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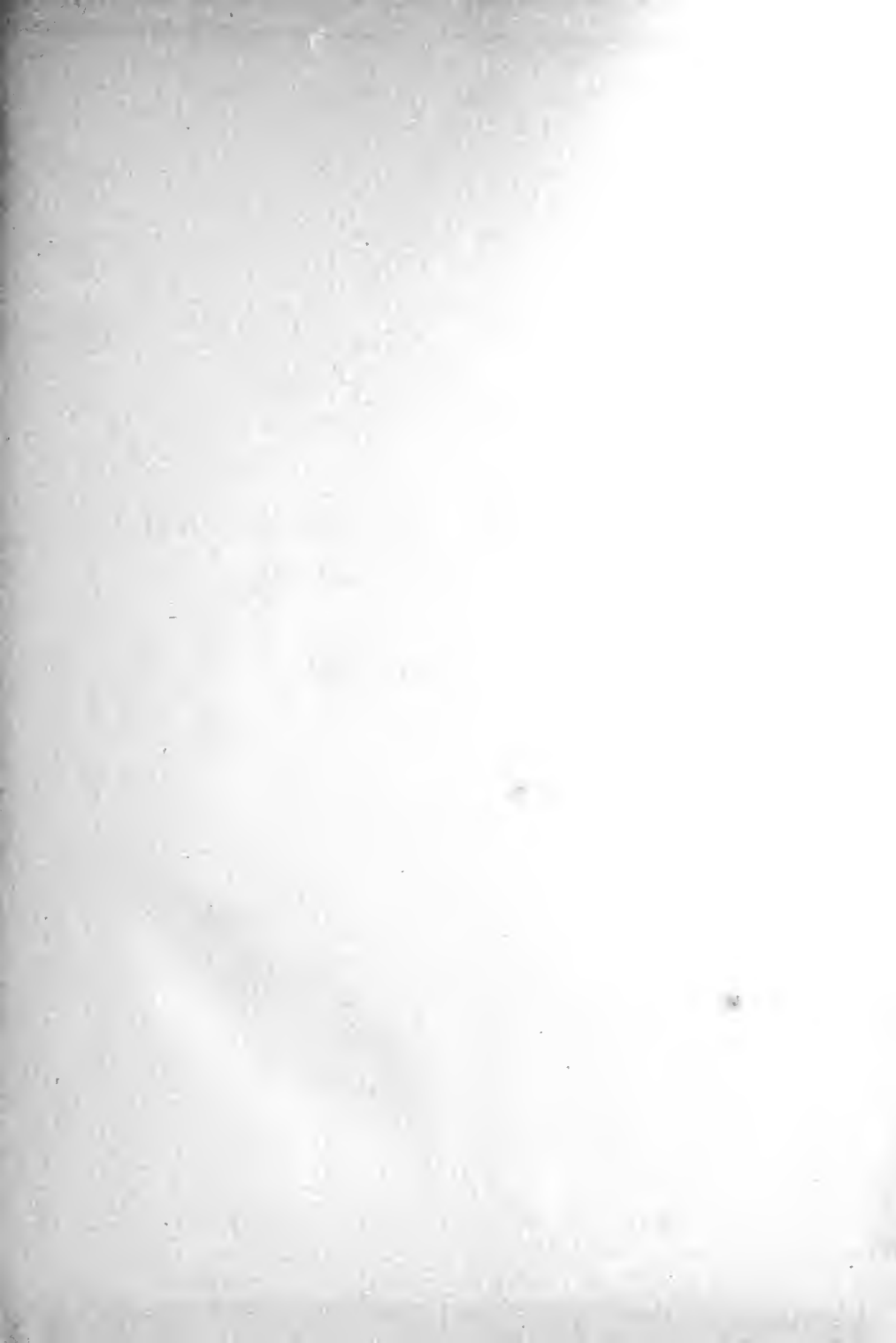
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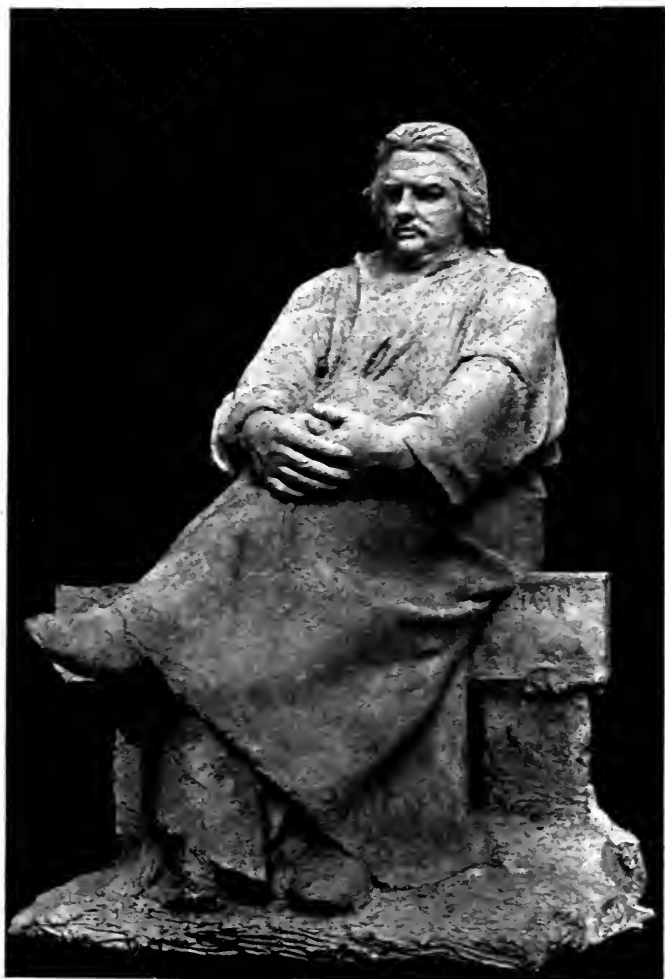


THE DRAMATIC WORKS
OF BALZAC


VOLUME II.









The Dramatic
Works of 
Honoré de Balzac

FIRST
ENGLISH
TRANSLATION



Rendered into
English by
E. de Valcourt-Vermont

V O L U M E 2
THE STEP-MOTHER
M E R C A D E T

GEBBIE & COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

ENTERED ACCORDING TO ACT OF CONGRESS IN THE
YEAR 1901, BY
WILLIAM H. LEE
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According to the respective dates of their production, the drama and the comedy included in this volume are the last ones that came from the pen of the indefatigable novelist. In fact, Balzac never witnessed the "first night" of *Mercadet*, which was presented at the *Théâtre du Gymnase Dramatique*, on August 24, 1851, i. e., just one year and six days after the death of the great Frenchman.

The reader will agree with the professional critics in recognizing, in both these plays, qualities that are lacking, to a certain degree, in the three dramatic efforts contained in Volume I. The action is more compact, the dialogue quicker and livelier, and the climaxes a great deal more satisfactory than in *Quinola's Resources*, for example. It seems as if the master had realized, to some extent, his deficiencies as a playwright and had forced himself, with his usual energy, to obey more closely the stern requirements of the stage. In our time of "théâtre populaire" and "théâtre naturaliste" he would have met with a very different welcome. The influence of Scribe and his imitators, all-powerful in those days, has so completely vanished from French literary circles that it seems to have never existed. The depth

of feeling and the pitiless logic which are paramount in the problem plays of the present generation are certainly much akin to the methods used by Balzac. In fact it is surprising how he seems to have had the intuition of the coming stage era; but, like most precursors, his own people refused to approve his innovations, and crushed them under their cruel Parisian ridicule.

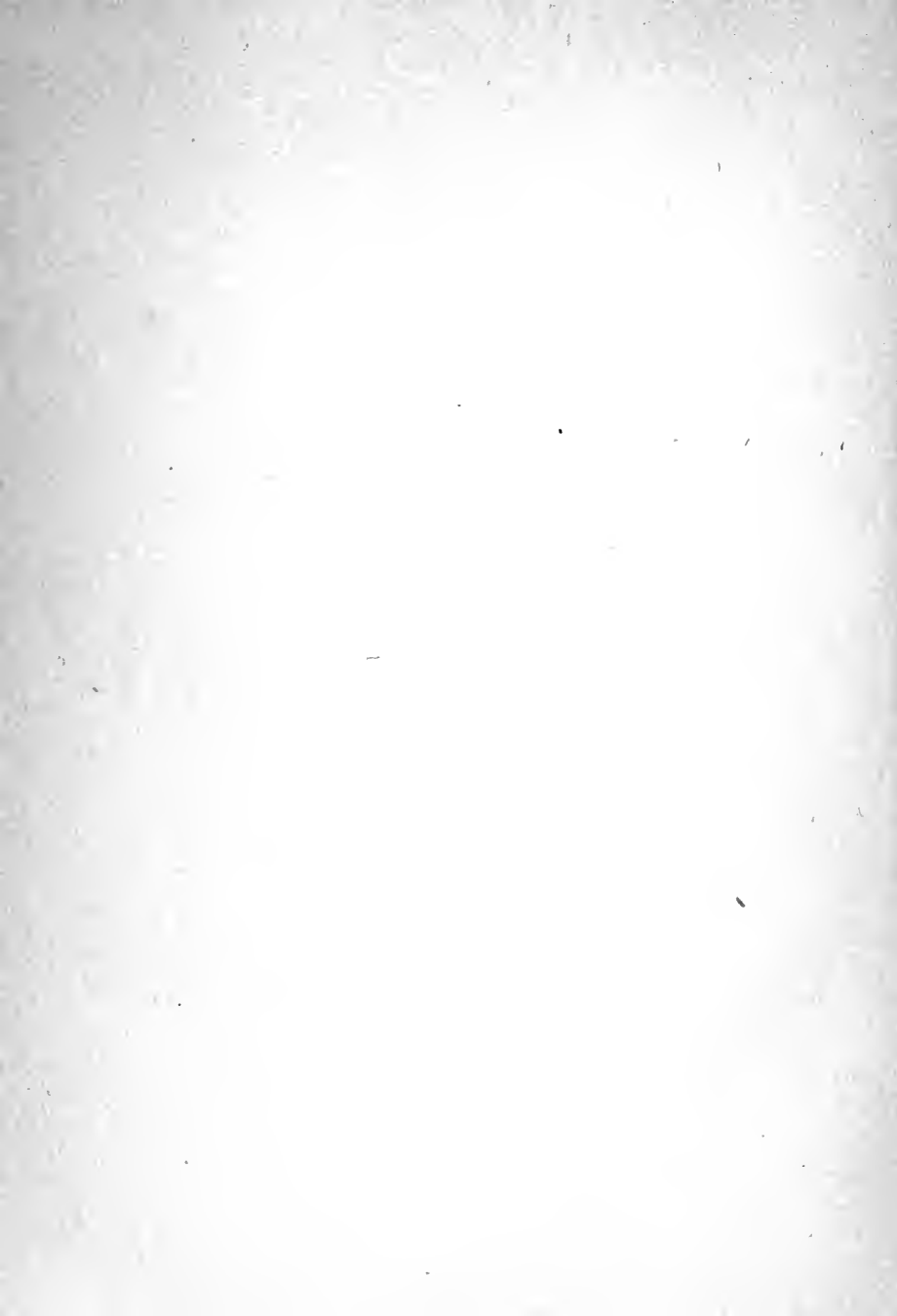
But posterity has declined to confirm the verdict of Balzac's contemporaries. As early as 1869, the Comédie Française,—the proud and severe guardian of Gallic stage traditions—added Mercadet to its regular repertoire and there is hardly a year when it is not produced in the beautiful Théâtre of the Rue Richelieu. As Marcel Barrière wrote: "Never has the greed and lack of all principles that characterize a certain class of speculators been denounced more scathingly and with greater intrepidity." Mercadet is the natural companion of that other terrible indictment against those modernized highway robbers and financiers: The firm of Nucingen. We have them still with us.

E. de V-V.

THE STEP-MOTHER

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS AND EIGHT TABLEAUS

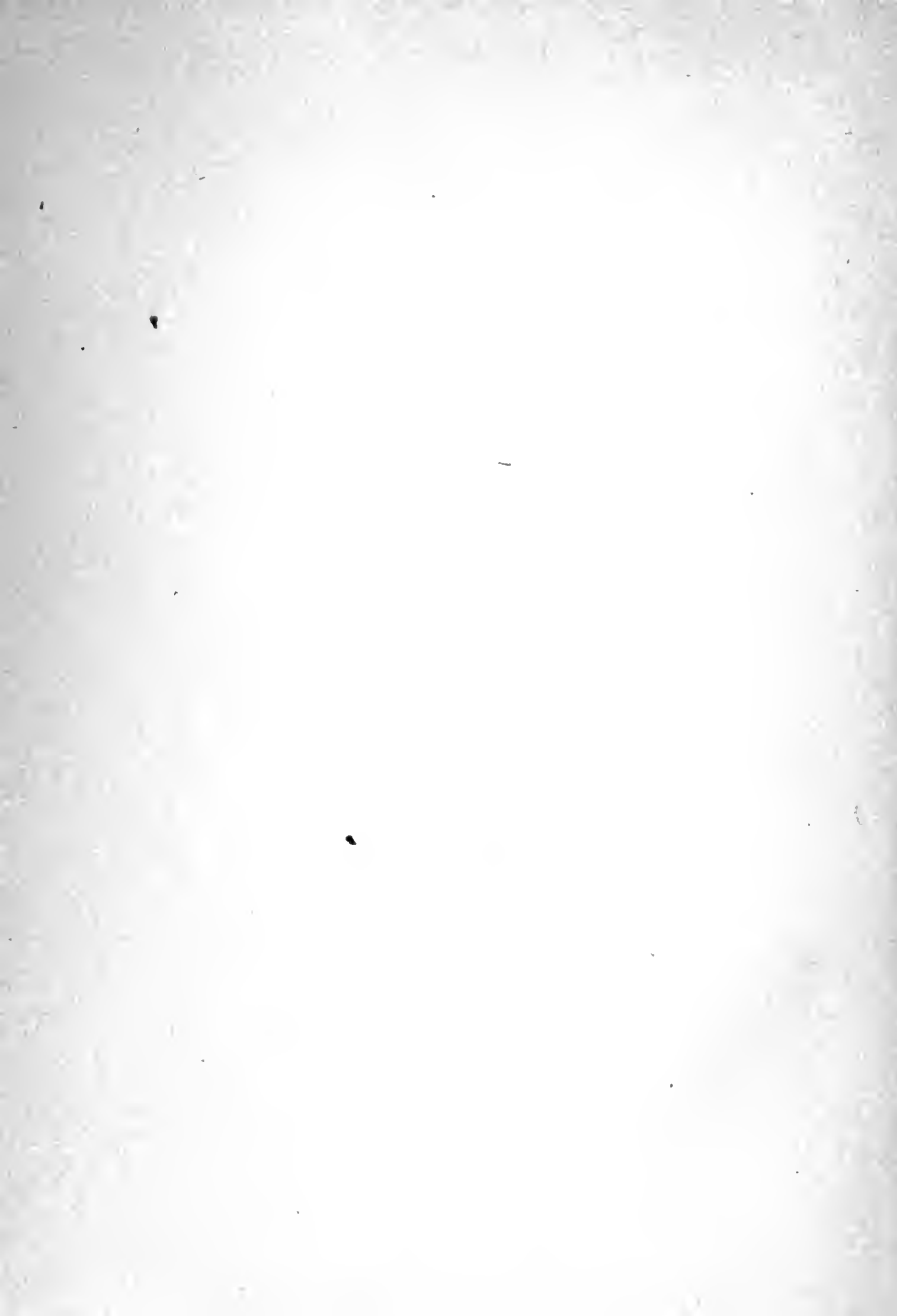
*Presented for the first time at the Théâtre Historique,
Paris, May 25, 1848.*



CHARACTERS

- COMTE DE GRANDCHAMP, a retired general of Napoleon.
EUGENE RAMEL, a public prosecutor.
FERDINAND MARCANDAL, manager of General de Grandchamp's
cloth-works.
DR. VERNON, a physician.
GODARD, a landed proprietor.
AN INVESTIGATING JUDGE.
FELIX, a trusted old servant of the General.
CHAMPAGNE, a foreman in the cloth-works.
BAUDRILLON, a druggist.
NAPOLEON, son of the General by his second wife.
GERTRUDE, second wife of the General.
PAULINE, a daughter of the General by his first wife.
MARGUERITE, Pauline's maid.
Gendarmes, a court-clerk, a priest and his assistants.

*The action takes place in the Château of General de Grand-
champ, near Louviers, in Normandy.*



THE STEP-MOTHER

FIRST ACT

The stage represents a well-furnished drawing-room on the walls of which hang, in prominent positions, the portraits of the great Napoleon and of his son, the King of Rome. Back of the stage, large double glass-doors open on a terrace and on a short flight of outside stairs leading down to the park visible in the background. A door leading to Pauline's suite of rooms is seen at the right of the spectator. A door to the left opens into the suites occupied by the General and his wife. On one side of the glass-door there is a table; on the other side, a beautiful Boule chiffonier. A flower-stand is placed under a large looking-glass, next to the entrance to Pauline's rooms. Opposite is a marble mantelpiece with a beautiful bronze clock and candelabras. At the front of the stage, to the right, is a sofa, and to the left is another.

SCENE I

GERTRUDE. THE GENERAL

(Enter Gertrude, holding flowers she has just gathered during a walk through the park, and which she busies herself arranging in the flower-stand.)

GERTRUDE.—I tell you, dear, it would be foolish to wait any longer before finding a husband for your daughter. She is now twenty-two years old and has had plenty of time to make a selection. In such a

case, parents must take matters in charge and find a suitable mate. Besides, I am personally interested in the affair.

THE GENERAL.—How is that?

GERTRUDE.—A step-mother's position is always under criticism. Everybody in Louviers has been saying, for a long while, that I was the one who prevented Pauline from marrying earlier.

THE GENERAL.—These silly country peoples' tongues! I wish I could cut off a few! The idea of attacking you, Gertrude, who for twelve years have been a true mother to Pauline, and given her such an excellent education!

GERTRUDE.—That's the way of the world! They bear us a grudge for living so near their wretched little city and declining to visit there. "Society" punishes us for dispensing with it. Did you imagine that our happiness caused no envy? Even our doctor—

THE GENERAL.—Vernon?

GERTRUDE.—Yes, Doctor Vernon. He is terribly envious of you. He is furious never to have been able to inspire any woman with the affection I have for you. So, he does not hesitate saying that I am playing a part— The idea of my playing a part for twelve continuous years! Why, that's ridiculous!

THE GENERAL.—A woman could not deceive any one for twelve years without being found out— It's all foolishness— So, Vernon, he also—

GERTRUDE.—Oh, he is only joking, you know. Well, as I started to tell you, Godard is coming to see you; I am surprised he has not arrived yet. It would be sheer insanity to refuse such a wealthy suitor. He loves Pauline and although, of course, he has his little

defects, and is, perhaps, a trifle provincial in his manners, he will make your daughter quite happy.

THE GENERAL.—I leave Pauline entirely free to choose her husband.

GERTRUDE.—Oh, you may feel quite at rest on that score—Pauline is a thoroughly, good, gentle and well-behaved girl.

THE GENERAL.—Gentle! Why, she has my own temper, and a pretty quick one it is!

GERTRUDE.—Pauline! A quick temper! But you, general, are not quick-tempered— You always do everything I please—

THE GENERAL.—Oh, it's because you are such an angel, and have no wish I do not approve of. By the way, Vernon is coming to dine with us, after he is through with his autopsy.

GERTRUDE.—It wasn't necessary for you to tell me.

THE GENERAL.—Oh, I am mentioning the fact only to have you order up the wines he prefers.

FELIX, *entering*.—Monsieur de Rimonville!

THE GENERAL.—Let him come in.

GERTRUDE, *pointing to Felix to arrange the flower-stand*.—I shall go to Pauline's room while you two gentlemen are talking business. I want to give a last look to her toilet. Young girls, sometimes, do not know what suits them best.

THE GENERAL.—If she does not, it is not for lack of money spent on herself. During the last eighteen months, her toilet has cost double what it did before; but after all it is the poor girl's only pleasure.

GERTRUDE.—Her only pleasure! For what do you count then, the delight of living in a family circle like ours? If I had not the happiness of being your wife I

would like nothing better than to be your daughter! And I—I will never leave you! (*She walks a few steps toward the door.*) You say, for the last eighteen months? That's strange— Well, now that I think of it, it is since then that she has begun to really care for jewelry, laces and other pretty things.

THE GENERAL.—Well, she is rich enough, in her own right, to allow herself those little fancies.

GERTRUDE.—Of course, she is of age. (*Aside.*) This love of dress—that's the smoke—but where is the fire? (*She leaves the room through Pauline's door.*)

SCENE II

THE GENERAL, *alone*.—What a unique pearl this woman is! After going through twenty-six campaigns, receiving eleven wounds, and losing the angel she has replaced in my heart, truly kind Providence owed me this gift of my Gertrude, if only to console me for the loss of my emperor.

SCENE III

GODARD. THE GENERAL.

GODARD, *entering*.—General!

THE GENERAL.—Good morning, Godard. I hope you are coming to spend the day with us?

GODARD.—The day and perhaps the week, general, if you turn a favorable ear to the request which I hardly dare present to you.

THE GENERAL.—Fire away! I know all about your request— My wife is on your side— Ah, you true Norman, you have attacked the fortress at its weak point.

GODARD.—General, you are an old soldier, and hate roundabout ways. You go ahead as if you were on the firing line.

THE GENERAL.—Straight and at full speed.

GODARD.—Well, that fits me all right, because I, myself, am rather timid—

THE GENERAL.—You timid! Then I'll have to apologize, for I always took you for a man who knew his full value only too well—

GODARD.—You mean that I am conceited— As a matter of fact, general, I want to marry because I do not know how to pay court to women.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—Oh, you, civilian. (*Aloud.*) What! you! If that's really so, sir, my daughter is not for you.

GODARD.—Oh, do not worry— You misunderstand me— I have a warm heart, general, and plenty of it; I only want to be sure I shall not be refused.

THE GENERAL.—You feel full of valor when storming an unfortified city, is that it?

GODARD.—That's not at all what I mean, general; you see, you are already intimidating me with your bantering.

THE GENERAL.—Explain yourself, then.

GODARD.—Well, the matter is that I understand nothing about women's ways. I never discover in time when their "yes" means "no" and when their "no" means "yes." Besides, when I love, I want to be loved in return.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—With his ways he has little chance to be—

GODARD.—There are many men like me whom this skirmishing, made out of formalities and pretences, tires to a supreme degree.

THE GENERAL.—But that mock-resistance is the most delicious part of it all—except the pleasure of the final victory!

GODARD.—None of this for me, please. When I feel hungry, I do not begin flirting with my soup—Although a Norman by birth, I like cases quickly settled and hate the law's tricks and delays. Every day I see, in society, fellows who succeed amazingly well with women by telling them, for instance: "Oh, how lovely your gown is! What exquisite taste! No other woman can compare with you"—or words to that effect. And from this beginning they go on and on—and they reach their goal all right! they are simply prodigious, on my word! For my part, I absolutely fail to understand how a few empty phrases like these may lead one to success. I would get mixed up a hundred times before being able to tell a pretty woman what love she inspires me with.

THE GENERAL.—Ah, these were not the ways of the men of the Empire!

GODARD.—It's this very awkwardness that has rendered me so bold—in appearance! This assumed audacity, coupled with my forty thousand a year, is accepted as genuine and helps me to get ahead. That's the reason you took me for a conceited fellow. But when one has not a franc of mortgage on some of the finest grazing land in the valley of Auge, when one owns a pretty little château just furnished anew—for

my future wife will find the place supplied to the minutest details, including my late mother's laces and diamonds; so that she need bring in nothing but her trunks—when one possesses all these advantages, general, one may indulge in almost any whim. That's why I am now Monsieur de Rimonville.

THE GENERAL.—No, you are Godard.

GODARD.—Godard de Rimonville.

THE GENERAL.—Just plain Godard.

GODARD.—General, such changes are tolerated.

THE GENERAL.—No, sir; I, for one, do not tolerate that any man, even if he be my son-in-law, should disown the name of his father. Yours—and a very decent fellow he was—used to drive his cattle himself from Poissy to Paris and all along the way he was known as Godard, Father Godard.

GODARD.—He was a well-considered man.

THE GENERAL.—Well considered in his sphere— But I see now your purpose. Your father's beeves procured you your forty-thousand-a-year fortune. You count on another kind of cattle to get you called Monsieur de Rimonville.

GODARD.—Now, listen, general. Suppose you ask Mademoiselle Pauline's opinion on the subject. She belongs to the present day. We are now in 1829 under King Charles X. Ask her if she will not prefer, when leaving a ball-room, to have the lackey call out, "The carriage of Madame de Rimonville" rather than "The carriage of Madame Godard."

THE GENERAL.—Oh, if this foolishness amuses my daughter, she is welcome to it, as far as I am concerned. For people won't make fun of her but of you, my dear Godard.

GODARD.—De Rimonville.

THE GENERAL.—Godard! Well, now, to business! You are honest, you are rich, you are young, you say that you will not flirt with other women and that my daughter shall be queen in her household— If it's all to be so, go ahead. Obtain her consent and you shall have mine. But, understand me clearly; my daughter shall marry none but the man she loves, be he rich or poor. There is only one exception, but it does not concern you. I had rather follow her coffin to the grave than to lead her to the mayor's office to marry the son, grandson, brother, nephew or cousin to the remotest degree of one of the four or five arch-scoundrels who have betrayed—for, you know, my soul's worship belongs to—

GODARD.—To Emperor Napoleon— Yes, yes, everybody knows that.

THE GENERAL.—First God, then France or the Emperor—they are one to me,—then my wife and my children. Whoever touches my deities, he is my enemy; I'd kill him like a dog, without a pang of remorse. These are my ideas on religion, country and family. My catechism is short but it is good. Do you know why, in 1816, after their accursed dismissal of the Loire Army, I took my poor little orphan girl in my arms and came over here in Louviers? Do you know why I, a colonel in the young Guard, wounded at Waterloo, decided to turn cloth-manufacturer?

GODARD.—I suppose you did not want to serve those now in power.

THE GENERAL.—I did not want to end my life under the guillotine, like a murderer.

GODARD.—Good Lord! What do you mean?

THE GENERAL.—I mean that if I had met one of these rascals, it would have been all up with him. Even now, after fifteen years, my blood boils in my veins if I happen to read their names in the papers, or if they are mentioned in my presence. I tell you, if I found myself with one of them, nothing could prevent me from rushing to his throat, to tear him to pieces, to throttle him.

GODARD.—And right you would be, by Jove! (*Aside.*)—I'll humor him.

THE GENERAL.—Yes, sir, throttle him— And if my son-in-law should torment my darling—I would act just the same—

GODARD.—Ah!

THE GENERAL.—Oh, I do not want him to be led by her. A man must be king in his own household, just as I am here.

GODARD, *aside*.—Poor man! How he deceives himself!

THE GENERAL.—What are you saying?

GODARD.—I was saying, general, that your threat does not frighten me. When one intends to love but one woman, you may be sure that she is loved in the right way!

THE GENERAL.—Well said, my dear Godard. As to the dowry—

GODARD.—Yes?

THE GENERAL.—My daughter's dowry is composed of—

GODARD.—Is composed of?

THE GENERAL.—Of the fortune of her mother and of the inheritance of her uncle Boncoeur. Both are

intact. They amount to 350,000 francs capital and one year's interest, for Pauline is twenty-two years old.

GODARD.—367,500 francs all told.

THE GENERAL.—No.

GODARD.—How, no?

THE GENERAL. It's more than that.

GODARD.—More?

THE GENERAL.—400,000 francs. (*Pleased movement of Godard.*) I will give the balance! But from me, do not expect anything more— You understand?

GODARD.—I must say, I fail to grasp your meaning.

THE GENERAL.—Here it is then. I idolize the little Napoleon.

GODARD.—What! The Duke of Reichstadt?

THE GENERAL.—No, my son, whom they refused to register, at birth, except under the name of Leon. But here (*he strikes his breast*) he is registered as Napoleon! So, now, all I make and save is for him and his mother.

GODARD, *aside*.—Especially for the mother, who is a sly one!

THE GENERAL.—You know now how things stand, and if they do not suit, you'd better say so right away.

GODARD, *aside*.—We'll go to law about it, all right. (*Aloud.*) They are perfectly satisfactory in every respect, and if you wish me to, I'll assist you in your projects.

THE GENERAL.—You are all right, and you understand better now, my dear Godard—

GODARD.—De Rimonville.

THE GENERAL.—No, Godard; I prefer Godard—you understand better why I, who have commanded the grenadiers of the young Guard, I, General Comte de

Grandchamp, am now weaving cloth for our infantry soldiers' uniforms.

GODARD.—But it's splendid on your part, general! Keep on saving money, by all means. You could not think of leaving your widow without a fortune.

THE GENERAL.—She is an angel, Godard.

GODARD.—De Rimonville.

THE GENERAL.—Godard! An angel to whom you owe the excellent education of your future wife. She has made her to her own image. Pauline is a pearl, a jewel; she never has been away from her father's roof; she is as pure, as innocent as a baby in its cradle.

GODARD.—General, allow me to make a confession; there are a number of handsome girls in Normandy, very rich besides, richer than Mademoiselle Pauline.—If you only knew how the fathers and mothers of these heiresses have been after me! It is positively indecent the way they have been carrying on! But I find it good fun—I get myself invited from château to château, I am made a great deal of—

THE GENERAL.—Conceited again—

GODARD.—Oh, it is not for my sake, I know! I am not blind! It is for the sake of my wide pastures, without the shadow of a mortgage; it is for my invested savings and for my well-known habit of never over-stepping my revenues. Now, do you guess what caused me to look up an alliance with your family in preference to all others?

THE GENERAL.—No; I must say, I do not.

GODARD.—There are even some rich and influential would-be-fathers-in-law who promise to obtain for me, from His Majesty, the title of Comte de Rimonville, and later, perhaps, a peerage.

THE GENERAL.—A title and a peerage—to you!

GODARD.—Yes, indeed, to me.

THE GENERAL.—And what battle did you win? When and how did you save your country? What deed of yours would they want to illustrate by a title? I tell you, it's pitiful—

GODARD.—It's pit— (*Aside.*) What am I saying? (*Aloud.*) We do not have the same opinion on the subject. Finally, do you wish to know why I prefer your adorable Pauline to all others?

THE GENERAL.—Because you love her, I imagine—

GODARD.—Of course— Of course— But it is also because there reigns in this house such an atmosphere of harmony, of peace, of bliss! It is so attractive to enter a family of such pure, simple, patriarchal habits of life! I am an observer, general.

THE GENERAL.—You mean, you have an inquisitive mind.

GODARD.—An inquisitive mind, general, is the father of observation. I am fully conversant with the right side and the seamy side of the society of our district.

THE GENERAL.—Well, what if you are?

GODARD.—Well, I've discovered hidden skeletons in the closets of our best families. The general public sees only a decent exterior, highly respectable mothers, kind fathers, model uncles! One feels like accepting them all to the communion table without the trouble of a confession; one would almost place funds in their care— Were you allowed to investigate all these good people, you would discover enough wickedness to frighten even an investigating magistrate.

THE GENERAL.—Oh, is this your way of looking at humanity? For my part, I prefer to keep my illusions.

To rummage people's consciences, that's the duty of priests and judges. I hate those black gowns and I hope I may die without having had anything to do with them. I will say this, however, Godard; the feeling that induces you to prefer my family to any other, pleases me more than the amount of your fortune— Here is my hand on it— You have my esteem, and I am not prodigal in bestowing it.

GODARD.—Thanks heartily, General. (*Aside.*) I have got the father-in-law properly nailed down.

SCENE IV

THE PRECEDING. PAULINE. GERTRUDE.

THE GENERAL, *noticing Pauline.*—Ah, here you are, little one—

GERTRUDE.—Is she not lovely?

GODARD.—Madam—

GERTRUDE.—Oh, excuse me, sir, I was absorbed in my masterpiece.

GODARD.—Mademoiselle is dazzling.

GERTRUDE.—We are to have company to dinner, and, as I am not in any way the traditional step-mother, I was delighted to help enhance the beauty of my daughter.

GODARD, *aside.*—They were expecting me!

GERTRUDE, *aside to Godard.*—I will leave you alone with her. Make your declaration. (*To the General.*) My dear, let us go to the gate to see if our dear doctor is in sight.

THE GENERAL.—I am at your service, as ever. (*To Pauline.*) Adieu, darling. (*To Godard.*) I'll see you again in a moment. (*Gertrude and the General walk as far as the stairs on the other side of the large glass-doors, and stand there looking out. From time to time, Gertrude is noticed observing Pauline and Godard. Ferdinand shows his head at the door to Pauline's apartment, but, a curt sign from the young girl causes him to withdraw at once, nobody else noticing this brief by-play.*)

GODARD, *in front of the stage, aside.*—Now what could I say that would be dainty and delicate? Ah, I have it— (*Aloud.*) This is very beautiful weather we are having to-day, Mademoiselle.

PAULINE.—Very beautiful, indeed, sir.

GODARD.—Mademoiselle—

PAULINE.—Sir?

GODARD.—It depends on you to make me find it a hundred times more beautiful.

PAULINE.—How could that be, sir?

GODARD.—You do not understand me? Has not Madame de Grandchamp, your step-mother, told you anything concerning me?

PAULINE.—Oh, yes! A few minutes ago, as she was dressing me, she spoke of you in most complimentary terms.

GODARD.—And you, Mademoiselle, do you believe a few of the kindly things she said of me?

PAULINE.—Oh, every word of them, sir.

GODARD, *sitting in one of the arm-chairs, aside.*—It runs almost too smoothly. (*Aloud.*) I wonder if she committed the lucky indiscretion of telling you that I love you so dearly that I wish for no greater happiness than to see you the mistress of Rimonville castle?

PAULINE.—She said vaguely that you were here for a purpose that honored me greatly.

GODARD, *on his knees*.—Mademoiselle, I am insanely in love with you. I prefer you to Mademoiselle de Blondville, to Mademoiselle de Clairville, to Mademoiselle de Verville, to Mademoiselle de Pont de Ville, to—

PAULINE.—Oh, enough, sir, enough. I am bewildered by the many proofs of a love so recently born. They amount almost to a holocaust. (*Godard rises from his uncomfortable position.*) Your father, sir, was

satisfied with driving his victims to the slaughterhouse; but you, you seem to sacrifice them yourself—

GODARD, *aside*.—I am afraid she is making fun of me! I'll get even with her, by and by—

PAULINE.—It would have been better for you, perhaps, to have waited a little longer, for I must confess—

GODARD.—That you do not wish to marry yet— You are happy with your father and you have no desire to leave him.

PAULINE.—You express my very thoughts.

GODARD. In such cases, there are mothers who say that their daughters are too young, but, as your father stated to me that you are twenty-two, I supposed that you might wish to settle yourself for life.

PAULINE.—Sir!

GODARD.—I know that you are the final arbiter of your destiny and of mine, but, made bold by the approval of your father and your second mother, who believe you heart-free, may I beg of you to allow me some hope?

PAULINE.—Sir, your intentions concerning me, flat-

tering though they are, give you no right to pursue such an impertinent inquiry.

GODARD, *aside*.—Is there a rival in the field? (*Aloud.*) No one, Mademoiselle, likes to give in without a struggle—

PAULINE.—If you persist, sir, I shall have to withdraw.

GODARD.—Oh, I beg of you, Mademoiselle— (*Aside.*) That's my revenge for making fun of me.

PAULINE.—You are wealthy, sir, and personally well-endowed by nature; you are so highly bred, so witty, that you will have no trouble securing a young lady, both handsomer and richer than I am.

GODARD.—But, Mademoiselle, when one is in love—

PAULINE.—Well, sir, you have said it.

GODARD, *aside*.—She is in love with some one else—I'll stay and find out who he is— (*Aloud.*) Mademoiselle, for the sake of my wounded pride, will you permit me to remain here a few days?

PAULINE.—My father, sir, is the proper person to answer your request.

GERTRUDE, *coming forward and speaking to Godard.*—Well, how did you fare?

GODARD.—Refused point blank, harshly and without any future hope. Her heart is already taken.

GERTRUDE, *to Godard.*—What! Her heart taken! A child I have brought up! Why, I should know all about it. Besides, nobody comes here who— (*Aside.*) This man arouses a suspicion that pierces me like the deadly stab of a poniard. (*To Godard.*) Why did you not ask her?

GODARD.—Ask her! At the first jealous insinuation of mine she flew into a tantrum.

GERTRUDE.—Well, then, I will question her myself.

THE GENERAL, *coming up from the glass-door*.—Here is the doctor— At last we shall hear the truth concerning the death of Champagne's wife.

SCENE V

THE PRECEDING. DOCTOR VERNON.

THE GENERAL.—Well, what news?

VERNON.—I knew how it was, all the time. Ladies! (*He bows to them.*) As a general rule, when a man is in the habit of beating his wife, he never poisons her. He would lose too much. He grows attached to his victim.

THE GENERAL, *to Godard*.—Charming!

GODARD.—Charming!

THE GENERAL, *to the Doctor, introducing Godard*.—Monsieur Godard.

GODARD.—De Rimonville.

VERNON, *he looks at Godard, wipes his nose and proceeds with his narrative*.—If he kill her, it's all a mistake; he happened to hit too hard. And then, he is in despair; while, in this case, poor Champagne is frankly delighted to have become a widower by natural means. As a matter of fact, his wife died of Asiatic cholera. I am rather interested in the case, because it is a very rare one in our climate. I have not met with Asiatic cholera since the Egyptian campaign. If they had called me in time I might have saved her.

GERTRUDE.—How pleased I am with your conclusions, doctor! A crime committed in our works—that

have been so free of any kind of scandal for over twelve years—would have chilled me to the marrow.

THE GENERAL.—This affair is all due to wicked gossiping. I trust you are absolutely sure of your ground, Vernon?

VERNON.—Of course I am! What a question to ask of a retired chief-surgeon, who has had twelve French armies under his care, from 1793 to 1815; who has practiced his art in Germany, Spain, Italy, Russia, Poland, Egypt—a genuine cosmopolitan doctor—

THE GENERAL, *slapping him on the shoulder*.—Ah, you big humbug, you— (*To the others.*) He has killed more people in all these countries than I have.

GODARD.—May I ask what the trouble was?

GERTRUDE.—Oh, people hereabouts, were saying that Champagne, our foreman, had poisoned his wife.

VERNON.—Unfortunately for him, the day before she was taken ill, the couple had a rather noisy quarrel, out of which they seem to have come about even. Ah, these two did not imitate their master's example—

GODARD.—And yet such happiness as we witness here ought to prove contagious. On the other hand, it is true, the perfection we admire in the countess is most rare.

GERTRUDE.—Where is the merit in loving such an excellent husband, and a daughter like this one?

THE GENERAL.—Now stop, Gertrude— These things ought not to be told before people.

VERNON, *aside*.—It's the way they have to be told if you want people to believe them.

THE GENERAL, *to Vernon*.—What are you muttering now?

VERNON.—I say that I am sixty-seven, that I am

your junior, and that I should be delighted to be loved in this wise. (*Aside.*) I should have to be sure though that it was the real article.

THE GENERAL.—You envious fellow! (*To his wife.*) Dear child, though I have not the power of God when I bless you, yet I believe he has granted it to me to love you the better.

VERNON.—My dear man, you forget that I am a doctor. What you say to Madame sounds like the refrain of a love song.

GERTRUDE.—There are love songs, doctor, that are pretty true to life.

THE GENERAL.—Doctor, if you continue teasing my wife in this manner, we shall quarrel. A mere doubt on the subject, I consider an insult.

VERNON, *aside*.—Of course, he does! (*To the General.*) Oh, I only meant that with this God-given power of yours you have loved so many women in your life, that I, a medical man, am delighted to behold you such a good Christian at seventy years old. (*While Vernon speaks, Gertrude walks slowly to the sofa on which the doctor is sitting.*)

THE GENERAL.—Hush! Don't you know that the last passions, my friend, are the strongest?

VERNON.—You are right. In youth we love with our whole strength which goes ebbing away; in old age, we love with our whole weakness, which goes increasing, increasing.

THE GENERAL. — Disagreeable philosopher! (*He walks a few steps toward the glass-door.*)

GERTRUDE, *aside to Vernon*.—Why do you, otherwise so kind, endeavor to cast doubts into Monsieur de Grandchamp's mind? You know him to be jealous

enough to kill any one on a mere suspicion. I respect so much his feelings in that regard that my only callers now are you, the mayor and the rector of the parish. Do you wish me to give up your society, which is so pleasant to us all? Ah, here comes Napoleon.

VERNON, *aside*.—This is a plain enough declaration of war. She has sent away everybody else, now comes my turn.

GODARD.—Doctor, you, who almost belong to this house, won't you tell me what you think of Mademoiselle Pauline? (*The doctor rises from his seat, stares at Godard, then blows his nose and walks away. First dinner bell.*)

SCENE VI

THE PRECEDING. NAPOLEON. FELIX.

NAPOLEON, *coming in on a run*.—Papa, papa, didn't you allow me to ride Coco?

THE GENERAL.—Certainly I did.

NAPOLEON, *to Felix*.—Now, you see!

GERTRUDE, *wiping her son's brow*.—How warm he is!

THE GENERAL.—It was under condition that somebody should escort you.

FELIX.—Now, you hear, Master Napoleon, I was right. General, the little scamp wanted to ride away all alone on his pony.

