

DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE
MESMERIST'S
VICTIM

Александр Дюма

The Mesmerist's Victim

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Alexandre Dumas

The Mesmerist's Victim

CHAPTER I

THE DESPERATE RESCUE

ON the thirteenth of May, 1770, Paris celebrated the wedding of the Dauphin or Prince Royal Louis Aguste, grandson of Louis XV. still reigning, with Marie-Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria.

The entire population flocked towards Louis XV. Place, where fireworks were to be let off. A pyrotechnical display was the finish to all grand public ceremonies, and the Parisians were fond of them although they might make fun.

The ground was happily chosen, as it would hold six thousand spectators. Around the equestrian statue of the King, stands were built circularly to give a view of the fireworks, to be set off at ten or twelve feet elevation.

The townsfolk began to assemble long before seven o'clock when the City Guard arrived to keep order. This duty rather belonged to the French Guards, but the Municipal government had refused the extra pay their Commander, Colonel, the Marshal Duke Biron, demanded, and these warriors in a huff were scattered in the mob, vexed and quarrelsome. They sneered loudly at the tumult, which they boasted they would have quelled with the pike-stock or the musket-butt if they had the ruling of the gathering.

The shrieks of the women, squeezed in the press, the wailing of the children, the swearing of the troopers, the grumbling of the fat citizens, the protests of the cake and candy merchants whose goods were stolen, all prepared a petty uproar preceding the deafening one which six hundred thousand souls were sure to create when collected. At eight at evening, they produced a vast picture, like one after Teniers, but with French faces.

About half past eight nearly all eyes were fastened on the scaffold where the famous Ruggieri and his assistants were putting the final touches to the matches and fuses of the old pieces. Many large compositions were on the frames. The grand bouquet, or shower of stars, girandoles and squibs, with which such shows always conclude, was to go off from a rampart, near the Seine River, on a raised bank.

As the men carried their lanterns to the places where the pieces would be fired, a lively sensation was raised in the throng, and some of the timid drew back, which made the whole waver in line.

Carriages with the better class still arrived but they could not reach the stand to deposit their passengers. The mob hemmed them in and some persons objected to having the horses lay their heads on their shoulder.

Behind the horses and vehicles the crowd continued to increase, so that the conveyances could not move one way or another. Then were seen with the audacity of the city-bred, the boys and the rougher men climb upon the wheels and finally swarm upon the footman's board and the coachman's box.

The illumination of the main streets threw a red glare on the sea of faces, and flashed from the bayonets of the city guardsmen, as conspicuous as a blade of wheat in a reaped field.

About nine o'clock one of these coaches came up, but three rows of carriages were before the stand, all wedged in and covered with the sightseers. Hanging onto the springs was a young man, who kicked away those who tried to share with him the use of this locomotive to cleave a path in the concourse. When it stopped, however, he dropped down but without letting go of the friendly spring with one hand. Thus he was able to hear the excited talk of the passengers.

Out of the window was thrust the head of a young and beautiful girl, wearing white and having lace on her sunny head.

"Come, come, Andrea," said a testy voice of an elderly man within to her, "do not lean out so, or you will have some rough fellow snatch a kiss. Do you not see that our coach is stuck in this mass like a boat in a mudflat? we are in the water, and dirty water at that; do not let us be fouled."

"We can't see anything, father," said the girl, drawing in her head: "if the horse turned half round we could have a look through the window, and would see as well as in the places reserved for us at the governor's."

"Turn a bit, coachman," said the man.

"Can't be did, my lord baron," said the driver; "it would crush a dozen people."

"Go on and crush them, then!"

"Oh, sir," said Andrea.

"No, no, father," said a young gentleman beside the old baron inside.

"Hello, what baron is this who wants to crush the poor?" cried several threatening voices.

"The Baron of Taverney Redcastle – I," replied the old noble, leaning out and showing that he wore a red sash crosswise.

Such emblems of the royal and knightly orders were still respected, and though there was grumbling it was on a lessening tone.

"Wait, father," said the young gentleman, "I will step out and see if there is some way of getting on."

"Look out, Philip," said the girl, "you will get hurt. Only hear the horses neighing as they lash out."

Philip Taverney, Knight of Redcastle, was a charming cavalier and, though he did not resemble his sister, he was as handsome for a man as she for her sex.

"Bid those fellows get out of our way," said the baron, "so we can pass."

Philip was a man of the time and like many of the young nobility had learnt ideas which his father of the old school was incapable of appreciating.

"Oh, you do not know the present Paris, father," he returned. "These high-handed acts of the masters were all very well formerly; but they will hardly go down now, and you would not like to waste your dignity, of course."

"But since these rascals know who I am –"

"Were you a royal prince," replied the young man smiling, "they would not budge for you, I am afraid; at this moment, too, when the fireworks are going off."

"And we shall not see them," pouted Andrea.

"Your fault, by Jove – you spent more than two hours over your attire," snarled the baron.

"Could you not take me through the mob to a good spot on your arm, brother?" asked she.

"Yes, yes, come out, little lady," cried several voices; for the men were struck by Mdlle. Taverney's beauty: "you are not stout, and we will make room for you."

Andrea sprang lightly out of the vehicle without touching the steps.

"I think little of the crackers and rockets, and I will stay here," growled the baron.

"We are not going far, father," responded Philip.

Always respectful to the queen called Beauty, the mob opened before the Taverneys, and a good citizen made his wife and daughter give way on a bench where they stood, for the young lady. Philip stood by his sister, who rested a hand on his shoulder. The young man who had "cut behind" the carriage, had followed them and he looked with fond eyes on the girl.

"Are you comfortable, Andrea?" said the chevalier; "see what a help good looks are!"

"Good looks," sighed the strange young man; "why, she is lovely, very lovely. She is lovelier here, in Parisian costume, than when I used to see her on their country place, where I was but Gilbert the humble retainer on my lord Baron's lands."

Andrea heard the compliment; but she thought it came not from an acquaintance so far as a dependent could be the acquaintance of a young lady of title, and she believed it was a common person who spoke.

Infinitely proud, she heeded it no more than an East Indian idol troubles itself about the adorer who places his tribute at its feet.

Hardly were the two young Taverneys established on and by the bench than the first rockets serpented towards the clouds, and a loud "Oh!" was roared by the multitude henceforth absorbed in the sight.

Andrea did not try to conceal her impressions in her astonishment at the unequalled sight of a population cheering with delight before a palace of fire. Only a yard from her, the youth who had named himself as Gilbert, gazed on her rather than at the show, except because it charmed her. Every time a gush of flame shone on her beautiful countenance, he thrilled; he could fancy that the general admiration sprang from the adoration which this divine creature inspired in him who idolized her.

Suddenly, a vivid glare burst and spread, slanting from the river: it was a bomshell exploding fiercely, but Andrea merely admired the gorgeous play of light.

"How splendid," she murmured.

"Goodness," said her brother, disquieted, "that shot was badly aimed for it shoots almost on the level instead of taking an upward curve. Oh, God, it is an accident! Come away – it is a mishap which I dreaded. A stray cracker has set fire to the powder on the bastion. The people are trampling on each other over there to get away. Do you not hear those screams – not cheers but shrieks of distress. Quick, quick, to the coach! Gentlemen, gentlemen, please let us through."

He put his arms around his sister's slender waist, to drag her in the direction of her father. Also made uneasy by the clamor, the danger being evident though not distinguished yet by him, he put his head out of the window to look for his dear ones.

It was too late!

The final display of fifteen thousand rockets-burst, darting off in all directions, and chasing the spectators like those squibs exploded in the bull-fighting ring to stir up the bull.

At first surprised but soon frightened, the people drew back without reflection. Before this invincible retreat of a hundred thousand, another mass as numerous gave the same movement when squeezed to the rear. The wooden work at the bastion took fire; children cried, women tossed their arms; the city guardsmen struck out to quiet the brawlers and re-establish order by violence.

All these causes combined to drive the crowd like a waterspout to the corner where Philip of Taverney stood. Instead of reaching the baron's carriage as he reckoned, he was swept on by the resistless tide, of which no description can give an idea. Individual force, already doubled by fear and pain, was increased a hundredfold by the junction of the general power.

As Philip dragged Andrea away, Gilbert was also carried off by the human current: but at the corner of Madeline Street, a band of fugitives lifted him up and tore him away from Andrea, in spite of his struggles and yelling.

Upon the Taverneys charged a team of runaway horses. Philip saw the crowd part; the smoking heads of the animals appeared and they rose on their haunches for a leap. He leaped, too, and being a cavalry officer, captain in the Dauphiness's Dragoons, knew how to deal with them. He caught the bit of one and was lifted with it.

Andrea saw him flung and fall; she screamed, threw up her arms, was buffeted, reeled, and in an instant was tossed hence alone, like a feather, without the strength to offer resistance.

Deafening calmor, more dreadful than shouts of battle, the horses neighing, the clatter of the vehicles on the pavement cumbered with the crippled, and livid glare of the burning stands, the sinister flashing of swords which some of the soldiers had drawn, in their fury and above the bloody chaos, the bronze statue gleaming with the light as it presided over the carnage – here was enough to drive the girl mad.

She uttered a despairing cry; for a soldier in cutting a way for himself in the crowd had waved the dripping blade over her head. She clasped her hands like a shipwrecked sailor as the last breaker swamps him, and gasping "God have mercy" fell.

Yet to fall here was to die.

One had heard this final, supreme appeal. It was Gilbert who had been snaking his way up to her. Though the same rush bent him down, he rose, seized the soldier by the throat and upset him.

Where he felled him, lay the white-robed form: he lifted it up with a giant's strength.

When he felt this beautiful body on his heart, though it might be a corpse, a ray of pride illuminated his face.

The sublime situation made him the sublimation of strength and courage extreme; he dashed with his burden into the torrent of men. This would have broken a hole through a wall. It sustained him and carried them both. He just touched the ground with his feet, but her weight began to tell on him. Her heart beat against his.

"She is saved," he said, "and I have saved her," he added, as the mass brought up against the Royal Wardrobe Building, and he was sheltered in the angle of masonry.

But looking towards the bridge over the Seine, he did not see the twenty thousand wretches on his right, mutilated, welded together, having broken through the barrier of the carriages and mixed up with them as the drivers and horses were seized with the same vertigo.

Instinctively they tried to get to the wall against which the closest were mashed.

This new deluge threatened to grind those who had taken refuge here by the Wardrobe building, with the belief they had escaped. Maimed bodies and dead ones piled up by Gilbert. He had to back into the recess of the gateway, where the weight made the walls crack.

The stifled youth felt like yielding; but collecting all his powers by a mighty effort, he enclasped Andrea with his arms, applying his face to her dress as if he meant to strangle her whom he wished to protect.

"Farewell," he gasped as he bit her robe in kissing it.

His eyes glancing about in an ultimate call to heaven, were offered a singular vision.

A man was standing on a horseblock, clinging by his right hand to an iron ring sealed in the wall: while with his left he seemed to beckon an army in flight to rally.

He was a tall dark man of thirty, with a figure muscular but elegant. His features had the mobility of Southerners', strangely blending power and subtlety. His eyes were piercing and commanding.

As the mad ocean of human beings poured beneath him he cast out a word or a cabalistic token. On these, some individual in the throng was seen to stop, fight clear and make his way towards the beckoner to fall in at his rear. Others, called likewise, seemed to recognize brothers in each other, and all lent their hands to catch still more of the swimmers in this tide of life. Soon this knot of men were formed into the head of a breakwater, which divided the fugitives and served to stay and stem the rush.

At every instant new recruits seemed to spring out of the earth at these odd words and weird gestures, to form the backers of this wondrous man.

Gilbert nerved himself. He felt that here alone was safety, for here was calm and power.

A last flicker of the burning staging, irradiated this man's visage and Gilbert uttered an outcry of surprise.

"I know who that is," he said, "he visited my master down at Taverney. It is Baron Balsamo. Oh, I care not if I die provided she lives. This man has the power to save her."

