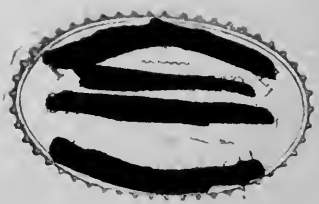

THE FELON'S BEQUEST.

A NOVEL OF THE PRISON AND THE BOUDOIR,

BY

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THE FELON'S BEQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

A FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE BEQUEST.

A BRIGHT December day, a clear blue sky overhead, and a cold, invigorating breeze blowing, one of those days on which the Parisians love to walk on the boulevards.

The men bury their hands in the pockets of their overcoats, and with their sticks tucked away under their arm, move along briskly, in order to promote circulation. The women make the heels of their little boots ring on the asphalte, and as they gaze in at the shop windows cast sly glances at the passers-by through their veils. There is nothing more pleasant in life than to be able to go wherever one's fancy leads one, and to have no given duty to perform.

The prisoners in Mazas are taking exercise, too, but in rather a different manner. In this age of progress, prison arrangements have been brought to a pitch of perfection; and the difficult problem has been solved of enabling many different persons to take exercise at the same time, and in the same plot of ground, without catching a glimpse of each other, and this, too, is done without covering the prisoner's head with a hood, as is done in the Belgian Penitentiaries. The plan upon which the prison of Mazas is built somewhat resembles an open fan, which has six sticks, represented by six long three-storied galleries, all converging to one common point, which forms

the button at the handle of the fan. Outside, in the space between the galleries, exercise grounds have been formed. Each of these is in the form of a wheel, the nave of which is a tower, upon the summit of which stands a warder, whilst the spokes are the exercise grounds, separated one from the other by high walls. They run from the central tower to a gate at which another warder is posted. During the hour allotted for exercise, the prisoners are placed in these open passages like bears in a pit, without any possibility of communicating with their next door neighbors. They are brought from their cells, and taken back again after the expiration of the hour, without crossing each other on the way. The poor caged birds march backwards and forwards in these triangular spaces, in which they cannot take more than fifteen steps in the same direction, with melancholy faces, trampling the gravel under foot, and seeking for the shade in summer and the sun in winter. Some smoke; those, that is, that have a few pence to buy tobacco, whilst others talk to themselves. They do not shout out or sing, for it is forbidden, and they have besides no inclination to do so. They drag themselves slowly along, with their backs bent as though carrying some ponderous burden. The whole enormous weight of the prison seems to be placed on their shoulders. Many of them do not even attempt to think, but live mechanically, like wild beasts in a cage. But there is no rule without an exception, and one day, towards the end of last year, the warder was surprised to see, from his post of observation, one of the prisoners walking in his exercise ground with an easy, careless step. He was smoking a cigar, and every now and then he would stop to watch the spiral curls of smoke float away in the air. He looked more like a gentleman who had just eaten an excellent breakfast, and was strolling about to promote digestion, than a prisoner.

This contented prisoner wore a comfortable great coat with a fur collar; he had a travelling cap on his head, and looked like a Russian prince on his travels.

"He must be some financier who has ruined his poor dupes of shareholders, or a cashier who has robbed the till; the poor devils on the other side, shivering in their blouses, are worth a dozen of him," thought the warder,

as he every now and again caught sight of the man in the fur-collared coat.

But the prisoner had never been either a cashier or a rich financier, although he made a good deal of money. George Cransac was simply an outside operator on the Stock Exchange, and an unfortunate event had caused him to be arrested and remanded. His employer's signature had been imitated on a check, and the forgery had been detected the day after it had been paid. It was no use for Cransac to protest that he had been mistaken for some one bearing a resemblance to him; he was given in charge at once, and for the last ten days had been in Mazas prison. But his last examination had turned out favorable to him, and he had been able to prove to the magistrate that at the time when the unknown forger was cashing the check at the Credit Lyonnais, he, Cransac, was taking instructions from one of his employer's clients who resided in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne. An *alibi* being thus proved, the order for his release might be expected at any moment. He had good reason, therefore, to feel comfortable, for it is easier to enter Mazas than to leave it.

He had not really suffered much, for knowing that he was quite innocent, he never believed that he would remain in prison for long. He had even seized the opportunity of his stay in the grim precincts of the prison to take various mental notes, with which he made up his mind to regale his friends when he should be once again outside the walls; for he imagined that he would be received by them on his release like a shipwrecked mariner cast upon some unknown coast.

At twenty-five years of age a man always looks on the bright side of things, and George Cransac had been twenty-five, six weeks ago. He was clever, good-looking, and a favorite with the fair sex, and earned money enough to satisfy all his pleasures. Why, then, should he not look on the rosy side of life? As he walked quickly backwards and forwards, thinking of the manner in which he would employ his first day of liberty, a pebble thrown over the wall fell at his feet. A second, and then a third followed.

"Halloa!" said he, in a low voice; "here is my next door neighbor asking for a cigar." He had a good stock

of tobacco in his cell, and he had been in the habit of throwing one or two over to the unlucky fellow who signified his presence in the way described.

Prisoners pass some objects, and even letters, to each other by this means. All they have to do is to watch for the moment when the warder's back is turned. Cransac had learned from notes written without the slightest regard to either grammar or spelling, that his neighbor was going to be tried at the sessions. But he did not know of what offence he had been guilty, nor did he care to do so. The day before, however, he had thought proper to send a message by the same route, and had thrown over a piece of paper wrapped round a pebble, upon which he had written before leaving his cell: "Do not throw anything more over. I shall not be here, and your letters might fall into the hands of another prisoner, who would possibly report you."

This time Cransac threw over a packet of cigars as a farewell gift.

The message arrived in safety at its destination, and the manœuvre escaped the vigilance of the warder at his post of observation.

Cransac thought that this would wind up his relations with the rogue on the other side, but to his surprise he received a fresh packet as soon as the warder had again turned his back. This time it was a big ball of paper sufficiently heavy to be tossed over without the usual accompanying stone. Cransac hastened to pick it up and put it in his pocket. He was certain that in the ball of paper a letter was concealed, which he could not read whilst in the exercise yard without fear of detection, but which he could easily peruse on his return to his cell, for he was anxious to learn what the malefactor had to write to him about.

"I expect that he takes me for one of his own stamp," thought he, "and knowing that I am going out to-morrow, has entrusted me with some commission for some one of his accomplices. I will take care to have nothing to do with it, but I will preserve his signature as a remembrance of my trip to Mazas."

Cransac had done well in concealing his neighbor's missive, for eleven o'clock struck, and the hour of exercise was over. A warder opened the gate that led into the

gallery in which his cell was situated, and beckoned him to come in.

The warder who had charge of him, before turning the key of his cell, whispered in his ear words which sounded like the sweetest music. "Good news!" said he. "The order for your release has come, and in ten minutes you will be sent for to receive the order for your discharge."

"At last then," cried Cransac, as soon as he found himself alone, "I am going back to the society of honest people. How pleasant it will be once again to associate with my old friends and companions! They did not put themselves out much to come and see me in Queer Street, but I am not angry with them. The busy life of Paris carries a man along too fast to enable him to stop and pick up those who fall by the way. But I am on my legs again, thank goodness, and everyone will hold out their hands to me." Then, as he remembered the letter he had in his pocket, he said to himself: "I have half a mind to burn it; but there —I run no risk by reading it, so here goes."

He untied the ball, and on a greasy piece of paper, in which a candle had evidently been wrapped, he read these words: "I expect you are a *swell-faker*——'"

"What does he mean by that? Ah, I have it. He means a first-class thief. Well my neighbor is complimentary. Let us go on: 'But you are a *safe pal*, and your weeds are *immensikoff*. I go before the *beaks* next week, and am in for a stretch of twenty years, and as I am fifty now, I shall never again cross the herring pond; the *noses* have come the artful over me. I shan't leave my *swag* to the gang—no fear, I'll make you my heir; and this is where I have stowed it——'

"His *swag?*" muttered George. "What does my friend of the exercise-yard mean by that? It must be a slang term, and my education in that line has been neglected. Here is a good opportunity to commence my studies. Let me see how he goes on."

"'I tell you my swag is worth the trouble of fishing up. You are, I expect, about stumped, and will be glad enough to grab it. That ain't a hard matter. All you have to do is to take a walk to Montmartre one night. You must climb the hill by the steps at the end of the Rue Germain Pilon. After that you will leave the Montmartre Town Hall on the right hand, go up the Rue Ravignan, then turn

to the right into the Rue Gabrielle. In the middle of it you will see on your left a kind of a garden, closed by a rotten wooden gate. Put your shoulder to it, and it will give; then go through the trees, until you come to a house standing up all alone, like a ninepin. The crib has three floors, with only one window in each storey. It has been unoccupied for the last twenty years, and is falling to bits——'

"Good," muttered Cransac. "So the swag is money that he has hidden in a ruined house. A nice little walk he suggests to me!

"'On the ground floor you will find a door without bolt or lock. You have only to push it to get in. You will see in front of you a brass plate at the back of the chimney, all black with soot. In the top of the plate is a large iron pin. Turn it three times, and then pull it down, and the plate will open like the lid of a desk——'

"Good—very good. It gets interesting.

"'I ain't agoing to tell you what you'll find behind it. You'll see what you will see, and you'll have a real good spree with it. Oh, lor! it's me what would have had the spree, if I hadn't been fool enough to have got nabbed over a job that didn't bring in four sous. But I'd rather you had it than anyone else. And don't you fret that I shall ever come back and ask for my regulars. I shall go off the hooks in New Caledonia, and even if I didn't, I couldn't find you, for I have never clapped eyes on your mug, and don't even know your name——'

"And a good thing, too. I am nearly at the end.

"'I had a daughter once, but she slung her hook five years ago. The minx was ashamed of her old dad. I didn't take no pains to go after her, you may guess. She might have ridden in her own carriage with my bequest, and now she will end with a workhouse burial. That'll teach her to be stuck up. Keep it all, old pal, and spend it like a man. When I shall be over there, it'll cheer me up to think that the beaks ain't got the swag. Good luck to you, and down with the noses!

"'PIERRE.'"

Cransac had had some difficulty in understanding that *swag* meant money, but he knew at once that "Down with the noses" signified "down with the informers," for he had read this threat dozens of times scrawled on the

walls of the exercise-ground and of his cell. There was a postscript to this strange letter: "If you come across a chap named Troche, a fellow that is always loafing about the boulevards, you might break every bone in his skin for me. It was him as sold me."

Cransac could hardly restrain a laugh at this last recommendation, and was about to read the letter over again for his amusement, when the clash of bolts and bars warned him that the turnkey was about to make his appearance, and he had only just the time to conceal it in his pocket when the man came in.

"It is all right," said the warder. "You are wanted at the office. Take up your bundle, and come along."

His bundle was not very heavy; he had only the clothes in which he stood, and a little linen which he had hastily packed up. He followed the jailer, and more than once asked himself if they would not search him, and find the letter of the worthy Pierre, the enemy of informers. But they do not search prisoners who are leaving Mazas, and his order of discharge was read to him with all due formality, and the door was opened for his exit, after his watch and money had been returned to him.

Once again he found himself standing, with his bundle in his hand, on the Parisian pavement, half stunned by the din of carriages which filled the vicinity of the Lyons terminus. But he soon pulled himself together, and prepared once again to enter that life from which the warrant for his arrest had so roughly removed him. It seemed to him as if he had had an unpleasant dream, and that now he had woke up, all that he had to do was to pick up his connection and set to work once more. He glanced at a neighboring clock, and saw that it was half-past eleven, so that he would have plenty of time to reach the Exchange in time for its opening, and he felt sure that all his friends would receive him with open arms. He therefore hailed a cab, and ordered the driver to go to the Bourse, as he intended appearing there before going to his own rooms.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRICKEN DEER.

Cransac had not deceived himself when he imagined that his reappearance on 'Change would create a sensation. As he ascended the main staircase he saw some of the most assiduous frequenters who know him by sight looking at him with an air of profound astonishment; but he noticed that not one of them gave him the usual greeting of busy stock-brokers—a slight nod of the head. Under the Colonade matters were worse. He fell into the midst of a group of "outside operators," who scattered on all sides at his approach. When he arrived at the corner where his best customers were in the habit of congregating, those to whom he bowed turned their backs on him. At last he recognized a friend who worked for the same broker as he did, and who was pushing his way through the crowd, with his note-book in his hand and his pencil behind his ear. This man had been his boon companion, and Cransac caught him by the arm, and stopped him, saying: "What do you mean by cutting me like this?"

"Faith, my dear fellow," answered the broker's agent. "I only do like the others. You did not, I suppose, expect to be very enthusiastically received by your old companions?"

"I expected to be received like a friend who has been unjustly accused."

"A friend! Who has just come out of Mazas."

"Oh, if that is the way you look on it, you may go to the devil. I will explain matters to my employer."

"He has just come. You will find him over there, and can say what you like, for the opening bell has not yet rung."

Cransac left his cowardly friend, and hastened into the main hall of the building, where there was yet plenty of room, for it was still easy to make one's way about. He soon came up to the broker, who looked at him with a calm and severe expression of face.

"You here, sir?" said he. "I confess that I did not expect to see you, and *here* too!"

"Why not?" asked Cransac, warmly. "Is it because I have been the victim of a mistake? The authorities have admitted it, and I have a right to show myself everywhere since I am an innocent person."

"I would willingly believe it, but everyone on 'Change knows that you were taken up, and I cannot have you about me any longer; besides, you would gain nothing by remaining, for no one would entrust you with any orders. I advise you to change your line of business, and you ought to get on, for you are active and intelligent."

Then, as he perceived that Cransac was about to burst into a storm of passion, he added:

"Your account is made up, and there is some money due to you on your last month's brokerage. My cashier will settle with you whenever you like."

The bell rang to announce that the Exchange was open, the broker hurried off, and all the daily din and hubbub commenced. Even had Cransac wished, he could not have uttered another word, for the tumult would have drowned his voice.

Boiling over with rage, he hurried away, not lingering for a moment in the accursed spot, and ran out into the open street. His cab was waiting for him, and getting into it, he was driven to his home in the Rue Frochot.

His rage almost suffocated him. For the first time he had learned to read Man. His former friends repudiated him; his employer discharged him. He had nothing to reproach himself with, he had not even committed an act of imprudence, and yet all refused to listen to him when he attempted to justify himself and prove that he had not committed the disgraceful act of which he had been accused. This injustice made him hate the financial world in which he had lived ever since he left school.

At the Rue Frochot fresh annoyances awaited him. The porter, when he caught sight of him, seemed to imagine that he had fallen from the clouds, and was half inclined to call a policeman, evidently believing that Cransac had escaped from prison; and when he was about to go up to his own room, he called after him in a sulky tone:

"You needn't take the trouble to do that. The landlord has sealed up the door of your room."

"What, has he ventured to——?"

"Don't you know that the commissary of police came and searched your rooms. We can't keep a lodger in a respectable house like ours, who is wanted by the police. And now I'll give you a piece of advice, and that is—be off, as sharp as you can."

Cransac grasped the insolent fellow by the collar, and, shaking him like a rat, shouted:

"You impertinent hound, I'll go to the commissary of police, and we will see if this beast of a landlord has the right to turn me out of doors."

For at that moment he was so much exasperated that he had forgotten all about his detention in Mazas, and the strange letter that lurked in his pocket.

Cransac's only wish was to regain possession of his rooms, even if he had to go to the commissary of the district to enable him to do so.

As he had been discharged, he had nothing to fear from that official, but for all that he felt a certain amount of repugnance in applying to him for assistance. After hurling the insolent porter from him, who fell gasping into a chair, Cransac paid the fare, took the bundle of linen out of the cab, and placing it in the porter's room, said: "Go and tell your master that he shall hear from me to-day, and that I intend to sleep in my own bed to-night." This threatening communication was delivered in so fierce a manner that the porter began to change his tone, and, commencing to stammer out some excuses, promised to deliver the message. Cransac, still a pray to anger, left the house, and walked quickly away, hardly knowing where he was going. His head seemed on fire, and he felt that he must walk about to collect his ideas; besides, after fourteen days' imprisonment the possibility of a long and brisk walk was full of charms for him, and he almost longed to break into a run, as a horse who has been for a long time mewed up in a stable stretches his legs by a good gallop. The Rue Frochot leads into the Place Pigalle, through which Cransac only passed to get into a narrow, precipitous street, like all those in the neighborhood of the Butte Montmartre. He climbed up as high as he could, and at last arrived on a kind of plat-

form which overlooked the Place Saint Pierre. There his breath failed him, and he was obliged to stop and rest, sitting down to do so on a heap of earth. Beneath him Paris stretched itself out, like a huge grey spot; that Paris in which he had spent so many happy hours, and where every door was now closed against him. In summer these high grounds are a great deal frequented, but in the latter months of the year hardly anyone comes there. The place is a perfect desert, and the view which can be obtained from it does not in any way compensate for the ugliness of the surroundings. The ground under foot seems composed of dried mud, on which are erected dilapidated buildings and wooden huts.

Cransac sat plunged in thought, which was not of a much brighter hue than the objects that surrounded him. With his mind's eye he fathomed the abyss into which the hand of fatality had plunged him. What would become of him—repulsed on all sides, without friends, without money, and, what was worse, without character? He felt that a man tainted with the suspicion of dishonor does not recover himself by his own unaided efforts. But who would stretch out a hand to aid him in rising from his undeserved fall? He had no relations and the very name he bore did not belong to him.

George Cransac did not know whose son he was, and his earliest recollections did not go beyond a man, whose face he did not even recollect, coming to the village where he had been placed in a laborer's family, and taking him away to Paris, where he was placed in a school, which he only left to go to the College of Saint Louis; thence he was dismissed on account of the annual fees not being paid. George was then nineteen years of age, and was about to enter the Polytechnic School, after having passed a highly successful examination.

Was it his father who up to this time had defrayed the expenses of his education, and had he died suddenly without being able to provide for the wants of his illegitimate son? George knew nothing of the real facts of the case. The school fees used to reach the principal of the college in a registered but unsigned letter, and the man who had brought George to Paris had never again made his appearance.

George therefore found himself without resources at a

moment when he was about to enter on a career in which he would doubtless have achieved a brilliant success. His first idea was to enlist, but some of his schoolfellows managed to place him with a stockbroker, where he soon succeeded in making a very good position for himself. His brokerages brought him in some fifteen thousand francs a year; but, as he spent money as fast as he made it, George had no savings to fall back on, and all that remained to him was the bitter regret for his want of foresight, a feeling of intense anger against those who had abandoned him in his misfortune, and an ardent desire to discover and deliver up to justice the forger who had been the cause of his misfortune, the scoundrel who resembled him so much that the one had been taken for the other. By dint of pondering over his doubtful parentage and his terrible disaster, George recovered all his former energy. His anguish turned to rage, and shaking his fist at the mighty city which lay at his feet, he cried: "There is no longer a place for me in Paris, where they crush the feeble, and cringe to the powerful. Well, I will make a place for myself. Money is a mighty thing, and when I have it, those who now repulse me will lick the dust from my shoes. I will be rich, and will spare no means to attain my ends. But I will not confess that I am conquered. I will first have an explanation with the cowards who have turned their backs on me. I will force them to acknowledge that I am worth more than they are, and will force them to wage the battle with me. I will conquer, or perish in the attempt. I will have a brilliant reparation, and I will go to work without a moment's delay, for I will never bow my head beneath their insults."

Cheered by this brief monologue, George Cransac rose to his feet. He had something else to do than hurl curses on Paris from the summit of the Butte Montmartre. He had first to find the client whose evidence had proved that Cransack was receiving his orders in his house in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne at the very hour when his double was presenting the forged check at the Crédit Lyonnais. This client was a wealthy foreigner, who had always treated the young outsider operator with marked politeness, and would not hesitate to give a written testimony how utterly impossible it was that Cransac could

have uttered the forged check. Furnished with so powerful a piece of evidence, Cransac would have no trouble in silencing his calumniators, and he was determined that the reparation should be as public as the injury. The Stock Exchange is hardly a place for atonements of this kind, but both Cransac and his friends were members of a club, and that would be an excellent place for a decisive explanation. Cransac, therefore, descended from the eminence in all haste, so that he might drive to the house of the Marquis of Simancas, whom he was almost certain of finding at home at this hour of the day. Instead of returning by the way he had come, George took a shorter cut, by a flight of steps which he imagined would lead directly to the Place Saint Pierre. But he almost immediately found out that the steps stopped half-way, at the end of a side street, the name of which he read on a wall —the Rue Gabrielle. All at once it flashed upon his mind that this was the street spoken of in the letter from his fellow-prisoner in Mazas. The opportunity was most suitable to find out if the description of the locality given by his unseen neighbor was a correct one.

Cransac could hardly believe that in so thickly populated a quarter of the town a neglected garden and a ruined house of the kind mentioned in the letter could exist. As, however, he was forced to go down the Rue Gabrielle, nothing was easier than to verify the fact. Even if he found it as described, nothing would oblige him to enter the house, and at the moment he had no intention of doing so. He therefore walked straight on, and had not advanced thirty paces when he found himself in front of the garden mentioned in the letter. A low wall cut it off from the street, and beyond it was a rather large extent of ground covered with trees and brushwood, which even the wildest imagination could hardly designate as a garden, for there was not a sign of cultivation to be seen in it. It looked more like a primeval forest. In the middle of the wall was a worm-eaten wooden gate hanging crookedly from its broken hinges. The owner of this strange abode no doubt lacked the necessary funds to keep it in repair, and it had become a haunt for the night wanderers who swarmed in the district. "That is a queer place to hide a treasure in," thought Cransac. "I should think the young gutter-

jumpers of the neighborhood would have found it out long before." He looked for the house, but could only perceive the roof peeping out above the trees. He, however, could guess at the spot where it stood. It was perched on the top of a wooded slope, and the desire seized on him to examine it closer. There was no chance of any one seeing him, for there were no buildings opposite the gate, and he seemed to be the only person in the street. He pushed against the door, which yielded to the first touch of his hand, and entered the enclosure. But the most difficult part had yet to be overcome, the paths were overgrown with rank weeds and vegetation of all kinds, and it was necessary to make a path through a tangled mass of briar and brambles. After much trouble he emerged from the thicket and found himself in front of the house, which was exactly what the prisoner of Mazas had described. "Shall I go on any further?" mused Cransac. "The ruin has a cut-throat look about it. Who can say that the rogue may not have laid a trap for me. He wouldn't think that I should leave the prison without any money in my pocket, and he may have sent me direct to fellows of his own stamp, who will knock me on the head after robbing me. Well, never mind, my life isn't worth much, and the fellow has not lied. There may be a stolen fortune inside, which the police, on my information, will restore to the rightful owner."

CHAPTER III.

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

Some broken steps, which threatened to crumble away beneath the feet of the first comer, led up to the only door of the house. All the glass in the windows was shattered, the shutters had been wrenched away, and the door swung backwards and forwards in the breeze on its broken hinges. George Cransac hesitated for a moment, and then, ashamed of his indecision, pushed back the worm-eaten door and entered the room on the ground floor, but halted for a moment on the threshold before venturing in. He saw only the four bare walls, no wall paper, no hangings, no furniture, a tile floor, covered with dust, and the corners thickly festooned with spiders' webs. A heap of plaster, which had fallen from the ceiling lay in front of the fire-place, and was so high as almost to conceal the famous brass plate behind which lay, if the prisoner of Mazas was to be believed, his "swag," or in plain English, his money. But this was not the moment to verify the rogue's statements.

Both house and garden were easy of access, and Cransac had no wish to be detected handling, or even looking at the treasure which had been hidden there by a robber. He never thought of taking it away, having only come to the spot by chance, and entered the garden from curiosity. If the money was there, there was no risk in leaving it until the day when he should decide to inform the police authorities of the existence of the treasure, and he had not even yet made up his mind whether he would do so or not.

After all a secret is a secret, whether it belongs to a robber or not; and an honorable man never informs against anyone, unless, indeed, he has to do so in self-defence. As he was on the spot, however, he thought he might inspect the house from cellar to garret. At the other end of the room was a dark passage, in which was a dilapidated staircase, leading to the upper floors. Cransac ascended it, and found that it was even in a worse state than it looked. The roof of this species of square turret

terminated in a sort of Italian terrace, where the autumn rains had left large pools of water, which had filtered through into the walls and threatened shortly to bring the whole place to the ground, when the treasure would run a great risk of being buried beneath the ruins. Cransac had now seen all that he desired to see, and he began to think that the place, after all, was not so badly suited for a hiding place, for no one would ever think of searching for valuables in such a ruin. He therefore descended from the roof at once, and in doing so, saw that a fire had been recently lighted in the grate in the room on the first floor. Some poor, homeless wanderer had, no doubt, come in to warm himself; but there were no signs of his having used it as a permanent abode.

Thoroughly satisfied with his inspection, Cransac once more forced his way through the tangled wilderness, and as soon as he reached more civilized regions hailed a cab, and drove to the address of the Marquis de Simancas. He was going to play his final card, for this gentleman had only to act and he would at once be restored to his proper position, even in the eyes of the most prejudiced persons. The question was, Would he do so? Would the kindness with which he had always treated the young man be sufficient reason to induce him to come forward publicly and clear his character in the estimation of the public?

The marquis was a Cuban Spainard, immensely rich, whose sole employment was the pursuit of pleasure. Would he agree to put himself to any inconvenience? He had given evidence in favor of Cransac before the examining magistrate; but then he was obliged to do this, for no one has the right to refuse to bear witness in a criminal trial whether he be a rich, influential foreigner, or the poorest citizen in France. As his cab sped on towards the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, Cransac thought over all these points which soon drove out of his head the ruined house he had recently visited, for the treasure of the prisoner of Mazas occupied him much less than the result of the interview that he was now seeking. It was just three o'clock when he reached the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne: it is at this hour that in winter the long lines of carriages are to be seen making their way to the wood, and the road was crowded with elegant carriages. The humble cab in which Cransac was seated cut but a poor

figure in the midst of the fashionable equipages. Without going much into the gay world of Paris, George Cransac, like many other young men connected with the Stock Exchange, knew by sight many of the celebrities in the circles of Bohemia. With some even he was on terms of intimacy, and was ever ready to offer them a merry dinner or to send them bouquets of flowers. But he could not help seeing that these last, after having glanced at him for a moment with an air of surprise, turned their heads sharply on one side, so as to avoid recognizing him as they passed; but he accounted for this by saying to himself that this was because his get-up was rather shabby. His hat was good enough because it was new on the day of his arrest; but contact with the walls of his prison had made his overcoat look very seedy, the fur on the collar was rubbed off here and there, and his collar, which he had not changed, was limp and dirty. Young ladies of this class have a keen eye to recognize at the first glance when a man is beginning to drift into poverty. Their behavior did not affect Cransac much, for he knew that their sentiments would change when he appeared before them again as well dressed as ever. The house in which the marquis resided was at the corner of the Rue Pergolèse, and as Cransac got out of his cab the marquis issued from his house, and was about to get into the magnificent carriage which was waiting for him. The footman was holding the door open, and the coachman was only waiting his master's order to give the reins to his horses. Cransac came up, hat in hand, and felt a cold chill strike his heart, when the marquis said:

"Ah, is it you, sir? And what do *you* want?"

Cransac turned pale. He had expected a different reception, and it was all that he could do to muster up sufficient courage to reply:

"I came to thank you, my lord."

"Thank me! And for what, pray?"

"For having given evidence in my favor before the examining magistrate. It is to you that I owe my liberty."

"There is no occasion to thank me for having told the truth."

"At least, may I hope that you will again confirm what you said before, and state that you are sure that it was a

case of mistaken identity. That I am innocent you know better than anyone else."

"I beg your pardon. I know you were at my house at eleven o'clock, on the day upon which it appears that a forged check was presented at the Crédit Lyonnais; but I know nothing more, and cannot undertake to clear your character."

"You really speak as if you thought me guilty," said Cransac, bitterly.

"I know nothing about your guilt, or your innocence. You have been suspected, and that is enough, too much even, and I certainly should not confide my sale or purchase of stock to you any more; and so, sir, farewell."

With these words the Marquis de Simancas got into his carriage, and at once drove off to the wood.

"Rascal!—coward!" muttered the young man; "a word from him to the broker would have silenced every malicious tongue, and he will not say it. He declines to receive me, and hints that I am a thief."

For a few moments the poor young fellow remained stupified. He felt that all was lost. But anger soon got the mastery, and the lust for vengeance grew keener. On whom should he take revenge? On the first of his traducers that he could come across.

"To the Club, Rue Volney," cried he to the cabman. The poor fellow thought, "I can have my pick of them there, for they all come after the day's work. I will wait for them, and when I have struck one of them, we will see whether he will refuse to fight." But Cransac was no more prepared for the reception that he was going to meet with at the club than he had been for the treatment he had received at the hands of his friends. When he entered the hall, and was about to ascend the stairs, he noticed that the servants were whispering together, and on the first floor he was met on the threshold of the drawing-room by the majestic steward of the club, who, lowering his voice, said: "You cannot come in here, sir."

"What is that you say?" asked Cransac, furiously.

"Are you unaware, sir, that you are no longer a member of this club?"

"Since when?"

"Since the day before yesterday."

"And who ventured to give any such order?"

"It was the unanimous decision of the committee, and was posted up yesterday in the drawing-room."

This was the last and final stroke.

George felt that his last chance of vengeance had been wrested from him. You may strike one man, but you bannot beat a committee. He might certainly have picked out one, but he hardly knew their names. He did not, however, yield tamely. "Send one of the Committee to me," said he, coldly.

"There are none of them here," replied the steward. "You must be aware, sir, that the committee only meets on Thursday."

It was impossible for George to enter into an altercation with a servant, or endeavor to force his way into the club, where he might not even meet with those that he so ardently desired to meet face to face. He therefore adopted the only course that remained to him, and left the house, saying as he did so, "Very well, they shall hear from me."

He went off in a state of utter despair. His last hope had fled. His friends had deserted him, and his enemies had stolen a march on him. Every door seemed closed, and nothing remained for him but death. He had no revolver in his pocket with which to blow out his brains, and he was about to order his coachman to drive to the river, when a tall young fellow came along the pavement of the Rue Volney. He had nothing to do with the Stock Exchange, being a journalist, and George knew him, as he knew many others that he had met in the world of youth and gaiety. They had frequently taken their pleasure together. They had the same tastes, and were of the same age, and they had soon drifted into intimacy. Was this sharer of his pleasures going to cut him too? George asked himself this question, prepared to pass him in disdain and anger if he showed the slightest semblance of a desire to avoid him. But Paul Valbrec stretched out his hand without a moment's hesitation, and exclaimed, in tones of unfeigned pleasure, "I knew well enough that you were no forger! They locked you up, but that might happen to any one. Magistrates are such asses. But now that you are out, we must celebrate the happy event in a proper manner."

"I don't feel up to it," replied George, deeply moved

at this unexpected reception. "But I thank you from the bottom of my heart for not having doubted me."

"Have those fools on the Stock Exchange received you badly, then?"

"They have all cut me dead. The broker for whom I have been working has dismissed me, and the committee of my club has expelled me."

"These are all misfortunes, for which it is easy to find consolation, old boy. Everything in this world is for the best. You were too clever to remain a money-grubber all your life. I will find you a place on my paper."

"I ask for nothing better; but——"

"Don't trouble about how you will manage. There is room for every kind of talent there, and I am sure you are just the man to turn out a spicy article."

"I doubt it very much.

"Try it, at any rate. Why should you not begin by a sketch of 'Life in the Prison of Mazas,' as you have just come out of it?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"Perfectly so. To-morrow I will introduce you to my editor, and will be answerable for you. He will find you some place or other. But now that I have got you, I mean to keep you. Where were you going to in that rattletrap?"

"I was going to pitch myself into the river."

"The duce—my dear fellow! You go to work sharply. But if all those who have been arrested by mistake took it into their heads to have a dip in the Seine, we should have to build a new Morgue. There is always time enough to drown yourself. Dismiss the cab, and come with me for a stroll in the Boulevards. We will dine together. I invite you on the spot. We will uncork a few flasks of choice Burgundy, and after dinner you will have given up all idea of 'shuffling off this mortal coil.'"

George did not hestitate long. After so many insults and rebuffs he had found one true friend who believed in his innocence, and he felt fresh hope spring up in his bosom. He did not expect to succeed at the outset in the new career which Paul Valbrec had promised to open to him, but he determined to try it, without for a moment renouncing the hope of coming across the scoundrel who had forged the check on the Crédit Lyonnais.

Paul passed his arm through that of his friend and led him on to the boulevards. "And now," said he, "tell me all about the matter. I have heard of it vaguely from people who calumniated you, and whose mouths I closed, but I do not know the details. That there was some mistake I am certain, but how came it about? Where did they 'nab' you?"

"In the street, just as I was leaving my rooms to go to breakfast. A shabbily-dressed fellow came up to me, and politely requested me to go with him to the commissary of police, who wanted some information from me. I went with him to the office, and found the cashier there in the uniform of the Crédit Lyonnais. Directly he set eyes on me he cried out, 'That's the man.' I did not understand what he meant, but the commissary was kind enough to explain that the man recognized me as having the day before, at eleven o'clock in the morning, presented a check bearing my employer's signature——"

"What was the amount of the check?" interrupted Valbrec.

"Twelve thousand."

"That was a low price to have ruined yourself at."

"I protested," continued George, "that it was a case of mistaken indentity, but it was of no avail. The cashier persisted in his certainty that I was the man, and I was remanded to the House of Detention."

"What! without further evidence? That was a strong measure."

"Yes, things happened as I tell you. The examining magistrate told me next day that, in the evening after the payment had been made, the clerk who was making up the books fancied there was something wrong about the signature. It was shown to my employer, who declared it to be a forgery. An inquiry was set on foot, and some people were found who asserted that the description of the forger corresponded exactly with my appearance, and then the warrant was issued."

"Then the forger resembles you?"

"Very closely, it seems; and he knows my employer's signature, for the forgery was most skilfully executed. He must have had a check-book and access to the office of my employer; perhaps he was an outside operator, like myself."

"And did none of your comrades take up your defence?"

"On the contrary, I think that they made matters as bad as they could."

"You were making too much money, and they were delighted at the chance of getting hold of some of your brokerages, and it was lucky that you managed to prove that they were wrong. How did you manage to do so?"

"I summoned a client at whose house I was, quite in another part of Paris, whilst the check was cashed over the counter."

"An *alibi;* that was a strong defence."

"It seems a very simple thing to have questioned this gentleman, and got his reply, and yet they took eight days over it. The examining magistrate did not want to summon him at first, and then refused to believe his evidence. At last he decided to confront me once more with the cashier, who at the second interview did not dare to maintain that I was the man who presented the check; and so this morning they let me out."

"Imagine such a thing as this happening in the most civilized city in the world. They lay hold of a man who is perfectly innocent, they keep him locked up for eight days, and when they find that he is absolutely guiltless, they let him go, without troubling themselves as to what becomes of him; nor do they in any way indemnify him for the injury that he has sustained. It is simply disgraceful; but, at any rate, you owe something to the worthy fellow whose evidence got you out of the scrape."

"Suppose I were to tell you that I went to see him this morning, and he received me exactly as if I had been guilty?"

"Impossible! Pray what is the name of this extraordinary personage?"

"The Marquis de Simancas, a very rich Spaniard, who has a fine house in the Avenue de Bois de Boulonge."

"Good—I know the festive foreigner. I have already had a shy at him in my paper, in which I chaffed him about his rings, his watch chain, and his diamond sleeve links. I'll touch him up again in my next."

"Don't do that, my dear fellow. He certainly received me very badly, because he feared that he might have to

come forward publicly; but for all that, his deposition took me out of Mazas."

"You are right. I will let him alone then. Now that I understand the matter completely, I can clearly see that you have been the victim of a cunning scoundrel, who has done the trick, and got himself up to look like you. You must find the fellow out, and if you like I will help you to do so."

"Of course I should like it. Ah! if once I get hold of him——"

"He will have a bad time of it, eh? But tell me, do you know that they searched your rooms the day after your arrest?"

"The porter told me so."

"They were most likely looking for the twelve thousand francs, the produce of the check; but they found nothing, and that is the best proof that you never had them. But will you credit it, they did the same at Juliet Taupier's house?"

"By Jove! this is too much. And under what pretext?"

"Well, it wasn't hard to find out that you were her lover."

"Oh, indeed!—her lover?"

"Well one of them, to speak more exactly; and they thought that you might have hidden the money at her house. It was not there, however; but dear Juliet wasn't half pleased with the business, and she hates you with a deadly hatred, and says that hanging is too good for you."

"What! has she too turned against me?" murmured George.

"Worse than any of them," replied Valdrec. "Are you simple enough to believe in the disinterested affection of girls of her class? I will wager that you have done a great deal for her, and yet she drags your name through mud and mire. It is only human nature, and you do wrong to fret over it. Why, you really ought not to show the slightest surprise."

George let his head fall on his breast, for in his heart he knew that Valbrec was right; and yet Juliet, who held a medium position in the world of gallantry, had made a deeper impression in his heart than he cared to avow. Roughly thrown into the whirlpool of business and pleas-

ure at his first entrance into life, without relations and with no footing in good society, George had plunged headlong into a connection with Juliet, who had crossed his path at that time, and it had cost him dear. If he now found himself almost penniless, it was because he had spent large sums of money on the girl, who was no better and no worse than others of her own class.

This connection was the more inexcusable on George's part, because he possessed all that was pleasing to the other sex in the highest degree. Not only was he remarkably handsome, but he had an aristocratic air, and a soft, and melodious voice.

George was born to inspire some duchess with a romantic passion, and yet he wasted his sweetness on a woman of equivocal reputation.

The thought of Juliet had not ceased to haunt him in his lonely cell in Mazas, and the reason that he had not paid her a visit the moment that he was discharged was because he wished first to regain his footing in the Stock Exchange, where he earned his living. But he had delayed his visit to her pretty little house in the Rue Jouffroy until he had resumed his position with the broker. He had expected to be received with open arms, and the disclosures made to him by the only friend who had remained faithful to him fell on his ardent passion like a shower of icy water.

"Ah!" remarked Valbrec, cynically, "if you were a rich man, Juliet would adore you. Moral: Gain as much money then as you can. And you will gain it, if you will follow my advice and throw yourself into financial journalism."

"May your prediction prove true," sighed George.

"And now, my boy, one more question. You told me that you had never known your parents."

"Never to my misfortune."

"But they must have been wealthy, since they gave you an expensive education."

"Until the time when they deserted me."

"For reasons of which you are ignorant, and which may one day cease to exist. Do you not remember, my dear George, that in former days all illegitimate children were presumed to be of noble birth. And now even there is no reason why you should not be the son of a

prince or a millionaire. Why should you not one fine day receive a letter from a lawyer announcing that some gentleman, whose name you never heard in your life, had left you heir to an enormous property?"

"You are too full of imagination," returned Cransac, sadly.

"Perhaps I am, but we are not forbidden to live in hope. How delightful it would be to wake up and to find yourself richer than those who ruined you! To see all of them, men and women, doing all in their power to regain your good graces? How I should like to be present at so strange a spectacle! It would please me as much as if the money had come to me myself; but that will never happen, for both father and mother have died, and not left me a rap, whilst the traditional uncle does not exist in my family.

George made no answer to the playful remarks of his friend, for he was thinking that it only depended on himself to realize a fortune in a different manner by taking possession of the convict's hoard, if indeed it actually existed. Even, however, up to the present, he had not got over the scruples which had prevented his touching it when it was almost within his grasp, at the time of his visit to the house in the Rue Gabrielle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN OF THE LIONS.

These and many other thoughts whirled through his brain as he and his companions sipped their absinthe at the Café Riche. Whilst they were sitting enjoying a good Havana, George had the satisfaction of seeing many of his acquaintances pass by, who, after a moment's hesitation, bowed to him on seeing him in company with Valbrec, whose caustic pen was well known and dreaded. It seemed as if he were going to recover his position. At seven o'clock they adjourned to the Café Americain, where a liberal supply of good wine raised George's spirits to their usual height. The dinner was prolonged, and the clock had struck ten, when they asked each other how they should spend the rest of the evening.

"I have nothing to do at the publishing office until midnight," remarked Paul Valbrec. "It is too late to go to the theatre; besides, I have had too much of theatres lately. I sigh for open-air dissipation, and want a good walk to enable me to digest the woodcock and burgundy. It is not very cold this evening, and will not rain. Suppose we walk up to the Boulevard Rochechouart, and have a look at the fair. That wont be far from your place?"

"Willingly," replied George, who began to feel a little fatigued after a day full of such exciting incidents, and who had made up his mind to sleep in his own bed, either with or without the permission of his landlord. He therefore walked on with Valbrec towards that portion of the city in which they both lived, and in a short time came into the midst of the fair. Every year, from the fifteenth of November, there is a fair in this thickly-populated district, and the outer boulevards are covered with sheds, booths, and tents of every description. There is the Cocheris Theatre for pantomine and drama, the Corvi Theatre for monkeys and learned dogs; but these are the most aristocratic amusements, and there are in addition, Hercules, giants, dwarfs, seals, and somnambulists, to any extent. That year there was, in addition to all these amusements, a wild beast show, where lions and tigers went through their performances under the guidance of an excessively handsome girl. The reporters of the newspapers mentioned her, and it soon began to be the fashion for the mashers to take a trip to Montmartre to see her.

The two friends made straight for the tent, which covered a large extent of ground, not very far from the Place Pigalle, and went in at once, for the last show was now on. There was a dense crowd, and they had some difficulty in making their way to the large cage in the centre, where the Lion Queen was performing, surrounded by her court of lions and lionesses. She was a tall, handsome girl, of symetrical proportions, with magnificent dark eyes and hair, the latter falling down over her shoulders, and in the course of her performance she shook it backwards and forwards like a mane. Her tight-fitting flesh-colored bodice displayed her well-developed, but handsome bust, and her feet looked small and slender in the scarlet buskins with which they were covered. She was evidently not more

than twenty years of age, and Cransac thought it was well worth the trouble to come so far to see her.

"Is not young Cornelian magnificent?" asked Valbrec.

"What do you call her?" asked George. "Cornelian! What a strange name!"

"Of course, it is a fancy name. Cornelian is a precious stone, and it suits her very well. She has plenty of go in her."

"Yes, but there is something evil about her. I don't wonder that the beasts are afraid of her, when she looks at them as she does."

"She has a way of looking at men too, as you will see presently," answered Valbrec, with a smile, for this was not his first visit to the menagerie. The beautiful tamer of beasts went through her performance completely. At a word from her, and her voice was very sweet, the lions leapt through hoops like mere poodles, and if they hesitated she thrashed them soundly. With hearty kicks from her delicate little boots, she made the unwilling, however, do their work, seeming to fear them no more than if they had been King Charles' spaniels. She concluded the performance by collecting all the tawny monsters together in one corner, and made a bed of them, reclining upon one huge black maned lion, with her elbow resting on his head, and placing her feet on a lioness, who served as a footstool. This was the finale, and the applause was long and loud. Cornelian came to the front of the cage and bowed, at the same time tapping her scarlet boots with her whip, and letting her eyes wander contemptuously over the crowd, as though she were saying: "Yes, gentleman—yes, it is with my whip that I keep my lovers in order."

All at once her eyes met those of George's and in a moment their expression changed, and as she gazed on his handsome face her look became soft and tender.

"Good," said Valbrec, nudging his friend. "You have 'mashed' Cornelian, she has no eyes for anyone but you at present. You hit her flying at the first shot, added Paul, laughing.

"Be quiet," answered George. "It is only a trick of her profession; and if she has taken a liking to me, I can't say that I return it. I should always fancy that there was an odor of wild beasts hanging about her."

They spoke in a low voice, and yet it seemed as if Cornelian could hear what they were saying, for the expression of her face again became threatening, and the vibrations of her whip more rapid.

"She is mad because you don't give in at once," whispered Paul."

Meanwhile the crowd continued to applaud the Queen of the Lions. For a moment she remained motionless, then with a quick and sudden movement of her white hand she hurled the whip straight at George's face, and it was only by good luck that he caught it ere it reached its destination. The lions, who had been prowling about her feet, seemed half disposed to take advantage of her defenceless state; but, stepping back, she opened a door at the other end of the cage, and disappeared in the midst of a tumult of applause.

The scene had passed with the rapidity of a flash of lightning, and the audience could not understand why she had thrown away her whip, unless she had done so in mere bravado, as a dancer on the tight-rope casts aside the balancing pole to show that the feat can be performed without it. The tent was filled with shouts for her recall, but she did not appear again and George remained utterly astounded, holding in his hand the whip which he had so adroitly caught.

"That is the way she 'throws her handkerchief,' said Paul, bursting with laughter. "You have only to go behind and give it to her; depend on it she will receive you kindly."

"I doubt it. Besides, I don't care whether she does or not," answered George much vexed at being an object of curosity to the spectators, some of whom now began to sing in chorus—

"He will keep it,
He won't keep it."

And not knowing what course to pursue, he compromised the matter by hurling it back into the cage, where the lions soon tore it to pieces with teeth and claws. At this there was much applause, and it was suggested that George should take Cornelian's place in the cage, as the audience had now decided that he was a beast tamer in plain clothes, who had come to witness the performance

of a fellow artist of the weaker sex. George thought that it would be advisable to leave the place, when a fresh episode, and one quite unlooked for, caused a diversion of an unpleasant character.

A young woman, very loudly dressed, and escorted by two or three young dandies, elbowed her way noisily through the crowd, and George, who had turned round to effect his escape, found himself face to face with Juliet Taupier. He still had a passionate longing to see her again, and he could easily have forgiven her for the abuse that she had lavished on him, but he could have dispensed with meeting her in the midst of a crowd where his presence had already created some sensation. Juliet, however, soon showed him what her feelings were.

"So the fine gentleman has got out of Mazas, I see," remarked she, withering him with a contemptuous look, "and has lost no time going on the spree. In Queer Street in the morning, and in the fair of Montmartre in the evening."

At the name of Mazas the bystanders pricked up their ears, and George wished himself a hundred feet below the surface of the earth.

"And to pull himself together he is making eyes at a beast tamer," sneered Juliet; "that is the finishing touch."

"Hold your tongue," said George angrily.

"I hold my tongue! Not whilst I have breath: and every time that I meet you, you shall have a taste of it, to teach you, my good fellow, not to mix me up in your dirty business,"

"I"

"Yes, you. Was it on your account—yes or no—that the police came and searched my house, upset my dresses, and looked into my drawers. I am an honest girl, and was not afraid of them, but I saw no fun in it, I can tell you, and I tell you plainly that you shall pay dearly for it."

"Calm yourself, my dear creature," remarked the journalist ironically, "or they will put you out of the booth."

"I should just like to see them do it. And I can't understand how it is that you Valbrec, who are a decent fellow, can be seen about with a fellow just out of quod."

"You insolent wretch!" cried George, making a threatening gesture, but the girl darted behind one of her male

friends, a fair, dandified fellow, quite unknown either to Valbrec, or Cransac. "Arthur," cried she "I trust that you will not permit me to be insulted!"

Arthur had not a very bellicose appearance, but when appealed to in such a manner he had no alternative, and so he interfered without the slightest enthusiasm, but rather as a man who, having a disagreeable duty to perform, gets through it somehow or other.

It was an unfortunate thing for him that he did so. Cransac's hand was raised, and it fell on Arthur's cheek with a loud smack, that rang through the booth. "I shall expect your friends to-morrow," cried Cransac. "The woman with you, can give you my address," and hitting right and left, he forced his way through the gaping crow that had gathered round him, and gained the door, closely followed by Valbrec. At that moment he came across Cornelian, who, having hastily thrown a shawl over her shoulders, had come in front to catch one more glimpse of the good-looking young fellow that she had caught sight of through the bars of the lion's cage. Cransac took no notice of her, and when he again found himself in the boulevard, he said to Valbrec: "At last I have given one of them a box on the ear. We shall see if this dandy has got an ounce of pluck, and if he has, I hope to oblige him with as pretty a sword-thrust as he could wish."

"If he will fight," muttered the journalist; "but I doubt it."

"He will be an awful cur if he pockets the slap that I gave him and says nothing."

"Well, he doesn't look much like a fighting man. Juliet's lovers are a shy lot, according to report. It seems to me that I have seen that fellow's face somewhere, and not in the best society either. I am not quite certain, for then he had a heavy, fair moustache like yours, but he may have cut it off."

"I don't care about his moustache, but I'll slit his skin for him."

"I hope that you will—only don't be vexed at what I am going to say. He has an excuse for declining to meet you; that jade Juliet shouted out before fifty persons that you had just come out of Mazas."

"Again! Am I always to have that insult flung in my

face, and all because I have the misfortune to look like a rogue?"

"It won't last forever, but you must have patience. You know that you are innocent, so despise your slanderers, and scorn the opinions of fools. Let the storm pass, and the day will come when you can take your revenge; when you can catch your double."

"And in the meantime, I am to live the life of a Pariah! No, I would rather put a bullet through my head."

"That is the resource of men who have lost their position and have no energy to reconquer it. The sudden conclusion of your connection with Juliet has for the moment unnerved you, but be firm. Suicide is not a solution of your difficulties, especially when you have nothing to reproach yourself with. Pluck up your spirits, and make up your mind to live."

"What is the use of living—and for whom shall I live?"

"For me, in the first place, who am your true friend, and then for a woman—oh! don't get angry. All women in this world are not Juliets. You will easily find one who deserves to be loved, for you are a man that they all like; for instance, look at the Queen of the Lions."

"Are *you* going to chaff me now?"

"Not a bit; and the proof is that I am ready to do battle against everyone in your behalf. Just now you are too excited to reason calmly. Go home, sleep soundly, and come and see me to-morrow at the office of the paper. The night brings good counsel with it, and you will be the more disposed to listen to me, when I plainly lay before you the steps I propose to take to set you up once more. And so, dear friend, good night, and try not to dream of Cornelian."

