

AROUND THE WORLD ON FIVE SOUS

I. Cousin Richard's Will

"Your answer, then?"

"I've already told you, Monsieur Bouvreuil—never!"

"Thank about it, Monsieur Lavarède."

"I've thought about it. Never, never!"

"You don't understand, then, that you're in my hands—that if you push me to the end, I'll sell your furniture tomorrow, and you'll be homeless, with nowhere to go."

"You might as well add: with no money."

"Whereas if you agree, it's a good marriage, a fortune, independence..."

"And you think I could look myself in the face if I became the son-in-law of Monsieur Bouvreuil, former crooked businessman and police informer?"

"A poor devil of a journalist like you ought to be very honored to become the son-in-law of a prosperous landlord, and rich financier...not to mention that my daughter Pénélope loves you, and that I'm giving her a dowry of two hundred thousand francs, plus very good expectations..."

"Your daughter has nothing to do with it, Monsieur; it's not the prospect of marriage that I find repulsive, nor the young lady I'm refusing—it's the father-in-law."

"You're not very polite, you know, Monsieur Lavarède."

"I absolutely don't give a damn, you know, Monsieur Bouvreuil."

The landlord had one last argument in reserve. Slowly, he displayed a number of legal documents, some white and some blue, originals and copies, which he began to list.

"Here are your three demands for rent arrears, and here are various obligations that I took over in order to have leverage on you. All your debts are paid."

"You're truly very kind," said the young man, ironically.

"Yes, but I'm now your only creditor. If you marry Pénélope, I'll hand you the file. If you refuse, I pursue you relentlessly."

"Pursue away, as you please."

"The total is twenty thousand francs. With the expenses I'll land you with, it won't take long for the sum to be doubled."

"I can see that you understand legal matters marvelously."

"It's absolutely necessary that you make a decision immediately, because I have to leave for Panama. A syndicate of shareholders is sending me to make enquiries on location."¹

"The syndicate in question is placing its trust in a singular manner, then. As for my decision, I believe that I've already made it sufficiently clear to you not to have to return to the matter. Let's leave it there, my dear Monsieur; we have nothing more to say to one another. Go see your bailiff—go see all your bailiffs, solicitors and advocates. Go browse your legal documents, if that nourishment suits you; it's indigestible to me. *Bonjour.*"

Monsieur Bouvreuil collected his papers, put on his hat, went out and slammed the door. He was not happy.

¹ Work on the Panama Canal had begun in 1881 under the direction of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the celebrated architect of the Suez Canal, but it ran into dire difficulties because of the climatic conditions; the initial company went bankrupt in 1889 with colossal losses, ruining many shareholders and causing an enormous scandal, replete with accusations of fraud and mismanagement. A new company took over the project in 1894, but the novel is set in 1891; the shareholders represented by Bouvreuil are presumably those in the original company, still hoping that the disaster might be redeemable.

From the comments exchanged above, Monsieur Bouvreuil's character is sufficiently clear: he was one of those individuals who have enriched themselves unscrupulously, for whom money is insufficient, and who is also ambitious for worldly esteem.

However, Lavarède, our hero, requires a few lines of biography.

Armand Lavarède, born in Paris of a father from the Midi and a Breton mother, participated in two races, borrowing from one his impetuous spontaneity and from the other his reflective calm. Parisian to boot, he received the gift typical of the children of Lutece: an unconfused and satirical mind, as difficult to astonish as to frighten. Orphaned at an early age, he had been brought up by his Uncle Richard, who, although he had paid for all the necessary lessons and tutors, had paid scarcely any attention to the simultaneous education of his nephew's character. He had had too much to do, the poor fellow, with his own son, Jean Richard, who was, in consequence, Armand Lavarède's cousin, but was completely different in temperament. Whereas Armand was healthy, joyful and prodigal, Jean was sickly, sad and economical.

Jean was a little older than Armand. In 1891 the former was nearly forty, the latter thirty-five. Jean had taken over his father's business, had taken a generous commission, and had quickly become rich in consequence. Frail in health and sour in character, he had ended up taking against Paris, France, his friends and his relatives and had gone to reside in Devonshire, in England. A commercial hazard, an unpaid bill for consignment of American cotton, had brought him, as reimbursement, a beautiful country house. Having become a misanthrope, he was glad to go and live in a country where he did not know anyone, and nobody knew him.

In the meantime, Lavarède, audacious and enterprising, but a lover of chance, had "rolled around," as the saying had it. While still a boy, in 1870, he had volunteered for the army, seen action in the army of the Loire under the orders of General Chanzy,² and thus begun his apprenticeship in courage. Afterwards, he had resumed the course of his studies, tried out medicine and had not taken long to become disgusted with human miseries dissected at too close a range. He had begun working as a naval engineer, had done some sailing and some shipbuilding, and when he knew enough practical mechanics for what remained unknown no longer to interest him, he changed tack again.

He returned to Paris, departed as a war correspondent for the Turko-Russian war, traveled around, lived in Plowna, headed into Asia, and on his return, thought he had found his Road to Damascus. He was an excellent reporter, the Sire de Vapartout³ encountered him in Tunisia, Egypt, Serbia, Russia Spain and so on—in all the countries to which the Parisian press sent its representatives. Having a keen intelligence and prompt in decision, and his solid health and complete education having left him a superficial acquaintance with all of modern knowledge, Lavarède became a journalist.

And it is in that situation that we found him at the beginning of this chapter, in rather bitter conference with Monsieur Bouvreuil, his landlord.

