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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 799.

D E N I S E BY THE AUTHOR OF "MADEMOISELLE MORI."

IN ONE VOLUME.

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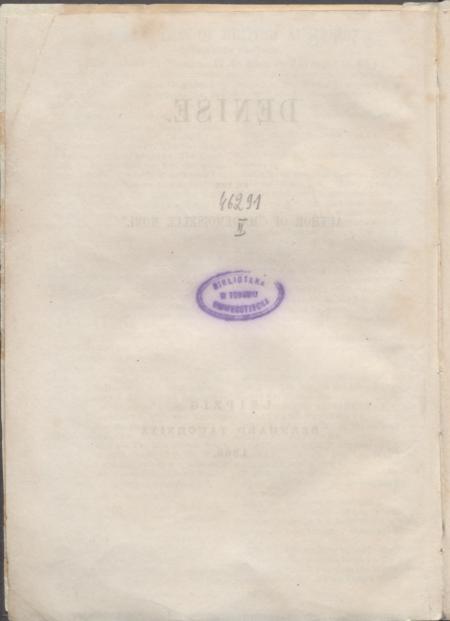
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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1865.



COLLECTION

OF

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VOL. 799.

DENISE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MADEMOISELLE MORI."

IN ONE VOLUME.

"Wait, my faith is large in time And that which brings it to a perfect end."

TENNYSON.

CHAPTER I.

According to political distribution the little town of Farnoux is in France, but the character of its inhabitants and the surrounding scenery is far more Italian than French. The Farnousiens are a primitive race, in whom the rude Provençal nature is tempered by something of the graceful, inborn Italian courtesy. Their patois, too, has more than a fair share of Italian mingled with it, besides certain other words, Arabic and Spanish, descended from former days, when the south of France was almost entirely subjugated by the Saracens.

Farnoux is an aristocratic little town; it has no commerce, and its chief produce consists of olives and oranges — fruits which the Nymphs might not have disdained to cultivate in classic days. It is rich in local associations, and its ancient seigneurs still dwell in the château perched on the grey crag that looks down from afar upon the town. History tells that the château was once a monastery, till the Saracens seized it, and converted it into a fortress, afterwards retaken by Charles Martel. Here tradition steps in, and says that by Charles Martel it was given to the De Farnoux — for there always were De Farnoux, long before Saracens were ever heard of — and thenceforward they held the château and lands around on condition of protecting both the town and

Denise.

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neighbouring coast from invasion. So the De Farnoux fortified the little town; and remains of those fortifications may still be seen in the picturesque walls straggling down the hill-sides, worn away by the weather into fantastic battlements and ivy-clad turrets, as if they had put on a peaceful mantle instead of a coat of mail. Nay, here and there, where the stones have crumbled away, a wild olive has sprung up in the breach.

The town is entered by massive gateways, and might yet make a stout resistance if the inhabitants chose to defend their narrow streets. Truth to tell, it rather looks as if the lords of Farnoux had feared their own vassals as much as the Saracens, when they set their dwellings like an eagle's eirie; and perhaps the town found its worst enemies in its neighbours. All the villages - they are scarcely more than villages - along this coast, especially where it becomes indubitably Italian, seem to have had their hand against every one, and every one's hand against them. Antibes and Hyères, little Voltri and Spottorno, Nice and Monaco, only followed the example of Crema and Cremona, Ancona and Venice, and all the other great cities, French and Italian, which indulged their jealousy and spited each other to their mutual ruin. Other causes besides these local feuds had combined to change Farnoux from a flourishing little city into a stagnant village. Its lords, more than suspected of a leaning to the Albigense heresy, had openly and early devoted themselves to "the religion," as its followers emphatically called the Huguenot cause. Their vassals were not slow to follow their example — Provence has ever been a fertile soil for what some call heresy, and others reformation. Persecution drove out at least half of the population of Farnoux; for a time even the château was deserted, but its lords returned as soon as a gleam of tolerance shone out. But "the re-

ligion" had been almost uprooted in Farnoux; and at the present day scarce twenty Protestants could be found among a population of several thousand Romanists. Only one name of one of the crooked old streets in the upper part of the town, tells that there once was a "temple" (as the Huguenot churches were called) in Farnoux.

The nearest town is at least fourteen miles of — fourteen miles of white, hilly, dusty road, but a diligence passes through Farnoux, and keeps the inhabitants *au courant du jour*. They are easily satisfied; the events occurring in those barbarous regions where there are no olives or orange-trees do not interest them much. It would be possible to find men and women in the oldest and least civilized part of the town who hardly know what Paris is, and are so little concerned as to the last change of rulers that the name of Napoleon represents to them their former emperor returned from St. Helena.

The scenery around Farnoux has a mingled beauty and austerity difficult to describe. There is so much barrenness mingled with extreme fertility - such dreary, sunbleached limestone crags rise above the soft olive woods, that the first view is apt to cause a shock of surprise and disappointment to any one who comes from' the smiling hill-sides and fruitful valleys that border the sea a little further south. Provence has obtained, like Languedoc, a poetical reputation which only a small part of it deserves. Its salt lakes and marshes, its hills and plains, are more dreary, more scorched and desolate, than any other part of France. Farnoux has, indeed, great beauty, but beauty which needs time to realise it, and even more does it require sunshine - not the steady withering sun of noonday, for that reveals the hardness and barrenness of the limestone crags, but a day of gleams and shadows, half smiles, half frowns. A grey autumn evening

is not favourable to Farnoux. It was at this time that the diligence passed through it, and there could be no doubt of the unfavourable impression made on at least one of its occupants, as, after toiling up the last hill, it descended to the town, late one autumn day. The sun had set among grey clouds, and the limestone rocks that towered over the road and girded in the wide bay, looked colourless and arid. The lines of town swept down the hill-side, and terminated in an ancient fort, standing on the further horn of the bay, round which a fringe of white waves leaped — a decrepit old town, elinging to the mountain-side, its lowest houses on the very shore, upon which a pale sea was querulously plashing.

Farnoux did not look tolerable just then, even as a resting-place for the night, and the young traveller who leant out and surveyed it, reflected with dismay that she was about to make it her home. She was travelling alone for the first time, and her expectations were high; she had heard - who has not? - of the wondrous blue of the Mediterranean, and the exceeding loveliness of its coasts, and she felt cheated and ill-used. In the indistinct light defects were more perceptible than beauties; she saw the dreary sea and rocks. but could not guess that the strange fragrance wafted into the stifling intérieur of the diligence came from orangegardens, on the slopes above which grey olives drooped their pensile branches, and pine-trees climbed the heights where olives refused to grow. She bent forward again, but could distinguish nothing but shimmering sea and pale rocks, with a château far off on the highest. She looked long and earnestly at this. Perhaps because a French château was a new and romantic object to her - possibly because some presentiment told her that she and the old castle would one day see strange things together.

The diligence drove through an ancient gateway, over

which were still seen the half-defaced arms of the seigneurs of Farnoux, rudely handled in the Revolution, but still there. A long, narrow, chilly street led to the little inn where it stopped; and where, as usual, a group of idlers had gathered to see it arrive. There was the usual bustle and confusion, change of horses and exchange of words, but neither the *commis voyageur*, nor the soldier, nor the shopkeeper who had come into the country with his child of a year old for a day or two's pleasuring, nor the peasant women in and about the vehicle alighted; there was only one passenger for Farnoux; the girl already mentioned.

She got out, stood by her box, and looked round anxiously, as if expecting to be claimed by some one. Meeting only curious, wondering looks, she seemed to perceive that no one was there on her account, turned to the *faquin* who had lifted down her box, and said, "Where does Mademoiselle Le Marchand live?"

She spoke French as if it were the language she habitually used, but it had neither the brisk vivacity of Parisian French, nor the soft accent of the south, and the porter's reply was, "Mam'selle is not of this country?"

Everybody pressed nearer to hear her answer. She looked up quickly at the bronzed faces around, as if questioning their right to catechise her, but seeing nothing but goodhumoured, undisguised curiosity, she answered, "I have lived in England, but I am French."

"She has lived in England, but she is French," repeated the whole crowd of idlers, which had received several accessions in the last few minutes, and this remarkable news, translated into patois for their benefit by the porter, flew from mouth to mouth. An instinct of something novel at hand brought several heads to windows near: the crowd thickened. The diligence might go as soon as it liked; there

was something newer to look at. Apparently the young stranger did not find it agreeable to be the centre of all eyes, for she repeated her question impatiently. The porter surveyed her again, satisfied himself that the address on her trunk was "Mademoiselle Denise Le Marchand," reflected, and finding the mental effort too great, appealed to the bystanders to know what inhabitant of Farnoux the demoiselle could possibly want. On this there arose such a Babel of suggestions that Denise thought everybody in Farnoux must have this plebeian name; women, children, and dogs flocked up and added to the clamour, which being in patois was unintelligible to her; and she stood frowning and tapping her foot impatiently, greatly annoyed at being thus detained at the inn door, because no one would listen to the name of the street which she gave. The landlord at last came, and, in the momentary silence which ensued, she demanded, "Mademoiselle Le Marchand, rue de la Miséricorde." Then -"E-h! she wants Misé Marchand, the fada," and again the patois baffled her. Every one in a southern village has his or her sobriquet, usually derived from some peculiarity of mind or body, and often ludicrously appropriate. A fada is a sort of grown-up child, mischievous and malignant, perhaps possessing the evil eve-in short, a dangerous and suspicious being. Every one looked with astonishment and compassion on Denise, when they found that she belonged to this Mile. Le Marchand, and would have followed, whispering and grimacing, when the porter took up her box, but the landlord of La Poste called them to order, and only one or two pursued Denise as she moved away. The porter strode through the little place with its lime-tree in the middle. Half the population of Farnoux were gathered in the evening air. The men - handsome, sunburnt, red-capped fishermen - smoking, sitting on stone benches and steps, or on the

wall above the sea, which broke against it, the plash just audible above the buzz of talk. Two or three village magnates strolled up and down, and discussed the prospects of the olives. Women leant in the doorway with babies in their arms or at their feet, or distaffs in their hands; and girls chattered round the fountains. All looked at Denise as she passed, nor did she escape some of the sharp arrows of French satire, ready to be launched at any stranger, native or foreign. Denise in her turn did not fail to note the hardy, red-capped, red-sashed fishermen, and the women, with a flower of jessamine or oleander set coquettishly in their dark hair behind the ear. From beneath an archway a narrow street wound steeply upwards to a terrace of old houses. Still higher rose similar terraces, one above another; narrow streets intersected each other, and were crossed here and there, now by a mere line of brickwork, with a fringe of valerian and caper, now by an arch so broad and solid that a house was perched upon it, and joined the upper stories of those right and left. As they passed through this maze, the porter, between the whiffs of his cigar, asked Denise more questions than she liked to answer. It sounded too naïf for impertinence, and he was so ready to tell his own history, and so certain that she could not object to tell hers, that she hardly knew how to reply. She was well pleased when he pointed out the house of which they were in search; it was close to an old church, and its open door revealed an interior so unlike anything that the aspect of the tumble-down town suggested, that Denise stood amazed. A great hall appeared, feebly lighted by a window on the landing-place of the first floor; many doors opened into it; one, which was ajar, disclosed stores of wood, oil, and wine within. No one seemed to inhabit this rez-de-chaussée; it was only a region of store and lumber rooms. The last gleams of daylight fell from

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the window above on the broad steps of a stone staircase, with a fanciful iron balustrade. A woman was coming down, with a green water-jar on her head. The porter asked if Mlle. Le Marchand were at home.

"Eh! I do not know. I am Mme. Huard's servant."

"On which floor does Mlle. Le Marchand live? the fada, you know."

"On the fifth, — and the woman went away through a door leading into a garden, utterly indifferent to the presence and perplexity of Denise. It seemed an evil augury as to the welcome Denise would receive, when at last her relative was found. If the welcome were cold, at least strangers should not witness it.

"Thanks — you need come no further," said she, as the porter shouldered her box, and prepared to ascend.

"Tis a long way to the *cinquième*: Mademoiselle may find it difficult to have her box carried up," said he, reluctant to miss the meeting between aunt and niece. "Besides, Misé Marchand may be absent: she is often from home."

"What do I owe you for your trouble?" asked Denise, with a little resolute gesture, that indicated she intended to be obeyed.

"What mam'selle pleases."

Perplexing answer, which left Denise in uncertainty, and caused her to pay twice as much as was necessary.

"Thanks, a thousand thanks, mam'selle! mam'selle is generous, like her aunt," said the man, walking off with satisfaction that would have shown a more experienced traveller she had been lavish beyond what the occasion demanded.

Denise heard sounds of mirth on the first-floor, otherwise all was as still as if this great house had been uninhabited. She came to one landing after another, with doors opening

on each. One on the rez-de-chaussée opened as she passed. and a keen eye watched her up the stairs, perceiving directly that she was a total stranger. It belonged to Mme. Rocca, the owner of the house, but Denise did not notice her in the gathering darkness, and mounted wearily on till she reached the fifth story. Here were two locked doors, with a brass plate on each. By a glimmer which still crept through a skylight. Denise read the names rudely cut on each plate: "Madame Pitre" - "Mademoiselle Le Marchand." She had found the apartment of which she was in search, but where was the owner? What could have become of this unknown and sole relation? why had nobody met her, and how was she to get in? and if she should not be able to get in at all that night! - It was a dismal prospect for a maiden of nineteen, thrown for the first time on her own resources. She rang in vain. Then she put her hand in her pocket to feel for her purse, as if she had no other friend, yet when she had it, she stood with it in her hand, quite uncertain what to do. At this moment quick tripping steps came lightly up the long ascent, and a little, sallow, black-eved woman appeared. She seemed so much at home, that Denise guessed directly she must be the owner of one of the locked rooms, and while the new comer stood amazed at the sight of the girl, whose eyes were full of tears of disappointment and perplexity - "I speak to Mme. Pitre?" said Denise. "Can she tell me where Mlle. Le Marchand is?" Some instinct told her that this was not her aunt.

"Oh, my dear demoiselle, it is useless asking me. I have had letters of hers waiting these three weeks. There they are on my mantelshelf, as you will see if you come in. It is like asking where a comet is! Her apartment is locked up; she never lets any one enter it during her absences, not even me! She is engaged on a large painting after nature, but I am ignorant in what spot. She may be back to-night, or she may stay away a month. You seek her, my dear?"

"She has never had my letter!" said Denise in dismay, hearing no more of Mme. Pitre's chatter than the words that conveyed this unpleasant idea.

"It is here: without doubt I have it here, my child; she will get it when she returns. Are you in haste to see her? You are a stranger here?"

"I am her niece. I have lived in England with a lady who brought me up. She is dead, and as I had no other friends, I was obliged to come here at once. A lady let me travel part of the way with her, but she could not spare time to come here," said Denise, with a grave conciseness that contrasted drolly with Mme. Pitre's rapid *babillage*.

"What, her niece! I see the niece of whom my dear friend so frequently has spoken to me? her only brother's child? what joy!" cried the little woman, kissing Denise on both cheeks with unfeigned cordiality. "That excellent Mlle. Le Marchand will be transported with delight! — Enter! but enter then, I say; you remain with me till she returns; it is a thing of course. I have not much to offer you, that is too true!" and she looked with chagrin round the little room to which she had introduced Denise; "but here you are at home for the moment. Of what then thought that Englishwoman when she let a young girl run thus about the world? Bah! tell me not that those English have their own ideas; it is not seemly."

"She was French," Denise replied.

"Really!" said Mme. Pitre, a good deal taken aback; "but then, doubtless, she had lived long in England? *Tenez*! — you are hungry? — thirsty? Let us see what we can do."

Poverty sat lightly on Mme. Pitre; she provided for the comfort of her unexpected guest with the utmost gaiety out

of her small resources, and descended to the apartment of Mme. Rocca to beg her assistance in making up a bed in a small empty room, adjoining the one which served her as bedroom, kitchen, and parlour. Presently she tripped back again, and nodded to Denise, who was finishing her coffee. "Bien, bien, mon enfant; employ yourself, eat and drink after your journey. All is being arranged; Mme. Rocca is charming to-night. She knows she loses nothing by serving a niece of Mlle. Le Marchand. She had already discovered your arrival; a mouse does not squeak in all the house, but Mme. Rocca knows it! Very right, too, as you will find when you have to manage a household. And that dear droll M. Rocca gives her so much trouble! — My dear," (this was added as she popped her head out of the inner room a moment later,) "when did you see your aunt last?"

"I do not remember her."

"Tiens! never visited you? It is droll! she speaks of you with an affection! — an affection! Well, she is ... original, I deny it not; but excellent. You will not judge of her circumstances by mine. I am poor as Job; but she, though she lives up here, and dresses as even I should really hesitate to do — but then she has such talent! — she has a pretty property in Normandy. In effect, she is rich; what I call rich, I mean. I daresay the family at the Château are less well off. Certainly at one time the De Farnoux knew what poverty was, and it is all the harder in their rank of life, for 'noblesse oblige,' you know."

"My aunt is rich?" said Denise with wonder.

"Assuredly. Have you found your letter? there are a heap for her up there: she has visits and letters from artists, from musicians — do I know from whom! — in short, letters of all sorts, except love-letters — I never heard of her receiving any of those," said Mme. Pitre, with a sly twinkle

in her eye. Yet, doubtless, she has had many such in her time, only 'twas her fancy to be an old maid. I am one, too, my dear; Pitre is my maiden name — Mesdélices Pitre; nobody's 'delight' but my own, I fear! But I call myself Madame; I find it more respectable and better since I live all alone, and have my bread to earn. I would not tell every one, but I am sure you do not want for discretion. I wished Mlle. Le Marchand to do the same, but she said — however, that does not regard a young girl like you."

"Nay, tell me, or I shall have to ask my aunt," said Denise, rousing up from her half-asleep state, and laughing a little.

"Well, it may assist you to understand her; she is peculiar. I told you she was an original," said Mme. Pitre, something of compassion mingling with the profound respect that she evidently felt for her friend. "Such a pity she is not more like other people!"

"But why should she be?"

"Why! Ah, my dear, one should keep in the beaten track on all occasions. Well, she said, my dear, she said in her brusque way, 'The only one to whom I ever would have given the right to make me Madame, did not care to do it. Never speak of it again.' And it is unnecessary to say that I never did. She has had sorrows — your aunt; I do not know it, but I divine it. You seem weary, my child; will you go to bed? As for me I must go out early to-morrow; but I can explain that by and bye. Come, see your room."

It was a narrow, cell-like abode; a bed had been made on the floor, and that was all that Denise comprehended. She was too weary to look, speak, or think, but she had not yet reached the age when fatigue banishes slumber, and when Mme. Pitre returned for a few last words, the girl lay asleep. It was hard to have to repress the speech bubbling

on her lips, but she stood smiling good-humouredly, considering her young visitor more narrowly than she had hitherto had time to do. Her plain face softened into tenderness as she looked.

"Pawrette! no one to meet her; no one but her aunt to take care of her, and she a genius! Knows not how to look after a young girl! an orphan, too! No sisters nor brothers! Ah, well, I had both once, and how many are living now? But I'm a middle-aged woman — at least, not young — sixty last year! while this child ... What a serene face it is now! as calm as an angel's, poor child! 'Tis hard, very hard, to lose relations, but harder still, like her, to have none to lose. I have not truly lost them, for I hope to meet them again in Paradise. I shall know them, no doubt, having had them once for my own. Figure then to thyself, Mesdélices, that this young girl has much to envy thee. Every one is better off than he thinks; it is folly to complain. Courage, then!"

And the little woman wiped her eyes, and went away cheerfully to her own bed.

CHAPTER II.

MADAME Pitre had not the heart to wake her guest the next morning, but she waited impatiently for her appearance, much afraid that it would not take place until she had gone forth to her daily avocations. In fact, she was on the point of sallying out when Denise at last came from her room. After so long a rest as gave her no excuse for not being perfectly fresh and bright, Mme. Pitre could now judge of what she was in her ordinary condition. She did not think her pretty; no one in Farnoux would. Her complexion was of that smooth southern paleness on which the sun has no power, and looked more colourless still from the thick hair,

dark and glossy as that of a Genoese, which was folded and coiled round her head. The eyes that had looked black by night now turned out to be of soft dark grey, shaded by lashes thick and straight, of the same shade as the hair, and well-marked eyebrows. Altogether, the young face was so calm and serious, that it might have befitted a woman of thirty rather than a girl of nineteen. Mme. Pitre saw all this immediately, but she was also greatly struck with a certain air of distinction and royal bearing of the head, set on a throat as round and smooth as a pillar.

"You are not in the least like your aunt!" cried she, after casting many quick glances, like a little bird, at Denise. "Are you said to resemble your mother?"

"I do not know; she died when I was a little child."

"It must be that; it cannot be on the father's side - Le Marchand, a good honest name, but roturier - very! Yet there is good birth here, decidedly; there is something not the least bourgoise about this child. Now many people would not see that; they laugh at such theories in these days, but I know what I know, and either the Le Marchands are well born, or it's the mother. Who was she, I wonder?" mused Mme. Pitre, resuming aloud, "You see I have kept some coffee for you, we will have our breakfast when I come in; I always come back for that about noon. I have my little occupations, thank Heaven; they are my pleasure as well as my livelihood. I am almost a stranger here; that is, I have only lived here a few years; your aunt and I are the only strangers in Farnoux, I believe. This was how I came here. I had an uncle an employé here, and he sent for me from Strasbourg, where I had a situation in a school, and of course I came; but he only lived a year, and died criblé with debts, poor man, and since then I have managed as I can.

I teach two or three families, I have a few pupils to whom I give music lessons."

She looked round her room and resumed, "Ah, if you could but have seen my uncle's Turkish salon! He was a man of the most elegant tastes, and had been at Constantinople, so it was fitted up in the Turkish fashion. *Tenez*, those scent-bottles were thence, it is all I have left of his pretty things. I put all the rest that were left, after his debts were paid, into a lottery. I had been ill and wanted money, and ladies of the town disposed of them for me. It was but a polite way of begging," said Mme. Pitre, with tears in her lively black eyes, but she twinkled them away in a instant. "And now I must leave you, my dear; amuse yourself well; unpack your box; read any of my books that you like. I would not say quite the same if it were your aunt's library; she reads everything, everything, just like a man! Adieu for the moment."

"Do you mean to say," interrupted Denise, who appeared to be of a matter-of-fact nature, seizing on one point in a story at a time; "that your uncle caused you to come here, and then spent all his money?"

"Precisely, dear child; but what would you have? The poor dear man hoped to live many years, and make a fortune, but death comes to all; that is a sad truth which one can only think of as little as possible. This is the only way with such melancholy thoughts."

"It was exceedingly wrong of him," said Denise, severely, without specifying whether it were the debts or the decease of the late M. Pitre that she alluded to.

"Ah, young people are always severe!" said Mme. Pitre. "And yet it was hard — yes it was," she repeated, as if the girl's indignation had recalled slumbering recollections. "I was a stranger here; all the ladies who have since been so

kind to me were at their country houses. I was ill; I sat alone all day and cried. But after all, it all turned out so well! My doctor said I had a malady of the throat, and must speak as little as possible, and you see I had no temptation to disobey; and now I am as strong as a lioness."

Denise could believe that, only under such circumstances could Mme. Pitre have obeyed the doctor's orders; but she began to like her too much to be inclined to laugh at her. Besides, her indignation against M. Pitre was still boiling.

"It makes the case no better for monsieur your uncle. I hope there are not many who would act thus. Are you sure that my aunt will return soon?" asked she, with faith evidently wavering in the whole race of uncles and aunts.

"Oh, as to that, be tranquil, my child. It is true that that dear woman is a little romantic, but no one can be more excellent in her way. Yet it is unfortunate that she insists on being an artiste; when there is no need for it, too! But as for you, you will, I know, have a pretty dowry; you will marry soon. Ah, if I could choose your husband! You must not be too much guided by your aunt in a practical matter like that. It is not an affair of sentiment, but a grave matter that assures you a position. Now indeed it must be that I go."

And this time she did go, and Denise remained leaning on the window-sill, looking vaguely out, and meditating on the strange and complete change that a few days had brought about in her life. London seemed as far away as if it had ceased to exist, and so it had as far as Denise was concerned. Difficult as it is to break off all connection with what has once formed part of a life, in her case England and all that had happened there were separated from the new life just commencing by a gulf. Not many nor varied were her English recollections. A quiet life, spent beside the invalid friend with whom she had passed most of her life, a view into a dult square in an unfashionable part of the town, brick houses. smoky trees with nurses and children sitting under them. an occasional visit from an acquaintance - this was all that Denise had to recall. But she had brought with her to Farnoux the character formed by this tranquil life, so that the hidden thread that runs through every existence from birth to death still connected her past and present, though every outward circumstance had changed. Denise did not, however, indulge in any metaphysics as she looked dreamily out; she was simply wondering what she should find to do at Farnoux. During the last year of her friend's life Denise had been housekeeper, and, in fact, mistress, and had developed a talent for ruling that merited a wider sphere. Each hour had had its own quiet occupation; she instinctively looked round now for employment. It took but a few moments to survey the little apartment in which she found herself domiciled. It consisted of but two little rooms, the one that she had occupied, and the one that served Mme. Pitre as bedroom and salon; a little alcove, shut off by a white curtain, contained the bed, above which was a crucifix, and a branch of consecrated box. Two tables, a large bureau, and some chairs, formed the furniture of the room, whose floor was brick and uncarpeted. Above the mantel-piece was a large villanous daub of a Holy Family, flanked by the Turkish scent-bottles, standing on each side of a small frame, containing a representation of a weeping willow, done in the hair of several deceased relations of Mme. Pitre. The inner room had had no furniture in it till the arrival of Denise caused some hasty preparations to be made. On a shelf, however, was Mme. Pitre's whole library, consisting of the grammar and dictionary used by her in her instructions, a few other school-books, and "Quentin Durward," translated into French, and embellished with engravings of the rudest

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Denise.

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style of cheap art. No wonder she had felt so happily confident that Denise could take no harm, even if entrusted to her own discretion, among the books. The walls of both rooms were papered alike, and a most singular paper it was, to be found in such a demure little retreat; but, doubtless, Mme. Pitre was not responsible for it. It represented scenes of dissipation, highly caricatured, but with a certain esprit about them that was irresistibly amusing. Here a billiard player was making his stroke, while his companions looked on in ludicrous attitudes of eager suspense. There half a dozen fishermen dropped their lines into the sea, as they sat side by side on a wall, and so long had they sat there that a giant spider had spun his web and secured his strands to their heads. Monotony of effect had been accidentally avoided by the paper-hanger having joined his pieces without regard to the subjects, so that here and there they mingled, and billiardplayers were invaded by opera-dancers, and the fishermen were jostled by a crowd of boys hunting an unhappy cur with a tin kettle tied to his tail. Denise discovered the picturegallery before her, surveyed it with decided disapprobation, and turned to look out again. From one window she looked over roofs descending terrace after terrace, the brown roofs looking as if the sun had furrowed them, down to the sea, whose pale aqua-marine was tracked by wavy lights that might have been the wakes of phantom ships; the short and frequent plash of the little waves came up even to this height. There was not even a fishing-boat visible upon the wide bay. From the other windows the scene was even stiller. The house had once been a convent, joining the cathedral, with a private entrance into the cloisters, which ran round a little quadrangle overtopped by houses that had all belonged to ecclesiastics or to the convent. Many changes had come to pass in Farnoux, and the nunnery now belonged to a fat

bourgeois, or rather to his wife, since she was the monied and managing partner. They lived on the rez-de-chaussée, and let the other floors. The first was occupied by a gay widow, the beauty and coquette of the town, with all the little world of Farnoux at her feet, and her salon was the head-quarters of mirth and wicked wit; so that if a caricature or a malicious report got abroad, it might generally be traced to the apartment, once occupied by a beatified abbess, in the rue de la Miséricorde. The private entrance to the cloisters was little used, and Farnoux guessed not that in those cloisters it possessed an architectural treasure very rare in a town of the south of France. The old church had no beauty; it was large and gloomy as a vault, its floor the rock itself, its narrow windows excluding the sun, and if a ray did steal in, it only brought into strong contrast with the gloom and desolation the tawdry decorations in the side chapels. The cloisters must have been of different date; time had dealt mercifully with them; the Revolution had not discovered them; and the slender shafts, the graceful capitals, and light arches, retained their pristine beauty. Several families had the right of being buried in the little plot of ground enclosed in the quadrangle, but it was long since the grass had been disturbed for any purpose. Wild salvia raised its dark blue spikes among the thick herbage, and entire globes of dandelion seed floated round the sundial in the centre. A Virginian creeper (vigne vierge, as it was called there) had been planted at some far-away date, and now flung its blushing festoons from arch to arch - here garlanded a shaft, and there crowned the head of a saint carved on a capital, and its wavering shadows checkered the pavement within, and danced over the stones worn by feet that had been at rest a hundred years and more. It looked so calm a retreat, so green and cool, owing perhaps to a deep well in one corner,

that it was easy to understand how, in that hot and dusty land, it had obtained its popular name of "Le Paradis." The Farnousien imagination, however, had not stopped there; but, by a familiar association of ideas, the steep stone steps without, that led to a street upon the higher level, had been called, time out of mind, "Le Chemin de Purgatoire," and the open *place* above, exposed to the scorching sun and merciless *mistral*, was "La Place d'Enfer."

Denise longed to escape from the hot little room, of which she had become thoroughly weary, into the cloisters, and was considering whether she might do so, and how to get there, when her meditations were put to flight by the entrance of a gipsy-looking girl, alert, bold-eyed, with a yellow *fichu* on her head, and a merry smile.

"Bonjour, mam'selle!" said she, and stood with one arm akimbo, looking quite at home.

Denise supposed that she had come to seek Mme. Pitre, and explained that she would not return till noon.

"Oh, I know it, mam'selle, I do not want her. I am Mme. Rocca's servant; she is the owner of the house. My name is Thérézon, or Zon in patois, or Zino, if you like; in French it is Thérésine. I can talk French perfectly, mam'selle; there are not many here who can, but my grandmother lived with the De Farnoux, and so she is not a common person. Did you notice me in the *Place* yesterday? I was talking to my cousin at her shop-door, and I helped to make your bed last night. *Bonne mère!* how tired you were! it gave me pain to see you! Mam'selle is from London?"

"Yes," said Denise, a little puzzled by the Farnousien accent, in spite of Zon's boasted French.

"Is it a fine city? Mam'selle must think Farnoux very small and mean. The people here think it stupendous; but

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I have a friend who has gone to Paris, and I know about it. London is much larger than Farnoux, mam'selle?"

"Decidedly; so large that you might drive all day about it, and see not a single tree or field."

"Dame! how beautiful it must be! No trees, nor fields, nor mountains? nor even the sea? What a grand place!"

"The sea and the mountains are grander still," said Denise, aroused to a new appreciation of them by the girl's contempt, and she looked out again, and felt for the first time how fine the view was.

"Mam'selle is in jest. She does not mean that this stupid sea, and those frightful hills, are worth houses, and streets, and shops?"

"Can I get into the cloisters?" asked Denise, by way of reply.

"What cloisters?"

"Down there, of course!"

"Ah!" said Zon, as if perceiving for the first time that there were such things as the cloisters. "I comprehend yes, assuredly mam'selle can enter them by the little door; but what does she desire to do in that dismal old place? Ah, if she would but wait till the afternoon, when I shall be free to go out! I am occupied every instant till then. Mme. Roeca's eyes are everywhere; she is a hawk by day, and an owl by night — not a moment can one be idle."

"You must not stay here, then," said Denise; who, having kept a household in order herself, sympathised entirely with the mistress. "Mme. Rocca is quite right."

"Bah! one must rest sometimes," said Zon, who did not seem a specimen of overwork. "What is the use of it all? If I dust to-day, more dust will come to-morrow. Has mam'selle seen Madame yet? — Mme. la Bise Noire, we call her, for she is just like the wind, cold, and black, and insupportable."

"In England, servants do not call their mistresses by nicknames."

"Dame! we all have our sobriquets here! The old maid over the way, Mlle. Legrand, is Sainte-Nitouche. Mam'selle knows what a Sainte-Nitouche is: one who feigns to be so good, so good, so proper, so proper, while all the time! and M. the Abbé Vernet, he is always called the heron; Mme. Huard, the widow on the first floor, gave him that name, because she said he had the air of the heron in a fable. Tenez, I recollect the couplet, it was in every body's mouth—

> 'Un jour sur ses longs pieds allait, je ne sais où, L'héron au long bec emmanché d'un long cou.'

All the world laughed at it. As I was saying, if mam'selle will wait a little instant, instead of going to the cloisters, I will conduct her to the cemetery, and show her the tomb of a girl who died of love. I can find it directly; we need not say wherefore we are come, for that would not be delicate. The sexton will ask us no questions; every one will be at the cemetery to-day, as it is *jour des morts*. The family have put a beautiful chapel over the grave, and have mass said there frequently, and there is a most touching inscription, telling the whole history. If mam'selle would wait? Mme. Pitre only stays a few moments to eat her breakfast. Was mam'selle's dress made in England?"

Thérézon took it by the hem, and after a minute inspection inquired what it cost a yard. "The material is good," said she, with a competent air, on being satisfied as to this point; "there is nothing like England for such things; but the make! — Ah, when mam'selle has had her dresses made by a milliner here! when one has such a slender waist it is a

sin not to wear wellmade dresses! I pinch myself all I can, but mam'selle has already a perfect figure; she is not tall, but she looks so, and then she has so good an air!"

Zon stood with a hand on either side of her own waist, and gravely contemplated Denise, who was more abashed than she had ever been in her life before.

" $\mathcal{F}y$ suis! I know of what mam'selle reminds me! It is singular — Ah, Mme. La Bise, I hear you calling! Call, then! Well, *au revoir*, mam'selle; you are Protestant, like your aunt? What a pity! though, doubtless, it is an excellent religion; but it is not liked here. Still, you will go to the cemetery? All the world will be there — what family has not its dead? and then there are others who go for the walk; and besides, the day is superb! Heaven knows it is a fête day, and sends us weather accordingly."

As Zon had predicted, Mme. Pitre only came in for a hurried meal, and departed again, having advised Denise to accept the invitation.

"That will offer you a little *distraction*, my dear," said she. "This will be but a dull life for a young girl who necessarily loves the world, and balls, and fêtes."

"Is a visit to the cemetery what you call 'distraction' in Farnoux?" asked Denise, smiling.

"Comment?" said Mme. Pitre, perplexed by the irony. "Is it as a Protestant that you hesitate to go? I assure you your aunt would not object. I have just seen Mme. Huard go out; she is in mourning to-day, out of compliment to a relation who left her all his property. Ah, if you could make her acquaintance! she has such gay réunions! I myself shall make time for a little visit to the cemetery, though, I thank Heaven, I have no friends there. Yet it is a little melancholy, after all."

During the whole morning both rich and poor had been

visiting the burial-ground, which was situated on the hill above the town, commanding a view of blue sea and indented coast, where the gentle waves had hollowed out tiny bays and creeks, rock-crowned and olive-fringed, all melting at last into misty distance. Ascending through the town was a constant succession of groups, chiefly in mourning: at every few paces stalls had been erected, where crowns of yellow immortelles, white garlands, and plaster casts, to place on tombs, might be bought; and when Denise and Zon entered the cemetery, they found it crowded with visitors. Denise had not at all expected so sad and striking a scene; it woke the slumbering imagination within her, and made her ask herself with a thrill, if it were not ominous that her first action in Farnoux should be to visit the burial-ground. It was so desolate a spot too - barren, and crowded with graves, marked by decrepid black crosses. Little verdure could exist in this rocky, scorching spot; tombs that had once been cared for were now wildly overgrown by brambles, which alone seemed to flourish; and the heap of crosses lying at the entrance of the grave-yard, told of graves every trace of which - repulsive thought! - had been removed altogether. For it was only the rich who could afford to buy ground \dot{a} perpétuité. To the poor their graves were granted but for a limited time. Every mournful thought seemed to rise unbidden, as Denise looked round. Here four sisters knelt and prayed around the tomb of one gone from among them. There a poor widow led along her little child, with a garland of immortelles on its arm; or a mother sobbed over a son's grave. Whole families murmured a litany in hushed voices over some marble tomb, or by one of the humbler graves, marked only by a wooden cross; or beside the resting-place of some little one, laid to sleep in the portion of ground especially allotted to children. Strange contrast! Careless visitors

wandered about among the mourners, looking on with indifference, talking gaily together!

In the centre of the burial-ground rose a little chapel, where vespers were being performed. Thérézon drew Denise towards it, but she had no mind to be entrapped into a Roman Catholic chapel, and was about to resist Zon's desire to stay and hear the sermon about to be preached, when curiosity held her silent. In front of the chapel a catafalque had been erected, covered with a black and white pall; a crowd had already gathered round it, standing or sitting, to be sure of good places when the sermon should begin, and there was a ceaseless hum of unsubdued voices, increasing with the increasing crowd, all full of expectation and interest in the coming sermon. The crowd consisted almost exclusively of women, which Zon explained by saving, "Gentlemen are not pious." Presently, however, a new group joined the audience, a man of perhaps seven or eight and twenty, with two ladies. All eyes turned to them, and there was a murmur of interest. "Mons. Gaston de Farnoux!" whispered Zon, much excited. "He is come, like mam'selle, to look on; he is a Protestant, but his aunt - the lady in the veil - is a Catholic, and so is her daughter, Mlle. Gautier. Look, mam'selle, you cannot see Mme. de Farnoux's face - what a pity! but Mlle. Lucile! is she not beautiful as a rose? She is the daughter of Mme. de Farnoux by her first husband, who was a nobody. Doubtless she and M. Gaston are fiancés - it is charming for her, for now she is nobody, nothing but when she is his wife - and only observe him, mam'selle! the distinguished air! Hush, the procession arrives."

Denise withdrew her eye reluctantly from the aristocratic party pointed out to her; not that she was bewitched by the idea of a title, but that the family of a baron who lived in a château had all the interest of a romance for her. She glanced

again at Gaston de Farnoux - saw that he was fair and pale. with a calm, dignified air, and carried his head proudly. Just then a slight movement in the crowd, as it parted to make room for the crucifix which headed the approaching procession, brought her close behind the party who had fixed her interest. The chaunted service was unintelligible to her, and she spent the time in observing her neighbours; but a sudden hush, as the sermon was about to begin, recalled her to what was passing. Nothing could be more picturesque than the scene. Around was the mute, expectant crowd, all filled with the same feeling, and gathered in the grave-yard, where corpses lay thickly on all sides. Between the gloomy cypresses rose, at a little distance, the cross above the chapel. Behind the preacher was the dark catafalque, backed by other cypresses, and the blue sky, where white clouds floated, "shepherded by the soft unwilling wind." The sunlight fell full on the preacher's figure, as he stood, apparently lost in thought, robed in the flowing dark brown dress of his monastic order, over which was a white woollen mantle, catching every ray of light - the hood falling back from the austere and tonsured head. At length he broke the solemn pause by beginning to speak, in measured tones, that grew rapid and energetic as he proceeded. No more striking time and place could have been found for a sermon - every grave around, every sight and sound, was a sermon in itself, telling of death, telling of life, telling of resurrection. But not such was the Carmelite's theme. He spoke of purgatory and its sufferings, and the waiting souls that craved release - release which those yet living might hasten. As he depicted the dread anguish of that middle region, a sound of sobbing arose from the mourners standing around. Denise was looking on in indignant scepticism, but those about her were drowned in tears, and Zon was gasping amid her sobs,

"My brother! my poor brother!" Lucile Gautier was looking up to M. de Farnoux with pale trembling lips, and murmuring, "Mon cousin, I cannot bear it! Why did we come?"

"Child!" he answered, with a modulation of voice singularly gentle, and looking down on her with a smile both rallying and tender, he drew her arm closer on his own. The confiding look which Lucile raised to him thrilled Denise with a strange momentary feeling hitherto unknown to her; she felt a keen pang of envy as she thought, "I should like a brother like him. I am sure he is firm, and gentle, and tender. Oh, to have some one to take care of me always! How lovely, how lovely she is!"

And Denise looked with unmingled pleasure and admiration at the fair Lucile, who did not at all perceive the interest which she excited in the girl, dressed, like almost everybody else, in black, close beside her.

The sermon ended abruptly, with a last eloquent exhortation to hearken to the souls that were crying aloud for help amid their tortures. A short pause followed, and then the crowd dispersed, gathering again around the chapel, where a new service was about to begin; and the numbers that sought to enter were so far beyond what the building would hold, that half were forced to remain outside, and knelt on the steps and the ground below. To see this black-robed, kneeling throng, one would have supposed that Farnoux had been stricken by a pestilence, and that these were bereaved suppliants, imploring that the Angel of Death might pass from among them. Denise would not join them; she could not kneel among them, and she would not stand by as a mere spectator. Zon consoled herself by leading the way to the tomb of the girl who died for love. It so happened that for some paces they followed Gaston de Farnoux and Lucile, who were walking slowly about the burial-ground, while

Mme. de Farnoux prayed in the chapel. Lucile's sweet, childlike tones were saying, "As you say, dear Gaston, it would make a poem; you must write one; I understand what you mean, of course, and I like to hear you describe it, but it was terrible! Ah, you do not believe in purgatory?"

"No, I do not, and could I have guessed how it would impress you, silly one, you should not have heard this sermon."

Denise again was attracted by the voice, and its modulation, when addressed to Lucile.

"But you yourself liked to see it, cousin?"

"I would not have missed it for much. The wrapt interest of the audience — the spell of the same strong feeling shared by all — the monk's figure and gestures — but all that is in an artistic point of view. What a sermon! Only a monk who had no dear ones for whose life he trembled, could have preached, at such a time, one so cold, so uncomforting, so merciless. Imagine the Père Lacordaire, or, amongst Protestants, Vinet, preaching at such a moment — or Paul Rabaut in 'the Desert' — and picture to yourself what they would have said!"

Lucile was listening with an unmistakable conviction that Gaston was better worth hearing than all the preachers he had named put together. He gave a slight, amused, conscious smile; Denise heard no more; they took a different path to hers.

"Vinet — bien! — but Rabaut? but Père Lacordaire? who are these? I think I know nothing!" said she to herself with impatience, and never dreaming that Lucile knew as little. "I certainly do know nothing! I have no accomplishments. If I had to earn my living, like Mme. Pitre, what would become of me?" she asked herself in dismay, too inexperienced to guess what a long way a little learning may

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be made to go, and she heard so little of what Zon was saying that she had assented to a request to visit "ma grand'mère," and was leaving the cemetery without well knowing what they were about

CHAPTER III.

The brisk tongue of Thérézon ran on unchecked as they passed through the upper streets of the old town, a very labyrinth of narrow winding ways; old houses with grated windows, steep ascents, archways, and flights of steps, with here and there an orange-garden nestled among the rocks, which, altogether ousted from the lower part of the town, gradually re-appeared in the upper; here hewn into the staircase in which a street terminated, and there jutting up behind a dwelling. The old church stood planted among them, and where the last straggling houses ended, as wild a region of crags and heather and aromatic plants began at once, as if no town were to be seen within miles of it.

Thérézon paused at the open door of a house, out of which came a swarm of children with tawny bare legs, who surrounded her with a chorus of "Here is Zon! here is Zéno!" and curious looks at Denise. In the door-way sat an old woman, still comely, though withered as a date, with long gold ear-rings, a red fichu over her grey hair, and a carnation stuck over her right ear. She ceased her spinning to scold the shouting children, shouting louder than they; — saw Denise, and, after peering up at her keenly, muttered angrily, in reply to some words addressed to her by Thérézon, "She does not resemble them, I tell you; don't talk such folly; a little chit of a bourgeoise resemble the De Farnoux?"

She spoke in patois, but, though Denise could not under-

stand it, Thérézon was none the less scandalized. "Pardon, mam'selle. My grandmother is rather deaf, and does not know we hear her," said she. "She knows good manners, I assure you; she was born, so to say, in the Château, and can speak French, and she has a picture — ah, if I can coax her into showing it! Grandmother, I want mam'selle to know what a great family you lived in; she has lived in London, and knows about these things."

"What does it matter to her? Taisas-vous?"

"Well, well, grandmother — if you are so cross, I need not ask leave to show what I want to show; I shall just go and get it;" and off she ran upstairs, disregarding a peremptory call to come back.

The old woman span on, evidently disturbed and reflective; Denise waited quietly outside, while the children, tired of looking at her, strayed away. The strangeness of all around struck her more than ever; she almost believed herself in a dream, or gone back a few hundred years into the middle ages, so far did she seem from modern civilized life. She was in a very narrow street, with an old archway at the further end, through which appeared a glimpse of hills whose crests were dimly seen through floating clouds. The windows of the houses were all barred with iron, even those of a small oratory, above whose door was a basrelief, so rude and worn that its subject had become incomprehensible; a wreath of withered leaves round the door-way told of some past fête-day. A woman presently came through the archway, with a dahlia, several carnations, and three African marigolds in her hair, which mingled with the long grass and leaves that hung down from the bundle on her head. She carried her shoes in her hand, and had evidently just come in from the country. Her donkey followed her, laden with two barrels, whose contents betrayed themselves by the

purple stain on the wood. A countryman came behind, singing, with a large gourd on his shoulder. But Denise's attention was recalled from the scene around by the voice of the old woman saying, with a certain solemnity, "You must not take it ill, mam'selle, that I scolded that foolish girl, when she said you were like the De Farnoux. I mean no harm, and no one need wish to resemble them. It is an unlucky family. Some die young, and some had better have died, and one has only lived to break her own heart, and that of other people."

"You seem to know all about them," said Denise.

"I think I ought, mam'selle, for my family have served theirs more years than any one can count. When they turned Protestants, so did we, and when they have had illluck, we have had ill-luck. I was MIle. Félise's fostermother, and they thought something of old Benoîte, in the Château — not that I was old then. Now, of them all there is only M. Gaston left to raise the family up a little; he is the last of the younger branch, and the elder has no children. M. Gaston is the heir of both. Félise was his mother; she married her cousin, one of the other De Farnoux, and the present Baron is his uncle."

"Thérézon says he is to marry his cousin, Mlle. Gautier." "Is there another such fool as that girl?" cried the old woman, in tones shrill with anger. "Her father is a fool, though he is my son-in-law, and she is worse; the child of an ass brays twice a day! His cousin, ma foi! Mlle. Gautier, his uncle's step-daughter! We shall see that! It is true that things were finely altered before the Baron ventured to bring home a wife who is no more noble than a stock-fish; but then he was always a poor creature, M. le Baron — M. Gaston — that is different. He was the pride of the family — you may see that only to see him walk by, and Mlle. de

Farnoux is not buried yet, though they act as if she were. Si je ne lave pas bien la tête à cette folle de Thérézon!"

The offender came back while she yet spoke, and answered the objurgation that greeted her, with "Why, grandmother, every one says they are fiancés, and there would be no need to ask the King's leave. Even if the De Farnoux are as old and as noble as Herod, Mlle. Lucile is pretty enough to deserve twice as grand a match. I suppose that counts for something," she added, conscious that she herself was a pretty girl, full of *esprit de corps* accordingly. Benoîte was speechless with indignation for a moment, and Thérézon took advantage of it to open a morocco case, containing a miniature, saying, "I will wager my ear-rings that it is like mademoiselle."

The grandmother made a rapid attempt to seize it, but Thérézon prevented her, exclaiming, "I never knew you so cross before, grandmother! one would think you were afraid of its being seen."

"Look as much as you like," said Benoîte, sullenly.

Denise looked, and saw a miniature of a woman whose age might have been two-and-twenty, a pale, dark-eyed face with a sorrowful, restless look, that made her involuntarily exclaim, "She was very unhappy!"

"Oh, unhappy — as for that, yes," said Thérézon, leaning against the wall, and folding her arms. "It is not that mam'selle has the same look, but there is a something — I have heard grandmother say that every one knew MIle. Félise married against her will, and that on the wedding-day MIle. de Farnoux, the eldest sister, stood behind her like a jailer, and put the pen back into her hand, when she dropped it, instead of signing the contract. She married her cousin, and M. Gaston, whom you saw to-day, is her son."

"Is she alive?"

"She died many years ago. Grandmother was with her when she died. Granny had lived forty years in the Château, but Mlle. de Farnoux turned her off one day, for some nonsense about my mother's marriage — she never overlooked an offence, did she, grandmother? never forgot or forgave — she prided herself on that, because it was in the family; I never saw her, but I have heard it all. It did not signify to granny that she was turned off; she just went to Mlle. Félise — you loved her, didn't you, granny? and my mother was her *sœur de lait*. After her death, all was upside down in La Pinède — (that was where she lived) monsieur her husband away in Paris, as usual; no one with her but M. Gaston, and he a boy; and as the servants knew their wages would not be paid, they went away, taking what they could."

"That is it; it was so. Zon is quite right," said old Benoîte, nodding her head complacently as her grandchild recounted the tale she had often and often heard.

"And your grandmother took this?" said Denise, confounded by the coolness with which it was avowed.

"Some one else would have taken it if she had not and it was better that some one who really loved this poor lady should have it. Grandmother means to leave it a legacy to M. Gaston. I have a most beautiful embroidered fichu that I wear on fêtes; it has Mlle. de Farnoux's name, and a garland, and a crest upon it. You shall see it some day. My grandmother has several other things that she brought from La Pinède; a silver cross, for instance, superb, I assure you! and some silk stockings fit for a queen!"

Denise glanced at the bare brown feet of the old servant, and was obliged to conclude that sheer love of pilfering had induced such a theft. And yet, after all, she looked so Denise. 3

cheerful, so decent and comely, that it was impossible to believe she had supposed herself committing a theft.

"M. Gaston is not like his mother," she said, to change the subject.

"You have not seen him look sorrowful, mam'selle. If you had seen him at his mother's death-bed, you would know how like they were. When he found she was really gone it was never his way to show what he felt — as he leant over her listening for the breath that was gone, he looked looked as she did on her marriage morning!" said Benoîte through her teeth.

"Why did they make her marry? Why did she consent? No one could have forced her!"

"Mademoiselle is so learned in these matters!"

"I see nothing to laugh at. Every one knows that girls cannot be forced to marry against their will now."

"It is better to marry, if you married a hangman, than stay at home and be treated as if you had disgraced your family. Perhaps mam'selle does not know what black looks and words, or no words at all are, from morning to night, and sunrise to sunset. Besides, Mlle. de Farnoux's will was a terrible thing. You might bend an iron bar, but you could not bend that. And she chose Félise to marry her cousin. You never saw such a handsome lady; she looked like an empress. She was a generous lady too, she would have given with both hands if she had had enough to give. But she had a cruel temper; it made the Château into a desert. Both her sisters would turn pale at the sound of her step, and M. le Baron-he never was the man to drive the English out of France, and I do assure you he dared not look round without her leave. Besides, he was so much younger, and Mademoiselle had taken the reins and kept them."

"She was mistress and master too, you see," said Thérézon.

"That she was. I never saw but one who could govern her, and that was a noble gentleman whom she should have married. I can tell you she loved him; but it never came to pass; I suppose he got weary of her temper. They tell me she is quite broken down now. I have not seen her these fifteen years. A while ago she had an illness, and since then a fall, and she lives now in her own rooms and plagues nobody, and M. le Baron has brought a wife home."

"How was it he never married before?"

"Oh, his sister was always seeking him a wife, and never finding him one to her mind; this one was too rich, and that too poor; this a Romanist, and that something else. The truth was, she could not bear the thought of another mistress in Farnoux. And then something took the Baron to Paris, and instead of coming home he only wrote; and then he did not write, and at last, all of a sudden, she went off to fetch him. Some say he was already married, but I don't know he did not come home with her, at all events. She was away a month, and when she came back there were grey hairs among the black. Then her marriage was broken off, and after that she was harder than ever. I do not think M. de Farnoux ever wrote to her again, and he never came home till last year. He had been eighteen years away."

"And she?" said Denise, interested, in spite of herself, in the haughty, baffled woman.

"Oh, as for that, she remained in the Château."

"In that lonely Château? by herself?"

"Certainly; there was no one of the family left."

"There was another sister," said Thérézon, "Mlle. Géraldine, the youngest."

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"There was no one of the family left," repeated old Benoîte, angrily, interrupting her granddaughter.

"But there was, granny," persisted Thérézon. "It was some time after Mademoiselle came back from Paris that Mlle. Géraldine died."

"Well, she died," said Benoîte, "and what does it matter when? She died at the house of her aunt, Mme. de Bézièrs, and I was with her. There was barely time to send for Mademoiselle."

There was a pause, during which Benoîte observed Denise closely. Denise was thinking of the history she had just heard.

"No, you are right; no one need wish to belong to them!" she said.

"I wish you better luck, mam'selle!" said Benoîte. And, after an instant's hesitation, she added, "Where does mam'selle come from? she is not of the south?"

"I believe my family is of Normandy; I know my aunt has property there, but I have always lived in England."

"Mam'selle has not seen her aunt since she was a child," said Thérézon, with an expressive gesture. "You shall hear all she has told me another time, grandmother; I must go now, or Mme. la Bise Noire will have something to say!"

"Nobody wants you to stay, mauvaise tête."

"I like to hear you talk," said Denise, "I shall come again."

"Misé will be welcome," said the old woman, in a roguish tone, that implied that Denise might as well have asked permission.

"Thanks. Adieu, then, for the moment. I have not heard your name."

"Name? - Oh, I am called Benoîte."

"But your family name?"

Christian names or sobriquets were so much more used in Farnoux than surnames, that Benoîte actually had to consider what hers was.

"Roques," said she, at last.

"Like the saint's! Is there not a Saint-Roch?"

"Oh, mam'selle, ours is an older name than that. One may be a saint without having a name as ancient as ours; it is hundreds of years old — as old as De Farnoux."

The tranquil pride with which she spoke amused and surprised Denise. All was new here — language, feelings, scenery — more ideas presented themselves here in a day, than would have been suggested during a whole year of her former life.

"I am glad we came," she said to Thérézon, as they walked home.

"Does not my grandmother speak French well?" replied Zon, with a pride which told how rare was the accomplishment in her own rank at Farnoux.

"Very well; and you can speak it too, Zon; you talked no patois to her."

"Oh, mam'selle, I do not find it delicate to speak patois before those who do not understand it. Mam'selle might imagine I was talking of her."

Meanwhile Benoîte was watching them go down the street.

"That minx of a Zon ought to have her neck wrung! What possessed her to bring that pale girl here, and prate about the De Farnoux? Misé Marchand, too! why bring the girl here, unless she has some scheme in her head, that Mademoiselle would be little pleased to hear? Why cannot people die and have done with their lives without leaving children to make mischief after them? I wonder if Mademoiselle is as much changed as they say? Well, I must see

her once more. I said I never would again, but time brings round strange changes, and what must be must be. Plague on both the girls! I would rather go a hundred miles than face Mademoiselle, and yet I should like to see how she will look when she hears my news, too!"

CHAPTER IV.

As Denise and Zon entered Maison Rocca, by which name the old convent was now known, the gay widow who owned the first floor was coming down the stairs, attended by one of the many admirers who fluttered round her, and another of the male breed, not an admirer, but simply a visitor, who had called to pay his respects, as he happened to be for a few hours at Farnoux. The first gentleman apparently asked some question concerning Denise, whom they saw in the hall below, for the lady's audible answer was: "It is the little niece of old Mademoiselle Le Marchand; she dropped from the skies last night."

A few words were here inaudible, but the lessening distance, as they descended the stairs, made it impossible not to hear the laugh of scornful wonder with which the widow again answered: "Visit her! Of what are you thinking? An artiste!"

"My mother knows her well," said the second gentleman, coolly.

They were by this time in the hall, where Denise had paused. She looked at them full as they approached, and the steady indignant glance was so evident a challenge, that the mischief-loving widow could not resist it.

"Good-day, mademoiselle," said she; "may one have the honour of knowing your name?"

"Denise Le Marchand."

"Mlle. Denise is from England, I hear?"

"From London."

"Ah! from London! Let me introduce to these gentlemen — M. Verignon, M. Marcellin Duval — Mlle. Denise, from London; and I am Mme. Huard, of Farnoux."

"I see it madame," said Denise, with a quiet survey of the widow's toilette, resplendent in its exaggeration of provincial fashion.

"And how does Mlle. Denise see it?"

"Oh, madame, it is not difficult to tell whether a person is English, or Parisian, or of the provinces," said Denise simply, but by no means unaware of the malice of her reply.

"Upon my word, I believe the child wishes to be satirical!" cried Mme. Huard, as much amused as if some baby of three years old had made a quick reply; and indeed the young girl did seem a mere infant to the widow, who, though not very much older, held a position, as a married woman and a beauty, that put all unmarried maidens at an immeasurable distance. "Such wit never came from England. Has mademoiselle been residing in Paris?"

"I have not left England long," said Denise, with clear, indignant tones: "but I feel it is very far away, for England is courteous to strangers."

"Well answered, indeed, my dear! I find a rival, an enemy at my very door! Let us see — ah, she has black eyes, has she not? Ah, mademoiselle, *les yeux noir vont au Purgatoire!* or is it *les yeux gris qui vont au Paradis?*"

Denise stood the laughing impertinent scrutiny of Mme. Huard and M. Verignon bravely, but a bit of orange blossom which she had plucked somewhere slipped from her fingers. Marcellin Duval, who had stood rather apart, restored it to her; she thanked him by a slight bend of the head, and prepared to pass on.

"Ah, mademoiselle, beware! What an omen!" cried Mme. Huard — "Orange blossoms! Ah, you blush — happy child, yet young enough to blush! what charming innocence! There, there, *petite*, I will not torment you any more; let us be friends; I want some one to amuse me; come and see me, unless you are too proud."