"Don't talk to me any more about that mountebank."

"All right; but you won't escape her. I will lay you two to one that she will ask Juliet for your address, and five to two that Juliet will give it to her, in hopes of doing you a bad turn."

With these parting words Paul Valbrec shook his friend warmly by the hand, and set off at a rapid pace towards the Rue Fromentin.

George was left alone in the midst of the merry crowd on its way to the fair, deafened by the din of cymbals and the blast of trumpets, and blinded by the rays of

electric light which gleamed from the top of the Cochreri Theatre. The music and the lights seemed to mock his despair, and he was eager to remove himself from the lights and merriment. The wise advice of Paul Valbrec had neither calmed or consoled him. He had no more thoughts of suicide. All he thought of was to arm himself for the fray. Society had cast him out; and he declared war against Society.

Money is the sinews of war; and he knew where to procure it.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW MONTE CRISTO.

There was the prisoner's treasure still available, a stolen treasure doubtless, but which, abandoned as it was, might fall into worse hands than his. Some hours before, when he had not yet seen all the horrors of his position, he had determined not to touch the accursed money, bnt now his scruples had fled as his illusions were dissipated. He vowed that he would use it to punish the wicked, and to recompense the good, as Monte Cristo had done in Dumas' romance. He saw no harm in usurping the functions of Providence, which too often seems to act in a manner not at all in accordance with human ideas. He did not even stop to consider whether his sudden rise to affluence would not increase the cloud of suspicion which already hung so heavily over him. "It has been ordained," thought he, "that I should deviate from the right path, and let those who have treated me as a guilty person bear the blame. I feel no remorse." He then looked at his watch, and saw that it was a quarter to twelve. "Let me get in," said he to himself, "it is time to be at work; the Rue Gabrielle is not far from this." As a smoker, George was of course provided with matches, but these would not afford sufficient light for the work that he had in hand, and for a moment he thought of going to his own rooms and procuring a candle, for all the shops in the neighborhood were closed. Whilst he was hesitating, a man came by with a truck, upon which were some of those Venetian or Algerian lanterns, which afford a cheap method of illumination, and George bought half

a dozen of them, fearing that one would prove insufficient if the work that he was about to undertake should prove longer than he thought. Furnished with these paper funnels, with the small piece of inflammable matter at the bottom, George started boldly for the ruined house. The streets through which he had to pass were almost deserted; but he had no fear of night prowlers, for the simple reason that passers-by were so scarce that these gentry did not think it worth their while to lay in wait for them. When he reached the wooden gate, he found it still half opened, as he had left it, and stopped a moment before passing through it.

He gazed round him, and listened.

He saw nothing but the dark shapes of the trees on the slope, and only heard that vague, indescribable sound, which seems the respiration of sleeping Paris, the distant rattle of carriage wheels, and the creaking of the leafless boughs as they swung backwards and forwards in the winter's breeze.

Very likely that Juliet, whom he loved so much and who had so openly insulted him, was now supping with her friends in some night tavern, and it seemed to him as if the idiotic hum of their conversation could reach his ears even here. And here in front of him lay a fortune, absolutely at his own disposal; all that he had to do was to carry it away, and with it he could revenge himself upon the woman who had insulted him, ruling her by the only master she respected—Gold. He pictured her to himself kneeling at his feet, and he, humiliating her, by treating her with contempt—as if a woman like her could ever feel the sting of his humiliation. It would have been better for George to remember that in this mighty city of Paris, so full of poverty and wealth, there are thousands of honest girls who gain their bread by hard toil, and that thrice happy are the industrious workers upon whom they set their affections. But in the circle in which George had lived, the world of finance and business, there was little thought for those who suffered and toiled. Without further hesitation he struggled through the wilderness of tangled weeds, and found it harder than he had done in his first visit by the light of day.

After tearing his hands and clothes, he at last arrived

at the steps. High above him rose the house, dark and silent, like a ruined donjon keep. Everything seemed quiet, and there was but little fear of anyone coming to disturb him at his work. He went in, and lighting one of his paper lanterns, hung it to a nail in the chimney, so that the light might not be visible from the outside. The outer door had neither bolt nor lock, but he piled against the lower portion of it some of the bricks and plaster that lay in a heap in front of the chimney-piece. He did all this slowly and silently, like a man who is in no hurry, but who thinks that he ought not to neglect any precautions, and when he had completed his task he crouched down in front of the famous brass plate, so as to examine it more closely. It was blackened with soot, as he had noticed on his first visit. As he looked at it more attentively he could see under this soot the form of screws and hinges. The hinges were at the bottom, the iron pin at the top. Cransac seized the pin; at first it resisted his efforts, because it had grown rusty, but after a time it yielded and turned round with a creaking sound, such as an old-fashioned clock makes when it is wound up. After the third turn he heard a sound like a bolt being withdrawn from its socket, and the pin would move no further. Evidently the work was over, and the fastenings undone. All that remained was to pull it down; he did so, and the plate yielded so quickly that he had great difficulty in preventing its falling with a loud crash. It had been held in its place by three steel bolts, but before he could examine these, a gust of damp, mephitic air blew right in his face, and made him start back. It was like the exhalation that arises when an abandoned well has been re-opened, or when a cellar that has been closed for a long time has once again been put in use. But the feeling of cold that chilled Cransac was mingled with an impression of disgust at the indescribable odor. There was something deathlike in it, and Cransac asked himself if the real owner of the stolen treasure had not been buried beneath it by his murderer. The Venetian lantern gave but a feeble light, and he could only see in front of him a wall, and when he looked more closely a heap of objects, the shape of which he could not readily distinguish. The opening in the wall was not more than three feet in diameter, it was not, therefore, likely that a human body had been

buried there. A little reassured by this, George lit another of his lanterns, and after waiting until the foul air had evaporated, he put his head into the cavity, in which he began to fear that he should find nothing. He then saw that the bottom was covered with a bed of fine sand, and that underneath this was a number of small rolls of paper, which looked like cartridges for a large bored gun. Was the treasure nothing but ammunition hidden away by some band of conspirators? That was hardly likely. These rolls, which were arranged in order, had an outer wrapping of green paper. Cransac took up one, after having cleared away the sand with his fingers, and saw at once, from its weight, that it was a packet of a thousand francs in gold, like cashiers of banks make up for their customers. At a first glance George could see fifty of these packets which of themselves were a fortune, but others lay beneath them, and he could not get down to the bottom of the deposit, but he had every reason to suppose that an incalculable amount of coined gold was hidden away in this metallic receptacle. In order to know the exact amount of his treasure, he must have emptied the hiding place, but it would have been useless for him to do so, for he could not have carried it away in his pockets, nor yet on his back, even if he had a sack to stow it away in.

The prisoner of Mazas had told the truth.

To gain such an enormous booty he must have broken into the strong room of one of the largest banking establishments; and yet, if he had done so, how had he contrived to carry away the treasure to the top of the hill of Montmartre? But Cransac did not trouble himself to solve this riddle; all he thought of was how he could best appropriate this treasure which it was so difficult to carry away. The most sensible method was to take away a little at a time, and make a series of visits to the spot. He made up his mind to act in this manner, when a sudden sound made him start. He turned sharply round, but the door was still fast, nor was any suspicuous form visible from the window. The sound had come from upstairs, and as Cransac listened eagerly, he fancied that he heard someone walking in the room above. Then the noise ceased, and it had been so slight that George asked himself if he might not be deceived. It was perhaps only a rat scampering across the flooring. There were alway plenty of rats

in deserted houses, and the one in the Rue Gabrielle might be full of them. Entirely re-assured, he went to work, and drew from the receptacle twenty packets of a thousand francs each, and put ten in each pocket of his overcoat. He could not have carried any more, for ten thousand francs in gold weigh at least six pounds, and the linings and sewing of a pocket must be strong to resist such a strain. Besides, twenty thousand francs would suffice to start him in the new life into which he was about to enter. All he had to do was to pay frequent visits until the treasure was completely exhausted, and this he made up his mind to do, for he determined for the future to lead the life of a millionaire.

And if people suspected the source of his miraculous change of fortune, he had his answer ready, an answer which his friend Valbrec had unconsciously suggested to him. He would say that his father—that unknown father who had provided for the wants of his childhood, and early youth—had made himself known to him before his death, and had willed all his property to him. To give an air of truth to this story, he had only to go and pass a month away from Paris, and on his return relate that he had inherited this magnificent legacy in some foreign country. People would take it all for granted without troubling themselves to go there and make inquiries, and certainly no one would guess that the bequest came to him from a felon. There was nothing now for him to do but to return to his rooms in the Rue Frochot with such a sum in his possession as he had never before had. He often gained as much every year by his brokerages, but he spent it as fast as he made it; and this was the first time that he had had so large a sum at his disposal at one time. He put back the plate, and turned the pin, made sure that the steel bolts had gone home in their sockets, and that all was firm and secure; then sprang to his feet, although his pockets were so heavily weighted with gold, and was about to extinguish his lantern, when he heard a dull, heavy sound, as though some article of furniture had been overturned on the flooring of the room above.

He had seen no furniture when he had visited the rooms in the morning, but there must have been something to cause the noise, and he felt that there was someone upstairs. At first he thought of beating a retreat,

without troubling himself to find out who it was that had introduced themselves into the uninhabited house, but the thought crossed his mind that perhaps this nocturnal visitor had come upon the same errand as himself, and he did not feel at all disposed to share the treasure with him. A timid man would have given way, but George Cransac was endowed with a disposition that led him to carry out his resolution to the end. He had no weapon, but nature had furnished him with a pair of strong arms and a courageous heart; and, with his lantern in his hand, he moved towards the staircase leading to the upper rooms. This was an act of the greatest imprudence, for, even supposing that he succeeded in expelling the intruder, he ran the risk of being recognized by a person who was certainly not on these premises with any good motive. Cransac hesitated for a moment at the foot of the staircase, he heard nothing more; but at this moment a whiff of suffocating smoke rolled down, as if to meet him, causing him to cough violently. It was too late now to draw back. The cough must have betrayed his presence, and if the intruder had accidently or intentionally set fire to the house, there might yet be time to extinguish a conflagration, which would certainly bury in the smoking ruins the enormous treasures of the prisoner of Mazas.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BRAZIER OF CHARCOAL.

Cransac ran rapidly up the stairs, and in another moment arrived on the first floor; he was not surprised to find the door shut, and the smoke that had met him at the foot of the stairs pouring through the crevices in the broken panels. The site of the conflagration was there, but the incendiary was still invisible. Cransac beat his clenched hand against the door, but no one answered his appeal for admission. Stepping back as far as the landing would permit, he gave the door a violent kick, which tore it from its hinges and sent it flying to the other side of the room. A thick cloud of smoke issued forth and made George Cransac recoil. He had expected to be attacked, and stood on the defensive; but no one appeared. Now or never was the time to act, and without a moment's hesitation he burst into the room. All was dark, and the feeble light which his lantern gave seemed like a luminous paint in the gloom. In entering, he stumbled over some object which rolled further into the room, and he could feel that his feet were crunching some substance that felt like charcoal. Instinctively he made for the window; none of the glass was broken, and it was tightly closed. He opened it at once, and established a thorough draught which drove away the smoke. George already knew that in entering he must have stumbled over a brazier, and that it could not have been lighted without hands; but his thoughts were speedily diverted from this by finding as the smoke cleared away that a body was lying at his feet. In a moment he knelt down beside it, and saw it was a woman. The head of the unhappy creature was almost in contact with the brazier, and her hair had been singed by the burning embers that had rolled on the floor. The first thing that George did was to extinguish these by crushing them beneath his feet. There was more need to do this than to assist the woman, for the flooring was of pine, and would soon have been fanned into flame by the combined draughts from the door and window. The nascent conflagration was soon extinguished, and blowing

out and pocketing his Venetian lantern, he raised up the woman's body in his arms, and, carrying her down the stairs, placed her on the steps in the fresh air. She was not very heavy, but, loaded with gold as he was, he found his task by no means an easy one; yet he could not find it in his heart to abandon a fainting woman. He knew that she was not dead, for he could feel her heart beat; but she was totally insensible, and the first thing to be done was to bring her to. As he groped about for some more convenient seat, his hand came in contact with a hollow stone, in which the recent rain had left a little water. This enabled him to apply the simplest remedy, and one that is usually most efficacious in cases of syncope. He sprinkled this cold water over the woman's face, and almost immediately she shuddered, and murmured a few unconnected words. George could not see if she was pretty or not, but judging from her figure he imagined she must be young, and was almost in a position to guess at her history. An attempt at suicide owing to some disappointment in love, or to escape from the curse of poverty. One of those sad dramas in real life so often performed in Paris in the garrets of the poor.

But what he could not understand was, why this poor despairing creature has chosen the deserted house in the Rue Gabrielle for the place of her death, and he determined to ask her the question as soon as she should be in a position to answer him. This too would be an excellent opportunity to make a good use of the gold with which his pockets were filled if poverty had driven her to so rash a step. Only he must not hang about the house too long, for it was most important that he should not be seen, and the spot was not a safe one. The smoke might have been seen by some of the police, and if they took it into their heads to enter the garden, it would be difficult for him to explain his business there at such an hour, with an insensible woman at his feet; then, if they were not satisfied with his explanation, they would take him to the nearest police-station and when he was searched the twenty thousand francs in his pocket would be brought to light. To escape from this perilous position with as little delay as possible, he wetted the eyes of the insensible woman, slapped her hands, and even shook her with some degree of violence, but without achieving any great

success. Certainly she contrived to sit up on the step, but when she made an effort to rise to her feet she sank down again, and her head fell on George's shoulder as she sank into his arms. He was compelled to press her to him so as to hold her up, and these embraces insensibly warmed his blood. He never thought of the danger that he ran in prolonging them, and he even began to hope that the woman he had saved was pretty, and might be brought to love him.

At last he thought of lighting a match and holding it under her nose. He did so; her eyes opened and she saw George's face almost touching hers. "You!—it is you, yourself!" cried she, and drew him to her so rapidly that their lips met. He had only time to see by the fleeting light of the match that she was beautiful, and he did not attempt to draw back, but he imagined that she was delirious, for her face was perfectly unknown to him. But there is an end to everything, even to kisses and illusions, and the woman who had flung herself into his arms tore herself away, and, pushing him from her, exclaimed: "Unhappy woman that I am, it is not he!" George was now certain that she was mad. What else could he think of a woman who first took him for her lover, and then after a long and tender kiss, repulsed him with horror! But he soon saw that he had deceived himself. She was not mad; the shock that she had experienced had entirely restored her to her senses, which had deserted her on the approach of suffocation. "Forgive me, sir," faltered she; "but I have been the dupe of a most surprising resemblance."

"I don't find fault with your mistake," answered George with a smile.

"What must you think of me after all that has passed? It seems to me that I have just awoke from a dream."

"It was no dream. You had attempted to kill yourself; by good fortune I arrived in time to save you."

"Yes, I remember all now. I lit some charcoal; at first I suffered terribly, then I began to lose my senses, little by little, as one does when sinking into sleep. Ah! sir, why did you hinder me from dying?"

"Dying—at your age!"

"I am young in years, but I have passed through as much trouble as though I had lived a century."

"But I hope now that you have done with such thoughts for ever." Then, as the girl made no reply, he continued: "Pray listen to me, madam——"

"Do not call me madam. I am not married."

"I ask you no questions. All I ask is to be permitted to come to your aid. I do not know why you wanted to kill yourself, but I swear to you that I am ready to do all I can to extricate you from your difficulties. It was written that I was to save your life, and it was no doubt also written that you would accept my friendship. Let us aid each other mutually to pass through life. Do not misunderstand the meaning of my words. I do not propose to become your lover, for I am sure you have one——"

"I had one," answered the girl, "but he is lost to me forever!"

"I might say that in this world you should be certain of nothing, but will content myself with saying that I will be for you whatever you wish; and now come with me.'

"Where?"

"Wherever you wish to go; but I will not leave you alone here."

"You were here alone. What did you come for?"

"Perhaps to put an end to my life like yourself. I was on the ground floor, when I heard you upset the brazier of charcoal in your last convulsive struggles. You know what followed. So here we are both of us condemned to live."

"I begin to believe so too," answered the girl, simply.

"Then take my arm, and let us leave the garden," returned George.

He helped her to her feet, and assisted her to walk, though how he was to make his way through the tangle with a companion who could hardly keep her feet he was at a loss to understand. The girl, however, relieved him from this difficulty by pointing out a side-path which was tolerably open, and led to another gate which opened on to a flight of steep steps running down into the Rue Gabrielle.

"Was this the road by which you came in?" asked he.

"I know of no other."

"But you are acquainted with the house?"

"For a long time past. I used to play in the garden when I was a little child."

"You live in this quarter of the city?"

"I used to; but now my home is in Belleville."

"And you came all this distance to die?"

"I wished no one to know of my death. My body would have been carried to the Morgue, and no one would have recognized it."

"Have you no mother?"

"I am an orphan."

As they spoke they were descending side by side the public flight of steps that lead to the Place Saint Pierre, and Cransac asked himself more than once how this strange adventure was going to end. It had commenced in so curious a manner that he had not even thought of what might be the future results, and he had hardly glanced at the features of the woman he had rescued; but something within him said that this meeting would have much to do with his future life.

The girl could not manage to walk any further, and on turning into the Boulevard Rochechouart George saw a café still open. It was one of those with a verandah to it, and seats, so that customers could take their refreshments in the open air. His companion made no objection to sitting down and sipping a little punch, which completely restored her.

George was now able to examine her features by the light of the gas. She was simply attired in a black stuff dress, like a poor workgirl, but she was strangely beautiful, pale, and dark, with a sad and tender look upon her face, such as is seldom seen amongst girls of her position. He begged her to tell him her story, and she made no objection.

"Sir," said she, seriously, "I owe you my life, and now I think with you, that I ought to accept the destiny which fate has accorded to me—that is to say, the friendship that you offer me; but, if we are to meet again, you must know who I am. My name is Cécile Cambremer, and I am twenty-two years of age. I was fifteen when my father died broken-hearted after a heavy pecuniary loss, which he had neither expected nor deserved. I had lost my mother before, and I should have starved if a kind neighbor had not assisted me, and taught me the trade of an artificial

florist. In three years I became so skillful that when she died I was able to earn my living, and carry on business on my own account." Cransac could not help thinking that this recital began like all those which certain young ladies are in the habit of confiding to rich men: a tale of good birth, unmerited misfortune, and a struggle for existence. He only half believed in her, and the cynical Valbrec, had he been present, would not have believed at all; but she continued her story with an air of sincerity that impressed him in spite of himself.

"I opened a shop," continued Cécile, "and I was doing well, until a man utterly unworthy of me, crossed my path. I do not attempt to conceal anything from you. I might have married an honest workman in my own rank of life, but I fell deeply in love with this man, whom I now despise, as much as I formerly adored him. He continually put off our marriage; and when he found that I would not yield to his seductions he was profuse in his apoligies, but managed to draw from me nearly all the money I made, which he squandered on a creature well suited to him. When I had no more to give him he left me to misery and destitution. I heard that he had money, and I wrote to him—I confess it to my shame—for aid and assistance, but my letter remained unanswered. Then I felt that I had fallen low enough, and only desired to die."

"But you have promised to live," cried George eagerly. "and it is your own fault if you are not happy; that is, if you have cured yourself of a love that has been so fatal to you, and this you must permit me to doubt, for a little time back, when you took me for that man——"

"I was not in my senses then; but now I swear to you that I hate him as much as I formerly loved him. I have made up my mind to live. I have had to close my shop for want of money to pay my assistants, but I can get a place——"

"No; you must let me help you."

"I thank you, sir; but I can take nothing from you."

"What! not even a loan? Why you would take one from a business man or a banker. Then why refuse to accept one from me, who am neither one or the other, but who is able to render you this service without the slightest inconvenience?"

Cécile looked George full in the face, to see if he spoke seriously.

"I can read your thoughts," said he. "You think that I have some unworthy motive in making this offer? Undeceive yourself: I have none. I do not purpose to make you a present of the sum you require. I intend to grant you a loan, and you shall fix the rate of interest yourself."

"But, sir, I do not know you. You know my name, whilst I——"

"My name is George Cransac; I live at 19, Rue Frochot, and you can give me a note payable on demand. Oh! not this evening. You can send it to me to-morrow; and I will give you my word of honor not to present myself at your residence without your consent."

"Then," said Cécile, slowly, "after all you are rich, and yet you tell me that you went into that deserted house in order to take your life."

"Do you think there is no reason for suicide except poverty? There are many other reasons to induce a man to make away with himself."

"You are right. Had I only had to endure poverty, I should never have sought to release myself by death."

"Then you can easily understand that there was some other reason for my despair than want of money. Take this," continued George, placing one of his packets on the table. "Will a thousand francs be sufficient?"

"It is too much," faltered Cécile, deeply moved.

"It is better to have too much than too little; and now where do you live?"

"22, Avenue de Laumière, near the Park des Buttes Chaumont."

"Good. I shall not offer to see you home, but I shall put you into a cab; and I shall expect your note of hand payable to my order to-morrow morning by post. Do not trouble to bring it, as I am leaving Paris to-morrow evening. When I return I will let you know."

George uttered these last words in a dry, business-like manner, so as to reassure Cécile as to the honorable intentions of the man who had saved her life.

A cab just then passed; George hailed it, half-forced the parcel of gold into Cécile's hand, threw a five-franc piece on the table to discharge the reckoning, paid the

cab fare, and, after assisting the girl in, walked off without another word in the direction of the Rue Frochot. He had need of little rest, but he determined to devote one night only to it, for he had resolved to put into execution the plan he had conceived of leading a new life. He would wait until twelve o'clock for a visit from the seconds of Juliet's new lover, and whether they came or not he would write a letter to Paul Valbrec, informing him that he had been summoned to England by letter, and leading him to suppose that it had something to do with a legacy; to remain in London eight days, and to return to Paris again in the guise of a millionaire. Then he could once again see the beautiful Cécile, who had already secured a corner in his heart, and revenge himself upon those who had insulted and repulsed him.

The gold that he had procured through the prisoner of Mazas did not lie so heavily on his conscience now that he had employed a portion of it in assisting a woman who had been so cruelly treated, and he hoped that this propitious commencement would bring him good luck.

He forgot that in this world we must always be prepared for the unexpected.

CHAPTER VII.

A MILLIONAIRE'S PERPLEXITIES.

In ten days' time George Cransac returned from London. He had had plenty of time in which to reflect, and he had not altered any of his plans. He had indeed made up his mind more firmly than ever to profit by the stroke of chance that had made him a rich man. He felt no remorse, and had returned to Paris like a victorious general entering a conquered city. He had written from London to Paul Valbrec, and had received a letter from him congratulating him, and urging him to return to Paris as soon as possible, to show those who had calumniated him that he was now rich, and to shame those who had repulsed him in the days of his poverty. George did not wish to return to his small apartment in the Rue Frochot, and had requested Valbrec to secure rooms for him at the Grand Hotel. He came to Paris by the night train, and slept late, and after breakfasting in his own room was preparing to go out, when his faithful friend made his appearance.

"Good day, millionaire," cried he, shaking his friend cordially by the hand.

George returned his greeting warmly; but in his own heart he was not very hopeful as to how this conversation would end, for he felt sure that his friend would put several difficult questions to him, and in this he was not deceived.

"Well, yours is an almost miraculous adventure," remarked the journalist. "Do you not remember that on the evening before you left I said something about this to you when we were taking our absinthe at the Café Riche? I then predicted that this mysterious father of yours would turn up one day and make you his heir. I thought then that I was only chaffing, but you see that I was a prophet in spite of myself. And now, tell me this tale of a thousand and one nights, for your letters have, as yet, given me no details. Are you the son of a prince, or of a mere capitalist?"

"And suppose I told you that I was no wiser than I was before?" said George, who had his tale all cut and dry.

"Impossible! The author of your days cannot have left you his fortune without making you acquainted with his name."

"I don't even know if this fortune comes from my father. I received a letter from a London banker, telling me that a sum of fifty thousand pounds sterling had been paid into my credit."

"Twelve hundred and fifty thousand francs—a nice little lump."

"I found this letter awaiting me at home, after I had left you in front of the menagerie, and at first I thought that it was a hoax. But this banker asked me to bring all documents proving my identity, and added that, if I wanted it he would advance me my travelling expenses; but I had a few louis left, and I thought that in my desperate position it would be wise to risk everything, so I acted at once, and it was well I did so, for on my arrival I saw that the affair was a *bonâ fide* one. I produced my voting card, the receipts for rent, and the registration of my birth, in which my parents were described as unknown. He then asked me certain questions regarding my past life, which I answered in a satisfactory manner, and then I at once saw that he had been made acquainted with various incidents in my life. I could not, however, obtain from him the slightest information regarding the name or position of my benefactor, as he merely contented himself with saying that in placing this sum at my disposal, he had merely acted in accordance with a letter of advice that he had received from one of his New York correspondents, and that he knew nothing more about the matter."

"But this is a perfect fairy tale you are relating."

"It is like one; and yet I am obliged to believe it, for the money is at my disposal."

"I suppose you dipped into it at once?"

"I should have liked to; but I should not have known what to do with it, so I only drew twenty thousand francs and left the rest with him. He will pay me interest until I have found some good investment for it here."

"That will be easy; but I am surprised that you did

not turn it into bills on Paris, in case your unknown benefactor should change his mind."

"I never thought of that," muttered George.

"But you must think of it, and get your money over here as soon as possible. You can invest it profitably and afterwards you can sleep in peace, having nothing further to dread at the hands of that queer fellow who has just now taken it into his head to make you a rich man. Above all, I warn you to lose no time, and for this reason: those who know you will not deprive themselves of the pleasure of talking over your change of position, and will ask how it all came about; and I don't suppose you want to publish this miraculous history everywhere."

"Certainly not," answered George, quickly; "and I beg that you will keep it to yourself."

"Very well; but there are certain ill-disposed persons who will assert that you are spending the proceeds of the forged check, therefore you must show something more than mere cash in hand. When your notary—for you must get one—can certify that you possess twelve hundred thousand francs, no one can say that such a sum comes from the check that you have been accused of forging. We must even go further," continued Valbrec; "the police have their eye on you. You were discharged, but that does not guarantee you against any future proceedings; and I should not be at all surprised at the examining magistrate calling upon you to give him the name and address of your banker in London. What is his name?"

"Campbell," replied the imprudent Cransac, giving the first name that came into his head.

"Very good; if they question you, you have only to give his name and address, and when the magistrate learns that the money was paid into your credit in London, he will not bother you any more. All you will then have to contend with is the malevolence of fools; but we can easily shut up these. But I beg you to believe, old boy, that when I say all this to you, it is not because I have any doubts in the matter. I am your true friend, and I prove it by giving you good advice, which I am sure you will follow; and now I will back you up against everyone, and in all quarters. I have already told my friends that you are about to inherit a large fortune, but

I did not say where from. They can think, if they like, that it is from the inevitable uncle in America, and I want to introduce you to them this evening. You will have no further occasion to turn out copy as a means of livelihood; but it is a good thing to be well in with the literary world. I have ordered a nice little dinner at Brébant's, for eight o'clock, and I will go bail that you won't be bored."

"I can't promise to come."

"Oh! my dear fellow, you won't leave me in the lurch? Why, I have announced your advent, and if you don't come they will think that you are afraid to show. It is settled, is it not, eh? At eight o'clock then, at Brébant's; ask for M. Valbrec's private dining-room. That sounds the right thing, does it not?"

Valbrec then took his leave, and George did not attempt to detain him, for he could not help feeling that he had for the last quarter of an hour made him feel most uncomfortable.

Poor George, from the commencement of his conversation with Valbrec, had enveloped himself in a maze of falsehood, and he would have had the greatest difficulty in holding his own if his friend had pushed his questions home. How, then, could he hope to sustain this tale with persons who were not disposed to take everything for granted? The story that he had invented regarding his trip to London would not hold water if strict inquiries were made, and in the coming interview he had a suspicion that his statement would afford strong grounds for disbelief. He certainly thought Valbrec's advice excellent; but how was he to place in a notary's hands, or in a bank, the money that was concealed at the back of a chimney—a fortune, of which he did not even know the amount, since he had not learned the extent of the gold mine; but which appeared to consist of coin which he was utterly unable to remove in a single journey? He would have to make frequent trips to the ruined house, which would expose him to many perilous meetings, certainly more disagreeable than his encounter with Cécile Cambremer. It would be necessary to conceal the money in his room at the hotel, or else take it to the money-changers for conversion into bank-notes. But these constant trips would infallibly attract attention to him, and

so the foolish idea that he had entertained of using the hiding-place of the convict as a niche for his treasure melted away. He must find out some other means, or renounce making use of the treasure; and to do this last would be to alienate himself from the only friend who had stood by him. In the meantime, until he could hit upon some plan to extricate him from his embarrassing position, he resolved to pay a visit to one whom he was most anxious to see once more. Since his sudden departure he had refrained from writing to the girl whose life he had saved, and he was most desirous to see her; for his rescue of her was the pleasantest remembrance that he had carried away with him from Paris, where he had experienced many hard trials, and where he had a presentiment he should pass through many more.

CHAPTER VIII

A ROUGH WOOING.

HAVING at last made up his mind, George left the Grand Hotel and turned his steps, in the first place, to his former lodgings in the Rue Frochot. At the time he took leave of Cécile Cambremer he had given her that address, and he was anxious to know if she had written to him during his absence in England. There were, no doubt, other letters for him in charge of the porter, and it was necessary to notify to that extremely disagreeable personage his intention of shortly leaving the lodgings that he had occupied. On his departure for London he had given notice, and he almost regretted that he had been hasty, now that he saw the many inconveniences attendant on his newly-acquired fortune; but it was too late to recall the written notice he had given his landlord, who was not much prepossessed in his favor. Nothing, therefore, remained for him but to pay up the rent that was due, and to remove his furniture, as soon as he had found a suitable spot in which to take up his abode. The fair of Montmartre was not yet over; but when he came to its neighborhood, it was the time when most of the shows are closed, so that there was not that turmoil and confusion that there had been on the evening when he was last

there. On reaching his home in the Rue Frochot, he found the porter much more amiable; the man raised his cap on his arrival, and did not attempt to put it on during the whole of the interview. George told him to make out his receipts by the next day, and asked if anything had come for him during his absence. The porter answered that no letters had arrived, but that two ladies had called, who had not left their names; they were both dark, one was tall, and the other of medium height. The shorter of the two had only called once, but the latter one had been every day.

The medium-sized lady was certainly Célile; but who could the other one be? However, this was a matter upon which George felt no curiosity, for he had many lady friends, and there was nothing surprising in one of them having called on him. Of one thing he was sure, that it was not Juliet Taupier, for she was as fair as the lily, and did not correspond with either of the descriptions that he had received.

On the morning of his departure he had received from Cécile the note of hand as arranged, with one line; "Thank you; I hope to see you again." It was evident, however, that she had called, and this made George all the more anxious to see her. Having learned all that he wished, he left the porter, in order to look for a cab to take him to the Avenue de Laumière, where Cécile resided; and whilst doing so he found himself in the midst of the booths and tents that had been erected by the exhibitors at the fair. But few of the shows opened before the close of the day, and at this time the place was almost deserted. Here and there a few boys belonging to the neighborhood were playing at hide-and-seek behind the booths and stalls; venders of fancy goods were arranging their stock to the best advantage; a rope-dancer, muffled up in an old shawl, was seated on a stool mending her fleshings, and an acrobat whose trunks were but half concealed by a threadbare greatcoat, was returning from market with a basket in his hand. It was the hour when the performers, who a little later on were looked on as superior beings by an admiring audience, became, for the time, simple mortals, and were ready enough to accept a drink at the nearest wine-shop. Cransac had often gazed on this scene before, and did not pay much

attention to it; but his eye was caught by the figure of a man in a jacket, seated on the shaft of a cart, smoking a pipe, whose face he thought he recognized. The man was of powerful build with an unprepossessing face, a nose like a vulture's beak, and a huge, lipless mouth. The cart, upon the shafts of which he was seated, resembled a Noah's ark; it was of large size, with several narrow windows, and had more than one tin chimney, from which issued volumes of smoke and a strong odor of cooking. It was what the mountebanks term a living wagon—a kind of movable house—in which they reside and travel about. A subdued roar made George glance in the direction from which the sound came, and he saw a huge circular tent, ornamented with a painting representing Cornelian, in beast-tamer's costume, surrounded by all the savage animals of the known world. George had completely forgotten all about her and the ridiculous episode of the whip flung at him through the bars of the lion's cage; but he recognized in the smoke the man who, pike in hand walked backwards and forwards in front of the dens, and he remembered that he had kept back the beasts with his pike when Cornelian had thrown away her whip.

As the fellow continued to stare at him, George, who had no desire to have anything to say to a person of his kind, was proceeding on his way, when the face of Cornelian appeared at one of the windows of the living wagon. She only looked out for an instant, but in that brief time she recognized George, and a moment afterwards she appeared at the door. She slowly descended the four or five steps of the movable ladder, then going up to the man who was seated smoking on the shaft she shook him roughly by the shoulder, exclaiming:

"What are you doing here, you brute? Don't you hear the beasts crying for their food? Run and give them their meat, and be sharp; I don't want to be eaten to-night."

And as the feeder of the animals appeared to hesitate, she repeated:

"Quick! Clear out of this."

He obeyed her with a growl like that of a savage dog, who is kicked out of the way; but before leaving he cast an angry glance at George—the look of a servant who

loves his mistress and is jealous of her. George was rooted to the spot with astonishment, and on looking again at the girl decided that she was even better looking than she had appeared in her fleshings in the lion's den.

As a general rule, women of her profession only look well during their performances, and their every day dress does not suit them at all. But Cornelian, in her black satin dress, a black mantilla over her shoulders, her raven hair confined in a silken net, and a fan in her hand, entirely resembled a Spanish lady about to take a walk on the Prado, a veritable Marquesa d'Amaëgué, the beautiful Andalusian of Alfred de Musset's song.

George saw at once that she was about to come up and speak to him, and as he had no chance of avoiding her, he awaited her coming firmly.

"At last you have come," said she with a smile. "That is all right. I was going to your house."

"You were going to my house?" cried George, in surprise.

"Yes, my dear; No. 19, Rue Frocnot, quite close to this. I have been there every day since the first time I saw you. When did you return to Paris?"

"I have only just arrived. How did you find out my address?"

"From Juliet Taupier."

"What, do you know her?"

"A little; but I know a good deal of the chap that was with her, and whose head you punched. I shan't forget that slap in a hurry. I liked you when I was at work with my pupils, but that blow of yours fetched me at once. I'm the sort of girl that likes to see one man hit another. Arthur took it quietly, did he not?"

"Arthur?" repeated George, interrogatively.

"Yes; the fair dandy who relieved you of your Juliet. I knew that he wouldn't fight. I think he is fond of collecting slaps in the eye. He had two given him when he was with me. Just fancy my having been spoons on him because he had a fine moustache. He is as ugly as an ape now that he has cut it off."

"Then he was your lover?"

"Only for a short time. He fetched me a bit last summer at the fair of Saint Cloud; it lasted just a month. But

what of that? After you had gone, I gave him his marching orders. I told him that he wasn't worth much, and that his girl would not make anything of him. That Juliet was with you, was she not? Oh, don't say no; she proclaimed it loudly enough. But that is all over now, for after the affront she put on you, I don't suppose you'll put your head inside her door."

Overwhelmed by this flood of endearment, George held his peace, although he felt much tempted to make inquiries regarding the rascal who he had publicly corrected, and who had not ventured to resent his having done so. Cornelian, however, left him no leisure to recover from his surprise.

"So now, my little George, you are free. I have got hold of you, and I mean to keep you. You are the handsomest fellow that I have ever seen, and we shall suit each other down to the ground. Don't you imagine that I care a bit what that jade said about your having been in Mazas over some bit of rascality. Well, suppose you have, you suit me just as well. Why, anyone may be quodded in Mazas."

George turned pale with the anger that was rapidly gaining an ascendancy over him.

"And besides," continued the girl, "it is love at first sight. I make more money than I want, and will never take a sou from you, even if you were as rich as Rothschild. I shan't, of course, object to your paying for a supper, but that won't cost you much, for I don't go in for swell eating cribs. Will you come for me after the show?" added Cornelian, placing her hand on George's arm, and devouring him with her eyes as she spoke. This was rather too much. Disgusted, furious, and irritated, George wrenched himself roughly away, and said, coldly:

"You are making a mistake. I am not to be got hold of quite so easily as you seem to fancy. I don't know you, and I don't want to."

It was now Cornelian's turn to grow pale with anger, and her eyes blazed with passion. "Why, you can't have looked at me," cried she, drawing herself up, so as to display all the grace of her figure. "You won't find a girl like me in a hurry, I can tell you; certainly not amongst the lot from which you picked out your Juliet. I am twenty years of age, my dear, and during the last five, in which I

have risked my body and bones every night amongst the lions, I have refused the offers of princes and men worth millions. If I chose I need not go about from fair to fair, for I have been offered an engagement at the Porte Saint Martin Theatre, in a piece which they were going to get up expressly for me; I was to play the part of a martyr exposed to the beasts in the arena of Rome. What a sensation it would create! Why, all Paris would ring with it. Well, I just refused the offer, because I felt sure that I should see you here again, and was afraid of missing you. For the last ten days I have done nothing but run after you."

"Well, I couldn't help that, for I was travelling; but if I had known——"

"Now, just listen, and remember all I am going to tell you. My beasts obey me like dogs, and no one has ever yet resisted me, neither man nor woman. You will not do so, more than the others. Do you understand? I have taken a fancy to you, and mean to have you."

"This is too much," muttered George between his teeth.

"Too much is it; I'll tell you more. You were right just now in saying that you did not know me; if you did you would also know that nothing could stop me. My will is law, as you will find. I will kill you, sooner than give you up; and if any woman interferes between us, I will strangle her with my own hands, with these very hands with which I flog the lions." As she spoke she stretched them out before him, a thought too large, perhaps, and a little sunburnt, but with well-shaped long fingers, terminating in carefully-kept nails. She looked quite capable of ridding herself of a rival.

George began to think this scene was more amusing than alarming. He had pleased many women, but this was the first time that he had ever had to defend himself against the direct advances of one of the sex; but, as he was resolved not to yield, he did not trouble himself much with Cornelian's threats, for he knew that she could not carry him off by force, and as he had no mistress there was no reason to fear for her,

"Look there," continued she, pointing out the feeder of the beasts, who at that moment came out of the tent after having given the animals their meal. "Well, if I

told that man to go into the cage with my two big lions, after they had had nothing to eat for three days, he would not hesitate a moment in obeying me, although he knew perfectly that they would only make a mouthful of him, he is so madly in love with me."

"A hopeless love, I suppose," thought George.

"Do you doubt," continued the girl, "that he would think twice if I told him to kill anyone whom I might point out; some one who had insulted me, or some lover who had deceived me?"

George could hardly restrain a shudder, for now there was some tangible danger to dread.

The adorer of Cornelian looked like a sworn tormentor of the middle ages, or a robber whom it would be advisable not to meet at night in a lonely spot.

"I shall take care not to go out for the future without my revolver," thought George.

"Remember, you have been warned. At any rate, I am spared another visit to the Rue Frochot; and now, my dear, I will detain you no longer. I have a show to-day at four o'clock, and another this evening at ten; but I had rather that you would not come, for you might distract my attention, and that won't do in my business. The other evening, when I threw my whip at you, Frédegonde, my lioness, almost had me; but after it is over you shall take me to supper. So if you don't wait for me, between eleven and twelve, over there at the Café du Rat Mort, look out for yourself, my little man, for it will be war between us, and you will have to pay for all breakages." Then, as she saw the man in the jacket creeping up slyly, she exclaimed: "Get to kennel, watch-dog;" and as he seemed inclined to disobey her, she drove him with blows and thrusts in the back to the side entrance of the menagerie, whilst George profited by this movement to make his escape by darting between some of the booths.

CHAPTER IX.

POVERTY'S BANKER.

He had reached the Place Pigalle, where he hoped to find a cab, when some distance off he saw a woman whose figure reminded him of Cécile Cambremer. She had come out of the Rue Frochot, and was going along the Rue Duperré. Cransac thought that she had been to his house to make inquiries regarding him, but he wondered where she could be going, for she was not returning to the Avenue Laumière in which she resided, which would spare him a journey to Belleville. He resolved to follow her on the chance, and see if she went in anywhere. This portion of the town is full of artists, and ladies are very fond of them; she might even have a lover amongst them, and George wanted to find out if this was the case. He must have been in love, for he felt a pang of jealousy, and his love had sprang up without his knowledge, for he was hardly conscious of the nature of his feeling for Cécile. He followed her like a shadow, as detectives follow those whom they are ordered to watch, but not arrest, permitting her to keep some fifteen paces ahead. If it was Cécile, she certainly had not squandered any of the money that he had advanced her on dress, for she wore the same hat and skirt as when he had first found her gasping on the floor by the side of the brazier of charcoal. Her health did not seem to have suffered from her recent attempt at suicide; she walked firmly, like a woman who knows where she is going, and is in a hurry to get there. She looked really charming, and as George followed her with admiring eyes, he never thought of looking behind him; had he done so he would have noticed the keeper from the managerie following him with the stealthy gait of a fox tracking his prey. The fellow must have managed to escape from the booth into which Cornelian had thrust him—escaped, perhaps, to pick a quarrel with the gentleman whom he looked upon as his rival; unless, indeed, he had been dispatched by his mistress to dog the footsteps of the handsome

young man whom she was desirous of securing for herself. The Rue Duperré is not a very long street, and the girl soon turned off to the right. "This is strange," thought George; "why here she is going down the street where Valbrec lives; surely, she is not going to see him—and yet, why not? Paul is a deuce of a fellow, and knows all the women in Paris; but no, just now he is at the office writing his article, and my idea is an absurd one." He, however, pushed on, fearing lest he should lose sight of the woman who was such a puzzle to him, and as he turned the corner of the Rue Fromentin, he saw her disappear in one of the first houses in the street. The door through which she had passed was not a private gateway, for it had only to be pushed to open. George Cransac knew well that swing door, which opens and shuts without noise, and which was surmounted by a lamp, upon which were painted these words, "Pawnbroking Establishment, Office Z." He had in his time been inside the place, where persons of social ranks meet and mix, and those who are in easy circumstances are not the least constant frequenters of it, for a pawnbroker's establishment is more obliging than a friend and never alludes again to the obligation that has been conferred. Contrary to the general opinion, the very poor are not those who have the most frequent recourse to it, for the simple reason that in order to borrow you must have something to pledge. The habitual frequenters are petty tradesmen, gay women of all classes, fast men, and gamblers. In these establishments, which have been greatly multiplied, the customers vary according to the quarter of the town in which it has been opened, and as the office in the Rue Fromentin is not far from the Rue Bréda, or the Place Pigalle, it is much frequented by actresses, and women of the middle circles of the world of gallantry. Cransac had in former times pledged his watch in order to furnish him with funds to go on the spree with, but of recent years his commission on Stock Exchange transactions had furnished him sufficient funds to lead a merry life, so he had almost forgotten the road to the "pop shop," and he was much surprised at seeing the woman he was following go in there. "The deuce," muttered he, between his teeth, "if that woman is my debtor my thousand francs have not gone very far, since

ten days after she has received them she has to pay a visit to 'her uncle.' This hardly coincides with her business-like idea of starting an artificial florist's shop, which she told me of at the café in the Boulevard Rochechouart." Then he began to wonder if this young girl, with the face of a poetess, whom he had saved from death, and destitution, was not, after all, a mere adventuress, who had invented a tale to extract money from him. But, on reflection, he made up his mind that this woman who had gone into the pawn office was not Cécile, and that he had lost his time in following some one utterly unknown to him.

But in order to set all his doubts at rest, he went in after her. The girl had gone straight into the public room instead of going in by the little door, upon which was painted in black letters, "Private entrance," disdaining to avail herself of the accommodation offered to well-dressed borrowers. Even in a pawn office there are certain social distinctions. Cransac imitated her, and saw that the room was full.

The winter months press heavily on poverty.

The room was of large size, but full of silence and sadness. It seemed like the entrance to some hospital, and no one felt an inclination either to laugh or gossip. Even the voices of the officials, as they mentioned the sums that could be lent, or the nature of the articles redeemed, hardly seemed to rise above a whisper. The borrowers answered in a low voice when the numbers were called, and the shamefacedness of destitution would have touched the heart of any rich man who might have come in to look about him. The unfortunate creatures pressed forward eager to get their business over, some carrying small objects in their hands, and others large bundles, which the assistants unpacked on the counter. There was no time lost in spreading out and valuing the articles of clothing, nor indeed in declining the pledge when it was insufficient to cover the value of the loan demanded. A woman would then draw back, her eyes swimming in tears, and all was over.

The office for the redemption of pledges was not so crowded as the other, and the formalities were not so tedious, as all that had to be done was to hand in the ticket and pay the money; unless, indeed, it had been

paid the evening before, and in that case it was even more simple an act. Articles which are not given up until the day after payment were handed over in exchange for a receipt for payment, which was the work of a moment. George, who had nothing either to pledge or to redeem, gazed in the crowd for the girl he had followed, but could not see her. Instead, however, he caught sight of a woman, poorly but neatly clad, who was arguing with one of the officials, who would not lend her more than five francs on a gold wedding ring. She had asked fifteen, but this was so much above the mark that they had handed it back to her, and she was leaving the place in despair with her head hanging on her bosom. Misfortune is the parent of selfishness, and the poor, needy creatures around her paid but little attention to her trouble. Scenes of this kind were of constant occurrence, and fresh ones took place every day, but George, who saw the tears start to her eyes, said to her in a low voice as she passed him: "That is your marriage ring, is it not?"

The woman seemed surprised, but managed to stammer out: "Yes, sir; but——"

"And your husband has deserted you. How many children have you?"

"Three," sobbed she; "and they have had nothing to eat since yesterday. The five francs they offered me here would give them bread for four days, but what would happen afterwards? I cannot get work——"

"What is your business?"

"I used to do knitting for the large houses, but I am so poor now, that they won't trust me with the wool, and I have no money to buy it.

"I know some one who will give you work," returned George, "and take this to go on with," and as he spoke he handed her a louis.

"I was not begging," faltered she.

"Nor am I giving you alms. You can return me the money from your earnings."

"If I were only sure of earning something——"

"I know a young lady who wants workwomen to make artificial flowers."

"But, sir, I don't know how to make them."

"She will teach you. Go to her from me, George Cran-

sac. Her name is Mdlle. Cambremer, and she lives at 22 Avenue Laumière."

The idea of sending this unhappy creature to Cécile had suddenly entered George's head, as a means of satisfying himself that the girl had spoken the truth respecting her workshop, which she was going to start again with the thousand francs which he had given her, and he was at the same time doing another good action, much more disinterested than the first one, for the poor creature who he had just assisted was neither young nor pretty. He received his reward much sooner than he had expected, and in an equally unlooked for manner. She thanked him with such enthusiasm that he had to raise his voice to beg her to moderate her expressions of gratitude, and his accents were recognized by a girl who was standing near the counter at which pledges are redeemed. She turned to look at him. It was Cécile. A vivid blush spread over her face as she recognized him, and she made a sign to him to wait for her until she had finished her business. George hastily disembarrassed himself of the women to whom he had shone so much kindness, and then quietly made his way to the passage outside the door. He was delighted to find that she had come to redeem and not to pledge; as he perceived when she approached him holding a little card board box in her hand. But this corridor was not a suitable place for an interview, and however pleased she might have felt at seeing him, and pleased she most certainly was, the place was to public to permit of her indulging in any open demonstrations. "I am so happy to see you," said she at length, "but I did not expect to find you here."

"I followed you from the Place Pigalle," answered George.

"I had just come from your house."

"I guessed as much, for I felt that it was you who had called yesterday.

"Yes, it was I. I came here to redeem a pair of earrings that my father had given me a month before his death, and which I had been obliged to pledge, and as your house was close by, I called and learnt from the porter that you had returned."

"And I was on my way to your house when I saw you a long way off."

"You were coming to see me! You had not forgotten me then?"

"I have never ceased to think of you; and since chance has brought us together again, I hope that wou will permit me to spend the day with you. We have so much to say to each other."

"Oh! yes; but I must first go back to Belleville. I have an order to get, and there is some work that I expect home."

"May I go to Belleville with you?"

"Certainly. How shall we go—by tram?"

"If you like; but why not have a cab?"

"Because I have no money to throw away in cabs. You paid for me once, and that is enough; and if we are to meet often, we must place matters on a proper footing. I shall be ever so much more pleased when I have paid off my debt to you," added Cécile, casting down her eyes.

"Oh! do not speak of that as if I were some tradesman who had given you credit. Do you only think of me as a creditor?"

"You are my best, or rather my only friend, and it is for that reason that I want money matters to be put on a proper footing between us. Suppose I were to tell you that since our first meeting I had made all sorts of projects, and had indulged in dreams which doubtless will never be realized?"

"Tell me what they were."

"No, not in this passage. I will tell you them at my own house, if you care to climb up five flights of stairs."

"I will climb up ten if you wish."

"Well then, let us go," cried the girl merrily.

They left the office together, and in the most innocent manner Cécile accepted George's arm, and were just in time to catch a tram in which there were two vacant places. There is not much comfort in talking in a public conveyance, where your neighbors can hear every word you say, but George made up for this by admiring at his ease Cécile's charming features. She pleased him even more than she had done on the night on which he had come to her aid. The character of her beauty had changed, and she had acquired a more life-like and mobile expression. It seemed as if the statue had been warmed into

life. Cécile seemed ready enough to talk, and during their ride, as they were unable to talk of their private affairs, she questioned her companion as to the poor woman whom he had assisted at the pawn office. "Do not laugh," said she, with a smile. "There is no necessity for hiding a good deed; I saw you slip something into her hand." And then, when she learned that Cransac had even without asking her given the poor creature her address, she thanked him warmly. "I will find her some work," added she; for she now guessed that George's idea in sending the poor woman to her was to make sure that she had really gone into business as she had promised she would.

