

without unexpected interruptions. I have

weighed all the chances, calculated the time required for all the forms; something must have happened.

And then he walked rapidly to and fro, and pressed his burning forehead against the fence. Had Valentine fainted? or had she been discovered and stopped in her flight? These were the only obstacles which appeared possible to the young man.

The idea that her strength had failed her in attempting to escape, and that she had fainted in one of the paths, was the one that most impressed itself upon his mind. In that case, said he, I should lose her, and by my own fault. He dwelt on this idea for a moment, then it appeared reality. He even thought he could perceive something on the ground at a distance; he ventured to call, and it seemed to him that the wind wafted back an almost inarticulate sigh.

At last the half-hour struck. It was impossible to wait longer, his temples throbbed violently, his eyes were growing dim; he passed one leg over the wall, and in a moment leaped down on the other side. He was on Villeforts premises"had arrived there by scaling the wall. What might be the consequences? However, he had not ventured thus far to draw back. He followed a short distance close under the wall, then crossed a path, hid entered a clump of trees. In a moment he had passed through them, and could see the house distinctly.

30341m

Then Morrel saw that he had been right in believing that the house was not illuminated. Instead of lights at every window, as is customary on days of ceremony, he saw only a gray mass, which was veiled also by a cloud, which at that moment obscured the moons feeble light. A light moved rapidly from time to time past three windows of the second floor. These three windows were in Madame de Saint-MÃ©rans room. Another remained motionless behind some red curtains which were in Madame de Villeforts bedroom. Morrel guessed all this. So many times, in order to follow Valentine in thought at every hour in the day, had he made her describe the whole house, that without having seen it he knew it all.

This darkness and silence alarmed Morrel still more than Valentines absence had done. Almost mad with grief, and determined to venture everything in order to see Valentine once more, and be certain of the misfortune he feared, Morrel gained the edge of the clump of trees, and was going to pass as quickly as possible through the flower-garden, when the sound of a voice, still at some distance, but which was borne upon the wind, reached him. At this sound, as he was already partially exposed to view, he stepped back and concealed himself completely, remaining perfectly motionless.

He had formed his resolution. If it was Valentine alone, he would speak as she passed; if she was accompanied, and he could not speak, still he should see her, and know that she was safe; if they were strangers, he would listen to their conversation, and might understand something of this hitherto incomprehensible mystery.

The moon had just then escaped from behind the cloud which had concealed it, and Morrel saw Villefort come out upon the steps, followed by a gentleman in black. They descended, and advanced towards the clump of trees, and Morrel soon recognized the other gentleman as Doctor dAvrigny.

30339m

The young man, seeing them approach, drew back mechanically, until he found himself stopped by a sycamore-tree in the centre of the clump; there he was compelled to remain. Soon the two gentlemen stopped also. Ah, my dear doctor, said the procureur, Heaven declares itself against my house! What a dreadful death"what a blow! Seek not to console me; alas, nothing can alleviate so great a sorrow"the wound is too deep and too fresh! Dead, dead!

The cold sweat sprang to the young mans brow, and his teeth chattered. Who could be dead in that house, which Villefort himself had called

accursed?

My dear M. de Villefort, replied the doctor, with a tone which redoubled the terror of the young man, I have not led you here to console you; on the contrary""

What can you mean? asked the procureur, alarmed.

I mean that behind the misfortune which has just happened to you, there is another, perhaps, still greater.

Can it be possible? murmured Villefort, clasping his hands. What are you going to tell me?

Are we quite alone, my friend?

Yes, quite; but why all these precautions?

Because I have a terrible secret to communicate to you, said the doctor. Let us sit down.

Villefort fell, rather than seated himself. The doctor stood before him, with one hand placed on his shoulder. Morrel, horrified, supported his head with one hand, and with the other pressed his heart, lest its beatings should be heard. Dead, dead! repeated he within himself; and he felt as if he were also dying.

Speak, doctor"I am listening, said Villefort; strike"I am prepared for everything!

Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran was, doubtless, advancing in years, but she enjoyed excellent health. Morrel began again to breathe freely, which he had not done during the last ten minutes.

Grief has consumed her, said Villefort"yes, grief, doctor! After living forty years with the marquis""

It is not grief, my dear Villefort, said the doctor; grief may kill, although it rarely does, and never in a day, never in an hour, never in ten minutes. Villefort answered nothing, he simply raised his head, which had been cast down before, and looked at the doctor with amazement.

Were you present during the last struggle? asked M. d'Avrigny.

I was, replied the procureur; you begged me not to leave.

Did you notice the symptoms of the disease to which Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran has fallen a victim?

I did. Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran had three successive attacks, at intervals of some minutes, each one more serious than the former. When you arrived, Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran had already been panting for breath some minutes; she then had a fit, which I took to be simply a nervous attack, and it was only when I saw her raise herself in the bed, and her limbs and neck appear stiffened, that I became really alarmed. Then I understood from your countenance there was more to fear than I had thought. This crisis past, I endeavored to catch your eye, but could not. You held her hand"you were feeling her pulse"and the second fit came on before you had turned towards me. This was more terrible than the first; the same nervous movements were repeated, and the mouth contracted and turned purple.

And at the third she expired.

