'Never mind that; we have a second bed in the adjoining room.'

Caderousse stared at his wife with much astonishment.

The jeweller, meanwhile, was humming a song as he stood warming his back at the fire La Carconte had kindled to dry the wet garments of her guest; and this done, she next occupied herself in arranging his supper, by spreading a napkin at the end of the table, and placing on it the slender remains of their dinner, to which she added three or four fresh-laid eggs. Caderousse had once more parted with his treasure—the banknotes were replaced in the pocket-book, the gold put back into the bag, and the whole carefully locked in the cupboard. He then began pacing the room with a pensive and gloomy air, glancing from time to time at the jeweller, who stood reeking with the steam from his wet clothes, and merely changing his place on the warm hearth, to enable the whole of his garments to be dried.

'There,' said La Carconte, as she placed a bottle of wine on the table, 'supper is ready whenever you are.'

'And you?' asked Joannes.

'I don't want any supper,' said Caderousse.

'We dined so very late,' hastily interposed La Carconte.

'Then it seems I am to eat alone,' remarked the jeweller.

'Oh, we shall have the pleasure of waiting upon you,' answered La Carconte, with an eager attention she was not accustomed to manifest even to guests who paid for what they took.

From time to time Caderousse darted on his wife keen, searching glances, but rapid as the lightning flash. The storm still continued.

'There, there,' said La Carconte; 'do you hear that? upon my word, you did well to come back.'

'Nevertheless,' replied the jeweller, 'if by the time I have finished my supper the tempest has at all abated, I shall make another start.'

'It's the mistral,' said Caderousse, 'and it will be sure to last till tomorrow morning.' He sighed heavily.

'Well,' said the jeweller, as he placed himself at table, 'all I can say is, so much the worse for those who are abroad.'

'Yes,' chimed in La Carconte, 'they will have a wretched night of it.'

The jeweller began eating his supper, and the woman, who was ordinarily so querulous and indifferent to all who approached her, was suddenly transformed into the most smiling and attentive hostess. Had the unhappy man on whom she lavished her assiduities been previously acquainted with her, so sudden an alteration might well have excited suspicion in his mind, or at least have greatly astonished him. Caderousse, meanwhile, continued to pace the room in gloomy silence, sedulously avoiding the sight of his guest; but as soon as the stranger had completed his repast, the agitated innkeeper went eagerly to the door and opened it.

'I believe the storm is over,' said he.

But as if to contradict his statement, at that instant a violent clap of thunder seemed to shake the house to its very foundation, while a sudden gust of wind, mingled with rain, extinguished the lamp he held in his hand.

Trembling and awe-struck, Caderousse hastily shut the door and returned to his guest, while La Carconte lighted a candle by the smouldering ashes that glimmered on the hearth.

'You must be tired,' said she to the jeweller; 'I have spread a pair of white sheets on your bed; go up when you are ready, and sleep well.'

Joannes stayed for a while to see whether the storm seemed to abate in its fury, but a brief space of time sufficed to assure him that, instead of diminishing, the violence of the rain and thunder momentarily increased; resigning himself, therefore, to what seemed inevitable, he bade his host good-night, and mounted the stairs. He passed over my head and I heard the flooring creak beneath his footsteps. The quick, eager glance of La Carconte followed him as he ascended, while Caderousse, on the contrary, turned his back, and seemed most anxiously to avoid even glancing at him.

All these circumstances did not strike me as painfully at the time as they have since done; in fact, all that had happened (with the exception of the story of the diamond, which certainly did wear an air of improbability), appeared natural enough, and called for neither apprehension nor mistrust; but, worn out as I was with fatigue, and fully purposing to proceed onwards directly the tempest abated, I determined to obtain a few hours' sleep. Overhead I could accurately distinguish every movement of the jeweller, who, after making the best arrangements in his power for passing a comfortable night, threw himself on his bed, and I could hear it creak and groan beneath his weight.

