

'You are not ill, madame?' asked that ridiculous fop, Montfériot, who had been presented to me, and was whispering the most fatuous compliments.

'No, I thank you.'

The fact was that Diaz, since his retirement, had not yet played to anyone except myself. This was his first appearance. I was afraid for him. I trembled for him. I need not have done. He was absolutely master of his powers. His fingers announced, quite simply, one of the most successful airs from *La Vallière*, and then he began to decorate it with an amazing lacework of variations, and finished with a bravura display such as no pianist could have surpassed. The performance, marvellous in itself, was precisely suited to that audience, and it electrified the audience; it electrified even me. Diaz fought his way through kisses and embraces to Villedo, who stood on his toes and wept and put his arms round Diaz' neck.

'*Cher maître,*' he cried, 'you overwhelm us!'

'You are too kind, all of you,' said Diaz. 'I must ask permission to retire. I have to conduct Mademoiselle Peel to her hotel, and there is much for me to do during the night. You know I start very early to-morrow.'