

CHAPTER V

As David climbed the garret stairs to his room, the thought of Louie flashed across his mind for the first time since the morning. He opened the door and looked round. Yes; all her things were gone. She had taken up her abode with the Cervins.

A certain anxiety and discomfort seized him; before going out to the Boulevard to snatch some food in preparation for his evening at the 'Trois Rats' he descended to the landing below and rang the Cervins' bell.

A charwoman, dirty and tired with much cleaning, opened to him.

No, Madame was not at home. No one was at home, and the dinner was spoiling. Had they not been seen all day? Certainly. They had come in about six o'clock *avec une jeune personne* and M. Montjoie. She thought it probable that they were all at that moment down below, in the studio of M. Montjoie.

David already knew his way thither, and was soon standing outside the high black door with the pane of glass above it to which Madame Merichat had originally directed him. While he waited for an answer to his ring he looked about him. He was in a sort of yard which was almost entirely filled up by the sculptor's studio, a long structure lighted at one end as it seemed from the roof, and at the other by the usual north window. At the end of the yard rose a huge many-storied building which seemed to be a factory of some sort. David's Lancashire eye distinguished machinery through the monotonous windows, and the figures of the operatives; it took note also of the fact that the rooms were lit up and work still going on at seven o'clock. All around were the ugly backs of tall houses, every window flung open to this May heat. The scene was squalid and *triste* save for the greenish blue of the evening sky, and the flight of a few pigeons round the roof of the factory.

A man in a blouse came at last, and led the way in when David asked for Madame Cervin. They passed through the inner studio full of a confusion of clay models and casts to which the dust of months gave the look and relief of bronze.

Then the further door opened, and he saw beyond a larger and emptier room; sculptor's work of different kinds, and in various stages on either side; casts, and charcoal studies on the walls, and some dozen people scattered in groups over the floor, all looking towards an object on which the fading light from the upper part of the large window at the end was concentrated.

What was that figure on its pedestal, that white image which lived and breathed? *Louie?*

The brother stood amazed beside the door, staring while the man in the blouse retreated, and the persons in the room were too much occupied with the spectacle before them to notice the new-comer's arrival.

Louie stood upon a low pedestal, which apparently revolved with the model, for as David entered, Montjoie, the man in the grey suit, with the square, massive head, who had joined the party in the Louvre, ran forward and moved it round slightly. She was in Greek dress, and some yards away from her was the clay study—a mænad with vine wreath, tambourine, thyrsus, and floating hair—for which she was posing.

Even David was dazzled by the image thus thrown out before him. With her own dress Louie Grieve seemed to have laid aside for the moment whatever common or provincial elements there might be in her strange and startling beauty. Clothed in the clinging folds of the Greek chiton; neck, arms, and feet bare; the rounded forms of the limbs showing under the soft stuff; the face almost in profile, leaning to the shoulder, as though the delicate ear were listening for the steps of the wine god; a wreath of vine leaves round the black hair which fell in curly masses about her, sharpening and framing the rosy whiteness of the cheek and neck; one hand lightly turned back behind her, showing the palm, the other holding a torch; one foot poised on tiptoe, and the whole body lightly bent forward, as though for instant motion:—in this dress and this attitude, worn and sustained with extraordinary intelligence and audacity, the wild hybrid creature had risen, as it were, for the first time, to the full capacity of her endowment—had eclipsed and yet revealed herself.

The brother stood speechless, looking from the half-completed study to his sister. How had they made her understand?—where had she got the dress? And such a dress! To the young fellow, who in his peasant and tradesman experience had never even seen a woman in the ordinary low dress of society, it seemed incredible, outrageous. And to put it on for the purpose of posing as a model in a room full of strange men—Madame Cervin was the only woman present—his cheek burnt for his sister; and for the moment indignation and bewilderment held him paralysed.

In front of him a little way, but totally unaware of the stranger's entrance, were two men whispering and laughing together. One held a piece of paper on a book, and was making a hurried sketch of Louie. Every now and then he drew the attention of his companion to some of the points of the model. David caught a careless phrase or two, and understood just enough of their student's slang to suspect a good deal worse than was actually said.

Meanwhile Montjoie was standing against an iron pillar, studying intently every detail of Louie's pose, both hands arched over his eyes.

'*Peste!* did one ever see so many points combined?' he threw back to a couple of men behind him. 'Too thin—the arms might be better—and the hands a *little* common. But for the *ensemble—mon Dieu!* we should make Carpeaux's *atelier* look alive—*hein?*'

'Take care!' laughed a man who was leaning against a cast a few feet away, and smoking vigorously. 'She likes it, she has never done it before, but she likes it. Suppose Carpeaux gets hold of her. You may repent showing her, if you want to keep her to yourself.'

