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.'

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

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.'

'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.

occurrence for a gambler to lose not only what he possesses but also what he has not.'

Morrel pronounced these words with perfect calmness; Valentine looked at him a moment with her large, scrutinizing eyes, endeavouring not to let Morrel discover the grief which struggled in her heart.

'But, in a word, what are you going to do?' asked she.

'I am going to have the honour of taking my leave of you, mademoiselle, solemnly assuring you that I wish your life may be so calm, so happy, and so fully occupied, that there may be no place for me even in your memory.'

'Oh!' murmured Valentine.

'Adieu, Valentine, adieu!' said Morrel, bowing.

'Where are you going?' cried the young girl, extending her hand through the opening, and seizing Maximilian by his coat, for she understood from her own agitated feelings that her lover's calmness could not be real; 'where are you going?'

'I am going, that I may not bring fresh trouble into your family: and to set an example which every honest and devoted man, situated as I am, may follow.'

'Before you leave me, tell me what you are going to do, Maximilian.' The young man smiled sorrowfully.

'Speak, speak!' said Valentine; 'I entreat you.'

'Has your resolution changed, Valentine?'

'It cannot change, unhappy man; you know it must not!' cried the young girl.

'Then adieu, Valentine!'

Valentine shook the gate with a strength of which she could not have been supposed to be possessed, as Morrel was going away, and passing both her hands through the opening, she clasped and wrung them. 'I must know what you mean to do!' said she. 'Where are you going?'

'Oh, fear not,' said Maximilian, stopping at a short distance, 'I do not intend to render another man responsible for the rigorous fate reserved for me. Another might threaten to seek M. Franz, to provoke him, and to fight with him; all that would be folly. What has M. Franz to do with it? He saw me this morning for the first time, and has already forgotten he has seen me. He did not even know I existed when it was arranged by

your two families that you should be united. I have no enmity against M. Franz, and promise you the punishment shall not fall on him.'

'On whom, then!—on me?'

'On you? Valentine! Oh, Heaven forbid! Woman is sacred; the woman one loves is holy.'

'On yourself, then, unhappy man; on yourself?'

'I am the only guilty person, am I not?' said Maximilian.

'Maximilian!' said Valentine, 'Maximilian, come back, I entreat you!'

He drew near with his sweet smile, and but for his paleness one might have thought him in his usual happy mood.

'Listen, my dear, my adored Valentine,' said he in his melodious and grave tone; 'those who, like us, have never had a thought for which we need blush before the world, such may read each other's hearts. I never was romantic, and am no melancholy hero. I imitate neither Manfred nor Anthony; but without words, protestations, or vows, my life has entwined itself with yours; you leave me, and you are right in doing so,—I repeat it, you are right; but in losing you, I lose my life. The moment you leave me, Valentine, I am alone in the world. My sister is happily married; her husband is only my brother-in-law, that is, a man whom the ties of social life alone attach to me; no one then longer needs my useless life. This is what I shall do; I will wait until the very moment you are married, for I will not lose the shadow of one of those unexpected chances which are sometimes reserved for us, since M. Franz may, after all, die before that time, a thunderbolt may fall even on the altar as you approach it,—nothing appears impossible to one condemned to die, and miracles appear quite reasonable when his escape from death is concerned. I will, then, wait until the last moment, and when my misery is certain, irremediable, hopeless, I will write a confidential letter to my brother-in-law, another to the prefect of police, to acquaint them with my intention, and at the corner of some wood, on the brink of some abyss, on the bank of some river, I will put an end to my existence, as certainly as I am the son of the most honest man who ever lived in France.' Valentine trembled convulsively; she loosened her hold of the gate, her arms fell by her side, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. The young man stood before her, sorrowful and resolute.

'Oh, for pity's sake,' said she, 'you will live, will 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?'

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?'

'No, on my honour,' said Maximilian; 'but that will not affect you. You have done your duty, and your conscience will be at rest.'

