

"Excuse me," he said.

"By all means."

As he read his face flushed; he read it again and grew crimson. It was Raoul's brilliant dispatch from Dijon: "My dear father, I have abandoned my journey. Most extraordinary meeting. Your number three—actually your number three in the train with her mother—and I had refused to see her! Oh, if I had only known! Let us strike whilst the iron is hot—I'm striking, and you must strike. Monsieur D. is sure to be at the club—speak to him straight off. Tell him I can away so as not to marry an ugly woman—that I would only marry for love—that I am madly in love with his daughter. This evening we shall be at Marseilles, Hotel de Noailles. Let Monsieur D. advise Madame D. by telegraph. I will ask for you on the telephone to-morrow. At this moment she is cracking nuts. Exquisite! She is exquisite! She fell in my arms on the gangway. Telephone to-morrow at 9."

The excitement of M. Chamblard could not escape the notice of M. Derame.

"Something serious?" he asked.

"Yes."

"We will stop the play, if you like."

"Yes. But tell, tell me, did Mme. and Mlle. Derame leave this morning by express for Marseilles?"

"Yes, at 8.50. Why do you ask? There hasn't been an accident?"

"Oh, no—no accident. You could hardly call it an accident—more like—But come along into the other room."

Then he told him everything, showed him the despatch, and gave him the necessary explanation as to "Number Three." The fathers of the two young people were both convulsed with mirth, and in ecstasies of delight over the providential meeting.

"Why, you said your son did not want to marry."

"No more he did; but he has seen your daughter, and now he is quite willing. Come now, send a telegram at once to Mme. Derame."

"Won't she be thunderstruck at being introduced to a son-in-law by telegraph?" Here the footman came back again. This time it was a telegram from M. Derame.

"This is from my wife," he said, "at Macon, 2.15."

"Capital!" said M. Chamblard, "the affair makes progress."

"Am much disturbed," the message ran. "Have come across the son of M. C. Rue Rougemont, your club friend, in the train. Introduced by Maurice. You have often spoken of a possible alliance in that quarter. He is evidently charmed by her. Just now he is talking to her, and looking—you know how. What is to be done? Check, or let things take their course? Large for me, I believe."

The elder Derame shows his telegram in his turn to the elder Chamblard, and they go on talking in the best possible humor and agreement. Then they start their piquet again, after sending off two telegrams to the Hotel de Noailles.

The first message, to Mme. Derame, ran thus: "If you like, if she likes, yes. Enormous fortune."

And the second, to Raoul: "Spoken to D. Is telegraphing to Mme. D. He approves; so do I."

A footman takes both messages to the office in the Palace de la Bourse. And whilst they sped along the wires and overtook the express about 6.30 o'clock, in

the neighborhood of Saint Lambert, the Derames, with Raoul and Maurice, were dining together at the same table in the best of spirits, as familiarly as possible. Marthe was gazing at Raoul and Raoul was gazing at Marthe, and Mme. Derame was saying to herself:

"Marthe is falling in love—I know she is falling in love. She did it last year—at a ball, with a very handsome young man, but he had not a sou. This time, luckily, Edouard told me there is plenty of money; so, of course, if Marthe is willing, so are we."

The train rushed on and on, and Raoul never ceased talking. He even passed away from actualities and soared into the region of general ideas, vigorously expounding the theory that the first duty of a woman to display refined elegance in all things. With endless detail, he explained what a perfectly correct life in the social sphere implied and what a perfect elegant woman ought to be. And in imagination he took his elegant woman from Paris to Treuville, from Treuville to Lake Como, from Como to Mute Carl, and he drew a picture of the elegant woman's travelling trunks—a wonderful set of trunks. Besides, he was also the inventor of a trunk, for he had invented heaven knows what!

Very daintily, then, he put the young Marthe through a sort of examination, which bore no resemblance to the examination of the Sorbonne or Hotel de Ville. Did she skate? That was what he wanted to know first of all. He was himself a distinguished skater, and wanted to meet with a woman devoted to sport. He had no sooner mentioned skating than her young brother—how invaluable young brothers can be at times—exclaimed:

"My sister just can skate, and no mistake! You should see her doing eight. And she can swim, too, like a fish!"

