

Ferragus eBook

Ferragus by Honoré de Balzac

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FERRAGUS, CHIEF OF THE DEVORANTS

CHAPTER I

Madame Jules

Certain streets in Paris are as degraded as a man covered with infamy; also, there are noble streets, streets simply respectable, young streets on the morality of which the public has not yet formed an opinion; also cut-throat streets, streets older than the age of the oldest dowagers, estimable streets, streets always clean, streets always dirty, working, laboring, and mercantile streets. In short, the streets of Paris have every human quality, and impress us, by what we must call their physiognomy, with certain ideas against which we are defenceless. There are, for instance, streets of a bad neighborhood in which you could not be induced to live, and streets where you would willingly take up your abode. Some streets, like the rue Montmartre, have a charming head, and end in a fish's tail. The rue de la Paix is a wide street, a fine street, yet it wakens none of those gracefully noble thoughts which come to an impressible mind in the middle of the rue Royale, and it certainly lacks the majesty which reigns in the Place Vendome.

If you walk the streets of the Ile Saint-Louis, do not seek the reason of the nervous sadness that lays hold upon you save in the solitude of the spot, the gloomy look of the houses, and the great deserted mansions. This island, the ghost of *fermiers-generaux*, is the Venice of Paris. The Place de la Bourse is voluble, busy, degraded; it is never fine except by moonlight at two in the morning. By day it is Paris epitomized; by night it is a dream of Greece. The rue Traversiere-Saint-Honore—is not that a villainous street? Look at the wretched little houses with two windows on a floor, where vice, crime, and misery abound. The narrow streets exposed to the north, where the sun never comes more than three or four times a year, are the cut-throat streets which murder with impunity; the authorities of the present day do not meddle with them; but in former times the Parliament might perhaps have summoned the lieutenant of police and reprimanded him for the state of things; and it would, at least, have issued some decree against such streets, as it once did against the wigs of the Chapter of Beauvais. And yet Monsieur Benoiston de Chateauneuf has proved that the mortality of these streets is double that of others! To sum up such theories by a single example: is not the rue Fromentin both murderous and profligate!

These observations, incomprehensible out of Paris, will doubtless be understood by musing men of thought and poesy and pleasure, who know, while rambling about Paris, how to harvest the mass of floating interests which may be gathered at all hours within her walls; to them Paris is the most delightful and varied of monsters: here, a pretty woman; farther on, a haggard pauper; here, new as the coinage of a new

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reign; there, in this corner, elegant as a fashionable woman. A monster, moreover, complete! Its garrets, as it were, a head full of knowledge and genius; its first storeys stomachs repleted; its shops, actual feet, where the busy ambulating crowds are moving. Ah! what an ever-active life the monster leads! Hardly has the last vibration of the last carriage coming from a ball ceased at its heart before its arms are moving at the barriers and it shakes itself slowly into motion. Doors open; turning on their hinges like the membrane of some huge lobster, invisibly manipulated by thirty thousand men or women, of whom each individual occupies a space of six square feet, but has a kitchen, a workshop, a bed, children, a garden, little light to see by, but must see all. Imperceptibly, the articulations begin to crack; motion communicates itself; the street speaks. By mid-day, all is alive; the chimneys smoke, the monster eats; then he roars, and his thousand paws begin to ramp. Splendid spectacle! But, O Paris! he who has not admired your gloomy passages, your gleams and flashes of light, your deep and silent *cul-de-sacs*, who has not listened to your murmurings between midnight and two in the morning, knows nothing as yet of your true poesy, nor of your broad and fantastic contrasts.

There are a few amateurs who never go their way heedlessly; who savor their Paris, so to speak; who know its physiognomy so well that they see every wart, and pimple, and redness. To others, Paris is always that monstrous marvel, that amazing assemblage of activities, of schemes, of thoughts; the city of a hundred thousand tales, the head of the universe. But to those few, Paris is sad or gay, ugly or beautiful, living or dead; to them Paris is a creature; every man, every fraction of a house is a lobe of the cellular tissue of that great courtesan whose head and heart and fantastic customs they know so well. These men are lovers of Paris; they lift their noses at such or such a corner of a street, certain that they can see the face of a clock; they tell a friend whose tobacco-pouch is empty, "Go down that passage and turn to the left; there's a tobacconist next door to a confectioner, where there's a pretty girl." Rambling about Paris is, to these poets, a costly luxury. How can they help spending precious minutes before the dramas, disasters, faces, and picturesque events which meet us everywhere amid this heaving queen of cities, clothed in posters,—who has, nevertheless, not a single clean corner, so complying is she to the vices of the French nation! Who has not chanced to leave his home early in the morning, intending to go to some extremity of Paris, and found himself unable to get away from the centre of it by the dinner-hour? Such a man will know how to excuse this vagabondizing start upon our tale; which, however, we here sum up in an observation both useful and novel, as far as any observation can be novel in Paris, where there is nothing new,—not even the statue erected yesterday, on which some young gamin has already scribbled his name.



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Well, then! there are streets, or ends of streets, there are houses, unknown for the most part to persons of social distinction, to which a woman of that class cannot go without causing cruel and very wounding things to be thought of her. Whether the woman be rich and has a carriage, whether she is on foot, or is disguised, if she enters one of these Parisian defiles at any hour of the day, she compromises her reputation as a virtuous woman. If, by chance, she is there at nine in the evening she conjectures that an observer permits himself to make upon her may prove fearful in their consequences. But if the woman is young and pretty, if she enters a house in one of those streets, if the house has a long, dark, damp, and evil-smelling passage-way, at the end of which flickers the pallid gleam of an oil lamp, and if beneath that gleam appears the horrid face of a withered old woman with fleshless fingers, ah, then! and we say it in the interests of young and pretty women, that woman is lost. She is at the mercy of the first man of her acquaintance who sees her in that Parisian slough. There is more than one street in Paris where such a meeting may lead to a frightful drama, a bloody drama of death and love, a drama of the modern school.

Unhappily, this scene, this modern drama itself, will be comprehended by only a small number of persons; and it is a pity to tell the tale to a public which cannot enter into its local merit. But who can flatter himself that he will ever be understood? We all die unknown —'tis the saying of women and of authors.

At half-past eight o'clock one evening, in the rue Pagevin, in the days when that street had no wall which did not echo some infamous word, and was, in the direction of the rue Soly, the narrowest and most impassable street in Paris (not excepting the least frequented corner of the most deserted street),—at the beginning of the month of February about thirteen years ago, a young man, by one of those chances which come but once in life, turned the corner of the rue Pagevin to enter the rue des Vieux-Augustins, close to the rue Soly. There, this young man, who lived himself in the rue de Bourbon, saw in a woman near whom he had been unconsciously walking, a vague resemblance to the prettiest woman in Paris; a chaste and delightful person, with whom he was secretly and passionately in love,—a love without hope; she was married. In a moment his heart leaped, an intolerable heat surged from his centre and flowed through all his veins; his back turned cold, the skin of his head crept. He loved, he was young, he knew Paris; and his knowledge did not permit him to be ignorant of all there was of possible infamy in an elegant, rich, young, and beautiful woman walking there, alone, with a furtively criminal step. *She* in that mud! at that hour!

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The love that this young man felt for that woman may seem romantic, and all the more so because he was an officer in the Royal Guard. If he had been in the infantry, the affair might have seemed more likely; but, as an officer of rank in the cavalry, he belonged to that French arm which demands rapidity in its conquests and derives as much vanity from its amorous exploits as from its dashing uniform. But the passion of this officer was a true love, and many young hearts will think it noble. He loved this woman because she was virtuous; he loved her virtue, her modest grace, her imposing saintliness, as the dearest treasures of his hidden passion. This woman was indeed worthy to inspire one of those platonic loves which are found, like flowers amid bloody ruins, in the history of the middle-ages; worthy to be the hidden principle of all the actions of a young man's life; a love as high, as pure as the skies when blue; a love without hope and to which men bind themselves because it can never deceive; a love that is prodigal of unchecked enjoyment, especially at an age when the heart is ardent, the imagination keen, and the eyes of a man see very clearly.

Strange, weird, inconceivable effects may be met with at night in Paris. Only those who have amused themselves by watching those effects have any idea how fantastic a woman may appear there at dusk. At times the creature whom you are following, by accident or design, seems to you light and slender; the stockings, if they are white, make you fancy that the legs must be slim and elegant; the figure though wrapped in a shawl, or concealed by a pelisse, defines itself gracefully and seductively among the shadows; anon, the uncertain gleam thrown from a shop-window or a street lamp bestows a fleeting lustre, nearly always deceptive, on the unknown woman, and fires the imagination, carrying it far beyond the truth. The senses then bestir themselves; everything takes color and animation; the woman appears in an altogether novel aspect; her person becomes beautiful. Behold! she is not a woman, she is a demon, a siren, who is drawing you by magnetic attraction to some respectable house, where the worthy *bourgeoise*, frightened by your threatening step and the clack of your boots, shuts the door in your face without looking at you.

A vacillating gleam, thrown from the shop-window of a shoemaker, suddenly illuminated from the waist down the figure of the woman who was before the young man. Ah! surely, *she* alone had that swaying figure; she alone knew the secret of that chaste gait which innocently set into relief the many beauties of that attractive form. Yes, that was the shawl, and that the velvet bonnet which she wore in the mornings. On her gray silk stockings not a spot, on her shoes not a splash. The shawl held tightly round the bust disclosed, vaguely, its charming lines; and the young man, who had often seen those shoulders at a ball, knew well the treasures that the shawl concealed.

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By the way a Parisian woman wraps a shawl around her, and the way she lifts her feet in the street, a man of intelligence in such studies can divine the secret of her mysterious errand. There is something, I know not what, of quivering buoyancy in the person, in the gait; the woman seems to weigh less; she steps, or rather, she glides like a star, and floats onward led by a thought which exhales from the folds and motion of her dress. The young man hastened his step, passed the woman, and then turned back to look at her. Pst! she had disappeared into a passage-way, the grated door of which and its bell still rattled and sounded. The young man walked back to the alley and saw the woman reach the farther end, where she began to mount—not without receiving the obsequious bow of an old portress—a winding staircase, the lower steps of which were strongly lighted; she went up buoyantly, eagerly, as though impatient.

“Impatient for what?” said the young man to himself, drawing back to lean against a wooden railing on the other side of the street. He gazed, unhappy man, at the different storeys of the house, with the keen attention of a detective searching for a conspirator.

It was one of those houses of which there are thousands in Paris, ignoble, vulgar, narrow, yellowish in tone, with four storeys and three windows on each floor. The outer blinds of the first floor were closed. Where was she going? The young man fancied he heard the tinkle of a bell on the second floor. As if in answer to it, a light began to move in a room with two windows strongly illuminated, which presently lit up the third window, evidently that of a first room, either the salon or the dining-room of the apartment. Instantly the outline of a woman’s bonnet showed vaguely on the window, and a door between the two rooms must have closed, for the first was dark again, while the two other windows resumed their ruddy glow. At this moment a voice said, “Hi, there!” and the young man was conscious of a blow on his shoulder.

“Why don’t you pay attention?” said the rough voice of a workman, carrying a plank on his shoulder. The man passed on. He was the voice of Providence saying to the watcher: “What are you meddling with? Think of your own duty; and leave these Parisians to their own affairs.”

The young man crossed his arms; then, as no one beheld him, he suffered tears of rage to flow down his cheeks unchecked. At last the sight of the shadows moving behind the lighted windows gave him such pain that he looked elsewhere and noticed a hackney-coach, standing against a wall in the upper part of the rue des Vieux-Augustins, at a place where there was neither the door of a house, nor the light of a shop-window.

Was it she? Was it not she? Life or death to a lover! This lover waited. He stood there during a century of twenty minutes. After that the woman came down, and he then recognized her as the one whom he secretly loved. Nevertheless, he wanted still to doubt. She went to the hackney-coach, and got into it.



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“The house will always be there and I can search it later,” thought the young man, following the carriage at a run, to solve his last doubts; and soon he did so.

The carriage stopped in the rue de Richelieu before a shop for artificial flowers, close to the rue de Menars. The lady got out, entered the shop, sent out the money to pay the coachman, and presently left the shop herself, on foot, after buying a bunch of marabouts. Marabouts for her black hair! The officer beheld her, through the window-panes, placing the feathers to her head to see the effect, and he fancied he could hear the conversation between herself and the shop-woman.

“Oh! madame, nothing is more suitable for brunettes: brunettes have something a little too strongly marked in their lines, and marabouts give them just that *flow* which they lack. Madame la Duchesse de Langeais says they give a woman something vague, Ossianic, and very high-bred.”

“Very good; send them to me at once.”

Then the lady turned quickly toward the rue de Menars, and entered her own house. When the door closed on her, the young lover, having lost his hopes, and worse, far worse, his dearest beliefs, walked through the streets like a drunken man, and presently found himself in his own room without knowing how he came there. He flung himself into an arm-chair, put his head in his hands and his feet on the andirons, drying his boots until he burned them. It was an awful moment,—one of those moments in human life when the character is moulded, and the future conduct of the best of men depends on the good or evil fortune of his first action. Providence or fatality?—choose which you will.

This young man belonged to a good family, whose nobility was not very ancient; but there are so few really old families in these days, that all men of rank are ancient without dispute. His grandfather had bought the office of counsellor to the Parliament of Paris, where he afterwards became president. His sons, each provided with a handsome fortune, entered the army, and through their marriages became attached to the court. The Revolution swept the family away; but one old dowager, too obstinate to emigrate, was left; she was put in prison, threatened with death, but was saved by the 9th Thermidor and recovered her property. When the proper time came, about the year 1804, she recalled her grandson to France. Auguste de Maulincour, the only scion of the Carbonnon de Maulincour, was brought up by the good dowager with the triple care of a mother, a woman of rank, and an obstinate dowager. When the Restoration came, the young man, then eighteen years of age, entered the Maison-Rouge, followed the princes to Ghent, was made an officer in the body-guard, left it to serve in the line, but was recalled later to the Royal Guard, where, at twenty-three years of age, he found himself major of a cavalry regiment, —a splendid position, due to his grandmother, who had played her cards well to obtain it, in spite of his youth. This double biography is a

compendium of the general and special history, barring variations, of all the noble families who emigrated having debts and property, dowagers and tact.



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Madame la Baronne de Maulincour had a friend in the old Vidame de Pamiers, formerly a commander of the Knights of Malta. This was one of those undying friendships founded on sexagenary ties which nothing can weaken, because at the bottom of such intimacies there are certain secrets of the human heart, delightful to guess at when we have the time, insipid to explain in twenty words, and which might make the text of a work in four volumes as amusing as the Doyen de Killerine, —a work about which young men talk and judge without having read it.

Auguste de Maulincour belonged therefore to the faubourg Saint-Germain through his grandmother and the vidame, and it sufficed him to date back two centuries to take the tone and opinions of those who assume to go back to Clovis. This young man, pale, slender, and delicate in appearance, a man of honor and true courage, who would fight a duel for a yes or a no, had never yet fought upon a battle-field, though he wore in his button-hole the cross of the Legion of honor. He was, as you perceive, one of the blunders of the Restoration, perhaps the most excusable of them. The youth of those days was the youth of no epoch. It came between the memories of the Empire and those of the Emigration, between the old traditions of the court and the conscientious education of the *bourgeoisie*; between religion and fancy-balls; between two political faiths, between Louis XVIII., who saw only the present, and Charles X., who looked too far into the future; it was moreover bound to accept the will of the king, though the king was deceiving and tricking it. This unfortunate youth, blind and yet clear-sighted, was counted as nothing by old men jealously keeping the reins of the State in their feeble hands, while the monarchy could have been saved by their retirement and the accession of this Young France, which the old doctrinaires, the *emigres* of the Restoration, still speak of slightingly. Auguste de Maulincour was a victim to the ideas which weighed in those days upon French youth, and we must here explain why.

The Vidame de Pamiers was still, at sixty-seven years of age, a very brilliant man, having seen much and lived much; a good talker, a man of honor and a gallant man, but who held as to women the most detestable opinions; he loved them, and he despised them. *Their* honor! *their* feelings! Ta-ra-ra, rubbish and shams! When he was with them, he believed in them, the *ci-devant* “monstre”; he never contradicted them, and he made them shine. But among his male friends, when the topic of the sex came up, he laid down the principle that to deceive women, and to carry on several intrigues at once, should be the occupation of those young men who were so misguided as to wish to meddle in the affairs of the State. It is sad to have to sketch so hackneyed a portrait, for has it not figured everywhere and become, literally, as threadbare as that of a grenadier of the Empire? But the vidame had an influence on Monsieur de Maulincour’s destiny which obliges us to preserve his portrait; he lectured the young man after his fashion, and did his best to convert him to the doctrines of the great age of gallantry.



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The dowager, a tender-hearted, pious woman, sitting between God and her vidame, a model of grace and sweetness, but gifted with that well-bred persistency which triumphs in the long run, had longed to preserve for her grandson the beautiful illusions of life, and had therefore brought him up in the highest principles; she instilled into him her own delicacy of feeling and made him, to outward appearance, a timid man, if not a fool. The sensibilities of the young fellow, preserved pure, were not worn by contact without; he remained so chaste, so scrupulous, that he was keenly offended by actions and maxims to which the world attached no consequence. Ashamed of this susceptibility, he forced himself to conceal it under a false hardihood; but he suffered in secret, all the while scoffing with others at the things he revered.

It came to pass that he was deceived; because, in accordance with a not uncommon whim of destiny, he, a man of gentle melancholy, and spiritual in love, encountered in the object of his first passion a woman who held in horror all German sentimentalism. The young man, in consequence, distrusted himself, became dreamy, absorbed in his griefs, complaining of not being understood. Then, as we desire all the more violently the things we find difficult to obtain, he continued to adore women with that ingenuous tenderness and feline delicacy the secret of which belongs to women themselves, who may, perhaps, prefer to keep the monopoly of it. In point of fact, though women of the world complain of the way men love them, they have little liking themselves for those whose soul is half feminine. Their own superiority consists in making men believe they are their inferiors in love; therefore they will readily leave a lover if he is inexperienced enough to rob them of those fears with which they seek to deck themselves, those delightful tortures of feigned jealousy, those troubles of hope betrayed, those futile expectations,—in short, the whole procession of their feminine miseries. They hold Sir Charles Grandison in horror. What can be more contrary to their nature than a tranquil, perfect love? They want emotions; happiness without storms is not happiness to them. Women with souls that are strong enough to bring infinitude into love are angelic exceptions; they are among women what noble geniuses are among men. Their great passions are rare as masterpieces. Below the level of such love come compromises, conventions, passing and contemptible irritations, as in all things petty and perishable.

Amid the hidden disasters of his heart, and while he was still seeking the woman who could comprehend him (a search which, let us remark in passing, is one of the amorous follies of our epoch), Auguste met, in the rank of society that was farthest from his own, in the secondary sphere of money, where banking holds the first place, a perfect being, one of those women who have I know not what about them that is saintly and sacred,—women who inspire such reverence that love has need of the help of a long familiarity to declare itself.



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Auguste then gave himself up wholly to the delights of the deepest and most moving of passions, to a love that was purely adoring. Innumerable repressed desires there were, shadows of passion so vague yet so profound, so fugitive and yet so actual, that one scarcely knows to what we may compare them. They are like perfumes, or clouds, or rays of the sun, or shadows, or whatever there is in nature that shines for a moment and disappears, that springs to life and dies, leaving in the heart long echoes of emotion. When the soul is young enough to nurture melancholy and far-off hope, to find in woman more than a woman, is it not the greatest happiness that can befall a man when he loves enough to feel more joy in touching a gloved hand, or a lock of hair, in listening to a word, in casting a single look, than in all the ardor of possession given by happy love? Thus it is that rejected persons, those rebuffed by fate, the ugly and unfortunate, lovers unrevealed, women and timid men, alone know the treasures contained in the voice of the beloved. Taking their source and their element from the soul itself, the vibrations of the air, charged with passion, put our hearts so powerfully into communion, carrying thought between them so lucidly, and being, above all, so incapable of falsehood, that a single inflection of a voice is often a revelation. What enchantments the intonations of a tender voice can bestow upon the heart of a poet! What ideas they awaken! What freshness they shed there! Love is in the voice before the glance avows it. Auguste, poet after the manner of lovers (there are poets who feel, and poets who express; the first are the happiest), Auguste had tasted all these early joys, so vast, so fecund. SHE possessed the most winning organ that the most artful woman of the world could have desired in order to deceive at her ease; *she* had that silvery voice which is soft to the ear, and ringing only for the heart which it stirs and troubles, caresses and subjugates.

And this woman went by night to the rue Soly through the rue Pagevin! and her furtive apparition in an infamous house had just destroyed the grandest of passions! The vidame's logic triumphed.

"If she is betraying her husband we will avenge ourselves," said Auguste.

There was still faith in that "if." The philosophic doubt of Descartes is a politeness with which we should always honor virtue. Ten o'clock sounded. The Baron de Maulincour remembered that this woman was going to a ball that evening at a house to which he had access. He dressed, went there, and searched for her through all the salons. The mistress of the house, Madame de Nucingen, seeing him thus occupied, said:—

"You are looking for Madame Jules; but she has not yet come."

"Good evening, dear," said a voice.

Auguste and Madame de Nucingen turned round. Madame Jules had arrived, dressed in white, looking simple and noble, wearing in her hair the marabouts the young baron had seen her choose in the flower-shop. That voice of love now pierced his heart. Had



he won the slightest right to be jealous of her he would have petrified her then and there by saying the words, "Rue Soly!" But if he, an alien to her life, had said those words in her ear a thousand times, Madame Jules would have asked him in astonishment what he meant. He looked at her stupidly.

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For those sarcastic persons who scoff at all things it may be a great amusement to detect the secret of a woman, to know that her chastity is a lie, that her calm face hides some anxious thought, that under that pure brow is a dreadful drama. But there are other souls to whom the sight is saddening; and many of those who laugh in public, when withdrawn into themselves and alone with their conscience, curse the world while they despise the woman. Such was the case with Auguste de Maulincour, as he stood there in presence of Madame Jules. Singular situation! There was no other relation between them than that which social life establishes between persons who exchange a few words seven or eight times in the course of a winter, and yet he was calling her to account on behalf of a happiness unknown to her; he was judging her, without letting her know of his accusation.

Many young men find themselves thus in despair at having broken forever with a woman adored in secret, condemned and despised in secret. There are many hidden monologues told to the walls of some solitary lodging; storms roused and calmed without ever leaving the depths of hearts; amazing scenes of the moral world, for which a painter is wanted. Madame Jules sat down, leaving her husband to make a turn around the salon. After she was seated she seemed uneasy, and, while talking with her neighbor, she kept a furtive eye on Monsieur Jules Desmarets, her husband, a broker chiefly employed by the Baron de Nucingen. The following is the history of their home life.

Monsieur Desmarets was, five years before his marriage, in a broker's office, with no other means than the meagre salary of a clerk. But he was a man to whom misfortune had early taught the truths of life, and he followed the strait path with the tenacity of an insect making for its nest; he was one of those dogged young men who feign death before an obstacle and wear out everybody's patience with their own beetle-like perseverance. Thus, young as he was, he had all the republican virtue of poor peoples; he was sober, saving of his time, an enemy to pleasure. He waited. Nature had given him the immense advantage of an agreeable exterior. His calm, pure brow, the shape of his placid, but expressive face, his simple manners,—all revealed in him a laborious and resigned existence, that lofty personal dignity which is imposing to others, and the secret nobility of heart which can meet all events. His modesty inspired a sort of respect in those who knew him. Solitary in the midst of Paris, he knew the social world only by glimpses during the brief moments which he spent in his patron's salon on holidays.



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There were passions in this young man, as in most of the men who live in that way, of amazing profundity,—passions too vast to be drawn into petty incidents. His want of means compelled him to lead an ascetic life, and he conquered his fancies by hard work. After piling all day over figures, he found his recreation in striving obstinately to acquire that wide general knowledge so necessary in these days to every man who wants to make his mark, whether in society, or in commerce, at the bar, or in politics or literature. The only peril these fine souls have to fear comes from their own uprightness. They see some poor girl; they love her; they marry her, and wear out their lives in a struggle between poverty and love. The noblest ambition is quenched perforce by the household account-book. Jules Desmarets went headlong into this peril.

