

DUMAS
ALEXANDRE

THE CORSICAN
BROTHERS

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The Corsican Brothers:

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Alexandre Dumas

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CHAPTER I

IN the beginning of March, 1841, I was travelling in Corsica.

Nothing is more picturesque and more easy to accomplish than a journey in Corsica. You can embark at Toulon, in twenty hours you will be in Ajaccio, and then in twenty-four hours more you are at Bastia.

Once there you can hire or purchase a horse. If you wish to hire a horse you can do so for five francs a-day; if you purchase one you can have a good animal for one hundred and fifty francs. And don't sneer at the moderate price, for the horse hired or purchased will perform as great feats as the famous Gascon horse which leaped over the Pont Neuf, which neither Prospero nor Nautilus, the heroes of Chantilly and the Champ de Mars could do. He will traverse roads which Balmat himself could not cross without *crampons*, and will go over bridges upon which Auriol would need a balancing pole.

As for the traveller, all he has to do is to give the horse his head and let him go as he pleases; he does not mind the danger. We may add that with this horse, which can go anywhere, the traveller can accomplish his fifteen leagues a day without

stopping to bait.

From time to time, while the tourist may be halting to examine some ancient castle, built by some old baron or legendary hero, or to sketch a tower built ages ago by the Genoese, the horse will be contented to graze by the road side, or to pluck the mosses from the rocks in the vicinity.

As to lodging for the night, it is still more simple in Corsica. The traveller having arrived at a village, passes down through the principal street, and making his own choice of the house wherein he will rest, he knocks at the door. An instant after, the master or mistress will appear upon the threshold, invite the traveller to dismount; offer him a share of the family supper and the whole of his own bed, and next morning, when seeing him safely resume his journey, will thank him for the preference he has accorded to his house.

As for remuneration, such a thing is never hinted at. The master would regard it as an insult if the subject were broached. If, however, the servant happen to be a young girl, one may fitly offer her a coloured handkerchief, with which she can make up a picturesque coiffure for a fête day. If the domestic be a male he will gladly accept a poignard, with which he can kill his enemy, should he meet him.

There is one thing more to remark, and that is, as sometimes happens, the servants of the house are relatives of the owner, and the former being in reduced circumstances, offer their services to the latter in consideration of board and lodging and a few piastres

per month.

And it must not be supposed that the masters are not well served by their cousins to the fifteenth and sixteenth degree, because the contrary is the case, and the custom is not thought anything of. Corsica is a French Department certainly, but Corsica is very far from being France.

As for robbers, one never hears of them, yet there are bandits in abundance; but these gentlemen must in no wise be confounded one with another.

So go without fear to Ajaccio, to Bastia, with a purse full of money hanging to your saddle-bow, and you may traverse the whole island without a shadow of danger, but do not go from Oceana to Levaco, if you happen to have an enemy who has declared the Vendetta against you, for I would not answer for your safety during that short journey of six miles.

Well, then, I was in Corsica, as I have said, at the beginning of the month of March, and I was alone; Jadin having remained at Rome.

I had come across from Elba, had disembarked at Bastia, and there had purchased a horse at the above-mentioned price.

I had visited Corte and Ajaccio, and just then I was traversing the province of Sartène.

On the particular day of which I am about to speak I was riding from Sartène to Sullacaro.

The day's journey was short, perhaps a dozen leagues, in consequence of detours, and on account of my being obliged to

climb the slopes of the mountain chain, which, like a backbone, runs through the island. I had a guide with me, for fear I should lose my way in the maquis.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when we arrived at the summit of the hill, which at the same time overlooks Olmeto and Sullacaro. There we stopped a moment to look about us.

“Where would your Excellency wish to stay the night?” asked the guide.

I looked down upon the village, the streets of which appeared almost deserted. Only a few women were visible, and they walked quickly along, and frequently looked cautiously around them.

As in virtue of the rules of Corsican hospitality, to which I have already referred, it was open to me to choose for my resting place any one of the hundred or hundred and twenty houses of which the village was composed, I therefore carried my eyes from house to house till they lighted upon one which promised comfortable quarters. It was a square mansion, built in a fortified sort of style and machicolated in front of the windows and above the door.