At the end of the first attack I discovered symptoms of tetanus; you confirmed my opinion.

Yes, before others, replied the doctor; but now we are alone""

What are you going to say? Oh, spare me!

That the symptoms of tetanus and poisoning by vegetable substances are the same.

M. de Villefort started from his seat, then in a moment fell down again, silent and motionless. Morrel knew not if he were dreaming or awake.

Listen, said the doctor; I know the full importance of the statement I have just made, and the disposition of the man to whom I have made it.

Do you speak to me as a magistrate or as a friend? asked Villefort.

As a friend, and only as a friend, at this moment. The similarity in the symptoms of tetanus and poisoning by vegetable substances is so great, that were I obliged to affirm by oath what I have now stated, I

should hesitate; I therefore repeat to you, I speak not to a magistrate, but to a friend. And to that friend I say, "During the three-quarters of an hour that the struggle continued, I watched the convulsions and the death of Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran, and am thoroughly convinced that not only did her death proceed from poison, but I could also specify the poison.

Can it be possible?

The symptoms are marked, do you see?"sleep broken by nervous spasms, excitation of the brain, torpor of the nerve centres. Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran succumbed to a powerful dose of brucine or of strychnine, which by some mistake, perhaps, has been given to her.

Villefort seized the doctors hand.

Oh, it is impossible, said he, I must be dreaming! It is frightful to hear such things from such a man as you! Tell me, I entreat you, my dear doctor, that you may be deceived.

Doubtless I may, but""

But?

30345m

But I do not think so.

Have pity on me doctor! So many dreadful things have happened to me lately that I am on the verge of madness.

Has anyone besides me seen Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran?

No.

Has anything been sent for from a chemists that I have not examined?

Nothing.

Had Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran any enemies?

Not to my knowledge.

Would her death affect anyones interest?

It could not indeed, my daughter is her only heiress"Valentine alone.

Oh, if such a thought could present itself, I would stab myself to punish my heart for having for one instant harbored it.

Indeed, my dear friend, said M. d'Avrigny, I would not accuse anyone; I speak only of an accident, you understand,"of a mistake,"but whether accident or mistake, the fact is there; it is on my conscience and compels me to speak aloud to you. Make inquiry.

Of whom?"how?"of what?

May not Barrois, the old servant, have made a mistake, and have given Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran a dose prepared for his master?

For my father?

Yes.

But how could a dose prepared for M. Noirtier poison Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran?

Nothing is more simple. You know poisons become remedies in certain diseases, of which paralysis is one. For instance, having tried every other remedy to restore movement and speech to M. Noirtier, I resolved to try one last means, and for three months I have been giving him brucine; so that in the last dose I ordered for him there were six grains. This quantity, which is perfectly safe to administer to the paralyzed frame of M. Noirtier, which has become gradually accustomed to it, would be sufficient to kill another person.

My dear doctor, there is no communication between M. Noirtiers apartment and that of Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran, and Barrois never entered my mother-in-laws room. In short, doctor although I know you to be the most conscientious man in the world, and although I place the utmost reliance in you, I want, notwithstanding my conviction, to believe this axiom, \_errare humanum est\_.

Is there one of my brethren in whom you have equal confidence with myself?

Why do you ask me that?"what do you wish?

Send for him; I will tell him what I have seen, and we will consult together, and examine the body.

And you will find traces of poison?

No, I did not say of poison, but we can prove what was the state of

the body; we shall discover the cause of her sudden death, and we shall say, ~Dear Villefort, if this thing has been caused by negligence, watch over your servants; if from hatred, watch your enemies.

What do you propose to me, dAvrigny? said Villefort in despair; so soon as another is admitted into our secret, an inquest will become necessary; and an inquest in my house"impossible! Still, continued the procureur, looking at the doctor with uneasiness, if you wish it"if you demand it, why then it shall be done. But, doctor, you see me already so grieved"how can I introduce into my house so much scandal, after so much sorrow? My wife and my daughter would die of it! And I, doctor"you know a man does not arrive at the post I occupy"one has not been kings attorney twenty-five years without having amassed a tolerable number of enemies; mine are numerous. Let this affair be talked of, it will be a triumph for them, which will make them rejoice, and cover me with shame. Pardon me, doctor, these worldly ideas; were you a priest I should not dare tell you that, but you are a man, and you know mankind. Doctor, pray recall your words; you have said nothing, have you?

My dear M. de Villefort, replied the doctor, my first duty is to humanity. I would have saved Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran, if science could have done it; but she is dead and my duty regards the living. Let us bury this terrible secret in the deepest recesses of our hearts; I am willing, if anyone should suspect this, that my silence on the subject should be imputed to my ignorance. Meanwhile, sir, watch always"watch carefully, for perhaps the evil may not stop here. And when you have found the culprit, if you find him, I will say to you, ~You are a magistrate, do as you will!

I thank you, doctor, said Villefort with indescribable joy; I never had a better friend than you. And, as if he feared Doctor dAvrigny would recall his promise, he hurried him towards the house.

When they were gone, Morrel ventured out from under the trees, and the moon shone upon his face, which was so pale it might have been taken for that of a ghost.

I am manifestly protected in a most wonderful, but most terrible manner, said he; but Valentine, poor girl, how will she bear so much sorrow?