In perfect self-sacrifice, he raised the girl up in both hands and shouted:

"Baron Balsamo, save Andrea de Taverney!"

Balsamo heard this voice from the depths; he saw the white figure lifted above the matted beings; he used the phalanx he had collected to cover his charge to the spot. Seizing the girl, still

sustained by Gilbert though his arms were weakening, he snatched her away, and let the crowd carry them both afar.

He had not time to turn his head.

Gilbert had not the breath to utter a word. Perhaps, after having Andrea aided, he would have supplicated assistance for himself; but all he could do was clutch with a hand which tore a scrap of the dress of the girl. After this grasp, a last farewell, the young man tried no longer to struggle, as though he were willing to die. He closed his eyes and fell on a heap of the dead.

CHAPTER II

THE FIELD OF THE DEAD

TO great tempests succeeds calm, dreadful but reparative.

At two o'clock in the morning a wan moon was playing through the swift-driving white clouds upon the fatal scene where the merry-makers had trampled and buried one another in the ditches.

The corpses stuck out arms lifted in prayers and legs broken and entangled, while the clothes were ripped and the faces livid.

Yellow and sickening smoke, rising from the burning platforms on Louis XV. Place, helped to give it the aspect of a battlefield.

Over the bloody and desolate spot wandered shadows which were the robbers of the dead, attracted like ravens. Unable to find living prey, they stripped the corpses and swore with surprise when they found they had been forestalled by rivals. They fled, frightened and disappointed as soldier's bayonets at last appeared, but among the long rows of the dead, robbers and soldiers were not the solely moving objects.

Supplied with lanterns prowlers were busy. They were not only curious, but relatives and parents and lovers who had not had their dear ones come home from the sightseeing. They came from the remotest parts for the horrible news had spread over Paris, mourning as if a hurricane had passed over it, and anxiety was acted out in these searches.

It was muttered that the Provost of Paris had many corpses thrown into the river from his fears at the immense number lost through his want of foresight. Hence those who had ferreted about uselessly, went to the river and stood in it knee-deep to stare at the flow; or they stole with their lanterns into the by-streets where it was rumored some of the crippled wretches had crept to beg help and at least flee the scene of their misfortune.

At the end of the square, near the Royal Gardens, popular charity had already set up a field hospital. A young man who might be identified as a surgeon by the instruments by his side, was attending to the wounded brought to him. While bandaging them he said words rather expressing hatred for the cause of their injuries than pity for the effect. He had two helpers, robust reporters, to whom he kept on shouting:

"Let me have the poor first. You can easily pick them out for they will be badly dressed and most injured."

At these words, continually croaked, a young gentleman with pale brow, who was searching among the bodies with a lantern in his hand, raised his head.

A deep gash on his forehead still dropped red blood. One of his hands was thrust between two buttons of his coat to support his injured arm; his perspiring face betrayed deep and ceaseless emotion.

Looking sadly at the amputated limbs which the operator appeared to regard with professional pleasure, he said:

"Oh, doctor, why do you make a selection among the victims?"

"Because," replied the surgeon, raising his head at this reproach, "no one would care for the poor if I did not, and the rich will always find plenty to look after them. Lower your light and look along the pavement and you will find a hundred poor to one rich or noble. In this catastrophe, with their luck which will in the end tire heaven itself, the aristocrats have paid their tax as usual, one per thousand."

The gentleman held up his lantern to his own face.

"Am I only one of my class?" he queried, without irritation, "a nobleman who was lost in the throng, where a horse kicked me in the face and my arm was broken by my falling into a ditch. You say the rich and noble are looked after – have I had my wounds dressed?"

“You have your mansion and your family doctor; go home, for you are able to walk.”

“I am not asking your help, sir; I am seeking my sister, a fair girl of sixteen, no doubt killed, alas! albeit she is not of the lower classes. She wore a white dress and a necklace with a cross. Though she has a residence and a doctor, for pity's sake! answer me if you have seen her?”

“Humanity guides me, my lord,” said the young surgeon with feverish vehemence proving that such ideas had long been seething within his bosom; “I devote myself to mankind, and I obey the law of her who is my goddess when I leave the aristocrat on his deathbed to run and relieve the suffering people. All the woes happened here are derived from the upper class; they come from your abuses, and usurpation; bear therefore the consequences. No lord, I have not seen your sister.”

With this blasting retort, the surgeon resumed his task. A poor woman was brought to him over whose both legs a carriage had rolled.

“Behold,” he pursued Philip with a shout, “is it the poor who drive their coaches about on holidays so as to smash the limbs of the rich?”

Philip, belonging to the new race who sided with Lâfayette, had more than once professed the opinions which stung him from this youth: their application fell on him like chastisement. With breaking heart, he turned aloof on his mournful exploration, but soon they could hear his tearful voice calling:

“Andrea, Andrea!”

Near him hurried an elderly man, in grey coat, cloth stockings, and leaning on a cane, while with his left hand he held a cheap lantern made of a candle surrounded by oiled paper.

“Poor young man,” he sighed on hearing the gentleman's wail and comprehending his anguish, “Forgive me,” he said, returning after letting him pass as though he could not let such great sorrow go by without endeavoring to give some alleviation, “forgive my mingling grief with yours, but those whom the same stroke strikes ought to support one another. Besides, you may be useful to me. As your candle is nearly burnt out you must have been seeking for some time, and so know a good many places. Where do they lie thickest?”

“In the great ditch more than fifty are heaped up.”

“So many victims during a festival?”

“So many? – I have looked upon a thousand dead – and have not yet come upon my sister.”

“Your sister?”

“She was lost in that direction. I have found the bench where we were parted. But of her not a trace. I began to search at the bastion. The mob moved towards the new buildings in Madeleine Street. There I hunted, but there were great fluctuations. The stream rushed thither, but a poor girl would wander anywhere, with her crazed head, seeking flight in any direction.”

“I can hardly think that she would have stemmed the current. We two may find her together at the corner of the streets.”

“But who are you after – your son?” questioned Philip.

“No, an adopted youth, only eighteen, who was master of his actions and would come to the festival. Besides, one was so far from imagining this horrid catastrophe. Your candle is going out – come with me and I will light you.”

“Thanks, you are very kind, but I shall obstruct you.”

“Fear nothing, for I must be seeking, too. Usually the lad comes home punctually,” continued the old man, “but I had a forerunner last evening. I was sitting up for him at eleven when my wife had the rumor from the neighbors of the miseries of this rejoicing. I waited a couple of hours in hopes that he would return, but then I felt it would be cowardly to go to sleep without news.”

“So we will hunt over by the houses,” said the nobleman.

“Yes, as you say the crowd went there and would certainly have carried him along. He is from the country and knows no more the way than the streets. This may be the first time he came to this place.”

“My sister is country-bred also.”

“Shocking sight,” said the old man, before a mound of the suffocated.

“Still we must search,” said the chevalier, resolutely holding out the lantern to the corpses. “Oh, here we are by the Wardrobe Stores – ha! white rags – my sister wore a white dress. Lend me your light, I entreat you, sir.”

“It is a piece of a white dress,” he continued, “but held in a young man’s hand. It is like that she wore. Oh, Andrea!” he sobbed as if it tore up his heart.

The old man came nearer.

“It is he,” he exclaimed, “Gilbert!”

“Gilbert? do you know our farmer’s son, Gilbert, and were you seeking him?”

The old man took the youth’s hand, it was icy cold. Philip opened his waistcoat and found that his heart was quiet. But the next instant he cried: “No, he breathes – he lives, I tell you.”

“Help! this way, to the surgeon,” said the old man.

“Nay, let us do what we can for him for I was refused help when I spoke to him just now.”

“He must take care of my dear boy,” said the old man.

And taking Gilbert between him and Taverney, they carried him towards the surgeon, who was still croaking:

“The poor first – bring in the poor, first.”

This maxim was sure to be hailed with admiration from a group of lookers-on.

“I bring a man of the people,” retorted the old man hotly, feeling a little piqued at this exclusiveness.

“And the women next, as men can bear their hurt better,” proceeded the character.

“The boy only wants bleeding,” said Gilbert’s friend.

“Ho, ho, so it is you, my lord, again?” sneered the surgeon, perceiving Taverney.

The old gentleman thought that the speech was addressed to him and he took it up warmly.

“I am not a lord – I am a man of the multitude – I am Jean Jacques Rousseau.”

The surgeon uttered an exclamation of surprise and said as he waved the crowd back imperiously:

“Way for the Man of Nature – the Emancipator of Humanity – the Citizen of Geneva! Has any harm befallen you?”

“No, but to this poor lad.”

“Ah, like me, you represent the cause of mankind,” said the surgeon.

Startled by this unexpected eulogy, the author of the “Social contract” could only stammer some unintelligible words, while Philip Taverney, seized with stupefaction at being in face of the famous philosopher, stepped aside.

Rousseau was helped in placing Gilbert on the table.

Then Rousseau gave a glance to the surgeon whose succor he invoked. He was a youth of the patient’s own age, but no feature spoke of youth. His yellow skin was wrinkled like an old man’s, his flaccid eyelid covered a serpent’s glance, and his mouth was drawn one side like one in a fit. With his sleeves tucked up to the elbow and his arms smeared with blood, surrounded by the results of the operation he seemed rather an enthusiastic executioner than a physician fulfilling his sad and holy mission.

But the name of Rousseau seemed to influence him into laying aside his ordinary brutality. He softly opened Gilbert’s sleeve, compressed the arm with a linen ligature and pricked the vein.

“We shall pull him through,” he said, “but great care must be taken with him for his chest was crushed in.”

“I have to thank you,” said Rousseau, “and praise you – not for the exclusion you make on behalf of the poor, but for your devotion to the afflicted. All men are brothers.”

“Even the rich, the noble, the lofty?” queried the surgeon, with a kindling look in his sharp eye under the drooping lid.

“Even they, when they are in suffering.”

“Excuse me, but I am like you a Switzer, having been born at Neuchatel; and so I am rather democratic.”

“My fellow-countryman? I should like to know your name.”

“An obscure one, a modest man who devotes his life to study until like yourself he can employ it for the common-weal. I am Jean Paul Marat.”

“I thank you, Marat,” said Rousseau, “but in enlightening the masses on their rights, do not excite their revengeful feelings. If ever they move in that direction, you might be amazed at the reprisals.”

“Ah,” said Marat with a ghastly smile, “if it should come in my time – should I see that day – ”

Frightened at the accent, as a traveler by the mutterings of a coming storm, Rousseau took Gilbert in his arms and tried to carry him away.

“Two willing friends to help Citizen Rousseau,” shouted Marat; “two men of the lower order.”

Rousseau had plenty to choose among; he took two lusty fellows who carried the youth in their arms.

“Take my lantern,” said the author to Taverney as he passed him: “I need it no longer.”

Philip thanked him and went on with his search.

“Poor young gentleman,” sighed Rousseau, as he saw him disappear in the thronged streets. He shuddered, for still rang over the bloody field the surgeon’s shrill voice shouting:

“Bring in the poor – none but the poor! Woe to the rich, the noble and the high-born!”

CHAPTER III

THE RESTORATION

WHILE the thousand casualties were precipitated upon each other, Baron Taverney escaped all the dangers by some miracle.

An old rake, and hardened in cynicism, he seemed the least likely to be so favored, but he maintained himself in the thick of a cluster by his skill and coolness, while incapable of exerting force against the devouring panic. His group, bruised against the Royal Storehouse, and brushed along the square railings, left a long trail of dead and dying on both flanks but, though decimated, its centre was kept out of peril.

As soon as these lucky men and women scattered upon the boulevard, they yelled with glee. Like them, Taverney found himself out of harm's reach. During all the journey, the baron had thought of nobody but his noble self. Though not emotional, he was a man of action, and in great crises such characters put Caesar's adage into practice – Act for yourself. We will not say he was selfish but that his attention was limited.

But soon as he was free on the main street, escaped from death and re-entering life, the old baron uttered a cry of delight, followed by another of pain.

"My daughter," he said, in sorrow, though it was not so loud as the other.

