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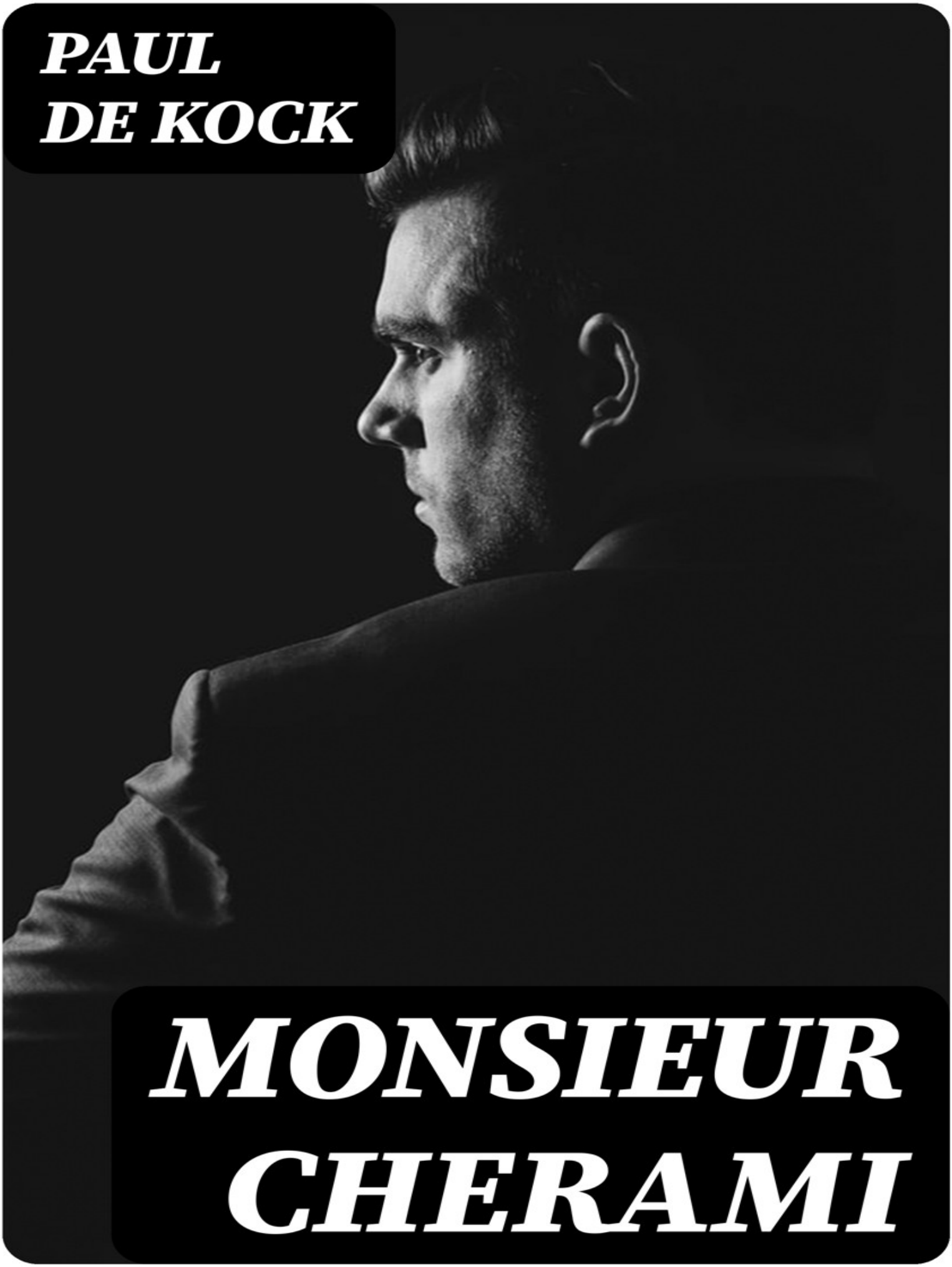

