

was no longer clad in her poor, old clothes, but was dressed in black, with as much simplicity as taste. The sad color seemed to indicate her renunciation of all human vanity, the eternal mourning of her heart, and the austere duties imposed upon her by her devotion to misfortune. With her black gown, she wore a large falling collar, white and neat as her little gauze cap, with its grey ribbons, which, revealing her bands of fine brown hair, set off to advantage her pale and melancholy countenance, with its soft blue eyes. Her long, delicate hands, preserved from the cold by gloves, were no longer, as formerly, of a violet hue, but of an almost transparent whiteness.

Her agitated features expressed a lively uneasiness. Extremely surprised, Mdlle. de Cardoville exclaimed: "What do you say?"—"M. Rodin betrays you, madame."

"M. Rodin? Impossible!"—"Oh, madame! my presentiments did not deceive me."

"Your presentiments?"—"The first time I saw M. Rodin, I was frightened in spite of myself. My heart sank within me, and I trembled—for you, madame."

"For me?" said Adrienne. "Why did you not tremble for yourself, my poor friend?"

"I do not know, madame; but such was my first impression. And this fear was so invincible, that, notwithstanding the kindness that M. Rodin showed my sister, he frightened me, none the less."

"That is strange. I can understand as well as any one the almost irresistible influence of sympathies or aversions; but, in this instance— However," resumed Adrienne, after a moment's reflection, "no matter for that; how have these suspicions been changed to certainty?"

"Yesterday, I went to take to my sister Cephyse, the assistance that M. Rodin had given me, in the name of a charitable person. I did not find Cephyse at the friend's who had taken care of her; I therefore begged the portress to inform my sister that I would call again this morning. That is what I did; but you must excuse me, madame, some necessary details."

"Speak, speak, my dear."—"The young girl who had received my sister," said Mother Bunch, with embarrassment, casting down her eyes and blushing, "does not lead a very regular life. A person, with whom she has gone on several parties of pleasure, one M. Dumoulin, had informed her of the real name of M. Rodin, who has a kind of lodging in that house, and there goes by the name of Charlemagne."

"That is just what he told us at Dr. Baleinier's; and, the day before yesterday, when I again alluded to the circumstance, he explained to me the necessity in which he was, for certain reasons, to have a humble retreat in that remote quarter—and I could not but approve of his motives."

"Well, then! yesterday, M. Rodin received a visit from the Abbe d'Aigrigny."—"The Abbe d'Aigrigny!" exclaimed Mdlle. de Cardoville.

"Yes, madame; he remained for two hours shut up with M. Rodin."

"My child, you must have been deceived."

"I was told, madame, that the Abbe d'Aigrigny had called in the morning to see M. Rodin; not finding him at home, he had left with the portress his name written on a slip of paper, with the words, 'I shall return in two hours.' The girl of who I spoke, madame, had seen this slip of paper. As all that concerns M. Rodin appears mysterious enough, she had the curiosity to wait for M. d'Aigrigny in the porter's lodge, and, about two hours afterwards, he indeed returned, and saw M. Rodin."

"No, no," said Adrienne, shuddering; "it is impossible. There must be some mistake."

"I think not, madame; for, knowing how serious such a discovery would be, I begged the young girl to describe to me the appearance of M. d'Aigrigny."

"Well?"—"The Abbe d'Aigrigny, she told me, is about forty years of age. He is tall and upright, dresses plainly, but with care; has grey eyes, very large and piercing, thick eye-brows, chestnut-colored hair, a face closely shaved, and a very decided aspect."

"It is true," said Adrienne, hardly able to believe what she heard. "The description is exact."

"Wishing to have all possible details," resumed Mother Bunch, "I asked the portress if M. Rodin and the Abbe d'Aigrigny appeared to be at variance when they quitted the house? She replied no, but that the abbe said to M. Rodin, as they parted at the door: 'I will write to you tomorrow, as agreed.'"

"Is it a dream? Good heaven!" said Adrienne, drawing her hands across her forehead in a sort of stupor. "I cannot doubt your word, my poor friend; and yet it is M. Rodin who himself sent you to that house, to give assistance to your sister; would he have willfully laid open to you his secret interviews with the Abbe d'Aigrigny? It would have been bad policy in a traitor."