This was the first time I had seen these domestic fortifications; but I may mention that the province of Sartène is the classic ground of the Vendetta.

“Ah, good!” said my guide, as he followed the direction of my hand – “that is the house of Madame Savilia de Franchi. Go on, go on, Signor, you have not made a bad choice, and I can see you do not want for experience in these matters.”

I should note here that in this 86th department of France Italian is universally spoken.

“But,” I said, “may it not be inconvenient if I demand hospitality from a lady, for if I understand you rightly, this house belongs to a lady.”

“No doubt,” he replied, with an air of astonishment; “but what inconvenience does your lordship think you will cause?”

“If the lady be young,” I replied, moved by a feeling of propriety – or, perhaps, let us say, of Parisian self-respect – “a night passed under her roof might compromise her.”

“Compromise her!” repeated the guide, endeavouring to probe the meaning of the word I had rendered in Italian with all the emphasis which one would hazard a word in a strange tongue.

“Yes, of course,” I replied, beginning to feel impatient; “the lady is a widow, I suppose?”

“Yes, Excellency.”

“Well, then, will she receive a young man into her house?”

In 1841 I was thirty-six years old, or thereabouts, and was entitled to call myself young.

“Will she receive a young man!” exclaimed the guide; “why, what difference can it make whether you are young or old?”

I saw that I should get no information out of him by this mode of interrogation, so I resumed —

“How old is Madame Savilia?”

“Forty, or nearly so.”

“Ah,” I said, replying more to my thoughts than to my guide,

“all the better. She has children, no doubt?”

“Yes, two sons – fine young men both.”

“Shall I see them?”

“You will see one of them – he lives at home.”

“Where is the other, then?”

“He lives in Paris.”

“How old are these sons?”

“Twenty-one.”

“What, both?”

“Yes, they are twins.”

“What professions do they follow?”

“The one in Paris is studying law.”

“And the other?”

“The other is a Corsican.”

“Indeed!” was my reply to this characteristic answer, made in the most matter-of-fact tone. “Well, now, let us push on for the house of Madame Savilia de Franchi.”

We accordingly resumed our journey, and entered the village about ten minutes afterwards.

I now remarked what I had not noticed from the hill, namely, that every house was fortified similarly to Madame Savilia’s. Not so completely, perhaps, for that the poverty of the inhabitants could not attain to, but purely and simply with oaken planks, by which the windows were protected, loop-holes only being left for rifle barrels; some apertures were simply bricked up.

I asked my guide what he called these loop-holes, and he said

they were known as *archères*— a reply which convinced me that they were used anterior to the invention of firearms.

As we advanced through the streets we were able the more fully to comprehend the profound character of the solitude and sadness of the place.

Many houses appeared to have sustained a siege, and the marks of the bullets dotted the walls.

From time to time as we proceeded we caught sight of a curious eye flashing upon us from an embrasure; but it was impossible to distinguish whether the spectator were a man or a woman.

We at length reached the house which I had indicated to my guide, and which was evidently the most considerable in the village.

As we approached it more nearly, one thing struck me, and that was, fortified to all outward appearance as it was, it was not so in reality, for there were neither oaken planks, bricks, nor loop-holes, but simple squares of glass, protected at night by wooden shutters.

It is true that the shutters showed holes which could only have been made by the passage of a bullet; but they were of old date, and could not have been made within the previous ten years.

Scarcely had my guide knocked, when the door was opened, not hesitatingly, nor in a timid manner, but widely, and a valet, or rather I should say a man appeared.

It is the livery that makes the valet, and the individual who then

opened the door to us wore a velvet waistcoat, trowsers of the same material, and leather gaiters. The breeches were fastened at the waist by a parti-coloured silk sash, from the folds of which protruded the handle of a Spanish knife.

“My friend,” I said, “is it indiscreet of me, who knows nobody in Sullacaro, to ask hospitality of your mistress?”

“Certainly not, your Excellency,” he replied; “the stranger does honour to the house before which he stops.” “Maria,” he continued, turning to a servant, who was standing behind him, “will you inform Madame Savilia that a French traveller seeks hospitality?”

