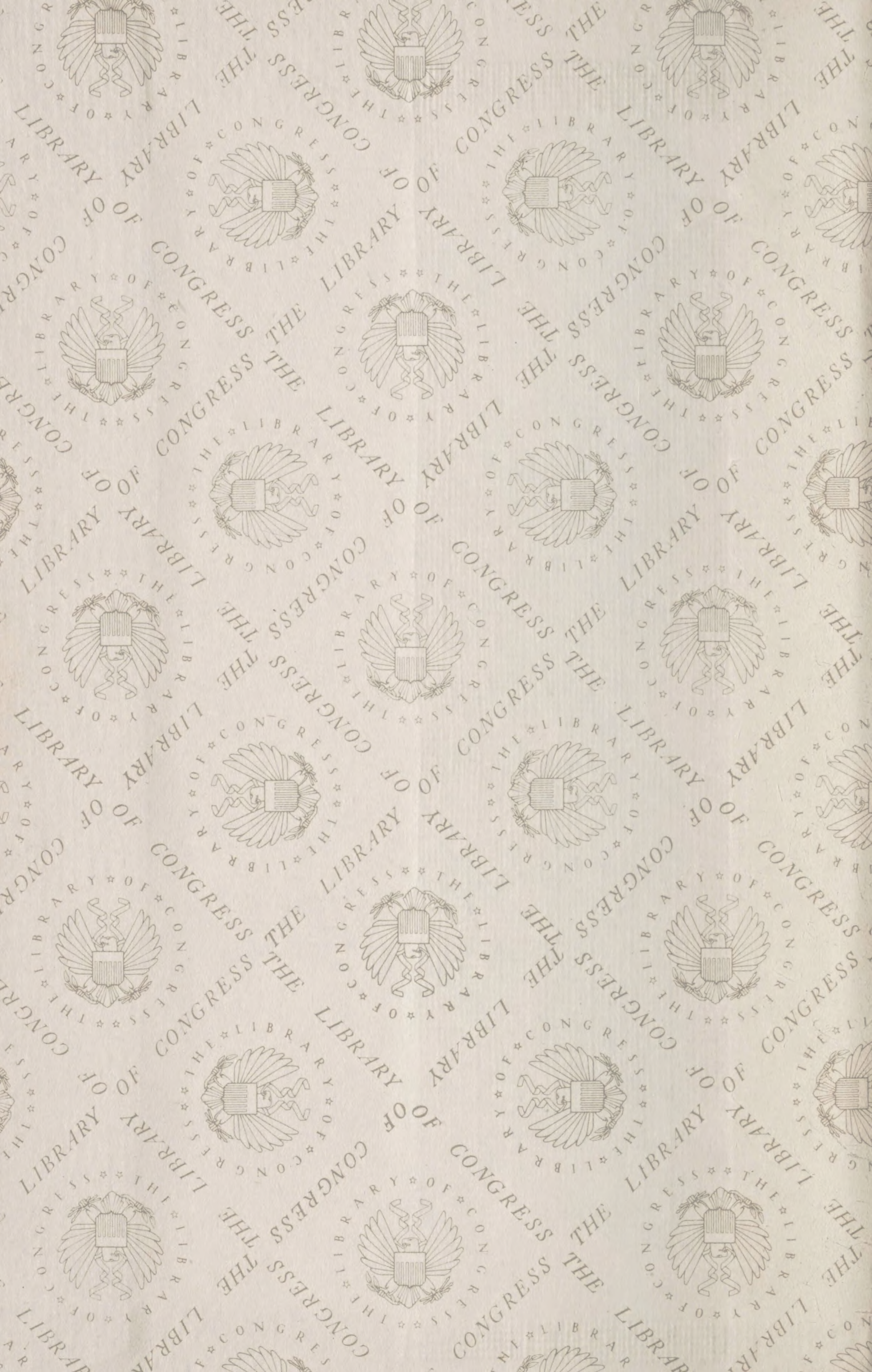
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THE CONSEQUENCES OF A DUEL

A PARISIAN ROMANCE.

BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST
NEW YORK
George Munro
PUBLISHER

e Seaside Library, Pocket Edition, Issued Tri-weekly. By subscription $26 per annum.

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BY

F. DU BOISGOBEY.

[TRANSLATED BY A. D HALL.]

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF A DUEL.

CHAPTER I.

THIS is a story of yesterday. The early spring weather of last year had already brought out the leaves on the old chestnut-trees of the Tuileries, and the sprouting grass was beginning to clothe with verdure the naked plains which border the Seine between Asnières and Saint-Denis.

An open barouche, drawn by two good horses, and driven by a coachman in livery, had passed the bridge of Saint-Ouen, and was proceeding at a good speed along the dusty road across the peninsula of Gennevilliers.

The occupants of the carriage were three, three men, all young; the eldest was not more than thirty. They had not come to breakfast joyously upon the grass, for they were dressed in black from head to foot, and people who pride themselves on knowing the customs of society do not dress thus for a picnic in the country.

"Look! there are some fellows going to enjoy themselves by crossing swords," exclaimed a laborer, engaged in breaking stones by the roadside.

"This isn't a bad place for that sort of work," rejoined one of his companions, leaning upon his pick to watch the carriage pass.

"Those suburban observers are very clever," said the occupant of the back seat of the barouche, a big fellow, with a pleasant face.

"How the devil could they have guessed that one of us was going to fight?" demanded the tall, dark man, who sat opposite to him.

"By Jove! It wasn't a very difficult thing. We are three, and there are always three when a duel is to be fought, the principal and his two seconds; we are all three in frock coats and buttoned up to the chin, as is the fashion in such affairs; it is scarcely two

o'clock, and there is no reason why we should be taking a drive for pleasure. Good Heavens! What should we be here for if Monsieur de Pontaumur and his acolytes had not given us a meeting to settle a foolish quarrel? That laborer, from his appearance, has probably served in the army, and he understood at a glance what was up. Only, he was mistaken in speaking of swords, as Maurice is to fight with the pistol. I'll be hanged if I know why with the pistol, by the way. That was the fashion under the Restoration, but it is no longer."

"You forget, my dear Coulanges, that I did not have the choice of weapons," said the third occupant of the carriage, gently.

This last speaker was small and light-complexioned; he had good features and a pleasant expression.

"It was your own fault that you didn't, Saulieu; there was no need of striking that beast of a Pontaumur before a dozen people, and without any reason, too."

"There is always a reason, when one renders himself liable to accepting a challenge and the conditions of his adversary."

"Well, doubtless, there was a reason; but you have not deemed it proper to tell me of yours," said the dark man, who had been astonished at the laborer's perspicacity.

"Pardon me, but you were at the club when Monsieur de Pontaumur, who was my partner at whist, reproached me in bitter terms of having made a mistake."

"Oh! He told you that you played like a dummy. It was not very polite, but it was not a grave injury, and I assure you that I, George Courtenay, who am not very good-tempered, would not have responded to such a remark with a blow. And, moreover, I do not like the man who uttered it. But he had received the blow, and there was nothing for him to do but to efface the insult. You had placed yourself absolutely in the wrong, and we were obliged to submit to the exactions of his seconds, two men whom I like no better than him. There is one of them whom I especially mistrust."

"Corleon!" exclaimed Coulanges. "It is said that he cheats at cards. I have never seen him play, but I think that he is quite capable of assisting fortune, and I can not abide him."

"Nevertheless," said Courtenay, "you are going to give this Pontaumur a good lesson, Maurice. I am astonished that he has chosen the pistol, for he knows that you are a magnificent marksman, and he himself is by no means a bad swordsman."

"It matters to me little how I fight, provided I do fight," murmured Maurice Saulieu.

Courtenay gazed fixedly at his friend, who turned his eyes away, and the conversation ceased.

However brave a man may be, or however accustomed to affairs of this sort, he feels the need of collecting himself a little during the last few minutes which precede a meeting brought about by serious causes, and Courtenay was beginning to suspect that this duel had an origin which the two combatants did not wish to disclose. He knew thoroughly the character of Maurice, who was his oldest and best friend; they had been classmates at college, had entered society together, and were seldom apart, although their fortunes were unequal and they were very unlike in tastes and temperament. But, like love, friendship is often founded on contrasts. This was the first time that Maurice had hidden anything from George, who never concealed anything from him, not even his love affairs.

Maurice, although he was calm, was silent and preoccupied. Coulanges bore a grave air, perhaps because he felt obliged to; he was much less intimate than George Courtenay with Maurice Saulieu, and he had been chosen as a second chiefly on account of his profession. He was a graduate of the medical school.

No one would have guessed it from the life he led, for he was to be met with wherever there was anything amusing going on. He had become a doctor as he would have become a lawyer, in order not to go against the wishes of his family; but, his father having left him thirty thousand francs a year, he did not bother himself about the practice of his profession.

"We are nearing the place," he said, to break a silence which weighed upon him. "I recognize that field of asparagus. I served as a second last year at the same place, in the old redoubt of Gennevilliers, which was not torn down after the siege. It might have been erected for the express use of duelists, for it was never bombarded by the Prussians, and it is an excellent place to cross swords or to exchange pistol shots."

"Speaking of pistols," said George, "you made sure, I suppose, that those which these gentlemen are going to use have never been fired before?"

"I went and bought them yesterday at Galand's, with Monsieur Corleon, who pretends to be a connoisseur of weapons, and we both examined them and saw that they were new. We also examined the powder and balls. And it was all placed in a box which Corleon kept, after having locked it in my presence, and given me the key. Unless I had placed seals upon the box I could not have taken more precautions."

"What you did was sufficient. We are agreed with them as to the conditions of the duel, twenty paces and fire simultaneously at the word of command; the fire will cease after the third shot exchanged, even if neither of the adversaries is touched."

"Exactly. That is the precise programme. And here is the path which leads to the redoubt that you see below there."

"We have not arrived the first. I see another carriage; Pontaumur and his seconds have already descended. Jean," to the coachman, "do not go any further."

The carriage stopped. They alighted, and Dr. Coulanges took from under the seat a case of surgical instruments, which he had never yet had occasion to use.

"In case of accident," he said in Courtenay's ear, "the carriages can advance."

"I hope that ours will take us all three back safe and sound," murmured George.

"We have no time to lose," said Maurice Saulieu. "Those gentlemen have gone across the fields. Do not let us keep them waiting."

George passed his arm through that of his friend, and sensible Coulanges had the tact to walk on ahead, thinking that the two friends might like to be alone during the short walk they had to take before reaching the place of rendezvous.

"My dear Maurice," said George, "I am sure that you are going to emerge from this without a scratch, but, as you know, a duel with pistols is a regular lottery, and, in view of the very improbable chance of anything happening to you, have you any commands to give me?"

"One only, my friend," responded Saulieu, firmly. "Promise me that, if I am killed, you will go yourself and tell Marianne."

"Mademoiselle Mezenc, your betrothed! It would kill her also, and if you should exact that I fulfill such a commission, I should do it through an intermediary. She has a mother, and to her mother I should address myself."

"Her mother is in such a state of health that the least excitement would be fatal to her, as you know very well."

"I know that she has been paralyzed for two years, but the blow would be less severe to her than to her daughter."

"Perhaps; and yet I beg you to do what I ask. I have counted on your not refusing, and I promised—"

"Whom? Marianne?"

"Yes, Marianne."

"She knows that you are going to fight?"

"She knows it. I had to tell her."

"By Jove! I believe I am dreaming. What! you adored that young girl, you would have already married her if you had had enough fortune for two; you inherited money three months ago and you immediately asked me to demand Mademoiselle Mezenc's hand, which was accorded you without difficulty, you are to be married after Easter; she loves you with all her heart, and you could imagine nothing better than to go and tell her that you were to risk your life to-day! While you were in the vein of committing follies, you should have invited the poor girl to be present at the duel."

"I could not hide from her that I was going to fight."

George started. He began to have a glimmering of the truth.

"Listen, Maurice," he said in a voice which trembled a little: "I have purposely abstained from asking you why you sought a quarrel with Pontaumur, but if Mademoiselle Mezenc has been mixed up in any fashion in this unfortunate affair, you must tell me, were it only to enable me to defend her if you were not there. I have for her as much esteem and friendship as—"

"As she has for you," interrupted Maurice; "I know it, my dear George; and I am certain that, if I miss him, you would no more allow her to be insulted than I would."

"What! Has this Pontaumur allowed himself to—"

"Not content with paying Marianne undesired attentions, when he met her in society, he has said odious things about her, which I did not hear but which were repeated to me."

"What could he say?"

"Spare me from telling you. It is better that you should always be ignorant, whatever happens. I did not wish that Marianne's name should be pronounced in connection with a duel between this man and me. I had, therefore, no other choice than to act as I have; to insult the wretch publicly on the first pretext. I shall kill him, if Heaven is just, but he may kill me, and in that case, I count upon you."

"To avenge you? I swear it."

"No, that would be to awaken the memory of a calumny which Pontaumur will not dare to repeat. I count upon you to protect an unfortunate young girl who will soon be alone in the world, for her mother has not long to live, and, if it were not for me, her aunt, Madame Fresnay, would soon cease to have anything to do with her. But, here we are. Will you promise me to go to Marianne, if anything happens to me?"

"Well, yes, I promise; but I hope it will be you who will make the visit. You are a wonderful shot and you are perfectly cool. You will lodge a bullet in that knave's breast. Ah! if I had known! It would have been I who would have given him the blow."

"Gentlemen, they are waiting for us," said Coulanges, turning to the two friends, whom he was a few steps ahead of.

"Here we are," responded Maurice Saulieu, tranquilly.

M. de Pontaumur and his friends were standing at the entrance of the redoubt, which was surrounded by cultivated fields. The nearest house was five or six hundred yards away.

M. Corleon carried the box which contained the pistols. He appeared well enough, whatever Courtenay might say, and seemed rather nervous, this being doubtless the first time he had figured in an affair of honor. The other second was a retired officer, who was a member of the club, and who was present when the blow was struck. This latter could not but have a bad opinion of the adversary of the man he represented, and he did not hesitate to show it.

As for M. de Pontaumur himself, he was a man approaching forty and of Herculean build, but his large size did not prevent him from having the appearance of a gentleman. He might even pass for a handsome man, although his complexion lacked freshness and his hair was beginning to be slightly gray. He was no longer what is called in the theater a lover, but he might very well have played the strong leading rôles, and if he did not generally please men because of his haughty manners, he could please women who like strength and massiveness. He had the "fatal air," as they used to say in the old melodramas.

The two parties saluted each other coldly, the principals drew away a little and the seconds came together to proceed to the final preparations.

"Gentlemen," commenced M. Corleon in a grieved tone, "I fear that it is too late to stop this duel, which we all deplore. However, my friend, M. de Pontaumur, has commissioned me to make a last attempt at reconciliation. He is the insulted party and his bravery is beyond question. He can, therefore, allow himself to express a desire for an arrangement, which—"

"Pardon me, monsieur," interrupted George Courtenay, "I must, in the first place, call to your attention that an affair as grave as this is, can not be arranged. We are not children. In the second place, I do not see how we could come to an understanding, unless your friend is content to accept the blow he received."

"You know as well as I, monsieur, that he has the right to de-

mand reparation. But if Monsieur Saulieu were willing, in our presence, to acknowledge that he was wrong—"

"Do you mean to apologize?"

"Certainly. It seems to me that, in such a case, it is almost a duty."

"It may seem so to you," said George, dryly, "but it does not seem so to me. That Saulieu was too quick, is possible; but, in such a case, a man of honor has nothing to do but to submit to the consquences of his rashness.

"I may add," said Corleon, "that the accomplishment of this duty would have nothing painful about it. We were all present at the scene of violence which was the cause of this meeting and we should understand it if Monsieur Saulieu expressed his regret for having attacked causelessly another member of the club."

"If Monsieur de Pontaumur could be satisfied with such a declaration, he can not be very exacting."

"The apology would be stated in the report which we should draw up," said Captain Morgan.

"And which you would publish, of course. Come, gentlemen, all this is not serious. Let us end it, I beg."

"You will not refuse, I hope, to submit our proposition to Monsieur Saulieu," said Corleon.

"I refuse categorically, because I am certain that he would not accept it. If he had wished to make an apology, he would have begun by doing so. Now, it is too late. It is a pity, perhaps, but at the point where we now are, we must go on to the end."

"Permit me to say, that it is a great responsibility that you are taking upon yourself."

"A responsibility which does not weigh upon me at all. I know my friend's wishes and judge it useless to consult him. We have lost enough time. Will you open that box?"

"Since you exact it. The doctor has the key."

"Here it is," said the Coulanges.

"It was a precaution which we both thought it best to take," added Corleon. "There can not be too many guarantees to equalize the chances of an encounter. We bought together the pistols and the ammunition. The box was closed by Monsieur Coulanges, and you can see for yourself that it has not been opened since yesterday."

"I am quite convinced of it," growled George, with a shrug of the shoulders to show how ridiculous these precautions and discourses seemed to him.

"No one suspects you of tampering with it," added the doctor, impatiently.

Courtenay examined the pistols, assured himself that they had never been fired, and that the balls were of right weight, poured a little powder into his hand, scrutinized it, and said:

"It is all right. I will count off the paces with Monsieur Morgan, while you load the weapons."

"With the doctor's help," said M. Corleon. "It is not proper for me to do it alone."

"Coulanges will load one of the pistols and you the other."

"That is what I meant. You see we have selected old-fashioned, muzzle-loading pistols. You are surer of what is done than with ready prepared cartridges, and they are quite as accurate, too accurate, alas! for, at twenty paces and with fire-arms, a misfortune is to be feared."

"We did not come here to fire into the air and breakfast together afterward," replied Courtenay, brusquely.

"Will you come with me, monsieur?" he added, addressing the captain, who replied:

"I am at your orders. And, if you are wiling, I would prefer that you should measure the distance. You are taller than I; your strides will be longer, and I think you do not wish to bring the combatants any nearer together than possible."

"Certainly not, I wished to place them thirty paces apart in the beginning."

The ground was selected. By placing the adversaries face to face near the entrance of the redoubt, a perfect equality was obtained. They had the sun on their side, and no wall or tree could favor the shot of one or the other.

While George was pacing the soil with Captain Morgan M. Corleon and the doctor performed their duty with much zeal. M. Corleon brought to it a minute care, and he understood better than Coulanges the rather delicate task. Without him, Coulanges would have forgotten to clear out the muzzles of the pistols, and when, after this proceeding, they poured in the powder, he showed the doctor how to measure the charges so that they should be equal.

He absolutely insisted that Coulanges should choose two balls and give him one. One would have said that he was afraid to select one himself; and before putting it into the pistol, he held it an instant between his thumb and forefinger, as if to show that he did not put it in his pocket.

Coulanges, who did not attach so much importance to these details, thought only of carefully loading his own weapon.

The task was finished, when the two other seconds returned, after having marked the places by thrusting their canes into the ground.

"There is nothing more to be done, gentlemen," said Corleon, "except to draw the pistols by lot. I will cover them with my handkerchief and the adversaries can choose without seeing them."

"What is the use of this complication?" demanded Courtenay, out of temper. "We shall never end, if we listen to you. You two were to prepare the weapons, and it is clear that everything was done correctly. Let us decide, if you are willing, that your friend shall use the pistol loaded by the doctor and that Saulieu shall use the other. Give it to me, I will take it to him, Captain Morgan, will you give Monsieur de Pontaumur the pistol Monsieur Coulanges holds in his hand?"

This arranged, the seconds separated into two groups.

"What does that imbecile mean by his drawing from under a handkerchief?" grumbled Courtenay, as he turned to join Maurice. "Does he take us for prestidigitators and believe us capable of trickery?"

"No," said the doctor, "but he is not ignorant perhaps that he himself has been accused of cheating at baccarat, and he fears that he may be suspected of cheating on the duel ground."

"Ah!" said Courtenay between his teeth, "we have to do with a fine gentleman, and this Pontaumur chooses his seconds well. One is stiff as a ramrod and the other does not inspire me with the least confidence. But you watched the operation of loading and are sure there was nothing underhand?"

"Perfectly sure," affirmed the doctor. "I saw everything and even selected myself the bullets."

"Well, never mind. If no one is touched at the first fire I shall demand that the rôles be inverted. The captain and I will load the pistols. Now, my dear fellow, I have still a word to say to Saulieu, and I have no need of you to conduct him to his post."

"Very well; I will let you go, and remain here."

"I will rejoin you in a minute. This is a good place for the seconds."

Coulanges stopped where he was. Morgan and Corleon had joined their friend, and Courtenay went to his, who was quietly waiting a short distance away.

"All is ready," he said, handing him the pistol, which he had cocked. "The captain will give the signal, and he has promised

me not to be too slow. You know what you have to do: aim at the first command, and fire at the moment he pronounces the word three! after having said, one! two! at the precise moment, you understand."

"Yes."

"A second sooner or a second later would be considered dishonorable."

"I know it."

"But there is no reason for you to be too much occupied with the signal. You will hear it plainly and it is useless to keep your eye upon Morgan. Think only of sighting your adversary and try not to miss him. Since I have known what preceded the blow, I would give anything to fight in your place. For, after all, I do not amount to much, and my life is not worth a great deal, while you are going to marry a charming young girl. But don't let us talk any more of that."

"Talk of it, on the contrary. I have your promise, old man, and I expect you to keep it."

"I repeat, since you exact it, your will shall be done."

"I might have another request to make of you, only—"

"Another! No more of this talk, now. It makes the hand tremble and injures the aim. We will continue the conversation when you have stretched Monsieur de Pontaumur upon the ground; for I don't doubt that you will do so. You are cool, and I have seen you hit the bull's eye five times out of seven. You will at least break one of his ribs."

"What will be, will be. My cause is just and I do not fear death. That is all that is necessary. But, without returning to what you have promised to do if I am killed, I can tell you that you will find in my pocket-book, here upon my breast, in the pocket of my coat, papers which I ask you to read and examine."

"A will? That was quite useless. But, it is understood. Not a word more. This is the limit which you must not pass, my cane. Place yourself there. Your adversary is already at his post."

"I am ready. Give me your hand; that is not forbidden by the code," said Maurice, smiling.

"No, old fellow, and I give it to you gladly, because it will not be the last time. You have pulled up your cuffs and turned up the collar of your coat, I see, to hide any spot of white; that is right; and, above all, keep your side turned toward him. Ah! one word more: the weapon always rises, aim at the knee to touch the heart. The trigger is a little stiff. Begin to pull gently at the word, two."

"I understand. Farewell, George; these gentlemen are becoming impatient. Do not delay longer or they will think that I am afraid and you are bracing me up."

"Those who should say that would have to settle with me," replied George, quitting his friend.

The three other seconds had taken their position on a little mound, which overlooked the field of combat. Coulanges was greatly moved. He liked Saulieu very much and he was thinking of the dangerous effects of firearms which mangle when they do not kill. M. Corleon was agitated and showed even more uneasiness than he felt perhaps. The captain appeared very calm, and was so in reality.

"I rely on your not pausing too much between the words of command," whispered Courtenay to him.

M. Morgan responded by a gesture which signified: Be easy, I know my business; and, advancing a little, he cried:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

The question was a simple formality, for the two combatants, the right shoulder forward and the pistol pointed to the ground, were awaiting the signal.

It would have been impossible to decide which of the two was the calmer. Saulieu was a trifle pale, but he had the confident look of a man who has no fear and he carried his head erect. M. de Pontaumur, firm upon his legs, held himself steady, with frowning brow and eye fixed upon his opponent. With his dark complexion, pronounced features and large frame, he had the appearance of a bronze statue.

His rather massive build was a marked disadvantage, for Maurice, being very small, presented much less vulnerable surface.

"Go on, captain," murmured George, who was suffering cruelly from the anguish the bravest feel, when the life of a friend is at stake.

Morgan uttered the first word of command in a deep, clear voice, and the arms were raised at the same time.

"One! two! three!" he cried, without leaving more than a second's interval between each word.

The two pistols were fired so exactly together that only one report was heard.

M. de Pontaumur immediately lowered his weapon. He was evidently untouched; but Saulieu let his fall, and quickly raised his left hand to his breast. He remained standing, however, and Courtenay arrived in time to receive him in his arms.

"You are wounded!" he exclaimed in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, there, under the arm," said Maurice, with a shudder.

"It's nothing," cried the doctor, running up. "Carry him, Courtenay, to the grass over there; lean upon me, my dear Saulieu."

They, with difficulty, dragged him about ten steps, and laid him down upon the grass. The wound could not be seen, but his face was livid and his eyes closed.

"Help me to loosen his coat," said Coulanges, in a low tone.

His hand trembled, and, in his hurry, he had dropped his case of instruments.

"Do you suffer?" asked George, anxiously.

"No, very little," gasped the wounded man, "but I am suffocating."

The doctor had unbuttoned his coat and vest; a thin line of blood stained the shirt, which he quickly tore open. A scarcely visible wound appeared, two inches below the collar-bone.

"Well?" said George.

Coulanges responded by a shake of the head, which foreboded no good.

M. de Pontaumur had joined his seconds, as is the custom in such cases. It was proper, however, that they should inquire as to the condition of the adversary whom a too-well directed ball had touched.

M. Corleon and the captain went first. Pontaumur followed behind; it was plain to be seen from his face that he did not care to approach too near, for fear of finding himself face to face with a corpse.

"The wound is not serious, I hope?" said Corleon, with a constrained air.

And the doctor, making a gesture, which signified it is mortal, he threw up his hands.

"Oh! my God! what a misfortune! You will do us this justice, gentlemen, that we did all that was possible to stop this duel, and that everything was done in an honorable manner."

"Go to the devil!" cried Courtenay, shaking his fist at him. "We want nothing of your jeremiads and protestations."

And as M. Corleon hastened to beat a retreat, Courtenay called Morgan, and said in another tone:

"Take away your friends, captain; take them away quickly, and at the first inn you come to below there, near the bridge, send us two men with a wheelbarrow and a mattress."

"Rely upon me, monsieur," answered the officer, with the

phlegm of an old soldier, who has seen many such cases. "I will also give your coachman orders to advance."

Courtenay knelt down and raised the head of his friend, who had opened his eyes.

"Maurice," he asked, "do you know me? It is I George."

"You will go," murmured Maurice, in a voice which was only a whisper, "you will go—you promised."

"I promise you again."

"Thanks, thanks! Lean over, George, nearer—nearer still."

"You hurt yourself. Do not speak, I implore."

"I must. I wish you to know all. Marianne—"

"Well, you will see her again. In two hours we shall be in Paris; she will come."

"No; I shall never see her again. But at least, you shall know the secret which I did not dare to confide to you, and she for whom I die will be saved."

"Yes; for you will live, and she loves you."

"No; it is you whom she loves," said Maurice, so low that George alone heard this strange avowal.

"What do you say?" cried George, in amazement.

Maurice did not reply. These last words had cost him his life. His head fell back, his eyes closed, and George saw the shadow of death steal like a veil over his young face.

"It is over," murmured Coulanges, letting fall the hand which he held. "The pulse has stopped. The heart no longer beats."

"But, good heavens! you have let him die. You have done nothing to save him!" cried George, with a movement of anger.

"There was nothing to do, I assure you. The ball penetrated the upper lobe of the right lung, not very deeply perhaps, for it passed through two or three garments, but it cut an artery and internal hemorrhage was produced. I had not a moment of hope after examining the wound. I am even astonished that the poor fellow could live as long as he did, and speak so much."

"Speak? No; he was not conscious of what he was saying; he was delirious."

"You are mistaken. He suffered horribly, but he died in full possession of his faculties. I, who ought to be accustomed to such spectacles, am completely upset."

"That is very apparent," said Courtenay. "You talk medicine instead of acting. Go and see if Jean is coming with the carriage, since your science is powerless."

"The carriage? You don't dream, I hope, of using it to trans-

port the body to Paris. We should be arrested on the way. Still, if it were a closed carriage— But we have not even anything with which to cover the face of our unfortunate friend."

"My coachman will give us the covers of the horses; and, besides, didn't you hear me ask the captain to send us some men with a mattress?"

"Morgan? He is worth no more than the other two, and if you count upon him to help us—"

"The service which I asked of him is one which can not be refused, even to an enemy, and this rough soldier is not my enemy, although I do not fancy him at all."

"He is the friend of Pontaumur and that other fool."

"Corleon? Ah! the wretch! Just now, when he approached to ask me in such a sugary way if Saulieu were seriously hurt, I could have grabbed him by the throat and strangled him."

"I should have infinite pleasure in crossing swords with him, if I could find the opportunity; but he is not worth bothering ourselves about. It is upon the murderer that Maurice Saulieu's death must be avenged."

"Oh! I have more than one account to regulate with him. I intend to make him pay dear for that pistol-shot, and the rest," added George, between his teeth.

"Yes; I hope that the matter will not rest here, and that one of us will give him the lesson he deserves. The devil of it is, that few of the members of the club will take part against him."

"Why? Everybody detests him."

"Granted. But he was publicly struck; he was in the right, and I fear that no one will pity our friend who was the aggressor."

Courtenay started to protest that the first wrong came from Pontaumur, but he remembered in time that the secret was not his, and he contented himself with a threatening gesture.

Courtenay had risen after seeing Saulieu expire in his arms. His heart failed him to sustain that dead body already disfigured by death. But he could not take his eyes off it. It seemed to him that the mouth was going to speak, the hand he extended to grasp his own. And he was seeking the solution of the enigmatical words: "It is you whom she loves," which Maurice's white lips had uttered.

"Marianne Mezenc," he thought, striding up and down, "whom I scarcely know—she loves me? No, it is impossible! Maurice was delirious, whatever the doctor may declare; he did not know what he was saying; and yet he used his last strength to speak to

me and confide to me this secret. That was his expression, and that was his last thought—a secret. Ah! yes, and a very impenetrable one; for I should never have suspected that there existed between me and this young girl any mysterious bond, and even now I do not believe it yet; she adored Saulieu, she was going to marry him, and I only saw her rarely in society, where her minx of an aunt took her. How under the sun could she have fallen in love with me? It is certainly not my fault if she has. She was Maurice's *fiancée*, it was as if she had been my sister, and I never even told her that I thought her pretty."

While George was indulging in these incoherent thoughts, the doctor, a little piqued by the reproaches which his comrade had addressed to him, applied his ear to Saulieu's breast to make sure that he was indeed dead, and he acquired the sad certainty that the heart had ceased to beat. The blood no longer flowed from the small hole made by M. de Pontaumur's bullet, and the body was already cold.

"Ah! this dueling with pistols!" he muttered between his teeth. "It ought to be forbidden! A thrust from a sword can be parried, and when it is received, it is not absolutely fatal, while these infernal leaden balls perforate a vital organ as easily as they would cut through a sheet of paper. I would bet, now, that this one lodged quite near the spine, despite the coat, vest and shirt; at such a distance it is unheard-of, for George's twenty paces are equal to thirty. Ah! that was good powder that Monsieur Corleon weighed with so much care, and if poor Saulieu had aimed better Pontaumur would not have returned to Paris on his feet. Bah! what is the use of practicing? In the shooting gallery Saulieu would put twenty balls into the target one after the other, and on the dueling ground he misses a man with the height and shoulders of a grenadier; he was not nervous, though, his hand did not tremble, but he must have fired hurriedly—that Morgan spoke so quickly."

"What shall we do?" asked George. "Shall we wait here the arrival of the men? I wonder if we had not better go and find them ourselves. The bridge of Saint-Ouen is not far, and the carriage would take us there and back in twenty minutes."

"You are right. But it is not necessary for us both to go. We can not abandon the body of our friend; he is dead, alas! and my skill can not restore him, but we must not leave him at the mercy of any passer-by. Saulieu must have money upon him and papers—"

"Yes, I remember that he spoke to me of a pocket-book and asked me to take it out of his pocket—the breast-pocket."

"It seems to me that, in opening his coat, I felt something; and, between ourselves, he ought not to have retained that pocket-book, which might have saved him; it is forbidden by the code. Ah! Here it is," said Coulanges, showing a large Russia leather pocket-book, which he had taken from the coat,

"Give it to me."

"Good Heavens! Look! It is torn; Monsieur de Pontaumur's bullet has passed through it. It is marvelous; and I have heard stories of lives saved by a roll of manuscript! This pocket-book is full of letters and photographs, but it did no good. Open it and see what havoc the ball has made."

"I shall know soon enough, since Maurice requested me to examine the contents."

"Wait! Here is a picture," cried the doctor, picking up a photograph which had fallen to the ground, "a photograph of a woman. See, the ball has carried away a bit of paper, there from the breast, just over the heart. That is a sinister omen; she will die perhaps of grief when she learns that poor Maurice has been killed, and Monsieur de Pontaumur will be doubly a murderer."

George snatched the picture from the doctor's hand and at a glance recognized the feature of Mlle. Mezenc, his friend's betrothed. It was true. The likeness was pierced in the breast, almost in the same place as Saulieu, and this strange coincidence impressed George with a presentiment of misfortune.

"Only my heart remains to be pierced," he thought. "And who knows? This woman must be fatal to all those who love her or whom she loves. But I do not love her, I shall never love her, and I doubt very much if she has any feeling for me; she has certainly never betrayed it."

"Do you know, Courtenay," said Coulanges, "if everything in that pocket-book has been pierced through, you will find big hiatuses. Our friend's will is perhaps there, and a will to which a signature is lacking would be worthless."

"'What matters his will?" exclaimed George, brusquely. "I do not expect to be his heir nor you either. He has relations, distant ones, it is true; but at all events, his money will not find its way into the coffers of the State, and I would gladly throw into the Seine this pocket-book, which is stained with Maurice's blood."

"You will not do that, I hope. You would be cheating some one."

"Some one," repeated George gravely. "Yes, a woman perhaps: a woman who has caused his death."

"What!" cried the doctor, "the original of that picture? Was she the cause of this unfortunate duel?"

"I did not say that," replied Courtenay, angrily. "You are dreaming and I spoke at hazard. We are both losing our heads, and, in truth, there is some reason for it. Let us carry away the body of our friend. I imagine at times that he hears us. My carriage is above there, and the coachman is making signs that he sees somebody upon the road. Morgan has done his duty and the men are coming. What shall we do? I think with you that we can not return to Paris escorting a dead body."

"Especially the body of a man killed in a duel. There are formalities to be fulfilled or we may get ourselves into a bad scrape; for instance, the police must be informed and the mayor of the commune, and a doctor's certificate must be handed in, stating the cause of the death. If we should disappear without saying anything, we should expose ourselves to arrest; and I am by no means sure that we shall not be arrested, anyhow."

"Bah! It is a long time since seconds have been sent up to the court of assizes, unless the duel was an unfair one."

"It is not so in this case. But remember, Courtenay, that a man has been killed, and that is so rare—"

"Well, let them take the murderer. I should not be sorry to see him condemned to a term of years in prison."

"And I should be extremely vexed, for we would get six months and perhaps more, and that would not be cheerful."

"What, we who saw our friend killed by that man! That would be absurd!"

"The law does not allow of any distinction between the seconds; it considers them as accomplices, whichever side they belong to. Saulieu fired at Pontaumur and did not hit him. You and I are accomplices of an attempt at murder."

"We only did our duty, and I, for my part, shall know how to defend myself."

"So shall I, but, believe me, if this matter comes before a jury we shall be greatly blamed by the prosecuting attorney, while Corleon and Morgan will be treated with indulgence. Corleon especially."

"Why?"

"You forget that he made us propositions to arrange matters,

and you would not listen to anything of the sort. You even refused to inform our friend of the attempt at reconciliation."

"It would have been quite useless, and they knew perfectly well that Maurice would not accept their conditions; and by demanding an apology which he could not make without dishonoring himself, they had no other end in view than to give an appearance of moderation."

"And to put you in the wrong. They succeeded, too. Be sure that Monsieur Corleon will not fail to tell every one, and especially the members of the club, that he made prodigious efforts to prevent the duel, and that you were intractable; he will paint you as a beast thirsting for gore, and declare that, in reality, it was you who killed Saulieu."

"If he says that, he will have to answer me for his words."

"Another duel! that would be worse still, you would be considered a seeker of quarrels, a bully."

"Doctor, are you trying to drive me wild with your predictions?" exclaimed Courtenay, in exasperation. "I have quite enough trouble and worry without your nonsense. Let them accuse me, arrest me, send me to the galleys, if they like; just now I can only think of the present situation. To end it more quickly, I am going with Jean to meet the men and bring them here in the carriage; we will aid them to raise Maurice and will accompany them to the nearest house, where we will leave the body. Then, you can take the carriage and make the proper declaration to the authorities; I shall take the first train to Paris, although I have nothing agreeable to do there, I can assure you; I promised poor Maurice to do something for him, and to morrow I shall have sad duties to fulfill, the funeral to see to, the notary to advise, and—"

"That is true. Saulieu lived alone, and you were the only one he was intimate with; he has probably appointed you as his executor?"

"Heaven forbid! Besides, he has some relatives in the country."

"Was he not to be married shortly? He never spoke to me of it, you know how uncommunicative he was, but rumor said that he was going to make a love-match with a girl without dowry."

"Rumor! Rumor! it says many things which are not true, and now is no time to occupy ourselves with its foolish opinions. I am going."

"And I will wait for you here. One of us must remain. Lose no time."

While talking, they had walked slowly along and had reached the

place where the four seconds had stood to witness the encounter. Coulanges had left his case of instruments there, and in the excitement of the fatal ending of the affair he had forgotten all about it.

"It was indeed a fine thing to bring those things," said Courtenay, touching the case with his foot, as he left the doctor to his reflections, which were not *couleur de rose*.

This excellent doctor loved a quiet life, and he had a horror of unexpected complications. He held his own comfort above everything, and he must have thought a great deal of Maurice to have consented to be one of his seconds. He would certainly have refused, could he have foreseen the end of the matter. But duels with pistols are terminated nine times out of ten by a harmless exchange of shots, the seconds declare that honor is satisfied, they bow, sometimes shake hands, and depart as they came. Powder has spoken, as the Arabs say, and that is enough. The journals announce that M. de P. and M. S. bore themselves with bravery, and the friends who assisted them benefit in their turn from the notoriety of a day.

Coulanges supposed that he would be quit with an excursion to the suburbs of Paris, and he brought his instruments only as a matter of form; and he had fallen upon a hopeless case, one of those frightful accidents which have terrible consequences. He remained with a dead man on his hands, and the court of assizes in prospect, and he inveighed against Courtenay, who had had the unfortunate idea of requiring his services.

"And yet he seemed to be angry with me," he thought. "Just now he almost reproached me for not attempting an operation upon a man who should have fallen stiff the moment he received the shot. This will teach me not to put myself out to oblige friends, who would not do so much for me. I liked Saulieu, and Courtenay is a good fellow, but there was no reason for me to mix myself up in their business. Saulieu was in the wrong, too, and Courtenay only blew the flames. It rested with him that the duel should not take place; but no, thanks to his folly, here am I in a ridiculous position, twenty-four hours at least of annoyance before me; I was going to dine this evening at the Café Anglais with some charming people, and I shall dine perhaps all alone in some tavern of Saint-Ouen or Gennevilliers, for the authorities will not let me go this evening. Then what a life is before me, even if the seconds are not arrested and tried! The club will be divided into two camps, the one will defend Saulieu's memory, the other will sustain Pontaumur. You won't be able to sit down to a whist-table without being

exposed to a quarrel. Ah! I have prepared an agreeable existence for myself."

Thus did Coulanges grumble as he put his case in his pocket; and yet Coulanges was not an egoist in the bad sense of the word; he was a practical philosopher, a good-natured fellow, who thought of himself first, but who also thought of others, and who would oblige them willingly if he could do so without troubling himself too much. He was kind-hearted by nature, and he liked to be surrounded with happy people, but he had his own idea of happiness, and he did not imagine that others had different ones.

He saw Courtenay drive away in the carriage, and, while waiting for him to return, he paced up and down, gradually drawing further and further away from the place where the body lay.

The ground was even, and the dryness of an exceptional winter had hardened the soil and blighted the straggling grass which grew in this abandoned corner of a fertile plain.

"Here is a battle-field which has not preservd the least trace of the combat," thought Coulanges. "I am exactly in the line of fire. Pontaumur was there, quite near, on the left, and Saulieu below there on the right. A short time ago this would not have been a good place to be stationed. Bullets do not get out of the way for any imprudent person in their path. Pontaumur's, alas, went straight to its goal. What has become of poor Maurice's. It must have been lost in the plain; he fired too high. But no," he suddenly exclaimed, stooping down to examine more closely an object he had perceived at his feet, "he fired, on the contrary, too low, for here it is. Yes, it is indeed a bullet; it is visible enough, for it has not penetrated the ground. That is extraordinary; I should have thought at this distance the ground is harder than a man's skin, but it has not the resistance of an iron plate, and besides, bullets are flattened against an impenetrable surface, and this one has preserved its round form. Now, why the devil did it fall so softly, and why didn't it go further? The powder was good; Saulieu was nearly shot through the body; and he aimed well, for, although his ball did not reach the target, it did not deviate from the straight line. I should like to know the cause of this phenomenon, for I do not understand it."

The doctor remained for some time in contemplation of the bullet, but did not think of picking up the object which preoccupied him. He looked about him, as if an inspection of the ground would furnish him with an explanation. "By Jove! What a fool I am!" he cried, striking his forehead. "Where was my mind? This ball

did not come from Saulieu's pistol, for the very good reason that it never entered it. Corleon let it fall when he was loading the weapon. He was so nervous that he did not know what he was doing, and he may have badly rammed in the one he put in the pistol. This would explain why our friend did not touch his adversary; such a little thing may suffice to make a morsel of lead deviate from its course. Ah! the monk of the Middle Ages who invented powder may flatter himself with having made a fine discovery! formerly, at all events, it was only used in war; the knights who had a quarrel settled it with lance or rapier, with anything except the pistol—they commenced to use that villainous weapon only under Louis XIII., and then they fought on horseback and wore a breastplate—"

Coulanges was at this point of his invective against modern customs when he perceived behind a tuft of dry grass a wooden box.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "Corleon has forgotten the pistol case, and, indeed, I don't see why he should have taken it away, for it is mine; I paid for it out of my own pocket. Damnation! it was a fine way to lay out money! And to think that I had at home a superb pair of swords and these gentlemen would not have them! I have a great mind to bury these cursed pistols, but no, I will keep them, to make me remember all my life that I had the weakness to assist a friend who had accepted such absurd conditions, and it will stop my ever doing such a thing again. But are they in the box? Saulieu dropped his at the place he was hit, but Pontaumur must have given his to one of his seconds."

Coulanges picked up the box, opened it, and was a little surprised to see that the two pistols were inside. They had been returned to their sockets of green cloth, and were even arranged with so much care that one would have thought they had never been taken out.

"Those seconds kept their heads," muttered the doctor, who was a born reasoner. "One of them took the trouble to go and pick up the weapon Saulieu let fall; I did not observe him, but I had something else to think of. Well, a man must be singularly organized to think of collecting the weapons at the moment a man has been mortally wounded; he might as well have cleaned them while he was about it. I am not quite so calm as all that, and when I think that one of these implements has killed a charming fellow whom I saw every day, when I think that it was I who loaded it, it seems to me that I should never dare to touch it. I should not be sorry, though, to know which one it was; I would place a mark upon it to recognize it, and I should only have to look at it once in

a while to keep myself in a state of holy horror against the duel at twenty paces."

Impelled by this praiseworthy indignation, and a little, too, by curiosity, Coulanges took the pistols one after the other out of the box, and began to examine them, not without some repugnance. They were absolutely alike and the muzzle of each was blackened with powder. The only peculiarity he noticed was that one of them was, perhaps, a trifle more greasy than the other, but this was of really no importance. He replaced them, closed the box, and aimlessly retraced his steps.

It happened that he again perceived the fallen bullet and this time he stooped down to pick it up; but, when he took it between his fingers, he suddenly started and exclaimed:

"My God! it weighs nothing. It certainly is not lead. What does this mean?"

On examining it more closely, he found that it was made of wood, perfectly round and covered with a thin layer of that metallic paper which is used to wrap about bonbons and which has the color and brightness of new lead. It had been fashioned so skillfully, that, from its appearacance alone, it would have deceived any one. It was only from its weight that the difference between it and a real bullet could be perceived.

"What a singular plaything!" muttered the doctor between his teeth; "who has left it here and what was it used for? It has soiled my fingers, too, and—"

He raised it to his nose and recognized the smell of powder. Then, he began to understand.

"Ah! the wretches!" he cried; "the cowards! They have assassinated Saulieu. Yes, this false ball was in his pistol, while Pontaumur fired at him with a real one. That is why Corleon wished to load himself! How did he do it? I was there, and the ball which I selected was certainly not of wood, I am sure of it. He must have substituted another which he held concealed in his hand. Why not? It is said that he cheats at cards, and one evening when they were throwing dice at the club, a loaded dice was found under the table which he was suspected of having used. When he held the box, he substituted it for a good one; and he has repeated that game here. It was not difficult; I was not watching him. I did not imagine that I had to do with a scoundrel; but I know it now. I will denounce him, and if he is not condemned to death, it will not be my fault; yes, to death, and Pontaumur too, and Morgan too, for those rascals are his accomplices!"

Here, Coulanges interrupted his monologue. He was easily excited, but reason quickly returned to him. He commenced to think:

"His accomplices? I am not very sure of that; I am even inclined to think the contrary of the captain; an old officer does not connect himself with a brigand. As for Pontaumur, that is another thing; the crime has profited him, but nothing in his past justifies an imputation of this nature. Besides, how could I prove it? Or even prove that infamous Corleon did anything out of the way? It would be no use for me to show the bullet; no one would believe that it came from Saulieu's pistol and that Corleon prepared it. No one saw me pick it up. If Courtenay had been here when I did so, it would have made two to declare that fact; but that would not be sufficient; they would laugh in our faces, and we should be considered slanderers. And then, how to proceed? File an accusation? In that case, we should be sure to be brought before the court of assizes as seconds. No! no! I do not want that sort of satisfaction. I like my tranquillity too well to embark in a criminal trial; and Courtenay would certainly make a row, if I should show him what I have found. The devil! I had better keep it to myself. Why not, after all? If I should act now, I should risk making a mistake, for I am not sure that Pontaumur is guilty. Isn't it wiser to wait and observe the way these men behave? I can hope that they will end by betraying themselves, and, by keeping the ball, I shall always be armed against them."

Upon this conclusion, Coulanges put the accusing ball in the pocket of his vest; but not, however, without asking himself if he had the right, conscientiously, to conceal the matter. It cost him something to acknowledge to himself that his petty sin, the exaggerated love of repose, had much to do with the prudent resolution he had taken, but he succeeded without much difficulty in persuading himself that, "When in doubt, keep still," was the most sensible of all proverbs. It must be said, also, in his excuse, that certain particulars of the preparations for the duel seemed to contradict the supposition of a premeditated assassination. For instance, Corleon had proposed to draw the pistols by lot from under a handkerchief. If this system had been adopted, Pontaumur would have been exposed to choosing the inoffensive weapon and the *rôles* might have been reversed.

Coulanges congratulated himself on thinking of this, and yet a solution soon presented itself to his mind; one of the pistols might bear a trifling mark, but recognizable to the touch. Then, M. de

ontaumur could have chosen with certainty, and in that case, here could be no doubt of his complicity; for, in order to profit by the mark, it must have been pointed out to him beforehand. The doctor was about to open the box to inspect the weapons with more care than the first time, when he saw George Courtenay coming toward him, followed by two men bearing a litter. He decided for the present to keep silent as to the discovery he had made, and he consequently put off his examination till a more favorable moment.

"All is arranged," said George. "These good people will receive the body of our poor friend. You will remain to be present at the inquest, and I shall return to Paris. You need not complain of your task, I have a much harder one to fulfill and one there is no escape from. Maurice made me promise to accomplish it this evening."

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CHAPTER II.

When George Courtenay alighted from the railway carriage in Paris, he was in a very bad humor. The talk with the people at the inn of Saint-Ouen had been prolonged beyond measure. He had been obliged to explain matters to the lieutenant of police, sign a preliminary report, give his name and address and promise to present himself before the local authorities whenever his presence should be required. It had been useless to say that Doctor Coulanges would remain to answer. He had been forced to lose three quarters of an hour, and, to complete his misfortunes, he had lost the train at Asnières.

These accumulated annoyances had so irritated him, that he felt less keenly the sorrow of having seen his best friend die in his arms.

Man is so constituted that the pricks of a pin make him forget momentarily great sorrows.

And George, when he reached Paris, was not at the end of his minor troubles. Everything fell upon him: the duty of informing Maurice Saulieu's relations, the preparations for the funeral and a hundred other details which follow death, especially when death comes suddenly. And it is much worse when the victim has led the isolated existence of a bachelor, who has been an orphan from infancy.

This was precisely Maurice Saulieu's case. His mother died when he was born, and he was not twelve years old when he lost his father an old soldier, who had not grown rich in the service, and who dreamed of making a soldier of his son. His mother had a

little fortune something like a hundred thousand francs, and this small capital, wisely administered by Commandant Saulieu, and after him by an honest guardian, assured independence to Maurice and enabled him to live without following what is called a career. And Maurice had done so, to the great regret of his only surviving near relative, a brother of his mother's, an old merchant who had made a snug little fortune in trade. This uncle, while disapproving of idleness, had not ceased to love his nephew, and had left him, when he died, all his property.

Maurice had lived alone, therefore, from the time he left college, for he had remained in Paris, and his uncle lived in the country. They saw each other once a year when the nephew went to hunt in Burgundy. And Maurice had no other friend than George Courtenay, his college classmate, whom he saw constantly, although they did not live at all the same sort of life.

Coulanges was only a club acquaintance, and a very recent one, for it was only the year before that Saulieu had been received into the "Moucherons," the nickname given to the club of which the doctor and Courtenay were members.

Coulanges had, therefore, done more than his duty in acting as Saulieu's second and in remaining at the inn where the body had been temporarily placed.

The other duties devolved upon George, who, moreover, had no idea of not fulfilling them.

The most painful was assuredly the one which consisted in keeping the promise given to his dying friend.

To announce to a young girl that her *fiancé* has been killed in a duel is always a sad and difficult task; but this task, which he had unwillingly accepted, troubled him very much since the strange confession which Maurice had made to him before expiring.

Courtenay had met quite often in society Mlle. Mezenc, but he had never shown her any attention, not that he did not like her, for he thought her charming, as indeed she was. He did not keep away from her, because she had no other fortune than her beauty, wit, and distinction; nor because she was reserved toward him almost to coldness. He was rich, a dowry he cared nothing for, and difficult enterprises tempted him. But Maurice ardently loved Mlle. Mezenc, and had asked her hand in marriage. This was enough for George to treat her as if she were already Mme. Saulieu.

This situation had come to an end, since her *fiancé* was dead; but George never dreamed of availing himself of Maurice's declaration to become a suitor for Mlle. Mezenc's hand. He did

not even believe that declaration made by a wounded man who was in no condition to express clearly what he thought. George supposed that Maurice, when he said: "She loves you," did not mean to give to these words the meaning which is generally attributed to them when one speaks of a woman and to a man. But they still rang in his ears, and they troubled him, although he determined not to take them in earnest.

He saw that the memory of these unexpected farewell words would take away the calmness he had need of to announce the frightful news; and for nothing in the world would he have wished the young girl to divine the singular embarrassment he felt.

And he could not forget also that Mlle. Mezenc was the cause of the terrible duel; it was for her that Maurice had fallen, struck by M. de Pontaumur's bullet. If she had not committed the imprudence of complaining of this man, Maurice would not have struck him. Did she deserve that Maurice should give her his last thought, his fortune, perhaps, and that he should recommend her to his best, his only friend? For it was a recommendation, almost a prayer, this last confidence.

It was as if he had bequeathed his betrothed to George, and George did not feel disposed to accept the legacy. The idea of succeeding Maurice filled him with a sort of horror.

He resolved to make no allusion before Mlle. Mezenc to the words of the man who had sacrificed his life for her. But could he also be silent as to the true cause of the encounter? Could he feign to believe that Maurice had fought for a speech which was scarcely offensive, when, on the contrary, he had had the courage to give himself the appearance of being the aggressor, in order that no one should know the words which she herself had repeated to him without foreseeing that Maurice would think himself obliged to avenge her?

After having asked himself twenty times, without obtaining any answer, these and kindred questions, he resolved to be guided by circumstances, and not to broach delicate subjects, unless he should be forced to by her attitude or language.

The hard experience would soon be over, moreover; and he would have gone immediately to Mlle. Mezenc's house, if he had not thought that it would be well to first examine the papers left by Saulieu.

This examination could not take long, but he did not like to make it in a railway-carriage, where there were other travelers with him. The pocket-book stained with blood, and pierced by the murderous

ball, was in his pocket; but he would have thought that he was committing a sacrilege, if he had opened it before the eyes of strangers.

Besides, Mlle. Mazenc lived in the Rue Blanche, with her mother, and Courtenay, who resided in the Rue de Milan, could, without much delay, enter his own house for an instant, before going to hers.

The hotel he occupied was not large, but it belonged to him, and he kept up a certain style: three horses, two carriages, a coachman, a groom, a valet, a cook, and a chamber-maid. In these times, this was scarcely the establishment of a man who enjoyed an income of one hundred thousand francs, as Courtenay did.

On leaving the station, he jumped into the first cab that presented itself, and drove first to his own door.

The valet and chamber-maid were talking in the court, and, from their faces, George saw at once that they knew where he had been. The preparations for a duel can not be hidden from servants, and the coachman, ordered to be ready at noon with the barouche, had told the others who, moreover, had remarked the repeated calls of two gentlemen who had never been seen before at the house without counting those of M. Saulieu and Dr. Coulanges.

Courtenay was not disposed to inform his people of what had occurred in the plain of Gennevilliers, and they, of course, did not dare to question him.

"Are there any letters for me?" he asked.

The idea had struck him that perhaps Mlle. Mezenc had written to him. She must have known that the meeting was to take place about three o'clock, and she might have thought of asking news from Maurice Saulieu's intimate friend.

"No, monsieur, there have been none since this morning," answered the valet.