MONSIEUR CHERAMI

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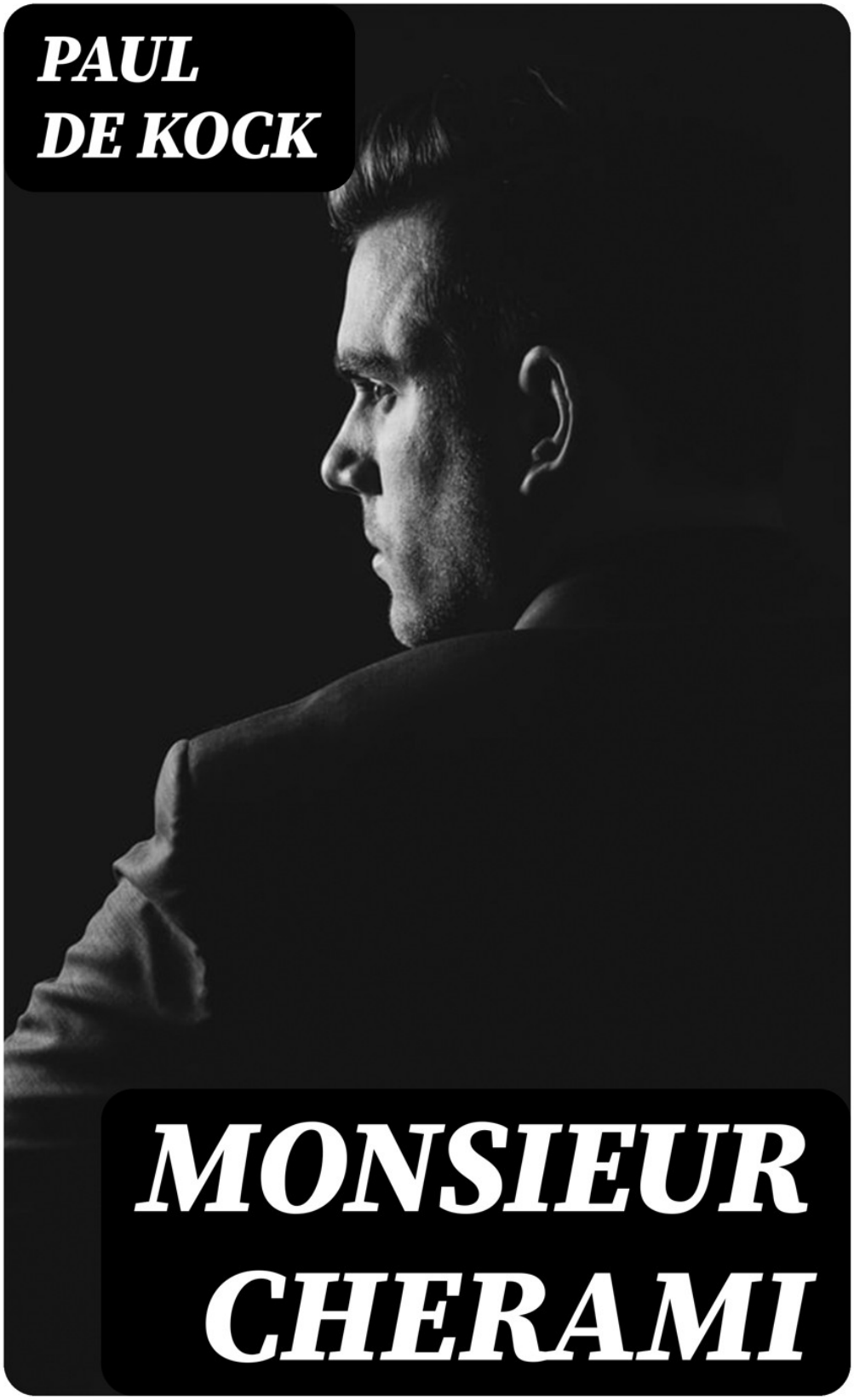

MONSIEUR CHERAMI

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I

AN OMNIBUS OFFICE

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The office in question stood near Porte Saint-Martin, at the corner of the Boulevard and Rue de Bondy, in the same building as the Deffieux restaurant, which was one of the most popular establishments in Paris in respect of wedding banquets; so that one who passed that way during the evening, and often after midnight, was likely to find the windows brilliantly lighted on the first or second floor, on the boulevard or on the square, and sometimes on both floors and on both sides; for it happened not infrequently that Deffieux entertained four or five wedding parties the same evening. That caused him no embarrassment, for he had room enough for all; indeed, I believe that, at a pinch, he would have set tables on the boulevard.

And there was dancing everywhere, on all sides: in this room, a fashionable ball; in that, a bourgeois affair; on the floor above, something not far removed from the plebeian; but it is likely that the latter was not the least enjoyable of the three, to those who took part in it; certainly, there was more noise made, at any rate.

What a home of pleasure! It seems to me that those who live in such places ought to be always in high spirits, and to have one leg in the air, ready to dance. That would be tiresome perhaps, but how can one avoid a longing to be merry when one has constantly before one's eyes a crowd of

merry folk, dancing, eating, drinking, singing, making soft eyes at one another, or shaking hands with all the warmth of the most sincere regard! Man is so expansive toward the end of a hearty meal! At such a time, we all attract and love one another.