'Ah, that right knee wants throwing forward a trifle,' said Montjoie in a preoccupied tone, and going up to Louie, he spoke a few words of bad English.

'Allow me, mademoiselle—put your hand on me—*ainsi*—vile I change dis pretty foot.'

Louie looked down bewildered, then at the other men about her, with her great eyes, half exultant, half inquiring. She understood hardly anything of their French. One of them laughed, and, running to the clay Mænad, stooped down and touched the knee and ankle, to show her what was meant. Louie instinctively put her hand on Montjoie's shoulder to steady herself, and he proceeded to move the bare sandalled foot.

One of the men near him made a remark which David caught. He suddenly strode forward.

'Sir! Have the goodness to tell me how you wish my sister to stand, and I will explain to her. She is not your model!'

The sculptor looked up startled. Everybody stared at the intruder, at the dark English boy, standing with a threatening eye, and trembling with anger, beside his sister. Then Madame Cervin, clasping her little fat hands with an exclamation of dismay, rushed up to the group, while Louie leapt down from her pedestal and went to David.

'What are you interfering for?' she said, pushing Madame Cervin aside and looking him full in the eyes, her own blazing, her chest heaving.

'You are disgracing yourself,' he said to her with the same intensity, fast and low, under his breath, so as to be heard only by her. 'How can you expose yourself as a model to these men whom you never saw before? Let them find their own models; they are a pack of brutes!'

But even as he spoke he shrank before the concentrated wrath of her face.

'I will make you pay for it!' she said. 'I will teach you to domineer.'

Then she turned to Madame Cervin.

'Come and take it off, please!' she said imperiously. 'It's no good while he is here.'

As she crossed the room with her free wild step, her white draperies floating, Montjoie, who had been standing pulling at his moustaches, and studying the brother from under his heavy brows, joined her, and, stooping, said two or three smiling words in her ear. She looked up, tossed her head and laughed—a laugh half reckless, half *farouche*; two or three of the other men hurried after them, and presently they made a knot in the further room, Louie calmly waiting for Madame Cervin, and sitting on

the pedestal of a bronze group, her beautiful head and white shoulders thrown out against the metal. Montjoie's artist friends—of the kind which haunt a man whose *mœurs* are gradually bringing his talent to ruin—stood round her, smoking and talking and staring at the English girl between whiles. The arrogance with which she bore their notice excited them; but they could not talk to her, for she did not understand them. Only Montjoie had a few words of English. Occasionally Louie bent forward and looked disdainfully through the door. When would David be done prating?

For he, in fact, was grappling with Madame Cervin, who was showing great adroitness. This was what had happened according to her. Monsieur Montjoie—a man of astonishing talent, an artist altogether superior—was in trouble about his statue—could not find a model to suit him—was in despair. It seemed that he had heard of mademoiselle's beauty from England, in some way, before she arrived. Then in the studio he had shown her the Greek dress.

'—There were some words between them—some compliments, Monsieur, I suppose—and your sister said she would pose for him. I opposed myself. I knew well that mademoiselle was a young person *tout-à-fait comme il faut*, that monsieur her brother might object to her making herself a model for M. Montjoie. *Mais, mon Dieu!*' and the ex-modiste shrugged her round shoulders—'mademoiselle has a will of her own.'

Then she hinted that in an hour's acquaintance mademoiselle had already shown herself extremely difficult to manage—monsieur would probably understand that. As for her, she had done everything possible. She had taken mademoiselle upstairs and dressed her with her own hands—she had been her maid and companion throughout. She could do no more. Mademoiselle would go her own way.

'Who were all these men?' David inquired, still hot and frowning.

Madame Cervin rose on tiptoe and poured a series of voluble biographies into his ear. According to her everybody present was a person of distinction; was at any rate an artist, and a man of talent. But let monsieur decide. If he was dissatisfied, let him take his sister away. She had been distressed, insulted, by his behaviour. Mademoiselle's box had been not yet unpacked. Let him say the word and it should be taken upstairs again.

And she drew away from him, bridling, striking an attitude of outraged dignity beside her husband, who had stood behind her in a slouching abstracted silence during the whole scene—so far as her dwarf stature and vulgar little moon-face permitted.

'We are strangers here, Madame,' cried David. 'I asked you to take care of my sister, and I find her like this, before a crowd of men neither she nor I have ever seen before!'

Madame Cervin swept her hand grandiloquently round.

'Monsieur has his remedy! Let him take his sister.'

He stood silent in a helpless and obvious perplexity. What, saddle himself afresh after these intoxicating hours of liberty and happiness? Fetter and embarrass every moment? Shut himself out from freedom—from *her*?

