

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE SWORD OF
HONOR; OR, THE
FOUNDATION OF THE
FRENCH REPUBLIC

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**The Sword of Honor; or, The
Foundation of the French Republic**

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Eugène Sue

The Sword of Honor; or, The Foundation of the French Republic / A Tale of The French Revolution

INTRODUCTION

I, John Lebrenn, the son of Ronan, whose father was Alain, the last son of Salaun Lebrenn the mariner, now take up the thread of our family history, by writing the following narrative.

Thanks to God, Oh, sons of Joel! my eyes have seen the beautiful day predicted to our ancestor Scanvoch the soldier by Victoria the Great, now more than fifteen centuries ago, and awaited from age to age by our family. I have witnessed the solemn judgment, the expiatory punishment of Louis Capet, called Louis XVI, the last of that line of Kings of Frankish origin. Rejoice, ye shades of my ancestors – ye martyrs of the Church, of the Nobility, and of Royalty! Rejoice, ye obscure soldiers who fought in the bloody conflicts that you engaged in from age to age, in resolute insurrections of the oppressed against the oppressors of centuries – of the sons of the conquered Gauls against the conqueror Franks! Rejoice! Old Gaul has recovered her ancient republican freedom! She has broken the abhorred yoke of the Kings, and the infamous yoke of the Church of Rome.

I am writing this narrative in the year II of the French Republic, one and indivisible.

My great-grandfather, Salaun Lebrenn, died at Amsterdam in his ninety-first year, on December 20, 1715. His son Alain, born in 1685, was then thirty years of age. He worked in Amsterdam as a printer, one of the most lucrative trades, in that the large number of books, then being written against the Church and royalty, could be published only at Geneva, or in Holland, free countries in which the right of intellectual free research was recognized and protected. My ancestor Alain sold in 1715 the modest patrimony which he inherited from his father Salaun, left Holland, and settled down in France at the beginning of the Regency under Louis XV, the successor of Louis XIV. The freedom then enjoyed was great compared with conditions at the period of Louis XIV. Being exceptionally skilled at his trade, my grandfather secured the position of foreman in the printing house of one of the descendants of the famous Estienne, in whose establishment our ancestor Christian was long employed. Alain married the niece of his employer. Of that marriage was born, in 1727, my father Ronan. He followed my grandfather's trade. The latter died in 1751. My father had two children – my sister Victoria, born in 1760, and myself, John Lebrenn, born in 1766.

My grandfather's life was spent in peace and obscurity. But great misfortunes fell upon our family. As you will read in the course of the following history, Oh, sons of Joel! it was not vouchsafed to my father to witness, as I did, the brilliant victory that crowned fifteen centuries of incessant, painful and bloody endeavor, thanks to which our ancestors – successively slaves, serfs and vassals – conquered, at the price of their lives and of innumerable rebellions, step by step, one by one, the franchises that the French Republic has now confirmed and consecrated in the face of the whole world, by proclaiming, in the name of the Rights of Man, the downfall of Kings and the sovereignty of the People.

PART I

FALL OF THE BASTILLE

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE IN ST. FRANCOIS STREET

One night toward the middle of April, 1789, when the moon with its radiance clearly lighted the scene, a man, wrapped in a great-coat, and with his hat pulled far over his countenance, might have been seen carefully surveying the neighborhood of a building located in one of the most deserted streets of Paris, St. Francois Street, in the Swamp. A lofty wall, its black stones weathered with years of exposure, ran nearly the whole length of the thoroughfare, and served as facing to a terrace surmounted with trees that had laughed to scorn the storms of a century. Through their heavy foliage one caught glimpses of the stone front, the peaked roof, and the high brick chimneys of a mansion in the style of Louis XIV. A wall, pierced by several grated openings, formed a deep, semi-circular approach, leading up to a coach gate of massive oak, studded with enormous spikes of iron. To judge from the thick layers of dust and cobwebs which covered the gate, many had been the days since it was opened. A little bastard gate, closed with a wicket, and no less massively built than the principal entrance, gave on its other side onto a narrow and vaulted passage. To the left of this passage stood the door of a lodge the windows of which overlooked a spacious garden, laid out in the fashion of the previous century, and ornamented with vases and statues of stone, stained and broken by time. In the center of the garden rose another dwelling whose doors had been walled up, and whose windows were sealed with plates of lead, soldered into iron frames set in the masonry.

One more little building, snuggled up against the entry-gate and evidently intended for the porter, was occupied only by a Jew and his wife. The couple this evening were chatting in a lower room whose half-open door communicated with the vaulted passage running to the street.

David Samuel was in the neighborhood of thirty, his wife Bathsheba, twenty-five. The lineage of Israel was strongly stamped on their features. Bathsheba, seated before a little table lighted by a copper lamp, was preparing to write at her husband's dictation. The latter, sunk in an arm-chair, his forehead in his hands, was in grave mood, and said to his wife after a silence of several minutes:

"The more I think over the present state of affairs, the more am I convinced that it is the part of prudence and necessity for us to prepare against unfortunate eventualities. In spite of our precautions within and without, what goes on here may one day be uncovered by the creatures of the Lieutenant of Police. We would then both be imprisoned, my dear Bathsheba! Then, if I should die in prison – "

"Ah, my friend, what gloomy forebodings! Think not of such sad chances."

"Everything must be reckoned with. So, then, in case I die, our cousin Levi, on whom I count as on myself – you know him – "

"Your confidence is well placed."

"I am sure of it. I wish to charge him, in that case, to take my place in the sacred mission which my grandfather and father have handed down to me. That is why I wish to hold ready, in advance, the memorandum which will place our relative in possession of the knowledge he will need in order to replace me. Come then, write as I dictate."

At the moment that Samuel uttered these last words, he heard a knocking in a peculiar manner at the little bastard gate. First there were three blows, then two, separated from the others by a pause; and then two again; total, seven, the cabalistic number.

Samuel manifested no surprise at the signal. He left the room, traversed the passage, drew close to the wicket, and asked in an undertone:

"Who knocks?"

"*A blind one.*"

"What does he seek?"

"*The light.*"

"What time is it?"

"*The hour of darkness, my brother!*"

Immediately upon the last response, Samuel swung back the gate. Two persons wrapped in cloaks hurried through the passage and disappeared in the garden. The Jew secured again the gate, and returned to his wife, who, no more surprised than he by the mysterious entrance of the two newcomers, said:

"Dictate, my friend; I shall write."

"In the year 1660," began Samuel, "Monsieur Marius Rennepont, a rich Protestant shipowner and captain, lay in Lisbon. He had carried from France, on his ship, Monsieur the Duke of San Borromeo, one of Portugal's greatest lords. The very day of his arrival in Lisbon, Monsieur Rennepont saw from his hotel on the Plaza Mayor, the preparations for an auto-da-fé. On inquiry he learned that the next day a Jew named Samuel was to be burnt in the cause of religion. Monsieur Rennepont, being a humane and generous-minded man, and, moreover, having sympathy for the fate of heretics as his own Protestant co-religionists were beginning in France to be persecuted in spite of the Edict of Nantes, resolved to snatch this Jew from the torture, and counted on the support and protection of the Duke of San Borromeo.

"The latter, more than once during the passage, had made tender of his services to the captain. Chance so willed it that he was the elder brother of the Inquisitor of Lisbon. Monsieur Rennepont's hopes were realized. The Duke of San Borromeo by his credit obtained from the tribunal of the Inquisition a commutation of the Jew's sentence from capital punishment to one of perpetual banishment. Monsieur Rennepont, having saved his protégé, made inquiries as to his character, and received the best accounts thereof. He proposed that the Jew accompany him to France, an offer which the latter accepted with gratitude. Later on Monsieur Rennepont entrusted him with the money matters of his trade; and Samuel devoted himself body and soul to his benefactor.

"That Hebrew, my grandfather, was soon able to prove his gratitude to Monsieur Marius Rennepont. The Protestant persecutions increased in fury. Those who refused to be converted were exposed to violence and exactions of every sort. Monsieur Rennepont had a son whom he loved passionately. In order to ensure to this son the enjoyment of his goods by sheltering them from confiscation, he abjured the Protestant faith. Dearly he paid for that moment of weakness. The Jesuit Society, for some hidden reason which my grandfather never could fathom, pursued from age to age with their secret surveillance and hatred a certain Lebrenn family, with which one of Monsieur Rennepont's ancestors had been connected by marriage in the middle of the Sixteenth Century.¹ For reasons to be revealed later, that branch of the Renneponsts had broken off its relations with the Lebrenns; it was even ignorant of whether its former allies had left any descendants.

"The Society of Jesus, enveloping in its covert network of espionage all who, either closely or distantly, were connected with the Lebrenn family, learned through its agents that Monsieur Marius Rennepont, in spite of his apparent conversion to Catholicism, was in the habit of attending, along with several of his co-religionists, a certain Protestant church. Denounced by the Jesuits, Monsieur Rennepont incurred the terrible penalties visited upon the fallen from faith – the galleys for life, and the confiscation of his property. At the same time his only son fell a victim to a duel without witnesses. Some time thereafter, the father conceived the hazardous idea of escaping, at his age, from the rigors of the galleys. He fled to a house several hours distant from Paris, called my grandfather Samuel to his side, and entrusted to him his wishes and his last testament. The goods confiscated from him, had,

¹ See "The Pocket Bible," the sixteenth of this series.

by a royal order, been turned over to his betrayers, the Jesuits, who thus profited by his fortune. But Monsieur Rennepont, having long intended to leave to his son, should the latter survive him, a certain patrimony had laid away in a secret place fifty thousand crowns in gold. That sum he confided to my grandsire, charging him to re-purchase this estate where we now are, then estimated at between seven and eight thousand crowns. Samuel was instructed to carry out certain orders with regard to the main dwelling of the estate, and to live, with his descendants, in the lodge which we occupy.

"The sum thus remaining in my grandfather's hands, amounting to some forty thousand crowns, he was to put out at interest as securely as possible; the sums accruing from this interest were to be capitalized and added to the principal for the space of about a century and a half, that is to say, till the year 1832. Samuel was authorized to draw every year two thousand livres from the profit of these investments, and to pass on this duty, and the salary attached to it, to his own son, or in case of the latter's death, to some relative, or co-religionist, known to him for probity.

"Such is the solidarity which binds us Hebrews together, and which constitutes our strength, that my grandsire, even had he no son, would have found some faithful repository for his trust. But God willed that it should be my father Isaac himself who was to acquit himself of this debt of gratitude towards the protector of our ancestor, and that I, in turn, should fulfil the same duty.

"The object of Monsieur Marius Rennepont in thus bequeathing to us the duty of investing the interests on the sum which he confided to our ancestor, was to leave to the third or fourth generation of his heirs an enormous fortune, the employment of which will only be disclosed upon the opening of his will, which his representatives will perform in forty-three years, on the 13th of February, 1832, in this house, the door of which is to remain sealed and the windows fastened until that date."