CHAPTER X.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

They got out of the train at La Vallette, and still arm in arm walked down the Rue d'Allemagne. George knew very little of this part of town, in which stockbrokers are not likely to number many clients, but he permitted himself to be led on, only too happy to feel the young girl's heart beating against his arm. "We are getting near our destination," said she. "You are a long way now from the Rue Frochot, but you will not regret having taken all this trouble when I show you the pretty view that I have from my windows." A few moments afterwards as they reached the corner of the Avenue Laumière, Cécile, who had an eye for everything, remarked: "Have you noticed that horrible looking man walking behind us? It really seems as if he were following us." Cransac turned quickly round, and instantly recognized the keeper of the menagerie, the unscrupulous tool and instrument of Cornelian. George could hardly believe his eyes in recognizing at Belleville the ruffian that he had left behind amongst the booths in the Boulevard de Clichy. He had never noticed the fellow following him to the Place Pigalle, or that having hidden himself in a narrow passage facing the pawn office, he had again taken up the pursuit, and climbing on to the top of the tram, had got down upon its arrival at Belleville. This discovery made Cransac

feel rather uneasy, whilst Cécile, who did not know who the man was, could not suspect him of nourishing any evil designs against her. George, however, now knew that he had another enemy in the field; but he resisted the strong desire he felt to go up to the fellow and ask him why he was following him. And he was right for the street is free to everyone, and Cornelian's slave had as much right to be there as anyone else, and to insist on his going in another direction would have led to a scuffle, in which he might probably have been worsted. A quarrel, besides, would only have terrified Cécile, and it would be just as well for her to be left in ignorance of George's adventure with the Lion Queen, and so he did nothing except make up his mind that he would have an explanation with the attendant on the wild beasts, if he again crossed his path.

"Pooh," said he, affecting an air of perfect ease, "he has, I confess, a sinister look, and I daresay he lodges in the quarries in the Buttes Chaumont, but these fellows who live in the lime kilns don't attack people in broad daylight, and if he ventured to annoy you, here am I raedy to protect you."

"Oh!" replied the girl, "I am not at all afraid; besides, here we are, for this is my house." The house which she pointed out was the last one in the avenue, and consequently the next to the Park of the Buttes Chaumont, except the Town Hall of the working-men's quarter, and really offered a very handsome appearance, with its new frontage and its balconies at every floor. "You are astonished that I am living in such a fine house?" said Cécile, with a smile; "but it is to you that I am indebted for doing so. I had received notice because I had not paid up my rent; but with the money you lent me I saved my furniture, which was about to be sold, and what is more, I re-engaged my workpeople, and have now sufficient orders to occupy a dozen of them." They paused a moment before passing through the door, and noticed that the man was still following them but at a longer distance than before. Cécile, who was quite reassured regarding him, paid no more attention, but George asked himself if he would push his audacity so far as to enter the house with them. "I warned you that you would have rather a climb," said she, as she began to ascend

the staircase after receiving a respectful greeting from the porter, which was an excellent sign, for young ladies who do not lead regular lives are seldom treated with respect by these delegates of the landlord. George was well aware of this and consequently his confidence in Cécile increased. She had not exaggerated the number of the floors ; there were five all told, but fortunately the stairs were not very steep, and youth has good and active limbs.

George arrived at their destination without panting, and Cécile who had no servant, pulled a key out of her pocket and opened the door herself. Her lodging was composed of four rooms, all looking into the street, and the one into which she first introduced George could hardly be called a manufactory, for it was not large enough for workpeople, but rather the private workroom of an artificial florist, the wall covered with a grey paper, two straw-bottomed chairs, and a large table covered with all kinds of small objects, the use of which George was at a loss to understand. There was also a small brazier full of burning charcoal, some utensils containing pastes of different colors, a gum bottle and brush, packets of brass wire, fragments of straw-colored silk, scissors, a golfering iron, snippings of cambric, and a large box full of moss roses, ready to be sent out. As George cast an admiring glance at these last, Cécile remarked: "These are my making. I did them this morning."

"Will you give me one of them ?"

"Not one of those. I will make one especially for you; look at me at work."

"These are the stamens," said she, cutting off small ends of silk, which she fixed at the ends of the brass wires; "I dip them, as you see, in the gum to make them stiff, and then I dry them before the fire. There, now that they are dry, I moisten the tips with some of this paste, which is made of gum arabic and wheat flour, and then plunge it into this yellow tinsel. See, each little tip has picked up a grain of tinsel, and the heart of my rose is completed. The rose already begins to assume a shape."

"Yes; a butterfly could perch upon it."

"Oh ! no, butterflies know better than that. Now for the leaves of the calyx; I had them already cut out of a piece of green starched taffeta. There is nothing more to be done but to put them together."

"Upon my word, I don't know why people take the trouble to grow roses," answered George, with a laugh.

"I should be very sorry if they did not. I make artificial flowers, but I love real ones. Shall this one have buds? No, it would take too long. I have to sew up the kid after having filled it with gummed cotton wool; and now see, in order to finish it, I cover the wire that forms the stem with thread, and roll round it green ribbon paper. That is all; my rose is finished, and I offer it to you."

George took it, and kissed it.

"I hope you are not going to put it in your button-hole. An artificial flower there would be quite too funny."

"I will place it on my heart," replied he, putting it in his pocket-book, which was filled with the bank-notes that he had brought from London. Cécile blushed, but she hesitated to reply to this indirect declaration. "Come," said she after a pause, "and see the rest of my apartments; after that I will show you the view from my balcony, for I have a fine balcony."

"I am poor, and you are rich."

"Not so rich as you fancy."

"If you were not, how could you have lent me a thousand francs, when you knew nothing of me?"

"A man may have such a sum at his command and yet not have a large fortune. I gain money by my labor, the same as you do."

"Forgive me asking, but what is your business?"

"I was an outside operator on the stock exchange; now I am a pressman, or at least I am going to be one."

"A pressman!" repeated Cécile, sadly.

"Yes. Do you not like the idea?"

"Not much, for a literary man has, I believe, to live in a world where the charms of domestic happiness are but little appreciated."

"No, no, there is no necessity for that. Some literary men certainly lead a very irregular life, but I declare to you that I have no fancy for a Bohemian existence."

"Have you already tried it then?" asked Cécile, with a smile.

"Too much perhaps. I don't want to make myself out better than I am. You have spoken openly to me, and

so I will confess that I have been wild, and have often squandered my money. But can you wonder? I was young, and had not found a woman that I loved."

"Young! But what are you now?"

"But now that I have found one to lead me in the right path, I——." George hesitated and looked steadily at Cécile.

"If I could only believe you," sighed she.

"What can I do to convince you?"

"We must know each other better. What would you think of me if I at once told you that I loved you?"

"I should think that you had confidence in me, as I had in you."

"Thank you for thinking so well of me," returned Cécile, deeply moved. "If you always speak to me like that we shall one day be happy together. You know hardly anything of my past life, and I know nothing at all of yours."

"My past!—oh! I have had troubles like you."

"But the present, the future. How shall we live for one another? You, in the midst of a whirl of pleasure and excitement, and I kept here by the necessity of looking after my workroom: you in the Rue Frochot, I at Belleville."

"I can come and live close to you, for I have already given notice to quit my rooms."

"But you will not come to live in this part of the town; it would be too far from your paper."

"We could meet each other half-way."

"We should both of us lose the same amount of time."

"But, after all, I am not obliged to work for a living."

"Then I have guessed it: you are rich."

"And suppose I was; suppose that I had enough for two?"

"I could not share it with you."

At this firm reply Cransac hesitated, not knowing what to say or do, for whilst this conversation had been taking place his ideas had undergone a change, and he felt that illgotten money would not bring him good luck, nor even peace of mind, for his conscience would always reproach him with having accepted it, and that he would feel more at ease in earning his daily bread, now that he had found a woman to make him happy. Why should not the career of a journalist, in which Valbrec had offered to initiate

him, permit him to earn an honest livelihood by his pen, instead of using the ill-omened coin which had already caused him such trouble, since he was compelled to explain his change of circumstances by a series of falsehoods which were most difficult to sustain? Would it not be a thousand times better to again enter the right road, and withdraw from the dangerous course in which he had embarked? All that he had to do was to invent a fresh story, and tell his friend that the anonymous bequest had been revoked, and to put back in its hiding-place the sum that he had already taken out; and as for the amount he had spent, he could repay that out of his first earnings.

"You hesitate," said Cécile. "Was I not right, then, in not indulging in vain hopes?"

"You are wrong," replied George; "I was only trying you. But the obstacle you refer to does not exist; I am no richer than you are, and there is nothing to prevent us from leading a similar life. You have just said that you know but little of me. Well, put me to the proof. You shall know the life I lead, and when you have convinced yourself that I am not rolling in riches, you will perhaps let me speak to you of love."

Cransac spoke earnestly, but all at once he saw that Cécile was not listening to him.

"There he is again," said she, pressing closely to George.

"Who?"

"There in the street, the man who followed us.

Cransac looked down and recognized the fellow from the wild beast show, whose very existence he had forgotten, but whose reappearance did not surprise him at all.

"And suppose it should be the same man," said he. "Loafers are not very rare about here; the fellow has come for a stroll in the park here, and is on his way there. It is all natural enough."

"I do not know why the idea should enter my head, but I think he is watching us."

"What a strange fancy! See, he is some distance off now, and did not even raise his head as he passed under your balcony."

"Never mind, let us go in; will you?"

"I will do whatever you wish."

They re-entered the room, and Cécile closed the window. "You have not told me that I may love you," said George, gently.

"Do you think it necessary to obtain my permission to do so?" asked Cécile, with a smile.

"No, for I already love you without having asked your leave," returned George, briskly.

"I can believe you; for though I have not lived long in this world, I have learned that love comes one knows not how, and that we cannot prevent its springing up. Can a soldier in the battle-field avoid the fatal bullet?"

"Well, I have received that bullet, it has struck me full in the heart, and I shall die——"

"Unless I love you? You deceive yourself; such wounds are easily cured. I have got over mine, and you must not be surprised at my dreading love. I have suffered so much from it already."

"Take me on trial."

"What do you mean?"

"The most simple thing in the world. Let us be simple friends, until the day when you think fit to let love come on the scene; and let me first prove to you that I am not the man you think. To prove this, I must see you every day. You will say that your business takes up all your time. So does mine; but one does not work without cessation, and we shall each have some hours of liberty. Let us pass these together."

"I dread the fire," murmured Cécile; "I fear to be burnt!"

She first led him into the kitchen, which was also the dining-room, with a stove and its accessories in one corner, a walnut-wood dresser, scantily furnished with glasses and plates, some chairs that did not match, and a table covered with a piece of oilcloth. "I eat but little," said she, as an excuse for the poverty-stricken appearance of the surroundings; "but it is because I have but a small appetite, for now, thanks to you, I need deprive myself of nothing. Let us now go into my sitting-room; that is a little more presentable." It was indeed a charming little room, with four chairs, two armchairs, a clock supported by a figure, and candelabra of gilt bronze. It was just such furniture as you may see in the homes of small shopkeepers, or in the room behind the shop of a

third-class dressmaker, but brushed and kept in order with the most scrupulous neatness.

"That is all that remains to me of those happy days, when no one had disturbed my peaceful existence," murmured Cécile. "Those few articles of furniture are what I bought with my earnings, and I should have lost them had you not so generously come to my aid."

Cransac took good care not to say that they were hideous in his eyes, but he resolved to give her some others, for he already felt that he could not live without seeing her very frequently, and he had no desire to come and plant himself at the foot of the Buttes Chaumont.

"And now let us come out on my terrace," said she, pointing with her finger to the window that opened on to her balcony.

"Pardon me mademoiselle, but you have not yet shown me all your rooms; there is yet—'

"My bedroom! I have vowed that no man shall enter it."

"What, not even your best friend, as you called me just now?'

Cécile hesitated for a moment, then, throwing open the door, she permitted him to go in. It was a perfect school-girl's chamber; a little narrow bed with white hangings, a washstand, and tiny toilet table, a whatnot full of little ornaments of low value, some books in stained pine shelves, and a side table in imitation of Japanese work, comprised the whole of the furniture. Everything showed that the young girl led the strictest and purest of lives,

George, however, caught a glimpse of a photograph in a gilt frame placed on the side table, and without noticing the pained expression that rose to Cécile's face, he bent over to look at it. "But this is myself," said he seizing it in both his hands; "my portrait when I was younger. By what extraordinary chance—"

"No, it is not you," faltered Cécile, in great distress; "it is that of the man who resembles you."

"What, the man who treated you so cruelly; the man you took me for in the garden of the house in the Rue Gabrielle?"

"Do not speak of him," returned Cécile. "He is

nothing to me now, and I blush to think that I ever imagined I cared for him."

"Yes, yes, I believe you; but what a strange resemblance! Any one would swear that it was I who had posed before the camera of the photographer."

"Yes, he was very like you when that photograph was first taken; but since then he is greatly changed, so much so, that if you were to see him now you would not recognize him from this."

"I have no wish to do so," answered George coldly; "It is enough for me to have found his photograph in your room."

"It shall remain there no longer," murmured Cécile.

"What will you do with it?"

"I will destroy it, if you wish me to do so."

"I have no right to ask you to make such a sacrifice. You might think that I was jealous."

"No, for people are only jealous when they love."

"And you think that I do not love you. Why do you do so?"

"I think that I have gained your sympathy; but as to loving me as I wish to be loved, we are a long way from that."

George's face flushed; he replaced the portrait on the table, took Cécile's hands in his, and drew her towards him. "How would you wish to be loved?" asked he.

His eyes burned with passion, and Cécile felt that she must extinguish the fire that she had lighted. "I will tell you," murmured she calmly, "but not here." She loosed herself from his grasp, and opening the window, stepped out on to the balcony. She had understood the danger which threatened her in that chamber, where they were both alone together, and where she felt a strange indescribable feeling stealing over her, which might be the dual result of the promptings of the heart and the sudden development of the physical feelings, for George had pleased her more than she even ventured to confess to herself. He followed her on to the balcony, the advantages of which she had not exaggerated, for it commanded a magnificent view of all that portion of Paris, and besides was a safe refuge where she could be sure of not letting her senses overpower her. Open air cools passion, as daylight drives away spectres. "Listen to me," said

she, as soon as George was leaning over the balcony by her side. "I am no longer a child, and I have no false modesty; you know that, for have I not told you of my love for so unworthy an object? My ill-placed love has been cruelly punished, but if I were to swear to you that for such a reason I would drive away all love for the future, I should deceive you, and you would not believe my vow. I am only twenty-two years of age, and I lack the courage to look forward to a life of solitude and loneliness. But I feel that after the last cruel deception, I never could love a man until I knew his character completely. I therefore will choose carefully the man to whom I give my second love, and you would not, I am sure, insult me by suggesting that my choice should be dictated by interested motives."

"Oh! no, never," cried George, positively.

"The man that I should love would only have to love me, and to be my equal in position."

"What do you mean by your equal?"

"One who is like me in feelings, birth, and circumstances. The man who first inspired me with a feeling of love was a wretch whom I now despise more than I hate, and that will show you that I shall never see him again, for though hatred may be cured, contempt never can. What I ardently desire is one existence of two souls—not a mere worldly, daily life. No, no; let each work on his own account—I could not endure a life of idleness; let each one work for the means of living, so that independence may be preserved. We shall unite our love, our griefs and our joys together. We shall have but one heart, as an old song ran which I used formerly to know, but we shall have two abodes."

"Those are precisely my sentiments," answered George, with a smile.

"Yes, it is my dream—the dream of which I spoke before, but which, I fear, will never come to pass."

"It only depends upon you."

"Yes, I know; but then I am not your equal."

"You are; for I have no relations, and am as much alone in the world as you are."

"We can pass them in public. Do you like the theatre?"

"Very much, indeed."

"Well, there is nothing easier for me than to get tickets through my paper, which I hope that you will not refuse; and as you cannot go alone——"

"You will escort me! Oh! that will be delightful."

"That is all I ask. When shall we begin?"

"Soon; but I shall require a few days to install myself in my new workroom; and when that is done, I shall have more liberty."

"And you will keep your evenings for me; how can I thank you enough? But, until then, I shall see you——"

"When you like!"

"Where—here, or at my rooms?"

"I should prefer your rooms. I want to prove to you that I have unlimited confidence in you, and then, though you will call me childish, I want to see how you live."

"Speak out, and say that you want to see if I am rich!" answered George, with a laugh. "But reassure yourself; my rooms are not much larger and finer than yours. I will keep them until you tell me to move, and when I do, it will be to come closer to you!'

"Oh! distance is nothing. I am accustomed to omnibus riding. All I want to know is, at what hours I shall be certain to find you?"

"Whatever hours will suit you."

"And how about your paper?"

"I am not yet permanently established in it, and so do not yet know how my time will be occupied; but you will permit me to call to-morrow, and let you know?"

"I am going out to-morrow morning, but I shall be in all the afternoon, and shall expect you."

"Then you agree to the trial?"

"I do, and as a proof of my sincerity, listen. I promised that I would destroy this portrait, but I feel that I have not the courage. Take it, and do so yourself!"

George took it, and kissed the pretty hand that presented it to him. He had not counted on this sacrifice which Cécile had spontaneously made, and he would certainly not have dared to ask it; but he thoroughly appreciated the delicacy of sentiment that had inspired it, and he accepted it as a happy omen for the future of his love.

He was jealous too of the man who had first made an impression on Cécile's heart, and vowed that he would, if ever he came across him, treat him as he deserved; and he had a sort of an idea that this man who resembled him so much was his double who had presented the forged check, and, therefore, he decided to keep the portrait with a view to making further inquiries. And now there was nothing for it but to take his leave, for it would have been ill-advised on his part to prolong his visit, and he would have died sooner than raise the suspicions of an honest girl, who had trusted in his honor.

She did not endeavor to detain him, and he left her, with a thousand joyous visions dancing through his brain, and leaving his heart behind him. He hardly knew himself, so much had his notions changed in the brief space of a few hours. When he left the Grand Hotel that morning he had determined to carry on a war to the knife against all those who had treated him so cruelly, and to use for that purpose the bequest made to him by his next door neighbor in the prison. He had thrust aside all his scruples, and the hateful legacy was no longer a burden on his conscience. The wise advice of Valbrec had caused him a little anxiety, in opening his eyes to the dangers of his equivocal position, but he had never seriously thought of stopping short in the perilous road upon which he was proceeding; and, yet, a few words from Cécile Cambremer had upset all his previous resolves. He entirely forgot his enemies, his plans of revenge, and even Cornelian, who threatened him with her dangerous love. He only thought of Cécile, and that sweet and happy existence of which she had permitted him to catch a glimpse. He had not wished to listen to the voice of his conscience, and yet he had not been able to stifle it entirely. He had argued to himself that he was at perfect liberty to use this money to do good to the unfortunate who had been cruelly persecuted by destiny; but now the scales had fallen from his eyes, and, though blinded by a momentary evil impulse, he saw the correct road of duty. This vast amount of gold must belong to some one and he had no right to dispose of it, even in works of charity. It was natural that he should feel unwilling to denounce the robber who had trusted in him, but that

need not prevent his seeking for the person who had been plundered. The disappearance of so large a sum must have caused some sensation at the time of the robbery, and no doubt the papers of that date would have mentioned the occurrence. All that he had to do, then, was to go through them carefully, and see if there was any narrative of the breaking into, and emptying of a safe by some daring burglars, and if he could find out all about it, all that he would have to do would be to inform the victims of the robbery, or their heirs, of the existence of the treasure in the Rue Gabrielle. In order to do this he need not even give his name, as an anonymous letter would serve the purpose.

He need not even put back the money he had taken from the hiding-place, for, doubtless, the exact amount of the sum was unknown, and even if it were the owners would certainly not be surprised at finding a certain deficiency in it which he could afterwards replace, by sending it to them anonymously, without running any risk. Then he would have no more feelings of anxiety, no more pangs of remorse; he would no longer be entangled in a web of falsehood, and would be freed from the necessity of making any more nocturnal visits to the Hill of Monmartre. Instead of living like a millionaire, he could lead an honorable existence on the results of his work, and so prove himself worthy of the brave and true-hearted girl whose acquaintanceship he had made. In order to keep his promise to her, he must take the position on the paper, which Valbrec had offered him, and he hoped that he would do well in it. He had no doubt regarding his ability to fill it, for George had a fairly good opinion of himself. These thoughts occupied the whole of the time consumed in his return from the Avenue Laumière, and recurred to him again and again during the remainder of the day.

CHAPTER XI.

A STUMBLE ON THE THRESHOLD.

George had now made up his mind to accept Valbrec's proposal, and at the appointed time began to dress himself for the dinner at which he was to meet his future colleagues. He took so much time over his toilet that by the time he arrived they had already sat down to dinner. He found half a dozen merry fellows seated round the board, two of whom he knew as professed men about town. All the others belonged to the world of journalism. There was a retailer of the doings of society, Valbrec, a political writer, a theatrical critic, and an advertising agent, who was not the least important personage of the party. Valbrec received George with enthusiasm, and all gave him a hearty welcome, though everyone was well acquainted with his little misadventure. But it was the lucky heir to a large fortune that they were now greeting, for Valbrec had told them all; and though they might, like his comrades on the Stock Exchange, have turned their backs on him had his circumstances remained as they were, yet their utmost respect was given to the million which he was reported to have brought over from England.

George could have dispensed with their congratulations, which he now felt, since his last resolve, were rather ill-timed, but it was necessary to endure them, and he made up his mind that during dinner he would tell them that, in spite of this money, he was determined to pursue the profession of a journalist."

"My dear fellow," said Valbrec, when the introduction had been completed, "can you do without soup?"

"Easily."

"Good; because it has just been taken away. You are two bottles of champagne behind us, and must try and catch us up."

"Fill my glass," answered George, gaily; and when this was done, he drained it at a draught, and was soon in a fit disposition to hold his own with the others, who were not men to let the evening pass in dullness and

melancholy. The conversation became general, and the most serious subjects were treated with sceptical sarcasm. George was quite able to join in this conversation, for his experience on the Stock Exchange had taken away his regret for most things.

To his great amusement they laid bare, in a few biting words, the characters of the celebrities of the day, political, literary, or any sort whatever, and he took a prominent part in the exchange of cutting remarks regarding them.

After a day of intense excitement wine soon gets into the head, and the tongue moves freely. George's remarks became so witty that at last the theatrical critic observed: "What a pity it is that you are so rich! You were born to write the weekly echoes of the day."

"I ask nothing better," returned George, "and I look to my friend Paul to find me a place on his paper."

"Whenever you like, my dear fellow," returned Valbrec. "You have but to say the word. I don't think that you would make a figure in the heavier lines, but I am sure that the lighter ones would suit you to a hair."

"A man is always successful who has plenty of money," said the advertising agent."

"If," said the political writer, "I were a millionaire, like M. Cransac, instead of scribbling for other papers, I would start one of my own, and be the editor."

"With yourself as sub-editor," retorted Valbrec. "Don't listen to him George, my boy, and be content with writing the skits that suit you. I do not think that you have much ambition, and you will be all the more comfortable from having no responsibility, Do you want a subject? Here is one. Why should you not start with one on Mazas?"

"A capital idea,' said the theatrical critic.

"You must commence it by a violent attack upon the present system of prison discipline," remarked the leading article writer.

"I should simply narrate what I saw," said George, who was a little annoyed at the allusion to his recent adventure; "but I will take good care to mention the kind of reception I received on the Exchange after I came out."

"The Stock Exchange fellows are a regular set of curs,

Now that you have money to invest they will wait outside your door for hours, so as to gain a little brokerage."

"Talking of investments," said Valbrec, "are you still resolved to buy a house?"

"I have not quite made up my mind yet," stammered George, who did not like to mention his new plans before the present company.

"If you do decide, I can tell you of a fine opportunity. Juliet, your old flame, is quite smashed up. Her house in the Rue Jouffroy is for sale, and will go for a song. It would be funny for you to take possession of it, after her creditors had turned her out. She played you a nice trick, so it would be a sweet bit of revenge."

"A bad lot, that Juliet," remarked the theatrical critic. "She has brought ill-luck to all her lovers."

"Don't you buy," said the advertisement agent. "Much better build. I know of a splendid site to be sold very cheap, and in a splendid position, on the Butte Montmartre."

"That isn't a fashionsble locality," interposed the political writer. "You must have an interest in the property, dear boy, and want to make commission."

"Nothing of the kind. M. Cransac would have a splendid view, and there would be something original in the idea of establishing himself there. He would be different from everybody else, and, in addition, I know an architect who would undertake to build a charming house there at a moderate cost.

George had picked up his ears at the mention of the name Montmartre, but he did not for a moment imagine that the spot in question was the garden in the Rue Gabrielle.

"Gentlemen, you are most wearisome, talking about real property and estate to people who have not a halfpenny to buy them with. I would as soon read the advertisement columns in the papers as listen to you. If M. Cransac wants to become a house proprietor, let him go to his notary and consult him. Let us talk about women; it will be far more amusing."

"Talk about women? Why, what else have we done since we sat down to dinner?"

"Don't you talk. Is it because you mentioned Juliet Taupier? Well, she dosen't count, because she has

gone to the wall. Peace be to the memory of a fallen star. Well, well, I only occupy myself with rising stars, and I know one that will draw all Paris to her."

"Where will they be drawn to?"

"To the theatre of the Porte Saint Martin where she is coming out."

"As a dancer?"

"No, as a tamer of wild beasts. She does the lion and tiger business, and fetches the men besides. She is the finest girl I have ever seen."

"Where does she hang out?"

"Just now she is on show in the Boulevard de Clichy."

"I know her," cried Valbrec. "It is Cornelian. What do you say, Cransac?"

"If you have seen her you will agree with me that she is a magnificent creature, and will be a wonderful draw at the theatre. In my next article I propose to give her a notice that will make her go like anything."

"You are in her good graces then?"

"Suppose I told you that I have just come from seeing her, and that I narrowly missed bringing her here to dinner this evening?"

"With all her beasts? No, thank you."

"Not with her beasts, but in her tunic and her fleshings; and I tell you she is shaped like the huntress Diana."

"Brébant would not have let her come in, in that rig-out."

"Well why didn't you bring her after all?"

"Because she had a show on at ten o'clock. I entreated her to come in afterwards, but she pretended that she had an appointment at midnight."

"With the Hercules of the North, or the Rampart of Montpellier?"

"I don't know. I think she has a lover in that class; but that won't prevent her being the pet of all the mashers when she comes out. I tell you that she will cause a perfect furor."

George knew more than they did about this new wonder, and congratulated himself with not having met her at dinner, for had he done so he was sure that she would have begun her game over again, and he was more than ever resolved to repulse the advances of a woman who was evidently unfettered by the slightest feelings of mod-

esty. On the whole he was rather disgusted that both her name and Juliet's should have come up at table. He wished to blot out the past; and it seemed as if all the men with whom he was dining had conspired to remind him of it. Each of them, he noticed, was working for his own interests; the theatrical critic was raving of the beauties of a girl he wished to push on; the political writer wanted him to start a paper, for the sake of getting the post of sub-editor; and the advertisement agent sought to sell a plot of land in order to gain his commission. But not one of them seemed surprised that Cransac was desirous, in spite of his recent accession to wealth of entering the profession of literature, for he still persisted in keeping to the honorable course he had resolved on, of earning his bread by toil, and not touching the stolen money, a portion of which was even then in his pocket. He had now come across a portion of society who accepted him with all his antecedents, and not one of whom doubted the fact that he had been the victim of a judicial error. This reflection soothed him, and restored the equilibrium of his mind. The end of the dinner was even gayer than the beginning, and George showed that he was made of different stuff from the brokers with whom he had until now been in the habit of associating. George held his own with the most brilliant amongst the conversationalists, and one of the company proposed to consecrate his entrance into the world of letters by pouring some champagne on his head. George, upon whom the wine had taken some effect, submitted to this burlesque ceremony with patience, but even amidst all these follies he did not forget Cécile Cambremer. It seemed to him so sweet to call up the remembrance of the poor workgirl, who was so entirely unknown to the merry band assembled round the table and who seemed to him to know everyone. These thoughts were passing through his mind when the name of the Marquis de Simancas struck upon his ear, and the man himself referred to in not the most respectful terms. This grand foreign nobleman, according to them, passed his time in dabbling in speculations, and in running after the daughters of the lower ranks of Parisians.

George, who was still incensed against the marquis for his reception of him, was not at all displeased to hear that the conduct of his former customer was by no means

irreproachable, but the idea never crossed his mind that Simancas might one day endeavor to dazzle with his colossal fortune the fair florist of the Avenue Laumière.

It is impossible to foresee everything.

A meeting like the present one could not be suddenly cut short, and about eleven o'clock the advertising agent proposed to end it by a game of écarté. George ought now to have left, but he was fond of cards, and had drank enough to prevent his being cautious. He therefore remained, so as not to give offence to his new friends, and he did not like to refuse when he was informed that in his capacity as a capitalist it had been decided that he should engage all the other players. The money that he was thus compelled to risk was not his own but he considered that he might make use of it temporally. The money which he had taken from the convict's store had already been dipped into, and he was not in a position to refund it in its entirety, so he had effected a compromise with his conscience, by which he was to pay back the sum he had borrowed at a later date. He had brought from London something like seventeen thousand francs, which he had about him in notes of the Bank of France. He might just as well, he thought, risk one, in the hopes of gaining three or four, which would at once enable him to repay the full sum borrowed from the unknown owner of the treasure. There is a proverb that says, "Hell is paved with good intentions," and this saying generally proves true. The card table had been placed in one corner of the large room in which they had been dining, and in sitting down to play George had expected that the stakes would be moderate. Generally journalists are not overburdened with cash, and he therefore expected that the stakes would not exceed a few louis. He therefore took from his pocket book a note for a thousand francs, which ought, in his opinion, to be sufficient to cover the stakes, and in doing so, he unfortunaty permitted the others to see that there were many more left in the book. This was enough to induce them to make a combined attack on him. The wary Valbrec put down twenty francs, the political writer did the same, but the advertising contractor began with five louis, and the two other men risked two each. George's self-respect induced him to accept all the bets, and he soon won a game from

Valbrec, who gave up his place to the theatrical critic, who was not more fortunute. His run of luck continued, and he encountered all his opponents with the same good fortune. After the sixth game he had two thousand francs before him, without counting his own bank-note which he had thrown down. He was in imagination, on his way to the Rue Gabrielle, and resolved that very night to put back the money he had taken, and so set his conscience at rest. He made up his mind that he would win five thousand francs, which would leave him two thousand to go on with after he had made the restitution. Three games more brought his gains up to four thousand, and he was strongly tempted to stop there. "Faith, my dear fellow." said Valbrec, who had lost three hundred francs, "you are too lucky. I shan't try any longer to get back my money, and shall go to bed. Good night all. When you leave, tell them to send me the bill, as I have stood the dinner. George fancied that Valbrec was giving him a hint and prepared to rise from his seat, but was stopped by a chorus of maledictions which rose up against the runaway who was setting so bad an example. "All you have to do now is to take away M. Cransac,' growled the advertisement agent. "Why don't you advise him to make off with his winnings, whilst you are about it?"

"If I were in his place, I should go away," returned Valbrec, calmly; "but he is at perfect liberty to remain."

And so Cransac stayed, though he was most anxious to go away. The game went on but not with the same results. The advertisement agent took the cards, and fickle fortune, veered round at once, for he began to gain immediately. The last game had cost George seventy-five louis. "Will you go a hundred louis?" asked one of the players. Then, as George hesitated, he went on: "If you don't accept, I will take your place; that is the rule." George accepted the bet, and lost. All his winnings had gone, and he must either retire from the field or dip more deeply into the contents of his pocket book. He did so, and the reverse became a total defeat; his banknotes flew across the table like routed soldiers retreating before the enemy. His store grew less, and less, and his adversaries continued to increase their stakes, so that after a last loss of five hundred louis, George found that he had lost all

he possessed. He need not have ceased playing, for his opponents would have permitted him to go on on credit, but he would not do so, for he already owed the advertisement agent five thousand francs, just the sum he had hoped to gain. A gleam of good sense flashed across his brain, and he rose up from the table. His creditor in honeyed accents besought him to take all necessary time to pay his debt in, but he at the same time took good care to give him his address, so that the unlucky gamester could send him the money within the twenty-four hours. The others had divided the rest of the seventeen thousand francs amongst them, and George found himself exactly in the same position that he had been on leaving Mazas. The money belonging to his prison-mate had not done him much good. Certainly it had been ordained that all his good resolutions should vanish in smoke. After this well-deserved disaster he had nothing to do but to apply himself once again to the accursed source from which he had drawn the first portion of his wealth, although he had vowed not to go back again except to replace what he had taken away. He could resign himself to endure misery and privation, but he could not endure the thought of being the debtor of a man who had some position on the paper on which he was about to be engaged, and he dared not extricate himself from his embarrassments by telling the whole truth to Valbrec.

As he went forth into the street, with the chill feeling of despair and death clutching at his heart, he murmured:

"I had resolved to become an honest man, but fate prevents me. I will pay another visit to Montmartre."

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNHOLY COMPACT.

Whence come all these wealthy foreigners, furnished with sonorous titles, who alight every year in Paris, like the locusts do in the Algerian harvests? Where have they obtained their millions and their rank? Have they been formerly pirates, or only simple slave dealers? Have they escaped from some penal colony beyond the seas, and assumed a new identity like the convict Coignard, who was received at the Court of Louis XVIII, under the name of Count Pontis de Saint Hélène. In Paris no one is suspicious of anyone who has plenty of money. People highly placed in society treat them as adventurers, but accept invitations to their parties. Tradesmen endeavor to gain their custom, and the regular Parisian cad admires them immensely. It is only the people, the real people, who estimate them at their true worth, and who shrug their shoulders when they see them roll past in their gaudy carriages. The people thoroughly understand their insolent pursuit of their daughters, and look upon the luxury that they flauntingly display as an insult to honest poverty. The worst of all are those who dabble in speculation, and who often rob the unwary with the most perfect impunity, as when the speculation turns out badly all that they have to do is to put the sea between their dupes and themselves.

M. de Simancas was a magnificent specimen of the Transatlantic adventurer. He had one day dropped on Paris with the suddenness of an aerolite, and had resided there for the last three years without anyone knowing anything at all regarding his past. He gave himself the title of marquis, and pretended that he had served in some portion of the world with the rank of general, and some persons were polite enough to believe his statement. Every now and then he would give a splendid ball at his house in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, to which many would go who would not have received their host in their own house, and he had become one of those Parisian celebrities whose daily doings are recorded by the Press; but his private history, which many would have liked to learn, was still

wrapped in impenetrable mystery. If the truth must be told he had really come to Paris to do business—that is, to get hold of other people's money; and he only loved two things in this world: money and women—more especially money. Women held a secondary place, though in his pursuit of them he allowed no obstacles to stand in his way. He behaved himself in Paris like a bandit chief in a town that his band had taken by assault, and every strategem by which he could gratify his whims was legitimate. He had commenced by making the acquaintance of all the ladies of the half world, but growing wearied of these easy successes, he sought for other fields in which the victory could be achieved by cunning or violence. To tempt a married woman to forget her duties to her husband, to profit by pecuniary distresses to buy a child from an unworthy mother, to draw into a trap a virtuous work-girl, were some of the pleasures that he most preferred. He loved evil for its own sake, and he had more than once lent money to persons in embarassed circumstances, so that he might have the pleasure of hunting them down with unflinching pertinacity. It was his natural vileness of disposition that had prevented his testifying publicly to George Cransac's innocence; and his reason for giving his evidence before the examining magistrate was that he always kept on good terms with the law, for he hated the young man for having once or twice refused to mix himself up in shady transactions, when he had endeavored to make him his tool, and he wanted some one who was less scrupulous.

In appearance Don Manuel de Simancas was a handsome man, with hair, beard, and moustache as black as jet, and eyes of flame. He did not seem to be more than five and forty years of age, but he may have been over fifty. He was a careful dresser, and his manner was of that haughty character which impresses the uninitiated, and some ladies who judge by outward show might have been captivated by him. The house which he purchased on his arrival in Paris was, like its master, extremely fine, and the cage was worthy of the bird ; gilded reception rooms, cosy private apartments, all furnished with the greatest luxury ; summer and winter gardens, magnificent stabling—nothing was wanting. The life of this mighty aristocrat was mapped out with all the regularity of an

official ceremony. The morning was devoted to business. M. de Simancas received his agents and financiers, and gave orders for his operations on the Stock Exchange, when he declined to show himself. At three he went out driving or riding. The remainder of his time he gave up to enjoyment, and he varied these pleasures by luxurious dinners at a restaurant, choice parties in his house, or expeditions in search of some beauty of whose charms he had been informed by his emissaries.

The day after the night which had turned out so disastrously for George M. Simancas was talking to two or three outside operators when his valet brought him a card, upon which was inscribed the name of Juliet Taupier. She was an old friend of the Marquis de Simancas, this ill-conditioned woman who insulted her lovers after plundering them. He had made her acquaintance upon his first arrival in Paris, and had contributed somewhat to the position that she had attained; but he soon grew weary of her, though he saw her occasionally to gain from her some intelligence regarding the new stars that had rizen on the horizen of the world of Bohemia, and information regarding which she was able to furnish. Simancas was ignorant that George Cransac had been one of her lovers; indeed, he had no curiosity regarding the life she led since his leaving her. She had come to see him thus early in order that she might be certain to find him in, and to take him by surprise, so that he might not refuse to receive her. As he imagined that she might have come to announce the discovery of some marvel of youth and beauty, he told his valet to usher her into his study. It was a long time since Juliet had been admitted to the more private apartments of the house, and she entered the room timidly, with the air of an ex-favorite, who felt that her charms will not be sufficient to reconquer the heart of her former lord. The marquis received her without rising from his arm-chair, in which he was smoking a cigar. It appeared as if he wished to humiliate her, for he treated her like a tradesman. And yet Juliet was very pretty, with her golden hair, her fair complexion, and great blue eyes; but the voluptuary was tired of her, and only appreciated fresh faces, as she knew well enough.

"Well," said he, roughly, "so here you are. I expect that you have a proposal to make."

"Two," answered Juliet, not in the least disconcerted.

"Two are too much at one time."

"No, they are not, for they are of different kinds. I have come to recommend a friend of mine to you, who may be very useful to you, and to speak to you about a charming woman."

"One of your friends," answered Simancas. "Who can that be?"

"My lover."

"Well, what am I to do with that gentleman?"

"Whatever you like; he is good at everything."

"What, even to taking a message to a lady. Thank you, I only employ ambassadresses for that kind of work, and I find you sufficient."

"Arthur doesn't get his living that way."

"Arthur!—a pretty name for the business. Well, how does he get his living?"

"He understands all kinds of business. I don't know yours, marquis, but I know that in great financial operations you have sometimes need of an intelligent young fellow not overburdened with scruples, for there are certain things that people do not care to do themselves, and Arthur would act for you much better than the brokers' clerks to whom you entrust your commissions, and who often make a mistake by carrying out your orders literally."

"You are right; I am sick of these outside operators I employed one lately, who got shut up in Mazas, and who had the impertinence to come to me and ask for a certificate of his innocence."

"That was a fellow named George Cransac, was it not?"

"Just so; do you know him?"

"Very little; he is not a very reputable lot. Arthur would not have got into such an ugly scrape. Try him, marquis, and I am sure that he will suit you."

"You don't keep this Arthur of yours very well, since he is obliged to work," remarked M. de Simancas in the most contemptuous tone."

"I don't keep him; but if he has any money, he would share it with me, and times are bad just now, for I haven't a rap."

"What! you who used to live in such grand style?"

"In your time, yes; but generous noblemen like you are rare, and since you left me I have gone down hill fast, and now I think that I am at the bottom of it, for my furniture has been seized, and I owe money on all sides."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Simancas, licking his lips like a tiger who smells fresh flesh; "so you have tasted a bit of poverty's meal."

To see any one suffer, more especially a woman, was a rich treat for him.

"Well, my girl," said he, "you haven't come to the end of your troubles yet. In your line of business, when you once begin going down you don't stop in a hurry. We shall soon see you looking for gallants in the Folies Bergères."

"Well, if it comes to that, I shan't grumble; but I had rather go into housekeeping with my Arthur, and that is why I ask you to make some use of his talents, and time presses, for my house has been seized as well."

"What! your place in the Rue Jouffroy?"

"Alas! yes, and I was so comfortable there, and to think that I shall be reduced to take rooms like a mere beginner, and must pay my rent weekly. Ah! if you would only buy my house, instead of letting it be sold by auction for half of what it cost me."

"And of what use would such a place be to me?"

"Why you might keep a pretty girl there. Oh! not me, I know all that is over, but I can tell you of one who is worth a good house, and something over.

"Oh, so that is what you come for, my poor Juliet; you have lost your time. I have had enough of setting up hussies in houses."

"But this one is virtue itself."

"Then she is an imposter who wants to make capital out of her pretended good conduct."

"She is not what you imagine at all. She is a young woman of good berth, and well educated, who works for her living because she has no fortune, and is not at all on the lookout for a protector. If I spoke about a house, it is because I am looking forward to the future. Just now you might offer her your own house, and she wouldn't

look at it, but later on she may not be so particular. It is the first step that will be the most difficult."

"And has not that been taken already?"

No; and to tell you the truth I don't think she will take it of her own accord."

"Well, and suppose that to be the case?"

"A man of your character, marquis, always gains his object; in the end she will yield half willingly and half against her will."

"Yes, and blackmail me afterwards. Thanks, but I don't want to have any trouble with the police. The game is not worth the candle, as the saying is here."

"You would not talk like this if you had seen her."

"Is she so very beautiful then?"

"More so than any one you have ever met."

"Fair, or dark?"

"Dark as the night, with the tint and warmth of a creole."

"That is the style that I prefer. Is she tall?"

"Rather, but not excessively so. Suberb shoulders, a bust of marble, and a waist that you can span."

"Well, and what sort of hands and feet?"

"The feet of a child, the hands of a duchess."

"And her voice?"

"As clear as silver: one of those voices which stir up a man's soul."

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-one.

"Of full age, that is a guarantee against any criminal proceeding. But you will never persuade me that a girl of that age——"

"I will answer for her being strictly virtuous."

"I don't think much of your responsibility, but if her other qualities are such as you described, and I find that you have not exaggerated them——but a work-girl, why her fingers must be all pricked with the needle."

"They are not, and for the excellent reason, that she is not a seamstress. She gives out and superintends the work, but never soils her hands with it. I tell you that she is perfection; a veritable pearl."

"And in what gutter of Paris have you found this same pearl?"

"Not in a theatre, nor in a restaurant, nor by the lakes

in the Bois de Boulogne. She lives as retired a life as a sister of charity."

"Where does she live?" I must know that; for, as you can imagine, I don't put unlimited confidence in you. I must see her before going further in the matter."

"That is only fair; she lives at Belleville."

"At Belleville!" exclaimed M. de Simancas; "and do you think I am going to Belleville to look at her?"

"Certainly not. I know that the Marquis de Simancas could not put himself out to look for an artificial florist; besides, it would most likely spoil the whole affair."

"Then we must remain where we are, for I can't buy a pig in a poke."

"You are quite right; but she shall come to you."

"What! will this excessively virtuous girl spare me the trouble of such a journey? That is what I call a most convenient style of virtue. My good girl, I believe that your pretended find is all humbug, and if you have nothing more to say to me——"

"Permit me to explain matters, I beg of you. She will come, but she will not know whose house it is that she has visited."

"I don't understand you."

"And yet it is very simple. She has an artificial flower business, and receives orders every day. Suppose a foreign lady wrote to her to order some, which are to be sent to America, don't you think that she would hurry off to the address, which might turn out to be yours?"

"Do you think that I would compromise myself by writing to the girl?"

"I will write the letter, and sign my name to it; an English one would be the best. Choose your day and time, and I will answer for it that she will be punctual."

"Very good. We will say that she comes, and then ——"

"Then; why then, marquis, the rest concerns you and no one else. Tell your valet to show her into the little house at the end of the garden, and once there she won't come out again without your leave. If you don't fancy her you can tell her that she has made a mistake, or that some one has hoaxed her; that there is no English lady residing here, and that you have no need of artificial

flowers; but I am not afraid of that, for when once you have seen her you will be in no hurry to let her go."

"Do you think that she will consent?" asked the marquis, after a short silence.

"Of course not; but there, that is your affair, and she will doubtless console herself as others have done. A few banknotes heal all such troubles; there are certain things which a woman does not like to make public, and she is not one of the other sort, I assure you."

The marquis paused, and reflected before he made any reply. Steeped in vice as he was, he was extremely careful, and he hesitated to plunge into a dangerous adventure. But the portrait which Juliet had drawn was still in his mind, and the thought that he might succeed in spite of every obstacle roused his passions, and then the wickedness of the whole thing was like piquant sauce to his jaded passions. "Very well," said he. "Write as Mrs. Acton, that is my housekeeper's name. I will give my servants their orders, and all will be ready."

"That is right!" exclaimed the vile woman. "Had you hesitated to profit by so favorable a chance, I should have thought Don Manuel de Simancas had greatly changed for the worse; but now my mind is at rest, and after to-morrow you will thank me warmly."

"Say rather what you mean, and that is that I should make you a handsome present."

"Oh! I rely entirely on your generosity, marquis. All I ask of you is to do something for my Arthur."

"Let your Arthur go to the deuce. I don't know him, and I don't want to."

"Only consent to see him; that will not in any way bind you, and he can best explain to you himself in what way he can be useful to you."

"You are very pertinacious. Let him come to me to-morrow at eleven o'clock; only I tell you plainly that if he doesn't suit me, out he goes."

"I agree to that."

"At any rate, you can take this with you," added the marquis, opening a drawer, and taking out a bank-note for a thousand francs, and throwing it to Juliet, who pounced on it at once, and putting it in her bosom was bursting into a flood of thanks, which the marquis cut short, and dismissed her without any ceremony.

If M. de Simancas had been able to follow her with his eyes he would have seen an amusing sight.

Arthur was waiting for his fair friend on a bench in the Avenue de Bois de Boulogne, but as soon as he saw her coming he rose from his seat, and sauntered in the opposite direction, knowing that she would speedily follow him, and he had no desire to meet her almost under the windows of the marquis. Juliet came up with her well-matched lover, some fifty yards from the Rue Pergolèse.

"Well?" asked Arthur.

"I had some trouble in making him listen to me, but I managed it at last. He will see the girl at five o'clock to-morrow, so I have no time to lose in writing to the little prude."

"Did you say anything about me?"

"Yes, and that was a far harder matter; but he promised to see you to-morrow morning."

"Good; all I want is to see him."

"I am glad that you are satisfied, but what is the business that you are going to propose to him?"

"My dear, that is my lookout. I have one that he will snap at, I am certain."

"You might tell me all about it."

"No good. Women don't understand these matters. Your line is to decoy the girl into the trap, and when she is there, we will see what more we can make out of the foreign swell."

"We will get all we can, by threatening to report the matter to the police."

"It was my idea to bait the hook with the girl, and it was a golden one. No more Queer Street then, and I shall be able to do business on a grand scale, and leave off little swindles."

"If you make a fortune, you will owe it to me, and I shall expect my share."

"Of course, of course," answered Arthur; but there was none of that heartiness in his tone that bears conviction with it.

"And also that you won't leave me for another girl."

"Come, come, no jealousy. It appears to me that I have given you proofs. You were always telling me that I had a hankering after Cécile, and it was to shut your mouth

that I showed you the way to throw her into the clutches of Simancas."

"A question of money, not of sentiment," replied Juliet, who had fathomed the baseness of her lover s disposition.

"Did I make a fuss about you and your George," retorted Arthur.

"You know I only cared about his money, and now he hasn't got one coin to rub against another."

"But he has friends in the literary world, and may pick himself up again."

"Never, he is too great a fool; besides, after the way in which I treated him at Montmartre, he won't be too anxious to come across me again."

Arthur did not care to be reminded of the slap in the face he had received at that meeting, and therefore cut short his mistress' discourse.

"Will you get anything out of the marquis for your information?"

"Not a rap, my dear. The marquis is as artful as Old Nick. He pays well when he is well served, but he doesn't come down in advance."

Arthur said no more, but Juliet could see plainly that he did not believe her, and she determined, upon her arrival at home, to hide her banknote carefully, so that it might not be found by the fellow whom she termed her real lover, probably because neither of them had an idea what real love meant.

Their interesting conversation had carried them as far as the Place de l'Etoile, and, as the funds were low, they were about to take the omnibus, at the entrance of the Avenue Wagram, which passes down the Avenue Villiers, close by the Rue Jouffroy, when they saw a woman in an open carriage disputing with her coachman in the middle of the street. "Look there!" cried Juliet; "talk of the devil, etc. Why, there is the wild beast girl, that threw her whip at Cransac."

"Well, what of that? I don't suppose you want to speak to her," said Arthur, endeavoring to draw his fair companion in an opposite direction.

But Cornelian had good eyes, and recognizing them both in a moment, jumped out of her cab, and came straight up to the affectionate couple, who were endeavoring to avoid her.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SLIGHTED WOMAN.

Arthur and Juliet could hardly believe their eyes, for in everyday costume the Lion Queen was hardly recognizable. Juliet had only seen her once in her fleshings, and though Arthur had been on more intimate terms with her, he was not aware that she possessed such handsome clothes. Ever since the Fair of Saint Cloud, where he had first met her, Cornelian had taken far more pains with her toilet. The plaid shawl, which she had formerly considered good enough when she played in the suburbs, had been replaced by an elegant mantle from the Magasin de Louvre, and her cotton dress, by a superb silk costume.

