HONORÉ DE BALZAC

SCENES FROM A COURTESAN'S LIFE

Оноре де Бальзак
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Содержание

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DEDICATION

To His Highness Prince Alfonso Serafino di Porcia. Allow me to place your name at the beginning of an essentially Parisian work, thought out in your house during these latter days. Is it not natural that I should offer you the flowers of rhetoric that blossomed in your garden, watered with the regrets I suffered from home-sickness, which you soothed, as I wandered under the boschetti whose elms reminded me of the Champs-Elysees? Thus, perchance, may I expiate the crime of having dreamed of Paris under the shadow of the Duomo, of having longed for our muddy streets on the clean and elegant flagstones of Porta-Renza. When I have some book to publish which may be dedicated to a Milanese lady, I shall have the happiness of finding names already dear to your old Italian romancers among those of women whom we love, and to whose memory I would beg you to recall your sincerely affectionate
DE BALZAC.

July 1838.

ESTHER HAPPY; OR, HOW A COURTESAN CAN LOVE

In 1824, at the last opera ball of the season, several masks were struck by the beauty of a youth who was wandering about the passages and greenroom with the air of a man in search of a woman kept at home by unexpected circumstances. The secret of this behavior, now dilatory and again hurried, is known only to old women and to certain experienced loungers. In this immense assembly the crowd does not trouble itself much to watch the crowd; each one's interest is impassioned, and even idlers are preoccupied.

The young dandy was so much absorbed in his anxious quest that he did not observe his own success; he did not hear, he did not see the ironical exclamations of admiration, the genuine appreciation, the biting gibes, the soft invitations of some of the masks. Though he was so handsome as to rank among those exceptional persons who come to an opera ball in search of an adventure, and who expect it as confidently as men looked for a lucky coup at roulette in Frascati's day, he seemed quite philosophically sure of his evening; he must be the hero of one of those mysteries with three actors which constitute an opera ball, and are known only to those who play a part in them; for, to young wives who come merely to say, "I have seen it," to country

people, to inexperienced youths, and to foreigners, the opera house must on those nights be the palace of fatigue and dulness. To these, that black swarm, slow and serried – coming, going, winding, turning, returning, mounting, descending, comparable only to ants on a pile of wood – is no more intelligible than the Bourse to a Breton peasant who has never heard of the Grand livre.

With a few rare exceptions, men wear no masks in Paris; a man in a domino is thought ridiculous. In this the spirit of the nation betrays itself. Men who want to hide their good fortune can enjoy the opera ball without going there; and masks who are absolutely compelled to go in come out again at once. One of the most amusing scenes is the crush at the doors produced as soon as the dancing begins, by the rush of persons getting away and struggling with those who are pushing in. So the men who wear masks are either jealous husbands who come to watch their wives, or husbands on the loose who do not wish to be watched by them – two situations equally ridiculous.

Now, our young man was followed, though he knew it not, by a man in a mask, dogging his steps, short and stout, with a rolling gait, like a barrel. To every one familiar with the opera this disguise betrayed a stock-broker, a banker, a lawyer, some citizen soul suspicious of infidelity. For in fact, in really high society, no one courts such humiliating proofs. Several masks had laughed as they pointed this preposterous figure out to each other; some had spoken to him, a few young men had made

game of him, but his stolid manner showed entire contempt for these aimless shafts; he went on whither the young man led him, as a hunted wild boar goes on and pays no heed to the bullets whistling about his ears, or the dogs barking at his heels.

Though at first sight pleasure and anxiety wear the same livery – the noble black robe of Venice – and though all is confusion at an opera ball, the various circles composing Parisian society meet there, recognize, and watch each other. There are certain ideas so clear to the initiated that this scrawled medley of interests is as legible to them as any amusing novel. So, to these old hands, this man could not be here by appointment; he would infallibly have worn some token, red, white, or green, such as notifies a happy meeting previously agreed on. Was it a case of revenge?

Seeing the domino following so closely in the wake of a man apparently happy in an assignation, some of the gazers looked again at the handsome face, on which anticipation had set its divine halo. The youth was interesting; the longer he wandered, the more curiosity he excited. Everything about him proclaimed the habits of refined life. In obedience to a fatal law of the time we live in, there is not much difference, physical or moral, between the most elegant and best bred son of a duke and peer and this attractive youth, whom poverty had not long since held in its iron grip in the heart of Paris. Beauty and youth might cover him in deep gulfs, as in many a young man who longs to play a part in Paris without having the capital to support his pretensions,

and who, day after day, risks all to win all, by sacrificing to the god who has most votaries in this royal city, namely, Chance. At the same time, his dress and manners were above reproach; he trod the classic floor of the opera house as one accustomed there. Who can have failed to observe that there, as in every zone in Paris, there is a manner of being which shows who you are, what you are doing, whence you come, and what you want?

"What a handsome young fellow; and here we may turn round to look at him," said a mask, in whom accustomed eyes recognized a lady of position.

"Do you not remember him?" replied the man on whose arm she was leaning. "Madame du Chatelet introduced him to you – "

"What, is that the apothecary's son she fancied herself in love with, who became a journalist, Mademoiselle Coralie's lover?"

"I fancied he had fallen too low ever to pull himself up again, and I cannot understand how he can show himself again in the world of Paris," said the Comte Sixte du Chatelet.

"He has the air of a prince," the mask went on, "and it is not the actress he lived with who could give it to him. My cousin, who understood him, could not lick him into shape. I should like to know the mistress of this Sargine; tell me something about him that will enable me to mystify him."

This couple, whispering as they watched the young man, became the object of study to the square-shouldered domino.

"Dear Monsieur Chardon," said the Prefet of the Charente, taking the dandy's hand, "allow me to introduce you to some one

who wishes to renew acquaintance with you – ”

“Dear Comte Chatelet,” replied the young man, “that lady taught me how ridiculous was the name by which you address me. A patent from the king has restored to me that of my mother’s family – the Rubempres. Although the fact has been announced in the papers, it relates to so unimportant a person that I need not blush to recall it to my friends, my enemies, and those who are neither – You may class yourself where you will, but I am sure you will not disapprove of a step to which I was advised by your wife when she was still only Madame de Bargeton.”

This neat retort, which made the Marquise smile, gave the Prefet of la Charente a nervous chill. “You may tell her,” Lucien went on, “that I now bear gules, a bull raging argent on a meadow vert.”

“Raging argent,” echoed Chatelet.

“Madame la Marquise will explain to you, if you do not know, why that old coat is a little better than the chamberlain’s key and Imperial gold bees which you bear on yours, to the great despair of Madame Chatelet, nee Negrepelisse d’Espard,” said Lucien quickly.

“Since you recognize me, I cannot puzzle you; and I could never tell you how much you puzzle me,” said the Marquise d’Espard, amazed at the coolness and impertinence to which the man had risen whom she had formerly despised.

“Then allow me, madame, to preserve my only chance of occupying your thoughts by remaining in that mysterious

twilight," said he, with the smile of a man who does not wish to risk assured happiness.

"I congratulate you on your changed fortunes," said the Comte du Chatelet to Lucien.

"I take it as you offer it," replied Lucien, bowing with much grace to the Marquise.

"What a coxcomb!" said the Count in an undertone to Madame d'Espard. "He has succeeded in winning an ancestry."

"With these young men such coxcombry, when it is addressed to us, almost always implies some success in high places," said the lady; "for with you older men it means ill-fortune. And I should very much like to know which of my grand lady friends has taken this fine bird under her patronage; then I might find the means of amusing myself this evening. My ticket, anonymously sent, is no doubt a bit of mischief planned by a rival and having something to do with this young man. His impertinence is to order; keep an eye on him. I will take the Duc de Navarrein's arm. You will be able to find me again."

Just as Madame d'Espard was about to address her cousin, the mysterious mask came between her and the Duke to whisper in her ear:

"Lucien loves you; he wrote the note. Your Prefet is his greatest foe; how can he speak in his presence?"

The stranger moved off, leaving Madame d'Espard a prey to a double surprise. The Marquise knew no one in the world who was capable of playing the part assumed by this mask; she suspected

a snare, and went to sit down out of sight. The Comte Sixte du Chatelet – whom Lucien had abridged of his ambitious *du* with an emphasis that betrayed long meditated revenge – followed the handsome dandy, and presently met a young man to whom he thought he could speak without reserve.

"Well, Rastignac, have you seen Lucien? He has come out in a new skin."

"If I were half as good looking as he is, I should be twice as rich," replied the fine gentleman, in a light but meaning tone, expressive of keen raillery.

"No!" said the fat mask in his ear, repaying a thousand ironies in one by the accent he lent the monosyllable.

Rastignac, who was not the man to swallow an affront, stood as if struck by lightning, and allowed himself to be led into a recess by a grasp of iron which he could not shake off.

"You young cockerel, hatched in Mother Vauquer's coop – you, whose heart failed you to clutch old Taillefer's millions when the hardest part of the business was done – let me tell you, for your personal safety, that if you do not treat Lucien like the brother you love, you are in our power, while we are not in yours. Silence and submission! or I shall join your game and upset the skittles. Lucien de Rubempre is under the protection of the strongest power of the day – the Church. Choose between life and death – Answer."

Rastignac felt giddy, like a man who has slept in a forest and wakes to see by his side a famishing lioness. He was frightened,

and there was no one to see him; the boldest men yield to fear under such circumstances.

"No one but HE can know – or would dare – " he murmured to himself.

The mask clutched his hand tighter to prevent his finishing his sentence.

"Act as if I were *he*," he said.

Rastignac then acted like a millionaire on the highroad with a brigand's pistol at his head; he surrendered.

"My dear Count," said he to du Chatelet, to whom he presently returned, "if you care for your position in life, treat Lucien de Rubempre as a man whom you will one day see holding a place far above where you stand."

The mask made a imperceptible gesture of approbation, and went off in search of Lucien.

"My dear fellow, you have changed your opinion of him very suddenly," replied the Prefet with justifiable surprise.

"As suddenly as men change who belong to the centre and vote with the right," replied Rastignac to the Prefet-Depute, whose vote had for a few days failed to support the Ministry.

"Are there such things as opinions nowadays? There are only interests," observed des Lupeaulx, who had heard them. "What is the case in point?"

"The case of the Sieur de Rubempre, whom Rastignac is setting up as a person of consequence," said du Chatelet to the Secretary-General.

"My dear Count," replied des Lupeaulx very seriously, "Monsieur de Rubempre is a young man of the highest merit, and has such good interest at his back that I should be delighted to renew my acquaintance with him."

"There he is, rushing into the wasps' nest of the rakes of the day," said Rastignac.

The three speakers looked towards a corner where a group of recognized wits had gathered, men of more or less celebrity, and several men of fashion. These gentlemen made common stock of their jests, their remarks, and their scandal, trying to amuse themselves till something should amuse them. Among this strangely mingled party were some men with whom Lucien had had transactions, combining ostensibly kind offices with covert false dealing.

"Hallo! Lucien, my boy, why here we are patched up again – new stuffing and a new cover. Where have we come from? Have we mounted the high horse once more with little offerings from Florine's boudoir? Bravo, old chap!" and Blondet released Finot to put his arm affectionately around Lucien and press him to his heart.

Andoche Finot was the proprietor of a review on which Lucien had worked for almost nothing, and to which Blondet gave the benefit of his collaboration, of the wisdom of his suggestions and the depth of his views. Finot and Blondet embodied Bertrand and Raton, with this difference – that la Fontaine's cat at last showed that he knew himself to be duped, while Blondet, though

he knew that he was being fleeced, still did all he could for Finot. This brilliant condottiere of the pen was, in fact, long to remain a slave. Finot hid a brutal strength of will under a heavy exterior, under polish of wit, as a laborer rubs his bread with garlic. He knew how to garner what he gleaned, ideas and crown-pieces alike, in the fields of the dissolute life led by men engaged in letters or in politics.

Blondet, for his sins, had placed his powers at the service of Finot's vices and idleness. Always at war with necessity, he was one of the race of poverty-stricken and superior men who can do everything for the fortune of others and nothing for their own, Aladdins who let other men borrow their lamp. These excellent advisers have a clear and penetrating judgment so long as it is not distracted by personal interest. In them it is the head and not the arm that acts. Hence the looseness of their morality, and hence the reproach heaped upon them by inferior minds. Blondet would share his purse with a comrade he had affronted the day before; he would dine, drink, and sleep with one whom he would demolish on the morrow. His amusing paradoxes excused everything. Accepting the whole world as a jest, he did not want to be taken seriously; young, beloved, almost famous and contented, he did not devote himself, like Finot, to acquiring the fortune an old man needs.

The most difficult form of courage, perhaps, is that which Lucien needed at this moment to get rid of Blondet as he had just got rid of Madame d'Espard and Chatelet. In him, unfortunately,

the joys of vanity hindered the exercise of pride – the basis, beyond doubt, of many great things. His vanity had triumphed in the previous encounter; he had shown himself as a rich man, happy and scornful, to two persons who had scorned him when he was poor and wretched. But how could a poet, like an old diplomate, run the gauntlet with two self-styled friends, who had welcomed him in misery, under whose roof he had slept in the worst of his troubles? Finot, Blondet, and he had groveled together; they had wallowed in such orgies as consume something more than money. Like soldiers who find no market for their courage, Lucien had just done what many men do in Paris: he had still further compromised his character by shaking Finot's hand, and not rejecting Blondet's affection.

Every man who has dabbled, or still dabbles, in journalism is under the painful necessity of bowing to men he despises, of smiling at his dearest foe, of compounding the foulest meanness, of soiling his fingers to pay his aggressors in their own coin. He becomes used to seeing evil done, and passing it over; he begins by condoning it, and ends by committing it. In the long run the soul, constantly strained by shameful and perpetual compromise, sinks lower, the spring of noble thoughts grows rusty, the hinges of familiarity wear easy, and turn of their own accord. Alceste becomes Philinte, natures lose their firmness, talents are perverted, faith in great deeds evaporates. The man who yearned to be proud of his work wastes himself in rubbishy articles which his conscience regards, sooner or later, as so many

evil actions. He started, like Lousteau or Vernou, to be a great writer; he finds himself a feeble scrivener. Hence it is impossible to honor too highly men whose character stands as high as their talent – men like d'Arthez, who know how to walk surefooted across the reefs of literary life.

Lucien could make no reply to Blondet's flattery; his wit had an irresistible charm for him, and he maintained the hold of the corrupter over his pupil; besides, he held a position in the world through his connection with the Comtesse de Montcornet.

"Has an uncle left you a fortune?" said Finot, laughing at him.

"Like you, I have marked some fools for cutting down," replied Lucien in the same tone.

"Then Monsieur has a review – a newspaper of his own?" Andoche Finot retorted, with the impertinent presumption of a chief to a subordinate.

"I have something better," replied Lucien, whose vanity, nettled by the assumed superiority of his editor, restored him to the sense of his new position.

"What is that, my dear boy?"

"I have a party."

"There is a Lucien party?" said Vernou, smiling

"Finot, the boy has left you in the lurch; I told you he would. Lucien is a clever fellow, and you never were respectful to him. You used him as a hack. Repent, blockhead!" said Blondet.

Blondet, as sharp as a needle, could detect more than one secret in Lucien's air and manner; while stroking him down, he

contrived to tighten the curb. He meant to know the reasons of Lucien's return to Paris, his projects, and his means of living.

"On your knees to a superiority you can never attain to, albeit you are Finot!" he went on. "Admit this gentleman forthwith to be one of the great men to whom the future belongs; he is one of us! So witty and so handsome, can he fail to succeed by your quibuscumque viis? Here he stands, in his good Milan armor, his strong sword half unsheathed, and his pennon flying! – Bless me, Lucien, where did you steal that smart waistcoat? Love alone can find such stuff as that. Have you an address? At this moment I am anxious to know where my friends are domiciled; I don't know where to sleep. Finot has turned me out of doors for the night, under the vulgar pretext of 'a lady in the case.'"

"My boy," said Lucien, "I put into practice a motto by which you may secure a quiet life: Fuge, late, tace. I am off."

"But I am not off till you pay me a sacred debt – that little supper, you know, heh?" said Blondet, who was rather too much given to good cheer, and got himself treated when he was out of funds.

"What supper?" asked Lucien with a little stamp of impatience.

"You don't remember? In that I recognize my prosperous friend; he has lost his memory."

"He knows what he owes us; I will go bail for his good heart," said Finot, taking up Blondet's joke.

"Rastignac," said Blondet, taking the young dandy by the arm

as he came up the room to the column where the so-called friends were standing. “There is a supper in the wind; you will join us – unless,” he added gravely, turning to Lucien, “Monsieur persists in ignoring a debt of honor. He can.”

“Monsieur de Rubempre is incapable of such a thing; I will answer for him,” said Rastignac, who never dreamed of a practical joke.

“And there is Bixiou, he will come too,” cried Blondet; “there is no fun without him. Without him champagne cloys my tongue, and I find everything insipid, even the pepper of satire.”

“My friends,” said Bixiou, “I see you have gathered round the wonder of the day. Our dear Lucien has revived the Metamorphoses of Ovid. Just as the gods used to turn into strange vegetables and other things to seduce the ladies, he has turned the Chardon (the Thistle) into a gentleman to bewitch – whom? Charles X.! – My dear boy,” he went on, holding Lucien by his coat button, “a journalist who apes the fine gentleman deserves rough music. In their place,” said the merciless jester, as he pointed to Finot and Vernou, “I should take you up in my society paper; you would bring in a hundred francs for ten columns of fun.”

“Bixiou,” said Blondet, “an Amphitryon is sacred for twenty-four hours before a feast and twelve hours after. Our illustrious friend is giving us a supper.”

“What then!” cried Bixiou; “what is more imperative than the duty of saving a great name from oblivion, of endowing the

indigent aristocracy with a man of talent? Lucien, you enjoy the esteem of the press of which you were a distinguished ornament, and we will give you our support. – Finot, a paragraph in the 'latest items'! – Blondet, a little butter on the fourth page of your paper! – We must advertise the appearance of one of the finest books of the age, *l'Archer de Charles IX.*! We will appeal to Dauriat to bring out as soon as possible *les Marguerites*, those divine sonnets by the French Petrarch! We must carry our friend through on the shield of stamped paper by which reputations are made and unmade."

"If you want a supper," said Lucien to Blondet, hoping to rid himself of this mob, which threatened to increase, "it seems to me that you need not work up hyperbole and parable to attack an old friend as if he were a booby. To-morrow night at Lointier's – " he cried, seeing a woman come by, whom he rushed to meet.

"Oh! oh! oh!" said Bixiou on three notes, with a mocking glance, and seeming to recognize the mask to whom Lucien addressed himself. "This needs confirmation."

He followed the handsome pair, got past them, examined them keenly, and came back, to the great satisfaction of all the envious crowd, who were eager to learn the source of Lucien's change of fortune.

"Friends," said Bixiou, "you have long known the goddess of the Sire de Rubempre's fortune: She is des Lupeaulx's former 'rat.'"

A form of dissipation, now forgotten, but still customary at the

beginning of this century, was the keeping of "rats." The "rat" – a slang word that has become old-fashioned – was a girl of ten or twelve in the chorus of some theatre, more particularly at the opera, who was trained by young roues to vice and infamy. A "rat" was a sort of demon page, a tomboy who was forgiven a trick if it were but funny. The "rat" might take what she pleased; she was to be watched like a dangerous animal, and she brought an element of liveliness into life, like Scapin, Sganarelle, and Frontin in old-fashioned comedy. But a "rat" was too expensive; it made no return in honor, profit, or pleasure; the fashion of rats so completely went out, that in these days few people knew anything of this detail of fashionable life before the Restoration till certain writers took up the "rat" as a new subject.

"What! after having seen Coralie killed under him, Lucien means to rob us of La Torpille?" (the torpedo fish) said Blondet.

As he heard the name the brawny mask gave a significant start, which, though repressed, was understood by Rastignac.

"It is out of the question," replied Finot; "La Torpille has not a sou to give away; Nathan tells me she borrowed a thousand francs of Florine."

"Come, gentlemen, gentlemen!" said Rastignac, anxious to defend Lucien against so odious an imputation.

"Well," cried Vernou, "is Coralie's kept man likely to be so very particular?"

"Oh!" replied Bixiou, "those thousand francs prove to me that our friend Lucien lives with La Torpille – "

"What an irreparable loss to literature, science, art, and politics!" exclaimed Blondet. "La Torpille is the only common prostitute in whom I ever found the stuff for a superior courtesan; she has not been spoiled by education – she can neither read nor write, she would have understood us. We might have given to our era one of those magnificent Aspasias without which there can be no golden age. See how admirably Madame du Barry was suited to the eighteenth century, Ninon de l'Enclos to the seventeenth, Marion Delorme to the sixteenth, Imperia to the fifteenth, Flora to Republican Rome, which she made her heir, and which paid off the public debt with her fortune! What would Horace be without Lydia, Tibullus without Delia, Catullus without Lesbia, Propertius without Cynthia, Demetrius without Lamia, who is his glory at this day?"

"Blondet talking of Demetrius in the opera house seems to me rather too strong of the *Debats*," said Bixiou in his neighbor's ears.

"And where would the empire of the Caesars have been but for these queens?" Blondet went on; "Lais and Rhodope are Greece and Egypt. They all indeed are the poetry of the ages in which they lived. This poetry, which Napoleon lacked – for the Widow of his Great Army is a barrack jest, was not wanting to the Revolution; it had Madame Tallien! In these days there is certainly a throne to let in France which is for her who can fill it. We among us could make a queen. I should have given La Torpille an aunt, for her mother is too decidedly dead on

the field of dishonor; du Tillet would have given her a mansion, Lousteau a carriage, Rastignac her footmen, des Lupeaulx a cook, Finot her hats" – Finot could not suppress a shrug at standing the point-blank fire of this epigram – "Vernou would have composed her advertisements, and Bixiou her repartees! The aristocracy would have come to enjoy themselves with our Ninon, where we would have got artists together, under pain of death by newspaper articles. Ninon the second would have been magnificently impertinent, overwhelming in luxury. She would have set up opinions. Some prohibited dramatic masterpiece should have been read in her drawing-room; it should have been written on purpose if necessary. She would not have been liberal; a courtesan is essentially monarchical. Oh, what a loss! She ought to have embraced her whole century, and she makes love with a little young man! Lucien will make a sort of hunting-dog of her."

"None of the female powers of whom you speak ever trudged the streets," said Finot, "and that pretty little 'rat' has rolled in the mire."

"Like a lily-seed in the soil," replied Vernou, "and she has improved in it and flowered. Hence her superiority. Must we not have known everything to be able to create the laughter and joy which are part of everything?"

"He is right," said Lousteau, who had hitherto listened without speaking; "La Torpille can laugh and make others laugh. That gift of all great writers and great actors is proper to those who have investigated every social deep. At eighteen that girl had already

known the greatest wealth, the most squalid misery – men of every degree. She bears about her a sort of magic wand by which she lets loose the brutal appetites so vehemently suppressed in men who still have a heart while occupied with politics or science, literature or art. There is not in Paris another woman who can say to the beast as she does: 'Come out!' And the beast leaves his lair and wallows in excesses. She feeds you up to the chin, she helps you to drink and smoke. In short, this woman is the salt of which Rabelais writes, which, thrown on matter, animates it and elevates it to the marvelous realms of art; her robe displays unimagined splendor, her fingers drop gems as her lips shed smiles; she gives the spirit of the occasion to every little thing; her chatter twinkles with bright sayings, she has the secret of the quaintest onomatopoeia, full of color, and giving color; she – "

"You are wasting five francs' worth of copy," said Bixiou, interrupting Lousteau. "La Torpille is something far better than all that; you have all been in love with her more or less, not one of you can say that she ever was his mistress. She can always command you; you will never command her. You may force your way in and ask her to do you a service – "

"Oh, she is more generous than a brigand chief who knows his business, and more devoted than the best of school-fellows," said Blondet. "You may trust her with your purse or your secrets. But what made me choose her as queen is her Bourbon-like indifference for a fallen favorite."

"She, like her mother, is much too dear," said des Lupeaulx. "The handsome Dutch woman would have swallowed up the income of the Archbishop of Toledo; she ate two notaries out of house and home – "

"And kept Maxime de Trailles when he was a court page," said Bixiou.

"La Torpille is too dear, as Raphael was, or Careme, or Taglioni, or Lawrence, or Boule, or any artist of genius is too dear," said Blondet.

"Esther never looked so thoroughly a lady," said Rastignac, pointing to the masked figure to whom Lucien had given his arm. "I will bet on its being Madame de Serizy."

"Not a doubt of it," cried du Chatelet, "and Monsieur du Rubempre's fortune is accounted for."

"Ah, the Church knows how to choose its Levites; what a sweet ambassador's secretary he will make!" remarked des Lupeaulx.

"All the more so," Rastignac went on, "because Lucien is a really clever fellow. These gentlemen have had proof of it more than once," and he turned to Blondet, Finot, and Lousteau.

"Yes, the boy is cut out of the right stuff to get on," said Lousteau, who was dying of jealousy. "And particularly because he has what we call independent ideas…"

"It is you who trained him," said Vernou.

"Well," replied Bixiou, looking at des Lupeaulx, "I trust to the memory of Monsieur the Secretary-General and Master of

Appeals – that mask is La Torpille, and I will stand a supper on it."

"I will hold the stakes," said du Chatelet, curious to know the truth.

"Come, des Lupeaulx," said Finot, "try to identify your rat's ears."

"There is no need for committing the crime of treason against a mask," replied Bixiou. "La Torpille and Lucien must pass us as they go up the room again, and I pledge myself to prove that it is she."

"So our friend Lucien has come above water once more," said Nathan, joining the group. "I thought he had gone back to Angoumois for the rest of his days. Has he discovered some secret to ruin the English?"

"He has done what you will not do in a hurry," retorted Rastignac; "he has paid up."

The burly mask nodded in confirmation.

"A man who has sown his wild oats at his age puts himself out of court. He has no pluck; he puts money in the funds," replied Nathan.

"Oh, that youngster will always be a fine gentleman, and will always have such lofty notions as will place him far above many men who think themselves his betters," replied Rastignac.

At this moment journalists, dandies, and idlers were all examining the charming subject of their bet as horse-dealers examine a horse for sale. These connoisseurs, grown old in

familiarity with every form of Parisian depravity, all men of superior talent each his own way, equally corrupt, equally corrupting, all given over to unbridled ambition, accustomed to assume and to guess everything, had their eyes centered on a masked woman, a woman whom no one else could identify. They, and certain habitual frequenters of the opera balls, could alone recognize under the long shroud of the black domino, the hood and falling ruff which make the wearer unrecognizable, the rounded form, the individuality of figure and gait, the sway of the waist, the carriage of the head – the most intangible trifles to ordinary eyes, but to them the easiest to discern.

