

GERFAUT - V2

CHARLES DE BERNARD*

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER VI

GERFAUT'S STORY

While the two friends are devouring to the very last morsel the feast prepared for them by Madame Gobillot, it may not be out of place to explain in a few words the nature of the bonds that united these two men.

The Vicomte de Gerfaut was one of those talented beings who are the veritable champions of an age when the lightest pen weighs more in the social balance than our ancestors' heaviest sword. He was born in the south of France, of one of those old families whose fortune had diminished each generation, their name finally being almost all that they had left. After making many sacrifices to give their son an education worthy of his birth, his parents did not live to enjoy the fruits of their efforts, and Gerfaut became an orphan at the time when he had just finished his law studies. He then abandoned the career of which his father had dreamed for him, and the possibilities of a red gown bordered with ermine. A mobile and highly colored imagination, a passionate love for the arts, and, more than all, some intimacies contracted with men of letters, decided his vocation and launched him into literature.

The ardent young man, without a murmur or any misgivings, drank to the very dregs the cup poured out to neophytes in the harsh career of letters by editors, theatrical managers, and publishers. With some, this course ends in suicide, but it only cost Gerfaut a portion of his slender patrimony; he bore this loss like a man who feels that he is strong enough to repair it. When his plans were once made, he followed them up with indefatigable perseverance, and became a striking example of the irresistible power of intelligence united to will-power. Reputation, for him, lay in the unknown depths of an arid and rocky soil; he was obliged, in order to reach it, to dig a sort of artesian well. Gerfaut accepted this heroic labor; he worked day and night for several years, his forehead, metaphorically, bathed in a painful perspiration alleviated

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only by hopes far away. At last the untiring worker's drill struck the underground spring over which so many noble ones breathlessly bend, although their thirst is never quenched. At this victorious stroke, glory burst forth, falling in luminous sparks, making this new name—his name—flash with a brilliancy too dearly paid for not to be lasting.

At the time of which we speak, Octave had conquered every obstacle in the literary field. With a versatility of talent which sometimes recalled Voltaire's "proteanism," he attacked in succession the most difficult styles. Besides their poetic value, his dramas had this positive merit, the highest in the theatre world they were money-makers; so the managers greeted him with due respect, while collaborators swarmed about him. The journals paid for his articles in their weight in gold; reviews snatched every line of his yet unfinished novels; his works were illustrated by Porret and Tony Johannot—the masters of the day—and shone resplendent behind the glass cases in the Orleans gallery. Gerfaut had at last made a place for himself among that baker's dozen of writers who call themselves, and justly, too, the field-m Marshals of French literature, of which Chateaubriand was then commander-in-chief.

What was it that had brought such a person a hundred leagues from the opera balcony, to put on a pretty woman's slipper? Was the fair lady one of those caprices, so frequent and fleeting in an artist's thoughts, or had she given birth to one of those sentiments that end by absorbing the rest of one's life?

The young man seated opposite Gerfaut was, physically and morally, as complete a contrast to him as one could possibly imagine. He was one of the kind very much in request in fashionable society. There is not a person who has not met one of these worthy fellows, destined to make good officers, perfect merchants, and very satisfactory lawyers, but who, unfortunately, have been seized with a mania for notoriety. Ordinarily they think of it on account of somebody else's talent. This one is brother to a poet, another son-in-law to a historian; they conclude that they also have a right to be poet and historian in their turn. Thomas Corneille is their model; but we must admit that very few of our writers reach the rank attained by Corneille the younger.

Marillac was train-bearer to Gerfaut, and was rewarded for this bondage by a few bribes of collaboration, crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. They had been close friends since they both entered the law school, where they were companions in folly rather than in study. Marillac also had thrown himself into the arena of literature; then, different fortunes having greeted the two friends' efforts, he had descended little by little from the role of a rival to that of an inferior. Marillac was an artist, talent accepted, from the tip of his toes to the sole of his boots, which he wished to lengthen by pointed toes out of respect for the Middle Ages; for he excelled above all things in his manner of dressing, and possessed, among other intellectual merits, the longest moustache in literature.

If he had not art in his brain, to make up for it he always had its name at his tongue's end. Vaudeville writing or painting, poetry or music, he dabbled in all these, like those horses sold as good for both riding and driving, which are as bad in the saddle as in front of a tilbury. He signed himself "Marillac, man of letters"; meanwhile, aside from his profound disdain for the bourgeois, whom he called vulgar, and for the French Academy, to which he had sworn never to belong, one could reproach him with nothing. His penchant for the picturesque in expression was not always, it is true, in the most excellent taste, but, in spite of these little oddities, his unfortunate passion for art, and his affection for the Middle Ages, he was a brave, worthy, and happy fellow, full of good qualities, very much devoted to his friends, above all to Gerfaut. One could, therefore, pardon him for being a pseudo-artist.

"Will your story be a long one?" said he to the playwright, when Catherine had conducted them after supper to the double-bedded room, where they were to pass the night.

"Long or short, what does it matter, since you must listen to it?"

"Because, first, I would make some grog and fill my pipe; otherwise, I would content myself with a cigar."

"Take your pipe and make your grog."

"Here!" said the artist, running after Catherine, "don't rush downstairs so. You are wanted. Fear nothing, interesting maid; you are safe with us; but bring us a couple of glasses, brandy, sugar, a bowl, and some hot water."

"They want some hot water," cried the servant, rushing into the kitchen with a frightened look; "can they be ill at this hour?"

"Give the gentlemen what they want, you little simpleton!" replied Mademoiselle Reine; "they probably want to concoct some of their Paris drinks."

When all the articles necessary for the grog were on the table, Marillac drew up an old armchair, took another chair to stretch his legs upon, replaced his cap with a handkerchief artistically knotted about his head, his boots with a pair of slippers, and, finally, lighted his pipe.

"Now," said he, as he seated himself, "I will listen without moving an eyelid should your story last, like the creation, six days and nights."

Gerfaut took two or three turns about the room with the air of an orator who is seeking for a beginning to a speech.

"You know," said he, "that Fate has more or less influence over our lives, according to the condition of mind in which we happen to be. In order that you may understand the importance of the adventure I am about relating to you, it will be necessary for me to picture the state of mind which I was in at the time it happened; this will be a sort of philosophical and psychological preamble."

"Thunder!" interrupted Marillac, "if I had known that, I would have ordered a second bowl."

"You will remember," continued Gerfaut, paying no attention to this pleasantry, "the rather bad attack of spleen which I had a little over a year ago?"

"Before your trip to Switzerland?"

"Exactly."

"If I remember right," said the artist, "you were strangely cross and whimsical at the time. Was it not just after the failure of our drama at the Porte Saint-Martin?"

"You might also add of our play at the Gymnase."

"I wash my hands of that. You know very well that it only went as far as the second act, and I did not write one word in the first."

"And hardly one in the second. However, I take the catastrophe upon my shoulders; that made two perfect failures in that d—d month of August."

"Two failures that were hard to swallow," replied Marillac, "We can say, for our consolation, that there never were more infamous conspiracies against us, above all, than at the Gymnase. My ears ring with the hisses yet! I could see, from our box, a little villain in a dress coat, in one corner of the pit, who gave the signal with a whistle as large as a horse-pistol. How I would have liked to cram it down his throat!" As he said these words, he brought his fist down upon the table, and made the glasses and candles dance upon it.

"Conspiracy or not, this time they judged the play aright. I believe it would be impossible to imagine two worse plays; but, as Brid Oison says, 'These are things that one admits only to himself'; it is always disagreeable to be informed of one's stupidity by an ignorant audience that shouts after you like a pack of hounds after a hare. In spite of my pretension of being the least susceptible regarding an author's vanity of all the writers in Paris, it is perfectly impossible to be indifferent to such a thing—a hiss is a hiss. However, vanity aside, there was a question of money which, as I have a bad habit of spending regularly my capital as well as my income, was not without its importance. It meant, according to my calculation, some sixty thousand francs cut off from my

resources, and my trip to the East was indefinitely postponed.

"They say, with truth, that misfortunes never come singly. You know Melanie, whom I prevented from making her debut at the Vaudeville? By taking her away from all society, lodging her in a comfortable manner and obliging her to work, I rendered her a valuable service. She was a good girl, and, aside from her love for the theatre and a certain indolence that was not without charm, I did not find any fault in her and grew more attached to her every day. Sometimes after spending long hours with her, a fancy for a retired life and domestic happiness would seize me. Gentlemen with brains are privileged to commit foolish acts at times, and I really do not know what I might have ended in doing, had I not been preserved from the danger in an unexpected manner.

"One evening, when I arrived at Melanie's, I found the bird had flown. That great ninny of a Ferussac, whom I never had suspected, and had introduced to her myself, had turned her head by making capital out of her love for the stage. As he was about to leave for Belgium, he persuaded her to go there and dethrone Mademoiselle Prevost. I have since learned that a Brussels banker revenged me by taking this Helene of the stage away from Ferussac. Now she is launched and can fly with her own wings upon the great highway of bravos, flowers, guineas—"

"And wreck and ruin," added Marillac. "Here's to her health!"

"This triple disappointment of pride, money, and heart did not cause, I hope you will believe me, the deep state of melancholy into which I soon fell; but the malady manifested itself upon this occasion, for it had been lurking about me for a long time, as the dormant pain of a wound is aroused if one pours a caustic upon its surface.

"There is some dominant power in each individual which is developed at the expense of the other faculties, above all when the profession one chooses suits his nature. The vital powers thus condensed manifest themselves externally, and gush out with an abundance which would become impossible if all the faculties were used alike, and if life filtered away, so to speak. To avoid such destruction, and concentrate life upon one point, in order to increase the action, is the price of talent and individuality. Among athletes, the forehead contracts according as the chest enlarges; with men of thought, it is the brain which causes the other organs to suffer, insatiable vampire, exhausting at times the last drop of blood in the body which serves as its victim. This vampire was my torturer.

"For ten years I had crowded romance upon poetry, vaudeville upon drama, literary criticism upon leader; I proved, through my own self, in a physical way, the phenomena of the absorption of the senses by intelligence. Many times, after several nights of hard work, the chords of my mind being too violently stretched, they relaxed and gave only indistinct harmony. Then, if I happened to resist this lassitude of

nature demanding repose, I felt the pressure of my will exhausting the sources at the very depths of my being. It seemed to me that I dug out my ideas from the bottom of a mine, instead of gathering them upon the surface of the brain. The more material organs came to the rescue of their failing chief. The blood from my heart rushed to my head to revive it; the muscles of my limbs communicated to the fibres of the brain their galvanic tension. Nerves turned into imagination, flesh into life. Nothing has developed my materialistic beliefs like this decarnation of which I had such a sensible, or rather visible perception.

"I destroyed my health with these psychological experiments, and the abuse of work perhaps shortened my life. When I was thirty years old my face was wrinkled, my cheeks were pallid, and my heart blighted and empty. For what result, grand Dieu! For a fleeting and fruitless renown!

"The failure of my two plays warned me that others judged me as I judged myself. I recalled to mind the Archbishop of Granada, and I thought I could hear Gil Blas predicting the failure of my works. We can not dismiss the public as we can our secretary; meanwhile, I surrendered to a too severe justice in order to decline others' opinions. A horrible thought suddenly came into my mind; my artistic life was ended, I was a worn-out man; in one word, to picture my situation in a trivial but correct manner, I had reached the end of my rope.

"I could not express to you the discouragement that I felt at this conviction. Melanie's infidelity was the crowning touch. It was not my heart, but my vanity which had been rendered more irritable by recent disappointments. This, then, was the end of all my ambitious dreams! I had not enough mind left, at thirty years of age, to write a vaudeville or to be loved by a grisette!

"One day Doctor Labanchie came to see me.

"'What are you doing there' said he, as he saw me seated at my desk.

"'Doctor,' said I, reaching out my hand to him, 'I believe that I am a little feverish.'

"'Your pulse is a little rapid,' said he, after making careful examination, 'but your fever is more of imagination than of blood.'

"I explained to him my condition, which was now becoming almost unendurable. Without believing in medicine very much, I had confidence in him and knew him to be a man who would give good advice.

"'You work too much,' said he, shaking his head. 'Your brain is put to too strong a tension. This is a warning nature gives you, and you will make a mistake if you do not follow it. When you are sleepy, go to bed; when you are tired, you must have rest. It is rest for your brain that

you now need. Go into the country, confine yourself to a regular and healthy diet: vegetables, white meat, milk in the morning, a very little wine, but, above all things, no coffee. Take moderate exercise, hunt—and avoid all irritating thoughts; read the 'Musee des familles' or the 'Magasin Pittoresque'. This regime will have the effect of a soothing poultice upon your brain, and before the end of six months you will be in your normal condition again.'

"'Six months!' I exclaimed. 'You wretch of a doctor, tell me, then, to let my beard and nails grow like Nebuchadnezzar. Six months! You do not know how I detest the country, partridges, rabbits and all. For heaven's sake, find some other remedy for me.'

"'There is homoeopathy,' said he, smiling. 'Hahnemann is quite the fashion now.'

"'Let us have homoeopathy!'

"'You know the principles of the system: 'Similia similibus!' If you have fever, redouble it; if you have smallpox, be inoculated with a triple dose. So far as you are concerned, you are a little used up and 'blase', as we all are in this Babylon of ours; have recourse, then, as a remedy, to the very excesses which have brought you into this state. Homoeopathize yourself morally. It may cure you, it may kill you; I wash my hands of it.'

"The doctor was joking, I said to myself after he had left. Does he think that passions are like the Wandering Jew's five sous, that there is nothing to do but to put your hand in your pocket and take them out at your convenience when necessary. However, this idea, strange as it seemed, struck me forcibly. I decided to try it.

"The next day at seven o'clock in the evening, I was rolling along the road to Lyons. Eight days later, I was rowing in a boat on Lake Geneva. For a long time I had wanted to go to Switzerland, and it seemed as if I could not have chosen a better time. I hoped that the fresh mountain air and the soft pure breezes from the lakes would communicate some of their calm serenity to my heart and brain.

"There is something in Parisian life, I do not know what, so exclusive and hardening, that it ends by making one irresponsive to sensations of a more simple order.

"'My kingdom for the gutter in the Rue du Bac!' I exclaimed with Madame de Stael from the height of the Coppet terrace. The spectacle of nature interests only contemplative and religious minds powerfully. Mine was neither the one nor the other. My habits of analysis and observation make me find more attraction in a characteristic face than in a magnificent landscape; I prefer the exercising of thought to the careless gratification of ecstasy, the study of flesh and soul to earthly

horizons, of human passions to a perfectly pure atmosphere.

"I met at Geneva an Englishman, who was as morose as myself. We vented our spleen in common and were both bored together. We travelled thus through the Oberland and the best part of Valais; we were often rolled up in our travelling robes in the depths of the carriage, and fast asleep when the most beautiful points of interest were in sight.

"From Valais we went to Mont-Blanc, and one night we arrived at Chamounix--"

"Did you see any idiots in Valais?" suddenly interrupted Marillac, as he filled his pipe the second time.

"Several, and they were all horrible."

"Do you not think we might compose something with an idiot in it? It might be rather taking."

"It would not equal Caliban or Quasimodo; will you be so kind as to spare me just now these efforts of imagination, and listen to me, for I am reaching the interesting part of my story?"

"God be praised!" said the artist, as he puffed out an enormous cloud of smoke.

"The next day the Englishman was served with tea in his bedroom, and when

I asked him to go to the 'Mer de Glace' he turned his head toward the wall; so, leaving my phlegmatic companion enveloped in bedclothes up to his ears, I started alone for the Montanvert.

"It was a magnificent morning, and small parties of travellers, some on foot, others mounted, skirted the banks of the Arve or climbed the sides of the mountain. They looked like groups of mice in the distance, and this extreme lessening in size made one comprehend, better than anything else, the immense proportions of the landscape. As for myself, I was alone: I had not even taken a guide, this was too favorite a resort for tourists, for the precaution to be necessary. For a wonder, I felt rather gay, with an elasticity of body and mind which I had not felt in some time.

I courageously began climbing the rough pathway which led to the Mer de Glace, aiding myself with a long staff, which I had procured at the inn.

"At every step I breathed with renewed pleasure the fresh, pure, morning air; I gazed vaguely at the different effects of the sun or mist, at the undulations of the road, which sometimes rose almost straight up in the air, sometimes followed a horizontal line, while skirting the open abyss at the right. The Arve, wending its course like a silvery ribbon, seemed

at times to recede, while the ridges of the perpendicular rocks stood out more plainly. At times, the noise of a falling avalanche was repeated, echo after echo. A troupe of German students below me were responding to the voice of the glaciers by a chorus from Oberon. Following the turns in the road, I could see through the fir-trees, or, rather, at my feet, their long Teutonic frock-coats, their blond beards, and caps about the size of one's fist. As I walked along, when the path was not too steep, I amused myself by throwing my stick against the trunks of the trees which bordered the roadside; I remember how pleased I was when I succeeded in hitting them, which I admit was not very often.

"In the midst of this innocent amusement, I reached the spot where the reign of the Alpine plants begins. All at once I saw, above me, a rock decked with rhododendrons; these flowers looked like tufts of oleanders through the dark foliage of the fir-trees, and produced a charming effect. I left the path in order to reach them sooner, and when I had gathered a bouquet, I threw my staff and at the same time uttered a joyous cry, in imitation of the students, my companions on this trip.