Certainly Arthur had nothing to do with this change, for he never spent anything on his lady loves, and that Juliet knew well, but Cornelian, who had for the past year been sharing the profits of the menagerie, could afford to dispense with funds from her lovers. What could she want with the well-matched pair? Arthur suspected that she was going to pour out the vials of her jealousy on his head, and Juliet feared that this tamer of savage beasts was about to scratch out her eyes. And yet the ladies had parted on the best of terms; after the performance, when Arthur had received his box on the ear, Cornelian had asked Juliet for George's address, which had been given, but the matter had ended there, and to-day the wind might be in another quarter. She felt, however, more comfortable when Cornelian came up to her with a smile on her face.

Good day, my dears," began the tamer of animals, who was perfectly free from all prejudice. "It seems that you are still together, and I am delighted, for I wanted to see you both, and since I have met you I can kill two birds with one stone. But we cannot talk here because of all the carriages. Shall we walk up to the Arch of Triumph?" Arthur and Juliet followed her, wondering much what she could have to say to them, and the conversation commenced under that magnificent monument raised in commemoration of the glory of the French

Army. "My boy," began Cornelian, "you know that we have always been good friends. I had a weakness for you once, but that is over and past, and I congratulate you on your friend here, who is really charming."

Juliet, who was much flattered, smiled amiably.

"And she was quite right to take up with you, for you were always a pretty fellow."

It was now Arthur's turn to bow his thanks; but both he and Juliet asked themselves: What can she be driving at?

"And so," continued the Lion Queen, "I thought that you would not refuse to aid me in revenging myself on an insolent hound, who has behaved ill to me, and whom you both know; I mean George Cransac."

"George Cransac!" cried Arthur and Juliet in chorus.

"The same. You, my dear girl, he has thrown up in a most shabby manner, and you, Arthur, he has slapped in public. He fetched me awfully. I don't attempt to hide it from you since you were at the menagerie that evening. I made an appointment for him yesterday night, after the performance, and my gentleman never turned up. Such a thing has never happened to me before, and shall never again; but for all that I will make him remember his treatment of me."

"Pooh," returned Arthur. "He is in an awful hole, and you had better leave him there. What can you do with a man who has just come out of Mazas, and who may go back there any morning? I could not, of course, condescend to go out with him."

"And for my part," added Juliet, "I care no more for him than I do for the first pair of boots I ever had. You saw how I treated him, and if I may give you a bit of advice it is, do the same. Out at elbows fellows like that don't deserve that a woman should occupy herself about them."

"Out at elbows he is not, for he has come into a fortune."

"Since when?"

"Since last week. A journalist who knows both of us, told me so; but it is all the same to me whether he had money or not. It is the man I want, and I know why he won't have anything to do with me; it is because he has

got a mistress, a minx, who is not to be compared to me, and it is through her that I will be revenged on him."

"What a fresh mistress!" murmured Juliet, who immediately began to regret having broken with George now that she heard he was rich once more.

"Goliath was on the scout and saw her yesterday with him. Goliath is the chap that cleans out my lions' cages, a brute who is in love with me, but he ran them both to earth; and now that I know where the jade lives, I am only longing to think how I can pay her off. I always come back to the same idea, of laying my whip about her ears at the first opportunity, and you can make that opportunity for me."

"The idea is an excellent one," sneered Arthur, "only I don't see how I and Juliet can help you."

"In this way, I want to get her into some quiet spot, where I can thrash her at my leisure, and Goliath can't do the job for me, because she noticed that he was following her, and may distrust him. But you can do it; she doesn't know you; and if you ask her under some pretext or other to meet you some evening in a lonely part of the town——"

"That won't act," said Arthur.

"No, not if I try it on, for she may think that you are after her, but if Madame Juliet would consent."

"A nasty job," muttered Juliet, who felt no inclination to compromise herself for nothing.

"And, besides, what good will it do? You will have the satisfaction of horsewhipping her, but it may cost you dear; if you were caught in the act you might get more than you bargained for, and Cransac would only be the fonder of her because of the ill-treatment she had received at your hands."

"Would he?" said Cornelian, with an evil smile. "I do my work thoroughly, so much so that she wouldn't care so show herself afterwards. I'd mark her face, break one or two of her teeth, and certainly knock out one eye."

"You always go in for gentle measures, the same as you deal out to your lions. But I know a better means of making George disgusted with——"

"What is that?"

"Get her another lover."

"It is no go with that one. Goliath has made enquiries in the crib where she lives. She is a real prude, and Cransac is the only man she has been seen with."

"Where does she live?" asked Juliet, who had half an idea that she was about to make an unexpected find. The snare which she and her base lover were about to set for Cécile Cambremer might serve to entrap another young girl, as long as she was as pretty as the florist, and she saw her way to opening a fresh negotiation with Simaucas, who was fond of change. In setting the first she only hoped to gain a heavy commission on the shameful transactions, by the ruin of a young girl, to which project Arthur was prepared to lend himself, with the most cold-blooded infamy; but she never for a moment thought that in throwing Cécile into the arms of Simaucas she was dealing a fatal blow to George's new born love.

"Why should I tell you, if you are not going to help me?" asked Cornelian.

"Tell me, at any rate, and we will see what we can do afterwards," said Juliet.

"Well, then, she lives at Belleville."

"At Belleville!" repeated Juliet, in astonishment.

"Yes; Avenue de Laumière, close to the Park of Buttes Chaumont, a famous spot in which to give the jade a sound hiding."

"What does she do for a living?" asked Arthur, quickly.

"She pretends to be an artificial flower maker to conceal her real game; but I'll lay one of my best lions against a street cat that she has her little sprees on the sly. Cambremer is her name, Cécile Cambremer; but what is the matter with you two that you are staring so at each other?"

The two accomplices had settled the matter with a glance.

"You wish to revenge yourself on the girl?" said Juliet.

"Yes, and sharp too."

"Well, you can do so. Your revenge is already, and I have prepared it for you."

"Then you know this Cécile?" asked Cornelian in astonishment.

"Yes; and now listen: I am going to play the hussy a trick that will disgust Cransac with her forever and a day."

"But that won't prevent my giving her a thrashing, will it?"

"Certainly, it would spoil all."

"What do you mean?"

"If you spoil her looks, our gentleman would not care about her."

"Who is your gentleman?"

"A rich Spaniard, who has bought her of me."

"I don't understand you."

"Just let me do it my own way. She will be lured to his house to-morrow; and once there, she will remain until he is tired of her. Cransac may look for her, and if he does find her, it will be there; and you may be sure that he won't take up with her again. The idiot is going in for virtue now, and after she has passed a week in the Spaniard's cage, he will have nothing more to do with her."

This time Cornelian could not misunderstand their intentions, and the expression of her face changed. She was made of different stuff to Juliet, and, though both passionate and vindictive, and one who would use the most violent measures against a rival, she would never have descended so low as to lure a girl into a trap to revenge herself on a faithless lover. "And is it you?" asked she, "who have hit on this famous plan?"

"Yes, I flatter myself that it is entirely my own," replied Juliet, without flinching.

"Then you too must be jealous of George Cransac."

"Not a bit of it; and the proof of it is that I did not know that he had anything to do with the girl."

"Why do you wish to ruin her then?"

"Because I shall find it to my advantage. The Spaniard is very open handed."

At this vilely cynical reply Cornelian could no longer restrain herself, and her anger and disgust blazed out. "And you too," asked she, turning to Arthur, "are you to have a share in this business?"

"What is that to you?" asked Juliet's lover insolently.

"It is this much, that I am disgusted with the pair of

you and want to have nothing more to do with your blackguardisms."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Juliet; "and so this is your gratitude for having given you Cransac's address the night he fetched you so?"

"I could have done without you then, and I will take good care to do so for the future. I'll have my revenge, but I will have it my own way. I'll go and find this woman who has taken George from me, and we will have a little explanation together. I may break a bone or two belonging to her, but, before doing so, I will let her know your infernal plans. Get out of my path, you reptiles."

Cornelian spat on the ground as a sign of her disgust, and stepping briskly into her cab, was driven away in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne.

Those arches upon which are carved the names of the battles won by our brave soldiers in the time of the First Republic had doubtless never echoed to such a conversation, but the Lion Queen had come out of it with all honor. Arthur and Juliet remained where they were, crushed down under the contempt and the threats of Cornelian, who was willing enough to kill her rival, but whose whole soul revolted against the idea of selling her.

"You have made a nice mess of it," said Arthur, roughly. "What need had you to talk about the Spaniard?"

"Who would have supposed that this tamer of beasts would have had any scruples?"

"Well, you ought to have been more careful. Now, for all we know, she may be against us, and the whole thing is upset."

"She may not do so."

"Why, has she not threatened to warn Cécile? and she is just the girl to do it."

"I don't know; she may think twice before she does so. But I wonder where Cransac could have met this girl; not when he was with me, for he only left me to go to the Stock Exchange, or to visit his clients."

"Perhaps so, but since he came out of Mazas he has had plenty of time to make fresh acquaintances, especially if he has come into money, as this girl says he has."

"Folly! From whom could he have inherited? He was an illegitimate child; he must have stolen it."

"And it would not be the first time that he did so, for,

as you know, they quodded him once. If he took up with Cornelian it would be a proper household, for she is a thief's child."

"How do you know that?"

"She told me so herself once; indeed, she makes no secret of it. Her father has already done a stretch of ten years, and he won't be contented with that. But that is a matter of no importance. The Simancas affair is off."

"Why so? Cornelian won't be sufficiently foolish to go and warn Cécile; she is more likely to give her a good licking first, and you don't give good advice to a woman after thrashing her; besides, even if she does mention us, why should not the plan succeed all the same? What have I said, after all, to Cornelian? That I was going to send the girl to a rich Spaniard, but I did not give his name; then the letter to her will be signed by an Englishwoman, Georgina Acton. That is all arranged, and the marquis has given the necessary orders to his servants. Cécile will never guess that it is a man that is waiting for her, and she will walk straight into the wolf's mouth."

"Yes, after all the thing may go," murmured Arthur.

"It is a dead certainty, my dear, but we must act at once; in order to succeed there should be no delay."

"And, as you wish to save your house, you must be quick; but the execution has been terribly talked of, and I doubt whether your hidalgo will help you out of the mess. How much do you owe, without any nonsense?"

"About thirty thousand francs; but I don't expect to get that out of him. He might buy the house and furniture to give this girl. I made the proposition to him, but he did not bite at once."

"When I shall have once got a footing in his house, things will change."

"He will see you to-morrow morning at eleven."

"I will go; but now let us get home, to write the note for Mlle. Cambremer. You shall write from my dictation, and I will correct the faults of spelling. Without my help you would do all sorts of foolish things; but I know the English style of letter-writing, and I'll wager what you like that the little girl will be taken in."

Three-quarters of an hour afterwards these reptiles, as

Cornelian so truly called them, had completed their work; and nothing but a miracle could save the unfortunate Cécile.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FORCED SALE.

At the very hour when Arthur and his vile companion were plotting against Cécile, George Cransac was making his way towards Montmartre.

He had passed a terrible night, and was now making his way thither in spite of his better self. He had returned to his rooms at the Grand Hotel as the day was breaking, with misery and despair tugging at his heart-strings, and, after vain efforts to sleep, had at last fallen into a troubled slumber, the slumber of a ruined gamester, whose rest is troubled by dreams of his disaster. This was not the first time in his life that he had lost all his ready money at play; but he had up to this time easily consoled himself. He then had an established business, and the brokerages which he received were always sufficient to cover his losses; and all he had to do was to live more cheaply for the coming month. Accustomed to live from day to day, he occupied himself very little with the future. But now his position was no longer the same, for the embarrassment into which his own folly had placed him, had made a complete alteration in his designs. He was compelled to make use of the money which he had sworn never to touch, in order to extricate himself from his difficulties, and to keep up the farce of being a wealthy man in spite of his wishes to the contrary.

What would Valbrec say if his friend George went and told him that his anonymous benefactor had changed his mind, and that the sum to his credit in the London bank was no longer available? He would have certainly believed, and with justice, that the pretended legacy had never existed, and would have broken off all relations with a man whom he had so warmly defended on his discharge from Mazas, but who had now been detected in an infamous falsehood; and George, deprived of the only backer he had, would have had nothing more to look

forward to. He had counted on journalism as a means of existence, but what paper would accept his services, if his only friend refused to speak for him? He might think himself lucky if the story of his losses at cards, which might be mentioned in several quarters, did not arouse the suspicions of the police, who might still be keeping an eye on him.

The lot had been cast, and George must fulfill his destiny to the bitter end. He had also lied to Cécile Cambremer, in telling her that he was not rich; but she would, doubtless, pardon him for having deceived her, when he had proved to her that he loved her as she wished to be loved. She had consented to the trial, which he had himself proposed, and it was to commence that day. There was no longer any time to hesitate, for he had promised to settle his debt within twenty-four hours, and he had resolved not to wait until night to draw again on the convict's hoard. The house in the Rue Gabrielle was a lonely spot even in the daytime, and he hoped to run less risk in opening the hiding-place in the daytime, than by the light of a lantern, which might betray his presence. He had been in the deserted house before at two in the morning, and had found no one there, and he hoped that he would have the same good fortune this time; and that after having filled his pockets he might change the gold into notes, and pay the five thousand francs which were still due to the advertisement agent. The coldness of the atmosphere had increased since the previous night, and the streets in the neighborhood of the Rue Gabrielle were less frequented than ever, but when he arrived before the gate of the uncultivated garden, he was disagreeably surprised at seeing on the slope two gentlemen in earnest conversation, whilst they were at the same time watching a man who was measuring the ground with a surveyor's chain. Their backs were turned to Cransac, who was therefore able to remain, unseen, glued to the spot with surprise and horror at the sight of what was going on. There was no mistaking what they were about. When a property is being measured, something is going to be done with it; no doubt the little estate would be sold, and then the house would certainly be pulled down, for it was in too dilapidated a state to be worth repairing, and then, as

soon as the sale had been concluded, the purchaser would certainly surround it by a strong hoarding, which would shut out all trespassers, himself included. Then farewell to the treasure! The masons who pulled down the walls would assuredly come across it, and meantime it would be impossible for George to get at it, unless indeed he lost not a moment in commencing operations. He could not get into the house at once, as it was now occupied, but he hoped that work would not begin on that very day, nor even on the next one, and that he would have three or four nights in which to remove his gold before the pickaxes of the workmen demolished the famous mantelpiece. He had a good mind to make some enquiries now as to the ultimate destination of the old building from the present visitors, one of whom might be the proprietor; but it would be necessary to find some pretext for accosting them, and the most simple was to present himself as a purchaser in search of a suitable plot of ground. Only he did not think it advisable to speak to them across the wall, and judged that it would be better to wait until they came out after finishing what they were about. They seemed in no hurry, neither did the man with the chain, and they continued talking in a sufficiently loud tone for Cransac to hear what they said:

"My dear fellow," said one, "I much fear that you will do no good; we may repair and patch up as much as we can, but the place will be deuced hard to sell."

"I know that," replied the other; "it would not suit a business man, nor a tradesman, but it would be just the thing for some rich, eccentric fellow with lots of money, who wished to have the finest view of Paris from his window; and, I think, I have found my man!"

"Has he seen the place?"

"Not yet; I want to make it look a little tidy before I show it to him."

"And will this mug that you have raked up build, do you think?"

"Of course he will; and you, friend Thomas, shall be his architect, and build him a charming little villa in the style of Louis XIII., which shall cost you one hundred and fifty thousand francs, and you shall give him an estimate for two hundred thousand, and pocket the difference."

"That will suit me down to the ground; and what will you make out of it, old man?"

"Oh! I shall finger a good commission on the sale of the property. The cloth manufacturer who owns it got it from a bankrupt debtor, and has never had a sou from it since it came into his hands, and he would willingly sell it for ten thousand; so that, if I can get forty or fifty for it, he will share the surplus with me."

"Good business that!" exclaimed the architect. "I am not surprised at your being in a hurry to conclude the sale."

"I have full power to put the grounds in order; and after the sale, I shall get all my out-of-pocket expenses. The first thing to be done is to pull down the house, which is fast falling to ruin, and that won't cost much. It looks as if you could send it to the ground with a breath."

Cransac was horrified. This speculator was, without any further delay, going to pull down this mass of red brickwork, which rose up from the garden, and he had only one night in which to empty the hiding-place. He was about to leave the spot for a time, when he heard a name that was familiar to him:

"You may rely on me, my dear Lourdier," said the man who had been addressed as the architect.

Lourdier was the advertising contractor who had been one of the guests at Brébant's, and to whom George Cransac owed five thousand francs. Chance had brought him face to face with his creditor at the very moment when he was in search of the money to pay him with. And this very money was concealed in the house, and inaccessible to him for the moment. From this point of view, the meeting was a disagreeable one, but in compensation, George had learned the destined fate of the ruined house, which might be of service to him.

At this moment the two men turned, and Lourdier at once recognized George. "Well, this is a strange chance, our meeting here!" said the advertisement agent, as much surprised as George was.

"I came here for a walk," stammered George. "After sitting up all night, I wanted a walk and some fresh air."

"The most natural thing in the world, and you have just come across me at the right moment."

"Not quite; for after my walk I intended to go to my banker, draw the money I owe you, and call at your house."

"Don't speak of that, my dear fellow; we shall always be coming across each other, and you can pay me when you like. But this is an excellent opportunity for finishing the business that I spoke of to you yesterday at dinner."

"What business?" asked George, who naturally did not wish Lourdier to know that he had overheard the conversation between him and the architect, as in it they had spoken of him as a dupe, and exposed their hands.

"What," returned Lourdier, "have you already forgotten the bit of land of which I spoke to you? Well, this is it!"

"What?---this place, all covered with brambles?"

"It will be all cleared away in two days, and the building you see there will have disappeared next week. But come in; we can talk better then."

Cransac pushed open the gate, and then, pointing towards Paris, he remarked: "The first look leaves much to be desired, but the view is grand. On a clear day one ought to be able to see the heights of Chatillon."

"And the Hills of Meudon, too—a perfect panorama, my dear fellow; and for all that you have to pay a mere nothing!"

"Yes, the land can't be worth more than twenty or five and twenty thousand francs," said George, who, now that he knew what arrangements Lourdier contemplated making, was able to act adroitly. "But then I should have to build.

"For a hundred thousand francs my friend Thomas, to whom I beg to introduce you, will build you a little house in which you can live like a prince, and that will be much better than succeeding Juliet Taupier in her little box of a house in the Rue Jouffroy."

"M. Thomas is an architect, I presume," said George, who wished to continue to play the part of having heard nothing of the preceding conversation.

"Yes, he is a member of the Academy of Fine Arts. If the land suits you, I advise you to lose no time in securing it, for a purchaser may make his appearance any day.

They are asking forty-five thousand for it, but I think that I could get it for less for you."

George paused before replying, for an idea had flashed across his brain. The simplest means of securing the property would be to become the purchaser. When this was once completed, no mason could strike a blow with his pickaxe without his permission, and if he made up his mind to demolish the existing building in order to erect another, it would not be until he had transferred his gold to some safer hiding-place. There would be no difficulty about the payment, for in the transfer of real estate it was not a matter of cash down, and all that he had need of was twenty-four hours in which to make a nocturnal visit to the treasure, and to take away sufficient to pay a sum on account, or, if necessary, the full amount. Later on, when he had settled matters, and was master of the place, he could act without hindrance, and could wall up the grounds against nocturnal intruders. Just now what he had to find out was with whom to treat, and what the conditions would be, for Lourdier was evidently only an intermediary, and the conversation that he had heard between the two men had not given him any real idea of the right value of the property.

"Forty-five thousand francs," said he, after a pause, "is much too dear."

"Let us say forty thousand," said Lourdier eagerly.

"We are a long way yet from the price that I should pay. I might, perhaps, go as far as thirty thousand, but—"

"But what?"

"I have not this sum at my immediate disposal."

"Is that all that makes you hesitate? As long as the vendor gets a third upon the day on which you sign the deed, he will give you every facility for the payment of the balance. You shall fix the terms of payment yourself. He is a rich man, and consequently in no hurry to realize, and is only anxious to get rid of a property that has brought him nothing since it came into his hands."

"Then why the deuce did he buy it?"

"He did not buy it. It came to him as the result of a liquidation, by which he lost a great deal of money.

There was a Parisian banker in it, who was a sleeping partner with him, and who failed one day."

"And what did the banker do with it?"

"On my word, I don't know. Perhaps it served him for a park and country house. He most likely spent his Sundays there. At any rate he was not a Rothschild, and he blew out his brains when he found that he was ruined."

"What was his name?"

"I never heard, or if I did I have forgotten it. It is such an old story. The actual owner may be able to tell you something about him if you are anxious to hear about him, but I suppose that you are not much interested in the matter?"

"Oh, no; not a bit," answered George, who had been thinking of the father of Cécile Cambremer, who had killed himself when he discovered that he was ruined. The thought that she might have come to the house in which she formerly lived to commit suicide had lingered for an instant in George's imagination, but he had dismissed it at once as preposterous and absurd.

"Well, have you made up your mind?" asked Lourdier. "I press you, because I think that the purchase would be an advantageous one for you, and also because I am anxious to know what I have to do. I must have the workpeople here to-morrow to pull that old ruin down, and to cut paths through all this jungle, and if you don't intend to buy I shall set them to work to-night. If, on the other hand, you elect to buy, I shall not send either masons or other workpeople, unless indeed you wish it.

"No," returned Cransac, quickly. "If I purchase I shall not begin to build until next summer, so there will be time enough to clear away everything at the end of the winter."

"As you like, my dear fellow. But just answer me one question: Are you going to buy? Yes or no? You just now spoke about thirty thousand. Put another five to it, and the place is yours."

"No, thirty thousand; ten paid down, and the balance in two instalments at six and twelve months."

"Ah, I see you understand business. I expect that you have done plenty in your time."

"Only for others; never for myself."

"Yes, I heard you were with a stockbroker; but now you belong to the paper for which I work, though in a different line of business, but when we are in the same boat we must all pull together. And so, my dear fellow, I accept your offer. I will let you have the property for thirty thousand francs, though I could, I am sure, have sold it for forty thousand to another party. I have had an offer of thirty-five thousand, which I refused. And now is it settled? If so, give me your hand."

"It is settled," answered George, after a moment's hesitation.

"You know that according to the Code a promise to purchase holds good. I have full powers from the owner. Will you get over the thing at once, and come with me to the vendor's notary? We will instruct him to prepare the deed of sale, and you will sign it—when shall we say?"

"The day after to-morrow," replied George, who wished to have two clear nights in which to place himself in funds, for, though the bank from which he intended to draw them was close at hand, in contradistinction to the usual run of banks it did not open until after sunset.

"Very well, then, the day after to-morrow; and you will have to pay the costs in addition, and expenses of registration."

"Which will amount to how much, do you think?"

"M. Guerin, the notary, will tell you the exact amount. He lives close here, in the Place Dancourt, by the Montmartre Theatre. Shall we go there now?"

"Is it absolutely necessary that I should go with you now?"

"It would be better; but I rely upon your word, given in the presence of my friend Thomas, and can therefore dispense with your attendance to-day. The day after to-morrow I shall expect you at M. Guerin's office between two and three o'clock in the afternoon. I don't remember the number, but you will see his name on a plate on the door. Bring fifteen thousand francs with you, and that will leave an ample margin for the costs."

"All right; and now if you will excuse me, I will leave you. I am expected at the other end of Paris, and I see that you have not yet completed your measurements."

"I shall not be long over them; I only want to know the extent of frontage on the Rue Gabrielle, and my man won't be more than ten minutes over that."

"Shall I see you presently at the office of the paper?"

"Most probably."

"Until then, my dear sir, good-bye."

Cransac shook hands with Lourdier, although he was a person that he had not much liking for; then bowing coldly to the architect, who was not best pleased at finding all business transactions put off until the spring, took his leave, for he felt the necessity of being alone, to reflect at his leisure on the new course that affairs had taken.

In agreeing to purchase he had, as the saying is, burnt his boats, and it was impossible for him now to draw back from the evil course into which his losses at play had impelled him. He wanted twenty thousand francs within the next twenty-four hours, merely to settle his card debts, and to pay the deposit on the purchase, and so he would have to take away thirty thousand francs at his next nightly visit, so as not to leave himself penniless after paying his debts. He had resolved not to content himself with this only. He wanted to empty the hiding-place of its last coin, so as to see how much he had really inherited from his neighbor of the exercise-yard of Mazas. When he knew this he could arrange his mode of life according to his fortune, and without the slightest feelings of compunction he hoped that it might be very large. It is only the first step that is difficult, and this step had been taken ten days back. Cransac rather liked the idea of building on the site of the ruined house a comfortable villa, in which he hoped to persuade Cécile to live with him, for he had already begun to feel the extreme inconvenience of having two places of abode: one in the Rue Frochot, and the other the Grand Hotel.

Neither of these were suitable for what he wanted just now, a place of safe deposit for a very large sum of money, and until he should have found a more convenient lodging he saw that he should be compelled to carry large sums of money about his person. He knew that it was far from safe or prudent to go about the streets with his pocket filled with gold or notes, and this to a certain extent spoiled the pleasure he had felt in knowing that

the house in which his treasure was buried was not to be demolished.

George had not spoken falsely when he said that he was expected at the other end of Paris, for he had promised to go and see Cécile Cambremer at Belleville in the afternoon, and the day was getting on. He therefore made all haste to the Boulevard de Clichy, where he could get a cab to take him to the Avenue Laumière; but when he found himself but a few paces from the Rue Frochot, he could not resist the temptation of calling at the porter's lodge, to see if there was a letter for him, and so he made his way thither, looking wearily round the corners, for fear of encountering the terrible Cornelian, or her hideous assistant, Goliath.

It was fortunate for him that he had thought of going home first, for the porter handed him a letter which the postman had just left, and on the envelope of which he recognized Cécile's handwriting, although he had only seen it once before. Lovers have always good memories. On his return from London, George had not thought it necessary to tell her that he was stopping at the Grand Hotel, and therefore she could only write to him at the address she knew, and this was one of the reasons that had decided him to call at his own rooms before going on to Belleville. The porter took the opportunity of handing to George the two receipts which he had asked for the day before, but as he had not sufficient money about him to settle, he had to ask that they might stand over until the next day. After making this arrangement, he went away to enjoy the letter from his love in private. It was a short one, and the contents surprised him a little.

"My friend," wrote the flowermaker, "I have the most earnest wish to see you, but I want to spare you a useless journey. To-day I am obliged to go out, and make arrangements with an artificial flower merchant, who wishes to entrust me with an important order. His place of business is a long way from where I live, and I do not know at what time I shall get back. I am not sure either of seeing you to-morrow, for orders are coming in from all sides, but I shall be certainly free at six o'clock, and I will keep my evening for you. I will dine with you, if you like, and afterwards we can go to the theatre—never mind to which one, as I have not seen any of the pieces

which are being played just now. You see I treat you like an old friend, and yet we have known each other but a short time, but a feeling of affinity came over me at once, and I flatter myself that this feeling is reciprocal. I shall, therefore, come for you to the Rue Frochot, at half-past six to-morrow. If I put you out in any way, I beg that you will let me know; a line by post will reach me in time. If I receive no reply I shall come."

The letter was simply signed "Cécile," and there was of course a postscript: "I forgot to tell you that I have seen the good woman you sent to me and see how well chance sometimes serves us, for I found that she knew me when I was a child. I will tell you all about it when I see you. I have got her some work, and I hope that I shall not part with her again."

George read and re-read this letter, which put off the first appointment, several times; and he saw that Cécile was sincere in wishing to adjourn their meeting until the next day. The hope of passing a long evening with her compensated him for the change in the arrangements, and in his heart he was not sorry to defer the pleasure for twenty-four hours, for his mind would be more at ease after the expedition which he was about to undertake that night was over, as then all his plans would be arranged and his projects settled, and he could then open his heart to Cécile, make arrangements for their future life, and urge upon her that a more tender tie ought to unite them. He had no need to write to her, as by his silence he accepted the meeting for the next day.

CHAPTER XV.

"HALVES."

Nothing now remained for Cransac but to make arrangements for his second nocturnal visit to the ruined house in the Rue Gabrielle. He was in haste to get it over, and he would not have waited until nightfall had he not feared to find the two men he had met before still there; for, in spite of all that Lourdier had said, the measuring might not be over until dusk, and Cransac did not at all want to see him that day. What he had to do was to employ his time in the best manner that he could before starting on his expedition, and he began by returning to the Grand Hotel, to make his preparations accordingly, as he wished to be better prepared than he had been on the preceding visit. He had told Valbrec that he would come down to the offices of the newspaper to see him, but this was an appointment that he could easily put off until the next day. Privacy is best for those who have a hazardous undertaking in hand, and Cransac preferred to isolate himself, to spending his time in idle conversation. The great point was to make his expedition as successful as possible, and, taught by his former experience he thought of taking with him a bag in which he could at one visit take away a large sum of money. He had a leather one, very large and deep, furnished with a leather strap, to sling over the shoulder, which he had brought from England with him. He slung this on under his great coat, and then thought how he could best protect himself from other dangers which might threaten him. On his last expedition he had only met a helpless woman, but he might at any moment find himself face to face with some ill-disposed man, and he desired to be in a condition to defend himself in case of attack. He therefore took with him a heavily-weighted stick, and a six-chambered revolver, which he carefully loaded. Nor did he forget a good provision of matches, and on leaving the hotel, he purchased a lantern small enough to go into his pocket These preparations occupied him until it was the hour for dinner, which he partook of in

a third-class restaurant, where he was sure of not meeting anyone that knew him. He then sought an unfrequented café, where he sat for a long time with a newspaper before him, as a man does whose mind is preoccupied with something else than politics or literature, until midnight sounded from an adjacent belfry.

The hour had come, and taking a cab, he drove to the Place Saint Pierre. He had chosen this route as he knew that the inhabitants of the Butte Montmartre avoided it after sunset; but it suited Cransac to arrive at his destination by devious ways, and he wished to enter the garden by the flight of steps which he had descended with Cécile, and make his entry by the side gate which she had pointed out to him. By taking this route he would avoid the thick vegetation, and reach the front door with more celerity. As the night was pretty clear, he was the better able to take a view of the surroundings; he perceived that the sloping garden had a terrace at the end of it, upon which the house stood; but the terrace, like everything else, was in ruins, and there were large holes in it where the stones had fallen away, which would serve as a refuge for wanderers in search of a shelter. Cransac did not lose any time in exploring these lurking places, for he rightly judged that those poor wretches who had no home would prefer a shelter in the house, dilapidated as it was, to holes where they would be exposed to the night blasts.

At length he arrived at the house, which he determined to explore from top to bottom before he went to work. He began naturally by the chamber on the ground floor, which he found in the same state as he had left it. He made sure of this by lighting his lantern, and this seemed a sign of good omen for the ultimate success of his expedition. Then he went up stairs, and inspected each story successively, and found that they had all been undisturbed since his last visit, There was the overturned brazier, and the scattered lumps of charcoal lying on the floor where Cécile Cambremer had endeavored to suffocate herself, but everything seemed to show that no human being had been there since his last visit on that momentous night. He came back from his inspection completely reassured, and did not lose a moment in getting to work, for he knew well that the quicker he was, the less risk he should run of being surprised. He therefore placed his

hand on the pin, which yielded to his first effort, because it was no longer encrusted with rust. The plate opened, and he again saw the rolls of gold pieces wrapped up in green paper, but he no longer smelt the sickening odor which had poured out the first time that he opened it. The mephitic vapor which had collected inside had been dispelled by the fresh air during the time that the door of the hiding-place had remained open, and it was easy to believe that if a dead body had at any time been thrown down there, it must by now be reduced to a mere skeleton. But Cransac thought of nothing but his treasure, and cared little whether a crime had been committed or not at some previous time in the deserted house. He picked up the precious parcel by handfuls without counting them, and crammed them into his bag, and when that was full he filled his pockets. He would have liked to have carried all the treasure away, but beneath the first layer he saw that there were others, and he would have been borne to the ground by the weight of gold. His load was already as heavy as he could bear. He was about to close the plate when, in feeling the mass of parcels for the last time, his fingers encountered a soft flat object which he had some difficulty in disengaging from the weight that pressed on it. It was an immense pocket-book, such as ministers, barristers and bank cashiers carry. It was made of black morocco leather, but the copper lock was off, the key had disappeared, and the leather was battered and torn; on the outside could still be read the letters B. and C., probable the initials of the capitalist to whom it formerly belonged. Cransac opened it, and found that it was crammed with banknotes. The damp had stuck some of them one against the other, and he dared not finger them lest he should tear them to pieces. This unexpected find was most fortunate for him, for it almost did away with the necessity of making another perilous trip, at least for some time. He had now many hundred thousand of francs, which in their present shape weighed less than ten thousand in gold, and which would cause him no trouble to take back to the Grand Hotel, even if he had to walk there. All that he had to do was to take care not to lose them on the way, which he would certainly have done had he placed the dilapidated pocket-book under his

arm. As the best thing to be done he placed it in his breast between his waistcoat and his shirt, and buttoned it up carefully. After having taken this precaution he felt half inclined to throw the rolls of coin back into the hole, but he thought that he was strong enough to carry the lot, and so he closed the hiding-place, which was still half full. He had had to kneel down to extract his treasure, and when he strove to rise to his feet, he had great difficulty in doing so. Cransac was young and vigorous, but he was loaded like a mule, and his muscular shoulders trembled beneath his burden. He extinguished his lantern, and put it into the pocket with his revolver, grasped his loaded stick firmly in his right hand, and turned towards the door. He now found himself opposite the window from which all the glass had been broken away. Inside the room the darkness was profound, but outside it was a little lighter, and on glancing in that direction Cransac fancied that he saw a round object showing against the light, at the height where the lower panes of glass had been, which had something of the appearance of a human head. At first he thought that his eyes must have deceived him, but the instant that he made a step forward, the object disappeared, and he heard a slight sound such as a man's feet, would make on dropping from a certain height. Someone had evidently been hanging on to the window sash, and had let go all of a sudden. This spy might enter at any moment and attack George, who accordingly stood on his defence, with his left hand on his revolver, his loaded stick raised for a blow in his right, and his face turned toward the door.

But no one showed themselves.

He listened, but there was not a sound in the garden.

Had the man crept away with stealthy tread, or was he lying in wait outside the door?

To know this it was necessary to search for him. One thing was clear: the secret of the hiding-place had been discovered. But by whom? Probably by some night wanderer, who would have no scruples in coming back and emptying it, and who, perhaps, was now meditating Cransac's murder, in order to rob him of his booty. Whichever might be the case, Cransac could not permit himself to be besieged there; the longer he waited the more risk he ran, for the man might summon others to

help him, and then the odds would not be in his favor, whilst, armed as he was, he could easily hold his own against a solitary robber.

He resolved to leave the place at once. He pulled the door to him, which opened inwards, and going out on to the step looked round him. He could see no one, and in the moonlight a man could have been seen twenty paces off. The road to the side steps was therefore free, though there was a chance of the man having hidden himself in the brambles, but all George had to do was not to go too close to them. He therefore walked slowly in the direction of the gate, weighed down by the weight of his load. He had strong arms, good legs, and clear sight; the gate by which he had come in was not far off, and he hoped to reach it without any accident, and he believed that he had not much to fear when he was once outside the garden. Night is very lonely in that deserted quarter, but still there were people about, and when the cry of "murder" or "fire" is raised, the sleepers awake from their slumbers, and the guardians of the peace interfere—at least sometimes. On the outer boulevards, the cafés remain open all the year round until two in the morning; and during the fair at Montmartre everyone is about—the mountebanks perform, the drums are beaten, the trumpets peal, the wooden horses go round to the sound of music, and in the midst of all this turmoil and crowd even pickpockets find it difficult to exercise their profession. All, then, that George had to do was to get that far, so as to be in safety from any attack, and then to take a cab to the Grand Hotel. At two paces from the gate, when he thought that the worst was over, Cransac saw a shadowy form rise before him, which seemed to have sprung out of the wall.

"Halves!" cried a guttural voice, and at the same instant he felt a heavy blow on his chest. He stepped backwards, but at the moment when his adversary was about to repeat the blow, he struck him heavily over the head with his loaded stick. The man fell like a log, and Cransac, stepping back, prepared to defend himself against any new opponent, or in case the fallen man should attempt to renew the attack; but he showed no sign of life, and lay perfectly still, with his arms extended. Cransac, who had lost neither his equilibrium or his cool-

ness, pushed him with his foot, so as to be certain that he was not in a condition to renew the attack, and finding that he did not stir, was about to proceed on his way, when the idea struck him that he might as well look what sort of a man his assailant was. "Halves!" was what the wretch had cried out as he rushed upon him. He was therefore aware that Cransac had money about him. Did he know this because he had watched him helping himself to the treasure, or because he had been previously made acquainted with its existence? Had the prisoner of Mazas, after George's discharge, taken anyone else into his confidence? Did one of his former accomplices know the secret of the hiding-place, and had he come there to empty it and found Cransac at work? Any of these conjectures were possible. Without leaving go of his revolver, Cransac turned the man over on to his back without his exhibiting any signs of life. The blow of the loaded stick appeared to have fractured his skull, and it seemed doubtful if he would get over it, though he still breathed. He was dressed in a torn blouse, and a tattered pair of trousers, with heavy shoes, and one of those rough caps so much affected by the roughs of the lowest class. As far as Cransac could make out in the half-obscurity that reigned, his features did not belie his dress, and he looked like one of those miserable scoundrels who live on the precarious earnings of the unfortunate women who ply their trade beyond the barriers. He was a young man, not more than twenty-five years of age. The blood from his wound had spread over his convulsed features, and his eyes which were wide open, had no expression in them. It would have been useless to question him, and if he was not already dead he was nearly so. But the question that Cransac asked himself was, should he let him lie there? If he did so, the police when they found his body would certainly cause an inquiry to be made. They might not find the murderer, but in searching the house they might discover the hiding-place. Cransac at first thought of dragging the body to the public flight of steps close at hand, but he could not bear the idea of lifting it. "After all," thought he, "it matters very little whether the police put their hands on the money," as he had no more need

to return there to supply himself with gold, or whether they would consider the murder as having been committed in a street row by a ruffian of a similar stamp; in which case the inquiry would not be a long one. He saw now that the fellow, after having quitted his post of observation, had hidden himself in one of the hollows of the wall of the terrace, to spring out on Cransac as soon as he came within his reach. The cowardly scoundrel still grasped in his hand a long pointed knife, with which he had struck Cransac in the breast, and would have infallibly killed him on the spot had not the point of his formidable weapon encountered the pocket-book. The banknotes, which formed a kind of breastplate, had saved the life of the felon's heir. The steel had passed through them, and just grazed the skin; one bundle less and Cransac would have been a dead man. Never had a few hundred thousand francs been placed more advantageously, and the possessor of this fortune, however doubtfully it might have been acquired, might now believe that luck had come back to him once more.

He thought this more than once, as he descended the steep, narrow street that led on to the boulevards. The crowd had begun to disperse, and many of the booths had put out their lights, but he caught a belated cab, and drove straight to the Grand Hotel. As he passed through the courtyard, where some persons still lingered, he noticed that some turned and gazed after him with ill concealed curiosity. They could not, however, have guessed that he was loaded with gold and banknotes. Perhaps they were surprised at his slow and steady pace, or the way in which his overcoat, the pockets of which were weighted with gold, hung stiffly down.

Laden as he was Cransac had some difficulty in climbing upstairs to the third floor, where he had two rooms, and his first care was to relieve himself of all his burdens; then, in default of a safe lockup, he threw everything pell-mell into his wardrobe, and taking out the key, drew the bolt of his room door. He did not even attempt to count his wealth. After so many mental and physical shocks, he was worn out with fatigue, and only retained a confused remembrance of the events of the day which had succeeded each other with such startling rapidity. It all appeared like a dream to him. All at

once he saw blood on his hands, and everything came back to him in a moment. "A murderer," murmured he, "I, George Cransac, am a murderer. I killed that man to preserve the secret of a fortune which is not mine; a fortune which I inherited from a robber." He gazed at himself in the glass, and it seemed to him that the very expression of his face had changed, and to avoid the reflection, he staggered back to his bed upon which he cast himself. After a time his wearied brain sank to rest and he fell asleep, with the terrible words "a murderer, a murderer!" still dropping from his lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LURE OF THE FOWLER.

When Cécile wrote to George that orders were coming in, in shoals, she had only spoken the truth, for she had gained a name in the business; not only for punctuality, but also for superiority of execution. It was therefore not very hard for her, in spite of her brief absence, to push herself in the trade, and to pick up the connection which she had let slip. One of the business houses with which she had been formerly connected had written to her to supply it with an assortment of artificial roses, and on her return home Cécile had found a letter waiting for her from a Mrs. Georgina Acton, who begged her to call at her house in the Avenue de Boulogne at five o'clock on the next day, to discuss an important order for artificial flowers for transmission to the United States. Cécile had certainly never heard of Madam Acton, but she had occasionally received an order from America, and she never for a moment doubted that the order was genuine Both hour and time were convenient to her, as she had promised to come to the Rue Frochot at half-past six; but in spite of that, she fancied that her interview with the foreign lady would not detain her so long as to prevent her arriving in time, by taking a cab after it was over. The poor woman whom George had sent to her address had called in the meantime, and by a curious chance, in a place like Paris, where friends may live for

years without ever meeting, she had discovered that they were old acquaintances. The poor woman had formerly been a friend of the nurse in M. Cambremer's service, and Cécile, who possessed a wonderful memory for faces, remembered her, though she had not seen her for more than fifteen years. This was quite sufficient to make Cécile take the greatest interest in her, for she was on the lookout for an elderly respectable woman to superintend her workgirls when she was unable to be present herself, and so she soon made an arrangement with her. Josephine Sureau, who had been deserted by her husband and left with three young children, was almost dying of hunger when George Cransac had come to her assistance in the office of the Government Pawnbroking Establishment, and she felt herself only too happy to enter Cécile's service, who had not lost a moment in endeavoring to extricate her from her difficulties. In twenty-four hours Cécile had found an asylum for her children: the two eldest she had apprenticed, and the youngest was placed in a public nursery, where it would be taken care of for the day. Josephine was thoroughly grateful to Cécile, but she unfortunately had two defects: she was very talkative and excessively curious. When she talked to her mistress about by-gone times, she tried to worm out the story of her troubles, and how she, the daughter of wealthy parents, had been reduced to gain her livelihood by the manufacture of artificial flowers. Cécile had taken care to tell her that her father had died without leaving her anything, and had entreated her to ask her nothing further regarding her past life; but she had felt it necessary to speak to her regarding her acquaintanceship with M. George Cransac, and to tell her that the young man was her best friend. Upon the day of her visit to Madam Acton she thought it would be as well to take Josephine with her, to carry her boxes of samples to exhibit to the American lady and to let her see afterwards upon what footing she was with the gentleman residing in the Rue Frochot. Josephine was delighted at the idea of accompanying her new mistress, and went off to get a cab, into which they both got, with their sample boxes of flowers. Cécile had taken extra pains with her dress, not only that Madam Acton might not take her for a woman in a small way of

business, but also that George might feel proud of the companion that he was taking to the theatre. She still possessed a dress, one of the last relics of her days of prosperity, and an excessively becoming mantle which she had taken out of pawn. She knew how to dress her hair, and her boots and gloves were simply perfection. Upon this occasion she had used all her taste, and the effect was really charming. Happiness invariably increases the good looks of a woman, and joyous anticipations had thrown a mantle over her naturally cold expression of countenance. She still resembled an antique statue, but the glow of life had now shed a glow through the marble.

It was a long drive in a cab, for almost the entire width of Paris had to be crossed, but Cécile did not feel wearied at the time consumed in it. The future was now all rose-colored, and, contrary to her usual habits, she spoke freely to her companion of her business matters, and her hopes of extending them. She had an idea that a great deal might come of this visit, which would doubtless open out to her an extensive foreign connection, and she had great hopes that this Madam Acton might be the head of a large similar business in New York. The snare had been cunningly set, and poor Cécile fell headlong into it.

Josephine Sureau threw a little cold water on her enthusiasm, by remarking innocently: "It is a strange part of the town for a lady in that line to be stopping in."

"It is the part that the Americans frequent the most," returned Cécile.

"Yes, those who are well off, but a tradeswoman——"

"Over there very large fortunes are made in trade, and I am not certain that Madam Acton wishes to buy on her own account; she may only be a representative."

"Oh! I see. I thought people in business stopped in the streets off the main boulevards, near to the Palais Royal, but I never thought that there were lodging-houses in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne."

"Generally they are all private houses, but, of course, there may be furnished apartments; but we shall soon find out all about it."

As she spoke the cab passed the Place de l'Etoile, where the evening before a vile plot had been hatched.

Cécile grew more and more silent as the time passed on. She began to ask herself if she was not committing

an act of great imprudence in thus keeping an appointment which she had made with a woman entirely unknown to her; but even now she had no fear of any serious danger. Whom should she distrust: the man upon whom she had so unwisely lavished her first affections, who, after draining her of all her money, had so cruelly cast her off? Certainly not; for she felt that he would never again attempt to re-possess himself of her love, after her eyes had been so cruelly opened to his treachery. Nor could she for a moment imagine that some wealthy voluptuary had cast his eyes upon her, considering how rarely she left her home, and that she lived in one of the poorest quarters of Paris. The cab drew up at the corner of the Rue Pergolèse, in front of a carriage gateway which opened upon a large garden.

"I think that the driver must have made a mistake," murmured Cécile.

Josephine put her head out of the window and shouted something to the coachman.

"This is the number you told me to stop at," returned he.

"But here we are at the door of a private house," said Madam Sureau to her patroness.

"Perhaps Madam Acton is staying with some fellow-country people of hers," said Cécile; but we will soon find out. Get down, and ask for her. If the porter says he knows nothing of her, come back and tell me and we can go away."

Josephine hastened to obey her, and Cécile followed her with her eyes. She saw her ring the bell and say a few words to the porter, who at first seemed inclined to shut the door in her face. Then he appeared to think better of it, and began again to enter into conversation with Cécile's messenger.

Mlle. Cambremer remained seated in the cab, and could see a conversation going on, although she could not hear a word of what was said; but she could not help feeling surprised at the time the conversation lasted. Surely it would have been more natural for the man to have replied, "No," or "Yes," as to whether Madam Acton lived there or not; and yet he seemed to be questioning Josephine. At last the woman came back to the cab-door, and the first words she said were:

"She is in."

Then, as Cécile was about to ask her the cause of all this delay, she added:

"But she doesn't wan't to see everybody, for he began by telling me that he did not know any such person. He stared at me from head to foot, but at last he looked up the street, then he caught sight of the trap, and says he:

"'Who are you, and whom do you come from? What do you want with Madam Acton?'

"It seemed as if he would never have done. I answered plainly, 'I am Mlle. Cambremer's servant, who received a letter from Madam Acton, making an appointment for five o'clock.' Upon which he growled out:

"'So your mistress must employ a messenger, must she? Well, let her come in, since she is here; but we don't wan't you here.' The cove ain't a bit civil; and so I just turned sharp around and came here. The Yankee woman must have lots of coin for her flunkeys to be so cheeky; at any rate, however, she is ready to see *you*. So just go in; I will wait for you in the cab; and if she wants to see any patterns, you will have to send for them, for they certainly won't let me come in."

Cécile hesitated for a moment, all these precautions appeared rather suspicious. On the other hand, she had no desire to lose an affair which might turn out highly advantageous.

"Well," said she, "I will go in. Mind and wait for me. I shall, perhaps be some time, for these foreigners take a long while to decide. But if I am detained longer than you think is reasonable, ring at the door, and have me called down by the servant. I will come even if the business is not settled, for I must be at 19, Rue Frochot, M. Cransac's lodgings, at half-past six."

"That is the gentleman that gave me twenty francs and sent me to you. I would go through fire and water for him, and you are quite right not to keep him waiting he is a right down good one, he is."

CHAPTER XVII.

A PARISIAN SERAGLIO.

Heaping these encomiums on George's head, Josephine opened the door for Cécile, who at once entered the house. The man-servant, who had remained standing on the threshold, immediately allowed her to enter without any questions, for the fellow at once saw that the expected visitor had at length arrived.

"If you will have the goodness to follow me, mademoiselle," said he, "I will take you to Madam Acton."

Cécile found herself in a large courtyard brilliantly lighted with gas, and separated by railings from a garden full of venerable trees. The house was on the left-hand side, and all the windows were lighted up.

"Madame Acton," continued the servant, "occupies the little detached dwelling at the end of the garden. She is only here for a day or two, and did not wish to be in the general's way."

"The general?" repeated Cécile, in tones of astonishment.

"Yes, mademoiselle; this house belongs to General Burdett, the relative and countryman of Madam Acton."

The man had learned his lesson well, and these last words entirely cleared away Cécile's doubts. She had only to pass through the garden, which was as well lighted as the courtyard, and some thirty paces in front of her she saw an elegant little building covered with ivy, like an English cottage. Cécile thought that this little bower of verdure could not have been built for the commission of dark deeds, and that Madam Acton, who resided in it, must be a person of the highest respectability; she, therefore, had no further grounds for fear. The servant knocked discreetly at the door, which was at once opened, and an elderly woman appeared dressed in black, with her grey hair gathered up in a net.

"Here is the young lady for Madam Acton," said the man.

"Very good," said the old woman, in a strong foreign

accent. "The lady can come up; Madam Acton is waiting for her upstairs."

For a moment Cécile again hesitated, for she fancied that there was something suspicious about the old woman's appearance; but it was now too late to draw back. She ascended a white marble staircase, and on arriving at the landing on the first floor, she turned to question the woman as to her next movements.

"You will find Madam Acton in the room in front; go straight in."

And with these words she turned round and disappeared.