Insensibly my eyelids grew heavy, deep sleep stole over me, and having no suspicion of anything wrong, I sought not to shake it off. I looked into the

kitchen once more and saw Caderousse sitting by the side of a long table upon one of the low wooden stools which in country places are frequently used instead of chairs; his back was turned towards me, so that I could not see the expression of his countenance—neither should I have been able to do so had he been placed differently, as his head was buried between his two hands. La Carconte continued to gaze on him for some time, then shrugging her shoulders, she took her seat immediately opposite to him.

At this moment the expiring embers threw up a fresh flame from the kindling of a piece of wood that lay near, and a bright light flashed over the room. La Carconte still kept her eyes fixed on her husband, but as he made no sign of changing his position, she extended her hard, bony hand, and touched him on the forehead.

Caderousse shuddered. The woman's lips seemed to move, as though she were talking; but because she merely spoke in an undertone, or my senses were dulled by sleep, I did not catch a word she uttered. Confused sights and sounds seemed to float before me, and gradually I fell into a deep, heavy slumber. How long I had been in this unconscious state I know not, when I was suddenly aroused by the report of a pistol, followed by a fearful cry. Weak and tottering footsteps resounded across the chamber above me, and the next instant a dull, heavy weight seemed to fall powerless on the staircase. I had not yet fully recovered consciousness, when again I heard groans, mingled with half-stifled cries, as if from persons engaged in a deadly struggle. A cry more prolonged than the others and ending in a series of groans effectually roused me from my drowsy lethargy. Hastily raising myself on one arm, I looked around, but all was dark; and it seemed to me as if the rain must have penetrated through the flooring of the room above, for some kind of moisture appeared to fall, drop by drop, upon my forehead, and when I passed my hand across my brow, I felt that it was wet and clammy.

To the fearful noises that had awakened me had succeeded the most perfect silence—unbroken, save by the footsteps of a man walking about in the chamber above. The staircase creaked, he descended into the room below, approached the fire and lit a candle.

The man was Caderousse—he was pale and his shirt was all bloody. Having obtained the light, he hurried upstairs again, and once more I heard his rapid and uneasy footsteps.

Chapter XLV

The Rain of Blood

As the jeweller returned to the apartment, he cast around him a scrutinizing glance—but there was nothing to excite suspicion, if it did not exist, or to confirm it, if it were already awakened. Caderousse's hands still grasped the gold and bank-notes, and La Carconte called up her sweetest smiles while welcoming the reappearance of their guest.

'Well, well,' said the jeweller, 'you seem, my good friends, to have had some fears respecting the accuracy of your money, by counting it over so carefully directly I was gone.'

'Oh, no,' answered Caderousse, 'that was not my reason, I can assure you; but the circumstances by which we have become possessed of this wealth are so unexpected, as to make us scarcely credit our good fortune, and it is only by placing the actual proof of our riches before our eyes that we can persuade ourselves that the whole affair is not a dream.'

The jeweller smiled. 'Have you any other guests in your house?' inquired he.

'Nobody but ourselves,' replied Caderousse; 'the fact is, we do not lodge travellers—indeed, our tavern is so near the town, that nobody would think of stopping here.'

'Then I am afraid I shall very much inconvenience you.'

'Inconvenience us? Not at all, my dear sir,' said La Carconte in her most gracious manner. 'Not at all, I assure you.'

'But where will you manage to stow me?'

'In the chamber overhead.'

'Surely that is where you yourselves sleep?'

A moment later he came down again, holding in his hand the small shagreen case, which he opened, to assure himself it contained the diamond,—seemed to hesitate as to which pocket he should put it in, then, as if dissatisfied with the security of either pocket, he deposited it in his red handkerchief, which he carefully rolled round his head.

After this he took from his cupboard the bank-notes and gold he had put there, thrust the one into the pocket of his trousers, and the other into that of his waistcoat, hastily tied up a small bundle of linen, and rushing towards the door, disappeared in the darkness of the night.

