

And then the door shut, and my housekeeper heard no more."

"You saw Félicie yourself, I suppose, afterwards?"

"Yes. She passed my door now and then; but rarely, for she seldom went out. Sometimes I used to run out and speak to her. I had known her from her cradle, remember, and she had always seemed to like me in the days when she was bright and gay. Now she had an air that was at once listless and anxious, as if she had no interest in her present life, but was waiting for something—sometimes hoping, sometimes fearing, and never happy. She would speak to me in the old sweet voice that I knew so well—her mother's voice; but she rarely smiled, and if ever she did, the smile was almost sadder than tears. Every time I saw her I saw a change for the worse; and I felt that she had begun that journey we must all take some day, even if we live to the age of the immortal Voltaire."

"Did any one ever come to see her—a gentleman—an Englishman?" inquired Lucius.

"Ah," cried the watchmaker, "I see you know her history better than I. Yes, an English gentleman did visit her. It was nearly a year after her return that he came, in the middle of summer. He stayed a week at the hotel, the same to which Félicie went to see the English lady with whom she left Rouen. This gentleman used to spend most of his time next door, and he and Félicie Dumarques drove about in a hired carriage together to different places in the neighbourhood, and for the first time since her return I saw Félicie with a happy look on her face. But there was the stamp of death there too, clear and plain enough for any eyes that could read; and I think the Englishman must have seen it as well as I. Marthon contrived to find out all that happened next door. She told me that a grand physician had come from Paris to see Félicie Dumarques, and had ordered a new treatment, which was to cure her. And then I regret to say that Marthon, who has a wicked tongue, began to say injurious things about our neighbours. I stopped her at once, forbidding her to utter a word to the discredit of Félicie Dumarques, and a short time after Marthon came to me more full of importance, to say that I was right and Félicie was an honest woman. The old servant next door had told my housekeeper that the English gentleman was Félicie's husband. They had been married in England, but they were obliged to keep their marriage a secret, on account of the Englishman's uncle, who would disinherit him if he knew his nephew had married a lady's maid, for this gentleman was nephew of the invalid lady who had taken Félicie away."

"I begin to understand," said Lucius, and then, producing the double miniature, he showed the watchmaker the two portraits.

"Is either of those faces familiar to you?" he asked.

"Both of them," cried the other. "One is a portrait of Félicie Dumarques, in the prime of her beauty; the other of the Englishman who came to visit her."

"Did you hear the Englishman's name?" inquired Lucius.

"Never, though Marthon, who does not scruple to push curiosity to impertinence, asked the direct question of the old servant next door. She was repulsed with severity. 'I have told you there is a secret,' said the woman, 'and it is one that can in no manner concern you, Madame' (meaning Félicie) 'is an angel of goodness. And do you think Mademoiselle Hortense would allow the English gentleman to come here if all was not right; she who is so correct in her conduct, and goes to mass every day?' Even Marthon was obliged to be satisfied with this. Well, sir, the Englishman went away, I saw Félicie drive home in a *voiture de remise*; she had been to the station to see him off. Great Heaven, I never beheld so sad a face! 'Alas, poor child,' I said to myself, 'all the physicians in Paris will never cure you, for you are dying of sorrow!' And I was not far wrong, sir. The poor girl died in less than a month from that day, and was buried on the hill yonder, by the chapel of our Lady of Bons Secours."

"And her elder sister?"

"Mademoiselle Hortense? She died two years ago, and lies yonder on the hill with the rest of them."

"But one sister remains, you say?"

"Yes, there is still Mademoiselle Julie. She went to Paris to a situation in a *magasin de modes*, I believe. She was always clever with her needle."

"And you think you can procure me her present address in Paris?"

"I believe I can, and without much difficulty. The house next door belongs to Mademoiselle Dumarques. The present tenants must know her address."

"I shall be beyond measure obliged again if you will obtain it for me."

"If you will be kind enough to call again this evening, I will make the inquiry in the mean time."

"I thank you, sir, heartily. You have already given me some valuable information, which may assist a most amiable young lady to regain her proper place in the world."

The disciple of Jean Jacques declared himself enraptured at the idea that he had served a fellow creature.

"There is one point, however, that I might ascertain before I leave Rouen," said Lucius, "and that is the name of Félicie's husband. You say he stayed at the same hotel at which Félicie had seen the English lady. Which hotel was it?"

"The Britannique."

"And can you give me the date of Félicie's interview with the lady?"