"Very well. I am at home to no one, and am going out again immediately. I am going to the smoking-room. Prepare my dressing-room; I shall be there in five minutes."

He did not think of dressing for his painful visit, as one dresses for dinner, but it seemed to him improper to present himself before Maurice's *fiancée* in the same garments he had worn on the duel-ground.

"Madame Brehal stopped in her carriage on her way back from the Bois," said the valet.

"When was that?"

"About an hour ago. She asked if monsieur had returned, and

old me to say to monsieur that she would be at home this evening."

"This evening? But this is not her day," murmured George.

He had his reasons for being astonished at a circumstance which ordinarily would have appeared natural enough.

Mme. Brehal, who had driven out of her way expressly to invite George Courtenay to come and see her was not his *fiancée*, but she held a place in his life, a great place even, for two days never went by without his seeing her.

Now, the evening before, seeing that the preliminaries and perhaps the consequences of Maurice's duel, would absorb all his time, George had written to Mme. Brehal that unexpected business would take him away from Paris till the end of the week. The meeting had to be kept secret as much as possible, and he had, therefore, been obliged to invent an excuse to explain his absence to a person who expected his daily visit between five and six without speaking of her Wednesday teas, at which he was almost always present.

And he guessed now that the excuse had not deceived the lady, since she had stopped, on her way from the Bois, at the hotel in the Rue de Milan; if she had thought that George was out of town, she would not have taken the trouble to do so, nor would she have told the valet that she should expect M. Courtenay that evening.

"She knows what has occurred, and she wishes to speak to me about it," thought George, throwing his hat and coat to his valet. "How can she have been so well informed? It is true that the whole club knew of the blow, and Madame Brehal sees a good many people. She even received Pontaumur sometimes. Could he have told her? No, that is impossible; a man does not boast of having been struck. Never mind! I shall tell her what I think of that gentleman, and advise her not to receive him. I will go to see her this evening, since she has asked me, and I shall be very glad to do so, for I always feel at ease with her; but now I must make a much less pleasant call, and there is very little time left to prepare for it."

He did not wish to present himself at Mlle. Mezenc's before opening Maurice's pocket-book, for it might contain written instructions.

In the redoubt, as he was going to his post, Maurice had expressly reqested his friend to look over the papers in this pocket-book. He had said simply, papers; but it was natural to suppose that, among these papers, would be found a will, and George was convinced that this will would constitute Marianne

Mezenc universal legatee. And this, moreover, he considered perfectly proper

Maurice had only distant relatives, who lived in comfortable circumstances in the provinces. Marianne, without being absolutely poor, was not rich. By wedding M. Saulieu, she would have made an unlooked-for marriage. No one could see anything wrong in it, or even be astonished, if he left her his fortune, to console her for the loss of her *fiancé*, who was to have taken her from the dullness in which she vegetated, between a sick mother and an aunt by alliance, who had constituted herself her protectress and who made her pay dear enough for the protection.

"If he has left his fortune to the girl he loved, he was a hundred times right," thought Courtenay, "and my mission will be a little less painful to fulfill, if I can at the same time tell her that she has inherited a fortune. And yet, it seems to me that she would feel some repugnance to accept it, for after all she will owe it to the murderer of her lover, that Pontaumur, whom I encounter everywhere. What would she do if she should meet him? And she will meet him, for he is received at Madame Fresnay's, who is her chaperon; it was very probably there that he made the remarks which Maurice heard of, to his sorrow. Well," concluded Courtenay, "that is her affair. She is very intelligent and very courageous. She will know what to do. All that I ask is that Saulieu has not chosen me as his executor, for that wouldn't suit me at all."

While he was thinking thus, he took the pocket-book out of his pocket, and as he gazed at it, the tears came into his eyes.

The hole was as clearly defined as if the Russia leather had been cut with a punch, and it seemed to him as if he still saw the wound made in his friend's breast by the homicidal bullet.

"Come! come!" he murmured, "no weakness! I must proceed and examine these blood-stained papers."

He opened the pocket-book, which was fastened by a steel clasp and divided inside into several compartments. In the middle was a little memorandum book and a pencil.

Courtenay saw again the pierced photograph and took it up to look at it. It was an admirably finished picture and the resemblance was striking. The face was lovely enough to have tempted a painter.

"She is like one of Raphael's Virgins," thought Courtenay. "It is exactly like her; it seems as if the mouth was going to speak. And the eyes—no, the eyes are not so good, something is lacking, I don't know what; or, rather, I do know—they have not

that sparkle which is the characteristic mark of Marianne's beauty, but it would be impossible to get that in a picture. The rest is perfect; the ball only touched the breast; and after all, if the eyes are calm, the day Mademoiselle Mezenc sat, she was very happy. The date is here, December 23, 1883, and her name below, written in her own hand. The writing is characteristic, fine and bold, elegant and firm. I remember that twenty-third of December; Maurice was to go with me the next day to Madame Brehal's, and he came in the morning to excuse himself and to tell me that he was engaged to be married; he wanted to be alone to dream of his happiness, and I did not see him for four days. Poor fellow! He little thought that, three months afterward, nothing would remain of this deep love but a memory, and that Marianne would be a widow before being a wife. What will she do with this picture? Will she keep it, or will it inspire her with fear by constantly recalling the horrible catastrophe which has ruined her life? She will burn it, perhaps; burn it to forget, for at her age one forgets—it is nature. If I dared I would keep this card which the bullet passed through, before killing Saulieu. No, I have no right; and then, what would Mademoiselle Mezenc think, if she should even learn that I had confiscated it? She might think— The devil! I must return it to her."

And, to see it no longer, Courtenay replaced the photograph in the pocket-book.

The valet had gone to prepare the dressing-room, and his master, left alone in the large vestibule of the hotel, had no need to go to the smoking-room to finish examining his friend's papers.

The first he unfolded was a carefully drawn up list of the amounts Saulieu owed his tradespeople. He must have written it the night before the duel, for quite recent purchases appeared, with the date. The list bore also the amount of money in his desk and the amount to his credit at his banker's.

Saulieu had evidently taken his precautions in view of the transmission of his property to some one mentioned in another paper.

"The will is probably in this," said George, taking out an envelope.

It was addressed to him and firmly sealed. To tell the truth, it had more the appearance of a letter, and it was not surprising that Maurice had written some words of farewell to his dearest friend, in case there should be an accident. Here, too, the ball had made a hole in the very middle of the envelope.

"Humph!" ejaculated Courtenay, "the fears which the doctor

expressed are beginning to attack me. Heaven grant that the will is not in this envelope, for the brutal bullet may well have destroyed the signature, and then what would become of Maurice's last wishes?"

He hastened to break the seal, and, when he unfolded the paper, he saw at the first glance that the writing ended with this sentence: "Be happy and think sometimes of the one who cared so much for you."

Courtenay drew a long breath: it was only a letter and he hastened to read it.

It commenced as follows:

"My Friend.—I do not wish to impose upon you the task of attending to my affairs when I shall be no more. I only ask you to take to my notary my will, which is perfectly regular and which is the expression of my last wishes. You will find it in the --"

The end of the sentence was missing. The ball had carried it away.

"The devil!" murmured George, "this is almost the same as if the ball had carried away Maurice Saulieu's signature to his will. He has written: 'You will find it in the —' and the rest is gone. In the what? In the house? In the room? In the box? There are a hundred places he might have put it. He has not deposited it with his notary, since he asks me to take it to him. Where can he have put it? That is a question which I am not yet in a position to solve. Let us see if the rest of the letter will help me any."

Before continuing, he examined carefully the part torn away and saw that the end of the missing sentence could not be long, half a line at the most. The next sentence was the beginning of a paragraph. In this also some words were lacking, but without rendering the meaning absolutely unintelligible:

"The will which I have —— to you, without —— I made yesterday, after mature reflection, and although one of the disp— may appear strange to you, I am almost cer— you will approve it, and I beg you to instantly make yourself acq— with it, before ——"

"That does not clear up matters much," thought Courtenay. 'The will which I have ——' that seems to be, which I have confided to you, and Maurice has confided nothing to me, except, at the last moment, the secret of the duel. 'Without'—I don't understand that at all. 'One of the disp—,' dispositions, that is evident. It may appear strange to me, I admit that; I shall approve it, possibly; but I am no better informed. I don't know what the disposition is. I

should not be surprised if it concerned Mademoiselle Marianne. The poor fellow thought of nothing but his sweetheart. And the rest is no less obscure. 'To make yourself acquainted with it before'—before taking it to the notary? No; I certainly should not go to ask him about it afterward. Besides, it is easy to see that there are more than six words missing. What are they? It would need a magician to find out. The savants who restored the text of Tacitus would be at their wits' end here. Now, the rest? The rest consists of a very short paragraph, which does not throw the least light on the meaning of the two preceding ones. Maurice asks my pardon for the trouble and embarrassment he is going to cause me; he invokes as an excuse the memory of our long and warm friendship, and wishes me happiness. Of Mademoiselle Mezenc, there is not a word; but that is no reason why she should not be mentioned in the will. And all these obscurities would be nothing if I knew where that will was; but I haven't the slightest idea. Ah! Monsieur de Pontaumur may congratulate himself on having done all the evil he could. With one shot, he has killed my best friend and rendered it impossible for me to fulfill his last wishes. What shall I do? What shall I say to Mademoiselle Mezenc? Shall I show her this letter? No, she could make no more of it than I."

George sadly replaced the letter in the envelope, and the envelope in the compartment where he had found it. There were no more papers. He opened the memorandum-book to see if there might be any explanation there, but there were only very cursory notes which told him nothing: dates marked with a cross, abbreviated words and initials, especially those of his *fiancée*. It was the note-book of a lover, who thinks only of his love, and who recalls, by signs of which he has the key, the memory of interviews with his beloved.

Upon one of the last pages, two lines, almost effaced, seemed to be clearer:

"To-day, March 27th, I have guessed the secret. I will have a decisive understanding—"

And a little below, with the date of March 29th:

"Courage has failed me. And then, what would be the use? I no longer doubt my unhappiness. I shall die of it. I must."

The hand which held the pencil had trembled in tracing the last words.

What was the meaning of this inscription? What sentiment had impelled Maurice to write it in this place? Maurice was neither

excitable nor romantic. Whatever he did, he did simply; and he doubtless felt no need of a memorandum to mark one of those crises which upset a whole existence. Still less had he any need to excite himself to act against an enemy or a rival. Maurice was the most resolute of men, firm in his plans and brave as those people who make little bluster always are.

And yet he had noted down his impressions, like a young girl who has just entered society and who continues to keep her journal begun at boarding-school.

"How foolish of him," thought George, "to write down his thoughts in this way. Still, if they were comprehensible, I should not regret having read them, for they would teach me perhaps what to say to his *fiancée* and what attitude to assume toward her. But now I must trust to chance and proceed in the dark. What was this discovery made by Maurice the 27th of March? Where was he that day? I can not remember what I did myself. Did I see Maurice the 27th of March? Probably; we rarely went twenty-four hours without seeing one another; but it is certain that our interview on that date made no particular impression upon me. And then,' the secret'? Whose secret? Not mine, certainly. I have no secrets. I never had them, especially with Maurice. I have even told him that I was afraid I should fall in love with Madame Brehal. A man's secret probably, since he intended to come to a decisive understanding. I would rather decipher the hieroglyphics of an obelisk than puzzle my head over these incomplete sentences. What is very clear, however, is that my poor friend foresaw that he was going to die, and did not care to live. His 'unhappiness,' that was evidently the certainty of not being loved. Ah! if I had known!"

This monologue was interrupted by the valet who came to inform his master that the dressing-room was ready for him.

The interruption was a timely one, for Courtenay had had enough of these papers which told him nothing and only troubled him at a moment when he needed all his coolness and clear-headedness for his interview with Mlle. Mezenc.

He closed the pocket-book, dismissed his valet and proceeded to change his clothes. He did not forget to take with him the photograph which Maurice had carried over his heart.

There was nothing now to do but to arm himself with courage, and he departed with a determination to end as soon as possible a situation which weighed upon him.

His carriage was waiting for him and he gave the driver the address, telling him to lose no time on the way.

Mme. Mezenc and her daughter occupied a modest apartment on the third floor of a house in the upper part of the Rue Blanche.

Courtenay had therefore time to reflect, and as he did not wish to return to conjectures upon an exhausted subject, he naturally turned his thoughts to the two women he was going to see; to the two, for, free as she was by the force of circumstances, Mlle. Marianne was not in the habit of receiving callers alone. Her mother, confined to her arm chair by paralysis of the limbs, was quite capable of conversing, and, although she allowed Marianne much liberty, she held to the conventionalities. She had been a great society woman once, and she passed her days in her salon, dressed as if she daily expected ceremonious calls, and she permitted those who presented themselves to see her daughter only after they had paid their respects to herself. According to circumstances and individuals, Mlle. Mezenc came into the salon or awaited them in a room which was a sort of studio. She painted upon porcelain, carved wood, and even could use a lathe as well as a professional carpenter.

Courtenay therefore expected to be received by Mme. Mezenc, and he was wondering how he could manage to ask permission to go to mademoiselle's studio, when, as he came in sight of the house, he perceived a woman leaning out of a window on the third floor.

"That house is certainly the one where Madame Mezenc lives," he said to himself. "-Yes, I recognize it by the balcony on the first floor. And the apartment which she occupies is on the third. It can not certainly be she who is at the window; she does not leave her chair. Can it be her daughter, and, if so, has she taken her position at the window to watch for me? The post would be well chosen, for it overlooks all the upper part of the Rue Blanche, and as I live in the Rue de Milan, I should have to come that way. Yes, but how could she know of my visit? In case she does, she must already be informed of the result of the encounter, and that supposition is absurd. Coulanges would never have sent her a dispatch, in the first place, because he would have no desire to do such a thing, and in the second place, because he does not know her nor where she lives. As for Monsieur de Pontaumur, I do not think that he has had the audacity to telegraph to the young lady: I have killed your *fiancé*. Of the seconds, Captain Morgan is incapable of committing an infamy of that sort, and base as Corleon is, he does not do evil for the pleasure of doing it. But, I think it must be Maurice she is watching for; she knew that he was going to fight to-day, for he told her so himself, perhaps she even knew that the duel was to take place in the plain of Gennevilliers, and she thinks

that Maurice will arrive at the Saint Lazare station; besides, he lives, or rather lived, in the Rue Caumartin, and, if he had returned from the duel, he would have lost no time in hastening to see her. She is dying of anxiety and perhaps she has been for hours at that window. I think it is the window of her studio."

As the carriage drew nearer, Courtenay looked up to make sure that he was not mistaken.

"It is indeed she," he murmured. "She is looking down the street and does not see me. I am sorry for that, for if she saw me, she would guess at once that an accident had happened to Maurice and I should find her a little prepared to receive the terrible news I bring her. Poor little girl! What a blow I must give her! Unless —but no, Maurice's raving had not common sense, and she loved him. I will commence with the mother, and if I can avoid a *tête-à tête* with the daughter it will be much easier for me; and after all, why not? It is proper that the interview should take place in Madame Mezenc's presence, and my mission will be none the less fulfilled; I promised Maurice that I would myself apprize Mademoiselle Mezenc of his death, but I did not promise that there should be no one else present, and it does not depend upon me to prevent her mother from being there."

The carriage stopped and George got out, but, before entering the house, he looked up.

"She is no longer there," he said to himself. "Did she see me? I shall know that immediately, for if she did she will not wait for me to ask to see her. I should not be very much astonished if she came herself to open the door."

But George was mistaken. A maid appeared in answer to his ring, and did not appear astonished to see him, although he came rarely to Mme. Mezenc's.

"Madame Mezenc is in the salon," she said, "and I will announce monsieur."

This was quickly done, for there were the ante-chamber and the dining-room to cross.

Courtenay knew the apartment, which was not large, and he remembered the room where the young lady worked was separated from the salon by two sleeping chambers.

"It seems that she did not see me," he thought. "So much the worse, the blow will be more severe."

Mme. Mezenc was seated in a corner of the fireplace in her invalid's chair, a chair made expressly for her, from plans drawn by her

daughter, who had a talent for mechanics, and given her by Maurice Saulieu.

This ingenious chair moved upon rollers and, by using her hands, the paralytic could transport herself from one place to another.

She read easily from a movable desk, fixed to one of the arms. She passed three quarters of her time in this seat; she embroidered there, eat there, and slept there until the time came for her nurse to put her to bed.

Mme. Mezenc was scarcely fifty, and it was now ten years since she had been reduced to this sad state, which she supported with extraordinary courage.

It is true that she suffered only at intervals, but her hours of pain did not make her ill-tempered nor injure the clearness of her mind. She never complained, although she felt her misfortune very keenly. She never gave way to that discouragement which takes possession of the stoutest hearts in those desperate cases where the invalid had no other prospect than death after long suffering.

She liked to talk and she talked well, without pretense or ill nature. She was kind-hearted without affectation, gentle without weakness, and, in fact, her only fault was loving her daughter too well, loving her passionately, almost violently. She lived only for her and in her.

She had once possessed rare beauty, and she still preserved traces of it. She had beautiful teeth, her forehead was unwrinkled, and her eyes had lost nothing of their brightness. Her hair, white as snow, was marvelously becoming, and did not age her.

Courtenay had never before been so struck with her sweet face. It must be said that he did not see her often; he had called on her once or twice since Maurice's marriage had been settled, but he had never been alone with her, as his friend had always accompanied him.

To-day, his face naturally wore a grave expression, and he was not a little surprised at the reception accorded him by Marianne's mother.

"How kind you are, dear monsieur," she said, smiling brightly, "and how glad I am you have had the courage to mount my three flights of stairs."

"She knows nothing," thought George. "It appears that her daughter does not confide in her."

"Sit down near me, and let us talk," continued Mme. Mezenc, gayly. "I have a multitude of questions to ask you."

"And I, madame, came to—"

"In the first place, what have you done with Monsieur Saulieu?"

George, who had seated himself, almost started up again; but Mme. Mezenc took no notice, and went on in her pleasant, well-modulated voice:

"You absorb him, and that is very bad of you. I acknowledge that you have almost a right to be angry with us, for we also take him away from you. Lovers neglect their friends. But you take too great a vengeance; we have not seen him for two days."

"Here I am in a nice position," thought Courtenay. "I can not answer her point-blank, 'You will never see him again. He is dead!'"

"Oh! I am not uneasy. We know that he consulted you before doing me the honor to ask my daughter's hand, and that you spoke in her favor. I am profoundly grateful to you, for you scarcely knew her, and you could not judge of her merits. I assure you, she has not forgotten all the good you said of her. If Monsieur Maurice knew in what terms she speaks of you to me, I think he would be jealous."

"I am very much touched, madame; but I must tell you—"

"You can tell me anything you like presently; but I want very much to assure you that my daughter and I both intend that your friend's marriage shall not prevent you from seeing one another as intimately as formerly. You will not draw away from him, I hope; and, besides, it is not written that you will not marry yourself. I even think that a little bird has whispered something in my ear in regard to that very matter."

Courtenay made a gesture of denial.

"If I did not fear to be indiscreet, I would suggest to you an idea which has come to me, but it would be perhaps a little too soon."

"I assure you, madame, that I have no desire to throw celibacy to the winds," asseverated George.

"And I have no design of converting you. Let us talk of something else. Do you see Madame Brehal often?" she asked, with a smile.

"Not oftener than usual," replied George, with a certain impatience.

"She is one of the most charming women I know, and I am absolutely astonished that she remains a widow. She is twenty-five, exceedingly pretty, has much wit, what is better, much heart, and a magnificent fortune. I should like her to have a husband worthy of her, and if I knew one— You are going to ask me why I am so

much interested in Madame Brehal's happiness. You don't know how good she has been to my daughter—"

"Pardon me, madame; I do know it. And, since you have spoken of Mademoiselle Mezenc, I—"

"You are surprised not to find her here. If you wish to see her, dear monsieur, you must go and seek her in her studio. She is seized with such a passion for painting, that if I should send the maid to ask her to come here, I doubt if she would do so. Yes," continued Mme. Mezenc, "it is a veritable rage, especially during the last few days. She works as if she had to make her living, and that, too, when she sees opening before her an unexpected future. Formerly, I encouraged her to cultivate the taste she has for art. I have such a small fortune, and when I am no more, her situation would have been so precarious that I wished her to be in a position to do something for herself. Now, I can die in peace; she will have Maurice."

Courtenay, at these words, could scarcely conceal a nervous movement. Mme. Mezenc's discourse upon her daughter's happiness troubled him so that he could no longer endure it. It rested with him to stop it by telling her the terrible news, but he did not dare, and, in fact, no one would have dared.

He no longer desired even that Marianne should enter the room, for the presence of the poor girl would only add to the difficulties of the situation. He only thought of imagining some pretext to go and seek her in the studio, where she was doubtless awaiting in horrible torture to know her fate; and this pretext Mme. Mezenc had furnished him with.

He hastened to take advantage of it.

"Indeed, madame," with the most nonchalant air he could assume, "you will doubtless consider me indiscreet, but if you think that Mademoiselle Mezenc does not wish to abandon her work, even for an instant, I am going to ask your permission to go to her studio."

"Oh! I grant it with all my heart," responded Mme. Mezenc. "Are you not Maurice's friend? And, between ourselves, I think Marianne will like to talk to you alone. She has secrets from me now, you will not believe it, but I have noticed it; and I warn you that she will overwhelm you with questions: 'What is Maurice doing? Why hasn't he been here yesterday and to-day? Does he think of me? What does he say of me?' and a hundred others, which you will have to answer or quarrel with her. These young girls are pitiless."

Courtenay listened, without a word, to this maternal outburst. He was already up, and longed to be able to go without being impolite.

"But," continued Mme. Mezenc, "Monsieur Saulieu has probably sent a message by you to my daughter. A message! what a grave word! But I use it designedly, because I know that lovers attach importance to the most ordinary things. Monsieur Saulieu has, perhaps, sent you as an embassador to implore Marianne's indulgence. There is a long absence to be pardoned, and he does not dare to come himself. I have guessed it, have I not?"

Courtenay had not the courage to answer yes. He simply bowed, and this vague sign was taken by Mme. Mezenc as a token of acquiescence.

"Go, monsieur," she said; "and do not abridge your call. I am accustomed to solitude, and I foresee that Marianne will keep you as long as she can. Prepare, therefore, to acquit yourself as well as possible of one of those tasks which friendship imposes. I warn you, also, that she generally works as she talks, and I hope that you will not be offended at seeing her continue to paint a fan or turn a napkin ring, while you are giving her news of Monsieur Saulieu."

Courtenay allowed Mme. Mezenc to keep her illusion, and hastened to close the interview by bowing again, but this time very decidedly.

There are bows which signify: "Not a word more; I am going;" and the lady could not mistake it.

He did not even soften the distinctness of his pantomime by accompanying it with a word or two expressive of a desire to continue his conversation with the mother after seeing the daughter.

The truth was, that he intended to leave the apartment without entering the salon. He knew that this was practicable by passing through a passage which led directly from the antechamber to the studio, and he did not wish to see Mme. Mezenc again that day. One explanation was enough; he did not care to have two. And he feared less telling his bad tidings to Maurice's *fiancée* than to a poor woman who suspected nothing, and whom the sad news might kill.

Mlle. Mezenc knew that her lover was to fight, and that duels sometimes end tragically. She was, therefore, better prepared to receive the blow.

The most difficult thing for the envoy on these sad occasions is the broaching the subject. To say to a woman who receives you

with a smile upon her lips, "I come as a messenger of death," is horrible.

When, on the contrary, her eyes question you anxiously, a look is a sufficient answer. There are gestures and looks which announce a death as clearly as a black-bordered letter.

Courtenay was very much agitated when he reached the door of the studio.

He was not obliged to knock, for the door was open, and he saw the young girl seated near the window, in an attitude which admirably displayed her beauty, although doubtless she had not taken her pose with that intention.

She was sitting with her head thrown back against the chair, her eyes half closed, and her hands folded in her lap. She was pale, and the pure line of her profile was distinctly outlined against the dark curtain. She looked like one of those statues which guard the tombs in the cemeteries of Italy, a rejuvenated Mater Dolorosa, or a Magdalen in the desert.

Had she fallen asleep, after long hours of waiting? Was she dreaming of her lover? Did she see him struck to the earth by the ball of his adversary? Courtenay was tempted to believe it, for her features expressed suffering, and her breast heaved as if oppressed by some terrible dream. He did not dare to advance and he was very near beating a retreat. He made a slight movement, however, and she rose immediately.

"You!" she exclaimed, coming toward him. "It is you, and you are alone! Ah! my presentiments did not deceive me. He is dead!"

"Yes," murmured George, profoundly moved; "he is dead. He died as brave men die upon the field of battle."

"I knew it."

"You saw me in the street, and you guessed—"

"No; it was he whom I saw. I saw him two days ago in a state of excitement bordering upon madness. I saw him, I tell you, and a few hours ago, I felt a terrible pain; it seemed to me that my heart was breaking."

"His last thought was for you. He died pronouncing your name; and before expiring in my arms, he made me promise to come myself and tell you."

"I myself asked him to allow no one but you to come."

Courtenay did not attempt to repress a start of surprise, and she continued, bitterly:

"You think ill of me, acknowledge it, monsieur. You accuse

me of indifference because I do not sob, because my eyes are dry, because I speak to you as if he were not my *fiancé*. You do not know, you can not know, what I suffer, for you do not know me. I am twenty, I ought to feel as girls of twenty do, but Heaven has made me otherwise: I have no tears."

"Great sorrows are silent," faltered Courtenay, more and more astonished.

"Do you think I would not weep if I could? If I should tell you that I am the cause of his death, would you doubt me still? Would you still accuse me of being insensible, when my heart is riven in two?"

"It was true then! Maurice fought to avenge you?"

"He told you that! I knew that he would tell you. Did he tell you also that I did my best to prevent this duel? that I begged him to take no notice of the infamous words, and that he refused to listen to me? Did he tell you that those words were of such a nature that they could not hurt me, and that the man who uttered them deserved only contempt?"

"I blamed Maurice for having struck Monsieur de Pontaumur in the face, but there are offenses which a man of honor does not tolerate, and if any one should publicly attack the reputation of a young girl I was about to marry, I should act as my friend did."

"Even if the attacks were wildly extravagant?'

"I do not know what Monsieur de Pontaumur said, but—"

"He said that Monsieur Saulieu had played a farce in asking my hand, that the marriage would never take place."

"That was simply absurd and no one could have believed him, if the man said only that—"

"He said that Monsieur Saulieu would not marry me, because a man does not marry a woman when he has been her—lover."

"Ah! that was infamous, and I—"

"Infamous, yes, but more absurd than infamous, unless you think as he did."

"Oh, mademoiselle!" said Courtenay, sadly. "How can you say that? I know you and I knew Maurice. One must be a Monsieur de Pontaumur to believe such infamies."

"You forget that I am poor," continued the young girl, bitterly, "and that Monsieur Saulieu was rich."

"I—no, I do not understand."

"What! you do not understand that it must have been supposed that I was only too glad to get the chance to marry him?"

"Well? Whoever thought that was mistaken, for you were

worthy of him. Your merit compensated for the inequality of fortune. But there is a great distance from this mistake to an abominable accusation."

"Not so great as you think, monsieur. It was thought that I was ambitious, that I wished this marriage at any cost, and that I speculated on Monsieur Saulieu's generous instincts to accord me reparation."

"But, I say again, this is senseless!"

"What matters that? Calumny has wings, and it ended by reaching my ears. I disdained to defend myself. I knew the author of it and why he hated me."

"Monsieur de Pontaumur? What reason had he for hating you?"

"He persecuted me with his attentions, and I let him see the antipathy with which he inspired me; and so he revenged himself."

"But he did not come here. Your mother does not receive, or, at least, she receives only intimate friends."

"She made a mistake in thinking that Monsieur de Pontaumur desired to marry me and she tolerated his visits. My mother has a fixed idea, to marry me advantageously; but she closed her doors to him when I proved to her his real character. Unfortunately, I have not ceased to encounter him in the society to which my aunt, Madame Fresnay, takes me. It was at a ball that Monsieur Saulieu heard a conversation in which my name was pronounced."

"Who dared to say anything before him?"

"Friends of Monsieur de Pontaumur. It was a fatality. They were talking in a door-way between two salons, and they did not see Monsieur M. Saulieu, who was hidden by a curtain."

"He should have demanded satisfaction from them."

"They said they had heard the calumny they repeated from their friend, which was true. My aunt knew that the rumor had been put in circulation by Monsieur de Pontaumur, and she had the imprudence to tell it to Monsieur Saulieu, and to me—to me!"

Courtenay made a gesture which expressed what he thought of Madame Fresnay's conduct.

"I understood that Monsieur Saulieu would not tolerate this insult, and I proffered an explanation which he had the delicacy not to ask. I told him why that wretch sought to ruin my reputation, and I begged him to do nothing about it. I represented to him the consequences which an outbreak would have for me. He answered that he had found a means to avoid that, but that he was decided to fight —and—you know the rest. I did all I could to prevent the duel, and I should have prevented it if —"

"Go on, mademoiselle."

"If Monsieur Saulieu had not taken before that interview, which was the last, a desperate resolve. He wished to die."

"He! But he was happy; he loved, he was loved, you had consented to marry him."

"And I should have kept my promise; but he demanded what I could not give him."

"What! you loved him?"

"Not as he loved me. I felt for him friendship, esteem, gratitude, but I did not share that passionate love with which I had inspired him, and I could not feign a sentiment I did not feel. Now, I reproach myself bitterly for not having hidden the truth from him better. But my courage failed me; I could not lie."

"And yet, when he asked your hand—"

"I said yes, and I should have been to him the most devoted of wives, I should have done everything in my power to have rendered him happy and to have kept him in ignorance of the nature of the attachment I had for him."

"How did he discover his mistake? Did you enlighten him?"

"No, I assure you I did not. I had a presentiment that a sincere avowal would kill him, and I was silent although he begged me to speak. He laid traps to surprise a secret which I concealed in my inmost heart: I avoided them. I had sworn to myself not to disturb his happiness: and then I too indulged in illusions, I nursed the hope that the clouds which threatened my life would roll away, that once married I should forget what I felt, what I feel still; I had more than a month to struggle in, to struggle against myself. I did not foresee the misfortune before me: a day came, a fatal day, when Maurice guessed all. It was on that day he resolved to die, and he is dead; he died cursing me perhaps, me who would have given my heart's blood to have saved him."

"That day was the 27th of March," said Courtenay, slowly.

"The 27th of March," repeated the young girl, turning pale. "What do you mean?"

"You have forgotten the date. Maurice remembered it."

"What! he spoke of it! What did he tell you? Hide nothing from me, monsieur, I can bear all. I have suffered so much, that one wound the more can not hurt me."

"Maurice did not speak. He wrote."

"To you?"

"Yes, to me, a letter, all of which I could not read."

"Why?"

"Because this letter was in his breast-pocket in a pocket-book, in which he had placed other papers."

"And it was in this letter he told you?"

"No. He only spoke in that of the will which he had made and which he begged me to take to his notary. But I found a few words in his handwriting, written in pencil upon the leaf of a memorandum book; I did not understand the meaning of these words, but I do now, and when you have seen them, you will see that he must have written them the day he perceived that you did not love him."

George was about to produce the pocket-book, but Mlle. Mezenc stopped him.

"I do not wish to see them," she said, quickly.

"But in this pocket-book, there is also—your portrait, the one you gave him just before Christmas, and below this portrait, you have written your name."

"I do not take back what I have given."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," replied Courtenay, dryly, "it was not to me that you gave the picture, and I can not keep it."

"Well, burn it, then."

Courtenay started. Mlle. Mezenc's words and manner seemed to him so strange that he wondered if sorrow had not affected her brain. She guessed what he was thinking, and said in a different tone:

"You also, monsieur, accuse me of having no heart. Everybody will think so when they know that the blow which has fallen upon me has made no change in my life. The opinion of others is indifferent to me, and I forgive you for thinking badly of me. You do not know me, you will never know me; no one knows me, not even my mother."

"I am sorry to have wounded you, mademoiselle, but I had a duty to fulfill, and—"

"I thank you for having come, and I beg you to hear me to the end. I want you to know what I am going to do, and why I do it. If I could shut myself up in a convent, I would enter one to-morrow; but my mother needs me, and in her state of health, any violent emotion would kill her."

"That was the reason I had not the courage to tell her that Maurice was dead."

"You had seen her, then?"

"Certainly. I thought that you knew it."

"And you said nothing to her! Thanks! oh, thanks! I expected no less of you."

"Madame Mezenc can not always be ignorant."

"She will know that Monsieur Saulieu is dead, later, when I have prepared her for the blow; but she shall never know that he was killed in a duel, she must never know it, and I will see that others do not tell her."

George was silent, but his face showed that he was not convinced.

"You doubt that being possible? Trust me, monsieur. My mother will believe what I wish her to believe, and I shall begin by telling her that the marriage she has dreamed of for me will not take place. I have already let her suspect that I consented to it against the dictates of my heart. I shall tell her that I have withdrawn my consent, that I have signified my resolution to Monsieur Saulieu, and that I shall never marry. I will even confess, if necessary, that I have learned to my sorrow what it costs a poor girl to become engaged to a rich man, and I shall declare that I will receive no one again on the footing I have received Monsieur Saulieu, no one, not even you, monsieur, for it might be said of you what was said of him."

"Do you think that I would suffer any one to slander you?" cried George.

"No," said the girl, her eyes burning with a singular light; "I think that you would do what your friend has done, and I do not wish you to fall by the sword of a scoundrel. I shall never forgive myself for having been the involuntary cause of this fatal duel, and if the same misfortune should happen to you, that time I should die. George started in amazement and Mlle. Mezenc turned away her head; one would have said that she feared to let him see the feeling reflected on her face.

"The sword!" repeated George, sadly. "Didn't you know that Maurice had to submit to the conditions of that man who dared to maintain that he was the insulted party? Did not Maurice tell you that he was going to fight with pistols?"

"No," murmured Marianne. "He only told me that he was to fight to-day at three o'clock, and I had not the courage to question him further."

"I wished him to fight with swords; and, had I known what took place before the scene of violence which made Maurice the offender, I should have prevented the meeting, for I should have fought in his place, and I should not, like him, have placed myself in the

wrong. But what difference does it make what I would have done? Maurice is dead, and you think of taking a desperate resolution—"

"Do not pity me, monsieur. I carry misfortune to all those who approach me. It is just that I should condemn myself to isolation. My life, henceforth, is already traced out; I shall take refuge in work, which will not give me peace of mind, but which will, at least, insure me independence. I am clever enough to make sufficient for my mother's support and my own."

"If I should tell you that perhaps Maurice has provided—"

"I do not understand," interrupted Mlle. Mezenc, raising her head.

"In the letter he wrote to make known to me his last wishes, he spoke of his will."

"I hope that he has not insulted me by leaving me his fortune."

"Insulted! Oh! Mademoiselle!"

"Yes, insulted; for people would say worse things than ever of me."

"You were his *fiancée*, you would have been his wife, and he had the right to leave you his property."

"Perhaps, but I have also the right not to accept it."

"Then you would refuse to benefit by his will!"

"I was not mistaken, then! That will—"

"I do not know what it contains. I have not seen it."

"But you will see it."

"If I find it, yes."

"You told me just now that he had confided it to you."

"No, you are mistaken, unfortunately, for it may be lost."

"What do you mean?"

"Pardon me for returning to a sad subject and entering into painful details; the letter in which Maurice spoke of the will was in the pocket-book, the one I have here; he carried it in his pocket when he went on the field, and Monsieur de Pontaumur's bullet—"

"Well?" asked Mlle. Mezenc, trembling.

"The bullet pierced the paper as it pierced your picture."

"This is horrible!"

"And it carried away the passage in which Maurice told me what I had to do to find his will. Do you wish to see the letter?"

"No! Oh! No!" cried the young girl, stretching out her hands as if to repulse the bloody relic which Courtenay offered to show her.

"I can understand that it is repugnant for you to touch it, but I may at least tell you what I read, which was: 'I ask you to take to

my notary my will, which is perfectly regular. You will find it in the—' The rest of the sentence is missing."

"The ball could not have destroyed it, and if it is sought—"

Mlle. Mezenc stopped short in the middle of a thoughtless response. The words which she had spoken evoked a frightful picture. This ball was in Maurice's breast and the idea of seeking there with a scalpel made her shudder. George divined why she did not finish, and hastened to add:

"Maurice evidently meant some piece of furniture, with which I was familiar. He must have spoken to me, before the duel, of this very thing, but, in the hurry attending the preparations for the encounter, I have forgotten what he said, but I shall do my best to recall it."

"What is the use?" murmured Marianne. "It is much better that the will should never be found. Monsieur Saulieu's relatives will inherit, and I shall not suffer from the affront which I fear. Besides, whatever happens, I am determined to receive nothing from him. If he had inflicted upon me the shame of making me his heir, you would bring me the will and I would burn it. I have already declared to you, monsieur, that I wish to owe nothing to any one except myself. My measures are taken, and, from to-morrow, I shall receive orders which will take all my time. Do not be astonished if you no longer see me in society."

"No one will be astonished, that, after an event which makes you a widow—"

"I am not a widow, as I have never been married, and I shall ask Madame Fresnay to deny any report that I was to have been married. She will perhaps demand from me that I continue to appear at her house on her reception-days. If I should cease to go there, people would believe that she did not speak the truth. I shall have the courage to show myself at her Fridays. Oh! do not hasten to condemn me," she added, noticing a movement of Courtenay's, almost immediately repressed. "I do not wish any one to guess my secret. I shall go to her house with death in my heart, but I shall go. I must."

"I do not blame you, mademoiselle," said Courtenay, with marked coldness; "only, I can not help thinking that you will expose yourself to meeting in Madame Fresnay's salon the man who killed Maurice Saulieu."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," replied Marianne, drawing herself up. "I have insisted on my aunt's forbidding him the house, and I will not submit to Monsieur de Pontaumur's presence.

Heaven grant that you also may not have to meet him, you, who were present at the murder."

"You probably mean that I shall be forced to see him at the club, of which we both are members. No, mademoiselle; I shall not see him there. If he does not feel that after this duel he ought to retire from the club where he was publicly struck, if he dares ever to set his foot inside it, I shall go there no more and send in my resignation."

"Monsieur de Pontaumur goes often to Madame Brehal's."

"How do you know that?"

"He has boasted of it, at all events, and you are very intimate there. Can you induce her not to receive him?"

This was too much. George did not answer this embarrassing question, and he thought now only of retiring.

"I will conform to your wishes, mademoiselle," he said. "I shall do everything which my friendship for Maurice demands, and I shall see that his intentions are carried out. But your name shall not be pronounced, and nothing will prevent you from acting as if you had never been Monsieur Saulieu's betrothed. Need I add that I shall not trouble the repose you aspire to?"

"Do you mean that I shall not see you again?" asked Marianne, with an emotion she did not seek to conceal.

"I only beg you to excuse me to your mother, if she is astonished that I have left without saying good-bye to her."

With these coldly polite words, George bowed and departed.

The door had remained open, and he knew how to reach the staircase without entering the salon. He left hurriedly, but not so quickly but that he could hear the young girl sobbing.

He did not think of going back to console her, but went away, outraged and still more afflicted.

"To kill oneself for a woman!" he muttered to himself. "There is one for whom Maurice sacrificed his life, and, on hearing of his death, she thought only of saving her compromised reputation. She did not show one spark of feeling. What can she hope to attain with her ridiculous plans? Her mother will learn the truth sooner or later, and her aunt will never persuade any one that her marriage was never intended."

George, talking to himself, descended the stairs two at a time. At the tenth he was already saying:

"I must, however, do her the justice to say that she was disinterested. Her pride revolted when I spoke of the will. And she is frank, for she did not hide that she never had any love for Mau-

rice. She did not play the comedy of regrets. It is not her fault, after all, if Maurice inspired her only with friendship," he thought, on reaching the first floor.

And, at the foot of the stairs—

"Why did she speak to me of Madame Brehal? Why did she recall that Madame Brehal had the weakness to receive Monsieur de Pontaumur? One would say that she was jealous. If it were true what Maurice told me! If she loves me!"

On his way home, George made laudable attempts to chase away this idea, and only half succeeded.

CHAPTER III.

THE fashion is for hotels. English customs have become implanted in France, and the idea of a home has gained upon the more sociable Parisians. They do not yet divide their *cafes* into compartments, as in London, where the drinkers wish to be in solitude to absorb their grog, but the English selection of a domicile has become fashionable. The Parisians no longer wish for neighbors.

The rich *bourgeois* who were contented, thirty years ago, with a fine apartment on the first floor, in a central quarter, now think themselves obliged to inhabit an hotel a long way from the Boulevard des Italiens. They die of *ennui*, but they follow the fashion, and they have a house to themselves.

M. Brehal, a millionaire banker, purchased, a few years back, a handsome house in the Avenue de Villiers, with a large garden planted with beautiful trees, and bordering upon a street recently laid out.

This financier, who was just married, gave the place to his bride as a wedding present, but he had no time to establish himself there with her. Six months after, Mme. Brehal was a widow, at nineteen, and alone in the world, for she had lost both her parents when a child. Already rich in her own right, and brought up in the ideas of the *bourgeoisie*, to which she belonged, she found it quite natural to marry, on leaving the convent, a man who possessed a large fortune, and whom she scarcely knew. He did not displease her, moreover, and, at his death, she had sincerely mourned him; but she had never pretended to be inconsolable, and, her regulation mourning over, she did not fly from worldly distractions.

The hotel, transformed under her direction, and furnished anew with intelligent taste, had opened its doors to Parisian society. Her

family belonged to the commercial aristocracy, and among her school friends there were many who had made wealthy marriages, and who liked to receive as much as she did. From her acquaintances, and those of her husband, Mme. Brehal made a choice; there were enough to form the nucleus of a pleasant society, but she had extended little by little the circle of her friends, and as she pitilessly excluded the bores of both sexes, her house was one of those where witty people liked to go. A person was received there only on condition of furnishing his or her contingent of gayety and intelligence.

Mme. Brehal did not pose as a protectress of artistic and literary celebrities; she avoided blue-stockings, and men of talent were only admitted if they were also men of good breeding. She did not have readings at her house, nor launch unappreciated poets; she wished her guests to be amused, and they were amused.

This independent attitude, of course, caused severe criticism. Many women said that she lived too much outside of social rules, and found fault with her exclusiveness. Many men declared that a young widow, with two hundred thousand francs a year, had no right to remain a widow, and they did not hesitate, most of them being by the way rejected suitors, to say: Seek the lover!

They did seek, but they did not find him.

Mme. Brehal did not conceal that she had her favorite friends, but she lived in the full light of day; her hotel was a house of glass. A woman can not have secrets when she is served by numerous domestics, and Mme. Brehal kept a dozen.

On the other hand, she did not hesitate to stop her carriage before the hotel in the Rue de Milan, whenever she chose.

George Courtenay was assuredly the dearest of her intimate friends, and, during the last year, especially, she had admitted him on a footing which somewhat astonished her acquaintances.

George openly professed his admiration for Mme. Brehal, praised her virtues and excused her faults; he was always ready to break a lance for her, like a veritable Don Quixote; he even declared that, if ever he should tire of a bachelor's life, he should become a suitor for the hand of this queen of widows, but he never failed to add gayly that she wouldn't have him. Mme. Brehal, on her side, said to any one who cared to hear it, that, of all the men she knew, George Courtenay was the only one for whom a woman like herself could sacrifice her liberty, but that pleasant companionship was worth more than love, and that the sacrifice, moreover, would be reciprocal, for M. Courtenay had no desire to wear the chains of matrimony. To the more or less well-intentioned wiseacres who

showed her the danger of giving cause for calumny, she replied that she despised slanderers.

And when they spoke in this way, they both meant what they said.

For some months, however, the character of their relations had been somewhat altered. Mme. Brehal seemed to wish to enter more into George's life. She questioned him laughingly in regard to his plans for the future, spoke to him of his friends, wished to know what he thought of them, M. Saulieu among others, was interested in what he did, in the horses he bought, the card-parties where he lost his money, and the talk of the club. She even permitted herself, now and then, to give him a word of advice.

And more than once George had wondered if he were not in love with Mme. Brehal without being aware of it. He perceived that he liked to be with her, and the pleasures with which he had been contented palled upon him. As far as marrying her went, he scarcely thought of it, or thought of it only as a sub-lieutenant thinks of the life he will lead when he is a retired general. But when twenty-four hours went by without his seeing her he felt that something was lacking in his life.

So he was only too glad to keep the appointment she had taken the pains of coming to the Rue de Milan to make, while Maurice was dying in the redoubt of Gennevilliers.

After his visit to Mme. Mezenc, George returned home, very much troubled, wishing to be alone, determined to close his door to every one, but also determined to accept the invitation of Mme. Brehal, his best and only counselor.

A dispatch came about seven o'clock from the doctor, saying that, if no unforeseen incident occurred, he should hope to return to Paris that evening, and asking Courtenay to wait for him in the Rue de Milan.

George naturally dined at home. He was in no humor to dine at the club with numerous companions. But at nine o'clock, Coulanges not having appeared, he ordered his coupé, and, at half-past nine, stopped before the monumental gateway of Mme. Brehal's hotel.

He was expected, for the gateway was open, and the entrance of the coupé was immediately signaled by the ringing of a bell and the appearance of two footmen in livery.

He was well acquainted with the hotel, the interior arrangements and decorations of which the charming widow had superintended

herself, and, yet, every time he came there, he marveled as if he had never seen it.

Even in the vestibule it was easy to see that one was in the house of a woman who cared nothing for expense, for the princely furnishing must have cost immense sums, and also in the house of a woman of taste. Although everything was luxurious nothing shocked the eye, and there was a touch of originality in the most minor details.

The vestibule was paved with black marble, and across it was a broad band of Persian carpet, which entirely covered the staircase, lighted by large onyx candelabra and paneled with immense mirrors which reflected the light and doubled its effect.

"Does madame receive this evening?" asked Courtenay, a little surprised at the illumination.

"Madame is at home to monsieur," replied the footman, evasively. George followed him without further question. He remembered that one of Mme. Brehal's numerous fancies was to have all the candelabra and lusters lighted, even when she expected no one. She said a lady had no right to reserve brilliancy for great receptions, after the fashion of provincials who dress only on fête days, and take the covers off the furniture in the salon only when they have company to dinner.

As he mounted the magnificent staircase George thought of the little lodging in the Rue Blanche, where he had left Mlle. Mezeuc alone with her sorrow. He understood better now the words she had spoken and which had seemed to him so strange. "What a punishment," he said to himself, "to be young, beautiful, and proud, when one is poor, and what courage she must have to support the life Maurice's death has given to her. There is no great merit in Mme. Brehal's resignation to her widowhood, but Marianne reduced to work with her own hands, condemned too to go into the world under penalty of social position—it is atrocious! All pretty women should have four millions and a palace like this."

It was indeed a palace that Mme. Brehal inhabited, and an artistic palace, which would put to shame many royal residences, only official inns built for the use of some king or emperor.

The dining-room, which Courtenay crossed, did not resemble one of those galleries fit to give banquets with sixty covers to the great dignitaries of the State. It had only one window, but an immense, deep window, all shrouded in plants like a conservatory. The ceiling was of carved oak; the walls were hung with Cordova leather, stamped with arabesques of color. The sideboard in the style of the

Renaissance, was flanked by figures of sirens, bearing garlands of flowers. And the chairs of old oak had high exquisitely carved backs.

Courtenay, who had dined once at Mme. Mezenc's with Maurice, thought of the plain buffet, the mahogany table, and the cane-bottomed chairs.

And when he entered the salon, where burnished panels alternated with hangings of white velvet, where statues placed upon ebony pedestals elbowed lovely paintings on gilded easels, where superb arm-chairs majestically surrounded the fire-place, he recalled the engravings in cheap frames, the hired upright piano and waxed floor on which the paralytic rolled about her chair.

Mme. Brehal was established this evening in the little salon, which led out of the large one; this room was a charming little place, which she liked above all others, and where she admitted only her intimate friends. It was circular, the hangings were of China silk, and the chimney-piece was built like a little pagoda.

The lady, seated upon a sofa, covered with cushions of all colors, was reading by the soft light of a lamp of old Sèvres, and she did not lift her eyes, when Courtenay raised, without being announced, the silken *portière*.

She had never appeared to him more charming, and yet she did not efface from his memory the image of Marianne, whom sorrow rendered even more beautiful.

The contrast was striking.

Marianne was pale and dark as night, with great black eyes and arched eyebrows, the clear cut profile of a Greek statue and the figure of one of Jean Goujon's nymphs.

Gabrielle Brehal was *petite* and dimpled; her hair was of reddish gold, and her eyes blue, a little elongated toward the temples; she had the delicate nose and full lips of Mme. Dubarry, and the rosy complexion, brilliant teeth and sparkling smile of one of Watteau's shepherdesses. And upon this eighteenth century face, that century when the great affair was love, was an expression of frank gayety and good humor which won all hearts.

"I would bet that book she is reading does not interest her much," thought George, without advancing. "What is she thinking of?"

The footman had discreetly retired, and in this perfumed retreat the silence was so profound that George could hear the almost imperceptible sound of Mme. Brehal's breathing. He did not wish her to think that he had been spying upon her, and he decided to step

forward. It was enough to have surprised Mlle. Mezenc some hours before.

The lady started at the slight noise he made advancing over the carpet, and, when she perceived him, she rose and came toward him.

"I was beginning to despair of seeing you," she said, holding out her hand. "Thanks for having come, for having remembered that you still have a friend."

"You know then?"

"Yes, I know that your unhappy friend is dead. I guessed that he was going to fight and that you were his second. It was not difficult to guess that. You had abandoned me for two days. I even feared for an instant that your part in the duel was that of principal, but I inquired and was assured that it was not. I hoped that this encounter would be like so many others where no one is wounded, and yet I longed to know the result. It was for that reason I went to your house. Alas! I knew the fatal ending only too soon; on my way from the Bois, I stopped at my dress maker's and found there Madame Fresnay, who told me that Monsieur Saulieu had been killed."

"Madame Fresnay? How did she know it?"

"I did not ask her. But—is she not a near relative of Mademoiselle Mezenc, whom Monsieur Saulieu was to marry?"

"Her aunt by alliance. And at the moment her niece was receiving the terrible news of Maurice's death she was occupied with ordering dresses."

"I was a little astonished at meeting her, and much more at seeing that she did not appear in the least afflicted. Perhaps she did not approve this project of marriage?"

"It seems much more natural to think that she has no heart. You will acknowledge, at least, that it is infinitely more probable."

"Do not let us hasten to judge her. Tell me about the young girl whom this catastrophe throws into mourning. But first," continued Mme. Brehal, who still held George's hand, drawing him toward the sofa she had left to receive him, "come and sit down here opposite me. We can talk better face to face, and I have so many things to say to you this evening which I have kept for a very long time."

George did not need to be urged to take the place which Mme. Brehal assigned him.

Like her, he was of the opinion that, to talk agreeably it is necessary to be opposite your companion. When seated side by side you are obliged to turn your head at every sentence, and the dialogue

loses much. You do not pay court to a woman when you see only her profile. On such occasions the eyes say more than the lips.

Gabrielle Brehal certainly did not wish any one to address burning declarations to her, since she had no desire to be married again; and yet she had taken care that the little salon where she received her intimates should be amply provided with conveniences for conversation.

Before the sofa on which she sat was an assortment of arm-chairs, ottomans and stools.

This evening George's heart was full of sadness, and the charming woman who had summoned him, broached in the beginning a sorrowful subject; to tell the truth, he was not disposed to speak of anything else.

"Yes," said Mme. Brehal, "I asked you to come, because I expect no one this evening and because I wished to have a long chat with you. I am interested in Mademoiselle Mezenc, and you are the only one who can inform me exactly as to her situation."

"But," answered George, "you know her situation. Mademoiselle Mezenc has no fortune, or so little that it is almost as if she had none. She and her mother live upon five or six thousand francs a year, and this meager income will be diminished one half on the death of the mother."

"I know that she is poor. And Monsieur Saulieu's death is a great misfortune to her; for, by marrying him, she would have made an unhoped-for marriage. Your friend was rich, was he not?"

"Rich, no. He inherited from an uncle a few hundreds of thousands of francs."

"That was much for a girl who has nothing. Besides, she loved him for himself, as he deserved to be, for he was a charming fellow. I would have liked to have known him better, but he was very reserved, and you brought him here so rarely."

"He lived only for her, and it was for her that he died."

"What! for her? I thought the duel was caused by a discussion over cards at the club, that club of which you are so fond."

"Maurice took as a pretext a scarcely offensive word to strike a man who had spread scandalous reports about Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"Then he did right. A man does not allow the woman he loves to be insulted. I was very badly informed. I heard that Monsieur Saulieu had provoked a quarrel with some one, I didn't know whom, I don't know now."

"What! Didn't Madame Fresnay tell you?"

"She told me that Monsieur Saulieu had been killed and nothing more. You can understand that I asked her no questions. Besides, she went away almost immediately. And then, I thought only of the unhappiness which had overtaken you; you had lost your dearest friend, and I cared little to know the name of his adversary."

"It is well however that you should know it, for this adversary may one of these days have an affair with me; and as he is received at your house, I want to warn you—"

"I hope that you are not going to risk your life to avenge Monsieur Saulieu," said Mme. Brehal, quickly. "But who is it?"

"A man whom I have always had a horror of and whom you receive. Monsieur de Pontaumur killed Maurice."

"Monsieur de Pontaumur! I confess that I thought him incapable, not of fighting, but of speaking of a young girl so—"

"Infamously, say the word. There is no other with which to qualify his conduct. He said to men, who have repeated it, that Mademoiselle Mezenc was Maurice's mistress."

"If he said that—"

"Do you doubt it?"

"No, since you say so. But I am very much astonished. He has never spoken of her to me except in her praise."

"Do you undertake his defense?" asked George, with a certain bitterness.

"No, my friend," answered Mme. Brehal, sweetly. "I have no particular reasons for defending a man whom I meet everywhere and who comes here sometimes, as many others do, but whom I do not fancy."

