

must not find us together. — You call yourself my master, friend Selicour! Look out — — Your disciple is making progress, and, before this very evening, you shall learn a thing or two from him. (*Exeunt.*)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Mrs. Belmont and Charlotte.

Mrs. Belmont. Stay here, Charlotte. We have a word to say to one another, before the company arrives — Tell me, my child, what do you think of Mr. Selicour?

Charlotte. I, mamma?

Mrs. Belmont. Yes, you!

Charlotte. Well, he appears to be a very pleasant, well deserving, worthy man.

Mrs. Belmont. I am glad to hear that! I am rejoiced, my child, that you have such a good opinion of him — for, if your father and myself can in any way influence your heart, Mr. Selicour will soon be your husband!

Charlotte (*surprised*). My husband! —

Mrs. Belmont. Does that astonish you?

Charlotte. Mr. Selicour?

Mrs. Belmont. We do not think we can better provide for you.

Charlotte. From your hands and my dear father's, I will gladly accept a husband — but you will consider me to be very capricious, dear grand-

mamma! I don't know — this Mr. Selicour, whom I highly esteem — to whom I do not at all object — I don't know, how it is — when I think of him as my husband, I feel in the depth of my heart a sort of —

Mrs. Belmont. I hope not of aversion?

Charlotte. I might even call it horror. I know that I wrong him, but I really can't get over it. — My feeling is more that of fear than of love.

Mrs. Belmont. All right! This fear we know, my child!

Charlotte. No, listen to me! —

Mrs. Belmont. A pleasing maidenly timidity! I must know that, believe me. — Have I not also been young once? — Besides, this match pleases your family. A man who knows everything — a man of taste — of sound judgment — and such a courteous, tried friend. — In all the houses, too, he is a most welcome guest. If he were not so much distressed just now about his mother, he would have promised me a romance for you this evening — for he can do anything, and would like to please you in everything, however trifling. — But I hear him coming! He never keeps one waiting. Indeed, there is not his equal.

SCENE II.

Selicour to the former.

Selicour. You asked me to-day for a song full of feeling and tenderness! I have done my best, Madam! — and I beg to lay it at your feet.

Mrs. Belmont. How, Mr. Selicour? You have

finished it already? — Indeed, I was afraid the bad news —

Selicour. What news?

Mrs. Belmont. Of your mother?

Selicour. Of my mother! — Yes — I — I have just received a letter from her — wherein she tells me that at last she has —

Mrs. Belmont. That she has received the thousand thalers — Well, I am glad of it —

Selicour. Could I, otherwise, have been in a proper frame of mind? — But thank Heaven! This great weight is now off my heart, and, in the first burst of joy, I composed these strophes which I have the honour to present to you.

Mrs. Belmont (*to Charlotte*). You would have pitied him, if you had seen him — It was then that I got an insight into his excellent heart. Mr. Selicour, I love your romance, even before I have read it.

SCENE III.

The same. Narbonne.

Narbonne. Is Selicour with you? Indeed, dear mother, you keep him from more important business. — He has so many more important things to attend to, and you charge him with unnecessary commissions.

Mrs. Belmont. See, see, my son! — Does it not seem as if he were getting displeased?

Narbonne. What is to become of the essay, which is indeed so important and pressing?

Selicour. The essay is done. Here it is.

Narbonne. What, already finished?

Selicour. And I beg you to believe that I have spared neither time nor trouble about it.

Narbonne. But how is that possible?

Selicour. The abuses of the late government have but too often grieved my heart — I could not content myself with idly lamenting them. I committed my displeasure, my censure, and my plans of reform to paper, and so it happens that the essay you demanded of me has been privately finished by me some time ago. — Nor, indeed, should I have been wanting in courage to appear with it in public, had not the government at last changed its course of its own account, and selected in you the man who will set everything right again. — Now is the time to make a public use of these papers. — It only required arranging them properly, and that was done in a few moments.

Mrs. Belmont. Well, my son! You may be satisfied, I think — Mr. Selicour has fulfilled your wish, before he knew it; he has worked for you in advance, and you meet one another half-way by the luckiest chance possible —

Narbonne. I see with pleasure that we are of one and the same opinion. — Give it me, Mr. Selicour! I will this very evening forward the essay to the proper quarter.

