

'No.'

'Madame de Villefort?'

'No.'

'Me?' The former sign was repeated.

'Are you displeased with me?' cried Valentine in astonishment. M. Noirtier again closed his eyes.

'And what have I done, dear grandpapa, that you should be angry with me?' cried Valentine.

There was no answer, and she continued:

'I have not seen you all day. Has anyone been speaking to you against me?'

'Yes,' said the old man's look, with eagerness.

'Let me think a moment. I do assure you, grandpapa—Ah—M. and Madame de Villefort have just left this room, have they not?'

'Yes.'

'And it was they who told you something which made you angry? What was it then? May I go and ask them, that I may have the opportunity of making my peace with you?'

'No, no,' said Noirtier's look.

'Ah, you frighten me. What can they have said?' and she again tried to think what it could be.

'Ah, I know,' said she, lowering her voice and going close to the old man. 'They have been speaking of my marriage,—have they not?'

'Yes,' replied the angry look.

'I understand; you are displeased at the silence I have preserved on the subject. The reason of it was, that they had insisted on my keeping the matter a secret, and begged me not to tell you anything of it. They did not even acquaint me with their intentions, and I only discovered them by chance, that is why I have been so reserved with you, dear grandpapa. Pray forgive me.'

But there was no look calculated to reassure her; all it seemed to say was, 'It is not only your reserve which afflicts me.'

'What is it, then?' asked the young girl. 'Perhaps you think I shall abandon you, dear grandpapa, and that I shall forget you when I am married?'

'No.'

'They told you, then, that M. d'Épinay consented to our all living together?'

'Yes.'

'Then why are you still vexed and grieved?' The old man's eyes beamed with an expression of gentle affection.

'Yes, I understand,' said Valentine; 'it is because you love me.' The old man assented.

'And you are afraid I shall be unhappy?'

'Yes.'

'You do not like M. Franz?' The eyes repeated several times, 'No, no, no.'

'Then you are vexed with the engagement?'

'Yes.'

'Well, listen,' said Valentine, throwing herself on her knees, and putting her arm round her grandfather's neck, 'I am vexed, too, for I do not love M. Franz d'Épinay.'

An expression of intense joy illumined the old man's eyes.

'When I wished to retire into a convent, you remember how angry you were with me? A tear trembled in the eye of the invalid. 'Well,' continued Valentine, 'the reason of my proposing it was that I might escape this hateful marriage, which drives me to despair.' Noirtier's breathing came thick and short.

'Then the idea of this marriage really grieves you too? Ah, if you could but help me—if we could both together defeat their plan! But you are unable to oppose them,—you, whose mind is so quick, and whose will is so firm are nevertheless, as weak and unequal to the contest as I am myself. Alas, you, who would have been such a powerful protector to me in the days of your health and strength, can now only sympathize in my joys and sorrows, without being able to take any active part in them. However, this is much, and calls for gratitude and Heaven has not taken away all my blessings when it leaves me your sympathy and kindness.'

At these words there appeared in Noirtier's eye an expression of such deep meaning that the young girl thought she could read these words there: 'You are mistaken; I can still do much for you.'

'Do you think you can help me, dear grandpapa?' said Valentine.

‘Yes,’ Noirtier raised his eyes, it was the sign agreed on between him and Valentine when he wanted anything.

‘What is it you want, dear grandpapa?’ said Valentine, and she endeavoured to recall to mind all the things which he would be likely to need, and as the ideas presented themselves to her mind, she repeated them aloud, then,—finding that all her efforts elicited nothing but a constant ‘No,’—she said, ‘Come, since this plan does not answer, I will have recourse to another.’

She then recited all the letters of the alphabet from A down to N. When she arrived at that letter the paralytic made her understand that she had spoken the initial letter of the thing he wanted.

‘Ah,’ said Valentine, ‘the thing you desire begins with the letter N; it is with N that we have to do, then. Well, let me see, what can you want that begins with N? Na—Ne—Ni—No—’

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ said the old man’s eye.

‘Ah, it is No, then?’

‘Yes.’

