BOOK SIXTH.--THE CONJUNCTION OF TWO STARS

CHAPTER I--THE SOBRIQUET: MODE OF FORMATION OF FAMILY NAMES

Marius was, at this epoch, a handsome young man, of medium stature, with thick and intensely black hair, a lofty and intelligent brow, well-opened and passionate nostrils, an air of calmness and sincerity, and with something indescribably proud, thoughtful, and innocent over his whole countenance. His profile, all of whose lines were rounded, without thereby losing their firmness, had a certain Germanic sweetness, which has made its way into the French physiognomy by way of Alsace and Lorraine, and that complete absence of angles which rendered the Sicambres so easily recognizable among the Romans, and which distinguishes the leonine from the aquiline race. He was at that period of life when the mind of men who think is composed, in nearly equal parts, of depth and ingenuousness. A grave situation being given, he had all that is required to be stupid: one more turn of the key, and he might be sublime. His manners were reserved, cold, polished, not very genial. As his mouth was charming, his lips the reddest, and his teeth the whitest in the world, his smile corrected the severity of his face, as a whole. At certain moments, that pure brow and that voluptuous smile presented a singular contrast. His eyes were small, but his glance was large.

At the period of his most abject misery, he had observed that young girls turned round when he passed by, and he fled or hid, with death in his soul. He thought that they were staring at him because of his old clothes, and that they were laughing at them; the fact is, that they stared at him because of his grace, and that they dreamed of him.

This mute misunderstanding between him and the pretty passers-by had made him shy. He chose none of them for the excellent reason that he fled from all of them. He lived thus indefinitely,--stupidly, as Courfeyrac said.

Courfeyrac also said to him: "Do not aspire to be venerable" [they called each other thou; it is the tendency of youthful friendships to slip into this mode of address]. "Let me give you a piece of advice, my dear fellow. Don't read so many books, and look a little more at the lasses. The jades have some good points about them, O Marius! By dint of fleeing and blushing, you will become brutalized."

On other occasions, Courfeyrac encountered him and said:--"Good morning, Monsieur l'Abbe!"

When Courfeyrac had addressed to him some remark of this nature, Marius avoided women, both young and old, more than ever for a week to come, and he avoided Courfeyrac to boot.

Nevertheless, there existed in all the immensity of creation, two women whom Marius did not flee, and to whom he paid no attention whatever. In truth, he would have been very much amazed if he had been informed that they were women. One was the bearded old woman who swept out his chamber, and caused Courfeyrac to say: "Seeing that his servant woman wears his beard, Marius does not wear his own beard." The other was a sort of little girl whom he saw very often, and whom he never looked at.

For more than a year, Marius had noticed in one of the walks of the Luxembourg, the one which skirts the parapet of the Pepiniere, a man and a very young girl, who were almost always seated side by side on the same bench, at the most solitary end of the alley, on the Rue de l'Ouest side. Every time that that chance which meddles with the strolls of persons whose gaze is turned inwards, led Marius to that walk,--and it was nearly every day,--he found this couple there. The man appeared to be about sixty years of age; he seemed sad and serious; his whole person presented the robust and weary aspect peculiar to military men who have retired from the service. If he had worn a decoration, Marius would have said: "He is an ex-officer." He had a kindly but unapproachable air, and he never let his glance linger on the eyes of any one. He wore blue trousers, a blue frock coat and a broad-brimmed hat, which always appeared to be new, a black cravat, a quaker shirt, that is to say, it was dazzlingly white, but of coarse linen. A grisette who passed near him one day, said: "Here's a very tidy widower." His hair was very white.

The first time that the young girl who accompanied him came and seated herself on the bench which they seemed to have adopted, she was a sort of child thirteen or fourteen years of age, so thin as to be almost homely, awkward, insignificant, and with a possible promise of handsome eyes. Only, they were always raised with a sort of displeasing assurance. Her dress was both aged and childish, like the dress of the scholars in a convent; it consisted of a badly cut gown of black merino. They had the air of being father and daughter.

Marius scanned this old man, who was not yet aged, and this little girl, who was not yet a person, for a few days, and thereafter paid no attention to them. They, on their side, did not appear even to see him. They conversed together with a peaceful and indifferent air. The girl chattered incessantly and merrily. The old man talked but little, and, at times, he fixed on her eyes overflowing with an ineffable paternity.