At this point of his dictation Samuel was interrupted by a new series of raps, in the pre-arranged fashion, at the little gate. He disappeared for a moment, and almost as soon returned, saying to his wife:

"We shall have to postpone our writing – we can take it up later. You may withdraw now about your household affairs. Prince Franz of Gerolstein has just arrived with a new comrade whom he wishes to entertain here in this chamber, before his initiation."

"We shall continue the dictation again, then, my friend," responded Bathsheba, rising. And she added, with a deep sigh, "O, may you never regret having affiliated yourself with the 'Seeing Ones,' or 'Voyants,' as they call themselves."

"No, my beloved wife, never shall I regret my affiliation with the Voyants. The ideas of which they have made themselves the propagandists must infallibly bring about the reign of fraternity and the emancipation of the human race. Then we, condemned Jews, shall enter into the communion of the great human family. In affiliating myself with the Voyants of Paris, in offering them the subterranean chambers which I place at their disposal for their meetings, I serve our own personal cause and also the cause of the disinherited, the downtrodden ones of the world. I am fulfilling thereby a sacred duty. Whatever may hap, I shall not regret having put my shoulder to the work of emancipation."

"Oh, will that sacred cause, to which you have given yourself, soul and body, ever triumph? What dangers must be run, and for an uncertain end!"

"Everything proclaims the early victory of our cause! Be of good cheer!"

"Illusion, Samuel; the illusion of a generous heart. I fear you are but cruelly deceived."

"It is no illusion, Bathsheba! Must it not be truth, which has so irresistible an attraction? Why else should the offspring of a prince be a Voyant?"

"You mean Prince Franz of Gerolstein?"

"He was initiated in Germany, the very cradle of our secret society. He has become one of our most ardent converts. Blessings on the day when it was given me to make acquaintance with the noble young man. Never did the cause of humanity have a more eloquent apostle, a more great-hearted defender. And still withal the society of which he is a member has declared an implacable war upon all privilege of birth or riches, upon all authority, royal or religious. 'Neither Kings nor priests!' – that

is our motto. The Prince holds these ideas of equality, of emancipation – he, of a sovereign race! he, one destined to rule! Are not these thrilling signs? The doctrines of the enfranchisement of the working class are spread by the sovereign princes. The Emperor of Austria, Joseph II, brother of Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France, without owning allegiance to the Voyants, without completely accepting their principles, nevertheless travels Europe incognito as a philosopher, nowhere permitting that they pay him the honors due to royal blood, visiting the bourgeois, the lower ranks, mingling with all classes of society, observing for himself the trend of their spirit, sympathizing with their new ideas, submitting himself, perhaps without his own knowledge, to the influence of that regenerating breeze which is sweeping over the old world. The reign of justice and equality is close at hand!"

"In truth – these signs are thrilling," mused Bathsheba pensively.

"Yes, dear wife, the end of persecution and iniquity draws nigh. In a few years, one will find difficulty in persuading himself that there was a time when we Israelites were under the ban of the world; when there was a price upon us; when we were tortured, hanged, burned, all because we were Jews; and when the Protestants, like us, were sent to the galleys or to death, solely because they were Lutherans or Calvinists. Ah, no fear, the descendants of Monsieur Marius Rennepont will be able to enjoy in security the huge fortune which they are to inherit, whether they are Catholics or Protestants – my hope is firm."

Bathsheba reflected a moment and answered:

"My friend, I do not understand you. Monsieur Marius Rennepont left at his death but fifty thousand crowns in gold as his whole heritage. Out of this your ancestor paid the price of this mansion. How, then, will his heirs inherit the colossal fortune of which you speak!"

"In this way, Bathsheba. My grandfather, after the death of Monsieur Rennepont, by means of certain financial operations, succeeded, after some little time, in recouping the eight thousand crowns paid for the estate. In 1683 he had completely restored the fifty thousand crowns. He took the cash; invested it, together with the interest and emoluments, and fifteen years later, in 1696, the sum had already grown to three hundred thousand livres, which, doubled by investment in 1710, made six hundred thousand. Finally, in 1719, when my grandfather died, the sum had reached nearly a million. The doubling of the capital took place in ten, twelve, or fourteen years, depending on the rate of interest, it being in different years seven, six, or five per cent.

"The million which my grandfather Samuel left at his death," continued Samuel, "had, by 1724, become 1,200,000; 1742, two years after my birth, nearly 5,000,000; in 1766, it was 9,600,000 livres; in 1780, 19,600,000 livres; and at this moment the bequest of Marius Rennepont has attained the magnitude of 34,300,000 livres, 8 sous, 11 deniers. That is not all. Just think of what it will be forty years from now, progressing at the same rate: In 1794 it will climb to nearly 38,000,000; in 1808, to 76,000,000; in 1822, to 150,000,000; and in 1832, the time set for the opening of the will of Monsieur Marius Rennepont and for the partition of his fortune among his descendants, the fortune will have capped the enormous figure of 220,000,000 livres!"

"It is certainly prodigious," rejoined Bathsheba. "Even with your explanation, my surprise makes me dizzy. But that dizziness," she added, with great emotion, "shall not keep me from feeling a noble pride in the fact that it was your grandsire, your sire, and you yourself, who have been till now the worthy repositories of such a treasure. Oh, Samuel, you indeed acquit the debt of gratitude contracted by your grandfather toward Monsieur Marius Rennepont."

"We but perform a sacred duty confided to our integrity and our prudence," returned the Jew. "My grandparent, my parent and I have ever been careful not to endanger the smallest part of this sum in risky ventures. Thanks to the financial relations of our co-religionists with all the banks of Europe, we have been able to confine ourselves rigorously to investments of the highest security. Should God give to us a son, my dear wife, he will have, I hope, the prudence and the probity of his fathers. If the joy of having a son is denied us, or if some unforeseen development should prevent me from carrying on this mission of honor, our cousin Levi, whose uprightness I well know, will take

my place. Or better still, perhaps the Lord will grant me a green old age, thus enabling me in 1832, with ninety winters on my back, to return in person to the heirs of the house of Rennepont the sacred trust which their ancestor so long ago confided to mine. That will be a day too good to hope for, if I can be present at the opening of Monsieur Rennepont's testament. But God alone knows the future!"

After a pause, Samuel continued:

"To bring his heirs together at the distant time set for the opening of his will, Monsieur Rennepont, a short time before his death, hit upon an ingenious plan. He transmitted to each of his descendants a medal which bore on one side the legend:

VICTIM OF S. J

PRAY FOR ME

1682

And on the reverse, the words:

AT PARIS, SAINT FRANCOIS STREET, NO. 3

IN A CENTURY AND A HALF YOU WILL BE

FEBRUARY THE 13TH, 1832

"It is by means of these medals, handed down from generation to generation, that the Rennepont heirs will one day be reunited here, in this, the house of their ancestor."

"My friend," asked Bathsheba, "in the note you were dictating to me for our friend Levi, you made mention of a Lebrenn family, related to Monsieur Rennepont, which, in spite of its relationship, will probably not partake in the division of the fortune. Whence and why this exclusion?"

"I learned from my father that the grandfather of Monsieur Rennepont, after his abjuration, conceived the greatest aversion for his relatives of the Lebrenn branch, severed all connection with them, and even concealed the fact of their existence from his son, out of dread to submit him some day to the influence of that family, the implacable enemy, as it was, of the Church."

"And did the father of Monsieur Marius Rennepont remain true to the Roman faith?"

"He did, my beloved Bathsheba; but his son, Monsieur Marius himself, reaching the age of reason shortly after his father's death, embraced Protestantism, which still later he feigned to renounce, in order to protect his fortune for his son – a regrettable act of weakness."

"How, then, was the existence of this Lebrenn branch discovered? It all grows more and more mysterious to me, and whets my curiosity."

"Shortly before his death, by suicide, Monsieur Marius Rennepont was looking over some family papers running back to the Sixteenth Century, to the period of the religious wars. There he found to a certainty proof of the connection between the Renneponts and the Lebrenns. But whether the latter had left any descendants he was unable to determine."

"Does that mean, Samuel, that should there be living survivors of the Lebreun family at the time the Rennepont fortune is partitioned, they will have no share in it?"

"The formal wish of the testator," replied Samuel, "is that only those who in 1832 present themselves here armed with their hereditary medallion shall be admitted to benefice in the inheritance. I shall abide by the instructions which have been handed down to me. According to what my father said, who had his information direct from his father, the confidant of Monsieur Rennepont himself, that clause was dictated by motives which will be revealed in the will."

"Everything in this affair is strange and singular. Probably no one even knows where to find the present descendants of Monsieur Rennepont."

"As to me, Bathsheba, I have not the slightest clue. Still – my father did tell me that twice in his life, Rennepont heirs presented themselves here with their hereditary medals bearing the address of this house, drawn hither by curiosity or vague pecuniary expectations – curiosity and expectations which met only with disappointment."

"What said your father to them?"

"Just what I should say in like case: 'I have nothing to communicate to you. This house belongs to me; it was left me by my father. I know not for what purpose or with what plan in view your ancestor designated this building to his heirs as their rendezvous a century and a half from date.'"

"That is, in fact, the answer commanded by prudence, Samuel. The world must remain in ignorance of the great value of the bequest you are charged with."

"Reasons of the utmost gravity impose upon us an absolute secrecy on the subject. In the first place, according to what my father had from my grandfather, the Society of Jesus, always so well served by its innumerable host of spies, succeeded in finding out that Monsieur Rennepont had saved an important sum from the confiscation which proved so profitable to the reverend fathers; for the informers and the executioners parted the spoils."

"Samuel! If these priests, so powerful, so masterful, and with so many avenues of underground working should ever suspect the truth! I tremble at the mere thought."

"Take heart, my good wife. The danger would be great, but I should know how to escape it. It was even more necessary in my grandfather's and especially in my father's case that they kept in profound secrecy the treasures they possessed; for the governments of Louis XIV, the Regent, and Louis XV, always in want, always at their wits' end for cash, were none too scrupulous in the means they chose to replenish their coffers. We Jews have always been a little beyond the pale of common rights, so that my grandfather or my father, once suspected of being the possessors of a sum amounting to several millions, would have been haled off on *lettres de cachet*, thrown into the cell of some State prison, and kept there till they had bought off their liberty, or, perhaps, their very lives at the price of the treasure which they were suspected of guarding."

"Ah, Samuel, I shudder to think that in those days every wickedness was possible. They might even have put your father to the torture."

"Thanks be to God, all that is out of the question to-day. And still, anticipating ill chances and exactions, we have always stowed our treasure in safe places and safe hands. Should the mansion be ransacked from cellar to eaves, the wealth of which we are the keepers would escape the search – "

Pricking his ear, Samuel checked his speech and listened intently a moment in the direction of the street gate. Then he said aloud to himself:

"Who is knocking there? It is not one of our men."

"The hour is unearthly," answered Bathsheba, uneasily. "It is past midnight. This lonely street has long since been deserted. May it not be our lookout come to warn us of the approach of some peril?"

"No, our lookout would have given the established signal," answered the Jew. "I'll go see what it may be."