We have silhouetted him sufficiently for it to be easily understandable that, spending his money without keeping count, careless of the morrow and retaining in his heart an immoderate love of his independence, Lavarède was not rich. He earned a good deal of money, but he did not accumulate it and lived handsomely, from day to day.

His conversation with Monsieur Bouvreuil, however, had caused him to reflect.

² Antoine Chanzy (1823-1883), having been suspected of collaboration with the press, was initially refused command of a brigade when the Prussians invaded, but when the going got tough he was hastily recalled from Algeria and put in command on the XVIth Corps of the Army of the Loire, participating with distinction in the only significant French victories of the entire war, most notably at Coulmiers. Although Lavarède is the same age as Paul Deleutre was in 1891, this part of his biography surely reflects Henri Chabrilat's experiences.

³ I have reproduced this name as it is given in the text, although the reference is obviously to *Le Sieur de Va-Partout* [roughly, "Sir Go-Anywhere"] (1880), a novel by Pierre Giffard (1853-1922) which was the first to feature a globetrotting reporter as a hero. Giffard worked with Chabrilat and d'Ivoi at *Le Figaro* and with the latter at *Le Petit Journal*; they both knew him well and his influence is manifest in the present novel, especially in the final chapters. In 1908 Giffard wrote a long future war novel, *La Guerre infernale*, published as a part-work illustrated by Albert Robida

That animal, he thought, not without reason, is going to put a claim on my salary from the paper. He's going to seize and sell my furniture. It's certain that I'll be greatly annoyed twenty-four hours from now—so, let's make the most of today. There'll always be another day's work to be done.

And in fact, he went to sleep that evening as peacefully as a judge in court, and was only woken up the following morning by his concierge, who had a good deal of amity for him.

“There's a letter for you, Monsieur Armand. It was a notary's clerk who brought it; he didn't know your exact address, and must have gone to look for your yesterday at the newspaper, the restaurant and I don't know where else. Finally, he arrived here late last night and asked me to hand you this first thing in the morning.”

“Thank you, my good Madame Dubois—but are you sure that it was a notary's clerk?”

“Well, he said he was.”

“Hmm! I'm rather afraid that he might have been a bailiff's clerk. It's Bouvreuil commencing hostilities.”

Lavarède was endowed with such insouciance that he did not open his letter immediately. He read the morning papers, got dressed and went out to get something to eat. It was not until he was in the street that he decided to unseal it.

It really was a letter from a notary: a summons. Maître Panabert simply asked him to call in at his office in the Rue de Châteaudun urgently “on a matter of concern to him”—a banal formula that did not say very much.

Having nothing better to do for the moment, Armand went to the notary's office after lunch; the meeting was at two o'clock.

On the way, he noticed an English family on the sidewalk, going the same way.

There was no mistaking it, they were definitely English. The man, about fifty years old, had the classic stiffness, the well-known side-whiskers and the check suit, with the ulster by means which everyone recognizes traveling companions. An old lady, mother or governess, with a wretched round hat and green veil, and a long shapeless mackintosh, accompanied a young woman. The latter, of course, was fresh and pretty, white and pink, as Anglo-Saxon women are when they are neither withered nor ill-tempered.

Lavarède had looked at her mechanically.

A hundred paces further on, at the crossroads of the Rue de Châteaudun and the Faubourg Montmartre, three carriages were passing by, coming from different directions. The young Englishwoman avoided two of them, but did not see the third, and might have been about to be run over when Armand leapt forward and, with a solid hand over the nostrils, stopped the horse dead in its tracks.

The coachman swore, the horse whinnied, the passers-by cried out, but the young woman got away with a fright.

Although slightly pale, she remained quite calm. Extending her hand to Armand, she thanked him with a vigorous handshake, in the English manner.

“It was nothing, Mademoiselle; there's really no need.”

The father and the governess also approached, and Lavarède's hand was forcefully shaken three times in succession.

“No, really,” he said, with an entirely sincere modesty. “It might seem that I saved your life, but you would have had time to get past—our cab-horses are very slow, I assure you.”

“You've rendered me a service, even so—isn't that right, Father? Isn't it, Mrs. Griff?”

“Certainly,” opined the two witnesses.

“So I have the right to be grateful to you. It's just that I'm not used to walking in our Parisian streets, and I'm always a little frightened, especially when I'm trying to find my way.”

“May I be of assistance?” Lavarède asked, politely.

It was the father who spoke, taking a letter from his portfolio. “We're going to see a notary.”

“Why, so am I.”

“A notary that we don't know.”

“Just like me.”

“Who lives in the Rue de Châteaudun.”

“Mine too.”

“Maître Panabert.”

“That’s his name.”

“A curious coincidence.”

“But providential, Allow me, then, to guide you.”

They all arrived, handed over the letters summoning them, and were introduced into the notary’s study—except for the governess, who waited in the outer office.

It’s for the same business, then, thought Lavarède and the Englishman.

The coincidence was bizarre, between people who did not know one another and found themselves summoned thus by a ministerial officer whose name had been unknown to them the day before.

A greeting, an introduction, no preliminaries; Maître Panabert is a notary with no time to waste. He begins immediately

“Monsieur Lavarède, Mr. Murlyton, Miss Aurret, I have the honor and the regret of informing you of the decease of one of my best clients, the proprietor of the Château de Marsannay on the Côte-d’Or, two houses in Paris situated in the Rue Auber and the Boulevard Malesherbes, and the estate of Baslett Castle in Devonshire. I am referring to the late lamented Monsieur Jean Richard.”

