named Albert de Morcerf or Raoul de Château-Renaud; but Morrel was of plebeian extraction, and Valentine knew how the haughty Marquise de Saint-Méran despised all who were not noble. Her secret had each time been repressed when she was about to reveal it, by the sad conviction that it would be useless to do so; for, were it once discovered by her father and mother, all would be lost.

Two hours passed thus; Madame de Saint-Méran was in a feverish sleep, and the notary had arrived. Though his coming was announced in a very low tone, Madame de Saint-Méran arose from her pillow.

'The notary!' she exclaimed, 'let him come in.'

The notary, who was at the door, immediately entered. 'Go, Valentine,' said Madame de Saint-Méran, 'and leave me with this gentleman.'

'But, grandmamma— '

'Leave me—go!'

The young girl kissed her grandmother, and left with her handkerchief to her eyes; at the door she found the valet de chambre, who told her that the doctor was waiting in the dining-room. Valentine instantly ran down. The doctor was a friend of the family, and at the same time one of the cleverest men of the day, and very fond of Valentine, whose birth he had witnessed. He had himself a daughter about her age, but whose life was one continued source of anxiety and fear to him from her mother having been consumptive.

'Oh,' said Valentine, 'we have been waiting for you with such impatience, dear M. d'Avrigny. But, first of all, how are Madeleine and Antoinette?'

Madeleine was the daughter of M. d'Avrigny, and Antoinette his niece. M. d'Avrigny smiled sadly.

'Antoinette is very well,' he said, 'and Madeleine tolerably so. But you sent for me, my dear child. It is not your father or Madame de Villefort who is ill. As for you, although we doctors cannot divest our patients of nerves, I fancy you have no further need of me than to recommend you not to allow your imagination to take too wide a field.'

Valentine coloured. M. d'Avrigny carried the science of divination almost to a miraculous extent, for he was one of the physicians who always work upon the body through the mind. 'No,' she replied, 'it is for

my poor grandmother. You know the calamity that has happened to us, do you not?'

'I know nothing.' said M. d'Avrigny.

'Alas,' said Valentine, restraining her tears, 'my grandfather is dead.'

'M. de Saint-Méran?'

'Yes.'

'Suddenly?'

'From an apoplectic stroke.'

'An apoplectic stroke?' repeated the doctor.

'Yes, and my poor grandmother fancies that her husband, whom she never left, has called her, and that she must go and join him. Oh, M. d'Avrigny, I beseech you, do something for her!'

'Where is she?'

'In her room with the notary.'

'And M. Noirtier?'

'Just as he was, his mind perfectly clear, but the same incapability of moving or speaking.'

'And the same love for you—eh, my dear child?'

'Yes,' said Valentine, 'he was very fond of me.'

'Who does not love you?' Valentine smiled sadly. 'What are your grandmother's symptoms?'

'An extreme nervous excitement and a strangely agitated sleep; she fancied this morning in her sleep that her soul was hovering above her body, which she at the same time watched. It must have been delirium; she fancies, too, that she saw a phantom enter her chamber and even heard the noise it made on touching her glass.'

'It is singular,' said the doctor; 'I was not aware that Madame de Saint-Méran was subject to such hallucinations.'

'It is the first time I ever saw her in this condition,' said Valentine; 'and this morning she frightened me so that I thought her mad; and my father, who you know is a strong-minded man, himself appeared deeply impressed.'

'We will go and see,' said the doctor; 'what you tell me seems very strange.' The notary here descended, and Valentine was informed that her grandmother was alone.

'Go upstairs,' she said to the doctor.

'And you?'

'Oh, I dare not—she forbade my sending for you; and, as you say, I am myself agitated, feverish and out of sorts. I will go and take a turn in the garden to recover myself.'

The doctor pressed Valentine's hand, and while he visited her grandmother, she descended the steps. We need not say which portion of the garden was her favourite walk. After remaining for a short time in the parterre surrounding the house, and gathering a rose to place in her waist or hair, she turned into the dark avenue which led to the bench; then from the bench she went to the gate. As usual, Valentine strolled for a short time among her flowers, but without gathering them. The mourning in her heart forbade her assuming this simple ornament, though she had not yet had time to put on the outward semblance of woe. She then turned towards the avenue. As she advanced she fancied she heard a voice speaking her name. She stopped astonished, then the voice reached her ear more distinctly, and she recognized it to be that of Maximilian.