And taking the lamp, he passed out of the chamber.

CHAPTER II

REVOLUTIONARY EFFERVESCENCE

Lamp in hand, Samuel approached the wicket gate. The light he carried revealed to him standing outside a lackey in a livery of orange and green, trimmed with silver lace. The fellow, swaying unsteadily on his feet, and with the air of one half-seas over with drink, knocked again, violently.

"Ho, friend!" cried Samuel. "Don't knock so hard! Perhaps you mistake the house."

"I – I knock how I please," returned the lackey in a thick voice. "Open the door – right off. I want to come in – gallows-bird!"

"Whom do you wish?"

"You do not want to open; dog of Jewry! Swine! My master will beat you to death with his stick. He said to me: 'Carry – this letter to Samuel the Jew – and above all – rascal – do not tarry at the inn!' So I want to get in to your dog-kennel, you devil of a Jew!"

"May I ask your master's name?"

"My master is Monseigneur the Count of Plouernel, colonel in the Guards. You know him well. You have before now lent him money – triple Arab! – according to what my lord's steward says – and at good interest, too."

"Have you your master's letter?"

"Yes – pig! And so, open. If not – I'll break in the gate."

"Then pass me the letter through the wicket, and hurry about it. Else I shall go in and leave you as you are."

"Mule! Isn't he stubborn, that animal!" grumbled the lackey as he shoved the letter through the grating. "I must have an answer, good and quick, I was told," he added.

"When I have read the letter," replied Samuel.

"To make me wait outside the door – like a dog!" muttered the tipsy servingman. "Me, the first lackey of my lord!"

Samuel, without paying the least attention to the impertinences of the lackey, read the letter of the Count of Plouernel by the light of his lamp, and then answered:

"Say to your master that I shall visit him to-morrow morning at his rooms. Your errand is done. You may leave."

"You won't give me a written answer?"

"No, the reply I have just given you will suffice."

Leaving the valet outside to fume his wrath away, Samuel refastened the wicket and returned to the room where he had left his wife. Bathsheba said to him, with some uneasiness:

"My friend, did I not hear a threatening voice?"

"It was a drunken lackey who brought me a letter from the Count of Plouernel."

"Another demand for a loan, I suppose?"

"Exactly. He has ordered me to undertake to secure for him the sum of 100,000 livres. He did not call on me direct for the loan, because he thought me too poor to be able to furnish it."

"Will you lend him the money, my friend?"

"Surely, on excellent securities of thirty deniers to one. The Count is good for it, and it will please me to squeeze him, along with other great seigneurs, to the profit of the strong-box of the Voyants."

Hardly had Samuel uttered these words when Prince Franz of Gerolstein, accompanied by one single companion, entered the room. Samuel and his wife silently passed upstairs to the floor above, leaving the two alone.

Franz of Gerolstein, then at the age of twenty-five, tall of stature and at once graceful and robust, presented an appearance both noble and impressive. In his face could be read frankness,

resolution, and generosity. He was simply dressed. His companion, who was evidently a woman disguised in male habiliments, seemed as young as he, though she was really thirty. In spite of their rare beauty, her features bore the stamp of virility. Her figure was tall and lithe; a brownish down marked strongly her upper lip; everything harmonized with her masculine garments. Yet the beauty of this woman was of a sinister character. The marble-like pallor of her brow, the flashes of her black eyes, the contraction of her pupils, the bitterness of the smile, frequently cruel, which curled on her lips – all seemed to bear witness to the ravages of passion or to some incurable chagrin. She seemed either a superb courtesan, or a repentant Magdalen.

Neither Franz nor his companion broke the silence of the lower room for an instant. The Prince spoke first, in a voice grave and almost solemn:

"Victoria, it is now three months since my visit to the Prison of the Repentant Women. Your beauty, marked with a depth of sadness, seized possession of me at once. I learned why you had been condemned to confinement. Those reasons, once learned, moved me deeply. From that time dates the interest with which you have inspired me. By the intervention of a powerful friend, I am fortunate enough to have secured your release."

"Yes, I owe you my liberty," responded she whom he called Victoria, in a virile voice. "And moreover, you have given me, in my misfortune, many proofs of affection."

"But the interest I have shown you has other springs than in your misfortune – although that has much augmented it."

"What may they be, Franz? Speak – I am listening."

The Prince paused in silence for a second, and then asked:

"Know you who I am?"

"Have you not told me that you were a student in one of the universities of Germany, your native land?"

"I deceived you as to my station, Victoria. I am no student."

"You deceived me! You whom I thought so true?"

"You will soon learn for what cause I hid from you the truth. But first I would make you aware of the nature of the sentiments you inspire in me. I can no longer hold back the confession. Hear me, then, Victoria –"

The young woman shuddered, stopped the Prince, and said in tones of bitterness:

"Unless I greatly mistake, I foresee the end of this speech, Franz. So before you proceed, and in the hope of sparing you a refusal which would be an insult to you, I must declare that I have not changed since I met you. I must repeat what I said to you in our first interview: My heart is dead to love – one single passion rules me, and that is, vengeance. I have hid from you nothing of the past."

"Aye, I know that you have suffered. Victoria, if your heart is dead, mine is no longer mine. I left behind in Germany a young girl, an angel of candor, of virtue, of beauty. She is poor and obscure of birth, but I have sworn before God to make her my wife. I shall remain true to my love and to my oath."

"Oh, thanks, Franz, thanks for your confidence. It has lifted from me a fearsome apprehension," said Victoria, with a sigh of joy. "I love you with the tenderness of a sister, or rather, of a friend. For I am no longer a woman, and it would have been cruelty on my part to inspire in you a sentiment I could not share. But what, then, is the nature of your feeling towards me?"

"I feel for you the tender compassion due to the sorrows of your childhood and early youth – a profound esteem for the qualities which in you have survived, have overcome, all the causes of your degradation; – and finally, Victoria, I am united to you by an indissoluble bond which reaches into the most distant past – that of kinship."

Victoria gazed at the Prince in a sort of stupor as he proceeded: "We are of one blood, Victoria. We are relatives. One cradle, one origin, embraced our two families. Have you ever read the records your fathers have handed down from age to age, for now over sixteen centuries?"

"I learned of those writings during the two years I spent with my mother and brother, subsequent to the event I have related to you. The reading of our annals, added to all the ferments of hate, already planted in my soul, and to the disappearance of my father, now dead or languishing in some pit of the Bastille, all created and matured in me that craving for vengeance, or rather for reprisals, which now possesses me. I long to serve that vengeance, at the cost of my life, if need be. That is why I have consented to this initiation, the hour of which is now approached. Vengeance will be but justice, and I wish it to be implacable."

"The hour is indeed arrived, Victoria, and also the moment to reveal to you what we are to each other. You have in your plebeian annals a princely name, that of Charles of Gerolstein. That prince was a descendant of Gaëlo the Pirate, who in the Tenth Century accompanied old Rolf, chief of the Northman pirates, to the siege of Paris.² One of the descendants of Gaëlo, taking his departure from Norway, went, some time in the Tenth Century, to establish himself with one of the independent tribes of Germany. His courage, his military prowess, caused his election as chief of the tribe. His son, equal to his father for wisdom and bravery, succeeded him to the command. The chieftainship from that time forward became hereditary in the family. Later, the tribe of Gerolstein became one of the foremost in the German confederation. Thus did the descendants of Gaëlo found the sovereign house of Gerolstein, to-day represented by my father, who now holds sway in his German principality. Our relationship is beyond doubt, Victoria, and the bonds thereof were again strengthened in the Sixteenth Century, when, in the religious wars, the ancestors of us both fought together under Admiral Coligny."

"So, Franz, you are of the race of sovereigns," Victoria made answer. Then she continued: "It is now three months since you rescued me from prison. Shame, grief, self-contempt have deterred me from returning to my mother and brother. I am penniless. I wished to earn my living as a sempstress, a trade in which my mother instructed me during my stay with her. That would be the wisest thing to do. Why have you opposed my desires?"

"Because I thought you could serve the cause of humanity more fruitfully than by occupying yourself with the needle."

"You told me that I was to go through a novitiate of several months, during which time I might demand no assistance in my work. I accepted of you the money necessary for my modest needs. You were to me both brother and teacher. I saw you every day for hours. Little by little my eyes were opened to the light. Radiant horizons dazzled my vision. You filled me with your generous aspirations. You fired me with that fever of devotion and resignation, that thirst for sacrifices, from which spring saints and martyrs. You followed with interest my progress in the new path that you opened out to me. Day by day I wished that my initiation might end. I wished to take my part in action, in your projects. But now that you have revealed your birth, your station, I begin to doubt you. Is the object of your society really that which you have taught me it was, the recovery of the rights ravaged from the disinherited classes?"

"The least doubt on your part on that score, Victoria, would be a cruel blow to me. We have taken arms for justice and right."

"Pardon me, Franz. Then the *level*, that inflexible emblem – the social level – "

"Is our emblem. Equality of rights for man and woman!"

"It is your emblem, my lord? Yours, the son of a sovereign?"

"The aim of my life is the triumph of liberty, the birth of the Republic! Hear me, Victoria. You have borne the hardships, the sufferings, the shame of a prison. Which, you or a person unknown to prison horrors, knows them better? Which would hate them more?"

"I read your thought. Despotism itself has taught you its horror."

"And you will no longer wonder at me – of a sovereign race, but yet as lowly of origin as you, as both our families originated in the same place – when I take the level as my emblem?"

² See "The Iron Arrow Head," the tenth of this series.

"I shall wonder no more, Franz; but to my wonder succeeds a glow of admiration." With her eyes full of tears, and bowing her knee before the Prince of Gerolstein, Victoria kissed his hand, saying, "May you be blessed and glorified for your generous sentiments."

"Rise, Victoria," answered the Prince with emotion. "My conduct does not merit your admiration. It is but a puny sacrifice for us to make of our privileges, compared with the grandeur of our cause." Then after a pause, he resumed in mild and grave tones: "But now reflect on this solemn moment of your initiation. There is still time for you to retract your allegiance to us."

"Franz, after three months of proof, I shall not weaken at the last moment. I am ready for the ceremony."

"Think of the terrible vows you are about to take."

"Be they what they may, I shall not be found wanting in faith, courage, or devotion."

"I wished to reveal to you our family connection in order that you could accept from me without embarrassment, as should be between relatives, your means of livelihood for the future, should you not care to carry out your plan. Your liberty of action shall remain complete and absolute."

"I shall always accept from you, Franz, a service without blushing. But more than ever before, am I resolved to pledge myself to your cause, to the cause of the expropriated – if you think me worthy to serve it."

"I shall not speak to you of the perils confronting us. You are above all, valiant. But it is necessary to reconcile you to a complete renunciation of self. You will be an instrument; not a blind one, but at once intelligent and passive. The Voyants are obliged to employ, for the deliverance, regeneration and happiness of mankind, some of the very means which the Society of Jesus uses to enslave and brutalize it. The sword, according as it is used, may be the dagger of the assassin or the glaive of the citizen wielded in defense of his country. It was the glaive with which Brutus opposed the Roman aristocracy, and smote Caesar."