Valentine fell on her knees, and pressed her almost bursting heart. 'Maximilian,' said she, 'Maximilian, my friend, my brother on earth, my true husband in heaven, I entreat you, do as I do, live in suffering; perhaps we may one day be united.'

'Adieu, Valentine,' repeated Morrel.

'My God,' said Valentine, raising both her hands to heaven with a sublime expression, 'I have done my utmost to remain a submissive daughter; I have begged, entreated, implored; he has regarded neither my prayers, my entreaties, nor my tears. It is done,' cried she, wiping away her tears, and resuming her firmness, 'I am resolved not to die of remorse, but rather of shame. Live, Maximilian, and I will be yours. Say when shall it be? Speak, command, I will obey.'

Morrel, who had already gone some few steps away, again returned, and pale with joy extended both hands towards Valentine through the opening.

'Valentine,' said he, 'dear Valentine, you must not speak thus—rather let me die. Why should I obtain you by violence, if our love is mutual? Is it from mere humanity you bid me live? I would then rather die.'

'Truly,' murmured Valentine, 'who on this earth cares for me, if he does not? Who has consoled me in my sorrow but he? On whom do my hopes rest? On whom does my bleeding heart repose? On him, on him, always on him! Yes, you are right, Maximilian, I will follow you. I will leave the paternal home, I will give up all. Oh, ungrateful girl that I am,' cried Valentine, sobbing, 'I will give up all, even my dear old grandfather, whom I had nearly forgotten.'

'No,' said Maximilian, 'you shall not leave him. M. Noirtier has evinced, you say, a kind feeling towards me. Well, before you leave, tell him all; his consent would be your justification in God's sight. As soon as we are married, he shall come and live with us, instead of one child, he shall have two. You have told me how you talk to him and how he answers you; I shall very soon learn that language by signs, Valentine, and I promise you solemnly, that instead of despair, it is happiness that awaits us.'

'Oh, see, Maximilian, see the power you have over me, you almost make me believe you; and yet, what you tell me is madness, for my father will

curse me—he is inflexible—he will never pardon me. Now listen to me, Maximilian; if by artifice, by entreaty, by accident—in short, if by any means I can delay this marriage, will you wait?'

'Yes, I promise you, as faithfully as you have promised me that this horrible marriage shall not take place, and that if you are dragged before a magistrate or a priest, you will refuse.'

'I promise you by all that is most sacred to me in the world, namely, by my mother.'

'We will wait, then,' said Morrel.

'Yes, we will wait,' replied Valentine, who revived at these words; 'there are so many things which may save unhappy beings such as we are.'

'I rely on you, Valentine,' said Morrel; 'all you do will be well done; only if they disregard your prayers, if your father and Madame de Saint-Méran insist that M. d'Épinay should be called tomorrow to sign the contract— '

'Then you have my promise, Maximilian.'

'Instead of signing— '

'I will go to you, and we will fly; but from this moment until then, let us not tempt Providence, let us not see each other. It is a miracle, it is a providence that we have not been discovered. If we were surprised, if it were known that we met thus, we should have no further resource.'

'You are right, Valentine; but how shall I ascertain?'

'From the notary, M. Deschamps.'

'I know him.'

'And for myself—I will write to you, depend on me. I dread this marriage, Maximilian, as much as you.'

'Thank you, my adored Valentine, thank you; that is enough. When once I know the hour, I will hasten to this spot, you can easily get over this fence with my assistance, a carriage will await us at the gate, in which you will accompany me to my sister's; there living, retired or mingling in society, as you wish, we shall be enabled to use our power to resist oppression, and not suffer ourselves to be put to death like sheep, which only defend themselves by sighs.'

'Yes,' said Valentine, 'I will now acknowledge you are right, Maximilian; and now are you satisfied with your betrothal?' said the young girl sorrowfully.