'But she saw no one?'

'Phantoms are visible to those only who ought to see them. It was the soul of my husband!—Well, if my husband's soul can come to me, why should not my soul reappear to guard my granddaughter? the tie is even more direct, it seems to me.'

'Oh, madame,' said Villefort, deeply affected, in spite of himself, 'do not yield to those gloomy thoughts; you will long live with us, happy, loved, and honoured, and we will make you forget— '

'Never, never, never,' said the marchioness. 'When does M. d'Épinay return?'

'We expect him every moment.'

'It is well. As soon as he arrives inform me. We must be expeditious. And then I also wish to see a notary, that I may be assured that all our property returns to Valentine.'

'Ah, grandmamma,' murmured Valentine, pressing her lips on the burning brow, 'do you wish to kill me? Oh, how feverish you are; we must not send for a notary, but for a doctor!'

'A doctor?' said she, shrugging her shoulders, 'I am not ill; I am thirsty—that is all.'

'What are you drinking, dear grandmamma?'

'The same as usual, my dear, my glass is there on the table—give it to me, Valentine.' Valentine poured the orangeade into a glass and gave it to her grandmother with a certain degree of dread, for it was the same glass she fancied that had been touched by the spectre.

The marchioness drained the glass at a single draught, and then turned on her pillow, repeating,

'The notary, the notary!'

M. de Villefort left the room, and Valentine seated herself at the bedside of her grandmother. The poor child appeared herself to require the doctor she had recommended to her aged relative. A bright spot burned in either cheek, her respiration was short and difficult, and her pulse beat with feverish excitement. She was thinking of the despair of Maximilian, when he should be informed that Madame de Saint-Méran, instead of being an ally, was unconsciously acting as his enemy.

More than once she thought of revealing all to her grandmother, and she would not have hesitated a moment, if Maximilian Morrel had been

All this was said with such exceeding rapidity, that there was something in the conversation that seemed like the beginning of delirium.

'It shall be as you wish, madame,' said Villefort; 'more especially since your wishes coincide with mine, and as soon as M. d'Épinay arrives in Paris— '

'My dear grandmother,' interrupted Valentine, 'consider decorum—the recent death. You would not have me marry under such sad auspices?'

'My child,' exclaimed the old lady sharply, 'let us hear none of the conventional objections that deter weak minds from preparing for the future. I also was married at the death-bed of my mother, and certainly I have not been less happy on that account.'

'Still that idea of death, madame,' said Villefort.

'Still?—Always! I tell you I am going to die—do you understand? Well, before dying, I wish to see my son-in-law. I wish to tell him to make my child happy; I wish to read in his eyes whether he intends to obey me;—in fact, I will know him—I will!' continued the old lady, with a fearful expression, 'that I may rise from the depths of my grave to find him, if he should not fulfil his duty!'

'Madame,' said Villefort, 'you must lay aside these exalted ideas, which almost assume the appearance of madness. The dead, once buried in their graves, rise no more.'

'And I tell you, sir, that you are mistaken. This night I have had a fearful sleep. It seemed as though my soul were already hovering over my body, my eyes, which I tried to open, closed against my will, and what will appear impossible above all to you, sir, I saw, with my eyes shut, in the spot where you are now standing, issuing from that corner where there is a door leading into Madame Villefort's dressing-room—I saw, I tell you, silently enter, a white figure.'

Valentine screamed.

'It was the fever that disturbed you, madame,' said Villefort. 'Doubt, if you please, but I am sure of what I say. I saw a white figure, and as if to prevent my discrediting the testimony of only one of my senses, I heard my glass removed—the same which is there now on the table.'

'Oh, dear mother, it was a dream.'

'So little was it a dream, that I stretched my hand towards the bell; but when I did so, the shade disappeared; my maid then entered with a light.'