"Perhaps I am, madame."

"Mademoiselle bears malice, apparently," said M. Verignon, showing his small even teeth with a little laugh, that seemed to Denise the essence of impertinence. "I, at least, cannot have been so unhappy as to offend her?"

"One is not offended, monsieur, with those whom one has not observed enough to know them, should one meet them a second time. As for madame, when she had the kindness to invite me to visit her, she must have forgotten for the moment that my aunt is an artiste."

The air and tone were so proud that no one laughed till Denise had passed, then Mme. Huard and M. Verignon gave way to merriment. Marcellin Duval had smiled, but not at Denise. He was thinking, "That child has *esprit*. She may have got that from her aunt, but where did she inherit that look of an antelope?" And he, too, laughed now, at his recollections of Mile. Le Marchand.

"Ah, M. Marcellin," said the laughing widow, "with what a touching air you restored that sprig of orange blossom! I saw it all! And you are acquainted with the aunt? There can be but one *dénouement*. Adieu! Your visits here will now of course be frequent. I must write to felicitate your dear mother. Au plaisir!"

She looked round with her saucy, coquettish air, and went away laughing, rightly secure in her belief that she

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was, and would be, the Queen of Farnoux, where a pale girl of nineteen, like Denise, had little chance of being her rival.

Denise, meanwhile, thought to herself, "M. Duval is a gentleman. He is ugly, perhaps; 1 do not know, and I suppose he is but a boy — he looked very young, and so slender. Yes, he is ugly, but I liked his smile; and he has handsome eyes, too. The other — what is his name? Verignon — is a contemptible *roturier*. I wonder where Mme. Duval lives; if in Farnoux, there is *one* lady here."

A little while afterwards some one knocked at the door of Mlle. Le Marchand's room, and obtaining no answer, crossed to Mme. Pitre's. She, too, was absent, as usual at this hour, but Denise opened it, and saw the very boy with the handsome eyes of whom she had been thinking. He was not really a boy, however, except in the disdainful eyes of a girl of nineteen; his age was at least two and twenty.

"A thousand pardons!" said he, with a lively courtesy, that made Denise smile, and feel as if he were an old friend. "I am at Farnoux for an hour, on my way back to Marseilles, and came to know if Mlle. Le Marchand (an old friend of ours) has any commissions for me. She often honours me with some. I am entrusted with orders for colours, canvas, nails — I imagine she is or will soon be at home, since she has, it seems, a niece to keep watch over."

"She is absent for an uncertain time, monsieur."

"Quelle scie! How am I to make your acquaintance, then? and I am sure you agree with me that friendships should be hereditary. Your aunt and my mother are friends, therefore I, Marcellin Duval, and you -?"

"Denise."

"Denise Le Marchand — should be friends too. When will she return?"

"I have no idea, and every one seems to think it absurd to imagine any body can guess where she may be. I have not seen her. Mme. Pitre will soon be at home; will you not come in?"

"Mademoiselle, I regret to tell you that what you have just proposed is extremely delightful, but entirely out of the question. You mentioned just now that you were newly arrived from England: now, as a commencement of our friendship, I must enlighten you as to French manners, which, alas! do not permit *tête-à-têtes* between young ladies and young gentlemen."

"In that case, monsieur" — said Denise, laughing, and about to retire, for the manner of Marcellin's speech was too kindly droll to give offence.

"It is not that I fail to appreciate the honour, or that I do not see what an enchanting *début* it would be for our future friendship," said Marcellin, detaining her; "but already doubtless, all Farnoux knows that I have had the happiness of conversing with you for five minutes on the landing, and will talk of it for a week. Your opposite neighbour, Mlle. Legrand, can see through any wall; she marked me come in, and is on the watch for my going out."

"Farnoux can have very little to do if it cares to trouble itself with my affairs," said Denise.

"You are perfectly right, mademoiselle; Farnoux has very little to do; what will become of you here — you, educated in that terrible England, where all idle people are hanged?"

"You have never been there, monsieur?"

"Else, you would say, I should not be alive now? Ah, unjust one, I have indeed, but I had a safe-conduct; the son of the firm Duval and Cie., Marseilles, was in no danger. Besides, I can work on occasion."

"Monsieur, forgive me if I quote an old proverb, n faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée," said Denise; "and it seems to me that a tête-à-tête on the staircase is much the same as a tête-à-tête by the hearth."

"You have a thousand times reason, mademoiselle! I forgot my own counsels! Au revoir. Recall me affectionately to your aunt," said Marcellin bowing and repentant. "That is always the way with me! there never was a runaway horse like my tongue. - What delightful company women are!" he added to himself, as he looked back from the bottom of the first flight of steps, and saw Denise, who, in spite of her proverb had not yet shut her door, and was watching him, smiling. "They let one talk of oneself by the hour, and I know of no subject so interesting - to oneself I mean. What man would tolerate it? As for women, it actually interests them; they feel it as a compliment, a confidence placed in their tact and sympathy. Sympathy from a pretty woman! delightful! To think that there should be a delusion, that women are chatterboxes! I never met one equal to myself; on the contrary, I know many excellent listeners. Denise Le Marchand - it seems to me that a romance opens before me - vet no! Denise - her aunt's name - I could not associate romance with that wonderful woman. No; I suspect, too, that the niece would be dangerous; it is as a friend that I desire her. She is not the future mistress of my heart - I may safely venture into the temperate zone of friendship. Ah! Mlle. Legrand! good morning!" cried he, perceiving the acid countenance in its concealment behind a green blind, and he stopped to bow with politeness most exasperating to the object of it, who had believed herself spying at her neighbours unseen and unsuspected.

CHAPTER V.

THEREZON had, of course, listened to the encounter between Denise and Mme. Huard, and did not fail to give a lively description of it to Mme. Pitre as soon as she came in. Mme. Pitre was much shocked by the audacity of Denise, and gave her a lecture on it which caused Denise to proclaim her profound disdain for the widow's society, and, instead of being moved by the picture of the advantage that her acquaintance would have been, she declared that, sooner than know her, she would know nobody at all at Farnoux. Moreover, she was equally contemptuous of M. Verignon, although she learnt that he was an unmarried man, and the son of the sous-préfet; a most desirable match. At the name of Marcellin Duval, Mme. Pitre smiled, and said he was a charming young man, most excellent, most amusing, and frequently a guest at the Château, though his father was a merchant - but when she heard of the interview with Denise, she turned quite pale with dismay, and hastened to explain how wrong, how unprecedented a proceeding it had been to invite him in. Denise, who had latterly received all the visitors of her friend Mrs. Lisle, was coldly indignant at her discretion being called in question, and Mme. Pitre, on the other hand, was so distressed by the inefficacy of her lecture, that their friendship might have come to an end in these early days, had not little steps pattered up the stairs, and a child's voice called, Mme. Pitre! "It is little Louis Rocca," said she, hastening to let him in.

Almost a baby seemed to creep in; so small, thin, and fragile was the child. His eyes were dark, but hair and face were nearly colourless. On seeing Denise he fled for protection to Mme. Pitre, and hid his face on her shoulder.

"Little *nigaud*! he is afraid of all strangers — come, Louis, look up; see what a nice demoiselle it is — would you ever have thought him four years old?" said Mme. Pitre. "Come, Louis, let me hear you say some pretty verses. Dear little fellow — come! He knows an astonishing quantity! Come then!"

Louis closed his eyes and reclined against her.

"He is not asleep — bah!" said Mme. Pitre, in an explanatory tone. "He is shy, the little *nigaud*!"

"Poor little one! How sickly he looks! Stay!" cried Denise, going in search of some bon-bons. "See, Louis!"

The dark eyes speedily unclosed, and Louis permitted her to pour her sugar-plums into his lap.

"What a kind friend Louis has found! But, my dear, you need not have given them all," said Mme. Pitre, looking rather wistfully at the bon-bons.

"Louis cannot eat all those, I am sure. Will he not give some of those to Mme. Pitre, who is so good to him?" asked Denise.

"Dear Madame Pitre!" said the little fellow, holding up his mouth to kiss her, but covering up his bon-bons with both hands all the while. "Next time the lady gives me some."

"Do you hear that! the little serpent!" said Mme. Pitre, between a sense of injury and pride in his intelligence. "But it is such a clever little creature! He is always begging me to tell him stories."

"Come here, Louis, and I will tell you of the Fairy Carabosse, who had a bed made of gingerbread, and curtains of spun sugar."

"Mosquito curtains?" asked Louis, looking at his little thin arms, on which the marks of many bites were visible. "There are no such things as fairies; there are angels, and there are cupids, and mermen, but I know there are no fairies."

However, in spite of this precocious scepticism, he listened attentively to Denise's story though he could not be induced to stir from Madame Pitre's lap, nor to reply, when Denise said she should come down stairs and play with him.

"Where does he play?" she asked.

"In the cloisters," said Louis for himself.

"In the cloisters! no wonder he looks like a little white ghost."

"Why, he is quite safe there," said Mme. Pitre. "In the garden he might fall into the cistern, or gather the violets, which are sold to the distillery, you know; when he is in the cloisters Madam Rocca knows he is safe."

Denise could not see the reasoning. Even if Mme. Rocca lost a few sous by the violets that Louis might pick, she could afford it! Why did she not have a *bonne*, and send her child out walking? Denise was indignant; she understood nothing of southern economy. Her compassion for Louis made her take pains to conquer his shyness, though she was not usually fond of children. Mme. Pitre thus gained a new view of her character, and was consoled by it. She had begun to think Denise a very intractable damsel, but one so kind to Louis must after all be amiable. Her alarms had not quite subsided however, for the next morning, before starting on her daily rounds, she inquired anxiously what Denise was going to do, and brightened up at her proposal to take her work into the cloisters, and play with Louis.

Accordingly Denise found her way into the still retreat, and espied Louis, sitting on the pavement, just where a ray of sunshine stole in between the wavering garlands of Virginian creeper. He looked at her, but made no reply to her greeting, and continued building up a pile of snail-shells, which appeared to be his playthings. She sat down a little

way off, near a great door leading into the cathedral. It looked as if it had been long closed. Denise examined the panels, with their borders of pomegranate and vine, enclosing knights in armour, ladies in quaint coifs, and stiff, yet graceful drapery, - a whole legendary history of the Magdalene, in fact, which the Protestant Denise had never heard of - carved in high relief on the black cedar wood. Her eye glanced over them without gaining many impressions; but suddenly a little hand came on her lap, and Louis asked mysteriously, "Do you know who those are? I can tell you - it is Mary Madeleine - a most beautiful rich lady, who lived in a palace, and gave balls and réunions to all the noble families of the country, but she never heard mass, and never went to confession. Here she is with a pearl necklace, and here is her sister, whose name was Martha, telling her she is a wicked woman, and the curé said so from the pulpit. Look here, now the Madeleine has become good, but you see she is not nearly so pretty. I like her best before. Here she is preaching to the people at Marseilles. Zon knows a song about her:

> 'Laissez-moi arranger ma chevelure, Et mettre mes gants blancs, Ainsi que mes pierres fines et mes diamants' "...

Denise was struck with the sweetness of the childish voice, and wanted him to continue; but he broke off, and pointed out the last panel.

"There she is dead, you see, and the angels are carrying her up to Paradise. Why do people die? Should you like to die?"

Denise, much at a loss what to answer, tried to enter seriously on the subject, and Louis listened attentively for a few minutes, but at the culminating point said dreamily, "Do you like eating snails?"

"Snails!" cried Denise, doubly horrified, both at the idea of such a dish, and by the very inappropriate interruption.

"I do, and so does Zon. She looks for them in the garden, and here too, and we put them in the fire with a little salt, and when they cease to cry they are done. Mamma is fond of them too, and then I get the shells to play with. The little brown ones are the fattest. Tell me about the Fairy Carabosse."

It was well for Denise that she had even little Louis to interest her. No nun, in the days when Maison Rocca was a convent, ever led a stiller life than she. Far more eventful, far more occupied, had been her London one, especially in its earliest time, when she went to a small French school, where, of course, she had companions of her own age. Mme. Pitre would not let her make any acquaintances in her aunt's. absence, and even objected to her venturing out to do any. commissions, scaring her with those tyrannical laws of custom, which were all the more mysterious and imperative to Denise, that she felt conscious of being quite ignorant of what Farnoux might think right and wrong. So she walked in the garden, and looked up to the battlemented crags that lifted their heads over orange-grove and olive-wood, sat with . Mme. Pitre in the evening, and played with Louis Rocca in the cloisters; if playing it could be called, when his delight was to sit still, and watch her build up his snail-shells, make chains of the great daisies that grew in the grass, and lay patterns of the red leaves of the Virginian creeper on the pavement. She made acquaintance with her propriétaire too; Mme. Rocca, as she went about with her discreet and cautious air, never failed to mark anything, indoors or out, that was for her advantage. She had noted with satisfaction the commencement of friendship between her little son and Denise, and made her a gracious and amicable sign when-

ever she happened to meet her. Then she stopped to speak, and say something polite about Mlle. Le Marchand. Denise did not admire her, but was willing to be friendly, and responded accordingly. One day Mme. Rocca's door chanced to open as Denise went by; Mme. Rocca herself appeared, and begged Denise would come in and pay her a little visit. Amid her everyday phrases of politeness she did not fail to slip in many questions about the former history of Denise, who, having nothing to conceal, answered them with concise and careless frankness. Mme. Rocca talked on, though usually she was chary of words, and scanned Denise with keen, quiet eyes. This was the first time that Denise had been in the salon of her propriétaire. It was large and long, with two deeply recessed windows offering an eligible view into the street, and another at the further end, which led into a garden. The red-tiled floor was bare, but before each chair was placed a little square of carpet; the chairs themselves were ranged against the walls; a clock with a golden heart transpierced by an arrow stood between two china figures, a shepherd smiling audaciously at a shepherdess, who simpered with downcast eyes, as if very conscious of his admiration; a table with a lamp upon it stood in the middle of the room; a smaller one, with Mme. Rocca's wellfilled work-basket upon it, was drawn near one of the windows. Beside it was stitching a seamstress, hired for the day. She hardly looked up at the entrance of Denise, but worked industriously, with evident consciousness of Mme. Rocca's presence.

Through the further window the rows of orange-trees were visible, which furnished the chief product of the garden. High walls, covered with Catalonian jessamine, shut it in, and divided it from other similar gardens. The slender Byzantine bell-tower of the church rose close by on the left,

Denise.

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and overhead in front rose higher streets and gardens, and olive grounds, terrace after terrace. Against the further wall of the garden were raised three stone steps, with a tiled roof above them; Mme. Rocca assured Denise that it was a delightful place to sit and work in, and she had had it erected entirely for her lodgers. A green arbour, right and left, testified again to her amiable care for them. Rows of immortelles and violets were planted under the orangetrees, all destined for sale, and the golden fruit itself. long before it was ripe, would be sold for exportation. Mme. Rocca was not the woman to leave an inch of ground unproductive or unprofitable, and yet she pointed out the violets now just coming into blow - for spring treads close on the heels of autumn in Farnoux - and begged that Denise would gather as many as she liked. Denise spied some one at work among them, with a black velvet cap on his head, a great green water jar by his side and a spade represented by a small fire-shovel. She was about to make some remark on this singular agricultural implement, when the owner rose from his stooping position, and entered the salon, shovel in hand. Seeing Denise, he politely removed his cap. and bowed, and Mme. Rocca introduced him as her husband. Denise now saw before her, not the gardener, as she had imagined, but a fat, whiskerless, smiling little bourgeois, looking younger than his wife, and as good-humoured as she was acid. He paid Denise a pretty compliment, and seemed much amused at her inability to answer in the same strain. Denise had plenty of sang-froid, and was ready at badinage, but pay compliments she could not.

"You permit me?" said he, politely to his wife, as he took a carnation from a nosegay, after asking how Denise liked Farnoux, and all the other matter-of-course questions. "And mademoiselle permits too?" he added, offering it to

Denise, with precisely the same gallant air with which he had addressed his wife. "Sweets to the sweet, mademoiselle! You have not seen our garden yet? I am a great gardener; my wife has but one fault — she is too severe; she does not approve of the *Cercle*, nor of the chase; she even objects to the most innocent little walks on the Boulevard. In fact, it is too flattering, but I assure you I speak the truth, she approves of nothing that takes me from home; so I am forced to occupy myself as you see."

Denise looked from one to the other, uncertain how much was jest, and how much earnest. Mme. Rocca's aspect led her to believe it was earnest. She did not look like a votary of pleasure, certainly, with her pale, sharp features, and the black dress that was her unvarying costume. Denise pitied M. Rocca, though he did not look as if he wanted pity; and was the very impersonation of flourishing health and cheerfulness. At this moment a little by-play was going on between him and his wife. Denise saw him display an empty purse, with comic supplication, answered by a brief gesture of decided refusal. More pantomime followed, which Mme. Rocca refused to see, and M. Rocca finally shrugged his shoulders, took quite an affectionate leave of Denise, a mutely reproachful and droll one of his wife, and disappeared. Denise took leave too. The next time she saw Mme. Rocca, that lady took occasion to thank her for her kindness to Louis, and mentioning her anxieties that he should take a good place when he went to school, but he was too delicate to be forced to learn; and she had not the time to teach him. Denise, who thought that a mother ought to have time for her child, replied that a great deal could be taught without regular lessons by those who always had a child with them.

"Very true," Mme. Rocca said; "but as for herself she

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had no gift of teaching, and besides was so occupied. She had never learnt any language but her own; mademoiselle was more fortunate; she knew both English and French equally well — what an advantage!"

"I learnt them together," said Denise. "The lady I lived with was French, and spoke French by preference, but she knew English perfectly, and had many English visitors."

"I wish Louis had your opportunities, dear mademoiselle!"

"He would soon learn."

"Ah, it is such an idle little varlet, mademoiselle! you do not know him!"

"I am sure I could teach him without the least difficulty!" cried Denise, with some indignation; and piqued by Mme. Rocca's smiling incredulity, she added, "may I try?"

"If you like, dear mademoiselle; I am sure I am most grateful."

"A short lesson every day would be much better for him than idling and dreaming."

"Well, you are very kind to the boy, Mlle. Denise, and if any one can make him a scholar, no doubt you will; but I wait to see!" said Mme. Rocca, smiling, and her apparent indifference left Denise somewhat provoked, and perfectly unconscious that Mme. Rocca had secured an English teacher for Louis without its costing her a farthing.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE had been a peculiar tie between old Benoîte Roques and the family at the Château; she was the fostermother of Félise de Farnoux, and a foster-mother in the south of France is regarded as almost a relation, and honoured even when her nursling is grown up, with the fond title of "mere." Herself the child of one of the Farnoux servants, she had spent all her life in and about the Château; had left it only to marry, and in a year or so returned to serve there again. She was in high favour there, not only as the mère of Félise, but because she belonged to one of the few Protestant families remaining in Farnoux; a family which had been humbly devoted to its seigneurs for time out of mind. Benoîte was very proud of this, though she had little personal attachment to any of the family, except her own fosterchild. In later years she had fallen into disgrace. Her daughter had married a Roman Catholic of the town, and abjured her own faith very readily to gain the consent of his family to the marriage. Benoîte made no objection, but she was very anxious that this affair should remain unknown at the Château, well aware that Mlle. de Farnoux would consider it unpardonable. It might have seemed impossible to conceal anything that happened at Farnoux from one living at so short a distance; but Mlle. de Farnoux, at that time, held no intercourse with any one beyond her own walls, cut short every attempt to bring her gossip, and in fact knew no more of what went on out of the Château, than a nun of the strictest order knows what is passing in Paris. Benoîte found no difficulty in persuading her that Marie was in service in the town, and the girl herself would come and pay her respects to her lady, and give as fluent an account

of her situation, and its advantages and disadvantages, as if it were simple matter of fact, instead of the most audacious invention. Accident revealed the deception to Mlle. de Farnoux, and since that time, Benoîte had been forbidden to set foot in the Château. She had not, therefore, seen her mistress for many years, and a little curiosity to discover if she were indeed as changed as report declared, mingled with another motive, made her resolve, after she had seen Denise, to venture into the presence of Mlle. de Farnoux, uncalled for. Few people cared to do so now; but not always had Eleanor de Farnoux been an object of fear and aversion. In her father's lifetime, when beauty, high spirits, and generosity, went far to conceal her violent temper, she had been among the most worshipped and admired of the maidens of Provence. Afterwards, circumstances had combined to sour her, and develope the dark side of her character. Left to govern a noble and poor family, her pride suffered continual mortifications, and she bent all her will on restoring her family to their old influence and consideration in the neighbourhood. For this she spared and saved, sou by sou, till she had amassed a dowry sufficient to tempt the worthless representative of the younger branch of the De Farnoux to marry the reluctant Félise, and thus secure her a position; as far as name and fortune went, that seemed to befit a daughter of the seigneurs of Farnoux. Félise married: it remained to find a husband of her own faith for Géraldine, whose marriage portion was also slowly gathered together. On such objects did Mlle. de Farnoux spend the best years of her youth, only to be baffled utterly, and to sink into a querulous, half-childish invalid. Even yet, however, she was an object of fear to the household, for there were startling sudden returns of reason and intelligence, or some trifle would rouse the tiger-mood, and make her the Eleanor of old

days, whose merciless irony and imperious will had made allaround her tremble. She had been nobly gifted with talents, and beauty, and friends. Now the beauty was utterly gone, the friends were estranged, the talents sunk in something approaching imbecility. Old Benoîte had said truly that Mile. de Farnoux had only lived to break her own heart and that of others. She had been cursed, even when her wishes seemed granted. Félise had submitted to the husband chosen for her, but he had proved insolently neglectful; he had wasted her fortune and his own, and left her to occupy her heart and time as she would. The world had excused him, and spoken lightly of her. Félise held her sister responsible for the wreck of her happiness, and, long before her own death, had refused to see her. Latterly the heart, which had found no rest in anything that earth could offer, had taken refuge in a new form of faith, one which, as she bitterly said, "should not be her sister's." This was the last lowest step of degradation in the eyes of Mlle. de Farnoux; this apostasy, as she called it, seemed to dim the honour of all their forefathers, and when she forced her way to Félise's death-bed, it was with the passionate desire to call her back to the creed of her ancestors. But a priest was bending over the dying woman, holding a crucifix to her lips, and Félise gave no sign of recognition. Only a quiver of the white eyelids, a faint catching of the breath, betrayed that she was aware of her sister's presence. Thus they parted. There was no remorse on the part of Mlle. de Farnoux; she took no reproach to herself for the unhappy marriage; she only felt that she had loved Félise, and received but a sullen submission in return. As entirely had she failed in regard to her brother. She had treated him as a boy as long as possible, had ruled supreme in the Château, hindering several projects of marriage that did not please her; always seeking him a wife,

and never finding one. He had suddenly escaped from her guidance under circumstances that shipwrecked her own life. Géraldine yet remained, and if Mlle. de Farnoux had been ungentle even in her happy days, she was merciless now. The girl lived a weary life, and the end of her history was like a worm gnawing secretly and incessantly at the proud heart of her sister.

Only within two years had the Baron returned, and even then in fear and trembling, under his wife's compulsion. He did not venture to face his sister for several weeks, and assured himself many times of her changed condition before he would enter her apartment. He had last seen her in the height of her stately beauty, and found her now aged and childish. Was it the sins of her youth visited upon her, that made his first sensation one of relief? The next was of dismay, as her dim eyes began to kindle, and her voice to assume the tones he remembered so well. The sight of him had awakened recollections of the past. He would as soon have faced a lioness in her den as his sister in this mood. The last of the elder branch of the De Farnoux was a coward; there was no denying it, though he would have fought a duel gaily, like a nobleman; but early training and a bad conscience made a craven of him in the presence of his sister. Mme. de Farnoux rarely appeared in the apartment of her sister-in-law; her brief visits of ceremony never failed to call up a passion of anger, ending in violent weeping or wilder laughter. At other times Mlle. de Farnoux would sit still by the hour, with hands idly folded, and a vacant smile on her lips, as she gazed motionless from her window. Her attendant had been with her but a short time: no old servant of the family now repaid her mistress' past generosity by faithful care; it seemed as if she had had no power liberal as she had been - to attach any one. Old Benoîte

assuredly had no personal affection for her, and in her heart had never forgiven her own abrupt dismissal from the Château; yet she was faithful after her manner, and knew herself a messenger of weighty tidings as she toiled up to the Château.

"I could run up like a partridge once!" said she to herself, looking onwards to where the Château rose, about a quarter of a mile off, occupying the small space of table-land on the top of a cliff whose face, on the sea-side, was so perpendicular, that from the terrace in front of the building a stone might have been dropped straight into the valley beneath. Even the hardy aromatic plants of the hills would scarcely grow on this bleak face of rock, where the wind beat and the sun dazzled. The Château looked from its lonely eminence down a winding glen, shut in by grey walls of rock; the glen appeared to have been formed by a torrent, which had furrowed a deep channel down the mountain side. and spread out into a wide and stony bed below. In summer this was bare, dry, and dusty, except where a scanty rivulet filtered down to the sea; but a few hours' rain would always send a muddy torrent rushing down, and render what was otherwise used as a high road totally impassable. Olives, orange gardens, and vines, ascended some way up on either side of the valley, terrace above terrace; pines then took their place, growing more and more rare towards the summit, and disappearing altogether before the level at which the Château was placed. The path from Farnoux wound in zigzags up the bare face of rock, and was impassable for a carriage of any description. When arrived at the summit of the cliff, it was altogether a surprise to find that the other side, hidden from the sea, and protected by other further hills, was covered with verdure, and behind the Château, in the narrow space of ground that remained, was a garden.

which was a wilderness indeed, but a wilderness that blossomed as the rose. The building itself protected this little home of greenness and flowers from the mistral - that cruel wind that scourges the south of France - and it extended up to the wall, massive and breast high, which followed the undulations of the ground on the verge of the cliff. A little fertile valley lay slumbering far beneath, with low olive-clad hills around it, over which rose again barren limestone crags. The cliff on which the Château stood was much less precipitous on this side; pines and ilexes climbed it; myrtle and sarsaparilla grew thickly beneath them, and mounted in tangled luxuriance up to the very parapet round the Château. So abruptly did this surrounding parapet rise from the edge of the rock that no eye could tell where the natural fortification ended, and the artificial began. Time had blended the grey tints of both together, painted them with lichens, and fringed them with the hardier ferns, and the topmost boughs of the most aspiring pines swept the wall above. On the other side, however, all was different: there was nothing but the rugged face of rock to be seen till the eye fell on the glen, far below. The Château itself was half stronghold, half dwelling. The oldest part was a square tower at one end, standing, as perhaps it had done since Roman times, without one stone having fallen from it, though for hundreds of years it had been neither inhabited nor repaired. The rest of the Château had been built by a De Farnoux; the cipher of the family was interlaced alternately with their coat of arms or the Farnoux motto, Sortes meæ in manu Dei sunt, above the deeply-recessed windows. A wide low archway gave entrance to a court in the midst of the building, where grass and weeds sprang between the stones. Ironbarred windows looked down upon it, and many doors opened into it. There was a desolate, decaying look about

the Château, notwithstanding its solidity, as if the owners no longer dwelt there, or were unprosperous. It bore tokens, however, of its vicinity to Italy. A door, studded with heavy nails, was open, and offered a view into the entrance-hall, small in proportion to the size of the Château, but lofty, and set round with marble pillars, supporting a vaulted and frescoed ceiling, where the colours were yet bright, and cupids laughed from among the vine-boughs where they swung. The tessellated pavement was of grev and white marble, and a wide staircase, with low steps like the pavement, led up to the first floor. The rez-de-chaussée was abandoned to solitude: servants had once occupied it. but three now formed the whole establishment of the Barons. Bats and owls dwelt in the deserted rooms, and sallied out at night and flapped against any window where there might be a light visible. On a broad paved terrace (where the barons of De Farnoux had doubtless often played at bowls) extending the whole length of the front of the Château, Benoîte saw two ladies pacing up and down, doubtless Mme, de Farnoux and her daughter; but she had no business to transact with them, and hastened into the hall. She needed no guide, for she knew that Mlle. de Farnoux occupied her old apartment. The room where she habitually sat was in an angle of the Château, with a window commanding a view down the winding path. Two small rooms, once habited by young Félise and Géraldine, opened into it, and had no other egress or means of communication with each other. Trifling as this circumstance was, it indicated justly the close surveillance under which the two girls had been kept. Benoîte mounted to the larger room, and stood unannounced at the door, contemplating the mistress whom she had not seen for so long.

The scanty furniture of the room was unchanged, each

chair stood where it had stood of old; the great bed was still there, half buried in its faded heavy hangings; large as it was, it seemed to occupy but a small space in the great half-furnished, dreary room. Only one person was there, Mlle. de Farnoux herself, sitting at the window, her hands on her lap, her eyes on the road below, and that vacant painful smile on her lips that Benoîte had heard described by the careless servants when they came down to Farnoux. Her tall commanding figure gained amplitude from her loose wrapper, but fear and awe seemed the last feelings likely to be awakened by the childish invalid. Benoîte stood aghast at what she saw for many minutes, and held council with herself whether she should not withdraw and leave the object of her visit untold; at last she spoke, to see whether any gleam of rationality would justify her in relating it; she was unheeded, and it was not till she had advanced close and spoken again, that Mlle. de Farnoux perceived her. "Good day!" she said, when she did, in thick, inarticulate tones; "what do you seek?"

"Mademoiselle does not remember me? Benoîte — Benoîte Roques?"

Mlle. de Farnoux knitted her brows with an evident effort to gather the sense of what was said. Benoîte stood waiting humbly before her with a deprecatory look. Gradually the filmy eyes began to sparkle, the face to flush, the figure to dilate, as if indignation had restored Mlle. de Farnoux to her old self. The name of Benoîte had reached her torpid recollection, and roused her.

"Who sent you here?" she demanded imperiously. "Who lent you courage to come when I had forbidden it? No more; not another word. Begone."

"Mademoiselle must hear me," said Benoîte earnestly, and lowering her voice. "It is not for myself that I come to

speak. I know mademoiselle has reason to be displeased. I came to tell her something that it concerns the family honour she should know."

"M. de Farnoux will soon return; his business has detained him longer than he expected in Paris; there are some family affairs to be settled," said Mlle. de Farnoux, evidently forgetting that the Baron had long been at home.

"It is not of M. le Baron that I would speak. It is of another —"

"I will not hear that woman's name!" cried Mile. de Farnoux, in great agitation. "Go — get back to your mistress, you and your daughter are fit company for her. All apostates together! I have nothing to do with you; she is dead to me. I would not forgive her if she lay dying at that door."

"She has no more need of your forgiveness, mademoiselle — and if Heaven pardons you it will be more to the purpose than your pardoning her; — heart of stone!" muttered the old nurse to herself. "I was not going to speak of Félise."

Mlle. de Farnoux rose up at that name; she clutched the back of her chair with one hand; with the other she seemed about to strike old Benoîte. "Did I not tell you not to name her to me! where did you learn to disobey me?" she cried.

"Alas, mademoiselle, pardon! I would speak of what you and I know — is it permitted? If I do not speak, others may learn what would anger you sorely. Antoine Le Marchand —"

Ear and eye seemed suddenly alive in mute attention; a sign bade Benoîte proceed.

"Mademoiselle remembers how I met him, and another, that morning?" continued Benoîte, glancing fearfully round; "she knows how I hurried to tell her, and what she and I planned. He is dead, but his sister returned awhile ago."

"Dead! Ah, that is well. Secrets are so safe in the grave! that is the only safe place. No one escapes thence; no need to keep watch when the earth is heaped over. Only people will not die as soon as they ought."

"Mademoiselle," said Benoîte, anxious to arrest the fleeting intelligence, which had already begun to relapse into apathy. "Misé Marchand —"

The name recalled the same keen attention as before.

"Misé Marchand lives still; she can keep a secret like the grave; no one ever heard a whisper of it from her; she came back to live here alone, and no one but myself recollected her, it seems; but now there is a niece — Antoine's child, mademoiselle, a girl of nineteen, pale, dark-eyed, something like — speaking with respect — the De Farnoux."

"A girl — Antoine Le Marchand's daughter? — our *intendant's* daughter?" said Mile. de Farnoux, slowly.

"Antoine's — and his wife's," repeated Benoîte, with emphasis.

"Ah! I comprehend!" said Mlle. de Farnoux, sinking into her chair with a gasp. "Benoîte!" she exclaimed, suddenly raising herself, "have they talked in the town?"

"Of what, mademoiselle? What is there to talk of? But if the girl marries, there will be inquiries about her parents; mademoiselle must see this. Now I have done; if mademoiselle doubts what I say, she may ask others, or see the girl herself next time there is service in the chapel. Doubtless she will be there. Adieu, mademoiselle; pardon my intruding."

The old woman withdrew while Mlle. de Farnoux sat as if petrified by what she had heard. Benoîte descended the staircase, and went into the kitchen, readily finding a pretext for her visit, without mentioning her interview with Mlle. de Farnoux, which was the last thing any one would have

suspected. In a few moments she was gossiping with the three servants, who were delighted to have a visitor, and meanwhile her eye roved around to see if there were no morsel of gourd, or stray love-apple that she could beg or filch. Her business was done, and her mind at ease. No touch of pity for the wreck she had seen troubled her, only much wonder at the change. No love for her old mistress had prompted her journey; she was inspired only by a feeling of loyalty, such as might have existed between lord and vassal, without a whit of personal affection.

CHAPTER VII.

DENISE had almost ceased to expect her aunt. There was enough of novelty in this new life to make it peacefully agreeable, and too few events to keep up the expectation that something was about to happen. She once met M. Verignon in the street; he honoured her with a stare, and she thought him even less attractive and more dissipated looking than before. His little yellow moustache, blue eyes, and small even teeth could not win from Denise one whit of the admiration which Farnoux generally accorded to this ravager of hearts and terror of careful mothers. Mme. Pitre could not believe Denise's indifference to this lion of Farnoux to be real; looked uneasy when she heard of the encounter in the street, and begged Denise would not go out alone; it was not usual, at least till girls were married. People talked of anything unusual, and that often hindered a young person's establishment in life; and Denise must remember that no girl ever thought of talking to a gentleman. Mme. Pitre was evidently uncomfortable at the responsibility thrust upon her. In some things Denise was very English, and the English tone of thought puzzled the Frenchwoman. Again, Denise

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seemed matter-of-fact, and not given to flights of fancy, but now and then showed a touch of humour. Mme. Pitre could have entered into wit, but anything like humour or irony bewildered her. Denise was grave and reserved, with feelings deep and strong, but not readily shown. Her new acquaintances thought her odd and ungirlish, and she thought them frivolous; perhaps they were all mistaken together. Her want of accomplishments shocked Mme. Pitre greatly: had she thrown them aside after marriage it would have been most natural, but not to possess them before was inexcusable! Her aunt too was so excellent an artist, so admirable a musician — how was it that Denise had no little talents? Mme. Pitre fairly compelled her to practise daily on a piano belonging to Mlle. Le Marchand, but which was kept in Mme. Pitre's apartment. Then it was that Denise first discovered with amazement how little a governess may contrive to know; beyond her own little treadmill of exercises and rules Mme. Pitre could not make a step, could not comprehend, could not explain. Denise, whose education had been narrow, but good so far as it went, would gladly have continued it, but what could she learn, and who was to teach her, at Farnoux? There was indeed a cabinet de lecture in the town, but Paul de Kock, Sue, and Dumas were almost the only authors to be found in it. She wondered what other girls of her own age did at Farnoux; afterwards she discovered that they were not troubled by a thirst for mental improvement, and they had their wool-work, their young friends, their little parties, walks, and visits to country houses, and the prospect of being married as soon as a respectable *parti* could be found. Not one was in a position anything like that of Denise, and in fact at this time hers was an uncomfortable anomalous position. Farnoux had not made up its mind whether to receive her into its arms or not; her dowry was still uncertain, and

the small gentry of the place - the families of the apothecary, attorney, doctor, distiller, and small proprietors, to say nothing of the sprinkling of nobility, had hitherto sneered at and ignored, more or less, the old artiste, whose niece she was. On the other hand, Denise had nothing in common with the country girls, who gathered the olives and sang so gaily, and went out to fish with brothers and fathers. No bronzed peasant or hardy fisherman could invite Denise to seek with him the plane-shaded Boulevard, which immemorial custom had consecrated to the promenades of Farnoux lovers on Sunday afternoons, while friends and relations sat by on the stone benches and thus gave public sanction to the proceeding. Nor could she join the light-hearted grisettes, who on fête days filled the streets, arm-in-arm, in their best attire. So she knew nobody beyond Maison Rocca, and, moreover, had seen no one, save Marcellin Duval, whom she wished to know. Meanwhile, however, an increasing curiosity and interest began to be felt about Denise, and the return of her aunt was eagerly awaited. For the moment, Louis Rocca and Thérézon were her chief companions; Louis was the better of the two, Thérézon knew far too much of the abundant gossip of the little town, and poured more into the ears of Denise than she wished to hear. Thérézon was an odd mixture of candour and falsehood, caprice and fidelity, probably much what her grandmother had been before her faithful when trusted, repaying suspicion by most ingenious deceit, she was always occupied in cheating the sharp-eyed mistress who never put any confidence in her, and was always on the watch, and yet generally found herself worsted. But she did not dismiss the girl, for "what would you? these creatures are all alike! it is useless to change!" said Mme. Rocca. Denise learnt that Thérézon had a lover, yet she never joined the parties on the Boulevard; and on Sundays Denise.

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was apt to look downcast and have tears in the bright brown eyes that usually beamed with mischief. She was less communicative on the subject of her despondency than on most others, and it was from Mme. Pitre that Denise learned that Zon's lover bore no good repute, and had, indeed, only just been released from jail. All her friends persecuted her to give him up, but the more they said the less she listened. She was not old enough to marry without her parents' permission, but she submitted to being treated as a kind of prodigal rather than give up her Manoële; he was a very handsome fellow, perhaps that was the reason. This was not, however, Zon's explanation when at length she entered on the subject with Denise; she said that love was a fatality, and that the Pope himself could not hinder it. She had told the whole affair in confession, and she had gone to pray at Sainte-Dévote (the church dedicated to the patron saint of the neighbourhood), and her mother had vowed a candle if Zon could forget Manoële; and really she thought she was beginning to forget him, for he had been a long while away just then, only it happened that an enemy brought a false charge against him and he was imprisoned. That, unluckily, made her think about him again, Thérézon said; every body was against him so she was obliged to take his part; she had enraged all her family and risked her place with Mme. Rocca by going off without leave to visit him in jail, and had sold all her dearly loved little ornaments to buy him comforts during an illness. Moreover, since Sainte-Dévote could or would do nothing for her, she had gone on a pilgrimage to the chapel of Sainte-Agnesca, who was supposed to be favourable to lovers, but as yet this had not answered either. Every one prophesied that if ever she married her handsome reprobate she would repent it, and so she seemed to think herself, but without any idea of renouncing him. She would

slip out of an evening or linger on the way to market, regardless of Mme. Rocca's scoldings, and in fact underwent a constant persecution for the sake of Manoële, which cost her many tears, but was powerless to shake her constancy or depress her except for the moment. As for Manoële, he was an audacious poacher, to whom all game, from a pretty girl to a widgeon, came alike; a smuggler on occasion, and an arrant male coquette; his character might be guessed by any one who saw him sauntering along the Boulevard, his cap on one side and a rose stuck in it, very conscious of his good looks, and braving his ill repute with a swagger. Whenever he was in trouble he came to his old love, and she never failed to meet him more than half-way. Poor Zon! she got no sympathy even from Denise, whose feelings on love matters were as yet very crude, and who only thought her extremely foolish.

It is a trite remark, that events always come when nobody wants or expects them. Denise had not once thought of her aunt the day that a voice, coming up the stairs in loud soliloquy, brought her to the door to see who it was. A large woman in a yellow striped shawl, a vast hat, and a bundle crowned by a parrot's cage in her arms, was ascending slowly.

"November! say August. There is a heat to hatch crocodile's eggs on every landing, and these stairs are as long and as steep as if one were going up the great pyramid! One would think these houses had been built by a winged race, who only used stairs when they were moulting. All good things are difficult of attainment — both Paradise and one's own home. Why, who's that, eh? —"

She stopped short, looked at Denise, who was standing amazed in the doorway of Mme. Pitre's apartment.

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"Who's that, I say? Diantre! it is not possible! — Denise!"

"Yes, aunt! I wrote -"

"You have not run away?" demanded Mlle. Le Marchand, in a sharp, startled voice.

"Mrs. Lisle is dead. I wrote -"

"What! Mrs. Lisle dead! ... Well, she was a good friend to me and mine when we wanted one badly," said Mlle. Le Marchand, standing in deep thought for some moments; then — "You wrote? Where's the letter?"

"It is with a great many more, but as I am here --"

"No, let me hear it, you can read it to me," said Mlle. Le Marchand, letting herself into her room as she spoke.

It seemed a strange awkward proceeding, to read her own letter aloud, but Denise could only obey, and her aunt listened in perfect silence, her hands on her knees, her eyes fixed on Denise, and her bird and bundle at her feet. When it was ended she said brusquely —

"I shall burn that photograph;" and she rose, struck a light, took down a photograph of Denise from the wall, and deliberately set fire to it. "There," said she, "that photograph prevented my visiting you years ago. Till good Mrs. Lisle sent it to me and assured me it was an excellent resemblance, I had a vision of my little niece; I pictured her under certain features to myself. When that arrived good lack! — well, I said to myself, it may be justice without mercy, or it may be one of those falsehoods which the sun and men between them do contrive to perpetrate; but I never had courage to go and see. Hum! what do you think of her now, Cocotte?"

The parrot, thus adjured, sidled up to the wires of his cage, and uttered something which his mistress interpreted into "*Ca ira*, *ca ira*!" "Good, good," said she, much pleased.

"So you approve of our niece, Cocotte? And, and there are few people's opinions I would take before yours. Let's look at you, sweetheart. Child, where did you get that grave face from? You have not been unhappy?"

"No, not at all."

"Ah, you are none of mine after all; that face is your mother's; it is to her family that you belong. And where have you lived since you came? Why, I shall have to keep house for two, as if one were not trouble enough! I hope, at least, you have not that terrible English appetite?"

"I do not eat much," replied Denise, gravely.

Mlle. Le Marchand looked at her with twinkling eyes, that showed her oddity to be in some degree, at all events, assumed.

"Ah! And what do you think of Farnoux? has Mme. Pitre looked out a husband for you yet? You must have one, I suppose, if any one will tolerate such a queer old stock-fish of an aunt-in-law as I am."

Denise was overcome by a laugh that suddenly made her face child-like and joyous. She was alarmed the next moment, lest she had offended Mlle. Le Marchand, and hastened to offer a kiss of apology.

"No, no, laugh as much as you will, child, at me or at what you like, only don't look as if the shadow of all our troubles had fallen upon you. So you have come to me! My poor girl, I wish you had a better friend! What can such an old vagabond do for you? Ah, Denise, the Shunamite woman was right; neither prophet nor king need waste gifts on her who 'dwells among her own people!' I must find a home for you; I cannot have you wandering like a Bohemian. It will never do to have another old maid in the family to dress St. Catherine's hair, either! I daresay you think one too much? Come and give me a kiss, but don't compromise my fichu."

Denise's mirthful laugh awoke again at the idea that anything in her aunt's toilette was capable of being "compromised." She was excessively amused by her new-found relative, and already more at ease with her than with Mme. Pitre. Though Mlle. Le Marchand had hardly even offered a kiss of welcome, there was no mistaking the emotion and pleasure that she experienced at the sight of Denise, who felt that at last here was some one on whom she had a claim.

Mme. Pitre was not less rejoiced at the arrival of Mile. Le Marchand. Now she could enjoy the presence of Denise and fidget about her, without too much sense of responsibility. It was much more agreeable to fear lest the aunt should not know how to fulfil the duties of a guardian, admonish her, and endeavour sedulously to make up for her deficiencies, than to act guardian herself. Mme. Pitre combined the greatest respect for her friend's genius, with a vast contempt for her common-sense. She was quite ready to believe that Mlle. Le Marchand stood on altitudes whence she could look "from eastern point of Libra to the fleecy star;" but as for supposing her capable of understanding how many sous made half a franc, she would have shrugged her shoulders hopelessly as such an idea. In fact, the matter-of-fact little woman held Mlle. Le Marchand, in her absence, as an oracle, against whom it would have been treason to open her lips; but when they were together, the oddity, the paradoxes, and the erudition of her friend were alike apt to provoke her, and tempt her to try to infuse a grain of the good common-sense on which she piqued herself. In an abstract point of view, she considered Denise most fortunate in being the niece of such a person, but practically she felt

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her to be an unfortunate child in the hands of one who would never think of establishing her well in life.

CHAPTER VIII.

MME. PITRE had already mentally reviewed all the unmarried youth of Farnoux; considered who would find the Protestant faith an insurmountable obstacle, and who might be willing to put up with it; calculated the debts of some and the prospects of all; and allowed herself to mention discreetly many little facts which she had gathered regarding the fortune of Mlle. Le Marchand, in the years during which they had been acquainted. Mme. Pitre was a great gatherer of news on matters which concerned other people, but she was no gossip as far as retailing it went, and now only told what she knew of her friend's affairs for a special purpose. It had an immediate effect. M. Verignon, himself Denise's aversion, suddenly bethought him whether Denise might not be obtained with less trouble than the coquettish widow, who was environed by a host of other suitors, and did not show herself as exclusively sensible to his merits as she ought. He hesitated, however, feeling that, as the son of the souspréfet, with no more debts or follies than a young man had a right to, he was condescending below what he owed to himself and his good looks, in offering his hand to Denise. Still Mme. Huard was terribly exacting, and the devotion she required was very burdensome to a gentleman so sensible of his own merits as M. Alexandre Verignon. With Denise, all that was necessary would be the formal demand - a short courtship; the marriage would follow, and after that - since marry one must - he should become a good père de famille, and abandon the agreeable bachelor life, which was too charming to last for ever. M. Alexandre,

therefore, explained his views to his family, and after much discussion, it was settled that as soon as Mlle. Le Marchand should return, Mme. Verignon should pay her a visit, which had indeed been long due, and see how the land lay. Should all seem promising, this call might preface the demand for the niece's hand; should they wait too long, other suitors might appear. The ground must not be left unoccupied. So sharply did Mme. Verignon watch for the reappearance of Mlle. Le Marchand, that she thought her returned two days before she really did come home, and thus was led to make her appearance at a very awkward moment. An operation always immediately followed the arrival of Mlle. Le Marchand, which she was accustomed to style "a general branle." As no one ever was admitted into her rooms while she was absent, they required extensive dusting on her return. She carried this out with her usual energy. In this branle tables danced on their heads, and arm-chairs skipped into the midst of the room with books and papers, stools, a chauffe-pied, and a violin in their embrace; and all the furniture performed such feats of locomotion as rivalled any performed by the spirit-haunted tables and chairs of these latter times. Nay, it is possible, that if any one had entered at the right moment, they might have seen Mlle. Le Marchand floating about in the air, feet foremost, on clouds of dust. At all events. Mme. Pitre believed her capable of that or any other singularity. Mme. Pitre declared her friend's apartment to be un vrai capharnaum, and closed her own doors and windows in haste when there were symptoms of a branle. As for passers-by in the street, Mlle. Le Marchand had no mercy on them, if they chanced to be underneath when she prepared to shake her bits of carpet from her windows. Half an hour after her meeting with her niece she commenced operations furiously. Denise was sent out with a basket to

buy provisions, and when she objected that Farnoux would be scandalized, she was answered with a "Bah!" which gave her the measure of her aunt's indifference to public opinion. It was, at all events, a comfort to escape from the dust and dirt, and she went on her errand. Every article of furniture had been hunted out of its place when an old book on astronomy came tumbling from its shelf, apparently infected by the general commotion; Mlle. Le Marchand picked it up. put her duster on her head to be out of her way, read a page, reflected, and finally became absorbed in it; and while she thus stood, totally forgetting her branle, her broom tucked under one arm, and all her goods and chattels strewed around, a discreet knock was heard; she replied "Enter!" without any idea of what she was saying, and accordingly there entered, in silk attire, best bonnet, and lemon-coloured gloves, Mme. Verignon.

"Ah! a thousand pardons! I intrude. But I believed you returned two days ago, and could not refuse myself the pleasure of this visit," said she, with heroic politeness, that ignored the capharnaum, though it required all a mother's devotion to her son's interests not to withdraw the silk robe and the kid gloves at once from such a perilous neighbourhood. Mlle. Le Marchand woke up from her studies in an instant, advanced her visitor a chair, took one herself, and behaved as if all were in perfect order about her; but there was something of ceremony in Mme. Verignon's air and toilette that struck her, and she was considering what it could mean, all the time that the lively, good-natured Mme. Verignon was inquiring where she had been, complimenting her on her success in her art, smilingly admiring the sunny aspect of the room, the view from the windows, and the paintings, large and small, hung against the walls. Presently the violin caught her eye. "Ah! a violin!" said she; "the adorable instrument! Alexandre, my son, has such a talent for it, only he has had no time to cultivate it – instead, he plays on the piano."

"Her son — Hon! I have it! Number one of our suitors! The sous-préfet's son, too! Hon!" muttered Mlle. Le Marchand to herself, with a sudden perception of the probable motive at the bottom of the visit.

"And to whom does the violin belong?" continued Mme. Verignon.

"To my niece," replied Mlle. Le Marchand.

"Does she play on the violin?" said Mme. Verignon, so much astonished, and so little gratified, that it elicited a grim chuckle from Mlle. Le Marchand, who, however, added, "At least I may call it hers; one cannot live for ever, and at my death, of course I shall leave her — one cannot live for ever —"

"It is too true!" responded Mme. Verignon, delighted at immediately entering on the very subject that occupied her thoughts, and which yet was too delicate to be introduced by her. Mlle. Le Marchand pausing, Mme. Verignon ventured to lead her on. "Oh, it is natural you should leave to your niece — and namesake, is she not?—and goddaughter, I imagine? —"

"All my musical instruments," continued Mlle. Le Marchand.

"And no doubt mademoiselle plays like an angel," said Mme. Verignon, trying not to seem disconcerted. "The 'Violet' of Herz, for instance: does she know that?"

"Rubbish! stuff! the 'Violet' of Herz! When I think that I once performed that worthless piece before a public audience, I am ashamed of myself!" exclaimed Mille. Le Marchand, so moved that she forgot Denise, and everything but her recollections.

"Nevertheless, I believe it is very fine; I know that Alexandre has never been able to play it," said Mme. Verignon, piqued at this depreciation of the piece that had baffled her son. "My Palmire has just returned from the convent, and she, too, is an accomplished musician; I am sure she and Mlle. Denise have an infinity of tastes in common. What pleasure it would be to hear them play a duet together! Alexandre listens with delight to his sister's music; it is charming to see. But he has tastes that might render any woman happy."

"And he can choose where he likes, for, with the fortune that he will have, his wife's can be of no importance."

"Yes, yes; but you understand, my dear mademoiselle, you understand that we cannot reason in that way," said Mme. Verignon, eagerly, and laying her hand on the arm of her companion, who looked down with a satirical smile at the delicate kid glove, as it reposed on her sleeve: "Alexandre has ambition; so has his father for him; one day he must be a député — I speak not of myself; a mother can but wish the happiness of her son; but naturally, with the advantages that he possesses, he expects certain things in return. There is so much to be thought of in a marriage! And girls expect so much now-a-days, and the corbeille alone is so expensive!"

"Of course the bridegroom counts his gifts as so much deducted from the bride's dowry," said Mlle. Le Marchand.

"Exactly — exactly — you have said the word — the cachemires alone! Young men in love do not think of these things, but their parents must for them. Alexandre, I must tell you in confidence, might make an excellent marriage any moment he pleased; one that would make him the envy of the place — a lady, not so far away as Paris — —"

"In Farnoux?"

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"Certainly. Ah, you divine!"

"In Farnoux?" repeated Mlle. Le Marchand, with provoking astonishment.

"Yes, assuredly! Come, I must not give names, but a widow — young, rich — —"

"In Farnoux?" repeated Mile. Le Marchand, for the third time.

"Mme. Huard!" cried Mme. Verignon, out of patience.

"I have been away a whole month, dear madame; I forgot that in so long a time Mme. Huard was sure to have changed her favoured suitor. When I went M. Blaizac was in the ascendant."

"M. Blaizac! Oh, M. Blaizac is M. Blaizac; I do not deny it ----"

"Why, it would avail so little to deny it, dear madame."

"But still, supposing my Alexandre had paid serious attentions to Mme. Huard — — "

> " 'Il l'aime, mais enfin cette veuve inhumaine N'a payé jusqu'ici son amour, que de haine,"

quoted Mlle. Le Marchand.

"On the contrary, mademoiselle — but that is all over. Since he has seen a certain young person, whom I am not at liberty to name, he has thought of no one else. Of course they have not exchanged a word yet, and his father has decided that nothing shall be said till we know what the young person's prospects are. Poor boy! it requires all my influence to restrain him. I say, 'When thy father has said a thing, thou knowest he is inflexible. It is thy duty to submit.' But why should I *ennuyer* mademoiselle with these matters? I am too fond a mother! I live in my children."

"Il peut, seigneur, il peut, dans ce désordre extrême, Epouser ce qu'il hait, et perdre ce qu'il aime." again quoted Mlle. Le Marchand.

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"Dear mademoiselle," said the perplexed Mme. Verignon, "we see too little of each other. Why do you live like a hermit? We lose much pleasure, and you, too, a little."

"What would you have, madame! An artiste!"

"Oh, but all know that if mademoiselle is an artiste, it is because she chooses to be an artiste; we are all aware that her fortune does not demand this. Now that her niece is come she will surely relent towards our poor society?"

"Alas, I am not fit for society, madame. How can I attempt to make a toilette, I who never could bring myself to wear corsets?"

"But, dear mademoiselle, it is an excellent example that you set us!" said Mme. Verignon, with a passing thought of satisfaction given to her own trim figure. "Let not such miseries keep you aloof. I know that you have your own circle, but now you must cease to confine yourself to it. *Apropos*, may I ask — it is an idea just come to me — are you related to an excellent family of the same name who formerly lived here? In my father's time, I believe; he recollects a Jerome Le Marchand, also a Protestant — —"

"Le Marchands are 'common as Maries at Ravenna," said Mlle. Le Marchand, quoting a well-known proverb.

"True — but the religion being the same — however, I believe you are Norman? You have property in Normandy?"

"Plague take the woman! who told her that? That chatterbox Pitre, I conclude," muttered Mlle. Le Marchand. "Property — well, I don't know what rich people like you call property."

"It is said that mademoiselle is richer than any of us," smiled Mme. Verignon. "But this is a visitation that I am making! I must go, indeed; adieu, or rather, *au revoir!* My regards to your dear niece, whom I had hoped to see.

Palmire dies with desire to make her acquaintance." Mme. Verignon retreated briskly, contented at having prepared the ground for further advances, should they be advisable, and resolved to go no further till she knew more of Mlle. Le Marchand's affairs. Denise came in soon after she was gone, and was received with, "Listen, child; should you like to be married?"

"Yes, aunt," said she, taken by surprise.

"Good. You may have M. Alexandre Verignon, if you like."

"Him! Marry that contemptible man!"

"All his family are dying to make your acquaintance."

"I will not know one of them — nothing shall induce me, aunt."

"Softly, softly; you don't know what an agreeable visit I have had from his mother, all decked out as fine as a village Virgin. I see I shall come in for a little second-hand courtship, and I won't be deprived of it — it's my last chance. The young man has blue eyes, and wants a wife; there's no harm in that."

"I will not be treated as merchandise, aunt."

"Don't suppose I should gain by selling you, sweetheart. Quite the contrary. It is only in savage countries that girls are sold; in France we pay to get rid of them. Well, well, be contented —

> 'Je te marierai bien Dès que je le pourrai, s'il ne m'en coûte rien.' "

Denise lifted her head in proud and silent indignation.

"Their very air!" said Mlle. Le Marchand, in an altered, almost awe-struck tone — "Has no one wondered that you are so unlike me, child? — Well, never mind — I have other things to think of — give me a wet duster; dust is the great enemy of us oil-painters."

"Will the one on your head do, aunt?"

"Bless me! have I been receiving company with a duster on my head? That woman is really heroic; she is capable of enduring great things for her son. Henceforward she will know something of artistes; she will lay it down as a general rule that they all wear dusters on their heads. Think that she would still accept you as a daughter-in-law — supposing a pretty dowry was forthcoming — and be grateful."

Denise's lips unclosed, but she seemed to think it not worth while to answer, and went away into the inner room.

CHAPTER IX.

MADAME VERIGNON'S visit to Mlle. Le Marchant was speedily known throughout Farnoux; every one guessed what it was to prelude, and it excited high disapproval in the families where there were young marriageable damsels, though the promptness of the step won much admiration. The ground was felt to be occupied, and it was supposed that Mme. Verignon had assured herself of the solid fortune of Mile. Le Marchand. There was much anxiety to know its real amount, but this was not easy to ascertain, as she employed no notary at Farnoux, and being a Protestant of course had no confessor to whom discreet inquiries might be addressed. Some recollected that there had been a poor and Protestant family of the same name years before in Farnoux, but it had died out, and Le Marchand was too common a name to build upon. Mlle. Le Marchand had rather held aloof from society, and none had been desirous of forcing their acquaintance on the old artiste, whom they had never suspected of having a niece with a dowry. It was now ascertained that the aunt possessed a substantial little property in Normandy, which Denise would doubtless inherit. Even the

heaviest load of debts would hardly have induced any young man to propose to Mlle. Le Marchand herself, but this niece was a perfect godsend; all the young men who wanted wives were ready to scramble for her. Mlle. Le Marchand found herself courted and fêted, sought and deferred to; and, highly amused, she encouraged the belief in her wealth, and entertained herself with Denise's unconsciousness of the manifold little intrigues that her arrival had set going. With some families the Protestantism was a decided obstacle, but others would have overlooked it. It was not the pretty hand that Mme. Huard had so early discovered — for Denise was universally considered dull and plain — but the gold that it held, which was the attraction, just as Marcellin Duval had said.