Cécile had half a mind to retrace her steps, but she was ashamed of her nervousness, and went on. She first came into an ante-room hung with Cordovan leather, a drawing-room, all gilding from top to bottom, and a boudoir with plush-silk hangings. These three rooms were only separated from each other by curtains which hung across the doorways. All were lighted up with candles, and fires were burning in the hearths; but there was no Madam Acton. Cécile, who had now made up her mind to carry the matter through, went on further, and came to a fourth room, very strangely furnished. Here there were nothing but circular divans, luxurious couches, lounging-chairs, and cushions all covered in black satin, with huge bear-skins spread about over the Persian carpet. There were looking-glasses everywhere, even on the ceilings. Upon the walls were pictures representing nude female figures in various attitudes; but still no Madam Acton. It could not certainly have been she who had arranged these rooms in so singular a style; the couches, the hangings, and the pictures so free in their execution, more suitable for the boudoir of a fast woman than the rooms occupied by an American lady, with all her national airs of prudery. And yet it was not Madam Acton's fault if her fellow-countryman who lived in Paris had a weakness for eccentric furniture or indelicate pictures. All this mattered very little to Cécile as long as she could find the lady, who, up to the present moment, had remained invisible. She pushed her researches on further, and came to a bedroom, the appearance of which was hardly more respectable. The bed was placed in a recess draped with lace, and surrounded with mirrors. All the toilet arrange-

ments were of the most luxurious description, the ewers and bowls on the washing-stand were of agate, and there were various implements in ivory, silver, and old china, scattered about. A respectable woman would have blushed to have dressed in such a room, and for an instant Cécile thought that she had fallen into a trap. She could hear no sound, and see no one, and yet everything around her looked as if some one was expected.

Who was it that was waited for? Was it herself? And if so, was it for the mere purchase of artificial flowers?

She was frightened, and her only thought was to escape. But how was she to do so? The woman whom she had met on her entrance had doubtless closed the door of the cottage, and even had it remained open, the main gate was, perhaps, closed and guarded. Would the porter let her pass through? She did not wish to remain for another moment in this abode of abomination; the very carpet seemed to burn her feet. She turned back sharply, and was already in the room with the circular divans when she fancied she heard some one come in. It was a soft, steady step, but it came nearer and nearer, and did not sound at all like the tread of a woman. Cécile was rooted to the ground with terror; had she been able she would have hidden herself like a child behind a chair, or under a couch, but she was too late. All at once she saw the figure of a man coming towards her, dressed in a brocaded dressing gown; his bare neck emerged from a red silk shirt. He wore a beard and moustache, and his eyes glowed like coals of fire.

At the sight of this unexpected appearance, Cécile drew back, but the nearness of the danger gave her courage.

"I am waiting for Madam Acton, who sent for me," said she.

Instead of making any reply, the man took a step towards her; she hurriedly drew back, he advanced, and she still retreated, until she was driven back to the wall, and now she could recede no further, and was in the position of a duelist driven backwards to the wall by a more powerful adversary.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE TIGER'S CAGE.

The man was still there standing in front of her, and devouring her with his eyes. The mirrors reflected his form, and Cécile saw him on all sides of her. Then fright overcame her. "What do you want with me?" stammered she, "I do not know you."

"Did you really think that you came to see an American lady, who was to buy flowers of you?" asked the man with a sneer.

"Certainly, I did."

"What! did you not know that you were coming to see a gentlemen who is fond of pretty girls, and is always generous to them?"

And now Cécile understood him, and her blood froze in her veins.

"You are very innocent, and yet I could wager that you have had a lover before now! Come, come, confess that you knew well enough what was coming."

"I forbid you to insult me," said Cécile, drawing herself up haughtily.

"No grand airs here, please. You are in my power, my pretty one, so I advise you to be more humble. I only wish to act for your good. Before seeing you, I had not made up my mind; but now the case is different, and I will risk everything to possess you!"

"I order you to let me leave this."

"You are right to speak like that; you look superb. Your eyes are blazing with rage; were you more deeply affected, you would be adorable. I should like to see you weep."

"Wretch!"

"Go on—abuse me—I want your anger to melt away in tears," returned the pretended compatriot of Madam Acton. He enjoyed her agitation and despair intensely. His face gleamed with ferocity and passion; he had all the appearance of a satyr.

"I desire to leave this house," said she, firmly.

"To wish and to be able are two different things. My

servants have orders not to let you out. Give up the foolish idea of leaving," returned the dastardly Simancas, seating himself astride of a chair, two paces from where Cécile was standing. "And now, let me explain my ideas to you. I don't care whether you love me or not; indeed, I should, I think, prefer you to hate me. You can't understand that, because you have always lived a mere humdrum existence, and have no idea of the strange tastes of a man steeped to the lips in luxury as I am. Well, now listen. As long as my fancy for you lasts, you shall wallow in gold, and when it is over, you can carry yourself and your riches where you like. Whilst you are with me, you shall do just as you like; no doubt you will deceive me, but when that happens—and be sure I shall hear of it—I shall not send you away, but I shall chastise you, and that will be an additional pleasure."

"You may kill me, if you like," returned Cécile, "but in life I will never be yours."

"Kill you?" sneered Simancas; "I should be sorry to do that. I would much sooner make you suffer. I want you to learn the fate that awaits you. You shall be as much my slave as if you were shut up in the harem of the Sultan of Constantinople, with this difference, that you may go for a drive in the Bois de Boulogne when you like. You will say that we are not in Turkey, but in Paris; but a man with millions at his command, as I have, is beyond the reach of the law. If you venture to tell anyone that you were decoyed here, I shall deny it, and no one will believe that you did not come here of your own free will and accord. I could not even be prosecuted on account of your age, for I have learned that you are twenty-two."

Terrified out of her life, Cécile asked herself how this odious voluptuary had learned so much concerning her, and never for a moment conceived that Juliet had furnished Simancas with them, having in her turn procured them from the dastardly Arthur.

"But things will never go so far as that," continued the marquis, "for we are going to make a bargain."

"I do not think so," answered the young girl in a firm voice.

"But I am sure of it, and you will not leave here until all is settled. I will set you up as the woman should be

that I honor with my countenance. You shall have a house, horses and carriages; indeed, I desire that you should do me credit, and as I told you before, I will not be too exacting as regards your fidelity to me."

"And I tell you that I will never be yours whilst I live. If you keep me here in spite of myself, there are those who will come here to seek me. I did not come here alone, and the person who is waiting for me at your door, when she does not see me come out, will go and tell some one, who will not leave me long in your power."

"I am glad you have told me that," replied Simancas, coolly, "and I thank you for the information, which I will act on at once." As he spoke, he rose from the chair, and moved towards the bell.

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed Cécile, overwhelmed with surprise.

"You shall see, or rather, hear."

In another moment, the old woman appeared:

"Send the footman to tell the woman who is waiting for this lady at my door that her mistress will remain here this evening, and does not require her to stay here any longer!"

The woman left without a word, silent as the mutes who obey the orders of the Sultan.

Cécile now felt that all was indeed lost, for Josephine, of course, could not guess what was going on in the interior of the house, and would obey what she conceived to be her mistress' orders.

Would she go to the Rue Frochot to tell George that Cécile would not keep her appointment?

This was the only hope that remained to Cécile; and certainly had the execrable Simancas known that Cransac was likely to be informed of what had happened, he would have taken other steps, for as Cransac knew his address, he was not likely to be deceived by the story of the false Madam Acton.

"Well," said Simancas, rubbing his hands, "are you satisfied that no one will now take any steps to find you?"

Cécile made no reply. She was seeking for some means, not of flight, but of death, by which she might escape from the fate that the villain was preparing for her. She had no sort of weapon, and the accursed chamber

had no windows. She might have endeavored to dash her head against the mirrors, but Simancas could easily have prevented her doing so; and besides, she might not succeed in killing herself at the first blow. Could she call out for help? No one would come to her. Her cries would not even be heard; the thick hangings would deaden them like the vaulted roof of a dungeon.

Should she implore for mercy? As soon ask it from a tiger. Even the tiger, when he has satisfied his appetite, disdains the living prey that passes within reach of his claws; but the appetite of Simancas was beginning to develop. He gloated over Cécile's anguish, and would, if he could, have drunk her tears, as a tiger drinks blood.

Simancas evidently took a fiendish pleasure in prolonging this painful situation, for Cécile was absolutely defenceless, and entirely in his power, but he preferred to dally over his approaching victory. He could see hatred and disgust painted in the young girl's exquisite features, and the sight of these roused his passions to the maddest extent. The end was very near, but it seemed as if he considered that she had not yet suffered enough, and his object was to give himself the pleasure of gloating over her agonies. "You have done well," sneered he, "in having endeavored to repulse me. Had you yielded to me I might have accepted you, but my passion would have rapidly passed away, but you draw back, you affect virtuous instincts, and you are ready to tear out my eyes. Delicious; that is just the seasoning that I require. If I could hope that I could never bend you willingly to my desires, I should like it all the better, for then I should have found what I have for a long time been seeking for, a woman that I could torture, and who would yet be mine."

"Coward!" cried Cécile.

"Yes, yes, abuse me, and prepare to tear my eyes out. You cannot think how pleasant you are making things for me." As he spoke he crept up slyly to her.

"Coward!" she repeated, and as she spoke she spat in his face.

The villain at once made a rush at her, but she escaped him by diving under his outstretched arm, and darting

behind an ottoman. As she rose from her recumbent position she caught sight of the poker, which, having been placed between the bars, was now red hot, and would prove a formidable weapon, even in the hands of a woman. She darted upon it. "One more step," cried she, "and I will burn out your eyes."

"Ha, ha," laughed he. "Do you force me to proceed to extremities? Well, well, it is your own fault," and as he spoke he pressed the button of an electric bell which was near him in the wall."

"I will have you tied hand and foot by my servants, and then we shall see what you will do. I might even tell them to gag you, but I would rather hear you beg and entreat for mercy, so that there was no one but me to hear you."

Cécile felt that she was indeed lost, and gazed around her for some fresh means of escape. Simancas kept at a distance from the flaming weapon in her hand. He was waiting for help to enable him to accomplish his object without risking his skin. There was a candelabra full of candles on the mantel-piece; Cécile seized it, and set fire to the brocade hangings which concealed the walls. Before Simancas could wrench it from her hand, the whole place was in a blaze. As the smoke began to fill the room, he made another rush at her, but she hurled the red hot poker at his head, and he started back with a shriek of agony. Cécile profited by this moment's respite to make her escape. She rushed into the next room, and almost fell over two footmen, who had answered the bell, but who now only thought of rescuing their master, who was in the burning room. She let them pass by her, and ran down the staircase, crying out "fire, fire." As the footmen had entered they had omitted to close the door; Cécile was therefore able to make her way into the garden without any hindrance. The porter had left his lodge, and was gazing stupidly at the smoke which was beginning to pour out of the building, and she crept past him without his seeing her and then opened the door, without pausing to see what progress the conflagration had made. All she thought of was to escape from the clutches of Simancas, who was quite capable of sending his servants in pursuit of her She felt that she would not be in safety until she reached

the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne; it was not far off, and she hurried to it. She knew that she should be able to get a conveyance there, although at that hour the number of vehicles decreased, and the streets were almost dark, but she ran with all her speed to the Arch of Triumph, which she could see towering up in front of her, and which, in her eyes, looked as a beacon on a rock-bound coast appears to storm-tossed mariners. Beyond it was the haven of safety. There was Paris, living, moving Paris, in which she was certain of finding aid and assistance.

She fancied that she could hear the sound of hurried footsteps pursuing her, but she never stopped to ascertain the correctness of her supposition. Cécile had looked for the cab in which she had come, and which she had left at the corner of the Rue Pergolèes, but it was no longer there. Evidently Josephine had believed the message that the footman had given her, and had gone away. All that she had to do was to find another conveyance, and could she but reach the Place de l'Etoile she felt sure that she could do so, for there was a cabstand at the end of the Avenue of the Champs Elysées. Then all she would have to do would be to drive to the Rue Frochot, for she had resolved not to return home without having seen George Cransac. Would he still be at home, or would he have grown tired of waiting for her? The time had flown, whilst she was defending herself against the villainous attempts of Simancas, and it was now seven o'clock. Her drive to the Rue Frochot would take at least forty minutes more. If Josephine had gone direct to George, and repeated the message that had been given, what would he think of her, and of her having at the last moment changed her mind, and broken her appointment? It was enough to make him believe that she was faithless to him, and had been deceiving him all along. Such thoughts as these were not suited to soothe her feelings after the terrible shock that she had sustained, and she reached the Rue Frochot in a state of extreme nervousness and anxiety. She almost hoped not to find the man she had so ardently desired to see, so great fear had she of being received unkindly. How was she to narrate to him the trial that she had passed through in all its native hideousness? How could she tell him all the shameful details? Might

he not then demand satisfaction from the man who had insulted her, and in a duel might not George's life be sacrificed? Unable to come to any decision, she resolved to leave all to chance, and felt that everything depended upon the reception that he would accord her.

As a beginning the porter made an unpleasant remark. "What, another!" muttered he; "it seems as if it was the day for visits." Then, as she persisted in going upstairs, he added: "As you like, but I have not seen her come down."

Cécile went upstairs more troubled in mind than ever. The words, "What another?" evidently referred to Josephine, who must have been there a short time before. What could she have said to George? Had she contented herself with stating without further comment that her mistress would not come? Cécile could not guess what had taken place, and every pulse in her heart throbbed as she rang at the door of the man she loved.

CHAPTER XIX.

"CAN WE NOT TRUST EACH OTHER?"

As Cransac had never had a servant in his life, he opened the door himself, and a sudden change came over his face as he recognized his visitor. "I did not expect you mademoiselle," said he, with a frown.

"Was I wrong then in coming?" asked she, in deep distress.

"No, only I expected you earlier. May I ask you to come in?"

He ushered her into a plainly furnished room, which he used as a study, offered her a seat, and remained standing in front of her.

"If you only knew what I had gone through to-day," faltered she.

"I know perfectly," answered George, coldly. "You received a letter from a lady who wished to give you an order, and you took the trouble to write to me that you were going to wait on her at five o'clock; but you did not tell me that you would remain there. Therefore I was a

little surprised at learning that you would not be here this evening."

"Ah! then you have seen——?"

"The woman I introduced to you, and in whom you were kind enough to interest yourself. Yes, mademoiselle, I have seen her."

"And she told you?——"

"Hardly anything. She told me that the lady to whom you had gone had kept you—to dinner, I suppose, and would have gone into further explanations, but I wished to hear nothing further, and dismissed her."

"Happily he knows nothing," thought Cécile. But for all that she could see that he suspected her; his reserved manner, his icy tone, and the distant manner in which he addressed her, all indicated that he did not trust her. To convince him that he had no cause to doubt her it would be necessary to tell him the whole truth, and she had never before so thoroughly understood the truth of the old adage "Truth is not always palatable."

"I am glad to see," continued George, in the same sarcastic tone, "that the lady has at last been able to dispense with your company; at least I presume so, since you have obtained her permission to come and see me."

"Why do you speak to me in this manner?" asked Cécile, sadly. "What have I done to you?"

"Nothing at all, mademoiselle, for I have no right to expect anything of you, not even the courtesy of punctuality, and I trust you will not do me the unjustice of thinking that I am complaining about having missed my dinner on your account."

"No, I think that you are angry with me for other reasons, and much more serious ones. Well, if you have any friendship for me, tell me what they are, and let me know of what you accuse me."

"I accuse you of nothing, mademoiselle. I have not the right to do so, nor have you any account to give me of your conduct; but I have the right to be grieved," returned George, speaking with an emotion that he strove in vain to hide. "I am foolish I know, but how can I help it? I had put my whole confidence in you. I had dreamed of a possible future for us both, and I had fancied that this very evening was to have been a commencement of that sweet life which you yourself had

mapped out for us; but the vision has fled. I might have looked for its doing so."

"And so," returned Cécile slowly, "you think then that I have lied to you, and that this story of an order which compelled me to go from one end of Paris to the other was a mere invention on my part? You must think me very silly, for there was no reason why I should have written to you making the appointment, and had I wished to have acted unfairly to you, I could have chosen my opportunity better."

"Perhaps you had no alternative."

"You mean that I was forced to obey an order. From whom, pray, should I receive one—I who am at no one's beck and call?" Then, as George made no reply, she continued: "Be open, and speak out; you believe that I had an appointment with some man, which it was impossible for me not to keep."

"And why should I not think so?" asked George, gazing steadily into the young girl's face, whose eyes never for a moment fell before his.

"You have a wretched opinion of me," said she, bitterly. "Would you believe me if I showed you the letter which I received, a woman's letter, signed Georgina Acton?"

"I do not ask to see it."

"And if I swore to you by the memory of my father, that I left my home this morning on a mere matter of business——"

"I should not doubt you, but I beg you to explain to me how it was that the woman who was with you came to me to tell me that I should not see you this evening?"

"I did not send her."

"What! do you mean she invented the whole thing? And to what end pray?"

"She invented nothing; she believed what she was told."

"Then she was deceived; but by whom? Tell me, I beg of you, and do not not leave me in suspense; this doubt is killing me. You are still silent. Can you not see how I am suffering?"

Cécile too was suffering terribly. To put an end to this embarrassing dialogue all she had to do was to

narrate her unfortunate adventure and this she did not dare do for fear of future consequences between George and Simancas.

After some consideration she resolved to tell him what had occurred, without naming the villain who had endeavored to draw her into the snare. "Well," said she, after a short silence, "if you must know all, listen. The letter that I received was a lure to draw me into a trap, and I fell into it. I thought that I was going to the house of some wealthy foreign lady, who would give me an extensive order for artificial flowers for the United States. And, in proof of the truth of this assertion, I took Josephine Sureau with me, with samples of my work. All this she would have told you had you only listened to her."

"I allow all that; but when you came to the address that had been given you, you must have seen that you had been hoaxed, and that there was no American lady at all."

"The villain had foreseen everything; his servants were in the conspiracy, and when I asked for Madame Acton, they told me that she was expecting me. How could I guess what was going to take place? I told Josephine to wait for me in the cab, and even took the precaution to tell her to come and ask for me if I was detained for any length of time.'

"And instead of obeying your orders, she, who was everything to you, deserted her post?"

"Not exactly; a footman was sent to her, presumably from me to tell her not to wait. The poor woman believed the message, and drove to your house, because I told her that you were expecting me."

"Why did I not question her?" asked George, striking his forehead.

"Alas! she could not have told you the danger to which I was exposed."

"Tell me what it was."

"Can you not guess the danger a young woman runs when she is betrayed into the clutches of a monster. It is not her money or her life that he demands——"

"What, a man dared——?"

"I had no distrust; I was taken to a detached building in the garden, and left alone there. As soon as I per-

ceived that I had been entrapped, I tried to fly, but the doors were closed on me. Then a man came in——"

"Ah! this is too terrible."

"He addressed me in the most insulting manner. He had the audacity to tell me that he had bought me, and that I belonged to him soul and body."

"But did he stop there?"

"I spat in his face, and then he rushed upon me——"

"And in the unequal strife you were overpowered?"

"No," answered Cécile, with energy.

"How did you contrive to escape him?"

"I seized a candle and set fire to the hangings of the room. I burnt my hands, but as his servants rushed in I managed to escape."

George fell upon his knees, and taking in his hands those delicate fingers, which still bore the trace of the fire, bathed them with tears, and covered them with kisses. "And I—I who accused you," faltered he.

Then, suddenly starting to his feet, he exclaimed: "His name—give me the villain's name!"

"His name?" stammered Cécile; "I do not know his name."

"What!" cried George. "You went to his house, and you do not know his name?"

"Forgive me, but it was to Madam Acton's that I went."

"You at least know the address?"

"It was near the Bois de Boulogne."

"Give me the exact address."

"For what reason?"

"That I may punish the scoundrel."

"You mean to challenge him? No, you shall not fight for me."

"I will, unless indeed I find that he is one of those men with whom one cannot fight without degrading oneself."

"And he is one of those. He has acted like a villain of the lowest stamp, and should be treated as such."

"You are right. He has committed an offence in the eye of the law, and I will denounce him, and let him pay the penalty of his crime; that will be the better course."

"Then all will know that I was in his house for an

hour, and do you think that he will hesitate to calumniate me? He will say that I came to him willingly; and how can I prove the contrary? No, you must not do that."

"Then I must kill him," replied George, in a determined tone.

"He will refuse to fight, he will deny everything, and will swear that I came to his house of my own free will."

George grew deadly pale, and a spasm of pain contracted his features. "Good," he said, in broken accents. "Since you insist on it I will do nothing, but I shall be at liberty to think what I like of this obstinacy of yours, in refusing to give me this man's name and address. Ah! mademoiselle, you had better have kept this tale to yourself; there was no need for you to have told it to me."

"You are right, and that proves the truth of it. Had I wished to deceive you, it would have been easy for me to have invented a more plausible story to have justified my want of punctuality."

"You cannot always think of everything. You hoped that this one would have been sufficient for me, and now that you see how determined I am to sift the matter thoroughly, you seek to stop. I now begin to understand."

"You believe that I am deceiving you; this was all that was wanted to fill my cup to the brim," sobbed Cécile. "What can I do, great heavens! to convince you that you have no grounds on which to reproach me?"

"Give me his address then."

"So that you may risk your life against his, against that villian's! Never! Sooner let me die, and then later on you will know that I was not guilty, and will shed a tear for me."

"How can I put faith in your story? Do I even know that you have received this letter with the English signature? Had you done so you would have shown it to me."

Cécile could hold out no longer; to lose George's love and to rest under the weight of his contempt was too much. She drew the letter from her bosom, and handed it to him. "Here it is," said she; "will you believe me now?"

George took the letter and read the address. "How did this foreign woman know where you lived?" asked he.

"Read the letter; you will then see that the woman or the man who wrote it got my address from a wholesale dealer, with whom I have done business for a long time."

George took the letter from its envelope, his eyes were dim, and his hands trembled, so deep was the emotion he felt. He perused it all down to the very signature, from which he learned nothing, as it was a false one; but beneath the signature "Rue Pergolèse, at the corner of the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne." When she gave him the letter in her own justification, Cécile had forgotten that she had handed him the clue to the identity of the man who had so basely ensnared her.

"That man!" vociferated George. "Is that the man who has laid this devilish trap for you? Ah! this time, I have got the villian firmly."

"What do you mean?" asked Cécile, who did not know of George's old grudge against the marquis.

"I mean that the man who lives there has already treated me in a most scandalous manner, and that I will now be revenged on him for all the insults he has heaped on my head."

"How can he have insulted you? You must be deceiving yourself."

"Not at all. At the corner of the Rue Pergolèse, on entering the avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, there is a house, and that house belongs to Simancas."

"Simancas?"

"Yes; a Spaniard who calls himself a marquis, and has his lackeys call him General. The man you saw was a foreigner, was he not?"

"I think so; but——"

"What is he like?"

"Rather tall, broad shoulders, very dark, wearing a full black beard."

"It is the same man, I tell you. Where can he have seen you, that he set this trap for you?"

"Nowhere; at least, I do not recollect seeing him anywhere."

"Then he was ignorant of your existence? You must have been pointed out to him. He pays unsexed women to find out poor and virtuous girls for him. Who can

have found you out? Ah! but I seem to recognize this writing."

George examined the letter more attentively. "Now I know it," cried he, after a strict scrutiny. "It is Juliet."

"Juliet!" repeated Cécile, as though the name had suggested a vague, indefinite recollection to her.

"Yes, Juliet, a woman who, to my misfortune, I formerly knew."

"Were you her lover?"

"Yes, with many others; but, I confess it, I was foolish enough to show myself with her, and she rewarded me by slandering me everywhere. She hates me, and I return the feeling cordially. She dealt the blow at me, in endeavoring to throw you into the arms of Simancas."

"Have you spoken of me to her?"

"Never. I have never seen her since I met you."

"Then how was she able to learn that you knew me?"

"How can we tell? Perhaps she saw you in the street, and your beauty attracted her attention, and as she has fallen so low as to pander for the passions of a wealthy voluptary, she may have followed you."

"I should have noticed it, as I did when that man followed us on the day when we were last together."

The recollection which the girl roused in George's mind caused a fresh suspicion to come across him. This spy was the servant and ready tool of Cornelian. Had the Lion Queen and Juliet conspired together to remove a rival from their path? It seemed hardly likely; and yet he was aware that they had met since his first visit to the menagerie, when Juliet had told Cornelian his address in the Rue Frochot.

Quivering with emotion, Cécile for a few moments reflected deeply. "What is that woman's name?" asked she, suddenly.

"I told you—Juliet."

"Juliet what?"

"Juliet Taupier."

"Ah! sobbed Cécile, hiding her face in her hands, "I had guessed it all, only too truly."

"What do you mean?"

"Her lover is——"

"Finish your sentence."

"The man whom I fancied I loved; but I could hardly

believe in such infamy. Now I understand all. He has mentioned me to his new mistress, and they have plotted together to hand me over to that man."

"And I saw the scoundrel with Juliet; his name is Arthur."

"How do you know that?"

"I heard Juliet call him so, when she insulted me before him, and I struck him."

"You struck him?"

"Yes, and he did not return the blow."

A flush of shame passed across Cécile's cheek as she heard of the cowardly conduct of the man she had once loved. And this thoroughly feminine feeling did not for a moment injure her in George Cransac's eyes, whose heart was a sufficiently noble one to understand her completely. "I cannot comprehend how it was I did not recognize his portrait the moment that I saw it at your rooms," remarked he, to draw her mind away from the painful flood of recollection that had evidently swept over it.

"I thought I had told you," returned she, "that since he had shaved off his moustache he had altered greatly. But now you have the portrait. I entreated you to burn it, or to tear it up. I do so no longer, but supplicate you to cast it into the common sewer."

As Cécile spoke the fire flashed from her eyes; and if George had still any doubts of her, the transport of passion which pervaded her whole being showed plainly that she had nothing with which to reproach herself. The noble-minded girl, who showed such anger against a debased man, could not stoop to a lie. "No," replied George; "I will keep that portrait. It may be of use to me later on, when I know where to find the original of it; but I promise you that I will not lay hands on either this rogue or his accomplice; the police will have *them* in good time; but it is Simancas that I want."

"Why so?" asked Cécile, eagerly; "he is no better or worse than the others, and is, therefore, as much beneath your anger as they are."

"He has what they have not got—a certain social standing, which prevents his shrinking back if he is challenged."

"Are you then resolved to do so, in spite of my tears and entreaties?"

"More so than ever. I have an old score to settle with him, and finish off that and the new one at the same time."

"But it is I that he has insulted—I alone, for he did not know that I lo—that I knew you."

Cécile had, in a moment of forgetfulness, almost uttered the words "I loved you."

"Are you defending his conduct to me?" asked George, harshly.

"No, certainly not; but I can see what he will reply to your demands that I am not your wife, nor even your mistress, and that you have no authority to act in my defence."

"I shall not argue the point with him. I shall strike him across the face to begin with, and, if he is not the veriest coward upon earth, that will make him fight!"

George forgot the wise words of warning that Valbrec had given him: that people who were acquainted with his case would refuse to cross swords with a man suspected of forgery, and discharged in default of sufficient evidence to convict him.

Simancas would certainly take this view of the case, and would refuse to fight, even if the provocation he received was followed by an act of personal violence.

But of this Cécile was ignorant. All she desired was to prevent an encounter which might prove fatal to the man she loved. "Once again I ask you as a favor," pleaded she, taking his hands in hers, "do not risk your life for me. Do not honor this villain by crossing swords with him."

"Take care," returned George, bitterly; "if you persist in your request, I shall begin to think that you have a tender feeling for him, and are afraid that I shall kill him!"

"How can you say so?" replied Cécile, deeply humiliated at the idea.

"How do I know?" answered George, ironically. "You are perhaps in fear for him. You are right to be so. I am a dead shot, and can use my sword fairly well. I vow to you that I will not be too gentle with this noble marquis from across the sea, who affects to treat France

as a conquered country, and our women as if they were purchased slaves, that he could trample on as he liked. Is it his high position or the lofty airs he gives himself that have pleased you, or is it the magnificence of his mansion that has turned your head?"

"Do not say such cruel things," faltered Cécile; "you know that I despise him, and that I love you."

"You love me!" exclaimed George, drawing her to him. "It is the first time that you have ever told me so. I will believe you when you prove it to me. I am sure if I were your husband I should be unable to resist your entreaties!"

Cécile closed his mouth with a kiss. Once more their lips met in a burning, passionate kiss, as they had met before on the step of the ruined house; but this time Cécile did not take him for another, and knew that she was clasped in the arms of a man that she loved with all her soul. The past was all forgotten in the mutual transports of their love, and the thought of those degraded beings who had plotted against their happiness passed completely away; they lived only for each other.

That night Josephine waited vainly for the return of her mistress to Belleville.

CHAPTER XX.

A PENNY-A-LINER.

Happiness drives away gloomy thoughts—makes the heart joyous. For the past few days Cransac had been the happiest of men. Life looked bright, and he firmly believed that all his troubles were at an end.

There was to be no more doubt, no more hesitation. He was no longer going to hide his riches from anyone, not even from Cécile Cambremer, who had promised, after much hesitation, to share his wealth with him. She understood that by remaining separated from him she would always be exposed to the attacks of her cowardly enemies; and she loved George too well to refuse to agree to his wish, that she should never leave him. She had, however, stipulated that she should still continue the business which insured her independence.

She was to direct the operations of her workroom from a distance, and Josephine Sureau was to perform the active duties of overlooker. The project seemed rather impracticable to George, but he had been induced to assent to it.

He had resolved upon quite a different class of existence when he had secured and furnished a fitting place of abode. He was on the lookout for one, and in the meantime Cécile took up her residence in the Rue Frochot, to the utter bewilderment of the porter, who had been all smiles and civility since he had heard that George was a great deal richer than his master, the landlord. The lovers lived without a cloud to mar their happiness. They took their dinner at a restaurant, the porter's wife looked after the rooms, and all went smoothly and happily.

George told her the whole story of his arrest, and his detention in Mazas, but refrained from informing her from what source his wealth had come. He repeated the old story of the anonymous inheritance, and she believed what he told her implicitly.

The gold and banknotes which George had brought away on his last visit to the ruined house were now securely stored away in a safe, which George had purchased,

and which was firmly secured to the floor of the bedchamber, where a safe had never been seen before, for the simple reason that those who had previously occupied the room had never possessed anything worth putting under lock and key.

George, the first time that Cécile was absent for a short time, had removed to his present abode all his wealth, which he had temporarily placed in the wardrobe at the Grand Hotel. He had not said a word to her regarding his intention to build at Montmartre: but he had concluded his bargain for the land, and it was now in course of being surrounded by a hoarding, which would prevent robbers and loafers from entering the place. Therefore, George had no real cause for anxiety of any description. He heard no more of Simancas and his vile accomplices; the failure of their plot must have discouraged them, and it would have been folly to have thrown himself in their way. "Let sleeping dogs lie," is an old saying, and in nine cases out of ten, a very sensible one. Cransac hoped never to find them in his path, for he might be tempted to forget himself, and disastrous results might follow. Chance had also smiled upon him, by delivering him from another source of anxiety.

The fair of Montmartre was over, and the men of the shows had packed up their abodes, and betaken themselves, with their performers and wild beasts, to other parts of France, and so Cransac was no longer apprehensive of meeting Cornelian, who, he presumed, had gone off like the rest. He had entirely forgotten that at Valbrec's dinner some of the better informed among the guests had mentioned that the Lion Queen of the Boulevard de Clichy was about to make her first appearance at one of the Paris theatres, whilst he thought that she was far away giving her performances in some provincial fair. He had not given up all idea of a journalistic career, for Cécile, who dreaded the effects of idleness upon her lover, urged him to seek for some opening in the literary world, and he felt no disinclination to follow her advice. Since Cécile had given herself up to him, he had neglected all his former friends; and Valbrec, who was much occupied, hardly noticed the disappearance of his young friend. Of all those who had assembled round that merry dinner table, Lourdier was the only one that

Cransac had met again. He had gone with him to the to the notary to settle about the property at Montmartre, and had also called upon him to pay him the money that he had lost at cards.

Cransac desired to be absent from Cécile's side as little as possible; and it was she who, with a true woman's instinct, understood that to make love endure for ever it was not good to be always together. One fine morning after breakfast she proposed a new arrangement for the day. She had resolved to go alone to the workroom to give her orders to Josephine, whilst George should go to the office of the newspaper upon which Valbrec was employed, and endeavor to enter into some definite arrangement for employment with him. George was to spend the morning at the office, and meet Cécile for dinner at the Café Anglais, after which they were to go to the theatre. On that evening a new piece was to be played at the Porte Saint Martin Theatre, and Cécile, who had never been to a first performance, was most anxious to be present. It had been settled that George should go and secure seats, if there were any still vacant, and after a tender farewell the lovers separated. The office of the newspaper was on the mezzanine floor of a house in the Boulevard des Italiens, and as Valbrec was never there before three o'clock, George had plenty of time in which to go to the theatre, which he did, leisurely smoking a cigar on the way. Upon his arrival at the box office he was informed that there was not a seat in any portion of the house available; and yet, after all, it was only one of those spectacular pieces, a mere extravaganza, with plenty of ballet, certainly not a work of any literary merit, and yet all Paris was in a ferment to be present at it. George did not care a bit what they were playing, he had not even read the posters; but, as Cécile had expressed a wish to see it, he was much annoyed at not being able to gratify the first wish she had expressed. In Paris, however, everything can be obtained for money. As Cransac was leaving the box office he was accosted on the pavement by an individual with a red scarf round his neck, who offered to sell him a ticket for one of the stage boxes for two hundred francs. Since George had stilled the admonitions of his conscience, he did not at all care what money he spent. He therefore followed the man

into a neighboring wine shop, and the bargain was concluded over the counter. Two hundred francs was a large sum to pay for a box, and Cécile would have been the first to blame him had she known that he had done so, but he resolved that he would say nothing to her about the price, and was only too delighted at being able to gratify her wishes at any cost.

After completing this stroke of business, George turned back to the office of the paper, and was ushered into Valbrec's sanctum, a little ill-furnished den opening into the public room, where visitors were continually coming and going. Valbrec was just commencing his society jottings, but he was quite willing to put by his work for a moment, for he was not one of those who are too fond of work; besides, he was really pleased to see George once more.

"Where the deuce have you been hiding yourself since our dinner at Brébant's?" cried he. "I began to ask myself if you had not gone back to London to collar the rest of the money that fell on you from the skies."

"No," returned George, who did not care for too many questions regarding his wonderful heritage. "I have not had to cross the channel again. My banker has made me a remittance and all my business is now settled.

"Bravo! Your fortune will be better invested here in France, where you have it in your own hands." Then, as George seated himself at the ink-stained table, at which he had been writing, he continued: "I heard of you from Lourdier. It seems that he landed you over the ground at Montmartre."

"Yes, though I did not much fancy the bargain. I let myself be inveigled into it."

"He tells me that you are going to build there?"

"I have not made up my mind about that."

"I advise you to look twice before you do. Lourdier is a very good fellow, but he is shrewder than you are, and if you go in for building from the plans of his friend Thomas, you will be plucked pretty bare. Take some comfortable rooms in a good part of the town."

"I am looking for some."

"Very good. Make yourself comfortable in them, and don't take all the responsibility and expense of a house

on your shoulders. Spend your money on yourself, my boy, not in rent and taxes, and servants."

"I agree with you entirely."

"Well, now tell me what you have been doing with yourself since the last day we met. I hope that you have not begun to play again. Ecarté does not agree with you, and the next time you may not get off for a few thousand francs."

"Where could I have played? I don't belong to any club now?"

"No more do you," answered Valbrec, who recollected too late the insulting manner in which George had been treated in the Rue Volney. "Let us talk of something else. You have, I hope, given up the idea of sending in copy?"

"Well, no; I came here expressly to ask you if I could be of any use here."

"You have plenty of talent and intelligence, but that is practically saying nothing."

"I don't understand you."

"My dear fellow, general talent in no particular line is not adapted to journalism. To succeed you must have a special aptitude, and I cannot see that you possess this."

"You spoke to me of writing paragraphs."

"If you fancy doing so you can try, but I predict that you will soon grow weary of it. If you were poor, and had to struggle for a living, you might perhaps succeed; but a man only arrives at the goal of success when he is spurred on by necessity, and between ourselves, old man, an amateur journalist isn't up to much. I know that they are not much greater fools than the others. We make use of them by sending them into society to report, because they know how to dress and behave. Journalism resembles diplomacy; to succeed in it you must be born to it."

"Why do you endeavor to discourage me?"

"You are in error; I only want to open your eyes. Come, do you want to write for the pleasure of seeing yourself in print?'

"Certainly not."

"Or for the sake of 'interviewing political and literary celebrities?'"

"Still less so."

"Then rest satisfied with enjoying your fortune, and if the mania for writing seizes upon you, write a book. That will fill up your time, and after all you may have something in you; but don't try to get on a paper."

"You spoke to me quite in a different tone when I met you after my mishap."

"Because then you were absolutely without resources, and poverty works wonders. But now that you are rolling in money, if you try to write you will lose time that you might use in a better way. Why do you not look out for a nice girl. You will have no trouble in finding one a great deal better than Juliet Taupier, as I told you before."

"I have found one already."

"Why did you not tell me? It would have saved me the trouble of preaching a sermon to you. Well, amuse yourself in this life, and leave conceited ones to endeavor to pass themselves off for what they are not. Is she pretty?"

"Perfectly lovely."

"I don't suppose it is she that has put it into your head to write in the papers?" asked Valbrec, with a smile.

"But she is the one that *has* done it," answered Cransac. "She does not wan't me to be idle."

"Good, idleness is the mother of all the vices. The lady is very sensible, but it seems a strange idea on her part to imagine that a rich man like you wants to work. What class of society does she belong to? Is she a literary lady? If so, I pity you."

"Not at all. She is an artificial flower maker."

"Curious one doesn't often meet one with such ideas; but no matter, both of you will soon lose this desire for literary distinction."

"Perhaps; but our connection is not a slight one. We are going to set up house together."

"The more reason not to quarrel, for what you have undertaken is a serious matter. You watch your treasure carefully, and hide her from all your friends."

"Not at all. You shall see her."

"I shall be charmed, especially if, after having seen

her, you will permit me to tell you my opinion of her frankly."

"I am sure you can only form a favorable one of her."

"You lovers are always in extremes, and you appear to have gone in for it seriously. Don't be afraid, however, I am not going to undertake to cure you; indeed, I should only give myself useless trouble. Go on, dear boy, only don't run into any foolishness for her. All these romances come to an end somehow, and it is the woman who takes upon herself the duty of untying the knot."

"Cransac was a little annoyed at hearing his old comrade speak so lightly of Cécile, and he was about to protest that this was not a mere passing fancy, when he saw Valbrec beckoning to some one who had just entered the adjoining room, the door into which had remained open. "Forgive me," said he, "but I have taken the sub-editor's place to-day, who is away goodness knows on what business, and I have to look after the paper." Then, turning to the new comer, he cried out: "Come in my dear Saintonge, don't put yourself out; this is a friend of mine who is with me. What interesting items have you brought me?"

The man he had called came in, and Cransac saw a young fellow shabbily dressed, his features as much worn as his coat, but still shrewd and intelligent-looking. "Cransac," said Valbrec, "permit me to introduce you to our head reporter." Cransac bowed, and prepared to take his departure.

"I have two matters," returned Saintonge, "a big one and a little one. They are not quite fresh, but I am the only one who has got hold of them."

"Let us hear what they are," said Valbrec.

"First, a fire in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne. The conflagration broke out in a detached building, which burnt like a box of matches—not government matches, you understand."

"But, Saintonge, that has been in all the papers. It is a very stale piece of news."

"Wait a bit; the papers all attributed it to an act of negligence on the part of a servant, who held a candle too near some lace curtains. Well, they are wrong; the place was set on fire on purpose by a woman."

"Look here, you are telling me some made-up yarn that

will land us in an action for libel. Are you sure of the facts of the case?"

"I had them from the servant who was discharged on account of the accident."

"Did he mention the woman's name?"

"No, he had never seen her before, but the story he told was a funny one. A girl had been decoyed to the house, and in saving herself from the violence of the master had set fire to the place, and that was why the marquis had not given her in charge."

"What marquis?"

"General, the Marquis of Simancas, the man who has that fine house at the corner of the Rue Pergolèse. The house narrowly escaped being burnt down, and the hidalgo being roasted."

"Hulloa!" exclaimed Valbrec, looking at Cransac, "that is your man, my dear fellow."

"Does the gentleman know the marquis?" asked Saintonge.

"Very slightly," returned George, very much vexed.

"You know enough of him not to like him much," returned Valbrec, "and here is an excellent opportunity for you to pay off your grudge. Shall I give him a first-class slating in to-morrow's issue? It will please our readers, for they all detest these insolent foreigners. Saintonge can begin this evening by a few carefully considered lines, which he can slip in amongst the events of the day.

"'Great scandal in a princely abode in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. Commencement of a drama which may be played out in a court of justice, *in camera*.' Next day I will write a scathing article on the disreputable class of foreigners who now infest Paris, and if Simancas comes here to ask for an explanation, I will receive him; unless, indeed, you would like to take that duty on yourself?"

Cransac was in no hurry to reply, for two separate feelings were contending in his bosom; on one side he was rejoiced to find an unbiassed witness confirm the recital of Cécile Cambremer; and, on the other, he did not wish his friend Valbrec to make a violent attack upon Simancas in his paper. The marquis had kept silence on an adventure in which he had not played a very distin-

guished part, but if he were pushed hard, he might accuse Cécile of having set fire to his house, and swear that she had come there of her own accord.

"Well," said Valbrec, "what do you say?"

"I should prefer another mode of revenge. I have a personal quarrel with the man——"

"And you would rather take your own method of revenge? Perhaps you are right, and the paper would have a chance of losing the case. The servant who gave Saintonge the information would very likely leave us in the lurch at the last moment. We should never be able to find the woman who had been insulted and Simancas would get damages and costs against us. No, we will say nothing more. We have noticed the conflagration, and we will say nothing about the incendiary, or what is hidden in the background."

"Just as you like," muttered the reporter.

"And now for the second item of news that you have brought me, my dear Saintonge."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MURDER AT MONTMARTRE.

"That is a more serious matter. It is about the man who was murdered the other day on the Hill of Montmartre."

At this unexpected announcement George turned deadly pale. It seemed as if this collector of accidents and offences would never have ceased darting poisoned arrows at him. The murdered man was doubtless the scoundrel that George had struck down on the night of his last visit to his treasure. His recent happiness had almost made him forget this tragic adventure, and if he did occasionally think of it he did so without any feelings of remorse, as it was a legitimate case of self-defence, and he hoped that the world of Paris would not occupy itself much with an occurrence which was so constantly to be seen in the columns of the journals. And now this unpleasant history was all at once recalled to him by a

man whose profession it was to show up such events in a manner to satisfy the curiosity of the public."

"Pooh!" returned Valbrec, "a loafer about the outskirt knocked on the head in a drunken row by one of his companions. That is not very interesting, Saintonge."

"I thought as you did at first, but I have changed my mind since I heard some unexpected news at the inquest. The police think that they have got a clue."

"A clue to what?"

"To this. As there were no papers on the dead man, he was taken to the Morgue, and in three days the body was recognized. He was a convict who had just come out of the Central Prison at Melun, after having done seven years."

A feeling of relief passed through George's heart when he heard that the man he had killed was after all a mere malefactor."

"The rogue," continued Saintonge, "had been sentenced for complicity in a robbery which made some little noise in its day from its extent and audacity: the safe of a banker in the Rue du Faubourg Poissonière was taken away one night, and carried no one knew where. There must have been three men at least engaged in the business, and the messenger of the bank was their accomplice. The latter has never been heard of, and they only managed to arrest one of the thieves, a man named Mahossier, in whose possession five rolls of gold coin were found, which were recognized by the banker from their being wrapped up in green paper. Mahossier is the fellow who has just been made away with on the Hill of Montmartre."

"This is serious," remarked Valbrec. "Let us hear the end of it."

George said nothing, but he was struck with the mention of the green paper, and he redoubled his attention.

"The end is that the police hope to discover the safe. Mahossier was killed in an open garden, where he was either going to or coming from a ruined house, which formerly belonged to the banker upon whom the robbery was committed. It seems the safe held over two millions, and its loss ruined the owner of it. The question is what Mahossier was doing on this spot, to which he can-

not have come alone, since he had been killed by the blow of a stick——"

"Given by a fellow of his own stamp, who will never be seen again. Well, my dear fellow, if this is your famous bit of news——"

"They will very likely not find the murderer, but they may discover the treasure."

"What treasure?"

"Why, the safe that was stolen seven years ago. It is suspected that the robbers buried it in this garden."

"Of course they may have done so, but it is a deuce of a long way from the Faubourg Poissonière to the top of the Hill of Montmartre; and if they did so, I should think that they would have emptied it first."

"It is supposed that they had very little time after the robbery, for immediately after it had taken place they were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for other crimes, so that they had to wait for their liberation before they could dig it up. It has therefore been decided to make a thorough search of the premises."

"Two millions are worth looking for."

"The banker would be pleased if they were found."

"No; he is dead. It appears that he committed suicide when he became insolvent."

"But I suppose he left some heirs; and I hear that he has left plenty of creditors, and they would be delighted to get hold of the money. The search will begin to-morrow, and it would be interesting to be present at it."

"So it would."

"Besides, our paper would be the first in the field, for I am the only one that knows all about the matter."

"Bravo, my dear fellow. You have a week's work before you at the very least, and can send in plenty of copy, for they won't find the safe at the first go off. Ah! if we could only get hold of another affair like the Tropmann murder. That was a magnificent piece of business; they found a fresh body every eight days. We brought out drawings representing the pick-axe and the shovel which the murderer had used to dig the graves with. Our sale went up ten thousand a day."

"We shan't have such luck as that. Tropmanns are rare unfortunately; they only occur once in a century. But I will engage to get all I can out of this business."

"Well, I rely upon you. Go to work boldly."

"Be easy on that head; I won't miss a single performance, and will make the thing go. The most curious thing about it is that the land belonged to a business man, who gave it to our advertisement agent to sell for him."

"What, Lourdier?"

"Just so; if he had only known that there was a gold mine underneath it, eh!"

"But here, George," cried Valbrec, "why, Lourdier has sold the land to you?"

"I don't know if it is the same bit of land," answered George, whose feelings it would be difficult to describe.

"The land that I am speaking of," said Saintonge, "is bounded on one side by the Rue Gabrielle, and runs up the hill to the Place de Tertre, near the Church of Montmartre. There is a brick building in it, that is falling to pieces rapidly."

"Is that yours?" asked Valbrec.

"I think it must be," stammered George.

"You ought to know. Hang it all, man, you didn't buy it without seeing it, did you?"

"I saw very little of it; besides, I don't know, after all, whether I shall build or not. I may not even set foot in it again."

"Ha, ha! And suppose they find a treasure, you would have a share in it. According to law, unless I am deceived the owner has a right to a third of the sum found."

"Yes, when there is no owner for the money; but you say that this is stolen property, and you may be sure that a claim will be put in for it."

"Besides, you don't want it; but there it is just like your luck to buy a piece of land and find a treasure buried in it!"

George did not think much of his luck; on the contrary, he considered that he had attained to the pitch of misfortune in having attracted the attention of the police to the house in the Rue Gabrielle, by unfortunately killing a rogue in self-defence, though he might have known that an inquest invariably follows when a dead body is found bearing traces of violence. But even had he thought of this, who would have supposed that this had anything to do with a robbery committed seven years before? He had felt quite secure that no one would

accuse him of having murdered a criminal who he had never seen before that night, and he had hoped that all efforts to find the murderer would be speedily abandoned. But the affair had now assumed an entirely different complexion; the papers were going to take it up, and would doubtless give it enormous publicity. A search would doubtless reveal the scene of the hiding-place, in which a very large sum still remained; a sum which he had not intended to make use of, for since his last visit he was sufficiently wealthy, but which he certainly did not wish anyone else to appropriate. Of one thing he was almost sure, and that was that it would be impossible to implicate him in the old story of the bank robbery; and yet he had cause for uneasiness. The man of the exercise-yard at Mazas could not denounce him as having taken possession of property knowing it to be stolen, for he knew him neither by name or sight. But he might make up his mind to confess everything, and tell how he had thrown a note, containing full information as to where the treasure was, over the wall to another prisoner. What had become of the robber who had signed his name Pierre? Had he been sentenced, as he expected, to twenty years' penal servitude, and already shipped off to New Caledonia? Might he not manage to effect his escape before embarkation? and might he not, on reaching Paris, be retaken at any moment in the ruined house?

"Yes," continued the reporter, recurring to the subject, "we have an almost inexhaustible sensational topic, for if the search proves fruitless, the police can make what they call a 'rat-trap' of the house, and the odds are that Mahossier's murderer will be caught there."

"Saintonge, my boy, you are immense," cried Paul Valbrec. "Don't let us have anything to do with the Simancas matter. Occupy yourself entirely with the 'Mystery of Montmartre'—a good title, eh?"

"Excellent; and now, if you have no more need of me, I will get back to the police-station," said the reporter.

George was half inclined to ask him a few questions, but he did not dare do so, for fear of letting him see the interest he took in the matter; but Saintonge relieved him from his perplexity.

"If, sir," said the reporter, who was anxious to make himself agreeable to any friend of Valbrec's, "you would

care to follow the operations of the police, I can, I think, obtain permission to take you with me, as, in your position as owner, you have certainly a right to be present at the search on your own property."

"I should go, if I were you," exclaimed Valbrec.

"I don't say that I will not avail myself of your offer," said George, "for I am anxious to know the details of the robbery, which is the point from whence this strange story starts, and with which I never was acquainted before."