The watchmaker shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot say. The years in our quiet life are so much alike. Félicie was away about six years."

"And I have a letter written by her after her return—dated. That will give me an approximate date at any rate. I'll try the Hôtel Britannique."

Lucius paused in his passage through the shop to select some trifling articles from the watchmaker's small stock of jewelry which might serve as gifts for Lucille. Slender as his means were he could not leave a service entirely unrequited. He bought a locket and a pair of earrings, at the old man's own price, and left him delighted with his visitor, and pledged to obtain Mademoiselle Dumarques' address, even should the tenant of number seventeen prove unwilling to give it.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY GROWS CLEARER.

The Britannique was a handsome hotel on the quay, bright-looking and many-balconied. The house had a busy look, and early as it was—not long after noon—a long table in the gaily-decorated dining-room was already laid for the table d'hôte. Thereupon Lucius beheld showy pyramids of those wooly peaches and flavourless grapes and wooden pears which seem peculiar to the soil of France—the Dead-sea apples of a table-d'hôte dessert. Already napkins, spread fan-shape, adorned the glasses, ranged in double line along the vast perspective of table-cloth. Waiters were scurrying to and fro across the hall, chamber-maids bawled to each other—as only French chamber-maids can bawl—on the steep winding stair-case. An insupportable odour of dinner—strongly flavoured with garlic—pervaded the atmosphere. Tourists were hurriedly consulting time-tables, as if on the point of departure; other tourists, just arrived and burdened with luggage, were gazing disconsolately around, as if doubtful of finding accommodation. Habitues of the hotel were calmly smoking their midday cigarettes, and waiting for the dainty little breakfast which the harassed cook was so slow to produce through yonder hutch in the wall, to which hungry eyes glanced impatiently.

In a scene so busy it hardly seemed likely that Lucius would find any one willing to lend an ear, or to sit calmly down and thoughtfully review the past, in order to discover the identity of those English guests who had taken Félicie Dumarques away from her joyless home. He made the attempt notwithstanding, and walked into a neat little parlour to the left, where two disconsolate female—strangers to each other and regardless of each other's woes—were poring over the mysteries of a couple of railway-guides; and where a calm-looking middle-aged female, with shining black hair and neat little white-lace cap, sat at a desk making out accounts.

To this tranquil personage Mr. Davoren addressed himself.

"Could I see the proprietor of the hotel?"

The lady shrugged her shoulders dubiously. As a rule, she told Lucius, the proprietor did not permit himself to be seen. He had his servants, who arranged everything.

"Cannot I afford you any information you may require, monsieur?" she asked, with an agreeable smile.

"That, madame, will depend upon circumstances. May I ask how long you have been in your present position?"

"From the age of eighteen. Monsieur Dolfe—the proprietor—is my uncle."

"That may be at most ten years," said Lucius, with gallantry.

"It is more than twenty, monsieur."

Lucius expressed his amazement.

"Yes, monsieur, I have kept these books more than twenty years."

"You must be very tired of them, I should think," said Lucius, who saw that the lady was good-natured, and inclined to oblige him.

"I am accustomed to them, monsieur, and custom endears even the driest duty. I took a week's holiday at Dieppe last summer, for the benefit of my health, but believe me I missed my books. There was a void. Pleasure is all very well for people who are used to it, but for a woman of business—that fatigues!"

"The inquiry which I wish to make relates to some English people who were staying for a short time in this house—about four-and-twenty years ago, and whose names I am anxious to discover."

Mademoiselle Dolfe elevated her black eyebrows to an almost hazardous extent.

"But, monsieur, four-and-twenty years ago! You imagine that I can recall visitors of four-and-twenty years ago? English visitors—and this hotel is three-parts filled with English visitors every year from May to October. Thirty English visitors will sit down to-day at our table d'hôte, that is to say, English and American, all the same."

"It might be impossible to remember them un-assisted; yet there are circumstances connected with these people which might recall them to you. But you have books in which visitors write their names?"

"Yes, if it pleases them. They are even asked to write; but there is no law to compel them; there is no law to prevent them writing a false name. It is a mere formula. And if I can find the names, supposing you to know the

exact date, how are we to identify them with the people you want? There are several names signed in the visitors'-book every day in our busy season. People come and go so quickly. It is an impossibility which you ask, monsieur."

"I think if I had time for a quiet chat with you I might bring back the circumstances to your recollection. It is a very important matter—a matter which may seriously affect the happiness of a person very dear to me, or I would not trouble you."