Many visitors now came to seek Mlle. Le Marchand, but unless they arrived of an evening they were apt to find her door fast locked. According to Farnoux custom, ladies received their guests every afternoon (without prejudice to the evening habitués), and in almost every house some of the female members of the family would have been found sitting at work and expecting visitors. In Farnoux almost all families were connected with each other by relationship, more or less near. Families had intermarried repeatedly; new-comers were few; the Farnousiens lived sociably, knew each other's affairs by heart, gossiped vigorously about them in their salons, during their promenades on the Boulevard, and after mass at the church-door, but did not quarrel much after all. The little local newspaper, printed in coarse type and on infamous paper, had hard work to fill its weekly sheet; for events were scarce at Farnoux, and those beyond the banlieue - those which concerned distant places and other nations, were very moderately interesting. The fête of the patron saint was a living, important event,

causing a setting to rights of every house, and a gathering of rich and poor; the whole town was alive with crowds and dancing, the wild southern dance that still exists in remote spots like Farnoux - the weather, too, was universally interesting, affecting the interests of each proprietor, great or small; the prospects of the olives also, and the quantity of the orange crop; every one took a lively interest in these topics. But what did it matter whether M. de Guizot were chief minister, or General Cavaignac were banished? whether a republic ruled, or a president became an emperor? There were no politics in the little paper, but it sometimes descanted on an excellent plan approved of by M. le Maire, for bringing more water into the town, and announced that there would be a public meeting to discuss it; and then the meeting would duly take place, and separate, just as it had done annually for ten years past, much having been said and nothing done. Or a concert was advertised, or a lottery for the poor, and there would be a leading article on the perfections of Farnoux and all belonging to it. Such were the chief topics of L'Aigle Farnousien. There was no theatre at Farnoux, but a vaudeville was sometimes got up among friends in the winter; the Cercle dragged on a languid existence, but that did not advantage the ladies, as public opinion forbade them to play billiards or smoke. They had their children, their cuisine, their lessive (and a great wash was serious and important), they made marmalade and other preserves, and visited each other. Births, deaths, and marriages were, as elsewhere, very interesting at Farnoux, and this new fortune just fallen into the midst of its inhabitants caused a great sensation.

Denise was not so unconscious but that she imbibed the idea that it was necessary for her to be married, and that soon. Mme. Pitre took care of that, and Mlle. Le Marchand Denise. 6

was quite of the same opinion; but she was far more romantic than her niece, and desired a love match, while Denise only looked forward to a solid, comfortable home, and a husband whom she could esteem. Both aunt and niece, however, agreed so far as that none of the suitors who came forward pleased them, and Denise had been at Farnoux three months and still was not fitted with a husband. By that time she began to understand the new life on which she had entered. She knew something of many families, heard more, had found some employments, and understood how each evening would be spent so long as she lived with her aunt. As regularly as Mme. Pitre came in from her day's work, she appeared, after a short interval passed in her own domain, in the sitting-room of Mlle. Le Marchand, who then quitted her employment, whatever it might be, and allowed a table to be cleared of books, writings, and sketches, in preparation for a game of cards, to be begun as soon as M. and Mme. Rocca should appear. Sometimes the round, beaming, whiskerless face of M. Rocca did not accompany the business-like countenance of his wife, and then Denise had to take his place. Over the card-table the affairs of Farnoux were discussed, for Mlle. Le Marchand herself could condescend to the gossip which was the natural element of the others; but occasionally the game was delaved and conversation took its place, which usually ended in her quitting the little interest of Farnoux, the new bonnet of the apothecary's daughter, the purchase of a turkey by the notary's wife, or the dispute of M. such a one with M. such another on the respective merits of their dogs, Vasp and Milord. She would indeed soar so far above these things, into regions so far beyond her hearers, that the sight of M. Rocca smiling amiably in sleep, Mme. Rocca evidently absorbed over her knitting with calculations much

more interesting to her than the flights of fancy of her lodger, might have warned her to return to middle earth. But she was indifferent to these signs, and the attempts of Mme. Pitre, who, like a Greek mariner, did not like losing sight of land, to turn the conversation into a more reasonable strain. Denise alone used to have some inkling of what her aunt meant. She had enough imagination, dormant though it was, to be roused and interested by the fantastic reveries that the old artiste abandoned herself to, but she had caught Mme. Pitre's contempt for Mlle. Le Marchand's capacity in practical matters. Denise had taken their housekeeping into her hands with great zeal, and her aunt let her alone, perceiving very well what the girl's opinion of her was: but suddenly Denise was astonished by being informed that she had been cheated of two sous by the baker and three by the grocer. She was amused by the idea that Mlle. Le Marchand fancied she knew anything about it, and brought her accounts. Mlle. Le Marchand was right.

"Yes," said she, while Denise stood confounded, "I knew how it was, and last week you lost another sou in the same way. Oh, you foolish child! do you think that knowing something of astronomy, chemistry, astrology — what you will — hinders one from perceiving that three sous are more than two? People think I let myself be cheated because I know no better; I do so because I am too lazy to care. You will not sin thus; take care, however, you don't value the sous above the science." And she returned to her occupation of the moment, namely, drawing a planisphere in which Boötes in trunk-hose, fur mantle, and cap and plume, was chasing a great white bear round the pole.

"But aunt," said Denise, after a pause of humiliated reflection; "after all, those who stand on a hill cannot see every little thing in the plain below."

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"Hein! the child improves! But still, if they do not see each little thing, they have a broad general view which shows them how the land lies. Some men have minds like little maps of provinces, where each cottage and by-path is marked; others are maps of the world — both useful in their way. Give me that old brown book."

Denise expected some further illustration of the subject to come out of the brown book, but Mlle. Le Marchand had done. Though a great talker when the fit seized her, she had long intervals of silence. When once she began to discourse not even the agile tongue of Mme. Pitre had the slightest chance: but then perhaps for an hour she would sit mute, during which her friend babbled like a fountain, happily indifferent whether she was listened to or not. The sound of her tripping steps was presently a summons to Mlle. Le Marchand to push her planisphere aside, and disappear into an adjoining room for her evening's toilette; but even after this had taken place, her loose gown, black fichu awry on her head, and ancient muffatees, presented a striking contrast to the trimness and neatness of all about Mme. Pitre, whose poverty did not prevent a certain finish and care in dress that proved her a true Frenchwoman.

"Good evening to the company !" said she, as she entered. "So Mme. Verignon was here again to-day?"

"Oh, I thought I heard some one clawing at my door," said Mlle. Le Marchand, establishing herself in her armchair.

"Heard some one! did you not go and see who it was?"

"I noticed a troublesome noise, but I had something better to do than to attend to it. I was at work on my picture," said Mlle. Le Marchand, with an affectionate glance towards the table where stood her painting apparatus. "I believe you love your paintings much better than your niece!" cried Mme. Pitre.

"They are likely to do me more credit than ever she will."

"You are letting time pass, until she will lose all chance of marrying," said Mme. Pitre, who seldom let an evening go by without arguing this subject.

"Where were you, child, when Mme. Verignon called?"

"I was teaching Louis to read down-stairs."

"How soon did Mme. Rocca set you on that?" asked Mlle. Le Marchand.

"It was my own idea, I believe - really, I am not sure."

"It was an arrow out of her quiver, -I know, whatever you may think. What has she been about to-day? I always know she has some affair specially of the world in progress when she walks about, carrying 'Le Jour d'un Chrétien' in her hand."

"I met M. Rocca to-day," said Mme. Pitre, who gathered up news wherever she went. "M. Henri, I mean, and he told me that our M. Rocca has offered him the money to build his *mas*; imagine if he is pleased!"

"Ay, and who will pay the music?" asked Mlle. Le Marchand.

"Oh, as for that — Of course Mme. Rocca must find the money — but M. Rocca is so amiable, he gives to every one."

"Ay, his wife's money. Poor woman, she does her best; she only allows him a small sum for his *menus plaisirs*, knowing he will gamble it away at the Cercle, and keeps the rest in her own hands; but he manages to be liberal with it, nevertheless, and then the world cries out, 'How liberal is M. Rocca! while his wife would shear an egg.' Depend

npon it, Denise, people who are the most generous to strangers are the least just to their own family."

"Since I am one of the strangers, I may like M. Rocca best, aunt."

"Still, never marry that kind of person, my dear," urged Mme. Pitre, alarmed. "Yet why do I speak of marrying? your aunt apparently never means you should."

"On the contrary! Whenever she sees a man she can love."

"Love!" said Mme. Pitre, blushing very much. "You really say such improper things! before the child, too! How can you suggest such ideas to her?"

"My dear, we have left off our school-girls' pinafores," said Mlle. Le Marchand; "but there! be tranquil! Denise shall marry when ——."

"When ---?"

"M. Gaston de Farnoux asks her."

"What folly! Denise is too sensible to listen to you."

"King Cophetua married a beggar-girl."

"Oh if you go to your Greek and Latin kings, I am lost," said Mme. Pitre, who apparently believed King Cophetua to have been of classic celebrity. "I don't know a bit more history than I want to teach my pupils. As for M. Gaston, you may see him to-morrow, for I suppose you are going to hear M. Vuillemin preach at the Château? and really I have a mind to go too; my confessor must overlook this little sin for once."

"Yes, I shall go," said Mlle. Le Marchand; "and that will give me a whiff of fresh air; I feel as if I had been imprisoned a year in this place."

"One would think you had been born in a gipsy's tent. You have only been quiet here two months."

"Travelling is a necessity of life," said Mlle. Le Marchand. "All the world travels, one way or other."

"Not I, indeed, nor half the people I know. No respectable people wander like Bohemians; they remain tranquil ——."

"As cabbages — with numerous young cabbages sprouting round them; and yet they travel too, one way or other."

"Let us hear that. I dare say she will prove it," said Mme. Pitre, with expectant admiration.

"Why, who really live tranquil fixtures in this world of ours? You see their phantoms, but the people themselves are far away. M. Guizot lately grew so weary of present life, that he retired to a world of two hundred years ago, when 'Love in Married Life' existed. Did not M. Ampère grow tired of the most witty salon in Paris, and become a pilgrim in Dante's footsteps? Has not M. Michelet tried all the centuries in turn, and finally deserted mankind for birds and insects. Even you, my good friend, travel a little in a world not yet created, where Denise appears, accompanied by a husband."

"Oh, you mean that?" said Mme. Pitre; "but that is only imaginary travelling, after all; now yours —___"

"Imaginary!" cried MIle. Le Marchand, firing up; "and who then are the true possessors, if not those who possess through their imagination? Look there!" — she pointed to the view from the window — "you see those rocks, lighted by the sunset; the cape where the woods rise dark against the rosy sky? Beautiful as Paradise! but be sure that visions more radiant rise up before some invalid, who never leaves his couch, or some captive, from whom the very light of day is shut! Take Carl Maria Weber, too poor to own a horse, and too feeble to mount it if he had one. Well, he went to the chase with the 'Wild Huntsman,' and heard and saw what made amends to him for never hunting with the Grand Duke, I take it."

"All things are for the best, no doubt," said Mme. Pitre. "I was once very near marrying my uncle, and when I saw his Turkish salon, I regretted that I had not; but, in fact, it was a happiness that the project fell through."

"All things for the best!" exclaimed Mile. Le Marchand, regardless of an exclamation that had escaped Denise; "what do you say, then, to the destruction, the waste in Nature; the plants that bud and never bring forth fruit? the hopes formed only to end in despair? — the Calvinism of Nature, things predestined to destruction ——"

"I never can endure seeing anything wasted, and never do waste anything that I know of," said Mme. Pitre; "and if all our neighbours thought like me, it would be very well."

"Marry your uncle! Can that be done?" Denise succeeded in slipping in.

"Certainly, my dear, and even it is not very expensive. I think a dispensation costs about 500 francs. My family wished me to marry an uncle, but I was young and foolish, and could not believe I could ever love an uncle *d* amour. One of my school companions, however, married thus; her uncle was a handsome man, but stupid, as all handsome men are. She came in one day and said, 'Well, I am going to marry my uncle Alphonse!' 'Oh, you are a lucky girl,' said I; 'you have done with lessons!' But, as your good aunt says, my dear Denise, all things always turn out for the best, unless we are wasteful and extravagant."

Denise looked at her aunt, and saw her eyes twinkling. The entrance of M. and Mme. Rocca arrested the conversation; he more smiling and obliging even than usual; all beaming with the consciousness of having done a generous

act that day; she with an additional shade on her countenance. Greetings passed between the party, and presently cards were produced, and all sat down to play, except Denise, who seated herself by the window and knitted. So warm was the climate of sheltered Farnoux that in February flowers were springing in every olive-wood, and windows remained open as long as their owners chose. Scraps of Farnoux gossip reached Denise, and mingled with her musings. She was thinking of the Château, which she was to visit for the first time the next day; an occasional service there, when the pasteur from Toulon visited it, being the only opportunity of worship which the Protestants of Farnoux enjoyed. Their number shrank yearly, and the congregation who now assembled at such times was a very thin one, even though curiosity to see the service and the family of the Château sometimes induced a few of the orthodox Farnousiens to join it. Denise had a great wish to see the De Farnoux in their ancestral abode. A noble French family - there was something that woke the imagination in the mere words, and these De Farnoux, the seigneurs of the place, isolated by their creed, famed in the history of Provence - a halo hovered around them, which none of the other nobles who still dwelt in or about Farnoux seemed to possess. The Comte de Puylaureux, the Baron de Nogaret, and one or two more as aristocratic, who had châteaux in the neighbourhood, seemed quite commonplace to Denise beside the De Farnoux. It never entered her head to wish to know them. She was fully aware that an intimacy could not exist between one of her own bourgeoise class and the noble family of the Château, though - perhaps because difference of rank was so sharply marked and clearly acknowledged - there was much cordiality, and even, in some cases, acquaintance, between the bourgeoisic and those

above them in Farnoux. The nobles, secure in their position, did not fear to condescend; the bourgeoisie did not dream of encroaching. For Farnoux was still an isolated, primitive little place, where the march of intellect found no road to travel by. But as for the De Farnoux, they held only a distant and unfrequent intercourse even with the families of their own rank. In the old Baron's latter years he had lived a very retired life, and during his son's long absence Mlle. de Farnoux had visited and received no one. The De Rodelle, the Puylaureux, the De Nogaret, and other Provençal nobles looked askance on the wife whom the reigning Baron had brought home; there was a scandalous rumour that she not only had roturier blood in her veins, but had been a milliner - an ouvrière, a marchande - in short, something that no noble lady could associate with! and then, no mother with sons could venture to bring them into contact with that fair Lucile, whose beauty was believed to be her only dowry.

Denise's attention was recalled from the Château to the card players, by hearing Mme. Pitre say, "So M. Molion has let his house again!"

"Of course. He always has such good fortune!" said Mme. Rocca, with the acrimony of a rival proprietor.

"But you have only the two little north rooms unlet," said Mlle. Le Marchand.

"I had an offer for them to-day," said Mme. Rocca.

"To-day! I thought so!" said Mile. Le Marchand, delighted by her own penetration.

"Yes, yes, she might have let them this morning, and declined!" said M. Rocca, as he sorted his cards. "She declined. Now I tell her if she could afford to do this, she can afford to be a little more liberal to me; if she does not let me have a little more money, I declare I'll turn Protestant!"

Mme. Pitre cried out so at this, that M. Rocca threw himself back in his chair overcome with laughter; and then suddenly recollecting Mlle. Le Marchand's creed, started up again to apologise. His wife, meanwhile, preserved silence, and occupied herself in taking every trick from her adversaries. This entirely upset the temper of Mlle. Le Marchand, who could on occasion scold loudly and long, and now launched out into vituperation, which, however, passed very much as a matter of course, only eliciting a peevish justification from her partner, Mme. Pitre, whose voice was speedily borne down and drowned in Mlle. Le Marchand's louder tones.

"Now, my dear, do let me ask Mme. Rocca who that pretty new maid of Mme. Caron's can be," said Mme. Pitre, when a new deal produced a break in the torrent of words.

"It is because you think of nothing but these miseries that we lose every game. Talk if you like, or play if you like, but do them one at a time. If you go on in this way I shall have just such a hand as last time, and in that case, this shall be the last time we play whist in this room."

Perhaps Mme. Pitre was alarmed by this threat; at all events, she succeeded in giving her partner a good hand, which mollified Mlle. Le Marchand.

"There, see what you can do when you are attending to the game," said she; "now you may ask what you like while we sort our cards."

"The girl is from the Hôpital at Montpellier, mesdames!" replied Mme. Rocca, severely. "I can only say I would not have one of those creatures in my house for the world."

"A naturelle! They are all born with every bad quality!"

cried Mme. Pitre, who, kind-hearted as she was, had all the merciless prejudices of the south against illegitimates.

"A race hardly human?" suggested Mile. Le Marchand, with irony.

"Quite so; and imagine what Mme. Caron said, mesdames, when all her friends remonstrated with her for sending away that *brave fille*, Olympe, simply for showing that she felt as we all do towards such creatures. Well, imagine Mme. Caron saying, the world was already so hard on these poor innocents — her very words, mesdames! — that there was no need for her to visit the sins of the fathers on the children. Going against the Scriptures, as Mlle. Le Grand observed, when she told me!"

At that name Denise roused up like a dog when it hears an enemy's footstep. She had one thing in common with her aunt - she could love and hate vehemently. She was discriminating, however. She knew that the gay Mme. Huard had amused half Farnoux with a caricature of Mlle. Le Marchand, her parrot, and her niece; that she mocked at Denise's suitors, and had asserted her to be betrothed to an Englishman with a broad back and red face. Denise did not care a whit. She foiled all such little darts of malice by a tranquil and silent pride, which blunted them effectually. She did not detest Mme. Huard; but what she did care for was the knowledge that the hungry eyes of Mlle. Le Grand were for ever noting her goings out and comings in; that she and every other Farnousien, were spied on, whispered about, and ill reported of, by that devout spinster.

"Certainly, certainly," responded Mme. Pitre, to Mme. Rocca's last speech.

"But, as Mlle. Le Grand also said," continued Mme. Rocca, "Mme. Caron is not so constant at mass as one

would wish to see, and when one puts this and that together, one fears! — Spades are trumps, dear madame."

"My dear ladies, what a privilege it is to hear you discuss one another!" said M. Rocca; "how clear-sighted you are! how charitable! it is edifying!"

"Tais-tois," murmured his wife.

"Is Mme. Caron the pretty young woman with the paralytic husband twenty years her senior? Why then you *know* she stays at home to amuse him and play at piquet with him!" cried Denise wrathfully.

"I saw two *bonnes sceurs* go to Mme. Angier's house at a wonderfully early hour this morning," said Mme. Pitre. "Her charity wakes with the lark."

"As Mlle. Le Grand says, it is singular how immediately all her good deeds are known!" said Mme. Rocca.

"No fault of that dear neighbour of ours; it is not Mlle. Le Grand who trumpets them," said Mlle. Le Marchand.

"On the contrary, it is she, dear mademoiselle," said M. Rocca, caressing the little tuft on his chin; "only somehow, when she tells them, they do not sound like good deeds at all!"

"The trick is ours," said Mme. Pitre, triumphantly.

"I think you had three honours in your own hand," observed Mme. Rocca.

"What! what! she had three honours, and I two good trumps! I was not attending — and we only won one trick!" cried Mile. Le Marchand.

"I have always understood that it required very good play to secure the trick," said Mme. Pitre, complacently.

"You have heard of the distress that Victor Achard has caused his parents?" said Mme. Rocca, dealing as she spoke.

"I don't believe a word of it! I will wager my life that is another report of our neighbour's."

"I did not hear it from her."

"But she set it going; she has the most malicious tongue in the town, not to be uncharitable, though I know it is saying a great deal!" said Mlle. Le Marchand.

"One may be as slanderous as one likes, when one is so pious and so devoted to the *confrérie*," observed M. Rocca.

"Oh, though people do say she half-starves her servant, and quarrels with her sister, she is a second Sainte-Dévote; she never fails to hear three masses every day; one must allow there is great merit in that," said Mme. Pitre.

"Why," began Mlle. Le Marchand, "as for that — What's that? hey-day, Denise! are you mad? What are you about?"

For Denise had suddenly snatched up a jug of water just as the speech of Mme. Pitre concluded, and flung its contents into the street below.

"The grey cat was there, aunt," said she apologetically.

"The grey cat — why should you drown the grey cat, child?"

"He sat looking so sanctimonious, aunt, with his paws folded; he looked just like Mile. Le Grand."

CHAPTER X.

THE "Temple" at Farnoux had been erected in days when Protestantism was strong enough to force the reluctant Government to recognise its existence as a political fact, but yet was unable to obtain any recognition as a community of Christians. No building where the Huguenots met was allowed to call itself a church; the sacred title was prohibited by law, in the same spirit which now forbids the members of other communions than the Roman, should death find them in the "Eternal City," to have a verse from the Bible inscribed upon their graves. The Huguenots chose another name, almost as sacred, and called their houses of prayer "Temples."

The temple of Farnoux had probably been destroyed in the times of persecution; for the very place where it had stood was forgotten. Only the name of an old street in the upper part of the town now told that a house of praver had once existed there; and probably few bestowed a thought on how this "rue du Temple" got its appellation. When the seigneurs of Farnoux returned to their Château, with little left them by confiscation and exile, except their family archives, they only ventured to have the services of their Church performed in cautious mystery by some pasteur who came for the purpose, and departed again, after this brief intercourse with his little flock. As time passed and brought toleration with it, the French Reformed Church re-organized itself, and ministers were appointed wherever there were congregations. But Farnoux no longer required one: the Protestants had, with few exceptions, lapsed into Romanism, fled, or died bravely for their faith. Though the last fires of death had hardly gone out when the gentle Louis XVI.

began to reign, by the time Louis-Philippe was on the throne the Farnousiens had forgotten those days of terror when their pastors perished on the rack and on the wheel; when their men were sent to the galleys, and their women explated the crime of attending a Huguenot meeting by a life-long imprisonment in the desolate tower of Aigues-Mortes, or in the convents of zealous orders, who spared no ungentle means to bring back the heretics to the fold. Yes, Farnoux had forgotten, and what marvel, when the Cevenols themselves are fast forgetting, too? Even in the Cevennes and the Vivarais, where the Protestants of France "were slain with the sword, were destitute, afflicted, tormented; wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth;" even there, the manifold events that have occurred since - the flood of revolution, the marvellous reign of Napoleon, and the numerous changes of rulers since his time, have all but swept away the glorious memories that the Huguenots bequeathed to their descendants. The peasant will say that he attends the prêche and not the mass, and his wife fastens her mantle with a silver dove, instead of wearing a cross; and they will point out some champ-desang or mas-calvi, but be all the while unconscious of what lies at the bottom of all this, and hardly comprehend that the blood shed on the field, and the lives taken in the mas, were given for the faith which they still profess. If things be thus where the Reformed religion seemed to have struck deepest root, what wonder that in remote districts like Farnoux it should be the same? Yet it has not been prosperity which caused the faith of the French Protestants to wax cold; for it is but very lately that they have received the same civil and religious privileges as the Romanists, or that temples have been generally opened and frequented without fear of the law. Even now, if the curé and mayor

unite against them, they have it in their power grievously to harass the Protestants of the commune.

In the Château of Farnoux the old memories had been cherished proudly. The race of De Farnoux were tenacious of impressions, and revered and retained old customs, because they were old, if for no other reason. When he who was known as "the old Baron" died, his daughter continued to rule all as he had ruled it, altering nothing, and looking on any change as profanation. She was a vehement Protestant, earnest, thoroughly rooted in her faith, accepting all that in a persecuted and oppressed form of faith was congenial to her own proud and self-reliant nature, but with a heart that knew nothing of the gentle virtues which that creed should have inspired. Her faith was a part of her pride of race; for the De Farnoux traced back what their Romanist neighbours called their heresy to the time of the Albigenses, showed the emblematic stars and lighted torch in their arms, and boasted alliances with the lords of Lux and the barons of Astorg. By her own desire, therefore, even if old usage had not sanctioned and commanded it. she would have encouraged the periodical visits of the pasteur, an old and tried friend. Yet his visits had suddenly ceased. and a new minister appeared in his stead. How he had offended the haughty lady, or how she had alienated her old friend, none knew. After she sank into childishness she had never consented to see a minister; the suggestion always roused that anger which was still so terrible. It seemed as if she always thought of the old friend whom she had driven away, and could not understand that he had been long dead. She attended the occasional services held in the chapel, but would see no pasteur in private. Mme. de Farnoux was believed to be a Romanist, but she seemed to Not Concerts A. The - Denise.

have adopted her husband's faith, or perhaps was indifferent to both forms.

Mlle. Le Marchand was mentally dwelling on what Mlle. de Farnoux had been when she saw her last - years before - and what she was reported now to be, as she and Denise and Mme. Pitre climbed up the steep ascent on their way to the Château. Curiosity was Mme. Pitre's inducement; she felt like a child who has had a holiday given him; it was Sunday, therefore no pupils missed the light of her instructions; her luncheon was tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, and she tripped along, chattering as fast as the steep ascent would let her. Little Louis Rocca had been allowed, at Denise's special request, to join the party, and walked along, holding her hand and thinking it a very great adventure. When once the town, clinging to the mountain side amid olives and pomegranates, was left behind, a narrow way, paved with white pebbles, led steeply upwards, bordered for a time by walls within which were orange groves; but it mounted ever upwards, far beyond the sheltered nooks where oranges grew - an "olive-bordered way," winding among the rocks. A station (one of those little chapels commemorating the different incidents of the Passion of our Lord) occurred from time to time, and marked that the track had once been frequented by pious pilgrims; but the stations were ruined and deserted, the frescoes that had adorned them were dropping off. The road led to what the peasantry called the chapel of Sainte-Agnesca, a cave in a wild remote glen, where stalactites and rocks had combined to form a natural altar, with its tapers set upon it, and popular imagination saw the figures of the saint and a kneeling monk on each side of the entrance. Few visited the chapel now, except some love-stricken maiden, to whose prayers Sainte-Agnesca was supposed to be peculiarly pro-

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pitious, or some mother trembling for a sick child. The wild bees hummed in the lavender without, and built in the crevices of the altar, and the blue ouzel haunted it, drank from the cold clear spring that bubbled up in a recess of the cave, and sang his loud clear song - the only hymn now heard in this mountain solitude. It was hard to say why the country people sought the chapel of Sainte-Agnesca no more. It had not been thus in Mlle. Le Marchand's youth. She paused and looked around her, and the rest of the party were not sorry to pause a moment too. An expanse of rocks and heather, and aromatic plants that breathed out pungent fragrance, lay on the right; on the left the hill-side, covered with olives, sloped steeply down to a narrow valley, far below, filled with the fresh green of orange-trees, among which rose the slender white bell-tower of a church, and a few scattered cottages appeared here and there around it. On the other side of the valley towered grey bleak mountains. raising their jagged crests into the clouds. Looking back towards Farnoux, the bell-tower of its cathedral was still visible in an angle of the hills, at whose foot lay the sea, a network of blue ripples, that became a long purple band under the horizon. There was not a sound, nor a living creature anywhere to be seen, except a kite hovering over the valley. The Château was still far off, but its long front and the square tower at one end had become each moment more distinct.

"I remember this way frequented," said MIle. Le Marchand, musingly. "Visitors used to ride up to the Château in the old Baron's time; and whenever the tanks were empty, or we wanted fine weather for the olives, or there was a fever in the town, the first thing thought of was a pilgrimage to Sainte-Agnesca."

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"Do you know who Ste.-Agnesca was, Louis?" asked Denise.

"Yes; a Roman lady, who died a long, long time ago; I think quite a hundred years, but I am not sure."

"It was a pretty sight," continued Mlle. Le Marchand, regardless of the interruption. "They always went of an evening; the priests and the crucifix first, and then men and women, and children, all carrying lighted candles. My father never would hear of my going to look on at such Babylonish practices, as he said; but I managed to see the procession once for all that. From where I was, you could only see a dark moving line, winding in and out, with the lights glittering like fire-flies among the olives, and the moon shining overhead on the bare solemn peaks. Then they came down to the cemetery, chanting, and all knelt outside while the priests prayed. It was very beautiful. I put it all into a picture afterwards, which is at Toulouse."

"But when did you see all this?" asked Mme. Pitre.

"Years ago."

"Do you mean to say you lived here as a girl?"

"Yes," answered Mlle. Le Marchand, briefly.

"What an astonishing person you are," cried Mme. Pitre, "not to have told me so before! And I who fancied you a stranger here! You seem to have been everywhere!"

"Not quite."

"Well, where have you not been, then?"

"In prison, for one place."

"Bah! I do wish you would recount to me a little of your history!"

"I was born, christened, and never married — that's all. What is there to say about an old maid?"

"It is true, but then you have seen the world like a mar-

ried woman. I dare say, now, you knew the Demoiselles de Farnoux?"

"I? — I should have looked at the Demoiselles de Farnoux as some lean cat that runs in the gutters would look at a queen's tabby, born in the purple, so to say! We were poor, and they were poor; but they were noble my dear!"

"To be sure," said Mme. Pitre, with ready acquiescence in the gulf of separation, and quite unaware of the sarcasm conveyed in Mlle. Le Marchand's tone and manner.

"Yes, they were noble, and every one in Farnoux took off his hat to them, though we all knew they had not a penny to bless themselves with. The present Baron is better off; he got a distant relation's property a while ago."

"So I heard; a Lavigne? a -?"

"Count Prosper de Béziers," said Mlle. Le Marchand, who knew the genealogy of every noble family in France. "A De Béziers married a Farnoux in the last generation; I know some queer bits of their family history, but that's neither here nor there."

"She knows everything!" said Mme. Pitre, in an admiring aside to Denise; "but, my dear, could you not have got her to buy a new bonnet? really, this — dear mademoiselle," she added aloud, "if you had but told me you meant to wear this bonnet, I would have trimmed it up for you. Really! —"

And she looked with discomposure at the old grey gown, the fichu, which sat awry, and the crooked bonnet, which had resisted all Denise's patting and pulling.

"What! anything wrong? Denise looked to all that."

"I did my best," said Denise, comparing the trim, though economical attire of Mme. Pitre with that of her aunt, and looking annoyed.

"Well, child! ashamed of me, eh?"

"No, aunt," said Denise, but she was disturbed by the appearance of her companion, as any girl would have been.

"A little, I think," said Mlle. Le Marchand, in a careless tone, meant to hide a sharp pang. "I have been a solitary animal so long that I forgot any one could be concerned how I looked. I promise you that when you are once married I will take myself off and not disgrace you."

"Aunt!" said Denise, vexed and reproachful.

Here they were overtaken by a party coming up, like themselves, from Farnoux, and all proceeded on together, for nearly a quarter of a mile, when Mlle. Le Marchand paused again, suffering them to outstrip her, while she surveyed the view down the glen.

"Men come and go," said she; "but the hills are the same. These rocks were just as grey and calcined as they are now, I suppose, when the Saracen feluccas used to sail into the bay, and the galleys of Marseilles and Genoa went by out yonder. This Château was a monastery then, and the monks rang their bell to warn the country round of the pirates, and then what a scurry to hide in the hills! Generations have come and gone, and the Saracens with them, but here are the everlasting hills just as they were then."

"Dear! I never thought about it, but I imagine there has never been any danger from the Saracens since Bonaparte conquered them in his expedition to Egypt," said Mme. Pitre, rather anxiously, as she looked towards the mouth of the glen.

"I do not see any feluccas coming," said Denise, much amused; "it would enliven Farnoux very much. Mme. Rocca would come and ask in her most amiable tones for a quarter's rent in advance, as we left without due notice; and Zon would say she should stay, as Manoële could protect her, and she wished to see the Corsairs."

"Well, I don't exactly know what I should pack up first," said Mme. Pitre, entering into the spirit of the thing; "perhaps a box of allumettes to light us a fire in the hills; but I am afraid we should all get the rheumatism. And what would you do, Louis?"

"I would make Denise carry me."

"O fie? would you not fight the Corsairs?"

"If they had no guns or swords."

"Yes," said Mlle. Le Marchand, who had fallen into one of her reveries, and was deaf to all else; "I have always had a theory that each people was exactly adapted to the vegetation amongst which Providence has placed it. The evergreen pine for the Northern nations, sombre, tenacious of life like itself; the gorgeous short-lived flowers of the tropics for the violent, perishable, and pleasure-loving Southerns; the slender palm for the frugal Arab. Establish a new race in a country and you change the vegetation too. Ah — an exact silhouette of that crag thrown in a shadow on the rocks to the left — I must make a memorandum of that."

She whipped out a pencil and a little sketch-book, and began to draw, regardless of Mme. Pitre.

"But, my dear — but, my good friend — consider! the family may see us from the windows, we are quite close, and it is getting late; M. and Mme. Cazlon have passed us, and they were the last; pray, come — come along! She does not hear a word! Mademoiselle! Bah, she is as deaf as an adder! Denise, do make her come! Well, I have not walked all this way to hear mass for nothing, so if you will not ——"

"Mass! I wonder the old walls do not tumble about your ears!" said Mlle. Le Marchand, showing that she heard if she did not heed, and sketching all the time.

"Now you have finished; come, I say! Oh, well then, I am going. Come, Louis; come Denise."

Denise was about to follow, but checked herself. MIle. Le Marchand, looking up, saw her still beside her. "What! you here still?"

"You shall not say twice that I am ashamed of you, aunt."

"Ah! is that it? Well, thank you, child; you are a good girl, but it was true for all that. Come along. But I hate this place!"

"Why did you come, aunt?" said Denise, quite startled by the vehemence with which this was said.

"That you might see it. Ah, Farnoux, Château and village! both fatal to me and mine alike! I'm not mad, child; don't stare at me with those eyes of yours; it was an unlucky day when a pair like them first came in your father's sight."

> " 'Les yeux gris Vont au Paradis,'

aunt!"

"Those I was thinking of are there," replied Mile. Le Marchand, with a deep sigh, hastily smothered. "You don't understand a word of what I am saying. Never mind. The Farnoux chapel is here — this way."

CHAPTER XI.

DENSE had no time to enter on a question which she often debated with herself; namely, whether her aunt was crazy, or only one of those "great wits to madness near allied." They were already within the chapel; it had once been an oratory, but the piety of the De Farnoux, when they became Huguenots, had been shown by defacing almost all the decorations. Some traces of carving and gilding lingered on the doors; an empty niche betrayed where the figure of a

saint had been placed; a coloured pane of glass here and there in a window told how it had once been filled. There was a small gallery at one end of the chapel, with a red curtain in front; Denise noticed that her aunt looked up at it with a frown as they entered. It was approached from the interior of the house. The high altar of course had vanished; a humble table without any covering stood at one side of the chapel, behind it towered a lofty pulpit, from which the prayers were offered and the sermon preached. Oaken benches were ranged around. Two or three servants sat there, and such of the congregation as came from Farnoux. A little apart were the members of the Baron's family; it was not therefore they who occupied the gallery. The Baron did not fail to be present, en grande tenue, a little withered man. looking much older than he really was; he surveyed the assembly as if every one there was his vassal and dependent. Mme. de Farnoux sat beside him. Whatever her past history or rank might have been, she had a very pretty, smiling face, and seemed in her proper sphere. Thérézon would certainly have said that her beauty was sufficient to justify M. de Farnoux's choice; yet "Speculator of a woman!" muttered Mlle. Le Marchand, as she regarded the Baronne. Lucile sat behind her, by Gaston de Farnoux. So unlike were mother and daughter in expression that at first no one perceived the close resemblance in feature: the sweet dove-like innocence of Lucile's countenance, the childlike smile, the colour, bright and delicate as the pink of a sea-shell, that came and went in her cheeks, had a loveliness far beyond that of the mother. The true De Farnoux had never boasted such beauty. In the last generation Mlle. de Farnoux had, indeed, been strikingly handsome, like her father; but her brother was insignificant, and the two younger sisters, Félise and Géraldine, had been pale, sad, and grave, as if the sun

had never shone upon them. All, however, had possessed the beautiful grey eyes and pale, smooth complexions that were hereditary in their race. Gaston was like his unhappy mother, but not from Félise had he inherited his dark soft eyes which could laugh into mirth, though their usual expression was almost melancholy. Denise looked round with keen interest, noting all that was to be seen. Some inexplicable attraction made her look up to the gallery. Long thin fingers were drawing aside the curtain: two eyes met and fixed hers; Denise thrilled all over, as if she had encountered the gaze of something not human - something which had not reason; and while she sat fascinated, no one else having observed the momentary occurrence, the curtain was allowed to escape from the hand that held it aside; something half laugh, half sob', startled all in the chapel; every one looked round at his neighbours, and then, seeing no explanation in their marvelling faces, upwards to the gallery, where was a slight movement as if some one were leaving it, or being supported out.

All was then still, and the general sensation was suppressed by the entrance of the pasteur. Respect for the owners of the chapel had caused all to assemble in good time; there was none of that unseemly arriving in the very middle of the service, or only in time for the sermon, that may too often be seen in a French Protestant temple. All of the service that was not sermon was brief enough. It was performed by a middle-aged pasteur, who had the humble, timid look of one belonging to an oppressed race, and of an inferior station. He read a chapter from the New Testament and repeated the short form of prayer carefully, but almost with the air of one going through a task; a long extempore prayer followed, during which all the congregation stood, and several times a hymn was sung — hymns that had

doubtless often been breathed on hillsides, and in "the Desert." The sermon that followed was not unworthy of Paul Rabaut himself. Now the meek pasteur spoke with authority, his face changed and lighted up, his gestures were full of eloquence, and very touching was it to hear this discourse on charity, this brotherly love to enemies as well as friends, this complete and generous forgiveness, urged by one who came of a persecuted people on those who were descended from men who had suffered cruelly for their faith. Denise was so wrapt up in the sermon that she forgot for the time what had so startled her; forgot all around, and only, when they had left the chapel, remembered, and was amused by remembering, that a sermon had again brought her into contact with Lucile and Gaston.

After the service the little congregation stood in groups outside the chapel door in the hall, or exchanged greetings or remarks on the terrace, where the Baron was pacing up and down talking graciously to the minister. M. de Farnoux found his time hang very heavy on his hands, and a visitor was not to be despised, even though he were only the pasteur, and it cost him a dinner. Lucile, too, came out and looked round as if seeking some one. Perceiving at length Mlle. Le Marchand, she advanced and said with winning sweetness —

"Pardon, but I was going to ask if that dear little boy with you had come all the way from Farnoux? I am so fond of children and we never see one here." Little Louis came up readily, looking at her with exceeding admiration. "Dear little one!" said she, kissing him, "I saw you so good and quiet during the service! I wish I could keep you to play with! Is he your brother, mademoiselle?" she asked, addressing Denise.

"No relation, and we cannot stay; his mother will storm

if we are late," said Mlle. Le Marchand brusquely. "Come, Denise; adieu, Mlle. Lucile."

Lucile responded courteously, though evidently surprised and almost wounded by the manner in which her advances had been met. She drew back and Mlle. Le Marchand hurried on.

"Well, if you call that good manners —" began Mme. Pitre.

"I don't call it anything at all. I was an old fool to come."

"I like that pretty lady," said Louis, turning to look back.

"I daresay; come along. We shall find a place to eat our luncheon in presently."

The mood of Mlle. Le Marchand was incomprehensible to her companions, but so much impressed them that no one said anything more. When then they were seated some time later among the lavender and thyme, and sheltered from the hot sun by a great fragment of rock that had fallen down amid the tall heath, Denise said —

"Aunt, do you know who sat in that gallery?"

"I know who is said to sit there, but if only seeing is believing I should believe nothing; the curtain takes care of that."

"But I did see something."

"What?" asked the three others, excited by her manner.

"I hardly know," she answered reluctantly. "I do not know now why I felt so terrified. I happened to look up it was as if I felt some one watching me, and — I never saw an insane person, but I should think they would look like that — as if they wanted to kill you!"

"You saw some one! some one watching you, you say?" "Yes, aunt, - I wish I could forget it."

"The child must be dreaming!" said Mme. Pitre, quite alarmed.

"Not she. I will tell you who sits there. She was watching you, eh? Ah — well, it was Mlle. de Farnoux."

CHAPTER XII.

"I TELL you what child," said Mlle. Le Marchand, that evening; "if I stay here much longer, I shall be fit for nothing but to bask in the sun and sleep. I shall become as selfish and suspicious and bilious as a badger, than which there is not a more detestable egotistical animal, as I have reason to know. What are you laughing at?"

"I was wondering when a badger could have offended you, aunt."

"Oh, I know all those creatures," said Mlle. Le Marchand, laughing too. "I have lived in the country as well as the town, till they all seem my friends or enemies. I once spent a whole autumn in the hills on the borders of Appenzell; and many times, while I was making a series of sketches for a large painting that is now at Lyons, I watched an old badger sunning himself at the mouth of his burrow. Most creatures like me: I have tamed a boussecarlonne, as they call it here-the wildest little bird in the world; the squirrels will come and frisk round me, and the rabbits sit up close by to look at me; but that badger was off the instant he caught a glimpse of me. You may depend upon it he had led a bad life. Why else should men or animals shrink from their fellow-creatures? If I did not object to taking him on trust, he need not have required an introduction to me, I think!" concluded she, with indignation that was quite serious.

"But are you really going away, aunt? We are so comfortable!"

"That is just it, child; since you made my den into a boudoir, I feel smothered in it. I want space and solitude; I can't think indoors. There is a view, too, that haunts me, and I must get rid of it somehow. I knew a painter once who told me he had lived near a madhouse for a month, and afterwards, sleeping or waking, he could never get free from the sight of the poor lunatics; they seemed impressed on his mind's eye. He painted a picture of it, and exorcised them completely. You may come with me, if you like; I shall only be gone a few days, and shall lodge with honest folks whom I know very well."

"Oh, let me go! Is it in a village?"

"So you have some spirit of adventure. A village! No — a little lodge in a garden of cucumbers. There's a great deal here that reminds me of what travellers tell of Palestine; corn, wine, and oil; white rocks; the Rochers rouges out yonder for the hills of Edom, low walls with vines running over them; the same sea. So there's nobody you regret at Farnoux?"

"You said we were soon coming back, aunt. But indeed, except Mme. Pitre, there is nobody I care much for. I should like to know Adrienne Berthet, but her mother always listens to what we are saying; if we go into the garden, she is sure to follow us, and if I send Adrienne the least note, her mother reads it first."

"That is the system here, child."

"I suppose that is why people talk so much about Mme. de Farnoux allowing Mlle. Lucile and M. Gaston to be so constantly together?"

"All is not gospel that's said in the town, child. But I daresay they do see each other in full liberty. Mme. de

Farnoux is a clever woman; it will take some time to stoop the De Farnoux pride to such an alliance, but if M. Gaston sees no other pretty girl as constantly as he does Lucile and pretty she is as a rose of May — and he a young man we all know that wedlock rides in the saddle, and repentance on the croup — I daresay she will succeed. Faugh! Hush, I hear Mme. Pitre; we shall start at daybreak, but there's no need to mention it to her, or I shall have her buzzing round me like a blue-bottle fly."

The sun had not risen the next morning before they were on their way. Denise saw her aunt give a hasty glance at Mme. Pitre's door as they passed, much as if she expected her to pop out upon them. But Mme. Pitre slept "as if she had supped upon dormouse pie," little guessing that when she rose she should find her neighbour's apartment locked up, and Denise gone too. A boy with a donkey was waiting below, ordered overnight by Mlle. Le Marchand, to convey her painting apparatus, the carpet-bag in which Denise had packed some articles of dress, and the parrot's cage. Wherever his mistress went the parrot always accompanied her, and perhaps this constant companionship had given them a certain likeness to each other. It was certain that when the bird was meditating some piece of mischief, and put his wicked head on one side while he contemplated those about him, or Mlle. Le Marchand had said something expressly to enrage Mme. Pitre, and was slily watching its effect, bird and mistress had a curious resemblance to each other. Neither came exactly under the head of amiable beings; both could bite and both could scold, and both had a habit of forming vehement and instantaneous likes and dislikes, by which they abided ever after. Mlle. Le Marchand had a great belief in the parrot's judgment. If he ruffled up his feathers and sulked when strangers appeared, or scolded and snapped his beak when they approached, she instantly began to suspect them, and was never satisfied till she had found out something that, in her opinion, entirely confirmed the parrot's judgment. "There!" she would say, "look how he behaves to Mme. Pitre. He knows she is afraid of him, and only is polite to him because she fears he may bite her. He is always poking his head out of the cage to give her a sly nip, but it is not out of wickedness; it is entirely in play. Now Mme. Rocca he hates in earnest. Look at his expression when she comes in, and observe how invariably he screams when she utters some little hypocritical speech. These creatures are wonderfully intelligent. Denise, again, he admires. She can do what she likes with him. I cannot tell you with what anxiety I waited to see what he thought of her on her arrival."

Boy and donkey mounted the steep path into the hills with deliberate steps; Mlle. Le Marchand followed after, inhaling the fresh air, and looking around her with profound enjoyment. It was the first time that Denise had ever been so early out of doors; all looked and felt chilly, grev, and silent, with dew lying cold on the olives, and sparkling on each pointed leaf of the tall white heath that sprang amid the stones. The sea lay like a sheet of silver, the sky overhead was misty, and a slight wind blew from time to time and sent a shiver through the olive woods. But soon a sparkle came on the sea, a light on the mountain tops, a rosy tint on the clouds that were floating along the hills; the chirp of birds began to be heard; there was a stir, a visible awakening throughout nature, a glad rejoicing in the warmth that began to be diffused abroad; a clearer light began to touch all things, and suddenly the sun rose up glorious over the hills; night, with its gloomy uncertainties, was past; dawn had merged into day.

An hour's walk seemed to have taken Denise very far from Farnoux. There were hills all round, with little towns that had once been mountain strongholds and brigands' nests, perched here and there on some precipitous rock. This was rather the land of the olive than the vine; but still there were occasional vineyards, looking as if a crop of little black imps were springing up in them, for the young leaves had not vet budded forth on the bare ceps. No vineyard was without a cottage or hut, some inhabited, some merely used as a shelter for the vine-dresser from the noon-day heat. To one of the former Mlle. Le Marchand directed her steps. Her approach had been perceived by several children, who stood at the cottage door. The eldest threw down a rude flute, which he was constructing out of a reed, like a little god Pan, and ran indoors calling his mother. A woman next looked out from a window that had never known glass, and came down to welcome the visitors. Denise perceived that their destination was reached. The donkey was unloaded, and Mlle. Le Marchand gave the lad who had driven it a message for Mme. Rocca, promising him a reward if she found he had delivered it properly.

"And if I do not?" said the boy, as if he hoped somehow to obtain the sous without the trouble of working for them.

"Then I give you nothing."

"Very well, misé," replied he, shrugging his shoulders sulkily; and he turned back when he had gone some way, and shouted in patois to the peasant woman: "Beware! it is a *fada*! She can bewitch you all! Those folks love to do a mischief!"

Now that Denise had learnt that her aunt was a native of Farnoux, she comprehended that perfect familiarity with the very peculiar patois of the district, that had at first excited her wonder. She herself was beginning to understand it a

Denise.

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little, but she could not follow the rapid speech that passed between Mlle. Le Marchand and the paysanne. All must have been speedily and amicably settled, for the smiling mistress of the cottage led the way in with gestures whose friendliness was perfectly intelligible, whatever her patois might be. Her husband was at work close by among the vines, but he seemed to consider it a little household affair of his wife's, for, after a "Good day!" to the visitors as they passed him, and a reply of "It is well!" when his wife called out to him that they had come to lodge with her, he went on with his work, and took no further notice. Not that the gaining even of one sou was ever indifferent to a peasant; and indeed the peasant of Provence works hard for all he gains; for the arid soil, except in the most favoured spots, will yield nothing that it is not forced to do. They heard his cheerful voice borne back to them from a distance, as he accompanied his labour with snatches of a familiar song, perhaps suggested by the vision of Mlle. Le Marchand.

> "With four darling old maids I'm in love, And to marry them all have a will: Number one in a sack will I shove, And pack off to be ground at the mill; Number two every morn a good stroke Of my fist shall awake from her sleep; And the third I will set, for a joke, On a straw rick, and then fire the heap; But I'll dress up the fourth, and I'll back her to beat, At the carnival, every droll in the street!"

The cottage consisted of one large lower room, unfurnished and unused. A great jar of oil, like an amphora, stood there, and the chickens roosted on a beam that traversed it. Upstairs were three little chambers, all paved with cement, whitewashed, and tolerably clean. The family bedroom contained a vast bed, with coverlet, curtains, and pil-

lows, of blue check, and a black chest of unknown age, which had contained the wardrobe of the family for one generation after another. A beam, corresponding to the one below, traversed this room also, and was garnished with maize and dried grapes. Beyond was a little cell that served as storehouse and kitchen. Red earthenware pans stood on the floor amid potatoes and fir-cones; water-jars, whose shape, and bright green or vellow hues, seemed to proclaim them modelled on the gourds of the country, were set on a bench, with fresh eggs in a basket beside them. A sack of maize filled one corner; half a huge gourd, whose magnificent orange-red colour would have delighted a Dutch painter, lay on the top of it; others, whose natural shape indicated their use, had been dried and emptied and served as bottles, or, cut in half, as ladles. Strings of rosy onions and brown filberts hung on either side of the window. Mlle. Le Marchand and Denise were conducted through the rooms by their new propriétaire, who filled her hands with figs, which she pressed Denise to accept.

"Gently! gently! you will have no more these many months!" said Mlle. Le Marchand, and Denise hesitated to accept, but found them forced into her hands, with a laughing, "Bonne mère! it is very little!"

The third room was the one destined for the visitors. It had a bed in it, a table, chairs, and a carved ancient "bahut," or cabinet, an article of furniture common in every cottage in that district, where the owners little guess the value that fashion has set upon them. From the window a fine mountain view was visible; a little flight of stone steps, with a tile roof over it, led down into the vineyard. The southern peasant cares little for a flower-garden, with its unproductive beauty, and would pluck away the wild-flower that sprang amid his vines, or blossomed on his roof; but Nature will sometimes

outmatch him, and here a caper had niched itself into the wall of the house, hanging down over one of the windows, and would open in autumn its numerous and lovely venillescented blossoms. A gourd had thrown its broad-leaved wreaths over the stone steps, and a rosebush, carelessly stuck into the ground, had become almost a tree, all covered with pink blossoms, which its mistress plucked to set on the altar of the Virgin in the village church. Several years before, Mlle. Le Marchand had taken a fancy to the cottage and its owners, and had caused the third room, then unused, to be fitted up in some degree for herself when caprice or business should bring her that way. The bahut she had bought from her landlord, in exchange for a good modern cupboard of deal, which he and his wife thought much more valuable than the quaint old cabinet, with its many little drawers and carved doors, representing Jacob bringing Isaac venison on one side, and the selling of Joseph into Egypt on the other. Set on the top was a huge wooden figure, probably of the same date as the cabinet, but not by any means belonging to it. Its former owners called it un homme de mer, or merman, but Mlle. Le Marchand had a theory of her own on this subject, as indeed she had on most others, and clung to it as if her life depended on it.

"You see," she said to Denise, as she pointed it out to her, "this image is of unknown age. There is a rudeness of workmanship about it which shows its date to be a very remote one. In fact, there is every reason to believe it the offspring of some venerable tradition lingering among the people, a relic of a heathen belief. I have tried for some years to discover some trace of it among our peasants, but there is no game so shy as a superstition; however there certainly is a line in a patois song that seems to bear upon it. I shall make it all out some day. You see it is half human,

half fish, which is exactly what the divinity of a nation of fishermen would be. Such the dwellers on this coast always were, and always will be, while the sea exists. Such were the Philistines; and the accounts which we have of their god Dagon, and their goddess, I forget her name at this instant, represent them exactly in this form."

Denise was not likely to contradict her, having never considered the subject, but she thought the rudeness of form on which her aunt dwelt, as likely to have been the result of modern as of ancient unskilfulness. She had, however, learnt never to cross the fancies of an antiquarian like Mlle. Le Marchand.

Long use had taught the old artiste to carry with her but few things, and those exactly what she should want. Denise unpacked a basket of provisions, and a little lamp for heating coffee, while her aunt, who was impatient to get to work, arranged her painting materials, and shouldered her campstool and umbrella. The scene of her purposed sketch was at some little distance; and she advised Denise to bring their dinner with them, and plenty of needle-work, as they should not return till dusk. It was still early morning when they set out again. Denise enjoyed the idea of a few days of wild, out-of-door life extremely. She had grown a little weary of the town, with its narrow round of interests, which were no interests at all to her; and either experience of the scenery, or her aunt's lectures on its merits, had begun to show her that the country was beautiful, and that not only the fertile valleys had charms, but the grey rocks above them, where the sunbeams chased the shadows all day long. Then spring was just come, and flowers were awakening on all sides; scarlet anemones under the olives, tall pink gladioles in the patches of green corn, and an embroidery of lesser beauties in every nook and corner of the hills. The almonds, too,

were hastening to open every rosy bud, soon to fade into whiteness; nay, so profuse were already their blossoms that they had, the day before, moved even Mme. Pitre into poetry, and stopping to admire them, she had enthusiastically declared them to be "powdered like a marquis!"

Not very many miles distant in fact, but very far in feeling, was Denise from Farnoux. All the habits and necessities of her town life seemed to have passed away, and a new existence to have commenced for her this day; she could have fancied that it was henceforward to be spent among the hills, with blue sky above and blue sea below, and nothing to recall social existence except the distant sound of the Angelus, from a village out of sight, when the evening shades began to creep over the landscape.

CHAPTER XIII.

On the evening of the same day Gaston de Farnoux was slowly ascending the rugged mountain-side, his gun on his shoulder, and a long-haired, bristly wolf-dog following him. Perhaps he was anxious to make the most of one of the last days of the spring shooting season, but his game-bag contained more books than birds, and his eye dwelt on the landscape as if it interested him more than sport, though he marked with sportsmanlike keenness each rustle and chirp which betrayed the neighbourhood of a possible victim. He had mounted through the grey olives which nestled into the valley below, and reached an elevation where Nature defied all the pains that man could take to tame her. Here only cork-trees sprang from the stony ground, mingled with bright green Aleppo pines, over which a barren peak lifted itself, known in the neighbourhood as Le Pic des Maures; doubt-

less its name was connected with some forgotten tradition of Saracen invasion, but the peasantry imagined it gained its name from its being visible from Africa. The path which Gaston had taken was, in fact, but the dry bed of a torrent; it wound steeply upwards between ilexes and pines and fallen rocks, almost hidden in giant heath and myrtle. Impatient to see the sunset, glimpses of whose glories he obtained from time to time through the trees, Gaston quitted the watercourse and made his way across a more open part of the hillside, stepping over sheets of dark, weather-worn rock, and through thickets of briars and bushes, till he reached a point where vale and sea and sky were all displayed before him. Not a breath ruffled the grey tranquillity of the olive woods in the valley below, over which a sunny gleam was just beginning to steal; the Mediterranean lay smooth as a mirror, its usual deep azure somewhat paled. But overhead, too far off to affect the world below, there was storm. On the left, over the shoulder of a mountain promontory, marched up serried ranks of huge grey clouds, hurrying on, piling themselves one upon another in their haste to attend the funeral of the sun, then just sinking into the waters. Half-way above the sea they paused, arrested by a contrary current, which brought another army of clouds from the right to meet them, and as each dark mass paused it became suddenly suffused with purest amber - vivid, radiant - while the sky above and around was purest blue - such a blue and such a burning glory as Murillo has sought to express in his Assumptions, when heaven itself has opened, and revealed for a moment its ineffable splendour.

Under this gorgeous sunset earth too became glorified; the olive woods glowed with light, the battlemented rocks that ran out into the sea, and the distant promontory, became rosy lilac, and a distant island took the same delicate

tint, and looked as if it were the abode of beatified spirits. Well might Gaston stand and look. Native of Provence though he was, he would not see many such sunsets as that in his life. Whatever the worth of the popular tradition concerning the Pic des Maures might be, from Africa surely came the glow which lingered around it still; though already the gorgeous tints began to change, even while Gaston watched the stormy splendour in wonder. The amber clouds grew crimson, and the crimson was a prelude to paler tints, dying into grey, but even an hour later red scarfs of cloud still lingered in the west.

Gaston de Farnoux was a poet; it was to his credit that the sunset absorbed him so entirely that he never once thought of how he might make it useful to himself; which went far to prove him a true poet, and showed that he had not yet come to regard all things as having a possible future in print. When the pageant became dim he withdrew his eyes with a long-drawn breath, looked round, and wondered where he was. Secure that sooner or later he must see the Château on its rocky eminence, he made his way round the Pic, noting the singular contrast of the barrenness and fertility all around, the bleak rocks rising abruptly out of their fringe of pines over the olive-filled valleys, where white cottages nestled. An unexpected sight at this elevation arrested his steps; a little lake, locked in by rocks, and sheltered with ilex and thick myrtle. Not a ripple troubled its dark surface, where each golden star of a cluster of celandines was reflected. Gaston was making a mental memorandum of the pretty picture, when the harsh note of some bird unknown to him woke up his sportsman instinct, and at the same time he noticed the erected ears and bristling coat of his dog. His finger was on the trigger of his gun, when something or some one started up into a kneeling posi-

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tion among the myrtles, and a girl's indignant voice exclaimed —

"Monsieur! monsieur! my aunt's parrot!"