NAPOLEON.—He fears for me all the time; I'm not afraid of anything. (*Felix goes out. Second dinner bell.*)

THE GENERAL.—Come and kiss me for saying that. Here is a youngster who is near kin to the young Guard.

VERNON, *looking at Gertrude*.—How much like his father!

GERTRUDE, *like a flash*.—Morally, he is just like his father, but he looks like me.

FELIX, *from the door*.—Madame, dinner is served.

GERTRUDE.—By the way, where is Ferdinand? He, always so punctual. Run out, Napoleon, and see if he is not on the road leading to the factory. Tell him to hurry up, as the dinner bell has been rung twice already.

THE GENERAL.—Oh, we do not need to wait for Ferdinand—Godard, offer your arm to my daughter. (*Vernon steps forward and offers his arm to Gertrude.*) Oh, excuse me, Vernon— Do you not know, by this time, that no one but myself ever takes my wife's arm?

VERNON, *aside*.—Decidedly, he is incurable!

NAPOLEON, *running back through the glass-door*.—I have just seen Ferdinand coming up the avenue.

VERNON.—Give me your paw, tyrant!

NAPOLEON.—I'm a tyrant, am I? Let me drive you then— (*He forces the doctor to turn around two or three times. They all leave the room, chatting with animation.*)

SCENE VII

FERDINAND, *comes out with great precaution from Pauline's room*.—The boy just saved me by discovering me on the avenue, by I do not know what hallucination. One more such imprudence and we are

lost. It is time to get out of this situation, at any cost. Pauline has been asked in marriage and has had to refuse Godard. The General and especially Gertrude will insist on being told the motive of this refusal! Well, now I must go over to the outside stairs so that it may look as if I were entering the house through the park. If only I am not seen from the dining-room— (*As he reaches the glass-door he meets Ramel entering.*)

SCENE VIII

FERDINAND. RAMEL.

RAMEL.—You here, Marcandal!

FERDINAND.—Hush! Hush! Never pronounce that name in this house! If the General heard me called Marcandal, if he were informed that it is my name, he would shoot me down like a mad dog!

RAMEL.—And why should he?

FERDINAND.—Because I am General Marcandal's son.

RAMEL.—A general to whom the Bourbon King partly owed his second return.

FERDINAND.—In General de Grandchamp's eyes to have abandoned Napoleon to serve the Bourbons is to have betrayed France. Alas, this was also my poor father's opinion, for he died of grief. So, do not forget to call me Ferdinand Charny; that's my mother's name.

RAMEL.—But what are you doing here anyway?

FERDINAND.—I am the manager, the cashier, the general factotum of the cloth-works.

RAMEL.—What! Out of necessity?

FERDINAND.—Yes, indeed, out of necessity. My father went through all the money he ever had, including my mother's private fortune. She is living now in a small place in Brittany on her pension as the widow of a lieutenant-general.

RAMEL.—What! Your father, who occupied such a brilliant position as commander-in-chief of the Royal Guard, did not leave his son a franc or even a protector?

FERDINAND.—Has ever a man betrayed his party without some secret reason?

RAMEL.—I think we had better drop the subject—

FERDINAND.—My father was an inveterate gambler— That was his reason for being so indulgent for my wild ways— But you, tell me, what is bringing you here?

RAMEL.—For two weeks now, I have occupied the office of the King's Public Prosecutor for the Louviers district.

FERDINAND.—I thought I heard of— Was not another name given as that of the appointee?

RAMEL.—The name of De La Grandiere, I suppose?

FERDINAND.—That's it.

RAMEL.—Before marrying Mademoiselle de Boudeville, I had to obtain the official permission of changing my name and adding that of my mother—just as you did, yourself. The Boudeville family are influential people and, within a year, I expect to be appointed assistant attorney-general to the Court of Appeals of Rouen. That will be a stepping-stone to a Paris position.

FERDINAND.—And what brings you to our peaceful cloth factory?

RAMEL.—An investigation concerning a poisoning case. A first-class start for me. (*Enter Felix.*)

FELIX.—Oh, Monsieur Ferdinand, Madame is so anxious about you—

FERDINAND.—Please tell her that I am engaged. (*Exit Felix.*) My dear Eugène, in case the General, who is very inquisitive, like most retired soldiers with practically nothing to keep their minds busy, if the General ask you where we met just now, tell him, please, that we came upon each other in the main avenue leading to the château. It's of the greatest importance for me— Now, about the business that brings you here. It's concerning the late wife of our foreman Champagne that you are gathering information, I suppose. Well, the poor fellow is as innocent as a new-born babe.

RAMEL.—You believe so do you? Well, public prosecutors are paid to be incredulous. I see that you have remained what you were in the years of our life together, the most noble-hearted, enthusiastic fellow in the world; in a word, a poet! A poet who lives his poetry instead of writing it down; who believes in everything that is good and beautiful! Ah, by the way, what has become of the angel of your youthful dreams, of Gertrude?

FERDINAND.—Hush! I believe it is not only the Minister of Justice but heaven itself that has sent you to Louviers just at the time when I am sorely in need of a friend in the awful crisis I am facing. Come nearer, Eugène, and listen. I am addressing now my college chum, the confidant of early days; I trust you

will never act the King's Prosecutor toward me; am I right? The nature of my avowal will show you that it ought not to be whispered to any one but a father-confessor!

RAMEL.—Do you mean that there is something criminal in your case?

FERDINAND.—Indeed not, or only such violations of the code as most judges would delight in committing.

RAMEL.—If it were otherwise I could not listen to you, or, if I did listen, I should have to ask for a change of district—

FERDINAND.—Ah, I see that you are still my good friend, my best friend— Well, now— For over three years, I have been deeply in love with Mademoiselle de Grandchamp and she—

RAMEL.—Oh, I understand— You are acting Romeo and Juliet over again, here in prosaic Normandy!

FERDINAND.—With this difference, that the hereditary hatred that kept the two lovers apart is but a trifle compared with the horror Monsieur de Grandchamp would harbor against the son of Marcandal, the traitor.

RAMEL.—But will not Mademoiselle de Grandchamp be free to act according to her own sweet will within three years? By the Boudevilles, I have been told that she is quite wealthy in her own right. All you will have to do will be to get married in Switzerland, unless you prefer to obtain the General's consent by legal means.

FERDINAND.—Should I need to consult you about such a simple and commonplace solution to our difficulties?

RAMEL.—Oh, I think I grasp the situation? You married your Gertrude— Who has turned out as most angels do—after we marry them!

FERDINAND.—Things are a thousand times worse, my dear Eugène! Gertrude is now—Madame de Grandchamp!

RAMEL.—I declare— And how did you get yourself into such a hornets' nest?

FERDINAND.—As do all those who get into hornets' nests—by looking after honey.

RAMEL.—I must admit that the situation is most serious and I want you to hide nothing from me.

FERDINAND.—Originally, Mademoiselle Gertrude de Meilhac, a pupil of the St. Denis Academy for the daughters of the Legion of Honor, must have been attracted to me solely out of ambition. Believing me a rich man, she did everything to captivate me and induce me to make of her my wife.

RAMEL.—That's the invariable method of all scheming orphan girls.

FERDINAND.—But the extraordinary passion that has grown from such a beginning! It has truly become, for Gertrude, the one, overpowering love that dominates her whole life and devours it. When, at the end of the year 1816, she saw me financially ruined, knowing me, as you did, to be but a poet, a spoiled child, fond of art, luxury and an easy, soft life, she conceived—without telling me a word about it—an infamous and sublime scheme, such as ardent and opposed passions beget in the brains of women, who, in the interest of their love, will act just as a despot does for the sake of retaining his power in his hands— For, in her eyes, love is the supreme law—

RAMEL.—The facts—the facts, my dear man— You are pleading a case now, forgetting that I am a lawyer myself—

FERDINAND.—While I was establishing my mother in Brittany, Gertrude met General de Grandchamp, who was looking for a governess for his daughter. All she saw in the veteran soldier, then fifty-eight years old and bearing the marks of severe wounds, was his money bags. She imagined that, in a very short time, she would be a widow, and a rich one at that, ready to return to her love and to her slave. She persuaded herself that this marriage would be but a brief nightmare followed by the most delightful awaking. And this nightmare has now lasted twelve years! But you know how women reason!

RAMEL.—They have a logic all their own.

FERDINAND.—Gertrude's exacting jealousy is simply terrible. She wants to be compensated by her lover's fidelity for her own unfaithfulness toward her husband; and, as she suffered martyrdom—so she said—away from me, she insisted—

RAMEL.—That you should come and live under the same roof so as to be sure to keep you all to herself.

FERDINAND.—She succeeded so far as to induce me to come and stay in this neighborhood. For three years now, I have occupied a cottage near the factory. But, if I did not leave at the end of the first week, it was solely because the very day after my arrival, I realized that I could never live without Pauline.

RAMEL.—As a magistrate, I will admit that the existence of this love renders your present position here less ugly than it would be otherwise.

FERDINAND.—My position! Why, my dear fellow, it

has simply grown unbearable on account of the peculiarities of the three human beings with whom I am in daily contact. Pauline is, at times, recklessly bold, like all pure-minded girls whose love is absolutely ideal and who dream of nothing wrong when the man they love is their pledged husband. On the other hand, Gertrude's mind is sharply penetrating, and we are saved from her perspicacity only through the constant terror Pauline is kept in lest her father should discover my identity. That gives her the strength to dissemble! But now, Pauline has had to refuse Godard, and—

RAMEL.—I know Godard— Under his dull manner, he hides one of the shrewdest, most inquisitive minds in this vicinity. He is here now, is he?

FERDINAND.—He is seated at the General's dinner table.

RAMEL.—You had better beware of him.

FERDINAND.—I'll do so. Now if either of these women, neither of whom loves the other any too much, should discover that they are rivals, one may kill the other. I could not tell which: one, urged by the strength of her innocence, of her legitimate passion; the other, rendered furious by the loss of what she believes the hard-earned fruit of so much deceit, sacrifice, crime even—

RAMEL.—You actually frighten me, me a public prosecutor— Ah, how true it is that women often cost us more than they are worth!

NAPOLEON, *running in*.—Papa and mamma are impatient after you— They say you must quit business, and Vernon is talking about his digestion—

FERDINAND.—Little scamp, did you come to listen?

NAPOLEON.—Mamma whispered to me to run out and find what you were doing.

FERDINAND.—Well, go back, quick, little man, I am coming. (*Aside to Ramel.*) You see, she has trained that child to be an innocent spy. (*Exit Napoleon.*)

RAMEL.—Is this the General's child?

FERDINAND.—It is.

RAMEL.—Is he not twelve years old?

FERDINAND.—Just about.

RAMEL.—Have you nothing more to confide to me, Ferdinand?

FERDINAND.—Nothing; I have said enough.

RAMEL.—In that case, you had better attend to your dinner. No need to mention my arrival or my office. Let them take their meal in peace. Go, my friend, go.

SCENE IX

RAMEL, *alone*.—Poor fellow, I pity him! Well, if all young men had had my legal experience of the last seven years, they would be convinced that marriage has to be accepted as the only safe romance in one's life— But, then, if passion were wise it would be another name for virtue!

(ACT CURTAIN.)

SECOND ACT

(The stage is set as in the first act.)

SCENE I

RAMEL. MARGUERITE, later FELIX.

(Ramel is sunk in meditation and so seated on the sofa as not to be seen at first. Marguerite enters, carrying candlesticks and packs of playing cards. Between this act and the preceding, night has set in.)

MARGUERITE.—Four packs of cards, that's enough, even if the rector, the mayor and his assistant should drop in. *(Felix walks in and begins lighting the lamps and the candles in the candelabras.)* I'd make a bet that my poor darling Pauline is not to be married even this time— Ah, if her sainted mother could see of what little account her precious child is in this house, she would weep over it in her grave! If I stay here, it is solely to console the dear girl, to serve her—

FELIX, *aside*.—What is the old crone talking about? *(Aloud.)* Against whom are you venting your grudge just now, Marguerite? I'll wager it's against Madame?

MARGUERITE.—No, it is against Monsieur.

FELIX.—The General! Oh! You may talk all you please— That man is a saint.

MARGUERITE.—A stone saint, then, for he is blind.

FELIX.—You mean blinded.

MARGUERITE.—Ah, you have found the right word for it, you have, indeed.

FELIX.—The General has but one weakness, he is jealous.

MARGUERITE.—And hot-tempered, too.

FELIX.—Yes, hot-tempered; but it's all the same thing. At the first suspicion, he strikes. That's the way he killed two men already—on the spot. By the name of all that's sacred, the only way to deal with such a man is to smother him with coddlings, and that's just what Madame is doing. Nothing could be plainer. And with those clever ways of hers, she has done as they do with balky horses: she has put blinkers on him; he can't see either to the right or to the left. She just needs to say: "My dear, look straight before you;" that's all there is about it.

MARGUERITE.—So you think, as I do, that a woman of thirty-two is not in love with a man of seventy without a secret scheme of some sort. Depend upon it—she has her plan.

RAMEL, *aside*.—Oh, our servants! Spies paid out of our own pocket.

FELIX.—What scheme could she have? She never steps out of the grounds, and nobody calls.

MARGUERITE.—She would shave an egg. Do you know why she has taken from me the housekeeping keys?

FELIX.—Oh, I suppose she is feathering her nest.

MARGUERITE.—Indeed she is, and it has gone on for the last twelve years with Mademoiselle's income and the profits of the factory. That's the reason she is forever delaying my dear child's marrying! For property has to be surrendered when a husband steps in.

FELIX.—That's the law.

MARGUERITE.—I'd pardon her everything if only she made Mademoiselle happy; but, all the time I catch my darling a-crying, and, when I ask her what is the matter, she just answers me: "Nothing's the matter, my good Marguerite." (*Exit Felix.*) Let me see now, is everything all right? Yes—here are the playing tables, the candles, the cards— Ah, I must arrange Monsieur's cushions on the sofa. (*She walks to it and for the first time sees Ramel.*) Lord in heaven! A stranger!

RAMEL.—Have no fear, Marguerite.

MARGUERITE.—Has Monsieur heard it all?

RAMEL.—Never mind if I have. I am discreet by profession: I am the King's Public Prosecutor.

MARGUERITE.—Oh!

SCENE II

THE PRECEDING. PAULINE. GODARD. VERNON.
 NAPOLEON. FERDINAND. THE GENERAL.
 GERTRUDE.

(*As soon as Gertrude enters and notices Marguerite arranging the cushions for the General's favorite seat on the sofa, she rushes to her and snatches a cushion out of the old woman's hands.*)

GERTRUDE.—Marguerite, don't you know that you pain me by not allowing me to attend myself to everything that concerns Monsieur's comfort? Besides, no one but me knows how to fix his cushions right.

MARGUERITE, *aside to Pauline.*—What nonsense!

GODARD.—I declare! but we have here the King's Public Prosecutor in person!

THE GENERAL.—The Public Prosecutor in my house!

GERTRUDE.—He!

THE GENERAL.—May I inquire, sir, the reason that brings you here?

RAMEL.—I had requested my friend, Monsieur Ferdinand Mar— (*Quick gesture of Ferdinand, while both women cannot restrain a slight movement.*)

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—It is his friend, Eugène Ramel.

RAMEL.—Ferdinand de Charny, whom I informed of the object of my call, not to make you acquainted with it until you had finished a peaceful dinner.

THE GENERAL.—Ferdinand is your friend, sir?

RAMEL.—My childhood's friend. We met a few minutes ago in your avenue. After eight years' separation one has so much to say to each other that his being late for dinner is entirely my fault.

THE GENERAL.—And now, sir, may I ask you again to what we owe your presence here?

RAMEL.—You owe it to your foreman Jean Nicot, nicknamed Champagne, who is accused of a crime.

GERTRUDE.—But, sir, our friend here, Doctor Vernon, acknowledges that Champagne's wife died a natural death.

VERNON.—Indeed she did. She died of Asiatic cholera, sir.

RAMEL.—The Public Prosecutor's office, sir, only trusts its own experts and draws its own conclusions. You were wrong to proceed with your examination in our absence.

FELIX.—Shall I bring in the coffee, Madame?

GERTRUDE.—Not yet. (*Aside.*) How changed the

man is! Since he has assumed the Public Prosecutor's office I scarcely recognize him— He makes me feel cold all over—

THE GENERAL.—But, sir, even the pretended crime committed by Champagne, an old soldier, for whom I will gladly furnish bail, does not explain your presence here.

RAMEL.—The approaching arrival of the Investigating Judge will make matters clear to you.

THE GENERAL.—In the meantime, will you please take a seat?

FERDINAND, *aside to Ramel, pointing to Pauline.*—Here she is!

RAMEL.—One would face death for the sake of such an adorable creature.

GERTRUDE, *to Ramel, quickly and low.*—We do not know each other? You never saw me? Have pity on me! Have pity on him!

RAMEL.—You may count upon my discretion.

THE GENERAL, *who has noticed Ramel and Gertrude talking together.*—Is my wife of any use in the investigation of this case?

RAMEL.—She is, General, and it is just because I wished her to be informed of what is expected of her that I came here to-day.

THE GENERAL.—My wife mixed in this affair! It's truly going too far—

VERNON.—Do not get excited, my friend.

FELIX, *from the door.*—His Honor the Investigating Judge.

THE GENERAL.—Let him come in.

SCENE III

THE PRECEDING. THE INVESTIGATING JUDGE. CHAMPAGNE. BAUDRILLON. A GENDARME *who has Champagne in his custody.*

THE JUDGE, *bowing as he enters.*—Monsieur the Public Prosecutor, I beg leave to introduce to you Monsieur Baudrillon, the druggist.

RAMEL.—Monsieur Baudrillon has not seen the accused man?

THE JUDGE.—No, sir, the accused came in with me in charge of this gendarme who has not allowed him to communicate with anybody.

RAMEL.—Now, we shall know the truth. Let Monsieur Baudrillon come to the front; you also, Champagne. Monsieur Baudrillon, you recognize this man as having bought of you some arsenic, two days ago?

BAUDRILLON.—I recognize him.

CHAMPAGNE.—Did I not tell you, Monsieur Baudrillon, that the stuff was intended for mice that were eating up everything round the house here, and that Madame had sent me for it?

THE JUDGE.—You hear what he says, Madame? He claims that you, yourself, sent him to purchase the drug and that he delivered the package to you just as he received it from Monsieur Baudrillon.

GERTRUDE.—All this is the truth, sir.

RAMEL.—Have you, Madame, made any use of this arsenic?

GERTRUDE.—No, sir.

JUDGE.—In that case, you will be able to produce the package delivered by Monsieur Baudrillon. This

parcel must bear his seal and if he finds this seal to be whole and untampered with, a portion of the grave charges laid against your foreman will be removed. We should then only have to wait for the report of our surgeons, now busy with the autopsy.

GERTRUDE.—The package in question, sir, has not left the inside of my desk, in my bed-room. (*Exit Gertrude.*)

CHAMPAGNE.—Ah, General, I am a saved man!

THE GENERAL.—My poor Champagne!

RAMEL.—General, we will be glad to be able to proclaim your foreman's innocence; unlike you soldiers, we are greatly pleased to be defeated.

GERTRUDE, *re-entering the room.*—Gentlemen here is what you asked for.

BAUDRILLON, *putting on his spectacles and examining closely the package Gertrude has placed in the Investigating Judge's hands.*—It is exactly as I delivered it, gentlemen, the seal is unbroken.

THE JUDGE, *returning the package to Gertrude.*—That will do, Madame. But lock it back again carefully; we hear of nothing, nowadays, but stories of poisoning cases.

GERTRUDE.—It was in my private desk, sir, to which no one but myself and the General has keys. (*She returns to her room.*)

RAMEL.—General, we shall not await the report from the medical experts. The main charge—a very grave one you must admit, and concerning which the whole town had grown interested—having been satisfactorily explained away, and the skill and integrity of Doctor Vernon inspiring us with full confidence, (*return of Gertrude*) Champagne, you are a free man. (*General*

movement of satisfaction.) But, you see, my friend, to what ugly suspicions one is exposed when marital relations are known to be bad.

CHAMPAGNE.—Your Honor, ask my General here whether I am not a lamb for gentleness. But my wife—may the good Lord help her soul—was the worst creature that ever lived—an angel could not have stood her temper. If I had to give her a piece of my mind once in a while, the last half hour I've had to go through, is sufficient punishment for it! To be taken for a poisoner! To be arrested on such a horrible suspicion, knowing one's self to be innocent! (*Tears run down his face.*)

THE GENERAL.—Well, everything is all right now, my good fellow, since full justice has been granted you—

NAPOLEON.—Papa, say, what is justice made of, anyway?

THE GENERAL.—Gentlemen, the representatives of justice ought not to commit such blunders.

GERTRUDE.—There seems to be always something fatal in the administration of justice! This poor man never will see the end of the evil gossip resulting from your visit, gentlemen.

RAMEL.—Madame, criminal investigations have nothing of a fatal character as far as innocent persons are concerned. 'See how promptly Champagne has been set free. (*Looking into Gertrude's eyes.*) Those who live a life above reproach, who have none but noble affections and high aims, need fear nothing from the representatives of justice.

GERTRUDE.—Ah, sir, how little you know the people of this district— Ten years from now, there will be

somebody to say that Champagne poisoned his wife and that, without our protection—

THE GENERAL.—Now, now, Gertrude, these gentlemen have done their duty. (*Felix is preparing on a side-table to the left, the cups, etc., for after-dinner coffee.*) May we offer you a cup of coffee, gentlemen?

THE JUDGE.—You'll have to kindly excuse me, General, but my wife is waiting upon me for dinner, at our Louviers home. (*He walks to the glass-door in answer to a sign from a doctor who has just come up the stairs.*)

THE GENERAL.—And you, Ferdinand's friend, will you do us the honor, sir?

RAMEL.—Ah, General, you have in Ferdinand the noblest heart, the most sterling honesty and the most charming disposition I ever met with.

PAULINE.—What a nice man this public prosecutor is!

GODARD, *to himself*.—Why does she say that? Is it because he is praising this Monsieur Ferdinand so highly? There may be something in that!

GERTRUDE, *to Ramel*.—Whenever you have any leisure, sir, try to come and call upon Monsieur de Charny. (*To the General.*) We shall profit by it.

THE JUDGE.—Monsieur de La Grandiere, our physician just reports to me that he has discovered, as Doctor Vernon did before him, that the death in question was undoubtedly due to Asiatic cholera. All that is now left for us to do, Madame and General, is to ask you to excuse our short intrusion in your charming and peaceful home. (*He walks away, the General escorting him to the glass-door.*)

RAMEL, *aside to Gertrude on the front of the stage*.—

Beware, Madame. Fate does not assist such reckless attempts. I have guessed everything. Give up Ferdinand; allow him the freedom of his life, and be satisfied with the bliss of a happy wife and mother.

GERTRUDE.—Give him up! I would rather die!

RAMEL, *aside*.—Well, I see I shall have to carry off Ferdinand. (*He makes a sign to his friend, takes him by the arm and walks out after bowing ceremoniously to the ladies.*)

THE GENERAL, *returning after bowing Ramel out*.—At last, we are rid of them! (*To Gertrude.*) Please, have the coffee passed round.

GERTRUDE.—Pauline, kindly ring for Felix. (*Pauline goes to the bell and rings.*)

SCENE IV

THE PRECEDING, *minus* FERDINAND, RAMEL, THE JUDGE
and BAUDRILLON.

GODARD, *aside*.—I shall know in a minute if Pauline loves this Monsieur Ferdinand. The little one with his question about what justice is made of, will do the job for me. (*Enter Felix.*)

GERTRUDE.—The coffee. (*Felix brings forward the small table upon which the cups have been laid out.*)

GODARD, *aside to Napoleon*.—Do you want to play a funny trick?

NAPOLEON.—Of course I want to? Do you know of any?

GODARD.—Come here and I'll tell you of something good. (*He walks with Napoleon as far as the outside of the glass-door.*)

THE GENERAL.—Pauline, my coffee, please. (*Pauline brings him a cup.*) Not quite sweet enough. (*She puts in one more lump of sugar.*) Thanks, daughter.

GERTRUDE.—Monsieur de Rimonville?

THE GENERAL.—Godard?

GERTRUDE.—Monsieur de Rimonville?

THE GENERAL.—Godard, my wife wishes to know if you want any coffee?

GODARD. Indeed I do, Madame. (*He goes and sits in a place from which he can have a good view of Pauline's face.*)

THE GENERAL.—How pleasant it is to enjoy one's coffee in such a comfortable seat!

NAPOLEON, *he comes in on a run.*—Oh, mamma, mamma, Ferdinand just fell down; he must have broken his leg for they are carrying him here—

VERNON.—I declare!

THE GENERAL.—That's terrible!

PAULINE, *falling, half fainting, in an arm-chair.*—Oh!

GERTRUDE, *to Napoleon.*—What are you telling us?

NAPOLEON.—It was for fun. I wanted to see how much you all loved Ferdinand.

GERTRUDE.—That's a very naughty thing to do! But you never could have thought of it yourself!

NAPOLEON, *low, to his mother.*—No, Godard told me.

GODARD, *aside.*—He is the loved one. Pauline got caught in my trap; it never misses.

GERTRUDE, *to Godard while she offers him a glass of cordial.*—What a very poor instructor for a boy you would be, Monsieur! The idea of your teaching a child such wicked tricks!

GODARD.—You will realize how cleverly I have acted when you know that my little scheme has

revealed to me who my rival is. (*He points to Ferdinand who is just then entering the room.*)

GERTRUDE, *dropping the sugar-bowl she holds in her hand.*—He!

GODARD, *aside.*—What! She also?

GERTRUDE, *aloud.*—You frightened me!

THE GENERAL, *rising.*—What is the matter, my dear child?

GERTRUDE.—Nothing; just a joke of Monsieur Godard who pretended that the Public Prosecutor was on his way back here. Felix, take away this sugar-bowl and bring another.

VERNON.—This is a day of events.

GERTRUDE.—Monsieur Ferdinand, you will have sugar directly. (*Aside.*) He is not looking at her. (*Aloud.*) Well, Pauline, you are not dipping a lump of sugar in your father's cup, as usual?

NAPOLEON.—Oh, she is too much upset; she just said "Ah!"

PAULINE.—Can't you keep quiet, little fibber? You are always teasing me. (*She sits by her father and dips a lump of sugar in his cup.*)

GERTRUDE, *aside.*—Can this be true? And I, who have taken such pains with her! (*To Godard.*) If your surmises are correct, you'll marry her within a fortnight. (*Aloud.*) Monsieur Ferdinand, here is your coffee.

GODARD, *aside.*—So I have caught two of them in my mouse-trap! And the General keeps so serenely confident! The household is so peaceful! There is going to be some fun! I shall stay for a game of whist— But I am not going to marry the girl, not I! (*Nodding toward Ferdinand.*) The lucky fellow!

Loved by two such charming, delicious women! What a monopolizer! But what has the fellow got that I lack, I with forty thousand a year?

GERTRUDE.—Pauline, daughter, offer the gentlemen the cards for the whist. It is almost nine o'clock, and if they want to play a couple of games to-night, it is time they began. (*Pauline arranges the cards.*) And you, Napoleon, it is your hour for saying good-night to everybody. Give us all a nice opinion of you by not loitering about as you do every evening.

NAPOLEON.—Good-night, papa; say, what does justice look like?

THE GENERAL.—She is as blind as a bat! Good-night, little darling!

NAPOLEON.—Good-night, Monsieur Vernon; say what is justice made of?

VERNON.—She is made of all our crimes. When you are naughty, you get whipped, don't you? Well that's justice.

NAPOLEON.—I never have been whipped.

VERNON.—Then you never had justice dealt you.

NAPOLEON.—Good-night, Ferdinand; good-night, Pauline; good-night, Monsieur Godard.

GODARD.—De Rimonville.

NAPOLEON.—Mamma, I have been good? (*Gertrude kisses him.*)

THE GENERAL.—I have drawn the king.

VERNON.—And I the queen.

FERDINAND, *to Godard.*—We are partners, sir.

GERTRUDE, *noticing Marguerite at the door.*—Now go, darling, say your prayers nicely, and don't tease Marguerite.

SCENE V

THE PRECEDING, *minus* NAPOLEON.

THE GENERAL.—When this child gets into one of his questioning fits, he is very amusing.

GERTRUDE.—The answers are often quite difficult to find. (*To Pauline.*) Come over here and we will finish this piece of work together.

VERNON.—It's your deal, General.

THE GENERAL.—Is that so? Vernon, you ought to get married; then we could go to your place as you come here and you would enjoy all the delights of family life. I tell you, Godard, there is not, in the whole district a man so happy as I.

VERNON.—When one is sixty-seven years late in catching happiness, one can't make up for lost time. I'll die a bachelor. (*The two ladies begin work upon the same piece of embroidery.*)

GERTRUDE, *to Pauline.*—My dear child, Godard told me you had given him a very chilly reception; he is quite a desirable suitor, just the same.

PAULINE.—Madame, my father has granted me the permission of choosing my husband.

GERTRUDE.—Do you know what Godard will surely say? That you have refused him because your choice was already made.

PAULINE.—If it were so, both you and my father would know all about it. What reason could there be for my withholding my confidence?

GERTRUDE.—There might be a reason, and I should

hardly blame you for it. There have been love affairs of which the secret had to be guarded heroically by women—guarded while a thousand torments were being endured.

PAULINE, *aside, while picking up her scissors from the floor.*—How right Ferdinand was in telling me to beware of her— She can be so insinuating—

GERTRUDE.—Should it happen that some such love enter your heart, count upon me— I am so fond of you that I would bring your father to give in. He has some confidence in me, and I know that I can influence his mind, his decision— My dear child, why not open your heart to me?

PAULINE.—It is an open book, Madame; I hide nothing from you.

THE GENERAL.—Vernon, what are you doing? (*Muttered complaints are heard from the card-table; Pauline looks in that direction.*)

GERTRUDE, *aside.*—Direct questioning has been a failure. (*Aloud.*) How pleased I am to hear you speak that way! This provincial wit of a Godard pretends that you almost fainted when he had Napoleon cry out that Ferdinand had broken a leg—Ferdinand is a pleasant young man who has now been living four years in our family circle. Nothing would be more natural than that you should have felt attracted toward him; he is a gentleman by birth and a talented man besides.

PAULINE.—He is my father's clerk.

GERTRUDE.—Ah, thank heavens, you are not in love with him! I had quite a fright, for you ought to know, my dear, that he is a married man.

PAULINE.—A married man! Why does he hide the

fact? (*Aside.*) Married! That would be infamous! I'll know to-night. I'll make the signal agreed upon between us.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—Not a feature of her face moved! Either Godard is mistaken or this child is as deep as I. (*Aloud.*) What is the matter with you, darling?

PAULINE.—Oh, nothing.

GERTRUDE, *touching the back of the girl's bare neck*.—How hot you are! Do you see? (*Aside.*) She loves him, I know it, I am sure of it! But he, does he love her? Oh, I am tortured!

PAULINE.—I suppose I applied myself too closely to our work— But you are hot too, are you not—?

GERTRUDE.—Nothing is the matter with me. Were you not asking why Ferdinand concealed his marriage?

PAULINE.—Yes, why?

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—Let us see if she knows the secret of his name. (*Aloud.*) Because his wife is not a discreet woman— Her talking would compromise him. I can not say any more.

PAULINE.—How compromise him?

GERTRUDE, *aside, as she rises and walks away*.—If the girl loves him, she has an iron will! But where can they have met? I hardly leave her a moment in the day-time and Champagne is constantly with him at the factory— No, the whole thing is foolish! If she loves him, she alone is in love, as it has happened to many a young girl who was attracted to a man without his taking any notice of her. But, should there be an understanding between the two, I have struck too deep for her not to communicate with him, if only by a look. Oh, I'll not lose sight of them!

GODARD.—We have won, Monsieur Ferdinand. That

was fine. (*Ferdinand leaves the card-table and walks toward Gertrude.*)

PAULINE, *aside*.—I did not think it possible to suffer so much without dying!

FERDINAND.—Madame, my seat is yours.

GERTRUDE.—Please enter the game in my stead, Pauline. (*Aside.*) I must not tell him that he is in love with the girl; it might put the idea into his head. What can I do? (*To Ferdinand.*) She confessed everything to me!

FERDINAND.—She confessed what?

GERTRUDE.—Everything.

FERDINAND.—I fail to understand you. Are you speaking of Mademoiselle de Grandchamp?

GERTRUDE.—I am.

FERDINAND.—And what has she done?

GERTRUDE.—Say that you have not betrayed me? That there is not between you two an understanding that would kill me?

FERDINAND.—Kill you? She? I?

GERTRUDE.—Or am I the victim of one of Godard's stupid jokes?

FERDINAND.—Gertrude, you are beside yourself—

GODARD, *to Pauline*.—Oh, Mademoiselle, you are making lots of mistakes—

PAULINE.—It is a great loss for you, sir, not to have my step-mother as your partner.

GERTRUDE.—Ferdinand, I do not know what is the lie and what is the truth in this matter; but rather a thousand deaths than the wreck of all our hopes!

FERDINAND.—You had better be more prudent—For the last few days, Doctor Vernon has begun to look at us in a peculiar way.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—She did not look at him. (*Aloud.*) Any way, Pauline shall marry Godard. Her father shall compel her to.

FERDINAND.—I should think Godard an excellent match.

THE GENERAL.—There is no use going on playing that way. My daughter is making mistake after mistake, and you, Vernon, you don't seem to know what card you are throwing; twice you trumped my kings.

VERNON.—My dear General, it was to even up for the girl's errors.

THE GENERAL.—You are a good-for-nothing, that's what you are! But it's near ten o'clock; we had better go to bed than continue playing in this way. Ferdinand, do me the kindness to show Godard to his room. You, Vernon, ought to be sentenced to sleep under your bed for trumping all my kings.

GODARD.—Remember, General, the rubber was only five francs.

THE GENERAL.—Five francs and the honor of winning, sir! (*To Vernon.*) Hold on, although you played so atrociously, let me hand you your cane and hat. (*Pauline picks up a flower from the flower-stand and begins to play with it absent-mindedly.*)

GERTRUDE, *to herself*.—Ah! That's the signal! Now, even at the risk of being killed by my husband, I will watch over her all night!

FERDINAND, *who has taken a candlestick from Felix*.—Monsieur de Rimonville, I am at your service.

GODARD.—Madame, I wish you a good-night! Your respectful servant, Mademoiselle. Good-night, General.

THE GENERAL.—Good-night, Godard.

GODARD.—De Rimonville. Doctor—

VERNON *looks at him and wipes his nose.*—Good-by, my friend.

THE GENERAL, *leading Vernon to the glass-door.*—Well, until to-morrow, Vernon, but don't fail to come early.

SCENE VI

GERTRUDE. PAULINE. THE GENERAL.

GERTRUDE.—My dear, Pauline refuses the offer of Godard.

THE GENERAL.—And what are your reasons, daughter?

PAULINE.—I do not like him well enough to accept him as my husband.

THE GENERAL.—All right. We'll look around for another suitor. But you ought to come to some early decision, for you are already twenty-two years old and people might begin to say unkind things concerning you, and my wife, and myself.

PAULINE.—Is it not allowable, then, to remain single?

GERTRUDE, *aside to the General.*—She has made her choice, but will not tell the name to any one except you. I leave you two together; she'll surely confess all to you. (*To Pauline.*) Good-night, child; open your heart to your father. (*Aside.*) I'll listen to their conversation. (*She closes the glass-door and then withdraws through the door leading to her apartment.*)

SCENE VII

THE GENERAL. PAULINE.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—Obtain a confession out of my daughter— I am absolutely unfit for such a task. She would easier get a confession out of me. (*Aloud.*) Pauline, come here. (*He takes her on his knee.*) Now, don't you know that an old soldier like me guesses what is hidden behind such resolution to remain single? This means, in every language in the world, that the young lady in question wants to marry—the man she loves.

PAULINE.—Papa, I should like to tell you something, but I have no confidence in you.

THE GENERAL.—No confidence! What do you mean, missie?

PAULINE.—You repeat everything to your wife.

THE GENERAL.—And what secret can you possibly have that must not be told to that angel, to the woman who has brought you up, to your second mother?

PAULINE.—Oh, if you begin to get angry, I am going right to bed— I imagined that a father's heart was the surest shelter for a daughter.

THE GENERAL.—Oh, you cajoling little one— Well, for your sake, I'll be as gentle—

PAULINE.—Oh, how kind you are! And, now tell me, if I should love the son of one of these men you are cursing?

THE GENERAL, *he rises suddenly and pushes his daughter away from him*.—If you did that I would curse you, too.

PAULINE.—Ah, so, that's what you call being gentle, is it? (*Gertrude appears at her half-opened door.*)

THE GENERAL.—My child, there are feelings that must never be awakened within me. They belong to my very life. You don't want to cause your father's death?

PAULINE.—Oh!

THE GENERAL.—Dear child! I had my full share of hard times, and now, living here with you, with my Gertrude, my existence is truly to be envied! Well, charming and sweet as my life be here, I would leave it without regret if by so doing I could make you happy; for, we owe happiness to those we have brought into the world.

PAULINE, *noticing Gertrude's half-opened door, aside.*—Ah she is listening. (*Aloud.*) Father, there is nothing in the matter to give you the slightest anxiety. But—just let me ask you, if I did have such a feeling, and it were so overpowering that I would die for it?

THE GENERAL.—If it were so, you should tell me nothing about it—that would be far wiser—and then await my death. And even then, if it be true that for a father there is nothing more sacred, after God and his country, than his own children, must not children, in their turn, hold sacred the wishes of their father and obey him even after his death? If you ceased to be true to this hatred of mine, I believe I would come out of my grave and curse you.

PAULINE, *kissing her father.*—Oh, angry, angry papa! Now I shall know if you can be discreet— Give me your word of honor not to repeat anything of all this!

THE GENERAL.—I give it. But what can be your reason for not trusting Gertrude?

PAULINE.—If I told you, you would not believe me.

THE GENERAL.—Is it your intention to worry your father?

PAULINE.—Indeed not— But tell me what is dearer to you, your hatred against the traitors or your own honor?

THE GENERAL.—The one is as dear to me as the other; they flow from the same principle.

PAULINE.—Well, then, if you break the word of honor you just gave me, you might just as well be untrue to your hatred. That's all I wanted to know.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—If women are angels, at times they are regular devils. How in the world can such ideas enter the innocent mind of my daughter! That's how they all lead us by—

PAULINE.—Good-night, papa.

THE GENERAL.—Naughty child, you! (*He kisses her.*)

PAULINE.—Be discreet or I'll bring you a son-in-law that will make you shudder.

SCENE VIII

THE GENERAL, *alone*.—There must be a solution to this enigma. It has to be found. The two of us, Gertrude and I, will solve the riddle all right.

(TABLEAU, CURTAIN.)

SECOND TABLEAU

(The stage now represents the bed-room of Pauline. It is very simply furnished, with the bed at the right back-ground, and a small round table at the left. The entrance is at the right; besides, there is a door cut into the high panelling and not visible unless opened.)

SCENE IX

PAULINE.—At last I am alone and not compelled to pretend any longer! Married! My Ferdinand married! If he were, he would be the most cowardly, the most infamous, the vilest of men! I would kill him!— Kill him! Oh! No! I should not survive a minute if I were convinced of this horror! I abominate my step-mother— But if she shows herself my enemy, I'll give her war and [it will be to the knife! I'll tell my father everything. *(She looks at her watch.)* Half past eleven— He cannot come here before midnight, when the whole house is asleep— Poor Ferdinand, to so risk his life for one hour's chat with his future wife! How he must love me! One does not face such perils for all women! And I, what would I not do for his sake! Should my father surprise us he would surely kill me first! Ah! To doubt the man we love, what a torture! It is worse than to lose him. In death, we can follow him— But suspicion, that's the most cruel of separations! Hark! I hear him coming— *(Enter Ferdinand.)*

SCENE X

FERDINAND. PAULINE. *(She pushes the bolt of the door.)*

PAULINE.—Are you married?

FERDINAND.—What a silly question! Wouldn't I have told you?

PAULINE.—Ah! (*She falls on an arm-chair, then on her knees.*) Holy Virgin, what pledge may I give you? (*She kisses the hand of Ferdinand.*) And, you, be blessed a thousand times!

FERDINAND.—Who could tell you such an absurdity.

PAULINE.—My step-mother.

FERDINAND.—She knows everything, or if she does not yet, she will spy upon us and discover all. With such women, suspicion equals certitude. Now, listen to me, for minutes are precious. It was Madame de Grandchamp who brought me to this house.

PAULINE.—And why did she do that?

FERDINAND.—Because she loved me.

PAULINE.—This is horrible! And my father?

FERDINAND.—She loved me before she married him.

PAULINE.—She loves you—but you, do you love her?

FERDINAND.—Would I have remained in this house?

PAULINE.—Does she love you—yet?

FERDINAND.—Unfortunately, she does. She was, I must confess it, my first attachment; but now I hate her with all my soul's might—I hardly know why. Is it because I love you and because all true, pure love is, by its very nature, exclusive? Is it because the constant comparison between an angel of purity like you and a she-devil like her awakens, in my soul, a hatred for everything evil as strong as my adoration for thee, my own, my bliss, my delicious treasure? I can not tell. But I do hate her and I love you so that I would not care if your father killed me for it. One of our little talks, just one brief hour spent together seems to me, even after it is over, worth my life.

PAULINE.—Oh, speak, speak on—I am not troubled any longer! After listening to you, I feel able to par-

don you the pain you caused me when confessing that I am not your first, your only love, as you are mine! It is just an illusion vanished. Don't you know, darling, girls are foolish, they are so ambitious in their love that they would own all the past as well as all the future. But you hate her, and in this word "hate" there is more love for me than in anything you have said to me, these two years. Ah, if you knew with what cruelty this wicked step-mother of mine has turned me on the rack! Oh, I'll have my revenge!