Besides, already his first instinctive rage was disappearing. In the confusion of this new world he could no longer tell whether he was right or ridiculous. Had he been playing the Philistine, mistaking a mere artistic convention for an outrage? And Louie was so likely to submit to his admonitions!

Madame Cervin watched him with a triumphant eye. When he began to stammer out what was in effect an apology, she improved the opportunity, threw off her suave manners, and let him understand with a certain plain brutality that she had taken Louie's measure. She would do her best to keep the girl in order—it was lucky for him that he had fallen upon anybody so entirely respectable as herself and her husband—but she would use her own judgment; and if monsieur made scenes, she would just turn out her boarder, and leave him to manage as he could.

She had the whip-hand, and she knew it. He tried to appease her, then discovered that he must go, and went with a hanging head.

Louie took no notice of him nor he of her, as he passed through the inner studio, but Montjoie came forward to meet the English lad, bending his great head and shoulders with a half-ironic politeness. Monsieur Grieve he feared had mistaken the homage rendered by himself and his friends to his sister's beauty for an act of disrespect—let him be reassured! Such beauty was its own defence. No doubt monsieur did not understand artistic usage. He, Montjoie, made allowance for the fact, otherwise the young man's behaviour towards himself and his friends would have required explanation.

The two stood together at the door—David proudly crimson, seeking in vain for phrases that would not come—Montjoie cool and malicious, his battered weather-beaten face traversed by little smiles. Louie was looking on with scornful amusement, and the group of artists round her could hardly control their mirth.

He shut the door behind him with the feeling of one who has cut a ridiculous figure and beaten a mean retreat. Then, as he neared the bottom of the stairs, he gave himself a great shake, with the gesture of one violently throwing off a weight. Let those who thought that he ought to control Louie, and could control her, come and see for themselves! He had done what he thought was for the best—his quick inner sense carefully refrained from attaching any blame whatever to Mademoiselle Delaunay—and now Louie must go her own gait, and he would go his. He had said his say—and she should not spoil this hoarded, this long-looked-for pleasure. As he passed into the street, on his way to the Boulevard for some food, his walk and bearing had in them a stern and passionate energy.

He had to hurry back for his appointment with Mademoiselle Delaunay's friends of the morning. As he turned into the Rue Chantal he passed a flower-stall aglow with roses from the south and sweet with narcissus and mignonette. An idea struck him, and he stopped, a happy smile softening away the still lingering tension of the face. For a few sous he bought a bunch of yellow-eyed narcissus and stepped gaily home with them. He had hardly time to put them in water and to notice that Madame Merichat had made Dubois' squalid abode look much more habitable than before, when there was a knock at the door and his two guides stood outside.

They carried him off at once. David found more of a tongue than he had been master of in the morning, and the three talked incessantly as they wound in and out of the streets which cover the face of the hill of Montmartre, ascending gradually towards the place they were in search of. David had heard something of the history of the two from Elise Delaunay. Alphonse was a lad of nineteen brimming over with wild fun and mischief, and perpetually in disgrace with all possible authorities; the possessor nevertheless of a certain delicate and subtle fancy which came out in the impressionist landscapes—many of them touched with a wild melancholy as inexplicable probably to himself as to other people—which he painted in all his spare moments. The tall black-bearded Lenain was older, had been for years in Taranne's *atelier*, was an excellent draughtsman, and was now just beginning seriously upon the painting of large pictures for exhibition. In his thin long face there was a pinched and anxious look, as though in the artist's inmost mind there lay hidden the presentiment of failure.

They talked freely enough of Elise Delaunay, David alternately wincing and craving for more. What a clever little devil it was! She was burning herself away with ambition and work; Taranne flattered her a good deal; it was absolutely necessary, otherwise she would be for killing herself two or three times a week. Oh! she might get her *mention* at the Salon. The young Solons sitting in judgment on her thought on the whole she deserved it; two of her exhibits were not bad; but there was another girl in the *atelier*, Mademoiselle Bréal, who had more interest in high places. However, Taranne would do what he could; he had always made a favourite of the little Elise; and only he could manage her when she was in one of her impracticable fits.

Then Alphonse put the Englishman through a catechism, and at the end of it they both advised him not to trouble his head about George Sand. That was all dead and done with, and Balzac not much less. He might be great, Balzac, but who could be at the trouble of reading him nowadays? Lenain, who was literary, named to him with enthusiasm Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary' and the brothers Goncourt. As for Alphonse, who was capable, however, of occasional excursions into poetry, and could

quote Musset and Hugo, the *feuilletons* in the 'Gaulois' or the 'Figaro' seemed, on the whole, to provide him with as much fiction as he desired. He was emphatically of opinion that the artist wants no books; a little poetry, perhaps, did no harm; but literature in painting was the very devil. Then perceiving that between them they had puzzled their man, Alphonse would have proceeded to 'cram' him in the most approved style, but that Lenain interposed, and a certain cooling of the Englishman's bright eye made success look unpromising. Finally the wild fellow clapped David on the back and assured him that 'Les Trois Rats' would astonish him. 'Ah! here we are.'