Marius had acquired the mechanical habit of strolling in that walk. He invariably found them there.

This is the way things went:--

Marius liked to arrive by the end of the alley which was furthest from their bench; he walked the whole length of the alley, passed in front of them, then returned to the extremity whence he had come, and began again. This he did five or six times in the course of his promenade, and the promenade was taken five or six times a week, without its

having occurred to him or to these people to exchange a greeting. That personage, and that young girl, although they appeared,--and perhaps because they appeared,--to shun all glances, had, naturally, caused some attention on the part of the five or six students who strolled along the Pepiniere from time to time; the studious after their lectures, the others after their game of billiards. Courfeyrac, who was among the last, had observed them several times, but, finding the girl homely, he had speedily and carefully kept out of the way. He had fled, discharging at them a sobriquet, like a Parthian dart. Impressed solely with the child's gown and the old man's hair, he had dubbed the daughter Mademoiselle Lanoire, and the father, Monsieur Leblanc, so that as no one knew them under any other title, this nickname became a law in the default of any other name. The students said: "Ah! Monsieur Leblanc is on his bench." And Marius, like the rest, had found it convenient to call this unknown gentleman Monsieur Leblanc.

We shall follow their example, and we shall say M. Leblanc, in order to facilitate this tale.

So Marius saw them nearly every day, at the same hour, during the first year. He found the man to his taste, but the girl insipid.

CHAPTER II--LUX FACTA EST

During the second year, precisely at the point in this history which the reader has now reached, it chanced that this habit of the Luxembourg was interrupted, without Marius himself being quite aware why, and nearly six months elapsed, during which he did not set foot in the alley. One day, at last, he returned thither once more; it was a serene summer morning, and Marius was in joyous mood, as one is when the weather is fine. It seemed to him that he had in his heart all the songs of the birds that he was listening to, and all the bits of blue sky of which he caught glimpses through the leaves of the trees.

He went straight to "his alley," and when he reached the end of it he perceived, still on the same bench, that well-known couple. Only, when he approached, it certainly was the same man; but it seemed to him that it was no longer the same girl. The person whom he now beheld was a tall and beautiful creature, possessed of all the most charming lines of a woman at the precise moment when they are still combined with all the most ingenuous graces of the child; a pure and fugitive moment, which can be expressed only by these two words,--"fifteen years." She had wonderful brown hair, shaded with threads of gold, a brow that seemed made of marble, cheeks that seemed made of rose-leaf, a pale flush, an agitated whiteness, an exquisite mouth, whence smiles darted like sunbeams, and words like music, a head such as Raphael would have given to Mary, set upon a neck that Jean Goujon would have attributed to a Venus. And, in order that nothing might be lacking to this bewitching

face, her nose was not handsome--it was pretty; neither straight nor curved, neither Italian nor Greek; it was the Parisian nose, that is to say, spiritual, delicate, irregular, pure,--which drives painters to despair, and charms poets.

When Marius passed near her, he could not see her eyes, which were constantly lowered. He saw only her long chestnut lashes, permeated with shadow and modesty.

This did not prevent the beautiful child from smiling as she listened to what the white-haired old man was saying to her, and nothing could be more fascinating than that fresh smile, combined with those drooping eyes.

For a moment, Marius thought that she was another daughter of the same man, a sister of the former, no doubt. But when the invariable habit of his stroll brought him, for the second time, near the bench, and he had examined her attentively, he recognized her as the same. In six months the little girl had become a young maiden; that was all. Nothing is more frequent than this phenomenon. There is a moment when girls blossom out in the twinkling of an eye, and become roses all at once. One left them children but yesterday; today, one finds them disquieting to the feelings.

This child had not only grown, she had become idealized. As three days in April suffice to cover certain trees with flowers, six months had

sufficed to clothe her with beauty. Her April had arrived.

One sometimes sees people, who, poor and mean, seem to wake up, pass suddenly from indigence to luxury, indulge in expenditures of all sorts, and become dazzling, prodigal, magnificent, all of a sudden. That is the result of having pocketed an income; a note fell due yesterday. The young girl had received her quarterly income.