As he finished speaking he came down the eight rough ladder-like steps which led to the entrance door, and took the bridle of my horse.

I dismounted.

“Your Excellency need have no further concern,” he said; “all your luggage will be taken to your room.”

I profited by this gracious invitation to idleness – one of the most agreeable which can be extended to a traveller.

CHAPTER II

I SLOWLY ascended the steps and entered the house, and at a corner of the corridor I found myself face to face with a tall lady dressed in black.

I understood at once that this lady of thirty-eight or forty years of age, and still beautiful, was the mistress of the house.

“Madame,” said I, bowing deeply, “I am afraid you will think me intrusive, but the custom of the country may be my excuse, and your servant’s invitation my authority to enter.”

“You are welcome to the mother,” replied Madame de Franchi, “and you will almost immediately be welcomed by the son. From this moment, sir, the house belongs to you; use it as if it were your own.”

“I come but to beg hospitality for one night, madame,” I answered; “to-morrow morning, at daybreak, I will take my departure.”

“You are free to do as you please, sir; but I hope that you will change your mind, and that we shall have the honour of your company for a longer period.”

I bowed again, and Madame continued —

“Maria, show this gentleman to my son Louis’ chamber; light the fire at once, and carry up some hot water. You will excuse me,” she said, turning again to me as the servant departed, “but I always fancy that the first wants of a tired traveller are warm

water and a fire. Will you please to follow my maid, sir; and you need have no hesitation in asking her for anything you may require. We shall sup in an hour, and my son, who will be home by that time, will have the honour to wait upon you.”

“I trust you will excuse my travelling dress, madame.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied smiling; “but on condition that you, on your part, will excuse the rusticity of your reception.”

I bowed my thanks, and followed the servant upstairs.

The room was situated on the first floor, and looked out towards the rear of the house, upon a pretty and extensive garden, well planted with various trees, and watered by a charming little stream, which fell into the Tavoro.

At the further end the prospect was bounded by a hedge, so thick as to appear like a wall. As is the case in almost all Italian houses, the walls of the rooms were white-washed and frescoed.

I understood immediately that Madame de Franchi had given me this, her absent son’s chamber, because it was the most comfortable one in the house.

While Maria was lighting the fire and fetching the hot water, I took it into my head to make an inventory of the room, and try to arrive at an estimation of the character of its usual occupant by those means.

I immediately put this idea into execution, and beginning with the left hand, I took mental notes of the various objects by which I was surrounded.

The furniture all appeared to be modern, a circumstance

which in that part of the island, where civilization had not then taken deep root, appeared to indicate no inconsiderable degree of luxury. It was composed of an iron bedstead and bedding, a sofa, four arm-chairs, six other occasional chairs, a wardrobe, half book case and half bureau, all of mahogany, from the first cabinet maker in Ajaccio.

The sofas and chairs were covered with chintz, and curtains of similar material fell before the windows, and hung round the bed.

I had got so far with my inventory when Maria left the room, and I was enabled to push my investigation a little closer.

I opened the book-case, and found within a collection of the works of our greatest poets. I noticed Corneille, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, Ronsard, Victor Hugo, and Lamartine.

Our moralists – Montaigne, Pascal, La Bruyère.

Our historians – Mezeray, Chateaubriand, Augustin Thierry.

Our philosophers – Cuvier, Beudant, Elie de Beaumont.

Besides these there were several volumes of romances and other books, amongst which I recognized, with a certain pride, my own “Impression of Travel.”

The keys were in the drawer of the bureau. I opened one of them.

Here I found fragments of a history of Corsica, a work upon the best means of abolishing the Vendetta, some French verses, and some Italian sonnets, all in manuscript. This was more than I expected, and I had the presumption to conclude that I need not seek much farther to form my opinion of the character of

Monsieur Louis de Franchi.

He appeared to be a quiet, studious young man, a partizan of the French reformers, and then I understood why he had gone to Paris to become an advocate.

There was, without doubt, a great future for him in this course. I made all these reflections as I was dressing. My toilette, as I had hinted to Madame de Franchi, although not wanting in a certain picturesqueness, demanded that some allowance should be made for it.