Then all became clear and manifest to me, and I reproached myself with what had happened, as though I myself had done the guilty deed. I fancied that I still heard faint moans, and imagining that the unfortunate jeweller might not be quite dead, I determined to go to his relief, by way of atoning in some slight degree, not for the crime I had committed, but for that which I had not endeavoured to prevent. For this purpose I applied all the strength I possessed to force an entrance from the cramped spot in which I lay to the adjoining room. The poorly fastened boards which alone divided me from it yielded to my efforts, and I found myself in the house. Hastily snatching up the lighted candle, I hurried to the staircase; about midway a body was lying quite across the stairs. It was that of La Carconte. The pistol I had heard had doubtless been fired at her. The shot had frightfully lacerated her throat, leaving two gaping wounds from which, as well as the mouth, the blood was pouring in floods. She was stone dead. I strode past her, and ascended to the sleeping chamber, which presented an appearance of the wildest disorder. The furniture had been knocked over in the deadly struggle that had taken place there, and the sheets, to which the unfortunate jeweller had doubtless clung, were dragged across the room. The murdered man lay on the floor, his head leaning against the wall, and about him was a pool of blood which poured forth from three large wounds in his breast; there was a fourth gash, in which a long table knife was plunged up to the handle.

I stumbled over some object; I stooped to examine—it was the second pistol, which had not gone off, probably from the powder being wet. I approached the jeweller, who was not quite dead, and at the sound of my footsteps and the creaking of the floor, he opened his eyes, fixed them on me with an anxious

and inquiring gaze, moved his lips as though trying to speak, then, overcome by the effort, fell back and expired.

This appalling sight almost bereft me of my senses, and finding that I could no longer be of service to anyone in the house, my only desire was to fly. I rushed towards the staircase, clutching my hair, and uttering a groan of horror.

Upon reaching the room below, I found five or six custom-house officers, and two or three gendarmes—all heavily armed. They threw themselves upon me. I made no resistance; I was no longer master of my senses. When I strove to speak, a few inarticulate sounds alone escaped my lips.

As I noticed the significant manner in which the whole party pointed to my blood-stained garments, I involuntarily surveyed myself, and then I discovered that the thick warm drops that had so bedewed me as I lay beneath the staircase must have been the blood of La Carconte. I pointed to the spot where I had concealed myself.

'What does he mean?' asked a gendarme.

One of the officers went to the place I directed.

'He means,' replied the man upon his return, 'that he got in that way;' and he showed the hole I had made when I broke through.

Then I saw that they took me for the assassin. I recovered force and energy enough to free myself from the hands of those who held me, while I managed to stammer forth:

'I did not do it! Indeed, indeed I did not!'

A couple of gendarmes held the muzzles of their carbines against my breast.

'Stir but a step,' said they, 'and you are a dead man.'

'Why should you threaten me with death,' cried I, 'when I have already declared my innocence?'

'Tush, tush,' cried the men; 'keep your innocent stories to tell to the judge at Nîmes. Meanwhile, come along with us; and the best advice we can give you is to do so unresistingly.'

Alas, resistance was far from my thoughts. I was utterly overpowered by surprise and terror; and without a word I suffered myself to be handcuffed and tied to a horse's tail, and thus they took me to Nîmes.

I had been tracked by a customs-officer, who had lost sight of me near the tavern; feeling certain that I intended to pass the night there, he had returned to summon his comrades, who just arrived in time to hear the report of the

"Who's there?" cried Caderousse, rising, and drawing up in a heap the gold and notes scattered over the table, and which he covered with his two hands.

"It is I," shouted a voice.

"And who are you?"

"Eh, *pardieu!* Joannes, the jeweller."

"Well, and you said I offended the good God," said La Carconte with a horrid smile. "Why, the good God sends him back again." Caderousse sank pale and breathless into his chair.

