woman! If she merely looks at me coldly it stirs my inside like the colic! What grace! what wit! Josépha never gave me such emotions! What hidden perfections!—Oh, there’s my man!”

In the shadows of the rue de Babylone he beheld Hulot, with his head down, slipping along the side of some buildings in process of construction, and he went straight up to him.

“Good morning, baron; for it is past midnight, my dear fellow. What the devil are you doing here, walking up and down in the rain? It isn’t wise, at our age. Do you want me to give you a piece of good advice? Let us both go home; for, between ourselves, you won’t see that light in the window.”

As the baron heard these last words it dawned upon him that he was sixtythree years old, and that his cloak was wet.

“Who told you that?” he said.

“Valérie—hang it, *our* Valérie, who wishes to be solely *my* Valérie. That puts us even, and we’ll play for the rubber when you like. You can’t be angry, for you know it was agreed I should take my revenge. You spent three months in getting Josépha away from me, and I’ve got Valérie in—however, don’t let’s talk of that,” he added. “Now, I intend to have her all to myself. But we needn’t be less good friends.”

“Crevel, don’t joke,” said the baron, in a choking voice. “It is a matter of life and death to me.”

“Bless me, how you take it! Baron, don’t you remember what I said to you on your daughter’s wedding-day—why should two old fellows like us quarrel for a petticoat? It’s plebeian, vulgar, low-bred; you and I belong to another stripe—regency, blue doublets, Pompadour, eighteenth century, regular Richelieu; we are, and I dare to say it, connoisseurs in women!”

Crevel might have strung his literary terms together for some time longer, for the baron listened as deaf men listen when their infirmity begins; but the conqueror stopped short, seeing the ghastly face of his enemy by the gleam of a street lamp. The news fell like a thunderbolt on the baron, after the assurances of Madame Olivier and Valérie’s last look.

“Good God! and there were so many other women in Paris!” he said at last.

“That’s what I told you when you took Josépha,” retorted Crevel.

“Crevel, I don’t believe it; it is impossible. Give me proofs. Have you a key, as I have?”

And the baron, by this time before the house, plunged the key into the lock; but the door was immovable, and he began to shake it.

“Don’t make a disturbance,” said Crevel, coolly. “Come, baron, I have better keys than yours.”

“Proofs! proofs!” cried the baron, exasperated by his misery till he seemed crazy.

“Follow me, and I’ll give them to you,” answered Crevel; and then, according to Valérie’s instructions, he took the baron toward the quay by the rue Hillerin-Bertin. The unfortunate State councillor followed him like a merchant on his way to the court of bankruptcy. He was lost in conjectures as to the motives of the depravity at the bottom of Valérie’s heart, and he believed himself the dupe of some trickery. As they crossed the pont Royal a sense of his barren life, ending in nothingness and harassed with financial troubles, came over him, and he was on the point of yielding to the temptation to throw Crevel into the river and spring after him.

When they reached the rue du Dauphin, which in those days had not been widened, Crevel stopped before the double door of a small house. This door opened upon a long corridor paved with black and white marble, which formed a sort of portico, at the end of which was the staircase and the porter’s lodge, lighted from a small interior court, of which there are so many in Paris. This court, which adjoined that of the next property, was noticeable as encroaching on the latter. Crevel’s house—for he was the owner of the dwelling—had an addition with a glass roof, which was built on the adjoining lot of ground, but restricted by an injunction from being raised above the ground floor; it was therefore entirely hidden from sight by the porter’s lodge and the projection of the staircase.

This structure, of which there are many in Paris, had long served as a warehouse, back-room, and kitchen to one of the two shops on the street. Crevel had employed Grindot to detach the three rooms and turn them into a small dwelling. It could be entered on two sides: first, through the shop, which Crevel let to a furniture-dealer, at a low rent, and by the month, so that he might turn him out and punish him for the slightest indiscretion; and then, by a door so hidden in the wall of the corridor as to be almost invisible. With the single exception of the upholsterer, all the other tenants of the house were unaware of the existence of

Crevel's paradise. The portress, paid for silence, was an excellent cook. The mayor could go in and out of this isolated retreat at all hours of the night without dreading suspicious eyes. In the daytime a woman, dressed as a Parisian woman dresses to go shopping, and furnished with a key, risked nothing in visiting the place; she entered the shop as if to make a purchase, and left it without exciting suspicion in the minds of those who met her.

When Crevel had lighted the candelabra in the boudoir the baron was amazed to see the elegant and coquettish luxury of the room. The ex-perfumer had given Grindot carte-blanche as to the decorations, and the architect of bygone fame had produced a creation in the Pompadour style which cost his employer sixty thousand francs. "I want it," Crevel had said to Grindot, "to be so that if a duchess enters the place she may be surprised and delighted." He meant to have a perfect Parisian Eden for his Eve, his woman of the world, his Valérie, his duchess.

"There are two beds," said Crevel, showing a sofa which drew out like the drawer of a bureau and formed a bed. "Here is one; the other is in the next room. So we can both pass the night here."

"Proofs! proofs!" cried the baron.

Crevel took a light and led his friend into the bedroom, where, on a sofa, Hulot saw a superb dressing-gown belonging to Valérie, which he had seen her wear in the rue Vanneau. The mayor touched a spring in a pretty little article of furniture done in marquetry, a coffer or desk called *bonheur du jour*, searched for a moment, took out a letter, and handed it to the baron.

"Here, read that."

The councilor of state read the following note, written in pencil:—

"I have waited for you, my old scamp; and a woman like me is not born to wait for an ex-perfumer. There was no dinner ordered, no cigarettes. You shall pay dear for this."

"Is that her writing?" said Crevel.

"Good heavens!" said Hulot, sitting down overwhelmed. "I recognize all she ever touched—her slippers, her caps— Ha, how long is it since—"

Crevel made a sign that he understood, and then took a bundle of bills from the little desk.

"Here, old man," he said; "I paid the builders in December, 1838. Two months earlier, in October, we occupied this delightful little place."

Hulot bowed his head. "How could it be? For I know how every hour of her time was employed."

"Did you know how she walked in the Tuileries?" asked Crevel, rubbing his hands.

“What of that?” said Hulot bewildered.

“Your so-called mistress was supposed to be walking in the gardens from one to four o’clock, but two hours of that time she was here. Do you ever read Molière? Well, baron, is there nothing imaginary in your claims?”

Hulot, who could doubt no longer, kept a threatening silence. Catastrophes always drive intelligent and strong-minded men into philosophy. Morally, the baron was like a man seeking his way through a forest by night. But such gloomy silence and the change that came over his sunken countenance frightened Crevel, who certainly did not wish the death of his enemy.

“It is just as I told you, old fellow, we are even; let’s play the rubber— Don’t you want to play the rubber?”

“Why is it,” said Hulot, speaking to himself, “that out of ten handsome women, seven at least are depraved?”

The baron was too upset to find the solution of this problem. Beauty is the highest of human powers. All power without counterpoise, unshackled and autocratic, leads to abuse and to lawlessness. Arbitrary power is the madness of rulers; in women it turns to caprice.

“You are not to be pitied, comrade; you have got the most beautiful of wives, and she is virtuous.”

“I deserve my fate,” said Hulot. “I have never valued my wife; I have made her suffer, and she is indeed an angel. She suffers there alone, in silence—yes, she is worthy of adoration—of love—and I will try—for she is still charming, fair and fresh as a young girl—but was there ever such a base, vile, infamous creature as that Valérie?”

“A worthless woman,” said Crevel; “a hussy who ought to be whipped in the place du Châtelet; but my dear Canillac, we may be men of the olden time, Richelieu, Pompadour, Dubarry, roués, and all that’s most eighteenth century—but remember, there are no longer *lettres de cachet!*”

“How can a man compel a woman to love him?” said Hulot, thinking aloud.

“It is nonsense to seek to be loved, my dear fellow, we are only endured. Madame Marneffe is a hundred times more depraved than Josépha—”

“And more grasping! she has cost me ninety-two thousand francs,” cried Hulot.

“And how many sous?” asked Crevel, with the insolence of a full purse, thinking the sum named a small one.

“I see you don’t love her,” said Hulot, in a melancholy tone.

“I’ve had enough of her,” said Crevel; “she has cost me three hundred thousand francs.”

“Where has all that money gone to? what has she done with it?” said the baron, seizing his head in both hands.

“If you and I had had an understanding in the beginning, like those little fellows who club together to keep some cheap girl, she wouldn’t have cost either of us so much.”

“That’s an idea! said the baron, “but even then she would trick us. What do you think of that Brazilian, my good fellow?”

“Ah, you old fox, you are right; we are both swindled like—like stockholders,” said Crevel; “those women are a regular joint-stock company.”

“So it was she who told you of the light in the window?” said the baron.

“Old fellow,” said Crevel, assuming his attitude, “you and I are both jockeyed! Valérie is a— She told me to keep you here. I see it all! she is with that Brazilian. Ah! I’ll give her up; for if I held her hands she’d find means to trick me with her feet. She is infamous, wanton—”

“Worse than a prostitute!” said the baron; “Joséphine and Jenny Cadine were at their trade in deceiving us, but she—”

“She, the saint, the prude!” cried Crevel. “Hulot, go back to your wife; you don’t stand well in money matters; people are beginning to talk of certain notes that you signed for Vauvinet. As for me, I am cured of wanting high-bred women. Besides, at our age why should we run after such hussies, who, to tell the honest truth, can’t help deceiving men of our age. You’ve got false teeth and white hair, and I look like Silenus. I shall take to accumulating money. Money never deceives—every six months you get something from it; but women cost so much! Ah, my dear Gubetta, my old comrade, if it concerned only you I’d take the matter—well, philosophically; but as for that Brazilian, with his suspicious foreign wealth—”

“Woman,” said Hulot, “is an inexplicable being.”

“I can explain her,” remarked Crevel; “you and I are old, and the Brazilian is young and handsome.”

“True,” said Hulot, “I admit we are growing old. But, my good friend (how are we ever to do without the pretty creatures, looking at us with those sly smiles as they curl their hair; grimacing and telling lies, and complaining that we don’t love them when they see us troubled about matters, and coaxing us to be happy?)”

“Yes, faith, it is the only pleasant thing in life,” said Crevel. “Ah! when a pretty face smiles, and says, ‘My darling, how nice you are! I’m not one of those women who adore young fellows with pointed beards, smoking cigars and vulgar as lackeys—they are insolent because they are young. You suspect me of coquetry, but I prefer a man fifty years old to such young fry; he is faithful, he knows a woman can’t be easily replaced, he appreciates her—that’s why I love you, my old man.’ Ah! when they say that! though it is all false—”

"Falsehood is often pleasanter than truth," said Hulot, remembering certain charming scenes with Valérie which Crevel's mimicry evoked. "She's a fairy; she can metamorphose an old man into a young one."

"Ah, yes," continued Crevel, "she's an eel, slipping through your fingers—but such a pretty one! sweet and white as sugar, funny as Arnal, and clever! Ah!—"

"Clever, yes, clever and witty!" cried the baron, who no longer thought of his wife.

The brethren went to bed the best friends in the world, each recalling Valérie's many perfections, the intonations of her voice, her kittenish ways, her gestures, her droll sayings, the sallies of wit and the out-flowings of her heart—for this artist in love had moments of delightful emotion, like tenors who sing an air on some days better than on others. The pair went to sleep soothed by diabolic reminiscences full of temptation, and lighted by the fires of hell.

The next morning at nine o'clock Hulot talked of going to the ministry and Crevel of going out of town. They left the house together and Crevel offered his hand to the baron saying: "No resentment, I hope?—for we have both turned our backs on Madame Marneffe."

"Oh! it is over and done with," said Hulot, with an expression of disgust.

At half-past ten Crevel was puffing up Madame Marneffe's staircase. He found that infamous creature, that adorable enchantress, in a most coquettish dressing-gown, eating her breakfast in company with Baron Montez and Lisbeth. In spite of the shock the sight of the Brazilian gave him, Crevel asked Madame Marneffe to see him alone for two minutes. Valérie took him into the salon.

"Valérie, my angel," said the infatuated mayor, "Monsieur Marneffe has not long to live; if you will be faithful to me we will be married when he dies. So make up your mind whether that Brazilian is worth more than a mayor of Paris—a man who, for your sake, will aspire to the highest dignities, and who already possesses eighty and some odd thousands a year."

"I'll think of it," she said. "Expect me at the rue du Dauphin at two o'clock, and we will talk about it. But be prudent; and don't forget the transfer you promised me yesterday."

She returned to the dining-room, followed by Crevel, who flattered himself he had found a way to make her wholly his own; and there they found Baron Hulot, who, during their short colloquy, had arrived with the same purpose in view. The councilor of state also asked for a moment's interview. Madame Marneffe rose again to leave the room, smiling at the Brazilian as if to say, "They are both crazy—don't they see *you*?"

“Valérie,” said Hulot, “my dear child, this cousin—is no cousin at all.”

“There, that’s enough,” she cried, interrupting him; “Marneffe has never been, never will be, never can be my husband. The first, the only man I ever loved has come back without warning me—is it my fault? Look at Henri and look at yourself, and then say if a woman, above all where she loves, can hesitate. My dear friend, from this day forth I decline to be Susannah with the Elders. If you and Crevel want to come here, you must come as friends—but all else is over between us; I am twenty-six years old, and before long I intend to be a saint, an honorable and excellent wife—like yours.”

“Is that how you receive me?” asked Hulot, “when I come here like a pope with my hands full of indulgences! Well, your husband shall never be the head of his division nor an officer of the Legion of honor.”

“We will see about that,” said Madame Marneffe, looking at Hulot in a peculiar manner.

“Don’t let us get angry,” cried the baron, in despair. “I’ll come to-night and then we will make it all up.”

“Come to Lisbeth’s apartment, then.”

“Very good,” said the amorous old man.

Hulot and Crevel left the house together without saying a word until they reached the street; once there, they looked at each other and both laughed lugubriously.

“We are two old fools!” said Crevel.

“I have got rid of them,” said Madame Marneffe to Lisbeth as she returned to the breakfast-table. “I never have loved, never shall love any but my leopard,” she added, smiling at Henri Montez. “Lisbeth, dearest, you don’t know; I must tell you that Henri has forgiven me all the infamies to which poverty reduced me.”

“It was my fault,” said the Brazilian, “I ought to have sent you money.”

“Poor child that I was,” cried Valérie, “I ought to have worked for a living; but my fingers were never made for that—ask Lisbeth.”

The Brazilian departed the happiest of men.

Towards midday Valérie and Lisbeth were gossiping in the splendid bedroom, where its dangerous mistress was bestowing those last touches on her toilet which a woman gives with her own fingers. Drawing the bolts and curtains carefully, Valérie related, to their minutest detail, the events of the evening, of the night, and of the morning.

“Are you satisfied, my jewel?” she said to Lisbeth, as the tale ended. “Which shall I be, Madame Crevel or Madame Montez? What do you advise?”

“Crevel can’t live more than ten years, old libertine that he is,” answered Lisbeth, “and Montez is young. Crevel will leave you thirty thousand francs a year. Let Montez wait; he will be happy enough as a Benjamin. When you are thirty-three you will be as handsome as ever, and then you can marry your Brazilian and play a great rôle with his money, especially if you are under the wing of Madame la maréchale.”

“Yes, but Montez is Brazilian,” remarked Valérie; “he’ll never be anything in society.”

“These are the days of railroads,” said Lisbeth; “before long foreigners will become of social consequence in France.”

“Time enough when Marneffe dies,” said Valérie; “he hasn’t long to suffer.”

“Those pains which return upon him,” remarked Lisbeth, are like physical remorse, as it were. Good-by; I am going to see Hortense.”

“Well, go, my dearest, and bring me Wenceslas,” answered Valérie. “In three whole years not to have conquered one inch of ground! It is a shame to both of us! Wenceslas and Henri, my two only passions; one is love, the other fancy.”

“How beautiful you are this morning!” said Lisbeth, putting her arm round Valérie’s waist, and kissing her. “I delight in all your pleasures, your luck, your pretty dresses. I never really lived before the day which made us sisters.”

“Wait, my tigress,” said Valérie, laughing; “your shawl’s awry. You don’t know how to wear a shawl, in spite of all my lessons; and yet you want to be Madame la maréchale Hulot!”

CHAPTER XXI

WHAT IT IS THAT MAKES A GREAT ARTIST.

Shod in prunella boots and wearing gray silk stockings, a handsome silk dress, and her hair in smooth bands beneath a very pretty black velvet bonnet lined with yellow satin, Lisbeth made her way to the rue Saint-Dominique by the boulevard des Invalides, wondering whether the depression so visible in Hortense would deliver that strong spirit into her hands, and whether Sarmatian inconstancy, played upon at a moment when all things are possible with such natures, would make the husband's love for the wife give way.

Hortense and Wenceslas occupied the ground-floor of a house in the rue Saint-Dominique at the point where the street ends at the esplanade of the Invalides. The apartment, formerly in keeping with the honeymoon, now wore that half-fresh, half-faded appearance which may be called the autumn of furniture. Newly married people are terrible destroyers; they use and abuse things about them as they do love. Full of their present, they give very little thought to the future, whose cares are to come sooner or later on the mother of the family.

Hortense had just finished dressing a little Wenceslas, who was then sent off into the garden.

"Good morning, Bette," said Hortense, opening the door herself for her cousin.

The cook had gone to market; the chamber-maid, who was also the nurse, was washing.

"Good morning, dear," replied Lisbeth, kissing Hortense. "Well," she whispered, "is Wenceslas in his studio?"

"No, he is talking to Stidmann and Chanor in the salon."

"Can we be alone?" asked Bette.

"Come into my bedroom."

The room was hung in chintz with a pattern of pink roses and green foliage on a white ground, which the sun had now faded, together with the colors of the carpet. The curtains had not been washed for a long time. The odor of Wenceslas's cigar pervaded the room, and the sculptor, born a gentleman and now one of the great lords of art, dropped the ashes of his tobacco on the arms of the chairs and over the pretty things about the room, like a petted man to whom all such liberties are allowed, or a rich man who feels he can replace what he injures.

"Now then, let us talk over your affairs," said Lisbeth, looking at her beautiful cousin, who sat silent in the easy-chair into which she had thrown herself. "But what's the matter, dearest? You are pale."

“Two more criticisms have been published against my poor Wenceslas. That statue to Maréchal Montcornet is said to be very bad. They admit that the bas-reliefs are good, to support, with shameful insincerity, the assertion that he is only fit for a decorator, and that high art is beyond him! Stidmann, whom I entreated to tell me the truth, says that his opinion coincides with that of the critics and the artists and the public. ‘If Wenceslas,’ he said to me this morning in the garden before breakfast, does not exhibit a fine work next year, he will have to give up sculpture and take to decoration, and make designs for jewelry and silver-ware.’ This opinion terrifies me; for Wenceslas will never conform to it—he feels, he knows he has within him such grand ideas.”

“People can’t pay their expenses with ideas,” said Bette; “I was all the time telling him so. Money alone does it; and money is only earned by things done— things that please the middle classes so that they buy them. When it is a question of bread and butter the sculptor had better model a torch, a fender, a table, than a group or a statue; everybody wants that sort of thing, while the amateur of groups and statues with plenty of money is long in coming.”

“Yes, you are right. My good Lisbeth, tell him so—I have not the courage. Besides, he told Stidmann that if he went back to mere decoration he would have to renounce the Institute and the great creations of art; and we should lose the three hundred thousand francs which the minister has promised us for the work at Versailles and for the municipality of Paris. That is what those cruel articles, inserted by rivals who want to get our orders, will deprive us of.”

“Ah! it’s what you dreamed of, my poor darling,” said Bette, kissing Hortense; “you thought you were marrying a nobleman, a leader of art and the chief of sculptors. This is what poetry has brought you to! Poetry requires fifty thousand francs a year to support it, and you have only twenty-four hundred during my lifetime, three thousand when I die.”

Tears came into Hortense’s eyes; Bette lapped them with a glance, as a cat drinks milk.

Here follows a succinct history of the first honeyed months of this marriage; possibly the tale may not be lost upon artists.

Mental toil, search through the higher regions of the intellect, is one of the greatest efforts known to man. That which is most deserving of fame in art (under this term must be included all creations of thought) is courage—a courage of which common souls have no conception, and which has never, perhaps, been explained until here and now. Driven by the terrible pressure of poverty, held in by Bette, like a horse with blinders to prevent his seeing right and left along the way, lashed by the stern woman—hard image of necessity, that subaltern of Fate—Wenceslas, born a poet and a dreamer, passed from conception to execution without

measuring the gulf which separates those two hemispheres of art. To think, to dream, to conceive great works is a delightful occupation. It is like smoking hashish, or living the life of courtesans given over to their caprices. The ideal work appears in all its grace of infancy, in the wild joy of generation, with the perfumed colors of the flowers, and the sweetness of the fruits tasted and inhaled before they exist. Such is conception and its pleasures. He who can sketch out his idea in words passes for an extraordinary man; all writers and artists possess that faculty. But to produce! to bring the idea to birth! to raise the child laboriously from infancy, to put it nightly to sleep surfeited with milk, to kiss it in the mornings with the hungry heart of a mother, to clean it, to clothe it fifty times over in new garments which it tears and casts away—and yet not revolt against the trials of this agitated life, but to bring out of them the living masterpiece which speaks to every eye in sculpture, to every intellect in literature, to the memory of all in painting, to the hearts of all in music—this is execution and its toils. The hand must incessantly advance, ready at every instant to obey the head; and yet the head holds the creative instinct no more at command than the heart can bestow love at will.

This habit of creation, this unwearying maternal love, this motherhood (Nature's masterpiece, so truly comprehended by Raphael!) cerebral motherhood, though so difficult to attain, is lost with fatal facility. Inspiration is the opportunity of genius. Never does it fly low; it is in the air, it darts away with the timidity of a bird, no scarf floats from its shoulders to the poet's grasp, its ambient locks are flame; it evades us, like those beauteous rose-and-white flamingoes, the hunter's despair. The toil of art is therefore a relentless struggle, which great natures fear yet court, often as they are conquered in it. A great poet of our day has said, speaking of this toil, "I take it up in dread, I lay it down with regret." Let the ignorant learn this. If an artist does not spring to his work as Curtius into the gulf, as the soldier to the breach, without reflection; if, once within the crater, he does not labor as a miner buried in the earth; if he contemplates his difficulties instead of conquering them one by one, like lovers in fairy-tales who fight with enchanters, up-springing from each defeat to attain their mistresses—the work remains unachieved; it perishes in the studio; production becomes impossible and the artist assists the suicide of his own talent. Rossini, brother-genius of Raphael, is a startling example of this truth in the ripe and opulent age which followed his indigent and toiling youth.

Wenceslas, by nature a dreamer, had spent such energy in producing, in studying, and in working under the despotic rule of Lisbeth that love and happiness brought about a reaction. His real character reappeared. Indolence and carelessness, the effeminacy of the Slav, returned to the soul from which the master's whip had

driven them. For the first few months after his marriage he thought of nothing but his love for Hortense. The pair gave themselves up to the rapturous play of legitimate and blissful passion. The wife thus became the one to wean the husband from toil; the caresses of a woman put the muse to flight, and weakened the vigor and the dogged perseverance of the toiler. Six to seven months went by while the sculptor's hand forgot its cunning. When the necessity to take up his work came on, when the Prince de Wissembourg, chairman of the subscription committee, asked to see the statue of Montcornet, Wenceslas put him off with the speech sacred to idlers, "I am going to set about it." He satisfied his dear Hortense with delusive speeches and the splendid plans of a smoking artist. The wife's love redoubled for her poet; she foresaw the grandeur of the Montcornet monument. The figure was to represent the idealization of intrepid courage, the type of cavalry, the embodied boldness of Murat. Why, the mere sight of that statue would enable men to imagine all the victories of the Emperor. And what execution!

As a matter of actual production in the way of statues, a small Wenceslas soon appeared.

When it became imperative to go to the atelier at the Gros-Caillou to handle clay and work out the rough model, either the prince's clock required the artist's presence at Florent and Chanor's workshop, where the figures were being chiselled, or the weather was gloomy; to-day he had business, to-morrow there was a family dinner—not to speak of the indispositions of the mind, and the headaches of the body, or the days when he went pleasuring with an adored wife. The Maréchal Prince of Wissembourg got angry before he could get the statue, and threatened to rescind the order. It was only after appeals and angry speeches that the subscribers finally beheld the clay model. Every day that he really worked Steinbock returned home visibly fatigued; he complained of such, "mason's labor," and talked of his physical weakness. The Comtesse Steinbock, adoring her husband in all the happiness of satisfied love, thought the minister very cruel. She went to see him, and told him that great works could not be hammered out like cannon, that the State should sit, like Louis XIV., Francois I., and Leo X., at the feet of Genius. Poor Hortense, thinking that her arms embraced a Phidias, showed the maternal cowardice of a woman who pushes love into idolatry. "Don't press yourself," she said to her husband; "our future is in that statue; take your time, make it your masterpiece." She went often to the atelier. Steinbock, the lover, lost five hours out of seven in describing his work instead of doing it. It took him eighteen months to complete the work of such vital importance to his career.

When the plaster was run, and the model actually existed, Hortense, having witnessed the physical toil of her husband, whose health suffered from the lassitude which comes over the body, arms, and hands of sculptors at such times—poor Hortense thought the statue admirable. Her father, who knew nothing of sculpture, her mother, not less ignorant, exclaimed that it was a masterpiece. The minister of war came to inspect it under their auspices; persuaded by them, he declared himself satisfied with the cast, which was placed in its proper light before a green curtain. Alas! at the exhibition of 1841 universal disapproval pulled down the idol so hastily set up. Stidmann tried to break the fact to his friend Wenceslas, and was accused of jealousy. The articles in the newspapers seemed to Hortense the snarls of envy. Stidmann, kindly soul, instigated other articles contradicting the first, and calling attention to the fact that sculptors changed their work so much between the plaster and the marble that the latter alone ought to be exhibited and judged. “Between the design in plaster and the statue in marble,” wrote Claude Vignon, “it is quite possible to undo a fine thing or make a noble work of art out of a poor one; the plaster is the manuscript, the marble is the book.”

In the course of two years and a half Steinbock had made a statue and a son. The child was divinely beautiful; the statue detestable.

The clock of the Hours, sold to a prince, paid the family expenses. Steinbock contracted habits of the world, went into society, to the theatre, and the opera; talked admirably upon art and maintained his reputation as a great artist by his tongue and his critical disquisitions. There are men of genius in Paris who pass their lives in talking themselves out, and are content with a sort of salon fame. Steinbock, imitating those agreeable eunuchs, indulged day by day his increasing aversion to labor. He saw all the difficulties of a work when he tried to begin it, and the discouragement to which he yielded relaxed his will. Inspiration, the fury of intellectual generation, fled with hasty wing at the very aspect of the sick child.

Sculpture is like dramatic art, the easiest and at the same time the most difficult of all the arts. Copy a model, and the work is done; but put a soul within it, make a type representing man or woman, and the sin of Prometheus triumphs. Such successes may be counted in the annals of sculpture, as we count poets throughout the ages. Michael Angelo, Michel Colomb, Jean Goujon, Phidias, Praxiteles, Polyeletus, Puget, Canova, Albert Dürer are brothers to Milton, Virgil, Dante, Shakspeare, Tasso, Homer, and Molière. The work is so grand that one figure alone suffices to give immortality; witness that of Figaro, of Lovelace, of Manon Lescaut, which immortalized Beaumarchais, Richardson, and the Abbè Prévost. Superficial persons (artists can count many in their

own fraternity) have said that sculpture exists in the nude only, that it died with Greece, and that modern garments render it a lost art. But, in the first place, the ancients made sublime statues entirely draped, like the Polyhymnia, Julia, Agrippina, etc. Then let true lovers of art go to see Michael Angelo's Pensoso at Florence and Albert Dürer's Virgin in the Cathedral at Mainz—a living woman beneath her triple robes, with hair as soft and flowing as ever woman combed—let persons ignorant of art see these things, and all will admit that genius can impregnate the coat, the armor, or the robe with thought and fill them with a body, just as man himself gives his own character and the habits of his life to his garments. Sculpture is the constant realization of that distinctive thing in painting which goes by the supreme name of Raphael. The solution of the problem can be found only through incessant and sustained work; for the material difficulties must be so wholly vanquished, the hand so trained, so ready, so obedient, that the sculptor shall be enabled to struggle soul to soul with that invisible moral nature which must be transfigured while materializing it. If Paganini, who told out his soul on the strings of his violin, had spent three days without studying he would have become an ordinary violinist. Constant toil is the law of art, as it is of life; for art is idealized creation. Thus great artists, true poets, never await orders nor expect buyers; they generate and give birth to-day, to-morrow, ever. From this habit of labor results a ceaseless comprehension of difficulties, which keeps them in communion with the muse and her creative forces. Canova lived in his atelier as Voltaire lived in his study. Homer and Phidias must have done likewise.

Wenceslas Steinbock was on the arid way trod by these greatest men—the way that leads to Alps of glory—when Lisbeth chained him in his garret. Happiness in the form of Hortense had made the poet indolent, the normal condition of all artists; for idleness with them is occupation; it is the pleasure of pachas in the seraglio. They caress ideas, and grow intoxicated at the fountains of the mind. Great artists like Steinbock, given over to reverie, are not unjustly called dreamers. Such opium-eaters often die in misery, when, had circumstances forced them to inflexible efforts, they would have been great men. These semi-artists are always charming; men like them, and make them drunk with praise. They seem superior to other and truer artists, who are accused of self-assertion, aloofness, and rebellion against social customs—and for this reason: great men belong to their works. Their detachment from the things of life, and their devotion to their own ideas, make them egoists to the eye of fools, who expect them to be dressed like dandies and to perform those conventional evolutions called “duty to society.” They want an African lion combed and curled like the poodle of a countess. Such artists,

having few peers among their fellows, and meeting them seldom, fall into the exclusiveness of solitude; they become inexplicable for the majority—composed, as we know, of fools and of ignorant, envious, and superficial people. We can imagine the part a woman has to play beside these lofty exceptions. She must be, on the one hand, all that Lisbeth had been to Wenceslas for five years, and give him love besides—humble, discreet, ever-smiling, ever-present love.

Hortense, warned by the trials of her mother and harassed by terrible necessities, saw too late the fault her excessive love had led her involuntarily to commit; but, worthy daughter of a noble mother, her heart refused to admit the idea of wounding Wenceslas. She loved her poet too deeply to be his executioner, and she awaited the coming moment when poverty would be upon them all—her husband, her son, and herself.

“Come, come, dear child,” said Bette, seeing the tears in her cousin’s eyes; “you must not despair. A cupful of tears couldn’t buy a plateful of soup. How much do you want?”

“Five or six thousand francs.”

“I have only three thousand at the most,” said Lisbeth. “What is Wenceslas doing?”

“They have asked him to design a dinner-service for the Duc d’Hérouville for six thousand francs; Stidmann is to do it with him, and Chanor promises to pay the four thousand francs Wenceslas owes to Leon de Lora and Bridau—a debt of honor.”

“What! did Wenceslas receive the money for the statue and the bas-reliefs of the monument to Montcornet and not pay that debt?”

“But,” said Hortense, “for three years past we have spent twelve thousand francs a year. The monument, after paying all costs, did not bring us in more than sixteen thousand francs. In fact, if Wenceslas does not work I don’t see what will become of us. Ah! if I could learn to make statues, how I would work the day!” she said, stretching out her beautiful arms.

It was easy to see that the woman fulfilled the promise of the girl. Her eye flashed, and red blood flowed impetuously in her veins. She regretted that she was obliged to spend her energy on the care of her child.

“Ah, my little treasure, a wise girl wouldn’t have married an artist till he had made his fortune.”

The sound of steps, and the voices of Stidmann and Wenceslas showing Chanor to the door were heard; and presently Wenceslas entered with Stidmann. Stidmann, an artist much thought of in the world of journalists and of celebrated actresses, was an elegant young man, whom Madame Marneffe had made Claude Vignon present to her. Stidmann had just ended his relations with the famous Madame Schontz, who had lately

married in the provinces. Valérie and Lisbeth, who had known of the rupture through Vignon, thought it desirable to attract the friend of Wenceslas to the rue Vanneau. As Stidmann seldom visited the Steinbocks, and Lisbeth had been absent at the time of his presentation by Claude Vignon, she now saw him for the first time. While observing the young man she detected certain glances cast at Hortense, which made her think it possible he might console her in case Wenceslas was unfaithful. Stidmann did, in fact, feel that if Steinbock were not his friend, Hortense would be an adorable mistress; and the feeling, restrained by honor, kept him from the house. Lisbeth noticed in his manner the tell-tale embarrassment which hampers a man in presence of a woman with whom he feels forbidden to flirt.

“He is very good-looking,” she whispered to Hortense.

“Do you think so?” answered Hortense. “I never noticed it.”

“Stidmann, old fellow,” said Wenceslas, in a low voice, “I won’t stand on ceremony with a friend—the fact is, we have some business to talk over with the old maid.”

Stidmann bowed to the two ladies and withdrew.

“It is all settled,” said Wenceslas, returning to the salon after accompanying Stidmann to the door. “But such a work will take six months, and how are we to live in the meantime?”

“I have my diamonds,” cried Hortense, with the generous ardor of a loving woman.

The tears came into her husband’s eyes.

“Oh! I will work,” he answered, sitting down beside his wife and taking her on his knee. “I’ll work at trifles, wedding presents, bronze groups—”

“But, my dear children,” said Lisbeth, “you know you are my heirs; and I shall leave you a pretty little sum, especially if you help me to marry the marshal. If that comes about soon I’ll take you to live with me—you and Adeline. Ah, how happy we could be together! But now listen to the advice of my experience. Don’t resort to the Mont-de-piété; it is the ruin of borrowers. I have never known them able to pay the interest when it came to redeeming their property, and so all is lost. I will get you a loan of money at five per cent on your own note only.”

“Ah, that will save us,” cried Hortense.

“Well then, Wenceslas must go and see the person who will do you this service to oblige me. It is Madame Marneffe; if you flatter her, for she’s as vain as all parvenues, she’ll help you out of your troubles in the kindest way. Pay her a visit, my dear Hortense.”

Hortense looked at Wenceslas with an expression such as a condemned man mounting the scaffold might be expected to wear.

“Claude Vignon took Stidmann there,” said Wenceslas; “it is a very pleasant house.”

Hortenee bowed her head; what she felt was not grief, it was actual malady.

“But, my dear Hortense, you should give in to the ways of life,” cried Lisbeth, comprehending the eloquence of the wife’s gesture; “if not, you will, like your mother, be exiled to a deserted chamber to weep for Ulysses—another Calypso, in an age when there is no longer a Télémaque!” she added, quoting one of Madame Marneffe’s sarcasms. “You should regard people as utensils, to be taken or left according to the use you can make of them. Make use of Madame Marneffe, and get rid of her later. Are you afraid that Wenceslas, who adores you, will fall in love with a woman four or five years older than you, and as faded as a bale of hay?”

“I would rather pawn my diamonds,” said Hortense. “Oh, don’t go there, Wenceslas! it is hell!”

“Hortense is right,” said Wenceslas, kissing his wife.

“Thank you,” she said, smiling. “There, Lisbeth, see, my husband is an angel. He never gambles; he goes wherever I go, and if he could only take up his work and do it I should be perfectly happy. Why should we visit my father’s mistress?—a woman who has ruined him, and caused our noble mother such bitter grief that she is dying of it—”

“My dear child, your father’s ruin is not her work; it was that singer in the first place, and then your marriage,” answered Bette. “Madame Marneffe is very useful to him—there! I ought not to speak of it.”

“You have a good word for everybody, dear Bette.”

The baby’s cries called Hortense into the garden, and Lisbeth was left alone for a moment with Wenceslas.

“Your wife is an angel, Wenceslas,” she said. “Be sure you love her truly; don’t give her any cause for unhappiness.”

“Yes, I love her so much that I conceal our real situation from her,” answered Wenceslas, “but to you, Lisbeth, I can speak plainly. Even if my wife pawned her diamonds we should be no better off.”

“Well then, borrow of Madame Marneffe,” said Bette. “Either persuade Hortense to let you go, or else go without her knowledge.”

“That’s what I was thinking of when I refused to go so as to spare her feelings,” answered Wenceslas.

“Wenceslas, I love you both too well not to warn you of danger. If you go there, keep firm hold of your heart, for that woman is a demon; every man who sees her adores her—she is so vicious, so alluring, she fascinates like a masterpiece of art. Borrow her money but don’t leave your soul in pawn. I should never

forgive myself if Hortense were betrayed. Here she is," added Bette; "say no more, I'll arrange it all."

"Thank Lisbeth, dear love," said Steinbock to his wife; "she will lend us her savings to get us out of trouble."

"Then, my clearest, I hope you can go to work at once," said Hortense.

"Yes," replied the artist, "to-morrow."

"It is *to-morrow* that has ruined us," said Hortense, smiling on him.

"My dear child, you know yourself the hindrances and difficulties and other business that have kept me back."

"Yes, you are right, dear love."

"Here," cried Steinbock striking his brow, "I have ideas! I shall amaze and confound my enemies. I shall make a dinner-service in the German manner of the sixteenth century—the rhapsodic manner! I will cradle infants in the foliage and fill it with darting insects, and twine it round chimeras, true chimeras, the embodiment of dreams! ah! I grasp them! It shall all be tangled, airy, feathery!— Chanor was enchanted with the idea— I need encouragement, for that last article on the Montcornet monument broke me down."

Lisbeth and Wenceslas, seizing a moment when they were alone together, agreed that the latter should call the next day on Madame Marneffe, either with or without his wife's knowledge and permission.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ARTIST, YOUNG AND A POLE, WHAT ELSE COULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED?

Valérie, informed at once of Bette's success, exacted from Baron Hulot an invitation to dinner for Stidmann, Claude Vignon, and Steinbock; for she was beginning to tyrannize over him as such women tyrannize over old men, who are made to trot about town and supply whatever is necessary to the interests and vanities of their hard mistresses.

On the morrow Valérie put herself under arms in one of those toilets which Parisian women invent when they wish to make the most of their beauty. She studied herself in this operation, as a man about to fight a duel studies his feints and thrusts; not a fold was out of place, not a wrinkle to be seen. Valérie was in her freshest beauty—all softness and delicacy. All eyes were insensibly attracted by her *mouche*. It is supposed that the *mouches* of the eighteenth century are lost or suppressed, but that is a mistake. The women of our day are cleverer than those of former times; they entice the opera-glasses by daring stratagems. One invents a knot of ribbon in the centre of which a diamond sparkles, and she monopolizes all eyes for a whole evening; another resuscitates the Spanish hair-net, or sticks a dagger in her braids; a third puts on black velvet bracelets, or lacel lappets. These brave efforts, these Austerlitzes of coquetry or love, set the fashion of the day to lower spheres when these happy creatures of a higher discard them for others. On this particular evening Valérie, who was resolved to succeed, wore three *mouches*. She made Reine wash her hair with a lotion that turned it for a few day's from a golden to a flaxen tint. Madame Steinbock was a glowing blonde, and Valérie was resolved not to resemble her in any way. This new coloring gave an unusual and piquant expression to Valérie's whole person, which so preoccupied the faithful that Montez whispered in surprise, "What has happened to you this evening?" For the second *mouche* she wore a black velvet ribbon round her throat, which relieved the exquisite whiteness of her skin. The third may be compared to the "*ex-assassine*" of our grandmothers, namely, the prettiest of rose-buds nestling in the charming hollow of her breast.

"I'm appetizing!" she said to herself, going through her attitudes before the glass, as a danseuse practises her curtsy.

Lisbeth had gone to market, for the dinner was to be one of those superfine repasts such as Mathurine had cooked for the late prelate when he entertained the bishop of the adjoining diocese.

Stidmann, Claude Vignon, and Comte Steinbock arrived almost together at six o'clock. A common—or, if you please,

natural—woman would have come forward eagerly on the announcement of the long-wished-for name; but Valérie, who had been ready and waiting since five o'clock, now made her guests wait for her, certain that she was the topic of their conversation and their secret thoughts. While directing the arrangements of the salon she herself had placed about the room those delicious little baubles which Paris, and no other city, is capable of producing—costly trifles which reveal a woman, and, as it were, announce her; keepsakes of enamel and mother-of-pearl; cups full of charming rings; treasures of Sèvres and Dresden china mounted in exquisite taste by Florent and Chanor; statuettes, albums, knick-knacks costing fabulous sums, which passion buys in its first delirium or for a last make-peace. Valérie was, moreover, in the glow of intoxication consequent on success. She had promised Crevel to be his wife if Marneffe died, and the amorous mayor had transferred the capital of ten thousand francs a year to the name of Valérie Fortin, the sum total of his transactions in railways for the last three years—in short, the whole of the two hundred thousand francs which he had offered as a bribe to Madame Hulot. Valérie now possessed an income of thirty-two thousand francs. But Crevel had just made a promise of far greater importance than the gift of money. During the paroxysm of passion into which his duchess (he gave that title to Madame *de* Marneffe to carry out his illusions) plunged him between two and four of an afternoon, he felt obliged to encourage her continued fidelity by holding out the prospect of a pretty little mansion which an imprudent builder had put up in the rue Barquette and now desired to part with. Valérie imagined herself the possessor of a charming house “between court and garden” and a carriage.

“Can a virtuous life give all that as quickly and as easily?—tell me that,” she said to Bette, as she finished dressing.

Lisbeth dined with on this occasion to be able to say to Steinbock those things that persons cannot say for themselves. Madame Marneffe, radiant in happiness, entered the salon with modest grace, followed by Bette, dressed in black and yellow, who served, to use the language of studios, as a foil.

“Good evening, Claude,” she said, offering her hand to the celebrated critic.

Claude Vignon had become, like so many other literary men of the time, a politician—the new word coined to express the first stage of a man ambitious of public honors. The politician of 1840 is, in a way, the *abbé* of the eighteenth century. No salon is now complete without him.

“Dear, this is my cousin, Comte Steinbock,” said Lisbeth, presenting Wenceslas, whom Valérie had pretended not to see.

“I remember Monsieur le comte,” said Valérie, with a gracious inclination of her head. “I saw you frequently in the rue du

Doyenné, and I had the pleasure of being present at your marriage. My dear," she added, turning to Lisbeth, "it would be difficult to forget your ex-son, even if I had seen him but once. Monsieur Stidmann is very good," she continued, bowing to the sculptor, "to accept my invitation at such short notice; but necessity has no law. I knew you were intimate with these gentlemen. There is nothing so dull and awkward as a dinner where the guests do not know each other, and I ventured to invite you for their sakes. But you will come again for mine—will you not? Say yes!"

She walked about the room for a time with Stidmann, seeming quite absorbed in him. The footman announced successively Monsieur Crevel, Baron Hulot, and a deputy named Beauvisage. This personage, a provincial Crevel, one of those beings who are sent into the world merely to swell its numbers, voted under the banner of Giraud, councilor of state, and Victorin Hulot. These two politicians were trying to form a nucleus of progressists in the great phalanx of conservatives. Giraud dined sometimes with Madame Marneffe, who flattered herself she might also in time get Victorin Hulot; but the puritan lawyer had so far found various pretexts to decline his father-in-law's invitations. To dine with the woman who was the cause of his mother's tears seemed to him criminal. Victorin Hulot was to the puritanical politicians of the day what a pious woman is to a sanctimonious one. Beauvisage, formerly a hosier at Arcis, was anxious to acquire the "Parisian style." Puffed up with his election to the Chamber, he was being "formed" in the salon of the delightful and fascinating Madame Marneffe, who persuaded him to take Crevel, to whom he was much attracted, as his model, and mentor; he consulted him in everything, asked the address of his tailor, imitated him, even tried to assume his attitude—in short, Crevel became his prototype. Valérie, surrounded by these personages, seemed to Wenceslas a distinguished woman, and all the more so because Claude Vignon praised her in the language of a lover:—

"She is Madame de Maintenon in Ninon's petticoats," said the former critic. "To please her is an affair of an evening if you are witty; but to win her love is a triumph which might suffice a man's pride, and satisfy his whole being."

Valérie, apparently cold and indifferent to her former neighbor in the rue du Doyenné, touched his vanity without knowing it, for she was ignorant of the Polish character. There is a childlike side to the Slav nature, as in all primitive peoples, of whom it may be said that they irrupted among civilized nations instead of becoming civilized themselves. The race has spread like an inundation and now covers an immense portion of the earth's surface. It inhabits deserts where the free space is so vast that its peoples feel at their ease; it rubs shoulders with no other races (as

the European nations do), and civilization is impossible without the constant friction of ideas and interests. The Ukraine, Russia, the plains of the Danube, the whole Slav race and region are in fact the point of union between Europe and Asia, between civilization and barbarism. Thus the Poles, the finest specimen of the Slav peoples, show a childlikeness, an inconstancy of nature characteristic of immature nations. They possess courage, intellect, and strength, but these qualities, weakened by inconstancy and inconsistency, have no method and no intelligence. The Poles are variable as the wind which sweeps across their vast plains intersected by marshes; if they have the impetuosity of a tornado as it twists trees and dwellings and sweeps them away, like an avalanche of the air they drop into the nearest pond and dissolve into water. Men take some of their characteristics from their surroundings. The Poles, ever at war with the Turks, derived from them a love of Oriental magnificence; they often sacrifice the needful to the brilliant, they decorate their persons like women, and yet their climate has given them the hardy constitution of Arabs. It thus happens that the Polish nation, sublime in its sorrows, has allowed its oppressors to strike it down again and again, and has renewed in the nineteenth century the spectacle of the early Christian martyrs. Put ten per cent of British trickery into the frank and open nature of the Pole and the generous white eagle would reign where the double-headed bird now sails. A little machiavelism would have kept Poland from saving Austria, who shared in the partition; from borrowing money of Prussia, the usurer who undermined her; and from dividing herself at the time of the first partition. At the baptism of Poland some fairy Carabosse, unobserved by the other fairies who endowed that attractive nation with so many brilliant qualities, must have appeared and said: "Keep the gifts my sisters bring you, but remember, you shall desire and never know what it is you want." If Poland had triumphed in her heroic duel with Russia the Poles would have fought each other to-day as they formerly fought in their Diets to hinder one or another from becoming king. The day when that nation, composed as it is of none but generous natures, will have the common-sense to take a Louis XI. from its own loins, and accept his tyranny and his dynasty, it will be saved.