“My cousin!” exclaimed Lavarède.

“My neighbor!” said the Englishman.

The two men looked at one another, utterly nonplussed but without suspicion, with nothing but evident amazement.

The notary went on, impassively: “In conformity with the intentions of the deceased I have summoned you to hear the reading of his will, handwritten, duly signed and registered.”

He read the legal formulae rapidly, and slowed down slightly in order to articulate:

“Including the houses and properties designated above, the income bonds, shares and obligations, as well as the liquid assets deposited with my notary, my fortune amounts to approximately four million. As I have no brother, wife, child, or direct ascendant or descendant, my sole heir is my cousin, Armand Lavarède...”

“What did you say?” Armand interrupted.

“Wait,” replied the notary. “...‘But I only institute him as my universal legatee on one express condition. The fellow does not know the value of money; he would squander my fortune, would throw it to the four winds, as occurred on a pleasure trip we once took together to Boulogne-sur-Mer, which cost him two thousand francs, whereas I only spent a hundred and sixty-four francs eighty-five centimes.”

“Thus, Lavarède must leave Paris with five sous in his pocket, like the Wandering Jew, and, like the celebrated Semite, he must go around the world with no other sum at his disposal. He will thus be constrained to be economical. I give him a year, to the day, to carry out this clause.

“Obviously, he must be monitored, and I designate to accompany him a man who will have a personal and considerable interest in fulfilling his mission: my neighbor at Baslett Castle, Mr. Murlyton, whom I institute as my universal legatee instead of Armand Lavarède, if the latter does not accomplish the prescribed condition rigorously...”

“What, me?” said the Englishman. “But I scarcely know that eccentric, and we were constantly involved in lawsuits.”

“Mr. Murlyton,” the notary went on, imperturbably, “is a stickler for his rights. Every time I got bored, I had a conflict with him, either with regard to a boundary wall, a stream separating our parks, or the trees bordering our estates. That cheered me up, and relieved the tedium of my life. In consequence, Mr. Murlyton, for whom I have created a conditional right to my fortune, will know how to make the most of it. It is understood that he will lose any right to my fortune if he commits any act of treason toward poor Lavarède. He must monitor him simply and honestly. But I confess that it is not without a malign pleasure that I see in advance my handsome spendthrift cousin so inescapably disinherited.”

Even the irony of the final sentence did not succeed in brightening up the man who pronounced it—but the reading produced various effects on his listeners.

Lavarède smiled. Perhaps the smile was jaundiced, but its color was undistinguishable. Mr. Murlyton remained as calm as he would have been in the presence of a slice of roast beef. Only Miss Aurret was visibly agitated. First she blushed, and then went pale. Her gaze played over the two men who were about to start a fine hunt, whose prey was worth four million.

She was the one who spoke first. "Father," she said, "you can't despoil this young man, who isn't your enemy and who has just saved my life."

"Business is business, my daughter," he replied. "It's not practical to lose this fortune, because it is impossible, not only to go around the world, but even to go from Paris to London, with twenty-five farthings, a fifth of a shilling.⁴ Good business!"

"Then you won't renounce it?"

The notary intervened in the conversation. "Mademoiselle," he said, "even if your father refused to accept the conditional clause, Monsieur Lavarède would not then enter into possession of the inheritance. He only has a right to it on certain conditions, expressly indicated. And unless he renounces it himself..."

"You're joking!" said Lavarède. "Millions are falling from the sky, and you think I won't do anything to get my hands on them? First of all, what my cousin demands isn't so difficult. When one has been from the Bastille to the Madeleine without a single sou, one can go to America, China and the Devil with five."

"You want to try," said the Englishman. "So be it! I'm rich, my check-book is always to hand; I won't leave you alone for an instant, and we'll see whether I haven't won the game within two days."

"Well, I accept the duel," riposted Lavarède, coldly. Addressing the notary, he said: "Do you have a railway timetable in your offices, Monsieur?"

"Here's one, my dear Monsieur."

Lavarède consulted it. "Tomorrow, the twenty-sixth of March 1891, at nine o'clock in the morning, there's a train to Bordeaux, connecting at Pauillac with a transatlantic liner bound for America." He concluded, with devastating aplomb: "I'll see you at the Gare d'Orléans tomorrow morning, Mr. Murlyton."

The two rivals bowed to one another courteously while the notary arranged the Richard file methodically, and Miss Aurret smiled on seeing the young man so confident.

The latter addressed Maître Panabert again. "I must return to your office on the twenty-fifth of March 1892, before it closes for the day."

"At the latest, Monsieur."

"Perfect. I'll be here."

And he went out, tranquilly.

⁴ Twenty-four farthings used to be six pre-decimalization pence, which was half a shilling. Twenty-five centimes (five sous) is, of course, a quarter of a franc, so it is not at all obvious where Murlyton's arithmetic comes from, even if he is using "farthings" in some strange figurative sense.

II. Hide-and-Seek

On leaving the notary's office, Lavarède lit a cigar and walked for half an hour, thinking about what he was going to do. He found his initial idea excellent: that departure in quest of an exceedingly golden fleece appealed to his spirit of adventure.

He had no doubt that he would succeed. On reflection, however, he took account of the innumerable difficulties that he would encounter.