And then, she was no longer the school-girl with her felt hat, her merino gown, her scholar's shoes, and red hands; taste had come to her with beauty; she was a well-dressed person, clad with a sort of rich and simple elegance, and without affectation. She wore a dress of black damask, a cape of the same material, and a bonnet of white crape. Her white gloves displayed the delicacy of the hand which toyed with the carved, Chinese ivory handle of a parasol, and her silken shoe outlined the smallness of her foot. When one passed near her, her whole toilette exhaled a youthful and penetrating perfume.

As for the man, he was the same as usual.

The second time that Marius approached her, the young girl raised her eyelids; her eyes were of a deep, celestial blue, but in that veiled azure, there was, as yet, nothing but the glance of a child. She looked at Marius indifferently, as she would have stared at the brat running beneath the sycamores, or the marble vase which cast a shadow on the bench, and Marius, on his side, continued his promenade, and thought

about something else.

He passed near the bench where the young girl sat, five or six times, but without even turning his eyes in her direction.

On the following days, he returned, as was his wont, to the Luxembourg; as usual, he found there "the father and daughter;" but he paid no further attention to them. He thought no more about the girl now that she was beautiful than he had when she was homely. He passed very near the bench where she sat, because such was his habit.

CHAPTER III--EFFECT OF THE SPRING

One day, the air was warm, the Luxembourg was inundated with light and shade, the sky was as pure as though the angels had washed it that morning, the sparrows were giving vent to little twitters in the depths of the chestnut-trees. Marius had thrown open his whole soul to nature, he was not thinking of anything, he simply lived and breathed, he passed near the bench, the young girl raised her eyes to him, the two glances met.

What was there in the young girl's glance on this occasion? Marius could not have told. There was nothing and there was everything. It was a strange flash.

She dropped her eyes, and he pursued his way.

What he had just seen was no longer the ingenuous and simple eye of a child; it was a mysterious gulf which had half opened, then abruptly closed again.

There comes a day when the young girl glances in this manner. Woe to him who chances to be there!

That first gaze of a soul which does not, as yet, know itself, is like the dawn in the sky. It is the awakening of something radiant and strange. Nothing can give any idea of the dangerous charm of that

unexpected gleam, which flashes suddenly and vaguely forth from adorable shadows, and which is composed of all the innocence of the present, and of all the passion of the future. It is a sort of undecided tenderness which reveals itself by chance, and which waits. It is a snare which the innocent maiden sets unknown to herself, and in which she captures hearts without either wishing or knowing it. It is a virgin looking like a woman.

It is rare that a profound revery does not spring from that glance, where it falls. All purities and all candors meet in that celestial and fatal gleam which, more than all the best-planned tender glances of coquettes, possesses the magic power of causing the sudden blossoming, in the depths of the soul, of that sombre flower, impregnated with perfume and with poison, which is called love.

That evening, on his return to his garret, Marius cast his eyes over his garments, and perceived, for the first time, that he had been so slovenly, indecorous, and inconceivably stupid as to go for his walk in the Luxembourg with his "every-day clothes," that is to say, with a hat battered near the band, coarse carter's boots, black trousers which showed white at the knees, and a black coat which was pale at the elbows.

CHAPTER IV--BEGINNING OF A GREAT MALADY

On the following day, at the accustomed hour, Marius drew from his wardrobe his new coat, his new trousers, his new hat, and his new boots; he clothed himself in this complete panoply, put on his gloves, a tremendous luxury, and set off for the Luxembourg.

On the way thither, he encountered Courfeyrac, and pretended not to see him. Courfeyrac, on his return home, said to his friends:--

"I have just met Marius' new hat and new coat, with Marius inside them. He was going to pass an examination, no doubt. He looked utterly stupid."

On arriving at the Luxembourg, Marius made the tour of the fountain basin, and stared at the swans; then he remained for a long time in contemplation before a statue whose head was perfectly black with mould, and one of whose hips was missing. Near the basin there was a bourgeois forty years of age, with a prominent stomach, who was holding by the hand a little urchin of five, and saying to him: "Shun excess, my son, keep at an equal distance from despotism and from anarchy." Marius listened to this bourgeois. Then he made the circuit of the basin once more. At last he directed his course towards "his alley," slowly, and as if with regret. One would have said that he was both forced to go there and withheld from doing so. He did not perceive it himself, and thought that he was doing as he always did.