It was composed of a vest of black velvet, open at seams of the sleeves, so as to keep me cooler during the heat of the day, and slashed *à l'Espagnole*, permitting a silken chemise to appear underneath. My legs were encased in velvet breeches to the knee, and thence protected by Spanish gaiters, embroidered in Spanish silk. A felt hat, warranted to take any shape, but particularly that of a sombrero, completed my costume.

I recommend this dress to all travellers as being the most convenient I am acquainted with, and I was in the act of dressing, when the same man who had introduced me appeared at the door.

He came to announce that his young master, Monsieur Lucien de Franchi, had that instant arrived, and who desired to pay his respects to me if I were ready to receive him.

I replied that I was at the disposal of Monsieur Lucien de Franchi if he would do me the honour to come up.

An instant afterwards I heard a rapid step approaching my room, and almost immediately afterwards I was face to face with

my host.

CHAPTER III

HE was, as my guide had told me, a young man of about twenty-one years of age, with black hair and eyes, his face browned by the sun, rather under than over the average height, but remarkably well-proportioned.

In his haste to welcome me he had come up, just as he was, in his riding-costume, which was composed of a redingote of green cloth, to which a cartridge-pouch gave a somewhat military air, grey pantaloons with leather let in on the inner side of the legs, boots and spurs. His head-dress was a cap similar to those worn by our Chasseurs d'Afrique.

From either side of his pouch there hung a gourd and a pistol, and he carried an English carbine in addition.

Notwithstanding the youthful appearance of my host, whose upper lip was as yet scarcely shaded by a moustache, he wore an air of independence and resolution, which struck me very forcibly.

Here was a man fitted for strife, and accustomed to live in the midst of danger, but without despising it, grave because he was solitary, calm because he was strong.

With a single glance he took me all in, my luggage, my arms, the dress I had just taken off, and that which I had just donned.

His glance was as rapid and as sure as that of a man whose very life may depend upon a hasty survey of his surroundings.

"I trust you will excuse me if I disturb you," he said; "but I come with good intentions. I wish to see if you require anything. I am always somewhat uneasy when any of you gentlemen from the continent pay us a visit, for we are still so uncivilized, we Corsicans, that it is really with fear and trembling that we exercise, particularly to Frenchmen, our own hospitality, which will, I fear, soon be the only thing that will remain to us."

"You have no reason to fear," I replied; "it would be difficult to say what more a traveller can require beyond what Madame de Franchi has supplied. Besides," I continued, glancing round the apartment, "I must confess I do not perceive any of the want of civilization you speak of so frankly, and were it not for the charming prospect from those windows, I should fancy myself in an apartment in the Chaussee d'Antin."

"Yes," returned the young man, "it is rather a mania with my poor brother Louis; he is so fond of living *à la Française*; but I very much doubt whether, when he leaves Paris, the poor attempt at civilization here will appear to him sufficient on his return home as it formerly did."

"Has your brother been long away from Corsica?" I inquired.

"For the last ten months."

"You expect him back soon?"

"Oh, not for three or four years."

"That is a very long separation for two brothers, who probably were never parted before."

"Yes, and particularly if they love each other as we do."

“No doubt he will come to see you before he finishes his studies?”

“Probably; he has promised us so much, at least.”

“In any case, nothing need prevent you from paying him a visit?”

“No, I never leave Corsica.”

There was in his tone, as he made this reply, that love of country which astonishes the rest of the universe.

I smiled.

“It appears strange to you,” he said, smiling in his turn, “when I tell you that I do not wish to leave a miserable country like ours; but you must know that I am as much a growth of the island as the oak or the laurel; the air I breathe must be impregnated with the odours of the sea and of the mountains. I must have torrents to cross, rocks to scale, forests to explore. I must have space; liberty is necessary to me, and if you were to take me to live in a town I believe I should die.”

“But how is it there is such a great difference between you and your brother in this respect?”

“And you would add with so great a physical resemblance, if you knew him.”

“Are you, then, so very much alike?”

“So much so, that when we were children our parents were obliged to sew a distinguishing mark upon our clothes.”

“And as you grew up?” I suggested.

“As we grew up our habits caused a very slight change in our

appearance, that is all. Always in a study, poring over books and drawings, my brother grew somewhat pale, while I, being always in the open air, became bronzed, as you see.”