Suddenly—he had arrived at the Madeleine—a smile illuminated his darkened face. He had thought of something. But what? He retraced his steps and went to his newspaper, a boulevardian periodical, the *Échos Parisiens*. There, he wrote a piece for the following morning's edition in which, without identifying the individuals other than by semi-transparent pseudonyms, he recounted the story of the will.

Then he went to the cashier's office, where an initial tribulation awaited him, without surprising him overmuch. A bailiff commissioned by Bouvreuil had put in a claim on his salary.

"Well," he said, "it's starting."

He went home. In the same way, Madame Dubois told him that another bailiff had come, on behalf of the landlord Bouvreuil, to seize his furniture.

"What does it matter to me?" he said cheerfully. "I'm leaving for the other world tomorrow."

"Oh my God" said the worthy Madame Dubois. "You're not going to kill yourself, my dear Monsieur Armand! A wound in the pocket isn't mortal."

"Don't worry," he said, laughing. "The other world I'm going to is America. I'm going to collect the inheritance of a relative who was a millionaire four times over."

"You gave me quite a fright."

Lavarède knew enough. He took a cab and had himself taken to the shipping office at the Gare d'Orléans at top speed. He knew one of the clerks there, to whom he gave theater tickets from time to time. He spent a few minutes with him, and then went to inspect a loading platform, where he found all sorts of bales, crates and baskets piled up.

Doubtless satisfied with his visit, he returned to the office, wrote a letter of dispatch that astonished the clerk and made the supervisor who had accompanied him smile.

"It's really for Panama?" asked the supervisor.

"Yes, for Panama," said Lavarède, "at top speed. The parcel has to leave tomorrow morning on the express connecting with the steamer of the *Chargeurs Réunis*."

For greater surety, he went back to the platform, asked a crewman for a brush and a bucket of black paint, and wrote in large capital letters on an enormous wooden crate the word *PANAMA*. The crate had the form of a grand piano. Vast and oblong, it already bore other inscriptions, which he erased, and other dispatch and reception labels, which he removed. Then he gave a tip to the employees who had helped him, and a cordial handshake to the clerk, who had not ceased to manifest a genuine amusement.

"As a joke," the latter said, "it's good enough—but at least you can assure me that the Company won't be defrauded?"

"I'll answer for everything. And when I've won my bet, I promise you a good dinner, and a box at the Opéra afterwards."

He got back into the cab and went back toward the boulevard. He had not wasted his afternoon. He interrogated his purse and saw that he had a few louis left. It was necessary to spend them that evening, or during the night. That would not be difficult. A few invited companions, a lavish dinner washed down with good wine, a pleasant and joyful evening, a fine supper with champagne, would soon put an end to it. He arranged matters so that by morning, he would have nothing left in his pocket but a two-franc piece.

"That's exactly what I need. Thirty-five sous for a cab, and five sous to go around the world!"

Lavarède was, therefore, carrying the twenty-five centimes ordered by the testator when he disembarked at eight o'clock in the morning at the Gare d'Orléans.

He had not slept all night, to be sure. But *I'll have plenty of time to sleep on the way*, he thought.

Immediately, he disappeared in the direction of the shipping office.

Shortly afterwards, among the travelers preparing to take the express, several whose acquaintance we have already made were to be seen.

First of all there was the excellent Monsieur Bouvreuil, whom his daughter Pénélope had come to see off at the station, accompanied by a maid.

We shall cast a glance over Mademoiselle Pénélope. Frankly, one could not blame Lavarède for not wanting to unite his destiny with that of the young woman in question. Too tall to be elegant, bony rather than thin, of bilious complexion and a haughty and smug expression—what vulgar people call, in their vigorous mode of expression, “looking down her nose”—that was what the daughter of the good Monsieur Bouvreuil looked like. She knew that she was rich, and took a rather stupid vanity therein; her pride had been wounded by Lavarède’s refusal. She was the one who had advised her father to starve the young man out.

The old fox was attentively reading a newspaper, the *Échos Parisiens*, which had just appeared, and, in that paper, Lavarède’s article. As he found himself indicated therein under the name of “Monsieur Chardonneret, landlord, of the race of undomesticated vultures,”⁵ he read the rest of the article, and read between the lines. Then he passed the paper to his daughter, and made her party to his reflections.

“What!” she said, after having read it. “The fellow who doesn’t want me is going to inherit four millions, if he succeeds in making such a voyage with no money?”

“You can see that he’s mad, even to attempt it.”

“I hope he won’t succeed, then.”

“Don’t worry—he’ll be back in Paris before long, crestfallen and repentant. And he’ll find himself trussed up so tightly in my web of legal paper that he’ll be happy to accept release, along with your hand.”

Pénélope sighed. Already not very beautiful at rest, she was quite ugly when she sighed.

“It’s just that he’s charming, the monster,” she said, rolling her eyes, like those of a swooning carp, toward the heavens.

At that moment, crewmen transporting a crate of unusual size and shape into the baggage-car attracted all gazes.

“Look,” said Bouvreuil. “There’s a parcel making the same journey as me.”

“It’s going to Panama?” asked Pénélope.

“Yes—it’s written on top.”

“It must be a piano,” the demoiselle guessed.

“Doubtless some engineer out there who wants to charm his leisure hours.”

“Be careful of fevers, Father.”

“Don’t worry—with money, one can purchase perfect hygiene. Anyway, I won’t have to stay there very long. Time to inspect the yards, to verify the utility of the expenditures and the progress of the work. I’ll take a few notes and draft my report for the syndicate on the boat coming back. A fortnight should be amply sufficient.”