As he spoke they turned a corner, and a blaze of light burst upon them, coming from what seemed to be a gap in the street face, a house whereof the two lower stories were wall- and windowless, though not in the manner of the ordinary café, seeing that the open parts were raised somewhat above the pavement.

'The patron saint!' said Alphonse, stopping with a grin and pointing. Following the finger with his eye David caught a fantastic sign swinging above him: a thin iron crescent, and sitting up between its two tips a lean black rat, its sharp nose in the air, its tail curled round its iron perch, while two other creatures of the same kind crept about him, the one clinging to the lower tip of the crescent, the other peering down from the top on the king-rat in the middle. Below the sign, and heavily framed by the dark overhanging eave, the room within was clearly visible from the street. From the background of its black oak walls and furniture emerged figures, lights, pictures, above all an imposing *cheminée* advancing far into the floor, a high, fantastic structure also of black oak like the panelling of the room, but overrun with chains of black rats, carved and combined with a wild *diablerie*, and lit by numerous lights in branching ironwork. The dim grotesque shapes of the pictures, the gesticulating, shouting crowd in front of them, the mediævalism of the room and of that strange sign dangling outside: these things took the English lad's excited fancy and he pressed his way in behind his companions. He forgot what they had been telling him; his pulse beat to the old romantic tune; poets, artists, talkers—here he was to find them.

David's two companions exchanged greetings on all sides, laughing and shouting like the rest. With difficulty they found a table in a remote corner, and, sitting down, ordered coffee.

'Alphonse! *mon cher!*'

A young man sitting at the next table turned round upon them, slapped Alphonse on the shoulder, and stared hard at David. He had fine black eyes in a bronzed face, a silky black beard, and long hair *à la lion*, that is to say, thrown to one side of the head in a loose mane-like mass.

'I have just come from the Salon. Not bad—Regnault? *Hein?*'

'*Non—il arrivera, celui-là,*' said the other calmly.

'As for the other things from the Villa Medici fellows,' said the first speaker, throwing his arm round the back of his chair, and twisting it round so as to front them, 'they make me sick. I should hardly do my fire the injustice of lighting it with some of them.'

'All the same,' replied Alphonse stoutly, 'that Campagna scene of D.'s is well done.'

'Literature, *mon cher!* literature!' cried the unknown, 'and what the deuce do we want with literature in painting?'

He brought his fist down violently on the table.

'*Connu,*' said Alphonse scornfully. 'Don't excite yourself. But the story in D.'s picture doesn't matter a halfpenny. Who cares what the figures are doing? It's the brushwork and the values I look to. How did he get all that relief—that brilliance? No sunshine—no local colour—and the thing glows like a Rembrandt!'

The boy's mad blue eyes took a curious light, as though some inner enthusiasm had stirred.

'*Peuh!* we all know you, Alphonse. Say what you like, you want something else in a picture than painting. That'll damn you, and make your fortune some day, I warn you. Now I have got a picture on the easel that will make the *bourgeois* skip.'

And the speaker passed a large tremulous hand through his waves of hair, his lip also quivering with the nervousness of a man overworked and overdone.

'You'll not send it to the Salon, I imagine,' said another man beside him, dryly. He was fair, small and clean-shaven, wore spectacles, and had the look of a clerk or man of business.

'Yes, I shall,' cried the other violently—his name was Dumesnil—'I'll fling it at their heads. That's all our school can do—make a scandal.'

'Well, that has even been known to make money,' said the other, fingering his watch-chain with a disagreeable little smile.

'Money!' shouted Dumesnil, and swinging round to his own table again he poured out hot denunciations of the money-grabbing reptiles of to-day who shelter themselves behind the sacred name of art. Meanwhile the man at whom it was all levelled sipped his coffee quietly and took no notice.

'Ah, a song!' cried Alphonse. 'Lenain, *vois-tu?* It's that little devil Perinot. He's been painting churches down near Toulouse, his own country. Saints by the dozen, like this,' and Alphonse drooped his eyes and crossed his limp hands, taking off the frescoed mediæval saint for an instant, as only the Parisian *gamin* can do such things. 'You should see him with a *curé*. However, the *curés* don't follow him here, more's the pity. Ah! *très bien—très bien!*'

These plaudits were called out by some passages on the guitar with which the singer was prefacing his song. His chair had been mounted on to a table, so that all the world could see

and hear. A hush of delighted attention penetrated the room; and outside, in the street, David could see dark forms gathering on the pavement.