Valentine fetched a dictionary, which she placed on a desk before Noirtier; she opened it, and, seeing that the old man’s eye was thoroughly fixed on its pages, she ran her finger quickly up and down the columns. During the six years which had passed since Noirtier first fell into this sad state, Valentine’s powers of invention had been too often put to the test not to render her expert in devising expedients for gaining a knowledge of his wishes, and the constant practice had so perfected her in the art that she guessed the old man’s meaning as quickly as if he himself had been able to seek for what he wanted. At the word *Noirtier*, Noirtier made a sign to her to stop. ‘Notary,’ said she, ‘do you want a notary, dear grandpapa?’ The old man again signified that it was a notary he desired.

‘You would wish a notary to be sent for then?’ said Valentine.

‘Yes.’

‘Shall my father be informed of your wish?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you wish the notary to be sent for immediately?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then they shall go for him directly, dear grandpapa. Is that all you want?’

‘That assassination was a mysterious affair,’ said Villefort, ‘and the perpetrators have hitherto escaped detection, although suspicion has fallen on the head of more than one person.’

Noirtier made such an effort that his lips expanded into a smile.

‘Now,’ continued Villefort, ‘those to whom the guilt really belongs, by whom the crime was committed, on whose heads the justice of man may probably descend here, and the certain judgment of God hereafter, would rejoice in the opportunity thus afforded of bestowing such a peace-offering as Valentine on the son of him whose life they so ruthlessly destroyed.’ Noirtier had succeeded in mastering his emotion more than could have been deemed possible with such an enfeebled and shattered frame.

‘Yes, I understand,’ was the reply contained in his look; and this look expressed a feeling of strong indignation, mixed with profound contempt. Villefort fully understood his father’s meaning, and answered by a slight shrug of his shoulders. He then motioned to his wife to take leave.

‘Now sir,’ said Madame de Villefort, ‘I must bid you farewell. Would you like me to send Edward to you for a short time?’

It had been agreed that the old man should express his approbation by closing his eyes, his refusal by winking them several times, and if he had some desire or feeling to express, he raised them to heaven. If he wanted Valentine, he closed his right eye only, and if Barrois, the left. At Madame de Villefort’s proposition he instantly winked his eyes.

Provoked by a complete refusal, she bit her lip and said, ‘Then shall I send Valentine to you?’ The old man closed his eyes eagerly, thereby intimating that such was his wish.

M. and Madame de Villefort bowed and left the room, giving orders that Valentine should be summoned to her grandfather’s presence, and feeling sure that she would have much to do to restore calmness to the perturbed spirit of the invalid. Valentine, with a colour still heightened by emotion, entered the room just after her parents had quitted it. One look was sufficient to tell her that her grandfather was suffering, and that there was much on his mind which he was wishing to communicate to her.

‘Dear grandpapa,’ cried she, ‘what has happened? They have vexed you, and you are angry?’

The paralytic closed his eyes in token of assent.
‘Who has displeased you? Is it my father?’

While his wife was speaking, Villefort had narrowly watched the old man's countenance. When Madame de Villefort pronounced the name of Franz, the pupil of M. Noirtier's eye began to dilate, and his eyelids trembled with the same movement that may be perceived on the lips of an individual about to speak, and he darted a lightning glance at Madame de Villefort and his son. The procureur, who knew the political hatred which had formerly existed between M. Noirtier and the elder d'Épinay, well understood the agitation and anger which the announcement had produced; but, feigning not to perceive either, he immediately resumed the narrative begun by his wife.

'Sir,' said he, 'you are aware that Valentine is about to enter her nineteenth year, which renders it important that she should lose no time in forming a suitable alliance. Nevertheless, you have not been forgotten in our plans, and we have fully ascertained beforehand that Valentine's future husband will consent, not to live in this house, for that might not be pleasant for the young people, but that you should live with them; so that you and Valentine, who are so attached to each other, would not be separated, and you would be able to pursue exactly the same course of life which you have hitherto done, and thus, instead of losing, you will be a gainer by the change, as it will secure to you two children instead of one, to watch over and comfort you.' Noirtier's look was furious; it was very evident that something desperate was passing in the old man's mind, for a cry of anger and grief rose in his throat, and not being able to find vent in utterance, appeared almost to choke him, for his face and lips turned quite purple with the struggle. Villefort quietly opened a window, saying, 'It is very warm, and the heat affects M. Noirtier.' He then returned to his place, but did not sit down.