"A frightened scream responded to mine. My staff in its flight had crossed the path and darted into an angle in the road. At that same moment, I saw a mule's head appear with ears thrown back in terror, then the rest of its body, and upon its back a lady ready to fall into the abyss. Fright paralyzed me. All aid was impossible on account of the narrowness of the road, and this stranger's life depended upon her coolness and the intelligence of her beast. Finally the animal seemed to regain its courage and began to walk away, lowering its head as if it could still hear the terrible whistle of the javelin in his ears. I slipped from the rock upon which I stood and seized the mule by the bridle, and succeeded in getting them out of a bad position. I led the animal in this way for some distance, until I reached a place where the path was broader, and danger was over.

"I then offered my apologies to the person whose life I had just compromised by my imprudence, and for the first time took a good look at her. She was young and well dressed; a black silk gown fitted her slender form to perfection; her straw hat was fastened to the saddle, and her long chestnut hair floated in disorder over her pale cheeks. As she heard my voice, she opened her eyes, which in her fright she had instinctively closed; they seemed to me the most beautiful I had ever seen in my life.

"She looked at the precipice and turned away with a shudder. Her glance rested upon me, and then upon the rhododendrons which I held in my hand.

"The frightened expression on her face was replaced immediately by one of childish curiosity.

"'What pretty flowers!' she exclaimed, in a fresh, young voice. 'Are those rhododendrons, Monsieur?'

"I presented her my bouquet without replying; as she hesitated about taking it, I said:

"If you refuse these flowers, Madame, I shall not believe that you have pardoned me.'

"By this time, the persons who were with her had joined us. There were two other ladies, three or four men mounted upon mules, and several guides. At the word rhododendron, a rather large, handsome fellow, dressed in a pretentious style, slipped from his mule and climbed the somewhat steep precipice in quest of the flowers which seemed to be so much in favor. When he returned, panting for breath, with an enormous bunch of them in his hand, the lady had already accepted mine.

"Thank you, Monsieur de Mauleon,' said she, with a rather scornful air; 'offer your flowers to these ladies.' Then, with a slight inclination of the head to me, she struck her mule with her whip, and they rode away.

"The rest of the company followed her, gazing at me as they passed, the big, fashionable fellow especially giving me a rather impertinent glance. I did not try to pick a quarrel with him on account of this discourteous manifestation. When the cavalcade was at some distance, I went in search of my stick, which I found under a tree on the edge of the precipice; then I continued climbing the steep path, with my eyes fastened upon the rider in the black silk gown, her hair flying in the wind and my bouquet in her hand.

"A few moments later, I reached the pavilion at the Montanvert, where I found a gay company gathered together, made up principally of English people. As for myself, I must admit the frivolous, or, rather mundane, bent of my tastes; the truly admirable spectacle presented to my eyes interested me much less than the young stranger, who at this moment was descending with the lightness of a sylph the little road which led to the Mer de Glace.

"I do not know what mysterious link bound me to this woman. I had met many much more beautiful, but the sight of them had left me perfectly indifferent. This one attracted me from the first. The singular circumstances of this first interview, doubtless, had something to do with the impression. I felt glad to see that she had kept my bouquet; she held it in one hand, while she leaned with the other upon a staff somewhat like my own. The two other ladies, and even the men had stopped on the edge of the ice.

Monsieur de Mauleon wished to fulfil his duties as escort, but at the first crevasse he had also halted without manifesting the slightest desire to imitate the chamois. The young woman seemed to take a malicious pleasure in contemplating her admirer's prudent attitude, and, far from listening to the advice he gave her, she began to run upon the

ice, bounding over the crevasses with the aid of her stick. I was admiring her lightness and thoughtlessness, but with an uneasy feeling, when I saw her suddenly stop. I instinctively ran toward her. An enormous crevasse of great depth lay at her feet, blue at its edges and dark in its depths. She stood motionless before this frightful gulf with hands thrown out before her in horror, but charmed like a bird about to be swallowed by a serpent. I knew the irresistible effect upon nervous temperaments of this magnetic attraction toward an abyss. I seized her by the arm, the suddenness of the movement made her drop her staff and flowers, which fell into the depths of the chasm.

"I tried to lead her away, but after she had taken a few steps, I felt her totter; she had grown pale; her eyes were closed. I threw my arm about her, in order to support her and turned her face toward the north; the cold air striking her revived her, and she soon opened her beautiful brown eyes. I do not know what sudden tenderness seized me then, but I pressed this lovely creature within my grasp, and she remained in my arms unresistingly. I felt that I loved her already.

"She remained for a moment with her languishing eyes fixed on mine, making no response, perhaps not even having heard me. The shouts of her party, some of whom were coming toward her, broke the charm. With a rapid movement, she withdrew from my embrace, and I offered her my arm, just as if we were in a drawing-room and I was about to lead her out for a dance; she took it, but I did not feel elated at this, for I could feel her knees waver at every step. The smallest crevasse, which she had crossed before with such agility, now inspired her with a horror which I could divine by the trembling of her arm within mine. I was obliged to make numerous detours in order to avoid them, and thus prolonged the distance, for which I was not sorry. Did I not know that when we reached our destination, the world, that other sea of ice, was going to take her away from me, perhaps forever? We walked silently, occasionally making a few trivial remarks, both deeply embarrassed. When we reached the persons who awaited her, I said, as she disengaged my arm:

"You dropped my flowers, Madame; will it be the same with your memory of me?"

"She looked at me, but made no reply. I loved this silence. I bowed politely to her and returned to the pavilion, while she related her adventure to her friends; but I am quite sure she did not tell all the details.

"The register for travellers who visit the Montan-Vert is a mixture of all nationalities, and no tourist refuses his tribute; modest ones write down their names only. I hoped in this way to learn the name of the young traveller, and I was not disappointed. I soon saw the corpulent Monsieur de Mauleon busily writing his name upon the register in characters worthy of Monsieur Prudhomme; the other members of the little

party followed his example. The young woman was the last to write down her name. I took the book in my turn, after she had left, and with apparent composure I read upon the last line these words, written in a slender handwriting:

”Baroness Clemence de Bergenheim.”

CHAPTER VII

GERFAUT ASKS A FAVOR

”The Baroness de Bergenheim!” exclaimed Marillac. ”Ah! I understand it all now, and you may dispense with the remainder of your story. So this was the reason why, instead of visiting the banks of the Rhine as we agreed, you made me leave the route at Strasbourg under the pretext of walking through the picturesque sites of the Vosges. It was unworthy of you to abuse my confidence as a friend. And I allowed myself to be led by the nose to within a mile of Bergenheim!”

”Peace,” interrupted Gerfaut; ”I have not finished. Smoke and listen.

”I followed Madame de Bergenheim as far as Geneva. She had gone there from here with her aunt, and had availed herself of this journey to visit Mont Blanc. She left for her home the next day without my meeting her again; but I preserved her name, and it was not unknown to me. I had heard it spoken in several houses in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and I knew that I should certainly have an opportunity of meeting her during the winter.

”So I remained at Geneva, yielding to a sensation as new as it was strange. It first acted upon my brain whose ice I felt melting away, and its sources ready to gush forth. I seized my pen with a passion not unlike an access of rage. I finished in four days two acts of a drama that I was then writing. I never had written anything more vigorous or more highly colored. My unconstrained genius throbbed in my arteries, ran through my blood, and bubbled over as if it wished to burst forth. My hand could not keep even with the course of my imagination; I was obliged to write in hieroglyphics.

”Adieu to the empty reveries brought about by spleen, and to the meditations ’a la Werther’! The sky was blue, the air pure, life delightful—my talent was not dead.

”After this first effort, I slackened a little! Madame de Bergenheim’s face, which I had seen but dimly during this short time, returned to me in a less vaporous form; I took extreme delight in calling to mind the

slightest circumstances of our meeting, the smallest details of her features, her toilette, her manner of walking and carrying her head. What had impressed me most was the extreme softness of her dark eyes, the almost childish tone of her voice, a vague odor of heliotrope with which her hair was perfumed; also the touch of her hand upon my arm. I sometimes caught myself embracing myself in order to feel this last sensation again, and then I could not help laughing at my thoughts, which were worthy of a fifteen-year-old lover.

"I had felt so convinced of my powerlessness to love, that the thought of a serious passion did not at first enter my mind. However, a remembrance of my beautiful traveller pervaded my thoughts more and more, and threatened to usurp the place of everything else. I then subjected myself to a rigid analysis; I sought for the exact location of this sentiment whose involuntary yoke I already felt; I persuaded myself, for some time yet, that it was only the transient excitement of my brain, one of those fevers of imagination whose fleeting titillations I had felt more than once.

"But I realized that the evil, or the good—for why call love an evil?—had penetrated into the most remote regions of my being, and I realized the energy of my struggle like a person entombed who tries to extricate himself. From the ashes of this volcano which I had believed to be extinct, a flower had suddenly blossomed, perfumed with the most fragrant of odors and decked with the most charming colors. Artless enthusiasm, faith in love, all the brilliant array of the fresh illusions of my youth returned, as if by enchantment, to greet this new bloom of my life; it seemed to me as if I had been created a second time, since I was aided by intelligence and understood its mysteries while tasting of its delights. My past, in the presence of this regeneration, was nothing more than a shadow at the bottom of an abyss. I turned toward the future with the faith of a Mussulman who kneels with his face toward the East—I loved!

"I returned to Paris, and applied to my friend Casorans, who knows the Faubourg Saint-Germain from Dan to Beersheba.

"'Madame de Bergenheim,' he said to me, 'is a very popular society woman, not very pretty, perhaps, rather clever, though, and very amiable. She is one of our coquettes of the old nobility, and with her twenty-four carats' virtue she always has two sufferers attached to her chariot, and a third on the waiting-list, and yet it is impossible for one to find a word to say against her behavior. Just at this moment, Mauleon and d'Arzenac compose the team; I do not know who is on the waiting-list. She will probably spend the winter here with her aunt, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, one of the hatefulest old women on the Rue de Varennes. The husband is a good fellow who, since the July revolution, has lived upon his estates, caring for his forests and killing wild boars without troubling himself much about his wife.'

"He then told me which houses these ladies frequented, and left me,

saying with a knowing air:

”Take care, if you intend to try the power of your seductions upon the little Baroness; whoever meddles with her smarts for it!”

”This information from a viper like Casorans satisfied me in every way. Evidently the place was not taken; impregnable, that was another thing.

”Before Madame de Bergenheim’s return, I began to show myself assiduously at the houses of which my friend had spoken. My position in the Faubourg Saint-Germain is peculiar, but good, according to my opinion. I have enough family ties to be sustained by several should I be attacked by many, and this is the essential point. It is true that, thanks to my works, I am regarded as an atheist and a Jacobin; aside from these two little defects, they think well enough of me. Besides, it is a notorious fact that I have rejected several offers from the present government, and refused last year the ’croix d’honneur’; this makes amends and washes away half my sins. Finally, I have the reputation of having a certain-knowledge of heraldry, which I owe to my uncle, a confirmed hunter after genealogical claims. This gains me a respect which makes me laugh sometimes, when I see people who detest me greet me as cordially as the Cure of Saint-Eustache greeted Bayle, for fear that I might destroy their favorite saint. However, in this society, I am no longer Gerfaut of the Porte-Saint-Martin, but I am the Vicomte de Gerfaut. Perhaps, with your bourgeois ideas, you do not understand—”

”Bourgeois!” exclaimed Marillac, bounding from his seat, ”what are you talking about? Do you wish that we should cut each other’s throats before breakfast to-morrow? Bourgeois! why not grocer? I am an artist—don’t you know that by this time?”

”Don’t get angry, my dear fellow; I meant to say that in certain places the title of a Vicomte has still a more powerful attraction than you, with your artistic but plebeian ideas, would suppose in this year of our Lord 1832.”

”Well and good. I accept your apology.”

”A vicomte’s title is a recommendation in the eyes of people who still cling to the baubles of nobility, and all women are of this class. There is something, I know not what, delicate and knightly in this title, which suits a youngish bachelor. Duke above all titles is the one that sounds the best. Moliere and Regnard have done great harm to the title of marquis. Count is terribly bourgeois, thanks to the senators of the empire. As to a Baron, unless he is called Montmorency or Beaufremont, it is the lowest grade of nobility; vicomte, on the contrary, is above reproach; it exhales a mixed odor of the old regime and young France; then, don’t you know, our Chateaubriand was a vicomte.

"I departed from my subject in speaking of nobility. I accidentally turned over one day to the article upon my family in the Dictionnaire de Saint-Allais; I found that one of my ancestors, Christophe de Gerfaut, married, in 1569, a Mademoiselle Yolande de Corandeuil.

"'O my ancestor! O my ancestress!' I exclaimed, 'you had strange baptismal names; but no matter, I thank you. You are going to serve me as a grappling iron; I shall be very unskilful if at the very first meeting the old aunt escapes Christophe.'

"A few days later I went to the Marquise de Chameillan's, one of the most exclusive houses in the noble Faubourg. When I enter her drawing-room, I usually cause the same sensation that Beelzebub would doubtless produce should he put his foot into one of the drawing-rooms in Paradise. That evening, when I was announced, I saw a certain undulation of heads in a group of young women who were whispering to one another; many curious eyes were fastened upon me, and among these beautiful eyes were two more beautiful than all the others: they were those of my bewitching traveller.

"I exchanged a rapid glance with her, one only; after paying my respects to the mistress of the house, I mingled with a crowd of men, and entered into conversation with an old peer upon some political question, avoiding to look again toward Madame de Bergenheim.

"A moment later, Madame de Chameillan came to ask the peer to play whist; he excused himself, he could not remain late.

"'I dare not ask you to play with Mademoiselle de Corandeuil,' said she, turning toward me; 'besides, I understand too well that it is to my interest and the pleasure of these ladies, not to exile you to a whist table.'

"I took the card which she half offered me with an eagerness which might have made her suppose that I had become a confirmed whist expert during my voyage.

"Mademoiselle de Corandeuil certainly was the ugly, crabbed creature that Casorans had described; but had she been as frightful as the witches in Macbeth I was determined to make her conquest. So I began playing with unusual attention. I was her partner, and I knew from experience the profound horror which the loss of money inspires in old women. Thank heaven, we won! Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who has an income of one hundred thousand francs, was not at all indifferent to the gain of two or three louis. She, therefore, with an almost gracious air, congratulated me, as we left the table, upon my manner of playing.

"'I would willingly contract an alliance, offensive and defensive with you,' said she to me.

”The alliance is already contracted, Mademoiselle,’ said I, seizing the opportunity.

”How is that, Monsieur?’ she replied, raising her head with a dignified air, as if she were getting ready to rebuke some impertinent speech.

”I also gravely straightened up and gave a feudal look to my face.

”Mademoiselle, I have the honor of belonging to your family, a little distantly, to be sure; that is what makes me speak of an alliance between us as a thing already concluded. One of my ancestors, Christophe de Gerfaut, married Mademoiselle Yolande de Corandeuil, one of your great-grand-aunts, in 1569.’

”Yolande is really a family name,’ replied the old lady, with the most affable smile that her face would admit; ‘I bear it myself. The Corandeuils, Monsieur, never have denied their alliances, and it is a pleasure for me to recognize my relationship with such a man as you. We address by the title of cousin relatives as far back as 1300.’

”I am nearer related to you by three centuries,’ I replied, in my most insinuating voice; ‘may I hope that this good fortune will authorize me to pay my respects to you?’

”Mademoiselle de Corandeuil replied to my ‘tartuferie’ by granting me permission to call upon her. My attention was not so much absorbed in our conversation that I did not see in a mirror, during this time, the interest with which Madame de Bergenheim watched my conversation with her aunt; but I was careful not to turn around, and I let her take her departure without giving her a second glance.

”Three days later, I made my first call. Madame de Bergenheim received my greeting like a woman who had been warned and was, therefore, prepared. We exchanged only one rapid, earnest glance, that was all. Availing myself of the presence of other callers, numerous enough to assure each one his liberty, I began to observe, with a practised eye, the field whereon I had just taken my position.

”Before the end of the evening, I recognized the correctness of Casorans’s information. Among all the gentlemen present I found only two professed admirers: Monsieur de Mauleon, whose insignificance was notorious, and Monsieur d’Arzenac, who appeared at first glance as if he might be more to be feared. D’Arzenac, thanks to an income of ten thousand livres, beside being a man of rank, occupies also one of the finest positions that one could desire; he is not unworthy of his name and his fortune. Irreproachable in morals as in manners; sufficiently well informed; of an exquisite but reserved politeness; understanding perfectly the ground that he is walking upon; making also more advances than is customary among the pachas of modern France, he was, without doubt, the flower of the flock in Mademoiselle de Corandeuil’s drawing-

room. In spite of all these advantages, an attentive examination showed me that his passion was hopeless. Madame de Bergenheim received his attentions very kindly—too kindly. She usually listened to him with a smile in which one could read gratitude for the devotion he lavished upon her. She willingly accepted him as her favorite partner in the galop, which he danced to perfection. His success stopped there.

”At the end of several days, the ground having been carefully explored and the admirers, dangerous and otherwise, having been passed in review, one after another, I felt convinced that Clemence loved nobody.

”‘She shall love me,’ said I, on the day I reached this conclusion. In order to formulate in a decisive manner the accomplishment of my desire, I relied upon the following propositions, which are to me articles of faith.

