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CONSCIENCE

By Hector Malot

With a Preface by EDOUARD PAILLERON, of the French Academy

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HECTOR MALOT

HECTOR-HENRI MALOT, the son of a notary public, was born at La Brouille (Seine-Inferieure), March 20, 1830. He studied law, intending to devote himself also to the Notariat, but toward 1853 or 1854 commenced writing for various small journals. Somewhat later he assisted in compiling the 'Biographie Generale' of Firmin Didot, and was also a contributor to some reviews. Under the generic title of 'Les Victimes d'Amour,' he made his debut with the following three family-romances: 'Les Amants (1859), Les Epoux (1865), and Les Enfants (1866).' About the same period he published a book, 'La Vie Moderne en Angleterre.' Malot has written quite a number of novels, of which the greatest is 'Conscience,' crowned by the French Academy in 1878.

His works have met with great success in all countries. They possess that lasting interest which attends all work based on keen observation and masterly analysis of the secret motives of human actions.

The titles of his writings run as follows: 'Les Amours de Jacques (1868); Un Beau Frere (1869); Romain Kalbris (1864), being a romance for children; Une Bonne Afaire, and Madame Obernin (1870); Un Cure de Province (1872); Un Mariage sons le Second Empire (1873); Une Belle Mere (1874); L'Auberge du Monde (1875-1876, 4 vols.); Les Batailles du Mariage (1877, 3 vols.); Cara (1877); Le Docteur Claude (1879); Le Boheme Tapageuse (1880, 3 vols.); Pompon, and Une Femme d'Argent (1881); La Petite Soeur, and Les Millions Honteux (1882); Les Besogneux, and Paulette (1883); Marichette, and Micheline (1884.); Le Lieutenant Bonnet, and Sang Bleu (1885); Baccara, and Zyte (1886); Viceo Francis, Seduction, and Ghislaine (1887); Mondaine (1888); Mariage Riche, and Justice (1889); Mere (1890), Anie (1891); Complices (1892); Conscience (1893); and Amours de Jeunes et Amours de Vieux (1894).'

About this time Hector Malot resolved not to write fiction any more. He announced this determination in a card published in the journal, 'Le Temps,' May 25, 1895—It was then maliciously stated that "M. Malot his retired from business after having accumulated a fortune." However, he took up his pen again and published a history of his literary life: Le Roman de mes Romans (1896); besides two volumes of fiction, L'Amour dominateur (1896), and Pages choisies (1898), works which showed that, in the language of Holy Writ, "his eye was not dimmed nor his natural force abated," and afforded him a triumph over his slanderers.

EDOUARD PAILLERON
de l'Academie Francaise.

CONSCIENCE

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I. THE REUNION

When Crozat, the Bohemian, escaped from poverty, by a good marriage that made him a citizen of the Rue de Vaugirard, he did not break with his old comrades; instead of shunning them, or keeping them at a distance, he took pleasure in gathering them about him, glad to open his house to them, the comforts of which were very different from the attic of the Rue Ganneron, that he had occupied for so long a time.

Every Wednesday, from four to seven o'clock, he had a reunion at his house, the Hotel des Medicis, and it was a holiday for which his friends prepared themselves. When a new idea occurred to one of the habitues it was caressed, matured, studied in solitude, in order to be presented in full bloom at the assembly.

Crozat's reception of his friends was pleasing, simple, like the man, cordial on the part of the husband, as well as on the part of the wife, who, having been an actress, held to the religion of comradeship: On a table were small pitchers of beer and glasses; within reach was an old stone jar from Beauvais, full of tobacco. The beer was good, the tobacco dry, and the glasses were never empty.

And it was not silly subjects that were discussed here, worldly babblings, or gossiping about absent friends, but the great questions that ruled humanity: philosophy, politics, society, and religion.

Formed at first of friends, or, at least, of comrades who had worked and suffered together, these reunions had enlarged gradually, until one day the rooms at the Hotel des Medicis became a 'parlotte' where preachers of ideas and of new religions, thinkers, reformers, apostles, politicians, aesthetes, and even babblers in search of ears more or less complaisant that would listen to them, met together. Any one might come who wished, and if one did not enter there exactly as one would enter an ordinary hotel, it was sufficient to be brought by an habitue in order to have the right to a pipe, some beer, and to speak.

One of the habitues, Brigard, was a species of apostle, who had acquired celebrity by practising in his daily life the ideas that he professed and preached. Comte de Brigard by birth, he began by renouncing his title, which made him a vassal of the respect of men and of social conventions; an instructor of law, he could easily have made a thousand or twelve hundred francs a month, but he arranged the number and the price of his lessons so that each day brought him only ten francs in order that he might not be a slave to money; living with a woman whom he loved, he had always insisted, although he had two daughters, on living with her 'en union libre', and in not acknowledging his children legally, because the law debased the ties which attached him to them and lessened his duties; it was conscience that sanctioned these duties; and nature, like conscience, made him the most faithful of lovers, the best, the most affectionate, the most tender of fathers. Tall, proud, carrying in his person and manners the native elegance of his race, he dressed like the porter at the corner, only replacing the blue velvet by chestnut velvet, a less frivolous color. Living in Clamart for twenty years, he always came to Paris on foot, and the only concessions that he made to conventionality or to his comfort were to wear sabots in winter, and to carry his vest on his arm in summer.

Thus organized, he must have disciples, and he sought them everywhere—in the streets, where he buttonholed those he was able to snatch under the trees of the Luxembourg Gardens, and on Wednesday at the house of his old comrade Crozat. How many he had had! But, unfortunately, the greater number turned out badly. Several became ministers; others accepted high government positions for life; some handled millions of francs; two were at Noumea; one preached in the pulpit of Notre Dame.

One afternoon in October the little parlor was full; the end of the summer vacation had brought back the habitues, and for the first time the number was nearly large enough to open a profitable discussion. Crozat, near the door, smiled at the arrivals on shaking hands, and Brigard, his soft felt hat on his head, presided, assisted by his two favorite disciples of the moment, the advocate Nougarede and the poet Glady, neither of whom would turn out badly, he was certain.

To tell the truth, for those who knew how to look and to see, the pale face of Nougarede, his thin lips, restless eyes, and an austerity of dress and manners which clashed with his twenty-six years, gave him more the appearance of a man of ambition than of an apostle. And when one knew that Glady was the

owner of a beautiful house in Paris, and of real estate in the country that brought him a hundred thousand francs a year, it was difficult to imagine that he would long follow Father Brigard.

But to see was not the dominant faculty of Brigard; it was to reason, and reason told him that ambition would soon make Nougarede a deputy, as fortune would one day make Glady an academician; and in that case, although he detested assemblies as much as academies, they would then have two tribunes whence the good word would fall on the multitude with more weight. They might be counted on. When Nougarede began to come to the Wednesday reunions he was as empty as a drum, and if he spoke brilliantly on no matter what subject with an imperturbable eloquence, it was to say nothing. In Glady's first volume were words learnedly arranged to please the ears and the eyes. Now, ideas sustained the discourse of the advocate, as the verses of the poet said something—and these ideas were Brigard's; this something was the perfume of his teaching.

For half an hour the pipes burned fiercely, the smoke slowly rose to the ceiling, and as in a cloud Brigard might be seen like a bearded god, proclaiming his law, his hat on his head; for, if he had made a rule never to take it off, he manipulated it continually while he spoke, frequently pushing it forward, sometimes to the back of his head, to the right, to the left, raising it, and flattening it, according to the needs of his argument.

"It is incontestable," he said, "that we scatter our great force when we ought to concentrate it."

He pressed down his hat.

"In effect," he raised it, "the hour has arrived for us to assert ourselves as a group, and it is a duty for us, since it is a need of humanity—"

At this moment a new arrival glided into the room quietly, with the manifest intention of disturbing no one; but Crozat, who was seated near the door, stopped him and shook hands.

"'Tiens', Saniel! Good-day, doctor."

"Good-evening, my dear sir."

"Come to the table; the beer is good to-day."

"Thank you; I am very well here."

Without taking the chair that Crozat designated, he leaned against the wall. He was a tall, solid man about thirty, with tawny hair falling on the collar of his coat, a long, curled beard, a face energetic, but troubled and wan, to which the pale blue eyes gave an expression of hardness that was accentuated by a prominent jaw and a decided air. A Gaul, a true Gaul of ancient times, strong, bold, and resolute.

Brigard continued:

"It is incontestable"—this was his formula, because everything he said was incontestable to him, simply because he said it—"it is incontestable that in the struggle for existence the dogma of conscience must be established, its only sanction being the performance of duty and inward satisfaction —"

"Duty accomplished toward whom?" interrupted Saniel.

"Toward one's self."

"Then begin by stating what are our duties, and codify what is good and what is bad."

"That is easy," some one replied.

"Easy if you admit a certain innate regard for human life, for property, and for the family. But you must acknowledge that not all men have this regard. How many believe that it is not a fault to run away with the wife of a friend, not a crime to appropriate something that they want, or to kill an enemy! Where are the duties of those who reason and feel in this way? What is their inward satisfaction worth? This is why I will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our actions."

There were several exclamations at this, which Brigard checked.

"What guide, then, shall men obey?" he demanded.

"Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life!"

"That which leads to a wise and progressive extermination. Is this what you desire?"

"Why not? I do not shrink from an extermination that relieves humanity of idlers that it drags about without power to advance or to free itself, finally sinking under the load. Is it not better for the world to be rid of such people, who obstruct the advancement of others?"

"At least the idea is bizarre coming from a doctor," interrupted Crozat, "since it would put an end to hospitals."

"Not at all; I would preserve them for the study of monsters."

"In placing society on this antagonistic footing," said Brigard, "you destroy society itself, which is founded on reciprocity, on good fellowship; and in doing so you can create for the strong a state of suspicion that paralyzes them. Carthage and Venice practised the selection by force, and destroyed themselves."

"You speak of force, my dear Saniel," interrupted a voice; "where do you get that—the force of things, the tatum? There is no beginning, no will; events decide for us climate, temperament, environment."

"Then," replied Saniel, "there is no responsibility, and this instrument conscience, that should decide everything, is good for nothing. You need not consider consequences. Success or defeat may yet be immaterial, for the accomplishment of an act that you have believed condemnable may serve the race, while another that you have believed beneficent may prove injurious; from which it follows that intentions only should be judged, and that no one but God can sound human hearts to their depths."

He began to laugh.

"Do you believe that? Is that the conclusion at which you have arrived?"

A waiter entered, carrying pitchers of beer on a tray, and the discussion was necessarily interrupted, every one drawing up to the table where Crozat filled the glasses, and the conversation took a more private turn.

Saniel shook hands with Brigard, who received him somewhat coldly; then he approached Glady with the manifest intention of detaining him, but Glady had said that he was obliged to leave, so Saniel said that he could remain no longer, and had only dropped in on passing.

When they were both gone Brigard turned to Crozat and Nougarede, who were near him, and declared that Saniel made him uneasy.

"He believes himself stronger than life," he said, "because he is sound and intelligent. He must take care that he does not go too far!"

CHAPTER II. THE RICH MAN'S REFUSAL

When Saniel and Glady reached the street, the rain that had fallen since morning had ceased, and the asphalt shone clear and glittering like a mirror.

"The walking is good," Saniel remarked.

"It will rain again," responded Glady, looking at the sky.

"I think not." It was evident that Glady wished to take a cab, but as none passed he was obliged to walk with Saniel.

"Do you know," he said, "that you have wounded Brigard?"

"I regret it sincerely; but the salon of our friend Crozat is not yet a church, and I do not suppose that discussion is forbidden there."

"To deny is not to discuss."

"You say that as if you were angry with me."

"Not at all. I am sorry that you have wounded Brigard—nothing more."

"That is too much, because I have a sincere esteem, a real friendship for you, if you will permit me to say so."

But Glady, apparently, did not desire the conversation to take this turn.

"I think this is an empty cab," he said, as a fiacre approached them.

"No," replied Saniel, "I see the light of a cigar through the windowpane."

Glady made a slight gesture of impatience that was not lost upon Saniel, who was expecting some such demonstration.

Rich, and frequenting the society of poor men, Glady lived in dread of borrowers. It was enough for any man to appear to wish to talk to him privately to make him believe that he was going to ask for fifty louis or twenty francs; so often was this the case that every friend or comrade was an enemy against whom he must defend his purse. And so he lay in wait as if expecting some one to spring upon him, his eyes open, his ears listening, and his hands in his pockets. This explains his attitude toward Saniel, in whom he scented a demand for money, and was the reason for his attempt to escape by taking a cab. But luck was against him, and he tried to decline the unspoken request in another way.

"Do not be surprised," he said, with the volubility with which a man speaks when he does not wish to give his companion a chance to say a word, "that I was pained to see Brigard take seriously an argument that evidently was not directed against him."

"Neither against him nor against his ideas."

"I know that; you do not need to defend yourself. But I have so much friendship, so much esteem and respect for Brigard that everything that touches him affects me. And how could it be otherwise when one knows his value, and what a man he is? This life of mediocrity that he lives, in order to be free, is it not admirable? What a beautiful example!"

"Not every one can follow it."

"You think that one cannot be contented with ten francs a day?"

"I mean that not every one has the chance to make ten francs a day."

The vague fears of Glady became definite at these words. They had walked down the Rue Ferou and reached the Place St. Sulpice.

"I think that at last I am going to find a cab," he said, precipitately.

But this hope was not realized; there was not a single cab at the station, and he was forced to submit to the assault from Saniel.

And Saniel began:

"You are compelled to walk with me, and, frankly, I rejoice, because I wish to talk to you of a serious affair—on which depends my future."

"This is a poor place for serious talk."

"I do not find it so."

"We would better appoint some other time."

"Why should we, since chance has thrown us together here?"

Glady resigned himself to the inevitable, and was as polite as he could be in the circumstances.

"I await your pleasure," he said in a gracious tone, that was a contrast to his former one.

Saniel, who was in such a hurry a few moments before, now silently walked by Glady, whose eyes were on the shining asphalt pavement.

At last he spoke.

"I have told you that my future depends on the affair concerning which I wish to speak to you. I can tell you all in a few words: If I am not able to procure three thousand francs within two days, I shall be obliged to leave Paris, to give up my studies and my work here, and go and bury myself in my native town and become a plain country doctor."

Glady did not flinch; if he had not foreseen the amount he expected the demand, and he continued gazing at his feet.

"You know," continued Saniel, "that I am the son of peasants; my father was marshal in a poor village of Auvergne. At school I gave proof of a certain aptitude for work above my comrades, and our cure conceived an affection for me and taught me all he knew. Then he made me enter a small seminary. But I had neither the docile mind nor the submissive character that was necessary for this education, and after several years of pranks and punishments, although I was not expelled, I was given to understand that my departure would be hailed with delight. I then became usher in a small school, but without salary, taking board and lodging as payment. I passed a good examination and was preparing for my degree, when I left the school owing to a quarrel. I had made some money by giving private lessons, and I found myself the possessor of nearly eighty francs. I started for Paris, where I arrived at five o'clock one morning in June, and where I knew, no one. I had a small trunk containing a few shirts, which obliged me to take a carriage. I told the coachman to take me to a hotel in the Latin Quarter. 'Which hotel?' he asked; 'I do not care,' I answered. 'Do you wish to go to the Hotel du Senat?' The name pleased me; perhaps it was an omen. He took me to the Hotel du Senat, where, with what I had left of my eighty francs, I paid a month in advance. I stayed there eight years."

"That is remarkable."

"What else could I do? I knew Latin and Greek as well as any man in France, but as far as anything else was concerned I was as ignorant as a schoolmaster. The same day I tried to make use of what I knew, and I went to a publisher of classic books, of whom I had heard my professor of Greek literature speak. After questioning me he gave me a copy of Pindar to prepare with Latin notes, and advanced me thirty francs, which lasted me a month. I came to Paris with the desire to work, but without having made up my mind what to do. I went wherever there were lectures, to the Sorbonne, to the College de France, to the Law School, and to the School of Medicine; but it was a month before I came to a decision. The subtleties of law displeased me, but the study of medicine, depending upon the observation of facts, attracted me, and I decided to become a doctor."

"A marriage of reason."

"No, a marriage for love. Because, if I had consulted reason, it would have told me that to marry medicine when one has nothing—neither family to sustain you nor relatives to push you—would be to condemn yourself to a life of trials, of battles, and of misery. My student life was happy; I worked hard, and by giving lessons in Latin I had enough to eat. When I received as house-surgeon six, eight, nine hundred francs, I thought it a large fortune, and I would have remained in this position for the rest of my life if I had been able to do so, but when I took my degree of doctor I was obliged to leave the hospital. The possessor of several thousand francs, I should have followed rigorously my dream of ambition. While attending the mistress of one of my comrades I made the acquaintance of an upholsterer, who suggested that he should furnish an apartment for me, and that I might pay him later. I yielded to temptation. Remember, I had passed eight years in the Hotel du Senat, and I knew nothing of Paris life. A home of my own! My own furniture, and a servant in my anteroom! I should be somebody! My upholsterer could have installed me in his own quarter of Paris, and perhaps could have obtained some patients for me among his customers, who are rich and fashionable. But he did not do this, probably concluding that with my awkward appearance I would not be a success with such people. When you are successful it is original to be a peasant—people find you clever; but before success comes to you it is a disgrace. He furnished me an apartment in a very respectable house in the Rue Louis-le-Grand. When I went into it I had debts to the amount of ten thousand francs behind me, the interest on this sum, the rent of two thousand four hundred francs, not a sou in my pocket, not a relative —"

"That was courageous."

"I did not know that in Paris everything is accomplished through influence, and I imagined that an intelligent man could make his way without assistance. I was to learn by experience. When a new doctor arrives anywhere his brother doctors do not receive him with much sympathy. 'What does this intruder want?' 'Are there not enough of us already?' He is watched, and the first patient that he loses is made use of as an example of his ignorance or imprudence, and his position becomes uncomfortable.

The chemists of my quarter whom I called upon did not receive me very warmly; they made me feel the distance that separates an honorable merchant from a beggar, and I was given to understand that they could patronize me only on condition that I ordered the specialties that they wished to profit by—iron from this one and tar from that. On commencing to practise I had as patients only the people of the quarter, whose principle was never to pay a doctor, and who wait for the arrival of a new one in order that they may be rid of the old one and this sort is numerous everywhere. It happened that my concierge was from Auvergne like myself, and he considered it his duty to make me give free attendance to all those from our country that he could find in the quarter and everywhere else, so that I had the patriotic satisfaction of seeing all the charcoal-dealers from Auvergne sprawling in my beautiful armchairs. Finally, by remaining religiously at home every Sunday in summer, while the other doctors were away, by rising quickly at night every time my bell rang, I was able to acquire a practice among a class of people who were more reasonable and satisfactory. I obtained a prize at the Academy. At the same time I delivered, at a moderate price, lectures in anatomy at schools on the outskirts of the city; I gave lessons; I undertook all the anonymous work of the book trade and of journalism that I could find. I slept five hours a day, and in four years I had decreased my debt seven thousand francs. If my upholsterer wished to be paid I could have it arranged, but that was not his intention. He wishes to take his furniture that is not worn out, and to keep the money that he has received. If I do not pay these three thousand francs in a few days I shall be turned into the street. To tell the truth, I shall soon have a thousand francs, but those who owe it to me are not in Paris, or will pay in January. Behold my situation! I am desperate because there is no one to whom I can apply; those whom I have asked for money have not listened to me; I have told you that I have no relatives, and neither have I any friends—perhaps because I am not amiable. And then I thought of you. You know me. You know that people say I have a future before me. At the end of three months I shall be a doctor in the hospitals; my competitors admit that I shall not miss admission; I have undertaken some experiments that will, perhaps, give me fame. Will you give me your hand?"

Glady extended it toward him. "I thank you for having applied to me; it is a proof of confidence that touches me." He pressed the hand that he had taken with some warmth. "I see that you have divined the sentiments of esteem with which you have inspired me."

Saniel drew a long breath.

"Unfortunately," continued Glady, "I cannot do what you desire without deviating from my usual line of conduct. When I started out in life I lent to all those who appealed to me, and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money. I then took an oath to refuse every one. It is an oath that I cannot break. What would my old friends say if they learned that I did for a young man what I have refused to do for them?"

"Who would know it?"

"My conscience."

They had reached the Quai Voltaire, where fiacres were stationed.

"At last here are some cabs," Glady said. "Pardon me for leaving you, but I am in a hurry."

CHAPTER III. A LAST RESORT

Gady entered the cab so quickly that Saniel remained staring at the sidewalk, slightly dazed. It was only when the door closed that he understood.

"His conscience!" he murmured. "Behold them! Tartufes!"

After a moment of hesitation, he continued his way and reached the bridge of Saints-Peres, but he walked with doubtful steps, like a man who does not know where he is going. Presently he stopped, and, leaning his arms on the parapet, watched the sombre, rapidly flowing Seine, its small waves

fringed with white foam. The rain had ceased, but the wind blew in squalls, roughening the surface of the river and making the red and green lights of the omnibus boats sway in the darkness. The passers-by came and went, and more than one examined him from the corner of the eye, wondering what this tall man was doing there, and if he intended to throw himself into the water.

And why not? What better could he do?

And this was what Saniel said to himself while watching the flowing water. One plunge, and he would end the fierce battle in which he had so madly engaged for four years, and which would in the end drive him mad.

It was not the first time that this idea of ending everything had tempted him, and he only warded it off by constantly inventing combinations which it seemed to him at the moment might save him. Why yield to such a temptation before trying everything? And this was how he happened to appeal to Glady. But he knew him, and knew that his avarice, about which every one joked, had a certain reason for its existence. However, he said to himself that if the landed proprietor obstinately refused a friendly loan, which would only pay the debts of youth, the poet would willingly fill the role of Providence and save from shipwreck, without risking anything, a man with a future, who, later, would pay him back. It was with this hope that he risked a refusal. The landed proprietor replied; the poet was silent. And now there was nothing to expect from any one. Glady was his last resort.

In explaining his situation to Glady he lightened the misery instead of exaggerating it. For it was not only his upholsterer that he owed, but also his tailor, his bootmaker, his coal-dealer, his concierge, and all those with whom he had dealings. In reality, his creditors had not harassed him very much until lately, but this state of affairs would not last when they saw him prosecuted; they also would sue him, and how could he defend himself? How should he live? His only resource would be to return to the Hotel du Senat, where even they would not leave him in peace, or to his native town and become a country doctor. In either case it was renouncing all his ambitions. Would it not be better to die?

What good was life if his dreams were not realized—if he had nothing that he wanted?

Like many who frequently come in contact with death, life in itself was a small thing to him—his own life as well as that of others; with Hamlet he said: “To die, to sleep, no more,” but without adding: “To die, to sleep, perchance to dream,” feeling certain that the dead do not dream; and what is better than sleep to those who have had a hard life?

He was absorbed in thought when something came between him and the flaring gaslight, and threw a shadow over him that made him straighten himself up. What was it? Only a policeman, who came and leaned against the parapet near him.

He understood. His attitude was that of a man who contemplates throwing himself into the river, and the policeman had placed himself there in order to prevent it.

“Thanks!” he said to the astonished man.

He continued his way, walking quickly, but hearing distinctly the steps of the policeman following him, who evidently took him for a madman who must be watched.

When he left the bridge of Saints-Peres for the Place du Carrousel this surveillance ceased, and he could then indulge freely in reflection—at least as freely as his trouble and discouragement permitted.

“The weak kill themselves; the strong fight to their last breath.”

And, low as he was, he was not yet at his last breath.

When he decided to appeal to Glady he had hesitated between him and a usurer named Caffie, whom he did not know personally, but whom he had heard spoken of as a rascal who was interested in all sorts of affairs, preferring the bad to the good—of successions, marriages, interdictions, extortions; and if he had not been to him it was for fear of being refused, as much as from the dread of putting himself in such hands in case of meeting with compliance. But these scruples and these fears were useless now; since Glady failed him, cost what it might and happen what would, he must go to this scamp for assistance.

He knew that Caffie lived in the Rue Sainte-Anne, but he did not know the number. He had only to go to one of his patients, a wine-merchant in the Rue Therese, to find his address in the directory. It was but a step, and he decided to run the risk; there was need of haste. Discouraged by all the applications

that he had made up to this time, disheartened by betrayed hopes, irritated by rebuffs, he did not deceive himself as to the chances of this last attempt, but at least he would try it, slight though the hope of success might be.

It was an old house where Caffie lived, and had been formerly a private hotel; it was composed of two wings, one on the street, the other on an inside court. A porte cochere gave access to this court, and under its roof, near the staircase, was the concierge's lodge. Saniel knocked at the door in vain; it was locked and would not open. He waited several minutes, and in his nervous impatience walked restlessly up and down the court. At last an old woman appeared carrying a small wax taper. She was feeble and bent, and began to excuse herself; she was alone and could not be everywhere at the same time, in her lodge and lighting the lamps on the stairways. Caffie lived on the first floor, in the wing on the street.

Saniel mounted the stairs and rang the bell. A long time passed, or at least it seemed long to him, before there was an answer. At last he heard a slow and heavy step on the tiled floor and the door was opened, but held by a hand and a foot.

"What do you wish?"

"Monsieur Caffie."

"I am he. Who are you?"

"Doctor Saniel."

"I have not sent for a doctor."

"It is not as doctor that I am here, but as client."

"This is not the hour when I receive clients."

"But you are at home."

"That is a fact!"

And Caffie, concluding to open the door, asked Saniel to enter, and then closed it.

"Come into my office."

They were in a small room filled with papers that had only an old desk and three chairs for furniture; it communicated with the office of the business man, which was larger, but furnished with the same simplicity and strewn with scraps of paper that had a mouldy smell.

"My clerk is ill just now," Caffie said, "and when I am alone I do not like to open the door."

After giving this excuse he offered Saniel a chair, and, seating himself before his desk, lighted by a lamp from which he had taken the shade, he said:

"Doctor, I am ready to listen to you."

He replaced the shade on the lamp.

Saniel made his request concisely, without the details that he had entered into with Glady. He owed three thousand francs to the upholsterer who had furnished his apartment, and as he could not pay immediately he was in danger of being prosecuted.

"Who is the upholsterer?" Caffie asked, while holding his left jaw with his right hand.

"Jardine, Boulevard Haussmann."

"I know him. It is his trade to take back his furniture in this way, after three quarters of the sum has been paid, and he has become rich at it. How much money have you already paid of this ten thousand francs?"

"Including the interest and what I have paid in instalments, nearly twelve thousand francs."

"And you still owe three thousand?"

"Yes."

"That is nice."

Caffie seemed full of admiration for this manner of proceeding.

"What guarantee have you to offer for this loan of three thousand francs?"

"No other than my present position, I confess, and above all, my future."

At Caffie's request he explained his plans and prospects for the future, while the business man, with his cheek resting on his hand, listened, and from time to time breathed a stifled sigh, a sort of groan.

"Hum! hum!" he said when Saniel finished his explanation. "You know, my dear friend, you know:

To fools alone the future's smile unchangeable appears,
For Friday's laughter Sunday's sun may change to bitter tears."

"It is Sunday with you, my dear sir."

"But I am not at the end of my life nor at the end of my energy, and I assure you that my energy makes me capable of many things."

"I do not doubt it; I know what energy can do. Tell a Greek who is dying of hunger to go to heaven and he will go

Graeculus esuriens in coelum, jusseris, ibit."

"But I do not see that you have started for heaven."

A smile of derision, accompanied by a grimace, crossed Caffies face. Before becoming the usurer of the Rue Sainte-Anne, whom every one called a rascal, he had been attorney in the country, deputy judge, and if unmerited evils had obliged him to resign and to hide the unpleasant circumstances in Paris, he never lost an opportunity to prove that by education he was far above his present position. Finding this new client a man of learning, he was glad to make quotations that he thought would make him worthy of consideration.

"It is, perhaps, because I am not Greek," Saniel replied; "but I am an Auvergnat, and the men of my country have great physical strength."

Caffie shook his head.

"My dear sir," he said, "I might as well tell you frankly that I do not believe the thing can be done. I would do it myself willingly, because I read intelligence in your face, and resolution in your whole person, which inspire me with confidence in you; but I have no money to put into such speculations. I can only be, as usual, a go-between—that is to say, I can propose the loan to one of my clients, but I do not know one who would be contented with the guarantee of a future that is more or less uncertain. There are so many doctors in Paris who are in your position."

Saniel rose.

"Are you going?" cried Caffie.

"But—"

"Sit down, my dear sir! It is no use to throw the handle after the axe. You make me a proposition, and I show you the difficulties in the way, but I do not say there is no way to extricate you from embarrassment. I must look around. I have known you only a few minutes; but it does not take long to appreciate a man like you, and, frankly, you inspire me with great interest."

What did he wish? Saniel was not simple enough to be caught by words, nor was he a fop who accepts with gaping mouth all the compliments addressed to him. Why did he inspire a sudden interest in this man who had the reputation of pushing business matters to extremes? He would find out. In the mean time he would be on his guard.

"I thank you for your sympathy," he said.

"I shall prove to you that it is real, and that it may become useful. You come to me because you want three thousand francs. I hope I may find them for you, and I promise to try, though it will be difficult, very difficult. They will make you secure for the present. But will they assure your future? that is, will they permit you to continue the important works of which you have spoken to me, and on which your future depends? No. Your struggles will soon begin again. And you must shake yourself clear from such cares in order to secure for yourself the liberty that is indispensable if you wish to advance rapidly. And to obtain this freedom from cares and this liberty, I see only one way—you must marry."

CHAPTER IV. 'TWIXT THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA

Saniel, who was on his guard and expected some sort of roguery from this man, had not foreseen that these expressions of interest were leading up to a proposal of marriage, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him. But it was lost in the sound of the door-bell, which rang at that moment.

Caffie rose. "How disagreeable it is not to have a clerk!" he said.

He went to open the door with an eagerness that he had not shown to Saniel, which proved that he had no fear of admitting people when he was not alone.

It was a clerk from the bank.

"You will permit me," Caffie said, on returning to his office. "It will take but an instant."

The clerk took a paper from his portfolio and handed it to Caffie.

Caffie drew a key from the pocket of his vest, with which he opened the iron safe placed behind his desk, and turning his back to Saniel and the clerk counted the bills which they heard rustle in his hands. Presently he rose, and closing the door of the safe he placed under the lamp the package of bills that he had counted. The clerk then counted them, and placing them in his portfolio took his leave.

"Close the door when you go out," Caffie said, who was already seated in his arm-chair.

"Do not be afraid."

When the clerk was gone Caffie apologized for the interruption.

"Let us continue our conversation, my dear sir. I told you that there is only one way to relieve you permanently from embarrassment, and that way you will find is in a good marriage, that will place 'hic et nunc' a reasonable sum at your disposal."

"But it would be folly for me to marry now, when I have no position to offer a wife."

"And your future, of which you have just spoken with so much assurance, have you no faith in that?"

"An absolute faith—as firm to-day as when I first began the battle of life, only brighter. However, as others have not the same reasons that I have to hope and believe what I hope and believe, it is quite natural that they should feel doubts of my future. You felt it yourself instantly in not finding it a good guarantee for the small loan of three thousand francs."

"A loan and marriage are not the same thing. A loan relieves you temporarily, and leaves you in a state to contract several others successively, which, you must acknowledge, weakens the guarantee that you offer. While a marriage instantly opens to you the road that your ambition wishes to travel."

"I have never thought of marriage."

"If you should think of it?"

"There must be a woman first of all."

"If I should propose one, what would you say?"

"But—"

"You are surprised?"

"I confess that I am."

"My dear sir, I am the friend of my clients, and for many of them—I dare to say it—a father. And having much affection for a young woman, and for the daughter of one of my friends, while listening to you I thought that one or the other might be the woman you need. Both have fortunes, and both possess physical attractions that a handsome man like yourself has a right to demand. And for the rest, I have their photographs, and you may see for yourself what they are."

He opened a drawer in his desk, and took from it a package of photographs. As he turned them over Saniel saw that they were all portraits of women. Presently he selected two and handed them to Saniel.

One represented a woman from thirty-eight to forty years, corpulent, robust, covered with horrible cheap jewelry that she had evidently put on for the purpose of being photographed. The other was a young girl of about twenty years, pretty, simply and elegantly dressed, whose distinguished and reserved physiognomy was a strong contrast to the first portrait.

While Saniel looked at these pictures Caffie studied him, trying to discover the effect they produced.

"Now that you have seen them," he said, "let us talk of them a little. If you knew me better, my dear sir, you would know that I am frankness itself, and in business my principle is to tell everything, the good and the bad, so that my clients are responsible for the decisions they make. In reality, there is nothing bad about these two persons, because, if there were, I would not propose them to you. But there are certain things that my delicacy compels me to point out to you, which I do frankly, feeling certain that a man like you is not the slave of narrow prejudices."

An expression of pain passed over his face, and he clasped his jaw with both hands.

"You suffer?" Saniel asked.

"Yes, from my teeth, cruelly. Pardon me that I show it; I know by myself that nothing is more annoying than the sight of the sufferings of others."

"At least not to doctors."

"Never mind; we will return to my clients. This one"—and he touched the portrait of the bejewelled woman—"is, as you have divined already, a widow, a very amiable widow. Perhaps she is a little older than you are, but that is nothing. Your experience must have taught you that the man who wishes to be loved, tenderly loved, pampered, caressed, spoiled, should marry a woman older than himself, who will treat him as a husband and as a son. Her first husband was a careful merchant, who, had he lived, would have made a large fortune in the butcher business"—he mumbled this word instead of pronouncing it clearly—"but although he died just at the time when his affairs were beginning to develop, he left twenty thousand pounds' income to his wife. As I have told you what is good, I must tell you what is to be regretted. Carried away by gay companions, this intelligent man became addicted to intemperance, and from drinking at saloons she soon took to drinking at home, and his wife drank with him. I have every reason to believe that she has reformed; but, if it is otherwise, you, a doctor, can easily cure her —"

"You believe it?"

"Without doubt. However, if it is impossible, you need only let her alone, and her vice will soon carry her off; and, as the contract will be made according to my wishes in view of such an event, you will find yourself invested with a fortune and unencumbered with a wife."

"And the other?" Saniel said, who had listened silently to this curious explanation of the situation that Caffie made with the most perfect good-nature. So grave were the circumstances that he could not help being amused at this diplomacy.

"I expected your demand," replied the agent with a shrewd smile. "And if I spoke of this amiable widow it was rather to acquit my conscience than with any hope of succeeding. However free from prejudices one may be, one always retains a few. I understand yours, and more than that, I share them. Happily, what I am now about to tell you is something quite different. Take her photograph, my dear sir, and look at it while I talk. A charming face, is it not? She has been finely educated at a fashionable convent. In a word, a pearl, that you shall wear. And now I must tell you the flaw, for there is one. Who is blameless? The daughter of one of our leading actresses, after leaving the convent she returned to live with her mother. It was there, in this environment-ahem! ahem!—that an accident happened to her. To be brief, she has a sweet little child that the father would have recognized assuredly, had he not been already married. But at least he has provided for its future by an endowment of two hundred thousand francs, in such a way that whoever marries the mother and legitimizes the child will enjoy the interest of this sum until the child's majority. If that ever arrives—these little creatures are so fragile! You being a physician, you know more about that than any one. In case of an accident the father will inherit half the money from his son; and if it seems cruel for an own father to inherit from his own son, it is quite a

different thing when it is a stranger who receives the fortune. This is all, my dear sir, plainly and frankly, and I will not do you the injury to suppose that you do not see the advantages of what I have said to you without need of my insisting further. If I have not explained clearly—"

"But nothing is more clear."

"—it is the fault of this pain that paralyzes me."

And he groaned while holding his jaw.

"You have a troublesome tooth?" Saniel said, with the tone of a physician who questions a patient.

"All my teeth trouble me. To tell the truth, they are all going to pieces."

"Have you consulted a doctor?"

"Neither a doctor nor a dentist. I have faith in medicine, of course; but when I consult doctors, which seldom happens, I notice that they think much more of their own affairs than of what I am saying, and that keeps me away from them. But, my dear sir, when a client consults me, I put myself in his place."

While he spoke, Saniel examined him, which he had not done until this moment, and he saw the characteristic signs of rapid consumption. His clothes hung on him as if made for a man twice his size, and his face was red and shining, as if he were covered with a coating of cherry jelly.

"Will you show me your teeth?" he asked. "It may be possible to relieve your sufferings."

"Do you think so?"

The examination did not last long.

"Your mouth is often dry, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You are often thirsty?"

"Always."

"Do you sleep well?"

"No."

"Your sight troubles you?"

"Yes."

"Have you a good appetite?"

"Yes, I eat heartily; and the more I eat the thinner I become. I am turning into a skeleton."

"I see that you have scars from boils on the back of your neck."

"They made me suffer enough, the rascals; but they are gone as they came. Hang it, one is no longer young at seventy-two years; one has small vexations. They are small vexations, are they not?"

"Certainly. With some precautions and a diet that I shall prescribe, if you wish, you will soon be better. I will give you a prescription that will relieve your toothache."

"We will talk of this again, because we shall have occasion to meet if, as I presume, you appreciate the advantages of the proposition that I have made you."

"I must have time to reflect."

"Nothing is more reasonable. There is no hurry."

"But I am in a hurry because, if I do not pay Jardine, I shall find myself in the street, which would not be a position to offer to a wife."

"In the street? Oh, things will not come to such a pass as that! What are the prosecutions?"

"They will soon begin; Jardine has already threatened me."

"They are going to begin? Then they have not begun. If he does, as we presume he will, proceed by a replevin, we shall have sufficient time before the judgment. Do you owe anything to your landlord?"

"The lease expired on the fifteenth."

"Do not pay it."

"That is easy; it is the only thing that is easy for me to do."

"It is an obstacle in the way of your Jardine, and may stop him a moment. We can manage this way more easily. The important thing is to warn me as soon as the fire begins. 'Au revoir', my dear Sir."

CHAPTER V. A CHARMING VISITOR

Although Saniel had had no experience in business, he was not simple enough not to know that in refusing him this loan Caffie meant to make use of him.

"It is very simple," he said to himself, as he went downstairs. "He undertakes to manage my affairs, and in such a way that some day I shall have to save myself by marrying that charming girl. What a scoundrel!"

However, the situation was such that he was glad to avail himself of the assistance of this scoundrel. At least, some time was gained, and when Jardine found that he was not disposed to let himself be slaughtered, he might accept a reasonable arrangement. But he must manage so that Caffie would not prevent this arrangement.

Unfortunately, he felt himself hardly capable of such manoeuvring, having been always straightforward, his eyes fixed on the end he wished to attain, and thinking only of the work through which he would attain it. And now he must act the part of a diplomat, submitting to craftiness and rogueries that were not at all in accord with his open nature. He had begun by not telling Caffie, instantly, what he thought of his propositions; but it is more difficult to act than to control one's self, to speak than to be silent.

What would he say, what would he do, when the time for action came?

He reached his house without having decided anything, and as he passed before the concierge's lodge absorbed in thought, he heard some one call him.

"Doctor, come in a moment, I beg of you."

He thought some one wished to consult him, some countryman who had waited for his return; and, although he did not feel like listening patiently to idle complainings, he turned back and entered the lodge.

"Some one brought this," the concierge said, handing him a paper that was stamped and covered with a running handwriting. "This" was the beginning of the fire of which Caffie had spoken. Without reading it, Saniel put it in his pocket and turned to go; but the concierge detained him.

"I would like to say two words to 'monchieur le docteur' about this paper."

"Have you read it?"

"No, but I talked with the officer who gave it to me, and he told me what it meant. It is unfortunate, doctor."

To be pitied by his concierge! This was too much.

"It is not as he told you," he replied, haughtily.

"So much the better. I am glad for you and for me. You can pay my little bill."

"Give it to me."

"I have given it to you twice already, but I have a copy. Here it is."

To be sued by a creditor paralyzed Saniel; he was stunned, crushed, humiliated, and could only answer stupidly. Taking the bill that the concierge handed him, he put it in his pocket and stammered a few words.

"You see, doctor, I must say what has been in my heart a long time. You are my countryman, and I esteem you too much not to speak. In taking your apartment and engaging your upholsterer, you did too much. You ruin yourself. Give up your apartment, and take the one opposite that costs less than half,

and you will get on. You will not be obliged to leave this quarter. What will become of our neighbors if you leave us? You are a good doctor; everybody knows it and says so. And now, as for my bill, it is understood that I shall be paid first, shall I not?"

"As soon as I have the money I will pay you."

"It is a promise?"

"I promise you."

"Thank you very much."

"If it could be to-morrow, it would suit me. I am not rich, you know, but I have always paid the gas-bill for your experiments."

With the paper in his pocket, Saniel returned to Caffie, who was just going out, and to whom he gave it.

"I will see about it this, evening," said the man of business. "Just now I am going to dinner. Do not worry. To-morrow I will do what is necessary. Good-evening. I am dying of hunger."

But three days before, Saniel emptied his purse to soothe his upholsterer by an instalment as large as he was able to make it, keeping only five francs for himself, and with the few sous left he could not go to a restaurant, not even the lowest and cheapest. He could only buy some bread for his supper, and eat it while working, as he had often done before.

But when he returned to his rooms he was not in a state of mind to write an article that must be delivered that evening. Among other things that he had undertaken was one, and not the least fastidious, which consisted in giving, by correspondence, advice to the subscribers of a fashion magazine, or, more exactly speaking, to recommend, in the form of medical advice, all the cosmetics, depilatories, elixirs, dyes, essences, oils, creams, soaps, pomades, toothpowders, rouges, and also all the chemists' specialties, to which their inventors wished to give an authority that the public, which believes itself acute, refused to the simple advertisement on the last page. With his ambition and the career before him, he would never have consented to carry on this correspondence under his own name. He did it for a neighboring doctor, a simple man, who was not so cautious, and who signed his name to these letters, glad to get clients from any quarter. For his trouble, Saniel took this doctor's place during Sunday in summer, and from time to time received a box of perfumery or quack medicines, which he sold at a low price when occasion offered.

Every week he received the list of cosmetics and specialties that he must make use of in his correspondence, no matter how he recommended them, whether in answer to letters that were really addressed to him, or by inventing questions that gave him the opportunity to introduce them.

He began to consult this list and the pile of letters from subscribers that the magazine had sent him, when the doorbell rang. Perhaps it was a patient, the good patient whom he had expected for four years. He left his desk to open the door.

It was his coal man, who came with his bill.

"I will stop some day when I am near you," Saniel said. "I am in a hurry this evening."

"And I am in a hurry, too; I must pay a large bill tomorrow, and I count upon having some money from you."

"I have no money here."

After a long talk he got rid of the man and returned to his desk. He had answered but a few of the many letters when his bell rang again. This time he would not open the door; it was a creditor, without doubt. And he continued his correspondence.

But for four years he had waited for chance to draw him a good ticket in the lottery of life—a rich patient afflicted with a cyst or a tumor that he would take to a fashionable surgeon, who would divide with him the ten or fifteen thousand francs that he would receive for the operation. In that case he would be saved.

He ran to the door. The patient with the cyst presented himself in the form of a small bearded man with a red face, wearing over his vest the wine-merchant's apron of coarse black cloth. In fact, it was

the wine merchant from the corner, who, having heard of the officer's visit, came to ask for the payment of his bill for furnishing wine for three months.

A scene similar to that which he had had with the coal merchant, but more violent, took place, and it was only by threatening to put him out of the door that Saniel got rid of the man, who went away declaring that he would come the next morning with an officer.

Saniel returned to his work.

His pen flew over the paper, when a noise made him raise his head. Either he had not closed the door tightly, or his servant was entering with his key. What did he want? He did not employ him all day, but only during his office hours, to put his rooms in order and to open the door for his clients.

As Saniel rose to go and see who it was, there was a knock at the door. It was his servant, with a blank and embarrassed air.

"What is the matter, Joseph?"

"I thought I should find you, sir, so I came."

"Why?"

Joseph hesitated; then, taking courage, he said volubly, while lowering his eyes:

"I came to ask, sir, if you will pay me my month, which expired on the fifteenth, because there is need of money at my house; if there was not need of money I would not have come. If you wish, sir, I will release you—"

"How?"

"I will take the coat that you made me order a month ago; I am quite sure it is not worth what is due me, but it is always so."

"Take the coat."

Joseph took the coat from the wardrobe in the hall, and rolled it in a newspaper.

"Of course you will not expect me in the morning," he said, as he put his key on the table. "I must look out for another place."

"Very well, I shall not expect you."

"Good-evening, sir."

And Joseph hurried away as quickly as possible.

Left alone, Saniel did not return to his work immediately, but throwing himself in an armchair he cast a melancholy glance around his office and through the open door into the parlor. In the faint light of the candle he saw the large armchairs methodically placed each side of the chimney, the curtains at the windows lost in shadow, and all the furniture which for four years had cost him so many efforts. He had long been the prisoner of this Louis XIV camlet, and he was now going to be executed. A beautiful affair, truly, brilliant and able! All this had been used only by the poor Auvergnats, without Saniel enjoying it at all, for he had neither the bourgeois taste for ornaments nor the desire for elegance. A movement of anger and revolt against himself made him strike his desk with his fist. What a fool he had been!

The bell rang again. This time, not expecting a rich patient, he would not open it. After a moment a slight tap was heard on the panel. He rose quickly and ran to open the door.

A woman threw herself into his arms.

"O my dearest! I am so glad to find you at home!"

CHAPTER VI. A SWEET CONSOLER

She passed her arm about him and pressed him to her, and with arms entwined they entered the study.

"How glad I am!" she said. "What a good idea I had!"

With a quick movement she took off her long gray cloak that enveloped her from head to foot.

"And are you glad?" she asked, as she stood looking at him.

"Can you ask that?"

"Only to hear you say that you are."

"Are you not my only joy, the sweet lamp that gives me light in the cavern where I work day and night?"

"Dear Victor!"