In spite of this shapeless wrapper they could watch the most appealing of dramas, that of a woman inspired by a genuine passion. Were she La Torpille, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, or Madame de Serizy, on the lowest or highest rung of the social ladder, this woman was an exquisite creature, a flash from happy dreams. These old young men, like these young old men, felt so keen an emotion, that they envied Lucien the splendid privilege of working such a metamorphosis of a woman into a goddess. The mask was there as though she had been alone with Lucien; for that woman the thousand other persons did not exist, nor the evil and dust-laden atmosphere; no, she moved under the celestial vault of love, as Raphael's Madonnas under their slender oval glory. She did not feel herself elbowed; the fire of her glance shot from the holes in her mask and sank into Lucien's eyes; the thrill of her frame seemed to answer to

every movement of her companion. Whence comes this flame that radiates from a woman in love and distinguishes her above all others? Whence that sylph-like lightness which seems to negative the laws of gravitation? Is the soul become ambient? Has happiness a physical effluence?

The ingenuousness of a girl, the graces of a child were discernible under the domino. Though they walked apart, these two beings suggested the figures of Flora and Zephyr as we see them grouped by the cleverest sculptors; but they were beyond sculpture, the greatest of the arts; Lucien and his pretty domino were more like the angels busied with flowers or birds, which Gian Bellini has placed beneath the effigies of the Virgin Mother. Lucien and this girl belonged to the realm of fancy, which is as far above art as cause is above effect.

When the domino, forgetful of everything, was within a yard of the group, Bixiou exclaimed:

"Esther!"

The unhappy girl turned her head quickly at hearing herself called, recognized the mischievous speaker, and bowed her head like a dying creature that has drawn its last breath.

A sharp laugh followed, and the group of men melted among the crowd like a knot of frightened field-rats whisking into their holes by the roadside. Rastignac alone went no further than was necessary, just to avoid making any show of shunning Lucien's flashing eye. He could thus note two phases of distress equally deep though unconfessed; first, the hapless Torpille, stricken as

by a lightning stroke, and then the inscrutable mask, the only one of the group who had remained. Esther murmured a word in Lucien's ear just as her knees gave way, and Lucien, supporting her, led her away.

Rastignac watched the pretty pair, lost in meditation.

"How did she get her name of La Torpille?" asked a gloomy voice that struck to his vitals, for it was no longer disguised.

"*He* again – he has made his escape!" muttered Rastignac to himself.

"Be silent or I murder you," replied the mask, changing his voice. "I am satisfied with you, you have kept your word, and there is more than one arm ready to serve you. Henceforth be as silent as the grave; but, before that, answer my question."

"Well, the girl is such a witch that she could have magnetized the Emperor Napoleon; she could magnetize a man more difficult to influence – you yourself," replied Rastignac, and he turned to go.

"One moment," said the mask; "I will prove to you that you have never seen me anywhere."

The speaker took his mask off; for a moment Rastignac hesitated, recognizing nothing of the hideous being he had known formerly at Madame Vauquer's.

"The devil has enabled you to change in every particular, excepting your eyes, which it is impossible to forget," said he.

The iron hand gripped his arm to enjoin eternal secrecy.

At three in the morning des Lupeaulx and Finot found the

elegant Rastignac on the same spot, leaning against the column where the terrible mask had left him. Rastignac had confessed to himself; he had been at once priest and pentient, culprit and judge. He allowed himself to be led away to breakfast, and reached home perfectly tipsy, but taciturn.

The Rue de Langlade and the adjacent streets are a blot on the Palais Royal and the Rue de Rivoli. This portion of one of the handsomest quarters of Paris will long retain the stain of foulness left by the hillocks formed of the middens of old Paris, on which mills formerly stood. These narrow streets, dark and muddy, where such industries are carried on as care little for appearances wear at night an aspect of mystery full of contrasts. On coming from the well-lighted regions of the Rue Saint-Honore, the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, and the Rue de Richelieu, where the crowd is constantly pushing, where glitter the masterpieces of industry, fashion, and art, every man to whom Paris by night is unknown would feel a sense of dread and melancholy, on finding himself in the labyrinth of little streets which lie round that blaze of light reflected even from the sky. Dense blackness is here, instead of floods of gaslight; a dim oil-lamp here and there sheds its doubtful and smoky gleam, and many blind alleys are not lighted at all. Foot passengers are few, and walk fast. The shops are shut, the few that are open are of a squalid kind; a dirty, unlighted wineshop, or a seller of underclothing and eau-de-Cologne. An unwholesome chill lays a clammy cloak over your shoulders. Few carriages drive past. There are sinister places

here, especially the Rue de Langlade, the entrance to the Passage Saint-Guillaume, and the turnings of some streets.

The municipal council has not yet been to purge this vast lazar-place, for prostitution long since made it its headquarters. It is, perhaps, a good thing for Paris that these alleys should be allowed to preserve their filthy aspect. Passing through them by day, it is impossible to imagine what they become by night; they are pervaded by strange creatures of no known world; white, half-naked forms cling to the walls – the darkness is alive. Between the passenger and the wall a dress steals by – a dress that moves and speaks. Half-open doors suddenly shout with laughter. Words fall on the ear such as Rabelais speaks of as frozen and melting. Snatches of songs come up from the pavement. The noise is not vague; it means something. When it is hoarse it is a voice; but if it suggests a song, there is nothing human about it, it is more like a croak. Often you hear a sharp whistle, and then the tap of boot-heels has a peculiarly aggressive and mocking ring. This medley of things makes you giddy. Atmospheric conditions are reversed there – it is warm in winter and cool in summer.

Still, whatever the weather, this strange world always wears the same aspect; it is the fantastic world of Hoffmann of Berlin. The most mathematical of clerks never thinks of it as real, after returning through the straits that lead into decent streets, where there are passengers, shops, and taverns. Modern administration, or modern policy, more scornful or more shamefaced than the queens and kings of past ages, no longer dare look boldly in the

face of this plague of our capitals. Measures, of course, must change with the times, and such as bear on individuals and on their liberty are a ticklish matter; still, we ought, perhaps, to show some breadth and boldness as to merely material measures – air, light, and construction. The moralist, the artist, and the sage administrator alike must regret the old wooden galleries of the Palais Royal, where the lambs were to be seen who will always be found where there are loungers; and is it not best that the loungers should go where they are to be found? What is the consequence? The gayest parts of the Boulevards, that delightfulest of promenades, are impossible in the evening for a family party. The police has failed to take advantage of the outlet afforded by some small streets to purge the main street.

The girl whom we have seen crushed by a word at the opera ball had been for the last month or two living in the Rue de Langlade, in a very poor-looking house. This structure, stuck on to the wall of an enormously large one, badly stuccoed, of no depth, and immensely high, has all its windows on the street, and bears some resemblance to a parrot's perch. On each floor are two rooms, let as separate flats. There is a narrow staircase clinging to the wall, queerly lighted by windows which mark its ascent on the outer wall, each landing being indicated by a stink, one of the most odious peculiarities of Paris. The shop and entresol at that time were tenanted by a tinman; the landlord occupied the first floor; the four upper stories were rented by very decent working girls, who were treated by the

portress and the proprietor with some consideration and an obligingness called forth by the difficulty of letting a house so oddly constructed and situated. The occupants of the quarter are accounted for by the existence there of many houses of the same character, for which trade has no use, and which can only be rented by the poorer kinds of industry, of a precarious or ignominious nature.

At three in the afternoon the portress, who had seen Mademoiselle Esther brought home half dead by a young man at two in the morning, had just held council with the young woman of the floor above, who, before setting out in a cab to join some party of pleasure, had expressed her uneasiness about Esther; she had not heard her move. Esther was, no doubt, still asleep, but this slumber seemed suspicious. The portress, alone in her cell, was regretting that she could not go to see what was happening on the fourth floor, where Mademoiselle Esther lodged.

Just as she had made up her mind to leave the tinman's son in charge of her room, a sort of den in a recess on the entresol floor, a cab stopped at the door. A man stepped out, wrapped from head to foot in a cloak evidently intended to conceal his dress or his rank in life, and asked for Mademoiselle Esther. The portress at one felt relieved; this accounted for Esther's silence and quietude. As the stranger mounted the stairs above the portress' room, she noticed silver buckles in his shoes, and fancied she caught sight of the black fringe of a priest's sash; she went downstairs and catechised the driver, who answered without speech, and again

the woman understood.

The priest knocked, received no answer, heard a slight gasp, and forced the door open with a thrust of his shoulder; charity, no doubt lent him strength, but in any one else it would have been ascribed to practice. He rushed to the inner room, and there found poor Esther in front of an image of the Virgin in painted plaster, kneeling, or rather doubled up, on the floor, her hands folded. The girl was dying. A brazier of burnt charcoal told the tale of that dreadful morning. The domino cloak and hood were lying on the ground. The bed was undisturbed. The unhappy creature, stricken to the heart by a mortal thrust, had, no doubt, made all her arrangements on her return from the opera. A candle-wick, collapsed in the pool of grease that filled the candle-sconce, showed how completely her last meditations had absorbed her. A handkerchief soaked with tears proved the sincerity of the Magdalen's despair, while her classic attitude was that of the irreligious courtesan. This abject repentance made the priest smile.

Esther, unskilled in dying, had left the door open, not thinking that the air of two rooms would need a larger amount of charcoal to make it suffocating; she was only stunned by the fumes; the fresh air from the staircase gradually restored her to a consciousness of her woes.

The priest remained standing, lost in gloomy meditation, without being touched by the girl's divine beauty, watching her first movements as if she had been some animal. His eyes went

from the crouching figure to the surrounding objects with evident indifference. He looked at the furniture in the room; the paved floor, red, polished, and cold, was poorly covered with a shabby carpet worn to the string. A little bedstead, of painted wood and old-fashioned shape, was hung with yellow cotton printed with red stars, one armchair and two small chairs, also of painted wood, and covered with the same cotton print of which the window-curtains were also made; a gray wall-paper sprigged with flowers blackened and greasy with age; a fireplace full of kitchen utensils of the vilest kind, two bundles of fire-logs; a stone shelf, on which lay some jewelry false and real, a pair of scissors, a dirty pincushion, and some white scented gloves; an exquisite hat perched on the water-jug, a Ternaux shawl stopping a hole in the window, a handsome gown hanging from a nail; a little hard sofa, with no cushions; broken clogs and dainty slippers, boots that a queen might have coveted; cheap china plates, cracked or chipped, with fragments of a past meal, and nickel forks – the plate of the Paris poor; a basket full of potatoes and dirty linen, with a smart gauze cap on the top; a rickety wardrobe, with a glass door, open and empty, and on the shelves sundry pawn-tickets, – this was the medley of things, dismal or pleasing, abject and handsome, that fell on his eye.

These relics of splendor among the potsherds, these household belongings – so appropriate to the bohemian existence of the girl who knelt stricken in her unbuttoned garments, like a horse dying in harness under the broken shafts entangled in the reins – did the

whole strange scene suggest any thoughts to the priest? Did he say to himself that this erring creature must at least be disinterested to live in such poverty when her lover was young and rich? Did he ascribe the disorder of the room to the disorder of her life? Did he feel pity or terror? Was his charity moved?

To see him, his arms folded, his brow dark, his lips set, his eye harsh, any one must have supposed him absorbed in morose feelings of hatred, considerations that jostled each other, sinister schemes. He was certainly insensible to the soft roundness of a bosom almost crushed under the weight of the bowed shoulders, and to the beautiful modeling of the crouching Venus that was visible under the black petticoat, so closely was the dying girl curled up. The drooping head which, seen from behind, showed the white, slender, flexible neck and the fine shoulders of a well-developed figure, did not appeal to him. He did not raise Esther, he did not seem to hear the agonizing gasps which showed that she was returning to life; a fearful sob and a terrifying glance from the girl were needed before he condescended to lift her, and he carried her to the bed with an ease that revealed enormous strength.

"Lucien!" she murmured.

"Love is there, the woman is not far behind," said the priest with some bitterness.

The victim of Parisian depravity then observed the dress worn by her deliverer, and said, with a smile like a child's when it takes possession of something longed for:

"Then I shall not die without being reconciled to Heaven?"

"You may yet expiate your sins," said the priest, moistening her forehead with water, and making her smell at a cruet of vinegar he found in a corner.

"I feel that life, instead of departing, is rushing in on me," said she, after accepting the Father's care and expressing her gratitude by simple gestures. This engaging pantomime, such as the Graces might have used to charm, perfectly justified the nickname given to this strange girl.

"Do you feel better?" said the priest, giving her a glass of sugar and water to drink.

This man seemed accustomed to such queer establishments; he knew all about it. He was quite at home there. This privilege of being everywhere at home is the prerogative of kings, courtesans, and thieves.

"When you feel quite well," this strange priest went on after a pause, "you must tell me the reasons which prompted you to commit this last crime, this attempted suicide."

"My story is very simple, Father," replied she. "Three months ago I was living the evil life to which I was born. I was the lowest and vilest of creatures; now I am only the most unhappy. Excuse me from telling you the history of my poor mother, who was murdered – "

"By a Captain, in a house of ill-fame," said the priest, interrupting the penitent. "I know your origin, and I know that if a being of your sex can ever be excused for leading a life of

shame, it is you, who have always lacked good examples."

"Alas! I was never baptized, and have no religious teaching."

"All may yet be remedied then," replied the priest, "provided that your faith, your repentance, are sincere and without ulterior motive."

"Lucien and God fill my heart," said she with ingenuous pathos.

"You might have said God and Lucien," answered the priest, smiling. "You remind me of the purpose of my visit. Omit nothing that concerns that young man."

"You have come from him?" she asked, with a tender look that would have touched any other priest! "Oh, he thought I should do it!"

"No," replied the priest; "it is not your death, but your life that we are interested in. Come, explain your position toward each other."

"In one word," said she.

The poor child quaked at the priest's stern tone, but as a woman quakes who has long ceased to be surprised at brutality.

"Lucien is Lucien," said she, "the handsomest young man, the kindest soul alive; if you know him, my love must seem to you quite natural. I met him by chance, three months ago, at the Porte-Saint-Martin theatre, where I went one day when I had leave, for we had a day a week at Madame Meynardie's, where I then was. Next day, you understand, I went out without leave. Love had come into my heart, and had so completely changed

me, that on my return from the theatre I did not know myself: I had a horror of myself. Lucien would never have known. Instead of telling him what I was, I gave him my address at these rooms, where a friend of mine was then living, who was so kind as to give them up to me. I swear on my sacred word – "

"You must not swear."

"Is it swearing to give your sacred word? – Well, from that day I have worked in this room like a lost creature at shirt-making at twenty-eight sous apiece, so as to live by honest labor. For a month I have had nothing to eat but potatoes, that I might keep myself a good girl and worthy of Lucien, who loves me and respects me as a pattern of virtue. I have made my declaration before the police to recover my rights, and submitted to two years' surveillance. They are ready enough to enter your name on the lists of disgrace, but make every difficulty about scratching it out again. All I asked of Heaven was to enable me to keep my resolution.

"I shall be nineteen in the month of April; at my age there is still a chance. It seems to me that I was never born till three months ago. – I prayed to God every morning that Lucien might never know what my former life had been. I bought that Virgin you see there, and I prayed to her in my own way, for I do not know any prayers; I cannot read nor write, and I have never been into a church; I have never seen anything of God excepting in processions, out of curiosity."

"And what do you say to the Virgin?"

"I talk to her as I talk to Lucien, with all my soul, till I make him cry."

"Oh, so he cries?"

"With joy," said she eagerly, "poor dear boy! We understand each other so well that we have but one soul! He is so nice, so fond, so sweet in heart and mind and manners! He says he is a poet; I say he is god. – Forgive me! You priests, you see, don't know what love is. But, in fact, only girls like me know enough of men to appreciate such as Lucien. A Lucien, you see, is as rare as a woman without sin. When you come across him you can love no one else; so there! But such a being must have his fellow; so I want to be worthy to be loved by my Lucien. That is where my trouble began. Last evening, at the opera, I was recognized by some young men who have no more feeling than a tiger has pity – for that matter, I could come round the tiger! The veil of innocence I had tried to wear was worn off; their laughter pierced my brain and my heart. Do not think you have saved me; I shall die of grief."

"Your veil of innocence?" said the priest. "Then you have treated Lucien with the sternest severity?"

"Oh, Father, how can you, who know him, ask me such a question!" she replied with a smile. "Who can resist a god?"

"Do not be blasphemous," said the priest mildly. "No one can be like God. Exaggeration is out of place with true love; you had not a pure and genuine love for your idol. If you had undergone the conversion you boast of having felt, you would have acquired

the virtues which are a part of womanhood; you would have known the charm of chastity, the refinements of modesty, the two virtues that are the glory of a maiden. – You do not love."

Esther's gesture of horror was seen by the priest, but it had no effect on the impassibility of her confessor.

"Yes; for you love him for yourself and not for himself, for the temporal enjoyments that delight you, and not for love itself. If he has thus taken possession of you, you cannot have felt that sacred thrill that is inspired by a being on whom God has set the seal of the most adorable perfections. Has it never occurred to you that you would degrade him by your past impurity, that you would corrupt a child by the overpowering seductions which earned you your nickname glorious in infamy? You have been illogical with yourself, and your passion of a day – "

"Of a day?" she repeated, raising her eyes.

"By what other name can you call a love that is not eternal, that does not unite us in the future life of the Christian, to the being we love?"

"Ah, I will be a Catholic!" she cried in a hollow, vehement tone, that would have earned her the mercy of the Lord.

"Can a girl who has received neither the baptism of the Church nor that of knowledge; who can neither read, nor write, nor pray; who cannot take a step without the stones in the street rising up to accuse her; noteworthy only for the fugitive gift of beauty which sickness may destroy to-morrow; can such a vile, degraded creature, fully aware too of her degradation – for if you had

been ignorant of it and less devoted, you would have been more excusable – can the intended victim to suicide and hell hope to be the wife of Lucien de Rubempre?"

Every word was a poniard thrust piercing the depths of her heart. At every word the louder sobs and abundant tears of the desperate girl showed the power with which light had flashed upon an intelligence as pure as that of a savage, upon a soul at length aroused, upon a nature over which depravity had laid a sheet of foul ice now thawed in the sunshine of faith.

"Why did I not die!" was the only thought that found utterance in the midst of a torrent of ideas that racked and ravaged her brain.

"My daughter," said the terrible judge, "there is a love which is unconfessed before men, but of which the secret is received by the angels with smiles of gladness."

"What is that?"

"Love without hope, when it inspires our life, when it fills us with the spirit of sacrifice, when it ennobles every act by the thought of reaching some ideal perfection. Yes, the angels approve of such love; it leads to the knowledge of God. To aim at perfection in order to be worthy of the one you love, to make for him a thousand secret sacrifices, adoring him from afar, giving your blood drop by drop, abnegating your self-love, never feeling any pride or anger as regards him, even concealing from him all knowledge of the dreadful jealousy he fires in your heart, giving him all he wishes were it to your own loss, loving what he

loves, always turning your face to him to follow him without his knowing it – such love as that religion would have forgiven; it is no offence to laws human or divine, and would have led you into another road than that of your foul voluptuousness."

As she heard this horrible verdict, uttered in a word – and such a word! and spoken in such a tone! – Esther's spirit rose up in fairly legitimate distrust. This word was like a thunder-clap giving warning of a storm about to break. She looked at the priest, and felt the grip on her vitals which wrings the bravest when face to face with sudden and imminent danger. No eye could have read what was passing in this man's mind; but the boldest would have found more to quail at than to hope for in the expression of his eyes, once bright and yellow like those of a tiger, but now shrouded, from austerities and privations, with a haze like that which overhangs the horizon in the dog-days, when, though the earth is hot and luminous, the mist makes it indistinct and dim – almost invisible.

The gravity of a Spaniard, the deep furrows which the myriad scars of virulent smallpox made hideously like broken ruts, were ploughed into his face, which was sallow and tanned by the sun. The hardness of this countenance was all the more conspicuous, being framed in the meagre dry wig of a priest who takes no care of his person, a black wig looking rusty in the light. His athletic frame, his hands like an old soldier's, his broad, strong shoulders were those of the Caryatides which the architects of the Middle Ages introduced into some Italian palaces, remotely imitated in

those of the front of the Porte-Saint-Martin theatre. The least clear-sighted observer might have seen that fiery passions or some unwonted accident must have thrown this man into the bosom of the Church; certainly none but the most tremendous shocks of lightning could have changed him, if indeed such a nature were susceptible of change.

Women who have lived the life that Esther had so violently repudiated come to feel absolute indifference as to the critics of our day, who may be compared with them in some respects, and who feel at last perfect disregard of the formulas of art; they have read so many books, they see so many pass away, they are so much accustomed to written pages, they have gone through so many plots, they have seen so many dramas, they have written so many articles without saying what they meant, and have so often been treasonable to the cause of Art in favor of their personal likings and aversions, that they acquire a feeling of disgust of everything, and yet continue to pass judgment. It needs a miracle to make such a writer produce sound work, just as it needs another miracle to give birth to pure and noble love in the heart of a courtesan.

The tone and manner of this priest, who seemed to have escaped from a picture by Zurbaran, struck this poor girl as so hostile, little as externals affected her, that she perceived herself to be less the object of his solitude than the instrument he needed for some scheme. Being unable to distinguish between the insinuating tongue of personal interest and the unction of

true charity, for we must be acutely awake to recognize false coin when it is offered by a friend, she felt herself, as it were, in the talons of some fierce and monstrous bird of prey who, after hovering over her for long, had pounced down on her; and in her terror she cried in a voice of alarm:

"I thought it was a priest's duty to console us, and you are killing me!"

At this innocent outcry the priest started and paused; he meditated a moment before replying. During that instant the two persons so strangely brought together studied each other cautiously. The priest understood the girl, though the girl could not understand the priest.

He, no doubt, put aside some plan which had threatened the unhappy Esther, and came back to his first ideas.

"We are physicians of the soul," said he, in a mild voice, "and we know what remedies suit their maladies."

"Much must be forgiven to the wretched," said Esther.

She fancied she had been wrong; she slipped off the bed, threw herself at the man's feet, kissed his gown with deep humility, and looked up at him with eyes full of tears.

"I thought I had done so much!" she said.

"Listen, my child. Your terrible reputation has cast Lucien's family into grief. They are afraid, and not without reason, that you may lead him into dissipation, into endless folly – "

"That is true; it was I who got him to the ball to mystify him."

"You are handsome enough to make him wish to triumph in

you in the eyes of the world, to show you with pride, and make you an object for display. And if he wasted money only! – but he will waste his time, his powers; he will lose his inclination for the fine future his friends can secure to him. Instead of being some day an ambassador, rich, admired and triumphant, he, like so many debauchees who choke their talents in the mud of Paris, will have been the lover of a degraded woman.

"As for you, after rising for a time to the level of a sphere of elegance, you will presently sink back to your former life, for you have not in you the strength bestowed by a good education to enable you to resist vice and think of the future. You would no more be able to break with the women of your own class than you have broken with the men who shamed you at the opera this morning. Lucien's true friends, alarmed by his passion for you, have dogged his steps and know all. Filled with horror, they have sent me to you to sound your views and decide your fate; but though they are powerful enough to clear a stumbling-stone out of the young man's way, they are merciful. Understand this, child: a girl whom Lucien loves has claims on their regard, as a true Christian worships the slough on which, by chance, the divine light falls. I came to be the instrument of a beneficent purpose; – still, if I had found you utterly reprobate, armed with effrontery and astuteness, corrupt to the marrow, deaf to the voice of repentance, I should have abandoned you to their wrath.

"The release, civil and political, which it is so hard to win, which the police is so right to withhold for a time in the interests

of society, and which I heard you long for with all the ardor of true repentance – is here," said the priest, taking an official-looking paper out of his belt. "You were seen yesterday, this letter of release is dated to-day. You see how powerful the people are who take an interest in Lucien."

At the sight of this document Esther was so ingenuously overcome by the convulsive agitation produced by unlooked-for joy, that a fixed smile parted her lips, like that of a crazy creature. The priest paused, looking at the girl to see whether, when once she had lost the horrible strength which corrupt natures find in corruption itself, and was thrown back on her frail and delicate primitive nature, she could endure so much excitement. If she had been a deceitful courtesan, Esther would have acted a part; but now that she was innocent and herself once more, she might perhaps die, as a blind man cured may lose his sight again if he is exposed to too bright a light. At this moment this man looked into the very depths of human nature, but his calmness was terrible in its rigidity; a cold alp, snow-bound and near to heaven, impenetrable and frowning, with flanks of granite, and yet beneficent.

Such women are essentially impressionable beings, passing without reason from the most idiotic distrust to absolute confidence. In this respect they are lower than animals. Extreme in everything – in their joy and despair, in their religion and irreligion – they would almost all go mad if they were not decimated by the mortality peculiar to their class, and if happy

chances did not lift one now and then from the slough in which they dwell. To understand the very depths of the wretchedness of this horrible existence, one must know how far in madness a creature can go without remaining there, by studying La Torpille's violent ecstasy at the priest's feet. The poor girl gazed at the paper of release with an expression which Dante has overlooked, and which surpassed the inventiveness of his Inferno. But a reaction came with tears. Esther rose, threw her arms round the priest's neck, laid her head on his breast, which she wetted with her weeping, kissing the coarse stuff that covered that heart of steel as if she fain would touch it. She seized hold of him; she covered his hands with kisses; she poured out in a sacred effusion of gratitude her most coaxing caresses, lavished fond names on him, saying again and again in the midst of her honeyed words, "Let me have it!" in a thousand different tones of voice; she wrapped him in tenderness, covered him with her looks with a swiftness that found him defenceless; at last she charmed away his wrath.

The priest perceived how well the girl had deserved her nickname; he understood how difficult it was to resist this bewitching creature; he suddenly comprehended Lucien's love, and just what must have fascinated the poet. Such a passion hides among a thousand temptations a dart-like hook which is most apt to catch the lofty soul of an artist. These passions, inexplicable to the vulgar, are perfectly accounted for by the thirst for ideal beauty, which is characteristic of a creative mind. For are we not,

in some degree, akin to the angels, whose task it is to bring the guilty to a better mind? are we not creative when we purify such a creature? How delightful it is to harmonize moral with physical beauty! What joy and pride if we succeed! How noble a task is that which has no instrument but love!