”No woman is unattainable, except when she loves another. Thus, a woman who does not love, and who has resisted nine admirers, will yield to the tenth. The only question for me was to be the tenth. Here began the problem to be solved.

”Madame de Bergenheim had been married only three years; her husband, who was good-looking and young, passed for a model husband; if these latter considerations were of little importance, the first was of great weight. According to all probability, it was too soon for any serious attack. Without being beautiful, she pleased much and many; a second obstacle, since sensibility in women is almost always developed in inverse ratio to their success. She had brains; she was wonderfully aristocratic in all her tastes.

Last, being very much the fashion, sought after and envied, she was under the special surveillance of pious persons, old maids, retired beauties in one word, all that feminine mounted police, whose eyes, ears, and mouths seem to have assumed the express mission of annoying sensitive hearts while watching over the preservation of good morals.

”This mass of difficulties, none of which escaped me, traced as many lines upon my forehead as if I had been commanded to solve at once all the propositions in Euclid. She shall love me! these words flashed unceasingly before my eyes; but the means to attain this end? No satisfactory plan came to me. Women are so capricious, deep, and unfathomable! It is, with them, the thing soonest done which is soonest ended! A false step, the least awkwardness, a want of intelligence, a quarter of an hour too soon or too late! One thing only was evident: it needed a grand display of attractions, a complete plan of gallant strategy; but, then, what more?

”That earthly paradise of the Montanvert was far from us, where I had been able in less time than it would take to walk over a quadrille, to

expose her to death, to save her afterward, and finally to say to her 'I love you!' Passion in drawing-rooms is not allowed those free, dramatic ways; flowers fade in the candle-light; the oppressive atmosphere of balls and fetes stifles the heart, so ready to dilate in pure mountain air. The unexpected and irresistible influence of the glacier would have been improper and foolish in Paris. There, an artless sympathy, stronger than social conventions, had drawn us to each other—Octave and Clemence. Here, she was the Baroness de Bergenheim, and I the Vicomte de Gerfaut. I must from necessity enter the ordinary route, begin the romance at the first page, without knowing how to connect the prologue with it.

"What should be my plan of campaign?"

"Should I pose as an agreeable man, and try to captivate her attention and good graces by the minute attentions and delicate flattery which constitute what is classically called paying court? But D'Arzenac had seized this role, and filled it in such a superior way that all competition would be unsuccessful. I saw where this had led him. It needed, in order to inflame this heart, a more active spark than foppish gallantry; the latter flatters the vanity without reaching the heart.

"There was the passionate method—ardent, burning, fierce love. There are some women upon whom convulsive sighs drawn from the depths of the stomach, eyebrows frowning in a fantastic manner, and eyes in which only the whites are to be seen and which seem to say: 'Love me, or I will kill you!' produce a prodigious effect. I had myself felt the power of this fascination while using it one day upon a softhearted blond creature who thought it delightful to have a Blue-Beard for a lover. But the drooping corners of Clemence's mouth showed at times an ironical expression which would have cooled down even an Othello's outbursts.

"'She has brains, and she knows it,' said I to myself; 'shall I attack her in that direction?' Women rather like such a little war of words; it gives them an opportunity for displaying a mine of pretty expressions, piquant pouts, fresh bursts of laughter, graceful peculiarities of which they well know the effect. Should I be the Benedict to this Beatrice? But this by-play would hardly fill the prologue, and I very much wished to reach the epilogue.

"I passed in review the different routes that a lover might take to reach his end; I recapitulated every one of the more or less infallible methods of conquering female hearts; in a word, I went over my tactics like a lieutenant about to drill a battalion of recruits. When I had ended I had made no farther advance than before.

"'To the devil with systems!' exclaimed I; 'I will not be so foolish as wilfully to adopt the role of roue when I feel called upon to play the plain role of true lover. Let those who like play the part of Lovelace! As for myself, I will love; upon the whole, that is what pleases best.' And I jumped headlong into the torrent without troubling myself as to the

place of landing.

"While I was thus scheming my attack, Madame de Bergenheim was upon her guard and had prepared her means of defence. Puzzled by my reserve, which was in singular contrast with my almost extravagant conduct at our first meeting, her woman's intelligence had surmised, on my part, a plan which she proposed to baffle. I was partly found out, but I knew it and thus kept the advantage.

"I could not help smiling at the Baroness's clever coquetry, when I decided to follow the inspirations of my heart, instead of choosing selfish motives as my guide. Every time I took her hand when dancing with her, I expected to feel a little claw ready to pierce the cold glove. But, while waiting for the scratch, it was a very soft, velvety little hand that was given me; and I, who willingly lent myself to her deception, did not feel very much duped. It was evident that the sort of halo which my merited or unmerited reputation had thrown over me had made me appear to her as a conquest of some value, a victim upon whom one could lavish just enough flowers in order to bring him to the sacrificial altar. In order to wind the first chain around my neck, Mauleon and D'Arzenac, 'a tutti quanti', were sacrificed for me without my soliciting, even by a glance, this general disbandment. I could interpret this discharge. I saw that the fair one wished to concentrate all her seductions against me, so as to leave me no means of escape; people neglect the hares to hunt for the deer. You must excuse my conceit.

"This conduct wounded me at first, but I afterward forgave her, when a more careful examination taught me to know this adorable woman's character. Coquetry was with her not a vice of the heart or of an unscrupulous mind; having nothing better to do, she enjoyed it as a legitimate pastime, without giving it any importance or feeling any scruples. Like all women, she liked to please; her success was sweet to her vanity; perhaps flattery turned her head at times, but in the midst of this tumult her heart remained in perfect peace. She found so little danger for herself in the game she played that it did not seem to her that it could be very serious for others. Genuine love is not common enough in Parisian parlors for a pretty woman to conceive any great remorse at pleasing without loving.

"Madame de Bergenheim was thus, ingenuously, unsuspectingly, a matchless coquette. Never having loved, not even her husband, she looked upon her little intriguing as one of the rights earned on the day of her marriage, the same as her diamonds and cashmeres. There was something touching in the sound of her voice and in her large, innocent eyes which she sometimes allowed to rest upon mine, without thinking to turn them away, and which said, 'I have never loved.' As for myself, I believed it all; one is so happy to believe!

"Far from being annoyed at the trap she laid for me, I, on the contrary, ran my head into it and presented my neck to the yoke with a docility which must have amused her, I think; but I hoped not to bear it alone. A coquette who coolly flaunts her triumphs to the world resembles those master-swimmers who, while spectators are admiring the grace of their poses, are struck by an unexpected current; the performer is sometimes swept away and drowned without his elegant strokes being of much service to him. Throw *Celime* into the current of genuine passion—I do not mean the brutality of *Alceste*—I will wager that coquetry will be swept away by love. I had such faith in mine that I thought to be able to fix the moment when I should call myself victorious and sure of being obeyed.

"You know that sadness and ennui were considered etiquette last winter, in a certain society, which was thrown into mourning by the July revolution. Reunions were very few; there were no balls or soirees; dancing in drawing-rooms to the piano was hardly permissible, even with intimate friends. When once I was installed in *Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's* drawing-room upon a friendly footing, this cessation of worldly festivities gave me an opportunity to see *Clemence* in a rather intimate way.

"It would take too long to tell you now all the thousand and one little incidents which compose the history of all passions. Profiting by her coquetry, which made her receive me kindly in order to make me expiate my success afterward, my love for her was soon an understood thing between us; she listened to me in a mocking way, but did not dispute my right to speak. She ended by receiving my letters, after being constrained to do so through a course of strategies in which, truly, I showed incredible invention. I was listened to and she read my letters; I asked for nothing more.

"My love, from the first, had been her secret as well as mine; but every day I made to sparkle some unexpected facet of this prism of a thousand colors. Even after telling her a hundred times how much I adored her, my love still had for her the attraction of the unknown. I really had something inexhaustible in my heart, and I was sure, in the end, to intoxicate her with this philtre, which I constantly poured out and which she drank, while making sport of it like a child.

"One day I found her thoughtful and silent. She did not reply to me with her usual sprightliness during the few moments that I was able to talk with her; the expression of her eyes had changed; there was something deeper and less glowing in their depths; instead of dazzling me by their excessive splendor, as had often happened to me before, they seemed to soften as they rested on mine; she kept her eyelids a trifle lowered, as if she were tired of being gazed at by me. Her voice, as she spoke, had a low, soft sound, a sort of inexplicable something which came from the very depths of her soul. She never had looked at me with that glance or spoken to me in that tone before. Upon that day I knew that she loved me.

"I returned to my home unutterably happy, for I loved this woman with a love of which I believed myself incapable.

"When I met Madame de Bergenheim again, I found her completely changed toward me; an icy gravity, an impassible calm, an ironical and disdainful haughtiness had taken the place of the delicious abandon of her former bearing. In spite of my strong determination to allow myself to love with the utmost candor, it was impossible for me to return to that happy age when the frowning brows of the beautiful idol to whom we paid court inspired us with the resolve to drown ourselves. I could not isolate myself from my past experiences. My heart was rejuvenated, but my head remained old. I was, therefore, not in the least discouraged by this change of humor, and the fit of anger which it portended.

"'Now,' said I to myself, 'there is an end to coquetry, it is beaten on all sides; it is gone, never to return. She has seen that the affair is a little too deep for that, and the field not tenable. She will erect barriers in order to defend herself and will no longer attack.' Thus we pass from the period of amiable smiles, sweet glances, and half-avowals to that of severity and prudery, while waiting for the remorse and despair of the denouement. I am sure that at this time she called to her help all her powers of resistance. From that day she would retreat behind the line of duty, conjugal fidelity, honor, and all the other fine sentiments which would need numbering after the fashion of Homer. At the first attack, all this household battalion would make a furious sortie; should I succeed in overthrowing them and take up my quarters in the trenches, there would then be a gathering of the reserve force, and boiling oil or tar would rain upon my head, representing virtue, religion, heaven, and hell."

"A sort of conjugal earthquake," interrupted Marillac.

"I calculated the strength and approximate duration of these means of defence. The whole thing appeared to me only a question of time, a few days or weeks at most—so long on the husband's account, so long on the father confessor's account. I deserved to be boxed on the ears for my presumption; I was.

"A combat is necessary in order to secure a victory. In spite of all my efforts and ruses, it was not possible for me to fight this combat; I did not succeed, in spite of all my challenges, in shattering, as I expected, this virtuous conjugal fortress. Madame de Bergenheim still persisted in her systematic reserve, with incredible prudence and skill. During the remainder of the winter, I did not find more than one opportunity of speaking to her alone. As I was a permanent fixture every evening in her aunt's parlors, she entered them only when other guests were there. She never went out alone, and in every place where I was likely to meet her I was sure to find a triple rampart of women erected between us, through which it was impossible to address one word to her. In short, I was

encountering a desperate resistance; and, yet, she loved me! I could see her cheeks gradually grow pale; her brilliant eyes often had dark rings beneath them, as if sleep had deserted her. Sometimes, when she thought she was not observed, I surprised them fastened upon me; but she immediately turned them away.

”She had been coquettish and indifferent; she was now loving but virtuous.

”Spring came. One afternoon I went to call upon Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who had been ill for several days. I was received, however, probably through some mistake of the servants. As I entered the room I saw Madame de Bergenheim; she was alone at her embroidery, seated upon a divan. There were several vases of flowers in the windows, whose curtains only permitted a soft, mysterious light to penetrate the room. The perfume from the flowers, the sort of obscurity, the solitude in which I found her, overcame me for a moment; I was obliged to pause in order to quiet the beating of my heart.

”She arose as she heard my name announced; without speaking or laying down her work, she pointed to a chair and seated herself; but instead of obeying her, I fell upon my knees before her and seized her hands, which she did not withdraw. It had been impossible for me to say another word to her before, save ‘I love you!’ I now told her of all my love. Oh! I am sure of it, my words penetrated to the very depth of her heart, for I felt her hands tremble as they left mine. She listened without interrupting me or making any reply, with her face bent toward me as if she were breathing the perfume of a flower. When I begged her to answer me, when I implored her for one single word from her heart, she withdrew one of her hands, imprisoned within mine, and placed it upon my forehead, pushing back my head with a gesture familiar to women. She gazed at me thus for a long time; her eyes were so languishing under their long lashes, and their languor was so penetrating, that I closed mine, not being able to endure the fascination of this glance any longer.

”A shiver which ran over her and which went through me also, like an electric shock, aroused me. When I opened my eyes I saw her face bathed in tears. She drew back and repelled me. I arose impetuously, seated myself by her side and took her in my arms.

”’Am I not a wretched, unhappy woman?’ said she, and fell upon my breast, sobbing.

”’Madame la Comtesse de Pontiviers,’ announced the servant, whom I would willingly have assassinated, as well as the visiting bore who followed in his footsteps.

”I never saw Madame de Bergenheim in Paris again. I was obliged to go to Bordeaux the next day, on account of a lawsuit which you know all about. Upon my return, at the end of three weeks, I found she had left. I

finally learned that she had come to this place, and I followed her. That is the extent of my drama.

"Now you know very well that I have not related this long story to you for the sole pleasure of keeping you awake until one o'clock in the morning. I wanted to explain to you that it was really a serious thing for me, so that you might not refuse to do what I wish to ask of you."

"I think I understand what you are aiming at," said Marillac, rather pensively.

"You know Bergenheim; you will go to see him to-morrow. He will invite you to pass a few days with him; you will stay to dinner. You will see Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, in whose presence you will speak my name as you refer to our journey; and before night, my venerable cousin of 1569 shall send me an invitation to come to see her."

"I would rather render you any other service than this," replied the artist, walking up and down the room in long strides. "I know very well that in all circumstances bachelors should triumph over husbands, but that does not prevent my conscience from smiting me. You know that I saved Bergenheim's life?"

"Rest assured that he runs no very great danger at present. Nothing will result from this step save the little enjoyment I shall take in annoying the cruel creature who defied me today. Is it agreed?"

"Since you insist upon it. But then, when our visit is ended, shall we go to work at our drama or upon 'The Chaste Suzannah' opera in three acts? For, really, you neglected art terribly for the sake of your love affairs."

"The Chaste Suzannah or the whole Sacred History we shall put into vaudeville, if you exact it. Until to-morrow, then."

"Until to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII

A LOVER'S RUSE

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the drawing-room of the Chateau de Bergenheim presented its usual aspect and occupants. The fire on the hearth, lighted during the morning, was slowly dying, and a beautiful autumn sun threw its rays upon the floor through the half-opened windows. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, stretched on the couch before the fireplace

with Constance at her feet, was reading, according to her habit, the newspapers which had just arrived. Madame de Bergenheim seemed very busily occupied with a piece of tapestry in her lap; but the slow manner in which her needle moved, and the singular mistakes she made, showed that her mind was far away from the flowers she was working. She had just finished a beautiful dark lily, which contrasted strangely with its neighbors, when a servant entered.

"Madame," said he, "there is a person here inquiring for Monsieur le Baron de Bergenheim."

"Is Monsieur de Bergenheim not at home?" asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"Monsieur has gone to ride with Mademoiselle Aline."

"Who is this person?"

"It is a gentleman; but I did not ask his name."

"Let him enter."

Clemence arose at the servant's first words and threw her work upon a chair, making a movement as if to leave the room; but after a moment's reflection, she resumed her seat and her work, apparently indifferent as to who might enter.

"Monsieur de Marillac," announced the lackey, as he opened the door a second time.

Madame de Bergenheim darted a rapid glance at the individual who presented himself, and then breathed freely again.

After setting to rights his coiffure 'a la Perinet', the artist entered the room, throwing back his shoulders. Tightly buttoned up in his travelling redingote, and balancing with ease a small gray hat, he bowed respectfully to the two ladies and then assumed a pose a la Van Dyke.

Constance was so frightened at the sight of this imposing figure that, instead of jumping at the newcomer's legs, as was her custom, she sheltered herself under her mistress's chair, uttering low growls; at first glance the latter shared, if not the terror, at least the aversion of her dog. Among her numerous antipathies, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil detested a beard. This was a common sentiment with all old ladies, who barely tolerated moustaches: "Gentlemen did not wear them in 1780," they would say.

Marillac's eyes turned involuntarily toward the portraits, and other picturesque details of a room which was worthy the attention of a connoisseur; but he felt that the moment was not opportune for indulging

in artistic contemplation, and that he must leave the dead for the living.

"Ladies," said he, "I ought, first of all, to ask your pardon for thus intruding without having had the honor of an introduction. I hoped to find here Monsieur de Bergenheim, with whom I am on very intimate terms. I was told that he was at the chateau."

"My husband's friends do not need to be presented at his house," said Clemence; "Monsieur de Bergenheim probably will return soon." And with a gracious gesture she motioned the visitor to a seat.

"Your name is not unknown to me," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil in her turn, having succeeded in calming Constance's agitation. "I remember having heard Monsieur de Bergenheim mention you often."

"We were at college together, although I am a few years younger than Christian."

"But," exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, struck by some sudden thought, "there is more than a college friendship between you. Are you not, Monsieur, the person who saved my husband's life in 1830?"

Marillac smiled, bowed his head, and seated himself. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil herself could not but graciously greet her nephew's preserver, had he had a moustache as long as that of the Shah of Persia, who ties his in a bow behind his neck.

After the exchange of a few compliments, Madame de Bergenheim, with the amiability of a mistress of the house who seeks subjects of conversation that may show off to best advantage the persons she receives, continued:

"My husband does not like to talk of himself, and never has told us the details of this adventure, in which he ran such great danger. Will you be kind enough to gratify our curiosity on this point?"