What Poland has been politically, Poles may be said to be in their private lives, especially when trouble overtakes them. Wenceslas Steinbock, who for three years past adored his wife and knew himself her god, was so piqued because Madame Marneffe scarcely deigned to notice him that he made it a point of honor to force some attention out of her. Comparing Valérie with his wife he gave the palm to the former. Hortense was a beautiful piece of flesh and blood, as Valérie had said to Lisbeth, but with Madame Marneffe there were charms of mind in the very form

and piquancy of vice. The wife's devotion seemed to the husband to be his due; the sense of the enormous value of an absolute love is often lost, as a debtor fancies after a time that the money lent is really his. The wife's sublime loyalty becomes, as it were, the daily bread of the soul, while infidelity has the sugared sweetness of a dainty. A haughty woman, above all a dangerous one, excites curiosity just as spices season plain fare. Disdain, which Valérie played so well, was a novelty for Wenceslas after three years of facile pleasures. Besides, Hortense was the wife, Valérie the mistress. Many men desire these two editions of the same work; though it is a great proof of a man's inferior nature when he does not know how to make his wife his mistress. Constancy will ever be the genius of Love; the sign of an immense force—the force that constitutes a poet. A man should find all women in his wife—just as the soiled poets of the seventeenth century made Chloes and Daphnes of their Manons.

“Well,” said Lisbeth to Wenceslas, as soon as she saw him thoroughly fascinated, “what do you think of Valérie?”

“Too charming!” he answered.

“You wouldn't listen to me,” exclaimed Bette. “Ah, my little Wenceslas! if you and I had stayed together you should have been the lover of this siren; you should have married her when she became a widow, and had the benefit of her forty thousand francs a year.”

“Has she all that?”

“Certainly,” said Bette. “But take care now what you are about; I have warned you of your danger; don't burn your fingers. Come, give me your arm, dinner is ready.”

No speech could have been more demoralizing to a Pole; show him a precipice and he springs over it. The Polish race has the distinctive genius of cavalry; it believes in flinging; itself headlong against obstacles and coming out victorious. The spur with which Lisbeth prodded his vanity was enforced by the scene in the dining-room, where an exquisite silver service made him conscious of the elegancies and refinements of Parisian luxury.

“I should have done better,” he reflected, “to have married Célimène.”

During dinner Hulot, who was pleased to find his son-in-law present, and still more pleased at the certainty of reconciliation with Valérie, of whose fidelity he now felt sure, since he could promise her Coquet's place, made himself delightful. Stidmann responded to the baron's *bonhomie* with the wit and sparkle of Parisian pleasantry, and with his own artistic Atticism. Steinbock would not suffer his comrade to eclipse him; he displayed his powers, sharpened his wit, produced an effect, and was satisfied with himself; Madame Marneffe smiled at him once or twice to show that she fully understood him. The good cheer and the

heady wines plunged him finally into what we must call a slough of pleasure. Excited by the flowing bowl, he flung himself after dinner on a sofa in a state of physical and spiritual happiness, which Madame Marneffe lifted into the seventh heaven by placing herself beside him, light as a bird, perfumed and bewitching enough to seduce an angel. She bent toward Wenceslas and almost touched his ear with her lips as she said in a low voice:—

“We cannot talk business to-night unless you will remain after the others. Between you and me and Lisbeth it will be easy to arrange matters.”

“Ah, you are an angel, madame,” said Wenceslas, replying in the same low tone. “I was indeed a fool not to have listened to Lisbeth—”

“What did she tell you?”

“She hinted, in the rue du Doyenné, that you might love me.”

Madame Marneffe looked at Steinbock, seemed confused, and rose abruptly. A young and pretty woman never awakens in a man’s mind the idea of immediate success with impunity. Valérie’s response, the gesture of a virtuous woman repressing a passion hidden in her heart, was a thousand-fold more eloquent than the most passionate assurance.

Wenceslas, ardently excited, redoubled his efforts to please her. The woman in sight is the woman wanted. That is the terrible power of actresses. Madame Marneffe, knowing that she was being studied, behaved like an applauded actress. She made herself delightful and her triumph was absolute.

“My father-in-law’s passion no longer surprises me,” said Wenceslas to Lisbeth.

“If you talk so, Wenceslas,” she replied “I shall regret all my life having persuaded you to borrow those ten thousand francs. Can it be that you are like all the rest,” making a sign towards the others, “madly in love with that creature? Would you be the rival of your own father-in-law? Besides, reflect on the sorrow you would cause Hortense.”

“That is true,” said Wenceslas. “Hortense is an angel, and I should be a monster.”

“One is enough in a family,” remarked Lisbeth.

“Artists should never marry,” cried Steinbock.

“Ah! that’s what you said to me in the rue du Doyenné. Your children were to be those groups and statues and masterpieces!”

“What are you talking of?” said Valérie, coming up to them. “Please pour out tea, cousin.”

Steinbock, with Polish vain-glory, wished to seem intimate with the fairy mistress of the salon. He glanced insolently at Stidmann, Claude Vignon, and Crevel, and then, seizing Valérie by the hand, he compelled her to sit down by him on the sofa.

"You are too autocratic, Comte Steinbock," she said, making a slight resistance.

Then she laughed as she dropped beside him, and let him see the rosebud nestling in her bosom.

"Alas! if I were that, I should not be here now as a borrower," he said.

"Poor fellow—I remember your toilsome nights in the rue du Doyenné. You were foolish, were you not? you married as a hungry man snatches bread. You did not know Paris, and see the result! You turned a deaf ear to Bette's devotion—as well as to other love—"

"Say no more," cried Steinbock, "you annihilate me."

"You shall have your ten thousand francs, my dear Wenceslas, but on one condition," she said, playing with her pretty curls.

"And that is?—"

"Well, I can receive no interest."

"Madame!"

"Oh, don't be displeased; you can make me a bronze group in payment. You began the story of Samson; well, finish it. Make Delilah cutting the hair of the Jewish Hercules. You, who could be a great artist if you would only listen to me, you will understand the subject. The point is to express the power of woman. Samson plays no part in it; he is the dead body of power. Delilah is passion destroying all. How that replica—is that what you call it?" she added cleverly, seeing Stidmann and Claude Vignon approach on hearing this talk of art, "how far more beautiful this replica of the story of Hercules at the feet of Omphale is, than the Greek legend. Did Greece obtain it from Judea, or did Judea take the symbol from the Hellenes?"

"Ah, madame, there you raise a serious question," said Claude Vignon—"that of the periods at which the various books of the Bible were written. The immortal Spinoza, so idiotically classed among atheists—a man who proved, mathematically, the existence of God!—declared that Genesis, and what may be called the political part of the Bible, was written in the time of Moses; he showed the interpolations by philological facts—for which he was stabbed three times at the door of the sanctuary."

"I did not know I was so learned," said Valérie, annoyed to have her tête-à-tête interrupted.

"Women know all intuitively," replied Vignon.

"Well, will you promise me to make the group?" she said to Steinbock, taking his hand with the modest hesitation of a girl in love.

"You are a happy man if madame asks you for anything," said Stidmann.

"What is it?" asked Claude Vignon.

"A little bronze group," answered Steinbock. "Delilah cutting Samson's hair."

"Difficult," remarked Vignon, "on account of the bed—"

"No, very easy," said Valérie, smiling.

"Make us the design!" exclaimed Stidmann.

"Madame must give the model for that design," said Claude, with a meaning glance at Valérie.

"Well," she replied, smiling, "this is how I understand the subject: Samson wakes up without his hair—like many a dandy who wears a wig! The hero can sit on the side of the bed; you need only show part of it half hidden by the sheets and curtains. He sits there like Marius in the ruins of Carthage, his arms crossed, his head shorn, Napoleon at Saint-Helena, or what you please! Delilah kneels—a good deal like Canova's Magdalen. When a woman ruins a man she always idolizes him; in my opinion the Jewess was afraid of Samson when he was terrible and powerful, but she must have loved him when she had made him helpless. So she regrets what she has done, and longs to give him back his hair; she scarcely dares look at him; then she does look at him, smiling, for she sees her pardon in Samson's weakness. Such a group, coupled with one of that savage Judith, might really be called Woman Explained. Vice cuts off the hair, but virtue cuts off the head. Ah! take care of your locks, gentlemen!"

And she left the two artists and the critic, who all three sang praises in her honor. "Delightful!" said Stidmann.

"She is the most intelligent and the most desirable woman I have ever known," said Claude Vignon. "Such a union of beauty and intellect is rare indeed."

"If you, who have the happiness of knowing Camille Maupin intimately, can say that," replied Stidmann, "what must the rest of us think?"

"My dear count, if you will make your Delilah a portrait of Valérie," said Crevel, leaving the card-table where he had overheard the conversation, "I will give you three thousand francs for a copy. Yes, hang it all, I'm willing to *go that*."

"Go that?—what does he mean?" asked Beauvisage of Claude Vignon.

"If madame could be induced to sit," said Steinbock to Crevel. "Will you ask her?"

Just then Valérie herself brought Steinbock a cup of tea. It was more than a courtesy, it was a favor. There is an unspoken language in the way a woman gives a man his tea which the sex thoroughly understand; it is in fact a curious study to watch her movements, gestures, glances, tones, and accents as she performs this apparently simple act of politeness. In that varied question, "Do you take tea?" "Will you have some tea?" "A cup of tea?"—varying from the cold formula of the nymph who sits at the urn to

the poem of the odalisque who comes, cup in hand, to the pacha of her heart, and offers it submissively in caressing tones and with looks full of pleasurable promise—a physiologist may find the whole round of female sentiments, from aversion and indifference to the offer of Phedre to Hippolyte. In that little act women can make themselves, at will, disdainfully insulting, or submissive as an Eastern slave. Valérie was more than woman; she was the serpent made woman, and she crowned her diabolical work by approaching Steinbock with a cup of tea.

“I will take as many as you bring me,” whispered the artist rising and touching Valérie’s hand with his own as he took the cup “if you will give them to me thus.”

“What were you saying about my sitting to you?” she asked, without appearing to notice the declaration she had so eagerly awaited.

“Old Crevel offers me three thousand francs for your Delilah group—”

“Three thousand francs, he! a group?”

“Provided you will sit as Delilah.”

“He will not be present, I hope,” she said, “otherwise the group would cost his whole fortune, for Delilah, I think, must be somewhat disrobed.”

Just as men like Crevel affect a posture, so women assume a studied pose, an attitude of victory when they feel they are irresistibly admired. There are some who pass whole evenings in society in looking at the lace of their chemisettes or straightening the sleeves of their dresses, or showing the beauty of their eyes by looking at the cornices. Madame Marneffe did not proclaim her triumphs openly like other women. She turned quickly towards the tea-table to seek Bette; and the undulation of her robe as she did so fascinated Steinbock with the same spell by which she had first conquered Hulot.

“Your vengeance is complete,” whispered Valérie to Bette, “Hortense will weep all the tears in her body and curse the day when she took Wenceslas away from you.”

“Until I am Madame la maréchale I have gained nothing,” said Bette; “but they have begun to wish it. This morning I went to see Victorin—I forgot to tell you that. He and his wife have taken up the baron’s notes to Vauvinet; they are to sign bonds tomorrow for the repayment of seventy-two thousand francs in three years with five per cent interest, secured by a mortgage on their house. So they, too, will be pinched for the next three years, and they can raise no more money on their property. Victorin is dreadfully gloomy; he understands his father at last. Crevel is so angry at what has been done that he is quite likely to refuse to have anything more to do with them.”

“The baron must be entirely without resources by this time—don’t you think so?” whispered Valérie to Bette, smiling at Hulot.

“I don’t see that he can have anything left; but he gets back his salary in September.”

“And he has that life insurance; he has lately renewed it. It is high time Marneffe got his promotion. I shall attack Hector to-night.”

“Cousin,” said Bette, going up to Wenceslas, “do pray go away. You are making yourself ridiculous; you look at Valérie in a compromising way, and her husband is madly jealous. Don’t imitate your father-in-law, but go home; I am certain your wife is expecting you.”

“Madame Marneffe told me to remain till the last to settle that little money matter,” said Wenceslas.

“No,” said Lisbeth; “I’ll give you the ten thousand francs now; Marneffe has his eye upon you, and it would be very imprudent for you to stay now. Tomorrow morning, at nine o’clock, you can bring your note; that fool of Marneffe is then at his office, and Valérie will be alone. Go up to my rooms when you come—“Ah!” she added, detecting the look with which Steinbock took leave of Valérie, “I always knew you were a libertine by nature. Valérie may be beautiful, but don’t make Hortense unhappy.”

Nothing irritates married men so much as to find their wives between themselves and their desire, no matter how ephemeral it may be.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRST QUARREL OF MARRIED LIFE.

Wenceslas returned home about one in the morning. Hortense had been expecting him since half-past nine. From half-past nine to ten she listened to the rolling of carriages, thinking to herself that Wenceslas had never before been so late when he dined at Florent and Chanor's without her. She sat sewing by the cradle of her son; for she had begun to save the wages of a workwoman by doing the mending of the family herself. From ten to half-past ten she felt an uneasy doubt, and asked herself: "Surely, he went to dine, as he told me, with Chanor and Florent? He wore his best cravat, and the handsome pin; he took as much time to dress as a woman who wants to be better looking than she is. Ah! what a fool I am! He loves me. Here he is!" Alas! the carriage-wheels rolled by, instead of stopping.

From eleven o'clock till midnight Hortense was a prey to unutterable fears, increased by the dead silence of the neighborhood. "If he comes back on foot," she thought, "some harm may happen to him. He might slip on the pavement—artists are so absent-minded. Suppose a robber should stop him! This is the first time that he has left me alone for six whole hours! Why should I torment myself? I know he will never love any one but me."

Men ought to be faithful to the women who love them, were it only because of the miracles true love works in that sublime region called the spiritual world. A loving woman is, in relation to the man she loves, like a somnambulist on whom a magnetizer should bestow the melancholy power of being conscious as woman of what she perceived in trance. Passion brings the nervous forces of woman to that ecstatic state in which presentiment is equivalent to the vision of seers. A woman feels she is betrayed; she listens to no self-reasoning; she doubts because she loves, and she negatives the cry of her pythoness power. That paroxysm of love should be held in reverence. Admiration for its divine phenomena will ever be a barrier between all noble natures and infidelity. How is it possible not to revere the beautiful and spiritual being whose soul has reached the capacity for such manifestations?

By one o'clock in the morning Hortense was in such a state of anguish that she rushed to the door on hearing Wenceslas's well-known ring, took him in her arms and pressed him, as a mother might, to her bosom.

"At last!" she said, recovering the use of speech. "My dear love, in future I must go where you go; for I can never again bear the torture of such waiting. I fancied you falling on the pavement, your head wounded! killed by robbers!— No, if it were to happen

again I should go mad. And you were amusing yourself without me? Ah, rogue!”

“How could I help it, my dear little angel? Bixiou was there with a series of new absurdities, and Léon de Lora, whose wit is never to be quenched, and Claude Vignon, to whom I owe the only consoling criticism on the Montcornet monument. There was also—”

“Were there no women?” asked Hortense, eagerly.

“The worthy Madame Florent—”

“Then you dined at their house? You told me you were going to the Rocher de Cancale.”

“Yes, at their house; I made a mistake.”

“Did you drive home?”

“No.”

“You walked all the way from the rue des Tournelles?”

“I went with Stidmann and Bixiou round by the boulevards as far as the Madeleine; we were talking—”

“It couldn’t have rained on the boulevards, or the place de la Concorde and the rue de Bourgogne,” remarked Hortense, looking at the polish of her husband’s boots.

It had certainly been raining; yet Wenceslas had not muddied his boots.

“See, here are five thousand francs which Chanor has generously lent me,” said Wenceslas, hoping to cut short these judicial inquiries.

He had folded the ten thousand francs into two packets of five thousand each—one for Hortense, the other for himself, to pay debts of which she was ignorant; he owed them to his rough-hewer and workmen.

“That relieves you from anxiety, dear,” he said, kissing her. “To-morrow I shall set to work—yes, to-morrow you will see me off to the atelier at eight o’clock. I’ll go to bed at once, with your permission, darling, so as to get up early.”

The doubt which had vaguely entered his wife’s mind disappeared; she was a thousand leagues from suspecting the truth. Madame Marneffe! the idea never entered her mind. She was afraid of the society of loose women for her husband; and the names of Bixiou and Leon de Lora, notorious for their dissipated lives, alarmed her. The next day, seeing Wenceslas depart for his atelier at nine o’clock she was completely reassured. “There he is at work,” she thought to herself, as she proceeded to dress the baby. “Ah! I see he is going to take hold of his art! Well, if we can’t have the glory of Michael Angelo, at least he shall win that of Cellini.” Buoyed up by her own hopes Hortense believed in a prosperous future, and she was babbling to her son, aged twenty months, in that onomato-poetic language which makes a baby

smile, when the cook, unaware that Steinbock had gone out, announced Stidmann.

“Pardon me, madame,” said the artist. “Why! has Wenceslas gone already?”

“To his atelier.”

“I came to arrange with him about our new work.”

“I will send for him,” said Hortense, signing to Stidmann to be seated.

The young wife, thanking heaven for the opportunity, was anxious to detain Stidmann and hear something about the events of the night before. Stidmann bowed as he thanked her. She rang the bell, and the cook received the order to go to the atelier for her master.

“I hope you were amused last night,” said Hortense, “Wenceslas did not get home till one in the morning.”

“Amused?— well, not exactly,” said the artist, who had intended the night before to capture Madame Marneffe on his own account. “One can’t amuse one’s self in society unless one has some personal interests to gratify. That little Madame Marneffe is very witty, but she is coquettish and—”

“What did Wenceslas think of her?” asked Hortense, endeavoring to be calm, “he did not tell me.”

“I will tell you only one thing,” answered Stidmann, “she is a dangerous woman.”

Hortense turned as pale as a woman just after childbirth. “Then it was—with Madame Marneffe—and not with—Chanor—that you and Wenceslas dined yesterday,” she said; “and he—”

Stidmann, without understanding what harm he had done, guessed that he had made some blunder. The countess did not finish her speech, and suddenly fainted away. The artist rang the bell and the chambermaid came. After the woman had carried Hortense into her bedchamber a violent nervous attack came on. Stidmann, like others whose involuntary indiscretion knocks down a husband’s edifice of lies, could hardly believe that his speech should have caused such a result. He thought it probable that the countess was in a situation where a slight word of contradiction became dangerous. The cook entered at this moment and stated that monsieur was not at the atelier. The countess heard the words and a fresh attack came on.

“Go and get Madame’s mother,” said Louise, the chambermaid, to the cook; “run!”

“If I knew where to find Wenceslas, I would go for him,” said Stidmann, in despair.

“He is with that woman!” cried poor Hortense. “He was dressed for something else than his atelier.”

Stidmann went instantly to Madame Marneffe’s house, understanding at once this second-sight of the passions. At the

moment of his arrival Valérie was posing as Delilah. Too shrewd to ask for Madame Marneffe, Stidmann passed the porter's lodge and ran quickly up to the second floor, arguing with himself, "If I ask for her, I shall be told she is not in; if I ask for Steinbock, they'll laugh in my face—I'll force an entrance."

He rang the bell; Reine answered it.

"Tell Monsieur le Comte Steinbock to come at once; his wife is ill."

Reine, quite as shrewd as Stidmann, looked at him with a stupid air.

"But, monsieur, I don't exactly know—what you—"

"I tell you that my friend Steinbock is here—his wife is ill, and the matter is serious enough for you to disturb your mistress."

Stidmann left the house. "He's there!" he said to himself. He waited a few moments at the corner of the rue Vanneau till he saw Wenceslas come out, and then signed to him to move quickly. After relating what had happened, Stidmann scolded Steinbock for concealing the truth about the dinner of the night before.

"It is a terrible mishap," answered Wenceslas, "but I forgive you. I totally forgot you had promised to meet me this morning, and I made a great mistake in not telling you to say we dined at Florent's. But I couldn't help it; that Valérie has put me beside myself—but ah, my dear fellow she is worth more than fame; a man could face everything for her sake. Advise me. What am I to tell Hortense? how am I to excuse myself?"

"Advise you!" replied Stidmann, "I know nothing about it. Your wife loves you, doesn't she? Well, she will believe whatever you say. Tell her that you came for me when I went for you, and we crossed each other; you can at least get out of this morning's affair. Adieu!"

Lisbeth, hearing what had happened from Reine, overtook Steinbock at the corner of the rue Hillerin-Bertin; she was afraid of his Polish candor. Anxious not to be compromised, she said a few words to Wenceslas which made him stop and kiss her in the open street. Perhaps she threw him a plank by which to cross the conjugal strait.

When Hortense saw her mother, who arrived in haste, she burst into tears; and the nervous crisis fortunately took another turn.

"Betrayed! my dear mamma, betrayed!" she said. "Wenceslas, after giving me his word of honor that he would not visit Madame Marneffe, dined there yesterday, and only got back at one in the morning. The night before we had had, not a quarrel, but an explanation. I said such tender things to him—I told him that I was jealous of his love, that unfaithfulness would kill me. I said I was easily hurt, but he must forgive my weaknesses because they all came from my love for him; that I had as much of my father's

blood as of yours in my veins, and if betrayed I might be maddened and commit mad deeds; I might avenge myself and dishonor us all—him, our child, myself; that I might even kill him, and myself afterwards. And yet he went to her! he is there now! That woman is resolved to destroy us all. Yesterday Victorin and Célestine signed bonds to take up my father's notes for sixty thousand francs which he has wasted on that wanton. Yes, mamma, the creditors were about to put papa in prison. That horrible woman is not satisfied with my father's honor and your tears, she must also deprive me of Wenceslas!—I will go to her; I will stab her!”

Madame Hulot, horrorstricken by the news which Hortense in her fury betrayed, controlled her anguish by an heroic effort, such as noble mothers are alone able to make. She laid her daughter's head upon her breast, and covered it with kisses.

“Wait till you see Wenceslas, my child, and all will be explained. The evil cannot be as great as you think. I have myself been betrayed, Hortense. You think me beautiful, I am virtuous, and yet for the last twenty-four years I have been abandoned for such women as Jenny Cadine, Josépha, Madame Marneffe—did you know that?”

“You, mamma, you!—for twenty-four years you have suffered as—”

She stopped before the ideas in her own mind. “Imitate your mother, dear child; do as she has done. Be gentle and kind, and your conscience will be at peace. On his dying bed a man will say ‘My wife caused me no sorrow.’ God who hears those words will place them to our account. If I had yielded to anger as you are doing now, do you know what would have happened? Your father would have been embittered; he might have abandoned his home altogether; our ruin, which has come now, would have come ten years earlier; we should have shown to the world the shameful spectacle of a husband and wife living apart, a deplorable scandal, the destruction of the family; neither you nor your brother could have married. I sacrificed myself—and so courageously that if it had not been for your father's last liaison, the world would have thought me a happy wife. My deceit, my brave deceit, has protected Hector all his life; his reputation is uninjured—only, I fear this present passion, the madness of an old man, will carry him too far; yes, it will tear away the screen I have so long held between our home and the world. Ah! for twenty-four years I have held it up! behind it I wept alone, with no mother, no friend, no help except religion; but I have maintained the family honor all those years.”

Hortense listened to her mother with fixed eyes. The calm, resigned voice of this supreme sorrow silenced the angry voice of the younger woman's first wound; tears came, and came in

torrents. In a rush of filial devotion, overcome by the sublimity of her mother's life, she fell on her knees before her, and caught the hem of her dress and kissed it, as pious Catholics kiss the sacred relics of a martyr.

"Rise, my Hortense," said the baroness; "such feeling shown by my daughter blots out many a cruel memory! Come to my heart, which holds thy sorrows only. The grief of my little girl, whose joy was my sole joy, has broken the sepulchral seal which nothing less could take from my lips. Yes, I meant to carry my sorrows to the grave—a winding-sheet of grief! To calm thine anger, I have spoken—God will pardon me! Rather than see thy life like my life, what would I not do? Men, the world, chance, nature, God—all, all sell us love at the price of cruel torture. Ten happy years have cost me twenty-four of despair and bitterness and endless suffering."

"You had ten years, my own mamma, and I but three!" said the loving egoist.

"All is not lost, my little one; wait till you see Wenceslas."

"Mother," she said, "he lied to me; he has wilfully deceived me. He said, 'I will not go.' He said it before the cradle of his child; and he went!"

"My darling, men for their own pleasure commit the basest actions, villainies, crimes—it seems to be in their nature. We women are vowed to self-sacrifice. I thought my sorrows were coming to an end; alas! they begin anew; I little thought I should suffer again in the sufferings of my daughter. Courage and silence! My Hortense, swear to speak to none but me of your trials; to let no others suspect them. My child, show the pride of your mother."

Hortense shuddered, for at that moment she heard her husband's step.

"It seems that Stidmann came here for me just after I had gone to see him," said Wenceslas as he entered the room.

"Indeed!" cried Hortense, with the savage irony of an offended woman who uses speech as a dagger.

"Yes, I have just met him," answered Wenceslas, acting surprise.

"What of yesterday?" said Hortense.

"My dear love, I deceived you; but your mother shall judge between us."

His frankness softened his wife's heart. All noble women prefer truth to falsehood. They cannot bear to see their idols disgrace themselves; they choose to be proud of the masters they accept.

"Hear me, my dear mother, said Wenceslas; "I love my good and gentle Hortense so truly that I have hidden the extent of our embarrassments from her. How could I do otherwise? She is still

nursing her child, and more anxiety would have injured her. You know what risks a woman runs at such times. Her beauty, her freshness, even her health are in danger. Did I do wrong? she thought we owed five thousand francs, when in fact I owe twice as much. Yesterday I was in the depths of despair. No one is ever willing to lend money to an artist; persons distrust us, they distrust our talents and our caprices. I asked in vain; Lisbeth alone offered us her savings.”

“Poor woman!” said Hortense.

“Poor Bette!” echoed her mother.

“But Lisbeth’s two thousand francs—what were they? a drop in the bucket. Then our cousin spoke (as you know, Hortense), of Madame Marneffe, who, she thought—out of pride, owing all she has to the baron—would lend us the money without interest. Hortense wished to pawn her diamonds. They might have brought a few thousand francs, but we needed ten thousand. Here were the ten thousand offered to us for a year without interest. I said to myself: Hortense need never know; I will go myself and get them. The woman asked my father-in-law to invite me to dinner yesterday, and let me know through Lisbeth that I should then receive the money. How can Hortense, at twenty-four years old, fresh and pure and virtuous—she who is my glory and my happiness, whom I have never quitted for a day since our marriage—how can she imagine that I prefer—what? a sallow, faded, washed-out woman,” he added, using a slang term of the studios to make Hortense believe in his contempt by one of those extravagant condemnations that gratify the female mind.

“Ah, if your father had reasoned with me thus!” exclaimed the baroness.

Hortense threw herself on her husband’s breast.

“Yes, that is what I should have done,” said Adeline. “Wenceslas, my friend, your wife has nearly died of anxiety. She is yours. Alas,” thought the mother, sighing deeply, and thinking what all women think after the marriage of their daughters, “he can make her a martyr or a happy woman. It seems to me,” she said aloud, “that I suffer enough to deserve to have my children happy.”

“Do not be anxious, dear mamma,” said Wenceslas, overjoyed at the fortunate termination of the crisis; “in two months I shall have earned the money and returned it to that horrible woman. What else could I do?” he added, using that essentially Polish phrase with natural Polish grace. “There are moments when we are willing to borrow money of the devil. After all, it is family money. And the invitation once given, I should never have got the money had I replied to it rudely.”

“Oh, mamma, what harm papa has done us!” cried Hortense.

The baroness put a finger on her lip, and Hortense regretted the words, the first blame she had ever allowed herself to utter against a father so heroically defended by sublime silence.

“Good-by, my dear children,” said Madame Hulot. “It is all sunshine now. Never be angry with each other again.”

When, after taking the baroness to the door, Wenceslas and his wife returned to their own room, Hortense said to her husband, “Tell me all about last evening.” And she watched his face during the recital, which she interrupted now and then by questions which spring naturally to a wife’s lips in such a case. The account she received made her thoughtful; she perceived clearly enough the diabolical enjoyments artists must find in such vicious society.

“Be frank, dear Wenceslas—Stidmann, Claude Vignon, and Vernisset were present, who else? Did you enjoy it?”

“I? I thought of nothing but that ten thousand francs; I said to myself, They will relieve my Hortense of all anxiety.”

This questioning was becoming intolerably annoying to the Pole, and he seized a moment’s respite to say to Hortense, “What would you have done, my darling, had I been guilty?”

“I?” she said. “I should have taken Stidmann—without loving him, be it understood.”

“Hortense!” cried Steinbock, springing up with an almost theatrical movement, “you would never have had time to do it—I should have killed you!”

Hortense threw herself on her husband’s breast, clasped him to suffocation in her arms, and covered him with kisses, crying out: “Ah! you love me, Wenceslas! I fear nothing now. But no more Marneffe! Don’t plunge again into such mud-holes.”

“I swear to you, my Hortense, that I will never go back there until I take the money to pay my note.”

She was cold for a while, like other loving women who pretend coldness to gain a profit in the end. Wenceslas, weary of the scene, left her alone to sulk as she pleased and went off to his atelier to make the rough model for Samson and Delilah, the drawing of which was in his pocket. Hortense, regretting her manner and thinking Wenceslas displeased, followed him some time later, and reached the atelier just as her husband had finished manipulating the day, with that fury which takes possession of an artist in the grasp of fancy. When he saw his wife he flung a wet cloth over the roughly modelled figures and took Hortense in his arms, exclaiming:—

“We are not angry with each other, are we, my Ninette?”

Hortense had seen the group and the cloth thrown hastily over it, though she said nothing; but before leaving the atelier she turned round, lifted the wet rag, looked at the sketch, and said:—

“What is that?”

“An idea that has come into my head.”

“Why did you hide it from me?”

“I did not want you to see it till finished.”

“That woman is very pretty!” said Hortense.

And again suspicion grew in her mind, as in the Indies those rank vegetations spring up, tall and tufted, in a single night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIVE FATHERS OF THE MARNEFFE CHURCH.

By the end of three weeks Madame Marneffe was deeply incensed against Hortense. Women of her kind have their own form of self-love; they choose that others shall obey their devil's-spur; they never forgive a virtue which either does not fear their power or wrestles with it. Wenceslas had not paid a single visit in the rue Vanneau— not even the one which courtesy demanded to thank a woman for posing as Delilah. Each time that Lisbeth had gone to the Steinbocks' she found no one at home; monsieur and madame spent their whole time at the atelier. Lisbeth, pursuing the turtle-doves to their nest at Gros-Caillou, saw Wenceslas hard at work and ascertained from the cook that madame never left him. Wenceslas had yielded to the despotism of love. Valérie now shared Lisbeth's hatred of Hortense on her own account. Women are as desirous of a lover whom other women try to hold as men are of the women whom other men desire. The reflections which we make about Madame Marneffe apply equally to men of gallantry, who are, in a sense, male courtesans. Valérie's fancy for Wenceslas became rabid; she was determined in the first place to get her group, and she was thinking of going to see him at his atelier when an event happened which may be called, in the case of such women, *fructus belli*. Valérie announced this absolutely personal fact as she was breakfasting with Lisbeth and Monsieur Marneffe.

"Marneffe, did you know you were about to be a father for the second time?"

"No! really? Ah, let me kiss you—"

He rose and made the circuit of the table; his wife held her head at him so that the kiss fell on her hair.

"That will make me head of my department and officer of the Legion of honor! Ha, ha, my little girl! But I don't want Stanislas to be injured, poor little thing."

"Poor little thing indeed!" cried Lisbeth. "It is six months since you have seen him; they think I'm his mother at school, for I am the only one of the family who ever inquires for him."

"A child that costs a hundred francs a month!" exclaimed Valérie. "Besides, he is really yours, Marneffe, and you ought to pay his schooling out of your salary. The new-comer, instead of being a drain upon us, will keep us rich."

"Valérie," said Marneffe, imitating Crevel's attitude, "I hope Monsieur le baron Hulot will take care of his son, and not put the cost of the child on a poor clerk; I shall be very exacting with him on that point. Therefore, be ready with your proofs, madame. Try

to get letters in which he speaks of his happiness; the fact is, he hangs fire too long about my appointment.”

Marneffe departed to the ministry, where the inestimable friendship of his director allowed him to go at the late hour of eleven; he had little or nothing to do when there, by reason of his notorious incapacity and his aversion to work.

Left alone, Lisbeth and Valérie looked at each other for a moment like a pair of witches, and then they both burst into fits of laughter.

“But, Valérie, tell me, is it true,” said Bette, “or are you playing a farce?”

“It is a physical fact!” answered Valérie. “Hortense aggravates me. Last night I bethought me of firing the infant like a bomb into the Steinbock household.”

Valérie returned to her bedroom, followed by Lisbeth, to whom she showed the following letter.

Wenceslas, my friend, I still believe in your love, though I have not seen you for nearly a month. Do you despise me? Delilah refuses to believe it. Can it be that you are under the tyranny of the woman whom you told me you had ceased to love? Wenceslas, you are too great an artist to let yourself be ruled in that way. Such a home is the grave of glory. Ask yourself if you still resemble the Wenceslas of the rue du Doyenné. You failed on my father’s monument; but the lover is superior to the artist—you have triumphed with the daughter. My adored Wenceslas, you are a father. If you do not come to see me in the state in which I find myself, you will sink in the estimation of your friends. But I know myself; I know that I love you madly, and that I at least can never curse you. May I call myself forever

Thy Valérie?

“What do you say to sending that letter to the atelier at a time when our dear Hortense is sure to be there alone?” asked Valérie. “Stidmann told me last night that Wenceslas was to meet him at eleven o’clock at Chanor’s; so that minx of a Hortense will be alone.”

“If you play such a trick as that,” said Bette, “I can’t continue ostensibly your friend; I shall have to leave this house, and be supposed to neither see you nor speak to you.”

“Of course,” said Valérie, “but—”

“Well, never mind,” interrupted Bette. “We shall see each other when I marry the marshal. They are all eager for the match; the baron is the only one who knows nothing about it; you must make him agree to it.”

“But,” answered Valérie, “perhaps my own position with the baron will be rather ticklish now.”

“Madame Olivier is the only person you can trust to get that letter to Hortense; you must send it to the rue Saint-Dominique before she goes to the atelier.”

“Oh, the little fool will be sure to be at home,” answered Madame Marneffe, ringing for Reine to fetch Madame Olivier.

Ten minutes after the fatal letter had been despatched, the baron arrived. Madame Marneffe sprang with a kittenish action into his arms.

“Hector, you are a father,” she whispered in his ear.

Perceiving a certain amazement which the baron was not quick enough to conceal, she assumed a chilling air which tortured that official. She made him drag the proofs from her, one by one. As soon as conviction, prompted by vanity, had entered the old man’s mind, she talked to him of Marneffe’s fury.

“My dear old veteran,” she said, “you positively must make your responsible editor—ours if you like—head of his department and officer of the Legion of honor; for you have ruined the man; he adores his boy, Stanislas. I detest the little monster, for he is so like him! If you prefer it you might settle twelve hundred francs a the year on Stanislas,—the capital, of course; the income to be paid to me.”

“If I do that I prefer to put the capital in my own son’s name, and not in that of the ‘little monster’ as you call him,” said Hulot.

This imprudent speech, in which the words “my son” set the stream a-flowing, was enlarged at the end of an hour’s talk into a formal promise to settle twelve hundred francs a year on the coming infant. The promise once made, it became in Valérie’s hands like a drum in possession of a small boy, an instrument on which she played for the next twenty days.

At the very moment when Baron Hulot, happy as the husband of a year’s standing anxious for an heir, was leaving the rue Vanneau, Madame Olivier had managed to make Hortense drag out of her Valérie’s letter to Steinbock, which she said she was charged to put into no hands but his. The young wife bought the letter for twenty francs. Suicides pay for their opium, their pistols, their charcoal. Hortense read the letter; then she re-read it. She saw only the white paper barred with black lines; nothing existed in nature but that paper. All was chaos about her. The blaze of the conflagration which was burning up her happiness illuminated the letter in the deep darkness that surrounded her. The shouts of her little Wenceslas, who was playing near, came to her ear as if from the depths of a valley far below her. Insulted in her youth, her beauty, her pure and devoted love, it was not a dagger-thrust that wounded her—it was death itself. The shock given a few weeks earlier had been purely nervous; the body writhed in the agonies of jealousy; but conviction now entered the soul, and the body became non-existent. Hortense remained fully ten minutes in this paralyzed condition. The spirit of her mother then appeared to her, and a change took place; she grew cold and calm, and recovered her reason. Then she rang the bell.

“Let Louise help you, my dear,” she said to the cook. “Pack up everything that is mine in this house as soon as possible, and all that belongs to my son. I give you two hours to do it in. When all is ready call a coach and let me know. Make no remarks. I leave this house, and Louise will go with me. You will stay with monsieur; take good care of him.”

She entered her bedroom, sat down at her writing-table, and wrote the following letter:—

MONSIEUR LE COMTE—The enclosed letter will explain the reasons for a resolution which I have taken.

When you read these lines I shall have left your house, to live with my mother; and I shall have taken my child with me.

Do not expect me to return. Should you attribute my action to the hasty passion of youth or the anger of offended love, you will greatly deceive yourself.

I have thought deeply, during the last two weeks, on life, on love, on our union, and our mutual duties. I know to its full extent my mother’s self-devotion; she has told me her trials. She has been hourly heroic for twenty-four years; but I have not the strength to imitate her—not that I have loved you less than she has loved my father, but for other reasons which are derived from my own nature. Our home would become a hell; I might lose my self-command to the point of dishonoring you, myself, my child. I do not wish to be a Madame Marneffe; but in such a career a woman of my nature might not be able to stop short. I am, unhappily for me, a Hulot rather than a Fischer.

Alone, and out of sight of your immoralities, I can answer for myself; above all when occupied, as I shall be, with the care of my child beside my strong and noble mother, whose life must react on the tumultuous action of my heart. There I can be a good mother; there I can bring up our son; there I can live. Were I to remain with you, the wife would kill the mother, and our incessant quarrels would embitter my nature.

I can accept death at a blow; I will not be a dying woman for twenty-four years, like my mother. Ah! monsieur, you have begun earlier than my father that career of licentiousness, of waste, and dissipation which degrades the head of a family, diminishes filial respect, and leads at last to shame and to despair.

I am not implacable. It does not become such feeble beings, living in the sight of God, to be unforgiving. If you win fame and fortune by faithful labor, if you renounce the company of wantons and the path of shame and all uncleanness, you may recover a wife who is worthy of you.

I believe you are too truly a gentleman to have recourse to law. You will respect my wishes, Monsieur le comte, by leaving me with my mother. I request, above all, that you will never come to see me. I have left you all the money which you borrowed from that woman. Adieu.

Hortense Hulot.

The letter was written in anguish; Hortense gave way to tears, to the strangling cries of passion. She laid down the pen and took it up again and yet again, endeavoring to say simply what love usually declaims passionately in such parting letters. Her heart exhaled itself in cries and moans and tears; but reason dictated the words.

When Louise told her mistress that all was ready Hortense rose and walked slowly through the garden, the salon, the

bedroom, looking at all things for the last time. She gave earnest directions to the cook to look after her master's comfort, promising to reward her well if she were faithful. Then she got into the coach with a breaking heart, weeping (to the great distress of her maid), and kissing the little Wenceslas with a frantic ardor which betrayed how much love was still given to the father.

Adeline had already heard from Lisbeth that the baron was much to blame for the wrong-doing of his son-in-law. She was not surprised at the arrival of her daughter; she approved of her course, and consented to keep her. Recognizing at last that gentleness and self-devotion had never restrained her Hector, for whom her affection was beginning to diminish, she now thought her daughter wise in taking other measures. Within a few weeks the poor mother had received two fresh wounds, whose tortures almost surpassed those she had already endured. The baron had thrown Victorin and his wife into difficulties; and now, according to Lisbeth, he was the cause of his son-in-law's depravity. The honor of the father, so long maintained by the unwise sacrifices of the mother, was now abased. The young Hulots, while not regretting their money, were distrustful of the baron. Their feelings were visible enough to grieve Adeline deeply; she foresaw the breaking-up of the family.

The baroness gave her daughter the use of the dining-room, which was fitted up as a bedroom, thanks to the marshal's money; the vast antechamber then became, as in many families, the dining-room.

When Wenceslas reached home and read the two letters, he was seized by a feeling of joy mingled with sadness. Living on parole, as it were, to his wife, he had inwardly rebelled against this new form of imprisonment à la Lisbeth. Surfeited with love for three years, he too had reflected during the last two weeks, and he found the family burden too heavy to bear. Stidmann had just gratified his vanity by congratulating him on the love he had inspired in Valérie; for Stidmann, with a hidden motive, flattered the husband, hoping to console the wife. Wenceslas was, in fact, overjoyed to find himself free to return to Madame Marneffe; and yet as he recalled the pure, unalloyed happiness he had enjoyed for three years, and the perfections of his wife, her wisdom, her innocent and artless love, he keenly regretted her. He longed to rush to her mother's house and ask her pardon; but instead of that he did just what Crevel and Hulot had done before him; he went to see Madame Marneffe, carrying with him his wife's letter to show her the catastrophe of which she was the cause, and to recoup, as it were, his misfortune by the smiles of his mistress. He found Crevel already there. The mayor, puffed up with self-complacency, was walking about the room like a man in the throes of some tumultuous feeling. He struck an attitude as if about to

speak and dared not do so. His countenance shone; he drummed with his fingers on the window pane; he gazed at Valérie with touching tenderness. Happily for him Lisbeth made her appearance.

“Cousin,” he said in her ear, “do you know the news—I am a father! I fear I love my poor Célestine a little less. Ah, what it is to have a child by a woman you adore!—to unite the paternity of the heart with the paternity of the blood. Cousin, say to Valérie for me that I shall toil for that child; I will make him rich. She told me she thought, from certain indications, that it would be a boy. If it is a boy, I am determined that he shall be called Crevel; I shall consult my notary.”

“I know how much she loves you,” said Lisbeth, “but for the sake of your future and hers control yourself—don’t rub your hands in that way.”

While this aside was going on Valérie had got back her letter from Wenceslas and was whispering something in his ear which soon put an end to his depression.

“Now you are free, dear friend,” she said. “Great artists should never marry, should they? You exist only through fancy and by freedom. Ah, my poet, I will love you so well that you shall never regret your wife. And yet, if, like most people, you wish to keep up appearances I will undertake to make Hortense go back to you.”

“I wish it were possible,” said Wenceslas.

“I am sure it is,” said Valérie, piqued. “Your poor father-in-law is a thorough man of the world who likes, out of vanity, to have the appearance of being loved; he wants to make people believe he has a mistress. It is by that particular form of vanity that I rule him. The baroness is so fond of her Hector (like the Iliad, isn’t it?) that the two old people will soon persuade Hortense to be reconciled. But remember, if you don’t want to have tempests at home never desert your mistress again for nearly a month—I should die of another such period of neglect. My dearest, when a man is a nobleman he owes every consideration to a woman whom he has compromised and brought to the condition I am in; above all when that woman has a reputation to maintain. Stay to dinner, my angel—and remember I must seem cold to you—to you, the author of my miserable fault!”

Baron Montez was announced; Valérie rose and ran to meet him, whispering in his ear and making the same conditions of reserve and coldness that she had just addressed to Wenceslas; for the Brazilian wore a diplomatic countenance appropriate to the great news which filled him with joy—for he was certain of his paternity.

Thanks to successful strategy, based on the vanity and self-love of man in the condition of lover, Valérie sat down to dinner surrounded by four joyful, animated, fascinated men, each feeling

that she adored him alone, while Marneffe called them all, under his breath to Lisbeth, including himself in the category, "the five fathers of the church."

Baron Hulot seemed, at first, rather thoughtful. On leaving his office that morning he had gone to see the director in charge of the appointments and promotions at the War office—a general, and an old comrade of thirty years' standing. To him he spoke of his desire to appoint Marneffe in place of Coquet, who had agreed to resign.

"My dear friend," he said, "I don't want to ask this favor of the Maréchal unless you and I are first agreed about it."

"My dear friend," replied the other, "allow me to say that for your own sake you ought not to press that appointment. I have already told you what I think of it. It would create a scandal in your department, where too much is already being said about you and Madame Marneffe. All this is between ourselves. I don't wish to touch your tender spot, nor to disoblige you in any way, and I'll prove it. If you are really determined to ask for Coquet's place (the man will be a loss to the War office where he has been employed since 1809), I will go into the country for a couple of weeks, and leave the field open to you with the Maréchal, who loves you like his own son. I can thus be neutral, neither for nor against you, and I shall have done nothing in violation of my conscience as a public official."

"Thank you," said Hulot; "I will reflect on what you have said to me."

"If I make these remarks, my dear friend, it is that I am more concerned for your personal interests than for my own feelings. The Maréchal, however, will decide the matter. We get so much blame on all sides that a little more or less scarcely signifies! Under the Restoration, men were appointed for the appointment's sake and no one thought of the public service. You and I are old comrades—"

"Yes," replied the baron, "and it was because of our old friendship that—"

"Come, come," said his friend, seeing the anxiety on Hulot's face. "I will make that journey, old comrade. But take care; you have enemies—that is to say, persons who want your splendid situation and all its perquisites; and you are moored by only a single anchor. Ah! if you were a deputy like me, you need fear nothing. As it is, mind what you are about."

This advice, given in a friendly spirit, made a great impression upon the councilor of state.

"But tell me, Roger, is there anything behind all this? Be frank with me."

The individual named Roger looked at Hulot; then he took his hand and pressed it.

“We are such old friends that I may venture to give you a word of advice. If you want to hold your office make your bed so that you can lie in it. If I were you, instead of asking the Maréchal to appoint Marneffe to Coquet’s place, I should ask him to use his influence to retain me on the regular service of the Council of State, where I could die in peace; and then, like the beaver, I should abandon my directorship at the War office to the pursuers.”

“What can you mean? the Maréchal would not forget—”

“Old friend, the Maréchal has so ably defended you before a council of ministers that they have given up the idea of getting you turned out—but it was discussed. Therefore, give them no further ground of—but I will say no more. Just now you can make your conditions and become peer of France if you like. If you wait too long, or if you give them any handle against you, I will not answer for the consequences— Now, do you wish me to go into the country?”

“Wait; I will see the Maréchal myself,” said Hulot, “and I will send my brother to sound him.”

We may imagine the state of mind in which the baron came to dine with Madame Marneffe; he had almost forgotten that he was to be a father. Roger had done an act of true and loyal friendship by thus enlightening him of his real position. Nevertheless, such was Valérie’s power over him that by the middle of dinner he had put himself in harmony with his company, and became all the gayer because he had anxieties to stifle. The unhappy man little knew that on this very evening he was to find himself caught between his happiness and the danger revealed to him by his friend; that is, he was to be forced to choose between Madame Marneffe and his own official position.

CHAPTER XXV.

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF THE FAVORITES.

About eleven o'clock, just as the party reached a climax of gayety, the salon being full of people, Valérie took Hector to a corner sofa.