FERDINAND.—Take care! She is a dangerous woman! Your father is in her power and she will fight a fight to the death.

PAULINE.—To the death— That's just what I want!

FERDINAND.—Oh, but be prudent, my dearest one. We want to belong to each other, do we not? Well, then; my friend, the Public Prosecutor, insists that we must have the strength to stand a short separation if we are to triumph over the difficulties that surround us.

PAULINE.—Just give me two days' time and I shall have obtained everything from my father.

FERDINAND.—You do not know Madame de Grandchamp. She has gone too far not to risk everything rather than lose me. Before I leave, I will place in your hands terrible weapons against her.

PAULINE.—Oh, let me have them at once!

FERDINAND.—No, not yet. And you must give me your sacred promise not to use them unless your life is endangered; for it is almost a crime against the higher laws of honor that I shall commit in arming you with them. But, for your sake, what would I not do?

PAULINE.—And they consist of—?

FERDINAND.—Of the letters she wrote me before her marriage and a few of a later date. You shall have them to-morrow. But, Pauline, you must swear upon our love, upon our future happiness, not to read a single one of them. It would be sufficient, in case an urgent necessity arose, that she should know that they are in your possession to bring her trembling to your feet. Then, all her wicked plotting will go to pieces! But let it be your very last resource! And, above all, hide them well!

PAULINE.—What a duel!

FERDINAND.—A terrible duel, indeed! And now, my Pauline, keep courageously, as you have done all this time, the secret of our love. Wait, before confessing it until it has to be confessed.

PAULINE.—Ah, why did your father betray the Emperor! Lord in heaven, if the fathers knew how cruelly their children were to suffer through their faults, there would be none but good people in this world!

FERDINAND.—Perhaps this sad talk is to be our last joy, for some time to come?

PAULINE, *aside*.—I'll join him! (*Aloud.*) See, I am not crying any more! Tell me, will your friend be in the secret of your retreat?

FERDINAND.—Eugène will be our intermediary.

PAULINE.—And these letters?

FERDINAND.—The letters! You shall have them to-morrow. But where will you hide them?

PAULINE.—I will keep them about me.

FERDINAND.—And now, good-by!

PAULINE.—Oh, no, not yet!

FERDINAND.—A moment's delay may ruin us!

PAULINE.—Or unite us for ever! Only let me lead you out a little way! I am always so anxious until I know that you have reached the garden safely. Come, come—

FERDINAND.—One last look at this maidenly bower where everything speaks of you—where you will think of me—

(TABLEAU, CURTAIN.)

SCENE XI

(*The scene shifts back to that of the First Tableau.*)

PAULINE, *standing outside the glass-door, looking into the garden.* GERTRUDE, *in front of the door to her room.*

GERTRUDE, *aside.*—She has escorted him to the garden door— He was deceiving me— And so was she— (*She walks to Pauline, takes her roughly by the hand and brings her to the front of the stage.*) Will you dare tell me now, Mademoiselle, that you do not love him?

PAULINE.—I deceive no one, Madame.

GERTRUDE.—You deceive your father!

PAULINE.—And you, Madame?

GERTRUDE.—So, you two have agreed against me, have you? I'll go straight to—

PAULINE.—You shall do nothing, Madame, either against me or against him.

GERTRUDE.—Do not compel me to use my power. You have to obey your father and he obeys me.

PAULINE.—We shall see about that!

GERTRUDE.—Your coolness makes me furious! I feel my blood rushing like fire through my veins! Everything looks black! Why, girl, don't you know that I'd prefer death to a life without him?

PAULINE.—And so would I, Madame. But I, I am free, I have not sworn fidelity to a husband, as you have— And your husband is my father!

GERTRUDE, *falling on her knees before Pauline*.—But what have I done to you to be treated in this wise? I have loved you, I have raised you, I have been a mother to you!

PAULINE.—Be henceforth a faithful wife, and I promise to keep silent.

GERTRUDE, *rising hastily*.—Ah! Speak, speak as much and to whom you please— The fight has begun—

SCENE XII

THE PRECEDING. THE GENERAL.

THE GENERAL.—I say, what is the matter here?

GERTRUDE, *to Pauline*.—Faint, faint away, quick— (*She actually drags her down on the floor.*) The matter is, dear, that I heard moanings in Pauline's room. The dear child was calling for help, already half-asphyxiated by the flowers in her room.

PAULINE.—Yes, papa, Marguerite forgot to remove the flower-stand from my room. (*The two women move toward the door of Pauline's apartment.*)

THE GENERAL.—A moment, please— Where are the flowers?

PAULINE, *to Gertrude*.—I don't know where Madame carried them.

GERTRUDE.—There, in the garden. (*The General leaves the room in a rush, placing his candlestick on the card-table to the left.*)

SCENE XIII

PAULINE. GERTRUDE. *Later* THE GENERAL.

GERTRUDE.—Go back to your room, and lock yourself in, I take the whole matter upon myself! (*Pauline enters her room.*) I'll manage him. (*Gertrude enters her room.*)

THE GENERAL, *returning from the garden*.—I did not find any flower-stand, anywhere. I begin to believe that something extraordinary is happening here! Gertrude? Ah, Madame de Grandchamp, you are going to tell me all about it— It would be strange, indeed, if my wife and daughter agreed in fooling me! (*He picks up his candlestick and enters Gertrude's room.*)

(CURTAIN ON SECOND ACT.)

THIRD ACT

(The setting of the stage is unchanged, but night has given way to the day.)

SCENE I

GERTRUDE. *Later* CHAMPAGNE.

GERTRUDE, *entering through the glass-door, carrying a small flower-stand. She puts it down in the room.*—I found it very hard to get him to give up his suspicion. One or two more scenes like this and my power over him will be gone. But I have secured these few minutes of liberty— If only Pauline does not disturb me— Happily, she must be asleep— She went to bed so late! I wonder if I could not lock her in? *(She walks to Pauline's door and finds that the key is not in the lock.)* No, it can't be done—

CHAMPAGNE, *entering.*—Monsieur Ferdinand is coming, Madame.

GERTRUDE.—Thank you, Champagne. Did he retire late, last night?

CHAMPAGNE.—As you know, Madame, Monsieur Ferdinand, patrols the factory every night and goes to bed about half-past one, in the morning.

GERTRUDE.—Does he sometimes stay up later?

CHAMPAGNE.—It depends on the time it takes him to make his inspection.

GERTRUDE.—That will do, thank you. *(Exit Champagne.)* As the price of a sacrifice which has now lasted twelve long years and the cruelty of which

only women can understand, I asked for so little! Just to have him near me, without another joy but the exchange of a stolen look once in a long while. I was satisfied with the knowledge that he was waiting for me, a knowledge which is all sufficient for us poor things, who are not entitled to the full delight of a pure, heavenly love. Men refuse to admit that we love them until they have dragged us down into the mire! And see how he rewards me? By having night meetings with that stupid girl! At any rate, he shall have to pass my death sentence right to my face; and if he dares do it, I, in my turn, will dare to break their intercourse at once and forever! I know how to do it! But here he comes! I feel like fainting away— Oh, Lord in Heaven! Why do you allow us to love a man who loves us no more! (*Enter Ferdinand.*)

SCENE II

FERDINAND. GERTRUDE.

GERTRUDE.—Yesterday, you deceived me. You came here last night, opening this door with a false key so as to see Pauline, at the risk of being killed by Monsieur de Grandchamp. Oh, spare yourself a lie. I saw you, I caught Pauline just returning from her nocturnal promenade with you. I cannot congratulate you upon your choice. If you had been at this very spot, yesterday and witnessed the audacity of this girl, the boldness with which she denied everything, you would tremble for your future, that future

which is my own and for which I have sold myself, body and soul.

FERDINAND, *aside*.—The avalanche of reproaches I was expecting. (*Aloud.*) Now, Gertrude, let us try and talk calmly, both of us! Especially don't let us drop to any mean accusations. Never shall I forget what you have been to me; my friendship for you will remain as deep, as unwavering as it is now. But my love is no more.

GERTRUDE.—For the last eighteen months?

FERDINAND.—For the last three years.

GERTRUDE.—Then you are bound to admit that I have the right to hate your love for Pauline and to fight it with all my might? For that love has made of you a coward and a criminal as far as I am concerned.

FERDINAND.—Madame!

GERTRUDE.—Yes, you have cheated me— Remaining here, as you did, between us two, you caused me to assume a rôle which was against my whole nature. As you know I am violent by instinct. Now, violent people are sincere, while I, I have been treading a road of infamous deceptions. You do not know what it is to have to find every day, often at a minute's notice, some new lies and to utter them as with a poniard in one's heart— Ah, lying, lying, that's true punishment for all stolen happiness! It's shame if one succeeds; it's death if one fails. And you, you are envied by other men when women love you. You would be applauded, while for me there would be nothing but contempt. And you expect me not to defend myself! And you have nothing but bitter words for a woman who has concealed everything from you—her remorse, her tears! The wrath of heaven, I kept for myself

alone; alone I descended into the abyss of my soul, deepened by my sorrows! And, while repentance would try to force an entrance into my heart, my eyes, when looking at you were full of tenderness and even cheerful! Ferdinand, it would be folly on your part to throw aside so well tamed a slave!

FERDINAND, *aside*.—This thing has to stop. (*Aloud.*) Gertrude, listen to me. When we met, our mutual youth attracted us to each other. I succumbed to what you may call, if you like, a selfish impulse, such as is found in every man's nature, unknown to him, perhaps, and hidden under the flowers of early romance. There is so much wild thoughtlessness in our feelings at twenty-two. The intoxication that overpowers us gives us no chance to see life as it is or to think of the serious conditions of the future—

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—How coolly he reasons the whole thing out! Oh, it is infamous!

FERDINAND.—I loved you then with absolute candor, with an entire surrender of my whole being. But since— Well, since then—the aspects of life have changed for both of us. And, if I did remain under a roof that ought never to have sheltered me, it was because I had chosen Pauline as the only woman with whom I could find happiness to the end of my days. Gertrude, I beg of you not to throw yourself against these decrees of Providence. Do not torment two beings who ask their life's bliss from you, and who, in exchange, will love you dearly.

GERTRUDE.—Ah, so, you are the martyr, and I the torturer! But, should I not have been your wife for the past twelve years if I had not set your prosperity ahead of my happiness?

FERDINAND.—Then do the same thing again to-day, by granting me my liberty!

GERTRUDE.—You mean the liberty of loving another— You did not speak in this wise, twelve years ago! And now I'll die of it.

FERDINAND.—It is only in romance that one dies of love; in real life time brings consolation.

GERTRUDE.—But do you not, you men, die for a word, a gesture that has offended your honor? Well, then, there are women who die for their love's sake, when this love is the treasure wherein their very soul is wrapped—and I am one of these women! Since you have lived with us I have feared, almost every hour, some dreadful catastrophe! And I have had constantly in my possession the means to leave life on the minute, if fate should rule against us. Look. (*She shows him a small phial.*) Here is how I have lived all along! (*She bursts out sobbing.*)

FERDINAND.—Tears now!

GERTRUDE.—I had promised myself to master them, but they choke me— This coldly polite way you talk to me about your vanished love is the cruelest of insults! You do not even pretend to display the faintest sympathy! I truly believe you would prefer to see me dead so as to be rid of me! But, Ferdinand, you do not know me! I am resolved to confess everything to the General, for I will not deceive him any longer. I am deathly sick of all that lying! I shall take my child, and you and I shall flee together— No more thoughts of Pauline!

FERDINAND.—Should you attempt such a thing, I would kill myself!

GERTRUDE.—I would kill myself also, and thus, united in death, you would never be hers!

FERDINAND.—What a truly infernal nature!

GERTRUDE.—Besides, the barrier that separates you from Pauline may never be overcome. What could you do then?

FERDINAND.—Pauline will know how to keep her freedom.

GERTRUDE.—But her father may compel her to marry some one else?

FERDINAND.—I would die of it.

GERTRUDE.—It is only in romance that one dies of love; in real life, time brings consolation— And one does one's duty by keeping true to the woman to whom one has pledged eternal fidelity.

THE GENERAL, *from the outside*.—Gertrude! Gertrude!

GERTRUDE.—I hear my husband. (*The General is seen entering.*) That's the reason, Monsieur Ferdinand, I want you to hasten your business and come back to me. (*Exit Ferdinand.*)

SCENE III

THE GENERAL. GERTRUDE. *Later* PAULINE.

THE GENERAL.—What is the meaning of this early interview with Ferdinand? Anything about the factory?

GERTRUDE.—I'll tell you what is the matter; for you are like your son, you are bound to get an answer to all your questions. Well, the fact is, that I imag-

ined that Ferdinand was somewhat the cause of the refusal of Pauline to marry Godard.

THE GENERAL.—Thinking of it, you may be correct—

GERTRUDE.—So, I had Monsieur Ferdinand come to me, for the purpose of enlightening my doubts. You interrupted our conversation just as I was on the point of discovering something. (*Pauline listens at her half-opened door.*)

THE GENERAL.—But, if my daughter does love Ferdinand—

PAULINE, *aside*.—Oh, I must hear that—

THE GENERAL.—I only wonder why, last evening, when I was questioning her in a fatherly, gentle way, she concealed from me such a very natural feeling. She knows I leave her her freedom.

GERTRUDE.—Oh, you must have gone at it in the wrong way, or questioned her when her heart was still hesitating— A girl's feelings are such a mixture of contradictions.

THE GENERAL.—As a matter of fact, why should I oppose her? This young man is a hard worker, strictly honest and, doubtless, belongs to a good family.

PAULINE, *aside*.—Oh, I understand now! (*She withdraws into her room and closes the door.*)

THE GENERAL.—He will gladly furnish us the necessary information. He has always been very reticent concerning himself. But, by the way, you must know all about his family; didn't you discover this treasure yourself?

GERTRUDE.—Oh, he came here on the recommendation of old Madame Morin.

THE GENERAL.—She is dead.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—That's just why I mentioned her name. (*Aloud*.) She told me his mother, a widow, was still alive, and living somewhere in Brittany. He has been a model son to her; she belongs to an old family, over there—the Charnys.

THE GENERAL.—The Charnys? Well, anyway, if he loves Pauline and Pauline loves him, I would prefer him to Godard, in spite of the latter's fortune. Ferdinand knows everything about cloth manufacturing; he might buy the factory off my hands with Pauline's dowry; it would prove most convenient all round. He simply needs to tell us where he comes from, who he is, who his father was— And then we'll see his mother.

GERTRUDE.—Madame Charny?

THE GENERAL.—Yes, Madame Charny; she lives in Brittany, doesn't she? Well, Brittany is not the end of the world.

GERTRUDE.—Use some of your diplomatic tact, some of your old soldier's shrewdness, with lots of gentleness, and you are sure to be told by the child—

THE GENERAL.—Of course, lots of gentleness— Why should I get angry? Ah, here comes Pauline.

SCENE IV

THE PRECEDING. MARGUERITE. *Later* PAULINE.

THE GENERAL.—Ah, is that you, Marguerite? You very nearly caused my daughter's death, last night, through a very bad mistake— You forgot—

MARGUERITE.—I, cause the death of my child!

THE GENERAL.—You forgot to remove from her room a flower-stand containing some highly-scented plants and she was almost asphyxiated.

MARGUERITE.—I, do such a thing! Why, Madame must remember that the flower-stand had already been removed from Mademoiselle's room when we were dressing her before Monsieur Godard's arrival—

GERTRUDE.—You are mistaken, it was there—

MARGUERITE, *aside*.—This is a tall one, this is— (*Aloud.*) Doesn't Madame remember she wanted to place some natural flowers in Mademoiselle's hair and she remarked, at the time, that the flower-stand was not there?

GERTRUDE.—You are making up a story. Well, you tell us where you placed the stand.

MARGUERITE.—At the bottom of the porch stairs.

GERTRUDE, *to the General*.—Did you find it there, General?

THE GENERAL.—I did not.

GERTRUDE.—I took it out of the room myself and placed it there. (*She points out to the porch just beyond the glass-door.*)

MARGUERITE, *to the General*.—Sir, I could swear on my hopes of getting to heaven—

GERTRUDE.—No use of your swearing. (*Calling out.*) Pauline!

THE GENERAL.—Pauline! (*The girl appears on the threshold of her room.*)

GERTRUDE.—Was the flower-stand in your room, last night?

PAULINE.—Yes, it was— Dear old Marguerite, you must have forgotten all about it.

MARGUERITE.—You had better say, Mademoiselle,

that somebody carried it back to your room on purpose to make you sick!

GERTRUDE.—Who is that somebody, if you please?

THE GENERAL.—You silly old thing, if your memory fails you, do not, at least, accuse other people of your blunders.

PAULINE, *to Marguerite*.—Keep silent! (*Aloud.*) Marguerite, it was there; you do not remember, that's all.

MARGUERITE.—You are right— Now I think of it, it was the day before yesterday I removed it.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—She has been in my house for over twenty years— There is something strange in her insisting so persistently. (*He takes Marguerite aside.*) What's that you said about flowers in the hair?

MARGUERITE, *Pauline makes signs to her behind the General's back*.—I must have been the one who spoke of it, sir—I am getting so old that my memory is not what it used to be.

THE GENERAL.—Then why do you hint at such a wicked thought coming to any one's mind in this house?

PAULINE.—Please excuse her, father, the dear creature is so fond of me that sometimes she does not know exactly what she is saying.

MARGUERITE, *aside*.—Just the same I am absolutely sure I took the stand away—

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—Are my wife and daughter trying to deceive me? There's something queer in the whole matter, but an old trooper like me is not bamboozled so easily.

GERTRUDE.—Marguerite, we shall take tea here, as soon as Monsieur Godard comes down from his room. Tell Felix to bring in all the newspapers.

MARGUERITE.—Yes, ma'am.

SCENE V

GERTRUDE. THE GENERAL. PAULINE.

THE GENERAL, *to Pauline*.—You did not even say good-morning to me, you undutiful daughter. (*He kisses her.*)

PAULINE, *returning the kiss*.—But you begin scolding for trifles! I tell you, father, it is about time I undertook your education. At your age you ought not to lose your temper so easily! Why, a young man is a lamb compared to you. You frightened Marguerite almost to death, and when a woman is frightened she is likely to tell a little lie or two—and then one does not get at the truth—

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—Rather hard on us, isn't it? (*Aloud.*) Your conduct, daughter, is hardly such as to quiet my temper. For instance, now—I wish to marry you to a young man—

PAULINE.—A remarkably handsome and well-mannered young man—

THE GENERAL.—Keep silent while your father is talking to you, Missie. You refuse a man whose fortune is at least six times larger than yours! Of course you are at liberty to do so, but then you must tell me whom you do want, especially as I know it already—

PAULINE.—Then, father, you know more than I do. Won't you tell me his name, please?

THE GENERAL.—Well, he is a man between thirty and thirty-five, and I really like him better than I do Godard, although he is penniless; but, then, he almost belongs to our family, already.

PAULINE.—I did not know we had any relatives living with us.

THE GENERAL.—What grudge can you possibly have against poor Ferdinand that you—

PAULINE.—Oh, is he the man? Who could tell you such a story? Madame de Grandchamp, I'll wager.

THE GENERAL.—A story! So you never thought of him, eh?

PAULINE.—Never.

GERTRUDE, *aside to the General*.—She is lying; observe her.

PAULINE.—Madame doubtless has good reasons for suspecting me of being in love with my father's clerk. Oh, I understand, she wants you to tell me: "Daughter, if you are heart-free, why not marry Godard?" (*Aside to Gertrude.*) This move of yours is infamous! To compel me to deny my love to my own father! But, you just wait, I'll have my revenge!

GERTRUDE, *answering in the same way*.—Do your worst, but marry Godard, you shall!

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—Are they quarreling? I'll have to talk to Ferdinand about it. (*Aloud.*) What are you saying to each other?

GERTRUDE.—Your daughter, dear, is furious because I suppose her in love with a mere employé of yours; she is deeply humiliated.

THE GENERAL.—Then, it is quite sure, you do not love him?

PAULINE.—Father, I—I do not ask you to find a husband for me—I am happy as I am now! There is only one thing that God has given us women, as our very own, and that is our heart— I fail to understand why Madame de Grandchamp, who is not my mother,

should have anything to do with my feelings in this matter.

GERTRUDE.—My dear child, all I want is to see you happy. I know I am only your step-mother, but should you have loved Ferdinand, I—

THE GENERAL, *kissing his wife's hand*.—How good and kind you are!

PAULINE, *aside*.—I am choking! How I wish I could crush her!

GERTRUDE.—Yes, I should have thrown myself at your father's knees to obtain his consent, in case he had refused it.

THE GENERAL.—Here is Ferdinand. (*Aside*.) I am going to do some questioning in my own way, and I'll find out the lay of the land.

SCENE VI

THE PRECEDING. FERDINAND.

THE GENERAL, *to Ferdinand*.—Come to me, my dear fellow. Sit down here. You have been three years with us now, and I owe to you my restful sleep at night. Although our business is a very large one, you are almost as much the head of the works as I am myself. If you have shown yourself satisfied with a salary, which, although fair, was, perhaps, not in proportion to the services you have rendered me, I think I understand at last the motive of your disinterestedness.

FERDINAND.—My self-respect is my motive, General.

THE GENERAL.—Of course, of course; but does not your heart count for a great deal in the matter? Now listen, Ferdinand, you have known, for a long time,

what my ideas are concerning class distinctions! We are all self-made men: I rose from the ranks. That's why I want your whole confidence! I have been told everything! You are greatly attracted toward a young person now in this room— If she likes you, she is yours. My wife pleaded your cause, and it is already won in my heart.

FERDINAND.—Is it possible, General? Madame de Grandchamp has pleaded my cause? Ah! Madame! (*He kneels on one knee before her.*) How can I fittingly proclaim the loftiness of your soul! You are sublime, Madame, you are an angel! (*He rises and rushing to Pauline.*) Pauline! My Pauline!

GERTRUDE.—My surmises were correct, General, he loves Pauline.

PAULINE.—Sir, have I ever by a word, by a look, given you the right to address me in this manner? I am deeply astonished to have inspired in you the feelings you express now; they might flatter some other woman; for me, I have higher ambitions.

THE GENERAL.—Pauline, my child, you are unnecessarily hard— There must surely be some misunderstanding— Ferdinand, come to me, please—nearer—

FERDINAND.—But, Mademoiselle, since your step-mother, since your father consent—

PAULINE, *aside to Ferdinand.*—Lost!

THE GENERAL.—Oh, but I am going to play the tyrant— Tell me, Ferdinand, of course you belong to a respectable family?

PAULINE, *aside to Ferdinand.*—You see now!

THE GENERAL.—Certainly your father did not occupy a lower position than mine, who was a plain sergeant of the Watch.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—They will be separated forever!

FERDINAND.—Ah! (*Aside to Gertrude*.) I understand you! (*Aloud*.) General, I admit that in a dream, the sweetest of dreams, alas, a far-off one, such as the unfortunates, without family or money abandon themselves to—are not dreams their only wealth?—I admit that I did dream to, some day, become one of you—a happiness intense enough to drive one wild. But the reception given by Mademoiselle to the expression of these hopes has driven them away never to return. I am fully awake, now, General— A poor man has his pride, and it ought not to be wounded any more than your attachment for Napoleon. (*Aside to Gertrude*.) The part you play is terrible.

GERTRUDE, *aside to Ferdinand*.—She shall marry Godard.

THE GENERAL.—Poor young man! (*To Pauline*.) A fine fellow! I like him! (*He takes Ferdinand aside*.) I, in your place and at your age, I would— By Jove, I'm forgetting that she is my daughter!

FERDINAND.—General, I address myself to your honor— Promise me solemnly that what I am going to tell you will be kept a profound secret and that you will not tell it even to Madame de Grandchamp.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—I declare, he also, like my daughter, is suspicious of my wife. By— I am going to know what all this means. (*Aloud*.) You have my word, sir, the word of a man who never failed to keep it.

FERDINAND.—Having been induced to reveal that which was buried at the bottom of my heart, and the contemptuous attitude of Mademoiselle Pauline having literally struck me down, it will be impossible for

me to remain here. I shall put my accounts in order at once and leave to-night for Havre, where I hope to find a ship starting at once for South America.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—Just as well let him go now. He'll come back! (*To Ferdinand.*) May I announce your decision to my daughter?

FERDINAND.—Yes, but to her alone.

THE GENERAL, *aside to Pauline*.—Pauline, my dear child, you have so cruelly humiliated this poor fellow that the factory will be deprived of its head; Ferdinand leaves us to-night for South America.

GERTRUDE, *aside to Ferdinand*.—She shall marry Godard.

FERDINAND, *to Gertrude*.—If I am unable to punish you for such atrocious conduct, God will do it!

THE GENERAL, *to Pauline*.—South America is very far—and the climate is murderous.

PAULINE.—Yes, but fortunes are made there.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—She does not love him! (*To Ferdinand.*) My friend, you will not go without allowing me to supply you with the funds needed for a business start?

FERDINAND.—I thank you heartily, General; but what is due me as salary will suffice! On the other hand, you will hardly miss me, at the works, for Champagne has been carefully trained by me to take my place as the head of the manufacturing department of the establishment. If you will kindly walk over to the office with me I can show you—

THE GENERAL.—All right, I will do so. (*Aside.*) Everything is getting so mixed up here that I am going to send for Vernon. The advice and the wide-awake eyes of my old doctor will prove mighty useful

to help me discover what is troubling the peace of my home— That there is something amiss I feel certain. (*Aloud.*) I am ready, Ferdinand. Ladies, we shall be back right away. (*Aside.*) There is something—there is something— (*The General and Ferdinand leave.*)

SCENE VII

GERTRUDE. PAULINE.

PAULINE, *locking the door.*—Madame, is it your opinion that a pure love, a love that concentrates and broadens all human happiness and allows us to taste heavenly bliss, is it your opinion that such a love is to us more dear, more precious than life itself?

GERTRUDE.—You must have been reading Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, my dear; the words used are rather high-flown, but, in the main, true.

PAULINE.—If it be so, Madame, you have made me force a man to commit suicide.

GERTRUDE.—A fell deed that you would like *me* to be guilty of— And if you had succeeded in compelling me to it, your soul would now be flooded with the bliss that fills mine.

PAULINE.—My father always told me that war between civilized nations had its laws, but the war you wage against me, Madame, is that of the savages.

GERTRUDE.—Then do the same—if you can! But you are helpless, and *you shall marry Godard*. He is an excellent match and I assure you that he has all the qualities that will make you a most happy wife.

PAULINE.—And do you believe that I will permit you to become Ferdinand's wife?

GERTRUDE.—After the things we told to each other, last night, why should we resort to hypocritical formulas? I was in love with Ferdinand, my dear Pauline, when you were eight years old.

PAULINE.—Yes, but you are now over thirty, and I, I am young! Besides, he hates you, he abominates you! He has told me so, and he will not have anything to do with a woman capable of the black treachery you are guilty of against my father.

GERTRUDE.—In the eyes of Ferdinand my love for him absolves me of any crime.

PAULINE.—He shares my feelings towards you, Madame; he loathes you!

GERTRUDE.—Is that so? Well, then, it only strengthens my resolve. Pauline, if I did not want him out of love, I would claim him out of sheer revenge. When he came here, did he not know who I was?

PAULINE.—You must have caught him in some snare, just as you entrapped us a moment ago.

GERTRUDE.—Now, listen, my dear; a few words will end everything between us. Didn't you say to yourself a hundred, a thousand times, in the hours when the whole soul is carried away, that you would make for his sake the very greatest sacrifices?

PAULINE.—I have, Madame.

GERTRUDE.—Such sacrifices as to give up your father, your country, to yield him your honor, your salvation?

PAULINE.—Yes—yes! One only dreams of something more to offer; of something even more precious than one's self, the world and heaven!

GERTRUDE.—Well, Pauline, everything you have dreamed of giving him, I have actually given him. That means that nothing can stop me now, not even death!

PAULINE.—By saying this, you have furnished me the right to defend myself. (*Aside.*) O Ferdinand! She says it herself, our love is more than life! (*To Gertrude, who has taken a seat on the sofa while Pauline is talking to herself.*) Madame, all the harm you have done you can yet repair; you will know how to overcome the difficulties that oppose my marriage to Ferdinand. Your power over my father is such that you will induce him to even give up his hatred for General Marcandal's son—

GERTRUDE.—I shall, shall I?

PAULINE.—Yes, Madame, you shall.

GERTRUDE.—And what formidable means will you employ to compel me to do this?

PAULINE.—You said just now that the war between us is a war of savages?—

GERTRUDE.—Say a woman's war, that's more terrible! Savages only torture the body; we send our arrows through the heart, the pride, the self-respect, the inmost soul of our enemies; we pierce their very happiness!

PAULINE.—Yes, our war is all that; and it is truly the whole woman I propose to attack now— Listen. My dear and deeply-esteemed step-mother, either, before to-morrow, all the obstacles that separate me from Ferdinand, shall have been removed, or my father will be apprised, through me, of every detail of your conduct, before and since you married him.

GERTRUDE.—Oh, that's your great weapon, is it? My poor girl, he will never believe you!

PAULINE.—Oh, I know the extent of your power over my father's mind—but I have proofs!

GERTRUDE.—Oh, proofs! proofs!

PAULINE.—In Ferdinand's absence I visited his rooms— You know how inquisitive I am! and I discovered—your letters to him, Madame! I appropriated a number of them and their mere reading will, in a second, dissipate my father's delusions concerning you, for they will prove to him—

GERTRUDE.—They will prove what?

PAULINE.—Everything!

GERTRUDE.—Wretched child, this is robbery, and it will lead to murder—At your father's age—

PAULINE.—Did you not murder my happiness just now when you forced me to deny to the face of my father, of Ferdinand, my love, my glory, my life—?

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—I'll swear it is a mere trick and that she knows nothing! (*Aloud.*) This is a trap—I never wrote him a line— It's a lie— It's impossible— Where are these pretended letters?

PAULINE.—I have them.

GERTRUDE.—In your room?

PAULINE.—They are where you never will get at them.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—I feel the wild fancies of insanity clutching at my brain! It seems as if murder were oozing through my fingers! It is in just such moments that one kills! Ah! how I could kill her! Lord God, do not forsake me, do not let me lose my reason! Now, I must think!

PAULINE, *aside*.—Ah, Ferdinand, how can I thank you enough? I see now how dearly you love me; I have been able to return her in kind the harm she did me an hour ago! And, besides, she shall save us!

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—She must have them somewhere about her person! But how can I make sure of it?

Ah! (*Coming closer to Pauline.*) Pauline! If you had had these letters long you would have known that I loved Ferdinand; therefore they have been in your possession only a few hours!

PAULINE.—I have had them since this morning.

GERTRUDE.—You have not had time to read them through, then?

PAULINE.—Oh, I have read enough to know that they are your ruin.

GERTRUDE.—Pauline, life is just beginning for you. (*A knock at the door.*) Ferdinand is the first man endowed with youth, manners and talents—for he is full of talent—he is the first man of the kind you ever met. But there are many others like him in the world. Ferdinand lived almost under our own roof; you saw a great deal of him; nothing more natural than that the first quickening of the beatings of your heart should have been caused by him. In your place, I admit it would have been just the same with me. But you, little one, know neither society nor life. And what if you have made a mistake, as so many women have done before you? You have your whole life in which to make another choice; for me, everything is ended: I have no more chance to choose! I am past thirty; Ferdinand is the whole universe to me; I have sacrificed for his sake that which ought to be sacred to all—the honor of an old man! To you the future is wide open, you may love some one else even more passionately than you are loving him at the present time—such things do happen! O Pauline! do give him up, and in me you will have the most devoted of slaves! I will be more than a mother, more than a friend—your ever-willing and passive tool! See me

now at your feet! (*She throws herself on her knees before Pauline, her hands almost touching the girl's bosom.*) Yes, I, your rival, am here, prostrated before you! Am I humiliated enough? And if you knew what this costs a woman to do! Have mercy, have mercy upon me! (*Repeated and angry knocks at the door. Seeing Pauline very much bewildered, Gertrude manages to press the place where the letters are hidden, and feels them through the dress.*) Ah, give me life again! (*Aside.*) She has them, all right—

PAULINE.—Do not handle me in this way, Madame, or I shall call for help! (*She pushes her step-mother away and rushing to the door, opens it wide.*)

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—She has them, she has them on her person, but they must be got from her within an hour!

SCENE VIII

THE PRECEDING. THE GENERAL. VERNON.

THE GENERAL.—Locked in together! Why did you utter that shriek, Pauline?

VERNON.—Your face is quite disturbed, my dear girl; let me feel your pulse.

THE GENERAL, *to his wife*.—You also seem all upset?

GERTRUDE.—Oh, it was all a joke, we were just laughing; were we not, Pauline?

PAULINE.—Indeed, we were, papa; my dear mamma and I were frolicking like school-girls.

VERNON, *aside to Pauline*.—That's a pretty tall lie, young lady.

THE GENERAL.—You did not hear the knocking?

PAULINE.—Oh, we heard it all right, but we did not know you were the one knocking, papa.

THE GENERAL, *to Vernon*.—They seem to be leagued against me. (*Aloud*.) Now tell us what was really the matter?

GERTRUDE.—Oh, my dear, you always want to know everything, the beginning and the end, without a minute's delay! At least, let me ring for the tea.

THE GENERAL.—Well, well!

GERTRUDE.—You are a regular tyrant! Now, then, if you must know, we locked ourselves in so as not to be disturbed. Is that clear enough?

VERNON.—It is certainly clear enough!

GERTRUDE, *aside to her husband*.—I wanted a chance to get her secret out of your daughter; for she has a secret, I feel sure of it; and then you come rushing in! You, for the sake of whom I do all this, for Pauline is not my child, you charge upon us as if we were the enemy's troops, and you interrupt me just when I am about learning something of importance!

THE GENERAL.—Madame, since Godard's arrival—

GERTRUDE.—Ah, now, you bring in Godard—

THE GENERAL.—Please, do not make fun of my statements! Yes, since yesterday, nothing here runs in the usual way. And, by God, I am going to find out—

GERTRUDE.—Oaths now! It is the first time, sir, that an oath has been uttered in my presence. (*To Felix who enters the room*.) Felix, the tea, please. (*To the General*.) Have you become tired of your twelve years of continued happiness?

THE GENERAL.—I am not, and never shall be, a tyrant! But I think it strange that when I came in, a few moments ago, and you were talking with Ferdi-

nand, I was made to feel *de trop* and that the very same thing should happen again, just now, when I found you locked in with my daughter. And then, last night—

VERNON.—General, General, you may quarrel with Madame as much as you please but not before people. (*Godard is heard coming.*) I hear Godard. (*Aside to the General.*) Is this what you promised me? Didn't I tell you that with women—and God knows how many of the sweet things I have had confessing to me, their doctor—with women it is better to let things go their way until they betray themselves. If they are treated differently, and the least violence comes into play, down flow the tears and the hydraulic system once started, they are capable of drowning Hercules!

SCENE IX

THE PRECEDING. GODARD.

GODARD.—I came down, some time ago, to offer my respects, but I found the door of this room locked. General, I wish you good-morning. (*The General continues looking over his papers and waves his hand toward Godard.*) Ah, here is my adversary of yesterday—Are you coming for your revenge, doctor?

VERNON.—No, I am coming for some tea.

GODARD.—Ah, so you are cultivating here this English, Russian and Chinese habit?

PAULINE.—Would you prefer coffee?

GERTRUDE, *to Marguerite, who is standing near the door.*—Marguerite, bring some coffee, please.

GODARD.—Not for me, Madame, with your permission. I shall take tea; it will be a change. Besides, you have your luncheon at noon, I understand, and coffee now would cut my appetite for that meal. The English, the Russians and the Chinese may not be so very wrong, after all.

VERNON.—Tea, sir, is an excellent drink.

GODARD.—Especially good tea.

PAULINE.—This is caravan tea, sir.

GERTRUDE.—Doctor, here are the newspapers. (*To Pauline.*) Go over, and talk with Monsieur de Rimonsville, my dear child. I'll make the tea.

GODARD.—Perhaps Mademoiselle de Grandchamp does not care any more for my conversation than she does for my person?

PAULINE.—You are mistaken, Monsieur—

THE GENERAL.—Godard.

PAULINE.—If you will do me the kindness not to wish me any longer for your wife, you will be immediately endowed in my eyes with the qualities that attracted so powerfully Mesdemoiselles de Boudeville, de Clinville, de Derville, etc.

GODARD.—Ah, please, show some mercy, Mademoiselle! Why must you make such fun of a suitor you rejected in spite of his forty thousand a year? And I tell you, the longer I stay here the more I regret your cruel decision. What a happy man this Monsieur de Charny is!

PAULINE.—And why happy, the poor fellow? Because he is my father's chief clerk?

GERTRUDE.—Monsieur de Rimonsville—

THE GENERAL.—Godard—

GERTRUDE.—Monsieur de Rimonsville—

THE GENERAL.—Godard, my wife is speaking to you.

GERTRUDE.—Do you like a little or much sugar in your tea?

GODARD.—Just so so.

GERTRUDE.—And very little cream, I suppose?

GODARD.—On the contrary, lots of it, if you are so kind? (*Aside to Pauline.*) So Monsieur Ferdinand is not the man you have—distinguished— Well, I can assure you that he is very much to the taste of your step-mother.

PAULINE, *aside*.—What a plague these inquisitive people are!

GODARD, *aside*.—I must have some fun before taking my leave; I want to get my money's worth!

GERTRUDE.—Monsieur de Rimonville, if you wish something more substantial, here are sandwiches.

GODARD.—Thank you, Madame.

GERTRUDE, *aside to Godard*.—Everything is not lost for you yet.

GODARD.—Oh, Madame, Mademoiselle Pauline's refusal has led me to do lots of thinking.

GERTRUDE.—Is that so? (*To the doctor.*) Your tea as usual, doctor?

VERNON.—If you please, Madame.

GODARD, *aside to Pauline*.—The poor fellow, did you say, Mademoiselle? Why, Monsieur Ferdinand is not so poor as you believe him to be. He is richer than I am!

PAULINE.—How do you happen to know that?

GODARD.—Oh, I am certain of it, and I am going to tell you the whole secret.

PAULINE, *aside*.—Lord in heaven! does he know his real name?

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—A few drops of opium in her tea will put her to sleep and I shall be saved!

GODARD.—You would never guess who put me on the track.

PAULINE.—O, sir! for pity's sake—

GODARD.—It was the Public Prosecutor. I remembered that, at the Boudevilles, they were saying that your chief clerk—

PAULINE, *aside*.—He is torturing me—

GERTRUDE, *to Pauline*.—Here is your cup, Pauline.

VERNON, *aside*.—Am I crazy? I thought I saw her put something in Pauline's cup!

PAULINE.—And what did these people say?

GODARD.—Ah, how you listen to me! I should feel flattered indeed if I knew you would look as interested, if something concerning me was mentioned in your presence, as you are now that I speak of Monsieur Ferdinand.

PAULINE.—What a strange taste this tea has! Do you like yours?

GODARD.—Oh, now, you are talking about the tea to hide your interest in the present subject. That's an old dodge— Well then, I am going to excite your curiosity to the highest pitch by telling you that Monsieur Ferdinand is—

PAULINE.—Is?

GODARD.—A millionaire!

PAULINE.—You are making fun of me, Monsieur Godard.

GODARD.—On my word of honor, I am doing nothing of the kind, Mademoiselle; he really owns a treasure— (*Aside*.) She is wildly in love with him.

PAULINE, *aside*.—What a fright the stupid fellow gave

me! (*She rises with her cup in hand; Vernon takes it from her as she walks to the tea table.*)

VERNON.—Allow me, my dear child.

THE GENERAL, *to his wife.*—What is the matter, dear? You seem—

VERNON, *rapidly exchanging his cup for that of Pauline, nobody noticing him.*—(*Aside, after tasting the half-full cup.*) It is laudanum, but happily the dose is small. Well, we may expect some startling developments very soon. (*To Godard.*) Monsieur Godard, you are a very shrewd man. (*Godard pulls out his handkerchief and pretends to blow his nose.*) Ah! (*Vernon laughs.*)

GODARD.—Doctor, no ill-feeling on my part—

VERNON.—Now, listen: Do you think you could manage to get the General over to the factory and keep him there for an hour?

GODARD.—I should need the boy.

VERNON.—Unfortunately, he is at school until luncheon time.

GODARD.—May I know your purpose?

VERNON.—I can only tell you that it is a very praiseworthy one, and as you are a courteous gentleman—Do you really love Pauline?

GODARD.—Oh, I did love her yesterday, but this morning— (*Aside.*) I'll manage to discover what he wants me to do that for! (*To Vernon.*) All right, I'll do it. I shall walk down the outside steps and return at once saying that Ferdinand wants the General at the works. I'll fix the thing for you— It's no use, though. Here is Ferdinand himself coming in. (*He goes toward the glass-door.*)

PAULINE.—It's strange how sleepy I feel! (*She walks to the sofa and stretches herself on it. Ferdinand comes forward chatting with Godard.*)

SCENE X

THE PRECEDING. FERDINAND.

FERDINAND.—General, your presence is needed at the office to verify my accounts.

THE GENERAL.—Of course; I am coming.

GODARD.—General, with your permission, I'll take this occasion of visiting your establishment. I have never been through it.

THE GENERAL.—All right, come along, Godard.

GODARD.—De Rimonville.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—They leave the room; Fate is with me.

VERNON, *who has overheard her aside*.—In this case I happen to be Fate.