"Because you were too young. You could scarcely have left school at the time. I, who am older than you, recollect it, but not perfectly; but I can get you all the information that you require. All I have to do is to send some one to the National Library to consult the back numbers of the *Gazette des Tribunaux* for the years '77 and '78. My man can take notes, and you can learn all you want. He can tell you the exact date of the crime, and the name of the banker who was plundered."

"As for the name," broke in Valbrec, "you have only to ask Lourdier, who ought to know it, as he is the representative of one of the creditors of the bankruptcy."

"I never thought of that. When Lourdier sold me the land there was no question of this strange affair. But I need not ask him, since this gentleman has been good enough to say that he will furnish me with all the details."

"Just as you like. Well, good-bye, Saintonge. I shall be here until five o'clock, so don't be later than that, if you come back to-day."

The reporter took his leave without ever having sat down, for it is the nature of his tribe to be always in a hurry. George, too, was anxious to get away, for he was not in the humor to carry on a gay conversation; but Valbrec, who was in a mood for a gossip, did not feel inclined to break off the conversation that Saintonge had interrupted.

"How improbable fact is," cried he. "You came here to tell me of your projects and your love affairs, then that capital fellow Saintonge drops down upon us, and tells us two stories, in both of which you are interested. Simancas, and your piece of land. It seems as if he had done it for the purpose."

"Oh!" said Cransac, endeavoring to assume an easy

air, "I am not thinking now of that blackguard of a Spaniard; and as for the land I was fool enough to buy, I shall see it again as little as possible, for I don't care about living in a spot where people are knocked on the head."

"You do not wish to dwell upon the 'theatre of the tragedy,' as the Public Prosecutor would term it; the more so as you are going to set up house with your new friend, for it might prevent your sleeping. By-the-way, where have you built your temporary nest?"

"At my own place."

"What, have you taken her to the Grand Hotel?"

"No; I have gone back to my old rooms in the Rue Frochot. But she does not live there entirely; she has kept the apartments she had before, and she goes there every day; but, apart from that, we are almost always together."

"Ah; that is the usual commencement; but I am a little surprised, for I should have thought that Juliet's conduct to you would have given you a distaste for women."

"Of women of her stamp, certainly, and I have a perfect horror of them; but allow me to remind you of what you said just before the reporter came in and interrupted us, and which you had said before when you left me in the Boulevard de Clichy, upon the day I had been discharged from Mazas, and had been overwhelmed with insults and contempt the whole day. Well, the public affront that that girl had put on me had determined me to blow out my brains."

"Happily you did not carry out this fine idea."

"It was you that made me relinquish it by saying: 'Live for some woman; all are not Juliet Taupiers, and you will come across one deserving of your love.' I quote your own words to you."

"I don't deny them; and, since you have found your dream, all is for the best, for I believe in true love, as the only thing to enable a man to sail safely on in the voyage of life. Shall I be indiscreet if I ask you how and where you met the lady?"

"It was a chance meeting," answered George, evasively.

"Doubtless the incidents that decide our lives are always the offspring of chance. My life would have been entirely

different if at a certain hour of the day I had passed through such and such a street, but yet I do not regret having carried out my destiny. My principle is always to bow to circumstances, and therefore I am not surprised at a chance meeting, and prophesy that good will come of it. All I now ask is to be introduced to this charming personage. You promised me that you would do so, but if you regret having done so, I shall not insist on it."

"I don't regret it at all."

"Then when will you introduce me?"

As soon as we shall be regularly installed; and then you will always find a place laid for you at our table."

"Very good; and pray believe that I shall often take advantage of it—at least, if the lady does not object."

"What an absurd idea!"

"My good fellow my experience has shown me that women do not like their lover's former friends, for they distrust, and often with reason, the advice they give them."

"She knows that you will give me nothing but good counsel, and that nothing could separate me from her. You may therefore be sure that she would receive you as she would my brother, if I had one."

"Even when she knew that I have dissuaded you from becoming a journalist, which you tell me is her latest whim?"

"And a very reasonable one. She wanted me to have some occupation, but I can easily find other means of employing my time; and, besides, Cécile will see the validity of the objections you urge."

"Ah! her name is Cécile is it?—a very pretty name. Cecelia is the patron saint of musicians; is your friend one?"

"Really, I don't know. All I can tell you is that I saw no piano in her rooms; perhaps because she had no time to play."

"Well, don't buy her one," said Valbrec. "Of all sounds, music is the most expensive. But let us talk seriously. It is settled, then, that we shall see each other constantly when you are definitely installed, but in the meantime you must give me an opportunity of making Mlle. Cécile's acquaintance. Why don't you bring her to

dine with me at a restaurant one of these days? Not to-night, for I am going to the theatre."

"And so are we."

"Well, any other night; you will always find me here from five to seven. And now, my dear fellow, I have an article to write."

George rose from his seat. "But deuce take me if I know on what subject," resumed Valbrec. "Stay; I have it! suppose I fall on the police, who never by any chance discover the authors of a crime?"

"That is not a very new business."

"About the police, who, after a lapse of seven years, begin to look for the robbers of two millions of money!"

"I hope you won't refer to that unpleasant affair at Montmartre."

"What do you take me for? In the first place, I never speak of my friends in the paper; and, besides, I know how unpleasant you would find it to have public attention attracted to you. The error which led to your committal to Mazas has been acknowledged, but an anonymous denunciation would lead to inquiries as to your accession to wealth, and I suppose you don't care about having to make a public explanation. By-the-way, you have not been questioned yet, have you?"

"No."

"And I do not believe that you will be, although all those who know you are aware that you have become a millionaire; besides, even if you were questioned, it would be the easiest thing in the world for you to explain matters. But, for all that, it would be better that you should not be troubled; and now, my dear George, I won't keep you any longer. I have just time to write my article, and I don't want to keep them waiting for my copy."

George shook his friend's hand warmly, and left the office, glad enough to find himself alone, after a visit so full of unexpected incident, which had roused feelings within him which he was compelled to conceal.

When he came to see Valbrec, to ask for some employment on the paper, he had not expected to hear two matters in both of which he was much interested, discussed, Cécile's adventure was most satisfactorily cleared up, but he foresaw that some trouble might result from

his last nocturnal visit to Montmartre, and he almost regretted that he had consented to be present at the search that the police were about to institute on the morrow; but, on the other hand, curiosity urged on him to assist at the operations. He knew that nothing would be found in the garden, but the ruin would most certainly be searched; the chances were that the hiding-place would be found, and he was anxious to be there to see if the piles of gold did not conceal a decaying body, the odor of which he fancied he had perceived on his first visit. But yet he could not disguise the fact that his presence would draw upon him the attention of the police and he sought in vain to persuade himself that he could avoid this danger by begging M. Saintonge to present him as a mere reporter for the press, and not as the actual owner of the property. In this difficulty he could not consult Cécile, who upon any other matter would doubtless have given him excellent advice; but she knew nothing of his visits to Montmartre the night after he had saved her life. She did not even know that he had bought the property, which she must have known long before she had met him, as she had come there from Belleville to put an end to her life; and as he had made up his mind not to build there, he resolved that he would never tell her, for he wished that she should remain in ignorance of the strange adventure which had not only enriched him, but thrown him into a series of the most cruel perplexities. He saw only too plainly that he ran the chance of being accused of having had a hand in a robbery, and of having murdered one who, robber as he was, was still a man. As all this turmoil of thought seethed and bubbled in his brain the idea again came to him that if luck changed he could still shoot himself, as he had determined to do on the day he was discharged from the prison of Mazas. He would now, perhaps, regret life the less, because he had experienced the supreme happiness of living, and being beloved; for before his committal to prison he had only known a mere burlesque of love. All that he could do now was to keep up appearances before Cécile, who knew nothing of what was going on. He would have preferred not taking her to the theatre that evening, for he was not in the vein to amuse himself with the magnificent scenery, or the puns and jokes

of a burlesque; but he had not the courage to deprive Cécile of a pleasure which she so ardently looked forward to.

CHAPTER XXII.

"AND SLANDER WITH HER VENOMED TONGUE."

Cransac's interview with Valbrec had been a long one, and it was now time for him to return to the Rue Frochot, where Cécile was to meet him. Night had closed in, and the lamps were lighted as George came out on the boulevard. It was that hour of the evening when the loungers crowd the cafés, and the young ladies on the prowl sally forth, trusting for lucky meetings, or even in quest of a mere invitation to dinner, for after all that is better than returning home hungry. They can be seen walking along the pavement, casting smiles around them upon the young gentlemen sipping their absinthe, or upon the older ones, taking a brisk walk to promote a failing appetite. And yet the poor girls have no cause for smiles and laughter, for if they return unsuccessful from their man-hunt they will have nothing to eat, and will be beaten into the bargain, for Alphonse is sitting at home waiting for money, and the bully's temper is not of the sweetest when he does not get it. There are women about who could live, and live well too, without sweeping the muddy streets with their skirts, and who yet will not disdain to profit by what they term an opportunity. These do not stare into the faces of the passer by, but cast down their eyes when a man looks at them. A young fellow from college would be deceived, and a man from the country would apologize to them; but, for all that, they take care to turn down the first street they come to, and slacken their pace, so that the man whose notice they have attracted may come up with them, away from the glare and din of the boulevards. They make a halt before the shops, especially before those of the jewelers, as it is convenient to enter into conversation there without people noticing them too much; and then —who can tell?—they may, perhaps, find some generous

being who may open the acquaintance by the present of a ring or a bracelet.

George, however, was well acquainted with all the manœuvres of this class, and did not think their proceedings worth noticing. He walked on without looking at anyone, and was about to turn down the Rue Lafitte, when he involuntary remarked a woman, with a profusion of yellow hair, walking in front of him, who had turned round to look at him three or four times, without his being able to see her face, which was thickly veiled. As this was one of the usual performances of these clandestine wanderers, it would not have attracted his attention; but the figure of the woman, and the color of her dyed hair, recalled to his memory Juliet Taupier.

He could not, however, believe that it was she. A month back she had been living in good style in a pretty little house in the Rue Jouffroy, and she could hardly have fallen so low in so short a space. He turned the corner of the Maison Dorée, without occupying himself any further with this "lady of the night," who had done the same. She did not go very far, for after passing a tobacconist's some five doors down, she turned sharply round, and, raising her veil, stood still in the middle of the pavement, so as to bar his way. Cransac was about to step into the road to avoid her, when she accosted him. "Good evening, my little George," said she, softly.

Cransac lifted his eyes to her face, and recognized Juliet Taupier. "You wretched woman!" exclaimed he; "how dare you speak to me?"

"Are you still angry with me?" asked she, endeavoring to take his arm.

He thrust her from him so roughly that she staggered back against the street door hard by. In an instant, he regretted having done so, and expected to hear a volley of shrieks, which would have roused the neighborhood; but Juliet contented herself with moaning out: "Oh, my dear George, do not beat me! I was wrong to say all those wicked things that I did about you in the booth at the fair of Montmartre; but—what shall I say?—I was so angry because I had been worried by the police on your account. I have heard since that it was not your fault, and now I humbly ask pardon!"

"This is too much," muttered George, between his teeth.

"Don't be angry, I entreat you, but listen to me. If you only knew how unhappy I have been since I lost you. I I have done nothing but cry. I should like to tell you all that I have suffered, but I cannot here in the street; take me somewhere to dinner." Then, as George remained silent, utterly overwhelmed at her impudence, she continued, in a whining tone of voice: "Oh! I have been so unlucky. My furniture has been seized, and my house sold; but you will not desert me who used to be so nice to you in those days when you were not rolling in gold as you are now!"

Now George began to understand how matters stood. The vile woman had heard of his good fortune, and was audacious enough to endeavor to gain him over once more. A cold feeling of anger came over him—an anger that left him all his judgment to treat her as she deserved. "And so," said he harshly, "you have become a mere street walker?"

Juliet was about to deny it, but he cut her short. "What is the good of lying; I saw you just now in the boulevard!"

"Well, and suppose I am," returned she, "is that a reason for you to look down upon me? There are ups and downs in a woman's life. Those who are up in the stirrups one day may have to seek their bread in the streets the next: and, instead of abusing me, you ought to pity me."

"I might pity another woman of your class, or a dog, but you I hate and despise. If I saw you dying of hunger in the gutter, I would not stretch out a hand to help you."

"Ho, ho!" said Juliet, in quite another tone of voice. "You have grown infernally insolent since you have got a little money; fifteen days ago you were humble enough. What did I do, after all, when you were with me? I was unfaithful to you, I suppose you will say. Well, did you expect, for the few francs you gave me, that I was to be yours entirely?"

"What have you done!" exclaimed George, looking at her in a manner that would have made anyone with the slightest feeling of shame sink into the ground. "Do you think that I am going to reproach you for having left me for that scoundrel whom I struck across the face?

Why, you are admirably suited for each other; but I will tell you what you have done——"

"Go on, then; I am anxious to hear."

"You sold and handed over to Simancas the woman I loved."

"What—you know that, do you?" sneered the woman, who, now that she had no chance of getting hold of George again, did not care to conciliate him. "Pray, how did you know that?"

"I saw the letter that you wrote to draw a young girl into a trap."

"A young girl, indeed."

"Don't say a word against her, or I will twist your neck."

Juliet was frightened, although the street was not by any means deserted, for she knew that George was able to strangle her before she could utter a cry. "Yes," continued George, coming up close to her, "you sold her; and it was your pitiful hound of a lover who pointed her out to you. I will settle my account with him the first time I meet him; but as for you, your destination is Saint Lazare, the prison for abandoned women."

"Just you try and put me there, my good fellow!"

"You will go fast enough without my sending you there, and I will not degrade myself by denouncing you; only remember this, that if you act in any way against my wife, for my wife she shall be soon——"

"Pooh, pooh! And so you have made it up with her again, and are going to marry her into the bargain! What, after her little adventure with the marquis! Well, there is not an ounce of jealousy about you, and you have no hesitation in taking up the leavings of a generous gentleman."

"What is that you dare to insinuate?"

"I say that Simancas could tell you a good deal about your florist. She went to his house, and once there—well, the marquis is not a man to let anything stand between him and his whims; and, prude as she may have been, it was the same with her as with the rest of them."

"You lie!"

"Oh, I dare say she told you quite a different story. Perhaps that she set fire to the house to escape from the clutches of the marquis."

This blow struck home, and Juliet had shown her sense in speaking of the conflagration. That there had been one was certain, but had Cécile lighted it in her endeavor to preserve her honor?

"Ah, ha!" sneered Juliet, "I see it all. She told you that she had risked being burnt in defence of her virtue. Well, I was not there myself, but Simancas's housekeeper told me exactly what really happenend to our fine friend was shut up with Simancas for an hour. I can't say what took place. She may have scratched him for all I know; he likes that sort of thing. But of one thing you may be sure: he attained his end. The place was set on fire a little too late, my friend, and she was very foolish to do it, for it has made Simancas very angry. He was ready to do a lot for her, and now he never wishes to see her face again. That is all. When you like you can go and order a wreath of orange blossoms, if your heart urges you to do so; but remember what I have told you, and remember later on that you may be sorry for the act of folly you say you are going to commit."

George was tortured with suspicions, but he would not for a moment discuss the question with the vile woman who stood before him, nor would he deny the assertions that he did not desire to believe. He could, however, now that he had the chance, tell Juliet plainly the opinion he had of her. "Be silent," cried he; "you are a viper that I ought to crush beneath my feet."

"Not here, my good fellow," sneered Juliet; "they would lock you up if you tried to do so. Besides, you are wrong to be angry, for all that I have told you is for your good; and you are wrong, too, to bear malice, because I sent the girl to the Rue Pergolèse to make some money, for I did not then know that you had anything to do with her."

"You are lying again."

"No, I am not. It was not written on her face that she belonged to you. And besides, I didn't know her; it was Arthur who knew her."

"Yes, the cowardly scoundrel that I thrashed."

"Who has taken your place with me and preceded, you in the heart of your fair florist. I suppose you know that, eh?"

"I know that he is a most degraded blackguard; and

since he lives with you, tell him from me that when I meet him I will beat him to a jelly."

"You are angry with him because he was your woman's first lover. You ought to be more of a philosopher than that. Why, if he had not been, some other would."

Burning with rage George raised his hand to strike her to the ground for her insolence, but a sudden scruple restrained him. Seeing this, Juliet attacked him again. "None of that, my good man," cried she, raising her voice so that the passers-by might hear her. "You are not General the Marquis of Simancas, nor am I a little workgirl from Belleville, so don't think that I am going to stand and be beaten. If you lay a finger on me I'll call the police, and then we shall see if you have the right to thrash me, not counting that if the police poke their noses into your affairs again you may not find it pleasant. I should like to know where you got your money from, and what you would say to a magistrate if he questioned you about it; and you may be sure you will be questioned, for your friend Valbrec goes about everywhere saying that you have had a bequest left you. A bequest left to you, indeed! Why, you haven't a soul belonging to you on this earth, for you are only somebody's bastard. Where have you stolen your money from? Perhaps you picked up a packet of bank notes in a cab?"

George ground his teeth in anger.

"That goes home, does it?" cried Juliet. "All the worse for you. You should not have stood out as you did. I only wanted to be on your side, because I am a good sort of a girl after all, and we might have helped each other. For the moment I am in a hole, but I shall get out of it. If you had chosen peace you would have seen what the help of a woman like me was worth, but you preferred war. Good, you shall have it!" and with this threatening conclusion Juliet emerged from the doorway where she had been standing at the commencement of this stormy interview, and hurried away to the boulevard. George made no effort to follow her, but proceeded on his way to the Rue Frochot, overwhelmed by this flood of calumny and insult, with his heart deeply wounded, and his feelings painfully lacerated. He had left his house full of joy, in order to bring back good news from

Valbrec's office, and he had met with nothing but deception, humiliation, and increased anxiety. He certainly put no faith in the perfidious statements and plain-spoken accusations of Juliet, but he could not conceal from himself that the abandoned woman could do a great deal of harm both to Cécile and himself; especially to him, for she would not hesitate to spread about all sorts of malicious reports regarding the origin of his fortune, which might be productive of serious embarrassment to him. He had never for a moment had a shadow of doubt regarding the truth of the story that Cécile had told him, and the poor girl, who was now dressing to accompany him to the theatre, could not for a moment guess that a vile creature had stopped her lover in the Rue Lafitte, and accused her of having basely deceived him. He resolved not to say a word to her about his unfortunate meeting with Juliet; but the harm was done, and the poisoned dart which the vile woman had cast at him rankled in the festering wound.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FIRST NIGHT.

Dwellers in foreign lands can hardly realize the sensation that a first representation in a Parisian theatre excites. In Italy and Germany, where music is so highly thought of, a new opera will collect together an appreciative, sympathetic audience. But in Paris, whether it is a masterpiece or a mere bit of foolery, a lyric drama or burlesque, or a simple farce, a first night is always an event: not for the worthy citizens, nor yet for the working classes, who do not visit the theatre through vanity, but for that section which styles itself Parisian society, in which the idle and vicious are in the majority. Some come because others are going, as sheep follow their bellwether, and others in the hopes of their names appearing in the papers next day. It matters little to them whether

the piece be interesting or the reverse; indeed, they seldom listen to it. It is quite sufficient for them to be seen, and to attain this object they will lavish their gold to procure places. Some of them who have been unable to obtain seats have been known to parade in front of the theatre during the waits between the acts, in evening costume, so that it may appear that they have been present. They believe that it would be a slur on their reputation if they were not present at a dramatic solemnity of this kind, and will perform incredible acts of meanness to attain their object. It must be understood, however, that this only applies to some theatres, as others are certainly unknown to the fine gentlemen of society. The Ambigu was never "the thing," and the Porte Saint Martin was not so until melodramas by popular authors began to be played there. This evening this was not the case, for a grand spectacular drama was to be played by some unknown writers, but marvels were reported of the scenery and the stage effects. The fashionable world were to be there in great numbers, and their humble followers and admirers would not allow so favorable an opportunity of mixing with them to slip. There was therefore a crowd, and a very fashionable crowd, too, at the theatre. Fashionable evening dress in the stalls, and private boxes full of diamonds which glittered on the whitest of shoulders; nothing, indeed, was wanting.

George and Cécile did not arrive until after the first act was over. They had had a protracted dinner, though not a very merry one, at the Café Anglais, albeit Cécile was enchanted at enjoying a new pleasure with the man she loved, for she had never been present at a first representation. George had taken good care not to say a word regarding the incidents which had vexed him so much in the course of the day; but his mind continually wandered back to them, and he could not force himself to appear joyous and merry during the dinner. Even the champagne had no effect on him, and Cécile was a little uneasy at his moroseness, but she did not let him see it, and trusted to the performance to drive it away. Cécile wore no jewelry. George had not yet thought of giving her any, and, had he offered to do so, she would have most probably refused it; but she was dressed in perfect taste, and her toilet enhanced the charms of her face and

figure. There was not a woman in the theatre who could be compared to her. When, therefore, they drew aside the screens, after taking their seat in the stage-box, there was a sudden sensation amongst the occupants of the stalls. Twenty opera glasses were turned in her direction, for an unknown beauty is a grand treat to the frequenters of first nights at the theatre, who are accustomed to see the same female faces over and over again. Not one of them could remember ever having met the handsome brunette before, but some of the men connected with the Stock Exchange recognized the gentleman who escorted her; and Cransac could see some of them whispering to each other remarks which he felt sure had reference to him. His appearance puzzled those who knew of the trouble he had been in, and scandal and gossip flew about freely.

Cransac might have foreseen that all this was certain to happen, but he was not the less amazed by finding so many eyes fixed upon him, and almost regretted that he had come.

Cécile guessed his thoughts. "Shall we go away?" asked she suddenly.

"What, and deprive you of your night's pleasure, because a lot of fools are staring at us! Certainly not," answered George, deeply moved at this unsolicited offer on her part. Very few women would have consented to sacrifice their evening's amusement to gratify an unspoken desire, only to be read in their lover's eyes.

"It seems that they are looking at me," said she, with a smile. "Well, they shall have their trouble for nothing," she continued, "for I will turn my back on them."

She had, of course, the best seat in the box—that is to say, the one most remote from the stage—and she took such advantage of her position, and used her fan with such discretion, that she became almost invisible to the audience.

Cransac still remained the mark for the opera-glasses of a few of the more obstinate gazers, but he retaliated by directing upon them the barrels of an excellent pair of binoculars which he had brought with him, which ended at last in putting a stop to their rudeness.

When he had achieved this victory he began in his turn to inspect the audience, and found familiar faces in all parts of the house. In the box facing him was Lourdier with his wife and daughters. In the dress circle was the theatrical critic of the paper to which Valbrec belonged; and in the first row of the stalls was Valbrec himself in full evening costume, waiving friendly greetings to his brother journalists in the different parts of the house, and occasionally despatching a gracious smile in the direction of some lady of his acquaintance. Cransac was delighted to see him, and thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to introduce him to Cécile, according to his promise.

"There is Paul," said he, pointing him out to Cécile; "shall I go and bring him here?"

"Why should you disturb him?" murmured Cécile, who would have much sooner remained alone with her lover.

"Because he would be far more comfortable with us than with all those swells in the stalls. If he had seen us, I think that he would have been round before, for he is most anxious to make your acquaintance. Indeed, he asked me to bring him home as soon as we were properly settled down."

"As long as he does not find me too ugly," said Cécile, softly.

"Nonsense, he loves pretty women too well not to know one when he sees her."

"Or too foolish."

"He is too clever himself not to see at once that you have plenty of talent, so let me introduce you to him this evening."

"You know that I will do all you wish," returned Cécile extending her hand to him, which he kissed under cover of the sheltering screen.

"Then I will go," said he. "But no, it is useless; his stall is empty, and he is coming here."

Valbrec had at length noticed his friend and, having waved his hand to show his delight at the recognition, began to perform that unpleasant operation of gliding between unwilling pairs of knees and the backs of the stalls. In a few moments Cransac, who had opened the door of the box, introduced him to Cécile in these words:

"This is Paul, my dear; Paul, my best friend, of whom I have so often spoken to you."

"Pray, be my friend too," said Cécile, gracefully.

"Faith, I ask for nothing better," returned Valbrec, bluntly. "I never saw you before, my dear madam, but I feel sure that we are destined to meet very often, and I am perfectly certain that we shall get on well together. You don't believe me. Well, then, listen to my creed. Not only will I do all I can to concentrate all George's love on you, but if he ever thinks of leaving you, I will quarrel with him at once."

"What compliments!" answered Cécile, merrily. "But take care, sir, I always distrust those who make use of them."

"As a rule, you are right," replied Valbrec; "but I always say what I think. Ask George, if under any circumstances, I ever hid my sentiments from him, and he will tell you that it is the first time that I have ever congratulated him on the object of his love."

Cécile understood the allusion to Juliet Taupier, and the rough frankness of the journalist took her fancy at once. "I thank you for your good opinion," replied she, "and I hope that when you know me better you will have no cause to change it, and that you will still preserve a little esteem for me."

"Oh! esteem is far too cold a word. I openly offer you my friendship, and I beg you to believe that I do not abuse the ties of friendship, especially with ladies."

"What are you two arguing about?" asked George, whose good humor had been entirely restored by the arrival of his friend. "You are to be good friends, and so there the matter is settled. And now tell us all the news of the day, for you always have them cut and dried and first, about this piece, 'The Martyr.' What on earth is it all about? I have read the bill, but it does not tel me much."

"I don't know any more than you, for I was not at the dress rehearsal. I think that it is only a tag upon which to hang scenic decoration. It commences with the creation of the world, and ends with the taking of the Bastile The first act takes place in Eden, and I saw there an Eve with a magnificent pair of legs, but as foolish as a goose for she could't say two words without making a mistake

After that there is the amphitheatre at Rome, and then we glide at once into the Middle Ages, and come to the persecution of the Albigenses, and the act after that is the massacre of Saint Bartholomew. It ought to have been called the history of religious persecution from the earliest times, but it appears that in the end the persecuted have their revenge."

"The deuce," said Cransac; "it doesn't seem to me as if it would be very lively."

"I am afraid so, too; and I am certain that, in spite of the manner in which it has been put on the stage, the management wouldn't rake in a sou if it were not for a 'draw' that will bring all Paris here."

"What do you mean by a 'draw'?" asked Cécile, with a smile.

"In theatrical slang, it means a sensational scene, dear madam," answered the journalist; "and George knows what the draw is this evening."

George made a sign in the negative, and Valbrec was rather surprised, but presumed that he did not wish him to speak of the Lion Queen before Cécile; for the great draw of the Porte Saint Martin this evening was to be Cornelian, who, in very scanty attire, was to perform with her lions in the scene of the Roman amphitheatre, and Valbrec could not believe that George was ignorant of this fact, as her approaching appearance at the theatre had been spoken of at the dinner at Brébant's. A man must have a very bad memory to forget such information, but the fact is that truth is always stranger than fiction. George did not recollect a word about it; and even the name of Cornelian, printed at the bottom of the bill in large letters, had not excited his attention.

"Well," said Valbrec, "if you don't know the most exciting episode in the piece, I shan't tell you what it is, but let you have the pleasure of a surprise."

"Yes, I beg that you will do so," cried Cécile, "I am not yet tired of the emotions that a theatrical performance gives rise to, and do not wish to lose one of them. If you tell me all about it beforehand, I shall miss half my pleasure, and I want to enjoy a real shiver, for I suppose the scene is a terrible one."

"Oh, most terrible if——"

"Not another word, please. I don't want to know

anything. You will think me very foolish, but it is so long since I have been to the theatre; and then I am a Parisian by birth, and that means that I have adored the theatre from my earliest youth. When I was a little thing my dream was to have been an actress."

"Had you carried out your desire, you would have had a tremendous success!"

"I don't think so. To be a good actress you must have plenty of self-possession, and that is a quality that I am entirely lacking in. Besides, the wish passed away very quickly. When I grew older, my dream was to know the actresses, and to see them near."

"That is a wish I can gratify this evening. I have my entrée behind. The manager is my friend, and if you have still the desire to go behind the scenes, I can take you there."

"Oh! I should like it immensely."

"I will pilot you through in safety. George has no more idea of the world behind the scenes than you have, and if I did not act as a guide to both of you, you might fall down some trap, or get a piece of scenery on your head; but with me you will have nothing to fear."

"You will come, will you not?" asked Cécile of George who had made no reply to the proposal.

"Certainly, if you wish, only I think that you will regret having put yourself out," returned he. "It is not so strange a place as you imagine—pulleys, ropes, rough stage carpenters and dirty supers."

"We won't stay long; but if you do not wish to go, I will give up the idea at once."

"Oh, no. I won't stand in your way; and since Paul guarantees us against all accidents——"

"There, then, that is all settled," cried Cécile, joyously. "Thanks, my dear George. You cannot imagine the pleasure you have given me. At last, I shall meet the actresses face to face."

At this point, Valbrec was on the point of mentioning Cornelian, but he thought that George might think it bad taste on his part to mention her name. He therefore had no scruple in taking his two friends behind the scenes, where Cornelian would very likely not notice them, taken up as she was by her part.

Suddenly Cécile began to examine the curtain with a

great deal of attention, and certainly she was not engaged in reading the various advertisements with which it was covered. At one of the small round apertures pierced in the curtain for the convenience of those on the stage who wished to look for any one in the body of the house, was an eye, a dark flashing eye, which was obstinately fixed upon the stage box. Who was it watching? Was it the eye of some young lady friend of the journalist, who was well known to many of the members of the chorus? At any rate, Valbrec paid no attention to it, being just then engaged in watching one of the ladies of the demi-monde, who had just entered the upper boxes with a great deal of noise. But the eye never moved from the object upon which it was fixed, and Cécile began to fancy that that object was George. She asked herself why that flashing eye was so steadily watching her lover. Had he made a conquest of one of the actresses? for he was good looking enough to have done so. Whatever might be the case, he did not reply to it, nor indeed seem to notice it. A feeling of uneasiness came over her, and at last she was compelled to draw Valbrec's attention to the pertinacious gaze.

"Has that eye been gazing for so long a time at you, M. Valbrec?" said she.

"What eye?" asked he, turning his head towards the curtain. "Ah, I see the black diamond shining through a hole in the curtain. Why, it must belong to one of the vestals, for in the coming act you will see the vestal virgins seated on the benches of the Roman amphitheatre, and I have been told that they have been selected for their good looks but I don't know any of those young ladies, so I expect that this one is trying to mash one of the orchestra."

"No, no; she is looking at our box."

"Perhaps it is because she squints."

This reply made Cécile laugh though she was only half reassured. At that moment the eye disappeared.

"There," said Valbrec, "the vestal has fled. The musician did not return her loving gaze, and she is weary of making eyes at him."

Cécile felt more satisfied now, and reproached herself with having suspected George, who was standing up and gazing round to show those who had stared at him that

he did not fear them at all. Valbrec began to criticise the audience, telling Cécile their names, and keeping up a running commentary upon each of them. "Ah," said he, "there is the little Countess of Benserade, about whom and the Italian tenor there was so much talk. The box next to her is occupied by the old Countess of Barancos, who is in love with her coachman. Why, there is Fanny Carrelet with a Brazilian all over diamonds. It would seem that she has left the baron, then."

"Why, you know everybody," said Cecile, in profound surprise.

"That is my business," said the journalist, calmly; "but the more I see of them the more I dislike them. All these beautiful ladies and handsome men disgust me. Ah, if I might only say what I like about them in my paper! But I must give in to my subscribers, and if I may chaff them a little, it is all that I am permitted to do."

"Well, you exercise that privilege pretty freely," remarked George.

"I do; but I often get hauled over the coals for it. Why, you yourself persuaded me to hold my tongue about that vile foreigner's conduct. I did as you asked me, and I was wrong. I ought to have denounced, or let Saintonge denounce, this satyr from across the sea, who attempts to corrupt our wives and daughters." Cécile shuddered; she had a presentiment that this was a reference to her adventure in the Rue Pergolèse. "We might have been fined smartly, but I should have done my duty, whereas now the villain, encouraged by the impunity with which he can act, will recommence his infamies again."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Cécile, much excited.

"Why, of that elderly dandy, stuck up there in front of us in one of the boxes on the grand tier. He has just made his entrance, and is looking round for a fresh flower that is for sale. He looks like an ogre on the scent of human flesh."

George and Cécile raised their eyes at the same instant, and recognized Simancas. He had not yet caught sight of them, but he would not be long before he did so, for he was sweeping the whole house with his glass.

George was pale with rage, and for a moment forgot

the wise resolution that he had made to have nothing further to do with the villian. It appeared as if Simancas had come there on purpose to insult them, as if the odious voluptuary could have known that Cécile, who had so miraculously escaped from his clutches, would have been present with Cransac at the first representation of "The Martyr." Without saying a word, George was about to leave the box with the intention of striking the marquis before the whole audience; a mad project, which he had taken care not to impart to Valbrec. Cécile, still paler than her lover, only wished to quit the place so that she might no longer see the man who had so grossly insulted her, but she did not know what motive to assign for so sudden a departure.

"Why, what is the matter with you two?" asked Valbrec. "You don't seem able to sit quiet. Are you afraid of that wretched old foreigner?"

"Not afraid," muttered George between his teeth, "but I have an account to settle with him, and I am going——"

"You must settle your account elsewhere," said Valbrec. "You are really too revengeful. What, because he did not receive you politely when you went to see him three weeks ago, you want to set on him here at the theatre. That would be absurd, and I beg that you will remain quiet, and you too, dear madame. Have you also grounds of complaint against Simancas, for you seem to tremble from head to foot?"

"I don't feel very well," stammered Cécile. "It is so hot in this box."

"Yes, of course that is it. Shall we go and take a turn on the promenade? You have plenty of time for a breath of fresh air before the curtain rises."

"Thank you, but——"

"Ah, of course, why you want to go behind."

"I thought that you would have taken me there after this act was over."

"Let us go now. You will not find it much cooler, but you will come into the midst of a regular hurly-burly, which will distract your attention, and you can afterwards come back here and see the end of the piece."

George felt that the change proposed by his friend would give him the necessary time to calm down and pre-

vent his committing an act of folly. "Very well," said he, "then take us with you."

Cécile made no objection, for she wished to be certain that George had no acquaintance amongst the actresses, and she resolved to leave the theatre with him as soon as the second act was over. She guessed the feelings of the poor fellow, and she desired to prevent all chance of a meeting between Simancas and her lover.

"Come, then, my children," cried Valbrec, who had no idea of the true state of their feelings. "All that we have to do is to make haste."

Cécile would have liked to have got her mantle, but the box opener who had charge of it was not at her post, and Valbrec assured her that it was very warm behind the scenes. He practiced what he preached, for he had left his own coat in his stall, and George followed his example by depositing his in the cloak-room. One of the officials of the theatre was seated on a chair in front of the door of communication, and performed his duties as Cerberus with incorruptible fidelity. No one, although many heavy bribes were offered to him, had ever managed, unless properly authorized, to pass through that door. Paul Valbrec, one of the staff of a well-known paper, had his right of entrance, but the man looked rather queerly at Cransac as Paul, slipping a five-franc piece into the man's hand, whispered, "A member of our staff."

"And the lady?" asked the official, timidly.

"She belongs to it too," answered the journalist, with the most admirable coolness.

"Very good," returned the man, inserting a key in the lock. "Go in, sir."

Valbrec ascended the steps of a short ladder, he then turned and aided Cécile in her assent, George followed; the door was shut, and they found themselves in almost total darkness. "This is funny," said Valbrec; "I have been here twenty times, and I don't know where I am a bit."

They could see nothing, but heard all sorts of strange noises: the shouts of the workmen setting the scenes, the tramp of the supers collecting in the passages, the clash of metallic substances; and above all these sounds was a loud, sustained growling, varied by an occasional roar like a peal of thunder. Cécile was rather alarmed, and

pressed close to George, who reassured her as much as he was able, although he too was quite out of his element in this ill-lighted locality. At this instant three loud raps were heard. This was the signal given by the stage manager for the raising of the curtain. "Hang me, if I know where I am," muttered Valbrec. "On the stage perhaps, and we shall be in a nice predicament if the curtain draws up before we have got away. Just fancy what the public would think, for with all the good-will in the world they could not take us for Early Christians about to be cast to the beasts, and I fear we should be hissed. Let us endeavor to escape, my children."

"I am quite agreeable," returned George, "but which direction shall we take? Must we go on, or retreat?"

"Let us go in the direction of the light."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SCENE FROM ANTIQUE ROME.

Cransac and Cécile, in order to follow the advice of their guide, directed their course towards an oil-lamp fastened over a door; and, as they did so, they saw Valbrec, who was in front of them, fell across an elderly man who came out of a low door, bending his head to enable him to do so.

"Look out there, you stupid animal!" cried the journalist.

"Look out yourself," returned the other; "but first tell me how you came in here."

"Because I have the right to do so. I am Paul Valbrec, editor of the——"

"What! is that you, M. Valbrec? Pardon me, but I did not recognize you in the dark. You know me, I am the stage manager."

"What, you, Father Ralingue! Why, we came across you at just the right moment. You can get us a good place; I have two friends with me."

"So I see. If the manager knew of it he would make a nice fuss; he gave the strictest orders this morning to let no one behind but the press."

"Quite so; but you, my good fellow, would not be so

cruel as to turn out the charming lady who is with my friend."

"It is my duty, and I certainly ought to do so; but if you will promise to remain perfectly quiet in some corner——"

"We swear it; but tell me, what on earth have you done to the place. I can't find my way about at all."

"It is the new star that is the cause of it all."

"Well, your new star takes up a deuce of a lot of room."

"My dear sir, just think: a Roman amphitheatre just like the real one, with solid benches, not painted canvas. Why, over a hundred supers will be seated on them, with senators in their togas, vestal virgins, and—and—I don't know what others; but you, who are up in Roman history, know all about them. Everybody will be delighted, and we small make heaps of money."

"I believe you, my friend; but it seems to me that we had much better have remained in front, for it appears that we shall see nothing here."

"You won't see everything; but, if you are not too hard to please, I can put you in a corner where you will be quite at home and will not lose a bit of the acting."

"I don't suppose there will be much acting," said Valbrec, who knew well enough that Cornelian would not be devoured by the lions on the stage.

"Well, the act is a short one; but it will make your hair stand on end, I can tell you."

Cransac paid but little attention to what was going on, for he was thinking of Simancas, whom he had left seated in front.

Cécile believed that a gladiatorial contest was to be exhibited in the arena, or else that the semblance of the martyrdom of one of the early Christians was to be portrayed, and joyfully began to anticipate a scene which would fill her with pleasurable emotion.

"Come, Ralingue," continued Valbrec, who knew what they were going to see, "where must we place ourselves?"

"There, in that space under the benches. You must stoop to get in; and there is only one chair, which I had brought for myself; madame can use it."

"That is all we want. Neither I or my friend care about seeing much, certainly I don't."

"Then you had better stay where you are; and now, if the lady will permit me, I will take her to her seat?"

For a moment Cécile hesitated, as she gazed upon the dark hole into which she was invited to enter, and looked at George, as though to ask his permission, but he made no objection; indeed, he was anxious for a little privacy to talk with Valbrec about Simancas. "Go, dearest," said he, eagerly. "Paul and I will not move from here; and when you have had enough of it, you can come back to us."

Cécile did not wait for him to repeat his permission, but at once followed the obliging stage manager, who, giving her his hand and cautioning her to stoop low, lest she should strike her head, conducted her to her place, and left her with these words: "There is not the slightest danger, but do not come too forward. You must not be seen from the front of the house, and a couple of feet in advance would bring you into view."

Show herself indeed? Cecile vowed that she would take the greatest care not to do so whilst Simancas was there; and yet she thought that she was now quite safe from him, and, with a thrill of anxious expectation, she asked herself what she was going to see.

From her solitary position in the chair, Cécile could see nothing in front of her, though she looked with all her eyes. A fine curtain, made of some sort of gauze, separated her from the scene, and intercepted the gleams that fell from the sunlight in the centre of the house. But if she could not see, sne could hear close to her the sound of deep drawn breathing, which partially drowned the noisy overture the orchestra was performing. With a kind of apprehension she asked herself whence these heavy, harsh sounds could come from, and as she did so the curtain rose slowly to the flies, and a flood of light inundated the whole scene. Then it was that Cécile saw the famous scene that the stage manager had boasted of. It was a magnificent representation of the Colosseum at Rome, as it was in the days of the last of the Cæsars. An enormous amphitheatre, with its rows of benches dwinding away in the distance, and the seat of the Imperial Master in the centre. The scene had been copied from one of Gérome's most celebrated pictures, and to produce it in all is entirety and correctness the manage-

ment had spared neither care nor expense. The supers who occupied the benches fairly represented the Roman populace; the senators were well chosen, and an old ticket seller had been found to take the place of the Emperor, and from his corpulency and Roman nose could easily have sat for a portrait of Vitellius. The vestal virgins were simply superb; perhaps the distinguishing characteristic was wanting, but it is impossible to provide everything. Dazzled by this magnificent scene, Cécile could not take in everything at a first glance, but as she looked a second time she saw that the arena swarmed with lions; some were lying down, others pacing up and down, with heavy thread, on the planks, which creaked and groaned beneath their feet. One was lying down quite close to the curtain that separated Cécile from the stage. This was the one whose heavy breathing she had heard. She was not, however, alarmed for an instant, for she was sure that the authorities would not permit an exhibition in which there would be danger of life or limb either to the audience or the performers, and on looking more closely she saw that all these lions, who seemed entirely at liberty, were shut up in a huge cage, the bars of which, being painted a pale grey, were almost invisible from the front of the house, and made the illusion most complete.

A thundering peal of applause from all parts of the house testified to the success of the arrangement, and, as if to render the scene more real, some of the lions, excited by the noise, began to roar. Cécile had read sufficiently to know that in the time of the Roman Empire the Christians were thrown to the beasts, and she wondered how she had not guessed what was coming from the title, "The Martyr," which she had read on the playbill, and she was now most anxious to see how the programme would be carried out; for she could hardly think it possible that any of the performers would volunteer to be devoured on the stage. She would have gladly questioned George, but she did not dare to move, for fear she might miss some interesting episode.

At this moment George was explaining to Valbrec the fresh offence which Simancas had committed, and the latter was listening to him with a grave expression of face, like a man who will not commit himself to an opinion

until he has heard every detail. George could not help seeing that Valbrec had some doubts as to the entire veracity of Cécile's story, and George was endeavoring to convince both himself and his friend that she had escaped unharmed from the Bluebeard's Castle of the Spanish marquis. Cécile was beyond the reach of their voices, and was entirely wrapped up in the scene that was being developed before her eyes. All of a sudden she saw a real iron gate open beneath Cæsar's chair, and a group of martyrs of both sexes thrust through it by bare-armed executioners. The martyrs were loaded with pasteboard chains, and the executioners brandished whips above their heads, while the victims endeavoring to evade the blows, raising their hands to heaven in supplication. The lions, smelling human flesh, drew slowly nearer to them, and, as the bars of the cage were invisible, the illusion was perfect. Simancas was the only one upon whose face there was an evil smile, perhaps because he hoped that some of the precautions might fall, and that a blow from one of those heavy paws which were thrust through the bars might cause blood to flow. Cécile, who was on the stage, could see the deception, but to the audience in front the illusion was perfect. Evidently this was only the preliminary portion of the scene, and was to be followed by one still more thrilling, as has always been the custom in all theatrical performance from the very beginning. The Martyrs did not advance, but soon another executioner appeared dragging along a woman. She was clothed in tight fleshings, and seemed entirely nude; her unbound hair floated wildly over her shoulders, her beautiful head was haughtily erect, and her extended arms seemed to protest against the horror of the punishment that awaited her. The executioner was a hideous object, the features of a bulldog surmounted by a mass of shaggy hair; a bull neck and brawny limbs. Enthusiastic applause rang through the house, and if Cécile did not join in them it was because she remembered the injunctions of the stage manager to keep herself perfectly quiet. She thought the tall, handsome woman simply superb, but she could not refrain from trembling when she heard the lions, excited no doubt by the prospect of so luscious a repast, begin to roar, and saw them lash their flanks with their tails. The man who dragged the

woman along touched a hidden spring; the bars slid back without a sound and closed again upon the pretended martyr, who remained in the inside of the cage in the midst of the ferocious beasts. All was effected with such ingenuity that it seemed as if every one on the stage ran the same risk as the woman inside the bars. Cécile never took her eyes off her for a moment, although now she understood what was about to take place, but she waited with impatience for the conclusion of this perilous performance. To carry out her part as a martyr the Lion Queen was unable to go through her usual performance, which was to flog the lions, and to make them dance about like poodles. It was necessary for her to run hither and thither, as though in terror of being devoured; and yet how was she to effect this, with wild beasts who had been trained to obey her, and to crouch at her feet? The Fair of Montmartre looked forward to something fresh, and they were not disappointed.

Cornelian, after raising her eyes to heaven, as though to show that she died for her faith, crossed her arms and advanced boldly into the middle of the cage. The lions, as if the order had been given to them, formed a circle round her, roaring loudly. They had been trained to this for the last fifteen days under Cornelian's skillful tuition; but the audience who were not in the secret, looked on the performance in another light. From all sides ran the cry; "Enough, enough!" It was really a terrifying spectacle, but it was not all over yet. Cornelian fell on her knees, with her hands clasped together, and at this signal the lions rose upon their hind legs and roared hideously. This roar found an echo all over the theatre; many of the ladies were ready to faint, others hid their faces in their hands and a stifled sob burst from almost every bosom. But the excitement grew more intense when Goliath commenced to irritate the animals with his pike. Then the savage beasts began to bound backwards and forwards, showing their formidable teeth and claws, sometimes leaping over the kneeling woman, rushing madly at the man who was harassing them, and then coming back to the motionless figure in the centre of the cage and throwing it to the ground by pressing their ponderous paws on its shoulders, and finally hiding it completely beneath their bodies, as a

pack of hounds will cover the body of a stag that they have pulled down. Then fear seized on all the spectators, and a general rush took place. Men and women crushed and crowded in their efforts to escape. The performers on the stage, especially the vestal virgins, looked most uncomfortable, and the fat man who represented Cæsar prepared to decamp without the least regard for his imperial dignity. Everyone believed that this mad rush of the angry lions on a defenseless woman had not been contemplated, and that the performance had terminated in a hideous tragedy. More dead than alive, Cécile wished to fly, but was unable to stir hand or foot. The lions did not seem inclined to relinquish their prey. Nothing could be seen but a hideous mingling of waving manes, heavy paws, savage growls, collected over a white figure, of which a glance could only be caught at intervals. This was a draw, and a most wonderful one, for never since the fall of the Roman Empire had such a performance been witnessed in a modern theatre. It was time to let the curtain fall to prevent an accident in front of the house; a minute later and there would have been one of those terrible crushes which follow a mad effort to escape from a building.

"Curtain!" cried the voice of the manager, and the curtain came down a little quicker than usual.

But the stage was not dark now, for the gas was lighted, and from her hiding-place Cécile could see the lion Queen calmly disengage herself from the lions and rise to her feet, whilst the beasts dispersed themselves with low growls, incited to do so by the ever-ready pike of Goliath. Martyrs and executioners, senators and vestals, all hurried out pell-mell by the passage under Cæsar's chair, for it was now necessary to leave the stage free for the men whose duty it was to roll forward the cage into which the lions were to be placed. The duty of shifting the terrible animals from one to the other was performed by Cornelian and Goliath, who seemed to think nothing of it, and in a very brief space of time the savage beasts had been shifted into the cage which was their usual residence, and which the public had not yet seen.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SCENE IN MODERN PARIS.

Nothing now remained but to shift the scene, and the stage carpenters and the workmen hastened to their duties at once. Cécile had only just time to rush into the passage, where she found George and Valbrec, arguing with much vehemence on a subject that was evidently far more interesting to them than the scene which had caused her so much emotion. The two friends were still discussing how Cransac should treat Simancas. George persisting in asserting that now was a most excellent opportunity to assault this insolent foreigner, and Valbrec vainly endeavoring to calm him. Neither of them had taken any notice of the performance, and when Cécile clasped George by the arm, and exclaimed: "Oh! how frightened I was, I thought they would have eaten her," he could not understand what she meant.

At that moment there was a rush of supers, which carried them away with it, and it was only after a severe struggle that they had a chance of speaking.

"Was it so touching as all that?" asked Valbrec. "Did you really think for a moment that the girl was in any real danger?"

"I was not the only one that thought so," answered Cécile, who was still trembling. "Did you not hear the noise in the front? Why they were crushing each other to death in order to get out."

"What has been the matter?" asked George, still absorbed in the idea that Simancas was within his reach.

The stage manager, who came up puffing and blowing, with a face as red as a boiled lobster, answered for her:

"Ah, the jade!" muttered he.

"My dear Ralingue," said Valbrec, "you ought to be highly pleased with your new performer. The piece will run a hundred nights at the least. Whom are you abusing?"

"That infernal beast-taming woman. Ah! if the lions had eaten her I should not have been sorry. Thanks to her, our season has been ruined."

"How is that? Why, the lady here has just told me that the success was prodigious."

"Prodigious! Why, they have smashed the seats, and the hospital of the theatre is full of injured persons and fainting women."

"Well, and do you complain because the audience have found it too realistic? All Paris will gladly pay you to feel a touch of nature like this."

"Don't you understand that the police will stop all future performances, and that to-morrow, at the latest, the manager will receive a notice to that effect. All our expenses wasted—fifty thousand francs at the lowest. I tell you that it is simply ruin. We have nothing ready to go on with. We shall have to close for a month, or play some stock piece that won't bring in a sou; a nice look-out indeed for the winter."

"But you surely knew what your performance was going to be like. It is your own fault if you let her frighten your audience away."

"Not a bit, the hussy! She would not rehearse before anyone; the only one she admitted was that keeper, a kind of animal that played the executioner."

"I know him, I have seen him at the fair—an awful looking brute."

"I never thought that an audience would be such a set of asses as to take a scene that had all been arranged before as a serious matter."