He met one evening at his patron's house a girl of the rarest beauty. Unfortunate men who are deprived of affection, and who consume the finest hours of youth in work and study, alone know the rapid ravages that passion makes in their lonely, misconceived hearts. They are so certain of loving truly, all their forces are concentrated so quickly on the object of their love, that they receive, while beside her, the most delightful sensations, when, as often happens, they inspire none at all. Nothing is more flattering to a woman's egotism than to divine this passion, apparently immovable, and these emotions so deep that they have needed a great length of time to reach the human surface. These poor men, anchorites in the midst of Paris, have all the enjoyments of anchorites; and may sometimes succumb to temptations. But, more often deceived, betrayed, and misunderstood, they are rarely able to gather the sweet fruits of a love which, to them, is like a flower dropped from heaven.

One smile from his wife, a single inflection of her voice sufficed to make Jules Desmarets conceive a passion which was boundless. Happily, the concentrated fire of that secret passion revealed itself artlessly to the woman who inspired it. These two beings then loved each other religiously. To express all in a word, they clasped hands without shame before the eyes of the world and went their way like two children, brother and sister, passing serenely through a crowd where all made way for them and admired them.

The young girl was in one of those unfortunate positions which human selfishness entails upon children. She had no civil status; her name of "Clemence" and her age were recorded only by a notary public. As for her fortune, that was small indeed. Jules Desmarets was a happy man on hearing these particulars. If Clemence had belonged to an opulent family, he might have despaired of obtaining her; but she was only the poor child of love, the fruit of some terrible adulterous passion; and they were married. Then began for Jules Desmarets a series of fortunate events. Every one envied his happiness; and henceforth talked only of his luck, without recalling either his virtues or his courage.



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Some days after their marriage, the mother of Clemence, who passed in society for her godmother, told Jules Desmarets to buy the office and good-will of a broker, promising to provide him with the necessary capital. In those days, such offices could still be bought at a modest price. That evening, in the salon as it happened of his patron, a wealthy capitalist proposed, on the recommendation of the mother, a very advantageous transaction for Jules Desmarets, and the next day the happy clerk was able to buy out his patron. In four years Desmarets became one of the most prosperous men in his business; new clients increased the number his predecessor had left to him; he inspired confidence in all; and it was impossible for him not to feel, by the way business came to him, that some hidden influence, due to his mother-in-law, or to Providence, was secretly protecting him.

At the end of the third year Clemence lost her godmother. By that time Monsieur Jules (so called to distinguish him from an elder brother, whom he had set up as a notary in Paris) possessed an income from invested property of two hundred thousand francs. There was not in all Paris another instance of the domestic happiness enjoyed by this couple. For five years their exceptional love had been troubled by only one event,—a calumny for which Monsieur Jules exacted vengeance. One of his former comrades attributed to Madame Jules the fortune of her husband, explaining that it came from a high protection dearly paid for. The man who uttered the calumny was killed in the duel that followed it.

The profound passion of this couple, which survived marriage, obtained a great success in society, though some women were annoyed by it. The charming household was respected; everybody feted it. Monsieur and Madame Jules were sincerely liked, perhaps because there is nothing more delightful to see than happy people; but they never stayed long at any festivity. They slipped away early, as impatient to regain their nest as wandering pigeons. This nest was a large and beautiful mansion in the rue de Menars, where a true feeling for art tempered the luxury which the financial world continues, traditionally, to display. Here the happy pair received their society magnificently, although the obligations of social life suited them but little.

Nevertheless, Jules submitted to the demands of the world, knowing that, sooner or later, a family has need of it; but he and his wife felt themselves, in its midst, like greenhouse plants in a tempest. With a delicacy that was very natural, Jules had concealed from his wife the calumny and the death of the calumniator. Madame Jules, herself, was inclined, through her sensitive and artistic nature, to desire luxury. In spite of the terrible lesson of the duel, some imprudent women whispered to each other that Madame Jules must sometimes be pressed for money. They often found her more elegantly dressed in her own home than when she went into society. She loved to adorn herself to please her husband, wishing to show him that to her he was more than any social life. A true love, a pure love, above all, a happy love! Jules, always a lover, and more in love as time went by, was happy in all things beside his wife, even in her

caprices; in fact, he would have been uneasy if she had none, thinking it a symptom of some illness.

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Auguste de Maulincour had the personal misfortune of running against this passion, and falling in love with the wife beyond recovery. Nevertheless, though he carried in his heart so intense a love, he was not ridiculous; he complied with all the demands of society, and of military manners and customs. And yet his face wore constantly, even though he might be drinking a glass of champagne, that dreamy look, that air of silently despising life, that nebulous expression which belongs, though for other reasons, to *blases* men,—men dissatisfied with hollow lives. To love without hope, to be disgusted with life, constitute, in these days, a social position. The enterprise of winning the heart of a sovereign might give, perhaps, more hope than a love rashly conceived for a happy woman. Therefore Maulincour had sufficient reason to be grave and gloomy. A queen has the vanity of her power; the height of her elevation protects her. But a pious *bourgeoise* is like a hedgehog, or an oyster, in its rough wrappings.

At this moment the young officer was beside his unconscious mistress, who certainly was unaware that she was doubly faithless. Madame Jules was seated, in a naive attitude, like the least artful woman in existence, soft and gentle, full of a majestic serenity. What an abyss is human nature! Before beginning a conversation, the baron looked alternately at the wife and at the husband. How many were the reflections he made! He recomposed the “Night Thoughts” of Young in a second. And yet the music was sounding through the salons, the light was pouring from a thousand candles. It was a banker’s ball,—one of those insolent festivals by means of which the world of solid gold endeavored to sneer at the gold-embossed salons where the faubourg Saint-Germain met and laughed, not foreseeing the day when the bank would invade the Luxembourg and take its seat upon the throne. The conspirators were now dancing, indifferent to coming bankruptcies, whether of Power or of the Bank. The gilded salons of the Baron de Nucingen were gay with that peculiar animation that the world of Paris, apparently joyous at any rate, gives to its fetes. There, men of talent communicate their wit to fools, and fools communicate that air of enjoyment that characterizes them. By means of this exchange all is liveliness. But a ball in Paris always resembles fireworks to a certain extent; wit, coquetry, and pleasure sparkle and go out like rockets. The next day all present have forgotten their wit, their coquetry, their pleasure.

“Ah!” thought Auguste, by way of conclusion, “women are what the vidame says they are. Certainly all those dancing here are less irreproachable actually than Madame Jules appears to be, and yet Madame Jules went to the rue Soly!”

The rue Soly was like an illness to him; the very word shrivelled his heart.

“Madame, do you ever dance?” he said to her.

“This is the third time you have asked me that question this winter,” she answered, smiling.



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“But perhaps you have never answered it.”

“That is true.”

“I knew very well that you were false, like other women.”

Madame Jules continued to smile.

“Listen, monsieur,” she said; “if I told you the real reason, you would think it ridiculous. I do not think it false to abstain from telling things that the world would laugh at.”

“All secrets demand, in order to be told, a friendship of which I am no doubt unworthy, madame. But you cannot have any but noble secrets; do you think me capable of jesting on noble things?”

“Yes,” she said, “you, like all the rest, laugh at our purest sentiments; you calumniate them. Besides, I have no secrets. I have the right to love my husband in the face of all the world, and I say so,—I am proud of it; and if you laugh at me when I tell you that I dance only with him, I shall have a bad opinion of your heart.”

“Have you never danced since your marriage with any one but your husband?”

“Never. His arm is the only one on which I have leaned; I have never felt the touch of another man.”

“Has your physician never felt your pulse?”

“Now you are laughing at me.”

“No, madame, I admire you, because I comprehend you. But you let a man hear your voice, you let yourself be seen, you—in short, you permit our eyes to admire you—”

“Ah!” she said, interrupting him, “that is one of my griefs. Yes, I wish it were possible for a married woman to live secluded with her husband, as a mistress lives with her lover, for then—”

“Then why were you, two hours ago, on foot, disguised, in the rue Soly?”

“The rue Soly, where is that?”

And her pure voice gave no sign of any emotion; no feature of her face quivered; she did not blush; she remained calm.

“What! you did not go up to the second floor of a house in the rue des Vieux-Augustins at the corner of the rue Soly? You did not have a hackney-coach waiting near by? You



did not return in it to the flower-shop in the rue Richelieu, where you bought the feathers that are now in your hair?"

"I did not leave my house this evening."

As she uttered that lie she was smiling and imperturbable; she played with her fan; but if any one had passed a hand down her back they would, perhaps, have found it moist. At that instant Auguste remembered the instructions of the vidame.

"Then it was some one who strangely resembled you," he said, with a credulous air.

"Monsieur," she replied, "if you are capable of following a woman and detecting her secrets, you will allow me to say that it is a wrong, a very wrong thing, and I do you the honor to say that I disbelieve you."



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The baron turned away, placed himself before the fireplace and seemed thoughtful. He bent his head; but his eyes were covertly fixed on Madame Jules, who, not remembering the reflections in the mirror, cast two or three glances at him that were full of terror. Presently she made a sign to her husband and rising took his arm to walk about the salon. As she passed before Monsieur de Maulincour, who at that moment was speaking to a friend, he said in a loud voice, as if in reply to a remark: "That woman will certainly not sleep quietly this night." Madame Jules stopped, gave him an imposing look which expressed contempt, and continued her way, unaware that another look, if surprised by her husband, might endanger not only her happiness but the lives of two men. Auguste, frantic with anger, which he tried to smother in the depths of his soul, presently left the house, swearing to penetrate to the heart of the mystery. Before leaving, he sought Madame Jules, to look at her again; but she had disappeared.

What a drama cast into that young head so eminently romantic, like all who have not known love in the wide extent which they give to it. He adored Madame Jules under a new aspect; he loved her now with the fury of jealousy and the frenzied anguish of hope. Unfaithful to her husband, the woman became common. Auguste could now give himself up to the joys of successful love, and his imagination opened to him a career of pleasures. Yes, he had lost the angel, but he had found the most delightful of demons. He went to bed, building castles in the air, excusing Madame Jules by some romantic fiction in which he did not believe. He resolved to devote himself wholly, from that day forth, to a search for the causes, motives, and keynote of this mystery. It was a tale to read, or better still, a drama to be played, in which he had a part.

CHAPTER II

FERRAGUS

A fine thing is the task of a spy, when performed for one's own benefit and in the interests of a passion. Is it not giving ourselves the pleasure of a thief and a rascal while continuing honest men? But there is another side to it; we must resign ourselves to boil with anger, to roar with impatience, to freeze our feet in the mud, to be numbed, and roasted, and torn by false hopes. We must go, on the faith of a mere indication, to a vague object, miss our end, curse our luck, improvise to ourselves elegies, dithyrambics, exclaim idiotically before inoffensive pedestrians who observe us, knock over old apple-women and their baskets, run hither and thither, stand on guard beneath a window, make a thousand suppositions. But, after all, it is a chase, a hunt; a hunt in Paris, a hunt with all its chances, minus dogs and guns and the tally-ho! Nothing compares with it but the life of gamblers. But it needs a heart big with love and vengeance to ambush itself in Paris, like a tiger waiting to spring upon its prey, and to enjoy the chances and contingencies of Paris, by adding one special interest to the many that abound there. But for this we need a many-sided soul—for must we not live in a thousand passions, a thousand sentiments?

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Auguste de Maulincour flung himself into this ardent existence passionately, for he felt all its pleasures and all its misery. He went disguised about Paris, watching at the corners of the rue Pagevin and the rue des Vieux-Augustins. He hurried like a hunter from the rue de Menars to the rue Soly, and back from the rue Soly to the rue de Menars, without obtaining either the vengeance or the knowledge which would punish or reward such cares, such efforts, such wiles. But he had not yet reached that impatience which wrings our very entrails and makes us sweat; he roamed in hope, believing that Madame Jules would only refrain for a few days from revisiting the place where she knew she had been detected. He devoted the first days therefore, to a careful study of the secrets of the street. A novice at such work, he dared not question either the porter or the shoemaker of the house to which Madame Jules had gone; but he managed to obtain a post of observation in a house directly opposite to the mysterious apartment. He studied the ground, trying to reconcile the conflicting demands of prudence, impatience, love, and secrecy.

Early in the month of March, while busy with plans by which he expected to strike a decisive blow, he left his post about four in the afternoon, after one of those patient watches from which he had learned nothing. He was on his way to his own house whither a matter relating to his military service called him, when he was overtaken in the rue Coquilliere by one of those heavy showers which instantly flood the gutters, while each drop of rain rings loudly in the puddles of the roadway. A pedestrian under these circumstances is forced to stop short and take refuge in a shop or cafe if he is rich enough to pay for the forced hospitality, or, if in poorer circumstances, under a *porte-cochere*, that haven of paupers or shabbily dressed persons. Why have none of our painters ever attempted to reproduce the physiognomies of a swarm of Parisians, grouped, under stress of weather, in the damp *porte-cochere* of a building? First, there's the musing philosophical pedestrian, who observes with interest all he sees,—whether it be the stripes made by the rain on the gray background of the atmosphere (a species of chasing not unlike the capricious threads of spun glass), or the whirl of white water which the wind is driving like a luminous dust along the roofs, or the fitful disgorgements of the gutter-pipes, sparkling and foaming; in short, the thousand nothings to be admired and studied with delight by loungers, in spite of the porter's broom which pretends to be sweeping out the gateway. Then there's the talkative refugee, who complains and converses with the porter while he rests on his broom like a grenadier on his musket; or the pauper wayfarer, curled against the wall indifferent to the condition of his rags, long used, alas, to contact with the streets; or the learned pedestrian who studies, spells, and reads the posters on the walls without



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finishing them; or the smiling pedestrian who makes fun of others to whom some street fatality has happened, who laughs at the muddy women, and makes grimaces at those of either sex who are looking from the windows; and the silent being who gazes from floor to floor; and the working-man, armed with a satchel or a paper bundle, who is estimating the rain as a profit or loss; and the good-natured fugitive, who arrives like a shot exclaiming, "Ah! what weather, messieurs, what weather!" and bows to every one; and, finally, the true *bourgeois* of Paris, with his unfailing umbrella, an expert in showers, who foresaw this particular one, but would come out in spite of his wife; this one takes a seat in the porter's chair. According to individual character, each member of this fortuitous society contemplates the skies, and departs, skipping to avoid the mud, —because he is in a hurry, or because he sees other citizens walking along in spite of wind and slush, or because, the archway being damp and mortally catarrhal, the bed's edge, as the proverb says, is better than the sheets. Each one has his motive. No one is left but the prudent pedestrian, the man who, before he sets forth, makes sure of a scrap of blue sky through the rifting clouds.

Monsieur de Maulincour took refuge, as we have said, with a whole family of fugitives, under the porch of an old house, the court-yard of which looked like the flue of a chimney. The sides of its plastered, nitrified, and mouldy walls were so covered with pipes and conduits from all the many floors of its four elevations, that it might have been said to resemble at that moment the *cascatelles* of Saint-Cloud. Water flowed everywhere; it boiled, it leaped, it murmured; it was black, white, blue, and green; it shrieked, it bubbled under the broom of the portress, a toothless old woman used to storms, who seemed to bless them as she swept into the street a mass of scraps an intelligent inventory of which would have revealed the lives and habits of every dweller in the house,—bits of printed cottons, tea-leaves, artificial flower-petals faded and worthless, vegetable parings, papers, scraps of metal. At every sweep of her broom the old woman bared the soul of the gutter, that black fissure on which a porter's mind is ever bent. The poor lover examined this scene, like a thousand others which our heaving Paris presents daily; but he examined it mechanically, as a man absorbed in thought, when, happening to look up, he found himself all but nose to nose with a man who had just entered the gateway.

In appearance this man was a beggar, but not the Parisian beggar, —that creation without a name in human language; no, this man formed another type, while presenting on the outside all the ideas suggested by the word "beggar." He was not marked by those original Parisian characteristics which strike us so forcibly in the paupers whom Charlet was fond of representing, with his rare luck in observation,



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—coarse faces reeking of mud, hoarse voices, reddened and bulbous noses, mouths devoid of teeth but menacing; humble yet terrible beings, in whom a profound intelligence shining in their eyes seems like a contradiction. Some of these bold vagabonds have blotched, cracked, veiny skins; their foreheads are covered with wrinkles, their hair scanty and dirty, like a wig thrown on a dust-heap. All are gay in their degradation, and degraded in their joys; all are marked with the stamp of debauchery, casting their silence as a reproach; their very attitude revealing fearful thoughts. Placed between crime and beggary they have no compunctions, and circle prudently around the scaffold without mounting it, innocent in the midst of crime, and vicious in their innocence. They often cause a laugh, but they always cause reflection. One represents to you civilization stunted, repressed; he comprehends everything, the honor of the galleys, patriotism, virtue, the malice of a vulgar crime, or the fine astuteness of elegant wickedness. Another is resigned, a perfect mimer, but stupid. All have slight yearnings after order and work, but they are pushed back into their mire by society, which makes no inquiry as to what there may be of great men, poets, intrepid souls, and splendid organizations among these vagrants, these gypsies of Paris; a people eminently good and eminently evil—like all the masses who suffer—accustomed to endure unspeakable woes, and whom a fatal power holds ever down to the level of the mire. They all have a dream, a hope, a happiness,—cards, lottery, or wine.

There was nothing of all this in the personage who now leaned carelessly against the wall in front of Monsieur de Maulincour, like some fantastic idea drawn by an artist on the back of a canvas the front of which is turned to the wall. This tall, spare man, whose leaden visage expressed some deep but chilling thought, dried up all pity in the hearts of those who looked at him by the scowling look and the sarcastic attitude which announced an intention of treating every man as an equal. His face was of a dirty white, and his wrinkled skull, denuded of hair, bore a vague resemblance to a block of granite. A few gray locks on either side of his head fell straight to the collar of his greasy coat, which was buttoned to the chin. He resembled both Voltaire and Don Quixote; he was, apparently, scoffing but melancholy, full of disdain and philosophy, but half-crazy. He seemed to have no shirt. His beard was long. A rusty black cravat, much worn and ragged, exposed a protuberant neck deeply furrowed, with veins as thick as cords. A large brown circle like a bruise was strongly marked beneath his eyes. He seemed to be at least sixty years old. His hands were white and clean. His boots were trodden down at the heels, and full of holes. A pair of blue trousers, mended in various places, were covered with a species of fluff which made them offensive to the eye. Whether it was that his damp clothes exhaled a fetid

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odor, or that he had in his normal condition the “poor smell” which belongs to Parisian tenements, just as offices, sacristies, and hospitals have their own peculiar and rancid fetidness, of which no words can give the least idea, or whether some other reason affected them, those in the vicinity of this man immediately moved away and left him alone. He cast upon them and also upon the officer a calm, expressionless look, the celebrated look of Monsieur de Talleyrand, a dull, wan glance, without warmth, a species of impenetrable veil, beneath which a strong soul hides profound emotions and close estimation of men and things and events. Not a fold of his face quivered. His mouth and forehead were impassible; but his eyes moved and lowered themselves with a noble, almost tragic slowness. There was, in fact, a whole drama in the motion of those withered eyelids.

The aspect of this stoical figure gave rise in Monsieur de Maulincour to one of those vagabond reveries which begin with a common question and end by comprising a world of thought. The storm was past. Monsieur de Maulincour presently saw no more of the man than the tail of his coat as it brushed the gate-post, but as he turned to leave his own place he noticed at his feet a letter which must have fallen from the unknown beggar when he took, as the baron had seen him take, a handkerchief from his pocket. The young man picked it up, and read, involuntarily, the address: “To Monsieur Ferragusse, Rue des Grands-Augustains, corner of rue Soly.”

The letter bore no postmark, and the address prevented Monsieur de Maulincour from following the beggar and returning it; for there are few passions that will not fail in rectitude in the long run. The baron had a presentiment of the opportunity afforded by this windfall. He determined to keep the letter, which would give him the right to enter the mysterious house to return it to the strange man, not doubting that he lived there. Suspicions, vague as the first faint gleams of daylight, made him fancy relations between this man and Madame Jules. A jealous lover supposes everything; and it is by supposing everything and selecting the most probable of their conjectures that judges, spies, lovers, and observers get at the truth they are looking for.

“Is the letter for him? Is it from Madame Jules?”

His restless imagination tossed a thousand such questions to him; but when he read the first words of the letter he smiled. Here it is, textually, in all the simplicity of its artless phrases and its miserable orthography,—a letter to which it would be impossible to add anything, or to take anything away, unless it were the letter itself. But we have yielded to the necessity of punctuating it. In the original there were neither commas nor stops of any kind, not even notes of exclamation,—a fact which tends to undervalue the system of notes and dashes by which modern authors have endeavored to depict the great disasters of all the passions:—



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Henry,—Among the many sacrifices I imposed upon myself for your sake was that of not giving you any news of me; but an irresistible voice now compels me to let you know the wrong you have done me. I know beforehand that your soul hardened in vice will not pity me. Your heart is deaf to feeling. Is it deaf to the cries of nature? But what matter? I must tell you to what a dreadful point you are guilty, and the horror of the position to which you have brought me. Henry, you knew what I suffered from my first wrong-doing, and yet you plunged me into the same misery, and then abandoned me to my despair and suffering. Yes, I will say it, the belief I had that you loved me and esteemed me gave me courage to bare my fate. But now, what have I left? Have you not made me lose all that was dear to me, all that held me to life; parents, friends, honor, reputation,—all, I have sacrificed all to you, and nothing is left me but shame, opprobrium, and—I say this without blushing—poverty. Nothing was wanting to my misfortunes but the certainty of your contempt and hatred; and now I have them I find the courage that my project requires. My decision is made; the honor of my family commands it. I must put an end to my sufferings. Make no remarks upon my conduct, Henry; it is awful, I know, but my condition obliges me. Without help, without support, without one friend to comfort me, can I live? No. Fate has decided for me. So in two days, Henry, two days, Ida will have ceased to be worthy of your regard. Oh, Henry! oh, my friend! for I can never change to you, promise me to forgive me for what I am going to do. Do not forget that you have driven me to it; it is your work, and you must judge it. May heaven not punish you for all your crimes. I ask your pardon on my knees, for I feel nothing is wanting to my misery but the sorrow of knowing you unhappy. In spite of the poverty I am in I shall refuse all help from you. If you had loved me I would have taken all from your friendship; but a benefit given by pity *my soul refuses*. I would be baser to take it than he who offered it. I have one favor to ask of you. I don't know how long I must stay at Madame Meynardie's; be generous enough not to come there. Your last two visits did me a harm I cannot get over. I cannot enter into particulars about that conduct of yours. You hate me,—you said so; that word is written on my heart, and freezes it with fear. Alas! it is now, when I need all my courage, all my strength, that my faculties abandon me. Henry, my friend, before I put a barrier forever between us, give me a last proof of your esteem. Write me, answer me, say you respect me still, though you have ceased to love me. My eyes are worthy still to look into yours, but I do not ask an interview; I fear my weakness and my love. But for pity's sake write me a line at once; it will give me the courage I need to meet my troubles. Farewell, other of all my woes, but the only friend my heart has chosen and will never forget.

Ida.



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This life of a young girl, with its love betrayed, its fatal joys, its pangs, its miseries, and its horrible resignation, summed up in a few words, this humble poem, essentially Parisian, written on dirty paper, influenced for a passing moment Monsieur de Maulincour. He asked himself whether this Ida might not be some poor relation of Madame Jules, and that strange rendezvous, which he had witnessed by chance, the mere necessity of a charitable effort. But could that old pauper have seduced this Ida? There was something impossible in the very idea. Wandering in this labyrinth of reflections, which crossed, recrossed, and obliterated one another, the baron reached the rue Pagevin, and saw a hackney-coach standing at the end of the rue des Vieux-Augustins where it enters the rue Montmartre. All waiting hackney-coaches now had an interest for him.

“Can she be there?” he thought to himself, and his heart beat fast with a hot and feverish throbbing.

He pushed the little door with the bell, but he lowered his head as he did so, obeying a sense of shame, for a voice said to him secretly:—

“Why are you putting your foot into this mystery?”

He went up a few steps, and found himself face to face with the old portress.

“Monsieur Ferragus?” he said.

“Don’t know him.”

“Doesn’t Monsieur Ferragus live here?”

“Haven’t such a name in the house.”

“But, my good woman—”

“I’m not your good woman, monsieur, I’m the portress.”

“But, madame,” persisted the baron, “I have a letter for Monsieur Ferragus.”

“Ah! if monsieur has a letter,” she said, changing her tone, “that’s another matter. Will you let me see it—that letter?”

