

THE WANDERING JEW.

BY EUGENE SUE.

CHAPTER LX.

ANOTHER SECRET.

The following scene took place a few days after the abduction of Rose-Pompon by Ninny Moulin. Mlle. de Cardoville was seated, in a dreamy mood, in her cabinet, which was hung with green silk, and furnished with an ebony library, ornamented with large bronze caryatides. By some significant signs, one could perceive that Mlle. de Cardoville had sought in the fine airs some relief from sad and serious thoughts. Near an open piano, was a harp, placed before a music-stand. A little further, on a table covered with boxes of oil and water-color, were several brilliant sketches. Most of them represented Asiatic scenes, lighted by the fires of an oriental sun. Faithful to her fancy of dressing herself at home in a picturesque style, Mademoiselle de Cardoville resembled that day one of those proud portraits of Velasquez, with stern and noble aspect. Her gown was of black moire, with wide-swelling petticoat, long waist, and sleeve slashed with rose-colored satin, fastened together with jet bugles. A very stiff Spanish ruff reached almost to her chin, and was secured round her neck by a broad rose-colored ribbon. This frill, slightly heaving, sloped down as far as the graceful swell of the rose-colored stomacher, laced with strings of jet beads, and terminating in a point at the waist. It is impossible to express how well this black garment, with its ample and shining folds, relieved with rose-color and brilliant jet, harmonized with the shining whiteness of Adrienne's skin, and the golden flood of her beautiful hair, whose long, silky ringlets descended to her bosom.

The young lady was in a half-recumbent posture, with her elbow resting on a couch covered with green silk. The back of this piece of furniture, which was pretty high towards the fire-place sloped down insensibly toward the foot. A sort of light, semi-circular trellis-work, in gilded bronze, raised at about five feet from the ground, covered with flowering plants (the admirable *passiflora quadrangulata*, planted in a deep ebony box, from the centre of which rose the trellis work), surrounded this couch with a sort of screen of foliage, enamelled with large flowers, green without, purple within, and as brilliant as those flowers of porcelain which we receive from Saxony. A sweet, faint perfume, like a faint mixture of jasmine with violet, rose from the cup of these admirable *passiflora*. Strange enough, a large quantity of new books (Adrienne having bought them since the last two or three days), and quite fresh cut, were scattered around her on the couch, and on a little table; whilst other larger volumes, amongst which were several atlases full of engravings, were piled on the sumptuous fur, which formed the carpet beneath the divan. Stranger still, these books, though of different forms, and by different authors, all treated of the same subject! The posture of Adrienne revealed a sort of melancholy dejection. Her cheeks were pale; a light blue circle surrounded her large, black eyes, now half-closed, and gave to them an expression of profound grief. Many causes contributed to this sorrow—amongst others, the disappearance of Mother Bunch. Without absolutely believing the perfidious insinuations of Rodin, who gave her to understand that, in the fear of being unmasked by him, the hunchback had not dared to remain in the house, Adrienne felt a cruel sinking of the heart, when she thought how this young girl, in whom she had had so much confidence, had fled from her almost sisterly hospitality, without even uttering a word of gratitude; for care had been taken not to show her the few lines written by the poor needlewoman to her benefactress, just before her departure. She had only been told of the note for five hundred francs found on her desk; and this last inexplicable circumstance had contributed to awaken cruel suspicions in the breast of Mlle. de Cardoville. She already felt the fatal effects of that mistrust of everything and everybody, which Rodin had recommended to her; and this sentiment of suspicion and reserve had the more tendency to become powerful, that, for the first time in her life, Mlle. de Cardoville, until then a stranger to all deception, had a secret to conceal—a secret, which was equally her happiness, her shame and her torment.