Such alliances, made famous by the example of Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Alcibiades, Cethegus, and Pompey, and yet so monstrous in the eyes of the vulgar, are based on the same feeling that prompted Louis XIV. to build Versailles, or that makes men rush into any ruinous enterprise – into converting the miasma of a marsh into a mass of fragrance surrounded by living waters; placing a lake at the top of a hill, as the Prince de Conti did at Nointel; or producing Swiss scenery at Cassan, like Bergeret, the farmer-general. In short, it is the application of art in the realm of morals.

The priest, ashamed of having yielded to this weakness, hastily pushed Esther away, and she sat down quite abashed, for he said:

"You are still the courtesan." And he calmly replaced the paper in his sash.

Esther, like a child who has a single wish in its head, kept her eyes fixed on the spot where the document lay hidden.

"My child," the priest went on after a pause, "your mother was a Jewess, and you have not been baptized; but, on the other hand, you have never been taken to the synagogue. You are in the limbo where little children are – "

"Little children!" she echoed, in a tenderly pathetic tone.

"As you are on the books of the police, a cipher outside the pale of social beings," the priest went on, unmoved. "If love, seen as it swept past, led you to believe three months since that you were then born, you must feel that since that day you have been really an infant. You must, therefore, be led as if you were a child; you must be completely changed, and I will undertake to make you unrecognizable. To begin with, you must forget Lucien."

The words crushed the poor girl's heart; she raised her eyes to the priest and shook her head; she could not speak, finding the executioner in the deliverer again.

"At any rate, you must give up seeing him," he went on. "I will take you to a religious house where young girls of the best families are educated; there you will become a Catholic, you will be trained in the practice of Christian exercises, you will be taught religion. You may come out an accomplished young lady, chaste, pure, well brought up, if – " The man lifted up a finger and paused.

"If," he went on, "you feel brave enough to leave the 'Torpille' behind you here."

"Ah!" cried the poor thing, to whom each word had been like a note of some melody to which the gates of Paradise were slowly opening. "Ah! if it were possible to shed all my blood here and have it renewed!"

"Listen to me."

She was silent.

"Your future fate depends on your power of forgetting. Think of the extent to which you pledge yourself. A word, a gesture, which betrays La Torpille will kill Lucien's wife. A word murmured in a dream, an involuntary thought, an immodest glance, a gesture of impatience, a reminiscence of dissipation, an omission, a shake of the head that might reveal what you know, or what is known about you for your woes – "

"Yes, yes, Father," said the girl, with the exaltation of a saint. "To walk in shoes of red-hot iron and smile, to live in a pair of stays set with nails and maintain the grace of a dancer, to eat bread salted with ashes, to drink wormwood, – all will be sweet and easy!"

She fell again on her knees, she kissed the priest's shoes, she melted into tears that wetted them, she clasped his knees, and clung to them, murmuring foolish words as she wept for joy. Her long and beautiful light hair waved to the ground, a sort of carpet under the feet of the celestial messenger, whom she saw as gloomy and hard as ever when she lifted herself up and looked at him.

"What have I done to offend you?" cried she, quite frightened. "I have heard of a woman, such as I am, who washed the feet of Jesus with perfumes. Alas! virtue has made me so poor that I have nothing but tears to offer you."

"Have you not understood?" he answered, in a cruel voice. "I tell you, you must be able to come out of the house to which I shall take you so completely changed, physically and morally,

that no man or woman you have ever known will be able to call you 'Esther' and make you look round. Yesterday your love could not give you strength enough so completely to bury the prostitute that she could never reappear; and again to-day she revives in adoration which is due to none but God."

"Was it not He who sent you to me?" said she.

"If during the course of your education you should even see Lucien, all would be lost," he went on; "remember that."

"Who will comfort him?" said she.

"What was it that you comforted him for?" asked the priest, in a tone in which, for the first time during this scene, there was a nervous quaver.

"I do not know; he was often sad when he came."

"Sad!" said the priest. "Did he tell you why?"

"Never," answered she.

"He was sad at loving such a girl as you!" exclaimed he.

"Alas! and well he might be," said she, with deep humility. "I am the most despicable creature of my sex, and I could find favor in his eyes only by the greatness of my love."

"That love must give you the courage to obey me blindly. If I were to take you straight from hence to the house where you are to be educated, everybody here would tell Lucien that you had gone away to-day, Sunday, with a priest; he might follow in your tracks. In the course of a week, the portress, not seeing me again, might suppose me to be what I am not. So, one evening – this day week – at seven o'clock, go out quietly and get into

a cab that will be waiting for you at the bottom of the Rue des Frondeurs. During this week avoid Lucien, find excuses, have him sent from the door, and if he should come in, go up to some friend's room. I shall know if you have seen him, and in that event all will be at an end. I shall not even come back. These eight days you will need to make up some suitable clothing and to hide your look of a prostitute," said he, laying a purse on the chimney-shelf. "There is something in your manner, in your clothes – something indefinable which is well known to Parisians, and proclaims you what you are. Have you never met in the streets or on the Boulevards a modest and virtuous girl walking with her mother?"

"Oh yes, to my sorrow! The sight of a mother and daughter is one of our most cruel punishments; it arouses the remorse that lurks in the innermost folds of our hearts, and that is consuming us. – I know too well all I lack."

"Well, then, you know how you should look next Sunday," said the priest, rising.

"Oh!" said she, "teach me one real prayer before you go, that I may pray to God."

It was a touching thing to see the priest making this girl repeat Ave *Maria* and *Paternoster* in French.

"That is very fine!" said Esther, when she had repeated these two grand and universal utterances of the Catholic faith without making a mistake.

"What is your name?" she asked the priest when he took leave

of her.

"Carlos Herrera; I am a Spaniard banished from my country."

Esther took his hand and kissed it. She was no longer the courtesan; she was an angel rising after a fall.

In a religious institution, famous for the aristocratic and pious teaching imparted there, one Monday morning in the beginning of March 1824 the pupils found their pretty flock increased by a newcomer, whose beauty triumphed without dispute not only over that of her companions, but over the special details of beauty which were found severally in perfection in each one of them. In France it is extremely rare, not to say impossible, to meet with the thirty points of perfection, described in Persian verse, and engraved, it is said, in the Seraglio, which are needed to make a woman absolutely beautiful. Though in France the whole is seldom seen, we find exquisite parts. As to that imposing union which sculpture tries to produce, and has produced in a few rare examples like the Diana and the Callipyge, it is the privileged possession of Greece and Asia Minor.

Esther came from that cradle of the human race; her mother was a Jewess. The Jews, though so often deteriorated by their contact with other nations, have, among their many races, families in which this sublime type of Asiatic beauty has been preserved. When they are not repulsively hideous, they present the splendid characteristics of Armenian beauty. Esther would have carried off the prize at the Seraglio; she had the thirty points harmoniously combined. Far from having damaged the finish of

her modeling and the freshness of her flesh, her strange life had given her the mysterious charm of womanhood; it is no longer the close, waxy texture of green fruit and not yet the warm glow of maturity; there is still the scent of the flower. A few days longer spent in dissolute living, and she would have been too fat. This abundant health, this perfection of the animal in a being in whom voluptuousness took the place of thought, must be a remarkable fact in the eyes of physiologists. A circumstance so rare, that it may be called impossible in very young girls, was that her hands, incomparably fine in shape, were as soft, transparent, and white as those of a woman after the birth of her second child. She had exactly the hair and the foot for which the Duchesse de Berri was so famous, hair so thick that no hairdresser could gather it into his hand, and so long that it fell to the ground in rings; for Esther was of that medium height which makes a woman a sort of toy, to be taken up and set down, taken up again and carried without fatigue. Her skin, as fine as rice-paper, of a warm amber hue showing the purple veins, was satiny without dryness, soft without being clammy.

Esther, excessively strong though apparently fragile, arrested attention by one feature that is conspicuous in the faces in which Raphael has shown his most artistic feeling, for Raphael is the painter who has most studied and best rendered Jewish beauty. This remarkable effect was produced by the depth of the eye-socket, under which the eye moved free from its setting; the arch of the brow was so accurate as to resemble the groining

of a vault. When youth lends this beautiful hollow its pure and diaphanous coloring, and edges it with closely-set eyebrows, when the light stealing into the circular cavity beneath lingers there with a rosy hue, there are tender treasures in it to delight a lover, beauties to drive a painter to despair. Those luminous curves, where the shadows have a golden tone, that tissue as firm as a sinew and as mobile as the most delicate membrane, is a crowning achievement of nature. The eye at rest within is like a miraculous egg in a nest of silken wings. But as time goes on this marvel acquires a dreadful melancholy, when passions have laid dark smears on those fine forms, when grief had furrowed that network of delicate veins. Esther's nationality proclaimed itself in this Oriental modeling of her eyes with their Turkish lids; their color was a slate-gray which by night took on the blue sheen of a raven's wing. It was only the extreme tenderness of her expression that could moderate their fire.

Only those races that are native to deserts have in the eye the power of fascinating everybody, for any woman can fascinate some one person. Their eyes preserve, no doubt, something of the infinitude they have gazed on. Has nature, in her foresight, armed their retina with some reflecting background to enable them to endure the mirage of the sand, the torrents of sunshine, and the burning cobalt of the sky? or, do human beings, like other creatures, derive something from the surroundings among which they grow up, and preserve for ages the qualities they have imbibed from them? The great solution of this problem of race

lies perhaps in the question itself. Instincts are living facts, and their cause dwells in past necessity. Variety in animals is the result of the exercise of these instincts.

To convince ourselves of this long-sought-for truth, it is enough to extend to the herd of mankind the observation recently made on flocks of Spanish and English sheep which, in low meadows where pasture is abundant, feed side by side in close array, but on mountains, where grass is scarce, scatter apart. Take these two kinds of sheep, transfer them to Switzerland or France; the mountain breeds will feed apart even in a lowland meadow of thick grass, the lowland sheep will keep together even on an alp. Hardly will a succession of generations eliminate acquired and transmitted instincts. After a century the highland spirit reappears in a refractory lamb, just as, after eighteen centuries of exile, the spirit of the East shone in Esther's eyes and features.

Her look had no terrible fascination; it shed a mild warmth, it was pathetic without being startling, and the sternest wills were melted in its flame. Esther had conquered hatred, she had astonished the depraved souls of Paris; in short, that look and the softness of her skin had earned her the terrible nickname which had just led her to the verge of the grave. Everything about her was in harmony with these characteristics of the Peri of the burning sands. Her forehead was firmly and proudly molded. Her nose, like that of the Arab race, was delicate and narrow, with oval nostrils well set and open at the base. Her mouth, fresh and red, was a rose unblemished by a flaw, dissipation had left no

trace there. Her chin, rounded as though some amorous sculptor had polished its fulness, was as white as milk. One thing only that she had not been able to remedy betrayed the courtesan fallen very low: her broken nails, which needed time to recover their shape, so much had they been spoiled by the vulgarest household tasks.

The young boarders began by being jealous of these marvels of beauty, but they ended by admiring them. Before the first week was at an end they were all attached to the artless Jewess, for they were interested in the unknown misfortunes of a girl of eighteen who could neither read nor write, to whom all knowledge and instruction were new, and who was to earn for the Archbishop the triumph of having converted a Jewess to Catholicism and giving the convent a festival in her baptism. They forgave her beauty, finding themselves her superiors in education.

Esther very soon caught the manners, the accent, the carriage and attitudes of these highly-bred girls; in short, her first nature reasserted itself. The change was so complete that on his first visit Herrera was astonished as it would seem – and the Mother Superior congratulated him on his ward. Never in their existence as teachers had these sisters met with a more charming nature, more Christian meekness, true modesty, nor a greater eagerness to learn. When a girl has suffered such misery as had overwhelmed this poor child, and looks forward to such a reward as the Spaniard held out to Esther, it is hard if she does not realize

the miracles of the early Church which the Jesuits revived in Paraguay.

"She is edifying," said the Superior, kissing her on the brow.

And this essentially Catholic word tells all.

In recreation hours Esther would question her companions, but discreetly, as to the simplest matters in fashionable life, which to her were like the first strange ideas of life to a child. When she heard that she was to be dressed in white on the day of her baptism and first Communion, that she should wear a white satin fillet, white bows, white shoes, white gloves, and white rosettes in her hair, she melted into tears, to the amazement of her companions. It was the reverse of the scene of Jephtha on the mountain. The courtesan was afraid of being understood; she ascribed this dreadful dejection to the joy with which she looked forward to the function. As there is certainly as wide a gulf between the habits she had given up and the habits she was acquiring as there is between the savage state and civilization, she had the grace and simplicity and depth which distinguished the wonderful heroine of the American Puritans. She had too, without knowing it, a love that was eating out her heart – a strange love, a desire more violent in her who knew everything than it can be in a maiden who knows nothing, though the two forms of desire have the same cause, and the same end in view.

During the first few months the novelty of a secluded life, the surprises of learning, the handiworks she was taught, the practices of religion, the fervency of a holy resolve, the gentle

affections she called forth, and the exercise of the faculties of her awakened intelligence, all helped to repress her memory, even the effort she made to acquire a new one, for she had as much to unlearn as to learn. There is more than one form of memory: the body and mind have each their own; home-sickness, for instance, is a malady of the physical memory. Thus, during the third month, the vehemence of this virgin soul, soaring to Paradise on outspread wings, was not indeed quelled, but fettered by a dull rebellion, of which Esther herself did not know the cause. Like the Scottish sheep, she wanted to pasture in solitude, she could not conquer the instincts begotten of debauchery.

Was it that the foul ways of the Paris she had abjured were calling her back to them? Did the chains of the hideous habits she had renounced cling to her by forgotten rivets, and was she feeling them, as old soldiers suffer still, the surgeons tell us, in the limbs they have lost? Had vice and excess so soaked into her marrow that holy waters had not yet exorcised the devil lurking there? Was the sight of him for whom her angelic efforts were made, necessary to the poor soul, whom God would surely forgive for mingling human and sacred love? One had led to the other. Was there some transposition of the vital force in her involving her in inevitable suffering? Everything is doubtful and obscure in a case which science scorns to study, regarding the subject as too immoral and too compromising, as if the physician and the writer, the priest and the political student, were not above all suspicion. However, a doctor who was stopped by death had

the courage to begin an investigation which he left unfinished.

Perhaps the dark depression to which Esther fell a victim, and which cast a gloom over her happy life, was due to all these causes; and perhaps, unable as she was to suspect them herself, she suffered as sick creatures suffer who know nothing of medicine or surgery.

The fact is strange. Wholesome and abundant food in the place of bad and inflammatory nourishment did not sustain Esther. A pure and regular life, divided between recreation and studies intentionally abridged, taking the place of a disorderly existence of which the pleasures and the pains were equally horrible, exhausted the convent-boarder. The coolest rest, the calmest nights, taking the place of crushing fatigue and the most torturing agitation, gave her low fever, in which the common symptoms were imperceptible to the nursing Sister's eye or finger. In fact, virtue and happiness following on evil and misfortune, security in the stead of anxiety, were as fatal to Esther as her past wretchedness would have been to her young companions. Planted in corruption, she had grown up in it. That infernal home still had a hold on her, in spite of the commands of a despotic will. What she loathed was life to her, what she loved was killing her.

Her faith was so ardent that her piety was a delight to those about her. She loved to pray. She had opened her spirit to the lights of true religion, and received it without an effort or a doubt. The priest who was her director was delighted with her. Still, at

every turn her body resisted the spirit.

To please a whim of Madame de Maintenon's, who fed them with scraps from the royal table, some carp were taken out of a muddy pool and placed in a marble basin of bright, clean water. The carp perished. The animals might be sacrificed, but man could never infect them with the leprosy of flattery. A courtier remarked at Versailles on this mute resistance. "They are like me," said the uncrowned queen; "they pine for their obscure mud."

This speech epitomizes Esther's story.

At times the poor girl was driven to run about the splendid convent gardens; she hurried from tree to tree, she rushed into the darkest nooks – seeking? What? She did not know, but she fell a prey to the demon; she carried on a flirtation with the trees, she appealed to them in unspoken words. Sometimes, in the evening, she stole along under the walls, like a snake, without any shawl over her bare shoulders. Often in chapel, during the service, she remained with her eyes fixed on the Crucifix, melted to tears; the others admired her; but she was crying with rage. Instead of the sacred images she hoped to see, those glaring nights when she had led some orgy as Habeneck leads a Beethoven symphony at the Conservatoire – nights of laughter and lasciviousness, with vehement gestures, inextinguishable laughter, rose before her, frenzied, furious, and brutal. She was as mild to look upon as a virgin that clings to earth only by her woman's shape; within raged an imperial Messalina.

She alone knew the secret of this struggle between the devil and the angel. When the Superior reproved her for having done her hair more fashionably than the rule of the House allowed, she altered it with prompt and beautiful submission; she would have cut her hair off if the Mother had required it of her. This moral home-sickness was truly pathetic in a girl who would rather have perished than have returned to the depths of impurity. She grew pale and altered and thin. The Superior gave her shorter lessons, and called the interesting creature to her room to question her. But Esther was happy; she enjoyed the society of her companions; she felt no pain in any vital part; still, it was vitality itself that was attacked. She regretted nothing; she wanted nothing. The Superior, puzzled by her boarder's answers, did not know what to think when she saw her pining under consuming debility.

The doctor was called in when the girl's condition seemed serious; but this doctor knew nothing of Esther's previous life, and could not guess it; he found every organ sound, the pain could not be localized. The invalid's replies were such as to upset every hypothesis. There remained one way of clearing up the learned man's doubts, which now lighted on a frightful suggestion; but Esther obstinately refused to submit to a medical examination.

In this difficulty the Superior appealed to the Abbe Herrera. The Spaniard came, saw that Esther's condition was desperate, and took the physician aside for a moment. After this confidential interview, the man of science told the man of faith that the only

cure lay in a journey to Italy. The Abbe would not hear of such a journey before Esther's baptism and first Communion.

"How long will it be till then?" asked the doctor.

"A month," replied the Superior.

"She will be dead," said the doctor.

"Yes, but in a state of grace and salvation," said the Abbe.

In Spain the religious question is supreme, above all political, civil, or vital considerations; so the physician did not answer the Spaniard. He turned to the Mother Superior, but the terrible Abbe took him by the arm and stopped him.

"Not a word, monsieur!" said he.

The doctor, though a religious man and a Monarchist, looked at Esther with an expression of tender pity. The girl was as lovely as a lily drooping on its stem.

"God help her, then!" he exclaimed as he went away.

On the very day of this consultation, Esther was taken by her protector to the *Rocher de Cancale*, a famous restaurant, for his wish to save her had suggested strange expedients to the priest. He tried the effect of two excesses – an excellent dinner, which might remind the poor child of past orgies; and the opera, which would give her mind some images of worldliness. His despotic authority was needed to tempt the young saint to such profanation. Herrera disguised himself so effectually as a military man, that Esther hardly recognized him; he took care to make his companion wear a veil, and put her in a box where she was hidden from all eyes.

This palliative, which had no risks for innocence so sincerely regained, soon lost its effect. The convent-boarder viewed her protector's dinners with disgust, had a religious aversion for the theatre, and relapsed into melancholy.

"She is dying of love for Lucien," said Herrera to himself; he had wanted to sound the depths of this soul, and know how much could be exacted from it.

So the moment came when the poor child was no longer upheld by moral force, and the body was about to break down. The priest calculated the time with the hideous practical sagacity formerly shown by executioners in the art of torture. He found his protegee in the garden, sitting on a bench under a trellis on which the April sun fell gently; she seemed to be cold and trying to warm herself; her companions looked with interest at her pallor as of a folded plant, her eyes like those of a dying gazelle, her drooping attitude. Esther rose and went to meet the Spaniard with a lassitude that showed how little life there was in her, and, it may be added, how little care to live. This hapless outcast, this wild and wounded swallow, moved Carlos Herrera to compassion for the second time. The gloomy minister, whom God should have employed only to carry out His revenges, received the sick girl with a smile, which expressed, indeed, as much bitterness as sweetness, as much vengeance as charity. Esther, practised in meditation, and used to revulsions of feeling since she had led this almost monastic life, felt on her part, for the second time, distrust of her protector; but, as on the former occasion,

his speech reassured her.

"Well, my dear child," said he, "and why have you never spoken to me of Lucien?"

"I promised you," she said, shuddering convulsively from head to foot; "I swore to you that I would never breathe his name."

"And yet you have not ceased to think of him."

"That, monsieur, is the only fault I have committed. I think of him always; and just as you came, I was saying his name to myself."

"Absence is killing you?"

Esther's only answer was to hang her head as the sick do who already scent the breath of the grave.

"If you could see him – ?" said he.

"It would be life!" she cried.

"And do you think of him only spiritually?"

"Ah, monsieur, love cannot be dissected!"

"Child of an accursed race! I have done everything to save you; I send you back to your fate. – You shall see him again."

"Why insult my happiness? Can I not love Lucien and be virtuous? Am I not ready to die here for virtue, as I should be ready to die for him? Am I not dying for these two fanaticisms – for virtue, which was to make me worthy of him, and for him who flung me into the embrace of virtue? Yes, and ready to die without seeing him or to live by seeing him. God is my Judge."

The color had mounted to her face, her whiteness had recovered its amber warmth. Esther looked beautiful again.

"The day after that on which you are washed in the waters of baptism you shall see Lucien once more; and if you think you can live in virtue by living for him, you shall part no more."

The priest was obliged to lift up Esther, whose knees failed her; the poor child dropped as if the ground had slipped from under her feet. The Abbe seated her on a bench; and when she could speak again she asked him:

"Why not to-day?"

"Do you want to rob Monseigneur of the triumph of your baptism and conversion? You are too close to Lucien not to be far from God."

"Yes, I was not thinking – "

"You will never be of any religion," said the priest, with a touch of the deepest irony.

"God is good," said she; "He can read my heart."

Conquered by the exquisite artlessness and gestures, Herrera kissed her on the forehead for the first time.

"Your libertine friends named you well; you would bewitch God the Father. – A few days more must pass, and then you will both be free."

"Both!" she echoed in an ecstasy of joy.

This scene, observed from a distance, struck pupils and superiors alike; they fancied they had looked on at a miracle as they compared Esther with herself. She was completely changed; she was alive. She reappeared her natural self, all love, sweet, coquettish, playful, and gay; in short, it was a resurrection.

Herrera lived in the Rue Cassette, near Saint-Sulpice, the church to which he was attached. This building, hard and stern in style, suited this Spaniard, whose discipline was that of the Dominicans. A lost son of Ferdinand VII.'s astute policy, he devoted himself to the cause of the constitution, knowing that this devotion could never be rewarded till the restoration of the *Rey netto*. Carlos Herrera had thrown himself body and soul into the *Camarilla* at the moment when the Cortes seemed likely to stand and hold their own. To the world this conduct seemed to proclaim a superior soul. The Duc d'Angouleme's expedition had been carried out, King Ferdinand was on the throne, and Carlos Herrera did not go to claim the reward of his services at Madrid. Fortified against curiosity by his diplomatic taciturnity, he assigned as his reason for remaining in Paris his strong affection for Lucien de Rubempre, to which the young man already owed the King's patent relating to his change of name.

Herrera lived very obscurely, as priests employed on secret missions traditionally live. He fulfilled his religious duties at Saint-Sulpice, never went out but on business, and then after dark, and in a hackney cab. His day was filled up with a siesta in the Spanish fashion, which arranges for sleep between the two chief meals, and so occupies the hours when Paris is in a busy turmoil. The Spanish cigar also played its part, and consumed time as well as tobacco. Laziness is a mask as gravity is, and that again is laziness.

Herrera lived on the second floor in one wing of the house, and Lucien occupied the other wing. The two apartments were separated and joined by a large reception room of antique magnificence, suitable equally to the grave priest and to the young poet. The courtyard was gloomy; large, thick trees shaded the garden. Silence and reserve are always found in the dwellings chosen by priests. Herrera's lodging may be described in one word – a cell. Lucien's, splendid with luxury, and furnished with every refinement of comfort, combined everything that the elegant life of a dandy demands – a poet, a writer, ambitious and dissipated, at once vain and vainglorious, utterly heedless, and yet wishing for order, one of those incomplete geniuses who have some power to wish, to conceive – which is perhaps the same thing – but no power at all to execute.

These two, Lucien and Herrera, formed a body politic. This, no doubt, was the secret of their union. Old men in whom the activities of life have been uprooted and transplanted to the sphere of interest, often feel the need of a pleasing instrument, a young and impassioned actor, to carry out their schemes. Richelieu, too late, found a handsome pale face with a young moustache to cast in the way of women whom he wanted to amuse. Misunderstood by giddy-pated younger men, he was compelled to banish his master's mother and terrify the Queen, after having tried to make each fall in love with him, though he was not cut out to be loved by queens.

Do what we will, always, in the course of an ambitious life,

we find a woman in the way just when we least expect such an obstacle. However great a political man may be, he always needs a woman to set against a woman, just as the Dutch use a diamond to cut a diamond. Rome at the height of its power yielded to this necessity. And observe how immeasurably more imposing was the life of Mazarin, the Italian cardinal, than that of Richelieu, the French cardinal. Richelieu met with opposition from the great nobles, and he applied the axe; he died in the flower of his success, worn out by this duel, for which he had only a Capuchin monk as his second. Mazarin was repulsed by the citizen class and the nobility, armed allies who sometimes victoriously put royalty to flight; but Anne of Austria's devoted servant took off no heads, he succeeded in vanquishing the whole of France, and trained Louis XIV., who completed Richelieu's work by strangling the nobility with gilded cords in the grand Seraglio of Versailles. Madame de Pompadour dead, Choiseul fell!

Had Herrera soaked his mind in these high doctrines? Had he judged himself at an earlier age than Richelieu? Had he chosen Lucien to be his Cinq-Mars, but a faithful Cinq-Mars? No one could answer these questions or measure this Spaniard's ambition, as no one could foresee what his end might be. These questions, asked by those who were able to see anything of this coalition, which was long kept a secret, might have unveiled a horrible mystery which Lucien himself had known but a few days. Carlos was ambitious for two; that was what his conduct

made plain to those persons who knew him, and who all imagined that Lucien was the priest's illegitimate son.

Fifteen months after Lucien's reappearance at the opera ball, which led him too soon into a world where the priest had not wished to see him till he should have fully armed him against it, he had three fine horses in his stable, a coupe for evening use, a cab and a tilbury to drive by day. He dined out every day. Herrera's foresight was justified; his pupil was carried away by dissipation; he thought it necessary to effect some diversion in the frenzied passion for Esther that the young man still cherished in his heart. After spending something like forty thousand francs, every folly had brought Lucien back with increased eagerness to La Torpille; he searched for her persistently; and as he could not find her, she became to him what game is to the sportsman.