With the outward and return journeys, and the stay you anticipate, that adds up to an absence of about six weeks.”

“At the most. I’ll telegraph you via the cable to let you know the date of my arrival and that of my departure.”

So saying, Bouvreuil installed himself a first class compartment, where he was not long delayed in being joined by two other people.

Mr. Murlyton, escorted by his daughter, Aurret, and her governess, Mrs. Griff, had arrived at the station at the appointed time, with the precision and exactitude of the islanders of Great Britain. Looking around in all directions, they had not seen Lavarède. The latter, as we know, was not on the passengers’ platform.

“Has he already given up on the adventure?” the Englishman wondered.

⁵ Chardonneret is the common name in French of the finch family of birds, of which the bouvreuil [bullfinch] is a member—hence various avian puns, such as the reference to Bouvreuil as a vulture.

"It's not probable," Aurret replied.

Time passed, however; the moment of departure drew near, and Lavarède still had not appeared.

"Ach!" said Mr. Murlyton, discontented.

"You have to accompany him."

"For that, it's necessary for him to be here."

"Perhaps he thought it prudent to leave Paris for Bordeaux alone, before you."

"That's right—in order that I can't check his ticket, which cost more than twenty-five centimes," he said, laughing.

They carried out a rapid inspection of the carriages that were already packed with passengers. Lavarède was not among them. Suddenly, Aurret had an idea.

"In Paris, Father, in the bustle of the station, you run the risk of losing sight of him, but by going to wait for him at Bordeaux, you'll be sure of not missing him there. To board the steamer there's only one route—the gangplank. He said that the train connects with the steamship line at Pauillac—you ought to go that far, anyway."

"Oh, we Englishmen are great travelers—that can't bother us much. A mere stroll, after all."

"Yes, and if you're good, I'll go with you, to give you a kiss before you leave on your world tour."

"But what if the gentleman arrives late, after the express leaves? How will I know?"

"Mrs. Griff saw him yesterday, in the street and at the notary's. She has only to stay here and wait. She'll recognize him and send us a telegram at Bordeaux-Pauillac station, or the office of the Maritime Mail,"

"That's true."

They explained to the governess the role that she was to play, and they bought two tickets. Miss Aurret, with the gaiety of her twenty years, was delighted with that brief excursion, which resembled a schoolgirl escapade.

Mrs. Griff kissed her, gravely. "Until the day after tomorrow, then, Miss?"

"Perhaps tomorrow. The ship leaves this evening; it won't be necessary to stay overnight in Bordeaux. I'll take the night train, and it's not improbable that I'll be back tomorrow, not the day after."

"I'll come back here to meet you, then."

"I'll let you know by telegram."

The father intervened. "One last instruction, Mrs. Griff. As soon as my daughter returns, you'll leave Paris and return home to Devonshire. I don't know whether my absence will be long or short, or even if I'll be embarking; it doesn't depend on me but the other. In any case, I'd prefer to know that you were at home in England."

Mrs. Griff bowed respectfully. Murlyton and Aurret climbed into the only compartment that was still partly free. They sat down opposite Monsieur Bouvreuil, whom they did not know.

The latter had taken an enormous portfolio from his pocket—the portfolio of a businessman—and was making a few notes, while waiting for the train to depart, while Mademoiselle Pénélope searched with her eyes for her maid, who had disappeared.

On a blank sheet of paper, Bouvreuil wrote:

1. *Choose English hotels for preference, they're more comfortable.*
2. *Avoid the society of the French, except for the Company's engineers.*
3. *Don't discuss politics with anyone.*
4. *In case of difficulties, first go to see the French consul.*

He had reached that point in his wise provisions when his daughter ran toward the compartment. Her face seemed distressed, but radiant.

"Papa!" she said. "Papa! I've got some news."

"What is it?"

"Monsieur Lavarède must be on the same train as you."

"On the train? I haven't seen him."

"Nor has anyone else. He's in the crate."

"What crate?"

“You know—the big crate bound for Panama.”

“The one we thought had a piano in it?”

Murlyton and his daughter could not help exchanging glances and a brief word.

“Ah! Monsieur Lavarède...”

“I knew it!”

Bouvreuil looked at them, astonished to hear Lavarède’s name pronounced by the two strangers. He did not have time to interrogate them about it, however, because the conductors were already closing the doors of the compartments and he was about to be separated from Pénélope. Leaning out of the window, while his daughter stood on the footstep, he said: “But how do you know that?”

“The maid told me.”

“Bah!”

“One of the crewmen is from her native town, Santenay on the Côte-d’Or. They recognized one another, and the man told her, laughing, that he’d seen someone climbing into the crate at the shipping depot. The description is Monsieur Lavarède’s, there’s no doubt about it. A clerk from the office came, very cheerfully, to close the planks forming the door, and told the crewman to keep quiet...”

“An instruction that he hastened to disobey.”

“Oh, with his compatriot, it didn’t seem important—but no one in the station knows that.”

“Very good—I’ve got him! I’ll have him arrested at Bordeaux, and his four millions will go up in smoke!”

“Thank you, Papa—and tell him that he only has to come to the house, that I authorize him to pay court to me and that we can be married in five weeks, when you return.”

“Understood.”

Aurett and her father had not missed a word of that conversation, conducted in loud voices.

A blast of the whistle gave the signal for departure. The train pulled away. Bouvreuil, still leaning out of the window, waved goodbye. And everyone was on their way to Bordeaux-Pauillac, Lavarède in his crate, Murlyton, Aurett and Bouvreuil in their compartment.

