CHAPTER IV

It was the last evening of Carnival. The same masks, the same yells, the same mad rushes, the same bedlam of disguised humanity blowing about the streets in the great gusts of mistral that seemed to make them dance like dead leaves on an earth where all joy is watched by death.

It was exactly twelve months since that other carnival evening when I had felt a little weary and a little lonely but at peace with all mankind. It must have been—to a day or two. But on this evening it wasn't merely loneliness that I felt. I felt bereaved with a sense of a complete and universal loss in which there was perhaps more resentment than mourning; as if the world had not been taken away from me by an august decree but filched from my innocence by an underhand fate at the very moment when it had disclosed to my passion its warm and generous beauty. This consciousness of universal loss had this advantage that it induced something resembling a state of philosophic indifference. I walked up to the railway station caring as little for the cold blasts of wind as though I had been going to the scaffold. The delay of the train did not irritate me in the least. I had finally made up my mind to write a letter to Doña Rita; and this "honest fellow" for whom I was waiting would take it to her. He would have no difficulty in Tolosa in finding Madame de Lastaola. The General Headquarters, which was also a Court, would be buzzing with comments on her presence. Most likely that "honest fellow" was already known to Doña Rita. For all I knew he might have been her discovery just as I was. Probably I, too, was regarded as an "honest fellow" enough; but stupid—since it was clear that my luck was not inexhaustible. I hoped that while carrying my letter the man would not let himself be caught by some Alphonsist guerilla who would, of course, shoot him. But why should he? I, for instance, had escaped with my life from a much more dangerous enterprise than merely passing through the frontier line in charge of some trustworthy guide. I pictured the fellow to myself trudging over the stony slopes and scrambling down wild ravines with my letter to Doña Rita in his pocket. It would be such a letter of farewell as no lover had ever written, no woman in the world had ever read, since the beginning of love on earth. It would be worthy of the woman. No experience, no memories, no dead traditions of passion or language would inspire it. She herself would be its sole inspiration. She would see her own image in it as in a mirror; and perhaps then she would understand what it was I was saying farewell to on the very threshold of my life. A breath of vanity passed through my brain. A letter as moving as her mere existence was moving would be something unique. I regretted I was not a poet.

I woke up to a great noise of feet, a sudden influx of people through the doors of

the platform. I made out my man's whiskers at once—not that they were enormous, but because I had been warned beforehand of their existence by the excellent Commissary General. At first I saw nothing of him but his whiskers: they were black and cut somewhat in the shape of a shark's fin and so very fine that the least breath of air animated them into a sort of playful restlessness. The man's shoulders were hunched up and when he had made his way clear of the throng of passengers I perceived him as an unhappy and shivery being. Obviously he didn't expect to be met, because when I murmured an enquiring, "Señor Ortega?" into his ear he swerved away from me and nearly dropped a little handbag he was carrying. His complexion was uniformly pale, his mouth was red, but not engaging. His social status was not very definite. He was wearing a dark blue overcoat of no particular cut, his aspect had no relief; yet those restless side-whiskers flanking his red mouth and the suspicious expression of his black eyes made him noticeable. This I regretted the more because I caught sight of two skulking fellows, looking very much like policemen in plain clothes, watching us from a corner of the great hall. I hurried my man into a fiacre. He had been travelling from early morning on cross-country lines and after we got on terms a little confessed to being very hungry and cold. His red lips trembled and I noted an underhand, cynical curiosity when he had occasion to raise his eyes to my face. I was in some doubt how to dispose of him but as we rolled on at a jog trot I came to the conclusion that the best thing to do would be to organize for him a shake-down in the studio. Obscure lodging houses are precisely the places most looked after by the police, and even the best hotels are bound to keep a register of arrivals. I was very anxious that nothing should stop his projected mission of courier to headquarters. As we passed various street corners where the mistral blast struck at us fiercely I could feel him shivering by my side. However, Therese would have lighted the iron stove in the studio before retiring for the night, and, anyway, I would have to turn her out to make up a bed on the couch. Service of the King! I must say that she was amiable and didn't seem to mind anything one asked her to do. Thus while the fellow slumbered on the divan I would sit upstairs in my room setting down on paper those great words of passion and sorrow that seethed in my brain and even must have forced themselves in murmurs on to my lips, because the man by my side suddenly asked me: "What did you say?"—"Nothing," I answered, very much surprised. In the shifting light of the street lamps he looked the picture of bodily misery with his chattering teeth and his whiskers blown back flat over his ears. But somehow he didn't arouse my compassion. He was swearing to himself, in French and Spanish, and I tried to soothe him by the assurance that we had not much farther to go. "I am starving," he remarked acidly, and I felt a little compunction. Clearly, the first thing to do was to feed him. We were then entering the Cannebière and as I didn't care to show myself with him in the fashionable restaurant where a new face (and such a face, too) would be remarked, I pulled up the fiacre at the door of the Maison Dorée. That was more

of a place of general resort where, in the multitude of casual patrons, he would pass unnoticed.