"My old man," she said in his ear, "your daughter is so irritated against Wenceslas for coming here that she has left him. She has no sense. Ask Wenceslas to show you a letter the little fool has written to him. This separation of the loving couple, of which I am supposed to be the cause, may do me incredible harm; that's the way virtuous women attack each other. It is scandalous to play the victim for the purpose of throwing blame upon a woman whose only crime is to make her salon agreeable. If you love me you will get me out of the scrape by reconciling the turtle-doves. Besides, I am not at all anxious to receive your son-in-law in my house; you brought him here, now take him away. If you have any authority in your own family it seems to me you ought to require your wife to manage this reconciliation. Tell the good old lady from me that if she and her daughter accuse me unjustly of interfering with the young people's happiness and troubling the peace of a household by carrying away both father and son, I'll merit my reputation, and torment them as much as I choose. Lisbeth actually talks of leaving me! She prefers her family to me, and I can't blame her. She says she won't stay here unless the young people come together again. If she goes I know our expenses will be trebled—"

"Oh, as for that," said the baron, referring to his daughter's proceeding, "I shall put that to rights."

"Well," said Valérie, "there's another thing. About Coquet's place?"

"That," said Hulot, looking another way, "is a much more difficult matter, not to say an impossible one."

"Impossible! my dear Hector!" exclaimed Madame Marneffe, in a low voice, "don't you know it would drive my husband to extremities? I am in his power; he is immoral and self-interested after the fashion of most men, but he is also, like all little minds, excessively vindictive. In the condition in which you have put me, I am at his mercy."

Hulot made a vehement gesture.

"He will only leave me in peace on condition that he gets that appointment. It is infamous, but it's logical."

"Valérie, do you love me?"

"That question, in the state I am in, is impertinent, my dear friend."

“Well then, if I so much as attempt to ask the Maréchal to appoint Marneffe I shall lose my own place and Marneffe will be dismissed.”

“I thought that you and the Prince were the closest friends.”

“So we are; he has proved it; but, my dearest, there is a power above the Maréchal; for instance there’s the council of ministers. Perhaps by and by, by steering carefully, we could manage it; but we shall have to wait till they want some service out of me; then I can give them my sprat for your herring—”

“If I were to tell that to Marneffe, he would do us some ill turn. No, tell him yourself that he must wait, I dare not. Ah, I know my fate; he knows how to punish me!—Don’t forget about the twelve hundred a year for the little one.”

Hulot took Marneffe apart, feeling that his happiness was seriously in danger; and he abandoned for the first time his usual haughty tone to that individual, so alarmed was he by Valérie’s terror.

“Marneffe, my dear friend,” he said, “your matter was brought up to-day; but you won’t get the appointment as head of your division—not yet, we must take time—”

“I shall get it, Monsieur le baron,” said Marneffe, curtly.

“But, my dear fellow—”

“I shall get it, Monsieur le baron,” repeated Marneffe, glancing coolly first at the baron and then at Valérie. “You have put my wife under the necessity of keeping well with me—and I shall hold her to it; for, *my dear friend*, she is charming,” he added, with horrible irony. “I am master here, far more than you are master at your ministry.”

The baron was seized with one of those spasms of mental pain which affect the heart like a throbbing toothache; the tears almost came into his eyes. During this short scene Valérie had whispered in Henri Montez’s ear the same threat of Marneffe in order to get rid of him for a short time.

Crevel alone among the faithful four, the possessor of that thrifty little house, was exempted from this measure; and his face shone with a beatified air that was actually insolent, in spite of the reprimands which Valérie gave him by frowns and significant grimaces. His radiant paternity was proclaimed on every feature. As Valérie approached him to whisper a reproachful warning he seized her hand and said:—

“To-morrow, my duchess, you shall have your little mansion!”

“And the furniture?” she asked, smiling.

“I have a thousand shares in the Versailles Railway, left bank, bought at one hundred and twenty-five francs; they are going up to three hundred because of the junction of the two roads—I’m in the secret. Your house shall be furnished like the Queen’s palace!—But you promise to be mine only, don’t you?”

“Yes, old mayor!” she said, smiling; “but do behave yourself properly; respect the future Madame Crevel.”

“My dear cousin,” said Lisbeth, taking the baron’s arm, “I shall go and see Adeline early to-morrow morning; for, you understand, I cannot decently remain here. I shall go and keep house for your brother the marshal.”

“I am going home to-night, myself,” said Hulot. “Well then, I’ll come to breakfast to-morrow,” answered Lisbeth, smiling.

She understood how necessary her presence would be in the family scene which was to take place on the morrow. In the morning she went round by Victorin’s house and told him of the separation of Hortense and Wenceslas.

When the baron reached home, about half-past ten at night, Mariette and Louise, who had done a hard day’s work, were just closing the door of the apartment, so that Hulot had no need to ring the bell. Grieving over his enforced virtue, he went straight to his wife’s room. Through the open door he saw her kneeling before her crucifix, lost in prayer, in one of those expressive attitudes which make the fame of painters and sculptors when they are fortunate enough to be able to represent what they have once seen. Adeline, carried away by her emotion, cried aloud, “My God, in mercy to us, enlighten him!” It was thus that she prayed for her Hector. At the sight, so different from the scene he had just quitted, and at the words, dictated by the events of the day, the baron, much moved, gave vent to a sigh. Adeline turned round, her face bathed in tears. She fancied her prayer was heard, and making one bound, she clasped her Hector in her arms with the strength of joyful passion. Poor woman! she had laid aside all feminine desires, sorrow had quenched all, even the memory of them. Nothing remained to her but motherhood, family honor, and the pure affection of a Christian wife for a misguided husband, the sacred tenderness which survives all else in the hearts of women.

“Hector,” she said, “at last! have you come back to us? God has taken pity upon our family!”

“Dear Adeline,” said the baron, entering the room and seating his wife beside him, “you are the saintliest human being I have ever known; it is long since I have felt worthy of you.”

“It will be so easy, dear friend,” she said taking his hand and trembling with nervousness, “so easy for you to restore order—”

She dared not go on, feeling that every word implied blame, and she would not lessen the joy which this home-coming poured into her heart.

“I have come on account of Hortense,” answered Hulot; “she may do us more harm by this hasty step than my absurd passion for Valérie has ever done. But we will talk it over to-morrow

morning. Louise says that Hortense is asleep, so I won't disturb her now."

"Yes," said Madame Hulot, suddenly subdued and saddened; she saw that her husband had returned, less for the sake of his family than for some ulterior purpose connected with Madame Marneffe. "Leave her in peace until to-morrow. Poor child, she is in a deplorable condition, she has wept all day."

At nine o'clock the next morning the baron, while waiting for his daughter whom he had summoned, was walking up and down the vast uninhabited salon, preparing reasons with which to conquer the most difficult obstinacy of all to subdue, that of an offended and implacable young woman, to whom, in her irreproachable youth, the shameful compromises of the world are yet unknown, because she is above its passions and its self-interests.

"Here I am, papa," said Hortense, pale with grief, and speaking in a trembling voice.

Hulot sat down, took his daughter by the waist, and placed her on his knee.

"Well, my dear child," he said, kissing her brow. "I hear there is trouble in your home, and that you are carrying things with a high hand. That's not the thing for a girl who has been well brought up. My Hortense ought not to take such a decisive step as to leave her house and desert her husband without consulting her parents. If you had come in the first instance to your good and excellent mother, you would not have caused me the pain I now feel. You don't know the world, it is very censorious. It may say that your husband has sent you back to your parents. Daughters brought up as you were in their mothers' laps remain children longer than other girls; they know little of life. A fresh and artless passion, such as yours for Wenceslas, never, unfortunately, reflects; it acts on impulse; the heart goes off at a tangent, the head follows. You must believe your old father who has come to tell you that your conduct is not becoming. I will not speak of the deep pain you have caused me; it is bitter, for you have cast blame on a woman whose heart is unknown to you and whose enmity may become formidable. Alas, my child, you do not see that you, so candid, innocent and pure, may be libelled and calumniated. And besides, my little darling, you took what was meant as a joke seriously. I can, myself, assure you of the innocence of your husband. Madame Marneffe—"

Up to this point the baron, an artist in diplomacy, had carefully modulated his remonstrances. He had, as we have seen, managed the introduction of that fatal name with superior ability, yet when Hortense heard it she started like a person wounded to the quick.

“Listen to me,” said her father, preventing her from speaking. “That lady treats your husband very coldly. Yes, you have been the victim of some hoax; I can prove it to you. Yesterday Wenceslas dined there—”

“What! he dined there?” cried the young wife, springing to her feet and looking at her father with horror in her face. “Yesterday! after reading my letter! Good God! why did I not enter a convent instead of marrying!— My life is no longer mine, I have a child!” she added, sobbing.

Her tears wrung her mother’s heart; Madame Hulot emerged from her bedroom and clasped her daughter in her arms, weeping.

“Tears, tears!” said the baron to himself, impatiently, “and all was going so well! what am I to do now with crying women?”

“My child,” said the baroness, “listen to your father; he loves us, he is wise—”

“Come, Hortense, my dear child, don’t cry—it makes you ugly,” said the baron. “Now be reasonable. Go home quietly; I promise that Wenceslas shall not set foot in the house. I ask you to make the sacrifice—if it is a sacrifice to pardon a mere trifling fault in a husband you love. I ask it for the sake of my white hairs, for your mother’s sake—you don’t wish to fill our declining years with bitterness and grief?”

Hortense threw herself wildly at her father’s feet, with so passionate an action that her hair fell loose as she stretched out her hands to him with a gesture of despair.

“Father, you ask my life!” she said; “take it if you will; but at least take it pure and spotless. Don’t ask me to die dishonored, criminal! I am not like my mother; I cannot accept outrage. If I re-enter married life I may strangle Wenceslas in a fit of jealousy—or worse! Would you mourn me living? the least that could befall me would be madness—I feel it now at my elbow! Yesterday! yesterday! he dined with that woman after reading my letter!— Are all men created like that? Yes, I give you my life, but grant that my death be not shameful!—His fault! you call it light!—to have a child by that woman!—”

“A child!” cried Hulot, stepping back two paces. “Come, come, that is certainly a joke!”

At this moment Victorin and Bette entered the room and stood amazed at the scene. The daughter was prostrate at the feet of her father. The baroness, silent and vacillating between the feelings of a mother and those of a wife, was convulsed with weeping.

“Lisbeth,” said the baron, seizing the old maid by the hand and pointing to Hortense, “help me. My poor Hortense has lost her head; she thinks that Wenceslas is beloved by Madame Marneffe when she has only given him an order for a statuette—”

“Of Delilah!” cried the young woman, “the only thing he has done from inspiration since our marriage. He could not work for me or for his son, but he could work with ardor for that wanton—Ah, put an end to me, my father, at once, for every word you say stabs me like a dagger.”

Lisbeth looked at the baroness and Victorin and shrugged her shoulders with an expression of pity as she made them notice the baron, who stood so that he could not see her.

“Cousin,” said Lisbeth, addressing Hulot. “I did not know what Madame Marneffe was when you asked me to go and live in the story above her and manage her household; but in the course of three years a good deal may be learned. That woman is a prostitute! one whose depravity can be compared only to that of her infamous and disgusting husband. You are the dupe, the golden calf, of those creatures, and you will be led you don’t know where before they have done with you. I speak plainly because you are falling into an abyss.”

The baroness and her daughter, hearing these words, looked at Lisbeth with eyes like those of the faithful thanking a Madonna for saving their lives.

“That horrible woman is resolved to bring trouble into your son-in-law’s home—why, I do not know; my intellect is too feeble to understand clearly these underhand intrigues, wicked, shameful, scandalous as they are. Your Madame Marneffe does not love Wenceslas, but she wants him at her feet out of revenge. I have just told the wretched creature what I think of her. She is shameless; I have left her house; I will not live in such a sink of depravity; I belong to you, to my family. I knew that my poor little cousin had left Wenceslas and I came straight here. Your Valérie, whom you take for a saint, did bring about this separation. Could I stay in the house of such a woman? Our dear little Hortense,” she went on, touching the baron’s arm significantly, “may be the victim of a mere wish on the part of that woman, who, like others of her kind, will sacrifice a whole family to get a jewel. I don’t believe Wenceslas is guilty, but I know he is weak, and I cannot say that he might not yield to her insidious coquetry. My resolution is taken. The woman is a curse upon your life; she will bring you to beggary. I will no longer appear to take part in the ruin of the family; though in truth for three years past it is I alone who have hindered it. You are deceived, cousin; say firmly that you will have nothing to do with that appointment of Monsieur Marneffe and see what will happen! They are preparing to lash you about it.”

Lisbeth put her arms round Hortense and kissed her passionately.

“Dear Hortense, hold firm,” she whispered. The baroness embraced her cousin Bette with all the enthusiasm of a woman who feels that another has avenged her. The whole family stood

silently around the father, who was quick to feel what that silence denoted. A formidable expression of anger crossed his face; the veins swelled, the eyes were suffused with blood, the skin grew mottled. Adeline flung herself on her knees before him and took his hands, crying out. "My friend, my friend! forgive us!"

"I am odious to you all," said the baron, giving vent to the cry of his conscience.

We know our secret sins. We almost always attribute to our victims the feelings of hatred which, as we suppose, vengeance dictates to them; and in spite of our hypocrisy, confession appears on our faces or in our language at moments of unexpected torture; just as the criminal on the rack confesses against his will.

"Our children," he said, trying to cover up the inadvertent confession, "end by becoming our enemies—"

"Father," said Victorin.

"Do you venture to interrupt your father?" said the baron, in a thundering voice, looking at his son.

"Father," continued Victorin, in a firm, curt tone, the tones of a puritan deputy, "listen to me. I know too well the respect I owe you ever to fail in paying it; you will certainly always find me a most submissive and obedient son."

Persons who visit the Chambers habitually will recognize in this preamble the long-winded parliamentary phrases with which the speakers soothe opposition and gain time.

"We are far from being your enemies," continued Victorin. "Monsieur Crevel, my father-in-law, has quarrelled with me because I took up your notes to Vauvinet, the money for which you gave to Madame Marneffe. Oh! I am not reproaching you," he added, observing the baron's gesture, "I am only joining my testimony to that of my cousin Lisbeth, to show you that if our devotion to you, my dear father, is blind and limitless our pecuniary resources are, unhappily, very limited indeed."

"Money!" cried the old man, falling into a chair, overcome by this statement—"such words from my son! You will be repaid, sir," he said, rising.

He walked toward the door.

"Hector!"

The cry made him turn; his wife beheld his face covered with tears, and she flung her arms about him with the vehemence of despair.

"Don't leave us thus—not in anger!" she cried; "I have said nothing to make you angry."

At her cry the children fell on their knees before their father.

"We all love you," said Hortense.

Lisbeth, motionless as a statue, watched the group with a proud smile upon her lips. At this moment Maréchal Hulot's voice was heard in the antechamber. The whole family

understood the importance of secrecy, and the scene changed in a moment. The son and daughter rose to their feet, and all present tried to conceal their emotion.

Mariette's voice was heard disputing with some one at the door, and she presently entered the salon.

"Monsieur," she said to the baron, "the quartermaster of a regiment just returned from Algeria says he must speak with you."

"Let him wait."

"Monsieur," whispered Mariette in her master's ear, "he told me it was something about Monsieur Fischer."

The baron started; he believed the man had brought him a sum of money which he had asked of his uncle two months earlier to meet his notes, and he hastily went into the antechamber. He saw that the man was an Alsatian.

"Is this the baron Hulot?"

"Yes."

"Himself?"

"Himself."

The man, who was fumbling in the lining of his kepi during the colloquy, pulled out a letter which the baron eagerly opened and read as follows:—

MY NEPHEW, so far from being able to send you two hundred thousand francs, I must tell you that my position is not tenable if you do not make energetic efforts to save me. We are saddled with a public prosecutor who talks a gibberish of morality about the duties of government. It is impossible to make a civilian hold his tongue. If the War office lets the black coats ride over it, I am as good as dead. The man who carries this letter is trustworthy; try to get him promoted, for he has done us good service. Don't leave me to the crows.

The letter came like a thunderbolt; in it the baron saw the first sign of those intestinal struggles between the military and civil authorities which are carried on to this day in Algeria; he felt he must at once devise a remedy for the opening wound. He told the man to come back on the morrow and dismissed him with hopes of promotion; then he returned to the salon.

"Good-morning, and good-by," he said to his brother. "Adieu, my children; adieu, dear Adeline. What is to become of you, Lisbeth?"

"I am going to keep house for the marshal," replied Bette. "I must fulfil my mission by doing you all a service in turn."

"Don't leave Valérie till I have seen you again," said Hulot in her ear. "Adieu, Hortense, my wilful child; try to be more sensible. I have important business to attend to now, but we will talk of your submission later. Think it over, my little puss," he said, kissing her.

He was so manifestly troubled as he left the room that all present felt the keenest apprehension.

“Lisbeth,” said the baroness, “we must find out what the matter is. I have never seen Hector so upset. Stay two or three days longer with that woman; he tells her all, and you might discover what this new trouble is. Don’t be anxious; we will arrange your marriage with the marshal—in fact it has now become a necessity.”

“I shall never forget the courage you showed this morning,” said Hortense, embracing Bette.

“You avenged our poor mother,” said Victorin.

The marshal noted with an inquisitive eye the tokens of friendship thus bestowed on Bette, who made her way back to Valérie and related the whole scene.

This sketch will enable innocent minds to realize the various kinds of havoc which the Madame Marneffes of social life bring about in families, and the means by which such harpies strike down hapless virtuous women apparently so far removed from their own sphere of life. But if we transport, in thought, the like troubles to a higher stage of society—to the steps of a throne—and consider what the mistresses of kings have cost, we may estimate the obligations of a people to sovereigns who set an example of good morals and the purity of family life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SUMMONS WITH AND WITHOUT COSTS.

All the ministerial departments in Paris are like small cities from which women are banished; but there is as much gossiping and backbiting within their precincts as if a female population were present. For the last three years the position of Monsieur Marneffe had been held up to the light of day in the various offices, and the question was universal, "Will he or will he not be appointed in Coquet's place?"—just as in the Chambers it was formerly asked, "Will the budget be voted, or will it not be voted?" Every step taken in Baron Hulot's division was scrutinized. The shrewd director had enlisted on his side the man who would be injured by Marneffe's promotion—a clever worker—telling him that if he would make way for Marneffe, who was really dying, he should be his successor without fail. On the faith of this promise the employe worked for the appointment of Marneffe.

When Hulot, after leaving home, crossed the waiting-room at his ministry, he found it already filled with visitors, and in a corner he beheld the pallid face of Marneffe, who was the first man called in.

"What do you want of me, my dear fellow?" said Hulot, endeavoring to hide his anxiety.

"Monsieur le directeur, I am laughed at in all the departments. It appears that Monsieur Roger, the appointing director, has left Paris to-day to travel for his health; he will be away at least a month. Everybody knows what waiting a month means. You have delivered me over to the ridicule of my enemies. I don't intend, monsieur le baron, to be drummed out in both directions—"

"My dear Marneffe, it takes a great deal of patience to accomplish a purpose. You can't be made head of your office for two months yet, if indeed you ever are. At this moment, when I have to strengthen my own position, I cannot ask for a scandalous appointment."

"If you are turned out of office I shall never get the place I want," said Marneffe, coldly; "therefore you must get me appointed at once. I'll take neither more nor less."

"Am I to sacrifice myself to you?" asked the baron.

"If not, I shall cease to retain a good many of my present illusions about you."

"You are far too much of a Marneffe, Monsieur Marneffe," said the baron, contemptuously, rising and showing his subordinate the door.

"I have the honor to take leave, monsieur le baron," said Marneffe, humbly.

“The infamous scoundrel!” thought the baron. “This is rather too like a bandit, with his ‘Money or your life.’”

Two hours later, just as the baron had finished instructing Claude Vignon (whom he intended to send to the Department of Justice to gather information about the civilian judicial officers in the district where Johann Fischer was at work), Reine opened the door of the director’s office, and gave him a letter, which she said required an answer.

“To send Reine!” thought the baron—“what imprudence! Valérie is beside herself; she will compromise us all. She will prevent the appointment of that abominable Marneffe.”

He sent away his private secretary, and read as follows:—

Ah, my friend! what a scene I have just gone through! If you have made me happy for the last three years I have now paid dearly for it. He came home from his office in a state of fury that made me shudder. I knew he was ugly; but to-day he was hideous, monstrous. His four remaining teeth chattered; he threatened me with his perpetual company if I dared to receive you in my house. My poor old dear, alas! our doors will be henceforth closed to you. You see my tears—they fall upon my paper and bathe it. Could you but read my heart! Oh, my Hector! not to see you!—to renounce you!—when I have shared a little corner of your life, and, as I believe, your heart—ah, I shall die of it! Think of our little Hector! Do not abandon me! And yet I would not have you degrade yourself for Marneffe; do not yield to his threats. Ah, I love you as I never loved before! I remember all the sacrifices you have made for your Valérie. She is not, she never can be, ungrateful. You are, and ever shall be, my sole husband. Don’t think again of the twelve hundred francs a year I asked of you for our dear little Hector, who will be here in a few months; I am resolved to cost you no more.

If you loved me as I love you, my Hector, you would ask for your retirement; then we would leave our families, our annoyances, our surroundings where hatred reigns, and go with Lisbeth to some peaceful country-place in Brittany, or where you like. There we should see no one, we should be happy, far away from the world. Your pension and the little that I have in my own name would suffice for our wants. You have grown jealous of late—well, there you would find your Valérie devoted solely to her dear Hector; you would never have to scold her as you did the other day.

My love! in the exasperated state in which that man has put me I cannot and will not renounce the sight of you. Yes, we must meet in secret, and every day. I share your resentment against Marneffe; if you love me, never let him have that appointment; let him die as he is—a subordinate!— My mind is still distracted, his insults ring in my ears! Bette, who wished to leave me, now pities me so much that she will stay for some days longer.

My dear treasure, what am I to do? I see nothing but flight. I have always adored the country—Bretagne, Languedoc, wherever it pleases you, if only I am free to love you. Poor darling, how I pity you, forced to return to your old Adeline, that lachrymal vase! for Marneffe declares he will watch over me night and day—he even spoke of a police spy!— No, do not come to me. He is capable of anything—he who has made me the means of his dastardly gains. Would that I could return you every farthing of your generous gifts! Ah! my dear Hector, I may have been coquettish, I may have seemed to you light-minded, but you do not know your Valérie; she liked to torment you, but she loves you above all the world. Marneffe cannot prevent your seeing your cousin, and I shall arrange with her some way for us to meet. Dearest, write me a line to

make me happy since I cannot have your presence! A letter will be to me a talisman; write me from your very soul. I will return the letter, for we must be prudent; I could scarcely hide anything from him, he prys everywhere. But I pray you, reassure your Valérie, your wife, the mother of your child. Ah! to be obliged to write to you—I who have seen you every day! As I say to Lisbeth, I did not know my happiness when I had it. A thousand kisses. Adieu.

Thy

Valérie.

“Her tears!” cried Hulot to himself, as he finished the letter and saw the blurred and indecipherable signature. “How is she, Reine?” he said aloud.

“Madame is in bed,” answered Reine, “she had a violent nervous attack after writing that letter. Oh! it is enough to break one’s heart. She heard Monsieur coming up the stairs.”

The baron, greatly troubled, wrote the following letter on a sheet of official paper with its printed headings:—

“Do not distress yourself, my angel. He shall die as he is, a sub-director. Your idea is an excellent one; we will go far from Paris, and live happy with our little son. I will ask for my retirement, and find a situation on some railroad. Ah! my sweet Valérie, I feel my youth renewed by your letter. Yes, I will begin my life anew, and I will make, you shall see, a fortune for our little one. As I read your letter—a thousand times more ardent than those of the ‘Nouvelle Héloïse’—it worked a miracle within me; I did not think that my love for you could possibly increase. You will find me to-night at Lisbeth’s.

Your

Hector for life.”

Reine carried off this epistle, the first the baron had ever written to his sweet friend. The emotions it excited counterbalanced the rumblings of the storm which was gathering on his horizon; at this particular moment, however, Hulot, feeling sure he could ward off the attack on his uncle Fischer, thought only of the deficit.

One of the peculiarities of the Bonapartist character is its faith in the power of the sabre, and its conviction of the pre-eminence of the military over the civil system. Hulot scorned a public prosecutor in Algeria, a country ruled by the War department. Man is ever what he has been. How should the officers of the Imperial Guard forget that they had seen the mayors of the good cities of the empire, the prefects of the Emperor, little emperors themselves, coming humbly to receive the Guard, flattering it from end to end of the departments and paying sovereign homage to it?

At half-past four in the afternoon, the baron went to Madame Marneffe’s. His heart beat as he ran up the stairs like a young man, for the question was in his mind, “Shall I see her, or shall I not see her?” Under such circumstances how should he remember the events of the morning, or the sight of his family in tears at his feet? Did not Valérie’s letter, placed in a small pocket-book next his heart, prove to him that he was better loved than the most agreeable of younger men? After ringing the bell the

unfortunate baron heard the shuffling of Marneffe's slippers and his odious cough. Marneffe opened the door, but not to admit the baron; he put himself in the exact position, and pointed to the stairs with precisely the same gesture as Hulot had employed in showing him to the door of his office.

"You are by far too much of a Hulot, Monsieur Hulot," he said.

The baron attempted to pass in. Marneffe drew a pistol from his pocket and cocked it.

"Monsieur le baron, when a man is as vile as I am—for you think me very vile, don't you?—he would be the worst of galley-slaves if he did not get the profits of the honor he has sold. You mean war; well, you shall have it, without quarter. Never return here; don't attempt to force a way. I have told the commissary of police how matters stand between us."

Taking advantage of Hulot's stupefaction, he pushed him out and locked the door.

"The scoundrel!" muttered Hulot, going up to Lisbeth's apartment. "Now I understand Valérie's letter. Yes, she and I will leave Paris; she is mine for the rest of my days; she will close my eyes at the last."

Lisbeth was not at home. Madame Olivier informed him that she had gone to Madame Hulot's, hoping to meet him there.

"Poor old girl! I did not think her so clever as she proved to be this morning," thought the baron as he made his way to the rue Plumet. At the corner of the rue Vanneau and the rue de Babylone he turned and looked at the Eden from which Hymen had banished him, the sword of the law in hand. Valérie, sitting at her window, was gazing after him; as he raised his head she waved her handkerchief, but the infamous Marneffe struck it down and pulled her violently back. Tears came into the baron's eyes. "To be thus loved, and to see her ill-treated!" he said to himself, "and to be almost seventy years old!"

Lisbeth had gone to announce the good news to the family. Adeline and Hortense already knew that the baron, not willing to disgrace himself in the eyes of the government by asking for Marneffe's appointment, would find himself dismissed from the house by that worthy. Poor Adeline arranged her dinner hoping that he would find it better than Valérie's and the devoted Bette was assisting Mariette to produce that result. Cousin Bette was now the family idol; mother and daughter embraced her, and told her with touching joy that the marshal consented to let her keep his house.

"And from that, dear Bette, there is but one step to becoming his wife," said Adeline.

"At any rate he did not say no when Victorin proposed it to him," said the Countess Steinbock.

The baron was received by his family with such tender and touching affection that he was forced to conceal his private distress. The marshal came to dinner. After dinner Hulot did not go out. Victorin and his wife came in, and they all played whist.

"It is a long time, Hector," said the marshal, gravely, "since you have given us such an evening."

These words from the elder brother, hitherto so indulgent to the younger and now blaming him only by implication, made a great impression on those present. They became aware of a wound in the old heart whose painfulness echoed in these words. At eight o'clock the baron proposed to Lisbeth to take her home, promising to return himself.

"Lisbeth," he said, when they were in the street, "he ill uses her! Ah! I have never loved her as I do now!"

"And I never knew before how Valérie loves you," answered Bette; "she is frivolous, coquettish, and likes to be courted and flattered; she wants, as she says herself, to have a comedy of love played about her, but you are her one attachment."

"What did she tell you to say to me?"

"This," said Lisbeth: "She has, as you know, given favors to Crevel; you mustn't blame her, for it has put her above want for the rest of her days; but she hates him, and the affair is about over. Well, she has the key of a certain apartment—"

"Rue du Dauphin," cried Hulot; "I have been there, I know it—"

"Here is the key," said Lisbeth. "Get another made like it—two if you can."

"And then?"—cried Hulot, eagerly.

"Then to-morrow I will dine with you and you must return me this key (for old Crevel may ask Valérie for it), and you can go and meet her the following day; then you can settle your future plans. You are quite safe there, for there are two entrances; if Crevel, who has the morals of the regency, as he says, should happen to come in by the court you can go out by the shop, and *vice versa*. Well, you old scamp, you owe this to me—what are you going to do for me in return?"

"Anything you ask."

"Well then, don't oppose my marriage with your brother."

"You, Maréchale Hulot! you, Comtesse de Forzheim!" cried Hector, amazed.

"Adeline is a baroness!" retorted Bette, in sharp and threatening tones. "Listen to me, you old libertine; you know perfectly well what a state your affairs are in; your family will soon be in the gutter with nothing to eat."

"That's my dread!" cried Hulot, gloomily.

"If your brother were to die who would support your wife? The widow of a marshal of France gets a pension of six thousand

francs, doesn't she? Well, I wish to marry to secure bread for your wife and daughter, you madman!"

"I did not see it in that light," returned Hulot. "Yes, I will talk the matter up to my brother. We can all trust you. Tell my dear angel that my life is *hers*."

And the baron, after depositing Bette in the rue Vanneau, returned home and played whist. Madame Hulot was now in the seventh heaven of happiness; her husband seemed really to have returned to home life; for two weeks he went daily to the War department, came back to dinner at six, and remained the whole evening with his family. He even took Adeline and Hortense twice to the theatre. The mother and daughter caused three masses of thanksgiving to be said, praying God to preserve to them the husband and father now restored to the family.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SUMMONS OF ANOTHER KIND.

One evening Victorin Hulot remarked to his mother, on seeing his father go off to bed, "We ought to be happy now that my father has returned to his home. Célestine and I do not regret the loss of our money, if the change only lasts."

"Your father is nearly seventy years old," said the baroness. "He still thinks of Madame Marneffe—I see that; but before long he will forget her. A passion for women is like play, or speculation, or avarice—there comes an end to it."

The beautiful Adeline—for she was still beautiful in spite of her fifty years and her bitter griefs—was mistaken in this judgment. Libertines—men whom nature has endowed with the faculty of loving beyond the limits which she has fixed for love—are never as old as their years. During this period of his lapse to virtue the baron went three times to the rue du Dauphin. His renewed passion rejuvenated him; he would have sacrificed his honor and his family to Valérie without a pang. But Valérie, entirely changed, never spoke to him of money, nor of the twelve hundred francs for their son; on the contrary, she offered him money. She seemed to love her Hulot as a woman of thirty-six loves a law-student who is very poor, very poetic, and very loving. All this while poor Adeline thought she was recovering her Hector.

The fourth rendezvous was to take place at nine o'clock one morning. About eight Reine arrived, and asked to see the baron. Hulot, fearing a catastrophe, went out to speak to her, not wishing that she should enter the apartment. The woman gave him the following note:—

MY OLD HERO—Don't go to the rue du Dauphin. Our nightmare is ill, and I must nurse him. But be there at nine o'clock this evening. Crevel has gone to Corbeil to stay with Monsieur Lebas, and I am sure he won't come to the little house. I have made all my arrangements so that I can get back before Marneffe needs me in the morning. Answer about all this. Perhaps your walking elegy of a wife does not allow you as much liberty as you once had. They say she is still handsome, and that you are capable of betraying me. Burn this letter; I distrust everybody.

Hulot wrote in reply:—

DEAR ANGEL—My wife, as I have told you before, has never hindered my pleasures for more than twenty-five years. I would sacrifice a hundred Adelines for you! I will await my divinity in Crevel's temple at nine o'clock this evening. I trust the sub-director may soon die, so that we need never be separated. That is the dearest wish of
YOUR

HECTOR.

That evening the baron told his wife that he was to meet the ministers at Saint Cloud, and should not be back till the following day; he then departed for the rue du Dauphin. This was about the end of June.

Few men have lived to recall the terrible sensation of going to their death. Those who come back reprieved from the scaffold are soon counted; but some dreamers have vividly experienced this death-agony in their dreams; they have even felt the cold steel of the knife upon their necks at the instant when their awakening delivered them. Well, the sensation that overtook the councilor of state when he awoke at five o'clock in the morning, in Crevel's pretty and coquetish apartment, far surpassed any mere dream of lying with one's head above the fatal basket in presence of ten thousand spectators gazing at us with twenty thousand flaming darts. Valérie was still sleeping. The baron's eyes, wandering round the room like those of a man just waking who tries to recall his ideas, fell upon a door covered with flowers painted by Jan, an artist then in vogue. The baron did not see, like the man condemned to death, twenty thousand blazing eyes; he saw only one eye, whose glance, however, was more piercing than the score of thousands on the place de Grève. This sensation, inasmuch as it came in the midst of happiness, was certainly rare in the case of a condemned man. The baron remained in his horizontal position, but a cold sweat bedewed his person. He tried to doubt his senses; but the eye began to speak, and a murmur of voices was heard beyond the door.

"Can it be Crevel trying to play a joke on me?" thought the baron, no longer able to doubt that some one had invaded the temple.

The door opened. French law in all its majesty advanced in the form of a worthy little commissary of police, accompanied by a tall justice of the peace and Monsieur Marneffe. The commissary of police, standing with his lower extremities in two shoes whose flaps were tied with bows of muddy ribbon, exhibited above a yellow skull deficient in hair which denoted a sly dog and a lively one, for whom Paris held no secrets. His eyes, covered with spectacles, sent shrewd and sarcastic glances through the crystals. The justice of the peace, an old lawyer and an admirer of the fair sex, envied the culprit.

"Have the goodness to excuse the requirements of our duty, Monsieur le baron," said the commissary; "we are summoned here by the complainant. The judge has authorized an entrance to the domicile. I know you, Monsieur le baron, and also the female delinquent."

Valérie opened a pair of astonished eyes and gave the piercing cry which actresses have invented to express madness on the stage.

She rolled in convulsions on the bed, like a demoniac of the middle ages in a brimstone shirt on a pyre of fagots.

“Death! Hector! The police court! Oh, never! never!”

She sprang up and darted like a white cloud past the three spectators and hid herself behind the *bonheur du jour* in the adjoining room, with her head in her hands.

“Lost! lost! dead!” she cried.

“Monsieur,” said Marneffe, to Hulot, “if my wife becomes insane you will be more than a libertine, you will be an assassin.”

What could a man under such circumstances say? As follows:—

“Monsieur le commissaire, and you Monsieur le juge,” said the baron, with dignity, “have the goodness to care at once for that unhappy woman whose reason seems to be in danger. You can do it later. The doors are doubtless locked; besides, neither of us can escape in the condition in which you find us.”

The two functionaries complied with this request.

“Come here and speak to me, you miserable hound!” said Hulot, in a low voice to Marneffe, taking his arm and drawing him towards him. “It is not I who am the assassin, it is you! You are anxious to be the head of your department and officer of the Legion of honor?”

“Extremely anxious, my director,” said Marneffe, bowing.

“Well, you shall be. Go and protect your wife, and send away those men.”

“Not so fast,” said Marneffe, shrewdly. “Those gentlemen have to write out the particulars of the charge—*in flagrante delicto*; if I don’t get that paper in hand what security have I? You have stolen my wife and you have not made me head of my department. Monsieur le baron, I give you two days to do it in—if not, here are some letters—”

“Letters?” cried the baron, interrupting Marneffe.

“Yes, letters which prove that the child my wife is now carrying is yours. You understand me? You here promise to settle on my son an income equal to that which your bastard will take from him. But I will not exact it. To-morrow morning I must be appointed successor to Monsieur Coquet, and named on the list of officers of the Legion of honor at the fêtes of July next, or—the present charge made in due form will be brought before the police courts. I’m a good easy fellow to you, to set you free on those terms, am I not?”

“What a pretty woman!” said the judge to the commissary of police; “it would be pity if she went mad.”

“She is not mad,” said the commissary, in a low voice.

The police are doubt incarnate.

“Monsieur le Baron Hulot has fallen into a trap,” he continued, speaking loud enough for Valérie to hear him.

Valérie gave him a glance that would have killed him if eyes could stab with the rage they contain. The commissary smiled; he too had set his trap, and the woman had tumbled into it! Marneffe told his wife to come back into the room and dress herself; he had settled matters with the baron, who took a dressing-gown and went into the adjoining room.

“Gentlemen,” he said, to the two functionaries, “I need not ask you to keep this matter secret?”

The officials bowed. The commissary gave two little taps on the door and his clerk entered, sat down before the writing-table and began to write at the dictation of his superior, who spoke in a low voice. Valérie continued to weep aloud. When the charge was formally written out, Marneffe wanted to take away his wife; but Hulot, believing that he saw her for the last time, begged by a gesture to be allowed the favor of speaking to her.

“Monsieur, madame has cost me enough to make you willing that I should bid her adieu—in the presence of all, of course,” he said.

Valérie came in, and Hulot whispered quickly, “Flight is all that remains to us; how can we correspond? some one has betrayed us.”

“Reine,” she answered; “but, my dear friend, after this exposure we must never see each other again. I am disgraced. Besides, they will tell you shameful things about me, and you will believe them.” The baron made a gesture of denial. “You will believe them, and I thank heaven for it—you will regret me less—”

“He will *not* die as he is, sub-director!” said Marneffe in the baron’s ear, roughly taking his wife’s arm: “Enough, madame; if I am weak towards you, I am not a fool toward others.”

Valérie left Crevel’s little house with a last glance at the baron which convinced him he was adored. When the legal papers were all signed the commissary of police looked knowingly at Hulot over his spectacles.

“You love that little lady, Monsieur le baron?” he said.

“To my sorrow, as you see.”

“But suppose she does not love you?” said the commissary; “suppose she has tricked you?”

“I know that already, monsieur—here in this very place. Monsieur Crevel himself told me so.”

“Ah, then you know that you are in the mayor’s little sanctum?”

“I do.”

The commissary slightly raised his hat as if to salute the old man.

"You are in love and I will hold my tongue," he said, "I respect inveterate passions as much as doctors respect chronic maladies. I once saw Monsieur de Nucingen, the banker, attacked by a passion of that nature."

"He is a friend of mine," remarked the baron; "I have often supped with the beautiful Esther; she was worth the two millions he spent on her."

"She cost more," said the commissary, "the old banker's fancy sacrificed the lives of four persons. Such passions are like the cholera."

"What is it that you are trying to tell me?" said the councilor of state, who did not relish this indirect advice.

"Why should I destroy your illusions?" replied the commissary of police; "it is so rare to keep any at your age."

"Relieve me of them, then!" cried the baron.

"You will curse your physician," said the official, smiling.

"I request it of you, monsieur."

"Well, that woman planned all this with her husband."

"Oh!"

"That is a thing that happens, monsieur, twice in every ten cases. Oh, we know all about it!"

"What proof can you give of such collusion?"

"In the first place, the husband," said the commissary, with the calmness of a surgeon accustomed to lay open wounds. "Knavery is written on that dull, infamous face. But I believe you value a certain letter written by that woman in which there is mention of a child."

"I value it so much that I carry it always with me," said Hulot, fumbling in his pocket for the little portfolio which never left him.

"Leave the pocket-book where it is," said the commissary; "here is the letter. Did Madame Marneffe know what the pocket-book contained?"

"She alone."

"So I supposed. Here, then, is the proof you ask for of her collusion."

"Well, explain," said the baron, still incredulous.

"When we entered this room, monsieur le baron," said the commissary, "that rascally Marneffe passed in first, and he took the letter from this piece of furniture [pointing to the *bonheur du jour*], where the woman had doubtless placed it. Evidently, the very spot where she was to place the letter, provided she were able to rob you of it while you slept, had been arranged between the wife and husband. You see, of course, that the letter the woman wrote to you, together with those you wrote to her, are essential to the legal charge."

The commissary showed Hulot the letter which Reine had brought to his office at the ministry.

“Give it back, monsieur; it is now part of the indictment,” said the official.

“Monsieur,” said Hulot, whose face was now distorted, “that woman is licentiousness cut into slices. I am certain now that she has three lovers.”

“That’s evident,” said the commissary. “All prostitutes are not in the streets. When women take up that trade, monsieur, in salons or their own homes, and go about in carriages, money is not counted by francs and centimes. Mademoiselle Esther, of whom you spoke, and who poisoned herself, squandered millions. Suffer me to say, Monsieur le baron, that if I were you I should cut loose from such things. This last affair will cost you dear. That scoundrel of a husband has the law on his side. If it were not for me that little woman would have got you again—”

“I thank you,” said the baron, endeavoring to behave with dignity.

“Monsieur, we are going to lock up the apartment; the farce is played out. Will you have the goodness to return the key to Monsieur Crevel?”

Hulot returned home in a state of despondency which was almost prostration; he was lost in gloomy thought. Waking up his pure and saintly wife, he poured the history of the last three years into her bosom, weeping like a child that has lost its toy. This confession of an old man, young in desires—this horrible and blasting epic—though it moved Adeline to pity, nevertheless filled her with the liveliest inward joy. She thanked Heaven for the blow by which she believed her husband was driven at last and forever to his home.

“Lisbeth was right,” she said in a gentle voice, and without any useless reproaches; “she warned us of all this.”

“Yes. Ah, if I had only listened to her instead of getting angry that day when I wanted poor Hortense to return to her home so as not to compromise the reputation of that—Oh, my dear Adeline! we must rescue Wenceslas! he is in the mire up to his chin!”

“My poor Hector, the little bourgeoisie has served you no better than the actresses,” said his wife.

The baroness was shocked at the change in her husband. When she saw him unhappy, wretched, bowed down under the weight of his anxieties, she was all heart, all pity, all love. She would have given her life’s blood to be able to make him happy.

“Stay with us, dear Hector. Show me how it is that those women make you love them; I will try. Why have you not made me what you wanted of me? Is it that I am too dull? There are some who think me still handsome enough to court.”

Many married women, attached to their husbands and faithful to their duty, may well ask why men who are so loyal, so kind, so compassionate to the Madame Marneffes never make their wives,

especially when they resemble Adeline Hulot, the objects of their fancy and their passions. Here we find one of the deepest mysteries of the human organization. Love—that vast excess of reason, the stern and virile pleasure of great souls—and enjoyment—the vulgar happiness sold in the streets—are two aspects of the same thing. The woman who can satisfy these two cravings of man's double nature is as rare in her sex as the great general, the great writer, the great artist, the great inventor is among a people. The man of superiority equally with the common man—a Hulot as well as a Crevel—feels a need of the ideal and of the material pleasure both; they all seek the mysterious hermaphrodite, the rare being who comes to them, as a general thing, in two volumes. Libertines, those treasure-seekers, are as guilty as other misdoers who are punished more severely than they. This reflection is not intended as a moral aside; it gives the reason of many uncomprehended sorrows. The present scene, however, carries with it moral truths of more than one description.

The baron went at once to the Maréchal Prince de Wissembourg, whose powerful protection was his last resource. Patronized by the old warrior for the last thirty-five years, he had the right to ask for an audience whenever he pleased, and he now went to the marshal's apartment at his hour of rising.

"Well, good morning, my dear Hector," said the great and good chieftain. "What's the matter? You look worried. The session is finished, thank God—another over and done with, as I used to say of the campaigns. Faith, I believe the newspapers now call the sessions of the Chambers 'parliamentary campaigns.'"

"Yes, it is all bad, Maréchal; but it is the fault of the times in which we live," said Hulot. "It can't be helped; the world is made so. Every epoch has its disadvantages. The great evil of this present year of grace 1841 is that neither king nor ministers are free to act as the Emperor did."

The Maréchal gave Hulot one of those eagle glances whose lucid brightness, perspicacity, and pride, showed that in spite of years the great soul was ever vigorous and firm.

"You want something?" he said, assuming a playful manner.

"I am under the necessity of asking a personal favor—the promotion of one of my sub-directors to the head of his bureau and his nomination as officer of the Legion of honor."

"What is his name?" said the Maréchal, with a lightning glance at the baron.

"Marneffe."

"He has a pretty wife; I saw her at the marriage of your daughter. If Roger—but Roger is not here now. Hector, my son; this concerns one of your love-affairs. So you still keep up that sort of thing? You do honor to the Imperial Guard? My dear fellow, you must drop this matter; it is too gallant to be official."

“I cannot, maréchal; it is a bad business and threatens me with the police-court; you would not wish to see me there?”

“The devil!” cried the Maréchal, grave at once. “Go on.”

“I am like a fox caught in a trap. You have always been so good to me that I know you will deign to help me out of the humiliating position in which I find myself—”

And Hulot related his misadventure in the liveliest and wittiest manner he could assume.

“Prince,” he said, as he ended, “would you have my brother, whom you love so well, die of mortification—could you suffer one of your directors and a councilor of state to be disgraced? Marneffe is a degraded scoundrel, but we can retire him in a year or two.”

“How lightly you talk of a year or two, my dear friend,” said the marshal.

“Prince, the Imperial Guard is immortal.”

“I am the only surviving marshal of the first appointments,” said the minister. “Hear me, Hector; you do not know how truly I am attached to you; but you shall know. The day when I leave the ministry you will have to leave it too. Ah! you are not a deputy, my friend. There are plenty of persons seeking your place; and if it were not for me you could not keep it. Yes, I have broken many a lance in your behalf. Well, I grant both your requests because it would be too hard to let you go into the prisoner’s-dock at your age and in your position. But you have caused too much gossip for your own credit. If this appointment gives rise to comment, we shall be blamed. As for me I don’t care; but it will be another thorn in your foot; at the next session you will be turned out. Your place is already offered as a bait to five or six influential men, and you only keep it now on the strength of my arguments. I tell my colleagues that the day on which your place is given to another man there will be five discontented aspirants and only one man satisfied; whereas so long as they keep you hanging by a thread we are sure of six votes. They laugh and declare that the ‘ancient of days,’ as they call me, is becoming a parliamentary tactician. I tell you this plainly. Besides, you are getting old—however, you are lucky to be still able to get into scrapes. Alas! where are the days when sub-lieutenant Cottin had his mistresses!”

The maréchal rang the bell.

“We must tear up that indictment,” he said.

“Monseigneur, you treat me like a father; and yet I feared to tell you my trouble.”

“I wish Roger were here,” cried the marshal, seeing Mitoufflet, the usher, enter. “Go away, Mitoufflet. My old comrade, you must make out the papers for these appointments yourself. I will sign them; but that infamous fellow shall not long enjoy the fruit of his crimes. I shall have him watched, and broken at the head of his

company as soon as I catch him tripping. Now that you are safe, my dear Hector, be careful in future. Don't wear out your friends. The appointment shall be given to-day, and that man shall be made officer of the Legion in July. How old are you now?"

"Seventy, in three months."

"What a gay old boy!" said the marshal, smiling. "It is you who deserve promotion, but—blood and bullets! we are not under Louis XV.!"