You will tell me, perhaps, that these sentiments rarely outlast the time necessary for digestion; that even those joyous wedding feasts, during which the newly married pair look at and speak to each other with such a world of love in their eyes and of tender meaning in their voices, do not even wait till the end of the year before they become transformed into gloomy and depressing pictures. There are many people who have gone so far as to say that there are only two pleasant days in married life: that on which the husband and wife come together, and that on which they part; just as there are but two to the traveller: the day of departure, and the day of return.

But people say so many things that are not true! I have known many travellers who have enjoyed travelling; they were never in a hurry to return to their firesides.

I love to believe that it is the same with husbands and wives, and that there are some who enjoy the married state and have no desire to quit it.

But what, in heaven's name, am I chattering about, when we ought already to have entered the omnibus office, whence public conveyances started for Belleville, La Villette, Saint-Sulpice, Grenelle, and a multitude of other places, each farther from Paris than the last?

One could also purchase at the office in question small bottles of essence, flasks of perfumed vinegar, blacking, and

pomade. Commerce slides in everywhere! There is no harm in that. Commerce is the life of nations and of individuals. Everybody is engaged in commerce, even those who do not suspect it.

It was a beautiful day, in the middle of June, and a Saturday; three circumstances which could not fail to result in bringing a large crowd to the omnibus office, as well as to Deffieux's restaurant. That restaurant attracts me; I keep going back to it, in spite of myself. That is to say, that I go back to it, not in spite of myself, but with all my heart, for one is very comfortable there. Now, you know, or you do not know—but I should be very much surprised if you didn't,—I resume: you know that Saturday is the day on which more wedding feasts occur than on any other day in the week. Why? I fancy that I have already told you, somewhere or other; but, no matter! let us go on as if I had never told you. Saturday is the day before Sunday, and therein lies the whole secret; on Sunday, the government clerks do not go to their offices, and they are great fellows for marrying; on Sunday, the mechanics do not work, and the mechanic, too, is very fond of taking unto himself a housekeeper; lastly, Sunday is the day of rest, and people say that on the day after one's wedding one needs to rest.—Why so? Go to! do not ask me such questions! This much is certain—that the night between Saturday and Sunday is one of the finest nights in the week, even when there is no moon.

But, sapristi! here I am still at the restaurant!—You will end by thinking that I am much addicted to such places. Well, frankly, you are not mistaken. I frequent them not a little. I often hear people say: "Don't talk to me of restaurant

cooking; it's execrable!"—And those people think that nothing is good but beef stew, a leg of mutton, and roast beef. True classics those, in the matter of dishes. O Robert! O Brillat-Savarin! O Berchoux! Not for such as these did ye write and compound such delicious things! But be comforted, ye men of refined taste to whom we owe so much! there are still palates which relish your merit, which appreciate your skill, and which do not make faces at your succulent conceptions.

Again, Saturday, in summer, is the day which many people select for a trip to the country, to remain until Monday. On the day of which we write, therefore, the omnibuses were largely patronized; for everyone was in a great hurry to get to some railroad station, or to the point where they could take stages for some more or less distant destination.

So that there was a great crowd at the office by Porte Saint-Martin, and the clerk whose duty it was to distribute tickets did not know which way to turn; he had to be constantly on the alert, in order to avoid mistakes, especially as the travellers did not always confine themselves to asking for an exchange check or a number, but added irrelevant reflections, questions, and, in many cases, complaints.

"An exchange check for La Villette."

"Here you are, monsieur."

"When do we start?"

"When the 'bus comes, monsieur."

"Will it be long before it comes?"

"I don't think so, monsieur."

"A ticket for Belleville, please."

"Here it is, madame."

"Ah! mon Dieu! number seventy-five! Are there seventy-four ahead of me?"

"No, madame; we begin at fifty."

"Then there are twenty-five ahead of me?"

"Some of them haven't waited; they won't answer the call, and that puts the others ahead."

"A check for Saint-Sulpice."

"Here you are."

"Where's the 'bus?"

"It will come along."

"Oh! I've got to wait; that isn't very pleasant."

"*Dame*! monsieur, we can't have 'buses ready to start every minute."

"Why not? It would be much pleasanter for the passengers; but nothing is ever done to please the passengers; I must complain to the management."

"Complain, if you choose, monsieur; that's none of our business."

"Why, yes, it is your business, too; it ought to be your business, as you're the one we deal with. What sort of a way is that to answer? Is that the way you treat passengers here? It seems to me that you ought to show more respect."

The man who is going to La Villette approaches the clerk once more.

"Tell me, have I got time to go to the pastry-cook's to buy a cake?"