As he thought thus, he looked alternately at the window with red curtains and the three windows with white curtains. The light had almost disappeared from the former; doubtless Madame de Villefort had just put out her lamp, and the nightlamp alone reflected its dull light on the window. At the extremity of the building, on the contrary, he saw one of the three windows open. A wax-light placed on the mantle-piece threw some of its pale rays without, and a shadow was seen for one moment on the balcony. Morrel shuddered; he thought he heard a sob.

It cannot be wondered at that his mind, generally so courageous, but now disturbed by the two strongest human passions, love and fear, was weakened even to the indulgence of superstitious thoughts. Although it was impossible that Valentine should see him, hidden as he was, he thought he heard the shadow at the window call him; his disturbed mind told him so. This double error became an irresistible reality, and by one of the incomprehensible transports of youth, he bounded from his hiding-place, and with two strides, at the risk of being seen, at the risk of alarming Valentine, at the risk of being discovered by some exclamation which might escape the young girl, he crossed the flower-garden, which by the light of the moon resembled a large white lake, and having passed the rows of orange-trees which extended in front of the house, he reached the step, ran quickly up and pushed the door, which opened without offering any resistance.

Valentine had not seen him. Her eyes, raised towards heaven, were watching a silvery cloud gliding over the azure, its form that of a shadow mounting towards heaven. Her poetic and excited mind pictured it as the soul of her grandmother.

Meanwhile, Morrel had traversed the anteroom and found the staircase, which, being carpeted, prevented his approach being heard, and he had regained that degree of confidence that the presence of M. de Villefort even would not have alarmed him. He was quite prepared for any such encounter. He would at once approach Valentines father and acknowledge all, begging Villefort to pardon and sanction the love which united two fond and loving hearts. Morrel was mad.

Happily he did not meet anyone. Now, especially, did he find the description Valentine had given of the interior of the house useful to him; he arrived safely at the top of the staircase, and while he was feeling his way, a sob indicated the direction he was to take. He turned back, a door partly open enabled him to see his road, and to hear the voice of one in sorrow. He pushed the door open and entered. At the other end of the room, under a white sheet which covered it, lay the corpse, still more alarming to Morrel since the account he had so unexpectedly overheard. By its side, on her knees, and with her head buried in the cushion of an easy-chair, was Valentine, trembling and sobbing, her hands extended above her head, clasped and stiff. She had turned from the window, which remained open, and was praying in accents that would have affected the most unfeeling; her words were rapid, incoherent, unintelligible, for the burning weight of grief almost stopped her utterance.

The moon shining through the open blinds made the lamp appear to burn paler, and cast a sepulchral hue over the whole scene. Morrel could not resist this; he was not exemplary for piety, he was not easily impressed, but Valentine suffering, weeping, wringing her hands before him, was more than he could bear in silence. He sighed, and whispered a name, and the head bathed in tears and pressed on the velvet cushion of the chair "a head like that of a Magdalen by Correggio" was raised and turned towards him. Valentine perceived him without betraying the least surprise. A heart overwhelmed with one great grief is insensible to minor emotions. Morrel held out his hand to her. Valentine, as her only apology for not having met him, pointed to the corpse under the sheet, and began to sob again.

Neither dared for some time to speak in that room. They hesitated to break the silence which death seemed to impose; at length Valentine ventured.

My friend, said she, how came you here? Alas, I would say you are welcome, had not death opened the way for you into this house.

Valentine, said Morrel with a trembling voice, I had waited since half-past eight, and did not see you come; I became uneasy, leaped the wall, found my way through the garden, when voices conversing about the fatal event "

What voices? asked Valentine. Morrel shuddered as he thought of the conversation of the doctor and M. de Villefort, and he thought he could see through the sheet the extended hands, the stiff neck, and the purple lips.

Your servants, said he, who were repeating the whole of the sorrowful story; from them I learned it all.

But it was risking the failure of our plan to come up here, love.

Forgive me, replied Morrel; I will go away.

No, said Valentine, you might meet someone; stay.

But if anyone should come here "

The young girl shook her head. No one will come, said she; do not fear, there is our safeguard, pointing to the bed.

But what has become of M. d'Espinoza? replied Morrel.

30349m

M. Franz arrived to sign the contract just as my dear grandmother was dying.

Alas, said Morrel with a feeling of selfish joy; for he thought this death would cause the wedding to be postponed indefinitely.

But what redoubles my sorrow, continued the young girl, as if this feeling was to receive its immediate punishment, is that the poor old

lady, on her death-bed, requested that the marriage might take place as soon as possible; she also, thinking to protect me, was acting against me.

Hark! said Morrel. They both listened; steps were distinctly heard in the corridor and on the stairs.

It is my father, who has just left his study.

To accompany the doctor to the door, added Morrel.

How do you know it is the doctor? asked Valentine, astonished.

I imagined it must be, said Morrel.

Valentine looked at the young man; they heard the street door close, then M. de Villefort locked the garden door, and returned upstairs. He stopped a moment in the anteroom, as if hesitating whether to turn to his own apartment or into Madame de Saint-MÃ©rans; Morrel concealed himself behind a door; Valentine remained motionless, grief seeming to deprive her of all fear. M. de Villefort passed on to his own room. Now, said Valentine, you can neither go out by the front door nor by the garden.