"Poor dear old man," said some old women, flocking round ready to condole with him, but still more to question.

He had no popular inclinations. Ill at ease among the gossips he made an effort to break the ring, and to his credit got off a few steps towards the square. But they were but the impulse of parental love, never wholly dead in a man; reason came to his aid, and stopped him short.

He cheered himself with the reasoning that if he, a feeble old man had struggled through, Andrea, on the strong arm of her brave and powerful brother, must have likewise succeeded. He concluded that the two had gone home, and he proceeded to their Paris lodging, in Coq-Heron street.

But he was scarcely within twenty paces of the house, on the street leading to a summerhouse in the gardens, where Philip had induced a friend to let them dwell, when he was hailed by a girl on the threshold. This was a pretty servant maid, who was jabbering with some women.

"Have you not brought Master Philip and Mistress Andrea?" was her greeting.

"Good heavens, Nicole, have they not come home?" cried the baron, a little startled, while the others were quivering with the thrill which permeated all the city from the exaggerated story of the first fugitives spreading.

"Why, no, my lord, no one has seen them."

"They could not come home by the shortest road," faltered the baron, trembling with spite at his pitiful line of reasoning falling to pieces.

There he stood, in the street, with Nicole whimpering, and an old valet, who had accompanied the Taverneys to town, lifting his hands to the sky.

"Oh, here comes Master Philip," ejaculated Nicole, with inexpressible terror, for the young man was alone.

He ran up through the shades of evening, desperate, calling out as soon as he saw the gathering at the house door:

"Is my sister here?"

"We have not seen her – she is not here," said Nicole. "Oh, heavens, my poor young mistress!" she sobbed.

"The idea of your coming back without her!" said the baron with anger the more unfair as we have shown how he quitted the scene of the disaster.

By way of answer he showed his bleeding face and his arm broken and hanging like a dead limb by his side.

“Alas, my poor Andrea,” sighed the baron, falling, seated on a stone bench by the door.

“But I shall find her, dead or alive,” replied the young man gloomily.

And he returned to the place with feverish agitation. He would have lopped off his useless arm, if he had an axe, but as it was, he tucked the hand into his waistcoat for an improvised sling.

It was thus we saw him on the square, where he wandered part of the night. As the first streaks of dawn whitened the sky, he turned homeward, though ready to drop. From a distance he saw the same familiar group which had met his eyes on the eve. He understood that Andrea had not returned, and he halted.

“Well?” called out the baron, spying him.

“Has she not returned? no news – no clew?” and he fell, exhausted, on the stone bench, while the older noble swore.

At this juncture, a hack appeared at the end of the street, lumbered up, and stopped in front of the house. As a female head appeared at the window, thrown back as if in a faint, Philip, recognizing it, leaped that way. The door opened, and a man stepped out who carried Andrea de Taverney in his arms.

“Dead – they bring her home dead,” gasped Philip, falling on his knees.

“I do not think so, gentlemen,” said the man who bore Andrea, “I trust that Mdlle. de Taverney is only fainted.”

“Oh, the magician,” said the baron, while Philip uttered the name of “the Baron of Balsamo.”

“I, my lord, who was happy enough to spy Mdlle. de Taverney in the riot, near the Royal wardrobe storehouse.”

But Philip passed at once from joy to doubt and said:

“You are bringing her home very late, my lord.”

“You will understand my plight,” replied Balsamo without astonishment. “I was unaware of the address of your sister, though your father calls me a magician, kindly remembering some little incidents occurring at your country-seat. So I had her carried by my servants to the residence of the Marchioness of Savigny, a friend who lives near the Royal Stables. Then this honest fellow – Comtois,” he said, waving a footman in the royal livery to come forward, “being in the King’s household and recognizing the young lady from her being attendant of the Dauphiness, gave me this address. Her wonderful beauty had made him remark her one night when the royal coach left her at this door. I bade him get upon the box, and I have the honor to bring to you, with all the respect she merits – the young lady, less ill than she may appear.”

He finished by placing the lady with the utmost respect in the hands of Nicole and her father. For the first time the latter felt a tear on his eyelid, and he was astonished as he let it openly run down his wrinkled cheek.

“My lord,” said Philip, presenting the only hand he could use to Balsamo, “You know me and my address. Give me a chance to repay the services you have done me.”

“I have merely accomplished duty,” was the reply. “I owed you for the hospitality you once favored me at Taverney.” He took a few paces to depart, but retracing them, he added: “I ask pardon; but I was forgetting to leave the precise address of Marchioness Savigny; she lives in Saint Honore Street, near the Feuillant’s Monastery. This is said in case Mdlle. de Taverney should like to pay her a visit.”

In this explanation, exactness of details and accumulation of proofs, the delicacy touched the young lord and even the old one.

“My daughter owes her life to your lordship,” said the latter.

“I am proud and happy in that belief,” responded Balsamo.

Followed by Comtois, who refused the purse Philip offered, he went to the carriage and was gone.

Simultaneously, as if the departure made the swooning of Andrea cease, she opened her eyes. For a while she was dumb, and stunned, and her look was frightened.

“Heavens, have we but had her half restored – with her reason gone?” said Philip.

Seeming to comprehend the words, Andrea shook her head. But she remained mute, as if in ecstasy. Standing, one of her arms was levelled in the direction in which Balsamo had disappeared.

“Come, come, it is high time our worry was over,” said the baron. “Help your sister indoors my son.”

Between the young gentleman and Nicole, Andrea reached the rear house, but walked like a somnambulist.

“Philip – father!” she uttered as speech returned to her at last.

“She knows us,” exclaimed the young knight.

“To be sure I know you; but what has taken place?”

Her eyes closed in a blessed sleep this time, and Nicole carried her into her bedroom.

On going to his own room, Captain Philip found a doctor whom the valet Labrie had sent for. He examined the injured arm, not broken but dislocated, and set the bone. Still uneasy about his sister, he took the medical man to her bedside. He felt her pulse, listened to her breathing and smiled.

“Her slumber is calm and peaceful as a child’s,” he said. “Let her sleep on, young sir, there is nothing more to do.”

The baron was sound asleep already assured about his children on whom were built the ambitious schemes which had lured him to the capital.

CHAPTER IV

AN AERIAL JOURNEY

MORE fortunate than Andrea, Gilbert had in lieu of an ordinary practitioner, a light of medical science to attend to his ails. The eminent Dr Jussieu, a friend of Rousseau's, though allied to the Court, happened to call in the nick to be of service. He promised that the young man would be on his legs in a week.

Moreover, being a botanist like Rousseau, he proposed that on the coming Sunday they should give the youth a walk with them in the country, out Marly way. Gilbert might rest while they gathered the curious plants.

With this prospect to entice him, the invalid returned rapidly to health.

But while Rousseau believed that his ward was well, and his wife Therese told the gossips that it was due to the skill of the celebrated Dr. Jussieu, Gilbert was running the worst danger ever befalling his obstinacy and perpetual dreaming.

Gilbert was the son of a farmer on the land of Baron Taverney. The master had dissipated his revenue and sold his principal to play the rake in Paris. When he returned to bring up his son and daughter in poverty in the dilapidated manor house, Gilbert was a hanger-on, who fell in love with Nicole as a stepping-stone to becoming infatuated with her mistress. As at the fireworks, the youth never thought of anything but this mad love.

From the attic of Rousseau's house he could look down on the garden where the summerhouse stood in which Andrea was also in convalescence.

He did not see her, only Nicole carrying broth as for the invalid. The back of the little house came to the yard of Rousseau's in another street.

In this little garden old Taverney trotted about, taking snuff greedily as if to rouse his wits – that was all Gilbert saw.

But it was enough to judge that a patient was indoors, not a dead woman.

"Behind that screen in the room," he mused, "is the woman whom I love to idolatry. She has but to appear to thrill my every limb for she holds my existence in her hand and I breathe but for us two."

Merged in his contemplation he did not perceive that in another window of an adjoining house in his street, Platriere Street, a young woman in the widow's weeds, was also watching the dwelling of the Taverneys. This second spy knew Gilbert, too, but she took care not to show herself when he leaned out of the casement as to throw himself on the ground. He would have recognized her as Chon, the sister of Jeanne, Countess Dubarry, the favorite of the King.

"Oh, how happy they are who can walk about in that garden," raved the mad lover, with furious envy, "for there they could hear Andrea and perhaps see her in her rooms. At night, one would not be seen while peeping."

It is far from desire to execution. But fervid imaginations bring extremes together; they have the means. They find reality amid fancies, they bridge streams and put a ladder up against a mountain.

To go around by the street would be no use, even if Rousseau had not locked in his pet, for the Taverneys lived in the rear house.

"With these natural tools, hands and feet," reasoned Gilbert, "I can scramble over the shingles and by following the gutter which is rather narrow, but straight, consequently the shortest path from one point to another, I will reach the skylight next my own. That lights the stairs, so that I can get out. Should I fall, they will pick me up, smashed at her feet, and they will recognize me, so that my death will be fine, noble, romantic – superb!"

"But if I get in on the stairs I can go down to the window over the yard and jump down a dozen feet where the trellis will help me to get into her garden. But if that worm-eaten wood should break

and tumble me on the ground that would not be poetic, but shameful to think of! The baron will say I came to steal the fruit and he will have his man Labrie lug me out by the ear.

“No, I will twist these clotheslines into a rope to let me down straight and I will make the attempt to-night.”

From his window, at dark, Gilbert was scanning the enemy's grounds, as he qualified Taverney's house-lot, when he spied a stone coming over the garden-wall and slapping up against the house-wall. But though he leaned far out he could not discern the flinger of the pebble.

What he did see was a blind on the ground floor open warily and the wide-awake head of the maid Nicole show itself. After having scrutinized all the windows round, Nicole came out of doors and ran to the espalier on which some pieces of lace were drying.

The stone had rolled on this place and Gilbert had not lost sight of it. Nicole kicked it when she came to it and kept on playing football with it till she drove it under the trellis where she picked it up under cover of taking off the lace. Gilbert noticed that she shucked the stone of a piece of paper, and he concluded that the message was of importance.

It was a letter, which the sly wench opened, eagerly perused and put in her pocket without paying any more heed to the lace.

Nicole went back into the house, with her hand in her pocket. She returned with a key which she slipped under the garden gate, which would be out in the street beside the carriage-doorway.

“Good, I understand,” thought the young man: “it is a love letter. Nicole is not losing her time in town – she has a lover.”

He frowned with the vexation of a man who supposed that his loss had left an irreparable void in the heart of the girl he jilted, and discovered that she had filled it up.

“This bids fair to run counter to my plans,” thought he, trying to give another turn to his ill-humor. “I shall not be sorry to learn what happy mortal has succeeded me in the good graces of Nicole Legay.”

But Gilbert had a level mind in some things; he saw that the knowledge of this secret gave him an advantage over the girl, as she could not deny it, while she scarcely suspected his passion for the baron's daughter, and had no clue to give body to her doubts.

The night was dark and sultry, stifling with heat as often in early spring. From the clouds it was a black gulf before Gilbert, through which he descended by the rope. He had no fear from his strength of will. So he reached the ground without a flutter. He climbed the garden wall but as he was about to descend, heard a step beneath him.

He clung fast and glanced at the intruder.

It was a man in the uniform of a corporal of the French Guards.

Almost at the same time, he saw Nicole open the house backdoor, spring across the garden, leaving it open, and light and rapid as a shepherdess, dart to the greenhouse, which was also the soldier's destination. As neither showed any hesitation about proceeding to this point, it was likely that this was not the first appointment the pair had kept there.

“No, I can continue my road,” reasoned Gilbert; “Nicole would not be receiving her sweetheart unless she were sure of some time before her, and I may rely on finding Mdlle. Andrea alone. Andrea alone!”

No sound in the house was audible and only a faint light was to be seen.

Gilbert skirted the wall and reached the door left open by the maid. Screened by an immense creeper festooning the doorway, he could peer into an anteroom, with two doors; the open one he believed to be Nicole's. He groped his way into it, for it had no light.