SCENE XI

GERTRUDE. VERNON. PAULINE. *Later* MARGUERITE.

GERTRUDE.—Doctor, do you want another cup of tea?

VERNON.—No, thank you. I have been so absorbed in these electoral returns, that I have not finished my first cup.

GERTRUDE, *pointing to Pauline*.—The poor child is asleep.

VERNON.—What, asleep! At this time of day?

GERTRUDE.—Oh, it is not surprising. I must tell you, doctor, that she did not go to sleep until past three o'clock this morning. We had quite a scare during the night.

VERNON.—I am going to help you carry her to her room.

GERTRUDE.—Oh, no, thank you; here is Marguerite, who will assist me. (*Marguerite who for some time has been seen near the glass-door comes over, upon a sign from her mistress.*) Let us carry the child to her bed; she'll be more comfortable. (*Gertrude and Marguerite leave the room carrying Pauline.*)

SCENE XII

VERNON. FELIX, *who has just stepped in.*

VERNON.—Felix!

FELIX.—What can I do for you, sir?

VERNON.—Is there a closet in this room where I could store something?

FELIX, *opening a closet.*—Here, sir.

VERNON, *carrying into it Pauline's tea-cup.*—That'll do very well. Now, Felix, don't say a word of this to anybody. (*Aside.*) The man is sure to remember the incident. (*Aloud.*) It's a practical joke I want to play on the General, and it would miss fire if you talked about it.

FELIX.—I'll be as dumb as a fish, sir.

VERNON, *turning the key of the closet and putting it into his pocket.*—Now, when your mistress returns, leave me alone with her and don't let anybody disturb us for a few minutes.

FELIX, *aside as he goes out.*—Marguerite was right; there is something in the air, sure.

MARGUERITE, *to Vernon as she re-enters the room.*—
There is nothing the matter with Mademoiselle. She
sleeps peacefully.

SCENE XIII

VERNON.—What it is it that will suddenly set a-quar-
reling two women who previously have been living in
peace? All physicians of a philosophic turn of mind
know pretty well the infallible cause. Poor General,
who all his life thought he could escape the common
fate! Still the only men in his house are Ferdinand
and I—I hardly think I am the one, and I never
noticed that Ferdinand— Here she comes! To my
guns!

SCENE XIV

VERNON. GERTRUDE.

GERTRUDE, *aside.*—I have got the letters and I'll
burn them at once in my room. (*She finds herself face
to face with Vernon.*) Ah!

VERNON.—I have sent everybody away, Madame.

GERTRUDE.—And why did you do that?

VERNON.—Because we had to be alone for an expla-
nation.

GERTRUDE.—An explanation! What do you mean,
sir! You, the parasite of this house, what right have
you to ask an explanation from the Comtesse de Grand-
champ?

VERNON.—I a parasite! Why, madame, I have a for-

tune of ten thousand a year, besides my pension. I rank as a retired general and all I possess I have willed to the children of my old friend! I, a parasite! Oh! But I am not here only as a family friend, I am also a physician and—I saw you pour drops of laudanum into Pauline's tea.

GERTRUDE.—You saw me!!

VERNON.—I did and I have the cup in my possession.

GERTRUDE.—You have the cup? Why, I washed it.

VERNON.—You washed my cup, thinking it was Pauline's. Oh, I was not reading the paper, I was watching you!

GERTRUDE.—What an occupation!

VERNON.—You will have to admit that the occupation has its good points, as you may have to call me to your assistance if the drug should have a serious effect on Pauline.

GERTRUDE.—Serious effect? How could it have since I poured a few drops only?

VERNON.—So you acknowledge that you did put opium in her tea?

GERTRUDE.—Doctor, you are infamous!

VERNON.—Infamous, because I made you confess? That's the way women are sure to speak in all similar cases! I am used to it. But you had better not stop at the beginning, for you have many more avowals to make to me.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—A spy! The only thing I can do now, is to make him my accomplice. (*Aloud.*) Doctor, you can be too useful to me for me to quarrel with you. In a minute, I shall answer all your questions with absolute frankness. (*She enters her room and locks the door behind her.*)

VERNON.—She pushes the bolt—I am tricked— But, after all, I could not use violence. What is she doing now? Hiding her opium bottle, I suppose. It is always a sad mistake to attempt to render such services as my old friend, the poor General, expects of me. She'll fool me yet— Ah, here she comes.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—Burned to ashes—I am saved!
(*Aloud.*) Doctor!

VERNON.—Madame?

GERTRUDE.—My step-daughter, Pauline, whom you believe to be such an angel of candor, had managed in a most cowardly, criminal manner, to secure possession of a secret upon which depended the honor, the life, of four people.

VERNON.—Four people! (*Aside.*) Herself, the General—ah, her son, perhaps—and the unknown one.

GERTRUDE.—This secret, now, she is forced to keep, even if her own life be at stake!

VERNON.—I fail to understand!

GERTRUDE.—Well, all evidence concerning this secret has been destroyed! And, you, doctor, you who say you love us, would be as infamous as she, more infamous even,—for you are a man and cannot find an excuse in the mad passions of a woman—you would be nothing less than a monster if you took one step more in the direction you started upon just now.

VERNON.—So you are trying intimidation! Ah, Madame! Since human beings have congregated together, nothing but crime has grown from such seed as you are sowing now!

GERTRUDE.—Think of it, doctor, four lives in jeopardy! (*Aside.*) He is weakening! (*Aloud.*) Therefore, strong in my knowledge of this great dan-

ger, I tell you that you are going to help me preserve peace in this home, and that, in a few minutes, you will go out and procure what is needed to arouse Pauline from her present state. If it's necessary, you even will find some explanation to give to the General concerning Pauline's sudden fit of sleepiness. The cup, you will return to me, now, will you not? And after this, every step that it is necessary to take I'll explain to you fully—in advance.

VERNON.—Madame!

GERTRUDE.—Go now, go for this awakening draught. The General may return at any moment.

VERNON, *aside*.—I keep my hold on you just the same. My weapon is here— (*Exit Vernon.*)

SCENE XV

GERTRUDE, *leaning against the closet in which the cup is locked*.—For heaven's sake where did he hide the cup.

(CURTAIN ON THIRD ACT.)

FOURTH ACT

(The stage shows the bed-room of Pauline, arranged as in the second tableau in the second act.)

SCENE I

PAULINE, *asleep in a large arm-chair to the left.*

GERTRUDE.

GERTRUDE, *entering on tip-toes.*—She is still asleep! And that doctor told me she would awaken almost at once! This sleep frightens me! So here lies the woman he loves! I do not find her pretty at all! And yet—yes, she is beautiful! How is it men do not understand that beauty is but a promise and that it takes love to— *(A knock at the door.)* Ah, here is somebody coming.

VERNON, *from the outside.*—Pauline, may I come in?

GERTRUDE.—It's the doctor.

SCENE II

THE PRECEDING. VERNON.

GERTRUDE.—You told me she would be awake by this time.

VERNON.—Do not worry. *(Calling out.)* Pauline!

PAULINE, *opening her eyes.*—Doctor Vernon! Where am I? Ah, in my room! How did it happen?

VERNON.—My dear child, you went to sleep while drinking your tea. Madame de Grandchamp was a little afraid, as I was myself, that it might prove the beginning of some indisposition; happily, there does not seem to be anything the matter with you and you have merely suffered the consequences of a sleepless night.

GERTRUDE.—And now, Pauline, how do you feel?

PAULINE.—I feel sleepy! And Madame was here while I slept? (*She rises in the greatest excitement.*) Ah! (*She presses her hand upon her bosom.*) Ah! This is infamous! (*To Vernon.*) Doctor, is it possible that you could be the accomplice—

GERTRUDE.—The accomplice of whom? What were you going to say?

VERNON.—I, child, I, the accomplice of any evil-doer, and against you whom I love as I would my own daughter! You can't mean it! Now, tell me—

PAULINE.—Nothing, doctor, I have nothing to tell.

GERTRUDE.—Please, let me say a few words to her in private.

VERNON, *aside*.—What can be the reason that prevents this young girl from speaking out, after being the victim of such a plot? (*The two women talk together a few steps from Vernon.*)

GERTRUDE.—Now, Pauline, you have no longer in your possession the proofs of the foolish accusation you proposed to bring against me before your father!

PAULINE.—I understand all! You have drugged me to rob me!

GERTRUDE.—Each of us is as inquisitive as the other. I have done to you just what you did in Ferdinand's rooms.

PAULINE.—You are triumphing now, Madame, but it will soon be my turn!

GERTRUDE.—So, the war is to go on, is it?

PAULINE.—War! Say the duel to a finish, Madame! There is one too many of us two on this earth.

GERTRUDE.—You are melodramatic, my dear.

VERNON, *aside*.—There is no explosion— Apparently no disagreement! Why should I not go for Ferdinand. (*He takes a step to the door.*)

GERTRUDE.—Doctor?

VERNON.—Madame?

GERTRUDE.—We must have a talk together. (*In a low voice.*) I will not leave you until you have returned to me—

VERNON.—You know my condition—

PAULINE.—Doctor?

VERNON, *going to her side*.—What is it, child?

PAULINE.—Don't you know that my sleep just now was not a natural one?

VERNON.—I know it; you were put to sleep by your step-mother; I have the proof of it. And you, do you suspect why she did it.

PAULINE.—Certainly, doctor, it is because—

GERTRUDE, *from the door, where she has been waiting for Vernon*.—Well, doctor—

PAULINE.—Later, I shall tell you everything.

VERNON, *aside*.—From one or the other I am pretty sure to soon know all— Ah, my poor General!

GERTRUDE.—Are you not coming, doctor? (*He bows and they both walk out.*)

SCENE III

PAULINE, *she goes to the bell rope and pulls it.*—Yes, all that remains for me to do is to flee with him. If we keep on fighting as we are now doing, my step-mother and I, my poor father's honor soon will be gone! Is it not a hundred times better to disobey him. Besides, I'll write him some sort of an explanation. I shall be generous, since, after all, I shall be triumphing over her— I will leave my father's belief in her unsullied, and my reason for taking to flight will be his hatred against the name of Marcandal and my love for Ferdinand—

SCENE IV

PAULINE. MARGUERITE.

MARGUERITE.—Is Mademoiselle well again?

PAULINE.—Yes, well in body but not in mind. Oh, I am desperate! My poor old Marguerite, how terrible it is for a girl to be left without a mother!

MARGUERITE.—Especially if her father takes for his second wife a woman like the present Madame de Grandchamp. But, tell me, Mademoiselle, have I not been to you a devoted, though a humble, mother? Indeed, my love as your nurse since your babyhood has been rendered twice as strong by the hatred your step-mother has harbored against you.

PAULINE.—Oh, no, Marguerite, you can't love me so deeply! You think so, perhaps, but—

MARGUERITE.—Oh, Mademoiselle, put me to the test!

PAULINE.—Let me see now— Would you leave France with me?

MARGUERITE.—I'd follow you to the Indies!

PAULINE.—And at once?

MARGUERITE.—At once— Ah, my baggage does not amount to much!

PAULINE.—Well, if it be so, Marguerite, we shall leave to-night, and secretly.

MARGUERITE.—We shall leave? And why?

PAULINE.—Why? Don't you know that Madame de Grandchamp drugged me to sleep an hour ago?

MARGUERITE.—Yes, I knew it, and so did Doctor Vernon; for Felix told me that he had locked up the cup in which you had drunk your tea. But why should she do such a thing?

PAULINE.—Not a word more about it, if you love me— And if you are really as devoted as you say you are, go now to your room and gather up all your belongings; don't let anybody have the least suspicion that you are preparing to leave. We shall go shortly after midnight. You will take from here to your room my jewels and such things as I may need during a long journey. Be clever and cautious about it; for, if my step-mother gets the slightest inkling of my intentions, I am lost.

MARGUERITE.—Lost! In the name of heaven, Mademoiselle, what is happening in this house that you should be compelled to leave it in this way?

PAULINE.—Do you want to see me die?

MARGUERITE.—Die! You die! Oh, Mademoiselle, I will do anything you say.

PAULINE.—Now, you must go to Monsieur Ferdinand

and tell him to bring me my income for the year; I must see him at once.

MARGUERITE.—He was walking under your windows when I came in.

PAULINE, *aside*.—Under my windows! He thought he would never see me again! Poor Ferdinand!

SCENE V

PAULINE, *alone*.—So I am going to leave the paternal roof— I know my father— For a long time, he will search for me, the world over— What treasures does love offer us that can pay for such sacrifices? For I give up everything for Ferdinand's sake—my country, my father, my home— But then, this wicked woman will have lost him forever! Besides, I shall come back! The doctor and Monsieur Ramel will secure forgiveness for us— Isn't that Ferdinand's step? Yes, yes, it is!

SCENE VI

PAULINE. FERDINAND.

PAULINE.—Oh, my precious one, my Ferdinand!

FERDINAND.—And I, who thought never to see you again! So, Marguerite knows all?

PAULINE.—She knows nothing yet, but to-night she will find out that we are taking our flight together, you and I. For you shall take away your wife with you!

FERDINAND.—Oh, Pauline, do not deceive me!

PAULINE.—I had decided in any case to join you wher-

ever exile should take you; this odious woman simply hastened the execution of my plans. And there is no merit in my doing so, Ferdinand; my life is in danger.

FERDINAND.—Your life! What did she dare do?

PAULINE.—She almost killed me, this morning by drugging me to sleep, so as to gain possession of her letters which I had secreted upon my person! From what she has dared, already, in her determination to keep you for her own, judge of what she is capable! Therefore, if we are ever to belong to one another, our last resort is flight. No more good-bys then. To-night we shall be numbered among exiles— Where we shall go, is for you to decide.

FERDINAND.—I feel beside myself with joy!

PAULINE.—But, O my Ferdinand!—Neglect no precaution; first of all, drive right away to Louviers and see your friend, the Public Prosecutor, about the passports; also order a post-chaise and fast horses, so that my father, urged by this wicked step-mother of mine, will be unable to capture us in our flight: he would kill us both, for, in the letter I shall leave I shall tell him the fatal secret of your birth and say that it forces us to have recourse to flight.

FERDINAND.—Have no anxiety. Eugène Ramel has been busy since yesterday making everything ready for my departure. I have here the amount your father owed me. (*He shows her a pocket-book.*) Here are also funds that belong to you out of your regular income. Just sign me a receipt that I may turn it in with my final accounts. (*He places on the table, a few rolls of gold napoleons.*) Leaving at midnight, we shall reach Rouen at three in the morning and Havre in

good time to get on board a fast American packet which is announced to start to-morrow. Ramel has dispatched a confidential agent ahead to secure passage accommodation for me. Nobody on board will find it strange that at the last minute I should have decided to take my wife with me across the water. So, you see, there is no obstacle—

SCENE VII

THE PRECEDING. GERTRUDE.

GERTRUDE.—And what of me?

PAULINE.—We are lost!

GERTRUDE.—So, you were going to leave without a word to me, Ferdinand? Oh, no use denying—I heard everything?

FERDINAND, *to Pauline*.—Will you kindly give me your receipt, Mademoiselle; I need it to close my accounts with the General before leaving. (*To Gertrude.*) Madame, you may, perhaps, prevent Mademoiselle's departure, but you certainly can do nothing to prevent mine. So, go I will, and to-day.

GERTRUDE.—No, sir, you shall stay.

FERDINAND.—Against my will?

GERTRUDE.—What Mademoiselle, here, was planning to do, I will do myself, and fearlessly! I am going to send, this instant, for Monsieur de Grandchamp, and you will soon find out that you shall be compelled to leave this place, but with me and my child. (*She has rung the bell; Felix appears in answer to it.*) Please ask Monsieur de Grandchamp to be kind enough to come to this room.

FERDINAND, *to Pauline*.—I see what she wants to do. Keep her here while I prevent Felix from reaching the General. Ramel will tell you how to act. Once we are away from Louviers, Gertrude can do nothing against us. (*To Gertrude*.) Good-by, Madame; your attempt against Pauline's life has torn asunder the last bonds between us.

GERTRUDE.—You are always accusing me of something or other— But you don't know that this young lady was about to reveal to her father everything about you and me?

FERDINAND.—I love her and will love her all my life— I will find means of defending her against you, and I trust her enough to leave the country for her sake! Good-by!

PAULINE.—Oh, dear, dear, Ferdinand!

SCENE VIII

GERTRUDE. PAULINE.

GERTRUDE.—Now that we are alone, do you want me to tell you why I have sent for your father? Listen— I am going to tell him all about the name and the percentage of Ferdinand!

PAULINE.—Oh, Madame, you cannot do such a thing? As soon as my father is informed that the man who has gained his daughter's love is General Marcandal's son, he will start at once for Havre and get there as soon as Ferdinand; and then—

GERTRUDE.—I prefer Ferdinand dead to seeing him belong to any other woman, especially when I feel for

that other a hatred equal in strength to my love for him. This is the final incident of our duel, Mademoiselle.

PAULINE, *falling on her knees as she begins to plead.*—Oh, Madame, I am now down on my knees before you, just as you were before me yesterday— Let us kill each other, if you so decide, but don't let us murder him! My life, my life I offer in exchange for his!

GERTRUDE.—You give him up then?

PAULINE.—Yes, Madame, I give him up.

GERTRUDE, *as she speaks, her handkerchief drops from her hand.*—You are deceiving me! You speak this way because he loves you; because he insulted me a few minutes ago by confessing this love; because you think he never will be mine again— Pauline, Pauline, I must have more than your word, I must have a pledge of your sincerity!

PAULINE, *aside.*—Her handkerchief has dropped— In a corner of it she keeps the key of her desk— and the poison is there— (*Aloud.*) Pledge— You want a pledge? I'll do anything you say— What is it to be?

GERTRUDE.—I know of only one absolutely convincing proof— You must marry another man!

PAULINE.—I will marry another man.

GERTRUDE.—And pledge your word to him at once?

PAULINE.—You mean Godard? Well, you may notify him immediately of my willingness. Madame, bring my father here and I will—

GERTRUDE.—You will—

PAULINE.—Give my word then and there. It will be like giving my life.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—How resolutely she speaks out, and without a tear— She must be keeping something back. (*Aloud.*) So, you are resigned?

PAULINE.—I am.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—I'll test her. (*Aloud.*) If you speak the truth—

PAULINE.—You are deceit itself and always think others are lying— Ah, go from me, Madame! You disgust me!

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—Ah, now she is sincere! (*Aloud.*) I am going to notify Ferdinand of the resolution you have just taken. (*Pauline nods her assent.*) But he may not believe me— You had better write him a few words yourself.

PAULINE.—To tell him to stay— (*She scribbles a few lines on the table.*) Here they are, Madame.

GERTRUDE, *reading*.—"I have decided to marry Monsieur de Rimonville— Therefore you may remain. Pauline." (*Aside.*) I can't understand her—I am afraid of a trap—I had better let him leave and notify him of this marriage when he will be far from here. (*Exit Gertrude.*)

SCENE IX

PAULINE, *alone*.—Yes, yes, I see it now, Ferdinand is lost to me! I always felt it would be so— Life is either a paradise or a prison— I, a young girl, dreamt of paradise! Well, anyway, I have the key of her desk and can easily return it after securing what poison I need to escape from this horrible position! I'll do it at once.

SCENE X

PAULINE. MARGUERITE.

MARGUERITE.—Mademoiselle, your trunks are all packed. I'll begin here now.

PAULINE.—That's all right. (*Aside.*) I shall have to let her go on. (*Aloud.*) Here, Marguerite, take this gold to your room and hide it there.

MARGUERITE.—Are your reasons for going so very strong, Mademoiselle?

PAULINE.—Oh, my poor Marguerite, if I were only sure to go! Still—you had better proceed. (*Exit Pauline.*)

SCENE XI

MARGUERITE, *alone*.—And I imagined that the wicked woman would not allow Mademoiselle to marry! Has the dear child kept from me some love affair opposed by her father? He is so fond of her and professes to leave her free to choose— Ought I not to speak to him? No, I can't do it; my child might be the sufferer.

SCENE XII

PAULINE. MARGUERITE.

PAULINE, *aside*.—Nobody saw me take it— (*Aloud.*) Don't forget the money, Marguerite. Then, leave me to think of what I must do.

MARGUERITE.—In your place, Mademoiselle, I would go and tell everything to Monsieur.

PAULINE.—Tell everything to my father! Oh, for

heaven's sake, do not betray me! Let us respect the illusions he lives under!

MARGUERITE.—Illusions! Yes, that's the right word!

PAULINE.—Now, go, dear, go!

SCENE XIII

PAULINE. *Later* VERNON.

PAULINE, *holding in her hand a small package*.—So, this is death! Doctor Vernon told us yesterday, when talking of Champagne's wife, that it took this terrible drug several hours, sometimes a whole night, to do its work and that, at first, it can be fought against successfully. Now, if the doctor is in our house during the next few hours, he'll fight the poison and probably— (*A knock at the door.*) Who is there?

VERNON, *from the outside*.—It is I.

PAULINE.—Come in, doctor. (*Aside.*) Curiosity brings him here, curiosity will send him away.

VERNON.—My dear child, is it true that there are between you and your step-mother life and death secrets?

PAULINE.—Yes, death secrets.

VERNON.—Well then I am right in my element. Tell me now, have you not had recently some violent quarrel with Madame de Grandcamp?

PAULINE.—Oh, do not speak to me of this wicked creature! She deceives my father shamefully!

VERNON.—I know it.

PAULINE.—She never loved him.

VERNON.—I was sure of it.

PAULINE.—She has sworn to ruin me.

VERNON.—Does she want to break your heart?

PAULINE.—Perhaps she is after my life!

VERNON.—Oh, my poor child, what a suspicion! But I love you, dear Pauline, and if you are right, I'll save you.

PAULINE.—For me to be saved, my father would have to have radically different opinions. Listen now, I love Monsieur Ferdinand.

VERNON.—This also, I know. But what prevents you from marrying him?

PAULINE.—You'll keep our secret, will you? He is the son of General Marcandal!

VERNON.—Good God! Is it possible! Oh, you may be sure that I will keep that secret— Why, your father would fight a duel to the death with him, for no other reason than that he has lived under his roof for three years.

PAULINE.—Now, you see, there is no hope. (*She drops into an arm-chair, as if absolutely crushed.*)

VERNON.—Poor girl! Poor girl! I am afraid of hysterics! (*He pulls the bell and calls out at the same time.*) Marguerite, Marguerite!

SCENE XIV

THE PRECEDING. GERTRUDE. MARGUERITE.

THE GENERAL.

MARGUERITE, *rushing in*.—What do you want, sir?

VERNON.—Bring in a tea-pot of boiling-water and prepare an infusion of orange leaves.

GERTRUDE.—What is the matter with you, Pauline?

THE GENERAL.—My daughter! My darling child!

GERTRUDE.—Oh, it's nothing serious—I understand it all— It comes from the emotion of deciding her life's future.

VERNON, *to the General*.—Her life's future— And what is it to be?

THE GENERAL.—She is to marry Godard. (*Aside to Vernon*.) My wife just told me that she had given up at last some love she entertained for a fellow whose rascality she discovered only a few hours ago.

VERNON.—And you believe that story? Do not hurry things, General. We shall look into the matter quietly, to-night. (*Aside*.) Before that time, I shall have spoken to Madame de Grandchamp, privately.

PAULINE, *to Gertrude*.—The doctor knows everything—

GERTRUDE.—Ah!

PAULINE, *placing the handkerchief containing the key in Gertrude's pocket without the latter noticing it*.—Find some means to get him away, or he will tell my father all about Ferdinand and we are bound to save him, at any cost.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—She is right. (*Aloud*.) Doctor, I have just been told that François, one of our best workmen, was taken seriously ill yesterday. He is not able to get up. Would you be kind enough to go and see what is the matter with him?

THE GENERAL.—Did you say François? Oh, do go to him, Vernon.

VERNON.—Does he not live at Pré-l'Evêque? (*Aside*.) More than three leagues from here—

THE GENERAL.—You are not anxious about Pauline?

VERNON.—No, it's just a spell of old-fashioned hysterics.

GERTRUDE.—Then, doctor, you think it perfectly safe that I should take your place by her side?

VERNON.—Yes, Madame, I do. (*To the General.*) I'll wager that François is no sicker than I am now. Some one thinks me too clear-sighted and wants me out of the way.

THE GENERAL, *growing angry*.—Some one? Who, some one? What do you mean?

VERNON.—Are you going to get mad again? Now, hold yourself in check, General, or you will cause yourself life-long remorse.

THE GENERAL.—Remorse?

VERNON.—Never mind about this now. Just keep things as they are until I return.

THE GENERAL.—But—

GERTRUDE, *to Pauline, who is coming to*.—Well, well, and how are you feeling now, darling.

THE GENERAL, *to Vernon*.—Just look at them.

VERNON.—Oh, women will commit murder under cover of a kiss.

SCENE XV

THE PRECEDING *minus* VERNON. *Later* MARGUERITE.

GERTRUDE, *to the General who stands there, bewildered, after the last words of Vernon*.—Well, what is the matter with you?

THE GENERAL, *crossing over to Pauline*.—Nothing, nothing is the matter. Now, tell me, my own little

Pauline, do you really accept Godard out of your free will?

PAULINE.—I do. Freely and willingly.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—Ah!

THE GENERAL.—He is coming in directly.

PAULINE.—I await him.

THE GENERAL, *aside*.—There is much disappointment in those words. (*Marguerite enters, a cup in her hand.*)

GERTRUDE.—It is too soon, Marguerite. The infusion won't be strong enough. (*She tastes the tea.*) I'll fix this myself.

MARGUERITE.—I thought I used to take proper care of Mademoiselle.

GERTRUDE.—What do you mean by such language?

MARGUERITE.—But— Madame—

THE GENERAL.—Marguerite, one word more like this, and we shall have to quarrel, my dear old woman—

PAULINE.—Marguerite, you had better do what Madame de Grandchamp tells you. (*Marguerite goes out with Gertrude.*)

THE GENERAL.—So, you refuse to give your full confidence to a father who loves you so dearly? I only want you to tell me why you accept Godard to-day after refusing his offer so positively yesterday?

PAULINE.—Oh, it's just a young girl's changeable mind.

THE GENERAL.—You are not in love with any one else?

PAULINE.—It is just because I am not in love with anybody else that I am ready to marry your Monsieur Godard. (*Gertrude and Marguerite return.*)

THE GENERAL.—Ah!

GERTRUDE.—Here is your infusion, my dear girl; take care when you drink it, it's burning hot.

PAULINE.—Thank you, mother.

THE GENERAL.—Mother? Why, it's enough to make one crazy!

PAULINE.—Marguerite, the sugar - bowl, please. (*While Marguerite is out of the room and Gertrude talking at one side with the General, she drops the poison in the cup, and the paper the powder was in falls, unnoticed, on the floor.*)

GERTRUDE, *to her husband*.—What is the matter?

THE GENERAL.—My dear, I am like Godard, I cannot read women. (*Marguerite returns.*)

GERTRUDE.—Oh, you are like all men!

PAULINE, *after drinking hurriedly the poisoned cup*.—Ah!

THE GENERAL.—What is it, child?

PAULINE.—Nothing!—Nothing!

GERTRUDE.—I'll make you another cup.

PAULINE.—No, thank you, Madame. We had better await the doctor's return. (*She places the empty cup on the small table.*)

SCENE XVI

THE PRECEDING. FELIX. *Later* GODARD.

FELIX.—Monsieur Godard asks if he may come in? (*They look questioningly at Pauline who nods affirmatively.*)

PAULINE.—Certainly he may.

GERTRUDE.—What are you going to tell him?

PAULINE.—Just wait and listen.

GODARD, *entering*.—Oh, I am so sorry to hear that

Mademoiselle is not quite well! I will not intrude— (*A seat is pointed out to him.*) Then, allow me to thank you for thus admitting me within this sanctuary of innocence. Mademoiselle, Madame de Grandchamp and your kind father have just informed me of a decision that would have filled me with rapture had it been reached yesterday, but, to-day, I confess, it rather surprises me.

THE GENERAL.—What is that you are saying, Monsieur Godard?

PAULINE.—Do not feel vexed, my dear father; the gentleman is right. You do not know all I told him yesterday.

GODARD.—You are much too clever, Mademoiselle, not to consider as very natural the curiosity of an honest young fellow endowed with forty thousand-a-year plus his savings, who would like to know something of the reasons that lead you to accept him twenty-four hours after a positive refusal. For, (*pulling out his watch and looking at it*) it was at this very same hour—half-past five—that you—

THE GENERAL.—What are you talking about? You claim to be deeply in love and you begin to scold an adorable young girl, at the very moment when—

GODARD.—I should certainly not act in this wise, if it were not a question of marriage. But, as you well know, General, marriage is a mixture of business and sentiment.

PAULINE, *to Godard*.—Sir— (*Aside.*) Oh, how I suffer! (*Aloud.*) Why, sir, you must know that we, poor young girls—

GODARD.—Poor! You are not poor, Mademoiselle. You are worth four hundred thousand francs.

PAULINE.—I'll say then,—weak young creatures—

GODARD.—Why weak?

PAULINE.—Let us say innocent young maidens, then. Why should we not like to discover something of the temper of the man who wants to become our lord and master? If you truly love me, will you punish yourself, will you punish me, because I have ventured to test you?

GODARD.—Oh, of course, if it was meant that way!

THE GENERAL.—O Women! Women!

GODARD.—You may exclaim just as correctly: O Maidens! Maidens!

THE GENERAL.—Anyway, this proves that my daughter is cleverer than her father.

SCENE XVII

THE PRECEDING. GERTRUDE. NAPOLEON.

GERTRUDE.—Well, Monsieur Godard?

GODARD.—Ah, Madame! Ah, General! I am delighted! My dream is realized! To enter a family like yours! I, so unworthy! Ah, Madame! Ah, General! Ah, Mademoiselle! (*Aside.*) There is a mystery not yet unfolded, for she does not love me! I will penetrate it.

NAPOLEON, *running in.*—I have the medal, this week. Good afternoon, mamma. Where is Pauline? (*He discovers her on the arm-chair.*) Are you sick, poor little sister? I say, tell me, where does justice come from?

GERTRUDE.—Who has been speaking to you about

this? You naughty boy, how you have mussed your clothes!

NAPOLEON.—Teacher spoke about it. He said, justice came from God.

GODARD.—I don't believe your teacher is from Normandy.

PAULINE, *in a low voice to Marguerite*.—Oh, Marguerite! Dear Marguerite! Do manage to get them out of the room!

MARGUERITE.—Gentlemen, I think Mademoiselle needs rest.

THE GENERAL.—Well, then, we'll leave you, Pauline. I hope you will feel like coming to the dinner-table, by and by.

PAULINE.—I will, if I can. Father, won't you kiss me?

THE GENERAL, *kissing her*.—Oh, you darling child! (*To Napoleon.*) Come, little one. (*They all leave the room except Pauline, Marguerite and Napoleon.*)

NAPOLEON, *to Pauline*.—And me! you are not kissing me? What's the matter?

PAULINE.—Oh, I am dying!

NAPOLEON.—Who is dying? Pauline, tell me, what does death look like?

PAULINE.—Death—it—looks—like—this! (*She faints away in Marguerite's arms.*)

MARGUERITE.—Oh, my God! Help! Help!

NAPOLEON.—O Pauline! You frighten me! (*He runs out of the room, crying.*) Mamma! Mamma!

(CURTAIN ON FOURTH ACT.)

FIFTH ACT

(*The stage setting is unchanged.*)

SCENE I

PAULINE. FERDINAND. VERNON.

(*Pauline lies upon her bed. Ferdinand holds her hand in an attitude of profound grief and absolute despair. It is just before dawn; a lamp is still burning in the room.*)

VERNON, seated near the little round table.—I have seen thousands of dead on battlefields and in flying hospitals; yet the death of this young girl under her father's roof moves me a hundred-fold more than all these sufferings borne so heroically. In war, death is foreseen, almost expected; while here, it is not only a human existence that vanishes, but a whole family plunged into grief and precious hopes scattered to the winds. To see this child, I love so dearly, murdered—poisoned—and by whom? Marguerite did solve the riddle of this struggle between the two rivals. I felt it my sworn duty to go and reveal everything to the Public Prosecutor. And God knows that I did all that was humanly possible to snatch this life from the grasp of death. (*Ferdinand lifts his head and listens to Vernon.*) I have even procured this violent poison that is known to counteract the effects of the drug that is killing her. But I dare not administer it in the

absence of some of those lights of the medical world to whom such daring experiments are permitted. Alone, one cannot risk such a throw of the dice!

FERDINAND, *he rises and walks to the doctor's side.*— Doctor, as soon as the prosecuting magistrates arrive, tell them about this drug; they will surely sanction the experiment. And God, yes, God, will listen to me— By some miracle he will give her back to me!

VERNON.—I would have acted alone, if the poison had not gone so far. Now, I might be taken for the poisoner. No, dear friend, this (*he pulls out a small phial from his pocket and places it on the table absent-mindedly*) is of no use now and my desperate effort would only make me out a criminal.

FERDINAND, *placing a mirror before Pauline's lips.*— But everything is not lost yet— She is still breathing—

VERNON.—She will not see the rising day.

PAULINE.—Ferdinand!

FERDINAND.—She just uttered my name.

VERNON.—Oh, a twenty-two year old girl is strong in her struggle against destruction. Besides, she will preserve her intelligence to the last breath. She may even rise, walk about and speak, in spite of the terrible sufferings caused by the poison.

SCENE II

THE PRECEDING. THE GENERAL, *at first, outside.*

THE GENERAL.—Vernon!

VERNON, *to Ferdinand.*—The General. (*Overwhelmed, Ferdinand drops into an arm-chair, to the left, hidden*)

from the new-comer by the bed hangings.) What do you want?

THE GENERAL.—I must see Pauline!

VERNON.—If you listen to me, you will wait; it will make her worse.

THE GENERAL, *he forces the door open.*—I will come in!

VERNON.—General, General, do stop, please!

THE GENERAL, *entering the room and approaching the bed.*—I'll listen to nothing. Why, she is motionless and cold as ice— Oh, Vernon!

VERNON.—Now, General— (*Aside.*) I must send him away! (*Aloud.*) Alas! I have but a faint hope of saving her—

THE GENERAL.—What are you saying? Have you dared to deceive me all this time?

VERNON.—My old friend, you must look at this bed with the fearlessness you had when facing loaded batteries! And for the present, in the awful suspense I am in, you ought to go and— (*Aside.*) Oh, what an inspiration! (*Aloud.*) You ought to go yourself and secure the presence of a priest.

THE GENERAL.—Vernon, I must see her, embrace her— (*He leans over the bed.*)

VERNON.—Take care what you do!

THE GENERAL, *after kissing Pauline.*—Oh, so cold!

VERNON.—It is one of the symptoms of her malady, General— Now, go as fast as you can to the manse, for, if I should fail, your daughter, raised as a Christian girl, should not be left to die without the rites of the church.

THE GENERAL.—Yes, yes, I am going, I am going! (*Instead of walking to the door he starts toward the other side of the bed.*)

VERNON, *showing him the door*.—This way out.

THE GENERAL.—My friend, I feel beside myself— I have not an idea in my head— Vernon, a miracle, work a miracle! You who have saved so many, will you not, can you not, save my child?

VERNON.—Come, come with me— (*Aside.*) I must accompany him outside the house, for if he should meet the magistrates, what awful consequences would follow. (*They leave the room together.*)

SCENE III

PAULINE. FERDINAND.

PAULINE.—Ferdinand!

FERDINAND.—O Merciful God! Is this her last effort? Oh, Pauline, my Pauline, you are my life itself, and if Vernon does not save you, I will follow you— We shall be united forever!

PAULINE.—If it is so, I die without a regret.

FERDINAND, *picking up the small phial left behind by Vernon*.—This, which might have saved you if the doctor had reached you sooner, shall deliver me from life.

PAULINE.—No, live and be happy!

FERDINAND.—Never, never without you!

PAULINE.—You make me live again.

SCENE IV

THE PRECEDING. VERNON.

FERDINAND.—She speaks, her eyes are opened!

VERNON.—Poor thing! There she falls back into her

stupor! What will her awakening be? (*Ferdinand resumes his seat by the bedside and takes Pauline's hand in his own.*)

SCENE V

THE PRECEDING. RAMEL. THE INVESTIGATING JUDGE.
A COURT CLERK. A PHYSICIAN. A POLICE
OFFICER. MARGUERITE.

MARGUERITE.—Monsieur Vernon, here are the magistrates. Monsieur Ferdinand, come out this way. (*Exit Ferdinand by the door at the left.*)

RAMEL.—Officer, you will have your men watch the various exits of this house and hold yourself ready to obey further orders from us. Doctor, may we stay here a few minutes without endangering the life of your patient?

VERNON.—She is sleeping, sir; sleeping her last sleep.

MARGUERITE.—Here is the cup containing what remained of the infusion, and there is arsenic in it. I noticed it the minute I took it away.

THE COURT PHYSICIAN, *examining the cup and tasting the dregs at the bottom.*—There is no doubt that this contains some poisonous substance.

THE JUDGE.—You will please take possession of it and analyze it. (*He notices Marguerite picking a small piece of paper off the floor.*) What is this paper?

MARGUERITE.—Oh, it's nothing!

RAMEL.—In a case like this, nothing is insignificant to a magistrate! (*He starts as he looks at the paper.*) This will have to be examined closely, later on. Can

we have Monsieur de Grandchamp kept away for a little while?

VERNON.—He is gone to the manse, but he will be back soon.

THE JUDGE, *pointing out the bed to the Court Physician.*—Give your attention here please. (*The two doctors converse in a low voice at the foot of the bed.*)

RAMEL, *to the Judge.*—Should the General return while we are here, we shall act toward him as circumstances may dictate. (*Marguerite is sobbing, kneeling at the foot of the bed. The two physicians, the Judge and Ramel are grouped at the front of the stage.*)

RAMEL, *speaking to the Court Physician.*—If I understand you correctly, sir, your opinion is that the illness of Mademoiselle de Grandchamp, whom we saw, the day before yesterday, so full of life and happiness, is due to a crime?

THE COURT PHYSICIAN.—The poisoning symptoms are of the most convincing nature.

RAMEL.—And are the remains of the poison, yet in this cup, sufficient to constitute legal evidence on this particular point?

THE COURT PHYSICIAN.—They are, sir.

THE JUDGE, *to Vernon.*—Doctor, this woman, here (*pointing to Marguerite*) claims that yesterday you ordered an infusion of orange leaves prepared for Mademoiselle de Grandchamp, who was suffering from the effects upon her nerves of a discussion with her step-mother. She adds that Madame de Grandchamp, who managed to have you sent four leagues away on a fool's errand, made it a point to prepare this tea and give it herself to her step-daughter. Is all this correct?

VERNON.—Yes, sir, it is.

MARGUERITE.—By insisting that I should care for Mademoiselle, I brought upon myself a scolding from my good old master.

RAMEL, *to Vernon*.—Where did Madame de Grandchamp send you?

VERNON.—Gentlemen, there seems to be a fatality ruling this whole matter. There is no doubt in my mind that Madame de Grandchamp wanted to have me away from the house, for the workman she sent me to treat was enjoying himself at the village inn when I got there. I scolded Champagne for deceiving Madame as to the cause of the man's absence, but he assured me he never had said the fellow was ill.

FELIX.—Gentlemen, the clergy is at the door.

RAMEL.—Let us take the two pieces of evidence we have found into the parlor and proceed there with our inquiries.

VERNON.—This way, gentlemen, this way. (*They all leave the room.*)

(TABLEAU, CURTAIN.)

SCENE VI

(*The scene changes to the drawing-room of the First Act.*)

RAMEL. THE INVESTIGATING JUDGE.

THE COURT-CLERK. VERNON.

RAMEL.—Then, the facts stand as follows. According to the statements of Felix and Marguerite, first, Madame de Grandchamp, in this room, administered to her step-daughter a dose of opium, and you, Doctor Ver-

non, noticing the criminal action, managed to get possession of the cup and had it locked up.

VERNON.—That's correct, but—

RAMEL.—How is it, Doctor Vernon, that, having been a witness to this criminal deed, you did not stop Madame de Grandchamp from proceeding on the dangerous road she was traveling?

VERNON.—Believe me, sir, everything that prudence could dictate and my long experience suggest, I have done.

THE JUDGE.—Your conduct, sir, is somewhat strange and will need explaining. Yesterday you did your duty in securing this material proof, the cup, but why did you stop short in that direction?

RAMEL.—One moment, if you please, Judge. This old gentleman is sincere and honorable. (*He takes Vernon aside.*) Now, tell me, have you not discovered the cause of this crime!

VERNON.—Its motive lies in the rivalry of two women, urged to extremes by pitiless passions— More, I must not say.

RAMEL.—I know everything.

VERNON.—What! You, sir, know everything?

RAMEL.—And, like you, I have done my best to prevent a catastrophe; for Ferdinand was to leave to-night. In the old days, I knew Mademoiselle de Meilhac.

VERNON.—If that is so, sir, I beg of you, to be merciful! Have pity on an old soldier, with as many wounds perhaps as he has illusions! He is about to lose his wife and his daughter— Let him not lose his honor as a husband.

RAMEL.—We understand each other— As long as

Gertrude makes no confession that compels us to open our eyes to the real situation, I'll endeavor to persuade the investigating judge—a very shrewd and unwavering magistrate—that cupidity alone has directed Madame de Grandchamp's criminal hand. Help me to succeed. (*The Judge walks over to them. Ramel assumes at once a stern tone of voice, as he adds:*) Why should Madame de Grandchamp have wished to put her step-daughter to sleep? As the old friend of the family, you must know that.