Morrel looked at her with astonishment.

There is but one way left you that is safe, said she; it is through my grandfathers room. She rose. Come, she added.

Where? asked Maximilian.

To my grandfathers room.

I in M. Noirtiers apartment?

Yes.

Can you mean it, Valentine?

I have long wished it; he is my only remaining friend and we both need his help,"come.

Be careful, Valentine, said Morrel, hesitating to comply with the young girls wishes; I now see my error"I acted like a madman in coming in here. Are you sure you are more reasonable?

Yes, said Valentine; and I have but one scruple,"that of leaving my dear grandmothers remains, which I had undertaken to watch.

Valentine, said Morrel, death is in itself sacred.

Yes, said Valentine; besides, it will not be for long.

She then crossed the corridor, and led the way down a narrow staircase to M. Noirtiers room; Morrel followed her on tiptoe; at the door they found the old servant.

Barrois, said Valentine, shut the door, and let no one come in.

She passed first.

Noirtier, seated in his chair, and listening to every sound, was watching the door; he saw Valentine, and his eye brightened. There was something grave and solemn in the approach of the young girl which struck the old man, and immediately his bright eye began to interrogate.

Dear grandfather. said she hurriedly, you know poor grandmamma died an hour since, and now I have no friend in the world but you.

His expressive eyes evinced the greatest tenderness.

To you alone, then, may I confide my sorrows and my hopes?

The paralytic motioned Yes.

Valentine took Maximilians hand.

Look attentively, then, at this gentleman.

The old man fixed his scrutinizing gaze with slight astonishment on Morrel.

It is M. Maximilian Morrel, said she; the son of that good merchant of Marseilles, whom you doubtless recollect.

Yes, said the old man.

He brings an irreproachable name, which Maximilian is likely to render glorious, since at thirty years of age he is a captain, an officer of the Legion of Honor.

The old man signified that he recollected him.

Well, grandpapa, said Valentine, kneeling before him, and pointing to Maximilian, I love him, and will be only his; were I compelled to marry another, I would destroy myself.

The eyes of the paralytic expressed a multitude of tumultuous thoughts. You like M. Maximilian Morrel, do you not, grandpapa? asked Valentine.

Yes.

And you will protect us, who are your children, against the will of my father?

Noirtier cast an intelligent glance at Morrel, as if to say, perhaps I may.

Maximilian understood him.

Mademoiselle, said he, you have a sacred duty to fulfil in your deceased grandmothers room, will you allow me the honor of a few minutes conversation with M. Noirtier?

That is it, said the old mans eye. Then he looked anxiously at Valentine.

Do you fear he will not understand?

Yes.

Oh, we have so often spoken of you, that he knows exactly how I talk to you. Then turning to Maximilian, with an adorable smile; although shaded by sorrow, "He knows everything I know, said she.

Valentine arose, placed a chair for Morrel, requested Barrois not to admit anyone, and having tenderly embraced her grandfather, and sorrowfully taken leave of Morrel, she went away. To prove to Noirtier that he was in Valentines confidence and knew all their secrets, Morrel took the dictionary, a pen, and some paper, and placed them all on a table where there was a light.

But first, said Morrel, allow me, sir, to tell you who I am, how much I love Mademoiselle Valentine, and what are my designs respecting her.

Noirtier made a sign that he would listen.

It was an imposing sight to witness this old man, apparently a mere useless burden, becoming the sole protector, support, and adviser of the lovers who were both young, beautiful, and strong. His remarkably noble and austere expression struck Morrel, who began his story with trembling. He related the manner in which he had become acquainted with Valentine, and how he had loved her, and that Valentine, in her solitude and her misfortune, had accepted the offer of his devotion. He told him his birth, his position, his fortune, and more than once, when he consulted the look of the paralytic, that look answered, That is good, proceed.

And now, said Morrel, when he had finished the first part of his recital, now I have told you of my love and my hopes, may I inform you of my intentions?

Yes, signified the old man.

This was our resolution; a cabriolet was in waiting at the gate, in which I intended to carry off Valentine to my sisters house, to marry her, and to wait respectfully M. de Villeforts pardon.

No, said Noirtier.

We must not do so?

No.

You do not sanction our project?

No.

There is another way, said Morrel. The old mans interrogative eye said, Which?

I will go, continued Maximilian, I will seek M. Franz d'Espingay "I am happy to be able to mention this in Mademoiselle de Villeforts absence" and will conduct myself toward him so as to compel him to challenge me. Noirtiers look continued to interrogate.

You wish to know what I will do?

Yes.

I will find him, as I told you. I will tell him the ties which bind me to Mademoiselle Valentine; if he be a sensible man, he will prove it by renouncing of his own accord the hand of his betrothed, and will secure my friendship, and love until death; if he refuse, either through

interest or ridiculous pride, after I have proved to him that he would be forcing my wife from me, that Valentine loves me, and will have no other, I will fight with him, give him every advantage, and I shall kill him, or he will kill me; if I am victorious, he will not marry Valentine, and if I die, I am very sure Valentine will not marry him. Noirtier watched, with indescribable pleasure, this noble and sincere countenance, on which every sentiment his tongue uttered was depicted, adding by the expression of his fine features all that coloring adds to a sound and faithful drawing.