At the end of a lobby, a glazed door, with muslin curtains on the other side, showed a glimmer. On going up this passage, he heard a feeble voice.

It was Andrea's.

All Gilbert's blood flowed back to the heart.

CHAPTER V SUSPICIONS

THE voice which made answer to the girl's was her brother Philip's. He was anxiously asking after her health.

Gilbert took a few steps guardedly and stood behind one of those half-columns carrying a bust which were the ornaments in pairs to doorways of the period. Thus in security, he looked and listened, so happy that his heart melted with delight; yet so frightened that it seemed to shrink up to a pin's head.

He saw Andrea lounging on an invalid-chair, with her face turned towards the glazed door, a little on the jar. A small lamp with a large reflecting shade placed on a table heaped with books, showed the only recreation allowed the fair patient, and illumined only the lower part of her countenance.

Seated on the foot of the chair, Philip's back was turned to the watcher; his arm was still in a sling.

This was the first time the lady sat up and that her brother was allowed out. They had not seen each other since the dreadful night; but both had been informed of the respective convalescence. They were chatting freely as they believed themselves alone and that Nicole would warn them if any one came.

"Then you are breathing freely," said Philip.

"Yes, but with some pain."

"Strength come back, my poor sister?"

"Far from it, but I have been able to get to the window two or three times. How nice the open air is – how sweet the flowers – with them it seems that one cannot die. But I am so weak from the shock having been so horrid. I can only walk by hanging on to the furniture; I should fall without support."

"Cheer up, dear; the air and flowers will restore you. In a week you will be able to pay a visit to the Dauphiness who has kindly asked after you, I hear."

"I hope so, for her Highness has been good to me; to you in promoting you to be captain in her guards, and to father, who was induced by her benevolence to leave our miserable country house.

"Speaking of your miraculous escape," said Philip, "I should like to know more about the rescue."

Andrea blushed and seemed ill at ease. Either he did not remark it or would not do so.

"I thought you knew all about it," said she; "father was perfectly satisfied.

"Of course, dear Andrea, and it seemed to me that the gentleman behaved most delicately in the matter. But some points in the account seemed obscure – I do not mean suspicious."

"Pray explain," said the girl with a virgin's candor.

"One point is very out of the way – how you were saved. Kindly relate it."

"Oh, Philip," she said with an effort, "I have almost forgotten – I was so frightened."

"Never mind – tell me what you do remember."

"You know, brother, that we were separated within twenty paces of the Royal Wardrobe Storehouse? I saw you dragged away towards the Tuileries Gardens, while I was hurled into Royale Street. Only for an instant did I see you, making desperate efforts to return to me. I held out my arms to you and was screaming, 'Philip!' when I was suddenly wrapped in a whirlwind, and whisked up towards the railings. I feared that the current would dash me up against the wall and shatter me. I heard the yells of those crushed against the iron palings; I foresaw my turn coming to be ground to rags. I could reckon how few instants I had to live, when – half dead, half crazed, as I lifted eyes and arms in a last prayer to heaven, I saw the eyes sparkle of a man who towered over the multitude and it seemed to obey him."

"You mean Baron Balsamo, I suppose?"

"Yes, the same I had seen at Taverny. There he struck me with uncommon terror. The man seems supernatural. He fascinates my sight and my hearing; with but the touch of his finger he would make me quiver all over."

"Continue, Andrea," said the chevalier, with darkening brow and moody voice.

"This man soared over the catastrophe like one whom human ills could not attain. I read in his eyes that he wanted to save me and something extraordinary went on within me: shaken, bruised, powerless and nearly dead though I was, to that man I was attracted by an invincible, unknown and mysterious force, which bore me thither. I felt arms enclasp me and urge me out of this mass of welded flesh in which I was kneaded – where others choked and gasped I was lifted up into air. Oh, Philip," said she with exaltation, "I am sure it was the gaze of that man. I grasped at his hand and I was saved."

"Alas," thought Gilbert, "I was not seen by her though dying at her feet."

"When I felt out of danger, my whole life having been centred in this gigantic effort or else the terror surpassed my ability to contend – I fainted away."

"When do you think this faint came on?"

"Ten minutes after we were rent asunder, brother."

"That would be close on Midnight," remarked the Knight of Red Castle. "How then was it you did not return home until three? You must forgive me questions which may appear to you ridiculous but they have a reason to me, dear Andrea."

"Three days ago I could not have replied to you," she said, pressing his hand, "but, strange as it may be, I can see more clearly now. I remember as though a superior will made me do so."

"I am waiting with impatience. You were saying that the man took you up in his arms?"

"I do not recall that clearly," answered Andrea, blushing. "I only know that he plucked me up out of the crowd. But the touch of his hand caused me the same shock as at Taverny, and again I swooned or rather I slept, for it was a sleep that was good."

Gilbert devoured all the words, for he knew that so far all was true.

"On recovering my senses, I was in a richly furnished parlor. A lady and her maid were by my side, but they did not seem uneasy. Their faces were benevolently smiling. It was striking half-past twelve."

"Good," said the knight, breathing freely. "Continue, Andrea, continue."

"I thanked the lady for the attentions she was giving, but, knowing in what anxiety you must all be, I begged to be taken home at once. They told me that the Count – for they knew our Baron Balsamo as Count Fenix, had gone back to the scene of the accident, but would return with his carriage and take me to our house. Indeed, about two o'clock, I heard carriage wheels and felt the same warning shiver of his approach. I reeled and fell on a sofa as the door opened; I barely could recognize my deliverer as the giddiness seized me. During this unconsciousness I was put in the coach and brought here. It is all I recall, brother."

"Thank you, dear," said Philip, in a joyful voice; "your calculations of the time agree with mine. I will call on Marchioness Savigny and personally thank her. A last word of secondary import. Did you notice any familiar face in the excitement? Such as little Gilbert's, for instance?"

"Yes, I fancy I did see him a few paces off, as you and I were driven apart," said Andrea, recollecting.

"She saw me," muttered Gilbert.

"Because, when I was seeking you, I came across the boy."

"Among the dead?" asked the lady with the shade of assumed interest which the great take in their inferiors.

"No, only wounded, and I hope he will come round. His chest was crushed in."

"Ay, against hers," thought Gilbert.

"But the odd part of it was that I found in his clenched hand a rag from your dress, Andrea," pursued Philip.

"Odd, indeed; but I saw in this Dance of Death such a series of faces, that I can hardly say whether his figured truly there or not, poor little fellow!"

"But how do you account for the scrap in his grip?" pressed the captain.

"Good gracious! nothing more easy," rejoined the girl with tranquillity greatly contrasting with the eavesdropper's frightful throbbing of the heart. "If he were near me and he saw me lifted up, as I stated, by the spell of that man, he might have clutched at my skirts to be saved as the drowning snatch at a straw."

"Ugh," grumbled Gilbert, with gloomy contempt for this haughty explanation, "what ignoble interpretation of my devotion! How wrongly these aristocrats judge us people. Rousseau is right in saying that we are worth more than they – our heart is purer and our arms stronger."

At that he heard a sound behind him.

"What, is not that madcap Nicole here?" asked Baron Taverney, for it was he who passed by Gilbert hiding and entered his daughter's room.

"I dare say she is in the garden," replied his daughter, the latter with a quiet proving that she had no suspicion of the listener; "good evening, papa."

The old noble took an armchair.

"Ha, my children, it is a good step to Versailles when one travels in a hackney coach instead of one of the royal carriages. I have seen the Dauphiness, though, who sent for me to learn about your progress."

"Andrea is much better, sir."

"I knew that and told her Royal Highness so. She is good enough to promise to call her to her side when she sets up her establishment in the Little Trianon Palace which is being fitted up to her liking."

"I at court?" said Andrea timidly.

"Not much of a court; the Dauphiness has quiet tastes and the Prince Royal hates noise and bustle. They will live domestically at Trianon. But judging what the Austrian princess's humor is, I wager that as much will be done in the family circle as at official assemblies. The princess has a temper and the Dauphin is deep, I hear."

"Make no mistake, sister, it will still be a court," said Captain Philip, sadly.

"The court," thought Gilbert with intense rage and despair, "a height I cannot scale – an abyss into which I cannot hurl myself! Andrea will be lost to me!"

"We have neither the wealth to allow us to inhabit that palace, nor the training to fit us for it," replied the girl to her father. "What would a poor girl like me do among those most brilliant ladies of whom I have had a glimpse? Their splendor dazzled me, while their wit seemed futile though sparkling. Alas, brother, we are obscure to go amid so much light!"

"What nonsense!" said the baron, frowning. "I cannot make out why my family always try to bemean what affects me! obscure – you must be mad, miss! A Taverney Redcastle, obscure! who should shine if not you, I want to know? Wealth? we know what wealth at court is – the crown is a sun which creates the gold – it does the gilding, and it is the tide of nature. I was ruined – I become rich, and there you have it. Has not the King money to offer his servitors? Am I to blush if he provides my son with a regiment and gives my daughter a dowry? or an appanage for me, or a nice warrant on the Treasury – when I am dining with the King and I find it under my plate?"

"No, no, only fools are squeamish – I have no prejudices. It is my due and I shall take it. Don't you have any scruples, either. The only matter to debate is your training. You have the solid education of the middle class with the more showy one of your own; you paint just such landscapes as the Dauphiness doats upon. As for your beauty, the King will not fail to notice it. As for conversation, which Count Artois and Count Provence like – you will charm them. So you will not only be welcome

but adored. That is the word,” concluded the cynic, rubbing his hands and laughing so unnaturally that Philip stared to see if it were a human being.

But, taking Andrea’s hand as she lowered her eyes, the young gentleman said:

“Father is right; you are all he says, and nobody has more right to go to Versailles Palace.”

“But I would be parted from you,” remonstrated Andrea.

“Not at all,” interrupted the baron; “Versailles is large enough to hold all the Taverneys.”

“True, but the Trianon is small,” retorted Andrea, who could be proud and willful.

“Trianon is large enough to find a room for Baron Taverney,” returned the old nobleman, “a man like me always finds a place” – meaning “can find a place. Any way, it is the Dauphiness’s order.”

“I will go,” said Andrea.

“That is good. Have you any money, Philip?” asked the old noble.

“Yes, if you want some; but if you want to offer me it, I should say that I have enough as it is.”

“Of course, I forgot you were a philosopher,” sneered the baron. “Are you a philosopher, too, my girl, or do you need something?”

“I should not like to distress you, father.”

“Oh, luck has changed since we left Taverney. The King has given me five hundred louis – on account, his Majesty said. Think of your wardrobe, child.”

“Oh, thank you, papa,” said Andrea, joyously.

“Oho, going to the other extreme now! A while ago, you wanted for nothing – now you would ruin the Emperor of China. Never mind, for fine dresses become you, darling.”

With a tender kiss, he opened the door leading into his own room, and disappeared, saying:

“Confound that Nicole for not being in to show me a light!”

“Shall I ring for her, father?”

“No, I shall knock against Labrie, dozing on a chair. Good night, my dears.”

“Good night, brother,” said Andrea as Philip also stood up: “I am overcome with fatigue. This is the first time, I have been up since my accident.”

The gentleman kissed her hand with respect mixed with his affection always entertained for his sister and he went through the corridor, almost brushing against Gilbert.

“Never mind Nicole – I shall retire alone. Good bye, Philip.”

CHAPTER VI

WHAT GILBERT EXPECTED

A SHIVER ran through the watcher as the girl rose from her chair. With her alabaster hands she pulled out her hairpins one by one while the wrapper, slipping down upon her shoulders, disclosed her pure and graceful neck, and her arms, carelessly arched over her head, threw out the lower curve of the body to the advantage of the exquisite throat, quivering under the linen.

Gilbert felt a touch of madness and was on the verge of rushing forward, yelling:

"You are lovely, but you must not be too proud of your beauty since you owe it to me – it was I saved your life!"

Suddenly a knot in the corset string irritated Andrea who stamped her foot and rang the bell.

This knell recalled the lover to reason. Nicole had left the door open so as to run back. She would come.