"Ha, ha! my good sir, when your principal actors have teeth and claws you don't know what may happen."

"I assure you, sir," said Cécile, "that I, too, thought that there had been an accident, and I cannot help asking myself even now if the poor girl escaped without a scratch."

"She!" exclaimed the stage manager disdainfully; "she isn't likely to get hurt in an affair of this kind. A respectable woman would have been stifled or torn to pieces, but the minx is just now sitting smoking a cigarette, and laughing in the face of the manager, who is abusing her for her conduct. I will lay what you like

that if he dismisses her she will sue for damages, for she has an agreement with him."

"And she would have right on her side; but he won't send her off. The public know all about it now, and won't be a bit afraid to-morrow."

"Can't you hear them howling now?"

"They want to know how she is, man; why don't some one go forward and make a speech. It is your only way to get out of the scrape."

"Yes, that is a good idea."

"And one you ought to have thought of long ago. Don't lose a minute. Draw up the curtain, and take your beast-taming woman on to the stage."

"But they are not calling for her."

"Because they believe that the beasts have eaten her, but when they see her safe and sound they will applaud her to the skies; there will be a mad outburst of enthusiasm, and you will see what the papers will say to-morrow. They fought to get out this evening, next time they will fight to get in, the theatre will make its fortune, and the girl hers, into the bargain."

"You forget the prohibition to perform that we shall most likely receive to-morrow."

"The police won't do anything of the kind unless they are compelled to. You can appeal to the Prefect, to the Minister, and when you have clearly demonstrated that the girl does not even risk her skin, they will permit you to go on with the performance. Only look sharp if you don't want to miss your effect. Strike the iron whilst it is hot."

"I will," exclaimed the stage manager, rushing to the back of the stage.

"They will owe me one for this," cried Valbrec; "but we must not stay here, for they will be able to see us from the front when the curtain goes up." And speaking thus, he drew them away into a position of comparative security.

The scene shifter had already removed the cage with the invisible bars, and only a portion of the scene remained behind, which was the cage which formed the permanent dwelling-place of the lions; the front of the stage therefore was completely free. All at once, without the customary warning, the curtain went up, and the noise in

the auditorium ceased as if by magic. There were some cries of "Sit down in front, sit down," and then profound silence reigned. Everyone expected to hear an announcement that nothing remained of Cornelian but a few mangled remains that had been rescued from the lions, but when they saw her led forward by the stage manager, more full of life and beauty than ever, there was a burst of applause that was almost enough to bring down the roof. Cornelian looked superb, as, proud of her triumph, she stepped forward to the footlights, her head erect, and her eyes sparkling with animation, then drawing herself up she let go Father Ralingue's hand and saluted the audience with her whip, as a colonel does when his regiment marches past. Then she rapidly brought it down to the port and remained motionless, as though waiting for the verdict of the audience. Three thousand voices were raised in her praise. She had won her cause, and made the fortune of the theatre. The audience, who had just before been execrating Cornelian and the manager for the fright it had sustained now praised them both to the skies, and the stage manager mentally blessed Valbrec, for the advice he had received from the journalist had saved the piece. As Cornelian retired slowly, keeping her face to the audience, her eyes sought the box where she had seen George and Cécile sitting through the hole in the curtain. She had paid no more attention to them during her performance with the lions, for she well knew that a moment's inattention might cost her her life, but she had not forgotten that she had seen him. She did not know Cécile, but she had easily guessed who she was, and her rival's presence had revived all her feelings of jealousy. She fancied that George had brought his mistress to the theatre expressly to insult her; and she hated both of them with a deadly hatred, and revolved a thousand plans of vengeance in her brain, without knowing when or how to execute them, for it was impossible for her to appear in front during the performance. She would have been turned out if she had done so, and reprimanded by the manager. She had almost resigned herself to wait for another opportunity when she saw that the box was empty, and would have dismissed all her plans of vengeance had not some busy friend mixed himself up in the matter. George Valbrec and Cécile, huddled up together

in the wing, were standing immediately under a jet of gas, which threw a flood of light over them. Cornelian caught sight of them, and all her jealous fury burst forth again. She had no time to lose, for when the curtain dropped those whom she wished to attack would doubtless return to their box, so she was about to rush on them at once, when she was checked by the appearance of the manager and various officials connected with the theatre, who came to congratulate her on her brilliant success. "It is to M. Valbrec that we are chiefly indebted," cried the worthy Ralingue. "He advised me to take Mlle. Cornelian forward, and by it he saved us; and the idea of me, who have been stage manager here for twenty years, not thinking of such a thing, and yet it was as simple as it could be!"

"Valbrec!" cried one of the shareholders in the theatre "why, there he is!"

Just then some of the workmen had removed a portion of the scene, which disclosed the journalist. "We will carry him in triumph," said another;" "he is with a very pretty woman, and she shall share it with him."

"Who is she?" asked the manager.

"I think she is the sweetheart of the young gentlemen who is with him," replied Ralingue.

"She ought not to have been allowed behind; but since she is here, I will go and do the honors of the place to her, all on account of that splendid fellow Valbrec, who has got us out of such a hole, for the representative of the police has just told me that his report will not recommend the suppression of Cornelian's performance; but it seems as if they were going back to the front of the house for fear lest I should send them there. Run, and stop them."

Several gentlemen, including Father Ralingue, hastened in the direction of George Valbrec and Cécile. This junction of the two parties did not meet Cornelian's views at all, for she percieved that she could not attempt to assault her rival before so numerous a company. Had there only been supers about she would have beaten her without hesitation, but in the presence of the manager and so many influential gentlemen, she had to think twice of what she was going to do. She was therefore forced to remain quite close to the cage in which her lions were.

"Have you seen her, mistress?" asked Goliath, pointing out Cécile from the position where he stood, with his back to the bars of the cage. Cornelian took him aside into a corner, and a dialogue in a low voice began between the Lion Queen and her servant.

During this time Valbrec had prevented his friend leaving the place with Cécile, as he wished to do, and introduced him to the manager as a literary friend of his. Upon this the manager, who was a most courteous gentlemen, begged that he might be presented to Cécile, upon which occasion there was much handshaking, and an interchange of compliments, and then the polite manager offered his arm to Cécile, who did not dare to refuse it. Cransac was greatly annoyed, but he felt that he could make no objection to Cécile's being shown round that mysterious locality termed "behind the scenes.'

"No doubt, madame," said the courteous manager," you were greatly alarmed just now, but I want to prove to you that these lions are perfect lambs, and of a much more gentle disposition than their mistress, a young woman to whom, believe me, I shall not introduce you."

"She is very handsome," murmured Cécile, innocently, "and, oh! so courageous!"

Cransac followed the pair in high vexation, while Valbrec whispered in his ear: "I can see where the saddle galls you. You fear lest Cornelian should go on again, as she did on the night we first saw her. There is no fear of that, my friend. Those kind of girls haven't a very good memory. Don't be afraid, she won't eat up Mme. Cécile, and will keep her anger to herself. It will be amusing to watch her."

But George was not at all convinced, and made no reply, but contented himself with keeping an eye on Cornelian, who, leaning against a support, looked on with an expression of face that boded no good. Goliath had turned his face to the cage, and was keeping the animals in motion by pricking them with his pike, as if he wanted to keep them moving.

"If you will permit me, madame," continued the manager, "I will take you to the green-room; I only wanted you to to see our menagerie first because the cage will shortly be rolled away to make room for another scene." Then, turning to Goliath, who continued to thrust his pike

between the bars of the cage, he called out: "Here, you, sir, kindly let the animals alone, or you will make them want to bite some of us. There, that will do."

Goliath stepped back, and the lions began to grow more calm.

"You see, madame," continued the manager, "they are lying down. It would almost make one believe that the beasts understand that they are no longer before the public and need not, therefore, assume airs of ferocity. Now that the fellow has ceased to annoy them, they have stretched themselves out like rugs. It really seems as if one might recline on them."

"And so their mistress can," said Valbrec, with a laugh; "but I should not advise you to try it, my dear sir, though I have often seen her do so at the fair of Montmartre."

"I have no intention of trying the experiment, I assure you. It even seems to me as if we were a little too near the cage, the bars are very wide apart, and I should not like to catch a blow from the claw of that big fellow with the black hairs in his mane, who is pretending to be asleep, with his muzzle on his fore-paws. He has a sly look, has he not, madame?"

Cécile hardly glanced at the lions, but kept her eyes on Cornelian, who stared at her in return, Their eyes had met, and Cécile asked herself why those of the Lion Queen were fixed upon hers with such steady persistence.

She no longer saw Goliath, who had come close up to her, and was now playing with his pike, throwing it up in the air, and catching it again. No one paid any attention to him. Valbrec contented himself with admiring the artistic attitude of Cornelian. Father Rallingue was giving his last orders to the workmen, who were to roll away the cage to the stable where the lions were kept; the manager was only thinking how he could best be agreeable to Cécile; and George, absorbed in his own reflections, tapped his foot impatiently on the ground, without noticing what was going on around him. He could not take Cécile away from her obliging guide, but he was very anxious that the trip behind the scenes should be brought to a speedy conclusion.

"And now, madame," said the manager, politely, "if you have quite done looking at these ill-favored animals, may I conduct you to the green-room——"

He never finished his speech, for at that moment Goliath missed catching his pike, which, in falling, pricked the nose of the black-maned lion. Injured in a most sensitive part, the animal leapt to his feet with a loud roar, and dashing himself against the bars, which quivered under the shock, remained standing on his hind legs, his mouth wide open, his paws in the air, with every claw showing like a lion rampant of heraldic lore. And to add to the misfortune, Goliath, in dashing forward to pick up the pike that he had so clumsily let fall, pushed against Cécile, who fell with her face against the bars of the cage

The terrible claws of the lion closed at once upon Cécile's shoulder, she bent beneath the weight, and was within the reach of the monster's teeth, who had now assumed a crouching posture. Cécile fainted without having uttered a cry, and the hideous Goliath made no effort to rescue her. George alone rushed to her aid, and endeavored to tear her from the savage brute, but a blow from the other paw lacerated his hand, and the grasp on Cécile's left shoulder did not relax for a moment. But the brave young fellow, bleeding profusely, was about to return to an attack which might possibly cost him his life, when assistance arrived from an unexpected quarter, Cornelian, who up to this time had remained perfectly still, dashed between him and the cage, and dealt the lion a couple of heavy blows on the head with the but-end of her whip. The savage beast recognized its mistress and retreated, with a stifled growl, to the other side of the cage.

Although severely injured, George profited by the moment's delay to snatch up Cécile in his arms and carry her out of danger. All the workpeople had fled at the sight of this terrible accident, and taken refuge at the back of the stage; thither George followed them, and placed his insensible burden on a bench, which fortunately stood near. The stage manager wrung his hands, repeating, "I said that there would be an accident!" The manager shouted for a surgeon, and one of his friends ran off in search of one. Valbrec alone retained his presence of mind, and endeavored to calm George and to learn the cause of the accident. He suspected that Goliath had let fall his pike on purpose, and that he had also pushed Cécile against the bars of the cage; but

why Cornelian should have come to the rescue of her rival from the claws of the lion he could not understand, for all seemed to indicate that the keeper had only executed his mistress' orders. All of a sudden he perceived that she was close behind him, and before he had time to question her, she whispered in his ear: "I wanted her to have been eaten, but my heart failed me at the last minute. I hope that she will not die. I have had enough of vengeance. Tell your friend to mistrust his old love and that scoundrel Arthur. It was they who sold the girl to the Spaniard." With these words Cornelian disappeared, and George, who was on his knees by the side of Cécile, did not even catch a glimpse of the Queen of the Lions, who had rejoined Goliath, and was engaged with him in superintending the removal of the cage in which the animals, excited by the sight and smell of blood, were roaring savagely. At this moment the doctor arrived and examined the wounded woman, who had not yet recovered her senses. Cécile's left arm was broken in two places, and the claw had penetrated her shoulder, and had lacerated her breast above and below the collar bone.

"This is serious, most serious. The upper and lower bones of the arm have been broken, and there is a chance that the lung has been injured. I can do nothing here. Send for an ambulance, I will go with her to the hospital."

"No," said George, in a determined tone; "let her go to my house."

Cécile's eyes opened; she had heard what he said, and thanked him with a look of gratitude.

"To your house? Do not think of such a thing," said Valbrec; "it is too far."

"It is my wish," answered George.

"I see no harm in that," remarked the doctor. "I will see to the injured lady's removal, and she will be better off in a friend's house than in a hospital, and if the case is entrusted to me, I will do my best."

This arrangement suited the manager completely, who wished to proceed with the piece, and had no desire to see his green-room transformed into a hospital. He therefore gave all the necessary orders. A mattress was brought, upon which Cécile, who had again relapsed into

a state of insensibility, was placed, and it was carried downstairs by four carpenters to the stage door which opens into the Rue de Bondy. George, supported by Valbrec, followed the mournful procession, which was headed by the medical man. Father Ralingue had remained with the manager, and they were both hard at work in getting up the scenery for the third act. At the stage door they had to wait until the litter with the striped canvas covering could be procured from the nearest ambulance depot, and the wounded woman might expire in the dark passage in which the mattress had been placed before it arrived; but the doctor, who had again examined the wound, declared that there was no immediate danger, and that his patient could easily endure the transit from the Theatre of the Porte Saint Martin to the Rue Frochot, but he could not answer for what might take place afterwards. George, crushed down by this unexpected blow, remained silent, and Valbrec strove to cheer him up. "It is all my fault," said he. "I ought to have warned you that Cornelian with her lions was the star of the piece, but as a matter of fact I could not have supposed that you had not read the playbills.'

"I will kill her!" interrupted Cransac.

"Who? Cornelian? You are wrong. Without her aid Cécile would have been a dead woman, for the lions would have torn her to pieces. The keeper is the real criminal. I advise you to leave him alone, for you cannct prove that he did it all on purpose by letting fall his pike, and besides, what good would it be? You will gain nothing by denouncing him, and may injure yourself, for there will only be too much talk in Paris about this melancholy accident. How long the litter is in coming," added Valbrec, stepping out into the street. George remained by the side of Cécile. The doctor was endeavoring to make her inhale some smelling salts, but was unsuccessful in arousing her from the state of insensibility into which she had fallen. A small crowd had collected outside the door, and Valbrec was endeavoring to prevent them approaching the spot too closely, when a man ran up quite out of breath, and endeavored to pass.

"Halt!" cried the journalist, barring the passage;

then he added immediately: "What! is it you, Saintonge. Where the deuce are you going?"

"I was looking for you," replied the reporter.

'And for what reason?"

"I went into the theatre on the chance of something turning up, and managed to get a stool in the orchestra. I saw you in a stage box, then you suddenly disappeared, and the box-opener said that you had gone behind with some friends. They would not let me through, and as I wanted particularly to see you, I went round by the Rue de Bondy."

"What had you to say to me that was so urgent?"

"Well, there was a report in the house that a woman had been eaten by the lions, and I came to ask you about it that I might run off with it to the paper. It would make a famous paragraph, and perhaps we should be the only ones that had it."

"You are too full of zeal, my good fellow, and have had a run for nothing. Nobody has been eaten."

"All the worse," returned Saintonge, innocently.

"Yes, it is much to be deplored," returned Valbrec, sarcastically; "but go back and re-seat yourself on your stool, if it is only for the sake of letting people see that there has been no accident at all."

"Yes, it *is* a pity. Never mind, I shall make up for it to-morrow at Montmartre. Will your friend be there, eh?"

"I don't think so. Now be off like a good fellow, and meet me at the office at midnight."

The reporter went off sadly, asking himself what the deuce was the matter with Valbrec that he should dismiss him so cavalierly.

At that moment Valbrec perceived the bearers bringing the litter at the other end of the street, and just then the doctor came out on to the steps of the door, and said to him in a low voice: "She will not die of the wound from the claw, but the bites that the lion has given her are terrible. The forearm is all of a mash, and I much fear we shall have to amputate. Poor woman!" added the doctor, in a tone of voice which showed that he had but faint hopes of her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT THEY CAUGHT IN THE TRAP.

Poor Saintonge had experienced a great disappointment at the Porte Saint Martin Theatre. The paragraph which he hoped to get inserted had been reduced to nothing, for on his visit to the office of the paper, after the conclusion of the piece, Valbrec had again forbidden him to mention the accident that had occurred behind the scenes, or even to make any fresh inquiries regarding it for, as a friend of George Cransac, he wished that this unfortunate affair, which was only known to a few persons, should be completely buried into oblivion, and Saintonge could not help feeling that by thus preventing him from making use of an item of news which would have proved highly interesting to the general public, Valbrec was absolutely taking the bread out of his mouth. He was not even able to recoup himself by narrating the panic that had taken place when it had been supposed that a fatal accident had happened to Cornelian, for it was the special province of the dramatic critic of the journal to report all such matters, and he would permit of no intrusion in his own domain. But by a mere chance the unlucky reporter had another string to his bow, and the next day might be a very profitable one for him, for Valbrec had in no way prohibited him to follow and report the search operations which were about to be undertaken at Montmartre, but had, on the contrary, encouraged him to sift the matter thoroughly, and hoped that he would bring back with him a mass of information which had, as yet, not appeared in any of the other papers, and he had, therefore, made arrangements to hear, and see as much as possible, all that was going on.

One of the greatest advantages a reporter can have is to be on friendly terms with the police, and if he cannot open relations with the heads of departments, to be well acquainted with some of the higher classes of detectives. And Saintonge knew them all, and was quite intimate with some of them. He had gained the good graces of

some of the leading men in the police by getting them praised in the paper to which he was attached, and as he was not proud he had conciliated the subalterns by standing them an occasional drink at the wine shops. Besides all this, he knew how to be discreet when it was necessary to be so, and this quality, and a very rare one it is amongst reporters; had won for him the respect and esteem of some of those in high places, men who are not, as a rule, too prodigal of their civilities to outsiders. The magistrates themselves looked upon him with a very favorable eye, and permitted him occasionally to assist indirectly in a complicated case, for he had more than once given them valuable hints by drawing their attention to certain points which might otherwise have escaped notice; for he was very clear-sighted, and his great experience in his profession had given him the instincts of a detective, an accomplishment which he took good care not to boast about. In return for these little acts of courtesy they gave him scraps of information which they hid carefully from other journalists, and it was by these means that he had learned, before his other professional brethren, of the search that was going to be made in the house and garden in the Rue Gabrielle, and how they hoped to connect the murder of Mahossier, who had just been released from the prison at Melum, with the famous robbery of a bank in the Rue Poissonière in 1877.

What is usually termed a judicial investigation does not take place without the persons of the neighborhood taking some notice of it. In a little provincial town it is looked upon as a great event, especially when it is carried out with all magisterial pomp during a sitting of the Court of Assize, with the judges in their robes, the jury in charge of their foreman, and the police closing the procession on foot. It is an imposing spectacle, and, with very few exceptions, a perfectly useless one. In Paris a similar matter is conducted with less ceremony, and this one was to be carried out in a highly populated and little frequented neighborhood. The examining magistrate, the commissary of police, and a sub-inspector of the detective force had arranged to meet at nine o'clock; that is to say, shortly after it grew light, for the sun rises late in December. These gentleman were to assemble in the Rue Gabrielle, which had been placed in charge of a squad of

policemen and a *posse* of detectives. Saintonge, being duly warned of the time and place of the meeting, arrived there at half-past eight, and found no one to speak to but an old sergeant of the detective force, with whom he was intimately acquainted. The veteran was engaged in giving orders to his men as to the positions they were to take up, and who, according to the orders they had received, dropped in one by one from different directions.

"Good-day, Daddy Pigache," said Saintonge, coming up to him. "I see that our ideas coincide."

"I do not know, M. Saintonge, if we both see matters in the same light, but I believe I understand my business fairly; a search is a good thing but a surround is a better one."

"And as the piece of ground is open on three sides, you have posted men above it, below it, and on its right side. I had guessed you would do so, and I see that you always follow out the old principles, which are the best ones after all."

"Of course, we may not nab anyone, but we are just going to make a rat-trap——"

"In which you hope to take the man who knocked Mahossier on the head?"

"Him, or another."

"Do you really think, then, that this scoundrel has been killed by one of his accomplices of days gone by, and also in the story of a safe being carried off like a mere pocket-book?"

"I should think I did believe in it; and what is more, may my hand be burnt off if I don't think that it has been brought here and hidden, either in the house or the garden. Those who did the trick have not made a move for seven years, because they have been under lock and key. But now that their time is up they will come to fish up the treasure."

"But I should think that that has been done already; Mahossier's former pal, after having got rid of him, would doubtless have clapped his hands on it."

"That is not so sure; there are no traces of the ground having been disturbed."

"How are you going to work?"

"That will depend on the orders I receive. Whilst waiting for my superiors, I have posted some men at the

top to watch the exit by the Place de Tertre, others to guard the gate that opens on to the public flight of steps, and a third lot here in the Rue Gabrielle. So that if there should happen to be a fish in the net, we shall have him to a certainty."

"Here they come," said Saintonge, pointing to a cab which had drawn up some few yards from the gate. Three men dressed in black got out, followed by a fourth, who carried a barrister's bag full of papers. They came up to the sergeant, who at once saluted his superior officers. Saintonge did the same, and then stepped on one side; but the magistrate, who was well acquainted with him, at once said: "Pray stay with us, sir, you may be of service; but I shall expect you to send nothing to your paper until we authorize you. It may be that we shall have need of the publicity which you can give to our proceedings, but it is much more probable that we may ask you to keep silence regarding the whole matter. This we shall decide on the completion of the search, at which I permit you to be present."

Saintonge promised the most implicit obedience to the orders, of whatever kind they might be.

"Has the owner of the property been summoned?" asked the magistrate of the commissary of the police, who replied that he had been requested to attend at nine o'clock.

"We can begin without him," remarked the former, and I think that it would be as well to commence with the house. Later on, if there is any necessity for it, we can dig up the garden; but I do not believe that the robbers would have taken the trouble to dig a hole in the ground when it would be so much more easy for them to make a hiding-place in the walls. Sergeant, select four men to come with us, and let the others keep watch on the gate during our absence."

The order was at once executed. Pigache, who was acquainted with the locality, led the way, whilst Saintonge modestly brought up the rear.

The procession had not much trouble in making their way through the vegetation, which Lourdier had had thinned before the conclusion of the sale of the property to Cransac. When they arrived at the path on the right which led from the front door to the flight of steps at the

side, the commissary pointed out the place where the body of Mahossier had been found, and made the remark that the murdered man and the assassin must have walked side by side on the broad pathway on leaving the house.

"Or before going in," remarked the magistrate; "for there is nothing to prove that they touched the stolen money, even if it is in the house. But let us inspect it first; we can argue the case afterwards..'

The day had now fairly commenced—a dull, gloomy day. Paris was shrouded in fog and mist, and the forms of a few passers-by, who had been attracted by the sight of the police, could be dimly distinguished at the other end of the garden.

"Let us go in," said the magistrate, pointing to the ruined house. Two of the police went in first, but they had no sooner crossed the threshold than they drew back.

"What is it that you have found?" asked the commissary, who was following them closely.

As they made no reply, he stepped forward, and at the other end of the room saw a man lying on his face in a heap of fallen plaster. The man was in so sound a sleep that he never woke when the commissary called out in a loud and triumphant tone: "We have got one of them, at any rate."

Everyone pressed forward, and the magistrate, without a sign of emotion, remarked: "That is fortunate; wake him."

The policemen seized the sleeper, and shook him so violently that at last he opened his eyes. His first word was "Copped;" then, as he scrambled up in a sitting posture, he muttered, "Just like my luck."

The man was dressed in a brown jacket, and had large iron-shod boots on; his face was clean-shaved, and his closely-cut hair smacked strongly of prison discipline.

"What! another released prisoner?" asked the magistrate.

"No; an escaped one this time," said the commissary. "I know him," and placing his hand upon the man's shoulder, who looked at him with a stupefied air, he said: "You are Pierre Trouillard."

The man turned pale, but recovered himself in a moment; then shrugging his shoulders, replied with a sneer: "No

use in saying I ain't. Why, it was you as nabbed me three months ago."

"For robbery from the person with violence. You were sentenced to twenty years by the Assize Court of the Seine on the 26th of last November. You refused to appeal, and were sent off to the Isle of Rhé fifteen days ago. You were most anxious to be sent to New Caledonia, but it seems that you have altered your mind, since we find you here."

"It seems like it," growled Trouillard.

"How did you contrive to escape?"

"You ought to know well enough."

"I know that you jumped overboard during your transit from the prison to the vessel, and that you were reported as dead."

"Well, then, the report was wrong, you see; but it proves that I swim well, and dive better."

"Then you must have reached the coast and come to Paris?"

"Yes, tramped it in seven nights, at the rate of twelve leagues each night; and all that for you to come and nab me here. It is just like my luck."

"Oh, I dare say you had good reason for turning up on the Hill of Montmartre?"

"You didn't expect me to go to the Grand Hotel, did you? I came here, as I might have gone anywhere else. I found the crib empty, and I did my 'doss' here. It's always better than to sleep under the 'blue blanket' in the middle of winter. I am generally pretty wakeful, but I slept too late. Fact is, I was done up. It's a long way from the sea to Paris."

"So it is; but since your arrival you have had plenty of time for a rest."

"Have I? Why, I got here at three o'clock this morning, and was in my first sleep when your 'blue bottles' clapped their hands on me."

"You lie. You were in Paris eight days ago."

"What rot? At that rate, I should have walked as fast as the trains."

This answer struck the commissary, who was acquainted with the exact date of Trouillard's escape, and if the man had walked the distance, as he said he had, it would have

been practically impossible for him to have reached Paris sooner than the past night.

The magistrate noticed the embarrassment of his colleague, and came to his aid.

"Do you know a man named Mahossier?" asked he suddenly.

"Mahossier? Yes, I knew a bloke of that name, before," answered the man, without the least hesitation.

"Was he a thief?"

"Well, yes, he was on that lay; and the proof of it is that he got seven years in the Central, which he ought to have about worked off by this time."

"He was liberated last week."

"All the better for him. He has done his time, whilst mine is beginning again, and this time I shan't get off so easily. But why do you ask me about him? Has he been copped again already?"

"He is dead."

"Really. What did he die of?"

"He was murdered, most likely by some of his accomplices."

"Ah! see what a bad thing it is to have disreputable acquaintances."

"He was murdered here in this garden."

"That's rum. What was he dodging about here for? This isn't his part of the town."

"He came upon the same errand as you did."

"I don't tumble to your patter."

"I will endeavor to help your memory. You knew, I suppose, that Mahossier was sentenced in 1877 for having taken part in the robbery of a banking house in the Faubourg Poissonière. Five rolls of gold were found on him which belonged to the safe that had been plundered, but no one has ever found out what became of that safe, which contained nearly two millions."

"That was good business," sneered Trouillard, who was evidently growing uneasy.

"Well, when Mahossier came out of prison, he lost no time in going to look for this money; only, unfortunately for himself, he did not go alone."

"I shouldn't have thought he was such a fool."

"He came with some accomplice of former years, who killed him with a blow of a stick."

"Oh! so Mahossier had an accomplice, had he?"

"Two at the least, as you know perfectly."

"How should I know it? I—ah! that is coming it too strong. If I had nicked two millions, I should not have spent my life in prison. You just look at my sheet. I have been senten ced four times in seven months, three of which were police court affairs, for twopenny-halfpenny thefts; then I got twenty years, and was on my way across the herring pond; but as for this banking business, I wasn't in it. Since then I haven't been out of the stone jug for three months at a time, and I was forbidden to remain in Paris."

"That explains why you didn't take the money from where you had hidden it after the robbery. You were so well watched that you did not dare to come here. Mahossier ventured, but that was after he had been released."

"He may have done so, but he didn't come with me. After I had got over my hunger, I used to tramp along the roads by night, and slept in the woods by day."

"Why were you in such a hurry to get to Paris, then?"

"Because one can hide oneself better in Paris than anywhere else."

"And because you were anxious to get hold of your two millions."

"What! do you think they are here?"

"If they are not it is because Mahossier's murderer has carried them off."

"Good; but if I had done the trick should I have come back to hang about the empty place when I had pouched the swag?"

"We shall find out if it is empty, and pull down the house if necessary."

"That will make the owner grin on the wrong side of his mouth."

"And so it will you, though you pretend to joke about it. The search is about to commence, and you shall be present at it.

"Very good. I am anxious to look on; only let your chaps put me on my feet, for they are holding me like a trussed fowl."

On a sign from the magistrate, the policemen aided Trouillard to rise to his feet, but did not relax their hold on him.

During this examination the sub-inspector had been examining the walls and corners of the ground floor room, where Cransac had been surprised by Mahossier, and he had not neglected to inspect the chimney-piece, and bent down to get a better view of it. After having sounded it, he went up to the magistrate and whispered in his ear. Trouillard, who was securely held by the two policemen, still affected indifference, but he had lost much of his self-possession, and Saintonge, who watched him narrowly, noticed that every now and then he stole a glance at the plate in the chimney. The magistrate whispered an order to the sergeant, who at once set to work, and bending down, seized the iron pin with both his hands, and drew it in a downward direction with all his strength. The plate never moved.

"Try and turn it," said the magistrate.

Pigache did so, and the sound of bolts creaking as they left their sockets was at once heard.

"Now we have it," said the commissary. "Pull it down." At the first effort the plate opened, for it worked easier now than it did when Cransac had first opened it.

"I am done," growled Trouillard, as he saw the plate open.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"A SKELETON FORM LAY SMOULDERING THERE."

THERE was a momentary silence, which was broken by the voice of the sub-inspector. "Then you confess?" asked he, quickly.

"I confess the robbery," answered the convict, "but I didn't kill Mahossier. I haven't seen him since we cracked the crib together; besides, we were both of us nabbed—I the next day, he the day after, and not for the same job. I was quodded for six months over an assault case; without that I shouldn't have let the two millions rust in this hole."

"Then there is really two millions here?" asked the magistrate quickly, who knew by experience, that it is necessary to press a prisoner closely when he enters on the road of confession, for if he is given the time to reflect he often stops short and retracts what he has already admitted.

But Trouillard had evidently decided to make a clean breast of it, and he answered without hesitation: "There were nineteen hundred and forty-five thousand francs: three hundred and fifty-six thousand in bank notes in a pocket-book, and the rest in gold. You can count it, and see if I am not right. If I tell you the truth, it is because lying won't serve my turn. Now that you have got me again, you will send me off to New Caledonia, and I shan't be able to dodge you a second time, therefore I shall never profit by the swag there; nor will Mahossier, for the matter of that, since he has turned up his toes. I don't shirk spitting it all out, for even if you give me an additional stretch for it, at my age, twenty years or life is pretty much the same; but I don't want to have my neck slit, and I don't funk at its being so, for I did not kill Mahossier."

"Can you prove that it was not you who committed the crime?" asked the magistrate.

"If I had given him the crack on the crown I should have pouched the swag and taken my hook. Now, look

here. Would you like me to tell you how it all took place seven years ago? We each of us took five rolls of gold, a thousand francs each, and agreed that we would meet again every night and empty the place little by little; but luck was against us, and forty-eight hours afterwards we were both nabbed on separate charges. I was as drunk as an owl, and someone robbed me of my share while I was snoring on a bench in the Boulevard Rochechouart. Mahossier kept his, and it was found on him, and that was what got him his stretch of seven."

"How do you know that if you did not see him again?"

"By our pals; all those who come into quod bring us news of what goes on among the prigs. Why, in La Roquette I heard when Mahossier was coming out of the Central, and I made sure that he would take a turn this way, and when I cut my lucky, I hoped to get here before him. Well, it seems that he did me and got here the first, but it doesn't seem as if it did him much good, since some one knocked his brains out for him. I am sorry, though he did try to collar all the swag for himself."

"Who killed him then, if you didn't?"

"I don't know; perhaps some pal who he was fool enough to bring with him to help him lift to the shiners. He wasn't very strong, poor Mahossier, nor very fly neither. At any rate, if that is the way the thing went, there ought to be a deficiency in the pewter or the paper, the exact amount of which I have told you. Count it and see."

"And your other accomplice? You say nothing of him? Do not look surprised. The third robber was the bank messenger, who slept near the safe."

"What, do you know that too? Then I don't see why I should not tell you all about it. He was the chap that put up the job. He helped us to get the safe out of the window, and to wheel it off to this crib. It wasn't very large, but we had no end of trouble with it, and it was he that broke it open with some tools he had brought."

"What did you do with it?"

"We put it on the truck again when we had emptied it, and carted it as far as Saint Ouen, where we pitched it into the Seine. It is most likely still there."

"Good; and the bank messenger?"

"Ah! I never heard anything more of him. He knew

Mahossier better than he did me. All I know about him was that he wasn't copped."

"Yes, all trace of him was lost, and it was supposed that he was murdered by his accomplices."

"It was by Mahossier, then, not by me, for I never saw him after the trip to Saint Ouen; he had his share, like the rest of us, five rolls of gold. Perhaps some one killed him for them. What makes me think that he is dead is that if he had been alive he would have certainly come here and collared the swag. The best thing you can do is to see if the money is all right."

Trouillard was right. The magistrate should have commenced by verifying the amount in the hiding-place.

"To me," remarked Trouillard, "it looks as if the heap had gone done a bit, but better count it to make sure; but mind you get to the bottom of the hole. I dug it and put up the movable plate, and the work does me credit. I took six months over it. I am an engineer by trade."

"Six months!" repeated the magistrate. "Then the robbery was a premeditated one?"

"I should just think it was. The job had been talked of for a year before we did the trick. It was the bank messenger who pointed out the house in the Rue Gabrielle to us. It was not inhabited then, and you could go in and out as you liked. That was just what suited us, because, as you can understand, we couldn't walk into the cribs where we dossed with a couple of millions in our pockets. We wanted a warehouse until we could slip into a new skin, little by little, you know. I should have gone into the country and lived on my revenue. Mahossier was going to start as a restaurant and wine shop keeper outside the barriers. The bank man was a German, and was going back to his own country. We had calculated that at the end of two or three weeks, by coming here every night, and taking away five thousand yellow boys each time, we might have cleared the place out, and we had sworn that one would never come without the other two. We were to meet every night at a pub in the Chaussée Clignancourt. It was the lush that spoilt everything. I was mad drunk the first day, and the next both Mahossier and I were quodded. You are going to say, how about the bank chap? Why did they

never nab him? Well, I think that he must have in some way been finished off the night after we carried off the safe. I may be wrong, of course, but that is my idea; and I tell to you because, having nothing to lose, I feel inclined to play square."

The magistrate had listened to all these revelations with the attention they deserved, and began to believe that they were true. All that he had to do was to follow the advice of the convict, and make an inventory of the contents of the treasure. Two of the policemen went to work at once, and soon had the packets of gold spread out on the floor. They were proceeding to count them, when Trouillard exclaimed, "But the pocket-book—where is the pocket-book?"

"There is nothing more in the hole, nothing but sand," answered one of the policemen, after having carefully felt all round the bottom of the hiding-place.

"Then I have been robbed," cried the convict. "It is just as I thought. Mahossier came here with a pal, who killed him, and then filled his pockets; unless, indeed——"

"Ah, I have got something now," continued the policeman. "But it is not a pocket-book; it feels like bones."

At this unexpected announcement there was a profound sensation amongst all those present. The magistrate, the commissary, and the sub-inspector all drew up closer to the chimney-piece. Saintonge, who had stood modestly on one side, did not venture to come any nearer, but he trembled with inward delight. His paper would have the first news of the discovery of a body.

Trouillard did not betray much emotion, but he seemed as much surprised as the others. "After all, it may be Martin, of the bank, and Mahossier may have given him one the next day whilst I was asleep on the boulevard. Fancy the dogs having put their heads together to rob me on the very first evening!"

The policeman, who was scraping with both hands in the sand, brought out a fragment of a coat with a copper button with two letters in relief on it, a B and a C, the same as those that were on the pocket-book that Cran-

sac had taken away with him on the occasion of his last visit.

"These are the initials of the banker whose safe was robbed," said the commissary. 'It is the body of the bank messenger that we have discovered."

"Right you are," cried the convict, "and it must have been done as I tell you. Mahossier killed Martin to keep it all; and he would have done the same to me if we had not both been quodded, and later on he got a crack on the skull. I don't know who gave it to him, but it served him right, for he has taken the pocket-book and the missing packets of gold."

"What did he do with it, then?" asked the magistrate, "for he had only five thousand francs on him when arrested. Only five thousand francs, and not a single note."

"He had hidden the rest, of course."

"That is impossible; and instead of accusing a dead man, who cannot contradict you, it would be better for you to attempt to justify yourself."

"Justify yourself! and what about? You know well enough that I neither killed Martin or Mahossier. Had I killed either of them, I should not have been such an ass as to tell you that I was mixed up in the robbery of '77; and if I had not split upon myself you would never have been able to prove that I came here for anything but to take a sleep."

"You were found here, and that is quite enough to cause you to be suspected of both murders. It is for you to prove that you are not the assassin, and at present you have failed to do so. Have you anything more to say before I send you to the House of Detention?"

"No, it isn't worth while to jaw any longer. You would not believe me; suppose I had taken away the pocket-book and hidden it somewhere else? It held three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs. Would not that have contented a man without his coming here to get nabbed?"

"At any rate, it has gone, and who can have taken it if it was neither you nor your former accomplice, Mahossier?"

"Perhaps it was some one who found out the secret of the hidding-place in my absence."

"If any one had done so they would have left nothing behind them."

"That remains to be seen. Suppose he had not the time to take it all at once, or that he was going to act like us, and empty the hiding-place little by little? If that is his game he will begin again, and to nab him at his next visit you have only to set the trap afresh."

This argument seemed to have some effect on the judge, who began to reflect, for he saw that in the present examination he should draw nothing further from the man, and he was resolved not to send him off to the Isle of Rhé with another term of penal servitude to work out until all these mysteries had been cleared up. He half believed that Trouillard had not killed any one, but it was necessary to have him in readiness if an inquiry should be set on foot regarding the two murders and the robbery perpetrated in 1877. It was, however, necessary to remove the gold spread about over the floor, and to have the remains which had been discovered in the sand examined by a medical man; but it was not necessary that the convict should be present at either of these operations.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" asked he, gazing steadily at the criminal.

Trouillard hesitated for a moment; but at last he decided to speak, and give a last piece of information. "I repeat to you, that very likely the pocket-book was taken away whilst I was temporarily at Mazas," said he hurriedly. "I am almost sure of it now, and this is the reason. It was all owing to an act of folly that I committed, but perhaps it may help me a little if I tell you all about it."

"This is enough preamble," interruped the magistrate. "Come to facts, for I am in a hurry."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PIERRE TROUILLARD SPEAKS.

AGAIN the convict paused for a few moments, and then, as though he had suddenly made up his mind, he began to speak with great volubility.

"Look here, sir, as soon as I was committed for trial my lawyer did not hide from me that my case was a bad one, and that I was booked for twenty years; so I said to myself that I should never get back across the herring pond, to pick up my two millions, and it bothered me awfully to think that no one would benefit by them except Mahossier, and I had my knife in him, and so the idea got into my head that I would make a present of them to some one."

"How could you manage to do that?"

"I'll just tell you how I did it. I expect you know that when we are out in the exercise-yard at Mazas we can telegraph to our next door neighbors, by throwing things over the wall between us; we chuck over tobacco, or a bit of paper rolled round a pebble."

The magistrate cast an inquiring glance at the sub-inspector, who replied: "He is quite right; it is impossible for the warders to prevent its being done."

"Well," continued Trouillard, "I had a neighbor who acted like a trump to me. He chucked over whatever I wanted; such bundles of cigars—I never smoked such bang-up stuff in my life. So I says to myself, 'As well this chap as another,' and I slings over a note, which showed him the whole bag of tricks, the road to take, the house in the Rue Gabrielle, the way to open the plate—in short, everything."

"Do you mean to say that he got this note?" asked the magistrate, eagerly.

"Got it?—I should think he just did; and as he had written to me the evening before that he was going out of the jug, I don't expect that he lost any time in profiting by the tip I had given him, which I shouldn't have done if I had been cocksure of getting away from the Isle of Rhé. But now I am landed. The rogue came

here and filled his pockets, beginning with the pocket-book, which was the easiest to carry off."

"Then this man killed Mahossier?"

"I know nothing about that. I don't believe they knew each other. A chap that smoked such prime baccy must have been a bang up swell faker, and you know that Mahossier was not in that swim; but they may have come across each other here one night, for all that."

"You don't know the name of this man?"

"No, nor why he was in quod either; and, of course, I never set eyes on him. One may live in Mazas for fifteen years alongside one's own brother and not know it. Nor do I expect that he knows any more of me than I do of him."

The magistrate made a mental note of the unexpected result of solitary confinement in prisons, and began to think how he could utilize the convict's statement, which had an air of probability about it.

"Then," continued he, "your next door neighbor was discharged, I suppose, for want of sufficient evidence?"

"I believe so," answered Trouillard. "On the piece of paper he tossed over to me, he had written, 'I shan't be here to-morrow,' which might have meant, 'I am about to be transferred elsewhere'; but since he has been taking a walk in this direction, I should think he had been let out."

This statement would not bear sifting, for it would have been first necessary to prove that this unknown who had been the recipient of the convict's confidence had profited by it; but the magistrate, as a preliminary step, drew the sub-inspector on one side, and gave him certain instructions as to examining the registers of the Mazas prison, to ascertain the names of those prisoners who had been released when Trouillard was there, previous to his appearance before the Assizes, and, as these registers were kept with scrupulous regularity and exactitude, the search would be neither long or difficult.

Nothing now remained but to sign the warrant for the escaped convict's committal to the House of Detention, and this the magistrate did at once, using the bag of the

clerk, who produced the necessary printed form, as a desk. "Take the prisoner away," said the magistrate.

"It was high time," growled Trouillard; "take me off to the cells, I can hardly stand on my legs, and there, at any rate, I shall be able to have a lay down." Then, as the constables adjusted his handcuffs, he added: "I should have liked to take a squint to see if it is really Martin's carcass down there, but that copper button almost settles the case; besides there can't be much of him left, and I should have no end of trouble in recognizing him. Take me off, then: all I ask is a cab, for I can hardly put one foot before the other."

Just after he had been removed, one of the constables whom the sergeant had posted in front of the gate leading into the Rue Gabrielle came in to inform the magistrate that the owner of the property was in the garden, and was ready to appear before him, whenever his presence was required.

"I don't want him to come in here," said the magistrate after a moment's reflection. "I will speak to him outside. Take him into the path on the right that skirts the terrace; and until the medical man makes his appearance, will you, sir," turning to the commissary, "have the goodness to remain here in charge, and you, sub-inspector, come with me. M. Saintonge, you can stay here; I want to say a few words to you presently." With these words the magistrate left the room, and as soon as he was a few steps from the door, he turned to the sub-inspector, and said: "What do you think of all this? I confess that I don't see my way, and before going any further I should like to hear your opinion."

"Sir," replied the police official, "my opinion is already formed. The convict Trouillard has spoken the truth; it was Mahossier who murdered the bank messenger, and he himself was killed a day or two ago by the prisoner who was discharged from Mazas about a month back."

"A man whose name and description we do not know."

"But we shall have both this evening, for I will go myself to the registry office of Mazas prison."

"We sha'n't catch him though, for he has had plenty of time to get out of the country with his money."

"He did not take it all, and my opinion is that he has remained in Paris, with the hope of securing the re-

mainder, in which case he will certainly return here, and if we leave some men on the watch we shall trap him."

"I have not much confidence in our doing so. In this wretched affair, it is all groping in the dark, and our clues are very slight. I do not even know to whom this sum of money belongs that we have just discovered."

"To the creditors of the banker who was robbed, and after they have been paid, to his heirs, if he has left any, a fact of which I am at present in ignorance."

"The house and grounds, they tell me, once belonged to him. It seems a strange thing that the robbers should have chosen it for a hiding-place for their plunder."

"Oh! but the place had been deserted for some years before the robbery was committed, as Trouillard has just told us. The bank messenger who planned the robbery knew well enough that no one ever came near the place, and that consequently it would form a safer hiding-place than they could find elsewhere."

"Well, what we now have to do is to question the present proprietor of the property. Who knows if he did not know of the existence of the treasure, and he may even have endeavored to secure it for himself? At any rate, he may be able to furnish us with information regarding many points, and I wish you to be present when I question him."

"He is a most respectable business man, and I do not think that you will find that he is implicated in the affair, but here he is."

Escorted by one of the police who had been sent in search of him, Lourdier appeared at the other end of the walk. He seemed rather nervous, although he had nothing to reproach himself with, and came up to the magistrate, removing his hat as he did so.

"You are M. Moras, a cloth merchant, are you not?" asked the magistrate.

"No, sir," answered the advertising agent. "M. Moras is ill, and has sent me in his place."

"But no one can take his place, and I am surprised that M. Moras should think so. When a regular notice has been served, a personal attendance is absolutely necessary."

"M. Moras knows that, sir, but he is in bed, and if you desire to interrogate him, he is entirely at your disposal.

But if, in the meantime, you require any information about this property, I can give it you, for I know more about it than the owner, who has never occupied it."

"Will you then answer the questions that I put to you? When and from whom did he buy it?"

"He did not buy it, sir. He got the property at the liquidation of a banker who owed him money, nearly seven years ago."

"A banker in the Faubourg Poissonière?"

"Just so; the banker had been robbed. At that time the affair created a great sensation, but the lost property was never recovered."

"You are wrong. It has been found."

"Indeed! and where? Not here?"

"Yes, sir; and one of the robbers has been arrested. One of them was murdered in this garden a few days back."

"I heard that a man had been killed here, but I never connected him with the former robbery of the banker, any more than I thought that the money was hidden away in M. Moras' property. If I had known that——"

"What would you have done?" asked the magistrate, quickly.

Lourdier already regretted having spoken too quickly, but he could not withdraw his words, so he answered in an embarrassed manner: "Why, of course, I should not have sold it then."

"Sold it!" repeated the magistrate. "What right had you to sell it?"

"M. Moras gave me full authority to do so, as he was anxious to get rid of it, and at last I managed to find a purchaser. The deed of sale was drawn up by M. Guerin, a notary in the Place Dancourt, Montmartre."

"How long ago?"

"Quite recently. I think the business was completed upon the very day on which the body of the man who had been murdered was found."

"Who bought it?"

"A most respectable gentleman, very wealthy, who bought the house and ground in one lot."

"A strange idea, was it not, to buy an uninhabitable house, and a bit of ground that brought in nothing?"

"Oh! he got it cheap, though I had a good deal of difficulty in persuading him to buy."

"But what could he want with a spot like this, that is of no marketable value?"

"To have a country house in the middle of Paris. That could easily have been done by pulling down the old house, and re-modelling the garden entirely. In fact, he did not make a bad investment."

"He would have made a still better one if he had got hold of the stolen millions, and perhaps this was his idea all along."

"Eh! what? I never thought of that," muttered Lourdier, "If that was his idea he was more shrewd than I gave him credit for."

"What was the name of the purchaser?"

"Cransac—George Cransac."

The name was not familiar to the magistrate, who, having had nothing to do with the charge of uttering the forged check, had never even heard it. The sub-inspector had, of course, heard of the case, but he saw so many prisoners from one year's end to another, that his memory could not retain all their names.

"You knew the gentlemen with whom you did business before, I presume?" asked the magistrate.

"I did not, nor have I known him long," returned Lourdier. "It was sufficient for me that he was solvent, and as I knew that he was so, I did not make any inquiries about him, and so can tell you nothing on that head."

Lourdier began to think that the magistrate suspected Cransac of some misdemeanor or other, and he wished to avoid compromising a friend of Valbrec's, who was the editor of an influential paper, with the advertising department of which he had a great deal to do. He therefore took care to say nothing about George's misadventure regarding the check, and endeavored to say nothing against a friend, with whom his relations had always been of the most pleasant description.

"You tell me that this young man is wealthy," continued the magistrate. "What does he do?"

"I dont think he does anything; his means permit him to be idle. He had some idea of writing articles in the paper to which I belong, but it was only an idea."

"You are a journalist then?"

"Not exactly; I have charge of the publicity department."

"In other words, you are an advertising agent?"

"Yes, sir; but I am acquainted with nearly all the journalists in Paris. It was through one of them, indeed, that I had the pleasure of first meeting M. Cransac."

"Who was this gentleman, if you please?"

"Paul Valbrec."

"A writer that I always read with much pleasure. No doubt, then, he would be able to tell me all about M. Cransac?"

"Much better than I can, for I have not seen him since the conclusion of the sale of M. Moras' property."

"I will request him to call upon me at my office, and question him there. M. Saintonge belongs to the staff of M. Valbrec's paper—do you know him?"

"Saintonge, the king of reporters! I should think I do know him. If you put him on this business he would give you a wonderful account of it, and make a good thing for himself out of it too. There is not his equal in making the most of an incident."

"And he has another excellent quality, that of never being indiscreet, and so hindering the course of a judicial inquiry; and it would be well if all his brethren of the press were equally reserved."

Lourdier took this as a hint, and protested that he would not whisper a word of what had passed to anyone, though he resolved to go and see Valbrec the moment the magistrate had finished with him.

"Where does Cransac reside?" asked the sub-inspector, who thought he might as well know where he could lay hands upon the suspicious purchaser of the property.

"At the Grand Hotel, I believe," answered the wary Lourdier. He knew very well that Cransac's real abode was at 19, Rue Frochot; but he did not wish to mention this until he had consulted Valbrec, whose good opinion he desired to retain.

Lourdier thought to himself: "I am not telling a falsehood, since a week ago Cransac had still his rooms at the Grand Hotel; and if his conscience is not quite clear, he will have time to slope, after Valbrec has warned him that he is suspected of one or two gross misdemeanors."

"If he is so wealthy, why does he reside at an hotel?" asked the keen sub-inspector.