VERNON.—Pauline was about to confide her secret to me. Doubtless, Madame de Grandchamp got an inkling that I was to be informed of things she preferred to keep concealed; I think this is also the reason why she managed to have me called away professionally to see a perfectly healthy man. She did not try to prevent help from reaching Pauline in good time, for Louviers is close by and there are lots of physicians to be had there.

THE JUDGE.—What a degree of premeditation! (*To Ramel.*) She is doomed unless we find the proofs of her innocence locked up in her own desk. She does not expect us— She will be thunderstruck!

SCENE VII

THE PRECEDING. GERTRUDE. *Then* MARGUERITE.

GERTRUDE.—I hear church chants— Oh, the magistrates again— What is happening here? (*She walks over toward Pauline's door, when it is suddenly thrown open and Marguerite stands on the threshold. She starts back in an awful fright.*) Ah!

MARGUERITE.—They are saying prayers on your victim's body!

GERTRUDE.—What? Pauline? Pauline dead?

THE JUDGE.—And you poisoned her, Madame.

GERTRUDE.—I! I! I! Tell me, am I awake? (*To Ramel.*) You here, how lucky— You'll be able to explain everything! For you know all! And you do not believe me capable of a crime, do you? Anyhow, what am I accused of? I, try to kill her! I, the wife of an old man who is the soul of honor! I, the mother of a child who must never have cause to blush on my account! Ah, law and justice will be on my side, I know—Marguerite, let no one leave this room— And won't somebody tell me what has happened since I left Pauline merely ailing a little?

THE JUDGE.—Collect yourself, Madame. You are now in the presence of your country's magistrates.

GERTRUDE.—Oh! I feel chilled, all over—

THE JUDGE.—The magistrates, in France, Madame, remain strictly impartial in the pursuance of their duties. They set no traps, they act openly, strong in the feeling of their truth-seeking mission. For the present, you are in the preliminary stage of an accusation, and I owe you my protection. But the truth you must tell me, the whole truth. The rest will take care of itself.

GERTRUDE.—If it is so, sir, just bring me to Pauline's bed, and, standing there, I will cry out that I am innocent of her death!

THE JUDGE.—Madame!

GERTRUDE.—Let us stop all these long phrases you delight to wrap around those you accuse— My grief is inexpressible! I weep over Pauline's death as if

she were my own child— Everything she has done against me I pardon her— What else do you want of me now? Proceed, I'll answer your questions!

RAMEL.—What is it you have to pardon?

GERTRUDE.—I meant—

RAMEL, *in a low voice to Gertrude*.—For heaven's sake, be prudent—

GERTRUDE, *answering him*.—How right you are— Around me nothing but yawning chasms!

THE JUDGE, *to the Court Clerk*.—You will take down the name, etc. later on; just now limit yourself to jotting down brief notes of the interrogatory. (*To Gertrude*.) Did you, yesterday, about noon, administer opium to Mademoiselle de Grandchamp, by pouring some of the drug in her teacup?

GERTRUDE.—So, doctor, you—?

RAMEL.—Do not accuse Doctor Vernon of any unkindness— He has compromised himself only too much for your sake. Answer the Judge's question.

GERTRUDE.—Yes, it is true.

THE JUDGE, *presenting the cup to her*.—Do you identify this as being the cup in question?

GERTRUDE.—I do. What next?

THE JUDGE, *to his clerk*.—Write down that Madame identifies the cup and admits that she poured opium into it. That will be sufficient, for the present, concerning this first accusation.

GERTRUDE.—So you are accusing me of something else? Of what?

THE JUDGE.—Madame, if you are unable to properly explain the action concerning which I am now going to question you, you will stand accused of the crime of

murder by poison. Let us look together for the proofs of your innocence or your guilt.

GERTRUDE.—And where shall we look for them, please?

THE JUDGE.—In your bed-room. Yesterday, you caused Mademoiselle de Grandchamp to drink an infusion of orange leaves out of this other cup, here, in which arsenic has been found.

GERTRUDE.—Arsenic in that cup! Can such a thing be possible?

THE JUDGE.—You told us the day before yesterday, that the desk in which you kept a package of arsenic was always locked, with a key that never left your person.

GERTRUDE.—It is now in the pocket of this dress! Ah! thank you for remembering that, sir; this torture will now end!

RAMEL.—So, you made no use of this—?

GERTRUDE.—None whatever; you'll find the package sealed as it was when last you had it in your hands.

RAMEL.—I truly hope so, Madame.

THE JUDGE, *to Ramel*.—I doubt it— We have to deal with a most audacious criminal—

GERTRUDE.—My room is all upset, allow me—

THE JUDGE.—No, no, the three of us shall go in together.

RAMEL.—Your innocence is at stake, Madame.

GERTRUDE.—Well then, come in, gentlemen.

SCENE VIII

VERNON, *alone*.—My poor old friend, kneeling now at his daughter's bedside! No one but God can give her back to him, now—

SCENE IX

VERNON. GERTRUDE. RAMEL. THE JUDGE.
THE COURT CLERK.

GERTRUDE.—Am I awake? Am I dreaming? Am I—?

RAMEL.—You are lost, Madame.

GERTRUDE.—I know I am, sir! But who has done this deed?

THE JUDGE, *to his clerk*.—Write down that Madame de Grandchamp, having herself opened the desk in her bed-room, and, having handed over to us the package of arsenic that had been sealed by Monsieur Baudrillon, we have found this package, which we had left, the day before yesterday unopened and untouched, with its seal broken and an amount abstracted from it sufficient to cause death.

GERTRUDE.—To cause death! I!!

THE JUDGE.—It was not without a reason, Madame, that I picked up this scrap of torn paper, inside your desk. We found in Mademoiselle de Grandchamp's room this other scrap which fits perfectly the one we thus secured. This is a proof that when you opened your desk to obtain the poison, you picked up this piece of paper to hold the amount of the drug you took from the package. Then, in the bewilderment that often accompanies the commission of a crime, you threw away the fragment after emptying it.

GERTRUDE.—Did you not say, a moment ago, that you would act as my protector! And is this—?

THE JUDGE.—One moment, Madame. The witness' summons, which I had caused to be prepared for you,

must now be changed to an order of arrest. (*He signs the paper which his clerk hands him.*) Now, Madame, you must consider yourself a prisoner.

GERTRUDE.—I suppose it has to be as you say— But you told me also, that your mission was to find the truth. Shall we not look for it together, sir?

THE JUDGE.—We shall, Madame.

GERTRUDE, *to Ramel, as she bursts into tears.*—Ah, Monsieur Ramel, Monsieur Ramel!

RAMEL.—Have you anything to say in your defense that might induce us to release you?

GERTRUDE.—Gentlemen, I am innocent of this horrible crime of murder, but I find everything to be against me! I beseech you, instead of torturing me, assist me just a little! For instance, the key must have been taken from me— Some one must have entered my room in my absence. Ah! I understand it all now— (*Aside to Ramel.*) Pauline loved as I love— She poisoned herself—

RAMEL.—For the sake of your honor as a wife do not say a word of this without absolute proof—

THE JUDGE.—Madame, is it true that yesterday, knowing that Doctor Vernon was to dine at your house, you sent him away—

GERTRUDE.—Ah, your questions are like so many stabs through my very heart— And you go on, and you go on—

THE JUDGE.—Did you or did you not send him to attend a workman, at Pré-l'Evêque?

GERTRUDE.—I did.

THE JUDGE.—This workman, Madame, was at the inn, in perfect health.

GERTRUDE.—Champagne had said he was ill.

THE JUDGE.—Champagne, whom we questioned, denies this. He never said the man was ill. Your object was to keep help from the sick girl.

GERTRUDE, *aside*.—And it was Pauline who had me send the doctor away! Ah Pauline! Pauline! You'll drag me to the grave with you, but I'll go down to it a branded criminal! Oh no! Never! Never! (*Aside to Ramel.*) I have but one resource left me, sir. (*To Vernon.*) Is Pauline still alive?

VERNON, *pointing to the General, who is entering the room*.—Here comes my answer!

SCENE X

THE PRECEDING. THE GENERAL.

THE GENERAL.—She is dying, Vernon, dying! If I lose her, I shall never survive her death!

VERNON.—My dear, dear friend!

THE GENERAL.—There seems to be many people here— What are they doing? Oh, save her, save her! Where is Gertrude? (*They lead the feeble old man to the rear of the stage and make him sit down.*)

GERTRUDE, *on her knees before the General*.—Poor father! Dear friend! (*Speaking half to herself.*) Oh, if only they would kill me now without a trial! (*She rises suddenly.*) No, it is impossible! Pauline has wrapped me up in her shroud and I feel her icy fingers around my throat— And yet, I had given up the struggle, yes, I had decided to bury with me the secret of this horrible domestic drama— Such a lesson it would be for other women!— But I cannot stand this fighting with a corpse that has got hold of me,

that instills within me the chill of death. Ah! But now, my innocence will come out of my confession! If it is at the expense of somebody's honor, what do I care? At least I shall not be branded a vile, cowardly poisoner! Yes, I am going to tell everything!

THE GENERAL, *rising and walking threateningly toward her*.—Then you are going to tell the magistrates what you have hidden obstinately from me, for the last two days! Oh—you—contemptible and deceitful creature! You, with your lying caresses! You have killed my daughter. Whom else do you want to destroy?

GERTRUDE, *to herself*.—Must I keep silent? Must I speak?

RAMEL.—General, I beseech you, withdraw from this room. It is the law's command.

THE GENERAL.—The law! You stand here for the law of man— I represent the law of God— Far, far above you, gentlemen— I am the accuser, the court, the jury, the executioner! And now, Madame, speak out—

GERTRUDE, *on her knees before her husband*.—Oh, have mercy, sir— Yes, I am—

RAMEL.—Oh, the wretched woman!

GERTRUDE, *to herself*.—No, No! I will not speak— He must never know the truth! (*Aloud*.) If the whole world thinks me guilty, to you I will say, to my last breath, that I am innocent! Some day, out of two graves, truth, cruel, pitiless truth, will rise and proclaim that you, you also, are guilty, that you also have been blinded by your hatred—

THE GENERAL.—I! I! Guilty! Am I losing my reason? How dare you accuse me! (*Seeing Pauline walking into the room*.) Ah! Ah! My God!

SCENE XI

THE PRECEDING. PAULINE, *leaning on* FERDINAND.

PAULINE.—I have been told everything. This woman is innocent of the crime of which she is accused. My Christian faith tells me that I can expect no forgiveness in the other life if I do not pardon all in this world. It was I who took the key of Madame's desk and secured the poison; I, who tore the scrap of paper to wrap in it the drug that was to end my miserable life.

GERTRUDE.—Ah, Pauline! Take my life, take from me everything I hold dear— Doctor, doctor, save her!

THE JUDGE.—Mademoiselle, are you telling us the truth?

PAULINE.—The truth! Dying persons always tell the truth!

THE JUDGE, *to Ramel*.—We shall never reach the bottom of this mystery.

PAULINE, *to Gertrude*.—And do you know why I have thus appeared to save you from certain ruin? It is because Ferdinand just whispered into my ear a word that has aroused me from my deathly sleep. He has such a horror of remaining in this life with you that he prefers to follow me to the grave where we shall rest together, united in death.

GERTRUDE.—Ferdinand dead! My God! At what price am I saved?

THE GENERAL.—But unhappy child, why should you die? Have I not been, am I not still the most affec-

tionate of fathers? They dare to say that I am the guilty one.

FERDINAND.—And so you are, General.—I am the only one able to solve this terrible riddle and to tell you why you are the guilty one—

THE GENERAL.—How dare you speak thus, Ferdinand! You, to whom I offered my daughter, you of whom I was so fond—

FERDINAND.—My name is Ferdinand, Comte de Marcandal, son of General Marcandal— Do you understand now?

THE GENERAL.—Ah, son of a traitor, you were fated to bring to my home treachery and death! Defend yourself! *(He makes one threatening step toward Ferdinand as if to attack him.)*

FERDINAND.—Do you want to fight a dead man, General? *(He falls dead at his feet.)*

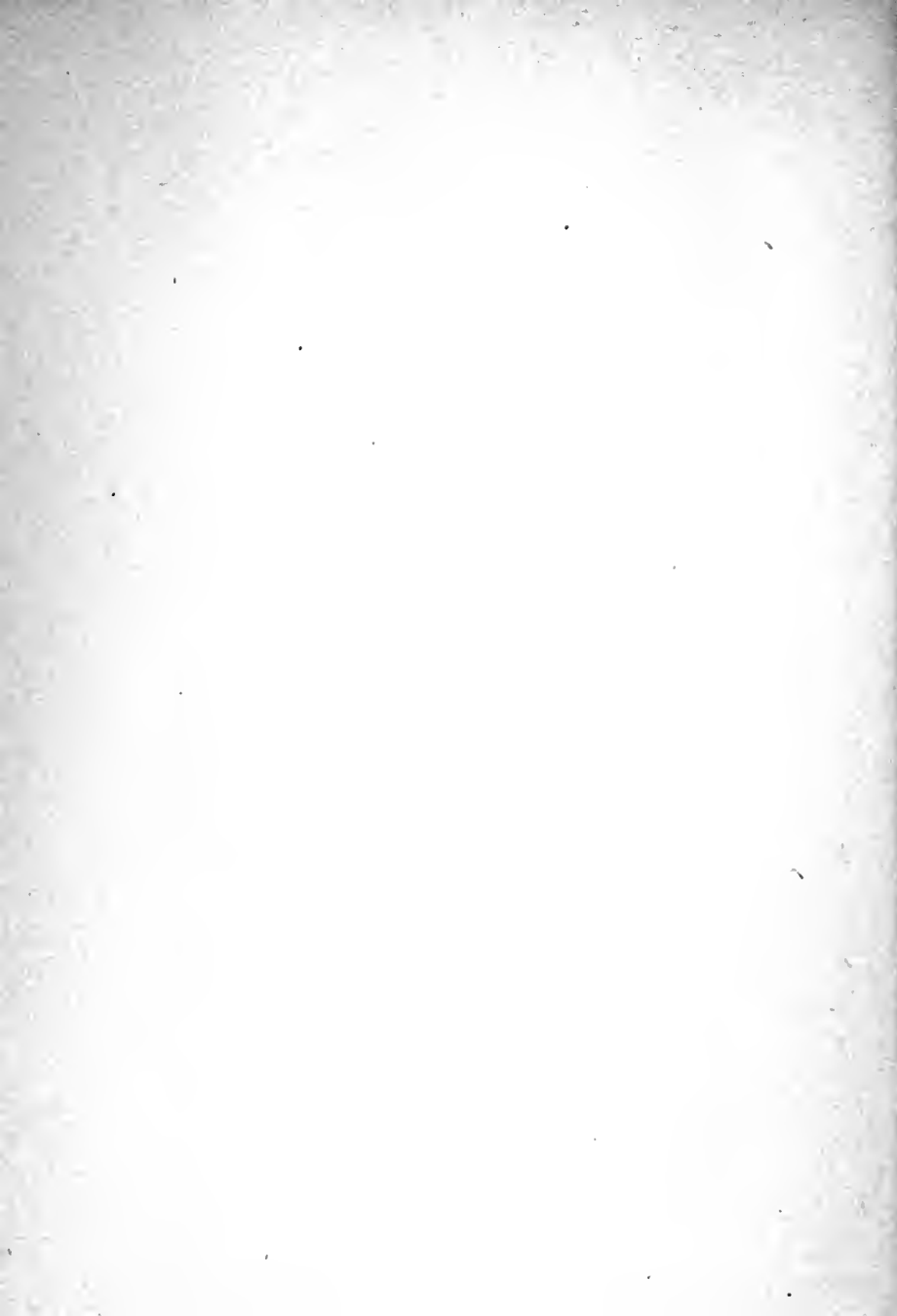
GERTRUDE, *utters a shriek and rushes toward Ferdinand.*—Oh! *(She throws herself back as the General walks toward his daughter. She pulls out a phial but almost at once throws it away.)* No, No! I condemn myself to live for this old man's sake! *(The General kneels before his daughter, breathing her last stretched on the sofa.)* Doctor, doctor, what is he doing? Is his reason forsaking him?

THE GENERAL, *stuttering like a man who cannot find his words.*—I—I—I—

VERNON.—What are you doing, General?

THE GENERAL.—I—I—am—trying—to—pray—over my dead child!!

(FINAL CURTAIN.)



MERCADET

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS AND IN PROSE

*Presented for the first time at the Théâtre du
Gymnase-Dramatique, in Paris,
August 24, 1851.*

CHARACTERS

MERCADET, a promoter.

MADAME MERCADET, his wife.

JULIE, their daughter.

MINARD, a clerk in Mercadet's office.

VERDELIN, a friend of Mercadet.

GOULARD, }
PIERQUIN, } creditors of Mercadet.
VIOLETTE, }

MERICOURT, an acquaintance of Mercadet.

DE LA BRIVE, a suitor to Julie's hand.

JUSTIN, a valet,

THERESE, a chamber-maid, } in the service of Mercadet.

VIRGINIE, a cook,

SUNDRY CREDITORS OF MERCADET.

*The three acts take place in the richly furnished apartments of
Mercadet. Time, about 1845.*

MERCADET

FIRST ACT

(A Drawing-room. A door at the back. Doors on the right and on the left. At the front of the stage, to the left, a mantel-piece with a looking-glass. To the right, a window; next to it a small table with writing material upon it; arm-chairs to the right and to the left.)

SCENE I

JUSTIN. VIRGINIE. THERESE.

JUSTIN, *going on with his dusting*.—Yes, my dears, this poor Monsieur Mercadet may swim a while longer, but drown he will, you take my word for it.

VIRGINIE, *her marketing-basket on her arm*.—Do you really think so?

JUSTIN.—Do I! I tell you, he has gone to pieces, and, although there are lots of pickings for servants in the house of a financially-embarrassed master, he owes us now a whole year's back wages, and we would do well to have ourselves bounced.

THERESE.—Bounced! That's easier said than done—Some masters are so obstinate— I have been mighty impertinent to Madame half a dozen times lately, but she doesn't seem to notice—

VIRGINIE.—Well, I've served as cook in a score of

houses, but this family beats them all! When I get tired of kitchen-work, I'll just go straight on the stage; it's a right smart actress I am now.

JUSTIN.—That's what we are all doing—acting a regular comedy—

VIRGINIE.—Why, this morning, one of the creditors came to the door and asked for Monsieur. "Monsieur!" I exclaimed, with well-feigned surprise, "don't you know that he left this morning for Lyons?"—"For Lyons?" says the party. "Yes, he has gone to close a big deal that's going to make him richer than ever, a marvelous coal mine, they say"—"Is that so? Well, well, and when is he expected back?" "Ah, that—we don't know." Yesterday, another of these fellows called; I answered the bell with a face as long and as sad as if I had lost my best beloved—

JUSTIN, *aside*.—She means her money, of course.

VIRGINIE, *mimicking a weeping woman*.—"Ah, Sir, Monsieur and Mademoiselle are in great grief— Poor, poor Madame, the doctors say there is no hope for her—the family had to leave in a hurry for the south of France"— Ha! (*She bursts out laughing.*)

THERESE.—'T isn't always such fun— Some of these creditors are very insolent—they talk to us as if we were the masters of the house!

VIRGINIE.—Well, it's decided this time— I'll tell Madame that she must settle with me at once— Anyway, the storekeepers won't deliver any more supplies except for cash—and, sure, I'm not going to advance my own money—

JUSTIN, *walking up the stage*.—Let us all ask for our wages.

VIRGINIE and THERESE, *together*.—Yes, yes, let us all ask for our wages!

VIRGINIE.—And they call themselves capitalists! Why, the real capitalists are always spending money for their table—

JUSTIN, *coming back to the front*.—And are devoted to their servants.

VIRGINIE.—And remember them handsomely in their wills— That's the kind of capitalists I care to serve.

THERESE.—Well said, Virginie— All the same, I can't help pitying Mademoiselle, their daughter, and young Minard, her beau.

JUSTIN.—Bosh! You don't expect Monsieur Mercadet to give his daughter to a no-account clerk, with 1,800 a year salary— He aims higher than that, Monsieur Mercadet—

THERESE and VIRGINIE.—Does he? And who is the man?

JUSTIN.—I don't know, for sure; though two young men drove to our door in a trap and their groom told Father Gruneau, the doorkeeper, that one of them was to marry Mademoiselle Mercadet.

VIRGINIE.—What! You don't mean those two gentlemen, with light-colored gloves and stunning waistcoats want to marry Mademoiselle?

JUSTIN, *laughing*.—Not both of them, certainly.

VIRGINIE.—Their trap was varnished to kill, the horse had rose-buds here. (*Pointing to her ear*.) It was left in charge of a little groom hardly eight years old, pink and white and frizzled, with top-boots, and the looks of a mouse gnawing at some lace work—and he swore like a Tartar! His master is as handsome as can be, with a big diamond in his necktie— You

don't mean to tell me that Mademoiselle Mercadet is to marry such as he— Never!

JUSTIN.—Oh! well! you don't know Monsieur Mercadet! Listen! I have been in this house for six years, but it is only since he began to go down, down—financially—and since I have seen him handle his creditors the way he does, that I have understood that this man can do most anything—even get rich again. One day, I'd say to myself: This time he is smashed for good and all! The auction notices would be pasted on the gate; constables and lawyers' clerks would be dumping summons and protests by the ream—I could have sold pounds of them as waste paper without his noticing it. Then, in a jiffy, everything would change and he would be on top again! You have no idea of that man's inventions! Something brand new every day in the week! And such schemes! Paving stones made out of almost anything! Ducal estates, duck-ponds, wind-mills, every thing you can think of—turned into stocks and bonds! But his cash-box must have a big hole somewhere: fill it as fast as he can, it's always empty! Only the creditors remain. But how he jollies them! One time, after I had seen them come here in a towering rage, threatening to carry off every stick of furniture, to have him arrested on the spot; he began talking to them in his fetching way and, in a moment, they were the best friends he had in the world and withdrew smiling and shaking hands. People speak of lion-tamers, of tiger-tamers—that's nothing—Monsieur Mercadet tames creditors!

THERESE.—One of them though is hard to fool—that fellow Pierquin.

JUSTIN.—A regular jackal feeding on bankrupts!
And poor father Violette—

VIRGINIE.—Half beggar—half creditor, he is—I
always feel like giving him a bowl of soup.

JUSTIN.—And that man Goulard!

THERESE.—A discounter who wants to discount me!
(*They laugh.*)

VIRGINIE.—I hear Madame.

JUSTIN.—Let us be nice to her— We'll hear some-
thing about the marriage.

SCENE II

THE SAME. MADAME MERCADET.

MADAME MERCADET, *enters from the right.*—Justin, did
you attend to the errand I gave you?

JUSTIN.—Yes, ma'am, but they refuse to deliver the
dresses, the hats, everything your ordered, until—

VIRGINIE.—I must also tell Madame that the butcher
and grocer decline to—

MADAME MERCADET.—I understand.

JUSTIN.—Monsieur's creditors are at the bottom of
this— Ah! if I only knew how to make them rue it.

MADAME MERCADET.—They have to be paid; nothing
else will do.

JUSTIN, *aside.*—Wouldn't they be surprised?

MADAME MERCADET.—It is useless to hide from you
my growing anxiety concerning Monsieur's business.
We may have to count upon your discretion— Will
you be true to us?

ALL, *speaking together.*—Sure, we will.

VIRGINIE.—We were just saying how kind our employers are.

THERESE.—And that we would throw ourselves into the fire for their sake.

JUSTIN.—Our very words! (*Mercadet appears at the back.*)

MADAME MERCADET.—Thank you, you are kind-hearted people. (*Mercadet, still unnoticed, shrugs his shoulders.*) All Monsieur needs is a little more time— He is so clever. And then there is a brilliant offer for the hand of Mademoiselle and if only—

SCENE III

THE SAME. MERCADET.

MERCADET, *interrupting his wife.*—Please, my dear!
(*The servants move away.*)

MERCADET, *aside to his wife.*—The way you talk to your servants! They'll turn impertinent, next— (*To Justin.*) Justin, go at once to Monsieur Verdelin, and ask him to come over to talk with me on a most pressing business— If you are reticent enough, he is sure to come— You, Therese, you return right away to the stores where Madame ordered the goods, and tell them, curtly, that if they deliver everything this afternoon, they'll be paid—yes, paid in cash— You may go. (*Justin and Therese move toward the door.*) Stay—let me see— Ah! if these gentlemen call again, show them in here.

(*Madame Mercadet takes a seat at the right.*)

JUSTIN.—These gentlemen— What gentlemen?

THERESE and VIRGINIE.—Yes, what gentlemen?

MERCADET.—Why! Don't you know them by this time? My "gentlemanly" creditors, of course.

MADAME MERCADET.—Your creditors!

MERCADET, *taking a seat by the table to the right.*—Why, yes, my dear. I am feeling lonely; I need their company. (*To Justin and Therese.*) That's all right.

(*They withdraw, but Virginie lingers.*)

SCENE IV

MERCADET. MADAME MERCADET. VIRGINIE.

MERCADET, *to Virginie.*—Has not Madame given you her orders for the day?

VIRGINIE.—No, sir, besides, the butcher and—

MERCADET, *not heeding her.*—You'll have to distinguish yourself to-night— We'll have four guests for dinner, Monsieur Verdelin and his wife, Monsieur de Mericourt and Monsieur de la Brive; we'll sit seven at the table. These small meals are the triumph of great cooks. After a clear soup, give us a fine fish and two entrées, delicate and savory.

VIRGINIE.—But, sir, the grocer—

MERCADET, *continuing.*—The next service— Oh! that must be brilliant and toothsome; at the same time, substantial and dainty— Let us see—

VIRGINIE.—But the butcher, the grocer, sir—

MERCADET.—What? the butcher, the grocer? How can you talk of these people the very day my daughter's future husband is to be introduced to her!

VIRGINIE.—But they won't deliver any more goods, sir—

MERCADET.—What's that? Storekeepers that won't deliver goods! Why, my good woman, patronize other dealers— Go to their competitors, tell them I'll trade with them, and they will be so glad that they'll tip you.

VIRGINIE.—And when I leave, how am I going to pay them?

MERCADET.—Don't worry about that. It's their business.

VIRGINIE.—But suppose they hold me responsible— Now, really, I can't do it!

MERCADET, *rising*.—(*Aside*.) This girl has money. (*Aloud*.) Virginie, you ought to know by this time, that credit is the very basis of government. Indeed, the storekeepers would show positive contempt for the laws of their country, they would be little short of radicals and enemies of the constitution, if they did not leave me in peace— Don't bother me by talking about people in open insurrection against the vital principle of all well-ordered nations— You just go and take care of the dinner, and show us what an A-1 cook like you can do in her line! And if, Madame Mercadet, the day after her daughter's marriage, should happen to owe you— I'll settle it myself!

VIRGINIE, *hesitating*.—Well, sir—

MERCADET.—Just go away! I'll make your money earn you 10 per cent. interest every six months— That's better than any savings bank, isn't it?

VIRGINIE.—I should think so, it hardly pays me 4 per cent—

MERCADET, *aside to his wife*.—Now, don't you see?

(*To Virginie.*) What! you invest your money in a stranger's hands! I should have thought you shrewd enough to take care of your savings yourself, and in this house.

VIRGINIE, *aside, walking to the door.*—Ten per cent. interest every six months!— (*Turns around.*) I'll attend to the dinner, sir; please have Madame instruct me about it. Now, I'll cook the luncheon. (*Exit Virginie.*)

SCENE V

MERCADET. MADAME MERCADET.

MERCADET, *looking at Virginie as she leaves the room.*— This girl has put in the savings bank three thousand francs she squeezed out of us— We don't need to worry about her department for a while.

MADAME MERCADET.—Oh! Monsieur Mercadet, can you allow yourself to sink so low?

MERCADET.—Madame, there is no detail too small for the wise man to attend to— Do not judge my ways— A moment ago, when you were trying to humor your servants, they had to be ordered about, curtly, as Napoleon did.

MADAME MERCADET.—How am I to order them about, when we have stopped paying them?

MERCADET.—That's just it— They have to be paid in audacity.

MADAME MERCADET.—But can we not obtain from their attachment what they would refuse to—?

MERCADET.—Their attachment! Oh how little you

know our times! To-day, Madame, there is no more household attachment—nothing but individual selfishness. Everybody's heart is in a cash-box! Even a wife hardly counts upon her husband— She prefers an insurance policy on his life. We pay our debt to our country by hiring a man to play soldier in our place! All our duties are turned into contracts! Our servants—as frequently changed as France does its constitution—have no staid attachment for their masters. They will be devoted to you as long as you have their money in your hands—

MADAME MERCADET.—O sir! What are you saying? You, always so honorable, so honest!

MERCADET.—You mean that from words to acts there is but a step? Well, you may depend on it that I'll do everything to save myself, for (*pulling a five-franc piece from his pocket*) here is Modern Honor! Do you know why dramas with rascals as chief heroes are so popular? It's because the audience goes home, after the play, thinking: "How much more virtuous we are than those scoundrels!"

MADAME MERCADET.—My dear husband—

MERCADET.—Yes—I know—I have an excuse— I am crushed under the weight of my partner's crime— That man, Godeau, who ran away after embezzling our firm's capital!— Anyway, there is nothing dishonorable in owing something to somebody! Every man owes his father his life. Does he ever return it? Mother Earth is in a state of chronic insolvency toward the Sun. Life, Madame, life itself is a constant succession of borrowing, borrowing— And it's not every one that can get into debt! Am I not my creditors' superior? I have their money, they are

awaiting mine— I ask nothing of them, they are ceaselessly importuning me. A man without debts! why, nobody cares a fig about him! while my creditors are thinking of me all the time!

MADAME MERCADET.—Yes, and rather too much, I should say. Of course, to owe when one can pay is right enough, but to borrow when you know in advance that you cannot pay—

MERCADET.—Oh! why bestow such pity upon my creditors, they trusted us.—

MADAME MERCADET.—Because they believed in us—

MERCADET.—No, Madame—because they wanted to make money out of us! The speculator and the stockholder are two birds of the same breed—they want to get rich in a day and an hour. In my time, I have helped every one of these creditors of mine, and now they want to extract something more out of me. Where should I be, had I not a thorough knowledge of their interests and of their weaknesses? You'll see in a few minutes, how I can sing to each one the tune that suits him. (*He takes a seat to the left.*)

MADAME MERCADET.—Yes! I heard you say—

MERCADET.—That I was ready to receive them. I have to. (*Taking her hand.*) I have just come down to my last resource, dear friend; now is the time for a bold stroke—and Julie will help me succeed.

MADAME MERCADET.—Our daughter!

MERCADET.—My creditors are pressing me, harassing me, I must marry Julie brilliantly in order to dazzle them into giving me more time to turn around— But to bring about this marriage, those kind gentlemen will have to let me have some more money.

MADAME MERCADET.—They, give you money!

MERCADET.—Must we not have spot cash to pay for the gowns you are expecting to-day and to purchase a trousseau worthy of my daughter? By the way, with a dowry of 200,000 francs, nothing less than a 15,000 franc trousseau will do—don't you think so?

MADAME MERCADET.—But you have no such dowry to give away.

MERCADET, *rising*.—All the more reason, then, to give the trousseau.—Now, listen: We must have 12,000 to 15,000 francs for the trousseau and at least three thousand more to settle pressing household accounts. It would not do to let Monsieur de la Brive suspect that we are in the least financially embarrassed!

MADAME MERCADET.—But the idea of asking your creditors for that money?

MERCADET.—Why not? Have they not become, so to speak, members of the family? Find me any relative as anxious as they are to see me wealthy and rich! Relatives are always somewhat envious of any happiness or lucky turn Providence may send our way—our creditors, never. Should I die now, there would be more creditors than relatives to follow my hearse; the first might mourn me in their hearts and show it in their clothes; the latter would feel my loss in their account-books and in their purses; that's where death creates a real void! The heart forgets after a year or less; crepe is thrown aside—but the unpaid debt remains unpaid and the gap is ever yawning.

MADAME MERCADET.—But, my dear husband, I know your creditors—you'll not obtain anything from them.

MERCADET.—I'll obtain from them time and money.
(*Madame Mercadet makes a movement of surprised*)

protest.) Don't you know, my dear, that once they have opened their purses, creditors are like gamblers, and will continue throwing good money after bad. (*Excitedly.*) Oh, they are simply inexhaustible mines! If you have no father to leave you a fortune, your creditors will act the part of delightfully generous uncles—they'll never tire of helping you!

JUSTIN, *entering from the back.*—Monsieur Goulard asks whether Monsieur really wants to see him?

MERCADET, *to his wife.*—He is amazed. (*To Justin.*) Ask him to walk in. (*Exit Justin.*) Goulard, the most intractable of the lot! With never less than three constables in his employ! Luckily, he is a cowardly and greedy speculator who puts his money in the most risky enterprises and trembles with fear lest they miscarry—

JUSTIN, *announcing.*—Monsieur Goulard. (*Exit Justin.*)

SCENE VI

THE PRECEDING. GOULARD.

GOULARD, *in an angry voice.*—So you consent to be at home, sir, when it pleases you!

MADAME MERCADET, *aside to Mercadet.*—He seems to be furious.

MERCADET, *with a reassuring gesture.*—Monsieur is my creditor, my dear.

GOULARD.—Yes, I am—and I won't leave this place until I receive my money.

MERCADET, *aside.*—You shall not leave this place until you have given me some money. (*Aloud.*) You have

hounded me pretty hard, Goulard, just as if we had not had so many dealings together.

GOULARD.—Dealings that were not all profitable.

MERCADET.—Of course they were not all profitable; if all dealings were, everybody would go into business.

GOULARD.—You don't suppose I came here to get new evidence of your clever wit. I know you are brighter than I—you have my money.

MERCADET.—Well! money has got to be somewhere, you know. (*To his wife.*) You see here, my dear, a man who has hunted me as if I were a rabbit. Yes, Goulard, you have treated me shamefully, and any one else, in my place, would take his revenge—I could make you lose a big sum of money—

GOULARD.—So you will, if you don't pay what you owe me— But I'll take care of that— The order of arrest is in the Sheriff's hands.

MADAME MERCADET.—The order of arrest!

MERCADET.—Is in the Sheriff's hands! I declare, you must have gone crazy! But, wretched man, you don't know what you are doing! You are ruining me, and ruining yourself, by one fell blow—

GOULARD, *anxious*.—What's that? You, I don't deny, but not me! How could it be?

MERCADET.—You are ruining us both, I tell you! Quick, don't lose a minute, and write—

GOULARD, *mechanically sitting down and picking up a pen*.—Write—What? To whom?

MERCADET.—To Delannoy, your cashier, asking him to have proceedings against me stopped at once—and to send me 3,000 francs, of which I am in pressing need.

GOULARD, *throwing the pen away*.—Three thousand francs—I guess not—

MERCADET.—You hesitate, when I am just about to marry my daughter to a powerfully rich man— You want me arrested— You throw away your claim, your capital and interest— You—

GOULARD.—Are you really going to marry your daughter?

MERCADET.—To the Count de la Brive, worth as many thousands a year as there are years in his age!

GOULARD.—Then if he is a man of age all the better— I might give you a little time— But no, that's no use, I won't be fooled again— No delay—nothing; good-bye— (*He turns to go.*)

MERCADET, *with great energy*.—All right—you may go, ungrateful man—but, remember that I tried to save you—

GOULARD.—To save me—from what?

MERCADET, *aside*.—I've got him— (*Aloud.*) From what? From total ruin!

GOULARD.—From ruin! That's preposterous!

MERCADET, *taking a seat to the right*.—How can it be that you, an intelligent, shrewd man, whom I thought so clever—so very clever, could make such a deal! I tell you, it makes me furious to think of it, furious against you— Not that I have such great affection for you—simply because I have looked upon your future somewhat as my own. I used to say to myself: I owe him so much already that I can depend upon his coming to my help on some great occasion—like this one for instance! And here you are, risking all you have in the world in one enterprise! Ah! You were right in refusing me those three thousand francs! Better sink them with the rest. Send me to the

debtor's prison, my dear fellow— Then you'll know where to look for a friend when all is gone—

GOULARD, *coming closer to Mercadet.*—Mercadet! My dear Mercadet! Is what you say really true?

MADAME MERCADET, *indignantly.*—Sir—

MERCADET.—What a disaster! If I were not here to save him—

GOULARD.—Mercadet! Are you speaking of the Basse-Indre Mining Co.?

MERCADET.—Of course I am. (*Aside.*) Ah! rascal so you have got Basse-Indre stock, have you?

GOULARD.—But I thought the deal a splendid one—

MERCADET.—Splendid— Yes, for those who sold out yesterday.

GOULARD.—Sold out! Who? What?

MERCADET.—Of course they sold out, yesterday afternoon, after the close of the Exchange, a secret deal—

GOULARD.—Good - by then, and many thanks; Madame, my best regards—

MERCADET, *stopping him.*—Goulard!

GOULARD.—What is it?

MERCADET.—And those few lines for Delannoy?

GOULARD.—I'll tell him to delay proceedings.

MERCADET.—No, sit down right here and send him a written order; in the meantime I'll tell you of someone who will buy your stock.

GOULARD, *sitting at the table.*—All my Basse-Indre stock? (*He takes up a pen.*) And who is he?

MERCADET, *aside.*—Now look at this honest man, ready to rob his neighbor. (*Aloud.*) Write down "three months' time"—

GOULARD.—All right— It's down— "Three months' time."

MERCADET.—My man, who is buying on the quiet for fear of a rise, wants three hundred shares— I suppose you have as many as that?

GOULARD.—I have three hundred and fifty.

MERCADET.—Fifty more! Never mind, he'll swallow them. (*Looking at the writing.*) By the way, did you write about the three thousand francs?

GOULARD.—What's the man's name?

MERCADET.—His name? You did not write about—

GOULARD.—His name!

MERCADET.—The three thousand francs!

GOULARD.—What a fellow you are! (*He writes.*) Well it's here now.

MERCADET.—His name is Pierquin.

GOULARD, *rising*.—Pierquin!

MERCADET.—That is, he is the man in charge of the purchases. Go straight home; I'll send him to you— You must not seem to be running after a buyer.

GOULARD.—Of course not! You have saved my life! Good-by, friend. Madame, please accept my best wishes for your daughter's happiness. (*Exit Goulard.*)

MERCADET.—One of them bagged! I'll get them all, one after the other!

SCENE VII

MADAME MERCADET. MERCADET. *Later* JULIE.

MADAME MERCADET.—Was it the truth you told this man just now? I have given up trying to unravel what you tell them.

MERCADET.—It is to my friend Verdelin's interest to create a panic on Basse-Indre stock. The business of

the company, which has been quite poor so far, will be **marvelously improved** by the discovery of new veins of ore; but only the insiders know of it. Oh, if only I was able to buy two or three hundred thousand francs' worth of that stock—I'd be a made man again—Well, never mind this, just now, Julie's marriage is the first matter to attend to.

MADAME MERCADET.—I hope you know everything about this Monsieur de la Brive, my dear husband.

MERCADET.—I dined at his place yesterday. A most charming flat—superb silverware all marked with his crest! Couldn't have borrowed it! Ah! this is a splendid match for our daughter— As for the young man— Well, well, when one of the two parties to a matrimonial contract is satisfied that's a pretty good average, I tell you—

(Julie enters from the right.)

MADAME MERCADET.—Here is our daughter, dear. Julie, your father and I wish to talk to you on a subject which is always welcome to a young girl.

JULIE.—Oh! Has Monsieur Minard spoken to you, papa?

MERCADET.—Monsieur Minard! Madame, did you expect a Monsieur Minard to be master of your daughter's heart? By the way, that Monsieur Minard, is he not a petty clerk of mine?

JULIE.—Yes, papa.

MERCADET.—And you love him?

JULIE.—Yes, papa.

MERCADET.—To love is easy enough; to be loved is the main thing.

MADAME MERCADET.—Does he love you?

JULIE.—Yes, mamma.

MERCADET.—Yes, papa— Yes, mamma— That's baby talk— How is it that full grown girls must speak as if they had just emerged from the nursery? Be kind enough to call your mother, ma'am, so that she may get the benefit of her beauty and persistent youth.

JULIE.—Yes, sir, I will.

MERCADET.—Oh! you may call me papa— I don't mind it. Now tell me, what proof have you that he loves you.

JULIE.—The best of all proofs— He wants to marry me—

MERCADET.—These young girls, like nursery children, have answers that knock one down— Now listen, Mademoiselle— A clerk with eighteen hundred a year salary does not know how to love— He hasn't got the time for it—he owes it all to his firm—

MADAME MERCADET.—My poor child—

MERCADET.—Oh, I have it! Let me talk to her! Listen, Julie, I will let you marry Minard. (*Joyful movement on the part of Julie.*) Wait— You have no money to bring him, understand— What will become of you, a week after you are married? Have you thought of that?

JULIE.—Yes, papa, I have.

MADAME MERCADET, *kindly to her husband.*—The dear child must be crazy—

MERCADET.—No, she is in love. (*To Julie.*) Speak out, Julie; I am not your father now, I am your confidant; go on.

JULIE.—After we are married, we will keep on loving each other.

MERCADET.—But is Cupid to offer you gold on the tip of his arrow?