Auguste showed the folded letter. The old woman shook her head with a doubtful air, hesitated, seemed to wish to leave the lodge and inform the mysterious Ferragus of his unexpected visitor, but finally said:—

“Very good; go up, monsieur. I suppose you know the way?”



Without replying to this remark, which he thought might be a trap, the young officer ran lightly up the stairway, and rang loudly at the door of the second floor. His lover's instinct told him, "She is there."

The beggar of the porch, Ferragus, the "orther" of Ida's woes, opened the door himself. He appeared in a flowered dressing-gown, white flannel trousers, his feet in embroidered slippers, and his face washed clean of stains. Madame Jules, whose head projected beyond the casing of the door in the next room, turned pale and dropped into a chair.

"What is the matter, madame?" cried the officer, springing toward her.

But Ferragus stretched forth an arm and flung the intruder back with so sharp a thrust that Auguste fancied he had received a blow with an iron bar full on his chest.

"Back! monsieur," said the man. "What do you want there? For five or six days you have been roaming about the neighborhood. Are you a spy?"



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“Are you Monsieur Ferragus?” said the baron.

“No, monsieur.”

“Nevertheless,” continued Auguste, “it is to you that I must return this paper which you dropped in the gateway beneath which we both took refuge from the rain.”

While speaking and offering the letter to the man, Auguste did not refrain from casting an eye around the room where Ferragus received him. It was very well arranged, though simply. A fire burned on the hearth; and near it was a table with food upon it, which was served more sumptuously than agreed with the apparent conditions of the man and the poorness of his lodging. On a sofa in the next room, which he could see through the doorway, lay a heap of gold, and he heard a sound which could be no other than that of a woman weeping.

“The paper belongs to me; I am much obliged to you,” said the mysterious man, turning away as if to make the baron understand that he must go.

Too curious himself to take much note of the deep examination of which he was himself the object, Auguste did not see the half-magnetic glance with which this strange being seemed to pierce him; had he encountered that basilisk eye he might have felt the danger that encompassed him. Too passionately excited to think of himself, Auguste bowed, went down the stairs, and returned home, striving to find a meaning in the connection of these three persons,—Ida, Ferragus, and Madame Jules; an occupation equivalent to that of trying to arrange the many-cornered bits of a Chinese puzzle without possessing the key to the game. But Madame Jules had seen him, Madame Jules went there, Madame Jules had lied to him. Maulincour determined to go and see her the next day. She could not refuse his visit, for he was now her accomplice; he was hands and feet in the mysterious affair, and she knew it. Already he felt himself a sultan, and thought of demanding from Madame Jules, imperiously, all her secrets.

In those days Paris was seized with a building-fever. If Paris is a monster, it is certainly a most mania-ridden monster. It becomes enamored of a thousand fancies: sometimes it has a mania for building, like a great seigneur who loves a trowel; soon it abandons the trowel and becomes all military; it arrays itself from head to foot as a national guard, and drills and smokes; suddenly, it abandons military manoeuvres and flings away cigars; it is commercial, care-worn, falls into bankruptcy, sells its furniture on the place de Chatelet, files its schedule; but a few days later, lo! it has arranged its affairs and is giving fetes and dances. One day it eats barley-sugar by the mouthful, by the handful; yesterday it bought “papier Weymen”; to-day the monster’s teeth ache, and it applies to its walls an alexipharmatic to mitigate their dampness; to-morrow it will lay in a provision of pectoral paste. It has its manias for the month, for the season, for the year, like its manias of a day.



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So, at the moment of which we speak, all the world was building or pulling down something,—people hardly knew what as yet. There were very few streets in which high scaffoldings on long poles could not be seen, fastened from floor to floor with transverse blocks inserted into holes in the walls on which the planks were laid,—a frail construction, shaken by the brick-layers, but held together by ropes, white with plaster, and insecurely protected from the wheels of carriages by the breastwork of planks which the law requires round all such buildings. There is something maritime in these masts, and ladders, and cordage, even in the shouts of the masons. About a dozen yards from the hotel Maulincour, one of these ephemeral barriers was erected before a house which was then being built of blocks of free-stone. The day after the event we have just related, at the moment when the Baron de Maulincour was passing this scaffolding in his cabriolet on his way to see Madame Jules, a stone, two feet square, which was being raised to the upper storey of this building, got loose from the ropes and fell, crushing the baron's servant who was behind the cabriolet. A cry of horror shook both the scaffold and the masons; one of them, apparently unable to keep his grasp on a pole, was in danger of death, and seemed to have been touched by the stone as it passed him.

A crowd collected rapidly; the masons came down the ladders swearing and insisting that Monsieur de Maulincour's cabriolet had been driven against the boarding and so had shaken their crane. Two inches more and the stone would have fallen on the baron's head. The groom was dead, the carriage shattered. 'Twas an event for the whole neighborhood, the newspapers told of it. Monsieur de Maulincour, certain that he had not touched the boarding, complained; the case went to court. Inquiry being made, it was shown that a small boy, armed with a lath, had mounted guard and called to all foot-passengers to keep away. The affair ended there. Monsieur de Maulincour obtained no redress. He had lost his servant, and was confined to his bed for some days, for the back of the carriage when shattered had bruised him severely, and the nervous shock of the sudden surprise gave him a fever. He did not, therefore, go to see Madame Jules.

Ten days after this event, he left the house for the first time, in his repaired cabriolet, when, as he drove down the rue de Bourgogne and was close to the sewer opposite to the Chamber of Deputies, the axle-tree broke in two, and the baron was driving so rapidly that the breakage would have caused the two wheels to come together with force enough to break his head, had it not been for the resistance of the leather hood. Nevertheless, he was badly wounded in the side. For the second time in ten days he was carried home in a fainting condition to his terrified grandmother. This second accident gave him a feeling of distrust; he thought, though vaguely, of Ferragus

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and Madame Jules. To throw light on these suspicions he had the broken axle brought to his room and sent for his carriage-maker. The man examined the axle and the fracture, and proved two things: First, the axle was not made in his workshop; he furnished none that did not bear the initials of his name on the iron. But he could not explain by what means this axle had been substituted for the other. Secondly, the breakage of the suspicious axle was caused by a hollow space having been blown in it and a straw very cleverly inserted.

“Eh! Monsieur le baron, whoever did that was malicious!” he said; “any one would swear, to look at it, that the axle was sound.”

Monsieur de Maulincour begged the carriage-maker to say nothing of the affair; but he felt himself warned. These two attempts at murder were planned with an ability which denoted the enmity of intelligent minds.

“It is war to the death,” he said to himself, as he tossed in his bed, —“a war of savages, skulking in ambush, of trickery and treachery, declared in the name of Madame Jules. What sort of man is this to whom she belongs? What species of power does this Ferragus wield?”

Monsieur de Maulincour, though a soldier and brave man, could not repress a shudder. In the midst of many thoughts that now assailed him, there was one against which he felt he had neither defence nor courage: might not poison be employed ere long by his secret enemies? Under the influence of fears, which his momentary weakness and fever and low diet increased, he sent for an old woman long attached to the service of his grandmother, whose affection for himself was one of those semi-maternal sentiments which are the sublime of the commonplace. Without confiding in her wholly, he charged her to buy secretly and daily, in different localities, the food he needed; telling her to keep it under lock and key and bring it to him herself, not allowing any one, no matter who, to approach her while preparing it. He took the most minute precautions to protect himself against that form of death. He was ill in his bed and alone, and he had therefore the leisure to think of his own security,—the one necessity clear-sighted enough to enable human egotism to forget nothing!

But the unfortunate man had poisoned his own life by this dread, and, in spite of himself, suspicion dyed all his hours with its gloomy tints. These two lessons of attempted assassination did teach him, however, the value of one of the virtues most necessary to a public man; he saw the wise dissimulation that must be practised in dealing with the great interests of life. To be silent about our own secret is nothing; but to be silent from the start, to forget a fact as Ali Pacha did for thirty years in order to be sure of a vengeance waited for for thirty years, is a fine study in a land where there are

few men who can keep their own counsel for thirty days. Monsieur de Maulincour literally lived only through



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Madame Jules. He was perpetually absorbed in a sober examination into the means he ought to employ to triumph in this mysterious struggle with these mysterious persons. His secret passion for that woman grew by reason of all these obstacles. Madame Jules was ever there, erect, in the midst of his thoughts, in the centre of his heart, more seductive by her presumable vices than by the positive virtues for which he had made her his idol.

At last, anxious to reconnoitre the position of the enemy, he thought he might without danger initiate the vidame into the secrets of his situation. The old commander loved Auguste as a father loves his wife's children; he was shrewd, dexterous, and very diplomatic. He listened to the baron, shook his head, and they both held counsel. The worthy vidame did not share his young friend's confidence when Auguste declared that in the time in which they now lived, the police and the government were able to lay bare all mysteries, and that if it were absolutely necessary to have recourse to those powers, he should find them most powerful auxiliaries.

The old man replied, gravely: "The police, my dear boy, is the most incompetent thing on this earth, and government the feeblest in all matters concerning individuals. Neither the police nor the government can read hearts. What we might reasonably ask of them is to search for the causes of an act. But the police and the government are both eminently unfitted for that; they lack, essentially, the personal interest which reveals all to him who wants to know all. No human power can prevent an assassin or a poisoner from reaching the heart of a prince or the stomach of an honest man. Passions are the best police."

The vidame strongly advised the baron to go to Italy, and from Italy to Greece, from Greece to Syria, from Syria to Asia, and not to return until his secret enemies were convinced of his repentance, and would so make tacit peace with him. But if he did not take that course, then the vidame advised him to stay in the house, and even in his own room, where he would be safe from the attempts of this man Ferragus, and not to leave it until he could be certain of crushing him.

"We should never touch an enemy until we can be sure of taking his head off," he said, gravely.

The old man, however, promised his favorite to employ all the astuteness with which Heaven had provided him (without compromising any one) in reconnoitring the enemy's ground, and laying his plans for future victory. The Commander had in his service a retired Figaro, the wiliest monkey that ever walked in human form; in earlier days as clever as a devil, working his body like a galley-slave, alert as a thief, sly as a woman, but now fallen into the decadence of genius for want of practice since the new

constitution of Parisian society, which has reformed even the valets of comedy. This Scapin emeritus was attached to his master as to a superior being; but the shrewd



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old vidame added a good round sum yearly to the wages of his former provost of gallantry, which strengthened the ties of natural affection by the bonds of self-interest, and obtained for the old gentleman as much care as the most loving mistress could bestow on a sick friend. It was this pearl of the old-fashioned comedy-valets, relic of the last century, auxiliary incorruptible from lack of passions to satisfy, on whom the old vidame and Monsieur de Maulincour now relied.

“Monsieur le baron will spoil all,” said the great man in livery, when called into counsel. “Monsieur should eat, drink, and sleep in peace. I take the whole matter upon myself.”

Accordingly, eight days after the conference, when Monsieur de Maulincour, perfectly restored to health, was breakfasting with his grandmother and the vidame, Justin entered to make his report. As soon as the dowager had returned to her own apartments he said, with that mock modesty which men of talent are so apt to affect:—

“Ferragus is not the name of the enemy who is pursuing Monsieur le baron. This man—this devil, rather—is called Gratien, Henri, Victor, Jean-Joseph Bourignard. The Sieur Gratien Bourignard is a former ship-builder, once very rich, and, above all, one of the handsomest men of his day in Paris,—a Lovelace, capable of seducing Grandison. My information stops short there. He has been a simple workman; and the Companions of the Order of the Devorants did, at one time, elect him as their chief, under the title of Ferragus XXIII. The police ought to know that, if the police were instituted to know anything. The man has moved from the rue des Vieux-Augustins, and now roosts rue Joquelet, where Madame Jules Desmarets goes frequently to see him; sometimes her husband, on his way to the Bourse, drives her as far as the rue Vivienne, or she drives her husband to the Bourse. Monsieur le vidame knows about these things too well to want me to tell him if it is the husband who takes the wife, or the wife who takes the husband; but Madame Jules is so pretty, I’d bet on her. All that I have told you is positive. Bourignard often plays at number 129. Saving your presence, monsieur, he’s a rogue who loves women, and he has his little ways like a man of condition. As for the rest, he wins sometimes, disguises himself like an actor, paints his face to look like anything he chooses, and lives, I may say, the most original life in the world. I don’t doubt he has a good many lodgings, for most of the time he manages to evade what Monsieur le vidame calls ‘parliamentary investigations.’ If monsieur wishes, he could be disposed of honorably, seeing what his habits are. It is always easy to get rid of a man who loves women. However, this capitalist talks about moving again. Have Monsieur le vidame and Monsieur le baron any other commands to give me?”

“Justin, I am satisfied with you; don’t go any farther in the matter without my orders, but keep a close watch here, so that Monsieur le baron may have nothing to fear.”



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“My dear boy,” continued the vidame, when they were alone, “go back to your old life, and forget Madame Jules.”

“No, no,” said Auguste; “I will never yield to Gratien Bourignard. I will have him bound hand and foot, and Madame Jules also.”

That evening the Baron Auguste de Maulincour, recently promoted to higher rank in the company of the Body-Guard of the king, went to a ball given by Madame la Duchesse de Berry at the Elysee-Bourbon. There, certainly, no danger could lurk for him; and yet, before he left the palace, he had an affair of honor on his hands,—an affair it was impossible to settle except by a duel.

His adversary, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, considered that he had strong reasons to complain of Monsieur de Maulincour, who had given some ground for it during his former intimacy with Monsieur de Ronquerolles' sister, the Comtesse de Serizy. That lady, the one who detested German sentimentality, was all the more exacting in the matter of prudery. By one of those inexplicable fatalities, Auguste now uttered a harmless jest which Madame de Serizy took amiss, and her brother resented it. The discussion took place in the corner of a room, in a low voice. In good society, adversaries never raise their voices. The next day the faubourg Saint-Germain and the Chateau talked over the affair. Madame de Serizy was warmly defended, and all the blame was laid on Maulincour. August personages interfered. Seconds of the highest distinction were imposed on Messieurs de Maulincour and de Ronquerolles and every precaution was taken on the ground that no one should be killed.

When Auguste found himself face to face with his antagonist, a man of pleasure, to whom no one could possibly deny sentiments of the highest honor, he felt it was impossible to believe him the instrument of Ferragus, chief of the Devorants; and yet he was compelled, as it were, by an inexplicable presentiment, to question the marquis.

“Messieurs,” he said to the seconds, “I certainly do not refuse to meet the fire of Monsieur de Ronquerolles; but before doing so, I here declare that I was to blame, and I offer him whatever excuses he may desire, and publicly if he wishes it; because when the matter concerns a woman, nothing, I think, can degrade a man of honor. I therefore appeal to his generosity and good sense; is there not something rather silly in fighting without a cause?”

Monsieur de Ronquerolles would not allow of this way of ending the affair, and then the baron, his suspicions revived, walked up to him.

“Well, then! Monsieur le marquis,” he said, “pledge me, in presence of these gentlemen, your word as a gentleman that you have no other reason for vengeance than that you have chosen to put forward.”



“Monsieur, that is a question you have no right to ask.”

So saying, Monsieur de Ronquerolles took his place. It was agreed, in advance, that the adversaries were to be satisfied with one exchange of shots. Monsieur de Ronquerolles, in spite of the great distance determined by the seconds, which seemed to make the death of either party problematical, if not impossible, brought down the baron. The ball went through the latter’s body just below the heart, but fortunately without doing vital injury.



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“You aimed too well, monsieur,” said the baron, “to be avenging only a paltry quarrel.”

And he fainted. Monsieur de Ronquerolles, who believed him to be a dead man, smiled sardonically as he heard those words.

After a fortnight, during which time the dowager and the vidame gave him those cares of old age the secret of which is in the hands of long experience only, the baron began to return to life. But one morning his grandmother dealt him a crushing blow, by revealing anxieties to which, in her last days, she was now subjected. She showed him a letter signed F, in which the history of her grandson’s secret espionage was recounted step by step. The letter accused Monsieur de Maulincour of actions that were unworthy of a man of honor. He had, it said, placed an old woman at the stand of hackney-coaches in the rue de Menars; an old spy, who pretended to sell water from her cask to the coachmen, but who was really there to watch the actions of Madame Jules Desmarests. He had spied upon the daily life of a most inoffensive man, in order to detect his secrets,—secrets on which depended the lives of three persons. He had brought upon himself a relentless struggle, in which, although he had escaped with life three times, he must inevitably succumb, because his death had been sworn and would be compassed if all human means were employed upon it. Monsieur de Maulincour could no longer escape his fate by even promising to respect the mysterious life of these three persons, because it was impossible to believe the word of a gentleman who had fallen to the level of a police-spy; and for what reason? Merely to trouble the respectable life of an innocent woman and a harmless old man.

The letter itself was nothing to Auguste in comparison to the tender reproaches of his grandmother. To lack respect to a woman! to spy upon her actions without a right to do so! Ought a man ever to spy upon a woman whom he loved?—in short, she poured out a torrent of those excellent reasons which prove nothing; and they put the young baron, for the first time in his life, into one of those great human furies in which are born, and from which issue the most vital actions of a man’s life.

“Since it is war to the knife,” he said in conclusion, “I shall kill my enemy by any means that I can lay hold of.”

The vidame went immediately, at Auguste’s request, to the chief of the private police of Paris, and without bringing Madame Jules’ name or person into the narrative, although they were really the gist of it, he made the official aware of the fears of the family of Maulincour about this mysterious person who was bold enough to swear the death of an officer of the Guards, in defiance of the law and the police. The chief pushed up his green spectacles in amazement, blew his nose several times, and offered snuff to the vidame, who, to save his dignity, pretended not to use tobacco, although his own nose was discolored with it. Then the chief took notes and promised, Vidocq and his spies aiding, to send in a report within a few days to the Maulincour family, assuring them meantime that there were no secrets for the police of Paris.

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A few days after this the police official called to see the vidame at the Hotel de Maulincour, where he found the young baron quite recovered from his last wound. He gave them in bureaucratic style his thanks for the indications they had afforded him, and told them that Bourignard was a convict, condemned to twenty years' hard labor, who had miraculously escaped from a gang which was being transported from Bicetre to Toulon. For thirteen years the police had been endeavoring to recapture him, knowing that he had boldly returned to Paris; but so far this convict had escaped the most active search, although he was known to be mixed up in many nefarious deeds. However, the man, whose life was full of very curious incidents, would certainly be captured now in one or other of his several domiciles and delivered up to justice. The bureaucrat ended his report by saying to Monsieur de Maulincour that if he attached enough importance to the matter to wish to witness the capture of Bourignard, he might come the next day at eight in the morning to a house in the rue Sainte-Foi, of which he gave him the number. Monsieur de Maulincour excused himself from going personally in search of certainty, —trusting, with the sacred respect inspired by the police of Paris, in the capability of the authorities.

Three days later, hearing nothing, and seeing nothing in the newspapers about the projected arrest, which was certainly of enough importance to have furnished an article, Monsieur de Maulincour was beginning to feel anxieties which were presently allayed by the following letter:—

Monsieur le Baron,—I have the honor to announce to you that you need have no further uneasiness touching the affair in question. The man named Gratien Bourignard, otherwise called Ferragus, died yesterday, at his lodgings, rue Joquelet No. 7. The suspicions we naturally conceived as to the identity of the dead body have been completely set at rest by the facts. The physician of the Prefecture of police was despatched by us to assist the physician of the arrondissement, and the chief of the detective police made all the necessary verifications to obtain absolute certainty. Moreover, the character of the persons who signed the certificate of death, and the affidavits of those who took care of the said Bourignard in his last illness, among others that of the worthy vicar of the church of the Bonne-Nouvelle (to whom he made his last confession, for he died a Christian), do not permit us to entertain any sort of doubt.

Accept, Monsieur le baron, *etc.*, *etc.*

Monsieur de Maulincour, the dowager, and the vidame breathed again with joy unspeakable. The good old woman kissed her grandson leaving a tear upon his cheek, and went away to thank God in prayer. The dear soul, who was making a novena for Auguste's safety, believed her prayers were answered.

“Well,” said the vidame, “now you had better show yourself at the ball you were speaking of. I oppose no further objections.”



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CHAPTER III

THE WIFE ACCUSED

Monsieur de Maulincour was all the more anxious to go to this ball because he knew that Madame Jules would be present. The fete was given by the Prefect of the Seine, in whose salons the two social worlds of Paris met as on neutral ground. Auguste passed through the rooms without finding the woman who now exercised so mighty an influence on his fate. He entered an empty boudoir where card-tables were placed awaiting players; and sitting down on a divan he gave himself up to the most contradictory thoughts about her. A man presently took the young officer by the arm, and looking up the baron was stupefied to behold the pauper of the rue Coquilliere, the Ferragus of Ida, the lodger in the rue Soly, the Bourignard of Justin, the convict of the police, and the dead man of the day before.

“Monsieur, not a sound, not a word,” said Bourignard, whose voice he recognized. The man was elegantly dressed; he wore the order of the Golden-Fleece, and a medal on his coat. “Monsieur,” he continued, and his voice was sibilant like that of a hyena, “you increase my efforts against you by having recourse to the police. You will perish, monsieur; it has now become necessary. Do you love Madame Jules? Are you beloved by her? By what right do you trouble her peaceful life, and blacken her virtue?”

Some one entered the card-room. Ferragus rose to go.

“Do you know this man?” asked Monsieur de Maulincour of the new-comer, seizing Ferragus by the collar. But Ferragus quickly disengaged himself, took Monsieur de Maulincour by the hair, and shook his head rapidly.

“Must you have lead in it to make it steady?” he said.

“I do not know him personally,” replied Henri de Marsay, the spectator of this scene, “but I know that he is Monsieur de Funcal, a rich Portuguese.”

Monsieur de Funcal had disappeared. The baron followed but without being able to overtake him until he reached the peristyle, where he saw Ferragus, who looked at him with a jeering laugh from a brilliant equipage which was driven away at high speed.

“Monsieur,” said Auguste, re-entering the salon and addressing de Marsay, whom he knew, “I entreat you to tell me where Monsieur de Funcal lives.”

“I do not know; but some one here can no doubt tell you.”

The baron, having questioned the prefect, ascertained that the Comte de Funcal lived at the Portuguese embassy. At this moment, while he still felt the icy fingers of that



strange man in his hair, he saw Madame Jules in all her dazzling beauty, fresh, gracious, artless, resplendent with the sanctity of womanhood which had won his love. This creature, now infernal to him, excited no emotion in his soul but that of hatred; and this hatred shone in a savage, terrible look from his eyes. He watched for a moment when he could speak to her unheard, and then he said:—



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“Madame, your *bravi* have missed me three times.”

“What do you mean, monsieur?” she said, flushing. “I know that you have had several unfortunate accidents lately, which I have greatly regretted; but how could I have had anything to do with them?”

“You knew that *bravi* were employed against me by that man of the rue Soly?”

“Monsieur!”

“Madame, I now call you to account, not for my happiness only, but for my blood—”

At this instant Jules Desmarets approached them.

“What are you saying to my wife, monsieur?”

“Make that inquiry at my own house, monsieur, if you are curious,” said Maulincour, moving away, and leaving Madame Jules in an almost fainting condition.

There are few women who have not found themselves, once at least in their lives, a *propos* of some undeniable fact, confronted with a direct, sharp, uncompromising question,—one of those questions pitilessly asked by husbands, the mere apprehension of which gives a chill, while the actual words enter the heart like the blade of a dagger. It is from such crises that the maxim has come, “All women lie.” Falsehood, kindly falsehood, venial falsehood, sublime falsehood, horrible falsehood,—but always the necessity to lie. This necessity admitted, ought they not to know how to lie well? French women do it admirably. Our manners and customs teach them deception! Besides, women are so naively saucy, so pretty, graceful, and withal so true in lying,—they recognize so fully the utility of doing so in order to avoid in social life the violent shocks which happiness might not resist,—that lying is seen to be as necessary to their lives as the cotton-wool in which they put away their jewels. Falsehood becomes to them the foundation of speech; truth is exceptional; they tell it, if they are virtuous, by caprice or by calculation. According to individual character, some women laugh when they lie; others weep; others are grave; some grow angry. After beginning life by feigning indifference to the homage that deeply flatters them, they often end by lying to themselves. Who has not admired their apparent superiority to everything at the very moment when they are trembling for the secret treasures of their love? Who has never studied their ease, their readiness, their freedom of mind in the greatest embarrassments of life? In them, nothing is put on. Deception comes as the snow from heaven. And then, with what art they discover the truth in others! With what shrewdness they employ a direct logic in answer to some passionate question which has revealed to them the secret of the heart of a man who was guileless enough to proceed by questioning! To question a woman! why, that is delivering one’s self up to her; does she not learn in that way all that we seek to hide from her? Does she not

know also how to be dumb, through speaking? What men are daring enough to struggle with the Parisian woman?—a



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woman who knows how to hold herself above all dagger thrusts, saying: “You are very inquisitive; what is it to you? Why do you wish to know? Ah! you are jealous! And suppose I do not choose to answer you?”—in short, a woman who possesses the hundred and thirty-seven methods of saying *No*, and incommensurable variations of the word *Yes*. Is not a treatise on the words *yes* and *no*, a fine diplomatic, philosophic, logographic, and moral work, still waiting to be written? But to accomplish this work, which we may also call diabolic, isn’t an androgynous genius necessary? For that reason, probably, it will never be attempted. And besides, of all unpublished works isn’t it the best known and the best practised among women? Have you studied the behavior, the pose, the *disinvoltura* of a falsehood? Examine it.