For this last night of carnival the big house had decorated all its balconies with rows of coloured paper lanterns right up to the roof. I led the way to the grand salon, for as to private rooms they had been all retained days before. There was a great crowd of people in costume, but by a piece of good luck we managed to secure a little table in a corner. The revellers, intent on their pleasure, paid no attention to us. Señor Ortega trod on my heels and after sitting down opposite me threw an ill-natured glance at the festive scene. It might have been about half-past ten, then.

Two glasses of wine he drank one after another did not improve his temper. He only ceased to shiver. After he had eaten something it must have occurred to him that he had no reason to bear me a grudge and he tried to assume a civil and even friendly manner. His mouth, however, betrayed an abiding bitterness. I mean when he smiled. In repose it was a very expressionless mouth, only it was too red to be altogether ordinary. The whole of him was like that: the whiskers too black, the hair too shiny, the forehead too white, the eyes too mobile; and he lent you his attention with an air of eagerness which made you uncomfortable. He seemed to expect you to give yourself away by some unconsidered word that he would snap up with delight. It was that peculiarity that somehow put me on my guard. I had no idea who I was facing across the table and as a matter of fact I did not care. All my impressions were blurred; and even the promptings of my instinct were the haziest thing imaginable. Now and then I had acute hallucinations of a woman with an arrow of gold in her hair. This caused alternate moments of exaltation and depression from which I tried to take refuge in conversation; but Señor Ortega was not stimulating. He was preoccupied with personal matters. When suddenly he asked me whether I knew why he had been called away from his work (he had been buying supplies from peasants somewhere in Central France), I answered that I didn't know what the reason was originally, but I had an idea that the present intention was to make of him a courier, bearing certain messages from Baron H. to the Quartel Real in Tolosa.

He glared at me like a basilisk. "And why have I been met like this?" he enquired with an air of being prepared to hear a lie.

I explained that it was the Baron's wish, as a matter of prudence and to avoid any possible trouble which might arise from enquiries by the police.

He took it badly. "What nonsense." He was—he said—an employé (for several years) of Hernandez Brothers in Paris, an importing firm, and he was travelling on their business—as he could prove. He dived into his side pocket and

produced a handful of folded papers of all sorts which he plunged back again instantly.

And even then I didn't know whom I had there, opposite me, busy now devouring a slice of pâté de foie gras. Not in the least. It never entered my head. How could it? The Rita that haunted me had no history; she was but the principle of life charged with fatality. Her form was only a mirage of desire decoying one step by step into despair.

Señor Ortega gulped down some more wine and suggested I should tell him who I was. "It's only right I should know," he added.

This could not be gainsaid; and to a man connected with the Carlist organization the shortest way was to introduce myself as that "Monsieur George" of whom he had probably heard.

He leaned far over the table, till his very breast-bone was over the edge, as though his eyes had been stilettos and he wanted to drive them home into my brain. It was only much later that I understood how near death I had been at that moment. But the knives on the tablecloth were the usual restaurant knives with rounded ends and about as deadly as pieces of hoop-iron. Perhaps in the very gust of his fury he remembered what a French restaurant knife is like and something sane within him made him give up the sudden project of cutting my heart out where I sat. For it could have been nothing but a sudden impulse. His settled purpose was quite other. It was not my heart that he was after. His fingers indeed were groping amongst the knife handles by the side of his plate but what captivated my attention for a moment were his red lips which were formed into an odd, sly, insinuating smile. Heard! To be sure he had heard! The chief of the great arms smuggling organization!

"Oh!" I said, "that's giving me too much importance." The person responsible and whom I looked upon as chief of all the business was, as he might have heard, too, a certain noble and loyal lady.