JULIE.—Papa, we shall live in a small flat, on the fifth story, if need be and in the most unpretentious of suburbs! I'll be his maid-of-all-work— Oh! with what delight will I busy myself with household duties, thinking all the time that I am doing it for him; he will be working for me while I work for him! I will save him all the worry I can— He will hardly notice how poor we are; our home will be so neat, so dainty— Good taste needs so little to display itself—it comes from the soul, and happiness is its cause as well as its effect. I can earn enough with my brush to be of no expense to him and even to bear my share of his load; and then, love will help us live over the hard days— Adolphe is full of ambition, like all high-minded men, and he is sure to succeed—

MERCADET.—He might succeed as a bachelor; once married, he'll wear himself out settling household bills and spend his spare time running after a thousand-franc banknote as a dog follows a carriage—

JULIE.—But, papa, Adolphe has such strength of character and such talents that he'll reach almost any position! Why, he may be Secretary of State some day—

MERCADET.—Of course he may— In our time everybody thinks he'll be a minister of something or other. They hardly graduate from college before they believe themselves poets, orators, statesmen! Do you know what your Adolphe really will be? A father of children, who will quickly upset your plan of a thrifty and saving life, and, through the piling-up of debts, will land his excellency in the debtor's jail— What you

just described, my dear girl, is the romance, not the reality of life. (*He walks up the stage.*)

MADAME MERCADET.—My daughter, there is nothing serious in this love affair.

JULIE.—It is a love for the sake of which he and I would sacrifice everything.

MERCADET, *coming to the front again.*—By the way, your Adolphe believes we are wealthy, does he not?

JULIE.—He never has mentioned money matters to me.

MERCADET.—Of course—I understand—Julie, be kind enough to write to him at once asking him to call upon me—

JULIE.—Oh, papa! (*She kisses him.*)

MERCADET.—And you shall marry Monsieur de la Brive— Instead of a fifth floor flat in a humble suburb, you will have, for a home, a fine mansion on the Chaussée d'Antin, and if you are not a Secretary of State's wife, you may become the life companion of a Peer of France. I am sorry, my child, not to have anything better to offer you. Besides, you will have no choice: Monsieur Minard will give you up of his own accord.

JULIE.—Never, papa, never. But he will touch your heart—

MADAME MERCADET.—And suppose he really loves her?

MERCADET.—I tell you, she deceives herself.

JULIE.—I only wish never to be worse deceived.

(*The door bell rings.*)

MADAME MERCADET.—The bell is ringing, and there's no servant in the house to open the door.

MERCADET.—Well, let it ring.

MADAME MERCADET.—I cannot help imagining that it is Godeau returning to us—

MERCADET.—After his eight years' absence you still hope for Godeau's return! My dear, you remind me of the old Grenadiers, forever awaiting their Napoleon!

MADAME MERCADET, *listening to the door bell*.—It is still ringing.

MERCADET.—Julie, you may as well go to the door. Tell the caller that your mother and I are both out—If he does not believe a young girl's statement, he must be a creditor—and you may let him in. (*Exit Julie, at the back.*)

MADAME MERCADET.—This love outburst has touched me.

MERCADET.—You women are full of sentimental notions.

JULIE, *entering*.—It's Monsieur Pierquin, papa.

MERCADET.—A full fledged usurer—a low, crawling creature who will cringe just as long as he thinks I have any resources left—a kind of ferocious jackal held in check by my audacity. If, for a minute, I showed the white feather he would devour me—(*Stepping to the door.*) Come in, Pierquin, come in.

SCENE VIII

THE SAME. PIERQUIN.

PIERQUIN.—I offer my congratulations—I know all about the splendid match you contemplate—Made—

moiselle is about to marry a millionaire— It's the talk of the town.

MERCADET.—A millionaire. Oh, no! He is hardly worth more than nine hundred thousand.

PIERQUIN.—This splendid advertisement will give patience to many people— That tale of Godeau's return was getting somewhat stale, and I myself—

MERCADET.—You were thinking of having me arrested—

JULIE.—Arrested!

MADAME MERCADET.—Oh! Sir!

PIERQUIN.—Well, you see, my claim is two years overdue, and I never allow my collections to fall so much in arrears. However, this new invention of yours—

MADAME MERCADET.—Invention!

MERCADET.—Let me tell you, sir, that my future son-in-law, Monsieur de la Brive, is a young man of—

PIERQUIN.—What! A real, live young man? How much do you pay that young man?

MADAME MERCADET.—Oh!

MERCADET, *silencing his wife with a gesture*.—Enough impertinence, sir—or you will force me to ask for a detailed settlement of our account—and I should n't be surprised if such proceedings were to cost you a pretty penny, Master Pierquin. At the rate you are loaning your money, why, I bring you in more profit than a regular gold mine—

PIERQUIN.—Sir—

MERCADET, *haughtily*.—Sir, I'll soon be rich enough not to have to stand any joking—not even from a creditor.

PIERQUIN.—But—

MERCADET.—Not a word—or I'll pay you your just dues! Come into the library, and we'll settle the business for which I sent for you.

PIERQUIN.—At your service, sir. (*Aside.*) The extraordinary man! (*Exit to the left into Mercadet's library, and as he passes the ladies, he bows respectfully.*)

MERCADET, *walking behind him, to his wife.*—The wild beast is tamed— Things will go my way.

SCENE IX

MADAME MERCADET. JULIE. *Later* THE SERVANTS.

JULIE.—Oh! Mamma! I can never marry Monsieur de la Brive!

MADAME MERCADET.—But he is a rich man.

JULIE.—I prefer poverty and happiness to wealth and wretchedness.

MADAME MERCADET.—My child, there is no possible happiness in poverty; there is no wretchedness that wealth does not alleviate.

JULIE.—What disheartening words!

MADAME MERCADET.—The parents' experience ought to be the children's lesson. The trials we are going through now are a cruel illustration of life as it really is— My dear daughter, be wise and marry money.

JUSTIN, *entering through the door at the back, followed by Therese and Virginie.*—Madame, we have executed all Monsieur's orders.

VIRGINIE.—Everything is on hand for the dinner.

THERESE.—The tradespeople will send their goods this afternoon.

JUSTIN.—As to Monsieur Verdclin—

SCENE X

THE SAME. MERCADET, *entering with papers in his hand.*

MERCADET.—Well, what of my friend Verdelin?

JUSTIN.—He'll be down in a moment. He was on his way to bring some funds to Monsieur Bredif, the owner of this house.

MERCADET.—Bredif is a millionaire— You watch for the arrival of Monsieur Verdelin and have him come to me first. Well, Therese, what about the milliner, the dressmaker?

THERESE.—Oh! as soon as I spoke of cash payment, sir, they were all smiles.

MERCADET.—All right—and the dinner, Virginie, will it be a success?

VIRGINIE.—Monsieur will compliment me.

MERCADET.—And the storekeepers?

VIRGINIE.—They'll have to wait, that's all.

MERCADET.—I'll settle with you to-morrow— I'll settle with all of you— You may go now! (*Exeunt the servants.*) Just have your servants on your side and you are better off than a minister with every newspaper singing his praise—

MADAME MERCADET.—And Pierquin.

MERCADET, *showing the bundle of papers.*—Here is all I could get out of him—a stoppage of the proceedings against me and these papers, in exchange for a few shares of stock I had left. This is a claim, with judgment all complete, for 47,000 francs against a man called Michonin, a very insolvent specimen of a gentleman-rider, a very industrious kind of a chevalier, with an old aunt living somewhere near Bordeaux.

Monsieur de la Brive has his estate over there. I'll ask him if the claim is worth anything.

MADAME MERCADET.—But all our tradespeople are coming in a few moments—

MERCADET.—Let them come, my dear; I'll be on hand to receive them.

(The two ladies leave the room.)

SCENE XI

MERCADET. *Later* VIOLETTE.

MERCADET, *pacing the floor*.—Yes, they are coming! Everything now depends on Verdelin's doubtful friendship. Verdelin, a man whose fortune is my work! Ah! When a man has passed forty he ought to know that the world is peopled with ingrates—But I'll be blown if I see where the benefactors are! Verdelin and I have the highest esteem for each other. He owes me lots of gratitude, I owe him some money; neither of us pays his debts. And to-day, to secure Julie's marriage, I must find three thousand francs in a pocket that he will surely declare to be empty—I must break into his heart to break into his safe—What an undertaking! Adored women are the only beings that succeed in that line.

JUSTIN, *speaking outside*.—Yes, sir, he is in.

MERCADET.—Ah! here he comes. *(Walks to the back of the stage. Violette appears.)* My dear friend— Oh! is that you Father Violette?

VIOLETTE.—This is my eleventh call in a week, my

dear Monsieur Mercadet, and want, actual want compelled me to wait for you yesterday, three hours, on the sidewalk; finally I had to believe what they said, that you had gone into the country, but to-day—well, here I am.

MERCADET.—My poor Father Violette, we are just as hard up, you and I!

VIOLETTE.—I hardly think so— At home we have had to pawn everything we possessed.

MERCADET.—That's just what we have begun to do here.

VIOLETTE.—I never before have approached you with the tale of my absolute financial ruin— You thought you would make us both rich— But talk pays no bills, so I am compelled to ask you for a little something to apply on the interest due—I don't ask—I actually beg of you, for the sake of a starving family—

MERCADET.—Father Violette, you break my heart! Be of good cheer, I'll divide with you. (*Lowering his voice.*) We have hardly one hundred francs in the house and it's my daughter's own pin money—

VIOLETTE.—Is that possible! You, Mercadet, whom I have known so rich!

MERCADET.—I am hiding nothing from you.

VIOLETTE.—Unfortunates owe each other the truth!

MERCADET.—Oh! if they owed only that, how quickly accounts would be ignored! But, keep my secret; my daughter is just about to marry.

VIOLETTE.—I have two daughters, sir, and they both work, work without hope of ever marrying— I hate to trouble you in the circumstances you mention—but my wife, my girls, are awaiting my return with such anguish—

MERCADET.—All right then, I'll give you sixty francs. (*Goes out by the door at the left.*)

VIOLETTE.—How my wife and daughters will bless you, sir. (*Aside while Mercadet is absent from the room.*) The others harass him and get nothing; but, by complaining and begging as I do, I manage to get my little interest money, he! he! (*He chuckles, while tapping his waistcoat pocket.*)

MERCADET, *entering, sees the gesture of triumphant glee.*—(*Aside.*) What? Oh, the old miserly beggar! Sixty francs on account, paid ten times, come to 600 francs! Well—I have sowed enough, now is harvest time! (*Aloud.*) Here is the money.

VIOLETTE.—Sixty francs! and in gold! How long it is since I have seen as much—Good-by, sir; we shall pray for Mademoiselle's happiness!

MERCADET.—Good-bye, Father Violette. (*Keeping the hand he has grasped.*) Poor fellow, every time I see you, I feel almost ill— Your misfortune touches me to the quick— And, think of it, yesterday I thought I saw myself on the eve of paying back all I owe, principal and interest—

VIOLETTE.—Of paying me back—everything—

MERCADET.—It came within a hair's breadth!

VIOLETTE.—Oh, tell me about it!

MERCADET.—Just imagine, my dear man, the most brilliant discovery, the most stupendous speculation, the most sublime invention! Something that appeals to all, that will open every purse, and for the realization of which a stupid banker refused me the pitiful sum of three thousand francs—when there is a clear million in sight!

VIOLETTE.—A million!

MERCADET.—A million to start with, because, when fairly launched, nobody knows where the popularity of the—of the “conservative pavement” will stop—

VIOLETTE.—The “conservative—

MERCADET.—Pavement.” A pavement that renders all barricades, all rioting, impossible. Hence, the name—

VIOLETTE.—You don't say so!

MERCADET.—I do— You see how every government, deeply interested in the continuance of peace and order in the streets, will become our first stockholders— Nothing but ministers, princes, kings even—are to be our original subscribers— In their train will come the Napoleons of finance, the great capitalists, bankers and speculators of all grades and sizes—even the socialistic agitators, foreseeing the ruin of their business will have to buy our stock to get some money to live on!

VIOLETTE.—Ah! That's splendid! That's great!

MERCADET.—More than that— It's sublime! It's philanthropic! And to think of those poor fools refusing me 4,000 francs for the expenses of promotion.

VIOLETTE.—Four thousand francs! I thought it was—

MERCADET.—Four thousand francs! Not a franc more! And I offered half the profits! A fortune, ten fortunes!

VIOLETTE.—Listen! Listen! I'll look around—I'll speak to somebody!

MERCADET.—On your life, don't say a word! Why they would rob us of the idea—or again, they might not grasp it as quickly, as intelligently as you did, just now— These moneyed people are so stupid! Then, besides, I expect Verdellin, every minute—

VIOLETTE.—Verdelin— Well, one might—perhaps—
 MERCADET.—Lucky Verdelin! What a fortune for
 him if he'll just put up six thousand francs—

VIOLETTE.—But you spoke of four thousand francs, a
 moment ago.

MERCADET.—They refused me four thousand francs—
 but the business needs six thousand! By just invest-
 ing six thousand francs, Verdelin, whom I have already
 made a millionaire will become two, three, four times,
 a millionaire—and it will be fair enough, for, after
 all, Verdelin is a wide-awake fellow!

VIOLETTE.—Mercadet, I'll find you that amount.

MERCADET.—No, no, it's no use. He is on his way
 here, and if I am not to close the deal with him, it will
 have to be closed with another before his arrival.
 This, of course, being out of the question, all I can do
 is to say, to you, good-by—and be of good cheer—
 you'll get back your 30,000 francs.

VIOLETTE.—But I say, couldn't we?—couldn't I—?

MADAME MERCADET, *entering*.—Monsieur Verdelin has
 just arrived, my dear.

MERCADET, *aside*.—That's pat— (*Aloud*.) Please
 keep him in the next room a few minutes. (*Exit
 Madame Mercadet*.) Good-by, Father Violette—

VIOLETTE, *pulling out a greasy pocketbook*.—Stay—
 just a moment—I have the amount with me, and I'll
 close the deal right now.

MERCADET.—You—with 6,000 francs in your pocket!

VIOLETTE.—Yes—a friend of mine asked me to find
 him an investment—

MERCADET.—You could find no better one— Later
 in the afternoon, we shall sign an agreement! (*He*

takes the banknotes.) Here goes— Verdelin is losing the chance of his life!

VIOLETTE.—Until later—

MERCADET.—Yes, I'll send for you— Come this way. (*He leads him out through the library door to the left; as the door closes Madame Mercadet enters.*)

MADAME MERCADET.—Monsieur Mercadet!

MERCADET, *coming down the stage.*—My dear wife, I am a fool, a wretched fool, I ought to blow my brains out!

MADAME MERCADET.—Oh, Lord! what is the matter?

MERCADET.—The matter! Why, a minute ago I struck father Violette—this humbug of a pretended broken-down capitalist—for six thousand francs—

MADAME MERCADET.—And he refused you?

MERCADET.—On the contrary, he handed them over right away—

MADAME MERCADET.—Well then?

MERCADET.—Why, like a fool, I had to take the paltry six thousand when it would have been just as easy to have gotten ten thousand francs out of him.

MADAME MERCADET.—What an extraordinary man you are! By the way, you have forgotten that Verdelin is waiting for you in the next room.

MERCADET.—That's all right. Tell him to come in here. I have now collected enough money for Julie's trousseau; next, I must get hold of the funds necessary for household expenses and your dressmaker's bill, so as to carry us through until after the marriage has actually taken place. By all means, send Verdelin to me.

MADAME MERCADET.—Oh! He is our friend; he'll let you have what you need. (*Exit Madame Mercadet.*)

MERCADET, *alone*.—A friend—a friend— We'll see. He is all puffed up with his money— He has not been swindled yet by a scamp of a Godeau. (*Looking round to see if he is alone.*) Godeau— Well, I wonder whether the fellow's embezzlement has not helped me make more money than he took away with him—

SCENE XII

MERCADET. VERDELIN.

VERDELIN.—How do, Mercadet? What is it you want? Your man stopped me on my way up to Bredif's.

MERCADET.—Oh! Bredif can wait! I am surprised that a man like you should call on such a fellow.

VERDELIN, *laughing*.—If we called only on the people we respect I'm afraid one's visiting list would be rather short.

MERCADET, *laughing and shaking him by the hand*.—One might even feel like not returning home.

VERDELIN.—Well, now what do you want of me?

MERCADET.—You do not leave me time enough to gild the pill— Have you not guessed what I am after?

VERDELIN.—My poor comrade, I can do nothing more for you. I have not the ready money, and even if I had it, I feel I have gone far enough. All I could possibly spare I have let you have, and you'll admit that I never have asked you to return one franc. I am your friend, as well as your creditor. But, honestly, if I were not by nature a grateful man, if I were an

ordinary, everyday individual, the creditor in me would have killed the friend long ago—I tell you, there is a limit to everything—

MERCADET.—There are limits to friendship—none to misfortune.

VERDELIN.—If I were rich enough to save you for good and all, to pay your debts in full, I'd do it at once, and with my whole heart; for I admire your indomitable pluck. But it can't be done, and so you had best give in to the inevitable. Your latest undertakings, clever though they were, have utterly failed; you are in the way of losing your reputation; in fact, you are becoming quite a dangerous man— You did not even manage to make the best of the short-lived success of your operations! Now, let me tell you, Mercadet, the moment you are really gone to pieces, you will find me ready to furnish you something to live on— Until then— Well, a friend's duty is to tell us such things.

MERCADET.—What would friendship be worth if it did not give us the right to find ourselves as wise as our friends appear foolish, of feeling comfortable when they are in trouble, of paying ourselves compliments while telling them all sorts of disagreeable things? So, then, on the Bourse, they rate me a scamp?

VERDELIN.—Not quite as bad as that, yet; they still consider you an honest man, but you are driven now to such expedients—

MERCADET.—And they are not being justified by success—I understand. Ah! Success! Of how many infamies is it made, I wonder? Now, here is a case, listen— This morning I started a bear campaign

against the Basse-Indre mining stock; I know you want to get it under your control, before the latest engineer's report comes out, with its favorable—

VERDELIN.—Hush! Hush! You are right, Mercadet, how clever you are! (*He pats him on the back.*)

MERCADET.—I just want you to understand that I need none of your advice and moralizing—nothing but your money. Alas! I am not begging for myself, but for my daughter's sake— She is about to be married, and, here, in this house, we have reached the limits of secret want. You are in a home where dire poverty is covered from view by a thin layer of luxury. But we have reached the point, where credit is dead, promises are of no avail, and if I cannot provide the cash for a few indispensable outlays, this marriage will fall through. I need but two weeks of apparent wealth, just as you want but twenty-four hours of time in which to fool the Stock Exchange. Verdelin, I'll not come to you twice with the same request; I have but one daughter. Must I tell you the worst? My wife and Julie have not a decent gown to their backs—

VERDELIN, *aside*.—He has acted so many comedies for my benefit, that I can hardly believe this story about his daughter's marriage— Who would marry her, under the circumstances?

MERCADET.—To-night I am giving a formal dinner to my future son-in-law, whom a mutual friend is to introduce to the ladies; and my silverware is gone—you know where— Not only do I need three thousand francs, but also the loan of your silver— Besides, you and your wife must dine with us.

VERDELIN.—Three thousand francs, Mercadet! Why,

nobody has such a sum in his house; not to lend, anyway; if one loaned such sums all the time, one would never have anything for his own use— (*He walks to the mantel-piece.*)

MERCADET, *following him, aside.*—I'll land him yet. (*Aloud.*) Verdelin, you know how dearly I love my wife and daughter; that love has been my sole consolation in my recent disaster; they are both so gentle, so patient— If I only could see them out of this awful situation! Ah! This is my greatest sorrow! (*They come down the stage arm in arm.*) In these last few years, I have had to swallow the bitterest pills, I have slipped upon my wood pavement; I have organized monopolies only to see myself swindled out of my share of the profits! But all these disappointments would be as nothing compared to a refusal on your part in such a critical time. I will not tell you to what rash act it might lead me, for I am not appealing to your pity—

VERDELIN, *sitting down, at Mercadet's right.*—Three thousand francs! Now, what use would you make of that money?

MERCADET, *aside.*—It is mine! (*Aloud.*) Don't you know, my dear fellow, that a prospective son-in-law is a bird the least little blunder will frighten away? For him, a yard of lace missing on a gown might prove a revelation! Now, I have ordered the dresses; the tradesmen will be here in a few moments with all our purchases of finery— Yes, I was rash enough to send them word to bring along their goods, and that they would be paid on delivery—I felt so sure of you! Verdelin, three thousand francs won't break you, with your sixty thousand a year, and it will be like giving

a new lease of life to the poor child you are so fond of. For you love Julie! She dotes on your little girl; they play together like the blessed darlings they are! Will you allow your daughter's friend to wither on the branch? Have a care, it's contagious! It brings ill-luck!

VERDELIN.—My dear man, I tell you I have not three thousand francs in ready cash; I'll lend you my silver, all right, but—

MERCADET.—Signing a check will take but a minute—

VERDELIN, *rising*.—I— Once for all, no!

MERCADET.—O, my poor child! your fate is settled! (*As if crushed he drops into an arm-chair.*) May God pardon me for closing abruptly this sad nightmare of a life, to awaken in His bosom!

VERDELIN, *crosses the stage silently*.—Now, tell me the truth— Have you really found a son-in-law?

MERCADET, *jumping out of his chair*.—Have I found a son-in-law! You doubt my word? Ah! Verdelin, you may refuse me the means of securing my daughter's happiness, but to insult me like this! For three thousand francs, I would not have harbored such a thought concerning you! You can only win pardon by letting me have that money—

VERDELIN, *starting for the door*.—I'll see whether I can manage it—

MERCADET.—No, that's only a way of getting rid of me. What! You, whom I have seen so often spend much larger amounts for a petty satisfaction of vanity, for a passing fancy, you refuse to invest a paltry three thousand in a generous action—

VERDELIN.—Good investments are rare nowadays. (*He laughs.*)

MERCADET, *laughing also*.—A capital joke! You laugh, I am saved. (*Verdelin, laughing still, drops his silk hat. Mercadet picks it up and brushes it on his sleeve.*) Say, old man, didn't we have fun together in the old days? For we began life hand in hand; we were to be chums until death us did part, don't you remember?

VERDELIN.—Indeed I do. Say, don't you recall our trip to Rambouillet when I had to fight a duel with an officer in the Royal Guard, all on your account—

MERCADET.—I thought you fought for the lovely eyes of Clarissa, your former sweetheart? How young we were then— And, to-day, we have daughters of marriageable age! Ah! If Clarissa were alive, now, she would reproach you for your hesitation in coming to my rescue.

VERDELIN.—Had Clarissa lived I should never have married any one else.

MERCADET.—That shows how truly you can love! And that's why I count upon you to come to dinner to-night, and to give me your word to send me—

VERDELIN.—My silverware, yes—

MERCADET.—And the three thousand francs also.

VERDELIN.—You insist! I told you I could not possibly do it.

MERCADET, *aside*.—This man certainly will not die of heart trouble. (*Aloud.*) Shall it be that my best friend will cause my death? Alas! It's always so! Nothing can move him— Not even the remembrance of Clarissa or the despair of a father reduced to the last straits! (*Shouting in the direction of his wife's room.*) All is over! No use struggling any longer! You'll see me blow out my brains—

SCENE XIII

THE PRECEDING. MADAME MERCADET. JULIE.

MADAME MERCADET, *in great agitation*.—What is it? What is it?

JULIE.—Father, your voice frightened us!

MERCADET.—The poor things heard me! You see, they rush in, as my two guardian angels! (*He takes them by the hand.*) My dears, you move me deeply. (*To Verdelin.*) Verdelin, do you really want to kill us all? This proof of their devoted love gives me the courage to fall at your feet. (*He almost kneels down.*)

JULIE, *stopping her father*.—Ah! sir, let me be the one to implore him for you— (*To Verdelin.*) Whatever it may be he is asking of you, grant it to him, sir—he must be in grievous need, if he has to beg for it in this manner.

MERCADET, *coming down the stage again*.—My darling! (*Aside.*) What accents she has! I cannot be so true to life.

MADAME MERCADET.—Monsieur Verdelin, listen to us!

VERDELIN, *to Julie*.—Have you any idea of what he wants of me?

JULIE.—None, whatever.

VERDELIN.—He wants three thousand francs to help marry you—

JULIE.—If that is his purpose, sir, never mind my request— I'll not accept a husband bought with my father's humiliation!

MERCADET, *aside*.—She is splendid!

VERDELIN, *much moved*.—Julie, I will go straight home and get you that money. (*He walks out through the center door back of the stage.*)

SCENE XIV

THE PRECEDING, *minus* VERDELIN. *Then*

THE SERVANTS.

JULIE.—Oh father! Why didn't you tell me—?

MERCADET, *kissing her*.—You simply saved us, dear—
Ah! When shall I be rich and powerful again to make
him pay for his *kindness*!

MADAME MERCADET.—Do not be unfair— He did
give in, after all.

MERCADET.—He gave in to Julie's appeal, not to
my supplications. My dear, he has put me through
more than three thousand francs worth of humiliations!

JUSTIN, *entering from the back, with Therese and Virginie*.—They are all here, sir.

VIRGINIE.—The milliner and the dressmaker.

THERESE.—And the clerks from the dry-goods stores.

MERCADET, *to himself*.—I have succeeded! My
daughter shall yet be Countess de la Brive. (*To the
servants.*) Bring them all to me! I'm waiting! The
cash is here. (*Head erect, he walks toward the door of
his study; the servants look at him amazed.*)

(ACT CURTAIN.)

ACT SECOND.

(*Mercadet's private study, in his apartment. A door at the back of the stage. Windows in the corners. Bookcases between the windows and the door. To the left, in the foreground, a large safe. To the right, an upright desk. To the left, toward the back of the stage, a flat desk used by Mercadet, forming a right angle with a bookcase and an arm-chair, the back of the latter being turned to the window. To the left, near the safe, another arm-chair. To the right, near the upright desk, a sofa.*)

SCENE I

MINARD. JUSTIN. *Later* JULIE.

MINARD, *from the back*.—You say that Monsieur Mercadet wants to see me?

JUSTIN.—Yes, sir, he does; but Mademoiselle has instructed me to have you wait for him here.

MINARD, *aside*.—Her father sends for me—and she wishes to see me before the interview takes place. Something strange is in the air.

JUSTIN.—Here is Mademoiselle.

MINARD, *rushing to her*.—Mademoiselle Julie!

JULIE.—Justin, inform my father that Monsieur Minard is here. (*Justin leaves through the back door.*) Adolphe, if you want our love to shine as purely before everyone's eyes as it does in our hearts, you must show as much courage as I will.

MINARD.—What has happened?

JULIE.—Another suitor for my hand, young and wealthy, has come forward, and my father will be pitiless.

MINARD.—What did you say? A rival! And you asked me if I felt courageous? Just tell me his name, Julie, and you will soon be convinced—

JULIE.—Adolphe, you make me shudder! If you imagine, for a moment, that such conduct would soften my father—

MINARD, *noticing Mercadet*.—Here he comes!

SCENE II

THE PRECEDING. MERCADET.

MERCADET, *from the back of the stage*.—So you are in love with my daughter, sir?

MINARD.—I am, sir.

MERCADET.—That is, she thinks you are; you were clever enough to persuade her of the fact—

MINARD.—You express a doubt that would offend me greatly if it came from any one else, sir. But how could I not love your daughter? She is the only one who ever manifested heartfelt sympathy for me, a man forsaken by his own kin and left without an affection in the world. Mademoiselle Julie is to me both a sister and the dearest of friends; I have no other family. She alone has smiled to me, and sustained me with her affection! How could I not love her beyond expression?

JULIE.—Must I remain, father?

MERCADET.—O you greedy little one! (*Addressing Minard.*) Minard, concerning love I entertain those matter-of-fact ideas for believing in which elderly people are so harshly judged by the younger generation. I am all the more suspicious in your case, because I am not one of those fathers who are blinded by paternal illusions. I see Julie just as she is; I don't say that she is plain, but her beauty is not of a kind to call forth admiring exclamations. It is of the average order, no more.

MINARD.—You are mistaken, sir; allow me to say that you do not know your daughter.

MERCADET.—Well, well, I declare—

MINARD.—I repeat it; you do not know her, sir.

MERCADET.—But I tell you, my dear fellow, I know her, I know her perfectly, as well as if—

MINARD.—No, sir, you do not!

MERCADET.—Monsieur Minard!

MINARD.—Of course you know the Julie who is familiar to everybody in her home-circle. But love has transformed her; it has endowed her with an exquisite beauty that is my own creation.

JULIE.—Father, I am ashamed to listen—

MERCADET.—You mean, delighted—I dare say that you told her such things frequently—

MINARD.—I will repeat them a hundred times, a thousand times— It cannot be wrong to do so, as long as her father is listening!

MERCADET.—You flatter me greatly. I thought I was her father, but you seem to have brought forth another Julie whose acquaintance I should be charmed to make.

MINARD.—Were you never in love?

MERCADET.—Of course I have been in love. Like

most men I have dragged along this heavy, golden ball!

MINARD.—But now we love much better than you used to.

MERCADET.—And how do you do that, if I may ask?

MINARD.—We attach ourselves to the soul, to the ideal nature.

MERCADET.—In my younger days, we called this blindfolded love.

MINARD.—This is the pure and holy love that fills with delight every hour of one's life.

MERCADET.—The hours of meals not included, I am afraid.

JULIE.—Father, do not mock the love of two young people bound to each other by a true, pure attachment, by an affection based on their knowledge of each other's character, on the absolute faith in their ability to triumph over the difficulties of life— Do not make fun of two children who will love you so tenderly.

MINARD, *to Mercadet*.—Listen to this angel, sir.

MERCADET, *aside*.—An angel! (*He slips one arm of Julie under his left arm and one arm of Minard under his right.*) You happy children! So you love each other dearly? What a sweet example of romance! (*To Minard.*) You want her as your wife?

MINARD.—I do, sir.

MERCADET.—In spite of all obstacles?

MINARD.—I am ready to overcome every one of them

JULIE.—Father, you are not grateful to me for bringing to you a son gifted with such lofty ideals, with a soul that—?

MINARD, *with a gesture of protest*.—Oh, Mademoiselle!

JULIE.—Let me finish, sir—I will also have my say.

MERCADET.—Daughter, you had best go to your mother, now. This gentleman and I must talk over matters not quite so ethereal.

JULIE.—I go, father.

MERCADET.—Come back with your mother, in a few moments, child. (*He kisses her on the forehead and leads her to the door.*)

MINARD, *aside*.—I feel hopeful.

MERCADET, *coming down the stage*.—My dear sir, I am a ruined man.

MINARD.—What do you mean!

MERCADET.—I mean that I am a total financial wreck— If you really want my Julie, she will be truly yours. Your home, poor as it may be cannot fail to be more comfortable than her parents' house. Not only has she no dowry, but she is handicapped with penniless parents. We are worse than penniless.

MINARD.—Worse than penniless— How can such a thing be?

MERCADET.—Why, sir, we have debts, piles of debts, terribly pressing debts—

MINARD.—No, no—it is not possible.

MERCADET.—You cannot believe me? (*Aside.*) He is obstinate. (*Walking to the desk and picking up a bundle of papers.*) Look over these documents, my would-be son-in-law; they'll tell you everything about my fortune—

MINARD, *with a gesture of protest*.—Monsieur Mercadet!

MERCADET.—My *negative* fortune. Read this— A sheriff's inventory of our furniture.

MINARD.—Is this possible.

MERCADET.—Of course it is possible— Here is a

whole handful of summonses— An order of arrest in a civil suit— It's dated yesterday, so, you see, things are looking pretty black— Finally, in this other large bundle, are copies of all the judgments entered against me. Oh! everything is in perfect order, for never does a man need more order in his papers than when his affairs are in the worst disorder. A well-classified disorder, one domineers over it, so to speak. What can a creditor say when he finds his claim properly and neatly docketed and filed under its number? I follow the government's red tape habits and have arranged my evidences of indebtedness in alphabetical order. So far, I have not taken up letter A. (*He places the bundles back on the desk.*)

MINARD.—You mean, you have not paid anything yet?

MERCADET.—Hardly a franc— Now, you, in the office, know what the running expenses of my business are—you are an expert bookkeeper— (*He walks back to his desk.*) Look at these figures: three hundred and eighty thousand!—

MINARD.—I see this is the total of your liabilities up to date.

MERCADET.—Now you understand how I shuddered when I heard you bewildering my daughter with your fine protestations of love. For, I tell you sir, to marry a dowerless girl on an eighteen hundred-franc salary is like mating a notice of protest with a court summons.

MINARD, *sunk in thought.*—Ruined! Absolutely ruined!

MERCADET, *aside.*—Just what I thought— (*Aloud.*) Well, young man, what have you got to say?

MINARD.—I have, first, to thank you, sir, for the frankness of your statement.

MERCADET.—That's all right— But now what about your ideal love for my daughter?

MINARD.—My love for Julie? You have opened my eyes, sir.

MERCADET, *aside*.—That's it—

MINARD.—I thought my love for her boundless, but I see now that I love her a thousand times more than I had any idea of.

MERCADET.—What? What do you say? Explain yourself!

MINARD.—Did you not tell me just now that she had need of all my courage, all my devotion! It will not be my tenderness alone that will make her happy, I'll earn her gratitude, thanks to my efforts, thanks to my indefatigable labor.

MERCADET.—Then you still want to marry her?

MINARD.—Want to marry her! Why, when I believed you a rich man, it was with fear and trembling that I asked for her hand; I was so ashamed of my poverty! While now, sir, it is with delighted assurance that I beg you to give her to me.

MERCADET, *speaking to himself*.—Well, I declare, such love is real, sincere, and noble! I had no idea a feeling like this existed in this world! (*Speaking to Minard.*) You must pardon me, young man, for the opinion I held of you! And, above all, you must pardon me the sorrow I have in store for you.

MINARD.—What sorrow, sir?

MERCADET.—My friend Minard—Julie—my daughter cannot become your wife—

MINARD.—Not become my wife, sir! After what

you know of my love—after all you have told me of your position!

MERCADET.—Yes, sir, just on account of what I confessed to you! A few minutes ago, I laid bare before you, Mercadet, the supposed rich capitalist; now, I am going to reveal to you Mercadet, the hard, skeptical, business man. I allowed you to look into my books; you may gaze, now, into my very heart.

MINARD.—Say what you have to say, sir, but bear in mind how dearly I love Mademoiselle Julie—Remember, that only my devotion can equal my love.

MERCADET.—I'll admit all this— Yes, by dint of tireless labor you'll manage to earn enough to keep Julie out of actual want. But, please, who is to take care of us, her mother and me?

MINARD.—Oh, trust me, sir, I—

MERCADET.—I know what you are going to say— You will work for four as well as for two! But, my dear man, how long will you be able to stand the strain? And besides, we should be robbing your children of their future bread—

MINARD.—What are you saying, sir!

MERCADET.—And I, in spite of your generous efforts, I should succumb, crushed under the weight of a shameful bankruptcy. Only a brilliant marriage contracted by my daughter can gain me respite from my creditors. And that respite may give me back my credit. With the assistance of a wealthy son-in-law, my fortune, my position may be reconquered! My daughter's marriage—why, that's my only salvation, the sole hope that may yet rescue my fortune and my honor! You love my daughter, my friend— Let me appeal to that very love. Do not drag her into pov-

erty. Do not bring upon her the remorse of having caused her father's ruin and shame!

MINARD, *his voice full of grief*.—What can I do? What can I do for you?

MERCADET, *pressing his hand*.—I want you to find in the noble feeling with which she has inspired you a sum of courage greater than what I possess myself.

MINARD.—I shall have all the courage needed.

MERCADET.—Then listen to me— Should I refuse you Julie's hand, she, in turn, would surely refuse the husband I wish her to marry. So, I shall have to—grant you her hand—and you will be compelled to refuse—

MINARD.—O sir! She will never believe it of me—

MERCADET.—She shall believe you if you declare that poverty frightens you, on her account.

MINARD.—She will accuse me of having been attracted solely by her money.

MERCADET.—But, in truth, she will owe you her happiness.

MINARD, *despairingly*.—She will despise me, sir!

MERCADET.—Yes, she will. But if I have read your heart aright, you love her deeply enough to sacrifice yourself, unreservedly, for her sake. Here she comes, sir, and her mother is with her— It is in both their names that I entreat you; may I count upon you?

MINARD, *with a great effort*.—You—may.

MERCADET.—Thank you. Thank you.

SCENE III

THE PRECEDING. JULIE. MADAME MERCADET.

JULIE.—Come, mother, I feel sure that by this time Adolphe has overcome all obstacles.

MADAME MERCADET.—My dear husband, M. Minard has asked you Julie's hand— What answer did you give him?

MERCADET, *crosses over to his desk and remains standing.*—Monsieur Minard will reply for himself.

MINARD, *aside.*—How can I tell her? I feel my heart breaking!

JULIE.—Well, Adolphe?

MINARD.—Mademoiselle—

JULIE.—“Mademoiselle!” Am I not any longer “Julie” to you? Oh, please answer at once—Has everything been settled with my father?

MINARD.—Your father gave me his full confidence; he made a clean breast of his present position—

JULIE.—Well! what of that? please hasten—

MERCADET.—I told our friend here that we were financially ruined—

JULIE.—And this confession changed nothing in your intentions—in your love— Is it not so, Adolphe?

MINARD, *passionately.*—In my love! (*Mercadet without the others noticing him, presses Minard's hand.*) I should deceive you, Mademoiselle, (*speaking with great effort,*) if I said that these revelations did not affect my intentions.

JULIE.—But this is impossible! It cannot be my Adolphe who is speaking thus!

MADAME MERCADET.—Julie!

MINARD, *warming up to his task*.—There are men to whom necessity gives increased energy, men whose delight it would be to devote to a beloved one the indefatigable labor of every hour of the day, fully rewarded by a tender and joyful smile— (*Resuming his part.*) But I, Mademoiselle, I do not belong to that chosen few; the thought of poverty unmans me—I could not stand the sight of your misery—

JULIE, *bursting into tears and throwing herself into her mother's arms*.—O Mamma! O Mamma!

MADAME MERCADET.—My darling girl, my poor Julie!

MINARD, *in a low voice to Mercadet*.—Have I done enough, sir?

JULIE, *not looking at Minard*.—I should have had courage for two; never would you have seen me other than smiling—I should have worked without a regret—and happiness would have always reigned in our little home— And you refused that! O Adolphe, Adolphe! You have refused all that!

MINARD, *in a low voice to Mercadet*.—O sir! Let me go—

MERCADET, *leading the way to the right*.—Come.

MINARD.—Good-by, Julie— A love that would condemn you to poverty would be that of a madman—I choose the love that sacrifices itself for the loved one's happiness—

JULIE.—I do not believe you any longer— (*To her mother in a low voice.*) My only bliss would have been to be his—

JUSTIN, *calling out from the back of the stage*.—Monsieur de la Brive! Monsieur de Mericourt!

MERCADET, *coming to the front*.—Take your daughter to your own room, Madame. You, sir, kindly follow

me— (*To Justin.*) Have these gentlemen wait here a few minutes. (*To Minard.*) Come—I am pleased with you.

(*Madame Mercadet leaves by the left side door with Julie. Mercadet and Minard withdraw by the door to the right, while Justin, going up the stage introduces the visitors by the center back entrance.*)

SCENE IV

DE LA BRIVE. MERICOURT.

JUSTIN.—Monsieur Mercadet requests the gentlemen to kindly wait for him here. (*Exit Justin.*)

MERICOURT.—At last, my dear fellow, you are inside the breastworks and about to become the official suitor of Mademoiselle Mercadet! You must steer straight now, for the father is a shrewd one.

DE LA BRIVE.—That's just what I am afraid of; he'll be a hard nut to crack.

MERICOURT.—I do not think so. Mercadet is a speculator by trade; rich to-day, he may be poor to-morrow. From what his wife told me of his intentions, I imagine that he is quite anxious to have a portion of his fortune in his daughter's name and to secure a son-in-law capable of assisting him in his financial ventures.

DE LA BRIVE.—I should like nothing better! But what if he asked for too much and too minute information concerning me?

MERICOURT.—Oh, I gave M. Mercadet excellent references about you.

DE LA BRIVE.—This is a piece of such extraordinary luck—

MERICOURT.—Will it deprive you of your vaunted assurance? I understand full well how perilous your situation has grown lately. One must reach to the very edge of absolute despair to think of marrying. Marriage nowadays is the form of suicide of the bon-vivant, while it once used to be his culminating success. (*In a low voice.*) Tell me the truth, can you hold on much longer.

DE LA BRIVE.—My dear fellow, if I did not use two names, one for the constables and one for the society world, I would long ago have been banished from the boulevard. Woman and I, as you well know, have cleaned each other's pockets pretty thoroughly, and there are no more wealthy and amorous British dowagers in quest of men of my ilk.

MERICOURT.—What about card playing?

DE LA BRIVE.—Oh, card playing is an inexhaustible resource only for a particular breed of scamps. I am not such an arrant fool as to wager my honor for the sake of a few paltry gains that would stop perforce after a while. The press, my dear fellow, has wrecked all these wicked careers formerly so profitable. Well, to cut it short, when I sign 100,000 francs of notes, the usurers refuse to give me more than 10,000 francs for the lot. Pierquin sends me to a kind of sub-Pierquin—little father Violette, they call him, and Violette tells my broker that it would be spoiling valuable stamped paper— My tailor declines to understand the brilliant future yet in store for me. My horse boards on credit. As for that nicely dressed little imp, my groom, I have not the faintest idea where he

gets his sustenance; I prefer not to unravel this mystery. As our civilization is not far advanced enough to declare all debts off every ten years, as the Jewish law prescribed, I'll have to pay up with my own person— Pretty bad, isn't it? For a young man, accepted in the most select ranks of swelldom, rather good looking and only twenty-seven years old, to be compelled to marry the daughter of a mere lucky speculator!

MERICOURT.—Oh, what does that matter?