"Why, monsieur, no one interferes with your going.—Here's the Grenelle 'bus—passengers for Grenelle—take

your places!"

"I ask you if I have got time to go to get a cake before my 'bus comes?"

"Place des Victoires! All aboard for Place des Victoires!"

"Tell me about getting my cake!"

"Yes, monsieur; yes, yes, go to the pastry-cook's!"

And the clerk turns to his comrade, muttering:

"What a nuisance the fellow is with his cake!—Where should we be if everybody asked questions like that?"

A woman, of forty years or thereabout, who could not easily have found a compartment large enough to hold her, entered the office, leading two small boys, one of eight and one of four years, who were dressed like the little trained dogs that do tricks on the boulevards, and whose noses had evidently been overlooked because of their hurried departure from home.

A servant, laden with an enormous basket, from which protruded divers fishes' tails and bunches of leeks, and with an insecurely tied pasteboard box, bulging as to the sides and split in several places, sulkily followed her mistress, hitting everybody with her basket and box, without a word of apology, but apparently rather inclined to make wry faces at her victims.

"I want two seats for Romainville, monsieur—for me and my maid; my boys don't pay, because we hold them in our laps."

"Madame, this boy is certainly more than five; he must pay."

"But, monsieur, I tell you, I hold him in my lap; so we only fill one seat."

"That must annoy your neighbors."

"I don't suppose people ride in omnibuses to be comfortable!—Aristoloche, where are you going? Stay with your nurse, sir! Adelaide, do look out for the child; you know how fretful he is!"

Mademoiselle Adelaide, who looked more like a cook than a lady's maid, had gone with her packages and planted herself on a bench, between an old gentleman and an old woman, causing them to jump into the air as if they were elastic. The shock was so violent that the old woman shrieked, thinking that she had been electrified. The man, irritated beyond words by the manner in which the servant had plumped down beside him, and perceiving that the fishes' tails which protruded from her basket were caressing the sleeves of his coat, pushed the basket away with his elbow, exclaiming:

"What sort of way is that to sit down, throwing yourself onto people? Pay attention to what you are doing, mademoiselle, and be good enough to move your basket; I have no desire to have your fish rub against my sleeves and make them smell like poison."

"What! what do you say? What's the matter with the old fellow?"

"I tell you to move your basket; I don't want it under my nose."

"Where do you want me to put my basket, eh? On the floor perhaps, so that someone can steal it! Oh, yes! we should have a nice time in the country, where there's never anything to eat. What harm does the basket do you?"

"It smells like the devil!"

"Nonsense, it's yourself!"

"I pity the passengers in the 'bus with you; they'll have a fine time!"

"Shut up, you old cucumber! you'd like to be as fresh as my fish!"

The epithet old cucumber touched the old man to the quick; he got up and walked away, muttering:

"If you weren't a woman, I'd stuff your words down your throat!"

"Oh, indeed! you'd have plenty to do then, for I feel like saying a good deal more to you."

"But, Adelaide, I beg you, look out for Aristoloche; he's going out of the office."

"Well, I can't help it, madame; I can't attend to everything; I have quite enough to do with your box and your basket—and with talking back to this veteran."

"Veteran! I believe that you had the face to call me *veteran!*"

"La Villette—all aboard!—Monsieur, you're for La Villette; hurry up!"

These words were addressed to the old man who was disputing with Adelaide, and who, as he left, bestowed a crushing glance on the servant, who laughed in his face and administered a cuff to young Aristoloche, the child of four, who, despite his mamma's orders, persisted in trying to leave the office.

II

A BLONDE AND A BRUNETTE

"Well, monsieur," said the corpulent dame, pulling over her eldest son's eyes a small gray felt hat, with a Henri IV crown, and surrounded on all sides by feathers which drooped like palm-leaves; "we can get tickets for Romainville, I hope?"

"We don't sell tickets for Romainville, madame, but for Belleville; there you'll find the Romainville stage."

"Oh! you don't sell tickets for Romainville here; that's very unpleasant. Shall we have to pay again when we change?"

"Yes, madame; but if you take checks, it will be only four sous twenty centimes."

"For each?"

"To be sure."

"That's very dear. Narcisse, do pull your hat down, or you'll lose it; you know it fell off just now on the boulevard, and somebody almost stepped on it; your fine Henri IV hat is very pretty, you know."

"I hate it; the feathers make me squint."

"Hold your tongue, bad boy; your aunt bought that hat for you; you won't get another for two years!"

"Take off the feathers, then!"

"Hush! you don't deserve to be so fine!"

"Fine! oh, yes! all the boys make fun of me and say I look like a *chienlit*."[A]

"They're little villains! They say that from envy, for they'd like right well to have a hat like yours.—Say, monsieur, can you promise me a seat in the other 'bus?"