"I know the end toward which I shall be guided, the triumph of right and of justice. I shall obey."

"Perhaps you will also have to renounce your hopes of vengeance and reprisals. Will you be equal to that?"

The young woman shook and her features darkened under the stress of the internal struggle which these words caused her. Finally she broke out in an altered voice:

"What, Franz! Shall centuries of oppression not have their day of retribution? Shall the crimes of ages go unpunished? Shall the shades of our martyred fathers not be appeased by vengeance? Shall the example of inexorable justice not be given to the world, in the name of eternal good? What! They would deny us one day, one single day of legitimate reprisals after fifteen centuries of crime? Must the victims be constrained to pardon their executioners?"

"Victoria, those who seek the birth of the reign of fraternity on earth hold blood in abhorrence. They hope to accomplish the freedom, the regeneration of mankind by mercy and pardon, and by educating the working class."

"Then I renounce my vengeance!" said the young woman. "But if the eternal enemies of humanity oppose themselves, by trickery or by violence, to the emancipation of the oppressed; if on their part, the conflict is engaged without either mercy or pity, shall the victims have to kneel, and offer their throats to the knife?"

"In that case, Victoria, may the blood fall on the heads of those who first shed it. Accursed be those who respond by treachery or violence to our words of love, of concord, of justice and of reparation! Then will be fulfilled once more, perhaps for the last time, that law of human progress, which, so many times across the ages, has encrimsoned the conquest of the most equitable reforms. Insurrection will have to impose upon the oppressors concessions the voluntary granting of which would have saved the world from all these woes. Accursed be those who shall then attempt to oppose force to the demands of the times. Then, Victoria, there shall be war, war tremendous, pitiless! It will be the unchaining of popular passions. No bridle can hold them. The justice of God will pass over

a terror-stricken world. Then, in the midst of that tempest which shall overturn thrones and altars – then, Victoria, you shall appear, terrible as the Goddess of Vengeance, striking with her broad sword the old world, condemned in the name of the good of the peoples."

"Oh, my life, my whole life for one hour of such vengeance!" cried the young woman, palpitating in wild exaltation. "Aye, let my life be a hundred times more miserable, more abject, more horrible than that which a King put upon me – I shall live it twice over in order to assist in the hour of this vengeance. A day, an hour of reprisals, for my life of misery!"

"Come then, Victoria, you shall be ours as we shall be yours, in life, in death, in triumph, in vengeance!"

So speaking, the Prince of Gerolstein led Victoria Lebrenn out of Samuel's chamber, across the garden, and into a deserted and half-subterranean green-house.

CHAPTER III

THE VOYANTS

The half-underground hot-house into which Franz of Gerolstein conducted his new convert was dimly lighted by a lamp placed at the foot of a stairway leading still further beneath the earth. On the first step of this staircase Franz found a package from which he produced two loose robes and two masks. Addressing his companion, he said:

"Put this robe on over your garments, and hide your countenance behind this mask."

They descended the stairs, and arrived in a corridor, lighted by the hanging lamp whose rays had guided them from above. At the extremity of the passage stood a man cloaked in red and with a black mask over his visage. He held a naked sword in his hand, and advanced two steps to meet the newcomers.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"We are of the *disinherited*," replied Franz. "For father we had *enslavement*, for mother *ignorance*; our condition is *misery*. We are of the poor, the oppressed, the damned here below."

"What do you wish, my brother?"

"*Liberty, knowledge, happiness.*"

"Knock at that door," commanded the masked figure in red, stepping aside to make way for Franz and his companion. "Knock and it shall be opened unto you; seek, and ye shall find."

The door opened, and as soon closed behind the two initiates. For a moment they were blinded by the brilliance which flooded the subterraneous chamber to which they had now penetrated. It was lighted by seventy candelabra, each bearing seven candles – again the mystic number. The walls were covered with red drapery; at the further end a raised platform formed a dais with closed curtains; on the front of the dais was the picture of a carpenter's level. Several steps from the platform, on a draped table, were thrown in confusion a royal crown, a scepter, a pontifical tiara, a bishop's crosier, several collars of chivalric orders, and a few ducal or princely coronets; besides these there lay in the heap some pouches, half open, and full of gold and silver pieces.

Directly behind the table on which thus lay cluttered the emblems of religion, royalty, aristocracy and wealth, stood seven masked men, garbed in long robes, silent and erect, their arms crossed on their chests, seven specters, seven fantastic apparitions. The one whose duty it was to officiate at the reception of initiates stood in the center. Three Voyants were ranged to his right, three to his left. He addressed Victoria, who keenly felt the impression produced on her by the strange spectacle:

"Woman, your age?"

"Fifteen centuries, and more. I was born the first day of the enslavement and misery of my brothers."

"What would you?"

"The end of oppression. I wish to beat down thrones and altars, privileges of birth and of fortune, all the hoary monuments of ignorance, of slavery, and of iniquity, all the monopolies, all the privileges which flourish upon the people."

"What will happen when the level shall have passed over the old world, and when the exploiters of the people shall have disappeared?"

"The darkness of ages shall be superseded by the revivifying warmth and the fruitful light of the sun; harvests of abundance will cover with their sheaves the soil tilled by a fecund revolution."

"Is your severance from the old world complete?"

"I have broken with the old world, and rallied to the new."

"Behold this pontifical tiara, this kingly crown; gaze on these symbols of nobility, these sacks of gold and silver. You may demand of kings, of priests, of nobles, of the rich, the enjoyments of life, all by devoting yourself body and soul to these idols and to tyranny."

"It is my wish to overthrow those idols. I vow an implacable hatred to the enemies of the people."

"From this hour," responded the cloaked president, apparently satisfied with the interrogatory, "you shall be ours as we will be yours. Our device so has it —*All for each; each for all*. By this device, co-operation will replace in the future the selfishness of the masters of the old world. Who caused all the evils of which selfishness has been the source? He who first dug a ditch about a piece of common land and said 'This is mine.' The usurpation was consecrated by men simple-minded enough to respect these arbitrary boundaries; the spoliation of several by one gradually became a right; the deed became the law, the exception the rule. The tyranny growing out of this principle, initiated by violence and perpetuated by custom, became rooted in the peoples' mind, till at length they came to own an infant mewling in the cradle for their King, and to kiss the boot of the Pope. What consequences have not come out of these aberrations! Peoples have throttled each other. The earth has its damned ones, more to be pitied than those with whom superstition peoples hell. The damned on earth call themselves vassals, serfs, proletarians, artisans, laborers! It is of these damned ones that we seek the redemption. Think you the overturning of thrones and altars will suffice for the deliverance of these victims? No, alas, no. To the tyranny of King and Church will succeed an exploitation still more tyrannical, that of the tribe of Business. Then the dispenser of work and of wages will exert an empire absolute over his wage-earning workingmen. On the ruins of the thrones and altars will soon grow up the oligarchy of merchants and bourgeois.

"That oligarchy must also in its end be overthrown," continued the initiator. "That is our final aim.³ Our design is to unite by the bond of a common faith, thousands of initiates in every country of Europe – first in Germany, then in France, in England, and elsewhere; to bring them gradually, by initiation, into the knowledge of the object of our association; to have them swear obedience to its chiefs, visible and invisible, and chosen from all ranks of society, from the highest to the lowest; to recruit our partisans and co-workers in the very councils of the Kings themselves, in the heart of the palace of the Popes. Our enemies will find themselves, without their knowing it, perpetually under our eyes; their plots will be revealed to us; their own creatures, to all appearances the most devoted to them, will obey our orders, and undermine the foundations of their social edifice. Then in the hour of redemption the old world shall crumble and go down under its debris of priests, nobles, and Kings.

"Woman," continued the master of ceremonies, outstretching his hand toward Victoria, "you now know our purposes. Here are our sinews of action. An annual assessment levied on all our brothers, who number themselves by millions, makes us masters of a mighty treasure. That is the source of the wealth in which revel those of our number whose duty it is to mix with the mighty ones of the day, sharing in their dalliances and dissipations – foxes to deceive, wolves to devour our enemies. Victoria Lebrenn, it is for you, thanks to your remarkable gifts of nature, to become one of our most active auxiliaries. But to serve well our cause, it will be necessary that you abdicate your own will, and that you stand ready, at any hour of the day or night, to follow our orders."

"Command; I obey."

"I must first acquaint our brothers with the particulars of your life, as you have set them down in your own hand, and confided them to your converter."

Picking up a roll of manuscript, the presiding officer proceeded to read the story of Victoria Lebrenn, as follows:

³ This speech, which clearly shows the social tendencies of the most radical party in 1789, is here reproduced almost literally from Luchet, *Essays on the Illuminati*, chap. V, p. 23.

"In the year 1772, being then eleven years and a half old, I was one day crossing the garden of the Tuileries, carrying dinner to my father, a workman in a printing shop in Bac Street. I paused a moment to watch some little children at play. A woman well dressed and with decent features drew close to me, examined me attentively, and made me some compliments on my good looks. Then noting the porringer with my father's dinner, and learning from me that I was on my way to him, she proposed that I go with her in her carriage. Delighted to have a carriage-ride for the first time in my life, I readily agreed. Near the Draw Bridge a coach was waiting, into which I got with my conductress. She offered me some lozenges from a box, which I accepted. The lozenges contained some species of narcotic, for in a few minutes I had fallen into a deep sleep.

"When I awoke, it was night. I was lying in a great bed with damask curtains. The ceiling of my chamber was of gold, and the room itself was richly furnished. Beside my pillow was seated the woman by whose agency I had been taken to the place. I asked her where I was. I wept at the anxiety of my parents; she calmed me, promising that they should soon be with me. She added that I was in the house of a person of great quality, who was interested in my youth, wished me much good, and would enrich my family. I knew I was not dreaming, but thought myself the heroine of a fairy tale. Two women entered. They made me rise, and put me in a perfumed bath. Then they dressed my hair, one of them winding a string of pearls through it. They dressed me in silk and lace, and served me with supper on plates of vermilion and gold. I experienced a sort of vertigo; I obeyed mechanically. Still, I kept asking for my father and mother. The woman of the carriage assured me that they would soon arrive, and be overjoyed to see me so beautiful. A hard-visaged man entered the chamber. I heard the old woman call him Monsieur Lebel, and speak to him with great respect. The man scrutinized me carefully. 'Little one,' he said to me, 'you must go to bed now.' Then he went out.