The discretion of the English, who never speak first to people they do not know, is well-known. It was, therefore, Bouvreuil who began.

“I beg your pardon,” he said to his neighbors, “but just now, you appeared to know this Monsieur Lavarède, about whom my daughter was speaking.”

“We do indeed know him,” said Mr. Murlyton. “But to whom do I have the honor...?”

“Bouvreuil, landlord, financier, President of the Syndicate of the Shareholders of Panama,” he replied, presenting his card.

“Very good, honorable sir. For myself, I am Mr. Murlyton, and this is my daughter Aurett.”

“Ah! Are you the Englishman designated in the article in the *Échos* under the name of Mirliton, esquire?”⁶

“I don’t know the article in question.”

“Here—read it.”

After a rapid examination, the Englishman said: “Yes, that must be me. And you’re the bird of the vulture species?”

“Exactly—the blackguard!”

“You’re not one of his friends, I can see.”

“Oh, no!”

With a polite smile, Aurett put in: “However, your daughter, just now... is there not a question of a marriage between the two of them?”

“My daughter would like that, but he, the rascal, won’t hear of it.”

“Oh, forgive me...” And a bizarre, enigmatic smile played over her lips, in place of the courteous and amiable smile that had previously been sketched there. Aurett had seen the face and the disagreeable personality of Mademoiselle Pénélope, and privately sided with Monsieur Lavarède. In her thinking, the

⁶ A mirliton is a toy trumpet, once very popular in France at carnival time.

poor fellow who had saved her life—she had not let go of that idea—deserved better than that unbecoming spouse.

But the two men continued chatting.

“Yes,” said Bouvreuil, “I’m going to make him lose his inheritance. He’ll be arrested this evening; that ought to satisfy you, since you’re his competitor, and you’ll be glad to help me.”

“Oh, I don’t have anything against him. It’s a question of honor, foreseen by the will. I must only verify, without creating any obstacle myself.”

“It makes no difference. I’ll do it myself, and he won’t get past Bordeaux.”

After a four-hour journey, the baggage was taken down on to the quay for loading the ships. Bouvreuil did not lose sight of the crate that contained his enemy. Rubbing his hands, he headed for the customs office.

At the same moment, a knocking was heard on the side of the crate, and a soft voice called: “Monsieur Lavarède! Monsieur Lavarède!”

It was Aurette who, instinctively and without reflection, was taking Lavarède’s side against Bouvreuil. In so doing, she was also setting herself against her father, but she did not even think about that. Her first impulse—the best, according to Talleyrand—pushed her to defend the young against the old, the handsome against the ugly, the poor against the rich. Let us not reproach her for that natural generosity—it is so rare in life, although it is common enough at Aurette’s age. Is not the twentieth year one of illusions?

It is certain that if the young Englishwoman had been a person of common sense, if she had been taught to count at school and if she had been informed of the value of money, she would have said to herself: *There’s a fellow who seems to me to be quite determined. If no one stops him, he’s capable of earning neighbor Richard’s millions. Now, those millions might be mine one day, or perhaps serve as my dowry. Whereas, if that vile bird named Bouvreuil is allowed to have his way, the young traveler will be arrested, put in prison, condemned at the least to a fine that he’ll have to pay. At any rate, he’ll be obliged to lose time, to go back, to explain, to go to court, to earn money by working; in the meantime, the days will go by, perhaps months. And the fine millions will go their own way, without him, soon to revert to Papa Murlyton.*

That reasoning, so logical and sensible, never entered her virginal head. Her honest mind refused even the mute and tacit complicity of letting matters take their course. And quite naturally, as if it were her duty, she went to tap on the crate with her dainty fingers and repeated: “Monsieur Lavarède.”

No sound; no response.

Still in a soft voice, she went on: “Don’t be suspicious, I beg you. A danger is threatening you, and I’ve come to warn you.”

Then, from inside, came a muffled voice. “One might think that was your voice, Miss Aurette.”

“Yes!” she said, joyfully. “Get out of there, quickly.”

“No, Mademoiselle, I shan’t come out until my bedroom is embarked aboard the steamer and the movement indicates that the ship is en route for Colon.”

“But they won’t even load your...the shocking thing that you’ve just said.”

“Why not, Mademoiselle?” he asked, struck by the young Englishwoman’s desperate tone.

“Because Monsieur...I don’t know his name—the bird of the vulture race...”

“Monsieur Bouvreuil?”

“Exactly...has just gone to fetch the customs officers and the employees to have you *pinched in the box.*”

“Pinched! Damn it!”

So saying, he opened the door. Miss Aurette was blushing.

“Oh!” she said, confused. “Perhaps *pinched* isn’t a very nice word. It’s what he said a little while ago. He also said *the box* when he was talking to my father.”

“But what the devil is he doing here?”

“My father? He’s escorting you, as he has to do.”

“No, not your father—the other one.”

“He told us that he’s going to Panama.”

“Good, good—thank you, Miss...so Monsieur Murlyton’s in on the plot?”

“Oh no! Papa’s very correct. He’s promised not to do anything, so he’s gone away.”

“To let the other have his way?”

“He can’t stop him, Monsieur...but I...”

“You!” exclaimed Lavarède, jumping down on to the quay. “You’re Providence. It’s perhaps to fulfill that role that the good God made you so pretty...”

“No compliments, Monsieur my savior. And hide, quickly—here they come!”