'This marriage,' added Madame de Villefort, 'is quite agreeable to the wishes of M. d'Épinay and his family; besides, he had no relations nearer than an uncle and aunt, his mother having died at his birth, and his father having been assassinated in 1815, that is to say, when he was but two years old; it naturally followed that the child was permitted to choose his own pursuits, and he has, therefore, seldom acknowledged any other authority but that of his own will.'

'Yes,' Valentine rang the bell, and ordered the servant to tell Monsieur or Madame de Villefort that they were requested to come to M. Noirtier's room.

'Are you satisfied now?' inquired Valentine.

'Yes.'

'I am sure you are; it is not very difficult to discover that.' And the young girl smiled on her grandfather, as if he had been a child. M. de Villefort entered, followed by Barrois.

'What do you want me for, sir?' demanded he of the paralytic.

'Sir,' said Valentine, 'my grandfather wishes for a notary.' At this strange and unexpected demand M. de Villefort and his father exchanged looks.

'Yes,' motioned the latter, with a firmness which seemed to declare that with the help of Valentine and his old servant, who both knew what his wishes were, he was quite prepared to maintain the contest.

'Do you wish for a notary?' asked Villefort.

'Yes.'

'What to do?'

Noirtier made no answer.

'What do you want with a notary?' again repeated Villefort. The invalid's eye remained fixed, by which expression he intended to intimate that his resolution was unalterable.

'Is it to do us some ill turn? Do you think it is worth while?' said Villefort.

'Still,' said Barrois, with the freedom and fidelity of an old servant, 'if M. Noirtier asks for a notary, I suppose he really wishes for a notary; therefore I shall go at once and fetch one.' Barrois acknowledged no master but Noirtier, and never allowed his desires in any way to be contradicted. 'Yes, I do want a notary,' motioned the old man, shutting his eyes with a look of defiance, which seemed to say, 'and I should like to see the person who dares to refuse my request.'

'You shall have a notary, as you absolutely wish for one, sir,' said Villefort; 'but I shall explain to him your state of health, and make excuses for you, for the scene cannot fail of being a most ridiculous one.'

'Never mind that,' said Barrois; 'I shall go and fetch a notary, nevertheless.' And the old servant departed triumphantly on his mission.

Villefort did not need the help of either Valentine or the domestic in order to carry on with his father the strange conversation which he was about to begin. As we have said, he perfectly understood the old man's vocabulary, and if he did not use it more often, it was only indifference and *ennui* which prevented him from so doing. He therefore allowed Valentine to go into the garden, sent away Barrois, and after having seated himself at his father's right hand, while Madame de Villefort placed herself on the left, he addressed him thus:

'I trust you will not be displeased, sir, that Valentine has not come with us, or that I dismissed Barrois, for our conference will be one which could not with propriety be carried on in the presence of either. Madame de Villefort and I have a communication to make to you.'

Noirtier's face remained perfectly passive during this long preamble, while, on the contrary, Villefort's eye was endeavouring to penetrate into the inmost recesses of the old man's heart.

'This communication,' continued the procureur, in that cold and decisive tone which seemed at once to preclude all discussion, 'will, we are sure, meet with your approbation.'

The eye of the invalid still retained that vacancy of expression which prevented his son from obtaining any knowledge of the feelings which were passing in his mind; he listened, nothing more.

'Sir,' resumed Villefort, 'we are thinking of marrying Valentine.' Had the old man's face been moulded in wax it could not have shown less emotion at this news than was now to be traced there. 'The marriage will take place in less than three months,' said Villefort.

Noirtier's eye still retained its inanimate expression.

Madame de Villefort now took her part in the conversation and added:

'We thought this news would possess an interest for you, sir, who have always entertained a great affection for Valentine; it therefore only now remains for us to tell you the name of the young man for whom she is destined. It is one of the most desirable connections which could possibly be formed; he possesses fortune, a high rank in society, and every personal qualification likely to render Valentine supremely happy,—his name, moreover, cannot be wholly unknown to you. It is M. Franz de Quesnel, Baron d'Épinay.'