"That is true, and the same reflection occurred to me. And yet the meeting of these two men appeared so dangerous to you, madame, that I returned home full of terror."

Characters of extreme honesty are very hard to convince of the treachery of others; the more infamous the deception, the more they are inclined to doubt it. Adrienne was one of the characters, rectitude being a prime quality of her mind. Though deeply impressed by the communication, she remarked: "Come, my dear, do not let us frighten ourselves to soon, or be over-hasty in believing evil. Let us try to enlighten ourselves by reasoning, and first of all remember facts. M. Rodin opened for me the doors of Dr. Baleinier's asylum; in my presence, he brought his charge against the Abbe d'Aigrigny; he forced the superior of the convent to restore Marshal Simon's daughters, he succeeded in discovering the retreat of Prince Djalma—he faithfully executed my intentions with regard to my young cousin; only yesterday, he gave me the most useful advice. All this is true—is it not?"

"Certainly, madame."

"Now suppose that M. Rodin, putting things in their worst light, had some after-thought—that he hopes to be liberally rewarded, for instance; hitherto, at least, he has shown complete disinterestedness."

"That also is true, madame," said poor Mother Bunch, obliged, like Adrienne, to admit the evidence of fixed facts.

"Now let us look to the possibility of treachery. Unite with the Abbe d'Aigrigny to betray me! Betray me?—how? and for what purpose? What have I to fear? Is it not the Abbe d'Aigrigny, on the contrary, is it not Madame de Saint-Dizier, who have to render an account for the injuries they have done me?"

"But, then, madame, how do you explain the meeting of these two men, who have so many motives for mutual aversion? May there not be some dark project still behind? Besides, madame, I am not the only one to think so."

"How is that?"—"This morning, on my return, I was so much agitated, that Mdlle. Florine asked me the cause of my trouble. I know, madame, how much she is devoted to you."

"Nobody could be more so; only recently, you yourself informed me of the signal service she rendered, during my confinement at Dr. Baleinier's."

"Well, madame, this morning, on my return, thinking it necessary to have you informed as soon as possible, I told all to Mdlle Florine. Like me—even more, perhaps—she was terrified at the meeting of Rodin and M. d'Aigrigny. After a moment's reflection, she said to me: 'It is, I think, useless to disturb my mistress at present; it can be of no importance whether she is informed of this treachery two or three hours sooner or later; during that time I may be able to discover something more. I have an idea, which I think a good one. Make my excuses to my mistress; I shall soon be back.' Then Florine sent for a hackney-coach, and went out."

"Florine is an excellent girl," said Mdlle. de Cardoville, with a smile, for further reflection had quite reassured her; "but, on this occasion, I think that her zeal and good heart have deceived her, as they have you, my poor friend. Do you know, that we are two madeaps, you and I, not to have thought of one thing, which would have put us quite at our ease?"

"How so, madame?"—"The Abbe d'Aigrigny fears M. Rodin; he may have sought him out, to entreat his forbearance. Do you not find this explanation both satisfactory and reasonable?"

"Perhaps so, madame?" said Mother Bunch, after a moment's reflection; "yes, it is probable." But after another silence, and as if yielding to a conviction superior to every possible argument, she exclaimed: "And yet, no; believe me, madame, you are deceived. I feel it. All appearances may be against what I affirm; yet, believe me, these presentiments are too strong not to be true. And have you not guessed the most secret instincts of my heart? why should I not be able to guess the dangers with which you are menaced?"

"What do you say? what have I guessed?" replied Mdlle. de Cardoville, involuntarily impressed by the other's tone of conviction and alarm.

"What have you guessed?" resumed the latter. "All the troublesome susceptibility of an unfortunate creature, to whom destiny has decreed a life apart. If I have hitherto been silent, it is not from ignorance of what I owe you. Who told you, madame, that the only way to make me accept your favors without blushing, was to give me some employment, that would enable me to soothe the misfortunes I had so long shared? Who told you, when you wished me to have a seat at your table, and to treat as your friend the poor needlewoman, in whose person you sought

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