On turning into the walk, he saw M. Leblanc and the young girl at the other end, "on their bench." He buttoned his coat up to the very top, pulled it down on his body so that there might be no wrinkles, examined, with a certain complaisance, the lustrous gleams of his trousers, and marched on the bench. This march savored of an attack, and certainly of a desire for conquest. So I say that he marched on the bench, as I should say: "Hannibal marched on Rome."

However, all his movements were purely mechanical, and he had interrupted none of the habitual preoccupations of his mind and labors. At that moment, he was thinking that the Manuel du Baccalaureat was a stupid book, and that it must have been drawn up by rare idiots, to allow of three tragedies of Racine and only one comedy of Moliere being analyzed therein as masterpieces of the human mind. There was a piercing whistling going on in his ears. As he approached the bench, he held fast to the folds in his coat, and fixed his eyes on the young girl. It seemed to him that she filled the entire extremity of the alley with a vague blue light.

In proportion as he drew near, his pace slackened more and more. On arriving at some little distance from the bench, and long before he had reached the end of the walk, he halted, and could not explain to himself why he retraced his steps. He did not even say to himself that he would not go as far as the end. It was only with difficulty that the young girl could have perceived him in the distance and noted his fine

appearance in his new clothes. Nevertheless, he held himself very erect, in case any one should be looking at him from behind.

He attained the opposite end, then came back, and this time he approached a little nearer to the bench. He even got to within three intervals of trees, but there he felt an indescribable impossibility of proceeding further, and he hesitated. He thought he saw the young girl's face bending towards him. But he exerted a manly and violent effort, subdued his hesitation, and walked straight ahead. A few seconds later, he rushed in front of the bench, erect and firm, reddening to the very ears, without daring to cast a glance either to the right or to the left, with his hand thrust into his coat like a statesman. At the moment when he passed,--under the cannon of the place,--he felt his heart beat wildly. As on the preceding day, she wore her damask gown and her crape bonnet. He heard an ineffable voice, which must have been "her voice." She was talking tranquilly. She was very pretty. He felt it, although he made no attempt to see her. "She could not, however," he thought, "help feeling esteem and consideration for me, if she only knew that I am the veritable author of the dissertation on Marcos Obregon de la Ronde, which M. Francois de Neufchateau put, as though it were his own, at the head of his edition of Gil Blas." He went beyond the bench as far as the extremity of the walk, which was very near, then turned on his heel and passed once more in front of the lovely girl. This time, he was very pale. Moreover, all his emotions were disagreeable. As he went further from the bench and the young girl, and while his back was turned to her, he fancied that she was gazing after him, and that made him stumble.

He did not attempt to approach the bench again; he halted near the middle of the walk, and there, a thing which he never did, he sat down, and reflecting in the most profoundly indistinct depths of his spirit, that after all, it was hard that persons whose white bonnet and black gown he admired should be absolutely insensible to his splendid trousers and his new coat.

At the expiration of a quarter of an hour, he rose, as though he were on the point of again beginning his march towards that bench which was surrounded by an aureole. But he remained standing there, motionless. For the first time in fifteen months, he said to himself that that gentleman who sat there every day with his daughter, had, on his side, noticed him, and probably considered his assiduity singular.

For the first time, also, he was conscious of some irreverence in designating that stranger, even in his secret thoughts, by the sobriquet of M. le Blanc.

He stood thus for several minutes, with drooping head, tracing figures in the sand, with the cane which he held in his hand.

Then he turned abruptly in the direction opposite to the bench, to M. Leblanc and his daughter, and went home.

That day he forgot to dine. At eight o'clock in the evening he perceived

this fact, and as it was too late to go down to the Rue Saint-Jacques, he said: "Never mind!" and ate a bit of bread.

He did not go to bed until he had brushed his coat and folded it up with great care.

CHAPTER V--DIVRS CLAPS OF THUNDER FALL ON MA'AM BOUGON

On the following day, Ma'am Bougon, as Courfeyrac styled the old portress-principal-tenant, housekeeper of the Gorbeau hovel, Ma'am Bougon, whose name was, in reality, Madame Burgon, as we have found out, but this iconoclast, Courfeyrac, respected nothing,--Ma'am Bougon observed, with stupefaction, that M. Marius was going out again in his new coat.