Could Herrera understand the nature of a poet's love?

When once this feeling has mounted to the brain of one of these great little men, after firing his heart and absorbing his senses, the poet becomes as far superior to humanity through love as he already is through the power of his imagination. A freak of intellectual heredity has given him the faculty of expressing nature by imagery, to which he gives the stamp both of sentiment and of thought, and he lends his love the wings of his spirit; he feels, and he paints, he acts and meditates, he multiplies his sensations by thought, present felicity becomes threefold through aspiration for the future and memory of the past; and with it he mingles the exquisite delights of the soul, which makes him the

prince of artists. Then the poet's passion becomes a fine poem in which human proportion is often set at nought. Does not the poet then place his mistress far higher than women crave to sit? Like the sublime Knight of la Mancha, he transfigures a peasant girl to be a princess. He uses for his own behoof the wand with which he touches everything, turning it into a wonder, and thus enhances the pleasure of loving by the glorious glamour of the ideal.

Such a love is the very essence of passion. It is extreme in all things, in its hopes, in its despair, in its rage, in its melancholy, in its joy; it flies, it leaps, it crawls; it is not like any of the emotions known to ordinary men; it is to everyday love what the perennial Alpine torrent is to the lowland brook.

These splendid geniuses are so rarely understood that they spend themselves in hopes deceived; they are exhausted by the search for their ideal mistress, and almost always die like gorgeous insects splendidly adorned for their love-festival by the most poetical of nature's inventions, and crushed under the foot of a passer-by. But there is another danger! When they meet with the form that answers to their soul, and which not unfrequently is that of a baker's wife, they do as Raphael did, as the beautiful insect does, they die in the Fornarina's arms.

Lucien was at this pass. His poetical temperament, excessive in all things, in good as in evil, had discerned the angel in this girl, who was tainted by corruption rather than corrupt; he always saw her white, winged, pure, and mysterious, as she had made

herself for him, understanding that he would have her so.

Towards the end of the month of May 1825 Lucien had lost all his good spirits; he never went out, dined with Herrera, sat pensive, worked, read volumes of diplomatic treatises, squatted Turkish-fashion on a divan, and smoked three or four hookahs a day. His groom had more to do in cleaning and perfuming the tubes of this noble pipe than in currying and brushing down the horses' coats, and dressing them with cockades for driving in the Bois. As soon as the Spaniard saw Lucien pale, and detected a malady in the frenzy of suppressed passion, he determined to read to the bottom of this man's heart on which he founded his life.

One fine evening, when Lucien, lounging in an armchair, was mechanically contemplating the hues of the setting sun through the trees in the garden, blowing up the mist of scented smoke in slow, regular clouds, as pensive smokers are wont, he was roused from his reverie by hearing a deep sigh. He turned and saw the Abbe standing by him with folded arms.

"You were there!" said the poet.

"For some time," said the priest, "my thoughts have been following the wide sweep of yours." Lucien understood his meaning.

"I have never affected to have an iron nature such as yours is. To me life is by turns paradise and hell; when by chance it is neither, it bores me; and I am bored – "

"How can you be bored when you have such splendid

prospects before you?"

"If I have no faith in those prospects, or if they are too much shrouded?"

"Do not talk nonsense," said the priest. "It would be far more worthy of you and of me that you should open your heart to me. There is now that between us which ought never to have come between us – a secret. This secret has subsisted for sixteen months. You are in love."

"And what then?"

"A foul hussy called La Torpille – "

"Well?"

"My boy, I told you you might have a mistress, but a woman of rank, pretty, young, influential, a Countess at least. I had chosen Madame d'Espard for you, to make her the instrument of your fortune without scruple; for she would never have perverted your heart, she would have left you free. – To love a prostitute of the lowest class when you have not, like kings, the power to give her high rank, is a monstrous blunder."

"And am I the first man who had renounced ambition to follow the lead of a boundless passion?"

"Good!" said the priest, stooping to pick up the mouthpiece of the hookah which Lucien had dropped on the floor. "I understand the retort. Cannot love and ambition be reconciled? Child, you have a mother in old Herrera – a mother who is wholly devoted to you – "

"I know it, old friend," said Lucien, taking his hand and

shaking it.

"You wished for the toys of wealth; you have them. You want to shine; I am guiding you into the paths of power, I kiss very dirty hands to secure your advancement, and you will get on. A little while yet and you will lack nothing of what can charm man or woman. Though effeminate in your caprices, your intellect is manly. I have dreamed all things of you; I forgive you all. You have only to speak to have your ephemeral passions gratified. I have aggrandized your life by introducing into it that which makes it delightful to most people – the stamp of political influence and dominion. You will be as great as you now are small; but you must not break the machine by which we coin money. I grant you all you will excepting such blunders as will destroy your future prospects. When I can open the drawing-rooms of the Faubourg Saint-Germain to you, I forbid your wallowing in the gutter. Lucien, I mean to be an iron stanchion in your interest; I will endure everything from you, for you. Thus I have transformed your lack of tact in the game of life into the shrewd stroke of a skilful player – "

Lucien looked up with a start of furious impetuosity.

"I carried off La Torpille!"

"You?" cried Lucien.

In a fit of animal rage the poet jumped up, flung the jeweled mouthpiece in the priest's face, and pushed him with such violence as to throw down that strong man.

"I," said the Spaniard, getting up and preserving his terrible

gravity.

His black wig had fallen off. A bald skull, as shining as a death's head, showed the man's real countenance. It was appalling. Lucien sat on his divan, his hands hanging limp, overpowered, and gazing at the Abbe with stupefaction.

"I carried her off," the priest repeated.

"What did you do with her? You took her away the day after the opera ball."

"Yes, the day after I had seen a woman who belonged to you insulted by wretches whom I would not have condescended to kick downstairs."

"Wretches!" interrupted Lucien, "say rather monsters, compared with whom those who are guillotined are angels. Do you know what the unhappy Torpille had done for three of them? One of them was her lover for two months. She was poor, and picked up a living in the gutter; he had not a sou; like me, when you rescued me, he was very near the river; this fellow would get up at night and go to the cupboard where the girl kept the remains of her dinner and eat it. At last she discovered the trick; she understood the shameful thing, and took care to leave a great deal; then she was happy. She never told any one but me, that night, coming home from the opera.

"The second had stolen some money; but before the theft was found out, she lent him the sum, which he was enabled to replace, and which he always forgot to repay to the poor child.

"As to the third, she made his fortune by playing out a farce

worthy of Figaro's genius. She passed as his wife and became the mistress of a man in power, who believed her to be the most innocent of good citizens. To one she gave life, to another honor, to the third fortune – what does it all count for to-day? And this is how they reward her!"

"Would you like to see them dead?" said Herrera, in whose eyes there were tears.

"Come, that is just like you! I know you by that – "

"Nay, hear all, raving poet," said the priest. "La Torpille is no more."

Lucien flew at Herrera to seize him by the throat, with such violence that any other man must have fallen backwards; but the Spaniard's arm held off his assailant.

"Come, listen," said he coldly. "I have made another woman of her, chaste, pure, well bred, religious, a perfect lady. She is being educated. She can, if she may, under the influence of your love, become a Ninon, a Marion Delorme, a du Barry, as the journalist at the opera ball remarked. You may proclaim her your mistress, or you may retire behind a curtain of your own creating, which will be wiser. By either method you will gain profit and pride, pleasure and advancement; but if you are as great a politician as you are a poet, Esther will be no more to you than any other woman of the town; for, later, perhaps she may help us out of difficulties; she is worth her weight in gold. Drink, but do not get tipsy.

"If I had not held the reins of your passion, where would you

be now? Rolling with La Torpille in the slough of misery from which I dragged you. Here, read this," said Herrera, as simply as Talma in *Manlius*, which he had never seen.

A sheet of paper was laid on the poet's knees, and startled him from the ecstasy and surprise with which he had listened to this astounding speech; he took it, and read the first letter written by Mademoiselle Esther: —

> To Monsieur l'Abbe Carlos Herrera.
>
> "MY DEAR PROTECTOR, – Will you not suppose that gratitude is stronger in me than love, when you see that the first use I make of the power of expressing my thoughts is to thank you, instead of devoting it to pouring forth a passion that Lucien has perhaps forgotten. But to you, divine man, I can say what I should not dare to tell him, who, to my joy, still clings to earth.
>
> "Yesterday's ceremony has filled me with treasures of grace, and I place my fate in your hands. Even if I must die far away from my beloved, I shall die purified like the Magdalen, and my soul will become to him the rival of his guardian angel. Can I ever forget yesterday's festival? How could I wish to abdicate the glorious throne to which I was raised? Yesterday I washed away every stain in the waters of baptism, and received the Sacred Body of my Redeemer; I am become one of His tabernacles. At that moment I heard the songs of angels, I was more than a woman, born to a life of light amid the acclamations of the whole earth, admired by the world in a cloud of incense and prayers that were intoxicating, adorned like a virgin for the Heavenly Spouse.

> "Thus finding myself worthy of Lucien, which I had never hoped to be, I abjured impure love and vowed to walk only in the paths of virtue. If my flesh is weaker than my spirit, let it perish. Be the arbiter of my destiny; and if I die, tell Lucien that I died to him when I was born to God."

Lucien looked up at the Abbe with eyes full of tears.

"You know the rooms fat Caroline Bellefeuille had, in the Rue Taitbout," the Spaniard said. "The poor creature, cast off by her magistrate, was in the greatest poverty; she was about to be sold up. I bought the place all standing, and she turned out with her clothes. Esther, the angel who aspired to heaven, has alighted there, and is waiting for you."

At this moment Lucien heard his horses pawing the ground in the courtyard; he was incapable of expressing his admiration for a devotion which he alone could appreciate; he threw himself into the arms of the man he had insulted, made amends for all by a look and the speechless effusion of his feelings. Then he flew downstairs, confided Esther's address to his tiger's ear, and the horses went off as if their master's passion had lived in their legs.

The next day a man, who by his dress might have been mistaken by the passers-by for a gendarme in disguise, was passing the Rue Taitbout, opposite a house, as if he were waiting for some one to come out; he walked with an agitated air. You will often see in Paris such vehement promenaders, real gendarmes watching a recalcitrant National Guardsman, bailiffs taking steps to effect an arrest, creditors planning a trick on the

debtor who has shut himself in, lovers, or jealous and suspicious husbands, or friends doing sentry for a friend; but rarely do you meet a face portending such coarse and fierce thoughts as animated that of the gloomy and powerful man who paced to and fro under Mademoiselle Esther's windows with the brooding haste of a bear in its cage.

At noon a window was opened, and a maid-servant's hand was put out to push back the padded shutters. A few minutes later, Esther, in her dressing-gown, came to breathe the air, leaning on Lucien; any one who saw them might have taken them for the originals of some pretty English vignette. Esther was the first to recognize the basilisk eyes of the Spanish priest; and the poor creature, stricken as if she had been shot, gave a cry of horror.

"There is that terrible priest," said she, pointing him out to Lucien.

"He!" said Lucien, smiling, "he is no more a priest than you are."

"What then?" she said in alarm.

"Why, an old villain who believes in nothing but the devil," said Lucien.

This light thrown on the sham priest's secrets, if revealed to any one less devoted than Esther, might have ruined Lucien for ever.

As they went along the corridor from their bedroom to the dining-room, where their breakfast was served, the lovers met Carlos Herrera.

"What have you come here for?" said Lucien roughly.

"To bless you," replied the audacious scoundrel, stopping the pair and detaining them in the little drawing-room of the apartment. "Listen to me, my pretty dears. Amuse yourselves, be happy – well and good! Happiness at any price is my motto. – But you," he went on to Esther, "you whom I dragged from the mud, and have soaped down body and soul, you surely do not dream that you can stand in Lucien's way? – As for you, my boy," he went on after a pause, looking at Lucien, "you are no longer poet enough to allow yourself another Coralie. This is sober prose. What can be done with Esther's lover? Nothing. Can Esther become Madame de Rubempre? No.

"Well, my child," said he, laying his hand on Esther's, and making her shiver as if some serpent had wound itself round her, "the world must never know of your existence. Above all, the world must never know that a certain Mademoiselle Esther loves Lucien, and that Lucien is in love with her. – These rooms are your prison, my pigeon. If you wish to go out – and your health will require it – you must take exercise at night, at hours when you cannot be seen; for your youth and beauty, and the style you have acquired at the Convent, would at once be observed in Paris. The day when any one in the world, whoever it be," he added in an awful voice, seconded by an awful look, "learns that Lucien is your lover, or that you are his mistress, that day will be your last but one on earth. I have procured that boy a patent permitting him to bear the name and arms of his maternal ancestors. Still,

this is not all; we have not yet recovered the title of Marquis; and to get it, he must marry a girl of good family, in whose favor the King will grant this distinction. Such an alliance will get Lucien on in the world and at Court. This boy, of whom I have made a man, will be first Secretary to an Embassy; later, he shall be Minister at some German Court, and God, or I – better still – helping him, he will take his seat some day on the bench reserved for peers – "

"Or on the bench reserved for – " Lucien began, interrupting the man.

"Hold your tongue!" cried Carlos, laying his broad hand on Lucien's mouth. "Would you tell such a secret to a woman?" he muttered in his ear.

"Esther! A woman!" cried the poet of *Les Marguerites.*

"Still inditing sonnets!" said the Spaniard. "Nonsense! Sooner or later all these angels relapse into being women, and every woman at moments is a mixture of a monkey and a child, two creatures who can kill us for fun. – Esther, my jewel," said he to the terrified girl, "I have secured as your waiting-maid a creature who is as much mine as if she were my daughter. For your cook, you shall have a mulatto woman, which gives style to a house. With Europe and Asie you can live here for a thousand-franc note a month like a queen – a stage queen. Europe has been a dressmaker, a milliner, and a stage super; Asie has cooked for an epicure Milord. These two women will serve you like two fairies."

Seeing Lucien go completely to the wall before this man, who was guilty at least of sacrilege and forgery, this woman, sanctified by her love, felt an awful fear in the depths of her heart. She made no reply, but dragged Lucien into her room, and asked him:

"Is he the devil?"

"He is far worse to me!" he vehemently replied. "But if you love me, try to imitate that man's devotion to me, and obey him on pain of death! – "

"Of death!" she exclaimed, more frightened than ever.

"Of death," repeated Lucien. "Alas! my darling, no death could be compared with that which would befall me if – "

Esther turned pale at his words, and felt herself fainting.

"Well, well," cried the sacrilegious forger, "have you not yet spelt out your daisy-petals?"

Esther and Lucien came out, and the poor girl, not daring to look at the mysterious man, said:

"You shall be obeyed as God is obeyed, monsieur."

"Good," said he. "You may be very happy for a time, and you will need only nightgowns and wrappers – that will be very economical."

The two lovers went on towards the dining-room, but Lucien's patron signed to the pretty pair to stop. And they stopped.

"I have just been talking of your servants, my child," said he to Esther. "I must introduce them to you."

The Spaniard rang twice. The women he had called Europe and Asie came in, and it was at once easy to see the reason of

these names.

Asie, who looked as if she might have been born in the Island of Java, showed a face to scare the eye, as flat as a board, with the copper complexion peculiar to Malays, with a nose that looked as if it had been driven inwards by some violent pressure. The strange conformation of the maxillary bones gave the lower part of this face a resemblance to that of the larger species of apes. The brow, though sloping, was not deficient in intelligence produced by habits of cunning. Two fierce little eyes had the calm fixity of a tiger's, but they never looked you straight in the face. Asie seemed afraid lest she might terrify people. Her lips, a dull blue, were parted over prominent teeth of dazzling whiteness, but grown across. The leading expression of this animal countenance was one of meanness. Her black hair, straight and greasy-looking like her skin, lay in two shining bands, forming an edge to a very handsome silk handkerchief. Her ears were remarkably pretty, and graced with two large dark pearls. Small, short, and squat, Asie bore a likeness to the grotesque figures the Chinese love to paint on screens, or, more exactly, to the Hindoo idols which seem to be imitated from some non-existent type, found, nevertheless, now and again by travelers. Esther shuddered as she looked at this monstrosity, dressed out in a white apron over a stuff gown.

"Asie," said the Spaniard, to whom the woman looked up with a gesture that can only be compared to that of a dog to its master, "this is your mistress."

And he pointed to Esther in her wrapper.

Asie looked at the young fairy with an almost distressful expression; but at the same moment a flash, half hidden between her thick, short eyelashes, shot like an incendiary spark at Lucien, who, in a magnificent dressing-gown thrown open over a fine Holland linen shirt and red trousers, with a fez on his head, beneath which his fair hair fell in thick curls, presented a godlike appearance.

Italian genius could invent the tale of Othello; English genius could put it on the stage; but Nature alone reserves the power of throwing into a single glance an expression of jealousy grander and more complete than England and Italy together could imagine. This look, seen by Esther, made her clutch the Spaniard by the arm, setting her nails in it as a cat sets its claws to save itself from falling into a gulf of which it cannot see the bottom.

The Spaniard spoke a few words, in some unfamiliar tongue, to the Asiatic monster, who crept on her knees to Esther's feet and kissed them.

"She is not merely a good cook," said Herrera to Esther; "she is a past-master, and might make Careme mad with jealousy. Asie can do everything by way of cooking. She will turn you out a simple dish of beans that will make you wonder whether the angels have not come down to add some herb from heaven. She will go to market herself every morning, and fight like the devil she is to get things at the lowest prices; she will tire out curiosity

by silence.

"You are to be supposed to have been in India, and Asie will help you to give effect to this fiction, for she is one of those Parisians who are born to be of any nationality they please. But I do not advise that you should give yourself out to be a foreigner. – Europe, what do you say?"

Europe was a perfect contrast to Asie, for she was the smartest waiting-maid that Monrose could have hoped to see as her rival on the stage. Slight, with a scatter-brain manner, a face like a weasel, and a sharp nose, Europe's features offered to the observer a countenance worn by the corruption of Paris life, the unhealthy complexion of a girl fed on raw apples, lymphatic but sinewy, soft but tenacious. One little foot was set forward, her hands were in her apron-pockets, and she fidgeted incessantly without moving, from sheer excess of liveliness. Grisette and stage super, in spite of her youth she must have tried many trades. As full of evil as a dozen Madelonnettes put together, she might have robbed her parents, and sat on the bench of a police-court.

Asie was terrifying, but you knew her thoroughly from the first; she descended in a straight line from Locusta; while Europe filled you with uneasiness, which could not fail to increase the more you had to do with her; her corruption seemed boundless. You felt that she could set the devils by the ears.

"Madame might say she had come from Valenciennes," said Europe in a precise little voice. "I was born there – Perhaps monsieur," she added to Lucien in a pedantic tone, "will be good

enough to say what name he proposes to give to madame?"

"Madame van Bogseck," the Spaniard put in, reversing Esther's name. "Madame is a Jewess, a native of Holland, the widow of a merchant, and suffering from a liver-complaint contracted in Java. No great fortune – not to excite curiosity."

"Enough to live on – six thousand francs a year; and we shall complain of her stinginess?" said Europe.

"That is the thing," said the Spaniard, with a bow. "You limbs of Satan!" he went on, catching Asie and Europe exchanging a glance that displeased him, "remember what I have told you. You are serving a queen; you owe her as much respect as to a queen; you are to cherish her as you would cherish a revenge, and be as devoted to her as to me. Neither the door-porter, nor the neighbors, nor the other inhabitants of the house – in short, not a soul on earth is to know what goes on here. It is your business to balk curiosity if any should be roused. – And madame," he went on laying his broad hairy hand on Esther's arm, "madame must not commit the smallest imprudence; you must prevent it in case of need, but always with perfect respect.

"You, Europe, are to go out for madame in anything that concerns her dress, and you must do her sewing from motives of economy. Finally, nobody, not even the most insignificant creature, is ever to set foot in this apartment. You two, between you, must do all there is to be done.

"And you, my beauty," he went on, speaking to Esther, "when you want to go out in your carriage by night, you can tell Europe;

she will know where to find your men, for you will have a servant in livery, of my choosing, like those two slaves."

Esther and Lucien had not a word ready. They listened to the Spaniard, and looked at the two precious specimens to whom he gave his orders. What was the secret hold to which he owed the submission and servitude that were written on these two faces – one mischievously recalcitrant, the other so malignantly cruel?

He read the thoughts of Lucien and Esther, who seemed paralyzed, as Paul and Virginia might have been at the sight of two dreadful snakes, and he said in a good-natured undertone:

"You can trust them as you can me; keep no secrets from them; that will flatter them. – Go to your work, my little Asie," he added to the cook. – "And you, my girl, lay another place," he said to Europe; "the children cannot do less than ask papa to breakfast."

When the two women had shut the door, and the Spaniard could hear Europe moving to and fro, he turned to Lucien and Esther, and opening a wide palm, he said:

"I hold them in the hollow of my hand."

The words and gesture made his hearers shudder.

"Where did you pick them up?" cried Lucien.

"What the devil! I did not look for them at the foot of the throne!" replied the man. "Europe has risen from the mire, and is afraid of sinking into it again. Threaten them with Monsieur Abbe when they do not please you, and you will see them quake like mice when the cat is mentioned. I am used to taming wild

beasts," he added with a smile.

"You strike me as being a demon," said Esther, clinging closer to Lucien.

"My child, I tried to win you to heaven; but a repentant Magdalen is always a practical joke on the Church. If ever there were one, she would relapse into the courtesan in Paradise. You have gained this much: you are forgotten, and have acquired the manners of a lady, for you learned in the convent what you never could have learned in the ranks of infamy in which you were living. – You owe me nothing," said he, observing a beautiful look of gratitude on Esther's face. "I did it all for him," and he pointed to Lucien. "You are, you will always be, you will die a prostitute; for in spite of the delightful theories of cattle-breeders, you can never, here below, become anything but what you are. The man who feels bumps is right. You have the bump of love."

The Spaniard, it will be seen, was a fatalist, like Napoleon, Mahomet, and many other great politicians. It is a strange thing that most men of action have a tendency to fatalism, just as most great thinkers have a tendency to believe in Providence.

"What I am, I do not know," said Esther with angelic sweetness; "but I love Lucien, and shall die worshiping him."

"Come to breakfast," said the Spaniard sharply. "And pray to God that Lucien may not marry too soon, for then you would never see him again."

"His marriage would be my death," said she.

She allowed the sham priest to lead the way, that she might stand on tiptoe and whisper to Lucien without being seen.

"Is it your wish," said she, "that I should remain in the power of this man who sets two hyenas to guard me?"

Lucien bowed his head.

The poor child swallowed down her grief and affected gladness, but she felt cruelly oppressed. It needed more than a year of constant and devoted care before she was accustomed to these two dreadful creatures whom Carlos Herrera called the two watch-dogs.

Lucien's conduct since his return to Paris had borne the stamp of such profound policy that it excited – and could not fail to excite – the jealousy of all his former friends, on whom he took no vengeance but by making them furious at his success, at his exquisite "get up," and his way of keeping every one at a distance. The poet, once so communicative, so genial, had turned cold and reserved. De Marsay, the model adopted by all the youth of Paris, did not make a greater display of reticence in speech and deed than did Lucien. As to brains, the journalist had ere now proved his mettle. De Marsay, against whom many people chose to pit Lucien, giving a preference to the poet, was small-minded enough to resent this.

Lucien, now in high favor with men who secretly pulled the wires of power, was so completely indifferent to literary fame, that he did not care about the success of his romance, republished under its real title, *L'Archer de Charles IX.*, or the excitement

caused by his volume of sonnets called *Les Marguerites*, of which Dauriat sold out the edition in a week.

"It is posthumous fame," said he, with a laugh, to Mademoiselle des Touches, who congratulated him.

The terrible Spaniard held his creature with an iron hand, keeping him in the road towards the goal where the trumpets and gifts of victory await patient politicians. Lucien had taken Beaudenord's bachelor quarters on the Quai Malaquais, to be near the Rue Taitbout, and his adviser was lodging under the same roof on the fourth floor. Lucien kept only one horse to ride and drive, a man-servant, and a groom. When he was not dining out, he dined with Esther.

Carlos Herrera kept such a keen eye on the service in the house on the Quai Malaquais, that Lucien did not spend ten thousand francs a year, all told. Ten thousand more were enough for Esther, thanks to the unfailing and inexplicable devotion of Asie and Europe. Lucien took the utmost precautions in going in and out at the Rue Taitbout. He never came but in a cab, with the blinds down, and always drove into the courtyard. Thus his passion for Esther and the very existence of the establishment in the Rue Taitbout, being unknown to the world, did him no harm in his connections or undertakings. No rash word ever escaped him on this delicate subject. His mistakes of this sort with regard to Coralie, at the time of his first stay in Paris, had given him experience.

In the first place, his life was marked by the correct regularity

under which many mysteries can be hidden; he remained in society every night till one in the morning; he was always at home from ten till one in the afternoon; then he drove in the Bois de Boulogne and paid calls till five. He was rarely seen to be on foot, and thus avoided old acquaintances. When some journalist or one of his former associates waved him a greeting, he responded with a bow, polite enough to avert annoyance, but significant of such deep contempt as killed all French geniality. He thus had very soon got rid of persons whom he would rather never have known.

An old-established aversion kept him from going to see Madame d'Espard, who often wished to get him to her house; but when he met her at those of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, of Mademoiselle des Touches, of the Comtesse de Montcornet or elsewhere, he was always exquisitely polite to her. This hatred, fully reciprocated by Madame d'Espard, compelled Lucien to act with prudence; but it will be seen how he had added fuel to it by allowing himself a stroke of revenge, which gained him indeed a severe lecture from Carlos.

"You are not yet strong enough to be revenged on any one, whoever it may be," said the Spaniard. "When we are walking under a burning sun we do not stop to gather even the finest flowers."

Lucien was so genuinely superior, and had so fine a future before him, that the young men who chose to be offended or puzzled by his return to Paris and his unaccountable good fortune were enchanted whenever they could do him an ill turn. He knew

that he had many enemies, and was well aware of those hostile feelings among his friends. The Abbe, indeed, took admirable care of his adopted son, putting him on his guard against the treachery of the world and the fatal imprudence of youth. Lucien was expected to tell, and did in fact tell the Abbe each evening, every trivial incident of the day. Thanks to his Mentor's advice, he put the keenest curiosity – the curiosity of the world – off the scent. Entrenched in the gravity of an Englishman, and fortified by the redoubts cast up by diplomatic circumspection, he never gave any one the right or the opportunity of seeing a corner even of his concerns. His handsome young face had, by practice, become as expressionless in society as that of a princess at a ceremonial.