He wanted to dart out of the house, but the baron had closed the other doors as he came along. He was forced to take refuge in Nicole's room.

From there he saw her hurry in to her mistress, assist her to bed and retire, after a short chat, in which she displayed all the fawning of a maid who wishes to win her forgiveness for delinquency.

Singing to make her peace of mind be believed, she was going through on the way to the garden when Gilbert showed himself in a moonbeam.

She was going to scream but taking him for another, she said, conquering her fright:

"Oh, it is you – what rashness!"

"Yes, it is I – but do not scream any louder for me than the other," said Gilbert.

"Why, whatever are you doing here?" she challenged, knowing her fellow-dependent at Taverny. "But I guess – you are still after my mistress. But though you love her, she does not care for you."

"Really?"

"Mind that I do not expose you and have you thrown out," she said in a threatening tone.

"One may be thrown out, but it will be Nicole to whom stones are tossed over the wall."

"That is nothing to the piece of our mistress's dress found in your hand on Louis XV Square, as Master Philip told his father. He does not see far into the matter yet, but I may help him."

"Take care, Nicole, or they may learn that the stones thrown over the wall are wrapped in love-letters."

"It is not true!" Then recovering her coolness, she added: "It is no crime to receive a love-letter – not like sneaking in to peep at poor young mistress in her private room."

"But it is a crime for a waiting-maid to slip keys under garden doors and keep tryst with soldiers in the greenhouse!"

"Gilbert, Gilbert!"

"Such is the Nicole Virtue! Now, assert that I am in love with Mdlle. Andrea and I will say I am in love with my playfellow Nicole and they will believe that the sooner. Then you will be packed off. Instead of going to the Trianon Palace with your mistress, and coqueting with the fine fops around the Dauphiness, you will have to hang around the barracks to see your lover the corporal of the Guards. A low fall, and Nicole's ambition ought to have carried her higher. Nicole, a dangler on a guardsman!"

And he began to hum a popular song:

"In the French Guards my sweetheart marches!"

"For pity's sake, Gilbert, do not eye me thus – it alarms me."

"Open the door and get that swashbuckler out of the way in ten minutes when I may take my leave."

Subjugated by his imperious air, Nicole obeyed. When she returned after dismissing the corporal, her first lover was gone.

Alone in his attic, Gilbert cherished of his recollections solely the picture of Andrea letting down her fine tresses.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRAP TO CATCH PHILOSOPHERS

INDIFFERENT to everything since he had learnt of Andrea's going soon to the court, Gilbert had forgotten the excursion of Rousseau and his brother botanist on Sunday. He would have preferred to pass the day at his garret window, watching his idol.

Rousseau had not only taken special pains over his attire, but arrayed Gilbert in the best, though Therese had thought overalls and a smockfrock quite good enough to wander in the woods, picking up weeds.

He was not wrong for Dr. Jussieu came in his carriage, powdered, pommaded and freshened up like springtime: Indian satin coat, lilac taffety vest, extremely fine white silk stockings and polished gold buckled shoes composed his botanist's outfit.

"How gay you are!" exclaimed Rousseau.

"Not at all, I have dressed lightly to get over the ground better."

"Your silk hose will never stand the wet."

"We will pick our steps. Can one be too fine to court Mother Nature?"

The Genevan Philosopher said no more – an invocation to Nature usually shutting him up. Gilbert looked at Jussieu with envy. If he were arrayed like him, perhaps Andrea would look at him.

An hour after the start, the party reached Bougival, where they alighted and took the Chestnut Walk. On coming in sight of the summerhouse of Luciennes, where Gilbert had been conducted by Mdlle. Chon when he was picked up by her, a poor boy on the highway, he trembled. For he had repaid her succor by fleeing when she had wished to make a buffoon of him as a peer to Countess Dubarry's black boy, Zamore.

"It is nine o'clock," observed Dr. Jussieu, "suppose we have breakfast?"

"Where? did you bring eatables in your carriage?"

"No, but I see a kiosk over there where a modest meal may be had. We can herborize as we walk there."

"Very well, Gilbert may be hungry. What is the name of your inn?"

"The Trap."

"How queer!"

"The country folks have droll ideas. But it is not an inn; only a shooting-box where the gamekeepers offer hospitality to gentlemen."

"Of course you know the owner's name?" said Rousseau, suspicious.

"Not at all: Lady Mirepoix or Lady Egmont – or – it does not matter if the butter and the bread are fresh."

The good-humored way in which he spoke disarmed the philosopher who besides had his appetite whetted by the early stroll. Jussieu led the march, Rousseau followed, gleaning, and Gilbert guarded the rear, thinking of Andrea and how to see her at Trianon Palace.

At the top of the hill, rather painfully climbed by the three botanists, rose one of those imitation rustic cottages invented by the gardeners of England and giving a stamp of originality to the scene. The walls were of brick and the shelly stone found naturally in mosaic patterns on the riverside.

The single room was large enough to hold a table and half-a-dozen chairs. The windows were glazed in different colors so that you could by selection view the landscape in the red of sunset, the blue of a cloudy day or the still colder slate hue of a December day.

This diverted Gilbert but a more attractive sight was the spread on the board. It drew an outcry of admiration from Rousseau, a simple lover of good cheer, though a philosopher, from his appetite being as hearty as his taste was modest.

"My dear master," said Jussieu, "if you blame me for this feast you are wrong, for it is quite a mild set-out –"

"Do not depreciate your table, you gormand!"

"Do not call it mine!"

"Not yours? then whose – the brownies, the fairies?" demanded Rousseau, with a smile testifying to his constraint and good nature at the same time.

"You have hit it," answered the doctor, glancing wistfully to the door.

Gilbert hesitated.

"Bless the fays for their hospitality," said Rousseau, "fall on! they will be offended at your holding back and think you rate their bounty incomplete."

"Or unworthy you gentlemen," interrupted a silvery voice at the summerhouse door, where two pretty women presented themselves arm in arm.

With smiles on their lips, they waved their plump hands for Jussieu to moderate his salutations.

"Allow me to present the Author Rousseau to your ladyship, countess," said the latter. "Do you not know the lady?"

Gilbert did, if his teacher did not, for he stared and, pale as death, looked for an exit.

"It is the first time we meet," faltered the Citizen of Geneva.

"Countess Dubarry!" explained the other botanist.

His colleague started as though on a redhot plate of iron.

Jeanne Dubarry, favorite of King Louis X. was a lovely woman, just of the right plumpness to be a material Venus; fair, with light hair but dark eyes she was witching and delightful to all men who prefer truth to fancy in feminine beauty.

"I am very happy," she said "to see and welcome under my roof one of the most illustrious thinkers of the era."

"Lady Dubarry," stammered Rousseau, without seeing that his astonishment was an offense. "So it is she who gives the breakfast?"

"You guess right, my dear philosopher," replied Jussieu, "she and her sister, Mdlle. Chon, who at least is no stranger to Friend Gilbert."

"Her sister knows Gilbert?"

"Intimately," rejoined the impudent girl with the audacity which respected neither royal ill-humor nor philosopher's quips. "We are old boon companions – are you already forgetful of the candy and cakes of Luciennes and Versailles?"

This shot went home; Rousseau dropped his arms. Habituated in his conceit to think the aristocratic party were always trying to seduce him from the popular side, he saw traitors and spies in everybody.

"Is this so, unhappy boy?" he asked of Gilbert, confounded. "Begone, for I do not like those who blow hot and cold with the same breath."

"But I ran away from Luciennes where I was locked up, and I must have preferred your house, my guide, my friend, my philosopher!"

"Hypocrisy!"

"But, M. Rousseau, if I wanted the society of these ladies, I should go with them now?"

"Go where you like! I may be deceived once but not twice. Go to this lady, good and amiable – and with this gentleman," he added pointing to Jussieu, amazed at the philosopher's rebuke to the royal pet, "he is a lover of nature and your accomplice – he has promised you fortune and assistance and he has power at court."

He bowed to the women in a tragic manner, unable to contain himself, and left the pavillion statelily, without glancing again at Gilbert.

"What an ugly creature a philosopher is," tranquilly said Chon, watching the Genevan stumble down the hill.

“You can have anything you like,” prompted Jussieu to Gilbert who kept his face buried in his hands.

“Yes, anything, Gilly,” added the countess, smiling on the returned prodigal.

Raising his pale face, and tossing back the hair matted on his forehead, he said in a steady voice:

“I should be glad to be a gardener at Trianon Palace.”

Chon and the countess glanced at each other, and the former touched her sister’s foot while she winked broadly. Jeanne nodded.

“If feasible, do it,” she said to Jussieu.

Gilbert bowed with his hand on his heart, overflowing with joy after having been drowned with grief.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LITTLE TRIANON

WHEN Louis XIV. built Versailles and perceived the discomfort of grandeur, he granted it was the sojourning-place for a demi-god but no home for a man. So he had the Trianon constructed to be able to draw a free breath at leisure moments.

But the sword of Achilles, if it tired him, was bound to be of insupportable weight to a myrmidon. Trianon was so much too pompous for the Fifteenth Louis that he had the *Little Trianon* built.

It was a house looking with its large eyes of windows over a park and woods, with the wing of the servant's lodgings and stables on the left, where the windows were barred and the kitchens hidden by trellises of vines and creepers.

A path over a wooden bridge led to the Grand Trianon through a kitchen garden.

The King brought Prime Minister Choiseul into this garden to show him the improvements introduced to make the place fit for his grandson the Dauphin, and the Dauphiness.

Duke Choiseul admired everything and passed his comments with a courtier's sagacity. He let the monarch say the place would become more pleasant daily and he added that it would be a family retreat for the sovereign.

"The Dauphiness is still a little uncouth, like all young German girls," said Louis; "She speaks French nicely, but with an Austrian accent jarring on our ears. Here she will speak among friends and it will not matter."

"She will perfect herself," said the duke. "I have remarked that the lady is highly accomplished and accomplishes anything she undertakes."

On the lawn they found the Dauphin taking the sun with a sextant. Louis Aguste, duke of Berry, was a meek-eyed, rosy complexioned man of seventeen, with a clumsy walk. He had a more prominent Bourbon nose than any before him, without its being a caricature. In his nimble fingers and able arms alone he showed the spirit of his race, so to express it.

"Louis," said the King, loudly to be overheard by his grandson, "is a learned man, and he is wrong to rack his brain with science, for his wife will lose by it."

"Oh, no," corrected a feminine voice as the Dauphiness stepped out from the shrubbery, where she was chatting with a man loaded with plans, compass, pencil and notebook.

"Sire, this is my architect, Mique," she said.

"Have you caught the family complaint of building?"

"I am going to turn this sprawling garden into a natural one!"

"Really? why, I thought that trees and grass and running water are natural enough."

"Sire, you have to walk along straight paths between shaped boxwood trees, hewn at an angle of forty-five, to quote the Dauphin, and ponds agreeing with the paths, and star centres, and terraces! I am going to have arbors, rockeries, grottoes, cottages, hills, gorges, meadows – "

"For Dutch dolls to stand up in?" queried the King.

"Alas, Sire, for kings and princes like ourselves," she replied, not seeing him color up, and that she had spoken a cutting truth.

"I hope you will not lodge your servants in your woods and on your rivers like Red Indians, in the natural life which Rousseau praises. If you do, only the Encyclopædists will eulogise you."

"Sire, they would be too cold in huts, so I shall keep the out-buildings for them as they are." She pointed to the windows of a corridor, over which were the servant's sleeping rooms and under which were the kitchens.

"What do I see there?" asked the King, shielding his eyes with his hand, for he had short-sight.

“A woman, your Majesty,” said Choiseul.

“A young lady who is my reading-woman,” said the princess.

“It is Mdlle. de Taverney,” went on Choiseul.

“What, are you attaching the Taverneys to your house?”

“Only the girl.”

“Very good,” said the King, without taking his eyes off the barred window out of which innocently gazed Andrea, with no idea she was watched.

“How pale she is!” remarked the Prime Minister.

“She was nearly killed in the dreadful accident of the 30th of May, my lord.”