Madame Desmarets was seated in the right-hand corner of her carriage, her husband in the left. Having forced herself to recover from her emotion in the ballroom, she now affected a calm demeanor. Her husband had then said nothing to her, and he still said nothing. Jules looked out of the carriage window at the black walls of the silent houses before which they passed; but suddenly, as if driven by a determining thought, when turning the corner of a street he examined his wife, who appeared to be cold in spite of the fur-lined pelisse in which she was wrapped. He thought she seemed pensive, and perhaps she really was so. Of all communicable things, reflection and gravity are the most contagious.

“What could Monsieur de Maulincour have said to affect you so keenly?” said Jules; “and why does he wish me to go to his house and find out?”

“He can tell you nothing in his house that I cannot tell you here,” she replied.

Then, with that feminine craft which always slightly degrades virtue, Madame Jules waited for another question. Her husband turned his face back to the houses, and continued his study of their walls. Another question would imply suspicion, distrust. To suspect a woman is a crime in love. Jules had already killed a man for doubting his wife. Clemence did not know all there was of true passion, of loyal reflection, in her husband’s silence; just as Jules was ignorant of the generous drama that was wringing the heart of his Clemence.

The carriage rolled on through a silent Paris, bearing the couple, —two lovers who adored each other, and who, gently leaning on the same silken cushion, were being parted by an abyss. In these elegant coupes returning from a ball between midnight and two in the morning, how many curious and singular scenes must pass,—meaning those coupes with lanterns, which light both the street and the carriage, those with their windows unshaded; in short, legitimate coupes, in which couples can quarrel without caring for the eyes of pedestrians, because the civil code gives a right to provoke, or beat, or kiss, a wife in a carriage or elsewhere, anywhere, everywhere! How many



secrets must be revealed in this way to nocturnal pedestrians,—to those young fellows who have gone to a ball in a carriage, but are obliged, for whatever cause it may be, to return on foot. It was the first time that Jules and Clemence had been together thus,—each in a corner; usually the husband pressed close to his wife.



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"It is very cold," remarked Madame Jules.

But her husband did not hear her; he was studying the signs above the shop windows.

"Clemence," he said at last, "forgive me the question I am about to ask you."

He came closer, took her by the waist, and drew her to him.

"My God, it is coming!" thought the poor woman. "Well," she said aloud, anticipating the question, "you want to know what Monsieur de Maulincour said to me. I will tell you, Jules; but not without fear. Good God! how is it possible that you and I should have secrets from one another? For the last few moments I have seen you struggling between a conviction of our love and vague fears. But that conviction is clear within us, is it not? And these doubts and fears, do they not seem to you dark and unnatural? Why not stay in that clear light of love you cannot doubt? When I have told you all, you will still desire to know more; and yet I myself do not know what the extraordinary words of that man meant. What I fear is that this may lead to some fatal affair between you. I would rather that we both forget this unpleasant moment. But, in any case, swear to me that you will let this singular adventure explain itself naturally. Here are the facts. Monsieur de Maulincour declared to me that the three accidents you have heard mentioned—the falling of a stone on his servant, the breaking down of his cabriolet, and his duel about Madame de Serizy—were the result of some plot I had laid against him. He also threatened to reveal to you the cause of my desire to destroy him. Can you imagine what all this means? My emotion came from the sight of his face convulsed with madness, his haggard eyes, and also his words, broken by some violent inward emotion. I thought him mad. That is all that took place. Now, I should be less than a woman if I had not perceived that for over a year I have become, as they call it, the passion of Monsieur de Maulincour. He has never seen me except at a ball; and our intercourse has been most insignificant,—merely that which every one shares at a ball. Perhaps he wants to disunite us, so that he may find me at some future time alone and unprotected. There, see! already you are frowning! Oh, how cordially I hate society! We were so happy without him; why take any notice of him? Jules, I entreat you, forget all this! To-morrow we shall, no doubt, hear that Monsieur de Maulincour has gone mad."

"What a singular affair!" thought Jules, as the carriage stopped under the peristyle of their house. He gave his arm to his wife and together they went up to their apartments.

To develop this history in all its truth of detail, and to follow its course through many windings, it is necessary here to divulge some of love's secrets, to glide beneath the ceilings of a marriage chamber, not shamelessly, but like Trilby, frightening neither Dougal nor Jeannie, alarming no one,—being as chaste as our noble French language requires, and as bold as the pencil of Gerard in his picture of Daphnis and Chloe.

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The bedroom of Madame Jules was a sacred plot. Herself, her husband, and her maid alone entered it. Opulence has glorious privileges, and the most enviable are those which enable the development of sentiments to their fullest extent,—fertilizing them by the accomplishment of even their caprices, and surrounding them with a brilliancy that enlarges them, with refinements that purify them, with a thousand delicacies that make them still more alluring. If you hate dinners on the grass, and meals ill-served, if you feel a pleasure in seeing a damask cloth that is dazzlingly white, a silver-gilt dinner service, and porcelain of exquisite purity, lighted by transparent candles, where miracles of cookery are served under silver covers bearing coats of arms, you must, to be consistent, leave the garrets at the tops of the houses, and the grisettes in the streets, abandon garrets, grisettes, umbrellas, and overshoes to men who pay for their dinners with tickets; and you must also comprehend Love to be a principle which develops in all its grace only on Savonnerie carpets, beneath the opal gleams of an alabaster lamp, between guarded walls silk-hung, before gilded hearths in chambers deadened to all outward sounds by shutters and billowy curtains. Mirrors must be there to show the play of form and repeat the woman we would multiply as love itself multiplies and magnifies her; next low divans, and a bed which, like a secret, is divined, not shown. In this coquettish chamber are fur-lined slippers for pretty feet, wax-candles under glass with muslin draperies, by which to read at all hours of the night, and flowers, not those oppressive to the head, and linen, the fineness of which might have satisfied Anne of Austria.

Madame Jules had realized this charming programme, but that was nothing. All women of taste can do as much, though there is always in the arrangement of these details a stamp of personality which gives to this decoration or that detail a character that cannot be imitated. To-day, more than ever, reigns the fanaticism of individuality. The more our laws tend to an impossible equality, the more we shall get away from it in our manners and customs. Thus, rich people are beginning, in France, to become more exclusive in their tastes and their belongings, than they have been for the last thirty years. Madame Jules knew very well how to carry out this programme; and everything about her was arranged in harmony with a luxury that suits so well with love. Love in a cottage, or “Fifteen hundred francs and my Sophy,” is the dream of starvelings to whom black bread suffices in their present state; but when love really comes, they grow fastidious and end by craving the luxuries of gastronomy. Love holds toil and poverty in horror. It would rather die than merely live on from hand to mouth.



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Many women, returning from a ball, impatient for their beds, throw off their gowns, their faded flowers, their bouquets, the fragrance of which has now departed. They leave their little shoes beneath a chair, the white strings trailing; they take out their combs and let their hair roll down as it will. Little they care if their husbands see the puffs, the hairpins, the artful props which supported the elegant edifices of the hair, and the garlands or the jewels that adorned it. No more mysteries! all is over for the husband; no more painting or decoration for him. The corset—half the time it is a corset of a reparative kind—lies where it is thrown, if the maid is too sleepy to take it away with her. The whalebone bustle, the oiled-silk protections round the sleeves, the pads, the hair bought from a coiffeur, all the false woman is there, scattered about in open sight. *Disjecta membra poetae*, the artificial poesy, so much admired by those for whom it is conceived and elaborated, the fragments of a pretty woman, litter every corner of the room. To the love of a yawning husband, the actual presents herself, also yawning, in a dishabille without elegance, and a tumbled night-cap, that of last night and that of tomorrow night also,—“For really, monsieur, if you want a pretty cap to rumple every night, increase my pin-money.”

There’s life as it is! A woman makes herself old and unpleasing to her husband; but dainty and elegant and adorned for others, for the rival of all husbands,—for that world which calumniates and tears to shreds her sex.

Inspired by true love, for Love has, like other creations, its instinct of preservation, Madame Jules did very differently; she found in the constant blessing of her love the necessary impulse to fulfil all those minute personal cares which ought never to be relaxed, because they perpetuate love. Besides, such personal cares and duties proceed from a personal dignity which becomes all women, and are among the sweetest of flatteries, for is it not respecting in themselves the man they love?

So Madame Jules denied to her husband all access to her dressing-room, where she left the accessories of her toilet, and whence she issued mysteriously adorned for the mysterious fetes of her heart. Entering their chamber, which was always graceful and elegant, Jules found a woman coquettishly wrapped in a charming *peignoir*, her hair simply wound in heavy coils around her head; a woman always more simple, more beautiful there than she was before the world; a woman just refreshed in water, whose only artifice consisted in being whiter than her muslins, sweeter than all perfumes, more seductive than any siren, always loving and therefore always loved. This admirable understanding of a wife’s business was the secret of Josephine’s charm for Napoleon, as in former times it was that of Caesonia for Caius Caligula, of Diane de Poitiers for Henri II. If it was largely productive to women of seven or eight lustres what a weapon is it in the hands of young women! A husband gathers with delight the rewards of his fidelity.



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Returning home after the conversation which had chilled her with fear, and still gave her the keenest anxiety, Madame Jules took particular pains with her toilet for the night. She wanted to make herself, and she did make herself enchanting. She belted the cambric of her dressing-gown round her waist, defining the lines of her bust; she allowed her hair to fall upon her beautifully modelled shoulders. A perfumed bath had given her a delightful fragrance, and her little bare feet were in velvet slippers. Strong in a sense of her advantages she came in stepping softly, and put her hands over her husband's eyes. She thought him pensive; he was standing in his dressing-gown before the fire, his elbow on the mantel and one foot on the fender. She said in his ear, warming it with her breath, and nibbling the tip of it with her teeth:—

“What are you thinking about, monsieur?”

Then she pressed him in her arms as if to tear him away from all evil thoughts. The woman who loves has a full knowledge of her power; the more virtuous she is, the more effectual her coquetry.

“About you,” he answered.

“Only about me?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! that's a very doubtful 'yes.'”

They went to bed. As she fell asleep, Madame Jules said to herself:—

“Monsieur de Maulincour will certainly cause some evil. Jules' mind is preoccupied, disturbed; he is nursing thoughts he does not tell me.”

It was three in the morning when Madame Jules was awakened by a presentiment which struck her heart as she slept. She had a sense both physical and moral of her husband's absence. She did not feel the arm Jules passed beneath her head,—that arm in which she had slept, peacefully and happy, for five years; an arm she had never wearied. A voice said to her, “Jules suffers, Jules is weeping.” She raised her head, and then sat up; felt that her husband's place was cold, and saw him sitting before the fire, his feet on the fender, his head resting against the back of an arm-chair. Tears were on his cheeks. The poor woman threw herself hastily from her bed and sprang at a bound to her husband's knees.

“Jules! what is it? Are you ill? Speak, tell me! Speak to me, if you love me!” and she poured out a hundred words expressing the deepest tenderness.

Jules knelt at her feet, kissed her hands and knees, and answered with fresh tears:—



“Dear Clemence, I am most unhappy! It is not loving to distrust the one we love. I adore you and suspect you. The words that man said to me to-night have struck to my heart; they stay there in spite of myself, and confound me. There is some mystery here. In short, and I blush to say it, your explanations do not satisfy me. My reason casts gleams into my soul which my love rejects. It is an awful combat. Could I stay there, holding your head, and suspecting thoughts within it to me unknown? Oh! I believe in you, I believe



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in you!" he cried, seeing her smile sadly and open her mouth as if to speak. "Say nothing; do not reproach me. Besides, could you say anything I have not said myself for the last three hours? Yes, for three hours, I have been here, watching you as you slept, so beautiful! admiring that pure, peaceful brow. Yes, yes! you have always told me your thoughts, have you not? I alone am in that soul. While I look at you, while my eyes can plunge into yours I see all plainly. Your life is as pure as your glance is clear. No, there is no secret behind those transparent eyes." He rose and kissed their lids. "Let me avow to you, dearest soul," he said, "that for the last five years each day has increased my happiness, through the knowledge that you are all mine, and that no natural affection even can take any of your love. Having no sister, no father, no mother, no companion, I am neither above nor below any living being in your heart; I am alone there. Clemence, repeat to me those sweet things of the spirit you have so often said to me; do not blame me; comfort me, I am so unhappy. I have an odious suspicion on my conscience, and you have nothing in your heart to sear it. My beloved, tell me, could I stay there beside you? Could two heads united as ours have been lie on the same pillow when one was suffering and the other tranquil? What are you thinking of?" he cried abruptly, observing that Clemence was anxious, confused, and seemed unable to restrain her tears.

"I am thinking of my mother," she answered, in a grave voice. "You will never know, Jules, what I suffer in remembering my mother's dying farewell, said in a voice sweeter than all music, and in feeling the solemn touch of her icy hand at a moment when you overwhelm me with those assurances of your precious love."

She raised her husband, strained him to her with a nervous force greater than that of men, and kissed his hair, covering it with tears.

"Ah! I would be hacked in pieces for you! Tell me that I make you happy; that I am to you the most beautiful of women—a thousand women to you. Oh! you are loved as no other man ever was or will be. I don't know the meaning of those words 'duty,' 'virtue.' Jules, I love you for yourself; I am happy in loving you; I shall love you more and more to my dying day. I have pride in my love; I feel it is my destiny to have one sole emotion in my life. What I shall tell you now is dreadful, I know—but I am glad to have no child; I do not wish for any. I feel I am more wife than mother. Well, then, can you fear? Listen to me, my own beloved, promise to forget, not this hour of mingled tenderness and doubt, but the words of that madman. Jules, you *must*. Promise me not to see him, not to go to him. I have a deep conviction that if you set one foot in that maze we shall both roll down a precipice where I shall perish—but with your name upon my lips, your heart in my heart. Why hold me so high in that heart and yet so low in



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reality? What! you who give credit to so many as to money, can you not give me the charity of faith? And on the first occasion in our lives when you might prove to me your boundless trust, do you cast me from my throne in your heart? Between a madman and me, it is the madman whom you choose to believe? oh, Jules!" She stopped, threw back the hair that fell about her brow and neck, and then, in a heart-rending tone, she added: "I have said too much; one word should suffice. If your soul and your forehead still keep this cloud, however light it be, I tell you now that I shall die of it."

She could not repress a shudder, and turned pale.

"Oh! I will kill that man," thought Jules, as he lifted his wife in his arms and carried her to her bed.

"Let us sleep in peace, my angel," he said. "I have forgotten all, I swear it!"

Clemence fell asleep to the music of those sweet words, softly repeated. Jules, as he watched her sleeping, said in his heart:—

"She is right; when love is so pure, suspicion blights it. To that young soul, that tender flower, a blight—yes, a blight means death."

When a cloud comes between two beings filled with affection for each other and whose lives are in absolute unison, that cloud, though it may disperse, leaves in those souls a trace of its passage. Either love gains a stronger life, as the earth after rain, or the shock still echoes like distant thunder through a cloudless sky. It is impossible to recover absolutely the former life; love will either increase or diminish.

At breakfast, Monsieur and Madame Jules showed to each other those particular attentions in which there is always something of affectation. There were glances of forced gaiety, which seemed the efforts of persons endeavoring to deceive themselves. Jules had involuntary doubts, his wife had positive fears. Still, sure of each other, they had slept. Was this strained condition the effect of a want of faith, or was it only a memory of their nocturnal scene? They did not know themselves. But they loved each other so purely that the impression of that scene, both cruel and beneficent, could not fail to leave its traces in their souls; both were eager to make those traces disappear, each striving to be the first to return to the other, and thus they could not fail to think of the cause of their first variance. To loving souls, this is not grief; pain is still far-off; but it is a sort of mourning, which is difficult to depict. If there are, indeed, relations between colors and the emotions of the soul, if, as Locke's blind man said, scarlet produces on the sight the effect produced upon the hearing by a blast of trumpets, it is permissible to compare this reaction of melancholy to mourning tones of gray.



But even so, love saddened, love in which remains a true sentiment of its happiness, momentarily troubled though it be, gives enjoyments derived from pain and pleasure both, which are all novel. Jules studied his wife's voice; he watched her glances with the freshness of feeling that inspired him in the earliest days of his passion for her. The memory of five absolutely happy years, her beauty, the candor of her love, quickly effaced in her husband's mind the last vestiges of an intolerable pain.

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The day was Sunday,—a day on which there was no Bourse and no business to be done. The reunited pair passed the whole day together, getting farther into each other's hearts than they ever yet had done, like two children who in a moment of fear, hold each other closely and cling together, united by an instinct. There are in this life of two-in-one completely happy days, the gift of chance, ephemeral flowers, born neither of yesterday nor belonging to the morrow. Jules and Clemence now enjoyed this day as though they forboded it to be the last of their loving life. What name shall we give to that mysterious power which hastens the steps of travellers before the storm is visible; which makes the life and beauty of the dying so resplendent, and fills the parting soul with joyous projects for days before death comes; which tells the midnight student to fill his lamp when it shines brightest; and makes the mother fear the thoughtful look cast upon her infant by an observing man? We all are affected by this influence in the great catastrophes of life; but it has never yet been named or studied; it is something more than presentiment, but not as yet clear vision.

All went well till the following day. On Monday, Jules Desmarets, obliged to go to the Bourse on his usual business, asked his wife, as usual, if she would take advantage of his carriage and let him drive her anywhere.

“No,” she said, “the day is too unpleasant to go out.”

It was raining in torrents. At half-past two o'clock Monsieur Desmarets reached the Treasury. At four o'clock, as he left the Bourse, he came face to face with Monsieur de Maulincour, who was waiting for him with the nervous pertinacity of hatred and vengeance.

“Monsieur,” he said, taking Monsieur Desmarets by the arm, “I have important information to give you. Listen to me. I am too loyal a man to have recourse to anonymous letters with which to trouble your peace of mind; I prefer to speak to you in person. Believe me, if my very life were not concerned, I should not meddle with the private affairs of any household, even if I thought I had the right to do so.”

“If what you have to say to me concerns Madame Desmarets,” replied Jules, “I request you to be silent, monsieur.”

“If I am silent, monsieur, you may before long see Madame Jules on the prisoner's bench at the court of assizes beside a convict. Now, do you wish me to be silent?”

Jules turned pale; but his noble face instantly resumed its calmness, though it was now a false calmness. Drawing the baron under one of the temporary sheds of the Bourse, near which they were standing, he said to him in a voice which concealed his intense inward emotion:—

“Monsieur, I will listen to you; but there will be a duel to the death between us if—”



“Oh, to that I consent!” cried Monsieur de Maulincour. “I have the greatest esteem for your character. You speak of death. You are unaware that your wife may have assisted in poisoning me last Saturday night. Yes, monsieur, since then some extraordinary evil has developed in me. My hair appears to distil an inward fever and a deadly languor through my skull; I know who clutched my hair at that ball.”



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Monsieur de Maulincour then related, without omitting a single fact, his platonic love for Madame Jules, and the details of the affair in the rue Soly which began this narrative. Any one would have listened to him with attention; but Madame Jules' husband had good reason to be more amazed than any other human being. Here his character displayed itself; he was more amazed than overcome. Made a judge, and the judge of an adored woman, he found in his soul the equity of a judge as well as the inflexibility. A lover still, he thought less of his own shattered life than of his wife's life; he listened, not to his own anguish, but to some far-off voice that cried to him, "Clemence cannot lie! Why should she betray you?"

"Monsieur," said the baron, as he ended, "being absolutely certain of having recognized in Monsieur de Funcal the same Ferragus whom the police declared dead, I have put upon his traces an intelligent man. As I returned that night I remembered, by a fortunate chance, the name of Madame Meynardie, mentioned in that letter of Ida, the presumed mistress of my persecutor. Supplied with this clue, my emissary will soon get to the bottom of this horrible affair; for he is far more able to discover the truth than the police themselves."

"Monsieur," replied Desmarests, "I know not how to thank you for this confidence. You say that you can obtain proofs and witnesses; I shall await them. I shall seek the truth of this strange affair courageously; but you must permit me to doubt everything until the evidence of the facts you state is proved to me. In any case you shall have satisfaction, for, as you will certainly understand, we both require it."

Jules returned home.

"What is the matter, Jules?" asked his wife, when she saw him. "You look so pale you frighten me!"

"The day is cold," he answered, walking with slow steps across the room where all things spoke to him of love and happiness,—that room so calm and peaceful where a deadly storm was gathering.

"Did you go out to-day?" he asked, as though mechanically.

He was impelled to ask the question by the last of a myriad of thoughts which had gathered themselves together into a lucid meditation, though jealousy was actively prompting them.

"No," she answered, in a tone that was falsely candid.

At that instant Jules saw through the open door of the dressing-room the velvet bonnet which his wife wore in the mornings; on it were drops of rain. Jules was a passionate man, but he was also full of delicacy. It was repugnant to him to bring his wife face to



face with a lie. When such a situation occurs, all has come to an end forever between certain beings. And yet those drops of rain were like a flash tearing through his brain.

He left the room, went down to the porter's lodge, and said to the porter, after making sure that they were alone:—

“Fouguereau, a hundred crowns if you tell me the truth; dismissal if you deceive me; and nothing at all if you ever speak of my question and your answer.”



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He stopped to examine the man's face, leading him under the window. Then he continued:—

“Did madame go out this morning?”

“Madame went out at a quarter to three, and I think I saw her come in about half an hour ago.”

“That is true, upon your honor?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“You will have the money; but if you speak of this, remember, you will lose all.”

Jules returned to his wife.

“Clemence,” he said, “I find I must put my accounts in order. Do not be offended at the inquiry I am going to make. Have I not given you forty thousand francs since the beginning of the year?”

“More,” she said,—“forty-seven.”

“Have you spent them?”

“Nearly,” she replied. “In the first place, I had to pay several of our last year's bills—”

“I shall never find out anything in this way,” thought Jules. “I am not taking the best course.”

At this moment Jules' own valet entered the room with a letter for his master, who opened it indifferently, but as soon as his eyes had lighted on the signature he read it eagerly. The letter was as follows:—

Monsieur,—For the sake of your peace of mind as well as ours, I take the course of writing you this letter without possessing the advantage of being known to you; but my position, my age, and the fear of some misfortune compel me to entreat you to show indulgence in the trying circumstances under which our afflicted family is placed. Monsieur Auguste de Maulincour has for the last few days shown signs of mental derangement, and we fear that he may trouble your happiness by fancies which he confided to Monsieur le Vidame de Pamiers and myself during his first attack of frenzy. We think it right, therefore, to warn you of his malady, which is, we hope, curable; but it will have such serious and important effects on the honor of our family and the career of my grandson that we must rely, monsieur, on your entire discretion.



If Monsieur le Vidame or I could have gone to see you we would not have written. But I make no doubt that you will regard this prayer of a mother, who begs you to destroy this letter.

Accept the assurance of my perfect consideration.

Baronne de Maulincour, *nee* de Rieux.

“Oh! what torture!” cried Jules.

“What is it? what is in your mind?” asked his wife, exhibiting the deepest anxiety.

“I have come,” he answered, slowly, as he threw her the letter, “to ask myself whether it can be you who have sent me that to avert my suspicions. Judge, therefore, what I suffer.”

“Unhappy man!” said Madame Jules, letting fall the paper. “I pity him; though he has done me great harm.”