Such is the tie that binds these glorious relics of the Napoleonic phalanx, who fancy they are still in a bivouac and bound to protect each other through and against all.

"One more favor like that," thought Hulot, as he crossed the courtyard, "and I am lost."

The unhappy functionary now betook himself to Baron Nucingen, to whom he still owed a comparatively insignificant sum of money, and succeeded in borrowing forty thousand francs more by assigning over his salary for the next two years; but the banker stipulated that in case Hulot lost his office the available portion of his retiring pension should be given as security for the sum now borrowed until capital and interest were both paid. This new transaction was done, like the former, in the name of Vauvinet; to whom the baron gave his note for twelve thousand francs. On the following day the fatal indictment, the complaint of the husband, and the letters, were wiped out as though they had never existed. The scandalous appointments of the Sieur Marneffe passed almost without notice during the bustle of the fêtes of July, and were not commented upon even in the newspapers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NOBLE COURTESAN.

Lisbeth, having apparently quarrelled with Madame Marneffe, took up her abode with Maréchal Hulot. Ten days later the first banns of marriage between the spinster and the illustrious old soldier were published. To obtain the latter's consent Adeline told him of the financial catastrophe which had overtaken Hector, begging him not to speak of it to her husband, who, she said, was gloomy, much depressed, in fact despondent. "Alas! he is getting old," she added.

Lisbeth triumphed. She was about to reach the summit of her ambition; her plans were succeeding; her hatred was satisfied. She enjoyed through anticipation the happiness of reigning over a family by whom she had long felt herself despised. She intended to be the protectress of her protectors, the guardian angel of the ruined household; she bowed to her reflection in the glass, calling herself "Madame la comtesse" and "Madame la maréchale." Adeline and Hortense were doomed to end their days in distress, struggling with poverty, while she, their despised cousin Bette, received at the Tuileries, would be a power in society.

A terrible event upset the old maid's calculations, and flung her from the heights on which she was proudly standing.

The day after the banns were first published the baron received a missive from Africa. Another Alsatian appeared, delivered a letter, after convincing himself that he gave it to Baron Hulot in person, and departed, giving his address, and leaving the high functionary stunned by the first words of the epistle:—

NEPHEW—You will receive this letter, as I calculate, about the 7th of August. Supposing that you require three days to obtain the relief we need, and that it takes fifteen more to send it here, I ought to get a reply by the first of September.

If you accomplish the matter within that time you will save the honor and the life of your devoted Johann Fischer.

This is what the official whom you made my accomplice demands. I am, it appears, liable to be brought before either the police courts or a council of war. You can well believe that no one shall ever drag Johann Fischer before any earthly tribunal; he will himself go before that of God.

Your official strikes me as a rascal, who will sooner or later compromise you; but he is a clever scoundrel. He declares that you ought to cry out lustily for reform, and send commissions and inspectors specially charged to discover the guilty parties and ferret out abuses and talk severely, while in reality they stand between us and the courts by provoking controversy.

If you could send such a commission, taking its orders from you, to be here by September 1, and if you can also send us two hundred thousand francs with which to fill the storehouses with the supplies which we are supposed to keep at the distant stations, we shall be thought solvent and immaculate.

You can rely on the soldier who delivers this letter. Give him a check to my order on any bank in Algiers. He is a safe man, a father, and quite incapable of seeking to know what he carries. I have taken measures to make sure of his safe return. If you are unable to do this, I shall die willingly for one to whom we owe the happiness of our Adeline.

The agonies and delights of his passion, and the catastrophe which had just overtaken his career of gallantry, had prevented Baron Hulot from even thinking of poor Johann Fischer, whose first letter warned him of the danger now become imminent. The baron left the dining-room in such trouble of mind that he flung himself on the sofa in the salon. He was prostrated, benumbed, under the shock of such a fall. For a while he gazed at the pattern of the carpet without observing that he held the fatal letter in his hand. Adeline heard him fall on the sofa like an inert mass. The noise was so peculiar that she imagined an attack of apoplexy. A prey to the terror which stops our breath and holds us motionless, she looked through the door into a mirror on the opposite wall, and saw her Hector in the posture of a man felled by a blow. She went to him softly on tiptoe; the baron did not hear her; she leaned over him, saw the letter, took it, read it, and trembled in every limb. One of those violent nervous convulsions from which the body never entirely recovers seized her; she became subject, a few days later, to a constant quivering motion of the head; for, after the first horrible shock had passed, the necessity of action roused a momentary strength which can be taken only from the very sources of vitality.

“Hector, come into my bedroom,” she said, in a voice that was scarcely above a breath. “Don’t let your daughter see you thus. Come, dear friend, come.”

“Where can I get two hundred thousand francs? I could make Claude Vignon inspector; he would be faithful to me. That could be managed in two days; but two hundred thousand francs—how could I get them? Victorin hasn’t got such a sum; his property is mortgaged for three hundred thousand francs. My brother has laid by very little out of his salaries. Nucingen would laugh in my face. Vauvinet—I could scarcely get ten thousand francs for the child of that infamous Marneffe out of him. No, it is all over with me. I must go to the Maréchal and fling myself on his mercy and confess all. I must hear myself called a scoundrel. I’d rather receive a broadside and go to the bottom decently!”

“But, Hector, this is not ruin only, it is dishonor,” said Adeline. “My poor uncle will kill himself. Kill us—for you have the right to do so—but do not murder him. Take courage; we must find a way to send him this money.”

“There is no way,” said the baron. “No one in the government could lay hold of two hundred thousand francs, were it even to save the ministry. Ah, Napoleon! why is he no longer here!”

“My uncle, poor man! Hector, we must not let him die dishonored.”

“There might be one way,” he said, “but—it is very doubtful. Yes, Crevel is at daggers drawn with his daughter; he has money enough—he alone could—”

“Hector, better that your wife should perish than that our uncle, your brother, the honor of our family should be destroyed,” said Madame Hulot, struck as by a flash of light. “Yes, I can save you all— Oh, my God, this shameful thought! how did it ever come to me?”

She clasped her hands and fell on her knees and said a prayer; then, rising, she saw an expression of such wild hope on her husband’s face that again the diabolical thought assailed her, and she sank into a species of idiocy.

“Go, go, my friend, go to the ministry,” she suddenly cried, rousing herself from this torpor. “Try to send the inspector; wind the Maréchal round your finger; when you get back here you may find—yes, you shall find the two hundred thousand francs. Your family, your honor as a man, as a public officer, as a member of the government, your uprightness, your son, all shall be saved—except your Adeline—she must perish; you will never see her again. Hector,” she said, kneeling down and taking his hand and kissing it, “bless me and say farewell.”

The scene was agonizing; as Hector raised his wife and kissed her he said, “I do not understand you.”

“If you did understand me,” she said, “I should die with shame, or I should have no strength to make you this last sacrifice.”

“Breakfast is ready,” said Mariette.

Hortense came up to wish her father and mother good-morning. It was necessary to gather round the table with deceitful faces.

“Take your breakfast without me,” said the baroness, “I will join you later.”

She sat down at her table and wrote the following note:—

MY DEAR MONSIEUR CREVEL—I have a service to ask of you; will you come to me this morning? I rely on your gallantry, which I know so well, not to keep me waiting.

Your devoted servant,

Adeline Hulot.

“Louise,” she said to her daughter’s maid, “take this letter to the porter and tell him to carry it at once to that address and ask for an answer.”

The baron, who was reading the newspapers when she re-entered the room, handed her a Republican newspaper. Pointing to an article, he whispered, “Is there still time? Read that; it is one

of those hateful paragraphs with which they butter their political muffins." The article read as follows:—

"Our correspondent in Algiers writes that such abuses have been discovered in the commissariat department of the Province of Oran that the law has been compelled to step in. The malpractices are evident, and the guilty parties known. If this evil is not severely repressed we shall continue to lose more men through the extortions and peculations which affect their rations than by the lances of the Arabs or the heat of the climate. We await further developments before saying more on this deplorable subject."

"I shall dress and go to the ministry," said the baron, as he left the table. "Time is precious; a man's life hangs on every minute."

"Oh, mamma, I have no longer any hope," said Hortense; "see!" Unable to restrain her tears, she gave her mother a magazine devoted to the fine arts, in which was an engraving of Steinbock's Delilah with the words, "Group belonging to Madame Marneffe." Every line of the accompanying article, "V.," revealed the talent and the obligingness of Claude Vignon.

"Poor darling!" said Madame Hulot.

Amazed at the half-indifferent tone in which her mother said the words, Hortense looked up at her, and beheld the signs of a sorrow in presence of which her own griefs sank down; she went up to Madame Hulot and kissed her, saying, "Mamma, what is it? Can we be more unhappy than we now are?"

"My child, my past sufferings seem to me as nothing to those I now endure. Oh, when shall I cease to suffer?"

"In heaven, mother," sobbed Hortense.

When Adeline returned to her room she went straight to the looking-glass and gazed mournfully and searchingly at herself as if to ask, "Am I still beautiful? Shall I still attract? Have I any wrinkles?"

She pushed up the beautiful blond hair from her temples; they were fresh and pure as those of a young girl; so were the arms and shoulders, and a momentary sense of pride came over her. The beauty of a woman's shoulders is the last to leave her, especially if her life has been a pure one. Adeline selected the elements of her toilet carefully; yet when all was done the chaste and pious woman was still chastely attired, in spite of her little efforts at coquettishness. Of what use were the gray silk stockings and the sandalled slippers to a woman wholly ignorant how to show a pretty foot at a decisive moment! She wore her daintiest dress of muslin, with painted flowers, made low with short sleeves; then, shocked at the exposure, she covered the beautiful arms with gauze draperies, and veiled the shoulders with an embroidered scarf. The curls of her hair à l'anglaise struck her as too significant, and she restrained their luxuriance under an elegant lace cap; but with or without a cap would she have known how to play with the

golden ringlets and show the grace of her tapering fingers? Yet her anguish made her a painted image: the sense of her criminality, these preparations for a deliberate deed, burned the devoted woman with an inward fever which gave her back the bloom of youth. Her complexion glowed, her eyes sparkled. But this, instead of making her seductive, gave her, and she saw it with horror, an air that was almost shameless. Lisbeth had told her the circumstances of Steinbock's infidelity, and the baroness had then learned to her amazement that in one evening, in one moment, Madame Marneffe had made herself mistress of the seduced artist. "How do such women manage it?" she had asked Lisbeth. Nothing equals the curiosity of pure women on this subject; they long to possess the attractions of vice, remaining virtuous. "Why," answered Bette, "they seduce—that's their business. Valérie was seductive enough that night to drag an angel to perdition." "Tell me how she did it?" "Oh, there is no theory in that trade; practice is the one thing needful." The baroness now recollected this conversation. Poor woman! incapable of inventing a *mouche* or putting a rose-bud in her bosom, or contriving any of the stratagems of dress which awaken desire, she was nothing more than carefully attired. No woman can be a courtesan at will. "Woman is a man's porridge," says Molière, by the mouth of the ever-wise Gros-Réné. This comparison applies a sort of culinary science to love; pursuing the metaphor, the virtuous and honorable woman becomes the Homeric feast of flesh flung on the blazing coals; the courtesan, a production of Monsieur Carême, a triumph of spices and condiments. Madame Hulot could not serve up her white shoulders in a dish of guipure, like Madame Marneffe, for she knew not how. The noble woman might have turned and looked back a hundred times without attracting the well-trained eye of a libertine. To be a virtuous, prudent wife in the eyes of the world, and make herself a courtesan to her husband, is the attribute of a woman of genius—such women are few indeed. Therein lies the secret of lifelong attachments, inexplicable to women who are not possessed of those splendid two-fold faculties. Imagine Madame Marneffe virtuous and you have the Marquise de Pescaire. These grand and illustrious women, these beautiful and virtuous Dianes are soon counted.

The scene with which this terrible and solemn study of Parisian morals opened is now to be reproduced, with the singular difference that the prophecy of the militia captain was fulfilled under an absolute change of parts. Madame Hulot awaited Crevel with those intentions which three years earlier had made him smile with self-complacency as he sat erect in his *milord*.

Strange truth! Adeline was faithful to herself, to her heart's love, in making herself guilty of the grossest infidelity—as it will

seem to the eyes of certain judges. "How can I become a Madame Marneffe?" she was saying to herself as the bell rang. She repressed her tears; fever fired her cheeks; she pledged herself to be indeed a courtesan—poor, noble creature!

"What the devil does that good Madame Hulot want of me?" thought Crevel, as he puffed up the stairway. "I'll bet it's about my quarrel with Célestine and Victorin." When he followed Louise into the salon he said to himself, as he looked at what he called the "nakedness of the land," "Poor soul! she is like a fine picture stuck in a garret by a man who doesn't know what painting is."

Crevel, we may remark, had observed Comte Popinot, minister of Commerce, buying pictures and statues, and wished to be himself ranked among the Parisian Mecæneses, whose love of art is shown in their search for good bargains.

Adeline smiled graciously on Crevel, and signed to him to take a chair.

"Here I am, my dear lady, at your orders," said the mayor.

Having become a political character, Crevel now dressed in black cloth. His face shone above his darkling garments like the full moon rising from a curtain of black clouds. His shirt, starred by three large pearls worth five hundred francs apiece, gave a high idea of the thoracic capacities behind it—indeed, he called himself the "future athlete of the tribune." His large and vulgar hands wore the inevitable yellow gloves; his varnished boots proclaimed the little coupé in which he drove about. For the last three years ambition had considerably changed his favorite posture. Like the great painters, he attained his "second manner." In society, when he went to the houses of such people as the Prince de Tissembourg and Comte Popinot he held his hat in one hand in a free and easy manner which Valérie had taught him, inserting the thumb of the other into the arm-hole of his waistcoat with a jaunty air, grimacing all the while with head and eyes. This new pose was due to his malicious mistress, who, under pretence of rejuvenating her mayor, trained him to be more ridiculous than ever.

"I begged you to come, my good, my dear Monsieur Crevel. on a matter of the utmost importance—"

"I can guess it, madame," said Crevel, with a shrewd air. "But what you want is impossible. Oh, I'm not a barbarous father—not, as Napoleon said, a solid block of avarice. Listen to me, my dear lady. If my children were wasting their money on themselves I would go to their assistance; but to stop your husband's leaks—heavens! one might as well attempt to fill the tub of the Danaïdes! Fancy mortgaging their house for three hundred thousand francs to help an incorrigible father! They haven't anything left, poor things!—and they didn't get any fun out of it, either. They will have nothing now to live on but what Victorin can earn by his

profession. It is all very well for him to give himself airs. He was going to be a minister, was he?—the family hope! A pretty fellow at the helm, faith! Why, he has run himself ashore at the start! If he were short of money to help him on—if he went into debt for feasting the deputies. I should say to him. ‘Here’s my purse: dip into it.’ But to pay for his father’s vices—those vices I told you about—no! His father’s misdeeds have thrown him out of a public career. It is I who will be made a minister, madame.”

“Alas! dear Crevel, it was not about our children—poor devoted creatures!—that I wished to see you. If your heart is closed against Célestine and Victorin, I must love them well enough to soften the pain they will feel at your anger. You punish your children for doing a good deed.”

“Yes, for a good deed ill-done—a semi-crime,” said Crevel, vain of the remark.

“The way to do good, dear Crevel,” said the baroness, “is, not to give money from an over-full purse, but to bear privations for the sake of being generous, to suffer in benefiting others, to expect ingratitude. Charity which costs nothing is ignored in heaven.”

“Saints may die in a hospital, madame; they know that for them it is the gate of heaven. But as for me, I am of the world. I fear God; but I am still more afraid of the hell of poverty. To be without a penny is the last degree of misery in our present social state. I belong to my epoch; I worship money.”

“You are right,” said Adeline, “from the world’s stand-point.”

She was a hundred leagues from the subject in her mind, and she felt like Saint Lawrence on his gridiron as she thought of her uncle; her mind wandered to a thought of him with a pistol at his head. She lowered her eyes; then she raised them, and looked at Crevel with angelic sweetness, but with none of the alluring vice so seductive in Valérie. Three years earlier she would have fascinated Crevel by that glance.

“I have known you,” she said, “to be more generous; you once spoke to me of three hundred thousand francs as some great lord might have spoken of them—”

Crevel looked at Madame Hulot: she seemed to him a lily just going out of bloom. A vague idea entered his mind: but he honored the saintly creature so truly that he drove back his suspicions into the libertine quarter of his mind.

“Madame. I am unchanged: but an old merchant is and ought to be a great lord, with economy, method, and regularity: he should carry his ideas of order into everything. He can open an account with folly, allow it a credit, and spend certain profits on it—but suffer it to touch his capital! that would be madness. My children will eventually have their whole property, their mother’s and mine: but they don’t expect their father to be a monk or a mummy. My nature is lively: I float gayly down the stream. I fulfil all the duties

the law, my own heart, and family ties impose upon me. as scrupulously as I meet my notes when due. If my children behave as well as I do in my own home I shall be satisfied: and as for the rest, provided my follies—and I commit follies—don't hurt any one, my children can't reproach me, and they'll get a fine fortune at my death. Your children can't say the same of their father, who goes heels over head to the ruin of his family."

The further she went, the farther she got from her purpose. "You are very bitter against my husband, dear Crevel." she said: "yet you would have been his best friend had you found his wife—"

She gave Crevel a burning glance: but in so doing she made Dubois's mistake when he kicked the Regent three limes—she overshot her mark, and the libertine ideas of the regency perfumer came back with such a rush that he said to himself, "Can she want to revenge herself on Hulot? It must be that, or does she like me better as mayor? Women are so queer!" whereupon he struck the attitude of his second manner, and gazed at the baroness with a rakish air.

"It almost seems," she continued. "as if you revenged yourself on him for a virtue which resisted you—for a woman whom you loved enough—to—to buy," she added, in a low voice.

"For a divine woman;" replied Crevel, smiling significantly at the baroness, whose eyes were moist; "what indignities you've had to bear for the last three years! hey, my dear?"

"Don't speak of my sufferings, dear Crevel—they are beyond human endurance. Ah, if you still love me, pull me from the abyss in which I lie—I am in hell! the martyrs whom they tortured, and drew, and quartered lay on roses compared to me—their bodies were lacerated, but my heart is torn apart by wild horses!"

Crevel's thumb slipped out of his waistcoat, he laid his hat on the work-table, lost his attitude, and smiled! The smile was so silly that the baroness mistook its meaning and thought it an expression of kindness.

"You see before you a woman, not only in despair, but in the death agony of her honor—resolved on all, *all, my friend*—to prevent crimes." Then, fearing that Hortense might come in, she went to the door and slipped the bolt, and with the same impulse, she flung herself at Crevel's feet and kissed his hands. "Be my helper!" she cried. She believed there were generous fibres in the man's commercial heart, and a sudden hope dashed before her of obtaining the money without her own dishonor. "Buy a soul—you who once sought to buy a virtue," she cried, with a delirious glance. "Have faith in my uprightness as a woman, in my honor, the strength of which is known to you. Be my friend! Save a family from ruin, shame, despair; save it from rolling into a slough whose mire is made of blood! Oh! don't ask me to tell you what I mean," she cried, as Crevel made a motion to speak. "Above all, do not

say to me, 'told you how it would be.' Hear me! obey one whom you once said you loved—a woman whose abasement here at your feet is perhaps the highest act of her life; ask her nothing, expect all from her gratitude!—No, give nothing, but lend—lend to her you once called Adeline—”

Tears choked her words and flowed in such abundance that they wet the gloves on Crevel's hands and made her next words, “I need two hundred thousand francs,” almost as indistinguishable in the flood of weeping as the rocks brought down by Alpine torrents swollen by the melting snows.

Such was the inexperience of virtue! Vice would have asked nothing, it would have forced an offer of all. Such women as Madame Marneffe await the moment when they have become indispensable before they show themselves exacting. Distinguishing the words “two hundred thousand francs,” Crevel understood the whole matter. He raised the baroness gallantly, saying, in an insolent tone, “Come, come, be calm, my little woman”—words which, in her wild excitement, Adeline did not hear. The scene had changed; Crevel, to use his own language, was master of the field.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION OF THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF CÉLESTIN CREVEL.

The immensity of the sum demanded had so startling an effect on Crevel that his lively emotion at beholding a beautiful woman at his feet in tears passed off. Besides, no matter how angelic and lovely a woman may be, if she weeps her beauty disappears. The Madame Marneffes pretend to weep occasionally and allow a tear or two to glide down their cheeks; but dissolve in tears and redden their eyes and nose!—no, they never commit such a fault as that.

“Come, come, my dear, be calm!” said Crevel, taking her beautiful hands in his own and patting them. “Why do you ask me for two hundred thousand francs? what do you want of them? who are they for?”

“Don’t ask me for an explanation,” she said; “give them to me. You will save the lives of three persons and your children’s honor.”

“And do you believe, my little woman,” said Crevel, “that there’s a man in all Paris, who, at the request of a woman who is pretty nearly crazy, would go hunting, *hic et nunc*, in a drawer, anywhere, for two hundred thousand francs supposed to be hiding there till she happens to want them? Is that your idea of life and business, my lady? Your mysterious beggars must be pretty far gone; send them the sacraments, for nobody in Paris except its serene Highness the Bank of France, or the illustrious Nucingen, or misers in love with gold as other men are with women, can pull hundreds of thousands of francs out of a hiding-place on demand. The civil list, civil as it is, would ask you to call again to-morrow. Everybody makes the most of his money and turns it over and over as best he can. You are much mistaken, my dear angel, if you think it is the king, Louis-Philippe, who reigns over us—he himself knows better than that. He knows, as we all do, that above the charter sits enthroned that sacred, venerable, solid, gracious, kindly, beautiful, noble, youthful, and all-powerful coin—the five-franc piece. Now, my adorable angel, money exacts interest; its whole business is to look out for interest. ‘God of the Jews, thou rulest all,’ says the great Racine. It is the everlasting allegory of the golden calf. Men were stock-jobbers in the days of Moses. It’s Biblical. The golden calf was the first ledger. You don’t know everything in the rue Plumet, dear Adeline,” he continued. “The Egyptians loaned immense sums to the Hebrews and they chased the people of God, not for themselves, but for their capital.” Crevel looked at the baroness as if to say, “That’s witty, isn’t it?” “You don’t take into consideration men’s love for their breeches-pocket.” he continued. “Excuse me. Now listen if you can, and

take in my argument. You want two hundred thousand francs? no one can give them without changing investments. Therefore, calculate. To get two hundred thousand francs in *living money*, that is in cash, one must sell out nearly seven hundred thousand francs' worth of stock at three per cent. Even then you can't get the money for two days. That's the quickest possible time. Now before a man can be persuaded to give up a fortune—for it is a fortune to most people, two hundred thousand francs—he ought to be told where it is going, and for what reason.”

“Dear Crevel, it concerns the life of two men, one of whom will die of grief and the other will kill himself. And also, it concerns me—I am going mad—am I not already so?”

“No, no,” he said, laying his hand upon her knee; “old Crevel has his price, now that you have deigned to think of him, my angel.”

“You once offered me a fortune,” she said, blushing and covering her face with her hands.

“Ah, my little woman, but that was three years ago,” said Crevel. You are more beautiful now than I have ever seen you.” he added, pressing her arm to his heart. “And so you've kept me in mind, dear creature? I wish you had never played the prude, for that three hundred thousand francs you refused so proudly went into the pocket of another woman. I loved you then and I still love you; but let us look back to three years ago. When I said to you, ‘I shall have you,’ what was my object? Vengeance on your scoundrel of a husband. Since then, my dear, he has had a treasure of a woman for his mistress, a jewel, a pearl, a slyboots, who was twenty-three years old then, for she is twenty-six now. I felt it was better fun, more the thing, more Richelieu, more Louis XV., more Corsican, to deprive him of that charming creature—who, by the by, never even liked him, and has been for three years desperately in love with your humble servant.”

So saying, Crevel, releasing Madam Hulot's hands, recovered position. He stuck his two thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and flapped his torso with both elbows as though they were wings, confident that he was making himself both desirable and delightful. He seemed to say, “Behold the man you formerly discarded.”

“So, my dear child, I am avenged and your husband knows it. I have categorically proved to him that he has been fooled—what I call jockeyed. Madame Marneffe is *my* mistress, and when the Sieur Marneffe dies she will be my wife.”

Madame Hulot looked fixedly at Crevel, though her eyes seemed dazed.

“Does Hector know that?” she said.

“Yes, and he went back to her, and I allowed it,” answered Crevel, “because Marneffe insisted on being promoted to the head

of his department. But she swore to me that our baron should be got rid of before long in a way to prevent his ever reappearing. And my little duchess (for she is a duchess, that woman, honor bright) has kept her word. She now, to use her own witty language, returns your Hector virtuous in perpetuity. The lesson has done him good, severe as it is; he won't run after actresses or well-bred women any more. I call him radically cured; he has been rinsed out like a teapot. If you had listened to old Crevel instead of mortifying him and turning him out of your house, you might have had four hundred thousand francs; for my revenge has cost me fully that. But I expect to get back the money when Marneffe dies. That's the secret of my extravagance. I've solved the problem of how to be a great lord cheaply."

"And you mean to give such a niother-in-law to your daughter?" cried Madame Hulot.

"You don't know, Valérie, madame," said Crevel, gravely, striking the attitude of his first manner. "She is well-born, well-bred, and a lady who is held in the highest social estimation. Only yesterday the vicar of our parish dined with her. We have just given—for she is very pious—a superb monstrance to the church. Oh! she's clever, witty, delightfully educated, in fact, she has everything in her favor. As for me, dear Adeline, I owe all I am to that charming woman; she has quickened my mind and refined, as you must have observed, my language; she checks my little jokes and puts words and ideas into my head. I don't say improper things any longer. There is a great change in me, as you must have seen. She has also roused my ambition. I intend to be a deputy and I sha'n't make a mess of it either; I shall consult my Egeria in everything. Great political characters—Numa Pompilius and our present illustrious prime minister—have all had their Sibyls. Valérie receives dozens of deputies; she is getting to be influential, and now that I am going to give her an elegant mansion and put her in a carriage, she will become one of the occult queens of Paris. Ah! a beautiful woman is a splendid engine. Many a time I've thanked you for dismissing me."

"It is enough to make one doubt the power of God," said Adeline, whose indignation dried her tears. "But no!—divine justice must hover above that woman's head."

"You are ignorant of the world, my good lady," said Crevel, deeply affronted. "The world loves success! What does it care for your sublime Virtue—whose price is two hundred thousand francs!"

The words increased Madame Hulot's nervous trembling. She saw that the ex-perfumer was determined to revenge himself upon her as he had upon her husband; disgust rose in her throat like nausea, so that she could not speak.

"Money—always money!" she said at last.

“I am greatly touched,” said Crevel, reminded by that word of the woman’s humiliation, “to see you weeping at my feet. Perhaps you won’t believe me, but if I had the money here in my pocket, it should be yours. Come, you want that sum—”

Hearing these words, big with two hundred thousand francs, Adeline forgot the man’s insults and fell into the trap of imaginary success, which Crevel laid for her intending to worm out her secret and laugh over it with Valérie.

“Ah, I will do anything!” cried the unhappy woman. “Monsieur, I will sell myself; I will become, if I must, another Valérie—”

“Difficult for you!” said Crevel. “Valérie is a triumph of her species. My little woman, a virtue of twenty-five years’ standing is never attractive—and yours seems to have grown rather mildewed. But I’ll prove that I still love you; you shall have your two hundred thousand francs.”

Adeline seized Crevel’s hand and pressed it to her heart, unable to articulate a word, while tears of joy moistened her eyelashes.

“Wait, wait, there are certain formalities. As for me, I’m a man of the world, a good fellow, and without prejudices; I shall explain things plumply. You say you wish to do as Valérie does—very good. But that’s not all that’s necessary; we must find some one, some Hulot, some capitalist, who would be as glad as I would have been three years ago to give three hundred thousand francs for the love of a woman as well-bred as—”

“Silence, Monsieur Crevel!” said Madame Hulot, no longer disguising her feelings, and letting her shame overspread her face. “My punishment is greater than my sin. My conscience, repressed by the iron hand of necessity, now cries out to me that such sacrifices are impossible. But my pride has gone; I cannot be indignant as I once was—I have lost the right—I have offered myself to you—I am a prostitute. Yes, I have soiled my soul, hitherto so pure, with a base purpose and—I am without excuse, I know it!—I deserve the insults you put upon me! God’s will be done! If he wills the death of two beings fit to enter his presence, let them die; I will mourn them, I will pray for them! If he wills the degradation of our family, let us bow before the avenging sword and kiss it, for we are Christians. I know how to expiate this momentary shame which will torture me through all the coming years. It is no longer Madame Hulot who speaks to you, it is the poor, the humble sinner, the Christian woman whose heart from henceforth holds one feeling only—repentance; the last of women and the first of penitents through the magnitude of her evil deed. You are the means of my return to reason; through you the voice of God has spoken within me; I thank you—”

She trembled with a nervous movement which, from that moment, never left her. Her gentle voice contrasted with the feverish tones in which she had hitherto spoken; the blood forsook her cheeks; she grew pallid and her eyes were dry.

"I played my part ill," she said, looking at Crevel as the martyrs may have looked at the proconsul. "True love, the sacred and devoted love of a woman, has other pleasures than those that are sold in the market of prostitution. But why do I say these things?" she exclaimed, checking herself, making, as she did so, one step onward in the path of perfection—"they sound like sarcasm, and God knows I do not mean that; forgive me if they seem so—perhaps it is myself they wound, not others."

The majesty of virtue, its celestial light, had swept away the fleeting impurity of the woman who, resplendent in the sacred beauty that belonged to her, seemed, even in Crevel's eyes, ennobled. At this moment she was like those figures of Religion leaning on a cross which the old Venetians loved to paint; she exhibited to the eye the grandeur of her sorrows, and of the Catholic Church, to which she flew for refuge like a wounded dove. Crevel was awed and overcome.

"Madame, I am yours without conditions," he said, yielding to an impulse of generosity. "I will look into the matter, and—what is it you want?—the impossible? Well, you shall have it. I will deposit my securities at the bank, and in two hours I will bring you the money."

"My God! a miracle!" cried the poor woman, falling on her knees.

She said a prayer with such fervor that the tears were in Crevel's eyes as she rose from her knees.

"Be my friend," she said to him. "You have a soul above your conduct or your words. God gave you that soul. Your ideas and your passions are only of this world. Oh, I will love you!" she cried, with an angelic ardor that contrasted strangely with her paltry little efforts at coquetry.

"Don't tremble so," said Crevel.

"Do I tremble?" she said, not yet aware of the infirmity that had come upon her so suddenly.

"Why, yes! see!" he exclaimed, taking her arm and showing her how it twitched. "Madame," he said, respectfully, "be calm, I entreat you; I will go straight to the bank—"

"And return quickly. Remember, dear friend," she added, betiding her secret, "I must prevent my uncle Fischer's suicide; he is compromised through my husband. There, I have told you all. See what trust I place in you. Besides, if we are not in time—I know the marshal; he is the soul of honor; he would die of the disgrace."

"I go," said Crevel, kissing her hand. "But what has that poor Hulot done?"

"He has robbed the State!"

"Good God! I will hurry. Madame, I understand you; I respect you."

Crevel bent his knee and kissed the hem of her dress; then he left the room, saying, "Expect me soon."

Unhappily, between the rue Plumet and his own house, where he was to go for his securities, Crevel passed through the rue Vanneau, and he could not resist the desire to see his little duchess. His face was still troubled as he entered the room where Valérie's maid was dressing her hair. The siren examined Crevel in the glass, and was immediately, like all women of her kind, displeased to see that he was under some strong emotion of which she was not the cause.

"What is the matter, my hero?" she said. "Is that the way to visit your little duchess. Before long you won't think me a duchess at all, monsieur."

Crevel answered by a gloomy smile, and looked at Reine.

"Reine, my dear, that will do for to-day. I'll finish my hair myself. Bring me a morning-gown."

Reine, whose face was pitted with small-pox like a colander, and who seemed to have been born expressly to be Valérie's maid, smiled at her mistress and brought the garment. Valérie took off her peignoir and slipped into the loose gown like an adder coiling into a tuft of grass.

"Madame is not at home to anyone?"

"What a question!" said Valérie. "Now, my old man, what is it? Have the Left Bank shares gone down?"

"No."

"Has some one outbid you on the house?"

"No."

"You think you are not the father of our little Crevel?"

"Nonsense."

"Then I can't guess what it is. If I have got to pull a friend's troubles out of him, just as you pull corks out of champagne bottles, I give up. Go away; you annoy me."

"Oh, it is nothing—only I must get two hundred thousand francs within an hour."

"You can get them easily. I haven't used the fifty thousand we got through the Hulot indictment, and I can easily borrow fifty thousand more from Henri."

"Henri! always Henri!" growled Crevel.

"Do you think, my budding Machiavelli, that I shall dismiss Henri? Does France disband her navy? Henri! he is a dagger in a sheath hanging on a nail. That fellow," she cried, "helps me to find out if you love me—and you don't love me this morning."

“Not love you, Valérie!” exclaimed Crevel. “I love you better than a million!”

“That is not enough,” she said, springing on his knee, and twining both arms around his neck; “I must be loved like ten millions—like all the gold on earth, and more too. Henri couldn’t be with me five minutes without telling all that was in his heart. Come, what’s the matter, my old darling? Unpack your troubles. Tell all, and quickly too, to your little pet.” And she wafted her hair lightly across his face as she pinched his nose. “How can a man have such a nose as that,” she cried, “and keep a secret from his Va-va- [the nose went to the right] lé-lé- [to the left] ri-rie [the nose recovered position]?”

“Well, I have just seen—” Crevel stopped and looked at Madame Marneffe. “Valérie, my treasure, you promise me, on your honor, not to repeat a word of what I tell you?”

“Honor bright, mayor!” she said. “See! I raise my hand—and my foot!” And she pirouetted in a way to drive Crevel beside himself from his head to his heels.

“I have just seen virtue in despair.”

“*Who* is virtuous? and what *is* despair?” she cried, nodding her head and crossing her arms à la Napoleon.

“I am speaking of poor Madame Hulot; she wants two hundred thousand francs. If she can’t get them the old marshal and her uncle Fischer will blow their brains out; and as you are partly the cause of it, my little duchess, I am going to repair damages. She is a good woman, a saint—I know her, she’ll pay me back.”

At the name of Hulot and the mention of the money, Valérie’s eyes emitted a look through their long lashes like the flash of a cannon through its smoke.

“What has the old woman done to make you pity her? Has she shown you her—her—religion?”

“Don’t make fun of her, dearest, she is a noble, pious, saintly woman, worthy of all respect.”

“And I am not!” said Valérie, with a dangerous look.

“I didn’t say that,” answered Crevel, comprehending how the praise of virtue must stab Madame Marneffe.

“I’m pious too,” said Valérie, moving away from Crevel and sitting down in an armchair; “but I don’t make a trade of my religion; I hide in a corner when I go to church.”

She was silent and paid no further attention to Crevel. Made excessively uneasy, that worthy planted himself in front of her chair, and beheld her lost in the painful thoughts he had so foolishly evoked.

“Valérie, my little angel!”

No answer. A problematical tear was furtively wiped away.

“One word, my pet.”

“Monsieur!”

“What-are you thinking of?”

“Oh, Monsieur Crevel, I am thinking of the day of my first communion. I was beautiful! I was pure! I was innocent, immaculate! Ah! if any one had gone to my mother then and said, ‘Your daughter will be a profligate, she will deceive her husband, she will sell herself to Crevel to betray Hulot, two wicked old men’—horrors! she would have died before the end of the speech—she loved me so.”

“Be calm.”

“You don’t know how one must love a man before we can silence the remorse that wrings the heart of an adulteress. I am sorry Reine is not here; she could tell you that she found me this morning praying to God with tears in my eyes. I never mock at religion, Monsieur Crevel; did you ever hear me say one disrespectful word on that subject?”

Crevel made a gesture of approbation.

“I won’t allow them to be said before me. I scoff at much—at kings, judges, marriage, love, young girls, old men; but religion, the church, God, never! I stop there. I know I do evil; I know I am risking my salvation for you, and yet you doubt my love—”

Crevel clasped his hands.

“Ah, you need to look into my heart and measure the strength of my convictions before you can realize what I have sacrificed for you. I feel within me the soul of the Magdalen; see how I surround myself with priests, what gifts I make to the altar! My mother brought me up in the Catholic faith—I know God. It is to us sinners that he speaks in terrifying tones.”

Valérie wiped away two tears which were rolling down her cheeks. Crevel was dismayed; Madame Marneffe rose, wildly excited.

“My treasure, be calm. You frighten me.”

She fell on her knees.

“My God!” she cried, clasping her hands, “I am not a bad woman. Deign to seek thy lost lamb, afflict her, beat her with many stripes, take her from the paths of wickedness and adultery—gladly will she hide in thy bosom, happy in returning to the fold.”

She rose from her knees, looked at Crevel; the man trembled at her glazed eyes.

“And then, oh, Crevel! I am frightened sometimes. God’s justice falls in this world as well as in that to come. What can I hope from God? Vengeance is his upon the guilty, and who knows when and where it may fall? All misfortunes which fools are unable to explain are expiations. That is what my mother told me on her dying bed, speaking of old age. Oh! if I lost you,” she cried, seizing Crevel and clasping him with savage energy, “what would become of me? I should die.”

Madame Marneffe released Crevel and once more knelt before her chair, joined her hands, and, in that ravishing attitude, she said with incredible unction the following prayer:—

“And you, Saint Valérie, my protectress, why do you not oftener visit the pillow of her who was sacredly confided to your care? Oh, come to-night as you have come this morning! Inspire me with holy thoughts; help me to abandon evil ways—to renounce, like Magdalen, deceitful joys, the pomps of life, and—him—I love.”

“My darling!” cried Crevel.

“No longer your darling,” she said, turning away with the pride of virtue, her eyes moist with tears, dignified, cold, almost indifferent. “Leave me,” she said; “I know my duty—I must belong only to my husband. He is dying, and yet how do I treat him? I have deceived him at the very verge of his grave. He thinks your son is his. I will tell him the truth; I will begin by seeking his pardon before I ask that of God. Monsieur Crevel, we must part. Farewell,” she said, standing erect and offering him an icy hand; “farewell, my friend, may we meet in a better world. You owe me pleasures—criminal alas!—but now I need—yes I must have—your esteem.”

Crevel melted into tears.

“Oh! you old ninny,” she cried, with an infernal burst of laughter, “I am showing you how pious women go to work to get two hundred thousand francs out of you. And you, who talk about Richelieu, the original of Lovelace, you let yourself be taken in by such chaff as that! I could have got two hundred thousand francs out of you then if I had kept on, you old fool. Take care of your money in future. If you have more than you want, it belongs to me. If you give two sous to that respectable old woman who plays the pious because she is fifty-seven years old, I’ll never see you again, and you can take her in place of me. I know you will come back to me the next day sore all over from her angular charms.”

“It is true,” said Crevel, “that two hundred thousand francs is a good deal of money.”

“Those pious women have good appetites. They sell their sermons for more than we can get for the only sure thing on earth, and that is pleasure. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, old man, you who are not given to giving, for you never gave me two hundred thousand francs yet.”

“Yes, I have,” said Crevel; “the little house has cost more than that.”

“So you are worth four hundred thousand, are you?” she said, with a reflective air.

“No.”

“Well, if you lend that old horror two hundred thousand francs on my house, it will be a crime of lèze-Valérie.”

“But just listen to me.”

“If you give that money to some stupid philanthropic invention you’ll be thought a man of ideas,” she said, growing animated, “and I shall be the first to advise you to do so, because you are such an innocent you could never write political books and make a reputation—you haven’t style enough! But you might pose like others in the same case, who gild their name with glory by sticking it at the head of some social, moral, national, or universal affair—benevolence is out of the question, it is poor style just now; liberated convicts (about whom they made more fuss than over the honest poor devils) have had their day. I would like to see you employ that two hundred thousand francs on something more important, something really useful. If they were to call you a second Montyon shouldn’t I be proud! But to throw two hundred thousand francs into a basin of holy water and lend them to a sanctimonious old woman deserted by her husband, for any reason, I don’t care what, is an absolute stupidity which, in this year of grace, could germinate only in the skull of an ex-perfumer! It smells of the counter! You wouldn’t dare look at your face in the glass the next day. Go and put your money in the Sinking Fund, and don’t come here again without the receipt for it. Go—at once—quick!”

She pushed Crevel by the shoulders out of the room, noticing that his natural avarice had once more blossomed on his face. When the outer door was closed, she said aloud, “There’s Lisbeth avenged and doubly avenged. What a pity she has gone, we should have had such fun over it! Ha, ha! so the old woman wants to take the bread out of my mouth! I’ll shake her well for that!”

CHAPTER XXX.

A BRIEF DUEL BETWEEN MARÉCHAL HULOT, COMTE DE FORZHEIM, AND HIS EXCELLENCY MONSEIGNEUR LE MARÉCHAL COTTIN, PRINCE DE WISSEMBOURG, DUC D'ORFANO, MINISTER OF WAR.

Maréchal Hulot, considering himself obliged to live in a manner becoming to the highest military dignity, occupied a fine house in the rue du Mont-Parnasse, a street which contains two or three princely mansions. Though he hired the whole house he occupied only the ground-floor. When Lisbeth came to live with him she proposed to sub-let the first floor, which, she said, would pay the rent of the whole house and the count would get his own apartment for next to nothing; but the old soldier refused. For the last few months many anxious thoughts had passed through his mind. He had guessed his sister-in-law's poverty and suspected the evils which led to it, without being able to detect their cause. The old man, by nature serene and joyous, had of late grown taciturn and anxious; he believed that his house might some day be a refuge for the baroness and her daughter, and he was keeping the first floor of it for them. The smallness of his fortune was so well known that the minister of war, the Prince de Wissembourg, had forced his old comrade to accept an indemnity of equipment. Hulot employed the money in furnishing the ground-floor, where all was in keeping with his rank; for he did not choose, he said, to carry a marshal's baton afoot. The house had belonged, under the empire, to a senator; the salons on the ground-floor, decorated with great magnificence in white and gold with bas-reliefs, were in good preservation. The marshal added fine old furniture of the same period. In the coach-house he kept a carriage, with batons painted on the panels in saltire, and hired horses whenever he desired to drive in state either to the ministry, or the palace, or to any public ceremony or fête. For the last thirty years an old soldier, now sixty years old, had been his valet, and the man's sister was cook to the establishment; this economical mode of living enabled the count to lay by some ten thousand francs towards the little fortune he meant to leave Hortense. The old man went every day on foot from the rue du Mont-Parnasse to the rue Plumet. All the old Invalides ranged themselves in line and saluted him as he passed; and the marshal rewarded them with a friendly smile.

"Why do you salute the like of him?" said a young workman, one day to an old captain of the Invalides.

"I'll tell you, you young scamp," said the old officer. The youth struck an attitude of resignation to his garrulity.

"In 1809," continued the Invalide, "we were covering the flank of the Grand Army under command of the Emperor in person,

on the march to Vienna. We came to a bridge defended by a triple battery of cannon, three redoubts, as it were, placed one above the other on the rocks and commanding the bridge. We were under the orders of Maréchal Massena. I, here present, was then colonel of the grenadiers of the Guard, and I marched with the line. Our columns were on one side of the river, the batteries on the other. Three times we attempted the bridge, three times the columns balked. 'Send for Hulot!' cried Massena; "none but he and his men can swallow that morsel!" We were brought up. The last general who had tried and failed stopped Hulot, under fire, clogging the way, to tell him how to manage. 'I don't want advice, but the room to pass,' said the general, springing upon the bridge at the head of his column—r-r-rah! and thirty cannon pelted us!—"

"Thunder!" cried the workman, "it must have made cripples of a good many of you!"

"If you had heard him say those words, tranquilly, as I did, my little man, you'd salute him to the ground. The affair never made the noise of the bridge at Arcola, but it wasn't less fine. We followed Hulot, on the run, into the batteries!—Honor to those who stayed there," said the veteran, lifting his hat. "The *kaiserlicks* were stunned by the blow, and that's why the Emperor made the old man you saw count; he honored us all in our chief, and the present government has done well to make him marshal of France."

"Long live the marshal!" cried the workman. "No use shouting, my lad; he can't hear you; those cannons deafened him!"

This anecdote will give an idea of the respect in which the old army held Maréchal Hulot, whose republican opinions won, besides, the popular sympathies of his neighborhood.

The sorrow which now entered that pure and calm and noble soul was grievous to behold. Madame Hulot endeavored to deceive him, and bid the full truth as best she could with her womanly tact. During this disastrous morning the marshal, who, like all old men, slept little, had heard from Lisbeth certain facts about his brother. We may well believe that the old maid was delighted to have him draw from her a confidence she had been longing to give since her arrival in his house; it strengthened the prospects of her own marriage.

"Your brother is incorrigible!" said Lisbeth, shouting into the marshal's best ear.

The sharp, clear voice of the Lorraine peasant-woman enabled her to converse with the old man. She strained her lungs, never over-strong, in the effort to show her future husband that he would never be deaf with her.

"To keep three mistresses," exclaimed the marshal, "while he had an Adeline! Poor Adeline!"

“If you would take my advice,” said Lisbeth, “you would use your influence with the Prince de Wissembourg to obtain some honorable situation for my cousin Adeline. She needs it; the baron’s salary is mortgaged for three years.”

“I will go and see him at once,” he replied. “I will find out what he thinks of my brother, and ask him to use his influence for my sister. Where could we find a suitable employment for her?”

“A number of charitable ladies have formed an association for benevolent works under the auspices of the archbishop. They want some visitors, whom they employ at suitable salaries, to ascertain the real needs of the applicants for relief. Such work would just suit my dear Adeline; her heart would be in it.”

“Send for the horses!” said the marshal, “I will dress and go—to Neuilly, if necessary.”

“How he loves her!” thought Bette. “Is she to be ever in my way?”

Lisbeth was already domineering over the household—but out of sight of the marshal. She had taken to herself a waiting-woman, and displayed all the meddlesomeness of an old maid in spying about her and demanding an account of expenditures, in the interests, she said, of the dear marshal. She was quite as republican as he was; pleasing him thus on his democratic side, and flattering him in other ways with amazing ability. For the last two weeks the old man, who now fared better and was looked after by his new housekeeper as a child by its mother, had come to regard Bette as in part the realization of his wishes.

“My dear maréchal,” she said, accompanying him to the portico when the carriage came to the door, “do pray pull up the windows, don’t sit in a draught—for my sake!”

The Maréchal, a true old bachelor, who had never been petted in his life, smiled at her, although his heart was aching.

At the same moment Baron Hulot was also making his way to the cabinet of the Maréchal Prince de Wissembourg, who had sent for him. Though there was nothing extraordinary in the fact that the minister should send for one of his directors, Hulot’s conscience was so uneasy that he fancied he saw something cold and forbidding in the face of Mitouflet, the messenger.