"Doubtless, in the course of the repast, they had served me with several glasses of heady wine, for I felt my reason clouding. I allowed myself to be put to bed, though not without again inquiring for my parents. They promised to take me back to them the next day. The woman and her two companions bade me good night, snuffed the candles in the candelabrum, and left me for light a single alabaster lamp, which threw a pale illumination over the spacious room. I was about to succumb less to sleep than to the leaden lethargy into which I had been plunged, when a start of fright restored to me, for a few moments, all my senses. My bed was set in an alcove. Two of the gilded panels which formed the alcove slid back in their grooves, and I beheld an old man in a dressing gown. I uttered a cry of astonishment – it was the King, Louis XV. I had seen him but a short time before at a public ceremony in Paris. I was stupefied into immobility. Close behind the King, in the secret passageway leading into the alcove, stood a beautiful young woman half-clad in a night robe, and holding a candle-stick. She laughed aloud, and said to the King, pushing him by the shoulder – 'Go on, France, it is the loving hour!'

"That woman, I afterwards learned, was Countess Du Barry. I fainted with fear. I was the victim of an odious assault. Five days afterward, another poor child, aged like me, hardly twelve, the daughter of a miller of Trianon, was delivered after the same manner to the lust of Louis XV, and gave him the small-pox of which he died. Two days before his death, the woman of whom I have spoken, one of the royal procuresses, made me leave by night the little apartment in the palace of Versailles, and get with her into a carriage, assuring me she was about to restore me to my father, whom I continually called for, in tears. I still was not fully aware of my dishonor. Instead of returning me to my home, the procuress left me in an isolated dwelling not far from Versailles. High walls surrounded the garden; the only entry was by a gate which was kept under careful guard. Flight was impossible.

"In that house I found several young girls, of whom the youngest was barely my age, and the oldest, twenty. The place was the habitual haunt of great lords, prelates, and financiers. They came to sup with us – suppers that ended in shameful orgies. My companions, the immature victims, like myself, of kingly debauchery, gradually made known to me the extent of my disgrace. At first I was overcome by shame; then familiarity with vice, the contagion of example, the influence of the corrupt

atmosphere in which I dwelt, stifled my better sentiments and my early training. I would never have dared at this time to return to my family. I reached my sixteenth year without having left that house of ill fame. By that time reflection and chagrin had matured my reason; then there began to grow up beside the sense of my degradation, the implacable hatred of the King and of those who, after him, had plunged me still deeper into the mire of infamy. I assisted daily in the orgies of the seigneurs of the Court, of the Church and of the Bourse. They never supposed creatures of our sort capable of attaching any importance to what they said in our presence; they expressed without hesitation their disdain and aversion for the people. Just about that time, several disturbances brought on by the dearness of provisions had been quelled at the musket's mouth; our guests regretted that the acts of repression had not been still more pitiless, saying, 'These flames can never be quenched save by rivers of blood.'

"Thus there was created in me, a daughter of the people, a blind thirst for vengeance. Louis XV was dead, but I followed with my hatred both royalty and nobility, clergy and financiers. Our relations with the men of this class taught me to see in them our merciless enemies. Still my material comfort and my early degradation engendered in me a cowardly inertia. I felt neither the courage nor the desire to flee the domicile where I was held. I was seized with mortal terror at the bare thought of encountering my father, my mother, my young brother; of soiling our hearth with my presence. And, finally, knowing that their life was poor and laborious, it seemed impossible to me to summon the will to work and to share their privations. Ease and luxury were enervating, were depraving me. Thus passed several years. I reached the age of twenty. The woman who kept the place died, and my companions and I were turned adrift. I was without resources and unable to earn my daily bread, my apprenticeship as a sempstress having been cut short by my kidnapping. The fear of misery, my determination not to continue in that abject life, the uncertainty of the future, and lastly my attachment to my family, overcame my shame and gave me the courage to return home. My parents believed me dead; my appearance overwhelmed them with joy and rendered them merciful. I confessed to them my past. They both covered me with tears and caresses, and withheld every reproach. My father gave me to read the plebeian legends of our family. Then my poor father, exasperated by the deed that marred my childhood, printed and distributed to the public with his own hand an account which he wrote and entitled *A Night of Louis XV*. A few days after the publication of this article, my father failed to come home at night. Since then we have had no trace of him. Doubtless he now is dead, or languishes in the cell of some State prison.

"For a year I remained with my mother and brother. I forced myself to live down my past. I took up again my sempstress's apprenticeship, and soon ceased to be a care to my mother. While my body had been stained, my heart remained pure. I had never felt the pangs of love. I now conceived a violent affection for a young sergeant in the French Guards named Maurice, the son of one of our neighbors. The young fellow did not know through what a slough my youth had been dragged, and thought me entirely worthy of him; so much did I dread his scorn that I had not the heart to disabuse him. He asked my hand of my mother. I begged her to hide from him my past shame; moved by my tears she consented to silence. We were affianced, Maurice and I. I had attained the summit of my prayers. I felt a secret remorse in deceiving the man who loyally offered me his hand, but I consoled myself with the thought of fulfilling scrupulously my marriage vows and making my husband as happy as possible. Cruelly was my dissimulation punished. One day, while walking between my mother and my betrothed, we met one of my old companions in misery. She knew me and addressed me in terms of a terrible meaning. Terrified at the expression of Maurice's face at this revelation, my heart broke – I collapsed. When I came to myself my mother stood at my side in tears. Commanded by my beloved to tell him all, for he still could not believe in my past indignity, my mother dared no longer hide the truth. Maurice was stricken dumb with grief, for he loved me with all his heart. He returned to the barracks in bewilderment, and chancing to come into the presence of his colonel, the Count of Plouernel, did not think to salute him. The Count, angered at this want of respect, knocked

off Maurice's hat with a blow of his cane. He, half crazed with despair, raised his hand against his colonel. The crime was punishable by death under the scourge. The next day the young sergeant expired under that inhuman torture. The death of the man I loved threw me into a sort of frenzy. Often before, as the record of our family tells, had our fathers, as serfs or vassals, found themselves in arms face to face with the race of Plouernel. This memory redoubled my hatred for the colonel. Disgusted with life by the death of my only love, I resolved to avenge on the Count of Plouernel the decease of Maurice. I repaired to the quarters of the Guards at the hour when I knew I could find the colonel in his rooms. My hope was dashed. My paleness and agitation aroused the suspicions of the two under-officers to whom I addressed myself. They demanded the reason of my desire to see their chief. The brusqueness of my replies, my sinister and wild appearance strengthened their mistrust. They fell upon me, searched me, and found in my pocket – a dagger. Then I told them why I came. They arrested me; they haled me to the Repentant Women. I was subjected in that prison to the most barbarous treatment. One day a stranger visited the place. He questioned me. My answers impressed him. A few days later I was set at liberty, thanks to the efforts of this stranger, Franz, who came in person to fetch me from the Repentant Women."

The chief initiator concluded the reading of the melancholy recital, and replaced the pages of manuscript on the table before him. "The account of our sister is authenticated throughout," he said.

"To this story of my sad life," declared Victoria, "there is nothing to add. Only to-day did I learn the name of the generous stranger to whom I owe my release from prison; and again I declare myself ready to pledge my devotion and service to the cause of humanity. Let the war upon the oppressors be implacable!"

"From the most obscure to the most illustrious, all devotion is equal in the eyes of our great cause, and in the eyes of its most noble martyr, the immortal crucified master of Nazareth," added the initiator, drawing aside the curtains of the dais and disclosing a Christ on a crucifix, surmounted with the level of equality. Then he continued, speaking to Victoria, "Woman, in the name of the poor carpenter of Nazareth, the friend of the sorrowing and the disinherited, the enemy of the priests and the rulers of his day – woman, do you swear faith, love, and obedience to our cause?"

"I swear!" answered Victoria in a ringing voice, raising her hands toward the crucifix. "I swear faith and obedience to our cause!"

"You are now ours as we are yours," replied the officiant, dropping the curtains. "From to-morrow on you will receive our instructions from our brother Franz. To work! The opening of the States General shall be the signal for the enfranchisement of the people. The thrones shall disappear beneath the scourge of the revolution!"⁴

At that moment the watch posted in the corridor of the Voyant temple of liberty struck thrice precipitately on the door, giving the alarm. The lights which had cast their radiance over the meeting went out as if by magic, and a profound darkness took possession of the underground chamber.

From the obscurity was heard the voice of Anacharsis Clootz, the masked officiant, saying to the other Voyants who had been present at the initiation of Victoria Lebrenn:

"Baboeuf, go with Buonarotti, Danton and Condorcet by the right exit. I shall take the left, together with Franz, Loustalot, and our neophyte."

⁴ See, for details of these scenes, and the questions and discourse of the initiators, Luchet's *Essays on the Illuminati*, chap. V. p. 23, and following; also Robinson, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against All the Religions and all the Governments of Europe*, vol. I, p. 114 and following.

CHAPTER IV

LITTLE RODIN

While Anacharsis Clootz, the rich Dutch banker, later to be known as the "Orator of the Human Race," was thus presiding at the initiation of Victoria Lebreun into the sect of the Voyants, Samuel, left alone with his wife by the departure of Franz of Gerolstein and his companion, had been just preparing to continue his dictation to Bathsheba, when he heard the street-outlook rapping discreetly at the gate. Samuel, hastening at the call, found the watcher holding by the hand a young boy who cried bitterly.

"The poor little fellow has lost his way," said the lookout, passing the boy in to Samuel. "I found him sitting down there by the buttress of the gate, sobbing. You would better keep him with you for the night, and to-morrow, in the daylight, he can be taken back to his folks – if you can find out from him where he lives."

Touched by the child's grief, Samuel took him into the lower room and both he and Bathsheba bent all their energies toward quieting him. The boy seemed to be about nine or ten years old. He was poorly clad, and of a wan and ailing appearance. His face presented none of the smiling prettiness usual with children of his age. His peaked features, his sickly and cadaverous pallor, his thin, pale lips, his sly and shift, yet keen and observing glance – revealing a precocious cleverness – in fine, something low, mean and crafty in the look of the boy would, no doubt, have inspired aversion rather than sympathy in the breasts of the couple were it not for the cruel desertion of which he seemed the victim. Hardly had he entered the room when he dropped to his knees, crossed himself, and clasping his hands exclaimed through his tears:

"Blessed be You, Lord God, for having pitied Your little servant and led him to this good sir and this good lady. Save them a place in Your paradise!"

Dragging himself on his knees toward the Jew and his wife, the urchin kissed their hands effusively and with far too great a flood of gratitude for sincerity. Bathsheba took him on her knees, and said to him as she wiped his tear-stained face, "Don't cry, poor little one. We'll take care of you to-night, and to-morrow we'll take you home. But where do you live, and what is your name?"

"My name is Claude Rodin," answered the child; and he added, with a monstrous sigh, "The good God has been merciful to my parents, and took them to His holy paradise."

"Poor dear creature," answered Samuel, "you are, then, an orphan?"

"Alas, yes, good sir! My dear dead father used to be holy water dispenser at the Church of St. Medard. My dear dead mother used to rent out chairs in the same parish. They are now both with the angels; they are walking with the blessed saints."

"And where do you live, my poor child?"

"With Monsieur the Abbot Morlet, my good lady; a holy man of God, and my kind god-father."

"But how did it happen, my child, that you went astray at this late hour of the night?" asked Samuel. "You must have left home all alone?"