Noirtier's hair was long and white, and flowed over his shoulders; while in his eyes, shaded by thick black lashes, was concentrated, as it often happens with an organ which is used to the exclusion of the others, all the activity, address, force, and intelligence which were formerly diffused over his whole body; and so although the movement of the arm, the sound of the voice, and the agility of the body, were wanting, the speaking eye sufficed for all. He commanded with it; it was the medium through which his thanks were conveyed. In short, his whole appearance produced on the mind the impression of a corpse with living eyes, and nothing could be more startling than to observe the expression of anger or joy suddenly lighting up these organs, while the rest of the rigid and marble-like features were utterly deprived of the power of participation. Three persons only could understand this language of the poor paralytic; these were Villefort, Valentine, and the old servant of whom we have already spoken. But as Villefort saw his father but seldom, and then only when absolutely obliged, and as he never took any pains to please or gratify him when he was there, all the old man's happiness was centred in his granddaughter. Valentine, by means of her love, her patience, and her devotion, had learned to read in Noirtier's look all the varied feelings which were passing in his mind. To this dumb language, which was so unintelligible to others, she answered by throwing her whole soul into the expression of her countenance, and in this manner were the conversations sustained between the blooming girl and the helpless invalid, whose body could scarcely be called a living one, but who, nevertheless, possessed a fund of knowledge and penetration, united with a will as powerful as ever although clogged by a body rendered utterly incapable of obeying its impulses.

Valentine had solved the problem, and was able easily to understand his thoughts, and to convey her own in return, and, through her untiring and devoted assiduity, it was seldom that, in the ordinary transactions of every-day life, she failed to anticipate the wishes of the living, thinking mind, or the wants of the almost inanimate body.

As to the servant, he had, as we have said, been with his master for five-and-twenty years, therefore he knew all his habits, and it was seldom that Noirtier found it necessary to ask for anything; so prompt was he in administering to all the necessities of the invalid.

Chapter LIX

The Will

s soon as Barrois had left the room, Noirtier looked at Valentine with a malicious expression that said many things. The young girl perfectly understood the look, and so did Villefort, for his countenance became clouded, and he knitted his eyebrows angrily. He took a seat, and quietly awaited the arrival of the notary. Noirtier saw him seat himself with an appearance of perfect indifference, at the same time giving a side look at Valentine, which made her understand that she also was to remain in the room. Three-quarters of an hour after, Barrois returned, bringing the notary with him.

'Sir,' said Villefort, after the first salutations were over, 'you were sent for by M. Noirtier, whom you see here. All his limbs have become completely paralysed, he has lost his voice also, and we ourselves find much trouble in endeavouring to catch some fragments of his meaning.'

Noirtier cast an appealing look on Valentine, which look was at once so earnest and imperative, that she answered immediately.

'Sir,' said she, 'I perfectly understand my grandfather's meaning at all times.'

'That is quite true,' said Barrois; 'and that is what I told the gentleman as we walked along.'

'Permit me,' said the notary, turning first to Villefort and then to Valentine—'permit me to state that the case in question is just one of those in which a public officer like myself cannot proceed to act without thereby incurring a dangerous responsibility. The first thing necessary to render an act valid is, that the notary should be thoroughly convinced that he has faithfully interpreted the will and wishes of the person dictating the act. Now I cannot be sure of the approbation or disapprobation of a

client who cannot speak, and as the object of his desire or his repugnance cannot be clearly proved to me, on account of his want of speech, my services here would be quite useless, and cannot be legally exercised.'

The notary then prepared to retire. An imperceptible smile of triumph was expressed on the lips of the procureur. Noirtier looked at Valentine with an expression so full of grief, that she arrested the departure of the notary.

'Sir,' said she, 'the language which I speak with my grandfather may be easily learnt, and I can teach you in a few minutes, to understand it almost as well as I can myself. Will you tell me what you require, in order to set your conscience quite at ease on the subject?'

'In order to render an act valid, I must be certain of the approbation or disapprobation of my client. Illness of body would not affect the validity of the deed, but sanity of mind is absolutely requisite.'