Chapter LXXIII

The Promise

It was indeed Maximilian Morrel, who had passed a wretched existence since the previous day. With the instinct peculiar to lovers he had anticipated after the return of Madame de Saint-Méran and the death of the marquis, that something would occur at M. de Villefort's in connection with his attachment for Valentine. His presentiments were realized, as we shall see, and his uneasy forebodings had goaded him pale and trembling to the gate under the chestnut-trees.

Valentine was ignorant of the cause of this sorrow and anxiety, and as it was not his accustomed hour for visiting her, she had gone to the spot simply by accident or perhaps through sympathy. Morrel called her, and she ran to the gate.

'You here at this hour?' said she.

'Yes, my poor girl,' replied Morrel; 'I come to bring and to hear bad tidings.'

'This is, indeed, a house of mourning,' said Valentine; 'speak, Maximilian, although the cup of sorrow seems already full.'

'Dear Valentine,' said Morrel, endeavouring to conceal his own emotion, 'listen, I entreat you; what I am about to say is very serious. When are you to be married?'

'I will tell you all,' said Valentine; 'from you I have nothing to conceal. This morning the subject was introduced, and my dear grandmother, on whom I depended as my only support, not only declared herself favourable to it, but is so anxious for it, that they only await the arrival of M. d'Épinay, and the following day the contract will be signed.'

A deep sigh escaped the young man, who gazed long and mournfully at her he loved.

'Alas,' replied he, 'it is dreadful thus to hear my condemnation from your own lips. The sentence is passed, and, in a few hours, will be executed; it must be so, and I will not endeavour to prevent it. But, since you say nothing remains but for M. d'Épinay to arrive that the contract may be signed, and the following day you will be his, tomorrow you will be engaged to M. d'Épinay, for he came this morning to Paris.' Valentine uttered a cry.

'I was at the house of Monte Cristo an hour since,' said Morrel; 'we were speaking, he of the sorrow your family had experienced, and I of your grief, when a carriage rolled into the courtyard. Never, till then, had I placed any confidence in presentiments, but now I cannot help believing them, Valentine. At the sound of that carriage I shuddered; soon I heard steps on the staircase, which terrified me as much as the footsteps of the commander did Don Juan. The door at last opened; Albert de Morcerf entered first, and I began to hope my fears were vain, when, after him, another young man advanced, and the count exclaimed: "Ah, here is the Baron Franz d'Épinay!" I summoned all my strength and courage to my support. Perhaps I turned pale and trembled, but certainly I smiled; and five minutes after I left, without having heard one word that had passed.'

'Poor Maximilian!' murmured Valentine.

'Valentine, the time has arrived when you must answer me. And remember my life depends on your answer. What do you intend doing?' Valentine held down her head; she was overwhelmed.

'Listen,' said Morrel; 'it is not the first time you have contemplated our present position, which is a serious and urgent one; I do not think it is a moment to give way to useless sorrow; leave that for those who like to suffer at their leisure and indulge their grief in secret. There are such in the world, and God will doubtless reward them in heaven for their resignation on earth, but those who mean to contend must not lose one precious moment, but must return immediately the blow which fortune strikes. Do you intend to struggle against our ill-fortune? Tell me, Valentine for it is that I came to know.'

'Sir,' said Madame de Saint-Méran, without using any circumlocution, and as if fearing she had no time to lose, 'you wrote to me concerning the marriage of this child?'

'Yes, madame,' replied Villefort, 'it is not only projected but arranged.'

'Your intended son-in-law is named M. Franz d'Épinay?'

'Yes, madame.'

'Is he not the son of General d'Épinay who was on our side, and who was assassinated some days before the usurper returned from the Island of Elba?'

'The same.'

'Does he not dislike the idea of marrying the granddaughter of a Jacobin?'

'Our civil dissensions are now happily extinguished, mother,' said Villefort; 'M. d'Épinay was quite a child when his father died, he knows very little of M. Noirtier, and will meet him, if not with pleasure, at least with indifference.'

'Is it a suitable match?'

'In every respect.'

'And the young man?'

'Is regarded with universal esteem.'

'You approve of him?'

'He is one of the most well-bred young men I know.'