"I am as noble as she is," he snapped peevishly, and I put him down at once as a very offensive beast. "And as to being loyal, what is that? It is being truthful! It is being faithful! I know all about her."

I managed to preserve an air of perfect unconcern. He wasn't a fellow to whom one could talk of Doña Rita.

"You are a Basque," I said.

He admitted rather contemptuously that he was a Basque and even then the truth did not dawn upon me. I suppose that with the hidden egoism of a lover I was thinking of myself, of myself alone in relation to Doña Rita, not of Doña Rita herself. He, too, obviously. He said: "I am an educated man, but I know her people, all peasants. There is a sister, an uncle, a priest, a peasant, too, and perfectly unenlightened. One can't expect much from a priest (I am a free-thinker of course), but he is really too bad, more like a brute beast. As to all her people, mostly dead now, they never were of any account. There was a little land, but they were always working on other people's farms, a barefooted gang, a starved lot. I ought to know because we are distant relations. Twentieth cousins or something of the sort. Yes, I am related to that most loyal lady. And what is she, after all, but a Parisian woman with innumerable lovers, as I have been told."

"I don't think your information is very correct," I said, affecting to yawn slightly. "This is mere gossip of the gutter and I am surprised at you, who really know nothing about it—"

But the disgusting animal had fallen into a brown study. The hair of his very whiskers was perfectly still. I had now given up all idea of the letter to Rita. Suddenly he spoke again:

"Women are the origin of all evil. One should never trust them. They have no honour. No honour!" he repeated, striking his breast with his closed fist on which the knuckles stood out very white. "I left my village many years ago and of course I am perfectly satisfied with my position and I don't know why I should trouble my head about this loyal lady. I suppose that's the way women get on in the world."

I felt convinced that he was no proper person to be a messenger to headquarters. He struck me as altogether untrustworthy and perhaps not quite sane. This was confirmed by him saying suddenly with no visible connection and as if it had been forced from him by some agonizing process: "I was a boy once," and then stopping dead short with a smile. He had a smile that frightened one by its association of malice and anguish.

"Will you have anything more to eat?" I asked.

He declined dully. He had had enough. But he drained the last of a bottle into his glass and accepted a cigar which I offered him. While he was lighting it I had a sort of confused impression that he wasn't such a stranger to me as I had assumed he was; and yet, on the other hand, I was perfectly certain I had never seen him before. Next moment I felt that I could have knocked him down if he hadn't looked so amazingly unhappy, while he came out with the astounding

question: “Señor, have you ever been a lover in your young days?”

“What do you mean?” I asked. “How old do you think I am?”

“That’s true,” he said, gazing at me in a way in which the damned gaze out of their cauldrons of boiling pitch at some soul walking scot free in the place of torment. “It’s true, you don’t seem to have anything on your mind.” He assumed an air of ease, throwing an arm over the back of his chair and blowing the smoke through the gash of his twisted red mouth. “Tell me,” he said, “between men, you know, has this—wonderful celebrity—what does she call herself? How long has she been your mistress?”

I reflected rapidly that if I knocked him over, chair and all, by a sudden blow from the shoulder it would bring about infinite complications beginning with a visit to the Commissaire de Police on night-duty, and ending in God knows what scandal and disclosures of political kind; because there was no telling what, or how much, this outrageous brute might choose to say and how many people he might not involve in a most undesirable publicity. He was smoking his cigar with a poignantly mocking air and not even looking at me. One can’t hit like that a man who isn’t even looking at one; and then, just as I was looking at him swinging his leg with a caustic smile and stony eyes, I felt sorry for the creature. It was only his body that was there in that chair. It was manifest to me that his soul was absent in some hell of its own. At that moment I attained the knowledge of who it was I had before me. This was the man of whom both Doña Rita and Rose were so much afraid. It remained then for me to look after him for the night and then arrange with Baron H. that he should be sent away the very next day—and anywhere but to Tolosa. Yes, evidently, I mustn’t lose sight of him. I proposed in the calmest tone that we should go on where he could get his much-needed rest. He rose with alacrity, picked up his little hand-bag, and, walking out before me, no doubt looked a very ordinary person to all eyes but mine. It was then past eleven, not much, because we had not been in that restaurant quite an hour, but the routine of the town’s night-life being upset during the Carnival the usual row of fiacres outside the Maison Dorée was not there; in fact, there were very few carriages about. Perhaps the coachmen had assumed Pierrot costumes and were rushing about the streets on foot yelling with the rest of the population. “We will have to walk,” I said after a while.—“Oh, yes, let us walk,” assented Señor Ortega, “or I will be frozen here.” It was like a plaint of unutterable wretchedness. I had a fancy that all his natural heat had abandoned his limbs and gone to his brain. It was otherwise with me; my head was cool but I didn’t find the night really so very cold. We stepped out briskly side by side. My lucid thinking was, as it were, enveloped by the wide shouting of the consecrated Carnival gaiety. I have heard many noises since, but nothing that gave me such an intimate impression of the savage instincts hidden in the breast of mankind; these yells of festivity suggested