If the parrot had shot Gaston he could hardly have been more atonished, as he surveyed the mountain nymph who had sprung up to confront him, with a branch of heath set thick with white bells, like a sceptre, in her hand. He apologized for the unintentional misdeed that he had been on the point of committing, wondering, meanwhile, where he had seen her before; and adding —

"Let me advise you, mademoiselle, another time not to come within the lines of a sportsman's gun."

"I knew you would not shoot," said she.

"Certainly not when I knew you were there; but, before I discovered it, an accident might have occurred very unpleasant for both of us," said Gaston, provoked by her impenitence; "and now you are running into danger again ... take care, do not touch my dog; he is treacherous, and will bite even a lady's fingers if they be those of a stranger. There is a very pretty white hand that he will not allow to touch him. Here, sir!"

"That hand belongs to some one who does not like him. I am not afraid, and see!" said she, laying her hand fearlessly on the snaky head of the animal, who looked up at her with intelligent eyes, and pressed closer to her, to Gaston's surprise.

"You are perfectly right, mademoiselle, he appreciates your confidence. And now, with renewed apologies —"

"Make them to my aunt, monsieur, only you would hardly be wise in confessing how you had endangered the life of her pet."

"Even though our lakes and fountains appear to have their nymphs, as of old, I could hardly have guessed that tropical birds haunted our ilexes! Ah! I see my friend now, and congratulate him and myself on his escape. But you speak of your aunt, mademoiselle; can I see you under her care? Surely it is too late an hour for ladies to linger in such a lonely spot."

"She is not far off; she has been sketching all day."

"Have you far to go to-night?" asked Gaston, marvelling more and more who his companion could be.

"No, we spend the night in a cottage down yonder. It is much too far to go back to Farnoux."

"To Farnoux?" said Gaston, with new interest. "Have we not met before?"

"Yes," said Denise, turning to lift the parrot's cage from the ilex in which it was hung. Gaston hastened to help her.

"Pray let me carry it; are you not rash to give chasseurs the chance of such game? or do you always watch it?"

"I should think few chasseurs came here. My aunt thought Cocotte would enjoy the sunset, and sent me to the cottage to fetch him," said Denise, with gravity that left Gaston at a loss whether to believe her in jest or earnest. There was, however, a momentary expression as she glanced up to see how he took it, which led him to believe she was laughing at him. He coloured, with displeased surprise, and was on the point of demanding where they had met, when she said, "There is my aunt," and he beheld a large dark figure, sitting on the ground and examining the drawing on her lap with intentness rendered doubly necessary by the failing light. She rose at the sound of her niece's voice, and exclaimed, fast and loud —

"What's this, Denise? what's this? whom have you found? A young man! Put a girl on the top of Monte Rosa and a young man would be sure to start out of a crevasse to join

her! And what do you want now you are here, monsieur? Is it Oreste? —

'J'aime; je viens chercher Hermione en ces lieux, La fléchir, l'enlever, ou mourir à ses yeux!'"

Gaston was both amused and disconcerted at this torrent of words, which burst forth with new vehemence when Denise had laconically related how her acquaintance with him came about.

"Kill my parrot! O men, men, all alike carnivorous and destructive! would you have been the better or happier had you held the dead body of my bird in your hands? Could you have even worn his tail in your hat, or dined on him? Must you take away life from the innocent before you can feel that you are a ruler of creation? and you have not even the excuse of love of sport, young man; there are books, not birds in your game-bag! what have you been reading instead of learning the lessons that the hills could teach you? The last new romance, where, after a hurricane period, the happy pair inhabit a world of barley-sugar, which they spend the rest of their lives in sucking? Your heart was with them, not with your gun. What is your name?"

"Gaston de Farnoux, at madame's service."

"What! what!" cried Mlle. Le Marchand, knitting her shaggy brows and trying to see him clearly; "the sun has blinded me ... stand still ... are you really Gaston, the Baron's nephew?"

"Exactly, madame."

She surveyed him with a scared, sharp glance, and said in a wholly altered, quiet manner —

"I ought to have known you, but the sun dazzled my eyes. I am Mlle. Le Marchand."

"He bowed gravely, though hardly able to conceal his

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amusement at the whole scene, especially the solemnity with which the plebeian name was enunciated.

"So you never heard of me before, M. Gaston?"

"You must pardon my ignorance, madame, I am but a new resident at Farnoux, and I have not the advantage of knowing many neighbours. But I have met your niece."

"Where?"

Gaston had been short-sighted, not to see that this remark, which he had hoped would elicit an explanation, might instead bring him into new difficulties. However Mlle. Le Marchand did not care for an answer. "Ah, well! you would not be likely to hear my name in the Château; it might revive disagreeable recollections. There are such in all noble families. And what brings you here to-night?"

"A fancy to explore the Pic des Maures, and a little love for the chase, if I dare say so before you, madame."

"Ah, ha! the Pic — yes, the country is worth exploring," and, turning to the sea, she began —

> 'Montrez-lui, montrez-lui cette voûte enchantée, Ce transparent azur, ouvert de toutes parts, Où si profondément j'enfonce mes regards — Montrez-lui de ces monts le suave contour, Et de leurs horizons l'inépuisable harmonie; Montrez-lui cette mer, sereine, bleue, unie, Belle des bords charmants qu'elle pare à son tour!"

"She has escaped from some madhouse!" thought Gaston, as she recited the lines with great energy and gesticulation, but the next instant their beauty and appropriateness struck him, and taking off his hat, between jest and earnest, he said, "Bravo, Pierre Lebrun!"

"How! you know the author? That is more than I expected; you must have had a good education. I fancied that young men now-a-days only quoted Béranger. You laugh!

What, is he gone out of fashion too? Good lack! I am behind the age, I see. Are you an artist, sir?"

"At least I can appreciate the work of one. A lady who feels so strongly the charm of this scenery must be able to represent it with her brush. Permit me." He took the drawing which she held, and scrutinized it as closely as the dim light would allow, while Mlle. Le Marchand watched him with malice dancing in her little brown eyes. But Gaston did know a good painting when he saw one. "I would give much to possess this sketch," said he, with genuine admiration.

"What for? Do you know a crayon from a camel's-hair pencil? I have nothing pretty and lady-like for you; all is as rough as if done with a bear's paw. Perhaps you think it is? Good things are not to be had for the asking — nor the buying always — for the most part, though. But I don't sell my sketches to everybody; I don't make a trade of my art, I can tell you. What do you want this sketch for? As a memorial of a meeting with a queer old woman, and her niece, and her parrot? Not but what I have lived, it may be, in better society than ever you have."

The slight involuntary smile on Gaston's lips was detected instantly.

"Ah, you smile, but I have frequented salons where the élite of Paris were proud to have the entrée. I have seen dukes and marshals sitting on the ground for want of better accommodation, and glad to be there on those terms, though they only came to visit an old lady — what do you think of that? Did you ever hear of Mme. Lebrun? I was her pupil. Ah, that salon is empty now, and so is Gérard's. I knew him too, and Legros, and others whose names sell a picture for 20,000 francs any day — or double. And I have met Le Maistre, and Cuvier, and Humboldt, — and — pooh, what does it matter! A sketch? I will send one up to the Château some day. Do they say you are like your mother?"

"Did you know her?" asked Gaston, hastily.

"Oh, I have seen all the Demoiselles de Farnoux, years ago. She was the second, Félise. It is challeging destiny to call a woman Félise! What a mockery a name may be!"

"Adieu, madame," said Gaston, colouring with haughty displeasure, and speaking in a stiff, reserved tone, which betrayed exactly what it was intended to hide, namely, that she had touched on a painful theme. "I have lingered too long already."

"Adieu, M. Oreste. That is your way and this is ours. Come, Denise."

Denise withdrew her hand from the head of Gaston's dog, whom she had continued to caress while listening to the conversation; Gaston lifted his hat and turned in the direction pointed out. When he turned to look back, his dog was standing as if doubtful whom to follow, and the aunt and niece were disappearing down a winding path.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN they reached the cottage the chickens had gone to roost in the room below, and their owners were preparing to do the same in the room above. It was still early however. Mlle. Le Marchand walked straight in, lighted a candle, sought for pencil and paper, and set them before her; but there came to a pause, and, folding her hands, she leant back in her chair and fell into a reverie. Denise knew from experience that it was likely to last long, and, being hungry, sought their supper of bread and vin ordinaire, and suggested to her aunt that it was a long time since they had dined.

Some practical idea must have been suggested by this to the mind of Mlle. Le Marchand, for she ate and drank something, but in a moment or two she took up her pencil, and began to draw furiously. Denise had become quite used to her strange moods, and sat silently at work, till Mlle. Le Marchand said abruptly, "Look this way, child; I want to see the colour of your eyes."

Thus adjured, Denise looked up smiling, but gradually her face assumed its usual serious look, while her aunt surveved her with a prolonged and troubled gaze. Mlle. Le Marchand was apt to become very fierce and excited, when at work on anything that interested her; she would give hard knocks on the table, all unconsciously, and address her pencil or book with vehement criticism. Denise had not noticed what she was drawing, supposing it to be only some memorandum of a peculiar effect of light and shade, or the shape of some tree, or attitude of some sheep or goat which had struck her aunt during the day. As, however, the colour of her eyes was hardly likely to appear in a landscape, she inquired what the drawing was. Mlle. Le Marchand was cutting a pencil; her reply was, "Grey, with a dark ring round the iris; lashes black and straight. Yes. Now let me see the shape of the evebrows - fine, and straight, and dark just so. Wuff!" she concluded, with an extraordinary sound between a puff and a groan.

Denise was now so curious that she went to her aunt's side, and saw no sketch of shade, ravine, or picturesque olive, but the portrait of a young girl; the figure only slightly indicated, but the face already clearly sketched. A sad young face, with shadowy, reproachful eyes.

"Why, aunt! who is that? It is like old Benoîte's miniature! it is Félise de Farnoux! How like M. Gaston!"

Mlle. Le Marchand heard this time. "What! you there,

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Denise? So you see a likeness to Gaston de Farnoux! Hom! I had not thought of him, but I see it now."

"Oh, there can be no doubt of it, aunt. There is the same sad mouth, only his is a man's, and firmer, and this forehead is lower — but the expression is exactly what his was at one moment — though he has brown eyes, that smile when he speaks."

"Upon my word, mademoiselle! I blush for you! What would Pitre say if she heard you? Good lack! good lack!"

"But, aunt, you must have been thinking of him when you drew this."

"Du tout, child. I was thinking of some one else. You don't recollect any one who resembled this? Come, don't be dull; think a little! I don't believe you can be my niece, you are so unpardonably matter-of-fact, and slow."

"I am sorry, aunt," said Denise, with a deprecating movement of the shoulder.

"And I am an old fool, that is the truth. Of course you cannot recollect her," said Mlle. Le Marchand, her anger suddenly extinguished. She looked long and sadly at her sketch. "Yet you ought to have known her, you unlucky child, only fate is hard on you, as it was on her. You were very young when she died. This is your mother's portrait, Denise; your own poor mother."

"Aunt, what was her name before she was married?" cried Denise, with a sudden, glad perception that in some way she must be connected with the family at the Château.

"Her name! can't you guess! Géraldine de Farnoux."

"Géraldine — the sister of Félise — the aunt of M. Gaston?"

"Yes, Géraldine, Demoiselle de Farnoux, who married her brother's secretary," replied Mlle. Le Marchand, laying down the sketch to wipe away the tears that dimmed her eyes.

"De Farnoux! but then I am - M. le Baron is? -"

"You are a De Farnoux yourself in blood, and the Baron is your uncle. Oh, child, child, I have hardly the heart to tell you the story, but I suppose I must. You ought to know how it all came about. There! don't look at me as if you thought I was distraught; come here, and you shall hear all the history, and some of mine too."

Denise sat down, dizzy with wonder. Mlle. Le Marchand brushed her hand roughly across her face, as if her thoughts angered her.

"Where am I to begin, child? You know that I was born at Farnoux?"

"No!" said Denise, who passed from surprise to surprise.

"Well, then, you know it now. My father was a small proprietor; he had a house in the town, and an olive-yard, and a garden of orange-trees - the Pré, it was called. It belongs to some one else now. No one was what you would call rich in Farnoux. We were poor, but others had enough and to spare, for it was a primitive little place. So it is now, for that matter. My mother was from Normandy, and she had a law-suit for her dowry, like a true Norman. It ate up all we had, and more besides. I can't say I had a happy childhood. It seems to me that children know more of their mothers now than they did then; I don't know whether they are any the better for it. I was as still as a mouse when my father or mother were by; it was a matter of course that I should get up whenever they came into the room, and stand till they gave me leave to sit down. That's all altered; we have had the deluge since then. My mother, as I said, was a Norman; she detested the south, and wanted to make me Denise. 9

a little prudish devotee, a *Mlle. Pimbêche*, like the girls in her own part of the world. I was southern to the tips of my fingers, and shocked her every moment, poor dear woman! All the money we could scrape together went to feed the law-suit, and educate Antoine — my younger brother your father, child."

She paused and looked at Denise, to see if she could detect any likeness to the dead father.

"No! you are all De Farnoux. It was the stronger nature, and prevailed in their child. Well, we lived on quietly, till I was older than you are. Then I had troubles - it does not matter what - but they broke my life to pieces. Nobody ever knew, unless my mother guessed, and she never showed much what she thought. I tell you, child, my heart was broken under their eyes, and no one everthought about it. Till then, I had always taken a glad heart full of thanksgiving to my prayers - it was long, long after, before I took anything but tears. I lived on in the old still way; but I have always been better at doing than bearing, and at last I felt I should go mad if I had to stay any longer in the same place, where everything reminded me, each moment - Yes, I do think my mother guessed, for at last she persuaded my father to let me go to relations in Paris, though it went sorely against the grain with him, for he was a stern old man, and liked to keep us under his own eye; and people stayed at home in those days. I got mixed up with artists, and politicians, and such folk, at Paris; I always had a turn for people of that kind, and some talent for music and painting, though it never had a chance of showing itself before; and I took to my violin and my paint-box, to save myself from the thoughts that lay in wait for me at every quiet moment --Pish! what a fool I was!"

The quick clenching of her withered hands betrayed that

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the aged woman could feel the sting of the pain, to which even now she would not give a name, almost as keenly as the young girl had done.

"Time does much, my dear, but I never was clever at forgetting. Twelve years did I stay in Paris, and father and mother died, and Antoine was steward to the Baron de Farnoux - or secretary, as they chose to call him; he wrote sometimes from the old Baron's dictation, and after his death he looked after the accounts and the land for Mademoiselle, but he was still the secretary; it sounded well. The Baron thought a great deal of our family, because we were Protestants, and had suffered for it too, and my father was one of the true old stock. I used to go up to the Château as a girl, and Antoine, before he was secretary, often played bowls with the present Baron, then a young man. Well, I stayed away twelve years - years that the locust has eaten! twelve: and vet when Antoine wrote to me to come to him, I would as soon have returned to a bath of fire! But his letters had made me uneasy; and then, you see, I knew that Antoine was one of those insufferably unlucky people, who, if they tumble on their backs, contrive to break their nose - (it was his heart this time, however) - so I went. He lived at the Château, but he found me lodgings in the town. I was not there a week, and made no acquaintances, but I learnt all I could about the family at the Château. I had my reasons. The old Baron had long been dead; the present one was gone to Paris. He never was very wise, and as ignorant as a capuchin, and I hear he has grown quite a foolish old man now. Well, there was Félise, married and gone, and at the Château remained Mademoiselle and young Géraldine."

"Ah!" murmured Denise.

"Ay. There was but one word for Mademoiselle. Every

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one said the same of her. She was the handsomest woman I ever saw, but her temper might have belonged to a demon. Yet I always thought she had gifts to fit her for something great; I daresay in her proper place she would have been a Jeanne d'Albret; perhaps there was not scope enough for her in Château Farnoux. Anyhow, she made her brother's and sisters' lives miserable, and yet I do believe she would have died for any one of them. Even the poor feared her much, and loved her little. She gave — gave — gave, though there was little to spare, but it was a tyrant kindness. I would as soon have had a blow. I was often at Farnoux as a girl, and liked her little enough."

"Ah, I see! You have always known them."

"Oh, in a humble way. Mademoiselle was young then, a handsome girl with a clever tongue that cut like a lash, but then her smile made it sting less - some thought so men. I believe: I was a woman. And her sisters, children then, how they dreaded her! I remember well how I once kept Félise's birthday there, with some other children. I was a long way her elder, but being then gay and hopeful, I could be a child among children. In the midst of a noisy game, in came Mademoiselle. She was in good humour, very gracious, but we were like a flock of little birds when the hawk is overhead; and one creeps into the grass, another slips under the olive trees, a third lies flat on the ground; all the songs are hushed, and only a terrified chirp is heard now and then. Just so we were, still and mute, longing to escape. She bade us go on with our game, and waited to see us begin, but the spirit was gone. She saw it, and how her face darkened! She went away without a word, and we remained all sobered and dreading to see her return. One feared her by instinct, and she - she feared no one, not even the old Baron, but she respected him. She was a good

daughter; I will say that for her, though I hated her, that I did, with all my heart. Poor woman, she has paid for all her sins — paid double, long ago. You have heard how she married her sister Félise to a rascally cousin? It was called a good match, but it was a bad day's work, as you would know if you had ever heard the history of Félise de Farnoux."

"Old Benoîte told me she had turned Romanist," said Denise, as low as if she feared the walls might hear her.

"If that were all! Poor Félise! When I was a child I used to think only children had guardian angels, because, when they grew up, they were too wise to want them. I used to shock my poor mother sadly, by asking when I should be old enough to do without mine. She said such a little pagan could not be her child. Oh, my dear, it is not that, when people grow up they have no need of guardian spirits, but that they have grown deaf to their promptings! Ah, poor Félise! When I came back to Farnoux, the town was full of talk how Mademoiselle had at last found a suitor for Géraldine, who liked him as little as Félise had liked hers; and they said it would be a harder struggle now, for the younger sister had the will of her family, and had seen what came of Félise's marriage. The servants of the Château told something of what went on, but there was not much intercourse between the Château and the town. Mlle. De Farnoux had been away; she had gone to her brother in Paris, she said; she was going to be married herself, too; however, she came back, and broke off her engagement. All that has always been a mystery, and nobody knows anything about it but herself. Those were black days for Géraldine. I know that one day when Antoine had got me leave to sketch in the Château garden, I saw her come by, as pale as death. She rested her hands on the parapet, and looked

down that dizzy height with such a white, despairing look, that I do believe she was thinking whether to leap over would not be better than to marry the old Marquis, whom her sister had chosen for her. I gathered myself up ready to seize her, but she never saw me, and at last she walked away with a long sigh that made my heart ache."

Denise's eyes, wide open with suspense, closed now; she sighed as her mother had done.

"Child! you are just like your mother; but Heaven keep the look from your face that I saw then on hers! I had only come to Farnoux for a week, and Antoine was to see me back safe to Paris. The morning before I was to leave Farnoux, between the dark and the light, his voice woke me. I jumped out of bed; I knew what had happened before he spoke — he was there and she too. I had guessed months before that he loved the very grass she had stepped on -he, the poor secretary, and she one of those proud De Farnoux! Before I could answer him, she was sobbing on my shoulder. I hardly ever saw her weep but that once. The next moment she stood up and said, 'He says he loves me - no one else does-and I am come to you." However, her sister did love her, I am sure of that, though she, poor girl, could not see it. I had said my say long before to Antoine, and was not going to reason it all out again, for I am not fond of wasting good advice, especially on a lover."

"And she loved him too?"

"Oh, as for that, such a thought would never have entered the head of a noble demoiselle, had not a marriage with him offered her means of escape from worse; and it was something to a girl, who was as wretched and lonely as she, to be loved even by a *roturier*. I said nothing, for in my heart I certainly thought it a better fate to get Antoine instead of the Marquis. I had lived with the wolves till I had learned

to howl, and was rather a Jacobin, my dear. We went to the old *pasteur* at Toulon, and after many words he married them. I don't suppose he had a very pleasant visit at the Château when he told what he had done; he wrote us enough to show how it was. Mlle. De Farnoux's chief thought was to hide it all, and she succeeded, it seems."

"And you went to Paris?"

"Lived anyhow, from hand to mouth, for four or five years. Antoine had made sure that the lawsuit was just terminating in our favour, but it went on. Political troubles scattered my old friends, and made a livelihood hard to earn. Hard! I don't know how we did it! Poverty is rather stupifying too; I seemed to have lost all power of painting; every idea gone out of my head, beyond daubing at screens, and fans, and costumes in fashion-books! You were born; she named you after me, thinking it would bring better luck than a Farnoux name. By and bye we shifted our quarters to London, and that was another false step. Those years made an old woman of me before my time. I have beaten about the world for half a lifetime since, and seen many ups and downs, but that was slow, quiet starvation. Somehow, Géraldine learned to love Antoine in the midst of it - and he never wished to undo what he had done. He fell ill just when work came; we were starving. Never mind that last year; it is over - over; one can't have many such in a life," she added, with a long-drawn breath. "Never mind that last year. He died with her hand in his, and her lips on his forehead. If we had been rich, he would have lived: want killed him - nothing else. The earth was iron beneath, and the sky brass above us. You see, we paid dearly for the honour of an alliance with the De Farnoux. Yet after all, I have often envied those two, seeing what happiness love is, even when people are poor and plebeian. It is singular,

that common people should even have more of such a luxury than aristocrats."

"Oh, if she had written to Mademoiselle, she would — she must — surely? — ".

"Is that all you know yet of Mademoiselle? Denise, your mother did write — a letter that might have touched a statue. No answer. Stay! let me be just; there was an answer — a full answer — her own letter returned, torn half across. I have it now. It had been read, apparently. Ah; Mademoiselle de Farnoux! you worked for your reward, and you have it. No one ever prospered who injured me — no one! and I have seen how those who were kind to me have been blessed," said Mlle. Le Marchand, solemnly. It was not the first time that Denise had remarked a vein of superstition running through the masculine mind of her aunt.

"Ah, well," resumed Mlle. Le Marchand, "I have nearly finished. She did not live long after his death; a little thing kills when there have been years of distress. We found a friend in good Mrs. Lisle, a Frenchwoman, married to an English merchant — a widow when I knew her. I was left an old woman when I still ought to have been young - a tough old piece of leather, who would never know romance any more; and I wanted to be gone, only I had a little orphan niece on my hands. Mrs. Lisle took us both into her house, but I could not stay - I was a born Bohemian; and besides, one ought to be happy if one is to live in England. People are happy there, but there is no amusement: one gets that in wandering. So I left you with our good friend. and have drifted about ever since. I'm like the sea-weed that flourishes as long as it is tossed about by the waves, but withers as soon as it is cast high and dry on the beach. Soon after my poor Géraldine's death, that villanous law-

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suit ended in our favour. It gave me my pretty farm in Normandy, and I lived there for a little while, but there was a sickening feeling that it had come too late for all that I loved; so I and my paint-box, and Cocotte, went off to the Pyrenees, and to the Italian lakes, and back to Normandy; and then I went to Germany, and once or twice to Spain, till fifteen years or so had passed, and I began to long to see Farnoux again."

"Farnoux, aunt?"

"Why, after all, the best of my life was spent there the bon vieux temps, lorsque j'étais si misérable - and I was a true southern, as I said just now. I would have given all the green meads and blossoming fruit-trees of the north for one pinch of lavender from my own rocks. Besides, as Lafontaine says, Il en faut toujours revenir à son destin. So I came back, and nobody remembered me, which was all very well, though now I see they begin to suspect I am related to old Jerome Le Marchand, since some one remembered his wife was a Norman. They take great interest in that property of mine. I did think of sending for you at one time, hoping you might find a home with the Baron, for Géraldine was his pet sister, but then I found he had got a wife - brought her home at last, too. A widow Gautier a worthy person, I daresay; but, my dear, when Mademoiselle was herself, he no more dared have done such a thing than he would to have had high mass sung in his Huguenot chapel. Là! I have done my story, and I'm glad of it."

And with this, MIle. Le Marchand lapsed into silence, her hand beating on her knee, as was her custom when thoughtful, unless, for variety, she pinched the tip of her nose. She presently arrived at this stage, and happened to rouse herself by an extraordinarily hard nip; whereupon she

rose up, bade Denise go to bed, and descending by the stone staircase into the vineyard, marched for a whole hour, with long steps, up and down in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XV.

The hour of supper was fixed by custom at an early period of the evening in Château Farnoux. Once returned, the Baron seemed to have entirely forgotten the gay life he had led as a young man at Paris, and to believe himself the Seigneur of Farnoux, ruling over his vassals. His father had been a grand old man, whom every one had reverenced, but the son's peevish tyranny caused as much mirth as murmuring among his dependents. He never guessed it. It never occurred to him that he could possibly be ridiculous. Nothing annoyed him more than any breach of the formal usages to which he had been accustomed in his youth. His many years' absence seemed to have taught him nothing that the nineteenth century had to teach, not even that the ceremonious habits of his grandfather's time had become singular in his father's, and were absurd in his own.

The hour of supper was the most formal part of the day at Farnoux. All the family, except indeed Mlle. de Farnoux, were expected to appear at it in full toilette, and the one valet whom the Baron kept waited on those present, in a livery once splendid, but now faded. The Baron, who at other times wore clothes so shabby that not the poorest of Farnoux proprietors would have condescended to appear in them, dressed elaborately for this solemn meal, which was always long, though very frugal. After being a spendthrift of other people's money in his youth, he had become a miser of his own in his age; and while sighing for the time when

he was a *bon vivant*, he fretted and lamented over every dish which appeared on the table without absolute necessity.

"Mme. la Baronne is served."

The Baron entered just as this announcement was made by the valet, and prepared to conduct his wife into the supper-room, but looking round he did not see Gaston, who, in fact, had lost his way in the hills, and was at that moment in converse with Mlle. Le Marchand, some miles from the Château. M. de Farnoux did not condescend to ask where his nephew was, but directed a wandering, inquiring glance around the room. Lucile was there; no one else, except Mme. de Farnoux. The Baron found himself obliged to ask where the missing member of his family could be, and articulated with dignified reproach the one word "Gaston?"

"I do not know," replied his wife carelessly. "Do you, Lucile?"

"Mlle Lucile is not likely, I imagine, to be better informed on that point than yourself. This is very singular! absent at this hour; keep me waiting! Such a thing never occurred before, and ought not to have occurred now."

"He will no doubt soon appear, and explain for himself. Meanwhile, I think you honour him too much by waiting for him," said Mme. de Farnoux.

The Baron was perplexed. He felt that this breach of custom on Gaston's part ought to be severely marked and rebuked, but then it certainly did not befit his dignity to stand waiting for a truant. After ruminating the problem gloomily for a moment, he offered one hand to his wife and the other to Lucile, and conducted them into the salle à manger, faintly lighted by candles set at intervals down the long table in silver branches. The poultry-yard and potager had supplied all the materials for the meal; the salad was gathered on the hills, the oranges came from the garden of

a farm at their foot. La vie matérielle was cheap at Farnoux. M. de Farnoux glanced over the table to see that no extravagance had been committed, and frowned at a superfluous omelette, without observing the smile that his displeasure called up on the valet's countenance. Lucile was wondering where Gaston could be, and sat mute and wistful; her mother put in a few calm, indifferent words from time to time, when there was a pause in the Baron's monologue on unnecessary expenses, and the ill-breeding of the rising generation. At length they returned to the great room where they habitually passed their evenings. The De Farnoux had never had many gold pieces to spare, and those they had were rarely spent on the decoration of their Château. This room, or rather hall, remained just as it had been for a hundred years, or perhaps twice as long. It was still hung with tapestry, whose hem swept the dark wainscot, and the furniture consisted chiefly of chairs of embossed leather, or seats of black wood which were both chest and bench, with carved backs; arm-chairs, whose faded embroidery had been the work of successive generations of those pale demoiselles or dames whose portraits hung in some of the other rooms; a cabinet or two inlaid with ivory and ebony, and tables, some massive and polished, some small and fanciful in shape. There was nothing of modern comfort or luxury; nothing that gave token of the habitual presence of women. The floor was uncarpeted, except where a kind of rug was spread out before the chair of Mme. de Farnoux, close to the huge open hearth, which was surmounted by a heavy mantelpiece, whose stone carvings were traversed by the family motto, so often repeated without and within the house, Sortes meæ in manu Dei sunt. A fire of logs and vine-boughs burnt on the hearth, and as its lambent flames leapt and sank, the figures on the tapestry in different parts of the dusky room seemed

to move and mingle strangely; the feathers nodded on the knights' helmets; the horses tossed their heads, the ladies waved their scarfs, and seemed to advance and recede. Now a whole boar-hunt became visible and animated; now a tournament was suddenly revealed; the lances met and shivered, the spectators bent forward, horses and riders met in full eareer; but all was done in ghostly silence, and almost in an instant restored to darkness.

The Baron paced up and down the room; Mme. de Farnoux drew a little table with a light on it close to the fire, and worked in silence. Lucile sat in the recess of a distant window, looking intently out into the dusk, and there was no sound except the Baron's steps, and the crackling of the fire, until he paused before her and exclaimed, "Well, mademoiselle! well! how long do you intend to play the part of a lady in waiting? In my time it was the gentleman who waited for the lady, and thought himself too happy if she allowed her eyes to turn on him. I had known Mlle. de Villemer many years before I ventured to send her a poulet. I have often heard my mother say that she never saw her intended husband, my father, till three days before their marriage; and it was not till the contract had been signed, and then only by her mother's express permission, that he so much as ventured to kiss the tips of her fingers."

Mme. de Farnoux's smile seemed to hint that her own recollections of Parisian life were somewhat different. Lucile raised her eyes, blue as the Mediterranean sea, to the Baron's face, much as if she had not heard what he said, answered with her sweet innocent smile, and looked out again earnestly into the night.

"Did you do me the honour of listening to what I said, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, there! now he will come!" cried Lucile, joyfully, as a trail of light shot down the sky, and vanished.

"I think it is strange that I cannot obtain a rational reply," said M. de Farnoux, peevishly. "If Mlle. thought the examples of the Demoiselles de Farnoux worth copying, I could tell her that when my father addressed them they listened with profound respect, and replied, 'Yes, monsieur,' or 'No, monsieur,' as the case required."

"I beg your pardon!" murmured Lucile, awakened to present things by the increasing testiness of his tone. "I was watching for a falling star."

"I should much like to hear why you take such an interest in astronomy that you cannot hear when you are spoken to."

"They say if you can wish while a star shoots, you gain your desire."

"Childish folly!" muttered the Baron, angrily. "As if that excused — — "

"Let the child alone, monsieur," said Mme. de Farnoux.

He paced up the hall, and paused by her as he returned. "May I ask, madame, what you mean by addressing me in that manner?"

She shrugged her shoulders slightly by way of reply.

"But I tell you it cannot, and shall not be, madame! I see what your aim is, though I have considered it too absurd to mention. I am head of the family; I have a voice in the matter, I imagine. It is for the head of the family to arrange the alliances of its members. Gaston is our only heir; Gaston must marry some one of his own rank."

"Gaston's uncle did Lucile's mother the honour to marry her."

"I did," said M. de Farnoux, ruefully; "but that was entirely an accident, madame, and such good fortune is not

likely to befall your daughter. You were a young widow, whose friend I had the honour to be; a man of my rank a De Farnoux, is remarked; his actions are commented on; reports got abroad which grieved me; I could answer them in only one way. To protect you effectually, I gave you my name."

Mme. de Farnoux raised her eyebrows and looked at him, as if to see whether he was serious in offering her this view of the case, but it was evident that he had taught himself to believe in it, and presented it in good faith to her.

"I thought — but of course you know best," she answered contemptuously — "I thought that certain debts might have explained your marriage, as well as your nice sense of honour."

M. de Farnoux walked away. When he returned he continued, "Now that you are here, madame — now that, entirely to content you, I have resigned Paris, and the attractions that it offers to a man of my position — —"

"Oh, you should be at court, monsieur! there is no doubt that with your talents you would have made your fortune there! and I should not be dying of *ennui* here."

"Madame, our religion has always kept us at a distance from the court. The De Farnoux have been loyal subjects, but they would not receive favours from a government that persecuted those of their faith. The De Farnoux have been great enough to dispense with royal favours. The reigning monarch, whatever he may be, king or emperor, cannot be nobler than the De Farnoux at Farnoux."

"Among the blind a one-eyed man is king!" murmured Mme. de Farnoux.

"I hope I did not hear you rightly, madame. I trust you appreciate, in some degree at least, the name you bear;

though I do not expect you to esteem it like those to whom it has descended through generations of ancestors."

"It did not serve to introduce me to the Faubourg St. Germain," said Mme. de Farnoux, impatiently. "You seemed as little at home there as I."

"I have never cultivated the friendship of the Faubourg. We have lived on our own estate, and married among ourselves."

"I imagined, when you told me this at Paris, that I should find friends here, but the aristocrats of Paris are less exclusive than these Provençal families."

"We have hitherto held somewhat aloof from them, and the first advances must necessarily come from us."

"As if I had not made them!" murmured Mme. de Farnoux. "What more could I do? — but who would come to this owl's nest who could help it? Still, it is something to be a baroness; all my friends know that I am Mme. de Farnoux — by and bye, too ——" and she looked at Lucile. M. de Farnoux had not heard what she said, but he saw the glance.

"It cannot be, madame; I am resolved on that point, so let us leave it. Gaston is degenerate enough already; his disrespectful conduct of this evening shows it — he has opinions, actually, liberal. I would as soon have had a sansculotte in the family as a young man who admires Lamartine — who writes in magazines — receives money. I am told!"

"I did not know that making money was so objectionable in your eyes."

"Madame, a De Farnoux should encourage art, but it is beneath him to profit by it. A De Farnoux ——" here his indignation was turned in a new direction by a sudden blaze on the hearth. He stooped and removed a log. "Waste!

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always waste! How often must I say that burning wood here is burning gold? One would think we possessed the mines of Peru to see the extravagance that goes on in this château, and your indifference to it."

"As to that, your own surveillance leaves nothing for me to do."

"When there are servants, the master's eye, and mistress's, too, would not suffice — Well, mademoiselle! what now?"

Lucile had started up.

"I knew if I could only wish at the right instant — and there is my cousin."

"Indeed! At last."

"There is some one with him — Marcellin Duval," said Mme. de Farnoux, coming to the window where Lucile stood. "At last we shall see a new face!"

"Marcellin Duval is always welcome, but I confess I am astonished that he should have come without asking what my wishes were. It is impossible that Gaston should have allowed himself to invite him," said the Baron, bristling up.

"How is it that there is such an intimacy between your family and the Duvals, monsieur? Merchants — yet Gaston and Matcellin are sworn friends."

"Because, madame, we have rendered them services, and received services from them."

"I know that the Duvals lent your father, and grandfather, and yourself money, but I never heard that the De Farnoux had done anything for them."

"We accepted the loan, madame, and thereby acknowledged the friendship which existed between the families, for we should not have borrowed from strangers. A family like ours can afford to choose its friends where it will; we ennoble *Denise.* 10

those whom we select. A parvenu must be careful not to compromise his dignity."

"My brother is highly honoured. Like him, it was in their quality of friends that they were never repaid!"

"Pardon me, madame, they were strictly repaid, and my father allowed Hélène Duval and her brothers constantly to visit us. Hélène was a charming creature! it was a pity she was bourgeoise," said the Baron, with a sentimental sigh, which seemed to hint that the fair Duval had been one of his many loves; probably the first.

"Oh, your father! Yes, I know that all his debts were repaid in his lifetime; I was thinking of his son."

The Baron's indignant reply was cut short by the entrance of Gaston and Marcellin Duval. M. de Farnoux advanced a step, and received the latter with a stately welcome, listening graciously to his explanation of the business that brought him to Farnoux, and assuring him that he was bound, as the son of an old friend - (the Baron looked pointedly at his wife as he uttered this with great emphasis) - never to visit Farnoux without coming to the Château. This did but suspend that reprimand to Gaston which M. de Farnoux had been arranging ever since supper was announced. Gaston did not look like a person whom it was easy to reprimand; he listened as if it were due to his own sense of courtesy, however absurd his uncle might be, smiled a little, replied that he had lost his way in the hills, and regretted that Mme. de Farnoux should have waited an instant for him, and then summoned Marcellin to accompany him to the salle à manger.

"If there were another de Farnoux in the world he should never inherit a centime of mine!" said the Baron, turning red, and fuming with displeasure. "Lost his way! a pretty excuse! why should he lose his way? What business had he

to be wandering in the hills like a *garriguaire*? Some day I shall make him feel who is master in the Château."

The faint smile, that never lighted her restless blue eyes, just flitted over his wife's pretty face and was gone. Lucile still sat in her recess, entirely contented now Gaston was come, and satisfied to wait the moment when he would return and recount his adventures. Life in the lonely old Château was all radiant to her; Gaston was her world, and here she saw much more of him than at Paris, for then he came but as a guest; here, since his father's death, and the forced sale of La Pinède, his ancestral home, he had lived almost constantly. It was his uncle's pleasure, and Gaston was dependent upon him. Lucile's presence must have been a powerful charm to Gaston, for as yet he had not wearied of the monotonous life, was contented to renounce Paris, and endure his uncle's company, and pursued tranquilly that occupation of writing which so seriously displeased the Baron.

Lucile had not even heard the peevish ejaculations of M. de Farnoux as he marched up and down the long room. Ear and eye were intent on Gaston's return; but when at length he did return he did not come to her side, though she half rose with a beseeching look. Hers was the loving simplicity of a child; Gaston, much older, was peculiarly reserved, and never was willing either to show any strong feeling or expose himself to the raillery of Marcellin. He placed himself by Mme. de Farnoux; Marcellin, on the contrary, much diverted by Lucile's air of astonished disappointment, went up to her, on teasing intent. The unconcealed disapproval of this substitute for Gaston, which she evinced, greatly entertained him; she would have risen and gone to Gaston's side, as he stood talking to her mother, but Marcellin would not allow it.

"You are too unkind! I have not seen you for three months, yet you have not a word to say to me! Have I not

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known you as long as Gaston? You have quite forgotten those delightful days of Paris, when — unless a disastrous *pensum* blighted my happiness — I spent my holiday beside you. Friendship finds no place in your breast. Ah, Lucile, you are sadly cold-hearted, and distractingly beautiful."

"You know you do not care for me, Marcellin," said Lucile, distressed by his tragic air, in which she put full faith.

"I do not care for you, cruel one! Why am I here, then? Do you suppose that the business with the Baron that I mentioned is anything but a feint? a blind? How shall I convince you of your error? Send me to the dragonguarded fountain to fetch the water of beauty — but that is useless; you already possess it."

"Marcellin, please let me go; I have not seen Gaston all day."

"Gaston! you have no feeling for me, though I have become a skeleton with pining to see you!"

"You are always thin," said Lucile, contemplating him with some alarm. "I do not see any difference, Marcellin."

"I refer you to my tailor, who has had to alter all my clothes; a very serious expense, Lucile! 'Ah, monsieur,' said he, 'it is the heart that has done this.' 'Ah, if you had seen her, my dear Amarante,' I replied; 'liquid dark eyes,' no! I mean azure — excuse me, Lucile —"

"There! you were not thinking of me, Marcellin."

"'Azure eyes! hair of woven sunbeams!' 'Ah, I know what monsieur has experienced!' he answered, 'I too suffer.' And we wept copiously together."

"I am sorry, Marcellin if it is true," said Lucile, with a shadow of doubt.

"No, do not go, stony-hearted one! I will tell you

something about Gaston. Ah, now you listen! but how shall I break it to you? how do you think he has been spending his time? he has made the acquaintance of a beautiful stranger."

"That is not true!" cried Lucile.

"Ask him yourself. A ravishing stranger and her delightful aunt; that is why he is so late, and has incurred the heavy displeasure of his respectable uncle. See, he looks towards us — guilt in every feature! he guesses that I have betrayed him."

"Marcellin, you are too provoking! I am sure Gaston would never care about any stranger," said Lucile, almost with tears in her eyes.

"You are like a little kitten ruffling itself at a rude dog," said Marcellin, amused and yet half-repentant of having teased her. "There, he is beginning the story of his adventures; come and hear all about it; Mme. de Farnoux beckons you."

Lucile gladly rose; Gaston placed a seat for her by Mme, de Farnoux, and continued his history of the day's adventures, while Lucile, though listening anxiously, found time to contrast him with Marcellin, to the extreme disadvantage of the latter. Yet perhaps she was unjust to Marcellin, who, though remarkably plain and sallow, had the handsome eyes, and vivacious, mobile countenance of the southerns. No one in France could be a greater flirt; it was not often that he had to complain of injustice from women, with whom he was exceedingly popular. He and the fair objects of his attentions knew perfectly well that his devotion was not fated to last long, but then it was sincere while it lasted, and there was an earnestness and *naïveté* in his most rattling talk that was original and amusing. Gaston, who had known him all his life, and had been thrown con-

stantly with him at Paris, was very fond of him, and yet put out of patience with him every moment. Marcellin was peculiarly trying to a man who liked quiet, and detested practical jokes; it seemed to be his chief object while with Gaston to torment him in every possible way: then he was totally incapable of tranquillity or silence: his slender. lithe figure was always assuming some new position: his fingers always toying with something. He paid not unfrequent visits to the Château, and the neighbourhood looked on him as a prétendant of Lucile's: but Lucile was, as it happened. the only pretty girl of his acquaintance whom he had never worshipped. Loyalty to Gaston forbade such poaching on his ground; though Marcellin, in his heart, did not desire Lucile to be his friend's wife. He had set Gaston - mercilessly as he mocked at him - on such a pedestal in his imagination, that he could have found no woman worthy to share it with his hero. However, as he intended to keep his friend, even when Gaston should be married, he was wise enough to hold his peace on this subject.

"Le Marchand!" said the Baron, when Gaston arrived at this name, and thereby startled him into forgetting his offended dignity enough to take part in the conversation; "Le Marchand: why we had a secretary, Antoine Le Marchand — what became of him, I wonder? And he had a sister — how Eleanor used to hate her!" he looked nervously round as he uttered the name, as if he feared that it might have conjured up his sister; and all involuntarily did the same.

"Have you seen your aunt to-day, Gaston?" asked Mme. de Farnoux.

"I spent a few minutes with her just now. She seemed flushed — excited. She asked if I had heard any news in Farnoux; a thing I never knew her do before. Jeanette

tells me she has been extraordinarily anxious for news of late, and that she walks her room like an *âme en peine*."

"Do you think she will leave it?" asked Lucile with terror.

"Nothing is less likely, nor is there anything to fear."

"It is enough and too much to have her in the house," said Mme. de Farnoux uneasily.

"Av. Eleanor hated her," resumed the Baron, who had been musing. "Used to say the very way the young woman uttered 'Mlle. de Farnoux' was a mockery. Remember all about them now. Antoine played well at bowls - often was here, with his sister - a homely girl - brusque - no manners. Some talent though; we were once au bout de notre Latin to fill up a rôle in a comedy (I acted in the afterpiece, 'Dorine and Nestor,' as a cupid; I had azure wings, I remember, and rose-coloured boots). Well, she took the rôle. There were thunders of applause. It was a magnificent success! Ah, what triumphs I have had in that little theatre vonder! The next day old Jerome, the father, came up with an insolent tirade against all such impious diversions, and above all that his daughter should have shared in them. He ought to have been thrown over the cliff for his insolence. But my father would not notice an insult from an inferior."

"Ah, if we could act now-a-days! there would be some pleasure in life then! What delightful visits to the theatres of Paris I have made!" sighed Mme. de Farnoux.

"I believe I met this very Mlle. Le Marchand to-day," said Gaston.

"The same? An old woman now?" said the Baron.

"A half-witted, impertinent sort of person, inclined to boast of her intimacy, such as it was, with our family, I fancy," Gaston said.

"Half-witted! more witted than most other mortals, mon cher!" cried Marcellin. "I know the old woman well; my mother knew her here long ago. She sometimes pays us a visit. A strange caustic person, of the old bourgeois, frondeur sort, mixing up Calvinism and Jacobinism. An erratic genius with a disreputable turn for the arts! It is rich to see her play the violin."

"She is an excellent artist, and I have bespoken a sketch."

"Of the niece whom you spoke of?" asked Marcellin, glancing wickedly at Lucile. "A daughter of your secretary, M. le Baron. I have been trying to describe her to Mlle. Lucile, but when I think of your eloquence, my dear Gaston, mine folds her wings abashed."

"Did I describe her?"

"Oh!" said Marcellin, with malicious emphasis, and charmed to see Lucile raise her eyes in piteous reproach to Gaston.

"I said her face perplexed me by its likeness to some one whom I could not recollect!"

"You will have another opportunity of studying it on Ste.-Dévote's fête; I mean to come over expressly for the dance in the afternoon; it was prodigiously amusing last year. I feel sure Mlle. Denise will be there."

"Do you think her so very pretty, Gaston?" asked Lucile.

"I had not thought about it."

"I saw her, I think, when there was service in the chapel — but I did not think her at all pretty. Did you?"

"I hardly noticed her."

Gaston's indifference was most real. Lucile, however, only wondered whether the shortness of his answers meant that the subject was disagreeable to him.

"Now, Gaston, listen; I have settled how it shall be; we will go to the Place, where they dance; I look around - I see the aunt - I say, 'Here is my friend, for whose respectability I vouch, dying to obtain the hand of Mlle. Denise for this dance' - you pursue your advantage - I, on my part, dance with Lucile."

"Mlle. Lucile is not likely to be there," said the Baron, hastening to rebuke Marcellin's presumption. "My sisters never took part in the village dances."

"That is a custom to be broken through, M. le Baron."

"It is my habit to keep up old customs. Families like ours are bound to keep up the customs of their ancestors; the commonalty may do as they please."

"But, M. le Baron, to insist that all old customs should be maintained is as if you expected each generation to wear all the old clothes of those which preceded it!"

Gaston smiled; M. de Farnoux looked as if he thought there was something in this speech that he ought to resent, could he but see what. Failing to discover the point of it, he resumed graciously, "I was not speaking of you, or Gaston. You are at liberty to do as you please. I myself in my youth often shared in the amusements of the people, and if you are inclined to pay us a visit on the fête, Marcellin, you will be welcome."

CHAPTER XVI.

MLLE. LE MARCHAND kept her promise of sending a painting to the Château, only she had never meant it for Gaston. Instead, she addressed it to the Baron. She had for some time been intending to throw a bomb into the enemy's camp, as she said to herself, and now the hour was come.

The father of the present Baron had latterly lived a singular and solitary life, rising with dawn, summer and winter; walking out in the early morning and late evening; breakfasting alone on a cup of coffee, and remaining in his own room till the early dinner-hour; and retiring again till the family assembled for supper. He had been a great reader, and something of an author too. His solitary hours were passed in studying old controversial works, and in compiling memoirs of the troubled times in which his lot had been cast. For these he found ample material in his personal recollections, and in the faithful journal of every occurrence, great or small, in the family history, which he had kept for years, thus handing down a curious picture of life in a poor and noble family. There had been no modern books added to the old library; the great folios from Henri Estienne's press stood dusty on the shelves that lined the room. The reigning Baron aped in some degree his father's mode of life, but the papers heaped on the writing-table were contracts, leases, and accounts. He studied these intently, and gave his farmers solemn audience in the library; and, when there was nothing else to do, he dozed there in his huge arm-chair. No one disturbed him; the apartment of his wife was in a distant part of the Château; Gaston had appropriated two rooms elsewhere; the chamber of Mlle. de Farnoux was as far off as possible, and the few servants slept here and there, and made no show in the many-roomed building.

M. de Farnoux was so little used to being roused in his den that he started up in his arm-chair when a parcel was brought in by his valet, and exclaimed peevishly, "I won't see any one; I never do at this hour—it is only two o'clock! What am I to do till supper-time?" and then sat staring with half-awake eyes at the packet.

"What's that? Anything to pay, Georges?"

"Nothing, M. le Baron. A messenger from the town has just brought it," said the servant, stooping unbidden to open the package, his curiosity being strongly aroused by its unusual shape and size.

"Who sent it?" asked the Baron, now wide awake, and approaching.

"I did not hear, M. le Baron. Nanoun brought it to me, and I carried it up at once."

"There is some mistake; it cannot be for me. A picture — I never bought such a thing — What do I want with pictures?"

"Perhaps it is for M. Gaston?"

"A portrait — a woman, too! For M. Gaston! What are you thinking of, you varlet? Hold it up — so — What's this written at the bottom? My spectacles — Why, what what on earth — Géraldine! What's this? — married? why the girl died at Mme. de Bézier's. Who has had the insolence to do this? Speak, man, can't you?" shrieked the Baron, choking with fury.

The servant stared at him, astounded into silence.

"Do you not hear me? Go this instant and ask where this — this — audacious lie came from. Go, you rascal," cried M. de Farnoux, with a threatening gesture.

Georges ran off at full speed', leaving the Baron to con-

template the picture, under which was written very clearly these amazing words: — "Géraldine Le Marchand, born De Farnoux, married 18—, died 18—."

Georges burst into the kitchen, and found the messenger, a Farnousien lad, in full talk with the women-servants.

"I say, my boy, who sent you here to send our master out of his senses?"

"Some one who can steal all your senses if she chooses, that is, if you have any," said the boy with a grin. "The fada, old Mlle. Le Marchand."

"She has fada'd the Baron, then. He had hardly set eyes on the picture when he flew at me in such a rage that I thought he would skin me!"

"That would be as profitable as skinning an egg!" laughed Jeanette the cook. "I'll bewitch M. le Baron any day you like, if going into a rage is a proof of it. Waste an onion, throw a *visé* (vine-bough) too much on the fire, and you'll see."

"Bah! it was not like that. He was purple with anger, and spoke — why, I no more dared laugh — it might have been Mademoiselle herself as you say she is, at her worst, Nina. I can't stay, or he will be after me."

"Nobody wants you, chatterer!"

"As the pie said to the parrot," observed Nina, who was Georges' special ally.

Georges found M. de Farnoux reflecting before the portrait. He had cooled down, but looked greatly agitated. "Le Marchand!" he repeated. "The woman is at Farnoux, then?"

"M. le Baron may have noticed her last Sunday in the chapel; a large woman, near the door, and her niece Mlle. Denise, whose portrait that seems to be."

"The portrait is nothing to you, you impudent fellow,"

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said the Baron, very angrily, and stepping forward as if to hide it — then suddenly recollecting that the man could not read — "Pish! look if you like; whose likeness did you say it was?"

"Excuse me, monsieur, I thought it was Misé Denise, Misé Marchand's niece. She is an heiress, they say; she has at least 60,000 francs; some say 100,000; a fine dowry, is it not? and she is so proud and so fêted that she has refused every *parti* in Farnoux."

"100,000 francs!" murmured the Baron. "Diable! a dowry indeed for Farnoux! It cannot be the same; they were poor as church rats. Yet — And who is there to tell one? Who is this Misé Marchand, Georges, do you know?"

"A stranger, M. le Baron; she came from the north five or six years ago, and lately a niece has arrived, an orphan, they say. They are Protestants, and rich, though the aunt has the mania of seeming poor, but if she chose —"

"Enough, enough, Georges," interrupted his master, perhaps afraid lest these remarks should come too home. "And why has she sent me this picture?"

"Do I know, monsieur?" said the man, looking at his master's troubled face with undisguised wonder.

"I do not wish to hear any more gossip; these Le Marchands are nothing to me," said the Baron, with a sudden resumption of dignity. "I will settle it all; it is a mistake, altogether a mistake."

"Certainly, monsieur."

M. de Farnoux looked again at the picture. There was that inscription which must mean something; which might mean so much. He shifted his posture uneasily and thought. In spite of his first furious incredulity, a thought had slipped into his mind, while he was waiting for Georges' return — a suspicion that it was just possible he did not know all the

history of his family, and that if one of his family had indeed so infinitely forgotten herself as to make a *mésalliance*, Mlle. de Farnoux might not have informed him of it. He knew how well she could keep a secret. For a moment the thought of asking an explanation from her suggested itself, but his dread of facing her made him speedily reject it. "Bah!" said he, in excuse to himself; "either she has forgotten it— I wish she did forget a little more — or it would incense her to recall it. Who else? — Ah, old Benoîte; BenoîteRoques; doubtless she was here when Géraldine died; she can testify to it. Georges — my hat!"

"M. le Baron will change his dress?" said Georges, much surprised, for M. de Farnoux, while he dressed in private at the Château as no respectable scarecrow would have done, yet never appeared abroad except in full toilette.

"You and your dress — Oh, ay, I forgot; make haste, then, you vagabond; this is the way you lose time, standing about as if every moment did not belong to your master! Be quick, I say. And, Georges — listen — there is no need to gossip about this foolish blunder to everybody — a portrait! —"

"I comprehend, M. le Baron."

"It is some time since I have given you anything, Georges."

"It is monsieur."

"There is — let me see — you are a faithful servant, George —"

"I serve monsieur with all my power. Good heavens! he is quite mad; the fade has stolen his senses! Give anything away!" muttered Georges.

"I have a coat — not the old one, but one that I wore before that — I think I must give it to you, my good Georges. You know where it is hung. It is too good to give away, but - Well, you are an excellent servant; you may have it. You can sell it for a good deal."

"A thousand thanks, monsieur. M. le Baron is too good. More in his senses than I thought!" added poor Georges to himself.

"And you need say nothing about this absurd picture. If Mme. de Farnoux —"

"Parfaitement, M. le Baron."

It was a considerable walk for M. de Farnoux to the town. but he was so wrapped up in his thoughts, that he was descending the first steep, rocky street before he knew that his hurried steps had brought him half-way. The poorest of the Farnousiens alone dwelt in this part of the town; rags and nets were suspended to dry overhead, and a goat or donkey sometimes looked from the house-door, amid the swarming children, their playmates. A beggar addressed the Baron by name, in a doleful whine. M. de Farnoux looked round. roused by the appeal to his pocket, saw himself observed by the women and children at the doors, and felt that as Seigneur of Farnoux he was bound to give, however economy remonstrated. He laid a silver-piece in the outstretched hand, and went on with a groan, but moderately consoled by the benediction invoked upon him. Old Benoîte lived lower down, with her son-in-law. She was as usual sitting at her door, singing and spinning. She rose with much respect on seeing the Baron, and thus recalled him to a sense of what he had entirely forgotten in his perturbation, namely, his affability in visiting his old servant.

"Good-day, my poor Benoîte; 1 am glad to see you can work still; you make many a penny, I have no doubt," said he amicably, and naturally desirous to prevent false hopes that he was going to give her anything.

"Yes, M. le Baron, a penny here and a penny there,

enough to buy my cup of cocoa without being a burden to any one, though a few more would not come amiss. And I have my little school; the children come to me to learn the *croix* (alphabet), and I keep them out of harm; that's what their mothers think most of," added she, brandishing her distaff, as if it helped sometimes to keep order with a blow or two.

"What do the bonnes sœurs say to your teaching?"

"Oh, they do not care; they like to have the children when they are old enough to have consciences, but as for babies like mine — bah! To-day is a holiday; my daughter is helping at Mme. Caron's *lessive* (wash), and the children are gone to pick up a few fir-cones. All helps."

"And your son-in-law is always in good work?"

"Not a better workman anywhere, M. le Baron, but he is always at the tavern; he loves it better than his *chez-lui*!"

"Wrong, very wrong," replied M. de Farnoux, considering how he should bring the conversation round to the subject that interested him. "You have had troubles, my poor woman?"

"Ah, monsieur, we all have troubles, and I certainly had mine by lap-fulls while my poor defunct husband lived, but Heaven is very merciful, M. le Baron; you know he died from a blow he got in a quarrel, and since then I have done well enough. He beat me many times before his death; it was his right, as he often said. When he spoke so kindly, and hardly swore at me at all, I knew he would die," said Benoîte, putting her apron to her eyes. "And I always fear he had something on his mind. I said to him: 'If confession does not ease you, tell me all, mon ami, relieve your heart; you know I can think no worse of you than I do,' but he would not, and he died. It is all for the best, and I believe he is happy." "It is long past, my poor Benoîte, and you did not see much of him, for soon after your marriage you returned to live at the Château."

"Oh, monsieur, I only left you to marry, and I soon found I had better go to service again."

"And then you left us again, I know not why."

"Oh, my children required me," said Benoîte, after a glance had assured her that the Baron really did not know or care for the cause of her dismissal.

"Let me see — that was seventeen years ago?"

"Yes. M. le Baron was away."

"Ah, true. It was before my sister Géraldine's death."

Benoîte shot a swift, keen look at him. "After, monsieur. She has been longer dead than that."

"So she has — these twenty years. As you say, I was away," said the Baron, entering and sitting down on a barrel in the large bare room, like a cellar above ground, but in nothing but his position did he resemble a Bacchus, for anxiety and emotion made him look even more withered, pinched, and miserly, in spite of his careful costume, than ever.

"I have never heard any particulars of that sad time," said he, tapping his cane on the ground. "I feared to distress Mademoiselle by recalling it, but you can tell me what I want to know."

"And what does M. le Baron want to know?" asked the old woman, turning in the door-way, so as to face him.

"Were you with the poor girl when she died?"

"Assuredly. She was on a visit to her aunt and godmother, Mme. de Béziers, now dead also. A fever took her — pouf! — she was gone like a spark. Mademoiselle could hardly arrive in time to see her die."

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"Poor child!" said the Baron, with a sigh of regret and relief. He had loved this sister as much as it was in his nature to love anything. "That suffices, Benoîte, I thank you. If I can possibly show my gratitude — for I know you were kind to my poor sister — I will. Certainly, I will."