He went to the Luxembourg again, but he did not proceed further than his bench midway of the alley. He seated himself there, as on the preceding day, surveying from a distance, and clearly making out, the white bonnet, the black dress, and above all, that blue light. He did not stir from it, and only went home when the gates of the Luxembourg closed. He did not see M. Leblanc and his daughter retire. He concluded that they had quitted the garden by the gate on the Rue de l'Ouest. Later on, several weeks afterwards, when he came to think it over, he could never recall where he had dined that evening.

On the following day, which was the third, Ma'am Bougon was thunderstruck. Marius went out in his new coat. "Three days in succession!" she exclaimed.

She tried to follow him, but Marius walked briskly, and with immense strides; it was a hippopotamus undertaking the pursuit of a chamois. She lost sight of him in two minutes, and returned breathless,

three-quarters choked with asthma, and furious. "If there is any sense," she growled, "in putting on one's best clothes every day, and making people run like this!"

Marius betook himself to the Luxembourg.

The young girl was there with M. Leblanc. Marius approached as near as he could, pretending to be busy reading a book, but he halted afar off, then returned and seated himself on his bench, where he spent four hours in watching the house-sparrows who were skipping about the walk, and who produced on him the impression that they were making sport of him.

A fortnight passed thus. Marius went to the Luxembourg no longer for the sake of strolling there, but to seat himself always in the same spot, and that without knowing why. Once arrived there, he did not stir. He put on his new coat every morning, for the purpose of not showing himself, and he began all over again on the morrow.

She was decidedly a marvellous beauty. The only remark approaching a criticism, that could be made, was, that the contradiction between her gaze, which was melancholy, and her smile, which was merry, gave a rather wild effect to her face, which sometimes caused this sweet countenance to become strange without ceasing to be charming.

CHAPTER VI--TAKEN PRISONER

On one of the last days of the second week, Marius was seated on his bench, as usual, holding in his hand an open book, of which he had not turned a page for the last two hours. All at once he started. An event was taking place at the other extremity of the walk. Leblanc and his daughter had just left their seat, and the daughter had taken her father's arm, and both were advancing slowly, towards the middle of the alley where Marius was. Marius closed his book, then opened it again, then forced himself to read; he trembled; the aureole was coming straight towards him. "Ah! good Heavens!" thought he, "I shall not have time to strike an attitude." Still the white-haired man and the girl advanced. It seemed to him that this lasted for a century, and that it was but a second. "What are they coming in this direction for?" he asked himself. "What! She will pass here? Her feet will tread this sand, this walk, two paces from me?" He was utterly upset, he would have liked to be very handsome, he would have liked to own the cross. He heard the soft and measured sound of their approaching footsteps. He imagined that M. Leblanc was darting angry glances at him. "Is that gentleman going to address me?" he thought to himself. He dropped his head; when he raised it again, they were very near him. The young girl passed, and as she passed, she glanced at him. She gazed steadily at him, with a pensive sweetness which thrilled Marius from head to foot. It seemed to him that she was reproaching him for having allowed so long a time to elapse without coming as far as her, and that she was saying to him: "I am coming myself." Marius was dazzled by those eyes fraught with rays and

abysses.

He felt his brain on fire. She had come to him, what joy! And then, how she had looked at him! She appeared to him more beautiful than he had ever seen her yet. Beautiful with a beauty which was wholly feminine and angelic, with a complete beauty which would have made Petrarch sing and Dante kneel. It seemed to him that he was floating free in the azure heavens. At the same time, he was horribly vexed because there was dust on his boots.

He thought he felt sure that she had looked at his boots too.

He followed her with his eyes until she disappeared. Then he started up and walked about the Luxembourg garden like a madman. It is possible that, at times, he laughed to himself and talked aloud. He was so dreamy when he came near the children's nurses, that each one of them thought him in love with her.

He quitted the Luxembourg, hoping to find her again in the street.

He encountered Courfeyrac under the arcades of the Odeon, and said to him: "Come and dine with me." They went off to Rousseau's and spent six francs. Marius ate like an ogre. He gave the waiter six sous. At dessert, he said to Courfeyrac. "Have you read the paper? What a fine discourse Audry de Puyraveau delivered!"