“For which we would have punished somebody severely,” said Louis, “but Chancellor Segulier proved it was the work of Fate. Only that fellow Bignon, Provost of the Merchants, was dismissed – and – poor girl! he deserved it.”

“Has she recovered?” asked Choiseul quickly.

“Yes, thank heaven!”

“She goes away,” said the King.

“She recognized your Majesty, and fled. She is timid.”

“A cheerless dwelling for a girl!”

“Oh, no, not so bad.”

“Let us have a look round inside, Choiseul?”

“Your Majesty, Council of Parliament at Versailles at half-past two.”

“Well, go and give those lawyers a shaking!”

And the sovereign, delighted to look at buildings, followed the Dauphiness who was delighted, also, to show her house. They passed Mdlle. de Taverney under the eaves of the little kitchen yard.

“This is my reader’s room,” remarked the Dauphiness. “I will show you it as a sample of how my ladies will fare.”

It was a suite of anteroom and two parlors. The furniture was placed; books, a harpsichord, and particularly a bunch of flowers in a Japanese Vase, attracted the King’s attention.

“What nice flowers! how can you talk of changing your garden? who the mischief supplies your ladies with such beauties? do they save any for the mistress?”

“It is very choice.”

“Who is the gardener here so sweet upon Mdlle. de Taverney?”

“I do not know – Dr. Jussieu found me somebody.”

The King looked round with a curious eye, and elsewhere, before departing. The Dauphin was still taking the sun.

CHAPTER IX

THE HUNT

A LONG rank of carriages filled the Forest at Marly where the King was carrying on what was called an afternoon hunt. The Master of the Buckhounds had deer so selected that he could let the one out which would run before the hounds just as long as suited the sovereign.

On this occasion, his Majesty had stated that he would hunt till four P. M.

Countess Dubarry, who had her own game in view, promised herself that she would hunt the King as steadfastly as he would the deer.

But huntsmen propose and chance disposes. Chance upset the favorite's project, and was almost as fickle as she was herself.

While talking politics with the Duke of Richelieu, who wanted by her help or otherwise to be First Minister instead of Choiseul, the countess – while chasing the King, who was chasing the roebuck – perceived all of a sudden, fifty paces off the road, in a shady grove, a broken down carriage. With its shattered wheels pointing to the sky, its horses were browsing on the moss and beech bark.

Countess Dubarry's magnificent team, a royal gift, had out-stripped all the others and were first to reach the scene of the breakdown.

"Dear me, an accident," said the lady, tranquilly.

"Just so, and pretty bad smash-up," replied Richelieu, with the same coolness, for sensitiveness is unknown at court.

"Is that somebody killed on the grass?" she went on.

"It makes a bow, so I guess *it* lives."

And at a venture Richelieu raised his own three-cocked hat.

"Hold! it strikes me it is the Cardinal Prince Louis de Rohan. What the deuce is he doing there?"

"Better go and see. Champagne, drive up to the upset carriage."

The countess's coachman quitted the road and drove to the grove. The cardinal was a handsome gentleman of thirty years of age, of gracious manners and elegant. He was waiting for help to come, with the utmost unconcern.

"A thousand respects to your ladyship," he said. "My brute of a coachman whom I hired from England, for my punishment, has spilled me in taking a short cut through the woods to join the hunt, and smashed my best carriage."

"Think yourself lucky – a French Jehu would have smashed the passenger! be comforted."

"Oh, I am philosophic, countess; but it is death to have to wait."

"Who ever heard of a Rohan waiting?"

"The present representative of the family is compelled to do it; but Prince Soubise will happen along soon to give me a lift."

"Suppose he goes another way?"

"You must step into my carriage; if you were to refuse, I should give it up to you, and with a footman to carry my train, walk in the woods like a tree nymph."

The cardinal smiled, and seeing that longer resistance might be badly interpreted by the lady, he took the place at the back which the old duke gave up to him. The prince wanted to dispute for the lesser place but the marshal was inflexible.

The countess's team soon regained the lost time.

"May I ask your Eminence if you are fond of the chase again," began the lady, "for this is the first time I have seen you out with the hounds."

"I have been out before; but this time I come to Versailles to see the King on pressing business; and I went after him as he was in the woods, but thanks to my confounded driver, I shall lose the royal audience as well as an apartment in Paris."

"The cardinal is pretty blunt – he means a love appointment," remarked Richelieu.

"Oh, no, it is with a man – but he is not an ordinary man – he is a magician and works miracles."

"The very one we are seeking, the duke and I," said Jeanne Dubarry. "I am glad we have a churchman here to ask him if he believes in miracles?"

"Madam, I have seen things done by this wizard which may not be miraculous though they are almost incredible."

"The prince has the reputation of dealing with spirits."

"What has your Eminence seen?"

"I have pledged myself to secrecy."

"This is growing dark. At least you can name the wizard?"

"Yes, the Count of Fenix –"

"That won't do – all good magicians have names ending in the round O."

"The cap fits – his other name is Joseph Balsamo."

The countess clasped her hands while looking at Richelieu, who wore a puzzled look.

"And was the devil very black? did he come up in green fire and stir a saucepan with a horrid stench?"

"Why, no! my magician has excellent manners; he is quite a gentleman and entertains one capitally."

"Would you not like him to tell your fortune, countess?" inquired the duke, well knowing that Lady Dubarry had asserted that when she was a poor girl on the Paris streets, a man had prophesied she would be a queen. This man she maintained was Balsamo. "Where does he dwell?"

"Saint Claude Street, I remember, in the Swamp."

The countess repeated the clue so emphatically that the marshal, always afraid his secrets would leak out, especially when he was conspiring to obtain the government, interrupted the lady by these words:

"Hist, there is the King!"

"In the walnut copse, yes. Let us stay here while the prince goes to him. You will have him all to yourself."

"Your kindness overwhelms me," said the prelate who gallantly kissed the lady's hand.

"But the King will be worried at not seeing you."

"I want to tease him!"

The duke alighted with the countess, as light as a schoolgirl, and the carriage rolled swiftly away to set down the cardinal on the knoll where the King was looking all about him to see his darling.

But she, drawing the duke into the covert, said:

"Heaven sent the cardinal to put us on the track of that magician who told my fortune so true."

"I met one – at Vienna, where I was run through the body by a jealous husband. I was all but dead when my magician came up and cured my wound with three drops of an elixir, and brought me to life with three more imbibed."

"Mine was a young man –"

"Mine old as Mathusaleh, and adorned with a sounding Greek name, Althotas."

The carriage was coming back.

"I should like to go, if only to vex the King who will not dismiss Choiseul in your favor; but I shall be laughed at."

"In good company, then, for I will go with you."

At full speed the horses drew the carriage to Paris, containing the young and the old plotter.

CHAPTER X

A SEANCE OF MESMERISM

IT was six P. M.

Saint Claude Street was in the outskirts on the main road to the Bastile Prison. The house of the Count Felix, alias Baron Balsamo, was a strong building, like a castle; and besides a room used for a chemical laboratory, another study, where the sage Althotas, to whom the duke alluded, concocted his elixir of long life, and the reception rooms, an inner house, to which secret passages led, was secluded from ordinary visitors.

In a richly furnished parlor of this secret annex, the mysterious man who, with masonic signs and words, had collected his followers on Louis XV. Place, and saved Andrea upon Gilbert's appeal – he was seated by a lovely Italian woman who seemed rebellious to his entreaties. She had no voice but to reproach and her hand was raised to repulse though it was plain that he adored her and perhaps for that reason.

Lorenza Feliciani was his wife, but she railed at him for keeping her a prisoner, and a slave, and envied the fate of wild birds.

It was clear that this frail and irritable creature took a large place in his bosom if not in his life.

"Lorenza," he softly pleaded, "why do you, my darling, show this hostility and resistance? Why will you not live with one who loves you beyond expression as a sweet and devoted wife? Then would you have nothing farther to long for, free to bloom in the sunshine like the flowers and spread your wings like the birds you envy. We might go about in company where the fictitious sun, artificial light, glows on the assemblies of society. You would be happy according to your tastes and make me happy in my own way. Why will you not partake of this pleasure, Lorenza, when you have beauty to make all women jealous?"

"Because you horrify me – you are not religious, and you work your will by the black art!" replied the woman haughtily.

"Then live as you condemn yourself," he replied with a look of anger and pity; "and do not complain at what your pride earns you."

"I should not complain if you would only leave me alone and not force me to speak to you. Let me die in my cage, for I will not sing to you."

"You are mad," said Balsamo with an effort and trying to smile; "for you know that you shall not die while I am at hand to guard and heal you."

"You will not heal me on the day when you find me hanging at my window bars," she screamed. He shuddered.

"Or stabbed to the heart by this dagger."

Pale and perspiring icily, Balsamo looked at the exasperated female, and replied in a threatening voice:

"You are right; I should not cure you, but I would revive you!"

The Italian woman uttered a shriek of terror for knowing there was no bounds to the magician's powers – she believed this – and he was saved.

A bell rang three times and at equal intervals.

"My man Fritz," said Balsamo, "notifying me that a messenger is here – in haste –"

"Good, at last you are going to leave me," said Lorenza spitefully.

"Once again," he responded, taking her cold hand, "but for the last time. Let us dwell in pleasant union; for as fate has joined us, let us make fate our friend, not an executioner."

She answered not a word; her dead and fixed eyes seemed to seek in vacancy some thought which constantly escaped her because she had too long sought it, as the sun blinds those who wish to

see the very origin of the light. He kissed her hand without her giving any token of life. As then he walked over to the fireplace, she awoke from her torpor and let her gaze fall greedily upon him.

"Ha, ha," he said, "you want to know how I leave these issueless rooms so that you may escape some day and do me harm, and my brothers of the Masonic Order by revelations. That is why you are so wide awake."

But extending his hands, with painful constraint on himself, he made a pass while darting the magnetic fluid from palm and eye upon her eyes and breast, saying imperatively:

"Sleep!"

Scarcely was the word pronounced before Lorenza bent like a lily on its stalk; her swinging head inclined and leaned on the sofa cushions; her dead white hands slid down by her sides, rustling her silky dress.

Seeing how beautiful she was, Balsamo went up to her and placed a kiss on her brow.

Thereupon her whole countenance brightened up, as if the breath from Love's own lips had dispelled the cloud; her mouth tremulously parted, her eyes swam in voluptuous tears, and she sighed like those angels may have sighed for the sons of man, when the world was young.

For an instant the mesmerist contemplated her as one unable to break off his ecstasy but as the bell rang again, he sprang to the fireplace, touched a spring to make the black plate swing aside like a door and so entered the house in Saint Claude Street.

In a parlor was a German servant confronting a man in courier's attire and in horseman's boots armed with large spurs. The vulgar visage announced one lowly born and yet his eyes were kindled with a spark of the holy fire which one superior's mind may light.

His left hand leaned on a clubhandled whip while with his right he made signs which Balsamo understood, for he tapped his forehead with his forefinger to imply the same. The postilion's hand then flew to his breast where he made a new sign which the uninitiated would have taken for undoing a button. To this the count responded by showing a ring on his finger.

"The Grand Master," muttered the envoy, bending the knee to this redoubtable token.

"Whence come you?" asked Balsamo.

"From Rouen last. I am courier to the Duchess of Grammont, in whose service the Great Copt placed me with the order to have no secrets from the Master."

"Whither go you?"

"To Versailles with a letter for the First Minister."

"Hand it to me."

The messenger gave Balsamo a letter from a leather bag strapped to his back.

"Wait, Fritz!" The German who had withdrawn, came to take "Sebastian" to the servant's hall, and he went away, amazed that the Chief knew his name.

"He knows all," remarked the servant.

Remaining alone Balsamo looked at the clear impression of the seal on the wax which the courier's glance had seemed to beg him to respect. Slowly and thoughtfully, he went upstairs to the room where he had left Lorenza in the mesmeric slumber. She had not stirred, but she was fatigued and unnerved by the inaction. She grasped his hand convulsively when offered. He took her by the hand which squeezed his convulsively and on her heart laid the letter.