"A person very dear to you! Your betrothed perhaps, monsieur?" inquired Mademoiselle Dolfe, with evident sympathy.

Lucius felt that his cause was half won.

"Yes, madame," he said, "my betrothed, whose mother was a native of your city."

This clenched the matter. Mademoiselle Dolfe was soft-hearted and sentimental. Even the books, and the perpetual adding-up of dinners and breakfasts, service appartements, bougies, siphons, bouteilles, demi-bouteilles, and those fatal sundries which so fearfully swell an hotel bill—even this hard exercise of an exact science had not extinguished that vital spark of heavenly flame which Mademoiselle Dolfe called her soul. She had been betrothed herself, once upon a time, to the proprietor of a rival establishment, who had blighted her affections by proving inconstant to his affianced, and only too constant to the brandy-bottle. She had not forgotten that springtime of the heart, those alcyon summer evenings when she and her Gustave had walked hand-in-hand in the shadowy avenues across yonder bridge. She sighed, and looked at Lucius with the glance of compassion.

"Would it be possible for you to give me half-an-hour's quiet conversation at any time?" asked Lucius pleadingly.

"There is the evening," said Mademoiselle Dolfe. "My uncle is a severe sufferer from gout, and rarely leaves his room; but I do not think he would object to receive you in the evening for half an hour. He has all the old books of the hotel in his room—they are indeed his only library. When in want of a distraction he compares the receipt of past years with our present returns, or examines our former tariffs, with a view to any modification, the reduction or increase of our present charges. If you will call this evening at nine o'clock, monsieur, I will induce my uncle to receive you. His memory is extraordinary; and he may be able to recall events of which I in my frivolous girlhood, took little notice."

"I shall be eternally obliged to him, and to you, madame," said Lucius. "In the mean time, if you will kindly send a porter for my bag, which I left at the station, I will take up my abode here. I shall then be on the spot whenever Monsieur Dolfe may be pleased to receive me."

"You will stay here to-night, monsieur?"

"Certainly. Unhappily I must go on to Paris to-morrow morning."

Mademoiselle Dolfe surveyed a table of numbers, and rang for a chamber-maid.

"Show this gentleman to number eleven," she said; and then, turning to Lucius, she added graciously, "It is an airy chamber, giving upon the river, monsieur, and has but been this instant vacated. I shall have a dozen applications when the next train from Dieppe comes in."

Lucius thanked Mademoiselle Dolfe for this mark of favour, and went up to number eleven to refresh himself after his journey, with the assistance of as much cold water as can be obtained by hook or by crook in a foreign hotel. His toilet made, he descended to the coffee-room, when he endeavoured to derive entertainment from a flabby Rouen journal while his tardy breakfast was being prepared. This meal dispatched, he went out into the streets of the city, looked for the picturesque old bits he remembered on his last visit, mooned away a pleasant hour in the cathedral, looked in St. Ouen and finished his afternoon in the Museum of Arts, contemplating the familiar old pictures, and turning the vellum leaves of a noble misal in the library.

He dined at the table d'hôte, and after dinner returned to the Rue Jeanne d'Arques.

The little watchmaker had a triumphant air, and at once handed him a slip of flimsy paper with an address written on it in a niggling fly-leggish caligraphy.

"I had a good deal of trouble with my neighbour," he said. "He is a disagreeable person, and we have embroiled ourselves a little on the subject of our several dustbins. He objects to vegetable matter; I object more strongly to the shells of stale fish, of which he and his lodgers appear to devour an inordinate quantity, judging from the contents of his dustbin. When first I put the question about Mademoiselle Dumarques I found him utterly impracticable. He knew his landlady's address, certainly, but it was not his business to communicate her address to other people; she might object to have her address made known; it might be a breach of confidence on his part. I was not a little startled when, with a sudden burst of rage, he brought his clenched fist down upon the table. 'Sacrebleu!' he cried; 'I divine your intention. Traitor! You are going to write to Mademoiselle Dumarques about my dustbin.' I assured him as soon as I recovered my scattered senses that nothing was farther from my thoughts than his dustbin. Nay, I suggested that we should henceforward regulate our dustbins upon a system more in accord with the spirit of the *contrat social* than had hitherto prevailed between us. In a word, by some judicious quotations from the inimitable Jean Jacques, I finally brought him to a more amiable

frame of mind, and induced him to give me the address, and to tell me all he knows about Mademoiselle Dumarques."

"For which devotion to my cause I owe you thousand thanks," said Lucius.