She was a tall, slender young woman with chestnut hair, whose thick curls clustering about her forehead almost touched her eyebrows. Her beautiful eyes were dark, her nose short, while her superb teeth and rich, ruby-colored lips gave her the effect of a pretty doll; and she had gayety, playful vivacity, gracious effrontery, and a passionate caressing glance. Dressed extravagantly, like the Parisian woman who has not a sou, but who adorns everything she wears, she had an ease, a freedom, a natural elegance that was charming. With this she had the voice of a child, a joyous laugh, and an expression of sensibility on her fresh face.

"I have come to dine with you," she said, gayly, "and I am so hungry."

He made a gesture that was not lost upon her.

"Do I disturb you?" she asked, uneasily.

"Not at all."

"Must you go out?"

"No."

"Then why did you make a gesture that showed indifference, or, at least, embarrassment?"

"You are mistaken, my little Phillis."

"With any one else I might be mistaken, but with you it is impossible. You know that between us words are not necessary; that I read in your eyes what you would say, in your face what you think and feel. Is it not always so when one loves—as I love you?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her long and tenderly. Then going to a chair on which he had thrown his coat, he drew from the pocket the bread that he had bought.

"This is my dinner," he said, showing the bread.

"Oh! I must scold you. Work is making you lose your head. Can you not take time to eat?"

He smiled sadly.

"It is not time that I want."

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out three big sous.

"I cannot dine at a restaurant with six sous."

She threw herself in his arms.

"O dearest, forgive me!" she cried. "Poor, dear martyr! Dear, great man! It is I who accuse you, when I ought to embrace your knees. And you do not scold me; a sad smile is your only reply. And it is really so bad as that! Nothing to eat!"

"Bread is very good eating. If I might be assured that I shall always have some!"

"Well, to-day you shall have something more and better. This morning, seeing the storm, an idea came to me associated with you. It is quite natural, since you are always in my heart and in my thoughts. I told mamma that if the storm continued I would dine at the pension. You can imagine with what joy I listened to the wind all day, and watched the rain and leaves falling, and the dead branches waving in the whirlwind. Thank God, the weather was bad enough for mamma to believe me safe at the pension; and here I am. But we must not fast. I shall go and buy something to eat, and we will play at making dinner by the fire, which will be far more amusing than going to a restaurant."

She put on her cloak quickly.

"Set the table while I make my purchases."

"I have my article to finish that will be sent for at eight o'clock. Just think, I have three tonics to recommend, four preparations of iron, a dye, two capillary lotions, an opiate, and I don't know how many soaps and powders. What a business!"

"Very well, then, do not trouble yourself about the table; we will set it together when you have finished, and that will be much more amusing."

"You take everything in good part."

"Is it better to look on the dark side? I shall soon return."

She went to the door.

"Do not be extravagant," he said.

"There is no danger," she replied, striking her pocket.

Then, returning to him, she embraced him passionately.

"Work!"

And she ran out.

They had loved each other for two years. At the time they met, Saniel was giving a course of lectures on anatomy at a young ladies' school just outside of Paris, and every time he went out there he saw a young woman whom he could not help noticing. She came and went on the same trains that he did, and gave lessons in a rival school. As she frequently carried under her arm a large cartoon, and sometimes a plaster cast, he concluded that she gave lessons in drawing. At first he paid no attention to her. What was she to him? He had more important things in his head than women. But little by little, and because she was reserved and discreet, he was struck by the vivacity and gayety of her expression. He really enjoyed looking at this pretty and pleasing young woman. However, his looks said nothing; if their eyes smiled when they met, that was all; they did not make each other's acquaintance. When they left the train they did not notice each other; if he took the left side of the street, she took the other, and vice versa. This state of things lasted several months without a word having been exchanged between them; in due time they learned each other's names and professions. She was a professor of drawing, as he supposed, the daughter of an artist who had been dead several years, and was called Mademoiselle Phillis Cormier. He was a physician for whom a brilliant future was prophesied, a man of power, who would some day be famous; and, very naturally, their attitude remained the same. There was no particular reason why it should change. But accident made a reason. One summer day, at the hour when they ordinarily took the train back to Paris, the sky suddenly became overcast, and it was evident that a violent storm was approaching. Saniel saw Phillis hurrying to the station without an umbrella, and, as some friend had lent him one, he decided to speak to her for the first time.

"It seems as if the storm would overtake us before we reach the station. As you have no umbrella, will you permit me to walk beside you, and to shelter you with mine?"

She replied with a smile, and they walked side by side until the rain began to fall, when she drew nearer to him, and they entered the station talking gayly.

"Your umbrella is better than Virginia's skirt," she said.

"And what is Virginia's skirt?"

"Have you not read Paul and Virginia?"

"No."

She looked at him with a mocking smile, wondering what superior men read.

Not only had he not read Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's romance, nor any others, but he had never been in love. He knew nothing of the affairs of the heart nor of the imagination. Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love, for they require a liberty of mind and an independence of life that he had not. Where could he find time to read novels? When and how could he pay attention to a woman? Those that he had known since his arrival in Paris had not had the slightest influence over him, and he retained only faint memories of them. On the contrary, thinking of this walk in the rain, he remembered this young girl with a vividness entirely new to him. She made a strong impression on him, and it remained. He saw her again, with her smile that showed her brilliant teeth, he heard the music of her voice, and the bare plain that he had walked so many times now seemed the most beautiful country in

the world to him. Evidently there was a change in him; something was awakened in his soul; for the first time he discovered that the hollow and muscular conoid organ called the heart had a use besides for the circulation of blood.

What a surprise and what a disappointment! Was he going to be simpleton enough to love this young girl and entangle his life, already so hard and heavily weighted, with a woman? A fine thing, truly, and nature had built him to play the lover! It is true that only those who wish it fall in love, and he knew the power of will by experience.

But he soon lost confidence in himself. Away from Phillis he could do as he wished, but with her it was as she wished. With one look she mastered him. He met her, furious at the influence she exercised over him, and against which he had struggled since their last meeting; he left her, ravished at feeling how profoundly he loved her.

To a man whose life had been ruled by reason and logic until this moment, these contradictions were exasperating; and he only excused himself for submitting to them by saying that they could in no way modify the line of conduct that he had traced out for himself, nor make him deviate from the road that he followed.

Rich, or even with a small fortune, he might—when he was with her and in her power—let himself be carried away; but when he was dying of hunger he was not going to commit the folly of taking a wife. What would he have to give her? Misery, nothing but misery; and shame, in default of any other reason, would forever prevent him from offering himself to her.

She was the daughter of an artist who, after years of struggle, died at the moment when fortune was beginning to smile upon him. Ten years more of work, and he would have left his family, if not rich, at least in comfortable circumstances. In reality, he left nothing but ruin. The hotel he built was sold, and, after the debts were paid, nothing remained but some furniture. His widow, son, and daughter must work. The widow, having no trade, took in sewing; the son left college to become the clerk of a money-lender named Caffie; the daughter, who, happily for her, had learned to draw and paint under her father's direction, obtained pupils, and designed menacs for the stationers, and painted silk fans and boxes. They lived with great economy, submitting to many privations. The brother, weary of his monotonous existence and of the exactions of his master, left them to try his fortunes in America.

If Saniel ever married, which he doubted, certainly he would not marry a woman situated as Phillis was.

This reflection was reassuring, and he was more devoted to her. Why should he not enjoy the delicious pleasure of seeing her and listening to her? His life was neither gay nor happy; he felt perfectly sure of himself, and, as he knew her now, he was also sure of her—a brave and honest girl. Otherwise, how had she divined that he loved her?

They continued to see each other with a pleasure that seemed equal on both sides, meeting in the station, arranging to take the same trains, and talking freely and gayly.

Things went on this way until the approach of vacation, when they decided to take a walk after their last lesson, instead of returning immediately to Paris.

When the day came the sun was very hot; they had walked some distance, when Phillis expressed a wish to rest for a few minutes. They seated themselves in a shady copse, and soon found themselves in each other's arms.

Since then Saniel had never spoken of marriage, and neither had Phillis.

They loved each other.

CHAPTER VII. A LITTLE DINNER FOR TWO

Saniel was still at work when Phillis returned.

"You have not yet finished, dear?"

"Give me time to cure, by correspondence, a malady that has not yielded to the care of ten physicians, and I am yours."

In three lines he finished the letter, and left his desk.

"I am ready. What shall I do?"

"Help me to take things out of my pockets."

"Don't press too hard," she said as he took each parcel.

At last the pockets were empty.

"Where shall we dine?" she asked.

"Here, as the dining-room is transformed into a laboratory."

"Then let us begin by making a good fire. I wet my feet coming from the station."

"I do not know whether there is any wood."

"Let us see."

She took the candle and they passed into the kitchen, which, like the dining-room, was a laboratory, a stable where Saniel kept in cages pigs from India and rabbits for his experiments, and where Joseph heaped pell-mell the things that were in his way, without paying any attention to the stove in which there never had been a fire. But their search was vain; there was everything in this kitchen except fire-wood.

"Do you value these boxes?" she asked, caressing a little pig that she had taken in her arms.

"Not at all; they enclosed the perfumes and tonics, but they are useless now."

They returned to the office, Saniel carrying the boxes.

"We will set the table here," she said, gayly, for Saniel told her that the dining-room was uninviting, as it was a small bacteriological laboratory.

The table was set by Phillis, who went and came, walking about with a gracefulness that Saniel admired.

"You are doing nothing," she said.

"I am watching you and thinking."

"And the result of these thoughts?"

"It is that you have a fund of good-humor and gayety, an exuberance of life, that would enliven a man condemned to death."

"And what would have become of us, I should like to know, if I had been melancholy and discouraged when we lost my poor papa? He was joy itself, singing all day long, laughing and joking. He brought me up, and I am like him. Mamma, as you know, is melancholy and nervous, looking on the dark side, and Florentin is like her. I obtained a place for Florentin, I found work for mamma and for myself. We all took courage, and gradually we became calm."

She looked at him with a smile that said:

"Will you let me do for you what I have done for others?"

But she did not speak these words. On the contrary, she immediately endeavored to destroy the impression which she believed her words had made upon him.

"Go and bring some water," she said, "and I will light the fire."

When he returned, carrying a carafe, the fire blazed brightly, lighting the whole room. Phillis was seated at the desk, writing.

"What are you doing?" he asked in surprise.

"I am writing our menu, for you know we are not going to sit down at the table like the bourgeois. How do you like it?"

She read it to him.

“Sardines de Nantes.”

“Cuisse de dinde rotie.”

“Terrine de pate de foie gras aux truffes du Perigord.”

“But this is a feast.”

“Did you think that I would offer you a fricandeau au jus?”

She continued:

“Fromage de Brie.”

“Choux a la creme vanillge.”

“Pomme de Normandie.”

“Wine.”

“Ah! Voila! What wine? I do not wish to deceive you. Let us put, ‘Wine from the wine-seller at the corner.’ And now we will sit down.”

As he was about to seat himself, she said:

“You do not give me your arm to conduct me to the table. If we do not do things seriously and methodically we shall not believe in them, and perhaps the Perigord truffles will change into little black pieces of anything else.”

When they were seated opposite to each other, she continued, jesting:

“My dear doctor, did you go to the representation of Don Juan, on Monday?”

And Saniel, who, in spite of all, had kept a sober face, now laughed loudly.

“Charming!” she cried, clapping her hands. “No more preoccupation; no more cares. Look into my eyes, dear Victor, and think only of the present hour, of the joy of being together, of our love.”

She reached her hand over the table, and he pressed it in his.

“Very well.” The dinner continued gayly, Saniel replying to Phillis’s smiles, who would not permit the conversation to languish. She helped him to each dish, poured out his wine, leaving her chair occasionally to put a piece of wood on the fire, and such shoutings and laughter had never been heard before in that office.

However, she noticed that, little by little, Saniel’s face, that relaxed one moment, was the next clouded by the preoccupation and bitterness that she had tried hard to chase away. She would make a new effort.

“Does not this charming little dinner give you the wish to repeat it?”

“How? Where?”

“As I am able to come this evening without making mamma uneasy, I shall find some excuse to come again next week.”

He shook his head.

“Have you engagements for the whole of next week?” she asked with uneasiness.

“Where shall I be next week, to-morrow, in a few days?”

“You alarm me. Explain, I beg of you. O Victor, have pity! Do not leave me in suspense.”

“You are right; I ought to tell you everything, and not let your tender heart torment itself, trying to explain my preoccupation.”

“If you have cares, do you not esteem me enough to let me share them with you? You know that I love you; you only, to-day, to-morrow, forever!”

Saniel had not left her ignorant of the difficulties of his position, but he had not entered into details, preferring to speak of his hopes rather than of his present misery.

The story that he had already told to Glady and Caffie he now told to Phillis, adding what had passed with the concierge, the wine-seller, the coal man, and Joseph.

She listened, stupefied.

"He took your coat?" she murmured.

"That was what he came for."

"And to-morrow?"

"Ah! to-morrow—to-morrow!"

"Working so hard as you have, how did you come to such a pass?"

"Like you, I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me! Because I felt within me a will that nothing could weaken, a strength that nothing could fatigue, a courage that nothing could, dishearten, I imagined that I was armed for battle in such a way that I should never be conquered, and I am conquered, as much by the fault of circumstances as by my own—"

"And in what are you to blame, poor dear?"

"For my ignorance of life, stupidity, presumption, and blindness. If I had been less simple, should I have been taken in by Jardine's propositions? Should I have accepted this furniture, this apartment? He told me that the papers he made me sign were mere formalities, that in reality I might pay when I could, and that he would be content with a fair interest. That seemed reasonable, and, without inquiring further, I accepted, happy and delighted to have a home, feeling sure of having strength to bear this burden. To have confidence in one's self is strength, but it is also weakness. Because you love me you do not know me; you do not see me as I am. In reality, I am not sociable, and I lack, absolutely, suppleness, delicacy, politeness, as much in my character as in my manners. Being so, how can I obtain a large practice, or succeed, unless it is by some stroke of luck? I have counted on the luck, but its hour has not yet sounded. Because I lack suppleness I have not been able to win the sympathy or interest of my masters. They see only my reserve; and because I stay away from them, as much through timidity as pride, they do not come to me—which is quite natural, I admit. And because I have not yielded my ideas to the authority of others, they have taken a dislike to me, which is still more natural. Because I lack politeness, and am still an Auvergnat, heavy and awkward as nature made me, men of the world disdain me, judging me by my exterior, which they see and dislike. More wary, more sly, more experienced, I should be, at least, sustained by friendship, but I have given no thought to it. What good is it? I had no need of it, my force was sufficient. I find it more easy to make myself feared than loved. Thus formed, there are only two things for me to do: remain in my poor room in the Hotel du Senat, living by giving lessons and by work from the booksellers, until the examination and admission to the central bureau; or to establish myself in an out-of-the-way quarter at Belleville, Montrouge, or elsewhere, and there practise among people who will demand neither politeness nor fine manners. As these two ways are reasonable, I have made up my mind to neither. Belleville, because I should work only with my legs, like one of my comrades whom I saw work at Villette: 'Your tongue, good. Your arm, good.' And while he is supposed to be feeling the pulse of the patient with one hand, with the other he is writing his prescription: 'Vomitive, purgative, forty sous;' and he hurries away, his diagnosis having taken less than five minutes; he had no time to waste. I object to the Hotel du Senat because I have had enough of it, and it was there that Jardine tempted me with his proposals. See what he has brought me to!"

"And now?"

CHAPTER VIII. EXPLANATIONS

At this moment, without warning, the candle on the table went out.

Phillis rose. "Where are the candles?" she asked.

"There are no more; this was the last."

"Then we must brighten up the fire."

She threw a small log on the hearth, and then, instead of resuming her seat, she took a cushion from the sofa, and placing it before the chimney, threw herself upon it, and leaned her elbow on Saniel's knee.

"And now?" she repeated, her eyes raised to his.

"Now I suppose the only thing for me to do is to return to Auvergne and become a country doctor."

"My God! is it possible?" she murmured in a tone that surprised Saniel. If there was sadness in this cry, there was also a sentiment that he did not understand.

"On leaving the school I could continue to live at the Hotel du Senat, and, while giving lessons, prepare my 'concours'; now, after having reached a certain position, can I return to this life of poverty and study? My creditors, who have fallen on me here, will harass me, and my competitors will mock my misery—which is caused by my vices. They will think that I dishonor the Faculty, and I shall be rebuffed. Neither doctor of the hospitals nor fellow, I shall be reduced to nothing but a doctor of the quarter. Of what use is it? The effort has been made here; you see how it has succeeded."

"Then you mean to go?"

"Not without sorrow and despair, since it will be our separation, the renouncement of all the hopes on which I have lived for ten years, the abandonment of my work, death itself. You see now why, in spite of your gayety, I have not been able to hide my preoccupation from you. The more charming you were, the more I felt how dear you are, and the greater my despair at the thought of separation."

"Why should we separate?"

"What do you mean?"

She turned toward him.

"To go with you. You must acknowledge that until this moment I have never spoken to you of marriage, and never have I let the thought appear that you might one day make me your wife. In your position, in the struggle you have been through, a wife would have been a burden that would have paralyzed you; above all, such a poor, miserable creature as myself, with no dot but her misery and that of her family. But the conditions are no longer the same. You are as miserable as I am, and more desperate. In your own country, where you have only distant relatives who are nothing to you, as they have not your education or ideas, desires or habits, what will become of you all alone with your 158 disappointment and regrets? If you accept me, I will go with you; together, and loving each other, we cannot be unhappy anywhere. When you come home fatigued you will find me with a smile; when you stay at home you will tell me your thoughts, and explain your work, and I will try to understand. I have no fear of poverty, you know, and neither do I fear solitude. Wherever we are together I shall be happy. All that I ask of you is to take my mother with us, because you know I cannot leave her alone. In attending her, you have learned to know her well enough to know that she is not disagreeable or difficult to please. As for Florentin, he will remain in Paris and work. His trip to America has made him wise, and his ambition will now be easily satisfied; to earn a small salary is all that he asks. Without doubt we shall be a burden, but not so heavy as one might think at first. A woman, when she chooses, brings order and economy into a house, and I promise you that I will be that woman. And then I will work. I am sure my stationer will give me as many menus when I am in Auvergne as he does now that I am in Paris. I could, also, without doubt, procure other work. It would be a hundred francs a month, perhaps a hundred and fifty, perhaps even two hundred. While waiting for your patients to come, we could live on this money. In Auvergne living must be cheap."

She had taken his hands in hers, and she watched anxiously his face as the firelight shone on it, to see the effect of her words. It was the life of both of them that was to be decided, and the fulness of her heart made her voice tremble. What would he reply? She saw that his face was agitated, without being able to read more.

As she remained silent, he took her head in his hands, and looked in her face for several moments.

"How you love me!" he said.

"Let me prove it in some way besides in words."

"It would be cowardly to let you share my misery."

"It would be loving me enough to feel sure that I would be happy."

"And I?"

"Is not the love in your heart greater than pride? Do you not feel that since I have loved you my love has filled all my life, and that there is nothing in the world, in the present or in the future, but it and you? Because I see you for several hours from time to time in Paris, I am happy; whatever difficulties await us, I should be much happier in Auvergne, because we should be together always."

He remained silent for some time.

"Could you love me there?" he murmured.

Evidently it was more to himself than to her that he addressed this question, which was the sum of his reflections.

"O dear Victor!" she cried. "Why do you doubt me? Have I deserved it? The past, the present, do they not assure the future?"

He shook his head.

"The man you have loved, whom you love, has never shown himself to you as he really is. In spite of the trials and sorrows of his life he has been able to answer your smile with a smile, because, cruel as his life was, he was sustained by hope and confidence; in Auvergne there will be no more hope or confidence, but the madness of a broken life, and the dejection of impotence. What sort of man should I be? Could you love such a man?"

"A thousand times more, for he would be unhappy, and I should have to comfort him."

"Would you have the strength to do it? After a time you would become weary, for the burden would be too heavy, however great your devotion or profound your tenderness, to see my real position and my hopes, and, descending into the future, to see my ruin. You know I am ambitious without having ever compassed the scope of this ambition, and of the hopes, dreams if you like, on which it rests. Understand that these dreams are on the eve of being realized; two months more, and in December or January I pass the 'concours' for the central bureau, which will make me a physician of the hospitals, and at the same time the one for the admission, which opens the Faculty of Medicine to me. Without pride, I believe myself in a position to succeed—what sportsmen call 'in condition.' And just when I have only a few days to wait, behold me ruined forever."

"Why forever?"

"A man leaves his village for Paris to make a name for himself, and he returns only when bad luck or inability sends him back. And then it is only every four years that there is a 'concours' for admission. In four years what will be my moral and intellectual condition? How should I support this exile of four years? Imagine the effect that four years of isolation in the mountains will produce. But this is not all. Besides this ostensible end that I have pursued since I left my village, I have my special work that I can carry out only in Paris. Without having overwhelmed you with the details of medicine, you know that it is about to undergo a revolution that will transform it. Until now it has been taught officially, in pathology, that the human organism carries within itself the germ of a great many infectious diseases which develop spontaneously in certain conditions; for instance, that tuberculosis is the result of fatigue, privations, and physiological miseries. Well, recently it has been admitted, that is to say, the revolutionists admit, a parasitical origin for these diseases, and in France and Germany there is an army looking for these parasites. I am a soldier in this army, and to help me in these researches I established a laboratory in the dining-room. It is to the parasites of tuberculosis and cancers that I devote myself, and for seven years, that is, since I was house-surgeon, my comrades have called me the cancer topic. I have discovered the parasite of the tuberculosis, but I have not yet been able to free it from all its impurities by the process of culture. I am still at it. That is to say, I am very near it, and to-morrow, perhaps, or in a few days, I may make a discovery that will be a revolution, and cover its discoverer with glory. The same with the cancer. I have found its microbe. But all is not done. See what I must give up in leaving Paris."

"Why give all this up? Could you not continue your researches in Auvergne?"

"It is impossible, for many reasons that are too long to explain, but one will suffice. The culture of these parasites can be done only in certain temperatures rigorously maintained at the necessary degree, and these temperatures can be obtained only by stoves, like the one in my laboratory, fed by gas, the entrance of which is automatically regulated by the temperature of the water. How could I use this stove in a country where there is no gas? No, no! If I leave Paris, everything is at an end my position, as well as my work. I shall become a country doctor, and nothing but a country doctor. Let the sheriff turn me out to-morrow, and all the four years' accumulations in my laboratory, all my works en train that demand only a few days or hours to complete, may go to the second-hand dealer, or be thrown into the street. Of all my efforts, weary nights, privations, and hopes, there remains only one souvenir—for me. And yet, if it did not remain, perhaps I should be less exasperated, and should accept with a heart less sore the life to which I shall never resign myself. You know very well that I am a rebel, and do not submit tamely."

She rose, and taking his hand, pressed it closely in her own.

"You must stay in Paris," she said. "Pardon me for having insisted that you could live in the country. I thought more of myself than of you, of our love and our marriage. It was an egotistic thought, a bad thought. A way must be found, no matter what it costs, to enable you to continue your work."

"But how to find it? Do you think I have not tried everything?"

He related his visits to Jardine, his solicitations, prayers, and also his request of a loan from Glady, and his visit to Caffie.

"Caffie!" she cried. "What made you think of going to Caffie?"

"I went partly because you had often spoken of him."

"But I spoke of him to you as the most wicked of men, capable of anything and everything that is bad."

"And partly, also, because I knew from one of my patients that he lends to those of whom he can make use."

"What did he say to you?"

"That it was probable he would not be able to find any one who would lend what I wished, but he would try to find some one, and would give me an answer tomorrow evening. He also promised to protect me from Jardine."

"You have put yourself in his hands?"

"Well, what do you expect? In my position, I am not at liberty to go to whom I wish and to those who inspire me with confidence in their honor. If I should go to a notary or a banker they would not listen to me, for I should be obliged to tell them, the first thing, that I have no security to offer. That is how the unfortunate fall into the hands of rascals; at least, these listen to them, and lend them something, small though it may be."

"What did he give you?"

"Advice."

"And you took it?"

"There is time gained. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall be turned into the street. Caffie will obtain a respite."

"And what price will he ask for this service?"

"It is only those who own something who worry about the price."

"You have your name, dignity, and honor, and once you are in Caffies hands, who knows what he may exact from you, what he may make you do, without your being able to resist him?"

"Then you wish me to leave Paris?"

"Certainly not; but I wish you to be on your guard against Caffie, whom you do not know, but I do, through what Florentin told us when he was with him. However secret a man may be, he cannot hide himself from his clerk. He is not only guilty of rascalities, but also of real crimes. I assure you that he

deserves ten deaths. To gain a hundred francs he will do anything; he makes money only for the pleasure of making it, for he has neither child nor relative."

"Well, I promise to be on my guard as you advise. But, wicked as Caffie may be, I believe that I shall accept the concours that he offered me. Who knows what may happen in the short time that he gains for me? Because I need not tell you that I know beforehand what his reply will be to my request for a loan —he could find no one."

"I shall come, all the same, to-morrow evening to learn his answer."

CHAPTER IX. CAFFIE'S ANSWER

Although Saniel did not build any false hopes on Caffie's reply, he went to see him the next afternoon at the same hour.

As before, he waited some time after ringing the bell. At last he heard a slow step within.

"Who is there?" Caffie asked.

As soon as Saniel answered, the door was opened.

"As I do not like to be disturbed in the evening by troublesome people, I do not always open the door," Caffie said. "But I have a signal for my clients so that I may know them. After ringing, knock three times on the door."

During this explanation they entered Caffie's office.

"Have you done anything about my affair?" Saniel asked, after a moment, as Caffie seemed disinclined to open the conversation.

"Yes, my dear sir. I have been running about all the morning for you. I never neglect my clients; their affairs are mine."

He paused.

"Well?" Saniel said.

Caffie put on an expression of despair.

"What did I tell you, my dear sir? Do you remember? Do me the honor to believe that a man of my experience does not speak lightly. What I foresaw has come to pass. Everywhere I received the same reply. The risk is too great; no one would take it."

"Not even for a large interest?"

"Not even for a large interest; there is so much competition in your profession. As for me, I believe in your future, and I have proved it by my proposition; but, unfortunately, I am only an intermediary, and not the lender of money."

Caffie emphasized the words, "my proposition," and underlined them with a glance; but Saniel did not appear to understand.

"And the upholsterer's summons?" he asked.

"You may be easy on that point. I have attended to it. Your landlord, to whom he owes rent, will interfere, and your creditor must indemnify him before going farther. Will he submit? We shall see. If he does, we shall defend ourselves on some other ground. I do not say victoriously, but in a way to gain time."

"How much time?"

"That, my dear sir, I do not know; the whole thing depends upon our adversary. But what do you mean by 'how much time?'—eternity?"

"I mean until April."

"That is eternity. Do you believe that you will be able to free yourself in April? If you have expectations founded on something substantial, you should tell me what they are, my dear sir."

This question was put with such an air of benevolence, that Saniel was taken in by it.

"I have no guarantee," he said. "But, on the other hand, it is of the utmost importance to me that I should have this length of time. As I have explained to you, I am about to pass two examinations; they will last three months, and in March, or, at the latest, in April, I shall be a physician of the hospitals, and fellow of the Faculty. In that case I should then offer a surface to the lenders, that would permit you, without doubt, to find the sum necessary to pay Jardine, whatever expenses there may be, and your fee."

As he spoke, Saniel saw that he was wrong in thus committing himself, but he continued to the end.

"I should be unworthy of your confidence, my dear sir," Caffie replied, "if I encouraged you with the idea that we could gain so much time. Whatever it costs me—and it costs me much, I assure you—I must tell you that it is impossible, radically impossible; a few days, yes, or a few weeks, but that is all."

"Well, obtain a few weeks," Saniel said, rising, "that will be something."

"And afterward?"

"We shall see."

"My dear sir, do not go. You would not believe how much I am touched by your position; I think only of you. When I learned that I could not find the sum you desire, I paid a friendly visit to my young client of whom I spoke to you—"

"The one who received a superior education in a fashionable convent?"

"Exactly; and I asked her what she would think of a young doctor, full of talent, future professor of the Faculty, actually considered already a savant of the first order, handsome—because you are handsome, my dear sir, and it is no flattery to say this—in good health, a peasant by birth, who presented himself as a husband. She appeared flattered, I tell you frankly. But immediately afterward she said, 'And the child?' To which I replied that you were too good, too noble, too generous, not to have the indulgence of superior men, who accept an involuntary fault with serenity. Did I go too far?"

He did not wait for an answer.

"No?" he went on. "Exactly. The child was present, for the mother watches over it with a solicitude that promises much for the future, and I examined it leisurely. It is very delicate, my dear sir, and like its father. The poor baby! I doubt if you, with all your skill, can make it live. If it should die, as it is to be feared it will, it would not injure your reputation. You can give it care, but not life."

"Speaking of health," interrupted Saniel, who did not wish to reply, "did you do what I advised about yourself?"

"Not yet. The chemists of this quarter are only licensed cutthroats; but I am going this evening to see one of my clients who is a chemist, and he will deal honestly with me."

"I will see you again, then."

"When you wish, my dear sir; when you have reflected. You have the password."

Before leaving home Saniel gave his key to the concierge, so that on her arrival Phillis might go immediately to his rooms. On his return the concierge told him that "madame" was up-stairs, and when he rang the bell, Phillis opened the door.

"Well?" she asked in a trembling voice, before he had time to enter.

"It is as I told you yesterday; he has found no one."

She clasped him in a long, passionate embrace.

"And the upholsterer?"

"Caffie has promised to gain some time for me."

While speaking, they entered the office. A fire burned on the hearth, and an inviting dinner was on the table. Saniel looked at it in surprise.

"I have set the table, you see; I am going to dine with you."

And throwing herself in his arms:

"Knowing Caffie better than you do, I knew what his answer would be, and I did not wish you to be alone on your return. I made an excuse for not dining with mamma."

"But this chicken?"

"We must have a piece de resistance."

"This fire, and these candles?"

"There, that is the end of my economies. I should have been so happy if they had been less miserable and more useful."

As on the previous evening, they sat before the fire, and she began to talk of various things in order to distract him. But what their lips did not say, their eyes, on meeting, expressed with more intensity than words could do.

It was Saniel who suddenly betrayed his preoccupation.

"Your brother studied Caffie well," he said, as if speaking to himself.

"He did, indeed!"

"He is certainly the most thorough rascal that I have ever met."

"He proposed something infamous, I am sure."

"He proposed that I should marry."

"I suspected that."

"This is the reason why he refuses to lend me the money. I was foolish enough to tell him frankly just how I am situated, and how important it is for me to be free until April. He hopes that I shall be so pushed that I will accept one of the women whom he has proposed to me. With the knife at my throat, I should have to yield."

"And these women?" she asked, not daring to look at him.

"Do not be alarmed, you have nothing to fear. One is the drunken widow of a butcher, and the other is a young girl who has a baby."

"He dares to propose such women to a man like you!"

And Saniel repeated all that Caffie had said to him about these two women.

"What a monster he is!" Phillis said.

"While he was telling me these things I thought of what you said—that if some one killed him, it would be no more than he deserved."

"That is perfectly true."

"Nothing would have been easier than for me to have made away with him. He had the toothache, and when he showed me his teeth I could easily have strangled him. We were alone, and a miserable diabetic, such as he is, who has not more than six months to live, I am sure, could not have resisted a grasp like this. I could take his keys from his pocket, open his safe, and take the thirty, forty, sixty thousand francs that I saw heaped up there. The devil take me if it were ever discovered. A doctor does not strangle his patients, he poisons them. He kills them scientifically, not brutally."

"People who have no conscience can do such things; but for us they are impossible."

"I assure you it is not conscience that would have restrained me."

"The fear of remorse, if I may use an ugly word."

"But intelligent persons have no remorse, my dear child, because they reason before the deed, and not after. Before acting they weigh the pros and cons, and know what the consequences of their actions will be to others as well as to themselves. If this previous examination proves to them that for some reason or other they may act, they will always be calm, assured that they will feel no remorse, which is only the reproach of conscience."

"Without doubt what you say is to the point, but it is impossible for me to accept it. If I have never committed crimes, I have often been foolish and have committed faults, many of them deliberately, after the examination of which you speak. I should have been, according to you, perfectly placid and

free from the reproach of conscience; however, the next morning I woke unhappy, tormented, often overwhelmed, and unable to stifle the mysterious voice that accused me."

"And in whose name did it speak, this voice, more vague than mysterious?"

"In the name of my conscience, evidently."

"'Evidently' is too much, and you would be puzzled if called upon to demonstrate this evidence; whereas, nothing is more uncertain and elusive than the thing that is called conscience, which is in reality only an affair of environment and of education."

"I do not understand."

"Does your conscience tell you it is a crime to love me?"

"No, decidedly."

"You see, then, that you have a personal way of understanding what is good and bad, which is not that of our country, where it is admitted, from the religious and from the social point of view, that a young girl is guilty when she has a lover. Of course, you see, also, that conscience is a bad weighing-machine, since each one, in order to make it work, uses a weight that he has himself manufactured."

"However it is, you did right not to strangle Cafflie."

"Whom you, yourself, have condemned to death."

"By the hand of justice, whether human or divine; but not by yours, any more than by Florentin's or mine, although we know better than any one that he does not deserve any mercy."

"And you see I foresaw your objections, as I did not tighten his cravat."

"Happily."

"Is it necessary to say 'happily'?"

CHAPTER X. SANIEL MAKES A RESOLUTION

This evening Phillis was obliged to be at home early, but she cleared off the table, and put everything in order before leaving.

"You can breakfast on the remains of the chicken," she said, as she put it in the pantry.

And as Saniel accompanied her with a candle in his hand, he saw that she had thought not only of his breakfast for the following day, but for many days, besides carrots for the rabbits.

"What a good heart you have!" he said.

"Because I think of the rabbits?"

"Because of your tenderness and thoughtfulness."

"I wish I could do something for you!"

As soon as she was gone he seated himself at his desk and began to work, anxious to make up for the time that he had given to sentiment. The fact that his work might not be of use to him, and that his experiments might be rudely interrupted the next morning or in a few days, was not a sufficient reason for being idle. He had work to do, and he worked as if with the certitude that he would pass his examinations, and that his experiments of four years past would have a good ending, without interference from any one.

This was his strong point, this power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything; not by pleasure or pain, by preoccupation or by misery. In the street he could think of Phillis, be he hungry or sleepy; at his desk he had no thought of Phillis, neither of hunger nor of sleep, no cares, no memories; his work occupied him entirely.

It was his strength, and also his pride, the only superiority of which he boasted; for although he knew that he had others, he never spoke of them, while he often said to his comrades:

"I work when I will and as much as I wish. My will never weakens when I am at work."

This evening he worked for about an hour, in his usual condition of mind; neither sheriffs, nor Jardine, nor Caffie troubled him. But having to draw upon his memory for certain facts, he found that it did not obey him as usual; there were a hesitation, a fogginess, above all, extraordinary wanderings. He wrestled with it and it obeyed, but only for a short time, and soon again it betrayed him a second time, then a third and fourth time.

Decidedly he was not in a normal state, and his will obeyed in place of commanding.

There were a name and a phrase that recurred to him mechanically from time to time. The name was Caffie, and the phrase was, "Nothing easier."

Why should this hypothesis to strangle Caffie, of which he had lightly spoken, and to which he had attached no importance at the moment when he uttered it, return to him in this way as a sort of obsession?

Was it not strange?

Never, until this day, had he had an idea that he could strangle a man, even as wicked as this one, and yet, in talking of it, he found very natural and legitimate reasons for the murder of this scamp.

Had not Phillis herself condemned him?

To tell the truth, she had added that Providence or justice should be his executor, but this was the scruple of a simple conscience, formed in a narrow environment, to which influence he would not submit.

Had he these scruples, this old man who coldly, and merely for the interest of so much a hundred on a dot, advised him to hasten the death of a woman by drunkenness, and that of an infant in any way he pleased?

When he reached this conclusion he stopped, and asked himself whether he were mad to pursue this idea; then immediately, to get rid of it, he set to work, which absorbed him for a certain time, but not so long a time as at first.

Then, finding that he could not control his will, he turned his thoughts to Caffie.

It was only too evident that if he had carried out the idea of strangling Caffie, all the difficulties against which he had struggled, and which would overwhelm him, if not the following day, at least in a few days, would have disappeared immediately.

No more sheriffs, no more creditors. What a deliverance!

Repose, the possibility of passing examinations with a calm spirit that the fever of material troubles would not disturb—in this condition he felt his success was assured.

And his experiments! He would run no danger of seeing them rudely interrupted. His preparations were not cast out-of-doors; his precious culture-tubes were not broken; his vases, his balloons, were not at the second-hand dealer's. He continued this train of thought to the results that he desired for him, glory; for humanity, the cure of one, and perhaps two, of the most terrible maladies with which it was afflicted.

The question was simple:

On one side, Caffie;

On the other side, humanity and science;

An old rascal who deserved twenty deaths, and who would, anyhow, die naturally in a short time;

And humanity, science, which would profit by a discovery of which he would be the author.

He saw that the perspiration stood out on his hands, and he felt it run down his neck.

Why this weakness? From horror of the crime, the possibility of which he admitted? Or from fear of seeing his experiments destroyed?

He would reflect, think about it, be upon his guard.

He had told Phillis that intelligent men, before engaging in an action, weigh the pro and con.

Against Caffie's death he saw nothing.

For, on the contrary, everything combined.

If he had had Phillis's scruples, or Brigard's beliefs, he would have stopped.

But, not having them, would he not be silly to draw back?

Before what should he shrink? Why should he stop?

Remorse? But he was convinced that intelligent men had no remorse when they came to a decision on good grounds. It was before that they felt remorse, not after; and he was exactly in this period of before.

Fear of being arrested? But intelligent men do not let themselves be arrested. Those who are lost are brutes who go straight ahead, or the half-intelligent, who use their skill and cunning to combine a complicated or romantic act, in which their hand is plainly seen. As for him, he was a man of science and precision, and he would not compromise himself by act or sentiment; there would be nothing to fear during the action, and nothing afterward. Caffie strangled, suspicion would not fall upon a doctor, but on a brute. When doctors wish to kill any one, they do it learnedly, by poison or by some scientific method. Brutal men kill brutally; murder, called the assassin's profession.

A few minutes before, he was inundated by perspiration; this word froze him.

He rose nervously, and walked up and down the room with long, unsteady steps. The fire had long since gone out; out-of-doors the street noises had ceased, and in his brain resounded the one word that he pronounced in a low tone, "Assassin!"

Was he the man to be influenced and stopped by a word? Where are the rich, the self-made men, the successful men, who have not left some corpses on the road behind them? Success carries them safely, and they achieved success only because they had force.

Certainly, violence was not recreation, and it would be more agreeable to go in his way peacefully, by the power of intelligence and work, than to make a way by blows; but he had not chosen this road, he was thrown into it by circumstances, by fate, and whoever wishes to reach the end cannot choose the means. If one must walk in the mud, what matters it, when one knows that one will not get muddy?

If Caffie had had heirs, poor people who expected to be saved from misery by inheriting his fortune, he would have been touched by this consideration, undoubtedly. Robber! The word was yet more vile than that of assassin. But who would miss the few banknotes that he would take from the safe? To steal is to injure some one. Whom would he injure? He could see no one. But he saw distinctly an army of afflicted persons whom he would benefit.

A timid ring of the bell made him start violently, and he was angry with himself for being so nervous, he who was always master of his mind as of his body.

He opened the door, and a man dressed like a laborer bowed humbly.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, sir."

"What do you want?"

"I called on account of my wife, if you will be so good as to come to see her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"She is about to be confined. The nurse does not know what to do, and sent me for a doctor."

"Did the nurse tell you to come for me?"

"No, sir; she sent me to Doctor Legrand."

"Well?"

"His wife told me he could not get up on account of his bronchitis. And the chemist gave me your address."

"That is right."

"I must tell you, sir, I am an honest man, but we are not rich; we could not pay you—immediately."

"I understand. Wait a few minutes."

Saniel took his instruments and followed the laborer, who, on the way, explained his wife's condition.

"Where are we going?" Saniel asked, interrupting these explanations.

"Rue de la Corderie."

It was behind the Saint Honore' market, on the sixth floor, under the roof, in a room that was perfectly clean, in spite of its poverty. As soon as Saniel entered the nurse came forward, and in a few words told him the woman's trouble.

"Is the child living?"

"Yes."

"That is well; let us see."

He approached the bed and made a careful examination of the patient, who kept repeating:

"I am going to die. Save me, doctor!"

"Certainly, we shall save you," he said, very softly. "I promise you."

He turned away from the bed and said to the nurse:

"The only way to save the mother is to kill the child."

The operation was long, difficult, and painful, and after it was over Saniel remained a long time with the patient. When he reached the street a neighboring clock struck five, and the market-place had already begun to show signs of life.

But in the streets was still the silence and solitude of night, and Saniel began to reflect on what had occurred during the last few hours. Thus, he had not hesitated to kill this child, who had, perhaps, sixty or seventy years of happy life before it, and he hesitated at the death of Caffie, to whom remained only a miserable existence of a few weeks. The interests of a poor, weak, stunted woman had decided him; his, those of humanity, left him perplexed, irresolute, weak, and cowardly. What a contradiction!

He walked with his eyes lowered, and at this moment, before him on the pavement, he saw an object that glittered in the glare of the gas. He approached it, and found that it was a butcher's knife, that must have been lost, either on going to the market or the slaughterhouse.

He hesitated a moment whether he should pick it up or leave it there; then looking all about him, and seeing no one in the deserted street, and hearing no sound of footsteps in the silence, he bent quickly and took it.

Caffie's fate was decided.

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XI. THE INSTRUMENT OF DEATH

When, after two hours' sleep, Saniel woke, he did not at first think of this knife; he was tired and dull. Mechanically he walked about his room without paying attention to what he was doing, as if he were in a state of somnambulism, and it astonished him, because he never felt weariness of mind any more than of body, no matter how little he had slept, nor how hard he had worked.

But suddenly, catching a glimpse of the knife that he had placed on the mantel, he received a shock that annihilated his torpor and his fatigue. It dazzled him like a flash of lightning.

He took it, and, going to the window, he examined it by the pale light of early morning. It was a strong instrument that, in a firm hand, would be a terrible arm; newly sharpened, it had the edge of a razor.

Then the idea, the vision that had come to him two hours before, came back to him, clear and complete at nightfall, that is, at the moment when the concierge was in the second wing of the building, he mounted to Caffie's apartment without being seen, and with this knife he cut his throat. It was as simple as it was easy, and this knife left beside the corpse, and the nature of the wound, would lead the police to look for a butcher, or at least a man who was in the habit of using a knife of this kind.

The evening before, when he had discussed Caffie's death, the how and the when still remained vague and uncertain. But now the day and the means were definitely settled: it should be with this knife, and this evening.

This shook him out of his torpor and made him shudder.

He was angry with himself for this weakness. Did he know or did he not know what he wished? Was he irresolute or cowardly?

Then, going from one idea to another, he thought of an observation that he had made, which appeared to prove that with many subjects there is less firmness in the morning than in the evening. Was this the result of dualism of the nervous centres, and was the human personality double like the brain? Were there hours when the right hemisphere is master of our will, and were there other hours when the left is master? Did one of these hemispheres possess what the other lacked, and is it according to the activity of this or that one, that one has such a character or such a temperament? This would be curious, and would amount to saying that, a lamb in the morning, one might be a tiger at evening. With him it was a lamb that woke in the morning to be devoured by a tiger during the day. To which hemisphere belonged the one and the other of these personalities?

He was angry with himself for yielding to these reflections; it was a time, truly, to study this psychological question! It was of Caffie that he should think, and of the plan which in an instant flashed through his mind in the street, before he decided to pick up this knife.

Evidently things were neither so simple nor so easy as they at first appeared, and to insure the success of his plan a combination of circumstances was necessary, which might be difficult to bring about.

Would not the concierge see him pass? Would no one go up or down the stairs? Would Caffie be alone? Would he open the door? Might not some one ring after he had entered?

Here was a series of questions that he had not thought of before, but which now presented itself.

He must examine them, weigh them, and not throw himself giddily into an adventure that presented such risks.

He was alone all day, fortunately, and, as in the state of agitation in which he found himself he could not think of work, he gave himself up to this examination. The stakes were worth the trouble—his honor and his life.

As soon as he was dressed he went out, and walked straight before him through the streets that were already filled with people.

It was only when he had left the heart of Paris that he could reflect as he wished, without being disturbed each instant by people in a hurry, for whom he must make way, or by others who, reading the newspapers, did not look before them, and so jostled against him.

Evidently the risks were more serious than he had imagined; and, as they loomed up before him, he asked himself whether he should go on. To suppress Caffie, yes; to give himself up, no.

"If it is impossible—"

He was not the man to set himself wildly against the impossible: he should have had a dream, a bad dream, and that would be all.

He stopped, and, after a moment of hesitation, turning on his heel, he retraced his steps. Of what use was it to go farther? He had no need to reflect nor to weigh the pro and con; he must give up this plan; decidedly it was too dangerous.

He had gone but a short distance when he asked himself whether these dangers were such as he saw them, and whether he were face to face with a radically demonstrated impossibility.

Without doubt, the concierge might observe him when he passed her lodge, either on going up-stairs or coming down; and, also, she might not observe him. This, in reality, depended much upon himself, and on his method of proceeding.

Every evening this lame old concierge lighted the gas in the two wings of the building, one on the street and one on the court. She began by lighting that on the street, and, with the difficulty that she found in walking, it should take her some time to climb the five stories and to descend. If one watched from the street when, at dusk, she left her lodge with a wax taper in her hand, and mounted the stairs behind her, at a little distance, in such a way as to be on the landing of the first story when she should reach the second, there would be time, the deed done, to regain the street before she returned to her lodge, after having lighted the gas on the two staircases. It was important to proceed methodically, without hurry, but, also, without loitering.

Was this impossible?

Here, exactly, was the delicate point which he must examine with composure, without permitting himself to be influenced by any other consideration than that which sprang from the deed itself.

He was wrong, then, not to continue his route, and it was better, assuredly, to get out of Paris. In the country, in the fields or woods, he could find the calm that was indispensable to his over-excited brain, in which ideas clashed like the waves of a disturbed sea.