Selicour (*to himself*). Everything goes on well. — Now to get rid of this Firmin, who is in my way — (*Aloud*) Will you pardon me, Mr. de Narbonne? — I am sorry to mention it — but I cannot help fearing lest the accusation of Mr. La Roche this morning should nevertheless have made some impression upon you.

Narbonne. Not the slightest.

Selicour. I was afraid it might have. — After all I see, this La Roche has already given my post to another. —

Narbonne. How?

Selicour. I have always thought very well of Mr. Firmin, but, I confess — I begin at last to have my doubts about him.

Narbonne. How? But this very morning you praised to me his good nature.

Selicour. Is even the most good-natured to be trusted up to a certain point? I see myself surrounded by enemies. They are laying snares for me. —

Narbonne. You do Mr. Firmin injustice. I know him better, and I answer for him.

Selicour. I wish I could think the same of him.

Narbonne. The disgraceful ingratitude of this La Roche must, of course, make you suspicious. But if you have even the shadow of a doubt regarding Mr. Firmin, you will immediately have an opportunity of correcting your error.

Selicour. How so?

Narbonne. He will shortly be here himself.

Selicour. Mr. Firmin — here?

Narbonne. Yes. — I could not deny myself the pleasure. I went to see him!

Selicour. You saw him! Capital!

Narbonne. He and his son dine with us this evening.

Selicour. Dine here! — His son! Capital!

Mrs. Belmont and Charlotte. Charles Firmin?

Narbonne. The young officer, whose accomplishments you have so often and so highly spoken

to me about. — I have invited father and son to dine with us.

Mrs. Belmont. I shall welcome them with pleasure.

Narbonne (*to Selicour*). You do not object to it, I hope?

Selicour. I beg your pardon — quite the contrary.

Mrs. Belmont. I am already prepossessed in favour of the father for the sake of his son. And what does our Charlotte say to it?

Charlotte. I, mamma — I am quite of your opinion.

Narbonne. Then you can explain yourself quite openly to one another.

Selicour. Oh, that is not necessary — not in the least. — To confess it candidly — I have always considered Mr. Firmin to be the most honourable of men, and if I wronged him for a moment, I acknowledge my mistake with pleasure. — For my part, I am convinced that he is my friend.

Narbonne. He has shown it! He speaks of you with high esteem. — It is true I have only to-day made his acquaintance, but certainly he deserves —

Selicour (*interrupting him*). All those praises that I have, as you know, but lately bestowed upon him. That is my way! My heart knows nothing of envy!

Narbonne. He unites a clear head with an excellent heart, and no man can be freer from ambition than he is. I'll bet he is capable of relinquishing to another the whole merit of what he himself has done.

Selicour. Do you think so?

Narbonne. He is the man to do it!

Mrs. Belmont. His son might think differently on this point.

Charlotte. Yes, of course, he is a young fiery poet, who won't stand a joke on this head.

Selicour. Do you think he would give up the glory of his labour to another?

Charlotte. I doubt it very much!

Narbonne. I like this spirit in a young warrior.

Selicour. Oh certainly, that is promising!

Narbonne. Each being put in his right place, they will both be of excellent service.

Selicour. It is really most admirable how you select able men!

Narbonne. That is my duty. (*He speaks to his daughter.*)

Selicour. That's it! (*To Mrs. Belmont, aside.*) One word, Madam! — One might think you kept me from my professional duties. — If, therefore, my poem should be sung this evening, don't mention my name!

Mrs. Belmont. If you don't wish it, I won't.

Selicour. Yes — it occurs to me. — Now, suppose I were, in order to ensure greater safety, to prevail upon one of the company to acknowledge himself to be the author. —

Mrs. Belmont. How? You could relinquish the glory of it to another?

Selicour. Pooh! that is a trifle! (*Enter both Firmins.*)

Charlotte (*perceiving them, eagerly*). There they are coming!

SCENE IV.

The same. Both Firmins.

Narbonne (*going towards them*). I have been expecting you for some time, gentlemen! — come in, pray! draw nearer! You are heartily welcome! Here, Mr. Firmin, my mother, and here my daughter, — you are no stranger in my family.