"Thanks, dear monsieur."

"I fear it must be at some future time," he added, his gratitude cooling as his fears subsided. "I know of no immediate way of serving you."

"Oh, monsieur, when rich folks have the will -"

"Whew! — rich! Those who are called rich, have so many claims upon them, that they are the truly poor!" said M. de Farnoux, withdrawing his hand empty from his pocket. "I wish I could see how to assist you better. Your grandchildren are most welcome to pick up fir-cones in my wood, for instance — fir-cones are most useful, and I have them carefully gathered for our own burning — indeed, I wish we had more, but still your grandchildren —"

Old Benoîte looked up at him with so merry and significant a twinkle in her eyes, that he fairly blushed.

"Nobody can imagine what the rank of a man like myself costs him," said he peevishly. "If I meet a beggar, I must give him a dole, because I am the châtelain. If some temple at the other end of France wants repairing, the case is brought before me, and I must give again and again, because we are the De Farnoux. It is absurd. But old servants are different, Benoîte, and therefore if I can really aid you —"

"I need nothing, M. le Baron. A thousand thanks for your generosity."

He was about to go, when the recollection of how strangely clear and positive the inscription under the likeness had been, crossed his mind. "Benoîte!" said he, turning sharply, "have you told me the truth?"

"Does M. le Baron doubt it?" she asked, so taken by surprise that she changed countenance a little, though she answered readily.

"I do. I believe you know more than you have said. There can be no secrets which I, the head of the family, ought not to know."

"If monsieur does not believe me, let him ask Mademoiselle."

"Mademoiselle referred me to you," said M. de Farnoux, without hesitation. Benoîte looked perplexed. "If — if Mademoiselle said so, doubtless she explained what I was to mention."

"The truth, whatever that is. I don't believe a word you have been saying," said the Baron hastily. "You are in some infamous plot to conceal what I ought to know. Now that I am come home there is no master in Farnoux but I; and I must hear whatever it concerns my honour I should know."

"Cest bien," said Benoîte, slowly, her respect for the actual head of the family whom she had served evidently at war with her unconscious habit of considering MIle. de Farnoux as its real chief. "If M. le Baron orders me to speak, I ought, no doubt; and he must excuse me to Mademoiselle if she hears of it. What does monsieur wish me to say?"

"When did you see Géraldine last?"

"On a May morning, between the light and the dark. I was going back to the Château, after nursing my son, who was ill, all night, and there was she coming into the town, but not alone, monsieur."

"Antoine Le Marchand?"

"She nodded. The Baron's tremulous hand closed hard,

and he uttered an oath between his teeth. "Could you not stop them?"

"And how? Call the mayor and the police, and tell all the town? I did what I could, you may be sure; I almost flew to the château; it was grey dawn still when I got there. Ah. if I could run like that now! Mademoiselle was not up; Géraldine must have passed through her room to get out. I told Mademoiselle what I had seen; she sprang from her bed like a mad woman, and threw open Géraldine's door. Empty room, silence when she called! And then she said 'Too late!' and sat down, looking as if death had got hold of her. Presently she asked if any one had seen them. I said nobody would be stirring at that hour, and that I had heard Antoine and his sister were to leave Farnoux that day. 'Ay,' said she, and thought again; then she got up, and took hold of my arms, hard, and whispered, 'We will say she is dead. She is dead to us all. No one will know if we keep our counsel!" "

"How did you deceive the servants?" asked M. de Farnoux, who had listened in rapt attention.

"She and I settled that we should give out that Géraldine had gone away very early with me to Mme. de Béziers. They wondered, but every one knew that Géraldine was obstinate about her marriage, and they thought that Mademoiselle had sent her away till she should be reasonable. I went away to some friends of mine at Carcaran, and wrote a letter to Mademoiselle, who said her sister was ill, and set off to see her; but she would not take any one with her, lest they should catch the fever, she said. It all turned out just as we had planned; there was some talk, but no one ever knew how it really was."

"Run away with the secretary! Peste! Where did he

find impudence enough to think of it? A Demoiselle de Farnoux!"

Old Benoîte shrugged her shoulders.

"Disgrace us in this way! I will never hear her name again. You and my sister did right, Benoîte, perfectly right, just as I should have done myself. But," added M de Farnoux, with a start, — "She turned you off, did she not? sent you away, eh?"

"True, monsieur. Mademoiselle was easily offended, and never forgave, you know."

"What imprudence! You behaved excellently, my poor Benoîte; you might have revenged yourself by telling this wretched affair to all Farnoux!"

"M. le Baron has been a long time away," said Benoîte, with a shade of contempt. "I do not know what they do in the places where he has been; but we Farnousiens would scorn to tell the secrets of a family we had served."

"What is to be done now?" said the Baron, on whom the reproof was quite wasted. "Here is a disgraceful, shameful affair, which one believed dead and buried, come to life again! No knowing what may get about next! The sister of the scoundrel in the very place, and he too, for aught I know!"

"Antoine is dead, Monsieur, but Misé Marchand has been here some years, and now her niece is come, as I told Mademoiselle a while ago."

"Told my sister! You should have told me, Benoîte," said the Baron, sharply. "It was very well to refer everything to her in my absence, when of course she acted for me; but now I am returned it is a different thing. Besides, she could hardly understand — eh?"

"Pardon, M. le Baron; when I said that as soon as Misé

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Denise married it would be known who her mother was, Mademoiselle was as awake as a wild cat."

"Good heavens! I never thought of that! certificates, and I don't know what, will be produced! What am I to do? I must see that woman; yet if I go to her all the town will know; and if I send for her, who knows whether she will come? Those Le Marchands are as obstinate as bull-dogs; I have even known old Jérome *tenir tête* against my father himself! What can I do?"

Benoîte waited respectfully, without proffering any advice. She had a look of sly amusement, as if she enjoyed her master's perplexity.

"You know the whole business; cannot you suggest something?" he asked, at last, his condescension changed into a testy helplessness.

"I do not know, M. le Baron; we poor folks cannot judge for great people. *Ma foi*, if Mademoiselle had been half as long in settling what to do, all Farnoux would have known the story," she added to herself.

"There is the girl, too -"

"The niece of M. le Baron? -"

"A Le Marchand my niece! Benoîte you strangely forget yourself!"

"Pardon, M. le Baron, only since she is Mlle. Géraldine's daughter ---"

"Tonnerre! so she is!" said the Baron, at his wits' end. "I wish mother and daughter had never been born! I must go and see that annoying, impudent woman, and that alone is enough to set all Farnoux talking."

So saying, and with scant courtesy to old Benoîte, the Baron departed. She watched him until he disappeared round one of the abrupt angles of the steep descent, muttering as she lost sight of him, "Ay, ay! hide a secret as deep

as one will, when the time is ready it springs up again. Mademoiselle buried this one, and set her foot on it; but it has grown and come up to the light; and now M. le Baron thinks he can pluck it up and make an end of it; but what Mademoiselle could not do, M. le Baron will find hard to accomplish — and, after all, the girl is Mlle. Géraldine's daughter."

CHAPTER XVII.

"ONE's notary would be the right person to send," mused M. de Farnoux, as he went with slow steps towards Maison Rocca; "but plague take it! old Richer is just dead, and this is not an affair to trust to a young man like his son; a fellow. too, who let that fine slip, out of sheer stupidity, when old Mazel's lease was renewed! I have no opinion of that young man; indeed, I must take the liberty of looking on him as a rogue. Now these Le Marchands mean mischief, or why that picture? I must make it worth their while to leave the place quietly. Surely this person will have the grace to be ashamed of the part her rascally brother played." Here he recollected, with some trepidation, that unless much changed, she was likely to be a formidable enemy, and he considered deeply how to combine persuasive affability with a due weight of displeasure. Arrived at Maison Rocca, he paused to reflect again in the hall. A girl was coming in from the garden, laden with jessamine. M. de Farnoux, whatever his preoccupations, was always anxious to see a new female face, for the chance of its being pretty. He seized the occasion, and, taking off his hat, said, "May I beg you to tell me on what floor Mlle. Le Marchand lives?"

A startling answer awaited him in the dark-eyed face turned towards him, and a voice whose every tone seemed familiar. "My aunt, monsieur? On the *cinquième*. I will show you the way."

"Many thanks," said M. de Farnoux, following her. "Peste! the very face! the very voice!"

And Denise, on her side, had instantly recognised him, having marked him in the chapel with her clear, observant glance. She knew nothing of the picture's visit to the Château, but she felt that this visit portended serious things. "M. le Baron de Farnoux!" she announced, opening her aunt's door, and withdrawing as soon as he had entered, conscious that a discussion was impending in which she was too nearly concerned to be present. She went down into the cloisters, and sat there in suspense. She had not known till now how fast and thick hearts can beat. " Πy va de ma vie!" she murmured. "How still all is! how quiet! one would think there were no such things as hopes and fears in the world! What are they saying up-stairs?"

Mlle. Le Marchand rose to confront her visitor. She waited for him to begin the combat, keeping her own forces in reserve. He hemmed, fidgeted, and at last said severely, "You sent me a portrait, madame; may I ask with what object?"

"It is simple as bonjour! Merely to recall a little family event to M. le Baron's memory, in case he should have forgotten it."

"There are things which are better forgotten," said M. de Farnoux, not without dignity.

"Only, unfortunately, these are exactly what cannot be forgotten, sir. And I thought it only a mark of proper respect to inform M. de Farnoux, should I have an opportunity, that he possesses a niece."

"You must pardon me, madame," he said, hastily, "if I tell you that Mile. Denise Le Marchand cannot be received

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by us in that character. What cannot be forgotten, at least need not be proclaimed. This unhappy — *enlèvement* — has never been known; let it remain a secret. My absence may make me a little to blame; had I been at home it could never have happened.

"I don't know; *I* was at home, and I'm sure no one could have desired more heartily than I that it should not have 'happened,' as you say. Yet it did!"

"I am convinced already that mademoiselle was no partner in M. Antoine's treachery."

"Excuse me, monsieur, there was no treachery, Géraldine was of age; you could not have hindered her from marrying one of your grooms, had she chosen. She might have walked out of the Château on Antoine's arm, and no one could have stayed her; but Mademoiselle had cowed them both for years, and they never thought of open resistance. As it was, she married an honest man who loved her; and, let me tell you, her fate was a thousand times better than that of Félise!"

"Madame, our family concerns are our own, and --"

"A thousand times better, I tell you! No one ever breathed on Géraldine's fair name, and yours as being hers! no one could say she renounced the honoured religion of her forefathers, or open their mouths about her husband! They could only say that she refused an old reprobate marquis, whom she detested, and took an humble bourgeois, who paid dearly for the honour of the alliance. We bought that honour with a noble price, monsieur; a price, you may say, paid out of our hearts' blood!"

"She is dead?" said M. de Farnoux, after a pause, for the passion with which Mlle. Le Marchand spoke completely bore him down, and swept away all that he had planned to say. "She is."

"Of what did she die?"

"Of want."

He made a start and gesture. "Of want!" she repeated. "We lived as we could for some years; then we did not live at all. There were days — not few — when not one of us but the child broke our fast. Such things are, M. le Baron. Antoine died first. Man and beast can go a long way after they are tired, but if they once fall it's a hard matter to get them up again. Then she went."

"Of want! of want! My sister!"

"Exactly, M. le Baron. I trust Mlle. de Farnoux will be contented when she hears this."

"You should have appealed to us."

"Apparently you have forgotten that we did. Géraldine wrote to Mademoiselle. This was her answer. I have kept it."

Unlocking a desk, she took out an old letter, torn half across. M. de Farnoux's passive hand received it; then he suddenly sat down and covered his face.

"You see we explated our offence in marrying into a noble family, M. le Baron; if it be possible to explate such an offence."

"I was from home. I give you my word I never heard or knew of this!"

"Well," said his grim antagonist, a little softened by his distress, "I certainly have heard Géraldine say, 'If my brother had been at home I should have had a friend;' and I believe it is true; though no doubt you would have helped to hunt her into that infamous marriage, and shown that her duty to her noble family required it."

As he recovered in some measure from the shock of what he had heard, M. de Farnoux's thoughts returned to their

former channel. He looked round as if to see something that might assist him in proving to Mlle. Le Marchand that it was her duty to bury the affair in silence. He only met the eye of her grey parrot, who was surveying him with an evil-minded aspect.

"Of want! What could one expect!" said he, quite innocent of wishing to give offence. To M. de Farnoux his secretary appeared much in the same light as did her footman to a grande dame, who answered to her friend's reproach for allowing him to be present during her toilette, "Comment! est-ce que tu appelles ça un homme?" Had Géraldine married Antoine to save her life, it would hardly have seemed pardonable to her aristocratic brother; and to have deliberately wedded poverty, was indeed degrading. MIle. Le Marchand deigned no reply. She beat her fingers slowly on the table by which she had now seated herself, and waited for him to continue.

After a long pause he said, "You have been but a few years returned, mademoiselle? Doubtless, you had a strong motive for returning?"

"Farnoux is my birth-place."

"Ah, true — but — where had you been living, may I ask? In London. Ah — being absent, it seems to me there were weighty reasons — every reason —"

"For what, M. le Baron? For returning sooner?"

"On the contrary! And now that your niece has arrived, old stories, that had else never been heard of, will get abroad. Surely, any place of residence had been better than Farnoux?"

"I don't see it. There are no old stories that I am ashamed of, and I don't see that I am bound to deny myself the satisfaction — such as it is — of living in my old home, to satisfy the squeamishness of a noble family. Let them go their way; mine will not cross it. I am well contented to be an old bourgoise; I have no reason to admire what I know of aristocrats."

"There is not a more respectable family than yours in all Farnoux, mademoiselle. Do not imagine I question it. But you comprehend that I do not wish my family affairs to amuse the world. I am sure of your discretion, of your proper feeling towards us —"

"A fig for proper feeling," said Mile. Le Marchand, irreverently. "I don't know what you are driving at."

"I am sure of your admirable discretion," repeated the Baron, a little startled out of his bland condescension, and at a loss how to express with politeness the horror which he felt at the idea that the *mésalliance* between his sister and his *intendant* might become known. "But if Mlle. Denise marries here, naturally her — her mother's name would become known."

"Does M. le Baron require his niece to remain single, in order to preserve his family secrets?"

"No, no, my excellent friend; but she should marry elsewhere. I might find her a good *parti;* I admit that this is, in a measure, my affair; between ourselves I am ready to admit it."

"One can say anything in a *tête-à-tête*," observed Mile. Le Marchand.

"I would, if necessary — but I hear she is an heiress? — add to her dowry."

"A little more money never comes amiss, does it, my Cocotte? Fie! what a screech! You startled M. le Baron, Cocotte! How much would you add, sir?"

"Why — at this moment I can hardly say. But if we arrange our conditions, I would — I would take care you were satisfied. — Cost what it would!" added he to himself,

family pride for the moment surmounting every other feeling. *Peste* take that bird! whenever I look up it has its eye upon me! Yes, I pass my word you should be contented, mademoiselle."

"You are too kind. Denise has already a pretty fortune; all my Norman estate will be hers, and Mrs. Lisle, who adopted her, left her ten thousand pounds."

"What!" cried M. de Farnoux.

"Ten thousand pounds, available at any moment. Fairly good, eh? I am so overweighted by all this money, that at present I think I shall stay here with my niece. Time will show her destiny; I foresee many possibilities. I think if you were to consider the affair a little more, the next time we meet our discussion would run on wheels. For the moment we seem to have finished."

"You will at all events think of what I have said?"

"And you will think of what I have said, M. le Baron. No, I don't want that letter; it belongs to your archives; a thousand good deeds to Géraldine's child would not blot out that page of them. No, not if instead of offering her a dowry of hush-money to carry her out of sight and hearing, you made her heiress of Farnoux, and married her to your nephew Gaston! Don't talk to me of your family honour out on it, and the pride which sacrificed Félise, and turned a deaf ear to Géraldine, when she claimed to be heard from the depths where she was perishing! I have my honour too, and my pride; I never cringed, or lied, or begged, in my life, and I am not ashamed to look any one in the face. But that goes for nothing with you nobles, while there is no 'De' before my name. Pouf! what is there any of you could do for me if you would? Nothing! Good day, then. If you want me, I am here, but insult me no more with your offers. Make amends to Géraldine's child if you please;

that might bring some luck to the Château, and regards yourself. Adieu, M. le Baron!"

And M. de Farnoux found the door opened for him, and shut so suddenly, that he had hardly time to know how he got outside.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"This all comes of letting a girl remain unmarried after she is out of her teens!" was the reflection of M. de Farnoux, as he departed. "Why could not Eleanor have found her a husband before! Félise, poor thing, was not fortunate; but after all, a girl once married — the rest concerns the husband. We ought to have convents like the Papists, and then one would know what to do with unmarried women. Poor Géraldine! so she used to speak of me! I dare say it was Eleanor's fault that she ran away; shut up with Eleanor — hem! — [and I was away. All goes wrong when the master's eye is wanting."

M. de Farnoux had contrived to forget that where Mile. de Farnoux had been, there was no master but herself.

"That virago!" continued he, thinking of Mlle. Le Marchand, "worse than a harem of wives! I really think she might have been a match for Eleanor. An old Jacobin, without a grain of right feeling. What a day I have passed! and all owing to Eleanor's mismanagement; and so I should certainly tell her plainly, only it would be cruel in her present state."

He little knew, as he thus valiantly discoursed with himself, that an opportunity of showing his courage was awaiting him. Had he known it, instead of returning home, he would have probably fled far enough from the Château. He

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mounted the toilsome path wearily, looking an older man than when he descended it so hastily in the morning.

It had been a day of events at the Château. Mme. de Farnoux was pondering over a letter from a brother who had made a very fair fortune at Marseilles - (Farnoux would have called the fortune "colossal") - by speculating in oils, wines, and lemons. He had written to propose his son as a candidate for the hand of the pretty Lucile. Mme. de Farnoux knew wherefore he desired this penniless niece as a daughter-in-law. Young Auguste had already accumulated debts to the amount of many thousand francs; had spent the year in Paris, where he had been sent to study, in acquiring every kind of knowledge that was not desirable, and none that was desirable; and, since his father had ordered him home, had continued a career so far from creditable, that at last M. Luchon had determined he should marry, believing that this would assuredly reform him. But the son did not wish to be reformed. Life was so agreeable already; why burden himself with the yoke of matrimony? No one whom M. Luchon selected could fascinate this burdensome son, whose conduct scandalized the father as much as if it had not been his own early history over again. At last, in his despair at finding his son so vigorously chasser de race, he thought of Lucile, whose beauty had once charmed her cousin, but M. Luchon took prompt measures then to prevent this vehement admiration from going any further. Now he had altered his mind.

Mme. de Farnoux knew all this. She did not hesitate because her nephew was a very pillar of support to the tavern, a coarse and violent man, and a gambler. She quite believed, like her brother, that some day he would settle down into a keen man of business, and double the fortune he would inherit. She would not have hesitated one moment to give

him her only child, and confide to him the future of an innocent girl of seventeen; but there was a weight in the other scale. She had been ambitious from her earliest days, ever since her school experiences taught her the value of a title in the eyes of the world. One of her schoolfellows had married nobly, and taken the first opportunity of slighting her late particular friend, Mlle. Luchon, who never forgot it, looked at herself in the glass, and resolved that her beauty should make her at least a marquise. But M. Gautier appeared, backed by her parents' authority. She obeyed, and was rewarded by early widowhood. M. Gautier died poor, and she was thankful to find a home with a brother, a prosperous notary in Paris. M. de Farnoux was then at Paris too, very poor, very fond of cards, and very glad to get a dinner, whenever he could, without paying for it. He happened to make the acquaintance of M. Emile Luchon, and received important assistance from him in the business which had brought him to Paris. The Baron did not offer any payment, but was very affable towards him and his handsome sister, Mme. Gautier, who was enraptured at the approach of this noble prey within reach of her net. However, the idea of marrying her would never have entered his aristocratic brain, had not fortune aided and abetted her designs. M. de Farnoux had no luck at cards, yet could never keep his hands off them. M. Luchon was equally fond of them, but a great deal more fortunate, and in a respectful way he won a good deal from his noble client. He also lent him various sums from time to time, which were never repaid. This state of things suited neither the purse nor honour of the Baron, and he was quite grateful when Mme. Gautier came to the rescue. M. Luchon was thinking of getting married, and wanted to be quit of his sister and her child, and was contented to let the debts rest on the condition of her marriage

with the Baron. She contrived to have M. de Farnoux informed of it; he shrank a good deal from the prospect, but finally gave in, and when she was exulting in her future rank, did not think it necessary to inform her he should not dare to take her to Farnoux. For there, at that time, reigned his terrible sister.

The alliance would not, after all, have been very scandalous, for the Luchons were well known and respected; and no one really believed that Mme. de Farnoux had been a marchande de modes, only he was so ashamed of the marriage himself that every one took their tone from him. When he brought her home at last, after years of needy existence in Paris, the poor woman found herself quite isolated. The aristocratic circle that she pined to enter was closed against her. No one but herself knew what she imagined that fairyland to be like; it was the Paradise from which she was excluded, and nothing could have convinced her that, after all, it was a very dull circle indeed, not half as gay and diverting as the good bourgeoise set whom she had known at Paris. Her title was, however, some compensation to her; it even almost made up for the monotonous life of Château Farnoux, and the society of a miserly husband. And as he was fast growing old, while she was comparatively young, her mirror lent her philosophy to wait patiently till she could return to Paris free, and accompanied by a noble son-in-law. When, in the early days of her second marriage, she was longing for her Provençal castle, she had been far-sighted enough to make Gaston very welcome at all times. The noble nephew-in-law was a visible proof that she too was now noble; and if he would but marry Lucile, the name of Gautier would become altogether extinct. Besides, she really was delighted to make any one comfortable and happy, if it did not inconvenience herself.

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Everybody allowed her to be a very good-natured woman. Gaston was well pleased to have some resort, where every one received him warmly. Lucile was then a charming little child; and he was very affectionate and courteous to his new aunt. After his school-days, he remained in Paris to study law, not with a view to living by it, but as a part of his education. The extent of his father's debts was not yet known. Thus Lucile had been devoted to Gaston from childhood, and looked on his comings and goings as the great events of her life. He too loved Lucile as deeply as Mme. de Farnoux could wish; all the deeper that it was in defiance of his family pride and the prejudices of his caste. But by-and-by it appeared that his father had contrived, before his death, to spend every sou that he possessed. Consequently Gaston found himself dependent on his uncle, who gave him to understand that Lucile was no wife for him. There was a sort of armed truce between them on this matter; both avoided touching on it. Mme. de Farnoux did not like this delay; Gaston was not even distinctly pledged to Lucile, and she pondered much on M. Luchon's offer. Finally she determined to wait awhile ere she replied to it. and keep the matter secret, lest Gaston's pride should start at the idea of a plebeian rival in his path.

Lucile, all unconscious that her fate was trembling in the balance, was full of other anxieties. Georges had not felt himself so bound to discretion by his master's liberality, as not to tell the story of the picture to his fellow-servants. None had lived long enough at the Château to recollect that a Le Marchand had once been the Farnoux *intendant*; all they comprehended was that this mysterious portrait had thrown their master into an unprecedented state of agitation, and caused him to set off instantly for the town. He had meant to lock his door, but in his hurry he did not observe

that the bolt had shot without acting as a fastening. Georges did not think it needful to make any remark, and very soon after his master was seen to have left the Château, all the domestics were in the library, examining and discussing the portrait with lively interest; but, as none could read, they only saw that there was an inscription which might clear up all their perplexities, could they but decipher it. Nina suggested that Lucile would tell them what it meant; the proposal was hailed with acclamations, but presently she returned crest-fallen. Mlle. Lucile said she dared not venture into the Baron's library without his leave; and, moreover, Mlle. de Farnoux was ringing her bell, and it must be attended to. "And if she asks me what news there is today, I shall have something to tell her," said she. "I can't imagine what makes her always asking that now-a-days as if there ever were any news in this old place up in the skies!"

Though Lucile had refused Nina's solicitations, she had a perilous longing to see the likeness of the young girl, whom, Marcellin Duval said, Gaston had admired. For the servants all thought the portrait meant for Denise. Lucile had often pondered about her lately, wished she had observed her more narrowly, and wondered why Gaston never mentioned her. And why was this likeness come here? She waited till the servants had gone their ways, and then, with a beating heart, stole into the library, where she had never been before. Fearing lest the Baron should return and find her, she listened to each noise like a startled fawn, but when she saw the portrait she forgot her terrors in earnest contemplation. The inscription simply bewildered her; she had never heard of Géraldine, and was above all occupied in studying the face which she took to be that of Denise, though its sad, wistful expression was most unlike the serene

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thoughtfulness of Denise's countenance. The sound of steps behind her frightened her out of her reverie. She looked round, with guilty alarm, and saw, not the stooping, withered form of the Baron, but the tall figure of one whose very name always scared her — Mile. de Farnoux.

Never before had Lucile beheld her; never would she even have had courage to pass her bed-room door. She held Mlle. de Farnoux in childish awe, regarding her, whether as insane or imbecile, with the greatest terror, feeling every room in the Château haunted by her, and trembling in her bed at night when she thought of her. And now she, all alone, found herself in this awful presence. She shrank to one side, her hands pressed together, her eyes wide open with alarm, gazing at the object of her fears, as she came in with slow, difficult steps, leaning on her stick. Her face was flushed with the exertion of what was to her a long and toilsome journey, from her distant part of the Château, and there was a fierce light in the eyes, that looked straight before her, never glancing right or left. She paid no attention to the terrified girl, but came opposite the portrait, and stood looking down from her stately height upon it. She knew well enough for whom it was intended. Obscured as her intelligence was on things of the present, there were those in the past on which it was as vivid as ever. Her looks grew so inexorably fierce, that the excess of Lucile's terror was more than excusable.

"So you have brought back your shame from the grave!" said she, as if she were challenging a living being.

Her voice completed Lucile's consternation. With a shriek, snatching courage from despair, she flew past Mlle. de Farnoux, darted out of the room like a bird, not even seeing the Baron, who was just returned, and struggled wildly when some one caught her, and demanded what had frightened her.

"Lucile! What is it? Do you not know me?"

"O, Gaston! is it you? is it you? Oh, take care of me!" "What has frightened you?"

"Oh," she said, now venturing to raise her face from his breast, as if his voice had full assurance of protection in it, "I am not afraid now."

"So it seems, sweet one! Sit down, you cannot stand. Who has dared to alarm you in this way?"

"Not here. I cannot stay here. Oh, she might come!" and she started up and struggled again to escape.

"No one can hurt you where I am. Tell me what all this means."

"Yes...O, Gaston! I thought she never left her room! How shall I ever live in the Château now? Oh, never go away, cousin, or take me with you!"

"I have not heard what alarmed you?" he said, with his brief smile.

"She - Mlle. de Farnoux - came - where I was."

"My aunt? Out of her apartment?"

"I thought — O, Gaston! if you knew what I felt when I turned round and saw her there!"

"Foolish child!" he said, in the tone of tenderness which his voice always took in speaking to her, "do you think that any one belonging to me would harm you?"

"I wish she were not your aunt, Gaston! I fear her so much, and I do not like fearing any one you care for. Can you really love her?"

"You are needlessly afraid. You fancy her insane, but she is not. At times she is almost imbecile, which is a very different thing. There are strange flashes of intelligence; for the time she seems completely herself, but I notice that

they leave her doubly weak and apathetic afterwards. The servants are foolishly afraid of her at such times."

"Oh, I have heard such stories of her temper! Of things she did and said —"

"Yes, she has left an awful impression on her acquaintances; but where could you have heard such tales? These servants are new-comers."

"Oh, they have heard such things from people in the town — And even now Nina hardly dares come near her, when she is angry!"

"The old temper breaks out at times, but I can always calm her."

"Gaston, why do you care for her?"

"I am glad to have the power of cheering so sad an existence, and she loves me."

"But you know — she was so cruel to your mother!"

"We will let that rest, Lucile."

"O, Gaston! you are angry with me."

"Not in the least, but I cannot talk on that subject."

"You did once — don't you remember? that night when the wind sighed so, and you said it reminded you of the pine-woods sighing round La Pinède. And then you told me a great deal about your mother, but you never have since."

"A man may be in the mood, once in a way, to tell what he would have very little inclination to speak of at another time."

"Yes — but I cannot help thinking you must have liked me better that night than you do now, cousin. I should like to hear some more."

"You think you have only to say 'Play!' as the giant did to his magic harp, and the air you want will sound? Instead, tell me where you saw my aunt. I can perceive

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that you are not really re-assured. Will you not come with me and judge for yourself? I am sure you could please and enliven her, if you would try."

"Gaston! you are cruel! I dare not! Do not say I must go!"

"I have no right to say it. There is no need for tears."

"You are vexed! If you really say I must — I will try," she murmured, so like a docile frightened child, that he stooped and kissed her, just as he had done years before, when he was her tall cousin, and she little Lucile.

"Then I need not go? Ah, that is my own kind Gaston again!" cried she. "You are really not angry? Now, Gaston, have you been writing to-day?"

He smiled, and showed her a manuscript that he had laid down while talking.

"But you cannot hear it now, my child, for Mme. de Farnoux was asking for you."

"Then I must go, I suppose," said Lucile, with clouded looks. "I wonder she has not come to seek me."

But there was no need, for Mme. de Farnoux knew perfectly well where her daughter was. She had been in a room whose door was ajar, close by, during the whole conversation, feigning, lest some one should look in, to be occupied in arranging a great wardrobe. Gaston wasted much gratitude when he mentally thanked his aunt for trusting him so often with Lucile unwatched.

CHAPTER XIX.

The headlong flight of Lucile had startled M. de Farnoux into a conviction that she had been in his library. Yet the key was in his pocket. An exclamation of anger escaped him as he saw the open door. He hurried forward, then staggered like one who has had a sudden blow. For very good reasons he had a profound dread of his sister.

And there she was, seated, as if keeping watch and ward over the picture, whose sad eyes seemed to seek and follow the Baron.

"So! you are come at last!" said she hoarsely. "And where is the other?"

"What other?"

"Félise. We want her to make us complete. How comes this here?"

"I assure you, sister, I had nothing to do with it. It was sent unknown to me."

"Did you ever know anything that our honour required you should know?"

"If you had informed me of certain circumstances before," replied M. de Farnoux, divided between peevish vexation and habitual submission, "I should have better known how to act."

"Act! was there no fire to burn, no well down which to throw this thing? Act! Did you ever know how to act in your life?"

"If you will listen," said M. de Farnoux, quickly, "you will find that I have acted, and taken prompt measures to secure our secret being kept. I have seen that Mlle. Le Marchand —"

"Yes - well? - well?"

"She is not an easy person to deal with, but I represented my view of the affair strongly; I put it forcibly before her ———."

"I daresay. Go on."

The Baron winced under the utter contempt of her tone, but obeyed.

"I explained that she could not possibly be allowed to live in Farnoux; that I could not permit such a thing, and that it would also be for her advantage to go. Her niece there is a niece, Eleanor."

"I know it. I have seen her. Go on."

"Seen her?" began M. de Farnoux, but, alarmed by his sister's impatient gesture, he continued in haste. "The aunt is a very eccentric person; not so respectful as she certainly ought to be; but I think, Eleanor, I think she could not help feeling the force of what I said. I have no doubt she will go elsewhere, and in that case I have promised to add to the girl's dowry."

M. de Farnoux paused complacently, much pleased at having proved he could act readily and decisively, and awaited his sister's approbation.

"Well - well - what else?"

"What else?"

"Yes, yes, what else did you offer to buy her silence?"

"Offer? Why, I have explained to you. I argued with her, and offered to find the girl an honest bourgeois for a husband, say at Marseilles, who ---"

"I know you there!" said Mlle. de Farnoux, with a scorn that words cannot express. "I recognise your admirable expedients! Are you indeed such an utter fool as to believe that woman will accept such terms, when she holds us all in her power, and can dictate what she pleases?"

"What should I have done?" asked the Baron, peevishly.

"Done!" Offered her anything we posses — bade her take fortune, lands, anything, so long as she pledged herself to silence!"

"As for that, it would have made at least as much scandal to resign the Château to her, as anything she can say," said the Baron, with reason. "And however disgraceful an elopement may be, the man is dead, and Géraldine too ——."

"The girl!" cried Mile. de Farnoux. "She belongs to us — our own blood! Are we to have a new *mésalliance* there too? And, listen, not only will some low-born Farnousien boast of his alliance with the De Farnoux, but all the countryside will ring with the story how Mile. de Farnoux schemed and lied, to hide that her sister ran off with the steward! Such a discovery would be a thousand times worse now than if it had been made then!"

"They were married at Toulon," said the Baron, hurriedly.

"I know it, but I have reason to believe that in their haste the civil ceremony was never performed. They might look on it as a marriage, and that idiot of a pastor might do the same — who else would? He thought himself still in 'the Desert,' — poor man!"

"Are you sure of this?"

"Nearly so. In any case, think of the scandal! Think of what gossip would add, and how our neighbours would sneer at the Protestant family, which disgraced itself in *both* the daughters! Oh, if I could strangle them all — silence all their gibing tongues! If I had them here!"

"I am sure I am truly thankful 'they' — whoever they may be — are a long way off!" muttered the Baron, casting a look of consternation on his sister, who, however, had now sunk back exhausted, the fire in her eyes dying out.

"I wish you had let me know all this. I must say, too,

that a daughter of our house should not have been left to starve," he added presently, looking at the portrait with sorrow.

"She was dead to us from the moment she left this house. A little sooner, a little later could not matter."

"I don't think they would have said so . . . If I had been at home —"

"No doubt you would have managed admirably."

"I could not have managed worse," said M. de Farnoux stung into momentary courage. "Félise – Géraldine – you have not much to boast of, yourself."

He repented his sudden audacity, for she kindled in an instant.

"And where were you? Where were you, M. de Farnoux? Do you dare to reproach me, you for whom I sacrificed my future, my happiness? who caused me to be a desolate woman, instead of a happy wife! Do you remember there was one who loved me - loved me? gave me all his heart? Bah! you cannot understand what such words mean. My wedding-day was fixed, M. de Farnoux, when I learnt that you, absent in Paris, were about to contract a low marriage to pay your debts. You know if I hesitated. I gave him up; I could not tell a secret that touched my brother's honour. I sought you out, gave up my dowry to pay those debts, and you looked on, and left me to learn, too late, that you were already married! Since then - since then! Oh, what a life! I only saw him to say that we must part, and so we did, no reason given. He was angry, and we never met again. I watch, but he does not come."

The last words were spoken in the inward, imperfect accents that were habitual to her, as if she had returned to a familiar train of thought, and had forgotten all else. M. de Farnoux stood like a criminal, but rather in impatience than remorse. He had not force of mind enough to repent. He had always known what she had just said, and her passionate outpouring annoyed rather than touched him.

"All that you say is true," he answered at last; "but it is nothing to the present purpose. This girl — what do you propose doing with her?"

Mlle. de Farnoux must have had a mighty influence over him once, since even in her present state he deferred to her judgment.

"This Denise - Antoine's daughter," he added.

"Yes, I understand. Marry her to Gaston."

"To Gaston!"

"Yes, yes, what better can you do? Is not that the only way to bribe the aunt to silence, and extinguish the Le Marchand name?"

"A new mésalliance!"

"True. But a man raises his wife; gives her his own rank —"

"Very right," said the Baron, whose pride, terribly chafed by his own marriage, was unexpectedly soothed by this doctrine from his sister's lips.

"But will not all the world wonder? A De Farnoux! my heir!"

"Yes — talk! Oh, they will talk! But you said the girl had a dowry; was rich — some one said so; I don't recollect who. I cannot remember who spoke to me of Denise." She pressed her hands on her head with a perplexed, straining look, as if the thoughts refused to come. The strong will forced the enfeebled brain to do its work, however, for she went on: "I know — old Benoîte. She came to me one day, a long while ago — at least I think it was long; I have watched and waited ever since, and I saw the girl; she was like that," indicating the portrait. "A true De Farnoux. No Le Marchand about her. And I said she should marry Gaston."

"But the gossips -"

"She is rich, I tell you! Say she has double, treble, fourfold her dowry, whatever that may be. Is not that enough to explain any marriage? Better that Gaston should seem to raise a wife below himself to his own rank, than that all Farnoux should babble over that old story which I resolved should sleep in the grave. And it shall."

"'It shall!' — her old self! That was always the way!" thought M. de Farnoux. "I suppose it will be so now. It seems to me that she is more determined than ever. Only conceive what will become of me if this lasts! If she once begins to rule us all again, I shall go back to Paris before the week is out!"

CHAPTER XX.

The fête of the patron saint was a very important day at Farnoux. To do it due honour every house-wife cleansed her dwelling, scrubbed her pots and pans, and chased out all the spiders and insects which dwelt at other times in dark corners undisturbed! So thorough was this purification, that it was sometimes considered sufficient till the revolving year brought the fête day again. The fête began with a farandole, that singular southern dance of the whole unmarried population, sometimes grave, serious, and most elegant; sometimes turning into a kind of follow-my-leader, and dashing madly through the village; the mid-day repast followed; and then a ball under the broad-leafed plane-trees. So far the fête of Ste.-Dévote resembled that of any other southern saint, but the evening always ended with what was probably a remnant

of some ancient pagan custom; fires were kindled on the high ground of the Place de l'Enfer, which all the *gamins* delighted to nourish with combustibles; to say nothing of their graver elders, who, as they flung their contribution into the flames, uttered an old spell, that bade all the ill-luck of the year be consumed with it.

Ste.-Dévote, the patroness of Farnoux, was a local saint, unknown even a few miles further north, but much honoured in her native town, where a great many damsels were called after her, whose characters corresponded but ill to their edifying name. The *fête* fell in April. Thérézon came running in to remind Denise that it was come, and to ask whether she were going to the Place de l'Enfer at night to see the scene. Mile. Le Marchand had a friend whose windows looked on the Place, and readily agreed to take Denise there in the evening.

"Ah, what blessed things are *fête* days!" said Zon; "then one can amuse oneself a little. What day does mam'selle prefer? Easter is charming; all the world go into the country, and eat eggs and salad; then the Annunciation! Mam'selle, what a pity it is that Protestants do not believe in the blessed Virgin! We, what could we do without her! She comprehends all our wishes and troubles, for she is a woman like ourselves; one would not dare to mention anything very wrong to her, you know; not tell her things to make her blush; but one can say, 'Holy mother, I have sinned; I cannot tell you how; oh, be kind, obtain my pardon.' That is what I do."

The girl spoke with *naïve* faith. Denise replied, "If the servants are so kind, what must the Master be, Zon?"

"Ah, mam'selle! but one's heart should be as pure as lilies, to open it to Him!"

"You know the history of Mary Magdalene, Zon. She

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had no heart like a lily to bring; she had only tears. And how He received her!"

There was a thrill of such exceeding love and gratitude in the voice of Denise, so glad a light in her eyes, as if all the scene rose visibly before her, that Zon observed her in reverent silence for a moment, and then said, "Mam'selle is a saint herself, I believe. She is very young to be so *dévote*; yet it seems to make her very happy. Mam'selle, I sometimes think you see Paradise!"

Denise smiled and said, "If one could, we should find life very happy."

But she was beyond Thérézon now. "Mam'selle! surely one would think everything in the world gloomy and shabby! But I was forgetting the thing that I came to say. You know, doubtless, that each year we choose a lord of the sports — some one who is a favourite, and has some wit, you see! Only imagine, this year they have chosen Manoële, (not without opposition, mind you!) and think how proud I am! Of course I dance with him in the farandoulo — and it will be a mad one this year, I warrant you! Now I am so glad I am not married; after all, marriage is the beginning of slavery — and married people never dance in the farandoulo. How I hope we shall come this way, and enter this house that is a thing Mme. Rocca hates — we shall skip over benches and chairs —"

"Is that what you call dancing?"

"In the farandoulo. We all take hands, each with her partner, and whatever happens you must follow the leader, and never let go. Then there is the ball in the afternoon; every house is open, of course, and every one sitting at the doors talking to the passers-by; and friends come from a distance, and the gentry join in the dancing. Not so much as they used, however — indeed, many of our mothers say dancing does not befit modest girls. I say a modest girl can take care of herself. Mam'selle, to-day you must notice me; I shall wear the cross grandmother brought from La Pinède. She is to lend it to me."

"You will never be ready, Zon!"

"Bah! I have been to mass, and you do not suppose I shall do any work to-day? No, indeed, *daumassi*! Did you see the procession? the priests, and the crucifix, and the banners? Mme. Huard gave a banner last year, made out of a dress that she had only worn once or twice — a silk superb!"

From an early hour the streets had been full of people, and a general hum of laughter and mirth was abroad. All Farnoux seemed in the streets, or at their doors, and Denise was surprised to see the aristocracy of the town seated on chairs and benches before their houses, exchanging familiar nods and greetings with the passers-by. All distinction of rank seemed tacitly suspended; every one wore a gala dress, and even faces as acid as Mme. Rocca's seemed to grow agreeable. The whole population had cast care aside, and were enjoying themselves.

Mme. Pitre was to chaperone Denise to the Place in the afternoon, when the ball began. The hautboy, which had already done duty at the tail of the farandole, began again to pipe, reinforced by a violin, and their sounds gathered the crowd speedily into the Place in the lower town. Every bench was soon filled with spectators, and, before the dancing was organized, the young men stood laughing together, and making remarks on the clusters of country girls, in broad hats and short striped skirts, and the grisettes, in more pretentious, but far less picturesque costumes. Two or three crones, whose age quite precluded dancing, were selling bunches of flowers to the men, who offered them to

the women whom they chose for their partners, and a fire of jests was kept up between buyers and sellers, lads and lasses.

"Claude has a rose - here, Rosine, 'tis for you! - A bunch of ass's pepper (wild thyme) for Jean Blaise! - Here, Jacques, buy Marie la Béguine a little ne me touchez pas! -Come, old Sabre de Bois, buy a bit of arbre à perruque to cover your bald head, or the lasses will not dance with you!"

The violin screamed louder; the dancing began in earnest; some of the notables of the town had set the example, and others were not slow to follow. Marcellin Duval had been in the thick of the fun all day; he was among the first dancers, and having looked round in vain for Denise, speedily picked out the prettiest peasant girl, who luckily for him was anxious to pique a sullen lover, and let herself be whirled off before the young man could come forward. There was great laughter and joking among the bystanders, for the countless little dramas that went on seemed perfectly comprehended and shared in by the spectators. Marcellin was in his element, amusing and amused. He had induced Gaston to come with him, promising him a subject for his muse and a variety in his life. Gaston stood looking on, indifferent to the interest accorded him, or the bright eyes that suggested he might readily find partners. Among the very few girls now partnerless was Denise. She and Mme. Pitre had come rather late, and there were several young men present whose alliance Denise had declined. They were not sorry to have the chance of mortifying her. Every one noticed her arrival, and knew that she was standing still because no one asked her to dance. Mme. Pitre . felt it much more keenly than did Denise, but she put a good face on the matter, chattered, smiled, and regretted that her 13 Denise.

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position as a teacher of youth would not permit her to join in the dance. Presently, in a pause of the figure, Marcellin rushed up to greet Denise, ask if her aunt were returned, promise (uninvited) to visit her without fail, and demand why she was not dancing.

"Because no one has asked me," she answered quietly.

"Good heavens! And I am engaged — and partners become each moment scarcer! Mine waits by the bye, and if I linger her Celadon will certainly carry her off. He had the air of the sheep-dog who beholds a wolf elope with a lamb, just now."

Then, as ill-luck would have it, he remarked that Denise's enemy and suitor, Alexandre Verignon, was standing idle near, and exclaimed half aloud to him, "*Tu es ravissant, mon cher!* stand still when you might dance! when Mlle. Denise is disengaged!"

"One must draw a line somewhere," replied M. Alexandre audibly; "lady or peasant, well and good, but girls who belong to neither class — excuse me!"

"What do you mean by that, sir?" cried Marcellin, who saw that this was meant to be heard, and that the colour rose high on Denise's cheeks.

"Cannot you imagine, with an instance close by?"

"Desirable as a wife, but not as a partner, eh?"

"Town talk!" replied M. Alexandre, indifferently.

Gaston had heard too. He answered effectually, for he came forward, bowed to Denise, and begged her to dance with him. There was a shudder of indignant consternation amongst all the other ladies at her good luck. Zon, dancing with Manoële, saw and exulted. Mme. Pitre was *aux anges*.

"Thanks!" said Denise, raising her eyes to his. Those deep eyes startled him, he knew not why. He led her to join the dancers, among whom Marcellin, well pleased at

this *denouement*, was so highly distinguishing himself by his grace and spirit that his pretty peasant looked round on envying companions with evident triumph, while her swain had serious thoughts of summarily disposing of his dangerous rival before the day was over.

Gaston could always talk, and talk well if he pleased. He could not fail to enchain the attention of his companion, but he felt some thought was dividing her attention with him, and wondered what it was. The occasional wistful glances that she raised to him had nothing of wounded vanity. She was not thinking of M. Verignon's little spite, or the scornful half-laugh with which some bystanders had received his words. There were deeper thoughts in her mind. Gaston was right. She could not but feel it was a singular hazard that gave her Gaston de Farnoux as a partner. She saw that he knew nothing of her history, and understood that gentlemanly feeling alone had induced him to shield her from mortification. He alluded to their former meeting, but her answers were brief, and he learned little from them. Denise was occupied, too, in comparing his calm, reserved air, his courteous refinement, with the robust hilarity of Alexandre Verignon and other Farnousiens, and she was well pleased to find her instinctive contempt for their pretensions justified. "Less gentlemen by far than the real peasants! Gaston de Farnoux is of another race another world!"

And he, as they danced and talked, was wondering more and more of whom this girl reminded him.

At the conclusion of the dance he restored her to Mme. Pitre, and withdrew a step, as if their acquaintance had ceased with the dance. She certainly did not expect him to linger by her, yet there was a pang of pride and regret, and a sensation as if she could not endure her false position.

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Mme. Pitre expressed her delight at Denise's good fortune unheeded.

Marcellin now came up and presented her with a flower, and they went back to the dance. Gaston did not choose Farnoux to say that he had danced but with one partner, and soon found another. Denise could not refrain from asking Marcellin so many questions about Gaston and the Château, that he turned to look at her, and said, "Is the Château so interesting? it is mighty dull to those who live there. I have spent two days there, and found it — sufficient."

"My aunt was much there as a girl-"

"Yes" said Marcellin, by way of a question, for Denise was so perfectly candid that she could not make her speech sound like the whole truth.

"The Château interests me."

Her answer was simple enough, but Marcellin's keen penetration discerned that there was more behind.

"I cannot tell you why," she answered, replying to his look, "so do not ask me."

"You are altogether English!" he said, smiling, and turned to another subject; but Denise was now horrorstricken at her incautiousness, and trembled, not without reason, lest he should report what she had said to Gaston.

"I have displeased you!" said Marcellin, tragically; "you no longer look upon me with favourable eyes. Explain, I conjure you, by our friendship!"

"If we were real friends — if you did not talk like some one in a play — I would tell you."

"Our friendship is, or will be, real; and for the moment I will be as grave as befits the son of Duval and Co."

"You say I am altogether English, but an Englishwoman would have known better than to say things that might sound

very foolish if reported. I saw you thought my questions singular, and I had certainly better not have asked them of a stranger. Yes, we are strangers; do not be silly!" she added, with an imperious gesture, as if addressing a mere boy. "And I would rather not have it supposed I am particularly interested in the Château, because I know all Farnoux would say — would think—"

She paused and coloured with vexation.

"That your interest was concentrated on one member of it? I understand. Do not be afraid; the first time I saw you I took your conduct under my surveillance, and I should be in despair if anything in it shocked Farnoux. Come, trust me a little, Mademoiselle l'Anglaise!"

"Yes, I do," said Denise, after surveying him.

"I shall see you again this evening?" said he.

"Where?"

"Why, on the Place de l'Enfer. Oh, I mean to be there, and burn my ill-luck with the rest of you. I have taken a holiday on purpose. And you, a new-comer, are certain to be present; I need not ask."

"Try then if you can see me," said Denise, believing that he would not be likely to look up to a second-floor window in search of her. "I would wager something that I discover you, without your seeing me."

"Done! I will wear a flower in my hat, and you shall tell me what it was, unless I spy you out on the Place."

Mile. Legrand would certainly have called this a *rendez*vous. It was lucky that she was not near Denise.

As darkness came on the dancing ceased; the streets, however, were still filled with saunterers, enjoying the fragrant evening air. There was no moon, but the sky was clear, the stars came out in steady southern brilliancy, and

one magnificent planet sent a long silver ray across the sea, along which Thetis might have passed with her silver-slippered feet. Presently the tall bell-tower, close to the Place de l'Enfer, glowed with a very different light; the glare of a conflagration seemed reflected upon it, and a cloud of smoke rose up and hung over the town. All steps were speedily turned towards the Upper Place, Gaston and Marcellin with the rest. A long ascent led to the narrow chemin de Purgatoire, passing by the old church, whose open doors showed a dim space where, unheeding the joyous tumult without, a few worshippers were kneeling - weary-hearted women, whose cares none ever heard or cared to hear, but their God - there they knelt, weeping perhaps; no one could say, for they were half lost in the shadow. At the farther end of the church the clear rays of a lamp, burning before some popular altar, shone a little way in the gloom, which pressed upon it on all sides. At this hour there was no service going on. The crowd went by and pressed up to the Place, where a fire had just been lighted, to which all the population were bringing fuel; grandmothers and grandchildren came, men and maidens, sailors, fishermen, and matrons; some standing in their door-ways to look on, some leaning from windows overhead; these bringing chestnut and vine boughs, those a worn-out bit of furniture or broken basket. At each fresh offering the shrieks and shouts redoubled, while the children joined hands, screamed out some patois rhyme, and then, snatching a lighted stick, gallopaded madly up and down the street, passing the burning torch from one to another till it was extinguished. The war of tongues was deafening, and a shower of cuffs sometimes added life to the scene, when an enthusiastic votary, generally a child, appeared with some offering that his elders esteemed too precious, and sought to seize and rescue; and then a struggle would take

place, in which the crowd invariably sided with the offerer, clapping their hands and shrieking applause.

"Ah, villanous child! my window-shutter! give it back, I say!"

"Oh, boy, plague take you! my stool! my stool!" shrieked the owner, while the crowd laughed and cheered. Then a new piece of carpet was suddenly flung into the flame, with the cry, "There goes all the ill-luck of Mme. la Bise Noire!"

"Brava, Zon, brava! Is she liberal then, thy mistress! *Pécaire*! she must be about to die!" laughed the bystanders.

"Liberal! bah! we kept it till to-day on purpose," cried Zon, at the top of her voice. "There are *animals* in it!"

The flames leaped up again, exulting, and threw their quivering light on the scarlet caps and handsome bronzed faces of the men, and the bright fichus of the women, and the eager laughing spectators leaning from every story of the surrounding houses.

"There! Make a poem of this, mon cher. Write a history of our popular customs which nobody knows or cares for, but which have more poetry in them than hundreds of the subjects on which men make rhymes that gain the prize of the Academy! But where can that little sorceress be? She sees me, I have no doubt — I feel it!"

As Marcellin looked around, Gaston did the same. He chanced to lift his eyes towards the opposite house, where every window had gazing groups. Denise, much amused by her wager with Marcellin, had kept carefully in the background till this moment, but now, anxious to note the flower he wore, she came forward. The ruddy flames were at their height, and illumined all around; behind her all was darkness. She remained for a moment the foremost of the group. That pale face, those eyes that were searching the crowd below, that grave smile; once more, who was it that they so

strangely, so forcibly recalled to Gaston? The answer flashed upon him — they were the features of his own family, and that face was the face of a De Farnoux.

CHAPTER XXI.

M. DE FARNOUX would not allow himself to suppose it possible that Gaston could dispute his will, any more than if lettres de cachet had been still in full force; vet he instinctively shrank from setting before him the family arrangement lately made. He would gladly have left Mlle. de Farnoux to explain her own scheme, but he could not so far derogate from his own position as chief of the house, as to delegate such a serious transaction to another; and besides, since the stormy interview in the library, she had had an attack of illness that left her very feeble, and seemingly indifferent to everything. She did not prowl about her apartment like a caged tigress now, or ask what people were talking of in the town; but kept her daily, listless watch at her window, gazing ever down the path by which no doubt one used to come to seek her, who came no more. The love that she had not hesitated to cast away when she thought that family honour demanded it, must have been entwined with her life. It survived all other feelings.

So startled had Gaston been by the face of Denise, as he saw it by the light of the leaping flames, that he was already half prepared for the revelation that at length his uncle thought proper to make. Told even by him, the story of Géraldine was sad enough to touch the young man, who had seen something of a broken heart when he, a child, lived at La Pinède with his mother — that mother whose death had been the keenest anguish he had ever known! He had his

full share of family pride, and it revolted as much as the Baron's could, from the idea that this dark passage of the De Farnoux history should be brought up to entertain the neighbourhood; but he could not agree that the Baron should suppress Denise, as he had once intimated his thought of doing. Gaston did Mlle. Le Marchand the injustice of believing that she might be induced to be a party to this scheme; but he declared that since Denise was after all part of the De Farnoux family, she ought to be acknowledged and provided for. This was better than the Baron could have hoped; and he even forgave Gaston's hasty interruption. Since he had reflected on Denise's fortune, he had gradually come to think a marriage between her and Gaston endurable; nay, it only needed a little opposition to make him believe the project entirely his own, and cling to it accordingly. But he had reckoned after all without his host. Gaston had not had the remotest idea of what M. de Farnoux was aiming at, and smiled scornfully at the notion that he could consent to such a preposterous scheme. In vain did the Baron argue, order, represent; Gaston just preserved his temper, but evinced a contemptuous scorn that drove M. de Farnoux nearly beside himself. He knew well that Lucile was the real obstacle in his way, and, stammering with rage, assured Gaston that her at least he should never marry. Uncle and nephew parted on terms that made the latter almost resolve never to see Château Farnoux again. It was not the first time that his dependence had galled him; but never as now, when it and his love for a penniless girl were cast in his teeth together. They could not meet again till time enough had elapsed to allow both to suppose this scene forgotten, and Gaston gladly accepted Marcellin Duval's invitation to return to Marseilles with him for awhile. Marcellin was not supposed to know anything about what had

just passed; but though Gaston was slow in bestowing confidences, and, indeed, looked on them as worse than useless, Marcellin's curiosity — greater than ever was woman's and his penetration combined, always made him so *au fait* in the affairs of his friends, that Gaston generally found himself speaking to him as to one who of course knew already whatever there was to be known.

He felt that his sudden departure would be unwelcome news for Lucile. Not finding her in the house, he went to seek her in the blooming wilderness behind the Château. Mme. de Farnoux was there gathering herbs to make some decoction. He had already told her he was going away for a time, and she looked flushed and uneasy, and kept near enough to watch his interview with Lucile, yet so far off as to leave them unconstrained. Lucile was just coming round the angle of the building to the terrace in front. She looked fair and bright as a wild rose, as the wind lifted the light brown locks on which the sunbeam glistened. The wild canary, who darted by like a flash, was not more bright than she. Her eyes were on it eagerly, and she exclaimed, "See, see! there is a hawk overhead! Poor little bird, it is in that old olive. Oh, why have you not your gun? The hawk pounces -"

"It has missed," said Gaston. "Your verdon has flown into the cork-wood yonder."

"I am glad! I cannot bear to see anything in pain; I always go away if any creature seems to suffer. It is dreadful to witness it."

"You would not make a *sœur de charité*," said Gaston, but so indulgently that probably he thought her perfect as she was.

"No, I cannot endure sorrowful things. I cannot think how the unhappy can live. And à propos — only the verdon

put it out of my head -I was wishing you would repeat that last poem you wrote. What are those two lines — hours likes roses? — I liked it so much —"

"That you have forgotten it."

"I know I thought my hours always resembled those when with you, cousin."

" 'Rose-like hours, so fragrant and so bright, Their darkest shade was but a deepened light,"

said Gaston, smiling, but the cloud was still on his face, and she now noticed it, and said, "O cousin! something has displeased you! Have I?"

"Certainly not. Am I in the habit of being displeased with you?"

"Then do not look grave. I will not let you look so while I am with you. If you look grave I shall go away."

"It is I that must go away. I am going to Marseilles with Marcellin."

"Marcellin Duval! It is always he that takes you away. O Gaston! and to-morrow is my fête!"

"I know it. I am sorry to miss it, but I must go."

"Then you do not care whether it is my fête or not!" and her blue eyes filled with tears. "I wish nobody had fêtes they are disappointing, silly things!"

"It is Lucile who is a silly little thing," said Gaston, caressingly, as she turned petulantly away. "Lucile, who will not see that only necessity could make me give her pain."

"You say so to frighten me. Why should you look grave and go away? I am sure nothing has happened."

"Nothing that I can tell you. You shall see that I do not forget your *fete*."

She looked up with the spoiled-child pout that Gaston thought so bewitching, and shook her head.

"I will give you a pledge of my good memory," he added, slipping off a ring. "You know this ring? Keep it till I return to redeem it."

"Gaston! are you in earnest? Your mother's ring! Oh, you shall never have it back!" she cried, crimsoning with joyful surprise. He kissed her silently and earnestly and left her, feeling that now he was bound to her by a bond that only Lucile herself could break. For the ring had a story, and Lucile knew it. She remained standing alone, looking at it with exultant joy.

"Oh, I am glad the bird escaped! I am glad! Everything should be happy to-day. I think everything is," she added, looking up to the cloudless sky that seemed repeated in the deep blue sea, rippling at the mouth of the glen. "What a happy world it is!"