He was at this moment in the middle of the Faubourg Saint Honore; he followed a street that would bring him to the Champs Elysees, a desert at this early hour.

It took him some time to examine all the hypotheses that might present themselves, and he reached the conclusion that what had appeared impossible to him was not so. If he preserved his calmness, and did not lose perception of the passing time, he could very well escape the concierge, which was the main point.

To tell the truth, the danger of the concierge removed, all was not easy. There was the possibility of meeting one of the lodgers on the stairs; there was a chance of not finding Caffie at home, or, at least, not alone; or the bell might ring at the decisive moment. But, as everything depended upon chance, these circumstances could not be decided beforehand. It was a risk. If one of them happened, he would wait until the next day; it would be one more day of agitation to live through.

But one question that should be decided in advance, because, surely, it presented serious dangers, was how he should justify the coming into his hands of a sum of money which, providentially and in the nick of time, relieved him from the embarrassments against which he struggled.

He had reached the Bois de Boulogne and still continued his walk. In passing a fountain the rippling of the water attracted his attention, and he stopped. Although the weather was damp and cold under the influence of a strong west wind charged with rain, his tongue was dry; he drank two goblets of water, and then pursued his way, indifferent where he went.

Then he built up an arrangement which appeared ingenious to him, when it occurred to him to remember that he had gone to Caffie to borrow three thousand francs. Why would he not lend it to him, if not the first day, at least the second? With this loan he paid his debts, if he were questioned on this point. To prove this loan he need only to sign a receipt which he could place in the safe, and which would be found there. Would not the first thought of those who had signed a paper of this kind be to take it when an occasion presented itself? As he would not seize this occasion to carry off his note, it would be the proof that he had not opened the safe.

Among other advantages, this arrangement did away with robbery; it was only a loan. Later he would return these three thousand francs to Caffies heirs. So much the worse for him if it were a forced loan.

On returning to Paris he would buy a sheet of stamped paper, and as he had asked the price the previous evening, he knew that he could afford the expense.

When he reached Saint Cloud he entered a tavern and ordered some bread and cheese and wine. But if he drank little, he ate less, his parched throat refusing to swallow bread.

He took up his march in the clayey streets on the slope of Mont Valerian, but he was insensible to the unpleasantness of slipping on the soft soil, and walked hither and thither, his only care being not to get too far away from the Seine, so that he might enter Paris before night.

He was delighted since he had made up his mind to make out and sign a receipt for the money. But on giving it further consideration, he perceived that it was not so ingenious as he had at first supposed. Do not the dealers of stamped paper often number their paper? With this number it would be easy to find the dealer and him who had bought it. And then, was it not likely that a scrupulous business man like Caffie would keep a record of the loans he made, and would not the absence of this one and the note be sufficient to awaken suspicion and to direct it to him?

Decidedly, he only escaped one danger to fall into another.

For a moment he was discouraged, but it did not go so far as weakness. His error had been in imagining that the execution of the idea that had come to him while picking up the knife was as plain as it was easy. But complicated and perilous as it was, it was not impossible.

The question which finally stood before him was, to know whether he possessed the force needed to cope with these dangers, and on this ground hesitation was not possible; to wish to foresee everything was folly; that which he would not have expected, would come to pass.

He returned toward Paris, and by the Pont de Suresnes reentered the Bois de Boulogne. As it was not yet three o'clock, he had plenty of time to reach the Rue Sainte-Anne before night; but, on the way, a heavy shower forced him to take shelter, and he watched the falling rain, asking himself if this accident, which he had not foreseen, would not upset his plan. A man who had received the force of this shower could not appear in the street before Caffie's door without attracting the attention of the passers-by, and it was important for him that he should not attract the attention of any one.

At length the rain ceased, and at twenty minutes of five he reached his home. There remained fifteen or twenty minutes of daylight, which was more than he needed.

He stuck the point of the knife in a cork, and, after having placed it between the folded leaves of a newspaper, in the inside left-hand pocket of his overcoat, he went out.

CHAPTER XII. THE CRUCIAL MOMENT

When he reached Caffies door the night had scarcely fallen, and the streets were not yet lighted.

The better and the surest plan for him had been to wait in the 'porte-cochere' across the street; from there he could watch the 'concierge', who would not be able to go out without being seen by him. But though the passers were few at this moment, they might have observed him. Next to this 'porte-cochere' was a small 'cafe', whose brilliant lights would cause him to be seen quite plainly. He, therefore, walked on, but soon returned.

All irresolution, all hesitation, had disappeared, and the only point on which he still questioned himself bore upon the state in which he found himself at this moment. He felt himself firm, and his pulse, he was certain, beat regularly. He was as he had imagined he would be; experience confirmed his foresight; his hand would tremble no more than his will.

As he passed before the house he saw the concierge come slowly out of her lodge and close her door carefully, putting the key in her pocket. In her left hand she held something white that he could not see distinctly in the twilight, but it was probably the wax-taper which, doubtless, she had not lighted for fear the wind would blow it out.

This was a favorable circumstance, that gave him one or two minutes more than he had counted on, for she would be obliged to strike a match on the stairs to light her taper; and, in the execution of his

plan, two minutes, a single minute even, might be of great importance.

With dragging steps and bent back she disappeared through the vestibule of the stairway. Then Saniel continued his walk like an ordinary passer-by until she had time to reach the first story; then, turning, he returned to the porte-cochere and entered quietly. By the gaslight in the vestibule he saw by his watch, which he held in his hand, that it was fourteen minutes after five o'clock. Then, if his calculation was right, at twenty-four or twenty-five minutes after five he must pass before the lodge, which should still be empty at that moment.

On the staircase above him he heard the heavy step of the concierge; she had lighted the gas on the first story, and continued on her way slowly. With rapid but light steps he mounted behind her, and, on reaching Caffie's door, he rang the bell, taking care not to ring too loudly or too timidly; then he knocked three times, as Caffie had instructed him.

Was Caffie alone?

Up to this time all had gone as he wished; no one in the vestibule, no one on the stairs; fate was in his favor; would it accompany him to the end?

While he waited at the door, asking himself this question, an idea flashed into his mind. He would make a last attempt. If Caffie consented to make the loan he would save himself; if he refused, he condemned himself.

After several seconds, that appeared like hours, his listening ears perceived a sound which announced that Caffie was at home. A scratching of wood on the tiled floor denoted that a chair had been pushed aside; heavy, dragging steps approached, then the bolt creaked, and the door was opened cautiously.

"Ah! It is you, my dear sir!" Caffie said, in surprise.

Saniel entered briskly and closed the door himself, pressing it firmly.

"Is there anything new?" Caffie asked, as he led the way to his office.

"No," Saniel replied.

"Well, then?" Caffie asked, as he seated himself in an armchair before his desk, on which stood a lighted lamp. "I suppose you have come to hear more about my young friend. This hurry augurs well."

"No, it is not of the young person that I wish to talk to you."

"I am sorry."

On seating himself opposite to Caffie, Saniel had taken out his watch. Two minutes had passed since he left the vestibule; he must hurry. In order to keep himself informed of the passing of time, he retained his watch in his hand.

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes; I will come immediately to business. It concerns myself, my position, and I make a last appeal to you. Let us be honest with each other. Undoubtedly you think that, pushed by my distress, and seeing that I shall be lost forever, I shall decide to accept this marriage to save myself."

"Can you suppose such a thing, my dear sir?" Caffie cried.

But Saniel stopped him....

"The calculation is too natural for you not to have made it. Well, I must tell you that it is false. Never will I lend myself to such a bargain. Renounce your project, and let us discuss my demand. I am in absolute want of three thousand francs, and I will pay the interest that you fix upon."

"I have not found a money-lender, my dear sir. I have taken a great deal of trouble, I assure you, but I did not succeed."

"Make an effort yourself."

"Me? My dear sir!"

"I address myself to you."

"But I have no ready money."

"It is a desperate appeal that I make. I understand that your long experience in business makes you insensible to the misery that you see every day—"

"Insensible! Say that it breaks my heart, my dear sir."

"But will you not permit yourself to be touched by the misery of a man who is young, intelligent, courageous, who will drown if a hand is not held out to help him? For you, the assistance that I ask so earnestly is nothing—"

"Three thousand francs! Nothing! Bless me! How you talk!"

"For me, if you refuse me, it is death."

Saniel began to speak with his eyes fixed on the hands of his watch, but presently, carried away by the fever of the situation, he raised them to look at Caffie, and to see the effect that he produced on him. In this movement he made a discovery that destroyed all his calculations.

Caffie's office was a small room with a high window looking into the court; never having been in this office except in the evening, he had not observed that this window had neither shutters nor curtains of muslin or of heavier stuff; there was nothing but the glass. To tell the truth, two heavy curtains of woollen damask hung on either side of the window, but they were not drawn. Talking to Caffie, who was placed between him and this window, Saniel suddenly perceived that on the other side of the court, in the second wing of the building, on the second story, were two lighted windows directly opposite to the office, and that from there any one could see everything that occurred in the office.

How should he execute his plan under the eyes of these people whom he saw coming and going in this room? He would be lost. In any case, it was risking an adventure so hazardous that he would be a fool to attempt it, and he was not that; never had he felt himself so much the master of his mind and nerves.

Also, it was not only to save Caffie's life that he argued, it was to save himself in grasping this loan.

"I can only, to my great regret, repeat to you what I have already said, my dear sir. I have no ready money."

And he held his jaw, groaning, as if this refusal aroused his toothache.

Saniel rose; evidently there was nothing for him to do but to go. It was finished, and instead of being in despair he felt it as a relief.

But, as he was about to leave the room, an idea flashed through his mind.

He looked at his watch, which he had not consulted for some time; it was twenty minutes after five; there yet remained four minutes, five at the most.

"Why do you not draw these curtains?" he said. "I am sure your sufferings are partly caused by the wind that comes in this window."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it; you should be warm about the head, and avoid currents of air."

Passing behind Caffie, he went to the window to draw the curtains, but the cords would not move.

"It is years since they were drawn," Caffie said. "Doubtless the cords are entangled. I will bring the light."

And, taking the lamp, he went to the window, holding it high in order to throw light on the cords.

With a turn of the hand Saniel disentangled the cords, and the curtains slid on the rods, almost covering the window.

"It is true a good deal of air did come in the window," Caffie said. "I thank you, my dear doctor."

All this was done with a feverish rapidity that astonished Caffie.

"Decidedly, you are in a hurry," he said.

"Yes, in a great hurry."

He looked at his watch.

"However, I have still time to give you a consultation if you desire it."

"I would not trouble you—"

"You do not trouble me."

"But—"

"Sit down in your armchair, and show me your mouth."

While Caffie seated himself, Saniel continued in a vibrating voice:

"You see I give good for evil."

"How is that, my dear sir?"

"You refuse me a service that would save me, and I give you a consultation. It is true, it is the last."

"And why the last, my dear sir?"

"Because death is between us."

"Death!"

"Do you not see it?"

"No."

"I see it."

"You must not think of such a thing, my dear sir. One does not die because one cannot pay three thousand francs."

The chair in which Caffie seated himself was an old Voltaire, with an inclined back, and he half reclined in it. As his shirtcollar was too large for him since he had become thin, and his narrow cravat was scarcely tied, he displayed as much throat as jaw.

Saniel, behind the chair, had taken the knife in his right hand, while he pressed the left heavily on Caffies forehead, and with a powerful stroke, as quick as lightning, he cut the larynx under the glottis, as well as the two carotid arteries, with the jugular veins. From this terrible wound sprang a large jet of blood, which, crossing the room, struck against the door. Cut clean, not a cry could be formed in the windpipe, and in his armchair Caffie shook with convulsions from head to foot.

Leaving his position behind the chair, Saniel, who had thrown the knife on the floor, looked at his watch and counted the ticking of the second-hand in a low voice.

"One, two, three-"

At the end of ninety seconds the convulsions ceased.

It was twenty-three minutes after five. Now it was important that he should hurry and not lose a second.

The blood, after having gushed out, had run down the body and wet the vest pocket in which was the key of the safe. But blood does not produce the same effect upon a doctor as upon those who are not accustomed to its sight and odor, and to its touch. In spite of the lukewarm sea in which it lay, Saniel took the key, and after wiping his hand on one of the tails of Caffie's coat, he placed it in the lock.

Would it turn freely, or was it closed with a combination? The question was poignant. The key turned and the door opened. On a shelf and in a wooden bowl were packages of bank-notes and rolls of gold that he had seen the evening when the bank-clerk came. Roughly, without counting; he thrust them into his pocket, and without closing the safe, he ran to the front door, taking care not to step in the streams of blood, which, on the sloping tiled floor, ran toward this door. The time was short.

And now was the greatest danger, that of meeting some one behind this door, or on the stairs. He listened, and heard no noise. He went out, and no one was to be seen. Without running, but hastily, he descended the stairs. Should he look in the lodge, or should he turn his head away? He looked, but the concierge was not there.

A second later he was in the street mingling with the passersby, and he drew a long breath.

CHAPTER XIII. DISTRACTION

There was no longer any need to be cautious, to listen, to stretch his nerves, to restrain his heart; he could walk freely and reflect.

His first thought was to endeavor to explain to himself how he felt, and he found that it was an immense relief; something, doubtless, analogous to the returning to life after being in a state of asphyxiation. Physically, he was calm; morally, he felt no remorse. He was right, therefore, in his theory when he told Phillis that in the intelligent man remorse precedes the action, instead of following it.

But where he was mistaken was in imagining that during the act he should maintain his coolness and force, which, in reality, had failed him completely.

Going from one idea to another, tossed by irresolution, he was by no means the strong man that he had believed himself: one to go to the end unmoved, ready to face every attack; master of his nerves as of his will, in full possession of all his powers. On the contrary, he had been the plaything of agitation and weakness. If a serious danger had risen. before him, he would not have known on which side to attack it; fear would have paralyzed him, and he would have been lost.

To tell the truth, his hand had been firm, but his head had been bewildered.

There was something humiliating in this, he was obliged to acknowledge; and, what was more serious, it was alarming. Because, although everything had gone as he wished, up to the present time, all was not finished, nor even begun.

If the investigations of the law should reach him, how should he defend himself?

He felt sure that he had not been seen in Caffies house at the moment when the crime was committed; but does one ever know whether one has been seen or not?

And there was the production of money that he should use to pay his debts, which might become an accusation against which it would be difficult to defend himself. In any case, he must be ready to explain his position. And what might complicate the matter was, that Caffie, a careful man, had probably taken care to write the numbers of his bank-notes in a book, which would be found.

On leaving the Rue Sainte-Anne he took the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs to his home, to leave the bank-notes and to wash off the stains of blood that might have splashed on him and his hands, particularly the right one, which was still red. But suddenly it occurred to him that he might be followed, and it would be folly to show where he lived. He hastened his steps, in order to make any one who might be following him run, and took the streets that were not well lighted, those where there was little chance of any one seeing the stains, if they were visible, on his clothing or boots. He walked in this way for nearly half an hour, turning and returning on his track, and after having crossed the Place Vendome twice, where he was able to look behind him, he decided to go home, not knowing whether he should be satisfied to have bewildered all quest, or whether he should not be furious to have yielded to a sort of panic.

As he passed by the lodge without stopping, his concierge called him, and, running out, gave him a letter with unusual eagerness. Saniel, who wished to escape observation, took it hastily, and stuffed it into his pocket.

“It is an important letter,” the concierge said. “The servant who brought it told me that it contained money.”

It needed this recommendation at such a moment, or Saniel would not have opened it, which he did as soon as he entered his rooms.

“I do not wish, my dear Doctor, to leave Paris for Monaco, where I go to pass two or three months, without sending you our thanks.

“Yours very gratefully,

“C. DUPHOT.”

These thanks were represented by two bills of one hundred francs, a payment more than sufficient for the care that Saniel had given some months before to the mistress of this old comrade. Of what use now were these two hundred francs, which a few days sooner would have been so much to him? He threw them on his desk; and then, after having lighted two candles, he inspected his clothing.

The precaution that he had taken to place himself behind the chair was wise. The blood, in squirting in front and on each side, had not reached him; only the hand that held the knife and the shirt-sleeve were splashed, but this was of no consequence. A doctor has the right to have some blood on his sleeves, and this shirt went to join the one he had worn the previous night when attending the sick woman.

Free from this care, he still had the money in his pockets. He emptied them on his desk and counted all: five rouleaux of gold, of a thousand francs, and three packages of ten thousand francs each, of bank-notes.

How should he get rid of this sum all at once, and, later, how should he justify its production when the moment came, if it came?

The question was complex, and, unfortunately for him, he was hardly in a state to consider it calmly.

For the gold, he had only to burn the papers in which it was rolled. Louis have neither numbers nor particular marks, but bills have. Where should he conceal them while waiting to learn through the newspapers if Caffie had or had not made a note of these numbers?

While burning these papers on which Caffie had written “2,000 francs,” he tried to think of a place of concealment.

As he threw a glance around him, asking from things the inspiration that his brain did not furnish, he caught sight of the letter he had just received, and it suggested an idea. Duphot was at Monaco to play. Why should he not go also, and play?

Having neither relatives nor friends from whom he could procure a certain sum, his only resource was to make it at play; and in his desperate position, known to every one, nothing was more natural than this experiment. He had received two hundred francs, which would not save him from his creditors. He would risk them at roulette at Monaco. Whether he lost or won was of little consequence. He would have played that would be sufficient. He would be seen playing. Who would know whether he lost or won? From Monaco he would pay Jardine by telegraph, out of the five thousand Louis, which would be more than sufficient for that; and, when he returned to Paris, he would free himself from his other creditors with what remained.

The money affair decided—and it seemed to him cleverly settled—did not include the bank-notes, which, spread out before his eyes, disturbed him. What should he do with them? One moment he thought of burning them, but reflection held him back. Would it not be folly to destroy this fortune? In any case, would it not be the work of a narrow mind, of one not fertile in resources?

In trying to think of some safe place to hide the banknotes, one thought continually absorbed him: What was happening in the Rue Sainte-Anne? Had any one discovered the dead man?

He should be there to observe events, instead of timidly shutting himself up in his office.

For several minutes he tried to resist this thought, but it was stronger than his will or his reason. So much was he under its power that he could do nothing.

Willing or unwilling, foolish or not, he must go to the Rue Sainte-Anne.

He washed his hands, changed his shirt, and throwing the notes and gold into a drawer, he went out.

He knew very well that there was a certain danger in leaving these proofs of the crime, which, found in an official search, would overwhelm him, without his being able to defend himself. But he thought that an immediate search was unlikely to occur, and if he could not make a probable story, it would be better for him not to reason about it. It was a risk that he ran, but how much he had on his side!

He hastened along the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, but on approaching the Rue Sainte-Anne he slackened his steps, looking about him and listening. Nothing unusual struck him. Even when he turned into the Rue Sainte-Anne he found it bore its ordinary aspect. A few passers-by, not curious; no groups on the sidewalk; no shopkeepers at their doors. Nothing was different from usual.

Apparently, nothing had yet been discovered. Then he stopped, judging it useless to go farther. Already he had passed too much time before Caffie's door, and when one was of his build, above the medium height, with a physiognomy and appearance unlike others, one should avoid attracting attention.

For several minutes he walked up and down slowly, from the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs to the Rue du Hasard; from there he could see Caffie's house, and yet be so far away that no one would suspect him of watching it.

But this promenade, which was quite natural, and which he would have continued for an hour in ordinary circumstances, without thinking anything about it, soon alarmed him. It seemed as if people looked at him, and two persons stopping to talk made him wonder if they spoke of him. Why did they not continue their way? Why, from time to time, did they turn their heads toward him?

He left the place, and neither wishing nor being able to decide to go far away from "the house," he concluded to go to a small cafe which was close by.

On entering, he seated himself at a table near the door that appeared to be an excellent observatory, from where he could easily survey the street. A waiter asked him what he would have, and he ordered coffee.

He gave this order mechanically, without thinking what he was saying, and not till afterward did he wonder if it were natural to take coffee at this hour. The men seated at the other tables drank appetizers or beer. Had he not made a blunder?

But everything seemed a blunder, as everything seemed dangerous. Could he not regain his composure and his reason? He drank his coffee slowly; then he asked for a newspaper. The street was quiet, and people left the cafe one by one.

Behind his newspaper he reflected. It was his feverish curiosity that made him admit that Caffie's death would be discovered during the evening. In reality, it might easily remain undiscovered until the next day.

But he could not stay in the cafe until the next day, nor even until midnight. Perhaps he had remained there too long already.

He did not wish to go yet, so he ordered writing materials, and paid the waiter, in case he might wish to go hastily—if anything occurred.

What should he write? He wished to test himself, and found that he was able to write clearly, and to select the proper words; but when he came to read it over, his will failed him.

Time passed. Suddenly there was a movement under the porte-cochere of "the house," and a man ran through the street. Two or three persons stopped in a group.

Without hurrying too much, Saniel went out, and in a strong voice asked what had happened.

"An agent of business has been assassinated in his office. Word has been sent to the police bureau in the Rue du Hasard."

CHAPTER XIV. THE EXAMINATION

Saniel was there to observe, without having decided what he should do. Instantly, with the decision that had "failed him so often during his vigil," he resolved to go to Caffie's. Was he not a doctor, and the physician of the dead-man? What could be more natural?

"A money-lender!" he exclaimed. "Is it Monsieur Caffie?"

"Exactly."

"But I am his doctor."

"A doctor! Here is a doctor!" cried several voices.

The crowd parted, and Saniel passed under the porte-cochere, where the concierge, half fainting, was seated on a chair, surrounded by all the maids of the house and several neighbors, to whom she related the news.

By using his elbows he was able to approach her.

“Who has said Monsieur Caffie is dead?” he asked with authority.

“No one has said he is dead; at least, I have not.”

“Well, then?”

“There is a stain of blood that has run from his office down to the landing; and as he is at home, since the light of his lamp is seen in the court, and he never leaves it burning when he goes to dinner, something must have happened. And why are his curtains drawn? He always leaves them open.”

At this moment two policemen appeared, preceded by a locksmith armed with a bunch of keys, and a little man with a shrewd, sharp appearance, wearing spectacles, and a hat from under which fell blond curls. The commissioner of police probably.

“On which story?” he asked the concierge.

“On the first.”

“Come with us.”

He started to go upstairs, accompanied by the concierge, the locksmith, and one of the policemen; Saniel wished to follow them, but the other policeman barred the way.

“Pardon, Monsieur Commissioner,” Saniel said.

“What do you wish, sir?”

“I am Monsieur Caffie’s physician.”

“Your name?”

“Doctor Saniel.”

“Let the doctor pass,” the commissioner said, “but alone. Make every one go out, and shut the porte-cochere.”

On reaching the landing the commissioner stopped to look at the brown stain which, running under the door, spread over the tiling, as Caffie never had had a mat.

“It is certainly a stain of blood,” Saniel said, who stopped to examine it and dipped his finger in it.

“Open the door,” the commissioner said to the locksmith.

The latter examined the lock, looked among his keys, selected one, and unlocked the door.

“Let no one enter,” the commissioner said. “Doctor, have the goodness to follow me.”

And, going ahead, he entered the first office, that of the clerk, followed by Saniel. Two little rills of blood, already thickened, starting from Caffie’s chair, and running across the tiled floor, which sloped a little toward the side of the staircase, joined in the stain which caused the discovery of the crime. The commissioner and Saniel took care not to step in it.

“The unfortunate man has had his throat cut,” Saniel said. “Death must have occurred two or three hours ago. There is nothing to do.”

“Speak for yourself, doctor.”

And, stooping, he picked up the knife.

“Is it not a butcher’s knife?” asked Saniel, who could only use this word.

“It looks like it.”

He had raised Caffie’s head and examined the wound.

“You see,” he said, “that the victim has been butchered. The stroke was from left to right, by a firm hand which must be accustomed to handle this knife. But it is not only a strong and practised hand that has done this deed; it was guided by an intelligence that knew how to proceed to insure a quick, almost instantaneous death, and at the same time a silent one.”

“You think it was done by a butcher?”

"By a professional killer; the larynx has been cut above the glottis, and with the same stroke the two carotid arteries, with the jugular veins. As the assassin had to raise the head, the victim was not able to cry out; considerable blood has flowed, and death must have ensued in one or two minutes."

"The scene appears to me very well reconstructed."

"The blood should have burst out in this direction," Saniel continued, pointing to the door. "But as this door was open, nothing is to be seen."

While Saniel spoke, the commissioner threw a glance about the room—the glance of the police, which takes in everything.

"The safe is open," he said. "The affair becomes clear; the assassination was followed by theft."

There was a door opposite to the entrance, which the commissioner opened; it was that of Caffie's bedroom.

"I will give you a man to help you carry the body into this room, where you can continue your examination more easily, while I will continue my investigations in this office."

Saniel would have liked to remain in the office to assist at these investigations, but it was impossible to raise an objection. The chair was rolled into the bedroom, where two candles had been lighted on the mantel, and when the body was laid on the bed, the commissioner returned to the office.

Saniel made his examination last as long a time as possible, to the end that he need not leave the house; but he could not prolong it beyond certain limits. When they were reached, he returned to the clerk's office, where the commissioner had installed himself, and was hearing the concierge's deposition.

"And so," he said, "from five to seven o'clock no one asked for M. Caffie?"

"No one. But I left my lodge at a quarter past five to light the gas on the stairs; that took me twenty minutes, because I am stiff in my joints, and during this time some one might have gone up and down the stairs without my seeing them."

"Well," the commissioner said, turning to Saniel, "have you found any distinguishing feature?"

"No; there is only the wound on the neck."

"Will you draw up your medico-legal report while I continue my inquest?"

"Willingly."

And, without waiting, he seated himself at the clerk's desk, facing the commissioner's secretary, who had arrived a few minutes previous.

"I am going to make you take the oath," the commissioner said.

After this formality Saniel began his report:

"We, the undersigned, Victor Saniel, doctor of medicine of the Paris Faculty, residing in Paris in the Rue Louis-le-Grand, after having taken an oath to fulfil in all honor and conscience the mission confided to us—"

All the time that he was writing he paid attention to everything that was said, and did not lose one word of the concierge's deposition.

"I am certain," she said, "that from half-past five until now no one has gone up or down the stairs but the people who live in the house."

"But before half-past five?"

"I have told you that from a quarter past five until half-past I was not in my lodge."

"And before a quarter past five o'clock?"

"Several persons passed whom I did not know."

"Did any one among them ask you for Monsieur Caffie?"

"No; that is to say, yes. There was one who asked me if Monsieur Caffie was at home; but I know him well; that is why I answered No."

"And who is he?"

"One of Monsieur Caffies old clerks."

"His name?"

"Monsieur Florentin—Monsieur Florentin Cormier."

Saniel's hand was arrested at this name, but he did not raise his head.

"At what hour did he come?" asked the commissioner.

"Near three o'clock, before rather than after."

"Did you see him go away?"

"Certainly, he spoke to me."

"What time was it?"

"Half-past three."

"Do you think that death could have occurred at this moment?" the commissioner asked, turning to Saniel.

"No; I think it must have been between five and six o'clock."

"It is wrong for the commissioner to suspect Monsieur Florentin," cried the concierge. "He is a good young man, incapable of harming a fly. And then, there is a good reason why death could not have taken place between three o'clock and half-past; it is that Monsieur Caffie's lamp was lighted, and you know the poor gentleman was not a man to light his lamp in broad daylight, looking as he was—"

She stopped abruptly, striking her forehead with her hand.

"That is what I remember, and you will see that Monsieur Florentin has nothing to do with this affair. As I went upstairs at a quarter past five to light my gas, some one came behind me and rang Monsieur Caffie's bell, and rapped three or four times at equal distances, which is the signal to open the door."

Again Saniel's pen stopped, and he was obliged to lean his hand on the table to prevent its trembling.

"Who was it?"

"Ah! That I do not know," she answered. "I did not see him, but I heard him, the step of a man. It was this rascal who killed him, you may be sure."

This seemed likely.

"He went out while I was on the stairs; he knew the customs of the house."

Saniel continued his report.

After having questioned and cross-questioned the concierge without being able to make her say more, the commissioner dismissed her, and leaving Saniel at his work, he passed into Caffie's office, where he remained a long time.

When he returned he brought a small note-book that he consulted. Without doubt it was the book of Caffie's safe, simple and primitive, like everything relating to the old man's habits, governed by the narrowest economy in his expenses, as well as in his work.

"According to this note-book," the commissioner said to his secretary, "thirty-five or thirty-six thousand francs must have been taken from the safe; but there are left deeds and papers for a large sum."

Saniel, who had finished his report, did not take his eyes from the note-book, and what he could see reassured him. Evidently these accounts were reduced to a minimum: a date, a name, a sum, and after this name a capital P, which, without doubt, meant "paid." It was hardly possible that with such a system Caffie had ever taken the trouble to enter the number of the bills that had passed through his hands; in any case, if he did, it was not in this note-book. Would another one be found?

"My report is finished," he said. "Here it is."

"Since you are here, perhaps you can give me some information concerning the habits of the victim and the persons he received."

"Not at all. I have known him but a short time, and he was my patient, as I was his client, by accident. He undertook an affair for me, and I gave him advice; he was in the last stage of diabetes. The assassin hastened his death only a short time-a few days."

"That is nothing; he hastened it."

"Oh, certainly! Otherwise, if he is skilful in cutting throats, perhaps he is less so in making a diagnosis of their maladies."

"That is probable," responded the commissioner, smiling. "You think it was a butcher?"

"It seems probable."

"The knife?"

"He might have stolen it or found it."

"But the mode of operating?"

"That, it seems to me, is the point from where we should start."

Saniel could remain no longer, and he rose to leave.

"You have my address," he said; "but I must tell you, if you want me, I leave to-morrow for Nice. But I shall be absent only just long enough to go and return."

"If we want you, it will not be for several days. We shall not get on very rapidly, we have so little to guide us."

CHAPTER XV. A NEW PLAN

Saniel walked home briskly. If, more than once during this interview, his emotion was poignant, he could not but be satisfied with the result. The concierge had not seen him, that was henceforth unquestionable; the hypothesis of the butcher's knife was put in a way to make his fortune; and it seemed probable that Caffie had not kept the numbers of the bank-notes.

But if they had been noted, and should the notebook containing them be discovered later, the danger was not immediate. While writing his report and listening to the concierge's deposition, by a sort of inspiration he thought of a way of disposing of them. He would divide them into small packages, place them in envelopes, and address them with different initials to the poste restante, where they would remain until he could call for them without compromising himself.

In the deposition of the concierge, in the track indicated by the knife, in the poste restante, he had just motives for satisfaction, that made him breathe freely. Decidedly, fate seemed to be with him, and he should have been able to say that everything was going well, if he had not committed the imprudence of entering the cafe. Why had he gone there and remained long enough to attract attention? What might not be the consequences of this stupidity?

As soon as he reached home and his door was closed, he carried out his intentions regarding the bank-notes, dividing them into ten packages. His first thought was to place them in the nearest letterbox, but reflection showed him that this would be unwise, and he decided to mail each one in a different quarter of the city.

After his long walk of the morning, and the emotions of the evening, he felt a fatigue that he had never known before, but he comprehended that he was not at liberty to yield to this weariness. A new situation was made for him, and henceforth he no longer belonged to himself. For the rest of his life he would be the prisoner of his crime. And it was this crime which, from this evening, would command, and he must obey.

Why had he not foreseen this situation when, weighing the pro and con like an intelligent man who can scrutinize the future under all its phases, he had examined what must happen? But surprising as it was, the discovery was no less certain, and the sad and troublesome proof was that, however intelligent one may be, one can always learn by experience.

What was there yet to learn? He confessed that he found himself face to face with the unknown, and all that he wished was, that this lesson he had learned from experience might be the hardest. It would be folly to imagine that it was the last. Time would show.

When he returned home, after posting his letters, it was long past one o'clock. He went to bed immediately, and slept heavily, without waking or dreaming.

It was broad daylight when he opened his eyes the next morning. Surprised at having slept so late, he jumped up and looked at his watch, which said eight o'clock. But as he should not leave until a quarter past eleven, he had plenty of time.

How should he employ it?

It was the first time in years that he had asked himself such a question; he, who each day always found that he needed three or four hours more to carry out his programme.

He dressed slowly, and then thought of writing to Phillis to tell her of his trip to Nice. But suddenly he changed his mind, and decided to go to see her.

The preceding year he attended Madame Cormier, who had been stricken with paralysis, and he could occasionally present himself at her house without appearing to call upon Phillis. It was easy to say that he was passing by, and wished to learn news of the patient whom he had cured.

At nine o'clock he knocked at her door.

"Enter," a man's voice said.

He was surprised, for in his visits to Madame Cormier he had never seen a man there. He crossed the hall and knocked at the dining-room door. This time it was Phillis who bid him come in.

He opened the door and saw Phillis, in a gray blouse, seated before a large table placed by the window. She was painting some cards.

Hearing steps, she turned her head and instantly rose, but she restrained the cry-the name that was on her lips.

"Mamma," she said, "here is Doctor Saniel."

Madame Cormier entered, walking with difficulty; for, if Saniel had put her on her feet, he had not given her the suppleness or the grace of youth.

After a few words, Saniel explained that, having to pay a visit to the Batignolles, he would not come so near his former patient without calling to see her.

While Madame Cormier told at great length how she felt, and also how she did not feel, Phillis looked at Saniel, uneasy to see his face so convulsed. Surely, something very serious had happened; his visit said this. But what? Her anguish was so much the greater, because he certainly avoided looking at her. Why? She had done nothing, and could find nothing with which to reproach herself.

At this moment the door opened, and a man still young, tall, with a curled beard, entered the room.

"My son," Madame Cormier said.

"My brother Florentin, of whom we have spoken so often," Phillis said.

Florentin! Was he then becoming imbecile, that he had not thought the voice of the man who bid him enter was that of Phillis's brother? Was he so profoundly overwhelmed that such a simple reasoning was impossible to him? Decidedly, it was important for him to go away as quickly as possible; the journey would calm his nerves.

"They wrote to me," Florentin said, "and since my return they have told me how good you were to my mother. Permit me to thank you from a touched and grateful heart. I hope that before long this gratitude will be something more than a vain word."

"Do not let us speak of that," Saniel said, looking at Phillis with a frankness and an open countenance that reassured heron a certain point. "It is I who am obliged to Madame Cormier. If the word were not barbarous, I should say that her illness has been a good thing for me."

To turn the conversation, and because he wished to speak to Phillis alone, he approached her table and talked with her about her work.

Saniel then gave Madame Cormier some advice, and rose to go.

Phillis followed him, and Florentin was about to accompany them, but Phillis stopped him.

"I wish to ask Doctor Saniel a question," she said.

When they were on the landing she closed the door.

“What is the matter?” she asked in a hurried and trembling voice.

“I wished to tell you that I start for Monaco at eleven o’clock.”

“You are going away?”

“I have received two hundred francs from a patient, and I am going to risk them at play. Two hundred francs will not pay Jardine or the others, but with them I may win several thousands of francs.”

“Oh! Poor dear! How desperate you must be—you, such as you are, to have such an idea!”

“Am I wrong?”

“Never wrong to my eyes, to my heart, to my love. O my beloved, may fortune be with you!”

“Give me your hand.”

She looked around, listening. There was no one, no noise.

Then, drawing him toward her, she put her lips on his:

“All yours, yours!”

“I will return Tuesday.”

“Tuesday, at five o’clock, I shall be there.”

CHAPTER XVI. THE SMILES OF FORTUNE

No one knew so little about play as Saniel. He knew that people played at Monaco, and that was all. He bought his ticket for Monaco, and left the train at that place.

On leaving the station he looked all about him, to see what kind of a place it was. Seeing nothing that looked like a gambling-house as he understood it, that is, like the Casino de Royal, the only establishment of the kind that he had ever seen, he asked a passer-by:

“Where is the gambling-house?”

“There is none at Monaco.”

“I thought there was.”

“There is one at Monte Carlo.”

“Is it far?”

“Over yonder.”

With his hand the man indicated, on the slope of the mountain, a green spot where, in the midst of the foliage, were seen roofs and facades of imposing buildings.

Saniel thanked him and followed his directions, while the man, calling another, related the question that had been addressed to him, and both laughed, shrugging their shoulders. Could any one be so stupid as these Parisians! Another one who was going to be plucked, and who came from Paris expressly for that! Was he not funny, with his big legs and arms?

Without troubling himself about the laughter that he heard behind him, Saniel continued his way. In spite of his night on the train, he felt no fatigue; on the contrary, his mind and body were active. The journey had calmed the agitation of his nerves, and it was with perfect tranquillity he looked back upon all that had passed before his departure. In the state of satisfaction that was his now, he had nothing more to fear from stupidity or acts of folly; and, since he had recovered his will, all would go well. No more backward glances, and fewer still before. The present only should absorb him.

The present, at this moment, was play. What did they play? He knew roulette, but he knew not if the game was roulette. He would do as others did. If he were ridiculed, it was of little importance; and in

reality he should desire to be ridiculed. People remember with pleasure those at whom they have laughed, and he had come here to find some one who would remember him.

When he entered the salon where the playing was going on, he observed that a religious silence reigned there. Round a large table covered with a carpet of green cloth, which was divided by lines and figures, some men were seated on high chairs, making them appear like officers; others, on lower chairs, or simply standing about the table, pushed or picked up the louis and bank bills on the green cloth, and a strong voice repeated, in a monotonous tone:

"Messieurs, faites votre jeu! Le jeu est fait! Rien ne va plus!"

Then a little ivory ball was thrown into a cylinder, where it rolled with a metallic noise. Although he had never seen roulette, it required no effort to divine that this was the game.

And, before putting several louis on the table, he looked about him to see how it was played. But after the tenth time he understood as little as at first. With the rakes the croupiers collected the stakes of certain players; with these same rakes they doubled, separated, or even paid, in proportions of which he took no account, certain others, and that was all.

But it mattered little. Having seen how the money was placed on the table, that was sufficient.

He had five louis in his hand when the croupier said:

"Messieurs, faites votre jeu."

He placed them on the number thirty-two, or, at least, he believed that he placed them on this number.

"Rien ne va plus!" The ball rolled in the cylinder.

"Thirty-one!" cried the croupier, adding some other words that Saniel did not understand. So little did he understand roulette that he thought he had lost. He had placed his stake on the thirty-two, and it was the thirty-one that had appeared; the bank had won. He was surprised to see the croupier push a heap of gold toward him, which amounted to nearly a hundred louis, and accompany this movement with a glance which, without any doubt, meant to say:

"For you, sir."

What should he do? Since he had lost, he could not take this, money that was given to him by mistake.

In placing his stake on the table, he had leaned over the shoulder of a gentleman whose hair and beard were of a most extraordinary black, who, without playing, pricked a card with a pin. This gentleman turned toward him, and with an amiable smile, and in a most gracious tone said:

"It is yours, sir."

Decidedly, he was mistaken in thinking he had lost; and he must take this heap of louis, which he did, but neglecting to take, also, his first stake.

The game continued.

"Thirty-two," called the croupier.

Saniel perceived that his five louis had remained on the thirty-two; he believed that he had won, since this number was called, and his ignorance was such that he did not know that in roulette a number is paid thirty-six times the stake: the croupier would, therefore, push toward him one hundred and eighty Louis.

But, to his great surprise, he pushed him no more money than at first. This was incomprehensible. When he lost, money was paid to him, and when he won, he was paid only half his due.

His face betrayed his astonishment so plainly that he saw a mocking smile in the eyes of the black-haired man, who had again turned toward him.

As he played merely for the sake of playing, and not to win or lose, he pocketed all that was pushed toward him and his stake.

"Since you are not going to play any more," said the amiable gentleman, leaving his chair, "will you permit me to say a word to you?"

Saniel bowed, and together they left the table. When they were far enough away to converse without disturbing the players, the gentleman bowed ceremoniously:

“Permit me to present myself-Prince Mazzazoli.”

Saniel replied by giving his name and position.

“Well, doctor,” the prince said with a strong Italian accent, “you will pardon me, I hope, for making the simple observation that my age authorizes: you play like a child.”

“Like an ignoramus,” Saniel replied, without being angry. For, however unusual this observation might be, he had already decided that it might be a good thing in the future to call upon the testimony of a prince.

“I am sure you are still asking yourself why you received eighteen times the sum of your stake at the first play, and why you did not receive thirty-six times the sum at the second.”

“That is true.”

“Well, I will tell you.” And he proceeded to explain.

Saniel did not wait for the conclusion to learn the fact that this very-much-dyed Italian prince was a liar.

“I do not intend to play again,” he said.

“With your luck that would be more than a fault.”

“I wanted a certain sum; I have won it, and that satisfies me.”

“You will not be so foolish as to refuse the hand that Fortune holds out?”

“Are you sure she holds it out to me?” Saniel asked, finding that it was the prince.

“Do not doubt it. I will show you—”

“Thank you; but I never break a resolution.”

In another moment Saniel would have turned his back on the man, but he was a witness whom it would be well to treat with caution.

“I have nothing more to do here,” he said, politely. “Permit me to retire, after having thanked you for your offer, whose kindness I appreciate.”

“Well,” cried the prince, “since you will not risk your fate, let me do it for you. This money may be a fetich. Take off five louis, only five louis, and confide them to me. I will play them according to my combinations, which are certain, and this evening I will give you your part of the proceeds. Where are you staying? I live at the Villa des Palmes.”

“Nowhere; I have just arrived.”

“Then let us meet here this evening at ten o’clock, in this room, and we will liquidate our association.”

His first impulse was to refuse. Of what use to give alms to this old monkey? But, after all, it did not cost much to pay his witness five louis, and he gave them to him.

“A thousand thanks! This evening, at ten o’clock.”

As Saniel left the room he found himself face to face with his old comrade Duphot, who was accompanied by a woman, the same whom he had cured.

“What! you here?” both the lover and his mistress exclaimed.

Saniel related why he was at Monaco, and what he had done since his arrival.

“With my money! Ah! She is very well,” Duphot cried.

“And you will play no more?” the woman asked.

“I have all I want.”

“Then you will play for me.”

He wished to decline, but they drew him to the roulette table, and each put a louis in his hand.

“Play.”

“How?”

"As inspiration counsels you. You have the luck."

But his luck had died. The two louis were lost.

They gave him two others, which won eight.

"You see, dear friend."

He went on, with varying luck, winning and losing.

At the end of a quarter of an hour they permitted him to go.

"And what are you going to do now?" Duphot asked.

"To send what I owe to my creditors by telegraph."

"Do you know where the telegraph is?"

"No."

"I will go with you."

This was a second witness that Saniel was too wise to shake off.

When he had sent his telegram to Jardine, he had nothing more to do at Monte Carlo, and as he could not leave before eleven o'clock in the evening, he was idle, not knowing how to employ his time. So he bought a Nice newspaper and seated himself in the garden, under a gaslight, facing the dark and tranquil sea. Perhaps he could find in it some telegraph despatch which would tell him what had occurred in the Rue Sainte-Anne since his departure.

At the end of the paper, under "Latest News," he read:

"The crime of the Rue Sainte-Anne seems to take a new turn; the investigations made with more care have led to the discovery of a trousers' button, to which is attached a piece of cloth. It shows, therefore, that before the crime there was a struggle between the victim and the assassin. As this button has certain letters and marks, it is a valuable clew for the police."

This proof of a struggle between the victim and the assassin made Saniel smile. Who could tell how long this button had been there?

Suddenly he left his seat, and entering a copse he examined his clothing. Was it he who had lost it?

But soon he was ashamed of this unconscious movement. The button which the police were so proud to discover, did not belong to him. This new track on which they were about to enter did not lead to him.

CHAPTER XVII. PHILLIS'S FEARS

On Tuesday, a little before five o'clock, as she had promised, Phillis rang at Saniel's door, and he left his laboratory where he was at work, to let her in.

She threw herself on his neck.

"Well?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

He told her how he had played and won, without stating the exact sum; also the propositions of the Prince Mazzazoli, the meeting with Duphot, and the telegram to Jardine.

"Oh! What happiness!" she said, pressing him in her arms. "You are free!"

"No more creditors! I am my own master. You see it was a good inspiration. Justice willed it."

Then interrupting him:

"Apropos of justice, you did not speak of Caffie the morning of your departure."

"I was so preoccupied I had no time to think of Caffie."

"Is it not curious, the coincidence of his death with the condemnation that we pronounced against him? Does it not prove exactly the justice of things?"

"If you choose."

"As the money you won at Monaco proves to you that what is just will happen. Caffie is punished for all his rascalities and crimes, and you are rewarded for your sufferings."

"Would it not have been just if Caffie had been punished sooner, and if I had suffered less?"

She remained silent.

"You see," he said smiling, "that your philosophy is weak."

"It is not of my philosophy that I am thinking, but of Caffie and ourselves."

"And how can Caffie be associated with you or yours?"

"He is, or rather he may be, if this justice in which I believe in spite of your joking permits him to be."

"You are talking in enigmas."

"What have you heard about Caffie since you went away?"

"Nothing, or almost nothing."

"You know it is thought that the crime was committed by a butcher."

"The commissioner picked up the knife before me, and it is certainly a butcher's knife. And more than that, the stroke that cut Caffie's throat was given by a hand accustomed to butchery. I have indicated this in my report."

"Since then, more careful investigations have discovered a trousers' button—"

"Which might have been torn off in a struggle between Caffie and his assassin, I read in a newspaper. But as for me, I do not believe in this struggle. Caffie's position in his chair, where he was assaulted and where he died, indicates that the old scamp was surprised. Otherwise, if he had not been, if he had struggled, he could have cried out, and, without doubt, he would have been heard."

"If you knew how happy I am to hear you say that!" she cried.

"Happy! What difference can it make to you?" and he looked at her in surprise. "Of what importance is it to you whether Caffie was killed with or without a struggle? You condemned him; he is dead. That should satisfy you."

"I was very wrong to pronounce this condemnation, which I did without attaching any importance to it."

"Do you think that hastened its execution?"

"I am not so foolish as that, but I should be better pleased if I had not condemned him."