"Why do you receive him, then?"

"I might suggest to you that I am not obliged to render you an account of my conduct," said Mme. Brehal, half smiling. "But I prefer to answer you quite simply that, on Wednesdays my house is open to all those who care to present themselves, and I have never thought of excluding Monsieur de Pontaumur, who is a well-bred man."

"It is perhaps for that reason that you do not see me often on that day."

"I have noticed, in fact, that you were frequently lacking at my weekly reunions. They are not always amusing, and I am not angry with you. If you should forsake me entirely, that would be different. But you are not sulky with me, since you are here."

"Sulky! Oh, no. But I confess that if I were exposed to finding that man in your house—"

"Is that a threat?"

"Not even a condition. I have no right to impose conditions upon you, still less would I presume to threaten you. Acknowledge, though, that, after what has occurred to-day, I might very well ask you to choose between Monsieur de Pontaumur and myself."

"I thought so. This is a regular ultimatum. You wish me to close my doors to him. I would ask nothing better, but it would be a mistake."

"Why?"

"Do you wish to know? Well, because Monsieur de Pontaumur has paid me attentions which I have pretended not to take in earnest, but which have not passed unnoticed. Some of my friends have spoken to me of it. If I should banish him they would think that I was afraid of him, and that would lead to commentaries without end. How could I do it, besides? To close your door to a gentleman you receive is easily said, but it is not so easily done when this gentleman has committed no act to publicly deserve it. I can not write to Monsieur de Pontaumur that I forbid him to set foot in my house without giving him any reason."

"You can, at least, if he asks to see you, send word that you are not at home."

"That is what I should do if he came, like you, the days I admit only my intimate friends. But on Wednesdays I do not belong to myself, so to speak. To keep Monsieur de Pontaumur out I should have to instruct my people; all Paris would know it."

"And no one would be astonished that you no longer cared to see the murderer of Maurice Saulieu, my best friend."

Mme. Brehal was silent and a pause followed this speech. She looked at Courtenay as if to ask him if he intended to complete the thought which his last words indicated, but as he did not speak, she said:

"You are mistaken, my dear George. I was not very intimate with Monsieur Saulieu, I am so with you it is true, but—you are not my relative nor my husband. People would be astonished if I should forbid Monsieur de Pontaumur my house for the sole reason that he is your enemy. I am certain, moreover, that he will have the good taste to keep away. He has tact, and he can not be desirous of meeting you face to face."

"He will do so, however, if he does not resign from the club," replied Courtenay, with very marked ill-humor.

"He will doubtless do so. Let us speak no more of him, I pray, but return to that young girl. What is she going to do now?"

"She is going to work for a living. She paints and carves wood, and she will try to make money out of her talents."

"Then she will renounce society?"

"No, she will go wherever she has been in the habit of going. She has even decided not to wear mourning for Saulieu, whom she was to have married in a month."

"That is a strange resolution."

"Strange, yes, to those who do not know Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"But you know her well, do you not?"

"I commenced to know her a few hours ago."

"You have seen her, then, since this unfortunate duel?"

"Maurice made me promise, before he died, to go myself and inform her of his death. I have kept my word, and I almost regret having kept it. But why do you ask me what I think of his *fiancée?*"

"Because I wish to be her friend, as you were the friend of Maurice Saulieu."

"You; her friend!" exclaimed Courtenay.

"Why not?" asked Mme. Brehal gently. "Do you not think her worthy of my friendship?"

"I do not say that."

"Or do you think that I do not merit that she should accord me hers?"

"I think that she would be only too fortunate in having a protectress like you, but—"

"But I am too old to be her friend; I am twenty-six and she is twenty; too old and too—what shall I say—frivolous?"

"You take pleasure in mocking me."

"On the contrary, I am speaking very seriously, and if you will listen to me a minute, you will be convinced of it. When I learned from Madame Fresnay that Monsieur Saulieu had been killed, my first thought was for you. I knew how intimate you were, I pitied you with all my heart, and I longed to console you: do not misunderstand what I say, but I am only a woman and can not replace the friends you have lost. I thought then of Maurice's *fiancée*, of that poor child who was left alone with an infirm mother and no other protector than an aunt, whom, I confess, I should not trust to have charge of a young girl in society."

"Madame Fresnay! an idiot and perhaps worse than that. It was she who caused all the trouble by her chattering, and her behavior is revolting. She should have been with her niece, instead of going

to talk over the fashions with her dress-maker. You are a thousand times right. Mademoiselle Mezenc is in very bad hands."

"You are not astonished, then, that I wish to take her out of them."

"The intention is excellent, but I doubt if it can be realized."

"Why not? I only know Madame Mezenc a little, but I am ready to become more intimate with her. She is no longer young, and a cruel malady condemns her to remain at home; it is therefore my place to make the advances, and I shall make them all the more willingly, because Madame Mezenc is a distinguished woman in all respects."

"Her only fault, I think, is being weak."

"As regards her daughter? That is a very excusable weakness. Now, I want you to tell me why you do not approve of my plan; is it because you think Mademoiselle Mezenc would reject it, if you should speak to her of it?"

"I can not tell, not knowing just what your plan is. But she is in a position so different from yours—"

"I know it, and I do not intend to prevent Mademoiselle Mezenc from working for her living, since she is resolved to do so; I even admire her for having taken that resolution. But you have just told me that she did not wish to renounce society, and in that, I think again that she is right. Why then should she not come to my house, and why should I not go to hers? Would you yourself, George, cease to come here because you might encounter Mademoiselle Mezenc?"

"No, no, and yet, I must tell you something about her. When you know it, you can at least act with a knowledge of the case."

"Well?"

"In the first place, she squarely declared to me that she had never loved Maurice."

"And she would have married him!"

"Yes, in deference to her mother's wishes. The excuse seems to you a poor one, does it not? She gave me others, however, which you will perhaps consider better. She says that she had not the courage to take away Maurice's illusion, which he finally lost though, for he perceived that his *fiancée* felt only friendship for him, and it was this sad discovery which impelled him to seek death. I think, for my part, that she was sincere in what she said, and I am sure that hypocrisy is not one of her faults. She is incapable of disguising her sentiments, and even carries frankness too far, in my opinion."

"My opinion is that one can never be too frank. And if you have only that to reproach her with—"

"Pardon me, I do not reproach her at all. I simply tell you this, because I think it best that you should know it."

"Thank you. But, you have your own opinion in regard to this girl"

"Oh! certainly, in what concerns certain phases of her character. I think that she has a will of iron, much pride, too much perhaps, for she has already suffered from it and will suffer again; and much disinterestedness; I am almost sure that Maurice left her all his fortune, and she insists that she will not accept it."

"Well, these are qualities of the first order."

"Which may become faults if they are exaggerated. And then, I do not know all; I passed only half an hour with her, and that is not enough to study her character; the impression I carried away with me from this short interview is that Mademoiselle Mezenc is of an extravagant nature, in good as well as in evil. I hasten to add that I have not perceived the evil, but I repeat, I do not know her well."

"You are a man and you understand nothing of the sentiments of a young girl. I shall know her very quickly."

"I hope so, but how are you going to introduce her to your society, which is not hers? by what title will you patronize her?"

"That is very simple. In the first place, I shall ask her to paint four panels for the summer salon my architect is finishing; flowers are her specialty, I believe."

"I think so. By the way, I am not sure that she has talent; I am even inclined to believe the contrary."

"It is enough for me if she consents. I only want a pretext to attract her here and to present her to my friends."

"Even to Monsieur de Pontaumur?" asked Courtenay, ironically.

"Monsieur de Pontaumur is not my friend, you know it very well, and it is unkind of you to speak in that way. But I forgive you, because you have, without meaning to, given me the pretext I sought to get rid of that person whom you do not like, nor I either for that matter. No one will be astonished if I deprive myself of his visits, when I have in my house Mademoiselle Mezenc, who was to have been the wife of Monsieur Saulieu."

"You would do that?"

"How can you doubt it? Do you think that I could impose on that young girl the presence of a man who has killed her *fiancée*, and who, moreover, has slandered her?"

"Then I hope that she will accept your offer. I even hope that you will succeed in marrying her advantageously."

"I hope so too."

"It will be more difficult than you think."

"Because she has no dowry? Is that a reason why she should not find a husband? There are still in Paris men who do not care for money and who have enough for two. You yourself, my dear George, would not hesitate to marry a woman as poor as Job, if you loved her."

"I, possibly. But I am an exception. And then the difficulty would come from Mademoiselle Mezenc. She is strangely sensitive on that point; she does not wish to be married out of charity."

"Then only the rich could marry. It is not possible that she spoke seriously, if she used that expression."

"She did not use it, but it expresses very well what she thinks. She considers that poverty condemns her to remain unmarried, under penalty of exposing herself to new misfortunes. She was slandered because she was poor, and it has caused Maurice's death."

"She is mistaken if she thinks that wealth preserves one from unhappiness," murmured Mme. Brehal. "People envy my lot, and if they could know—"

"What?" said Courtenay, smiling. "With your fortune in order to be unhappy you must have love troubles, and up to the present—"

"I have not had them. Such is your opinion, and if I should contradict you you would smile perhaps. I assure you, monsieur, if I had love troubles I should not select you for a confidant. But, admitting that I am free from them, do you count for nothing the unhappiness of doubting the sincerity of all the declarations made to me?" added Mme. Brehal, gayly.

"Why should you doubt them?" asked George, surprised at this sudden change in a conversation which had as a subject only Mlle. Mezenc.

"Because I have a fine house and two hundred thousand francs a year, my friend. Whenever any one has told me he loved me I have never been able to believe that it was for myself alone. This is a punishment which poor girls do not know. They are not loved for what they possess."

"I do not doubt but that you have met men who wished only your fortune. Is it to be concluded, on that account, that you never inspire a real sentiment?"

"I fear so."

"Do you know that, if you really lack faith on that point, it

would discourage a good fellow who should honestly fall in love with you? I know those who would never avow it, for fear of being misunderstood."

"You do? Really?"

"I know at least one," responded George, drawing a little nearer.

"You, my friend? Yes, I think that if you loved me you would be silent through excess of delicacy. But you do not love me."

"How do you know?"

A moment more and George would have been kneeling at her feet, perhaps without really meaning to, but the sound of a footfall caused him to recover his equilibrium and prevented Mme. Brehal from answering him.

The footman, who had ushered him in, appeared on the threshold of the little salon, and for this footman to have appeared without being summoned it was necessary that some unlooked-for incident had obliged him to, for Mme. Brehal had expressly declared that she was at home to no one.

George had immediately assumed the ordinary attitude of a caller, and doubtless he was not sorry of an interruption which came just in time to stop him at the moment he was about to yield to a ridiculous impulse.

Mme. Brehal did not probably share George's ideas, for she cast a severe look at the domestic who had permitted himself to interrupt the *tête-à-tête* at the most interesting moment.

"What is it?" she asked. "I have given my orders."

"Pardon me, madame, but a gentleman is below—"

"Well, why did you not tell him that I was not receiving?"

"The gentleman desires to speak to Monsieur Courtenay."

"To me?" exclaimed George. "What does that mean?"

"He sent up his card to monsieur," said the footman, advancing with a silver salver in his hand.

George took the card, read the name which it bore, and made a gesture of surprise.

"Ask the gentleman to wait," he said.

"No bad news, I hope?" said Mme. Brehal, as soon as the servant had disappeared.

"No, no. One of my friends, whom I waited for at my house till nine o'clock."

"And who guessed that you were here," added the lady with a smile. "That does honor to his perspicacity."

"He must have insisted on seeing me and was told that he would

find me at your house. My valet knew that I was to be here, because you gave your message to him this afternoon."

"And, naturally, you did not command him to be silent, for you do not conceal coming to see me any more than I conceal receiving you. You did not foresee that one of my people, in announcing the arrival of your friend, would interrupt the beginning of a sentence which presaged a declaration."

"Confess that it was well it happened as it did, and that you provoked the declaration a little. I was about to thrust my head into the trap for you to laugh at me."

"Laugh at you! I assure you, I should take no pleasure in doing that. We were speaking of serious things, and I don't know how we came to discourse about love as we are neither of us in love with the other. There are days when these things are in the air, but we must never begin again."

"I shall not promise that."

"No, no. Never. We must not play with fire, and if yours should be rekindled I could not restrain you."

"Say rather that you would send me away."

"Not at all. I would much prefer to keep you, for we do not agree, and I would like to convert you to my ideas. But your friend is waiting, and if he has taken the trouble to make the journey to the Avenue de Villiers, he doubtless has important news to tell you."

"My friend is Doctor Coulanges, who was Maurice's second with me, and whom I left at Saint-Ouen to appear before the coroner's jury. I think he ought not to have followed me here, unless he comes to tell me of danger."

"What! you are exposed—"

"To being arrested. Yes, and the prospect does not alarm me much, as we have nothing to reproach ourselves with. Well, if it happens, I shall be consoled by thinking that that miserable Pontaumur will be the chief prisoner."

"Whatever occurs," said Mme. Brehal, quickly, "I promise you that you shall not meet him in my house. I shall see Mademoiselle Mezenc to morrow and do my utmost to persuade her to work here. Her presence will protect me from the visits of a man who has become odious to me since he has killed your friend. When shall I see you?"

"When I have finished with the painful duties I must perform. Maurice Saulieu had no relatives in Paris, and I shall have to act for his family."

"How I pity you! and how I wish I could share your sad task. But I am only a woman, and women are of no account in the great trials of life. Go, my dear George, and believe that I shall not cease to think of you for an instant during these sad days."

Courtenay kissed the hand which Mme. Brehal extended to him, and left her with no further word.

He was not sorry to go. The air in that perfumed retreat intoxicated him. He had lost the just appreciation of things, and he wished to recover it.

He departed troubled and discontented with himself, almost as when he had left Marianne Mezenc's studio.

"Is it fated, then," he thought as he crossed the large salon, "that I shall forget Maurice's death to listen to peculiar lamentations and equivocal expressions of faith? One announces to me desperate resolutions, while declaring that she never loved her *fiancé* and hinting that her heart was given—elsewhere. The other amuses herself with enlarging upon the inconveniences of wealth considered in its relations with lovers and nearly succeeds in bringing me gently to her feet. And again, with that girl, if I cut short her confidences, it was because I felt an emotion which was not caused by poor Maurice's death. Twice in the same day, it is too much. I am ashamed of myself. Fortunately, the doctor is here. A talk with him will cure me. But what the deuce can he have to say to me in such a hurry?"

The footman was waiting at the top of the marble staircase, and preceded M. Courtenay to the vestibule. Coulanges was not there, and George learned that, after sending up his card, he had reentered the cab in which he came.

The coupé was before the door, and when George went out he saw that perhaps out of deference for such an aristocratic equipage the driver of the cab had stationed himself twenty feet off.

He could not see Coulanges, and, thinking that he would find him sitting inside the cab, he signed to his coachman to stay where he was, and, lighting a cigar, walked down the street.

There was no one in the cab. He could easily assure himself of this, as the door was open.

"The gentleman got out," said the man on the box.

"Ah! and where has he gone?" asked Courtenay, surprised.

"To walk along the fortifications. I saw him turn the corner below there. Oh! he can not be far; it isn't five minutes since he left the cab."

"What is the matter with him?" growled George. "Is he go-

ing back to Saint-Ouen on foot; I have a great mind to call him; no, in this quiet place my voice would attract all the servants in the house; they would think that I was calling for help. I will go and see what has become of him; that is the quickest and surest way."

The property acquired by the late M. Brehal was bounded by the three sides of a triangle formed by the Avenue de Villiers, the continuation of the Rue de Courcelles, and the Boulevard Berthier, which runs along by the fortifications. The hotel faced on the avenue; the garden extended to the Boulevard, and the grounds which completed the property were on the Rue de Courcelles. From the entrance to the hotel commenced a high wall, above which could be seen the trees of the park which surrounded the house.

Courtenay had always come in a carriage to see Mme. Brehal, and had never been further down the avenue than the entrance to the house. On setting out to meet his friend Coulanges, he was, therefore, going to venture into unknown regions, but he supposed that the fanciful doctor had not gone far, and he did not think in the least of the unpleasant encounters to which one is exposed when he walks at night in unfrequented parts of Paris. Besides, it was not very late, and the toll-house was within reach of his voice, without speaking of the two coachmen sitting on their boxes.

He advanced to the angle of the wall, gave a glance to the right, and saw no one. The Boulevard Berthier was deserted, there was no doubt of that, for the gas-jets gave enough light to see.

"Where can he be?" wondered George, who was beginning to be uneasy. "I must find out and make my mind easy." And he walked down the Boulevard, keeping close to the wall.

At his left, rose the banks of the fortifications, and a little further on was a mound of earth. When he reached the top of this eminence, he paused to look about him, and it seemed to him that there was a man seated at the foot of the artificial hill.

There is nothing alarming in a man seated at the foot of a mound, near the fortifications, between ten and eleven o'clock in the evening, nor even astonishing, for these distant places are frequented enough at night by people who belong to the lower classes, and notably by drunkards, who come there to sleep off the wine absorbed in the taverns around about.

But the man was not asleep. He was watching, and when he saw George appear, he rose suddenly. At this motion, George backed up against the wall and prepared to defend himself against an attack.

He was very much surprised to see that the man, instead of ad-

vancing, made him a sign to approach, and the idea came to him that this star-gazer might be the doctor he was seeking. It was his figure and dress, so far as the light from the street-lamp, twenty feet off, allowed him to judge.

George, who never hesitated, deliberately crossed the street, and, as he reached the opposite sidewalk, he saw that it was indeed Coulanges.

"What the devil are you doing there?" he called out to him; "and what are you gesticulating like that for?"

"Not so loud, not so loud!" responded the doctor. "And come at once; I want to speak to you."

George, more and more puzzled, quickened his steps, and, in a few seconds, joined Coulanges, who seized him by the arm and drew him into the shadow of the hillock.

"Well, will you explain?"

"It was to explain that I drew you here," whispered the doctor. "Here we can not be seen, and we can talk without any one hearing us."

"But who would hear us? There is no one here."

"Now, no; and yet I don't know, a man with good ears might. Besides, this one may reappear any moment."

"I understand less and less."

"Let me tell you what has happened; my story will perhaps be interrupted, but—"

"Go on, will you? You drive me crazy with your preambles. Who are you watching here? Tell me at once."

"If I should tell you point-blank, you would not believe me, or, at least, you would think it improbable, and would interrupt me to ask questions, and I should have to go back to the beginning; so I prefer to begin at the beginning; but, first, let me place myself so as not to lose sight of that inclosure on the other side of the Boulevard."

"Good! the mystery is behind the wall, it seems," muttered Courtenay.

"My dear fellow," said Coulanges, with his back against the embankment, "you must not think that I came here without a reason. I sent you a dispatch to ask you—"

"To wait for you. I received it, but I was obliged to go out at nine o'clock. Madame Brehal had taken the trouble to stop at my house in the afternoon."

"Your valet told me so, and gave me the lady's address; by the way, she lives a little far away. But I was very anxious to see yo

this evening; I will tell you why presently, so I drove to the end of the Avenue de Villiers, and, at the risk of being indiscreet, I sent you my card."

"You can tell me nothing that I do not know, or have not guessed. Go on, doctor, go on."

"Well, as you did not come, after waiting a quarter of an hour on the sidewalk, as I was tired with running about all the evening at Gennevilliers, I got into the cab to rest my legs. (By the way, I left your carriage at the stable.) The groom, who drives your coupe this evening, saw me, and I supposed that he would tell you where I was."

"It was needless. I perceived your carriage, and thought that I should find you inside, but you were not there. Then I asked your driver, and he told me that you had gone to walk in this street."

"Not for my pleasure, I assure you. I had been seated for about five minutes upon the by no means soft cushions of my cab, when a man passed quite near me."

"And you followed the man, I suppose. But I do not see what your motive was in tracking him. Did you know him?"

"I thought I recognized him."

"Well, you had only to call to him, and you would have known at once."

"I took care not to do that, for reasons you will understand, when I have told you all. Let me finish. I would like, before giving you the key to this mystery, to ask you what you think of the duel and what has followed since?"

"Doctor, you are insupportable. However, we have both time to lose. My call is made, and you, I suppose, do not return to Gennevilliers this evening?"

"Oh, no! I have had enough of that; and yet, all is not finished there yet, but no matter. I told you that this individual attracted my attention; I saw him stop at the corner of the avenue, and look back, evidently to make sure that he was not followed, and then turn to the right. Then I wished to know where he was going."

"That idea would not have occurred to me."

"Perhaps. Wait, before giving an opinion. I got out and advanced to the corner of the wall; from there, I could, without being seen, watch the movements of the gentleman."

"It was a gentleman, then?" asked Courtenay, ironically.

"Do you think that I should have amused myself with watching a tramp? I have nothing to do with such people."

"I am sure of it. Well, what did your gentleman do?"

"He walked on about a hundred feet, and then disappeared."

"In a trap, like an imp in a pantomime?"

"No, in the wall."

"You are certainly making fun of me!"

"Pardon me; I forgot to tell you that there is a door. Look, you can see it from here."

"I only see a fence which joins the garden wall."

"Look more carefully, and you will see that at the place where it commenced, there is a sort of a recess. The entrance is there."

"The entrance to what?"

"I must ask you that; for I have never been here before, while you, being intimate with Madame Brehal, must know the surroundings of her hotel."

"I know that the garden is surrounded by walls, and beyond are grounds which she has never wished to sell for fear somebody would build there."

"And these grounds are simply inclosed by a plank fence, high enough and well put together. It is impossible to see what there is on the other side."

"There is nothing at all, not even potatoes. The land is uncultivated."

"Good! But the question is: Is there, behind that fence, any communication between this uncultivated land and the garden?"

"I remember vaguely having perceived, in strolling about the walks, an old door which should have been condemned a long time ago, for it is almost hidden by clusters of ivy. But what is the meaning of all these questions, please?"

"The other door, the one I have pointed out to you, gives access only into the field. The first planks of the fence form a sort of gate, which opens by means of a key. I have been there and felt the lock."

"And this man had the key?"

"Exactly. He took it out of his pocket, used it, entered and locked the gate behind him."

"But this is a story of thieves you are telling me."

"Pardon me; you just told me there was nothing to steal there, not even vegetables."

"That is true."

"Might it not be supposed that, from the field, the man entered the garden by that apparently condemned door?"

"The devil! If I believed that, I should immediately go and warn Madame Brehal's domestics. When one takes roundabout

ways he has no good intentions. After all, what are we doing here instead of giving the alarm?"

"I am waiting for this singular visitor to come out."

"And when he comes out, what will you do? It is a hundred times better to capture him in the act of theft. We need not both of us remain here, at all events. Continue to mount guard here, and I will give the alarm to the people of the hotel. I will place myself at their head, and we will hunt for this rascal; if he comes out on the boulevard you can call, and besides, I will send you re-enforcements."

"My dear fellow, I beg you to reflect before putting so many people on the track."

"I have reflected."

"Yet—if this man were not a thief. If he were—"

"What?"

"Good Heavens! I don't affirm anything; but, after all, it is not only thieves who introduce themselves clandestinely into an inhabited house. There are also—lovers."

"Lovers!" repeated Courtenay, completely taken aback.

"Oh! It may be all right. A woman may receive a gentleman secretly with the best intentions."

"Come, doctor, what you say hasn't common sense and you know it very well. A man does not present himself at eleven o'clock in the evening with the key of a secret door in his pocket, when everything is *en règle*."

"Unless the man does so without being authorized."

"To have a nearer look at the house where his idol reposes, or to play the guitar under her windows. That is improbable."

"You suppose, then, that Madame Brehal—"

"I suppose that the individual who has entered there is simply a thief; I have already told you that, and I return to my first idea. Wait here while I speak to the servants. It will only take five minutes, and I will return to aid you if the knave, seeing that the alarm is given, tries to escape by that gate, which is more than probable."

"Wait a minute. You will regret having acted with so much precipitation."

"Wait for what? Till this scoundrel has pillaged the hotel?"

"I haven't told you all."

"Well, tell me all and let me go."

"You forget that I thought I recognized the man."

"True. If you had not thought you recognized him you would

not have followed him. I no longer thought of that," replied Courtenay, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, tell me who it is; you should have begun with that."

"My dear fellow, it is so extraordinary—"

"Well, I expect extraordinary revelations. Come, out with it! Who is it?"

"You will not believe me, and yet I am sure that I was not mistaken. It was Monsieur de Pontaumur."

"You are mad!"

"No, I saw him clearly. He passed quite near my cab and his figure struck me. And then, when he turned to see if any one was following him, the gaslight from the corner fell full in his face. I was so surprised to see, before Madame Brehal's hotel, poor Saulieu's adversary, that I wished to know where he was going. I scarcely foresaw the end of the adventure, and I begin to believe that I was wrong to follow him."

"The end! the end!" repeated Courtenay, angrily, "I do not understand your end. Pontaumur, admitting that it was Pontaumur, must have continued his way, and it was not he who entered this inclosure. You told me that you lost sight of him for a certain length of time."

"Yes, but he had not time to disappear. He was scarcely fifty feet ahead of me. And, besides, where could he have hidden? This boulevard is straight as the grand alley of the garden of the Tuileries, and on the other side of the fortifications there is a ditch. You don't suppose that he jumped in there."

"And this hillock near which I found you?"

"I went around it before sitting down, and I can answer for it that there was no one behind it. Besides, I observed the man while he was opening the gate, and I am certain it was the same who, a moment before, walked up the Avenue de Villiers."

"And your conclusion is?"

"That the man is not a thief. Monsieur de Pontaumur is rich, or at least is supposed to be; and even if he were not, he would not practice theft under such circumstances as these, by breaking alone, so early, into an inhabited house."

"You think then, that he is Madame Brehal's lover?" asked Courtenay, quickly.

"My dear fellow, I think nothing at all. I do not know the lady. I have never heard anything evil of her, and I am ignorant if she knows Monsieur de Pontaumur. You do know her and are much

better able to judge than I. For my part, I declare that I do not believe it possible. Are you not of my opinion?"

"I agree with you so absolutely that I am going to the hotel to give the alarm. If it is Monsieur de Pontaumur who entered, we shall see him. And I should not be sorry if it were he. It would be an excellent opportunity to treat him as he deserves."

Courtenay made a step forward, but the doctor detained him.

"Take care," he said, gently. "This man, if he is captured, will have to explain what he came there for. And who knows what he will invent to justify his conduct? He may slander Madame Brehal."

Courtenay started. He knew of what M. de Pontaumur was capable.

"And even if he should say nothing," continued the doctor, "the servants will never believe that a gentleman, dressed like he is, came to steal."

"They can believe what they like; it is none of my business, and I—"

"It seems to me that Madame Brehal will scarcely thank you for exposing her to the commentaries of her people. The more innocent she is the more she will desire to avoid scandal. And, moreover, permit me to say, that you have no right to interfere in so delicate an affair. You are no relation of hers."

"I am her friend and nothing more, but that is quite enough."

"No, it is not enough, my dear Courtenay. I am very disinterested in this matter since I have not the honor of Madame Brehal's acquaintance. I can therefore examine all sides coldly, and—"

"Oh! d—n your reasoning! A man has entered her house. I wish to know why. If this man is Monsieur de Pontaumur, there is all the more reason for clearing up the matter."

"By clearing it up, as you call it, you may do exactly what he desires. I have the worst opinion of him, and I should not be at all surprised if he sought to compromise Madame Brehal. If you do what you intend, you will aid him."

Courtenay did not answer; he felt the wisdom of these words.

"He would have his part all prepared," continued the doctor. "He would absolutely refuse to answer those who questioned him, you as well as others, and he would be delighted to be taken before the commissary of police, for the commissary, knowing who he is, would never believe him to be a malefactor. He would take him for a man of honor who sacrifices himself to save a woman's reputation. And everybody else would share the commissary's opinion."

"Very well!" cried Courtenay in a rage. "But he shall answer to me, to me!"

"A duel! That would be even worse. A duel about Madame Brehal! You can not dream of it. It would only compromise her all the more. And, besides, Pontaumur has just fought, he has killed your friend, he would almost have the right to refuse another encounter; a man does not go upon the duel ground two days in succession. Everybody would say you were wrong, and what would be much worse, Madame Brehal would never pardon you for dragging her name into a quarrel."

Courtenay trembled with anger. He was at the end of his arguments.

"If he should come out while we are here," he said between his teeth, "I think I should give myself the pleasure of choking him."

"Then we had better both go. The *rôle* of spy is a villainous one. I allowed myself to be led away by an impulse of curiosity, which I regret; I saw him enter a gate which opens into a waste place. Nothing proves that from this place he could penetrate into Madame Brehal's garden. The contrary is indeed very probable."

"So be it! But what is he doing in that deserted inclosure?"

"I don't know, and I don't wish to know. There is a mystery here, the explanation of which we shall certainly not have this evening, but which it will depend only on yourself to discover later."

"How so?"

"You go often to see Madame Brehal. Why should not you tell her quite simply what we have seen? Or, if you fear to wound her, you can always arrive at your end by circuitous means. What would prevent you, for instance, from visiting the garden and making sure that the door of communication has not been opened. Nothing would be easier, if, as you say, this door is covered with ivy branches. You can see, at a glance, if they have been broken or disturbed."

Courtenay was silent. The doctor's logic had finally converted him to wiser ideas. And yet he did not cease to regard the fence behind which Pontaumur had disappeared.

"Come," continued Coulanges, taking his arm, "be a man, old fellow. You do not doubt my discretion, I hope. All this shall remain between ourselves. But let us go, I beg. If we continue to mount guard before this fence, we shall end by laughing in one another's faces, for we shall see that we are ridiculous. Remember, besides, what we have to do to-morow at Saint-Ouen and at Paris, and do me the kindness to take me home, without more delay. I

am going to send away my cab and enter your *coupé*. I have still to tell you of what took place at Saint-Ouen after your departure."

Courtenay allowed himself to be led away, but he determined not to let the matter rest there, and while obediently accompanying the doctor, he thought:

"Either Pontaumur is the worst of villains, or Madame Brehal is a monster of hypocrisy. I must, at all costs, know the truth."

CHAPTER IV.

Dr. Coulanges had not a house of his own, like his friend Courtenay and Mme. Brehal, the fair châtelaine of the Avenue de Villiers.

He occupied, in a fine new house in the Rue de Chateaudun, a pretty apartment on the fourth floor, with a balcony, from which there was a superb view.

This doctor *in partibus* was a philosopher, and a practical philosopher, for he had arranged his life according to his tastes, and his tastes were not superior to his fortune. He liked all Parisian pleasures, and he deprived himself of nothing, that is, in moderation. He cared little for society; he made modest wagers on the races and he played only whist. His household consisted of a woman of a certain age to cook his breakfasts—he was an epicure—and a valet of fifty to open his door and do his errands. He kept no carriage, of course, nor even a park hack, although he rode quite well and was something of a connoisseur in horses. Neither did he ruin himself in objects of art, for he only appreciated bargains patiently sought for, and he did not cover with gold the pictures and old furniture he bought at the auction-rooms. He almost always obtained more than his money's worth, and he could have sold his little collection at a large profit.

Coulanges could have cut a dash, like many others, if he had wished, but he was of an opinion that fixed expenses procure only moderate pleasure, and that it was the part of wisdom to keep as much money as possible for unexpected fancies. But what he valued above all, was tranquillity of mind, and this tranquillity, which was so dear to him, had been very much disturbed of late.

Three weeks had passed since the duel, and he was beginning to take up again his epicurean habits, but he had been obliged to submit to many tribulations.

Maurice Saulieu's death had imposed upon George a mass of

duties of which the good doctor had taken his share; and to complete his annoyance, they had been obliged to appear before a magistrate. The surviving principal and the seconds of an encounter, which had had such a fatal issue, narrowly escaped being remanded for a trial. But, at last, all was ended. They had been dismissed by the magistrate, Maurice reposed in the cemetery of Montmartre, and the excitement occasioned by the tragic event had died away.

In Paris things are quickly forgotten. At the club which the actors of the drama of Gennevilliers frequented, they already scarcely spoke of the unfortunate affair which had been for a week the subject of all conversations. M. de Pontaumur did not put in an appearance at this club where he had been struck, and his supporter, M. Corleon, showed himself only at the hours when baccarat was played. So Coulanges, who liked the place well enough, could go there without being annoyed by the sight of the two men he disliked so heartily.

Courtenay, after having drawn largely on his friend's good nature, demanded nothing more of him; he must have been absorbed by his own private cares, for no one saw him any more. Coulanges had met him scarcely two or three times since the funeral of their unfortunate comrade. It must be said, however, that Coulanges did not seek him. He thought that George must be preoccupied with what had happened the evening of the duel upon the Boulevard Berthier, and he had no desire to give him fresh advice. It was enough that he had prevented him from committing a folly. His friend's affairs of the heart were not his, and he suspected that Courtenay was not indifferent to Mme. Brehal. He had not even deemed it proper to inquire about the young girl whom Saulieu was to have married. He did not know her and he did not desire to, any more than he desired to know how Saulieu had left his property. George, without entering into explanations in regard to the contents of the pocket-book, had told him that it contained no will, and he had asked nothing more.

Delivered from the cares which had worried him, the doctor might, therefore, have been as peaceably happy as ever, and yet he had not recovered that serenity of which he was so proud, that cheerfulness which was his strong point, and which Rabelais, his favorite author, calls Pantagruelism.

The doctor was tormented by a sort of remorse. He reproached himself for not having told all to the magistrate. He had spoken to no one, not even to George, of the bullet he had picked up on

the duel ground; and he knew, that if he had shown it, things might have been materially changed.

He had preserved the wretched ball and carefully locked it up in a drawer of his secretary, but this precaution was a useless one, as he abstained from undertaking, as at first had been his intention, a personal investigation into the acts of Pontaumur and his acolyte, before and after the duel. He said to himself that this discovery proved absolutely nothing, that the false bullet had not come from Maurice's pistol, since Corleon could not have introduced it there, and that, besides, he had offered to draw the weapons by lot. He said to himself that the ball had, perhaps, fallen there on another occasion, for this was probably not the first time people had fought with pistols in the redoubt of Gennevilliers. He finally argued that it was no longer the time to make use of the article, the authenticity of which would appear doubtful to everybody. This reasoning did not, however, completely satisfy his conscience, and he tried, without succeeding, to think no more of the problem which haunted him.

He had the box of pistols; he had paid for them, and he had the right to keep them. But this box recalled to him unceasingly a memory which he wished to chase away, and the idea came to him one day of returning it to the gunmaker who had sold it to him.

On this particular day he had been breakfasting with a young person who proposed to make her *début* soon upon the stage of a third-class theater, and who came to consult him when she had any trouble with her throat.

The amiable doctor's specialty was affections of the larynx, and this is a specialty which procures for a physician entrance behind the scenes of theaters, where operettas are sung, and assures him a practice among pretty women. Coulanges prescribed for them gratis and generally treated them to champagne.

Delphine Grabas, better known under the name of Mme. du Raincy, was one of his patients, and on the least excuse, she hastened to her dear Coulanges.

She was singing an air from the "Petite Mariée," accompanying herself upon the piano at the end of a salon where the doctor loved to smoke and regard his beloved bric-à-brac.

This room was a little museum, but he had left, upon a table, the offensive box of pistols, and it annoyed him to such a point that he would have willingly thrown it out of the window. He intended, however, to get rid of it by a less radical means; and while listen-

ing absently to the vocalization of his young friend, he arranged in his head his programme for the day.

There was to be a sale of pictures, which interested him, at the Hôtel Drouot. He decided that he would go there, and first stop at Galand's to ask him to take back the box of pistols at any price he wished.

Upon this wise resolution, he left Mlle. Delphine to her operetta and went to dress. He proposed to go, after the sale, to the riding school, and then to dine at the club, where he had not been for two days.

His toilet was quickly made, and he returned to the salon to dismiss his singer, who had a rehearsal at two o'clock. She had not told him so, but Coulanges knew her way of pretending that rehearsals and music lessons took up a great part of her time. He did not believe a single word of it, but it pleased him to affect to believe it, so that he should not have to devote his afternoon to her.

When he re-entered the room, she had quitted the piano and was busily engaged in examining the objects which littered the table and mantel-piece. He was accustomed to her familiar ways and he allowed them, but this time they made him angry and he knew why, for she had opened the pistol-case and was playing with one of the pistols.

"What are you doing?" he exclaimed, brusquely. "Those toys were not made for little girls." And he snatched it away from her.

"Oh! the brute!" cried Delphine. "He has hurt me! Look! you have drawn the blood," she added, showing the palm of her hand.

Coulanges was quick, but he was tender-hearted, and the sufferings of women always moved him. He placed the pistol upon the table, and, before examining the scratch, he commenced by gallantly kissing the injured hand. This had the effect of immediately calming the young lady, and she said: "I shall not die of it; but you might have been a little more gentle."

"I was wrong, my dear, and I ask your pardon. But I don't like to see you play with firearms; one never knows whether they are loaded or not. And then, how the deuce could I foresee that I was going to hurt you? Let me see this terrible wound."

"You are laughing at me, you heartless fellow."

"No, indeed! I shall not be obliged to amputate your pretty hand, but I must have hurt you very much. The skin is broken."

"Oh! of course it is. I am sure that I shall be marked for life."

"I'll be hanged if I see how the rubbing of the palm of your hand against a smooth surface could break the skin."

"In the first place, monsieur, you ought to know that my skin is very delicate. And then, you can talk as much as you please about your smooth surface, I am certain that it was a nail which scratched me."

"A nail!" repeated Coulanges. "You are dreaming, my dear. There are no nails in the butt-end of a pistol."

"A nail or a pin or whatever you like. But it was something pointed. Look and see."

The doctor took the weapon and examined it. To his great amazement, he discovered near the butt of the pistol the head of a small screw which jutted out a little from the wood.

It was certainly not the maker who had put it there, for it served absolutely no purpose except to annoy the one who should fire it. The idea came to Coulanges that Saulieu had had the disadvantage of using the weapon, but he soon reflected that Saulieu would have perceived the screw, and would not have failed to call his second's attention to the suspicious circumstance. Then he recalled suddenly that Corleon had proposed to draw the pistols by lot from under a handkerchief, and he began to understand.

"Yes," he thought, "that fine gentleman would have thrown a coin into the air, and if Pontaumur had cried tails, he would have arranged to have it fall tails; Pontaumur would have had the choice and he would have taken the good one, the one I loaded with a real ball, for he knew that this one was marked and would have recognized it by the touch. Decidedly, it is no longer possible to doubt the dishonesty of Maurice's adversary, and George's friend died assassinated."

"Well, what do you say?" asked Delphine, wiping the wound with a fine cambric handkerchief. "Will you still maintain that one can not be scratched by handling a pistol? If I were a man, and a gunmaker should sell me such a poorly made weapon, I would make him give me back my money."

Coulanges was scarcely listening. He was examining the other pistol, and found it to be intact. How could this strange disparity be the fault of the gunmaker? He thought for a moment of questioning him, but that would be a gross imprudence; the duel and its fatal *dénouement* were known to everybody; the man would not fail to wonder who had driven in this suspicious screw and he would not keep the secret. The rumor would spread that criminal trickery had been practiced by one of the seconds and public indignation

would be roused. It would be necessary to show that the box had not passed into the doctor's hands until after the duel, and, if Corleon should deny this, as he was capable of doing, it would be difficult to prove it. The investigation would probably be reopened, and, in any case, Coulanges and his friend Courtenay would be suspected. It was better to keep silent than to run such a risk, and Coulanges promptly decided to do so. As he had begun by being reticent, he could not depart from it, under penalty of being compromised, and if his conscience told him that he was wrong not to act, his temperament accommodated itself very easily to inactivity, or at least to expectation, for he still flattered himself that the truth would be discovered without his proclaiming it. He tried to persuade himself that Providence would intervene one day or another.

"To think that I loaded it, and perceived nothing," he thought, closing the box.

"What are you thinking of, you love of a doctor?" asked Delphine, laughing. "Is it my accident that makes you melancholy? I assure you that I am not in the least angry, and to show you that I forgive you, I am going to devote my day to you. We will take a drive in the Bois, dine in the Champs-Elysées, and in the evening you shall take me to an open-air concert."

"You don't rehearse to-day, then?"

"Yes, there is a rehearsal, but I shall sacrifice the dramatic art to you. I shall be fined, but I don't care; besides, you will pay the fine."

"With pleasure; but—I am engaged. I dine this evening in the city, and now I must go to the Rue Drouot to see if I can pick up a picture I want at a fair price."

"A sale! that suits me. You can give me a China vase or a Japanese idol with big enameled eyes, I adore those, or if you find that is too dear, something else, I don't care what; you owe me something for hurting me with your miserable pistol. I sha'n't be able to play a note for a week."

"I hope that you are not going to tell at the theater that you were hurt at my house," said Coulanges, who feared her chattering.

"No, not if you take me to the auction. You have no idea how it amuses me to hear the hammer. Oh! I sha'n't bother you. When I have my little present, I will take it home and leave you to bid for your picture."

"Pardon me, I—"

"Not a word more, doctor, or you will lose me for a patient. The next time my throat pains me, I shall consult another physician."

"That threat decides me," said Coulanges, gayly. "But hurry. It is past two o'clock. The sale has begun, and I do not wish the Clouet of my dreams to be knocked down without me—a jewel of a portrait, which ought to be in the Louvre, and which I shall obtain, perhaps, for fifteen louis. The collection is not well known, and the big dealers will not be there."

"I will be ready in three seconds. I can put on my gloves as we go along, not the right one, of course."

"Well, I am waiting."

Coulanges put away the box of pistols in a desk, promising himself never to touch them again, and led away his patient, who no longer complained.

In the street he hailed a cab, and five minutes afterward, he alighted with Delphine, before the door of the Hôtel des Ventes.

The girl was not acquainted with the place, and she was about to direct her footsteps toward the rooms on the ground-floor, where are sold the effects of poor people who have not paid their bills or their rent; but Coulanges assured her that she would find there only battered chairs and kitchen utensils, and not the least vestige of a Japanese idol. He had no difficulty in persuading her to follow him to the first floor where objects of art and handsome furniture were sold. He even obtained her permission to find out about the Clouet, and the man in charge having assured him that the picture would not be put up until four o'clock, he led her into the neighboring room where the auctioneer was already crying his wares.

There were pyramids of arm-chairs, cascades of silk curtains, and quantities of old oak sideboards, and ebony desks. At the back were ranged different kinds of china vases, more or less authentic.

The doctor saw at a glance that there was piled up here material from different sources, and that connoisseurs would not find the least bargain; but Delphine could very well find what she sought, and he amused himself with praising the merits of two imitation Chinese vases, which probably could be purchased at a modest price.

"Pooh!" ejaculated his companion; "I don't absolutely desire pottery. A pretty little rosewood chiffonier would suit me, or an inlaid table. There is room in my salon, too much room, alas! and if you are kind, you will let me choose. Oh! I will be discreet; I won't let you spend too much money, but you can at least spare me three-quarters of an hour of your time."

This prospect did not rejoice Coulanges, but he yielded with the best grace possible. He even procured a chair for Delphine, and stood behind her to aid her with his experience.

The sale did not progress very rapidly. The people present were mostly idlers, and there was no opulent amateur collector in the crowd which pressed about the auctioneer and examined the different objects.

But as Coulanges glanced over the motley crowd, he perceived, close to the auctioneer, M. Corleon.

There was nothing very surprising in this; M. Corleon had the right to come, like any one else, to the Hôtel des Ventes; but the doctor, who entered the place every day or two, had never seen him there before; and, since the duel, he had not met him anywhere.

When he perceived the disagreeable face of this shady personage, he had almost the same sensation one experiences at treading on a reptile, and he wondered why Corleon was there.

It was probably not to purchase furniture, for he had been established in Paris for some time, nor was it to purchase objects of art, for the sale had absolutely nothing artistic about it.

Coulanges, after a moment's reflection, thought that, after all, he might very well have come simply to kill time, and to amuse himself with the bustle and movement of the sale.

It was a common diversion enough, and there are people who pass their days at the Hôtel Drouot, and never purchase anything; only, it is rare that these people take their position in the place reserved for serious buyers, who are known, at least by sight, to the auctioneers. This was what M. Corleon had done.

The sale proceeded, and everything went at ridiculously low prices. It seemed as if the second-hand dealers were leagued together to share, at small expense, the spoils offered to their rapacity. No one bid against them, for fear of paying tribute to the monopolizing band, which does not willingly allow any outsider to cut the grass from under its feet.

It must be said, however, that nothing had been offered but old-fashioned clocks, faded curtains and horse-hair chairs. There was nothing interesting in the spectacle, and M. Corleon seemed to take no pleasure in it, for he kept his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

The doctor, also, did not find it exciting, for he leaned over to whisper in Delphine's ear:

"This is no fun, and as I see nothing which you would like, I advise you to go. We can come again some other time."

"No, no," she replied, quickly. "I am here, and here I remain. Everything is selling for nothing. It is a superb opportunity; and I have discovered a little piece of furniture which I should say, from here, would suit me perfectly."

"Where is it?"

"Over there, near the big mirror."

Coulanges perceived the object indicated, and an odd-looking thing it was. From a distance, it was almost impossible to guess its use; it was a massive table, with carved feet, and surmounted by a veritable edifice of ebony with drawers above and shelves below.

It might serve to keep a woman's work in, or for a collection of medals or books.

Delphine must have had execrable taste to select this affair, but the doctor took care not to disgust her with it, for fear that she should take a fancy to something dearer.

He had even the cowardice to whisper to her:

"It is very original, indeed. I have never seen anything like it, and you can boast of possessing something unique. We must find out when this ebony curiosity will be put up for sale."

"Go and ask the auctioneer to put it up at once."

Coulanges, who was longing to finish the matter, was easily persuaded to use his influence. He had often done so, and he was known in the rooms as an amateur.

Habitués are granted privileges, and he knew it well. But, as he was about to step forward, he saw M. Corleon lean over and speak to the auctioneer, pointing to some object in the room.

"Well," he thought, "I begin to believe that he has come to buy. I would like to know what."

He had not long to wait. The auctioneer raised his head, and said gravely to one of his men:

"Place upon the table that ebony chiffonier; yes, that one before the mirror. Be quick!"

"It seems that it is a chiffonier," muttered the doctor. "D—d if I should have guessed it. Has Monsieur de Pontaumur's friend an idea of purchasing that thing? That would be droll."

The men slowly lifted the chiffonier, and planted it upon the long table, half a dozen feet from Delphine, who turned to say to Coulanges:

"It is just what I want. But you must bid. I don't dare to. You know how timid I am."

"No; I had never observed it," laughed the doctor. "But, since you wish it, I will take charge of buying it. You understand, your choice is made, and you will not regret your Japanese idol?"

"Not at all. Go ahead; so much the worse for you, if it costs you a thousand francs."

Coulanges smiled. He expected to discharge his obligation with fifty.

"Gentlemen," commenced the auctioneer, who was a natural wit, "here, at last, is an object of art, a veritable object of art; a secretary with drawers and compartments, pure style of the Empire, the whole in massive ebony, and in very good condition."

"Ha! it is a secretary now," chuckled one of the dealers.

"Let us see, gentlemen, how much for this object of art? An old piece of furniture, in as good a condition as if it were new. It is worth five hundred francs, if it is worth a sou."

This statement provoked a burst of laughter.

"Come, gentlemen, come. Four hundred francs? Three hundred francs? Some one said two hundred, I think."

No one had breathed a word.

"A bid, gentlemen!" continued the auctioneer. "Madame wishes to see the interior? There!" he added, pulling open the drawers.

It was Delphine who had requested this, in spite of the timidity of which she boasted. She half rose to examine it, and was pleased with her inspection, doubtless, for she nodded her head in token of approbation.

"You still wish it?" asked Coulanges.

"Of course I do. I am sure I shall discover secret compartments and it will amuse me to seek for them; and when I have found them I shall keep my love-letters there, not yours, monster! You have never written me anything but prescriptions."

"Twenty-five francs," said one of the bystanders, hesitatingly.

"Twenty-five francs!" exclaimed the auctioneer. "That is absurd, gentlemen. Twenty-five francs would not represent the value of the ebony employed in manufacturing this masterpiece."

And as no one spoke:

"Will you notice, gentlemen, that the feet of the table are very curious? They are evidently not of the same date as the rest of the piece, but they were turned by a very skillful workman, or rather by an artist. Observe the delicacy of the lines; I even perceive incrustations of ivory."

"Five sous more for the ivory," called out an old woman.

Coulanges saw that the feet must indeed have been added recently. They were quite new and differently ornamented from the rest of the table, but they added nothing to the value of the object.

"Well," whispered Delphine. "Speak!"

"Let me alone, you don't understand anything about it," re-

sponded the doctor, who piqued himself on knowing how and when to bid.

"Thirty francs, gentlemen, is no price," cried the auctioneer. "See how it is carved."

"Thirty-five," said the first bidder.

"Gentlemen, we are wasting our time, and the sale is a heavy one. One decent bid and I knock it down. Does no one answer? Then forty francs, by me. It shall not be said that a charming piece of furniture, in the pure style of the First Empire, which belonged to the first consul perhaps, was sold by me for thirty-five francs."

"Fifty francs," uttered a voice which Coulanges recognized as that of M. Corleon.

"Ah! Ah!" thought the doctor. "It appears that it is really that ridiculous thing he wants. This is odd. This man does nothing without a motive; he must therefore have a reason for bidding; what is it? I can not guess. But we shall see if he really wishes to acquire a piece of furniture which I would not take as a gift."

"Sixty," said Coulanges, raising his voice, so as to be heard throughout the whole room.

"It was time," whispered Delphine. "I was beginning to wonder if you were dumb."

M. Corleon, to make his bid, had left the group gathered together at the corner of the desk, but when the doctor spoke, he immediately stepped back.

"He hadn't noticed me," thought the doctor, "and he has now recognized me. He is probably going to withdraw. I don't see him any more. Ah! he is talking to the old fellow who has his back turned. But, I am not mistaken, that old fellow is Pere Salomon. Good! I have it! Corleon has given him a commission to bid for him. He imagines probably that I have not seen him, and he does not wish me to know that he is bidding for the chiffonier. Why this mystery? Well, I won't let him have it anyhow."

"Seventy francs," said Pere Salomon, who was an old Jew, a frequenter of the Hotel des Ventes, very much appreciated by timid amateurs, who are afraid to bid themselves. He had the reputation of being very skillful in his way and he made a good deal of money, which did not prevent him from going about dressed like a beggar. He wore a long greasy coat and had an unkempt beard, as long as that of the Wandering Jew.

"One hundred francs," said the doctor, who knew that a brisk rise in the price was almost equivalent to a defiance.

"We shall see now what he means," he thought.

"A hundred and twenty," mumbled Salomon.

"Oh!" thought Coulanges. "This is becoming serious."

The dealers were laughing in their sleeves. They had divined that two outsiders were going to dispute, at big prices, for the possession of an antiquity for which the boldest of them would not have given three louis.

The auctioneer, astonished enough at his success and scenting a struggle, had risen from his seat to urge on the competitors with voice and gesture.

"Where are we, gentlemen?" he asked. "Some one said a hundred and twenty francs, I think, but we shall not rest there."

"Fifty," cried Coulanges.

"One hundred and fifty," repeated the auctioneer, regarding Pere Salomon out of the corner of his eye.

The old Hebrew made a sign.

"One hundred and seventy-five! Two hundred, by the gentleman opposite. Nothing more, I am going to knock it down, gentlemen."

Here the hammer was raised, the famous hammer which plays so great a part at the end of hotly contested sales. In the beginning, it rests upon the auctioneer's table, a sword in its sheath. But when the proper moment comes, it is changed into a sword of Damocles, which the auctioneer holds suspended above the heads of the contestants.

In the art of managing it lies the superiority of masters of their craft. There is a threatening movement which makes the big bids flow as the water once flowed from the rock struck by Moses, and a skillfully calculated suspension which draws out the bank-notes from the pocket as surely as an hydraulic machine.

The auctioneer on duty to-day was one of the best of his trade, and he knew his business thoroughly. Coulanges was a favorite of his, and, if he had consulted his feelings, he would have struck the final blow at the bid of two hundred francs. But his love for his profession carried him away and he thought he ought to prolong the business. He raised his hammer, he lowered it to within three inches of the table, then he raised it again and made it describe capricious circles. He had the appearance of a leader of an orchestra conducting with his bâton a band of musicians.

Salomon timidly raised the bid twenty-five francs, and at this moment, Coulanges, who had good eyes, saw that M. Corleon, who was behind the Jew, pulled him by his coat to give him the signal to bid.

The doctor was determined and did not hesitate to raise the sum

to the respectable amount of three hundred francs. This was very dear for a chiffonier, although it was of ebony, and Delphine, who was a good girl, said to him:

"Don't go too far. I do not wish to ruin you. And then, if you intend to pay a large price, you know, I—I would prefer a ring or a bracelet."

"They are fools," said the woman who had bid twenty-five francs at the beginning. "The thing is worth one hundred francs, not a sou more."

Salomon showed evident signs of uneasiness. He ran his fingers nervously through his beard. He had evidently promised M. Corleon to obtain the chiffonier for a dozen louis, to which was to be added one for his commission.

"It is your turn," cried the auctioneer. And at a wink from the Jew: "Three hundred and twenty-five francs."

"Four hundred," cried Coulanges, in a rage.

This time it was a regular declaration of war. It was as much as to say: Go as high as you please, I shall not yield.

Salomon understood it so, and, not daring to trust to the repeated twitches of his coat, he turned around to consult the capitalist he represented.

He chose his time badly.

The auctioneer, who was not sorry to be agreeable to M. Coulanges, continued in a lower tone:

"Gentlemen, no one seems to wish to bid more. I warn you that I am about to knock it down."

At the same time the hammer gently approached the desk.

"We are at four hundred, for the third and last time, four hundred. It is four hundred?"

"Four hundred."

"Going, going—"

Salomon turned around, and sure now of being approved, he pronounced two words which were to be followed by a third. He meant to say four hundred and fifty, but the sound of the hammer cut short his bid.