Towards the middle of 1829 his marriage began to be talked of to the eldest daughter of the Duchesse de Grandlieu, who at that time had no less than four daughters to provide for. No one doubted that in honor of such an alliance the King would revive for Lucien the title of Marquis. This distinction would establish Lucien's fortune as a diplomate, and he would probably be accredited as Minister to some German Court. For the last three years Lucien's life had been regular and above reproach; indeed, de Marsay had made this remarkable speech about him:

"That young fellow must have a very strong hand behind him."

Thus Lucien was almost a person of importance. His passion for Esther had, in fact, helped him greatly to play his part of a serious man. A habit of this kind guards an ambitious man from

many follies; having no connection with any woman of fashion, he cannot be caught by the reactions of mere physical nature on his moral sense.

As to happiness, Lucien's was the realization of a poet's dreams – a penniless poet's, hungering in a garret. Esther, the ideal courtesan in love, while she reminded Lucien of Coralie, the actress with whom he had lived for a year, completely eclipsed her. Every loving and devoted woman invents seclusion, incognito, the life of a pearl in the depths of the sea; but to most of them this is no more than one of the delightful whims which supply a subject for conversation; a proof of love which they dream of giving, but do not give; whereas Esther, to whom her first enchantment was ever new, who lived perpetually in the glow of Lucien's first incendiary glance, never, in four yours, had an impulse of curiosity. She gave her whole mind to the task of adhering to the terms of the programme prescribed by the sinister Spaniard. Nay, more! In the midst of intoxicating happiness she never took unfair advantage of the unlimited power that the constantly revived desire of a lover gives to the woman he loves to ask Lucien a single question regarding Herrera, of whom indeed she lived in constant awe; she dared not even think of him. The elaborate benefactions of that extraordinary man, to whom Esther undoubtedly owed her feminine accomplishment and her well-bred manner, struck the poor girl as advances on account of hell.

"I shall have to pay for all this some day," she would tell herself

with dismay.

Every fine night she went out in a hired carriage. She was driven with a rapidity no doubt insisted on by the Abbe, in one or another of the beautiful woods round Paris, Boulogne, Vincennes, Romainville, or Ville-d'Avray, often with Lucien, sometimes alone with Europe. There she could walk about without fear; for when Lucien was not with her, she was attended by a servant dressed like the smartest of outriders, armed with a real knife, whose face and brawny build alike proclaimed him a ruthless athlete. This protector was also provided, in the fashion of English footmen, with a stick, but such as single-stick players use, with which they can keep off more than one assailant. In obedience to an order of the Abbe's, Esther had never spoken a word to this escort. When madame wished to go home, Europe gave a call; the man in waiting whistled to the driver, who was always within hearing.

When Lucien was walking with Esther, Europe and this man remained about a hundred paces behind, like two of the infernal minions that figure in the *Thousand and One Nights*, which enchanters place at the service of their devotees.

The men, and yet more the women of Paris, know nothing of the charm of a walk in the woods on a fine night. The stillness, the moonlight effects, the solitude, have the soothing effect of a bath. Esther usually went out at ten, walked about from midnight till one o'clock, and came in at half-past two. It was never daylight in her rooms till eleven. She then bathed and went through an

elaborate toilet which is unknown to most women, for it takes up too much time, and is rarely carried out by any but courtesans, women of the town, or fine ladies who have the day before them. She was only just ready when Lucien came, and appeared before him as a newly opened flower. Her only care was that her poet should be happy; she was his toy, his chattel; she gave him entire liberty. She never cast a glance beyond the circle where she shone. On this the Abbe had insisted, for it was part of his profound policy that Lucien should have gallant adventures.

Happiness has no history, and the story-tellers of all lands have understood this so well that the words, "They are happy," are the end of every love tale. Hence only the ways and means can be recorded of this really romantic happiness in the heart of Paris. It was happiness in its loveliest form, a poem, a symphony, of four years' duration. Every woman will exclaim, "That was much!" Neither Esther nor Lucien had ever said, "This is too much!" And the formula, "They were happy," was more emphatically true, than even in a fairy tale, for "they had *no* children."

So Lucien could coquet with the world, give way to his poet's caprices, and, it may be plainly admitted, to the necessities of his position. All this time he was slowly making his way, and was able to render secret service to certain political personages by helping them in their work. In such matters he was eminently discreet. He cultivated Madame de Serizy's circle, being, it was rumored, on the very best terms with that lady. Madame de Serizy had carried him off from the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse,

who, it was said, had "thrown him over," one of the phrases by which women avenge themselves on happiness they envy. Lucien was in the lap, so to speak, of the High Almoner's set, and intimate with women who were the Archbishop's personal friends. He was modest and reserved; he waited patiently. So de Marsay's speech – de Marsay was now married, and made his wife live as retired a life as Esther – was significant in more ways that one.

But the submarine perils of such a course as Lucien's will be sufficiently obvious in the course of this chronicle.

Matters were in this position when, one fine night in August, the Baron de Nucingen was driving back to Paris from the country residence of a foreign banker, settled in France, with whom he had been dining. The estate lay at eight leagues from Paris in the district of la Brie. Now, the Baron's coachman having undertaken to drive his master there and back with his own horses, at nightfall ventured to moderate the pace.

As they entered the forest of Vincennes the position of beast, man, and master was as follows: – The coachman, liberally soaked in the kitchen of the aristocrat of the Bourse, was perfectly tipsy, and slept soundly, while still holding the reins to deceive other wayfarers. The footman, seated behind, was snoring like a wooden top from Germany – the land of little carved figures, of large wine-vats, and of humming-tops. The Baron had tried to think; but after passing the bridge at Gournay, the soft somnolence of digestion had sealed his eyes. The horses

understood the coachman's plight from the slackness of the reins; they heard the footman's basso continuo from his perch behind; they saw that they were masters of the situation, and took advantage of their few minutes' freedom to make their own pace. Like intelligent slaves, they gave highway robbers the chance of plundering one of the richest capitalists in France, the most deeply cunning of the race which, in France, have been energetically styled lynxes – loups-cerviers. Finally, being independent of control, and tempted by the curiosity which every one must have remarked in domestic animals, they stopped where four roads met, face to face with some other horses, whom they, no doubt, asked in horses' language: "Who may you be? What are you doing? Are you comfortable?"

When the chaise stopped, the Baron awoke from his nap. At first he fancied that he was still in his friend's park; then he was startled by a celestial vision, which found him unarmed with his usual weapon – self-interest. The moonlight was brilliant; he could have read by it – even an evening paper. In the silence of the forest, under this pure light, the Baron saw a woman, alone, who, as she got into a hired chaise, looked at the strange spectacle of this sleep-stricken carriage. At the sight of this angel the Baron felt as though a light had flashed into glory within him. The young lady, seeing herself admired, pulled down her veil with terrified haste. The man-servant gave a signal which the driver perfectly understood, for the vehicle went off like an arrow.

The old banker was fearfully agitated; the blood left his feet

cold and carried fire to his brain, his head sent the flame back to his heart; he was chocking. The unhappy man foresaw a fit of indigestion, but in spite of that supreme terror he stood up.

"Follow qvick, fery qvick. – Tam you, you are ashleep!" he cried. "A hundert franc if you catch up dat chaise."

At the words "A hundred francs," the coachman woke up. The servant behind heard them, no doubt, in his dreams. The baron reiterated his orders, the coachman urged the horses to a gallop, and at the Barriere du Trone had succeeded in overtaking a carriage resembling that in which Nucingen had seen the divine fair one, but which contained a swaggering head-clerk from some first-class shop and a lady of the Rue Vivienne.

This blunder filled the Baron with consternation.

"If only I had prought Chorge inshtead of you, shtupid fool, he should have fount dat voman," said he to the servant, while the excise officers were searching the carriage.

"Indeed, Monsieur le Baron, the devil was behind the chaise, I believe, disguised as an armed escort, and he sent this chaise instead of hers."

"Dere is no such ting as de Teufel," said the Baron.

The Baron de Nucingen owned to sixty; he no longer cared for women, and for his wife least of all. He boasted that he had never known such love as makes a fool of a man. He declared that he was happy to have done with women; the most angelic of them, he frankly said, was not worth what she cost, even if you got her for nothing. He was supposed to be so entirely blase, that

he no longer paid two thousand francs a month for the pleasure of being deceived. His eyes looked coldly down from his opera box on the corps de ballet; never a glance was shot at the capitalist by any one of that formidable swarm of old young girls, and young old women, the cream of Paris pleasure.

Natural love, artificial and love-of-show love, love based on self-esteem and vanity, love as a display of taste, decent, conjugal love, eccentric love – the Baron had paid for them all, had known them all excepting real spontaneous love. This passion had now pounced down on him like an eagle on its prey, as it did on Gentz, the confidential friend of His Highness the Prince of Metternich. All the world knows what follies the old diplomate committed for Fanny Elssler, whose rehearsals took up a great deal more of his time than the concerns of Europe.

The woman who had just overthrown that iron-bound money-box, called Nucingen, had appeared to him as one of those who are unique in their generation. It is not certain that Titian's mistress, or Leonardo da Vinci's Monna Lisa, or Raphael's Fornarina were as beautiful as this exquisite Esther, in whom not the most practised eye of the most experienced Parisian could have detected the faintest trace of the ordinary courtesan. The Baron was especially startled by the noble and stately air, the air of a well-born woman, which Esther, beloved, and lapped in luxury, elegance, and devotedness, had in the highest degree. Happy love is the divine unction of women; it makes them all as lofty as empresses.

For eight nights in succession the Baron went to the forest of Vincennes, then to the Bois de Boulogne, to the woods of Ville-d'Avray, to Meudon, in short, everywhere in the neighborhood of Paris, but failed to meet Esther. That beautiful Jewish face, which he called "a face out of te Biple," was always before his eyes. By the end of a fortnight he had lost his appetite.

Delphine de Nucingen, and her daughter Augusta, whom the Baroness was now taking out, did not at first perceive the change that had come over the Baron. The mother and daughter only saw him at breakfast in the morning and at dinner in the evening, when they all dined at home, and this was only on the evenings when Delphine received company. But by the end of two months, tortured by a fever of impatience, and in a state like that produced by acute home-sickness, the Baron, amazed to find his millions impotent, grew so thin, and seemed so seriously ill, that Delphine had secret hopes of finding herself a widow. She pitied her husband, somewhat hypocritically, and kept her daughter in seclusion. She bored her husband with questions; he answered as Englishmen answer when suffering from spleen, hardly a word.

Delphine de Nucingen gave a grand dinner every Sunday. She had chosen that day for her receptions, after observing that no people of fashion went to the play, and that the day was pretty generally an open one. The emancipation of the shopkeeping and middle classes makes Sunday almost as tiresome in Paris as it is deadly in London. So the Baroness invited the famous Desplein

to dinner, to consult him in spite of the sick man, for Nucingen persisted in asserting that he was perfectly well.

Keller, Rastignac, de Marsay, du Tillet, all their friends had made the Baroness understand that a man like Nucingen could not be allowed to die without any notice being taken of it; his enormous business transactions demanded some care; it was absolutely necessary to know where he stood. These gentlemen also were asked to dinner, and the Comte de Gondreville, Francois Keller's father-in-law, the Chevalier d'Espard, des Lupeaulx, Doctor Bianchon – Desplein's best beloved pupil – Beaudenord and his wife, the Comte and Comtesse de Montcornet, Blondet, Mademoiselle des Touches and Conti, and finally, Lucien de Rubempre, for whom Rastignac had for the last five years manifested the warmest regard – by order, as the advertisements have it.

"We shall not find it easy to get rid of that young fellow," said Blondet to Rastignac, when he saw Lucien come in handsomer than ever, and uncommonly well dressed.

"It is wiser to make friends with him, for he is formidable," said Rastignac.

"He?" said de Marsay. "No one is formidable to my knowledge but men whose position is assured, and his is unattacked rather than attackable! Look here, what does he live on? Where does his money come from? He has, I am certain, sixty thousand francs in debts."

"He has found a friend in a very rich Spanish priest who has

taken a fancy to him," replied Rastignac.

"He is going to be married to the eldest Mademoiselle de Grandlieu," said Mademoiselle des Touches.

"Yes," said the Chevalier d'Espard, "but they require him to buy an estate worth thirty thousand francs a year as security for the fortune he is to settle on the young lady, and for that he needs a million francs, which are not to be found in any Spaniard's shoes."

"That is dear, for Clotilde is very ugly," said the Baroness.

Madame de Nucingen affected to call Mademoiselle de Grandlieu by her Christian name, as though she, nee Goriot, frequented that society.

"No," replied du Tillet, "the daughter of a duchess is never ugly to the like of us, especially when she brings with her the title of Marquis and a diplomatic appointment. But the great obstacle to the marriage is Madame de Serizy's insane passion for Lucien. She must give him a great deal of money."

"Then I am not surprised at seeing Lucien so serious; for Madame de Serizy will certainly not give him a million francs to help him to marry Mademoiselle de Grandlieu. He probably sees no way out of the scrape," said de Marsay.

"But Mademoiselle de Grandlieu worships him," said the Comtesse de Montcornet; "and with the young person's assistance, he may perhaps make better terms."

"And what will he do with his sister and brother-in-law at Angouleme?" asked the Chevalier d'Espard.

"Well, his sister is rich," replied Rastignac, "and he now speaks of her as Madame Sechard de Marsac."

"Whatever difficulties there may be, he is a very good-looking fellow," said Bianchon, rising to greet Lucien.

"How 'do, my dear fellow?" said Rastignac, shaking hands warmly with Lucien.

De Marsay bowed coldly after Lucien had first bowed to him.

Before dinner Desplein and Bianchon, who studied the Baron while amusing him, convinced themselves that this malady was entirely nervous; but neither could guess the cause, so impossible did it seem that the great politician of the money market could be in love. When Bianchon, seeing nothing but love to account for the banker's condition, hinted as much to Delphine de Nucingen, she smiled as a woman who has long known all her husband's weaknesses. After dinner, however, when they all adjourned to the garden, the more intimate of the party gathered round the banker, eager to clear up this extraordinary case when they heard Bianchon pronounce that Nucingen must be in love.

"Do you know, Baron," said de Marsay, "that you have grown very thin? You are suspected of violating the laws of financial Nature."

"Ach, nefer!" said the Baron.

"Yes, yes," replied de Marsay. "They dare to say that you are in love."

"Dat is true," replied Nucingen piteously; "I am in lof for somebody I do not know."

"You, in love, you? You are a coxcomb!" said the Chevalier d'Espard.

"In lof, at my aje! I know dat is too ridiculous. But vat can I help it! Dat is so."

"A woman of the world?" asked Lucien.

"Nay," said de Marsay. "The Baron would not grow so thin but for a hopeless love, and he has money enough to buy all the women who will or can sell themselves!"

"I do not know who she it," said the Baron. "And as Motame de Nucingen is inside de trawing-room, I may say so, dat till now I have nefer known what it is to lof. Lof! I tink it is to grow tin."

"And where did you meet this innocent daisy?" asked Rastignac.

"In a carriage, at mitnight, in de forest of Fincennes."

"Describe her," said de Marsay.

"A vhite gaze hat, a rose gown, a vhite scharf, a vhite feil – a face just out of de Biple. Eyes like Feuer, an Eastern color – "

"You were dreaming," said Lucien, with a smile.

"Dat is true; I vas shleeping like a pig – a pig mit his shkin full," he added, "for I vas on my vay home from tinner at mine friend's – "

"Was she alone?" said du Tillet, interrupting him.

"Ja," said the Baron dolefully; "but she had ein heiduque behind dat carriage and a maid-shervant – "

"Lucien looks as if he knew her," exclaimed Rastignac, seeing Esther's lover smile.

"Who doesn't know the woman who would go out at midnight to meet Nucingen?" said Lucien, turning on his heel.

"Well, she is not a woman who is seen in society, or the Baron would have recognized the man," said the Chevalier d'Espard.

"I have nefer seen him," replied the Baron. "And for forty days now I have had her seeked for by de Police, and dey do not find her."

"It is better that she should cost you a few hundred francs than cost you your life," said Desplein; "and, at your age, a passion without hope is dangerous, you might die of it."

"Ja, ja," replied the Baron, addressing Desplein. "And vat I eat does me no goot, de air I breade feels to choke me. I go to de forest of Fincennes to see de place vat I see her – and dat is all my life. I could not tink of de last loan – I trust to my partners vat haf pity on me. I could pay one million franc to see dat voman – and I should gain by dat, for I do nothing on de Bourse. – Ask du Tillet."

"Very true," replied du Tillet; "he hates business; he is quite unlike himself; it is a sign of death."

"A sign of lof," replied Nucingen; "and for me, dat is all de same ting."

The simple candor of the old man, no longer the stock-jobber, who, for the first time in his life, saw that something was more sacred and more precious than gold, really moved these world-hardened men; some exchanged smiles; other looked at Nucingen with an expression that plainly said, "Such a man to have come to

this!" – And then they all returned to the drawing-room, talking over the event.

For it was indeed an event calculated to produce the greatest sensation. Madame de Nucingen went into fits of laughter when Lucien betrayed her husband's secret; but the Baron, when he heard his wife's sarcasms, took her by the arm and led her into the recess of a window.

"Motame," said he in an undertone, "have I ever laughed at all at your passions, that you should laugh at mine? A goot frau should help her husband out of his difficulty vidout making game of him like vat you do."

From the description given by the old banker, Lucien had recognized his Esther. Much annoyed that his smile should have been observed, he took advantage of a moment when coffee was served, and the conversation became general, to vanish from the scene.

"What has become of Monsieur de Rubempre?" said the Baroness.

"He is faithful to his motto: Quid me continebit?" said Rastignac.

"Which means, 'Who can detain me?' or 'I am unconquerable,' as you choose," added de Marsay.

"Just as Monsieur le Baron was speaking of his unknown lady, Lucien smiled in a way that makes me fancy he may know her," said Horace Bianchon, not thinking how dangerous such a natural remark might be.

"Goot!" said the banker to himself.

Like all incurables, the Baron clutched at everything that seemed at all hopeful; he promised himself that he would have Lucien watched by some one besides Louchard and his men – Louchard, the sharpest commercial detective in Paris – to whom he had applied about a fortnight since.

Before going home to Esther, Lucien was due at the Hotel Grandlieu, to spend the two hours which made Mademoiselle Clotilde Frederique de Grandlieu the happiest girl in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But the prudence characteristic of this ambitious youth warned him to inform Carlos Herrera forthwith of the effect resulting from the smile wrung from him by the Baron's description of Esther. The banker's passion for Esther, and the idea that had occurred to him of setting the police to seek the unknown beauty, were indeed events of sufficient importance to be at once communicated to the man who had sought, under a priest's robe, the shelter which criminals of old could find in a church. And Lucien's road from the Rue Saint-Lazare, where Nucingen at that time lived, to the Rue Saint-Dominique, where was the Hotel Grandlieu, led him past his lodgings on the Quai Malaquais.

Lucien found his formidable friend smoking his breviary – that is to say, coloring a short pipe before retiring to bed. The man, strange rather than foreign, had given up Spanish cigarettes, finding them too mild.

"Matters look serious," said the Spaniard, when Lucien had

told him all. “The Baron, who employs Louchard to hunt up the girl, will certainly be sharp enough to set a spy at your heels, and everything will come out. To-night and to-morrow morning will not give me more than enough time to pack the cards for the game I must play against the Baron; first and foremost, I must prove to him that the police cannot help him. When our lynx has given up all hope of finding his ewe-lamb, I will undertake to sell her for all she is worth to him – ”

“Sell Esther!” cried Lucien, whose first impulse was always the right one.

“Do you forget where we stand?” cried Carlos Herrera.

“No money left,” the Spaniard went on, “and sixty thousand francs of debts to be paid! If you want to marry Clotilde de Grandlieu, you must invest a million of francs in land as security for that ugly creature’s settlement. Well, then, Esther is the quarry I mean to set before that lynx to help us to ease him of that million. That is my concern.”

“Esther will never – ”

“That is my concern.”

“She will die of it.”

“That is the undertaker’s concern. Besides, what then?” cried the savage, checking Lucien’s lamentations merely by his attitude. “How many generals died in the prime of life for the Emperor Napoleon?” he asked, after a short silence. “There are always plenty of women. In 1821 Coralie was unique in your eyes; and yet you found Esther. After her will come – do you

know who? – the unknown fair. And she of all women is the fairest, and you will find her in the capital where the Duc de Grandlieu's son-in-law will be Minister and representative of the King of France. – And do you tell me now, great Baby, that Esther will die of it? Again, can Mademoiselle de Grandlieu's husband keep Esther?

"You have only to leave everything to me; you need not take the trouble to think at all; that is my concern. Only you must do without Esther for a week or two; but go to the Rue Taitbout, all the same. – Come, be off to bill and coo on your plank of salvation, and play your part well; slip the flaming note you wrote this morning into Clotilde's hand, and bring me back a warm response. She will recompense herself for many woes in writing. I take to that girl.

"You will find Esther a little depressed, but tell her to obey. We must display our livery of virtue, our doublet of honesty, the screen behind which all great men hide their infamy. – I must show off my handsomer self – you must never be suspected. Chance has served us better than my brain, which has been beating about in a void for these two months past."

All the while he was jerking out these dreadful sentences, one by one, like pistol shots, Carlos Herrera was dressing himself to go out.

"You are evidently delighted," cried Lucien. "You never liked poor Esther, and you look forward with joy to the moment when you will be rid of her."

"You have never tired of loving her, have you? Well, I have never tired of detesting her. But have I not always behaved as though I were sincerely attached to the hussy – I, who, through Asie, hold her life in my hands? A few bad mushrooms in a stew – and there an end. But Mademoiselle Esther still lives! – and is happy! – And do you know why? Because you love her. Do not be a fool. For four years we have been waiting for a chance to turn up, for us or against us; well, it will take something more than mere cleverness to wash the cabbage luck has flung at us now. There are good and bad together in this turn of the wheel – as there are in everything. Do you know what I was thinking of when you came in?"

"No."

"Of making myself heir here, as I did at Barcelona, to an old bigot, by Asie's help."

"A crime?"

"I saw no other way of securing your fortune. The creditors are making a stir. If once the bailiffs were at your heels, and you were turned out of the Hotel Grandlieu, where would you be? There would be the devil to pay then."

And Carlos Herrera, by a pantomimic gesture, showed the suicide of a man throwing himself into the water; then he fixed on Lucien one of those steady, piercing looks by which the will of a strong man is injected, so to speak, into a weak one. This fascinating glare, which relaxed all Lucien's fibres of resistance, revealed the existence not merely of secrets of life and death

between him and his adviser, but also of feelings as far above ordinary feeling as the man himself was above his vile position.

Carlos Herrera, a man at once ignoble and magnanimous, obscure and famous, compelled to live out of the world from which the law had banned him, exhausted by vice and by frenzied and terrible struggles, though endowed with powers of mind that ate into his soul, consumed especially by a fever of vitality, now lived again in the elegant person of Lucien de Rubempre, whose soul had become his own. He was represented in social life by the poet, to whom he lent his tenacity and iron will. To him Lucien was more than a son, more than a woman beloved, more than a family, more than his life; he was his revenge; and as souls cling more closely to a feeling than to existence, he had bound the young man to him by insoluble ties.

After rescuing Lucien's life at the moment when the poet in desperation was on the verge of suicide, he had proposed to him one of those infernal bargains which are heard of only in romances, but of which the hideous possibility has often been proved in courts of justice by celebrated criminal dramas. While lavishing on Lucien all the delights of Paris life, and proving to him that he yet had a great future before him, he had made him his chattel.

But, indeed, no sacrifice was too great for this strange man when it was to gratify his second self. With all his strength, he was so weak to this creature of his making that he had even told him all his secrets. Perhaps this abstract complicity was a bond

the more between them.

Since the day when La Torpille had been snatched away, Lucien had known on what a vile foundation his good fortune rested. That priest's robe covered Jacques Collin, a man famous on the hulks, who ten years since had lived under the homely name of Vautrin in the Maison Vauquer, where Rastignac and Bianchon were at that time boarders.

Jacques Collin, known as *Trompe-la-Mort*, had escaped from Rochefort almost as soon as he was recaptured, profiting by the example of the famous Comte de Sainte-Helene, while modifying all that was ill planned in Coignard's daring scheme. To take the place of an honest man and carry on the convict's career is a proposition of which the two terms are too contradictory for a disastrous outcome not to be inevitable, especially in Paris; for, by establishing himself in a family, a convict multiplies tenfold the perils of such a substitution. And to be safe from all investigation, must not a man assume a position far above the ordinary interests of life. A man of the world is subject to risks such as rarely trouble those who have no contact with the world; hence the priest's gown is the safest disguise when it can be authenticated by an exemplary life in solitude and inactivity.

"So a priest I will be," said the legally dead man, who was quite determined to resuscitate as a figure in the world, and to satisfy passions as strange as himself.

The civil war caused by the Constitution of 1812 in Spain,

whither this energetic man had betaken himself, enabled him to murder secretly the real Carlos Herrera from an ambush. This ecclesiastic, the bastard son of a grandee, long since deserted by his father, and not knowing to what woman he owed his birth, was intrusted by King Ferdinand VII., to whom a bishop had recommended him, with a political mission to France. The bishop, the only man who took any interest in Carlos Herrera, died while this foundling son of the Church was on his journey from Cadiz to Madrid, and from Madrid to France. Delighted to have met with this longed-for opportunity, and under the most desirable conditions, Jacques Collin scored his back to efface the fatal letters, and altered his complexion by the use of chemicals. Thus metamorphosing himself face to face with the corpse, he contrived to achieve some likeness to his Sosia. And to complete a change almost as marvelous as that related in the Arabian tale, where a dervish has acquired the power, old as he is, of entering into a young body, by a magic spell, the convict, who spoke Spanish, learned as much Latin as an Andalusian priest need know.

As banker to three hulks, Collin was rich in the cash intrusted to his known, and indeed enforced, honesty. Among such company a mistake is paid for by a dagger thrust. To this capital he now added the money given by the bishop to Don Carlos Herrera. Then, before leaving Spain, he was able to possess himself of the treasure of an old bigot at Barcelona, to whom he gave absolution, promising that he would make restitution of the

money constituting her fortune, which his penitent had stolen by means of murder.

Jacques Collin, now a priest, and charged with a secret mission which would secure him the most brilliant introductions in Paris, determined to do nothing that might compromise the character he had assumed, and had given himself up to the chances of his new life, when he met Lucien on the road between Angouleme and Paris. In this youth the sham priest saw a wonderful instrument for power; he saved him from suicide saying:

"Give yourself over to me as to a man of God, as men give themselves over to the devil, and you will have every chance of a new career. You will live as in a dream, and the worst awakening that can come to you will be death, which you now wish to meet."