Half-recumbent on her divan, pensive and depressed, Adrienne pursued, with a mind often absent, one of her newly purchased books. Suddenly, she uttered an exclamation of surprise; the hand which held the book trembled like a leaf, and from that moment she appeared to read with passionate attention and devouring curiosity. Soon, her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, her smile assumed ineffable sweetness, and she uttered an exclamation of surprise, and she seemed at once proud, happy, delighted—but, as

she turned over the last page, her countenance expressed disappointment and chagrin. Then she recommenced this reading, which had occasioned her such sweet emotion, and this time she read with the most deliberate slowness, going over each page twice, and spelling, as it were, every line, every word. From time to time, she paused, and in a pensive mood, with her forehead leaning on her fair hand, she seemed to reflect, in a deep reverie, on the passage she had read with such tender and religious love. Arriving at a passage which so affected her, that a tear started in her eye, she suddenly turned the volume, to see on the cover the name of the author. For a few seconds, she contemplated this name with a singular expression of gratitude; and could not forbear raising to her rosy lips the page on which it was printed. After reading many times over the lines with which she had been so much struck, forgetting, no doubt, the letter in the spirit, she began to reflect so deeply, that the book glided from her hand, and fell upon the carpet. During the course of this reverie, the eyes of the young girl rested, mechanically, upon an admirable bas-relief, placed on an ebony stand, near one of the windows. This magnificent bronze, recently cast after a plaster copy from the antique, represented the triumph of the Indian Bacchus. Never, perhaps, had Grecian art attained such rare perfection. The youthful conqueror, half-clad in a lion's skin, which displayed his juvenile grace and charming purity of form, shone with divine beauty. Standing up in a car, drawn by two tigers, with an air at once gentle and proud, he leaned with one hand upon a thyrsus, and with the other guided his savage steeds in tranquil majesty. By this rare mixture of grace, vigor, and serenity, it was easy to recognize the hero who had waged such desperate combats with men and with monsters of the forest. Thanks to the brownish tone of the figure, the light, falling from one side of the sculpture, admirably displayed the form of the youthful god, which, carved in relieve, and thus illumined, shone like a magnificent statue of pale gold upon the dark fretted background of the bronze.

When Adrienne's look first rested on this rare assemblage of divine perfections, her countenance was calm and thoughtful, but this contemplation, at first mechanical, became gradually more and more attentive and conscious, and the young lady, rising suddenly from her seat, slowly approached the bas-relief, as if yielding to the invincible attraction of an extraordinary resemblance. Then a slight blush appeared on the cheeks of Mlle. de Cardoville, stole across her face, and spread rapidly to her neck and forehead. She approached still closer, threw around a hasty glance, as if half-ashamed, or as if she had feared to be surprised in a blamable action, and twice stretched forth her hand, trembling with emotion, to touch with the tips of her charming fingers the bronze forehead of the Indian Bacchus. And twice she stopped short, with kind of modest hesitation. At last, the temptation became too strong for her. She yielded to it; and her alabaster finger, after delicately caressing the features of pale gold, was pressed more boldly for an instant on the pure and noble brow of the youthful god. At this pressure, though so slight, Adrienne seemed to feel a sort of electric shock; she trembled in every limb, her eyes languished, and, after swimming for an instant in their humble and brilliant crystal, were raised, half-closed, to heaven. Then her head was thrown a little way back, her knees bent insensibly, her rosy lips half-opened, as if to give passage to her heated breath, for her bosom heaved violently, as though youth and life had accelerated the pulsations of the heart, and made her blood boil in her veins. Finally, the burning cheeks of Adrienne betrayed a species of ecstasy, timid and passionate, chaste and sensual, the expression of which was ineffably touching.

An affecting spectacle indeed is that of a young maiden, whose modest brow flushes with the first fires of a secret passion. Does not the Creator of all things animate the body as well as the soul, with a spark of divine energy? Should He not be religiously glorified in the intellect as in the senses, with which He has so paternally endowed his creatures? They are impious blasphemers who seek to stifle the celestial senses, instead of guiding and harmonizing them in their divine flight. Suddenly, Mlle. de Cardoville started, raised her head, opened her eyes as if awaking from a dream, withdrew abruptly from the sculptures, and walked several times up and down the room in an agitated manner, pressing her burning hands to her forehead. Then, falling, as it were, exhausted on her seat, her tears flowed in abundance. The most bitter grief was visible in her features, which revealed the fatal struggle that was passing within her. By degrees, her tears ceased. To this crisis of painful dejection, succeeded a species of violent scorn and indignation against herself, which was expressed by these words that escaped her: 'For the first time

in my life, I feel weak and cowardly. Oh, yes! cowardly—very cowardly!