"Nay, monsieur, I would do much more to serve a fellow creature. The address you have there in your hand. It appears that Mademoiselle Dumarques set up in business for herself some years ago at that address, where she resides alone, or with some pupil to whom she confides the secrets of her art."

Lucius repeated his acknowledgments, and took his leave of the loquacious watchmaker. But he did not quit the Rue Jeanne d'Arques without pausing once more to contemplate the quiet old house in which Lucille's fair young mother had drooped and died, divided from her only child, and in a measure deserted by her husband. A shadowed life, with but a brief glimpse of happiness at best.

He reentered the hotel a few minutes before nine. The little office on the left side of the hall, where Mademoiselle Dolfe had been visible all day, and always employed, was abandoned. Mademoiselle had doubtless retired into private life, and was ministering to her gouty uncle. Lucius gave his card to a waiter, requesting that it might be taken to Mademoiselle Dolfe without delay. The waiter returned sooner than he could have hoped, and informed him that Monsieur and Mademoiselle would be happy to receive him.

He followed the waiter to a narrow staircase at the back of the house, by which they ascended to the entresol. Here, in a small sitting-room, with a ceiling which a moderate-sized man could easily touch with his hand, Lucius beheld Monsieur Dolfe reposing in a ponderous velvet-cushioned chair, with his leg on a rest; a stout man, with very little hair on his head, but, by way of succedaneum, a gold-embroidered smoking-cap. The small low room looked upon a courtyard like a well, and was altogether a stifling apartment. But it was somewhat luxuriously furnished, Lucius perceived by the subdued light of two pair of wax candles—the unfinished bougies of the establishment were evidently consumed here—and Monsieur Dolfe and his niece appeared eminently satisfied with it, and entirely unaware that it was wanting in airiness and space.

The books of the hotel, bulky business-like volumes, were ranged on a shelf in one corner of the room. Lucius's eye took that direction immediately; but Monsieur Dolfe was slow and pompous, and sipped his coffee as if in no hurry to satisfy the stranger's curiosity.

"I have told my uncle what you wish, Monsieur Davoren," said Mademoiselle graciously, and with a pleading glance at the old gentleman in the skull-cap.

"May I ask your motive in wishing to trace visitors of this hotel—visitors of twenty-four years back?" asked Monsieur Dolfe, with an important air. "Is it a will case, some disputed testament, and are you in the law?"

"I am a surgeon, as my card will show you," said Lucius, "and the case in which I am interested has nothing to do with a will. I wish to discover the secret of a young lady's parentage—a lady who at present bears a name which I believe is not her own."

"Humph," said Monsieur Dolfe doubtfully; "and there is no reward attaching to your inquiries—you gain nothing if successful?"

"I may gain a father, or at least a father's name, for the girl I love," answered Lucius frankly.

Monsieur Dolfe appeared disappointed, but Mademoiselle was enthusiastic.

"Ah, see you," she cried to her uncle, "is it not interesting?"

Lucius stated his case plainly. At the name of Dumarques Monsieur Dolfe pricked up his ears. Something akin to emotion agitated his bloated face. A quiver of mental pain convulsed his triple chin.

"You are familiar with the name of Dumarques?" said Lucius, wondering.

"Am I familiar with it? Alas, I know it too well!"

"You knew Félicie Dumarques?"

"I knew Félicie Dumarques' mother before she married that old skinkfin who murdered her."

"But, my uncle!" screamed Mademoiselle.

"*Tais-toi, child!* I know it was slow murder. It came not within the law. It was an assassination that lasted months and years. How often have I seen that poor child's pale face! No smile ever brightened it, after her marriage with that vile miser. She did not weep; she did not complain. The angels in heaven are not more spotless than she was as wife and mother. She only ceased to smile, and she died by inches. No matter that she lived twenty years after her marriage—it was gradual death all the same."

Monsieur Dolfe was profoundly moved. He pushed back his skull-cap, exposing his bald head, which he rubbed despondently with his fat white hand.

"Did I know her? We were neighbors as children. My parents and hers lived side by side. Her father was a notary—above my father in station; but she and I played together as children—went to the same school together as little ones—for the notary was poor, and Lucille—"

"Lucille!" repeated Lucius.

"Yes, Madame Dumarques' name was Lucille."

"I understand. Go on, pray, monsieur."

"Monsieur Valneau, Lucille's father, was poor. I repeat, and the children—there were several—were brought up anyhow. Thus we saw more