“I hope,” I said, “that you will permit me to judge of this resemblance, and if you have any commission for Monsieur Louis, you will charge me with it.”

“Yes, certainly, with great pleasure, if you will be so kind. Now, will you excuse me? I see you are more advanced in your toilet than I, and supper will be ready in a quarter of an hour.”

“You surely need not trouble to change on my account.”

“You must not reproach me with this, for you have yourself set me the example; but, in any case, I am now in a riding dress, and must change it for a mountaineer’s costume, as, after supper, I have to make an excursion in which boots and spurs would only serve to hinder me.”

“You are going out after supper, then?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied, “to a rendezvous.”

I smiled.

“Ah, not in the sense you understand it – this is a matter of business.”

“Do you think me so presumptuous as to believe I have a right to your conscience?”

“Why not? One should live so as to be able to proclaim what one has done. I never had a mistress, and I never shall have one. If my brother should marry, and have children, it is probable that I shall never take a wife. If, on the contrary, he does not

marry, perhaps I shall, so as to prevent our race from becoming extinct. Did I not tell you," he added, laughing, "that I am a regular savage, and had come into the world a hundred years too late? But I continue to chatter here like a crow, and I shall not be ready by the time supper is on the table."

"But cannot we continue the conversation?" I said. "Your chamber, I believe, is opposite, and we can talk through the open doors."

"We can do better than that; you can come into my room while I dress. You are a judge of arms, I fancy. Well, then, you shall look at mine. There are some there which are valuable – from an historical point of view, I mean."

CHAPTER IV

THE suggestion quite accorded with my inclination to compare the chambers of the brothers, and I did not hesitate to adopt it. I followed my host, who, opening the door, paused in front of me to show me the way.

This time I found myself in a regular arsenal. All the furniture was of the fifteenth or sixteenth century – the carved and canopied bedstead, supported by great posts, was draped with green damask *à fleur d'or*; the window curtains were of the same material. The walls were covered with Spanish leather, and in the open spaces were sustained trophies of Gothic and modern arms.

There was no mistaking the tastes of the occupant of this room: they were as warlike as those of his brother were peaceable.

“Look here,” he said, passing into an inner room, “here you are in three centuries at once – see! I will dress while you amuse yourself, for I must make haste or supper will be announced.”

“Which are the historic arms of which you spoke amongst all these swords, arquebuses, and poignards?” I asked.

“There are three. Let us take them in order. If you look by the head of my bed you will find a poignard with a very large hilt – the pommel forms a seal.”

“Yes, I have it.”

“That is the dagger of Sampietro.”

“The famous Sampietro, the assassin of Vanina?”

“The assassin! No, the avenger.”

“It is the same thing, I fancy.”

“To the rest of the world, perhaps – not in Corsica.”

“And is the dagger authentic?”

“Look for yourself. It carries the arms of Sampietro – only the fleur-de-lis of France is missing. You know that Sampietro was not authorized to wear the lily until after the siege of Perpignan.”

“No, I was not aware of that fact. And how did you become possessed of this poignard?”

“Oh! it has been in our family for three hundred years. It was given to a Napoleon de Franchi by Sampietro himself.”

“Do you remember on what occasion?”

“Yes. Sampietro and my ancestor fell into an ambushade of Genoese, and defended themselves like lions. Sampietro’s helmet was knocked off, and a Genoese on horseback was about to kill Sampietro with his mace when my ancestor plunged his dagger into a joint in his enemy’s armour. The rider feeling himself wounded spurred his horse, carrying away in his flight the dagger so firmly embedded in his armour that he was unable to withdraw it, and as my ancestor very much regretted the loss of his favourite weapon Sampietro gave him his own. Napoleon took great care of it, for it is of Spanish workmanship, as you see, and will penetrate two five-franc pieces one on top of another.”

“May I make the attempt?”

“Certainly.”

Placing the coins upon the floor, I struck a sharp blow with the dagger. Lucien had not deceived me.

When I withdrew the poignard I found both pieces pierced through and through, fixed upon the point of the dagger.