The singer was a young man, undersized and slightly deformed, with close-cut hair, and a large face, droll, pliant and ugly as a gutta-percha mask. Before he opened his lips the audience laughed.

David listened with all his ears, feeling through every fibre the piquant strangeness of the scene—alive with the foreigner's curiosity, and with youth's pleasure in mere novelty. And what clever fellows, what dash, what *camaraderie*! That old imaginative drawing towards France and the French was becoming something eagerly personal, combative almost,—and in the background of his mind throughout was the vibrating memory of the day just past—the passionate sense of a new life.

The song was tumultuously successful. The whole crowded *salle*, while it was going on, was one sea of upturned faces, and it was accompanied at intervals by thunders of applause, given out by means of sticks, spoons, fists, or anything else that might come handy. It recounted the adventures of an artist and his model. As it proceeded, a slow crimson rose into the English lad's cheek, overspread his forehead and neck. He sat staring at the singer, or looking round at the absorbed attention and delight of his companions. By the end of it David, his face propped on his hands, was trying nervously to decipher the names and devices cut in the wood of the table on which he leant. His whole being was in a surge of physical loathing—the revulsion of feeling was bewildering and complete. So this was what Frenchmen thought of women, what they could say of them, when the mask was off, and they were at their ease. The witty brutality, the naked coarseness of the thing scourged the boy's shrinking sense. Freedom, passion—yes! but *this*! In his wild recoil he stood again under the Arc de Triomphe watching her figure disappear. Ah! pardon! That he should be listening at all seemed to a conscience, an imagination quickened by first love, to be an outrage to women, to love, to her!

Yet—how amusing it was! how irresistible, as the first shock subsided, was the impression of sparkling verse, of an astonishing mimetic gift in the singer! Towards the end he had just made up his mind to go on the first pretext, when he found himself, to his own disgust, shaking with laughter.

He recovered himself after a while, resolved to stay it out, and betrayed nothing. The comments made by his two companions on the song—consisting mainly of illustrative anecdote—were worthy of the occasion. David sat, however, without flinching, his black eyes hardening, laughing at intervals.

Presently the room rose *en bloc*, and there was a move towards the staircase.

'The manager, M. Edmond, has come,' explained Alphonse; 'they are going upstairs to the concert-room. They will have a

recitation perhaps,—*ombres chinoises*,—music. Come and look at the drawings before we go.'

And he took his charge round the walls, which were papered with drawings and sketches, laughing and explaining. The drawings were done, in the main, according to him, by the artists on the staffs of two illustrated papers which had their headquarters at the 'Trois Rats.' David was especially seized by the innumerable sheets of animal sketches—series in which some episode of animal life was carried through from its beginning to a close, sometimes humorous, but more often tragic. In a certain number of them there was a free imagination, an irony, a pity, which linked them together, marked them as the conceptions of one brain. Alphonse pointed to them as the work of a clever fellow, lately dead, who had been launched and supported by the 'Trois Rats' and its frequenters. One series in particular, representing a robin overcome by the seduction of a glass of absinthe and passing through all the stages of delirium tremens, had a grim inventiveness, a fecundity of half humorous, half pathetic fancy, which held David's eye riveted.

As for the ballet-girl, she was everywhere, with her sisters, the model and the *grisette*. And the artistic ability shown in the treatment of her had nowhere been hampered by any Philistine scruple in behalf of decency.

Upstairs there was the same mixed experience. David found himself in a corner with his two acquaintances, and four or five others, a couple of journalists, a musician and a sculptor. The conversation ranged from art to religion, from religion to style, from style to women, and all with a perpetual recurrence either to the pictures and successes of the Salon, or to the *liaisons* of well-known artists.

'Why do none of us fellows in the press pluck up courage and tell H. what we really think about those Homeric *machines* of his which he turns out year after year?' said a journalist, who was smoking beside him, an older man than the rest of them. 'I have a hundred things I want to say—but H. is popular—I like him himself—and I haven't the nerve. But what the devil do we want with the Greeks—they painted their world—let us paint ours! Besides, it is an absurdity. I thought as I was looking at H.'s things this morning of what Prévault used to say of Pradier: "*Il partait tous les matins pour la Grèce et arrivait tous les soirs Rue de Bréda.*" Pose your goddesses as you please—they are *grisettes* all the same.'