Marillac, among his other pretensions, had that of being able to relate a story in an impressive manner. These words were as pleasing to his ears as the request for a song is to a lady who requires urging, although she is dying to sing.

"Ladies," said he, crossing one leg over the other and leaning upon one arm of his chair, "it was on the twenty-eighth of July, 1830; the disastrous decrees had produced their effects; the volcano which—"

"Pardon me, Monsieur, if I interrupt you," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, quickly; "according to my opinion, and that of many others, the royal decrees you speak of were good and necessary. The only mistake of Charles Tenth was not to have fifty thousand men around Paris to force their acceptance. I am only a woman, Monsieur, but if I had had under my

command twenty cannon upon the quays, and as many upon the boulevards, I assure you that your tricolored flag never should have floated over the Tuileries."

"Pitt and Cobourg!" said the artist between his teeth, as, with an astonished air, he gazed at the old lady; but his common-sense told him that republicanism was not acceptable within this castle. Besides, remembering the mission with which he was charged, he did not think his conscience would feel much hurt if he made a little concession of principles and manoeuvred diplomatically.

"Madame," replied he, "I call the decrees disastrous when I think of their result. You will certainly admit that our situation to-day ought to make everybody regret the causes which brought it about."

"We are exactly of the same opinion regarding that point, Monsieur," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, resuming her serenity.

"The open volcano beneath our feet," continued Marillac, who still stuck to his point, "warned us by deep rumblings of the hot lava which was about to gush forth. The excitement of the people was intense. Several engagements with the soldiers had already taken place at different points. I stood on the Boulevard Poissonniere, where I had just taken my luncheon, and was gazing with an artist's eye upon the dramatic scene spread out before me. Men with bare arms and women panting with excitement were tearing up the pavements or felling trees. An omnibus had just been upset; the rioters added cabriolets, furniture, and casks to it; everything became means of defence. The crashing of the trees as they fell, the blows of crowbars on the stones, the confused roaring of thousands of voices, the Marseillaise sung in chorus, and the irregular cannonading which resounded from the direction of the Rue Saint-Denis, all composed a strident, stupefying, tempestuous harmony, beside which Beethoven's Tempest would have seemed like the buzzing of a bee.

"I was listening to the roaring of the people, who were gnawing at their chains before breaking them, when my eyes happened to fall upon a window of a second-floor apartment opposite me. A man about sixty years of age, with gray hair, a fresh, plump face, an honest, placid countenance, and wearing a mouse-colored silk dressing-gown, was seated before a small, round table. The window opened to the floor, and I could see him in this frame like a full-length portrait. There was a bowl of coffee upon the table, in which he dipped his roll as he read his journal. I beg your pardon, ladies, for entering into these petty details, but the habit of writing—"

"I assure you, Monsieur, your story interests me very much," said Madame de Bergenheim, kindly.

"A King Charles spaniel, like yours, Mademoiselle, was standing near the window with his paws resting upon it; he was gazing with curiosity at the

revolution of July, while his master was reading his paper and sipping his coffee, as indifferent to all that passed as if he had been in Pekin or New York.

”’Oh, the calm of a pure, sincere soul!’ I exclaimed to myself, at the sight of this little tableau worthy of Greuze; ’oh, patriarchal philosophy! in a few minutes perhaps blood will flow in the streets, and here sits a handsome old man quietly sipping his coffee.’ He seemed like a lamb browsing upon a volcano.”

Marillac loved volcanoes, and never lost an opportunity to bring one in at every possible opportunity.

”Suddenly a commotion ran through the crowd; the people rushed in every direction, and in an instant the boulevard was empty. Plumes waving from high caps, red-and-white flags floating from the ends of long lances, and the cavalcade that I saw approaching through the trees told me the cause of this panic. A squadron of lancers was charging. Have you ever seen a charge of lancers?”

”Never!” said both of the ladies at once.

”It is a very grand sight, I assure you. Fancy, ladies, a legion of demons galloping along upon their horses, thrusting to the right and left with long pikes, whose steel points are eighteen inches long. That is a charge of lancers. I beg you to believe that I had shown before this the mettle there was in me, but I will not conceal from you that at this moment I shared with the crowd the impression which the coming of these gentlemen made. I had only time to jump over the sidewalk and to dart up a staircase which ran on the outside of a house, every door being closed. I never shall forget the face of one of those men who thrust the point of a lance at me, long enough to pierce through six men at once. I admit that I felt excited then! The jinn having passed—”

”The-what?” asked Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who was not familiar with Eastern terms.

”I beg a thousand pardons, it was a poetical reminiscence. The lancers, having rushed through the boulevard like an avalanche, a laggard rider, a hundred steps behind the others, galloped proudly by, erect in his stirrups and flourishing his sword. Suddenly the report of a gun resounded, the lancer reeled backward, then forward, and finally fell upon his horse’s neck; a moment later he turned in his saddle and lay stretched upon the ground, his foot caught in the stirrup; the horse, still galloping, dragged the man and the lance, which was fastened to his arm by a leather band.”

”How horrible!” said Clemence, clasping her hands.

Marillac, much pleased with the effect of his narration, leaned back in

his chair and continued his tale with his usual assurance.

"I looked to the neighboring roofs to discover whence came this shot; as I was glancing to the right and left I saw smoke issuing through the blinds of the room on the second floor, which had been closed at the approach of the lancers.

"'Good God!' I exclaimed; 'it must be this handsome old man in the mouse-colored silk dressing-gown who amuses himself by firing upon the lancers, as if they were rabbits in a warren!'

"Just then the blinds were opened, and the strange fellow with the unruffled countenance leaned out and gazed with a smiling face in the direction the horse was taking, dragging his master's body after him. The patriarch had killed his man between two sips of his coffee."

"And that is the cowardly way in which members of the royal guard were assassinated by the 'heroes' of your glorious insurrection!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, indignantly.

"When the troops had passed," Marillac continued, "the crowd returned, more excited and noisy than ever. Barricades were erected with wonderful rapidity; two of those were on the boulevard close to the place where I was. I saw a horseman suddenly bound over the first; he wore a tuft of red-and-white feathers in his hat. I saw that it was a staff officer, doubtless carrying some despatch to headquarters. He continued his way, sabre in its sheath, head erect, proud and calm in the midst of insulting shouts from the crowd; stones were thrown at him and sticks at his horse's legs; he looked as if he were parading upon the Place du Carrousel.

"When he reached the second barricade, he drew his horse up, as if it were merely a question of jumping a hurdle in a steeplechase. just then I saw the window on the first floor open again. 'Ah! you old rascal!' I exclaimed. The report of a gun drowned my voice; the horse which had just made the leap, fell on his knees; the horseman tried to pull him up, but after making one effort the animal fell over upon his side. The ball had gone through the steed's head."

"It was that poor Fidele that I gave your husband," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who was always very sentimental in the choice of names she gave to animals.

"He merited his name, Mademoiselle, for the poor beast died for his master, for whom the shot was intended. Several of those horrible faces, which upon riot days suddenly appear as if they came out of the ground, darted toward the unhorsed officer. I, and several other young men who were as little disposed as myself to allow a defenceless man to be slaughtered, ran toward him. I recognized Christian as I approached; his right leg was caught under the horse, and he was trying to unsheath

his sword with his left hand. Sticks and stones were showered at him. I drew out the sword, which his position prevented him from doing, and exclaimed as I waved it in the air: 'The first rascal who advances, I will cut open like a dog.'

"I accompanied these words with a flourish which kept the cannibals at a distance for the time being.

"The young fellows who were with me followed my example. One took a pickaxe, another seized the branch of a tree, while others tried to release Christian from his horse. During this time the crowd increased around us; the shouts redoubled: 'Down with the ordinances! These are disguised gendarmes! Vive la liberte!—We must kill them! Let's hang the spies to the lamp-posts!'

"Danger was imminent, and I realized that only a patriotic harangue would get us out of the scrape. While they were releasing Christian, I jumped upon Fidele so as to be seen by all and shouted:

"'Vive la liberte !'

"'Vive la liberte!' replied the crowd.

"'Down with Charles Tenth! Down with the ministers! Down with the ordinances!'

"'Down!' shouted a thousand voices at once.

"You understand, ladies, this was a sort of bait, intended to close the mouths of these brutes.

"'We are all citizens, we are all Frenchmen,' I continued; 'we must not soil our hands with the blood of one of our disarmed brothers. After a victory there are no enemies. This officer was doing his duty in fulfilling his chief's commands; let us do ours by dying, if necessary, for our country and the preservation of our rights.'

"'Vive la liberte! vive la liberte!' shouted the crowd. 'He is right; the officer was doing his duty. It would be assassination!' exclaimed numerous voices.

"'Thanks, Marillac,' said Bergenheim to me, as I took his hand to lead him away, availing ourselves of the effect of my harangue; 'but do not press me so hard, for I really believe that my right arm is broken; only for that, I should ask you to return me my sword that I might show this rabble that they can not kill a Bergenheim as they would a chicken.'

"'Let him cry: Vive la Chartre!' roared out a man, with a ferocious face.

"'I receive orders from nobody,' Christian replied, in a very loud voice, as he glared at him with eyes which would have put a rhinoceros to flight."

"Your husband is really a very brave man," said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, addressing Clemence.

"Brave as an old warrior. This time he pushed his courage to the verge of imprudence; I do not know what the result might have been if the crowd had not been dispersed a second time by the approach of the lancers, who were returning through the boulevard. I led Bergenheim into a caf; fortunately, his arm was only sprained." Just at this moment Marillac's story was interrupted by a sound of voices and hurried steps. The door opened suddenly, and Aline burst into the room with her usual impetuosity.

"What has happened to you, Aline?" exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, hurrying to her sister's side. The young girl's riding-habit and hat were covered with splashes of mud.

"Oh, nothing," replied the young girl, in a broken voice; "it was only Titania, who wanted to throw me into the river. Do you know where Rousselet is? They say it is necessary to bleed him; and he is the only one who knows how to do it."

"Whom do you mean, child? Is my husband wounded?" asked Clemence, turning pale.

"No, not Christian; it is a gentleman I do not know; only for him I should have been drowned. Mon Dieu! can not Rousselet be found?"

Aline left the room in great agitation. They all went over to the windows that opened out into the court, whence the sound of voices seemed to arise, and where they could hear the master's voice thundering out his commands. Several servants had gone to his assistance: one of them held Titania by the bridle; she was covered with foam and mud, and was trembling, with distended nostrils, like a beast that knows it has just committed a wicked action. A young man was seated upon a stone bench, wiping away blood which streamed from his forehead. It was Monsieur de Gerfaut.

At this sight Clemence supported herself against the framework of the window, and Marillac hurriedly left the room.

Pere Rousselet, who had at last been found in the kitchen, advanced majestically, eating an enormous slice of bread and butter.

"Good heavens! have you arrived at last?" exclaimed Bergenheim. "Here is a gentleman this crazy mare has thrown against a tree, and who has received a violent blow on the head. Do you not think it would be the

proper thing to bleed him?"

"A slight phlebotomy might be very advantageous in stopping the extravasation of blood in the frontal region," replied the peasant, calling to his aid all the technical terms he had learned when he was a hospital nurse.

"Are you sure you can do this bleeding well?"

"I'll take the liberty of saying to Monsieur le Baron that I phlebotomized Perdreau last week and Mascareau only a month ago, without any complaint from them."

"Indeed! I believe you," sneered the groom, "both are on their last legs."

"I am neither Perdreau nor Mascareau," observed the wounded man with a smile.

Rousselet drew himself up at full height, with the dignity of a man of talent who scorns to reply to either criticism or mistrust.

"Monsieur," said Gerfaut, turning to the Baron, "I am really causing you too much trouble. This trifle does not merit the attention you give it. I do not suffer in the least. Some water and a napkin are all that I need. I fancy that I resemble an Iroquois Indian who has just been scalped; my pride is really what is most hurt," he added, with a smile, "when I think of the grotesque sight I must present to the ladies whom I notice at the window."

"Why, it is Monsieur de Gerfaut!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, toward whom he raised his eyes.

Octave bowed to her with a gracious air. His glance wandered from the old lady to Clemence, who did not seem to have the strength to leave the window. M. de Bergenheim, after hurriedly greeting Marillac, finally yielded to the assurance that a surgeon was unnecessary, and conducted the two friends to his own room, where the wounded man could find everything that he needed.

"What the devil was the use in sending me as ambassador, since you were to make such a fine entrance upon the stage?" murmured Marillac in his friend's ear.

"Silence!" replied the latter as he pressed his hand; "I am only behind the scenes as yet."

During this time Clemence and her aunt had led Aline to her room.

"Now, tell us what all this means?" said Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, while the young girl was changing her dress.

"It was Christian's fault," replied Aline. "We were galloping along beside the river when Titania became frightened by the branch of a tree. 'Do not be afraid!' exclaimed my brother. I was not in the least frightened; but when he saw that my horse was about to run away, he urged his on in order to join me. When Titania heard the galloping behind her she did run away in earnest; she left the road and started straight for the river. Then I began to be a little frightened. Just fancy, Clemence, I bounded in the saddle at each leap, sometimes upon the mare's neck, sometimes upon the crupper; it was terrible! I tried to withdraw my foot from the stirrup as Christian had told me to do; but just then Titania ran against the trunk of a tree, and I rolled over with her. A gentleman, whom I had not seen before, and who, I believe, actually jumped out of the ground, raised me from the saddle, where I was held by something, I do not know what; then that naughty Titania threw him against the tree as he was helping me to my feet, and when I was able to look at him his face was covered with blood. Christian rushed on the scene, and, when he saw that I was not badly hurt, he ran after Titania and beat her! Oh! how he beat her! Mon Dieu! how cruel men are! It was in vain for me to cry for mercy; he would not listen to me. Then we came home, and, since this gentleman is not badly wounded, it seems that my poor dress has fared worst of all."

The young girl took her riding-habit from the chair as she said these words, and could not restrain a cry of horror when she saw an enormous rent in it.

"Mon Dieu!" she exclaimed, as she showed it to her sister-in-law. It was all that she had strength to articulate.

Mademoiselle de Corandeuil took the skirt in her turn, and looked at it with the practised eye of a person who had made a special study of little disasters of the toilet and the ways of remedying them.

"It is in the fullness," said she, "and by putting in a new breadth it will never be seen."

Aline, once convinced that the evil could be repaired, soon recovered her serenity.

When the three ladies entered the drawing-room they found the Baron and his two guests chatting amicably. Gerfaut had his forehead tied up with a black silk band which gave him a slight resemblance to Cupid with his bandage just off his eyes. His sparkling glance showed that blindness was not what there was in common between him and the charming little god. After the first greetings, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil, who was always strict as to etiquette, and who thought that Titania had been a rather unceremonious master of ceremonies between her nephew and M. de Gerfaut,

advanced toward the latter in order to introduce them formally to each other.

"I do not think," said she, "that Monsieur de Bergenheim has had the honor of meeting you before today; allow me then to present you to him. Baron, this is Monsieur le Vicomte de Gerfaut, one of my relatives."

When Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was in good humor, she treated Gerfaut as a relative on account of their family alliance of 1569. At this moment the poet felt profoundly grateful for this kindness.

"Monsieur has presented himself so well," said Christian frankly, "that your recommendation, my dear aunt, in spite of the respect I have for it, will not add to my gratitude. Only for Monsieur de Gerfaut, here is a madcap little girl whom we should be obliged to look for now at the bottom of the river."

As he said these words, he passed his arm about his sister's waist and kissed her tenderly, while Aline was obliged to stand upon the tips of her toes to reach her brother's lips.

"These gentlemen," he continued, "have agreed to sacrifice for us the pleasure of the Femme-sans-Tete, as well as Mademoiselle Gobillot's civilities, and establish their headquarters in my house. They can pursue their picturesque and romantic studies from here just as well; I suppose, Marillac, that you are still a determined dauber of canvas?"

"To tell the truth," replied the poet, "art absorbs me a great deal."

"As to myself, I never succeeded in drawing a nose that did not resemble an ear and vice versa. But for that worthy Baringnier, who was kind enough to look over my plans, I ran a great risk of leaving Saint Cyr without a graduating diploma. But seriously, gentlemen, when you are tired of sketching trees and tumbledown houses, I can give you some good boar hunting. Are you a hunter, Monsieur de Gerfaut?"

"I like hunting very much," replied the lover, with rare effrontery.

The conversation continued thus upon the topics that occupy people who meet for the first time. When the Baron spoke of the two friends installing themselves at the chateau, Octave darted a glance at Madame de Bergenheim, as if soliciting a tacit approbation of his conduct; but met with no response. Clemence, with a gloomy, sombre air fulfilled the duties that politeness imposed upon her as mistress of the house. Her conduct did not change during the rest of the evening, and Gerfaut no longer tried by a single glance to soften the severity she seemed determined to adopt toward him. All his attentions were reserved for Mademoiselle de Corandeuil and Aline, who listened with unconcealed pleasure to the man whom she regarded as her saviour; for the young

girl's remembrance of the danger which she had run excited her more and more.