Yet just above her was something that might well have startled her out of her Arcadian dreams, and brought a dismal conviction that life had storms and perils unknown and numberless. Mlle. de Farnoux sat gazing vacantly down the glen at the window overhead. The girl was dreaming of an ecstatic future — the woman living vaguely in the past. The one life had been wrecked years before; the other had gone on lightly over sunny seas, and the future lay before her bright and alluring. Lucile would have turned faint with dismay, had any one told her that her own life might become as dreary as that of Mlle. de Farnoux. If she could just then have believed in sorrow, she would have said she should dart away from it, like the little verdon from the hawk. Rosy dawn and black night seemed more nearly allied together than Lucile and sorrow.

"My ring?" She kissed the opal repeatedly. "Mamma often says that girls have nothing to do with love, but I know now that Gaston loves me! I must say it is a gift for my fête;

I do not want to talk about it to mamma. I think she was too far off to hear us, though of course she was listening."

And she went away, with a face at once so radiant and pensive, that no woman who remembered her own youth, but might have read the story written there.

M. de Farnoux saw Gaston and Marcellin depart together. With angry steps he went out to work off his feelings by superintending the labourers in his olive-grounds; and that morning the Provençal proverb "to swear like a waggoner." might rather have run, "to swear like a baron." All went wrong with him that afternoon; he thought all the world combined to cheat and defy him, and after a lengthened inspection of his property, he sat down on the broad edge of one of the deep reservoirs sunk on the hill-sides to catch the precious rain-water. The Provençals are always praying for rain; though when it comes, it is in such floods that one would think nothing ever would be dry again. Not a drop had fallen for weeks, dust lay thick on the trees and plants. the paths wound white and dazzling, the torrent-beds were dry; all was thirsty and gasping, and the little water in the cistern hardly covered the thick mass of ill-smelling mud left at the bottom. There is no more pestiferous place than such a cistern; fever and ague brood and lurk there, but his Farnoux nose was so accustomed to bad smells, that the Baron, like everybody else in the place, hardly knew that such things existed. Besides, he was taken up with his own reflections. He looked down the olive-covered slope below without seeing it; the Château rose overhead, but his thoughts were not there either. He was taking a review of his life, as he sat there, a little, mean, withered old man, with no future to look forward to, and nothing satisfactory in the past unless it were those days when he acted Cupid in sky-blue wings and rose-coloured boots. He could not but remember

the reverence and honour in which all had held his father; how truly and nobly he had been and borne himself Seigneur of Farnoux; how thoroughly he believed in the faith of his forefathers, and lived the life consistent with it of a Christian gentleman. His son had never been esteemed or respected by any one, had spent a great deal of money, lived like a pagan, and been miserable all the time. That money! it had not been his own, and therefore he had not lessened his fortune; but in these latter days, the thought of having thrown away such sums at all lay heavy on his mind. He calculated what they would have brought in, properly invested, and cursed his youthful folly. And now new discredit was impending, and Gaston would not move a finger to prevent it.

"And the olives will certainly fail, unless this atrociously fine weather changes," said the poor Baron, as one affliction after another suggested itself; "and just because I shall have a tolerable vintage, all my neighbours will have one too, and wine will be worth nothing. The girl with such a fortune too! As for those farm repairs, old Grétry may make them for himself; do they think I possess Peru? - Lucile! why she has not a brass sou! Cazlon's lease will soon be out; I shall raise the rent of that farm; he has been prosperous these three years. Ah, M. my nephew, I'll teach you to beard me! The Code says nothing about nephews, I'll disinherit him! Stay - he refuses to obey me in my lifetime, eh? then he shall obey me in my death. Death - what a hateful word that is! If it were not so inconvenient to oneself, I would die to spite him! Rags so dear, too! Why can't olives thrive without manure? The pastor says all things are for the best - why don't nephews obey uncles, and olives grow without rag-manure, then?"

M. de Farnoux was sinking into a doze, which may ac-

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count for the incoherency of his reflections, though, indeed, his mind was never very logical. Provencal born and bred, he ought to have known that none but a madman would let himself fall asleep, hot and weary, by an empty tank; but, full of mighty thoughts, he forgot this. He woke very cold, but his mind seemed to have made itself up in sleep, for he rose and went all the way down to the town to see his lawyer. Those who saw him go by remarked how ill he looked, and calculated his age. The lawyer came the next day to the Château, and had a very long private interview, to the great disquiet of Mme. de Farnoux. She perceived signs of illness in her husband, but he only resented, even more resolutely than usual, every attempt to convince him of what he disliked. Two or three days were thus lost, days of vital importance. M. de Farnoux had caught a fever by the cistern, and swift and sharp must be the remedies employed, if the doctor would be beforehand with grim death in southern lands. The Baron knew this well, but the economy of a simple tisane, made by his valet, had irresistible charms for him. The tisane had no effect, and an impression got abroad that the Baron was seriously ill. Mme. de Farnoux sent for a physician, and when he came the Baron, much affronted, would not see him. The terrible thought of death scared him more and more, yet he refused with anger to hear or see anything that seemed to acknowledge it was near. So some time passed. Then Mme. de Farnoux found he was evidently worse, and sought him again to remonstrate. He lay in bed, feeble, but obstinate as ever, hardly visible in the twilight. All was very still within and without, except that Mme. de Farnoux, and the valet who waited on him, argued with him by turns or both together. No, there was nothing amiss; whatever they might wish, he should recover; Gaston would not be master vet.

As the querulous accents paused, Mme. de Farnoux and Georges exchanged looks of baffled perplexity. There was silence. All at once the long mournful cry of a flight of migratory birds, passing over the house, broke it. The cry said nothing to Mme. de Farnoux, but to the Baron and his man it said a great deal. There would be no want of charity in asserting that M. de Farnoux believed in nothing but the superstitions of his nurse; and there was not a man, woman, or child in Farnoux, but held the cry of birds passing over a house where some one lay sick, to be a sure sign of death.

Georges turned pale; the Baron hid his face with a moan. There was another silence. Mme. de Farnoux made an inquiring sign, to which the valet replied low and hurriedly. She smiled contemptuously, came close to the bed, and said, "You will not let such nonsense disturb you, monsieur; but if you feel really ill, I beg you again to see M. Piche."

He made no answer, but as she was withdrawing raised his head and cried sharply, "What is the use of doctoring a dead man? Let me alone. All will go to rack and ruin when I am gone. I kept things together!" he murmured dolefully. "Spend, spend, now. But I have made my will."

He lay still again, and then in a scared voice, like a frightened child, he cried out, "It is all dark. I never saw such darkness before! 'A horror of great darkness' — who said that? I want no preaching here. Lights, Georges, quick — let me feel your hand — your fingers are like ice, man!" They had brought candles long before this, and the man's hand was warm. Before the next morning M. de Farnoux was dead.

He had been neither respected nor deserving of respect in life, and in death no one regretted him. Not one tear fell for M. de Farnoux. When his sister heard of his death it seemed to rouse her slightly, but not as she had been roused

before. She comprehended this new event, however; for she muttered, "Dead! dead! but what men do, lives on! But still he was the head of the house, and every one must put on mourning for him:" and she would not be satisfied till deep mourning, of the fashion of her youth, had been provided for her. After that she was tranquil, and sat idly at her window again. None troubled themselves about her; Gaston, who never failed in kindness and attention to her, was away; Mme. de Farnoux was devoured by anxieties of her own, and waited impatiently for Gaston's return, and Lucile found herself treated by the servants as their future mistress. She was not so childish but that she knew very well the difference that M. de Farnoux's death might make to her. Speculations as to the effect of it came thick upon her. For worlds she would not have entered the room where the corpse lay; she shrank from the thought of the dead Baron, as much as from that of the living Mlle. de Farnoux; but otherwise, she thought not at all of the awful summons that had come to the house. Her mother's maid, always Lucile's confidante, was not slow to suggest agreeable ideas, but Lucile, in fact, was rather unhappy at the prospect of marriage. She was so happy already!

"Though I should like to be called Madame," said she; "it sounds so well, and De Farnoux is a fine name."

"Certainly, mademoiselle, and while a demoiselle is nobody, a married lady has a position in the world."

"I wonder if mamma would continue to live with me, Nina? That would not be necessary, if we were married, would it? I should never feel myself 'madame' with mamma here. Perhaps she would go back to Paris."

"And you too, mademoiselle. You would not continue to live in this dungeon, where one has nothing to do but réver cimetière?"

Denise.

"Oh, as for that, I hate Paris. Gaston would go into the world; he would see people that he liked better than me, perhaps."

"But you would have an hôtel, and a box at the Opera."

"I am sure mamma would live with me if we went to Paris. Besides, I don't care for anything, if Gaston is with me."

"But, mademoiselle, love cannot last for ever; married, one needs some other amusement."

"I know it does not," said Lucile, sighing. "Perhaps in ten or fifteen years Gaston would get tired of me. It is very sad to think of, Nina."

"That is why I say you must have other interests, mademoiselle. If I were a lady I would have new dresses every month, and new furnish my house yearly, and wear the most fashionable jewels."

"Gaston has liked me without any."

"Ah, that is very well before marriage, but a lover's eyes and a husband's are different."

"That is why I think we are better as we are, Nina. M. de Farnoux would never have allowed us to marry, but we were together!"

"There is nothing to prevent your marriage now, mademoiselle. If I speak the truth I shall say I find we are better without M. le Baron. Now one has a little liberty; we had such a feast to-day in the kitchen, for instance, as we never dared have in his lifetime; one requires additional nourishment at sorrowful times — *les émotions creusent* — and of course we need extra help just now, so we are quite a party. I have never known it so cheerful. M. Gaston will not poke his nose into every pot, as M. le Baron did!"

"I do wonder when Gaston will come home, Nina!"

CHAPTER XXII.

GASTON, restless and anxious, had not remained at Marseilles, but gone elsewhere the day after his arrival. Consequently, the news of his uncle's death did not immediately reach him. He returned at once when he learnt it, but he knew that the funeral would have taken place before he reached the Château. Had any one wished to delay it, they could not have done so. The law would have stepped in to prevent it; and nature, too, commands that in southern climes the dead should be speedily buried out of the sight of the living.

Gaston could not return without thick-coming thoughts. Death had suddenly thrown a sanctity round the passionate, unreasonable old man, with whom Gaston had parted estranged a little while before. His prospects were very uncertain when he left Château Farnoux; he returned the master of it, the noble old château, every stone of which was dear to him. He had loved his own home, La Pinède; many memories clustered round it, but Château Farnoux was the birth-place of his family; he regarded it with hereditary pride, and rejoiced to be its master, and the representative of the long line of all the De Farnoux.

And Lucile! How her lovely eyes would brighten when she saw him! Poor Baron de Farnoux! how impotent his opposition was now! So Gaston thought to himself; but sometimes the dead are stronger than the living.

The first person he met was his uncle's valet, who, unasked, mentioned that Mme. de Farnoux was in the library. The meaning tone and smile seemed to say he knew very well what she wanted there. In fact her first care, almost before her husband's death, had been to search for his will.

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Armed with his keys she ransacked his bureau until she found it, and remained contented till the recent date of his lawyer's visit occurred to her, and with it the suspicion that there might be a will more recent. Greatly vexed that she should have been so slow to think of this, she recommenced her search, and had again succeeded when Gaston entered. She was reading a paper with a stormy countenance, and did not immediately perceive him. When she did she was too angry to be abashed at his detecting her, and came to meet him, exclaiming, "It is time you were come!"

"So I see," said Gaston pointedly.

"Yes, your uncle did not forget your interests! You will find he paid all attention to them!" she replied, with angry agitation. "Not a penny has he left me! Read that!"

He read. The will had been drawn up briefly and hastily, but it was in due form. It purported that all the De Farnoux property — except a legacy to Lucile, "if she did not marry a nobleman" — should come to Gaston, nephew of Auguste Pierre Paul de Farnoux, on condition of his marrying the Demoiselle Denise Le Marchand. Failing these conditions, it was to pass to Paul de Farnoux, of Suffolk, England, cousin of the Baron.

Gaston astounded Mme. de Farnoux by breaking into a laugh as he read. Perhaps he did not know himself that he laughed; he was like one whose ship has gone down in harbour, while the sky is clear and the sea smooth. Her exclamations roused him to a clearer comprehension of what had happened, and where he was.

"You laugh, Gaston! It is truly very amusing. Who are these English De Farnoux?"

"Very distant relations, whose very name I should not have thought he remembered."

And he relapsed into silence, which seemed to irritate

her, for she broke out, "But it is infamous! monstrous! He cheated me in our marriage, and now he would cheat me in his death!"

"So he thinks in his grave to accomplish what he could not in life," said Gaston. "A dead man's whim against a living man's happiness."

"And one can neither persuade nor annoy him now!" said Mme. de Farnoux, with tears of vexation. "If I had only known of this while he lived! To think that he should have hid it so successfully, and all the time I was occupied in procuring consolation for his last moments! Had he had any feeling he must have found my care insupportable!"

"So, old home, you must go into hands that know you not," said Gaston, not hearing her lamentations. "You will be owned by those of the right name, or else I could wish he had left you to that pale girl down yonder, who has more right to you, than any one but myself. They will not be as proud of you as I am! The name, at least, is left me," he added, with a gesture of recovered courage, while a smile took the place of the gloomy look on his face, "and I suppose there are ways of gaining one's bread, of which a De Farnoux need not be ashamed. I shall see Paris sooner than I expected, and if you, my dear aunt, will make your home with me, to whom you have ever been most kind, I will try to repay that kindness in part. It is for Lucile that I grieve." And the dark look of resentment returned again.

"But what are you dreaming of, my dear Gaston? My home must be with my child."

"I thought that I should have had Château Farnoux to offer her; as it is, it must be a humbler home."

"He is mad!" said Mme. de Farnoux, in unfeigned surprise. "Do you imagine I can give Lucile to you now?"

Here was a taste of his altered position for Gaston. The

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day before Mme. de Farnoux would have lavished her gratitude on him had he offered to marry her daughter; she treated him *de haut en bas* this afternoon.

"You would not have hesitated had I been the master of Château Farnoux!"

"Of course not! I tell you you are mad, my poor Gaston! I always loved you with all my heart; but that is no reason why, without a fortune, you should marry Lucile."

"It would be a reason against addressing her now for the first time, but you know well that she loves me."

"But I am quite poor myself; Lucile's beauty is my estate. When I was young, I said my face should obtain me a position. Alas! all that it did, was to obtain me a very *médiocre* sort of husband; and then how deceived I was in my second marriage! To think that I should be a widow twice, and be none the better for it! I have taken courage all the years I have been mewed up here with a foolish old man and a mad woman, thinking better times would come. I saw Lucile would be happy with you —"

"Her happiness has suddenly become a very secondary consideration!"

"Her happiness! Good heavens! have I no happiness of my own to think of?" cried poor Mme. de Farnoux. "Who will consider it, unless I do? Do you think I will return to Paris as I left it? All my friends laughed enough at me in my first husband's time. Paris is very well for the rich; one can spend a million there very pleasantly; but Paris, when one must consider every sou, spare fire, patch clothes, live on a fifth floor, walk in the mud because one has not six sous to pay an omnibus — bah, bah! The capital, if you can have a *loge* at the opera, and frequent the Café de Paris — otherwise... And how would you gain a livelihood, eh?" "I shall write for bread instead of for amusement."

"'Literature! You have had some success, I know; enough for a gentleman, but as for living by it! — ah, better spare your pains! And, for promotion! I hardly think you could be even a sous-préfet, your Protestantism would stand in your way, and so it would everywhere; you have no interest with the Government. Unless you keep Château Farnoux you will starve, and starve alone, for I will never give you Lucile!"

"And how am I to keep Château Farnoux?"

"Oh you need not put on your airs of masculine wisdom! This will is abominably unjust; your uncle was not himself when he made it. I would bear witness to that, if necessary. It is sought for, and not found; he destroyed it. I can assure every one that he promised me he would. And he would have destroyed it had I ever known of it — of that I am certain. You and I keep our own secret, and justice is done."

Gaston looked at her in astonishment, but her eager face did not belie her words.

"Why not? why not?" she repeated. "These English Farnoux are nothing to you; they will not even be disappointed, for they could never have expected to have the property. Justice requires you to have it. Dear Gaston, be reasonable; think of me, think of Lucile, who loves you!"

"And Heaven knows how I love Lucile!" replied Gaston, laying his hand on the will, after a momentary, vehement struggle with himself.

"Then you will do as I say? Ah, now I am rewarded for all I have gone through! I wonder what my old friends in Paris will say to my coming back with a noble son-in-law! I wish you could bear your title, Gaston; I cannot conceive why a chevalier does not call himself so now-a-days."

"Dear aunt, I am sorry to disappoint you, but the best thing I can do is to forget your mad proposal. I feel sure it was only suggested by kindness for me. It is absurd —"

"It is you who are absurd! You men would do a thousand things that we poor women call shameful — any one of them would disgrace a woman — but nobody calls you to account; and then, when some little affair needing common sense occurs, you instantly talk about your honour! Do you wish to drive me to marry Lucile to my nephew? Ah, you start!"

"Lucile may have something to say before that happens."

"She thinks and feels exactly as I do, Gaston."

"That you will allow me to ascertain for myself."

"I have no patience with you men, and the calm, lofty way in which you always treat a woman's schemes! Perhaps, however, Lucile's arguments may seem better than mine. Lucile! Lucile!"

Her shrill call reached Lucile's ears, for she was darting in search of Gaston. She ran in, rosy with joy, but he made no step to meet her, and she stopped in surprise. He stood and looked on her, as if there was an abyss opening between them; a lifetime was compressed into the few instants while he watched her rosy colour fade, her eyes dilate with terror, and mustered the words that were to dash all the innocent gladness of her young life to atoms. He took her hands and spoke low, but the quiver in his voice betrayed him.

"Lucile, suppose a man loved you above his life; next to his honour — above it, perhaps — Heaven help the poor wretch! Suppose he came to you one day, and said, I am penniless; I have nothing to offer you but my love; what would you say? Answer quickly, cousin, don't torture me with suspense — what I say is plain, is it not? Was the love worth having without wealth to back it? or the man a wretched egotist to wish to drag you into the depths with him? A well brought-up girl is always guided by her mother; now then! what answer?"

He had lost his forced coolness, and spoke passionately, grasping her hands, and studying her face.

"I don't comprehend, Gaston. Let me go — you frighten me!"

"Frighten my darling? do I? I think Lucile would answer that she thought success was by his side, and nothing but failure elsewhere; I think she would know that by giving herself to him, she had secured him against all possibility of worldly failure; for what could daunt him, with her love to be his light and strength! For he loved her, Lucile; loved her with all his heart and soul!"

"There, that will do," interrupted Mme. de Farnoux. "The child does not understand an a or b in the whole affair. Here it is, Lucile; Gaston is threatened with the loss of Farnoux, but he can keep it by doing a very little thing. Instead, he prefers to starve, and begs you to share an empty plate with him."

"A very little thing?" repeated Lucile, gazing wistfully at him.

"A very little thing, Lucile, but that little thing is a crime."

"He is an ass," said Mme. de Farnoux. "I only want him to do justice to me and to himself."

"A crime that would leave me more beggared in selfrespect, than I am in fortune if I lose Château Farnoux, and that is saying much."

"And so, my daughter, you understand he requests you to share this agreeable lot, and live, I imagine, in some garret of the Quartier Latin; or else he will go off to Africa, while you and I wait at home till he comes to claim you with his marshal's staff."

"Lucile, it is for you to decide this. Should you be happier in poverty as my wife, or waiting as my betrothed, or shall we part as strangers?"

"But, O Gaston! why must you be poor?"

"There it is!" said Mme. de Farnoux.

"For a reason that I cannot explain."

"Mamma, is it true? What does he mean?"

"The saints only know, my poor child!"

"Lucile!" — Gaston's voice grew harsh — "this turns on what your own feelings may be. I do not ask you to think of me. Consider your own happiness. Shall I set you free?"

Trembling, bewildered, she looked from him to her mother. She would fain have thrown herself on his breast, and implored him to keep her safe and let nothing part them; but her mother's presence chilled and silenced her. She seemed fascinated by Mme. de Farnoux's glances, and only murmured, "Every one said you would have Château Farnoux!"

His hands slowly loosed hers; he looked down on her pityingly — a little wonderingly, and his voice grew cold and gentle as he said, "Poor child! was that your vision? I expected too much! I have nothing to offer you, Lucile, now."

"Nothing, and now, Gaston, I have given you every chance," said Mme. de Farnoux; "but even this child can see that to marry a beggar is ludicrous. Ah, what fools men are! what an unlucky woman I have always been! Come, my dear child, let us go — come, I say!"

Lucile let her take her hand, but looked piteously to Gaston, whose eyes had dwelt on her all the time, but the

ardour of the gaze had changed into bitterness. "Gaston!" -- she whispered, imploringly, "Gaston!"

"No, no - we have had enough and too much, my child, come!"

Lucile resisted now. "Cousin! you know I will do whatever you wish."

"Go with your mother, Lucile."

"Oh, do not speak so — don't kill me by such a look — let me stay!"

"No one but yourself could have separated us. As it is, your mother was right."

"O cousin!" and she made a movement to spring to him, but her mother's grasp was firm, and her whisper emphatic. Lucile covered her face with her disengaged hand, and sobbed piteously. Perhaps Gaston even yet thought she would return, but he forgot that Mme. de Farnoux had accustomed her to implicit obedience. Lucile, faintly resisting, let herself be led away. He watched them go, heard the door close - close on all the past and its hopes - and he was alone. The will lay open before him. He stood looking down on it for a moment or two without seeing it; then he remembered suddenly what it was. Who would ever ask an account of it - a lawyer who had no interest in it - distant relatives who would never hear of it? tyrannical, unjust will! He walked up and down, while the temptation to destroy it grew every instant fiercer. He thought of Lucile, and even when his anger that she had loved him for his fortune was hottest, the desire to make her his wife was stronger still. He knew she was weeping somewhere, and he had a wild impulse to find her, console her, promise whatever she asked. His quickened steps told the tumult in his mind. Fortune, love, all lost together! He had thought sometimes of late with interest of Denise, but now only as

the bride forced upon him; the recollection of her sickened him. Then he stood still before the broad hearth, while anger at the injustice done him combined with all his other thronging thoughts, as if to madden him. The last of his name, and a beggar! His eye caught the motto of the De Farnoux carved deep and black above the hearth: Sortes meæ in manu Dei sunt, and in his present mood he repeated it with something like derision. The familiar words recalled associations in which he was accustomed to delight. A long line of ancestors had made it their device, and shown their faith by their spotless honour and brave lives, and whatever tricks fortune might play him, he was still the representative of those dead lords of Farnoux.

"We must have degenerated of late!" he muttered. "We are hardly worthy to be even roturiers now-a-days!" and he smiled in disdain of his own mocking words. "'All is lost save honour' should be my motto. Honour! that will go next. Our ruin will be complete then, and the bourgeoisie in the person of Mme. de Farnoux, née Luchon, may triumph. No, by heavens, that she never shall! Share such a secret with that woman! throw my honour into her hands! I am not come to that yet; the moon is not quite full! I must have been fit for the Bicêtre a moment ago. Why, when she coolly suggested her scheme, I felt the temptation; but, spoken out by another person, it seemed utterly vile and impossible. Now, left alone with that bit of paper, I seemed to hear a legion of demons tell me I must, and ought, and should destroy it! What a scoundrel I must be!" He rang the bell impetuously.

"Georges!" (to the valet who answered it) "Take that paper" — he folded and sealed it — "to M. Richer. Tell him to keep it safely. That is all. Away with you!"

"That is done!" he added, with a deep breath. "So

far is clear. Mme. de Farnoux, I must see you again and hear your plans for the future. I thank Heaven that I did not come upon that will alone; that I had time to remember how the plan to destroy it sounded from another's lips. After all, I am not a deliberate villain, but there is not much selfrespect left me. I am poor enough without losing that. I was rich an hour ago, and now I find myself without home, fortune, or bride. Poor child, I think she loves me after all; and as for me, it makes a fool of me when I think of what I planned for her only this morning."

He threw himself into a chair, and hid his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GASTON, as he considered what future was open to him, found himself believing that, could he but offer her a maintenance. Lucile would still share it. He did not know Mme. de Farnoux. He had lived half his life near or with her, and yet knew nothing of her after all. He had judged her as she affected himself, and to him she had always shown a caressing amiability, by no means insincere. Mme. de Farnoux was not exactly mercenary: she esteemed rank above riches, she loved to see every one comfortable and gay about her, and, indeed, if they were not so, felt quite ill-used, for sad looks interfered with her own comfort. Gaston had seen her give money readily, and treat those who came in contact with her with captivating softness and gaiety; and though not a lady at the core, she had sufficient cleverness to catch the tone of good society, and never offend even his fastidious taste. He had vet to discover the hard layer of selfishness that was the foundation of her character. She, who would have exclaimed against

the hurting of a fly, would have crushed it without remorse had its buzzing annoyed her. Now, that she was forced to afflict Lucile was truly vexatious; but what could she do, if Gaston would not be a reasonable man! And her anger against him waxed hotter.

It burst out, when she heard from him that the will was no longer in his hands, and she expatiated on the cruelty and heartlessness of his conduct both to her and to Lucile. Though his own happiness was so nearly concerned, Gaston could not help smiling. He had counted on seeing Lucile again, but Mme. de Farnoux watched so well, that neither letter nor message reached her. Lucile's tears annoyed her mother, and called forth some sharp words, after which the poor child shed them only when unseen. To both her and Gaston a page of life's book was opening, "wherein dark things were writ, hard to be understood."

Gaston wrote to the English connections, who so unexpectedly found themselves interested in the old Château. Once upon a time a De Farnoux and his wife had taken their lives in their hands, and fled from their native France, when she offered them the gentle choice of turning Roman Catholics, or being lodged for life on board the galleys. Etienne de Farnoux thought the galleys were already sufficiently manned by Huguenots, and the convent that awaited his wife seemed to him worse than galleys, scaffold, or fire. The French Protestants held the strongest possible opinions as to what sort of life was led in convents, apart from their aversion to the doctrines taught there. They viewed them as the nests of all iniquity; and those who know what Port Royal was before the time of the excellent Mère Angélique, will scarcely charge them with injustice. Etienne de Farnoux, with wife and child, crossed the south of France in disguise, reached Bourdeaux, and finding so

strict a watch kept on all vessels, that escape from that port was impossible, embarked further down the river in an open boat, and let the winds and waves take them where they would. Such faith as this was shown by hundreds of French Protestants in that time of terror. Etienne de Farnoux had no reason to repent his belief that, not loving his life he should find it: an English merchant vessel picked up the little party, and landed them at Rye, where already a small band of refugees had found a welcome. Some were of low degree, and better prepared to earn their bread than the De Farnoux; but they all found friends and prospered. In course of time the De Farnoux became so thoroughly naturalised in England, that their very name grew Anglicised. They became a family of consideration, settled down in Suffolk near the paper mill that had made their fortune; and kept no token of foreign descent except the French names from time to time bestowed on a child of the family. There were Raymonds and Gastons among them still, and still they avoided the Louis or Louisa, that had become hateful in Huguenot ears, as the name of the faithless king who took back from them the toleration granted by the Edict of Nantes. "French of Paris did they nothing know," any more than Chaucer's Prioress, but they recalled their family history complacently, and kept up with some pride the recollection, that in Provence still dwelt the elder branch of their family in the old Château which bore their name. Gaston had some acquaintance with these English cousins. The squire who represented the head of them happened once to visit Paris, and accidentally heard the name of Gaston's father mentioned. He made inquiries, and got acquainted with him, but the Englishman and the fashionable roué had not a single point of contact; the one was honestly disgusted, the other sneered contemptuously; but Gaston,

then a schoolboy, received a kind invitation to Farnoux Park, and spent the vacation of that year there. He had very pleasant recollections of that summer, and could write with full confidence that his cousins would not rejoice in the turn of fortune that would transfer Château Farnoux from himself to them; and he had no fear of their refusing his request that MIle. de Farnoux might spend the rest of her life undisturbed in her old home. He paid her a kind visit daily, which seemed to please her, though she hardly ever now answered connectedly; and he thought it unnecessary to tell her what changes were impending. No one but himself, Mme. de Farnoux, and the family lawyer, as yet knew the conditions of the Baron's will.

In due time an answer came to his letter. He had told little, but that the conditions, by which the property would be his, were impossible to fulfil; and worthy Paul Farnoux, unwilling to profit by injustice suggested that Gaston should meet him in Paris and explain the business more fully. His sons were settled in life, his daughter married, and he would make a second wedding tour to Paris with his wife. The jovial tone of the letter contrasted strangely with the feelings with which Gaston received it. He would fain have settled the matter at once and have done with it. To live in the Château, with Lucile close at hand, yet never see her, was intolerable; and in any case he must have gone to Paris, to learn how his plans of earning daily bread could best be carried out.

Mme. de Farnoux, meanwhile, was preparing to leave the Château, and the neighbourhood began to marvel and discuss the evident breach between her and Gaston. All agreed that she had wished to marry Lucile, and been baffled, and every rumour that gossip could devise floated about; while mingled with them were surmises, gathering

strength and consistency, as to the parentage of Denise. Those who knew most had held their tongues; but Lucile had recollected and spoken of the strange inscription at the foot of the portrait, and the servants had spread the story of it. Farnoux had noted the Baron's visit to Mlle. Le Marchand, and knew that he had made particular inquiries as to the fortune of Denise. Mme. Rocca too, had stored up every hint of the private history of her lodgers, and knew it almost as well as they did themselves. Perhaps she had listened at the door during the Baron's stormy interview with Mlle. Le Marchand. There had been a flutter of a silk dress in the passage just before Mlle. Le Marchand expelled him. Every one was on the alert to see what Gaston would do next; and, when he seemed to be doing nothing, they explained it as best they could. Mlle. Le Marchand was on tenter-hooks lest a long cherished hope should fail. No girl ever lived in a more romantic world than she, or regarded a love-match more tenderly, though her grim, grey exterior gave no token of such weakness; whatever had been her early history, she had once for all, in youth, given up all day-dreams for herself, but she cherished them boundlessly for others. When Gaston and Denise met on the Pic des Maures, she seemed to see her hoped-for drama commencing, and had waited and hoped and feared, ever since. Once she grew unbearably restless, and carried off Denise to visit Marcellin's family at Aix; but she soon returned, and waited with growing impatience in her den. It was not rank or fortune that she wanted for her niece; but reparation for the past, and love for the future. Denise followed her thoughts with tolerable accuracy, but smiled at them quietly. She did not think an alliance between herself and Gaston at all likely; and though the visit of the Baron had roused in her a conflict of feelings that surprised her, she 15 Denise.

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had hardly wondered when nothing more was heard of him. Only, these feelings once roused would not be put quite to rest again, and weariness of her daily life was upon her. She had lived hitherto the stillest life imaginable, but it had not been tedious, for her keen, clear mind found food for thought in every trifle. She was not a reader, however; and. like some of the same temperament, had centered all her imagination on one subject, and it turned to faith faith so singularly child-like, profound, and practical, that not one in a hundred persons would have understood it. To her each event, great or small, seemed sent direct from Heaven; men were permitted to be the instruments by which these things were done, but unless so permitted could do nothing, either for good or ill. As the girl sat alone she would muse on these things, unwitting how little those about her shared her views, and picturing scenes from her Bible to herself with a vividness that made them almost more visible than the room where she was, or the old cloister where she sat. And now she strove to still the impatient throbs of her young heart by telling herself that when the right moment came something new would happen, and till then this life, where she was set by no choice of hers, must be the best for her. When she answered her aunt in this manner, Mlle. Le Marchand would look at her, as if trying to enter into the calm trust that look and words alike expressed, and then sigh, and say, "Child, to me you always seem of a positive nature, unromantic as a wig-block; yet there are times when you recall to me one whose life was a long heroism. Thirty years did she spend in prison in Aigues-mortes. I can barely recollect her; but I know that to her, what she believed was the one important thing in the world — it bore her through those deadly years; and so it would be with vou!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A JOURNEY to Paris took some time before the railroad along the Rhone was made. It seemed interminable to Gaston's impatience. He found his cousin quite taken up with showing sights to his wife, and quite averse to business; the worthy pair were, indeed, enjoying a second honeymoon. Gaston had no inclination to intrude his personal concerns on them, and said nothing of Lucile, or of the beggared condition in which he found himself. The hearty Suffolk squire was cordial and kind-hearted as possible, but there was nothing about him that invited a young man to confide a love-tale to him; and Gaston suffered too keenly not to shrink from an approach to the subject of his lost love. Nor could he well lay his money affairs before the very man who would profit by his poverty. Mr. Farnoux (he had dropped the De) was exceedingly reluctant to take advantage of the Baron's will. He did not offer to give up the property; perhaps he hardly could, in justice to his own children; and, knowing nothing of Lucile, he could laugh and urge Gaston at least to see a little more of the bride tacked on to the estate, since, by his own confession he had but three times met her, and might come to like her after all. And having thus discharged his conscience, he bade him decide at his leisure, refused to hear any more about the matter, and went off to the theatre with his wife.

Gaston knew there was nothing but kindness in this, but he was in that state that any decision would have been a relief to him. The careless good-humour with which Paul Farnoux treated what was life and death to him galled him; and yet he shrank from the gentle interest of Mrs. Farnoux, who was clearer-sighted than her good husband, and had also

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treated Gaston, when he visited her as a boy, with a tender kindness that had made him worship her. He grew very anxious, too, on the score of employment; he vainly sought one that he could undertake, and vainly looked for friends who might have helped him in this strait. At last he left Paris suddenly, and went south again, pausing at Aix to seek a friend of very old standing, who had known his family for years, M. Duval, the father of Marcellin.

The elder Duval had retired from business, but his brothers and sons belonged to a firm long established at Marseilles. Though their warehouses and bureau stood in a gloomy, out-of-the-way street, and were of modest appearance, the Duvals carried on business in every quarter of the world. Indian shawls, English cottons, Lyons silks, and Turkey carpets, met in all harmony under the roofs of their magasin. The house followed old traditions of steady, sober trade, made no rash ventures, but throve and prospered from generation to generation, till it became a sort of proverb to say, "Sure as a Duval affair."

Marcellin's father had made his fortune, and bought himself a property at Aix, where he lived and enjoyed all good things in a sober way — the society of pretty women, wine, and sunshine; but his old business habits were not forgotten and he spent a good deal of time at Marseilles. Gaston arrived at Aix on a Sunday, when all the population were strolling up and down the Cours, shaded by plane-trees, and adorned with a huge statue of good King René, under whose brows two swallows had built their nests. Gaston had no thoughts for the Judas-trees rosy with blossom in the gardens, or the pretty girls in the crowd; he sought impatiently for M. Duval, and found him, accompanied by wife and daughter, promenading leisurely with all the world. There was nothing for it but to delay what he had to say, and stroll

along too, and talk of the almonds and vines, and *les mouches* qui volent. Later in the evening, however, M. Duval and his cigar were at Gaston's service, and they came out again, and sat on a bench on the Boulevard.

"Now let us talk business," said the merchant. "Your family always come to me when they are in a scrape. So Mme. de Farnoux and you have quarrelled, and she is gone to her brother at Marseilles. What does it all mean?"

Gaston explained briefly.

"Hum!" said M. Duval, stroking his chin meditatively; "it was always a thing that angered me to think of — your marrying Lucile Gautier. A pretty creature; she might have sat as a model to Greuze; but the mother ... much better without her, my friend, unless you could have suppressed the mother. And now you want employment. What can you do, eh?"

"I have studied law," said Gaston, struggling with the feelings that surged up on hearing Lucile thus spoken of.

"Law? You have no interest. You cannot live on law. How many years do you think it would take to make 4000 frances per annum by the law? You have written — written well, too. But you can't live by that either. You spend so much time in bringing everything you write to perfection. Would you like to play *journaliste*, and write articles for let me see — the *Aigle Farnousien*?"

"I fear my table would have little on it if all the provisions were brought in by the *Aigle*."

"Journaliste in the provinces, or say at Paris. Labour without recompense, convictions suppressed, talent at the command of the blockhead in power over you. Articles written whether you have anything to say or not. And if you would belong to a leading paper, you must have a name worth signing at the bottom of your article, or your *feuilleton* — a name better known than yours."

"I grant you the picture is not rose-coloured, but one must live, though Talleyrand thought it unnecessary; but then he was speaking of another, and not of himself. It is at least indispensable to the individual."

"If you had interest you would make your way. You have none. Nay, that touch of politics in that little *brochure* of last year has done you harm. It is unfortunate."

"A man must say what he thinks," said Gaston, smiling.

"Renounce journalism after that sentiment, my friend. What remains? If I offered you a clerkship in our business ——."

"I should assuredly take it."

"Bah! you know nothing about it, M. Gaston de Farnoux. Your education has not fitted you for it. You would be miserable, *mon_garçon*. You would not die of hunger, but you would of *ennui*. And the clerks — good fellows, but not the society you are used to. You are too aristocratic; they could not resist the desire to mortify a De Farnoux."

"What is good enough for Marcellin, is good enough for his friend."

"Marcellin! There is a difference between a son of the house and a clerk. *Allez*, *allez*, *mon garçon;* believe me this would not do. Nor could you be *intendant* to some family; that, too, is not the direct road to the sun."

"Then it only remains to enlist."

"Well, that might do, though *consignes* are not agreeable. I know a man of noble birth who took this course. I last saw him carrying a sack of potatoes on his shoulder for the use of the regiment. His comrades liked him; he treated them to wine when he could, and kissed the landlady with

perfect good-breeding. The pay is not great, certainly. By the bye, have you any debts?"

"Too true it is, when I was a student in Paris and thought La Pinède was mine ——"

"Young man," said M. Duval sharply, "you all seem to think that the only way to prove yourselves gentlemen is to spend all your fortune in folly, and worse than folly. How are you to acquit these debts with a soldier's pittance?"

"My good friend, I have said it all to myself a hundred times. Surely in this France of ours there must be something to do. I came to you to hear what I could do. You only tell me what I cannot."

"You can marry your cousin Denise," said M. Duval, turning his little bright eyes on Gaston.

"So they have proclaimed the story!" exclaimed Gaston, who had kept back the history of Denise.

"No, you need not start and waste your indignation. You need not suspect my good old friend Mlle. Le Marchand; she told me the story the other day in strict confidence. But it must all leak out."

"You, too, recommend this expedient!"

"My dear boy, I may be a prejudiced adviser. I knew something of your aunt and mother, and I testify their fate was a hard one. Denise is their image, and I confess I should like to see Géraldine's daughter at Farnoux. A clever girl, too, capable *de tenir salon* as a man wishes his wife to do."

"There is a fatal objection," said Gaston.

"Lucile Gautier. But it is decided that she marries young Luchet —"

Gaston's brief exclamation startled him. He looked in the young man's face, paused, and continued with emphasis: "I know it is so. I know it has been in contemplation these

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two months. I wish the poor girl had a happier lot; but as it is, Gaston, she must forget you. You know she must."

"Married — Lucile — my Lucile — impossible! But a few weeks ago — Why, she still wears my ring!"

"Very likely. You don't know women, Gaston."

"I tell you that girl loved me with all her heart and soul —"

"I daresay you loved her in that mad fashion, but for all that she will marry Luchet. He is rich, *mon garçon*. What are you now?"

Gaston could not help remembering Lucile's consternation when she heard of the loss of Château Farnoux.

"I shall have no rest till I know the truth of this," said he, starting up. "We will talk of business another time."

"Stay, stay — where are you going? To Marseilles! What to do there?"

"I shall, at all events, see Mme. de Farnoux."

"Have you not already attacked her twice? You have nothing new to say. And as for seeing Lucile, which of course is at the bottom of your thoughts, you may be sure that will not be allowed. Think what the consequences would be — I don't mean to yourself — if you roused that young demon Luchet's jealousy. No doubt you would like nothing better than to dispute her, hand to hand, with him. Consider the weapon you arm him with, if you appear and there is a scene. 'The old lover,' every time the husband was out of humour. Come, my boy, be generous."

"Duval, I must know whether they have forced her to consent."

"Write, then."

"I take your advice," said Gaston, after a pause. "I will enclose a letter for her in one to her mother, and it shall reach her. I will take care of that."

They rose, and walked the length of the Boulevard in silence. As they turned, M. Duval pressed Gaston's hand, and said, "Gaston, you would scorn to play the tempter. Never see Lucile again; you are answerable for her and yourself. I will help you now, or later. Go and write your letter if you choose, but avoid meetings. They will undo you both."

CHAPTER XXV.

GASTON awaited a reply to his letter in Château Farnoux, whose solitude suited well with his present temper. Solitude was an old acquaintance. As a child, he had been the constant companion of a melancholy mother, who loved to keep him beside her, but had no spirits to amuse her little son. He hardly knew his father, who lived almost entirely in Paris; his mother, her confessor, who taught him, and the servants and peasants of the neighbourhood, were the only people he ever saw. Félise de Farnoux, after her vain struggle to satisfy heart and mind with pleasure was abandoned, gave herself up to austere devotion, and for years before her death was a prey to the melancholy temperament of her family.

La Pinède was peculiarly fitted to nurse such moods. It stood amid the pine-wood from which it took its name, amongst whose gloomy branches the sea-wind sighed and moaned, while the waves washed its outskirts, and tossed up a fringe of foam and sea-weeds, and heaped fragments of broken shells among the very roots of the fir-trees. A plain without path or track, broken by clumps of feathery tamarisk, or white oblong stacks of salt and brine-pools, stretched around the Château, and a scanty, fever-stricken population inhabited the few huts that appeared near the *étangs* or salt-

lakes. The very herbage was rank and strange; the seabirds flew round, with harsh, mournful cries. A lonely and imaginative child could not fail to be strongly impressed by such an abode. Gaston's after-life had never effaced its effect: it had made a solitary student of him. La Pinède was his no longer; every sou had gone to pay the debts of a father of whom he had not one gentle recollection. In the solitude of Château Farnoux, reminiscences of his childhood thronged upon him; and as he recalled as much of his mother's history as he knew, there mingled with the deep resentment that the thought of her sufferings always aroused, a strong interest and curiosity as to the history of the young sister of whom Félise used to speak so fondly - that Géraldine who had cost him so dear. What had not she too suffered before and after she fled from her home! His deep affection for his mother led him to compassionate this other sufferer, and his romantic temper induced him to sympathise strongly with the outcast who had died unforgiven. While arranging family papers, he came upon the heart-broken letter from Géraldine, which Mlle. Le Marchand had restored to the Baron; for M. de Farnoux had had a kind of superstition against destroying or giving away anything. Every note or bill that he had received for years was still in existence, in the mass that filled the drawers of his writing table, and the old cabinets in the library. This letter moved Gaston's inmost heart. The dead lips on which the dust had long been heaped appealed to him to protect Denise, and in his present mood, when the brightness of life seemed vanished, and each day he saw more clearly that Lucile could not be his, the thought of showing kindness to the orphan cousin, who had no better protector than her strange old aunt, attracted him strongly. If, however, the idea presented itself that thus his own difficulties would be solved,

he turned angrily from all thoughts of Denise; and if he were influenced by it, it was unconsciously to himself.

He felt as if he had waited months for Lucile's reply, yet' it really came with little delay. It was authentic. He could not doubt the childish style, the tremulous characters tearblotted. It ran thus: "Dear Gaston, — Mamma has convinced me that it is my duty to marry my cousin Auguste. She says I shall learn to love my husband, and that she will always be with me; and she says there is no one like a mother. But, O Gaston —" here some words smeared out— "However that is all over, and I suppose you will forget me soon. I know I ought to forget you. L. G."

So she had submitted! To the last he had never thought she would. He had believed that some new turn of the wheel would again change all their destiny. No doubt she had resisted a little, but her love had been but a childish fancy; while his! - And Marcellin wrote that he had seen her, and she looked just as she used to look in old times! Gaston could not dispute a bride who seemed so easily resigned to her fate, and yet he waited in suspense, as if he did not know what the next act in the drama must be. It was actually an unexpected blow, when he received the formal announcement from Mme. de Farnoux that Lucile was married. The wedding had been strictly private, in consequence of her step-father's death, barely three months before; and Mme. de Farnoux might have added that the world was highly amused at her haste to secure her son-in-law. There lay the astounding announcement before Gaston - Lucile had become Mme. Luchet.

He never gave any account of how he spent the three next days: the fourth was passed in wandering in the hills. He came back to the Château wearied out in body and mind. Those days had tamed him strangely. He was tired of soli-

tude now, and wished Marcellin Duval would come to him; but Marcellin was at Marseilles, and he had no companion but the hound which Denise had caressed so fearlessly on the Pic des Maures. Lucile had always detested this dog, half in childish fear, half in jealousy of anything that shared Gaston's affection with her. The creature was now lying at his feet; as he moved restlessly and sighed, it raised its head and laid it on his arm. Somehow, the wistful intelligence of its eyes reminded him of Denise, when she thanked him at the *fête*. He rose and sought the letter of her mother, and read it through again, and it touched him anew.

"My own happiness has gone down in the storm, yet I might secure that of this girl," he thought. "Love I have not to give, but what I can I will. She shall hear the whole, and then decide. I will see her to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVI.

GASTON had hesitated long, in all the tortures of indecision, and now that he was resolved to act, he did it impetuously. Many motives, that he hardly was conscious of, had combined to decide him. One was the desire to put every possible bar between himself and the image of Lucile. The thought of having Mlle. Le Marchand for a near connection was at this moment quite indifferent to him, though formerly he would have been disgusted by it. Just as he reached her door, Zon came out. Her eyes sparkled with surprise and delighted intelligence at the sight of him, and she said, "Shall I announce monsieur? Mam'selle is reading to her aunt."

He put her aside, entered, and shut her out. As he stood in the little passage unnoticed, he could look full into the

room, the door being open, and saw therein MIle. Le Marchand sitting at her easel, with sketches heaped round her: but she held her brush idle, while she listened with profound attention to what Denise was reading, in English, from a great volume. The words were unfamiliar to Gaston, and struck him as singularly poetical; and as he looked at the girl's earnest, serene face, and heard the expressive modulations of her voice, he could not but own to himself that the man who had so pure and sweet a face at his hearth was not to be pitied after all.

"Give me wisdom that sitteth by Thy throne, and reject me not from among Thy children . . . O send her out of Thy holy heavens, and from the throne of Thy glory, that being present she may labour with me, that I may know what is pleasing unto Thee."

Denise paused. Mlle. Le Marchand spoke a moment later. "Thank you, child, I like to hear you read. I sometimes think wisdom has spoken to you indeed."

"Does it not speak to every one, dear aunt? Even if we do not exactly recognize its voice as we go along our way, our hearts often burn within us; and at last, if we listen long enough, we shall know and see whose voice it is."

"You are thinking of Emmaus. I like the thought, child, and I daresay the voice is in all things that speak to our hearts."

"You followed my English quite easily, aunt?"

"Quite, quite; I understand it well enough, though I am such an old blockhead, that though I was three years in England I could never, from first to last, speak two words to be comprehended. Cocotte there could speak it infinitely better than I. Roast beef! my Cocotte, speak!"

Here Gaston came forward. Mlle. Le Marchand's back

was towards him and she did not see him, but Denise did, and said with some emotion, "Aunt, M. de Farnoux!"

"Nonsense, child, he's dead and buried!" exclaimed Mile. Le Marchand, turning sharply towards the door. "What! Oreste! And what brings you here?"

"To speak a few words to my cousin, with your leave," said Gaston, bowing to her.

"Your cousin! Ah, if you claim to speak to her by that title, you may say what you like; you have a right," said Mlle. Le Marchand, sitting down, as if she had no share in the interview.

Denise was standing by the table, with a blush deepening fast on her cheeks. She felt that scarcely any motive but one could have caused this visit.

"Denise," said Gaston, in rapid, agitated tones, "it is only a little while ago that I learnt your history. My uncle told me of our relationship, and he expressed a strong wish that we two should be united in marriage, in a mariage de convenance. I was then full of hopes, of projects that.... No matter now. You shall hear what they were another time, if you choose. I did not think then that such a marriage was possible for either of us. What do we know of each other? You do not love me, nor do I love you, at this moment. — You may well ask why, saying this, I still come here to-day, desiring above all things to hear you promise to be my wife —"

"Is it because I am half a De Farnoux, cousin?"

"In a measure," he answered, wincing at hearing her address him by the name that Lucile had always spoken so fondly.

"Perhaps it is because you find Château Farnoux wants a mistress," said Denise, smiling, to keep down rising tears.

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"Would these motives satisfy you, Denise?"

"They seem to me good ones," she answered, with the calm acquiescence of a French girl.

Mlle. Le Marchand saw Gaston bite his lip. He-was silent, and resumed in a measured tone: "If they suffice I need say no more. Our compact is clear. We will not talk of love, but enter on life together as good friends and affectionate relations."

"Yes," answered Denise, relieved by his change of tone, for the agitation with which he began to speak had scared her. And then he kissed her hand, and asked Mile. Le Marchand if she would give him her niece.

"All of her that I have to give," she replied, brushing away a few tears. "She was a De Farnoux from the beginning. God grant the child more happiness than those who lived before her in the old Château ever knew."

Gaston looked at her, and suddenly held out his hand and pressed hers warmly.

"Thank you," she said, in an unsteady voice; "I am glad to touch the hand of a De Farnoux in friendship again. I think I could forgive even Mademoiselle now; and when the child is married I shall go away, and you may forget the Le Marchand connection if you like. No, I'm not speaking to you, silly girl; M. Gaston cannot be expected to feel as you do on this subject."

"Denise must not imagine that she loses her best-loved relation in accepting a husband," said Gaston, very kindly. "Before the time you speak of, we shall be too good friends to think of parting."

"I can't say, I'm sure, where M. le Baron may be at this moment," said Mlle. Le Marchand; "but I do think it can't be within hearing, or he would have manifested his presence now. If he desired anything in the world, it was to annihilate me. He came down here in the strength of his foolishness, thinking it was as easy as stringing beads to suppress the past. Poor man! And I was as stiff-necked as an old ram, and bided my time. Well, well, we'll talk of business another time. You had better go now; you have already made my hand shake so that I shall not be able to paint another stroke to-day. Adieu, Oreste."

By and bye Gaston did go. He had gained a new view of the uncouth old lady who seemed created to shock his taste in every way — and nothing is so implacable as taste. Yet he could now imagine Marcellin's estimate of her correct. But Denise! Denise, whose quiet, business-like view of the affair had thrown him back on himself, when he was about to tell her all! Doubtless she would have accepted Alexandre Verignon, had he been master of Farnoux! After all, Gaston said to himself in the bitterness of his heart, it was well, for he could fully give all that she was ever likely to desire.

Mlle. Le Marchand sat in a beatific reverie, till Denise raised her head, which had been resting on her aunt's lap, and then she said, "Child, it was a providential thing that you did not accept young Verignon."

"I could not. I have only seen two people whom I could have married."

"Two!"

"Marcellin Duval, and my cousin Gaston."

"Either, unfortunate child? either of them? One as freely as the other?"

"I can see which is the handsomest," said Denise, laughing and colouring.

"Good heavens! do you like them equally? Do you mean you would have married Marcellin if he had asked you?" "Yes, aunt; I think he is good and true, and would make any one happy."

"Oh, you wretched girl, I have a great mind to call that poor young man back and confess the truth! I refuse my consent! I'll have him back, I'll be no party to such treason," cried Mlle. Le Marchand, furiously.

"Dear aunt, you do not imagine I could care for either till they were more than slight acquaintances," said Denise, with a little show of proud amusement. "M. de Farnoux must know that. I suppose one learns to feel very differently, and even now I could trust and love my cousin dearly. I recollect noticing his manner to Lucile Gautier, and thinking that she must feel so safe and happy. Yes; I am happy, very happy; I knew that if it were good for me some change would come."

"You should have belonged to the Quietists, child. What do you mean?"

"This new life that has come to me was none of my own seeking, aunt; I have waited and tried to be patient, though sometimes I did long for something more to care for and to do; but there was no outlet. So I knew I ought to wait on tranquilly. You see more than I dreamed of has been sent me; and I am so glad to think all this."

"It is the most singular thing," said Mlle. Le Marchand, who had followed the girl's every look and gesture as she spoke; "one would not suppose that religious opinions could be inherited like family features, and yet here is this child talking exactly like her ancestress, Madeleine Le Marchand, who took her creed with her into that purgatory Aigues-Mortes, and lived there happy on the strength of it. Child, where did you learn these thoughts?"

"I always had them, aunt."

"You are a riddle to me, child — a riddle that I never Denise. 16 can solve. Perhaps your husband may find out the motd'éniqme."

When Mme. Pitre returned in the evening from her daily round, the first sounds she heard were the impromptu variations to Mendelssohn's Wedding March which Mlle. Le Marchand was executing on her violin. Now the notes breathed softly as a lullaby; then they rose into stormy shrieks of triumph, with shrill lamenting sounds amongst them, which probably represented the discomfiture of the poor Baron. Presently a wailing voice, inexpressibly sad, spoke of past recollections, but at last it changed into a strain still grave. and with a touch of sadness in it, but firm and sweet; and this depicted the union of the current of two lives, flowing on to the sea together. Mme. Pitre came in and spoke, but Mlle. Le Marchand took no notice of her till the last note had died into silence; and then, laving aside her violin, she pointed gravely to Denise, and said, "King Cophetua has come; the wedding is fixed; and there sits the bride. Let me present you to the future Mme. de Farnoux."

CHAPTER XXVII.

So all the world learnt that Denise was to marry Gaston de Farnoux; and it now became his part duly to pay his court to his *fiancée* during the time that would elapse before the marriage. His pride was unlike his uncle's, for he was careless of concealing the relationship that had seemed such a disgrace in the eyes of the Baron, and indeed looked down contemptuously from the height of his aristocracy on what gossip might be pleased to say concerning him. If at this time he had cared to reflect on such things, he would have wondered to find himself an *habitué* of Mile. Le Marchand's

salon, with Mme. Pitre for an intimate acquaintance. She was so innocently happy in the approaching exaltation of Denise, that Mlle. Le Marchand would not exclude her, though she saw that the little woman wearied Gaston considerably. M. and Mme. Rocca discreetly refrained from appearing when he was there, or his forbearance might have been over-tried; indeed he manifested much more surprise than pleasure on one occasion, when he found M. Rocca amiably helping Denise to manufacture paper flowers for the adornment of the ball-room of the Cercle. Contrary to his expectations, the moments he spent with his betrothed were those when painful thoughts had least hold upon him. Not that she had much to do with this, for she was apt to sit listening in silence, but the phantasies and sallies of Mlle. Le Marchand roused and interested him; and though her uncouth appearance offended him whenever he noticed it, he was growing used to her. A lasting friendship was springing up between them; they found common ground in the work into which he was beginning to throw himself. He had cast aside the collection of Provençal legends which it had been his delight for some months to make; such food was now too light to satisfy his mind; and besides, each legend had been related to Lucile, and was full of associations with her. Instead, he had transported himself into a world very unlike any which he knew from experience - that, namely, in which his ancestors Philippe de Farnoux, and Raymond, Philippe's son had lived. For in their journals, carefully preserved in the family archives, he had discovered that he possessed a faithful picture of France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from the Protestant point of view.

Philippe de Farnoux had lived before the Protestants of France had adopted that title. The journal called his fellowbelievers in Germany "Protestants," but those in France 16*

"les fidèles," or "les évangéliques," and showed evidently that he himself belonged to the singular school of mystics which very early appeared in the French Reformed Church. Yet with this, there was still a touch of humour in his writing that showed him a fellow-countryman of Rabelais, and presented the abuses of the Roman Church in a light so ludicrous, that no sober reasoning could have been more fatal to them. This journal began in the early part of the reign of Louis XIV., when the policy of the Court was to win the Protestants by conciliation. As long as their religion had exposed them to danger, the Protestant nobles had stood firm; but under this system each day saw soi-disant conversions. The Rohan-Chabots, the Les Trémouilles, the Châtillons, led the way: the *petite noblesse* followed, and as each name was recorded in the journal of Philippe de Farnoux. some brief pithy comment followed. Then came domestic entries, mingled with notices that told of coming troubles. The Protestants were forbidden to enter any learned profession - next, their ministers were ordered to guit the country in fifteen days; the temples were pulled down -"l'église est sous la croix," wrote Philippe. An entry followed, showing the De Farnoux, even then, not to be overburdened with riches. Baron Philippe was evidently extremely incommoded by a new law freeing all converts to the Roman Catholic Church from any debts they owed to those who remained Huguenots. A still greater trial was next recorded. A brother of the writer, charged with the crime of assisting some Bordelais Protestants to escape from the kingdom was cast into prison. Abjuration was to be the key that would open his cell. Donc il y mourra, wrote Philippe de Farnoux. Gaston sought in vain to discover whether this was so. A word or two here and there showed that his further fate was unknown to his brother.

The second journal began when the other ceased, and Raymond de Farnoux became the head of the house. In him Gaston found the man of action, rather than the thinker; the enthusiasm that is as strong in failure as in success, and needs no hope to keep it alive. Beside the earnest faith of these men, Gaston's own life and time seemed singularly empty and poor. Till now, descendant of the De Farnoux though he was, he had known very little about the history of his Church; these journals were like a revelation to him. When he spoke on the subject to Mile. Le Marchand, she would buzz round him as if she had been one of those terrible bees out of her favourite book, the "Ruche Romaine" of Marnix de Ste.-Aldegonde.