"Do you regret it?"

"I regret that he is dead."

"Decidedly, the enigma continues; but you know I do not understand it, and, if you wish, we will stop there. We have something better to do than to talk of Caffie."

"On the contrary, let me talk to you of him, because we want your advice."

Again he looked at her, trying to read her face and to divine why she insisted on speaking of Caffie, when he had just expressed a wish not to speak of him. What was there beneath this insistence?

"I will listen," he said; "and, since you wish to ask my advice on the subject, you must tell me immediately what you mean."

"You are right; and I should have told you before, but embarrassment and shame restrained me. And I reproach myself, for with you I should feel neither embarrassment nor reproach."

"Assuredly."

"But before everything else, I must tell you—you must know—that my brother Florentin is a good and honest boy; you must believe it, you must be convinced of it."

"I am, since you tell me so. Besides, he produced the best impression on me during the short time I saw him the other day at your house."

"Would not one see immediately that he has a good nature?"

"Certainly."

"Frank and upright; weak, it is true, and a little effeminate also, that is, lacking energy, letting himself be carried away by goodness and tenderness. This weakness made him commit a fault before his departure for America. I have kept it from you until this moment, but you must know it now. Loving a woman who controlled him and made him do what she wished, he let himself be persuaded to-take a sum of forty-five francs that she demanded, that she insisted on having that evening, hoping to be able to replace it three days later, without his employer discovering it."

"His employer was Caffie?"

"No; it was three months after he left Caffie, and he was with another man of business of whom I have never spoken to you, and now you understand why. The money he expected failed him; his fault was discovered, and his employer lodged a complaint against him."

"We made him withdraw his complaint, never mind how, and Florentin went to America to seek his fortune. And since you have seen him, you admit that he might be capable of the fault that he committed, without being capable-of becoming an assassin."

He was about to reply, but she closed his lips with a quick gesture.

"You will see why I speak of this, and you will understand why I do not drop the subject of Caffie, and of this button, on which the police count to find the criminal. This button belonged to Florentin."

"To your brother?"

"Yes, to Florentin, who, the day of the crime, had been to see Caffie."

"That is true; the concierge told the commissioner of police that he called about three o'clock."

Phillis gave a cry of despair.

"They know he was there? Then it is more serious than we imagined or believed."

"In answering a question as to whom Caffie had received that day, the concierge named your brother. But as this visit took place between three and half-past, and the crime was certainly committed between five and half-past, no one can accuse your brother of being the assassin, since he left before Caffie lighted his lamp. As this lamp could not light itself, it proves that he could not have butchered a man who was living an hour after the concierge saw your brother and talked with him."

"What you say is a great relief; if you could know how alarmed we have been!"

"You were too hasty to alarm yourself."

"Too hasty? But when Florentin read the account to us and came to the button, he exclaimed, 'This button is mine!' and we experienced a shock that made us lose our heads. We saw the police falling on us, questioning Florentin, reproaching him with the past, which would be retailed in all the newspapers, and you must understand how we felt."

"But cannot your brother explain how he lost this button at Caffie's?"

"Certainly, and in the most natural way. He went to see Caffie, to ask him for a letter of recommendation, saying that he had been his clerk for several years. Caffie gave it to him, and then, in the course of conversation, Caffie spoke of a bundle of papers that he could not find. Florentin had had charge of these papers, and had placed them on a high shelf in the closet. As Caffie could not find them, and wanted them, Florentin brought a small ladder, and, mounting it, found them. He was about to descend the ladder, when he made a misstep, and in trying to save himself, one of the buttons of his trousers was pulled off."

"And he did not pick it up?"

"He did not even notice it at first. But later, in the street, seeing one leg of his trousers longer than the other, he thought of the ladder, and found that he had lost a button. He would not return to Caffie's to look for it, of course."

"Of course."

"How could he foresee that Caffie would be assassinated? That the crime would be so skilfully planned and executed that the criminal would escape? That two days later the police would find a

button on which they would build a story that would make him the criminal? Florentin had not thought of all that."

"That is understood."

"The same evening he replaced the button by another, and it was only on reading the newspaper that he felt there might be something serious in this apparently insignificant fact. And we shared his alarm."

"Have you spoken to any one of this button?"

"Certainly not; we know too much. I tell you of it because I tell you everything; and if we are menaced, we have no help to expect, except from you. Florentin is a good boy, but he is weak and foolish. Mamma is like him in more than one respect, and as for me, although I am more resistant, I confess that, in the face of the law and the police, I should easily lose my head, like children who begin to scream when they are left in the dark. Is not the law, when you know nothing of it, a night of trouble, full of horrors, and peopled with phantoms?"

"I do not believe there is the danger that you imagined in the first moment of alarm."

"It was natural."

"Very natural, I admit, but reflection must show how little foundation there is for it. The button has not the name of the tailor who furnished it?"

"No, but it has the initials and the mark of the manufacturer; an A and a P, with a crown and a cock."

"Well! Among two or three thousand tailors in Paris, how is it possible for the police to find those who use these buttons? And when the tailors are found, how could they designate the owner of this button, this one exactly, and not another? It is looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. Where did your brother have these trousers made? Did he bring them from America?"

"The poor boy brought nothing from America but wretchedly shabby clothes, and we had to clothe him from head to foot. We were obliged to economize, and a little tailor in the Avenue de Clichy, called Valerius, made this suit."

"It seems to me scarcely probable that the police will find this little tailor. But if they do, would he recognize the button as coming from his stock? And, if they get as far as your brother, they must prove that there was a struggle; that the button was torn off in this struggle; that your brother was in the Rue Sainte-Anne between five and six o'clock; in which case, without doubt, he will find it easy to prove where he was at that moment."

"He was with us—with mamma."

"You see, then, you need not feel alarmed."

CHAPTER XVIII. A GRAVE DISCUSSION

Phillis hurried to return to the Rue des Moines, to share with her mother and brother the confidence that Saniel caused her to feel.

She pulled the bell with a trembling hand, for the time was past when in this quiet house, where all the lodgers knew each other, the key was left in the door, and one had only to knock before entering. Since the newspapers had spoken of the button, all was changed; the feeling of liberty and security had disappeared; the door was always closed, and when the bell rang they looked at each other in fear and with trembling.

When Florentin opened the door, the table was set for dinner.

"I was afraid something had happened to you," Madame Cormier said.

"I was detained."

She took off her hat and cloak hastily.

"You have learned nothing?" the mother asked, bringing in the soup.

"No."

"They spoke to you of nothing?" Florentin continued in a low voice.

"They spoke to me of nothing else; or I heard only that when I was not addressed directly."

"What was said?"

"No one believes that the investigations of the police bear on the button."

"You see, Florentin," Madame Cormier interrupted, smiling at her son.

But he shook his head.

"However, the opinion of all has a value," Phillis cried.

"Speak lower," Florentin said.

"It is thought that it is impossible for the police to find, among the two or three thousand tailors in Paris, all those who use the buttons marked A. P. And if they did find them, they could not designate all their customers to whom they have furnished these buttons. It is really looking for a needle in a bundle of hay."

"When one takes plenty of time, one finds a needle in a bundle of hay," Florentin said.

"You ask me what I heard, and I tell you. But I do not depend entirely on that. As I passed near the Rue Louis-le-Grand, I went to Doctor Saniel's; it being his office hour I hoped to find him."

"You told him the situation?" Florentin exclaimed.

In any other circumstances she would have replied frankly, explaining that she had perfect confidence in Saniel; but when she saw her brother's agitation, she could not exasperate him by this avowal, above all, because she could not at the same time give her reasons for her faith in him. She must reassure him before everything.

"No," she said, "but I spoke of Caffie to Doctor Saniel without his being surprised. As he made the first deposition, was it not natural that my curiosity should wish to learn a little more than the newspapers tell?"

"Never mind, the act must appear strange."

"I think not. But, anyhow, the interest that we have to learn all made me overlook this; and I think, when I have told you the doctor's opinion, you will not regret my visit."

"And this opinion?" Madame Cormier asked.

"His opinion is, that there was no struggle between Caffie and the assassin, whereas the position of Caffie in the chair where he was attacked proves that he was surprised. Therefore, if there was no struggle, there was no button torn off, and all the scaffolding of the police falls to the ground."

Madame Cormier breathed a profound sigh of deliverance.

"You see," she said to her son.

"And the doctor's opinion is not the opinion of the first-comer, it is not even that of an ordinary physician. It is that of the physician who has certified to the death, and who, more than any one, has power, has authority, to say how it was given—by surprise, without struggle, without a button being pulled off."

"It is not Doctor Saniel who directs the search of the police, or who inspires it," replied Florentin. "His opinion does not produce a criminal, while the button can—at least for those who believe in the struggle; and between the two the police will not hesitate.

"Already the newspapers laugh at them for not having discovered the assassin, who has rejoined all the others they have let escape. They must follow the track they have started on, and this track—"

He lowered his voice:

"It will lead them here."

"To do that they must pass by the Avenue de Clichy, and that seems unlikely."

"It is the possible that torments me, and not the unlikely, and you cannot but recognize that what I fear is possible. I was at Caffies the day of the crime. I lost there a button torn off by violence. This

button picked up by the police proves, according to them, the criminality of the one who lost it. They will find that I am the one—"

"They will not find you."

"Let us admit that they do find me. How should I defend myself?"

"By proving that you were not in the Rue Sainte-Anne between five and six o'clock, since you were here."

"And what witnesses will prove this alibi? I have only one—mamma. What is the testimony of a mother worth in favor of her son in such circumstances?"

"You will have that of the doctor, affirming that there was no struggle, and consequently no button torn off."

"Affirming, but carrying no proof to support his theory; the opinion of one doctor, which the opinion of another doctor may refute and destroy. And then, to prove that there was no struggle; Doctor Saniel will say that Caffie was surprised. Who could surprise Caffie? To open Caffies door when the clerk was away, it was necessary to ring first, and then to knock three times in a peculiar way. No stranger could know that, and who could know it better than I?"

Step by step Phillis defended the ground against her brother; but little by little the confidence which at first sustained her weakened. With Saniel she was brave. Between her brother and mother, in this room that had witnessed their fears, not daring to speak loud, she was downcast, and let herself be overcome by their anxieties.

"Truly," she said, "it seems as if we were guilty and not innocent."

"And while we are tormenting ourselves, the criminal, probably, in perfect safety laughs at the police investigations; he had not thought of this button; chance throws it in his way. Luck is for him, and against us—once more."

This was the plaint that was often on Florentin's lips. Although he had never been a gambler—and for sufficient reason—in his eyes everything was decided by luck. There are those who are born under a lucky star, others under an unlucky one. There are those who, in the battle of life, receive knocks without being discouraged, because they expect something the next day, as there are those who become discouraged because they expect nothing, and know by experience that tomorrow will be for them what today is, what yesterday was. And Florentin was one of these.

"Why did I not stay in America?" he said.

"Because you were too unhappy, my poor boy!" Madame Cormier said, whose maternal heart was moved by this cry.

"Am I happier here, or shall I be to-morrow? What does this to-morrow, full of uncertainty and dangers, hold for us?"

"Why do you insist that it has only dangers?" Phillis asked, in a conciliating and caressing tone.

"You always expect the good."

"At least I hope for it, and do not admit deliberately that it is impossible. I do not say that life is always rose-colored, but neither is it always black. I believe it is like the seasons. After winter, which is vile, I confess, come the spring, summer, and autumn."

"Well, if I had the money necessary for the voyage, I would go and pass the end of the winter in a country where it would be less disagreeable than here, and, above all, less dangerous for my constitution."

"You do not say that seriously, I hope?" cried Madame Cormier.

"On the contrary, very seriously."

"We are hardly reunited, and you think of a separation," she said, sadly.

"It is not of a separation that Florentin thinks," cried Phillis, "but of a flight."

"And why not?"

"Because only the guilty fly."

"It is exactly the contrary. The intelligent criminals stay, and, as generally they are resolute men, they know beforehand that they are able to face the danger; while the innocent, timid like myself, or the unlucky, lose their heads and fly, because they know beforehand, also, that if a danger threatens them, it will crush them. That is why I would return to America if I could pay my passage; at least I should feel easy there."

There was a moment of silence, during which each one seemed to have no thought but to finish dinner.

"Granting that this project is not likely," Florentin said, "I have another idea."

"Why do you have ideas?" Phillis asked.

"I wish you were in my place; we should see if you would not have them."

"I assure you that I am in your place, and that your trouble is mine, only it does not betray itself in the same manner. But what is your idea?"

"It is to find Valerius and tell him all."

"And who will answer to us for Valerius's discretion?" asked Madame Cormier. "Would it not be the greatest imprudence that you could commit? One cannot play with a secret of this importance."

"Valerius is an honest man."

"It is because he cannot work when political, or rather patriotic, affairs go wrong, that you say this."

"And why not? With a poor man who lives in a small way by his work, are not this care and pride in his country marks of an honorable heart?"

"I grant the honorable heart, but it is another reason for being prudent with him," Phillis said. "Precisely because he may be what you think, reserve is necessary. You tell him what is passed. If he accepts it and your innocence, it is well; he will not betray your secret voluntarily nor by stupidity. But he will not accept it; he will look beyond. He will suppose that you wish to deceive him, and he will suspect you. In that case, would he not go and tell all to the police commissioner of our quarter? As for me, I think it is a danger that it would be foolish to risk."

"And, according to you, what is to be done?"

"Nothing; that is, wait, since there are a thousand chances against one for our uneasiness, and we exaggerate those that may never be realized."

"Well, let us wait," he said. "Moreover, I like that; at the least, I have no responsibilities. What can happen will happen."

CHAPTER XIX. THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR

In order to put the button found at Caffies on the track of the assassin, it required that it should have come from a Parisian tailor, or, at least, a French one, and that the trousers had not been sold by a ready-made clothing-house, where the names of customers are not kept.

The task of the police was therefore difficult, as weak, also, were the chances of success. As Saniel had said, it was like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, to go to each tailor in Paris.

But this was not their way of proceeding. In place of trying to find those who used these buttons, they looked for those who made them or sold them, and suddenly, without going farther than the directory, they found this manufacturer: "A. Pelinotte, manufacturer of metal buttons for trousers; trademark, A.P., crown and cock; Faubourg du Temple."

At first this manufacturer was not disposed to answer questions of the agent who went to see him; but when he began to understand that he might reap some advantage from the affair, like the good

merchant that he was, young and active, he put his books and clerks at his disposition. His boast was, in effect, that his buttons, thanks to a brass bonnet around which the thread was rolled instead of passing through the holes, never cut the thread and could not be broken. When they came off it was with a piece of the cloth. What better justification of his pretensions, what better advertisement than his button torn off with a piece of the trousers of the assassin? The affair would go before the assizes, and in all the newspapers there would be mention of the "A. P. buttons."

He was asked for his customers' names, and after a few days the search began, guided by a list so exact that useless steps were spared.

One morning a detective reached the Avenue de Clichy, and found the tailor Valerius in his shop, reading a newspaper. For it was not only when the country was in danger that Valerius had a passion for reading papers, but every morning and evening.

Nothing that was published in the papers escaped him, and at the first words of the agent he understood immediately about what he was to be questioned.

"It is concerning the affair in the Rue Sainte-Anne that you wish this information?" he said.

"Frankly, yes."

"Well, frankly also, I do not know if the secrets of the profession permit me to answer you."

The agent, who was by no means stupid, immediately understood the man's character, and instead of yielding to the desire to laugh, caused by this reply honestly made by this good-natured man, whose long, black, bushy beard and bald head accentuated his gravity, he yielded to the necessity of the occasion.

"That is a question to discuss."

"Then let us discuss it. A customer, confiding in my honesty and discretion, gives me an order to make a pair of trousers; he pays me as he agreed, without beating me down, and on the day he promised. We are loyal to each other. I give him a pair of good trousers, honestly made, and he pays me with good money. We are even. Have I the right afterward, by imprudent words, or otherwise, to furnish clews against him? The case is a delicate one."

"Do you place the interest of the individual above that of society?"

"When it is a question of a professional secret, yes. Where should we be if the lawyer, the notary, the doctor, the confessor, the tailor, could accept compromises on this point of doctrine? It would be anarchy, simply, and in the end it would be the interest of society that would suffer."

The agent, who had no time to lose, began to be impatient.

"I will tell you," he said, "that the tailor, however important his profession may be, is not placed exactly as the doctor or confessor. Have you not a book in which you write your customers' orders?"

"Certainly."

"So that if you persevere in a theory, pushing it to an extreme, I need only to go to the commissioner of your quarter, who, in virtue of the power of the law conferred upon him, will seize your books."

"That would be by violence, and my responsibility would be at an end."

"And in these books the judge would see to whom you have furnished trousers of this stuff. It would only remain then to discover in whose interest you have wished to escape the investigations of the law."

Saying this, he took from his pocket a small box, and taking out a piece of paper, he took from it a button to which adhered a piece of navy blue stuff.

Valerius, who was not in the least moved by the threat of the commissioner, for he was a man to brave martyrdom, looked at the box curiously. When the agent displayed the button, a movement of great surprise escaped him.

"You see," the agent exclaimed, "that you know this cloth!"

"Will you permit me to look at it?" Valerius asked.

"Willingly, but on condition that you do not touch it; it is precious."

Valerius took the box, and approaching the front of the shop, looked at the button and the piece of cloth.

"It is a button marked 'A.P.,' as you see, and we know that you use these buttons."

"I do not deny it; they are good buttons, and I give only good things to my customers."

Returning the box to the agent, he took a large book and began to turn over the leaves; pieces of cloth were pasted on the pages, and at the side were several lines of large handwriting. Arriving at a page where was a piece of blue cloth, he took the box and compared this piece with that of the button, examining it by daylight.

"Sir," he said, "I am going to tell you some very serious things."

"I am listening."

"We hold the assassin of the Rue Sainte-Anne, and it is I who will give you the means of discovering him."

"You have made trousers of this cloth?"

"I have made three pairs; but there is only one pair that can interest you, that of the assassin. I have just told you that the secrets of the profession prevented me from replying to your questions, but what I have just seen frees my conscience. As I explained to you, when I make a pair of good trousers for a customer who pays me in good money, I do not think I have the right to reveal the affairs of my client to any one in the world, even to the law."

"I understand," interrupted the agent, whose impatience increased.

"But this reserve on my part rests on reciprocity: to a good customer, a good tailor. If the customer is not good the reciprocity ceases, or, rather, it continues on another footing—that of war; if any one treats me badly, I return the same. The trousers to which this stuff belongs"—he showed the button—"I made for an individual whom I do not know, and who presented himself to me as an Alsacian, which I believed so much more easily, because he spoke with a strong foreign accent. These trousers—I need not tell you how careful I was with them. I am a patriot, sir. He agreed to pay for them on delivery. When they were delivered, the young apprentice who took them had the weakness to not insist upon the money. I went to him, but could obtain nothing; he would pay me the next day, and so on. Finally he disappeared, leaving no address."

"And this customer?"

"I will give you his name without the slightest hesitation. Fritzner, not an Alsacian as I believed, but a Prussian to a certainty, who surely struck the blow; his disappearance the day after the crime is the proof of it."

"You say that you were not able to procure his address?"

"But you, who have other means at your disposal, can find him. He is twenty-seven or thirty years old, of middle height, blue eyes, a blond beard, and a complete blue suit of this cloth."

The agent wrote this description in his note-book as the tailor gave it to him.

"If he has not left Paris with these stolen thirty-five thousand francs, we shall find him, and the thanks will be yours," he said.

"I am happy to be able to do anything for you."

The agent was going, but he thought better of it.

"You said that you had made three suits of this cloth?"

"Yes, but there is only this Fritzner who counts. The two others are honest men, well known in the quarter, and they paid me honestly."

"Since they have no cause for alarm, you need have no scruples in naming them. It is not in the name of justice that I ask their names, but for myself.—They will look well in my report and will prove that I pushed my investigations thoroughly."

"One is a merchant in the Rue Truffant, and is called Monsieur Blanchet; the other is a young man just arrived from America, and his name is Monsieur Florentin Cormier."

"You say Florentin Cormier?" the agent asked, who remembered this name was that of one who had seen Caffie on the day of the crime. "Do you know him?"

"Not exactly; it is the first time that I have made clothes for him. But I know his mother and sister, who have lived in the Rue des Moines five or six years at least; good, honest people, who work hard and have no debts."

The next morning about ten o'clock, a short time after Phillis's departure, Florentin, who was reading the newspaper in the dining-room, while his mother prepared the breakfast, heard stealthy steps that stopped on the landing before their door. His ear was too familiar with the ordinary sounds in the house to be deceived; there was in these steps a hesitation or a precaution which evidently betrayed a stranger, and with the few connections they had, a stranger was surely an enemy—the one whom he expected.

A ring of the doorbell, given by a firm hand, made him jump from his chair. He did not hesitate; slowly, and with an air of indifference, he opened the door.

He saw before him a man of about forty years, with a polite and shrewd face, dressed in a short coat, and wearing a flat hat.

"Monsieur Florentin Cormier?"

"I am he."

And he asked him to come in.

"The judge desires to see you at his office."

Madame Cormier came from the kitchen in time to hear these few words, and if Florentin had not motioned to her to be silent, she would have betrayed herself. The words on her lips were:

"You came to arrest my son!" They would have escaped her, but she crushed them back.

"And can you tell me for what affair the judge summons me?" Florentin asked, steadying his voice.

"For the Caffie affair."

"And at what hour should I present myself before the judge?"

"Immediately."

"But my son has not breakfasted!" Madame Cormier exclaimed. "At least, take something before going, my dear child."

"It is not worth while."

He made a sign to her that she should not insist. His throat was too tight to swallow a piece of bread, and it was important that he should not betray his emotion before this agent.

"I am ready," he said.

Going to his mother he embraced her, but lightly, without effusion, as if he were only to be absent a short time.

"By-and-by."

She was distracted; but, understanding that she would compromise her son if she yielded to her feelings, she controlled herself.

CHAPTER XX. A TIGHTENING CHAIN

As it was a part that he played, Florentin said to himself that he would play it to the best of his ability in entering the skin of the person he wished to be, and this part was that of a witness.

He had been Caffie's clerk; the justice would interrogate him about his old employer, and nothing would be more natural. It was that only, and nothing but that, which he could admit; consequently, he should interest himself in the police investigations, and have the curiosity to learn how they stood.

"Have you advanced far in the Caffie affair?" he asked the agent as they walked along.

"I do not know," the agent answered, who thought it prudent to be reserved. "I know nothing more than the newspapers tell."

On leaving his mother's house, Florentin observed on the other side of the street a man who appeared to be stationed there; at the end of several minutes, on turning a corner, he saw that this man followed them at a certain distance. Then it was not a simple appearance before the judge, for such precautions are not taken with a witness.

When they reached the Place Clichy, the agent asked him if he would take a carriage, but he declined. What good was it? It was a useless expense.

Then he saw the agent raise his hat, as if bowing to some one, but this bow was certainly not made to any one; and immediately, the man who had followed them approached. The raising of the hat was a signal. As from the deserted quarters of the Batignolles they entered the crowd, they feared he might try to escape. The character of the arrest became accentuated.

After the presentiments and fears that had tormented him during the last few days this did not astonish him, but since they took these precautions with him, all was not yet decided. He must, then, defend himself to the utmost. Distracted before the danger came, he felt less weak now that he was in it.

On arriving at the Palais de justice he was introduced immediately into the judge's office. But he did not attend to him at once; he was questioning a woman, and Florentin examined him by stealth. He saw a man of elegant and easy figure, still young, with nothing solemn or imposing about him, having more the air of a boulevardier or of a sportsman than of a magistrate.

While continuing his questioning, he also examined Florentin, but with a rapid glance, without persistence, carelessly, and simply because his eyes fell upon him. Before a table a clerk was writing, and near the door two policemen waited, with the weary, empty faces of men whose minds are elsewhere.

Soon the judge turned his head toward them.

"You may take away the accused."

Then, immediately addressing Florentin, he asked him his name, his Christian names, and his residence.

"You have been the clerk of the agent of affairs, Caffie. Why did you leave him?"

"Because my work was too heavy."

"You are afraid of work?"

"No, when it is not too hard; it was at his office, and left me no time to work for myself. I was obliged to reach his office at eight o'clock in the morning, breakfast there, and did not leave until seven to dine with my mother at the Batignolles. I had an hour and a half for that; at half-past eight I had to return, and stay until ten or half-past. In accepting this position I believed that I should be able to finish my education, interrupted by the death of my father, and to study law and become something better than a miserable clerk of a business man. It was impossible with Monsieur Caffie, so I left him, and this was the only reason why we separated."

"Where have you been since?"

This was a delicate question, and one that Florentin dreaded, for it might raise prejudices that nothing would destroy. However, he must reply, for what he would not tell himself others would reveal; an investigation on this point was too easy.

"With another business man, Monsieur Savoureux, Rue de la Victoire, where I was not obliged to work in the evening. I stayed there about three months, and then went to America."

"Why?"

"Because, when I began to study seriously, I found that my studies had been neglected too long to make it possible for me to take them up again. I had forgotten nearly all I had learned. I should, without doubt, fail in my examination, and I should only begin the law too late. I left France for America, where I hoped to find a good situation."

"How long since your return?"

"Three weeks."

"And you went to see Caffie?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"To ask him for a recommendation to replace the one he gave me, which I had lost."

"It was the day of the crime?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"I reached his house about a quarter to three, and I left about half-past three."

"Did he give you the certificate for which you asked?"

"Yes; here it is."

And, taking it from his pocket, he presented it to the judge. It was a paper saying that, during the time that M. Florentin Cormier was his clerk, Caffie was entirely satisfied with him; with his work, as with his accuracy and probity.

"And you did not return to him during the evening?" the judge asked.

"Why should I return? I had obtained what I desired."

"Well, did you or did you not return?"

"I did not return to him."

"Do you remember what you did on leaving Caffie's house?"

If Florentin had indulged in the smallest illusion about his appearance before the judge, the manner of conducting the interview would have destroyed it. It was not a witness who was being questioned, it was a culprit. He had not to enlighten the justice, he had to defend himself.

"Perfectly," he said. "It is not so long ago. On leaving the Rue Sainte-Anne, as I had nothing to do, I went down to the quays, and looked at the old books from the Pont Royale to the Institute; but at this moment a heavy shower came on, and I returned to the Batignolles, where I remained with my mother."

"What time was it when you reached your mother's house?"

"A few minutes after five."

"Can you not say exactly?"

"About a quarter past five, a few minutes more or less."

"And you did not go out again?"

"No."

"Did any one call at your mother's after you arrived there?"

"No one. My sister came in at seven o'clock, as usual, when she returned from her lesson."

"Before you went up to your rooms did you speak with any of the other lodgers?"

"No."

There was a pause, and Florentin felt the judge's eyes fixed on him with an aggravating persistency. It seemed as if this look, which enveloped him from head to foot, wished to penetrate his inmost thoughts.

"Another thing," said the judge. "You did not lose a trousers' button while you were with Caffie?"

Florentin expected this question, and for some time he had considered what answer he should make to it. To deny was impossible. It would be easy to convict him of a fib, for the fact of the question being asked was sufficient to say there was proof that the button was his. He must, then, confess the truth, grave as it might be.

"Yes," he said, "and this is how—"

He related in detail the story of the bundle of papers placed on the highest shelf of the cases, his slipping on the ladder, and the loss of the button, which he did not discover until he was in the street.

The judge opened a drawer and took from it a small box, from which he took a button that he handed to Florentin.

"Is that it?" he asked.

Florentin looked at it.

"It is difficult for me to answer," he said, finally; "one button resembles another."

"Not always."

"In that case, it would be necessary for me to have observed the form of the one I lost, and I gave no attention to it. It seems to me that no one knows exactly how, or of what, the buttons are made that they wear."

The judge examined him anew.

"But are not the trousers that you wear to-day the same from which this button was torn?"

"It is the pair I wore the day I called on Monsieur Caffie."

"Then it is quite easy to compare the button that I show you with those on your trousers, and your answer becomes easy."

It was impossible to escape this verification.

"Unbutton your vest," said the judge, "and make your comparison with care—with all the care that you think wise. The question has some importance."

Florentin felt it only too much, the importance of this question, but as it was set before him, he could not but answer frankly.

He unbuttoned his waistcoat, and compared the button with his.

"I believe that it is really the button that I lost," he said.

Although he endeavored not to betray his anguish, he felt that his voice trembled, and that it had a hoarse sound. Then he wished to explain this emotion.

"This is a truly terrible position for me," he said.

The judge did not reply.

"But because I lost a button at Monsieur Caffie's, it does not follow that it was torn off in a struggle."

"You have your theory, and you will make the most of it, but this is not the place. I have only one more question to ask: By what button have you replaced the one you lost?"

"By the first one I came across."

"Who sewed it on?"

"I did."

"Are you in the habit of sewing on your buttons yourself?"

Although the judge did not press this question by his tone, nor by the form in which he made it, Florentin saw the strength of the accusation that his reply would make against him.

"Sometimes," he said.

"And yet, on returning home, you found your mother, you told me. Was there any reason why she could not sew this button on for you?"

"I did not ask her to do it."

"But when she saw you sewing it, did she not take the needle from your hands?"

"She did not see me."

"Why?"

"She was occupied preparing our dinner."

"That is sufficient."

"I was in the entry of our apartment, where I have slept since my return; my mother was in the kitchen."

"Is there no communication between the kitchen and the entry?"

"The door was closed."

A flood of words rushed to his lips, to protest against the conclusions which seemed to follow these answers, but he kept them back. He saw himself caught in a net, and all his efforts to free himself only bound him more strongly.

As he was asked no more questions it seemed to him best to say nothing, and he was silent a long time, of the duration of which he was only vaguely conscious.

The judge talked in a low tone, the recorder wrote rapidly, and he heard only a monotonous murmur that interrupted the scratching of a pen on the paper.

"Your testimony will now be read to you," the judge said.

He wished to give all his attention to this reading, but he soon lost the thread of it. The impression it made upon him, however, was that it faithfully reproduced all that he had said, and he signed it.

"Now," said the judge, "my duty obliges me, in presence of the charges which emanate from your testimony, to deliver against you a 'manda depot'."

Florentin received this blow without flinching.

"I know," he said, "that all the protestations I might make would have no effect at this moment; I therefore spare you them. But I have a favor to ask of you; it is to permit me to write to my mother and sister the news of my arrest—they love me tenderly. Oh, you shall read my letter!"

"You may, sir."

CHAPTER XXI. "REGARDING THE CAFFIE AFFAIR"

After the departure of her son and the detective, Madame Cormier was prostrated. Her son! Her Florentin! The poor child! And she was sunk in despair.

Had they not suffered enough? Was this new proof necessary? Why had their life been so unmercifully cruel? Why had not Dr. Saniel let her die? At least she would not have seen this last catastrophe, this disgrace; her son accused of assassination, in prison, at the assizes!

Heretofore when she had yielded to her feelings and bewailed their sad lot, Phillis was at hand to cheer and caress her; but now she was alone in her deserted apartment, no one to hear her, see her, nor scold. Why should she not abandon herself to tears? She wept and trembled, but the moment arrived when, after having reached the extreme of despair, which showed her her son condemned as an assassin, and executed, she stopped and asked herself if she had not gone too far.

He would return; certainly she might expect him. And she waited for him without breakfasting; he would not like to sit down to the table all alone, the poor child.

Besides, she was too profoundly overcome to eat. She arranged the fire with care, so that the haricot of mutton would keep warm, for it was his favorite dish.

Minutes and hours passed and he did not return. Her anguish came back; a witness would not be retained so long by the judge. Had they arrested him? Then what would become of him?

She fell into a state of tears and despair, and longed for Phillis. Fortunately she would not be late to-day. Finally a quick, light step was heard on the landing, and as soon as she could, Madame Cormier went to open the door, and was stunned on seeing the agitated face of her daughter. Evidently Phillis was surprised by the sudden opening of the door.

"You know all, then?" Madame Cormier cried.

Phillis put her arms about her, and drew her into the dining-room, where she made her sit down.

"Becalm," she said. "They will not keep him."

"You know some way?"

"We will find a way. I promise you that they will not keep him."

"You are sure?"

"I promise you."

"You give me life. But how did you know?"

"He wrote to me. The concierge gave me his letter, which had just come."

"What does he say?"

Madame Cormier took the letter that Phillis handed her, but the paper shook so violently in her trembling hand that she could not read.

"Read it to me."

Phillis took it and read

"DEAR LITTLE SISTER: After listening to my story, the judge retains me. Soften for mamma the pain of this blow. Make her understand that they will soon acknowledge the falseness of this accusation; and, on your part, try to make this falseness evident, while on mine, I will work to prove my innocence.

"Embrace poor mamma for me, and find in your tenderness, strength, and love, some consolation for her; mine will be to think that you are near her, dear little beloved sister.

"FLORENTIN."

"And it is this honest boy that they accuse of assassination!" cried Madame Cormier, beginning to weep.

It required several minutes for Phillis to quiet her a little.

"We must think of him, mamma; we must not give up."

"You are going to do something, are you not, my little Phillis?"

"I am going to find Doctor Saniel."

"He is a doctor, not a lawyer."

"It is exactly as a doctor that he can save Florentin. He knows that Caffie was killed without a struggle between him and the assassin; consequently without the wrenching off of a button. He will say it and prove it to the judge, and Florentin's innocence is evident. I am going to see him."

"I beg of you, do not leave me alone too long."

"I will come back immediately."

Phillis ran from the Batignolles to the Rue Louis-le-Grand. In answer to her ring, Joseph, who had returned to his place in the anteroom, opened the door, and as Saniel was alone, she went immediately to his office.

"What is the matter?" he asked, on seeing her agitation.

"My brother is arrested."

"Ah! The poor boy!"

What he had said to her on explaining that this arrest could not take place was sincere; he believed it, and he more than believed it, he wished it. When he decided to kill Caffie he had not thought that the law would ever discover a criminal; it would be a crime that would remain unpunished, as so many were, and no one would be disturbed. But now the law had found and arrested one who was the brother of the woman he loved.

"How was he arrested?" he asked, as much for the sake of knowing as to recover himself.

She told what she knew, and read Florentin's letter.

"He is a good boy, your brother," he said, as if talking to himself.

"You will save him?"

"How can I?"

This cry escaped him without her understanding its weight; without her divining the expression of anxious curiosity in his glance.

"To whom shall I address myself, if not to you? Are you not everything to me? My support, my guide, my counsel, my God!"

She explained what she wished him to do. Once more an exclamation escaped Saniel.

"You wish me to go to the judge—me?"

"Who, better than you, can explain how things happened?"

Saniel, who had recovered from his first feeling of surprise, did not flinch. Evidently she spoke with entire honesty, suspecting nothing, and it would be folly to look for more than she said.

"But I cannot present myself before a judge in such away," he said. "It is he who sends for those he wants to see."

"Why can you not go to his court, since you know things which will throw light upon it?"

"Is it truly easy to go before this court? In going before it, I make myself the defender of your brother."

"That is exactly what I ask of you."

"And in presenting myself as his defender, I take away the weight of my deposition, which would have more authority if it were that of a simple witness."

"But when will you be asked for this deposition? Think of Florentin's sufferings during this time, of mamma's, and of mine. He may lose his head; he may kill himself. His spirit is not strong, nor is mamma's. How will they bear all that the newspapers will publish?"

Saniel hesitated a moment.

"Well, I will go," he said. "Not this evening, it is too late, but tomorrow."

"Oh, dear Victor!" she exclaimed, pressing him in her arms, "I knew that you would save him. We will owe you his life, as we owe you mamma's, as I owe you happiness. Am I not right to say you are my God?"

After she was gone he had a moment of repentance in which he regretted this weakness; for it was a weakness, a stupid sentimentalism, unworthy of a sensible man, who should not permit himself to be thus touched and involved. Why should he go and invite danger when he could be quiet, without any one giving him a thought? Was it not folly? The law wanted a criminal. Public curiosity demanded one. Why take away the one that they had? If he succeeded, would they not look for another? It was imprudence, and, to use the true word, madness. Now that he was no longer under the influence of Phillis's beautiful, tearful eyes, he would not commit this imprudence. All the evening this idea strengthened, and when he went to bed his resolution was taken. He would not go to the judge.

But on awakening, he was surprised to find that this resolution of the evening was not that of the morning, and that this dual personality, which had already struck him, asserted itself anew. It was at night that he resolved to kill Caffie, and he committed the deed in the evening. It was in the morning that he had abandoned the idea, as it was in the morning that he revoked the decision made the previous evening not to go to the rescue of this poor boy. Of what then, was the will of man made, undulating like the sea, and variable as the wind, that he had the folly to believe his was firm?

At noon he went to the Palais de justice and sent in his card to the judge, on which he wrote these words: "Regarding the Caffie affair."

He was received almost immediately, and briefly explained how, according to his opinion, Caffie was killed quickly and suddenly by a firm and skilful hand, that of a killer by profession.

"That is the conclusion of your report," the judge said.

"What I could not point out in my report, as I did not know of the finding of the button and the opinion it has led to, is that there was no struggle between the assassin and the victim, as is generally supposed."

And medically he demonstrated how this struggle was impossible.

The judge listened attentively, without a word, without interruption.

"Do you know this young man?" he asked.

"I have seen him only once; but I know his mother, who was my patient, and it is at her instigation that I decided to make this explanation to you."

"Without doubt, it has its value, but I must tell you that it tends in no way to destroy our hypothesis."

"But if it has no foundation?"

"I must tell you that you are negative, doctor, and not suggestive. We have a criminal and you have not. Do you see one?"

Saniel thought that the judge looked at him with a disagreeable persistency.

"No," he said, sharply.

Then rising, he said, more calmly:

"That is not in my line."

He had nothing to do but to retire, which he did; and on passing through the vestibule he said to himself that the magistrate was right. He believed that he held a criminal. Why should he let him go?

As for him, he had done what he could.

CHAPTER XXII. NOUGAREDE'S BRIDE

Saniel passed the first proofs of his two 'concours' so brilliantly that the results of either were not doubtful. In delivering his thesis for the 'agregation', he commanded the admiration of his audience; by turns aggressive, severe, ironical, eloquent, he reduced his adversary to such an extremity that, overwhelmed, he was not able to reply. In his lecture at the hospital, his eloquence and his clear demonstration convinced the judges who were opposed to him that he was in the right.

What could Caffie's death weigh, placed in the balance with these results? So little that it counted for nothing, and would have held no place in his thoughts if it had not been mixed in his mind with the accusation that would send Florentin to the assizes.

Cleared of this fact, the death of the old man rarely crossed his mind. He had other things in his head, truly, than this memory which brought neither regret nor remorse; and it was not at this moment, when he touched the end at which he aimed, that he would embarrass himself, or sadden his triumph, with Caffie.

A little before the expiration of the two months, during which time the poste restante retained the letters containing the thirty thousand francs, he called for them, and readdressed and mailed them to other post-offices.

What did he want of this money, which was, in reality, a nuisance? His habits remained the same, except that he no longer struggled with his creditors, and paid cash for everything. He had no desire to make any change in his former mode of living; his ambition was otherwise and higher than in the small satisfactions, very small for him, that money gives.

Days passed without a thought of Caffie, except in connection with Florentin. But Florentin, and above all, Phillis, reminded him that the comfort he enjoyed he owed to Caffie's death, and he was troubled accordingly.

He did not believe that the investigations of the law would reach him now; everything conspired to confirm him in his scrutiny. That which he arranged so laboriously had succeeded according to his wish, and the only imprudence that he had committed, in a moment of aberration, seemed not to have been observed; no one had noticed his presence in the cafe opposite Caffie's house, and no one was astonished at his pertinacity in remaining there at an hour so unusual.

But it was not enough that he was safe; he must prevent Florentin from being unjustly condemned for a crime of which he was innocent. It was a great deal that he should be imprisoned, that his sister

should be in despair, and his mother ill from chagrin; but if he should be sent to the scaffold or to the galleys, it would be too much. In itself the death of Caffie was a small thing; it became atrocious if it led to such an ending.

He did not wish this to happen, and he would do everything not only to prevent the condemnation, but to shorten the imprisonment.

It was this sentiment that he obeyed in going to see the judge; but the manner in which he was received, showing him that the law was not disposed to let its hypothesis be changed by a simple medical demonstration, threw him into a state of uneasiness and perplexity.

Without doubt, any one else in his place would have let things take their course, and since the law had a criminal with which it contented itself, would have done nothing to release him. While it followed its hypothesis to prove the criminality of the one it held, it would not look elsewhere; when it had condemned him, all would be finished; the Caffie affair would be buried, as Caffie himself was buried; silence and oblivion would give him security. The crime punished, the conscience of the public satisfied, it would ask for no more, not even to know if the debt was paid by the one who really owed it; it was paid, and that was sufficient. But he was not "any one else," and if he found the death of this old scamp legitimate, it was on the condition that Florentin did not pay for it, from whom he had not profited.

Florentin must be released as soon as possible, and it was his duty to interest himself in his behalf—his imperative duty not only toward Phillis, but toward himself.

He told Phillis that until Florentin came before the jury, he could do nothing, or almost nothing. When the time came, he would assert his authority, and speaking in the name of science, he would prove to the jury that the story of the button was an invention of the police, who were pushed to extremes, and would not bear examination; but until then the poor boy remained at Mazas, and however assured one might be at this moment of an acquittal, an immediate 'ordonnance de non-lieu' was of more value, if it could be obtained.

For this the intervention and direction of a doctor were of little use; it required that of an advocate.

Whom should he have? Phillis would have liked to apply to the most illustrious, to him who, by his talent, authority, and success, would win all his cases. But Saniel explained to her that workers of miracles were probably as difficult to find at the bar as in the medical profession, and that, if they did exist, they would expect a large fee. To tell the truth, he would have willingly given the thirty thousand francs in the 'poste restante', or a large part of this sum, to give Florentin his liberty; but it would be imprudent to take out the bills at this moment, and he could not declare that he had thirty thousand francs, or even ten thousand. He decided with Phillis to consult Brigard.

On a Wednesday he went to the parlor in the Rue Vaugirard, where he had not been since his experiment with Glady. As usual, he was received affectionately by Crozat, who scolded him for coming so rarely, and as usual also, in order not to disturb the discussion that was going on, he remained standing near the door.

This evening the theme of the discourse was a phrase of Chateaubriand's: "The tiger kills and sleeps; man kills and is sleepless." On listening to the discussion, Saniel said to himself that it was truly a pity not to be able to reply to all this rhetoric by a simple fact of personal experience. He had never slept so well, so tranquilly, as since Caffie's death, which relieved him from all the cares that in these last months had tormented and broken his sleep so much.

At the end, Brigard concluded the discussion on saying that nothing better proved the power of the human conscience than this difference between man and beast.

When they had all gone but Brigard, and Saniel was alone with him and Crozat, he stated his desire.

"But is it the Caffie affair?"

"Exactly."

And he explained in detail the interest he felt in Florentin, the son of one of his patients, and also the situation of this patient.

Brigard strongly recommended Nougarede, and described his recent successes before a jury. Crozat concurred with Brigard, and advised Saniel to see Nougarede the day after to-morrow.

"In the morning, because after the Palais, Nougarede will be at his wedding, which, as you know, prevents him from coming here this evening."

"What! Nougarede married?" exclaimed Saniel, surprised that the favorite disciple gave this lie to the doctrine and examples of his master.

"My God, yes! We must not be too hard on him.

"He submits to the fate of a special environment. Without our knowledge, Nougarede, we may say it now, and ought to say it, was the happy lover of a charming young person, the daughter of one of our most distinguished actresses, who was brought up in a fashionable convent. You see the situation. The result of this liaison was a child, a delicious little boy. It seemed quite natural that they should live 'en union libre', since they loved each other, and not weaken by legalities the strength of those that attached them to this child. But the mother is an actress, as I have told you, and wished her daughter to receive all the sacraments that the law and the church can confer. She managed so well that poor Nougarede yielded. He goes to the mayor, to the church; he legitimizes the child, and he even accepts a dot of two hundred thousand francs. I pity him, the unfortunate man! But I confess that I have the weakness to not condemn him as he would deserve if he married in any other way."

Saniel was a little surprised at these points of resemblance with the charming young person that Caffie had proposed to him. At the least, it was curious; but if it were the same woman, he was not vexed to see that Nougarede had been less difficult than himself.

CHAPTER XXIII. STUNNING NEWS

On going to see Nougarede, Saniel vaguely fancied the lawyer would tell him that an acquittal was certain if Florentin passed to the assizes, and even that an 'ordonnance de non-lieu' was probable. But his hope was not realized.

"The adventure of the button for you or me would not have the same gravity as for this boy; we have no antecedents on which presumptions might be established, but he has. The forty-five francs which constitute an embezzlement for a salaried man will be, certainly, a starting-point for the accusation; one commences by a weakness and finishes by a crime. Do you not hear the advocate-general? He will begin by presenting the portrait of the honest, laborious, exact, scrupulous clerk, content with a little, and getting satisfaction from his duties accomplished; then, in opposition, he will pass to the clerk of to-day, as irregular in his work as in his conduct, full of desires, in a hurry to enjoy, discontented with everything and everybody, with others as with himself. And he will go on to speak of the embezzlement of the forty-five francs as the beginning of the crimes that led to the assassination. You may be sure if the affair goes to the assizes that you will hear these words and more, and I assure you that it will be difficult for us to destroy the impression that he will produce on the jury. But I hope we shall succeed."

He had to give up the idea of obtaining the 'ordonnance de non-lieu', and to tell himself that the 'affaire' would come before the assizes; but it does not follow that one is condemned for what one is accused of, and Saniel persisted in believing that Florentin would not be. Assuredly, the prison was hard for the poor boy, and the trial before the jury, with all the ignominy that necessarily accompanies it, would be harder yet. But, after all, it would all disappear in the joy of acquittal; when that time came, there would be found, surely, some ingenious idea, sympathy, effective support, to pay him for all that he would have suffered. Certainly, things would come to pass thus, and the acquittal would be carried with a high hand.

He said this to himself again and again, and from the day when he put the affair in Nougarede's hands, he often went to see him, to hear him repeat it.