La Carconte, on the contrary, rose, and going with a firm step towards the door, opened it, saying, as she did so:

"Come in, dear M. Joannes."

"*Ma foi*," said the jeweller, drenched with rain, "I am not destined to return to Beaucaire tonight. The shortest follies are best, my dear Caderousse. You offered me hospitality, and I accept it, and have returned to sleep beneath your friendly roof."

Caderousse stammered out something, while he wiped away the sweat that started to his brow. La Carconte double-locked the door behind the jeweller.'

"Good—all right," said a voice almost lost in the distance.

"Close the door," said La Carconte; "I do not like open doors when it thunders."

"Particularly when there is money in the house, eh?" answered Caderousse, double-locking the door.

He came into the room, went to the cupboard, took out the bag and pocket-book, and both began, for the third time, to count their gold and bank-notes. I never saw such an expression of cupidity as the flickering lamp revealed in those two countenances. The woman, especially, was hideous; her usual feverish tremulousness was intensified, her countenance had become livid, and her eyes resembled burning coals.

"Why," she inquired in a hoarse voice, "did you invite him to sleep here tonight?"

"Why?" said Caderousse with a shudder; "why, that he might not have the trouble of returning to Beaucaire."

"Ah," responded the woman, with an expression impossible to describe; "I thought it was for something else."

"Woman, woman—why do you have such ideas?" cried Caderousse; "or, if you have them, why don't you keep them to yourself?"

"Well," said La Carconte, after a moment's pause, "you are not a man."

"What do you mean?" added Caderousse.

"If you had been a man, you would not have let him go from here."

"Woman!"

"Or else he should not have reached Beaucaire."

"Woman!"

"The road takes a turn—he is obliged to follow it—while alongside of the canal there is a shorter road."

"Woman!—you offend the good God. There—listen!"

And at this moment there was a tremendous peal of thunder, while the livid lightning illumined the room, and the thunder, rolling away in the distance, seemed to withdraw unwillingly from the cursed abode. "Mercy!" said Caderousse, crossing himself.

At the same moment, and in the midst of the terrifying silence which usually follows a clap of thunder, they heard a knocking at the door. Caderousse and his wife started and looked aghast at each other.

pistol, and to take me in the midst of such circumstantial proofs of my guilt as rendered all hopes of proving my innocence utterly futile. One only chance was left me, that of beseeching the magistrate before whom I was taken to cause every inquiry to be made for the Abbé Busoni, who had stopped at the inn of the Pont du Gard on that morning.

If Caderousse had invented the story relative to the diamond, and there existed no such person as the Abbé Busoni, then, indeed, I was lost past redemption, or, at least, my life hung upon the feeble chance of Caderousse himself being apprehended and confessing the whole truth.

Two months passed away in hopeless expectation on my part, while I must do the magistrate the justice to say that he used every means to obtain information of the person I declared could exculpate me if he would. Caderousse still evaded all pursuit, and I had resigned myself to what seemed my inevitable fate. My trial was to come on at the approaching assizes; when, on the 8th of September—that is to say, precisely three months and five days after the events which had perilled my life—the Abbé Busoni, whom I never ventured to believe I should see, presented himself at the prison doors, saying he understood one of the prisoners wished to speak to him; he added, that having learned at Marseilles the particulars of my imprisonment, he hastened to comply with my desire.

You may easily imagine with what eagerness I welcomed him, and how minutely I related the whole of what I had seen and heard. I felt some degree of nervousness as I entered upon the history of the diamond, but, to my inexpressible astonishment, he confirmed it in every particular, and to my equal surprise, he seemed to place entire belief in all I said.

And then it was that, won by his mild charity, seeing that he was acquainted with all the habits and customs of my own country, and considering also that pardon for the only crime of which I was really guilty might come with a double power from lips so benevolent and kind, I besought him to receive my confession, under the seal of which I recounted the Auteuil affair in all its details, as well as every other transaction of my life. That which I had done by the impulse of my best feelings produced the same effect as though it had been the result of calculation. My voluntary confession of the assassination at Auteuil proved to him that I had not committed that of which I stood accused.