“Are you aware that he has spoken to me?”

“Oh! have you been to see him, in spite of your promise?” she cried in terror.

“Clemence, our love is in danger of perishing; we stand outside of the ordinary rules of life; let us lay aside all petty considerations in presence of this great peril. Explain to me why you went out this morning. Women think they have the right to tell us little falsehoods. Sometimes they like to hide a pleasure they are preparing for us. Just now you said a word to me, by mistake, no doubt, a no for a yes.”



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He went into the dressing-room and brought out the bonnet.

“See,” he said, “your bonnet has betrayed you; these spots are raindrops. You must, therefore, have gone out in a street cab, and these drops fell upon it as you went to find one, or as you entered or left the house where you went. But a woman can leave her own home for many innocent purposes, even after she has told her husband that she did not mean to go out. There are so many reasons for changing our plans! Caprices, whims, are they not your right? Women are not required to be consistent with themselves. You had forgotten something,—a service to render, a visit, some kind action. But nothing hinders a woman from telling her husband what she does. Can we ever blush on the breast of a friend? It is not a jealous husband who speaks to you, my Clemence; it is your lover, your friend, your brother.” He flung himself passionately at her feet. “Speak, not to justify yourself, but to calm my horrible sufferings. I know that you went out. Well—what did you do? where did you go?”

“Yes, I went out, Jules,” she answered in a strained voice, though her face was calm. “But ask me nothing more. Wait; have confidence; without which you will lay up for yourself terrible remorse. Jules, my Jules, trust is the virtue of love. I owe to you that I am at this moment too troubled to answer you: but I am not a false woman; I love you, and you know it.”

“In the midst of all that can shake the faith of man and rouse his jealousy, for I see I am not first in your heart, I am no longer thine own self—well, Clemence, even so, I prefer to believe you, to believe that voice, to believe those eyes. If you deceive me, you deserve—”

“Ten thousand deaths!” she cried, interrupting him.

“I have never hidden a thought from you, but you—”

“Hush!” she said, “our happiness depends upon our mutual silence.”

“Ha! I *will* know all!” he exclaimed, with sudden violence.

At that moment the cries of a woman were heard,—the yelping of a shrill little voice came from the antechamber.

“I tell you I will go in!” it cried. “Yes, I shall go in; I will see her! I shall see her!”

Jules and Clemence both ran to the salon as the door from the antechamber was violently burst open. A young woman entered hastily, followed by two servants, who said to their master:—

“Monsieur, this person would come in in spite of us. We told her that madame was not at home. She answered that she knew very well madame had been out, but she saw



her come in. She threatened to stay at the door of the house till she could speak to madame.”

“You can go,” said Monsieur Desmarets to the two men. “What do you want, mademoiselle?” he added, turning to the strange woman.



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This “demoiselle” was the type of a woman who is never to be met with except in Paris. She is made in Paris, like the mud, like the pavement, like the water of the Seine, such as it becomes in Paris before human industry filters it ten times ere it enters the cut-glass decanters and sparkles pure and bright from the filth it has been. She is therefore a being who is truly original. Depicted scores of times by the painter’s brush, the pencil of the caricaturist, the charcoal of the etcher, she still escapes analysis, because she cannot be caught and rendered in all her moods, like Nature, like this fantastic Paris itself. She holds to vice by one thread only, and she breaks away from it at a thousand other points of the social circumference. Besides, she lets only one trait of her character be known, and that the only one which renders her blamable; her noble virtues are hidden; she prefers to glory in her naive libertinism. Most incompletely rendered in dramas and tales where she is put upon the scene with all her poesy, she is nowhere really true but in her garret; elsewhere she is invariably calumniated or over-praised. Rich, she deteriorates; poor, she is misunderstood. She has too many vices, and too many good qualities; she is too near to pathetic asphyxiation or to a dissolute laugh; too beautiful and too hideous. She personifies Paris, to which, in the long run, she supplies the toothless portresses, washerwomen, street-sweepers, beggars, occasionally insolent countesses, admired actresses, applauded singers; she has even given, in the olden time, two quasi-queens to the monarchy. Who can grasp such a Proteus? She is all woman, less than woman, more than woman. From this vast portrait the painter of manners and morals can take but a feature here and there; the *ensemble* is infinite.

She was a grisette of Paris; a grisette in all her glory; a grisette in a hackney-coach,—happy, young, handsome, fresh, but a grisette; a grisette with claws, scissors, impudent as a Spanish woman, snarling as a prudish English woman proclaiming her conjugal rights, coquettish as a great lady, though more frank, and ready for everything; a perfect *lionne* in her way; issuing from the little apartment of which she had dreamed so often, with its red-calico curtains, its Utrecht velvet furniture, its tea-table, the cabinet of china with painted designs, the sofa, the little moquette carpet, the alabaster clock and candlesticks (under glass cases), the yellow bedroom, the eider-down quilt,—in short, all the domestic joys of a grisette’s life; and in addition, the woman-of-all-work (a former grisette herself, now the owner of a moustache), theatre-parties, unlimited bonbons, silk dresses, bonnets to spoil,—in fact, all the felicities coveted by the grisette heart except a carriage, which only enters her imagination as a marshal’s baton into the dreams of a soldier. Yes, this grisette had all these things in return for a true affection, or in spite of a true affection, as some others obtain it for an hour a day,—a sort of tax carelessly paid under the claws of an old man.



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The young woman who now entered the presence of Monsieur and Madame Jules had a pair of feet so little covered by her shoes that only a slim black line was visible between the carpet and her white stockings. This peculiar foot-gear, which Parisian caricaturists have well-rendered, is a special attribute of the grisette of Paris; but she is even more distinctive to the eyes of an observer by the care with which her garments are made to adhere to her form, which they clearly define. On this occasion she was trigly dressed in a green gown, with a white chemisette, which allowed the beauty of her bust to be seen; her shawl, of Ternaux cashmere, had fallen from her shoulders, and was held by its two corners, which were twisted round her wrists. She had a delicate face, rosy cheeks, a white skin, sparkling gray eyes, a round, very promising forehead, hair carefully smoothed beneath her little bonnet, and heavy curls upon her neck.

“My name is Ida,” she said, “and if that’s Madame Jules to whom I have the advantage of speaking, I’ve come to tell her all I have in my heart against her. It is very wrong, when a woman is set up and in her furniture, as you are here, to come and take from a poor girl a man with whom I’m as good as married, morally, and who did talk of making it right by marrying me before the municipality. There’s plenty of handsome young men in the world—ain’t there, monsieur?—to take your fancy, without going after a man of middle age, who makes my happiness. Yah! I haven’t got a fine hotel like this, but I’ve got my love, I have. I hate handsome men and money; I’m all heart, and—”

Madame Jules turned to her husband.

“You will allow me, monsieur, to hear no more of all this,” she said, retreating to her bedroom.

“If the lady lives with you, I’ve made a mess of it; but I can’t help that,” resumed Ida. “Why does she come after Monsieur Ferragus every day?”

“You are mistaken, mademoiselle,” said Jules, stupefied; “my wife is incapable—”

“Ha! so you’re married, you two,” said the grisette showing some surprise. “Then it’s very wrong, monsieur,—isn’t it?—for a woman who has the happiness of being married in legal marriage to have relations with a man like Henri—”

“Henri! who is Henri?” said Jules, taking Ida by the arm and pulling her into an adjoining room that his wife might hear no more.

“Why, Monsieur Ferragus.”

“But he is dead,” said Jules.

“Nonsense; I went to Franconi’s with him last night, and he brought me home—as he ought. Besides, your wife can tell you about him; didn’t she go there this very afternoon at three o’clock? I know she did, for I waited in the street, and saw her,—all because



that good-natured fellow, Monsieur Justin, whom you know perhaps,—a little old man with jewelry who wears corsets,—told me that Madame Jules was my rival. That name, monsieur, sounds mighty like a feigned one; but if it is yours, excuse me.



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But this I say, if Madame Jules was a court duchess, Henri is rich enough to satisfy all her fancies, and it is my business to protect my property; I've a right to, for I love him, that I do. He is my *first* inclination; my happiness and all my future fate depends on it. I fear nothing, monsieur; I am honest; I never lied, or stole the property of any living soul, no matter who. If an empress was my rival, I'd go straight to her, empress as she was; because all pretty women are equals, monsieur—"

"Enough! enough!" said Jules. "Where do you live?"

"Rue de la Corderie-du-Temple, number 14, monsieur,—Ida Gruget, corset-maker, at your service,—for we make lots of corsets for men."

"Where does the man whom you call Ferragus live?"

"Monsieur," she said, pursing up her lips, "in the first place, he's not a man; he is a rich monsieur, much richer, perhaps, than you are. But why do you ask me his address when your wife knows it? He told me not to give it. Am I obliged to answer you? I'm not, thank God, in a confessional or a police-court; I'm responsible only to myself."

"If I were to offer you ten thousand francs to tell me where Monsieur Ferragus lives, how then?"

"Ha! n, o, *no*, my little friend, and that ends the matter," she said, emphasizing this singular reply with a popular gesture. "There's no sum in the world could make me tell you. I have the honor to bid you good-day. How do I get out of here?"

Jules, horror-struck, allowed her to go without further notice. The whole world seemed to crumble beneath his feet, and above him the heavens were falling with a crash.

"Monsieur is served," said his valet.

The valet and the footman waited in the dining-room a quarter of an hour without seeing master or mistress.

"Madame will not dine to-day," said the waiting-maid, coming in.

"What's the matter, Josephine?" asked the valet.

"I don't know," she answered. "Madame is crying, and is going to bed. Monsieur has no doubt got some love-affair on hand, and it has been discovered at a very bad time. I wouldn't answer for madame's life. Men are so clumsy; they'll make you scenes without any precaution."



“That’s not so,” said the valet, in a low voice. “On the contrary, madame is the one who—you understand? What times does monsieur have to go after pleasures, he, who hasn’t slept out of madame’s room for five years, who goes to his study at ten and never leaves it till breakfast, at twelve. His life is all known, it is regular; whereas madame goes out nearly every day at three o’clock, Heaven knows where.”

“And monsieur too,” said the maid, taking her mistress’s part.

“Yes, but he goes straight to the Bourse. I told him three times that dinner was ready,” continued the valet, after a pause. “You might as well talk to a post.”

Monsieur Jules entered the dining-room.



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“Where is madame?” he said.

“Madame is going to bed; her head aches,” replied the maid, assuming an air of importance.

Monsieur Jules then said to the footmen composedly: “You can take away; I shall go and sit with madame.”

He went to his wife’s room and found her weeping, but endeavoring to smother her sobs with her handkerchief.

“Why do you weep?” said Jules; “you need expect no violence and no reproaches from me. Why should I avenge myself? If you have not been faithful to my love, it is that you were never worthy of it.”

“Not worthy?” The words were repeated amid her sobs and the accent in which they were said would have moved any other man than Jules.

“To kill you, I must love more than perhaps I do love you,” he continued. “But I should never have the courage; I would rather kill myself, leaving you to your—happiness, and with—whom!—”

He did not end his sentence.

“Kill yourself!” she cried, flinging herself at his feet and clasping them.

But he, wishing to escape the embrace, tried to shake her off, dragging her in so doing toward the bed.

“Let me alone,” he said.

“No, no, Jules!” she cried. “If you love me no longer I shall die. Do you wish to know all?”

“Yes.”

He took her, grasped her violently, and sat down on the edge of the bed, holding her between his legs. Then, looking at that beautiful face now red as fire and furrowed with tears,—

“Speak,” he said.

Her sobs began again.

“No; it is a secret of life and death. If I tell it, I—No, I cannot. Have mercy, Jules!”



“You have betrayed me—”

“Ah! Jules, you think so now, but soon you will know all.”

“But this Ferragus, this convict whom you go to see, a man enriched by crime, if he does not belong to you, if you do not belong to him—”

“Oh, Jules!”

“Speak! Is he your mysterious benefactor?—the man to whom we owe our fortune, as persons have said already?”

“Who said that?”

“A man whom I killed in a duel.”

“Oh, God! one death already!”

“If he is not your protector, if he does not give you money, if it is you, on the contrary, who carry money to him, tell me, is he your brother?”

“What if he were?” she said.

Monsieur Desmarets crossed his arms.

“Why should that have been concealed from me?” he said. “Then you and your mother have both deceived me? Besides, does a woman go to see her brother every day, or nearly every day?”

His wife had fainted at his feet.

“Dead,” he said. “And suppose I am mistaken?”

He sprang to the bell-rope; called Josephine, and lifted Clemence to the bed.

“I shall die of this,” said Madame Jules, recovering consciousness.

“Josephine,” cried Monsieur Desmarets. “Send for Monsieur Desplein; send also to my brother and ask him to come here immediately.”



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“Why your brother?” asked Clemence.

But Jules had already left the room.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE GO TO DIE?

For the first time in five years Madame Jules slept alone in her bed, and was compelled to admit a physician into that sacred chamber. These in themselves were two keen pangs. Desplein found Madame Jules very ill. Never was a violent emotion more untimely. He would say nothing definite, and postponed till the morrow giving any opinion, after leaving a few directions, which were not executed, the emotions of the heart causing all bodily cares to be forgotten.

When morning dawned, Clemence had not yet slept. Her mind was absorbed in the low murmur of a conversation which lasted several hours between the brothers; but the thickness of the walls allowed no word which could betray the object of this long conference to reach her ears. Monsieur Desmarets, the notary, went away at last. The stillness of the night, and the singular activity of the senses given by powerful emotion, enabled Clemence to distinguish the scratching of a pen and the involuntary movements of a person engaged in writing. Those who are habitually up at night, and who observe the different acoustic effects produced in absolute silence, know that a slight echo can be readily perceived in the very places where louder but more equable and continued murmurs are not distinct. At four o'clock the sound ceased. Clemence rose, anxious and trembling. Then, with bare feet and without a wrapper, forgetting her illness and her moist condition, the poor woman opened the door softly without noise and looked into the next room. She saw her husband sitting, with a pen in his hand, asleep in his arm-chair. The candles had burned to the sockets. She slowly advanced and read on an envelope, already sealed, the words, “This is my will.”

She knelt down as if before an open grave and kissed her husband's hand. He woke instantly.

“Jules, my friend, they grant some days to criminals condemned to death,” she said, looking at him with eyes that blazed with fever and with love. “Your innocent wife asks only two. Leave me free for two days, and—wait! After that, I shall die happy—at least, you will regret me.”

“Clemence, I grant them.”

Then, as she kissed her husband's hands in the tender transport of her heart, Jules, under the spell of that cry of innocence, took her in his arms and kissed her forehead, though ashamed to feel himself still under subjection to the power of that noble beauty.



On the morrow, after taking a few hours' rest, Jules entered his wife's room, obeying mechanically his invariable custom of not leaving the house without a word to her. Clemence was sleeping. A ray of light passing through a chink in the upper blind of a window fell across the face of the dejected woman. Already suffering had impaired her forehead and the freshness of her lips. A lover's eye could not fail to notice the appearance of dark blotches, and a sickly pallor in place of the uniform tone of the cheeks and the pure ivory whiteness of the skin,—two points at which the sentiments of her noble soul were artlessly wont to show themselves.



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“She suffers,” thought Jules. “Poor Clemence! May God protect us!”

He kissed her very softly on the forehead. She woke, saw her husband, and remembered all. Unable to speak, she took his hand, her eyes filling with tears.

“I am innocent,” she said, ending her dream.

“You will not go out to-day, will you?” asked Jules.

“No, I feel too weak to leave my bed.”

“If you should change your mind, wait till I return,” said Jules.

Then he went down to the porter’s lodge.

“Fouguereau, you will watch the door yourself to-day. I wish to know exactly who comes to the house, and who leaves it.”

Then he threw himself into a hackney-coach, and was driven to the hotel de Maulincour, where he asked for the baron.

“Monsieur is ill,” they told him.

Jules insisted on entering, and gave his name. If he could not see the baron, he wished to see the vidame or the dowager. He waited some time in the salon, where Madame de Maulincour finally came to him and told him that her grandson was much too ill to receive him.

“I know, madame, the nature of his illness from the letter you did me the honor to write, and I beg you to believe—”

“A letter to you, monsieur, written by me!” cried the dowager, interrupting him. “I have written you no letter. What was I made to say in that letter, monsieur?”

“Madame,” replied Jules, “intending to see Monsieur de Maulincour to-day, I thought it best to preserve the letter in spite of its injunction to destroy it. There it is.”

Madame de Maulincour put on her spectacles, and the moment she cast her eyes on the paper she showed the utmost surprise.

“Monsieur,” she said, “my writing is so perfectly imitated that, if the matter were not so recent, I might be deceived myself. My grandson is ill, it is true; but his reason has never for a moment been affected. We are the puppets of some evil-minded person or persons; and yet I cannot imagine the object of a trick like this. You shall see my grandson, monsieur, and you will at once perceive that he is perfectly sound in mind.”



She rang the bell, and sent to ask if the baron felt able to receive Monsieur Desmarets. The servant returned with an affirmative answer. Jules went to the baron's room, where he found him in an arm-chair near the fire. Too feeble to move, the unfortunate man merely bowed his head with a melancholy gesture. The Vidame de Pamiers was sitting with him.

"Monsieur le baron," said Jules, "I have something to say which makes it desirable that I should see you alone."

"Monsieur," replied Auguste, "Monsieur le vidame knows about this affair; you can speak fearlessly before him."

"Monsieur le baron," said Jules, in a grave voice, "you have troubled and well-nigh destroyed my happiness without having any right to do so. Until the moment when we can see clearly which of us should demand, or grant, reparation to the other, you are bound to help me in following the dark and mysterious path into which you have flung me. I have now come to ascertain from you the present residence of the extraordinary being who exercises such a baneful effect on your life and mine. On my return home yesterday, after listening to your avowals, I received that letter."



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Jules gave him the forged letter.

“This Ferragus, this Bourignard, or this Monsieur de Funcal, is a demon!” cried Maulincour, after having read it. “Oh, what a frightful maze I put my foot into when I meddled in this matter! Where am I going? I did wrong, monsieur,” he continued, looking at Jules; “but death is the greatest of all expiations, and my death is now approaching. You can ask me whatever you like; I am at your orders.”

“Monsieur, you know, of course, where this man is living, and I must know it if it costs me all my fortune to penetrate this mystery. In presence of so cruel an enemy every moment is precious.”

“Justin shall tell you all,” replied the baron.

At these words the vidame fidgeted on his chair. Auguste rang the bell.

“Justin is not in the house!” cried the vidame, in a hasty manner that told much.

“Well, then,” said Auguste, excitedly, “the other servants must know where he is; send a man on horseback to fetch him. Your valet is in Paris, isn’t he? He can be found.”

The vidame was visibly distressed.

“Justin can’t come, my dear boy,” said the old man; “he is dead. I wanted to conceal the accident from you, but—”

“Dead!” cried Monsieur de Maulincour,—“dead! When and how?”

“Last night. He had been supping with some old friends, and, I dare say, was drunk; his friends—no doubt they were drunk, too—left him lying in the street, and a heavy vehicle ran over him.”

“The convict did not miss *him*; at the first stroke he killed,” said Auguste. “He has had less luck with me; it has taken four blows to put me out of the way.”

Jules was gloomy and thoughtful.

“Am I to know nothing, then?” he cried, after a long pause. “Your valet seems to have been justly punished. Did he not exceed your orders in calumniating Madame Desmarets to a person named Ida, whose jealousy he roused in order to turn her vindictiveness upon us?”

“Ah, monsieur! in my anger I informed him about Madame Jules,” said Auguste.

“Monsieur!” cried the husband, keenly irritated.



“Oh, monsieur!” replied the baron, claiming silence by a gesture, “I am prepared for all. You cannot tell me anything my own conscience has not already told me. I am now expecting the most celebrated of all professors of toxicology, in order to learn my fate. If I am destined to intolerable suffering, my resolution is taken. I shall blow my brains out.”

“You talk like a child!” cried the vidame, horrified by the coolness with which the baron said these words. “Your grandmother would die of grief.”

“Then, monsieur,” said Jules, “am I to understand that there exist no means of discovering in what part of Paris this extraordinary man resides?”



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“I think, monsieur,” said the old vidame, “from what I have heard poor Justin say, that Monsieur de Funcal lives at either the Portuguese or the Brazilian embassy. Monsieur de Funcal is a nobleman belonging to both those countries. As for the convict, he is dead and buried. Your persecutor, whoever he is, seems to me so powerful that it would be well to take no decisive measures until you are sure of some way of confounding and crushing him. Act prudently and with caution, my dear monsieur. Had Monsieur de Maulincour followed my advice, nothing of all this would have happened.”

Jules coldly but politely withdrew. He was now at a total loss to know how to reach Ferragus. As he passed into his own house, the porter told him that Madame had just been out to throw a letter into the post box at the head of the rue de Menars. Jules felt humiliated by this proof of the insight with which the porter espoused his cause, and the cleverness by which he guessed the way to serve him. The eagerness of servants, and their shrewdness in compromising masters who compromised themselves, was known to him, and he fully appreciated the danger of having them as accomplices, no matter for what purpose. But he could not think of his personal dignity until the moment when he found himself thus suddenly degraded. What a triumph for the slave who could not raise himself to his master, to compel his master to come down to his level! Jules was harsh and hard to him. Another fault. But he suffered so deeply! His life till then so upright, so pure, was becoming crafty; he was to scheme and lie. Clemence was scheming and lying. This to him was a moment of horrible disgust. Lost in a flood of bitter feelings, Jules stood motionless at the door of his house. Yielding to despair, he thought of fleeing, of leaving France forever, carrying with him the illusions of uncertainty. Then, again, not doubting that the letter Clemence had just posted was addressed to Ferragus, his mind searched for a means of obtaining the answer that mysterious being was certain to send. Then his thoughts began to analyze the singular good fortune of his life since his marriage, and he asked himself whether the calumny for which he had taken such signal vengeance was not a truth. Finally, reverting to the coming answer, he said to himself:—

“But this man, so profoundly capable, so logical in his every act, who sees and foresees, who calculates, and even divines, our very thoughts, is he likely to make an answer? Will he not employ some other means more in keeping with his power? He may send his answer by some beggar; or in a carton brought by an honest man, who does not suspect what he brings; or in some parcel of shoes, which a shop-girl may innocently deliver to my wife. If Clemence and he have agreed upon such means—”

He distrusted all things; his mind ran over vast tracts and shoreless oceans of conjecture. Then, after floating for a time among a thousand contradictory ideas, he felt he was strongest in his own house, and he resolved to watch it as the ant-lion watches his sandy labyrinth.



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“Fouguereau,” he said to the porter, “I am not at home to any one who comes to see me. If any one calls to see madame, or brings her anything, ring twice. Bring all letters addressed here to me, no matter for whom they are intended.”

“Thus,” thought he, as he entered his study, which was in the entresol, “I forestall the schemes of this Ferragus. If he sends some one to ask for me so as to find out if Clemence is alone, at least I shall not be tricked like a fool.”

He stood by the window of his study, which looked upon the street, and then a final scheme, inspired by jealousy, came into his mind. He resolved to send his head-clerk in his own carriage to the Bourse with a letter to another broker, explaining his sales and purchases and requesting him to do his business for that day. He postponed his more delicate transactions till the morrow, indifferent to the fall or rise of stocks or the debts of all Europe. High privilege of love!—it crushes all things, all interests fall before it: altar, throne, consols!

At half-past three, just the hour at which the Bourse is in full blast of reports, monthly settlements, premiums, *etc.*, Fouguereau entered the study, quite radiant with his news.

“Monsieur, an old woman has come, but very cautiously; I think she’s a sly one. She asked for monsieur, and seemed much annoyed when I told her he was out; then she gave me a letter for madame, and here it is.”

Fevered with anxiety, Jules opened the letter; then he dropped into a chair, exhausted. The letter was mere nonsense throughout, and needed a key. It was virtually in cipher.

“Go away, Fouguereau.” The porter left him. “It is a mystery deeper than the sea below the plummet line! Ah! it must be love; love only is so sagacious, so inventive as this. Ah! I shall kill her.”

At this moment an idea flashed through his brain with such force that he felt almost physically illuminated by it. In the days of his toilsome poverty before his marriage, Jules had made for himself a true friend. The extreme delicacy with which he had managed the susceptibilities of a man both poor and modest; the respect with which he had surrounded him; the ingenious cleverness he had employed to nobly compel him to share his opulence without permitting it to make him blush, increased their friendship. Jacquet continued faithful to Desmarets in spite of his wealth.