Still, when Morrel had finished, he shut his eyes several times, which was his manner of saying No.

No? said Morrel; you disapprove of this second project, as you did of the first?

I do, signified the old man.

But what then must be done? asked Morrel. Madame de Saint-Mans last request was, that the marriage might not be delayed; must I let things take their course? Noirtier did not move. I understand, said Morrel; I am to wait.

Yes.

But delay may ruin our plan, sir, replied the young man. Alone, Valentine has no power; she will be compelled to submit. I am here almost miraculously, and can scarcely hope for so good an opportunity to occur again. Believe me, there are only the two plans I have proposed to you; forgive my vanity, and tell me which you prefer. Do you authorize Mademoiselle Valentine to intrust herself to my honor?

No.

Do you prefer I should seek M. d'Espingay?

No.

Whence then will come the help we need? from chance? resumed Morrel.

No.

From you?

Yes.

You thoroughly understand me, sir? Pardon my eagerness, for my life depends on your answer. Will our help come from you?

Yes.

You are sure of it?

Yes. There was so much firmness in the look which gave this answer, no one could, at any rate, doubt his will, if they did his power.

Oh, thank you a thousand times! But how, unless a miracle should restore your speech, your gesture, your movement, how can you, chained to that armchair, dumb and motionless, oppose this marriage? A smile lit up the old mans face, a strange smile of the eyes in a paralyzed face.

Then I must wait? asked the young man.

Yes.

But the contract? The same smile returned. Will you assure me it shall not be signed?

Yes, said Noirtier.

The contract shall not be signed! cried Morrel. Oh, pardon me, sir; I can scarcely realize so great a happiness. Will they not sign it? No, said the paralytic. Notwithstanding that assurance, Morrel still hesitated. This promise of an impotent old man was so strange that, instead of being the result of the power of his will, it might emanate from enfeebled organs. Is it not natural that the madman, ignorant of his folly, should attempt things beyond his power? The weak man talks of burdens he can raise, the timid of giants he can confront, the poor of treasures he spends, the most humble peasant, in the height of his pride, calls himself Jupiter. Whether Noirtier understood the young mans indecision, or whether he had not full confidence in his docility, he looked uneasily at him.

What do you wish, sir? asked Morrel; that I should renew my promise of remaining tranquil? Noirtiers eye remained fixed and firm, as if to imply that a promise did not suffice; then it passed from his face



to his hands.

Shall I swear to you, sir? asked Maximilian.

Yes, said the paralytic with the same solemnity. Morrel understood that the old man attached great importance to an oath. He extended his hand.

I swear to you, on my honor, said he, to await your decision respecting the course I am to pursue with M. d'Aupinay.

That is right, said the old man.

Now, said Morrel, do you wish me to retire?

Yes.

Without seeing Mademoiselle Valentine?

Yes.

Morrel made a sign that he was ready to obey. But, said he, first allow me to embrace you as your daughter did just now. Noirtiers expression could not be understood. The young man pressed his lips on the same spot, on the old mans forehead, where Valentines had been. Then he bowed a second time and retired.

He found outside the door the old servant, to whom Valentine had given directions. Morrel was conducted along a dark passage, which led to a little door opening on the garden, soon found the spot where he had entered, with the assistance of the shrubs gained the top of the wall, and by his ladder was in an instant in the clover-field where his cabriolet was still waiting for him. He got in it, and thoroughly wearied by so many emotions, arrived about midnight in the Rue Meslay, threw himself on his bed and slept soundly.

VOLUME FOUR

40010m

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40020m

Chapter 74. The Villefort Family Vault

Two days after, a considerable crowd was assembled, towards ten oclock in the morning, around the door of M. de Villeforts house, and a long file of mourning-coaches and private carriages extended along the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and the Rue de la Pénitence. Among them was one of a very singular form, which appeared to have come from a distance. It was a kind of covered wagon, painted black, and was one of the first to arrive. Inquiry was made, and it was ascertained that, by a strange coincidence, this carriage contained the corpse of the Marquis de Saint-Méran, and that those who had come thinking to attend one funeral would follow two. Their number was great. The Marquis de Saint-Méran, one of the most zealous and faithful dignitaries of Louis XVIII. and King Charles X., had preserved a great number of friends, and these, added to the personages whom the usages of society gave Villefort a claim on, formed a considerable body.

Due information was given to the authorities, and permission obtained that the two funerals should take place at the same time. A second hearse, decked with the same funereal pomp, was brought to M. de Villeforts door, and the coffin removed into it from the post-wagon. The two bodies were to be interred in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise, where M. de Villefort had long since had a tomb prepared for the reception of his family. The remains of poor Renée were already deposited there, and now, after ten years of separation, her father and mother were to be reunited with her.

The Parisians, always curious, always affected by funereal display, looked on with religious silence while the splendid procession accompanied to their last abode two of the number of the old aristocracy—the greatest protectors of commerce and sincere devotees to their principles.

In one of the mourning-coaches Beauchamp, Debray, and Châteaurenault were talking of the very sudden death of the marchioness.