Mrs. Belmont (*to Charles Firmin*). I had not expected to see you here in Paris; it is very pleasant to meet with dear friends so unexpectedly.

Charles. This word has a high value for me. (*To Charlotte.*) You have left your aunt in good health, I hope?

Charlotte. Yes, Mr. Firmin!

Charles. Those were happy days that I spent at your house. — There it was, Miss Charlotte —

Narbonne (*to Firmin the father*). Let the young people renew their acquaintance. — Well, Mr. Firmin! there is Selicour!

Selicour (*to Firmin*). Indeed — I am — I cannot tell you how delighted I am to see you at Mr. de Narbonne's.

Narbonne. You are both the men to do justice to one another. (*To Firmin.*) He has something on his heart, I wish you, gentlemen, to explain yourselves to one another.

Selicour. Oh, not at all! Not at all! Mr. Firmin knows me to be his friend.

Narbonne. And be assured, he is yours too. I wish you had heard how warmly he took your part this very day. Certainly this La Roche has again —

Selicour. But what in the world has excited La Roche so much against me?

Narbonne. This La Roche is not my man — at least, I have a bad opinion of his character.

Firmin. You do him injustice. I have spoken against him to-day, but now I must defend him.

Selicour. It is not at all necessary. I esteem him, I know his good heart, and his whims too. — He may, for aught I care, vilify my character all over the world, provided *you* don't believe him! — You see we have done. — Our quarrel is settled, it needs no further explanation.

Mrs. Belmont. Well, won't you take seats, gentlemen?

Selicour (*to Charles Firmin*). The poem is already presented to the ladies.

Charles. Indeed?

Selicour. The old mamma has it, and I have not concealed from her the author's name. (*Taking Mrs. Belmont aside.*) Do you know what I have done?

Mrs. Belmont. Well!

Selicour. Young Firmin — you know he occupies himself with writing verses.

Mrs. Belmont. Yes! — Well!

Selicour. I have persuaded him to acknowledge himself to be the author of the song — he agrees to do so!

Mrs. Belmont. He agrees to do so? I believe that!

Selicour. Mind, you don't expose me by telling the truth.

Narbonne. But until our guests come, my dear mother, let us think of something to talk about. —

I won't ask you to play at cards, we can employ our time much better.

Firmin. Please to command.

Charles. It will depend upon Madam.

Charlotte. Are you still fond of music, Mr. Firmin?

Narbonne. Well, indeed, you don't sing badly — let us hear something. — Have you not a new song to give us?

Charles. If it does not give Miss Charlotte too much trouble. —

Charlotte. Somebody here has just handed to me some verses.

Narbonne. Well, with your permission I shall in the meantime read the essay of our friend.

Selicour. But don't we disturb you, Mr. de Narbonne?

Narbonne. Not at all! I am accustomed to work amidst the greatest noise, and here I have merely to read something! (*He goes to the opposite side where he sits down.*)

Selicour. But if you would rather —

Narbonne. Excuse me, but it admits of no delay. Duty before everything.

Mrs. Belmont. Let us leave him alone then, if he prefers it, and begin our song. (*All sitting down, Charlotte at one end, Mrs. Belmont beside Charlotte, Selicour between Mrs. Belmont and Charles, and the elder Firmin beside the latter.*)

Charlotte. The melody is equally well chosen, I see.

Mrs. Belmont. The author is not far off — I can see him without my spectacles.

Selicour (*low to Mrs. Belmont*). Don't betray

me. — (*To Charles Firmin.*) That is meant for you, my dear sir!

Charlotte. For him? How?

Firmin. Is it true, Charles? Are you —

Selicour. He is the author.

Charlotte (*to her grandmother*). How? Mr. Firmin is the author?

Mrs. Belmont (*aloud*). Yes! — (*Secretly.*) Don't mention the true author, please.

Charlotte. Why not?

Mrs. Belmont. For various reasons. (*To Selicour.*) Won't you accompany Charlotte?

Selicour. With pleasure.

Firmin (*peevishly to his son*). No doubt some careless piece of scribbling again — but some fellows *must* be rhymesters —

Charles. But, dear father, hear first, and then judge!