Jacquet, a nobly upright man, a toiler, austere in his morals, had slowly made his way in that particular ministry which develops both honesty and knavery at the same time. A clerk in the ministry of Foreign Affairs, he had charge of the most delicate division of its archives. Jacquet in that office was like a glow-worm, casting his light upon those secret correspondences, deciphering and classifying despatches. Ranking higher than

a mere *bourgeois*, his position at the ministry was superior to that of the other subalterns.

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He lived obscurely, glad to feel that such obscurity sheltered him from reverses and disappointments, and was satisfied to humbly pay in the lowest coin his debt to the country. Thanks to Jules, his position had been much ameliorated by a worthy marriage. An unrecognized patriot, a minister in actual fact, he contented himself with groaning in his chimney-corner at the course of the government. In his own home, Jacquet was an easy-going king,—an umbrella-man, as they say, who hired a carriage for his wife which he never entered himself. In short, to end this sketch of a philosopher unknown to himself, he had never suspected and never in all his life would suspect the advantages he might have drawn from his position,—that of having for his intimate friend a broker, and of knowing every morning all the secrets of the State. This man, sublime after the manner of that nameless soldier who died in saving Napoleon by a “qui vive,” lived at the ministry.

In ten minutes Jules was in his friend's office. Jacquet gave him a chair, laid aside methodically his green silk eye-shade, rubbed his hands, picked up his snuff-box, rose, stretched himself till his shoulder-blades cracked, swelled out his chest, and said:—

“What brings you here, Monsieur Desmarets? What do you want with me?”

“Jacquet, I want you to decipher a secret,—a secret of life and death.”

“It doesn't concern politics?”

“If it did, I shouldn't come to you for information,” said Jules. “No, it is a family matter, about which I require you to be absolutely silent.”

“Claude-Joseph Jacquet, dumb by profession. Don't you know me by this time?” he said, laughing. “Discretion is my lot.”

Jules showed him the letter.

“You must read me this letter, addressed to my wife.”

“The deuce! the deuce! a bad business!” said Jacquet, examining the letter as a usurer examines a note to be negotiated. “Ha! that's a gridiron letter! Wait a minute.”

He left Jules alone for a moment, but returned immediately.

“Easy enough to read, my friend! It is written on the gridiron plan, used by the Portuguese minister under Monsieur de Choiseul, at the time of the dismissal of the Jesuits. Here, see!”



Jacquet placed upon the writing a piece of paper cut out in regular squares, like the paper laces which confectioners wrap round their sugarplums; and Jules then read with perfect ease the words that were visible in the interstices. They were as follows:—

“Don’t be uneasy, my dear Clemence; our happiness cannot again be troubled; and your husband will soon lay aside his suspicions. However ill you may be, you must have the courage to come here to-morrow; find strength in your love for me. Mine for you has induced me to submit to a cruel operation, and I cannot leave my bed. I have had the actual cautery applied to my back, and it was necessary to burn it in a long time; you

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understand me? But I thought of you, and I did not suffer. "To baffle Maulincour (who will not persecute us much longer), I have left the protecting roof of the embassy, and am now safe from all inquiry in the rue des Enfants-Rouges, number 12, with an old woman, Madame Etienne Gruget, mother of that Ida, who shall pay dear for her folly. Come to-morrow, at nine in the morning. I am in a room which is reached only by an interior staircase. Ask for Monsieur Camuset. Adieu; I kiss your forehead, my darling."

Jacquet looked at Jules with a sort of honest terror, the sign of a true compassion, as he made his favorite exclamation in two separate and distinct tones,—

"The deuce! the deuce!"

"That seems clear to you, doesn't it?" said Jules. "Well, in the depths of my heart there is a voice that pleads for my wife, and makes itself heard above the pangs of jealousy. I must endure the worst of all agony until to-morrow; but to-morrow, between nine and ten I shall know all; I shall be happy or wretched for all my life. Think of me then, Jacquet."

"I shall be at your house to-morrow at eight o'clock. We will go together; I'll wait for you, if you like, in the street. You may run some danger, and you ought to have near you some devoted person who'll understand a mere sign, and whom you can safely trust. Count on me."

"Even to help me in killing some one?"

"The deuce! the deuce!" said Jacquet, repeating, as it were, the same musical note. "I have two children and a wife."

Jules pressed his friend's hand and went away; but returned immediately.

"I forgot the letter," he said. "But that's not all, I must reseal it."

"The deuce! the deuce! you opened it without saving the seal; however, it is still possible to restore it. Leave it with me and I'll bring it to you *secundum scripturam*."

"At what time?"

"Half-past five."

"If I am not yet in, give it to the porter and tell him to send it up to madame."

"Do you want me to-morrow?"

"No. Adieu."



Jules drove at once to the place de la Rotonde du Temple, where he left his cabriolet and went on foot to the rue des Enfants-Rouges. He found the house of Madame Etienne Gruget and examined it. There, the mystery on which depended the fate of so many persons would be cleared up; there, at this moment, was Ferragus, and to Ferragus all the threads of this strange plot led. The Gordian knot of the drama, already so bloody, was surely in a meeting between Madame Jules, her husband, and that man; and a blade able to cut the closest of such knots would not be wanting.



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The house was one of those which belong to the class called *cabajoutis*. This significant name is given by the populace of Paris to houses which are built, as it were, piecemeal. They are nearly always composed of buildings originally separate but afterwards united according to the fancy of the various proprietors who successively enlarge them; or else they are houses begun, left unfinished, again built upon, and completed,—unfortunate structures which have passed, like certain peoples, under many dynasties of capricious masters. Neither the floors nor the windows have an *ensemble*,—to borrow one of the most picturesque terms of the art of painting; all is discord, even the external decoration. The *cabajoutis* is to Parisian architecture what the *capharnaum* is to the apartment,—a poke-hole, where the most heterogeneous articles are flung pell-mell.

“Madame Etienne?” asked Jules of the portress.

This portress had her lodge under the main entrance, in a sort of chicken coop, or wooden house on rollers, not unlike those sentry-boxes which the police have lately set up by the stands of hackney-coaches.

“Hein?” said the portress, without laying down the stocking she was knitting.

In Paris the various component parts which make up the physiognomy of any given portion of the monstrous city, are admirably in keeping with its general character. Thus porter, concierge, or Suisse, whatever name may be given to that essential muscle of the Parisian monster, is always in conformity with the neighborhood of which he is a part; in fact, he is often an epitome of it. The lazy porter of the faubourg Saint-Germain, with lace on every seam of his coat, dabbles in stocks; he of the Chaussee d’Antin takes his ease, reads the money-articles in the newspapers, and has a business of his own in the faubourg Montmartre. The portress in the quarter of prostitution was formerly a prostitute; in the Marais, she has morals, is cross-grained, and full of crotchets.

On seeing Monsieur Jules this particular portress, holding her knitting in one hand, took a knife and stirred the half-extinguished peat in her foot-warmer; then she said:—

“You want Madame Etienne; do you mean Madame Etienne Gruget?”

“Yes,” said Jules, assuming a vexed air.

“Who makes trimmings?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, monsieur,” she said, issuing from her cage, and laying her hand on Jules’ arm and leading him to the end of a long passage-way, vaulted like a cellar, “go up the



second staircase at the end of the court-yard—where you will see the windows with the pots of pinks; that’s where Madame Etienne lives.”

“Thank you, madame. Do you think she is alone?”

“Why shouldn’t she be alone? she’s a widow.”

Jules hastened up a dark stairway, the steps of which were knobby with hardened mud left by the feet of those who came and went. On the second floor he saw three doors but no signs of pinks. Fortunately, on one of the doors, the oiliest and darkest of the three, he read these words, chalked on a panel: “Ida will come to-night at nine o’clock.”



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“This is the place,” thought Jules.

He pulled an old bellrope, black with age, and heard the smothered sound of a cracked bell and the barking of an asthmatic little dog. By the way the sounds echoed from the interior he knew that the rooms were encumbered with articles which left no space for reverberation, —a characteristic feature of the homes of workmen and humble households, where space and air are always lacking.

Jules looked out mechanically for the pinks, and found them on the outer sill of a sash window between two filthy drain-pipes. So here were flowers; here, a garden, two yards long and six inches wide; here, a wheat-ear; here, a whole life epitomized; but here, too, all the miseries of that life. A ray of light falling from heaven as if by special favor on those puny flowers and the vigorous wheat-ear brought out in full relief the dust, the grease, and that nameless color, peculiar to Parisian squalor, made of dirt, which crusted and spotted the damp walls, the worm-eaten balusters, the disjointed window-casings, and the door originally red. Presently the cough of an old woman, and a heavy female step, shuffling painfully in list slippers, announced the coming of the mother of Ida Gruget. The creature opened the door and came out upon the landing, looked up, and said:—

“Ah! is this Monsieur Bocquillon? Why, no? But perhaps you’re his brother. What can I do for you? Come in, monsieur.”

Jules followed her into the first room, where he saw, huddled together, cages, household utensils, ovens, furniture, little earthenware dishes full of food or water for the dog and the cats, a wooden clock, bed-quilts, engravings of Eisen, heaps of old iron, all these things mingled and massed together in a way that produced a most grotesque effect,—a true Parisian dusthole, in which were not lacking a few old numbers of the “Constitutionnel.”

Jules, impelled by a sense of prudence, paid no attention to the widow’s invitation when she said civilly, showing him an inner room:—

“Come in here, monsieur, and warm yourself.”

Fearing to be overheard by Ferragus, Jules asked himself whether it were not wisest to conclude the arrangement he had come to make with the old woman in the crowded antechamber. A hen, which descended cackling from a loft, roused him from this inward meditation. He came to a resolution, and followed Ida’s mother into the inner room, whither they were accompanied by the wheezy pug, a personage otherwise mute, who jumped upon a stool. Madame Gruget showed the assumption of semi-pauperism when she invited her visitor to warm himself. Her fire-pot contained, or rather concealed two bits of sticks, which lay apart: the grating was on the ground, its handle in the ashes. The mantel-shelf, adorned with a little wax Jesus under a shade of squares of



glass held together with blue paper, was piled with wools, bobbins, and tools used in the making of gimps and trimmings. Jules examined everything in the room with a curiosity that was full of interest, and showed, in spite of himself, an inward satisfaction.



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“Well, monsieur, tell me, do you want to buy any of my things?” said the old woman, seating herself in a cane arm-chair, which appeared to be her headquarters. In it she kept her handkerchief, snuffbox, knitting, half-peeled vegetables, spectacles, calendar, a bit of livery gold lace just begun, a greasy pack of cards, and two volumes of novels, all stuck into the hollow of the back. This article of furniture, in which the old creature was floating down the river of life, was not unlike the encyclopedic bag which a woman carries with her when she travels; in which may be found a compendium of her household belongings, from the portrait of her husband to *eau de Melisse* for faintness, sugarplums for the children, and English court-plaster in case of cuts.

Jules studied all. He looked attentively at Madame Gruget’s yellow visage, at her gray eyes without either brows or lashes, her toothless mouth, her wrinkles marked in black, her rusty cap, her still more rusty ruffles, her cotton petticoat full of holes, her worn-out slippers, her disabled fire-pot, her table heaped with dishes and silks and work begun or finished, in wool or cotton, in the midst of which stood a bottle of wine. Then he said to himself: “This old woman has some passion, some strong liking or vice; I can make her do my will.”

“Madame,” he said aloud, with a private sign of intelligence, “I have come to order some livery trimmings.” Then he lowered his voice. “I know,” he continued, “that you have a lodger who has taken the name of Camuset.” The old woman looked at him suddenly, but without any sign of astonishment. “Now, tell me, can we come to an understanding? This is a question which means fortune for you.”

“Monsieur,” she replied, “speak out, and don’t be afraid. There’s no one here. But if I had any one above, it would be impossible for him to hear you.”

“Ha! the sly old creature, she answers like a Norman,” thought Jules, “We shall agree. Do not give yourself the trouble to tell falsehoods, madame,” he resumed, “In the first place, let me tell you that I mean no harm either to you or to your lodger who is suffering from cautery, or to your daughter Ida, a stay-maker, the friend of Ferragus. You see, I know all your affairs. Do not be uneasy; I am not a detective policeman, nor do I desire anything that can hurt your conscience. A young lady will come here to-morrow-morning at half-past nine o’clock, to talk with this lover of your daughter. I want to be where I can see all and hear all, without being seen or heard by them. If you will furnish me with the means of doing so, I will reward that service with the gift of two thousand francs and a yearly stipend of six hundred. My notary shall prepare a deed before you this evening, and I will give him the money to hold; he will pay the two thousand to you to-morrow after the conference at which I desire to be present, as you will then have given proofs of your good faith.”



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“Will it injure my daughter, my good monsieur?” she asked, casting a cat-like glance of doubt and uneasiness upon him.

“In no way, madame. But, in any case, it seems to me that your daughter does not treat you well. A girl who is loved by so rich a man as Ferragus ought to make you more comfortable than you seem to be.”

“Ah, my dear monsieur, just think, not so much as one poor ticket to the Ambigu, or the Gaiete, where she can go as much as she likes. It’s shameful! A girl for whom I sold my silver forks and spoons! and now I eat, at my age, with German metal,—and all to pay for her apprenticeship, and give her a trade, where she could coin money if she chose. As for that, she’s like me, clever as a witch; I must do her that justice. But, I will say, she might give me her old silk gowns,—I, who am so fond of wearing silk. But no! Monsieur, she dines at the Cadran-Bleu at fifty francs a head, and rolls in her carriage as if she were a princess, and despises her mother for a Colin-Lampon. Heavens and earth! what heedless young ones we’ve brought into the world; we have nothing to boast of there. A mother, monsieur, can’t be anything else but a good mother; and I’ve concealed that girl’s ways, and kept her in my bosom, to take the bread out of my mouth and cram everything into her own. Well, well! and now she comes and fondles one a little, and says, ‘How d’ye do, mother?’ And that’s all the duty she thinks of paying. But she’ll have children one of these days, and then she’ll find out what it is to have such baggage,—which one can’t help loving all the same.”

“Do you mean that she does nothing for you?”

“Ah, nothing? No, monsieur, I didn’t say that; if she did nothing, that would be a little too much. She gives me my rent and thirty-six francs a month. But, monsieur, at my age, —and I’m fifty-two years old, with eyes that feel the strain at night,—ought I to be working in this way? Besides, why won’t she have me to live with her? I should shame her, should I? Then let her say so. Faith, one ought to be buried out of the way of such dogs of children, who forget you before they’ve even shut the door.”

She pulled her handkerchief from her pocket, and with it a lottery ticket that dropped on the floor; but she hastily picked it up, saying, “Hi! that’s the receipt for my taxes.”

Jules at once perceived the reason of the sagacious parsimony of which the mother complained; and he was the more certain that the widow Gruget would agree to the proposed bargain.

“Well, then, madame,” he said, “accept what I offer you.”

“Did you say two thousand francs in ready money, and six hundred annuity, monsieur?”



“Madame, I’ve changed my mind; I will promise you only three hundred annuity. This way seems more to my own interests. But I will give you five thousand francs in ready money. Wouldn’t you like that as well?”

“Bless me, yes, monsieur!”



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“You’ll get more comfort out of it; and you can go to the Ambigu and Franconi’s at your ease in a coach.”

“As for Franconi, I don’t like that, for they don’t talk there. Monsieur, if I accept, it is because it will be very advantageous for my child. I sha’n’t be a drag on her any longer. Poor little thing! I’m glad she has her pleasures, after all. Ah, monsieur, youth must be amused! And so, if you assure me that no harm will come to anybody—”

“Not to anybody,” replied Jules. “But now, how will you manage it?”

“Well, monsieur, if I give Monsieur Ferragus a little tea made of poppy-heads to-night, he’ll sleep sound, the dear man; and he needs it, too, because of his sufferings, for he does suffer, I can tell you, and more’s the pity. But I’d like to know what a healthy man like him wants to burn his back for, just to get rid of a tic douloureux which troubles him once in two years. However, to come back to our business. I have my neighbor’s key; her lodging is just above mine, and in it there’s a room adjoining the one where Monsieur Ferragus is, with only a partition between them. My neighbor is away in the country for ten days. Therefore, if I make a hole to-night while Monsieur Ferragus is sound asleep, you can see and hear them to-morrow at your ease. I’m on good terms with a locksmith,—a very friendly man, who talks like an angel, and he’ll do the work for me and say nothing about it.”

“Then here’s a hundred francs for him. Come to-night to Monsieur Desmaret’s office; he’s a notary, and here’s his address. At nine o’clock the deed will be ready, but—silence!”

“Enough, monsieur; as you say—silence! Au revoir, monsieur.”

Jules went home, almost calmed by the certainty that he should know the truth on the morrow. As he entered the house, the porter gave him the letter properly resealed.

“How do you feel now?” he said to his wife, in spite of the coldness that separated them.

“Pretty well, Jules,” she answered in a coaxing voice, “do come and dine beside me.”

“Very good,” he said, giving her the letter. “Here is something Fouguereau gave me for you.”

Clemence, who was very pale, colored high when she saw the letter, and that sudden redness was a fresh blow to her husband.

“Is that joy,” he said, laughing, “or the effect of expectation?”

“Oh, of many things!” she said, examining the seal.



“I leave you now for a few moments.”

He went down to his study, and wrote to his brother, giving him directions about the payment to the widow Gruget. When he returned, he found his dinner served on a little table by his wife’s bedside, and Josephine ready to wait on him.

“If I were up how I should like to serve you myself,” said Clemence, when Josephine had left them. “Oh, yes, on my knees!” she added, passing her white hands through her husband’s hair. “Dear, noble heart, you were very kind and gracious to me just now. You did me more good by showing me such confidence than all the doctors on earth could do me with their prescriptions. That feminine delicacy of yours—for you do know how to love like a woman—well, it has shed a balm into my heart which has almost cured me. There’s truce between us, Jules; lower your head, that I may kiss it.”



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Jules could not deny himself the pleasure of that embrace. But it was not without a feeling of remorse in his heart; he felt himself small before this woman whom he was still tempted to think innocent. A sort of melancholy joy possessed him. A tender hope shone on her features in spite of their grieved expression. They both were equally unhappy in deceiving each other; another caress, and, unable to resist their suffering, all would then have been avowed.

“To-morrow evening, Clemence.”

“No, no; to-morrow morning, by twelve o’clock, you will know all, and you’ll kneel down before your wife—Oh, no! you shall not be humiliated; you are all forgiven now; you have done no wrong. Listen, Jules; yesterday you did crush me—harshly; but perhaps my life would not have been complete without that agony; it may be a shadow that will make our coming days celestial.”

“You lay a spell upon me,” cried Jules; “you fill me with remorse.”

“Poor love! destiny is stronger than we, and I am not the accomplice of mine. I shall go out to-morrow.”

“At what hour?” asked Jules.

“At half-past nine.”

“Clemence,” he said, “take every precaution; consult Doctor Desplein and old Haudry.”

“I shall consult nothing but my heart and my courage.”

“I shall leave you free; you will not see me till twelve o’clock.”

“Won’t you keep me company this evening? I feel so much better.”

After attending to some business, Jules returned to his wife, —recalled by her invincible attraction. His passion was stronger than his anguish.

The next day, at nine o’clock Jules left home, hurried to the rue des Enfants-Rouges, went upstairs, and rang the bell of the widow Gruget’s lodgings.

“Ah! you’ve kept your word, as true as the dawn. Come in, monsieur,” said the old woman when she saw him. “I’ve made you a cup of coffee with cream,” she added, when the door was closed. “Oh! real cream; I saw it milked myself at the dairy we have in this very street.”

“Thank you, no, madame, nothing. Take me at once—”



“Very good, monsieur. Follow me, this way.”

She led him up into the room above her own, where she showed him, triumphantly, an opening about the size of a two-franc piece, made during the night, in a place, which, in each room, was above a wardrobe. In order to look through it, Jules was forced to maintain himself in rather a fatiguing attitude, by standing on a step-ladder which the widow had been careful to place there.

“There’s a gentleman with him,” she whispered, as she retired.

Jules then beheld a man employed in dressing a number of wounds on the shoulders of Ferragus, whose head he recognized from the description given to him by Monsieur de Maulincour.

“When do you think those wounds will heal?” asked Ferragus.

“I don’t know,” said the other man. “The doctors say those wounds will require seven or eight more dressings.”



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“Well, then, good-bye until to-night,” said Ferragus, holding out his hand to the man, who had just replaced the bandage.

“Yes, to-night,” said the other, pressing his hand cordially. “I wish I could see you past your sufferings.”

“To-morrow Monsieur de Funcal’s papers will be delivered to us, and Henri Bourignard will be dead forever,” said Ferragus. “Those fatal marks which have cost us so dear no longer exist. I shall become once more a social being, a man among men, and more of a man than the sailor whom the fishes are eating. God knows it is not for my own sake I have made myself a Portuguese count!”

“Poor Gratien!—you, the wisest of us all, our beloved brother, the Benjamin of the band; as you very well know.”

“Adieu; keep an eye on Maulincour.”

“You can rest easy on that score.”

“Ho! stay, marquis,” cried the convict.

“What is it?”

“Ida is capable of everything after the scene of last night. If she should throw herself into the river, I would not fish her out. She knows the secret of my name, and she’ll keep it better there. But still, look after her; for she is, in her way, a good girl.”

“Very well.”

The stranger departed. Ten minutes later Jules heard, with a feverish shudder, the rustle of a silk gown, and almost recognized by their sound the steps of his wife.

“Well, father,” said Clemence, “my poor father, are you better? What courage you have shown!”

“Come here, my child,” replied Ferragus, holding out his hand to her.

Clemence held her forehead to him and he kissed it.

“Now tell me, what is the matter, my little girl? What are these new troubles?”

“Troubles, father! it concerns the life or death of the daughter you have loved so much. Indeed you must, as I wrote you yesterday, you *must* find a way to see my poor Jules to-day. If you knew how good he has been to me, in spite of all suspicions apparently



so legitimate. Father, my love is my very life. Would you see me die? Ah! I have suffered so much that my life, I feel it! is in danger.”

“And all because of the curiosity of that miserable Parisian?” cried Ferragus. “I’d burn Paris down if I lost you, my daughter. Ha! you may know what a lover is, but you don’t yet know what a father can do.”

“Father, you frighten me when you look at me in that way. Don’t weigh such different feelings in the same scales. I had a husband before I knew that my father was living—”

“If your husband was the first to lay kisses on your forehead, I was the first to drop tears upon it,” replied Ferragus. “But don’t feel frightened, Clemence, speak to me frankly. I love you enough to rejoice in the knowledge that you are happy, though I, your father, may have little place in your heart, while you fill the whole of mine.”

“Ah! what good such words do me! You make me love you more and more, though I seem to rob something from my Jules. But, my kind father, think what his sufferings are. What may I tell him to-day?”



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“My child, do you think I waited for your letter to save you from this threatened danger? Do you know what will become of those who venture to touch your happiness, or come between us? Have you never been aware that a second providence was guarding your life? Twelve men of power and intellect form a phalanx round your love and your existence, —ready to do all things to protect you. Think of your father, who has risked death to meet you in the public promenades, or see you asleep in your little bed in your mother’s home, during the night-time. Could such a father, to whom your innocent caresses give strength to live when a man of honor ought to have died to escape his infamy, could I, in short, I who breathe through your lips, and see with your eyes, and feel with your heart, could I fail to defend with the claws of a lion and the soul of a father, my only blessing, my life, my daughter? Since the death of that angel, your mother, I have dreamed but of one thing,—the happiness of pressing you to my heart in the face of the whole earth, of burying the convict,—” He paused a moment, and then added: “—of giving you a father, a father who could press without shame your husband’s hand, who could live without fear in both your hearts, who could say to all the world, ‘This is my daughter,’—in short, to be a happy father.”

“Oh, father! father!”

“After infinite difficulty, after searching the whole globe,” continued Ferragus, “my friends have found me the skin of a dead man in which to take my place once more in social life. A few days hence, I shall be Monsieur de Funcal, a Portuguese count. Ah! my dear child, there are few men of my age who would have had the patience to learn Portuguese and English, which were spoken fluently by that devil of a sailor, who was drowned at sea.”

“But, my dear father—”

“All has been foreseen, and prepared. A few days hence, his Majesty John VI., King of Portugal will be my accomplice. My child, you must have a little patience where your father has had so much. But ah! what would I not do to reward your devotion for the last three years, —coming religiously to comfort your old father, at the risk of your own peace!”