"He is only staying there as a temporary measure until his villa is ready for him, which it will be next summer; but after all, I can only tell you what he has told me. My relations with him have been of the slighest kind, and I met him by a mere chance, at a dinner that Paul Valbrec gave to some of his friends.

All that Lourdir wanted was to be able to give Cransac the chance of seeking safety in flight if he had anything to fear from the police, but he chiefly desired not to compromise himself, and to prove that he was not at all intimate with a man who seemed just now an object of suspicion, after having already spent a short time within the walls of Mazas.

"Very well, sir," said the magistrate. "If I require your presence again I shall send for you, but at present I have no more need of you, and you may retire."

The advertisement contractor did not wait for a second notice of dismissal; he bowed to the magistrate and to the sub-inspector, and, turning round, made off in the direction of the Rue Gabrielle, delighted at having got off so easily, and firmly resolved to hasten off to Valbrec, whose residence was near the Hill of Montmartre, and whom he was pretty certain to find in bed, for, as he worked until an early hour in the morning, he seldom rose before midday.

As soon as the magistrate and the sub-inspector were left alone together they exchanged a look of satisfaction, showing that the same thought was passing through both their minds. Lourdier's examination had elicited nothing definite, and the information with which he had furnished them regarding the new owner of the property had not in any way cleared up the aspect of affairs. The magistrate, however, appeared to think that this M. Cransac had bought the land without any particular motive, just as he would have bought any other site that might have been presented to his notice which had the advantage of a fine view and was in an airy situation. He mentioned his opinion to the sub-inspector, who was not so completely convinced, and who determined without further loss of time to make some inquiry into the young man's past life, and also as to the origin of his fortune. "I will have

him watched at once," continued the wary police official, and I will inspect the register of the Mazas prison. If I find his name on the list, we need search no further; for nothing will then remain in doubt. We shall then have to act without a moment's delay; for if he is guilty, and by any chance learns what has taken place here to-day, he will be off by the first train."

"It would, perhaps, have been wiser to have detained that advertising agent, who appears to be quite capable of warning our man," remarked the magistrate.

"My fellows will be at the Grand Hotel before him, and if you have no further need of me, I will ask you to permit me to leave you now, so that I may go to Mazas and make inquiries."

"You are right, for it is most urgent."

"My sergeant, Pigache, can easily superintend the removal of the treasure."

"Very well; I see the doctor coming for the medical examination, so go. I shall expect you at twelve o'clock at my office with your report, and then I will decide what course I shall take."

"I shall also ask at the office of the Assize Court for the report of the sitting of the Court at which Mahossier was sentenced. It is necessary for me to know the exact amount of the sum that was stolen from the banker, seven years ago, so as to remit the surplus, after paying his creditors, to his heirs, if he has left any.

"All has been done so quickly that I have not had time to look through the papers relating to the robbery."

"Nor do I know anything of it; for at that date I was not in the detective department. And now, sir, since you think that you can dispense with my presence, I will give Pigache his instructions, and set to work at once."

The magistrate did not seek to detain his auxiliary, and went off to speak to the doctor, who he had not expected would arrive so soon. Just then Saintonge left the house where all operations had been suspended during the absence of the magistrate, and begged him to permit him to leave the place. He received the requisite permission, coupled with this piece of well-meant and fatherly advice: "You may relate in your paper all that you have seen here, do you understand? but not a syllable more; for if you indulge in any comments or

suppositions, I shall be unable for the future to permit your presence in the event of this matter requiring fresh search to be made in the garden."

Saintonge promised to attend scrupulously to this advice, and took his leave, delighted at having employed his morning so well. He was desirous of conveying to the editor the success of his mission, and he had no idea that the day which had now begun was to decide the fate of that George Cransac whom he had met in the office of Paul Valbrec.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HUNTED DOWN.

The little suite of rooms in the Rue Frochot had undergone a complete change.

The nest of the two fond lovers had been turned into a hospital.

The insensible figure of Cécile Cambremer had been brought there on a litter between ten and eleven o'clock.

The doctor and George Cransac had passed the remainder of the night watching by her bedside, and after having again examined her wounds, which he had been unable to do before in a satisfactory manner in the dark passage leading to the stage-door, the doctor had revoked his former sentence.

He now hoped to be able to save his patient without having recourse to amputation.

The animal's claws had not penetrated so deeply as he had at first imagined into the breast and shoulder, and the lung was fortunately untouched. The bone of the arm was certainly broken in two places, but it was not so terribly splintered as he had feared it was, and simple fractures are easily cured, unless some unforeseen complication arises. Cécile had endured with the greatest courage the painful operation of extracting two or three splinters of the bone from her flesh, and the first dressing had been applied. Josephine Sureau, who had been sent for with the first dawn of day, had arrived, and looked after the patient much better than George could have

done; for on occasions of this kind a man is of but little use, and Josephine, like all those who have suffered much themselves and seen much suffering in others, was a most excellent sick nurse. Instead of bursting into a flood of lamentations at the state in which she found her benefactress, and instead of loudly inquiring the cause of her being so seriously injured, she at once placed herself under George's orders, without making a single remark.

George reproached himself bitterly with having been the involuntary cause of her accident; first, in having taken her to the theatre, and secondly, in having let her penetrate behind the scenes. All seemed the result of a piece of inconceivable forgetfulness on his part. The fact that Cornelian was going to make her first appearance on the boards of the Theatre of the Porte Saint Martin had entirely escaped from his memory, and, with his mind filled with plans for vengeance on Simancas, he had permitted Valbrec to take Cécile behind the scenes. All that had happened afterwards seemed planned by the hand of Fate; and he did not for a moment doubt that the villainous Goliath had thrust Cécile against the cage on purpose to gratify the jealous hatred of Cornelian.

Had Cécile guessed the truth? George had reason to hope that she had not, for since she had regained consciousness she had not said a word about the Queen of the Lions or their keeper, and George took care to make no allusion to them. He now left her bedside whilst Josephine moved noiselessly here and there, preparing and applying the cold water bandage which the doctor had ordered to be kept constantly on the wounds. The doctor himself was to return in the afternoon with one of the most skillful surgeons of the day, who was to pronounce the verdict as to whether amputation was necessary or not.

The poor wounded girl had displayed invincible energy, and a clearness of intellect which was surprising under the circumstances. She strove to comfort George, who could not conceal the anguish he was enduring on her account, and she even endeavored to joke about her accident; once she said almost merrily: "It served me right, I was too curious. I have that fault; I had it

from my childhood. My poor father always predicted that I should be punished for it, and so I have been, but perhaps a little too severely. And yet it might have been worse. At one time I thought the terrible monster was going to strangle me. Then, George, all my thoughts fled to you, and I fainted. You, I am sure, must have suffered more than I did, and do not think that I am referring to the wound you received in trying to save me, but the pangs of your heart."

"My wound is a mere nothing," answered George, casting a glance at his right hand, which was swathed in bandages; "but had you died, I would not have survived you."

"Do not say that; it makes me so wretched. Remember that I may die after all, but swear to me that should I do so you will have the courage to live."

"You shall not die; the doctor said you would not."

"He may be wrong, and I had rather do so than let them cut off my arm. If I had but one, you would love me no longer."

"Do not say so."

"No, you would not love me as you have done; and if you did not I should kill myself. Ah! do not contradict me. I hope that I shall save my arm, and that your heart will not change, but so many things may happen that we must look forward to everything; and if I am to die, before leaving this world I should like, oh! how much I should like——"

"To do what?" asked George, deeply moved.

"You will laugh at me. I should like——"

"Tell me what; you terrify me."

"To make my will."

"That is madness."

"It is not madness. It is an idea that has been in my mind ever since I knew you. I wish to make you my heir." Then, as her lover made a gesture of refusal, she continued: "I can guess what you are about to say, that you are rich, and that I have nothing. You forget, dear friend, that, thanks to you, I am at the head of a prosperous business, and also that I owe you a thousand francs."

"Do not speak of that," murmured George, deeply hurt at the thought of her looking upon him in the light of a creditor.

"Do not be vexed, my dear George, but remember that I only took this money from you on the condition that I should be permitted to return it, and if I live you will permit me to pay off the loan?"

"Yes, but——"

"Ah! you make me very sad; you must allow me to do as I wish. I shall injure no one, for I have not a single relation in the world. Promise me, then, that you will accept the legacy."

"Very well, I promise if you persist in this strange fancy; but before doing so, you must take time to reflect."

"I have reflected, and it must be done at once."

"What! you desire——"

"Yes, I wish to make my will before the doctors meet in consultation here, which will be very soon, and I want to take advantage of the time that we are alone together, whilst that good Josephine is preparing the broth that the doctor ordered me to take. Do not say that it is impossible. I have lived long enough to know that we can dispense with the assistance of a notary, and that a will is legal if it is properly dated and signed, and written entirely by myself."

"What a strange whim!"

"I entreat you to yield to it."

George thought that it would be unwise to run counter to Cécile's wishes in her present state of health, and therefore would not deny her a pleasure which was perfectly harmless. Shrugging his shoulders, he took a blotting book from the table, placed a sheet of paper on it, and setting it before the injured girl, put a pen ready dipped in ink between her fingers, who wrote her last wishes in two lines:

"I make George Cransac, who has twice saved my life, my sole heir and executor."

She put in the date, and signed Cécile Cambremer in a firm hand. "Now my mind is more easy," said she, as she gave him back the document.

George was obliged to take it, but he put it down on the table without looking at it.

"Put it carefully away, I entreat you," said she, gently. "I want to make sure that it is quite safe. Lock it up in the strong box, where you keep your money."

To satisfy her, Cransac opened the box, and, taking out

the pocket-book he had brought from the deserted house, was about to put the will in it, when a bell rang loudly outside. Cransac started, and remained standing perfectly still, with the paper in his hand which Cécile had just written and signed, and to which he attached no importance. He could not comprehend the sudden feeling that had induced the poor girl to persist so strenuously in her design, and he was in no hurry to put away the document securely, in the damp pocket-book which he had just taken out of his strong box. He had not even noticed that Cécile's eyes had never quitted the pocket-book from the moment she had first caught sight of it, and they still remained fixed on it when he placed it on the table. Why did she look on it with such eagerness? No doubt she would have told George the reason when Josephine came hastily into the room and announced:

"M. Paul Valbrec."

Without taking the time to put away the pocket book or the will, George advanced to greet this faithful friend, who had followed the litter upon which lay the inanimate body of Cécile the night before.

Valbrec appeared to be in deep thought, and after asking Cécile how she was, turned abruptly to George, and said: "I have just seen Saintonge."

"Saintonge?" repeated George, who had forgotten the name of the reporter.

"Yes, Saintonge who you met at our office yesterday. Do you know what has been going on to-day in the house you bought?"

"How should I know?" stammered George, greatly agitated.

"They have found a hidden treasure amounting to two millions, and the dead body of a man."

"A dead body?"

"Exactly so; and they have captured an escaped convict."

"Well, what has all that to do with me?" asked George, affecting an air of indifference.

"That is not all," continued Valbrec, coldly. "I have seen Lourdier."

"Well."

"He came and woke me up with the news that you were going to be examined before a magistrate."

"I!"

"Yes, you; Lourdier was compelled to tell the magistrate that he had sold you the property on the Hill of Montmartre, and he saw at once that it was suspected that you had bought it because you knew that there was an immense sum of money hidden there; a sum of money which had been stolen from a banker seven years ago, as you know. Saintonge spoke of the matter yesterday before you."

"Yes, I recollect, but——"

"You are about to say that this has nothing to do with you; but for all that, the police authorities are on the lookout for you, and you would have already have been found had not Lourdier had the sense to tell them that you were staying at the Grand Hotel; but for all that, it will not be long before they know your true address. I also expect to be summoned to give evidence regarding your antecedents, and," concluded Valbrec, looking his friend straight in the face, "I thought it best to warn you of what was going on, because—well, because if you felt it necessary you might get out of the way."

George, who began to lose his self-command, commenced to equivocate. "Do they accuse me of having robbed a banker seven years ago? Why, they must be jesting! I had hardly left school then."

"Certainly, but it is best for you to know all. I am telling you what they said to Lourdier, and he knew no more, but Saintonge heard something besides. He was present when the convict who had been captured there was examined, and the man asserted that when he was at Mazas, before his trial, about the end of November, he had thrown over the wall of the exercise-ground, to another prisoner, a note, in which was pointed out the hiding-place of a sum of money which he had stolen some time before, nearly two millions—a good round sum, eh? The convict was not able to tell either the name or the appearance of the prisoner to whom he had thrown the note, but the prison register contains the names and description of all those who have been confined there, and the authorities are going to consult it; perhaps this has been done already."

Cransac's legs trembled beneath him, and his pallor was evidence of his conscious guilt. "Now you know all," continued Valbrec, coldly. "It is for you to consider the best way of acting. You were a prisoner in Mazas at the end of November, but of course that does not prove that the convict made you his confidant. You bought a house and ground at Montmartre, but that is only presumptive evidence against you. I have done all I can in telling you how matters stand. Now examine your own conscience. If you have nothing to reproach yourself with, fight tooth and nail, but if it is the other way, I have no advice to give you."

"Because you do not like to advise me to blow out my brains."

"I say nothing; and, lest anyone should say that I refused to give you a last piece of advice, I recommend you to put that pocket book out of the way, for one is missing from the hiding-place in which they found the rest of the millions, and if those who are in search of you should come here now, they will ask you where you got it from."

"The pocket book is mine," said Cécile.

Valbrec had forgotten that she was there; he turned quickly round, and the words, "It is false," were on his lips, but he pitied her and remained silent.

"Yes," continued she, with a boldness that took him by surprise. "It belongs to me of right, and I can prove it to you."

"It is not to me that you will have to prove it."

"I will prove it to anyone who ventures to accuse George, and if you wish to know how it came into my possession, ask your friend where it was that he first met me."

Valbrec did not understand what she meant, but George guessed that the heroic girl was accusing herself in order to save him, and vowed to himself that he would not accept such a sacrifice.

"Speak," continued she. "Is it not true that you found me one night in the deserted house in the Rue Gabrielle, into which you had gone by chance?" But Cransac had not the time to reply to her question, for again the bell rang loudly. A treatise might be written on the various sounds of front door bells. The ring of

the man who asks a favor is different from that of a creditor, and that of a commissary of police resembles no other in existence.

"The deuce!" muttered Valbrec between his teeth, for he guessed the reason of the sound. "I have come too late, or else too soon."

Voices were now heard in the ante-chamber.

Cransac made a step toward the window, but he had not time to throw it open, or his brains would have been scattered on the pavement.

The sub-inspector of detectives entered, followed by two subordinates, and said in a harsh voice: "Let no one stir. Which of you is George Cransac?"

"I am," answered the unfortunate young man.

"And you, sir, who are you?"

"My name is Valbrec, and I am——"

"I know your profession, but I have nothing to do with you at present; but stay here, I may have to talk to you presently." Then turning to Cécile, he asked? "Are you living with Cransac?"

"Yes," replied the injured girl, without a moment's hesitation.

The woman who opened the door to us is in your employ?"

"She is."

"Don't let her leave the house," said the sub-inspector to his two men. "Remain in the ante-room; open to anyone who rings, and ask their names, which you will report to me."

The detectives left the room, and closed the door, whilst their superior officer remained in the room with Cécile, George and Valbrec.

George was standing near the window, Valbrec was leaning against the table, and Cécile was propped up in bed by the pillows. The detective took the seat which no one had offered to him, and pointed out another to Valbrec, who did not take advantage of the permission to sit down, and at once began to question George. "I have a warrant against you, but before executing it I have some questions to put to you regarding certain facts with which no doubt you are acquainted, since your friend, M. Valbrec, reached here before me. He learned them from a reporter connected with his paper, and has most

likely repeated them to you. I could not get here sooner, though I have spent all the morning in looking for you."

"I have not hidden myself," returned George.

"That may be, but you left the Grand Hotel, and did not say where you were going."

"All my friends knew where I lived, and that I was only staying at the Grand Hotel as a temporary measure."

"I know that, and will come to that presently. You know what you are accused of."

"I am waiting to know."

"You are accused of robbery and murder."

"Nothing more?"

"I will begin at the commencement. Last November, you were arrested and confined in Mazas on suspicion of forgery."

"I was; but my innocence was established, and I was released."

"Discharged for want of sufficient evidence to convict; that does not mean that you were not guilty; but let us proceed. During your imprisonment at Mazas, you received a note from one of the other prisoners, who threw it to you over the wall of the exercise-ground."

George remained silent, and the detective continued: "The man who wrote it has been arrested and has confessed everything. But he could not point you out, because he had never seen you. But your detention at Mazas coincides with the time that he was there, before appearing before the Court of Assizes, and you were in the same part of the prison as he was."

"I have nothing to say."

"You will not answer? It is of no importance, for I have no need of your confession, as I have plenty of proofs without your doing so. You were almost penniless when you came out, but all at once your position underwent a change. You were absent for a time, and your absence has not yet been explained, and afterwards, instead of returning home, you took expensive rooms in the Grand Hotel. You played heavily and paid your losses, and went into other extravagances. The broker who employed you would do so no longer; from whence then did you draw your money? Evidently from the hiding-place which the prisoner had pointed out to you, and which you did not empty because sufficient time was not per-

mitted you to do so; but to be able to do so more at your ease, you bought the house, where this morning we found—but I will not enter into details with which you must be well acquainted. As for the murder, I shall content myself by saying that in the garden of the property you had purchased the body of a man was picked up, who had been killed by a blow on the head, and this man was one of them who took part in the robbery of 1877, from a banker's in the Faubourg Poissonière, the proceeds of which were hidden at the time in the house for which you paid cash some three weeks back. It is most natural to suppose that having met Mahossier, who was coming to the house with the same intention as yourself, you killed him sooner than divide the plunder. But this matter will be inquired into later on, at present we are only dealing with the robbery. You took away a great deal of gold—we know the amount—and three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs in banknotes. What have you done with this money? If you refuse to tell me, I know well enough where to look for it, and shall commence by searching your rooms."

"The search won't be a long one," thought Valbrec; "the notes are in that pocket book, which I can feel behind me on the table. If I shift my position it will be in sight before the policeman's very eyes. It is too stupid of Cransac; he had better confess everything."

CHAPTER XXX.

A WOMAN'S DEVOTION.

The silence that followed the conclusion of the detective's statement was broken by the clear voice of Cécile; "You need institute no search, sir; it is I who took the money that is deficient, as I will explain to you."

The detective glanced at her disdainfully. "Why do you interfere?" said he. "I have permitted you to remain in the room because you are hurt, so the porter told me, but if you do not keep quiet, I will have you taken to the hospital."

"You may do so, but you cannot prevent my telling the truth. I repeat that I discovered the hiding-place, and took the money, a great deal of the money."

"Why don't you say at once while you are about it that you killed Mahossier too."

"Because if I said that I should not be speaking the truth. I do not know who killed the man, but I know that I took away the packets of gold and the bank-notes."

"She is mad," muttered Valbrec.

"Good," said the sub-inspector; "I understand it all. You want to make me believe that your lover is as innocent as a child, and that you did it all. I have seldom seen so much devotion, but unfortunately your little story is wanting in common sense. Suppose I admit that you were Cransac's accomplice, doubtless he had no secrets from you, and gave you his entire confidence, regarding his discovery which he had made in Mazas, which is not a prison for women. Just kindly tell me how you could otherwise have guessed that there was a treasure hidden behind a plate in a chimney in a house in which you had probably never been before you went there with the accused."

"You are mistaken, sir. I have known the house from my childhood, and I have always imagined that the actors in the robbery of 1877 had hidden the stolen money there. I sought for it for a long time, and at last, by chance, I hit upon the right spot."

"A wonderful chance indeed; but even if we suppose that Cransac had nothing to do with it, you told him of your find, I suppose?"

"I did."

"Then *he* is your accomplice, and it does not make his position a bit better; he has helped you to spend the money that you assert you took?"

"No, sir, I employed a portion of it in paying my debts. I had a manufactory of artificial flowers, which was not a success."

"Oh, I daresay you have not spent it all in this short time, although your friend certainly eat his share of the cake. You don't get through some hundreds of thousands of francs in six weeks, especially when you live on a third floor, and keep no establishment. But you were both going to launch out, and I expect would soon have run through it. Where is what is left?"

"Here in this room, and I beg that you will take it."

"Begin then by giving it to me, if you want me to believe in all these fairy tales that you have been telling me for the last quarter of an hour."

"The gold is in that strong box, which is open over there, and the notes are in the pocket-book on the table behind M. Valbrec."

The detective officer rose quickly to his feet, pushed aside the journalist who hid the object from him, put his hand inside, and drew out a thick packet of bank-notes. "They are still wet," said he, feeling them, "and the leather of the pocket-book is all mildewed. It is the same one that was stolen in 1877, for the banker's initials are still legible on it, the same that were on the buttons of the livery of the bank messenger, whose skeleton we found at the bottom of the hiding-place."

At this moment the four actors of this drama formed what is called in theatrical parlance a "tableau." The detective was handling the notes; Valbrec stupified with astonishment; Cransac with consternation; Cécile had raised herself up in her bed, and was gazing on the scene with large black eyes which gleamed with the light of fever.

Valbrec no longer doubted her madness, and Cransac, with a bitter pang, felt that she was rushing onwards to destruction in seeking to save him, and was preparing

to contradict her self-accusations, but he waited to do so until she had related how she had discovered the hiding-place. The detective without letting go the pocket book, went straight to the strong-box, and seeing the piles of gold, remarked coldly; "That is right; they are all wrapped up in green paper, like the others, and evidently came from the same source."

Then turning to Cécile, he added: "If you really took them, do you mean to tell me that the accused did not help you, for no woman could have carried these?"

"He did help me," replied Cécile, boldly.

"Then you confess that he is as guilty as you are?"

"Guilty of what?"

"Of robbery, to be sure. Do you think, by any chance, that you had the right to take possession of this money under the pretext that it did not belong to anyone? You are too clever to believe anything of the kind; and even had you believed it, you would have been guilty of a misdemeanor all the same, the same as people who pick up a purse in the public streets and do not take it to the police office."

"No, sir, I knew perfectly well to whom the two millions belonged, for I am better acquainted with the story than you are, for that robbery was the ruin of an honest man seven years ago."

"The banker of the Faubourg Poissonière?" sneered the detective. "Do you mean to tell me that you propose to give him back those two millions?"

"Not to him, for he killed himself, being unable to survive the dishonor of his bankruptcy."

"You are wonderfully well informed; you wish, perhaps, to hand over these two millions amongst his creditors?"

"Yes, sir, to the last sous that is owing; but that does not amount to two millions."

"And you intended to keep the rest as a recompense for having discovered the treasure. This is really too delightful, only I think that you had better not tell the magistrate before whom you will have to appear, this pretty story."

"I shall content myself with telling him that I am M. Benedict Cambremer's heiress."

"This is getting better and better. Certainly these

were the names of the banker who was robbed—his initials are still legible on the pocketbook that I hold in my hand; but I should much like to see the will under which you inherit his fortune, if he had any left after his bankruptcy."

"He made no will; why should he, since I am his only child?"

"You! his daughter—absurd!"

"My certificate of birth is at my own house, 22, Avenue de Laumière, and also of my mother who died in bringing me into the world; besides, I have always borne my own name. In my own part of the town, where I have lived for the last four years, before I met M. Cransac, every one knows me as Cécile Cambremer, and the good woman who opened the door to you will tell you that she knew me as a child when my father was still alive."

"And yet it is only just now that you speak of this father, and claim your inheritance."

"To whom should I have spoken of it? When misfortune overtook him his friends forsook him, and his creditors turned me out of house and home. I had to gain my living by the toil of my hands. My sole desire was to be forgotten, and in this I succeeded, as you were ignorant even that I existed."

Her replies had some weight with the detective, but he was not entirely convinced that she was not endeavoring to shield her lover, for after a short pause he said: "Your assertions shall be put to the proof to-day. In the meantime, however, you must explain to me how you laid hand on the treasure which you allege belongs to you. Were you aware that it was hidden at Montmartre in a deserted house?"

"No, sir; but this house had belonged to my father, who often took me there in my childhood. It recalled to me remembrances which were very dear to me, and I loved to gaze upon the garden in which I had spent my childish hours. One day I met M. Cransac there——"

"What was he doing there?" interrupted the detective, quickly; "he had not the same motives as you had, to come and wander about in such a neglected spot."

"He had come out of mere curiosity to prove whether the convict had spoken the truth or not."

"What! he told you on the very first day he met you that he had just been released from Mazas?"

"Not on that day. I was fairly desperate, and had made up my mind to die. I told him all my sorrows; he consoled me, he helped me, aided me, and how could I help loving him in return? Then, some little time after that, I spoke to him of the robbery of which my father had been the victim, upon which he showed me the letter which he had received in Mazas. It was like a ray of light to me. I entreated him to take me to the ruined house, and he had not the courage to refuse my prayer. We went there after dark——"

"When?"

"About eight days ago. George had never given another thought of the hiding-place, but when he learnt that the money concealed in it had been stolen from my father he consented to go there with me. The robber had spoken the truth. We found the treasure; and the initials on the pocket-book, which you hold in your hand, proved that the gold and notes belonged to my father."

"That was no reason to take possession of them, for you know that your father had left many creditors behind him; your duty was to have given notice to the commissary of police of the district, who would have proceeded in due form. The money would have been paid into the Government treasury, and your claims would have been inquired into later on."

"That is what George advised me to do, and I alone am responsible for the removal of it. I have spent some thousands of francs for my personal wants, but I am sure that, after all claims against my father's estate have been satisfied, a large surplus will remain at my disposal. I had decided to make a proper declaration; George, indeed, had reproached me for delaying it so long, but I did not know the proper quarter to go to; and yesterday, when I so narrowly escaped death, my first thought was to make my will, and there it is on that table. By it I have instituted M. George Cransac my residuary legatee, not only because he saved my life, but because he would do all that was necessary in seeing that all the creditors of my father were paid, and that he would report the existence

of the concealed treasure in the proper quarter. That, sir, is the truth, and the whole truth, and M. Cransac cannot contradict it."

"I should think that he would take good care not to do so; but why did you begin by telling me that you had discovered the money by chance whilst walking about Montmartre?"

"Because I did not wish to bring in the name of a man that I love more than anyone in this world. Now you know all, and I place my fate in your hands. Do with me as you will, but do not accuse George unjustly. He has nothing on earth to reproach himself with except in having yielded to my entreaties instead of having followed his first impulse. Had he not met me he would doubtless have sought for the treasure, but had he found it he would have reported its existence on the spot—of that I am quite certain."

Without making any reply to Cécile's fervent entreaties, the sub-inspector placed the pocket-book in the strong box, which he locked, putting the key in his pocket, and then took from the table the paper upon which the wounded girl had inscribed her last wishes. "Yes," said he, after having read it at a single glance, "this is the will which you were so strangely prompted to write just before I came in, and which, I suppose, you left on the table for my inspection."

"When I wrote it," answered Cécile, without flinching, "I was ignorant that you were coming here."

"Oh! you knew well enough that I should be here, for M. Valbrec, who got in here in front of me, must have certainly informed you of all that M. Saintonge and M. Lourdier had told him."

"No, sir. When M. Valbrec came in the will had been already executed, and was on the table where you found it. George was, in accordance with my wish about to put it in the pocket-book, which he had taken out of the strong-box for the purpose, where you have just shut it up, and he had so little intention of hiding it that he never thought of concealing it when his friend came in."

"That is quite true," said Valbrec, who put no credit in the story told by Cécile, and who believed that she had only invented it for the purpose of screening her

lover; but the fact was that Cransac had given her the cue, for before Valbrec's visit she was entirely ignorant of what had taken place at Montmartre. Certainly, George had spoken to her regarding his detention in Mazas, but he had not said a word of the note he had received from the prisoner whilst he was taking exercise, nor had he said a word of the hidden treasure, or his nocturnal excursions to Montmartre; so that her own ready wit had prompted her to manufacture the tale she had told to the detective with the slender materials at her command. She knew perfectly well that she was the only daughter of Benedict Cambremer, who had been robbed of a sum that greatly exceeded the amount of the claims against him; and she knew that the property had never been recovered, although one of the robbers had been arrested and convicted. She, therefore, had always entertained a hope that some day the lost money might come to light, and she had taken it into her head to bequeath any such sum to George after the creditors had been paid in full. She had resolved to tell the whole story of the robbery to George one day, but up to the present he was completely ignorant of the whole matter; for the name of the banker to whom the house at Montmartre had belonged had never been pronounced in his hearing, since Lourdier very likely was ignorant of it, or if he had ever known it, he had forgotten it by this time.

At the moment when Valbrec rang at the door, Cécile had recognized the initials on the pocketbook, and had at once guessed the source of George's fortune; and the narrative by Valbrec of the search and inquiry that had been made, supplemented as it was by disturbing comments, had sufficed to make all clear to her. She had been unable to refrain from exclaiming that the pocketbook was her property, and this imprudent exclamation was but the prelude to a burst of confidence on her part, which the entrance of the detective had interrupted. The sub-inspector had at once flatly accused Cransac, and Cécile resolved to defend her lover by every means in her power. She had at first hit upon no better course than to declare that she only had found the treasure, and that she alone was responsible for the sums that had been taken from it. But, pressed as she had been by a

skillfully-conducted series of questions, Cécile soon perceived that she had made a false step; and, suddenly changing her tactics, she made up her mind to declare that she was the banker's heiress, and that ever since her father's death she had been in search of the stolen money; and having at last discovered it, she had entreated George Cransac to aid her in removing it from its hiding-place, and that he had only played a subordinate part in the matter, and that against his will. Whilst she improvised this line of argument, she never took her eyes off George, and with every stealthy glance that she cast on him she pleaded to him not to contradict her, and she felt almost hurt at not being able to read in her lover's eyes that he would accept this act of devotion at her hands, and was surprised at his not uttering a single word to confirm the statements she had made to prove his innocence.

But George's heart was rent by two opposing feelings: the fear of injuring Cécile by contradicting the statements she had made, and the desire of taking his share of the responsibility in the acts for which they were both to be arraigned. He was weary of giving evasive answers to the questions put to him by the detective officer, and it was repugnant to his feelings to benefit by the self-sacrificing falsehoods of Cécile; and had he not been afraid of aggravating her position, he would have avowed the whole truth at once, however strange his tardy confession might appear. The sub-inspector, who was not deficient in sagacity, had partially guessed the position of affairs, and felt that he should draw nothing from a woman who was resolute in her defense of the man she adored; so, instead of pressing her with any further questions, he turned again to George Cransac.

"Your mistress is an excellent special pleader," said he, with a half smile, "but we are not yet before a jury, and it is for you to justify your own acts, which at present you have not attempted to do. Up to this time you have let her do all the talking, but now the moment has arrived for you to explain yourself."

"Question me, and I will reply," answered Cransac, shortly.

"I hope you will, and it is in your interest that I do so. It may be that the *lady* is the daughter of M. Cam-

bremer, the banker, and that things may have happened as she says." It was the first time in the course of the conversation that he had referred to Cécile as *a lady*. "But it is necessary that you should confirm her statement. Is it correct?"

"Yes," answered Cransac. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added: "Only she has not told all!"

"Complete her statement, then," said the detective.

"I killed the man!" said George, resolutely."

"I had but little doubt on the subject, but you have done well to confess it, and it will be considered in your favor. I can now understand why the lady said nothing about the murder."

"She knew nothing of it."

"What—was she not present?"

"No, sir; and you can easily understand that I said nothing to her on the subject. I went to Montmartre that night alone. Just as I left the house, I was attacked in the garden close to the terrace by a man, who would certainly have killed me had I not struck him down with a blow of my stick."

"Then you assert that the blow was struck in self-defence?"

"I received a stab from a knife right in my breast.

"Rather a blunt knife, I expect, for you were not wounded, I presume."

"The point of the knife was stopped by the pocket book which I had taken from the hiding-place, and had put inside my waistcoat. You can see the perforation in it now, if you will examine it."

"It shall be examined. Why did this man attack you?"

"Because he had seen me open the plate in the chimney and take out the gold. You tell me now that this is the man who seven years ago, robbed M. Cambremer's bank. He had been released from prison, and hoped to find the treasure untouched, and when he surprised me kneeling before its hiding-place the idea of putting me out of the way naturally occurred to him. He had crept into the garden and climbed up to the window. I caught sight of him, and he fled into the darkness to wait for me in the walk on the right, and I killed him in self-defence;

and since I have learned what a villian he was, I do not regret having done so."

Overwhelmed by this news Cécile listened to him with a kind of feverish anxiety. She did not doubt for a moment that he was speaking the truth, and she asked herself whether the sub-inspector would think the same, and from the expression of his face she thought that he did so. All that now remained was to await his decision upon both their cases and to see if he would order George's immediate despatch to the House of Detention. She flattered herself that he was going to leave her at liberty, and she awaited his fiat with the deepest anxiety.

The sub-inspector was in no hurry to reply. He was reflecting upon the informal way in which he had gone to work to obtain these confessions, and regretted that he had not examined George and Cécile separately. Carried away by the excitement and interest of the dialogue, he perceived too late that all Cransac had to do was to comform his answers to the statements made by Cécile. However, as he was not deficient in experience and good sense, he saw that there was no remedy for the harm that had been done, and besides, he began to think that the matter was not so serious as he had at first supposed it to be. He certainly suspected that Cécile and George had tacitly arranged matters between them during the examination, but the former had certainly not invented the story of her right to the money that had been stolen from her father. These assertions were very easy to verify, and if she were really the next-of-kin to the banker, the fact of her having taken a portion of the treasure to which she was legitimately entitled would not constitute a robbery in the full acceptation of the word; at any rate, there would be extenuating circumstances. Then the murder of the man called Mahossier was not a very great offence if as seemed most probable, Cransac had struck him down in mere self-defence.

Valbrec, who had played the part of a mute listener, looked on matters in nearly a similar manner; but then he had no voice in the case, although his evidence might be heard later on. The sub-inspector, who had been charged with the preliminary inquiry, had resolved to take the only course open to him—that is to say, to conduct George to the office of the examining magistrate,

and to leave his two subordinates behind him to watch over the strong box in which he had put back the pocket-book containing the bank-notes, and also over Cécile, though her condition entirely prevented her from attempting to make her escape, for her long examination had almost worn her out.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TROUILLARD'S DAUGHTER.

THE sub-inspector was about to issue orders to this effect when a great disturbance was heard in the ante-room; slamming of doors, scuffling of feet, and a violent altercation between several persons, the voice of one of whom—a woman's—rose high above the others, and it was not the voice of Josephine Sureau, who had been sent back to her kitchen three-quarters of an hour ago.

A woman burst violently into the room—a woman whom no one at first recognized, for she was closely veiled: but she soon displayed a countenance of singular beauty, of a bold and masculine type, and exclaimed: "I say, are the traps here? Those long-legged fellows wanted to stop my coming in. All the worse for them. I knocked them about right and left. Here I am! I came to see you, little lady, and to ask you to forgive Pasha, my black-maned lion, who bit you yesterday. It was not his fault, on the word of Cornelian, and I have kicked out that brute Goliath, who shoved you against the cage."

The sub-inspector checked this flow of words by saying severely: "In the first place, who are you, and what do you want?"

"And who are you, may I ask?" retorted the mistress of the lions, who was not easily alarmed.

"I am a sub-inspector of the detective department, and I have the right to question you as much as I like."

"Ah, then you are the chief of the traps in the ante-room, are you? Well, I can't compliment you on their manners; but I ain't a bit afraid of you, for I have a clean

sheet to show. These gentleman know me, and M. Valbrec, who writes in the paper, can tell you that I am an actress engaged at the Porte Saint Martin Theatre, with all my beasts."

The detective was half inclined to have her turned out, but though he had not said a word to Cécile on the matter, he had read the police report of the accident to her of the night before, and he wished to learn more on a subject which might be a future subject of inquiry. Nothing is beneath the attention of a detective, who by a mere fluke may often pick up some useful information. He therefore decided to hear what Cornelian had to say, who still continued addressing Cécile: "You must be surprised at my coming to see you, and I find M. Cransac is the more surprised of the two, for he is looking very savagely at me, and he has probably told you that I hated you mortally on his account." Cécile did not understand her, for George had never said a word to her either about Cornelian or her violent method of making love. "Well," continued she, "that was true enough yesterday, but it is all over now. I should have been regularly knocked over if Pasha had finished you, and the proof is that I took you out of his claws, and have come to see how you were getting on. The doctor told me this morning that you had been brought here, and I am awfully glad of it, for now I am sure you will get over it. I can see it in your face. Lor' bless you, bites and scratches are quite in my line, and I'll lay my life you'll be on your feet again shortly; and it will be a good thing, for you are a great deal too young and too pretty to end as I shall one day or another. It is my business to be eaten, but I don't want my beasts to eat any one else. And now, whilst I am here, I want to tell you all that I have on my mind."

Valbrec could not help smiling at the incoherent speech of this charmer of beasts—and men; and George, in great anxiety, wondered what on earth she was going to say.

"I must first," said Cornelian, "expose the vileness of a woman who you don't know, and a rogue you know only too well. Troche and Taupier have sold you, without your leave or license, my little dear."

"Troche!" repeated George, who had some vague recollection of having heard the name somewhere.

"Yes, Arthur Troche, the villian who made love to you. I suppose you told him"—and she pointed to George—"of all that, but what he doesn't know is, that that same fine Arthur ought to have gone to Mazas in his place. The rogue tried to get on with me, because his Juliet hasn't got two sous to rub together, and I amused myself by making him talk. I can tell you he let out some queer things."

The sub-inspector was all attention now, for in consulting the prison register he found that George had been set at liberty in default of sufficient evidence to warrant his being committed for trial, and that the examining magistrate had expressed his opinion that it was a case of mistaken identity, and that there must be some one in Paris who greatly resembled him. He also remembered that a man named Troche had been wanted by the police for various swindles, but that for some months past they had lost all trace of him.

"You don't want me to believe," said he, turning to Cornelian, "that this man has boasted to you of his crimes."

"Crimes!" repeated she. "Not such a fool as that; he only said that he had played a trick on the traps, and that he would play them many another before he had done with them. Then he began talking of M. Cransac, who had been quodded on suspicion of forgery, and then I, who knew my gentleman, guessed the answer to the whole bag of tricks."

"And what was it?"

"It was that those who swore to M. Cransac, took him for that hound of an Arthur, who is as like him as two peas, especially since Arthur has let his whiskers sprout again, for he cut them off after cashing the forged paper. Ah! he is a rogue and a boaster, but he came to the wrong shop when he boasted of it to me, and, as you say you are one of the force, I hope you will nab him. It was a precious lucky thing for you all, it seems, that I came here this morning."

Cécile was of the same opinion, and in her heart she blessed Cornelian, although it had wounded her deeply to hear the name of the man upon whom she had so foolishly lavished the blossom of her first love, mentioned before George.

The sub-inspector was also rejoiced at Cornelian's visit, for he saw his way to profit by her information, and to lay hands upon a rogue who has laughed at the police for so long.

"Where does this man Troche live?"

"That I can't tell you," answered she. "He has been once or twice to wait for me at the stage door, and has tried to spoon me again, but I sent him off with a flea in his ear, so I hardly cared to ask his address. Why should I? I wasn't going to leave a card on him, and those kind of people generally live in no man's land."

"But he doesn't sleep under the dry arches of the bridges, I suppose. Everybody has some kind of home."

"Well, he used to hang about at Juliet's, but for the last few days she has been on the streets, and I expect her creditors would have showed him the door; but you may be sure he made a bolt in time, like rats, who, they say, leave a sinking ship."

"But you have seen him since he left that girl, and I suppose he told you some of his business?"

"He said that he was doing some dirty work for a foreigner in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, Marquis the General Simancas. Arthur rolled out mouthfuls about this Spaniard; but I have an idea that he ain't up to much, this supposed general."

"Never mind what he is," returned the detective; "we shall learn from him where this Troche lives, and I'll have him looked after at once. Are you ready to give evidence before a magistrate?"

"Whenever you like."

"It may be to-day; where do you live?"

"Since I have been playing at the Porte Saint Martin I have taken a furnished room at 29, Rue de Lancy; before that I lived in the menagerie with the other beasts."

"Are you living alone?"

"What a blessed foolish question! No, no, I don't like double harness; I am too fond of my liberty for that."

"Very good: now your name. if you please?"

"Cornelian, of course; it is well enough known, and is printed in whacking big letters on the posters."

"Cornelian is evidently an assumed name. I want your real one—the one in your certificate of birth."

"Euphemia, then; I never liked it a bit, and changed it when I began to work the fair racket."

"Euphemia; that is your Christian name. I want to know your surname."

"Oh! I never make use of that."

"Why?"

"Well, I ain't over proud of it; first, because it ain't a pretty one, and then——"

"Well, then?"

"Well, it is no good hiding things from you. You belong to the traps, and will know everything sooner or later, even if I refuse to tell you now. Well, the old man took our name into all sorts of bad places, and I never did any harm myself."

"Go on, you can't help your father's faults. What is your name?"

"Euphemia Trouillard."

"Trouillard!" repeated the sub-inspector. "Are you Pierre Trouillard's daughter?"

"Yes, I am."

"Do you know where your father is?"

"No, but I can precious well guess. I may as well tell you his history and mine at once, and then the beaks won't bother me any more. This is it: He was an engineer by trade, and made his fifteen francs per day. My mother worked hard too, and so I was brought up like a little queen. I was twelve when she died. Then the old man took to lushing; he'd come home as screwed as a boiled owl every night, and pitch into me like anything. I stood it for three years, but one night he didn't come back, for he had got locked up, I never knew why. Well, then I found myself on my own hook, with one dress to my back, and nothing to stick my teeth into. Of course it ended like such things always end."

"You took a lover?"

"Yes; I knew a chap that went round the fairs with a cart-load of beasts. He proposed that I should go with him, and learn his business. I went off, and we paddled our own canoe together, until a black panther finished him up; but he had time to make his will, and he left me the menagerie, which was worth money. Now I want no one, and do as I like; but if the old 'un knew it——"

"He would try to live on you; but don't be afraid he will have board and lodging for the rest of his life."

"Oh! I understand; he is a lifer. All the worse for him; he shouldn't have done it. Well, I can't do anything."

"Then don't you want to see him?"

"Not I, it wouldn't be over cheerful; but as I have the ill luck to be his daughter I'll send him a hundred francs a month when once he is across the water. He will be pleased, and so shall I—that is, to have got rid of him."

This cynical speech had no effect upon the sub-inspector, for he had heard many such. "Very well," returned he, "you shan't be confronted with him before he is sent away, but you certainly will be with Troche as soon as he is caught. You may go now if you like."

The Lion Queen was glad enough to do so; not that she repented the good impulse which had urged her to go and inquire after Cécile, and she thought that in denouncing Arthur she had made up for any fault she might have committed, but she was pleased to get out of the hornet's nest of police into which she had thrust her head unconsciously. "Get well quickly, little lady," said she, "and good-bye, all," added she, bowing on all sides, as she was accustomed to do when her performances were concluded.

When she had left, the sub-inspector, who had now made up his mind, spoke at once. "Sir," said he to Cransac, "I now know all that I wish to know, and I confess that the appearance of the affair is greatly changed. The examining magistrate will estimate the report that I have to make at its proper value, and it is for him to decide your lot. Will you therefore come with me to his office, where he is waiting for you?"

"I am quite ready," answered George, firmly.

"I shall take away the key of the strong-box, in which I have placed the notes, and Mlle. Cambremer's will. I leave my subordinates behind me to take charge of it. I have a cab waiting, and we will go off alone. It is quite unnecessary for any one in the house to know that you are even temporarily under arrest."

These words were of good omen, and Cécile experienced a feeling of relief in hearing them, whilst Valbrec began to hope that his friend would be able to extricate himself from his unpleasant position.

"May I remain with the lady?" asked he.

"I see no objection," answered the detective, whose manner had grown much more polite; "and if M. Cransac would like to kiss her before he leaves, I shall not prevent him."

Cransac at once availed himself of this license and hastened to kiss away the tears that bathed her cheeks, whilst she whispered in his ear:

"Not a word of contradiction as to what I said, for if you injure yourself I shall die."

At this supreme moment, when she felt her strength failing her, the sole idea of the noble girl was to save her lover, whom she dreaded never to see again.

"Come, sir," said George, rising to his feet, "let us go."

"I shall see you again soon, I hope," cried Valbrec.

George warmly shook the friendly hand that was extended to him, and left the room with the sub-inspector of the detective department.

EPILOGUE.

A YEAR had passed since the events we have recounted, and Paris has forgotten them as quickly as it has others which made an equal noise at the time. They occupied for a short period a space in the papers, and gave several reporters a chance of putting in copy; but they lacked the great dramatic conclusion of the Court of Assizes.

George Cransac was taken before a clear-sighted magistrate, who, after a calm and unbiassed reviewal of the case, decided that there was no necessity to send him for trial upon either of the offences laid to his charge. It was proved that Cransac, in killing Mahossier, had not exceeded the limits of legitimate self-defence, and the generous declaration of Cécile had considerably weakened the case against him of having appropriated any portion of the contents of the hiding-place. The noble girl had taken all upon herself, and it might have gone hard with her, for she had confessed that she had applied to her personal requirements a portion of the sum which had formerly been stolen from her father before he had settled with his creditors. But, on an inquiry being opened, and the bankrupt's accounts having been again gone into, it was found that his debts only amounted to nine hundred thousand francs, reduced to six hundred thousand by the sale of his property. The result, however was, that Cécile Cambremer found that after clearing her father's good name, she was left in possession of more than a million.

Whilst this inquiry was going on, the magistrate had permitted her as a favor, taking into consideration the terrible injuries that she had sustained, to remain in her own house, whilst Cransac, who had only received a blow from the lion's claw, spent fifteen days in Mazas before he was again discharged from want of sufficient evidence; but this time he went forth a perfectly free man, as far as the accusations of uttering a false check, for his villainous double, Arthur Troche, having been arrested, on the information furnished by the Lion Queen, and recognized by all the witnesses who had formerly given

evidence against George Cransac, had ended by confessing his crime, and was sentenced to five years' penal servitude. So that George had suffered a great deal for a crime that he had never committed, and very little for an act of culpable weakness against which his better nature had all along warned him.

Cécile had made him her heir, so that he might be able to enjoy the fortune which he had been weak enough to use before it was really his. But Cécile was not dead but living, and was only anxious that George should share with her the heritage which had come to her from her father. But to do that it was necessary that he should marry her, and this marriage has not yet taken place. Cécile feels that George cannot love her more than he does now, and he, on his part, hesitates to marry her now that she is a great heiress, and is waiting until he shall have something of his own to contribute to their mutual expenses.

Meanwhile he is working on Valbrec's paper, who has remained his friend, although he has never learned the whole truth. Valbrec knows the world, and is not too harsh on backsliders.

Although now a millionaire, Cécile has not abandoned her business, only she no longer works with her own hands. She has given the superintendence over to Josephine Sureau, and the business is going on well. In spite of the sinister prognostications of the doctor, Cécile did not lose her arm, although she underwent several severe and painful operations. George and she loved each other as much as they ever did before the catastrophe overwhelmed them, which threatened at one time to separate them forever. Nothing is wanting to their happiness, save wedlock and one of those tender pledges that unite two fond hearts still more fondly together, and if one of these should come it will be after their union shall been legalized rapidly.

Cornelian's fortunes have been of a different nature. After a long series of brilliant performances, she won the heart of the Marquis de Simancas, who never missed one of them, and who greedily took the bait she held out. This tormentor of the fair sex was seized with a mad passion for the Lion Queen, but he had to lavish showers of gold on her before she would deign to look on him. She finished by yielding at last, and has taken up her residence

in the house in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, where she uses her whip upon him as freely as ever she did upon any of her lions. And this vile man, whose sole delight was in torturing others, gives in to her, and submits to her caprices and insults in the most slavish manner. Cornelian is unfaithful to him in the most open way with the clown of a circus, and she has forced the marquis to have her menagerie kept in his garden, where she every now and then gives performances to her mountebank lover and his friends, at which Simancas is compelled to be present. When she has completely ruined him it is to be hoped that she will have him devoured by her terrible favorites; but until this happens, she contents herself with making the marquis send heavy sums every month to her convict father in Nouméa. This old villian was condemned to penal servitude for life, although he completely proved that he was innocent of the murder of the bank messenger; before he left he was reconciled to his daughter, Cornelian, and, thanks to her, his old age will not be an uncomfortable one. Juliet went from bad to worse, and now earns the scanty wages of infamy on the streets; and if she ever comes across Simancas he is not the man to bestow an alms on her.

Cécile Cambremer has had ample revenge.

George Cransac has expiated his faults, and his end will be better than his commencement.

He has never found out who his parents were, nor is it likely that he will ever do so—such miracles are rare now-a-days, though it was one that put that noble girl Cécile Cambremer in possession of her father's property. But George will never find his relations; and what need has he of relatives or ancestors, whilst he is happy in the love of his own Cécile?

THE END.

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A wealthy young man had a yacht,
Disfigured with many a spacht,
SAPOLIO he tried,
Which, as soon as applied,
Immediately took out the lacht!

SECOND LESSON.

Our girl o'er the housework would sigh,
Till SAPOLIO I urged her to trigh,
Now she changes her tune,
For she's done work at nune,
Which accounts for the light in her eigh!

THIRD LESSON.

There's many a domestic embroglio—
To describe which would need quite a foglio,
Might oft be prevented
If the housewife consented
To clean out the house with SAPOGLIO!

FOURTH LESSON.

Maria's poor fingers would ache,
When the housework in hand she would tache,
But her pains were allayed,
When SAPOLIO'S aid,
Her labor quite easy did mache!

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We have heard of some marvelous soaps,
Whose worth has exceeded our hopes,
But it must be confest,
That SAPOLIO'S the best
For with grease spots it easily coaps!

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Whose troubles with "helps" were etolonel
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