"Do you see – what do I hold in my hand – can you read this letter?"

With her eyes closed, her bosom heaving, Lorenza recited the following words which the mesmerist wrote down by this wonderful dictation.

"DEAR BROTHER: As I foresaw, my exile has brought me some good. I saw the President of the Parliament at Rouen who is on our side but timid. I pressed him in your name and, deciding, he will send the remonstrances of his friends before the week is out, to Versailles. I am off at once to Rennes, to stir up Karadeuc and Lachalotais who have gone to sleep. Our Caudebec agent was at Rouen, and I saw

him. England will not pause on the road, but is preparing a smart advice for the Versailles Cabinet. X asked me if it should go and I authorized it. You will receive the very latest lampoons against Dubarry's squibs, but they will raise a town. An evil rumor has reached me that you were in disgrace but I laugh at it since you have not written me to that effect. Still do not leave me in doubt, but write me by return of courier. Your next will find me at Caen, where I have some of our adherents to warm up. Farewell, with kisses, Your loving
"DUCHESS DE GRAMMONT."

Balsamo's forehead had cleared as the clairvoyante proceeded. "A curious document," he commented, "which would be paid for dearly. How can they write such damning things? It is always women who ruin superior men. This Choiseul could not be overthrown by an army of enemies or a multitude of intrigues, and lo! the breath of a woman crushes him while caressing. If we have a heart, and a sensitive cord in that heart, we are lost."

So saying he looked tenderly towards Lorenza who palpitated under his regard.

"Is what I think true?" he asked her.

"No," she answered, ardently; "You see that I love you too well to destroy you as a senseless and heartless woman would do."

Alas! in her mesmeric trance she spoke and felt just the contrary to what swayed her in her waking mood.

He let the arms of his enchantress interlace him till the warning bell of Fritz sounded twice.

"Two visits," he interpreted.

A violent peal finished the telegraphed phrase.

Disengaging himself from Lorenza's clasp, Balsamo left the room, the woman being still in the magnetic sleep. On the way he met the courier.

"Here is the letter. Bear it to the address. That is all."

The adept of the Order looked at the envelope and the seal, and seeing that both were intact, he manifested his joy, and disappeared in the shadows.

"What a pity I could not keep such an autograph," sighed the magician "and what a pity it cannot be placed by sure hands before the King."

"Who is there?" he asked of Fritz who appeared.

"A young and pretty lady with an old gentleman whom I do not know as they have never called before."

"Where are they?"

"In the parlor."

Balsamo walked into the room where the countess had concealed her face completely in her cloak hood; she looked like a woman of the lower middle class. The marshal, more shrinking than she, was garbed in grey like an upper servant in a good house.

"My lord count," began Dubarry, "do you know me?"

"Perfectly, my lady the countess. Will you please take a seat, and also your companion."

"My steward," said the lady.

"You are in error," said the host bowing; "this is the Duke of Richelieu, whom I readily recognize and who would be very ungrateful if he did not recall one who saved his life – I might say drew him back from among the dead."

"Oh, do you hear that, duke?" exclaimed the lady laughing.

"You, saved my life, count?" questioned Richelieu, in consternation.

"Yes, in Vienna, in 1725, when your grace was Ambassador there."

"You were not born at that date!"

"I must have been, my lord," replied Balsamo smiling, "for I met you dying, say dead, on a handbarrow with a fine swordthrust right through your midriff. By the same token, I dropped a little of my elixir on the gash – there, at the very place where you wear lace rather too rich for a steward!"

"But you are scarce over thirty, count," expostulated the duke.

"But you must see that you are facing a wizard," said the countess bursting into laughter.

"I am stupefied. In that case you would be –"

"Oh, we wizards change our names for every generation, my lord. In 1725, the fashion for us was to end in *us*, *os* or *as*, and there is no ground for astonishment that I should have worn a name either in Greek or Latin. But, Althotas or Balsamo, or Fenix, I am at your orders, countess – and at yours, duke."

"Count, the marshal and I have come to consult you."

"It is doing me much honor, but it is natural that you should apply to me."

"Most naturally, for your prediction that I should become a queen is always trotting in my brain: still I doubt its coming true."

"Never doubt what science says, lady."

"But the kingdom is in a sore way – it would want more than three drops of the elixir which sets a duellist on his legs."

"Ay, but three words may knock a minister off his!" retorted the magician. "There, have I hit it? Speak!"

"Perfectly," replied the fair visitress trembling. "Truly, my lord duke, what do you say to all this?"

"Oh, do not be wonderstricken for so little," observed Balsamo, who could divine what troubled so the favorite and the court conspirator without any witchcraft.

"The fact is I shall think highly of you if you suggest the remedy we want," went on the marshal.

"You wish to be cured of the attacks of Choiseul?"

"Yes, great soothsayer, yes."

"Do not leave us in the plight, my lord; your honor is at stake," added the lovely woman.

"I am ready to serve you to my utmost; but I should like to hear if the duke had not some settled plan in calling."

"I grant it, my lord count – Faith! it is nice to have a man of title for wizard, it does not take us out of our class."

"Come, be frank," said the host smiling. "You want to consult me?"

"But I can only whisper it in the strictest privacy to the count because you would beat me if you overheard, countess."

"The duke is not accustomed to being beaten," remarked Balsamo, which delighted the old warrior.

"The long and the short of it is that the King is dying of tedium."

"He is no longer *amusable*, as Lady Maintenon used to say."

"Nothing in that hurts my feelings, duke," said Lady Dubarry.

"So much the better, which puts me at my ease. Well, we want an elixir to make the King merry."

"Pooh, any quack at the corner will provide such a philter."

"But we want the virtue to be attributed to this lady," resumed the duke.

"My lord, you are making the lady blush," said Balsamo. "But as we were saying just now, no philter will deliver you of Choiseul. Were the King to love this lady ten times more than at present – which is impossible – the minister would still preserve over his mind the hold which the lady has over his heart?"

"That is true," said the duke. "But it was our sole resource."

"I could easily find another."

"Easily? do you hear that, countess? These magicians doubt nothing."

"Why should I doubt when the simple matter is to prove to the King that the Duke of Choiseul betrays him – from the King's point of view, for of course the duke does not think he is betraying him, in what he does."

"And what is he doing?"

"You know as well as I, countess, that he is upholding Parliamentary opposition against the royal authority."

"Certainly, but by what means?"

"By agents who foster the movement while he warrants their impunity."

"But we want to know these agents."

"The King sees in the journey of Lady Grammont merely an exile but you cannot believe that she went for any other errand than to fan the ardent and fire the cool."

"Certainly, but how to prove the hidden aim?"

"By accusing the lady."

"But the difficulty is in proving the accusation," said the countess.

"Were it clearly proved, would the duke remain Prime Minister?"

"Surely not!" exclaimed the countess.

"This necromancer is delightful," said old Richelieu, laughing heartily as he leaned back in his chair: "catch Choiseul redhanded in treason? that is all, and quite enough, too, ha, ha, ha!"

"Would not a confidential letter do it?" said Balsamo impassibly. "Say from Lady Grammont?"

"My good wizard, if you could conjure up one!" said the countess. "I have been trying to get one for five years and spent a hundred thousand francs a year and have never succeeded."

"Because, madam, you did not apply to me. I should have lifted you out of the quandary."

"Oh, I hope it is not too late!"

"It is never too late," said Count Fenix, smiling.

"Then you have such a letter?" said the lady, clasping her hands. "Which would compromise Choiseul?"

"It would prove he sustains the Parliament in its bout with the King; eggs on England to war with France; so as to keep him indispensable: and is the enemy of your ladyship."

"I would give one of my eyes to have it."

"That would be too dear; particularly as I shall give you the letter for nothing." And he drew a piece of paper folded twice from his pocket.

"The letter you want!" And in the deepest silence the letter was read by him which he had transcribed from Lorenza's thought reading.

The countess stared as he proceeded and lost countenance.

"This is a slanderous forgery – deuce take it, have a care!" said Richelieu.

"It is the plain, literal copy of a letter from Lady Grammont on the way, by a courier from Rouen this morning, to the Duke de Choiseul at Versailles."

"The duchess wrote such an imprudent letter?"

"It is incredible, but she has done it."

The old courtier looked over to the countess who had no strength to say anything.

"Excuse me, count," she said, "but I am like the duke, hard to accept this as written by the witty lady, and damaging herself and her brother; besides to have knowledge of it one must have read it."

"And the count would have kept the precious original as a treasure," suggested the marshal.

"Oh," returned Balsamo, shaking his head gently; "that is the way with those who break open seals to read letters but not for those who can read through the envelopes. Fie, for shame! Besides, what interest have I in destroying Lady Grammont and the Choiseuls? You come in a friendly way to consult me and I answer in that manner. You want service done, and I do it. I hardly suppose you came fee in hand, as to a juggler in the street?"

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Dubarry.

"But who advised you, count?" asked Richelieu.

"You want to know in a minute as much as I, the sage, the adept, who has lived three thousand and seven hundred years."

"Ah, you are spoiling the good opinion we had of you," said the old nobleman.

"I am not pressing you to believe me, and it was not I who asked you to come away from the royal hunt."

"He is right, duke," said the lady visitor. "Do not be impatient with us, my lord."

"The man is never impatient who has time on his hands."

"Be so good – add this favor to the others you have done me, to tell me how you obtain such secrets?"

"I shall not hesitate, madam," said Balsamo slowly as if he were matching words with her speech, "the revelation is made to me by a bodiless Voice. It tells me all that I desire."

"Miraculous!"

"But you do not believe!"

"Honestly not, count," said the duke; "how can you expect any one to believe such things?"

"Would you believe if I told you what the courier is doing who bears this letter to the Duke of Choiseul?"

"Of course," responded the countess.

"I shall when I hear the voice," subjoined the duke.

"But you magicians and necromancers have the privilege of seeing and hearing the supernatural."

Balsamo shot at the speaker so singular a glance that the countess thrilled in every vein and the sceptical egotist felt a chill down his neck and back.

"True," said he, after a long silence, "I alone see and hear things and beings beyond your ken: but when I meet those of your grace's rank and height of intellect and of your beauty, fair lady, I open my treasures and share. You shall hear the mystic voice."

The countess trembled, and the duke clenched his fist not to do the same.

"What language shall it use?"

"French," faltered the countess. "I know no other and a strange one would give me too much fright."

"The French for me," said the duke. "I long to repeat what the devil says, and mark if he can discourse as correctly as my friend Voltaire."

With his head lowered, Balsamo walked over to the little parlor door which opened on the secret stairs.

"Let me shut us in so that you will be less exposed to evil influences," he explained.

Turning pale, the countess took the duke's arm.

Almost touching the staircase door, Balsamo stepped into the corner where the inner dwelling was located, and where Lorenza was, and in a loud voice uttered in Arabic the words, which we translate:

"My dear, do you hear? if so, ring the bell twice."

He watched for the effect on his auditor's faces, for they were the more touched from not understanding the speech. The bell rang twice. The countess bounded up on the sofa and the duke wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Since you hear me," went on the magician in the same tongue, "push the marble knob which represents the lion's right eye in the mantelpiece of sculpture, and a panel will open. Walk through the opening, cross my room, come down the stairs, and enter the room next where I am speaking."

Next instant, a light rustle, like a phantom's flight, warned Balsamo that his orders had been understood and carried out.

“What gibberish is that? the cabalistic?” queried Richelieu to appear cool.

“Yes, my lord, used in invocations of the demons. You will understand the Voice but not what I conjure it with.”

“Demons? is it the devil?”

“A superior being may invoke a superior spirit. This spirit is now in direct communication with us,” he said as he pointed to the wall which seemed to end the house and had not a perceptible break in it.

“I am afraid, duke – and are not you?”

“To tell the truth I would rather be back in the battles of Mahon or before Philipsburg.”

“Lady and lord, listen for you would hear,” said Balsamo sternly. In the midst of solemn silence, he proceeded in French:

“Are you there?”