Undesirous of awaiting the pleasure of a gentleman he did not know, the auctioneer said in a voice to which there was no appeal:

"Gone!"

The Jew opened his mouth to protest, but the auctioneer launched a severe look at him, imposing silence.

"To whom? To you, monsieur?"

Coulanges, thus appealed to, shook his head, and commenced to

write with a pencil upon a leaf torn out of his note-book the name and address of Mme. du Raincy.

"It is all right," said the auctioneer to his clerk. "They will send the name up. Gentlemen, we will now sell a very beautiful mahogany bedstead."

The bedstead did not interest the doctor, and Delphine, who could not restrain her delight, had risen.

"How kind you are!" she said, leaning upon Coulanges' arm. "It was dear all the same, but it has *chic*. Lucie of the Bouffes has a chiffonier which isn't a patch upon mine. They will send it to my house to-morrow, I suppose?"

"This evening, if you wish. And yet—it is not very heavy—I advise you to have it taken at once by a messenger," said Coulanges, who was observing M. Corleon's movements out of the corner of his eye.

He had a discomfited air, but he did not appear to be about to quit the place.

"That is a good idea, but the money to pay for it? I have only ten francs with me."

The doctor handed her a bill of five hundred francs.

"You can keep what remains," he said. "Only do me the kindness to settle the bill yourself, and return and tell me if any one speaks to you. I will wait in the corridor."

"Whatever you wish," cried Delphine. "You are an angel."

"And if, by chance, any one should offer to purchase your bargain at a bigger price, promise me not to accept."

"There is no danger. The first present you ever made me! Never in the world! Even if that old Mordecai should offer me a hundred louis."

Coulanges conducted Delphine to the door, and while waiting for her, he walked up and down the corridor.

"I have made a fool of myself," he thought. "Courtenay would have laughed, if he had seen me, and yet, I thought, in bidding for that chiffonier, to circumvent Corleon. I do not know why I imagine that in that ugly thing will be found something relative to poor Saulieu's assassination, for he was assassinated, surely; the discovery of the screw in the pistol has removed my last doubts. Something? But what? I confess I have no idea. I shall go to see Delphine to-morrow, and I will demolish, if necessary, the table and the stand above it, to see what there is inside, provided she does not let it go. But no, she would not dare to sell the first present I have given her."

While he was thinking thus, they were selling the pictures in the front room and the sound of the bids reached his ears.

"I am afraid that they will sell my Clouet," he growled. "Delphine will never finish; I have a great mind to go in and hurry her up. No, I should find myself face to face with Corleon, and he has already seen too much of me. If he speaks to Delphine, I shall know it, and it will be a proof that he has strong reasons for wanting that chiffonier; but what they are I can not guess, unless he has really taken a fancy to an antiquity which I would throw out of the windows, if it were brought to my house."

At this moment, Delphine appeared, preceding a porter who bore upon his back the triumphant chiffonier. She was evidently delighted with her acquisition, for her eyes sparkled and her face beamed with joy.

"Well?" asked Coulanges.

"My dear doctor, everybody has complimented me."

"Upon what? Your figure? Your teeth? That does not astonish me."

"No, no, upon my purchase. The auctioneer told me that it was worth twice what I paid for it."

"The auctioneer was laughing at you."

"Not at all! The old bearded Jew offered me fifty francs more than it cost, but I sent him to the right-about."

"Did no one else speak to you?"

"Yes, a very nice gentleman whom I had not noticed before."

"Ah! and what did he say to you."

"That I was charming."

"Is that all?"

"But that is quite enough. Do you imagine he asked me for my address? Other people treat me with respect. It is only you who do not."

"No, because I adore you," said the doctor, gallantly. "And now, if you will take my advice, my dear Delphine, you will go home with that precious object which Pere Salomon disputed with you, and, if you want to please me, you will not touch it till I have examined it."

"Do you think that there is a treasure hidden in it? That would be luck!"

"No, but it needs cleaning. I know how it should be done and will tell you. I shall come and see you to-morrow."

"Not at my rehearsal hour, because my art, you know, is sacred."

"I shall come before or after. And, meanwhile, if I were in

your place, I should take a carriage and have the chiffonier put on the box."

"You are right. And then, that gentleman could not follow me. I don't care to make new acquaintances. Till to-morrow, then. Do you know, my hand does not hurt me at all now; you have cured me, doctor, with a bill of five hundred francs. Those little bits of paper are a sovereign remedy for scratches."

Coulanges did not care to prolong this colloquy in the corridor. He said good-bye to Delphine, who departed, pushing the messenger before her, and he returned to give a glance at the sale.

There was no longer any disputing over the objects offered; as fast as they were put up, they were knocked down to the first or second bidder.

The doctor had the satisfaction of seeing that M. Corleon was still there, and that he had no appearance of wishing to depart; he was talking in a low tone to Pere Salomon.

"I was certainly mistaken," thought Coulanges. "He came to buy something else than the ebony chiffonier, and my imaginings had not common sense. They cost me twenty-five louis, though. At last, I am rid of Delphine, who would not have left me all day, and I can dispose of my time as I wish. Just now, I will go to see where the collection is of M. Van K., a distinguished amateur of Rotterdam, as the advertisements have it. With the exception of my Clouet, this good M. Van K. of Rotterdam, possessed only daubs."

With this conclusion, the doctor hurried to the next room, and he had the misfortune to meet, as he entered, an amateur whom he knew and who carried the Clouet under his arm. It was necessary to give it up; the acquirer was not one of those who traffic, and he appeared too enchanted with the bargain he had made for Coulanges to dare to propose to him to yield it up.

"Bah!" he thought, by way of consolation, "my vist to the Hôtel Drouot has already cost me five hundred francs. That is quite enough for to-day. I will go and have a look at the riding-school. In this pleasant weather, all Paris should be there."

And without further deliberation, he desended the grand staircase, not without turning more than once, for he could not get M. Corleon out of his head, although he had made up his mind to think no more of him, and he was wondering still, if M. de Pontaumur's second would not follow Delphine and the ebony chiffonier; but he did not perceive him, and he decided to enter his cab, which he had left at the door.

When he arrived at the Palais de l'Industrie, he saw that, indeed, all Paris, all Paris of the races and first nights at the theaters, was there to-day, to buy or to look on, for the riding school has become a fashionable spectacle.

All the usual types were there. The old gentleman, who is still a superb rider, in spite of his seventy years, magnificent on horseback and always applauded by the ladies in the galleries, whom he still ogles and will ogle as long as he lives. The bourgeois officer as recognizable as if he were in uniform. The old general who finds that in his time horses cost much less and were worth much more. The provincial sportsman who comes there to attend to his little business, and who asks advice of no one, because he knows better than anybody else. The connoisseur who gives gratuitous counsel to people whom he does not know. The broker who curries favor with everybody, and who procures dogs and coachmen as well as horses and carriages. The journalist who takes notes. The gentleman who is never seen except on foot and who wishes to pass for a great lover of horse-flesh, although he never buys anything.

Coulanges knew them all and they no longer amused him. He had come to see pretty faces and elegant toilets, and he was not disappointed.

The galleries were filled with women of the world, and even of the great world, those who love horses because they have always had them.

The women of a lower grade in society, those whose husbands had recently become wealthy, were out in full force also, but they preferred to walk about on the arms of their friends, consulting them as to the purchase of an equipage promised by their husbands.

And the yellow-haired damsels were not lacking either, especially in the arena. These latter paid particular attention to the carriages. They entered those to be sold, under pretext of trying the springs, and they sometimes found a gentleman to purchase for them the victoria of their choice.

Coulanges was not this gentleman. He had expended enough for Delphine, and he had no desire to recommence. Some of his patients tried to stop him, but he extricated himself, and continued imperturbably to approach nearer the galleries.

Half way across the arena, as he turned aside to avoid a group of gentlemen who were discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the French method of breaking horses, he almost ran into George Courtenay, who was coming in the opposite direction.

"By Jove! this is a fortunate meeting!" cried the doctor, taking his friend's arm. "Where have been, old man? I never see you. I was beginning to wonder if you were angry with me."

"Angry with you?" said George. "Why should I be angry with you?"

"You will laugh at me, but I imagined that, after that foolish adventure in the Boulevard Berthier, you had not pardoned me for mixing myself up in what did not concern me."

"You are entirely mistaken. I no longer think of that, and the proof of it is, that Monsieur de Pontaumur is here, and I have just returned the bow with which he favored me."

"What! did he dare to bow to you?" exclaimed Coulanges.

"Certainly," replied Courtenay. "One ought to salute one's adversaries when you have saluted them on the duel-ground. And I should have made a mistake not to have returned his bow, for I have no personal grievances against Monsieur de Pontaumur. It is disagreeable for me to meet him since he has killed poor Saulieu, but I can not forbid him to enter the riding school."

"You spoke very differently the evening of that unfortunate duel, and I am pleased to hear that you have come to a more just appreciation of things. It is evident that if one never forgot anything, life would become impossible. Paris is full of people whom I detest, and whom I elbow without feeling the need of flying at their throats."

"Is that an allusion to something I said once?"

"No, certainly not; for I had forgotten all about it."

"My dear Coulanges, the evening when we watched together for a man who had entered an inclosure belonging to Madame Brehal, I was not cool, and I really believe if Monsieur de Pontaumur had reappeared, admitting it was Monsieur de Pontaumur—"

"Which was not proven," interrupted the doctor.

"If he had reappeared," continued Courtenay, "I would willingly have strangled him; but I have reflected much since that evening, and I am of opinion now that you were right. A gentleman does not play the spy, and I am very much obliged to you for having recalled to me that I had no right to watch over Madame Brehal's conduct."

"Let us speak no more of that, but tell me how you are getting on with the settlement of poor Saulieu's affairs. He left you the task, if I am not mistaken, of being his executor."

"No, very fortunately. He asked me, before he died, to take the pocket-book which he carried—but you know about that."

"Yes; the one perforated by Monsieur de Pontaumur's bullet, and which contained a woman's picture."

"Well, I found with that picture only unimportant papers. There was indeed a note which spoke of a will, but no will."

"The will must have been deposited with his notary."

"I thought so, but the notary has never received it. I should have sought elsewhere, but Maurice's heirs arrived in Paris, three provincial cousins, whom Maurice never saw and whom he thought little about; but they nevertheless were his legal heirs. They had learned through the papers of the death of their relative, and they did not trouble themselves to see me. They asked the proper authorities for the right to remove the seals from Maurice's property, and obtained it. I was told of what was taking place, and I went to Saulieu's apartment. I found there these gentlemen, who seemed quite at home, and who did not receive me very politely. '

"By Jove! That was too much! What! you, his intimate friend!"

"It was so, my dear fellow. These provincials are avaricious and ill-mannered. If you could have seen the suspicious looks they cast at me! They imagined, I believe, that I had in my pocket a will which bequeathed to me the fortune of their relative."

"Saulieu would have done well to have disinherited them."

"If he had done so to my advantage, I should have refused the legacy, but I think, with you, that he should have disposed of his property, instead of letting it go to such people."

"But I am convinced that he did dispose of it."

"It is possible; but this is no longer my business. I gave it all up, after almost throwing Saulieu's pocket-book at his cousins. I kept only a letter, which was addressed to me, and which told me nothing."

"And the portrait? You will find that I am very curious."

"I have the portrait," responded Courtenay, in a tone which cut short the doctor's questions. "Let us talk of something else, will you?"

"I ask nothing better," said Coulanges, who did not judge the moment opportune to speak of his adventure at the Hôtel Drouot.

He thought of it, however, in connection with the story of the lost will. But the simplest common sense told him that M. Corleon had no interest in recovering it, for Maurice Saulieu had certainly not chosen one of his enemies for his heir.

"I have come here to buy a saddle-horse," said Courtenay, "and I have not seen a single one I like. I have a great mind to go to the club, where I have not set foot for a long time, and dine there."

"I am your man, my dear Courtenay," replied the doctor; "and delighted to see you return to your old habits. I have missed you, I assure you, for I pass most of my time at the club, and when you are not there, I am not very much amused. But dinner is at seven o'clock, and we have a long time yet. I confess I would like to walk about a little before the galleries and see the pretty faces."

"My poor Coulanges, you will always be the same. The women will ruin you. I predict it."

"Pooh! I have never been in love in my life, and I never shall be. I hope as much for you."

"You say that as if you thought I were."

"You know very well that I never occupy myself with my friends' affairs, and, moreover, if you were—" The doctor paused and said, lowering his voice: "Here is a lady coming toward us; no, toward you, for I don't know her. She is no longer young, but her figure is good still."

George perceived the person spoken of by Coulanges, and made a movement to avoid her.

"Too late, my friend," whispered the doctor. "She sees that you have perceived her, and, unless you wish to be rude—"

It was indeed too late to draw back. Courtenay made a gesture of impatience, but he made no further effort to hide himself, although he disliked Mme. Fresnay, especially since the duel. This aunt of Mlle. Mezenc's might have been forty-five, and must have been very beautiful; but she had too vivid a remembrance of this latter fact, and her *embonpoint*, which approached the majestic, made ridiculous the vaporous airs she assumed. She advanced, flanked by two very young men, who might have been taken for her pages, and who were exceedingly attentive. And in order that nothing should be lacking to this disagreeable encounter, George noticed that her flaring costume made a sensation.

"You also have abandoned me, my dear monsieur," she said, in a lackadaisical manner. "I expected to receive a call from you also, after that unfortunate event."

George bowed without replying. It required an effort for him not to be insolent to this silly woman, who spoke of society duties in connection with Maurice's death.

"I say you, also," continued the lady, "for my niece has judged it proper to desert my house. You knew nothing of it, I suppose? Well, I will tell you that Marianne is an ingrate. I took so much pains to find her a husband, and it is not my fault if she has lost him."

"Are you quite sure of that, madame?" interrupted George, thoroughly exasperated.

"I do not understand, dear monsieur," said Mme. Fresnay, impudently. "But I want to tell you that Mademoiselle Mezenc is now tied to the apron-strings of Madame Brehal. She is decorating the summer salon in that lady's hotel; she is there permanently, and Madame Brehal has undertaken to marry her, I understand. It is what I expected of her, and I renounce her. Good-day, monsieur. If you meet her, tell her, I pray, that I am not angry with her."

Mme. Fresnay departed, flirting her fan, and followed by her two cavaliers who had lost nothing of this discourse.

George was pale with anger, and the doctor did not exactly know what to think.

"What was the matter with her?" he murmured, "and what was her reason for accosting you to complain of her niece, who was to have married our friend?"

"Suppose I should tell you that it was this woman who was the cause of Maurice's death!"

"What do you say?"

"No, nothing, I prefer to be silent. But let us go. I am stifling"

"The devil! I do not wish to cause you suffering. Let us go then, by all means, but let me first just give a glance at the galleries which seem to me to be full of lovely women."

"Be quick with your glance, then," returned Courtenay, following Coulanges with regret.

"A parterre of flowers," murmured the enthusiastic doctor. "Is it the effect of spring? I find them all charming, and how exquisitely they are dressed. And to think that among all those great ladies I don't know one; that is what comes from being too lazy to go into society. My dear fellow! will you look at those two lovely creatures? Sisters, perhaps. No, one is dark and pale, the other rosy and blonde. By Jove! if I had to choose between them, I should be embarrassed."

Courtenay looked up absently, but his face changed as he recognized Mlle. Mezenc and Mme. Brehal.

"Good gracious!" cried Coulanges. "They are bowing to you. Look! the blonde is motioning to you. Come, my dear fellow, you shall introduce me."

This time too, but for different reasons, Courtenay would willingly have avoided the honor done him. He obeyed the signal, however, and joined Mme. Brehal, saluting her as ceremoniously as possi-

ble. His coldness failed in its effect though, for she laughed heartily, and said to him:

"What have I done to you, my dear George? I have not seen you for three weeks; I have the happiness to encounter you, and you bow to me as if you were saluting the Queen of England. Mademoiselle Mezenc will think we have quarreled. No more of your ceremony, if you please. Or, if you stand upon form, present to me monsieur, who is your intimate friend, I know."

George with a bad enough grace presented Coulanges.

"Very well," continued Mme. Brehal deliberately. "Now know that if to-morrow, at noon precisely, you do not come to breakfast with me with Doctor Coulanges, who will pardon the unceremonious invitation, I will never see you again in my life; yes, you understand, to breakfast, not to dinner. You know I do nothing like other women, and then I have my reasons. I wish to show you my domains which you are not acquainted with, my fields—there are fields—my kiosks, and what is worth a thousand times more, the paintings which Mademoiselle Marianne Mezenc is executing. She has promised me to be there, and you can not refuse. I have spoken; and upon this, gentlemen, I pray Heaven to keep you in its holy guard," concluded the chatelaine of the Avenue de Villiers, dismissing them with a royal gesture.

CHAPTER V.

THE club, where took place the scene of violence, for which Maurice Saulieu paid with his life in the redoubt of Gennevilliers, did not pretend to rival the great clubs. But neither did it resemble those where you enter almost as into a café and which are managed by a steward, who after all is only a *croupier*. It was of the middle class of clubs and governed by a board of directors, who did not admit every one. Many perfectly irreproachable men, who do not dare to have their names presented at the Jockey or the Union for fear of receiving an undeserved blackball, attach themselves to less aristocratic and less exclusive associations, where it is still very honorable to be admitted, although less difficult.

This club, called familiarly the Moucherons, was certainly one of the most animated, lively, and agreeable of its class. Young men were in the majority, but there was not lacking a sprinkling of those of maturer age to give it weight. Rather heavy play was indulged in there as everywhere; but disagreeable occurrences were rare, that

is to say, when any one was discovered cheating, or when names were posted on the bulletin-board because the losses had not been paid within twenty-four hours.

The members naturally formed two classes: the day habitués, who came to read the newspapers, and those who arrived at the time of the closing of the theaters, when good bourgeois go to bed. Toward midnight, the night-owls assembled about the fire-place in the large red parlor, which then became a center of information, for each one brought the news of the evening and the latest scandals.

Before dinner, the whist-players did not tolerate loud conversation there, and the talkers took refuge in the billiard-room where chattering disturbed no one.

This was what George Courtenay and the doctor did when they arrived there from the riding-school. Although a discussion had been commenced as they left the Palais de l'Industrie, they had not yet come to an agreement. Mme. Brehal had dismissed them without waiting for an answer, and George wished to refuse her invitation while it was the doctor's desire to accept it. Each backed up his opinion with excellent reasons, and neither would yield.

In the billiard-room two players of almost equal skill were engaged in a match-game of thirty points, and there were numerous betters on each side. But the room was spacious and, to be somewhat isolated, the two friends took up their position quite at the end of the leather-covered settees on which were seated the spectators of the match.

"My dear Coulanges," said George, "I know Madame Brehal, and I am sure that she was jesting. A widow does not give breakfasts to bachelors."

"Pardon me, my dear Courtenay," responded Coulanges, "but you have often told me that Madame Brehal did nothing like other people."

"It was precisely for that reason that she thought of playing a joke upon us, something like an April-fool trick."

"I could understand her doing such a thing to you, who have known her for a long time, although these pleasantries are not in vogue among women of the world, but to me, whom she saw for the first time! I will never believe it."

"You are free to try the adventure. I shall not put my foot inside of her hotel."

"And do you think that I could go without you? What sort of an appearance should I make with a young widow and a young girl, neither of whom I know at all?"

"You can make love to both of them," replied George, brusquely.

"I should take care not to make myself so ridiculous. I possess no attractions for Madame Brehal, unless as a physician, and I should have scruples about paying foolish compliments to a young girl who still weeps the death of her *fiancé*."

"How do you know she weeps for him? Did you notice that her eyes were red?"

"No, indeed! Her eyes are superb, regular black diamonds. But she is sad, she must be."

"It appears not. She is seen at the riding-school three weeks after the duel in which Maurice was killed."

"My dear fellow, it is not proven that people in mourning ought not to go to the riding-school," said the doctor, smiling, "and then you forget what Madame Fresnay, her aunt, told you. Mademoiselle Mezenc paints every day at Madame Brehal's house, and it was quite natural that she should accompany her protectress. By the way, I am astonished that Saulieu did not think of her before he fought. He was rich enough to leave her a legacy."

"There are many things which astonish me," murmured Courtenay.

"That young girl is charming," continued the doctor, warmly. "If I had not made a vow to remain a bachelor for the rest of my days, I should really think of trying my luck there; later of course, when she is consoled. But let us go back to the original question. Are you entirely determined not to go to Madame Brehal's?"

"Absolutely."

"Take care. I shall begin to believe that you are angry with her since our nocturnal adventure in the Boulevard Berthier."

"Believe what you like."

"Oh, before we met her, I told you I never meddled in what did not concern me. And yet, I may acknowledge that I should have liked to breakfast to-morrow with that charming widow, not only for the pleasure of seeing her, but to visit her grounds."

"Do you think that the table will be spread in the garden?"

"No, not precisely. But you did not hear, apparently, that she promised to show us her fields, that was the word she used."

"She spoke of kiosks."

"Well, a kiosk in the midst of a field, perhaps in that very inclosure. I should be curious to see that."

"Not I," said Courtenay dryly.

The conversation ceased. Coulanges feared to wound his friend by saying too much, and yet he did not abandon his idea, for he was

tenacious; but a doubtful shot had been made, and the noise of the discussion which followed prevented any further talk.

"I tell you, my ball touched the red," cried one of the players, a frequenter of the Bourse who made year in and year out thirty thousand francs by playing billiards at the club.

"No one saw it," responded his opponent, a young man recently arrived from the provinces to spend his patrimony in Paris. "I appeal to the captain."

"Humph!" murmured the doctor. "Morgan is here. I didn't see him."

M. de Pontaumur's second emerged from one of the groups. The captain had seen twenty years of service and many campaigns, and he did not bear too good a character. He had bet on the young provincial, and he did not hesitate to declare that the ball had missed. He even added that a man had no right, in a game like this, to nurse three balls in a corner of the table. His opinion was the general one and the tumult was appeased. But the appearance of Morgan, the friend of Maurice's murderer, had not improved Courtenay's temper.

"Tell me," said the doctor. "Madame Brehal has chambermaids, has she not?"

"Still Madame Brehal!" exclaimed George. "And what does it matter to you if she has?"

"Why, if one of them was young and pretty—"

"They are all so. Well?"

"Then one of them probably has a lover."

"What are you driving at?"

"Nothing would prevent one of Madame Brehal's maids making an appointment in the fields which belong to her mistress, and I, for one, would like—"

"Upon my word you never give in. If you want to go there to morrow go without me."

"You know very well that that is impossible. At least," sighed Coulanges, "I hope you will invent some polite excuse to explain our absence."

"I shall invent nothing at all, for I shall not write to Madame Brehal."

"But that will be an outrageous rudeness."

"I do not see it. I am bound to reply to a letter, but when I am asked, personally, and no trouble is taken to wait for my answer, I have a right to take no notice of the invitation. You can write if you like. I most certainly shall not."

Upon this decision, which seemed without appeal, Courtenay rose and moved toward a little parlor next the billiard-room. The vicinity of Captain Morgan was disagreeable to him, and he wished to smoke his cigar in a place where he could no longer see his unpleasant face.

Coulanges followed him, not considering himself beaten yet.

They found there two members of the club who were talking in an embrasure of the window and who did not stop when they saw the two friends establish themselves on a sofa quite near them. Courtenay and Coulanges knew that one of them was a painter and the other an architect, and they were not surprised to hear them speaking of art matters.

"My picture is accepted," said the painter, "and I am going to give myself a vacation of two months. After the opening of the salon I am going to join some friends at Barbison. Will you come with me?"

"I wish I could," responded the architect, "but I have not finished my work in the Avenue de Villiers, at Madame Brehal's, a millionaire widow, and a beautiful woman to boot."

"I have seen her," said the painter. "She was pointed out to me, last Tuesday, in a box at the Français, and she is beautiful. A face like Fragonard used to paint, and as no one paints nowadays. If she should want her portrait painted at a good price remember your friend. And what are you building for this Dubarry of the Avenue de Villiers? I thought that she owned a house and lived in it."

"So she does," responded the architect; "it is just at the corner of the avenue and the Boulevard Berthier, which runs along by the fortifications."

"That is a little far, but when one owns horses and carriages, one can put up with the inconveniences of living two or three miles from the opera She is rich, eh?"

"Very rich, and not mean in business, which, for a woman born and married in the circle of finance, is very rare. The accounts of the builder are settled without the least difficulty; I even think she finds them not large enough."

"Introduce me."

"And with all that, she is not bourgeoise at all. She has taste and a highly developed artistic sentiment. I have only to execute her ideas, and she has three or four a day."

"Why, this lady is a phenomenon! I have never met such an

one. She must be unique of her kind. But what work has she confided to you?"

"One of not great importance, but it amuses me infinitely; it is the most original thing imaginable. Fancy, my dear fellow, that this intelligent Madame Brehal has had the idea of utilizing a large piece of ground which she owns and which touches the garden of her hotel."

Courtenay was about to rise, to escape a conversation which troubled him, because it had for its object a person whom he sought to forget, but Coulanges, divining his intention, nudged him and whispered: "Wait! This is becoming very interesting."

And Courtenay assented, biting a cigar which he had allowed to go out.

"It is praiseworthy," continued the architect, "for she might have sold this ground for a large price. But Madame Brehal loves to make plans, and she dreams of arranging a residence for herself like no other in Paris. So she has commenced by transforming the land in question into a park, a park of the nature of the Little Trianon."

"Well, but you are not a landscape gardener, I think?"

"No, but there are buildings: a cow-house, a dairy, and a bird-house, the plans of which I drew and which are a little out of my line. But the chief thing is the pavilion, which is built from my design with the lady's suggestions."

"A chalet like those in Switzerland, then? I can not compliment you."

"If you should say a kiosk it would be nearer the truth; and yet it is not precisely a kiosk, as we French understand it. It is thought here that in Turkey the kiosks are of wood, confounding that country with China. Madame Brehal desired to have an exact reproduction of the one the Sultan possesses upon the Bosphorus, in which the style of the Renaissance is very happily blended with the Oriental style, and I had only to copy it. It will be a little smaller, but it will be charming."

"Only the Bosphorus will be missing. But, if it is built of stone—"

"Of marble, white marble. It does not agree very well with our rainy climate, but Madame Brehal allows no discussion of her fancies."

"She can have her kiosk cleaned every year. But what is she going to use it for?"

"For change of air, she pretends. Her hotel is superb, and the

garden surrounding it is not bad, but she has no country-house nor villa in the suburbs, and she does not want one. She adores Paris to such a point that she never willingly leaves it, even during the summer. Therefore, she has imagined bringing the country to her own door, and when she is bored at nome or it is too warm she will go to breathe the air on the other side of her wall."

Courtenay did not lose a word of this instructive conversation, and Coulanges, who was also listening with much attention, said in his friend's ear, "I should like to ask him if there is a door between the garden of the hotel and the Little Trianon."

George responded only with a significant glance, and the doctor immediately fell back into the nonchalant position of a man half asleep on a sofa of his club, and who does not bother himself about what others are saying. The talkers, moreover, had no reason for being careful, for they were not speaking of secrets, and they did not suspect that the gentlemen near them knew the lady and the hotel.

"And how is this surprising work progressing?" asked the artist.

"It is almost finished. I have only to superintend the decoration of the interior."

"I am astonished that I have heard nothing of this in society or here, at the Moucherons. Madame Brehal is well known in Paris, and her idea is not a common one."

"She asked me to say nothing of it, and I am not even sure if her servants know of it. The ground extends to the Rue de Courcelles, and my workmen enter on that side."

"More and more curious," whispered Coulanges.

And assuredly George shared his opinion, although he appeared to be half asleep.

"She wishes it to be a surprise," continued the architect.

"To whom? To her husband?"

"No. I told you that she was a widow. To her friends, probably."

"I would like to be one of them. But how was it that you did not think of me for the decoration? There must be paintings."

"Certainly. Four panels in the summer salon, representing the four seasons. I did speak of you. The lady saw two of your paintings at the salon, and she admires your talent."

"Well."

"But—there is a but—she is the protectress of a young girl who paints, and as she wishes her to make some money—"

"What! a *paintress* to smear the walls of the Sultan's kiosk! And you dare to say that Madame Brehal is a woman of taste? Capdenac, my friend, you have lowered yourself considerably in my esteem. Let us talk no more of this, but go and play piquet."

"Be easy, Tartas, and I will recommend you for the portrait. Meanwhile, I will try to beat you a thousand points at five sous a point. What do you say? Is that high enough? You may, perhaps, lose a dozen louis, but you can tack it on to the price of the portrait."

The two gentlemen rose and entered the large parlor, pushing-to the door between.

"Well!" exclaimed the doctor, "do you still tell me that Madame Brehal's kind invitation is an April-fool joke? Those kiosks and the other marvels, which she wished to show us, exist. And the breakfast is explained; at this season of the year it is dark at dinner-time and we should have seen nothing."

"Not even Mademoiselle Mezenc's pictures," returned George, with a preoccupied air.

"While in the day-time we can admire them at our ease, and I admit that I should take great pleasure in doing so. That young girl interests me, and she certainly interests you also."

"Much less, since she has placed herself under Madame Brehal's protection. She needs no one else now."

"That is no reason why the friends of poor Saulieu should abstain from showing her marks of their sympathy, and since Madame Brehal has even exhibited a wish to encourage that, it would be very bad taste in us to refuse. Remember, too, that we shall be able to visit that mysterious inclosure, which puzzled us so much a certain evening—"

"I have already begged you, doctor, not to recall to me a circumstance which I wish to think no more of, any more than I do of the duel."

"I, too, would like to forget the duel, but I meet everywhere people who remind me of it. We have just seen one of Monsieur de Pontaumur's seconds, and, look! there is the other one in the large parlor; you can see him through the glass door."

"Corleon!" exclaimed George. "Yes, it is indeed he. I have not seen him since the day of the duel, and I take no pleasure in seeing him again."

"I have already encountered him, before, to-day," said the doctor, "and I confess that I am not very sorry to see him again here."

"You astonish me. This man inspires me with an indefinable repugnance."

"Do you think that I like him? I dislike him as much as you do, but to-day I have reasons for not being afflicted at his presence. I may even speak to him, if I find the opportunity."

"Great good may it do you! I shall not be a third in your conversation, and I should be very seriously annoyed to have to dine with him. Are you sure that his name was not down for the table d'hôte?"

"Yes, perfectly; but while I was writing ours, I saw the names of the two gentlemen who were talking here just now, Monsieur Capdenac and Monsieur Tartas."

"Oh! I don't mind them."

"Nor I, either. They are pleasant enough, and the bores preponderate here. I would rather have them next me at table than many people of my acquaintance. And then the subject of their conversation is not worn out. They have told us many curious things, and they will, perhaps, tell us many others."

"My dear doctor," said Courtenay, quickly, "I do not care at all to hear any more. And I hope that before all the guests at the table these gentlemen will have the sense not to babble about Madame Brehal and her fanciful constructions; it would be in the worst possible taste."

"Especially as Madame Brehal has requested secrecy of her architect. But the prohibition will soon be raised, as the work is finished. She, apparently, does not intend to reserve this delicious kiosk for her personal use, to the exclusion of all her friends, and as she has many—"

"She has very few, on the contrary."

"Well, you are one of them, at all events, and she loses no time in showing you the wonders of her transformed domain, and she is probably very anxious to do so."

"It would have been much better if she had told me of all this before she undertook it, but she did not say a word to me about it."

"She was arranging a surprise for you, and the breakfast to-morrow has no other end in view. I am very much flattered that she has asked me, for, before entering the riding-school, I had never seen her. Had you ever spoken of me to her?"

"I mentioned your name the evening you came to seek me at her house."

"And, perhaps, you told her that I had served with you as one of poor Saulieu's seconds?"

"Yes. I had to explain to her why you were in such a hurry to speak to me."

"Then, I am less surprised at being asked. She wishes to thank me in this way for having assisted you on a sad occasion."

"I don't know what she wishes; perhaps, she herself doesn't know, for she does not reflect much on what she does. However, she may have thought of presenting you to Mademoiselle Mezenc to replace the *fiancé* she has lost."

"If I thought that, I should run away," said Coulanges, laughing. "My celibacy is dear to me, and the woman who shall marry me is not born yet; for I do not intend to marry before I am fifty, and when I am that old, I shall only care for buds. But I am quite sure that you are mistaken. In the first place, Madame Brehal said that we should see the young lady working at her paintings. She did not say that she would breakfast with us."

"Why, they are always together; you heard what Madame Fresnay said. I would willingly bet that Madame Brehal has taken it into her head to find a husband for her *protegée*, and it seems to me that the *protegée* lends herself to the scheme very willingly. Between ourselves, it is ridiculous enough, for they scarcely knew each other before Maurice's death, and when Madame Brehal let me see her intentions in regard to Mademoiselle Mezenc, I did not hide from her my ideas on the subject. If I should accept her invitation, she would think that I had changed my opinion."

"Then, it is decided," said the doctor, in a melancholy voice. "We shall not contemplate the marvels of the 'Little Trianon.'"

"I do not prevent you from contemplating them."

"Without you? Never! And it is a pity, for I would have liked to see the interior of that inclosure where so many things are done. But, after all, I can give myself that pleasure without entering. The hillock, at the foot of which I was seated, overlooks the land which Madame Brehal has made a paradise of, and it would be sufficient to mount it to have a view of the whole."

"That is a very brilliant idea, and if Madame Brehal perceives you perched upon that eminence, she will conceive a high opinion of you."

Coulanges felt the irony of this speech and said no more. He was almost ashamed of having said so much, and he was amazed at the change in himself during the last few hours.

He, the careless skeptic; he, who would not have walked a mile to declare his love to the prettiest woman in Paris; he, who pretended that he was indifferent to everything in this mundane sphere, was

now racking his brain to solve problems which did not touch him personally, and allowed himself to follow clews like a professional detective.

The false bullet picked up after the duel, the screw which had scratched Delphine's hand, all these indications of a crime seemed to him to have an unexplained connection with the singular actions of Maurice Saulieu's adversary.

He had already given twenty-five louis to prevent M. Corleon from purchasing a ridiculous piece of furniture, and he had allowed himself this costly fancy because he imagined, without knowing why, that the chiffonier had also played a part in the shadowy machinations about him. And his case had this peculiarity about it: he was not at all decided to push the investigation to the end. On the contrary, he was inclined to keep himself clear of conjectures for fear of becoming involved in a series of difficulties and worries which should trouble his peaceful, philosophical life. But in vain did he reproach himself with weakness, the enigma would come into his mind, it absolutely besieged him, and, as all enigmas are made to be solved, Coulanges had become a detective in spite of himself.

To complete his hard luck, he could scarcely confide his doubts and troubles to George Courtenay, for he suspected him of being much more interested in Mme. Brehal than he would allow, and he feared to wound him by seeking to determine the nature of the secret relations which Mme. Brehal appeared to have with M. de Pontaumur.

For a moment he had hoped that the breakfast in the Avenue de Villiers would furnish him with some light; but George would not listen to it, and the disappointed doctor no longer knew what to do or even what to say.

A waiter relieved him from his immediate embarrassment by announcing that dinner was served.

Courtenay, whom many successive incidents had greatly agitated, was only too glad to have a change, and Coulanges followed him into the dining-room, where was served the *table d'hôte*, at which it was necessary to engage one's place in advance. The negligent or tardy had the resource of being served in a neighboring gallery.

The players in the red parlor had thrown down their cards at the first announcement of dinner, and the table was almost full when the doctor and his friend entered the room. They were enabled, however, to find two seats together, and Coulanges discovered that

he had for a neighbor the architect, Capdenac, beyond whom was the painter, Tartas; and they both seemed inclined to talk.

Courtenay, less fortunate, was seated at the right of a respectable landed proprietor, who had come up from the country to obtain information as to the progress in methods of raising live-stock.

The other guests almost all belonged to the category of economical clubmen, who prefer a dinner at a fixed price to the more varied, but dearer, repasts of the fashionable restaurants. These latter, moreover, always complain, and would like to have given them for seven francs truffled turkeys and Château Lafitte.

The dinner was the usual one in all clubs, where the same dishes invariably re-appear, and where the luxury of the service is not a sufficient compensation for the monotony of the *cuisine*.

The doctor was often afflicted by it, but this evening he scarcely paid any attention to what he was eating, and Courtenay still less, although he was accustomed to live well.

The other guests were more particular, and the reading of the *menu* gave rise to a general howl.

"Salmon again!" cried an old merchant, who had made a fortune in drugs, and who was contented with very meager fare, when he dined at home. "It is outrageous to have always to eat the same fish."

"Especially this one," said a gentleman in a white cravat and gold eyeglasses, like Henry Monnier's Prud'homme. "One gets tired of it so quickly that in Scotland, where it is very common, the servants—"

"Stipulate that they shall eat it only three times a week; everybody knows that," interrupted a facetious member of the Bourse. "But we are not in Scotland, and here at Ledoyen's and in the Champs- Elysées, they eat it three hundred and sixty-five times a year."

"Well," observed Tartas, gravely, "they have one day to rest in, when it is leap-year."

"All this, gentlemen, is the fault of the dinner committee," exclaimed a chronic kicker, who had even complained that the opening in the complaint-box was too small. "Monsieur Corleon is a member of it, and he inspires me with no confidence."

"Do you think that he has an understanding with the tradespeople?" asked Capdenac, laughing.

"I know nothing about it; but since he has been on the committee, everything is execrable, especially the wines."

"Send in your complaint, my dear fellow, with the proofs. He is going to drink his own wines, since he dines here this evening."

Courtenay glanced at the doctor, who said to him in a low tone:

"The fellow must have written his name at the last moment."

As he spoke, M. Corleon entered, and sat down nearly opposite to them.

His arrival cast a gloom over the company. He was not liked in the club, perhaps because he always won; but he was too politic to give people a chance to quarrel with him.

Courtenay was enraged, and he could scarcely keep from leaving the room, but his better reason prevailed, although he made up his mind never again to dine at the *table d'hôte*.

Coulanges did not regret very much being there. Corleon was one of the terms of the problem he was studying, and he hoped vaguely that the conversation would by chance furnish him with unexpected indications. He had not long to wait.

"Tell me, Corleon," exclaimed the speculator, whom Captain Morgan had accused of nursing his balls at billiards, "are you refurnishing your rooms? I saw you to-day at the Hôtel des Ventes, ardently bidding for an ebony chiffonier."

"You are mistaken, my dear Vervelle," responded M. Corleon, quickly, with a sidelong glance at the doctor. "I did not bid for anything."

"Pooh! you'll tell me next that I did not see you. You were hidden behind Père Salomon, but I have good eyes."

"An old Jew, very badly dressed, is he not? It was he who bid."

"On your account, though. You whispered to him the bids, and he repeated them."

"I tell you, no. I entered there by chance, and did not even notice what they were selling."

"Well, it was lucky you did not get the chiffonier, at all events. It was not worth three louis, and it was knocked down at a senseless price. Ask Doctor Coulanges, who bid against you."

Coulanges could well have dispensed with this appeal, which he had not foreseen.

He had indeed perceived Vervelle in the auction-room, but the gentleman, whom he had but a slight acquaintance with, only showed himself for an instant, and the doctor flattered himself that his bids had not attracted the attention of a man who was never so happy as when bothering M. Corleon.

He felt obliged to answer:

"It was not for myself, I beg you to believe, for I am quite of your opinion; the price was much too dear."

"It appears that no one wished it, and that it was sold all by itself," said Vervelle, laughing. "You do well to deny it, gentlemen, for it was a horribly ugly thing."

"That is what I said over and over again to the lady I bought it for, and who begged me to bid it for her."

"Little Delphine, of the Bouffes, was it not? I noticed her, and I also said to myself, 'It is not possible that the doctor has taken a fancy to such an object as that!' Well, all is explained. That little girl is as pretty as a pink, but she has a false idea of the value of furniture."

"It was, perhaps, the chiffonier of her mother," said the facetious painter.

"Perhaps it was," returned Vervelle, gravely. "And perhaps Corleon intended to offer it to her."

"In that case, I should have paid for it, and if you wish for information on that point, you have only to question the auctioneer."

"It would be simpler to question the doctor, but that would be indiscreet."

"Oh! not at all," replied Coulanges. "I confess very willingly that I could not refuse anything to Madame du Raincy, who is one of my patients. I went to the Hôtel Drouot to give myself a little picture of Clouet's, which pleased me very much; I missed it, and I met Delphine, who begged me to buy her something; she begged me so prettily that I was persuaded. I do not regret my money, but I regret that she had such bad taste."

"They are all alike; they have no appreciation of art. I will bet you that she would not have wanted your Clouet, and that she is delighted with her trumpery chiffonier."

Coulanges simply smiled in token of assent. He did not care to prolong this conversation, in which he was not sorry to have taken part, for M. Corleon, after having exhibited a certain uneasiness, now appeared quite reassured.

"He thinks that I was the dupe of his denials," thought the doctor; "that is what I wanted; and I am now positive. By denying that he bid for the chiffonier, he has proved to me that he has some reason for concealing that he wanted it."

The other diners, who had been very little interested in the preceding conversation, drifted on to other subjects, and the repast went on. People eat quickly at these club dinners, and they were soon at the second course.

Courtenay, still somber and preoccupied, had paid no attention to the remarks of his companions. He was thinking of Mme. Brehal, and, after having rejected the idea of accepting her invitation to breakfast, he was now wondering if it would not be better for him to go.

The words of the architect, Capdenac, had somewhat shaken his resolution, whatever he had said. Since the evening which had ended so badly in the Avenue Berthier, Courtenay had perceived that he was absolutely jealous, and he knew that one is not jealous without being in love. He would not acknowledge it to himself, but he missed Mme. Brehal. He had abstained from going to her house, because he feared that his feelings would again lead him away. He was afraid to take up the interview again at the dangerous point where he had left it off, and to finish the declaration commenced in the little salon, when he had almost fallen at the feet of the beautiful widow.

He hoped, besides, that she would come or write, and she had not given him any sign of life. This indifference wounded him, for Mme. Brehal had not accustomed him to such a system, and he could find only disagreeable explanations of it.

M. de Pontaumur was never out of his mind; and, as often happens in such cases, he shrunk from a solution of the mystery, which perhaps it only depended upon himself to obtain. Nothing prevented him, surely, from telling Mme. Brehal what he had seen, and it was not probable that she would take refuge in silence. But self-love restrained him; he knew that to speak would be to acknowledge what he felt, and he waited for some more fitting opportunity.

He had known indirectly that Mlle. Mezenc had agreed to paint the pictures ordered by Mme. Brehal, but he had not gone again to see Maurice Saulieu's *fiancée*. The call he had made upon her after the duel had left a painful impression upon him. And, suddenly, in the very midst of his uncertainty, he had met the young girl with Mme. Brehal, and, without excuses or preambles, the *chatelaine* of the Avenue de Villiers had given him a most unexpected invitation.

What was the meaning of this breakfast to which she had also invited the doctor? Why did she wish to bring together at her house the two friends of the man whom M. de Pontaumur had killed? Was it really to show them gardens and kiosks, or had Mme. Brehal more serious designs?

Courtenay kept asking himself these questions, and especially since he had accidentally heard of the transformation in her domain.

While he was reflecting and absently eating what the waiters placed before him, the name of the man he detested fell upon his ear. The speculator, Vervelle, an incessant talker, was asking Corleon for news of M. de Pontaumur, whom no one had seen for three weeks.

It was not very good taste to make such a request, in presence of the seconds who had assisted the unfortunate Saulieu, but in Paris the dead die quickly, and the duel was well-nigh forgotten. Courtenay and the doctor simply exchanged a look and listened without speaking a word. They noticed that M. Corleon answered as if against his will, and tried to turn the conversation into another channel. This was meritorious on his part, and they were tempted to give him credit for it, but the indiscreet Vervelle so insisted that other guests finally broke in.

"Monsieur de Pontaumur seeks solitude," said Mme. Brehal's architect. "I have met him two or three times at the fortifications."

"Bah!" cried Vervelle. "And what the devil was he doing there?"

"He was meditating. I saw him in broad daylight, seated on the top of a mound of earth."

"And didn't you ask him why he had mounted up there?"

"No. I scarcely know him. And, besides, I saw him from a distance. I thought that he was admiring the view. You can see from there all the new quarter which has been built at the end of the Avenue de Villiers; there are superb hotels and beautiful gardens."

"Tell me, Corleon, is your friend in love? Only lovers go to meditate in solitary places. From his appearance, I should never have suspected that he had heart troubles."

The doctor was upon thorns, and Courtenay, pale with anger, could scarcely contain himself.

The architect, who was not lacking in tact, ended by perceiving it, and took no notice of Vervelle's foolish words.

Some of the diners, well-bred men, who had not yet forgotten the sad story of the duel, raised their voices to discuss another subject, and there was no more question of M. de Pontaumur.

But the blow had been struck, and George had taken a decided resolution.

He let Coulanges engage with his neighbor in an insignificant colloquy, which had no other end than to prevent him from renewing the disagreeable subject, and when the doctor turned toward him

again, he said to him, lowering his voice, so as to be heard by him alone:

"This must be ended. That scoundrel would compromise Madame Brehal."

"I always thought that he sought nothing else," returned Coulanges.

"At all events, I wish her to be warned."

"How? Do you propose to write to her yourself?"

"No. Such things can not be written. I shall speak to her. I have changed my opinion. We will breakfast with her to-morrow."

"Good! I shall do so very willingly, and I promise not to be in your way. I have a presentiment, my dear fellow, that you will not regret going. Everything will be cleared up."

CHAPTER VI.

It was over, the breakfast, which Courtenay had accepted only after long hesitation, and which the doctor would have regretted all his life, if he had been obliged to deprive himself of it to please his friend.

He had never before found himself seated near so charming a woman, never had he tasted such exquisite cooking or drunk such good wines, although he knew and frequented all the restaurants renowned for their cellars. It was no longer only liking which he felt for Mme. Brehal, but veneration, since he had discovered that she could distinguish a fine wine from an ordinary one and appreciate it, which is still more rare. Coulanges professed the opinion that nature had refused the gastronomical instinct to the weaker sex, and this lack constituted in his opinion a grave inferiority.

Mme. Brehal was perfect, and the doctor, grateful for having been so well treated, would willingly have raised an altar as a thank-offering, in the midst of that famous park which he hoped to visit before taking leave of his hostess.

Not a word had yet been said of the marvels celebrated by the architect, Capdenac, and they were now at the coffee, which was served in a recess adjoining the dining-room, furnished in an original manner, with hangings of black silk and large divans of the same stuff and lighted by stained-glass windows. They had spoken of the new plays, the races, the toilets displayed at the previous Tuesday at the Théâtre Français, the last elections to the Academy and even of M. Pasteur's discourses, of everything in fact, except what

would have specially interested George Courtenay and Charles Coulanges.

Mme. Brehal had received them with a familiar cordiality which had astonished them both. The doctor had expected those polite phrases which are the usual accompaniment of the beginning of an acquaintance, but the lady had simply held out her hand to him, thanking him for having come, as if she had known him for years.

George had counted upon friendly reproaches, and even a little upon discreet explanations. It would have been quite natural for her to have told him why she no longer stopped her carriage before the hotel in the Rue de Milan, and for her to have demanded why he had not come to see her for nearly a month, when he used to come three or four times a week. But there had been nothing of all this. Mme. Brehal received him as if they had not ceased to see each other every day; not a reproachful word, not a question; and what surprised him even more, not the shadow of an allusion to the duel or to Mlle. Mezenc.

George thought that the latter would be at the breakfast, but Mme. Brehal did not seem to remember that, the day before, at the riding-school, she had announced to the gentlemen that they would meet Mlle. Mezenc at her house.

When one of them tried to lead the conversation toward less general subjects she evaded it gayly, but obstinately. She had even launched into a learned discussion with the doctor upon the comparative merits of Burgundy and Bordeaux; this was amusing enough for the doctor, but George became very impatient. He was beginning to think that the breakfast was a mystification and he made up his mind not to leave the place without telling Mme. Brehal of the conduct of M. de Pontaumur. But he could not decently broach this grave question before the doctor, and he waited until the promised walk should furnish him with the opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*. Would this walk through her grounds take place? He almost doubted it, and yet he noticed the absence of cigars which the hostess never failed to offer her guests when she gave a dinner. Ordinarily the men passed, on rising from the table, into a smoking-room furnished with the best Havana brands; but, to-day, Mme. Brehal had conducted them to a room much too small to permit them to light cigars.

Coulanges also regretted being deprived of one of his favorite pleasures, and he did not understand how so intelligent a woman could forget this indispensable accompaniment of coffee. She was not slow to enlighten him. He had emptied his cup and placed it,

with a sigh, upon the massive silver waiter, when she said to him with a smile:

"I know what you want, gentlemen; but I desire not to leave you and I can only endure the odor of tobacco in the open air. The time has come to give you the surprise which I have arranged for you, and if you will follow me, you can smoke at your ease. You will find an assortment of cigars in the gallery, which we shall have to pass through to descend to the garden."

"Is this surprise in the garden?" asked George.

"You shall see," responded Mme. Brehal, gayly. "All roads lead to Rome," and she rose with a grace which delighted the doctor. He had theories upon the movements of women; he claimed that they had ten different ways of rising, sitting, walking and wearing their dresses. And he found Mme. Brehal adorable in her flowered silk morning dress, covered with avalanches of lace, and her little slippers, above which was revealed now and then a black silk stocking embroidered with red butterflies.

At the end of the gallery, which was a regular winter garden, while the gentlemen were choosing their cigars, she donned a hat, which finished off Coulanges, a gem of a hat, lined with rose-colored silk covered with white lace and adorned with a garland of rosebuds.

She armed herself with a Chinese umbrella, round and flat, like a circular fan, the last mode of the day, and she placed her tiny foot upon the sand of the straight alley which traversed the park in all its length, passing under a continuous arch of foliage.

The doctor was so delighted at watching her that he remained a little behind, the better to admire her, exactly as a sportsman places himself at a distance the better to judge of the points of a thoroughbred horse. At this moment he scarcely thought of M. de Pontaumur.

But George thought of him, and he took advantage of the occasion to speak.

"Do you know that I did not wish to come," he said to Mme. Brehal in a low voice," and that I regret now having done so? I thought that you would feel, like me, the necessity of an explanation after a month's silence."

"And till now we have spoken of only insignificant things," interrupted Mme. Brehal. "Have no fear, my friend, you will lose nothing for having waited."

"Then why did you invite my friend Coulanges?"

"For various reasons, the first of which is that I feared being

alone with you. We parted, one evening, just as we were both beginning to lose our heads."

"The scene to which you allude shall not be renewed, I promise you."

"You are sure of yourself, it seems, but I am not so sure of myself, and as I desired a serious talk with you, I wished the interview to take place in the open air," replied Mme. Brehal, laughing.

"What have you to say to me?"

"You shall know soon; but let Monsieur Coulanges join us."

The doctor hastened forward and began to go into ecstasies over the beauty of the trees, as he could not express what he thought of the beauty of the hostess.

"Yes, I am very fond of walking here," said Mme. Brehal. "It is like being in the country. I have arranged, by the way, a sort of country-house, and that is what I am going to show you."

"The surprise?" asked Courtenay.

"A surprise which is not entirely one, for I spoke a little too much of it yesterday. But you scarcely expect what you are going to see. I have been committing follies."

"Suppose I should tell you that I know of what they consist," murmured Courtenay.

"You would astonish me considerably. My people themselves know absolutely nothing."

"What! they have never penetrated this inclosure which you are transforming?"

"Never! Mademoiselle Mezenc alone has the right to enter there, and we shall find her there. I hoped that she would breakfast with us, but she refused. I regretted it very much, for she is charming. Don't you think so, monsieur?"

This question was addressed to the doctor, who responded with a eulogy upon the perfections of the young girl whom he had seen for the first time the day before.

"To know her is to love her," said Mme. Brehal, "and I have become more and more attached to her. But you can not guess where I am taking you, my dear George I am very sure that you have never noticed that door, below there, at the end of the alley, in the middle of the wall covered with ivy."

"No, never," murmured George, exchanging a look with Coulanges. It was about twenty feet before them, and it must open into the ground which M. de Pontaumur had entered by the Boulevard Berthier. He could therefore have passed through this door and introduced himself into the garden of the hotel.

"I alone have the key to it," said Mme. Brehal.

"I can not understand why I have never noticed the door," said Courtenay with intention. "It seems to me that I have already walked through this alley as far as the wall."

"You are not mistaken," replied Mme. Brehal. "You have often walked here with me. But the door was hidden by heavy branches of ivy, and, to discover it, you would have to know it was there. I scarcely knew it myself."

"Then you never used it?"

"No, never, before I undertook to transform the land yonder. Why should I have gone into a field, where there were neither flowers nor trees. I think, besides, that it would have been very difficult to have opened it. The lock and hinges were horribly rusty."

"But they are so no longer, I hope, for the sake of your delicate hands."

"No, no, my architect sent a man who put everything in good condition."

"When?"

"Nearly a month ago, when the work was enough advanced for me to take pleasure in visiting it."

"A month!" repeated Courtenay. "That is singular."

"What is singular? You have not been in my garden for a month. Our walks naturally ceased during the winter; therefore, you could have perceived no change. And, really, my dear George, one would say that you suspected that a crime had been committed here. You question me with as much persistence as if you were a magistrate." And as George protested by a gesture she continued, laughing gayly: "Did you imagine, by chance, that fine cavaliers took this road to have secret interviews with me? That would be very romantic, I allow, but if I loved any one, I should wish him to enter by the grand entrance. I conceal neither my sentiments nor my acts, and I have always shown my preferences; you are not ignorant of that, although you seem to have forgotten it."

The opportunity was a good one to speak of M. de Pontaumur's nocturnal maneuvers, but the doctor was there, and Mme. Brehal had promised George a private interview. So he was silent and Coulanges hastened to say:

"Courtenay thinks, madame, that the door might serve a burglar."