During the whole of this conversation Valentine had remained silent.

'Well, sir,' said Madame de Saint-Méran, after a few minutes' reflection, 'I must hasten the marriage, for I have but a short time to live.'

'You, madame?'

'You, dear mamma?' exclaimed M. de Villefort and Valentine at the same time.

'I know what I am saying,' continued the marchioness; 'I must hurry you, so that, as she has no mother, she may at least have a grandmother to bless her marriage. I am all that is left to her belonging to my poor Renée, whom you have so soon forgotten, sir.'

'Ah, madame,' said Villefort, 'you forget that I was obliged to give a mother to my child.'

'A stepmother is never a mother, sir. But this is not to the purpose,—our business concerns Valentine, let us leave the dead in peace.'

'Do you wish to see her?' Noirtier again made an affirmative sign.

'Well, they have gone to fetch her, no doubt, from Madame de Morcerf's; I will await her return, and beg her to come up here. Is that what you wish for?'

'Yes,' replied the invalid.

Barrois, therefore, as we have seen, watched for Valentine, and informed her of her grandfather's wish. Consequently, Valentine came up to Noirtier, on leaving Madame de Saint-Méran, who in the midst of her grief had at last yielded to fatigue and fallen into a feverish sleep. Within reach of her hand they placed a small table upon which stood a bottle of orangeade, her usual beverage, and a glass. Then, as we have said, the young girl left the bedside to see M. Noirtier.

Valentine kissed the old man, who looked at her with such tenderness that her eyes again filled with tears, whose sources he thought must be exhausted. The old gentleman continued to dwell upon her with the same expression.

'Yes, yes,' said Valentine, 'you mean that I have yet a kind grandfather left, do you not.' The old man intimated that such was his meaning. 'Ah, yes, happily I have,' replied Valentine. 'Without that, what would become of me?'

It was one o'clock in the morning. Barrois, who wished to go to bed himself, observed that after such sad events everyone stood in need of rest. Noirtier would not say that the only rest he needed was to see his child, but wished her good-night, for grief and fatigue had made her appear quite ill.

The next morning she found her grandmother in bed; the fever had not abated, on the contrary her eyes glistened and she appeared to be suffering from violent nervous irritability.

'Oh, dear grandmamma, are you worse?' exclaimed Valentine, perceiving all these signs of agitation.

'No, my child, no,' said Madame de Saint-Méran; 'but I was impatiently waiting for your arrival, that I might send for your father.'

'My father?' inquired Valentine, uneasily.

'Yes, I wish to speak to him.'

Valentine durst not oppose her grandmother's wish, the cause of which she did not know, and an instant afterwards Villefort entered.

Valentine trembled, and looked at him with amazement. The idea of resisting her father, her grandmother, and all the family, had never occurred to her.

'What do you say, Maximilian?' asked Valentine. 'What do you mean by a struggle? Oh, it would be a sacrilege. What? I resist my father's order, and my dying grandmother's wish? Impossible!'

Morrel started.

'You are too noble not to understand me, and you understand me so well that you already yield, dear Maximilian. No, no; I shall need all my strength to struggle with myself and support my grief in secret, as you say. But to grieve my father—to disturb my grandmother's last moments—never!'

'You are right,' said Morrel, calmly.

'In what a tone you speak!' cried Valentine.

'I speak as one who admires you, mademoiselle.'

'Mademoiselle,' cried Valentine; 'mademoiselle! Oh, selfish man! he sees me in despair, and pretends he cannot understand me!'

'You mistake—I understand you perfectly. You will not oppose M. Villefort, you will not displease the marchioness, and tomorrow you will sign the contract which will bind you to your husband.'

'But, *mon Dieu!* tell me, how can I do otherwise?'

'Do not appeal to me, mademoiselle; I shall be a bad judge in such a case; my selfishness will blind me,' replied Morrel, whose low voice and clenched hands announced his growing desperation.

'What would you have proposed, Maximilian, had you found me willing to accede?'

'It is not for me to say.'

'You are wrong; you must advise me what to do.'

'Do you seriously ask my advice, Valentine?'