“I am here,” replied a pure and silvery voice which penetrated the wall and tapestry so muffled as to seem a sweet-toned bell sounded at an incalculable distance, rather than a human voice.

“Plague on it! this is growing exciting,” said the duke; “and yet without red fire, the trombone, and the gong.”

“It is dreadful,” stammered the countess.

“Take heed of my questioning,” said Balsamo. “First tell me how many persons I have with me?”

“Two, a man and a woman: the man is the Duke of Richelieu, the woman, the Countess Dubarry.”

“Reading in his mind,” uttered the duke; “this is pretty clever.”

“I never saw the like,” said the countess, trembling.

“It is well,” said Balsamo; “now, read the first line of the letter which I hold.”

The Voice obeyed.

Duke and countess looked at each other with astonishment rising to admiration.

“What has happened to this letter, which I wrote under your dictation?”

“It is travelling to the west and is afar.”

“How is it travelling?”

“A horseman rides with it, clad in green vest, a hareskin cap and high boots. His horse is a piebald.”

“Where do you see him?” asked Balsamo sternly.

“On a broad road plated with trees.”

“The King’s highway – but which one?”

“I know not – roads are alike.”

“What other objects are on it?”

“A large vehicle is coming to meet the rider; on it are soldiers and priests – ”

“An omnibus,” suggested Richelieu.

“On the side at the top is the word ‘VERSAILLES.’”

“Leave this conveyance, and follow the courier.”

“I see him not – he has turned the road.”

“Take the turn, and after!”

“He gallops his horse – he looks at his watch – ”

“What see you in front of him?”

“A long avenue – splendid buildings – a large town.”

“Go on.”

“He lashes his steed; it is streaming with sweat – poor horse! the people turn to hear the ringing shoes on the stones. Ah, he goes down a long hilly street, he turns to the right, he slackens his pace, he stops at the door of a grand building.”

“You must now follow with attention. But you are weary. Be your weariness dispelled! Now, do you still see the courier?”

“Yes, he is going up a broad stone staircase, ushered by a servant in blue and gold livery. He goes through rooms decorated with gold. He reaches a lighted study. The footman opens the door for him and departs.”

“Enter, you! What see you?”

“The courier bows to a man sitting at a desk, whose back is to the door. He turns – he is in full dress with a broad blue ribbon crossing his breast. His eye is sharp, his features irregular, his teeth good; his age fifty or more.”

“Choiseul,” whispered the countess to the duke who nodded.

“The courier hands the man a letter – ”

“Say the duke – it is a duke.”

“A letter,” resumed the obedient Voice, “taken from a leather satchel worn on his back. Unsealing it, the duke reads it with attention. He takes up a pen and writes on a sheet of paper.”

“It would be fine if we could learn what he wrote,” said Richelieu.

“Tell me what he writes,” said Balsamo.

“It is fine, scrawling, bad writing.”

“Read, I will it!” said the magician’s imperative voice.

The auditors held their breath.

And they heard the voice say:

“DEAR SISTER: be of good heart. The crisis has passed. I await the morrow with impatience for I am going to take the offensive with all presaging decisive success. All well about the Rouen Parliament, Lord X., and the squibs. To-morrow, after business with the King, I will append a postscript to this letter and despatch by this courier.”

While with his left hand Balsamo seemed to wrest out each word with difficulty, with his right he wrote the lines which Duke Choiseul was writing in Versailles.

“What is the duke doing?”

“He folds up the paper and puts it in a small pocketbook taken from the left side of his coat. He dismisses the courier, saying: ‘Be at one o’clock at the Trianon gateway.’ The courier bows and comes forth.”

“That is so,” said Richelieu: “he is making an appointment for the man to get the answer.”

Balsamo silenced him with a gesture.

“What is the duke doing?”

“He rises, holding the letter he received. He goes to his couch, passes between its edge and the wall, pushes a spring which opens an iron safe in the wall, throws in the letter and shuts the safe.”

“Oh, pure magic!” ejaculated the countess and the marshal, both pallid.

“Do you know all you wished?” Balsamo asked La Dubarry.

“My lord,” said she, going to him, but in terror, “you have done me a service for which I would pay with five years of my life, or indeed I can never repay. Ask me anything you like.”

“Oh, you know we are already in account. The time is not come to settle.”

“You shall have it, were it a million – ”

“Pshaw, countess!” exclaimed the old nobleman, “you had better look to the count for a million. One who knows – who can see what he sees, might discover gold and diamonds in the bowels of the earth as he does thoughts in the mind of man.”

“Nay, countess, I will give you the chance some day of acquitting yourself as regards me.”

“Count,” said the duke, “I am subjugated, vanquished, crushed – I believe!”

“You know you saw but that is not belief.”

“Call it what you please; I know what I shall say if magicians are spoken of before me.”

“My Spirit is fatigued,” said Balsamo smiling: “let me release it by a magical spell. Lorenza,” he pursued, but in Arabic, “I thank you, and I love you. Return to your room as you came and wait for me. Go, my darling!”

“I am most tired – make haste, Acharat!” replied the Voice, in Italian, sweeter than during the invocation. And the faint sound as of a winged creature flying was heard diminishing.

Convinced of his medium’s departure in a few minutes, the mesmerist bowed profoundly but with majestic dignity to his two frightened visitors, absorbed in the flood of thoughts tumultuously overwhelming them. They got back to their carriage more like intoxicated persons than reasonable ones.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOWNFALL AND THE ELEVATION

THE great clock of Versailles Palace was striking eleven when King Louis XV., coming out of his private apartments, crossed the gallery nearest and called out for the Master of Ceremonies, Duke Vrilliere. He was pale and seemed agitated, though he tried to conceal his emotion. An icy silence spread among the courtiers, among whom were included Duke Richelieu and Chevalier Jean Dubarry, a burly coarse bully, but tolerated as brother of the favorite. They were calm, affecting indifference and ignorance of what was going on.

The duke approaching was given a sealed letter for Duke Choiseul which would find him in the palace. The courtiers hung their heads while muttering, like ears of wheat when the squall whistles over them. They surrounded Richelieu while Vrilliere went on his errand, but the old marshal pretended to know no more than they, while smiling to show he was not a dupe.

When the royal messenger returned he was besieged by the inquisitive.

"Well, it was an order of exile," said he, "for I have read it. Thus it ran," and he repeated what he had retained by the implacable memory of old courtiers:

COUSIN: My discontent with your services obliges me to exile your grace to Chanteloup, where you should be in twenty-four hours. I should send you farther but for consideration of the duchess's state of health. Have a care that your conduct does not drive me to a severer measure.

The group murmured for some time.

"What did he say," queried Richelieu.

"That he was sure I found pleasure in bearing such a message."

"Rather rough," remarked Dubarry.

"But a man cannot get such a chimney-brick on his head Without crying out something," added the marshal-duke. "I wonder if he will obey?"

"Bless us, here he comes, with his official portfolio under his arm!" exclaimed the Master of Ceremonies aghast, while Jean Dubarry had the cold shivers.

Lord Choiseul indeed was crossing the courtyard, with a calm, assured look blasting with his clear glance his enemies and those who had declared against him after his disgrace. Such a step was not foreseen and his entrance into the royal privy chambers was not opposed.

"Hang it! will he coax the King over, again?" muttered Richelieu.

Choiseul presented himself to the King with the letter of exile in his hand.

"Sire, as it was understood that I was to hold no communication from your Majesty as valid without verbal confirmation, I come for that."

"This time it holds good," rejoined the King.

"Such an offensive letter holds good against a devoted servitor?"

"Against the servitor – you who received a letter in your house here, from Lady Grammont, by courier – "

"Surely brother and sister may correspond?"

"Not with such letters – " And the monarch held out a copy of the letter dictated by Balsamo's Voice – this time made by the King's own hand. "Deny not – you have the original locked up in the iron safe in your bedroom."

Pale as a spectre the duke listened to the sovereign continuing pitilessly.

"This is not all. You have an answer for Lady Grammont in your pocketbook only waiting for its postscript to be added when you leave my presence. You see I am well informed."

The duke bowed without saying a word and staggered out of the room as though he were struck by apoplexy. But for the open air coming on his face he would have dropped backwards; but he was a

man of powerful will and recovering composure, he passed through the courtiers to enter his rooms where he burnt certain papers. A quarter of an hour following he left the palace in his coach.

The disgrace of Choiseul was a thunderbolt which set fire to France.

The Parliament which his tolerance had upheld, proclaimed that the State had lost its strongest prop. The nobility sustained him as one of their order. The clergy felt fostered by a man whose severe style made his post almost sacerdotal. The philosophical party, very numerous by this time and potent, because the most active, intelligent and learned formed it, shouted aloud when “their” Government escaped from the hands of the protector of Voltaire, the pensioner of the Encyclopedist writers and the preserver of the traditions of Lady Pompadour playing the Maccenas-in-petticoats for the newspaper writers and pamphleteers.

The masses also complained and with more reason than the others. Without deep insight they knew where the shoe pinched.

From the general point of view Choiseul was a bad minister and a bad citizen, but he was a paragon of patriotism and morality compared with the sycophants, mistresses and their parasites – particularly Lady Dubarry whom a lampoonist qualified as less to be respected than a charcoal-man’s wife. To see the reins pass into the hands of the pet of a favorite made the future blacker than before.

Hence nearly everybody flocked on the road to cheer the Minister as he went away in exile.

There was a block to the traffic at the Enfer Tollbar, on the Touraine Road. A hundred carriages escorted the duke after he had got through here.

Cheers and sighs followed him, but he was too sharp not to know that there was less regret over his going than fear about those who would replace him.

On the crowded highway a postchaise came tearing and would have run down the minister but for a violent swerving of the postboy.

A head was stuck out of the chaise window at the same time as the Duke of Choiseul looked out of his.

It was the Duke of Aiguillon, nephew of Richelieu, who would probably have a place in the cabinet which the marshal duke, as the new minister, would form. No doubt he had received the cue and was hurrying to take the berth. He saluted the fallen one very lowly. The latter drew back in the coach, for in this second the sight had withered all the laurels.

At the same time, as compensation up came a carriage with the royal colors, drawn by eight horses on the Sevres branch-road, and crossing with Choiseul’s equipage by chance or the block.

On the back seat was the Dauphiness with her mistress of the Household, Lady Noailles; on the front one was Andrea de Taverney.

Red with glory and delight, Choiseul leaned out and bowed lowly.

“Farewell, princess,” he said in a choking voice.

“Farewell, my lord, till soon we meet again!” was the reply. The Archduchess gave an imperial smile and showed majestic disdain for court etiquette, by replying.

“Choiseul forever!” shouted an enthusiastic voice close upon these words.

Andrea turned rapidly towards the speaker, for she knew the voice.

“Room, make room there,” roared the royal squires, forcing Gilbert, pale and hot with getting to the front to see into the line along the roadside ditch.

It was indeed our hero, who had in a fit of philosophical fervor, shouted for Choiseul.

CHAPTER XII

ANDREA IN FAVOR

AT three in the afternoon Mdlle. de Taverney came out of her rooms dressed to perform her duty as reader to the princess.

On reaching the Trianon Summerhouse she was told that her mistress was in the grounds with her architect and head-gardener. In the upper story could be heard the whizz of the turning-lathe with which the Dauphin was busy making a safety lock for a chest which he thought a great deal of.

To join the Dauphiness, Andrea crossed the garden where, although the season had come on the pale flowers were lifting their heads to catch the fleeting rays of a still paler sun. Dark came at six, and the gardeners were covering the plants from the frost with glass bells.

On the lawn at the end of a walk hedged with trimmed trees and Bengal roses, Andrea suddenly perceived one of these men who, on seeing her, rose from stooping over his spade and saluted her with more grace and politeness than a common man could do. Looking she recognized Gilbert, whom she had seen from a child on her father's estate. She blushed in spite of herself, for the presence of this ex-retainer seemed a very curious kindness of destiny.

He repeated the salute and she had to return it as she passed on. But she was too courageous and straight-forward a creature to resist a movement of the spirit and leave a question unanswered of her disturbed soul.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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