After supper Mademoiselle de Corandeuil proposed a game of whist to M. de Gerfaut, whose talent for the game had made a lasting impression upon her. The poet accepted this diversion with an enthusiasm equal to that he had shown for hunting, and quite as sincere too. Christian and his sister—a little gamester in embryo, like all of her family—completed the party, while Clemence took up her work and listened with an absentminded air to Marillac's conversation. It was in vain for the latter to call art and the Middle Ages to his aid, using the very quintessence of his brightest speeches—success did not attend his effort. After the end of an hour, he had a firm conviction that Madame de Bergenheim was, everything considered, only a woman of ordinary intelligence and entirely unworthy of the passion she had inspired in his friend.

"Upon my soul," he thought, "I would a hundred times rather have Reine Gobillot for a sweetheart. I must take a trip in that direction tomorrow."

When they separated for the night, Gerfaut, bored by his evening and wounded by his reception from Clemence, which, he thought, surpassed anything he could have expected of her capricious disposition, addressed to the young woman a profound bow and a look which said:

"I am here in spite of you; I shall stay here in spite of you; you shall love me in spite of yourself."

Madame de Bergenheim replied by a glance none the less expressive, in which a lover the most prone to conceit could read:

"Do as you like; I have as much indifference for your love as disdain for your presumption."

This was the last shot in this preliminary skirmish.

CHAPTER IX

GERFAUT, THE WIZARD

There are some women who, like the heroic Cure Merino, need but one hour's sleep. A nervous, irritable, subtle organization gives them a power for waking, without apparent fatigue, refused to most men. And yet, when a strong emotion causes its corrosive waters to filtrate into the veins of these impressionable beings, it trickles there drop by drop,

until it has hollowed out in the very depths of their hearts a lake full of trouble and storms. Then, in the silence of night and the calm of solitude, insomnia makes the rosy cheeks grow pale and dark rings encircle the most sparkling eyes. It is in vain for the burning forehead to seek the cool pillow; the pillow grows warm without the forehead cooling. In vain the mind hunts for commonplace ideas, as a sort of intellectual poppy-leaves that may lead to a quiet night's rest; a persistent thought still returns, chasing away all others, as an eagle disperses a flock of timid birds in order to remain sole master of its prey. If one tries to repeat the accustomed prayer, and invoke the aid of the Virgin, or the good angel who watches at the foot of young girls' beds, in order to keep away the charms of the tempter, the prayer is only on the lips, the Virgin is deaf, the angel sleeps! The breath of passion against which one struggles runs through every fibre of the heart, like a storm over the chords of an Tolian harp, and extorts from it those magic melodies to which a poor, troubled, and frightened woman listens with remorse and despair; but to which she listens, and with which at last she is intoxicated, for the allegory of Eve is an immortal myth, that repeats itself, through every century and in every clime.

Since her entrance into society, Madame de Bergenheim had formed the habit of keeping late hours. When the minute details of her toilette for the night were over, and she had confided her beautiful body to the snowy sheets of her couch, some new novel or fashionable magazine helped her wile away the time until sleep came to her. Christian left his room, like a good country gentleman, at sunrise; he left it either for the chase—or to oversee workmen, who were continually being employed upon some part of his domain. Ordinarily, he returned only in time for dinner, and rarely saw Clemence except between that time and supper, at the conclusion of which, fatigued by his day's work, he hastened to seek the repose of the just. Husband and wife, while living under the same roof, were thus almost completely isolated from each other; night for one was day for the other.

By the haste with which Clemence shortened her preparations for the night, one would have said that she must have been blessed with an unusually sleepy sensation. But when she lay in bed, with her head under her arm, like a swan with his neck under his wing, and almost in the attitude of Correggio's Magdalen, her eyes, which sparkled with a feverish light, betrayed the fact that she had sought the solitude of her bed in order to indulge more freely in deep meditation.

With marvelous fidelity she went over the slightest events of the day, to which by a constant effort of willpower, she had seemed so indifferent. First, she saw Gerfaut with his face covered with blood, and the thought of the terrible sensation which this sight caused her made her heart throb violently. She then recalled him as she next saw him, in the drawing-room by her husband's side, seated in the very chair that she had left but a moment before. This trifling circumstance impressed her; she saw in this a proof of sympathetic understanding, a sort of gift of

second sight which Octave possessed, and which in her eyes was so formidable a weapon. According to her ideas, he must have suspected that this was her own favorite chair and have seized it for that reason, just as he would have loved to take her in his arms.

For the first time, Clemence had seen together the man to whom she belonged and the man whom she regarded somewhat as her property. For, by one of those arrangements with their consciences of which women alone possess the secret, she had managed to reason like this: "Since I am certain always to belong to Monsieur de Bergenheim only, Octave can certainly belong to me." An heterodoxical syllogism, whose two premises she reconciled with an inconceivable subtlety. A feeling of shame had made her dread this meeting, which the most hardened coquette could never witness without embarrassment. A woman, between her husband and her lover, is like a plant one sprinkles with ice-cold water while a ray of sunlight is trying to comfort it. The sombre and jealous, or even tranquil and unsuspecting, face of a husband has a wonderful power of repression. One is embarrassed to love under the glance of an eye that darts flashes as bright as steel; and a calm, kindly look is more terrible yet, for all jealousy seems tyrannical, and tyranny leads to revolt; but a confiding husband is like a victim strangled in his sleep, and inspires, by his very calmness, the most poignant remorse.

The meeting of these two men naturally led Clemence to a comparison which could but be to Christian's advantage. Gerfaut had nothing remarkable about him save an intelligent, intensely clever air; there was a thoughtful look in his eyes and an archness in his smile, but his irregular features showed no mark of beauty; his face wore an habitually tired expression, peculiar to those people who have lived a great deal in a short time, and it made him look older than Christian, although he was really several years younger. The latter, on the contrary, owed to his strong constitution, fortified by country life, an appearance of blooming youth that enhanced his noble regularity of features.

In a word, Christian was handsomer than his rival, and Clemence exaggerated her husband's superiority over her lover. Not being able to find the latter awkward or insignificant, she tried to persuade herself that he was ugly. She then reviewed in her mind all M. de Bergenheim's good qualities, his attachment and kindness to her, his loyal, generous ways; she recalled the striking instance that Marillac had related of his bravery, a quality without which there is no hope of success for a man in the eyes of any woman. She did all in her power to inflame her imagination and to see in her husband a hero worthy of inspiring the most fervent love. When she had exhausted her efforts toward such enthusiasm and admiration, she turned round, in despair, and, burying her head in her pillow, she sobbed:

"I cannot, I cannot love him!"

She wept bitterly for a long while. As she recalled her own severity in

the past regarding women whose conduct had caused scandal, she employed in her turn the harshness of her judgment in examining her own actions. She felt herself more guilty than all the others, for her weakness appeared less excusable to her. She felt that she was unworthy and contemptible, and wished to die that she might escape the shame that made her blush scarlet, and the remorse that tortured her soul.

How many such unhappy tears bathe the eyes of those who should shed only tears of joy! How many such sighs break the silence of the night! There are noble, celestial beings among women whom remorse stretches out upon its relentless brasier, but in the midst of the flames that torture them the heart palpitates, imperishable as a salamander. Is it not human fate to suffer? After Madame de Bergenheim had given vent, by convulsive sobs and stifled sighs, to her grief for this love which she could not tear from her breast, she formed a desperate resolution. From the manner in which M. de Gerfaut had taken possession of the chateau the very first day, she recognized that he was master of the situation. The sort of infatuation which Mademoiselle de Corandeuil seemed to have for him, and Christian's courteous and hospitable habits, would give him an opportunity to prolong his stay as long as he desired. She thus compared herself to a besieged general, who sees the enemy within his ramparts.

"Very well! I will shut myself up in the fortress!" said she, smiling in spite of herself in the midst of her tears. "Since this insupportable man has taken possession of my drawing-room, I will remain in my own room; we will see whether he dares to approach that!"

She shook her pretty head with a defiant air, but she could not help glancing into the room which was barely lighted with a night lamp. She sat up and listened for a moment rather anxiously, as if Octave's dark eyes might suddenly glisten in the obscurity. When she had assured herself that all was tranquil, and that the throbbing of her heart was all that disturbed the silence, she continued preparing her plan of defense.

She decided that she would be ill the next day and keep to her bed, if necessary, until her persecutor should make up his mind to beat a retreat. She solemnly pledged herself to be firm, courageous, and inflexible; then she tried to pray. It was now two o'clock in the morning. For some time Clemence remained motionless, and one might have thought that at least she was asleep. Suddenly she arose. Without stopping to put on her dressing-gown, she lighted a candle by the night-lamp, pushed the bolt of her door and then went to the windows, the space between them forming a rather deep projection on account of the thickness of the walls. A portrait of the Duke of Bordeaux hung there; she raised it and pressed a button concealed in the woodwork. A panel opened, showing a small empty space. The shelf in this sort of closet contained only a rosewood casket. She opened this mysterious box and took from it a package of letters, then returned to her bed with the eagerness of a miser who is about to gaze upon his treasures.

Had she not struggled and prayed? Had she not offered upon the tyrannical altar of duty as an expiation, tears, pale cheeks and a tortured soul? Had she not just taken a solemn vow, in the presence of God and herself, which should protect her against her weakness? Was she not a virtuous wife, and had she not paid dearly enough for a moment of sad happiness? Was it a crime to breathe for an instant the balmy air of love through the gratings of this prison-cell, the doors of which she had just locked with her own hand? Admirable logic for loving hearts, which, not being able to control their feelings, suffer in order to prove themselves less guilty, and clothe themselves in haircloth so that each shudder may cause a pain that condones the sin!

Being at peace with herself, she read as women read who are in love; leaning her head upon her hand, she drew out the letters, one by one, from her bosom where she had placed them. She drank with her heart and eyes the poison these passionate words contained; she allowed herself to be swayed at will by these melodies which lulled but did not benumb. When one of those invincible appeals of imploring passion awoke all the echoes of her love, and ran through her veins with a thrill, striking the innermost depths of her heart, she threw herself back and imprinted her burning lips upon the cold paper. With one letter pressed to her heart, and another pressed to her lips, she gave herself up completely, exclaiming in an inaudible voice: "I love thee! I am thine!"

The next morning, when Aline entered her sister-in law's room, according to her usual custom, the latter was not obliged to feign the indisposition she had planned; the sensations of this sleepless night had paled her cheeks and altered her features; it would have been difficult to imagine a more complete contrast than that between these two young women at this moment. Clemence, lying upon her bed motionless and white as the sheet which covered her, resembled Juliet sleeping in her tomb; Aline, rosy, vivacious, and more petulant than usual, looked very much the madcap Mademoiselle de Corandeuil had reproached her with being. Her face was full of that still childish grace, more lovely than calm, more pleasing than impressive, which makes young girls so charming to the eye but less eloquent to the heart; for are they not fresh flowers more rich in coloring than in perfume?

Clemence could hardly stifle a sigh as she gazed at those rosy cheeks, those sparkling eyes, that life so full of the rich future. She recalled a time when she was thus, when grief glided over her cheeks without paling them, when tears dried as they left her eyes; she also had had her happy, careless days, her dreams of unalloyed bliss.

Aline, after presenting her face like a child who asks for a kiss, wished to tease her as usual, but, with a tired gesture, her sister-in-law begged for mercy.

"Are you ill?" asked the young girl anxiously, as she seated herself

upon the edge of the bed.

Madame de Bergenheim smiled, a forced smile.

"Thank me for my poor health," said she, "for it obliges you to do the honors; I shall doubtless not be able to go down to dinner, and you must take my place. You know that it tires my aunt to have to trouble herself about others."

Aline made a little grimace as she replied:

"If I thought you were speaking seriously, I would go and get into my own bed at once!"

"Child! will you not in your turn be mistress of a home? Is it not necessary for you to become accustomed to it? It is an excellent opportunity, and, with my aunt as a guide, you are sure to acquit yourself well."

These last words were spoken rather maliciously, for the young woman knew that of all the possible mentors, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil was the one whom Aline dreaded most.

"I beg of you, my kind sister," replied the girl, clasping her hands, "do not be ill to-day. Is it the neuralgia of the day before yesterday you are suffering from? Do be a good sister, and get up and come and take a walk in the park; the fresh air will cure you, I am sure of it "

"And I shall not be obliged to preside at the dinner-table, you would add; is it not so? You selfish girl!"

"I am afraid of Monsieur de Gerfaut," said the child, lowering her voice.

When she heard pronounced this name, so deeply agitating her, Madame de Bergenheim was silent for a moment; at last she said:

"What has Monsieur de Gerfaut done to you? Is it not downright ungrateful to be afraid of him so soon after the service he has rendered you?"

"No, I am not ungrateful," replied the young girl quickly. "I never shall forget that I owe my life to him, for certainly, but for him, I should have been dragged into the river. But he has such black, piercing eyes that they seem to look into your very soul; and then, he is such a brilliant man! I am all the time afraid of saying something that he may laugh at. You know, some people think I talk too much; but I shall never dare open my mouth in his presence. Why do some persons' eyes make such an impression upon one?"

Clemence lowered her own beautiful eyes and made no reply.

"His friend, Monsieur Marillac, does not frighten me one bit, in spite of his big moustache. Tell me, does not this Monsieur de Gerfaut frighten you a little too?"

"Not at all, I assure you," replied Madame de Bergenheim, trying to smile. "But," she continued, in order to change the conversation, "how fine you look! You have certainly some plan of conquest. What! a city gown at nine o'clock in the morning, and hair dressed as if for a ball?"

"Would you like to know the compliment your aunt just paid me?"

"Some little jest of hers, I suppose?"

"You might say some spiteful remark, for she is the hatefulest thing! She told me that blue ribbons suited red hair very badly and advised me to change one or the other. Is it true that my hair is red?"

Mademoiselle de Bergenheim asked this question with so much anxiety that her sister-in-law could not repress a smile.

"You know that my aunt delights in annoying you," said she. "Your hair is very pretty, a bright blond, very pleasant to the eye; only Justine waves it a little too tight; it curls naturally. She dresses your hair too high; it would be more becoming to you if she pushed it back from your temples a little than to wave it as much as she does. Come a little nearer to me."

Aline knelt before Madame de Bergenheim's bed, and the latter, adding a practical lesson to verbal advice, began to modify the maid's work to suit her own taste.

"It curls like a little mane," said the young girl, as she saw the trouble her sister-in-law had in succeeding; "it was my great trouble at the Sacred Heart. The sisters wished us to wear our hair plain, and I always had a terrible time to keep it in place. However, blond hair looks ugly when too plainly dressed, and Monsieur de Gerfaut said yesterday that it was the shade he liked best."

"Monsieur de Gerfaut told you he liked blond hair best!"

"Take care; you are pulling my hair! Yes, blond hair and blue eyes. He said that when speaking of Carlo Dolci's Virgin, and he said she was of the most beautiful Jewish type; if he intended it as a compliment to me, I am very much obliged to him. Do you think that my eyes are as blue as that of the painted Virgin's. Monsieur de Gerfaut pretends that there is a strong resemblance."

Madame de Bergenheim withdrew her hand so quickly that she pulled out half a dozen or more hairs from her sister-in-law's head, and buried herself up to the chin in the bedclothes.

"Oh! Monsieur de Gerfaut knows how to pay very pretty compliments!" she said. "And you doubtless are very well pleased to resemble Carlo Dolci's Madonna?"

"She is very pretty!—and then it is the Holy Virgin, you know—Ah! I hear Monsieur de Gerfaut's voice in the garden."

The young girl arose quickly and ran to the window, where, concealed behind the curtains, she could see what was going on outside without being seen herself.

"He is with Christian," she continued. "There, they are going to the library. They must have just taken a long walk, for they are bespattered with mud. If you could only see what a pretty little cap Monsieur de Gerfaut has on!"

"Truly, he will turn her head," thought Madame de Bergenheim, with a decided feeling of anger; then she closed her eyes as if she wished to sleep.

Gerfaut had, in fact, just returned from paying his respects to the estate. He had followed his host, who, under the pretext of showing him several picturesque sights, promenaded him, in the morning dew, through the lettuce in the kitchen garden and the underbrush in the park. But he knew through experience that all was not roses in a lover's path; watching in the snow, climbing walls, hiding in obscure closets, imprisonment in wardrobes, were more disagreeable incidents than a quiet tete-a-tete with a husband.

He listened, therefore, complacently enough to Bergenheim's prolix explanations, interested himself in the planting of trees, thought the fields very green, the forests admirable, the granite rocks more beautiful than those of the Alps, went into ecstasies over the smallest vista, advised the establishment of a new mill on the river, which, being navigable for rafts, might convey lumber to all the cities on the Moselle, and thus greatly increase the value of the owner's woods. They fraternized like Glaucus and Diomedes; Gerfaut hoping, of course, to play the part of the Greek, who, according to Homer, received in return for a common iron armor a gold one of inestimable value. There is always such a secret mental reservation in the lover's mind when associating with the husband of his innamorata.

When he entered the room of his wife, whose indisposition had been reported to him, Christian's first words were:

"This Monsieur de Gerfaut appears to be a very excellent fellow, and I

shall be delighted if he will stay with us a while. It is too bad that you are ill. He is a good musician, as well as Marillac; you might have sung together. Try to get better quickly and come down to dinner."

"I can not really tell him that Monsieur de Gerfaut has loved me for more than a year," said Madame de Bergenheim to herself.

A moment later, Mademoiselle de Corandeuil appeared, and with a prim air seated herself beside the bed.