agonizing fear, rage of murder, ferocity of lust, and the irremediable joylessness of human condition: yet they were emitted by people who were convinced that they were amusing themselves supremely, traditionally, with the sanction of ages, with the approval of their conscience—and no mistake about it whatever! Our appearance, the soberness of our gait made us conspicuous. Once or twice, by common inspiration, masks rushed forward and forming a circle danced round us uttering discordant shouts of derision; for we were an outrage to the peculiar proprieties of the hour, and besides we were obviously lonely and defenceless. On those occasions there was nothing for it but to stand still till the flurry was over. My companion, however, would stamp his feet with rage, and I must admit that I myself regretted not having provided for our wearing a couple of false noses, which would have been enough to placate the just resentment of those people. We might have also joined in the dance, but for some reason or other it didn't occur to us; and I heard once a high, clear woman's voice stigmatizing us for a "species of swelled heads" (espèce d'enflés). We proceeded sedately, my companion muttered with rage, and I was able to resume my thinking. It was based on the deep persuasion that the man at my side was insane with quite another than Carnivalesque lunacy which comes on at one stated time of the year. He was fundamentally mad, though not perhaps completely; which of course made him all the greater, I won't say danger, but nuisance.

I remember once a young doctor expounding the theory that most catastrophes in family circles, surprising episodes in public affairs and disasters in private life, had their origin in the fact that the world was full of half-mad people. He asserted that they were the real majority. When asked whether he considered himself as belonging to the majority, he said frankly that he didn't think so; unless the folly of voicing this view in a company, so utterly unable to appreciate all its horror, could be regarded as the first symptom of his own fate. We shouted down him and his theory, but there is no doubt that it had thrown a chill on the gaiety of our gathering.

We had now entered a quieter quarter of the town and Señor Ortega had ceased his muttering. For myself I had not the slightest doubt of my own sanity. It was proved to me by the way I could apply my intelligence to the problem of what was to be done with Señor Ortega. Generally, he was unfit to be trusted with any mission whatever. The unstability of his temper was sure to get him into a scrape. Of course carrying a letter to Headquarters was not a very complicated matter; and as to that I would have trusted willingly a properly trained dog. My private letter to Doña Rita, the wonderful, the unique letter of farewell, I had given up for the present. Naturally I thought of the Ortega problem mainly in the terms of Doña Rita's safety. Her image presided at every council, at every conflict of my mind, and dominated every faculty of my senses. It floated before my eyes, it touched my elbow, it guarded my right side and my left side; my ears seemed to

catch the sound of her footsteps behind me, she enveloped me with passing whiffs of warmth and perfume, with filmy touches of the hair on my face. She penetrated me, my head was full of her . . . And his head, too, I thought suddenly with a side glance at my companion. He walked quietly with hunched-up shoulders carrying his little hand-bag and he looked the most commonplace figure imaginable.

Yes. There was between us a most horrible fellowship; the association of his crazy torture with the sublime suffering of my passion. We hadn't been a quarter of an hour together when that woman had surged up fatally between us; between this miserable wretch and myself. We were haunted by the same image. But I was sane! I was sane! Not because I was certain that the fellow must not be allowed to go to Tolosa, but because I was perfectly alive to the difficulty of stopping him from going there, since the decision was absolutely in the hands of Baron H.