The alliance between these two beings, who were to become one, as it were, was based on this substantial reasoning, and Carlos Herrera cemented it by an ingeniously plotted complicity. He had the very genius of corruption, and undermined Lucien's honesty by plunging him into cruel necessity, and extricating him by obtaining his tacit consent to bad or disgraceful actions, which nevertheless left him pure, loyal, and noble in the eyes of the world. Lucien was the social magnificence under whose shadow the forger meant to live.

"I am the author, you are the play; if you fail, it is I who shall be hissed," said he on the day when he confessed his sacrilegious disguise.

Carlos prudently confessed only a little at a time, measuring the horrors of his revelations by Lucien's progress and needs. Thus *Trompe-la-Mort* did not let out his last secret till the habit of Parisian pleasures and success, and gratified vanity, had enslaved the weak-minded poet body and soul. Where Rastignac, when tempted by this demon, had stood firm, Lucien, better managed, and more ingeniously compromised, succumbed, conquered especially by his satisfaction in having attained an eminent position. Incarnate evil, whose poetical embodiment is called the Devil, displayed every delightful seduction before this youth, who was half a woman, and at first gave much and asked for little. The great argument used by Carlos was the eternal secret promised by Tartufe to Elmire.

The repeated proofs of absolute devotion, such as that of Said to Mahomet, put the finishing touch to the horrible achievement of Lucien's subjugation by a Jacques Collin.

At this moment not only had Esther and Lucien devoured all the funds intrusted to the honesty of the banker of the hulks, who, for their sakes, had rendered himself liable to a dreadful calling to account, but the dandy, the forger, and the courtesan were also in debt. Thus, as the very moment of Lucien's expected success, the smallest pebble under the foot of either of these three persons might involve the ruin of the fantastic structure of fortune so audaciously built up.

At the opera ball Rastignac had recognized the man he had known as Vautrin at Madame Vauquer's; but he knew that if he

did not hold his tongue, he was a dead man. So Madame de Nucingen's lover and Lucien had exchanged glances in which fear lurked, on both sides, under an expression of amity. In the moment of danger, Rastignac, it is clear, would have been delighted to provide the vehicle that should convey Jacques Collin to the scaffold. From all this it may be understood that Carlos heard of the Baron's passion with a glow of sombre satisfaction, while he perceived in a single flash all the advantage a man of his temper might derive by means of a hapless Esther.

"Go on," said he to Lucien. "The Devil is mindful of his chaplain."

"You are smoking on a powder barrel."

"Incedo per ignes," replied Carlos with a smile. "That is my trade."

The House of Grandlieu divided into two branches about the middle of the last century: first, the ducal line destined to lapse, since the present duke has only daughters; and then the Vicomtes de Grandlieu, who will now inherit the title and armorial bearings of the elder branch. The ducal house bears gules, three broad axes or in fess, with the famous motto: Caveo non timeo, which epitomizes the history of the family.

The coat of the Vicomtes de Grandlieu is the same quartered with that of Navarreins: gules, a fess crenelated or, surmounted by a knight's helmet, with the motto: Grands faits, grand lieu. The present Viscountess, widowed in 1813, has a son and a daughter. Though she returned from the Emigration almost ruined, she

recovered a considerable fortune by the zealous aid of Derville the lawyer.

The Duc and Duchesse de Grandlieu, on coming home in 1804, were the object of the Emperor's advances; indeed, Napoleon, seeing them come to his court, restored to them all of the Grandlieu estates that had been confiscated to the nation, to the amount of about forty thousand francs a year. Of all the great nobles of the Faubourg Saint-Germain who allowed themselves to be won over by Napoleon, this Duke and Duchess – she was an Ajuda of the senior branch, and connected with the Braganzas – were the only family who afterwards never disowned him and his liberality. When the Faubourg Saint-Germain remembered this as a crime against the Grandlieus, Louis XVIII. respected them for it; but perhaps his only object was to annoy *Monsieur*.

A marriage was considered likely between the young Vicomte de Grandlieu and Marie-Athenais, the Duke's youngest daughter, now nine years old. Sabine, the youngest but one, married the Baron du Guenic after the revolution of July 1830; Josephine, the third, became Madame d'Ajuda-Pinto after the death of the Marquis' first wife, Mademoiselle de Rochefide, or Rochegude. The eldest had taken the veil in 1822. The second, Mademoiselle Clotilde Frederique, at this time seven-and-twenty years of age, was deeply in love with Lucien de Rubempre. It need not be asked whether the Duc de Grandlieu's mansion, one of the finest in the Rue Saint-Dominique, did not exert a thousand spells over Lucien's imagination. Every time the heavy gate turned on its

hinges to admit his cab, he experienced the gratified vanity to which Mirabeau confessed.

"Though my father was a mere druggist at l'Houmeau, I may enter here!" This was his thought.

And, indeed, he would have committed far worse crimes than allying himself with a forger to preserve his right to mount the steps of that entrance, to hear himself announced, "Monsieur de Rubempre" at the door of the fine Louis XIV. drawing-room, decorated in the time of the grand monarque on the pattern of those at Versailles, where that choicest circle met, that cream of Paris society, called then le petit chateau.

The noble Portuguese lady, one of those who never care to go out of their own home, was usually the centre of her neighbors' attentions – the Chaulieus, the Navarreins, the Lenoncourts. The pretty Baronne de Macumer – nee de Chaulieu – the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, Madame d'Espard, Madame de Camps, and Mademoiselle des Touches – a connection of the Grandlieus, who are a Breton family – were frequent visitors on their way to a ball or on their return from the opera. The Vicomte de Grandlieu, the Duc de Rhetore, the Marquis de Chaulieu – afterwards Duc de Lenoncourt-Chaulieu – his wife, Madeleine de Mortsauf, the Duc de Lenoncourt's granddaughter, the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto, the Prince de Blamont-Chauvry, the Marquis de Beauseant, the Vidame de Pamiers, the Vandenesses, the old Prince de Cadignan, and his son the Duc de Maufrigneuse, were constantly to be seen in this stately drawing-

room, where they breathed the atmosphere of a Court, where manners, tone, and wit were in harmony with the dignity of the Master and Mistress whose aristocratic mien and magnificence had obliterated the memory of their servility to Napoleon.

The old Duchesse d'Uxelles, mother of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, was the oracle of this circle, to which Madame de Serizy had never gained admittance, though nee de Ronquerolles.

Lucien was brought thither by Madame de Maufrigneuse, who had won over her mother to speak in his favor, for she had doted on him for two years; and the engaging young poet had kept his footing there, thanks to the influence of the high Almoner of France, and the support of the Archbishop of Paris. Still, he had not been admitted till he had obtained the patent restoring to him the name and arms of the Rubempre family. The Duc de Rhetore, the Chevalier d'Espard, and some others, jealous of Lucien, periodically stirred up the Duc de Grandlieu's prejudices against him by retailing anecdotes of the young man's previous career; but the Duchess, a devout Catholic surrounded by the great prelates of the Church, and her daughter Clotilde would not give him up.

Lucien accounted for these hostilities by his connection with Madame de Bargeton, Madame d'Espard's cousin, and now Comtesse du Chatelet. Then, feeling the importance of allying himself to so powerful a family, and urged by his privy adviser to win Clotilde, Lucien found the courage of the parvenu; he came to the house five days in the week, he swallowed all the affronts

of the envious, he endured impertinent looks, and answered irony with wit. His persistency, the charm of his manners, and his amiability, at last neutralized opposition and reduced obstacles. He was still in the highest favor with Madame de Maufrigneuse, whose ardent letters, written under the influence of her passion, were preserved by Carlos Herrera; he was idolized by Madame de Serizy, and stood well in Mademoiselle des Touches' good graces; and well content with being received in these houses, Lucien was instructed by the Abbe to be as reserved as possible in all other quarters.

"You cannot devote yourself to several houses at once," said his Mentor. "The man who goes everywhere finds no one to take a lively interest in him. Great folks only patronize those who emulate their furniture, whom they see every day, and who have the art of becoming as necessary to them as the seat they sit on."

Thus Lucien, accustomed to regard the Grandlieus' drawing-room as his arena, reserved his wit, his jests, his news, and his courtier's graces for the hours he spent there every evening. Insinuating, tactful, and warned by Clotilde of the shoals he should avoid, he flattered Monsieur de Grandlieu's little weaknesses. Clotilde, having begun by envying Madame de Maufrigneuse her happiness, ended by falling desperately in love with Lucien.

Perceiving all the advantages of such a connection, Lucien played his lover's part as well as it could have been acted by Armand, the latest *jeune premier* at the *Comedie Francaise*.

He wrote to Clotilde, letters which were certainly masterpieces of literary workmanship; and Clotilde replied, vying with him in genius in the expression of perfervid love on paper, for she had no other outlet. Lucien went to church at Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin every Sunday, giving himself out as a devout Catholic, and he poured forth monarchical and pious harangues which were a marvel to all. He also wrote some exceedingly remarkable articles in papers devoted to the "Congregation," refusing to be paid for them, and signing them only with an "L." He produced political pamphlets when required by King Charles X. or the High Almoner, and for these he would take no payment.

"The King," he would say, "has done so much for me, that I owe him my blood."

For some days past there had been an idea of attaching Lucien to the prime minister's cabinet as his private secretary; but Madame d'Espard brought so many persons into the field in opposition to Lucien, that Charles X.'s *Maitre Jacques* hesitated to clinch the matter. Nor was Lucien's position by any means clear; not only did the question, "What does he live on?" on everybody's lips as the young man rose in life, require an answer, but even benevolent curiosity – as much as malevolent curiosity – went on from one inquiry to another, and found more than one joint in the ambitious youth's harness.

Clotilde de Grandlieu unconsciously served as a spy for her father and mother. A few days since she had led Lucien into a recess and told him of the difficulties raised by her family.

"Invest a million francs in land, and my hand is yours: that is my mother's ultimatum," Clotilde had explained.

"And presently they will ask you where you got the money," said Carlos, when Lucien reported this last word in the bargain.

"My brother-in-law will have made his fortune," remarked Lucien; "we can make him the responsible backer."

"Then only the million is needed," said Carlos. "I will think it over."

To be exact as to Lucien's position in the Hotel Grandlieu, he had never dined there. Neither Clotilde, nor the Duchesse d'Uxelles, nor Madame de Maufrigneuse, who was always extremely kind to Lucien, could ever obtain this favor from the Duke, so persistently suspicious was the old nobleman of the man that he designated as "le Sire de Rubempre." This shade of distinction, understood by every one who visited at the house, constantly wounded Lucien's self-respect, for he felt that he was no more than tolerated. But the world is justified in being suspicious; it is so often taken in!

To cut a figure in Paris with no known source of wealth and no recognized employment is a position which can by no artifice be long maintained. So Lucien, as he crept up in the world, gave more and more weight to the question, "What does he live on?" He had been obliged indeed to confess to Madame de Serizy, to whom he owed the patronage of Monsieur Granville, the Public Prosecutor, and of the Comte Octave de Bauvan, a Minister of State, and President of one of the Supreme Courts: "I am

dreadfully in debt."

As he entered the courtyard of the mansion where he found an excuse for all his vanities, he was saying to himself as he reflected on *Trompe-la-Mort's* scheming:

"I can hear the ground cracking under my feet!"

He loved Esther, and he wanted to marry Mademoiselle de Grandlieu! A strange dilemma! One must be sold to buy the other.

Only one person could effect this bargain without damage to Lucien's honor, and that was the supposed Spaniard. Were they not bound to be equally secret, each for the other? Such a compact, in which each is in turn master and slave, is not to be found twice in any one life.

Lucien drove away the clouds that darkened his brow, and walked into the Grandlieu drawing-room gay and beaming. At this moment the windows were open, the fragrance from the garden scented the room, the flower-basket in the centre displayed its pyramid of flowers. The Duchess, seated on a sofa in the corner, was talking to the Duchesse de Chaulieu. Several women together formed a group remarkable for their various attitudes, stamped with the different expression which each strove to give to an affected sorrow. In the fashionable world nobody takes any interest in grief or suffering; everything is talk. The men were walking up and down the room or in the garden. Clotilde and Josephine were busy at the tea-table. The Vidame de Pamiers, the Duc de Grandlieu, the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto,

and the Duc de Maufrigneuse were playing Wisk, as they called it, in a corner of the room.

When Lucien was announced he walked across the room to make his bow to the Duchess, asking the cause of the grief he could read in her face.

"Madame de Chaulieu has just had dreadful news; her son-in-law, the Baron de Macumer, ex-duke of Soria, is just dead. The young Duc de Soria and his wife, who had gone to Chantepleurs to nurse their brother, have written this sad intelligence. Louise is heart-broken."

"A women is not loved twice in her life as Louise was loved by her husband," said Madeleine de Mortsauf.

"She will be a rich widow," observed the old Duchesse d'Uxelles, looking at Lucien, whose face showed no change of expression.

"Poor Louise!" said Madame d'Espard. "I understand her and pity her."

The Marquise d'Espard put on the pensive look of a woman full of soul and feeling. Sabine de Grandlieu, who was but ten years old, raised knowing eyes to her mother's face, but the satirical glance was repressed by a glance from the Duchess. This is bringing children up properly.

"If my daughter lives through the shock," said Madame de Chaulieu, with a very maternal manner, "I shall be anxious about her future life. Louise is so very romantic."

"It is so difficult nowadays," said a venerable Cardinal, "to

reconcile feeling with the proprieties."

Lucien, who had not a word to say, went to the tea-table to do what was polite to the demoiselles de Grandlieu. When the poet had gone a few yards away, the Marquise d'Espard leaned over to whisper in the Duchess' ear:

"And do you really think that that young fellow is so much in love with your Clotilde?"

The perfidy of this question cannot be fully understood but with the help of a sketch of Clotilde. That young lady was, at this moment, standing up. Her attitude allowed the Marquise d'Espard's mocking eye to take in Clotilde's lean, narrow figure, exactly like an asparagus stalk; the poor girl's bust was so flat that it did not allow of the artifice known to dressmakers as *fichus menteurs*, or padded habitshirts. And Clotilde, who knew that her name was a sufficient advantage in life, far from trying to conceal this defect, heroically made a display of it. By wearing plain, tight dresses she achieved the effect of that stiff prim shape which medieval sculptors succeeded in giving to the statuettes whose profiles are conspicuous against the background of the niches in which they stand in cathedrals.

Clotilde was more than five feet four in height; if we may be allowed to use a familiar phrase, which has the merit at any rate of being perfectly intelligible – she was all legs. These defective proportions gave her figure an almost deformed appearance. With a dark complexion, harsh black hair, very thick eyebrows, fiery eyes, set in sockets that were already

deeply discolored, a side face shaped like the moon in its first quarter, and a prominent brow, she was the caricature of her mother, one of the handsomest women in Portugal. Nature amuses herself with such tricks. Often we see in one family a sister of wonderful beauty, whose features in her brother are absolutely hideous, though the two are amazingly alike. Clotilde's lips, excessively thin and sunken, wore a permanent expression of disdain. And yet her mouth, better than any other feature of her face, revealed every secret impulse of her heart, for affection lent it a sweet expression, which was all the more remarkable because her cheeks were too sallow for blushes, and her hard, black eyes never told anything. Notwithstanding these defects, notwithstanding her board-like carriage, she had by birth and education a grand air, a proud demeanor, in short, everything that has been well named le je ne sais quoi, due partly, perhaps, to her uncompromising simplicity of dress, which stamped her as a woman of noble blood. She dressed her hair to advantage, and it might be accounted to her for a beauty, for it grew vigorously, thick and long.

She had cultivated her voice, and it could cast a spell; she sang exquisitely. Clotilde was just the woman of whom one says, "She has fine eyes," or, "She has a delightful temper." If any one addressed her in the English fashion as "Your Grace," she would say, "You mean 'Your leanness.'"

"Why should not my poor Clotilde have a lover?" replied the Duchess to the Marquise. "Do you know what she said to me

yesterday? 'If I am loved for ambition's sake, I undertake to make him love me for my own sake.' – She is clever and ambitious, and there are men who like those two qualities. As for him – my dear, he is as handsome as a vision; and if he can but repurchase the Rubempre estates, out of regard for us the King will reinstate him in the title of Marquis. – After all, his mother was the last of the Rubempres."

"Poor fellow! where is he to find a million francs?" said the Marquise.

"That is no concern of ours," replied the Duchess. "He is certainly incapable of stealing the money. – Besides, we would never give Clotilde to an intriguing or dishonest man even if he were handsome, young, and a poet, like Monsieur de Rubempre."

"You are late this evening," said Clotilde, smiling at Lucien with infinite graciousness.

"Yes, I have been dining out."

"You have been quite gay these last few days," said she, concealing her jealousy and anxiety behind a smile.

"Quite gay?" replied Lucien. "No – only by the merest chance I have been dining every day this week with bankers; to-day with the Nucingens, yesterday with du Tillet, the day before with the Kellers – "

Whence, it may be seen, that Lucien had succeeded in assuming the tone of light impertinence of great people.

"You have many enemies," said Clotilde, offering him – how graciously! – a cup of tea. "Some one told my father that you

have debts to the amount of sixty thousand francs, and that before long Sainte-Pelagie will be your summer quarters. – If you could know what all these calumnies are to me! – It all recoils on me. – I say nothing of my own suffering – my father has a way of looking that crucifies me – but of what you must be suffering if any least part of it should be the truth."

"Do not let such nonsense worry you; love me as I love you, and give me time – a few months – " said Lucien, replacing his empty cup on the silver tray.

"Do not let my father see you; he would say something disagreeable; and as you could not submit to that, we should be done for. – That odious Marquise d'Espard told him that your mother had been a monthly nurse and that your sister did ironing – "

"We were in the most abject poverty," replied Lucien, the tears rising to his eyes. "That is not calumny, but it is most ill-natured gossip. My sister now is a more than millionaire, and my mother has been dead two years. – This information has been kept in stock to use just when I should be on the verge of success here – "

"But what have you done to Madame d'Espard?"

"I was so rash, at Madame de Serizy's, as to tell the story, with some added pleasantries, in the presence of MM. de Bauvan and de Granville, of her attempt to get a commission of lunacy appointed to sit on her husband, the Marquis d'Espard. Bianchon had told it to me. Monsieur de Granville's opinion, supported by those of Bauvan and Serizy, influenced the decision of the

Keeper of the Seals. They all were afraid of the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, and dreaded the scandal, and the Marquise got her knuckles rapped in the summing up for the judgment finally recorded in that miserable business.

"Though M. de Serizy by his tattle has made the Marquise my mortal foe, I gained his good offices, and those of the Public Prosecutor, and Comte Octave de Bauvan; for Madame de Serizy told them the danger in which I stood in consequence of their allowing the source of their information to be guessed at. The Marquis d'Espard was so clumsy as to call upon me, regarding me as the first cause of his winning the day in that atrocious suit."

"I will rescue you from Madame d'Espard," said Clotilde.

"How?" cried Lucien.

"My mother will ask the young d'Espards here; they are charming boys, and growing up now. The father and sons will sing your praises, and then we are sure never to see their mother again."

"Oh, Clotilde, you are an angel! If I did not love you for yourself, I should love you for being so clever."

"It is not cleverness," said she, all her love beaming on her lips. "Goodnight. Do not come again for some few days. When you see me in church, at Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin, with a pink scarf, my father will be in a better temper. – You will find an answer stuck to the back of the chair you are sitting in; it will comfort you perhaps for not seeing me. Put the note you have brought under my handkerchief – "

This young person was evidently more than seven-and-twenty.

Lucien took a cab in the Rue de la Planche, got out of it on the Boulevards, took another by the Madeleine, and desired the driver to have the gates opened and drive in at the house in the Rue Taitbout.

On going in at eleven o'clock, he found Esther in tears, but dressed as she was wont to dress to do him honor. She awaited her Lucien reclining on a sofa covered with white satin brocaded with yellow flowers, dressed in a bewitching wrapper of India muslin with cherry-colored bows; without her stays, her hair simply twisted into a knot, her feet in little velvet slippers lined with cherry-colored satin; all the candles were burning, the hookah was prepared. But she had not smoked her own, which stood beside her unlighted, emblematical of her loneliness. On hearing the doors open she sprang up like a gazelle, and threw her arms round Lucien, wrapping him like a web caught by the wind and flung about a tree.

"Parted. – Is it true?"

"Oh, just for a few days," replied Lucien.

Esther released him, and fell back on her divan like a dead thing.

In these circumstances, most women babble like parrots. Oh! how they love! At the end of five years they feel as if their first happiness were a thing of yesterday, they cannot give you up, they are magnificent in their indignation, despair, love, grief, dread, dejection, presentiments. In short, they are as sublime as a scene

from Shakespeare. But make no mistake! These women do not love. When they are really all that they profess, when they love truly, they do as Esther did, as children do, as true love does; Esther did not say a word, she lay with her face buried in the pillows, shedding bitter tears.

Lucien, on his part, tried to lift her up, and spoke to her.

"But, my child, we are not to part. What, after four years of happiness, is this the way you take a short absence. – What on earth do I do to all these girls?" he added to himself, remembering that Coralie had loved him thus.

"Ah, monsieur, you are so handsome," said Europe.

The senses have their own ideal. When added to this fascinating beauty we find the sweetness of nature, the poetry, that characterized Lucien, it is easy to conceive of the mad passion roused in such women, keenly alive as they are to external gifts, and artless in their admiration. Esther was sobbing quietly, and lay in an attitude expressive of the deepest distress.

"But, little goose," said Lucien, "did you not understand that my life is at stake?"

At these words, which he chose on purpose, Esther started up like a wild animal, her hair fell, tumbling about her excited face like wreaths of foliage. She looked steadily at Lucien.

"Your life?" she cried, throwing up her arms, and letting them drop with a gesture known only to a courtesan in peril. "To be sure; that friend's note speaks of serious risk."

She took a shabby scrap of paper out of her sash; then seeing

Europe, she said, “Leave us, my girl.”

When Europe had shut the door she went on – “Here, this is what he writes,” and she handed to Lucien a note she had just received from Carlos, which Lucien read aloud: —

> “You must leave to-morrow at five in the morning; you will be taken to a keeper’s lodge in the heart of the Forest of Saint-Germain, where you will have a room on the first floor. Do not quit that room till I give you leave; you will want for nothing. The keeper and his wife are to be trusted. Do not write to Lucien. Do not go to the window during daylight; but you may walk by night with the keeper if you wish for exercise. Keep the carriage blinds down on the way. Lucien’s life is at stake.
>
> “Lucien will go to-night to bid you good-bye; burn this in his presence.”

Lucien burned the note at once in the flame of a candle.

“Listen, my own Lucien,” said Esther, after hearing him read this letter as a criminal hears the sentence of death; “I will not tell you that I love you; it would be idiotic. For nearly five years it has been as natural to me to love you as to breathe and live. From the first day when my happiness began under the protection of that inscrutable being, who placed me here as you place some little curious beast in a cage, I have known that you must marry. Marriage is a necessary factor in your career, and God preserve me from hindering the development of your fortunes.

“That marriage will be my death. But I will not worry you; I will not do as the common girls do who kill themselves by means

of a brazier of charcoal; I had enough of that once; twice raises your gorge, as Mariette says. No, I will go a long way off, out of France. Asie knows the secrets of her country; she will help me to die quietly. A prick – whiff, it is all over!

"I ask but one thing, my dearest, and that is that you will not deceive me. I have had my share of living. Since the day I first saw you, in 1824, till this day, I have known more happiness than can be put into the lives of ten fortunate wives. So take me for what I am – a woman as strong as I am weak. Say 'I am going to be married.' I will ask no more of you than a fond farewell, and you shall never hear of me again."

There was a moment's silence after this explanation as sincere as her action and tone were guileless.

"Is it that you are going to be married?" she repeated, looking into Lucien's blue eyes with one of her fascinating glances, as brilliant as a steel blade.

"We have been toiling at my marriage for eighteen months past, and it is not yet settled," replied Lucien. "I do not know when it can be settled; but it is not in question now, child! – It is the Abbe, I, you. – We are in real peril. Nucingen saw you – "

"Yes, in the wood at Vincennes," said she. "Did he recognize me?"

"No," said Lucien. "But he has fallen so desperately in love with you, that he would sacrifice his coffers. After dinner, when he was describing how he had met you, I was so foolish as to smile involuntarily, and most imprudently, for I live in a world

like a savage surrounded by the traps of a hostile tribe. Carlos, who spares me the pains of thinking, regards the position as dangerous, and he has undertaken to pay Nucingen out if the Baron takes it into his head to spy on us; and he is quite capable of it; he spoke to me of the incapacity of the police. You have lighted a flame in an old chimney choked with soot."

"And what does your Spaniard propose to do?" asked Esther very softly.

"I do not know in the least," said Lucien; "he told me I might sleep soundly and leave it to him;" – but he dared not look at Esther.

"If that is the case, I will obey him with the dog-like submission I profess," said Esther, putting her hand through Lucien's arm and leading him into her bedroom, saying, "At any rate, I hope you dined well, my Lulu, at that detestable Baron's?"

"Asie's cooking prevents my ever thinking a dinner good, however famous the chef may be, where I happen to dine. However, Careme did the dinner to-night, as he does every Sunday."

Lucien involuntarily compared Esther with Clotilde. The mistress was so beautiful, so unfailingly charming, that she had as yet kept at arm's length the monster who devours the most perennial loves – Satiety.

"What a pity," thought he, "to find one's wife in two volumes. In one – poetry, delight, love, devotion, beauty, sweetness – "

Esther was fussing about, as women do, before going to bed;

she came and went and fluttered round, singing all the time; you might have thought her a humming-bird.

"In the other – a noble name, family, honors, rank, knowledge of the world! – And no earthly means of combining them!" cried Lucien to himself.

Next morning, at seven, when the poet awoke in the pretty pink-and-white room, he found himself alone. He rang, and Europe hurried in.

"What are monsieur's orders?"

"Esther?"

"Madame went off this morning at a quarter to five. By Monsieur l'Abbe's order, I admitted a new face – carriage paid."

"A woman?"

"No, sir, an English woman – one of those people who do their day's work by night, and we are ordered to treat her as if she were madame. What can you have to say to such hack! – Poor Madame, how she cried when she got into the carriage. 'Well, it has to be done!' cried she. 'I left that poor dear boy asleep,' said she, wiping away her tears; 'Europe, if he had looked at me or spoken my name, I should have stayed – I could but have died with him.' – I tell you, sir, I am so fond of madame, that I did not show her the person who has taken her place; some waiting maids would have broken her heart by doing so."