'All very well for you critics,' growled a man smoking a long pipe beside him; 'but the artist must live, and the *bourgeois* will have subjects. He won't have anything to do with your "notes"—and "impressions"—and "arrangements." When you present him with the view, served hot, from your four-pair back—he buttons up his pockets and abuses you. He wants his stories and his sentiment. And where the deuce is the sentiment to be got? I should be greatly obliged to anyone

who would point me to a little of the commodity. The Greeks are already ridiculous,—and as for religion—'

The speaker threw back his head and laughed silently.

'Ah! I agree with you,' said the other emphatically; 'the religious pictures this year are really too bad. Christianity is going too fast—for the artist.'

'And the sceptics are becoming bores,' cried the painter; 'they take themselves too seriously. It is, after all, only another dogmatism. One should believe in nothing—not even in one's doubts.'

'Yes,' replied the journalist, knocking out his pipe, with a sardonic little smile—'strange fact! One may swim in free thought and remain as *banal* as a bishop all the time.'

'I say,' shouted a fair-haired youth opposite, 'who has seen C.'s Holy Family? Who knows where he got his Madonna?'

Nobody knew, and the speaker had the felicity of imparting an entirely fresh scandal to attentive ears. The mixture in the story of certain brutalities of modern manners with names and things still touching or sacred for the mass of mankind had the old Voltairean flavour. But somehow, presented in this form and at this moment, David no longer found it attractive. He sat nursing his knee, his dark brows drawn together, studying the story-teller, whose florid Norman complexion and blue eyes were already seared by a vicious experience.

The tale, however, was interrupted and silenced by the first notes of a piano. The room was now full, and a young actor from the Gymnase company was about to give a musical sketch. The subject of it was 'St. Francis and Santa Clara.'

This performance was perhaps more wittily broad than anything which had gone before. The audience was excessively amused by it. It was indeed the triumph of the evening, and nothing could exceed the grace and point of the little speech in which M. Edmond, the manager of the café, thanked the accomplished singer afterwards.

While it was going on, David, always with that poignant, shrinking thought of Elise at his heart, looked round to see if there were any women present. Yes, there were three. Two were young, outrageously dressed, with sickly pretty tired faces. The third was a woman in middle life, with short hair parted at the side, and a strong, masculine air. Her dress was as nearly as possible that of a man, and she was smoking vigorously. The rough *bonhomie* of her expression and her professional air reminded David once more of George Sand. An artist, he supposed, or a writer.

Suddenly, towards the end of the sketch, he became conscious of a tall figure behind the singer, a man standing with his hat in his hand, as though he had just come in, and were just going away. His fine head was thrown back, his look was calm, David thought disdainful. Bending forward he recognised M. Regnault, the hero of the morning.

Regnault had come in unperceived while the dramatic piece was going on; but it was no sooner over than he was discovered, and the whole *salle* rose to do him honour. The generosity, the extravagance of the ovation offered to the young painter by this hundred or two of artists and men of letters were very striking to the foreign eye. David found himself thrilling and applauding with the rest. The room had passed in an instant from cynicism to sentiment. A moment ago it had been trampling to mud the tenderest feeling of the past; it was now eagerly alive with the feeling of the present.

The new-comer protested that he had only dropped in, being in the neighbourhood, and must not stay. He was charming to them all, asked after this man's picture and that man's statue, talked a little about the studio he was organising at Tangiers, and then, shaking hands right and left, made his way through the crowd.

As he passed David, his quick eye caught the stranger and he paused.

'Were you not in the Louvre this morning with Mademoiselle Delaunay?' he asked, lowering his voice a little; 'you are a stranger?'

'Yes, an Englishman,' David stammered, taken by surprise. Regnault's look swept over the youth's face, kindling in an instant with the artist's delight in beautiful line and tint.

'Are you going now?'

'Yes,' said David hurriedly. 'It must be late?'

'Midnight, past. May I walk with you?'

David, overwhelmed, made some hurried excuses to his two companions, and found himself pushing his way to the door, an unnoticed figure in the tumult of Regnault's exit.

When they got into the street outside, Regnault walked fast southwards for a minute or so without speaking. Then he stopped abruptly, with the gesture of one shaking off a weight.

'Pah! this Paris chokes me.'

Then, walking on again, he said, half-coherently, and to himself:

'So vile,—so small,—so foul! And there are such great things in the world. *Beasts!*—*pigs!*—and yet so generous, so struggling, such a hard fight for it. So gifted,—many of them! What are you here for?'

And he turned round suddenly upon his companion. David, touched and captured he knew not how by the largeness and spell of the man's presence, conquered his shyness and explained himself as intelligibly as he could:

An English bookseller, making his way in trade, yet drawn to France by love for her literature and her past, and by a blood-tie which seemed to have in it mystery and pain, for it could hardly be spoken of—the curious little story took the artist's fancy. Regnault did his best to draw out more of it, helped the young fellow with his French, tried to get at his impressions, and

clearly enjoyed the experience to which his seeking artist's sense had led him.