"Oh! I can't promise you; but if there's no room in that, there's sure to be in the next one."

"Do they start often?"

"Every twenty minutes."

"Wait twenty minutes! why, that's horrible! Oh! how sorry I am I promised my aunt to dine with her to-day!"

"Especially," muttered the servant, "as we have to carry our own dinner when we dine with her.—A pretty kind of invitation! She don't ruin herself giving dinner parties!"

"Here, give me two tickets for Belleville."

"Here they are, madame."

"Come here, Aristoloche; come here this minute! Oh! how these children do torment me! They're like little snakes!"

"All aboard for Belleville!"

"Belleville, why that's ours! Take Aristoloche's hand, Adelaide."

"That's very convenient, when I have a basket and a box already!"

But before the stout woman, with her servant and the two children, had left the office, the Belleville omnibus had started off; there was but one vacant seat, and twenty people were waiting for it. You should have seen the disappointment depicted on all those faces then. Several persons, tired of waiting, decided to walk. Others remained in the square; but the majority returned to the office, where all the benches were already filled. These public carriages are surely an excellent invention; but let us admit that they are not equal to the most modest of char-à-bancs, which is entirely at your service, even when you only hire it.

Finding no place to sit inside the office, the dame with the little boys seated herself and them on a bench outside. As for the servant, she succeeded in finding room inside; the fish in her basket was of much assistance to her in inducing others to make room; there was a general rush to get as far away from her as possible.

The party with the cake returned, and ran up to the clerk.

"Well! isn't it about time for us to start?"

"Where are you going, monsieur?"

"You know perfectly well—to La Villette."

"The 'bus started three minutes ago."

"What! it didn't wait for me! I asked you if I had time to go to buy a cake, and you said *yes*. You ought to have said *no*, if I hadn't."

"You shouldn't have been so long about it, monsieur."

"I thought there was a pastry-cook on Carré Saint-Martin, but I couldn't find anything but pork-shops."

"You can take the next 'bus."

"How soon does it start?"

"In seven minutes."

"Then I've got time to go to drink a glass of beer to wash down my cake. Cafés aren't like pastry-cooks—you can find them anywhere."

"Be careful, monsieur; seven minutes at the outside."

"You can keep it waiting a minute if I'm not here."

"They never wait, monsieur."

Two rather attractive young women entered the office; they were modestly dressed, and their hats were so small, and set so far back on their heads, that they looked to be nothing more than caps. Their general appearance was that

of grisettes. Some writers who study present-day manners in their studies, or at table in a café, claim that there are no grisettes now; but I assure you that that is not true; if you do not find any, it is because you have not made a thorough search. There will always be grisettes in Paris, where the more or less flighty young work-girl of the Latin quarter does not pass at one bound from her modest chamber to the boudoir of a kept mistress.

One of the young women who entered the omnibus office was a brunette, with a retroussé nose, defiant eye, smiling mouth, teeth a little too far apart—but that is better than having false teeth; the other was a blonde, one of those blondes who have received a light touch of fire; but that color never yet prevented a woman from being pretty. If you doubt what I say, go to England or Scotland; auburn-haired women are in the majority there, and, as a general rule, they are very fascinating. The blonde grisette was pretty; but she had a sort of stupid expression which might at first sight pass for modesty; but on talking with her, you soon discovered that it was really stupidity; therein she formed a striking contrast to her companion, who had a bright, wide-awake manner.

"Monsieur," said the brunette, addressing the clerk, "have you any seats for Belleville?"

"You must take your turn, mademoiselle."

"But will our turn be long in coming?"

"Not very; a good many people have gone."

In truth, the odor exhaled by the whiting stuffed into Mademoiselle Adelaide's basket, and the fear of having to

travel with her, had led many persons to start for their destinations on foot.

"Here, mesdemoiselles, take these two tickets; your turn will come."

"Say, Laurette, suppose we walk?" said the pretty blonde.

"Thanks, and tire ourselves out, and arrive all drenched—what fun! For my part, I don't like to sweat; it uncurls my hair. Mon Dieu! what a crowd! It's all the rage now; no one is willing to go on foot, and there aren't enough 'buses."

"Belleville! Faubourg du Temple!"

"Ah! here it is! here it is!"

Further evolutions performed by the stout woman, the two boys, and the servant, but with no greater success; there were four vacant seats, but there were other numbers before theirs. The two girls also came forward.

"There's no more room, except on top," said the conductor.

"All right! we don't care; we'll go on top."

"Pardon! ladies are not allowed there."—And the conductor added, with a wink: "It isn't my fault, you know; nothing would suit me better."