"Then he would have to have the key, and I have never confided mine to any one, except to Mademoiselle Mezenc, who assuredly has

not made bad use of it. It is the easiest way, at present, to enter the inclosure. I told you, I think, that there is an entrance on the Rue de Courcelles. That is guarded by a porter, whom I have installed there some days ago."

"A man you can trust, I suppose," said George.

"Entirely. Mme. Mezenc recommended him to me the day I went to her house to ask her to allow her charming daughter to work for me. Therefore, there is no danger on that side, but my grounds are only separated from the Boulevard Berthier by a board fence, high enough and strong enough, it is true; an agile thief could scale it, but he would find nothing to steal, for the pavilion I have built is not yet furnished, and I would defy any one to climb over the wall before us; it is twenty feet high, and as you see, it is spiked with iron on the top. Besides, I am going to build one just like this all about my domain. So, you see, gentlemen, my hotel is impregnable."

This conversation had detained Mme. Brehal and her friends for a few minutes under the trees of the alley. She now walked forward with a deliberate step toward the door, which so engrossed George Courtenay, and, handing him the key, begged him to open it, which he immediately proceeded to do.

The two friends expected surprises, and they saw at the first glance that Capdenac had not exaggerated this terrestrial Eden. There were emerald grass-plots, tastefully arranged flower-beds, masses of well-chosen bushes; in the background were the Rue de Courcelles buidings, arranged like English cottages, of brick and wood, covered with creeping vines, and, in the center of the lawn, the famous pavilion of white marble, which had a charming effect upon the carpet of verdure. There was only one story above the ground floor, but it was covered with ornamentation, carved pillars, volutes and plinths, arabesqued balustrades, and round and oval windows placed as if by chance. The whole was imposing, and four flights of marble-steps, one on each side, gave to the pseudo-Oriental construction a character quite its own.

"What do you think of my creation?" asked Mme. Brehal. "For it is a creation; all the ideas are my own, and if you knew how much trouble I had in persuading the architect to execute them, you would admire my strength of will."

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed the doctor, enthusiastically.

"The garden is well laid out, and the pavilion is very original," said George, more calmly.

"Unfortunately, the interior decorations are not finished, but you

can, at least, judge of what they will be The salon where Mademoiselle Mezenc works is done; it only needs the paintings which she began scarcely two weeks ago."

"Do you think her capable of finishing them?"

"Certainly. Why do you ask that?"

"Oh—because, if you take her every day to the riding-school or other amusements, she will have little time for painting."

"That has happened only once. Do you find anything wrong in it?"

"I have no right to criticise Mademoiselle Mezenc's actions. I was a little surprised to meet her in the midst of that fashionable crowd, a few weeks after the death of a man whom she was on the point of marrying."

"I alone am culpable. She did not wish to go, but I dragged her there almost by force. If I thought myself obliged to excuse my conduct to you, my friend, I should limit myself to recalling to your mind what I said to you the evening of that unfortunate duel. In memory of Monsieur Saulieu, who was your friend, I promised to perform for this young girl the duties which had hitherto fallen to the charge of her aunt, Madame Fresnay."

"And you have succeeded very quickly; Madame Fresnay complains bitterly of you."

"Have you seen her?"

"I met her yesterday at the Palais de l'Industrie. She accosted me, and I was obliged to submit to the honor she did me; she said all the evil she could of her niece."

"And no good of me, I suppose?"

"She claimed that you wish to marry Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"She is right. I should be very glad to find Marianne a husband worthy of her. But I am in despair. She does not aid me at all. I have tried in vain to distract her, but her sadness still continues. I confess, gentlemen, that I count upon you to brighten her up a little."

"I beg to be excused," exclaimed Courtenay.

"Very well; but Monsieur Coulanges will not excuse himself, I am sure, and I know by experience, that he is the wittiest and most amiable of companions. I will not say to you that, if it had not been for him, our breakfast would have been a melancholy affair, but—"

"You content yourself with thinking so."

"Perhaps, and I will not conceal that I have many things to par-

don you for. Is it not so, monsieur?" addressing the doctor. "You will be attentive to my *protegée*, will you not?"

"It will not be a hard task. She is bewitching," said the doctor, with a warmth, which was of good augury.

"Bewitching is the word. It is sufficient to know her to become attached to her. I do not speak of her beauty, which is apparent to all eyes. Look, do you see her with her palette in her hand? She looks like the genius of painting."

All the windows were open, and, in the bright light of a clear spring day, the young girl's profile could be seen, almost as George had seen it in her poor studio in the Rue Blanche. Only, she was standing, and her figure, admirably displayed by her black dress, was sharply defined against the wood-work.

Mme. Brehal and her friends had walked on as they talked, and they had almost reached the marble steps of the pavilion. At the sound of their voices, Mlle. Mezenc turned and came to the window.

George was dazzled; he had never seen her so beautiful. As for the doctor, he stood in ecstasy before this virginal figure.

"My dear Marianne, you know these gentlemen. Will you permit them to enter? I ask you, because in your quality as an artist, you would have a perfect right not to allow any one to look at your work, before it is finished."

Mme. Brehal smiled as she spoke, and waved her hand to her friend, who answered sweetly:

"You know well, madame, that I have no secrets from you, nor from your friends, and I am always happy to see you."

"Then I will leave you Doctor Coulanges, to begin with, and take Monsieur Courtenay to visit my dairy. We wil rejoin you in a few minutes."

Coulanges was delighted with this arrangement. He thought that George and Mme. Brehal wanted to be alone, and for his own part, he asked nothing better than to talk with a pretty woman. He quickly mounted the steps and entered the summer salon, while his friend and his hostess walked away by a path which led round the pavilion.

"You told me that you wanted to speak seriously to me," said George, when they were far enough to be sure that no one could hear them.

"Yes, very seriously, too seriously, perhaps," immediately responded Mme. Brehal. "But you, my friend, have you nothing to say to me?"

"If I had nothing to say to you," answered Courtenay, "I should not be here, you may well believe."

"That means, doubtless, that you would have refused my invitation?"

"I should neither have refused not accepted it. I should not have come."

"And why, may I ask you, would you have been so impolite to me?"

"Because I have something to complain of."

"Pardon me, it is I who have something to complain of. Will you explain to me how it happens that you have suddenly ceased to come to my house?"

"And will you explain to me why you have not deigned to inquire what had become of me?"

"I could answer you, that I am a woman, and that it is not my place to run after you. But we are good comrades, which permits us to depart from the conventional rules, and I abstain from invoking the privilege of my sex. I prefer to tell you quite simply the truth, which is, that your last visit had—troubled me. I do not know any other word to express it. It seemed to me that the nature of our friendly relations was about to change. You see how frank I am—and before proceeding further on that perilous road, I wished to take time to reflect."

"Suppose I should give you the same reason to excuse my conduct, what would you say?"

"I should believe you and I should not blame you. It is a serious thing to replace an old and honest friendship by a livelier and less durable sentiment, even when the two parties are agreed as to the advantages of the change, and I do not know yet if that is the case. But I may say that I undoubtedly should not have delayed so long in asking you to come, if I had not thought that the death of your friend would give you duties to perform—"

"You were mistaken. His provincial relatives took those off my shoulders."

"I knew that they had taken possession of Monsieur Saulieu's property. He left no will, then?"

"None has been found."

"I regret it for dear Marianne's sake, for I believe that he intended to leave her his fortune. And that leads me to tell you that I have been also very much occupied with her. It was not without difficulty that I persuaded her to accept my patronage in society and the work in my pavilion. The negotiations with her and her

mother, who is a worthy woman, took up all my days. But I have entirely succeeded at last, and I hope that we shall not be separated until the day she marries. I can, therefore, think a little of myself, and if I had not met you yesterday at the riding-school, I should have certainly written you to-day. You can not say, my dear George, that I was sulky with you, since I was the first to make advances. And, now, it is your turn to confess," concluded Mme. Brehal, with a smile. "What have you to tell me, after this month of absence?"

"That you have broken your word to me," responded George, bluntly.

"Good heavens! You commence by accusing me of perjury. Where will you end?"

"Do not jest. It is very serious."

"What did I swear to you? Deign to recall it to my memory."

"I demanded no oath of you, you know very well. But you promised me that you would cease to receive Monsieur de Pontaumur."

"And I have kept my promise. He presented himself one Wednesday, when there were twenty persons with me, Mademoiselle Mezenc among them. I had foreseen the event, and my people had orders to tell him that I was not at home, which they did. The affront which he received was known to all my friends; I explained to them why I did not wish to receive Monsieur de Pontaumur, as I received Mademoiselle Mezenc, and they all approved. What more do you exact of me, my friend?"

"Nothing. I have no right to exact anything. But it is my duty to tell you what has happened."

"You alarm me. I can conceive that Monsieur de Pontaumur is not very well pleased, but I do not suppose that he has dared to calumniate me."

"He does worse. He compromises you."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mme. Brehal, with a start.

"Yesterday at the club, where I dined, your architect related at the table, before twenty people, that Monsieur de Pontaumur passed his time in watching what went on in your house."

"What! In my house? Why, this is folly! What method does he employ to spy upon me in my house? Does he climb up into the trees of my garden?"

"No. He contents himself with mounting that hillock which you see from here," said George, pointing to the mound of earth,

the top of which could be perceived above the fence. "It was there that your architect surprised him in a contemplative posture."

Mme. Brehal burst into such a frank peal of laughter, that George, who was observing her, was tempted to think that his suspicions had not common sense.

"Really," she cried, "this is the height of the ridiculous, and I have much difficulty in believing that Monsieur de Pontaumur has undertaken to play the sentimental lover, in full daylight, before all the passers in the avenue. But at all events, it was not for me that he perched himself on that observatory, for I pass very little time in my new garden. I go once a day to see Marianne at work, but I do not stay long, for fear of disturbing her. And now I think of it, she might perceive this man, who is odious to her, and I wish to spare her that annoyance. To-morrow, Monsieur Capdenac shall receive orders to immediately build the projected wall; I have told you, I think, that this wall will be twenty feet high, and we shall, therefore, be shielded from indiscreet observers. I wonder, moreover, for what purpose Monsieur de Pontaumur permits himself this extravagance; but if these are the serious things you have to tell me—"

"No; that is not all."

"What more, then?" asked Mme. Brehal, now thoroughly roused.

"I am going to be brutal. I must be so. Know, then, that the evening I was here, the evening of the duel, my friend Coulanges, who was waiting for me in a cab in the Avenue de Villiers, saw a man pass whom he thought he recognized, and whom he followed at a distance. This man took the Boulevard Berthier, and when he reached the fence which incloses this land, where we now are, he drew from his pocket a key with which he opened a gate over there in the corner, and entered."

"Well! It was doubtless some pupil of my architect's, or Monsieur Capdenac himself. I know that he often enters that way, and he had perhaps forgotten something in the pavilion."

"No; it was Monsieur de Pontaumur."

"What? Your friend dreamed that; or he was deceived by a resemblance."

"He declares he is sure of the fact."

"But you? Did you also see Monsieur de Pontaumur?"

"No. I waited a certain length of time, and I should have waited until he came out; but Coulanges prevailed on me to depart."

"And you did not come to warn my people, or to warn me, which would have been better?"

"I wished to, but Coulanges made objections to which I yielded."

"What were they?"

"He represented to me that the man could not be a thief."

"And he was not one, assuredly, for there is nothing to steal in the pavilion—nothing, except Mademoiselle Mezenc's paintings, which are scarcely begun. It was, I repeat, my dear George, one of Monsieur Capdenac's pupils."

George was silent, but he regarded Mme. Brehal fixedly.

"At last, I understand," she said, after a pause, in a voice which she vainly endeavored to steady; "you thought it was my lover. And what a lover! Monsieur de Pontaumur, who killed your friend in a duel, and whom I have forbidden my house! Ah! I confess that I did not expect to be accused by you of such infamy, and if—"

She stopped, and her eyes filled with tears.

"No, I did not accuse you," cried Courtenay, greatly moved; "I was revolted by the suspicions which besieged me, and yet I could not succeed in driving them away. If you only knew what I have suffered since that accursed day!"

"And this was the reason you did not come?"

"And I should never have come again, if Capdenac's imprudent words had not made me fear that reports would be spread about you, which it was necessary to stop. I wished to tell you what I knew. I have told you, but I do not ask any explanations from you."

"You can ask them, my friend, and I can not give them to you. How can I explain what I do not comprehend myself? All that I can think is, that Monsieur de Pontaumur seeks to ruin my reputation."

"I think like you, and if you authorize me to put an end to it—"

"The remedy would be worse than the disease. The publicity of a quarrel would serve his purpose. I can not prevent him from wandering about the streets near my grounds, but I can take measures so that he can not enter them. That gate in the fence shall be closed this very day. I alone have the key of the garden. I will also tell the porter, who guards the entrance on the Rue de Courcelles, that a man has entered the inclosure by night, and that he must keep a close watch. I will even place one of my domestics in the pavilion, arm him, and order him to fire on any intruder. What more can I do?"

"Nothing," replied George.

Mme. Brehal raised her eyes, still wet with tears, and said with an emotion which she did not seek to hide:

"Yes, my friend, I can do more. There is one means of cutting short the outrageous and ridiculous maneuvers of Monsieur de Pontaumur, and also to end a situation which—"

"Take that means, then."

"Will you aid me?" asked Mme. Brehal, half-smiling; "I can not employ this means by myself alone. Two are needed."

George turned and looked at Mme. Brehal, but she met his gaze frankly.

They had arrived quite near the cottages which marked the limit of the grounds on the side of the Rue de Courcelles. These constructions in the English style were completely finished, but they had not yet been put to the use for which they were destined. The porters' lodge was beyond; and at the spot where they had stopped, no one could hear them.

The sky was cloudless, and the air was soft; it was a day for love and lovers' confidences.

"Yes," continued Mme. Brehal, "two are needed. Alone, I could only prevent this man from pursuing me, for, in acting as he has, he has had a purpose, and I recognize what that purpose is. He wished to force me to marry him."

"He has every audacity, then," murmured Courtenay.

"Yes. He commenced, as I told you, by being very attentive to me. I could not be offended; he has a name and position in the world. I know women among my friends who would have advised me to marry him if I had consulted them, but I took care not to. I limited myself to discouraging Monsieur de Pontaumur, and I did it in such a way that he understood me, and his assiduities ceased. It was then that he must have conceived the idea of attaining his ends by scandalous means."

"He acted in the same fashion with Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"Not exactly. He slandered her publicly to revenge himself for her disdain. Marianne has told me all; and since I have known the real cause of that pitiful duel, I have had a horror of Monsieur de Pontaumur. But, with me, he proceeds differently, because it is not me he covets, but my fortune. He would never have married Mademoiselle Mezenc, who was poor."

"He must have had a very poor opinion of her."

"He has learned to know her. She treated him as he deserved, and you know what a revenge he took. But he does not know *me* yet! He hopes to intimidate me. He thinks that by having my name mixed up with his, he will end by persuading me that he really loves me, and, above all, he hopes that the rumor of his

lover-like extravagances will be spread abroad. You have just told me that they have already been remarked. Monsieur Capdenac has seen him planted upon an eminence, and contemplating my garden. Monsieur Coulanges has seen him entering this inclosure at night."

"Do you think, then, that it was indeed he whom the doctor surprised?"

"I am not sure of it; but I am very much inclined to believe it, since I know what he does in daylight. What his plan is, and how he obtained the key, are mysteries which will, perhaps, be explained some day. But what chiefly concerns me is to put an end to his shameful actions, and there is but one way—to marry. When I am married, Monsieur de Pontaumur will see that he is beaten, or, if by any possibility he should continue, he will find some one to call him to account in the person of my husband. I need a defender."

"Do you think that I am not ready to defend you?"

"I mean an authorized defender. By what title would you undertake my defense now?"

After a silence of a few seconds, Mme. Brehal continued in a less assured voice:

"And now, my friend, I come to the difficult part. You have guessed, I am sure, the object of this discourse, and, before you answer, let me tell you how I have come to speak to you as I have. I have reflected much during the last three weeks, and so have you, I think. Our decision will not be taken lightly. We knew each other well, but we needed to prove our feelings by a separation. The experiment has been made, and I do not blush to declare that I have suffered from not seeing you. You have acknowledged that you suffered also; you have even shown me that you were jealous."

"Madly jealous," exclaimed George. "We can not live without one another. If you love me as I do you, there is no reason why we should not be happy forever."

"I permit you to ask my hand," said Mme. Brehal, with a ravishing smile.

George already held this hand in his, and he raised it to his lips.

"Then, you no longer suspect me of making appointments with Monsieur de Pontaumur?" demanded Mme. Brehal, gayly.

"And you no longer suspect me of marrying you for your two hundred thousand francs a year?" retorted George, also laughing.

Mme. Brehal's frankness had cleared up the situation in an instant, as the first ray of the rising sun pierces the morning mist.

"We shall have cause to bless that horrible Pontaumur," said the young widow. "If your friend had not seen him slip into my

rural domain, you would have returned the next day, and we should perhaps never have perceived that we were necessary to one another. It was the separation that enlightened us as to our real feelings. I, at least, knew well that I loved you, but having only very vague notions as to love—you need not smile, monsieur!"

"I was not smiling, I assure you," exclaimed George. "How could I smile at an error into which I fell myself? I thought for a long time that I felt only friendship for you, but the evening Coulanges told me that a man had entered, I knew that I was mistaken, for my heart was devoured with furious jealousy."

"I am a little bit angry with you, not for being jealous, but for being so of a man I despise. I forgive you, though, and all's well that ends well. But Monsieur Coulanges must have a singular opinion of me."

"No, for he is persuaded that Pontaumur was going to see one of your maids. He told me so at once."

"I think that he is mistaken. My maids are all good girls. But I am not sorry that he thought so. I wish I could be useful to him. If he should fall in love with one of my friends, I would plead his cause, I assure you, and, by the way, I may as well confide to you that in inviting him I had an idea; I hoped that dear Marianne would please him, and then he would try to please her."

"You were wrong to hope so."

"Why? Monsieur Coulanges is rich enough not to care for a fortune."

"He has sworn never to marry."

"Bah! a man swears to remain a bachelor, and when he meets *the* woman, he marries very soon. You yourself, my dear George, must have taken that oath, and yet, you see! Now, Marianne is the ideal woman."

"Shall I confess that I had guessed your intentions and sounded the doctor, and that his answer was despairingly clear? He thinks Mademoiselle Mezenc charming, but he has not the slightest desire to make her his wife."

"I am sorry. Does it please you to announce the news to your friend, to make him ashamed of his hard heart?"

"I was just going to ask you if I might."

"Remember that after this declaration you can not withdraw."

"Nor you either. That is what I wish."

"Then come and present him to your future wife and I will present Marianne to my husband. You are not very anxious, I suppose, to visit my dairy, to-day?"

"I am only anxious never to leave you," murmured George, leaning over till his mustache brushed her cheek.

"Take care," she said, trembling. "Some one is coming."

George turned and saw a footman leaving the pavilion.

"There is your secret fled," he said, laughingly. "Your people now know the way here."

"I must have left the door open, but what matters it? Madame Brehal could have secrets; Madame Courtenay shall have none. Jean has a letter. If you ask me to read it, you shall break the seal."

"And if it is for me, you shall open it," returned George.

It was for him. The footman said that it had been brought by M. Courtenay's valet. He was about to explain perhaps how he had ventured upon forbidden ground, but Mme. Brehal immediately dismissed him.

"It is from my notary," said George, after glancing at the address.

"Then I do not insist on opening it," said Mme. Brehal, laughing. "But I do insist on your reading it without delay. Your valet would not have come here after you if the message were not pressing."

"I can not understand. I have no business with my notary. Still, since you wish—"

George had no sooner read it than his face changed.

"Ah!" he cried, "here is very good and very unexpected news. Maurice Saulieu's will has been found."

"Monsieur Saulieu's will found!" exclaimed Mme. Brehal. "I did not know that it was lost."

"No one knew what had become of it," answered George, "I thought I had told you that."

"No, or, rather I understood that he had made none."

"That is what I finally thought, also, although he said something about it in a note, but an incomplete note, unfortunately. Read this, and you will see that all is right up to a certain point; there are restrictions, but your *protégée* is Maurice's heiress."

"Marianne! Oh, George, this is a happy day! It seemed to me that something was lacking to our happiness. It is complete, now that Marianne has her share in it. Read that blessed letter aloud. It will be sweet to hear your voice announce the unexpected news."

"Well! This is what my notary, who was also Maurice's, writes:

"'My dear Monsieur,—You will be very much surprised to learn that the will of your friend, Monsieur Saulieu, reached me

this morning by post. I have examined it carefully and find it perfectly regular. It is dated, signed and drawn up in Monsieur Saulieu's hand You are appointed executor, and the universal legatee is Mademoiselle Marianne Mezenc. It is very simple and there is no codicil, but the testator has added a singular clause, which I transcribe literally: "On condition that Mademoiselle Mezenc marries the man she loves." The will is none the less valid, for this odd clause can only be considered as the expression of a more or less realizable wish, and not as a condition *sine quâ non*. I only fear that the tardy production of this paper may raise certain difficulties. The natural heirs have been placed in possession, and they probably have disposed of much of the property. It is probable, besides, that they will contest the authenticity of a will which comes by an unaccustomed route and from no one knows whom. There are, however, measures to be taken immediately, and I have hastened to inform you of what has happened, and to beg you to come as soon as possible to my office. I want to see you before acting, and by using any indications Monsieur Saulieu may have given you, we can perhaps discover what became of his will which re-appears in so unexpected a fashion. I shall be in my office all day, and I shall not go out this evening.'"

"You must go, George," exclaimed Mme. Brehal.

"Yes, certainly," said George, "although it is very hard for me to leave you at this moment. But what do you think of this strange event? Whence comes this will which I have sought so long and which an anonymous sender addresses to the notary, through the post, like an insignificant letter?"

"From a friend to whom Monsieur Saulieu had confided it, I suppose."

"Impossible. Saulieu had no other friend but me, and, besides, the note I found in his pocket-book leaves no doubt. His will was deposited somewhere, in a place where I was to find it and take it to the notary. By a lamentable fatality, the ball which killed Maurice tore the paper, and I have not been able to find out what he did with the will. It was not because I did not search for it, for I thought of it constantly for a week."

"Some one found it by chance."

"But that some one would not hide himself. He would have taken the trouble to bring it himself to the notary and explain how he found it."

"At all events, he is not malicious, for he might have cast it into the fire or kept it without showing it, and, on the contrary, he hastened to produce it. But what does it matter to us who it is, since Marianne inherits?"

"Yes, if the inheritance has not already disappeared. Maurice's country relatives arrived at the first news of his death and hastened

to sell all that belonged to him. I think, however, that there will be found at his banker's entries which will permit us to know at least the approximate amount of his fortune, and then his cousins can be forced to disgorge. But there will certainly be a lawsuit if Mademoiselle Mezenc decides to claim her rights, which I doubt."

"Why do you doubt it?"

"Because, from the first day, she has declared that she would not accept the fortune."

"That is true, she told me so later, but it would be folly, and I shall persuade her to accept. Why, with this fortune she could marry whom she liked, and who knows if your friend Coulanges—"

"You forget the condition imposed by poor Maurice. He wished Mademoiselle Mezenc to marry the man she loved."

"And the doctor is not that man, evidently. The clause is very queer."

"Didn't I tell you that she never loved Maurice, and that Maurice knew it? Perhaps he also knew that she loved another. He sought death by picking a quarrel with Monsieur de Pontaumur, and, chivalrous as he was, he very probably wished to assure Mademoiselle Mezenc's happiness."

"That would be sublime; and she must know the man Monsieur Saulieu wished her to marry. I shall question her."

"I do not believe she will answer you. But she must be informed at once. Before rejoining her, however, let us return to ourselves. You may believe me to be very selfish, but I declare that I care more for my own happiness than for that of Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"Your happiness will not fly away," said Mme. Brehal, laughing. "We are going to announce it to Monsieur Coulanges and Marianne, and if you think that that is not enough to pledge myself, I will proclaim it to all my friends to-morrow. But you should have said our happiness. Do you think that I have no share in it?"

George, overcome with joy, made a movement which proved that Mme. Brehal was right in subjecting to the open air the passionate outbursts she foresaw. He opened his arms to draw her to his breast, but she could, if not calm, at least arrest him by a gesture, pointing to the windows of the salon, where the doctor was flitting about Mlle. Mezenc's easel.

"Come, George," said Mme. Brehal, leaning upon his arm, "I permit you to call me Gabrielle. That concession ought to satisfy you, monsieur my husband."

They soon reached the pavilion, and the doctor received them with a beaming face.

Mlle. Mezenc, for a wonder, appeared very gay. She had descended from the elevated chair where she sat to paint, and she was laughing at the compliments which Dr. Coulanges had lavished upon her beauty, her wit, and even upon her talent, which was doubtful enough. The four seasons, with which she proposed to decorate the salon of the marble pavilion, were to occupy four rather narrow panels, and the artist had undertaken to represent them only by their attributes: flowers, fruits, and other natural products; perhaps she did not feel clever enough to attempt allegorical figures.

As she had commenced with spring, she was copying an immense bunch of lilacs, arranged in a silver basket.

"Come to my rescue, monsieur," she said to Courtenay; "help me to defend my lilacs against your friend, who pretends that it is an ugly flower."

"Coulanges is a man of paradoxes," responded George; "but I shall not enter into an argument, for I come to take leave of you, mademoiselle. I must go immediately to the notary of Maurice Saulieu."

At this name Marianne's expression changed.

"He has received my unhappy friend's will, the will which had disappeared, and which makes Mademoiselle Mezenc sole legatee."

"Me! Maurice Saulieu's heir!"

"Yes, my dear Marianne," said Mme. Brehal, "and I am very glad to have been the first to receive this good news."

"I thank you, madame, but I have no right to this property, and I refuse it."

"Why? Monsieur Saulieu was about to marry you—"

"I explained, a long time ago, the reasons of my refusal to Monsieur Courtenay, and I beg him to make my refusal known to the notary."

"I will do so, since you wish it, mademoiselle, but my declaration will have no value; to refuse an inheritance there are certain formalities to be fulfilled."

"I will fulfill them."

"Marianne, my dear child," said Mme. Brehal, "I understand and admire the feeling you have, but you are not obliged to decide this very moment, and I have another piece of news to tell you, a piece of news which, I am certain, you will receive with more joy than that of the discovery of Monsieur Saulieu's will. I have taken a great resolution. I am going to be married."

"You, madame!" murmured Marianne, turning very pale.

"Yes, and you guess to whom, do you not?" continued Mme. Brehal, with a glance at George.

"No—no. I do not guess."

"Then, let me present to you Monsieur Courtenay, my future husband. He was the friend, the best friend of your *fiancé*, and I hope that you will be always my best friend."

"And I—I hope that you will be happy, madame," said Mlle. Mezenc, almost overcome with emotion.

George hastened to put an end to this scene, which the doctor was observing with a very attentive eye, although he was very preoccupied, for private reasons, with the discovery of the will.

Mme. Brehal alone saw nothing; love is blind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE first day of happiness is the sweetest in the life of a lover, but this day has a to-morrow, and it sometimes happens that the to-morrow cuts short the happiness of the previous day.

This was certainly not George Courtenay's case twenty-four hours after he had become engaged to Mme. Brehal. On the contrary, he felt as if he had a new lease of life. Delivered from the cruel doubts, the weight of which he had borne for three weeks, he saw the future through a veil of rose-color, and he was amazed that he had been so slow to comprehend that his intimacy with the lovely widow of the Avenue de Villiers could only end in marriage. And, as often happens when one has hesitated for a long time, he wished to pass at once from resolution to execution. The scene in the park affected him at moments like a dream, one of those dreams with less wavering outlines than others, and which give the dreamer the illusion of reality and the memory of which is not dispelled on awakening. Those vows exchanged between the Oriental kiosk and the English cottages still rang in his ears, and yet he wondered if it were true that she was going to be his forever, the Gabrielle whom he had loved for a year, without being willing to acknowledge it to himself. He thought only of her, and the affair of the recovered will did not interest him much more than the private sentiments of Mlle. Mezenc.

After the indispensable visit to Maurice Saulieu's notary, George had shut himself up in his house to enjoy his happiness, and he did not go out, as he did not dare to return to Mme. Brehal, who perhaps

was not sorry to remain alone after so many sweet emotions. He had even forgotten his friend Coulanges, whom he had left with the two ladies in the marble pavilion.

He went to bed very late, and in the morning a gracious little note, signed "Gabrielle," arrived to fill him with joy. Mme. Brehal begged him to join her that evening in her box at the opera, and asked him if he would like to accompany her the next day to the fashionable shops. This desire to occupy herself with the indispensable preparations for a wedding delighted him, and gave him an idea. He had seen at his jeweler's a day or two before a beautiful bracelet, and he thought he might permit himself to offer it to her that evening at the opera. He hastened to dress and was about to go out to buy it, when Coulanges arrived with a face full of business. Coulanges was the only friend that he cared to see at that moment; he received him with open arms and commenced by asking him what had become of him since the day before.

"If I should tell you that I had passed all my time in running after a damsel who belongs to the stage you would not believe me," answered the doctor.

"Oh, yes, indeed I would," laughed George.

"You needn't laugh. When you know my reasons I think you will approve of me. But first let me congratulate you, my dear fellow. Madame Brehal is lovely, and she loves you, I know. I read it in her eyes, from the commencement of breakfast, and when she came to announce that you had come to an agreement, I saw that she longed to throw herself into your arms."

"You exaggerate, my dear Coulanges. But I acknowledge that I am very happy, for I adore her, and I sought foolishly to prove to myself the contrary. She, on her side, doubted if she had inspired in me a serious feeling. And, from misunderstanding to misunderstanding, we might have remained all our lives loving each other without speaking of it. An explanation was needed to drive away the clouds."

"Confess that I contributed a little to this happy ending. If I had not persisted so much you would not have gone, Madame Brehal would have been angry, and, who knows, perhaps you would never have seen her again."

"That is true, and I thank you cordially for having forced my hand. But I owe you some information, for the foolish idea about Monsieur de Pontaumur is set at rest."

"Let us bet that it was what I thought in the first place, a chamber-maid.

"No, Madame Brehal says not. But she took so calmly the story I told her of your nocturnal adventure that I blush now at having suspected her."

"What! did you drag me into it?"

"I couldn't help it, since you saw the man enter the fenced-in inclosure."

"But what will Madame Brehal think of me? I am afraid that I shall seem in her eyes a curious fool and become her pet aversion."

"Why so? She thinks that you have done her a service, for it was important for her to be warned of this man's maneuvers. Let me tell you what we think, she and I."

"What I think also, very probably."

"It appears to us to be evident that he seeks to compromise her, to revenge himself for having been disdained and finally dismissed. Last Wednesday she sent word, before twenty persons, to forbid him to enter her house. His sentimental attitudes upon the top of the mound of earth have had no other end, and he would not, perhaps, be sorry if I should resent his behavior on Madame Brehal's account."

"That would be a very foolish move."

"Yes; and I shall take care not to make it. There is a simpler means of putting an end to his extravagances, and that is to build a wall twenty feet high, which will very shortly be done. His entrances through the gate will also be stopped by having the gate nailed up. At present, we can not explain how he obtained the key, but we shall end by knowing, perhaps. He must have taken an impression of the lock or used a skeleton key. Now, what was he going to do there? Upon this point an idea has come to me. I think that on the evening you encountered him, he was roaming as usual about the hotel. He must have seen you leave your cab and enter it again. Then, thinking rightly that you would be very much astonished at seeing him at such an hour at the end of the Avenue de Villiers, and hoping that you would follow him, he arranged to pass quite near your carriage—"

"It is probable, and I was right in preventing you from giving the alarm. If Madame Brehal's domestics had surprised him hidden in the pavilion, there would have been a frightful scandal, and that is exactly what he wanted. You would not believe, by the way, how Mademoiselle Mezenc detests him; she spoke of him to me with horror."

"She must, indeed, have many reasons to hate him. But, since you have spoken of her, tell me what you think of her."

"I found her absolutely charming. She is rarely beautiful, she has much wit and much heart, too much heart, perhaps."

"Then she pleases you. When I tell that to Madame Brehal, she will be very glad."

"Good heavens! Has she any intentions in regard to me?"

"Matrimonial, my dear fellow. There, the secret is out. But I am not uneasy. You will know how to defend yourself."

"Yes, by Jove! And I shall have no difficulty, for I have an idea that the young lady's heart is already captured. She loves some one, and she loves without hope. I guessed that in talking to her. And it certainly is not I who has inspired her with the passion which has taken possession of her."

"At all events, her husband will not be unlucky, for Maurice left her a very pretty fortune. He was richer than I thought."

"But she refuses this fortune. She said so before you, and she repeated it again and again after your departure. Madame Brehal tried to persuade her that she ought to accept it, but it was of no use."

"So long as she has not renounced our friend's legacy by an authentic deed, she can always change her mind," said George, shaking his head.

"Then, you do not believe in the sincerity of her apparent disinterestedness?" asked the doctor, quickly.

"I have no fixed opinion upon that point; I have only doubts. But what do you think of this resurrection of the will?"

"It is precisely about that that I have many things to tell you. You have seen the notary?"

"Yesterday, on leaving Madame Brehal's house. He understands nothing, and, in fact, it is incomprehensible. The will reached him by post. The address, in a writing we neither of us knew, bore the stamp of the Madeleine office. Inside the envelope there was no line of explanation. The sender has preserved the most absolute *incognito*."

"But, by seeking for him, it seems to me that he can be found. You, who knew Saulieu intimately, must know what persons he might have confided it to."

"There was no one. I was the one who was to take it to the notary. The incomplete note I found in his pocket-book is evidence of that. The will was in his rooms, I am almost certain. I searched there the day after the duel, and I could not discover it. Two days

after, his provincial cousins arrived and took posssession of all that belonged to him, and I then retired, as you know."

"Do you suppose that these relations could have found the paper which disinherited them and were honest enough to send it to the notary?"

"Oh! no. I am sure, on the contrary, that if they had become possessed of it they would have burned it. One person alone was interested in its production, and that person is Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"Who refuses to benefit by it, and who, perhaps, was ignorant that she had been made sole legatee."

"She knew, at least, that the will existed. I told her so."

"But what reason could she have for producing it, since she will not accept the legacy?"

"Perhaps to show how disinterested she is by renouncing it publicly."

"You think it was she who sent it, then? The devil! You open strange horizons before me."

"My dear fellow, I affirm nothing. I simply use my reason, and my reason leads me to think that Mademoiselle Mezenc might very well have something to do with this mysterious turning-up of the will."

"Because she is the heir," murmured the doctor, thoughtfully. "But, I too, use my reason, and I wonder in the first place why she should have waited three weeks before inclosing this will to the notary."

"Probably because she did not have it."

"Then she must have found it some time after Saulieu's death. Has she been to his rooms?"

"Not that I know of. The seals were put on immediately, and they were taken off at the request of his relations."

"Who doubtless took good care that no stranger should enter their cousin's domicile. It must be supposed, then, that one of them, seized with a sudden friendship for Saulieu's *fiancée*, sacrificed his own interest to enrich her."

"That is highly improbable. None of them knew her."

"Or, perhaps one of her friends, by some unexplained chance, discovered the will."

"I do not know that she has any friends. But what is the use of worrying yourself? It is time lost, doctor, and for my part I confess the problem does not interest me. I have done my duty. I went to the notary, because he summoned me. I told him that,

as Maurice had appointed me executor, I would acquit myself of the obligation as well as possible; but I also pointed out to him that it did not depend upon me to make the relatives disgorge nor to induce Mademoiselle Mezenc to accept the property. He promised to see to this, and he will do whatever is best. The rest is of little consequence to me; and just now I have too much else to occupy my mind to guess enigmas. You, who are not going to be married, can try, if it amuses you."

"It does not amuse me precisely, but it makes me uneasy. And since you see no reason why I should not mix myself up in it, you can answer me one more question."

"Go on!"

"Do you know if poor Saulieu's furniture has been sold?"

"Oh! of course. The cousins lost no time in converting into money what they could not carry away. There will be some difficulty in recovering the property from them, if Mademoiselle Mezenc claims it."

"But the furniture?"

"Oh, the furniture was not worth much. Maurice was a sort of stoic who despised luxury and who had only the most ordinary stuff in his rooms. I even remember that his *fiancée*, who did not share his ideas at all, sometimes scolded him about it."

"Then the heirs did not take away the furniture?"

"No, certainly not. They sent it to the Hôtel Drouot."

"When?" exclaimed the doctor.

"I don't know exactly. Stay! Yes, the notary told me that the sale took place quite recently."

"The day before yesterday, perhaps?"

"I can't tell precisely. But if you want to know I can ask the notary. But what the deuce do you mean by all these questions, you interrogation point of a doctor?"

"You shall know. I have not finished. Did you ever notice at Saulieu's a sort of chiffonier made of ebony?"

"Never. Maurice had nothing of that sort."

"The one I speak of was old, or, at least, had that appearance. It was in bad condition."

"Then I am certain that it did not belong to Maurice, for Maurice cared only for new things. If he had had such a thing he would have got rid of it."

"It is singular; I imagined—"

"What? that Maurice had artistic feelings? You are quite mis-

taken. Maurice was very well educated, and very intelligent, but he did not appreciate antiquities. One can't be everything."

"But he was fond of books?"

"Yes; he was not a large buyer, but those which he possessed were well chosen, and he took great care of them."

"Then he had a book-case to keep them in?"

"Not precisely. His study was furnished with wooden shelves which contained some hundreds of books. His favorite volumes—those he read constantly—he kept in a queer sort of a thing, half-shelves and half-drawers, of moderate dimensions, and very poor quality, which was placed by his bedside."

"I thought you said just now he did not like antiquities?"

"But he valued this as a souvenir."

"Was not this book-case fastened to a table?"

"Yes; and the feet of this table were what gave it its value in his eyes."

"They were newer than the rest of it, were they not?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Wait a minute. Describe the object, please."

"As I remember, it came to Maurice from his uncle, who died last year, and Maurice had kept it, I don't know why, for it was of no use. Two of the feet were gone."

"And he had new ones made?"

"Among other talents, Mademoiselle Mezenc has that of making pretty little things of wood and ivory. She has at her house a machine, very old-fashioned to-day, a sort of turning-lathe."

"And it was Mademoiselle Mezenc who turned the feet of the table?"

"Exactly: and Maurice, delighted with the gift, would not have parted with his book-case for all the gold in the world. But I wish you would tell me how these details can interest you?"

"Suppose I should tell you that the heirs sold this piece of furniture?"

"Well, what of it? They had no reason for keeping relics."

"And that I was present when it was sold?"

"Where? at the Hôtel Drouot?"

"You no longer remember, then, the conversation that took place the other day, when we were dining at the club?"

"I wasn't listening. I only remember what Capdenac, the architect, said about Pontaumur."

"Then you did not hear what that idiot of a Vervelle yelled out

from one end of the table to the other, asking me what I was doing at the sale with an actress of the Bouffes?"

"No; and I don't see—"

"It was that actress who bought the piece of furniture with the new feet."

"Great good may it do her!"

"She bought it with my money, and it cost me twenty-five louis."

"So much the worse for you. But, my dear fellow, if it was to narrate your follies that you have detained me for half an hour, I must say that I find the joke a little tedious."

"You don't understand. I would have paid fifty louis rather than let Monsieur Corleon have the thing."

"Did he want it?"

"At any price. I obtained it only by accident, so to speak, because the auctioneer knew me and knocked it down quickly without giving Corleon time to bid again."

"It is singular—Corleon trying to acquire a book-case which belonged to the victim of his friend, Pontaumur. Well, you have it. What did you do with it?"

"I let my little friend have it, and I regret having done so."

"What, my dear Coulanges, you regret having been generous to a woman? I do not recognize you."

"And I, my dear Courtenay, am astonished that you have so little perspicacity. Hasn't the idea come to you of connecting this story of the Hôtel Drouot with an event which preoccupies you, whatever you may say?"

"No, indeed. You completely upset my ideas, by jumping so suddenly from my notary's office to the auction-room."

"The connection is not difficult to see, however."

"Possibly, but I don't see it yet. Enlighten, O Coulanges! my feeble intelligence!"

"Let us see. You told me that Maurice had left in his pocket-book a note which told you nothing, as the bullet had carried away a fragment of the paper, and—"

"Ah! I see now!" cried George. "Maurice had deposited his will in this queer book-case of his. I don't know why I did not think of it at once, for he spoke very often of that ridiculous piece of furniture. Mademoiselle Mezenc had made the feet. That was enough for him to be inspired with a sort of veneration for it. I don't see why I did not look into it."

"Others than you have done so," said the doctor. "But no harm is done, since the will is in the hands of the notary."

"Others, yes; but who? The furniture was entirely at the disposal of the heirs. Immediately after the seals were removed, they took possession of the apartment, and they did not leave it again, so to speak. They took turns in mounting guard."

"They must have rummaged everywhere. How did it happen that the will escaped their search? Was it hidden in a drawer, which they neglected to open? The chiffonier book-case had several drawers."

"I would bet that they opened every one of them."

"Perhaps there was a secret drawer. At all events, it is certain that they found nothing; for, if they had discovered the paper which disinherited them, the notary would never have heard of it."

"Wait a minute!" said George, striking his forehead. "Yes; I remember now, that in celebrating Mademoiselle Mezenc's artistic merits, Maurice, to give me a proof of her skill, told me that she had hollowed out the four feet of the table, and you had only to unscrew them to find a place very appropriate to hide a roll of papers in. There is no longer any doubt, Coulanges; the will was there, and the relations did not find it because they did not know of this peculiarity."

"Mademoiselle Mezenc knew about it, though, since she invented it; and, if we were sure that Saulieu told her where he had placed his will, the situation would be somewhat cleared up."

"Not for me, for she could not have touched the book-case, which went straight from Maurice's apartment to the auction-room. She did not know the heirs, and she did not buy the book-case."

"No; I did."

"For a young woman who is well disposed toward you, you told me."

"Yes; for Delphine du Raincy, the hope of the Bouffes."

"Good! and what did she do with her acquisition?"

"She took it away at once to her rooms in the Rue de Constantinople."

"Well, perhaps your Delphine had the idea of taking apart her wonderful purchase."

"I forbade her to touch it before seeing me; that does not prove anything, however, for curiosity is the least of her faults, and obedience is not one of her virtues. I should not be very much astonished, moreover, because she had an idea that it contained a hidden treasure. But, admitting that she did find the will, she would never have dreamed of sending it by post, especially as she did not know Saulieu, and still less his notary."

"That is true. Then we are no further advanced in our conjectures"

"I am afraid of one thing. Delphine is not incorruptible, and, if she were offered a large sum, she is quite capable of having given up her bargain. She swore to me never to part with her famous chiffonier, the importance of which I suspected; but I do not place much reliance on the oaths of women. Now, one could only have purchased it to obtain Saulieu's will, for it has no other value."

"Who could have done so?"

"Some one who knew that the will was there."

"Add, and whose interest it was to produce it."

"Assuredly."

"But this some one can not be Monsieur Corleon. It matters very little to him, I suppose, whether Mademoiselle Mezenc inherits or not. He has no connection with her."

"True; and yet the obstinacy with which he bid for the chiffonier has bothered me a good deal. Remember that he was willing to pay a very big price for it, and he has a reputation for being stingy. Corleon evidently had some secret reason for wanting it."

"Then it would be necessary to suppose that he acted in conjunction with the *fiancée* of Maurice Saulieu, whom his friend Pontaumur killed. If that were so, this Mademoiselle Marianne would be an abominable creature."

"That is the reason that I can not believe in any understanding between them. But if it were proved to me that Corleon bought the piece of furniture from Delphine, the complicity would be almost evident. Let me see. The sale took place the day before yesterday in the afternoon, and the notary received the will yesterday morning. The person who sent it by post must have procured it the day before yesterday in the evening."

"By obtaining the book-case from the girl. Well, you must be certain of this point. You have been to see Delphine, I suppose?"

"Unfortunately, no; I am not certain. When I left her at the door of the auction-rooms, I told her I should come to see her the next day, which was yesterday. Now, yesterday, we were invited to Madame Brehal's. I had no time to go to the Rue de Constantinople before the afternoon."

"I understand, but after you knew that the will had miraculously turned up, that was the time or never to hasten to Delphine's."

"I did not fail to do so. But Delphine, who was to have waited for me, had gone out. I told her maid that I would return at dinner-time, and I did so; but madame had come in during the interval

between my two calls, dressed and immediately gone out again. She had not left even a word of excuse for me."

"That was unpardonable," said George, laughing. "She should not have acted in that way to a friend who makes her such pretty presents."

"So I said to myself that there must be something under all this that I did not know; especially as the girl has a very pronounced bump of gratitude. I was not mistaken. I went again this morning to the Rue de Constantinople, and again Madame du Raincy was out."

"This is becoming serious; and if you were jealous—"

"Jealous of Delphine? Oh! dear me, no; but I could not understand, for other reasons, her prolonged absences. I talked with the maid, and she told me that her mistress, the day before yesterday, had made a new acquaintance, a noble lord, as she called him, and I found out that he had appeared for the first time at five o'clock, at the very moment when I was walking with you in the riding-school, and just an hour after the sale of the chiffonier."

"And you concluded that it was his design to appropriate that ugly piece of furniture. This is rather a far-fetched conjecture."

"I should not be surprised if it were a true one."

"At all events, this gentleman was not Monsieur Corleon, since Corleon dined that evening at the club, at the same table with us."

"Corleon has friends. One of them might have played the rôle of nabob with Delphine, and taken advantage of his intimacy to examine the book-case."

"Did you ask the maid if the book-case was still there?"

"Yes; but she did not seem to know what I meant. I had given her a louis for her information, and I did not get much for my money. But I do not consider myself beaten. I shall return to the chase; I know Delphine's habits, and I am sure I shall find her."

"By Jove! doctor, I admire your zeal, and I confess that it astonishes me. What good would it do you if you should discover that there are mysteries in Mademoiselle Mezenc's life? You do not think of marrying her?"

"No, but—don't you think, my dear George, that if this young girl is in connivance with Monsieur de Pontaumur's acolyte, it would be well to let Madame Brehal know what sort of a *protégée* she has?"

"Bah! that protection will not last always. Our marriage will settle that."

"The fact is, that it seemed to me that I read in Mademoiselle

Mezenc's face another sentiment than joy, when Madame Brehal announced to her that she was going to marry you, and if I dared to tell you an idea that came to me—"

"You may do so. I think that I can guess your idea."

"I wondered if you had not inspired a sentiment in her which she keeps carefully hidden, but which her eyes sometimes betray. Yesterday, in the salon of the kiosk, she gave a glance at you, and another at Madame Brehal, who, however, perceived nothing."

"I have spoken to Madame Brehal, and I shall do so again this evening, when I see her at the opera."

"You will not speak to her, I suppose, of our suppositions in regard to the young lady."

"No, no. I shall wait until we are certain. And now, my dear Coulanges, you must allow me to leave you. I am no longer my own master, you know; I am going to buy my engagement present, and, unless you care to go with me to the jeweler's shop—"

"It would be amusing enough, but it is better for me to try and find Delphine. This is the time she returns from her rehearsal, and I have some chance of finding her at home."

"Good luck to you! Shall I see you to-morrow?"

"This evening, if you like, at the club, after the opera."

"Very well," answered George, shaking the doctor's hand, as the two friends separated.

CHAPTER VIII.

Dr. Coulanges went away in a very reflective mood after his talk with George Courtenay. His suspicions had taken a body, and were much more precise, since he knew that the notary had received the will. He had scarcely any doubt now that this will had been hidden in the ebony chiffonier, and, to be certain of this, he had decided to push the investigation as far as possible. He had taken some time in starting out on his researches, but once started, he recognized no obstacles.

The twenty-five louis expended in the auction-room were nothing. He no longer regretted them, and he was ready to make any sacrifice to reach his end. But the problem was a complicated one. It was no longer simply a question of knowing what M. Corleon hoped to find in the chiffonier book-case; it was necessary, also, to find out why he was interested in Mlle. Mezenc, who alone profited by the unexpected discovery of Maurice Saulieu's last wishes.

He had seen, for the first time, the day before yesterday, that pitiful victim of the duel of Gennevilliers, that Marianne, whom M. de Pontaumur's bullet had touched in striking her *fiancé*, and her beauty had bewildered him. The next day, at Mme. Brehal's, her wit had charmed him. She inspired him with more than admiration; she inspired him with sympathy. And he did not often feel that sentiment for a woman, being naturally disposed to see the defects rather than the virtues of the weaker sex. He had even thought that he perceived at the end of the interview in the marble pavilion, that Mlle. Mezenc was not very much rejoiced at George Courtenay's marriage. He had also wondered if she were not jealous of the happiness of her benefactress, but it was a long way from this to take this young girl for a *protégée* of M. Corleon; and although he had allowed himself to entertain for a moment the ideas of his friend Courtenay, he could not believe that she had been mixed up in any way with M. de Pontaumur and his companions. Mlle. Mezenc declared that she would not accept the legacy left her; this cut short all harsh suppositions, and in pursuing his work as a detective, Coulanges hoped that he would be able to demonstrate at one and the same time Corleon's guilt, and Marianne's innocence. He was inclined to think that this affair of the Hôtel Drouot was attached by a mysterious bond to the criminal fraud which had cost Saulieu his life, and in the heat of conversation he had almost told George the story of the false bullet, and the screw driven into the butt of one of the pistols, but he did not wish to trouble Courtenay's happiness, and, besides, he judged it wiser to complete his investigations before exposing the facts to his friend.

Meanwhile, he could not better employ his time than by seeking for Delphine, and he walked toward the Rue de Constantinople which is not far from the Rue de Milan. He gained nothing for his pains.

The porter told him that Mme. du Raincy had not returned, and Coulanges did not care to mount four flights of steps to talk to a maid who gave him so little information with regard to his mistress. He feared that the maid would end by thinking him ridiculous, and he did not care to play at the house of a minor actress the rôle of a lover who comes three or four times a day to pull the bell of an apartment where he is not wanted. Delphine, besides, would not pass the whole week in running about to restaurants, and by returning at the dinner-hour the doctor would have some chance of at last finding her in. He also said to himself, that, after the fashion of Amanda—the Amanda of the popular street-song—Delphine

adored riding in a carriage, and that, by pushing on toward the Champs-Elysées, he might perhaps perceive her coming from the Bois de Boulogne, and stop her as she passed.

It was just the time for the carriage to return, and it was superb weather, clear and not too warm, a spring day, such as is seldom seen in Paris. Coulanges was afflicted with a tendency to stoutness, and on hygienic principles he loved to walk, so he did not neglect this occasion to do so, and he took the longest way by the Boulevard and the Place de la Concorde. As he entered the right alley, which fashionable promenaders prefer, the descent from the Bois commenced; it was a procession of luxurious equipages and simple cabs.

Upon the chairs lining the side of the avenue were seated hundreds of observers, who had come there to inspect the carriages, the horses, and the toilets, or simply to warm themselves in the sun. Young dudes watched for a propitious moment to salute a fashionable woman; which is an excellent way of making the passers-by believe that one has fine acquaintances; little matters it to them, besides, whether the salute be returned or not.

The doctor was not one of these. He did not give himself the trouble to take off his hat to the great equipages, or the stylish little coupés, but he could have named almost all the women who occupied them, for he knew the Parisian world thoroughly. Moreover, after ten minutes' walk, he had only perceived celebrities who interested him very little; great ladies who were not his patients or the queens of the *demi-monde;* the old guard were all out, and he had too often passed them in review to take any pleasure in contemplating them.

He was soon tired of elbowing and being elbowed by the crowd which filled the alley, and he decided to sit down at the foot of a great tree, about which were some vacant chairs. He thought with reason that it would be better to examine there the various vehicles which passed down the avenue. All kinds of carriages were represented, from the superb landau with powdered footmen and coachman, and crests upon the doors and harnesses, to the hired victoria driven by a coachman in white gloves like one of the Ambigu guests.

Delphine would probably be in one of the latter, so Coulanges devoted himself particularly to inspecting with a rapid glance the open or closed cabs which defiled before him. It was trouble lost, for he saw only unknown faces.

The ungrateful occupation to which he had conscientiously given himself up ended by wearying him, and he thought of going away, when he noticed not very far from the place where he had taken up his position a little coupé stationed close to the stone coping which separates the sidewalk from the roadway. This coupé had a certain air of mystery about it. It was painted a dark green, without crest and even without initials, and drawn by a handsome sorrel horse, which a coachman in a coat with three capes had sufficient difficulty in keeping quiet. The window panes were replaced by wooden blinds, hermetically closed, but on the side toward the sidewalk, the blind was raised only two thirds, and on the top of this blind was resting a small hand in a black glove, the hand of a woman who was hidden in the interior of the carriage. This hand seemed to be a signal. The fingers were nervously beating a measure on the top of the blind. The lady was doubtless waiting for some one and was impatient at his non-arrival. It was certainly not Delphine's hand. The careless person, whom Coulanges had been seeking for twenty-four hours, would not have dreamed of hiding herself. She would, on the contrary, have been very proud to show herself in so fine a turn-out. And then Delphine betrayed her breeding a little in her extremities, while the hand which he saw was small and well formed.

There was here doubtless one of those Parisian adventures, which are met so often that they no longer excite the curiosity of the passers-by, and under any other circumstances the doctor would have taken no notice of it; but just now everything interested him. As he had exercised his mind so much in guessing enigmas, he saw enigmas in the most insignificant facts, so he did not lose sight of the carefully closed coupé, and he was preparing to approach it softly at the risk of missing while doing so the damsel he was watching for. But at the moment he was about to rise, he perceived about thirty feet from him and about twenty from the carriage M. de Pontaumur, advancing with a cigar in his mouth. Instead of being upon the band of asphalt which marks the middle of the alley, M. de Pontaumur was walking betreen the first line of iron benches and the single chairs at the foot of the trees like that which the doctor occupied. He did not see Coulanges, but if Coulanges had carried out his first plan they would soon have been face to face.

Coulanges had the presence of mind to keep himself hidden, and Pontaumur, as he arrived opposite the coupé, stopped suddenly and commenced to study the horse. Immediately, the hand disappeared and the blind was drawn up.