When he quitted me, he bade me be of good courage, and to rely upon his doing all in his power to convince my judges of my innocence.

I had speedy proofs that the excellent abbé was engaged in my behalf, for the rigors of my imprisonment were alleviated by many trifling though acceptable indulgences, and I was told that my trial was to be postponed to the assizes following those now being held.

In the interim it pleased Providence to cause the apprehension of Caderousse, who was discovered in some distant country, and brought back to France, where he made a full confession, refusing to make the fact of his wife's having suggested and arranged the murder any excuse for his own guilt. The wretched man was sentenced to the galleys for life, and I was immediately set at liberty.'

'And then it was, I presume,' said Monte Cristo 'that you came to me as the bearer of a letter from the Abbé Busoni?'

'It was, your excellency; the benevolent abbé took an evident interest in all that concerned me.

"Your mode of life as a smuggler," said he to me one day, "will be the ruin of you; if you get out, don't take it up again."

"But how," inquired I, "am I to maintain myself and my poor sister?"

"A person, whose confessor I am," replied he, "and who entertains a high regard for me, applied to me a short time since to procure him a confidential servant. Would you like such a post? If so, I will give you a letter of introduction to him."

"Oh, father," I exclaimed, "you are very good."

"But you must swear solemnly that I shall never have reason to repent my recommendation."

I extended my hand, and was about to pledge myself by any promise he would dictate, but he stopped me.

"It is unnecessary for you to bind yourself by any vow," said he; "I know and admire the Corsican nature too well to fear you. Here, take this," continued he, after rapidly writing the few lines I brought to your excellency, and upon receipt of which you deigned to receive me into your service, and proudly I ask whether your excellency has ever had cause to repent having done so?'

'No,' replied the count; 'I take pleasure in saying that you have served me faithfully, Bertuccio; but you might have shown more confidence in me.'

and exclaimed, "*Morbleu!* nearly nine o'clock—why, I shall not get back to Beaucaire before midnight! Good-night, my friends. If the Abbé Busoni should by any accident return, think of me."

"In another week you will have left Beaucaire," remarked Caderousse, "for the fair ends in a few days."

"True, but that makes no difference. Write to me at Paris, to M. Joannes, in the Palais Royal, arcade Pierre, № 45. I will make the journey on purpose to see him, if it is worth while."

At this moment there was a tremendous clap of thunder, accompanied by a flash of lightning so vivid, that it quite eclipsed the light of the lamp.

"See here," exclaimed Caderousse. "You cannot think of going out in such weather as this."

"Oh, I am not afraid of thunder," said the jeweller.

"And then there are robbers," said La Carconte. "The road is never very safe during fair time."

"Oh, as to the robbers," said Joannes, "here is something for them," and he drew from his pocket a pair of small pistols, loaded to the muzzle. "Here," said he, "are dogs who bark and bite at the same time, they are for the two first who shall have a longing for your diamond, Friend Caderousse."

Caderousse and his wife again interchanged a meaning look. It seemed as though they were both inspired at the same time with some horrible thought. "Well, then, a good journey to you," said Caderousse.

"Thanks," replied the jeweller. He then took his cane, which he had placed against an old cupboard, and went out. At the moment when he opened the door, such a gust of wind came in that the lamp was nearly extinguished. "Oh," said he, "this is very nice weather, and two leagues to go in such a storm."

"Remain," said Caderousse. "You can sleep here."

"Yes; do stay," added La Carconte in a tremulous voice; "we will take every care of you."

"No; I must sleep at Beaucaire. So, once more, good-night." Caderousse followed him slowly to the threshold. "I can see neither heaven nor earth," said the jeweller, who was outside the door. "Do I turn to the right, or to the left hand?"