He was desperately in love.

After dinner, he said to Courfeyrac: "I will treat you to the play." They went to the Porte-Sainte-Martin to see Frederick in l'Auberge des Adrets. Marius was enormously amused.

At the same time, he had a redoubled attack of shyness. On emerging from the theatre, he refused to look at the garter of a modiste who was stepping across a gutter, and Courfeyrac, who said: "I should like to put that woman in my collection," almost horrified him.

Courfeyrac invited him to breakfast at the Cafe Voltaire on the following morning. Marius went thither, and ate even more than on the preceding evening. He was very thoughtful and very merry. One would have said that he was taking advantage of every occasion to laugh uproariously. He tenderly embraced some man or other from the provinces, who was presented to him. A circle of students formed round the table, and they spoke of the nonsense paid for by the State which was uttered from the rostrum in the Sorbonne, then the conversation fell upon the faults and omissions in Guicherat's dictionaries and grammars. Marius interrupted the discussion to exclaim: "But it is very agreeable, all the same to have the cross!"

"That's queer!" whispered Courfeyrac to Jean Prouvaire.

"No," responded Prouvaire, "that's serious."

It was serious; in fact, Marius had reached that first violent and charming hour with which grand passions begin.

A glance had wrought all this.

When the mine is charged, when the conflagration is ready, nothing is more simple. A glance is a spark.

It was all over with him. Marius loved a woman. His fate was entering the unknown.

The glance of women resembles certain combinations of wheels, which are tranquil in appearance yet formidable. You pass close to them every day, peaceably and with impunity, and without a suspicion of anything. A moment arrives when you forget that the thing is there. You go and come, dream, speak, laugh. All at once you feel yourself clutched; all is over. The wheels hold you fast, the glance has ensnared you. It has caught you, no matter where or how, by some portion of your thought which was fluttering loose, by some distraction which had attacked you. You are lost. The whole of you passes into it. A chain of mysterious forces takes possession of you. You struggle in vain; no more human succor is possible. You go on falling from gearing to gearing, from agony to agony, from torture to torture, you, your mind, your fortune, your future, your soul; and, according to whether you are in the power of a wicked creature, or of a noble heart, you will not escape from this

terrifying machine otherwise than disfigured with shame, or transfigured by passion.

CHAPTER VII--ADVENTURES OF THE LETTER U DELIVERED OVER TO CONJECTURES

Isolation, detachment from everything, pride, independence, the taste of nature, the absence of daily and material activity, the life within himself, the secret conflicts of chastity, a benevolent ecstasy towards all creation, had prepared Marius for this possession which is called passion. His worship of his father had gradually become a religion, and, like all religions, it had retreated to the depths of his soul. Something was required in the foreground. Love came.

A full month elapsed, during which Marius went every day to the Luxembourg. When the hour arrived, nothing could hold him back.--"He is on duty," said Courfeyrac. Marius lived in a state of delight. It is certain that the young girl did look at him.

He had finally grown bold, and approached the bench. Still, he did not pass in front of it any more, in obedience to the instinct of timidity and to the instinct of prudence common to lovers. He considered it better not to attract "the attention of the father." He combined his stations behind the trees and the pedestals of the statues with a profound diplomacy, so that he might be seen as much as possible by the young girl and as little as possible by the old gentleman. Sometimes, he remained motionless by the half-hour together in the shade of a Leonidas or a Spartacus, holding in his hand a book, above which his eyes, gently raised, sought the beautiful girl, and she, on her side, turned her

charming profile towards him with a vague smile. While conversing in the most natural and tranquil manner in the world with the white-haired man, she bent upon Marius all the reveries of a virginal and passionate eye. Ancient and time-honored manoeuvre which Eve understood from the very first day of the world, and which every woman understands from the very first day of her life! her mouth replied to one, and her glance replied to another.

It must be supposed, that M. Leblanc finally noticed something, for often, when Marius arrived, he rose and began to walk about. He had abandoned their accustomed place and had adopted the bench by the Gladiator, near the other end of the walk, as though with the object of seeing whether Marius would pursue them thither. Marius did not understand, and committed this error. "The father" began to grow inexact, and no longer brought "his daughter" every day. Sometimes, he came alone. Then Marius did not stay. Another blunder.