"I have good eyes," thought the doctor, "and if the lady opens the door I shall see who she is."

But Pontaumur, after pausing a moment, turned back a little, left the side walk, passed behind the carriage and suddenly became invisible. Ten seconds after, the sound of a door quickly closed struck Coulanges' ear, and the sorrel horse started off like a flash, dragging the coupé up the avenue.

Coulanges had not understood very well this movement, and when the coupé rolled away he expected to see Pontaumur standing in the place where he had seen him disappear behind the carriage. But the place was empty. The carriage bore away Pontaumur to unknown regions with a woman no less unknown. The operation had been so deftly performed that it must have been arranged beforehand between the two. It was an abduction, but instead of the man abducting the woman, as is usually the case, it was the woman who abducted the man, and the place had been singularly chosen by this more or less well assorted couple. In general, lovers who have anything to hide do not make appointments in the middle of the Champs-Elysées, at the time when the carriages are returning from the Bois. However, the agreement was evident. The coupé with wooden blinds had come from the Place de la Concorde, and it stopped exactly opposite the grand entrance of the Palais de l'Industrie. Pontaumur had come in an opposite direction, and he knew that he was going to meet the dark-green coupé, for he had walked as near as possible to the road, and had given a glance at each passing or stationary carriage. No one, to tell the truth, had taken any notice of his maneuvers, no one excepting Coulanges. The chairs, which were in the neighborhood of the meeting, were occupied by a bourgeois family; these good people were admiring the scene, and if they had noticed a gentleman walk behind an hermetically closed carriage, they surely would have suspected no mischief.

"Did Pontaumur perceive me?" wondered the doctor. And he answered himself: "No, it is not probable. If he had known that I were here, he would have passed on his way, making a sign to the lady to go and wait for him further on. He did not suspect that I was watching him unless—"

The doctor stopped short in his reasoning. The situation suddenly appeared to him in a new light.

"Unless the fellow did it on purpose," he thought, continuing his monologue. "Is it perhaps the continuation of his expeditions to the Boulevard Berthier? Who knows, if this time, also, he was not seeking to attract the attention of people who know him? He

hoped perhaps that I would tell this story at the club, and that certain people would believe it was Madame Brehal. It was not she certainly who was in the mysterious coupé, but nothing would prevent me saying it if I cared to do mischief, nor even from thinking it, for after all I saw nothing but a hand in a black glove."

Upon further reflection, Coulanges concluded that this imaginary supposition would, after all, have no serious basis; Pontaumur might very easily meet a lady in the Champs-Elysées, without Mme. Brehal counting for anything in the adventure. And he again returned to his occupation of observing the carriages, for he had not yet lost all hope of seeing Delphine pass. The idea then came to him that he would not be much further advanced if she should pass without seeing him. The carriages which descend from the Arc de Triomphe take the south side of the avenue, and Coulanges seated on the north side could scarcely call across the street to the person he was seeking. And in order to be ready for any event, the worthy doctor hailed a passing cab and engaged it by the hour, so as to have it close at hand in case he should be obliged to follow Delphine. He no longer counted very much on her appearance, for it was getting late, but he could still use the cab, as he did not intend to go on foot to the Rue de Constantinople. Not five minutes after he had engaged the cab, an elegant blue coupé attracted his attention. This one was not hermetically sealed like the other; the lowered windows permitted him to see the woman who occupied it, and as the horse was not going very fast, the doctor had plenty of time to recognize Mme. Brehal.

"Ah!" he murmured. "I knew very well it was not she who departed with Pontaumur."

Of course he bowed, and Mme. Brehal not only returned his bow, but stopped her carriage.

Coulanges, flattered by this attention, hastened to the door and was received as graciously as possible.

"I am delighted to see you," said the lady, "and I have a great mind to take you away with me. We will go as far as the lake and I will set you down wherever you like."

This amiable proposition did not suit the doctor's business at all, and he excused himself as well as he was able. He pretended that he was expected at five o'clock for a consultation.

"You have patients then?" asked Mme. Brehal, laughing. "I would not have believed it. But I do not wish to incommode you, and I give you your liberty on condition that you will come and see

me as soon as possible. You are George's best friend, and George's friends are mine. Have you seen him to-day?"

"I have just left his house," answered Coulanges.

"He will be at the opera this evening in my box and there will be a place for you, if you care to come. We will speak of dear Marianne. I fear that she is ill, for she did not come this morning as usual, and on my way home I shall stop in the Rue Blanche to inquire for her. *Au revoir*, my dear doctor," concluded Mme. Brehal, making a sign to her coachman to drive on.

"I would have made a bet that dear Marianne would be ill to-day," thought the doctor, going back to his place, "and my prescriptions would not cure her. It is Courtenay's marriage which has given her a heart-ache. She suffers much more from it, I fear, than she suffered from poor Saulieu's death. What a singular girl she is! She does not regret her *fiancé*, and she will not have the fortune he left her. She only wants what she can't have. I pity her, but what can I do? I should not succeed in consoling her, and I do not care to try, and yet I acknowledge she is charming. What a pity she is not destined for the theater like Delphine!"

This monologue came to an end as Coulanges reached his chair, and, at the same instant, an unexpected spectacle attracted his attention.

A victoria came dashing down the avenue, driven by a woman. A groom seated beside her showed unequivocal signs of fear, and the coachmen, driving in an opposite direction, took good care to keep well out of the way, to avoid a collision. This badly dressed domestic who was not in his proper place, this horse which had once been a good animal, but was now used up, the lady's manner of driving, were all the the height of bad form, and the people who lined the avenue, smiled at the grotesque equipage.

The doctor laughed, like everybody else, and even more when he recognized the damsel.

"It is Delphine," he murmured in amazement.

And it was she. The foolish creature bothered herself very little with turning aside for other carriages and seemed to think nothing of the dangers of collision. Leaning forward, with both hands clasped tight about the reins, she took the attitude of a driver in a hippodrome, conducting a four-horse chariot about the course, and her smiles seemed to say to the astonished promenaders who watched her pass: Admire me; admire my carriage, my groom, my horse and my chic!

"If she continues in that way," thought Coulanges, "she will

break her neck, there's no doubt of that, and I shall never know it the will was in the chiffonier. I will try to overtake her, if it is only to pick her up when she goes head over heels into the gutter."

His cab was standing close by, and the driver held himself in readiness.

"Follow it," said the doctor, pointing to the victoria. "At the pace she is going, you won't be able to catch her, but you shall have ten francs, *pourboire*, if you don't lose sight of her."

"It will be all right," said the coachman, "that beast is played out and my mare is a good one."

And upon this assurance, the pursuit commenced.

Delphine was already at the Place de la Concorde, but she was going much slower; the horse was winded.

"Is she going to turn and go up the avenue again?" thought Coulanges. "She is quite capable of it. She imagines that all the millionaires of Paris are contemplating her. No! fortunately, she is going home. At last we shall have an explanation."

The victoria, instead of taking the Rue Royale, to the great astonishment of the doctor, turned into the Rue de Rivoli, which is not the way to reach the Quartier de l'Europe.

"Where the devil is she going?" murmured Coulanges, satisfied to see that if his cab was not gaining any ground, it was at all events not losing any. "Probably to see the rich lord who has paid for that frightful turn-out. So much the better! I shall know who he is."

The victoria turned into the Rue Castiglione, crossed the Place Vendôme, and, entering the Rue de la Paix, turned up the Rue Neuve-de-Petits-Champs.

Coulanges did not understand this at all, but he encouraged his driver to keep on, and the driver plied his whip with ardor. All went well to the corner of the Rue Vivienne. There, an omnibus barred the passage of the cab, while the victoria, which had still a good start, continued to keep on. The doctor, excited by the ardor of the pursuit, swore at his coachman, who could, however, do nothing. It was impossible to advance. The omnibus had become locked with a wagon and its enormous bulk encumbered the road. It even intercepted the view, and although Coulanges rose to his feet, he could not perceive the victoria. The coachman turned round to say to him:

"Have no fear, she is not lost. She has taken the Rue des Petits-Pères."

This information did not, at all, reassure the doctor. The street

in question is not long, but it is crossed by three or four other streets which extend in different directions.

How was it possible to guess if the capricious Delphine had taken the one which leads toward the Bourse, or if she had continued straight on toward the Quartier Bonne-Nouvelle? Coulanges had become enamored of the chase, and he would have run all over Paris to have captured his prey.

Finally, after three or four minutes, which appeared very long to the hunter, the omnibus became disengaged and rolled on, leaving the passage free to the carriages accumulated in a line. The driver meant to gain his *pourboire*, and he managed so well, that he immediately took the lead, and the horse, vigorously whipped, dashed into the Rue des Petits-Pères, which comes out upon the place of the same name.

As the cab entered this place, the doctor had the unexpected joy of perceiving the victoria standing before the church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, but Delphine was not there.

Her groom, who had alighted, was examining the knees of the panting horse, and he did not appear very happy. He seemed to be asking himself if the poor animal would last until it reached the stable.

The intelligent coachman, who had driven Coulanges, drew up his cab against the sidewalk at the corner of the little frequented passage, which communicates with the Rue de la Banque, and Coulanges lost no time in alighting.

"Well! you didn't expect that, nor I either," said the coachman, pointing with the end of his whip to the victoria and the portal of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. "I knew I should catch her at last, though, but the stable-keeper won't be very well pleased; his horse is foundered."

"Wait for me there," interrupted the doctor, who did not wish to be left in the lurch, if, by chance, the chase should recommence; and he walked quickly toward the church. He decided not to enter, for fear he should miss her, and took up his station before the door.

He had not long to wait. Delphine appeared, and uttered a little cry of surprise on seeing him; but she did not attempt to avoid him; on the contrary, she came toward him with her hand held out and a smile upon her face.

"What! is it you?" she cried. "Ah, I didn't expect to meet you here. All the same, I am very glad to see you, my dear doctor."

"So am I glad to see you," growled Coulanges. "I have been running after you for two days."

"Yes, I know; my maid told me that you had come, and I was very sorry not to have been at home, but it wasn't my fault."

"Humph! you have made the conquest of a Russian prince, Justine told me that; but that is no reason for treating me as you have done. You might have left some message for me. If I hadn't seen you pass in the Champs-Elysées, I should still be wondering what had become of you."

"Ah! did you see me? In my victoria? How do you like my victoria?"

"It is beastly, my dear! The horse is twenty, if he is a day; and your groom looks as if he came out of a Jew pawnbroker's shop. If your boyard gave you that present —"

"Oh, no! I hired that for the day. I am going to have another one—one of my own, and which will have real *pschutt*. But I was in a hurry to cut a dash, and—"

"And you did cut a dash, indeed. Everybody was looking at you—and laughing at you."

"Because I drove myself? Why so? I didn't manage so badly, for a woman who has never learned."

"It was a miracle that you did not knock down somebody, especially in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, which isn't very broad."

"So you have been following me, then?"

"Virtually, since I am here. I followed you in a cab; I lost you ten times on the way, and I did not expect to find your rattletrap before a church."

"I went in to burn a candle to Notre Dame des Victoires."

"And what have you asked of Notre Dame des Victoires?"

"Well, I can tell you. I wanted my monsieur to return."

"Return? He is gone away already, then?"

"No—that is to say—well—we were to dine last night together at the Pavillon d'Armenonville. He told me that he would send his carriage at seven o'clock, but as it didn't come, I hired one and went there, but I didn't find him."

"The devil! That's a bad sign. And to-day—"

"To-day I went to the Grand Hôtel, where he lodges. He had gone out. Then I hired a victoria by the day. I hoped to meet him in the Bois, and I made the tour of the lake fifteen times, but he was not there."

"He has been making fun of you."

"It looks like it; and yet I can not believe it. He is so gentl manly, and then it happened so queerly."

"Tell me about it, and perhaps I will be able to give you goo advice."

"I ask nothing better, for I don't know what o do. But we can talk here."

"Well, let us go to your house."

"To my house! And if he comes?"

"If he comes, I will go away; but he will not come. You hav fallen upon a bird-of-passage, my poor Fifine, and this is no tim to quarrel with an old friend."

"Quarrel with you? Never! In the first place, you brought m luck."

"Bah! How?"

"You took me to the Hôtel Drouot, and it was there that he no ticed me."

"At the Hôtel Drouot?" cried the doctor, who thought at onc of Corleon.

"Yes, monsieur," said Delphine, "at the Hôtel Drouot; but didn't see him."

"It is very curious," interrupted the doctor; "and you must te me all about it. Send away your turn-out. I have a coupé whic will take us to your house, and we can talk on the way. Is you victoria paid for?"

"No; I owe thirty francs, without counting the *pourboire* for th groom."

Coulanges would have given much more not to lose the rest o the information, which promised so well. He hastened to put two louis into the hand of the groom, who was longing to take his un fortunate horse back to the stable.

Delphine, always appreciative of kind acts, entered the cab. The doctor gave the address to the driver, and they rolled off at a mod erate gait toward the Rue de Constantinople.

"It seems, then," began the doctor, "that your Russian prince—"

"In the first place," cried Delphine, "he is not a Russian at all he is a Spaniard, and his name is Fernando."

"What else? The Castilian must have a dozen names."

"Probably. But he did not think it best to tell them to me."

"You should have asked him."

"I didn't think of it, and then I expected that he would return. He told me that he lived at the Grand Hôtel, and I imagined that he was very well known."

"And when you asked for Monsieur Fernando, they laughed in your face? Confess that you have been something of a goose."

"My dear friend, anybody would have been taken in. A gentleman who takes me to dine at Bignon's, and slips twenty-five louis under my plate—of course I had confidence in him. Well, to proceed: After dinner we returned to my house to take tea. He asked me to sing something. He is very fond of music, and as I am as yet only so-so in musical ability, I proposed to go for Angele, one of my friends of the Bouffes, who plays the piano like an angel. He jumped at this proposition, so I went for Angele—she lives in the same street I do—and she executed for us all of Offenbach's operas; and, at midnight, Fernando took his leave."

"When did you first see him?"

"Fernando came to my house the day before yesterday."

"At what time?"

"As I was dressing to go to the theater, about two hours after I left the Hôtel Drouot; and I had installed my ebony chiffonier in the salon; it looks very pretty there."

"Is it still there?" asked the doctor, quickly.

"Why, do you imagine that I have sold it? No danger, my dear doctor, that I should part with an object given me by you. And the proof of that is, that I could have got a bigger price than was paid for it, before leaving the auction-room. The old Jew offered me fifty francs more if I would let him have it."

"Yes, I know; but didn't you tell me that a gentleman who stood near the auctioneer complimented you?"

"A little thin fellow, dark as a mulatto; but I did not answer him. I was too much occupied in giving my address to the clerk who had received my money."

"You had no need to give it, since you took the chiffonier away with you. Then this thin, dark gentleman knew your address?"

Mme. du Raincy, in few words, had perfectly described Corleon, and the doctor was wondering if it were he who had taken the name of an hidalgo.

"I don't know whether he heard it or not," replied Delphine; "but I know that I never saw him again. I saw only my Spaniard, who does not resemble him at all."

'But who was also in the room, and who must have asked your address at the desk. How else could he have found it out?"

"That is true. I hadn't thought of that. Well, whether he did or not, he came to see me two hours after the sale."

"You dined with him; you had music in the evening, and he bade you good-night. Well, what else?"

"That is about all. Fernando has not appeared again, though he promised to come the next day."

"Let me see. When you went for Angele, did he remain alone in your apartment?"

"Certainly; I didn't fear that he would steal anything. He was a gentleman; I told you that. But the next day I waited for him all day, without his turning up; still, I am sure he will come again."

"Pooh! You already know that he does not live at the Grand Hôtel, as he pretended. I would bet that he is no Spaniard, either."

"He does speak French perfectly, that's a fact."

"He is probably some practical joker."

"Excuse me," exclaimed Delphine, vexed; "you forget that he made me a present of twenty-five louis. The joke would be a trifle expensive, and I can't see any reason for it."

"I am afraid I do," muttered the doctor. "But tell me, how old is your Fernando, and what does he look like?"

"He looks to be about forty. He is very tall, and with immensely broad shoulders; he has a singular face, deeply bronzed; he wears a full black beard, and his hair is a little gray on the temples. Oh! he is enormously *pschutt*—all the women would run after him, simply for his looks."

"Did he wear a dark-green frock-coat?"

"Exactly."

"And a diamond in his scarf."

"A big diamond. Ah! you know him, then!"

"Perhaps," said Coulanges. "But here we are at your door. Will you permit me to come in? I want to see the chiffonier again."

"What a queer idea! But, if it amuses you, come on."

The doctor, preceded by Delphine, ascended the stairs, and they had scarcely entered the apartment, when he ran to the salon, where he had the satisfaction of perceiving the famous piece of furniture.

To take off the top piece, turn over the table with its four feet in the air, and kneel down to complete the operation was the work of a minute.

"Are you crazy?" asked Delphine in amazement.

Coulanges, instead of replying, unscrewed the four feet one after the other, without any difficulty, and saw that Courtenay's information was correct. They were hollow and—they were empty. He shook them and there fell out of one of the cavities a pink string which might have been used to tie up a roll of papers.

"Idiot that I was!" screamed Delphine. "The feet of the chiffonier were full of bank-notes, and I never suspected it!"

"Bank-notes? No, I think not," said Coulanges. "But, all the same, you were very wrong to leave Fernando alone with your chiffonier."

"Ah! the thief! It was to rob me that he sent me to Angele's! And I believed in his love of music! Heavens and earth! If I ever get him in my clutches, he will pass a bad quarter of an hour!"

"If you see him again, I advise you to say nothing to him, to follow him at a distance, until he enters somewhere, and then send for me by a messenger. In that way you will lose no time."

"And now, you are going?"

"Yes. I have some business to attend to, but come and see me to-morrow. You have rendered me a real service by relating the story of Fernando, and you deserve a reward."

The doctor took leave of Delphine, and ran down the four flights of stairs.

"Now," he thought, "I see what has happened; I see it as clearly as if I had been there; Corleon failed to obtain the chiffonier, but he had Delphine's address. He did not dare to operate himself, as he feared I had warned the girl against him; but he went and joined a friend who was waiting for him to learn the result of the sale, and this friend undertook to play the part of the Spanish don. The friend was Pontaumur, and he was going to the rendezvous when Courtenay met him leaving the riding-school. She described him so exactly that it is impossible to be mistaken. All is clear now, all, except one thing—one thing alone. Why is Pontaumur interested in Mademoiselle Mezenc?"

And as Coulanges entered his cab, he muttered between his teeth.

"That I will find out, if, to do so, I have to spy on them both!"

CHAPTER IX.

THAT evening, George, in full-dress and with a flower in his button-hole, entered the opera house at an hour when the fashionable world is still at dinner. The doctor, who was dining at the Café Anglais, was only at the salad, and yet he intended also to show himself in Mme. Brehal's box, in response to her gracious invitation; but the agreeable prospect of passing an hour or two there did not prevent him from doing full justice to his dinner and enjoying the heavy wines he delighted in. This was his way of refreshing himself after the fatigues and emotions of an eventful day.

George, who had no need of stimulants, had dined at home, intoxicating himself with his happiness, and arrived at the theater before the curtain was up, although he knew very well that he would not find Mme. Brehal there. A lover's watch is always fast, and George was madly, wildly in love. His case did not belong to either of the two best known categories of that affection of the heart, which those, who have never been attacked by it, would treat as a mental disease: it was not love at first sight, for he had known Mme. Brehal for years; nor was it that phenomenon which Stendahl calls crystallization, for he had not taken time to reflect. It was the bursting forth of a hidden fire which a word, a look from Gabrielle had caused to blaze up, as the sudden opening of a window fans a flame.

He now would have wished this marriage, which he had not thought of three days ago, to take place the next day. He even intended without delay to propose to Mme. Brehal to fix a very early date, and he hoped that she would join in with his ideas, for she had let him perceive that she was as impatient as he to have done with the wearisome preliminaries of their happiness.

On this particular evening "Don Juan" was to be given, and Gabrielle adored Mozart's music, which is the most agreeable of any to lovers' ears. It was the best accompaniment that George could desire to a low-voiced conversation between two lovers, isolated in the midst of the crowd. The tinkling airs of a ballet would have disturbed them; the trumpets of "Aïda" would have deafened them.

George arrived as they were finishing the overture, and entered the box, which was on the first tier. It held five, but there were to be but three, and he could dispose of the chairs as he pleased. It was quite a work of art to diminish the distance between them, without preventing freedom of movement.

He listened with some pleasure to the beautiful trio of the death of the commander, and during the less important morceaux which followed he gazed through his opera glasses at the house, which was filling more rapidly than usual. "Don Juan" is a treat, and the most blasé of subscribers do not wish to lose anything of it. There were many strange faces, for provincials and foreigners are invading more and more the opera house, and if this invasion continues, soon not a Parisian will be seen there. But he perceived some people that he knew, and as he exchanged bows, he thought to himself that his presence in Mme. Brehal's box was almost equivalent to a public declaration of their intended marriage, and he rejoiced at the thought.

The charming woman to whom the box belonged, entered during Zerlina's aria. George felt that it would be bad taste to speak at such a moment, so he contented himself with an eloquent pressure of the hand, and aided her to install herself in a corner of the box, receiving as his reward a smile more expressive than all the words in the world.

The chatelaine of the Avenue de Villiers was *en grande toilette*, as was befitting a solemn occasion. She had selected a gown of turquois velvet, embroidered with pearls and adorned with old Venetian point. Her beautiful neck and arms were bare, and on her right shoulder was a bunch of ostrich feathers clasped by a large sapphire. She carried a bouquet of gardenias, an exquisite fan, and an enameled opera-glass emblazoned with her monogram in diamonds. On her arm was the bracelet which George had sent her during the day, a marvelous work of art, without counting the value of the stones.

She gave little nods to certain of her friends, who whispered significantly as they scrutinized her. The particular attention accorded to her did not seem to embarrass her at all, and George had the pleasure of seeing that she was happy and proud to show herself in public with him. She then abandoned herself to the pleasure of listening to the melodies with which Mozart has embroidered his masterpiece, and he made no attempt to disturb her pleasure. But when it came to the "Maskers' Trio," he gently drew close to her, and they listened together in silence to the delicious music.

"How beautiful it is!" murmured George, when the last note had died away. "I never appreciated this lovely music before this evening. It was written for lovers, and they alone can understand its meaning."

"True, and I assure you that I understand it," breathed Gabrielle.

Their hands met and their eyes exchanged a vow. They were still dreaming when the curtain fell.

The intermission always brings about a change in attitudes as well as in sensations, and they recovered their former positions.

"Do you know what I am thinking of?" asked Gabrielle, laughing.

"I am thinking of you," replied George.

"I was thinking of those big boxes at the Opéra-Comique, where young girls are brought to be presented to a young man who arrives as if by accident. We have no need to play that farce, but this is indeed our betrothal evening. I read in the faces about me that to

morrow all Paris will know the news, and I am glad to have them know it."

"Then, you will not be angry if I implore you to abridge the delays which separate us from the happy day."

"Are you afraid that you will change your mind if you have to wait?"

"You are laughing at me, and I will not permit myself to ask you the same question. But, seriously, don't you think that there is no more foolish position than that of two people between their engagement and their marriage?"

"It is foolish and dangerous both. Poor Marianne has had a cruel experience of that. Fix any day you like, as soon as the law allows."

"In a month, if you are willing."

"I am not only willing, but I desire it. It is said, there is many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip; let us drink the cup before the accident happens. But, speaking of Mademoiselle Mezenc, do you know I haven't seen her to-day? She did not come to the pavilion this morning, and, as I was returning from the Bois this afternoon, I went to her house and they told me that she was ill. I asked to see her and sent in my name, but the answer came back that she would receive no one. Her refusal hurt me, and I wonder if I have offended her, without meaning to. Perhaps I should have insisted upon her breakfasting with us yesterday."

"Do you want my very sincere opinion?" interrupted George.

"Yes."

"Well, I think that you occupy yourself altogether too much with Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"You have already told me so, but—"

"Let her sulk if she likes. The decoration of your summer salon will gain by it, and you will lose nothing. Your *protégée* is not to be pitied, since it only depends upon herself to inherit Saulieu's fortune. She pretends that she does not wish it, but I am sure that she will accept. Perhaps she has already done so."

"George, you are unjust to that young girl."

"When you see the doctor, ask him what he thinks."

"The doctor! We are going to see him here, I hope. I met him this afternoon in the Champs-Elysées and I invited him to join us at the opera."

"Ah!" muttered Courtenay, with a slight frown.

"Do you disapprove? You are wrong," said Mme. Brehal, smiling. "The presence of your friend in my box will be more

remarked than your own. I am burning my ships this evening, and here I am definitely compromised. If you should change your opinion, I should never find any one else to marry me."

"Pardon me, Gabrielle. I love you so much that I am jealous of everybody. It is a villainous fault and I will try to correct it."

"I do not wish you to correct it. It is to your jealousy that we owe our happiness. If you had not imagined that Monsieur de Pontaumur—"

"Never speak of that man, I implore you. Every time I hear his name pronounced it enrages me. And when I see him, it is much worse, for he bows to me and I am obliged to return his salute, instead of striking him, as I would like to do."

Mme. Brehal was about to preach moderation, when Coulanges appeared, armed with a box of bon-bons, which he offered with rather a pretty compliment. This rather old-fashioned gallantry drew a jesting speech from George. "While you were about it, my dear fellow, why didn't you bring some oranges, too?"

Coulanges defended himself, and Mme. Brehal took his part, averring that the bon-bons were delicious.

"I do not reproach you for coming late," she said to him with a smile, "but you have sacrificed Mozart's music to the cuisine of the Café Anglais; confess it."

"Oh!" said the doctor, "I shall not deny that I only appreciate Mozart after a good dinner. But this evening I should have been here twenty minutes ago, if I had not been stopped at the door by —by a gentleman of our club, a gentleman whose conversation does not amuse me at all, and whom I had much difficulty in getting rid of."

"Who was it?" asked Courtenay.

"The one you see below there in the orchestra," responded Coulanges, who already regretted having said so much, and who wished to avoid pronouncing the name of Pontaumur. Mme. Brehal and George both looked in the direction he indicated and immediately recognized the man they detested.

M. de Pontaumur had taken possession of a chair on the left side of the orchestra, that is to say, opposite Mme. Brehal's box, and at this very moment he was regarding her with much attention. He had, however, the tact not to bow, and he changed his attitude the moment he perceived that he had been seen.

"One would really say that he was pursuing me," muttered George.

"He is a subscriber," observed Mme. Brehal. "It is natural enough to meet him at the opera."

"True," answered Coulanges, "but I also meet him everywhere. I saw him this afternoon in the Champs-Elysées and I find him here again this evening. It is too much."

"And he accosted you. I should like to know what he said."

"Polite trivialities. He feels that I bear him no good will since the duel, and he seeks to renew relations which were never intimate. I could not in decency turn my back upon him, but I was very cold, you may believe."

"Let us think no more of him," said Mme. Brehal.

"It will be all the easier to forget him, as he is going," responded the doctor.

"Yes," said George, "he is moving toward the door. He scarcely sat down."

"It is singular that he should leave just as the intermission is nearly over. It looks as though he entered the theater only to look at us three. But that man does nothing like any one else."

And as Mme. Brehal made a slight movement of impatience, Coulanges continued to explain what he had thoughtlessly said:

"Would you believe, madame, that, an instant before meeting you in the Champs-Elysées, I saw him glide mysteriously into a cab where an invisible woman was waiting for him? And the coupé bore them away toward the Arc de Triomphe. Was it not singular to choose the place where all Paris promenades?"

"His system is always the same," growled George. "He advertises himself by feigning to hide."

"This time, at least," said Mme. Brehal, laughing, "I shall not be compromised in Monsieur Coulanges' eyes, since he spoke to me in my carriage while an unknown was bearing away in hers this great conqueror But let us change the subject. What do you think of this marvelous opera, doctor, which I never hear without being transported, and which causes me every time new sensations?"

"Good gracious! Madame," responded the doctor, only too delighted to change the conversation, "you embarrass me terribly. I have stored away in my memory a fine assortment of ready-made phrases which I might use; nothing even would prevent me from enlarging upon the merits of artists who formerly sung 'Don Juan' and who have never been replaced; but I prefer to tell you quite simply that I am not competent to judge Mozart."

"You are not fond of music, and I pity you for not being so; but you have, at least, the courage of your opinion."

"But I adore music—as an aid to digestion. And to be entirely frank, I am going to say something which will sound dreadful in your ears. When I have had champagne with my dinner, I feel the need of hearing Offenbach. The fine brands of Burgundy prepare me admirably to enjoy the masterly works of Meyerbeer. To appreciate Mozart, I must taste beforehand the delicate bouquet of Château-Margaux. And this evening I offered myself two bottles of that king of Bordeaux wines which refreshed the old age of Cardinal Richelieu."

"Then you will be able to submit patiently to the four remaining acts. The one which is about to begin is the ballet act, which deserves to be listened to, but I permit you to talk."

The curtain rose, and the chair abandoned by M. de Pontaumur remained empty.

"Where can he have gone?" wondered Coulanges, whom this abrupt departure puzzled considerably, although he tried to appear not to attach any importance to it.

Since he had known the secret of the reappearance of the will the doctor had been rendered very uneasy by the acts of the person who had killed Maurice Saulieu, and who was evidently conspiring against the repose of Mme. Brehal. He had even made up his mind to watch him, and it was to watch him more easily that he had not repelled his advances, when he had met him in the corridors of the opera house. He wished to have a foot in the enemy's camp, and if he had resigned himself not to break with M. de Pontaumur it was because he was meditating a master-stroke.

He intended shortly to bring him face to face with Delphine, and to be present at the explanation which would be the result of the meeting between the false Spaniard and the actress of the Bouffes. Now, to arrive at his ends, it was necessary to sacrifice his repugnance, and keep up some connection with the *soi-disant* Fernando. But while waiting for an opportunity to present itself of confounding him, Coulanges would have given much to know what his tricky adversary was doing at this moment.

"He must be hatching some new plot," he thought, "and I should not be surprised if he were preparing some rascality. But what? He can not assassinate Madame Brehal as he assassinated poor Saulieu; for he did assassinate him, I no longer doubt it. The juggling with the bullets was not done without his knowing it. He will not employ that ingenious proceeding to get rid of Madame

Brehal; women do not fight duels. But if she is in his way, as Saulieu was, he will invent another means. But how was Saulieu in his way? That is what I have not guessed yet. If I knew it I should know all the rest, and I shall know it. I am the only one who can find the key of the enigma. Courtenay is in no condition to aid me. Lovers are good for nothing."

These recollections were interrupted by Mme. Brehal. Coulanges was seated at the back of the box, and she turned to him to say behind her fan:

"Don't you find the Don Juan type of man intensely disagreeable? To love all women is to love none."

"Not only disagreeable, but ridiculous. He allows himself to be duped like a school-boy. Why, Zerlina herself, that little goose of a Zerlina, mocks him outrageously."

"I wish the same would happen to all like him."

"The fact is, he is punished enough, and I do not see why he should be cast into a burning abyss at the end. This torture renders him interesting. It would be enough for him to be ridiculous. His victims would be much better avenged."

"You are right. Contempt is the weapon I should use if I were pursued by a Don Juan, and I should be infinitely obliged to my friends if they did not have recourse to violent means."

George understood the allusion, and his face crimsoned, for he had not given up the idea of punishing M. de Pontaumur, when he should find a pretext to seek a quarrel with him without compromising Mme. Brehal. But he said nothing, and the doctor, who concurred in Mme. Brehal's wise opinion, made no reply. The act was finished without any one speaking again, and without the reappearance of M. de Pontaumur.

Coulanges was dying to go and see if he could find him in the foyer or corridors. After indulging in wild conjectures as to the motives which had led M. Corleon's friend to leave his place, the doctor had reached the point of wondering if it would not be well to squarely accost him and lead the conversation to the lady of the Avenue de Villiers. The idea was dangerous, but it had its good side. Pontaumur might let fall some word which would betray his designs.

"Would you believe it, gentlemen? I came to-night in a cab," said Mme. Brehal. "I dined very late, and I did not wish to lose the first act. Now, I have a coachman who never has his wits about him, and at eight o'clock my coupé was not harnessed. The

horse which I prefer had to be shod, so I was forced to send for a cab."

"But, I suppose, you gave orders to your people to come for you?" said Courtenay.

"Oh! very precise orders. The coupé is to be stationed at the corner of the Rue Halevy and the Boulevard Haussmann."

"Why so far away?"

"Because Max, my favorite, is a shy animal, and hard to manage. When he is in a file of carriages he does not keep in his place; and I prefer to walk a few steps rather than to expose him to the noise and bustle—especially when I have you to accompany me. He ought to be here already; but I am the worst-served woman in Paris, and I should not be astonished if my coachman was late."

"Would you like to have me go and see?"

"No," said Mme. Brehal. "I would much prefer to keep you here, as I shall not remain till the end. I am a little fatigued, and I have a hundred things to do to-morrow morning. I will go after hearing the serenade of the third act."

"But I can go," exclaimed the doctor. "I saw your coachman to-day in the Champs-Elysées, and I shall recognize him easily."

"You saw my coupé also, and Max is a dark bay, with four white feet."

"I have more indications than I need. I will go and return in a few minutes. George will not be angry with me for leaving him with you."

George, indeed, made no objection to this arrangement, and Mme. Brehal thanked the doctor, who hastened to depart.

He made up his mind to run to the Boulevard Haussmann, speak to the coachman, and immediately return to hunt for M. de Pontaumur.

But it was written above that the doctor should never do what he intended to do.

He was in such a hurry to undertake his expedition that he did not take his overcoat. The season permitted him, however, to show himself in his evening dress in the streets which adjoin the opera house, and a gentleman, whose place is on the first tier, does not promenade in the foyer with his overcoat on.

The doctor rapidly descended the staircase, and reached the entrance without meeting the man whom he proposed to seek on his return. He did not stop, but hastened along the Rue Halevy. A solitary carriage was stationed where the Boulevard Haussmann crosses the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, a carriage which he took at

first for Mme. Brehal's. As he approached he perceived that he was mistaken. It was indeed a coupé, but the coachman wore a coat with three capes, and the horse was a sorrel.

"I could swear that that is the dark green coupé into which Pontaumur slipped in the Champs-Elysées," thought Coulanges. "Yes, it is the same; there are the wooden blinds. Oh! oh! the mystery becomes complicated. But this time I shall find out something, for I shall mount guard near this box of surprises."

He thought for a moment of questioning the coachman, but he very soon reflected that the man had doubtless orders to be silent, and that he would be able to extract absolutely nothing from him. It would be better to watch at a distance, and this he decided to do. He continued his way therefore, and he finally perceived at the end of the street another coupé which was certainly Mme. Brehal's.

Now was the time to discharge his mission, and then he could return to establish himself as a sentinel near the suspicious coupé!

He passed the carriage to examine it closer, to be sure that he was not mistaken. The dark bay with four white feet was there, and moreover the monogram, G. B., appeared upon the door. The coachman, besides, recognized him at once as the gentleman who had spoken to his mistress in the Champs-Elysées, and immediately assumed the classic pose of fashionable drivers, the reins well gathered together in the left hand, the whip resting upright upon the right leg, and the eyes fixed between the ears of the horse.

"I see that you are at your post," said Coulanges. "Madame Brehal has sent me to tell you that she will be here in three quarters of an hour."

"Monsieur may count upon my not budging," responded the coachman; and, as he saw that the doctor was disposed to talk, he added: "I have no wish to have any accident. My horse is nervous, and he runs away for nothing. You can do nothing with him in the midst of carriages. I only drive him where there is not much passing."

"Madame was right not to risk him in front of the opera house, then?" said Coulanges."

"Madame would do much better to sell him, but madame keeps him for his looks."

"Yes; a dark bay, with white feet, is not bad."

"But he is no good. The mare which I had this afternoon, when madame went to the Bois—ah! she is a different animal! But it needs a strong hand to hold this one; he drags this little coupé

like a feather, and when he is in motion, you have to keep an eye on him all the time."

"He does appear shy."

"Shy? Why, five minutes before monsieur appeared, a boy touched him as he passed; well, he gave me a jerk; my hands hurt me still. I should not dare to leave my box for an instant, for a crack of a whip, or a door suddenly shut, and away he would go, like a shot."

"The devil! The dark bay is a dangerous beast. Fortunately, you know how to manage him."

"Oh, as for that, I know my business."

The doctor, while talking, had not lost sight of the dark-green coupé, which remained motionless thirty feet behind. The two carriages were facing the same way, and Mme. Brehal's coachman could not see the other. It was, therefore, useless to ask him if the mysterious coupé had been there for a long time or if any one had got out of it. Besides, Coulanges thought that he had talked long enough with a servant, and did not care to continue the conversation.

"I will tell Madame Brehal that you are ready," he said, turning back toward the opera house.

He passed again quite close to the carriage with wooden blinds; the coachman seemed to be asleep, and paid no attention to him. But, as he reached the corner of the Rue Gluck, the doctor saw, in the deserted Chaussée d'Antin, a man who had his back turned toward him, and who was talking with some one. The general appearance of this man reminded him of the gentleman he was seeking, and he advanced a little to see his profile. It was indeed Pontaumur, and he was speaking to an individual dressed in a long white blouse, and with a slouched cap on his head.

This conference in the middle of the street between a gentleman and a collector of cigar-stubs was eminently suspicious, and the first idea which came to Coulanges was to intervene unexpectedly, in order to surprise the conspiracy. But this would have been a mistake, and Coulanges, after reflection, judged that it would be better to observe these people at a distance, see what they were going to do, follow them if they went off together, and accost Pontaumur at the moment he separated from his strange companion.

"If I should interrupt their colloquy," he thought, with reason, "Pontaumur would have no difficulty in inventing an explanation, and I should not know how to justify such an abrupt intrusion upon his affairs. He would perceive that I wished to penetrate his secrets, and he would be on his guard against me. I shall learn much

more by contenting myself with a discreet surveillance, for at present he does not suspect that I am here, and he will act as if no one were noticing him."

This calculation was a correct one. Pontaumur and the man walked side by side toward the Boulevard Haussmann, without leaving the middle of the street or looking behind them. Coulanges, who followed them, keeping close to the houses, could observe them at his ease. The man in a blouse was of very short stature; his head scarcely came to Pontaumur's shoulder, but Pontaumur was nearly six feet. They seemed to understand one another perfectly, for they talked animatedly, and Pontaumur used many gestures. Coulanges even imagined that his gestures referred to the dark-green coupé, which could not be seen, but which was on the other side of the massive constructions between the Rue Gluck and the Rue Halevy. His right hand was often raised, and his forefinger pointed in that direction, as the finger of a general before the combat points out, to an aid who is to execute his orders, the place on the battle-field where the principal effort is to be made.

When they reached the end of the street, the two talkers turned obliquely, and passed before the court which is in front of the vast buildings occupied by the management of the opera. This is a very crowded corner, while representations are going on; the artists enter and leave from there, and their carriages wait for them at that point; the coachmen are gathered together upon the broad sidewalk, and the stage-carpenters come and go from behind the scenes to the wine-shop opposite. It is not difficult to be lost in this crowd, and the doctor hastened his steps, for fear of missing the trail, for the game he was chasing had already disappeared behind a row of carriages. Coulanges came out upon the court just as M. de Pontaumur had stopped a cab, which was crossing the square.

The man in the blouse had turned back, and was advancing so as to meet the doctor, whom he doubtless had not noticed. Pontaumur entered the cab, and was driven away toward the Rue Scribe. Coulanges, who could not hope to catch up with him, stopped short, and stepped aside, so as to leave the passage free; the chief had escaped him, but he counted upon seeing the face of the subordinate. Unfortunately, the latter raised his eyes, perceived him, turned about, and ran away as fast as his legs could carry him.

Coulanges had no time to see his face, and, as he was in evening dress, without an overcoat, he did not attempt to pursue him. He remained where he was, very much annoyed at his failure, and troubled enough by this odd incident.

M. de Pontaumur's intimacy with a street scavenger furnished him with food for reflection; but he could not unravel the meaning of it. What could Maurice Saulieu's dishonest adversary be plotting with this queer companion? Was he preparing something against Mme. Brehal? That was impossible; in the heart of Paris, at ten o'clock in the evening, there is nothing to be feared from violence.

The doctor, comprehending nothing of it all, resolved to throw off the responsibility by relating to Courtenay what he had seen and even all that he knew. The time for silence was past. It was necessary to put an end to the manœuvers of a band of rascals who were plotting in secret about Mme. Brehal, and it was only right to point out their actions to the future husband of this charming woman.

Coulanges hastened back to the opera house, and entered, without stopping on the way. The third act had been in progress for over a quarter of an hour, and there was nobody in the corridors but the box-openers. The one who had charge of Mme. Brehal's box conducted the doctor there, and the latter was no little surprised not to find George.

Mme. Brehal was alone, leaning forward to listen to the exquisite trio: "*Nuit fraiche et nuit sereine*," and she was so much under the charm of the enchanting music that she did not turn at the slight noise of the opening door. She made a sign with her fan for Coulanges to sit down without speaking, and he took good care not to open his mouth; but he thought he might occupy the chair next her, which Courtenay's departure had left vacant.

When the trio was over, Mme. Brehal said to him:

"You will pardon me, will you not? I can not hear that air without being deeply moved, and I love emotions. But it is over. I am delighted to see you again, and we will talk until the serenade."

The doctor began by asking what had become of his friend.

"George has left me," answered the *chatelaine* of the Avenue de Villiers, "to his great regret, but it could not be avoided."

"Why, what has happened for him to give up the pleasure of being near you?"

"Oh! nothing serious. His notary, knowing, I don't know how, that he was at the opera in my box, sent him a letter to ask him to come to him immediately."

"That is very singular. At this hour, notaries are abed, or, seriously speaking, they do not occupy themselves after dinner with

the business of their clients. There is no question yet of signing the contract."

"Unfortunately, no," said Mme. Brehal, smiling. "But until that happy evening comes we must think a little of the happiness of others. George thought that the notary had an important communication to make to him in regard to his friend's will. I thought so also, and I advised him to go at once. You know that this will has made Mademoiselle Mezenc sole legatee, and that she refuses to profit by it; who knows if the good notary has not found a means of persuading her to accept."

"Do you think that he is so much interested in the lady as that?"

"He does not know her, but he knows that she was to marry George's friend, and George is one of his best clients."

"Notaries are not so zealous usually. But we shall soon know, for George is to return, I suppose."

"No. The notary lives in the Rue Babylon, at the end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It is quite a journey, and as I wished to return home early, I have counted upon you to accompany me to my carriage."

"I am at your orders, madame."

"George wished me to tell you that he would go to his club and wait for you there, even if it should please you to remain at the opera until the end of the performance."

"I shall join him, certainly, but I shall not return here after your departure. Without you, madame, the opera would have no charm for me."

"Am I to take that declaration as an avowal of musical indifference, or as a compliment to me?"

"In the latter case it would be a clumsy one. I simply told you the truth. I always make the mistake of not disguising my thoughts."

"Mistake! It is an excellent good quality, and upon that point, as upon all others, we agree perfectly. Do you know, doctor, I count upon you to aid George to bear a change of life for which he is little prepared? Our marriage was decided so quickly."

"George is the happiest of men, and I assure you, madame, that he will never regret his past life."

"I hope so. But, after the wedding journey, we shall inhabit my house in the Avenue de Villiers, and we shall be solitary if you abandon us, for I intend to considerably restrict the circle of my acquaintances. Society has no more attraction for me, and one friend will suffice."

"I shall be very proud to be that friend, and that hope alone would strengthen my determination to remain a bachelor."

"I understand; you want to warn me beforehand, but have no fear; I promise solemnly not to attempt anything against your liberty, and I even acknowledge that I made a mistake in seeking a wife for you. You are not ready for marriage."

"And I think I never shall be."

"The 'Serenade' will be sung in a few moments and then we will go. I suppose that you discovered my coachman?"

"Easily, madame. He is at his post, at the end of the Rue Halevy. I even spoke to him, and he confided to me his uneasiness in regard to the dark bay."

"My coachman is a coward and my dark bay is a love. Every time I ride behind him, he gives me a slight sensation of fear, which I delight in?"

"And if he should run away, my dear madame?"

"If he should run away I should not lose my head. He has already played me that trick once or twice, and I did not stir."

"That was brave of you, but carriage accidents are always serious."

"Well, if one happens to me you shall cure me. For I have promoted you, without your permission, to the post of physician in ordinary to Madame George Courtenay."

"You do me too much honor. I practice so little that I have almost forgotten all that I knew. So I hope that you will never have need of my science."

"I am wonderfully well, but whatever happens, I have faith in you, doctor, and I should never call in any one else if I were ill. So consider yourself appointed."

"Oh! I do not refuse, but—"

"Not a word more, please. The 'Serenade' is commencing. I am going to listen."

Coulanges could not do less than listen too, that is, be silent, although his imagination was very much excited. Pontaumur's maneuvers were never out of his mind and George's absence worried him. He did not believe at all in this summons by the notary, and wondered if Courtenay had invented it as a pretext to go, or if this strange sending of a letter were only a machination of his enemies to entice him away from the theater.

This last hypothesis was, in fact, the only one which the doctor admitted, for George was too much in love to be bored near Mme. Brehal. What made Coulanges despair was being obliged to hide

from her his suppositions and conceal his tears. The lady of the Avenue de Villiers, knowing nothing of the situation, was in no position to be enlightened. What would be the use of troubling her by informing her of what was taking place about her? It would be much better to protect her as she went out, and then to hasten to the club, where George would not fail to come.

"There, I will have an explanation with him," thought Coulanges, "and I will hide nothing of what I know. The time is come to act."

The "Serenade" was sung in a manner to make one regret Faure, who sings so well that delicious air, but Mme. Brehal loved Mozart for himself; she listened with passionate attention, and, when it was over, the doctor saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Let us go," she said. "That 'Serenade' always makes my heart beat. It seems to me that George is singing it to me, and I long to appear on my balcony. But I am talking folly, and it is time that you took me away."

The doctor concurred in this opinion, and hastened to open the door of the box; he aided Mme. Brehal to put on her cloak and offered her his arm. The act was not over, the corridors were deserted and the grand staircase had not the brilliant aspect it has at the close of the performance, when silks and laces trail over the marble steps, and it takes ten minutes to descend. In the vestibule, there was no one, except here and there a footman waiting for his master's appearance, and outside, there were a few spectators, *blasé* in regard to music, who preferred to smoke a cigar in the open air rather than to hear the statue of the commander accept Don Juan's invitation. Pontaumur was not among them.

"What a beautiful evening!" said Mme. Brehal, leaning upon Coulanges' arm. "It is lovely to breathe the air under that starry sky. If George were with us, I should propose to go to the cascade in the Bois de Boulogne."

"Your physician in ordinary would forbid it," responded Coulanges. "*Nuit fraîche et nuit sereine* is charming to sing in Spain, but, in Paris, in spring, it is very unhealthy."

"And then George has made an appointment with you, doctor; so take me quickly to my carriage and regain your liberty."

Coulanges asked nothing better. As they walked along by the balustrade which surrounded the opera house, he glanced up the Rue Halevy, and saw, with satisfaction, that the dark green coupé was no longer there. This coupé always gave him the idea of a

machine of war, which had enemies hidden within it, like the Homeric horse of Troy.

On the other hand, Mme Brehal's carriage had not changed its place, and this was a sure asylum, a refuge against all attacks.

"You see, Max hasn't stirred," said Mme. Brehal. "He is a much slandered animal."

"It seems to me that he is terribly uneasy," muttered Coulanges.

This was true. Max was stamping his feet and the sparks flew from under his hoofs; the coachman, erect upon his box, seemed to have difficulty in holding him.

Coulanges judged that it was time to calm the fractious dark bay by a smart trot to the Avenue de Villiers, and he hurried as much as he could without disturbing his companion.

They were not ten feet from the coupé, when he noticed a white form against the dark background of one of the houses and separated from Max only by the width of the sidewalk.

Mme. Brehal had perceived this figure also, for she exclaimed:

"Do you know why Max is uneasy? There is a man standing there near him. Max is like well-bred dogs; he does not allow ragged people to approach him. My coachman, who knows his character, should have changed his place."

"I am not at all sure that that fellow in a blouse would not have followed him," replied Coulanges. "He has been loafing about your carriage before, this evening; your coachman told me so."

"Do you think he has evil designs? You appear uneasy."

"No—but I think I have seen him before, near by, and I wonder what he is doing here."

"He is some poor fellow who is watching for the opportunity of making a few sous, by opening the door."

"I fear that he is watching for something else, but I will take care to prevent him from doing any harm."

"If I were timid, my dear doctor, you would end by alarming me. But I am all the more tranquil, as I have no enemies."

"One always has enemies," murmured George's friend. He could now see more clearly the man whom he had surprised, half an hour before, talking with M. de Pontaumur. There was no doubt but that it was the same one, and this time he stood motionless in the hollow of a door-way. He evidently had some purpose in taking his position there quite near the blue coupé. He was waiting for Mme. Brehal, and he knew very well that the coachman could not leave his box to drive him away, on account of Max's temper, and he took good care to keep out of the reach of the whip.

"He will fly when he sees me," thought the doctor; but, on the contrary, the man stood firm.

Coulanges would have liked to catch him by the collar, but he could not desert Mme. Brehal.

"Don't you see that it is a boy?" she whispered. "How he would laugh at us, if he suspected that he frightened us for a moment, but he is not thinking of us."

The doctor did not try to prove the contrary to the future Mme. Courtenay. He had conceived a plan, the execution of which seemed easy to him, a plan which consisted in falling upon this suspicious character as soon as the coupé had departed.

"If madame would get in at once," said the coachman, "it would be well, for the horse is restive."

"I shall see you soon, my dear doctor," said Mme. Brehal, with a frank shake of the hand. "Remind George that I expect him to-morrow, and come and dine with us, if you do not fear to be bored with two lovers."

Coulanges did not take time to answer. He was longing to attack the man in the blouse, who had not stirred.

He opened the carriage door, aided Mme. Brehal and turned to give the coachman his orders, when he saw the man in the door-way clear the breadth of the sidewalk in three bounds, and jump at the head of the dark bay.

What took place then lasted fewer seconds than it will take to relate it.

Coulanges instantly closed the door and rushed upon the strange assailant who had dared to lay his hand upon Max. At the same moment, the coachman aimed at the rascal a vigorous blow with his whip.

But, whether the lash touched Max's ears or the noise of the violently closed door frightened him, the nervous animal started off at a frightful pace. The doctor was in no position to stop him, so he thought only of seizing the culprit.

"Ah! you scoundrel!" he cried. "I have you at last!"

But he did not have him at all. The fellow had taken to his heels and was running with all his might. Coulanges started bravely after him, but not before he had lost some seconds in gazing after the horse which bore Mme. Brehal away, and who seemed to know no longer what he was about, for he was galloping like mad. He saw the coachman adroitly avoid the refuges placed for the security of foot-passengers and the perdition of carriages at the intersection

of six large streets, and direct Max toward the longest and straightest of the six, which is the Rue Lafayette.

"He has run away, that is clear," thought Coulanges, "but he has space before him and he will finally calm down, if he doesn't strike against anything."

The fugitive had taken the opposite side of the street, and the doctor's hesitation, short as it had been, had given him time to make some headway. He ran like a deer up the Boulevard Haussmann, and he had almost reached the Rue Mogador, when the gentleman who had given him chase perceived the dark-green coupé.

That accursed coupé was stationed there, and Coulanges immediately understood that Pontaumur's agent was again about to escape him; the carriage door was already open to receive him.

"Stop thief!" cried the poor doctor, who felt himself distanced.

Unfortunately the passers-by were few. One or two turned, but they did not comprehend, and before one of them thought of barring his way, the fellow leaped into the carriage, which whipped off and disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.

Coulanges, in exasperation, could willingly have beaten the imbeciles who had not obeyed his call; but he soon recovered himself and felt that it would be as ridiculous to complain as to follow on foot the green coupé. It would be much better to turn back and try to find out what had become of Mme. Brehal, and this he did.

He knew only too soon.

When he reached the square where the Rue Lafayette commences, he perceived almost at the entrance of the street and upon the left side a crowd collected, which appeared to him of very bad augury.

The doctor was of the opinion of Alfred de Musset, who wrote these lines:

"Quand le peuple s'assemble ainsi,
C'est toujours sur quelque ruine."

And he was right, for the mad course of the dark bay had ended in a catastrophe, less than a hundred yards from the place where he started.

There is a vacant space between the new street and the Cité d'Antin, and in the middle of this vacant space a sort of little monument, which one would take for a fountain, but which is really only an ornamental construction of stone and brick.

The coachman, just here, to avoid striking a large omnibus, had been obliged to turn Max to the left; unfortunately he was no longer master of his horse, and the furious dark bay had hurled himself against the first obstacle he met with.

The crowd, which the accident had attracted, made way for Coulanges when they knew that he was a physician, and he saw the horse extended on his side, the coupé broken, and the coachman seated upon the pavement and supported by two men. But he did not stop to contemplate these disasters; he was seeking for Mme. Brehal, and he found her a little further on, lying upon a cushion which had been taken out of the carriage, her head resting at the foot of the unlucky edifice against which Max had met his death. The doctor's heart stopped beating for an instant, for he thought she was dead, she was so pale; but she had already recovered consciousness, and she said, forcing herself to smile:

"Is it you, my dear doctor? I knew that you would come to my rescue."

"I hope that you are not seriously hurt!" faltered Coulanges, more moved than she.

"I think both my legs are broken."

"That will be nothing. Is there no cut on the head or the breast?"

"No. At least, I don't feel any pain."

"Then you can bear transportation, and I—"

"I have sent to the station for a covered litter," remarked a policeman.

As Coulanges was about to protest, Mme. Brehal said gently: "It was right, for I could not enter a carriage, and you can not examine me here. While we are waiting, will you have the kindness to see if my poor coachman is not in a worse plight than I am?"

"No, madame, no," said the policeman. "They say he is only out of his head. By Jove! I can understand it; he must have been frightened to death. But he is coming round, and he will be able to walk in a quarter of an hour."