'Certainly, dear Maximilian, for if it is good, I will follow it; you know my devotion to you.'

'Valentine,' said Morrel pushing aside a loose plank, 'give me your hand in token of forgiveness of my anger; my senses are confused, and during the last hour the most extravagant thoughts have passed through my brain. Oh, if you refuse my advice— '

'What do you advise?' said Valentine, raising her eyes to heaven and sighing.

'I am free,' replied Maximilian, 'and rich enough to support you. I swear to make you my lawful wife before my lips even shall have approached your forehead.'

'You make me tremble!' said the young girl.

'Follow me,' said Morrel; 'I will take you to my sister, who is worthy also to be yours. We will embark for Algiers, for England, for America, or, if you prefer it, retire to the country and only return to Paris when our friends have reconciled your family.'

Valentine shook her head.

'I feared it, Maximilian,' said she; 'it is the counsel of a madman, and I should be more mad than you, did I not stop you at once with the word "Impossible, Morrel, impossible!"'

'You will then submit to what fate decrees for you without even attempting to contend with it?' said Morrel sorrowfully.

'Yes,—if I die!'

'Well, Valentine,' resumed Maximilian, 'I can only say again that you are right. Truly, it is I who am mad, and you prove to me that passion blinds the most well-meaning. I appreciate your calm reasoning. It is then understood that tomorrow you will be irrevocably promised to M. Franz d'Épinay, not only by that theatrical formality invented to heighten the effect of a comedy called the signature of the contract, but your own will?'

'Again you drive me to despair, Maximilian,' said Valentine, 'again you plunge the dagger into the wound! What would you do, tell me, if your sister listened to such a proposition?'

'Mademoiselle,' replied Morrel with a bitter smile, 'I am selfish—you have already said so—and as a selfish man I think not of what others would do in my situation, but of what I intend doing myself. I think only that I have known you not a whole year. From the day I first saw you, all my hopes of happiness have been in securing your affection. One day you acknowledged that you loved me, and since that day my hope of future happiness has rested on obtaining you, for to gain you would be life to me. Now, I think no more; I say only that fortune has turned against me—I had thought to gain heaven, and now I have lost it. It is an every-day

de Villefort instantly hastened to her assistance, and aided her husband in dragging her to the carriage, saying:

'What a singular event! Who could have thought it? Ah, yes, it is indeed strange!'

And the wretched family departed, leaving a cloud of sadness hanging over the rest of the evening. At the foot of the stairs, Valentine found Barrois awaiting her.

'M. Noirtier wishes to see you tonight,' he said, in an undertone.

'Tell him I will come when I leave my dear grandmamma,' she replied, feeling, with true delicacy, that the person to whom she could be of the most service just then was Madame de Saint-Méran.

Valentine found her grandmother in bed; silent caresses, heartwrung sobs, broken sighs, burning tears, were all that passed in this sad interview, while Madame de Villefort, leaning on her husband's arm, maintained all outward forms of respect, at least towards the poor widow. She soon whispered to her husband:

'I think it would be better for me to retire, with your permission, for the sight of me appears still to afflict your mother-in-law.' Madame de Saint-Méran heard her.

'Yes, yes,' she said softly to Valentine, 'let her leave; but do you stay.'

Madame de Villefort left, and Valentine remained alone beside the bed, for the procureur, overcome with astonishment at the unexpected death, had followed his wife. Meanwhile, Barrois had returned for the first time to old Noirtier, who having heard the noise in the house, had, as we have said, sent his old servant to inquire the cause; on his return, his quick intelligent eye interrogated the messenger.

'Alas, sir,' exclaimed Barrois, 'a great misfortune has happened. Madame de Saint-Méran has arrived, and her husband is dead!'

M. de Saint-Méran and Noirtier had never been on strict terms of friendship; still, the death of one old man always considerably affects another. Noirtier let his head fall upon his chest, apparently overwhelmed and thoughtful; then he closed one eye, in token of inquiry.

Barrois asked, 'Mademoiselle Valentine?'

Noirtier nodded his head.

'She is at the ball, as you know, since she came to say good-bye to you in full dress.' Noirtier again closed his left eye.