“Mitouflet, how is the prince?” he said, closing his office door and overtaking the clerk, who had walked on.

“He must have a crow to pick with you, Monsieur le baron,” said Mitouflet, “for his voice and eyes and face are—tempestuous.”

Hulot became livid, and was silent. He crossed the antechamber and the salons, and reached the cabinet with a beating heart. The Maréchal, now seventy years of age, with perfectly white hair and a brown, leathery face, like many old men of his age, was distinguished by a noble brow of such amplitude that the imagination could see a whole battle-field written out upon

it. Beneath this broad cupola, covered with snow, glittered two eyes of Napoleonic blue, ordinarily sad, now full of bitter memories and regrets, and always shaded by the projecting arch of his eyebrows, which were very prominent. This rival of Bernadotte had hoped to ascend a throne. His eyes flashed lightning when some noble sentiment filled his soul; his voice, usually hollow, grew strident at such times. When angry, the prince fell back into the habits of the camp, and his language became that of sub-lieutenant Cottin; nothing restrained him. On entering the room Hulot d'Ervy beheld the old lion standing before the fireplace, with his hair tangled like a mane, his eyebrows contracted, his shoulders resting on the mantle-shelf, and his thoughts apparently absent.

"At your orders, prince," said Hulot, attempting an easy air.

The marshal looked fixedly at the director without saying a word during the time it took Hulot to come from the doorway to within a few feet of him. This leaden look was like the eye of God. The baron could not endure it; he lowered his own eyes confusedly. "He knows all!" thought he.

"Does your conscience warn you?" demanded the marshal, in a stern and hollow voice.

"It warns me, prince, that I have probably done wrong to order those raids in Algeria without consulting you. At my age, and with my tastes, I am without fortune, after a service of forty-five years. You know the principles of the four hundred Elected of France. Those gentlemen are envious of all positions; they cut down the salaries of everybody', even the ministers, as you know. Useless to ask *them* to help an old soldier out of his difficulties. What can you expect of men who pay their own civil service as they do; who give thirty sous a day to the Toulon laborers, when no man can support a family on less than forty; men who never reflect on the iniquity of paying clerks six hundred to a thousand or twelve hundred francs a year to do their work; and who covet our places for themselves if the salaries amount to forty thousand?—fellows, in short, who refuse to the crown crown-property, confiscated to the crown in 1830, when it was asked of them for a prince in distress! If you had no fortune, like my brother, prince, they would let you vegetate on a paltry salary, without remembering that you saved the Grand Army (and I with you) in the swamps of Poland."

"You have robbed the State!" said the marshal. "You are in danger of a criminal prosecution! You are no better than a cashier who steals from a bank! and you dare to treat the matter with such levity?"

"But what a difference, monseigneur!" cried Hulot. "Did I put my hands on any money that was entrusted to me?"

“When a man commits such infamies,” said the marshal, “he is doubly guilty. You have shamefully compromised the administration, which up to this time has been the cleanest in Europe; and you did it, monsieur, for two hundred thousand francs and a wanton!” continued the marshal, in a terrible voice. “You are a councilor of state; but the poor soldier who sells the property of his regiment is put to death! Colonel Poutin, of the Second Lancers, told me a case in point: One of his men at Saverne loved an Alsatian woman who wanted a shawl; she made such a fuss that the poor devil, on the point of being promoted sergeant-major after twenty years’ service—a man who was an honor to the service—sold some property belonging to the regiment to get the shawl. Do you know what he did, Baron Hulot? He powdered the glass of his window and swallowed it, and died in eleven hours in the hospital. Endeavor, yourself, to die of an apoplexy, if you wish to save your honor—”

Hulot looked at the old warrior with a haggard eye. The marshal, recognizing a coward in that glance, flushed red, and his eyes gleamed.

“Do not desert me!” stammered Hulot.

At this moment Maréchal Hulot, hearing that his brother and the minister were alone together, thought himself free to enter. With the directness of deaf persons, he went straight up to the prince.

“Oh!” cried the latter, “I know what you have come for, old friend; but it is useless!”

“Useless?” reputed Maréchal Hulot, who heard only that one word.

“Yes. You have come to speak about your brother; but do you know what your brother is?”

“My brother?” asked the deaf man.

“He is a villain, a damned scoundrel, unworthy of you!”

The Maréchal’s anger flashed from his eyes in a lightning glance which, like that of Napoleon, blasted the brains and the wills of those about him.

“You lie, Cottin!” replied the other marshal, turning livid. “Cast away your rank as I cast mine!—I am at your orders.”

The prince went straight to his old comrade, looked at him fixedly, and said in his ear as he grasped his hand, “Are you a man?”

“You shall see that I am.”

“Then, command yourself! you have to bear the worst misfortune that could befall you.”

The prince turned to the table, took up a written report, and gave it to the old man saying, “Read that!”

Comte Forzheim read the following letter, which accompanied the report:—

[Confidential.]

To His Excellency the President of the Council:

Algiers,—

My dear Prince—We are saddled with an extremely unpleasant business, as you will see from the accompanying report.

To sum it up—Baron Hulot d'Ervy has sent one of his uncles to the province of O— for certain swindling transactions in the matter of grain and forage, and has used his office to appoint a storekeeper named Chardin, who plays into their hands. This storekeeper made a confession to shift the blame from his own shoulders, and has ended by running away. The *procureur du roi*, not aware that any but subalterns were concerned, has followed the case up harshly; Johann Fischer, your director's uncle, was arrested on a criminal charge and committed suicide in prison.

The matter would have ended there if Fischer, evidently an honest man deceived by his nephew and the storekeeper, had not been so rash as to write to Baron Hulot. This letter fell into the hands of the *procureur* and so amazed him that he brought it to me. It would be a terrible blow to the administration to be forced to arrest and convict a councilor of state and a director in the War office, a man who has, moreover, done good and loyal service—for the fact is, he saved us all after Bérésina by reorganizing the administration of the army—I therefore requested the *procureur* to send me the papers; which I herewith refer to you.

Must we let the matter take its course? Or, the actual criminal being dead, shall we smother the matter by convicting the storekeeper in default?

The *procureur du roi* is willing that the matter be left to your management. Baron Hulot d'Ervy is domiciled in Paris, and the charge would therefore be made legally in your courts. We take this rather equivocal means to rid ourselves, momentarily, of the difficulty.

One thing more, my dear Maréchal; I must beg of you to act promptly. A great deal is being said already about this wretched business, which will do us still more harm if the guilt of the chief criminal (now known only to the *procureur du roi*, the *jugé d'instruction*, the prosecutor-general and myself) gets abroad.

Here the paper fell from the marshal's fingers. He looked at his brother and saw that it was useless to read the report; but he searched for Johann Fischer's letter and, having read it, gave it to the baron.

Prison at O—.

Nephew, when you read these words I shall not be living. Do not be uneasy; no proofs can be found against you. I dead, and your Jesuit of a storekeeper out of the way, the charges fall to the ground. The thought of our dear Adeline, who owes her happiness to you, makes death sweet to me. You need not send the two hundred thousand francs. Farewell.

This letter will reach you by a man on whose fidelity I can rely.

Johann Fischer.

“I beg your pardon,” said Maréchal Hulot with touching dignity to the Prince de Wissembourg. “How much did you take?” he asked, turning with severity to his brother.

“Two hundred thousand francs.”

“My dear friend,” said the marshal, addressing the minister, “you shall have that sum in less than forty eight hours. It shall never be said that a man bearing the name of Hulot has wronged the State to the value of a penny.”

“What nonsense!” said the prince; “I know where the money is, and I shall recover it— Write your resignation, and ask to be retired,” he continued, addressing the baron and flinging a sheet of foolscap paper towards the end of the table at which the latter was sitting, his legs shaking under him. “It would bring shame upon all of us if we should prosecute you; I have obtained permission from the Council of Ministers to act as I am now doing. Since you choose to accept a life without honor, without my respect, a degraded life, you shall have the retirement which is your due. But—see that men forget you.”

The minister rang the bell.

“Is the sub-director Marneffe waiting?”

“Yes, monseigneur.

“Let him come in.”

“You and your wife,” said the prince, as Marneffe appeared, “have deliberately ruined Baron Hulot d’Ervy, here present.”

“Monsieur le prince, we are poor people; I have only my salary to live upon; I have two children to support, the youngest of whom has been foisted upon me by Baron Hulot.”

“What a vile face!” remarked the prince to the marshal. “Enough of your Sganarelle speeches,” he said to Marneffe. “You will pay back those two hundred thousand francs, or you will go to Algeria.”

“But, Monsieur le prince, you don’t know my wife; she has squandered them all. Monsieur le baron invited six persons to dinner every day. It cost fifty thousand francs a year to keep the house.”

“Go!” said the prince, in that terrible voice which sounded the charge in battle; “you will receive notice of your removal to Algiers in two hours. Go!”

“I prefer to give in my resignation,” said Marneffe, insolently. “It is a little too much to be what I am and defeated into the bargain—I shall not allow that.”

And he left the room.

“An impudent fellow!” said the prince.

Maréchal Hulot, who during this scene had remained standing, erect, motionless, and pale as a lifeless body, silently watching his brother, now went up to the prince and took his hand, repeating: “In forty-eight hours the material harm shall be repaired, but—our honor! Farewell, Maréchal! the last blow kills. Yes, I shall die,” he said in his old friend’s ear.

“What the devil did you come here for?” replied the prince, deeply moved.

“I came on behalf of his wife,” replied the count, “she is without means of support; and now—”

“He will have his pension.”

“It is mortgaged.”

“The curse is on him!” cried the prince, with a gesture of disgust. “What philter have you swallowed to let those women destroy you body and mind?” he demanded, turning to the baron. “How could you, you who know the minute exactitude with which the French administration puts everything into written words, consumes reams of paper to prove the whereabouts of every farthing, you who were always complaining that so many signatures had to be given for mere nothings—to release a soldier, to buy curry-combs—how could *you* have expected to hide your thefts for any length of time? Did you forget the newspapers, and the men who would have liked to steal in your place? And all for women! for women who rob you of your common sense, who pull the wool over your eyes—or you are differently constituted from other men. You ought to have left the government when you felt yourself no longer a man, only a temperament! You have added folly to crime and you will end—I will not tell you where—”

“Promise that you will take care of her, Cottin,” said the marshal, not hearing what the other said and thinking only of his sister-in-law.

“Don’t doubt it!” said the minister.

“I thank you— Farewell! Come!” he said, sternly, to his brother.

The prince looked with an eye that was apparently calm at the two brothers, so different in attitude, in conformation, and in character—the brave man and the coward; the chaste man and the voluptuary; the man of honor and the peculator—and he said to himself: “That coward does not dare to die, but death sits already on the shoulders of my poor upright Hulot.”

He threw himself into his armchair and went back to the perusal of despatches from Africa, with a gesture that showed at once the sang-froid of a great captain and the profound pity the sight of a battlefield excites. There is nothing more truly humane in reality than soldiers, rough as they seem, to whom the habit of war has given that icy will so necessary in action.

On the morrow certain newspapers contained, under different headings, the following articles:—

“M. le Baron Hulot d’Ervy has asked to be retired. The troubles in the commissariat department of the administration in Algiers have influenced his determination. On learning of the wrongs committed by two functionaries in whom he had placed great confidence he was seized with paralysis in the cabinet of the minister.

“M. Hulot d’Ervy, brother of Maréchal Hulot, has seen forty-five years’ service. His resignation is much regretted by all who know M. Hulot, whose

personal qualities equal his administrative talents. His devotion to the country, as shown by his services in the Imperial Guard at Varsovie, and the marvellous energy which enabled him to organize the different services of the army improvised by Napoleon in 1815, can never be forgotten.

“Another of the glories of the Napoleonic era leaves the scene. Since 1830 M. le Baron Hulot has been one of the most important members in the Council of State and the War department.”

“ALGIERS—The affair in the commissariat department, to which some newspapers have given a ridiculous prominence, has ended by the death of the chief culprit, Johann Wisch, who killed himself in prison. His accomplice escaped; but judgment will be passed upon him by default.

“Wisch, formerly commissary to the Grand Army, was an honest man, greatly esteemed. He was unable to bear the idea of having been duped by Chardin, the storekeeper, who escaped.”

Among the local news of Paris the following appeared in various journals:—

“M. le Maréchal minister of War, hastening to put an end to abuses said to exist in the administration of the government in Algiers, has determined to create a subsistence bureau in Africa. It is said that Monsieur Marneffe, at present sub-director at the ministry of War, will be head of this new department.”

“The appointment of a successor to Baron Hulot excites much ambition. This directorship is promised, they say, to M. le Comte Martial de la Roche-Hugon, deputy, brother-in-law of M. le Comte de Rastignac. M. Massol, master of petitions, will be appointed councilor of state, and M. Claude Vignon takes M. Massol’s office.”

Of all *canards*, the most dangerous for the opposition journals is the official *canard*. However wary journalists may be, they are sometimes the voluntary or involuntary dupes of the cleverness of those among their number who have passed, like Claude Vignon, to the higher regions of governmental power. It maybe taken as an axiom that a journal can be put in the wrong only by a journalist.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE PRODIGAL FATHER.

Maréchal Hulot drove his brother home—the younger taking the front seat of the carriage, respectfully leaving the other to his elder. The two brothers did not exchange a word. Hector was annihilated, and the marshal wrapped in thought, like a man gathering up his strength to bear some crushing blow. When he reached home he took his brother silently and with imperative gestures to his private study. The marshal had received from Napoleon the gift of a pair of magnificent pistols from the manufactory of Versailles. He took out the case, on which was stamped the following inscription, “Given by the Emperor Napoleon to General Hulot,” and showed it to his brother, saying, “Here is your remedy.”

Lisbeth, who saw what took place from the other side of the half-open door, ran to the carriage and ordered the coachman to drive fast to the rue Plumet. Twenty minutes later she returned with the baroness, having warned her of the marshal’s threat.

Meantime the count, without looking at his brother, rang for his factotum, the soldier who had served him for thirty years.

“Beupied,” he said, “fetch my notary, Comte Steinbock, my niece Hortense, and the broker of the Treasury. It is half-past ten and I want all those persons here by twelve. Take carriages—go!” he said, with the terrible look on his face which held his soldiers quiet as he examined the jennets of Brittany in 1799. [See “*Les Chouans.*”]

“You shall be obeyed, Maréchal,” said Beupied, carrying the back of his hand to his forehead.

Without noticing his brother, the old man took a key from his desk and unlocked a casket made of malachite veneered on steel, a gift from the Emperor Alexander. The marshal had been sent by the Emperor Napoleon to the Russian emperor to return certain private property which had been captured at the battle of Dresden, in exchange for which Napoleon hoped to obtain Vandamme. The Czar rewarded General Hulot magnificently with this casket, and told him that he hoped some day to return the courtesy of the French emperor; but he kept Vandamme. The imperial arms of Russia were inlaid in gold on the cover of the box and the edges and ornaments were of solid gold. The marshal examined the value of its contents, and found that he was worth over a hundred and fifty thousand francs. He gave a sigh of satisfaction. At this moment Madame Hulot entered the room. She looked at Hector, at the case of pistols, and at the marshal with a frenzied eye.

“What complaint do you make of your brother? What has my husband done to you?” she said, in so piercing a voice that the marshal heard her.

“He has dishonored us all!” answered the old soldier, “He has robbed the State! He has rendered my name odious! He has made me wish to die! He has killed me! I have no strength left except to make restitution. I have been humiliated before the Condé of the Revolution, before the man I esteem the most and to whom I unjustly gave the lie, the Prince de Wissembourg. Is all that nothing? That is the public charge against him.”

The marshal wiped away a tear.

“The wrong done to his family is another thing,” he resumed. “He deprives you of the bread I was laying up for you, the fruit of thirty years’ savings, the cost of an old soldier’s privations! I destined these for you,” he said, showing her the bank bills. “He has killed his uncle Fischer, that noble Alsatian who was unable to bear, as he does, the stain upon his peasant name. God in his mercy had enabled him to choose an angel among women for his wife; he had the untold happiness of marrying an Adeline; he has betrayed her, he has steeped her in sorrow, he has deserted her for harlots, dancing-women, actresses, the Cadines, Joséphas and Marneffes! That is the man whom I made my child, my pride! Go, unhappy man, since you accept the infamous life you have made for yourself—depart! I—I have no strength to curse the brother I have loved so well; I am as weak toward him as you are, Adeline; but let him never enter my sight again. I forbid him to look upon me in my coffin or to follow me to the grave. Let him have the decency of crime if he has none of its remorse.”

The marshal, turning livid, fell on the sofa of his little room, exhausted by the utterance of these solemn words. Tears, perhaps for the first time in his life, rolled down his cheeks.

“My poor uncle Fischer!” cried Lisbeth, putting a handkerchief to her eyes.

“Brother!” said Adeline, kneeling before the marshal, “live for me. Help me in the work of restoring Hector to a right life and making him redeem his wrongdoing.”

“He!” said the marshal, “if he lives, his crimes will increase. A man who has deserted an Adeline, who has quenched within his soul the sentiments of a true republican—love of country, of family, of the poor and unfortunate—sentiments which I strove to teach him, is a monster, a hog. Take him away if you still love him, for I hear a voice within telling me to seize my pistols and blow his brains out. If I should kill him I should save you all; I should save him from himself.”

The old marshal rose with so formidable a gesture that poor Adeline, crying out “Come, Hector!” seized her husband’s arm and dragged him away, so broken in strength and spirit that she

was obliged to take him in a carriage to the rue Plumet, where he took to his bed. Half-dead, he stayed there several days, refusing all nourishment and saying not a word. Adeline coaxed him, with tears, to swallow a few mouthfuls of broth; she nursed him night and day, sitting by his pillow, conscious of no feeling among the many that formerly had filled her heart, but that of deepest pity.

At half-past twelve Lisbeth ushered the notary and Steinbock into the study of her dear marshal, whom she determined not to leave alone for a moment, so terrified was she at the changes that were taking place in him.

“Monsieur le Comte,” said the marshal, “I beg you to sign this paper authorizing my niece, your wife, to sell the investment in the Funds of which she owns the capital and her cousin the life-interest. Mademoiselle Fischer, do you acquiesce in this sale by resigning the income?”

“Yes, dear count,” said Lisbeth, unhesitatingly.

“Very good, my clear,” said the old soldier; “I hope to live long enough to make it up to you. I have never doubted you; you are a true republican, a daughter of the people.”

He took the hand of the old maid and kissed it.

“Monsieur Hannequin,” he resumed, turning to the notary, “draw up the necessary papers and let me have them two hours hence—in time to sell out the money at the Bourse to-day. My niece, the countess, has the certificates; she will be here, ready to sign the papers together with Mademoiselle, when you bring them. Monsieur le comte will accompany you and give you his signature at your office.”

At a sign from Lisbeth the artist bowed respectfully to the marshal and left the room.

The next day, at ten o'clock in the morning, the Comte de Forzheim asked an audience of the Prince de Wissembourg and was at once admitted.

“Well, my dear Hulot,” said Maréchal Cottin, holding out a batch of newspapers to his old comrade. “You see we have saved appearances—Read these.”

The marshal laid the papers on his friend's desk, and held out in turn the two hundred thousand francs.

“Here is what my brother took from the State,” he said.

“What madness!” exclaimed the minister. “It is quite impossible” he added, taking the ear trumpet the marshal offered him, “to make this restitution. We should be obliged to make public your brother's peculations, and we have now done all we can to hide them—”

“Do what you like with the money; but I will not permit the Hulot family to keep one penny of the public funds—stolen by one of us!” said the marshal.

“I will take the King’s orders on this subject. Let us say no more about it,” answered the minister, perceiving how impossible it was to overcome the old man’s obstinacy.

“Adieu, Cottin,” said the marshal, taking his old comrade by the hand. “My soul is numb—” Then, having gone a few paces, he turned, looked at the prince, saw his emotion, and opened his arms to him. The two friends clasped each other.

“I seem to bid adieu to the whole Grand Army in your person,” said the marshal.

“Farewell, my good and dear old comrade,” said the minister.

“Yes, farewell—I go to the old soldiers whom we have mourned.”

Claude Vignon entered the room at this moment. The old relics of the Napoleonic legions bowed to each other gravely, hiding all trace of emotion.

“I hope, prince, that you are satisfied with those articles?” said the journalist. “I have managed to make the opposition papers believe that they are publishing our secrets.”

“Unfortunately, it is all to no purpose,” said the minister, looking after the marshal who was passing out through the salon. “I have just said a grievous farewell. Maréchal Hulot has but a few days to live—I knew it yesterday. That man of divine honor, whom the very bullets respected in spite of his bravery, received his death-blow there, in that chair, from my hand, by a paper which I gave him. Ring for my carriage. I must go to Neuilly,” he said, locking up the two hundred thousand francs.

Three days later, in spite of all Bette’s care, Maréchal Hulot died. Such men are the honor of the parties with which they side. In the minds of Republicans the marshal was the ideal of patriotism; their leaders were at his funeral, which was followed by an immense crowd. The army, the administration, the court, the people came to do homage to that high virtue, that unblemished integrity, that spotless fame. It is not through desiring it that a man is mourned by a people! These obsequies were the occasion for one of those graceful testimonials, full of good feeling and good taste, which every now and then recall the virtues and the glow of the old French nobility. Behind the marshal’s coffin came the old Marquis de Montauran, brother of the Montauran who at the rising of the Chouans in 1799 had been the adversary, and the defeated adversary, of Hulot. The marquis, dying from a republican bullet, confided the interests of his younger brother to the hero of the Republic [see “*Les Chouans.*”]. Hulot fulfilled the verbal bequest of the nobleman so faithfully that he succeeded in saving the property of the younger Montauran, who had emigrated. Thus the respect and reverence of the old French nobility were not lacking to the funeral of the soldier who, nine years earlier, had vanquished MADAME.

The marshal's death, which took place four days before the time for the last publication of the banns of marriage, was to Lisbeth like a stroke of lightning that burned her whole harvest together with the granary. The woman had, as often happens, succeeded only too well. The marshal died of the blows which she and Madame Marneffe rained upon the family. The old maid's hatred, satiated by success, now redoubled under the defeat of her hopes. She rushed to Madame Marneffe and wept tears of rage. She was homeless, for the marshal's lease ended with his life. Crevel, to console his Valérie's dear friend, took her savings, and doubled them, investing the amount at five per cent, giving her the life-interest and placing the capital in Célestine's name. Thanks to this operation, Bette received an income of about two thousand francs. When the marshal's papers were examined a note was found addressed to his sister-in-law, his niece Hortense, and his nephew Victorin, requesting them to pay out of the property they inherited from him an annuity of twelve hundred francs to the woman who was to have been his wife.

Adeline, feeling that Hector hovered between life and death, concealed his brother's death for a few days. But Lisbeth came to see him dressed in mourning, and he learned the fatal truth eleven days after the funeral. The dreadful blow roused his energies. He rose from his bed and met the family in the salon. All were silent on his appearance. In the short space of fifteen days he was shrunken to a spectre, and appeared to his family but a shadow of himself.

"We must decide on what to do," he said in a hollow voice, sitting down in an armchair and looking round upon the family gathering, from which only Crevel and Steinbock were missing.

"We cannot stay here," remarked Hortense; "the rent is too high."

"As to a house," said Victorin, after a painful pause "I offer *my mother*—"

Hearing the words which seemed to exclude himself, the baron raised his eyes from the carpet where they had been fixed and gave his son an agonizing look. The rights of a father are so sacred, even though he be degraded and lost to a sense of honor, that Victorin stopped short.

"To your mother!" said the baron. "You are right, my son."

"The apartment above our own," said Célestine, completing her husband's offer.

"I am in your way, my children," said the baron with the gentleness of a man who condemns himself. "Do not be anxious about the future; you will have no further cause to complain of your father." Then signing to Lisbeth, who came up to him, he kissed her on the forehead and returned to his own room. Adeline, keenly distressed, followed him.

“My brother was right, Adeline,” he said, taking her by the hand. “I am unworthy of the family home. I dare not bless my poor children, whose conduct has been noble, for the blessing of an infamous man, of a father who has made himself a murderer, the scourge of his family, might be fatal to them; but I will bless them from afar daily. As for you, God alone, the All-powerful, can reward you according to your merits—I implore your pardon,” he said, kneeling before his wife and bathing her hands with his tears.

“Hector! Hector! your sins are great, but the Divine mercy is greater; you can redeem them by staying here in your home. Rise to Christian thoughts, dear friend. I am your wife and not your judge. I am your chattel, do with me as it pleases you; take me where you go; I have the power, I feel it, to console you, to make life bearable to you by love, by tenderness, by respect! Our children are settled in life; they no longer need me. Let me try to be your cheerfulness, your amusement. Let me share the trials of your exile, your poverty; let me soften them. I can always be good for something, be it only to save you the wages of a servant—”

“Do you forgive me, my dear, beloved Adeline?”

“Yes; but oh, my friend, rise!”

“Your forgiveness will enable me to live,” he said, rising from his knees. “I came back to my room that my children might not see the self-abasement of their father. How awful for them to have daily before their eyes a father as criminal as I am! it casts down paternal authority, it destroys the principle of family. I cannot remain in your midst; I go to spare you the odious spectacle of a father without a father’s dignity. Do not oppose my departure; if you do, it will be the pistol-shot by which I seek my death. Above all, do not follow me to my hiding-place; you would deprive me of the only strength that remains to me, that of remorse.”

His energetic entreaty silenced the poor, exhausted woman. Grand in the midst of ruin and desolation, she was gathering courage from her sense of inward union with her husband; she knew him hers; she saw her sublime mission—that of consoling him, of restoring him to family life, of reconciling him with himself.

“Hector, would you have me die of distress, of anxiety, of despair?” she said, seeing that her last hope, the principle of her life, was about to be taken from her.

“I will return, my guardian angel, who came from heaven to save me. I will return, if not rich, at least in comfort. Listen to me, Adeline; I cannot stay here for many reasons. In the first place, my pension, which is ten thousand francs a year, is mortgaged for four years; I have literally nothing. But that’s not all. If I remain here I shall be arrested for the non-payment of notes I have given Vauvinet. I must absent myself until my son, with whom I shall leave precise directions, has been able to redeem the papers. My

disappearance will aid the transaction. When my pension is free, and when Vauvinet is paid, I will come back to you. You would disclose my place of exile if I told it to you. Don't weep, Adeline; be calm. It is only for a month that—"

"Where are you going? what can you do? What will become of you? who will take care of you?—you, who are no longer young! Let me disappear with you; let us go abroad," she said.

"Well, I will see," he answered.

The baron rang the bell and told Mariette to get all his things together and pack his trunks quickly and secretly. Then, after kissing his wife with an effusion to which she was no longer accustomed, he asked her to leave him for a while that he might write his last instructions to Victorin; promising not to leave the house till night-fall and to take her with him. As soon as she had entered the salon and closed the door the wily old man passed through the dressing-room into the antechamber and left the house, giving Mariette a paper on which was written, "Direct my trunks to Monsieur Hector, Corbeil, to be kept till called for. Send them by railroad to Corbeil." He was in a hackneycoach and already half-across Paris before Mariette took the paper to the baroness, telling her that Monsieur had gone out. Adeline flew into his bedroom, trembling more than ever; her children followed her on hearing a piercing cry. She had fainted; they lifted her and put her to bed, where she was seized with a nervous fever which kept her between life and death for a month.

"Where is he?" were the only words they could get from her during that time.

Victorin's search for his father was fruitless—for the following reason. The baron had gone direct to the place du Palais-Royal. There, having summoned all his intelligence to carry out a scheme he had planned during the days when he had lain on his bed overcome with shame and grief, he hired a handsome carriage from a stable in the rue Joquelet. The coachman, receiving his orders, drove to the rue de la Ville-l'Evêque and entered the courtyard of Josépha's mansion, the gates flying back at the call of the driver of a fine equipage. Josépha, informed by her footman that an old man, too feeble to leave his carriage, was at the door asking to see her, came down out of sheer curiosity.

"Josépha, it is I!"

The illustrious singer recognized her former Hulot by his voice only

"What! you, my old man? Why, you look like those five-franc pieces which the Dutch Jews wash off, and the moneychangers reject!"

"Alas, yes," said Hulot, "I have just escaped death. But you are always beautiful—are you still kind?"

"That's according—all is relative," she answered.

“Look here,” said Hulot; “can you put me away in some servant’s room under the roof, for a few days? I am without a penny; without hope, or bread, or pension, or wife, or children, or refuge; without honor, without courage, without a friend, and worse than all, I am liable to be arrested for debt.”

“Poor old fellow! what a lot of withouts! Are you without breeches?”

“Ah, if you laugh at me, I am lost,” cried the baron. “Yet I counted on you as Gourville on Ninon.”

“I’m told it is a fashionable woman who has dragged you into your present plight,” said Josépha. “Those minxes know how to pluck a turkey better than we do! Why, you are like a carcass thrown to the crows. I can see daylight through you.”

“I am in a hurry, Josépha.”

“Well, come in, old man; I’m alone, and my servants don’t know you. Send away your carriage. Have you paid the fare?”

“Yes,” replied the baron, getting out, and leaning on Josépha’s arm.

“You can pass for my father, if you like,” said the singer, full of pity.

She made Hector sit down in the splendid room where he had last seen her.

“Is it true, old fellow,” she said, “that you have killed your brother and your uncle, ruined your family, mortgaged and remortgaged your property, and made ducks and drakes of the government money with your princess?”

The baron nodded sadly.

“Ha! I admire that!” cried Josépha, jumping up enthusiastically. “General conflagration! Sardanapalus! that’s grand! that’s *thorough!* You may be a scoundrel; but you have a heart. For my part, I prefer a passionate spendthrift like you, who wastes his substance on women, to those cold bankers without souls, virtuous (so called), who ruin thousands of families with their railways, which are gold to them and iron to others. As for you, you have only ruined your family; you have injured none but yourself. Besides, you had an excuse—a moral and physical excuse. ‘Tis Venus herself who has grasped her prey!” she cried, pirouetting.

Thus was Hulot absolved by vice—vice smiling upon him from the midst of its unbridled luxury. The grandeur of his crimes seemed there, as often happens before juries, an extenuating circumstance.

“Is she pretty—your society woman?” demanded Josépha, trying, out of charity, to divert the baron’s mind; for his evident suffering distressed her.

“Almost as pretty as you,” said the baron, shrewdly.

“And very—tricky, they tell me. What did she do to you?—worse than I?”

“Don’t speak of it,” said Hulot.

“They do say she has snared my old Crevel and little Steinbock and a splendid Brazilian—”

“Possibly.”

“She is living in as pretty a house as this, which Crevel gave her. That creature is my scavenger; she sweeps up my leavings. Come, old man, I want to know all about her. I have seen her in an open carriage in the Bois, but only at a distance. La Carabine says she is a thorough harpy. She tried to eat up Crevel, but could only get a nibble at him. Crevel is an old skinflint, a good-natured tight-fist who always says yes, and there it ends. He’s vain and he’s hot; but his money is cold. We get nothing out of such fellows but two or three thousand francs a month; they balk at prodigality like donkeys at a river. That’s not you, old man; you’ve got passions. We could make you do anything—sell your country! And so, you see, I am ready to do everything for you. You were my father; you launched me. The obligation is sacred. How much do you want?—a hundred thousand francs? I’ll go all lengths to get them for you. As for food and lodging, that’s nothing. Your plate will always be laid at my table, and there’s a good bedroom on the second floor; and you shall have three hundred francs a month pocket-money.”

The baron, touched by this kindness, had a momentary return of dignity.

“No, my dear, no,” he said; “I did not come to ask you to support me.”

“You might be proud of it, though, at your age.”

“Here is what I want you to do. Your Duc d’Hérouville owns large estates in Normandy. I want to be his steward, under the name of Thoul. I have enough ability and I am honest. Yes, a man may take from the government, but it doesn’t follow that he’ll rob a till.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Josépha. “He who has drunk will drink!”

“All I want is to live in hiding for three years.”

“That’s a trifling matter,” said Josépha; “to-night, after dinner, I have only to ask him. The duke would marry me if I wished it; but I have his fortune, and I want more—his esteem. He is a prince of the old school—noble, distinguished, grand, like Louis XIV and Napoleon rolled into one, though he *is a dwarf*. Besides, I have acted by him as La Schontz did by Rochefide; he has just made two millions by taking my advice. Now listen, my old fire-eater. I know you—you love women; and down there on the duke’s property you would run after the Norman girls (for they’re superb), and you would get your head broken by the lovers or the fathers, and d’Hérouville would have to dismiss you. Don’t I know, by the way you are looking at me now, that youth is not yet

dead in you, as Fenelon says? Stewardship is no business for you. You couldn't break away if you would, old fellow, from your Paris ways and from all of us. You would die of ennui down there in Normandy."

"What else can I do? I will only stay with you long enough to find somewhere to go."

"Well, what do you say to an idea of mine? Listen, old rake. You must have women; they console for everything. Now I know a girl who is a treasure, down there at the foot of the Courtille, rue Saint-Maur du Temple—a, pretty girl, prettier than I was at sixteen— Ha! your eyes sparkle already! She works sixteen hours a day embroidering handsome things for the silk-dealers, and all she gets for it is sixteen sous—a sou an hour! Horrors! She lives, like the Irish, on potatoes (only she fries them in rat grease), bread five times a week, and canal-water from the street-pipes, because the Seine water costs too dear. She can't set up a shop of her own short of five or six thousand francs—there isn't anything she wouldn't do for that sum. Your wife and family bore you—don't they? Besides, you couldn't live now where you were once a god. A father without money and without honor!—he's a nothing, a man of straw. He ought to be kept out of sight—"

The baron smiled drearily.

"Well, little Bijou is coming here to-morrow with an embroidered dress—a perfect love. It took her six months to do, and nobody is to have one like it. Bijou loves me, for I give her sweet things and all my old gowns. I send bread tickets and wood tickets and meat for the family, who would all break their necks in my service if I asked it. I try to do some good. Ah! I suffered enough when I went hungry! Bijou tells me all her little secrets. She has the makings of a ballet-girl for the Ambigu-Comique in her. She dreams of dresses like mine, and specially of driving in a carriage. If I say to her, 'My pretty, do you want a gentleman of—' How old are you?" said Josépha, suddenly interrupting herself—"seventy?"

"I'm of no age now."

"Shall I say seventy?—very neat, never takes snuff, sound as a roach, and just as good as a young man? I'll tell her she can marry you by the left hand and live very happily ever after; and that you'll give her seven thousand francs to set up a business, and a hundred francs a month to keep house on, and furnish her rooms in mahogany, and sometimes, if she is very good, take her to the theatre. I know Bijou, she's myself at fourteen! I jumped for joy when that abominable Crevel proposed to me. Now, my old fellow! this will pack you out of sight for three years. It's decent, it's honest, and moreover, it will give you some illusions for three or four years—not longer."

Hulot was not hesitating, for he was determined to refuse the offer; but his desire to show gratitude to Josépha, who was doing good after her kind, made him appear to vacillate between vice and virtue.

“Why you’re as cold as the stones in December,” she exclaimed, astonished. “If you do as I tell you, you’ll be the providence of a grandfather who earns nothing, a mother who is dying of overwork, and of two sisters, one of whom is ugly, who can earn only thirty two sous a day between them, at the risk of putting out their eyes. That will compensate for all the harm you have done at home; you’ll redeem your misdeeds and amuse yourself like a lorette at Mabille.”

Hulot, to put an end to the temptation, made a sign of being without a penny.

“As for that,” said Josépha, “never mind about the ways and means. My duke will lend you ten thousand francs—seven thousand to set up Bijou in a shop of her own, three thousand for furniture—and every three months you’ll find a cheque here for six hundred and fifty francs to live on. When you get back your pension you must return the total, seventeen thousand in all, to the duke. Meantime you’ll be as happy as a cricket, hidden away in a little hole where the police can’t find you. You’ll have to wear a big beaver coat, and make believe you are owner of some neighboring house, in easy circumstances. Call yourself Thoul, if that’s your fancy. I shall tell Bijou that you are an uncle of mine, just come from Germany—you’ll be worshipped like a god. So there you are, papa! and perhaps, who knows, you’ll be so happy you’ll never regret the past. If you do get dull sometimes, keep a dress-coat ready and come here to dinner and spend the evening with me.”

“But I meant to be virtuous, respectable! No, lend me twenty thousand francs and I’ll go and make my fortune in America, like my friend d’Aiglemont when Nucingen ruined him.”

“You!” cried Josépha, “no, no, leave morality to the shopkeepers, the everyday thieves and murderers, the French citizens who have nothing but virtue to fall back upon. You were never born for such silliness! As a man you are just what I am as a woman—an out-and-out vagabond!”

“Night brings wisdom,” said Hulot. “We’ll talk of this tomorrow.”

“You will dine with the duke to-night. My Hérouville will receive you politely, as if you had just saved the State, and tomorrow you can decide. Come, be lively, my old friend. Life’s but a garment—when it’s dirty, brush it; when it’s torn, mend it; make it last as long and as good as you can.”

This philosophy of vice and Josépha’s gayety combined removed the last of Hulot’s scruples.

The next day, after a succulent breakfast, the baron beheld one of those living masterpieces which Paris alone manufactures, by reason of the perpetual concubinage of luxury and poverty, vice and decency, repressed desire and continual temptation, which makes this city the lineal descendant of the Ninevehs, the Babylons, and the one imperial Rome. Mademoiselle Olympe Bijou, a little girl of sixteen, had a face like a Raphael Madonna, eyes of weary innocence, weary with incessant toil, dreamy dark eyes with long lashes, whose liquid lights were drying up under the fire of laborious nights—eyes that grew darker still with the gloom of exhaustion—a porcelain skin that was almost sickly, a mouth like the inside of a pomegranate, a throbbing bosom, the lines of the figure full and rounded, pretty hands, pearl-white teeth, abundant black hair; and all these beauties dressed in a twelve-sous calico, an embroidered collar, leather shoes without nails, and gloves of the cheapest make. The child, who did not know her own worth, had donned her best clothes to go to the house of a great lady. The baron, instantly gripped by the claw fingers of vice, felt his whole being going out through his eyes. He forgot all before this vision of beauty. He was like a hunter in sight of the game.

“Guaranteed innocent,” whispered Josépha, “and poor. That’s your Paris. I’ve been through it myself.”

“I decide,” said the baron, rising and rubbing his hands.

When Olympe Bijou had left the house Josépha looked slyly at the old man.

“If you don’t want to have trouble, papa,” she said, “begin firm; be as stern as a judge on the bench; hold the little thing in hand. Be a Bartholo. Look out for the Augustuses and Hippolytuses and Nestors and Victors, and all the rest of them. Plague take it! if you let her get her head after she is once well-fed and well-clothed, she’ll drag you about like a Russian. I’ll attend to settling you down there. The duke has been liberal; he lends you—that is to say, he gives you—ten thousand francs and puts eight of them with his notary, who is to pay you six hundred quarterly—for the fact is, I can’t trust you. Am I charming?”

“Adorable.”

Ten days after he had abandoned his family, and at the very moment when his children were standing in tears around the bed of the half-dying Adeline, who was saying in feeble tones, “Where is he?” Hulot, under the anagram of Thoul, went to live with Olympe in the rue Saint-Maur, at the head of an establishment for embroideries, which was called by the associated names of Thoul and Bijou.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

Through the implacable misfortunes of his family, Victorin Hulot received that last touch which corrupts a man or perfects him. He became perfect. In the great tempests of life we follow the example of wise captains who fling the heavier merchandise overboard in a hurricane to lighten the ship. The lawyer laid aside his inward pride, his outward assumption, his arrogance as an orator, and his political pretensions. In fact he became as a man what his mother was as a woman. He resolved to accept his Célestine for what she was—certainly not the realization of his dreams—he judged life soberly, and saw that the common law of existence obliges men to be content in all things with the approximate. He swore within himself to do his duty—so deep was the horror his father’s conduct caused him. This resolution was renewed and strengthened by the bedside of his mother on the day she was pronounced out of danger. That first relief did not come singly. On the same day Claude Vignon, who inquired daily for Madame Hulot on behalf of the Prince de Wissembourg, requested Victorin to return with him to the ministry.

“His Excellency,” he said, “wishes to confer with you about your family affairs.”

Victorin and the minister had known each other for a long time, and the latter now received the young man with a characteristic affability that augured well.

“My friend,” said the old warrior, “I swore to your uncle, the marshal, in this room, to take care of your mother. That noble woman will, I am told, recover her health. The moment has therefore come to heal the family wounds. I have two hundred thousand francs for you, which I will now pay over.”

The lawyer made a gesture of refusal worthy of his uncle the marshal.

“Do not be uneasy,” said the prince smiling; “the money was only placed in my hands in trust for your family. My days are numbered; I shall not be here long—take the money, therefore, and replace me as trustee. You are at liberty to use it to lift the mortgages from your house. The two hundred thousand francs belong to your mother and sister; but if I gave them to Madame Hulot her devotion to her husband is such that I fear she would waste them on him, and the intention of those who placed the money in my hands was that it should benefit Madame Hulot and her daughter, the Comtesse Steinbock. You are a moral man, the worthy son of your noble mother, a true nephew of my friend the marshal. You are appreciated here, my young friend, as you are

elsewhere. Be, therefore, the guardian of your family. Accept this legacy on their behalf from your uncle and from me.”

“Monseigneur,” said Hulot, taking the minister’s hand and pressing it, “men in your position know that words of gratitude mean nothing—thankfulness must prove itself by deeds.”

“Prove yours,” said the old soldier.

“What must I do?”

“Accept an offer. The government wishes to appoint you counsel for war-claims, the engineering department being overcrowded with litigations in relation to the fortifications of Paris; also legal adviser at the prefecture of police, and counsel for the civil-list. These three functions will give you a combined salary of eighteen thousand francs and will not deprive you of independence. You can vote in the Chamber according to your conscience and your political opinions—you are free to act; we should only be hampered if we had no national opposition. In conclusion let me say that I received a note from your uncle, written a few hours before he died, in which he suggested a line of conduct towards your dear mother. Mesdames Popinot, de Rastignac, de Navarreins, de Grandlieu, de Carigliano, de Lénoncourt, and de la Bastie have created a place for her as inspectress of benevolent enterprises. These presidents of various societies for good works cannot do all that their offices require; they need some lady fitted to act for them, to visit their cases, see that charity is not imposed upon, make sure that relief goes to the right applicant, and seek out the deserving and shrinking poor. Your mother could well fulfil that angelic mission; she would be responsible to the clergy and to these charitable ladies only; she would receive six thousand francs a year and her carriage hire. You see, my young friend, that the pure man, the nobly virtuous man, protects his family even from the grave. The memory of such men as your uncle is and ever should be an ægis against evil in all well organized societies. Follow his path; continue in his steps—your feet are there already, I know that.”

“Such delicate kindness, prince, cannot surprise me in my uncle’s friend,” said Victorin. “I will endeavor to answer your expectations.”

“Go and comfort your family with the news— But stay, tell me before you go,” added the prince, taking Victorin by the hand, “has your father disappeared?”

“Alas, yes.”

“So much the better. In so doing the unhappy man has shown, what he really possesses, good sense.”

“He had notes he could not meet.”

“Ah!” said the Maréchal. “Well, you shall receive six months’ salary in advance. That will help you to get his notes from the moneylenders. I’ll see Nucingen, and perhaps I can persuade him

to release your father's pension, without its costing you or the War office a penny. A peerage has not killed the banker in Nucingen; he is insatiable, and he wants some grant, I forget what, out of us."

Victorin was thus enabled to carry out his desire to take his mother and sister to live with him. The only property that he owned was one of the finest species of real estate in Paris; a house bought in 1834 in preparation for his marriage, situated on the boulevard, between the rue de la Paix and the rue Louis-le-Grand. A speculator had built two houses on the street and boulevard, between which, separated from both by a garden and bombard on each side, stood a beautiful pavilion, a relic of the splendors of the great Verneuil mansion. Victorin Hulot, sure of Mademoiselle Crevel's dowry, bought this superb property at auction for a million of francs, on which he paid five hundred thousand down. He lived on the ground-floor of the pavilion, expecting to pay the full costs of the house by letting the various apartments. But though speculation in houses may be a sure thing it is also either slow or capricious, for success depends on circumstances that are not to be foreseen. Idlers in Paris must have noticed that the boulevard between the rue Louis-le-Grand and the rue de la Paix was slow to become profitable; it was cleared out and unproved with such delay that commerce did not display its gorgeous shop-windows filled with the fairy fabrics of fashion and the splendors of luxury till 1841.

Although in the course of seven years Victorin had paid a part of the remaining purchase-money, yet in consequence of the relief he had afforded his father, the debt on the property now amounted to five hundred thousand francs. Happily, rents were increasing, and the beauty of the situation had begun to give a real value to the two houses. Offers came from different merchants of good terms for the shop, provided they could have leases for terms of years. The apartments also increased in value by the removal of the business centre to the neighborhood between the Bourse and the Madeleine, henceforth the seat of political and financial power. The two houses, the various apartments of which were now all rented, brought in a hundred thousand francs a-year. In two years more, during which time young Hulot could live on the salaries given him by the Maréchal, the family would be free from debt and in a splendid financial position. It was like manna falling from heaven. Victorin could give the first floor of the pavilion to his mother, and the second floor to his sister, where two rooms were reserved for Bette. Young Hulot himself, gifted with the faculty of legal speech, and a man of spotless integrity, gained the ear of judges and councilors and rapidly eclipsed his competitors of the bar. He studied cases, he advanced nothing he could not prove, refused to take indiscriminately all causes that

were offered to him, and became, in time, regarded as an honor to the profession.

The house in the rue Plumet had grown so distasteful to the baroness that she willingly allowed her son to move her to the rue Louis-le-Grand, where she occupied a charming apartment. All housekeeping cares were spared to her by Lisbeth, who agreed to perform once more the economical feats she had formerty undertaken for Madame Marneffe, foreseeing the chance of wreaking her secret vengeance on these noble lives, now, after the overthrow of all her hopes, the objects of her redoubled hatred. Once a month she went to see Valérie, sent by Hortense, who wanted news of Wenceslas, and by Célestine, extremely uneasy at the avowed and acknowledged intimacy of her father with the woman to whom her mother and sister-in-law owed their ruin and their misery. Lisbeth, as may well be supposed, used this curiosity to enable her to see Valérie as often as she wished to do so.

About twenty months passed in this way, during which time Madame Hulot's health improved, although the nervous trembling of her head and hands did not decrease. She soon mastered her new functions, which gave noble relief to her sorrows and suitable nourishment for the divine qualities of her nature. She saw also the mans of possibly recovering her husband in a work which took her into all quarters of Paris. During these months the baron's notes to Vauvinet were paid off and his pension almost liberated. The poor wife might have attained to something like happiness, had it not been for her ceaseless anxiety about her husband, her desire that he should share in the renewed prosperity of the family, her grief at her daughter's forlorn position, and the terrible blows rained upon her with apparent innocence by Lisbeth, whose fiendish nature now had full swing.