"Thanks, monsieur," responded Mme. Brehal, with astonishing coolness. "But no matter; go and examine him, doctor, and come back and tell me just how he is."

"Since you wish it, I will go," said Coulanges, admiring her courage and kindness of heart.

The coachman, in fact, was wandering a little. To all the doctor's questions he responded with incoherent sentences:

"The knave! the brigand! I know very well what he wanted with my horse—it was he who caused the trouble—the ear—he touched Max's ear—he put something in it."

"He doesn't know what he is talking about," said one of the men who were supporting him.

Coulanges was not precisely of this opinion. He understood very well what the words meant, and they opened to him new horizons.

"I ought to have broken his head with the butt of my whip," continued the coachman, "but he will bear my marks. I lashed him across the face."

"That is a good thing to remember," thought Coulanges. And he said aloud: "Be calm, my man, be calm; you have nothing broken, and you will be taken home. I shall remain to accompany madame, but I shall see you again and make a thorough examination."

With this promise, the doctor hastened to return to Mme. Brehal, and he did not see the coachman stoop over to pick up some object which he had noticed lying between two paving-stones.

CHAPTER X.

In leaving Mme. Brehal, Courtenay had obeyed a very praiseworthy sentiment. He did not exactly understand the letter which summoned him to the Rue de Babylon, but he thought himself bound to neglect nothing to assure the execution of his unfortunate friend's last wishes. And there was all the more merit in his acting in this way, as he was only moderately interested in Maurice Saulieu's heiress. The letter was not in the notary's handwriting, but in that of one of his clerks, and this clerk did not sign legibly, for George could not decipher his name. But the paper bore the business heading of the firm, and there appeared to be no doubt of the authenticity of the summons.

If Courtenay had taken time to reflect, he would have wondered how the notary knew the number of Mme. Brehal's box. The box-opener, who had given him the note, said that an employé of the theater had brought it to her, after receiving it from the hands of a messenger.

The address was as clear and explicit as possible: "Monsieur George Courtenay. Madame Brehal's Box. First Tier. Right Side." And the word "Urgent," was written in the corner.

The idea of there being anything wrong never entered George's head, and after a short and tender conversation with Mme. Brehal, who announced her intention of returning home early, he left the opera house and took a cab, which brought him in half an hour to the Rue de Babylon. There, George found, before the door of the house where he had business, a crowd of carriages, and, on raising

his eyes, he saw that the windows of his notary's apartment were brilliantly lighted. A party of some sort was evidently being given there, and something of great importance must have happened for the notary to occupy himself this evening with the interests of his clients.

George entered, and, as he was in full evening dress, the servants took him for an invited guest. He told them that he wished to speak to their master, but they did not understand his words and ushered him into the presence of the mistress of the house, who was surrounded by numerous friends.

Courtenay had met her once or twice, and he was obliged to go forward and pay his respects. This politeness drew from the lady an avalanche of disjointed sentences, where compliments and excuses were inextricably mixed. She thanked him for having come and asked his pardon for not having invited him, alleging as an excuse that the party was, in a certain sense, a profes ional one; the notary had given a dinner to several of his colleagues, and almost all, who were present, were connected in some way with the law. But she hoped to make amends soon, and she trusted that Mme. Brehal, after she had become Mme. Courtenay, would embellish with her presence a ball given in her honor.

George, to cut short this torrent of words, did not deem it best to explain the reason of his presence. This would have furnished new food for a conversation which annoyed him. He preferred to reply with phrases of ordinary courtesy, and, as soon as he could, he beat a retreat to seek the notary.

He found him in another room, seated at a whist table, and, to his great surprise, he obtained only a smile from him, when he expected him to leave his game at once and come to him.

This indifference passed all bounds, and Courtenay had decided to ask him to rise, when he saw that the rubber was ended. Others cut in, and the notary yielded his place. But George's surprise changed to bewilderment, when he heard the master of the house repeat the excuses of his wife.

This time, he did not hesitate to interrupt, saying:

"Shall we go into your study? I will hear the communication you have to make to me and you can return to your guests."

"The communication? I have nothing new to tell you," said the notary. "My head clerk is occupied in preparing the contract, but—"

"It was not in regard to the contract I came, but in regard to Maurice Saulieu's will. I have your letter here—"

"What letter?"

"The one I received at the opera."

"I have not written you since yesterday, my dear monsieur."

"But some one has written in your name. See!"

The notary took the letter which George drew from his pocket, but he had scarcely glanced at it, when he exclaimed:

"This is a jest, my dear monsieur, a detestable jest."

"Then, it was not one of your clerks who signed this?"

"My clerks would not permit themselves to play such a trick on one of my best clients. This letter is the work of some practical joker."

"I begin to think so, but I can not understand the object of it."

"Nor I either. April-fool's-day is past, and I can not comprehend it, unless some one had an interest in drawing you away from the theater where you were, with Madame Brehal perhaps."

"Yes, with her, and certainly I would gladly have remained there. But this does not explain to me why—"

"It explains nothing. And what is the strangest part of this singular affair is that the anonymous writer, to play you this bad turn, must have known that the will had been sent to me."

"I am very much inclined to think that the letter and will were sent by the same hand."

"Possibly, but—"

"How are you progressing with the heiress?"

"We are still at the same point. I wrote to her to notify her of her inheritance and to ask her to come to my office. But she did not come, and she has not even taken the trouble to answer me."

"Then you don't know whether she has filed a regular renunciation of the legacy?"

"If she had done so, I should have been informed of it, and that is why I am sure that there is no change in the situation. I may say that I should not be very much surprised if she should end by quietly accepting the bequest. One does not give up twenty thousand francs a year for nothing."

"I agree with you on that point. But I care little what Mademoiselle Mezenc does. The thing that interests me is that my marriage with Madame Brehal should not be delayed by the maneuvers of my enemies or hers, and what has happened to me this evening is a warning. I shall be on my guard, hereafter. It would be well, in the first place, that Madame Brehal should know of this, and I shall rejoin her without losing an instant."

The notary felt obliged to urge his client to stay, but George had

no desire to remain at this reunion of serious-looking men and overdressed women. He departed, after hastily taking leave of the mistress of the house, and entered his cab, which he had left at the door.

He hoped to find Mme. Brehal at the opera, but the two journeys, back and forth, and the talks with the notary and the notary's wife, had consumed fully an hour and a quarter, so that, when he reached Mme. Brehal's box, he found no one there. He was greatly annoyed at this, for he wished to tell her of his expedition, and ask her to whom she attributed this evidently malicious letter. But he could scarcely permit himself, at such an hour, to go to her house and consult her, and, besides, he did not feel the slightest uneasiness on her account, for he knew that she had left with Coulanges, who would be a sufficient protection, and whom he was soon to meet at the club.

He started away from the opera house, smoking a cigar, and, as he walked down the boulevard, he heard some people standing at the corner of the Chaussée d' Antin, speak of an accident to a carriage not far from there, but it never entered his head to connect the words with Mme. Brehal's coupé.

Paris is so constituted that one passes close to catastrophes without thinking anything about them, and a husband may see a body borne along on a litter, without suspecting that it is the body of his wife.

Courtenay was thinking only of the disagreeable experience he had passed through, and he made up his mind to discover the author of the letter, which he had kept. He hoped that chance would furnish him with the opportunity to recognize the handwriting by comparing it with that of the persons he suspected of plotting against his peace; and he naturally intended to commence by showing the letter to Dr. Coulanges, who had already shown proofs of his sagacity in such circumstances.

With this resolve Courtenay entered the club a little before midnight and was astonished enough not to find his friend there. It was in vain that he visited all the rooms, he could not discover Coulanges, who should have arrived before him, if he had only conducted Mme. Brehal to her carriage.

He did not suppose for a single instant that he had accompanied her to the Avenue de Villiers, and he accused him mentally of having gone off to supper somewhere. He knew the doctor's habits, and he thought him quite capable of wandering off, after the opera, to the Restaurant du Helder, or the Café Americain; but he was in no

humor to go and seek for him, and he decided to wait at the club, for he knew well that Coulanges would not go so far as to forget at a gay supper that he had made an appointment with an intimate friend.

Courtenay, besides, had not the least desire to go to sleep, and he would have no trouble in passing away an hour or two, for there were plenty to talk to and he was not an enemy to play, if he found a party to his liking.

He wandered into the red salon, when he was accosted by a man whom he held in great esteem and whom he always liked to meet, although there was a great difference in their ages.

"My dear monsieur," said this person, who was called the Count de Saint-Senier, "I was looking for you to ask your advice in regard to a painful but necessary proceeding to be taken against one of the members of the club."

The Moucherons is not one of those clubs which are governed by direct universal suffrage, but by a directory, elected by all the members who delegate to it the sovereign authority. This directory, renewable each year, decides upon the admission of candidates and also, in cases of necessity, the expulsions.

Courtenay had formerly been a member, and, when his term expired, M. de Saint-Senier had taken his place. It was quite natural, therefore, that this gentleman should consult Courtenay in a delicate case, and Courtenay could not dispense with giving his advice, although, for some time past, he had not been very much interested in the management of the club.

"It doubtless has to do with the posting of gaming debts not paid within the proper time," he said. "For my part, I find the rule a little too severe, and I think that it should be applied only to men who are manifestly dishonest. To post a good fellow who has been led on to lose more than he can pay the next day, or even in two or three days, strikes me as rather hard, my dear count."

"You have the right to be indugent, because you are irreproachable," answered M. de Saint Senier. "And, moreover, I think as you do, that before resorting to extreme measures, the moral standing of the delinquents should be taken into consideration. But the question before us is a much graver one."

"Really? What is it then?"

"A member of the club has been denounced to the directory as dishonest at cards."

"What! There is cheating going on here?"

"The fact, up to the present, has not been proven, but some one has been accused."

"Of stacking the cards?"

"Not positively, because no one has seen him; but it is supposed so, because it is stated that he does not bet correctly. He advances or retires his chips as he has good or bad luck."

"Well, in that case, there can be no cause for hesitation. The man who allows himself to indulge in such irregularities is a rascal who should be pitilessly driven from the society of decent men."

"I agree with you, if he is caught in the act, and if any one will denounce him openly. But, in such cases, no one cares to do so."

"I would, I assure you, if I should perceive him at his tricks; and I can not conceive how any one could act otherwise. To be silent is to become the accomplice of a knave, since silence insures him impunity. The duty of every honest man is to prevent him from continuing."

"All that is very true, but I think that we are all interested in avoiding a scandal."

"What! you would tolerate such actions?"

"No, certainly not; but we are seeking a means to put an end to them, without creating any disturbance, and I think we are right, for this reason. A great outcry is made just now against clubs. Certain newspapers do not hesitate to qualify them as gambling hells, and it must be acknowledged that, for some, the qualification is deserved."

"The bad practice of other clubs does not touch us."

"It is certain that we have never had any scandalous stories here, and it is precisely because we are immaculate that we desire to keep spotless our robe of innocence. If it should be known to-morrow that a man had been caught cheating at the Moucherons what would be said? The so-called clubs where this happens every year would be the first to rail against us. The event would be known all over Paris, and commented upon, to the great detriment of our good name."

"That is possible, but is not so bad as harboring a thief among us. Between two evils, we must choose the least."

"Unless we can succeed in avoiding them both."

"By what process?"

"I have thought of a plan which I would like to submit to you. It seems to me that it would be sufficient to warn the culprit, to satisfy justice. If, for example, during the progress of a game, a letter should be brought to him, containing these words: 'Cease.

You are discovered,' or something like them, I think that he would leave the table at once and never return."

"I am not sure of that. A fellow of that kind might not take any notice of an anonymous warning, for I don't suppose the directory would sign it."

"No. The directory has delegated its powers to Becherel and myself. We are appointed to investigate the matter secretly, and to end it without publicity, if possible. But in case the person, after being warned, should have the impudence to come again to the club, we are perfectly resolved to give orders to have him forbidden to enter it, and, if he asks for explanations, we will be there to answer him."

"Yes, that is feasible; although, on principle, I do not like anonymous letters. But, if he resists the written communication—"

"He will not resist it. I have observed him for a long time, and I am sure that he will quietly disappear. It is in his nature to do so."

This response made Courtenay think that it might be some one he knew.

"I do not ask his name," he said.

"And I can not tell it to you because we have agreed to tell no one. As you know, the members of a directory have their professional secrets as well as physicians. But it will be very easy for you to know it, now that I have told you of the case, and you approve our method of action. You have only to be present when the accused receives the notification."

"When will that be?"

"The letter is all ready. And as he has no suspicion of what is in store for him, I think that he will not fail to come to-night, and sit down as usual at the baccarat table. Perhaps he is there already. I am going to see, for we must not put off this matter. In such cases, any delay is to be avoided. Be present at the game, if it amuses you; bet even, if you feel in the mood, but do not think of being banker, for you would have to do with a cheat, and we shall wait, to strike the great blow, until he begins his trickery. Now, he is clever and you would see nothing, but we, who know who he is, are going to watch and we shall act at the proper moment. *Au revoir*. Not a word, you understand."

"Of course. I shall keep my eyes open, but I shall say nothing."

M. de Saint-Senier walked away, leaving Courtenay perplexed enough. He wanted very much to find out if a suspicion which

had come to him was well founded, but he wanted still more to talk to his friend Coulanges, and he feared that he would miss him. Baccarat was played in an out-of-the-way room, and he feared that the doctor would not think of coming there perhaps. "Half-past twelve!" he thought. "Where can the fellow be? Eating, probably, in some restaurant. If he had felt sleepy he would have come here first, and left word for me not to wait for him. Now, no one has seen him; so he may come any time and I am obliged to remain. I may as well pass the time in watching the scene that is to take place in the baccarat room"

Courtenay rang and told the servant who came to tell Dr. Coulanges, when he arrived, where he was, and that he wished to speak to him at once.

Easy on this score, George directed his steps toward the room where the lovers of chance were assembled.

The game was in full progress, and it was almost an event that the players were so numerous, for baccarat had languished for some time.

The bankers had been so lucky, that they had no longer found many adversaries; but, on this particular evening, without knowing why, the former players had come to try and win back their money.

All varieties of superstitions were represented about the green cloth. There were men who believed in the influence of a little pig worn as a charm; others held in their mouths an extinguished cigar, which they did not dare to light for fear of spoiling their luck. Some had wandered for a long time about the boulevards, in the hope of meeting a hunchback, and touching his hump.

All these faces were familiar to Courtenay, and one alone attracted his attention—that of M. Corleon, who was operating at the end of the table, and with success; for he had before him large piles of counters of twenty and one hundred francs, easily recognizable by their form and color.

The banker was a capitalist, celebrated for his large and constant winnings, who inspired small players with a salutary terror. Few of them would enter the game when he dealt the cards, and as he was detested, because of his persistent luck, many evil things were said about him.

Courtenay, who had heard some of these remarks after games which had been disastrous to the bettors, wondered if this was the gentleman the two directors were going discreetly to expel.

To-night, however, this great conqueror had lost much money, but he did not seem particularly disturbed by it.

M. de Saint-Senier stood behind the seats of the players, and did not appear to observe one more than another.

"I am afraid that the letter will not be delivered to-night," thought Courtenay, who had hoped for a moment that the culprit would prove to be M. Corleon.

The last deal was lost by the banker, and it was a heavy loss; for it took away at least a quarter of the profits acquired since the beginning of the game.

The loser paid it without any complaint.

Courtenay, who was attentively observing the game, saw M. Corleon carelessly rake in a large sum. This fortunate player had advanced a pile of chips without counting them. With a movement of his arm, he knocked them down, saying: "I don't know how much there is there;" and it was found that there were four chips of a hundred francs and twelve of twenty, in all thirty-two louis, which he received in gold and notes.

All this was perfectly regular on both sides, and Courtenay made up his mind that neither of these gentlemen was the culprit; he almost reproached himself for having suspected them.

The banker made no movement to rise. He had won enough to bear a run of ill-luck, and he intended to recover himself by continuing to deal.

They gathered up the cards which, after each deal, had been cast into a sort of bag sunk in the middle of the immense long table, and, during this forced pause the players conversed among themselves. Of course, they did not speak of politics, or literature, or women, for card-players never have any other subject of conversation than the game. They discussed gravely the eternal question of the *tirage à cinq*, approved by the school of Bordeaux, the birthplace of baccarat; and blamed by the school of Paris, whose opinion has prevailed in modern times. One player demonstrated to his neighbor that the banker was right to stop at three, when he has given nine to each of the two sides. The unlucky players exchanged bitter words in regard to the caprices of the deal, and growled imprecations against the persistent luck of the capitalist, who had won their money this evening, as always.

In the midst of the general hub-bub, M. Corleon preserved his coolness, and even his gayety, for he joked pleasantly with any one who cared to talk to him. It is true that he was the only player who had been able to win.

The Count de Saint-Senier had withdrawn a little, to speak to M. Becherel, his colleague in executing the wishes of the directory.

Courtenay concluded that the culprit was not present, and he commenced to worry himself again over the unpunctual doctor. Still, he remained in the room, having no better way of killing time than to watch the game. The banker, having shuffled the cards, asked him to cut them, and he did not refuse to render him this service, which is usually asked of people who are supposed to bring good luck. Courtenay was one of these, and the bettors cursed him in their hearts, for at the first deal the banker announced nine.

There was a general raking in of the bets, and the chips piled up by M. Corleon were also about to swell the banker's winnings, but Corleon, who had manipulated them before the cards were dealt, announced fifteen louis, and drew three one hundred-franc notes from his pocket, saying:

"I prefer to pay in paper. It is a superstition of mine."

And as all present were more or less superstitious, no one was astonished at this declaration.

M. Corleon possessed, moreover, the prudence of the serpent; for, after this breach in his capital, he remained for several deals without playing.

It was well that he did so, for not one of the bettors won. There was a formidable run of luck against them, and they were all the more enraged at Courtenay, who had cut, but did not play. They cast angry glances at him, but the banker gave him a pleasant smile. George determined to show them that he did not share their ridculous ideas, and, taking out a thousand-franc bill, he cast it upon the right side of the table.

At this action the victor made a grimace, the vanquished looked up, and M. Corleon erected a new pile of chips upon the *débris* of the one he had overturned, after paying with money; he took great care to build it in the form of a pyramid, placing the larger chips at the bottom and the smaller ones at the top.

On the side where Courtenay and Corleon had bet, the hand was held by a young man who had recently come to Paris, the one who had been beaten the evening before at billiards.

He was absolutely lacking in coolness; and when he had glanced over his hand, and the banker asked him if he would have any cards, he replied, "Yes," although his hand counted six.

M. Corleon could willingly have strangled him, but he restrained his anger, and even forced himself to smile. The others had seen the error, and their faces grew long.

The banker saw that his adversary had made a mistake, and he determined to profit by it.

The hand on the left stood at eight, but there were fewer bets on that than on the other. The thing was to beat the hand on the right, and the banker felt no uneasiness, as he held seven.

Unfortunately for him, he dealt a three, which gave the young man the triumphant point of seven, and the joy of the poor fellow was such that he nearly upset the table.

There was an explosion of reproaches against the idiot who thus exposed his hand.

The banker drew a card, which was also a three.

"Baccarat!" he exclaimed, throwing down his cards.

Then everything was changed. They praised the young man whom they had blamed; he had won when a more skillful player would certainly have lost by standing at six.

The capitalist, beaten by this error, had nothing to do but to pay, and he proceeded to do so with very good grace.

Courtenay pocketed a thousand francs, which he had scarcely expected, and when it came M. Corleon's turn, the banker, who had remembered the amount of the last bet, said:

"Fifteen louis, is it not?"

"Pardon me," answered Corleon; "I think that it is more. I will count my pile."

He did so, and found that the chips represented exactly forty-five louis.

The banker, this time also, paid without making any objection.

Courtenay was no longer thinking of the lucky player who lost the little bets and won the big ones. He did not even notice that M. de Saint-Senier had quitted the room, leaving his colleague on guard near the green table. The bank was very much reduced, but it was not broken, and the game continued.

George, satisfied with having given a lesson to the gentlemen who accused him of bringing them ill luck, did not make another bet.

M. Corleon had ceased also and appeared very much absorbed in the construction of a new pile of chips, which he intended to push forward, when the inspiration should come to him to try his luck.

At this moment, Courtenay, who was at a little distance from the table, saw a servant of the club enter the room, bearing a silver salver, on which was placed a large square letter.

"Ah!" he thought, "that servant, without knowing it, must be the executor of the will of the directory. Whom can the letter be destined for?"

The liveried messenger seemed to be seeking, among the players, the one to whom the sealed envelope was directed. The banker was about to deal the cards and M. Corleon had already pushed forward his pile, when the servant approached him and very respectfully presented the salver.

"Look!" said the facetious speculator, "Corleon receiving a love letter in the very midst of a game of baccarat."

The Italian forced a smile as he opened the letter.

"My dear fellow," continued the incorrigible joker, "you should really forbid the ladies to disturb you while you are at play. There is a time for everything."

Courtenay was watching with all his eyes and he was repaid for his pains. Corleon had scarcely unfolded the sheet contained in the envelope, when his face changed.

"You turn pale, my lord!" cried the speculator, imitating the voice of a melodramatic actor. "I will make a bet that your sweetheart has deserted you."

"Silence!" growled a nervous player. "I can't hear myself think."

"Well, monsieur, do you play or do you not?" asked the banker.

"No, not this time," muttered Corleon, drawning back his chips.

"It is certainly he," thought Courtenay. "Monsieur de Pontaumur is the friend of a sharper. Let us see what he is going to do."

Corleon did nothing. He abstained from betting and he did not leave his place.

At this moment a hand was placed upon Courtenay's shoulder, and he turned to find himself face to face with the doctor.

"Ah! at last!" he cried. "I have been waiting for you more than two hours. Where the devil have you been?"

"Not so loud," murmured Coulanges. "I will explain to you why I am late, but it is better that no one should hear what I have to tell you. Come with me into the little room near by; there is no one there now, and we can talk at our ease."

"Very willingly, in a few minutes."

"Are you playing?"

"No, but I want to see the end of a scene, the beginning of which I have just witnessed. Let us draw away a little, and I will tell you what has taken place."

Coulanges followed George into the recess of a window, where the players could not hear them.

The gay doctor did not seem the same as usual; he was pale, his

eyes did not sparkle with mirth, and his lips did not wear that Rabelaisian smile which became him so well. He had the worn-out look of a man who has passed the night in bad company and who has left all his money upon the green table of a gambling-hell.

"What is the matter with you, old fellow?" asked Courtenay. "You don't look well."

"I am tired," answered Coulanges, sadly.

"Have you been drinking a little too much?"

"No, no, and when you know where I come from, you will have no desire to jest, I assure you."

"At last, he has decided to go," muttered George, who was not listening very attentively to Coulanges' words.

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of a fellow whom you know well. Look over there, at the end of the table."

"Corleon? Yes, he is pocketing his money and his chips. He has won, doubtless, and he is going away. Does that surprise you?"

"He is going, because he has been ordered to do so. He has received a letter telling him that his cheating has been discovered and that he must cease to play, under penalty of being publicly expelled."

"Did you see him cheat?"

"Yes. I must say, however, that if I had not been told about it, I should not have discovered the process he employs. It is as simple as possible. He adds to his pile when he wins and takes away from it when he loses. This has been reported to the directory and he has been caught in the act."

"It is not the first time he has cheated," said Coulanges, in an undertone.

"Well, he is dishonored this time and I have not lost my evening, since I have been present at his execution. It was accomplished without noise, but it will soon be known to everybody. It will serve as a preliminary to beginning a campaign against Pontaumur. Corleon is his other self. I will prove it."

"I also will prove it," murmured the doctor.

"And I am also sure that this evening they have plotted something against me. Madame Brehal must have told you that I was summoned by my notary on important business. I went in all haste to the Rue de Babylon and I learned there that my notary had not written me. The letter was forged. I don't doubt but that it was the work of one of those two knaves. But what their purpose was, I can not imagine."

"I know what it was."

"You do? Tell me at once."

"Not here, my friend. I have serious things to talk to you about and a sad piece of news to tell you. So, if there is nothing to keep you here, follow me."

They left the room, and no one paid any more attention to their departure than they had to Corleon's disappearance, for the game had been begun again.

The doctor led his friend into the little room, where they had heard, two days before, the architect Capdenac describe the marvels of Madame Brehal's park. The place was well chosen for conversation, for, at this hour, they could count on not being disturbed.

"Well?" asked Courtenay, "what is your news?"

"An accident has happened to Madame Brehal," said Coulanges, abruptly.

"My God! but—nothing serious, I hope?"

"Her life is not in danger, but—"

"Go on! You are making me suffer tortures with your hesitation."

"The truth is, my friend, that the horse attached to her coupé ran away; the carriage was overturned and Madame Brehal has broken both her legs."

"Broken both her legs! This is frightful, and I—"

"The fractures are simple, very fortunately, and there is no complication to be feared. A cure is certain and there will remain no trace of the accident, but it will take a long time. Madame Brehal had just left the opera when the misfortune occurred."

"Were you there?"

"No, but I learned of it very quickly, for I was not far away."

"And you did not come to tell me of it till now!"

"My dear fellow, I had first to take care of the injured lady and to accompany her home. The transportation upon a litter lasted at least an hour."

"Upon a litter!" repeated George.

"Yes, that is the best way in such a case; in fact, the only one. I had also to send for the first surgeon in Paris, for I did not wish to trust to my own skill alone, and the surgeon set the broken limbs much better than I could have done it. I wanted also to know his opinion before seeing you. In short, I have just come from the Avenue de Villiers, and, I assure you, I have not lost a minute. Besides, I do not regret having waited, for now I can completely

reassure you. Madame Brehal is doing as well as possible, and the surgeon does not fear any dangerous consequences."

"He may be mistaken. Let us go! I wish to see her."

"I understand your impatience, my dear George, but you must wait until to-morrow. Madame Brehal needs repose and your visit would excite her. She asked me to tell you that she would receive you to-morrow morning and that she would be very happy to see you. She thinks only of you in the midst of her sufferings."

"She suffers, then?"

"Yes, but she has extraordinary courage. She does not allow a complaint to escape from her, and, when I arrived, a few minutes after the accident, I found her calmer than you are at this moment."

"But how was it that the horse ran away? The coachman is a good one and he has been in the habit of driving Max."

"It was not his fault. He could not foresee nor prevent an attempt at a crime."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear fellow, prepare yourself to hear very surprising things. Do you remember that, before your departure from the box, I went to see if Madame Brehal's coupé had arrived?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, whom do you suppose I surprised in the Rue Gluck talking to a man in a blouse and a cap? Monsieur de Pontaumur, in person. He did not see me; he left the individual after giving him his instructions and jumped into a cab which was passing. I hoped to catch his agent who was coming toward me, but the moment he caught sight of me, he turned and ran away."

"He knew you, then."

"It is more than probable, but I did not succeed in seeing his face."

"And do you suppose that Pontaumur ordered this man to excite the horse, so that he would run away?"

"I am sure of it, and this is why: three-quarters of an hour afterward as Madame Brehal and myself arrived at the place where her carriage was waiting, I discovered the same fellow hiding in a doorway."

"But you were there to defend Madame Brehal!"

"I had no chance to defend her, for he only attacked the horse. When she had entered the coupé and while I was closing the door, he suddenly darted out and touched the dark bay, who immediately started off on the run. I ran after the rascal and I should have caught him perhaps, if he had not jumped into another coupé,

which was waiting for him in the Rue Mogador, a coupé which I had already encountered in the Champs-Elysées, and which I very strongly suspect belongs to Monsieur de Pontaumur."

"There is no doubt of it, and the complicity of the two scoundrels is evident. But who can the agent be? Corleon?"

"No. It was not his build or height. I am rather inclined to think that it was simply some street boy whom Pontaumur paid to do his villainous work. If so, we shall not find him again. The coachman declares, however, that he would recognize him because he lashed him across the face with his whip."

"I shall not bother myself about the agent. Pontaumur is the man I want."

"And what are you going to say to him?"

"I don't know yet. The story you relate is so extraordinary, that I wonder if you are not mistaken."

'Both Madame Brehal and the coachman saw the man jump at the horse"

"Well, but the horse is very shy, he might have run away by himself, if you had only shut the door too hard."

"On the contrary, I closed it very gently. I had been warned that he was apt to run away."

"But what did the knave do? Did he strike Max, or prick him, or what?"

"This is what the coachman picked up at the place where the horse fell," said the doctor, presenting to George a round object, which he held between his thumb and forefinger.

"A bullet!" exclaimed Courtenay. "What does that mean?"

"It means that the man in the blouse placed that bullet in the horse's ear." And as George did not seem to understand, Coulanges countinued: "You know, a horse always runs away, if any one puts in his ear a hard object, which he can not get rid off, a little pebble for example, or better still a leaden bullet. There is also the bit of burning slow-match, a surer means still, but the fellow did not think of that, and besides, the bullet was sufficient, for it drove Max absolutely crazy."

"But this is a regular attempt at murder!" cried George.

"Most certainly, for the villains expected that Madame Brehal would be killed, and it is a miracle that she escaped as she did. They desired only her death and they addressed a forged letter to draw you away, because they feared that Madame Brehal would take you in her carriage."

"Then, if I am to believe you, they wish to preserve my life! That is absurd. Madame Brehal's enemies are also my enemies!"

"That may be, and yet I am certain of what I say. They wanted to save you."

"Why? For what purpose?"

"Ah! Now you have me! I am as ignorant as you, and this mystery is connected with another which has occupied my thoughts for nearly a month."

"Do you mean since Maurice Saulieu's death?"

"Precisely."

"But what connection can you see between the duel in which our friend was killed and this accident which might have cost Madame Brehal her life?"

The doctor hesitated an instant, but he felt that it was impossible to keep any longer the secrets which weighed upon him, and he decided to speak.

"My dear George," he said, "the time has come to make my confession to you. Know, then, that the duel in which Saulieu perished was an unfair one. Know that, immediately after this duel, I became almost certain Saulieu could not have touched his adversary because the pistol he used was not loaded."

"What! It was loaded before your eyes."

"Yes, by that gentleman who cheats at baccarat, and who cheated that day at a much more serious game, for he loaded Saulieu's pistol with a wooden ball, entirely inoffensive at thirty paces."

"And you let him do it?"

"I did not perceive anything. The scoundrel is very adroit with his hands; you can see that by the way he handles his chips. He juggled in the same way with the leaden bullet I gave him, and substituted for it another, which I picked up on the duel ground while you were gone to seek the men at the inn, and which I will show you some time, for I have carefully preserved it."

"Then, they assassinated Maurice!"

"Exactly. And I have not the least doubt that it was premeditated, for I discovered, afterward, that the pistols were marked. If they had drawn them by lot, as Corleon proposed, Pontaumur could have recognized, by the touch, the one he must choose. I will show you the screw in the butt of one of the weapons."

"You knew all this and you have not denounced these wretches!"

"I was wrong, but I can plead extenuating circumstances. In the first place, the proofs I possessed were not such as are easily accepted in a court of law. I should have had much difficulty in con-

vincing a magistrate by the exhibition of a little wooden ball, which no one saw me pick up in the redoubt of Gennevilliers. Who knows if I would not have been suspected of having manufactured it? Believe me, my friend, I would have reached no result, and we, you and I, would have found ourselves implicated in a bad matter. Public opinion often confounds the innocent and the guilty. I acknowledge that this last consideration decided me to keep silent."

"You should at least have informed me and asked my advice," said Courtenay, angrily.

"If you will take the trouble to reflect," replied the doctor, perfectly unmoved, "you will see that I was right to say nothing to you. You were not cool. The friendship which you felt for Saulieu would have pushed you to extremities, and perhaps we should never have penetrated the mystery which enveloped this abominable crime. I wished to go to the bottom of things, to discover the motive of the assassins. For three weeks I have sought it silently, and I have found it at last this evening."

"The motive! Why, it was Pontaumur's cowardice. He had been struck; he was obliged to fight and he wished to fight without risk."

"Perhaps. But that was not the only motive. Things have happened which cast a strange light upon Monsieur de Pontaumur's conduct."

"Yes, he has tried to ruin Madame Brehal's reputation and even to kill her, if it was indeed he you saw in the neighborhood of the opera house, but these new infamies do not explain the first."

"I will try to prove to you that the same motive impelled Pontaumur to get rid of Saulieu first and then of Madame Brehal. I leave out of the question Corleon, who must be under the orders and in the pay of Pontaumur, and who only played a subordinate part in the two affairs."

"That is probable. But what was Pontaumur's motive?"

"His interests are mixed up with that of another person, a woman."

"I begin to see what you mean, but—"

"You have not forgotten the conversation we had, at your house this very day, in regard to the chiffonier purchased by Delphine at the Hôtel des Ventes, and which certainly contained Maurice Saulieu's will. Well, after leaving you, I met Delphine, and after various incidents which it is useless to relate to you, I acquired the certainty that the will was stolen from her house by Monsieur de Pontaumur, who had passed himself off as a rich Spaniard; he even

gave twenty-five louis to the little fool who left him alone in the salon where the chiffonier was. Do you think that he would have made this sacrifice and committed such imprudences if your friend's heiress were indifferent to him?"

"No. I no longer doubt that he has relations with her, the nature of which I do not understand. I even admit, if you wish, that she is or has been his mistress. It would be monstrous, but it is possible. It would explain that Monsieur de Pontaumur wished to enrich Mademoiselle Mezenc. It would not explain Maurice's assassination or the attempt against Madame Brehal."

"There is a supposition which explains all, if it is well-founded —a supposition which I have already submitted to you and which did not strike you as very probable. Suppose that Mademoiselle Mezenc loves you, or, what comes to the same thing, as far as my argument goes, that she wishes to marry you."

"That idea has occurred to me more than once, but I have never harbored it."

"Accept it, and you will see that everything is clear. Mademoiselle Mezenc cast her eye upon you; but you did not notice her, and poor Saulieu asked her hand in marriage. She accepted him, and he made his will. She knew that he had left her all his fortune. This was the moment Monsieur de Pontaumur chose to spread abroad, in regard to her, reports which came to Saulieu's ears. Saulieu struck him. They fought and Saulieu was killed, you know how. Here was Mademoiselle Mezenc an heiress and free to marry whomever she wishes, and it is you she wishes."

"If this were true!"

"Let us see what follows. She learned from your mouth that the will had disappeared; but Maurice had told her where it was. She set Monsieur de Pontaumur on the track of it for she had not given up benefiting by it. It would help to console her, if her great project failed, and if it succeeded, she would have in your eyes the merit of disinterestedness, for she would then refuse this fortune, which she would no longer need when she was your wife."

"Yes, your reasoning is good," murmured George, almost convinced by the doctor's arguments.

"The one thing to be done was to conquer you," continued Coulanges, imperturbably. "The enterprise was all the more difficult, as she could scarcely go into society as in the past, and as you were not intimate at her house. But Madame Brehal, with the innocent imprudence of an honest woman, offered her the opportunity she needed. She gladly accepted the chance to go and paint bad pictures

in the marble pavilion, where she hoped that you would often come. It was then that Monsieur de Pontaumur emphasized his performances commenced some time before. It was necessary to ruin the reputation of Madame Brehal, who might be a rival. Pontaumur procured a key to the inclosure. He enters it at night, arranging so as to be seen, and he mounts the hillock which overlooks Madame Brehal's domain, remaining there in contemplation for hours at a time."

"I remember now that the porter who guards the entrance in the Rue de Courcelles was recommended by Madame Mezenc."

"He is therefore devoted to Mademoiselle Mezenc. But let us go on to the end. The day before yesterday, after the breakfast at which I was present, Madame Brehal announced to Mademoiselle Mezenc that your marriage was decided. All was lost for the ambitious person who had made up her mind to marry you. Desperate measures were necessary to prevent the ruin of her plans, and Monsieur de Pontaumur immediately conceived an infernal project, and hired a rascal to execute it. He learned that Madame Brehal was going to the opera; he sent his coupé to wait near by, for the sole purpose of aiding his infamous agent to escape, and he himself entered the orchestra. He saw you in the box, and as he did not wish you to be a victim also of the accident he was preparing, he went out to write, or have written, the letter which should draw you away. He did not care wether or no I entered the carriage with Madame Brehal, for it mattered little if I were killed with her, while the life of Mademoiselle Mezenc's future husband was precious. The false bullet of the duel perhaps suggested to him placing the leaden ball in the horse's ear. You know the rest. And now, my dear friend, that you have heard my deductions, draw your own conclusions."

"I conclude," cried George excitedly, "that Pontaumur and his accomplices are scoundrels who must be exterminated. But I still dislike to believe that Mademoiselle Mezenc was in the plot. If this man is her lover, he may have acted without consulting her."

"As regards the recovery of the will and the attempt against Madame Brehal, it is impossible. She alone knew that the will was hidden in one of the feet of the chiffonier book-case and that Madame Brehal was going to marry you."

"She might have given him information, but she took no active part in the affair of the runaway horse, and I will never believe that she was concerned in the assassination of her *fiancé*."

"It would be horrible, but, if you were on a jury, what would you do?"

"I don't know yet, but I swear to you that I will avenge Maurice and I will not stop at conjectures. To condemn her I must be certain. To-morrow I also will begin an investigation; but this evening, not a word more my friend, or you will drive me mad! Let us go!"

CHAPTER XI.

In a chamber hung with pale blue silk, upon a bed raised upon a dais, lay Mme. Brehal, enveloped in a peignoir of white satin. Her blonde head was resting upon a pile of pillows and looked as if floating in a sea of lace. Her delicate hands played with a feather fan, her lips were parted in a smile, and one would have been tempted to believe that she had only lain down to rest after returning from a ball. But it would have been very quickly perceived that, if the upper part of her body was free in its movements, her lower limbs were absolutely motionless. The peignoir, sustained by an ingenious apparatus, formed a sort of arch above her limbs, which could not bear the least contact, and fell in folds about her feet.

On one side of the bed George was seated upon an ottoman, and on the other, near the head of the invalid, Dr. Coulanges was standing.

Mme. Brehal received her lover and her physician as the great ladies of the Hôtel Rambouillet received in olden times their adorers.

The lover was melancholy, but the doctor had not at all a professional air, and the lady was very gay.

There was none of the paraphernalia of the sick-room in sight, but there were flowers everywhere; and through the open windows came the song of birds.

"I should never have believed that I would so soon grow accustomed to lying still," said Mme. Brehal, laughingly. "I have never been sick, but it seems to me as if I had been like this all my life."

"I admire your courage," murmured Courtenay.

"Oh! I don't deserve much credit for being resigned. Our good doctor promises to cure me, and you are here near me. What more could I want? Do you think that I regret not being able to pay visits or to ride in the Bois? Those are amusements which are not worth the pleasant talks with those one loves, and I don't expect that you will abandon me."

"I abandoned you altogether too much yesterday; if you knew

what anguish I suffered last night! I longed to see you, and Coulanges told me that you would not receive me until noon to-day."

"Excuse a woman's coquetry. I wished to prepare my surroundings, and modern surgery has charming inventions. If you did not know that that wretched Max had nearly killed me you would not suspect that both my legs were plastered with dextrine and inclosed in wooden splints. I can hope, therefore, that you do not find me too ugly. Yesterday, after the accident, I can assure you I was horrible."

"I protest," exclaimed Coulanges. "Seated upon a cushion, before your broken carriage, in the midst of those frightened people, you had the bearing and beauty of a queen."

"A queen whose chariot had been overturned and who was not escorted by the gentlemen of her court. Instead of guards, there were about me only policemen; and I was carried home on a hospital litter."

"You were as calm as you are now, you were superb."

"I confess that I was frightened when Max took the bit between his teeth. I knew what he was capable of, and I felt that I was lost beyond redemption. This only lasted three minutes and yet I had time to think of a thousand things, the past, the present, and the future; one sees triple at such moments. I saw again the alley where George told me he loved me; I wondered what he would do when I was dead, and what reconciled me to dying was the thought that he was safe; I blessed the notary who had summoned him, for if George had remained at the opera he would have entered my coupé, and perished with me; I remembered that he had told me that he had come on foot, and I had intended to propose to take him home. At the point we then were I might well have permitted myself that pleasure."

"At the point we shall always be," corrected Courtenay.

"Not at all, my friend," said Mme. Brehal, with a shade of sadness. "My sentiments have not changed, and I do not doubt the constancy of yours, but we can not be married, now, in a few days."

"That is only a delay."

"A delay to which must be added uncertainty."

"What do you mean?"

"That my happiness depends on the success of my cure. It is frightfully prosaic, but it is the truth."

"Really, Gabrielle, I do not understand you."

"Then I will explain myself more clearly. I have entire confidence in the predictions of our friend here. I hope that his care

and skill will make me again what I was when you loved me; but, if he is mistaken, if science is powerless to return to me what I have lost, the use of my limbs, you know well that I would give you back your word."

"Do you think that I would take it back?"

"No, my dear George, but I would refuse the sacrifice. You could not marry a cripple."

"Oh! madame," exclaimed Coulanges, "you have very little faith. If only my predictions were in question, I should say nothing. But you doubt the illustrious surgeon, who answers for your complete cure. That is impious."

"My dear doctor, I am very believing, but we must count also upon the unexpected, and if George wishes to please me he will speak no more of a project which is as dear to me as to himself, and which I have a firm hope will be realized. Let us keep this hope in our hearts, and be prepared to bear our unhappiness, if it is Heaven's will that it should come."

"You must allow me to see you every day," said George: "on that condition, I promise not to say a word more of our marriage. As I am certain that we shall be married silence will cost me little."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Mme. Brehal, holding out her hand. "Not only do I allow you to come as often as you like, but I shall be profoundly grateful to you for remaining faithful to me and brightening my solitude, yes, my solitude, for I have given orders to admit no one. I wish people to believe me very sick, and those who are indifferent will forget. You will see that soon the world will not think of us, and I want to conceal my happiness from curious eyes. Now, to pass to a pleasanter subject. I must tell you, my dear doctor, what I was thinking of, when they were setting my poor legs. You will smile, but I am only a woman. I was thinking of a ball where I waltzed with George, and I said to myself that that waltz would be perhaps the last, and I wept a little; you did not see it, but I did."

George took the hand which his *fiancée* offered him and kissed it. He was so touched that the tears also came into his eyes.

"I will weep no more, I promise you," she continued, "but still I have a great sorrow, and that, my friend, you can remove. Mademoiselle Mezenc, as I told you last evening at the opera, seems to be angry with me. I don't know whether I have unintentionally hurt her feelings, but I am sure that she would hasten to me if she knew what had happened. Oh! I guess what you are going to answer, but I beg you to say nothing. I may be mistaken as to Mari-

anne's real sentiments and judge her too favorably, but leave me my illusions, and consent to go for me, and tell her of the accident which condemns me to remain at home."

"It seems to me that it would be sufficient to write," answered Courtenay, coldly.

"No. I desire you to see her. Tell her that I ask her to come, and if she refuses, ask her what grievance she has against me. I hope that she has none, but if she has one, I want to know what it is; and I do not want any other embassador than you. It is an invalid s caprice, and you must excuse it."

George and the doctor exchanged a look. The same idea had come to both of them, that now was the time to tell Mme. Brehal the facts of which she had not the slightest suspicion. Coulanges had taken good care not to explain to her the cause of the accident. It was not a physician's duty to afflict a patient by revealing to her that an attempt had been made to kill her. To George alone belonged the task of expressing the reasons of his repugnance to act as a go-between between Mlle. Mezenc and the charming woman he was to marry; he alone could permit himself to declare why he did not like the former *fiancée* of Maurice Saulieu, assassinated in a cowardly manner by M. de Pontaumur and his acolyte Corleon.

But George had had time to reflect, since he had received the doctor's confession, and if he had resolved to open an investigation himself he had also resolved to be silent until he had acquired the certainty that Mlle. Mezenc was guilty of complicity in the infamous plots which had cost Maurice Saulieu his life and which had nearly cost Mme. Brehal hers.

What was the use of speaking of the wooden and the leaden balls, if he should not speak of the false letter from the notary? He had this letter with him, and he might have shown it to Mme. Brehal, who would perhaps recognize the handwriting. But once started he would have fatally gone further than he wished. Mme. Brehal would have asked him questions, which he would have been obliged to answer, and the time was not come to accuse the girl of being the accomplice, voluntary or involuntary, of two scoundrels.

"I will do all you command me," he said, forcing a smile; "I even regret that you do not put my obedience to a more difficult proof."

"Take care! I might take you at your word," replied Mme. Brehal, gayly, "but I will not abuse my authority. Only, since you are willing to take my message, be even kinder and do so at

once. If you defer going you will risk missing Marianne, while at this hour you are sure to find her at home."

"Very well; but, since you send me away, I shall take Coulanges with me."

"Monsieur Coulanges will return and you also. I expect that before evening you will bring me Marianne's answer, and my physician in ordinary owes me two visits a day. I resign myself easily, therefore, to letting you both go."

"If I had foreseen that you were going to dismiss us so quickly I don't think that I should have promised anything," said Courtenay, laughing; "but I have given my promise, and I will keep it."

"I also keep my promises, if Heaven permits," answered Mme. Brehal.

She accompanied this declaration with a smile which recompensed George for his obedience. The doctor received a warm pressure of the hand, and he was not sorry to go, for had he not said to Courtenay all that he wished to say. They had parted the evening before rather abruptly, and they had not come together to the Avenue de Villiers.

George once more kissed Mme. Brehal's hand; she rang for her maid, and they departed.

Mme. Brehal's people adored her; and those whom they met in the hall questioned the doctor, who reassured them as to their mistress's condition. The coachman, entirely recovered from his fall, came up to Coulanges in the court, and said:

"Ah! if only monsieur had not forbidden me to go to the police, how I would have punished the little rascal who killed Max and broke madame's legs! I am sure that he must be roaming about the opera every evening, to open the carriage doors; and I could recognize him, for my whip cut his face. I have time to search for him now, as madame can not go out, and I shall do so to-night."

"Very well, my friend," responded the doctor, "but, if you meet him, I advise you not to appeal to the police. They would not arrest him, as they would not understand the story of the ball in Max's ear."

"I don't know; some of them have served in the cavalry. However, monsieur may be easy; I shall not appeal to them. I shall content myself with grabbing him by the collar and giving him a good beating."

"That would be worse still. You would be taken to the station, and madame would not keep you in her service. Do you know what I would do if I were in your place? I would simply follow

the individual, and find out where he lives. Then come and tell me, and I will take charge of the rest."

"As monsieur wishes," muttered the coachman, not too well pleased.

The two friends went out on the Avenue de Villiers.

They had each come in a cab, but neither of them had kept his cab.

They were in no hurry, and they wanted to talk, so by mutual agreement they descended the avenue on foot.

"If that coachman should put his hand on Pontaumur's agent, we should make a great step on the road to discoveries," said Courtenay.

"It seems to me on the contrary that we would not be much more advanced," replied Coulanges. "Pontaumur directed everything, we have do doubt of that. What do we care for his agent? The great point is to know exactly the part played by Mademoiselle Mezenc in the two affairs."

"You are right. But do you understand why Madame Brehal sends me to make propositions of peace?"

"Madame Brehal will not believe in evil. And you can at any time tell her the truth in regard to her *protégée*. But the errand she has sent you on furnishes you with an excellent excuse to penetrate the enemy's camp."

"The fact is, if I were not obliged to, I should never set foot in that apartment of the Rue Blanche, where, perhaps, Maurice's assassination was plotted. Mademoiselle Mezenc inspires me with an instinctive repulsion, although I have difficulty in believing that a girl so cold and proud has prepared abominable crimes."

"I also have difficulty in believing it. But you know the proverb: Still waters run deep. We must try to see what this water hides under its calm surface. In an hour's conversation you can find out what this young person feels toward Madame Brehal. And then we will try to discover the life led by this angel of purity, who pretends to remain a virgin and a martyr, since she has lost her *fiancée*. Those are almost precisely the words she used when I was alone with her the other day in the marble pavilion. Between ourselves, I should not be surprised if she had had very intimate relations with Pontaumur for a long time."

"And when I think how near Maurice came to marrying her!"

Courtenay was silent. The discourses of his friend doubtless interested him, for he was absorbed in reflections which could not be pleasant ones, to judge from his countenance.

Coulanges respected his reverie, and after a long silence they arrived at the end of the Avenue de Villiers, where it runs into the boulevards. Here they were to separate, for to go to the Rue Blanche, where Mme. and Mlle. Mezenc lived, the Boulevard des Batignolles is the shortest road, and the doctor's way lay in the opposite direction. He was about to take leave of his friend, when Courtenay said, abruptly:

"Have you anything particular to do?"

"No. I promised another visit to Madame Brehal during the day, but I did not say what time. I expect Delphine, who promised to come and receive her reward for the information she furnished me yesterday in regard to Pontaumur. But she is not wonderfully punctual, and if she arrives before me, she will wait. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I would like you to accompany me."

"To Mademoiselle Mezenc's? You can't think of it, my dear fellow! I scarcely know her, and I am not, like you, Madame Brehal's embassador. I should trouble you in the accomplishment of your mission, and I should be troubled myself, for I should not know what to do."

"I do not ask you to go in with me, but only to wait for me at the door."

"Suppose she should be at the window?"

"Well, wait for me in the Place Blanche, which is quite near her house."

"Very willingly; but for what purpose?"

"I want very much to tell you the result of my interview with her. After that interview, I shall probably have a decision to take, and I shall need your advice."

"I think you could dispense with it very well, but I shall not refuse it. Let us go together to your embassy, since you appoint me your first attaché."

They walked side by side along the Boulevard des Batignolles, keeping close, in order to avoid the glare of the sun, to the wall of the reservoir. Courtenay had become silent again, and Coulanges amused himself by watching the promenaders under the shade of the trees planted on the other side of the street. They were chiefly working-girls and nurses, but suddenly he saw an umbrella of the most brilliant scarlet, which seemed to be coming toward him. The umbrella crossed the street, and was suddenly raised, discovering the laughing face of Delphine du Raincy.

"Ah!" she cried. "What luck to meet you! I have some news to tell you. I have found Fernando."

At these words, addressed to his friend, Courtenay looked up in considerable annoyance.

He did not know Delphine, but he guessed without any difficulty that the damsel with the flaming umbrella was one of the doctor's numerous patients, and he hoped that the doctor would quickly get rid of her.

She came tripping forward, balancing herself on her high-heeled shoes, and said to Coulanges, who appeared delighted at the meeting.

"Yes, I have tracked the dark gentleman, and I know all about him. I feel like singing: '*Il y a des gens qus se disent Espagnols*—'"

"*Et qui ne sont pas du tout Espagnols*," finished the doctor, who was well acquainted with the repertoire of the open-air concerts. "I am not astonished; I warned you. But tell me your story."

"Monsieur is with you?" asked Delphine, regarding Courtenay, who had approached.

"My best friend. You can speak before him. George, let me present you to Madame du Raincy, who is shortly to make her *début* on one of our great lyric stages."

George bowed coldly, and glanced at Coulanges with a frown.

"It was for her," continued the doctor, "that I purchased that little piece of furniture I spoke to you about."

George, at this, changed his demeanor, and smiled pleasantly; and it was well that he did, for Delphine, who had taken umbrage at his severe air, was about to decamp without even commencing her interesting recital.

"I am afraid that my story will not interest monsieur much," she said, simpering.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" exclaimed George. "A story related by a pretty woman is always interesting."

"Ah! you are pleasant now. A moment ago, you glared at me so that you frightened me. I am very easily frightened."

"Yes, I know that you are a regular sensitive plant," laughed the doctor; "but you are not frightened now. My friend is no more a bugbear than I am. So you can proceed with your narrative. Besides, he knows a little about it; I have explained to him how you made the acquaintance of a gentleman who was after your chiffonier. You have seen him again, it seems?"

"Yes; and I was on my way home when I perceived you. If it

will not tire your friend to mount four flights, come with me to the Rue de Constantinople."

"Another time, my dear, I will bring my friend, who will be charmed to hear you sing your great air from 'La Belle Helene.' But to-day we are in a great hurry. My friend has an appointment with his notary."

"What luck! I have no notary, because I have no houses or stocks. And when I think that I might have had a fine package of bank-notes, if that villain of a Fernando had not rummaged in the feet of the chiffonier you gave me! For you can not make me believe that the hiding place did not contain valuables. I have kept the pink string with which they were tied up."

George listened impatiently to this flow of words, and Delphine, perceiving it, said:

"You want to talk here? Well, I don't care. We are in the shade, and we sha'n't be disturbed. Only, I don't care to remain in one place; let us walk up and down, you on my left, and your friend on my right. The sidewalk is broad enough for three."

They had to agree to this arrangement, under penalty of losing confidences which promised to be interesting.

"Did you tell him what you thought of his conduct?" asked Coulanges.

"I wanted to, but I remembered the instructions you gave me. You advised me to follow him and try to find out where he lived. Well, doctor, I know now, and I hardly expected that we were neighbors."

"What! He lives in your quarter?" cried Coulanges, who knew perfectly that Pontaumur lived in the Avenue d'Eylau, very far from the Rue de Constantinople.

"Not exactly. He is a Castilian of the Batignolles; and I have learned queer things. There is a lady who goes to his house, closely veiled."

Coulanges and Courtenay exchanged a glance.

"But I am beginning at the end, and I must tell you in the first place how I caught him. I went out, after breakfast, to have my fortune told. I know a clairvoyant who lives near Montmartre, and I wished to know if Fernando would return. I could not find a place in the tramway and I walked along the boulevard where we now are, till, as I came to the Place Clichy, where there is a statue—"

"The statue of Marshal Moncey."

"I don't know. Well, what do I see? A pretty coupé, stop-

ping at the corner of the Rue Amsterdam and Fernando getting out."

"A dark green coupé, drawn by a sorrel horse?"

"Sorrel is a sort of yellow, isn't it? Then it was a sorrel. Do you know him?"

"Perhaps, but go on."

"I pretended to be looking in a shop window. Fernando did not see me, but I have eyes in the back of my head, and, without turning, I saw him enter on foot the Avenue de Clichy."