I saw Madame de Saint-Méran only last year at Marseilles, when I was coming back from Algiers, said Châteaurenault; she looked like a woman destined to live to be a hundred years old, from her apparent

sound health and great activity of mind and body. How old was she? Franz assured me, replied Albert, that she was sixty-six years old. But she has not died of old age, but of grief; it appears that since the death of the marquis, which affected her very deeply, she has not completely recovered her reason.

But of what disease, then, did she die? asked Debray.

It is said to have been a congestion of the brain, or apoplexy, which is the same thing, is it not?

Nearly.

It is difficult to believe that it was apoplexy, said Beauchamp.

Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran, whom I once saw, was short, of slender form, and of a much more nervous than sanguine temperament; grief could hardly produce apoplexy in such a constitution as that of Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran.

At any rate, said Albert, whatever disease or doctor may have killed her, M. de Villefort, or rather, Mademoiselle Valentine,"or, still rather, our friend Franz, inherits a magnificent fortune, amounting, I believe, to 80,000 livres per annum.

And this fortune will be doubled at the death of the old Jacobin, Noirtier.

That is a tenacious old grandfather, said Beauchamp. \_Tenacem propositi virum\_. I think he must have made an agreement with death to outlive all his heirs, and he appears likely to succeed. He resembles the old Conventionalist of 93, who said to Napoleon, in 1814, ~You bend because your empire is a young stem, weakened by rapid growth. Take the Republic for a tutor; let us return with renewed strength to the battle-field, and I promise you 500,000 soldiers, another Marengo, and a second Austerlitz. Ideas do not become extinct, sire; they slumber sometimes, but only revive the stronger before they sleep entirely.

Ideas and men appeared the same to him, said Albert. One thing only puzzles me, namely, how Franz dÃ©pinay will like a grandfather who cannot be separated from his wife. But where is Franz?

In the first carriage, with M. de Villefort, who considers him already as one of the family.

40024m

Such was the conversation in almost all the carriages; these two sudden deaths, so quickly following each other, astonished everyone, but no one suspected the terrible secret which M. d'Avrigny had communicated, in his nocturnal walk to M. de Villefort. They arrived in about an hour at the cemetery; the weather was mild, but dull, and in harmony with the funeral ceremony. Among the groups which flocked towards the family vault, ChÃ©teau-Renaud recognized Morrel, who had come alone in a cabriolet, and walked silently along the path bordered with yew-trees. You here? said ChÃ©teau-Renaud, passing his arms through the young captains; are you a friend of Villeforts? How is it that I have never met you at his house?

I am no acquaintance of M. de Villeforts, answered Morrel, but I was of Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran. Albert came up to them at this moment with Franz.

The time and place are but ill-suited for an introduction. said Albert; but we are not superstitious. M. Morrel, allow me to present to you M. Franz dÃ©pinay, a delightful travelling companion, with whom I made the tour of Italy. My dear Franz, M. Maximilian Morrel, an excellent friend I have acquired in your absence, and whose name you will hear me mention every time I make any allusion to affection, wit, or amiability.

Morrel hesitated for a moment; he feared it would be hypocritical to accost in a friendly manner the man whom he was tacitly opposing, but his oath and the gravity of the circumstances recurred to his memory; he struggled to conceal his emotion and bowed to Franz.

Mademoiselle de Villefort is in deep sorrow, is she not? said Debray to Franz.

Extremely, replied he; she looked so pale this morning, I scarcely knew her.

These apparently simple words pierced Morrel to the heart. This man had seen Valentine, and spoken to her! The young and high-spirited officer required all his strength of mind to resist breaking his oath. He took the arm of Châteaurenault, and turned towards the vault, where the attendants had already placed the two coffins.

This is a magnificent habitation, said Beauchamp, looking towards the mausoleum; a summer and winter palace. You will, in turn, enter it, my dear d'Espagnay, for you will soon be numbered as one of the family. I, as a philosopher, should like a little country-house, a cottage down there under the trees, without so many free-stones over my poor body. In dying, I will say to those around me what Voltaire wrote to Piron: ~\_Eo rus\_, and all will be over. But come, Franz, take courage, your wife is an heiress.

Indeed, Beauchamp, you are unbearable. Politics has made you laugh at everything, and political men have made you disbelieve everything. But when you have the honor of associating with ordinary men, and the pleasure of leaving politics for a moment, try to find your affectionate heart, which you leave with your stick when you go to the Chamber.

But tell me, said Beauchamp, what is life? Is it not a halt in Deaths anteroom?

40026m

I am prejudiced against Beauchamp, said Albert, drawing Franz away, and leaving the former to finish his philosophical dissertation with Debray.

The Villefort vault formed a square of white stones, about twenty feet high; an interior partition separated the two families, and each apartment had its entrance door. Here were not, as in other tombs, ignoble drawers, one above another, where thrift bestows its dead and labels them like specimens in a museum; all that was visible within the bronze gates was a gloomy-looking room, separated by a wall from the vault itself. The two doors before mentioned were in the middle of this wall, and enclosed the Villefort and Saint-Morand coffins. There grief might freely expend itself without being disturbed by the trifling loungers who came from a picnic party to visit Père-Lachaise, or by lovers who make it their rendezvous.