"He cannot be condemned; can he?"

"One may always be condemned, even when one is innocent; as one may die at any time, you know that, even with excellent health."

In one of these visits he met Madame Nougarede, who had then been several days married, and on recognizing in her the young virgin with a child, of whom Caffie showed him the portrait, he was strengthened in his idea that conscience, such as it was understood, was decidedly a strange weighing-machine, which might be made to say whatever one chose. Of what good were these hypocrisies, and whom did they deceive?

Although he had told Phillis repeatedly that an acquittal was certain, and that he had promised her he would do all he could for Florentin—which he really did—she did not give entirely into his hands, or into Nougarede's, the task of defending her brother, but worked with them in his defence.

Nougarede believed that the delay in bringing the affair before the assizes was caused by the attempts to learn if, during his residence in America, Florentin had not worked in some large meat-shop or sheepfold, where he would have learned to use a butcher knife, which was the chief point for the accusation. Phillis wrote to the various towns where Florentin had lived, and to tell the truth, he had worked at La Plata for six months as accountant in a large sheepfold, but never slaughtered the sheep.

When she received a letter, she carried it immediately to Saniel, and then to Nougarede; and, at the same time, on all sides, in Paris, among those who had held relations with her brother, she sought for testimony that should prove to the jury that he could not be the man that his accusers believed him. It was thus that, all alone, without other means of action than those which she found in her sisterly tenderness and bravery, she organized an investigation parallel to that of the law, which, on the day of judgment, would carry a certain weight, it seemed, with the conviction of the jury, showing them what had been the true life of this irregular and debauched man, capable of anything to glut his appetite and satisfy his desires.

Each time that she obtained a favorable deposition, she ran to Saniel to tell him, and then together they repeated that a conviction was impossible.

"You are sure, are you not?"

"Have I not always told you so?"

He had also said that Florentin could not be arrested, basing the accusation on the torn button, and he had said that certainly an 'ordonnance de non-lieu' would be given by the judge; but they wished to remember neither the one nor the other.

Things had reached this state, when one Saturday evening Phillis arrived at Saniel's, radiant.

As soon as the door opened she exclaimed:

"He is saved!"

"An ordonnance de non-lieu?"

"No; but now it is of little importance. We can go to the assizes."

She breathed a sigh which showed how great were her fears, in spite of the confidence she expressed when she repeated that conviction was impossible.

He left his desk, and going toward her, took her in his arms, and made her sit down beside him on the divan.

"You will see that I do not let myself be carried away by an illusion, and that, as I tell you, he is saved, really saved. You know that an illustrated paper has published his portrait?"

"I do not read illustrated papers."

"You could have seen them at the kiosks where they are displayed. It is there that I saw them yesterday morning when I went out, and I was petrified, red with shame, distracted, not knowing where to hide myself. 'Florentin Cormier, the assassin of the Rue Sainte-Anne.' Is it not infamous that an innocent person should be thus dishonored? This was what I said to myself. Where did the paper get the photograph? They came to ask us for one, but you can imagine how I treated them, not knowing how anything good for us would result from such a disgrace."

"And what is the result?"

"The proof that it is not Florentin who was with Caffie at the moment when the assassination took place. All day yesterday and all this morning I was filled with the feeling of disgrace that followed me, when at three o'clock I received this little note from the concierge of the Rue Sainte-Anne."

She took from her pocket a piece of paper folded in the form of a letter, which she handed to Saniel.

"MADEMOISELLE: If you will pass through the Rue Sainte-Anne, I have something to tell you that will give you a great deal of pleasure, I believe.

"I am your servant,

"WIDOW ANAIS BOUCHU."

"You know the lame old concierge has never been willing to admit that my brother could be guilty. Florentin was polite and kind to her during his stay with Caffie, and she is grateful. Very often she has said to me that she is certain the guilty one would be found, and that when it was announced I must tell her. Instead of my telling her the good news, she has written to me. You may be sure I hurried to the Rue Sainte-Anne, expecting to hear something favorable, but we have a proof. When I arrived, the old woman took both of my hands, and told me that she would conduct me immediately to a lady who saw Caffie's assassin."

"Saw him!" exclaimed Saniel, struck by a blow that shook him from head to foot.

"She saw him perfectly, as I tell you. She added that this lady was the proprietor of the house, and that she lived in the second wing of the building, on the second story on the court, just opposite to Caffie's office. This lady, who is called Madame Dammauville, widow of a lawyer, is afflicted with paralysis, and I believe has not left her room for a year. The concierge explained this to me while crossing the court and mounting the stairs, but would say no more."

If Phillis had been able to observe Saniel, she would have seen him pale to such a degree that his lips were as white as his cheeks; but she was completely absorbed in what she was saying.

"A servant conducted us to Madame Dammauville, whom I found in a small bed near a window, and the concierge told her who I was. She received me kindly, and after having made me sit down in front of her, she told me that hearing from her concierge that I was exerting myself in my brother's behalf, she had something to tell me which would demonstrate that Caffie's assassin was not the man whom the law had arrested and detained. The evening of the assassination she was in this same room, lying on this same bed, before this same window, and after having read all day, she reflected and dreamed about her book, while listlessly watching the coming of twilight in the court, that already obscured everything in its shadow. Mechanically she had fixed her eyes on the window of Caffie's office opposite. Suddenly she saw a tall man, whom she took for an upholsterer, approach the window, and try to draw the curtains. Then Caffie rose, and taking the lamp, he came forward in such a way that the light fell full on the face of this upholsterer. You understand, do you not?"

"Yes," murmured Saniel.

"She saw him then plainly enough to remember him, and not to confound him with another. Tall, with long hair, a curled blond beard, and dressed like a gentleman, not like a poor man. The curtains were drawn. It was fifteen or twenty minutes after five. And it was at this same moment that Caffie was butchered by this false upholsterer, who evidently had only drawn the curtains so that he might kill Caffie in security, and not imagining that some one should see him doing a deed that denounced him as the assassin as surely as if he had been surprised with the knife in his hand. On reading the description of Florentin in the newspapers when he was arrested, Madame Dammauville believed the criminal was found—a tall man, with long hair and curled beard. There are some points of resemblance, but in the portrait published in the illustrated paper that she received, she did not recognize the man who drew the curtains, and she is certain that the judge is deceived. You see that Florentin is saved!"

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXIV. HEDGING

As he did not reply to this cry of triumph, she looked at him in surprise saw his face, pale, agitated, under the shock evidently of a violent emotion that she could not explain to herself.

“What is the matter?” she asked, with uneasiness.

“Nothing,” he answered, almost brutally.

“You do not wish to weaken my hope?” she said, not imagining that he could not think of this hope and of Florentin. This was a path to lead him out of his confusion. In following it he would have time to recover himself.

“It is true,” he said.

“You do not think that what Madame Dammauville saw proves Florentin’s innocence?”

“Would what may be a proof for Madame Dammauville, for you, and for me, be one in the eyes of the law?”

“However—”

“I saw you so joyful that I did not dare to interrupt you.”

“Then you believe that this testimony is without value,” she murmured, feeling crushed.

“I do not say that. We must reflect, weigh the pro and con, compass the situation from divers points of view; that is what I try to do, which is the cause of my preoccupation that astonishes you.”

“Say that it crushes me; I let myself be carried away.”

“You need not be crushed or carried away. Certainly, what this lady told you forms a considerable piece of work.”

“Does it not?”

“Without any doubt. But in order that the testimony she gives may be of great consequence, the witness must be worthy of trust.”

“Do you believe this lady could have invented such a story?”

“I do not say that; but before all, it is necessary to know who she is.”

“The widow of an attorney.”

“The widow of an attorney and landowner. Evidently this constitutes a social status that merits consideration from the law; but the moral state, what is it? You say that she is paralyzed?”

“She has been so a little more than a year.”

“Of what paralysis? That is a vague word for us others. There are paralyses that affect the sight; others that affect the mind. Is it one of these with which this lady is afflicted, or one of the others, which permitted her really to see, the evening of the assassination, that which she relates, and which leaves her mental faculties in a sane condition? Before everything, it is important to know this.”

Phillis was prostrated.

“I had not thought of all that,” she murmured.

“It is very natural that you had not; but I am a doctor, and while you talked it was the doctor who listened.”

“It is true, it is true,” she repeated. “I only saw Florentin.”

“In your place I should have seen, like you, only my brother, and I should have been carried away by hope. But I am not in your place. It is by your voice that this woman speaks, whom I do not know, and

against whom I must be on my guard, for the sole reason that it is a paralytic who has told this story."

She could not restrain the tears that came to her eyes, and she let them flow silently, finding nothing to reply.

"I am sorry to pain you," he said.

"I saw only Florentin's liberty."

"I do not say this testimony of Madame Dammauville will not influence the judge, and, above all, the jury; but I must warn you that you will expose yourself to a terrible deception if you believe that her testimony alone will give your brother liberty. It is not on a testimony of this kind or of this quality that the law decides; better than we, it knows to what illusions people can lend themselves when it is the question of a crime that absorbs and excites the public curiosity. There are some witnesses who, with the best faith in the world, believe they have seen the most extraordinary things which only existed in their imaginations; and there are people who accuse themselves rather than say nothing."

He heaped words on words, as if, in trying to convince Phillis, he might hope to convince himself; but when the sound of his words faded, he was obliged to declare to himself that, whatever the paralysis of this woman might be, it had not, in this instance, produced either defect of sight or of mind. She had seen, indeed, the tall man with long hair and curled beard, dressed like a gentleman, who was not Florentin. When she related the story of the lamp and the curtain cords, she knew what she was saying.

In his first alarm he had been very near betraying himself. Without doubt he should have told himself that this incident of the curtains might prove a trap; but all passed so rapidly that he never imagined that, exactly at the moment when Caffie raised the lamp to give him light, there was a woman opposite looking at him, and who saw him so plainly that she had not forgotten him. He thought to use all precautions on his side in drawing the curtains, when, on the contrary, he would have done better had he left them undrawn. Without doubt the widow of the attorney would have been a witness of a part of the scene, but in the shadow she would not have distinguished his features as she was able to do when he placed himself before the window under the light. But this idea did not enter his mind, and, to save himself from an immediate danger, he threw himself into another which, although uncertain, was not less grave.

Little by little Phillis recovered herself, and the hope that Madame Dammauville put in her heart, momentarily crushed by Saniel's remarks, sprang up again.

"Is it not possible Madame Dammauville really saw what she relates?"

"Without any doubt; and there are even probabilities that it is so, since the man who drew the curtains was not your brother, as we know. Unfortunately, it is not ourselves who must be convinced, since we are convinced in advance. It is those who, in advance also, have one whom they will not give up unless he is torn from them by force."

"But if Madame Dammauville saw clearly?"

"What must be learned before everything is, if she is in a state to see clearly; I have said nothing else."

"A doctor would surely know on examining her?"

"Without doubt."

"If you were this doctor?"

It was a cry rather than an exclamation. She wished that he should present himself before this woman; but in that case she would recognize him.

Once more, under the pain of betraying his emotion, he must recover from this first impulse.

"But how can you wish me to go and examine this woman whom I do not know, and who does not know me? You know very well that patients choose their doctors, and not doctors their patients."

"If she sent for you?"

"By what right?"

"By what I shall learn on making the concierge talk, could you not recognize her kind of paralysis without seeing her?"

"That would be a little vague. However, I will do the best I can. Try to learn not only what concerns her illness, but all that relates to her—what her position is, who are her relations, which is important for a witness who overawes as much by what he is as by what he says. You understand that a deposition that destroys the whole plan of the prosecution will be severely disputed, and will only be accepted if Madame Dammauville has by her character and position a sufficient authority to break down all opposition."

"I will also try to learn who is her doctor. You may know him. What he would tell you would be worth more than all the details that I could bring you."

"We should be immediately decided on the paralysis, and we should see what credit we could accord this woman's words."

While listening to Phillis and talking himself, he had time to compass the situation that this thunderbolt created for him. Evidently, the first thing to do was to prevent a suspicion from arising in Phillis's mind, and it was to this that he applied himself on explaining the different kinds of paralysis. He knew her well enough to know that he had succeeded. But what would she do now? How did she mean to make use of Madame Dammauville's declaration? Had she spoken of it to any one besides himself? Was it her intention to go to Nougarede and tell him what she had learned? All that must be made clear, and as soon as possible. She must do nothing without his knowledge and approval. The circumstances were critical enough, without his letting accident become the master to direct them and conduct them blindly.

"When did you see Madame Dammauville?" he asked.

"Just this minute."

"And now, what do you wish to do?"

"I think that I ought to tell Monsieur Nougarde."

"Evidently, whatever the value of Madame Dammauville's declaration, he should know it; he will appraise it. Only, as it is well to explain to him what may vitiate this testimony, if you wish, I will go to see him."

"Certainly I wish it, and I thank you."

"In the mean time, return to your mother and tell her what you have learned; but, that she may not yield to an exaggerated hope, tell her, also, that if there are chances, and great ones, in favor of your brother, on the other side there are some that are unfavorable. Tomorrow or this evening you will return to the Rue Sainte-Anne and begin your inquiries of the concierge. If the old woman tells you nothing interesting, you must go to Madame Dammauville, and make some reason for seeing her. Make her talk, and you will notice if her ideas are consecutive, and examine her face and eyes. Above all, neglect nothing that appears to you characteristic. Having taken care of your mother, you know almost as well as a doctor the symptoms of myelitis, and you could see instantly if Madame Dammauville has them."

"If I dared!" she said timidly, after a short hesitation.

"What?"

"I would ask you to come with me to the concierge immediately."

"You think of such a thing!" he exclaimed.

Since the evening when he had testified to the death of Caffie, he had not returned to the Rue Sainte-Anne; and it was not when the description given by Madame Dammauville was, doubtless, already spread in the quarter, that he was going to commit the imprudence of showing himself. But he must explain this exclamation.

"How can you expect a doctor to give himself up to such an investigation? On your part it is quite natural; on mine it would be unheard of and ridiculous; add that it would be dangerous. You must conciliate Madame Dammauville, and this would be truly a stupidity that would give her a pretext for thinking that you are trying to find out whether she is, or is not, in her right mind."

"That is true," she said. "I had not thought of that. I said to myself that, while I could only listen to what the concierge would tell me, you would know how to question her in a way that would lead her to say what you want to learn."

"I hope that your investigation will tell me. In any case, let us offend in nothing. If to-morrow you bring me only insignificant details, we will consider what to do. In the mean time, return to the concierge this evening and question her. If it is possible, see Madame Dammauville, and do not go home until after having obtained some news on this subject that is of such importance to us. And I will go to see Nougarde."

CHAPTER XXV. DANGEROUS DETAILS

It was not to falsify Phillis's story that Saniel insisted on going to see Nougarede. What good would it do? That would be a blunder which sooner or later would show itself, and in that case would turn against him. He would have liked, with the authority of a physician, to explain that this testimony of a paralytic could have no more importance than that of a crazy woman.

But at the first words of an explanation Nougarede stopped him.

"What you say is very possible, my dear friend; but I shall make you see that it is not for us to raise objections of this kind. Here is a testimony that may save our client; let us accept this, such as it may be, whence it comes. It is the business of the prosecution to prove that our witness could not see what she relates that she saw, or that her mental condition does not permit her to know what she saw; and do not be afraid, investigation will not be lacking. Do not let us even give a hint from our side; that would be stupid."

This, certainly, was not what Saniel wished; only he believed it a duty, in his quality of physician, to indicate some rocks against which they might strike themselves.

"Our duty," continued the advocate, "is, therefore, to manage in a way to escape them; and this is how I understand the role of this really providential witness, if it is possible to make her undertake it. Since it has occurred to you—you who wish the acquittal of this poor boy—that the testimony of Madame Dammauville may be vitiated by the simple fact that it comes from a sick woman, it is incontestable, is it not, that this same idea will occur to those who wish for his conviction? This testimony should be irrefutable; it should be presented in such a way that no one could raise anything against it, so that it would compel the acquittal in the same moment that it is presented. It was between a quarter past and half past five o'clock that Caffie was assassinated; at exactly a quarter past five, a woman of respectable position, and whose intellectual as well as physical faculties render her worthy of being believed, saw in Caffies office a man, with whom it is materially impossible to confound Florentin Cormier, draw the curtains of the window, and thus prepare for the crime. She would make her deposition in these conditions, and in these terms, and the affair would be finished. There would not be a judge, after this confrontation, who would send Florentin Cormier before the assizes, and, assuredly, there would not be two voices in the jury for conviction. But things will not happen like this. Without doubt, Madame Dammauville bears a name that is worth something; her husband was an estimable attorney, a brother of the one who was notary at Paris."

"Have you ever had any business with her?"

"Never. I tell you what is well known to every one, morally she is irreproachable. But is she the same physically and mentally? Not at all, unfortunately. If a physician can be found who will declare that her paralysis does not give her aberrations or hallucinations, another one will be found who will contest these opinions, and who will come to an opposite conclusion. So much for the witness herself; now for the testimony. This testimony does not say that the man who drew the curtains at a quarter past five was built in such a way that it is materially impossible to confound him with Florentin Cormier, because he was small or hunchbacked or bald, or dressed like a workman; while Florentin is tall, straight, with long hair and beard, and dressed like a gentleman. It says, simply, that the man who drew the curtains was tall, with long hair, and curled blond beard, and dressed like a gentleman. But this description is exactly Florentin Cormier's, as it is yours—"

"Mine!" Saniel exclaimed.

"Yours, as well as that of many others. And it is this, unfortunately for us, which destroys the irrefutability that we must have. How is it certain that this tall man, with long hair and curled beard, is not Florentin Cormier, since these are his chief characteristics? And it was at night, at a distance of twelve or fifteen metres, through a window, whose panes were obscured by the dust of papers and the mist, that this sick woman, whose eyes are affected, whose mind is weakened by suffering, was able, in a very short space of time, when she had no interest to imprint upon her memory what she saw, to grasp certain signs, that she recalled yesterday strongly enough to declare that the man who drew the curtains was not Florentin Cormier, against whom so many charges have accumulated from various sides, and who has only this testimony in his favor—every sensible person could not but find it suspicious!"

"But it is true," Saniel said, happy to lend himself to this view of the matter, which was his own.

"What makes the truth of a thing, my dear sir, is the way of presenting it; let us change this manner and we falsify it. To arrive at the conclusion which made you say 'It is true,' I am on the side of the idea that to-morrow Madame Dammauville's story should be known to the law, that the brave lady should be heard before the prosecution, and that time should be allowed to examine this testimony that you suspect. Now let us look at it from the opposite point. Madame Dammauville's story is not known to the law, or, if something transpires, we will arrange that this something is so vague that the prosecution will attach but little importance to it. And this is possible if we do not base a new defence on this testimony. We arrive at the judgment, and when the prosecution has listened to its witnesses which have overwhelmed us—the agent of affairs Savoureux, the tailor Valerius,—it is Madame Dammauville's turn. She simply relates what she saw, and declares that the man who is on the prisoner's bench is not the same who drew the curtains at a quarter past five. Do you see the 'coup de theatre'? The prosecution had not foreseen it; it had not inquired into the health of the witness; the physician would not be there to quote the defects of sight or reason; very probably it would not think of the dusty windowpanes, or of the distance. And all the opposing arguments that would be properly arranged if there were time, would be lacking, and we should carry the acquittal with a high hand."

Arranged thus, things were too favorable for Saniel for him not to receive, with a sentiment of relief, this combination which brought Florentin's acquittal more surely, it seemed to him, than all that they had arranged for his defence up to this day. However, an objection occurred to him, which he communicated to Nougarede immediately.

"Would one wish to admit that Madame Dammauville had kept silent on so grave a matter, and waited for an audience to reveal it?"

"This silence she kept until yesterday; why should she not keep it a few days longer? It is evident that if she had not related what she saw, it is because she had reasons for being silent. It is probable that, being ill, she did not wish to expose herself to the annoyances and fatigue of an investigation; and in her eyes her deposition was not of great importance. What should she have revealed to the prosecution? That the man who committed the crime was tall, with a curled blond beard? This man the law held, or it held one the description of whom answered to this, which to Madame Dammauville was the same thing. She did not need, therefore, to call the police or the judge to tell them these insignificant things for her own comfort; and, also, because she believed that she had nothing interesting to say, she did not speak. It was when accident brought to her notice the portrait of the accused, she recognized that the law had not the real criminal, and then she broke the silence. The moment when she first saw this portrait is not stated precisely; I undertake to arrange that. The difficulty is not there."

"Where do you see it?"

"Here: Madame Dammauville may have already told her story to so many persons that it is already public property, where the prosecution has picked it up. In that case there will be no 'coup de theatre'. She will be questioned, her deposition examined, and we will have only a suspected testimony. The first thing to do, then, is to know how far this story has spread, and if there is yet time to prevent it from spreading farther."

"That is not easy, it seems to me."

"I believe Mademoiselle Phillis can do it. She is a brave woman, whom nothing dejects or disconcerts, which is the living proof that we are only valued according to the force and versatility of the inner consciousness. For the rest, I need not sound her praises, since you know her better than I; and what I say has no other object but to explain the confidence that I place in her. As I cannot interfere myself, I think there is no better person than she to act on Madame Dammauville, without disturbing or wounding her, and to bring about the result that we desire. I am sure that she has already won Madame Dammauville, and that she will be listened to with sympathy."

"Do you wish me to write to her to come to see you tomorrow?"

"No; it would be better for you so see her this evening, if possible."

"I shall go to the Batignolles when I leave you."

"She will enter into her part perfectly, I am certain, and she will succeed, I hope."

"It seems to me that your combination rests, above all, on the 'coup de theatre' of the non-recognition of Florentin by Madame Dammauville. How will you bring this paralytic to court?"

"I depend upon you."

"And how?"

"You will examine her."

"I shall have to go to her house!"

"Why not?"

"Because I am not her doctor."

"You will become so."

"It is impossible."

"I do not find it at all impossible that you should be called in consultation. I have not forgotten that your thesis was on the paralyses due to the affection of the spinal cord, and it was remarkable enough for us to discuss it in our 'parlotte' of the Rue de Vaugirard. You have, therefore, authority in the matter."

"It is not on account of having written several works on the pathological anatomy of medullary lesions, and especially on the alterations of the spinal ganglia, that one acquires authority in a question so comprehensive and so delicate."

"Do not be too modest, dear friend. I have had, lately, to consult my Dictionary of Medicine, and at each page your work was quoted. And, besides, the way in which you passed your examinations made you famous. Every one talks of you. So it is not impossible that Mademoiselle Phillis, relating that her mother was cured of a similar paralysis, will give Madame Dammauville the idea of consulting you, and her physician will send for you."

"You will not do that?"

"And why should I not do it?"

They looked at each other a moment in silence, and Saniel turned his eyes away.

"I detest nothing so much as to appear to put myself forward."

"In this case it is no matter what you detest or like. The question is to save this unfortunate young man whom you know to be innocent; and you can do a kind deed and aid us. You examine Madame Dammauville; you see with which paralysis she is afflicted, and consequently, what exceptions may be taken at her testimony. At the same time, you see if you can cure her, or, at least, put her in a state to go to court."

"And if it is proved that she cannot leave her bed?"

"In that case I shall change my order of battle, and that is why it is of capital importance—you know that that is the word—that we should be warned beforehand."

"You will make the judge receive her deposition?"

"In any case. But I shall make her write a letter that I shall read at the desired moment, and I shall call upon her physician to explain that he would not permit his patient to come to court. Without doubt,

the effect would not be what I desire, but, anyhow, we should have one."

CHAPTER XXVI. A GOOD MEMORY

After Phillis, Nougarde also wished him to see Madame Dammauville; this coincidence was not the least danger of the situation that opened before him.

If he saw her, the chances were that she would recognize in him the man who drew the curtains; for, if he was able to speak to Phillis and Nougarede of an affection of the eyes or of the mind, he did not believe in these affections, which for him were only makeshifts.

When he reached Madame Cormier's, Phillis had not returned, and he was obliged to explain to the uneasy mother why her daughter was late.

It was a delirium of joy, before which he felt embarrassed. How should he break the hope of this unhappy mother?

What he had said to Phillis and to Nougarede he repeated to her.

"But it is possible, also, for paralytics to enjoy all their faculties!" Madame Cormier said, with a decision that was not in accordance with her habit or with her character.

"Assuredly."

"Am I not an example?"

"Without doubt."

"Then Florentin will be saved."

"This is what we hope. I only caution you against an excess of joy by an excess of prudence. Nevertheless, it is probable Mademoiselle Phillis will settle this for us when she returns."

"Perhaps it would have been better if you had gone to the Rue Sainte-Anne. You would have found her."

There was, then, a universal mania to send him to the Rue Sainte-Anne!

They waited, but the conversation was difficult and slow between them. It was neither of Phillis nor of Florentin that Saniel thought; it was of himself and of his own fears; while Madame Cormier's thoughts ran to Phillis. Then there were long silences that Madame Cormier interrupted by going to the kitchen to look after her dinner, that had been ready since two o'clock.

Not knowing what to say or do in the presence of Saniel's sombre face and preoccupation, which she could not explain, she asked him if he had dined.

"Not yet."

"If you will accept a plate of soup, I have some of yesterday's bouillon, that Phillis did not find bad."

But he did not accept, which hurt Madame Cormier. For a long time Saniel had been a sort of god to her, and since he had shown so much zeal regarding Florentin, the 'culte' was become more fervent.

At last Phillis's step was heard.

"What! You came to tell mamma!" she exclaimed, on seeing Saniel.

Ordinarily her mother listened to her respectfully, but now she interrupted her.

"And Madame Dammauville?" she asked.

"Madame Dammauville has excellent eyes. She is a woman of intellect, who, without the assistance of any business man, manages her fortune."

Overcome, Madame Cormier fell into a chair.

"Oh, the poor child!" she murmured.

Exclamations of joy escaped her which contained but little sense.

"It is as I thought," Saniel said; "but it would be imprudent to abandon ourselves to hopes to-day that to-morrow may destroy."

While he spoke he escaped, at least, from the embarrassment of his position and from the examination of Phillis.

"What did Monsieur Nougarde say?" she asked.

"I will explain to you presently. Begin by telling us what you learned from Madame Dammauville. It is her condition that will decide our course, at least that which Nougarde counsels us to adopt."

"When the concierge saw me return," Phillis began, "she showed a certain surprise; but she is a good woman, who is easily tamed, and I had not much trouble in making her tell me all she knows of Madame Dammauville. Three years ago Madame Dammauville became a widow without children. She is about forty years of age, and since her widowhood has lived in her house in the Rue Sainte-Anne. Until last year she was not ill, but she went every year to the springs at Lamoulon. It is a year since she was taken with pains that were thought to be rheumatic, following which, paralysis attacked her and confined her to her bed. She suffers so much sometimes that she cries, but these are spasms that do not last. In the intervals she lives the ordinary life, except that she does not get up. She reads a great deal, receives her friends, her sister-in-law—widow of a notary—her nephews and nieces, and one of the vicars of the parish, for she is very charitable. Her eyes are excellent. She has never had delirium or hallucinations. She is very reserved, detests gossip, and above everything seeks to live quietly. The assassination of Caffie exasperated her; she would let no one speak to her of him, and she spoke of it to no one. She even said that if she were in a condition to leave her house, she would sell it, so that she would never hear the name of Caffie."

"How did she speak of the portrait and of the man she saw in Caffie's office?" Saniel asked.

"That is exactly the question that the concierge was not able to answer; so I decided to go to see Madame Dammauville again."

"You are courageous," the mother said with pride.

"I assure you that I was not so on going up-stairs. After what I had heard of her character, it was truly audacious to go a second time, after an interval of two hours, to trouble her, but it was necessary. While ascending, I sought a reason to justify, or, at least, to explain my second visit, and I found only an adventurous one, for which I ought to ask your indulgence."

She said this on turning toward Saniel, but with lowered eyes, without daring to look at him, and with an emotion that made him uneasy.

"My indulgence?" he said.

"I acted without having time to reflect, and under the pressure of immediate need. As Madame Dammauville expressed surprise at seeing me again, I told her that what she had said to me was so serious, and might have such consequences for the life and honor of my brother, that I had thought of returning the next day, accompanied by a person familiar with the affair, before whom she would repeat her story; and that I came to ask her permission to present this person. This person is yourself." "I!"

"And that is why," she said feebly, without raising her eyes, "that I have need of your indulgence."

"But I had told you—" he exclaimed with a violence that the dissatisfaction at being so disposed of was not sufficient to justify.

"That you could not present yourself to Madame Dammauville in the character of a physician unless she sent for you. I did not forget that; and it is not as a physician that I wish to beg you to accompany me, but as a friend, if you permit me to speak thus; as the most devoted, the most firm, and the most generous friend that we have had the happiness to encounter in our distress."

"My daughter speaks in my name, as in her own," Madame Cormier said with emotion; "I add that it is a respectful friendship, a profound gratitude, that we feel toward you."

Although Phillis trembled to see the effect that she produced on Saniel, she continued with firmness:

"You would accompany me, then, without doing anything ostensibly, without saying you are a doctor, and while she talks you could examine her. Madame Dammauville gave her consent to my

request with extreme kindness. I shall return to her to-morrow, and if you think it useful, if you think you should accept the part that I claimed for you without consulting you, you can accompany me."

He did not reply to these last words, which were an invitation as well as a question.

"Did you not examine her as I told you?" he asked, after a moment of reflection.

"With all the attention of which I was capable in my anguish. Her glance seemed to me straight and untroubled; her voice is regular, very rhythmical; her words follow each other without hesitation; her ideas are consecutive and clearly expressed. There is no trace of suffering on her pale face, which bears only the mark of a resigned grief. She moves her arms freely, but the legs, so far as I could judge under the bedclothes, are motionless. In many ways it seems to me that her paralysis resembles mamma's, though it is true that in others it does not. She must be extremely sensitive to the cold, for although the weather is not cold today, the temperature of her room seemed very high."

"This is an examination," Saniel said, "that a physician could not have conducted better, unless he questioned the patient; and had I been with you during this visit we should not have learned anything more. It appears certain that Madame Dammauville is in possession of her faculties, which renders her testimony invulnerable."

Madame Cormier drew her daughter to her and kissed her passionately.

"I have, therefore, nothing to do with this lady," continued Saniel, with the precipitation of a man who has just escaped a danger. "But your part, Mademoiselle, is not finished, and you must return to her tomorrow to fulfil that which Nougarde confides to you."

He explained what Nougarde expected of her.

"Certainly," she said. "I will do all that I am advised to do for Florentin. I will go to Madame Dammauville; I will go everywhere. But will you permit me to express my astonishment that immediate profit is not made of this declaration to obtain the release of my brother?"

He repeated the reasons that Nougarede had given him for not proceeding in this manner.

"I would not say anything that resembles a reproach," said Madame Cormier, with more decision than she ordinarily put into her words; "but perhaps Monsieur Nougarde has some personal ideas in his advice. Our interest is that Florentin should return to us as quickly as possible, and that he should be spared the sufferings of a prison. But I understand that to an 'ordonnance de non-lieu', in which he does not appear, Monsieur Nougarde prefers the broad light of the court, where he could deliver a brilliant address, useful to his reputation."

"Whether or not he has made this calculation," Saniel said, "things are thus. I, also, I should have preferred the 'ordonnance de non-lieu', which has the great advantage of finishing everything immediately. Nougarede does not believe that this would be a good plan to follow, so we must follow the one that he traces out for us."

"We will follow it," Phillis said, "and I believe that it may bring about the result Monsieur Nougarede expects, as Madame Dammauville would have spoken to but few persons. When I tried to make her explain herself on this point, without asking her the question directly, she told me that she had only spoken to the concierge of the non-resemblance of the portrait to the man she saw draw the curtains, so that the concierge, who had often spoken to her of Florentin and of my efforts to save him, might warn me. I shall see, then, to-morrow, how far her story has spread, and I will go to see you about it at five o'clock, unless you prefer that I should go at once to see Monsieur Nougarede."

"Begin with me, and we will go together to see him, if there is occasion. I am going to write to him."

"If I understand Monsieur Nougarde's plan, it seems that it rests on Madame Dammauville's appearance in court. Will this appearance be possible? That is what I could not learn; only a physician could tell."

Saniel did not wish to let it appear that he understood this new challenge.

"I forgot to tell you," Phillis continued, "that the physician who attends her is Doctor Balzajette of the Rue de l'Echelle. Do you know him?"

"A prig, who conceals his ignorance under dignified manners."

No sooner had these words left his lips than he realized his error. Madame Dammauville should have an excellent physician, one who was so high in the estimation of his ‘confreres’ that, if he did not cure her, it was because she was incurable.

“Then how can you hope that he will cure her in time for her to go to court?” Phillis asked.

He did not answer, and rose to go. Timidly, Madame Cormier repeated her invitation, but he did not accept it, in spite of the tender glance that Phillis gave him.

CHAPTER XXVII. A NEW PERIL

Would he be able to resist the pressure which from all sides at once pushed him toward the Rue Sainte Anne?

It seemed that nothing was easier than not to commit the folly of yielding, and yet such was the persistence of the efforts that were united against him, that he asked himself if, one day, he would not be led to obey them in spite of himself. Phillis, Nougarede, Madame Cormier. Now, whence would come a new attack?

For several months he had enjoyed a complete security, which convinced him that all danger was over forever. But all at once this danger burst forth under such conditions that he must recognize that there could never more be any security for him. To-day Madame Dammauville menaced him; tomorrow it would be some one else. Who? He did not know. Every one. And it was the anguish of his position to be condemned to live hereafter in fear, and on the defensive, without repose, without forgetfulness.

But it was not tomorrow about which he need be uneasy at this moment, it was the present hour; that is to say, Madame Dammauville.

That she should say, with so much firmness at the sight of a single portrait, that the man who drew the curtains was not Florentin, she must have an excellent memory of the eyes; at the same time a resolute mind and a decision in her ideas, which permitted her to affirm without hesitation what she believed to be true.

If they should ever meet, she would recognize him, and recognizing him, she would speak.

Would she be believed?

This was the decisive question, and from what he had heard of her, it seemed that she would be.

Denials would not suffice. He did not go to Caffie’s at a quarter past five. Where was he at this moment? What witness could he call upon? Caffie’s wound was made by a hand skilled in killing, and this learned hand was his, more even than that of a murderer. Every one knew that his position at that moment was desperate, financially speaking; and, suddenly, he paid his debts. Who would believe the Monte Carlo story?

One word, one little hint, from this Madame Dammauville and he was lost, without defence, without possible struggles.

Truly, and fortunately, since she was paralyzed and confined to her bed, he ran no risk of meeting her face to face at the corner of a street, or at the house of an acquaintance, nor of hearing the cry of surprise that she would not fail to give on recognizing him. But that was not enough to make him sleep in an imprudent security on saying to himself that this meeting was improbable. It was improbable, also, to admit that some one was exactly opposite to Caffies window at the moment when he drew the curtains; more improbable yet to believe that this fact, insignificant in itself, that this vision, lasting only an instant, would be so solidly engraved in a woman’s memory as to be distinctly remembered after several months, as if it dated from the previous evening; and yet, of all these improbabilities, there was formed a reality which enclosed him in such a way that at any moment it might stifle him.

Despite the importunities of Phillis, Madame Cormier, and Nougarede, and of all those which might arise, he would not be fool enough to confront the danger of a recognition in the room where this

paralytic was confined—at least, that was probable, for, after what had happened, he was certain of nothing—but this recognition might take place elsewhere.

In Nougarede's plan Madame Dammauville would come to court to make her declaration; he himself was a witness; they would, therefore, at a given moment, meet each other, and it was not impossible that before the court the recognition would occur with a 'coup de theatre' very different from that arranged by Nougarede.

Without doubt there were chances that Madame Dammauville would not be able to leave her bed to go to court; but were there only one for her leaving it, he must foresee it and take precautions.

A single one offered security: to render himself unrecognizable; to cut his beard and hair; to be no more the long-haired, curled, blond-bearded man that she remembered. Had he been like every one else she would not have remarked him; or, at least, she would have confounded him with others. A man can only permit himself to be original in appearance when he is sure beforehand that he will never have anything to fear.

Assuredly, nothing was easier than to have his hair and beard cut; he had only to enter the first barber shop he came to; in a few minutes the change would be radical.

Among his acquaintances he need not be uneasy at the curiosity that this change might produce; more than one would not remark it, and those who would be surprised at first would soon cease to think of it, without doubt; otherwise, he had an easy answer for them; on the eve of becoming a serious personage, he abandoned the last eccentricities of the old student, and passed the bridge without wish to return by the left bank.

But it was not only to acquaintances that he must account; there were Phillis and Nougarde. Had not the latter already remarked the resemblance between him and the description, and would it not be imprudent to lead him to ask why this resemblance suddenly disappeared?

It would be dangerous to expose himself to this question from the lawyer, but it would be much more dangerous coming from Phillis. Nougarede would only show surprise; Phillis might ask for an explanation.

And he must reply to her so much the more clearly, because four or five times already he had almost betrayed himself as to Madame Dammauville, and if she had let his explanations or embarrassment pass, his hesitations or his refusal, without questioning him frankly, certainly she was not the less astonished. Should he appear before her with short hair and no beard, it would be a new astonishment which, added to the others, would establish suspicions; and logically, by the force of things, in spite of herself, in spite of her love and her faith, she would arrive at conclusions from which she would not be able to free herself. Already, five or six months before, this question of long hair and beard had been agitated between them. As he complained one day of the bourgeois who would not come to him, she gently explained to him that to please and attract these bourgeois it was, perhaps, not quite well to astonish those whom one does not shock. That overcoats less long, hats with less brim, and hair and beard shorter; in fact, a general appearance that more nearly approached their own, would be, perhaps, more agreeable. He became angry, and replied plainly that such concessions were not in keeping with his character. How could he now abruptly make these concessions, and at a time when his success at the examinations placed him above such small compromises? He resisted when he needed help, and when a patient was an affair of life or death to him; he yielded when he had need of no one, and when he did not care for patients. The contradiction was truly too strong, and such that it could not but strike Phillis, whose attention had already had only too much to arouse it.

And yet, as dangerous as it was to come to the decision to make himself unrecognizable, it would be madness on his part to draw back; the sooner the better. His fault had been in not foreseeing, the day after Caffie's death, that circumstances might arise sooner or later which would force it upon him. At that moment it did not present the same dangers as now; but parting from the idea that he had not been seen by any one, that he could not have been seen, he had rejoiced in the security that this conviction gave him, and quietly become benumbed.

The awakening had come; with his eyes open he saw the abyss to the edge of which his stupidity had brought him.

How strong would he not be if during the last three months he had not had this long hair and beard, which was most terrible testimony against him? Instead of taking refuge in miserable makeshifts when Phillis and Nougarede asked him to see Madame Dammauville, he would have boldly held his own, and have gone to see her as they wished. In that case he would be saved, and soon Florentin would be also.

And he believed himself intelligent! And he proudly imagined he could arrange things beforehand so well that he would never be surprised! What he should have foreseen would come to pass, nothing more; the lesson that experience taught him was hard, and this was not the first one; the evening of Caffie's death he saw very clearly that a new situation opened before him, which to the end of his life would make him the prisoner of his crime. To tell the truth, however, this impression became faint soon enough; but now it was stronger than ever, and to a certainty, never to be dismissed again.

But it was useless to look behind; it was the present and the future that he must measure with a clear and firm glance, if he did not wish to be lost.

After carefully examining and weighing the question, he decided to have his hair and beard cut. However adventurous this resolution was, however embarrassing it might become in provoking curiosity and questions, it was the only way of escaping a possible recognition.

Mechanically, by habit, he bent his steps toward the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, where his barber lived, but he had taken only a few steps when reflection caused him to stop; it would be certainly a mistake to provoke the gossip of this man who, knew him, and who, for the pleasure of talking, would tell every one in the quarter that he had just cut the hair and beard of Dr. Saniel. He returned to the boulevard, where he was not known.

But as he was about to open the door of the shop which he decided to enter, he changed his mind. He happened to find the explanation that he must give Phillis, and as he wished to avoid the surprise that she would not fail to show if she saw him suddenly without hair and beard, he would give this explanation before having them cut, in such a way that all at once and without looking for another reason, she would understand that this operation was indispensable.

And he went to dinner, furious with himself and with things, to see to what miserable expedients he was reduced.

CHAPTER XXVIII. SANIEL VISITS A BARBER

The following day at five o'clock when Phillis rang, he opened the door for her. Hardly had she entered when she was about to throw herself into his arms as usual, with a quickness that told how happy she was to see him. But he checked her with his hand.

"What is the matter?" she asked paralyzed and full of fears.

"Nothing; or, at least nothing much."

"Against me?"

"Certainly not, dear one."

"You are ill?"

"No, not ill, but I must take precautions which prevent me from embracing you. I will explain; do not be uneasy, it is not serious."

"Quick!" she cried, examining him, and trying to anticipate his thought.

"You have something to tell me?"

"Yes, good news. But I beg of you, speak first; do not leave me in suspense."

"I assure you that you need not be uneasy; and when I speak thus, you know that you should believe me. You see that I am not uneasy."

"It is for others that you are alarmed, never for yourself."

"Do you know what the pelagre is?"

"No."

"It is a special disease of the hair and beard, due to the presence in the epidermis of a kind of mushroom. Well, it is probable that I have this disease."

"Is it serious?"

"Troublesome for a man, but disastrous for a woman, because, before any treatment, the hair must be cut. You understand, therefore, that if I have the pelagre, as I believe I have, I am not going to expose you to the risk of catching it in embracing you. It is very easily transmitted, and in that case you would be obliged, probably, to do for yourself what I must do for myself; that is, to cut my hair. With me it is of no consequence; but with you it would be murder to sacrifice your beautiful hair."

"You say 'probably.'"

"Because I am not yet quite certain that I have the pelagre. For about two weeks I have felt a slight itching in my head and, naturally, I paid no attention to it. I had other things to do; and besides, I was not going to believe I was attacked with a parasitic malady merely on account of an itching. But, after some time, my hair became dry and began to fall out. I had no time to attend to it, and the days passed; besides, the excitement of my examinations was enough to make my hair fall. To-day, just before you came, I had a few minutes to spare, and I examined one of my hairs through a microscope; if I had not been disturbed I should have finished by this time."

"Continue your examination."

"It would take some time to do it thoroughly. If it is really the pelagre, as I have reason to believe, tomorrow you will see me without hair and beard. I would not hesitate, in spite of the astonishment that my appearance would cause."

"What good will that do?"

"I cannot tell people that I had my hair and beard cut because I have a parasitic disease. Every one knows it is contagious."

"When the hair is cut, what will become of the disease?"

"With energetic treatment it will rapidly disappear. Before long you may embrace me if—you do not find me too ugly."

"O dearest!"

"And now for you; you have come from Madame Dammauville?"

He did not need to persist; Phillis accepted his story so readily that he felt reassured on her side; she would not alarm herself about it. As for others, the embarrassment of confessing a contagious malady would be a sufficient explanation, if he were ever obliged to furnish one.

"What did she say to you?" he asked.

"Good and kind words to begin with, which show what an excellent woman she is. After having presented myself twice at her house yesterday, you understand that I was not quite easy on asking her to receive me again to-day. As I tried to excuse myself, she said she was glad to see my devotion to my brother, that I need never excuse myself for asking her assistance, and that she would help me all she could. With this encouragement I explained what we want her to do, but she did not appear disposed to do it. Without giving her Monsieur Nougarede's reasons, I said we were obliged to conform to the counsels of those who directed the affair, and I begged her to help us. Finally she was won over, but reluctantly, and said she would do as we wished. But she could not assure me that her servants had not talked about it, nor could she promise to leave her bed to go to court, for she had not left her room for a year."

"Does she expect to be able to rise soon?"

"I repeat her words, to which I paid great attention in order not to forget them: 'I am promised that I shall be better next year, but who can tell? I will urge my doctor to give me an answer, and when you come again I will tell you what he says.' Profiting by the door that she opened to me, I kept the conversation on this doctor. It seems to me, but I am not certain, that she has but little confidence in him. He was the classmate of her husband and of her brother-in-law the notary; he is the friend of every one, curing those who can be cured, or letting them die by accident. You see what kind of a doctor he is."

"I told you I knew him."

"See if I deceive myself, and to what I tell you, add what you already know. Frightened to see in whose hands she is, I undertook to find out, and finished by learning—without asking her directly—that she has seen no other physician during the year. When she was taken with paralysis a consultation was held, and she has had Doctor Balzajette ever since. She says he is very kind, and takes care of her as well as another would."

Saniel improved the opportunity to refer to his stupidity in frankly expressing his opinion on the solemn Balzajette.

"It is probable," he said.

"It is certain? Do you believe that during one year nothing has appeared in Madame Dammauville's disease that should demand new treatment? Do you think the solemn Balzajette is incapable of finding it all by himself?"

"He is not so dull as you suppose."

"It is you who speak of dulness."

"To diagnose a disease and to treat it are two things. It is the consultation you speak of that settled the question of Madame Dammauville's disease, and prescribed the treatment that Balzajette had only to apply; and his capacity, I assure you, is sufficient for this task."

As she appeared but little reassured, he persisted, for it would be an imprudence to let Phillis become enamored of the idea that if he attended Madame Dammauville, he would cure her, even if it required a miracle.

"We have some time before us, since the 'ordonnance de renvoi' before the assizes is not yet given out. Madame Dammauville has promised to question her doctor, to learn if he hopes to put her in condition to leave her bed soon. Let us wait, therefore."

"Would it not be better to act than to wait?"

"At least let us wait for news from Balzajette. Either it will be satisfactory, and then we shall have nothing to do, or it will not be, and in that case I promise you to see Balzajette. I know him well enough to speak to him of your patient, which, above all, enables me, in making your brother intervene, to interest myself openly in his reestablishment."

"O dearest, dearest!" she murmured, in a spirit of gratitude.

"You cannot doubt my devotion to you first, and to your brother afterward. You asked me an impossible thing, that I was obliged to refuse, to my regret, precisely because it was impossible; but you know that I am yours, and will do all I can for your family."

"Forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive; in your place I should think as you do, but I believe that in mine you would act as I do."

"Be sure that I have never had an idea of blame in my heart for what is with you an affair of dignity. It is because you are high and proud that I love you so passionately."

She rose.

"Are you going?" he asked.

"I want to carry Madame Dammauville's words to mamma; you can imagine with what anguish she awaits me."

"Let us, go. I will leave you at the boulevard to go to see Nougarede."

The interview with the advocate was short.

"You see, dear friend, that my plan is good; bring Madame Dammauville to court, and we shall have some pleasant moments."

This time Saniel had not the hesitation of the previous evening, and he entered the first barber-shop he saw. When he returned to his rooms he lighted two candles, and placing them on the mantle, he looked at himself in the glass.

Coquetry had never been his sin, and often weeks passed without his looking in a mirror, so indifferent was he when making his toilet. However, as a young boy he sometimes looked in his small glass, asking himself what he would become, and he could now recall his looks—an energetic face with clearly drawn features, a physiognomy open and frank, without being pretty, but not disagreeable. His beard had concealed all this; but now that it was gone, he said to himself without much reflection that he would find again, without doubt, the boy he remembered.

What he saw in the glass was a forehead lined transversely; oblique eyebrows, raised at the inside extremity, and a mouth with tightened lips turned down at the corners; furrows were hollowed in the cheeks; and the whole physiognomy, harassed, ravaged, expressed hardness.

What had become of that of the young man of other days? He had before him the man that life had made, and of whom the violent contractions of the muscles of the face had modelled the expression.

"Truly, the mouth of an assassin!" he murmured.

Then, looking at his shaved head, he added with a smile:

"And perhaps that of one condemned to death, whose toilet has just been made for the guillotine."

CHAPTER XXIX. A BROKEN NEGATIVE

To have made himself unrecognizable was, without doubt, a safe precaution; but having started on this course, he would not be easy until he had destroyed all traces of himself in such a way that Madame Dammauville would never be able to find the man that she had seen so clearly under Caffie's lamp.

Precisely because he was not vain and had no pretension to beauty, he had escaped the photograph mania. Once only he had been photographed in spite of himself, simply to oblige a classmate who had abandoned medicine for photography.

But now this once was too much, for there was danger that this portrait taken three years before, and showing him with the hair and beard that he wished to suppress, might be discovered. Without doubt there were few chances that a copy of it would be seen by Madame Dammauville; but if there existed only one against a hundred thousand, he must arrange it so that he need have no fear.

He had had a dozen copies of this photograph, but as his relatives were few, he kept the majority of them. One he sent to his mother, who was living at that time; another went to the priest of his village, and later he had given one to Phillis. He must, then, have nine in his possession. He found them and burned them immediately.

Of the three that remained, only one might testify against him, the one belonging to Phillis. But it would be easy for him to get it again on inventing some pretext, while as to the others, truly he had nothing to fear.

The real danger might come from the photographer, who perhaps had some of the photographs, and who undoubtedly preserved the negative. This was his first errand the next day.

On entering the studio of this friend, he experienced a disagreeable feeling, which troubled him and made him uneasy; he had not given his name, and counting on the change made by the cutting of his

hair and beard, he said to himself that his friend, who had not seen him for a long time, certainly would not recognize him.

He had taken but a few steps, his hat in his hand, like a stranger who is about to accost another, when the photographer came toward him with outstretched hand, and a friendly smile on his face.

"You, my dear friend! What good fortune is worth the pleasure of your visit tome? Can I be useful to you in any way?"

"You recognize me, then?"

"What! Do I recognize you? Do you ask that because you have cut your hair and beard? Certainly it changes you and gives you a new physiognomy; but I should be unworthy of my business if, by a different arrangement of the hair, I could not recognize you.

"Besides, eyes of steel like yours are not forgotten; they are a description and a signature."

Then this means in which he placed so much confidence was only a new imprudence, as the question, "You recognize me, then?" was a mistake.

"Come, I will pose you at once," the photographer said. "Very curious, this shaved head, and still more interesting, I think, than with the beard and long hair. The traits of character are more clearly seen."

"It is not for a new portrait that I have come, but for the old one. Have you any of the proofs?"

"I think not, but I will see. In any case, if you wish some they are easily made, since I have the plate."

"Will you look them up? For I have not a single proof left of those you gave me, and on looking at myself in the glass this morning I found such changes between my face of to-day and that of three years ago, that I would like to study them. Certain ideas came to me on the expression of the physiognomy, that I wish to study, with something to support them."

The search for the proofs made by an assistant led to no results; there were no proofs.

"Exactly; and for several days I have thought of making some," the photographer said. "Because your day of glory will come, when your portrait will be in a distinguished place in the shop-windows and collections. Every one talks of your 'concours'. Although I have abandoned medicine without the wish to return to it, I have not become indifferent to what concerns it, and I learned of your success. Which portrait shall we put in circulation? The old or the new?"

"The new."

"Then let us arrange the pose."

"Not to-day; it is only yesterday that I was shaved, fearing an attack of pelagre, and the skin covered by the beard has a crude whiteness that will accentuate the hardness of my physiognomy, which is really useless. We will wait until the air has tanned me a little, and then I will return, I promise you."

"How many proofs do you want of your old portrait?"

"One will do."

"I will send you a dozen."

"Do not take the trouble; I will take them when I come to pose. But in the mean time, could you not show me the plate?"

"Nothing easier."

When it was brought, Saniel took the glass plate with great care, holding it with the tips of his fingers by the two opposite corners, in order not to efface the portrait. Then, as he was standing in the shadow of a blue curtain, he walked towards the chimney where the light was strong, and began his examination.

"It is very good," he said; "very curious."

"Only a photograph can have this documentary value."

To compare this document with the reality, Saniel approached the chimney more closely, above which was a mirror. When his feet touched the marble hearth he stopped, looking alternately at the plate which he held carefully in his hands, and at his face reflected in the glass. Suddenly he made an

exclamation; he let fall the plate, which, falling flat on the marble, broke into little pieces that flew here and there.

"How awkward I am!"

He showed a vexation that should not leave the smallest doubt in the photographer's mind as to its truth.

"You must get one of the proofs that you have given away," his friend said, "for I have not a single one left."

"I will try and find one."

What he did try to find on leaving was whether or no he had succeeded in rendering himself unrecognizable, for he could not trust to this experience, weakened by the fact that this old friend was a photographer. With him it was a matter of business to note the typical traits that distinguish one face from another, and in a long practice he had acquired an accuracy Madame Dammauville could not possess.

Among the persons he knew, it seemed to him that the one in the best condition to give certainty to the proof was Madame Cormier. He knew at this hour she would be alone, and as she had not been, assuredly, warned by her daughter that he intended to shave, the experiment would be presented in a way to give a result as exact as possible.

In answer to his ring Madame Cormier opened the door, and he saluted her without being recognized; but as the hall was dark this was not of great significance. His hat in his hand, he followed her into the dining-room without speaking, in order that his voice should not betray him.

Then, after she had looked at him a moment, with uneasy surprise at first, she began to smile.

"It is Doctor Saniel!" she cried. "Mon Dieu! How stupid of me not to recognize you; it changes you so much to be shaved! Pardon me."

"It is because I am shaved that I come to ask a favor."

"Of us, my dear sir? Ah! Speak quickly; we should be so happy to prove our gratitude."

"I would ask Mademoiselle Phillis to give me, if she has it, a photograph that I gave her about a year ago."

As Phillis wished the liberty to expose this photograph frankly, in order to have it always before her, she had asked for it, and Saniel had given it to her, in her mother's presence.

"If she has it!" exclaimed Mme. Cormier. "Ah! my dear sir, you do not know the place that all your goodness, and the services that you have rendered us, have made for you in our hearts."

And passing into the next room, she brought a small velvet frame in which was the photograph. Saniel took it out, on explaining the study for which he wanted it, and after promising to bring it back soon, he returned to his rooms.

Decidedly, everything was going well. The plate was destroyed, Phillis's proof in his hands; he had nothing more to fear from this side. As to the experiment made on the mother, it was decisive enough to inspire him with confidence. If Madame Cormier, who had seen him so often and for so long a time, and who thought of him at every instant, did not recognize him, how was it possible that Madame Dammauville, who had only seen him from a distance and for a few seconds, could recognize him after several months?

Would he never accustom himself to the idea that his life could not have the tranquil monotony of a bourgeois existence, that it would experience shocks and storms, but that if he knew how to remain always master of his force and will, it would bring him to a safe port?

The calm that was his before this vexation came back to him, and when the last proofs of his concours, confirming the success of the first, had given him the two titles that he so ardently desired and pursued at the price of so many pains, so many efforts and privations, he could enjoy his triumph in all security.

He held the present in his strong hands, and the future was his.

Now he could walk straight, boldly, his head high, jostling those who annoyed him, according to his natural temperament.

Although these last months had been full of terrible agitation for him, on account of everything connected with the affair of Caffie and Florentin, and above all, on account of the fatigue, emotion, and the fever of his ‘concours’, yet he had not interrupted his special works for a day or even an hour, and his experiments followed for so many years had at length produced important results, that prudence alone prevented him from publishing. In opposition to the official teaching of the school, these discoveries would have caused the hair to stand upright on the old heads; and it was not the time, when he asked permission to enter, to draw upon himself the hostility of these venerable doorkeepers, who would bar the way to a revolutionist. But, now that he was in the place for ten or twelve years, he need take no precautions, either for persons or for ideas, and he might speak.

CHAPTER XXX. PHILLIS PRECIPITATES MATTERS

Saniel saw his colleague, the solemn Balzajette, and so adroitly as not to provoke surprise or suspicion, he spoke of Madame Dammauville, in whom he was interested incidentally; without persisting, and only to justify his question, he explained the nature of this interest.

Although solemn, Balzajette was not the less a gossip, and it was his solemnity that made him gossip. He listened to himself talk, and when, his chest bulging, his pink chin freshly shaved resting on his white cravat, his be-ringed hand describing in the air noble and demonstrative gestures, one could, if one had the patience to listen to him, make him say all that one wished; for he was convinced that his interlocutor passed an agreeable moment, whose remembrance would never be forgotten. His patients might wait in pain or anguish, he did not hasten the majestic delivery of his high-sounding phrases with choice adjectives; and unless it was to go to a dinner-party, which he did at least five days in the week, he could not leave you until after he had made you partake of the admiration that he professed for himself.

It was to an affection of the spinal cord that Mme. Dammauville’s paralysis was due, and consequently it was perfectly curable; even Balzajette was astonished that with his treatment and his care the cure was delayed.

“But what shall I say to you, young ‘confrere’? You know better than I that with women everything is possible—above all the impossible.”

And during a half-hour he complaisantly related the astonishment that the fashionable women under his care had caused him, in spite of his knowledge and experience.

“Well, to resume, what shall I tell you, young ‘confrere’?”

And he repeated and explained what he had already said and explained.

Although Balzajette read only a morning paper, and never opened a book, he had heard of Saniel’s reputation, and because he was young he thought he might manage this ‘confrere’, who seemed destined to make a good position. In spite of the high esteem that he professed for his own merits and person, he vaguely felt that the doctors of his generation who were eminent did not treat him with all the consideration that he accorded himself, and in order to teach his ancient comrades a lesson, he was glad to enter into friendly relations with a young one ‘dans le mouvement’. He would speak of his young confrere Saniel: “You know the one who was appointed ‘agrege’,” and he would relate the advice that he, Balzajette, had given him.

That Madame Dammauville would be well enough to go to court Saniel doubted, above all, after Balzajette had explained his treatment; and as far as he was concerned, he could not but rejoice. Doubtless, it would be hard for Florentin not to have this testimony, and not to profit by the ‘coup de theatre’ prepared by Nougarede; but for himself, he could only feel happy over it. In spite of all the precautions he had taken, it would be better not to expose himself to a meeting with Madame

Dammauville in the witness-chamber, or even in court. They must depend upon a letter supported by Balzajette's deposition, and Florentin would be not the less acquitted. Only Nougarede would have to regret his 'coup de theatre'. But the satisfaction or disappointment of Nougarede was nothing to him.

But he did not tell Phillis the ideas suggested by his interview with Balzajette; he summed up the conclusions of this interview. Balzajette said that Madame Dammauville would soon be on her feet, and one might have faith in his word; Florentin would be saved, and there was nothing to do but to let things go on as they were going.

Phillis, Madame Cormier, Nougarede, Florentin himself, whom the Mazas cell had reconciled neither with hope nor with providential justice, were all delighted with this idea.

Also, when the chamber of the prosecution sent Florent to the assizes, the emotion of Madame Cormier and Phillis would not be too violent. Madame Dammauville would be in a state to make her deposition, since the evening before she had been able to leave her bed; and although she left it for only an hour, and then to go from her bedroom to her parlor, that was enough. Nougarede said that the affair would come on at the second session in April; between then and now Madame Dammauville would be solid enough on her legs to appear before the jury and carry the acquittal.

To Phillis, Saniel repeated that the cure was certain, and to her, also, he rejoiced aloud. But he was troubled about this cure. This meeting, only the idea of which had alarmed him to the point of losing his head, would be brought about, and under conditions that could not but affect him. Truly, the precautions he had taken should reassure him, but after all there remained no less a troublesome uncertainty. Who could tell? He preferred that she should not leave her room, and that Nougarede should find a way to obtain her deposition without taking her to court; he would then feel more reassured, more calm in mind, and with a more impassive face he could go to court.

Was he really unrecognizable? This was the question that beset him now. Many times he compared his reflection in the glass with the photograph that he had given Phillis. The hair and beard were gone, but his eyes of steel, as his friend said, still remained, and nothing could change them. He might wear blue eyeglasses, or injure himself in a chemical experiment and wear a bandage. But such a disguise would provoke curiosity and questions just so much more dangerous, because it would coincide with the disappearance of his hair and beard.

But these fears did not torment him long, for Phillis, who now passed a part of every day in the Rue Sainte-Anne with Madame Dammauville, came one evening in despair, and told him that that day the invalid had been able to leave her bed for a few minutes only.

Then she would not go to court.

This apprehension of meeting Madame Dammauville face to face had begun to exasperate him; he felt like a coward in yielding to it, and since he had not the force to shake it off, he was happy to be relieved from it by the intervention of chance, which, after having been against him so long, now became favorable. The wheel turned.

"See Madame Dammauville often," he said to Phillis, "and note all that she feels; perhaps I shall find some way to repair this impediment, something that I may suggest to Balzajette without his suspecting it. Besides, it is reasonable to believe that the recrudescence of cold that we are suffering from now may have something to do with the change in her condition; it is probable that with the mild spring weather she may improve."

He hoped by this counsel to quiet Phillis's uneasiness and to gain time. But it had the opposite effect. In her anguish, which increased as the time for the trial approached, it was not probabilities, any more than the uncertain influence of the spring, that Phillis could depend on; she must have something more and better; but fearing a refusal, she forbore to tell him what she hoped to obtain.

It was only when she had succeeded that she spoke.

Every day, on leaving Madame Dammauville, she came to tell him what she had learned, and for three successive days her story was the same:

"She was not able to leave her bed."

And each day he made the same reply:

"It is the cold weather. Surely, we shall soon have a change; this frost and wind will not continue beyond the end of March."

He was pained at her desolation and anguish, but what could he do? It was not his fault that this relapse occurred at a decisive moment; fate had been against him long enough, and he was not going to counteract it at the time when it seemed to take his side, by yielding to the desire that Phillis dared not express, but which he divined, and by going to see Madame Dammauville.

When she entered his office on the fourth day, he knew at once by her manner that something favorable to Florentin had happened.

"Madame Dammauville is up," he said.

"No."

"I thought she must be, by your vivacity and lightness." "It is because I am happy; Madame Dammauville wishes to consult you."

He took her hands roughly and shook them.

"You have done that!" he exclaimed.

She looked at him frightened.

"You! You!" he repeated with increasing fury.

"At least listen to me," she murmured. "You will see that I have not compromised you in anything."

Compromised! It was professional dignity of which he thought, truly!

"I do not want to listen to you; I shall not go."

"Do not say that."

"It only needed that you should dispose of me in your own way."

"Victor!"

Anger carried him away.

"I belong to you, then! I am your thing! You do with me what you wish! You decide, and I have only to obey! There is too much of this! You can go; everything is at an end between us."

She listened, crushed; but this last word, which struck her in her love, gave her strength. In her turn she took his hands, and although he wished to withdraw them, she held them closely in her own.

"You may throw in my face all the angry words you please; you may reproach me as much as you think I deserve it, and I will not complain. Without doubt, I have done you wrong, and I feel the weight of it on seeing how profoundly you are wounded; but to send me away, to tell me that all is over between us, no, Victor, you will not do that. You will not say it, for you know that never was a man loved as I love you, adored, respected. And voluntarily, deliberately, even to save my brother, that I should have compromised you!"

He pushed her from him.

"Go!" he said harshly.

She threw herself on her knees, and taking his hands that he had withdrawn, she kissed them passionately.

"But listen to me," she cried. "Before condemning me, hear my defence. Even if I were a hundred times more guilty than I really am, you could not drive me from you with this unmerciful hardness."

"Go!"

"You lose your head; anger carries you away. What is the matter? It is impossible that I, by my stupidity, through my fault, could put you in such a state of mad exasperation. What is the matter, my beloved?"

These few words did more than Phillis's despair of her expressions of love. She was right, he lost his head. And however guilty she might be towards him, it was evident that she could not admit that the fault she committed threw him into this access of furious folly. It was not natural; and in his words and actions all must be natural, all must be capable of explanation.

"Very well, speak!" he said. "I am listening to you. Moreover, it is better to know. Speak!"

CHAPTER XXXI. THE APPOINTMENT

"You should understand," she said with a little more calmness—for, since he permitted her to speak, she hoped to convince him—"that I have done all I could to bring Madame Dammauville to the idea of calling, in consultation with Monsieur Balzajette, a doctor—"

"Which would be myself."

"You or another; I have not mentioned any name. You should not think me awkward enough to put you forward clumsily; it would not be a good way to make you acceptable to an intelligent woman, and I value your dignity too much to lower it. I believed that another doctor than Monsieur Balzajette would find a remedy, some way, a miracle if you will, to enable Madame Dammauville to go to the Palais de justice, and I said it. I said it in every tone, in every way, with as much persuasion as I could put in my words. Was it not the life of my brother that I defended, our honor? At first, I found Madame Dammauville much opposed to this idea. She would be better soon, she felt it. Otherwise, if it were her duty to be carried to the Palais de justice, she would not hesitate."

"She would do that?"

"Assuredly. No one has a stronger sense of justice. She would feel guilty did she not give her testimony to save an innocent person; not to save him when she could would be to take the responsibility of his loss. It is therefore certain that if she cannot go to court alone, she will do all she can to go, no matter how—on M. Balzajette's arm, or on a stretcher. I was, then, easy enough on this side, but I was not for the stretcher. What would people think to see her in this condition? What impression would she make on the jury? Would not her appearance weaken the value of her testimony? As Madame Dammauville is fond of me, and very kind to me, I determined to profit by this kindness to urge a consultation, but without mentioning any name. I represented to her that, since M. Balzajette might say with every appearance of truth he had cured her, he should not be angry if she desired to ratify this cure. That besides, there was an imperative motive that would not permit her to wait, for it would be very disagreeable to her to present herself at the court of assizes in a theatrical way, which was not at all according to her character or habits. I easily discovered that the fear of giving pain to this old friend of her husband was the chief reason why she was opposed to this consultation. It was then that your name was pronounced."

"You acknowledge it, then?"

"You will see how, and you will not be angry about it. I have often spoken to Madame Dammauville of mamma, and, consequently, of how you cured her paralysis, that resembled hers. It was not wrong, was it, to say what you have done for us? And without letting any one suspect my love, I could praise you, which my gratitude prompted. She asked me many questions, and naturally, as usual when I speak of you, when I have the joy of pronouncing your name, I answered in detail. That is not a crime?"

She waited a moment, looking at him. Without softening the hardness of his glance, he made a sign to her to continue.

"When I persisted on the consultation, Madame Dammauville recalled what I had said, and she was the first—you hear?—the first to pronounce your name. As you had cured my mother, I had the right to praise you. With a nature like hers, she would not have understood if I had not done it; she would have believed me ungrateful. I spoke of your book on the diseases of the spinal cord, which was quite natural; and as she manifested a desire to read it, I offered to lend it to her."

"Was that natural?"

"With any but Madame Dammauville, no; but she is not frivolous. I took the book to her two days ago, and she has just told me that, after reading it, she has decided to send for you."

"I shall certainly not go; she has her own physician."

"Do not imagine that I have come to ask you to pay her a visit; all is arranged with Monsieur Balzajette, who will write to you or see you, I do not know which."

"That will be very extraordinary on the part of Balzajette!"

"Perhaps you judge him harshly. When Madame Dammauville spoke to him of you he did not raise the smallest objection; on the contrary, he praised you. He says that you are one of the rare young men in whom one may have confidence. These are his own words that Madame Dammauville told me."

"What do I care for the opinion of this old beast!"

"I am explaining how it happens that you are called into consultation; it is not because I spoke of you, but because you have inspired Monsieur Balzajette with confidence. However stupid he may be, he is just to you, and knows your value."

It was come then, the time for the meeting that he did not wish to believe possible; and it was brought about in such a way that he did not see how he could escape it. He might refuse Phillis; but Balzajette? A colleague called him in consultation, and why should he not go? Had he foreseen this blow he would have left Paris until the trial was over, but he was taken unawares. What could he say to justify a sudden absence? He had no mother or brothers who might send for him, and with whom he would be obliged to remain. Besides, he wished to go to court; and since his testimony would carry considerable weight with the jury, it was his duty to be present on account of Florentin. It would be a contemptible cowardice to fail in this duty, and more, it would be an imprudence. In the eyes of the world he must appear to have nothing to fear, and this assurance, this confidence in himself, was one of the conditions of his safety. Now, if he went to court, and from every point of view it was impossible that he should not go, he would meet Madame Dammauville, as she intended to be carried there if she were unable to go in any other way. Whether it was at her house, or at the Palais de justice, the meeting was then certain, and in spite of what he had done, circumstances stronger than his will had prepared it and brought it about; nothing that he could do would prevent it.

The only question that deserved serious consideration just now was to know where this meeting would be the least dangerous for him—at Madame Dammauville's or at the Palais?

He reflected silently, paying no more attention to Phillis than if she were not present, his eyes fixed, his brow contracted, his lips tightly closed, when the doorbell rang. As Joseph was at his post, Saniel did not move.

"If it is a patient," Phillis said, who did not wish to go yet, "I will wait in the dining-room."

And she rose.

Before she could leave the room, Joseph entered.

"Doctor Balzajette," he said.

"You see!" Phillis cried.

Without replying, Saniel made a sign to Joseph to admit Doctor Balzajette, and while Phillis silently disappeared, he went toward the parlor.

Balzajette came forward with both hands extended.

"Good-day, my young 'confrere'. I am enchanted to meet you."

The reception was benevolent, amicable, and protecting, and Saniel replied at his best.

"Since we met the other day," Balzajette continued, "I have thought of you. And nothing more natural than that, for you inspired me with a quick sympathy. The first time you came to see me you pleased me immediately, and I told you you would make your way. Do you remember?"

Assuredly he remembered; and of all the visits that he made to the doctors and druggists of his quarter, that to Balzajette was the hardest. It was impossible to show more pride, haughtiness, and disdain than Balzajette had put into his reception of the then unknown young man.

"I told you what I thought of you," continued Balzajette. "It is with regard to this patient of whom you spoke to me; you remember?"

"Madame Dammauville?"

"Exactly. I put her on her feet, as I told you, but since then this bad weather has compelled her to take to her bed again. Without doubt, it is only an affair of a few days; but in the mean time, the poor woman is irritable and impatient. You know women, young 'confrere'. To calm this impatience, I spontaneously proposed a consultation, and naturally pronounced your name, which is well known by your fine work on the medullary lesions. I supported it, as was proper, with the esteem that it has acquired, and I have the satisfaction to see it accepted."

Saniel thanked him as if he believed in the perfect sincerity of this spontaneous proposition.

"I like the young, and whenever an occasion presents itself, I shall be happy to introduce you to my clientage. For Madame Dammauville, when can you go with me to see her?"

As Saniel appeared to hesitate, Balzajette, mistaking the cause of his silence, persisted.

"She is impatient," he said. "Let us go the first day that is possible."

He must reply, and in these conditions a refusal would be inexplicable.

"Will to-morrow suit you?" he asked.

"To-morrow, by all means. At what hour?"

Before replying, Saniel went to his desk and consulted an almanac, which appeared perfectly ridiculous to Balzajette.

"Does he imagine, the young 'confrere', that I am going to believe his time so fully occupied that he must make a special arrangement to give me an hour?"

But it was not an arrangement of this kind that Saniel sought. His almanac gave the rising and the setting of the sun, and it was the exact hour of sunset that he wished: "26 March, 6h. 20m." At this moment it would not be dark enough at Madame Dammauville's for lamps to be lighted, and yet it would be dark enough to prevent her from seeing him clearly in the uncertain light of evening.

"Will a quarter past six suit you? I will call for you at six o'clock."

"Very well. Only I shall ask you to be very exact; I have a dinner at seven o'clock in the Rue Royale."

Saniel promised promptness. The dinner was a favorable circumstance, enabling him to escape from Madame Dammauville's before the lamps would be lighted.

When Balzajette was gone, he rejoined Phillis in the dining-room.

"A consultation is arranged for to-morrow at six o'clock, at Madame Dammauville's."

She threw herself on his breast.

"I knew that you would forgive me."

CHAPTER XXXII. THE FATAL LIGHT

It was not without emotion that the next day Saniel saw the afternoon slip away, and although he worked to employ his time, he interrupted himself at each instant to look at the clock.

Sometimes he found the time passing quickly, and then all at once it seemed to stand still.

This agitation exasperated him, for calmness had never been more necessary than at this moment. A danger was before him, and it was only in being master of himself that he could be saved. He must have the coolness of a surgeon during an operation, the glance of a general in a battle; and the coolness and the glance were not found among the nervous and agitated.

Could he escape from this danger?

This was the question that he asked himself unceasingly, although he knew the uselessness of it. What good was it to study the chances for or against him?

Either he had succeeded in rendering himself unrecognizable or he had not; but it was done, and now he could do nothing more. He did the best he could in choosing an hour when the dim evening light put the chances on his side; for the rest he must trust to Fortune.

All day he studied the sky, because for the success of his plan it must be neither too bright nor too dark: if it were too bright Madame Dammauville could see him clearly; if it were too dark the lamps would be lighted. He remembered that it was by lamplight she had seen him. Until evening the weather was uncertain, with a sky sometimes sunny, sometimes cloudy; but at this hour the clouds were driven away by a wind from the north, and the weather became decidedly cold, with the pink and pale clearness of the end of March when it still freezes.

On examining himself he had the satisfaction to feel that he was calmer than in the morning, and that as the moment of attack approached, his agitation decreased; decision, firmness, and coolness came to him; he felt master of his will, and capable of obeying it.

At six o'clock precisely he rang at Balzajette's door, and they started immediately for the Rue Sainte-Anne. Happy to have a complaisant listener, Balzajette did all the talking, so that Saniel had only to reply "yes" or "no" from time to time, and of course it was not of Madame Dammauville that he spoke, but other matters—of a first representation on the previous evening at the Opera Comique; of politics; of the next salon.

At exactly a quarter past six they reached the house in the Rue Sainte-Anne, where Saniel had not been since Caffies death. On passing the old concierge's lodge he felt satisfied with himself; his heart did not beat too quickly, his ideas were firm and clear. Should danger arrive, he felt assured of mastery over himself, without excitement, as without brutality.

Balzajette rang the bell, and the door was opened by a maid, who was, evidently, placed in the vestibule to await their arrival. Balzajette entered first, and Saniel followed him, giving a hasty glance at the rooms through which they passed. They reached a door at which Balzajette knocked twice.

"Enter," replied a feminine voice in a firm tone.

This was the decisive moment; the day was everything that could be wished, neither too light nor too dark. What would Madame Dammauville's first glance mean?

"My confrere, Doctor Saniel," Balzajette said on going toward Madame Dammauville, and taking her hand.

She was lying on the little bed of which Phillis had spoken, but not against the windows, rather in the middle of the room, placed there evidently after the experience of a sick person who knows that to be examined she must be easily seen.

Profiting by this arrangement, Saniel immediately passed between the bed and the windows in such a way that the daylight was behind him, and consequently his face was in shadow. This was done naturally, without affectation, and it seemed that he only took this side of the bed because Balzajette took the other.

Directed by Saniel, the examination commenced with a clearness and a precision that pleased Balzajette. He did not lose himself in idle words, the young 'confrere', any more than in useless details. He went straight to the end, only asking and seeking the indispensable; and as Madame Dammauville's replies were as precise as his questions, while listening and putting in a word from time to time he said to himself that his dinner would not be delayed, which was the chief point of his preoccupation. Decidedly, he understood life, the young 'confrere'; he might be called in consultation with his heavy appearance and careless toilet, there was no danger of rivalry.

However, when Madame Dammauville began to speak of being sensitive to cold, Balzajette found that Saniel let her lose herself in minute details.

"Have you always been sensitive to cold?"

"Yes; and with a deplorable disposition to take cold if the temperature is lowered one or two degrees."

"Did you exercise in the open air?"

"Very little."

"Were you ever advised to try shower-baths of cold water?"

"I should not have been able to bear it."

"I must tell you," Balzajette interrupted, "that before occupying this house that belongs to her, Madame Dammauville lived in a more modern apartment which was heated by a furnace, and where consequently it was easier to maintain an even temperature to which she was accustomed."

"On coming to live in this house, where it is not possible to have a furnace," Madame Dammauville went on, "I employed every means to shelter me from the cold, which I am sure is my great enemy. You can see that I have had weather-strips put at the doors, as well as at the windows."

In spite of this invitation and the gesture which accompanied it, Saniel was careful not to turn his head toward the window; he kept his face in the shadow, contenting himself with looking at the door which was opposite to him.

"At the same time," she continued, "I had hangings put on the walls, carpets on the floors, thick curtains at the windows and doors, and in spite of the large fire in my fireplace, often I am unable to get warm."

"Do you also have a fire in this little stove?" Saniel asked, pointing to a small movable stove at the corner of the fireplace.

"Only at night, so that my servants need not get up every hour to replenish the fire in the chimney. The fire is made in the evening just before I go to sleep; the pipe is placed in the chimney, and it maintains sufficient heat until morning."

"I think it will be expedient to suppress this mode of heating, which must be very inconvenient," Saniel said; "and my 'confrere' and myself will consider the question whether it will not be possible to give you the heat you need with this chimney, without fatiguing your servants, and without waking you too often to take care of the fire. But let us continue."

When he reached the end of his questions he rose to examine the patient on her bed, but without turning round, and in such a way as still to keep his back to the light.

As little by little the reflection of the setting sun faded, Balzajette proposed asking for a lamp: without replying too hastily, Saniel refused; it was useless, the daylight was sufficient.

They passed into the parlor, where they very quickly came to an amicable conclusion, for at everything that Saniel said Balzajette replied:

"I am happy to see that you partake of my opinion. That is it. Truly, that is so!"

And, besides, each had his reasons for hurrying—Saniel, for fear of the lamps; Balzajette, uneasiness for his dinner. The diagnosis and the treatment were rapidly settled; Saniel proposed, Balzajette approved. The question of the movable stove was decided in two words: for the night a grate would be placed in the chimney; a fire of coal covered with damp coal-dust would keep the fire until morning.

"Let us return," Balzajette said, who took the initiative and decided on all material things.

Saniel, who kept his eyes on the windows, was calm; it was yet too light to need lamps, besides, during their tete-a-tete, no servant had crossed the salon to enter Madame Dammauville's room.

But when Balzajette opened the door to return to the patient, a flood of light filled the parlor and enveloped them. A lamp with a shade was placed on the little table near the bed, and two other lighted lamps with globes were on the mantel, reflecting their light in the mirror. How had he not foreseen that there was another door to Madame Dammauville's room besides the door from the parlor? But if he had foreseen it, it would not have lessened the danger of the situation.

He would have had time to prepare himself, that was all. But to prepare himself for what? Either to enter the room and brave this danger, or to fly. He entered.

"This is what we have decided," Balzajette said, who never lost an occasion to put himself forward and to speak.

While he spoke, Madame Dammauville seemed not to listen to him. Her eyes were on Saniel, placed between her and the chimney with his back to the lamps, and she looked at him with a characteristic fixedness.

Balzajette, who listened to himself, observed nothing; but Saniel, who knew what there was behind this glance, could not but be struck with it. Happily for him, he had only to let Balzajette talk, for if he had spoken he would surely have betrayed himself by the quivering of his voice.

However, Balzajette seemed coming to the end of his explanations. Suddenly Saniel saw Madame Dammauville extend her hand toward the lamp on the table, and raise the shade by lowering it toward her in such a way as to form a reflector that threw the light on him. At the same time he received a bright ray full on his face.

Madame Dammauville uttered a small, stifled cry.

Balzajette stopped; then his astonished eyes went from Madame Dammauville to Saniel, and front Saniel to Madame Dammauville.

“Are you suffering?” he asked.

“Not at all.”

What, then, was the matter? But it was seldom that he asked for an explanation of a thing that astonished him, preferring to divine and to explain it himself.

“Ah! I understand it,” he said with a satisfied smile.

“The youth of my young ‘confrere’ astonishes you. It is his fault. Why the devil did he have his long hair and his light curled beard cut?”

If Madame Dammauville had not released the lampshade, she would have seen Saniel turned pale and his lips quiver.

“Mais voila!” continued Balzajette. “He made this sacrifice to his new functions; the student has disappeared before the professor.”

He might have continued along time. Neither Madame Dammauville nor Saniel listened to him; but, thinking of his dinner, he was not going to launch into a discourse that at any other moment he would not have failed to undertake. He rose to go.

As Saniel bowed, Madame Dammauville stopped him with a movement of her hand.

“Did you not know this unfortunate who was assassinated opposite?” she asked, pointing to the windows.

So serious as was an acknowledgment, Saniel could not answer in the negative.

“I was called in to prove his death,” he said.

And he took several steps toward the door, but she stopped him again.

“Had you business with him?” she asked.

“I saw him several times.”

Balzajette cut short this conversation, which was idle talk to him.

“Good evening, dear Madame. I will see you tomorrow, but not in the morning, for I go to the country at six o’clock, and shall not return until noon.”

CHAPTER XXXIII. SUSPENSE

“Did you observe how I cut the conversation short?” Balzajette said, as they went down-stairs. “If you listen to women they will never let you go. I cannot imagine why she spoke to you of this assassinated man, can you?”

“No.”

“I believe that this assassination has affected her brain to a certain point. In any case, it has given her a horror of this house.”

He continued thus without Saniel listening to what he said. On reaching the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, Balzajette hailed a passing cab.

"You have had the kindness not to delay me," he said, pressing the hand of his young 'confrere', "but I feel that I must hurry. 'Au revoir'."

A good riddance! This babbling gave Saniel the vertigo.

He must recover himself, look the situation in the face, and consider that which might, which must, happen.

The situation was plain; Madame Dammauville's cry revealed it. When the lamplight struck him full in the face, she found in him the man whom she had seen draw Caffies curtains. If, in her amazement, she at first refused to believe it, her questions regarding Caffie, and Balzajette's explanations about his hair and beard, destroyed her hesitation and replaced doubt by the horror of certainty. He was the assassin; she knew it, she had seen him. And such as she revealed herself to him, it seemed that she was not the woman to challenge the testimony of her eyes, and to let the strength of her memory be shaken by simple denials, supported by Balzajette's words.

With a vivid clearness he saw to the bottom of the abyss open before him; but what he did not see was in what way she would push him into this giddy whirlpool, that is, to whom she would reveal the discovery that she had made. To Phillis, to Balzajette, or to the judge?

It was almost a relief to think that for this evening, at least, it would not be to Phillis, for at this moment she would be at his rooms, anxiously awaiting his return. He felt a sadness and a revulsion at the thought that she might be the first to learn the truth. He did not wish that, and he would prevent it.

This preoccupation gave him an object; he reached the Rue Louis-le-Grand thinking more of Phillis than of himself. What distress when she should know all! How could she support this blow, and with what sentiments would it inspire her, with what judgment for the man whom she loved? Poor girl! He grew tender at the thought. As for him, he was lost, and it was his fault; he bore the penalty of his own stupidity. But Phillis—it would be a blow to her love that she must bear. And what a blow to this sensitive heart, to this proud and noble soul!

Perhaps he would now see her for the last time, for this one hour, and never again. Then he would be kind to her, and leave her a memory that, later, would be an alleviation to her sorrow, a warm, bright ray in her time of mourning. During these last few days he had been hard, brutal, irritable, strange, and with her habitual serenity she had overlooked it all. When he pushed her from him with his heavy hand, she had kissed this hand, fastening on him her beautiful, tender eyes, full of passionate caresses. He must make her forget that, and she must carry from their last interview a tender impression that would sustain her.

What could he do for her? He remembered how happy she had been at their impromptu dinners six months before, and he would give her this same pleasure. He would see her happy again, and near her, under her glance, perhaps he would forget tomorrow.

He went to the caterer who furnished him with breakfast, and ordered two dinners to be sent to his rooms immediately.

Before he could put the key in the lock, his door was opened by Phillis, who recognized his step on the landing.

"Well?"

"Your brother is saved."

"Madame Dammauville will go to court?"

"I promise you that he is saved."

"By you?"

"Yes, by me—exactly."

In her access of joy, she did not notice the accent on these last words.

"Then you forgive me?"

He took her in his arms, and kissing her with deep emotion said:

"With all my heart, I swear it!"

"You see it was written that you should see Madame Dammauville, in spite of yourself, in spite of all; it was providential."

"It is certain that your friend Providence could not interfere more opportunely in my affairs."

This time she was struck by the tone of his voice; but she imagined that it was only this allusion to superior intervention that had vexed him.

"It was of ourselves that I thought," she said, "not of you."

"I understood. But do not let us talk of that; you are happy, and I do not wish to shadow your joy. On the contrary, I thought to associate myself with it by giving you a surprise: we are going to dine together."

"Oh, dearest!" she exclaimed, trembling, "how-good you are! I will set the table," she added joyously, "and you light the fire; for we must have a bright fire to enliven us and to keep our dinner warm. What have you ordered?"

"I do not know; two dinners."

"So much the better! We will have surprises. We will leave the dishes covered before the fire, and we will take them anyhow. Perhaps we shall eat the roast before the entree, but that will be all the more funny."

Light, quick, busy, graceful, and charming, she came and went around the table.

When the dinner came, the table was ready, and they sat down opposite to each other.

"What happiness to be alone!" she said. "To be able to talk and to look at each other freely!"

He looked at her with a tenderness in his eyes that she had never before seen, with a depth of serious contemplation that overwhelmed her. From time to time little cries of happiness escaped her.

"Oh! Dearest, dearest!" she murmured.

Yet she knew him too well not to see that a cloud of sadness often veiled these eyes full of love, and that also they were often without any expression, as if they looked within. Suddenly she became quiet; but she could not long remain silent when she was uneasy. Why this melancholy at such a moment?

"What a difference between this dinner," she said, "and those of the end of October! At that time you were harassed by the most trying difficulties, at war with creditors, menaced on all sides, without hope; and now all is smooth. No more creditors, no more struggles. The cares that I brought you are nearly at an end. Life opens easy and glorious. The end that you pursued is reached; you have only to walk straight before you, boldly and proudly. Yet there is a sadness in your face that torments me. What is the matter? Speak, I beg you! To whom should you confess, if not to the woman who adores you?"

He looked at her a long time without replying, asking himself if, for the peace of his own heart, this confession would not be better than silence; but courage failed him, pride closed his lips.

"What should be the matter?" he said. "If my face is sad, it does not indicate faithfully what I feel; for what I feel at this moment is an ineffable sentiment of tenderness for you, an inexpressible gratitude for your love, and for the happiness that you have given me. If I have been happy in my rough and struggling life, it is through you. What I have had of joy, confidence, hope, memories, I owe to you; and if we had not met I should have the right to say that I have been the most miserable among the miserable. Whatever happens to us, remember these words, my darling, and bury them in the depths of your heart, where you will find them some day when you would judge me."

"To judge you—I!"

"You love me, therefore you do not know me. But the hour will come when you will wish to know exactly the man whom you have loved; when that time comes remember this evening."

"It is too radiant for me to forget it."

"Whatever it may be, remember it. Life is so fragile and so ephemeral a thing, that it is beautiful to be able to concentrate it, to sum it up by remembrance, in one hour that marks it and gives it its scope. Such an hour is this one, which passes while I speak to you with deep sincerity."

Phillis was not accustomed to these ‘elanas’, for, in the rare effusions to which he sometimes abandoned himself, Saniel always observed a certain reserve, as if he feared to commit himself, and to let her read his whole nature. Many times he rallied her when she became sentimental, as he said, and “chantait sa romance;” and now he himself sang it—this romance of love.

Great as was her happiness to listen to him, she could not help feeling an uneasy astonishment, and asked herself under what melancholy impression he found himself at this moment.

He read her too well not to divine this uneasiness. Not wishing to betray himself, he brought a smile to his eyes, and said:

“You do not recognize me, do you? I am sure you are asking yourself if I am not ill.”

“Oh, dearest, do not jest, and do not harden yourself against the sentiment that makes such sweet music on your lips! I am happy, so happy, to hear you speak thus, that I would like to see your happiness equal to mine; to dissipate the dark cloud that veils your glance. Will you never abandon yourself? At this hour, above all, when everything sings and laughs within us as about us! Nothing was more natural than that you should be sad six months ago; but today what more do you want to make you happy?”

“Nothing, it is true.”

“Is not the present the radiant morning of a glorious future?”

“What will you? There are sad physiognomies as there are happy ones; mine is not yours. But let us talk no more of that, nor of the past, nor of the future; let us talk of the present.”

He rose, and, taking her in his arms, made her sit next to him on the sofa.

The sound of the doorbell made Saniel jump as if he had received an electric shock.

“You will not open the door?” Phillis said. “Do not let any one take our evening from us.”

But soon another ring, more decided, brought him to his feet.

“It is better to know,” he said, and he went to open the door, leaving Phillis in his office.

A maid handed him a letter.

“From Madame Dammauville,” she said; “there is an answer.”

He left her in the vestibule, and returned to his office to read the letter. The dream had not lasted long; reality seized him with its pitiless hands. This letter, certainly, would announce the blow that menaced him.

“If Dr. Saniel is disengaged, I beg that he will come to see me this evening on an urgent affair; I will wait for him until ten o’clock. If not, I count on seeing him to-morrow morning after nine o’clock.

“A. DAMMAUVILLE.”

He returned to the vestibule.

“Say to Madame. Dammauville that I shall be there in a quarter of an hour.”

When he reentered the office he found Phillis before the glass, putting on her hat.

“I heard,” she said. “What a disappointment! But I cannot wish you to stay, since it is for Florentin that you leave me.”

As she walked toward the door he stopped her.

“Embrace me once more.”

Never had he pressed her in such a long and passionate embrace.

CHAPTER XXXIV. ON THE RACK

He had not a second of doubt; Madame Dammauville did not wish a professional visit from him. She wished to speak to him of Caffie, and, in the coming crisis, he said to himself that perhaps it was fortunate that it was so; at least he would be first to know what she had decided to do, and he could defend himself. Nothing is hopeless as long as a struggle is possible.

He rang the bell with a firm hand, and the door was opened by the maid who brought the letter. With a small lamp in her hand, she conducted him through the dining-room and the salon to Madame Dammauville's bedroom.

At the threshold, a glance showed him that some changes had been made in the arrangement of the furniture. The small bed where he had seen Madame Dammauville was placed between the two windows, and she was lying in a large bed with canopy and curtains. Near her was a table on which were a shaded lamp, some books, a blotting-book, a teapot, and a cup; on the white quilt rested an unusually long bellrope, so that she might pull it without moving. The fire in the chimney was out, but the movable stove sent out a heat that denoted it was arranged for the night.

Saniel felt the heat, and mechanically unbuttoned his overcoat.

"If the heat is uncomfortable, will you not remove your overcoat?" Madame Dammauville said.

While he disposed of it and his hat, placing them on a chair by the fireplace, he heard Madame Dammauville say to her maid:

"Remain in the salon, and tell the cook not to go to bed."

What did this mean? Was she afraid that he would cut her throat?

"Will you come close to my bed?" she said. "It is important that we should talk without raising our voices."

He took a chair and seated himself at a certain distance from the bed, and in such a way that he was beyond the circle of light thrown by the lamp. Then he waited.

A moment of silence, which he found terribly long, slipped away before she spoke.

"You know," she said at last, "how I saw, accidentally, from this place"—she pointed to one of the windows—"the face of the assassin of my unfortunate tenant, Monsieur Caffie."

"Mademoiselle Cormier has told me," he replied in a tone of ordinary conversation.

"Perhaps you are astonished that at such a distance I saw the face clearly enough to recognize it after five months, as if it were still before me."

"It is extraordinary."

"Not to those who have a memory for faces and attitudes; with me this memory has always been strongly developed. I remember the playmates of my childhood, and I see them as they were at six and ten years of age, without the slightest confusion in my mind."

"The impressions of childhood are generally vivid and permanent."

"This persistency does not only apply to my childish impressions. Today, I neither forget nor confound a physiognomy. Perhaps if I had had many acquaintances, and if I had seen a number of persons every day, there might be some confusion in my mind; but such is not the case. My delicate health has obliged me to lead a very quiet life, and I remember every one whom I have met. When I think of such a one, it is not of the name at first, but of the physiognomy. Each time that I have been to the Senate or to the Chamber, I did not need to ask the names of the deputies or senators who spoke; I had seen their portraits and I recognized them. If I go into these details it is because they are of great importance, as you will see."

It was not necessary for her to point out their importance; he understood her only too well.