If I were to go early in the morning and tell that fat, bilious man: "Look here, your Ortega's mad," he would certainly think at once that I was, get very frightened, and . . . one couldn't tell what course he would take. He would eliminate me somehow out of the affair. And yet I could not let the fellow proceed to where Doña Rita was, because, obviously, he had been molesting her, had filled her with uneasiness and even alarm, was an unhappy element and a disturbing influence in her life—incredible as the thing appeared! I couldn't let him go on to make himself a worry and a nuisance, drive her out from a town in which she wished to be (for whatever reason) and perhaps start some explosive scandal. And that girl Rose seemed to fear something graver even than a scandal. But if I were to explain the matter fully to H. he would simply rejoice in his heart. Nothing would please him more than to have Doña Rita driven out of Tolosa. What a relief from his anxieties (and his wife's, too); and if I were to go further, if I even went so far as to hint at the fears which Rose had not been able to conceal from me, why then—I went on thinking coldly with a stoical rejection of the most elementary faith in mankind's rectitude—why then, that accommodating husband would simply let the ominous messenger have his chance. He would see there only his natural anxieties being laid to rest for ever. Horrible? Yes. But I could not take the risk. In a twelvemonth I had travelled a long way in my mistrust of mankind.

We paced on steadily. I thought: "How on earth am I going to stop you?" Had this arisen only a month before, when I had the means at hand and Dominic to confide in, I would have simply kidnapped the fellow. A little trip to sea would not have done Señor Ortega any harm; though no doubt it would have been abhorrent to his feelings. But now I had not the means. I couldn't even tell where my poor Dominic was hiding his diminished head.

Again I glanced at him sideways. I was the taller of the two and as it happened I met in the light of the street lamp his own stealthy glance directed up at me with an agonized expression, an expression that made me fancy I could see the man's very soul writhing in his body like an impaled worm. In spite of my utter inexperience I had some notion of the images that rushed into his mind at the sight of any man who had approached Doña Rita. It was enough to awaken in any human being a movement of horrified compassion; but my pity went out not to him but to Doña Rita. It was for her that I felt sorry; I pitied her for having that damned soul on her track. I pitied her with tenderness and indignation, as if this had been both a danger and a dishonour.

I don't mean to say that those thoughts passed through my head consciously. I had only the resultant, settled feeling. I had, however, a thought, too. It came on me suddenly, and I asked myself with rage and astonishment: "Must I then kill that brute?" There didn't seem to be any alternative. Between him and Doña Rita I couldn't hesitate. I believe I gave a slight laugh of desperation. The suddenness of this sinister conclusion had in it something comic and unbelievable. It loosened my grip on my mental processes. A Latin tag came into my head about the facile descent into the abyss. I marvelled at its aptness, and also that it should have come to me so pat. But I believe now that it was suggested simply by the actual declivity of the street of the Consuls which lies on a gentle slope. We had just turned the corner. All the houses were dark and in a perspective of complete solitude our two shadows dodged and wheeled about our feet.

"Here we are," I said.

He was an extraordinarily chilly devil. When we stopped I could hear his teeth chattering again. I don't know what came over me, I had a sort of nervous fit, was incapable of finding my pockets, let alone the latchkey. I had the illusion of a narrow streak of light on the wall of the house as if it had been cracked. "I hope we will be able to get in," I murmured.

Señor Ortega stood waiting patiently with his handbag, like a rescued wayfarer. "But you live in this house, don't you?" he observed.

"No," I said, without hesitation. I didn't know how that man would behave if he were aware that I was staying under the same roof. He was half mad. He might want to talk all night, try crazily to invade my privacy. How could I tell? Moreover, I wasn't so sure that I would remain in the house. I had some notion of going out again and walking up and down the street of the Consuls till daylight. "No, an absent friend lets me use . . . I had that latchkey this morning . . . Ah! here it is."

I let him go in first. The sickly gas flame was there on duty, undaunted, waiting for the end of the world to come and put it out. I think that the black-and-white hall surprised Ortega. I had closed the front door without noise and stood for a moment listening, while he glanced about furtively. There were only two other doors in the hall, right and left. Their panels of ebony were decorated with bronze applications in the centre. The one on the left was of course Blunt's door. As the passage leading beyond it was dark at the further end I took Señor Ortega by the hand and led him along, unresisting, like a child. For some reason or other I moved on tip-toe and he followed my example. The light and the warmth of the studio impressed him favourably; he laid down his little bag, rubbed his hands together, and produced a smile of satisfaction; but it was such a smile as a totally ruined man would perhaps force on his lips, or a man condemned to a short shrift by his doctor. I begged him to make himself at home and said that I would go at once and hunt up the woman of the house who would make him up a bed on the big couch there. He hardly listened to what I said. What were all those things to him! He knew that his destiny was to sleep on a bed of thorns, to feed on adders. But he tried to show a sort of polite interest. He asked: "What is this place?"