The two coffins were placed on trestles previously prepared for their reception in the right-hand crypt belonging to the Saint-Morand family. Villefort, Franz, and a few near relatives alone entered the sanctuary. As the religious ceremonies had all been performed at the door, and there was no address given, the party all separated; Châteaurenault, Albert, and Morrel, went one way, and Debray and Beauchamp the other. Franz remained with M. de Villefort; at the gate of the cemetery Morrel made an excuse to wait; he saw Franz and M. de Villefort get into the same mourning-coach, and thought this meeting forboded evil. He then returned to Paris, and although in the same carriage with Châteaurenault and Albert, he did not hear one word of their conversation.

As Franz was about to take leave of M. de Villefort, When shall I see you again? said the latter.

At what time you please, sir, replied Franz.

As soon as possible.

I am at your command, sir; shall we return together?

If not unpleasant to you.

On the contrary, I shall feel much pleasure.

Thus, the future father and son-in-law stepped into the same carriage, and Morrel, seeing them pass, became uneasy. Villefort and Franz returned to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. The procureur, without going to see either his wife or his daughter, went at once to his study, and, offering the young man a chair:

M. d'Espagnay, said he, allow me to remind you at this moment,"which

is perhaps not so ill-chosen as at first sight may appear, for obedience to the wishes of the departed is the first offering which should be made at their tomb,"allow me then to remind you of the wish expressed by Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran on her death-bed, that Valentines wedding might not be deferred. You know the affairs of the deceased are in perfect order, and her will bequeaths to Valentine the entire property of the Saint-MÃ©ran family; the notary showed me the documents yesterday, which will enable us to draw up the contract immediately. You may call on the notary, M. Deschamps, Place Beauveau, Faubourg Saint-HonorÃ©, and you have my authority to inspect those deeds. Sir, replied M. dÃ©pinay, it is not, perhaps, the moment for Mademoiselle Valentine, who is in deep distress, to think of a husband; indeed, I fear""

40028m

Valentine will have no greater pleasure than that of fulfilling her grandmothers last injunctions; there will be no obstacle from that quarter, I assure you.

In that case, replied Franz, as I shall raise none, you may make arrangements when you please; I have pledged my word, and shall feel pleasure and happiness in adhering to it.

Then, said Villefort, nothing further is required. The contract was to have been signed three days since; we shall find it all ready, and can sign it today.

But the mourning? said Franz, hesitating.

Dont be uneasy on that score, replied Villefort; no ceremony will be neglected in my house. Mademoiselle de Villefort may retire during the prescribed three months to her estate of Saint-MÃ©ran; I say hers, for she inherits it today. There, after a few days, if you like, the civil marriage shall be celebrated without pomp or ceremony. Madame de Saint-MÃ©ran wished her daughter should be married there. When that is over, you, sir, can return to Paris, while your wife passes the time of her mourning with her mother-in-law.

As you please, sir, said Franz.

Then, replied M. de Villefort, have the kindness to wait half an hour; Valentine shall come down into the drawing-room. I will send for M. Deschamps; we will read and sign the contract before we separate, and this evening Madame de Villefort shall accompany Valentine to her estate, where we will rejoin them in a week.

Sir, said Franz, I have one request to make.

What is it?

I wish Albert de Morcerf and Raoul de ChÃ¢teau-Renaud to be present at this signature; you know they are my witnesses.

Half an hour will suffice to apprise them; will you go for them yourself, or shall you send?

I prefer going, sir.

I shall expect you, then, in half an hour, baron, and Valentine will be ready.

Franz bowed and left the room. Scarcely had the door closed, when M. de Villefort sent to tell Valentine to be ready in the drawing-room in half an hour, as he expected the notary and M. dÃ©pinay and his witnesses. The news caused a great sensation throughout the house; Madame de Villefort would not believe it, and Valentine was thunderstruck. She looked around for help, and would have gone down to her grandfathers room, but on the stairs she met M. de Villefort, who took her arm and led her into the drawing-room. In the anteroom, Valentine met Barrois, and looked despairingly at the old servant. A moment later, Madame de Villefort entered the drawing-room with her little Edward. It was evident that she had shared the grief of the family, for she was pale and looked fatigued. She sat down, took Edward on her knees, and from time to time pressed this child, on whom her affections appeared centred, almost convulsively to her bosom.

Two carriages were soon heard to enter the courtyard. One was the notarys; the other, that of Franz and his friends. In a moment the

whole party was assembled. Valentine was so pale one might trace the blue veins from her temples, round her eyes and down her cheeks. Franz was deeply affected. Châteaufort and Albert looked at each other with amazement; the ceremony which was just concluded had not appeared more sorrowful than did that which was about to begin. Madame de Villefort had placed herself in the shadow behind a velvet curtain, and as she constantly bent over her child, it was difficult to read the expression of her face. M. de Villefort was, as usual, unmoved. The notary, after having, according to the customary method, arranged the papers on the table, taken his place in an armchair, and raised his spectacles, turned towards Franz:

Are you M. Franz de Quesnel, baron d'Espingay? asked he, although he knew it perfectly.

Yes, sir, replied Franz. The notary bowed.

I have, then, to inform you, sir, at the request of M. de Villefort, that your projected marriage with Mademoiselle de Villefort has changed the feeling of M. Noirtier towards his grandchild, and that he disinherits her entirely of the fortune he would have left her. Let me hasten to add, continued he, that the testator, having only the right to alienate a part of his fortune, and having alienated it all, the will will not bear scrutiny, and is declared null and void.