Charlotte (*singing*).

At the spring the boy was sitting
Winding flowers into wreaths,
And he saw them carried downward,
Floating on the rippling waves.
And thus all my days are fleeting
Like the spring in restless haste,
And my youth is passing swiftly
Like the wreaths that quickly waste.

Mrs. Belmont (*looking at Selicour*). This beginning is very promising!

Selicour (*pointing towards Charles Firmin*). The compliment belongs to this gentleman.

Mrs. Belmont. Well! well! I understand.

Firmin. The thought is trivial, common.

Charles. But it is true.

Narbonne (*on the opposite side, occupied in reading the essay*). The introductory remarks are very good, and at once excite attention.

Charlotte (*again singing*).

Ask not why I'm sadly morning
In the budding time of life;
All is joyous, blithe, and hopeful
When the flow'rs of spring revive.
But these thousand lusty voices
Of kind nature, roused from sleep,
Wake within my feeling bosom
Nought but sorrow, keen and deep.

Mrs. Belmont. Charming!

Firmin. Not bad.

Selicour (*to Charles Firmin*). You see how they are all admiring you.

Narbonne (*reading*). Splendidly worked out in detail, and energetically stated. Just read with me, Mr. Firmin! (*Firmin goes up to the minister, and reads over his shoulder.*)

Mrs. Belmont. Quite heavenly!

Selicour (*going up to Narbonne*). But I am indebted to Mr. Firmin for a great deal, a very great deal indeed, in the drawing up of these statements. (*Goes to the other side, between Charles Firmin and Mrs. Belmont, without, however, losing sight of the other group.*)

Charlotte (*again singing*).

Joy to me is unavailing
Which the fairest spring imparts.
One alone I'm always seeking,
She is near, and ever far.
I hold out my arms with longing
To the phantom I adore,
But alas! I cannot reach it,
And my heart is ever sore.

Come to me, my charming angel,
Leave thy castle's proud abode.
Flowers, which the spring is bearing,
I will scatter on thy road.
Hark! the grove with songs resounding,
And the spring is rippling fair!
Room is in the smallest cottage
For a happy loving pair.

Mrs. Belmont. How touching the closing lines are! — The dear child has been quite moved by them.

Charlotte. Yes, whoever it be that wrote this poem, it has flowed from a heart that knows true love!

Selicour (*bowing to Charlotte*). This is highly flattering praise.

Charles. What? He expresses his gratitude —

Selicour (*quickly turning round to Charles Firmin*). Don't you think so too, my dear friend?

Mrs. Belmont. I am quite enraptured by it. —

Selicour (*bowing towards Mrs. Belmont*). You are too kind, Madam!

Charles. How am I to understand that?

Selicour (*just as quick to Charles Firmin again*). Well! Did I not tell you? You have obtained a perfect victory.

Charles. Is he making a fool of me?

Narbonne. The essay is excellent! quite excellent!

Selicour (*to Firmin the father*). You see I have been closely following your ideas in every particular.

Firmin (*laughing*). I must confess I perceive something like it.

Charlotte. I don't know to which of the two gentlemen —

Selicour (*to Charlotte, pointing to Charles Firmin*). A sweet triumph for the author!

Narbonne (*folding up the essay*). A perfect masterpiece, indeed!

Selicour (*bowing towards Narbonne*). Far too much honour!

Mrs. Belmont (*repeating the last strophe*).

Hark! the grove with songs resounding,

And the spring is rippling fair!

Room is in the smallest cottage

For a happy loving pair.

— Beautiful! heavenly! let him resist who can. —
Selicour, it is settled! You marry my Charlotte!

Charles. Good Heavens!

Charlotte. What do I hear!

Narbonne (*rising*). I know but few essays that are so excellent — **Selicour**, you are ambassador!

Charles. Good gracious!

Narbonne. Yes you *are*! I answer for your appointment! Whoever could write *that* must be an honest man, and a man of great genius.

Selicour. But allow me — I don't know if I can accept it — content with my present lot —

Narbonne. You must tear yourself away from anything, if the state requires you elsewhere.

Selicour. Might I not, at least, take Mr. Firmin with me as my secretary?