"Just after benediction," answered little Rodin, crossing himself devoutly, "Monsieur the Abbot, my good god-father, took me to walk with him in the Place Royale. There were a lot of people gathered around some mountebanks. I sinned!" cried the boy, beating his chest in contrition, "the Lord God punished me. It is my fault – my fault – my very great fault! Will God ever forgive me my sin?"

"But what great sin did you commit?" questioned Bathsheba.

"Mountebanks are heretics, fallen, and destined for hell," answered little Rodin, pressing his lips together with a wicked air, and striking his breast again. "I sinned, hideously sinned, in watching the games of those reprobates. The Lord God punished me by separating me from my good god-

father. The swaying of the crowd carried him away from me. No use to look for him! No use to call him! It was impossible to find him. It was my very great fault!"

"And how did you get here from the Place Royale? The two points are far apart."

"Having said my prayers, both mental and oral, several times, in order to call to my aid the divine pity," replied Rodin emphatically and with an air of beatitude, "I started out to find my way home, away down at the end of the Roule suburb, near the Folie-Beaujon."

"Poor child," interrupted Bathsheba. "More than a league to travel! How I pity the dear child. Go on with your story," she said to him.

"It is a long way, true enough," added Samuel, "but all he had to do was to follow the boulevards. How did you come to lose the road?"

"A worthy gentleman, of whom I inquired the way, told me I would reach home quicker by taking another street. I walked all evening, but all I did was to get lost. The wrath of the Lord pursued me!" After sighing and beating his breast again, little Rodin continued: "Then, at last, passing your house, I felt so tired, so tired, that I fell on your door-step from weariness, and prayed the good God to come to my help. He deigned to hear the prayer of His little servant, and so you came to pity me, my good sir and lady. May God receive you in heaven!"

"You shall spend the night here, dear child, and to-morrow we will take you back to your god-father – so don't weep any more."

"Alas, good sir, the holy man will be so anxious! He will think me lost!"

"It is impossible now to calm his anxiety. But are you hungry or thirsty? Will you have something to eat or drink?"

"No, good mistress; only I'm terribly sleepy, and wish I could lie down."

"I can well believe it," said Bathsheba, addressing her spouse; "after such fatigue and worry, the little fellow must be worn out. It is only natural that he should be dying to go to sleep."

"But where shall we put him? We are in a tight fix. We have but one bed."

"Oh, good sir," eagerly broke in little Rodin, "don't put yourself out for me. I shall sleep very well right there, if you will let me;" and the boy indicated a re-enforced and brass-bound chest which his keen eye had spied, and which formed a seat at the further end of the room. "That will do me, very well."

"I never thought of the chest," remarked Samuel. "The boy is right. At his age one sleeps anywhere. With plenty of warm covering he will pass the night there almost as comfortably as in his own bed. It all comes out for the best."

"I'll go fetch a cushion and a cloak, and fix him up as well as possible," added Bathsheba, leaving the room.

The boy sat down and huddled himself together as if unable to resist the lassitude and sleep which weighed upon him. His head sank upon his chest, and his eyes closed. But immediately peeping under his lids he saw on the table close beside him pens, ink, and several sheets of freshly written paper. It was Samuel's unfinished letter to Levi.

"I surely was inspired in asking to sleep here," murmured the boy, aside; "let me recall without forgetting anything the orders of my good god-father," he thought, as the Jew's wife returned with the makeshift bedding she had gone in search of.

"Here, dear boy," she said, "I'll put you to bed and tuck you in well from the cold."

Simulating a heavy sleep, the urchin did not stir.

"Poor creature – asleep already," said Bathsheba. "I'll have to carry him." Lifting little Rodin in her arms she placed him on the chest, while Samuel arranged the cushion under his head and covered him up with the cloak. These cares completed, Samuel and his wife turned again to the completion of the note to their cousin Levi; but his thoughts having been disarranged by the frequent interruptions, Samuel asked his wife to re-read the letter from the beginning, after which he finished it, while the young boy was seemingly sound asleep.

Bathsheba had just taken down the last of her husband's dictation when suddenly another rap resounded at the gate.

"Samuel," cried the Jewess, pale and trembling, "that time the watcher gave the alarm signal. Samuel went to the gate, opened the wicket and asked the lookout:

"What is up?"

"For nearly quarter of an hour I have remarked two men, closely wrapped in their cloaks, who came in from St. Gervais Street, and halted at the corner of the garden wall. They examined the house minutely. Immediately I fell on one of the stone benches in the dark passageway and pretended to be asleep. Two or three times they passed by without noticing me; they kept walking up and down, now examining the exterior of the building, now conversing in low tones. Finally they saw me, and said aloud – 'There is a wine-bibber sleeping himself sober.' They walked once more to some distance; then returning towards me, I heard them utter these words: 'And now, let us report to the sergeant.' They quickened their steps and vanished around the corner of St. Francois Street. Now you are warned, Master Samuel."

"When you first observed them, was anyone within?" asked Samuel. "Are you sure of that, lookout?"

"No one – except the child I brought to you, and whom you took in yourself."

"These two men must be attached to the police, since they intended to go straight to the sergeant; could their suspicions as to what went on here have been awakened by their observations to-night?"

"There was no one in the street while our brothers were arriving. I am sure of it; I kept good and sure guard."

"The suspicions of these fellows must, then, date from further back than this evening. But, in that case, at the first suspicion of one of his agents, the Lieutenant of Police would have had the house turned topsy-turvy by his searchers. There is something inexplicable in the conduct of these men. However, if they guessed that you were not really asleep, but could hear, I believe they would have enjoyed giving you a false scare. But then, to what purpose? No matter, forewarned is forearmed. Maintain your watch, and the instant you get sight or sound of the police sergeant, notify me with the usual signal."

Samuel thereupon ran to the green-house and gave the alarm, which, repeated by the Voyant on guard at the door of the temple, was the signal for the dispersal of the meeting. Then the Jew returned to the room where his wife awaited him.

"Well, my friend," asked Bathsheba hurriedly in an undertone, and unable to control her anxiety, "what is going on?"

"The danger is not imminent. Nevertheless, I have just warned our brothers to leave the temple by the two secret issues. The flag-stone which masks the descent under the hot-house will be replaced, for the police spies were watching the house. They will cause it to be searched, they must be able to discover nothing, and our friends must have time to escape. Reassure yourself, my dear wife; we run not the slightest danger."

"Lower, my friend, lower, lest you wake the child," cautioned Bathsheba, indicating little Rodin, who seemed to be still sound asleep, although his eyelids were imperceptibly winking. "Oh, may the alarms of this night be vain, and may all danger escape you!"

"Dear wife, let us trust to Providence. It inspired me to write that letter to our cousin Levi, and now, whatever may come, I am prepared. The sacred mission bequeathed to us by my grandfather will be fulfilled, and I shall have saved the heritage of Monsieur Marius Rennepont."

"First – a movable flag conceals the descent under the green-house. Second – this renegade of a Jew is going to safeguard the fortune of a certain Marius Rennepont," recited little Rodin to himself, not having lost a word of the conversation between Samuel and his wife. "Oh, now, I mustn't forget that name, nor the two secret exits of the *temple*, nor the movable flag-stone of the green-house – nor a lot of other things!"

The alarm given by the lookout proved premature, for neither the sergeant of police nor his men appeared on the scene that night to ransack the house in St. Francois Street.

CHAPTER V

COUNT AND JESUIT

More than four months had elapsed since the night on which Victoria Lebreun was received into the society of the Illuminati, and on which little Rodin, with froward slyness, had penetrated the secrets of the Jew Samuel, the guardian of the Rennepont fortune. In short, it was the night of July 13, 1789.

The Plouernel mansion, in the suburb of St. Germain, had been built, in the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, by the order of Raoul of Plouernel, peer and Marshal of France, and ambassador to Spain. This seigneur, residing habitually at Versailles or at Paris, left to his stewards and bailiffs the administration of his domains in Auvergne, Beauvoisis, and Brittany. He never visited his country seat of Plouernel, devastated at the time of the Breton uprising.⁵ Marshal Plouernel had had transported to his establishment in Paris all his family portraits, the oldest of which represented Neroweg, the leude of Clovis and count of the country of Auvergne. These portraits now adorned one of the halls of the Plouernel mansion; among them was one draped in black crepe, in token of mourning. The effigy hidden beneath the veil of black was that of Colonel Plouernel, traitor, according to the traditions of the monarchy, to his faith and to his King.

The first lackey of the Count of Plouernel, named Lorrain, the same who some months previously had carried the missive to Samuel the Jew, was showing into the Hall of the Portraits Abbot Morlet, of the Society of Jesus, a holy man of God and god-father to little Rodin, who, in fact, resembled him so closely as to be taken with reason for his son rather than his god-son. The Abbot was about forty years of age, clad in black, of middle height, weazened and nervous, with a fleshless, almost bald forehead over which fell a few straggling hairs of tawny yellow. His physiognomy, evil, insidious or beaming in turn, was above all remarkable for its caustic smile and its half-veiled glance, resembling that of a serpent. The Abbot was agitated, uneasy; he said to the lackey who introduced him:

"Announce me to your master without delay."

"Monsieur Abbot," respectfully answered Lorrain, "my lord will not keep you waiting an instant. His valets are just completing his toilet."

"His toilet!" exploded the Abbot. "To be thinking of such trifles – he must be out of his head!"

Then pausing a moment and recalling the air of preparation and the brilliant lighting of the parlors he had passed through on the ground floor, he added:

"The Count seems to be expecting a large company?"

"My lord is giving a grand supper."

"How is it that the agitation prevailing in Paris since day before yesterday and up to this very night does not compel the Count to be at the head of his regiment of the Guards?"

"Monsieur the Abbot is unaware that my lord journeyed this morning to Versailles to hand in his resignation, and to surrender the command of his regiment."

"To surrender the command of his regiment!" echoed the Jesuit, stupefied, and as if he could not believe what he heard. "What –"

At that moment Lorrain left the hall, walking backward as his master entered.

Count Gaston of Plouernel had reached at this time his thirtieth year. The facial traits of his Germanic ancestry were reproduced in him. The whole effect of his person was one of audacity, haughtiness and arrogance. He presented the accepted type of the great seigneur of his time, and wore with grace his costume of plain blue cloth of Tours, spangled with silver and embroidered in

⁵ See the preceding work in this series, "The Blacksmith's Hammer."

gold. His taffeta vest was half lost to view under the billows of Alençon point lace which formed his shirt frill and rivalled for costly workmanship the flowing ruffles of his cuffs. His red-heeled shoes were fastened with diamond buckles. Diamonds also glittered in the hilt of his small-sword, which he wore ostentatiously slung under one of the tails of his coat.

At the sight of Abbot Morlet the Count seemed greatly surprised. He cordially extended to him his hand, however, saying:

"Well! good day, holy Father. What good wind blows you to us? I thought you at this time still a hundred leagues from Paris!"