“Father!” cried Clemence, taking his hands and kissing them.

“Come, my child, have courage still; keep my fatal secret a few days longer, till the end is reached. Jules is not an ordinary man, I know; but are we sure that his lofty character and his noble love may not impel him to dislike the daughter of a—”

“Oh!” cried Clemence, “you have read my heart; I have no other fear than that. The very thought turns me to ice,” she added, in a heart-rending tone. “But, father, think that I have promised him the truth in two hours.”



“If so, my daughter, tell him to go to the Portuguese embassy and see the Comte de Funcal, your father. I will be there.”

“But Monsieur de Maulincour has told him of Ferragus. Oh, father, what torture, to deceive, deceive, deceive!”



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“Need you say that to me? But only a few days more, and no living man will be able to expose me. Besides, Monsieur de Maulincour is beyond the faculty of remembering. Come, dry your tears, my silly child, and think—”

At this instant a terrible cry rang from the room in which Jules Desmarets was stationed.

The clamor was heard by Madame Jules and Ferragus through the opening of the wall, and struck them with terror.

“Go and see what it means, Clemence,” said her father.

Clemence ran rapidly down the little staircase, found the door into Madame Gruget’s apartment wide open, heard the cries which echoed from the upper floor, went up the stairs, guided by the noise of sobs, and caught these words before she entered the fatal chamber:—

“You, monsieur, you, with your horrid inventions,—you are the cause of her death!”

“Hush, miserable woman!” replied Jules, putting his handkerchief on the mouth of the old woman, who began at once to cry out, “Murder! help!”

At this instant Clemence entered, saw her husband, uttered a cry, and fled away.

“Who will save my child?” cried the widow Gruget. “You have murdered her.”

“How?” asked Jules, mechanically, for he was horror-struck at being seen by his wife.

“Read that,” said the old woman, giving him a letter. “Can money or annuities console me for that?”

Farewell, mother! I bequeeth you what I have. I beg your pardon for my forlts, and the last greef to which I put you by ending my life in the river. Henry, who I love more than myself, says I have made his misfortune, and as he has drifen me away, and I have lost all my hops of merrying him, I am going to droun myself. I shall go abov Neuilly, so that they can’t put me in the Morg. If Henry does not hate me anny more after I am ded, ask him to berry a pore girl whose hart beet for him only, and to forgif me, for I did rong to meddle in what didn’t consern me. Tak care of his wounds. How much he sufered, pore fellow! I shall have as much corage to kill myself as he had to burn his bak. Carry home the corsets I have finished. And pray God for your daughter.

Ida.

“Take this letter to Monsieur de Funcal, who is upstairs,” said Jules. “He alone can save your daughter, if there is still time.”



So saying he disappeared, running like a man who has committed a crime. His legs trembled. The hot blood poured into his swelling heart in torrents greater than at any other moment of his life, and left it again with untold violence. Conflicting thoughts struggled in his mind, and yet one thought predominated,—he had not been loyal to the being he loved most. It was impossible for him to argue with his conscience, whose voice, rising high with conviction, came like an echo of those inward cries of his love during the cruel hours of doubt he had lately lived through.



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He spent the greater part of the day wandering about Paris, for he dared not go home. This man of integrity and honor feared to meet the spotless brow of the woman he had misjudged. We estimate wrongdoing in proportion to the purity of our conscience; the deed which is scarcely a fault in some hearts, takes the proportions of a crime in certain unsullied souls. The slightest stain on the white garment of a virgin makes it a thing ignoble as the rags of a mendicant. Between the two the difference lies in the misfortune of the one, the wrong-doing of the other. God never measures repentance; he never apportions it. As much is needed to efface a spot as to obliterate the crimes of a lifetime. These reflections fell with all their weight on Jules; passions, like human laws, will not pardon, and their reasoning is more just; for are they not based upon a conscience of their own as infallible as an instinct?

Jules finally came home pale, despondent, crushed beneath a sense of his wrongdoing, and yet expressing in spite of himself the joy his wife's innocence had given him. He entered her room all throbbing with emotion; she was in bed with a high fever. He took her hand, kissed it, and covered it with tears.

"Dear angel," he said, when they were alone, "it is repentance."

"And for what?" she answered.

As she made that reply, she laid her head back upon the pillow, closed her eyes, and remained motionless, keeping the secret of her sufferings that she might not frighten her husband,—the tenderness of a mother, the delicacy of an angel! All the woman was in her answer.

The silence lasted long. Jules, thinking her asleep, went to question Josephine as to her mistress's condition.

"Madame came home half-dead, monsieur. We sent at once for Monsieur Haudry."

"Did he come? What did he say?"

"He said nothing, monsieur. He did not seem satisfied; gave orders that no one should go near madame except the nurse, and said he should come back this evening."

Jules returned softly to his wife's room and sat down in a chair before the bed. There he remained, motionless, with his eyes fixed on those of Clemence. When she raised her eyelids she saw him, and through those lids passed a tender glance, full of passionate love, free from reproach and bitterness,—a look which fell like a flame of fire upon the heart of that husband, nobly absolved and forever loved by the being whom he had killed. The presentiment of death struck both their minds with equal force. Their looks were blended in one anguish, as their hearts had long been blended in one love, felt equally by both, and shared equally. No questions were uttered; a horrible certainty



was there,—in the wife an absolute generosity; in the husband an awful remorse; then, in both souls the same vision of the end, the same conviction of fatality.

There came a moment when, thinking his wife asleep, Jules kissed her softly on the forehead; then after long contemplation of that cherished face, he said:—



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“Oh God! leave me this angel still a little while that I may blot out my wrong by love and adoration. As a daughter, she is sublime; as a wife, what word can express her?”

Clemence raised her eyes; they were full of tears.

“You pain me,” she said, in a feeble voice.

It was getting late; Doctor Haudry came, and requested the husband to withdraw during his visit. When the doctor left the sick-room Jules asked him no question; one gesture was enough.

“Call in consultation any physician in whom you place confidence; I may be wrong.”

“Doctor, tell me the truth. I am a man, and I can bear it. Besides, I have the deepest interest in knowing it; I have certain affairs to settle.”

“Madame Jules is dying,” said the physician. “There is some moral malady which has made great progress, and it has complicated her physical condition, which was already dangerous, and made still more so by her great imprudence. To walk about barefooted at night! to go out when I forbade it! on foot yesterday in the rain, to-day in a carriage! She must have meant to kill herself. But still, my judgment is not final; she has youth, and a most amazing nervous strength. It may be best to risk all to win all by employing some violent reagent. But I will not take upon myself to order it; nor will I advise it; in consultation I shall oppose it.”

Jules returned to his wife. For eleven days and eleven nights he remained beside her bed, taking no sleep during the day when he laid his head upon the foot of the bed. No man ever pushed the jealousy of care and the craving for devotion to such an extreme as he. He could not endure that the slightest service should be done by others for his wife. There were days of uncertainty, false hopes, now a little better, then a crisis,—in short, all the horrible mutations of death as it wavers, hesitates, and finally strikes. Madame Jules always found strength to smile at her husband. She pitied him, knowing that soon he would be alone. It was a double death,—that of life, that of love; but life grew feebler, and love grew mightier. One frightful night there was, when Clemence passed through that delirium which precedes the death of youth. She talked of her happy love, she talked of her father; she related her mother’s revelations on her death-bed, and the obligations that mother had laid upon her. She struggled, not for life, but for her love which she could not leave.

“Grant, O God!” she said, “that he may not know I want him to die with me.”

Jules, unable to bear the scene, was at that moment in the adjoining room, and did not hear the prayer, which he would doubtless have fulfilled.



When this crisis was over, Madame Jules recovered some strength. The next day she was beautiful and tranquil; hope seemed to come to her; she adorned herself, as the dying often do. Then she asked to be alone all day, and sent away her husband with one of those entreaties made so earnestly that they are granted as we grant the prayer of a little child.



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Jules, indeed, had need of this day. He went to Monsieur de Maulincour to demand the satisfaction agreed upon between them. It was not without great difficulty that he succeeded in reaching the presence of the author of these misfortunes; but the vidame, when he learned that the visit related to an affair of honor, obeyed the precepts of his whole life, and himself took Jules into the baron's chamber.

Monsieur Desmarets looked about him in search of his antagonist.

"Yes! that is really he," said the vidame, motioning to a man who was sitting in an arm-chair beside the fire.

"Who is it? Jules?" said the dying man in a broken voice.

Auguste had lost the only faculty that makes us live—memory. Jules Desmarets recoiled with horror at this sight. He could not even recognize the elegant young man in that thing without—as Bossuet said—a name in any language. It was, in truth, a corpse with whitened hair, its bones scarce covered with a wrinkled, blighted, withered skin,—a corpse with white eyes motionless, mouth hideously gaping, like those of idiots or vicious men killed by excesses. No trace of intelligence remained upon that brow, nor in any feature; nor was there in that flabby flesh either color or the faintest appearance of circulating blood. Here was a shrunken, withered creature brought to the state of those monsters we see preserved in museums, floating in alcohol. Jules fancied that he saw above that face the terrible head of Ferragus, and his own anger was silenced by such a vengeance. The husband found pity in his heart for the vacant wreck of what was once a man.

"The duel has taken place," said the vidame.

"But he has killed many," answered Jules, sorrowfully.

"And many dear ones," added the old man. "His grandmother is dying; and I shall follow her soon into the grave."

On the morrow of this day, Madame Jules grew worse from hour to hour. She used a moment's strength to take a letter from beneath her pillow, and gave it eagerly to her husband with a sign that was easy to understand,—she wished to give him, in a kiss, her last breath. He took it, and she died. Jules fell half-dead himself and was taken to his brother's house. There, as he deplored in tears his absence of the day before, his brother told him that this separation was eagerly desired by Clemence, who wished to spare him the sight of the religious paraphernalia, so terrible to tender imaginations, which the Church displays when conferring the last sacraments upon the dying.

"You could not have borne it," said his brother. "I could hardly bear the sight myself, and all the servants wept. Clemence was like a saint. She gathered strength to bid us all



good-bye, and that voice, heard for the last time, rent our hearts. When she asked pardon for the pain she might unwillingly have caused her servants, there were cries and sobs and—”

“Enough! enough!” said Jules.



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He wanted to be alone, that he might read the last words of the woman whom all had loved, and who had passed away like a flower.

“My beloved, this is my last will. Why should we not make wills for the treasures of our hearts, as for our worldly property? Was not my love my property, my all? I mean here to dispose of my love: it was the only fortune of your Clemence, and it is all that she can leave you in dying. Jules, you love me still, and I die happy. The doctors may explain my death as they think best; I alone know the true cause. I shall tell it to you, whatever pain it may cause you. I cannot carry with me, in a heart all yours, a secret which you do not share, although I die the victim of an enforced silence.” Jules, I was nurtured and brought up in the deepest solitude, far from the vices and the falsehoods of the world, by the loving woman whom you knew. Society did justice to her conventional charm, for that is what pleases society; but I knew secretly her precious soul, I could cherish the mother who made my childhood a joy without bitterness, and I knew why I cherished her. Was not that to love doubly? Yes, I loved her, I feared her, I respected her; yet nothing oppressed my heart, neither fear nor respect. I was all in all to her; she was all in all to me. For nineteen happy years, without a care, my soul, solitary amid the world which muttered round me, reflected only her pure image; my heart beat for her and through her. I was scrupulously pious; I found pleasure in being innocent before God. My mother cultivated all noble and self-respecting sentiments in me. Ah! it gives me happiness to tell you, Jules, that I now know I was indeed a young girl, and that I came to you virgin in heart. “When I left that absolute solitude, when, for the first time, I braided my hair and crowned it with almond blossoms, when I added, with delight, a few satin knots to my white dress, thinking of the world I was to see, and which I was curious to see—Jules, that innocent and modest coquetry was done for you! Yes, as I entered the world, I saw *you* first of all. Your face, I remarked it; it stood out from the rest; your person pleased me; your voice, your manners all inspired me with pleasant presentiments. When you came up, when you spoke to me, the color on your forehead, the tremble in your voice,—that moment gave me memories with which I throb as I now write to you, as I now, for the last time, think of them. Our love was at first the keenest of sympathies, but it was soon discovered by each of us and then, as speedily, shared; just as, in after times, we have both equally felt and shared innumerable happinesses. From that moment my mother was only second in my heart. Next, I was yours, all yours. There is my life, and all my life, dear husband.” And here is what remains for me to tell you. One evening, a few days before



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my mother's death, she revealed to me the secret of her life,—not without burning tears. I have loved you better since the day I learned from the priest as he absolved my mother that there are passions condemned by the world and by the Church. But surely God will not be severe when they are the sins of souls as tender as that of my mother; only, that dear woman could never bring herself to repent. She loved much, Jules; she was all love. So I have prayed daily for her, but never judged her. "That night I learned the cause of her deep maternal tenderness; then I also learned that there was in Paris a man whose life and whose love centred on me; that your fortune was his doing, and that he loved you. I learned also that he was exiled from society and bore a tarnished name; but that he was more unhappy for me, for us, than for himself. My mother was all his comfort; she was dying, and I promised to take her place. With all the ardor of a soul whose feelings had never been perverted, I saw only the happiness of softening the bitterness of my mother's last moments, and I pledged myself to continue her work of secret charity,—the charity of the heart. The first time that I saw my father was beside the bed where my mother had just expired. When he raised his tearful eyes, it was to see in me a revival of his dead hopes. I had sworn, not to tell a lie, but to keep silence; and that silence what woman could have broken it?" "There is my fault, Jules,—a fault which I expiate by death. I doubted you. But fear is so natural to a woman; above all, a woman who knows what it is that she may lose. I trembled for our love. My father's secret seemed to me the death of my happiness; and the more I loved, the more I feared. I dared not avow this feeling to my father; it would have wounded him, and in his situation a wound was agony. But, without a word from me, he shared my fears. That fatherly heart trembled for my happiness as much as I trembled for myself; but it dared not speak, obeying the same delicacy that kept me mute. Yes, Jules, I believed that you could not love the daughter of Gratien Bourignard as you loved your Clemence. Without that terror could I have kept back anything from you,—you who live in every fold of my heart?" "The day when that odious, unfortunate young officer spoke to you, I was forced to lie. That day, for the second time in my life, I knew what pain was; that pain has steadily increased until this moment, when I speak with you for the last time. What matters now my father's position? You know all. I could, by the help of my love, have conquered my illness and borne its sufferings; but I cannot stifle the voice of doubt. Is it not probable that my origin would affect the purity of your love and weaken it, diminish it? That fear nothing has been able to quench in me. There, Jules, is the cause of my death. I cannot live fearing a word, a look,—a word you



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may never say, a look you may never give; but, I cannot help it, I fear them. I die beloved; there is my consolation. "I have known, for the last three years, that my father and his friends have well-nigh moved the world to deceive the world. That I might have a station in life, they have bought a dead man, a reputation, a fortune, so that a living man might live again, restored; and all this for you, for us. We were never to have known of it. Well, my death will save my father from that falsehood, for he will not survive me." Farewell, Jules, my heart is all here. To show you my love in its agony of fear, is not that bequeathing my whole soul to you? I could never have the strength to speak to you; I have only enough to write. I have just confessed to God the sins of my life. I have promised to fill my mind with the King of Heaven only; but I must confess to him who is, for me, the whole of earth. Alas! shall I not be pardoned for this last sigh between the life that was and the life that shall be? Farewell, my Jules, my loved one! I go to God, with whom is Love without a cloud, to whom you will follow me. There, before his throne, united forever, we may love each other throughout the ages. This hope alone can comfort me. If I am worthy of being there at once, I will follow you through life. My soul shall bear your company; it will wrap you about, for *you* must stay here still,—ah! here below. Lead a holy life that you may the more surely come to me. You can do such good upon this earth! Is it not an angel's mission for the suffering soul to shed happiness about him,—to give to others that which he has not? I bequeath you to the Unhappy. Their smiles, their tears, are the only ones of which I cannot be jealous. We shall find a charm in sweet beneficence. Can we not live together still if you would join my name—your Clemence—in these good works? "After loving as we have loved, there is naught but God, Jules. God does not lie; God never betrays. Adore him only, I charge you! Lead those who suffer up to him; comfort the sorrowing members of his Church. Farewell, dear soul that I have filled! I know you; you will never love again. I may die happy in the thought that makes all women happy. Yes, my grave will be your heart. After this childhood I have just related, has not my life flowed on within that heart? Dead, you will never drive me forth. I am proud of that rare life! You will know me only in the flower of my youth; I leave you regrets without disillusion. Jules, it is a happy death. "You, who have so fully understood me, may I ask one thing more of you,—superfluous request, perhaps, the fulfilment of a woman's fancy, the prayer of a jealousy we all must feel,—I pray you to burn all that especially belonged to *us*, destroy our chamber, annihilate all that is a memory of our happiness.

"Once more, farewell,—the last farewell! It is all love, and so will be my parting thought, my parting breath."



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When Jules had read that letter there came into his heart one of those wild frenzies of which it is impossible to describe the awful anguish. All sorrows are individual; their effects are not subjected to any fixed rule. Certain men will stop their ears to hear nothing; some women close their eyes hoping never to see again; great and splendid souls are met with who fling themselves into sorrow as into an abyss. In the matter of despair, all is true.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Jules escaped from his brother's house and returned home, wishing to pass the night beside his wife, and see till the last moment that celestial creature. As he walked along with an indifference to life known only to those who have reached the last degree of wretchedness, he thought of how, in India, the law ordained that widows should die; he longed to die. He was not yet crushed; the fever of his grief was still upon him. He reached his home and went up into the sacred chamber; he saw his Clemence on the bed of death, beautiful, like a saint, her hair smoothly laid upon her forehead, her hands joined, her body wrapped already in its shroud. Tapers were lighted, a priest was praying, Josephine kneeling in a corner, wept, and, near the bed, were two men. One was Ferragus. He stood erect, motionless, gazing at his daughter with dry eyes; his head you might have taken for bronze: he did not see Jules.

The other man was Jacquet,—Jacquet, to whom Madame Jules had been ever kind. Jacquet felt for her one of those respectful friendships which rejoice the untroubled heart; a gentle passion; love without its desires and its storms. He had come to pay his debt of tears, to bid a long adieu to the wife of his friend, to kiss, for the first time, the icy brow of the woman he had tacitly made his sister.

All was silence. Here death was neither terrible as in the churches, nor pompous as it makes its way along the streets; no, it was death in the home, a tender death; here were pangs of the heart, tears drawn from the eyes of all. Jules sat down beside Jacquet and pressed his hand; then, without uttering a word, all these persons remained as they were till morning.

When daylight paled the tapers, Jacquet, foreseeing the painful scenes which would then take place, drew Jules away into another room. At this moment the husband looked at the father, and Ferragus looked at Jules. The two sorrows arraigned each other, measured each other, and comprehended each other in that look. A flash of fury shone for an instant in the eyes of Ferragus.

“You killed her,” thought he.

“Why was I distrusted?” seemed the answer of the husband.

The scene was one that might have passed between two tigers recognizing the futility of a struggle and, after a moment’s hesitation, turning away, without even a roar.



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“Jacquet,” said Jules, “have you attended to everything?”

“Yes, to everything,” replied his friend, “but a man had forestalled me who had ordered and paid for all.”

“He tears his daughter from me!” cried the husband, with the violence of despair.

Jules rushed back to his wife’s room; but the father was there no longer. Clemence had now been placed in a leaden coffin, and workmen were employed in soldering the cover. Jules returned, horrified by the sight; the sound of the hammers the men were using made him mechanically burst into tears.

“Jacquet,” he said, “out of this dreadful night one idea has come to me, only one, but one I must make a reality at any price. I cannot let Clemence stay in any cemetery in Paris. I wish to burn her,—to gather her ashes and keep her with me. Say nothing of this, but manage on my behalf to have it done. I am going to *her* chamber, where I shall stay until the time has come to go. You alone may come in there to tell me what you have done. Go, and spare nothing.”

During the morning, Madame Jules, after lying in a mortuary chapel at the door of her house, was taken to Saint-Roch. The church was hung with black throughout. The sort of luxury thus displayed had drawn a crowd; for in Paris all things are sights, even true grief. There are people who stand at their windows to see how a son deplores a mother as he follows her body; there are others who hire commodious seats to see how a head is made to fall. No people in the world have such insatiate eyes as the Parisians. On this occasion, inquisitive minds were particularly surprised to see the six lateral chapels at Saint-Roch also hung in black. Two men in mourning were listening to a mortuary mass said in each chapel. In the chancel no other persons but Monsieur Desmarets, the notary, and Jacquet were present; the servants of the household were outside the screen. To church loungers there was something inexplicable in so much pomp and so few mourners. But Jules had been determined that no indifferent persons should be present at the ceremony.

High mass was celebrated with the sombre magnificence of funeral services. Beside the ministers in ordinary of Saint-Roch, thirteen priests from other parishes were present. Perhaps never did the *Dies irae* produce upon Christians, assembled by chance, by curiosity, and thirsting for emotions, an effect so profound, so nervously glacial as that now caused by this hymn when the eight voices of the precentors, accompanied by the voices of the priests and the choir-boys, intoned it alternately. From the six lateral chapels twelve other childish voices rose shrilly in grief, mingling with the choir voices lamentably. From all parts of the church this mourning issued; cries of anguish responded to the cries of fear. That terrible music was the voice of sorrows hidden from the world, of secret friendships weeping for the dead. Never, in any human religion, have the

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terrors of the soul, violently torn from the body and stormily shaken in presence of the fulminating majesty of God, been rendered with such force. Before that clamor of clamors all artists and their most passionate compositions must bow humiliated. No, nothing can stand beside that hymn, which sums all human passions, gives them a galvanic life beyond the coffin, and leaves them, palpitating still, before the living and avenging God. These cries of childhood, mingling with the tones of older voices, including thus in the Song of Death all human life and its developments, recalling the sufferings of the cradle, swelling to the griefs of other ages in the stronger male voices and the quavering of the priests,—all this strident harmony, big with lightning and thunderbolts, does it not speak with equal force to the daring imagination, the coldest heart, nay, to philosophers themselves? As we hear it, we think God speaks; the vaulted arches of no church are mere material; they have a voice, they tremble, they scatter fear by the might of their echoes. We think we see unnumbered dead arising and holding out their hands. It is no more a father, a wife, a child, —humanity itself is rising from its dust.

It is impossible to judge of the catholic, apostolic, and Roman faith, unless the soul has known that deepest grief of mourning for a loved one lying beneath the pall; unless it has felt the emotions that fill the heart, uttered by that Hymn of Despair, by those cries that crush the mind, by that sacred fear augmenting strophe by strophe, ascending heavenward, which terrifies, belittles, and elevates the soul, and leaves within our minds, as the last sound ceases, a consciousness of immortality. We have met and struggled with the vast idea of the Infinite. After that, all is silent in the church. No word is said; sceptics themselves *know not what they are feeling*. Spanish genius alone was able to bring this untold majesty to untold griefs.

When the solemn ceremony was over, twelve men came from the six chapels and stood around the coffin to hear the song of hope which the Church intones for the Christian soul before the human form is buried. Then, each man entered alone a mourning-coach; Jacquet and Monsieur Desmarets took the thirteenth; the servants followed on foot. An hour later, they were at the summit of that cemetery popularly called Pere-Lachaise. The unknown twelve men stood in a circle round the grave, where the coffin had been laid in presence of a crowd of loiterers gathered from all parts of this public garden. After a few short prayers the priest threw a handful of earth on the remains of this woman, and the grave-diggers, having asked for their fee, made haste to fill the grave in order to dig another.

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Here this history seems to end; but perhaps it would be incomplete if, after giving a rapid sketch of Parisian life, and following certain of its capricious undulations, the effects of death were omitted. Death in Paris is unlike death in any other capital; few persons know the trials of true grief in its struggle with civilization, and the government of Paris. Perhaps, also, Monsieur Jules and Ferragus XXIII. may have proved sufficiently interesting to make a few words on their after life not entirely out of place. Besides, some persons like to be told all, and wish, as one of our cleverest critics has remarked, to know by what chemical process oil was made to burn in Aladdin's lamp.