'What a night!' he said at last, drawing a full draught of the May into his great chest. 'Stop and look down those streets in the moonlight. What surfaces,—what gradations,—what a beauty of multiplied lines, though it is only a piece of vulgar Haussmann! Indoors I can't breathe—but out of doors and at night this Paris of ours,—ah! she is still beautiful—*beautiful!* Now one has shaken the dust of that place off, one can feel it. What did you think of it?—tell me.'

He stooped and looked into his companion's face. David was tall and lithe, but Regnault was at least half a head taller and broader in proportion.

David walked along for a minute without answering. He too, and even more keenly than Regnault, was conscious of escape and relief. A force which had, as it were, taken life and feeling by the throat had relaxed its grip. He disengaged himself with mingled loathing and joy. But in his shyness he did not know how to express himself, fearing, too, to wound the Frenchman. At last he said slowly:

'I never saw so many clever people together in my life.'

The words were bald, but Regnault perfectly understood what was meant by them, as well as by the troubled consciousness of the black eyes raised to his. He laughed—shortly and bitterly.

'No, we don't lack brains, we French. All the same I tell you, in the whole of that room there are about half-a-dozen people,—oh, not so many!—not nearly so many!—who will ever make a mark, even for their own generation, who will ever strike anything out of nature that is worth having—wrestle with her to any purpose. Why? Because they have every sort of capacity—every sort of cleverness—and *no character!*'

David walked beside him in silence. He thought suddenly of Regnault's own picture—its strange cruelty and force, its craftsman's brilliance. And the recollection puzzled him.

Regnault, however, had spoken with passion, and as though out of the fulness of some sore and long-familiar pondering.

'You never saw anything like that in England,' he resumed quickly.

David hesitated.

'No, I never did. But I am a provincial, and I have seen nothing at all. Perhaps in London—'

'No, you would see nothing like it in London,' said Regnault decidedly. 'Bah! it is not that you are more virtuous than we are. Who believes such folly? But your vice is grosser, stupider. Lucky for you! You don't sacrifice to it the best young brain of the nation, as we are perpetually doing. Ah, *mon Dieu!*' he broke out in a kind of despair, 'this enigma of art!—of the artist! One flounders and blunders along. I have been floundering and blundering with the rest,—playing tricks—'

following this man and that—till suddenly—a door opens—and one sees the real world through for the first time!'

He stood still in his excitement, a smile of the most exquisite quality and sweetness dawning on his strong young face.

'And then,' he went on, beginning to walk again, and talking much more to the night than to his companion, 'one learns that the secret of life lies in *feeling*—in the heart, not in the head. And no more limits than before!—all is still open, divinely open. Range the whole world—see everything, learn everything—till at the end of years and years you may perhaps be found worthy to be called an artist! But let art have her ends, all the while, shining beyond the means she is toiling through—her ends of beauty or of power. To spend herself on the mere photography of the vile and the hideous! what waste—what sacrilege!'

They had reached the Place de la Concorde, which lay bathed in moonlight, the silver fountains plashing, the trees in the Champs-Élysées throwing their sharp yet delicate shadows on the intense whiteness of the ground, the buildings far away rising softly into the softest purest blue. Regnault stopped and looked round him with enchantment. As for David, he had no eyes save for his companion. His face was full of a quick responsive emotion. After an experience which had besmirched every ideal and bemocked every faith, the young Frenchman's talk had carried the lad once more into the full tide of poetry and romance. 'The secret of life lies in *feeling*, in the heart, not the head!—ah, *that* he understood! He tried to express his assent, his homage to the speaker; but neither he nor the artist understood very clearly what he was saying. Presently Regnault said in another tone:

'And they are such good fellows, many of them. Starving often—but nothing to propitiate the *bourgeois*, nothing to compromise the "dignity of art." A man will paint to please himself all day, paint, on a crust, something that won't and can't sell, that the world in fact would be mad to buy; then in the evening he will put his canvas to the wall, and paint sleeve-links or china to live. And so generous to each other: they will give each other all they have—food, clothes, money, knowledge. That man who gave that abominable thing about St. Francis—I know him, he has a little apartment near the Quai St.-Michel, and an invalid mother. He is a perfect angel to her. I could take off my hat to him whenever I think of it.'

His voice dropped again. Regnault was pacing along across the Place, his arms behind him, David at his side. When he resumed, it was once more in a tone of despondency.