"I just got in, and after attending to some indispensable duties, hurried over to you, to communicate to you, my dear Count – to you, one of the leaders of the court party – important information I had picked up during my trip through several of our provinces. Judge of my surprise! When I arrived here, I learned from your first lackey – that you had this very day given up the command of your regiment. That's the way of it. The monarchy, the nobility, the clergy, are attacked as they never have been through the worst days of our history. And it is at such an hour that you, one of the greatest lords of France, you, a man of spirit and of courage, sheath your sword – at this hour when the battle is engaged with the Third Estate! Ah, Count, if you did not belong to the house of Plouernel, I would say that you were a coward and a traitor. But, as you are neither coward nor traitor, I shall make bold to say that you are a madman."

"On the contrary, my dear Abbot, never have I acted more wisely. Never have I more studiously served our cause, or proven better my signal devotion, not to the King – his weakness revolts me – but to the Queen, to royalty!"

"So, you have judged it wise and politic to abandon the command of your regiment in our present circumstances? Is it for me, only to-day arrived, to have to inform you that Paris is laboring under the greatest excitement, and perhaps on the verge of a formidable insurrection? Didn't I see them, on the other side of the Seine, beginning to throw up their barricades? Didn't I meet on every street corner groups of malcontents, harangued by caballers of the Third Estate?"

"That is all true, Abbot. We are drawing near the moment of a decisive crisis. The fever of revolution has lasted since day before yesterday, since Saturday, the 11th of July. The first act took place in the Palais Royal,⁶ when the recall of Necker became known to the public. A young man named Camille Desmoulins stirred up the gullible clowns in the gardens by crying out that the King was centering his troops on Paris, with the purpose of dissolving the National Assembly, arresting the leaders, and massacring the people of Paris. The most resolute of his hearers cried *To arms! To the barricades!* and suited the action to the word. Bezenval, the military commander of Paris, informed of the tumult, ordered the dragoons of the Marquis of Crussol to horse. The dragoons sabered the rabble. But that only angered the populace, and the agitation spread to the suburbs. A soldier of my command told the people that several French Guards had been sent to the Abbey Prison; for you must know, good Father, that insubordination had crept into my regiment. I had sent the mutineers in irons to the Abbey to await the time to administer to them the scourging they deserved, when the populace hurled themselves against the prison, put to rout the sentries, and liberated the mutinous Guards. The latter received as great an ovation as if they had had the honor of being Monsieur Necker, or Monsieur Mirabeau!"

"This detestable spirit of rebellion is only too like that which infests many of our provinces. But these saturnalia were, I hope, put down with the greatest severity?"

"Not a whit, my dear Father. A King who pretends to the title of 'Father of the people' does not punish them – or very little. What was the result? The mildness of the reproof redoubled the rabble's audacity. The success of the expedition against the Abbey whetted their appetite, and they turned their attention to the prison of La Force, where they delivered all the debtors. The insurrection growing

⁶ The old palace of the Bourbons, now abandoned to cheap lodgings and hucksters' booths.

more and more serious, the Prince of Lambesc at length received orders from Marshal Broglie, the new Minister of War, to mount his regiment, the Royal Germans, and charge upon this impious populace, then excitedly huddled in the garden of the Tuileries. At the same time I was ordered to bring up my regiment, to support, if necessary, the cavalry of Lambesc."

"The French Guards commanded by a colonel like you, Count, should easily mow down these rebels. And yet you abandon your command. Your conduct is an enigma."

"On the contrary, nothing is more clear. Do you know the difference between a German and a Frenchman?"

"What do you mean?"

"Picture to yourself a tribune of the cross-roads, an insolent droll named Gonchon,⁷ who never spoke of himself but in the third person, come to harangue the German soldiers in the name of the brotherhood of man. The German soldier, understanding nothing of that demagogic trash, draws at the command of his colonel, and sabers both Gonchon and the mob! That is what the dragoons of Lambesc did; that is what the cavalry of Berchiny would have done gladly, and the cavalry of Esterhazy and of Roëmer, or the regiments of Desbach, of Salis, or the Royal Swiss."

"Good! That is the medicine for this canaille."

"But hardly had Lambesc and his horse sabered the rabble in the garden of the Tuileries, when that very mob poured back into Louis XV Place, where I had stationed myself at the head of my regiment in battle array. I gave the order to fire on the ructious rabble. Murmurs broke out among the soldiers in the ranks; some made answer, *We will not fire on the people!* I ordered the mutinous men to be seized and shot on the spot. The murmurs grew louder. I repeated the order. Bang! Several soldiers struck me in the face! Whole companies broke ranks, waving the butts of their muskets in the air."

"Everything is lost if we cannot count on the army!" cried the Abbot in dismay.

"You have said it, Abbot – unless the court party is resolved to serve royalty to the exclusion of the King. In the face of the stand taken by my men, there was nothing to do but march them back to their quarters. This morning I repaired to Versailles, and on gaining an audience with the King I pleaded with his Majesty to authorize me to call a court-martial to judge and condemn to death within the hour about a hundred soldiers and under-officers of my regiment, the ringleaders of the revolt. After long consideration, his Majesty answered with a sour air that 'if it was a matter of shooting a half dozen or so insubordinates, he saw no great obstacle in the way, but that he would not listen at all to any mass slaughters.' Thereupon the King crabbedly turned his back on me, shrugged his shoulders, and took himself off to his private apartments. That is why, my good Father, I have renounced my command in the French Guards. But reassure yourself," he added, in response to the dumbfounded look the Abbot wore. "I shall remain neither passive nor idle. I hope to serve our cause more actively, and, without contradiction, more usefully, now, than if I still were at the head of my regiment."

"That assurance overwhelms me with joy, dear Count," cried the Abbot "What are your plans?"

"First, I give to-night a supper, a convivial repast in which I bring together the influential heads of the court party, for the purpose of deciding on our final measures – presided over by the most remarkable and adorable woman I have ever met."

The Jesuit gazed at Monsieur Plouernel in amaze, and answered: "Are you speaking seriously? Are you really dreaming of having a political meeting of such importance presided over by – a woman?"

"Your astonishment will cease, my dear Abbot, when you make the acquaintance of Madam the Marchioness Aldini, a Venetian by birth, the widow of Marquis Aldini, a great Florentine lord who left his wife an immense fortune. The Marchioness has resided in Paris for now nearly a month."

"You know the lady for only a month, and you dare initiate her into the secrets of our party!"

⁷ All the persons and facts cited in this story as of historic importance, are authentic.

"Oh, Abbot, the Marchioness is more of our party than we ourselves! A patrician and a Catholic, she nurses an invincible horror for the populace and for revolutions. We shall never have a more ardent auxiliary than she. And then, she is beautiful – seductive – irresistible!"

"And where did you meet this beautiful personage?"

"One day last month I received a note stamped with outraged pride. The writer, Marchioness Aldini, addressed to me, as colonel of the Guards, a complaint against the insolence of several of my soldiers, who had beaten her lackeys. Struck with the lofty tone of the missive, I called on the Marchioness, who was occupying the establishment of the Countess of St. Megrin, now in England, and maintained there a house on the grandest scale. One of the Marchioness's private valets introduced me to her in her parlor. Ah, Abbot! at the sight of her I stood spellbound, enchanted! The extreme beauty of the foreign dame, the fire of her glance, the expression of her face, the perfection of her stature, the complete admirableness of her person – all threw me into transports of admiration." Abbot Morlet puckered his brow dubiously, and the colonel continued: "In short, the Marchioness realized, she surpassed, an ideal a hundred times dreamt of by me, wearied as I am of the flirtatious beauties of the city and the court. What a difference, or rather what a distance, separates them from the Marchioness! Pride of patrician blood, resoluteness of character, ardor, impetuosity of passion, all were legible in her countenance of a masculine paleness, in her look of flame. Something imperious in her posture, something virile in the accents of her tongue, gave to this extraordinary woman – none other like her! – an irresistible charm; – for, before she had spoken a word, I felt myself captured, enchained, bewitched."

"And the fascination grew and grew, if that is possible," put in the Jesuit sardonically, "when this beautiful lady opened her mouth? The siren took you by the eyes and by the ears. She greeted you, I presume, in the most charming and gallant manner?"

"Not a bit of it! On the contrary, she greeted me with an air of arrogance and irritation. She taxed me severely for the insolence of my soldiers."

"But the tigress finished by turning sweet?"

"Yes, after the greatest protestations on my part, and my assurance that I would chastise the guilty soldiers."

"The anger of the Marchioness being calmed, the interview, no doubt, took a most tender turn?"

"We spoke of the affairs of the day."

"Strange, out of all whooping! A colonel of thirty, a man of the court, besides, to speak decorously of the events of the day – with a beautiful lady – and he so lusty elsewhere!"

"So it was, nevertheless, reverend Father. I never even thought, at that first interview, of venturing upon the slightest word of gallantry, so struck was I with the spirit of the Marchioness. Blue death! I was pale with rage at hearing the Marchioness's bitter sarcasms. I should have been glad – may God blast me! – to put myself at the head of my regiment and shoot down all the bourgeois in the States General."

"This retrospective zeal flows from an excellent sentiment; and I know not how sufficiently to applaud the beautiful Venetian for having aroused that sentiment in you. Strongly do I approve the belle's sarcasms, her scorn for the ranters of the Third Estate, and the populace which supports them. Still, methinks it is very surprising that a stranger should interest herself so warmly in our affairs," added the Jesuit thoughtfully.

Without a pause, the priest continued: "Tell me, Count – Have you dealt out the punishment to the insolent soldiers who beat the lackeys of Madam the Marchioness?"

"It was impossible to discover them."

"And she hasn't asked you for an account of their punishment? Strange! Do you know what I think, Count? The outrage was an imaginary one. It was the Marchioness's pretext to secure a first interview with you."

"Come, Abbot, you are insane! For what reason should she have sought to inveigle me into an interview?"

"I'll tell you, Count, for I foresee the end of this adventure. You returned often to visit the Marchioness? You became enamored of her? And soon the beautiful Venetian, answering your passion, granted you the boon of love for thanks – after having wheedled out of you all our party's closest secrets."

"You are mistaken, holy Father. On the faith of a gentleman, the Marchioness loves me as passionately as I love her; but she has placed certain conditions on her favors."

"And what may the conditions be with which she has hedged about her bounty?"

"A struggle to the death against the revolution; the exaltation of royalty, of the privileges of the nobility and the Church; the extermination of our enemies. Only on these conditions, Abbot, shall my love receive its sweetest recompense."

"Count," cried the Jesuit after a moment's silence, "you are only twenty years old! What am I saying? You are barely sixteen – you are still at the age of innocence and childlike credulity. You have been blindfolded, duped, made game of, tossed in a blanket, like the most artless of young fellows! Oh, the women! And you think yourself a Lovelace, a lady-killer, my poor Count! And you presume to play a role in the politics of the court!"