Firmin. What are you thinking of? Me? Me as your secretary?

Selicour. Yes, Mr. Firmin, I really want you very much.

Charles. That I believe.

Narbonne. We shall see about that! Well! How did the music go off?

Selicour. Miss Charlotte's singing was quite heavenly.

SCENE V.

Michel to the same.

Michel. The company is assembled in the drawing-room.

Narbonne. You will be so kind, dear mother, as to do the honours. — I will immediately despatch this — (*Low to Selicour*). Win the assent of my daughter, and I gladly accept you as son-in-law. Once more! the essay is excellent, and I would give much to have written it myself. (*Exit.*)

Selicour (*to Charles*). Well, enjoy your triumph, Mr. Firmin! — (*To Charlotte.*) Our young friend knows very well how to take a compliment.

Charlotte. After the beautiful things I have seen of him, I should not have thought I would require to deck himself out in borrowed plumes.

Selicour. A mere act of civility on his part, Miss Charlotte! — But the company is waiting —

Firmin (*to his son*). Well, you have obtained no end of praise! (*Selicour giving his arm to Charlotte.*)

Charles. Yes, I have good reason to be vainglorious.

Mrs. Belmont (*to Selicour*). That's right! give your arm to Charlotte — Everything becomes him. He is a charming man! (*She takes Firmin's arm.*)

Selicour (*pointing to Firmin*). To this gentleman the praise is due, and not to me. — I really don't know how I can appropriate it — all that I am, all that I am worth, is indeed his merit. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE VI.

Charles (*remaining behind alone*).

My agitation would betray me. — I must first get collected a little, before I can follow them. —

Have I really had patience enough to bear all this? — A fine triumph I have gained! In mere mockery they paid me the compliment. It is evident they do not consider me, but him, to be the author. I am their dupe, and the rogue has all the honour to himself alone.

SCENE VII.

Charles and La Roche.

La Roche. Behold, Mr. Firmin! — Quite alone! Everything goes on admirably, just as you wish it, I presume.

Charles. Oh quite admirably!

La Roche. I have also good hopes.

Charles. Selicour is in higher favour than ever.

La Roche. Indeed! You don't say so?

Charles. There is not an abler head nor a worthier man existing.

La Roche. Is it possible? But that important essay which the minister has demanded of him, and which he is not at all equal to.

Charles. The essay is finished.

La Roche. You don't say so?

Charles. It is finished, I tell you.

La Roche. You are joking. It is impossible.

Charles. A master-piece in form and substance.

La Roche. It is not possible, I tell you.

Charles. I tell you, it is! — The essay has been read, admired, and will immediately be despatched.

La Roche. Then he must have a devil in his pay who works for him.

Charles. And this appointment to the embassy!

La Roche. Well, the embassy —

Charles. He gets it! He obtains the hand of Miss Charlotte!

La Roche. She can't bear him.

Charles. She will yield.

La Roche. The embassy, and the girl besides! No, by Jove! That cannot be! That must not be! — How? what? this hypocrite, this base knave should carry off a prize which is only the reward of merit. — No, as sure as I live, we must not permit that, we who know him. That is against our conscience, we should be his accomplices, if we were to allow it.

Charles. I will go at once to see Miss Charlotte's grandmother — I will undeceive her as regards the poem.

La Roche. As regards the poem — nobody thinks or cares about the poem — With the old lady he may ingratiate himself by it; but do you think the minister is to be swayed by such a trifle? — No, Sir! It is this memoir, which is said to be so excellent, and which he must have got from somewhere or other by witchcraft — for he has not written it himself, he has not, I take my oath upon it — but his whole witchcraft consists in his tricks! And we must beat him with his own weapons. We did not succeed by honest means — we, therefore, must try dishonest ones. Stop, something occurs to me — Yes, that will do — But go away — quick, that we may not be seen together.

Charles. But please, don't act rashly, Mr. La Roche! Consider what is at stake!

La Roche. My honour is at stake, young gentleman, which is no less dear to me than your love

is dear to you — Step in here, quick! You shall hear more from me by-and-by.

SCENE VIII.

La Roche (*alone*).

