

CHAPTER II

THE MAISON DE MALINCOURT

SOME two or three hours after the scene in the market place a girl sat at her spinning wheel on the terrace of the Maison de Malincourt, opposite the head of the stately flight of steps leading down to the wide gardens. She had placed her wheel in an angle of the southern turret so that she could ply her task in comfort, protected from the rays of the July sun.

She was Lucette de Boisdegarde, the foster-sister and close friend of Mademoiselle de Malincourt, for whose coming she was now waiting with as much patience as her quick vivacious temperament permitted.

Her industry was only fitful. At times her shapely little foot pressed with insistent vigour upon the treadle and the wheel flew round rapidly, as if keeping pace with the thoughts that drew her dark pretty face into a frown of petulance and made her large eyes flash with gathering purpose. But the wheel was often still and she would sit back, idly fingering the threads of gleaming flax and thinking, while her gaze would roam over the blaze of lovely flowers in the garden, or stray away to the red roofs of the city which showed through the skirting trees beyond, or rest curiously on the vacant seat at her side on the cushions of which lay some needlework.

She was in one of these preoccupied moods when her sharp ear caught the sound of a footstep. In a moment she set the treadle of her wheel whirling swiftly, while