“This is indeed the dagger of Sampietro,” I said. “But what astonishes me is that being possessed of such a weapon he should have employed the cord to kill his wife.”

“He did not possess it at that time,” replied Lucien; “he had given it to my ancestor.”

“Ah! true!”

“Sampietro was more than sixty years old when he hastened from Constantinople to Aix to teach that lesson to the world, viz., that women should not meddle in state affairs.”

I bowed in assent, and replaced the poignard.

“Now,” said I to Lucien, who all this time had been dressing, “let us pass on from Sampietro to some one else.”

“You see those two portraits close together?”

“Yes, Paoli and Napoleon.”

“Well, near the portrait of Paoli is a sword.”

“Precisely so.”

“That is his sword.”

“Paoli’s sword? And is it as authentic as the poignard of Sampietro?”

“Yes, at least as authentic; though he did not give it to one of my male ancestors, but to one of the ladies.”

“To one of your female ancestors?”

“Yes. Perhaps you have heard people speak of this woman, who in the war of independence presented herself at the Tower of Sullacaro, accompanied by a young man?”

“No, tell me the story.”

“Oh, it is a very short one.”

“So much the worse.”

“Well, you see, we have not much time to talk now.”

“I am all attention.”

“Well, this woman and this young man presented themselves before the Tower of Sullacaro and requested to speak with Paoli; but as he was engaged writing, he declined to admit them; and then, as the woman insisted, the two sentinels repulsed her, when Paoli, who had heard the noise, opened the door and inquired the cause.”

“‘It is I,’ said the woman; ‘I wish to speak to you.’

“‘What have you to say to me?’

“‘I have come to tell you that I have two sons. I heard yesterday that one had been killed for defending his country, and I have come twenty leagues to bring you the other!!!’ ”

“You are relating an incident of Sparta,” I said.

“Yes, it does appear very like it.”

“And who was this woman?”

“She was my ancestress.”

“Paoli took off his sword and gave it to her.

“‘Take it,’ he said, ‘I like time to make my excuses to woman.’

”

“She was worthy of both – is it not so?”

“And now this sabre?”

“That is the one Buonaparte carried at the battle of the Pyramids.”

“No doubt it came into your family in the same manner as the poignard and the sword.”

“Entirely. After the battle Buonaparte gave the order to my grandfather, who was an officer in the Guides, to charge with fifty men a number of Mamelukes who were at bay around a wounded chieftain. My grandfather dispersed the Mamelukes and took the chief back a prisoner to the First Consul. But when he wished to sheath his sword he found the blade had been so bent in his encounter with the Mamelukes that it would not go into the scabbard. My grandfather therefore threw sabre and sheath away as useless, and, seeing this, Buonaparte gave him his own.”

“But,” I said, “in your place I would rather have had my grandfather’s sabre, all bent as it was, instead of that of the general’s, which was in good condition.”

“Look before you and you will find it. The First Consul had it recovered, and caused that large diamond to be inserted in the hilt. He then sent it to my family with the inscription which you can read on the blade.”

I advanced between the windows, where, hanging half-drawn from its scabbard, which it could not fully enter, I perceived the sabre bent and hacked, bearing the simple inscription —

“Battle of the Pyramids, 21st of July, 1798.”

At that moment the servant came to announce that supper was served.

“Very well, Griffo,” replied the young man; “tell my mother that we are coming down.”

As he spoke he came forth from the inner room, dressed, as he said, like a mountaineer; that is to say, with a round velvet coat, trowsers, and gaiters; of his other costume he had only retained his pouch.

He found me occupied in examining two carbines hanging opposite each other, and both inscribed —

“21st September, 1819: 11 A.M.”

“Are these carbines also historical?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answered. “For us, at least, they bear a historical significance. One was my father’s — ”

He hesitated.

“And the other,” I suggested.

“And the other,” he said, laughing, “is my mother’s. But let us go downstairs; my mother will be awaiting us.”

Then passing in front of me to show me the way he courteously signed to me to follow him.

CHAPTER V

I MUST confess that as I descended to the supper-room I could not help thinking of Lucien's last remark, "The other is my mother's carbine;" and this circumstance compelled me to regard Madame de Franchi more closely than I had hitherto done.