DE LA BRIVE.—It's in pretty bad taste, I know; but then I am growing tired of this loafing existence. I have discovered lately that the shortest way to wealth is to do some work to acquire it! The trouble, with us of the fast set, is that we believe ourselves fit for every situation, when, as a matter of fact, we are good for nothing. A man, like me, capable of inspiring passions, can be neither a clerk nor a soldier! Society has no berth for us. Well then, I'll launch into speculation, in the wake of father-in-law Mercadet; he is a choice specimen of the genus "promoter." By the way, you are positive that he can give a hundred and fifty thousand franc dowry to his daughter?

MERICOURT.—Judging from Madame Mercadet's gowns— Why, one meets her at all the first nights! She has her box at the opera, and her style is elegance itself.

DE LA BRIVE.—Oh, for that matter, I have style enough myself and yet—

MERICOURT.—But look at these rooms—everything here bears the mark of wealth— Oh, they are all right—

DE LA BRIVE.—Yes, it all looks like bourgeois splen-

dor; all of a solid, standard pattern. A good omen.

MERICOURT.—Then the mother is a woman of high principles, of unimpeachable reputation. By the way, have you enough funds on hands to keep things running until the climax?

DE LA BRIVE.—Oh, I am all right, in that respect. I won enough at the club, yesterday, to allow me to do things in handsome style; on the marriage presents I'll pay part down and owe the rest.

MERICOURT.—Without including my own loans, may I ask what is the amount of your debts?

DE LA BRIVE.—A mere trifle, my dear fellow! A paltry hundred and fifty thousand, which my prospective father-in-law will have no trouble shaving down to fifty thousand. That will leave me one hundred thousand clear, just enough for a starter in speculation. I always said that I'd never begin making a fortune until I had not a blessed cent left.

MERICOURT.—Mercadet is no fool; he will question you pretty closely about your finances; have you your answers ready?

DE LA BRIVE.—Do I not still own my estate of La Brive? Three thousand acres of desert land, worth about thirty thousand and mortgaged for forty-five. It might be used as the basis for a stock company with a capital of, say, three hundred thousand, for the raising, or the extracting, of something or other. You have no idea how useful this estate has been to me.

MERICOURT.—I see— Name, estate, horse even, you use everything for a double purpose.

DE LA BRIVE.—Not so loud!

MERICOURT.—So you have your mind made up?

DE LA BRIVE.—Indeed I have— All the more since I have decided to go into politics.

MERICOURT.—You are clever enough to make a success of it!

DE LA BRIVE.—First of all I am going to be a newspaper man.

MERICOURT.—A newspaper man! Why, you never wrote a line!

DE LA BRIVE.—Oh, there are newspaper men who write, and others who don't. The first ones, the editors, drag the wagon. The others, the owners, are the livery stable keepers; they give as little oats as they can, and keep all the income. I'll be an owner. All one has to do is to look wise and to exclaim, for instance, "the Eastern question, sir, is a weighty matter, sir, and it might lead us into all kinds of complications; nobody seems to realize it." Or, one closes up a debate by saying: "England, sir, will ever fool us!" Again, to a man who has been talking a long while without being listened to in the least, you answer: "We are walking to an abyss, sir; we are far from having accomplished all the evolutions of the revolutionary cycle!" To an anxious manufacturer: "Yes, sir, I agree with you, sir, something ought to be done in this matter!" You speak little, you are seen everywhere, you render all kinds of services, rather of the mysterious sort, to people in power, often doing what they cannot do themselves. You are supposed to inspire certain much-noticed articles, and you may even have to publish a yellow-backed volume on some utopian theory or other, a book so strongly conceived and written that nobody ever opens it while everybody claims to have read it.

Thus, you become a man of importance and you end by being "somebody," while you were, until then, but a nonentity.

MERICOURT.—Alas, your program is but too often followed in our times!

DE LA BRIVE.—Followed! Why, there are proofs of it every day. When called upon to take a share in the administration, you are not asked what good you can do, but what power for harm you have. Your talents don't count half so much as the fear you inspire. Politicians are a timid crowd. So, it is a settled matter with me that the day after I am married I will assume a profound mien—and a full set of principles! There are plenty to choose from, for, in France, political principles are as varied as a restaurant bill of fare. I may decide to stand up as a—Socialist! I like the word! At all epochs, my dear fellow, there have been certain adjectives which have proved the password for the ambitiously-inclined. Before 1789, it was the fashion to call one's self an "Economist"; in 1815, the word *a la mode* was "Liberal"; and so on and so on. The party of to-morrow will be called "Socialist," doubtless because it is so unsociable. You must take the opposite of each word's meaning to understand it fully.

MERICOURT.—But, my dear fellow, all the eloquence you possess is that of the masked-ball that passes for wit among those not blessed with it! What will you do when some real knowledge will have to be forthcoming?

DE LA BRIVE.—My friend, in all other branches of human endeavor, in sciences, arts, literature, one needs a capital to draw from, a certain amount of

knowledge—as you say—to give evidence of one's capacities; but, in politics, you know everything and you are everything—by the magic of one single phrase—

MERICOURT.—And what is this open “*sesame*”?

DE LA BRIVE.—“The principles of my friends,” “the party to which I belong”—

MERICOURT.—Silence! The father-in-law!

SCENE V

THE PRECEDING. MERCADET.

MERCADET, *entering from the right*.—Good day, my dear Mericourt. (*To de La Brive.*) The ladies have made you wait, sir. Ah, those gowns! As for myself, I was just dismissing—why should I not tell you?—I was dismissing another suitor for my daughter's hand. Poor young man, I may have been a little too harsh with him, and I feel truly sorry. He was so fond of my Julie; but then, I had no choice; he had only a paltry ten thousand a year!

DE LA BRIVE.—One can't go very far with that.

MERCADET.—One only vegetates—

DE LA BRIVE.—And you are not the man to give your clever and wealthy daughter to the first comer.

MERICOURT.—Indeed you are not!

MERCADET.—Gentlemen, before the ladies come in, let us talk business.

DE LA BRIVE, *to Mericourt*.—Here is the rub. (*They all sit down.*)

MERCADET.—And so you really love my daughter?

DE LA BRIVE.—I love her passionately, sir.

MERCADET.—Passionately!

MERICOURT, *aside to his friend*.—Take care; you overdo it—

DE LA BRIVE, *answering him aside*.—You just wait. (*Aloud.*) Monsieur Mercadet, I am an ambitious man—and I have discovered that Mademoiselle Julie is a highly distinguished, extremely witty and charmingly mannered young lady; she will be perfectly at home in any position to which fortune may lead me, and this is an essential element of success for a man who wants to go into politics.

MERCADET.—Ah, I understand you now. It is easy enough to find a wife, but it is very seldom that a man who aims to become minister or ambassador is lucky enough to meet a lady who can be the (let me use the word, since we are still between men), the female of his species.—You are a clever man, Monsieur de La Brive. May I know your political opinion?

DE LA BRIVE.—For the present, I am a socialist, sir.

MERCADET.—That's the new hobby, I understand. But let us talk now about the settlements.

MERICOURT.—Is it not the lawyers' work?

DE LA BRIVE.—No, Monsieur Mercadet is right; we should attend to these matters ourselves.

MERCADET.—Monsieur de La Brive is correct.

DE LA BRIVE.—As far as I am concerned, sir, my whole fortune consists in the estate of La Brive; it has been in my family for one hundred and fifty years, and I earnestly hope that it will stay there forever.

MERCADET.—In our days a capital in cash is perhaps preferable to real estate. Capital is always an available resource; revolutions may burst over us—and

how many such have we already seen—your capital follows you everywhere. Land, on the contrary, land pays for all. It has to stay there, like a dolt, and meet all the taxes, while capital takes to its heels. Still, this will not be a difficulty. What is the extent of your estate, sir?

DE LA BRIVE.—It covers 3,000 acres, without a break.

MERCADET.—Without a break!

MERICOURT.—Didn't I tell you?

MERCADET.—I never doubted—

DE LA BRIVE.—Besides, there is a château—

MERCADET.—Fine!

DE LA BRIVE.—And a large extent of salt marshes that might prove an important source of profit if the government would grant the permission to work them.

MERCADET.—Ah, sir, why did we not become acquainted sooner! You say that this estate is close to the sea?

DE LA BRIVE.—Not a mile away from it.

MERCADET.—And where located?

DE LA BRIVE.—Near Bordeaux.

MERCADET.—It is planted in vines?

DE LA BRIVE.—No, sir, happily not. Wine is often very hard to sell and vineyard cultivation costs like the mischief. My estate was planted in pines by an ancestor, a man of genius, who was far-sighted enough to sacrifice himself for his descendants' sake. Besides, of course, I have the household furniture you have seen.

MERCADET.—One minute, sir, a business man likes details—

DE LA BRIVE, *aside*.—It's coming—

MERCADET.—Your estate, your marshes, I foresee all

that could be got out of them— One might incorporate a stock company for the exploitation of the salt marshes of La Brive! There is a million in it!

DE LA BRIVE.—I know it, sir; I am waiting for someone to offer it to me.

MERCADET, *aside*.—That's a pretty clever retort. (*Aloud.*) But you must surely have some debts— Is the estate mortgaged?

MERICOURT.—You could hardly esteem my friend if he were without a franc of debt!

DE LA BRIVE.—I'll be frank with you, sir. My estate is encumbered with a 45,000-franc mortgage.

MERCADET, *aside*.—Unsophisticated young man, he might have— (*Rising, aloud.*) I approve of you, sir, you shall be my son-in-law; you are the very husband I was dreaming of for my daughter. You do not even suspect the amount of your fortune!!

DE LA BRIVE, *aside to Mericourt*.—It's working almost too well.

MERICOURT, *aside to de La Brive*.—He has scented some speculation in his line that dazzles him.

MERCADET, *aside*.—With some powerful influence, and it can be bought, salt works may readily be established there. I am saved! (*Aloud.*) Allow me to shake hands, English fashion; you are my ideal of a son-in-law. I see that you are not narrow-minded, like most country gentlemen. We shall agree.

DE LA BRIVE.—I am sure you will not take it amiss, sir, if, in my turn, I ask you—

MERCADET.—You want to know what my daughter's dowry is to be— Why, sir, if you did not ask me this question, I would grow suspicious! Well, sir, my daughter will marry with her full rights as my

sole heiress; besides, her mother will make her a present of all her fortune, consisting of a nice farm in the Brie district; only 200 acres but in a high grade of cultivation. As for me, I will give her, as a dower, the sum of 200,000 francs, the interest on which I will pay her until some remunerative investment has been selected by you. For, my dear young man, it is important not to risk all our eggs in the same basket, and we are going, you and I, to enter the business field. I like you already, you are my kind—ambitious to a degree—

DE LA BRIVE.—That I am, sir, I confess.

MERCADET.—You love luxury, you like to spend money freely— You want to shine in Paris—

DE LA BRIVE.—I'd like nothing better, sir.

MERCADET.—You want to play a part on this stage—

DE LA BRIVE.—Indeed I do.

MERCADET.—You see, since I am getting to be an old man, I wish to instil my ambition in some younger head. I will relinquish to you all the display part of the business.

DE LA BRIVE.—Monsieur Mercadet, if I had had my pick among all the possible Parisian fathers-in-law, I would have chosen you. You are the man to my liking; allow me to shake your hand, English style. (*They shake hands again.*)

MERCADET, *aside*.—It is working almost too well.

DE LA BRIVE, *aside*.—He is pitching into my marshes head foremost.

MERCADET, *aside as he is walking to the door to the left*.—He accepts the revenue instead of the capital!

MERICOURT, *to La Brive*.—Are you satisfied?

DE LA BRIVE, *answering him in a low voice*.—Yes, but

I don't see where the money for my debts is to come from.

MERICOURT, *answering him*.—Just wait. (*Aloud.*) Monsieur Mercadet, my friend is too correct to hide anything from you; he has a few debts—

MERCADET.—Please, have no hesitation to speak out—I understand such things quite well— Do they amount to 50,000 francs?

MERICOURT.—Just about—

MERCADET.—A mere trifle.

DE LA BRIVE, *laughing*.—As you say, a mere trifle.

MERCADET.—It will be the pretext for a charming little vaudeville scene between you and your young wife. Yes, you must let her have the pleasure of offering— In a word, we will gladly pay the amount— (*Aside.*) In stock of the La Brive Salt Marsh Co. (*Aloud.*) It is insignificant. (*Aside.*) We shall estimate the marshes a hundred thousand francs higher. (*Aloud.*) So everything is settled, son-in-law?

DE LA BRIVE.—Everything, father-in-law.

MERCADET, *aside*.—I am saved.

DE LA BRIVE, *aside*.—I am saved.

SCENE VI

THE PRECEDING. MADAME MERCADET. JULIE. *Both enter through the back door.*

MERCADET.—Here are my wife and daughter.

MERICOURT.—Madame, allow me to introduce to you Monsieur de La Brive, one of my friends who has manifested an admiration for your daughter—

DE LA BRIVE.—A passionate admiration.

MERCADET.—Our daughter will be an ideal wife for a man in politics.

DE LA BRIVE, *addressing Mericourt but staring at Julie through his single eye-glass.*—You are absolutely right. (*To Madame Mercadet.*) Like mother, like daughter. Madame, allow me to place my hopes under your protection.

MADAME MERCADET.—Introduced by Monsieur Mericourt, Monsieur de La Brive is sure of a welcome.

JULIE, *low to her father.*—What a conceited man!

MERCADET, *answering her.*—He is powerfully wealthy and will soon make us all millionaires. Besides, he's a brilliantly witty fellow. Now, be nice to him; you must.

Julie, *answering him.*—What can I say to a dandy whom I see for the first time and who is to be my husband whether I wish it or not?

DE LA BRIVE.—I trust that Mademoiselle Mercadet will permit me to hope that she is not opposed to—

JULIE.—My duty, sir, is to obey my father.

DE LA BRIVE.—Young ladies are not always aware of the feelings they inspire. For the last two months it has been my ambition to be allowed to pay my homage to you.

JULIE.—No one could be more flattered than I to have attracted so much attention.

MADAME MERCADET, *to Mericourt.*—He is charming. (*Aloud.*) We hope that Monsieur de La Brive and his friend will do us the pleasure of dining with us to-night, informally.

MERCADET.—Quite informally. (*To de La Brive.*) We crave your indulgence.

JUSTIN, *entering from the back, low to Mercadet.*—
Monsieur Pierquin wishes to speak to you, sir.

MERCADET.—Pierquin?

JUSTIN.—Yes, sir, he says it is most important and pressing business.

MERCADET.—What can he want of me? (*To Justin.*)
Bring him in. (*To Madame Mercadet.*) My dear,
these gentlemen are tired of business; will you lead
the way to the drawing-room—Monsieur de La Brive,
offer your arm to my daughter. (*He opens the door to
to the right.*)

DE LA BRIVE, *bowing and offering his arm to Julie.*—
Mademoiselle—

JULIE, *aside.*—He is handsome enough and wealthy.
Why does he ask my hand?

MADAME MERCADET.—Monsieur Mericourt, will you
see the painting which is to be raffled for the benefit
of our orphan asylum?

MERICOURT.—I'll be delighted to, Madame.

MERCADET.—Then walk in here; I'll be with you in a
moment.

(*Exeunt all except Mercadet.*)

SCENE VII

MERCADET. *A little later* PIERQUIN.

MERCADET, *alone.*—This time I am within sight of a
fortune, and it includes Julie's happiness and com-
plete bliss for everyone. Such a son-in-law is simply
a gold mine—with his three thousand acres, his

château, his salt-marshes. (*He sits down in front of his desk.*)

PIERQUIN, *entering*.—Good afternoon, Mercadet. I come—

MERCADET.—At the wrong time. What do you wish of me?

PIERQUIN.—I'll be brief. The claim, judgment, etc., against one Michonnin, which I assigned to you this morning—I told you then that they were valueless—

MERCADET.—You did.

PIERQUIN.—I'll offer you now three thousand francs for the lot.

MERCADET.—It's either too much or too little. If you offer that amount for it, the claim must be worth a great deal more— But I am expected in the other room— So, good-by.

PIERQUIN.—I offer four thousand francs.

MERCADET.—No, sir.

PIERQUIN.—Five—six thousand—

MERCADET.—Why don't you show your hand, Pierquin? Tell me the reason you are so anxious to have this claim re-assigned to you?

PIERQUIN.—That Michonnin insulted me—I want to see him in the debtors' jail.

MERCADET, *rising from his chair*.—Six thousand francs' worth of revenge! You are not the man to indulge in such luxury.

PIERQUIN.—But I assure you—

MERCADET.—Why, my dear man, a first class libel is not tariffed in the Code more than five or six hundred francs, and a slap in the face is quoted a paltry fifty francs.

PIERQUIN.—But I swear—

MERCADET.—Now I have it! Michonnin has inherited a fortune— The forty-seven thousand francs are worth just forty-seven thousand francs— You had better make a clean breast of it— And we'll divide, share and share alike.

PIERQUIN.—Well — then — Michonnin is going to marry—

MERCADET.—And whom is he going to marry?

PIERQUIN.—The daughter of some idiot of a nabob, who gives his daughter an enormous dowry.

MERCADET.—Where does Michonnin live?

PIERQUIN.—I suppose you want to have the papers served upon him at once? But the fact is, he has no official residence in Paris; his flat and furniture are under the name of a friend. His legal residence is Ermont, a small village, near Bordeaux.

MERCADET.—Hold on— There is in the house a man who comes from that part of the country— In a moment I'll have all the necessary information, and we shall be able to take the legal steps needed.

PIERQUIN.—Send me the documents then and I'll take charge of the whole matter for you.

MERCADET.—I consent that the claim be placed in your hands for collection upon your signing an agreement to divide the proceeds with me. I must give all my time to my daughter's marriage.

PIERQUIN.—No hitch in that direction?

MERCADET.—None whatever. My future son-in-law belongs to the nobility; he is wealthy, although a nobleman, and clever, although wealthy and a nobleman.

PIERQUIN.—You have my congratulations—

MERCADET.—Just one word more— You said,

Michonnin, from the village of Ermont, near Bordeaux?

PIERQUIN.—You got it right. He has there an old aunt who vegetates on a six hundred franc annual pension. The old crone's name is plain Bourdillac, but he has dubbed her Marquise de Bourdillac, and is never tired speaking about the delicate state of her health and her forty thousand francs a year fortune.

MERCADET.—That's all I need. Good-by.

PIERQUIN.—Good-by. (*He leaves by the back door.*)

MERCADET, *striking a bell on his desk.*—Justin!

JUSTIN.—Did you ring, sir?

MERCADET.—Ask Monsieur de La Brive to kindly step into this room for a few minutes. (*Exit Justin by the door to the right.*) That's twenty-three thousand francs found. It will help me do things up in fine style for this marriage.

SCENE VIII

MERCADET. DE LA BRIVE. JUSTIN.

DE LA BRIVE, *entering from the right with Justin and giving him a letter with a gold coin.*—Take this letter and have it sent at once— And, here is something for you.

JUSTIN, *aside.*—A napoleon! Mademoiselle will be a happy wife— (*He leaves by the back door.*)

DE LA BRIVE.—You want to speak to me, my dear father-in-law?

MERCADET.—Yes, I have— You see I am acting quite informally already— Please take a seat.

DE LA BRIVE, *sitting down on the sofa*.—I thank you for treating me in this way—

MERCADET.—I want you to give me some information about a debtor of mine who, like you, lives near Bordeaux.

DE LA BRIVE.—I know everybody around there.

MERCADET.—If need be, you certainly have some relatives there who could look the man up?

DE LA BRIVE.—Relatives—I have only one—an old aunt—

MERCADET, *raising his head*.—An—old aunt?

DE LA BRIVE.—Her health is—

MERCADET, *more excited*.—Delicate—

DE LA BRIVE.—And her fortune is estimated at forty thousand a year.

MERCADET, *crushed*.—My Lord! It is the very figure!

DE LA BRIVE.—You see, it is worth while humoring the dear old Marquise de—

MERCADET, *walking toward him in a towering rage*.—Bourdillac, sir!!

DE LA BRIVE.—Why! You know her name?

MERCADET.—And yours, too!

DE LA BRIVE.—Well, well!

MERCADET.—You are head over ears in debt; your furniture is under another's name; your aunt is worth just six hundred francs a year; Pierquin, one of the smallest of your creditors has forty-seven thousand francs of your protested notes. You are Michonnin and I am the idiotic nabob—

DE LA BRIVE, *stretched on the sofa*.—I declare, you are as well informed as I am.

MERCADET.—Fate is playing havoc with me again!

DE LA BRIVE, *aside while getting up*.—All is over with

the marriage. I was a socialist, I am now a communist!

MERCADET.—As badly fooled as on 'Change.

DE LA BRIVE.—Let us be worthy of our reputation.

MERCADET.—Monsieur Michonnin, your conduct is worse than culpable.

DE LA BRIVE.—What have I done? Didn't I tell you I had debts?

MERCADET.—O yes! one may have debts— But where is your estate?

DE LA BRIVE.—In the Landes district.

MERCADET.—What does it consist of?

DE LA BRIVE.—Of sand plains planted with pines.

MERCADET.—Good for making toothpicks.

DE LA BRIVE.—You are about right.

MERCADET.—And what is it worth?

DE LA BRIVE.—Thirty thousand francs.

MERCADET.—And mortgaged for—?

DE LA BRIVE.—Forty-five thousand.

MERCADET.—You managed to do that?

DE LA BRIVE.—I did.

MERCADET.—I declare that's pretty clever! And your salt-marshes, sir?

DE LA BRIVE.—They confine to the sea.

MERCADET.—That means that they are part of the ocean itself—

DE LA BRIVE.—Some wickedly disposed people round there said so and that stopped all borrowing possibilities.

MERCADET.—The fact is it would have been a rather difficult undertaking to bring the sea into a stock company. Between you and me, sir, your sense of honesty seems to be—

DE LA BRIVE.—Enough, sir—

MERCADET.—Somewhat clouded!

DE LA BRIVE, *angrily*.—Sir! (*Calming down.*) Well, if it's only between you and me—

MERCADET.—You put your furniture under some one else's name; you sign your notes with the first half of your name, Michonnin, and otherwise never use but the second half, de La Brive.

DE LA BRIVE.—Well, sir, what of it?

MERCADET.—What of it? Why, don't you know that I could make it hot for you?

DE LA BRIVE.—No, sir, you would not; first of all because I am your guest and also because I could deny it all. What proofs have you, anyhow?

MERCADET.—Proofs! Why, I have in my hands your notes to the amount of 47,000 francs.

DE LA BRIVE, *walking to him*.—The notes I made out to Pierquin?

MERCADET.—The very same.

DE LA BRIVE.—And they came into your possession this morning?

MERCADET.—This morning.

DE LA BRIVE.—And, as a consideration for the transfer, you gave Pierquin valueless shares, stock that never paid and never will pay any dividend!

MERCADET.—Sir!!

DE LA BRIVE.—And, to close the bargain, Pierquin, one of your smallest creditors, has granted you three months' time—

MERCADET.—Who told you all this?

DE LA BRIVE.—Why, Pierquin himself, when an hour ago I wanted to compromise my little matter with him.

MERCADET.—By Jove!!

DE LA BRIVE.—So you claim to give your daughter a 200,000 franc dowry and you are 350,000 francs in debt! Why, sir, between you and me, you tried to get a son-in-law under false pretenses!

MERCADET, *angrily*.—Sir! (*Calming down.*) Oh, if it's only between you and me—

DE LA BRIVE.—You were abusing my business ignorance.

MERCADET.—The business ignorance of a man who succeeds in mortgaging sand plains for fifty per cent. more than they are worth!

DE LA BRIVE.—Glass is made out of sand, sir.

MERCADET.—It is quite an idea!

DE LA BRIVE.—So you see, sir—

MERCADET.—Not a word more, sir; only keep mum about the marriage scheme being off—

DE LA BRIVE.—Certainly; you have my word to that effect— Ah!— But Pierquin will soon know— I just wrote him a line to get him to leave me in peace—

MARCADET.—Is that the letter you just sent out?

DE LA BRIVE.—The very one.

MARCADET.—And in it you told him—

DE LA BRIVE.—The name of my prospective father-in-law.

MARCADET, *terribly upset*.—You wrote that to Pierquin! Then the game is up! Through him the Bourse will hear of my new disaster— I am a lost man! But, perhaps I may stop him yet— I'll ask him—(*He walks to the desk.*)

SCENE IX

THE PRECEDING. MADAME MERCADET.

JULIE. VERDELIN.

MADAME MERCADET, *from the back of the stage*.—My dear, here is Monsieur Verdelin.

JULIE, *to Verdelin*.—Here is my father, sir.

MERCADET.—Ah, it is you—you—Verdelin; you have come—you have come to dine with us?

VERDELIN.—No, I have not come to dine with you.

MERCADET, *aside*.—He knows everything! He is furious!

VERDELIN.—Is this gentleman your future son-in-law? (*He nods curtly.*) That's a fine marriage.

MERCADET.—My dear friend, this marriage is not to take place.

JULIE.—Oh, what happiness! (*De La Brive bows to her and she lowers her eyes.*)

MADAME MERCADET, *restraining her*.—Daughter!

MERCADET.—Mericourt deceived me.

VERDELIN.—And this morning you acted one more of your comedy parts to extort three thousand francs out of me. But the story is now everybody's property and on the Stock Exchange they're enjoying it hugely, I tell you.

MERCADET.—So, they have been told—

VERDELIN.—That you have your hands full of protested notes signed by your worthy son-in-law, and Pierquin has just informed me that your exasperated creditors have called a meeting at Goulard's for to-night, when they will decide to act to-morrow like one man.

MERCADET.—To-night! To-morrow! Ah, I hear the bell of bankruptcy tolling in my ears!

VERDELIN.—Yes, to-morrow—and they add, “we’ll take him to the debtors’ prison in a cab.”

MADAME MERCADET *and* JULIE.—May the good Lord have mercy upon us!

MERCADET.—Such a cab drive is the funeral march of the speculator!

VERDELIN.—The Stock Exchange is going to be emptied of all these dangerous so-called promoters!

MERCADET.—The fools! Do they want the place turned into a desert! And I, am I to be driven from the Bourse to face ruin, shame, utter want—? No, no— Such a thing is impossible!

DE LA BRIVE.—Believe me, sir, I am deeply sorry to have been, even remotely, the cause of—

MERCADET, *looking de La Brive straight in the eyes.*—You!— (*Speaking to him in a low voice.*) Listen, you *did* hasten my undoing—but you can help me save myself yet—

DE LA BRIVE.—On what terms?

MERCADET, *aside.*—I’ll make the terms satisfactory! (*He walks to the right, while de La Brive steps toward the back door.*) Yes! It is a bold idea! but an assured success! To-morrow the Stock Exchange again will recognize Mercadet as one of its leaders—

VERDELIN.—What is he muttering to himself?

MERCADET, *aloud.*—To-morrow all my debts will have been paid in full and the firm of Mercadet will be handling money by the millions— I shall be called the Napoleon of finance.

VERDELIN.—What a man!

MERCADET.—And I shall meet no Waterloo!

VERDELIN.—But where are your troops?

MERCADET.—My army is Spot Cash— What can any one answer to a business man who says: “My cashier pays at sight.” And now let us dine!

VERDELIN.—All right; if things look that way, I'll dine with you, and be delighted to!

MERCADET, *while they all walk toward the door to the left.*—They willed it so! To-morrow I shall reign over millions of money—or make my bed under the waves of the river. (*He follows them to the left.*)

(ACT CURTAIN.)

THIRD ACT

(Another apartment in the house of Mercadet. At the back of the stage a mantel-piece. Above it a clear pane of glass in place of a mirror. On either side, a door; also doors right and left of the stage. In the middle a round table with chairs about it. A sofa near the mantel-piece. Arm-chairs to the right and to the left.)

SCENE I

JUSTIN. THERESE. VIRGINIE. *Later* MERCADET.

(Justin enters first, then turns round and beckons to Therese to come in. She does so, followed by Virginie with a bundle of bills in her hands. The cook with defiant mien throws herself down upon the sofa. Justin walks to the door at the left and puts his ear close to the key-hole.)

THERESE.—I wonder if they have the audacity to try and hide the state of their affairs from us?

VIRGINIE.—Father Grumeau just told me that Monsieur Mercadet is to be arrested in a few hours— He'll have to settle with me first— There's lots of money owing me besides my wages!

THERESE.—Oh, you may depend on it, we'll lose every cent. Master is going into bankruptcy.

JUSTIN.—I hear nothing—they are talking too low— How mean they are to suspect us!

VIRGINIE.—It's simply disgraceful!

JUSTIN, *pressing his ear to the key-hole.*—Hold on—I think I hear— (*The door opens suddenly, Mercadet appears.*)

MERCADET, *to Justin.*—I hope I did not disturb you—

JUSTIN, *abashed.*—I—I was—putting the furniture—in order, sir,—

MERCADET.—You were, eh! (*To Virginie rising hastily from the sofa.*) Please don't move, Mademoiselle Virginie. And you, Monsieur Justin, why didn't you come straight in; we might have talked about my business.

JUSTIN.—Monsieur amuses me—

MERCADET.—Do I? I am delighted to hear it.

JUSTIN.—Monsieur takes his misfortune cheerfully!

MERCADET, *severely.*—That's enough— Leave the room, all of you, and remember that henceforth I am at home to everybody. Be neither too insolent nor too polite to any one. None but paid creditors shall you have to meet at the door after this.

JUSTIN.—Impossible!

MERCADET.—You may go— (*The door at the back opens; appear Madame Mercadet, Julie and Minard. The servants withdraw, bowing, through the door to the right.*)

SCENE II

MERCADET. MADAME MERCADET. JULIE. MINARD.

MERCADET, *aside.*—I declare— Here are my wife and daughter— In a situation like mine, women are terribly in the way— They get so awfully nervous. (*Aloud.*) What can I do for you, my dear?

MADAME MERCADET.—My dear husband, you counted upon Julie's marriage to strengthen your credit and to quiet your creditors; but, yesterday's events have placed you at their mercy—

MERCADET.—You believe that? Well, my dear, you are entirely mistaken— Oh, is that you, Monsieur Minard. May I know what brings you here?

MINARD.—Monsieur Mercadet, I come—

JULIE.—Father, he wishes to—

MERCADET.—Do you want to ask me again for my daughter's hand?

MINARD.—Yes, sir, I do.

MERCADET.—But they all say that I shall be a bankrupt in a few hours—

MINARD.—I know it, sir.

MERCADET.—And you do not mind marrying a bankrupt's daughter?

MINARD.—No, because I will work hard to help him get upon his feet again.

JULIE.—Well spoken, Adolphe!

MERCADET, *aside*.—Fine young fellow— I'll interest him in my very next venture.

MINARD.—I informed the gentleman who has acted as my guardian of my deep attachment for your daughter, and I learned from him that I had a small fortune coming to me.

MERCADET.—A fortune—

MINARD.—Yes, it appears that when I was placed under his care, a certain sum of money was given him in trust; he invested it profitably and it amounts now to 30,000 francs.

MERCADET.—Thirty thousand francs!

MINARD.—As soon as I heard of the misfortune that

had befallen you, I sold the securities representing this small capital, and I bring you the proceeds, sir. Sometimes by paying small amounts on account creditors are disposed to enter into arrangements—

MADAME MERCADET.—What a generous heart!

JULIE, *proudly*.—Now you see, father—

MERCADET.—Thirty thousand francs! (*Aside.*) I might treble the sum by buying stock of Verdelin's gas company, and then double it again by—but no, no— (*To Minard.*) Child, you are still in the age of blind devotion— If I knew how to pay 200,000 francs with 30,000 it would be an easy matter for me to make the fortune of France, without speaking of my own and that of many others—but—but you had better keep your money?

MINARD.—What! You refuse it?

MERCADET, *aside*.—Suppose I use it to keep them quiet for a month— During that time, I'll have no trouble finding some broken-down stock that needs galvanizing, and then— But it would break my heart to thus endanger these poor children's money— It's wretched business one does with moist eyes— Stockholders' money is the only good kind to speculate with—no, no— (*Aloud.*) Adolphe, you shall marry my daughter!

MINARD.—O Monsieur Mercadet! O Julie! My Julie!

MERCADET.—You shall marry her as soon as I can give her 300,000 francs as her portion.

MADAME MERCADET.—Husband!

JULIE.—Father!

MINARD.—Ah, sir, how long am I to wait!

MERCADET.—Wait? You may have to wait a month—perhaps less—

ALL TOGETHER.—But how can that be?

MERCADET.—Oh, my brains will do it—with a little money— (*Minard hands him his pocket-book.*) You take your money away! Better still, lead my wife and daughter into the next room; I want to be alone.

MADAME MERCADET, *aside*.—Is he planning something against his creditors? I must know what it is— (*Aloud.*) Come, Julie.

JULIE.—Father, you are the kindest—

MERCADET.—Of course, I am!

JULIE.—And I love you dearly.

MERCADET.—Of course, again!

JULIE.—Adolphe, I do not thank you; I shall have my whole life for doing that.

MINARD.—Dear Julie—

MERCADET, *leading them to the back of the stage*.—Well, well, you can go on with your idyl in another room— (*Exeunt the two ladies and Minard by the left door at the back.*)

SCENE III

MERCADET. *Later DE LA BRIVE.*

MERCADET.—I resisted. It was a good impulse and a mistake— Well, if I have finally to give in, I'll amuse myself husbanding their little fortune— I shall do their investing— How truly my girl is beloved! These two young ones have hearts of gold! (*He walks to the door to the right.*) Let us now begin to make them wealthy— De La Brive is in that room waiting for me. (*He looks through the open door to the*

right.) I think he has fallen asleep— I suppose he had a bad night— (*Shouting.*) “The Constable, Michonnin, the Constable!”

DE LA BRIVE, *coming out of the room, rubbing his eyes.*— What’s that you say?

MERCADET.—Don’t get excited—I simply wanted to wake you up. (*He takes a chair near the center table.*)

DE LA BRIVE, *standing at the other side of the table.*— Monsieur Mercadet, a spree is for my brain what a shower is for the country—it freshens it up; my ideas begin to grow, to bloom! *In Vino Varietas.*

MERCADET.—Yesterday, we were interrupted just as we were getting down to business.

DE LA BRIVE.—Father-in-law, I remember every word of our conversation— We had just discovered that neither of our firms could keep its engagements— We are about being sold out, as they say on ‘Change. You are unfortunate enough to be my creditor to the tune of forty-seven thousand two hundred and thirty-three francs and a few centimes, and I have the luck to be your debtor to that same amount.

MERCADET.—Your head does not seem heavy—

DE LA BRIVE.—Nothing heavy about me, not even my pockets, nor, for that matter, my conscience. Anyway, what can they reproach me with? While spending my substance, I enriched many a branch of Parisian trade, even those branches that are not openly talked about. They say we, the fast set, are lazy drones! Why, the impulse we give to the circulation of money—

MERCADET.—By adding your notes to the volume of currency— Oh, your intelligence is wide-awake, I’ll admit that much.

DE LA BRIVE.—That's all I've left, you know.

MERCADET.—But that's the mint for such as you and I. Seeing you so well disposed I shall be brief in my statement.

DE LA BRIVE.—In that case, with your permission, I'll sit down!

MERCADET.—Listen— You have come close to this dangerous slope that leads down to the bold expedients which are the sole resources of those men whom fools call sharpers. You have tasted the intoxicating fruits of Parisian pleasure; luxury has become a companion you could not now dispense with. Paris, for you, begins in front of the Jockey-Club and ends at the Triumphal Arch of the Star. Paris, for you, is principally composed of those women who are spoken of too much—or never—

DE LA BRIVE.—You are right—

MERCADET.—Your Paris is the shady atmosphere wherein moves the journalist, the theatrical man, the political adventurer; a deep ocean out of which one may fish—everything— Well, this form of Parisian life, you must continue to lead, or blow out your brains!

DE LA BRIVE.—No, no, continue to lead!

MERCADET.—Do you feel in you the necessary genius to stand, in your patent leather shoes, up to the level of your aspirations? To domineer over people by the power of money or that of intelligence? Have you the strength to steer your way between these two shoals whereon swelldom is infallibly wrecked: the two-franc table d'hote and the debtors' prison?

DE LA BRIVE.—My dear man, you break into my inner self as if you were a burglar— You express my

very thoughts. And, now, what do you want of me?

MERCADET.—I want to save your life by launching you on the sea of affairs.

DE LA BRIVE.—How will you do it?

MERCADET.—Let me choose the gate.

DE LA BRIVE.—I say—

MERCADET.—But the man who will be compromised in my stead—

DE LA BRIVE.—Ah! straw-men have been burned up before!

MERCADET.—Be incombustible!

DE LA BRIVE.—And what about the division of profits?

MERCADET.—This will be an experiment. Serve me boldly in the desperate circumstances in which I now find myself, and I will make you a present of your 47,232 francs of debt. All that's needed is a little skill.

DE LA BRIVE.—With pistol or sword?

MERCADET.—I want nobody killed—on the contrary.

DE LA BRIVE.—I like it better that way.

MERCADET.—We must bring a man back to life.

DE LA BRIVE.—Oh, pray, none of that, my dear friend. The pretended legacy, Harpagon's cash-box, Scapin's little mule, all these farces which amuse us so much in the old plays are looked upon with great disfavor in real life nowadays. They are apt to bring a lot of policemen on one's track and we are not allowed to thrash them as our fathers did.

MERCADET.—Oh, five years in the debtors' prison—What's that?— A mere trifle!

DE LA BRIVE.—But, after all, it depends on what you want me to do. Only remember, my reputation, so far, is spotless, and it's worth—

MERCADET.—I understand— You want it well invested— Do not worry on that score; we'll need it too much by and by not to get out of it its full value. Just help me to keep my seat at the well-laden table of the Stock Exchange, and we'll get our fill of the good things. Don't you know, my dear fellow, that if millions are hard to find, yet they are not found at all if not looked for.

DE LA BRIVE.—One might try to enter your little game. You'll return to me my 47,000 francs—

MERCADET, *in English*.—*Yes, sir.*

DE LA BRIVE.—And I'll simply have to be—very clever?

MERCADET.—Well— Perhaps a trifle more than clever— But that "trifle more" will be, as the English say, "On the right side of the law."

DE LA BRIVE.—What does it consist of anyway?

MERCADET, *giving him a written paper*.—Here are your instructions. You are to be something like an uncle from America—in fact, a partner returning from India—

DE LA BRIVE.—I understand.

MERCADET.—Go to a carriage-dealer on the Champs-Élysées; hire or purchase a post-chaise; have it properly soiled and mud-covered. Then drive to this house with postillion, bells, etc. yourself wrapped up in a heavy fur coat and your head and face almost smothered under a huge beaver cap, like a traveller from a tropical climate suffering under our chilly skies. I'll welcome you; I'll introduce you; you'll talk to my creditors, not one of whom knew Godeau; you'll keep them in a patient humor—

DE LA BRIVE.—For how long?

MERCADET.—All I need is two days—two days, during which Pierquin will have completed, for my account, the heavy purchases of stock I shall order as soon as you “arrive”— Two days, during which I shall know how to boom the shares in question— You’ll be my backer, my living guarantee—and, as nobody will recognize you—

DE LA BRIVE.—All right, I will do it; but, remember, I’ll cease playing the part as soon as I shall have given you enough of it to be worth 47,233 francs and a few centimes.

MERCADET.—That’s understood— Hush! Somebody— Oh, my wife.

MADAME MERCADET, *entering from the left side.*—My dear, they have just brought some letters for you, requiring immediate answers. (*She walks toward the mantel-piece.*)

MERCADET.—I’ll attend to them at once. (*In a low voice to de La Brive.*) Not a word to my wife, she would not understand the move and might upset it. (*Aloud.*) Now, go at it quickly, and forget nothing.

DE LA BRIVE.—Have no fear. (*Exit Mercadet by the door at the right; de La Brive is about to leave through the center back door, when Madame Mercadet stops him.*)

SCENE IV

MADAME MERCADET. DE LA BRIVE.

DE LA BRIVE.—Madame?

MADAME MERCADET.—Excuse me, sir.

DE LA BRIVE.—I hope you will kindly excuse me also, Madame, but I must go at once—

MADAME MERCADET.—You shall not go—

DE LA BRIVE.—You are not aware—

MADAME MERCADET.—I am aware of everything—

DE LA BRIVE.—How can it be?

MADAME MERCADET.—You are planning, you and my husband, to make use of an old comedy trick! I made use of a still older one— I repeat to you, sir, I am aware of everything—

DE LA BRIVE, *aside*.—She has been listening.

MADAME MERCADET, *walking down the stage*.—Monsieur de La Brive, the part you have been asked to play, is a wicked, shameful one; you will have to give it up.

DE LA BRIVE.—But, Madame—

MADAME MERCADET.—Oh, I know what I am talking about, sir. It was only a few hours ago that I saw you for the first time, and yet—I believe I know you—

DE LA BRIVE.—If it be so, Madame, I wonder what opinion you have of me.

MADAME MERCADET.—One day was sufficient for me to judge you. And while my husband was endeavoring to discover what mad instinct he might exploit or what unholy passion awaken within you, I, sir, sounded your heart and discovered what worthy sentiments it still harbored, and how they could save you.

DE LA BRIVE.—Save me? I wonder, Madame—

MADAME MERCADET.—Yes, sir, save you and my husband with you. Do you not understand that you are both rushing to your ruin? To have debts is no dishonor, provided one confesses them frankly, and works hard to extinguish them— Think of it, you have your whole life before you, and you are a great deal too

sensible to be willing to blast it forever by sharing in an enterprise punishable in the criminal court—

DE LA BRIVE.—The criminal court!! Ah, Madame, you are indeed right, and I should not, for a minute lend myself to so dangerous an undertaking were it not that your husband holds over me papers—

MADAME MERCADET.—Which he will return to you, sir, you may take my word for it.