"I believe you," said a man in a blouse; "if women were allowed to climb up there, there's lots of men who would pay to be conductors."

"Why do they say that?" the blonde asked her companion; "what good would it do the conductors to have women ride in the three-sou seats?"

"Oh! what a fool you are, Lucie! What! don't you understand?"

"Why, no."

"Oh! you make me weary."

"Never mind; tell me why?"

"My dear girl, it's a matter of the point of view; that's all."

III

THE YOUNG MAN FROM PLACE CADET

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An awkward, loutish youth entered the office.

"Place Cadet, monsieur?"

"This isn't the office; it's out on the boulevard, at the left, just at the corner."

"Exceedingly obliged; will there be a seat?"

"How do you expect us to know, when this isn't the office?"

"Oh! of course; and that is where I must go for a number? Suppose you give me one, wouldn't that amount to the same thing?"

"Why, no, monsieur; the 'bus doesn't stop here."

"The 'bus is what I want to go on."

"You can go on it or under it; it's none of our affair."

"Do you mean that one can ride underneath?"

The clerk concluded to turn his back on the stupid idiot who asked such questions. Mademoiselle Laurette, having overheard the dialogue, burst out laughing, as she said:

"I'd have sent that fellow to the deuce in short measure. What a booby! You must need a good stock of patience to answer all those questions!"

"Ah! mademoiselle, if you were employed in an omnibus office, you'd hear many things like that!"

"Really! do you mean to say that there are others like him in Paris?"

"There are everywhere, mademoiselle."

Meanwhile, the individual who wished to go to Place Cadet had left the office; then he halted on the square, looking about him with a confused air. He spied the stout woman sitting on a bench, between Messieurs Narcisse and Aristoloche, one of whom was trying all the time to push away the feathers that adorned the front of his hat, while the other confined his energies to persistently stuffing one of his fingers into his nose. Our friend went up to the dame and said, touching his hat:

"A ticket for Place Cadet, madame, if you please."

"Do you take me for an omnibus clerk, monsieur?" replied the dame, sourly; "can't you go to the office?"

"Pardon me, madame; I just went there, and they told me to apply on the left, in a corner."

"Well, monsieur, am I a corner, I should like to know?"

"*Dame!* I don't know; they told me to go to the left; I don't see the office; I don't see the 'bus."

And the youth returned to the office he had just left, crying:

"Where is that place where you get tickets for Place Cadet? I can't find it; can't you come and show me the way?"

"Well, this caps the climax! If we had to act as guides for everybody who goes astray, then there would have to be a corps of messengers attached to the office.—Over yonder, I

told you, monsieur; on the other side of Boulevard Saint-Denis."

"What! have I got to go all the way to Saint-Denis to get to Place Cadet?"

"La Villette! all aboard for La Villette!"

All those who were bound for that destination hurried from the office, and in the confusion jostled the youth who wished to go to Place Cadet, and who persisted in remaining in the office where he had no business, looking at everybody as if he were disposed to weep.

"Why do you stay here, monsieur," inquired Mademoiselle Laurette, "when they told you to go to the office on Boulevard Saint-Denis?"

"I don't know Boulevard Saint-Denis, mademoiselle; and I am afraid of losing my way."

"The trouble is that you ought not to have been let go out alone; some parents are very imprudent! I'll tell you what you ought to do: go to one of the messengers over by Porte Saint-Martin; take his arm and give him ten sous, and he'll take you to Place Cadet; he'll carry you even, if you're tired."

"Ten sous! oh! that's too much. You're not going to Place Cadet, are you, mademoiselle?"

"Oh! no, monsieur; we're going to the country."

"Ah! do the omnibuses take people to the country too?"

"They take you everywhere, monsieur."

"Really! I have such a longing to see the sea; do the omnibuses give transfer checks for the seashore?"

"You have only to ask, and you'll find out."

The tall clown was on the point of returning to the clerks, but he was pushed aside by the man who had gone to get a

glass of beer, and who returned to the office with a joyous air, saying:

"Ah! this time I think I haven't been long; is my La Villette 'bus coming?"

"La Villette!—it's just started, monsieur."

"Oh! that is too much. Why couldn't you make it wait?"

"They never wait, monsieur."

"When will there be another one now?"

"In about ten minutes."

"Oh! then I have time enough to get a cup of coffee—and a glass of liqueur to wash down the beer."

With that, he returned to the café, followed by the tall youth, who shouted to him from afar:

"Monsieur, a ticket for Place Cadet?"

IV

ONLOOKERS AND LOITERERS

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A line of carriages, with white-gloved coachmen, semi-bourgeois equipages, had halted on the square in front of the restaurant; still another wedding party intending to banquet at Deffieux's.