Jacquet, being a government employee, naturally applied to the authorities for permission to exhume the body of Madame Jules and burn it. He went to see the prefect of police, under whose protection the dead sleep. That functionary demanded a petition. The blank was brought that gives to sorrow its proper administrative form; it was necessary to employ the bureaucratic jargon to express the wishes of a man so crushed that words, perhaps, were lacking to him, and it was also necessary to coldly and briefly repeat on the margin the nature of the request, which was done in these words: "The petitioner respectfully asks for the incineration of his wife."

When the official charged with making the report to the Councillor of State and prefect of police read that marginal note, explaining the object of the petition, and couched, as requested, in the plainest terms, he said:—

"This is a serious matter! my report cannot be ready under eight days."

Jules, to whom Jacquet was obliged to speak of this delay, comprehended the words that Ferragus had said in his hearing, "I'll burn Paris!" Nothing seemed to him now more natural than to annihilate that receptacle of monstrous things.

"But," he said to Jacquet, "you must go to the minister of the Interior, and get your minister to speak to him."

Jacquet went to the minister of the Interior, and asked an audience; it was granted, but the time appointed was two weeks later. Jacquet was a persistent man. He travelled from bureau to bureau, and finally reached the private secretary of the minister of the Interior, to whom he had made the private secretary of his own minister say a word. These high protectors aiding, he obtained for the morrow a second interview, in which, being armed with a line from the autocrat of Foreign affairs to the pacha of the Interior, Jacquet hoped to carry the matter by assault. He was ready with reasons, and answers to peremptory questions,—in short, he was armed at all points; but he failed.

"This matter does not concern me," said the minister; "it belongs to the prefect of police. Besides, there is no law giving a husband any legal right to the body of his wife, nor to fathers those of their children. The matter is serious. There are questions of public utility involved which will have to be examined. The interests of the city of Paris might

suffer. Therefore if the matter depended on me, which it does not, I could not decide *hic et nunc*; I should require a report.”



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A *report* is to the present system of administration what limbo or hades is to Christianity. Jacquet knew very well the mania for “reports”; he had not waited until this occasion to groan at that bureaucratic absurdity. He knew that since the invasion into public business of the *Report* (an administrative revolution consummated in 1804) there was never known a single minister who would take upon himself to have an opinion or to decide the slightest matter, unless that opinion or matter had been winnowed, sifted, and plucked to bits by the paper-spoilers, quill-drivers, and splendid intellects of his particular bureau. Jacquet—he was one of those who are worthy of Plutarch as biographer—saw that he had made a mistake in his management of the affair, and had, in fact, rendered it impossible by trying to proceed legally. The thing he should have done was to have taken Madame Jules to one of Desmaret’s estates in the country; and there, under the good-natured authority of some village mayor to have gratified the sorrowful longing of his friend. Law, constitutional and administrative, begets nothing; it is a barren monster for peoples, for kings, and for private interests. But the peoples decipher no principles but those that are writ in blood, and the evils of legality will always be pacific; it flattens a nation down, that is all. Jacquet, a man of modern liberty, returned home reflecting on the benefits of arbitrary power.

When he went with his report to Jules, he found it necessary to deceive him, for the unhappy man was in a high fever, unable to leave his bed. The minister of the Interior mentioned, at a ministerial dinner that same evening, the singular fancy of a Parisian in wishing to burn his wife after the manner of the Romans. The clubs of Paris took up the subject, and talked for a while of the burials of antiquity. Ancient things were just then becoming a fashion, and some persons declared that it would be a fine thing to re-establish, for distinguished persons, the funeral pyre. This opinion had its defenders and its detractors. Some said that there were too many such personages, and the price of wood would be enormously increased by such a custom; moreover, it would be absurd to see our ancestors in their urns in the procession at Longchamps. And if the urns were valuable, they were likely some day to be sold at auction, full of respectable ashes, or seized by creditors,—a race of men who respected nothing. The other side made answer that our ancestors were much safer in urns than at Pere-Lachaise, for before very long the city of Paris would be compelled to order a Saint-Bartholomew against its dead, who were invading the neighboring country, and threatening to invade the territory of Brie. It was, in short, one of those futile but witty discussions which sometimes cause deep and painful wounds. Happily for Jules, he knew nothing of the conversations, the witty speeches, and arguments which his sorrow had furnished to the tongues of Paris.



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The prefect of police was indignant that Monsieur Jacquet had appealed to a minister to avoid the wise delays of the commissioners of the public highways; for the exhumation of Madame Jules was a question belonging to that department. The police bureau was doing its best to reply promptly to the petition; one appeal was quite sufficient to set the office in motion, and once in motion matters would go far. But as for the administration, that might take the case before the Council of state,—a machine very difficult indeed to move.

After the second day Jacquet was obliged to tell his friend that he must renounce his desire, because, in a city where the number of tears shed on black draperies is tariffed, where the laws recognize seven classes of funerals, where the scrap of ground to hold the dead is sold at its weight in silver, where grief is worked for what it is worth, where the prayers of the Church are costly, and the vestry claim payment for extra voices in the *Dies irae*,—all attempt to get out of the rut prescribed by the authorities for sorrow is useless and impossible.

“It would have been to me,” said Jules, “a comfort in my misery. I meant to have died away from here, and I hoped to hold her in my arms in a distant grave. I did not know that bureaucracy could send its claws into our very coffins.”

He now wished to see if room had been left for him beside his wife. The two friends went to the cemetery. When they reached it they found (as at the doors of museums, galleries, and coach-offices) *ciceroni*, who proposed to guide them through the labyrinth of Pere-Lachaise. Neither Jules nor Jacquet could have found the spot where Clemence lay. Ah, frightful anguish! They went to the lodge to consult the porter of the cemetery. The dead have a porter, and there are hours when the dead are “not receiving.” It is necessary to upset all the rules and regulations of the upper and lower police to obtain permission to weep at night, in silence and solitude, over the grave where a loved one lies. There’s a rule for summer and a rule for winter about this.

Certainly, of all the porters in Paris, the porter of Pere-Lachaise is the luckiest. In the first place, he has no gate-cord to pull; then, instead of a lodge, he has a house,—an establishment which is not quite ministerial, although a vast number of persons come under his administration, and a good many employees. And this governor of the dead has a salary, with emoluments, and acts under powers of which none complain; he plays despot at his ease. His lodge is not a place of business, though it has departments where the book-keeping of receipts, expenses, and profits, is carried on. The man is not a *suisse*, nor a concierge, nor actually a porter. The gate which admits the dead stands wide open; and though there are monuments and buildings to be cared for, he is not a care-taker. In short, he is an indefinable anomaly, an authority which participates in all, and yet is nothing,—an authority placed, like the dead on whom it is based, outside of all. Nevertheless, this exceptional man grows out of the city of Paris,—that chimerical creation like the ship which is its emblem, that creature of reason moving on a thousand paws which are seldom unanimous in motion.



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This guardian of the cemetery may be called a concierge who has reached the condition of a functionary, not soluble by dissolution! His place is far from being a sinecure. He does not allow any one to be buried without a permit; he must count his dead. He points out to you in this vast field the six feet square of earth where you will one day put all you love, or all you hate, a mistress, or a cousin. Yes, remember this: all the feelings and emotions of Paris come to end here, at this porter's lodge, where they are administrationized. This man has registers in which his dead are booked; they are in their graves, and also on his records. He has under him keepers, gardeners, grave-diggers, and their assistants. He is a personage. Mourning hearts do not speak to him at first. He does not appear at all except in serious cases, such as one corpse mistaken for another, a murdered body, an exhumation, a dead man coming to life. The bust of the reigning king is in his hall; possibly he keeps the late royal, imperial, and quasi-royal busts in some cupboard,—a sort of little Pere-Lachaise all ready for revolutions. In short, he is a public man, an excellent man, good husband and good father,—epitaph apart. But so many diverse sentiments have passed before him on biers; he has seen so many tears, true and false; he has beheld sorrow under so many aspects and on so many faces; he has heard such endless thousands of eternal woes,—that to him sorrow has come to be nothing more than a stone an inch thick, four feet long, and twenty-four inches wide. As for regrets, they are the annoyances of his office; he neither breakfasts nor dines without first wiping off the rain of an inconsolable affliction. He is kind and tender to other feelings; he will weep over a stage-hero, over Monsieur Germeuil in the "Auberge des Adrets," the man with the butter-colored breeches, murdered by Macaire; but his heart is ossified in the matter of real dead men. Dead men are ciphers, numbers, to him; it is his business to organize death. Yet he does meet, three times in a century, perhaps, with an occasion when his part becomes sublime, and then he *is* sublime through every hour of his day,—in times of pestilence.

When Jacquet approached him this absolute monarch was evidently out of temper.

"I told you," he was saying, "to water the flowers from the rue Massena to the place Regnault de Saint-Jean-d'Angely. You paid no attention to me! *Sac-a-papier!* suppose the relations should take it into their heads to come here to-day because the weather is fine, what would they say to me? They'd shriek as if they were burned; they'd say horrid things of us, and calumniate us—"

"Monsieur," said Jacquet, "we want to know where Madame Jules is buried."

"Madame Jules *who?*" he asked. "We've had three Madame Jules within the last week. Ah," he said, interrupting himself, "here comes the funeral of Monsieur le Baron de Maulincour! A fine procession, that! He has soon followed his grandmother. Some families, when they begin to go, rattle down like a wager. Lots of bad blood in Parisians."



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“Monsieur,” said Jacquet, touching him on the arm, “the person I spoke of is Madame Jules Desmarets, the wife of the broker of that name.”

“Ah, I know!” he replied, looking at Jacquet. “Wasn’t it a funeral with thirteen mourning coaches, and only one mourner in the twelve first? It was so droll we all noticed it—”

“Monsieur, take care, Monsieur Desmarets is with me; he might hear you, and what you say is not seemly.”

“I beg pardon, monsieur! you are quite right. Excuse me, I took you for heirs. Monsieur,” he continued, after consulting a plan of the cemetery, “Madame Jules is in the rue Marechal Lefebre, alley No. 4, between Mademoiselle Raucourt, of the Comedie-Francaise, and Monsieur Moreau-Malvin, a butcher, for whom a handsome tomb in white marble has been ordered, which will be one of the finest in the cemetery —”

“Monsieur,” said Jacquet, interrupting him, “that does not help us.”

“True,” said the official, looking round him. “Jean,” he cried, to a man whom he saw at a little distance, “conduct these gentlemen to the grave of Madame Jules Desmarets, the broker’s wife. You know where it is,—near to Mademoiselle Raucourt, the tomb where there’s a bust.”

The two friends followed the guide; but they did not reach the steep path which leads to the upper part of the cemetery without having to pass through a score of proposals and requests, made, with honied softness, by the touts of marble-workers, iron-founders, and monumental sculptors.

“If monsieur would like to order *something*, we would do it on the most reasonable terms.”

Jacquet was fortunate enough to be able to spare his friend the hearing of these proposals so agonizing to bleeding hearts; and presently they reached the resting-place. When Jules beheld the earth so recently dug, into which the masons had stuck stakes to mark the place for the stone posts required to support the iron railing, he turned, and leaned upon Jacquet’s shoulder, raising himself now and again to cast long glances at the clay mound where he was forced to leave the remains of the being in and by whom he still lived.

“How miserably she lies there!” he said.

“But she is not there,” said Jacquet, “she is in your memory. Come, let us go; let us leave this odious cemetery, where the dead are adorned like women for a ball.”

“Suppose we take her away?”



“Can it be done?”

“All things can be done!” cried Jules. “So, I shall lie there,” he added, after a pause.
“There is room enough.”

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Jacquet finally succeeded in getting him to leave the great enclosure, divided like a chessboard by iron railings and elegant compartments, in which were tombs decorated with palms, inscriptions, and tears as cold as the stones on which sorrowing hearts had caused to be carved their regrets and coats of arms. Many good words are there engraved in black letters, epigrams reproving the curious, *concetti*, wittily turned farewells, rendezvous given at which only one side appears, pretentious biographies, glitter, rubbish and tinsel. Here the floriated thyrus, there a lance-head, farther on Egyptian urns, now and then a few cannon; on all sides the emblems of professions, and every style of art,—Moorish, Greek, Gothic,—friezes, ovules, paintings, vases, guardian-angels, temples, together with innumerable *immortelles*, and dead rose-bushes. It is a forlorn comedy! It is another Paris, with its streets, its signs, its industries, and its lodgings; but a Paris seen through the diminishing end of an opera-glass, a microscopic Paris reduced to the littleness of shadows, spectres, dead men, a human race which no longer has anything great about it, except its vanity. There Jules saw at his feet, in the long valley of the Seine, between the slopes of Vaugirard and Meudon and those of Belleville and Montmartre, the real Paris, wrapped in a misty blue veil produced by smoke, which the sunlight tendered at that moment diaphanous. He glanced with a constrained eye at those forty thousand houses, and said, pointing to the space comprised between the column of the Place Vendome and the gilded cupola of the Invalides:—

“She was wrenched from me there by the fatal curiosity of that world which excites itself and meddles solely for excitement and occupation.”

Twelve miles from where they were, on the banks of the Seine, in a modest village lying on the slope of a hill of that long hilly basin the middle of which great Paris stirs like a child in its cradle, a death scene was taking place, far indeed removed from Parisian pomps, with no accompaniment of torches or tapers or mourning-coaches, without prayers of the Church, in short, a death in all simplicity. Here are the facts: The body of a young girl was found early in the morning, stranded on the river-bank in the slime and reeds of the Seine. Men employed in dredging sand saw it as they were getting into their frail boat on their way to their work.

“*Tiens!* fifty francs earned!” said one of them.

“True,” said the other.

They approached the body.

“A handsome girl! We had better go and make our statement.”

And the two dredgers, after covering the body with their jackets, went to the house of the village mayor, who was much embarrassed at having to make out the legal papers necessitated by this discovery.



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The news of this event spread with the telegraphic rapidity peculiar to regions where social communications have no distractions, where gossip, scandal, calumny, in short, the social tale which feasts the world has no break of continuity from one boundary to another. Before long, persons arriving at the mayor's office released him from all embarrassment. They were able to convert the *proces-verbal* into a mere certificate of death, by recognizing the body as that of the Demoiselle Ida Gruget, corset-maker, living rue de la Corderie-du-Temple, number 14. The judiciary police of Paris arrived, and the mother, bearing her daughter's last letter. Amid the mother's moans, a doctor certified to death by asphyxia, through the injection of black blood into the pulmonary system,—which settled the matter. The inquest over, and the certificates signed, by six o'clock the same evening authority was given to bury the grisette. The rector of the parish, however, refused to receive her into the church or to pray for her. Ida Gruget was therefore wrapped in a shroud by an old peasant-woman, put into a common pine-coffin, and carried to the village cemetery by four men, followed by a few inquisitive peasant-women, who talked about the death with wonder mingled with some pity.

The widow Gruget was charitably taken in by an old lady who prevented her from following the sad procession of her daughter's funeral. A man of triple functions, the bell-ringer, beadle, and grave-digger of the parish, had dug a grave in the half-acre cemetery behind the church, —a church well known, a classic church, with a square tower and pointed roof covered with slate, supported on the outside by strong corner buttresses. Behind the apse of the chancel, lay the cemetery, enclosed with a dilapidated wall,—a little field full of hillocks; no marble monuments, no visitors, but surely in every furrow, tears and true regrets, which were lacking to Ida Gruget. She was cast into a corner full of tall grass and brambles. After the coffin had been laid in this field, so poetic in its simplicity, the grave-digger found himself alone, for night was coming on. While filling the grave, he stopped now and then to gaze over the wall along the road. He was standing thus, resting on his spade, and looking at the Seine, which had brought him the body.

"Poor girl!" cried the voice of a man who suddenly appeared.

"How you made me jump, monsieur," said the grave-digger.

"Was any service held over the body you are burying?"

"No, monsieur. Monsieur le cure wasn't willing. This is the first person buried here who didn't belong to the parish. Everybody knows everybody else in this place. Does monsieur—Why, he's gone!"

Some days had elapsed when a man dressed in black called at the house of Monsieur Jules Desmarets, and without asking to see him carried up to the chamber of his wife a large porphyry vase, on which were inscribed the words:—



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INVITA LEGE
CONJUGI MOERENTI
FILIOLAE CINERES
RESTITUIT
AMICIS XII. JUVANTIBUS
MORIBUNDUS PATER.

“What a man!” cried Jules, bursting into tears.

Eight days sufficed the husband to obey all the wishes of his wife, and to arrange his own affairs. He sold his practice to a brother of Martin Falleix, and left Paris while the authorities were still discussing whether it was lawful for a citizen to dispose of the body of his wife.

* * * * *

Who has not encountered on the boulevards of Paris, at the turn of a street, or beneath the arcades of the Palais-Royal, or in any part of the world where chance may offer him the sight, a being, man or woman, at whose aspect a thousand confused thoughts spring into his mind? At that sight we are suddenly interested, either by features of some fantastic conformation which reveal an agitated life, or by a singular effect of the whole person, produced by gestures, air, gait, clothes; or by some deep, intense look; or by other inexpressible signs which seize our minds suddenly and forcibly without our being able to explain even to ourselves the cause of our emotion. The next day other thoughts and other images have carried out of sight that passing dream. But if we meet the same personage again, either passing at some fixed hour, like the clerk of a mayor's office, or wandering about the public promenades, like those individuals who seem to be a sort of furniture of the streets of Paris, and who are always to be found in public places, at first representations or noted restaurants,—then this being fastens himself or herself on our memory, and remains there like the first volume of a novel the end of which is lost. We are tempted to question this unknown person, and say, “Who are you?” “Why are you lounging here?” “By what right do you wear that pleated ruffle, that faded waistcoat, and carry that cane with an ivory top; why those blue spectacles; for what reason do you cling to that cravat of a dead and gone fashion?” Among these wandering creations some belong to the species of the Greek Hermae; they say nothing to the soul; *they are there*, and that is all. Why? is known to none. Such figure are a type of those used by sculptors for the four Seasons, for Commerce, for Plenty, *etc.* Some others—former lawyers, old merchants, elderly generals—move and walk, and yet seem stationary. Like old trees that are half uprooted by the current of a river, they seem never to take part in the torrent of Paris, with its youthful, active crowd. It is impossible to know if their friends have forgotten to bury them, or whether they have escaped out of their coffins. At any rate, they have reached the condition of semi-fossils.



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One of these Parisian Melmoths had come within a few days into a neighborhood of sober, quiet people, who, when the weather is fine, are invariably to be found in the space which lies between the south entrance of the Luxembourg and the north entrance of the Observatoire, —a space without a name, the neutral space of Paris. There, Paris is no longer; and there, Paris still lingers. The spot is a mingling of street, square, boulevard, fortification, garden, avenue, high-road, province, and metropolis; certainly, all of that is to be found there, and yet the place is nothing of all that,—it is a desert. Around this spot without a name stand the Foundling hospital, the Bourbe, the Cochin hospital, the Capucines, the hospital La Rochefoucauld, the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, the hospital of the Val-de-Grace; in short, all the vices and all the misfortunes of Paris find their asylum there. And (that nothing may lack in this philanthropic centre) Science there studies the tides and longitudes, Monsieur de Chateaubriand has erected the Marie-Therese Infirmary, and the Carmelites have founded a convent. The great events of life are represented by bells which ring incessantly through this desert,—for the mother giving birth, for the babe that is born, for the vice that succumbs, for the toiler who dies, for the virgin who prays, for the old man shaking with cold, for genius self-deluded. And a few steps off is the cemetery of Mont-Parnasse, where, hour after hour, the sorry funerals of the faubourg Saint-Marceau wend their way. This esplanade, which commands a view of Paris, has been taken possession of by bowl-players; it is, in fact, a sort of bowling green frequented by old gray faces, belonging to kindly, worthy men, who seem to continue the race of our ancestors, whose countenances must only be compared with those of their surroundings.

The man who had become, during the last few days, an inhabitant of this desert region, proved an assiduous attendant at these games of bowls; and must, undoubtedly, be considered the most striking creature of these various groups, who (if it is permissible to liken Parisians to the different orders of zoology) belonged to the genus mollusk. The new-comer kept sympathetic step with the *cochonnet*,—the little bowl which serves as a goal and on which the interest of the game must centre. He leaned against a tree when the *cochonnet* stopped; then, with the same attention that a dog gives to his master's gestures, he looked at the other bowls flying through the air, or rolling along the ground. You might have taken him for the weird and watchful genii of the *cochonnet*. He said nothing; and the bowl-players—the most fanatic men that can be encountered among the sectarians of any faith —had never asked the reason of his dogged silence; in fact, the most observing of them thought him deaf and dumb.



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When it happened that the distances between the bowls and the *cochonnet* had to be measured, the cane of this silent being was used as a measure, the players coming up and taking it from the icy hands of the old man and returning it without a word or even a sign of friendliness. The loan of his cane seemed a servitude to which he had negatively consented. When a shower fell, he stayed near the *cochonnet*, the slave of the bowls, and the guardian of the unfinished game. Rain affected him no more than the fine weather did; he was, like the players themselves, an intermediary species between a Parisian who has the lowest intellect of his kind and an animal which has the highest.

In other respects, pallid and shrunken, indifferent to his own person, vacant in mind, he often came bareheaded, showing his sparse white hair, and his square, yellow, bald skull, like the knee of a beggar seen through his tattered trousers. His mouth was half-open, no ideas were in his glance, no precise object appeared in his movements; he never smiled; he never raised his eyes to heaven, but kept them habitually on the ground, where he seemed to be looking for something. At four o'clock an old woman arrived, to take him Heaven knows where; which she did by towing him along by the arm, as a young girl drags a wilful goat which still wants to browse by the wayside. This old man was a horrible thing to see.

In the afternoon of the day when Jules Desmarets left Paris, his travelling-carriage, in which he was alone, passed rapidly through the rue de l'Est, and came out upon the esplanade of the Observatoire at the moment when the old man, leaning against a tree, had allowed his cane to be taken from his hand amid the noisy vociferations of the players, pacifically irritated. Jules, thinking that he recognized that face, felt an impulse to stop, and at the same instant the carriage came to a standstill; for the postilion, hemmed in by some handcarts, had too much respect for the game to call upon the players to make way for him.

"It is he!" said Jules, beholding in that human wreck, Ferragus XXIII., chief of the Devorants. Then, after a pause, he added, "How he loved her!—Go on, postilion."

ADDENDUM

Note: Ferragus is the first part of a trilogy. Part two is entitled *The Duchesse de Langeais* and part three is *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*. In other addendum references all three stories are usually combined under the title *The Thirteen*.

The following personages appear in other stories of the *Human Comedy*.

Bourignard, Gratien-Henri-Victor-Jean-Joseph
The Girl with the Golden Eyes



Desmartes, Jules
Cesar Birotteau

Desmartes, Madame Jules
Cesar Birotteau

Desplein
The Atheist's Mass
Cousin Pons
Lost Illusions
The Government Clerks
Pierrette
A Bachelor's Establishment
The Seamy Side of History
Modeste Mignon
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Honorine



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Gruget, Madame Etienne
The Government Clerks
A Bachelor's Establishment

Haudry (doctor)
Cesar Birotteau
A Bachelor's Establishment
The Seamy Side of History
Cousin Pons

Langeais, Duchesse Antoinette de
Father Goriot
The Duchesse of Langeais

Marsay, Henri de
The Duchesse of Langeais
The Girl with the Golden Eyes
The Unconscious Humorists
Another Study of Woman
The Lily of the Valley
Father Goriot
Jealousies of a Country Town
Ursule Mirouet
A Marriage Settlement
Lost Illusions
A Distinguished Provincial at Paris
Letters of Two Brides
The Ball at Sceaux
Modeste Mignon
The Secrets of a Princess
The Gondreville Mystery
A Daughter of Eve

Maulincour, Baronne de
A Marriage Settlement

Meynardie, Madame
Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Nucingen, Baronne Delphine de
Father Goriot
Eugenie Grandet
Cesar Birotteau
Melmoth Reconciled



Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

The Commission in Lunacy

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Modeste Mignon

The Firm of Nucingen

Another Study of Woman

A Daughter of Eve

The Member for Arcis

Pamiers, Vidame de

The Duchesse of Langeais

Jealousies of a Country Town

Ronquerolles, Marquis de

The Imaginary Mistress

The Duchess of Langeais

The Girl with the Golden Eyes

The Peasantry

Ursule Mirouet

A Woman of Thirty

Another Study of Woman

The Member for Arcis

Serizy, Comtesse de

A Start in Life

The Duchesse of Langeais

Ursule Mirouet

A Woman of Thirty

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

Another Study of Woman

The Imaginary Mistress