'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 named Albert de Morcerf or Raoul de Château-Renaud; but Morrel was

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.'

'My adored Valentine, words cannot express one half of my satisfaction.'

Valentine had approached, or rather, had placed her lips so near the fence, that they nearly touched those of Morrel, which were pressed against the other side of the cold and inexorable barrier.

'Adieu, then, till we meet again,' said Valentine, tearing herself away. 'I shall hear from you?'

'Yes.'

'Thanks, thanks, dear love, adieu!'

The sound of a kiss was heard, and Valentine fled through the avenue. Morrel listened to catch the last sound of her dress brushing the branches, and of her footstep on the gravel, then raised his eyes with an ineffable smile of thankfulness to heaven for being permitted to be thus loved, and then also disappeared.

The young man returned home and waited all the evening and all the next day without getting any message. It was only on the following day, at about ten o'clock in the morning, as he was starting to call on M. Deschamps, the notary, that he received from the postman a small billet, which he knew to be from Valentine, although he had not before seen her writing. It was to this effect:

"Tears, entreaties, prayers, have availed me nothing. Yesterday, for two hours, I was at the church of Saint-Philippe-du-Roule, and for two hours I prayed most fervently. Heaven is as inflexible as man, and the signature of the contract is fixed for this evening at nine o'clock. I have but one promise and but one heart to give; that promise is pledged to you, that heart is also yours. This evening, then, at a quarter to nine at the gate.

"Your betrothed,

'Valentine de Villefort.'

'P.S.—My poor grandmother gets worse and worse; yesterday her fever amounted to delirium; today her delirium is almost madness. You will be very kind to me, will you not, Morrel, to make me forget my sorrow in leaving her thus? I think it is kept a secret from grandpapa Noirtier, that the contract is to be signed this evening.'

Morrel went also to the notary, who confirmed the news that the contract was to be signed that evening. Then he went to call on Monte Cristo and heard still more. Franz had been to announce the ceremony, and

Madame de Villefort had also written to beg the count to excuse her not inviting him; the death of M. de Saint-Méran and the dangerous illness of his widow would cast a gloom over the meeting which she would regret should be shared by the count whom she wished every happiness.

The day before Franz had been presented to Madame de Saint-Méran, who had left her bed to receive him, but had been obliged to return to it immediately after.

It is easy to suppose that Morrel's agitation would not escape the count's penetrating eye. Monte Cristo was more affectionate than ever,—indeed, his manner was so kind that several times Morrel was on the point of telling him all. But he recalled the promise he had made to Valentine, and kept his secret.

The young man read Valentine's letter twenty times in the course of the day. It was her first, and on what an occasion! Each time he read it he renewed his vow to make her happy. How great is the power of a woman who has made so courageous a resolution! What devotion does she deserve from him for whom she has sacrificed everything! How ought she really to be supremely loved! She becomes at once a queen and a wife, and it is impossible to thank and love her sufficiently.

Morrel longed intensely for the moment when he should hear Valentine say, 'Here I am, Maximilian; come and help me.' He had arranged everything for her escape; two ladders were hidden in the clover-field; a cabriolet was ordered for Maximilian alone, without a servant, without lights; at the turning of the first street they would light the lamps, as it would be foolish to attract the notice of the police by too many precautions. Occasionally he shuddered; he thought of the moment when, from the top of that wall, he should protect the descent of his dear Valentine, pressing in his arms for the first time her of whom he had yet only kissed the delicate hand.

When the afternoon arrived and he felt that the hour was drawing near, he wished for solitude, his agitation was extreme; a simple question from a friend would have irritated him. He shut himself in his room, and tried to read, but his eye glanced over the page without understanding a word, and he threw away the book, and for the second time sat down to sketch his plan, the ladders and the fence.

At length the hour drew near. Never did a man deeply in love allow the clocks to go on peacefully. Morrel tormented his so effectually that they

'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.'