"Do you know three persons who believe anything enough to die for it?" she would ask. "I don't. I lived in Paris forty years ago, and I've no illusions left. A woman here and there might - Denise would - but the men - bah! But there were men once who thought their lives a trifle. compared to their creed;" and then, traditions that she had heard in girlhood reviving in her mind, she would tell, with fierce energy, her recollections of the history of her own family; - her father, born in a cave of the Cevennes, on the very day that her grandfather was carried to the galleys of Toulon; while an uncle awaited his death at Montpellier, with - strange coincidence! - a De Farnoux for his companion. "They did not flinch on the scaffold, those two!" said she; "they smiled and embraced, giving each other rendezvous in heaven. Jacques Le Marchand was hung, and Paul de Farnoux beheaded, and so they died."

The recollections of MIle. Le Marchand greatly interested Gaston, and she was always ready with her narrative; but after a time his attention displeased her.

"It is to me, not my niece, that this young man pays his

addresses," she said; "though I am assuredly no Ninon, lovely as a girl when seventy years were over her head. This should not be; but, Denise, be not jealous, I'll give you half of him."

Denise smiled, and said, "There is no better way of pleasing me, than by appreciating you, dear aunt."

"I'm an old fool!" said Mlle. Le Marchand to herself. "If she cared for him, that speech would have been wormwood to her! Besides, his love is not mine to give, nor worth having, unless he gave it himself. M. Oreste, your attentions are very flattering, but I think, after the wedding, I shall find it necessary to see how my colza and beet-root are growing in Normandy. So we are to go to Aix?" she continued aloud. "That is a kind proposal of the Duvals, and the girls will be your bridesmaids. The Baron, I suspect, would have had you marry Gaston at Marseilles, or Paris, out of the way of Farnousien pryers, but he must put up with a little disappointment. We will hope he knows nothing about it. And have you examined the corbeille carefully; Pitre was in raptures over it."

The corbeille, of course, was Gaston's affair, and he had begged Mme. Duval, the only female friend to whom he could apply, to order from Paris all the cashmeres, silks, lace, and etceteras, that woman could desire. All Denise's young acquaintance came to see these marvels, whose fame went abroad through the town. These were happy days for Mme. Pitre and Thérézon. The latter had persuaded Denise to take her as her maid, and thought this almost better than being married herself. Gaston's commission to Mme. Duval had led to a most amiable invitation that the marriage should take place from the Duval house; and there was the additional reason that there was a Temple at Aix, whose minister was a friend of Gaston's. There could be no assembly of

friends at this wedding, for bride and bridegroom possessed very few. When they considered who ought to be invited, it appeared that neither had a near relation in the world except Mlle. Le Marchand and Mlle. de Farnoux. There might be some distant connections living in Normandy, but none who could be summoned on such an occasion. This discovery made Denise feel with new gratitude how precious a real home was to her.

Farnoux had the satisfaction of seeing the bridal party go to the *Mairie* to sign the civil contract, and of knowing what Denise wore; though, as usual on such occasions, the whole party wore only morning costume; but then, as Zon said, "How well mam'selle looked with a feather in her bonnet!" Which feather was more significant than may at first sight appear, for it marked the approaching change in Denise's position, as unaffianced maidens in France rarely wear that ornament.

To Denise the civil ceremony was strange and trying. When she and Gaston stood before the Mayor, and signed the various legal documents necessary on such occasions, and replied with Gaston to the usual questions, it all seemed like a dream, with no reality in it; - Mlle. Le Marchand standing by the table, the Mayor behind it in his scarf of office, Gaston looking pale and stern beside her - all trembled and wavered as shadows would. That look of his remained fixed in her memory however. He breathed more freely when all was done, down to the congratulations of the Mayor, and the customary gift to the poor. The indissoluble bond between him and Denise was now fastened, and there was no room for more doubt. But she could hardly believe in it yet. They travelled to Aix the same day, with Mlle. Le Marchand; Denise was very silent -- hardly hearing even Gaston. For once outward things were unheeded by her.

and when he said they were approaching Aix, and she leant forward and gazed, it was not to see the little city, lying in a hollow of the low white hills, but rather for breath; for the thought that the next day the ceremony, which she esteemed really her marriage, would take place, suddenly overwhelmed her. A kind welcome awaited her; the two Demoiselles Duval welcomed her as an old friend, and won her back to smiles again. They took the liveliest interest in the trousseau and her marriage; but they watched Gaston with some wonder, and remarked to each other that he had grown olderlooking, and much graver in the last three months. There was nothing to find fault with in his manner towards Denise; nay, he had hurried on the wedding, yet there was something in him that was unfamiliar and unintelligible. Marcellin, too, was most unusually serious; his sisters hardly knew him in this new character, and began to think a wedding a very triste affair.

Denise put on her bridal white the next day, and in the Temple, when she had clasped Gaston's hand in hers and promised to love and obey him, while he on his part vowed to cherish her through good and ill, "according to the duty of a Christian husband," she could believe that their joint life had begun.

"Que Dieu, notre Père céleste, vous comble, l'un et l'autre, de ses bénédictions, et vous fasse la grâce de vivre ensemble longtemps et heureusement, dans sa crainte et dans son amour!"

What were the thoughts aroused by those concluding words in Gaston's mind? He looked down at his wife, and Denise raised so sweet a look to him that a thrill of tenderness and compassion went through him, and for a moment he saw again in her the orphan cousin, whom he had desired

to shelter and protect, and not the girl who had made a mariage de convenance with the owner of Château Farnoux.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FEW months before. Denise had stood friendless in the streets of Farnoux. She now found herself mistress of that Château at which she had looked with such interest as she approached the town. Her energetic nature had made itself felt in every corner of her new domain; from the salon to the basse-cour Denise was mistress; she dealt with her southern household with a tact and spirit that reconciled them to her prompt government; and she enjoyed having scope for her energy so much, that it seemed to her as if she had only just learnt what it was to live. Even into the dreary apartment of Mile. de Farnoux she brought sunshine, and the care of the poor invalid fell daily, more and more, upon her, as Denise found that her voice and presence seemed to satisfy her when everything else failed. It had been an inexpressible shock when Gaston presented her to Mlle. de Farnoux. Denise had never recalled the look that had followed her in the chapel, without a shudder; and she was almost overcome when brought face to face with her aunt, though there was no violence, nothing but hopeless vacancy, and a sort of pleased smile and muttering when Gaston sought to make her comprehend that Denise was his wife.

"Oh, what a wreck! what a grievous sight!" Denise repeated, covering her face when she had left the room, and Gaston was startled and surprised to see her quite unable to recover herself. It was always very hard for Denise to regain her composure on the rare occasions when it gave way, but his distress that he had exposed her to such a shock restored it.

"If it be possible on earth, she must indeed have explated whatever she did amiss," said Denise. "All those years of solitary disappointment ending in this!" and a profound compassion filled her heart, and left no room for shrinking or dislike. At first when Denise used to visit her, Mlle. de Farnoux would evince uneasiness, watch her, and soon signify a wish to be left alone; but rather as if reminded of some one or something that she had disliked at a former time, than as if feeling any present aversion to Denise. After a while, however, she used to send for her, and when she came would give orders to her in the imperious way, which no doubt she had used with Géraldine and Félise; or else seem only to have wanted to bring her into the room. Denise, who had never known the depths of grief or sin, had, nevertheless, a pitying tenderness to both that an angel might have felt. The sin was abhorrent to her, but the sinner called forth her deepest compassion. All that she had heard of the harsh tyranny of Mlle. de Farnoux only caused her to deal more gently with her; "she is stricken of God," she said low to Gaston, when he marvelled at the peculiar feeling with which she regarded their aunt. But it was such a strain on her powers to cheer and amuse Mlle. de Farnoux day by day, as he had never dreamt of. The outbreaks that grew more and more rare, were almost less trying than the daily sight of failing intellect. Denise would brace herself up to quiet and soothe her, and at last find only vacant looks, halffinished sentences, and meaningless gestures.

It was a gloomy commencement of married life, and a look of care began to haunt the eyes hitherto so peaceful. But, after all, this was not owing to the poor invalid, in whose apartment Denise was now always welcome, and she knew it. There was only one part of the Château where she was not at home, and that was the library, where Gaston sat

habitually. He had transferred his own books to it, and read and wrote there more than half the day. Once Denise had come in, but he raised his head with surprise that seemed to ask what she wanted; there was a look of dissatisfaction, gone instantly, but she saw it. She never disturbed his solitude again. And the question began to haunt her, "Why cannot he love me?" She felt that she knew even less of her husband now than before their marriage. He saw her glad and cheerful, delighting in her new position, and his judgment of her was confirmed; he thought his part of their compact fulfilled, and esteemed himself at liberty to withdraw to his own thoughts and pursuits. Denise felt keenly that every day made them more like strangers, though his kindness left no room for complaint - but there is sometimes nothing more bitter than kindness. She found herself constantly wondering what he was like before she knew him, and how she could please him; and meanwhile she grew timid, and doubtful what he would have her say or do. But one substantial subject on which to claim his attention still gave her courage. To it he always listened with interest, though often with a smile. He had his views of what his position as the representative of an old Protestant family required; but they had not much resemblance to hers. Her schemes were apt to be of a very practical nature, requiring a great deal of exertion in carrying them out, and were exceedingly unlike any that would have arisen amid Gaston's world of books. This world of his, once all-sufficient, was becoming less and less so to him; he was near that perilous moment when a man looks on life in discouragement, and asks himself what it avails, and whither it is tending. All unconsciously Denise delayed this moment by calling him into the midst of wholesome, every-day matters. She would come and say, "Mon ami, I have been thinking whether some

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better way of crushing the grapes could not be found than those *pressoirs*, against which the men bruise themselves black and blue. I want you to write to M. Duval and ask if there is no other machine. Will you?"

"Certainly; but all the effect will be that they will positively refuse to use your machine, if it exists, and you will be told that it will not work, or 'our fathers used the *pres*soirs, and we are no wiser than they.""

"But you will write, Gaston, and make them try some new way, at least on your estate. And the new kind of orange that we are to graft —"

Gaston laughed. "Undaunted, in spite of old Jean's opposition!"

Denise had remonstrated a day or two before with her gardener for not procuring a better kind of orange than that universal at Farnoux, and he had replied, "*Nous autres*, we have always been accustomed to graft a tree from the one next it."

"Yes," replied Denise, persevering; "and there is something else much more important. Do you not think M. Bertin would come here oftener?"

M. Bertin was the *pasteur* who occasionally preached in the chapel to his scanty flock.

"I had thought of that myself."

"I am glad . . . Surely these people will forget to pray if they are reminded of it only every three months. Our service at London is the one thing there that I regret."

"You must not try conversion, my dear Denise; the Romanist clergy here are equally intolerant and unenlightened --"

"I do not want to convert; but if we could at least teach a little truth! Imagine Zon. She has seen me reading the Bible, and has sometimes asked me to read her something

out of it. She listens with great interest, but it seems to me that she has no idea what it is. When I read of the punishment of Lot's wife, she burst out laughing, and exclaimed, 'But the poor woman! one must pity her! Exchange the town, where no doubt there were shops, and *fetes*, and a carnival, and much amusement for the country — all the family were going to live in the country, were they not? *Tenez*, I should have looked back — I should have done like her!'''

"Yes, Zon's Bible are the pictures in the church of Ste.-Dévote; such as she need a teaching that speaks to the eye. I recollect once seeing two women come into Ste.-Geneviève, at Paris, and stand before a fresco of St. Martin sharing his cloak with the beggar; one, who knew the story, began relating it to the other with a *naïveté* that was worthy of the first ages of faith."

"But there is nothing real in all that, Gaston!"

"It is what the ignorant are fit for."

"No one can be fitted to live on what is untrue."

"Who shall say what truth is, Denise?"

"What your ancestors lived and died for. Oh, it would be too miserable to doubt, for nothing in all the world has any worth but that!"

He saw that she entirely meant what she said. Her eyes had that far-away gaze that Zon had remarked; the smile on her lips was at once triumphant and peaceful. Neither pain nor joy, honour nor dishonour, weighed with her in the balance against what she meant by truth. Many a time, already, had he wondered at the child-like faith that esteemed all things simply as right or wrong. He thought it was her secluded life that had kept her heart so pure, and her creed so simple; and smiled between scorn and sadness to think what would become of both when they had to do battle with the world.

"Your speaking of M. Duval reminds me that Marcellin proposes coming here to-day," he said, presently; and she, who had been watching him wistfully, gave a cry of joy, and with glad looks enquired how long he could stay. Gaston satisfied her, and remarked that she and Marcellin had always been great allies.

"I am enchanted that he is coming," she answered, with a warmth that surprised him still more, for to him timidity made her manner appear cold, and he could not guess that half her pleasure in the prospect of seeing Marcellin arose from the hope that he could tell her all she wanted to know about Gaston. She went away to arrange her occupations, so as to have a leisure afternoon. She was always busy now, and especially when, as on this day, Mme. Pitre was to give her a music lesson. Long before this she had learnt all that the little woman could teach her, but she continued to receive instructions from her, and paid well for them, as the easiest way of increasing Mme. Pitre's scanty income. Denise had at first gone down to Maison Rocca to take her lessons, but she found that Mme. Pitre thought going to Château Farnoux such honour, that she was quite mortified by Denise's attempt to spare her the toilsome walk.

So she had her own way, and Denise used the pretext of distance and paid for the lessons at a treble rate. Little Louis Rocca often came with Mme. Pitre, and sometimes remained for several days. He had always been a great pet of Denise, and Gaston, remembering that Lucile had admired and caressed the child, made a favourite of him, and treated him with something of the same tenderness which had once been Lucile's. Many a time a pang thrilled through Denise, as she longed to have that look and smile addressed to her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARCELLIN DUVAL arrived sooner than he was expected; Gaston was not at home, and Denise had to do the honours of the Château. Her welcome gratified Marcellin; who thought to himself that she was a châtelaine born, and ten times more bewitching than that pretty little silly thing Lucile, so wrapt up in Gaston that she never had a look for any one but him! As Gaston did not appear, Denise proposed that they should go in search of him. Marcellin wished for nothing better than to make an excursion with Denise for his guide, and she did not trouble herself just then to consider whether etiquette permitted it or not. As they set out he began, "So I find you fully established as Lady of Farnoux, without an idea of residing at Paris! Is it possible?"

"Yes. Gaston once suggested Paris, but he seemed to care little about it."

"You are going to bury yourself en province, then?"

"It is where we ought to be, since Gaston is master of Château Farnoux. I cannot think where those are who should be our country gentlefolks!"

"Ask the great revolution!"

"Ah, I suppose that as a body the French aristocracy perished then. But still there must be families who spend part of the year in Paris, and part in the country. I should like some time or other to do so."

"And the woman who has lived in Paris can never live anywhere else. You smile! but it is an ascertained fact. No woman really loves the country; they go there to economise or sulk; but they soon fly back to the town. I am convinced that women are born with a natural antipathy to the country."

"I would never go to Paris if I believed all that."

"And do you hope to make a country gentleman of your husband? He, an author, with his foot on the first step of the ladder of fame — the pen is as strong as the sword to carve out a career. Do you think he will not sigh for the battle-field of ideas at Paris? In the country we all vegetate; in Paris, you know, *Vesprit court dans les rues*."

"If it is always running about the streets, that may explain why very often there is so little in books," said Denise.

"You are determined to show me that wit inhabits the country as well as the capital. But are you serious in believing you can spend your life happily here? or Gaston either? You have *réunions* of friends; you visit the neighbouring châteaux; but you are too inaccessible to have any real society, unless you gather friends who can remain some days at a time. As for Farnoux itself —"

"Oh, that I know is hopeless."

"Decidedly, Gaston would hardly find congenial society at the Cercle — but you know nothing of that institution but its balls."

"Oh, I know that it meets above a chemist's shop, and I have an idea that the drugs and the coffec are prepared together. I suppose the arrangements are *des plus simples* — and people play cards and billiards, and smoke. One would meet a good many MM. Rocca, n'est ce pas?"

"Precisely. You yourself are an experienced whistplayer?"

"Certainly; since I came to Farnoux I have learnt to play sixette and quatrète, as well as how to cook snails, and a bouille-abaisse."

"That is what one learns en province, you see!"

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"But, Marcellin, we must live here. Everything combines to show it; all our work is here; you cannot say that Gaston will write less well because he lives in the country; and, besides, men are not made only to write books."

"You treat authorship with small reverence."

"I think it is a great gift; but I imagine a man should act as well as write. Surely he must live heartily for others — let him write the thoughts and feelings that come to him; but he cannot shut himself up and say, 'I will live to write.' Else he would look on everything as so much material for his next poem!"

"You have said all this to Gaston? Egeria must have spoken to ill-pleased ears! What did he say?"

"Oh, I never said all this as I have done now. I should not have had courage."

"You are not afraid of me, then?"

"Oh, no! I know that nothing I said could annoy you; and I should not care particularly if you liked it or not. You would forget all about it directly."

"There you are mistaken, madame. I never forget anything you say. It is too unlike the remarks of other people."

"I will tell you another reason why we must stay here. Mlle. de Farnoux —"

"Ah! How do you get on with her?"

"She likes having me near her, but it is so sad!" said Denise, with a visible shudder. "I am not afraid now, but it haunts me at night. Marcellin, how strange it is that some faults are so terribly punished, and others so slightly! Life is very puzzling when one begins to think about it!"

> "'L'onde et l'abîme ont un mystère, Que nul mortel ne pénétra; C'est Dieu qui leur dit de se taire Jusqu'au jour où tout parlera,'"

Denise.

was Marcellin's reply. Denise had never heard the lines before; they impressed her strongly.

"Yes, one knows nothing!" she answered. "But one can wait. When once it is clear, how simple it will all seem, as all our puzzles do when they are explained. But now it does seem singular that such a weight of punishment should fall on some! There are two people whose history I should so much like to know —"

"Your two aunts?"

"Yes."

"I have heard that Mlle. de Farnoux was on the point of marriage with that M. de Videlle who distinguished himself in Mexico. No one knows whether he or she broke it off. Fortunate man!"

"I think that, happy, she might have been so different. But there would always have been the violent temper. Imagine — I roused it last Sunday by putting on a coloured apron — you know I had just left off my mourning. It seems that it used to be a custom among the Huguenots to wear black on Sundays, though I suppose no one does so now; but she recollected this, and her fury was what I cannot describe! And yet generally now she is so passive."

"Where is that excellent woman, Mlle. Le Marchand?"

"Oh, imagine my vexation when I found the other day she had gone away quite suddenly, leaving a message with Mme. Pitre that I might write to her in Normandy!"

"I am always reminded, when I hear of her, of what a friend said to the Chevalier de Boufflers, meeting him on the highway: 'Je suis charmé de vous trouver chez vous.' Of course you have no idea when Mile. Le Marchand will return?"

"None, and I did so wish her to see how happy I am. Why do you look at me?"

"It is so agreeable to see happy people. An idea occurs to me; you see we do not find Gaston — have you yet visited the chapel of Ste.-Agnesca? No? Let us go there, then; he is as likely to be there as anywhere."

Denise laughed, and consented. They turned towards the grotto. There had been heavy rain during the night, and voices of countless little rills were babbling in every nook of the hills, hastening to join the swollen turbid torrent that rolled through the glen, and spread a carpet of mud far out on the sea. The clouds were yet lingering in the horizon, and the distant hills were purple and the sea gray. Myrtle and cistus bushes almost hid the unfrequented path to the grotto, but it grew more distinct on the barer ground, as Denise and Marcellin ascended and verdure grew scantier. The view over the sea became more extensive, and headland after headland, bay after bay appeared before them, till a sudden turn led them among hills that shut out the view behind, and in front suddenly appeared the deep opening of the grotto, or beaumo, the patois name for such caverns. The porous limestone was worn all around the entrance by sun and frost into a fantastic fretwork, and within all was dark, at least to eyes that came out of full daylight. The ear caught the sound of a little stream that rose in the grotto, and trickled slowly into a natural basin in the rock, fringed with maidenhair fern. Gradually the eye could perceive a stone altar with the irregular petrifactions that popular fancy had converted into tapers set on it: a rude crucifix had been placed there by some pious hand, no one knew when. Minor details could soon be distinguished; initials cut on the sides of the cave, and a handful of halfwithered flowers on the altar.

"Croix d'amour," said Marcellin, smiling, as he lifted and 17*

replaced the faded cresses. "An offering from some lovestricken maiden."

"Croix d'amour! is it so they call them? What an ominous name!" said Denise, touching them in her turn.

"Ominous! Sombre natures like yours might perhaps take that view of them. It would never have occurred to me. Now you will imagine some touching history of love chequered and oppressed — What are you seeking?"

"You said Gaston cut his name here long ago."

"I will show you our initials, cut years ago, with a blank left for the name of the future adored one."

"Room for how many did you leave?"

"Ah, malicious one! I am fidelity itself till the beloved herself changes. Then how can I continue to love, when she is no more what once charmed me?"

"Did he ever bring Mlle. de Lux here?"

"What could have suggested such an idea to you?"

"I once heard him say she was the most beautiful woman he ever saw."

Marcellin looked at her smiling, but Denise did not smile.

"Cupid must have effaced my initials," said he, avoiding the question, with his old love of teasing. "No, here!" —

"Those must be Gaston's," said Denise, pointing to where, amid all the letters of the alphabet, or the more ambitious attempts of scholars who had carved whole names, appeared a deep-cut G. de F. Marcellin looked, and started with dismay, for he was not aware that since the boyish visit to the cave of which he had spoken, Gaston had made another with a different companion.

"L. G.! That I should have brought here her to see that! She who took fire at a solitary mention of a handsome woman!"

"Are those Lucile Gautier's?" said Denise, as if in answer to this thought. "Gaston brought her here then —" and there was a startled look, gone, however, immediately. "I only saw her twice, but I always wished to know her. I always wonder how Gaston could help loving so pretty a creature. Was Mlle. de Lux as charming?"

"Are you doing her the honour to be jealous?"

Denise made a gesture as if offended.

"Pardon! I will not name her again."

"But I wish much to hear of her," said Denise, with simplicity that pleased Marcellin. "I know so little of my husband, and I want to understand what he likes."

"You must not be jealous of his past life; no man likes that."

"I do not think I am. For instance, I have no silly fears lest he should have loved Lucile; because I know that if he had he would have married her. Every one knew how much her mother wished it, and that she was so angry he did not, that she left the Château."

"You may be at rest, then. As for Mlle. de Lux, he never saw her but once, and never cared a rush for her."

"Ah, I am glad to know it was only my fancy — and after all, my husband would not love me in that manner."

"In what manner?"

"Of course," she answered, with grave simplicity, "I know that married people are friends, not lovers; he told me so himself before we married; but I often am afraid I am not clever enough for Gaston."

"Bah! he ought to see that you are adorable."

"Thank you," she answered, much amused at the earnestness with which he uttered the compliment. "I am glad Gaston's best friend should think so." "Whether Gaston does so or not now, be sure he will some day."

"I should be very glad to think that, Marcellin!"

Denise had seen enough of Marcellin to become intimate with him, and their friendship was very real. She still considered him as a rattle-pated boy, but at the same time relied on his brotherly affection and good sense to an extent of which she was hardly aware; and Gaston had observed that she never hesitated to claim from Marcellin a hundred little services, which she never asked from himself. With Marcellin she was as gay, as with Gaston she was timid and silent. Gaston failed not to observe this, but never guessed the true explanation of the difference of her manner to him and to his friend. Marcellin himself knew perfectly well that the whole secret lay in her certainty of his honest friendship for her; and wishing for nothing beyond, he began to lay sagacious schemes for piquing Gaston into jealousy, as the best way of awakening him to a sense of his wife's merits. All unconscious of his good intentions, she came out of the grotto, and sat down on the stone pedestal of a grev old cross, which some hand — probably the same that laid the cresses on the altar - had garlanded with leaves and flowers.

Marcellin lay on the ground below, twisting a bit of arbutus in his fingers, and inwardly giving thanks that she had thought so little of Lucile's initials. He returned to a safe subject by saying, "And so Mlle. Le Marchand is on her travels again. And Cocotte?"

"Of course, but do not laugh at Cocotte. She was the means of introducing me to Mrs. Lisle."

"Your adopted mother?"

"Yes. She has often told me about it. My family were

in the greatest poverty, and at last my aunt resolved to sell Cocotte."

"I wonder she did not rather sell her niece!"

"I daresay she would, only it was easier to find a purchaser for the bird. So she put up a great placard in our window, 'To sell; a parrot, speaking French and English.' Mrs. Lisle used to come and see a servant of hers ill in the house where we lodged; she saw this placard, and being fond of birds, inquired about it. Besides, she felt sure no English person had written the advertisement."

"She was herself French?"

"From Blois. Her husband met with her while he was studying French there."

"A widow?"

"Not when we first knew her. She did not buy Cocotte, but she was very kind to us, and for some years paid for my schooling. I went to a school kept by an old French lady and her daughter — it had been established long ago for the children of refugee Huguenots."

"Do you mean such institutions still survive in London?"

"Oh yes; but you know it is now the children of French tradespeople, and so on, who frequent them. The mistress I speak of escaped from France in the Revolution, and was very glad to gain a livelihood thus. Mrs. Lisle never became at all English, and anything French was always welcome to her, and I believe she was very kind to the old lady."

"Well, how long did you remain there?"

"Seven years. My aunt was wandering about, and did not want me. Then Mr. Lisle, who was a rich banker, died, and his widow took me to live with her."

"And with her you spent eight years?"

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"Yes. It was not gay. I see you think it must have been insupportably dull — but I was happy."

"You were fond of this good Mrs. Lisle, then?"

"I was grateful — yes, and fond of her, for she was very kind; but she was not a person to love passionately."

"Do you know what 'to love passionately,' means?"

Denise's thoughts turned to Gaston; she coloured and answered, "For all you have told me about Marie Leclerc and — others, Marcellin! I don't think you know either."

Marcellin protested against this, and the confidences which he proceeded to make would have greatly amused a third party. Denise was a good listener, a charm he had early discovered. Here, he said, he had found a third sister, with none of the prosaic associations of infancy; no recollections of tartines, screams, and scratches, to mar the poetry of the relationship. He had arrived in the midst of the history of his last grande passion, which, like all the others, was very serious while it lasted; and Denise had just given way to a joyous and cruel laugh, when the tête-à-tête was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Gaston. Marcellin, in pursuance of his schemes, put on an air of suppressed emotion; Denise, without any feigning, became grave at once; and Gaston, whom old associations had induced to visit the grotto, was confounded to find her there. Marcellin was delighted at this propitious commencement, but thought it as well to explain how he and Denise came there.

"I found your initials," said Denise to her husband, "and will you tell me if those below are not Mlle. Gautier's?"

Gaston looked at Marcellin, but there had evidently been no treachery. He answered, "They are," and stood for a few moments beside Denise, who had risen, and gone into the cave to point them out. A flood of recollections came

over him. She was about to say she should like to add hers, when, looking up at his face, she saw there the same look that had sunk into her memory at the *mairie*. She could not read it now any more than then; but a vague suspicion came into her mind, which would have been defined, but for her mistaken belief that Gaston had actually refused to marry Lucile; for so ran Farnoux gossip. She turned in silence to leave the cave.

"Nous dansons sur un volcan!" thought Marcellin.

Gaston knew that he had been near betraving himself. He made amends for having yielded to thoughts that he had firmly resolved to banish, by treating his wife with marked attention as they returned home. Denise had never till she married known the luxury of being guarded and cared for; it was particularly delightful to one who had been only used to the measured kindness of a benefactor. As she leant on Gaston's arm, with Marcellin to give her courage, she was gayer than Gaston had believed it was in her nature to be. Marcellin had not seen them for several months, and had many questions to ask, and she compelled him to listen for the answers, which was more than most people could do; and Gaston was amused at the peremptory way in which she treated him; but he was at the same time slightly dissatisfied. He called Marcellin to account, between jest and earnest, when they were alone together, and demanded what he and Denise always found to say to each other.

"We converse on a subject which I do not choose to tell you."

"Excuse my curiosity," said Gaston, laughingly. "It is unjustifiable — I know your fascinations; I am not so blind as you think, bah! — and I appear, as you know, when least expected."

"Ah, you disturbed a delightful *tête-à-tête*. You have a pearl of a wife, of whom you are perfectly unworthy!"

"Thanks, mon cher. You are about to tell me that you adore her, eh?"

"That should be your part; but I own I have already told her so."

"For the future leave me to act my part myself," said Gaston, still in jest, but more hastily than he intended; for his own affection and esteem for Marcellin made him quick to believe that his devotion, sportive as it was, might be dangerous to the peace of a young wife whose heart was unoccupied.

"Gaston!" said Marcellin, suddenly serious. "I have something to say to you."

"Say on!"

"We are old friends_"

"Old enough to speak frankly to each other."

"Well — here I am stranded — as much at a loss as if we were strangers. I have no idea why you married Denise. There must be some mystery in the affair. I should have sworn that when you married you would have given something more than a name and a ring! Why, I myself—" he added, becoming vehement as Gaston only smiled and lighted a cigar — "I, who am a matter-of-fact, prosaic animal, have nevertheless my ideas on this subject. If I married, I would give my whole confidence, my entire affection. I would not use up the best part of my life, and then submit to marriage as a necessary evil. You did not precisely do that, but—"

"Enough, mon cher. Brisons là. You said all that at Aix."

"This girl is full of that covered fire that burns hottest. When she learns that you love Lucile—"

"Stop there, Mareellin." And then, as if for once the hidden bitterness overflowed, Gaston exclaimed, "You talk of fire — I have seen nothing but ice. You are right in saying that no man ever looked forward more than I to that thing, whose name has become a standing jest among us marriage. I saw in it all that you say, and more; it represented life-long affection, trust, protection on one side, fond reliance on the other. The whole dream vanished. A dead man came between me and Lucile. Then, like a fool, I thought to reconstruct my vision, in a measure tried to realise it in Denise. She herself, one moment too late, showed me the absurdity of my hope."

"You found you could not satisfy her!"

"I found," said Gaston, "that her ideal was a certain position in the world; she never for an instant thought love necessary. I would have told her the whole truth, when she silenced me by her cool business view of the affair. She is excellent, conscientious, truthful — and, as long as she reigns supreme, she will be perfectly content."

"You think so?"

"I am convinced of it. As for Lucile — let the past sleep. Now we will have done with all this."

"I observe that a man usually enters on married life by quarrelling with his old friends," said Marcellin; "this is just the opportunity."

"I cannot afford to quarrel with you. The past is dead. The present I will deal with as I can. Denise is admirable; I esteem and trust her entirely — is that nothing? For myself, I had imagined a different life, but many a man finds himself living out an existence just the opposite of what he had looked for, and yet endures it very equably."

"Parbleu! you forget that two people, unless they are

both made of marble, cannot live together connected by the closest ties without loving or hating each other!"

"Bah! Look at half the married people you know!"

"Unless they have gone through an awful discipline first, neither men nor women resign themselves easily to a joyless life; and these are not times when, if you happen to dislike your wife, you can go on pilgrimage, or find out she is your cousin, and divorce her!"

Gaston made no answer; he was thinking of his mother's history, and that recollection always made him gloomy.

"There is a lefthandedness in the affairs of men that vexes me horribly!" muttered Marcellin to himself. "To think that he cannot see she has given him her heart! and love like hers is not so easily come by that one could afford to throw it away!"

CHAPTER XXX.

By a master-stroke of policy, Mme. Rocca had persuaded the uncle and godfather of little Louis, an abbé well-to-do in the world, to undertake the expense of the child's education. He was soon, therefore, to go away to Montpellier, where the uncle lived, and Denise would lose her little pet and scholar. M. Rocca and Denise lamented over the separation, but no reasonable objection could be made. Mme. Rocca had schemed very cleverly for her little son, and was quite reconciled to parting with him, by thinking of how many france she should save by escaping the expense of his education. She was always so calmly triumphant in her parsimony, that she had quite persuaded her neighbours to look on it as a virtue. Louis had come for a last visit to the Château, and informed Denise that he should be very glad to become a "collégien," for he was quite tired of his papa

and mamma, and wanted to go away and see something new. He did not even pretend to be sorry to leave Denise, and yet she was grieved to lose the little monkey, and kept him by her side and let him chatter as he liked. He had nearly lost his shyness, and would challenge Marcellin, who could make friends with any child, to a romp, or call on Gaston to hold his hand while he walked all along the top of the parapetwall of the terrace. Had any one but Gaston held him. Denise would not have permitted this exploit, for the parapet rose sheer above the valley, and few heads but swam to look down that dizzy height. Louis was the fonder of this exploit from a suspicion that it alarmed her; and when they all came in from their expedition to the chapel of Ste.-Agnesca he ran to meet them, and beg Gaston to put him on the wall. Denise was well pleased when he was contented to return. and sit at Gaston's feet on the terrace and watch the owls - Bèn l'oli - as he called them, fly round the Château. Denise was sitting near, and Marcellin leant against the parapet. The evening mists were rising in the valley far below, and lingering round the pine-trees in the hills, but the sky was clear and bright with stars.

"And so," continued Louis, who was inclined to take more than his fair share of conversation, "Mamma said I should go, because she could not leave me with Toinoun, and she locked up all the cupboards; and papa borrowed uncle Henri's little carriage, and we drove a long way, til we came to Costabelle."

"Little magpie! I daresay you saw no miracles there!" said Marcellin, with vexation that surprised Denise and Gaston. "What do you think you will see when you go to Montpellier, eh?"

"When I go to Montpellier, I shall be a *clerjoun* (chorister) and learn to sing. I can sing now; Zon has taught me."

"Let us hear," said Gaston, amused at the idea of the boy's education as an ecclesiastic being commenced by Zon.

Accordingly, Louis began to sing a cantique in patois, celebrating the glories of Paradise, to the tune of "Charmante Gabrielle:"

> "Demoron ravissento Aimable Paradis, O qu'uno amo es contento Qu' enfin de tu jouïs --- "

When, suddenly breaking off, he returned to his former topic with, "And we got to Costabelle, three whole leagues from Farnoux, and what do you think was the first thing I saw there? The pretty lady!"

"It is getting too cold to stay here," interrupted Marcellin.

"Cold!" said Denise, laughing. "It is only that you like hearing no one's voice but your own; does he, Gaston? What pretty lady, Louis?"

"The one I saw here when I came to mass with you and Misé Marchand. And she saw us, and said she was come to stay at the *bastide* near the village with her sister-in-law, because she was ill, and she kissed me, and asked when I was here last."

"Why, he must mean Mlle. Gautier — Mme. Luchet, I ought to say — your cousin Lucile, Gaston? We must go to visit her," said Denise, looking up to Gaston. "I wonder if M. Luchet —"

She stopped abruptly.

"She said she was ill," added Louis, "but she did not look so. Why is she not here now? I asked her, and I said she must come back, for I like her."

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"Indeed, you little vagabond!" said Marcellin, laughing, but his eye all the time on Denise.

"I do, and she gave me a *canesteleto* (little basket) full of fruit, and she kissed me, and I love her very much."

Gaston rose hastily, raised the child in his arms, and kissed his forehead. Then, setting him down, he walked away. In the rush of feelings awakened by learning that Lucile was so near, he forgot all but her — forgot that Denise was in existence. She stood stricken with swift conviction; all the vague doubts and fears that had been floating in her mind were crystallized as by an electric spark. She turned to Marcellin as if to speak, with an appealing, piteous look; then with a great effort rallied, and tried to make some trifling remark. Marcellin knew that to meddle here was more than perilous, but his sincere affection for her would not let him hold aloof.

"Denise! — Yes, I know that I have no business to interfere, you need not tell me that," he said, speaking English, that Louis might not understand. "You think, as your aunt once said, that I am like St.-Antony's pig, who poked his nose everywhere! No matter. I see how it will be. I would be silent if you were an ordinary sort of person! but you are not. You do not play on the piano, you do not cry, you do nothing like other women. You brood and think, and say nothing. Listen to me. I have known Gaston all my life —"

"And Lucile?"

"And Lucile most of it. A pretty, very pretty child, a plaything — Gaston loved her. You see I speak truth —"

"Say, loves then, Marcellin."

"Loves, then, if you will; yet he did not marry her. He chose you."

"He did!" she said, with sighing wonder.

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"He will end by loving you better than he ever did Lucile Gautier, for you have more love to give in return."

"I never thought of love; you know that. It is not that I am jealous, indeed. But, O Marcellin! he is very unhappy!" — and there was a pause.

"That is all she thinks of!" said Marcellin to himself. "But that cannot last. When I heard that Lucile had gone to Costabelle, I foresaw all would soon be known, but to think that that little atom —" he regarded Louis with comic disgust — "should have been the match to blow up the mine! I never believed myself intended by nature for a tragic actor, yet it seems to me that I have got a *rôle* in something that is astonishingly likely to turn to tragedy! And if she once falls in love she will have no more sympathy to bestow on me love is a horridly egotistical thing! What is she thinking of, I wonder, standing there with her eyes cast down, and holding Louis' hand? A statue could not be stiller. What a beautiful countenance it is, *selon moi*, and yet nobody agrees with me!"

"And I can do nothing! Nothing!" said Denise, breaking silence at last. "That is hard. If he would but once tell me what it all means, and if I could make him happier, I should be satisfied. I must wait till I know him better."

It is said that there exists a certain elf-king of the name of Tolf, who has no power over mortals unless called by name, but when once named he can never be exorcised. It is is often so with thoughts. For some time an undefined fear had hovered round Denise, and now it had taken shape. Before Marcellin left Château Farnoux he saw that her timidity had changed into a devouring anxiety, and that she was fast becoming absorbed by the question how to win the love of her husband, who all the time was unaware of having betrayed himself, and fancied — occupied by other thoughts

and feelings — that he and Denise were still on their old footing of calm friendship.

Elastic as his spirits were, Marcellin left Château Farnoux sadly enough.

CHAPTER XXXI.

UP to this time nothing had ever stirred the depths of Denise's nature, and her feelings were fresh as a child's, and strong as a woman's. Marcellin had rightly said, she was like covered fire; it had burst out now and she hardly knew herself. She was continually craving for her husband's presence, and yet, when with him, she longed for nothing so much as to escape again. She now never appeared to so little advantage as in his presence, occupied as she was in watching his looks, and uncertain of pleasing him. The dread, too, that sooner or later some meeting with Lucile would re-awaken all the old feelings, if indeed they slept, haunted even her dreams; and she woke, morning after morning, from visions that might well leave her unrefreshed. It was a mystery to her why Gaston had married her; Marcellin himself was equally ignorant; but she came near the truth in surmising that it was done in the bitterness of disappointment, when, for reasons unknown to her, Lucile could not be his. She saw now that he had long loved his beautiful cousin; and, though she trusted Gaston with all her own generous heart, and never doubted but that he was putting this love away from him with his whole strength, her courage drooped before the enterprise of winning a pre-occupied heart. They would meet, they must meet, and then beyond that she could not go. This terror was never absent from her mind; her thoughts would perpetually run on it, while she sat with Mlle. de Farnoux, or superintended her

Denise.

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household, or visited her poultry and silk-worms at the farm in the valley below the Château.

It was too true that already the old combat in Gaston's heart was fiercer than ever; not only had Louis betrayed Lucile's neighbourhood, but she, in her childish rashness, had confirmed the intelligence by a note, imploring him to come and hear why she had married her cousin. He dared not trust himself to a meeting. On the contrary, he forced himself in every way to realise that they were utterly and for ever parted; he shunned solitude, sought to make a constant companion of Denise, devised means of carrying out her innovations, little as he found himself caring for them; and of an evening he read to her the result of his day's labour upon the old journals and memoirs, which he purposed publishing, with notes, as a contribution to the history of the Reformed Church in France. Gaston had ambition, but the time was one when a conscientious man found it very difficult to act. The coup d'état had just taken place, and Gaston, while thoroughly averse to the ruler of France and the means which he had taken of arriving at power, could not but see that liberty and order depended on his retaining possession of the throne. A Legitimist at heart, he yet felt all the arguments brought forward by the other parties too strongly to be a warm adherent of Henri Cinq; and, moreover, a Protestant who had studied the history of his country could have little love for a priest-ridden king. Literature was therefore his natural resource, especially as he knew well that, as Marcellin said, the pen has carved out the career of many a statesman in France. Authorship had hitherto been his pastime; it was becoming his business; and this labour of his among the records of his ancestors was after Denise's own heart; she entered with enthusiasm into the researches which he found necessary, and brought a

clear-headedness and good sense to bear upon them, which he found not a little useful to him. With this subject in common they were sometimes so much at ease together that they might for a little while have believed theirs a happy marriage; but too soon some trifle would dispel the dream; Gaston would smile in mockery of himself, and Denise shrink from

> "The pang all other pangs above, Of kindness counterfeiting absent love."

And that was all she should know in her married life! and she, who beforehand, like almost every girl in Farnoux, looked on marriage as such a simple, common-place affair, now could not endure the very friendship which she had desired.

"Oh, if he had but loved me, we might have been so happy! Even now I think he is beginning to like me: but they will meet, and then — then!"

She had been murmuring the old thought to herself, as she came back from the orange garden, where Gaston had remained to see some alteration in the cistern that watered both his ground and that of several other proprietors. Denise stood still in the door-way of the Château, feeling as if turned into stone, for before her eyes was the fair spectre that haunted her — no vision, but in bodily presence — Lucile herself stood in the hall. There they faced each other; and Lucile saw in Denise Gaston's wife, while Denise beheld in Lucile the woman whom Gaston loved. Neither spoke for a moment; then, as if expecting Denise would seek to banish her, Lucile exclaimed defiantly, "Is my cousin not here?" and she laid a stress on the title of relationship.

Now that the dreaded moment was come, Denise's first wild feeling was, that while she lived, those two should never meet. Then she knew herself impotent to prevent it. She

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turned a look of such dumb despair on her rival, that Lucile, in all her agitation, was scared. She had never imagined that the woman who was Gaston's wife could look thus.

"Are you unhappy too?" she said.

"Unhappy! - Oh, why are you come here?"

"Do you love him, then?"

"Yes!" said Denise, out of a heart that seemed breaking. "Does he love you?" cried Lucile, hastily.

"If he saw me dead this moment, he would only say, 'My aunt will miss her!"

"Ah! he loves me still!" cried Lucile, with a flash of triumph.

"And if he does, what then? Oh, you were merciless when you came to-day. The past is so past for Gaston and you, that even to think of reviving it is sin. You have brought misery for us all. There is nothing on earth left for you but to forget each other. Why are you here?"

"You may speak severely, but you do not know my wretchedness!"

"Am I then so happy?" said Denise, bitterly. "Seas between us could not part me from my husband, more than your standing here. Lucile, if you know what it is to love him, go back, and do not ask to see him, even though I know you can mean only a last farewell."

"It is! it is so. I will never come again, but I must say that! All these long months I have resolved to see him this once more, and you may kill me, but I cannot go without that. You may stay and hear whatever I say; I do not care if all the world knows that I love him!"

"You do not know what love is," said Denise, looking with a kind of contemptuous pity on the girl, "for you think only of yourself."

"Say what you will - think what you will - you shall

not drive me away till he comes. You need not care, for it is the last time. Every one says that I shall die, and I hope it is true. I am so wretched! — Oh, so wretched! But after all, I am nothing at all to him, and you are his wife; I have no right here," she murmured, her mood changing under the influence of Denise's expressive silence. "You could send me away if you were cruel enough. I thought I should be happier if I spoke to him once more — that is all."

"Poor child!"

"I do not want to make you miserable — I never thought of that. Perhaps it was wrong to come. Must I go away?"

"It is too late," said Denise, and as she spoke Gaston entered the hall.

They all kept silence for a little while; but Gaston's first impulse was anger against Lucile, struggling, however, with tumultuous feelings of a far different kind. Denise was the first to speak.

"Gaston," she said, trying to steady her voice, "Your cousin wishes to see you. Say what you have to say, Lucile!"

"Stay, Denise," he said. "It can be nothing that you are not to hear!"

She lifted eyes full of anguish and despair, but trust above all.

"I am not afraid, Gaston. I trust you entirely," and as she spoke she glided from his detaining hand. Sense and breath seemed deserting her; she felt as if in another moment she should have fallen upon the floor of the hall. Gaston and Lucile were alone, but the shadow of her presence was between them still.

"Lucile! what madness possessed you?" were his first words.

"Oh, I see that I was mad! I know I was! But you did

not come when I wrote, and I waited and waited, and could not bear it. When they said I was ill, at Marseilles, I was delighted, for then I thought I could go to Costabelle, and see you."

"This is worse than folly, Lucile. Do you suppose I forget that I have Mme. Luchon before me?"

"Do not call me by that name, or I shall hate you, Gaston! Oh, why did you let me go away from here?"

"Why!"

"I should never have gone — I did not care whether you were rich or poor; but I was so frightened by mamma; and you forgot me and married Denise Le Marchand."

"After you married M. Luchon."

"Mamma made me, Gaston!"

"Did she make you write that answer to my letter, in which you said she had convinced you —"

"She declared that if I said I would marry Auguste, it would bring you back to me," said Lucile, pouting. "You did not come; I heard you were to marry Denise; and then I did not care what I did. Besides, I thought that I should be freer when I was married, and you see that, the instant I could, I came to tell you all this."

"Poor girl! it would have been better for you if you had never seen my face!"

"Oh, I know that — I have been so wretched — I would not eat, and the doctor said I was killing myself, and Auguste did not know what to do; so his sister, Anaïs, said she would take me to Costabelle."

"Is he kind to you?"

"I daresay he would be, if I let him. He should have asked me if I liked him before he married me, if he wanted to know! Though what else could I have done! And I am more at liberty, especially now that I am with Anaïs —"

"What was your excuse to her for coming here?"

"I said I should like to see Denise, and made her think we were dear friends; but, in any case, she would have been ready to please me, for Nina and I know some secrets of hers that she would not like told."

There was a look and tone that made Gaston involuntarily think of Denise, older, and yet so much more innocent than Lucile, who was wise already in a knowledge that was not wisdom.

"My poor child, fate is hard on you!" he said. "Who and what is this Anaïs — what sort of a friend for you?"

"Oh, I do not know — I do not care! I thought I should be contented if I could tell you how it all was, cousin; but now I am only more unhappy, and I must go back!" — and tears showered from her eyes.

"You have brought unhappiness enough here to-day, you foolish child," said Gaston, seeking to harden himself, as he felt himself growing less and less able to keep his first measured tone.

"Oh, cousin, it is cruel to speak to me so!"

"Cruel! Well, grant it, Lucile, you must see that you and I can be nothing henceforward but strangers. You are too childish to know that coming here as you have done — —"

"Then you do not love me after all!" she interrupted. "You never loved me! Denise even was kinder than you! You never cared for me! No, not even when you gave me the ring that your mother said no one must wear but the woman you loved! Take it back, then!" — she threw it to him. "Yes, I was wrong to come, though it was only to say farewell — and now it is said!"

"Farewell!" repeated Gaston.

"Is it really so, cousin!" She was again the childish Lucile of old times.

"It must be, my poor girl. You think me hard — Heaven knows if I am, and what you have made me endure. I tell you, Lucile, I dare not meet you again. Child that you are, cannot you see that you are on the edge of a precipice? All the laws of God and man are set between us; but they might be no saveguard for you if I saw you again, and knew that I had only to say the word and you would follow me to the world's end! Do not try to understand me — Lucile, my Lucile — for the last time — farewell!"

He clasped her close to him one moment, and the next put her from him. "For the last time! the last! — I shall never see you again, then?" she whispered amid her sobs, but he dared not hear — he saw Nina waiting on the terrace without, and called to her to come to her. mistress. And thus, blinded by tears, Lucile left Château Farnoux for the last time.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN Gaston sought Denise he found her sitting as she had sat for an hour past, perfectly still and unoccupied; but he might have heard her heart beating as she looked up and held out her hand to him. A few agitated words passed between them; he thanked her for her generous trust in him, and she, looking at him with mournful earnest eyes, answered, "I am glad of this, if it has comforted you at all Gaston."

He smiled at the words; he felt so very far from anything like comfort!

"I ought perhaps to have told you all this long ago," he said, "but I believed it gone by for ever."

"Tell me whatever you like now."

"It is a short story after all. I loved Lucile; I could not marry her — my uncle's will rendered it impossible."

And then he recollected that by marrying as that will had directed he had retained Château Farnoux. Before their marriage he would have told her this without hesitation; now it seemed out of the question, though mercenary motives had had small share in what he did.

"That poor child consented to marry her cousin, young Luchon, willingly, as I believed — unwillingly, as she now says. It seems that she submitted at first, and has rebelled ever since rebellion has become useless. There is nothing to be said — she had not realised how entirely she had separated herself from me — her coming here to-day was a frantic act, only to be excused by her childishness — —" he stopped short, then added hastily — "Denise, I feel that I did you a great wrong in marrying you!"

"I would not have it altered, Gaston."

"No, at least I can give you a name and a home, though I know now how poor a gift it is. It seems idle to tell you that you have my entire esteem and regard. I am glad now to know that you did not marry me for love, my poor Denise, though at the time I was unreasonable enough to think it wrong! As if I myself — Well, let that pass. There is no mystery between us now; you know all there is to know, and you must have patience with me. I am bad company to myself and others sometimes."

"Gaston — it is not quite for my own sake — but you and Lucile — — "

"We shall never meet again."

"Thank you."

Inconsistent as it might be, just when he had convinced himself and her that they could never be more than friends, he was ready to reproach her for enduring this trial to her feelings as a wife so patiently. He found in it a new proof of her complete indifference to him; but a suspicion that she had a heart worth winning was dawning upon him, and his thoughts ended in, "We are at least friends, Denise? I could not spare your friendship. It is a stronghold to me!"

"Yes, friends, always; there is nothing that I would not do if you wished it," she answered, choking back her sobs.

He pressed her hand, and said, "I do believe there never lived any one so good and sincere as yourself. I have learnt it more and more clearly of late; you have changed this old place into a 'home,' as they say in England. You have brought new life, too, to my poor aunt. What should we do without you?"

Her head was bent so that he could not see her face, but a great scalding tear fell on the hand that held hers.

"Denise! My dear Denise ---"

"Are you trying to make yourself believe that I am necessary to you, Gaston?"

"You are, my dear wife, you have grown very precious to me; we have learned to know each other better of late, have we not? Do you think I hold it a trifling blessing to have a friend and companion to share my life, whom I respect and trust entirely?"

But still there was one thing wanting! Love was absent. Kind, indeed, oh, always kind — how should she bear it? Years of happiness would hardly have compensated for the anguish that rushed upon her when Gaston left her. She felt that now she knew whatever there was to be known, and she did not doubt his promise to see Lucile no more; but there was no consolation in that or any other thought. How should she maintain this tone of quiet affection all

through the long future, while her heart felt breaking? how endure her daily occupations, while the very daylight was hateful to her!

"Can no one be happy in this Château!" she exclaimed. "Oh, why did I ever come to Farnoux!" and yet she had truly said that she would not undo her marriage if she could.

Little did Gaston imagine that Denise was more to be pitied than himself! he watched her with solicitude for a while; but, seeing her placid, and occupied as usual, he was satisfied that she was contented. She was far less timid with him than before; for now she hoped for nothing, and he did not guess what passed out of his sight. Mlle. Le Marchand, away in Normandy, thought not, asshe triumphed over the success of her castle-building, that her romance had turned to tragedy; and as little did Lucile know, while she struggled vainly against her lot, that she had caused Denise to suffer ten times more than she could do. Yet Denise would live, and Lucile would die. Mental pain does not kill as quickly as bodily, or there would be no complaint of over population; but it sometimes combines with lurking malady, and is fatal. When Denise heard Lucile say she was dying, she looked at the eyes and cheeks bright with fever, and did not believe it in the least. Perhaps Lucile only half believed it herself. Though too much afraid of her mother to make an effectual resistance before her marriage with M. Luchon, she seemed since to have entirely changed her character, and, strong in her position as a married woman, set Mme. de Farnoux at defiance; and young Luchon little liking his mother-in-law, she abandoned the home that she had looked forward to, and retired to solitary lodgings where she bewailed the ingratitude of her child, in perfect good faith, as an injured mother. As for

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Auguste Luchon, Lucile treated him with a sullen petulance that soon disgusted him and sent him back to the courses from which matrimony was to have weaned him. She openly professed to hate him, and said she only cared for one thing, and that was to die: and she exposed her health in every way, while her whole mind was secretly set on meeting Gaston again. Poor Lucile! brought up by a mother and a servant, in their different ways equally unprincipled, to baffle superior strength by cunning had been the only lesson she had ever learnt; and after all, in spite of this evil influence, she was still little more than a simple child, hardly comprehending wrong, and misled chiefly from not knowing what right was. She had carefully hidden her resolution to see Gaston again from all but Nina, who encouraged her in it, partly to obtain power over her, partly from love of a little excitement. Lucile had no plan, except to meet and speak to him; she never considered what would happen next. When she had first found herself really ill, she had secretly rejoiced, and declared that nothing would cure her but country air; only she would not be nursed by her mother; she must have her married sister-in-law, Mme. Cambel. For reasons of her own Mme. Cambel consented, and young Luchon was glad to get rid of Lucile for a while. Accordingly to Costabelle, where the Luchons had a house, they came, and remained till Mme. Cambel grew tired of her exile from Marseilles, and frequent arguments arose as to whether they should or should not go back.

The two were sitting together; Lucile now on a sofa, now moving restlessly about; the sister-in-law at work, looking impatient and out of temper.

"Go if you will, Anaïs; I stay here," said Lucile.

"But I cannot leave you here. What an idea! What would my brother say? he has already twice summoned you back, and if you delay he will certainly come himself, and then there will be a scene!"

"Yes, he will come and behave like a brute."

"He has a horrible temper, I allow; I shrink when that savage look comes — he would kill any one of whom he was jealous, I am certain. These men are dreadful —"

"All, my dear?"

"Ah, well, there are exceptions," smiled Mme. Cambel. "But we will not talk about the naughty creatures."

"Not if you do as I wish; otherwise I may talk more than you like."

"You would try the patience of a saint, Lucile. I cannot imagine what attracts you in this place. As for me, I am never in the country three days without being perfectly miserable. I was certainly born with a natural antipathy to the country."

"People go there when they cannot pay their debts in the town, I think."

There was some sting in the allusion to debts that made Mme. Cambel turn pale and frown. Lucile added: "You know very well that you had better keep on good terms with me, and then perhaps I may help in your affairs."

"If I only knew what you want here! When you came back from Château Farnoux so *défaite* and *bouleversée*, I thought" — Mme. Cambel looked meaningly at her — "I thought I could guess what *anguille il y avait sous roche;* but nothing has come of it. I know you have not received so much as a message."

"You know!" cried Lucile, with flashing eyes.

"Ah, yes, I know. My dear, I am responsible for you to Auguste, and as long as you place no confidence in me —"

Lucile hesitated. She had Mme. Cambel too completely

in her power to fear her; for the lady had been deceived by her apparent childishness, and had talked imprudently before her. She would make no revelations to her brother. But, low as Lucile's standard of moral feeling was, she had been so far raised by her love for Gaston as to shrink from speaking of it to such ears as those which were awaiting her tale. "When I have anything to say," she answered, shrugging her shoulders.

"You look innocent as a dove, but yet I don't know, my dear," said Mme. Cambel, incredulously.

Lucile walked about the room, pulled a rose to pieces, lifted and threw down her knitting. A sound of a horse galloping in the road caught her ear; she flushed red and ran to the window. Mme. Cambel watched her with greedy eyes. The sounds were soon lost in distance, and Lucile turned round, pale, with her hand at her side.

"Always thus when she hears a sound! I would give my little finger to know if it is M. de Farnoux whom she expects! Who did you think it was, my dear?"

"No one ... Oh, Anaïs!"

"What is it? Heavens! how strange you look! You suffer?"

"Yes - here - Oh, I cannot bear this pain!"

"Nina, Nina, quick, my salts here! Lucile, do not look so strangely!"

"I am better now. Oh, how horrible pain is!"

"I believe after all her illness is a fact," said Mme. Cambel.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE are many who call on death to deliver them from present distress, who would be the first to shrink back if he replied to their summons. They realize their present sufferings more vividly than the terrors of the great king. It was so with Lucile. As soon as she grew really alarmed about her health, she consented to go back to Marseilles, but its glare and dust and summer heat, and the pestiferous smells from the harbour, increased her illness so rapidly that the physician advised her return to Costabelle. M. Luchon found himself unable to quit business and pleasure to attend on an invalid wife, who made no secret of her dislike to his presence; Mme. Cambel was too much afraid of consumption to come near her; and thus it became necessary to make advances to Mme. de Farnoux, and propose that she should come and nurse her daughter.

There is a mournful little song called "La Poitrinaire," of which the burden is, "Je suis si jeune, je ne veux pas mourir." Such was ever Lucile's cry. Nothing could be sadder than her terrified clinging to life, and the horror of death which she manifested; not that life had many attractions for her, but she had not one thought to make the passage of the dark river from which all mortals shrink, less awful to her. If she knew anything of religion it was in its most formal sense; she found no support in it now. She looked from face to face continually, watching what they thought of her state, as if supplicating to be told there was no danger. At times she would break out into passionate reproaches against her mother, or call on Gaston to come to her, and cure her with the touch of his hand. "Send for Gaston — Oh, why did he say he would not come!" was always on her lips. She never reproached him; all her bitterness was for her mother. Love for Gaston had been, and was to the last, her truest, most elevated feeling. Mme. de Farnoux deserved some pity at this time. Brought face to face with death, obliged to watch his slow approach, and endure all the melancholy thoughts that were her special abhorrence — never was penance more complete. Her only idea of soothing an invalid was by denying that there was anything to fear. Sad, indeed, is the sick bed that has no better nurse than Mme. de Farnoux! The maid Nina was kind and faithful, and the curé who lived near found out the dying girl, and did his best to bring her spiritual consolation: but, like most curés of remote districts, he was little above the peasants of his flock either in birth or education, and her case perplexed him. Never did little white "bastide," amid its trees. look gaver than the Luchon house at Costabelle, and never was there sadder scene than that within its walls, where this young life was beating itself to pieces. Lucile, after all, did not wish to live, but she dared not die.