A number of people had gathered in front of the door, to watch the bridal couple enter. Inquisitive folk abound in Paris; perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they abound everywhere. Why this general desire to see a bride, when she has not as yet performed all the duties which that title devolves upon her? Is it simply to see whether she is

pretty, and to read upon her features whether or not she is looking forward joyfully to becoming a wife? This is a simple question that we ask, but we will not undertake to answer it.

Among the persons who had halted there, some in passing, others coming from the omnibus office, others on the way there, was a tall man, in the neighborhood of forty-five years, standing very straight, even bending back a little from the hips, with head erect, nose in air, and his hat on one side, in true roistering style.

This person, whose chestnut hair was beginning to be sprinkled with gray, had very irregular features. His eyes were small and deep-set, of a pale green shade, but full of fire and animation. His nose was crooked, slightly turned up, and might almost have been called flat. His mouth was large, but his teeth were fine, and not one was missing; so that his smile was not unattractive, especially as he was not over lavish of it. His chin retreated slightly, his cheek-bones, as a contrast, were exceedingly prominent; his complexion was high-colored and blotched, although he was thin both in body and face. With this unpromising exterior, my gentleman seemed none the less to consider himself an Apollo. He wore bushy mutton-chop whiskers, which almost met in the middle of his chin, leaving between them only a very narrow space, cleanly shaven, which he often caressed with affection, and which he called his dimple. His manners denoted no less self-assurance than familiarity with the world; and they would even have borne some traces of refinement, had he not adopted a sort of mincing gait not unlike that of a drum-major; but, instead of a great baton, this gentleman had a slender switch, curved at the top,

which seemed to have been painted and gilded long before, but had lost a large part of its decoration. It was a very pliable switch, with which he constantly tapped his trousers-legs.

His costume did not indicate the dandy, although its wearer affected the manners of one. His linen trousers, of a very large check, seemed to have been cut from the skirt of some concierge. His waistcoat was also of a check pattern, but its colors did not harmonize at all with those of the trousers; nothing was wanting except the plaid to give him altogether the aspect of a Scotch Highlander; but, instead of the plaid, he wore a nut-brown frock-coat, with ample skirts, which he often left unbuttoned the better to display his slender figure, and in which he sometimes encased himself hermetically, as if it were a cloak. It is needless to say that this costume was entirely lacking in freshness.

This personage, who had a habit of speaking always in a very loud tone, so that everybody could hear what he said and presumably be struck with admiration by his wit,—a method of attracting attention which enables you to divine instantly the sort of man with whom you have to do—this personage pushed and jostled some of the loiterers, exclaiming:

"What's all this? what's all this? a wedding party, eh? Mon Dieu! is a wedding party such a very strange thing that everybody must stop and push and crowd, to see the couple? Triple idiots of Parisians! On my word, one would think they had never seen such a thing before!"

"What's that! what makes you push me so hard to get my place, if there's nothing to look at?" said a youngster in a

blouse, whom the other had pushed away with some violence.

"Who is it that presumes to speak to me? God forgive me! I believe that this little turnspit dares to complain! Look out that I don't teach you whom you are talking to!"

"In the first place, I ain't a turnspit; do you hear, you long flag-pole?"

That epithet caused the gentleman in the Scotch nether garments to quiver with rage; he threw himself back and raised his cane, and, in the course of that evolution, trod on the feet of an old woman who stood behind him leading a small dog, which was doing its best to avoid being present at the arrival of the wedding party.

"Ah! monsieur, take care, for heaven's sake! you're treading on me. A little more, and you'd have crushed Abdallah!"

"Very sorry, madame; but I have no eyes in my back. Ah! the rascal who had the effrontery to reply to me has fled. I will not chase him, because he's only a child; if he had been a man, he'd have felt my switch on his shoulders before this."

"Monsieur, do take care; Abdallah is under your feet!"

"What's that! what, in God's name, is this Abdallah of yours, madame?"

"My dear little King Charles.—Come here, come, you runaway!"

"That beast a King Charles? He's a very ugly water-spaniel, and I wouldn't give two sous for him. How stupid some people are with their dogs! Ah! there's the bride, no doubt.—Peste! how lightly we jump down! Very good! I have

my cue. She'll wear the breeches; I can see that at a glance."

A young woman, in the traditional bridal costume, had, in fact, alighted from one of the carriages; she did not wait for the arm which a stout, chubby-faced papa, already perspiring profusely, who, however, was not one of the groomsmen, was preparing to offer her.