The sound of a door, opening and closing, roused Mlle. de Cardoville from her bitter reflections. Georgette entered the room, and said to her mistress: 'Madame, can you receive the Count de Montbron?'

Adrienne, too well-bred to exhibit before her women the sort of impatience occasioned by this unreasonable visit, said to Georgette: 'You told M. de Montbron that I was at home?'—'Yes, madame.'

'Then beg him to walk in.' Though Mlle. de Cardoville felt at that moment much vexed at the arrival of Montbron, let us hasten to say, that she entertained for him an almost filial affection, and a profound esteem, though, by a not unfrequent contrast, she almost always differed from him in opinion. Hence arose, when Mlle. de Cardoville had nothing to disturb her mind, the most gay and animated discussions, in which M. de Montbron, notwithstanding his mocking and skeptical humor, his long experience, his rare knowledge of men and things, his fashionable training, in a word had not always the advantage, and even acknowledged his defeat gaily enough. Thus, to give an idea of the differences of the count and Adrienne, before, as he would say, laughingly, he had made himself her accomplice, he had always opposed (from other motives than those alleged by Madame de Saint-Dizier) Adrienne's wish to live alone and in her own way; whilst Rodin, on the contrary, by investing the young girl's resolve on this subject with an ideal grandeur of intention, had acquired a species of influence over her. M. de Montbron, now upwards of sixty years of age, had been a most prominent character during the Directory, Consulate, and the Empire. His prodigal style of living, his wit, his gaiety, his duels, his amours, and his losses at play, had given him a leading influence in the best society of his day; while his character, his kind-heartedness, and liberality, secured him the lasting friendship of nearly all his female friends. At the time we now present him to the reader, he was still a great gambler; and, moreover, a very lucky gambler. He had, as we have stated, a very lordly style; his manners were decided, but polished and lively; his habits were such as belong to the higher classes of society, though he could be excessively sharp towards people whom he did not like. He was tall and thin, and his slim figure gave him an almost youthful appearance; his forehead was high, a little bald; his hair was gray and short, his countenance long, his nose aquiline, his eyes blue and piercing, and his teeth white, and still very good.

'The Count de Montbron,' said Georgette, opening the door. The count entered, and hastened to kiss Adrienne's hand, with a sort of paternal familiarity.

'Come!' said M. de Montbron to himself; 'let us try to discover the truth I am in search of, that we may escape a great misfortune.'

CHAPTER LX.

THE CONFESSION.

Mlle. de Cardoville, not wishing to betray the cause of the violent feelings which agitated her, received M. de Montbron with a feigned and forced gaiety. On the other hand, notwithstanding his tact and knowledge of the world, the count was much embarrassed how to enter upon the subject on which he wished to confer with Adrienne, and he resolved to feel his way, before seriously commencing the conversation. After looking at the young lady for some seconds, M. de Montbron shook his head, and said, with a sigh of regret: 'My dear child, I am not pleased.'

'Some affair of the heart, or of hearts, my dear count?' returned Adrienne, smiling.—'Of the heart,' said M. de Montbron.

'What! you, so great a player, think more of a woman's whim than a throw of dice?'—'I have a heavy heart, and you are the cause of it, my dear child.'

'M. de Montbron, you will make me very proud,' said Adrienne, with a smile.

'You would be wrong, for I tell you plainly, my trouble is caused by your neglect of your beauty. Yes, your countenance is pale, dejected, sorrowful; you have been low-spirited for the last few days; you have something on your mind, I am sure of it.'

'My dear M. de Montbron, you have so much penetration, that you may be allowed to fail for once, as now. I am not sad, I have nothing on my mind, and—I am about to utter a very silly piece of impertinence—I have never thought myself so pretty.'

'On the contrary, nothing could be more modest than such an assertion. Who told you that falsehood? a woman?'

'No; it was my heart, and it spoke the truth,'

answered Adrienne, with a slight degree of emotion. 'Understand it, if you can,' she added.