"Which was formerly called the Grande Rue des Batignolles?"

"Probably. Then I said to myself: 'My good fellow, I am going to find out what you have come here for,' and I started, at a distance, to follow him. The Avenue de Clichy is always full of people. But it leads to the fortifications, and I was wondering if Fernando was going there, when he turned up a street I did not know. I did not wish to lose him and I hurried my steps. When I reached the corner where he had turned, I saw him, still walking on. There was no one else in the street at the moment and I could not risk following him, but I remained at the foot of the street and five minutes after I saw Fernando stop at the end, quite at the end of the street, and enter a house. I had him, you see."

"But you did not stop there, I hope?"

"No. I commenced by looking at the sign, and I saw that the name of the street was the Rue Ganneron; and then I dashed into it, keeping close to the houses. Here and there, there was a store and children playing about the doors. It was as still as a village street, and, at the end, the wall of the Montmartre cemetery. Ah! Fernando has chosen a queer place to live in, and the view from the windows must be lively, cypresses and tombstones."

"I certainly scarcely expected to learn that this lord had elected to live in the proximity of a cemetery. Are you sure that he lives there?"

"On the contrary, I am sure that he does not. But he comes there every day and sometimes twice a day."

"Is he a counterfeiter?" asked the doctor, laughing.

"No, but he receives a lady there. I don't think much of the house outside, but it is very *chic* inside."

"How do you know?"

"My dear doctor I have a tongue in my head. I discovered a fruit-woman and I entered her shop to buy some apples. She was a talker, I can tell you, and she told me all that I wished to know. Fernando has no servants in his house, and no one enters it except

himself and the lady. They have each a key; they always arrive separately and on foot. He leaves his carriage in the place where the statue is. The lady perhaps has hers, which waits somewhere else. The next house has been for rent for some time, and no one wants it. The fruit-woman herself is charged with renting it."

George did not lose a word of this somewhat rambling recital, and the doctor exclaimed:

"Delphine, you are decidedly the most intelligent woman I know! and it is a pleasure to listen to your adventures."

"Wait! I have kept the best till the last. I have seen the lady."

"Ah! Bah!"

"Yes, indeed; while I was talking with the fruit-woman, she passed before the shop."

"What did she look like?"

"I could not see her face. She wore a thick veil. But she is rather tall, a pretty figure, and was very simply dressed, all in black."

"And you did not wait for her return?"

"Not I! I had enough of it. I paid for my apples, talked a little longer with the fruit-woman and learned some other things, which did not interest me much, for instance, the name of the owner of the house. It was Madame Fresnay."

"Madame Fresnay!" repeated George. "That house belongs to Madame Fresnay?"

"That was certainly the name the fruit-woman gave me," replied Delphine, a little startled at the vehemence of the doctor's friend. "Do you know her?"

"No, why?"

"Now, my dear," interrupted the doctor, "you had better think no more about your Fernando. Keep the twenty-five louis he gave you, and cut him dead if you meet him."

"That is what I shall do. But I have lost what was in the chiffonier. The clairvoyant told me that I had been on the point of finding a treasure."

"You consulted her all the same, then?"

"I have just come from there."

"Then, it was some time ago since you saw the lady."

"Two good hours. I was going home to tell you all about it, when I saw you. I won't ask you to come and see me now, since you are in a hurry, but you must come to-morrow with your friend."

"Yes, and you will lose nothing by waiting. I will bring you a

present which will be worth more than the papers hidden in the foot of the chiffonier; for there was nothing there, I would bet. Treasures, you see, only exist in sensational romances. Your clairvoyant has stolen your money."

"I do not regret it. But I don't wish to detain monsieur, who is going to his notary, and besides I have only time to dress to go to my rehearsal. Don't forget that I depend upon your visit."

George responded with a smile, which Delphine was free to take as a promise, and Coulanges did not try to prolong the interview.

The damsel pirouetted on her high heels and departed, twirling her red parasol around her yellow head.

"Well, Courtenay, what do you think of it?" asked the doctor. "It seems to me that we are amply informed. By Jove! I never thought that information would come from that little goose."

"What difference does it make where it comes from?" exclaimed Courtenay. "The information is exact, you don't doubt it nor I either, and Mademoiselle Mezenc is certainly Pontaumur's mistress."

"Then, you think that it was she who entered the house in the Rue Ganneron?"

"Think it? Why, who could help thinking it? Do you doubt it?"

"I—I hesitate."

"What more do you need to be convinced? Didn't you hear that the house belongs to Madame Fresnay?"

"I heard that, but—"

"Madame Fresnay is Mademoiselle Mezenc's aunt. It is clear enough, it seems to me."

"It is not possible that Madame Fresnay is aware of her niece's conduct."

"You don't know Madame Fresnay and you have no idea of what she is capable. The words which led Saulieu to fight were spoken at that woman's house, and it was she who repeated them. Immediately after the duel, when you were still at Saint-Ouen, she knew the result of it."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure She met Madame Brehal at her dressmaker's and she told her that Maurice was killed. There is but one source from which she could have heard it. Pontaumur, on his arrival in Paris, went to her house, or at least sent her a letter or a dispatch. Therefore, she was in the plot."

"Well, but Madamoiselle Mezenc?"

"She also knew of the event before seeing me. She was watching for me at the window, I saw her from my carriage, and when I got out, she retired to take a carefully studied pose in one of the arm-chairs which adorn her studio. She expected me. And after having played, like a consummate actress, the comedy of sorrow, she had the audacity to allow me to perceive that she was in love with me. All is clear now. Pontaumur has been this woman's lover for a long time. He tried, in the first place, to please Madame Brehal, and if he had succeeded in marrying her, he would have shared his wife's money with Mademoiselle Mezenc. When he understood that Madame Brehal would not have him, he formed another scheme. Saulieu presented himself, and Mademoiselle Mezenc accepted him temporarily; but she had resolved to marry me. I remember that she did all she could to make me notice her, and she succeeded. I thought her charming, and I made the mistake of letting her see it. It was then that Saulieu's death was resolved upon. They have killed him; and if I had fallen into the trap which his unworthy *fiancée* set for me, their plans would have succeeded. Come, acknowledge that my reasoning, founded upon facts, is irrefutable; acknowledge that Mademoiselle Mezenc, Madame Fresnay and Monsieur de Pontaumur are wretches who must be exterminated."

"Oh! I do not defend them," said Coulanges. "But it is not proven to me yet, that Pontaumur took the two women into his confidence, when he charged Corleon with preparing Saulieu's assassination, and the other agent, whom we do not know, with arranging the accident which was to have killed Madame Brehal."

"I shall know all that for a certainty, when I have seen Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"You persist, then, in your project of going to her house?"

"Yes. I shall have the self-control to look her in the face and to speak of the noble woman her infamous lover attempted to destroy; her answers will aid me to find out the truth. You will wait for me, as we have arranged. I have a presentiment that this interview with Maurice's *fiancée* will be decisive."

The two friends had by this time reached the Place Moncey.

"There is the Avenue de Clichy," said the doctor, "and this Rue Ganneron which runs to the cemetery, must be the third or fourth on the right. If I did not fear to be surprised by Pontaumur, I should propose to go and have a look at the house."

"It is possible that I may do so later," said Courtenay, "but the

time has not yet come. Let us go on. The Rue Blanche is not far, and Mademoiselle Mezenc must have returned by this time."

Coulanges made no objection. He also wished to end with uncertainty as soon as possible. They picked their way through the horse-cars and omnibuses, which cross each other in all directions. When they were half-way across the place, the doctor was accosted by one of his patients, who was looking for a seat in an omnibus and was in despair at finding them all full. Courtenay saw the meeting and kept on his way, leaving Coulanges to disengage himself as best he could. The doctor soon succeeded in finding a place for the lady, but Courtenay was already at the corner of the Rue de Douai, when Coulanges arrived opposite a branch postal and telegraph office, which was about half-way between the above mentioned street and the Place Moncey.

A woman came out of the office as he passed, a woman who, on seeing him, hastily lowered her veil, and hurried across the street at the risk of being run over. Coulanges had had time to recognize her, and he stopped short in amazement. George had seen nothing, for he had turned into the Rue de Douai; but the doctor, who, a moment before, was still hesitating to believe that Mlle. Mezenc had taken any active part in an attempt at murder, the skeptical doctor could no longer doubt, after what he had seen upon her face.

He did not commit the mistake of running after Mlle. Mezenc, and he even had the presence of mind not to turn and follow her with his eyes. All was done so quickly, that Mlle. Mezenc might very well believe that the doctor had not recognized her, although he had been for a moment almost face to face with her. He could not desire anything better, and he hastened to catch up with Courtenay, whom she certainly had not perceived, for he was already in the Rue de Douai at the moment she left the office.

"You will never change, my poor friend," said George, as Coulanges joined him. "You stop to speak to every woman you meet."

"You need not complain of the one who just spoke to me. You owe to her the knowledge of the share Mademoiselle Mezenc had in the attempt against Madame Brehal."

"What nonsense are you talking now?"

"I am telling you the truth. If my patient had not detained me a few instants, I should not have encountered Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"What! You have seen her!"

"At the door of the telegraph office, which you passed two minutes before me."

"Did you speak to her?"

"I wasn't such a fool. I pretended not to see her and she hurried away. She was going toward the Place Moncey, but she can not be very far, and we had better walk fast, for she might have the idea of turning back, and we must not let her know that you were ahead of me. It was lucky that you took this street. If you had gone straight on, she might have recognized you from behind."

"If she had, what then?"

"Come, I tell you, come quickly, and when we are safe in the Rue de Bruxelles I will explain myself."

Courtenay submitted, and when they had turned out of the Rue de Douai, the doctor said:

"I was wrong. She would not think of following me, as she only longed to get away from me. We can talk now; and I will begin by telling you that Delphine exactly described the dress of the person who visits Monsieur de Pontaumur in the Rue de Ganneron, black gown, thick veil—"

"Not so very thick, since her face was not invisible."

"She had raised it, probably to speak to the telegraph employées, and quickly as she lowered it, I had time to notice—"

"What?"

"That her face bore the very evident mark of the lash of a whip."

"And you think—"

"It was given her by Madame Brehal's coachman, of course. The good man will have no need to seek for the boy who introduced the lead ball into his horse's ear. I have found him, myself, this pretended boy, although he has changed his costume. Yes, my dear fellow, Mademoiselle Mezenc dressed herself as a man to perform the operation herself, I am sure of it. The mark she bears could have been made by nothing else than a whip. I am positively certain of that; I would swear to it in court. Now, draw your own conclusions."

"The woman is a monster!'

"Indeed, the qualification is not too harsh. Yes, she is a monster of wickedness and hypocrisy. What must she be to try and kill Madame Brehal, who had loaded her with benefits, and to go and meet her lover close to the cemetery where her *fiancé* is buried? Ah! she must be very clever to know how to commit so many crimes without any one suspecting her save ourselves, and we were reproaching ourselves just now for doubting her innocence. We are certain of the truth, now, but we can do nothing against her; she is a woman and immunity is assured to her."

"You are mistaken. The punishment will come," said George in a hollow voice.

"The only one which you could inflict upon her would be to tell her protectress that she is unworthy of her kindness; but that would not do her much harm, for I don't suppose she cares to see again the woman you are going to marry. Well, there is no longer any need of going to the Rue Blanche, and I congratulate you."

"You need not congratulate me. I am going there."

"What! you still wish to take Madame Brehal's message! You are going to act as if you did not know Mademoiselle Mezenc's character! True, you need not fear meeting her, as I have just seen her in the street, but if she should return—"

"I wish to see her. I must. Before condemning her, I want to have a proof I lack, a proof of another crime, more horrible still. Wait for me as we arranged, and I promise that you will not have to wait long."

Coulanges could not understand, but he saw that his friend had conceived a plan which all the reasoning and all the exhortations in the world would not prevent him from executing. He followed Courtenay to the Place Banche and took up his position before a shop window, while George quickly descended the street and entered the house where he had come a month before to announce Maurice Saulieu's death.

George knew well what he was going to do. He resolutely mounted the staircase, and, when he reached the third floor, he rang with a firm hand.

"Will you ask Madame Mezenc if she can receive me?" he said to the maid who opened the door.

"Madame is not very well, and mademoiselle is out, but she will soon return," answered the girl. "If monsieur will wait in the studio, madame will join him there. I was just dressing her and arranging her chair for her."

This exactly suited George, who cared much less to see Madame Mezenc than to visit the studio where Mademoiselle Mezenc worked.

The maid conducted him there and left him alone. Nothing was changed in the studio since the day he had entered it before. He saw again the high backed chair, where Maurice's *fiancée* had been seated in the attitude of sorrow, the easels, the faded curtains, and the lathe which had been used to make the feet of the famous chiffonier. He had come for the express purpose of examining this lathe, and he went straight up to it. It did not appear to have been

used recently. The shavin s had been swept up, but the dust was thick upon the tools which encumbered the table.

Courtenay saw all this at a glance, and he perceived in one corner a box, where had been cast pell-mell, nails, screws, tacks, etc. He took up this box and shook it. "At last!" he murmured. "I knew I should find this last proof."

Under the nails there were some lead bullets and some wooden balls. Both were of the same size, but almost all the wooden balls had some slight defect. Three or four only were perfectly round, and these were covered with a thin layer of metallic paper to give them the appearance of lead. Without hesitation Courtenay put two real bullets and two false ones in his pocket, noiselessly gained the outside door of the apartment, and descended the stairs more quickly than he had mounted them. In five minutes he found Coulanges pacing up and down the pavement of the Place Blanche, and said to him, simply:

"I have it."

"What?" asked the puzzled doctor.

"The proof that Mademoiselle Mezenc aided her lover to assassinate her *fiancée*. It was she who manufactured with her own hands the false bullet with which Corleon loaded the pistol our friend used. Look! Here are some like it. I discovered them in her studio."

"A judge would condemn her on nothing but this," exclaimed Coulanges, after turning them over and over again in his hands.

"And we also condemn her, do we not?"

"I have done so some time ago. She and her odious accomplices have twice merited death; but it is not in our power to apply the penalty. Let us forget these wretches, and content yourself by being happy with the lovely woman whom they wished to kill, as they have killed Saulieu."

"Do you think that they will let her live?"

"I think they would try again if they could, but I defy them. They can not get into her sick-room, where her broken limbs keep her—"

"For how long, doctor?"

"Sixty days, at least. I shall take charge of guarding her, and, when she goes out again, you will watch over her, for you will be her husband."

"Do you promise me that during those sixty days no one shall approach her, and will you dare to forbid her to receive any communication from outside, under pretext that the slightest emotion would

be injurious? You are a physician. She has confidence in you, and she will obey you."

"I can do that, but why?'

"Promise me that you will do it."

"Well, I promise, but tell me your purpose in thus shutting Madame Brehal up."

"You shall know when the purpose is attained, and that will be soon."

"But, meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile, my friend, ask me nothing, be astonished at nothing. Let it be sufficient for you to know that, to avenge Maurice I am going to do what Maurice himself would have done, if they had not killed him; you yourself said so. Farewell, I have not a minute to lose. Not a word to Madame Brehal."

"He is crazy," thought Coulanges, watching George's retreating figure.

But George was not crazy. Never, on the contrary, had he been more clear-headed, more master of himself and more resolute. He had formed his plans, and, if he sought his friend only to quit him almost immediately, it was because he had not a minute to lose to trace the line of conduct which must be pursued toward Mme. Brehal.

But he had not finished with Mme. Mezenc and her daughter.

While Coulanges was thoughtfully wending his way toward the Avenue de Villiers, George ran down the Rue Blanche again and mounted four steps at a time the staircase which led to the Mezenc's apartment. He hoped to get back before his short absence had been noticed; and in this hope he had taken the precaution to leave the door open, but he found it closed and he was obliged to ring.

"Mademoiselle has returned," said the maid. "She knows that you had come and she greatly regretted not having seen you. But madame is too ill to leave her room to-day."

Everything was exactly as George desired it, for he no longer cared to see the mother since he had discovered the false bullets made by the daughter. He wondered how Mlle. Mezenc would receive him, but he knew perfectly what he was going to say to her; his words were prepared. He had only to alter them a little as circumstances would dictate and to restrain his indignation in the presence of the odious woman, whose wickedness he was now well aware of.

The servant ushered him into the salon and went to inform her

mistress of his arrival. He was kept waiting some time and he divined the reason.

"She is arranging her face," he thought, bitterly. "She hopes that I shall not see the traces of the blow she received when trying to murder Gabrielle."

He was not mistaken. At the end of a quarter of an hour Mlle. Mezenc appeared, and he saw at the first glance that, thanks to a skillful application of powder, the mark was scarcely apparent, the mark which the doctor had seen in full daylight, while the salon was lighted by only one window, which looked out on a court.

Mlle. Mezenc had not changed her dress, and she appeared very calm. Her eyes alone reflected a slight feeling of uneasiness, and George saw that she was wondering why he had come.

"Mademoiselle," he said, without preamble, "I left here just now with very keen regret at not finding you in; I feared to disturb your mother; but I remembered in the street that your maid had told me that you would soon return, and as I longed to see you to-day I came back."

"Your assiduity flatters me, certainly," replied Mlle. Mezenc with pronounced coldness, "but I should be obliged if you would tell me the reason of it."

"Can you not guess that I come from Madame Brehal? Do you know that she has met with a serious accident?"

"No, monsieur, I did not know it," she answered, without the quiver of an eyelid. "What has happened to her?"

"Her horse ran away with her last night as she was leaving the opera, and she has broken both her legs."

"I pity her with all my heart, and I pity you also, monsieur. This will delay your marriage."

"My marriage?" repeated Courtenay gloomily. "It will never take place."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mlle. Mezenc, calmly. "You have changed your mind very quickly. It was only the day before yesterday that Madame Brehal announced in your presence that she was going to marry you."

"It is not certain if she will survive her injuries, and, if she does, she will be a cripple. She knows it, and has released me from my promise."

"That is very generous on her part. Is this the news you were longing to tell me?"

"Yes, for you had suddenly ceased to come to Madame Brehal's house, and I thought that the premature announcement

made to you in the marble pavilion had influenced the decision which you appeared to have taken."

A light appeared in Mlle. Mezenc's eyes.

"And if it were so?" she asked, looking Courtenay full in the face.

"If it were so, mademoiselle, I should dare to confess that I was deceived as to my real sentiments; I thought, for an instant, that I loved Madame Brehal, and she thought that she loved me. We have both discovered that we were mistaken."

"A strange error, really. I have always known whom I loved."

"Because you have never experienced the illusions of a worldly existence, but have listened only to your own heart. From constantly hearing that we were a well-assorted couple, both in fortune and position, we ended by persuading ourselves, Madame Brehal and I, that we ought to marry. The accident which has happened to her has opened our eyes, and with common accord we have decided to remain only friends as in the past. She has taken her liberty, and I have taken mine."

"I congratulate you, monsieur; but why have you judged me worthy of receiving this confidence?"

"You ask me that? Have you then forgotten our interview in this studio, which I entered a short time ago, and fled from it, because the memory of a vanished hope oppressed me?"

"No, I have not forgotten it," murmured Marianne, with an emotion which was not feigned, for she comprehended now what George's purpose was.

"It has never left my memory, that scene where courage failed you, and where I was lacking in frankness. Our unfortunate friend was dead, and his image rose between us. How could we confess what we both felt? His body was not yet cold; but how many times since have I reproached myself for having hidden from you the avowal Maurice made to me as he expired in my arms!"

"What did he say to you?" asked the girl, almost in a whisper.

"He said to me—you will pardon my repeating this last confidence, which was almost a prayer—he said to me, then, when I was speaking of your love for him—he said to me: 'It is you whom she loves.'"

Mlle. Mezenc turned very pale, but she managed to answer:

"He told you the truth."

"Ah!" cried Courtenay. "Then I can at last tell you that I also loved you, and that I reproached myself bitterly for loving you—you, the *fiancée* of my best friend. I shuddered at not being able

to conquer this love which seemed to me wicked. I swore never to see you again, and to cure myself; I bound myself by a promise, but I had no sooner promised Madame Brehal to marry her than I regretted it. When I guessed from your pallor the noble sentiments which made you so resigned; when I heard you proudly refuse Maurice's bequest, then I cursed my weakness, and I almost fell at your feet in that kiosk to which you have never returned."

"I could suffer without complaint, but I would not see again the woman you preferred to me."

"But you can do so now. I am free, and I have come to say to you: 'Marianne, will you be my wife?'"

"You marry me—you? No, no; it is impossible. You are testing me by speaking so, and it is cruel. I do not deserve it."

"Will you believe me if I ask you to permit me at once to hand in your name and mine at the mayor's office? Answer yes, and we will be married in ten days, as soon as the law allows."

"So quickly?"

"Yes; for I have no one's consent to ask, and I hope that Madame Mezenc will not refuse hers."

"My mother will do what I wish, but if Madame Brehal—"

"Do not pronounce Madame Brehal's name! I foresaw that you would speak of her, and I do not doubt but that you share my opinion, that she must know nothing; we owe it to her not to wound her pride. It will be easy, for this accident will keep her at home. I will arrange with the physician to forbid all visits or letters. Besides, we shall not be married secretly, but we shall be married without display. We will find discreet witnesses, and invite no one. Four days after the ceremony, we will depart for Scotland or Switzerland, remain there till the end of July, and on our return I will present Madame Courtenay to Madame Brehal, who will receive her cordially, for she has never loved me, and she will have had time to forget any injury to her vanity as a woman."

"You are right in thinking of what it would cost me to hurt her feelings. She has always been goodness itself to me," murmured Mlle. Mezenc.

"She acknowledges it, the infamous creature!" thought George; but he said aloud: "You accept, then?"

"Yes, on one condition—on condition that you will not speak of our engagement to Doctor Coulanges."

"I will be very careful not to do so. He can not keep a secret, and he would repeat everything I told him to Madame Brehal."

"And I ask you, also, not to force me to accept the fortune left me by the one who was our friend."

George turned white with indignation. He thought of the grave where Maurice lay murdered, the grave which the murderer and his accomplice could see from the windows of the house in the Rue Ganneron.

But he had self-control enough to answer quietly:

"I understand your scruples, and I leave you free to do as you please. But don't you think the time has come to ask your mother's consent?"

"Come!" she said, holding out her hand, which he forced himself to take.

He followed her to Mme. Mezenc's room; and while Marianne was thinking, "At last he is mine! His fortune is mine!" George was saying to himself:

"Maurice, you shall be avenged!"

———

CHAPTER XII.

Two weeks had passed.

Mme. Brehal was still in bed, but it was no longer a bed of suffering but a bed of repose.

Fractures, when they are simple are not dangerous, and the illustrious surgeon whom Coulanges seconded with zeal had had little to do to repair the injury. Unfortunately he could not restore to his patient the use of her limbs; science could do nothing here; time was necessary, nearly two months, and Mme. Brehal had still six weeks of inaction.

She bore her forced seclusion cheerfully and her friends did all they could to amuse her. George came every morning and every evening, and his constant attentions sufficed to console her. But Coulanges, who had not the same reasons for devotion, Coulanges never quitted her, so to speak. He arrived as soon as the maid had finished her mistress's toilet, the toilet of an invalid of course, but as complete as if the invalid were on her feet, and he did not leave until the time that his patient felt the need, not of going to bed, since she never left it, but of sleeping.

He breakfasted and dined at the hotel in the Avenue de Villiers, and if he permitted himself to be absent for a few minutes to light a cigar, he went to smoke it in the park near the marble pavilion. He really enjoyed this existence, so contrary to his habits, and he

was delighted to be constantly in the society of a charming, well-bred woman.

In the beginning it was not for his own pleasure that he had embraced the charitable but little lucrative profession of a voluntary nurse. He had done so out of devotion to George, for, after lively discussions, he had ended by entering into the ideas of Maurice Saulieu's avenger, and he had consented to aid his projects, hardy and impracticable as they appeared to him. And, his resolution once taken, he had entered with extreme ardor into the performance of the rôle which fell to him by right in the execution of the plan conceived by Courtenay.

To commence with, he had managed to extract from Mme. Brehal a request that he would establish himself at her house almost permanently. He was a physician, and authorized, therefore, to prescribe for his patient a particular mode of life, under pretext of imposing upon her a system necessary to her recovery; and he had abused his authority by forbidding her any kind of excitement or fatigue. No visitor, no reading of the newspaper; visitors are agitating, and the papers are full of frightful crimes, the reading of which cause too vivid sensations. No correspondence, which infallibly congests the brain. To write is a labor, and every letter overexcites the convalescent who receives it. Two hours of George a day and no more; nothing retards a cure like too frequent and too prolonged interviews with the man one loves. In a word, absolute repose of body and mind.

Such were the doctor's orders for this very special case, and he had been clever enough to obtain from the eminent surgeon a promise not to contradict these somewhat unusual prescriptions. He had persuaded this prince of science that Mme. Brehal was an exceptionally nervous subject, and it was necessary to subject her to complete sequestration.

And the patient had submitted without difficulty to all the prohibitions imposed upon her. She had even anticipated Coulange's intentions, for, the day after the accident, she had denied herself to every one. Her friends were society friends, such as one meets with pleasure but does not receive intimately. She had no relative, and the people who came to her Wednesday receptions, she was not devotedly attached to.

She regretted only Marianne Mezenc, and it would have been difficult to have prevented her from seeing her, if Marianne had yielded to the wish which George Courtenay had been charged to express to her. But Mme. Brehal knew that the embassy had failed. George,

without explaining fully, had let her understand that Mlle. Mezenc felt toward her benefactress hostile sentiments, the origin of which it was better not to seek for, for fear of discovering that the girl did not merit the interest which Mme. Brehal felt in her.

And Mme. Brehal, wounded at so much ingratitude, spoke no more of Marianne.

There were also the domestics, whose silence it was necessary to insure, in order that nothing should trouble her peace. Courtenay had warned his that he would instantly dismiss any one of them who should permit himself to speak of the actions of his master, or set his foot, under any pretext, in the hotel of the Avenue de Villiers, or even speak to the people of the hotel, if they met. And as Courtenay's house was a good one, they would take good care to obey orders.

Mme. Brehal's servants were too well trained to commit any indiscretion, and, besides, they no longer saw her. Her maid alone had permission to approach her; and this confidential servant was a very intelligent person. "The day your mistress is entirely recovered," the doctor had said to her, "Monsieur Courtenay will hand you two thousand francs, if, while she keeps her room, no news from outside reaches her ears. To gain this recompense you must be silent, whatever you may hear. A word too much would make you lose your money, and would kill Madame Brehal." And the woman was silent, knowing well that the doctor was a man of his word, and that the promise made in M. Courtenay's name would be kept.

So the patient was as completely a stranger to what was taking place in Paris as if she had been shut up in the palace of the Emperor of China. And Paris was already thinking very little of her, although the accident which had happened to her had made sensation enough. It was reported that she was much more dangerously hurt than she really was, that it was the physician's opinion that she would never recover the use of her limbs; and as a cripple is of no use in society, the people whom she received, thinking that her house would never be opened again, consoled themselves by taking their tea elsewhere.

All was, therefore, proceeding in the best possible manner. Courtenay had no doubt of the success of his exceedingly dangerous project. The plot was arranged; the drama was moving rapidly on, and the denouement was approaching. The first scene of this denouement had even been played; but success depended upon the last, and Coulanges, not without a sensation of alarm, viewed the

arrival of the decisive moment. He was even tormented by remorse; he reproached himself for not having dissuaded his friend from a design, the execution of which seemed to him horribly dangerous now that it was close at hand.

For the last three days especially the cheerful doctor had been almost melancholy, and this change, which Mme. Brehal noticed, coincided with George's absences, repeated absences which greatly disturbed the chatelaine of the Avenue de Villiers.

It was in vain that Coulanges redoubled his care and solicitude, he could not distract her; and one morning when he was forcing himself to try and cheer her up and succeeding less than ever, she said to him:

"Doctor, you are delightful, but be frank and confess that George no longer loves me."

"I would rather confess that I had poisoned one of my patients," exclaimed Coulanges. "George adores you. Where did you get such an odd idea?"

"I would like to be mistaken, doctor, but my woman's instinct never deceives me. In the first place, George is no longer the same. When he comes here his mind is far away, and he does not come as regularly as he used. The day before yesterday I did not see him all day, yesterday he remained only ten minutes, and to-day, you see," she continued, regarding the clock, "it is noon. The hour of his morning visit is past. He will not come."

"Didn't he tell you that he had some business to attend to?"

"Yes, and it is precisely that which troubles me. George, I know, has no business. He does not meddle in politics, thank Heaven he does not gamble on the Bourse, and his fortune has never given him the least care. He has, therefore, taken a pretext, and when a lover uses pretexts it is a grave symptom."

"I protest, as George's friend and as a physician. Your diagnosis of the case, my dear madame, is erroneous."

"I do not pretend to oppose my science to yours, but do you believe in presentiments?"

"Not in the least."

"I do. And I am besieged by the idea that my happiness is threatened. If I should tell you that last night I dreamed that I saw George making love to another woman you would laugh at me."

"No, but I should try to show you that you were accusing him wrongfully. George loves only you, sees only you. Other women do not exist for him. George, my dear madame, in a fine case of

exclusive love in the acute stage, an affection with which I have never been attacked."

"You are laughing. But I know that my destiny is being decided at this moment; my heart tells me so."

"George will soon show you that there is not the least reason for your fears, and that he has passed the morning with his notary."

"I would like to be sure of it."

"How can I procure for you that certainty? Would you like to have me find the accused for you, so that he can justify himself in your presence?"

"I did not dare to ask you, but, since you have offered to, I wish you would go, my dear doctor, where you think you will find George and bring him to me. I suffer from his absences, and I want to see him."

Coulanges reflected for an instant, and said, rising:

"Your wishes are laws for me, my dear madame. I will go."

"Thanks! How good you are!" murmured Mme. Brehal.

"But don't take him unawares," she added, gayly. "Warn him that he is going to appear before his judge, and that I summon him to relate in detail all that he has done in three days."

The doctor bowed without answering. He was thinking.

Coulange took his leave to Mme. Brehal's joy, for the desire to see George had seized her suddenly, as a caprice seizes upon an invalid, and she wished to satisfy her desire at any cost.

It must be said that passive obedience, in this case, did not cost the doctor much, for he also was uneasy, and his uneasiness did not spring from a simple presentiment.

He knew upon what George relied to punish legally Maurice's assassins, and, although he had tried to turn him from his project, the doctor was beginning to feel the moral responsibility weigh heavy upon him.

"George told me how he passed yesterday," he thought, as he left Mme. Brehal's house, "and the day ended uneventfully. Will it be the same to-day? George has not appeared this morning. That is a bad sign. I must find him, and his valet will tell me where he has gone. God grant that there may still be time to prevent a catastrophe, for the more I reflect upon it, the more I fear that his terrible revenge will cost him dear. It is all very fine to make one's self the instrument to punish the guilty whom the law does not reach, but the idea may be carried too far. I have not always advocated the employment of gentle means. I was indignant against those two criminals, and I allowed myself to be persuaded by Courtenay."

Coulanges took a cab and drove to the Rue de Milan. He found there the valet, and he noticed at once that this man, who had served Courtenay for ten years, wore a troubled countenance. He had no need to question him for the domestic asked him point-blank:

"Has any misfortune happened to monsieur?"

"Not that I know of," answered Coulanges. "Why do you ask?"

"I thought that monsieur the doctor was with monsieur, and seeing monsieur the doctor alone—"

"Explain yourself more clearly, my friend; I do not understand what you mean."

"I mean that monsieur had an affair this morning."

"An affair?"

"Yes, a duel."

"Where did you get that idea?"

"Monsieur passed a part of the night in writing, and he did not go to bed. When I entered his room this morning the bed had not been slept in."

"If you have no other reason for thinking that Monsieur Courtenay this morning—"

"Pardon me, monsieur the doctor, I have another. I found monsieur loading his pistols, the pistols which monsieur the doctor gave him."

Coulanges turned pale. He remembered that George had come to him the day before to ask for those pistols with which Maurice Saulieu had been killed, and had tried in his presence the leaden and wooden bullets he had found in Mlle. Mezenc's studio. They had both seen that they fitted exactly the caliber of the weapons purchased in M. Corleon's presence. George had not said what he meant to do, but Coulanges had guessed it and had made no opposition to his taking away the pistols. It had seemed just to him that George should use them to punish the murderers.

He now looked at things from a different point of view.

"And then this is not all," continued the valet. "Monsieur, before going out, told me that, if he did not return, I should send to-morrow morning to monsieur the doctor a letter which he left upon the mantel-piece. If monsieur the doctor wishes to see it—"

Coulanges hesitated an instant, but, after reflection, he judged that he had a right to read a letter addressed to him, even before the time appointed for delivering it had arrived.

The valet brought it to him in the court where he had stopped, having no time to lose. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is for this morning between eleven and twelve. Yesterday, after I left you, I surprised a note from Monsieur de P. which leaves me no doubt. My measures are taken. They can not escape me. But that will not be all. The consequences of the act of justice I am about to accomplish are inevitable and I accept them in advance. After the event, I shall not probably be able to see Madame Brehal, because I shall not be free, and it is important that she should be informed of the facts which have determined my resolution. You alone are the one to tell her what it is necessary for her to know to judge my conduct. I rely upon you, and I am certain that, after hearing you, she will pardon me. Need I add that the secret must remain eternally between us three? I do not know when I shall see you, but I hope that I shall not be forbidden to communicate with you.

"P.S.—I am calm, because I have thought it all over, and I am sure that my conscience will never reproach me. I have judged and absolved myself."

"May the jury do the same!" though Coulanges, not very much reassured. "But we have not come to that yet, and I will not wait till to-morrow to know where he is."

"Has monsieur the doctor any orders to give me for monsieur?" asked the valet, timidly.

"No, no—only it is possible that monsieur may not return this evening. Come to my house to-morrow morning; I will tell you what to do," said the doctor hurriedly, re-entering his cab. Before doing so, however, he looked at his watch and saw that it was half past twelve. The hour indicated by George was past; the tragedy must have been played, if it was to be played that day.

"Never mind," thought Coulanges. "I have promised Madame Brehal. I must at all costs end my present position, which is no longer tenable. I shall arrive too late, but at least I shall have information."

And he cried to the coachman:

"Avenue de Clichy! I do not remember the number, but I will stop you at the proper time."

Coulanges had seen only the entrance of this Avenue de Clichy, the day when he met quite near there, Mlle. Mezenc leaving the telegraph office. But he remembered perfectly the photographic description given that same day by Delphine du Raincy, and he knew that the house where the guilty couple met was situated at the end of a street which led from the avenue to the Montmartre cemetery.

Courtenay had described to him the exterior of this house, saying that he had obtained the means of entering it, but he did not say what this means was. The next house not being inhabited, if Delphine was to be believed, the doctor supposed that George must have hired it, and he regretted that he had not thought of opposing any such idea.

"They may condemn him to ten years imprisonment," thought Coulanges with anguish, "and Madame Brehal would die of sorrow. Fool that I was not to have stopped him! But, perhaps it is not too late yet."

When the cab reached the Place Moncey, he told the coachman to walk his horse up the avenue, keeping to the right. In his worry he had forgotten the name of the street where the house was, but he hoped he would recognize it by reading the signs; and, indeed, after passing many streets provided with odd appellations, he found what he sought.

"Rue Ganneron, that is it," he thought.

And he judged that it would be well to leave his carriage, for it would only be an annoyance to him in what he had to do. Detectives always operate on foot and for good reasons; they can not stroll about, chat, obtain information nor profit by a chance encounter, if they are in a cab.

Coulanges had no sooner left his than he congratulated himself on having done so. The street ascended so steeply that the horse would have had some difficulty in mounting it, and the noise of the wheels would have drawn to the windows the inhabitants of this little frequented place. The doctor walked on, examining the houses and shops and trying to give himself the appearance of a gentleman who was seeking lodgings.

A hundred feet from the Avenue de Clichy, the ascent ceased, and at this point could be perceived at the end of the street, a gray wall above which appeared the trees of the cemetery. The house must be on the left, and the doctor saw with joy that there was no crowd before the door.

"If there had been a murder or simply a violent scene, the whole quarter would be in an uproar. The woman has not come, but she will come perhaps, and George is doubtless watching for her. I have arrived in time to prevent him from blowing her brains out with the pistol which killed Maurice. It would be more than a crime, it would be madness and would cost him dear. The thing is to know where he is hiding and how to get at him. I will com-

mence by questioning that fruit-woman who gave Delphine such good information two weeks ago."

The woman was at her door occupied in peeling potatoes, and the doctor had no difficulty in entering into conversation with her, for she called out to him to offer him her merchandise.

He asked her if she were not charged with letting a house in the neighborhood, and he expected to learn that she had quite recently found a tenant. But the dame replied, to his great surprise:

"Yes, monsieur, at your service. It has been vacant these two years. Eight quarters' rent lost for my nephew who is a market-gardener at Argenteuil. If it suits you you can have it cheap, for not to get a sou's rent and pay the taxes is impossible. It is not a palace, of course, but it isn't a bad house; there is a bit of a garden and a place to keep a horse and carriage. But I can not show it to you to-day. My nephew came yesterday and he forgot to leave me the key."

"I will return to-morrow," said Coulanges, who was delighted to learn that Courtenay had not compromised himself in this dangerous neighborhood. "But I can give a glance at it from the street."

"Oh, that is easy. You can see it from here, next to the house with green blinds, which is on the corner. That one has been let for a long time, and it belongs to a Madame Fresnay, you know her, perhaps? No? Well, that doesn't make any difference. It is a true saying that only the rich have any luck."

The conversation was interrupted here by the arrival of a customer, and the fruit-woman entered her shop to serve him.

Coulanges, who had obtained all the information he wanted, called out to her that he would return, and continued his way. It was not the house which was for rent that he wished to see, but he desired to examine the other, the one Pontaumur had furnished to receive his unworthy mistress.

It was pure curiosity on his part, but he could well afford to give himself that satisfaction, since he was sure now that no one had been killed there yet.

He could not divine what had prevented a catastrophe. Had Marianne Mezenc failed to keep the appointment? or had George changed his resolution? He could not tell, but he knew that nothing had happened, for one does not fire two pistol-shots without the neighbors perceiving it, especially in a peaceful street where there is no sound of wheels to deaden the report.

The house was two stories high, with six windows furnished with

green blinds, which were tightly closed, as well as the door through which Delphine had seen enter a lady dressed in black.

Coulanges did not commit the imprudence of stopping.

The fruit-woman might reappear, and he did not wish her to see him contemplating the house. He saw that the street turned at right angles, continuing to the left, along the wall of the cemetery. The house, which was on the corner, must have another front, and Coulanges had only to turn this corner to be shielded from the curious eyes of the fruit-seller. This he did, and he saw that on this side of the house there were no windows; the tenants lost nothing by this, for there was nothing to be seen but the wall of the graveyard.

But there was a door, a large double door, which probably gave access to an interior court, and which could not be used very often, for it was in very bad condition.

Further on, only walls could be seen; and the street was absolutely deserted.

"It was, perhaps, by that door that Courtenay intended to surprise them," said the doctor to himself. "The place is well arranged for anything of that sort; a man could escape this way without meeting any one. But what is the use of thinking anything more about it? I have seen all I can see, and I feel easier. I have now only to find Courtenay, and he must be either at home or at Madame Brehal's."

He was about to retrace his steps when the idea came to him of seeing if there was not a crack in the door through which he could look. As long as he was there, there would be no harm in doing that, and there was no danger of his being observed, for everything was as silent as if the house had never been inhabited.

He approached, therefore, gliding along the wall, and sought for a fissure to apply his eye to, when he perceived that the door was ajar; at this discovery, he started back in amazement.

There was certainly reason enough for astonishment that M. de Pontaumur, who guarded himself so well, had neglected to barricade this entrance. It was even incomprehensible, and Coulanges immediately launched into other suppositions.

"Could George have gone out that way and forgotten to lock the door behind him?"

On examining the lock nearer, he saw that the key had not been left in it, if indeed a key had been used.

The lock was bent as if it had been forced.

"More and more strange," thought the doctor. "It is impos-

sible that it was Courtenay who did this. The picking of locks is not a proceeding in use among people like us."

The door opened, as he had supposed, upon a court, and, looking in, he saw that this court was kept with much care. Long rows of benches full of flowers gave it the appearance of a garden, and the inner side of the house was covered with vines.

From the outside, no one would have suspected such an arrangement.

Coulanges was debating whether he should push his investigation further, when, on raising his hand, which had been resting against the door, he saw blood upon his fingers.

He could not believe his eyes, and yet it was blood which stained his hand. A physician makes no mistake in such a case.

He examined the door, and saw that it bore large bloody prints.

"I have arrived too late," he murmured. "The assassin has fled this way, and not long ago, for the marks which he left are still quite fresh. He evidently took this street, along the cemetery, and that is why I did not meet him. But—this assassin is not, can not be George. He borrowed the dueling pistols of me, and intended to use them; when one kills at a distance, he is not so covered with blood that he marks everything he touches. No; some sharp instrument has been used, a knife or a razor, and I can not believe that George acted like a common malefactor. It was not he. But who was it?"

Reason advised him to depart, and not mix himself up in an affair where he could only be seriously compromised; but, on the other hand, the desire to know what had taken place impelled him to enter.

"I must warn Courtenay," he thought; "and I can not tell him anything positive, if I do not visit the interior of this house."

From the place where he was standing, he saw on his left a flight of steps, and on these steps two or three overturned flower-pots; one of them was broken in pieces. The murderer had doubtless knocked them down, as he had rushed out of the house, and to have fled so precipitately he must have feared being caught. He had not even paused to close the door of the court or that of the house itself.

An idea then came to Coulanges—an idea which drove all the color out of his face.

"Suppose that blood is George's, and Pontaumur has killed him! The scoundrel is quite capable of using a dagger, and he is much stronger than George; besides, he had a legitimate right to defend himself, if George presented himself pistol in hand. Decidedly,"

concluded the doctor, "I should be a coward if I remained in uncertainty as to my friend's fate!"

Without hesitating further, he entered the court, and went straight toward the flight of steps which led to the interior of the house. Upon the threshold he stopped an instant to listen, and, hearing no noise, he entered.

A paved corridor led to a staircase covered with a new carpet; and upon this carpet, upon the balustrade, and upon the painted walls, Coulanges again saw red spots.

The murder must have taken place upon the second floor.

Coulanges had advanced too far to retreat, and he conquered the disgust which he felt at walking, so to speak, upon blood, and mounted the stairs.

When he reached the poorly lighted landing, he almost stumbled over a body stretched across it, and on regaining his footing, he saw that the body was that of a woman.

"She!" he cried.

His eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, and he recognized Marianne Mezenc.

The unfortunate woman had been killed by a single blow on the left side of her throat—a blow given by a sure hand, which knew very well where to strike to sever the carotid artery.

She had not defended herself; her garments were not in disorder; and she must have been surprised at the moment she arrived, for the strings of her bonnet were not untied, and her veil was half down.

Only part of her face could be seen; her chin, her mouth, and the lower part of her cheek, which still bore the mark of the whip.

"It was not George who did that."

Such was the doctor's first thought; and, in fact, it was impossible to admit that Courtenay had awaited Marianne at the top of the stairs to cut her throat before she had met her lover. And Coulanges wondered if Pontaumur himself had not committed still another crime.

He soon knew what to believe.

Upon the landing there was a door, and he had only to push it open to see a frightful spectacle.

At the foot of a lounge, with his arms thrown over his head, lay the body of Pontaumur.

He must have struggled with the energy of despair, for he was covered with wounds. The overturned chairs, the torn curtains, all showed that he had succumbed only after a terrible combat and

that he had disputed his life with many assassins. One man alone could not have overcome this colossus, and George had certainly taken no aids to execute the wretch he had condemned. Therefore George was innocent of the double murder; and Coulanges had no difficulty in guessing what had happened, for a secretary, broken open with blows of a hatchet, showed drawers pulled out and scattered papers. Two or three pieces of gold had fallen on the ground and the assassins had disdained to pick them up.

"I understand all," murmured Coulanges. "Thieves, knowing that the house had been hired and furnished by a rich man who did not live in it, thought that they could reap a rich harvest. But when they found Pontaumur here, they attacked and killed him; and, after he was dead, they forced the secretary where he kept his money. During this operation, Pontaumur's mistress arrived. The assassins heard her coming up the stairs, and one of them met her and stabbed her as she reached the landing. They are far away now, but if I had come a quarter of an hour earlier, I should, perhaps, have fallen into their hands and I should not have gotten out alive."

This was very well reasoned, but the doctor forgot, for the moment, that he ran another danger almost as serious, and he suddenly remembered it.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "if I should be surprised here with two dead bodies, I should find myself in a pretty predicament. The least that would happen to me would be to be arrested and forced to explain what I was doing in this house."

Coulanges did not stop to reflect further. He quickly descended the stairs, and went out as he had come in, without encountering any one. The street was still deserted, but he judged it prudent not to pass by the fruit-woman, who might ask him embarrassing questions. He went in the opposite direction, along the wall of the cemetery, without knowing exactly where the road led to. The great point was not to be seen in this neighborhood, and he regretted not having dismissed his cab, for he could not leave it without paying, and this mistake necessitated his showing himself again in the Avenue de Clichy, which is the most frequented street in the quarter.

"What shall I do now?" he asked himself. "In the first place, I must find George, for I suppose he has not given up his project, and, if he should enter the house now, he might encounter the police. But where is he? The hour he mentioned in his letter is past. He is late, for reasons I do not know, but he will come; he

is, perhaps, at one end of the Rue Ganneron, while I am beating a retreat the other way."

The doctor, seized with uneasiness, commenced to run, and, after a long *détour*, finally came out on the avenue. There, he took a slower gait, in order not to attract the attention of the passers-by, and, going on toward the boulevard, he found his coachman, who was asleep on his box and consequently was in no way occupied with the acts of his passenger.

Coulanges awoke him, paid him, and with great satisfaction saw him whip up his horse without turning his head.

"There is no one who will testify against me," he thought. "He did not look me once in the face."

But this was the least of his worries, and he commenced to walk up and down the sidewalk, without losing sight of the Rue Ganneron. He continued this for a quarter of an hour, when a coupé stopped about fifty feet from him and he saw Courtenay alight.

"At last!" he murmured, and he ran toward him, gesticulating to him to stop.

George, who did not understand, received him with very bad grace.

"Why are you here?" he asked abruptly.

"I will tell you, but come away, come quickly! And since you have been so imprudent as to use your own carriage, let us take it and go to Madame Brehal's without losing a minute." And as George made a movement to pass him, he added: "They are dead. Maurice is avenged."

"You are mocking me!"

"No; I assure you, after having seen what I have, I am in no mood for jesting. They are dead, I tell you. They have been assassinated."

"Who killed them?"

"People who thought to find the house empty and entered to steal. Pontaumur was lying down, and they stabbed him with a knife. She came after they had finished with him, and they cut her throat. If I had entered while they were at work, they would have treated me in the same fashion, and you, too, my dear fellow. We have had a narrow escape. But do not let us remain here, I pray."

"Why?" asked Courtenay, stunned by what had been told him.

"Why? Don't you understand that the crime may be discovered at any moment and we may be accused of having committed it? You must have been several times in the Rue Ganneron and you

have probably been noticed. I have just left it and I spoke to a fruit-woman who would certainly recognize me. Now, it will soon be known that one of the victims was your wife, and that you were to-day in the neighborhood of the house where she met her lover."

"Do you think, then, that if I am questioned, I shall not tell the truth? I came to kill them."

"I know it and it is fortunate that you arrived too late. I have reflected much during the last two days and I have bitterly reproached myself for not having dissuaded you from a senseless project. I went to your house this morning to tell you what I thought of it, and, when your valet gave me your letter, I thought that all was lost; the only hope was to reach the house before you. I hastened there, and found two dead bodies. The assassins, in escaping, neglected to close the door of the court.

"It was by that I intended to enter. I had the key."

"How did you procure it?"

"One evening, when I was examining the house, I found it in the lock, where Pontaumur had doubtless forgotten it, and I took it."

"Well, if it is in your pocket, I advise you to throw it away; for it would have a bad look in case you should be suspected. I hope that, at least, you have not shown yourself this morning in the Rue Ganneron."

"No, I have been to my notary's and my banker's. I expected to be arrested this evening, and I wanted to have my affairs in order."

"And you have the pistols with you?"

"Yes," said George. "I loaded them with the bullets I found in the studio of the accomplice of our friend's assassin."

"You should at least have buttoned up your overcoat. I can see the pistols now, and you will do me the favor of getting rid of them immediately."

"I can not cast them into the street."

"No, but we are going to get into your carriage; you must leave them there and I will take them home. Come! we have delayed too long."

When they were seated in the carriage, Coulanges, who had pushed the pistols under the cushions and given the coachman Mme. Brehal's address, began as follows:

"My dear fellow, you are more lucky than you are wise. You are rid of those wretches, and you have no murder upon your conscience. But you must prepare yourself for the consequences of

the event. What are you going to say to the charming woman who is impatiently waiting for you? She is surprised at not seeing you so frequently as formerly. She sent me to find you and I promised to bring you back with me."

"I shall say nothing," answered George.

"It is my opinion that it is best not to tell her, now that Mademoiselle Mezenc has been assassinated."

"So you think it best to tell her nothing?"

"Yes, upon that point the friend and the physician are in accord."

"Then, why are we going to her house now?"

"Because, I repeat, she insists upon seeing you to-day. She is very nervous and very disposed to think that you are hiding something from her. If you did not appear, this idea would grow and you would have much difficulty in making your peace."

"I am in such a state of mind that I would gladly put off the interview. I need time to calm myself after what I have undergone during the last three days."

"You need not remain long with Madame Brehal. This time, it will suffice if you simply show your face; but take my advice and do not defer this indispensable visit."

Courtenay, half persuaded, did not say anything further, and the conversation ceased.

They soon arrived at the Avenue de Villiers, which is not very far from the Avenue de Clichy.

All was quiet as usual in the hotel, but they found, at the top of the staircase, the maid who had been watching for their arrival.

"Ah, monsieur the doctor," she said hurriedly, "it is time that you arrived. Madame is very agitated, and she has done nothing but ask for you."

"Well, announce us," said Coulanges, not in the least alarmed.

"Oh! she will be very glad to see you."

Mme. Brehal turned pale as she saw them, and, without saying a word, allowed them to approach the bed.

Mme. Brehal did not speak, but her eyes questioned George, who answered without hesitation:

"It is true. They are both dead, but they did not perish by my hand. She tried to murder you. It was she who, disguised as a street boy, placed a leaden bullet in your horse's ear, and caused him to run away."

"The proof of this accusation?"

"Ask Coulanges. He will show you the ball picked up on the

pavement where Max fell, and he will bear witness that the next day your *protégée* still bore on her face the mark of a blow inflicted by your coachman's whip."

"It is all true," said Coulanges, gravely.

"And this crime was not the first. Maurice Saulieu was assassinated, for the duel was unfair. The pistol given him by a wretch, who was Pontaumur's intimate friend, was loaded with a wooden bullet, and this bullet his *fiancée* fashioned with her own hands."

"She! Marianne! No! no! she is incapable of these infamies! Why should she have committed them? Monsieur Saulieu adored her, and only aspired to make her happy, and I, I was her devoted friend—"

"She would have spared you if you had not announced that you were going to marry me. But she resolved on your death when she knew that you were to take the place she coveted. She had already rid herself of Maurice, who stood in the way of her designs. Now Coulanges will tell you what he has seen."

The doctor was expecting to be called on by his friend, and he was prepared. He related clearly and succinctly, but passing over the too repugnant details, the history of his expedition which had been terminated by a ghastly discovery. He did not forget to mention the feeling which had led him to undertake this expedition, he congratulated himself on having arrived in time, and he pointed out the manifest intervention of Providence in the punishment of the guilty couple.

Mme. Brehal, overcome with emotion, was weeping:

George fell on his knees beside the bed, and said in a trembling voice:

"Nothing matters to me if you pardon and love me."

She had not the strength to answer, but he read in her eyes that she had already forgiven him.

* * * * * * *

A month in Paris is a century. Already the crime of the Rue Ganneron is scarcely spoken of.

The murderers have been arrested, and have made a full confession: there were three of them, one of whom knew M. de Pontaumur's habits, having been employed by this person whose antecedents left much to be desired, although he had access to the best society.

The case is not rare.

It was discovered in the examination of the affair that he had made a fortune in the Brazilian slave-trade.

The trial of the murderers will take place at the next assizes, but George will not be called as a witness, and he is only waiting to leave Paris until Mme. Brehal's recovery, which will not be long. It has been arranged that she shall pass the summer in Switzerland and the winter in Italy. George will accompany her, and they will be married on their return from this long journey.

The envious and the gossips will have had time to forget them; moreover, their enemies have disappeared.

Corleon, after his misadventure at the Moucherons club, thought it prudent to leave France, and he did well, for, in raking up Pontaumur's past, the police obtained some very bad information in regard to his acolyte, who was found to be a rascal capable of any baseness.

Mme. Fresnay, that aunt who was not much better than her niece, and who contributed to her ruin, has eloped to Germany, and she will probably not return.

Mme. Mezenc mourns the daughter whom she had guarded so badly, but she will lose nothing by her death for she inherited her property, and Mlle. Mezenc had not renounced Maurice Saulieu's bequest. The mother will have a lawsuit with the provincial cousins, but she will win it.

Delphine made a success at her *début* on the stage of the Bouffes, and she has furnished her apartments gorgeously. She speaks no more of Fernando, and she has sold the famous chiffonier which recalled only unpleasant memories.

And the doctor?

The doctor throughly enjoys the repose purchased by two long months of tribulations. He has resumed his former habits, and he swears that he will never again undertake to serve as a second in a duel, still less follow clews and clear up mysteries.

He has also entirely given up the practice of medicine. It was enough for him to have cured Mme. Brehal, and to remain her friend. But he has not changed his philosophy, and he persists in maintaining, like Dr. Pangloss of Candide, that all is for the best in the best of worlds.

And he now adds: All's well that ends well.

THE END.

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