"It used to belong to a painter," I mumbled.

"Ah, your absent friend," he said, making a wry mouth. "I detest all those artists, and all those writers, and all politicos who are thieves; and I would go even farther and higher, laying a curse on all idle lovers of women. You think perhaps I am a Royalist? No. If there was anybody in heaven or hell to pray to I would pray for a revolution—a red revolution everywhere."

"You astonish me," I said, just to say something.

"No! But there are half a dozen people in the world with whom I would like to settle accounts. One could shoot them like partridges and no questions asked. That's what revolution would mean to me."

"It's a beautifully simple view," I said. "I imagine you are not the only one who holds it; but I really must look after your comforts. You mustn't forget that we have to see Baron H. early to-morrow morning." And I went out quietly into the passage wondering in what part of the house Therese had elected to sleep that night. But, lo and behold, when I got to the foot of the stairs there was Therese coming down from the upper regions in her nightgown, like a sleep-walker. However, it wasn't that, because, before I could exclaim, she vanished off the first floor landing like a streak of white mist and without the slightest sound. Her attire made it perfectly clear that she could not have heard us coming in. In fact,

she must have been certain that the house was empty, because she was as well aware as myself that the Italian girls after their work at the opera were going to a masked ball to dance for their own amusement, attended of course by their conscientious father. But what thought, need, or sudden impulse had driven Therese out of bed like this was something I couldn't conceive.

I didn't call out after her. I felt sure that she would return. I went up slowly to the first floor and met her coming down again, this time carrying a lighted candle. She had managed to make herself presentable in an extraordinarily short time.

"Oh, my dear young Monsieur, you have given me a fright."

"Yes. And I nearly fainted, too," I said. "You looked perfectly awful. What's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

She had lighted by then the gas on the landing and I must say that I had never seen exactly that manner of face on her before. She wriggled, confused and shifty-eyed, before me; but I ascribed this behaviour to her shocked modesty and without troubling myself any more about her feelings I informed her that there was a Carlist downstairs who must be put up for the night. Most unexpectedly she betrayed a ridiculous consternation, but only for a moment. Then she assumed at once that I would give him hospitality upstairs where there was a camp-bedstead in my dressing-room. I said:

"No. Give him a shake-down in the studio, where he is now. It's warm in there. And remember! I charge you strictly not to let him know that I sleep in this house. In fact, I don't know myself that I will; I have certain matters to attend to this very night. You will also have to serve him his coffee in the morning. I will take him away before ten o'clock."

All this seemed to impress her more than I had expected. As usual when she felt curious, or in some other way excited, she assumed a saintly, detached expression, and asked:

"The dear gentleman is your friend, I suppose?"

"I only know he is a Spaniard and a Carlist," I said: "and that ought to be enough for you."

Instead of the usual effusive exclamations she murmured: "Dear me, dear me," and departed upstairs with the candle to get together a few blankets and pillows, I suppose. As for me I walked quietly downstairs on my way to the studio. I had a curious sensation that I was acting in a preordained manner, that life was not

at all what I had thought it to be, or else that I had been altogether changed sometime during the day, and that I was a different person from the man whom I remembered getting out of my bed in the morning.

Also feelings had altered all their values. The words, too, had become strange. It was only the inanimate surroundings that remained what they had always been. For instance the studio. . . .

During my absence Señor Ortega had taken off his coat and I found him as it were in the air, sitting in his shirt sleeves on a chair which he had taken pains to place in the very middle of the floor. I repressed an absurd impulse to walk round him as though he had been some sort of exhibit. His hands were spread over his knees and he looked perfectly insensible. I don't mean strange, or ghastly, or wooden, but just insensible—like an exhibit. And that effect persisted even after he raised his black suspicious eyes to my face. He lowered them almost at once. It was very mechanical. I gave him up and became rather concerned about myself. My thought was that I had better get out of that before any more queer notions came into my head. So I only remained long enough to tell him that the woman of the house was bringing down some bedding and that I hoped that he would have a good night's rest. And directly I spoke it struck me that this was the most extraordinary speech that ever was addressed to a figure of that sort. He, however, did not seem startled by it or moved in any way. He simply said:

"Thank you."

In the darkest part of the long passage outside I met Therese with her arms full of pillows and blankets.