Gaston heard that she had left Costabelle, and heard too that she had been brought back. He learnt it accidentally from Mme. Pitre one day when she was at Château Farnoux. "Such a pretty creature!" said she, sadly; "and only seventeen years old. It is very young to die!"

He had promised himself and Denise never to see Lucile again, but his promise did not extend to hearing no tidings of her at such a time. An hour or two later he was asking at Costabelle what truth there was in what Mme. Pitre had said. Nina's tearful answer confirmed what he had heard. He did not enter the house, or see Mme. de Farnoux, but he lingered near for a long time, looking at the window which he had learnt was Lucile's. She did not fail to hear of his coming, and the knowledge seemed for a while to bring

actual life with it. "He will come again!" she exclaimed; and day after day rallied her strength to sit at the window. and watch, unseen, through the Venetian blinds, for his visits. Strange to say, this seemed to content her. In these last days of life she only needed to feel that he still loved her; and the kind-hearted curé did not quite forbid this weakness, but sought to turn it to account, when he bade her think of Paradise, where all tears would be dried and all jealousies cease. When he spoke thus, she listened with something of the same docility that she used to show to Gaston, even in her most wilful moods; and perhaps the simple teaching suited her, for more than once she said, "I hope Denise is not very unhappy now," with something of repentance, but she would never call her either Mme. de Farnoux, or "Gaston's wife," though the curé urged it on her. as a token of her sincere resignation. He could, however, deal much more easily with Lucile, who, as life ebbed, became more and more tractable, than with her mother, whose petulant lamentations demanded reproof rather than sympathy.

Denise knew that soon Lucile would be but a memory to Gaston, but she was not tempted to rejoice. She saw well that Lucile dead was more to be dreaded than Lucile living. Had she lived, she would probably have accepted her lot sooner or later, and even become reconciled to it, and Gaston would have seen in her only the wife of Auguste Luchon; but now she would remain for ever a beautiful vision, his first love, with an aureole round her head. Denise knew it by instinct, but at this moment she almost forgot her own burden in the compassion that she felt for Lucile, and the intensity of her desire to comfort Gaston. Not a word had passed between them on any but commonplace subjects since Lucile's visit to the Château; but Denise could read Gaston's face Denise. 19

too well for her own peace. She could not but shrink, as if she had touched a fresh wound, when she thought it possible he might meet Lucile again; and yet the rumours brought by Mme. Pitre moved her compassion so much, that she would have done almost anything to comfort the dying girl. At last she took courage, and went herself to Costabelle, to ascertain her state. Mme. de Farnoux came to answer her inquiries in person.

"Oh, how kind of you to come, dear madame!" cried she, little knowing, however, how kind it was. "You find me broken-hearted; my sweet child... and I believed I should have a happy home with her for the rest of my life! I am a most unfortunate woman. To think that, when a poor mother has had all the anxiety of bringing up and marrying a child, she should lose her! The poor thing suffers from the heat to that degree — impossible to relieve her — it kills me to see her. Only a mother could understand what I undergo, and after all, it is in vain! She has heard you are here and insists on seeing you, but it is asking too much!"

Denise had scarcely counted on this, and hesitated.

"Oh, you are so amiable, I know you will not refuse her. Anything we can I think we ought to do to gratify her, whatever it costs our feelings."

Had Denise been inclined, she might have remarked that in this case it was not Mme. de Farnoux who sacrificed her feelings. She did not, however; she only followed her silently to the room, where Lucile was lying by the open window, shaded from the sun by its *persiennes*. Her light hair was loose, and lay in thick masses on her pillow; her eyes were closed, and for a moment she did not open them as Denise stood beside her. She was as lovely as ever; her fair cheek as rounded, her hands as white and dimpled as of old, and the eyes that she lifted at last to Denise were clear and starlike, but her voice was changed; its husky sound told of a throat parched with fever.

"How many times, Denise, have I seen you?" she asked. "Three."

"Three besides this? Once in the chapel, and once in the hall — the other?"

Denise could hardly force herself to say that their first meeting had been in the cemetery of Farnoux. The word sent a cold thrill through her, and Lucile shuddered visibly.

"Why have you come to see me?" she asked wonderingly.

"I heard you were very ill, and -"

"Do you want me to die? You will not have to wait long," said Lucile, more sadly than bitterly.

Denise knelt down by her side; she could only answer by tears. Lucile drew away the hand that Denise had pressed over her eyes, and laid a burning cheek upon it.

"Are you really sorry for me? No one else will care except - Oh, I know he will. Does he, Denise?"

"Yes, dear child, you know that."

"Yes, I know, but I like to be certain of it. I want him to remember me. You will let him, Denise?"

Poor Denise! She answered by a tender caress, not daring to speak, lest she should lose her self-control, for this tried her hard.

"I like your hand; it feels like his. The Baron used to say that all the De Farnoux had taper fingers, like these, and you are a De Farnoux, they say. I shall shut my eyes and fancy I am at the Château. Oh, I was so happy there! I wish I were a little *verdon*, and lived in those ilex woods. Ah, I recollect so well the day he gave me the ring —"

She relapsed into silence. Presently the rustle of a silk

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dress roused her. "That is mamma," said she with impatience. "I hate that rustle. Please go away."

"But, my dear child, you are detaining this kind visitor an unreasonable time; her carriage is waiting in the heat, and you know she will have a long walk from the last point to which a carriage —"

"What does it matter? I was happy for a minute, and so you — No, I ought not to speak so. M. le Curé told me it was very wrong. That is another sin to confess. Oh, do not go; stay, oh, if you would stay! Remain and nurse me; I think I should sleep at night if you were here; I should think there was an angel in the room, you look so gentle and kind, and then mamma need not sleep in that chair and fancy she is watching me."

"My darling Lucile!" exclaimed Mme. de Farnoux, reproachfully.

But Lucile's entreaties only grew more piteous, and ended in such convulsive weeping that all were greatly alarmed. and hailed with relief the entrance of her doctor. He made a sign to Denise not to oppose her, and she gradually became quiet again. Denise wrote a few words to tell Gaston where she was; and, when she had sent them remembered that this was the first time she had ever written to him. She learnt from the doctor that her task could not be a long one. A few days at most would see the end of the struggle, but it might yet be a very painful one. As she watched over Lucile, she seemed to enter into the love, at once tender and passionate, with which she had inspired Gaston. All that was faulty, all that could have repelled Denise, had vanished from Lucile's character; Denise saw in her only the clinging child, whom she, so far stronger, would fain have taken in her arms and sheltered from every wind. In these last days Lucile turned to her as if she had

been all that her life had wanted - sister, companion. friend - Denise brought the protection and peace that she had craved for in the beginning of her illness. Mme. de Farnoux and her selfish grief did not disturb them; she kept aloof, displeased that Denise should be all-sufficient to Lucile, yet well satisfied to escape distress and fatigue herself. From one unexpected guarter Denise met with true gratitude. Auguste Luchon showed a kinder and a kinder feeling towards Lucile when he came from time to time to visit her, that made Denise believe that, had he had a different wife he might, after all, have become an estimable man, and made her happy. But with poor Lucile all had gone ill from the outset. Had such fond care as Denise gave come sooner, it might have saved the brief life that was fading so fast. Each day Denise went to the garden gate to give her report to Gaston, and each day some new sign had appeared that told how near the end was. He never asked to see Lucile, nor did she appear to desire that he should come to her. Denise always told her when he had come and gone; and she smiled, and was contented. To Denise the look or word of thanks that Gaston gave her was strength for the whole day.

"Denise, I am not afraid now that it has come. You have made me not afraid," whispered Lucile.

They both knew what it was that she meant had come, and both knew that this last trial would very soon be over. The offices of the Church of Rome for the dying had been performed, for every one had thought in the afternoon, that she could not live out an hour. Yet she had revived again, and the curé was praying near. Denise was sitting holding her hand, or putting back the hair from her damp brow. Mme. de Farnoux, now really overcome, was sobbing in the next room. A little lamp in the window was flickering

and fading; no one thought of replenishing the oil. Fit emblem of the young life now ending, thought Gaston, as he watched in the garden below. He had stood outside Lucile's door all that afternoon, but the doctor had declared that any emotion must be instantly fatal to her, and he dared not enter, nor did she know he was there.

Lucile sought to speak again, but voice seemed gone. Denise leant over her, and fancied she heard her gasp: "But *I should like* to have seen him again!"

The poor child had been told by the curé that this desire was sinful, and must be offered up as a sacrifice of self-will, and she, not to the last comprehending why it should be a sin, had nevertheless obeyed; but now, half unconsciously, the long-suppressed wish escaped her. Denise rose up softly, went to the window, and signed to Gaston. The night was clear and balmy; stars were scattered over all the sky. There might be a soul further off than they ere long. Before the thought had well passed through her mind Gaston was at the door; she went to him, spoke a few low words, and led him to the bed-side. Lucile lay as if in profound sleep, only sleep was never so still and waxen. And a deep sighing wind came up through the pine-wood. The curé rose from his knees. "She is at rest!" he said. Denise clasped Gaston's hand, but he, throwing himself beside the bed, exclaimed, "Lucile! my Lucile! come back to me! Speak to me this once more, Lucile!"

At the very gates of the grave she heard that voice. Her eyelids unclosed once more; her blue eyes sought his face; a smile of perfect happiness came on her lips, and with that look on her face Lucile died.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MLLE. LE MARCHAND's little property in Normandy was situated in one of the most fertile valleys that border the sea near Avranches. Green slopes sheltered it; rich meadows extended down to the shore; roses climbed the walls of the farm-house; poultry scratched and clucked in the farm-yard, and a pair of great tawny oxen went out to plough under the guardianship of the honest labourer, who, with his wife, cultivated the land for Mlle. Le Marchand. She paid them unexpected visits from time to time, and examined the condition of her farm with a shrewdness that would have altered Mme. Pitre's opinion of her, could she but have known it; but she seldom stayed long. She had never forgiven the little property for having "come too late," as she said; and, when in the neighbourhood, she spent most of her time in some public gardens, little frequented by others, belonging to the town that crowned the hill above her farm. There she would sit and meditate, or sketch undisturbed. She was not a social creature, and used to say that she had inherited a shyness of mankind from her Huguenot forefathers, who dwelt in caves of the earth, and were hunted like wild beasts.

Therefore the solitude of these gardens pleased her, and above all, the view from them, which was full of the pale dreamy poetry of the north, and deeply tinged, too, with northern melancholy. From the foot of the green slopes stretched wide shining sands, over which hung a faint mist, so that no one could say where they met the line of grey sea, out of which, blue and distant, like a vision, rose Mont St.-Michel. She would sit and watch the tide creep over those treacherous sands, where, every year, thirty or forty

lives are lost, and recall the legends of the country-side, muse on old times, or listen unobserved to the chatter of the "collégiens" from some neighbouring school, who used to come and lie on the grass under the trees, and play each other tricks, while pretending to learn their tasks. They all knew her by sight, and rather liked the sharp words she occasionally threw them; they never molested her nor she them. Several months after Denise's marriage, Mile. Le Marchand was sitting in these gardens, where there was not another creature except a nursemaid, whose fingers were moving rapidly over her lace cushion, while two children played near.

Mile. Le Marchand had a theory that young married people should be left to themselves for a year or so, undisturbed by relations, and she was carrying out her theory by keeping away from Farnoux. She would hardly, however, have remained as long as she had done in Normandy, had not the wish to paint the view from these gardens taken hold of her, and occupied her thoughts. She had not begun even a first sketch yet, for she always pondered a subject long before commencing; and to tie herself down definitively to a new work, required a great effort of mind. She always regretted when she put the last touch to an old one, and shrank from beginning a fresh one; once begun, however, she devoted her whole time and thoughts to it, looking on it with a kind of reverence, and sparing no labour to bring it to perfection.

She had no pencil in her hand on this afternoon; yet her projected picture was occupying her mind, as she turned the leaves of a little old Bible from a Rochelle press, and sought a passage that she wanted. A sprig of the peculiar lavender that perfumes the hills of Provence marked it.

"Here it is!" said she, half aloud. "I always liked to

read how the two Hebrews were inspired with special powers to make beautiful the sanctuary. Neither head nor hand can work without the gift. You have not lost your scent, little mark. There's something in this fragrance that gives me the idea of freedom; a wild fresh odour from the mountains; and that's why I put it in an old Huguenot Bible. It always sets me longing for the south. Is it not extraordinary that I can't live anywhere else? I should soon hate this green land, though there's poetry in that view. Mournful enough, too; and this northern sun is pallid, and all the colour has gone out of the sky into the flax blossoms. Yes, I love those calcined rocks of Provence better than these woods — I wonder why?"

She was turning half unconsciously through her little Bible, as she meditated, and presently came to the last page, where was an index to the Psalms, very significant of the epoch when it was composed.

"Clement Marot's Psalms," said she; "here they are, music and all; the same airs to which Catherine de Medici and her ladies used to sing them, when they were the fashion at the court! But they were not in favour there when this index was compiled. No! they were being sung then to the echoes of the Esperon and the Algoal, in 'the Desert.' 'Quand Véglise sera affligée de calomnies et de force;' 'Si empeschée en l'exercice de la religion;' 'Si forcée de venir au combat.' To be sure! Our Church was planted with tears and watered with blood, and built up with lives; it ought to stand firm. What can be the reason, that now we are become like the Laodiceans, neither cold nor warm? Or cold outright, I might say! There's something lacking!"

She shook her head, and was some minutes before she continued her soliloquy. "I was brought up to read my Bible — a chapter every day, besides what my father read

before the evening prayer; but somehow I got out of the good habit. The child brought it back to me. I liked those days long ago at Paris; I knew the best of the Encyclopædia school - what the Revolution had left of them. People who were used to discuss everything in heaven and earth, but with good manners. Yet I learnt little good among them. Here is the Catechism that Antoine and I used to say every Sunday to my father, as we had no temple and no pasteur near. 'Quelle est la principale fin de la vie humaine?' 'Et ouel est le souverain bien des hommes?' I think I can hear his voice asking these questions, and little Antoine looking at me to be prompted. Curious how those days come back to me! I think it is because Denise seems to belong to them. I was growing a mere heathen, I believe; but the child brought the old thoughts again. There are not many people that I respect; and I always think they stand upright because they have not yet got into a slippery place; but I do believe in Denise. I should mightily like to see her again, and have a tilt with her husband, but young married people should be left alone to learn each other. Poor creatures! it's often sad rubbish that they have to learn. The child was always asking me to come in her first letters, but lately she has said nothing about it, and there's a tone I don't make out _"

Mlle. Le Marchand took a letter from her pocket and read it through.

"I don't like it. I can't make it out. Her letters used to be full of her *pressoirs* and *lavoirs*, and all the different kinds of olives, and what sort of grape did best on their ground, and so on. And Gaston's book, that which she expected to be a *chef-d'œuvre*, and his correspondence about it with this man and that in Paris, and Berne, and Berlin, and I don't know where. Then she must needs go off to nurse

that poor Lucile Gautier — ah, pretty creature, I little thought, when I was so huffed with you at Château Farnoux for patronising Denise, that she would smooth your deathbed within a year. I wonder whether those blue eyes of yours ever knew tears! They looked as if such things were altogether strangers to them!"

And, perhaps without knowing it, she hummed an old song of a neighbouring district: —

" 'La beauté, à quoi sert elle, Légèrement, belle hirondelle, Légèrement? Elle sert à porter en bière, Légèrement, blanche bergère, Légèrement.'

"And then she has had Mlle. de Farnoux on her hands ill - very sad, I daresay, but I still can't understand the tone of this letter: - 'I think I did not know how happy I was with you at Farnoux; it was like dwelling by the waters of Siloam that go softly.' People never begin to be grateful for past happiness while they are well contented with the present. The shadow of Château Farnoux is on the child! And then would any one believe that she finds a subject of thanksgiving in Mademoiselle's living on! Most people would say she had lived a good deal too long already. And then, again — Ah, there are those little vagabonds coming here; they see me. I can see you grinning, you young rogues! I wonder if I should be a happier woman if I had one of them for my own? Bah! if a niece is so much anxiety, what would a son be? Besides, he would grow up, and I should lose the child-face that was all mine. It's only the dead faces that keep the child look; and after all, when we meet them again, who knows how even they will be changed! Come, this won't do; I'm getting sentimental. What's that you are saying, you little polisson, there? Planning to go down to the grèves

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and catch crabs? Oh, you little reprobate, I'll report you to your schoolmaster, and ask him to give you a *pensum*."

"Then you shall have nothing of what we should have caught!" laughed the boys.

"Much obliged. I see you caricaturing me on that blank leaf; you sir! Two can play at that. Look here" — and her pencil was in her hand directly. "Give me the book — there — that's your likeness —" and she threw back so exact a resemblance to the lad, only that the head was set on the body of a crayfish, that all the boys burst into a shout of delight.

"Listen to me," said she, with unmoved gravity, "especially you, M. l'Ecrevisse. Do you know that on the 2nd of November, every year, there rises from the sands ——"

"A fog!"

"Ay, a great white fog; but you don't know of what it is composed, *hein?* Of all the souls of all the people who ever were *ensablés*, and there are so many, so many, that all the grève is covered as far as Mont St.-Michel. And there you would find the spirits of a great many little boys, who went on half-holidays to fish without leave."

She departed with a solemn gesture, but turned before she left the gardens to look back at the laughing boys, and observed to herself, "Now I know that if I had a son he would be the very first to go crab-catching, and I should be in constant terror about his precious life; and yet I never can see a pack of rosy children without a pain at my heart. Empty things ought to feel light; but it's not thus with hearts, I find. Who knows whether Denise will ever need me again? Well, if I had had a child of my own it would have been grown up by this time, and I should have been a grandmother. Anyhow, I've escaped that dispensation. Grandmothers are always simpletons; I've lived too long to give

into such nonsense. There's no denying, however, that a grandchild is the natural consolation of old age. Perhaps Denise may have a child — bah! I'm fancying her my daughter now! It's decreed that I shall only know life's best feelings in a sort of second-hand way. I don't suppose I really feel for her as a mother would. I'm only her aunt. But, after all, no one loves that child a little — people are either indifferent to her or else they adore her — it's a curious fact. I have a great mind to pay the child a visit — and there are those old letters that I want to find. Of course she does not want me, but still ——"

The next day would probably have seen her going southwards, had she not received another letter from Denise, which said she was going to Aix for a few days. Mlle. Le Marchand went a walking tour into Brittany, to work off her restlessness, and when she returned set to work on her new painting, in which she became so much absorbed that she allowed the weeks to slip by without thinking of returning to Farnoux.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DENISE had, indeed, only exchanged one sad scene for another. A few weeks after Lucile's death, Mlle. de Farnoux's illness increased so fast that her moments seemed numbered. Yet she lingered on, knowing no one now but Denise and Gaston, and never contented unless one or the other were near. Gaston saw Denise become thin and pale, and noted that her face grew daily sadder, and he would have prevented her from wearing herself out in this long watch; but there was no one to take her place, and she repulsed his anxious care with impatience such as she had never shown before; impatience born of the heart-ache, that

grew more intolerable every day. For now the whole burden of her lot had fallen upon her, and she became completely hopeless of ever winning from her husband more than the doubtful affection, which at times she longed to fling far away, as a mere mockery of what ought to have been hers. His very care for her angered her, when he attributed to her attendance on Mlle. de Farnoux the sadness which sprang from a far different source. One smile or caress from him would have borne her through hours tenfold more gloomy than any that she could spend by her sick-bed; and he never guessed it! What chance had she of pleasing one who had loved Lucile, so beautiful, so unlike herself! — and Denise looked at her own sad face in the glass, and "He never would have loved me, even if he had known me first!" was her bitter thought. "Why should he?"

Nor would she ever have been Gaston's first love. Some fair child-like creature, like Lucile, was sure to have been his ideal. When oldened by sorrow he might feel the deep spell that Denise possessed for the few who appreciated her at all; but this could not be while his heart was in Lucile's grave. He had sought, as far as man could, to put away the thought of her while she lived; but she was all-powerful now, and Denise knew it well. That he was full of gratitude for her care of Lucile she also knew; it had made a bond between them, and Denise had learnt to feel too gently towards the girl, whose passage to the grave she had lightened, to be jealous of her now. Jealous she could not be, but she would gladly have changed places with her. "Even in Paradise," so ran her thought, "Lucile will stand nearer to him than I; for he loved her!" That Denise was wretched could not long remain hidden from Gaston, though he did not guess the true reason. The fact broke upon him as they watched together by Mlle. de Farnoux at the worst crisis of her illness, and

sought in vain to relieve her. Gaston said, "This cannot last," and then suddenly Denise's self-control broke down, and she hid her face on the pillow, exclaiming, "Oh aunt! Oh, dear aunt! I cannot let you die! No one in all the world needs me but you!"

The words reached the dulled mind of the invalid; she looked at Gaston, and uttered his name hoarsely. He made no answer. His eyes were opened then to see that his wife was miserable; but at the time it simply embittered him. Lucile in her grave, Denise so wretched that she clung to Mlle. de Farnoux as her sole consolation — better that he had enlisted at five sous a day, and gone to serve in Algeria than this. He saw that he had made a terrible mistake in supposing that he could satisfy her, as Marcellin had said, with a name and a ring — he had nothing else to give, and neither he nor she could be free any more till death came.

When, contrary to all expectation, Mlle. de Farnoux rallied again. Denise seemed so worn out that he assumed authority over her, and took her to Aix for a change of scene. He would not own to himself that he saw her unwillingly among the Duvals, who welcomed her as they would have done a near relation. She had no other friends, and Marcellin was safe in the counting-house at Marseilles. Gaston only remained a day or two, and then returned to the Château; nominally because Mlle. de Farnoux could not be left entirely to the care of servants. Denise returned more like her old self, but she would have done better not to go; for, in her absence. Gaston had reverted to his old solitary habits, and was slow to change them again. He had grown hard towards himself and others; and there seemed a tacit understanding that he and Denise should lead separate lives. She submitted, for she had no hope. She might have had courage to strive against a living rival, but she had none against the

dead love. Gaston had wondered how her religious faith would endure contact with the world. In these dark hours, whose anguish she never told, that faith did sometimes waver, though only for a moment, as she looked round the world for love, and, finding none, was tempted to doubt whether it existed even in Heaven. He had never imagined such a trial as this; he had thought of the world's teaching, of life's mysteries, and of all the problems and temptations that beset a man. Her woman's trial was different; but if she could now — as she did — end by saying, with clasped hands, "I cannot see light, but I know that it exists," then nothing would ever shake the convictions that had struck root so deep.

She was enough of a De Farnoux to be very sensitive to all melancholy influences; and there were tendencies of character that might have made her as hopeless and hard as MIIe. de Farnoux herself; but with Denise, personal suffering had the effect of making her shrinkingly anxious to console or protect others; and this was her best resource at that time. Judging Gaston by herself, she longed for anything that would re-awaken his interest in every-day life; yet she dared not intrude idle matters upon him. The insight he had given her into his heart made her afterwards feel as if it were presumption to call upon him to be interested in her schemes. She cared little enough about them herself, and let the days go by monotonously, trying to bear the weight of each as it came, without thinking of the next.

At last came Gaston's first effort to rouse himself. Lucile's death had stunned him, and long after he had continued his old occupations without a shade of real interest. He felt at last that an entire change of thought was absolutely necessary to him. This he could not have in Château Farnoux, and a reason for going away was offered by the impossibility

of completing his notes on the journals of Philippe and Raymond de Farnoux without consulting documents preserved in public libraries of France and Switzerland. When he told this to Denise, she brightened and exclaimed, "Then it will be necessary to go to Paris?"

"Yes, and to Berne; possibly I may have to examine a manuscript of Antoine Court's at Geneva, too; I am not certain."

"When did you think of going?"

"I should like to be in Paris next week. It will be necessary to consult a publisher, too; and I am by no means sure how far the censorship will interfere with a book of this kind."

"Gaston, you will take me with you?"

"To Paris, at this time of the year, little *provinciale*, when every one who has a château is thankful to go there?"

"As if I cared for that!"

"But when I spoke of residing in Paris you would not hear of it."

"That was different. Take me, mon ami."

"I will if you so much desire it, but another time would be more convenient."

She saw that she was forcing herself upon him, and was silent in deep mortification.

"The fact is," he added with an effort, "I want a change. I cannot endure my life here any longer; I am only a burden to you and myself. This journey will give me exactly what I need; I shall come back another man, ma bonne amie. But you know I cannot leave you alone here, and if you are afraid of having the sole care of our poor aunt, tell me so frankly."

"No, I am not afraid of that." Denise.

"Will you invite Camille and Adrienne Duval to visit you?"

"There would be a hundred difficulties about their coming."

"I will see to that."

"I do not want them."

"That is different; I imagined you were great friends. Your aunt, then, Mlle. Le Marchand; it is strangely long since you have seen her, why not ask her?"

"Not for worlds!"

Gaston looked much surprised. "Well, then, is there any one else?" he asked.

"No one. I would rather be alone."

He combated this till she answered hastily; and then, without giving him time to say more, she went away. He understood her less than ever, but, at any rate, he was glad to have cleared the way so far. The thought of absence from Château Farnoux for an uncertain time, was like awaking to new life. Denise said no more about it, but accepted his approaching departure as a settled thing, and listened, when he told her what he purposed, with what seemed indifference. There are, however, one class of people in a household who are rarely deceived, however well their masters and mistresses may act their parts. Zon had long before remarked to her fellow-servants that most ladies loved their husbands in a tranquil, friendly manner, but madame loved monsieur d'amour, and her resolution was taken to prevent his leaving Château Farnoux. The night before he went, the mistral sobbed stormily round the Château; rain poured down, the sea lashed the shore, and yet at times there were sudden lulls, in which all was so still that the ear was strained to catch the renewal of sound. Denise could not sleep; she spent this night, as she had done but too many of late,

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walking up and down her room, or kneeling at the window, watching dawn creep up the sky. In the early morning, as she looked out she saw, to her astonishment, Zon coming towards the Château, struggling against the angry wind, her garments almost torn off her, and her broad beaver hat blown upright on her head. Denise went downstairs to demand what this meant, and encountered her dripping wet, with her hands full of herbs.

"Oh, madame! is it you?" said she, much discomposed, and visibly at fault for some explanation which should not be the true one. "Have you wanted me?"

"Where have you been at this hour, and in such weather?" "Eh! bonne mère, quel ventarou (great wind) there is outside! I have been seeking mourguettes," and she held out several corpulent snails, as evidence of the truth of what she said.

"Mourguettes? And what are these herbs?"

"Oh, they are something for grandmother. They must be gathered at day-break, or they have no power."

"Zon, you know you promised you would always tell me the truth."

"And so it is — at least, not exactly, for the herbs are, after all, not for grandmother. Madame will not be displeased? Well, then, she knows how learned grandmother is in herbs; she collects them for distilling."

"I have met her gathering them in the hills."

"There! Madame sees that I am telling the truth. People think that grandmother knows how to *escounjar* — call up storms, I mean — and to enable conscripts to draw a good number; but that is all nonsense. There is, however, one thing that she really does know; I could not go to her till yesterday to ask about it, but I assure you she is infallible in this. These are herbs to make a love-charm; look, this is

immortelle, and this rosemary, and this we call by a patois name that madame would not know; mixed together, they make a wonderful drink. Grandmother gave me one for Manoële, and madame herself knows how faithful he has been these three months."

"As far as you know, my poor Zon. Well, I have promised you your white crown when you require it, and monsieur will add a gold chain."

"Madame!"

A gold chain is the highest ambition of the peasant girl.

"Oh, madame and monsieur are too good! and I shall have a *clavier*, too, to hang to my apron with the best of them! Grandmother may well say it is a fine thing to serve the De Farnoux."

"But since Manoële is so satisfactory, what do you want these herbs for?"

"It is not for him, madame. Oh, indeed there is nothing wrong in it; I have said a *capelé* (rosary) every night and morning for this, and a litany to the saints besides; but if, to make sure, madame would let me brew this drink, and put a little in monsieur's coffee, he would never go from Farnoux!"

"Monsieur's coffee! What folly, Zon! M. de Farnoux is only going on a journey of business. And, if I could keep him, I would not owe it to —" she perceived that she was speaking her thoughts aloud, and stopped herself.

"Then madame will not try?" said Zon, greatly disappointed. "Yet she sees how it has succeeded with Monoële. It must be as she pleases."

"Even Zon can see how little he cares for me!" thought poor Denise, as she braced herself up to bid him good-bye calmly. He was shaking off his Farnoux look, she thought, even at the mere prospect of going away. Both met with

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the same outward tranquillity, and only a few minutes passed between their morning greeting and their adieu. Gaston had, as usual, breakfasted in his own apartment, and Denise could guess that he had wished to shorten the parting as much as possible.

"Good bye, ma chère amie," said he, kissing her forehead. "Write to me."

She made no answer, but inwardly wondered if he remembered what was the sole occasion on which she had written to him before.

"Good bye!" he repeated, "recollect I advise you to invite the Duvals --"

She shook her head and drew back. He made a goodnatured sign of farewell to the servants, who were assembled to see him start, all, except Zon, glad of a little excitement in their daily life - sprang on his horse, and rode away. Denise, from the terrace, could see him for some minutes appear and disappear down the winding-path. At the last turn from which he could see her, he looked back once more. and waved his hand. Then she went indoors and sat down. and crushed her hands together in dumb despair. Just so had the uncle of Gaston gone away, to escape from a loveless home. When would Gaston come back? She did not shed tears; they had all been poured out in the darkness of night. Had she wept or complained the agony had been sooner over, but that was not her nature. She and despair did mute battle together. In half-an-hour or so she rose up and went to see Mlle. de Farnoux, and superintended her household as usual; but that grim fight had left its traces. and the servants started and looked at each other, as they caught sight of her face, and there was an awe-struck tone in the voices that answered her quiet orders.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

So weary was Denise with the tumult of feeling in which, for some time, she had been living, that the first few days of solitude were positive relief; and her chief sensation, a desire never to feel grief or joy any more. But with Gaston's first letter the unquiet heart began to throb again. The details of the letter, its fullness - for Gaston could write to her much more easily than he could talk - roused the craving for somewhat more substantial, and the loneliness of the Château weighed upon her more each day. She had never before known what it was to be nervous; but now, as soon as evening came, she found herself starting at every sound, looking fearfully round as if, like Zon, she had expected to see the ghosts of those starved monks - concerning whom the Château had a legend - gazing in through the dim window-panes. Her task of attendance on Mile. de Farnoux was far from cheering; society, had she had spirit enough to desire it, could only be attained by an effort; and when she sat alone, her thoughts were ever occupied with the short period which, to her, had seemed the whole of life. Gaston had gone away to escape from that concentration of thought; in a like case Mlle. Le Marchand had done the same; but for Denise, as for Mlle. de Farnoux, no escape was possible; these two had had no choice but to sit still and drink of a well of bitterness, into whose depths no prophet came to cast a bough of healing.

Had Gaston had a suspicion of her feelings he would never have left her. Zon said "Madame will die!" but Denise was strong and young; yet it was well that an event at last occurred to break the terrible monotony of her life;

and this was the arrival of MIle. Le Marchand. She had not written to say she was coming; her arrival was made known to Denise by a voice outside the *salon* exclaiming, "Announce me! You will want to announce that I am come in the *Aigle Farnousien* next, I suppose! Don't be ridiculous! Madame knows me, and I know her, and I know my way, too. Get along, get along! Denise, where are you?" and in came MIle. Le Marchand, and in a moment Denise was sobbing on her breast.

"Why, Denise, Denise, child, if you *are* sorry to see me, you need not show it so plainly! Come, come, let me look at you — stand up — child, child, what has happened, that you cling to me as if you had not another friend? I would far rather have really found myself unwelcome, than had such a greeting as this!"

"It is nothing," said Denise, frightened at her own emotion, "only I have been alone some time, and —"

"Ay, I know that my nephew-in-law has gone away and left you with the *grands-flambés*, and all the other butterflies up here. Gone to England, eh?"

"Yes, there were papers that he required in the possession of M. Farnoux, in Suffolk, and he also had to visit a *pasteur* in London, who wrote and said he had information that would be useful. But how did you know he had gone to England? From Mme. Pitre?"

"Another friend. I stopped a day in Marseilles."

"Marcellin!" cried Denise, with a light in her eyes. "Did he say he was coming here?"

"Quite the contrary. What! is it such a disappointment?"

"Oh, sunshine comes and goes with Marcellin."

"Hum!" said Mlle. Le Marchand. "Denise!" she added, suddenly, "Why are not you and your husband happy?" A vivid colour dyed the cheeks of Denise; pride prompted a denial, but the pain was too sharp; her lips quivered, and she was mute.

"So the sunshine of your home depends on Marcellin Duval?"

"Aunt, if you knew what it is to have some one that you can please!"

Mile. Le Marchand replied by a sharp "Hum!"

"Some one with whom one is at ease! to whom one can give pain or pleasure! Oh, if — if — "

Had she ended her sentence it would have been, "If my husband loved me even as much as Marcellin does!" but womanly pride checked her.

"Denise, Denise, that feeling may lead you far!"

"Where can it lead me?" she answered in surprise; then, catching her aunt's meaning, "Do you think such a thing possible?" she cried, with an indignant gesture and scarlet cheeks. "I! Gaston's wife! As if any woman could give her love to Gaston and take it back!"

"Ah, did you love him when you married?"

"As much as he did me," answered Denise; pride quenched in sudden tears. "Aunt, aunt, why did you come and make me say all this? I thought at least I had courage to be silent!"

"It is no disgrace to love one's husband — in the country. We are not at Paris, you know. Why did you let him go away?"

"How could I help it? And perhaps it may make him happier."

"And you love him, eh? You need not answer — and you know how to love, too! 'La puissance d'aimer est une puissance de souffrir' — too true! So I have come back to learn this?"

"It is a poor welcome for you, dear aunt."

"Once upon a time," said Mlle. Le Marchand, disregarding the attempt to release her from her bonnet and shawl, "there was a nation who worshipped an idol. They set it up on a costly throne, and brought it offerings of their best treasures, gold and tears, and hearts too, if you will believe me, and knelt at its feet, while it stood high above them, deaf and dumb all the time. Poor things! they wanted a missionary sadly! But it strikes me most of us do much the same now-a-days! Oh, child, after all, be thankful — you are young, and heaven and earth are kind to youth. You have at least got an idol without a flaw — you have not awoke, as I did, one morning to find out that it was made after all of — very common clay! And then the shrine was empty; and there's nothing so melancholy as an empty shrine!"

"'Paths that I have not known," murmured Denise. "The way is hard sometimes! But, aunt, do not talk any more of this; let me be glad that you have come. Did you come here at once, or stay in the town at all?"

"Oh, I visited my den, and saw Pitre; why, the little woman is positively growing fat! She tells me she is laying by money for her old age!"

"She will never be old," said Denise, smiling; "but laying by money out of twenty frances a month! — and with the little cadeaux that she is always giving — impossible!"

"My dear, till lately she had but twelve francs a month to meet all expenses! How can you make her toil up here, eh? Ah, she was full of the glory of giving lessons at Château Farnoux, and she spoke quite lovingly of the *goûter* she finds ready for her!"

"Imagine that she used never to breakfast on anything but bread and a glass of water!"

"Oh, well, I have done that myself."

"Yes, but you do it for choice, while she ----"

"True, she enjoys good things when they come. What a little merry grasshopper it is! No storms in that life — no sentiment there!"

"Do not tell her so, aunt, for she once said to me, 'By nature I am romantic, very romantic; had it pleased Heaven to place me in a position to indulge in it, I should have been a heroine."

"And so you have actually called on that old scandalmonger, Mile. Legrand!"

"Did you not hear that she had lost her mother? I thought she must be so lonely, and I called; and, indeed, there seems a great deal of good in her, though she is bitter and harsh."

"Trouble will not make you so, child, I can see. You did very right; I hear she was much pleased by your visit, and even has a good word for Mme. de Farnoux!"

Mlle. Le Marchand made no further attempt to win her niece's confidence, though she remained some days at the Château, allowing herself to be waited on and attended to, and making Denise conduct her to old familiar spots in the environs. Once Denise found her standing in thought in the little theatre, long disused, the scene of much mirth in former years. For the first time Denise obtained a glimpse of her aunt's history, and some explanation of the deep personal grudge that she owed Mlle. de Farnoux.

"Yes, he acted Elmore with me," said she, "that one and only time that I appeared in this theatre. He was a very gay young noble, my dear; people thought he came for Mademoiselle — I knew better. And yet what did I know! He was *fiancé* all the time to a cousin in Touraine; but he did not tell me that — no! He was a scoundrel, but I found it

out in time. Mademoiselle looked on. She was far too grand to suppose there could be anything between one of my degree and his. She saw, and would not deign to see. She let me drift on. No thanks to her that I learnt his baseness. Some people would have spoken as woman to woman — not she, my dear!"

And that was the first and last allusion that Denise ever heard her aunt make to this part of her history.

After ten days or so, she grew visibly restless, and announced that she should go back to Maison Rocca. Denise strove to persuade her to remain, but vainly. "I am going, perverse child. If you had wanted me you might have asked me here before. You did not, you know!"

"From no lack of love, aunt!"

"Bah! I know it. I have my reasons for going; I hate this place, and its master will soon be home, and he must not find the 'old vivandière' here. Yes, he called me so once. My dear, what is the use of denying it? you never heard it till now. Oh, never mind how I know! my little finger told me. I am not going away on that account; he and I are the best of friends. He will come back, and a new life will begin for you. You, too, have paid a heavy price to bear the Farnoux name —"

"Yes, youth, and hope, and all that makes life worth having!" thought Denise.

"Never grudge it; I would rather see you think no price too heavy to pay to be Gaston's wife, than hear you say you could as soon have married Marcellin Duval as Gaston."

"When did I ever say so?"

"I dreamed it, perhaps," said Mlle. Le Marchand, smiling to see how entirely Denise had forgotten it, and how impossible such indifference seemed to her now.

"Don't lose hope, my child."

"I have none. I know now how soldiers feel after a lost battle. Oh, life is very cruel! Yet I ought not to say that; it *must* be for the best — if I can but wait patiently I know I shall be satisfied. But *when*?"

"Satisfied — yes," said Mlle. Le Marchand, reluctantly — "but, child, we must learn to be satisfied in God's way, not ours."

Denise covered her face. When she raised it from her hands they were bathed in tears, but her trustful look had returned.

"How strange that that should seem hard, when one knows it is the only real way! I will try to be patient, dear aunt."

"Patient! I am the right person to preach to you, to be sure! Well, let that go. Tell your husband I have found something for him that he will think worth its weight in gold — those letters from Madeleine Le Marchand when she was in prison."

"Oh, how glad I am!"

"I thought of you at each line I read, child."

"But, aunt, it is impossible that you can remember her?"

"Not so impossible as you think, child. I am more than seventy years old, you know. I was born just when the persecutions were coming to an end, and the Revolution beginning to growl, though nobody understood its voice. However, in fact, it's her daughter that I remember, just the mother over again, I have heard; and she used to talk of Madeleine till I fancied I knew her. Well, let me go. There, one kiss is enough!"

When some space lay between her and the Château, she stood and looked back with a long wistful gaze, yearning to send a blessing to the niece, whom, in her strange fashion, she loved so well. Unwonted moisture dimmed her eyes.

"I would give all I have to make that child happy!" said she, "and I cannot raise a finger to do it. No, not if I gave my life. The old story! Wasted love, wasted lives, opportunities gone for ever what does it all mean? Problems. problems! My old Encyclopedists could not solve them my pasteur friends just as little! So those last called them sinful temptations. I am sick of doubts - sick of doubts! If I could but see Denise happy, I should have faith in life again. There are better things than happiness, but it helps life along marvellously. 'Die not, O mine ass; the spring comes, and with it clover.' She shall be happy! Now then, where's a crayon - let's have done with human matters - where's a tuft of pimpernel? Ah, I see you, my little beauty, one last purple blossom - what a colour! We put our own present feelings into most things, even stones, but we can't into flowers; they will not look grey, or sad, or whatever suits our mood of the minute; they keep their own loveliness, and that's why men - poets especially - care so little about them; egotists that we all are!"

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

DENISE had brightened during the unexpected visit of her aunt, who contrived to leave with her a sensation of hope and expectation; but as days passed without a single new event, and Gaston's business seemed likely to last for months, solitude began again to sink down overwhelmingly upon her, and expectation died into dull despair. There were times when the pain of mind was so great, that she could almost have thrown herself from the highest cliff near Farnoux; or she would wander restlessly about, snatching courage from suffering, and believing that the very intensity of it proved that it could not last. Oftener, utter heart-sickness fell upon her, as she thought of the long life to be spent with a husband who did not love her, or desire her to love him. She did not murmur; to submit, and silence all repining was her one anchor, at times when her old child-like trust in Providence seemed dulled or dead; and yet a bitter cry would rise to her lips she knew not how, and she would find herself saying, "Lover and friend hast thou put away from me;" and then resolutely stop herself, and resolve - all in vain - to think no more. She suspected that she must be falling ill, so great became the effort of maintaining her cheerfulness before the servants or Mme. Pitre, or of interesting herself in anything; and Mlle. Le Marchand, when she came to see her, looked graver and graver, and went away each time more fully persuaded that whatever were the trials of a spinster, they were more tolerable than those of an unhappy wife. It became more difficult to answer Gaston's letters; she seemed to have less and less to say to him; but from the tone of his she might have divined that change of scene, and

an occupation in which he was enthusiastically interested, were doing their work. She tried to be glad, but it all seemed tending to separate them more.

"If monsieur delays much longer, he will have to return to madame's funeral!" exclaimed Zon, again and again; and Denise began hardly to have energy enough either to smile or to reprimand her.

"Now madame is sitting by Mademoiselle, and then in monsieur's library, among books as old as Herod; it was more amusing for her in Maison Rocca than here! Would she come out and see Goutoun and me catch larks? It is very entertaining; perhaps she would hold the looking-glass, and I will have the net ready? She used sometimes to do so with Mme. Rocca, and me, and M. Rocca."

In fact, lark-catching was a favourite recreation on a Sunday with M. Rocca, and Denise had found great amusement in watching him; but Zon's well-meant proposal now fell to the ground.

"Nothing will do but monsieur's return!" said she to the other servants, more numerous than in the Baron's time. "Gouton! you and I will go to Ste.-Agnesca's chapel and pray for it, and if that does not do, I'll vow a silver heart to Nôtre Dame des Pêcheurs down in the town, for his return."

Goutoun objected, that madame being a Protestant, Ste.-Agnesca and Nôtre Dame could not be expected to interest themselves in her, but Zon silenced this in high indignation.

"That is her misfortune, poor thing! They know that, well enough. Everybody has not the luck to be born *catholique*. And if ever there was a saint, it is madame. See how she attends on Mademoiselle — how she visits the sick —

how she loves her husband! Go and get the *thon* ready for dinner, and don't talk nonsense!"

After all, the pilgrimage was not needed, and Zon triumphantly appealed to this as a proof of the truth of what she had said, and she hung up the silver heart before the image of the Virgin in pure gratitude; for Gaston came home as unexpectedly as had Mlle. Le Marchand.

He had been five months absent, when he again set foot in Farnoux; five months filled with new thoughts, new scenes — how far had they changed his view of the life to which he was returning?

Grey stood the Château against the pale blue winter sky; the sea sparkled and danced, and the bay was full of fishing-boats. The town, amidst its olive-woods, seemed drinking in the light; pungent scents from the aromatic mountain-herbs were wafted away by the fresh breeze. But for the bare net-work of boughs that a fig-tree, or plane, or micocoulier, raised here and there, no one could have guessed that it was winter. Gaston dismounted from his horse, and walked slowly up the rocky way. The air grew fresher and more perfumed as he ascended; odours, imperceptible in the valleys whence they rose, mingled with the keen scent of lavender and rosemary: the ground grew more and more rocky - the Château was now close by. Gaston quickened his steps, put his horse into the stable, and entered the house. All was still, except a hum of servants' voices in some distant quarter.

Unseen he mounted to the boudoir, which Denise had modernised and appropriated. He entered, and saw his wife before him, but a wife much altered from the one he had left. He stood looking with startled surprise at the forlorn change that he saw there. All unconscious who was near, she lay with closed eyes on a sofa; her attitude spoke of

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utter dejection and listlessness, and one tear after another stealing slowly down her cheeks dropped on her pillow as if she were too tired and languid to dry them. Her look of weary sadness contrasted strangely with the careful decoration of the room; the bouquet on the table, winter though it was, the blooming jardinière, and the wreath of corona Christi round a quaint mirror. But this was Thérézon's loving thought, and Denise had not even noticed them. A movement of Gaston's, as he stood looking at her, roused her: she put her hand instinctively over her eyes to hide the tears, and said "What is it, Zon? I said no one must disturb me again -" then, looking up, she saw her husband. Uttering his name with a cry of joy, she started up and held out her arms, while her face lighted up with joy; but the next instant she drew back in painful confusion, and murmured, "I was so surprised — when did you come?"

He saw she was afraid to welcome him too warmly. She had overstepped the boundaries that he had set between them. A light flashed on him which seemed to project a radiance over all his future life.

"So you are glad to see me!" he said, with a kiss, as he sat down beside her.

"Yes."

"And I am very glad to come home, Denise!"

She looked up in undisguised surprise and incredulity.

"Have you been ill?" he asked, marking the wan look which her fitful colour could not hide, and the thinness of the cold tremulous hand that lay in his.

"Oh, it is nothing. And I have had my aunt to take care of me."

"That was well!"

"Oh, it was such a pleasure; only — she would not stay!"

Denise.

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"Now, Denise, you must tell me why, if it was such a pleasure, you refused to invite her when I left you. It could surely have been from no idle fancy that I should dislike it?"

"I cannot tell you, Gaston."

"Nay, you will. Yes! because I wish it!"

"That is a very unfair plea!" said Denise, laughing and blushing, "only its rarity is in its favour." The smile passed from her lips, however, and she added, with manifest effort, "My aunt is so keen-sighted; I thought she might think ... might fancy ... that I ... that we ... were not happy together."

"And that was your reason?"

"Yes."

"Not, then, that Mme. de Farnoux was ashamed of a bourgeoise aunt?"

"Gaston! you could not have thought that!"

"I am heartily ashamed if I did, my dear Denise."

"You really thought so?" she repeated, deeply mortified.

"Forgive me, Denise!" and as she looked up she met a smile such as had never beamed for her before; and, in the thrill that it sent through her, the former pang was forgotten.

There was a silence while Gaston studied her face.

"Denise — tell me one thing more — have you been very unhappy?"

But that question came too home; recalled too vividly all that had come and gone. She started up and went to her jardinière, leaning over it with a struggle to regain composure that could not escape Gaston.

"There!" she said, coming back presently with a rose, and ignoring what had just passed — "You can have seen nothing more charming, even in England, where they adore flowers. But stay, you must be hungry and thirsty after your journey, let me — —"

"No, no, come back and sit down, and you shall hear my adventures, if you care to hear — —"

She answered by a glance that made him put his arm round her, and draw her to rest against him. He had come back resolved to break down the icy barrier between them; duty and some sharp anxiety had led him home; but in this meeting with Denise, tenderness was awaking at last, and love itself might one day fold his rainbow wings by Gaston's hearth. This wife, neglected, needing care so much, unable to hide her joy at his return, was another than the Denise whom he had hitherto had no heart to comprehend.

"You know how my business prospered in Paris," he said, looking down on her bent face; "and besides succeeding in my literary affairs, I think I ascertained that the new dynasty is likely to need the support of the Protestants, and will probably follow in the steps of the first Napoleon in giving them their civil rights. I can foresee a probability of a political career being opened to me, Denise, that may cause us to spend more of the year in Paris than we thought of doing. But I promise that Château Farnoux shall be our home. Will that content you?"

"Quite," she answered; and there were few things that would not have contented her, as she heard in each tone of Gaston's voice how entirely he had recovered from the depression that had weighed him down.

"I did not stay long, you know, in Paris. I found myself in no mood for life there. I wanted to escape from myself, and only succeeded in being bad company for others. Then came that fruitless search in the library of Berne, and the

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more successful one at Geneva, where, also, I got indications of further intelligence to be had from M. Tourneur, in London. Arrived in London, I could do no less than visit the Suffolk Farnoux; besides, I thought they might have family papers or traditions, that would fill up that blank in the journal of our ancestor Raymond, which so long perplexed me —"

"When he was forced to leave the Château?"

"Yes. I suspect that his history during those years must have been entrusted to a separate volume, which is lost. Being in England, you may imagine that I searched out all that I could regarding the refugees; learnt what manufactures they had established; heard service in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, where it has been held every Sunday since the first little band of fugitives settled in the town. Well, you know all this from my letters —"

"You were very good to write so often."

"And you were good too, at first, but latterly you have used me ill."

"I had nothing to tell you that I thought you would care to know."

"There is a great deal that I want to know; but it can wait a while. These Farnoux that I spoke of are settled in the east of England. Thither I bethought me of going, one misty soft day — one would have thought it Holland. You do not know the east of England?"

"Only London."

"Only London! Well, imagine something as unlike London streets, with their fierce rush of life, as possible. Imagine broad green marshes, with a slow river gliding through them, and cattle feeding there; here and there a wide estuary, where laden barges go; windmills beside it,

vast trees, a château on some little eminence, and a spire indicating where the village clusters and the pasteur dwells. All silent, verdant, and monotonous -- the only sounds a flight of rooks cawing overhead. A place to drive the Arab spirits of the earth frantic - there are such in all nations what becomes of them in England? What did your aunt do there? I had almost turned and fled; but I found so cordial a welcome as made Suffolk lovely. There was my relation, the excellent Paul Farnoux - Farnoaks, as they profanely call themselves! - grever, older, but cheerful, well occupied; a man to be seen by his own hearth. I quite misunderstood him when we met a year ago in Paris. His wife no longer young, but still the same charming, dignified person, whom I had thought a type of woman and wife years ago: age had not wearied them of life or of each other; yet they had had much grief. The daughter, married to a neighbouring squire, was there, with husband and children - all fond, and proud, and cheerful. They understand domestic life in England."

Denise could not suppress a sigh, for Gaston's tone was bitter.

"Well," he continued, "this English life seemed all wearisome and tedious to me at first — I confess it — but that feeling did not last. It was real — solid — it stood sun and storm. I had already seen something of it in Switzerland. I grew attracted by this family love that I saw in many homes. These people — they were busy, practical people — they took amusement or happiness gratefully, but they did not make them the business of their lives. They interested me; and they made me one of themselves; recalled my former visit; asked innumerable questions about you, and could not comprehend why I had not brought you, and stood aghast to hear you were alone here. In short, they gave me a picture of what should have been, by taking it for granted that it was. Meanwhile I received this letter."

He gave it to Denise, who recognised her aunt's writing.

"M. my Nephew-in-law, — If the badger leaves his home, the fox will creep in. Had your ancestors kept ward as slackly as yourself, there had been no De Farnoux in your Château now. Have you left nothing in it worth stealing? I know, from experience, how dangerous characters can spring up on mountain-tops. Oreste, you were much better at home. — Your friend, the Old Vivandière."

Denise looked at Gaston for explanation.

"Nay! I have none to give. I expected to find one when I came home."

"I have none for you."

"In any case, Mlle. Le Marchand was right; I ought not to have left Château Farnoux as I did; and yet, Denise, if I could tell you! No, I cannot tell you the history of these last few months. You have been very generous and forbearing — I have all along felt that."

"Gaston, I always knew that, having loved *her*, you could not love me. I never hoped it after I knew the truth. I never hoped for more than the friendship that you promised me, and even that seemed failing me at last."

"No — there you are mistaken. Why did I not tell you the whole truth before we married! It was on my lips, when a word from you drove it back. I did not know you then, and that is my excuse, if I have any. I imagined you viewed the whole matter — as indeed any girl of your age is taught to do in this society of ours — as simply one of course, an affair of business; and I thought when I had shared my name and rank with you, my part was done."

"I thought so too, then," said Denise, with such painful shame, as brought irrepressible tears. "You need not seek any excuse, Gaston, it was just as you say."

"Then?" he repeated. "What brought other feelings, Denise?".

"I began really to know you, and one cannot be always trying to discover how to please a person without learning to care for them."

"Poor child! Never was any one more 'misunderstood!"

"But I never knew that I really loved you, Gaston, till that day when little Louis — you know!"

"Yes. Is it possible that on that day! And yet what boundless trust you showed me!"

"It was all that I could do."

"I little thought Denise, I was not worthy of such generous love. The one thing for which I never can thank you enough, brought its own reward. Lucile — ah, Denise, you want no thanks for watching over her. What would that sick bed have been but for you? I went to hear much that I could not rest without knowing from the *curé*, and all that he said was full of your name. Afterwards ... Denise, I was not myself then. I was thoroughly wretched — uncertain whether I had not done utterly wrong both by you and Lucile — shipwrecked altogether, as I thought. The bare idea of loving another seemed treason at that time to Lucile. And yet at that very time I must own to a spark of jealousy. Come, as we are making confessions of our sins, I will not say but that your aunt's letter was fuel to flame — I thought but of one explanation."

"I do not understand," she said, lifting her head to look at him.

"When I found out at last that you had a heart, Denise,

I was terribly afraid that another might have occupied it. I knew well enough that I had taken no pains to secure it myself. You never had such a glad look for me as for one other!"

"Marcellin!" answered Denise, blushing.

"See the guilty conscience!"

"You are as absurd as my aunt, Gaston!"

Gaston started, to find that another had shared his suspicions, but no shadow of doubt could linger before the shy, glad affection of Denise's eyes. She viewed all, that had cost him no small uneasiness, as a thing too slight to need reply.

"I never doubted that you were unconscious of danger," said Gaston. "Marcellin the same, only fool-hardy in braving it; but after all, it was chiefly the sense of my own demerits that weighed with me. Marcellin had always appreciated you."

"I knew he liked me, much as he does his sisters, only of course less; and then whether he did or not was such a trifle to me, compared with what you thought! First I knew too little, and then I knew too much."

Gaston recalled her assertion that, though he had no heart to give her, she was content to be his wife. He understood it better now.

"Denise, I do not deserve to ask you anything!"

"Say what you like, except that, Gaston."

"Well, then, do you know that Marcellin once, when I asked him what you and he always found to talk so confidentially about, refused point-blank to say!"

"Did he?" said Denise, unable to hide a smile. "Will you tell me instead?"

"I think we generally talked of you."

"And what did he find to tell you?"

Denise glanced up into his face, and the smile quivered into tears; but the impulse to answer frankly was swift and strong. Her voice faltered, but Gaston heard her reply.

"He said you would love me some day," she murmured.

"He knew me better than I did myself," said Gaston.

Zon always attributed Gaston's return to the vow which she had intended to make on the behalf of Denise, and brought forward this proof of her mistress being in favour with Ste.-Agnesca, whenever any one lamented in her hearing that Denise was a Protestant. She never ceased, however, to regret that Denise had refused to try the effect of old Benoîte's love-potion on Gaston, especially when Zon's own faith in it was confirmed by a serious proposal of marriage from the handsome Manoële. Perhaps he was farsighted enough to calculate future advantages from a marriage with the favourite maid of Mme. de Farnoux, and the event justified his foresight, for Gaston appointed him his garde-chasse, thereby transforming him from a poacher to an active and efficient game-keeper, discharging his duties in a manner that showed him to be one of those fortunate mortals who occupy the niche intended for them by nature. Zon is proud of her husband, and sees in her children the future attendants and retainers of the rising generation of De Farnoux. If she has an ambition still ungratified, it is to become foster-mother to one of Denise's children, and so occupy the position formerly held by her grandmother, towards the family at the Château. Old Benoîte still lives, and since the death of Mlle. de Farnoux has accepted

Denise as her liege lady, not quite worthy, perhaps, to rule in the place of her aunt, but still one who will uphold the family honour, and not more degenerate than the younger generation are apt to be in the eyes of those who have known the good old times of those who went before them.

If Zon took all the credit of Gaston's opportune return to herself, so, on the other hand, with perhaps a shade of justice, did Mlle. Le Marchand. She would give no explanation of her mysterious note, but said, "She had told Gaston that he would be much better at home, and he had found it so. She had had her reasons, and good ones too, as women's reasons always were, only men seldom had the sense to find it out." She never precisely ascertained by personal experience what the feelings of a grandmother might be, but no grandmother could be more devoted than she to the little ones who by-and-by inherited the long silent names of Félise and Géraldine, and chased away with their childish glee all melancholy from Château Farnoux. Mlle. Le Marchand was so capable of rejoicing profoundly in the happiness of others, in spite of her cynicism, that in these latter years her own life became filled with gladness. For Denise was happy. Her look of peace had returned, and a new brightness with it. She had won her husband's heart at last, and won it entirely. Not a chamber in it was shut from her. The esteem and affection that had been growing up for her in his heart, even when it seemed closed against her, had been no ill foundation for a love as true and deep, if less passionate, than that which he had felt in his early youth for Lucile. Never could such happiness as this have been his if he had married the poor child whose loss had caused him such an intensity of regret. This, indeed, he did not know, but he knew himself a very happy man; and when he looked at Denise, in her glad pride of wife and

mother, with her last treasure, their boy, in her arms, he acknowledged with deep gratitude that life had greater joys and more enduring blessings than he had ever dreamed possible, when all that made it precious to him seemed buried in the grave of Lucile.



THE END.

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