'Well, sir, by the help of two signs, with which I will acquaint you presently, you may ascertain with perfect certainty that my grandfather is still in the full possession of all his mental faculties. M. Noirtier, being deprived of voice and motion, is accustomed to convey his meaning by closing his eyes when he wishes to signify "yes," and to wink when he means "no." You now know quite enough to enable you to converse with M. Noirtier;—try.'

Noirtier gave Valentine such a look of tenderness and gratitude that it was comprehended even by the notary himself.

'You have heard and understood what your granddaughter has been saying, sir, have you?' asked the notary. Noirtier closed his eyes.

'And you approve of what she said—that is to say, you declare that the signs which she mentioned are really those by means of which you are accustomed to convey your thoughts?'

'Yes.'

'It was you who sent for me?'

'Yes.'

'To make your will?'

'Yes.'

'And you do not wish me to go away without fulfilling your original intentions?' The old man winked violently.

Chapter LVIII

M. Noirtier de Villefort



WE will now relate what was passing in the house of the king's attorney after the departure of Madame Danglars and her daughter, and during the time of the conversation between Maximilian and Valentine, which we have just detailed.

M. de Villefort entered his father's room, followed by Madame de Villefort. Both of the visitors, after saluting the old man and speaking to Barrois, a faithful servant, who had been twenty-five years in his service, took their places on either side of the paralytic.

M. Noirtier was sitting in an armchair, which moved upon casters, in which he was wheeled into the room in the morning, and in the same way drawn out again at night. He was placed before a large glass, which reflected the whole apartment, and so, without any attempt to move, which would have been impossible, he could see all who entered the room and everything which was going on around him. M. Noirtier, although almost as immovable as a corpse, looked at the new-comers with a quick and intelligent expression, perceiving at once, by their ceremonious courtesy, that they were come on business of an unexpected and official character.

Sight and hearing were the only senses remaining, and they, like two solitary sparks, remained to animate the miserable body which seemed fit for nothing but the grave; it was only, however, by means of one of these senses that he could reveal the thoughts and feelings that still occupied his mind, and the look by which he gave expression to his inner life was like the distant gleam of a candle which a traveller sees by night across some desert place, and knows that a living being dwells beyond the silence and obscurity.

'Ah, Valentine,' said Maximilian, 'give me but one finger through this opening in the grating, one finger, the littlest finger of all, that I may have the happiness of kissing it.'

'Maximilian, we said we would be to each other as two voices, two shadows.'

'As you will, Valentine.'

'Shall you be happy if I do what you wish?'

'Oh, yes!'

Valentine mounted on a bench, and passed not only her finger but her whole hand through the opening. Maximilian uttered a cry of delight, and, springing forwards, seized the hand extended towards him, and imprinted on it a fervent and impassioned kiss. The little hand was then immediately withdrawn, and the young man saw Valentine hurrying towards the house, as though she were almost terrified at her own sensations.

'Well, sir,' said the young girl, 'do you understand now, and is your conscience perfectly at rest on the subject?'

But before the notary could answer, Villefort had drawn him aside.

'Sir,' said he, 'do you suppose for a moment that a man can sustain a physical shock, such as M. Noirtier has received, without any detriment to his mental faculties?'

'It is not exactly that, sir,' said the notary, 'which makes me uneasy, but the difficulty will be in wording his thoughts and intentions, so as to be able to get his answers.'

'You must see that to be an utter impossibility,' said Villefort. Valentine and the old man heard this conversation, and Noirtier fixed his eye so earnestly on Valentine that she felt bound to answer to the look.

'Sir,' said she, 'that need not make you uneasy, however difficult it may at first sight appear to be. I can discover and explain to you my grandfather's thoughts, so as to put an end to all your doubts and fears on the subject. I have now been six years with M. Noirtier, and let him tell you if ever once, during that time, he has entertained a thought which he was unable to make me understand.'

'No,' signed the old man.

'Let us try what we can do, then,' said the notary. 'You accept this young lady as your interpreter, M. Noirtier?'

'Yes.'

'Well, sir, what do you require of me, and what document is it that you wish to be drawn up?'

Valentine named all the letters of the alphabet until she came to W. At this letter the eloquent eye of Noirtier gave her notice that she was to stop.

'It is very evident that it is the letter W which M. Noirtier wants,' said the notary.