A scene took place early in March, 1843, which will serve to show the effects produced by the persistent latent hatred of Bette, aided continually by Madame Marneffe. Two great events had happened in the latter's household. In the first place she had given birth to a still-born child, whose death brought her an annuity of two thousand francs. Then her husband's health failed rapidly; we give the report which Bette made to the Hulot family on her return one day from the Marneffe mansion:—

“That dreadful Valérie sent for Doctor Bianchon this morning to make sure that the other doctors who pronounced Marneffe dying the night before were not mistaken. Bianchon says the wretch will go to the hell where he belongs before night. Old Crevel and Madame Marneffe followed the doctor out, and your father, my dear Célestine, gave him six gold pieces for the good news. When they came back to the salon, Crevel cut capers like a ballet-dancer; he kissed that woman, shouting out, ‘Now I'll have a Madame Crevel!’ And when she returned to her husband's

bedside and left us alone, your honorable parent said to me: 'With Valérie for a wife, I shall be peer of Frame. I shall buy that estate I covet—Presles, which Madame de Sérizy wants to sell; I shall be Crevel de Presles; I shall become a member of the council-general for the Seine-et-Oise, and deputy! I shall have a son. I shall be all I choose to be!' 'Well,' said I, 'and what about Célestine?' 'Bah! she is only a daughter,' he replied; 'she has grown too much of a Hulot, and Valérie has a horror of the whole family. My son-in-law chose never to come here: why should he set up for a mentor, a Spartan, a puritan, a philanthropist? Besides, I have done my duty to my daughter; she has had her mother's property and two hundred thousand francs to boot. I am at liberty to do as I like. I shall see how my son-in-law and my daughter behave about my marriage. As they behave, so shall I. If they treat their step-mother well, I'll see what I can do! I am a man, and not a brute!'—and all such stuff! and then he struck an attitude like Napoleon on his column."

The ten-months' legal widowhood ordained by the Code Napoleon had just expired. Presles had been purchased. Victorin and Célestine sent Lisbeth one morning to Madame Marneffe's to ascertain when the charming widow was to marry the mayor of Paris, now a member of the council-general of the Seine-et-Oise.

Célestine and Hortense, whose affection was increased by living under one roof, were continually together. The baroness, influenced by her sense of honor, exaggerated the duties of her office and sacrificed herself to the works of mercy for which she was the intermediary, going out daily at eleven o'clock and not returning home till five. The sisters-in-law, occupied with their children, whom they cared for together, stayed at home with their sewing all day. They came at last to think aloud—a touching spectacle of sisterly union, one sister cheerful, the other dispirited. Beautiful, overflowing with life, animated, smiling, and witty, the unfortunate Hortense seemed to give the lie to her real position; while the depressed Célestine, gentle, calm, and equable as reason itself, habitually pensive and deliberate, gave an impression of inward grief. Perhaps this contrast contributed to their warm friendship. The two women lent to each other what the other lacked. Sitting in a little arbor in the garden, which the mania for speculation in bricks and mortar had left untouched through the fancy of a builder who meant to keep these hundred square feet of open ground for himself, they enjoyed the blooming of the lilacs, that spring delight which is only truly felt in Paris, where for six months Parisians live in total forgetfulness of vegetation between those cliffs of stone where the ocean of their human life tosses and flows.

"Célestine," said Hortense, replying to a remark of her sister-in-law, who was complaining that her husband had to waste such

fine weather at the Chamber, "I think you don't properly appreciate your blessings. Victorin is an angel; and you plague him sometimes."

"My dear, men like to be plagued. Certain squabbles are a sign of love. If your poor mother had been, I won't say exacting, but near to being so, you would not have had so many troubles to deplore."

"Lisbeth doesn't come back! I shall sing Marlborough's song," said Hortense. "I long for news of Wenceslas. How does he manage to live? He has not done a thing for two years."

"Victorin saw him the other day with that odious woman. He thinks she supports him in idleness. Ah! dear sister, if you only would, you could get him back again."

Hortense made a sign in the negative.

"But your situation will soon become intolerable," said Célestine. "At first, anger, despair, and indignation gave you strength; after that, the almost unheard- of troubles that fell upon us—two deaths, the ruin and disappearance of Baron Hulot—have filled your thoughts and your heart. But now that quiet and silence have settled down upon us, you will not easily bear the void in your life; and as you cannot, and never will, leave the path of honor, it stands to reason that you must be reconciled with Wenceslas. Victorin, who loves you so much, thinks as I do. There is something stronger than our sentiments—I mean our nature."

"A man so base!" cried Hortense, scornfully. "He loves that woman because she supports him! Paid his debts, has she? Good God! I think night and day of the situation that man has put himself in! He is the father of my child, and he disgraces himself!"

"Look at your mother, dear," said Célestine.

Célestine belonged to the class of women who, after you have given them reasons strong enough to convince a Breton peasant, return for the hundredth time to their original argument. The character of her somewhat insipid, cold, and common face, her light brown hair arranged in smooth, stiff bandeaux, and the color of her complexion, all indicated a sensible woman without charm, but also without weakness.

"Your mother," she continued, "would gladly be beside her disgraced husband, to comfort him and hide him in her heart from blame. She has arranged a room upstairs, as if she expected to find him some day and put him there."

"My mother is sublime," answered Hortense; "she has been sublime through every hour of every day for the last twenty-six years; but I have not her temperament. I can't help it. I get angry sometimes against myself; but oh! Célestine, you don't know what it is to be on good terms with infamy."

“Consider my father,” said Célestine, tranquilly; “he is on the very road by which your father perished. My father is ten years younger than the baron, and he has business habits, it is true; but what will be the end of him? That Madame Marneffe has made him her spaniel. She controls him, his money, his ideas, and nothing will make him open his eyes. I tremble lest I should hear that the banns are published. My husband thinks of making one effort to prevent the marriage; for he regards it as a duty to society, to family life, to bring that woman to account. Ah! my dear Hortense, souls like Victorin’s, hearts like ours, learn too late to know the world and its practices. This that I tell you is a secret; I confide it to you, for you are concerned in it; but you must not reveal it, by word or gesture, to Lisbeth, or your mother, or anybody, for—”

“Here’s Lisbeth!” exclaimed Hortense. “Well, cousin, how are things going in the infernal regions?”

“Badly for you, my dears. Your husband, my poor Hortense, is more infatuated than ever with that woman, who, I will admit, loves him madly. Your father, dear Célestine, is royally blind. All this, however, is nothing; I’ve been telling you this for months. I am truly thankful I have never been tied to a man; they are all animals. But the climax has come; five days hence, my poor dear, you and Victorin will have lost your father’s property.”

“Are the banns published?” said Célestine.

“Yes,” answered Bette. “I have just been pleading your cause. I told that monster, who is only taking the leavings of others, that if he would help you out of your present embarrassments by paying off the mortgage on your house, you would receive your step-mother.”

Hortense made a gesture of horror.

“Victorin will consider that,” said Célestine, coldly.

“What do you suppose the mayor replied?” resumed Lisbeth. “I wish them to be embarrassed,” he said. ‘You can’t break a horse unless you keep him hungry and sleepless and without sugar.’ Baron Hulot, bad as he is, is worth two of Monsieur Crevel. So, my dears, you may go into mourning for your inheritance. What a fortune to lose! Your father, Célestine, paid three millions for the estate of Presles, and he still has an income of thirty thousand francs. Ah! he has no secrets from me. He talks of buying the hotel Navarreins in the rue du Bac. Madame Marneffe herself has an income of forty thousand francs. Ah! here comes our guardian angel, your mother!” she cried, hearing the wheels of a carriage.

The baroness presently joined the little group in the garden. At fifty-five years of age, worn by many griefs, trembling incessantly as if with ague, Adeline, though pale and wrinkled, still retained her fine figure, with its magnificent lines, and her natural

dignity. Persons on seeing her said, "She must have been very handsome!" Wasting with grief at not knowing her husband's fate and being unable to let him share the comfort which the family were about to enjoy, she was, to an observer, a tender type of the majesty of ruins. As gleam after gleam of hope departed, and each inquiry proved fruitless, Adeline sank into a dark depression which terrified her children. Every morning she started on her rounds with renewed hope. Once an old commissary-general, a man Hulot had obliged, declared that he had seen the baron in a box at the Ambigu-Comique with a woman of remarkable beauty. Adeline went at once to question him. The functionary, while declaring that he certainly did see his old friend, and that his manner to the woman seemed to denote an illicit marriage, also stated to Madame Hulot that the baron left the theatre before the close of the play, evidently for the purpose of avoiding him. "His manner was that of a family man, and his dress betrayed a want of means," added the old officer.

"Well?" exclaimed the three women when Adeline returned.

"Monsieur Hulot is in Paris," said Adeline, "there's a gleam of happiness for me in feeling he is so near."

"He doesn't appear to have reformed," remarked Lisbeth, when Adeline had ended her account. "He has evidently taken up with some little workwoman. But where does he get the money? I'll bet some of his former mistresses support him, Jenny Cadine or Josépha, perhaps."

The nervous trembling of Madame Hulot's head increased; she wiped the tears from her eyes as she raised them sadly to heaven.

"I can not believe an officer of the Legion of honor would fall so low as that," she said.

"For his own pleasure there is nothing he would not do," said Lisbeth. "He has robbed the State; he would rob a friend, murder him, perhaps."

"Oh, Lisbeth!" cried the baroness, "keep such thoughts to yourself."

Just then Louise came toward the group of women, which the two little Hulots and little Wenceslas had joined to see if the pockets of their grandmother contained any sugarplums.

"What is it, Louise?" said Hortense.

"A man who wants Mademoiselle Fischer."

"What sort of man?" asked Lisbeth.

"Mademoiselle, he is in rags, and covered with horse-hair like a mattress-maker; his nose is red, and he smells of brandy—he is one of those workmen who only work half the week."

This unattractive description had the effect of sending Lisbeth instantly to the courtyard, where she found the man smoking a pipe whose coloring denoted an adept in the arts of tobacco.

“What are you doing here, père Chardin?” she said to him. “It was agreed that you should be at the hotel Marneffe, rue Barbet-de-Jony on the first Saturday of every month. I have just come from there, after waiting five hours for you.”

“I did start to go there, my good and charitable lady,” answered the maker of mattresses. “But you see there was a little game on hand at the café des Savants, rue du Cœur-Volant. Every one has his passion; mine is for billiards. Without billiards I should do well enough, for—mark this!” he said, fumbling in the pocket of his tattered trousers, “cafés lead to wine, and billiard-balls to brandy—ruinous, like all fine things, through their accessories. I knew my orders; but the old man is in a tight place, so I came upon the forbidden ground. If the hair of our mattresses were all hair one could sleep on it; but, you see, it’s mixed. God is not for everybody, as they say; he has his preferences—and he has a right to them. Here’s the letter of your estimable cousin and the very good friend of a mattress-maker. That is in the line of his political professions;” and père Chardin endeavored to trace a zigzag in the atmosphere with the forefinger of his right hand.

Lisbeth, without listening to him, read the following two lines:—

DEAR COUSIN—Be my banker. Give me three hundred francs to-day.
Hector.

“Why does he want so much-money?”

“He?” said père Chardin, still trying to draw aerial arabesques; “well, you see my son is back from Africa, through Spain, Bayonne, and—no, he didn’t steal anything, he never does steal, he’s a sly dog, my son—he’ll return all he borrows; he’s got ideas that will carry him along—”

“To the police courts,” said Lisbeth. “He is my uncle’s murderer. I sha’n’t forget him.”

“He! Why, he couldn’t kill a chicken, my good lady.”

“Here, take the three hundred francs,” said Lisbeth, drawing fifteen gold pieces from her purse. “Go away, and never come to this house again.”

She accompanied the father of the late Algerian storekeeper to the outer door and made the porter take a look at the old drunkard.

“Every time that man comes here, if he should come, you are not to let him in and you are to say I am out. If he asks whether Monsieur Hulot, junior, or Madame la Baronne Hulot live here, say that you don’t know such persons.”

“Very well, mademoiselle.”

“You will lose your place if any mistake occurs, even if it is accidental,” said the old maid in the porter’s ear. “Cousin,” she said to Victorin who entered the house at that moment, “you are threatened with a great misfortune.”

“What is it?”

“Your wife is to have Madame Marneffe for a stepmother in a very few days.”

“We shall see about that.”

For the last six months Lisbeth had paid a little stipend to her old friend the baron, the secret of whose abode was known to her; and she gloated over Adeline’s tears, telling her, if by chance she found her gay and hopeful, “We may expect some day to see my poor cousin’s name in the police reports.” But in this, as in her preceding efforts for revenge, she went too far. She roused Victorin’s caution. He determined to put an end to this sword of Damocles perpetually held by Lisbeth over the family head, and to the influence of the female devil to whom his mother and the whole family owed their sorrows. The Prince de Wissembourg, who knew of Madame Marneffe’s conduct, lent his aid to the purpose. He promised Victorin, as the President of the Council of State can promise, that the police should secretly assist in opening Crevel’s eyes, and in saving a noble property from the clutches of the diabolical prostitute to whom, as he declared, he would never forgive the death of the old marshal, nor the total ruin and disgrace of the baron.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DEVILS AND ANGELS HARNESSSED TO THE SAME CAR.

Bette's words, "He gets money from his former mistresses," kept the baroness awake all night. Like persons incurably ill who call in quacks, like others in the last depths of Dantesque despair, like drowning men who clutch at floating sticks, she ended by believing in a depravity the mere idea of which had scandalized her, and the thought came into her mind to appeal to one of those odious women. The next morning, without consulting her children, without a word to any one, she went to the house of Mademoiselle Josépha Mirah, now prima donna of the royal academy of music, in pursuit of a hope which danced before her mind like a will-o'-the-wisp.

About midday the maid of the great singer brought her the card of the Baronne Hulot, saying that the lady was waiting at the door to know if Mademoiselle would receive her.

"Is the salon in order?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Are the flowers fresh?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Tell Jean to give an eye all round and see that nothing's amiss before he ushers the lady in, and to show her the utmost respect. Then come and dress me, for I mean to be crushingly beautiful." She went to the psyche and looked at herself. "Now to array myself!" she said. "Vice must be under arms before virtue. Poor woman, what can she want of me? I don't quite like to meet 'of sorrow the august victim,'" and she sang that celebrated air, ending it as her maid re-entered the room.

"Madame," said the woman, "the lady trembles violently."

"Offer her something—orange-flower, rum, soup."

"I did, madame, but she refused them all; she says it is only a little infirmity, a nervous affection."

"Where is she?"

"In the large salon."

"Make haste, child. Give me my prettiest slippers, and that morning-gown Bijou embroidered; the one with the ripples of lace. Dress my hair in a way to astonish a woman just the opposite of me. And send word to the lady (for she's a great lady, my girl, and something better, something you'll never be, a woman whose prayers will get souls out of purgatory) send her word that I was in bed, that I sang last night, but that I am getting up."

The baroness, ushered into the grand salon of Josépha's apartment, did not observe how long she was kept waiting, though it was really more than half an hour. This salon, the furniture and decorations of which had already been changed since Josépha's

installation, was now draped in silks, of a color then called *massacca*, shot with gold. The luxury which great lords of the olden time displayed in the houses of their mistresses, of which so many relics remain to the present day, testifying to the "follies" which justified their name, was here shown to perfection by the aid of modern methods in the four communicating rooms, held at a delightful temperature by a heating apparatus with invisible openings. The baroness, bewildered, examined the works of art with amazement. She saw how fortunes were melted in the pot when pleasure and vanity lit the fires beneath it. The woman who for twenty-six years had lived amid the barren relics of imperial luxury, whose eyes were accustomed to threadbare carpets, tarnished gilding, faded stuffs—as faded and worn as her own heart—now realized the power of the seductions of vice as her eyes rested on its results. It was impossible not to envy these beautiful things, these splendid creations which the great unknown artists who make Paris what it is—the centre of European production—had all contributed. Here, the perfection of the unique thing was the surprising charm. The models having been destroyed, the groups, the figurines, the carvings were original and could never be reproduced. This is the highest reach of luxury in the present day. To possess things that are not vulgarized by two thousand opulent shopkeepers, who think they show their elegance when they display the costly articles which they buy for gold, is the sign of true luxury, the luxury of the modern great lords, the ephemeral stars of the Parisian firmament. As the baroness examined the flower-baskets, decorated in the style called Boule, and filled with rare exotics, she became, as it were, afraid of all the wealth the room contained. Such profusion must, she thought, react upon the person who lived in the midst of it. Adeline felt that Josépha Mirah, whose portrait painted by Joseph Bridau shone from the adjoining boudoir, was a woman of genius, a Malibran, and she expected to see a type of the true "lionne." She regretted having come. And yet she was urged onward by feelings so powerful and so natural, by a sentiment, a self-devotion so disinterested, that she gathered up her courage to endure the interview. Besides, she was about to satisfy the curiosity which beset her to know the charm by which this class of women extract such masses of metal from the miserly strata of the Parisian gold-fields. The baroness looked at herself in a mirror, to see if she were out of place in the midst of all this luxury; but her velvet robe with its point-lace collar had an air of dignity, and a velvet bonnet of the same color as the dress became her. Feeling that she was still regally imposing, a queen in adversity, the thought crossed her mind that the majesty of sorrow was even greater than the majesty of talent.

Three or four doors seemed to open and shut and then she beheld Josépha. The great singer was like the Judith of Allori, a

picture that clings to the memory of every one who has ever noticed it close to the door of the grand *sala* in the Pitti Palace; she had the same proud attitude, the same grand face, the same black hair twisted round her head without adornment, and a yellow robe with embroidered flowers, of a brocade precisely like that in which the nephew of Bronzino draped his great conception of the immortal murderess.

“Madame la baronne, I am confounded by the honor you have done me in coming here,” said the prima donna, determined to play her part with dignity.

She drew forward an armchair for the baroness and took fooling-stool for herself. Her eye detected the vanished beauty of the woman before her, and she was seized with pity as she noticed the nervous trembling which Adeline’s present emotion rendered almost convulsive. She read at a glance the saintly life that Hulot and Crevel had sometimes pictured; and not only did she instantly lose all idea of opposition to this woman, but she humiliated herself in spirit before a grandeur she was able to comprehend. The noble nature of the artist admired what the courtesan might ridicule.

“Mademoiselle, I am brought here by a sorrow which leads me to have recourse to every means—”

Josépha’s gesture made the baroness aware that she had tactlessly wounded one from whom she hoped so much, and she looked at the singer. That supplicating glance extinguished the flame in Josépha’s eyes, which began to smile. The little scene had the painful eloquence of a silent duel between the two women.

“It is now two years and a half since Monsieur Hulot left his family, and we do not know where he is, though I think he is in Paris,” began the baroness, in a trembling voice. “A dream has given me an idea, absurd perhaps, that you may have interested yourself in his behalf. If you could put me in the way to find Monsieur Hulot—ah, Mademoiselle! I would pray God for you to the end of my days.”

Two large tears rolled from the singer’s eyes.

“Madame,” she said, in a tone of deep humility, “I did you harm when I did not know you; but now that I have the happiness of seeing in you the noblest image of virtue on this earth, believe me, I understand the nature of the wrong I did, and I repent sincerely. Therefore, rely on me to do all in my power to repair it.”

She took Madame Hulot’s hand and kissed it respectfully before the latter could prevent her, and even went so far as to humbly bend her knee. Then she rose with the same proud air with which she stepped upon the stage as Mathilde, and rang the bell.

"Take a horse," she said to the footman, "and ride, full speed, to that little Bijou in the rue Saint-Maur du Temple and send her here; put her in a cab and pay the coachman double fare to press his horses. Don't lose a minute, or I dismiss you. Madame," she continued, returning to the baroness and speaking in tones of deep respect, "you must forgive me. As soon as the Duc d'Hérouville became my protector I sent the baron back to you, because I learned that he was ruining his family for my sake. Could I do more than that? In a theatrical career a protector is absolutely necessary to us when we first make our début. Our salary does not cover one half our expenses and we are forced to take temporary husbands. I did not care for Monsieur Hulot, who took me from a stupid and conceited rich man, old Crevet, who would certainly have married me—"

"He told me so," said the baroness, interrupting the singer.

"Well, you see, madame, I might have been an honest woman to-day, with a legal husband—"

"You have many excuses, mademoiselle," said the baroness; "God will consider them. As for me, far from reproaching you, I have come here to contract a debt of gratitude toward you."

"Madame, I did provide about three years ago for Monsieur Hulot."

"You!" cried the baroness, with tears in her eyes, "Ah! what would I not do for you? I can only pray—"

"I and the Duc d'Hérouville—a man of noble heart, a true gentleman," said Josépha.

She related the establishment in business and the semi-marriage of Monsieur Thoul.

"And so, mademoiselle, thanks to you, my husband has not been starved and wretched?"

"We endeavored to prevent it, madame."

"Where is he now?"

"Monsieur le duc told me about six months ago that the baron, known to the duke's notary under the name of Thoul, had used up the eight thousand francs which were paid to him in quarterly instalments," answered Josépha, "Since then neither I nor Monsieur d'Hérouville have heard anything about him. Life among my set of people is so busy, so distracting, that I have had no time to look after père Thoul. It so happens that for the last six months Bijou, my embroiderer and his—what shall I say?"

"His mistress," said Madame Hulot.

"His mistress," continued Josépha, "has not been here. Mademoiselle Olympe may have been divorced; I shouldn't wonder—divorce is not infrequent in our circles."

Josépha rose, looked among the rare plants in the windows, and gathered a lovely bouquet for the baroness, whose expectations in regard to the singer were much at fault. Like the

respectable middle-classes who believe that men of genius are monsters, walking about and eating, drinking, and speaking unlike other men, so the baroness expected to find Josépha the fascinator, Josépha the prima donna, the brilliant courtesan. Instead of that she found a calm and quiet woman, possessing the dignity of her talent, the simplicity of an actress who knows that she reigns at night, and better still, one who paid by her looks, her attitude and her manners full and complete homage to the virtuous woman, to the Mater Dolorosa of the sacred hymn.

“Madame,” said the footman, returning at the end of half an hour, “Bijou’s mother is coming at once; but it is doubtful about Olympe. She is married—”

“By the left hand?” asked Josépha.

“No, madame, really married. She is at the head of a splendid establishment; she is married to the proprietor of a great shop on the boulevard des Italiens, and has left her own place to her mother and sisters. Her name is Madame Grenouville. The old shopkeeper—”

“A Crevel?”

“Yes, madame,” said the footman; “the marriage contract states that he is worth thirty thousand francs a year.”

“This is against your interests, madame,” said the singer. I foresee that the baron is no longer where I settled him.”

Ten minutes later Madame Bijou was shown in. Josépha, as a matter of precaution, made Madame Hulot go into her boudoir, across the door of which she drew the portiere.

“The sight of you would frighten her,” said the singer; “she would not let out anything if she thought you were interested in it. I will confess her. Hide in there; you will hear all. This sort of thing is quite common among theatrical people—Well, mère Bijou,” said Josépha to an old woman wrapped in a stuff called “tartan,” who resembled a charwoman out for a Sunday in her best clothes, “I suppose you are very happy; your daughter is in luck?”

“Ho! happy!—my daughter gives me a hundred francs a month; she drives in her carriage and feeds off silver; and I do say she ought to have put me above want. To have to toil at my age!—is that happy?”

“She is very wrong to be ungrateful, for she owes her beauty to you,” returned Josépha. “But why didn’t she come to see me? It was I who put her above want by marrying her to my uncle.”

“Yes, madame, père Thoul. But he is so very old and broken—”

“What have you done with him? Is he still living with you? She did very wrong to leave him,—he is now worth millions.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed the old woman, “that’s what we always told her when she behaved so badly to him. He was

kindness itself, poor old fellow! Ah! didn't she make him step round! Olympe was corrupted, madame."

"By whom?"

"Well, she picked up—saving your presence—a *claqueur*, the nephew of an old mattress-maker in the faubourg Saint-Marceau,—a do-nothing, like all good-looking fellows; the pet of the boulevard du Temple, where he claps the new pieces and looks after the entrées of the actresses, as he says. In the morning he drinks brandy; he loves liquors and billiards by inheritance. I told Olympe such a trade as that wasn't to be relied on."

"Unfortunately, it is a trade," said Josépha.

"Well, she lost her head about the fellow, who, to tell the truth, madame, didn't keep good company. He came near being arrested in a drinking shop among thieves; but Monsieur Braulard, the head of the *claque*, got him off. The rascal wears gold ear-rings, and lives by doing nothing, hanging on to women who are fools about handsome men. He squandered the money père Thoul gave Olympe. The business went wrong; all she earned went for billiards. Besides this, the scamp had a pretty sister, who followed the same trade as the brother—a jade in the Latin quarter—"

"A lorette of the Chaumière," said Josépha.

"Yes, just so, madame," said Madame Bijou. "So, Idamore—he calls himself Idamore, though his name is Chardin—thought your uncle had more money than he said he had, and he managed, without my daughter knowing it, to send his sister Élodie to our place as workwoman. Heavens! she soon turned things topsy-turvy. She corrupted the poor girls, who are now—saving your presence—brutalized, and she carried off old père Thoul for herself and put him—we don't know where; which was very inconvenient for us on account of the bills. As soon as Idamore secured the old man for his sister he deserted Olympe for a little actress at the Funambules; and that brought about my daughter's marriage, as you'll see—"

"Do you know where the mattress-maker lives?" asked Josépha.

"Old Chardin? lives? He doesn't live anywhere! He is drunk at six in the morning; he makes one mattress a month, and spends the rest of his time in low wine-shops, playing billiards. His son Idamore is one of those fellows who is bound to go to a police court, and from there to a prison, and then—"

"To the galleys," added Josépha.

"Ah! I see madame knows all," said mère Bijou, smiling. "If my daughter had only understood that man, she—she would— But, as you say, she's been lucky, anyhow; Monsieur Grenouille fell enough in love to marry her—"

"How did the marriage come about?"

“Through Olympe’s despair. When she found she was deserted for the actress (whom she pounded to a mummy—goodness! didn’t she belabor her!) and that she’d lost père Thoul, who adored her, she talked of renouncing men. About that time Monsieur Grenouville, who buys a deal of us—sometimes two hundred embroidered China crape scarfs every three months—wanted to console her; but no—she wouldn’t listen to anything without the church and the mayor. ‘I mean to be virtuous,’ she kept saying, ‘or I’ll die.’ And she kept her word. At last Monsieur Grenouville agreed to marry her if she would break with us, and we consented.”

“For a consideration?” said the shrewd Josépha.

“Yes, madame; ten thousand francs, and an annuity for my father, who is too old to work.”

“I begged your daughter to make père Thoul happy, and she has flung him into the mud. She had no right to do it. I’ll never interest myself in anybody again. That’s the result of doing a benevolent deed. Benevolence is only good for something when it is a speculation. Olympe might at least have told me of all this jugglery. If you find out for me where père Thoul is, within a fortnight, I’ll give you a thousand francs.”

“That’ll be difficult, my dear lady; but there’s a good many five-franc pieccs in a thousand francs, and I’ll do my best to earn them.”

“Adieu, Madame Bijou.”

When Josépha entered the boudoir she found Madame Hulot in a dead faint; and yet, though the poor woman’s senses were gone, the nervous trembling still continued—like the halves of an adder cut in two, which still writhe and quiver. Strong salts, cold water, and all the ordinary restoratives soon recalled the baroness to life, or, it were truer to say, to a sense of her misery.

“Ah, mademoiselle, to what depths he has fallen!” she said, recognizing the actress, and seeing that she was alone with her.

“Take courage, madame,” replied Josépha, who was sitting on a cushion at Madame Hulot’s feet, and now kissed her hands; “we shall find him; and if he is in the mire—well, he can be cleansed. Believe me, when a man has been well brought up his restoration is only a matter of clothes. Let me repair the wrongs I have done you; I see by your coming here how deeply you must be attached to your husband, in spite of my conduct. Ah! poor man, he loves women. If you could only have had a little of our *chique* you might have kept him from running after them; you would have been what we know how to be—all women in one to a man. The government ought to create a school for virtuous wives; but governments are so strait-laced—and yet they are managed by the very men we manage! For my part, I pity the country. But the question is to help you in your trouble, not to make fun of things.

Well, do not be anxious, madame; go home and rest. I will return the baron to you as lively as though he were thirty years old.”

“Mademoiselle, let us go and see that Madame Grenouville, she may know something; perhaps I could find Monsieur Hulot this very day and rescue him at once from poverty—and shame.”

“Madame, how can I express the gratitude I feel for the honor you do me. I respect you far too much to allow you to be seen in public with me. This is not a pretence of humility, it is a homage which I render to you. Ah, madame, you make me regret that I cannot follow your way of life, in spite of the thorns which lacerate your feet and hands! but it cannot be helped—I belong to art as you belong to virtue.”

“Poor girl!” said the baroness, moved, in the midst of her own misery, to a strange feeling of commiserating sympathy. “I will pray God to help you, for you are the victim of society. When old age comes, turn to repentance; you will be forgiven if God deigns to hear the prayer of—”

“—a martyr, madame,” said Josépha, kissing Madame Hulot’s dress respectfully.

But Adeline took the singer’s hand, drew her towards her and kissed her on the forehead. Blushing with pleasure, Josépha led Madame Hulot to her carriage with an almost servile demeanor.

“That’s some charitable lady,” said the footman to the lady’s maid, “for she is never like that to anybody, not even to her dear friend Madame Jenny Cadine.”

“Wait patiently a few days, madame,” said Josépha as she parted from Madame Hulot, “and you shall see him, or I will deny the God of my fathers—and that is a good deal for a Jewess to say.”

At the hour when the baroness made her visit to Josépha, an old woman about seventy-five years of age was ushered into Victorin’s study, having used the terrible name of the chief of police to obtain access to the distinguished lawyer and deputy. The footman announced, “Madame de Saint-Estève.”

“I have taken one of my aliases,” she said, seating herself.

Victorin shuddered inwardly, so to speak, on seeing the hideous old woman. Though richly dressed, she appalled him by the signs of cold wickedness that lay on her flat, wrinkled, pallid, and muscular face. Marat, if a woman and of her age, would have been like the Saint-Estève, a living image of the Terror. The sanguinary appetites of a tiger gleamed in her small yellow eyes. The flattened nose, with the nostrils widened into oval cavities, belching the smoke of hell, suggested the beak of a bird of prey. The genius of intrigue sat enthroned on the low, cruel brow. Straggling hairs pushing up in the hollows of the face proclaimed the masculine instincts of her nature. Those who took note of this woman might well have doubted whether painters had ever truly represented the face of Mephistopheles.

“My dear monsieur,” she said in a patronizing tone, “I have long ceased to meddle with private affairs, and what I now do for you is really out of consideration for my dear nephew, whom I love better than if he were my own son. Now the prefect of police, in whose ear the president of the Council has whispered a word or two about your wishes, told Monsieur Chapuzot that the police had better not appear in an affair of this kind. So they have given *carte blanche* to my nephew, the head of the detective force; but my nephew only acts for the Council, and must not compromise himself.”

“Then you are the aunt of Vautrin?”

“You are right, and I am rather proud of it,” she replied, “for he is my own pupil, a pupil who soon made himself a master. He and I have studied your affair, and we think well of it. Will you give thirty thousand francs to put an end to the whole affair? You needn’t pay till the thing is done.”

“You know the persons?”

“No, my dear monsieur, I await your instructions. All we know is what they’ve told us—that an old booby has got into the hands of a widow; that the widow, twenty-nine years old, has thieved so well that she has secured an income of forty thousand francs out of two fathers of families; that she’s now on the point of swallowing up eighty thousand a year more by marrying a man sixty-one years of age and ruining a worthy family; and will soon no doubt get rid of the old husband and give his immense property to the child of some lover. That’s the tale as I heard it.”

“Quite correct,” said Victorin. “My father-in-law, Monsieur Crevel—”

“Ex-perfumer and mayor; yes, I live in his arrondissement, under the name of Madame Nourrisson.”

“The other person is Madame Marneffe.”

“Don’t know her,” said Madame de Saint-Estève, “but in three days I shall be able to count her chemises.”

“Can you prevent the marriage?”

“How far has it gone?”

“The banns have been twice published.”

“We ought to kidnap the woman. It is now Sunday; that leaves only three days. Of course they’ll be married Wednesday—no, it’s impossible to carry her off in that time. But we can kill her—”

Victorin Hulot started, as a man of honor would at hearing such words said in cold blood.

“Kill her!” he exclaimed, “what do you mean?”

“For forty years, monsieur, we have stood in the shoes of destiny,” she said with dreadful pride; “we do what we choose in Paris. Many a family—and in the faubourg Saint-Germain, too—has told me its secrets. I have made many marriages; I have torn up many wills; I have saved many reputations. I hold, penned up

there," she continued, tapping her forehead, "a flock of secrets that stand me in thirty thousand francs a year; you may be one of my lambs, if you like. A woman of my kind wouldn't be what I am if she talked about her means of action—she acts; I act. All that happens, my dear sir, will be accidental—you will not feel the slightest remorse. You will be like persons cured by somnambulists, who think at the end of a month that nature did it all."

Victorin was in a cold sweat. The sight of the hangman would have moved him less than this pretentious and sententious, daughter of the galleys; the sight of her dress, color of the dregs of wine, made him fancy she was swathed in blood.

"Madame, I shall not accept the help of your experience and of your active services if success is to cost a life, or if it involves any criminal deed whatsoever."

"You are nothing but a big child, monsieur," responded Madame de Saint-Estève. "You wish to stay honorable in your own eyes, and yet you want to get the better of your enemy."

Victorin made a gesture of denial.

"Yes," she replied, "you want Madame Marneffe to drop the prey she has got in her jaws. How can you force a tiger to let go his bit of flesh? by passing your hand down his back and saying, 'pussy, pussy'? You are not logical. You order a fight, but you don't want any wounds. Well, I'll make you a present of the innocence you are so fond of. For my part, I've always seen the threads of hypocrisy in the garments of decency. Some day, about three months hence, a poor priest will come and ask you for forty thousand francs for a pious work, say a convent in the Levant or in a desert. If you are then satisfied with what has happened give him the money—it won't be much, considering all it will bring you in."

She rose to her large feet, incased in satin shoes, with the flesh puffing over their edges, smiled as she bowed to the lawyer and retired.

"The devil has a sister," said Victorin, rising.

He followed the horrible creature, who seemed evoked from the lairs of detective inquisition as a fiend is called up by the wand of a fairy in a pantomime through the trap-door at the opera house. When his business at the Palais was over for the day, Victorin went to Monsieur Chapuzot, the head of a department at the prefecture of police, to obtain some information about this mysterious woman. Finding the chief alone in his office, Hulot thanked him for his services.

"You sent me," he said, "an old woman who may be said to personify Paris in its criminal aspect."

Monsieur Chapuzot took off his spectacles, laid them on his papers, and looked at the lawyer with an astonished air.

“I should not have presumed to send any one, no matter whom, without giving you due notice, or without a written line of introduction,” he said.

“Then it must have been Monsieur le préfet.”

“I don’t think so,” said Chapuzot. “The last time the Prince de Wissembourg dined with the minister of the Interior he saw the prefect, and spoke to him of your unfortunate position, and asked him to be so kind as to come to your assistance. Monsieur le préfet, much interested by what his Excellency told him, was so good as to consult me in the matter. Ever since the prefect took the reins of this administration (which is so calumniated and yet so useful) he has set his face against interfering in family affairs. He is right in principle and in morality; practically he is all wrong. The police, during the forty-five years that I have been in it, rendered immense services to private families from 1799 to 1815. Since 1820 the press and the constitutional government have totally changed the conditions of its existence. Consequently my advice, when the prefect asked it, was not to meddle in such a matter as yours, and Monsieur le préfet was good enough to yield to my opinion. The chief of the detective police received in my presence an order not to take any steps in the matter; if he has taken any, I shall reprimand him. It would be almost a case for dismissal. People say ‘The police will do this, that, or the other’—‘the police! the police!’ But, my dear sir, the Maréchal and the Council of ministers are ignorant of what the police really is. None but the police can understand the police. The old kings, Napoleon, and Louis XVIII., did understand theirs; but as for ours, no one but Fouché, or Monsieur Lenoir, Monsieur de Sartines, and a few prefects, men of intelligence, had any inkling of what it is. Nowadays all is changed; we are hampered and cut down. I have seen many family misfortunes which we could have prevented with five grains of interference. We shall be regretted by the very men who have destined us when they find themselves, as you are now, face to face with moral monstrosities which must be cleared away just as we clear away the mud in the streets. In politics the police is supposed to prevent crime so long as it concerns the public weal; but the welfare of families is another matter, the family is sacred! I may do all I can to discover and prevent an attempt upon the life of the king; I can even make the walls of houses transparent; but put my claws into private families and meddle with private interests—no, not so long as I hold my office, for I am afraid—”

“Afraid of what?”

“Of the press! Monsieur the deputy of the Left centre.”

“What am I to do?” resumed Victorin after a pause.

“Hey, you call yourselves the representatives of the Family,” said the chief, “act accordingly; do as you think you ought to do;

but don't ask us to help you, don't make the police the tool of passions and personal interests."

"But in my position—" began Hulot.

"You surely don't want me to advise you, my dear lawyer, you who live by giving legal advice. No, no, you are only joking—"

Victorin bowed and left the functionary, not observing the slight shrug of that official's shoulders as he rose to show him out. "And that man expects to be a statesman!" said the chief to himself, as he resumed his spectacles.

Victorin returned home, his perplexities on his back and not able to confide them to any one. At dinner the baroness announced joyfully that in a month's time their father would return to share their comfort and end his days peacefully in the bosom of his family.

"I'd give my whole income to see him back," cried Lisbeth; "but, my dear Adeline. I do beg you not to count on such happiness."

"Bette is right," said Célestine; "let us wait till it happens, dear mother."

The baroness, all heart and hope, related her visit to Josépha, told how such women were unhappy in their happiness, and spoke of Chardin, the father of the storekeeper at Oran, to prove that she was not indulging a false hope.

The next morning by seven o'clock Lisbeth was driving in a hackney-coach along the quai de la Tournelle. At the corner of the rue de Poissy she stopped the carriage.

"Go to the rue des Bernardins," she said to the driver, "number seven; it is a house with an alley-way, and there's no porter's lodge. Go up to the fourth story and ring the bell of the left-hand door, on which you will see the words, 'Mademoiselle Chardin, mender of laces and cashmeres.' Ask for '*the chevalier*.' They will reply, 'He is out.' You will then say, 'I know that, but you must find him, for his maid is in a coach on the quay and wants to see him.'"

Twenty minutes later an old man who seemed about eighty years of age, with snow-white hair, a nose reddened by the cold in a pallid face which was wrinkled like that of an old woman, dragging his feet, covered with old list slippers, as he walked with a bent back, and dressed in a shirt of suspicious color and a threadbare alpaca overcoat, without decoration, the sleeves of a knitted jacket appearing at the wrists, came timidly along the pavement, looked at the coach, recognized Lisbeth, and stopped before her.

"My dear cousin," she said to him, "what a state you are in!"

"Élodie takes everything for herself," said Baron Hulot. "Those Chardins are grasping brutes."

"Do you want to return home?"

“Oh no, no!” said the old man; “I want to go to America.”

“Adeline is on your track.”

“Ah! if they would only pay my debts,” said the baron, suspiciously. “Samanon is after me.”

“We have not yet paid off the old notes; your son still owes a hundred thousand francs on them—”

“Poor boy!”

“And your pension won’t be free for seven or eight months. If you can wait till then I have two thousand francs—”

The baron held out his hands with an eager gesture, frightful to see.

“Give it me, Lisbeth! God will reward you! Give it me! I know where to go.”

“But you must tell me where, you old monster.”

“Yes, I can wait eight months, for I have discovered a little angel, a good child, innocent, not old enough to be depraved.”

“You will get into the police-courts,” said Lisbeth, expressing her inmost wish.

“She lives in the rue de Charonne,” said Hulot, “a quarter where nothing makes a scandal. Nobody will ever find me there. I am disguised, Lisbeth, as père Thorec; I’m an old worker in ebony. The little girl loves me; and I sha’n’t have the fleece plucked off my back any more.”

“No, it’s done already!” said Lisbeth, with a glance at the alpaca overcoat. “Shall I drive you there, cousin?”

The baron got into the coach, abandoning Mademoiselle Élodie without a word of farewell, as we throw aside a finished novel.

In half an hour, during which time the baron talked of nothing but the little Atala Judici—for he had reached by degrees those awful passions which are the destruction of old men—Bette deposited him, supplied with the two thousand francs, at the door of a suspicious and dangerous-looking house in the rue de Charonne, faubourg Saint Antoine.

“Good-by, cousin; I’m to call you père Thorec, am I not? Send no one after me but the street-porters, and take them always from different stands.”

“So be it! Oh! I’m so happy!” cried the baron, his face illuminated with the joy of coming happiness.

“He won’t be found there, in that house,” said Lisbeth, to herself, as she stopped her coach on the boulevard Beaumarchais, where she took an omnibus and returned to the rue Louis-le-Grand.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VENGEANCE IN PURSUIT OF VALÉRIE.

Crevell paid a visit to his children the next day, just as they were assembled in the salon after breakfast. Célestine threw herself into her father's arms, and behaved to him as if he had been there the evening before, whereas it was the first visit he had paid her in two years.

"Good-morning, fether," said Victorin, holding out his hand.

"Good-morning, my children," said Crevel, pompously. "Madame la baronne, I lay my homage at your feet. Heavens! how those children grow; they drive us off the field—as good as saying, 'Come Grandpa, I want my place in the sun.' Madame la comtesse, as beautiful as ever!" he added, looking at Hortense; "and here's the last of oar treasures, my cousin Bette, the wise virgin. Why, how well you are situated here!" he continued, after distributing his little speeches to every one, followed by loud laughs which shook the heavy masses of his rubicund cheeks.

He looked rather contemptuously round his daughter's salon.

My dear Célestine, I will give you all the furniture of my house in the rue des Saussayes; it will do very well here. Your salon needs refurbishing. Ah! there's that little monkey, Wenceslas! Well, well! are we pretty good children? We must be good if we want to be happy."

"Have you tried it?" asked Bette.

"That sarcasm, my dear Lisbeth, has no longer any point for me. I'm about to put an end, my dear children, to the false position which I have held for so long; and like a good father I have come to announce my marriage to you frankly."

"You have a perfect right to marry," said Victorin; "and for my part, I give you back the promise you made when you gave me the hand of my dear Célestine."

"What promise?" demanded Crevel.

"Not to marry," replied the lawyer. "You will do me the justice to remember that I never asked you for it, and that you gave it voluntarily, in spite of my telling you at the time that you ought not to bind yourself in that way."

"Yes, I do remember, my dear friend," said Crevel, abashed. "And now, on my word of honor, my dear children, if you will live happily with Madame Crevel you shall never repent it. Your delicacy, Victorin, touches me deeply; no one is ever generous to me without return. Come, welcome your mother-in-law cordially; be present, all of you, at the marriage."

"You have not yet told us the name of the bride, father," said Célestine.

“Why, that’s the keynote of the comedy,” replied Crevel. “Don’t let’s play at hide-and-go-seek. Lisbeth must have told you—”

“My dear Monsieur Crevel,” interposed Bette, “there are names which must not be uttered in this house.”

“Well, then, I myself tell you it is Madame Marneffe.”

“Monsieur Crevel,” said the lawyer, sternly, “neither I nor my wife can be present at that marriage—not from motives of injured self-interest, for I have spoken sincerely on that point; but from other considerations of honor and delicacy, which you will surely understand, though I cannot express them, because they would reopen wounds which are still bleeding.”

The baroness made a sign to the countess, who took her child in her arms, saying, “Come and take your bath, Wenceslas. Adieu, Monsieur Crevel.”

The baroness bowed to the mayor in silence, and Crevel could not forbear smiling as he noticed the astonishment of the child thus menaced with an unexpected bath.

“You are marrying, monsieur,” said Victorin, when he and his wife and Crevel and Lisbeth were alone, “a woman who has ruined my father and coldly and deliberately made him what he now is—a woman who is the mistress of the son-in-law, after being that of the father—who has caused my sister deadly grief; and you expect that we shall sanction your madness by our presence. I pity you sincerely, my dear Monsieur Crevel; you have no sense of the ties of family; you do not comprehend the union of honor in which the members of a family hold together. One cannot argue (I know it to my cost) with the passions. Men in the grasp of passion are as deaf as they are blind. Your daughter Célestine has too deep a sense of her duty to utter one word of blame for you—”

“A pretty state of things if she did,” interposed Crevel, trying to cut short the lecture.

“Célestine would not be my wife if she reproached you,” continued the lawyer. “But as for me, I shall endeavor to stop you before you step into the gulf—especially after showing you my disinterestedness. It is not your fortune, but yourself, that I am thinking of. And to make my sentiments perfectly clear to you, I will add, if only to relieve your mind in framing your marriage contract, that my financial position is now such that we have nothing further to desire.”

“Thanks to me!” exclaimed Crevel, whose face became purple.

“Thanks to Célestine’s fortune,” replied the lawyer. “And if you regret having given your daughter, as a dowry coming from you, a sum which is less than half what her mother left her, we are ready to return it.”

“Are you aware, monsieur,” said Crevel, assuming his attitude, “that in covering Madame Marneffe with my name the world can only question her conduct in the character of Madame Crevel?”

“That may be a gentlemanly sentiment,” said the lawyer; “it is generous as to matters of the heart and errors of passion; but I know of no name, no law, no title, which can cover up a theft of three hundred thousand francs, basely stolen from my father. I tell you plainly, my dear father-in-law, that your future wife is unworthy of you; she is deceiving you, and she is madly in love with my brother-in-law Steinbock—she has paid his debts.”

“I paid them.”

“Very good,” said the lawyer; “I am glad on his account, and he will repay you; but I can tell you that he is loved by her—greatly loved and often loved.”

“Loved!” exclaimed Crevel, whose face proclaimed the violent commotion taking place within him. “It is base, it is cruel, it is petty and vulgar to calumniate a woman! When such things are said, monsieur, they should be proved.”

“I will give you proofs.”

“I shall expect them.”

“The day after to-morrow, my dear Monsieur Crevel, I will tell you the day, hour, and moment when and where I can show you the horrible depravity of your future wife.”

“Very good,” said Crevel, who had recovered his coolness; “I shall be delighted to have you do so. Adieu, Célestine; *au revoir*. Adieu, Lisbeth.”

“Follow him, Lisbeth,” said Célestine in Bette’s ear.

“Well, what are you off in such a hurry for?” cried Lisbeth, overtaking Crevel.