“Thank you, my good angel.”

And, blowing her a kiss from his fingertips, Armand hid himself behind the bales and barrels that formed an enormous heap not far away. Aurret, slightly troubled deep down, but calm in her facial expression, saw Bouvreuil coming with a customs officer and a railway employee. She had taken the precaution of reclosing the crate.

“He’s in there,” said Bouvreuil, with a gesture that was not without analogy with the one made by Napoleon at Marengo.

“You’re saying that there’s a man in there?” said the bewildered railway employee.

“Perhaps a malefactor in hiding,” Bouvreuil added.

“In any case, live meat, human flesh, undeclared merchandise, legally speaking,” pronounced the customs officer.

The two men did not know how to open the crate in order to verify the contents. Nor did Bouvreuil. All three tried in vain, watched by Aurret, who had difficulty keeping a straight face. Their attempts had only one result, which was to shift and shake the crate. It was immediately recognized by the men, accustomed to handling parcels, as being very light, and hence empty.

“You’re crazy, my man,” said the railway employee to Bouvreuil. “There can’t be a man inside.”

“Yes there is!” he affirmed.

“No,” the other insisted. “Look—I can lift it up one-handed, without difficulty.”

“That’s true,” opined the customs officer.

“But I can attest that I was told, in Paris...”

“In Paris, my colleagues were making fun of you.”

“At any rate, it’s only necessary to open it, and we’ll see.”

“But we don’t have any tools here, and I wouldn’t dare take the nails out, anyway, except in the presence of my superiors. I’ll go fetch some comrades to take the suspect package to the office.”

“And I,” said the customs man, “will go to fetch my brigadier. We’ll observe the autopsy.”

“That’s right!” said Bouvreuil, raising his arms to the heavens, with a distressed expression. “And in the meantime, the brigand who’s in there will escape from his cavern!”

“Well then, remain here on sentry duty on and you’ll see him if he comes out,” said the other two, going away.

Bouvreuil was left alone, pacing up and down in a small empty space between the piles of crates, barrels, bales, baskets and merchandise of all origins and all kinds that were coming from or going to America.

We say that he was alone because Aurret, a little while before, had gone to Lavarède’s hiding place, where he was showing signs of distress.

“I beg you, Miss,” he said, “don’t stay here. It’s necessary that there shouldn’t be a single witness to what’s about to happen.”

Without replying, she bowed to Bouvreuil and went away in order to catch up with her father, who was making his way toward the steamer.

“Well, my daughter?” he asked.

“Well, nothing definitive.”

“Ah! And Monsieur Lavarède?”

“I believe he’s going to embark.”

“Then I’ll go and pay for my passage.”

“Our passage, Father.”

Without showing any sign of emotion, Murlyton said: “You want to come with me?”

Just as coldly, like a true Englishwoman, she replied: “Yes Father. This little excursion to Panama might be instructive. I haven’t been to Central America as yet.”

“Travel forms youth. But what luggage do you have?”

“My traveling valise and my handbag.”

“Do you think that will be sufficient?”

“No, but I can make the indispensable purchases rapidly.”

“All right—but what about Mrs. Griff?”

“I’ll take advantage of my travels to send her a telegram telling her to go back to our cottage in Devonshire alone, right away.”

“Everything’s in order, then. That’s good.”

They exchanged a handshake and separated, she to go out into the environs of the maritime station of Pauillac, he to go aboard the ship and reserve two cabins. Neither of them had departed for an instant from the classic British phlegm. They were going to America as they would have gone to Asnières, still with the same calm.

While that little scene was occurring in front of the *Lorraine*, the transatlantic liner commanded by Captain Kassler, this is what was happening in front of the culpable crate.

Abruptly, the smiling Lavarède appeared in front of the angry Bouvreuil.

“Ah! I knew it!” said the latter, triumphantly

“You knew what?” enquired the young man, graciously.”

“That you were in there.” He pointed to the crate.

“You were mistaken, my dear Monsieur. I was somewhere else.”

“I know what I’m talking about.”

“Not as well as I do, believe me. I’m taking a stroll before making a little tour of America, like you. Except that I’m running away from your bailiffs, your amiable bailiffs.”

Bouvreuil assumed an expression of ironic pity. “Yes, as you say, you want to run away to America, but by traveling in a fraudulent manner, with the aid of a shady ploy.”

“The fact is,” said Armand, sardonically, “that one can’t see very clearly inside those planks. Shady is the right word.”

“Whereas I, Monsieur,” continued the financier, in a smug tone, “am traveling in broad daylight, paying for my passage, Monsieur, having reserved cabin number ten, not burying myself in the depths of an unspeakable parcel, Monsieur!”

Every time he emphasized the word *Monsieur* his voice swelled, taking on a majestic, pompous and melodramatic inflection.

Timidly, Lavarède riposted: “I do what I can, Monsieur.”

And, with a rapid movement, he opened the door of the crate, shoved the unfortunate landlord inside, and swiftly replaced the planks—but he released the catch with such a violent effort that Monsieur Bouvreuil was no longer able to get out of the infernal box.

The latter began by crying out, appealing for help, but his voice soon faded away. A shadow came over it. Was it anger that had stifled him, or was it the rarefaction of the breathable air?

Lavarède did not even ask himself that question. Briskly, he made off as fast as he could, and ran all the way to the gangplank where the passengers of the *Lorraine* were embarking.

He was just in time. Two minutes later, four crewmen or stevedores arrived on the cargo quay, preceded by the customs officer.