"In fine, I am thus," she continued. "It is, therefore, not astonishing that the physiognomy and the attitude of the man who drew the curtains in Monsieur Caffie's office should not leave my memory. You admit this, do you not?"

"Since you consult me, I must tell you that the operations of the memory are not so simple as people imagine. They comprise three things: the conservation of certain states, their reproduction and localization in the past, which should be reunited to constitute the perfect memory. Now this reunion does not always take place, and often the third is lacking."

"I do not grasp your meaning very well. But what is the third thing?"

"Recognition."

"Well, I can assure you that in this case it is not lacking!"

The action beginning in this way, it was of the utmost importance for Saniel that he should throw doubts in Madame Dammauville's mind, and should make her think that this memory of which she felt so sure was not, perhaps, as strong or as perfect as she imagined.

"It is," he said, "exactly this third thing that is the most delicate, the most complex of the three, since it supposes, besides the state of consciousness, some secondary states, variable in number and in degree, which, grouped around it, determine it."

Madame Dammauville remained silent a moment, and Saniel saw that she made an effort to explain these obscure words to herself.

"I do not understand," she said at last.

This was exactly what he wished; yet, as it would not be wise to let her believe that he desired to deceive or confuse her, he thought he might be a little more precise.

"I wish to ask," he said, "if you are certain that in the mechanism of the vision and that of the recognition, which is a vision of the past, there is no confusion?"

She drew a long breath, evidently satisfied to get rid of these subtleties that troubled her.

"It is exactly because I admit the possibility of this confusion, at least in part, that I sent for you," she said, "in order that you might establish it."

Saniel appeared not to comprehend.

"I, Madame?"

"Yes. When you came herewith Monsieur Balzajette a few hours ago, you must have observed that I examined you in a way that was scarcely natural. Before the lamps were lighted, and when you turned your back to the daylight, I tried in vain to remember where I had seen you. I was certain that I found in you some points of resemblance to a physiognomy I had known, but the name attached to this physiognomy escaped me. When you returned, and I saw you more clearly by lamplight, my recollections became more exact; when I raised the lamp-shade the light struck you full in the face, and then your eyes, so characteristic, and at the same time a violent contraction of your features, made me recall the name. This physiognomy, these eyes, this face, belonged to the man whom from this place" she pointed to the window—"I saw draw Monsieur Caffies curtains."

Saniel did not flinch.

"This is a resemblance that would be hard for me," he said, "if your memory were faithful."

"I tell myself that it may not be. And after the first feeling of surprise which made me cry out, I was confirmed in this thought on recalling the fact that you did not wear the long hair and blond beard that the man wore who drew the curtains; but at that moment Monsieur Balzajette spoke of the hair and beard that you had had cut. I was prostrated. However, I had the strength to ask if you had had any business with Monsieur Caffie. Do you remember your answer?"

"Perfectly."

"After your departure I experienced a cruel anguish. It was you whom I had seen draw the curtains, and it could not be you. I tried to think what I ought to do—to inform the judge or to ask you for an interview. For a long time I wavered. At length I decided on the interview, and I wrote to you."

"I have come at your call, but I declare that I do not know what to reply to this strange communication. You believe that you recognize in me the man who drew the curtains."

"I recognize you."

"Then what do you wish me to say? It is not a consultation that you ask of me?"

She believed she understood the meaning of this reply and divined its end.

"The question does not concern me," she said, "neither my moral nor mental state, but yourself. My eyes, my memory, my conscience, bring a frightful accusation against you. I cannot believe my eyes or my memory. I challenge my conscience, and I ask you to reduce this accusation to nothing."

"And how, Madame?"

"Oh, not by protestations!"

"How can you expect that a man in my position will lower himself to discuss accusations that rest on an hallucination?"

"Do you believe that I have hallucinations? If you do, call one of your 'confreres' to-morrow in consultation. If he believes as you do, I will submit; if not, I shall be convinced that I saw clearly, and I shall act accordingly."

"If you saw clearly, Madame, and I am ready to concede this to you, it proves that there is some one somewhere who is my double."

"I said this to myself; and it is exactly this idea that made me write to you. I wished to give you the opportunity of proving that you could not be this man."

"You will agree that it is difficult for me to admit a discussion on such an accusation."

"One may find one's self accused by a concourse of fatal circumstances, and be not less innocent. Witness the unfortunate boy imprisoned for five months for a crime of which he is not guilty. And I pass from your innocence as from his, to ask you to prove that the charges against you are false."

"There are no charges against me."

"There may be; that depends upon yourself. Your hair and beard may have been cut at the time of the assassination; in that case it is quite certain that the man I saw was not you, and that I am the victim of an hallucination. Were they or were they not?"

"They were not; it is only a few days since I had them cut on account of a contagious disease."

"It may be," she continued, without appearing to be impressed by this explanation, "that the day of the assassination, at the hour when I saw you, you were occupied somewhere in such a way that you can prove you could not have been in the Rue Sainte-Anne, and that I was the victim of an hallucination. And again, it may be that at the time your position was not that of a man at the last extremity, forced to crime by misery or ambition, and that consequently you had no interest in committing the crime of a desperate man. What do I know? Twenty other means of defence may be in your hands."

"You cited the example of this poor boy who is imprisoned, although innocent. Would it not be applicable to me if you did not recognize the error of your eyes or your memory? Would he not be condemned without your testimony? Should I not be if I do not find one that destroys your accusation? And I see no one from whom I can ask this testimony. Have you thought of the infamy with which such an accusation will cover me? If I repel it, and I shall repel it, will it not have dishonored me, ruined me forever?"

"It is just because I thought of this that I sent for you, to the end that by an explanation that you would give, it seemed to me, you would prevent me from informing the judge of this suspicion. This explanation you do not give me; I must now think only of him whose innocence is proved for me, and take his side against him whose guilt is not less proved. To-morrow I shall inform the judge."

"You will not do that!"

"My duty compels me to; and whatever might come, I have always done my duty. For me, in this horrible affair, there is the cause of the innocent and of the guilty, and I place myself on the side of the innocent."

"I can prove to you that it was an aberration of vision—"

"You will prove it to the judge; the law will appreciate it."

He rose brusquely. She put her hand on the bellcord. They looked at each other for a moment, and what their lips did not express their eyes said:

"I do not fear you; my precautions are taken."

"That bell will not save you."

At last he spoke in a hoarse and quivering voice:

"To you the responsibility of whatever happens Madame."

"I accept it before God," she said, with a calm firmness. "Defend yourself."

He went to the armchair on which he had placed his coat and hat, and bending down to take them, he noiselessly turned the draught of the stove.

At the same time Madame Dammauville pulled the bellcord; the maid opened the door of the salon.

"Show Doctor Saniel to the door."

CHAPTER XXXV. A SECOND VICTIM

On returning to his room Saniel was very much cast down, and without lighting a candle, he threw himself on the divan, where he remained prostrated.

The frightful part of the affair was the rapidity with which he condemned this poor woman to death, and without hesitation executed her. To save himself she must die; she should die. This time the idea did not turn and deviate as in Caffie's case. Is it not true then, that it is the first crime that costs, and in the path that he had entered, would he go on to the end sowing corpses behind him?

A shudder shook him from head to foot as he thought that this victim might not be the last that his safety demanded. When she threatened to warn the judge, he only saw a threat; if she spoke he was lost; he had closed her mouth. But had not this mouth opened before he closed it? Had she not already spoken? Before deciding on this interview she may have told all to some one of her friends, who, between the time of his departure with Balzajette and his return, might have visited her, or to some one for whom she had sent for advice. In that case, those also were condemned to death.

A useless crime, or a series of crimes?

The horror that rose within him was so strong that he thought of running to the Rue Sainte-Anne; he would awake the sleeping household, open the doors, break the windows, and save her. But between his departure and this moment the carbonic acid and the oxide of carbon had had time to produce asphyxiation, and certainly he would arrive after her death; or, if he found her still living, some one would discover that the draught of the stove had been turned, and seeing it, he would betray himself as surely as by an avowal.

After all, the maid might have discovered that the draught was turned, and in that case she was saved and he was lost. Chance would decide between them.

There are moments when a shipwrecked man, tired of swimming, not knowing to which side to direct his course, without light, without guide, at the end of strength and hope, floats on his back and lets himself be tossed by the waves, to rest and wait for light. This was his case; he could do nothing but wait.

He would not commit the insane folly of wishing to see and know, as in Caffie's case; he would know the result soon enough, too soon.

Rising, he lighted a candle, and paced up and down his apartment like a caged animal. Then it occurred to him that those underneath would hear his steps; doubtless they would remark this agitated march, would be surprised, and would ask an explanation. In his position he must take care not to give cause for any remark that could not be explained. He took off his boots and continued his walk.

But why had she spoken to him of double weatherstrips at the doors and windows, of hangings on the walls, of thick curtains? It was she who thus suggested to him the idea of the draught of the stove, which would not have come to him spontaneously.

The night passed in such agitating thoughts; at times the hours seemed to stand still, and again they flew with astounding rapidity. One moment the perspiration fell from his forehead on his hands; at another he felt frozen.

When his windows grew light with the dawn, he threw himself prostrated and shuddering on the divan, and leaning on a cushion he detected the odor of Phillis; burying his head in it he remained motionless and slept.

A ring of the bell woke him, horrified, frightened; he did not know where he was. It was broad daylight, carriages rumbled through the street. A second ring sounded stronger, more violent. Shivering, he went to open the door, and recognized the maid who the previous evening brought a note from Madame Dammauville. He did not need to question her: fate was on his side. His eyes became dim; without seeing her he heard the maid explain why she had come.

She had been to Monsieur Balzajette; he was in the country. Her mistress was nearly cold in her bed; she neither spoke nor breathed, yet her face was pink.

"I will go with you."

He did not need to learn more. That rosy color, which has been observed in those asphyxiated by oxide of carbon, decided it. However, he questioned the maid.

Nothing had occurred; she had talked with the cook in the kitchen, who, near midnight, went to her room in the fifth story, and then she went to bed in a small room contiguous to that of her mistress. During the night she heard nothing; in the morning she found her mistress in the state she mentioned, and immediately went for Monsieur Balzajette.

Continuing his questions, Saniel asked her what Madame Dammauville did after the consultation with Monsieur Balzajette.

"She dined as usual, but less than usual, eating almost nothing; then she received a visit from one of her friends, who remained only a few minutes, before starting on a voyage."

This was what he dreaded: Madame Dammauville might have told this friend. If this were so, his crime would be of no use to him; where would it carry him?

After a few moments, and in a tone that he tried to render indifferent, he asked the name of this friend.

"A friend of her youth, Madame Thezard, living at No. 9, in the Rue des Capucines, the wife of a consul."

Until he reached the house in the Rue Sainte-Anne he repeated this name and address to himself, which he could not write down, and which he must not forget, for it was from there now that the danger would come if Madame Dammauville had spoken.

For a long time he had been habituated to the sight of death, but when he found himself in the presence of this woman stretched on her bed as if she slept, a shiver seized him.

"Give me a mirror and a candle," he said to the maid and the cook who stood at the door, not daring to enter.

While they went in search of these things he walked over to the stove; the draught remained as he had turned it on the previous evening; he opened it and returned to the bed.

His examination was not long; she had succumbed to asphyxiation caused by the gas from the charcoal. Did it proceed from the construction of the stove, or from a defect in the chimney? The inquest would decide this; as for him, he could only prove the death.

On leaving him the evening before, Phillis, uneasy, told him that she would come early in the morning to know what Madame Dammauville wished. When he told her she was dead she was prostrated with despair; in that case Florentin was lost. He tried to reassure her, but without success.

Nougarede, also, was in despair, and regretted that he had not proceeded otherwise. And he tried to reassure Phillis; the prosecution rested on the button and the struggle that had torn it off. Saniel would destroy this hypothesis; he counted on him.

Saniel became, then, as he had been before the intervention of Madame Dammauville, the only hope of Phillis and her mother, and to encourage them he exaggerated the influence that his testimony would have.

"When I shall have demonstrated that there was no struggle, the hypothesis of the torn button will crumble by itself."

"And if it is sustained, how and with what shall we overthrow it?"

If he had appeared as usual, she would have shared the confidence with which he tried to inspire her; but since the death of Madame Dammauville he was so changed, that she could not help being uneasy. Evidently it was Madame Dammauville's death that made him so gloomy and irritable that he would submit to no opposition. He saw the dangers of the situation that this death created for Florentin, and with his usual generosity he reproached himself for not having consented to take care of her sooner; he would have saved her, certainly, as he had begun by demanding the removal of the stove, and Florentin would have been saved also.

The day of the trial arrived without a word from Madame Thezard, which proved that Madame Dammauville had said nothing to her friend. It was six months since the assassination occurred, and the affair had lost all interest for the Parisian public; in the provinces it was still spoken of, but at Paris it was a thing of the past. There is no romance about a clerk who cuts the throat of his employer to rob him; there is no woman in the case, no mystery.

Saniel preferred that Phillis should remain at home with her mother, but in spite of his wishes and prayers she insisted on going to court. She must be there so that Florentin would see her and take courage; he would defend himself better if she were there.

He defended himself badly, or at least indifferently, like a man who gives up because he knows beforehand that whatever he may say will be useless.

Until Saniel's deposition the witnesses who testified were insignificant enough, and revealed nothing that was not already known; only Valerius, with his pretensions to a professional secret, which he developed slowly, amused the audience. This deposition Saniel made brief and exact, contenting himself with repeating his report. But then Nougarede rose, and begged the president to ask the witness to explain the struggle which should have taken place between the victim and his assassin; and the president, who had commenced by arguing, before the insistence of the defence, decided to ask this question. Then Saniel slowly explained how the position of the body in the armchair and his condition were scientific proof that there was no struggle.

"This is an opinion," said the president dryly; "the jury will appreciate it."

"Perfectly," replied Nougarede, "and I intend to make the jury feel the weight that it carries on the authority of him who formulated it."

This phrase for effect was destined to invalidate in advance the contradictions that the prosecution would, he believed, raise against the testimony; but nothing of the kind occurred, and Saniel could go and take his place beside Phillis without being called to the bar to sustain his opinion against a physician whose scientific authority would be opposed to his.

In default of Madame Dammauville, Nougarede had summoned the concierge of Rue Sainte-Anne, as well as the maid and the cook, who had heard their mistress say that the man who drew Caffies curtains did not resemble Florentin's portrait; but this was only gossip repeated by persons of no importance, who could not produce the effect of the 'coup de theatre' on which he had based his defence.

When the advocate-general pronounced his address, it was evident why Saniel's opinion on the absence of a struggle was not contradicted. Although the prosecution believed in this struggle, it wished to abandon it a moment, having no need of this hypothesis to prove that the button had not been torn off on falling from a ladder; it had been done in the act of assassination, in the effort made to cut the throat of the victim who had violently extended the right arm, and, by the shock to the suspenders, the button was torn off. The effect of Saniel's deposition was destroyed, and that one produced by the testimony of Madame Dammauville's maids, far less strong, was also destroyed when the advocate-general proved that this gossip turned against the accused. She had seen, it was said, a man with long hair and curled beard, draw the curtains; very well! Does this description apply to the accused? To tell the truth, it was said that she did not recognize him in a portrait published by an illustrated paper. Well, it was because this portrait did not resemble him. Besides, was it possible to admit that a woman of Madame Dammauville's character would not have informed the judge if she believed her testimony important and decisive? The proof that she considered it insignificant was the fact that she had kept silent.

Nougarede's eloquent appeal did not destroy these two arguments, any more than it effaced the impression produced by the money-lender relative to the theft of forty-five francs. The jury brought in a verdict of "Guilty," but without premeditation, and admitting extenuating circumstances.

On hearing the decree that condemned Florentin to twenty years of forced labor, Phillis, half suffocated, clung to Saniel's arm; but he could not give her the attention he wished, for Brigard, who came to the trial to assist at the triumph of his disciple, accosted him.

"Receive my felicitations for your deposition, my dear friend; it is an act of courage that does you honor. If this poor boy could have been saved, it would have been by you; you may well say you are the man of conscience."

BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XXXVI. CONSCIENCE ASSERTS ITSELF

During the first years of his sojourn in Paris, Saniel had published in a Latin Quarter review an article on the "Pharmacy of Shakespeare"—the poison of Hamlet, and of Romeo and Juliet; and although since his choice of medicine he read but little besides books of science, at that time he was obliged to study the plays of his author. From this study there lingered in his memory a phrase that for ten years had not risen to his lips, and which all at once forced itself uppermost in his mind with exasperating persistency. It was the words of Macbeth:

"Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep;
Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds."

He also had lost it, "the innocent sleep, sore labor's bath, balm of hurt minds." He had never been a great sleeper; at least he had accustomed himself to the habit, hard at first, of passing only a few hours in bed. But he employed these few hours well, sleeping as the weary sleep, hands clenched, without dreaming, waking, or moving; and the thought that occupied his mind in the evening was with him on waking in the morning, not having been put to flight by others, any more than by dreams.

After Caffie's death this tranquil and refreshing sleep continued the same; but suddenly, after Madame Dammauville's death, it became broken.

At first it did not bother him. He did not sleep, so much the better! He would work more. But one can no more work all the time than one can live without eating. Saniel knew better than any one that the life of every organ is composed of alternate periods of repose and activity, and he did not suppose that he would be able to work indefinitely without sleep. He only hoped that after some days of twenty hours of work daily, overcome by fatigue, he would have, in spite of everything, four hours of solid sleep, that Shakespeare called "sore labor's bath."

He had not had these four hours, and the law that every state of prolonged excitement brings exhaustion that should be refreshed by a functional rest, was proved false in his case. After a hard day's work he would go to bed at one o'clock in the morning and would go to sleep immediately. But very

soon he awoke with a start, suffocating, covered with perspiration, in a state of extreme anxiety, his mind agitated by hallucinations of which he could not rid himself all at once. If he did not wake suddenly, he dreamed frightful dreams, always of Madame Dammauville or Caffie. Was it not curious that Caffie, who until then had been completely effaced from his memory, was resuscitated by Madame Dammauville in the night, ghost of the darkness that the daylight dissipated?

Believing that one of the causes of these dreams was the excitement of the brain, occasioned by excessive work at the hour when he should not exercise it, but on the contrary should allow it to rest, he decided to change a plan which produced so little success. Instead of intellectual work he would engage in physical exercise, which, by exhausting his muscular functions, would procure him the sleep of the laboring class; and as he could not roll a wheelbarrow nor chop wood, every evening after dinner he walked seven or eight miles rapidly.

Physical work succeeded no better than intellectual; he endured the fatigue of butchers and wood-choppers, but he did not obtain their sleep. Decidedly, bodily fatigue was worth no more than that of the brain. It was worth even less. At his table, plunged in his books, or in his laboratory over his microscope, he absorbed himself in his work, and, by the force of a will that had been long exercised and submissive to obedience, he was able to keep his thoughts on the subject in hand, without distraction as without dreams. Time passed. But when walking in the streets of Paris, in the deserted roads on the outskirts, by the Seine or Marne, his mind wandered where it would; it was the mistress, and it always dwelt on Madame Dammauville, Caffie, and Florentin. It seemed as if the heat of walking started his brain. When he returned in this state, after many hours of cerebral excitability, how could he find the tranquil and refreshing sleep, complete and profound, of the laboring classes who work only with their muscles?

Never having been ill, he had never examined nor treated himself: medicine was good for others but useless for him. With a machine organized like his he need fear only accidents, and until now he had been spared them; a true son of peasants, he victoriously resisted Paris life as the destroyer of the intellect. But the time had come to undertake an examination and to try a treatment that would give him rest. He was not a sceptical doctor, and he believed that what he ordered for others was good for himself.

The misfortune was that he could not find in himself any of the causes which resolve into insomnia; he had neither meningitis nor brain fever, nor anything that indicated a cerebral tumor; he was not anaemic; he ate well; he did not suffer with neuralgia, nor with any acute or chronic affection that generally accompanied the absence of sleep; he drank neither tea nor alcohol; and without this state of over-excitement of the encephalic centres, he might have said that he was in good health, a little thin, but that was all.

It was this excitement that he must cure, and as there are many remedies for insomnia, he tried those which, it seemed to him, were suitable to his case; but bromide of potassium, in spite of its hypnotic properties, produced no more effect than the over-working of the brain and body. When he realized this he replaced it with chloral; but chloral, which should create a desire to sleep, after several days had no more effect than the bromide. Then he tried injections of morphine.

It was not without a certain uneasiness that he made this third trial, the first two having met with so little success; and since it is acknowledged that chloral produces a calmer sleep than morphine, it seemed as if the latter would prove as useless as the former. However, he slept without being tormented by dreams or wakings, and the next day he still slept.

But he knew too well the effects produced by a prolonged use of these injections to continue them beyond what was strictly indispensable; he therefore omitted them, and sleep left him.

He tried them again; then, soon, as the small doses lost their efficacy, he gradually increased them. At the end of a certain time what he feared came to pass—his leanness increased; he lost his appetite, his muscular force, and his moral energy; his pale face began to wear the characteristic expression of the morphomaniac.

Then he stopped, frightened.

Should he continue, he would become a morphomaniac in a given time, and the apathy into which he fell prevented him from resisting the desire to absorb new doses of poison, a desire as imperious, as

irresistible in morphinism as that of alcohol for the alcoholic, and more terrible in its effects—the perversion of the intellectual faculties, loss of will, of memory, of judgment, paralysis, or the mania that leads to suicide.

If he did not continue, and these sleepless nights or the agitated sleep which maddened him should return, and following them, this over-excitement of the brain in troubling the nutrition of the encephalic mass, it might be the prelude of some grave cerebral affection.

On one side the morphine habit; on the other, dementia from the constant excitement and disorganization of the brain.

Between a fatally certain result and one that was possible he did not hesitate. He must give up morphine, and this choice forced itself upon him with so much more strength, because if morphine assured him sleep at night, it by no means gave him tranquil days—quite the contrary.

He began to use this remedy at night when he fell under the influence of certain ideas; during the day when applying himself to work, by an effort of will he escaped from these ideas, and was the man he had always been, master of his strength and mind. But the action of the morphine rapidly weakened this all-powerful will, so much so, that when these ideas crossed his mind during his working hours he had not the energy to drive them away. He tried to shake them off, but in vain; they would not leave his brain, to which they clung and encompassed it with increasing strength.

Truly, those two corpses troubled him horribly. Was it not exasperating for a man who had seen and dissected so many, that there should be always two before his eyes, even when they were closed—that of this old rascal and of this unfortunate woman? In order not to complicate this impression with another that humiliated him, he got rid of the packages of bank bills taken from Caffie, by sending them “as restitution” to the director of public charities. But this had no appreciable effect.

The thought of Florentin troubled him also; and if he saw Caffie lying in his chair, Madame Dammauville motionless and pink on her bed, to him it was not less cruel to see Florentin between the decks of the vessel that would soon carry him to New Caledonia.

The ideas on conscience that he had expressed at Crozat’s, and those that he explained to Phillis about remorse, were still his; but he was not the less certain that these two dead persons and the condemned one weighed upon him with a terrible weight, frightful, suffocating, like a nightmare. It was not in accordance with his education nor with his environment to have these corpses behind him and this victim before him.

But where his former ideas were overthrown, since these dead bodies seized hold of his life, was in his confidence in his strength.

The strong man that he believed himself, he who follows his ambition regardless of things and of persons, looking only before him and never behind, master of his mind as of his heart and of his arm, was not at all the one that reality revealed.

On the contrary, he had been weak in action and yet weaker afterward.

And it was not only humiliation in the present that he felt in acknowledging this weakness, it was also in uneasiness for the future; for, if he lacked this strength that he attributed to himself before having tested it, he should, if his beliefs were true, succumb some day.

Evidently, if he were perfectly strong he would not have complicated his life with love. The strong walk alone because they need no one. And he needed a woman; and so great was the need that it was through her only, near her, when he looked at her, when he listened to her, that he experienced a little calm.

Was he weak and cowardly on account of this? Perhaps not, but only human.

CHAPTER XXXVII. ATTEMPTED REPARATION

Because he felt calm when with Phillis, Saniel wished that she might never leave him.

But, as happy as she was in her sorrow to see that instead of avoiding her—which a less generous man would have done, perhaps—he sought to draw nearer each day, she could not give up her lessons and her work, which was her daily bread, to give all her time to her love, any more than she could leave her mother entirely alone, crushed with shame, who had never needed so much as now to be cheered and sustained.

She did not let a day pass without going to see Saniel; but in spite of her desire she could not remain with him as long as she wished and he asked. When she rose to go and he detained her, she remained, but it was only for a few minutes; they were short, and the time soon came when, after ten attempts, she was obliged to leave him.

At all times these separations had been full of despair to her, the apprehension of which, from the moment of her arrival, paralyzed her; but now they were still more cruel. Formerly, on leaving him, she often saw him deep in his work before she opened the door; now, on the contrary, he conducted her to the vestibule, detained her, and only let her leave him when she tore herself from his embrace, after promising and repeating her promise to come early the next day and stay longer. Formerly, also, she was calm when she left him, not thinking of his health, nor asking herself how she would find him at their next meeting, strong and powerful, as sound in body as in mind. On the contrary, now she worried herself, wondering how she would find him on the occasion of each visit. Would the sadness, melancholy, and dejection still remain? Would he be thinner and paler? It was her care, her anguish, to try to divine the causes of the change in him, which manifested itself as strongly in his sentiments as in his person. Was it not truly extraordinary that he was more grave and uneasy now that his life was assured than during the hard times when he was so worried that he never knew what the morrow would bring? He had obtained the position that his ambition coveted; he had sufficient money for his wants; he admitted that his experiments had succeeded beyond his expectations; the essays that he published on his experiments were loudly discussed, praised by some, contested by others; it seemed that he had attained his object; and he was sad, discontented, unhappy, more tormented than when he exhausted himself with efforts, without other support than his will. At last, when frightened to see him thus, she questioned him as to how he felt, he became angry, and answered brutally—

“Ill? Why do you think that I am—ill? Am I not better able than any one to know how I am? I am overworked, that is all; and as my life of privation does not permit me to repair my forces, I have become anaemic; it is not serious. It is strange, truly, that you ask for explanations of what is natural. Count the teeth of the polytechnicians and look at their hair after their examinations, and tell me what you think of them. Why do you think anything else is the matter with me? One cannot expend one’s self with impunity; that would be too good. Everything must be paid for in this world.”

She was obliged to believe that he was right and understood his condition; however, she could not help worrying. She knew nothing of medicine; she did not know the meaning of the medical terms he used, but she found that this was not sufficient to explain all—neither his roughness of temper and excess of anger without reason, any more than his sudden tenderness, his weakness and dejection, his preoccupation and absence of mind.

She discovered the effect she produced on him, and how, merely by her presence, she cheered this gloomy fancy and raised this depression by not asking him stupid questions on certain subjects which she had not yet determined on, but which she hoped to avoid. Also, she did not wish to leave him, and ingeniously invented excuses to go to see him twice a day; in the morning on going to her lessons, and in the afternoon or evening.

Late one evening she rang his bell with a hand made nervous with joy.

“I have come to stay till to-morrow,” she said, in triumphant tones.

She expected that he would express his joy by an embrace, but he did nothing.

“Are you going out?”

"Not at all; I am not thinking of myself, but of your mother."

"Do you think that I would have left her alone in her weak and nervous state? A cousin of ours arrived from the country, who will occupy my bed, and I profited by it quick enough, saying that I would remain at the school. And here I am."

In spite of his desire for it, he had never dared ask her to pass the night with him. During the day he would only betray himself by his sad or fantastic temper; but at night, with such dreams as came to him, might not some word escape that would betray him?

However, since she was come it was impossible to send her away; he could not do it for her nor for himself. What pretext could he find to say, "Go! I do not want you?" He wanted her above all; he wanted to look at her, to listen to her, to hear her voice that soothed and lulled his anguish, to feel her near him—only to have her there, and not be face to face with his thoughts.

She examined him secretly, asking herself the cause of this singular reception, standing at the entrance of the office, not daring to remove her hat. How could her arrival produce an effect so different from what she expected?

"You do not take off your hat?" he said.

"I was asking myself if you had to work."

"Why do you ask yourself that?"

"For fear of disturbing you."

"What a madness you have for always asking something!" he exclaimed violently. "What do you expect me to say? What astonishes you? Why should you disturb me? In what? 'Voyons', speak, explain yourself!"

The time was far distant when these explosions surprised her, though they always pained her.

"I speak stupidly," she said. "What will you? I am stupid; forgive me."

These words, "forgive me," were more cruel than numberless reproaches, for he well knew that he had nothing to forgive in her, since she was the victim and he the criminal. Should he never be able to master these explosions, as imprudent as they were unjust?

He took her in his arms and made her sit by him.

"It is for you to forgive," he said.

And he was as tender and caressing as he had been brutal. He was a fool to imagine that she could have suspicions, and the surest way to give birth to them was to show fear that she had them. To betray himself by such awkwardness was as serious as to let a cry escape him while sleeping.

But for this night he had a way which was in reality not difficult, that would not expose him to the danger of talking in his sleep-he would not sleep. After having passed so many nights without closing his eyes, without doubt he could keep them open this entire night.

But he deceived himself; when he heard the calm and regular respiration of Phillis with her head on his shoulder, and felt the mild warmth of her body penetrate his, in the quiet imposed upon him, without being conscious of it, believing himself far from sleep, and convinced that he required no effort to keep awake, he suddenly slept. When he awoke a ray of pale sunlight filled the room, and leaning her elbow on the bolster, Phillis was watching him. He made a brusque movement, throwing himself backward. "What is the matter?" he cried. "What have I said?" Instantly his face paled, his lips quivered; he felt his heart beat tumultuously and his throat pressed by painful constriction. "But nothing is the matter," she answered, looking at him tenderly. "You have said nothing." To come to the point, why should he have spoken? During his frightful dreams, his nights of disturbed sleep, he might have cried out, but he did not know if he had ever done so. And besides, he had not just waked from an agitated sleep. All this passed through his mind in an instant, in spite of his alarm. "What time is it?" he asked. "Nearly six o'clock." "Six o'clock!" "Do you not hear the vehicles in the street? The street-venders are calling their wares." It must have been about one o'clock when he closed his eyes; he had then slept five hours, profoundly, and he felt calm, rested, refreshed, his body active and his mind tranquil, the man of former times, in the days of his happy youth, and not the half-insane man of these last frightful months.

He breathed a sigh.

“Ah, if I could have you always!” he murmured, as much to himself as to her.

And he gave her a long look mingled with a sad smile; then, placing his arm around her shoulders, he pressed her to him.

“Dear little wife!”

She had never heard so profound, so vibrating, a tenderness in his voice; never had she been able, until hearing these words, to measure the depth of the love that she had inspired in him; and it even seemed that this was the declaration of a new love.

Pressing her passionately to him, he repeated:

“Dear little wife!”

Distracted, lost in her happiness, she did not reply.

All at once he held her from him gently, and looking at her with the same smile:

“Does this word tell you nothing?”

“It tells me that you love me.”

“And is that all?”

“What more can I wish? You say it, I feel it. You give me the greatest joy of which I can dream.”

“It is enough for you?”

“It would be enough if it need never be interrupted. But it is the misfortune of our life that we are obliged to separate at the time when the ties that unite us are the most strongly bound.”

“Why should we separate?”

“Alas! Mamma? And daily bread?”

“If you did not leave your mother. If you need no longer worry about your life?”

She looked at him, not daring to question him, not betraying the direction of her thoughts except by a trembling that she could not control in spite of her efforts.

“I mean if you become my wife.”

“Oh, my beloved!”

“Will you not?”

She threw herself in his arms, fainting; but after a moment she recovered.

“Alas! It is impossible,” she murmured.

“Why impossible?”

“Do not ask me; do not oblige me to say it.”

“But, on the contrary, I wish you to tell me.”

She turned her head away, and in a voice that was scarcely perceptible, in a stifled sigh:

“My brother—”

“It is greatly on account of your brother that I wish this marriage.”

Then, suddenly: “Do you think me the man to submit to prejudiced blockheads?”

CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE IMPORTANT QUESTION

Saniel had not waited until this day to acknowledge the salutary influence that Phillis’s presence exercised over him, yet the idea of making her his wife never occurred to him. He thought himself ill-

adapted to marriage, and but little desirous of being a husband. Until lately he had had no desire for a home.

This idea came to him suddenly and took strong hold of him; at least as much on account of the calmness he felt in her presence, as by the charm of her manner, her health, happiness, and gayety.

It was not only physical calm that she gave him by a mysterious affinity concerning which his studies told him nothing, but of which he did not the less feel all the force; it was also a moral calm.

There were duties he owed her, and terribly heavy were those he owed her mother and Florentin.

He did all he could for Florentin, but this was not all that he owed them. Florentin was in prison; Madame Cormier fell into a mournful despair, growing weaker each day; and Phillis, in spite of her elasticity and courage, bent beneath the weight of injustice.

How much the situation would be changed if he married her—for them, and for him!

When Phillis was a little recovered from her great surprise, she asked him:

"When did you decide on this marriage?"

He did not wish to prevaricate, and he answered that it was at that instant that the idea came to him, exact enough and strong enough to give form to the ideas that had been floating in his brain for several months.

"At least, have you considered it? Have you not yielded to an impulse of love?"

"Would it be better to yield to a long, rational calculation? I marry you because I love you, and also because I am certain that without you I cannot be happy. Frankly, I acknowledge that I need you, your tenderness, your love, your strength of character, your equal temper, your invincible faith in hope, which, for me as I am organized, is worth the largest dot."

"It is exactly because I have no dot to bring you. When you were at the last extremity, desperate and crushed, I might ask to become the wife of the poor village doctor that you were going to be; but to-day, in your position, above all in the position that you will soon occupy, is poor little Phillis worthy of you? You give me the greatest joy that I can ever know, of which I have only dreamed in telling myself that it would be folly to hope to have it realized. But just that gives me the strength to beg you to reflect, and to consider whether you will ever regret this moment of rapture that makes me so happy."

"I have reflected, and what you say proves better than anything that I do not deceive myself. I want a wife who loves me, and you are that wife."

"More than I can tell you at this moment, wild with happiness, but not more than I shall prove to you in the continuance of our love."

"Besides, dearest, do not have any illusions on the splendors of this position of which you speak; it is more than probable that they will never be realized, for I am not a man of money, and will do nothing to gain any. If it does not come by itself—"

"It will come."

"That is not the object for which I work. What I wish I have obtained partly; if now I make money and obtain a rich practice, the jealousy of my confreres will make me lose, or wait too long, for what my ambition prefers to a fortune. For the moment this position will be modest; my four thousand francs of salary, that which I gain at the central bureau while waiting to have the title of hospital physician, and five hundred francs a month more that my editor offers me for work and a review of bacteriology, will give us nearly twelve thousand francs, and we must content ourselves with that for some time."

"That is a fortune to me."

"To me also; but I thought I ought to tell you."

"And when do you wish our marriage to take place?"

"Immediately after the necessary legal delay, and as soon as I am settled in a new apartment; for you could not come here as my wife, where you have been seen so often. It would not be pleasant for you or for me."

"And we will not be so foolish as to put ourselves in the hands of an upholsterer; the first one cost enough."

He said these last words with fierce energy, but continued immediately:

"What do we need? A parlor for the patients, if they come; an office for me, which will do also as a laboratory; a bedroom for us, and one for your mother."

"You wish—"

"But certainly. Do you think that I would ask you to separate from her?"

She took his hand, and kissing it with a passionate impulse: "Oh, the dearest, the most generous of men!"

"Do not let us talk of that," he said with evident annoyance. "In your mother's condition of mental prostration it would kill her to be left alone; she needs you, and I promise to help you to soften her grief. We will make her comfortable; and although my nature is not very tender, I will try to replace him from whom she is separated. It will be a happiness to her to see you happy."

For a long time he enlarged upon what he wished, feeling a sentiment of satisfaction in talking of what he would do for Madame Cormier, in whom at this time he saw the mother of Florentin more than that of Phillis.

"Do you think you can make her forget?" he asked from time to time.

"Forget? No. Neither she nor I can ever forget; but it is certain our sorrow will be drowned in our happiness, and this happiness we shall owe to you. Oh, how you will be adored, respected, blessed!"

Adored, respected! He repeated these words to himself. One could, then, be happy by making others happy. He had had so little opportunity until this time to do for others, that this was in some sort the revelation of a sentiment that he was astonished to feel, but which, for being new, was only the sweeter to him.

He wished to give himself the satisfaction of tasting all the sweetness.

"Where are you going this morning?" he asked.

"I return to the school to help my pupils prepare their compositions for the prize."

"Very well; while you are at the school this morning, I will go to see your mother. The process of asking in marriage that we make use of is perhaps original, and conforms to the laws of nature, if nature admits marriage, which I ignore; but it certainly is not the way of those of the world. And now I must address this request to your mother."

"What joy you will give her!"

"I hope so."

"I should like to be there to enjoy her happiness. Mamma has a mania for marriage; she spends her time marrying the people she knows or those she does not know. And she has felt convinced that I should die in the yellow skin of an old maid. At last, this evening she will have the happiness of announcing to me your visit and your request. But do not make this visit until the afternoon, because then our cousin will be gone."

Saniel spent his morning in looking for apartments, and found one in a quarter of the Invalides, which he engaged.

It was nearly one o'clock when he reached Madame Cormier's. As usual, when he called, she looked at him with anxious curiosity, thinking of Florentin.

"It is not of him that I wish to speak to you to-day," he said, without pronouncing any name, which was unnecessary. "It is of Mademoiselle Phillis—"

"Do you find her ill?" Madame Cormier said, who thought only of misfortune.

"Not at all. It is of her and of myself that I wish to speak. Do not be uneasy. I hope that what I am going to say will not be a cause of sadness to you."

"Pardon me if I always see something to fear. We have been so frightfully tried, so unjustly!"

He interrupted her, for these complaints did not please him.

"For a long time," he said quickly, "Mademoiselle Phillis has inspired me with a deep sentiment of esteem and tenderness; I have not been able to see her so courageous, so brave in adversity, so decided

in her character, so good to you, so charming, without loving her, and I have come to ask you to give her to me as my wife."

At Saniel's words, Madame Cormier's hands began to tremble, and the trembling increased.

"Is it possible?" she murmured, beginning to cry. "So great a happiness for my daughter! Such an honor for us, for us, for us!"

"I love her."

"Forgive me if happiness makes me forget the conventionalities, but I lose my head. We are so unhappy that our souls are weak against joy. Perhaps I should hide my daughter's sentiments; but I cannot help telling you that this esteem, this tenderness of which you speak, is felt by her. I discovered it long ago, although she did not tell me. Your request, then, can only be received with joy by mother, as well as daughter."

This was said brokenly, evidently from an overflowing heart. But all at once her face saddened.

"I must talk to you sincerely," she said. "You are young, I am not; and my age makes it a duty for me not to yield to any impulse. We are unfortunates, you are one of the happy; you will soon be rich and famous. Is it wise to burden your life with a wife who is in my daughter's position?"

With the exception of a few words, this was Phillis's answer. He answered the mother as he had answered the daughter.

"It is not for you that I speak," said Madame Cormier. "I should not permit myself to give you advice; it is in placing myself at the point of view of my daughter that I, her mother, with the experience of my age, should watch over her future. Is it certain that in the struggles of life you will never suffer from this marriage, not because my daughter will not make you happy—from this side I am easy—but because the situation that fate has made for us will weigh on you and fetter you? I know my daughter-her delicacy; her uneasy susceptibility, that of the unfortunate; her pride, that of the irreproachable. It would be a wound for her that would make happiness give way to unhappiness, for she could not bear contempt."

"If that is in human nature, it is not in mine; I give you my word."

He explained how he meant to arrange their life, and when she understood that she was to live with them, she clasped her hands and exclaimed,

"Oh, my God, who hast taken my son, how good thou art to give me another!"

CHAPTER XXXIX. CONCESSION TO CONSCIENCE

He asked nothing better than to be a son to this poor woman; in reality he was worth much more than this unfortunate boy, effeminate and incapable. What did this maternal hunger require? A son to love. She would find one in her son-in-law. In seeing her daughter happy, how could she help being happy herself?

Evidently they would be happy, the mother and daughter; and whatever Phillis might think, still under the influence of the shameful blow, they would forget. They would owe him this.

It was a long time since he had worked with so much serenity as on this day; and when in the evening he went to bed, uneasy as usual about the night, he slept as calmly as if Phillis were resting her charming head on his shoulder and he breathed the perfume of it.

Decidedly, to make others happy was the best thing in the world, and as long as one could have this satisfaction there was no fear of being unhappy. To create an atmosphere of happiness for others is to profit by it at the same time.

He waited for Phillis impatiently, for she would bring him an echo of her mother's joy, and it was a recompense that she owed him.

She arrived happy, smiling, penetrated with tenderness; but he observed that she was keeping something from him, something that embarrassed her, and yet she would not tell him what it was.

He was not disposed to admit that she could conceal anything from him, and he questioned her.

"What are you keeping from me?"

"How can you suppose that I should keep anything from you?"

"Well, what is the matter? You know, do you not, that I read all your thoughts in your eyes? Very well your eyes speak when your lips are silent."

"I have a request to make of you, a prayer."

"Why do you not tell me?"

"Because I do not dare."

"Yet it does not seem to me that I show a disposition to make you believe that I could refuse you anything."

"It is just that which is the cause of my embarrassment and reserve; I fear to pain you at the moment when I would show you all the gratitude and love in my heart."

"If you are going to give me pain, it is better not to make me wait."

She hesitated; then, before an impatient gesture, she decided to speak.

"I wish to ask you how you mean to be married?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"But, like every one else!"

"Every one?" she asked, persistently.

"Is there any other way of being married?"

"Yes."

"I do not in the least understand this manner of asking conundrums; if you are alluding to a fashionable custom of which I know nothing, say so frankly. That will not wound me, since I am the first to declare that I know nothing of it. What do you wish?"

She felt his irritation increase, and yet she could not decide to say what she wished.

"I have begun badly," she said. "I should have told you at first that you will always find in me a wife who will respect your ideas and beliefs, who will never permit herself to judge you, and still less to seek to contend with them or to modify them. That you feel, do you not, is neither a part of my nature nor of my love?"

"Conclude!" he said impatiently.

"I think, then," she said with timid hesitation, "that you will not say that I fail in respect to your ideas in asking that our marriage take place in church."

"But that was my intention."

"Truly!" she exclaimed. "O dearest! And I feared to offend you!"

"Why should you think it would offend me?" he asked, smiling.

"You consent to go to confession?"

Instantly the smile in his eyes and on his lips was replaced by a gleam of fury.

"And why should I not go to confession?" he demanded.

"But—"

"Do you suppose that I can be afraid to confess? Why do you suppose that? Tell me why?"

He looked at her with eyes that pierced to her heart, as if they would read her inmost thoughts.

Stupefied by this access of fury, which burst forth without any warning, since he had smilingly replied to her request for a religious marriage, she could find nothing to say, not understanding how the

simple word “confess” could so exasperate him. And yet she could not deceive herself: is was indeed this word and no other that put him in this state.

He continued to look at her, and wishing to explain herself, she said: “I supposed only one thing, and that is that I might offend you by asking you to do what is contrary to your beliefs.”

The mad anger that carried him away so stupidly began to lose its first violence; another word added to what had already escaped him would be an avowal.

“Do not let us talk of it anymore,” he said. “Above all, do not let us think of it.”

“Permit me to say one word,” she replied. “Had I been situated like other people I would have asked nothing; my will is yours. But for you, for your future and your honor, you should not appear to marry in secret, as if ashamed, with a pariah.”

“Be easy. I feel as you do, more than you, the necessity of consecrated ceremonies for us.”

She understood that on this path he would go farther than she.

To destroy the impression of this unfortunate word, he proposed that they should visit the apartment he had engaged the previous day.

For the first time they walked together boldly, with heads held high, side by side in the streets of Paris, without fear of meeting others. How proud she was! Her husband! It was on her husband’s arm that she leaned! When they crossed the Tuileries she was almost surprised that people did not turn to see them pass.

In her present state of mind she could not but find the house he chose admirable; the street was admirable, the house was admirable, the apartment was admirable.

As it contained three bedrooms opening on a terrace, where he would keep the animals for his experiments, Saniel wished to have her decide which one she would choose; as she would share it with him she wished to take the best, but he would not accept this arrangement.

“I want you to choose between the two little ones,” he said. “The largest and best must be reserved for your mother, who, not being able to go out, needs more space, air, and light than we do.”

She was transported with his kindness, delicacy, and generosity. Never would she be able to love him enough to raise herself up to him.

Fortunately the principal rooms, the parlor and the office, were about the same size as those in the Rue Louis-le-Grand, so there need be but little change in furnishing; and they would bring their furniture from the Rue des Moines.

This feminine talk, interrupted by passionate exclamations and glances, charmed Saniel, who had forgotten the incident of the confession and his anger, thinking only of Phillis, seeing only her, ravished by her gayety, her vivacity, his whole being stirred by the tender caresses of her beautiful dark eyes.

How could he not be happy with this delicious woman who held such sway over him, and who loved him so ardently? For him a single danger henceforth—solitude. She would preserve him from it. With her gayety, good temper, courage, and love, she would not leave him to his thoughts; work would do the rest.

After the question of furniture was decided, they settled that of the marriage ceremony, and she was surprised to find that his ideas were the same as hers.

She decided upon her toilet, a silk gown as simple as possible, and she would make it herself, as she made all her gowns. And then they discussed the witnesses. “We have no friends,” Phillis said.

“You had some formerly; your father had friends and comrades.”

“I am no longer the daughter of my father, I am the sister of my brother; I would not dare to ask them to witness my marriage.”

“It is just because you are the sister of your brother that they cannot refuse you; it would be cruelty added to rudeness. Cruelty may be overlooked, but rudeness! Among the men of talent, who was your father’s best friend?”

“Cintrat.”

“Is he not a bohemian, a drunkard?”

"My father regarded him as the greatest painter of our time, the most original."

"It is not a question of talent, but of name; I am sure that he is not even decorated. Your father had other friends, more successful, more commonplace, if you wish."