"Perhaps you think that I am fooled by this indisposition. I see plainly that you wish to be impolite to Monsieur de Gerfaut, for you can not endure him. It seems to me, however, that a relative of your family ought to be treated with more respect by you, above all, when you know how much I esteem him. This is unheard-of absurdity, and I shall end by speaking to your husband about it; we shall see if his intervention will not have more effect than mine."

"You shall not do that, aunt," Clemence interrupted, sitting up in bed and trying to take her aunt's hand.

"If you wish that your discourteous conduct should rest a secret between us, I advise you to get rid of your neuralgia this very day. Now, you had better decide immediately--"

"This is genuine persecution," exclaimed Madame de Bergenheim, falling back upon her bed when the old lady had departed. "He has bewitched everybody! Aline, my aunt, and my husband; to say nothing of myself, for I shall end by going mad. I must end this, at any price." She rang the bell violently.

"Justine," said she to her maid, "do not let any one enter this room under any pretext whatsoever, and do not come in yourself until I ring; I will try to sleep."

Justine obeyed, after closing the blinds. She had hardly gone out when her mistress arose, put on her dressing-gown and slippers with a vivacity which betokened anger; she then seated herself at her desk and began to write rapidly, dashing her pen over the satiny paper without troubling herself as to blots. The last word was ended with a dash as energetically drawn as the Napoleonic flourish.

When a young man who, according to custom, begins to read the end of his letters first finds an arabesque of this style at the bottom of a lady's letter, he ought to arm himself with patience and resignation before he reads its contents.

CHAPTER X

PLOTS

That evening, when Gerfaut entered his room he hardly took time to place the candlestick which he held in his hand upon the mantel before he took from his waistcoat pocket a paper reduced to microscopic dimensions, which he carried to his lips and kissed passionately before opening. His eyes fell first upon the threatening flourish of the final word; this word was: Adieu!

"Hum!" said the lover, whose exaltation was sensibly cooled at this sight.

He read the whole letter with one glance of the eye, darting to the culminating point of each phrase as a deer bounds over ledges of rocks; he weighed the plain meaning as well as the innuendoes of the slightest expression, like a rabbi who comments upon the Bible, and deciphered the erasures with the patience of a seeker after hieroglyphics, so as to detach from them some particle of the idea they had contained. After analyzing and criticising this note in all its most imperceptible shades, he crushed it within his hand and began to pace the floor, uttering from time to time some of those exclamations which the Dictionnaire de l'Academie has not yet decided to sanction; for all lovers resemble the lazzaroni who kiss San-Gennaro's feet when he acts well, but who call him briconne as soon as they have reason to complain of him. However, women are very kind, and almost invariably excuse the stones that an angry lover throws at them in such moments of acute disappointment, and willingly say with the indulgent smile of the Roman emperor: "I feel no wound!"

In the midst of this paroxysm of furious anger, two or three knocks resounded behind the woodwork.

"Are you composing?" asked a voice like that of a ventriloquist; "I am with you."

A minute later, Marillac appeared upon the threshold, in his slippers and with a silk handkerchief tied about his head, holding his candlestick in one hand and a pipe in the other; he stood there motionless.

"You are fine," said he, "you are magnificent, fatal and accursed—You remind me of Kean in Othello—"

"Have you pray'd to-night, Desdemona?"

Gerfaut gazed at him with frowning brows, but made no reply.

"I will wager that it is the last scene in our third act," replied the artist, placing his candlestick upon the mantel; "it seems that it is to be very tragic. Now listen! I also feel the poetical afflatus coming over me, and, if you like, we will set about devouring paper like two boa-constrictors. Speaking of serpents, have you a rattle? Ah, yes! Here is the bell-rope. I was about to say that we would have a bowl of coffee. Or rather, I will go into the kitchen myself; I am very good friends with Marianne, the cook; besides, the motto of the house of Bergenheim is *liberte, libertas*. Coffee is my muse; in this respect, I resemble Voltaire—"

"Marillac!" exclaimed Gerfaut, as the artist was about to leave the room. The artist turned, and meekly retraced his steps.

"You will be so good as to do me the favor of returning to your room," said Gerfaut. "You may work or you may sleep, just as you like; between us, you would do well to sleep. I wish to be alone."

"You say that as if you meditated an attempt upon your illustrious person. Are you thinking of suicide? Let us see whether you have some concealed weapon, some poisoned ring. Curse upon it! the poison of the Borgias! Is the white substance in this china bowl, vulgarly called sugar, by some terrible chance infamous arsenic disguised under the appearance of an honest colonial commodity?"

"Be kind enough to spare your jokes," said Octave, as his friend poked about in all the corners of the room with an affectation of anxiety, "and, as I can not get rid of you, listen to my opinion: if you think that I brought you here for you to conduct yourself as you have for the last two days, you are mistaken."

"What have I done?"

"You left me the whole morning with that tiresome Bergenheim on my hands, and I verily believe he made me count every stick in his park and every frog in his pond. Tonight, when that old witch of Endor proposed her infernal game of whist, to which it seems I am to be condemned daily, you-excused yourself upon the pretext of ignorance, and yet you play as good a game as I."

"I can not endure whist at twenty sous a point."

"Do I like it any better?"

"Well, you are a nice fellow! You have an object in view which should make you swallow all these disagreeable trifles as if they were as sweet as honey. Is it possible you would like me to play Bertrand and Raton? I should be Raton the oftener of the two!"

"But, really, what did you do all day?"

Marillac posed before the mirror, arranged his kerchief about his head in a more picturesque fashion, twisted his moustache, puffed out, through the corner of his mouth, a cloud of smoke, which surrounded his face like a London fog, then turned to his friend and said, with the air of a person perfectly satisfied with himself:

"Upon my faith, my dear friend, each one for himself and God for us all! You, for example, indulge in romantic love-affairs; you must have titled ladies. Titles turn your head and make you exclusive. You make love to the aristocracy; so be it, that is your own concern. As for me, I have another system; I am, in all matters of sentiment, what I am in politics: I want republican institutions."

"What is all that nonsense about?"

"Let me tell you. I want universal suffrage, the cooperation of all citizens, admission to all offices, general elections, a popular government, in a word, a sound, patriotic hash. Which means regarding women that I carry them all in my heart, that I recognize between them no distinction of caste or rank. Article First of my set of laws: all women are equal in love, provided they are young, pretty, admirably attractive in shape and carriage, above all, not too thin."

"And what of equality?"

"So much the worse. With this eminently liberal and constitutional policy, I intend to gather all the flowers that will allow themselves to be gathered by me, without one being esteemed more fresh than another, because it belongs to the nobility, or another less sweet, because plebeian. And as field daisies are a little more numerous than imperial roses, it follows that I very often stoop. That is the reason why, at this very moment, I am up to my ears in a little rustic love affair:

Simple et naive bergerette, elle regne—"

"Stop that noise; Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's room is just underneath."

"I will tell you then, since I must give an account of myself, that I went into the park to sketch a few fir-trees before dinner; they are more beautiful of their kind than the ancient Fontainebleau oaks. That is for art. At dinner, I dined nobly and well. To do the Bergenheims justice, they live in a royal manner. That is for the stomach. Afterward I stealthily ordered a horse to be saddled and rode to La Fauconnerie in a trice, where I presented the expression of my adoration to Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot, a minor yet, but enjoying her full rights already. That is for the heart."

"Indeed!"

"No sarcasm, if you please; not everybody can share your taste for princesses, who make you go a hundred leagues to follow them and then upon your arrival, only give you the tip of a glove to kiss. Such intrigues are not to my fancy.

Je suis sergent,
Brave—"

"Again, I say, will you stop that noise? Don't you know that I have nobody on my side at present but this respectable dowager on the first floor below? If she supposes that I am making all this racket over her head we shall be deadly enemies by to-morrow."

"Zitto, zitto, piano, piano,
Senza strepito e rumore,"

replied Marillac, putting his finger to his lips and lowering his voice. "What you say is a surprise to me. From the way in which you offered your arm to Madame de Bergenheim to lead her into the drawing-room after supper, I thought you understood each other perfectly. As I was returning, for I made it my duty to offer my arm to the old lady—and you say that I do nothing for you—it seemed to me that I noticed a meeting of hands—You know that I have an eagle eye. She slipped a note into your hand as sure as my name is Marillac."

Gerfaut took the note which he held crumpled up in his hand, and held it in the flame of one of the candles. The paper ignited, and in less than a second nothing of it remained but a few dark pieces which fell into ashes upon the marble mantel.

"You burn it! You are wrong," said the artist; "as for me, I keep everything, letters and hair. When I am old, I shall have the letters to read evenings, and shall weave an allegorical picture with the hair. I shall hang it before my desk, so as to have before me a souvenir of the adorable creatures who furnished the threads. I will answer for it that there will be every shade in it from that of Camille Hautier, my first love, who was an albino, to this that I have here."

As he spoke, he took out of his pocket a small parcel from which he drew a lock of coal-black hair, which he spread out upon his hand.

"Did you pull this hair from Titania's mane?" asked Gerfaut, as he drew through his fingers the more glossy than silky lock, which he ridiculed by this ironical supposition.

"They might be softer, I admit," replied Marillac negligently; and he examined the lock submitted to this merciless criticism as if it were simply a piece of goods, of the fineness of whose texture he wished to

assure himself.

"You will admit at least that the color is beautiful, and the quantity makes up for the quality. Upon my word, this poor Reine has given me enough to make a pacha's banner. Provincial and primitive simplicity! I know of one woman in particular who never gave an adorer more than seven of her hairs; and yet, at the end of three years, this cautious beauty was obliged to wear a false front. All her hair had disappeared.

"Are you like me, Octave? The first thing I ask for is one of these locks. Women rather like this sort of childishness, and when they have granted you that, it is a snare spread for them which catches them."

Marillac took the long, dark tress and held it near the candle; but his movement was so poorly calculated that the hair caught fire and was instantly destroyed.

"A bad sign," exclaimed Gerfaut, who could not help laughing at his friend's dismayed look.

"This is a day of autos-de-fe," said the artist, dropping into a chair; "but bah! small loss; if Reine asks to see this lock, I will tell her that I destroyed it with kisses. That always flatters them, and I am sure it will please this little field-flower. It is a fact that she has cheeks like rosy apples! On my way back I thought of a vaudeville that I should like to write about this. Only I should lay the scene in Switzerland and I should call the young woman Betty or Kettly instead of Reine, a name ending in 'Y' which would rhyme with Rutly, on account of local peculiarities. Will you join in it? I have almost finished the scenario. First scene—Upon the rising of the curtain, harvesters are discovered—"

"Will you do me the favor of going to bed?" interrupted Gerfaut.

"Chorus of harvesters:

Deja l'aurore
Qui se colore—"

"If you do not leave me alone, I will throw the contents of this water-pitcher at your head."

"I never have seen you in such a surly temper. It looks indeed as if your divinity had treated you cruelly."

"She has treated me shamefully!" exclaimed the lover, whose anger was freshly kindled at this question; "she has treated me as one would treat a barber's boy. This note, which I just burned, was a most formal, unpleasant, insolent dismissal. This woman is a monster, do you

understand me?"

"A monster! your angel, a monster!" said Marillac, suppressing with difficulty a violent outburst of laughter.

"She, an angel? I must say that she is a demon—This woman—"

"Do you not adore her?"

"I hate her, I abhor her, she makes me shudder. You may laugh, if you like!"

As he said these words, Gerfaut struck a violent blow upon the table with his fist.

"You forget that Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's room is just beneath us," said the artist, in a teasing way.

"Listen to me, Marillac! Your system with women is vulgar, gross, and trivial. The daisies which you gather, the maidens from whom you cut handfuls of hair excellent for stuffing mattresses, your rustic beauties with cheeks like rosy apples are conquests worthy of counter-jumpers in their Sunday clothes. That is nothing but the very lowest grade of love-making, and yet you are right, a thousand times right, and wonderfully wise compared with me."

"You do me too much honor! So, then, you are not loved?"

"Truly, I had an idea I was, or, if I was not loved to-day, I hoped to be to-morrow. But you are mistaken as to what discourages me. I simply fear that her heart is narrow. I believe that she loves me as much as she is able to love; unfortunately, that is not enough for me."

"It certainly seems to me that, so far, she has not shown herself madly in love with you."

"Ah, madly! Do you know many women who love madly with their hearts and souls? You talk like a college braggart. There are conquerors like yourself who, if we are to believe them, would devour a whole convent at their breakfast. These men excite my pity. As for me, really, I have always felt that it was most difficult to make one's self really loved. In these days of prudery, almost all women of rank appear 'frappe a la glace', like a bottle of champagne. It is necessary to thaw them first, and there are some of them whose shells are so frigid that they would put out the devil's furnace. They call this virtue; I call it social servitude. But what matters the name? the result is the same."

"But, really, are you sure that Madame de Bergenheim loves you?" asked Marillac, emphasizing the word "love" so strongly as to attract his

friend's attention.

"Sure? of course I am!" replied the latter. "Why do you ask me?"

"Because, when you are not quite so angry, I want to ask you something." He hesitated a moment. "If you learned that she cares more for another than for you, what would you do?"

Gerfaut looked at him and smiled disdainfully.

"Listen!" said he, "you have heard me storm and curse, and you took this nonsense for genuine hatred. My good fellow! do you know why I raved in such a manner? It was because, knowing my temperament, I felt the necessity of getting angry and giving vent to what was in my heart. If I had not employed this infallible remedy, the annoyance which this note caused me would have disturbed my nerves all night, and when I do not sleep my complexion is more leaden than usual and I have dark rings under my eyes."

"Fop!"

"Simpleton!"

"Why simpleton?"

"Do you take me for a dandy? Do you not understand why I wish to sleep soundly? It is simply because I do not wish to appear before her with a face like a ghost. That would be all that was needed to encourage her in her severity. I shall take good care that she does not discover how hard her last thrust has hit me. I would give you a one-hundred-franc note if I could secure for to-morrow morning your alderman's face and your complexion a la Teniers."

"Thanks, we are not masquerading just at present.

Nevertheless, all that you have said does not prove in the slightest that she loves you."

"My dear Marillac, words may have escaped me in my anger which have caused you to judge hastily. Now that I am calm and that my remedy has brought back my nervous system to its normal state, I will explain to you my real position. She is my Galatea, I her Pygmalion. 'An allegory as old as the world,' you are about to say; old or not, it is my true story. I have not yet broken the marble-virtue, education, propriety, duty, prejudices—which covers the flesh of my statue; but I am nearing my goal and I shall reach it. Her desperate resistance is the very proof of my progress. It is a terrible step for a woman to take, from No to Yes. My Galatea begins to feel the blows from my heart over her heart and she is afraid—afraid of the world, of me, of her husband, of herself, of heaven and hell. Do you not adore women who are afraid of everything? She,

love another! never! It is written in all eternity that she shall be mine. What did you wish to say to me?"

"Nothing, since you are so sure of her."

"Sure—more than of my eternal life! But I wish to know what you mean."

"But you won't be told. just a suspicion that came to me; something that was told to me the other day; a conjecture so vague that it would be useless to dwell upon it."

"I am not good at guessing enigmas," said Octave, in a dry tone.

"We will speak of this again to-morrow."

"As you like," replied the lover, with somewhat affected indifference. "If you wish to play the part of Iago with me, I warn you I am not disposed to jealousy."

"To-morrow, I tell you, I shall enlighten myself as to this affair; whatever the result of my inquiries may be, I will tell you the truth. After all, it was nothing but woman's gossip."

"Very well, take your time. But I have another favor to ask of you. Tomorrow I shall try to persuade the ladies to take a walk in the park. Mademoiselle de Corandeuil will probably not go; you must do me the favor of sticking to Bergenheim and the little sister, and gradually to walk on ahead of us, in such a way as to give me an opportunity of speaking with this cruel creature alone for a few moments; for she has given me to understand that I shall not succeed in speaking with her alone under any circumstances, and it is absolutely necessary that I should do so."

"There will be one difficulty in the way, though—they expect about twenty persons at dinner, and all her time will probably be taken up with her duties as hostess."

"That is true," exclaimed Gerfaut, jumping up so suddenly that he upset his chair.

"You still forget that Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's room is beneath us."

"The devil is playing her hand!" exclaimed the lover, as he paced the room in long strides. "I wish that during the night he would wring the neck of all these visitors. Now; then, she has her innings. Today and tomorrow this little despot's battle of Ligny will be fought and won; but the day after to-morrow, look out for her Waterloo!"

"Good-night, my Lord Wellington," said Marillac, as he arose and took up his candlestick.

"Good-night, Iago! Ah! you think you have annoyed me with your mysterious words and melodramatic reticence?"

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" replied the artist as he left the room.

"Ce secret-la
Se trahira."

CHAPTER XI

A QUARREL

The next morning, before most of the inhabitants of the chateau had thought of leaving their beds, or at least their rooms, a man, on horseback, and alone, took his departure through a door opening from the stable-yard into the park. He wore a long travelling redingote trimmed with braid and fur, rather premature clothing for the season, but which the sharp cold air that was blowing at this moment made appear very comfortable. He galloped away, and continued this pace for about three-quarters of a mile, in spite of the unevenness of the road, which followed a nearly straight line over hilly ground. It would have been difficult to decide which to admire more, the horse's limbs or the rider's lungs; for the latter, during this rapid ride, had sung without taking breath, so to speak, the whole overture to *Wilhelm Tell*. We must admit that the voice in which he sang the *andante* of the Swiss mountaineer's chorus resembled a reed pipe more than a hautboy; but, to make amends when he reached the *presto*, his voice, a rather good bass, struck the horse's ears with such force that the latter redoubled his vigor as if this melody had produced upon him the effect of a trumpet sounding the charge on the day of battle.