Let us see — He always tried to find out the weak points of his superiors in order to render himself absolutely necessary to them. This very morning he spoke to the valet. The fellow is a gossip — He said there was a rumour about a gallant affair of the minister. That he had bespoken rooms in the suburbs. — I don't believe a word of it, though one might try — but stop! There he comes!

SCENE IX.

Selicour and La Roche.

Selicour (*without perceiving him*). Everything is going on according to my wishes, but still I am not quite free from anxiety. — I have as yet neither the appointment nor the bride, and there are son and father who keep a sharp eye upon me and might, at any moment, snatch both away from me. — If I could get them out of the way — But how? There is no getting at the minister — Those people who sail a straight course don't want anybody — one cannot get the whip-hand over them. Yes, if he had something to hush up — if I could spy out a weakness of his that would render me indispensable to him!

La Roche (*aside*). That's right! He runs straight into my way.

Selicour. Ah, behold! Mr. La Roche!

La Roche. It is I, and I have come, Mr. Selicour —

Selicour. What do you want?

La Roche. To confess my fault.

Selicour. Aha!

La Roche. Which has not even done me the slightest good.

Selicour. That is the best of it! For, indeed, your malicious tongue is not to blame, if I have not been utterly ruined.

La Roche. That is but too true, and, therefore, I scarcely dare hope that you can forgive me.

Selicour. Aha! Does the wind blow from that quarter? Do we begin to grow somewhat more submissive?

La Roche. I suppose, I can now no longer have any hopes of getting the nice post you meant to give me. — But, for the sake of our old friendship, don't, at least, injure me!

Selicour. I, injure you?

La Roche. Don't, please! Have pity on a poor fellow like me!

Selicour. But —

La Roche. And since somebody has been found who will kindly go to the minister and plead in my favour —

Selicour. So? Is there somebody? And who is it?

La Roche. A lady whom Michel, the valet, has recommended me to apply to.

Selicour. Michel, the valet! — Do you know this Michel?

La Roche. Not much! But since it is his nephew

who has turned me out of my situation, he wants to do me a favour.

Selicour. The lady is, I suppose, a relation of the minister's?

La Roche. She is said to be a handsome woman — they say he is seeking rooms for her in the suburbs.

Selicour. All right, I don't want to know anything at all about it. — And what is the lady's name?

La Roche. That I don't know.

Selicour. Well! well!

La Roche. Michel may perhaps be able to give you information about it.

Selicour. To me? Do you think I care at all about it?

La Roche. I don't say that.

Selicour. It is all the same to me — I don't care at all about these affairs. — You are then going to speak to that lady to-morrow?

La Roche. Yes, to-morrow.

Selicour. There seems to be a great secret —

La Roche (*eagerly*). To be sure! to be sure! Therefore I beg you not to appear as if you knew anything about it.

Selicour. Well, well! Enough of it — I shall not injure you, Mr. La Roche! — It seems to be my usual fate to lay ungrateful people under an obligation. — In spite of the bad services you wished to render me, I love you still, and, in order to show you how far my complaisance goes, I will make common cause with your protectress — Yes, that I will — You may depend upon it.

La Roche. Ah, you are too generous!

Selicour. But let that be a lesson to you for the future!

La Roche. Oh certainly, you shall see —

Selicour. Enough. Let it be.

La Roche. He has taken the bait. He is already as good as caught! How much faster one gets on with knavery than with honesty. (*Exit.*)

Selicour. Now directly to that Michel, the valet! — An affair of love, I see, is at the bottom of it. Without the slightest doubt. — Capital! I have you there, Narbonne! You are, then, a frail creature too — You are also a human being, and have certain weaknesses — and I am your master. (*Exit.*)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Enter **La Roche.**

They are still at table — The minister will come out of the room directly. — I am quite out of breath by running so fast — But, thank Heaven, I am on the scent and know all — I've got you at last, friend Selicour! You could do nothing with the minister, so long as he was virtuous — but thank God for his vices! There are secrets to be kept dark, services to be rendered! And the confidant, the pander has an easy game — He thinks he has found out one of the minister's little foibles — What a fine scope for his baseness! — Go on, go on! We are much better informed, friend Selicour! —