“Ah!” said Crevel, “my son-in-law is getting too uppish. The Palais and the Chamber, legal trickery and political trickery have made a swaggering fellow of him. Ha! ha! he knows very well that I’m to be married on Wednesday, and to-day, Sunday, my gentleman declares he will tell me three days hence at what date he can prove my wife is unworthy of me. That’s pretty clever of him. I am now on my way to sign the contract; come, too, Lisbeth, come! They’ll never know. I meant to arrange it so as to give Célestine forty thousand francs a year, but Hulot has behaved in a way to alienate my heart forever.”

“Give me ten minutes; wait for me in your carriage at the door. I’ll find some pretext to get away.”

“Very good.”

“My dear friends,” said Lisbeth, re-entering the salon, “I am going with Crevel; the contract is to be signed to-night, and I shall be able to tell you its terms. It will probably be my last visit to that woman. Your father is furious,” she added; “he means to disinherit you.”

“His vanity won’t allow that,” said the lawyer. “He wanted to own the estate of Presles, and he will keep it now he has got it. I know him. Even if he should have children, Célestine must have half the estate, and the law does not allow him to give away the whole of his personal fortune. However, these questions are nothing to me; I am thinking only of our honor. Go, cousin!” he said, pressing Lisbeth’s hand, “go, and bring back word about the settlements.”

Twenty minutes later Lisbeth and Crevel reached the mansion in the rue Barbet, where Madame Marneffe was awaiting with moderate impatience the result of the visit which she had ordered Crevel to make. In the long run Valérie had fallen a prey to that excessive love which once, at least, grasps the heart of every woman. Wenceslas, the abortive artist, became in Madame Marneffe’s hands, so perfect a lover that he was to her what she had been to Baron Hulot. She was holding his slippers in one hand, while the other was clasped in his, and her head rested on his shoulder. The conversation between them after Crevel’s departure on his errand was like those literary works of the present day whose title-pages bear the words, “Reproduction forbidden.” The poetic charm of their intimacy brought to the artist’s mind and so to his lips a regret which he expressed with some bitterness.

“Ah, what a misfortune that I am married!” he said. “If I had waited as Lisbeth advised I could have married you by this time.”

“A man must be a Pole before he can wish to make a wife of an adoring mistress,” cried Valérie. “Exchange love for duty, pleasure for monotony!”

“But you are so capricious,” replied Steinbock. “Did I not overhear you talking with Lisbeth about Baron Montez, that Brazilian?”

“Will you help me to get rid of him?” said Valérie.

“It would be the only way to keep you from seeing him,” replied the ex-sculptor.

“I will tell you, my treasure—for I tell you all, don’t I?—that I did once think of letting him be my husband. Oh! the promises I have made him!” (“long before I knew you,” she added, replying to a gesture of Steinbeck’s). “Well, those promises which he holds over me like a weapon oblige me to marry almost secretly; if he were to hear that I mean to marry Crevel he is capable of—killing me.”

“Oh, as for that,” said Steinbock, with a contemptuous gesture signifying that any such danger was absurd for a woman who was beloved by a Pole.

In the matter of courage the Poles are never unduly boastful, for the race is truly brave.

“That fool of a Crevel wants to have a gay wedding, and is full of his ideas of cheap splendor; it puts me in a position I don’t know how to get out of.”

Valérie could not admit to the man she adored that ever since Baron Hulot had been dismissed, Henri Montez had inherited the privilege of coming to her house, at all hours of the night and that, in spite of her cleverness, she had not yet been able to quarrel with the Brazilian, who in all her attempts invariably took the blame upon himself. She knew too well the man’s half-savage nature (which resembled Lisbeth’s in some aspects) not to tremble as she thought of this South American Othello. As Crevel’s carriage rolled into the courtyard, Steinbock retreated from Valérie, whose waist he was holding, and picked up a newspaper in which he was quite absorbed when Crevel and Lisbeth entered the room. Valérie was embroidering with great care a pair of slippers for her future husband.

“How they calumniate her!” whispered Lisbeth to Crevel in the doorway, showing him the little scene. “See her hair; is it the least ruffled? To hear Victorin one would suppose they were a pair of turtle-doves in a nest.”

“My dear Lisbeth,” said Crevel, in position, “to make a Lucretia out of an Aspasia one has only to inspire her with a great passion.”

“Yes, and I always told you,” returned Lisbeth, “that women love such libertines as you.”

“She would be very ungrateful if she did not,” said Crevel. “See what loads of money I have spent here; no one knows how much but Grindot and I.”

So saying he pointed back to the staircase. In the arrangement of the house, which Crevel regarded as his own, Grindot had tried to out-do Cleretti, the architect then in vogue, to whom the Duc d’Hérerville had intrusted the decoration of Josépha’s apartments. But Crevel, incapable of comprehending any question of art, intended, like others of the middle class, to spend a fixed sum agreed upon in advance. Restrained by this estimate, Grindot was unable to realize his architectural dream. The difference between Josépha’s mansion and Madame Marneffe’s was exactly that which lies between uniqueness and vulgarity. All that was most admired in Josépha’s house could be seen nowhere else; whereas the splendors Crevel had bestowed on Madame Marneffe’s might be bought anywhere. These two distinct forms of luxury are separated by the river of millions. A unique mirror costs six thousand francs; the mirror invented by manufacturers who turn out scores of them can be had for five hundred. A chandelier by Boule, if known to be authentic, brings at public auction three thousand francs; the very same thing, if cast, can be made for a thousand or twelve hundred; the one is to archaeology what a

picture by Raphael is to art, the other is a mere copy. The Crevel-Marneffe mansion was therefore a magnificent specimen of ignorant luxury, while Josépha's was a fine model of an artistic dwelling.

"War is proclaimed," said Crevel, going up to his future wife.

Madame Marneffe rang the bell.

"Go and fetch Monsieur Berthier," she said to the footman, "and don't come back without him. If you had succeeded, my dear old man," she said to Crevel, twining her arms about him, "you would have delayed our happiness; we should have been obliged to have a great wedding; but when a whole family opposes the marriage, decency requires that it shall take place quietly—especially when the bride is a widow."

"On the contrary, I am determined to display a luxury à la Louis XIV.," said Crevel, who for some time past had been thinking the eighteenth century rather petty. "I have ordered new carriages; there's a carriage for me, and a carriage for my wife, two little coupes, a calèche, and a state-coach with a box-seat which shakes like Madame Hulot."

"I am determined!—is that a way to speak? So you don't want to be my lamb any more? No, no, my precious, you'll do as I say. We will sign the marriage contract quietly by ourselves to-night; then on Wednesday we will be married legally in due form, and go on foot and plainly dressed to the church and have only a low mass. The witnesses can be Stidmann, Steinbock, Vignon, and Massol, all clever fellows who can happen into the mayor's office as if by accident; afterwards they must sacrifice themselves so far as to hear mass in church. Your colleague can marry us, for once in a way, at nine o'clock in the morning; mass is said at ten; and we can be home here to breakfast by half-past eleven. I have promised a number of guests that the feast shall last all day. We shall have Bixiou, your old comrade de Biroterie, du Tillet, Lousteau, Vernisset, Léon de Lora, the flower of French wit, who won't know that we have just been married; we'll mystify them all, and get them a trifle drunk. Lisbeth is coming and Bixiou is to make her some proposals—to take the starch out of her."

For two hours Madame Marneffe ran on, chattering nonsense which made Crevel come to the following wise conclusion: "How is it possible," he said to himself, "that such a gay and happy creature should be depraved? Giddy? well, yes, but wicked—never!"

"What did your children say about me?" asked Valérie, when she was holding Crevel close to her on the sofa—"all sorts of horrors?"

"They declare," he replied, "that you love Wenceslas criminally—you! virtue itself!"

“Love him? I should think I did love him, my little Wenceslas,” she cried, calling the artist to her and taking his head between her hands and kissing his brow. “Poor boy, without friends, without fortune, deserted by a giraffe with carrot hair! Wenceslas is my poet; I love him before all the world as I would my own child. Those virtuous women, they imagine evil everywhere and in everything. Can’t they keep quiet without making mischief for a man? As for me, I’m a spoilt child, and nothing is ever refused to me. Sugarplums have ceased to give me any emotion. Poor women! I pity them. Which of them said that of me?”

“It was Victorin.”

“Hey! and why did not you shut his mouth, the pettifogging parrot! with those two hundred thousand francs of his *mamma’s*?”

“Adeline had left the room,” said Lisbeth.

“Let them take care, Lisbeth,” said Madame Marneffe, frowning. “Either they must receive me in a proper spirit, and visit me as their step-mother, all of them! or—I’ll land them lower than the baron, and you may tell them so from me. I’ll turn wicked in the end. On my word of honor, I believe that Evil is the scythe which brings in the harvest of good.”

At three o’clock the notary Berthier, successor to Cardot, read the marriage contract—after a previous short conference with Crevel; for certain articles depended on the manner in which Monsieur and Madame Hulot, junior, received their father’s invitation. Crevel gave to his future wife the following fortune: 1. Forty thousand francs a year, secured in a designated manner. 2. The house in the rue Barbet and all that it contained. 3. Three millions in money. Over and above these settlements, he gave his wife all the donations that the law allowed; released her from the necessity of making inventories; and provided that in case either party died without children, the whole estate, real and personal, was to go to the survivor. This contract reduced Crevel’s own fortune to two million of francs. If he had children by his new wife, Célestine’s inheritance was cut down to five hundred thousand francs—about the ninth part of his actual property.

Lisbeth returned to dinner in the rue Louis-le-Grand with despair written on her face. She explained and discussed the marriage contract, and found Célestine as indifferent as Victorin to the money aspects of the affair.

“You have irritated your father, my dears. Madame Marneffe has sworn that you shall receive her as his wife, and visit her in her own house.”

“Never!” said Hulot.

“Never!” said Célestine.

“Never!” cried Hortense.

Lisbeth was seized with a desire to trample the pride of these Hulots underfoot.

“Madame Marneffe seems to have some weapon against us,” she replied; “I don’t know what it is, but I mean to find out—she alluded vaguely to some story about two hundred thousand francs which concerns Adeline—”

Madame Hulot fell back on the sofa and went into convulsions.

“Go, go to her, my children!” she cried. “Receive that woman! Monsieur Crevel is an infamous wretch! he deserves death—Yes, obey that woman—ah! he is a monster—*she knows all.*”

After a few more broken phrases mingled with tears, Madame Hulot found strength to go upstairs supported by Hortense and Célestine.

“What does all this mean?” cried Lisbeth, left alone with Victorin.

The lawyer stood rooted to the ground in such amazement that he did not even hear the words.

“What is the matter, Victorin?”

“I am horror-struck,” said the lawyer, whose face became threatening. “Evil to those who dare attack my mother; I shall have no scruples henceforth. I would crush that woman as I would a viper, if the means came in my way— She, she to attack my mother’s honor!”

“She said—but don’t repeat this, dear Victorin—that she would land the whole family lower than your father. She reproached Crevel openly for not shutting your mouth with this secret which seems so terrifying to Adeline.”

Hortense now sent down a request for a doctor, as Madame Hulot was growing worse. He ordered opium, and Adeline soon fell into a deep sleep; but the rest of the family remained in a state bordering on terror. The next day the lawyer went early to the Palais de Justice, and as he passed the prefecture of police he requested Vautrin, the head of the detective force, to send him Madame de Saint-Estève.

“We are forbidden to interfere in your affair, monsieur; but Madame de Saint-Estève has a business—she can call on you respecting that,” said the celebrated officer.

When he reached home the poor young man heard that his mother’s reason was in danger. Doctor Bianchon, Doctor Larabit and Professor Angard, meeting in consultation, had just decided to employ heroic remedies to drive the blood from her head. As Victorin was listening to Bianchon, who was explaining why he had hopes that the crisis could be controlled though his associates despaired of it, the footman announced Madame de Saint-Estève. Victorin left Bianchon in the middle of a sentence and ran down

to his own apartments with the headlong rapidity of an insane man.

“Can there be any hereditary tendencies to madness in the family?” thought Bianchon, turning to his colleagues.

The doctors went away, leaving one of their pupils to watch the case.

“A lifetime of virtue!” were the only words that Madame Hulot said after the blow had fallen. Lisbeth never left Adeline’s bedside; she sat up all night, and won the admiration of the two young women by her devotion.

“Well! my dear Madame de Saint-Estève, how is our matter coming on?” said Victorin, ushering the horrible old woman into his study, and carefully closing the doors.

“Well! my dear friend,” she replied, looking at him with an eye that was coldly ironical, “have you made your little reflections?”

“Have you done anything?”

“Will you give fifty thousand francs?”

“Yes,” said Hulot, “for the thing must be done. This woman, by a single word, has put my mother’s life and reason in danger—and so, go on.”

“We have gone on,” replied the old woman.

“Well?” said Victorin, convulsively.

“You won’t refuse to pay costs?”

“On the contrary.”

“The costs already amount to twenty-three thousand francs.”

Hulot looked at the old woman with a bewildered air.

“Ha! it can’t be possible that you’re a simpleton—you, one of the lights at the Palais,” said the old woman. “For that sum of money we have bought the conscience of a waiting-woman and a picture by Raphael. I don’t call that dear.”

Hulot continued to look at her stupidly with his eyes wide open.

“Well,” resumed Madame de Saint-Estève, “in plain words, we have bought Mademoiselle Reine Tousard, Madame Marneffe’s maid, who possesses all her secrets—”

“I understand.”

“If you mean to be niggardly, say so at once.”

“I shall pay as I agreed,” he answered. “Go on. My mother said such women deserved the worst punishment.”

“They don’t break people on the wheel nowadays.”

“You are certain of success?”

“Trust me for that,” answered the woman. “Your vengeance is already stirring.” She looked at the timepiece; it was six o’clock. “Your vengeance,” she continued, “is dressing itself at this moment; the dinner at the Rocher de Cancale is cooking, the horses of the carriages are champing their bits, my irons are getting

hot. Ha! I know your Madame Marneffe by heart. All is ready. The little pills are in the trap; I'll tell you to-morrow whether the mouse has poisoned herself. I think she will. Adieu, my son."

"Adieu, madame."

"Do you understand English?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever seen Macbeth played in that language?"

"Yes."

"Well, my son, 'all hail! thou shalt be king hereafter,'" said the horrible old witch foreseen by Shakspeare, and seeming familiar with him. She left Hulot, still bewildered, in the doorway of his apartment. "Don't forget that the case comes on to-morrow," she said, courteous; for she saw two persons near the door, and wished them to think her a Comtesse Pimbèche.

"What cool audacity!" thought Hulot, as he bowed to his pretended client.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A DINNER-PARTY OF LORETTES.

The Baron Montez de Montéjanos was a lion, but an unexplained lion. The Paris of fashion, of the turf, and of the lorettes admired the ineffable waistcoats of this foreign lord, his irreproachably varnished boots, his thorough-bred horses, his carriage driven by negroes who were docile and well trained. The baron's fortune was known; he had a credit of seven hundred thousand francs with his banker, du Tillet; yet he was never seen except alone. If he went to the first representation of some play he never took but one stall. He frequented no salon; he had never offered his arm to a lorette; his name was not connected with that of any pretty woman in society. His sole pastime was playing whist at the Jockey Club. Gossips were reduced to calumniating his morals, or, what seemed infinitely more comical, his person; they called him Combabus. Bixiou, Léon de Lora, Lousteau, Florine, Mademoiselle Héloïse Brisetout, and Nathan, supping one evening with the illustrious Carabine and several other lions and lionesses, invented this extremely burlesque explanation: Massol in his capacity as councilor of state, Claude Vignon as a former Greek professor, had related to the ignorant lorettes the famous anecdote handed down in Rollin's Ancient History concerning Combabus, that voluntary Abelard, who was charged with the duty of looking after the wife of a king of Assyria, Persia, Bactriana, Mesopotamia, and other regions named in the particular geography of old Professor du Bocage, the successor of D'Anville, who, by the by, created the East. This nickname, which kept the lorettes laughing for some time, became the subject of many jokes too vivacious to be repeated here, lest the Academy should refuse us the Montyon prize.

Now, on the morning of the very day when Madame de Saint-Estève prophesied success to Victorin Hulot, Carabine, or rather Mademoiselle Séraphine Sinet—who was to the banker du Tillet what Josépha Mirah was to the Duc d'Hérrouville—said to du Tillet:—

“If you were a good fellow, you would give me a dinner at the Rocher de Cancale and invite Combabus. We want to find out whether or no he has a mistress. I have bet he has, and I want to win.”

“He is still at the Hotel de Princes,” answered du Tillet. “I'll go and find him. We will have some fun. Get all our fellows—Bixiou, Lora, in short, the whole crowd.”

At half-past seven that evening, in the handsomest room of the famous establishment where all Europe has dined, a table was laid out with the magnificent silver service reserved for dinners where

vanity paid the bill in bank-notes. Floods of light rippled and danced on its chiselled edges. Servants, who might have been mistaken for diplomatists were it not for their age, were serious and calm, like men who know they are overpaid.

Five persons had arrived and were awaiting nine more. First came Bixiou, the salt of all intellectual cookery, still going on in 1843 with a battery of witticisms ever new—a phenomenon as rare in Paris as virtue itself. Then Léon de Lora, the greatest landscape and sea painter living, who maintained himself above all rivals by never falling below his early promise. The lorettes were unable to do without these two princes of wit and humor. Not a supper, not a dinner, not a pleasure party of any kind, could go on without them. Séraphine Sinet, called Carabine, came, in her capacity of mistress to the amphitryon, among the first arrivals, displaying under the dazzling flood of light a pair of unrivalled shoulders, a throat turned as if by a sculptor, without a crease, a piquant face, and a dress of brocaded satin, blue upon blue, trimmed with English lace in sufficient quantity to have kept a whole village from starvation for a month. Pretty Jenny Cadine, who did not play that night at her theatre, and whose portrait is too well known to need reproduction here, came in a fabulous toilette. A supper-party is to these dames a Longchamps of dresses, at which they all endeavor to show the worth of their millionnaires by saying to their rivals through their clothes, “See the price he has paid for me.”

A third woman, apparently at the outset of her career, looked with a sort of shame at the display of the two others. She was simply dressed, in white cashmere trimmed with blue, and crowned with flowers by a hairdresser of the Merlan type, whose clumsy hands had contrived, without knowing it, to give the graces of innocence to the beautiful blond hair. Not at ease in her dress, she showed, to use the consecrated phrase, “the timidity of a first appearance.” She had brought from Valogne to the markets of Paris an inexpressible freshness, a candor and beauty equal to any that Normandy has ever supplied to the various theatres of the capital. The lines of the unblemished face showed the ideal purity of angels; its milky whiteness reflected back the light as though it were a mirror, and her color was finely touched on as with a brush.

She was called Cydalise; and was, as we shall see, a pawn in the game which Madame de Saint-Estève, otherwise named Madame Nourrisson, was about to play against Madame Marneffe.

“You haven’t the arms of your name, my dear,” said Jenny Cadine, to whom Carabine presented the little beauty, who was sixteen years of age. In truth Cydalise presented for public admiration a pair of handsome arms, of fine texture but reddened by superabundant health.

“What is she worth?” asked Jenny Cadine in a whisper of Carabine.

“A fortune.”

“What do you want to do with her?”

“Make Combabus marry her.”

“What do you get for that performance?”

“Guess.”

“A silver service?”

“I have three.”

“Diamonds?”

“I sell some of mine.”

“A green monkey?”

“No! a picture by Raphael.”

“What maggot have you got in your head?”

“Josépha crows over me with her pictures.” answered Carabine. “I want some as fine as hers.”

Du Tillet arrived with the hero of the feast, the Brazilian; the Duc d’Hérouville followed with Josépha. The singer wore a simple velvet robe, but round her neck lay a necklace of pearls, worth a hundred and twenty thousand francs, and hardly distinguishable from a skin which was like a white camellia. She had put a red bud (a *mouche*) among the braids of her hair with bewildering effect, and round her arms, twined one above the other, were eleven pearl bracelets on each arm. “Lend me those mittens,” said Jenny Cadine, as she shook hands with her. Josépha took off the bracelets and offered them on a plate to her friend.

“What style!” exclaimed Carabine. “You ought to be a duchess!—You have plundered the sea, Monsieur le duc,” she added, turning to the little man.

Jenny Cadine accepted a single bracelet, fastened the twenty-one others to Josépha’s arms and kissed her. Lousteau, the literary sponger, la Palferine and Malaga, Massol and Vauvinet and Theodore Gaillard, proprietor of one of the most eminent political newspapers, completed the number of the guests. The Duc d’Hérouville, polite, as a great lord should be, to all the world, nevertheless gave the Comte de la Palferine that significant little bow which, without implying esteem or intimacy, says to everybody else, “We are equals—of the same race and family.” This little bow, the shibboleth of aristocracy, was invented to be the despair of men of intellect among the upper bourgeoisie.

Carabine placed Combabus at her left and the Duc d’Hérouville at her right. Cydalise flanked the Brazilian, and Bixiou was on the other side of Cydalise. Malaga sat next the duke.

At seven o’clock they attacked the oysters; at eight, between two courses, Roman punch was served. Everybody knows the bill of fare of such banquets. By nine o’clock they were all chattering

as people chatter after forty-two bottles of wine have been drunk among fourteen persons. The dessert, a miserable month of April dessert, was served. The heady atmosphere had intoxicated no one but Cydalise, who was singing a Christmas carol. With that exception, none of them had lost their heads, for men and women both were the elite of Paris as to suppers. Wit sparkled, eyes, though they shone, were full of intelligence, but the lips were verging on satire, anecdote, and indiscretion. The conversation, which had so far turned a vicious circle round current events, horses, disasters at the Bourse, the various merits of the people of their own stamp, comparing them with one another, together with well-known scandalous tales, now threatened to become personal, and to break up into groups of two.

It was at this moment that, in consequence of certain glances distributed by Carabine among Léon de Lora, Bixiou, la Palferine and du Tillet, the talk was turned on love.

“Doctors never talk medicine, real nobles never talk ancestors, men of genius never tell of their own works,” said Josépha, “why should we talk shop? I got excused from the Opera to come here to-night, and I don’t want to bring my business with me. Let’s change the subject, my dears.”

“We are talking of *real* love,” said Malaga, “love which drives men to perdition—drives them to ruin their fathers and mothers and sell their wives and their children—drives them into Clichy.”

“Don’t know it!” said Josépha. These words, aided by the eyes and expression of face of such women, is an epic poem upon their lips.

“Do I not love you, Josépha?” said the duke in a low voice.

“You may, perhaps, really love me,” whispered the singer, smiling; “but I do not love you with the love they are talking of, that love which turns the universe all black if the one we love is not with us. You are agreeable and useful, but you are not indispensable to me; if you desert me to-morrow, I shall find three dukes for one.”

“Does real love exist in Paris?” said Léon de Lora. “No one has time to make his fortune, how then can he give himself up to real love, which takes possession of a man as water saturates sugar. One must needs be enormously rich to love in that way, for love makes a man a cipher for everything else—witness our dear Brazilian baron here present. A real lover is like a eunuch, there are no longer any women on earth to him. He is a mystery, he is like the first Christian, solitary in his desert. Look at our worthy Brazilian.” All eyes turned to Henri Montez, who was annoyed to find himself the object of such notice. “He has been feeding there for the last hour without knowing, any more than an ox, that his neighbor is the—I won’t say the prettiest, but the freshest woman in Paris.”

“All is fresh here, even the fish which gives the Rocher de Cancale its renown,” said Carabine.

Baron Montez looked at the landscape painter in a friendly manner, saying, “Very good, I drink your health;” then he bowed, raised his glass, filled with port, and drank the wine ceremoniously.

“Then you do love some one?” said Carabine, interpreting his toast to have that meaning.

The Brazilian filled his glass, bowed to Carabine and repeated the toast.

“Here’s to Madame’s health,” said the lorette, in so comic a tone that Lora, du Tillet, and Bixiou burst out laughing.

The Brazilian continued as immovable as a bronze image. His cool reserve irritated Carabine. She knew perfectly well that he loved Madame Marneffe; but she did not expect to encounter such stolid faith, the obstinate silence of a perfectly secure man. We sometimes judge of a woman by the attitude of her lover, and of a lover by the conduct of his mistress. Proud of loving Valérie and sure of being loved by her, the baron’s smile bore, to the eyes of these professors emeriti, a tinge of irony, and he was certainly at that moment superb to look upon; wine had not heightened his color; his eyes, shining with the special brilliancy of golden hazel, kept back the secrets of his soul. Carabine said to herself: “What a woman! how does she manage to keep your heart under lock and key like that?”

“He is a roc,” said Bixiou, who saw the chance for a pun and did not suspect the importance which Carabine attached to the demolition of Montez’s reserve.

While these remarks, apparently so frivolous, were made on Carabine’s right the discussion of love was continued on her left by the Duc d’Hérouville, Lousteau, Josépha, Jenny Cadine, and Massol. They came at last to inquire whether its rare phenomena were produced by passion, by obstinacy, or by genuine feeling. Josépha, much bored by these theories, again tried to change the conversation.

“You talk of something you know nothing of,” she said. “Is there a man among you who has so loved a woman—an unworthy woman—as to squander his fortune and that of his children, sell his future, disgrace his past, risk the galleys by robbing the State, kill his uncle and his brother, and allow that woman to so blind him that he never sees the gulf into which she is aiming, as a last amusement, to drive him? Du Tillet carries a ledger in place of a heart; Léon de Lora his wit in the same place; Bixiou would laugh at himself if he loved anybody better than Bixiou; Massol’s heart is a ministerial portfolio; Lousteau’s nothing but a viscus (he who could let Madame de Baudraye leave him!); Monsieur le Duc is too wealthy to prove his love by ruining himself, and Vauvinet

doesn't count—the broker of the human species has no heart. No, none of you have ever loved, nor I either, nor Jenny, nor Carabine. But I did once, and once only, see the phenomenon I have just described, I mean,” she said, turning to Jenny Cadine, “our poor Baron Hulot, for whom I am now advertising as I would for a lost dog—I am determined to find him.”

“Ha!” thought Carabine, looking suspiciously at Josépha, “has Madame Nourrisson two of Raphaels pictures? Is Josépha playing my game?”

“Poor man!” said Vauvinet, “he was really a fine fellow. What style he had! what an air and manner! He was like Francois I.; a perfect volcano! and what ability, what genius he displayed in getting hold of money! I have no doubt he still manages to get it wherever he is; perhaps he digs it out of the walls of Paris somewhere in the faubourgs and about the *barrières* where he is probably hidden.”

“And all,” said Bixiou, “for that little Madame Marneffe! What a vicious thing she is, too!”

“She is going to marry my friend Crevel,” said du Tillet.

“And she is madly in love with my friend Steinbock,” said Léon de Lora.

The three speeches were like pistol-shots striking Montez full in the breast. He grew livid and suffered so intensely that he struggled to his feet.

“You are scoundrels!” he said. “You ought not to mention the name of an honest woman in presence of these lost women of yours, and make her a target for your vile jests.”

Montez was interrupted by a chorus of plaudits and bravos, for which Bixiou, Lora, Vauvinet, du Tillet, and Massol gave the signal.

“Long live the Emperor!” said Bixiou.

“Crown him!” cried Vauvinet.

“One groan for Médor, and hurrah for Brazil!” shouted Lousteau.

“Ah, my armored baron! so you love our Valérie?” said Léon de Lora, “and you are not yet disgusted?”

“What he said wasn't parliamentary,” remarked Massol, “but it was magnificent.”

“My dear invaluable client,” said du Tillet, “you have been recommended to me. I am your banker; and this blind innocence of yours will not redound to my credit.”

“Tell me, you who are a sober-minded man—” said the Brazilian to du Tillet.

“Thanks, for all of us,” said Bixiou, bowing.

“—tell me something positive,” continued Montez, paying no regard to Bixiou.

“Well,” said du Tillet, “I have the honor of being invited to Monsieur Crevel’s marriage with Madame Marneffe.”

“Ah, Combabus, now defend her,” cried Josépha. Rising solemnly, she walked with a tragic air to Montez and gave him a friendly tap on the head, gazing at him for a moment with an air of comic admiration; then she nodded her head and said: “Hulot is my first example of love through thick and thin; here’s the second,—but this one ought not to count; he comes from the tropics.”

As Joslpha gently tapped his head, Montez fell back in his chair and turned his eyes on du Tillet. “If I am the butt of your Parisian jests,” he said, “if you have wilfully torn my secret from me”—he wrapped the whole table and the guests in one flaming glance full of the fires of Brazil—“I pray you,” he added, with an almost childlike and suppliant air, “tell me that it is so—but do not calumniate the woman whom I love.”

“Ah!” whispered Carabine in his ear, “what if you are shamefully betrayed, deceived, and tricked by Valérie ; what if I can prove it to you, an hour hence, in my own house? Tell me, what would you do then?”

“I cannot tell you here in presence of all these Iagos.”

“Well then, come home with me, and I’ll give you proofs.”

Montez seemed annihilated. “Proofs!” he stammered, “think what you are saying.”

“Yes, proofs; more than you want,” answered Carabine. “But if mere suspicion flies to your head in this way I’m afraid the truth will drive you mad.”

“Isn’t he obstinately blind, that fellow? Why, he is worse than the late King of Holland,” said Léon de Lora. “Come, you fellows, Bixiou, Massol, and the rest, are not you all invited to Madame Marneffe’s wedding breakfast the day after to-morrow?”

“Yes,” replied du Tillet. “I have the honor to repeat, Monsieur le baron, that if you have any idea of marrying Madame Marneffe you are undoubtedly rejected by a black-ball under the name of Crevel. My good friend, Crevel has eighty thousand francs a year; probably you have not as much, or, I feel quite sure, you would have been preferred.”

Montez listened with an air half-dreamy, half-smiling, which seemed alarming to the company about him. At this moment the head-waiter entered the room and whispered to Carabine that one of her relations was in the salon and wished to speak to her. The lorette rose, left the room, and found Madame Nourrisson, *alias* Madame de Saint-Estève, waiting for her, enveloped in a cloud of black lace.

“Well, am I to go to your house, my clear? Has he taken the bait?”

“Yes,” replied Carabine, “the pistol is so well loaded that I am afraid it will burst.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CHEAP PARISIAN PARADISE OF 1840.

An hour later Montez, Cydalise, and Carabine, returning from the Rocher de Cancale, entered Carabine's little salon in the rue Saint-Georges. There the lorette saw Madame Nourrisson on a sofa beside the fire.

"Dear me! here's my worthy aunt," she said.

"Yes, my child, I came to get my little stipend. You've a good heart, but I feared you might forget that I have bills to pay to-morrow. Who is that with you?—the gentleman looks as though matters were not going well with him."

The hideous Madame Nourrisson, completely disguised, looked like a respectable old woman as she rose to kiss Carabine, one of the hundred or more lorettes whom she had started in the horrible career of vice.

"He is an Othello who makes no mistakes; I have the honor of introducing to you Monsieur le baron Montez de Montejanos."

"Eh! I have heard a good deal about him; you are called Combabus, they tell me, because you love only one woman. In Paris that's the same as if you loved none at all! Hey! can it be the one we were talking of—Madame Marneffe, who is to be Crevel's wife? If it is, bless your stars, my dear monsieur, for having lost her, instead of taking it to heart. She is a shameless hussy, that little woman—I know her ways."

"Ah," said Carabine, into whose hands Madame Nourrisson had covertly slipped a paper as she kissed her, "you don't understand Brazilians. They are madmen who stick knives in their own hearts. The more jealous they are the more they want to be. Monsieur talks of murdering everybody, but he won't kill a thing, because he's in love. I have brought him here to give him proofs of Madame Marneffe's infidelity which I got out of Steinbock."

Montez seemed drunk; he listened as if what he heard did not concern him. Carabine leisurely took off her velvet mantle and then read the following note aloud:—

"My treasure, *he* dines to-night with Popinot and will come to the Opera for me about eleven o'clock. I leave home at half-past five and shall expect to find you in our paradise, where you must order a dinner from the Maison d'Or. Dress so that you can take me to the Opera. We shall have four hours to ourselves. Return this note—not that your Valérie distrusts you—I would give you my life, my fortune, and my honor—but I fear accidents."

"There, baron; that's the fac-simile of a little note sent by Madame Marneffe to Comte Steinbock this morning. Read the address. The original is burned."

Montez turned and returned the paper; he recognized the handwriting; then a wise thought struck him, which proves how much he was shaken.

“You have some interest in tearing my heart in two,” he said, looking at Carabine; “otherwise why should you take the trouble and pay the costs of having this letter lithographed?”

“Simpleton!” cried Carabine, at a sign from Madame Nourrisson, “don’t you see that poor Cydalise, a child of sixteen, has loved you for the last three months, till she can neither eat nor drink nor sleep because you take no notice of her?” (Cydalise put her handkerchief to her eyes and appeared to weep.) “She is furious, in spite of her missish airs, at seeing the man she loves made a fool of by that scandalous woman,” continued Carabine; “she is ready to kill her—”

“Ha!” said the Brazilian, “that’s my affair.”

“Kill her! you, my young friend?” exclaimed Madame Nourrisson; “that’s not allowed in these days.”

“Ah,” said Montez, “I don’t belong to this country; its laws are nothing to me; I live in a land where I laugh at them, and if you give me proof—”

“Bless me! the note—isn’t that enough?”

“No,” said the Brazilian, “I don’t believe in writing, I must see—”

“See!” exclaimed Carabine, quickly understanding another gesture of her pretended aunt, “you shall see all, my dear tiger, on one condition.”

“What is it?”

“Look at Cydalise.”

At a sign from Madame Nourrisson, Cydalise gazed tenderly at the Brazilian.

“Listen to me,” cried Montez, perceiving this feminine masterpiece for the first time, “if you show me Valérie—”

“—and the Comte Steinbock, together? yes,” interposed Madame Nourrisson.

For the last ten minutes the old woman had watched the Brazilian narrowly—she saw in him an instrument tuned to the pitch of murder; she saw moreover that he was so blinded by excitement that he would take no notice of those who led him on. Sure of these two things, she now interposed.

“Cydalise is my niece,” she said, “and I have a right to inquire what all this means. As for your demand to see Madame Marneffe, that’s an affair of ten minutes. One of my friends lets to Comte Steinbock the room where your Valérie is this moment drinking her coffee—queer coffee! but she calls it coffee. But let us understand each other. What of Brazil? I like Brazil; it is a warm country. What will be my niece’s position there?”

“Old ostrich!” said Montez, struck by the feathers which adorned Madame Nourrisson’s bonnet. “Show me Valérie and the artist together—”

“As you would like to be with her,” said Carabine—“that’s understood.”

“—and I will marry this girl, if you want me to, and take her to Brazil—”

Cydalise took the Brazilian’s hand, which he extricated as soon as possible, continuing his own thoughts:—

“I came back intending to return to Brazil with Madame Marneffe,” he said; “you don’t know why it took me three years to get back?”

“No, my wild Indian,” said Carabine.

“She told me she wished to live alone with me in a desert—”

“Not so wild after all,” cried Carabine, bursting with laughter; “he belongs to the tribe of civilized savages.”

“She said it so often,” continued the baron, regardless of the lorette’s laughter, “that I prepared a delightful residence on my property in Brazil; I came back to Paris, and the night I again beheld her—”

“Beheld’! the word is decent. I’ll remember it,” said Carabine.

“—she told me to wait the death of that wretched Marneffe, and she would marry me. I consented; I even forgave her for accepting Baron Hulot’s attentions. I don’t know whether the devil was in her petticoats, but from that moment that woman satisfied all my wishes, all my caprices, all my exactions—in short, she never gave me reason to suspect her; no, not for an instant.”

“Ah, that’s too bad!” said Carabine, looking at Madame Nourrisson, who nodded her head in assent.

“My faith in that woman,” continued Montez, whose tears were now flowing, “equalled my love. I almost came to blows with those men just now—”

“Yes, I saw it,” said Carabine.

“If I am deceived, if she is to be married, if she is at this moment in Steinbock’s arms, that woman deserves a thousand deaths, and I would kill her as I would crush a fly.”

“And the police, my little man?” said Madame Nourrisson, with a smile that made the flesh creep.

“Yes, and the galleys and all the rest of it?” said Carabine.

“You are only boasting, my dear fellow,” said Madame Nourrisson, who wanted the Brazilian to reveal his plan of vengeance.

“I will kill her,” repeated Montez calmly. “Ha! you call me a wild Indian, a savage. Do you think that I shall imitate the folly of your compatriots, who buy poison and pistols in the shops? I thought over my revenge as you were bringing me here. I am prepared in case you produce proofs against Valérie. One of my

negro servants has brought with him an animal poison, the surest of all poisons, which creates a disease far more certain and horrible in its effects than any vegetable poison. I will find a way to convey it to that woman; and then, when death is in the veins of Crevel and his wife, I shall be far beyond the Azores with your niece, and I will marry her. We barbarians, as you call us, have our ways and means!— I am going mad,” exclaimed the Brazilian, in a hollow voice, suddenly falling backward on the sofa. “I shall die of this. But I *will* see; I *will* know! It is impossible! The note was lithographed; how do I know it was not forged?—Baron Hulot love Valérie?” he continued, remembering Josépha’s revelations, “why, the proof that he did not love her is that she still lives. Would I suffer her to live on if she were not wholly mine?”

Montez was terrifying to see, and more terrifying to hear. He foamed, he bellowed, he contorted himself; everything he touched he broke; the woodwork about him crashed like glass.

“He’ll break everything,” said Carabine to Madame Nourrisson. “Come, come,” she said, tapping the Brazilian, “a mad Roland is very well in a poem, but in a private house it is prosaic and costly.”

“My son,” said Madame Nourrisson, rising and planting herself before the Brazilian, “I am of your faith. When we love in a certain way we reckon with death; whoever betrays love tears life out by the roots, and pays with death! You have my respect, my admiration, my consent. But you love that woman; you will back down!”

“I?—if you prove her infamous, I will—”

“Come, come, you talk too much—let’s see what comes of it,” said Madame Nourrisson, becoming herself again. “A man who really intends to revenge himself doesn’t tell how he means to do it. To see your Valérie in her paradise, you must take Cydalise with you, and enter by mistake, as it were—no scandal, no disturbance, remember. If you really mean vengeance you must pretend to hang back, seem shocked at your intrusion, and let her abuse you. Are you up to that?” added Madame Nourrisson, observing the Brazilian’s surprise at the subtle scheme.

“Come, ostrich,” he exclaimed, “let us go; I understand you; I am ready.”

“Adieu,” said Madame Nourrisson to Carabine. She signed to Cydalise to go before with Montez, and stayed a moment alone with Carabine.

“Now, my dear,” she said, “I’m only afraid that he’ll strangle her. That would put me in a bad box—we want such things done quietly. You’ve earned your Raphael; but they say it isn’t a Raphael, only a Mignard. Never mind—it is handsomer; they tell me the Raphaels have all turned black, but this one is as pretty and bright as a Girodet.”

“I only want to get the better of Josépha,” cried Carabine; “and I don’t care whether it is a Mignard or a Raphael. That little thief wore pearls to-night—such pearls! I’d damn my soul for them.”

Cydalise, Montez, and Madame Nourrisson took a hackney-coach from the stand near Carabine’s front door. Madame Nourrisson whispered to the coachman the address of a house in the block under the Opera-house; which they would soon have reached—for the time required to go from the rue Saint-Georges is only about seven or eight minutes—but Madame Nourrisson ordered the man to drive through the rue Lepelletier and to go slowly past the carriages that were drawn up there waiting for the opera to be over.

“Brazilian!” said the old woman, “see if you recognize your angel’s carriage.”

The baron pointed to an equipage which the hackney coach was then passing.

“She told her servants to be here at ten o’clock; but she went herself in a street cab to the house where she now is with Comte Steinbock. She dined there, and she will come to the Opera in about half an hour. That woman manages well!” added Madame Nourrisson. “Now you see how it is she has contrived to escape detection so long.”

The Brazilian made no answer. Turned into a tiger, he had recovered the imperturbable coolness which the Frenchmen had admired at dinner. He was, in fact, as calm and composed as a bankrupt on the day after his assignment.

Before the door of the fatal house stood a street-cab with a pair of horses, of the kind called “*compagnie générale*,” from the name of the enterprise.

“Stay here,” said Madame Nourrisson to Montez, “you can’t enter this house as you would a tavern. You will be summoned in a few moments.”

The paradise which Madame Marneffe and Wenceslas were now occupying was not in the least like Crevel’s little nest; which, by the bye, he had just sold to Maxime de Trailles, fondly believing all use for it was over. Valérie’s present paradise, the paradise of many other persons, consisted of one room on the fourth story, opening on the staircase of a house situated in the block of the Italian Opera-house. On each story was a room opening directly on the landing of the stairs, which had formerly served as kitchen to each apartment. But the house had now become a sort of inn let to clandestine lovers at exorbitant prices; the chief proprietor, the real Madame Nourrisson, of the rue Neuve-Saint-Marc, having justly estimated that her kitchens would return a better profit if used in this way. All these rooms, inclosed by thick partition-walls and lighted from the street, were completely isolated from the rest of the house, and very thick

double doors shut them off from the landing. Important secrets might be talked of without the least risk of their being overheard. For greater security, the windows were provided with outside blinds and inside shutters. These rooms could be hired for three hundred francs a month. The whole house, big with mysteries and Parisian seventh heavens, was let to Madame Nourrisson for twenty-four thousand francs a year; on it she cleared, one year with another, twenty thousand francs profit over and above the rent.

The special paradise let to Comte Steinbock was hung in chintz. A soft, thick carpet protected the feet from the chilly hardness of a red-tiled floor. The furniture consisted of two pretty chairs and a bed in an alcove, partly hidden just now by a table covered with the remains of a choice dinner, where two long-necked bottles, and a bottle of Champagne standing empty in ice marked out the fields of Bacchus which Venus cultivated. Beside the fireplace stood a comfortable easy-chair, sent no doubt by Valérie, and against the wall was a pretty bureau in rosewood with a mirror draped à la Pompadour. A lamp, hanging from the ceiling, gave some light, which was increased by the wax-candles on the table and others standing on the mantle-shelf.

This sketch will serve to show, *urbi et orbi*, the petty and vulgar conditions of clandestine love as practised in the Paris of 1840. What a distance has the world travelled from the adulterous love symbolized by the net of Vulcan three thousand years ago!

As Cydalise and the baron were going up the four flights of stairs, Valérie, standing before the fireplace, where a few sticks were burning, was teaching Wenceslas to lace her corset.

“Upon my word! after two years’ practice, you don’t know how to lace a woman better than that! Ah! you’re too much of a Pole still! Come, it is almost ten o’clock, my Wenceslas.”

Just then a maid-servant of the house, using the blade of a knife, adroitly slipped the bolt of the double door which made Adam and Eve secure in their paradise. She opened the door abruptly—for people who hire rooms in such houses have little time to spare—and disclosed one of those *genre* pictures in Gavarni’s style so often exhibited in the Salon.

“This way, madame,” said the maid.

Cydalise entered, followed by Baron Montez.

“Ah! there’s some one here!” said the frightened Cydalise. “Excuse me, madame.”

“It is Valérie!” cried Montez, slamming the door violently.

Madame Marneffe, overcome with an emotion too strong to be mastered in a moment, fell on a chair at the corner of the fireplace. Tears came into her eyes, but dried instantly. She looked at Montez, then at Cydalise, and burst into a forced laugh. The anger of an offended woman stood her in place of her de-

ficient clothes; she came straight to the Brazilian, and looked at him so fiercely that her eyes glittered like weapons.

“So,” she said, pointing to Cyrdalise, “this is your fidelity!—you, who have made me promises enough to convert an atheist in love! you, for whom I have done so much—crimes even! You are right, monsieur; I am nothing in comparison with a girl of that age and beauty! I know what you would say,” she went on, pointing to Wenceslas, whose disordered appearance was a proof too evident to be denied. “This is my affair. If I could love you, after this infamous betrayal—for you have spied upon me, you have bought every step of that stairway, and the mistress of the house, and the servant, even Reine, perhaps—oh! what noble conduct!—if I had an atom of affection left for a man so base I would make him bite the dust; but I leave you, monsieur, to your doubts, which will turn into remorse. Wenceslas, my dress.”

She took the garment, put it on, looked herself all over in the glass, and tranquilly finished dressing, without even glancing at the Brazilian, absolutely as though she were alone.

“Wenceslas, are you ready? go first,” she said.

With the corner of her eye she had seen the expression of Montez’s face in the glass. In its pallor she thought she saw the indication of that weakness which delivers strong men over into the power of a woman’s fascination. She took his hand, coming near enough to let him breathe those terrible and beloved perfumes with which lovers intoxicate themselves; then, aware of his emotion, she looked at him reproachfully, and said:—

“I permit you to go to Monsieur Crevel and tell him of your discovery. He will never believe you. I do right to marry him; I shall marry him the day after to-morrow, and I shall make him happy. Adieu; try to forget me.”

“Ah, Valérie!” cried Henri Montez, clasping her in his arms; “that is impossible! Come with me to Brazil!”

Valérie looked at him; she had recovered her slave.

“If you still loved me, Henri,” she said, “I could be your wife in two years—but no, there’s something sly and dangerous in your face at this moment.”

“I swear to you that they made me drunk and flung that woman upon my hands—false friends that they were! Believe me, it is all accidental!”

“Then I can still forgive you?” she said, smiling.

“Will you marry me now?” asked the baron, a prey to the keenest anxiety.

“Eighty thousand francs a year!” she cried, with an enthusiasm that was almost comical; “and Crevel loves me so he must soon die!”

“Ha! I begin to understand you,” said the Brazilian.

She left him triumphantly.

“I have no longer any scruples,” thought the baron, who remained for a moment rooted to the spot. “Can such things be? That woman means to use her love to get rid of that old fool, just as she reckoned on the destruction of Marneffe. Yes, I will be the instrument of the wrath of God.”

Two days later the guests who at du Tillet’s banquet had torn Madame Marneffe to pieces with their tongues were all breakfasting at her table an hour after she had cast her skin and changed her name for the more illustrious one of the mayor of Paris. Such infidelities of the tongue are among the commonest peccadilloes of Parisian life. Valérie had seen with much satisfaction that Montez was present in the church, and his appearance at the breakfast astonished no one. All those men of wit and intellect were accustomed to the degradations of passion and the compromises of intrigue. The gloom displayed by Steinbock, who was beginning to despise the woman he had so long thought an angel, seemed to the persons present to be in excellent taste, intended to show that all was over between Valérie and himself. Lisbeth arrived to kiss her dear Madame Crevel, but excused herself from remaining to the breakfast on the ground of Madame Hulot’s alarming condition.

“Don’t be uneasy,” she said to Valérie as she left her, “they will invite you to their house, and you will receive them in yours. Those four little words, *two hundred thousand francs*, simply annihilated Adeline when she heard them. Oh! you hold the whip hand with that story—but you must tell me what it is.”