'Wait,' said Valentine; and, turning to her grandfather, she repeated, 'Wa—We—Wi—.' The old man stopped her at the last syllable. Valentine then took the dictionary, and the notary watched her while she turned over the pages.

She passed her finger slowly down the columns, and when she came to the word 'Will,' M. Noirtier's eye bade her stop.

'Will,' said the notary, 'it is very evident that M. Noirtier is desirous of making his will.'

'Yes, yes, yes,' motioned the invalid.

'Really, sir, you must allow that this is most extraordinary,' said the astonished notary, turning to M. de Villefort.

'Yes,' said the procureur, 'and I think the will promises to be yet more extraordinary, for I cannot see how it is to be drawn up without the intervention of Valentine, and she may, perhaps, be considered as too much interested in its contents to allow of her being a suitable interpreter of the obscure and ill-defined wishes of her grandfather.'

'No, no, no,' replied the eye of the paralytic.

'What?' said Villefort, 'do you mean to say that Valentine is not interested in your will?'

'No.'

'Sir,' said the notary, whose interest had been greatly excited, and who had resolved on publishing far and wide the account of this extraordinary and picturesque scene, 'what appeared so impossible to me an hour ago, has now become quite easy and practicable, and this may be a perfectly valid will, provided it be read in the presence of seven witnesses, approved by the testator, and sealed by the notary in the presence of the witnesses. As to the time, it will not require very much more than the generality of wills. There are certain forms necessary to be gone through, and which are always the same. As to the details, the greater part will be furnished afterwards by the state in which we find the affairs of the testator, and by yourself, who, having had the management of them, can doubtless give full information on the subject. But besides all this, in order that the instrument may not be contested, I am anxious to give it the greatest possible authenticity, therefore, one of my colleagues will help me, and, contrary to custom, will assist in the dictation of the testament. Are you satisfied, sir?' continued the notary, addressing the old man. 'Yes,' looked the invalid, his eye beaming with delight at the ready interpretation of his meaning.

'What is he going to do?' thought Villefort, whose position demanded much reserve, but who was longing to know what his father's intentions were. He left the room to give orders for another notary to be sent, but Barrois, who had heard all that passed, had guessed his master's wishes, and had already gone to fetch one. The procureur then told his wife to

'He is, as you see, a very valuable animal,' said Maximilian. "You know that my means are limited, and that I am what would be designated a man of moderate pretensions. Well, I went to a horse dealer's, where I saw this magnificent horse, which I have named Médéh. I asked the price; they told me it was 4,500 francs. I was, therefore, obliged to give it up, as you may imagine, but I own I went away with rather a heavy heart, for the horse had looked at me affectionately, had rubbed his head against me and, when I mounted him, had pranced in the most delightful way imaginable, so that I was altogether fascinated with him. The same evening some friends of mine visited me,—M. de Château-Renaud, M. Debray, and five or six other choice spirits, whom you do not know, even by name. They proposed a game of *bouillotte*. I never play, for I am not rich enough to afford to lose, or sufficiently poor to desire to gain. But I was at my own house, you understand, so there was nothing to be done but to send for the cards, which I did.

'Just as they were sitting down to table, M. de Monte Cristo arrived. He took his seat amongst them; they played, and I won. I am almost ashamed to say that my gains amounted to 5,000 francs. We separated at midnight. I could not defer my pleasure, so I took a cabriolet and drove to the horse dealer's. Feverish and excited, I rang at the door. The person who opened it must have taken me for a madman, for I rushed at once to the stable. Médéh was standing at the rack, eating his hay. I immediately put on the saddle and bridle, to which operation he lent himself with the best grace possible; then, putting the 4,500 francs into the hands of the astonished dealer, I proceeded to fulfil my intention of passing the night in riding in the Champs-Élysées. As I rode by the count's house I perceived a light in one of the windows, and fancied I saw the shadow of his figure moving behind the curtain. Now, Valentine, I firmly believe that he knew of my wish to possess this horse, and that he lost expressly to give me the means of procuring him.'

'My dear Maximilian, you are really too fanciful; you will not love even me long. A man who accustoms himself to live in such a world of poetry and imagination must find far too little excitement in a common, every-day sort of attachment such as ours. But they are calling me. Do you hear?'