The traveller, whom we have probably recognized by his musical feat, concluded his concert by stopping at the entrance to some woods which extended from the top of the rocks to the river, breaking, here and there, the uniformity of the fields. After gazing about him for some time, he left the road and, entering the woods on the right, stopped at the foot of a large tree. Near this tree was a very small brook, which took its source not far away and descended with a sweet murmur to the river, making a narrow bed in the clayey ground which it watered. Such was the modesty of its course that a little brighter green and fresher grass a few feet away from it were the only indications of its presence. Nothing was wanting to make this an idyllic place for a rendezvous, neither the protecting shade, the warbling of birds in the trees, the picturesque landscape surrounding it, nor the soft grass.

After dismounting from his steed and tying him to the branches of an oak,

thus conforming to the time-honored custom of lovers, the cavalier struck his foot upon the ground three or four times to start the circulation in his legs, and then drew from his pocket a very pretty Breguet watch.

"Ten minutes past eight," said he; "I am late and yet I am early. It looks as if the clocks at La Fauconnerie were not very well regulated." He walked up and down with a quick step whistling with a vengeance:

"Quand je quittai la Normandie
J'attends-j'attends—"

a refrain which the occasion brought to his mind. When this pastime was exhausted he had recourse to another, the nature of which proved that if the expected beauty had not punctuality for a virtue, she was not one of those little exacting creatures always ready to faint or whose delicate nerves make them intolerant of their lovers' imperfections. Plunging his hand into one of the pockets in his redingote, the waiting cavalier drew out a sealskin case filled with Havana cigars, and, lighting one, began to smoke, while continuing his promenade.

But at the end of a few moments this palliative, like the first, had exhausted its effect.

"Twenty-five minutes past eight!" exclaimed Marillac, as he looked at his watch a second time; "I should like to know what this little miniature rose takes me for? It was hardly worth the trouble of overstraining this poor horse, who looks as wet as if he had come out of the river. It is enough to give him inflammation of the lungs. If Bergenheim were to see him sweating and panting like this in this bleak wind, he would give me a sound blowing-up. Upon my word, it is becoming comical! There are no more young girls! I shall see her appear presently as spruce and conceited as if she had been playing the finest trick in the world. It will do for once; but if we sojourn in these quarters some time yet, she must be educated and taught to say, 'If you please' and 'Thanks.' Ah! ha! she has no idea what sort of man she is dealing with! Half past eight! If she is not here in five minutes I shall go to La Fauconnerie and raise a terrible uproar. I will break every bit of crockery there is in the 'Femme-sans-Tete' with blows from my whip. What can I do to kill time?" He raised his head quickly, as he felt himself suddenly almost smothered under a shower of dust. This was a fatal movement for him, for his eyes received part of the libation destined for his hair. He closed them with a disagreeable sensation, after seeing Mademoiselle Reine Gobillot's fresh, chubby face, her figure prim beyond measure in a lilac-and-green plaid gingham dress, and carrying a basket on her arm, a necessary burden to maidens of a certain class who play truant.

"What sort of breeding is this?" exclaimed Marillac, rubbing his eyes; "you have made me dance attendance for an hour and now you have blinded me. I do not like this at all, you understand."

"How you scold me, just for a little pinch of dust!" replied Reine, turning as red as a cherry as she threw the remainder of the handful which she had taken from a mole-heap close by them.

"It is because it smarts like the devil," replied the artist, in a milder tone, for he realized the ridiculousness of his anger; "since you have hurt me, try at least to ease the pain; they say that to blow in the eye will cure it."

"No. I'll do nothing of the kind—I don't like to be spoken to harshly."

The artist arose at once as he saw the young girl make a movement as if to go; he put his arm about her waist and half forced her to sit beside him.

"The grass is damp and I shall stain my dress," said she, as a last resistance.

A handkerchief was at once spread upon the ground, in lieu of a carpet, by the lover, who had suddenly become very polite again.

"Now, my dear Reine," continued he, "will you tell me why you come so late? Do you know that for an hour I have been tearing my hair in despair?"

"Perhaps the dust will make it grow again," she replied, with a malicious glance at Marillac, whose head was powdered with brown dust as if a tobacco-box had been emptied upon it.

"Naughty girl!" he exclaimed, laughing, although his eyes looked as if he were crying; and, acting upon the principle of retaliation less odious in love than in war, he tried to snatch a kiss to punish her.

"Stop that, Monsieur Marillac! you know very well what you promised me."

"To love you forever, you entrancing creature," said he, in the voice of a crocodile that sighs to attract his prey.

Reine pursed up her lips and assumed important airs, but, in order to obey the feminine instinct which prescribes changing the subject of conversation after too direct an avowal, with the firm intention of returning to it later through another channel, she said:

"What were you doing just as I arrived? You were so busy you did not hear me coming. You were so droll; you waved your arms in the air and struck your forehead as you talked."

"I was thinking of you."

"But it was not necessary, in order to do that, to strike your head with your fist. It must have hurt you."

"Adorable woman!" exclaimed the artist, in a passionate tone.

"Mon Dieu! how you frighten me. If I had known I would not have come here at all. I must go away directly."

"Leave me already, queen of my heart! No! do not expect to do that; I would sooner lose my life—"

"Will you stop! what if some one should hear you? they might be passing," said Reine, gazing anxiously about her. "If you knew how frightened I was in coming! I told mamma that I was going to the mill to see my uncle; but that horrid old Lambernier met me just as I entered the woods. What shall I do if he tells that he saw me? This is not the road to the mill. It is to be hoped that he has not followed me! I should be in a pretty plight!"

"You can say that you came to gather berries or nuts, or to hear the nightingale sing; Mother Gobillot will not think anything of it. Who is this Lambernier?"

"You know—the carpenter. You saw him at our house the other day."

"Ah! ah!" said Marillac, with interest, "the one who was turned away from the chateau?"

"Yes, and they did well to do it, too; he is a downright bad man."

"He is the one who told you something about Madame de Bergenheim. Tell me the story. Your mother interrupted us yesterday just as you began telling it to me.—What was it that he said?"

"Oh! falsehoods probably. One can not believe anything that he says."

"But what did he tell you?"

"What difference does it make to you what is said about the Baroness?" replied the young girl, rather spitefully, as she saw that Marillac was not occupied in thinking of her exclusively.

"Pure curiosity. He told you then that he would tell the Baron what he knew, and that the latter would give him plenty of money to make him keep silent?"

"It makes no difference what he told me. Ask him if you wish to know. Why did you not stay at the chateau if you can think only of the Baroness? Are you in love with her?"

"I am in love with you, my dear. [The devil take me if she is not jealous now! How shall I make her talk?] I am of the same opinion as you," he replied, in a loud voice, "that all this talk of Lambernier's is pure calumny."

"There is no doubt about it. He is well known about the place; he has a wicked tongue and watches everything that one does or says in order to report it at cross-purposes. Mon Dieu! suppose he should make some story out of his seeing me enter these woods!"

"Madame de Bergenheim," continued the artist, with affectation, "is certainly far above the gossip of a scoundrel of this kind."

Reine pursed up her lips, but made no reply.

"She has too many good qualities and virtues for people to believe anything he says."

"Oh, as to that, there are hypocrites among the Parisian ladies as well as elsewhere," said the young girl, with a sour look.

"Bless me!" thought Marillac, "we have it now. I'd wager my last franc that I'll loosen her tongue."

"Madame de Bergenheim," he replied, emphasizing each word, "is such a good woman, so sensible and so pretty!"

"Mon Dieu! say that you love her at once, then—that'll be plain talk," exclaimed Reine, suddenly disengaging herself from the arm which was still about her waist. "A great lady who has her carriages and footmen in livery is a conquest to boast of! While a country girl, who has only her virtue—"

She lowered her eyes with an air of affected modesty, and did not finish her sentence.

"A virtue which grants a rendezvous at the end of three days' acquaintance, and in the depths of the woods! That is amusing!" thought the artist.

"Still, you will not be the first of the fine lady's lovers," she continued, raising her head and trying to conceal her vexation under an ironical air.

"These are falsehoods."

"Falsehoods, when I tell you that I know what I am speaking about! Lambernier is not a liar."

"Lambernier is not a liar?" repeated a harsh, hoarse voice, which seemed to come from the cavity of the tree under which they were seated. "Who has said that Lambernier was a liar?"

At the same moment, the carpenter in person suddenly appeared upon the scene. He stood before the amazed pair with his brown coat thrown over his shoulders, as usual, and his broad-brimmed gray hat pulled down over his ears, gazing at them with his deep, ugly eyes and a sardonic laugh escaping from his lips.

Mademoiselle Reine uttered a shriek as if she had seen Satan rise up from the ground at her feet; Marillac rose with a bound and seized his whip.

"You are a very insolent fellow," said he, in his ringing bass voice. "Go your way!"

"I receive no such orders," replied the workman, in a tone which justified the epithet which had just been bestowed upon him; "we are upon public ground, and I have a right to be here as well as you."

"If you do not take to your heels at once," said the artist, becoming purple with rage, "I will cut your face in two."

"Apples are sometimes cut in two," said Lambernier, sneeringly advancing his face with an air of bravado. "My face is not afraid of your whip; you can not frighten me because you are a gentleman and I am a workman! I snap my fingers at bourgeois like—"

This time he did not have time to finish his comparison; a blow from the whip cut him in the face and made him reel in spite of himself.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed, in a voice like thunder, "may I lose my name if I do not polish you off well!"

He threw his coat on the grass, spat, in his hands and rubbed them together, assuming the position of an athlete ready for a boxing-bout.

Mademoiselle Gobillot, arose, trembling with fright at this demonstration, and uttered two or three inarticulate cries; but, instead of throwing herself between the combatants in the approved style, she ran away as fast as she could.

Although the weapons of the adversaries were not of a nature to spill blood upon the turf, there was something warlike about their countenances which would have done honor to ancient paladins. Lambernier squatting upon his legs, according to the rules of pugilism, and with his fists on a level with his shoulders, resembled, somewhat, a cat ready to bound upon its prey. The artist stood with his body thrown backward, his legs on a tension, his chin buried up to his moustache in the fur collar of his coat, with whip lowered, watching all his adversary's movements with

a steady eye. When he saw the carpenter advancing toward him, he raised his arm and gave him on the left side a second lash from his whip, so vigorously applied that the workman beat a retreat once more, rubbing his hands and roaring:

”Thunder! I’ll finish you—”

He put his hands in his trousers’ pockets and drew out one of those large iron compasses such as carpenters use, and opened it with a rapid movement. He then seized it in the centre and was thus armed with a sort of double-pointed stiletto, which he brandished with a threatening gesture.

Marillac, at this sight, drew back a few paces, passed his whip to his left hand and, arming himself with his Corsican poniard, placed himself in a position of defence.

”My friend,” said he, with perfect deliberation, ”my needle is shorter than yours, but it pricks better. If you take one step nearer me, if you raise your hand, I will bleed you like a wild boar.”

Seeing the firm attitude of the artist, whose solid figure seemed to denote rather uncommon vigor, and whose moustache and sparkling eyes gave him a rather formidable aspect at this moment; above all, when he saw the large, sharp blade of the poniard, Lambernier stopped.

”By the gods!” exclaimed Marillac, who saw that his bold looks had produced their effect, ”you are a Provençal, and I a Gascon. You have a quick hand, comrade—”

”But, by Jove! you are the one who has the quick hand; you struck me with your whip as if I had been a horse. You have put my eye almost out. Do you imagine that I am well provided for like yourself and have nothing to do but to flirt with girls? I need my eyes in order to work, by God! Because you are a bourgeois and I am a workman—”

”I am not more of a bourgeois than you,” replied the artist, rather glad to see his adversary’s fury exhaust itself in words, and his attitude assume a less threatening character; ”pick up your compass and return to your work. Here,” he added, taking two five-franc pieces from his pocket. ”You were a little boorish and I a little hasty. Go and bathe your eyes with a glass of wine.”

Lambernier scowled and his eyes darted ugly, hateful glances. He hesitated a moment, as if he were thinking what he had better do, and was weighing his chances of success in case of a hostile resolve. After a few moments’ reflection, prudence got the better of his anger. He closed his compass and put it in his pocket, but he refused the silver offered him.

"You are generous," said he, with a bitter smile; "five francs for each blow of the whip! I know a good many people who would offer you their cheek twelve hours of the day at that price. But I am not one of that kind; I ask nothing of nobody."

"If Leonardo da Vinci could have seen this fellow's face just now," thought the artist, "he would not have had to seek so long for his model for the face of Judas. Only for my poniard, my fate would have been settled. This man was ready to murder me."

"Listen, Lambernier," said he, "I was wrong to strike you, and I would like to atone for it. I have been told that you were sent away from the chateau against your will. I am intimate enough with Monsieur de Bergenheim to be useful to you; do you wish me to speak to him for you?"

The carpenter stood motionless in his place, with his eyes fixed upon his adversary while the latter was preparing his horse to mount, eyes which seemed filled with hatred to their very depths. His face suddenly changed its expression and became abjectly polite when he heard himself addressed anew. He shook his head two or three times before replying.

"Unless you are the very devil," he said, "I defy you to make this gentleman say yes when he has once said no. He turned me away like a dog; all right. Let them laugh that win. It was that old idiot of a Rousselet and that old simpleton of a coachman of Mademoiselle de Corandeuil's who told tales about me. I could tell tales also if I liked."

"But what motive could they have to send you away?" continued Marillac, "you are a clever workman. I have seen your work at the chateau; there are some rooms yet unfinished; there must have been some very grave reason for their not employing you just at the moment when they needed you most."

"They said that I talked with Mademoiselle Justine, and Madame caused me to be discharged. She is mistress there, is she not? But I am the one to make her repent for it."

"And how can you make her repent for it?" asked the artist, whose curiosity, left ungratified by Mademoiselle Reine, was growing more and more excited, "what can you have in common with Madame la Baronne?"

"Because she is a lady and I am a workman, you mean? All the same, if I could only whisper two or three words in her ear, she would give me more gold than I have earned since I worked at the chateau, I am sure of it."

"By the powers! if I were in your place, I would say those words to her this very day."

"So as to be thrown out by that band of idle fellows in their red coats. None of that for me. I have my own scheme; let them laugh that win!"

As he repeated this proverb, the workman uttered his usual sardonic laugh.

"Lambernier," said the artist, in a serious tone, "I have heard of certain very strange speeches that you have made within the last few days. Do you know that there is a punishment by law for those who invent calumnies?"

"Is it a calumny, when one can prove what he says?" replied the carpenter, with assurance.

"What is it that you undertake to prove?" exclaimed Marillac, suddenly.

"Eh! you know very well that if Monsieur le Baron—" he did not continue, but with a coarse gesture he finished explaining his thoughts.

"You can prove this?"

"Before the courts, if necessary."

"Before the courts would not amount to very much for you; but if you will cease this talk and never open your mouth about all this, whatever it may be, and will give to me, and me only, this proof of which you speak, I will give you ten napoleons."

For a moment Lambernier gazed at the artist with a singularly penetrating glance.

"So you have two sweethearts, then—one from the city and one from the country, a married woman and this poor girl," said he, in a jeering tone; "does little Reine know that she is playing second fiddle?"

"What do you mean to insinuate?"

"Oh! you are more clever than!"

The two men looked at each other in silence, trying to read each other's thoughts.

"This is a lover of Madame de Bergenheim," thought Lambernier, with the barefaced impudence of his kind; "if I were to tell him what I know, my vengeance would be in good hands, without my taking the trouble to commit myself."

"Here is a sneaking fellow who pretends to be deucedly strong in diplomacy," said Marillac to himself; "but he is revengeful and I must

make him explain himself.”

”Ten napoleons are not to be found every day,” continued the carpenter, after a moment’s silence; ”you may give them to me, if you like, in a week.”

”You will be able to prove to me, then, what you have said,” replied Marillac, with hesitation, blushing in spite of himself at the part he was playing at that moment, upon the odious side of which he had not looked until now. ”Bah!” said he to himself, in order to quiet his conscience, ”if this rascal really knows anything it is much better that I should buy the secret than anybody else. I never should take advantage of it, and I might be able to render the lady a service. Is it not a gentleman’s sworn duty to devote himself to the defence of an imprudent beauty who is in danger?”

”I will bring you the proof you want,” said the carpenter.

”When?”

”Meet me Monday at four o’clock in the afternoon at the cross-roads near the corner of the Come woods.”

”At the end of the park?”

”Yes, a little above the rocks.”

”I will be there. Until then, you will not say a word to anybody?”

”That is a bargain, since you buy the goods I have for sale—”

”Here is some money to bind the trade,” replied the artist. And he handed him the silver pieces he still held in his hand; Lambornier took them this time without any objections, and put them in his pocket.

”Monday, at four o’clock!”

”Monday, at four o’clock!” repeated Marillac, as he mounted his horse and rode away in great haste as if eager to take leave of his companion. He turned when he reached the road, and, looking behind him, saw the workman standing motionless at the foot of the tree.

”There is a scamp,” thought he, ”whose ball and chain are waiting for him at Toulon or Brest, and I have just concluded a devilish treaty with him. Bah! I have nothing to reproach myself with. Of two evils choose the least; it remains to be seen whether Gerfaut is the dupe of a coquette or whether his love is threatened with some catastrophe; at all events, I am his friend, and I ought to clear up this mystery and put him on his guard.”