'There is an ideal; but so twisted, so corrupted! What is wanted is not less intelligence but *more*—more knowledge, more experience—something beyond this fevering, brutalising Paris, which is all these men know. They have got the poison of the Boulevards in their blood, and it dulls their eye and hand. They want scattering to the wilderness; they want the wave of life to

come and lift them past the mud they are dabbling in, with its hideous wrecks and *débris*, out and away to the great sea, to the infinite beyond of experience and feeling! you, too, feel with me?—you, too, see it like that? Ah! when one has seen and felt Italy—the East,—the South—lived heart to heart with a wild nature, or with the great embodied thought of the past,—lived at large, among great things, great sights, great emotions, then there comes purification! There is no other way out—no, none!

So for another hour Regnault led the English boy up and down and along the quays, talking in the frankest openest way to this acquaintance of a night. It was as though he were wrestling his own way through his own life-problem. Very often David could hardly follow. The joys, the passions, the temptations of the artist, struggling with the life of thought and aspiration, the craving to know everything, to feel everything, at war with the hunger for a moral unity and a stainless self-respect—there was all this in his troubled, discursive talk, and there was besides the magic touch of genius, youth, and poetry.

'Well, this is strange!' he said at last, stopping at a point between the Louvre on the one hand and the Institute on the other, the moonlit river lying between.—'My friends come to me at Rome or at Tangiers, and they complain of me, "Regnault, you have grown morose, no one can get a word out of you"—and they go away wounded—I have seen it often. And it was always true. For months I have had no words. I have been in the dark, wrestling with my art and with this goading, torturing world, which the artist with his puny forces has somehow to tame and render. Then—the other day—ah! well, no matter!—but the dark broke, and there was light! and when I saw your face, your stranger's face, in that crowd to-night, listening to those things, it drew me. I wanted to say my say. I don't make excuses. Very likely we shall never meet again—but for this hour we have been friends. Good night!—good night! Look,—the dawn is coming!'

And he pointed to where, behind the towers of Notre-Dame, the first whiteness of the coming day was rising into the starry blue.

They shook hands.

'You go back to England soon?'

'In a—a—week or two.'

'Only believe this—we have things better worth seeing than "Les Trois Rats"—things that represent us better. That is what the foreigner is always doing; he spends his time in wondering at our monkey tricks; there is no nation can do them so well as we; and the great France—the undying France!—disappears in a splutter of *blague*!'

He leant over the parapet, forgetting his companion, his eyes fixed on the great cathedral, on the slender shaft of the Sainte Chapelle, on the sky filling with light.

Then suddenly he turned round, laid a quick hand on his companion's shoulder.

'If you ever feel inclined to write to me, the *École des Beaux-Arts* will find me. Adieu.'

And drawing his coat round him in the chilliness of the dawn, he walked off quickly across the bridge.

David also hurried away, speeding along the deserted pavements till again he was in his own dark street. The dawn was growing from its first moment of mysterious beauty into a grey disillusioning light. But he felt no reaction. He crept up the squalid stairs to his room. It was heavy with the scent of the narcissus.

He took them, and stole along the passage to Elise's door. There were three steps outside it. He sat down on the lowest, putting his flowers beside him. There was something awful to him even in this nearness; he dare not have gone higher.

He sat there for long—his heart beating, beating. Every part of his French experience so far, whether by sympathy or recoil, had helped to bring him to this intoxication of sense and soul. Regnault had spoken of the 'great things' of life. Had he too come to understand them—thus?

At last he left his flowers there, kissing the step on which they were laid, and which her foot must touch. He could hardly sleep; the slight fragrance which clung to the old bearskin in which he wrapt himself helped to keep him restless; it was the faint heliotrope scent he had noticed in her room.

CHAPTER VI

'He loves me—he does really! Poor boy!'

The speaker was Elise Delaunay. She was sitting alone on the divan in her *atelier*, trying on a pair of old Pompadour shoes, with large faded rosettes and pink heels, which she had that moment routed out of a broker's shop in the Rue de Seine, on her way back from the Luxembourg with David. They made her feet look enchantingly small, and she was holding back her skirts that she might get a good look at them.

Her conviction of David's passion did not for some time lessen her interest in the shoes, but at last she kicked them off, and flung herself back on the divan, to think out the situation a little.

Yes, the English youth's adoration could no longer be ignored. It had become evident, even to her own acquaintances and comrades in the various galleries she was now haunting in this byetime of the artistic year. Whenever she and he appeared together now, there were sly looks and smiles.

The scandal of it did not affect her in the least. She belonged to Bohemia, so apparently did he. She had been perfectly honest till now; but she had never let any convention stand in her way. All her conceptions of the relations between men and women were of an extremely free kind. Her mother's blood in her accounted both for a certain coldness and a certain personal refinement which