"Glorient."

"The member of the Institute?"

"Casparis, the sculptor."

"An academician, also; that is what we want, and both are 'archi-decore'. You will write them, and tell them who I am, assistant professor of the school of medicine, and doctor of the hospitals. I promise you they will accept. I will ask my old master Carbonneau, president of the academy of medicine; and Claudet, the ancient minister, who, in his quality of deputy of my department, could not decline any more than the others. And that will give us decorated witnesses, which will look well in the newspapers."

It was not only in the newspapers they looked well, but also in the church of Sainte-Marie des Batignolles.

"Glorient! Casparis! Carbonneau! Claudet! Art, science, and politics."

But the beauty and charm of the bride were not eclipsed by these glorious witnesses. She entered on Glorient's arm, proud in her modesty, radiant with grace.

While the priest celebrated mass at the altar, outside, before the door, a man dressed in a costume of chestnut velvet, and wearing a felt hat, walked up and down, smoking a pipe. It was the Count de Brigard, whose principles forbade him to enter a church for either a wedding or a funeral, and who walked up and down on the sidewalk with his disciples, waiting to congratulate Saniel. When he appeared the Count rushed up to him, and taking his hand pressed it warmly on separating him from his wife, and saying:

"It is good, it is noble. Circumstances made this marriage; without them it would not have taken place. I understand and I excuse it; I do more, I applaud it. My dear friend, you are a man."

And as it was Wednesday, in the evening at Crozat's, he publicly expressed his approbation, which, in the conditions in which it had been offered, did not satisfy his conscience.

"Gentlemen, we have assisted to-day at a grand act of reparation, the marriage of our friend Saniel to the sister of this poor boy, victim of an injustice that cries for vengeance. One evening in this same room, I spoke lightly of Saniel, some of you remember, perhaps, in spite of the time that has passed. I wish to make this public reparation to him. To-day he has shown himself a man of duty and of conscience, bravely putting himself above social weaknesses."

"Is it not a social weakness," asked Glady, "to have chosen as witnesses of this act of reparation persons who seem to have been selected for the decorative side of their official positions?"

"Profound irony, on the contrary!" said Brigard. "It is a powerful and fruitful lesson, which makes even those who are professional defenders concur in the demolition of the prejudiced. Saniel is a man!"

CHAPTER XL. PHILLIS IS SURPRISED

The Sunday following her marriage, Phillis experienced a surprise on which she reflected a long time without finding a satisfactory explanation.

As she was dressing, Saniel entered her room.

"What are you going to do to-day?" he asked.

"That which I do every day."

"You are not going to mass?"

She looked at him astonished, not being able to control her surprise, and as usual, when she appeared to wish to read his thoughts, he showed temper.

“In what way is my question extraordinary?”

“Mass is not exactly the usual subject of your thoughts, it seems to me.”

“It may become so, especially when I think of others, as is the case just now. Do you not often go to mass?”

“When I can.”

“Very well, you can go to-day if you wish. Listen to what I have to say to you. I have not forgotten the promise you made to respect my ideas and beliefs. I wish to make you the same; it is very simple.”

“All that is good and generous seems simple to you.”

“Well?”

“I will go at once.”

“Now? At once? It is not eight o’clock. Go to high mass, it is more fashionable.”

Fashionable! What a strange word in his mouth! It was not out of respect to fashion that she went to church, but because there was in her a depth of religious sentiment and of piety, a little vague perhaps, which Florentin’s misfortunes had revived.

“I will go to high mass,” she said, without letting it appear that this word had suggested anything to her, and continuing her dressing.

“Are you going to wear this frock?” he asked, pointing to one that lay on a chair.

“Yes; at least if it does not displease you.”

“I find it rather simple.”

In effect it was of extreme simplicity, made of some cheap stuff, its only charm being an originality that Phillis gave it on making it herself.

“Do not forget,” he continued, “that Saint-Francois-Xavier is not a church for working people; when a woman is as charming as you are she is always noticed. People will ask who you are.”

“You are right; I will wear the gown I wore at the distribution of the prices.”

“That is it; and your bonnet, will you not, instead of the round hat? The first impression should be the best.”

This mixture of religious and worldly things was surprising in him. Had she not understood him, then, until now? After all, perhaps it was only an exception.

But these exactions regarding her dress were repeated. Although before her marriage Phillis had only crossed Saniel’s path, she knew him well enough to know that he was entirely given up to work, without thought of anything else, and she believed that after marriage he would continue to work in the same way, not caring for amusements or society. She was correct about his work, but not so regarding society. A short time after their marriage the minister Claudet was cured opportunely of an attack of facial neuralgia by Saniel, for whom he conceived a great friendship. He invited Saniel and his wife to all his reunions and fetes, and Saniel accepted all his invitations.

At first her wedding gown answered very well, but it would not do always. It had to be trimmed, modified, three or four toilets made of one gown; but, however ingenious Phillis might be in arranging several yards of tulle or gauze, she could not make combinations indefinitely.

And besides, they did not please Saniel; they were too simple. He liked lace, beads, flowers, something shining and glittering, such as he saw other women wear.

How could she please him with the small resources at her disposal? In her household expenses she was as economical as possible; Joseph was dismissed, and replaced by a maid who did all the work; the table was extremely simple. But these little economies, saved on one side, were quickly spent on the other in toilets and carriages.

When she expressed a wish to work, to paint menus, he would not consent, and when she insisted he became angry.

He only permitted her to paint pictures. As she had formerly painted for amusement in her father's studio, she might do so now. If trade were a disgrace, art might be honorable. If she had talent he would be glad of it; and if she should sell her pictures it would be original enough to cause her to be talked about.

The salon was partly transformed into a studio, and Phillis painted several little pictures, which, without having any pretensions to great art, were pleasing and painted with a certain dash. Glorient admired them, and made a picture-dealer buy two of them and order others, at a small price it is true, but it was much more than she expected.

With the courage and constancy that women put into work that pleases them, she would willingly have painted from morning till night; but the connections that Saniel had made did not leave her this liberty. Through Claudet they made many acquaintances and accepted invitations that placed her under social obligations, so that almost every day she had a visit to pay, a funeral or a marriage to attend, besides an occasional charity fair, and her own day at home, when she listened for three hours to feminine gossip of no interest to her.

As for him, what pleasure could he take in dressing after a hard day's work to go to a reception? He, son of a peasant, and a peasant himself in so many ways, who formerly understood nothing of fashionable life and felt only contempt for it, finding it as dull as it was ridiculous.

She tried to find a cause for this change, and when lightly, in a roundabout way, she brought him to explain himself, she could only draw one answer from him, which was no answer to her:

"We must be of the world."

Why did he care so much about society? Was it because she was the sister of a criminal that he wished to take her everywhere and make people receive her? She understood this up to a certain point, although the part he made her play was the most cruel that he could give her, and entirely contrary to what she would have chosen if she had been free.

But this was all there was in his desire to be of the world. Because he had married her he was not the brother of a criminal, and on close observation it might be seen that all he desired of these persons in high places whom he sought was their consideration, a part of their importance and honor. But he did not need this; he was some one by himself. The position that he had made was worthy of his merit. His name was honored. His future was envied.

And yet, as if he did not realize this, he sought small satisfactions, unworthy of a serious ambition. One evening she was very much surprised when he told her that the decoration of a Spanish republic was offered to him, and although she had formed a habit of watching over her words she could not help exclaiming:

"What will you do with that?"

"I could not refuse it."

Not only had he not refused it, but he had accepted others, blue, green, yellow, and tricolored; he wore them in his buttonhole, around his neck, and on his breast. What good could those decorations do that belittled him? And how could a man of his merit hasten to obtain the Legion of Honor before it fell to him naturally?

All this was astonishing, mysterious, and silly, and her mind dwelt upon it when she was alone before her easel; while near her in his laboratory, he continued his experiments, or wrote an article in his office for the Review.

But it was not without a struggle that she permitted herself to judge him in this way. One does not judge those whom one loves, and she loved him. Was it not failing in respect to her love that she did not admire him in every way? When these ideas oppressed her she left her easel and went to him. Close to him they disappeared. At first, in order not to disturb him, she entered on tiptoe, walking softly and leaning over his shoulder, embraced him before he saw or heard her; but he betrayed such horror, such fear, that she gave up this way of greeting him.

She continued to go to his room, but in a different way. Instead of surprising him she announced her presence by rattling the handle of the door, and walking noisily, and instead of receiving her with uneasy manner he welcomed her joyfully.

"You have finished painting?"

"I have come to see you for a little while."

"Very well, stay with me, do not go away immediately; I am never so happy, I never work so well, as when I have you near me."

She felt that this was true. When she was with him, whether she spoke or not, her presence made him happy.

And still she must appear not to look at him too attentively, as if with the manifest intention of studying him; for she did this during the first days of their marriage, and angered him so much that he exclaimed:

"Why do you examine me thus? What do you look for in me?"

She learned to watch herself carefully, and when with him to preserve a discreet attitude that should not offend him. No curious looks, and no questions. But this was not always easy, so she asked leave to assist him in his work, and sometimes drew in larger size the designs that he made for his microscopical studies. In this way the time passed rapidly. If he were but willing to pass the evening hours in this sweet intimacy, without a word about going out, how happy she would be! But he never forgot the hour.

"Allons," he said, interrupting himself, "we must go."

She had never dared to ask the true reason for this "must."

CHAPTER XLI. A TROUBLED SOUL

If she dared not frankly ask him this question: Why must we go out? any more than the others: Why is it proper that I should go to mass to be seen? Why should I wear gowns that ruin us? Why do you accept decorations that are valueless in your eyes? Why do you seek the society of men who have no merit but what they derive from their official position or from their fortune? Why do we take upon ourselves social duties that weary both of us, instead of remaining together in a tender and intelligent intimacy that is sweet to us both? she could not ask herself.

They all appertained to this order of ideas, that she, without doubt, found explained them: disposition of character; the exactions of an ambition in haste to realize its desires; susceptibility or overshadowing pride; but there were others founded on observation or memory, having no connection with those, or so it seemed to her.

She began to know her husband the day following their marriage, having believed that he was always such as he revealed himself to her; but this was not the case, and the man she had loved was so unlike the man whose wife she had become, that it might almost be thought there were two.

To tell the truth, it was not marriage that made the change in his temper that distressed her; but it was not less characteristic by that, that it dated back to a period anterior to this marriage.

She remembered the commencement with a clearness that left no place for doubt or hesitation; it was at the time when pursued by creditors he entered into relations with Caffie. For the first time he, always so strong that she believed him above weakness, had had a moment of discouragement on announcing that he would probably be obliged to leave Paris; but this depression had neither the anger nor weakness that he had since shown. It was the natural sadness of a man who saw his future destroyed, nothing more. The only surprise that she then felt was caused by the idea of strangling Caffie and taking enough money from his safe to clear himself from debt, and also because he said—as a consequence of this act—speaking of the remorse of an intelligent man, that his conscience would not reproach him, since for him conscience did not exist. But this was evidently a simple philosophical theory, not a trait of character; a jest or an argument for the sake of discussion.

Relieved from his creditors with the money won at Monaco, he returned to his usual calm, working harder than ever, passing his 'concours', and when it seemed excusable that he might be nervous,

violent, unjust, he remained the man that he had been ever since she knew him. Then, all at once, a short time before Florlentin went to the assizes, occurred these strange explosions of temper, spasms of anger, and restlessness that she could not explain, manifesting themselves exactly at the time when, by Madame Dammauville's intervention, she hoped Florentin would be saved. She had not forgotten the furious anger, that was inexplicable and unjustifiable, with which he refused her request to see Madame Dammauville. He had thrust her away, wishing to break with her, and until she was a witness of this scene she never imagined that any one could put such violence into exasperation. Then to this scene succeeded another, totally opposed, which had not less impressed her, when, at their little dinner by the fire, he showed such profound desolation on telling her to keep the memory of this evening when she should judge him, and announcing to her, in a prophetic sort of way, that the hour would come when she would know him whom she loved.

And now this hour, the thought of which she had thrown far from her, had sounded; she sought to combine the elements of this judgment which then appeared criminal to her, and now forced itself upon her, whatever she might do to repel it.

How many times this memory returned to her! It could almost be said that it had never left her, sweet and sad at the same time, less sweet and more sad, according as new subjects for uneasiness were added to the others, in deepening the mysterious and troublous impression that it left with her.

To judge him! Why did he wish that she should judge him? And on what?

And yet with him it was not an insignificant word, but the evidence of a particular state of conscience, which many times since asserted itself. Was it not, in effect, to this order of ideas that the cry belonged that escaped him in the night when, waking suddenly, he asked with emotion, with fright: "What have I said?" And also to the same appertained the anger that carried him away when, 'a propos' of their religious marriage, she spoke of confession: "Why do you think that I should be afraid to go to confession?"

How could he imagine that she could admit the idea of fear in connection with him? The idea never occurred to her mind until this moment; and if now the memory of her astonishment came to her, it was because of other little things added to those of the past that evoked it.

How numerous and significant they were, these things: his constant uneasiness on seeing himself watched by her; his invitation when he thought she was going to question him; his access of passion when, through heedlessness or forgetfulness, or simply by chance, she asked him a question on certain subjects, and immediately the tenderness that followed, so sudden that they appeared rather planned in view of a determined end than natural or spontaneous.

It was a long time before she admitted the calculation under the sweet words that made her so happy; but in the end it was well that she should open her eyes to the evidence, and see that they were with him the consequences of the same and constant preoccupation, that of not committing himself.

It was only one step from this to ask him what he did not wish to yield up.

Yet, as short as it was, she resisted for a long time the curiosity that possessed her. It was her duty as a loving and devoted wife not to seek beyond what he showed her, and this duty was in perfect accord with the dispositions of her love; but the power of things seen carried her beyond will and reason. She could not apply her mind to search for that which agonized her, and she could not close her eyes and ears to what she saw and heard.

And what struck them were the same observations, turning always in the same circle, applied to the same subjects and persons:

Caffie's name irritated him; Madame Dammauville's angered him; Florentin's made him positively unhappy.

As for the two former, she might have prevented the pronunciation of them when she saw the effect they infallibly produced on him.

But she could not prevent the utterance of Florentin's name, even had she wished it. How could she tell her mother never to speak the name of him who was constantly in their thoughts?

In spite of Saniel's efforts and solicitations, supported by Nougarede's, Florentin had embarked for New Caledonia, whence he wrote as often as he could. His letters related all his sufferings in the

terrible galleys, where he was confined during the voyage, and since his arrival they were a series of long complaints, continued from one to the other, like a story without end, turning always on the same subject, his physical sufferings, his humiliation, his discouragement, and his disgust in the midst of the unfortunates whose companion he was.

The arrival of these letters filled the mother and sister with anguish that lasted for several days; and this anguish, that neither of them could dissimulate, angered Saniel.

"What would you do if he were dead?" he asked Phillis.

"Would it not be better for him?"

"But he will return."

"In what condition?"

"Are we the masters of fate?"

"We weep, we do not complain."

But he complained of the weeping faces that surrounded him, the tears they concealed from him, the sighs they stifled. Ordinarily he was tender and affectionate to his mother-in-law, with attention and deference which in some ways seemed affected, as if he were so by will rather than by natural sentiment; but at these times he forgot this tenderness, and treated her with hardness so unjust, that more than once Madame Cormier spoke of it to her daughter.

"How can your husband, who is so good to me, be so merciless regarding Florentin? One would say that our sadness produces on him the effect of a reproach that we would address to him."

One day when things had gone farther than usual, she had the courage to speak to him plainly: "Forgive me for burdening you with the weariness of our disgrace," she said to him. "When I complain of everything, of men and things, you should remember that you are the exception, you who have done everything to save him."

But these few words which she believed would calm the irritation of her son-in-law, had on the contrary exasperated him; he left her, furious.

"I do not understand your husband at all," she said to her daughter. "Will you not explain to me what the matter is with him?"

How could she give her mother the explanation that she could not give herself? Having reached an unfathomable abyss, she dared not even lean over to look into its depths; and instead of going on in the path where she was pledged in spite of herself, she made every effort to return, or at least to stop.

What good would it do to find out why he was so peculiar, and what it was that he took so much pains to conceal? This could only be idle curiosity on her part, for which she would be punished sooner or later.

Turning these thoughts over continually in her mind she lost her gayety, her power to resist blows of fate, such as the small trials of life, which formerly made her courageous; her vigorous elasticity sunk under the heavy weight with which it was charged, and her smiling eyes now more often expressed anxiety than happiness and confidence.

In spite of her watchfulness over herself she was not able to hide the change from Saniel, for it manifested itself in everything—in her face formerly so open, but which now bore the imprint of a secret sadness; in her concentrated manner, in her silence and abstraction.

What was the matter with her? He questioned her, and she replied with the prudence that she used in all her conversation with him. He examined her medically, but found nothing to indicate a sickly condition which would justify the change in her.

If she did not wish to answer his questions, and he had the proof that she did not wish to; if, on the other hand, she was not ill, and he was convinced that she was not—there must be something serious the matter to make the woman whom but lately he read so easily become an enigma that made him uneasy.

And this thing—if it were that whose crushing weight he himself carried on his bent shoulders? She divined, she understood, if not all, at least a part of the truth.

What an extraordinary situation was hers, and one which might truly destroy her reason.

Nothing to fear from others, everything from himself. Justice, law, the world—on all sides he was let alone; nothing was asked of him; that which was owed was paid; but he by a sickly aberration was going to awake the dead who slept in their tomb, from which no one thought of taking them, and to make spectres of them which he alone saw and heard.

And he believed himself strong. Fool that he was, and still more foolish to have taken such a charge when by the exercise of his will he did not place himself in a condition to carry it! To will! But he had not learned how to will.

CHAPTER XLII. THE POWER OF HYPNOTISM

The relative calm that Saniel had felt since his marriage he owed to Phillis; to the strength, the confidence, the peace that he drew from her. Phillis without strength, without confidence, without interior peace, such as she was now, could not give him what she no longer had herself, and he returned to the distracted condition that preceded his marriage, and felt the same anguish, the same agitation, the same madness. The beautiful relations, worldly consideration, success, decorations, honors, were good for others; but for his happiness he required the tranquillity and serenity of his wife, and her good moral health which passed into him when she slept on his shoulder. In that case there were no sudden awakenings, no sleeplessness; at the sound of her gentle respiration he was reassured, and the spectres remained in their tomb.

But now that this respiration was agitated, and he no longer felt in her this tranquillity and serenity, he was no longer calm; she was weak and uneasy, and she communicated her fever to him, not her sleep.

“You do not sleep. Why do you not sleep?”

“And you?”

He must know.

He persisted in his questions, but she was always on her guard, so that he was unable to draw anything from her, checked as he was by the fear of betraying himself, which seemed easy at the point he believed she had reached. An awkward word, too much persistence, would let a flood of light into her mind.

He also affected to speak as a physician when questioning her, and to look for medical explanations of her condition.

“If you do not sleep it is because you suffer. What is this suffering? From what does it proceed?”

Having no reasons to give to justify it, since she did not even dare to speak of her brother, she denied it obstinately.

“But nothing is the matter with me, I assure you,” she repeated. “What do you think is the matter?”

“That is what I ask you.”

“Then I ask you: What do you think I conceal from you?”

He could not say that he suspected her of concealing anything from him.

“You do not watch yourself properly.”

“I can do nothing.”

“I will force you to watch yourself and to speak.”

“How?”

“By putting you to sleep.”

The threat was so terrible that she was beside herself.

"Do not do that!" she cried.

They looked at each other for a few moments in silence, both equally frightened, she at the threat, he at what he would learn from her. But to show this fright was on his side to let loose another proof even more grave.

"Why should I not seek to discover in every way the cause of this uneasiness which escapes my examination as well as yours? For that somnambulism offers us an excellent way."

"But since I am not ill, what more could I tell you when I am asleep than when I am awake?"

"We shall see."

"It is an experiment that I ask you not to attempt. Would you try a poison on me?"

"Somnambulism is not a poison."

"Who knows?"

"Those who have made use of it."

"But you have not."

"Still I know enough to know that you will run no danger in my hands."

She believed that he opened a door of escape to her.

"Never mind, I am too much afraid. If you ever want to make me talk in a state of forced somnambulism, ask one of your 'confreres' in whom you have confidence to put me to sleep."

Before a 'confrere' she was certain he would not ask her dangerous questions.

He understood that she wished to escape him.

"Afraid of what?" he asked. "That I shall ask you questions about the past, concerning your life before we knew each other, and demand a confession that would wound my love?"

"O Victor!" she cried, distracted. "What more cruel wound could you give me than these words? My confession! It comprises three words: I love you; I have never loved any one but you; I shall never love any one but you. I have no past; my life began with my love."

He could not press it without showing the importance that he attached to it.

"I do not insist," he said; "it is a way like any other, but better. You do not wish it, and we will not talk of it."

But he yielded too quickly for her to hope that he renounced his project, and she remained under the influence of a stupefying terror. What would she say if he made her talk? Everything, possibly. She did not even know what thoughts were hidden in the depths of her brain, and she knew absolutely nothing of this forced somnambulism with which she was threatened.

At this time the works of the school of Nancy on sleep, hypnotism, and suggestion, had not yet been published, or at least the book which served as their starting-point was not known, and she knew nothing of processes that were employed to provoke the hypnotic sleep. As soon as her husband left the house she looked for some book in the library that would enlighten her. But the dictionary that she found gave only obscure or confused instructions in which she floundered. The only exact point that struck her was the method employed to produce sleep; to make the subject look at a brilliant object placed from fifteen to twenty centimetres in front of the eyes. If this were true she had no fear of ever being put to sleep.

However, she was not reassured; and when a few days later at a dinner she found herself seated next to one of her husband's 'confreres', who she knew interested himself in somnambulism, she had the courage to conquer her usual timidity concerning medicine, and questioned him.

"Are there not persons with certain diseases who can be put into a state of somnambulism?"

"It was formerly believed by the public and by many physicians that only persons afflicted with hysteria and nervous troubles could be put to sleep in this way, but it was a mistake; artificial somnambulism may be produced on many subjects who are perfectly healthy."

"Is the will preserved in sleep?"

"The subject only preserves the spontaneity and will that his hypnotizer leaves him, who at his pleasure makes him sad, gay, angry, or tender, and plays with his soul as with an instrument."

"But that is frightful."

"Curious, at least. It is certain that there is a local paralysis of such or such a cell, the study of which is the starting-point of many interesting discoveries."

"When he wakes, does the subject remember what he has said?"

"There is a difference of opinion on this point. Some say yes, and others no. As for me, I believe the memory depends upon the degree of sleep: with a light sleep there is remembrance, but with a profound sleep the subject does not remember what he has said or heard or done."

She would have liked to continue, and her companion, glad to talk of what interested him, would willingly have said more, but she saw her husband at the other end of the table watching them by fits and starts, and fearing that he would suspect the subject of their conversation she remained silent.

What she had just learned seemed to her frightful. But, at least, as she would not let herself be hypnotized she had nothing to fear; and remembering what she had read, she promised herself that she would never let him place her in a position where he could put her to sleep. It was during the sleep that the will of the hypnotizer controlled that of the subject, not before.

Resting on this belief, and also on his not having again spoken of sending her to sleep, she was reassured. Was not this a sign that he accepted her opposition and renounced his idea of provoked somnambulism?

But she deceived herself.

One night when she had gone to bed at her usual hour while he remained at his work, she awoke suddenly and saw him standing near her, looking at her with eyes whose fixed stare frightened her.

"What is the matter? What do you want?"

"Nothing, I want nothing; I am going to bed."

In spite of the strangeness of his glance she did not persist; questions would have taught her nothing. And besides, now that he no longer went to bed at the same time as she did, there was nothing extraordinary in his attitude.

But a few days from that she woke again in the night with a feeling of distress, and saw him leaning over her as if he would envelop her in his arms.

This time, frightened as she was, she had the strength to say nothing, but her anguish was the more intense. Did he then wish to hypnotize her while she slept? Was it possible? Then the dictionary had deceived her?

In truth it was while she slept that Saniel tried to transform her natural into an artificial sleep. Would he succeed? He knew nothing about it, for the experience was new. But he risked it.

The first time, instead of putting her into a state of somnambulism, he awoke her; the second, he succeeded no better; the third, when he saw that after a certain time she did not open her eyes, he supposed that she was asleep. To assure himself, he raised her arm, which remained in the air until he placed it on the bed. Then taking her two hands, he turned them backward, and withdrawing his own, the impulsion which he gave lasted until he checked it. Her face had an expression of calmness and tranquillity that it had not had for a long time; she was the pretty Phillis of other days, with the sprightly glance.

"To-morrow I will make you sleep at the same time," he said, "and you will talk."

The next night he put her to sleep even more easily, but when he questioned her she resisted.

"No," she said, "I will not speak; it is horrible. I will not, I cannot."

He insisted, but she would not.

"Very well, so be it," he said; "not to-day, to-morrow. But to-morrow I wish you to speak, and you shall not resist me; I will it!"

If he did not insist it was not only because he knew that habit was necessary to make her submit to his will without being able to defend herself, but because he was ignorant whether, when she awoke,

she had any memory of what happened in her sleep, which was an important point.

The next night she was the same as she had been the previous evening, and nothing indicated that she was conscious of her provoked sleep, any more than what she said in this sleep. He could then continue.

This time she went to sleep sooner and more easily than usual, and her face took the expression of tranquillity and repose he had seen the night before. Would she answer? And if she consented, would she speak sincerely, without attempting to weaken or falsify the truth? Emotion made his voice tremble when he put the first question; it was his life, his peace, the happiness of both which decided him.

"Where do you suffer?" he asked.

"I do not suffer."

"Yet you are agitated, often melancholy or uneasy; you do not sleep well. What troubles you?"

"I am afraid."

"Afraid of what? Of whom?"

"Of you!"

He trembled.

"Afraid of me! Do you think that I could hurt you?"

"No."

His tightened heart relaxed.

"Then why are you afraid?"

"Because there are things in you that frighten me."

"What things? Be exact."

"The change that has taken place in your temper, your character, and your habits."

"And how do these changes make you uneasy?"

"They indicate a serious situation."

"What situation?"

"I do not know; I have never stated exactly."

"Why not?"

"Because I was afraid; and I closed my eyes so that I might not see."

"See what?"

"The explanation of all that is mysterious in your life."

"When did you notice the mystery in my life?"

"At the time of Caffie's death; and before, when you told me that you could kill him without any remorse."

"Do you know who killed Caffie?"

"No."

His relief was so great that for several moments he forgot to continue his interrogations. Then he went on: "And after?"

"A little before Madame Dammauville's death, when you became irritable and furious without cause; when you told me to go because you did not wish to see Madame Dammauville; when, the night before her death, you were so tender, and asked me not to judge you without recalling that hour."

"Yet you have judged me."

"Never. When worry urged me, my love checked me."

"What provoked this uneasiness outside of these facts?"

"Your manner of living since our marriage; your accesses of anger and of tenderness; your fear of being observed; your agitation at night; your complaints—"

"I talked?" he cried.

"Never distinctly; you groan often, and moan, pronouncing broken words without sense, unintelligible—"

His anguish was violent; when he recovered he continued:

"What is it in this way of living that has made you uneasy?"

"Your constant care not to commit yourself—"

"Commit myself how?"

"I do not know—"

"What else?"

"The anger that you show, or the embarrassment, when the name of Caffie is pronounced, Madame Dammauville's, and Florentin's—"

"And you conclude that my anger on hearing these three names—"

"Nothing—I am afraid—"

CHAPTER XLIII. THE TERRIBLE REVELATION

This confession threw him into a state of confusion and agitation, for if it did not go beyond what he feared, yet it revealed a terrible situation.

Clearly, as in an open book, he read her; if she did not know all, she was but one step from the truth, and if she had not taken this step, it was because her love restrained her. If her love had been less strong, less powerful, she certainly would not have withstood the proofs that pressed on her from all sides.

But because she had held back so long, he must not conclude that the struggle would be continued in this way, and that a more violent blow, a stronger proof than the others, would not open her eyes in spite of herself.

It only needed an imprudence, a carelessness on his part, and unluckily he could no longer be relied on.

From what he had just learned it would be easy to watch himself closely, and to avoid dangerous subjects, those that she described to him; but if he could guard his words and looks during the day, neither saying nor letting anything appear that was an accusation, not confirming the suspicions against which she struggled, he could not do it at night.

He had not talked, and when she answered negatively to his question, she lifted a terribly heavy weight from his heart. But he had groaned and moaned, he had pronounced broken words without sense and unintelligible, and there was the danger.

What was necessary to make these sighs, these groans, these broken and unintelligible words become distinct and take a meaning? A nothing, an accident, since his real cerebral tendency placed him up to a certain point in a somnambulistic state. Was this tendency congenital with him or acquired? He did not know. Before the agitated nights after Madame Dammauville's death and Florentin's condemnation, the idea had never occurred to him that he might talk in his sleep. But now he had the proof that the vague fears which had tormented him on this subject were only too well founded; he had talked, and if the words that escaped were not now comprehensible, they might become so.

Without having made a special study of sleep, natural or induced, he knew that in the case of natural somnambulists a hypnotic sleep is easily produced, and that while holding a conversation with a subject who talks in his sleep one may readily hypnotize him. Without doubt he need not fear this from Phillis; but it was possible that some night when incoherent words escaped him she would not be able to resist

the temptation to enter into a conversation with him, and to lead him to confess what she wished to know—what the love that she felt for her brother would drive her to wish to learn.

If this opportunity presented itself, would the love for her brother or for her husband carry her away? If she questioned him, what would he not say?

For the first time he asked himself if he had done right to marry, and if, on the contrary, he had not committed a mad imprudence in introducing a woman into a life so tormented as his. He had asked calmness from this woman, and now she brought him terror.

To tell the truth, she was dangerous only at night; and if he found a way to occupy another room he would have nothing to fear from her during the day, on condition that he held himself rigorously on the defensive. Loving him as she did, she would resist the curiosity that drew her; if uneasiness drove her, her love would restrain her, as she herself had said; little by little this uneasiness and curiosity, being no longer excited, would die out, and they would again enjoy the sweet days that followed their marriage.

But in the present circumstances this way was difficult to find, for to propose another room to Phillis would be equal to telling her that he was afraid of her, and consequently it would give her a new mystery to study. He reflected, and starting with the idea that the proposition of two rooms must come from Phillis, he arranged a plan which, it seemed to him, would accomplish what he wished.

Ignorant of the fact that she had been hypnotized, and not remembering that she had talked, without doubt Phillis still feared that he would hypnotize her; he would threaten it again, and surely she would find a way to defend herself and escape from him.

This is what happened. The next day, when he told her decidedly that he wished to put her to sleep in order that he might learn what troubled her, she showed the same fright as on the first time.

“All that you have asked of me, everything that you have desired, I have wished as you and with you; but I will never consent to this.”

“Your resistance is absurd; I will not yield to it.”

“You shall not put me to sleep against my will.”

“Easily.”

“It is not possible.”

Without replying, he took a book from the library, and turning over the leaves, he read: “Is it possible to make a sleeping person, without awaking him, pass from the natural to the hypnotic sleep? The thing is possible, at least with certain subjects.”

Then handing her the book:

“You see that to put you to sleep artificially I need only the opportunity of finding you sleeping naturally. It is very simple.”

“That would be odious.”

“Those are merely words.”

He threw her into such a state of terror that she kept awake all night, and as he would not sleep for fear of talking, he felt that she exerted every faculty to keep awake. But had he not gone too far? And by this threat would he not drive her to some desperate act? If she should escape, if she deserted him—what would become of him without her? Was she not his whole life? But he reassured himself by saying that she loved him too much ever to consent to a separation. Without doubt, she herself would come to think as he wished her to think.

And yet when he returned home in the evening she told him that her mother was not well, and begged him to examine her. This examination proved that Madame Cormier was in her usual health; but she complained that her breath failed her—during the day she had feared syncope.

“If you are willing,” Phillis said, “I will sleep near mamma. I am afraid of not hearing her at night, and she is suffering.”

He began by refusing, then he consented to this arrangement; and to thank him for it she stayed with him in his office, affectionate, full of tenderness and caresses, until he went to his room.

He was then free to sleep or not; whether he groaned or talked she could not hear him, since there was no communicating door between his room and that of his mother-in-law; his voice certainly would not penetrate the partition.

Who could have told him on the night that he decided to marry, that he would come to such a pass—to be afraid, to hide himself from her who brought him the calmness of sleep; and that by his fault, by a chain of imprudences and stupidities, as if it were written that in everything he would owe his sufferings to himself, and that if he ever succumbed to the whirlwind that swept him along, it would be by his own deed, by his own hand? At last he had assured the tranquillity of his nights, and as a further precaution, although he did not fear that Phillis would enter his room while he slept, to surprise him—she who dared not look in the face what suspicion showed her—he locked his door. Naturally, Phillis could not always sleep with her mother; but he would find a way to suggest frankly their sleeping apart, and surely he could find one in the storehouse of medicine.

These cares and similar fears were not of a nature to dispose him to sleep, and besides for a long time he had suffered from an exasperating nervous insomnia. As the night was warm he thought a little fresh air would calm him, and he opened the window; if this freshness did not calm him, at least it would make him sleep.

Obliged to improvise a bed in her mother's room, Phillis placed it against the partition that separated her from her husband, but without preconcerted intention, simply by accident, because it was the only place where she could put the bed. A little after midnight an unusual noise awoke her; she sat up to listen and to recover herself. It seemed as if this noise came from her husband's room. Alarmed, she placed her ear against the partition. She was not deceived; they were stifled groans, moans that were repeated at short intervals.

Carefully yet quickly she left her bed, and as the dawn was already shining in the windows, she was able to leave the room without making any noise. Reaching the door of her husband's room she listened; she was not deceived; they were indeed groans, but louder and sadder than those she had so often heard during the night. She tried the door, but it was evidently locked on the inside. What was the matter with him? She must know, must go to him, and give him relief. She thought of knocking, of shaking the door; but as he did not reply when she tried to open it, it was because he did not hear or did not wish to hear. Then she thought of the terrace; from there she could see what happened, and if it were necessary she would break a pane to enter.

She found the window open and saw her husband on the bed, sleeping, his head turned toward her; she stopped and asked herself if she should cross the threshold and wake him.

At this moment, with closed lips, he pronounced several words more distinctly than those that had so many times escaped him: "Phillis—forgive."

He dreamed of her. Poor, dear Victor! for what did he wish her to pardon him? Doubtless for having threatened to hypnotize her:

Overcome by this proof of love she put her head through the opening of the window to give him a look before returning to her mother, but on seeing his face in the full white light of the morning, she was frightened; it expressed the most violent sorrow, the features convulsed with anguish and horror at the same time. Surely he was ill. She must wake him. Just as she took a step toward him he began to speak: "Your brother—or me?"

She stopped as if thunderstruck, then instinctively she drew back and clung to the window in the vestibule to keep herself from falling, repeating those two words that she had just heard, not understanding, not wishing to understand.

Instead of returning to her mother, trembling and holding on to the wall she entered the parlor and let herself fall into a chair, prostrated, crushed.

"Your brother—or me?"

This was, then, the truth, the frightful truth that she had never wished to see.

She stayed there until the noises in the street warned her that it was getting late, and she might be surprised. Then she returned to her mother.

"I am going out," she said; "I will return at half-past eight or nine o'clock."

"But your husband will not see you before going to the hospital."

"You will tell him that I have gone out."

She returned at half-past nine. Madame Cormier had finished dressing.

"At last you have come," she said.

But at sight of her daughter's face she saw that something had happened. "My God! What is the matter?" she asked, trembling.

"Something serious—very serious, but unfortunately it is irreparable. We must leave here, never to return."

"Your husband—"

"You must never speak to me of him. This the only thing I ask of you."

"Alas! I understand. It is what I foresaw, what I said would happen. You cannot bear the contempt that he shows us on account of your brother."

"We must hereafter be strangers to each other, and this is why we leave this house."

"My God! At my age, to drag my bones—"

"I have engaged a lodging at the Ternes; a wagon will come to take the furniture that belongs to us, what we brought here, only that. We will tell the concierge that we are going to the country. As for Josephine, you need not fear indiscreet questions, for I have given her a day off."

"But the money?"

"I have two hundred francs from the sale of my last picture; that is enough for the present. Before they are gone I shall have painted and sold another; do not worry, we shall have all we need."

All this was said in a hard but resolute tone.

A ring of the bell interrupted them. It was the express wagon.

"See that they do not take what does not belong to us," Phillis said. "While they fill their wagon I will write in the parlor."

At the end of an hour the wagon was ready. Madame Cormier entered the parlor to tell her daughter.

"I have finished," Phillis said.

Having placed her letter in an envelope, she laid it in full view on Saniel's desk.

"Now let us go," she said.

And as her mother sighed, while walking with difficulty

"Lean on me, dear mamma, you know I am strong."

CHAPTER XLIV. AFTER LONG YEARS

Saniel did not return until quite late in the afternoon. When he opened the door with his key he was surprised at not seeing his wife run to him and kiss him.

"She is painting," he said to himself, "she did not hear me."

He passed into the parlor, convinced that he would find her at her easel; but he did not see her, and the easel was not in its usual place, there nor anywhere else.

He knocked at the door of Madame Cormier's room; there was no reply; he knocked louder a second time, and after waiting a moment he entered. The room was empty; there was no bed, no furniture, no one.

Stupefied, he looked around him, then returning to the vestibule he called: "Phillis! Phillis!"

There was no reply. He ran to the kitchen, no one was there; he went into his office, no one there. But as he looked about him, he saw Phillis's letter on his desk, and his heart leaped; he grasped it eagerly, and opened it with a trembling hand. It was as follows:

"I have gone, never to return. My despair and disgust of life are such, that without my mother and the poor being who is so far away, I should kill myself; but in spite of the horror of my position I was obliged to reflect, and I do not wish to aggravate by folly the wickedness that is going on about me. My mother is no longer young; she is ill and has suffered cruelly. Not only do I owe it to her to brighten her old age by my presence, by the material and moral support that I can give her, but she must have faith that I am there to replace her, and to open my arms to her son, to my brother. The least that I can do for them is to wait courageously for him; and, however weary, terrible, or frightful my life may be hereafter, I shall bear it so that the unfortunate, the pariah, whom a pitiless fate has pursued, will find on his return a hearth, a home, a friend. This will be my only object, my reason for living; and in order to save myself from sluggishness and weariness, my thoughts will always be on the time when he will return, he whom I will call my child, and whom my love must save and cure. I know that long years separate me from that day, and that until it comes my broken heart will never have a moment of repose; but I shall employ this time in working for him, for the brother, for the child, for the cherished being who will come to me aged and desperate; and I wish that he may yet believe in something good, that he will not imagine everything in this world is unjust and infamous, for he will return to me weighed down by twenty years of shame, of degrading and undeserved shame. How will he bear these twenty years? What efforts must I not make to prove to him that he should not abandon himself to despair, and that life often offers the remedy, compassion to the most profound, to the most unjust human sorrows? How can I make him believe that? How lead his poor heart, closed to confidence, to feeling, to the tears that alone can relieve it? God who has so sorely tried me, without doubt will come to my aid, and will inspire me with words of consolation, will show me the path to follow, and give me the strength to persevere. Have I not already to thank Him for being alone in the world, outside of a mother and brother who will not betray me? I have no children, and I am spared the terror of seeing a soul growing in evil, an intelligence escaping from me to follow the path of infamy or dishonor. I leave, then, as I came. I was a poor girl, I go away a poor woman. I have taken the clothing and personal effects that I brought into our common home, nothing that was bought with your money; and I forbid you to interfere with my wish in this question of material things, as well as in my resolution to fly from you. Nothing can ever reunite us; nothing shall reunite us, no consideration, no necessity. I reject the past, this guilty past, the responsibility of which weighs so heavily on my conscience, and I should like to lose the memory of the detested time. It would be impossible for me to accept the struggle, or supplications, if you think it expedient to make any. I have cut our bonds, and hereafter we shall be as far apart as if one of us were dead, or even farther. Have no scruples, then, in leaving me alone to face a new life, a beginning that may appear difficult to one not situated as I am. The trials of former times were good for me, since they accustomed me to the difficulties of work. The desolation of to-day will sustain me, in the sense that having suffered all I can suffer, I no longer fear some discouraging catastrophe that will check me in my resolutions. In order not to compromise you, and more fully to become myself again, I shall take my family name—a dishonored name—but I shall bear it without shame. I shall live obscurely, absorbed in work and in trying to forget your existence; do the same yourself. If you think of the past, you will find, perhaps, that I am hard; yet this departure is not an egotistic desertion. I am no good to you, and the repose that you want would shun you hereafter in my presence. On the contrary, strive for forgetfulness, as I shall. If you contrive to wipe out of your life the part that is associated with me, perhaps you will be able to banish the remainder, and to recover

some of the calm of other days. I can no longer remember that I have loved you, for my position is such that I have not the refuge of memory; at my age I must remain without a past as without a future; the consolation of the unfortunate is lost to me with everything else. I cannot rise out of my sorrow to try to find one hour when life was sweet to me; those hours, on the contrary, make me tremble, and I reproach myself for them as if they were a crime. Thus, whichever way I turn, I find only sadness and sharp regrets; everything is blighted, dishonored for me."

Standing in the middle of his office he read this hastily written letter breathlessly. Arrived at the end he looked about him vaguely. His chair was near his desk; he let himself fall into it and remained there prostrated, holding the letter in his shaking hand.

"Alone!"

It was an October afternoon, dark and muddy; in the Rue des Saints-Peres, in front of the houses that hide the Charity Hospital, coupes were standing, and their long line extended to the Boulevard Saint-Germain, where the coachmen, having left their seats, talked together like persons who were accustomed to meet each other. At half-past four o'clock, in the deepening twilight, men with grave looks and dark clothes—members of the Academy of Medicine—the Tuesday sitting over, issued from the porch, and entered their carriages. Some of them walked alone, briskly, in a great hurry; others demonstrated a skilful tardiness, stopping to talk politely to a journalist, and to give him notes of the day's meeting, or continuing, with a 'confrere' who was not an Academician, the conversation begun in the room of the 'pas-perdus'; it was the Bourse of consultations that was just closed. Not all the members of the Academy have, in truth, a long list of patients to visit; but each one has a vote to give, and they are those whom the candidates surround, trying to win them.

One of the Academicians who appeared the last at the top of the steps was a man of great height but bent figure, with hollow cheeks and pale face lighted by pale blue eyes with a strange expression, both hard and desolate at the same time. He advanced alone, and his heavy gait and dragging step gave him the appearance of a man sixty years of age, while in other ways he retained a certain youthfulness. It was Saniel, twenty years older.

Without exchanging a bow or a hand-shake with any one, he descended to the pavement and walked to the boulevard, where he opened the door of a coups whose interior showed a complete ambulant library—a writing table with paper, ink, and lamp, pockets full of books and pamphlets.

Just as he was about to enter, a voice stopped him.

He turned; it was one of his old pupils, who had recently become a physician in the suburb of Gentilly.

"What is it?" asked Saniel.

"I want to ask you to come and assist me in a curious case of spasms, where your intervention may be decisive."

"Where?"

"At the Maison-Blanche, a poor woman. What day could you give me?"

"Is it urgent?"

"Yes."

"In that case I will go at once. Give the address to my coachman, and get in with me."

But at this moment a white-haired man dressed in chestnut velvet, wearing a felt hat and sabots, came toward them, accompanied by two young men with whom he discoursed in a loud tone while gesticulating. People turned to look at them, so original was the appearance of old Brigard, the same man from head to foot that he had always been.

He came to Saniel with outstretched hands, and Saniel, taking off his hat, received him with marked respect.

"Enchanted to meet you," Brigard said, "for I went to your office yesterday and did not find you."

"Why did you not send me word beforehand? If you need me I am at your disposal."

"Thanks, but happily I do not need your advice, neither for myself nor my family; it was simply that I wished to see you. Arriving at your house before your office hours, I waited in your reception-room and several patients came after me—a young woman who appeared to suffer cruelly, an old lady who was extremely anxious, and lastly a man who had some nervous disease that would not permit him to sit still. And, looking at them, I said to myself that as I was only making a friendly visit I would not remain and prolong the waiting of these unfortunates who counted the minutes, so I came away."

"May I ask to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

The two young men who accompanied Brigard, and Saniel's old pupil discreetly withdrew.

"The desire to present you my congratulations. When I learned of your candidature to the Academy of Medicine I said to myself: Here is one who has no chance; friend Saniel has originality and force; he has succeeded brilliantly; but these qualities are not exactly academic. I was deceived. You have broken open the doors, which is the only way that I understand of entering these places. That is why I congratulate you. And, besides, I did you wrong formerly—"

"Wrong? You?"

"I accused you of believing yourself stronger than life; in truth you were. My compliments!"

After warmly pressing Saniel's hands, he went on his way with his two disciples, preaching to them.

The young doctor approached Saniel.

"He is an original," he said.

"A happy man!" was the only reply.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

As ignorant as a schoolmaster
As free from prejudices as one may be, one always retains a few
Confidence in one's self is strength, but it is also weakness
Conscience is a bad weighing-machine
Conscience is only an affair of environment and of education
Find it more easy to make myself feared than loved
For the rest of his life he would be the prisoner of his crime
Force, which is the last word of the philosophy of life
He did not sleep, so much the better! He would work more
I believed in the virtue of work, and look at me!
In his eyes everything was decided by luck
Intelligent persons have no remorse
It is the first crime that costs
It is only those who own something who worry about the price
Leant—and when I did not lose my friends I lost my money
Leisure must be had for light reading, and even more for love
Looking for a needle in a bundle of hay
Neither so simple nor so easy as they at first appeared
One does not judge those whom one loves
People whose principle was never to pay a doctor
Power to work, that was never disturbed or weakened by anything
Reason before the deed, and not after
Repeated and explained what he had already said and explained
She could not bear contempt
The strong walk alone because they need no one
We are so unhappy that our souls are weak against joy
We weep, we do not complain
Will not admit that conscience is the proper guide of our action
You love me, therefore you do not know me

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