The bride was apparently about twenty years of age; she was short and plump, with light hair, a white skin, and a rosy complexion; she was not a beauty, but her face was piquant and attractive, with a pleasant smile of the sort that almost always denotes a quick wit; but smiles do not invariably fulfil their promises.

The stout papa, who had come forward too late to assist the bride to alight from her carriage, was also too late for another lady who followed her; and he missed a third likewise, because he was very busily occupied in wiping the perspiration from his brow.

The gentleman with the check trousers, having turned his eyes upon the stout man, rushed toward the carriage, exclaiming:

"Pardieu! I am not mistaken, it's my good Blanquette! Dear Monsieur Blanquette! Holà, there! I say, Père Blanquette! Holà! is it possible that you don't know your friends? Just turn your eyes this way!"

The stout papa, being thus noisily addressed, ceased to wipe his brow, and, looking in the direction of the crowd, speedily distinguished the person who had hailed him. Thereupon his face assumed an expression which denoted

annoyance rather than pleasure, and he answered his interlocutor's greetings with cold and constrained courtesy.

"Oh! good-day, Monsieur Cherami—glad to see you."

"So you're of the wedding party, Papa Blanquette?—All in full dress, eh? You were in the same carriage with the bride."

"Well, it would be a strange thing if I wasn't of the party, when it's my nephew who's being married!"

"Your nephew? Oho! then I understand; I have my cue. What! that dear little Adolphe—who never wanted to do anything—who didn't take to anything, as I remember."

"But he has taken to marriage very readily.—Besides, Adolphe is a big fellow now."

"What! it is your nephew whose wedding you are celebrating, and I did not know it? Such an old friend as I am, too—for you know, Papa Blanquette, how devoted I am to you! You have seen me in an emergency; and you let me know nothing about it, and I am not invited to the wedding! Do you know, Monsieur Blanquette, that I might justly be offended by such actions, if I were sensitive? But I am not—I leave that foible to idiots."

For some moments, the stout man had been listening with but one ear to the individual whose name we now know. The bridegroom's uncle was watching the carriages, and, another one having taken the place of that from which the bride had alighted, he was determined not to be behindhand again in offering his hand to the ladies; so he hurried to the door, leaving Monsieur Cherami still talking, and confined himself to an inclination of the head as he muttered:

"Excuse me, monsieur; but I have no time; there are some ladies whom I must assist—I cannot talk any longer."

Monsieur Cherami compressed his lips, frowned, and shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"Ah! this is your way of being polite, is it, you old numskull! He puts on airs because he's made a little money in Elbeuf broadcloth; as if that were such a wonderful thing! And to think that I have sent him more than fifty customers, —my tailor, among others!—and he acts as if he hardly knew me! All because he has money! a lot of merit in that! for who hasn't money now? It has become so common that persons of distinction don't want it."

"In that case, I fancy that tall, lanky fellow must be very distinguished!" whispered Mademoiselle Laurette to her friend; for the two girls had left the omnibus office to see the wedding party, and they were near enough to Monsieur Cherami to hear what he said. That was an easy matter, by the way, even at a distance, for our friend talked as *Mangin* does when he is describing his drawings in public.

Meanwhile, the four wedding carriages had discharged their freights, who had entered the restaurant; then the carriages drove away, and the bystanders dispersed, except those who had business at the omnibus office.

V

THE CAPUCINE FAMILY

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Monsieur Cherami remained on the square, staring at the porte cochère of the restaurant, and tapping his legs with his switch, with a nervous, jerky movement; he seemed undecided as to the course he had better pursue, and muttered, quite loud enough, however, to be overheard:

"I don't know what restrains me; I am tempted to join that wedding party; I have a perfect right to force myself on that crowd. If I were dressed, I'd do it. On my word of honor, I'd do it! not that I care so much for the banquet; I know what a feast is; I've had a hand in a few of them in my time, God knows! and some that this one can't hold a candle to. Sapristi! what is this that I feel against my legs?"

"Don't move, monsieur, I beg you! Abdallah's string has got tangled round your legs; I'll untwist it."

"Corbleu! madame, that's a most insufferable dog of yours! When you're leading a dog, you shouldn't give him so much string."

The old woman, having succeeded in disentangling her spaniel from our friend's legs, concluded to take Abdallah in her arms, then went away, glaring fiercely at all those in her neighborhood.

But Monsieur Cherami, being rid of the dog, turned about and spied the stout woman and the two small boys, who were still awaiting an opportunity to go to Belleville. Thereupon he exclaimed anew, saluting profusely, and shouting so loud that he attracted the attention of everybody within hearing:

"God bless me! do I see Madame Capucine? What a fortunate meeting! I didn't expect such good fortune. What!