"To the right," said Caderousse. "You cannot go wrong—the road is bordered by trees on both sides."

"The abbé told me it was worth 50,000 francs," muttered Caderousse.

"Come, come—give it to me! What a strange fellow you are," said the jeweller, taking the diamond from his hand. "I give you 45,000 francs—that is, 2,500 livres of income,—a fortune such as I wish I had myself, and you are not satisfied!"

"And the five-and-forty thousand francs," inquired Caderousse in a hoarse voice, "where are they? Come—let us see them."

"Here they are," replied the jeweller, and he counted out upon the table 15,000 francs in gold, and 30,000 francs in bank-notes.

"Wait whilst I light the lamp," said La Carconte; "it is growing dark, and there may be some mistake." In fact, night had come on during this conversation, and with night the storm which had been threatening for the last half-hour. The thunder growled in the distance; but it was apparently not heard by the jeweller, Caderousse, or La Carconte, absorbed as they were all three with the demon of gain. I myself felt a strange kind of fascination at the sight of all this gold and all these bank-notes; it seemed to me that I was in a dream, and, as it always happens in a dream, I felt myself riveted to the spot. Caderousse counted and again counted the gold and the notes, then handed them to his wife, who counted and counted them again in her turn. During this time, the jeweller made the diamond play and sparkle in the lamplight, and the gem threw out jets of light which made him unmindful of those which—precursors of the storm—began to play in at the windows.

"Well," inquired the jeweller, "is the cash all right?"

"Yes," said Caderousse. "Give me the pocket-book, La Carconte, and find a bag somewhere."

La Carconte went to a cupboard, and returned with an old leathern pocket-book and a bag. From the former she took some greasy letters, and put in their place the bank-notes, and from the bag took two or three crowns of six livres each, which, in all probability, formed the entire fortune of the miserable couple.

"There," said Caderousse; "and now, although you have wronged us of perhaps 10,000 francs, will you have your supper with us? I invite you with good-will."

"Thank you," replied the jeweller, "it must be getting late, and I must return to Beaucaire—my wife will be getting uneasy." He drew out his watch,

'I, your excellency?'

'Yes; you. How comes it, that having both a sister and an adopted son, you have never spoken to me of either?'

'Alas, I have still to recount the most distressing period of my life. Anxious as you may suppose I was to behold and comfort my dear sister, I lost no time in hastening to Corsica, but when I arrived at Rogliano I found a house of mourning, the consequences of a scene so horrible that the neighbours remember and speak of it to this day. Acting by my advice, my poor sister had refused to comply with the unreasonable demands of Benedetto, who was continually tormenting her for money, as long as he believed there was a sou left in her possession. One morning he threatened her with the severest consequences if she did not supply him with what he desired, and disappeared and remained away all day, leaving the kind-hearted Assunta, who loved him as if he were her own child, to weep over his conduct and bewail his absence. Evening came, and still, with all the patient solicitude of a mother, she watched for his return.

As the eleventh hour struck, he entered with a swaggering air, attended by two of the most dissolute and reckless of his boon companions. She stretched out her arms to him, but they seized hold of her, and one of the three—none other than the accursed Benedetto exclaimed:

"Put her to torture and she'll soon tell us where her money is."

It unfortunately happened that our neighbour, Wasilio, was at Bastia, leaving no person in his house but his wife; no human creature beside could hear or see anything that took place within our dwelling. Two held poor Assunta, who, unable to conceive that any harm was intended to her, smiled in the face of those who were soon to become her executioners. The third proceeded to barricade the doors and windows, then returned, and the three united in stifling the cries of terror incited by the sight of these preparations, and then dragged Assunta feet foremost towards the brazier, expecting to wring from her an avowal of where her supposed treasure was secreted. In the struggle her clothes caught fire, and they were obliged to let go their hold in order to preserve themselves from sharing the same fate. Covered with flames, Assunta rushed wildly to the door, but it was fastened; she flew to the windows, but they were also secured; then the neighbours heard frightful shrieks; it was Assunta calling for help. The cries died away in groans, and next morning, as

soon as Wasilio's wife could muster up courage to venture abroad, she caused the door of our dwelling to be opened by the public authorities, when Assunta, although dreadfully burnt, was found still breathing; every drawer and closet in the house had been forced open, and the money stolen. Benedetto never again appeared at Rogliano, neither have I since that day either seen or heard anything concerning him.