"And is the stranger there?"

"Well, sir, she came in the chaise that took away madame, and I hid her in my room in obedience to my instructions – "

"Is she nice-looking?"

"So far as such a second-hand article can be. But she will find her part easy enough if you play yours, sir," said Europe, going to fetch the false Esther.

The night before, ere going to bed, the all-powerful banker had given his orders to his valet, who, at seven in the morning, brought in to him the notorious Louchard, the most famous of the commercial police, whom he left in a little sitting-room; there the Baron joined him, in a dressing gown and slippers.

"You haf mate a fool of me!" he said, in reply to this official's greeting.

"I could not help myself, Monsieur le Baron. I do not want to lose my place, and I had the honor of explaining to you that I could not meddle in a matter that had nothing to do with my functions. What did I promise you? To put you into communication with one of our agents, who, as it seemed to me, would be best able to serve you. But you know, Monsieur le Baron, the sharp lines that divide men of different trades: if you build a house, you do not set a carpenter to do smith's work. Well, there are two branches of the police – the political police and the judicial police. The political police never interfere with the other branch, and vice versa. If you apply to the chief of the political police, he must get permission from the Minister to take up our business, and you would not dare to explain it to the head of the police throughout the kingdom. A police-agent who should act on his own account would lose his place.

"Well, the ordinary police are quite as cautious as the political police. So no one, whether in the Home Office or at the Prefecture of Police, ever moves excepting in the interests of the State or for the ends of Justice.

"If there is a plot or a crime to be followed up, then, indeed, the heads of the corps are at your service; but you must understand, Monsieur le Baron, that they have other fish to fry than looking after the fifty thousand love affairs in Paris. As to me and my men, our only business is to arrest debtors; and as soon as anything else is to be done, we run enormous risks if we interfere with the peace and quiet of any man or woman. I sent you one of my men, but I told you I could not answer for him; you instructed him to find a particular woman in Paris; Contenson bled you of a thousand-franc note, and did not even move. You might as well look for a needle in the river as for a woman in Paris, who is supposed to haunt Vincennes, and of whom the description answers to every pretty woman in the capital."

"And could not Contenson haf tolt me de truf, instead of making me pleed out one tousand franc?"

"Listen to me, Monsieur le Baron," said Louchard. "Will you give me a thousand crowns? I will give you – sell you – a piece of advice?"

"Is it vort one tousand crowns – your atvice?" asked Nucingen.

"I am not to be caught, Monsieur le Baron," answered Louchard. "You are in love, you want to discover the object of your passion; you are getting as yellow as a lettuce without water.

Two physicians came to see you yesterday, your man tells me, who think your life is in danger; now, I alone can put you in the hands of a clever fellow. – But the deuce is in it! If your life is not worth a thousand crowns – ”

“Tell me de name of dat clefer fellow, and depent on my generosity – ”

Louchard took up his hat, bowed, and left the room.

“Wat ein teufel!” cried Nucingen. “Come back – look here – ”

“Take notice,” said Louchard, before taking the money, “I am only selling a piece of information, pure and simple. I can give you the name and address of the only man who is able to be of use to you – but he is a master – ”

“Get out mit you,” cried Nucingen. “Dere is not no name dat is vort one tousant crown but dat von Varschild – and dat only ven it is sign at the bottom of a bank-bill. – I shall gif you one tousant franc.”

Louchard, a little weasel, who had never been able to purchase an office as lawyer, notary, clerk, or attorney, leered at the Baron in a significant fashion.

“To you – a thousand crowns, or let it alone. You will get them back in a few seconds on the Bourse,” said he.

“I will gif you one tousant franc,” repeated the Baron.

“You would cheapen a gold mine!” said Louchard, bowing and leaving.

“I shall get dat address for five hundert franc!” cried the Baron, who desired his servant to send his secretary to him.

Turcaret is no more. In these days the smallest banker, like the greatest, exercises his acumen in the smallest transactions; he bargains over art, beneficence, and love; he would bargain with the Pope for a dispensation. Thus, as he listened to Louchard, Nucingen had hastily concluded that Contenson, Louchard's right-hand man, must certainly know the address of that master spy. Contenson would tell him for five hundred francs what Louchard wanted to see a thousand crowns for. The rapid calculation plainly proves that if the man's heart was in possession of love, his head was still that of the lynx stock-jobber.

"Go your own self, mensieur," said the Baron to his secretary, "to Contenson, dat spy of Louchart's de bailiff man – but go in one capriolette, very qvick, and pring him here qvick to me. I shall vait. – Go out trough de garten. – Here is dat key, for no man shall see dat man in here. You shall take him into dat little garten-house. Try to do dat little business very clefer."

Visitors called to see Nucingen on business; but he waited for Contenson, he was dreaming of Esther, telling himself that before long he would see again the woman who had aroused in him such unhoped-for emotions, and he sent everybody away with vague replies and double-edged promises. Contenson was to him the most important person in Paris, and he looked out into the garden every minute. Finally, after giving orders that no one else was to be admitted, he had his breakfast served in the summer-house at one corner of the garden. In the banker's

office the conduct and hesitancy of the most knowing, the most clearsighted, the shrewdest of Paris financiers seemed inexplicable.

"What ails the chief?" said a stockbroker to one of the head-clerks.

"No one knows; they are anxious about his health, it would seem. Yesterday, Madame la Baronne got Desplein and Bianchon to meet."

One day, when Sir Isaac Newton was engaged in physicking one of his dogs, named "Beauty" (who, as is well known, destroyed a vast amount of work, and whom he reproved only in these words, "Ah! Beauty, you little know the mischief you have done!"), some strangers called to see him; but they at once retired, respecting the great man's occupation. In every more or less lofty life, there is a little dog "Beauty." When the Marechal de Richelieu came to pay his respects to Louis XV. after taking Mahon, one of the greatest feats of arms of the eighteenth century, the King said to him, "Have you heard the great news? Poor Lansmatt is dead." – Lansmatt was a gatekeeper in the secret of the King's intrigues.

The bankers of Paris never knew how much they owed to Contenson. That spy was the cause of Nucingen's allowing an immense loan to be issued in which his share was allotted to him, and which he gave over to them. The stock-jobber could aim at a fortune any day with the artillery of speculation, but the man was a slave to the hope of happiness.

The great banker drank some tea, and was nibbling at a slice of bread and butter, as a man does whose teeth have for long been sharpened by appetite, when he heard a carriage stop at the little garden gate. In a few minutes his secretary brought in Contenson, whom he had run to earth in a cafe not far from Sainte-Pelagie, where the man was breakfasting on the strength of a bribe given to him by an imprisoned debtor for certain allowances that must be paid for.

Contenson, you must know, was a whole poem – a Paris poem. Merely to see him would have been enough to tell you that Beaumarchais' *Figaro*, Moliere's *Mascarille*, Marivaux's *Frontin*, and Dancourt's *Lafleur*– those great representatives of audacious swindling, of cunning driven to bay, of stratagem rising again from the ends of its broken wires – were all quite second-rate by comparison with this giant of cleverness and meanness. When in Paris you find a real type, he is no longer a man, he is a spectacle; no longer a factor in life, but a whole life, many lives.

Bake a plaster cast four times in a furnace, and you get a sort of bastard imitation of Florentine bronze. Well, the thunderbolts of numberless disasters, the pressure of terrible necessities, had bronzed Contenson's head, as though sweating in an oven had three times over stained his skin. Closely-set wrinkles that could no longer be relaxed made eternal furrows, whiter in their cracks. The yellow face was all wrinkles. The bald skull, resembling Voltaire's, was as parched as a death's-head, and but for a few hairs at the back it would have seemed doubtful whether it was

that of a living man. Under a rigid brow, a pair of Chinese eyes, like those of an image under a glass shade in a tea-shop – artificial eyes, which sham life but never vary – moved but expressed nothing. The nose, as flat as that of a skull, sniffed at fate; and the mouth, as thin-lipped as a miser's, was always open, but as expressionless as the grin of a letterbox.

Contenson, as apathetic as a savage, with sunburned hands, affected that Diogenes-like indifference which can never bend to any formality of respect.

And what a commentary on his life was written on his dress for any one who can decipher a dress! Above all, what trousers! made, by long wear, as black and shiny as the camlet of which lawyers' gowns are made! A waistcoat, bought in an old clothes shop in the Temple, with a deep embroidered collar! A rusty black coat! – and everything well brushed, clean after a fashion, and graced by a watch and an imitation gold chain. Contenson allowed a triangle of shirt to show, with pleats in which glittered a sham diamond pin; his black velvet stock set stiff like a gorget, over which lay rolls of flesh as red as that of a Caribbee. His silk hat was as glossy as satin, but the lining would have yielded grease enough for two street lamps if some grocer had bought it to boil down.

But to enumerate these accessories is nothing; if only I could give an idea of the air of immense importance that Contenson contrived to impart to them! There was something indescribably knowing in the collar of his coat, and the fresh blacking on a pair

of boots with gaping soles, to which no language can do justice. However, to give some notion of this medley of effect, it may be added that any man of intelligence would have felt, only on seeing Contenson, that if instead of being a spy he had been a thief, all these odds and ends, instead of raising a smile, would have made one shudder with horror. Judging only from his dress, the observer would have said to himself, "That is a scoundrel; he gambles, he drinks, he is full of vices; but he does not get drunk, he does not cheat, he is neither a thief nor a murderer." And Contenson remained inscrutable till the word spy suggested itself.

This man had followed as many unrecognized trades as there are recognized ones. The sly smile on his lips, the twinkle of his green eyes, the queer twitch of his snub nose, showed that he was not deficient in humor. He had a face of sheet-tin, and his soul must probably be like his face. Every movement of his countenance was a grimace wrung from him by politeness rather than by any expression of an inmost impulse. He would have been alarming if he had not seemed so droll.

Contenson, one of the most curious products of the scum that rises to the top of the seething Paris caldron, where everything ferments, prided himself on being, above all things, a philosopher. He would say, without any bitter feeling:

"I have great talents, but of what use are they? I might as well have been an idiot."

And he blamed himself instead of accusing mankind. Find, if

you can, many spies who have not had more venom about them than Contenson had.

"Circumstances are against me," he would say to his chiefs. "We might be fine crystal; we are but grains of sand, that is all."

His indifference to dress had some sense. He cared no more about his everyday clothes than an actor does; he excelled in disguising himself, in "make-up"; he could have given Frederic Lemaitre a lesson, for he could be a dandy when necessary. Formerly, in his younger days, he must have mingled in the out-at-elbows society of people living on a humble scale. He expressed excessive disgust for the criminal police corps; for, under the Empire, he had belonged to Fouche's police, and looked upon him as a great man. Since the suppression of this Government department, he had devoted his energies to the tracking of commercial defaulters; but his well-known talents and acumen made him a valuable auxiliary, and the unrecognized chiefs of the political police had kept his name on their lists. Contenson, like his fellows, was only a super in the dramas of which the leading parts were played by his chief when a political investigation was in the wind.

"Go 'vay," said Nucingen, dismissing his secretary with a wave of the hand.

"Why should this man live in a mansion and I in a lodging?" wondered Contenson to himself. "He has dodged his creditors three times; he has robbed them; I never stole a farthing; I am a cleverer fellow than he is – "

"Contenson, mein freund," said the Baron, "you haf vat you call pleed me of one tousand-franc note."

"My girl owed God and the devil – "

"Vat, you haf a girl, a mistress!" cried Nucingen, looking at Contenson with admiration not unmixed with envy.

"I am but sixty-six," replied Contenson, as a man whom vice has kept young as a bad example.

"And vat do she do?"

"She helps me," said Contenson. "When a man is a thief, and an honest woman loves him, either she becomes a thief or he becomes an honest man. I have always been a spy."

"And you vant money – always?" asked Nucingen.

"Always," said Contenson, with a smile. "It is part of my business to want money, as it is yours to make it; we shall easily come to an understanding. You find me a little, and I will undertake to spend it. You shall be the well, and I the bucket."

"Vould you like to haf one note for fife hundert franc?"

"What a question! But what a fool I am! – You do not offer it out of a disinterested desire to repair the slights of Fortune?"

"Not at all. I gif it besides the one tousand-franc note vat you pleed me off. Dat makes fifteen hundert franc vat I gif you."

"Very good, you give me the thousand francs I have had and you will add five hundred francs."

"Yust so," said Nucingen, nodding.

"But that still leaves only five hundred francs," said Contenson imperturbably.

"Dat I gif," added the Baron.

"That I take. Very good; and what, Monsieur le Baron, do you want for it?"

"I haf been told dat dere vas in Paris one man vat could find the voman vat I lof, and dat you know his address… A real master to spy."

"Very true."

"Vell den, gif me dat address, and I gif you fife hundert franc."

"Where are they?" said Contenson.

"Here dey are," said the Baron, drawing a note out of his pocket.

"All right, hand them over," said Contenson, holding out his hand.

"Noting for noting! Le us see de man, and you get de money; you might sell to me many address at dat price."

Contenson began to laugh.

"To be sure, you have a right to think that of me," said he, with an air of blaming himself. "The more rascally our business is, the more honesty is necessary. But look here, Monsieur le Baron, make it six hundred, and I will give you a bit of advice."

"Gif it, and trust to my generosity."

"I will risk it," Contenson said, "but it is playing high. In such matters, you see, we have to work underground. You say, 'Quick march!' – You are rich; you think that money can do everything. Well, money is something, no doubt. Still, money can only buy men, as the two or three best heads in our force so often say. And

there are many things you would never think of which money cannot buy. – You cannot buy good luck. So good police work is not done in this style. Will you show yourself in a carriage with me? We should be seen. Chance is just as often for us as against us."

"Really-truly?" said the Baron.

"Why, of course, sir. A horseshoe picked up in the street led the chief of the police to the discovery of the infernal machine. Well, if we were to go to-night in a hackney coach to Monsieur de Saint-Germain, he would not like to see you walk in any more than you would like to be seen going there."

"Dat is true," said the Baron.

"Ah, he is the greatest of the great! such another as the famous Corentin, Fouche's right arm, who was, some say, his natural son, born while he was still a priest; but that is nonsense. Fouche knew how to be a priest as he knew how to be a Minister. Well, you will not get this man to do anything for you, you see, for less than ten thousand-franc notes – think of that. – But he will do the job, and do it well. Neither seen nor heard, as they say. I ought to give Monsieur de Saint-Germanin notice, and he will fix a time for your meeting in some place where no one can see or hear, for it is a dangerous game to play policeman for private interests. Still, what is to be said? He is a good fellow, the king of good fellows, and a man who has undergone much persecution, and for having saving his country too! – like me, like all who helped to save it."

"Vell den, write and name de happy day," said the Baron,

smiling at his humble jest.

"And Monsieur le Baron will allow me to drink his health?" said Contenson, with a manner at once cringing and threatening.

"Shean," cried the Baron to the gardener, "go and tell Chorge to sent me one twenty francs, and pring dem to me – "

"Still, Monsieur le Baron, if you have no more information than you have just given me, I doubt whether the great man can be of any use to you."

"I know off oders!" replied the Baron with a cunning look.

"I have the honor to bid you good-morning, Monsieur le Baron," said Contenson, taking the twenty-franc piece. "I shall have the honor of calling again to tell Georges where you are to go this evening, for we never write anything in such cases when they are well managed."

"It is funny how sharp dese rascals are!" said the Baron to himself; "it is de same mit de police as it is in buss'niss."

When he left the Baron, Contenson went quietly from the Rue Saint-Lazare to the Rue Saint-Honore, as far as the Cafe David. He looked in through the windows, and saw an old man who was known there by the name of le Pere Canquoelle.

The Cafe David, at the corner of the Rue de la Monnaie and the Rue Saint-Honore, enjoyed a certain celebrity during the first thirty years of the century, though its fame was limited to the quarter known as that of the Bourdonnais. Here certain old retired merchants, and large shopkeepers still in trade, were wont to meet – the Camusots, the Lebas, the Pillerault, the Popinots,

and a few house-owners like little old Molineux. Now and again old Guillaume might be seen there, coming from the Rue du Colombier. Politics were discussed in a quiet way, but cautiously, for the opinions of the Cafe David were liberal. The gossip of the neighborhood was repeated, men so urgently feel the need of laughing at each other!

This cafe, like all cafes for that matter, had its eccentric character in the person of the said Pere Canquoelle, who had been regular in his attendance there since 1811, and who seemed to be so completely in harmony with the good folks who assembled there, that they all talked politics in his presence without reserve. Sometimes this old fellow, whose guilelessness was the subject of much laughter to the customers, would disappear for a month or two; but his absence never surprised anybody, and was always attributed to his infirmities or his great age, for he looked more than sixty in 1811.

"What has become of old Canquoelle?" one or another would ask of the manageress at the desk.

"I quite expect that one fine day we shall read in the advertisement-sheet that he is dead," she would reply.

Old Canquoelle bore a perpetual certificate of his native province in his accent. He spoke of *une estatue* (a statue), *le peuble* (the people), and said *ture* for *turc*. His name was that of a tiny estate called les Canquoelles, a word meaning cockchafer in some districts, situated in the department of Vaucluse, whence he had come. At last every one had fallen into the habit of calling

him Canquoelle, instead of des Canquoelles, and the old man took no offence, for in his opinion the nobility had perished in 1793; and besides, the land of les Canquoelles did not belong to him; he was a younger son's younger son.

Nowadays old Canquoelle's costume would look strange, but between 1811 and 1820 it astonished no one. The old man wore shoes with cut-steel buckles, silk stockings with stripes round the leg, alternately blue and white, corded silk knee-breeches with oval buckles cut to match those on his shoes. A white embroidered waistcoat, an old coat of olive-brown with metal buttons, and a shirt with a flat-pleated frill completed his costume. In the middle of the shirt-frill twinkled a small gold locket, in which might be seen, under glass, a little temple worked in hair, one of those pathetic trifles which give men confidence, just as a scarecrow frightens sparrows. Most men, like other animals, are frightened or reassured by trifles. Old Canquoelle's breeches were kept in place by a buckle which, in the fashion of the last century, tightened them across the stomach; from the belt hung on each side a short steel chain, composed of several finer chains, and ending in a bunch of seals. His white neckcloth was fastened behind by a small gold buckle. Finally, on his snowy and powdered hair, he still, in 1816, wore the municipal cocked hat which Monsieur Try, the President of the Law Courts, also used to wear. But Pere Canquoelle had recently substituted for this hat, so dear to old men, the undignified top-hat, which no one dares to rebel against. The good man thought he owed so much

as this to the spirit of the age. A small pigtail tied with a ribbon had traced a semicircle on the back of his coat, the greasy mark being hidden by powder.

If you looked no further than the most conspicuous feature of his face, a nose covered with excrescences red and swollen enough to figure in a dish of truffles, you might have inferred that the worthy man had an easy temper, foolish and easy-going, that of a perfect gaby; and you would have been deceived, like all at the Cafe David, where no one had ever remarked the studious brow, the sardonic mouth, and the cold eyes of this old man, petted by his vices, and as calm as Vitellius, whose imperial and portly stomach reappeared in him palingenetically, so to speak.

In 1816 a young commercial traveler named Gaudissart, who frequented the Cafe David, sat drinking from eleven o'clock till midnight with a half-pay officer. He was so rash as to discuss a conspiracy against the Bourbons, a rather serious plot then on the point of execution. There was no one to be seen in the cafe but Pere Canquoelle, who seemed to be asleep, two waiters who were dozing, and the accountant at the desk. Within four-and-twenty hours Gaudissart was arrested, the plot was discovered. Two men perished on the scaffold. Neither Gaudissart nor any one else ever suspected that worthy old Canquoelle of having peached. The waiters were dismissed; for a year they were all on their guard and afraid of the police – as Pere Canquoelle was too; indeed, he talked of retiring from the Cafe David, such horror had he of the police.

Contenson went into the cafe, asked for a glass of brandy, and did not look at Canquoelle, who sat reading the papers; but when he had gulped down the brandy, he took out the Baron's gold piece, and called the waiter by rapping three short raps on the table. The lady at the desk and the waiter examined the coin with a minute care that was not flattering to Contenson; but their suspicions were justified by the astonishment produced on all the regular customers by Contenson's appearance.

"Was that gold got by theft or by murder?"

This was the idea that rose to some clear and shrewd minds as they looked at Contenson over their spectacles, while affecting to read the news. Contenson, who saw everything and never was surprised at anything, scornfully wiped his lips with a bandana, in which there were but three darns, took his change, slipped all the coppers into his side pocket, of which the lining, once white, was now as black as the cloth of the trousers, and did not leave one for the waiter.

"What a gallows-bird!" said Pere Canquoelle to his neighbor Monsieur Pillerault.

"Pshaw!" said Monsieur Camusot to all the company, for he alone had expressed no astonishment, "it is Contenson, Louchard's right-hand man, the police agent we employ in business. The rascals want to nab some one who is hanging about perhaps."

It would seem necessary to explain here the terrible and profoundly cunning man who was hidden under the guise of Pere

Canquoelle, as Vautrin was hidden under that of the Abbe Carlos.

Born at Canquoelles, the only possession of his family, which was highly respectable, this Southerner's name was Peyrade. He belonged, in fact, to the younger branch of the Peyrade family, an old but impoverished house of Franche Comte, still owning the little estate of la Peyrade. The seventh child of his father, he had come on foot to Paris in 1772 at the age of seventeen, with two crowns of six francs in his pocket, prompted by the vices of an ardent spirit and the coarse desire to "get on," which brings so many men to Paris from the south as soon as they understand that their father's property can never supply them with means to gratify their passions. It is enough to say of Peyrade's youth that in 1782 he was in the confidence of chiefs of the police and the hero of the department, highly esteemed by MM. Lenoir and d'Albert, the last Lieutenant-Generals of Police.

The Revolution had no police; it needed none. Espionage, though common enough, was called public spirit.

The Directorate, a rather more regular government than that of the Committee of Public Safety, was obliged to reorganize the Police, and the first Consul completed the work by instituting a Prefect of Police and a department of police supervision.

Peyrade, a man knowing the traditions, collected the force with the assistance of a man named Corentin, a far cleverer man than Peyrade, though younger; but he was a genius only in the subterranean ways of police inquiries. In 1808 the great services Peyrade was able to achieve were rewarded by an

appointment to the eminent position of Chief Commissioner of Police at Antwerp. In Napoleon's mind this sort of Police Governorship was equivalent to a Minister's post, with the duty of superintending Holland. At the end of the campaign of 1809, Peyrade was removed from Antwerp by an order in Council from the Emperor, carried in a chaise to Paris between two gendarmes, and imprisoned in la Force. Two months later he was let out on bail furnished by his friend Corentin, after having been subjected to three examinations, each lasting six hours, in the office of the head of the Police.

Did Peyrade owe his overthrow to the miraculous energy he displayed in aiding Fouche in the defence of the French coast when threatened by what was known at the time as the Walcheren expedition, when the Duke of Otranto manifested such abilities as alarmed the Emperor? Fouche thought it probable even then; and now, when everybody knows what went on in the Cabinet Council called together by Cambaceres, it is absolutely certain. The Ministers, thunderstruck by the news of England's attempt, a retaliation on Napoleon for the Boulogne expedition, and taken by surprise when the Master was entrenched in the island of Lobau, where all Europe believed him to be lost, had not an idea which way to turn. The general opinion was in favor of sending post haste to the Emperor; Fouche alone was bold enough to sketch a plan of campaign, which, in fact, he carried into execution.

"Do as you please," said Cambaceres; "but I, who prefer

to keep my head on my shoulders, shall send a report to the Emperor."

It is well known that the Emperor on his return found an absurd pretext, at a full meeting of the Council of State, for discarding his Minister and punishing him for having saved France without the Sovereign's help. From that time forth, Napoleon had doubled the hostility of Prince de Talleyrand and the Duke of Otranto, the only two great politicians formed by the Revolution, who might perhaps have been able to save Napoleon in 1813.

To get rid of Peyrade, he was simply accused of connivance in favoring smuggling and sharing certain profits with the great merchants. Such an indignity was hard on a man who had earned the Marshal's baton of the Police Department by the great services he had done. This man, who had grown old in active business, knew all the secrets of every Government since 1775, when he had entered the service. The Emperor, who believed himself powerful enough to create men for his own uses, paid no heed to the representations subsequently laid before him in favor of a man who was reckoned as one of the most trustworthy, most capable, and most acute of the unknown genii whose task it is to watch over the safety of a State. He thought he could put Contenson in Peyrade's place; but Contenson was at that time employed by Corentin for his own benefit.

Peyrade felt the blow all the more keenly because, being greedy and a libertine, he had found himself, with regard to

women, in the position of a pastry-cook who loves sweetmeats. His habits of vice had become to him a second nature; he could not live without a good dinner, without gambling, in short, without the life of an unpretentious fine gentleman, in which men of powerful faculties so generally indulge when they have allowed excessive dissipation to become a necessity. Hitherto, he had lived in style without ever being expected to entertain; and living well, for no one ever looked for a return from him, or from his friend Corentin. He was cynically witty, and he liked his profession; he was a philosopher. And besides, a spy, whatever grade he may hold in the machinery of the police, can no more return to a profession regarded as honorable or liberal, than a prisoner from the hulks can. Once branded, once matriculated, spies and convicts, like deacons, have assumed an indelible character. There are beings on whom social conditions impose an inevitable fate.

Peyrade, for his further woe, was very fond of a pretty little girl whom he knew to be his own child by a celebrated actress to whom he had done a signal service, and who, for three months, had been grateful to him. Peyrade, who had sent for his child from Antwerp, now found himself without employment in Paris and with no means beyond a pension of twelve hundred francs a year allowed him by the Police Department as Lenoir's old disciple. He took lodgings in the Rue des Moineaux on the fourth floor, five little rooms, at a rent of two hundred and fifty francs.

If any man should be aware of the uses and sweets of

friendship, is it not the moral leper known to the world as a spy, to the mob as a *mouchard*, to the department as an "agent"? Peyrade and Corentin were such friends as Orestes and Pylades. Peyrade had trained Corentin as Vien trained David; but the pupil soon surpassed his master. They had carried out more than one undertaking together. Peyrade, happy at having discerned Corentin's superior abilities, had started him in his career by preparing a success for him. He obliged his disciple to make use of a mistress who had scorned him as a bait to catch a man (see *The Chouans*). And Corentin at that time was hardly five-and-twenty.