A month after her marriage Valérie had reached her tenth quarrel with Steinbock, who insisted on explanations about Henri Montez and reminded her of expressions which she used during the scene in paradise. Not only did he wither her with his contempt, but he watched her so closely that she no longer had a moment’s freedom, caught as she was now between the jealousy of Wenceslas and the eagerness of Crevel. Lisbeth’s excellent advice being no longer at hand, Valérie lost her head sufficiently to reproach Wenceslas sharply for all the money he had cost her. Steinbock’s pride was up in arms and he absented himself from the Crevel mansion. This was Valérie’s object; she wished to get rid of him for a short time and recover her liberty. Crevel expected to pay a visit to Comte Popinot at his country place for the purpose of negotiating Madame Crevel’s presentation at court, and Valérie was anxiously awaiting that moment in order to come to an explanation with Montez. The morning of the day when all this was to happen, Reine, who judged her crime by the largeness of the sum received for it, tried to warn her mistress, in whom she was naturally more interested than in strangers; but she had been threatened with accusations of insanity and imprisonment in the Salpêtrière in case she played false, and was therefore timid.

“Madame is so happy now,” she began, “why should she trouble herself about that Brazilian? I distrust him.”

“That’s true, Reine,” answered her mistress, “and I am going to send him off.”

“Ah, Madame, I am so glad; he frightens me, that blackamoor! I think he’s capable of a crime.”

“Silly girl! It is for him you ought to fear when he is with me.”

Just then Lisbeth came in.

“Ah, my dearest, how long it is since I have seen you!” cried Valérie. “I’m very unhappy. Crevel plagues me to death and I’ve lost Wenceslas—we’ve quarrelled.”

“I know that,” said Lisbeth, “and I have come about it to-day. Victorin met him at five o’clock the other evening just as he was entering a twenty-five sous restaurant in the rue de Valois; he caught him fasting and plied him with sentiment and finally brought him to the rue Louis-le-Grand. When Hortense saw him, pale and ill and shabby, she held out her hand to him. That’s how you’ve betrayed me.”

“Monsieur le baron Montez, madame,” said the footman.

“You must go now, Lisbeth; I’ll explain it all to-morrow.”

But, as we shall see, Valérie was soon to be unable to explain anything.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FULFILMENT OF VALÉRIE'S JESTING PROPHECIES.

Toward the end of May Baron Hulot's pension was wholly freed by the payments which Victorin made from time to time to Baron Nucingen. Everybody knows that the quarterly distribution of pensions is not paid unless a certificate of the life of the annuitant is presented; and as nothing was known of Baron Hulot, the quarterly sums which had been assigned over to Vauvinet still remained unpaid in the Treasury. Vauvinet had signed his release of all claims and it now became necessary to find the nominee so as to draw out the accumulated funds. Madame Hulot, thanks to Dr. Bianchon, had recovered her health. The kind Josépha contributed to this result by a letter, the style and orthography of which betrayed the collaboration of her little duke. The following was all the information the singer was able to convey to the baroness after an active search of forty days:—

MADAME LA BARONNE,—Monsieur Hulot was living two months ago in the rue des Bernardins, with Élodie Chardin, the lace-mender, who took him away from Mademoiselle Bijou. He has now disappeared from there, leaving everything that he possessed behind him, and without saying where he was going. I am not discouraged, however; and I have set a man upon his traces who thinks he saw him not long ago on the boulevard Bourdon.

The poor Jewess will keep her promise to the Christian. Will the good spirit pray for the evil one? surely that is often done in heaven. I am with deep respect and forever,

Your humble servant,

Josépha Mirah.

Victorin Hulot, hearing nothing more of the dreadful Madame Nourrisson, finding that his father-in-law was really married, and having brought his brother-in-law back under the family roof, turned once more to his legal and political duties, and was carried along by the current of Parisian life, in which hours often count for as much as days. Having a certain report to make in the Chamber of Deputies, he sat up one night toward the close of the session to prepare it. He was sitting in his study about nine o'clock in the evening, waiting for the footman to bring him a shaded lamp, and thinking of his father. Feeling some reproach at leaving the search to Josépha, he was resolving to see Monsieur Chapuzot the next day about the matter, when he saw in the dim twilight, at his open window, the fine head of an old man, with a bald crown fringed with white hair.

“Monsieur, will you tell your servants to admit a poor hermit who has just come from the deserts to beg money to rebuild his convent?”

This apparition, speaking in human tones, suddenly reminded Victorin of Madame Nourrisson's prophecy, and he shuddered.

"Let that old man come in," he said to the footman.

"He'll poison the air of Monsieur's study," said the man. "That brown robe of his hasn't been changed since he left Syria, and he has no shirt."

"Let him come in," repeated the lawyer.

The old man entered. Victorin looked with a suspicious eye at the so-called pilgrim-hermit, and beheld a superb specimen of those Neapolitan monks whose robes are sister garments to the rags of the lazzarone, their sandals leathern thongs, and they themselves mere human tatters. The man was so perfect a specimen of his kind that Victorin, distrustful as he still was, checked his first impulse of belief in Madame Nourrisson's warning.

"What is it you want?"

"Whatever you choose to give me."

Victorin took a five-franc piece from a pile of silver on the table and gave it to the old man.

"It is a small sum on account for fifty thousand francs," said the mendicant.

The words put an end to Victorin's doubt.

"Has heaven fulfilled its promises?" said the lawyer, frowning.

"That question is an insult, my son," replied the hermit. "If you do not wish to pay until after the funeral, you have the right to refuse. I will return in a week."

"The funeral!" exclaimed Hulot, rising.

"Action has been taken," said the old man, bowing himself out; "the dead die quick in Paris."

When Hulot, who had lowered his head for a moment, was about to reply, the active old man had disappeared.

"I don't understand one word of it," said Victorin to himself. "But if he does come back in eight days I will ask him to produce my father—if he is not found in the mean time. Where in the world does Madame Nourrisson (yes, that is her real name) find such actors?"

The next day Dr. Bianchon allowed Madame Hulot to go into the garden; he was asked at this visit to examine Lisbeth, who had been confined to her room for two or three weeks with a slight bronchial trouble. The wise doctor, unwilling to express his opinion on Bette's state until he had seen more decisive symptoms, accompanied the baroness into the garden to watch the effect of the open air on her nervous quivering after being shut away from it for over two months. The hope of curing this infirmity incited his genius.

"Your life is a busy one," said the baroness, "and full of sadness. I have known what it is to spend days in watching physical suffering and infirmity."

“Madame,” said the doctor, “I know the work which your charity prompts you to undertake; but in the long run you will do like the rest of us. It is the law of social life. The confessor, the magistrate, the lawyer would find their occupation gone if the *spirit of the common weal* did not counteract the *heart of man*. Could existence continue without the accomplishment of that phenomenon? The soldiery, in times of war, see sufferings more terrible than those which we see, but all soldiers who have been under fire are tender-hearted. We physicians, have the joys of cure; you, the happiness of saving a family from hunger, degradation, misery, by enabling it to work and thus restoring its social status; but what shall console the magistrate, the commissary of police, the lawyer, who spends his days in laying bare the base intrigues of self-interest—that social monster which knows no regret but that of not succeeding, and which remorse and repentance never reaches? One half of society spends its time in watching the other half. I have a friend, a lawyer, now retired from business, who tells me that for the last fifteen years notaries and legal advisers are as distrustful of their clients as of their clients’ adversaries. Your son, madame, is a lawyer; has he never been compromised by the man he was retained to defend?”

“Oh, often!” said Victorin, smiling.

“What is the root of such evil?” asked Madame Hulot.

“The lack of true religion,” said the doctor; “the encroachment of money-getting, which is, in other words, egotism materialized. Money was formerly not the whole of life; other forms of superiority were admitted—nobility, genius, great services done to the State—but to-day law itself makes money the one standard; it has made it the essential basis of political capacity! Certain magistrates are not eligible! Jean-Jacques Rousseau would not be eligible. The perpetual dividing up of patrimonies obliges every man to look out for his own interests from the age of twenty-one. And so, between the necessity of making a fortune and the demoralization of trickery and intrigue the barriers are broken down; for the religious sentiment is lacking in France, in spite of the praiseworthy efforts of those who are trying to bring about a Catholic restoration. That is the opinion of those who, like me, view society in its inward parts.”

“You have little pleasure in life,” said Hortense.

“The true physician,” said Bianchon, “has a passion for science. He is borne up by that emotion as much as he is by the conviction of his social usefulness. Why, at this very moment I am all alive with scientific joy, and many persons would take me for a heartless fellow. To-morrow I shall announce a great discovery before the Academy of Medicine—a lost disease, of which I have two cases. It is incurable; science is powerless against it, at least in temperate climates; it can be cured, they say, in the Indies. It

existed in Europe in the middle ages. What an inspiring struggle between our noble profession and such a malady! For the last ten days I have thought incessantly of my patients; there are two—a husband and wife. By the bye, madame,” he added, turning to Célestine, “can they be relations of yours? Are you not the daughter of Monsieur Crevel?”

“My father!” exclaimed Célestine. “Does your patient live on the rue Barbet-de-Jouy?”

“Yes, he does,” answered Bianchon.

“And the disease is fatal?” said Victorin, horror-stricken.

“I must go to my father,” cried Célestine, rising.

“I positively forbid it, madame,” said Bianchon, quietly, “the disease is contagious.”

“You can do so if you like, monsieur,” said the young woman, firmly; “but do you think that the duty of a daughter is less imperative than that of a physician?”

“Madame, a physician knows how to protect himself; and your unreflecting self-devotion warns me that you have not my prudence.”

Célestine rose and went up to her own rooms, where she dressed to go out.

“Monsieur,” said Victorin to Bianchon, “have you any hope of saving Monsieur and Madame Crevel?”

“I hope it without expecting it,” replied Bianchon. “The case is inexplicable to me. The disease is peculiar to negroes and to those American nations whose cuticle differs from that of the white races. Now I cannot trace any connection between Monsieur and Madame Crevel and the blacks, or the copper-colored or half-breed races. The disease, though a very interesting one for us, is horrifying for all who come near it. The poor woman, they say, was pretty; to-day she is something too frightful to behold—if indeed she is a thing at all! Her teeth and her hair have fallen out; she looks like a leper; her hands are horrible, swollen and covered with greenish pustules, the nails fall out and remain in the holes which she scratches in her flesh—indeed all the extremities are being destroyed by the ichor which is eating into them. Poor woman! she has a horror of herself.”

“But what caused it?” said Hulot.

“Ah!” said Bianchon, “the cause is apparently the decomposition of the blood, which is going on with frightful rapidity. My hope is to attack the disease in the blood itself, which I have had analyzed, and I am now going home to learn the result from my friend Professor Duval, the famous chemist; I shall probably try one of those heroic measures which we doctors sometimes play against death.”

“The finger of God is in it!” said the baroness, in a voice of awful emotion. “Though that woman has caused us evils which

have made me call down the divine justice on her head, yet I pray to God you may succeed in saving her.”

Victorin Hulot was scarcely master of himself; he looked at his mother, his sister and the doctor alternately, trembling lest they should read his secret thoughts. He felt like an assassin. Hortense, for her part, thought God was just. Célestine returned dressed to go out, and requested her husband to accompany her.

“If you insist on going, madame, and you too, monsieur, remember to keep one foot away from the beds; that is the only precaution necessary. Neither you nor your wife must touch the patients. You must not leave your wife a moment, Monsieur Hulot, lest she transgress this rule.”

Adeline and Hortense, left alone, went up to sit with Lisbeth. Madame Steinbock’s hatred against Valérie was so great that she could not restrain an explosion of it.

“Cousin Bette, my mother and I are avenged,” she cried. “That venomous creature is stung at last; she is a heap of decomposition.”

“Hortense,” said Madame Hulot, “you are not a Christian woman. You ought to pray God to inspire that unhappy woman with repentance.”

“What are you talking about?” cried Bette, rising from her chair. “Are you speaking of Valérie?”

“Yes,” answered Hortense, “the doctors give her up; she is dying of a horrible disease, the very description of which would make you shudder.”

Bette’s teeth chattered; a cold sweat came out upon her, a terrible convulsion of her whole being proved the depth of her feeling for Valérie.

“I must go to her,” she said.

“But the doctor forbade your going out.”

“No matter; I shall go. Poor Crevel! what a state he must be in, for he loved his wife.”

“He is dying too,” said Madame Steinbock. “Ah, the devil has laid hands on all our enemies!”

“My daughter, they are in God’s hands.”

Lisbeth dressed herself, putting on the famous yellow cashmere, a black velvet bonnet, and laced boots; then, regardless of her cousin’s remonstrances, she departed as though driven by some despotic power. Reaching the rue Barbet not long after Monsieur and Madame Hulot, she found seven doctors, called together by Bianchon to view the extraordinary and unique case. Bianchon himself came in shortly after. These gentlemen, standing about the salon, were discussing the disease eagerly; first one and then another would go into Valérie’s bedroom or into Crevel’s to observe some point and then return with an argument based on that hasty examination.

Three opinions were held by these princes of science. One physician alone denied the existence of the malady of the middle-ages, and declared the case was one of simple poisoning from private motives. Three others considered it a decomposition of the lymph and other fluids of the system. The third opinion, held by Bianchon and the rest of the doctors, maintained that the disease was caused by a vitiation of the blood, corrupted by some unknown deadly element. Bianchon brought with him the results of Professor Duval's analysis of the blood. The proposed method of cure, though desperate and altogether empirical, depended on the present discussion of the question.

Lisbeth stood petrified three feet from the bed where Valérie lay dying when she saw the vicar of St. Thomas Aquinas beside the pillow of her friend, and a sister of charity taking care of her. Religion found a soul to save in that mass of corruption, where, of the five human senses, sight alone seemed all that was left. A sister of charity, who was found willing to nurse the dying woman, stood at a little distance. The Catholic Church, that divine body, ever guided by the inspiration of sacrifice in all things, was there to help the wicked, and now loathsome creature, with its double work for mind and body, its infinite compassion, and its treasures of mercy inexhaustible.

The servants, horror-stricken, and believing that their masters were justly punished, thought only of themselves, and refused to enter the sick-rooms. The stench was so great that, in spite of the open windows and the powerful perfumes strewn about, no one could remain long near Valérie. Religion alone watched over her. Could a woman with a mind so superior as hers refrain from asking herself what interest kept those representatives of the Church beside her? No; and she therefore gave heed to the words of the priest. Repentance entered and filled that corrupted soul, even as corruption ravaged and destroyed the beauty of its body. The delicate Valérie had offered less resistance to the fell disease than Crevel, and she was about to die before him, having, moreover, been the first attacked.

"If I had not been ill, my Valérie, I should have been here to nurse you," said Lisbeth at last, after exchanging a look with the sunken eyes of her friend.

"It is fifteen or twenty days since I left my room, but hearing to-day from the doctor of your illness, I have come at once."

"Poor Lisbeth! you love me still. I know it," said Valérie. "Listen, dearest; I have but a day or two to think—I cannot say to live. You see me; I have no body left. I am a mass of filth—I have what I deserve. Oh, would that I could now undo the evil I have done, that I might find mercy—"

"Oh," said Lisbeth, "if you talk like that, you are dead indeed."

“Do not hinder this woman from repentance,” said the priest; “leave her to Christian thoughts.”

“Nothing left of her!” muttered Lisbeth, horror-stricken—“not a feature; the mind gone too! Oh, it is frightful!”

“You do not know,” said Valérie, “what it is to die—to be forced to think of the day after death, of what there must be in the coffin: worms for the body, but what for the soul? Ah, Lisbeth, I am conscious there is another life, and the terror of it keeps me from feeling the pains of my rotting flesh!—I, who mimicked a good woman, and told Crevel, laughing, that God’s vengeance had many ways of punishment—ah, I was a prophet! Do not trifle with sacred things, Lisbeth! If you love me, repent, repent!”

“I!” said Bette; “I have seen vengeance everywhere in nature: the insects perish to satisfy their need of vengeance when they are attacked! And these gentlemen,” she said, pointing to the priest, “tell us that God is revengeful, and that his vengeance lasts through all eternity—”

The priest turned and looked gently at her. “You are an atheist, madame,” he said.

“But see, Lisbeth, what I have come to,” said Valérie.

“How did you get that gangrene?” asked Bette, doggedly maintaining her peasant scepticism.

“Henri sent me a note which left no doubt upon my fate. He has killed me. To die just as I meant to live decently—and to die an object of horror!—Lisbeth, give up all thoughts of vengeance; be good to that family; I have left them, in my will, all that the law allows me to dispose of. Lisbeth, you are the only being who does not rush away from me in horror, and yet I pray you go, go—leave me! I have so little time to give myself to God!—”

“She’s delirious,” thought Lisbeth, as she left the room.

The strongest known sentiment, the friendship of a woman for a woman, was not capable of the heroic constancy of the Church. Lisbeth, suffocated by miasmatic odors, left the chamber. She found the doctors still disputing; but Bianchon’s opinion was gaining ground, until finally no opposition was made to his proposed heroic measures.

“At any rate, there will be a magnificent *post-mortem*,” said one of the opponents; “we shall have two subjects and be able to establish comparisons.”

Lisbeth accompanied Bianchon as he returned to Valérie’s chamber and leaned over the bed, apparently not perceiving the effluvium that proceeded from her.

“Madame,” he said, “we are going to try a powerful remedy which may possibly save you.”

“If you save me,” she said, “shall I be as beautiful as before?”

“Perhaps,” said the cautious doctor.

"I know what your *perhaps* means!" said Valérie; "I shall be like those women who fall into the fire. No, leave me to the Church! I can please none but God. Let me strive to make my peace with him—it is my last seduction."

"Ah, now I recognize my Valérie!" cried Lisbeth, weeping.

She felt herself obliged to go into Crevel's bedroom, where she found Victorin and his wife sitting three feet from the bed of the plague-stricken man.

"Lisbeth," he cried when he saw her, "they are hiding my wife's condition from me; you have seen her, how is she?"

"She is better; she says she is saved," answered Lisbeth, allowing herself the play on words to ease Crevel's mind.

"Ah, good!" said the mayor; "I have been terribly anxious. If I were to lose her what would become of me? My children, believe me, on my word, I adore that woman."

Crevel tried to assume his attitude, sitting up in bed.

"Oh, papa!" said Célestine, "if you were only well again I would receive my step-mother; I vow it."

"Poor little Célestine!" said Crevel, "come and kiss me."

Victorin caught his wife as she was about to spring forward.

"You are not aware, monsieur," he said, gently, "that your disease is contagious."

"True," said Crevel, "and the doctors are congratulating themselves on finding a sort of middle-age black, death in it, which they have long been hunting up. Queer, isn't it?"

"Papa," said Célestine, "be brave, and you may still conquer the disease."

"Oh! don't be uneasy, my dear; death thinks twice before it strikes a mayor of Paris," he said, with comical ease of manner. "Besides, if my arrondissement is so unfortunate as to lose a man whom it has twice honored with its suffrages (hein! that's a well-turned phrase, isn't it?) I shall know how to pack my trunk. I'm an old traveller, in the habit of starting off on journeys. Ha! my children, I'm a free thinker, I always was."

"Papa, promise me you will let the Church minister at your bedside."

"Never!" replied Crevel. "I have sucked the breasts of the Revolution; my mind is not the equal of Baron d'Holbach's but I have his strength of character. Heavens and earth! I'm more than ever regency, mousquetaire. Abbè Dubois, and Richelieu! My poor wife, who is out of her head, has just sent me a man in a cassock—to me, the admirer of Beranger, the friend of Lisette, the child of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques! Dr. Bianchon said, to test me and see if the fever were going down, 'Have you seen a priest?' Well, how do you think I answered? I imitated the great Montesquieu. Yes, I looked at the doctor—there, like that [putting himself

at a three-quarter profile, as in his picture, and stretching forth his hand authoritatively]—and then I said:—

‘The helot came;
He showed his order, and he left with shame.’

Monsieur le president de Montesquieu retained all his wit on his death-bed. I’m fond of that passage—ha, ‘passage’—a pun! the passage-Montesquieu.”

Victorin Hulot gazed at his father-in-law, asking himself sadly whether ignorance and vanity did not possess as great a force as true grandeur of soul. The causes which pull the hidden wires of the soul seem to have no connection whatever with results. Can it be that the strength of will displayed by a great criminal is the same as that of which a Champcenetz was justly proud on his way to the scaffold?

By the end of the week Madame Crevel was in her grave, after unheard-of sufferings, and Crevel followed his wife within two days. According to the terms of the marriage contract Crevel inherited his wife’s property, having survived her.

The day after their funeral Victorin Hulot received a second visit from the old monk. The mendicant silently held out his hand, and silently Hulot placed within it eighty bank-bills of one thousand francs each, exactly the sum which was found in Crevel’s desk. Madame Hulot, junior, inherited the estate of Presles and thirty thousand francs a year. Madame Crevel had bequeathed three hundred thousand francs to Baron Hulot. The scrofulous Stanislas was to receive, on coming of age, the Crevel mansion and an income of twenty-four thousand francs.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL FATHER.

Among the numerous and sublime associations instituted by the Catholic charity of Paris is one founded by Madame de la Chanterie, the object of which is to marry legally and ecclesiastically persons of the working classes who live together illegitimately. Legislators who hold by the statistics of registration, the sovereign bourgeoisie which clings to its notarial fees, feign to ignore that three fourths of the working-people cannot pay fifteen francs for a marriage contract. Notaries are behind lawyers on this point. The Parisian lawyers, a body of men who are a good deal calumniated, bring suits gratuitously for the very poor, whereas notaries have never been willing to draw a marriage contract gratis for such persons. As to the public Treasury, one would have to shake the whole machine of government to make it relax its system in this matter. Registration is deaf and dumb. The Church, on its side, claims certain rights over marriage. The Church in France is extremely—fiscal; in the house of God it carries on a petty traffic in little benches and chairs which disgusts foreigners, though it cannot have forgotten the Saviour's anger when he drove the money-changers from the Temple. However, if the church is reluctant to yield its sordid rights, we must remember that those rights (called parish property) are to-day one of its means of living, and therefore the meanness of the Church is the fault of the State. This combination of claims—in days when people are thinking far too much of the woes of the negro and of the prisoners in jail to consider the sufferings of the worthy poor—results in the fact that a vast number of honest persons are living in a state of concubinage solely for lack of thirty francs, the lowest price at which a notary, the registration office, the mayor and the clergy can marry two Parisians. Madame de la Chanterie's institution, founded for the purpose of putting such poor households back into the paths of religion and virtue, searches out such couples, relieves their necessities in the first place, and then restores them to their lawful condition as citizens.

When Madame Hulot had entirely recovered her health she went back to her charitable occupations; and about that time the excellent Madame de la Chanterie asked her to add this legalization of natural marriage to the other good works for which she was an agent.

One of Adeline's first efforts in this line was in the dangerous quarter known formerly as "Little Poland," inclosed by the rue du Rocher, the rue de la Pépinière, and the rue Méroménil. It forms a sort of annex to the faubourg Saint-Marceau. In order to describe this neighborhood it is only necessary to say that the own-

ers of certain houses inhabited by workmen who do no work, by roughs, and seditious talkers, by beggars plying dangerous trades, are afraid to insist on their rents, and seldom find sheriff's officers who are willing to eject those who do not pay. At the present moment speculation in real estate, which tends toward changing the whole face of Paris in this quarter and to build up the space which separates the rue d'Amsterdam from the rue de la Faubourg-du-Roule, will doubtless improve the character of the inhabitants, and rid the neighborhood of its sinister population and its low haunts, where the police never set foot unless in the pursuit of criminals.

In June, 1844, the appearance of the place Delaborde and its surroundings was far from reassuring. If an elegant young gentleman had chanced to turn from the rue de la Pépinière into one of these horrible thoroughfares he would have been astonished at the squalid Bohemia lying cheek by jowl with the aristocratic street. In such quarters, where ignorance and abject poverty have reached their lowest depth, the street letter-writer of Paris still flourishes. Wherever you see the two words "Public Writer," written in a large, flowing hand on a sheet of white paper affixed to the filthy window of some ground-floor room, you may confidently believe that the neighborhood is thronged with illiterate persons, and, as a natural result, with vices, crimes, and criminals. Ignorance is the mother of crime, and crime is, above all, a lack of reason.

Now during Madame Hulot's illness this quarter, to which she had been a second Providence, acquired the services of a public writer, whose sign was hung up in the passage du Soleil—a name which presents an antithesis not uncommon in the nomenclatures of Paris; for this "passage of the sun" is sunless and doubly dark. This writer, thought to be a German, was named Vyder, and lived matrimonially with a young girl, of whom he was so jealous that he would only allow her to visit the family of a certain respectable chimneybuilder of the rue Saint-Lazare—Italians of course, like all others of that trade, who had lived many years in Paris. These worthy people had been saved from bankruptcy, which would have made them poor for life, by Madame Hulot, acting on behalf of one of her societies. In the course of a few months ease replaced distress, and religion entered minds which had long cursed fate with the ardor characteristic of the Italian nature. One of Madame Hulot's first visits was to this family. She was delighted with the sight that met her eyes at their establishment in the rue du Rocher. Above the busy warehouses and workrooms, where the apprentices and laborers—all Italians from the valley of Domodossola—were singing and whistling at their work, the family occupied a little apartment now abundantly supplied. Madame Hulot was welcomed like a vision of the Blessed Virgin. After a

quarter of an hour's talk (being obliged to wait for the husband to hear the exact state of affairs) Adeline began her pious search for persons living out of the pale of wedlock by inquiring if there were any such among the acquaintances of her Italian friends.

"Ah, my good lady, you who can save souls from hell," cried the Italian wife, "yes, there's a young girl living close by who might be dragged from perdition."

"Do you know her?" asked the baroness.

"She is the granddaughter of a former employer of my husband, named Judici, who came to France after the Revolution, in 1798. During the empire he was one of the best chimneybuilders in Paris, and he died in 1819, leaving a fine fortune to his son. But the son spent everything on bad women and finally married one of the slyest of them, by whom he had this poor little girl, who is about fifteen years old."

"What has happened to her?" said the baroness, struck with the resemblance in conduct between the father of the girl and her own husband.

"Well, madame. the child, named Atala, left her father and mother and came to live here with an old German, eighty years old at the least, named Vyder; he writes letters and does business for people who don't know how to read or write. They say the old scoundrel bought the girl of her mother for fifteen hundred francs, and it would be a good deed if you could get him to marry the little thing—he has but a short time to live, and I am told he is likely to come in for several thousand francs very soon. The child, who is a little angel, would be taken out of evil, and above all out of poverty, which is sure to corrupt her."

"Thank you for telling me of so good a thing to do," said Adeline, "but I must act cautiously. Who is the old man?"

"Well, he's quite a worthy old fellow, madame; he makes the child happy and has excellent good sense about her. He left the Judici neighborhood to protect her from her mother. The woman was jealous of her own daughter; and she meant to make a penny out of her beauty and set her up as a 'Mademoiselle.' Atala remembered us, so she advised 'monsieur' to settle in our neighborhood; and when the good man saw the kind of people we are he allowed the little one to come and see us. If you will get him to marry her, madame, you will do a good action. Once married, the little thing will be free of her mother, who watches her and would like to see her do better, either at the theatre or in the dreadful career she wants to start in."

"Why does not the old man marry her?"

"It wasn't necessary, madame," said the Italian. "Old Vyder is not an absolutely bad man; I think he is wise enough to want to stay master of the little thing; whereas if he marries her, he is

afraid, poor fellow! of all that hangs over the head of an old husband.”

“Can you send for the girl?” said the baroness; “I will see her here, and judge for myself if there is any way—”

The Italian signed to her eldest daughter, who ran out, and returned ten minutes later leading a young girl between fifteen and sixteen, of a beauty that was thoroughly Italian.

Mademoiselle Judici derived from her father that olive skin which is yellow by day and dazzling under the lamps at night, eyes of Eastern grandeur, shape, and brilliancy, lashes curling upward like little jet-black feathers, ebon hair, and the majestic carriage of the Lombard women, which makes a foreigner fancy, when he sees them for the first time, on a Sunday in Milan, that these daughters of the people are queens in their own right. Atala, told by the other girl that a great lady wanted to speak to her, had hastily put on a pretty silk dress, nice boots, and an elegant mantle. A cap with cherry-colored ribbons added to the effect of her head. The little thing stopped short in an attitude of naïve curiosity, examining the baroness out of the corner of her eyes, and greatly surprised by the nervous trembling of the lady’s head.

“What is your name, my child?”

“Atala, madame.”

“Can you read and write?”

“No, madame—but that’s no matter, because monsieur knows how—”

“Did your parents take you to church? Have you made your first communion? Do you know your catechism?”

“Madame, papa wanted me to do those things you mention, but mamma would not let me.”

“Your mother would not let you?” exclaimed the baroness; “was she unkind to you?”

“She was always beating me. I don’t know why, but my father and mother were continually quarrelling about me.”

“Did no one ever tell you about God?” said the baroness.

The child opened her eyes wide.

“Papa and mamma used to say, ‘In the name of God!’ ‘The curse of God!’” she said, artlessly.

“Have you never seen a church? Did it never occur to you to go inside of one?”

“Church? Ah, yes, Notre-Dame, the Pantheon; I have seen them at a distance when papa took me to Paris, but that was very seldom. There were no churches in the faubourg.”

“What faubourg did you live in?”

“The faubourg.”

“Yes, but what faubourg?”

“Why, the rue de Charonne, madame.”

The inhabitants of the faubourg Saint-Antoine never call that famous quarter anything but “the Faubourg.” To them it is the faubourg *par excellence*, the sovereign faubourg; manufacturers themselves accept the word as meaning specially the faubourg Saint-Antoine.

“Did no one ever explain to you what is good and what is evil?”

“Mamma whipped me if I did things she didn’t like.”

“But did you not know you did wrong when you left your father and mother and went to live with an old man?”

Atala Judici looked at the baroness grandly, and said nothing.

“The girl is an absolute barbarian,” thought Adeline.

“Ah! madame, there are many like her,” said the Italian wife who stood by.

“But she is ignorant of everything, even sin! Good God! Why don’t you answer me?” continued Madame Hulot, trying to take Atala by the hand.

The child, displeased, drew back.

“You are an old fool!” she said. “my father and my mother went hungry a week. My mother wanted to make something bad of me, and my father beat me and called me a thief. Just then Monsieur Vyder came and paid my father’s and my mother’s debts and gave them money—oh, a whole bagful!—and he carried me away, and my poor papa cried; but he knew we had to say good-by. Well, do you call that wrong?” she demanded.

“Do you love this Monsieur Vyder?”

“Do I love him?” said the child, “I should think so, madame! He tells me such beautiful stories at night. And he has given me pretty dresses and linen and a shawl. I’m tricked out like a princess, I can tell you. I never wear wooden shoes now! And besides, I don’t know what it is to go hungry. I get something better than potatoes to eat. He brings me sugar-plums, burnt almonds! Oh, isn’t chocolate good? I’d do anything he tells me for a bag of chocolate. And my dear old papa Vyder is so kind; he takes such care of me, he does just what one would think my mother might have done. He is going to get an old servant-woman to help me, for he says I mustn’t spoil my hands cooking. For the last month he has earned a good bit of money. He brings me three francs every night—which I put away in a moneybox. The only trouble is he doesn’t like me to go out—except to come here. But he’s a love of a man, and he does what he likes with me. He calls me his ‘little kitten’—my mother used to call me a ‘cursed little thief,’ a ‘viper,’ and I don’t know what all.”

“Well, then, my child, why should not Monsieur Vyder be your husband?”

“So he is, madame,” said the girl, looking straight at the baroness, proudly, without blushing, her brow calm and her eyes

clear. "He told me I was his little wife; but I shouldn't like to be a man's wife if it wasn't for the sugar-plums."

"Good God!" said the baroness, in a low voice; "what a monster he must be to take advantage of such perfect and holy innocence! To bring the child back to the paths of decency ought to redeem many faults. I knew what I was doing," she murmured, thinking of the scene with Crevel; "but she is ignorant of all."

"Do you know Monsieur Samanon?" asked little Atala, with a coaxing air.

"No, my child; why do you ask?"

"Really and truly?" said the girl, shyly.

"Don't be afraid of madame, Atala," said the Italian woman. "She is an angel."

"Well, my dear old man is afraid Samanon may find him. He has to hide; and I do wish he could be free."

"Why?"

"Oh, bless you! he'd take me to Bobino—perhaps to the Ambigu."

"You delightful little creature!" said the baroness, kissing the child.

"Are you rich?" asked Atala, playing with Madame Hulot's sleeves.

"Yes and no," replied the baroness. "I am rich for good little girls like you, when they are willing to be taught their Christian duties by a priest, and to walk in the right way."

"What way?" said Atala. "I walk on my two legs."

She looked slyly at the baroness and laughed.

"Look at madame, here," said the baroness, pointing to the Italian wife; "she is happy in her home; but you are only married, like the animals, for a time."

"I!" replied Atala; "but if you will give me what père Vyder gives me I should be glad not to be married at all. It is a torment—that's what it is."

"When once a woman has married a man as you have married Monsieur Vyder," said the baroness, "virtue requires her to be faithful to him."

"Till he dies?" said Atala, with a shrewd look. "Then I sha'n't have to wait long. If you only knew how père Vyder coughs and wheezes! Hu, hu!" And she imitated the old man.

"Virtue and morality require," said the baroness, "that the Church, which is the representative of God on earth, shall consecrate your marriage. See madame here; she was married legitimately."

"Would it be more amusing?" asked the child.

"You would be happier," said the baroness; "no one could then blame you. You would please God. Ask madame if she was married without the sacrament of marriage."

Atala looked at her friend.

“I don’t see that she is any better than I. I’m the prettiest.”

“Yes, but I am an honest woman, and folks can give you a bad name,” said the Italian.

“How can you expect God to protect you if you trample under foot all laws, both human and divine?” said the baroness. “Don’t you know that God keeps a paradise for those who live according to his will?”

“What is there in paradise—any theatres?”

“Paradise,” said the baroness, “means all the happiness you can possibly imagine. It is filled with angels with shining wings. God is there in all his glory; we share his power, we are happy to all eternity.”

Atala Judici listened to the baroness as she might have listened to music. Seeing that she was totally unable to understand her, Adeline thought she had better take the surer means of appealing to the old man.

“Go home now, my dear little girl,” she said, “and I will follow, and talk with Monsieur Vyder. Is he a Frenchman?”

“He is an Alsatian, madame. He is going to be very rich some day. If you could only pay what he owes to that villain Samanon he would return you the money; he will have six thousand francs a year in a few months, so he says, and then we are going to live in the country, ever so far away, down in the Vosges.”

The word Vosges sent the baroness into a passing reverie; her mind reverted to her native village; but she was presently roused by the entrance of the chimney-builder himself, who came to give her the particulars of his prosperity.

“In another year, madame,” he said, ending his tale, “I shall be able to pay back the loan you made me. I call it the money of the good God. It is that of the poor and the unfortunate. If I make a fortune you shall put your hand in my purse. I will return to others, through you, the benefits you have given to us.”

“Just now,” said the baroness, smiling, “I will not ask you for money, but for your help in a good work. I have just been talking with that little Judici who lives with an old man. I want them to be married legally, and by the Church as well.”

“Ah, old Vyder! He’s a worthy fellow, and knows what he is about. He has made friends already through the neighborhood, though he has been here only two months. He is now making out my bills. Ah, how he loves Napoléon! He was one of the old colonels; he’s decorated, but he never wears the cross. He says he’s waiting till he can show his face in the world. He has debts, poor man! I think myself he is hiding for fear of arrest.”

“Tell him I will pay his debts if he will marry the child.”

“Then it will be soon done. Come, madame, suppose we go and see him. He lives close by, in the passage du Soleil.”

The Italian showed Madame Hulot the way.

The passage du Soleil is really the beginning of the rue de la Pépinière, and it opens on the rue du Rocher. About the middle of this recently created passage (the rental of its little shops being very low indeed) the baroness observed in the upper panes of a window, curtained from inquisitive eyes by a drapery of old green silk, the words, "Public Writer," and on the panel of the door a further notice: "Business Office. Here petitions are drawn up, bills made out, copying done, etc. Discretion. Celerity."

The interior was something like those waiting-rooms at the omnibus-stations where people congregate to make connections. A staircase led up to an apartment above which belonged to the shop or office. The baroness noticed a bureau in whitewood, now blackened, a few engravings, and a cheap armchair. A man's cap and a green shade for the eyes with a steel spring, both extremely dirty, showed either certain precautions taken to conceal his identity or a failure of eyesight on the part of the old man.

"He is upstairs," said the Italian. "I'll go up and call him."

The baroness lowered her veil and sat down. A heavy step shook the little wooden staircase, and Adeline could not restrain a shriek when she saw her husband in a gray knitted jacket, a pair of old woollen trousers, and slippers.

"What can I do for you, madame?" said the baron, gallantly. Adeline rose, seized him, and said in a voice breathless with emotion:—

"At last I have found you!"

"Adeline!" cried the baron, stupefied, but turning to fasten the street door. "Joseph!" he cried to the Italian, "go out the back way."

"My friend," said his wife, forgetting everything in the excess of her joy; "you can come back to the bosom of your family; we are rich! Your son has a hundred and sixty thousand francs a year; your debts are all paid, your pension is free, and you have fifteen thousand francs waiting to be drawn on the certificate of your existence. Valérie is dead; she bequeathed to you a large sum of money. Your past is forgotten; don't be afraid! you can safely re-enter life. Come back, and our happiness will be complete. For three years I have searched all Paris for you; I knew I should find you. Your room is ready to receive you. Oh, come, come away from this dreadful place!"

"Yes, willingly," said the baron, half-bewildered; "but can I take the little one with me?"

"Hector, you must give her up! make that sacrifice to your Adeline! I promise to give the child a dowry, to have her educated, to marry her well. It shall never be said that any one of those who have made you happy has suffered for it, or fallen into disgrace or vice."

“So it was you,” said the baron, smiling, “who came to make me marry her?— Wait here a few minutes; I have suitable clothes in a trunk upstairs; I’ll go and put them on.”

When Adeline was alone she looked again round the horrible den and burst into tears. “He lived here!” she exclaimed, “while we were in luxury! Poor man, how bitterly he is punished—he who was elegance itself!”

The Italian came back at this moment and the baroness sent him for a carriage. When the man returned Adeline begged him to take the little Atala into his family, and to carry her away at once.

“Tell her,” she said, “that if she will put herself under the instruction of the curé of the Madeleine, I will give her thirty thousand francs on the day she makes her first communion, and I will find her a good husband, some fine young man.”

“My eldest son, madame! He is twenty-two years old, and he adores the child.”

The baron came down at this moment; his eyes were wet.

“You force me,” he whispered to his wife, “to leave the only creature I have ever known whose love could be compared with yours! The poor little girl is dissolved in tears—I cannot abandon her in this way.”

“Don’t fear, Hector; she is going among kind and worthy people; I will answer for her good conduct.”

“Ah! then I am ready to follow you,” said the baron, taking his wife to the carriage.

Hector, once more Baron Hulot d’Ervy, had donned trousers and frock coat of blue cloth, a white waistcoat, black cravat, and a pair of gloves. Just as the baroness seated herself in the carriage Atala slipped in after her like a lizard.

“Ah, madame,” she said, “let me go with you. I’ll be very obedient; I’ll do just what you tell me; but don’t part me from père Vyder, who has been so good to me; who gives me such pretty things—I shall be whipped at home.”

“No, Atala,” said the baron; “this is my wife, and we must part.”

“She? that old woman, who shakes like a leaf! Oh, see her head!”

And she mimicked Madame Hulot’s infirmity. The Italian was standing by the door of the carriage and the baroness signed to him.

“Take her away,” she said.

The man took Atala in his arms and carried her off by force.

“Thank you for making me that sacrifice, dear friend,” said Adeline, taking the baron’s hand and pressing it with almost delirious joy. “How changed you are! How you must have

suffered! What a surprise for your children; how happy we shall be!"

Adeline talked, as lovers talk who meet after a long absence, of a hundred things in a minute. When they reached the rue Louise-Grand she found the following letter:—

MADAME LA BARONNE,—Monsieur d'Ervy lived a month in the rue de Charonne, under the name of Thorec, anagram of Hector. He is now in the passage du Soleil, under the name of Vyder. He calls himself an Alsatian, does writing, and lives with a young girl named Atala Judici. Be cautious, madame, for others are actively in search of Monsieur le baron—for what purpose I do not know.

The actress has kept her word, and remains as ever, Madame la baronne,
Your humble servant, J. M.

The baron's return excited such family joy that he gave himself up to the delights of his home. He forgot his little Atala, for one of the effects of indulged passion was to make his feelings as volatile as those of a child. The satisfaction of the family was however lessened by the great physical change which had come over him. He had left them a hale old man; he returned almost a centenarian, broken, bent, and debased in countenance. At their first dinner, with luxuries improvised by Célestine which reminded him of Josépha's feasts, he whispered to Adeline:—

"You have killed the fatted calf for the prodigal father."

"Hush!" she said, "all is forgotten."

"Where is Lisbeth?" asked the baron, noticing the old maid's absence.

"Alas," said Hortense, "she is confined to her bed: she never leaves it, and I fear we are to lose her soon. She hopes to see you after dinner."

The next day, at sunrise, Victorin was informed by the porter that a body of the municipal guard had surrounded his whole property. They were in search of Hulot. The officer in charge followed the porter and presented documents by which it appeared that the baron owed notes for ten thousand francs to a usurer named Samanon, from whom he had probably received two or three thousand at the utmost. Victorin paid the notes and requested the officer to withdraw his men.

"Is that the whole?" he thought to himself, uneasily.

Lisbeth, unhappy enough already at the good fortune of the family, could not endure this additional happiness. She grew so rapidly worse that Bianchon announced she must die in a week—conquered at last in the long struggle where she had scored so many victories. She kept the secret of her hatred through the weary dying anguish of pulmonary consumption; and found supreme satisfaction in seeing Adeline, Hortense, Hulot, Victorin, Steinbock, Célestine, and the children, in tears around her bed,

considering her the angel of the family. Baron Hulot, restored by a good diet, began to look himself again; and Adeline was so peacefully happy that the nervous quiver of her head and hands diminished sensibly. "She will end by being happy," thought Lisbeth the evening before her death, as she noticed the veneration which the baron showed for his wife, whose sufferings had been told to him by Hortense and by Victorin. The sight hastened Bette's end; and her coffin was followed by the whole family in tears.

The baron and baroness Hulot, who had now reached an age when life needs absolute repose, gave up their handsome apartments on the first floor to the Comte and Comtesse Steinbock, and removed to the floor above. The baron, through the influence of his son, obtained a situation on a railway at the beginning of the year 1845, with a salary of six thousand francs; this with his pension and the interest of the money left him by Madame Crevel gave him an income of twenty-four thousand francs. Hortense had been separated from her husband as to property during the three years' quarrel, and Victorin no longer hesitated to make over to her the two hundred thousand francs entrusted to him by the Prince de Wissembourg; he gave her, moreover, from his own funds an annuity of twelve thousand francs. Wenceslas, as the husband of a rich woman, was never unfaithful to her again, but he idled and lounged, always unable to settle to any work, however unimportant it might be. Once more an artist *in partibus*, he had great success in society and was much consulted by amateurs. He came to be thought a past-master of criticism, like other incapables who fall below their natural promise.

Each of the three households was thus independent in means, though they continued to live together as one family. Learning wisdom from her misfortunes, the baroness allowed her son to manage her money matters, and confined the baron to his own income, trusting that its limitations might keep him from falling back into his old errors. But, by an unexpected happiness, on which neither the mother nor the son had really counted, the baron appeared to have renounced the fair sex. This tranquility, which might be attributed to his age, had so far reassured his family that they enjoyed without a sense of distrust the delightful amiability and charming domestic manners of the old baron. Full of little attentions to his wife and children, he accompanied them to the theatre and reappeared with them in society; and he did the honors of his son's salon with a grace that was all his own. In short, the prodigal father, restored to the bosom of his family, was a constant satisfaction to them. He was a charming old man, completely used up, but still lively and witty, with no remains of his vice except that part of it which can be turned into a social

virtue. The whole family lived therefore in complete security. Mother and children praised the father to the skies—forgetting the death of the two uncles.

Madame Victorin was a good housekeeper, made so in part by cousin Bette's instructions, and the necessities of her great household compelled her to hire a man-cook. The man-cook required a scullion. Such girls are very ambitious in these days; their object is to get the secrets of the *chef*, and to be cooks themselves as soon as they know how to concoct a sauce. The consequence is that scullions are a class of servants who are continually changing. At the beginning of December, 1845, Célestine engaged a stout Norman woman from Isigny with a short waist, red arms, and a common face; stupid, moreover, as an owl, and who could with difficulty be persuaded to abandon the classic cotton caps which the women of lower Normandy inherit. This girl, with the figure of a wet-nurse, threatened to burst the calico gown which enclosed her bust. Her ruddy face really looked as if cut in stone, so firm were its yellowish outlines. Naturally no one in the family took any notice of the arrival of this girl, who was named Agatha, one of the many whom the provinces send daily to Paris. Agatha presented no temptations to the cook, for she was vulgar in language, having lived among carters and served in country taverns; instead, therefore, of making a conquest of the *chef* and getting out of him the secrets of his fine dishes, she was merely an object of his contempt. The cook was courting Louise, Madame Steinbock's maid. Agatha considered herself ill-treated; she was sent out on errands on any excuse or no excuse, when the *chef* was finishing a dish or perfecting a sauce. "I've no chance," she said to herself, "and I'll go somewhere else." Nevertheless she stayed.

One night Adeline, wakened by an unusual noise, missed Hector from the adjoining bed; she waited an hour, expecting his return. Terrified, fancying some catastrophe, paralysis or apoplexy. She went up to the attic floor to call the servants, and was attracted to Agatha's room by a bright light and a murmur of voices. Suddenly she stopped short, horror-stricken on hearing the baron's voice. Seduced by the woman's charms, he was saying, in answer to her shrewd resistance: "My wife hasn't long to live; and I will marry you." Adeline uttered a cry, dropped her candlestick, and fled downstairs.

Three days later, after receiving the last sacraments, Madame Hulot lay dying, surrounded by her family in tears. A moment before she expired she took her husband's hand, pressed it, and whispered, "Friend, my life is all that is left me to give; you are now free; you can take another wife."

The survivors saw, what is rare indeed, two tears issuing from the eyes of a corpse. The ferocity of vice had worn out the

patience of an angel, from whose lips, on the borders of eternity, came the sole word of reproach she had ever uttered.

Baron Hulot left Paris three days after his wife's funeral. Eleven months later Victorin heard indirectly of his father's marriage with Mademoiselle Agatha Piquetard, which took place at Isigny on the 1st of February, 1846.

"Parents can oppose their children's marriage, but children cannot prevent the follies of their childish parents," said Hulot, junior, to his friend Popinot, the second son of the minister of Commerce, who talked to him about the marriage.