When her son entered the *salle à manger*, he respectfully kissed her hand, and she received this homage with queenly dignity.

"I am afraid that we have kept you waiting, mother," said Lucien; "I must ask your pardon."

"In any case, that would be my fault, madame," I said, bowing to her. "Monsieur Lucien has been telling me and pointing out many curious things, and by my reiterated questions I have delayed him."

"Rest assured," she said, "I have not been kept waiting; I have but this moment come downstairs. But," she continued, addressing Lucien, "I was rather anxious to ask you what news there was of Louis."

"Your son has been ill, madame?" I asked.

"Lucien is afraid so," she said.

"Have you received a letter from your brother?" I inquired.

"No," he replied, "and that is the very thing that makes me uneasy."

"But, then, how can you possibly tell that he is out of sorts?"

“Because during the last few days I have been suffering myself.”

“I hope you will excuse my continual questions; but, really, your answer does not make matters any clearer.”

“Well, you know that we are twins, don’t you?”

“Yes, my guide told me as much.”

“Were you also informed that when we came into the world we were joined together?”

“No; I was ignorant of that circumstance.”

“Well, then, it was a fact, and we were obliged to be cut asunder. So that, you see, however distant we may be, we have ever the same body, so that any impression, physical or moral, which one may receive is immediately reflected in the other. During the last few days I felt *triste*, morose, dull, and without any predisposing cause, so far as I am aware. I have experienced terrible pains in the region of the heart, and palpitations, so it is evident to me that my brother is suffering some great grief.”

I looked with astonishment at this young man, who affirmed such a strange thing without the slightest fear of contradiction, and his mother also appeared to entertain the same conviction as he did.

Madame de Franchi smiled sadly, and said, “The absent are in the hands of God, the great point is that you are certain that he is alive.”

“Yes,” replied Lucien, calmly, “for if he were dead I should have seen him.”

“And you would have told me, would you not, my son?”

“Oh, of course, mother, at once.”

“I am satisfied. Excuse me, monsieur,” she continued, turning to me, “I trust you will pardon my maternal anxiety. Not only are Louis and Lucien my sons, but they are the last of their race. Will you please take the chair at my right hand? Lucien, sit here.”

She indicated to the young man the vacant place at her left hand.

We seated ourselves at the extremity of a long table, at the opposite end of which were laid six other covers, destined for those who in Corsica are called the family; that is to say, the people who in large establishments occupy a position between the master and the servants.

The table was abundantly supplied with good cheer. But I confess that although at the moment blessed with a very good appetite, I contented myself with eating and drinking as it were mechanically, for my senses were not in any way attracted by the pleasures of the table. For, indeed, it appeared to me that I had entered into a strange world when I came into that house, and that I was now living in a dream.

Who could this woman be who was accustomed to carry a carbine like a soldier?

What sort of person could this brother be, who felt the same grief that his brother experienced at a distance of three hundred leagues?

What sort of mother could this be who made her son declare

that if he saw the spirit of his dead brother he would tell her at once?

These were the questions that perplexed me, and it will be readily understood they gave me ample food for thought.

However, feeling that continual silence was not polite, I made an effort to collect my ideas. I looked up.

The mother and son at the same instant perceived that I wished to enter into conversation.

“So,” said Lucien to me, as if he were continuing his remarks, “so you made up your mind to come to Corsica?”

“Yes, as you see, I had for a long time had a desire to do so, and at last I have accomplished it.”

“*Ma foi!* you have done well not to delay your visit; for with the successive encroachments of French tastes and manners those who come to look for Corsica in a few years will not find it.”

“However,” I replied, “if the ancient national spirit retires before civilization and takes refuge in any corner of the island, it certainly will be in the province of Sartène, and in the valley of the Tavano.”

“Do you think so, really?” said the young man, smiling.

“Yes, and it appears to me that here at the present moment there is a beautiful and noble tablet of ancient Corsican manners.”