“Why,” he said, astonished, “the old fellow’s no longer here!”

“He must have got impatient,” said the employee. “He’ll have gone. It’s just as well.”

The stevedores started to lift the crate.

“Uh oh!” said one of them. “It’s heavy!”

“That’s true. It weighs more than it did just now.”

“So there really is something inside?”

“Yes—it’s moving.”

“Look—when you lift one side, it goes the other way.”

Indeed, a dull thud could be heard

“It’s rolling.”

The customs officer put his ear to the crate.

“And one might think that it’s groaning.”

“Aha! We’ve caught the prey.”

“It’s the contraband.”

“For sure?”

“Let’s take the parcel away. First, I’m going to put it under lead seals. Nobody will touch it until the brigadier’s had lunch. He’s given orders that it should be taken to the lieutenant’s office. It’ll only be opened in the officer’s presence.”

That was immediately done—and the poor president of the Shareholders’ Syndicate, who had presumably lost consciousness, had time to come round. But we shall not occupy ourselves with him any longer, for the time being, and return on board the *Lorraine*.

Everything is ready for the departure. The ship is under steam. The engine is heating up, with the dull purr of a tame beast. The plume of smoke is thick and black. The sailors are attending to the rigging or occupying themselves with the luggage that has been brought aboard. Everyone is on deck. Relatives and friends have left the ship after the final adieux. The gangplank is about to be withdrawn. The mate summons the passengers.

“Let’s see—no one missing? We have cabins eight and nine, which have just been reserved.”

“Eight and nine are for me and my daughter,” Murlyton replies.

“Good! You’re aboard. But there’s still ten, who hasn’t responded. Let’s see who he is. Booked in Paris at the Agence Maritime...”

A man races over the gangplank, just as the sailor is about to remove it. “Number ten—that’s me. Here I am!” he shouts, urgently

“What name?”

“Bouvreuil, Paris.”

“That’s right. Let’s go!”

A whistle-blast, a clanging bell. The *Lorraine* pulls away majestically. It is under way.

Two passengers encountered one another face to face, beneath the poop deck.

“Ah!” said one. “Monsieur Lavarède.”

“Indeed, Mr. Murlyton. Has Mademoiselle your daughter returned to Paris?”

“No, Monsieur; she’s here.”

“On board! Truly delighted to be commencing our voyage in such gracious company.”

“Pardon me, Sir, but how do you come to be here? I know the price of a passage; I’ve just bought two of them—and it surpasses the sum that you ought to have in your pocket.”

“To be sure...so I haven’t paid, and here are my twenty-five centimes, still intact. You can check them, my strict accountant.”

“All right—but that doesn’t answer my question.”

“It’s quite simple. I have cabin number ten, whose reservation was made and paid in advance by the excellent Monsieur Bouvreuil, first class service and nourishment included.”

“He reserved it...for you?”

“No, for himself.”

“Oh! I don’t understand.”

“What’s complicated about it? I’m in his cabin.”

“And where’s he?”

“Him? He’s in my crate, of course.”

“The crate’s aboard?”

“No, it stayed behind.”

“With him inside?”

“Certainly...with him inside.”

Murlyton thought for a few seconds, and then smiled at his daughter, who had heard the last words as she approached. “Not at all correct,” he said, with gravity, “but very ingenious.” Then he turned on his heel and went to lean on the bulwark.

The two young people exchanged a few words.

“You’ve succeeded, Monsieur. I congratulate you.”

“If I’ve avoided the first danger, Miss, it’s to you that I owe it. I won’t forget it.”

“Oh, Monsieur, we’re not quits yet.”

“You still think, then,” he said, smiling, “that you owe me your life?”

“I’m intent, above all, on not damaging your interests.”

“Even at the expense of your own?”

Miss Aurett made no reply, and went to join her father. It was quite natural for Armand to follow the young woman, so devoid of avarice. In any case, his new friend authorized him to do so with a glance.

When the group was reunited, she said: “You’re going to think me very curious, Monsieur Lavarède, but when, by chance”—she blushed vividly as she pronounced those words—“the door of your little apartment opened a little while ago, I seemed to perceive something like a padded armchair. Was I mistaken?”

“Not at all, Miss.”

“Ah! How and why was it padded?” asked Murlyton.

“Because it had been prepared expressly to make a long voyage, from the Pyrenees to Paris, by a fantasist, the story of whose adventure I reported in my newspaper. I remembered it. I was sure that the crate, about which all Paris was talking, was still at the Gare d’Orléans...so I made use of it. That’s the whole story.”

“As I said,” observed the Englishman, “you’re a very ingenious gentleman.”

A smile from the young woman confirmed her father’s opinion.

Leaning on the bulwark, Murlyton paraded his marine binoculars over the strip of land that was beginning to disappear in the distant mists. Something caught his eye.

“Look, Monsieur Lavarède,” he said, passing the binoculars to him. “Can’t you see something agitating at the end of the jetty?”

Armand looked. “Yes—a short man making broad gestures. But he’s being pursued. One can’t quite make out the nature of the uniforms of those giving chase to him—gendarmes, no doubt.”

“What do you think is happening?”

“Oh, without hesitation, I imagine that it’s Bouvreuil. He didn’t die of apoplexy on the spot. So much the better, so much the better.”

In the meantime, they had emerged from the estuary, and no signal recalled the *Lorraine*. Lavarède therefore thought that he would be safe for the duration of the voyage.