Marius paid no heed to these symptoms. From the phase of timidity, he had passed, by a natural and fatal progress, to the phase of blindness. His love increased. He dreamed of it every night. And then, an unexpected bliss had happened to him, oil on the fire, a redoubling of the shadows over his eyes. One evening, at dusk, he had found, on the bench which "M. Leblanc and his daughter" had just quitted, a handkerchief, a very simple handkerchief, without embroidery, but white, and fine, and which seemed to him to exhale ineffable perfume. He seized it with rapture. This handkerchief was marked with the letters U. F.

Marius knew nothing about this beautiful child,--neither her family name, her Christian name nor her abode; these two letters were the first thing of her that he had gained possession of, adorable initials, upon which he immediately began to construct his scaffolding. U was evidently the Christian name. "Ursule!" he thought, "what a delicious name!" He kissed the handkerchief, drank it in, placed it on his heart, on his flesh, during the day, and at night, laid it beneath his lips that he might fall asleep on it.

"I feel that her whole soul lies within it!" he exclaimed.

This handkerchief belonged to the old gentleman, who had simply let it fall from his pocket.

In the days which followed the finding of this treasure, he only displayed himself at the Luxembourg in the act of kissing the handkerchief and laying it on his heart. The beautiful child understood nothing of all this, and signified it to him by imperceptible signs.

"O modesty!" said Marius.

CHAPTER VIII--THE VETERANS THEMSELVES CAN BE HAPPY

Since we have pronounced the word modesty, and since we conceal nothing, we ought to say that once, nevertheless, in spite of his ecstasies, "his Ursule" caused him very serious grief. It was on one of the days when she persuaded M. Leblanc to leave the bench and stroll along the walk. A brisk May breeze was blowing, which swayed the crests of the plaintain-trees. The father and daughter, arm in arm, had just passed Marius' bench. Marius had risen to his feet behind them, and was following them with his eyes, as was fitting in the desperate situation of his soul.

All at once, a gust of wind, more merry than the rest, and probably charged with performing the affairs of Springtime, swept down from the nursery, flung itself on the alley, enveloped the young girl in a delicious shiver, worthy of Virgil's nymphs, and the fawns of Theocritus, and lifted her dress, the robe more sacred than that of Isis, almost to the height of her garter. A leg of exquisite shape appeared. Marius saw it. He was exasperated and furious.

The young girl had hastily thrust down her dress, with a divinely troubled motion, but he was none the less angry for all that. He was alone in the alley, it is true. But there might have been some one there. And what if there had been some one there! Can any one comprehend such a thing? What she had just done is horrible!--Alas, the poor child had done nothing; there had been but one culprit, the wind; but Marius,

in whom quivered the Bartholo who exists in Cherubin, was determined to be vexed, and was jealous of his own shadow. It is thus, in fact, that the harsh and capricious jealousy of the flesh awakens in the human heart, and takes possession of it, even without any right. Moreover, setting aside even that jealousy, the sight of that charming leg had contained nothing agreeable for him; the white stocking of the first woman he chanced to meet would have afforded him more pleasure.

When "his Ursule," after having reached the end of the walk, retraced her steps with M. Leblanc, and passed in front of the bench on which Marius had seated himself once more, Marius darted a sullen and ferocious glance at her. The young girl gave way to that slight straightening up with a backward movement, accompanied by a raising of the eyelids, which signifies: "Well, what is the matter?"

This was "their first quarrel."

Marius had hardly made this scene at her with his eyes, when some one crossed the walk. It was a veteran, very much bent, extremely wrinkled, and pale, in a uniform of the Louis XV. pattern, bearing on his breast the little oval plaque of red cloth, with the crossed swords, the soldier's cross of Saint-Louis, and adorned, in addition, with a coat-sleeve, which had no arm within it, with a silver chin and a wooden leg. Marius thought he perceived that this man had an extremely well satisfied air. It even struck him that the aged cynic, as he hobbled along past him, addressed to him a very fraternal and very merry wink,

as though some chance had created an understanding between them, and as though they had shared some piece of good luck together. What did that relic of Mars mean by being so contented? What had passed between that wooden leg and the other? Marius reached a paroxysm of jealousy.--"Perhaps he was there!" he said to himself; "perhaps he saw!"--And he felt a desire to exterminate the veteran.