She skated! She swam! She was fond of sport. With quiet enthusiasm Raoul said to the girl:

"I congratulate you, Mademoiselle! A woman who does not swim is no woman!"

And with rising vehemence, he added: "A woman who does not skate is no woman!"

When a forcible idea occurred to him he had a way of going back to it concisely and strikingly.

Marthe was glowing with delight. She was a thorough woman! Never had a more pleasant speech been addressed to her.

Night was coming on and it was necessary for the time to interrupt his delicious conversation and return to the drawing room car. Young Derame was already asleep. Raoul's expositions were on too high a plane for him.

On their return journey they came to the gangway where they had first met in the morning. She was walking in front of him, and he said to her in a low voice:

"It was here this morning—"

And she turned around with a smile.

"Yes, here, this morning!"

There was still the same slight English accent which she never dispensed with, even under the influence of a strong emotion.

"Here this morning!" That was all and it said everything.

What an exquisite night it was! The rain was over, the wind had fallen. They had swept into the atmosphere, the charm the sweetness of the South. The moon chased every vestige of mist from this

idyllic scene. It was everywhere spring—spring in the world—spring in their hearts.

"She loves me!" he murmured to himself.

"He adores me!" she thought.

And they were justified in thus giving themselves up, without strife or resistance to the attraction which drew them naturally together. From the first word they exchanged, there had been a close and complete identity of tastes, ideas and sentiments between them. Our little Jack and Gill were thoroughly suited to glide through the world together, performing all the functions of fashionable life, all the rites and ceremonies of social worship, with the regularity of a machine or an automaton, at the fitting moment, in the assigned dress, wherever it was the correct thing to amuse oneself.

They reached the drawing room car. curtains were drawn over the lumps, and the travellers sank back, drowsy or asleep in the big, red arm chair.

"Let us change places," said Raoul to Maurice in a whisper. You come by her, and I will go and sit next to her mother, for I must speak to her."

Maurice took his part in the manoeuvre in the most accommodating manner. Marthe didn't understand it. Why was he leaving her? Why was he talking to her mother, and in such low tones that she could not hear him? What on earth was he saying?

This is what he contrived to say between Montelimar, 8.35, and Pierrelatte, 8.55.

"I beg you to listen to me, Madame, I am an honorable man, and I want—it is my duty—to tell you exactly how matters stand. Let us begin with a very important part. My father knows M. Derame."

"Yes, I know he does."

"Another still more important point, My father is very rich."

"Yes, I know he is."

"That is capital, then, capital! Now, I can go on. I left Paris this morning, and in my pocket I have a ticket for cabin No. 27 in the Irrwaddy, which sails at 4 to-morrow for Suez, Aden, Colombo and Singapore. I shall go on board to-morrow at 4 o'clock unless you allow me to hope that I may become your son-in-law."

"Monsieur!"

"Don't move, Madame, don't move. Mlle. Marthe pretends to be asleep, but she is not. She is watching us, and I have not finished yet. I have hardly begun. You will tell me—I am sure of it—you don't know me—that Mlle. Marthe doesn't know me. Allow me to inform you that mademoiselle and I knew each other better than three-fourths of the betrothed couples on the morning of their marriages. You know how these things generally come about. A hasty glance at the theatre, a long way off—good glasses have been put in requisition, and they inspect one another. 'What do you think of him?' 'Oh, not so bad.' Then some days later, at a ball between two sets of quadrilles, a few breathless, gasping phrases. Next, a meeting in the museum, between the four walls of a gallery. That is what happened to me with a young lady from the provinces. I lagged at it in the morning with the guide Joanne, so as to prepare something to say in front of the Raphaels and Murillof. After a few interviews of this sort everything has been done. They know each other, they come to terms and the marriage is agreed upon