'Do you mean that you are proud of the alteration in your features, because you are proud of the sufferings of your heart?' said M. de Montbron, looking at Adrienne with attention. 'Be it so; I am then right. You have some sorrow. I persist in it,' added the count, speaking with a tone of real feeling, 'because it is painful to me.'

'Be satisfied; I am as happy as possible—for every instant I take delight in repeating, how, at my age, I am free—absolutely free!'—'Yes; free to torment yourself, free to be miserable.'

'Come, come, my dear count!' said Adrienne, 'you are recommencing our old quarrel. I still find in you the ally of my aunt and the Abbe d'Aigrigny.'

'Yes; as the republicans are the allies of the legitimists—to destroy each other in their turn. Talking of your abominable aunt, they say that she holds a sort of council at her house these last few days, a regular mitred conspiracy. She is certainly in a good way.'

'Why not? Formerly, she would have wished to be Goddess of Reason, now, we shall perhaps see her canonized. She has already performed the first part of the life of Mary Magdalen.'

'You can never speak worse of her than she deserves, my dear child. Still, for quite opposite reasons, I agreed with her on the subject of your wish to reside alone.'—'I know it.'

'Yes and because I wished to see you a thousand times freer than you really are, I advised you.'—'To marry.'

'No doubt; you would have had your dear liberty, with its consequences, only, instead of Mlle. de Cardoville, we should have called you Madame Somebody, having found an excellent husband to be responsible for your independence.'

'And who would be responsible for this ridiculous husband? And who would bear a mocked and degraded name? I, perhaps?' said Adrienne, with animation. 'No, no, my dear count, good or ill, I will answer for my own actions; to my name shall attach the reputation, which I alone have formed. I am as incapable of basely dishonouring a name which is not mine, as of continually bearing it myself, if it were not held in esteem. And, as one can only answer for one's own actions, I prefer to keep my name.'—'You are the only person in the world that has such ideas.'

'Why?' said Adrienne, laughing. 'Because it appears to me horrible, to see a poor young girl lost and buried in some ugly and selfish man, and become, as they say seriously, the better half of the monster—yes! a fresh and blooming rose to become part of a frightful thistle!—Come, my dear count; confess there is something odious in this conjugal metempsychosis,' added Adrienne, with a burst of laughter.

The forced and somewhat feverish gaiety of Adrienne contrasted painfully with her pale and suffering countenance; it was so easy to see that she strove to stifle with laughter some deep sorrow, that M. de Montbron was much affected by it; but dissembling his emotion, he appeared to reflect a moment, and took up mechanically one of the new, fresh-cut books, by which Adrienne was surrounded. After casting a careless glance at this volume, he continued, still dissembling his feelings; 'Come, my dear madcap; this is another folly. Suppose I were twenty years old, and that you did me the honour to marry me—you would be called Lady de Montbron, I imagine?'—'Perhaps.'

'How perhaps? Would you not bear my name, if you married me?'

'My dear count,' said Adrienne, with a smile, 'do not let us pursue this hypothesis, which can only leave us—regrets.'

Suddenly, M. de Montbron started, and looked at Mlle. de Cardoville with an expression of surprise. For some moments, whilst talking to Adrienne, he had mechanically taken up two or three of the volumes scattered over the couch, and had glanced at their titles in the same careless manner. The first was the 'Modern History of India.' The second, 'Travels in India.' The third, 'Letters on India.' Much surprised, M. de Montbron had continued his investigation, and found that the fourth volume continued this Indian nomenclature being 'Rambles in India.' The fifth was 'Recollections of Hindostan.' The sixth, 'Notes of a Traveler in the East Indies.'

Hence the astonishment, which, for many serious reasons, M. de Montbron had no longer been able to conceal, and which his looks betrayed to Adrienne. The latter, having completely forgotten the presence of the accusing volumes by which she was surrounded, yielded to a movement of involuntary confusion, and blushed slightly; but, her firm and resolute character again coming to her aid, she looked full at M. de Montbron, and said to him: 'Well, my dear count! what surprises you?'

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