It was subsequently to these dreadful events that I waited on your excellency, to whom it would have been folly to have mentioned Benedetto, since all trace of him seemed entirely lost; or of my sister, since she was dead.'

'And in what light did you view the occurrence?' inquired Monte Cristo.

'As a punishment for the crime I had committed,' answered Bertuccio. 'Oh, those Villeforts are an accursed race!'

'Truly they are,' murmured the count in a lugubrious tone.

'And now,' resumed Bertuccio, 'your excellency may, perhaps, be able to comprehend that this place, which I revisit for the first time—this garden, the actual scene of my crime—must have given rise to reflections of no very agreeable nature, and produced that gloom and depression of spirits which excited the notice of your excellency, who was pleased to express a desire to know the cause. At this instant a shudder passes over me as I reflect that possibly I am now standing on the very grave in which lies M. de Villefort, by whose hand the ground was dug to receive the corpse of his child.'

'Everything is possible,' said Monte Cristo, rising from the bench on which he had been sitting; 'even,' he added in an inaudible voice, 'even that the procureur be not dead. The Abbé Busoni did right to send you to me,' he went on in his ordinary tone, 'and you have done well in relating to me the whole of your history, as it will prevent my forming any erroneous opinions concerning you in future. As for that Benedetto, who so grossly belied his name, have you never made any effort to trace out whither he has gone, or what has become of him?'

'No; far from wishing to learn whither he has betaken himself, I should shun the possibility of meeting him as I would a wild beast. Thank God, I have never heard his name mentioned by any person, and I hope and believe he is dead.'

"No matter," observed Caderousse, replacing the box in his pocket, "someone else will purchase it."

"Yes," continued the jeweller; "but someone else will not be so easy as I am, or content himself with the same story. It is not natural that a man like you should possess such a diamond. He will inform against you. You will have to find the Abbé Busoni; and abbés who give diamonds worth two thousand louis are rare. The law would seize it, and put you in prison; if at the end of three or four months you are set at liberty, the ring will be lost, or a false stone, worth three francs, will be given you, instead of a diamond worth 50,000 or perhaps 55,000 francs; from which you must allow that one runs considerable risk in purchasing."

Caderousse and his wife looked eagerly at each other.

"No," said Caderousse, "we are not rich enough to lose 5,000 francs."

"As you please, my dear sir," said the jeweller; "I had, however, as you see, brought you the money in bright coin." And he drew from his pocket a handful of gold, and held it sparkling before the dazzled eyes of the innkeeper, and in the other hand he held a packet of bank-notes.

There was evidently a severe struggle in the mind of Caderousse; it was plain that the small shagreen case, which he turned over and over in his hand, did not seem to him commensurate in value to the enormous sum which fascinated his gaze. He turned towards his wife.

"What do you think of this?" he asked in a low voice.

"Let him have it—let him have it," she said. "If he returns to Beaucaire without the diamond, he will inform against us, and, as he says, who knows if we shall ever again see the Abbé Busoni?—in all probability we shall never see him."

"Well, then, so I will!" said Caderousse; "so you may have the diamond for 45,000 francs. But my wife wants a gold chain, and I want a pair of silver buckles."

The jeweller drew from his pocket a long flat box, which contained several samples of the articles demanded. "Here," he said, "I am very straightforward in my dealings—take your choice."

The woman selected a gold chain worth about five louis, and the husband a pair of buckles, worth perhaps fifteen francs.

"I hope you will not complain now?" said the jeweller.