"Ten francs to-day, and ten napoleons Monday," said Lambernier as, with an eye in which there was a mixture of scorn and hatred, he watched the traveller disappear. "I should be a double idiot to refuse. But this does not pay for the blows from your whip, you puppy; when we have settled this affair of the fine lady, I shall attend to you."

CHAPTER XII

AN INHARMONIOUS MUSICAL

The visitors referred to in the conversation between the two friends arrived at the castle at an early hour, according to the custom in the country, where they dine in the middle of the day. Gerfaut saw from his chamber, where he had remained like Achilles under his tent, half a dozen carriages drive one after another up the avenue, bringing the guests announced by Marillac. Little by little the company scattered through the gardens in groups; four or five young girls under Aline's escort hurried to a swing, to which several good-natured young men attached themselves, and among them Gerfaut recognized his Pylades. During this time Madame de Bergenheim was doing the honors of the house to the matrons, who thought this amusement too youthful for their age and preferred a quiet walk through the park. Christian, on his side, was explaining methods of improvements to gentlemen of agricultural and industrial appearance, who seemed to listen to him with great interest. Three or four others had taken possession of the billiard-table; while the more venerable among the guests had remained in the parlor with Mademoiselle de Corandeuil.

"Have you a pair of clean trousers?" asked Marillac, hastily entering his friend's room as the first bell rang for dinner. An enormous green stain upon one of his knees was all the explanation necessary on this subject.

"You, lose no time," said Gerfaut, as he opened a drawer in his closet. "Which of these rustic beauties has had the honor of seeing you on your knees at her feet?"

"It was that confounded swing! Silly invention! To sacrifice one's self to please little girls! If I am ever caught at it again I'll let you know! Your selfish method is a better, one. By the way, Madame de Bergenheim asked me, with a rather sly look, whether you were ill and whether you would not come down to dinner?"

"Irony!"

"It: seemed like it. The lady smiled in a decidedly disagreeable manner.

I am not timid, but I would rather write a vaudeville in three acts than to be obliged to make a declaration to her if she had that impish smile on her lips. She has a way of protruding her under lip-ugh! do you know you are terribly slender? Will you let me cut the band of your trousers? I never could dance with my stomach compressed in this manner."

"What about this secret you were to reveal to me?" Gerfaut interrupted, with a smile which seemed to denote perfect security.

Marillac looked at his friend with a grave countenance, then began to laugh in an embarrassed manner.

"We will leave serious matters until to-morrow," he replied. "The essential thing to-day is to make ourselves agreeable. Madame de Bergenheim asked me a little while ago whether we would be kind enough to sing a few duets? I accepted for us both. I do not suppose that the inhabitants of this valley have often heard the duet from Mose with the embellishments a la Tamburini:

Palpito a quello aspetto,
'Gemo nel suo dolor.'

Would you prefer that or the one from 'Il Barbieri'? although that is out of date, now."

"Whatever pleases you, but do not split my head about it in advance. I wish that music and dancing were at the bottom of the Moselle."

"With all my heart, but not the dinner. I gave a glance into the dining-room; it promises to be very fine. Now, then, everybody has returned to the house; to the table!"

The time has long since passed when Paris and the province formed two regions almost foreign to each other. To-day, thanks to the rapidity of communication, and the importations of all kinds which reach the centre from the circumference without having time to spoil on the way, Paris and the rest of France are only one immense body excited by the same opinions, dressed in the same fashions, laughing at the same bon mot, revolutionized by the same opinions.

Provincial customs have almost entirely lost their peculiarities; a drawing-room filled with guests is the same everywhere. There are sometimes exceptions, however. The company gathered at the Bergenheim chateau was an example of one of those heterogeneous assemblies which the most exclusive mistress of a mansion can not avoid if she wishes to be neighborly, and in which a duchess may have on her right at the table the village mayor, and the most elegant of ladies a corpulent justice of the peace who believes he is making himself agreeable when he urges his fair neighbor to frequent potatoes.

Madame de Bergenheim had discovered symptoms of haughty jealousy among her country neighbors, always ready to feel themselves insulted and very little qualified to make themselves agreeable in society. So she resolved to extend a general invitation to all those whom she felt obliged to receive, in order to relieve herself at once of a nuisance for which no pleasure could prove an equivalent. This day was one of her duty days.

Among these ladies, much more gorgeously than elegantly attired, these healthy young girls with large arms, and feet shaped like flat-irons, ponderous gentlemen strangled by their white cravats and puffed up in their frock-coats, Gerfaut, whose nervous system had been singularly irritated by his disappointment of the night before, felt ready to burst with rage. He was seated at the table between two ladies, who seemed to have exhausted, in their toilettes, every color in the solar spectrum, and whose coquettish instincts were aroused by the proximity of a celebrated writer. But their simperings were all lost; the one for whom they were intended bore himself in a sulky way, which fortunately passed for romantic melancholy; this rendered him still more interesting in the eyes of his neighbor on the left, a plump blonde about twenty-five years old, fresh and dimpled, who doted upon Lord Byron, a common pretension among pretty, buxom women who adore false sentimentality.

With the exception of a bow when he entered the drawing-room, Octave had not shown Madame de Bergenheim any attention. The cold, disdainful, bored manner in which he patiently endured the pleasures of the day exceeded even the privilege for boorish bearing willingly granted to gentlemen of unquestionable talent. Clemence, on the contrary, seemed to increase in amiability and liveliness. There was not one of her tiresome guests to whom she did not address some pleasant remark, not one of those vulgar, pretentious women to whom she was not gracious and attentive; one would have said that she had a particular desire to be more attractive than usual, and that her lover's sombre air added materially to her good humor.

After dinner they retired to the drawing-room where coffee was served. A sudden shower, whose drops pattered loudly against the windows, rendered impossible all plans for amusement out of doors. Gerfaut soon noticed a rather animated conversation taking place between Madame de Bergenheim, who was somewhat embarrassed as to how to amuse her guests for the remainder of the afternoon, and Marillac, who, with his accustomed enthusiasm, had constituted himself master of ceremonies. A moment later, the drawing-room door opened, and servants appeared bending under the burden of an enormous grand piano which was placed between the windows. At this sight, a tremor of delight ran through the group of young girls, while Octave, who was standing in one corner near the mantel, finished his Mocha with a still more melancholy air.

"Now, then!" said Marillac, who had been extremely busy during these preparations, and had spread a dozen musical scores upon the top of the

piano, "it is agreed that we shall sing the duet from Mose. There are two or three little boarding-school misses here whose mothers are dying for them to show off. You understand that we must sacrifice ourselves to encourage them. Besides, a duet for male voices is the thing to open a concert with."

"A concert! has Madame de Bergenheim arranged to pasture us in this sheepfold in order to make use of us this evening?" replied Gerfaut, whose ill-humor increased every moment.

"Five or six pieces only, afterward they will have a dance. I have an engagement with your diva; if you wish for a quadrille and have not yet secured your number, I should advise you to ask her for it now, for there are five or six dandies who seem to be terribly attentive to her. After our duet I shall sing the trio from *La Date Blanche*, with those young ladies who have eyes as round as a fish's, and apricot-colored gowns on—those two over there in the corner, near that pretty blonde who sat beside you at table and ogled you all the time. She had already bored me to death! I do not know whether I shall be able to hit my low 'G' right or not. I have a cataclysm of *charlotte-russe* in my stomach. Just listen:

'A cette complaisance!—'

Marillac leaned toward his friend and roared in his ear the note supposed to be the "G" in question.

"Like an ophicleide," said Gerfaut, who could not help laughing at the importance the artist attached to his display of talent.

"In that case I shall risk my great run at the end of the first solo. Two octaves from 'E' to 'E'! Zuchelli was good enough to give me a few points as to the time, and I do it rather nicely."

"Madame would like to speak to Monsieur," said a servant, who interrupted him in the midst of his sentence.

"Dolce, soave amor," warbled the artist, softly, as he responded to the call from the lady of the house, trying to fix in his mind that run, which he regarded as one of the most beautiful flowers in his musical crown.

Everybody was seated, Madame de Bergenheim sat at the piano and Marillac stood behind her. The artist selected one of the scores, spread it out on the rack, turned down the corners so that during the execution he might not be stopped by some refractory leaf, coughed in his deep bass voice, placed himself in such a manner as to show the side of his head which he thought would produce the best effect upon the audience, then gave a knowing nod to Gerfaut, who still stood gloomy and isolated in a

far corner.

"We trespass upon your kindness too much, Monsieur," said Madame de Bergenheim to him, when he had responded to this mute invitation; and as she struck a few chords, she raised her dark, brown eyes to his. It was the first glance she had given him that day; from coquetry, perhaps, or because sorrow for her lover had softened her heart, or because she felt remorse for the extreme harshness of her note the night before, we must admit that this glance had nothing very discouraging in it. Octave bowed, and spoke a few words as coldly polite as he would have spoken to a woman sixty years of age.

Madame de Bergenheim lowered her eyes and endeavored to smile disdainfully, as she struck the first bars of the duet.

The concert began. Gerfaut had a sweet, clear, tenor voice which he used skilfully, gliding over dangerous passages, skipping too difficult ones which he thought beyond his execution, singing, in fact, with the prudence of an amateur who can not spend his time studying runs and chromatic passages four hours daily. He sang his solo with a simplicity bordering upon negligence, and even substituted for the rather complicated passage at the end a more than modest ending.

Clemence, for whom he had often sung, putting his whole soul into the performance, was vexed with this affectation of indifference. It seemed to her as if he ought, for her sake, to make more of an effort in her drawing-room, whatever might be their private quarrel; she felt it was a consideration due to her and to which his numerous homages had accustomed her. She entered this new grievance in a double-entry book, which a woman always devotes to the slightest actions of the man who pays court to her.

Marillac, on the contrary, was grateful to his friend for this indifference of execution, for he saw in it an occasion to shine at his expense. He began his solo 'E il ciel per noi sereno,' with an unusual tension of the larynx, roaring out his low notes. Except for the extension being a little irregular and unconnected, he did not acquit himself very badly in the first part. When he reached his final run, he took a long breath, as if it devolved upon him to set in motion all the windmills in Montmartre, and started with a majestic fury; the first forty notes, while they did not resemble Mademoiselle Grisi's pearly tones, ascended and descended without any notable accident; but at the last stages of the descent, the singer's breath and voice failed him at the same moment, the "A" came out weak, the "G" was stifled, the "F" resembled the buzzing of a bee, and the "E" was absent!

Zuchelli's run was like one of those Gothic staircases which show an almost complete state of preservation upon the upper floor, but whose base, worn by time, leaves a solution of continuity between the ground and the last step.

Madame de Bergenheim waited the conclusion of this dangerous run, not thinking to strike the final chord; the only sound heard was the rustling of the dilettante's beard, as his chin sought his voice in vain in the depths of his satin cravat, accompanied by applause from a benevolent old lady who had judged of the merit of the execution by the desperate contortions of the singer.

"D-n that charlotte-russe!" growled the artist, whose face was as red as a lobster.

The rest of the duet was sung without any new incident, and gave general satisfaction.

"Madame, your piano is half a tone too low," said the basso, with a reproachful accent.

"That is true," replied Clemence, who could not restrain a smile; "I have so little voice that I am obliged to have my piano tuned to suit it. You can well afford to pardon me for my selfishness, for you sang like an angel."

Marillac bowed, partly consoled by this compliment, but thinking to himself that a hostess's first duty was to have her piano in tune, and not to expose a bass singer to the danger of imperilling his low "E" before an audience of forty.

"Madame, can I be of any more service to you?" asked Gerfaut, as he leaned toward Madame de Bergenheim, with one of his coldest smiles.

"I do not wish to impose further upon your kindness, Monsieur," said she, in a voice which showed her secret displeasure.

The poet bowed and walked away.

Then Clemence, upon general request, sang a romance with more taste than brilliancy, and more method than expression. It seemed as if Octave's icy manner had reacted upon her, in spite of the efforts she had made at first to maintain a cheerful air. A singular oppression overcame her; once or twice she feared her voice would fail her entirely. When she finished, the compliments and applause with which she was overwhelmed seemed so insupportable to her that it was with difficulty she could restrain herself from leaving the room. While exasperated by her weakness, she could not help casting a glance in Octave's direction. She could not catch his eye, however, as he was busy talking with Aline. She felt so lonely and deserted at this moment, and longed so for this glance which she could not obtain, that tears of vexation filled her eyes.

"I was wrong to write him as I did," thought she; "but if he really loved

me, he would not so quickly resign himself to obeying me!”

A woman in a drawing-room resembles a soldier on a breastwork; self-abnegation is the first of her duties; however much she may suffer, she must present as calm and serene a countenance as a warrior in the hour of danger, and fall, if necessary, upon the spot, with death in her heart and a smile upon her lips. In order to obey this unwritten law, Madame de Bergenheim, after a slight interruption, seated herself at the piano to accompany three or four young girls who were each to sing in turn the songs that they had been drilled on for six months.

Marillac, who had gone to strengthen his stomach with a glass of rum, atoned for his little mishap, in the trio from *La Dame Blanche*, and everything went smoothly. Finally, to close this concert (may heaven preserve us from all exhibitions of this kind!), Aline was led to the piano by her brother, who, like all people who are not musical, could not understand why one should study music for years if not from love for the art. Christian was fond of his little sister and very proud of her talents. The poor child, whose courage had all disappeared, sang in a fresh, trembling little voice, a romance revised and corrected at her boarding-school. The word love had been replaced by that of friendship, and to repair this slight fault of prosody, the extra syllable disappeared in a hiatus which would have made Boileau's blond wig stand on end. But the Sacred Heart has a system of versification of its own which, rather than allow the dangerous expression to be used, let ultra-modesty destroy poetry!

This sample of sacred music was the final number of the concert; after that, they began dancing, and Gerfaut invited Aline. Whether because he wished to struggle against his ill-humor, or from kindness of heart because he understood her emotion, he began to talk with the young girl, who was still blushing at her success. Among his talents, Octave possessed in a peculiar degree that of adapting his conversation to the age, position, and character of his companions. Aline listened with unconcealed pleasure to her partner's words; the elasticity of her step and a sort of general trembling made her seem like a flower swaying to the breeze, and revealed the pleasure which his conversation gave her. Every time her eyes met Octave's penetrating glance they fell, out of instinctive modesty. Each word, however indifferent it might be, rang in her ears sweet and melodious; each contact with his hand seemed to her like a tender pressure.

Gerfaut experienced a feeling of melancholy as he noticed how this fresh, innocent rose brightened up at each word he uttered, and he thought:

”She would love me as I want to be loved, with all her heart, mind, and soul. She would kneel before my love as before an altar, while this coquette—”

He glanced in the direction where Madame de Bergenheim was dancing with

Marillac, and met her gaze fixed full upon him. The glance which he received was rapid, displeased, and imperious. It signified clearly: "I forbid you to speak thus to your partner."

Octave, at that moment; was not disposed to obedience. After glancing over the quadrille, as if it were by mere chance that his eyes had met Clemence's, he turned toward Aline and redoubled his amiability:

A moment later, he received, not directly, but through the medium of the mirror—that so often indiscreet confidant—a second glance more sombre and threatening than before.

"Very good," said he, to himself, as he led the young girl to her seat; "we are jealous. That alters the situation. I know now where the ramparts are the weakest and where to begin my attack."

No other incident marked the day. The guests left at nightfall, and the society was reduced to the usual members of the household. Octave entered his room after supper, humming an Italian air, evidently in such good spirits that his friend was quite surprised.

"I give it up, I can not understand your conduct," said the latter; "you have been as solemn as an owl all day, and now here you are as gay as a lark; have you had an understanding?"

"I am more vexed than ever."

"And you enjoy being so?"

"Very much."

"Ah! you are playing 'who loses wins!'"

"Not exactly; but as my good sentiments lead to nothing, I hope to conduct myself in such a disagreeable way as to force this capricious creature to adore me."

"The devil! that is clever. Besides, it is a system as good as any other. Women are such extraordinary creatures!"

"Woman," said Octave, "resembles a pendulum, whose movement is a continual reaction; when it moves to the right, it has to go to the left in order to return to the right again, and so on. Suppose virtue is on one side and love on the other, and the feminine balance between them, the odds are that, having moved to the right in a violent manner, it will return none the less energetically to the left; for the longer a vibration has been, the greater play the contrary vibration has. In order to hasten the action of this pendulum I am about to attach to it—to act as extra balance-weight—a little anguish which I ought to have

employed sooner.”

”Why make her suffer, since you believe that she loves you?”

”Why? Because she drives me to it. Do you fancy that I torture her willingly; that I take pleasure in seeing her cheeks grow pale from insomnia and her eyes show traces of tears? I love her, I tell you; I suffer and weep with her. But I love her, and I must make sure of her love. If she will leave but a road full of brambles and sharp stones for me to reach her, must I give up the struggle just because I run the risk by taking her with me, of wounding her charming feet? I will cure them with my kisses!”

”Listen to me! I am not in love; I am an artist. If I have some peculiar ideas, it is not my fault. And you, in your character of docile lover, have you decided to yield?”

”Morally.”

”Very well! after all, you are right. The science of love resembles those old signs upon which one reads: ‘Here, hair is dressed according to one’s fancy.’ If this angel wishes her hair pulled, do it for her.”