DE LA BRIVE.—But, Madame, I have not the money to redeem them!

MADAME MERCADET.—We will accept your word as full security, and you will pay us when you have made an honest fortune.

DE LA BRIVE.—An honest fortune— It may prove a pretty long contract—

MADAME MERCADET.—We will wait, sir; but now, go and tell my husband that you withdraw your assistance, so that he may give up this attempt. (*She walks to the door at the left.*)

DE LA BRIVE.—I do not especially care to see him. I should prefer to write.

MADAME MERCADET, *pointing to him the door through which he entered.*—In that room, you will find all you need. Wait there, until I come for your letter. I will deliver it to him myself.

DE LA BRIVE.—It shall be as you say, Madame. I begin to believe I am not half so bad a man as I thought myself. You have revealed me to myself and my deepest gratitude is yours. (*He kisses her hand with great respect.*) Thank you, Madame, thank you! (*He leaves the room by the indicated door.*)

MADAME MERCADET.—So far I have succeeded. If only I can decide Mercadet!

JUSTIN, *entering from the back.*—Madame—Madame here they come—all of them—

MADAME MERCADET.—Who? All?

JUSTIN.—Monsieur's creditors.

MADAME MERCADET.—Already!

JUSTIN.—And there are lots of them.

MADAME MERCADET.—Bring them all here. I'll notify Monsieur. (*She goes out through the door at the left. Justin opens the door to the right.*)

SCENE V

PIERQUIN. GOULARD, *and a number of other* CREDITORS.

GOULARD.—Gentlemen, we are all fully decided?

ALL.—Yes, yes!

PIERQUIN.—No more deceptive promises—

GOULARD.—No more prayers, no more supplications—

VIOLETTE.—No more of those on-account payments that help him to reach the bottom of our purses!

SCENE VI

THE PRECEDING. MERCADET.

MERCADET, *entering by the left.*—This means that you gentlemen are going to force me into bankruptcy.

GOULARD.—Unless you manage to pay to-day every franc you owe us.

MERCADET.—To-day!

PIERQUIN.—This very afternoon!

MERCADET, *standing, his back to the mantel-piece*.—Do you think I have the free use of the bank-note plates of the Bank of France?

VIOLETTE, *seating himself to the right*.—And so you have nothing to offer us?

MERCADET.—Not a blessed centime! [So you are going to jail me, are you? I pity the one who'll pay for the cab—he will not get the fare money out of my assets.

GOULARD.—Well then, I'll add it to what you owe me already—on the profit and loss page of my ledger.

MERCADET.—Thanks— And so, you are all perfectly decided to act?

THE CREDITORS.—Yes, yes.

MERCADET.—Touching unanimity! (*Pulling out his watch*.) Two o'clock. (*Aside*.) De La Brive has had plenty of time, he must be on his way to the house— (*Aloud*.) Gentlemen, let me compliment you upon the opportune inspiration that has made you choose this very day!

PIERQUIN.—What does he mean?

MERCADET.—For months, for years, I might say, you have allowed yourselves to be tempted by fine promises, to be deceived—yes, deceived by the most impossible tales, and it is to-day of all days that you choose to show yourselves pitiless! My word of honor, I call this a capital joke! By all means, gentlemen, let us go to jail.

GOULARD.—But, sir—

PIERQUIN.—He is actually laughing!

VIOLETTE, *rising excitedly*.—There is something, gentlemen, there is something—

PIERQUIN.—Will you, please, explain to us—

GOULARD.—We wish to know.

VIOLETTE.—Now, Monsieur Mercadet, if there is really something, tell it to us, please do.

MERCADET, *walking to the round table*.—Nothing—I'll say nothing— I demand to be carted to jail! I want to see the kind of faces you will pull to-morrow, or even to-night, when you hear of his return—

GOULARD, *rising*.—His return?

PIERQUIN.—What return?

VIOLETTE.—Whose return?

MERCADET, *walking to the front*.—The return of—of nobody— Let us start for the jail, gentlemen—

GOULARD.—Still—if you are really expecting some assistance—

PIERQUIN.—If you have any serious hopes—

VIOLETTE.—Should it only be a heavy legacy—

GOULARD.—Out with it!

PIERQUIN.—Answer!

VIOLETTE.—Tell us—

MERCADET.—Ah, you ought to beware— You are weakening, gentlemen, actually weakening; if I cared to, it would be an easy matter now to fool you once more. Brace up, I say, be again the hard, simon-pure creditors! Forget the past, forget those blessed days when, through me, you were coining money in the splendid affairs I used to interest you in before the departure of my good old Godeau—

GOULARD.—His good old Godeau!

PIERQUIN.—What if it were he—

MERCADET.—Forget all this delightful past, take no account of the circumstances that might bring about a return so—long awaited— Never mind all this. Gentlemen, let us ride to jail.

VIOLETTE.—Mercadet, you are expecting Godeau?

MERCADET.—No—

VIOLETTE, *as if inspired*.—Gentlemen, he is expecting Godeau!

GOULARD.—Could this be true?

PIERQUIN.—Speak out!

ALL THE CREDITORS.—Speak! Speak!

MERCADET, *weakly protesting*.—But I cannot speak—I tell you I cannot— Of course he may some day come back to us from India—with a—large fortune— (*Speaking with positiveness.*) Now, I give you my word of honor I—do—not—expect—Godeau—back to-day.

VIOLETTE, *excitedly*.—Then he's to arrive to-morrow— Gentlemen, he expects him to-morrow!

GOULARD, *addressing his fellow creditors in a low voice*.—Unless this is a new dodge to fool us and gain some more time—

PIERQUIN, *louder*.—You think so?

GOULARD.—It's quite possible.

VIOLETTE, *in a loud voice*.—Gentlemen, he is fooling us—

MERCADET, *aside*.—The wind is turning! (*Aloud.*) Well, gentlemen, when do we start?

GOULARD.—Perhaps— (*A carriage is heard stopping in front of the house.*)

MERCADET, *aside*.—At last. (*Aloud.*) Heavens! (*He puts his hand on his heart.*)

A POSTILION'S VOICE, *heard in the street*.—Gate, please.

MERCADET, *letting himself fall into an arm-chair*.—Ah!!

GOULARD, *running to the wide pane of glass above the mantle-piece*.—A carriage!

PIERQUIN, *from the same place*.—With post-horses!

VIOLETTE, *from the same place, impressively*.—Gentlemen, it is a post-chaise!

GOULARD.—Look, look, it is covered over with dust—

VIOLETTE.—And muddy up to the hood— It must have come from furthest India, to be so dirty!

MERCADET *gently*.—You do not know what you are talking about, Violette. People do not ride all the way from India in a post-chaise, my good fellow—

GOULARD.—Come and look, Mercadet, a man is stepping out—

PIERQUIN.—Wrapped up in a heavy fur coat—come here, come here—

MERCADET.—Excuse me, I prefer not—my joy—my emotion—I—

VIOLETTE, *shouting*.—Look at the enormous cash-box he carries under his arm— Gentlemen, it is Godeau! I know him by his cash-box!

GOULARD.—He returns from Calcutta—

PIERQUIN.—With a fortune—

GOULARD.—An incalculable fortune!

VIOLETTE, *triumphantly*.—What did I tell you? (*He walks to Mercadet and shakes his hand in silence; Goulard and Pierquin go through the same performance, which is imitated by all the other creditors.*)

MERCADET, *with well-feigned emotion*.—Ah, gentlemen, believe me—I am delighted—my friends—my dear comrades—

SCENE VII

THE PRECEDING. MADAME MERCADET.

MADAME MERCADET, *entering through the back door to the left*.—Mercadet! My dear husband!

MERCADET, *aside*.—My wife! I thought she had gone out!! She'll upset everything!!

MADAME MERCADET.—Dear heart, don't you know what has just happened?

MERCADET.—No— That is,—yes—I—

MADAME MERCADET.—Godeau has this moment returned!

MERCADET.—What? What did you say? (*Aside*.) Is she also—?

MADAME MERCADET.—I have seen him—I have spoken to him—It was I who received him—

MERCADET, *aside*.—De La Brive must have converted her! What a man he is! (*Aloud*.) Continue, my dear wife, continue, you are saving us—

MADAME MERCADET.—I am not, but he, he—

MERCADET, *to her in a low voice*.—That will do. (*Aloud*.) Gentlemen, you must excuse me, but I shall have to go and welcome my—

MADAME MERCADET.—Not yet, dear, not quite yet; our friend, poor Godeau, has over-exerted himself—Hardly had he reached our house when fatigue and emotion caused him to break down— He is trying to recover from a nervous spell—

MERCADET.—Is that so? (*Aside*.) She is [splendid!

VIOLETTE.—Poor Godeau!

MADAME MERCADET.—He just said to me: "Madame, I beg you—go to your husband, ask him to forgive me; I do not dare to meet him before I have repaired the past."

GOULARD.—That's beautiful!

PIERQUIN.—It's sublime!

VIOLETTE.—It brings tears to my eyes!

MERCADET, *aside*.—I declare, what a consummate

actress—I have as a wife! and I never had the remotest idea of it! (*Taking her hand.*) Dear wife—you'll excuse me, gentlemen! (*He kisses her cheek and whispers.*) You are doing first rate!

MADAME MERCADET, *in a low voice.*—What happiness, dear husband! and is it not a hundred times better than what you planned?

MERCADET.—Of course it is! (*Aside.*) And much more clever— (*Aloud.*) Go back to him, dear; and you, gentlemen, will you kindly come to my study. (*Pointing to the door to the left.*) And in a few minutes we shall have a settling of accounts. (*Madame Mercadet leaves through the door at the right rear of the stage.*)

GOULARD.—We are at your service, my dear friend.

PIERQUIN.—My excellent friend!

VIOLETTE.—Our friend, we are yours to command.

MERCADET, *one hand leaning on the center-table, conceitedly.*—Well, well— And some folks used to say that I was nothing but a common sharper—

GOULARD.—You! One of the most intelligent men in Paris!

PIERQUIN.—Who will earn millions after you have won the first one!

VIOLETTE.—Dear Monsieur Mercadet, we will await your convenience for the settlement—

ALL THE CREDITORS.—Certainly, certainly—

MERCADET.—A rather late offer! All the same, gentlemen, I thank you for it as if you had made it yesterday. Good-by then, for the present— (*Low to Goulard.*) Within an hour I'll have your stock sold—

GOULARD.—All right.

MERCADET, *low to Pierquin.*—You, stay— (*All the others leave through the door to the left.*)

PIERQUIN.—I'll stay.

SCENE VIII

MERCADET. PIERQUIN.

MERCADET.—Alone at last— We have not a minute to lose— Yesterday, as you know, the Basse Indre mining stock fell down several points— I want you to go straight to the Bourse and buy for my account 200, 300, 600 shares— Goulard alone will sell you half the amount.

PIERQUIN.—When are they to be delivered and where is your margin?

MERCADET.—A margin, what for? It's a cash deal. Bring me the certificate to-night, and you'll have the amount to-morrow.

PIERQUIN.—To-morrow, sure?

MERCADET.—Sure. (*Aside.*) By that time the stock will have climbed up sky-high.

PIERQUIN.—Of course, in your present situation, you are buying for Godeau?

MERCADET.—You think so?

PIERQUIN.—He must have sent you instructions to that effect in the letter announcing his return.

MERCADET.—That may be— Ah, Master Pierquin, we are starting in business again— Within the year, you will have made a hundred thousand francs in commissions out of us.

PIERQUIN.—A hundred thousand francs!

MERCADET.—You begin right away to drive down that stock and then buy gradually. (*He gives him a paper.*) Here is a letter to be inserted in the late edition of the evening papers; it will send the stock shooting up like a rocket. On the curb, to-night,

there will be a twenty per cent. rise— Only be quick—

PIERQUIN.—I am flying—Good-by.

(Exit Pierquin.)

SCENE IX

MERCADET. *Later* JUSTIN.

MERCADET.—Everything is in fine running order now, full steam up! The day Mahomet had recruited three associates who honestly believed in him (such men are awfully hard to find) the world was his! And I have *all* my creditors won over already. Thanks to the pretended return of Godeau, I have a week before me, and in money matters, a week means a fortnight—I will buy 300,000 francs' worth of Basse-Indre stock ahead of Verdelin! And when Verdelin tries to get them for himself, his bidding—will create the rise—It's sure to go far above par— I'll not let go of my shares under 600,000 francs profit. 300,000 pays for everything I owe and once more I shall be proclaimed the Napoleon of finance!

JUSTIN, *from the back of the stage, at the left.*—Sir—

MERCADET.—What's the matter, Justin?

JUSTIN.—Monsieur Violette, sir—

MERCADET.—Well, what of him, speak out—

JUSTIN.—He offers me sixty francs, if I will let him speak to Monsieur Godeau.

MERCADET.—Sixty francs. *(Aside.)* He robbed me of it!

JUSTIN.—Monsieur would not have me lose these small perquisites.

MERCADET—All right— Let yourself be bought up—

JUSTIN.—And the others, sir, Monsieur Goulard, all of them— They are crazy to see Monsieur Godeau—

MERCADET.—Do their bidding, Justin; I deliver them into your hands, shear them close—

JUSTIN.—I'll shear them close enough—thank you, sir—

MERCADET.—Let them all see Godeau— (*Aside.*) De La Brive will manage it all right. (*Aloud.*) Stop a minute— All of them except Pierquin— (*Aside.*) He might recognize his Michonnin!

JUSTIN.—It's all right, sir. Ah, here comes Monsieur Minard. (*Exit Justin by the left rear door.*)

SCENE X

MERCADET. MINARD.

MINARD, *as he comes forward.*—Ah, Monsieur Mercadet!!

MERCADET.—Well, Monsieur Minard, what brings you here now?

MINARD.—Despair, sir.

MERCADET.—Despair? What about?

MINARD.—Monsieur Godeau has returned— They all say you are a millionaire again!

MERCADET.—And that's the cause of your despair, is it?

MINARD.—Indeed it is, sir.

MERCADET.—Well, you are the strangest boy—

Yesterday, I revealed to you my total ruin, and you were delighted. To-day you learn that fortune is smiling upon me again, and you are in despair! Why, my dear fellow, you want to enter my family, and yet you behave like an enemy—

MINARD.—But it is this very fortune that causes me such terror. I am deathly afraid that now you will not grant me your daughter's hand—

MERCADET.—My daughter's hand— Adolphe, you ought to know that not all the business men lock up their hearts in their safes— Our feelings are not always governed by the rules of debit and credit— You offered me thirty thousand francs, all you possessed! I have no right to dismiss you now on account of the millions (*aside*) I have not got yet!

MINARD.—Ah, sir, you give me a new lease of life—

MERCADET.—Do I? I am delighted to hear it, for I am very fond of you— Your honesty is so natural and simple that you have no idea how deeply it touches me— It's such a change from— Ah, just wait till I have cashed in my 600,000 francs— (*Seeing Pierquin entering the room.*) Here they come—

SCENE XI

THE PRECEDING. PIERQUIN. VERDELIN.

MERCADET, *not noticing Verdellin, leads Pierquin to the front of the stage.*—Well, and how are things turning out?

PIERQUIN, *showing some embarrassment.*—The purchases have all been made—

MERCADET, *delighted*.—Bravo!

VERDELIN, *walking to Mercadet*.—Good afternoon!

MERCADET.—Verdelin!

VERDELIN.—You have had that stock bought ahead of me, and I'll be compelled to buy it back at a much higher figure— But I do not mind it at all. It was a fine stroke of business— So here is to the King of the Bourse! To the Napoleon of Finance! (*He bursts out laughing ironically.*)

MERCADET, *much upset*.—What do you mean?

VERDELIN.—Oh, I am only repeating your own words of yesterday—

MERCADET.—My own words—

PIERQUIN.—It seems that Monsieur, here—does not believe in Monsieur Godeau's return—

MINARD.—Ah, sir, how can you—

MERCADET.—What! Does any one doubt—

VERDELIN, *ironically*.—Of course not— At first I imagined that this opportune return was that bold stroke you were announcing yesterday—

MERCADET.—I— (*Aside.*) How foolish of me!

VERDELIN.—And that, on the strength of the presence of a pretended Godeau, you ordered stock bought for cash to-day—without a franc in your pocket—depending upon a rise to-morrow to settle the purchase price—

MERCADET.—So you imagined all this, did you?

VERDELIN, *walking to the mantel-piece*.—Yes, I imagined all that— But when I came here and saw in your court-yard this triumphant post-chaise, this master-piece of the Hindoo carriage-builders' handicraft, and when I realized that no such vehicle could be had from any of the Champs Elysées stables all my

doubts vanished in a trice. So, give him the stock-certificates, Monsieur Pierquin, give him the certificates—

PIERQUIN.—The—certificates—certainly—but—

MERCADET, *aside*.—Let us show a bold front or all is lost. (*Aloud*.) That's all right— Let me see the certificates—

PIERQUIN.—A moment, please, supposing what Monsieur Verdelin says should be true.

MERCADET, *stiffly*.—What do you mean, sir?

MINARD.—But gentlemen, Monsieur Godeau is here— I have seen him— I have spoken to him—

MERCADET, *to Pierquin*.—He has spoken to him—

PIERQUIN, *to Verdelin*.—The fact is that I myself have seen—

VERDELIN.—But I have not a doubt about it myself— now— By the way, Mercadet, what was the name of the ship Godeau wrote you he was coming on—

MERCADET.—The name of the ship? It was—*The Triton*—I believe—

VERDELIN.—How unreliable the newspapers are! The last arrival from India was the *Alcyon*— No *Triton* on the list at all—

PIERQUIN.—Is that so?

MERCADET.—Enough about this— Monsieur Pierquin, where are those certificates?

PIERQUIN.—One moment— I have no guarantee, you know, and—I shall want to speak to Godeau.

MERCADET.—You shall not speak to him, sir, I won't allow you to doubt my word.

VERDELIN.—He is superb!

MERCADET.—Monsieur Minard, go to Godeau; tell him I have just bought 300,000 francs worth of

securities; ask him to give you for me— (*With a special stress on the words following.*) —thirty thousand francs for use as a margin— In his position a man always has at least 30,000 francs about him. (*Low.*) In any case, you'll bring back your thirty thousand.

MINARD.—Yes, sir, I'll do it right away. (*Exit Minard through the door to the right.*)

MERCADET, *stiffly*.—Will this satisfy you, Monsieur Pierquin?

PIERQUIN.—Of course it will— (*To Verdelin.*) In that case he really must have returned.

VERDELIN, *rising*.—Better wait for the 30,000 francs!

MERCADET.—Verdelin, I have the right to show myself deeply offended by your insulting doubts; but, as I am still in your debt—

VERDELIN, *coming to the front of the stage*.—Oh, that's nothing! You have in Godeau's cash-box all you need to pay everybody in full, and, besides, by to-morrow, the Basse-Indre stock will be far above par— When I left 'Change it was shooting upward at a great rate— Your letter is doing wonders. We'll be obliged to give out the results of the engineers' new survey. The mine is worth any other in the Mons district— You have made your fortune in the deal when I expected to make mine—

MERCADET.—Now I understand your rage— (*To Pierquin.*) That's the origin of all his doubts.

VERDELIN.—And these doubts will vanish as soon as Godeau's money is forthcoming—

SCENE XII

THE PRECEDING. VIOLETTE. GOULARD.

GOULARD, *entering from the back door at the right.*—
Ah, my friend!

VIOLETTE, *who follows him.*—My dear Mercadet!

GOULARD.—What a man this Godeau is!

MERCADET, *aside.*—Fine!

VIOLETTE.—What delicate sensibilities!

MERCADET, *aside.*—Finer and finer!

GOULARD.—What a lofty soul!

MERCADET, *aside.*—Delightful!

VERDELIN.—You have seen him?

VIOLETTE.—Yes, I have seen him.

PIERQUIN.—You have spoken to him.

GOULARD.—Just as I speak to you now. And
besides, he has paid me.

ALL.—He has paid you!

MERCADET.—He paid you— And how?

GOULARD.—He paid me in full: 50,000 francs in
drafts—

MERCADET, *aside.*—So far, I understand—

GOULARD.—And the balance—8,000 francs, in notes.

MERCADET.—In—bank notes.

GOULARD.—Of course—in bank notes.

MERCADET, *aside.*—I fail to understand— Ah, I see!
Minard gave the 8,000—So he'll bring only 22,000—

VIOLETTE.—And I, I who might possibly have
accepted some slight reduction in my claim, received
the whole amount on the spot.

MERCADET.—The whole of it— (*Low.*) In drafts, I
suppose?

VIOLETTE.—Yes, in excellent drafts, eighteen thousand francs—

MERCADET.—What a wonderful man this De La Brive is!

VIOLETTE.—And the balance, twelve thousand francs—

VERDELIN.—Well, the balance?

VIOLETTE.—He paid in cash. Here it is. (*He displays a bundle of bank notes.*)

MERCADET.—He also— (*Aside.*) Minard will have only ten thousand left—

GOULARD, *taking a seat near the round table.*—And he is now engaged in settling with the rest of the creditors.

MERCADET.—On the same basis?

VIOLETTE, *also taking a seat by the round table.*—Yes, sir, he pays them in drafts, bank notes and gold coin.

MERCADET, *forgetting himself.*—Good Lord! (*Aside.*) Minard will not bring back a centime!

VERDELIN, *eyeing him suspiciously.*—But what is the matter with you?

MERCADET.—Matter with me?— Nothing—only—I—

SCENE XIII

THE PRECEDING. MINARD.

MINARD.—I fulfilled your errand—

MERCADET, *trembling with excitement.*—You did—eh, and you bring back a few thousands of—

MINARD.—A few thousands! Why, Monsieur Godeau would not even hear me out about the 30,000 francs—

(*Goulard and Violette rise from their seats and with a couple of other creditors who have followed Minard in, press excitedly around the young man.*)

MERCADET.—I understand.

MINARD.—“It is 300,000 francs he wants,” cried he, “here are 300,000 francs in bank bills for him—” (*He pulls out an enormous bundle of notes, which he piles upon the table.*)

MERCADET, *running to the table and sitting down by it.*—What did you say— (*Looking at the money.*)
What’s all this?

MINARD.—The 300,000 francs.

PIERQUIN.—My 300,000 francs:

VERDELIN.—True after all!

MERCADET, *absolutely bewildered.*—Three—hundred—thousand—francs—in—cash—I see it—I touch it—I hold it— (*To Minard, wildly.*) Where did you get that from?

MINARD.—I got it from him, of course. He gave it to me—

MERCADET, *with growing excitement.*—He— Who is He? What is He?

MINARD.—Monsieur Godeau, who else—?

MERCADET, *actually shouting.* — Godeau!! What Godeau? Which Godeau?

GOULARD.—Why, the Godeau who just returned from India.

MERCADET.—From India?

VIOLETTE.—Yes, and who is paying all your debts.

MERCADET.—Away with you, do you think I can be fooled by such Godeaus!

PIERQUIN.—He must be losing his head! (*Just then the crowd of other creditors appear at the back of the stage.*)

Verdelin walks over to meet them and is seen asking questions.)

VERDELIN, *coming down again.*—It's all true enough! Every one of them paid in full!

MERCADET.—Paid— Every one— (*Goes from one to the other and looks at the money and drafts in their hands.*) Paid— Settled in full! I see everything around turning blue, violet, pink, all the colors of the rainbow—

SCENE XIV

THE PRECEDING. MADAME MERCADET. JULIE. *They enter through the left rear door.* DE LA BRIVE, *enters through the door to the right.*

MADAME MERCADET.—My dear, Monsieur Godeau now feels well enough to see you—

MERCADET.—Ah, here you are at last, my daughter, my wife; come to me and you also, Adolphe, and you all, my friends, come closer, look me in the face. You do not want to deceive me, do you?

JULIE.—But what is the matter with you, father—?

MERCADET.—Now tell me— (*For the first time he notices De La Brive.*) What, you here, without a disguise?

DE LA BRIVE.—I had the happy inspiration, sir, to follow Madame Mercadet's advice— Otherwise you would have had two Godeaus at the same time, since heaven has returned to you the real one—

MERCADET.—So— He—has—actually—returned?

VERDELIN.—Then you did not know it, after all?

MERCADET, *himself again and rising to his full stature as he walks to the round table and begins fingering the bank bills.*—I—not—know—he had returned! Welcome home, O you Queen above all Kings! Archduchess of government loans, princess of stocks and bonds, mother of Credit! Welcome home, O Fortune so ardently pursued here and who, for the hundredth time arrives from far-off India!! Ah, how often did I repeat it to you all, Godeau's great heart equals his energy, and is only surpassed by his towering probity!!! (*Goes to his wife and daughter.*) And now, you two dear ones, embrace me!

MADAME MERCADET, *weeping.*—Ah, my dear, dear husband!!

MERCADET, *assisting her.*—Why, you weaken, after being so strong through the dark days!

MADAME MERCADET.—I have not the strength to stand the joy of seeing you rescued—rich again—

MERCADET.—Rich— But honest! My wife, my children, I must confess it now, I do not understand how I held on so long— How I resisted such endless fatigues, such constant strain of the mind, always on the alert, always under arms! It would have crushed a giant— At times I wanted to run away— Ah, give me rest—rest— Let us go and live in the country—

MADAME MERCADET.—You'll soon weary of it—

MERCADET.—No, indeed, I shall watch their happiness. (*He points to Minard and Julie.*) Besides, agriculture will fill my spare time— I feel like studying the possibilities of agriculture. (*To his creditors.*) Gentlemen, we shall remain friends, but do no more business together— (*To De La Brive.*) Monsieur de La Brive, I return to you your 48,000 francs!

DE LA BRIVE.—Ah, sir!

MERCADET.—And I loan you ten thousand more.

DE LA BRIVE.—Ten thousand francs! But I do not know when I shall be able to pay you back!

MERCADET.—Never mind that—accept—I have my purpose—

DE LA BRIVE.—All right—I accept.

MERCADET.—Just what I dreamed, for now I am—a—creditor! (*Speaking to his former creditors lined up in a row to the right.*) I—am—a— Creditor!!

MADAME MERCADET, *pointing to the door at the back.*—My dear, he is waiting—

MERCADET.—That's so— Let us go to him! I have so often made use of my dear old Godeau—in the distance, that I am well entitled to the right of seeing him again—in the flesh. To Godeau, my dear wife, to Godeau!!

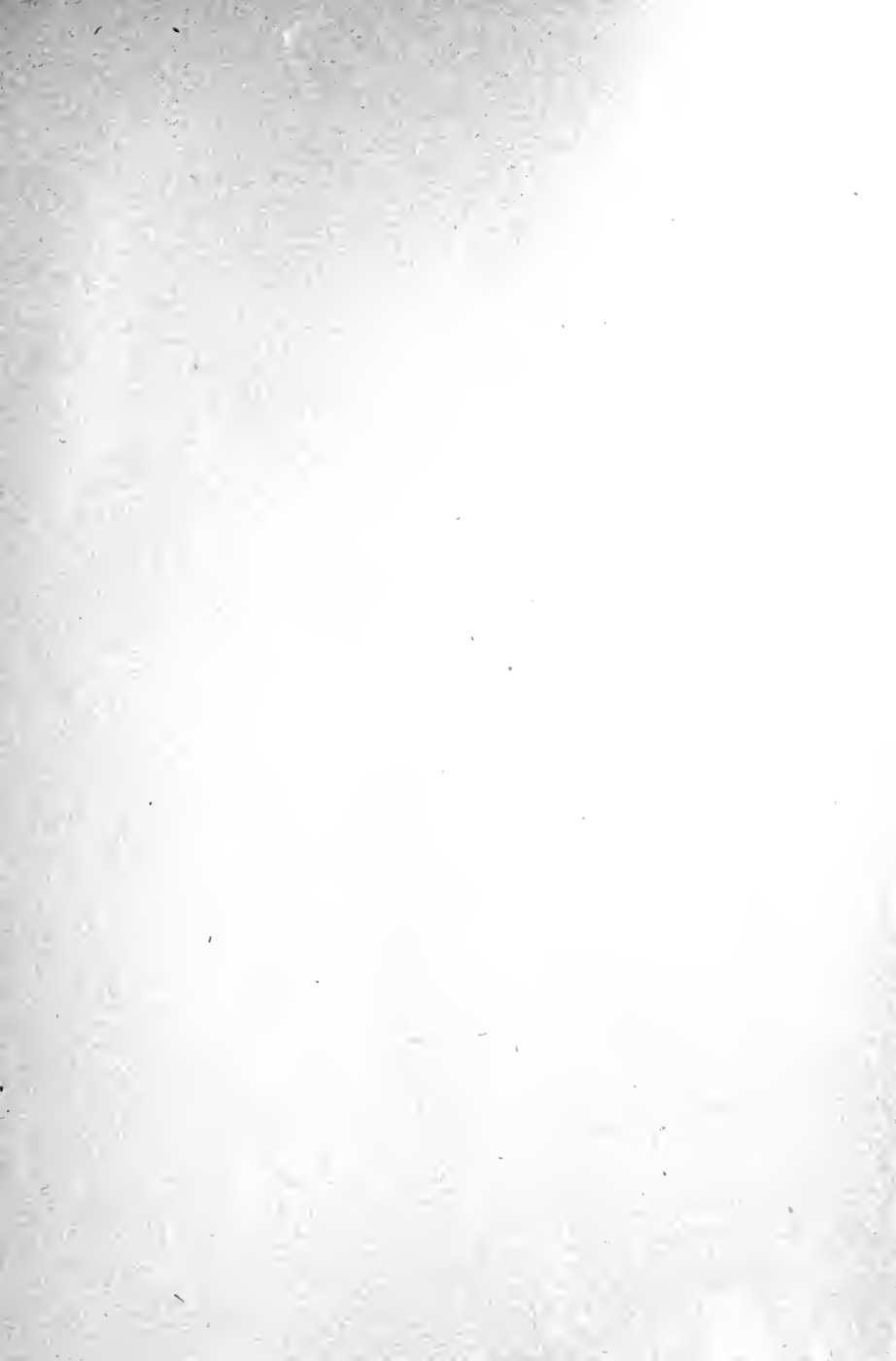
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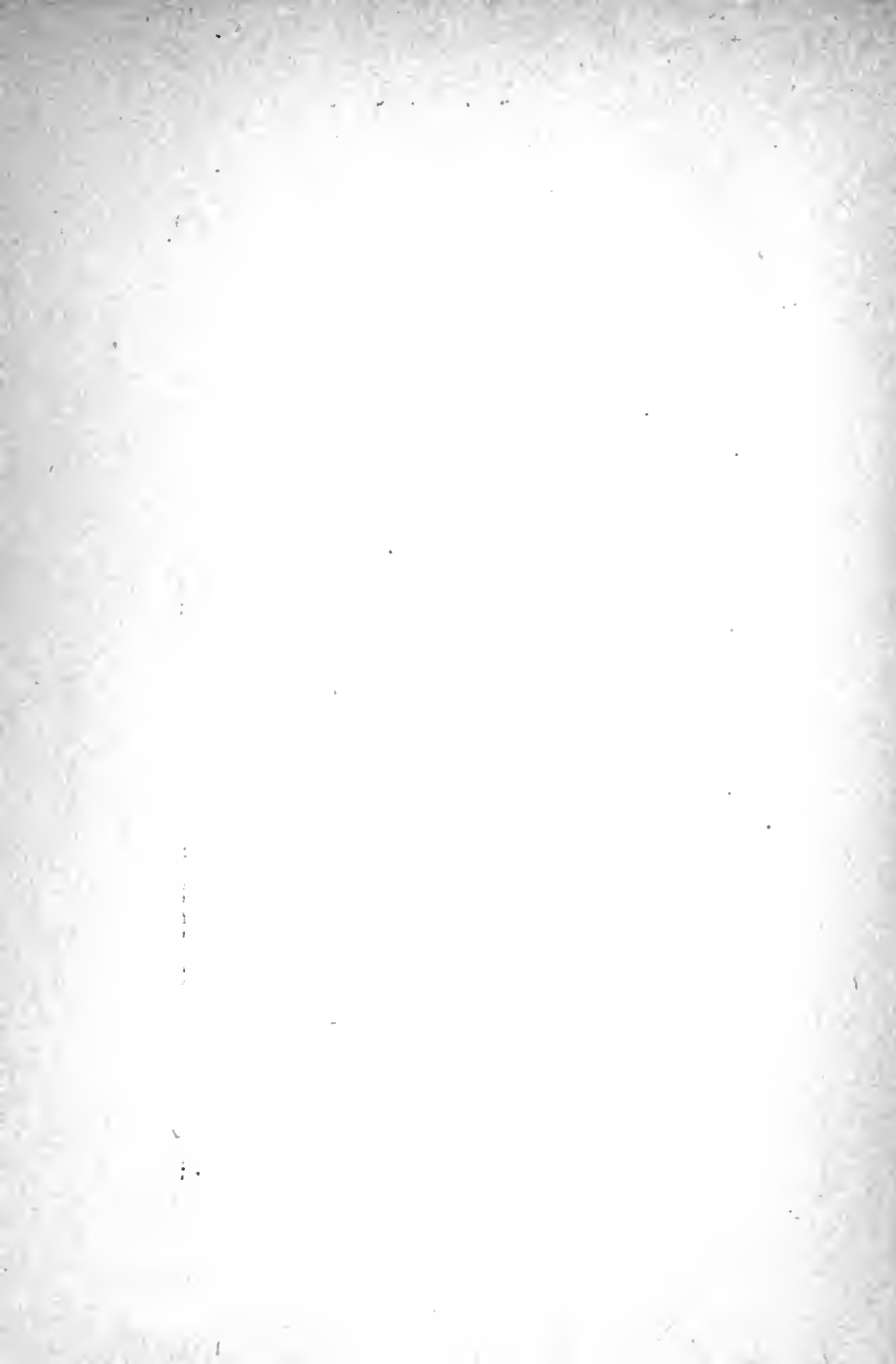


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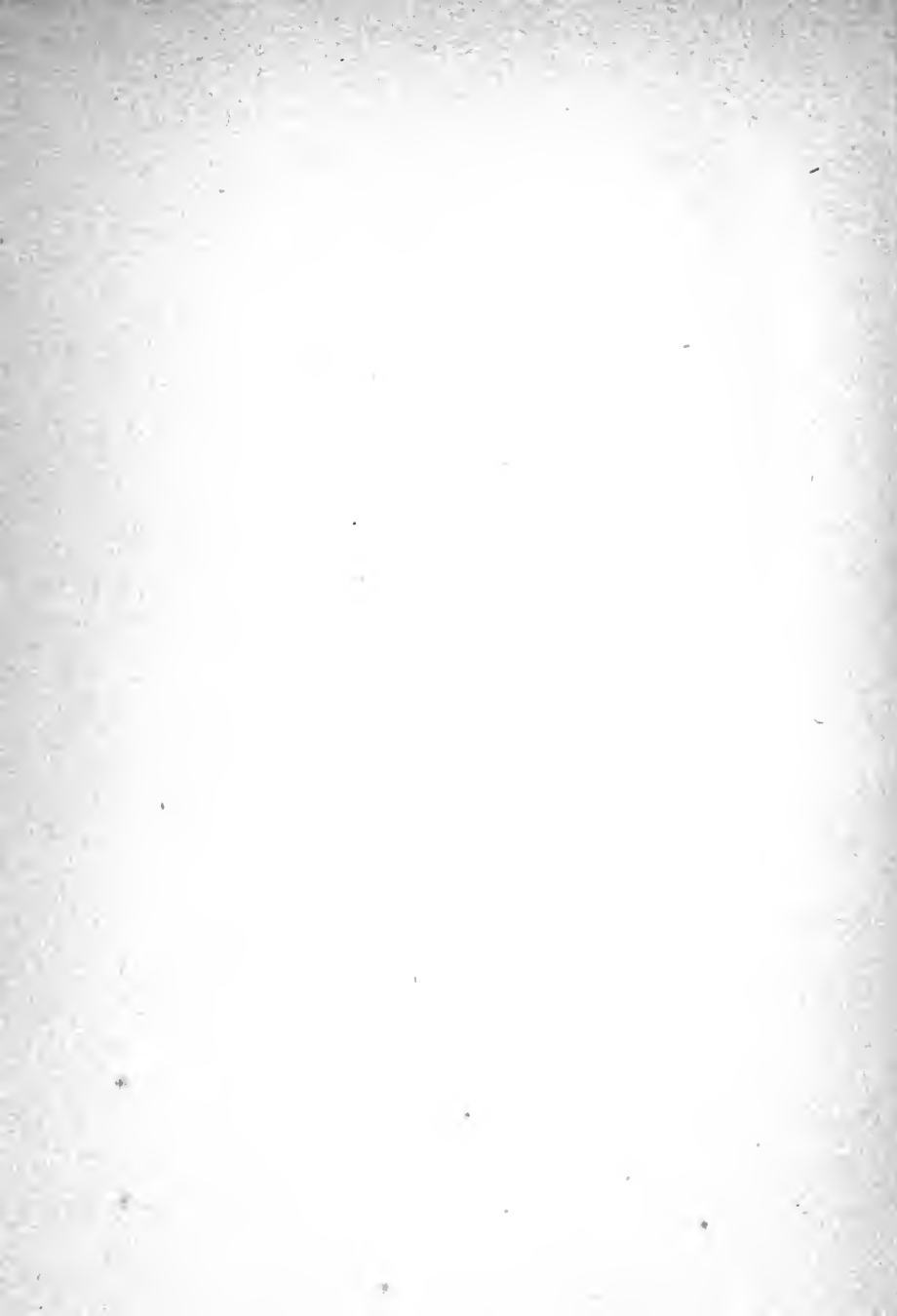
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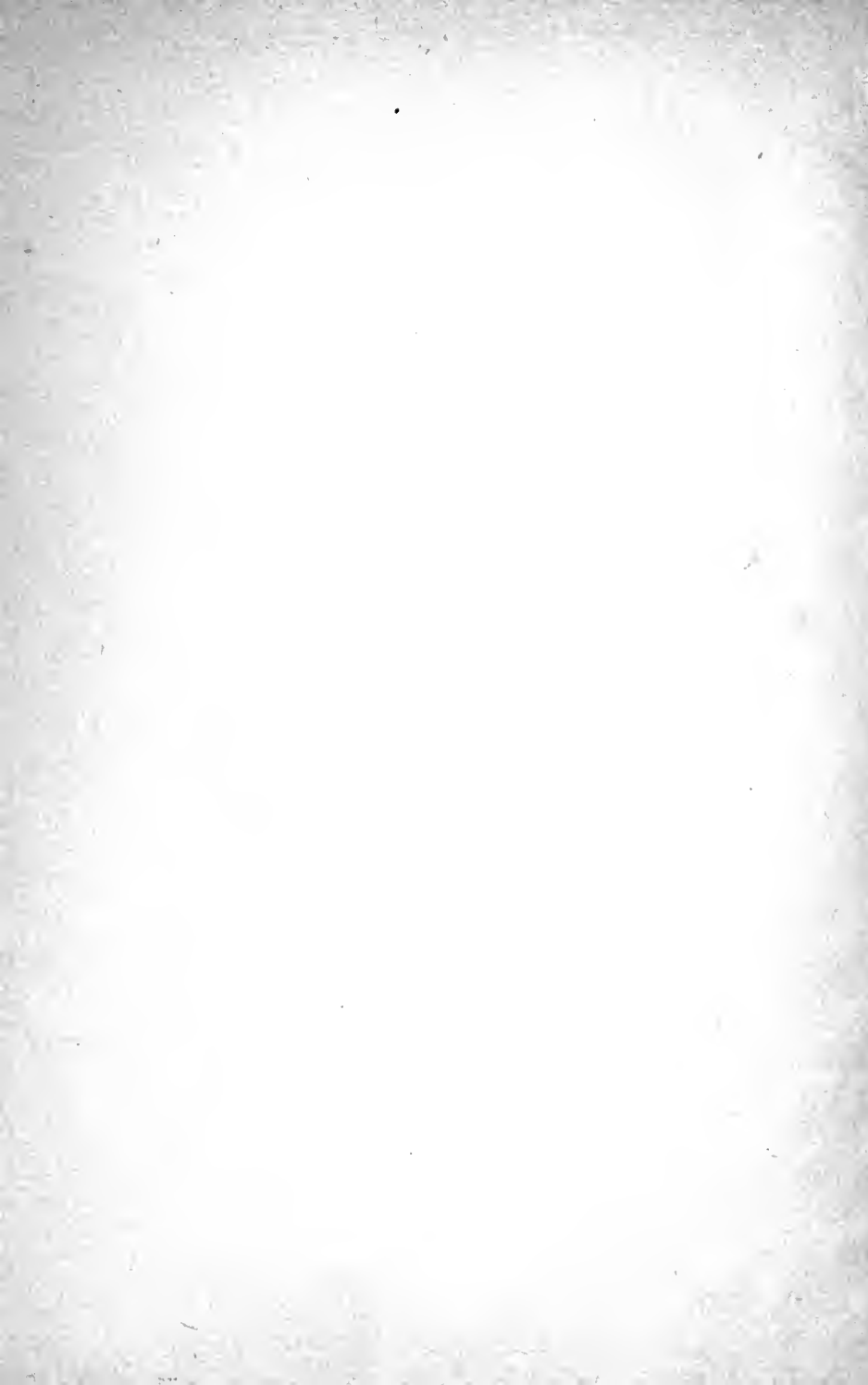












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