With the aid of time, all points grow dull. Marius' wrath against "Ursule," just and legitimate as it was, passed off. He finally pardoned her; but this cost him a great effort; he sulked for three days.

Nevertheless, in spite of all this, and because of all this, his passion augmented and grew to madness.

CHAPTER IX--ECLIPSE

The reader has just seen how Marius discovered, or thought that he discovered, that She was named Ursule.

Appetite grows with loving. To know that her name was Ursule was a great deal; it was very little. In three or four weeks, Marius had devoured this bliss. He wanted another. He wanted to know where she lived.

He had committed his first blunder, by falling into the ambush of the bench by the Gladiator. He had committed a second, by not remaining at the Luxembourg when M. Leblanc came thither alone. He now committed a third, and an immense one. He followed "Ursule."

She lived in the Rue de l'Ouest, in the most unfrequented spot, in a new, three-story house, of modest appearance.

From that moment forth, Marius added to his happiness of seeing her at the Luxembourg the happiness of following her home.

His hunger was increasing. He knew her first name, at least, a charming name, a genuine woman's name; he knew where she lived; he wanted to know who she was.

One evening, after he had followed them to their dwelling, and had seen them disappear through the carriage gate, he entered in their train and

said boldly to the porter:--

"Is that the gentleman who lives on the first floor, who has just come in?"

"No," replied the porter. "He is the gentleman on the third floor."

Another step gained. This success emboldened Marius.

"On the front?" he asked.

"Parbleu!" said the porter, "the house is only built on the street."

"And what is that gentleman's business?" began Marius again.

"He is a gentleman of property, sir. A very kind man who does good to the unfortunate, though not rich himself."

"What is his name?" resumed Marius.

The porter raised his head and said:--

"Are you a police spy, sir?"

Marius went off quite abashed, but delighted. He was getting on.

"Good," thought he, "I know that her name is Ursule, that she is the daughter of a gentleman who lives on his income, and that she lives there, on the third floor, in the Rue de l'Ouest."

On the following day, M. Leblanc and his daughter made only a very brief stay in the Luxembourg; they went away while it was still broad daylight. Marius followed them to the Rue de l'Ouest, as he had taken up the habit of doing. On arriving at the carriage entrance M. Leblanc made his daughter pass in first, then paused, before crossing the threshold, and stared intently at Marius.

On the next day they did not come to the Luxembourg. Marius waited for them all day in vain.

At nightfall, he went to the Rue de l'Ouest, and saw a light in the windows of the third story.

He walked about beneath the windows until the light was extinguished.

The next day, no one at the Luxembourg. Marius waited all day, then went and did sentinel duty under their windows. This carried him on to ten o'clock in the evening.

His dinner took care of itself. Fever nourishes the sick man, and love the lover.

He spent a week in this manner. M. Leblanc no longer appeared at the Luxembourg.

Marius indulged in melancholy conjectures; he dared not watch the porte cochere during the day; he contented himself with going at night to gaze upon the red light of the windows. At times he saw shadows flit across them, and his heart began to beat.

On the eighth day, when he arrived under the windows, there was no light in them.

"Hello!" he said, "the lamp is not lighted yet. But it is dark. Can they have gone out?" He waited until ten o'clock. Until midnight. Until one in the morning. Not a light appeared in the windows of the third story, and no one entered the house.

He went away in a very gloomy frame of mind.

On the morrow,--for he only existed from morrow to morrow, there was, so to speak, no to-day for him,--on the morrow, he found no one at the Luxembourg; he had expected this. At dusk, he went to the house.

No light in the windows; the shades were drawn; the third floor was totally dark.

Marius rapped at the porte cochere, entered, and said to the porter:--

"The gentleman on the third floor?"

"Has moved away," replied the porter.

Marius reeled and said feebly:--

"How long ago?"

"Yesterday."

"Where is he living now?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"So he has not left his new address?"

"No."

And the porter, raising his eyes, recognized Marius.

"Come! So it's you!" said he; "but you are decidedly a spy then?"