Yes, said Villefort; but I warn M. d'Espingay, that during my life-time my fathers will shall never be questioned, my position forbidding any doubt to be entertained.

40032m

Sir, said Franz, I regret much that such a question has been raised in the presence of Mademoiselle Valentine; I have never inquired the amount of her fortune, which, however limited it may be, exceeds mine. My family has sought consideration in this alliance with M. de Villefort; all I seek is happiness.

Valentine imperceptibly thanked him, while two silent tears rolled down her cheeks.

Besides, sir, said Villefort, addressing himself to his future son-in-law, excepting the loss of a portion of your hopes, this unexpected will need not personally wound you; M. Noirtiers weakness of mind sufficiently explains it. It is not because Mademoiselle Valentine is going to marry you that he is angry, but because she will marry, a union with any other would have caused him the same sorrow. Old age is selfish, sir, and Mademoiselle de Villefort has been a faithful companion to M. Noirtier, which she cannot be when she becomes the Baroness d'Espingay. My fathers melancholy state prevents our speaking to him on any subjects, which the weakness of his mind would incapacitate him from understanding, and I am perfectly convinced that at the present time, although, he knows that his granddaughter is going to be married, M. Noirtier has even forgotten the name of his intended grandson. M. de Villefort had scarcely said this, when the door opened, and Barrois appeared.

Gentlemen, said he, in a tone strangely firm for a servant speaking to his masters under such solemn circumstances, "gentlemen, M. Noirtier de Villefort wishes to speak immediately to M. Franz de Quesnel, baron d'Espingay. He, as well as the notary, that there might be no mistake in the person, gave all his titles to the bridegroom elect.

Villefort started, Madame de Villefort let her son slip from her knees, Valentine rose, pale and dumb as a statue. Albert and Châteaufort exchanged a second look, more full of amazement than the first. The notary looked at Villefort.

It is impossible, said the procureur. M. d'Espingay cannot leave the drawing-room at present.

It is at this moment, replied Barrois with the same firmness, that M. Noirtier, my master, wishes to speak on important subjects to M. Franz d'Espingay.

Grandpapa Noirtier can speak now, then, said Edward, with his habitual quickness. However, his remark did not make Madame de

Villefort even smile, so much was every mind engaged, and so solemn was the situation.

Tell M. Nortier, resumed Villefort, that what he demands is impossible.

Then, M. Nortier gives notice to these gentlemen, replied Barrois, that he will give orders to be carried to the drawing-room.

Astonishment was at its height. Something like a smile was perceptible on Madame de Villeforts countenance. Valentine instinctively raised her eyes, as if to thank heaven.

Pray go, Valentine, said; M. de Villefort, and see what this new fancy of your grandfathers is. Valentine rose quickly, and was hastening joyfully towards the door, when M. de Villefort altered his intention.

Stop, said he; I will go with you.

Excuse me, sir, said Franz, since M. Noirtier sent for me, I am ready to attend to his wish; besides, I shall be happy to pay my respects to him, not having yet had the honor of doing so.

Pray, sir, said Villefort with marked uneasiness, do not disturb yourself.

40032m

Forgive me, sir, said Franz in a resolute tone. I would not lose this opportunity of proving to M. Noirtier how wrong it would be of him to encourage feelings of dislike to me, which I am determined to conquer, whatever they may be, by my devotion.

And without listening to Villefort he arose, and followed Valentine, who was running downstairs with the joy of a shipwrecked mariner who finds a rock to cling to. M. de Villefort followed them. Châteaurenault and Morcerf exchanged a third look of still increasing wonder.

Chapter 75. A Signed Statement

Noirtier was prepared to receive them, dressed in black, and installed in his armchair. When the three persons he expected had entered, he looked at the door, which his valet immediately closed.

Listen, whispered Villefort to Valentine, who could not conceal her joy; if M. Noirtier wishes to communicate anything which would delay your marriage, I forbid you to understand him.

Valentine blushed, but did not answer. Villefort, approached Noirtier.

Here is M. Franz d'Espingay, said he; you requested to see him. We have all wished for this interview, and I trust it will convince you how ill-formed are your objections to Valentines marriage.

Noirtier answered only by a look which made Villeforts blood run cold. He motioned to Valentine to approach. In a moment, thanks to her habit of conversing with her grandfather, she understood that he asked for a key. Then his eye was fixed on the drawer of a small chest between the windows. She opened the drawer, and found a key; and, understanding that was what he wanted, again watched his eyes, which turned toward an old secretaire which had been neglected for many years and was supposed to contain nothing but useless documents.

Shall I open the secretaire? asked Valentine.

Yes, said the old man.

And the drawers?

Yes.

Those at the side?

No.

The middle one?

Yes.

Valentine opened it and drew out a bundle of papers. Is that what you wish for? asked she.

No.

She took successively all the other papers out till the drawer was empty. But there are no more, said she. Noirtiers eye was fixed on the dictionary.

Yes, I understand, grandfather, said the young girl.

40036m

She pointed to each letter of the alphabet. At the letter S the old man stopped her. She opened, and found the word secret. Ah! is there a secret spring? said Valentine.