“Yes, and nevertheless, even here, between my mother and myself, in the face of four hundred years of reminiscences of this old fortified mansion, the French spirit has come to seek out

my brother – has carried him away to Paris, when he will return to us a lawyer. He will live in Ajaccio instead of dwelling in his ancestral home. He will plead – if he possess the talent – he may be nominated *procureur du roi* perhaps; then he will pursue the poor devils who have ‘taken a skin,’ as they say here. He will confound the assassin with the avenger – as you yourself have done already. He will demand, in the name of the law, the heads of those who had done what their fathers would have considered themselves dishonoured *not* to have done. He will substitute the judgment of men for the justice of God; and in the evening, when he shall have claimed a head for the scaffold, he will believe that he has performed his duty, and has brought his stone as a tribute to the temple of Civilization, as our préfet says. Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu!”

The young man raised his eyes to heaven, as Hannibal is reported to have done after the battle of Zama.

“But,” I replied, “you must confess that it is the will of God to equalize these things, since in making your brother a proselyte of the new order He has kept you here as a representative of the old manners and customs.”

“Yes; but what is there to prove that my brother will not follow the example of his uncle instead of following mine? And even I myself may be about to do something unworthy of a de Franchi.”

“You!” I exclaimed, with astonishment.

“Yes, I. Do you wish me to tell you why you have come into this province of Sartène?”

“Yes, tell me.”

“You have come here to satisfy your curiosity as a man of the world, an artist, or a poet. I do not know what you are, nor do I ask; you can tell us when you leave, if you wish; if not, you need not inform us; you are perfectly free to do as you like. Well, you have come in the hope of seeing some village Vendetta, of being introduced to some original bandit, such as Mr. Merimée has described in ‘Columba.’ ”

“Well, it appears to me that I have not made such a bad choice, for if my eyes do not deceive me, your house is the only one in the village that is not fortified.”

“That only proves I have degenerated, as I have said. My father, my grandfather, and my ancestors for many generations have always taken one side or the other in the disputes which in the last ten years have divided the village. And do you know what I have become in the midst of musket shots and stabs? Well, I am the arbitrator. You have come into the province of Sartène to see bandits; is not that the fact? So come with me this evening and I will show you one.”

“What! will you really allow me to go with you this evening?”

“Certainly, if it will amuse you. It entirely depends upon yourself.”

“I accept, then, with much pleasure.”

“Our guest is fatigued,” said Madame de Franchi, looking meaningly at her son, as if she felt ashamed Corsica had so far degenerated.

“No, mother, no, he had better come; and when in some Parisian *salon* people talk of the terrible Vendettas, of the implacable Corsican bandits who strike terror into the hearts of children in Bastia and Ajaccio, he will be able to tell them how things actually are.”

“But what is the great motive for this feud, which, as I understand, is now by your intercession to be for ever extinguished?”

“Oh,” replied Lucien, “in a quarrel it is not the motive that matters, it is the result. If a fly causes a man’s death the man is none the less dead because a fly caused it.”

I saw that he hesitated to tell me the cause of this terrible war, which for the last ten years had desolated the village of Sullacaro.

But, as may be imagined, the more he attempted to conceal it the more anxious I was to discover it.

“But,” said I, “this quarrel must have a motive; is that motive a secret?”

“Good gracious, no! The mischief arose between the Orlandi and the Colona.”

“On what occasion?”

“Well, a fowl escaped from the farm yard of the Orlandi and flew into that of the Colona.

“The Orlandi attempted to get back the hen, the Colona declared it belonged to them. The Orlandi then threatened to bring the Colona before the judge and make them declare on oath it was theirs. And then the old woman in whose house the

hen had taken refuge wrung its neck, and threw the dead fowl into her neighbour's face, saying —

“Well, then, if it belongs to you, eat it.”

“Then one of the Orlandi picked up the fowl by the feet, and attempted to beat the person who had thrown it in his sister's face, but just as he was about to do so, one of the Colona appeared, who, unfortunately, carried a loaded gun, and he immediately sent a bullet through the Orlandi's heart.”

“And how many lives have been sacrificed since?”

“Nine people have been killed altogether.”

“And all for a miserable hen not worth twelve sous?”

“Yes, but as I said just now, it is not the cause, but the effect that we have to look at.”

“Since there were nine people killed, then, there might easily be a dozen.”

“Yes, very likely there would be if they had not appointed me as arbitrator.”

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