Corentin, who had been retained as one of the generals of whom the Minister of Police is the High Constable, still held under the Duc de Rovigo the high position he had filled under the Duke of Otranto. Now at that time the general police and the criminal police were managed on similar principles. When any important business was on hand, an account was opened, as it were, for the three, four, five, really capable agents. The Minister, on being warned of some plot, by whatever means, would say to one of his colonels of the police force:

"How much will you want to achieve this or that result?"

Corentin or Contenson would go into the matter and reply:

"Twenty, thirty, or forty thousand francs."

Then, as soon as the order was given to go ahead, all the means and the men were left to the judgment of Corentin or the agent selected. And the criminal police used to act in the same way to

discover crimes with the famous Vidocq.

Both branches of the police chose their men chiefly from among the ranks of well-known agents, who have matriculated in the business, and are, as it were, as soldiers of the secret army, so indispensable to a government, in spite of the public orations of philanthropists or narrow-minded moralists. But the absolute confidence placed in two men of the temper of Peyrade and Corentin conveyed to them the right of employing perfect strangers, under the risk, moreover, of being responsible to the Minister in all serious cases. Peyrade's experience and acumen were too valuable to Corentin, who, after the storm of 1820 had blown over, employed his old friend, constantly consulted him, and contributed largely to his maintenance. Corentin managed to put about a thousand francs a month into Peyrade's hands.

Peyrade, on his part, did Corentin good service. In 1816 Corentin, on the strength of the discovery of the conspiracy in which the Bonapartist Gaudissart was implicated, tried to get Peyrade reinstated in his place in the police office; but some unknown influence was working against Peyrade. This was the reason why.

In their anxiety to make themselves necessary, Peyrade, Corentin, and Contenson, at the Duke of Otranto's instigation, had organized for the benefit of Louis XVIII. a sort of opposition police in which very capable agents were employed. Louis XVIII. died possessed of secrets which will remain secrets from the best informed historians. The struggle between the general police

of the kingdom, and the King's opposition police, led to many horrible disasters, of which a certain number of executions sealed the secrets. This is neither the place nor the occasion for entering into details on this subject, for these "Scenes of Paris Life" are not "Scenes of Political Life." Enough has been said to show what were the means of living of the man who at the Cafe David was known as good old Canquoelle, and by what threads he was tied to the terrible and mysterious powers of the police.

Between 1817 and 1822, Corentin, Contenson, Peyrade, and their myrmidons, were often required to keep watch over the Minister of Police himself. This perhaps explains why the Minister declined to employ Peyrade and Contenson, on whom Corentin contrived to cast the Minister's suspicions, in order to be able to make use of his friend when his reinstatement was evidently out of the question. The Ministry put their faith in Corentin; they enjoined him to keep an eye on Peyrade, which amused Louis XVIII. Corentin and Peyrade were then masters of the position. Contenson, long attached to Peyrade, was still at his service. He had joined the force of the commercial police (the Gardes du Commerce) by his friend's orders. And, in fact, as a result of the sort of zeal that is inspired by a profession we love, these two chiefs liked to place their best men in those posts where information was most likely to flow in.

And, indeed, Contenson's vices and dissipated habits, which had dragged him lower than his two friends, consumed so much money, that he needed a great deal of business.

Contenson, without committing any indiscretion, had told Louchard that he knew the only man who was capable of doing what the Baron de Nucingen required. Peyrade was, in fact, the only police-agent who could act on behalf of a private individual with impunity. At the death of Louis XVIII., Peyrade had not only ceased to be of consequence, but had lost the profits of his position as spy-in-ordinary to His Majesty. Believing himself to be indispensable, he had lived fast. Women, high feeding, and the club, the *Cercle des Etrangers*, had prevented this man from saving, and, like all men cut out for debauchery, he enjoyed an iron constitution. But between 1826 and 1829, when he was nearly seventy-four years of age, he had stuck half-way, to use his own expression. Year by year he saw his comforts dwindling. He followed the police department to its grave, and saw with regret that Charles X.'s government was departing from its good old traditions. Every session saw the estimates pared down which were necessary to keep up the police, out of hatred for that method of government and a firm determination to reform that institution.

"It is as if they thought they could cook in white gloves," said Peyrade to Corentin.

In 1822 this couple foresaw 1830. They knew how bitterly Louis XVIII. hated his successor, which accounts for his recklessness with regard to the younger branch, and without which his reign would be an unanswerable riddle.

As Peyrade grew older, his love for his natural daughter had

increased. For her sake he had adopted his citizen guise, for he intended that his Lydie should marry respectably. So for the last three years he had been especially anxious to find a corner, either at the Prefecture of Police, or in the general Police Office – some ostensible and recognized post. He had ended by inventing a place, of which the necessity, as he told Corentin, would sooner or later be felt. He was anxious to create an inquiry office at the Prefecture of Police, to be intermediate between the Paris police in the strictest sense, the criminal police, and the superior general police, so as to enable the supreme board to profit by the various scattered forces. No one but Peyrade, at his age, and after fifty-five years of confidential work, could be the connecting link between the three branches of the police, or the keeper of the records to whom political and judicial authority alike could apply for the elucidation of certain cases. By this means Peyrade hoped, with Corentin's assistance, to find a husband and scrape together a portion for his little Lydie. Corentin had already mentioned the matter to the Director-General of the police forces of the realm, without naming Peyrade; and the Director-General, a man from the south, thought it necessary that the suggestion should come from the chief of the city police.

At the moment when Contenson struck three raps on the table with the gold piece, a signal conveying, "I want to speak to you," the senior was reflecting on this problem: "By whom, and under what pressure can the Prefet of Police be made to move?" – And he looked like a noodle studying his *Courrier Francais*.

"Poor Fouche!" thought he to himself, as he made his way along the Rue Saint-Honore, "that great man is dead! our go-betweens with Louis XVIII. are out of favor. And besides, as Corentin said only yesterday, nobody believes in the activity or the intelligence of a man of seventy. Oh, why did I get into a habit of dining at Very's, of drinking choice wines, of singing *La Mere Godichon*, of gambling when I am in funds? To get a place and keep it, as Corentin says, it is not enough to be clever, you must have the gift of management. Poor dear M. Lenoir was right when he wrote to me in the matter of the Queen's necklace, 'You will never do any good,' when he heard that I did not stay under that slut Oliva's bed."

If the venerable Pere Canquoelle – he was called so in the house – lived on in the Rue des Moineaux, on a fourth floor, you may depend on it he had found some peculiarity in the arrangement of the premises which favored the practice of his terrible profession.

The house, standing at the corner of the Rue Saint-Roch, had no neighbors on one side; and as the staircase up the middle divided it into two, there were on each floor two perfectly isolated rooms. Those two rooms looked out on the Rue Saint-Roch. There were garret rooms above the fourth floor, one of them a kitchen, and the other a bedroom for Pere Canquoelle's only servant, a Fleming named Katt, formerly Lydie's wet-nurse. Old Canquoelle had taken one of the outside rooms for his bedroom, and the other for his study. The study ended at the

party-wall, a very thick one. The window opening on the Rue des Moineaux looked on a blank wall at the opposite corner. As this study was divided from the stairs by the whole width of Peyrade's bedroom, the friends feared no eye, no ear, as they talked business in this study made on purpose for his detestable trade.

Peyrade, as a further precaution, had furnished Katt's room with a thick straw bed, a felt carpet, and a very heavy rug, under the pretext of making his child's nurse comfortable. He had also stopped up the chimney, warming his room by a stove, with a pipe through the wall to the Rue Saint-Roch. Finally, he laid several rugs on his floor to prevent the slightest sound being heard by the neighbors beneath. An expert himself in the tricks of spies, he sounded the outer wall, the ceiling, and the floor once a week, examining them as if he were in search of noxious insects. It was the security of this room from all witnesses or listeners that had made Corentin select it as his council-chamber when he did not hold a meeting in his own room.

Where Corentin lived was known to no one but the Chief of the Superior Police and to Peyrade; he received there such personages as the Ministry or the King selected to conduct very serious cases; but no agent or subordinate ever went there, and he plotted everything connected with their business at Peyrade's. In this unpretentious room schemes were matured, and resolutions passed, which would have furnished strange records and curious dramas if only walls could talk. Between 1816 and 1826 the

highest interests were discussed there. There first germinated the events which grew to weigh on France. There Peyrade and Corentin, with all the foresight, and more than all the information of Bellart, the Attorney-General, had said even in 1819: "If Louis XVIII. does not consent to strike such or such a blow, to make away with such or such a prince, is it because he hates his brother? He must wish to leave him heir to a revolution."

Peyrade's door was graced with a slate, on which very strange marks might sometimes be seen, figures scrawled in chalk. This sort of devil's algebra bore the clearest meaning to the initiated.

Lydie's rooms, opposite to Peyrade's shabby lodging, consisted of an ante-room, a little drawing-room, a bedroom, and a small dressing-room. The door, like that of Peyrade's room, was constructed of a plate of sheet-iron three lines thick, sandwiched between two strong oak planks, fitted with locks and elaborate hinges, making it as impossible to force it as if it were a prison door. Thus, though the house had a public passage through it, with a shop below and no doorkeeper, Lydie lived there without a fear. The dining-room, the little drawing-room, and her bedroom – every window-balcony a hanging garden – were luxurious in their Dutch cleanliness.

The Flemish nurse had never left Lydie, whom she called her daughter. The two went to church with a regularity that gave the royalist grocer, who lived below, in the corner shop, an excellent opinion of the worthy Canquoelle. The grocer's family, kitchen, and counter-jumpers occupied the first floor and the entresol;

the landlord inhabited the second floor; and the third had been let for twenty years past to a lapidary. Each resident had a key of the street door. The grocer's wife was all the more willing to receive letters and parcels addressed to these three quiet households, because the grocer's shop had a letter-box.

Without these details, strangers, or even those who know Paris well, could not have understood the privacy and quietude, the isolation and safety which made this house exceptional in Paris. After midnight, Pere Canquoelle could hatch plots, receive spies or ministers, wives or hussies, without any one on earth knowing anything about it.

Peyrade, of whom the Flemish woman would say to the grocer's cook, "He would not hurt a fly!" was regarded as the best of men. He grudged his daughter nothing. Lydie, who had been taught music by Schmucke, was herself a musician capable of composing; she could wash in a sepia drawing, and paint in gouache and water-color. Every Sunday Peyrade dined at home with her. On that day this worthy was wholly paternal.

Lydie, religious but not a bigot, took the Sacrament at Easter, and confessed every month. Still, she allowed herself from time to time to be treated to the play. She walked in the Tuileries when it was fine. These were all her pleasures, for she led a sedentary life. Lydie, who worshiped her father, knew absolutely nothing of his sinister gifts and dark employments. Not a wish had ever disturbed this pure child's pure life. Slight and handsome like her mother, gifted with an exquisite voice, and a delicate face framed

in fine fair hair, she looked like one of those angels, mystical rather than real, which some of the early painters grouped in the background of the Holy Family. The glance of her blue eyes seemed to bring a beam from the sky on those she favored with a look. Her dress, quite simple, with no exaggeration of fashion, had a delightful middle-class modesty. Picture to yourself an old Satan as the father of an angel, and purified in her divine presence, and you will have an idea of Peyrade and his daughter. If anybody had soiled this jewel, her father would have invented, to swallow him alive, one of those dreadful plots in which, under the Restoration, the unhappy wretches were trapped who were designate to die on the scaffold. A thousand crowns were ample maintenance for Lydie and Katt, whom she called nurse.

As Peyrade turned into the Rue des Moineaux, he saw Contenson; he outstripped him, went upstairs before him, heard the man's steps on the stairs, and admitted him before the woman had put her nose out of the kitchen door. A bell rung by the opening of a glass door, on the third story where the lapidary lived warned the residents on that and the fourth floors when a visitor was coming to them. It need hardly be said that, after midnight, Peyrade muffled this bell.

"What is up in such a hurry, Philosopher?"

Philosopher was the nickname bestowed on Contenson by Peyrade, and well merited by the Epictetus among police agents. The name of Contenson, alas! hid one of the most ancient names of feudal Normandy.

"Well, there is something like ten thousand francs to be netted."

"What is it? Political?"

"No, a piece of idiocy. Baron de Nucingen, you know, the old certified swindler, is neighing after a woman he saw in the Bois de Vincennes, and she has got to be found, or he will die of love. – They had a consultation of doctors yesterday, by what his man tells me. – I have already eased him of a thousand francs under pretence of seeking the fair one."

And Contenson related Nucingen's meeting with Esther, adding that the Baron had now some further information.

"All right," said Peyrade, "we will find his Dulcinea; tell the Baron to come to-night in a carriage to the Champs-Elysees – the corner of the Avenue de Gabriel and the Allee de Marigny."

Peyrade saw Contenson out, and knocked at his daughter's rooms, as he always knocked to be let in. He was full of glee; chance had just offered the means, at last, of getting the place he longed for.

He flung himself into a deep armchair, after kissing Lydie on the forehead, and said:

"Play me something."

Lydie played him a composition for the piano by Beethoven.

"That is very well played, my pet," said he, taking Lydie on his knees. "Do you know that we are one-and-twenty years old? We must get married soon, for our old daddy is more than seventy – "

"I am quite happy here," said she.

"You love no one but your ugly old father?" asked Peyrade.

"Why, whom should I love?"

"I am dining at home, my darling; go and tell Katt. I am thinking of settling, of getting an appointment, and finding a husband worthy of you; some good young man, very clever, whom you may some day be proud of – "

"I have never seen but one yet that I should have liked for a husband – "

"You have seen one then?"

"Yes, in the Tuileries," replied Lydie. "He walked past me; he was giving his arm to the Comtesse de Serizy."

"And his name is?"

"Lucien de Rubempre. – I was sitting with Katt under a lime-tree, thinking of nothing. There were two ladies sitting by me, and one said to the other, 'There are Madame de Serizy and that handsome Lucien de Rubempre.' – I looked at the couple that the two ladies were watching. 'Oh, my dear!' said the other, 'some women are very lucky! That woman is allowed to do everything she pleases just because she was a de Ronquerolles, and her husband is in power.' – 'But, my dear,' said the other lady, 'Lucien costs her very dear.' – What did she mean, papa?"

"Just nonsense, such as people of fashion will talk," replied Peyrade, with an air of perfect candor. "Perhaps they were alluding to political matters."

"Well, in short, you asked me a question, so I answer you. If you want me to marry, find me a husband just like that young

man."

"Silly child!" replied her father. "The fact that a man is handsome is not always a sign of goodness. Young men gifted with an attractive appearance meet with no obstacles at the beginning of life, so they make no use of any talent; they are corrupted by the advances made to them by society, and they have to pay interest later for their attractiveness! – What I should like for you is what the middle classes, the rich, and the fools leave unholpen and unprotected – "

"What, father?"

"An unrecognized man of talent. But, there, child; I have it in my power to hunt through every garret in Paris, and carry out your programme by offering for your affection a man as handsome as the young scamp you speak of; but a man of promise, with a future before him destined to glory and fortune. – By the way, I was forgetting. I must have a whole flock of nephews, and among them there must be one worthy of you! – I will write, or get some one to write to Provence."

A strange coincidence! At this moment a young man, half-dead of hunger and fatigue, who had come on foot from the department of Vaucluse – a nephew of Pere Canquoelle's in search of his uncle, was entering Paris through the Barriere de l'Italie. In the day-dreams of the family, ignorant of this uncle's fate, Peyrade had supplied the text for many hopes; he was supposed to have returned from India with millions! Stimulated by these fireside romances, this grand-nephew, named Theodore,

had started on a voyage round the world in quest of this eccentric uncle.

After enjoying for some hours the joys of paternity, Peyrade, his hair washed and dyed – for his powder was a disguise – dressed in a stout, coarse, blue frock-coat buttoned up to the chin, and a black cloak, shod in strong, thick-soled boots, furnished himself with a private card and walked slowly along the Avenue Gabriel, where Contenson, dressed as an old costermonger woman, met him in front of the gardens of the Elysee-Bourbon.

"Monsieur de Saint-Germain," said Contenson, giving his old chief the name he was officially known by, "you have put me in the way of making five hundred pieces (francs); but what I came here for was to tell you that that damned Baron, before he gave me the shiners, had been to ask questions at the house (the Prefecture of Police)."

"I shall want you, no doubt," replied Peyrade. "Look up numbers 7, 10, and 21; we can employ those men without any one finding it out, either at the Police Ministry or at the Prefecture."

Contenson went back to a post near the carriage in which Monsieur de Nucingen was waiting for Peyrade.

"I am Monsieur de Saint-Germain," said Peyrade to the Baron, raising himself to look over the carriage door.

"Ver' goot; get in mit me," replied the Baron, ordering the coachman to go on slowly to the Arc de l'Etoile.

"You have been to the Prefecture of Police, Monsieur le

Baron? That was not fair. Might I ask what you said to M. le Prefet, and what he said in reply?" asked Peyrade.

"Before I should gif fife hundert francs to a filain like Contenson, I vant to know if he had earned dem. I simply said to the Prefet of Police dat I vant to employ ein agent named Peyrate to go abroat in a delicate matter, an' should I trust him – unlimited! – The Prefet telt me you vas a very clefer man an' ver' honest man. An' dat vas everything."

"And now that you have learned my true name, Monsieur le Baron, will you tell me what it is you want?"

When the Baron had given a long and copious explanation, in his hideous Polish-Jew dialect, of his meeting with Esther and the cry of the man behind the carriage, and his vain efforts, he ended by relating what had occurred at his house the night before, Lucien's involuntary smile, and the opinion expressed by Bianchon and some other young dandies that there must be some acquaintance between him and the unknown fair.

"Listen to me, Monsieur le Baron; you must, in the first instance, place ten thousand francs in my hands, on account for expenses; for, to you, this is a matter of life or death; and as your life is a business-manufactory, nothing must be left undone to find this woman for you. Oh, you are caught! – "

"Ja, I am caught!"

"If more money is wanted, Baron, I will let you know; put your trust in me," said Peyrade. "I am not a spy, as you perhaps imagine. In 1807 I was Commissioner-General of Police at

Antwerp; and now that Louis XVIII. is dead, I may tell you in confidence that for seven years I was the chief of his counter-police. So there is no beating me down. You must understand, Monsieur le Baron, that it is impossible to make any estimate of the cost of each man's conscience before going into the details of such an affair. Be quite easy; I shall succeed. Do not fancy that you can satisfy me with a sum of money; I want something for my reward – "

"So long as dat is not a kingtom!" said the Baron.

"It is less than nothing to you."

"Den I am your man."

"You know the Kellers?"

"Oh! ver' well."

"Francois Keller is the Comte de Gondreville's son-in-law, and the Comte de Gondreville and his son-in-law dined with you yesterday."

"Who der teufel tolt you dat?" cried the Baron. "Dat vill be Georche; he is always a gossip." Peyrade smiled, and the banker at once formed strange suspicions of his man-servant.

"The Comte de Gondreville is quite in a position to obtain me a place I covet at the Prefecture of Police; within forty-eight hours the prefet will have notice that such a place is to be created," said Peyrade in continuation. "Ask for it for me; get the Comte de Gondreville to interest himself in the matter with some degree of warmth – and you will thus repay me for the service I am about to do you. I ask your word only; for, if you fail me,

sooner or later you will curse the day you were born – you have Peyrade's word for that."

"I gif you mein vort of honor to do vat is possible."

"If I do no more for you than is possible, it will not be enough."

"Vell, vell, I vill act qvite frankly."

"Frankly – that is all I ask," said Peyrade, "and frankness is the only thing at all new that you and I can offer to each other."

"Frankly," echoed the Baron. "Vere shall I put you down."

"At the corner of the Pont Louis XVI."

"To the Pont de la Chambre," said the Baron to the footman at the carriage door.

"Then I am to get dat unknown person," said the Baron to himself as he drove home.

"What a queer business!" thought Peyrade, going back on foot to the Palais-Royal, where he intended trying to multiply his ten thousand francs by three, to make a little fortune for Lydie. "Here I am required to look into the private concerns of a very young man who has bewitched my little girl by a glance. He is, I suppose, one of those men who have an eye for a woman," said he to himself, using an expression of a language of his own, in which his observations, or Corentin's, were summed up in words that were anything rather than classical, but, for that very reason, energetic and picturesque.

The Baron de Nucingen, when he went in, was an altered man; he astonished his household and his wife by showing them a face full of life and color, so cheerful did he feel.

"Our shareholders had better look out for themselves," said du Tillet to Rastignac.

They were all at tea, in Delphine de Nucingen's boudoir, having come in from the opera.

"Ja," said the Baron, smiling; "I feel ver' much dat I shall do some business."

"Then you have seen the fair being?" asked Madame de Nucingen.

"No," said he; "I have only hoped to see her."

"Do men ever love their wives so?" cried Madame de Nucingen, feeling, or affecting to feel, a little jealous.

"When you have got her, you must ask us to sup with her," said du Tillet to the Baron, "for I am very curious to study the creature who has made you so young as you are."

"She is a *cheff-d'oeufre* of creation!" replied the old banker.

"He will be swindled like a boy," said Rastignac in Delphine's ear.

"Pooh! he makes quite enough money to – "

"To give a little back, I suppose," said du Tillet, interrupting the Baroness.

Nucingen was walking up and down the room as if his legs had the fidgets.

"Now is your time to make him pay your fresh debts," said Rastignac in the Baroness' ear.

At this very moment Carlos was leaving the Rue Taitbout full of hope; he had been there to give some last advice to Europe,

who was to play the principal part in the farce devised to take in the Baron de Nucingen. He was accompanied as far as the Boulevard by Lucien, who was not at all easy at finding this demon so perfectly disguised that even he had only recognized him by his voice.

"Where the devil did you find a handsomer woman than Esther?" he asked his evil genius.

"My boy, there is no such thing to be found in Paris. Such a complexion is not made in France."

"I assure you, I am still quite amazed. Venus Callipyge has not such a figure. A man would lose his soul for her. But where did she spring from?"

"She was the handsomest girl in London. Drunk with gin, she killed her lover in a fit of jealousy. The lover was a wretch of whom the London police are well quit, and this woman was packed off to Paris for a time to let the matter blow over. The hussy was well brought up – the daughter of a clergyman. She speaks French as if it were her mother tongue. She does not know, and never will know, why she is here. She was told that if you took a fancy to her she might fleece you of millions, but that you were as jealous as a tiger, and she was told how Esther lived."

"But supposing Nucingen should prefer her to Esther?"

"Ah, it is out at last!" cried Carlos. "You dread now lest what dismayed you yesterday should not take place after all! Be quite easy. That fair and fair-haired girl has blue eyes; she is the antipodes of the beautiful Jewess, and only such eyes as Esther's

could ever stir a man so rotten as Nucingen. What the devil! you could not hide an ugly woman. When this puppet has played her part, I will send her off in safe custody to Rome or to Madrid, where she will be the rage."

"If we have her only for a short time," said Lucien, "I will go back to her – "

"Go, my boy, amuse yourself. You will be a day older to-morrow. For my part, I must wait for some one whom I have instructed to learn what is going on at the Baron de Nucingen's."

"Who?"

"His valet's mistress; for, after all, we must keep ourselves informed at every moment of what is going on in the enemy's camp."

At midnight, Paccard, Esther's tall chasseur, met Carlos on the Pont des Arts, the most favorable spot in all Paris for saying a few words which no one must overhear. All the time they talked the servant kept an eye on one side, while his master looked out on the other.

"The Baron went to the Prefecture of Police this morning between four and five," said the man, "and he boasted this evening that he should find the woman he saw in the Bois de Vincennes – he had been promised it – "

"We are watched!" said Carlos. "By whom?"

"They have already employed Louchard the bailiff."

"That would be child's play," replied Carlos. "We need fear nothing but the guardians of public safety, the criminal police;

and so long as that is not set in motion, we can go on!"

"That is not all."

"What else?"

"Our chums of the hulks. – I saw Lapouraille yesterday – He has choked off a married couple, and has bagged ten thousand five-franc pieces – in gold."

"He will be nabbed," said Jacques Collin. "That is the Rue Boucher crime."

"What is the order of the day?" said Paccard, with the respectful demeanor a marshal must have assumed when taking his orders from Louis XVIII.

"You must get out every evening at ten o'clock," replied Herrera. "Make your way pretty briskly to the Bois de Vincennes, the Bois de Meudon, and de Ville-d'Avray. If any one should follow you, let them do it; be free of speech, chatty, open to a bribe. Talk about Rubempre's jealousy and his mad passion for madame, saying that he would not on any account have it known that he had a mistress of that kind."

"Enough. – Must I have any weapons?"

"Never!" exclaimed Carlos vehemently. "A weapon? Of what use would that be? To get us into a scrape. Do not under any circumstances use your hunting-knife. When you know that you can break the strongest man's legs by the trick I showed you – when you can hold your own against three armed warders, feeling quite sure that you can account for two of them before they have got out flint and steel, what is there to be afraid of? Have not

you your cane?"

"To be sure," said the man.

Paccard, nicknamed The Old Guard, Old Wide-Awake, or The Right Man – a man with legs of iron, arms of steel, Italian whiskers, hair like an artist's, a beard like a sapper's, and a face as colorless and immovable as Contenson's, kept his spirit to himself, and rejoiced in a sort of drum-major appearance which disarmed suspicion. A fugitive from Poissy or Melun has no such serious self-consciousness and belief in his own merit. As Giafar to the Haroun el Rasheed of the hulks, he served him with the friendly admiration which Peyrade felt for Corentin.

This huge fellow, with a small body in proportion to his legs, flat-chested, and lean of limb, stalked solemnly about on his two long pins. Whenever his right leg moved, his right eye took in everything around him with the placid swiftness peculiar to thieves and spies. The left eye followed the right eye's example. Wiry, nimble, ready for anything at any time, but for a weakness of Dutch courage Paccard would have been perfect, Jacques Collin used to say, so completely was he endowed with the talents indispensable to a man at war with society; but the master had succeeded in persuading his slave to drink only in the evening. On going home at night, Paccard tippled the liquid gold poured into small glasses out of a pot-bellied stone jar from Danzig.

"We will make them open their eyes," said Paccard, putting on his grand hat and feathers after bowing to Carlos, whom he called his Confessor.

These were the events which had led three men, so clever, each in his way, as Jacques Collin, Peyrade, and Corentin, to a hand-to-hand fight on the same ground, each exerting his talents in a struggle for his own passions or interests. It was one of those obscure but terrible conflicts on which are expended in marches and countermarches, in strategy, skill, hatred, and vexation, the powers that might make a fine fortune. Men and means were kept absolutely secret by Peyarde, seconded in this business by his friend Corentin – a business they thought but a trifle. And so, as to them, history is silent, as it is on the true causes of many revolutions.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.