"Monsieur Abbot Morlet, familiarity has its limits – do not oblige me to recall the fact to you any more forcibly!" exclaimed Monsieur Plouernel, flaring into a rage. Then, calming himself with an effort, he continued, sarcastically: "It suits you ill indeed, my reverend sir, to twit me on the empire exercised over me by women. Has no woman ever reigned over you? Could not the record of the vestry tell of a fertile gossip, the hirer-out of chairs at the Church of St. Medard, and widow of Goodman Rodin, the dispenser of holy water in the same parish? Your mistress is the mother of that little Rodin whom you brought here one day last year!"

Unmoved by the raillery of Monsieur Plouernel, the Jesuit replied:

"Your sarcasm is in the last degree pleasant, and moreover, well to the point, in that it furnishes me the occasion, Count, to give you an excellent lesson. You need the bit, the bridle, and also the whip, my fine gentleman."

"I am listening, reverend sir."

"Your love for fine ladies of irresistible beauty is capable of leading you into the most mournful follies; while I, by reason of my love for my gossip Rodin, shall be, I hope, able to prevent, and what is more, to repair your insanities."

"This is getting curious, Abbot. Continue."

"About four months ago, about the beginning of April, at a late hour of the night, a child, overcome with fatigue, fell on the doorstep of a house in St. Francois Street, in the Swamp."

"St. Francois Street, in the Swamp! A rascal of a Jew, a skin-flint of a usurer, lives there. You know him, Abbot? He does business with the clergy too?"

"It was at the door of that very house that the child sank down with weariness, crying and shivering. The Jew, out of the pity of his heart, took in the little fellow, who, he supposed, had lost his way. Then, succumbing to fatigue and drowsiness, the lad fell asleep on a bench in the room in which the Jew and his wife were conversing."

"Bless my heart, holy Father! Your voice is trembling, your nose is growing red, your look is softening, and your eye grows moist! That infant gifted with so precocious an intelligence, that prodigy, surely can be no other than little Rodin, your god-son! Honor to you, Abbot, and to your gossip! You have performed a prodigy, like the Virgin Mary with the Holy Ghost!"

"Throughout, the little fellow lost not a word of the conversation between the Jew and his wife; and thanks to a false alarm, adroitly given without by one of our brothers and myself, my god-son, in the course of his feigned sleep, surprised two secrets of inestimable import for the welfare of religion and the nobility. You shall judge – "

"You are deceiving yourself, Abbot, in trying to make me believe that from the chatter of a miserable Jew and his wife, a chatter surprised by an urchin, secrets of such importance can be won."

"Count – what do you think of a fortune of nearly 220 millions of francs? Isn't it a magnificent sum? If these 220 millions should pass into the possession of a party religious, able, tireless, blessed with cleverness and boldness, would they not become a lever of immense power? Again, suppose there were a mysterious sect, the object of which was the annihilation of the Catholic Church, the overthrow of thrones, the abolition of the privileges of birth and of fortune; suppose that sect extended its ramifications throughout all Europe, that it counted in its ranks classes the most diversified in society, from the lowest to the highest, and that some of them were even of kingly rank; suppose that association had at its disposal a considerable treasure; suppose its masters, men and women, to be capable of assuming, at need, any mask, any role; that, thanks to their specious masquerade, they introduced themselves among the royalists, and fathomed the secrets of our party; – then, Count, what would you think of the discovery of that sect? Would it not be of the prime importance? What say you?"

"Surely; but only if the pretended sect existed. Come, holy Father, it is with surprise and regret that I see a man of your good sense fall into the net of these absurd fables about the Voyants of France, the Illuminati of Germany, and other fish-yarns, veritable Mother Goose tales!"

"If I prove to you the existence of this society – if I show you the place where their leaders meet, will you admit that the revealer of the secret has rendered a signal service to the throne and the altar? Well, Count, compare now the results of your mad-cap passion for the beautiful foreign Marchioness, with the consequences of what you term my love for my gossip Rodin. According to you, my godson is one of the visible and carnal outcomes of that love; if so I owe to the wily youngster first – the discovery of a treasure which should some day reach more than 200 millions, on the trail of which our Society of Jesus has been for over a century; and, second – the unearthing of a den of Voyants."

CHAPTER VI

ROYALISTS AT BANQUET

The answer which the Count of Plouernel was about to make to his friend the Jesuit was interrupted by the arrival of several of his convivial friends of the court party – dukes, marquises, canons, and archbishops. Among them was the Viscount of Mirabeau, nicknamed, by reason of his portly front and the quantity of liquor he could contain, "Barrel Mirabeau." He was an infantry colonel, and younger brother to the famous orator of the Third Estate. He seemed to be in great heat, and cried in a loud voice to Monsieur Plouernel:

"Good evening, my dear Count. Devil take this infamous town of Paris and its Parisians! Long live Versailles, the true capital of France."

"Whence all this anger, Viscount?"

"Anger! Allow me to inform you that just now this vile populace, which to-night overflows in all the streets, had the impudence to stop my carriage on the Louis XV Bridge. By God's death, I shall punish these people!"

"What did you say to the insolent creatures?"

"I was treating this fraction of the 'sovereign people' like the abject rabble that they are, when my lackey, trembling like a hare, and hoping to secure our release, conceived the infernal idea of calling out to the beggars 'Make way, there, if you please, for the carriage of Monsieur Mirabeau!' Immediately the tempest turned to a zephyr, and the stupid people made way for me, to cries of 'Long live Mirabeau!'"

"They must have taken you for your brother!"

"Death and fury! It is but too true! I shall never forgive my brother that insult!"

"Calm yourself, Viscount; but yet a few days and that filthy populace will be clouted back into the mire where it belongs."

"Her Excellency, Marchioness Aldini," loudly announced one of Plouernel's valets at that moment, swinging back both sides of the great door of the parlor, into which he introduced – Victoria Lebrenn under her borrowed name and title.

The friends of Monsieur Plouernel thus beheld Marchioness Aldini for the first time. All were struck with astonishment at her beauty, heightened as it was by the splendor of her toilet. For Victoria now wore a trailing robe of poppy-colored cloth of Tours, trimmed with black lace. The cut of her corsage left bare her arms, shoulders and the rise of her breast, which seemed sculptured in the purest marble. Her black hair was not buried, as was the custom of the time, under a layer of white powder, but, glowing with the luster of ebony, and rolled in thick and numerous ringlets around her head, majestically crowned her brow. A triple string of Venetian sequins served both as diadem and collar. Nothing can give an adequate idea of the effect of this original mode, at once elegant and severe, which was still more remarkable in that it differed completely from the pomponned attires of the period, and harmonized marvellously with Victoria's own cast of beauty.

Plouernel's friends, seized with admiration, were for a moment speechless. Every look was fastened on the foreign dame; – even Abbot Morlet experienced the fascination, and said to himself as he gazed at her:

"I can understand how the Count is mad over her. The danger is greater than I suspected. She is a very siren."

Of all Plouernel's assembled friends, the Abbot was the only one to penetrate the true nature of Victoria's beauty. Her pallor, her flashing black eyes, her bitter and sardonic smile, gave to her face an indefinable somberness, which was in accord with the severity of her costume of red, black and gold.

Soon the voice of Monsieur Plouernel's chief butler was heard, announcing that supper was served. The Count offered his arm to Victoria, to lead her into the capacious dining room. Walls of

white plaster were relieved by gilded moldings which framed large panels frescoed with birds, fruits and flowers. A splendid silver service was laid out on the table, along with a brilliantly colored set of Sevres china. On the burnished surface of the silver glittered the glow of rose-colored candles, held in candelabra of vermillion. The banqueters took their seats about the table. The Count, who had escorted Victoria to a place beside himself, opened the feast.

"Permit me, my friends," he said, "to follow a custom recently introduced from England into France, and to propose a first toast to Madam the Marchioness Aldini, who has deigned to accept my invitation to supper." The Count rose, glass in hand – "To Madam the Marchioness Aldini!"

The whole company, following the Count's example, rose in their places; holding their glasses in their out-stretched hands, they repeated:

"To Madam the Marchioness Aldini!"

Draining their glasses, they resumed their seats.

Victoria in her turn rose. After a moment's pause she replied:

"In response to the courtesy of Monsieur the Count of Plouernel, and of yourselves, my lords prelates, and gentlemen, I propose with my heart and with my lips a toast to the Church, to the monarchy, and to the nobility, – and to the extermination of revolutionists, of whatever rank."

With these words Victoria moistened her lips in the wine which filled her glass, while Plouernel's friends, transported by the words of the young woman, repeated in ecstasy, to the music of their clinking glasses —

"To the Church! To the King! To the nobility! To the extermination of the revolutionists!"

The roisterers sat down; even Abbot Morlet muttered to himself, "Ah, if the Marchioness is sincere, what an ally we should have in her! What a magic effect the energy of her words produced on these foppish gentlemen, and on these brainless and imprudent prelates, imbeciles who don't even know how to cloak their vices under their sacred robes!"

Victoria, who had been cautiously watching the Jesuit, replied to his thought in her own mind: "That priest with the cadaverous mask keeps his snaky looks ever fastened on me. He alone, of all this company, seems to mistrust me. We must redouble our care and boldness – the game is on."

Meanwhile a Cardinal was puzzling over something, and thinking to himself: "Where did I meet that beautiful Marchioness, or at least a girl who much resembled her? Ah! I remember! It was in the little house where the Dubois woman kept her nymphs, in the King's 'Doe Park,' as he called it, near Versailles. Come, come, that must be an illusion – although, that Italian lord, Aldini, not knowing the antecedents of the old inmate of the Dubois house, might well have left her his name, his title, and all. But let us look into things a bit before we pass a rash judgment."

The Viscount of Mirabeau was the first to speak aloud. "Madam the Marchioness," he said, "has pledged us a toast to the death of the revolutionists of all ranks and conditions. I understand how a bourgeois, or a peasant, can be a revolutionary; but I can not admit that princes, nobles, or clericals would train with that breed."

"All revolutionists are fit for the noose," retorted a Duke. "But the opinions of the groundlings may be explained by their desire to shake off the yoke. The people is at the end of its patience; it is kicking the traces; it rebels."

"You speak words of gold, my dear Duke," answered young Mirabeau. "We shall hang them all, and we shall show ourselves without pity for those pretended revolutionists, Orleans, Talleyrand, Lafayette, and my unworthy brother Mirabeau, who has brought dishonor upon our house."

"No, no pity for traitors, to whatever class they belong – nobles, clergy, or bourgeoisie," cried the Count of Plouernel.

"On the day of reckoning," echoed the Cardinal, "these felons shall all be hanged, high and low alike."

"They shall all be hanged at the same height – on their own principle of equality!" added a young Marquis, laughing.

Victoria cut short his laugh. "By the blood of Christ," she cried, "is there not in France a revolutionist a hundred times more damnable than the gentlemen, the bishops, and even than the princes of the blood who league themselves with the revolution – I would say, the most guilty?"

Surprise fell upon the company. Finally the Count of Plouernel stammered out: "What! Who is that revolutionist – more highly situated, according to you, than gentlemen or bishops – or even princes of the blood?"

"The King, Louis XVI!"

Again silence and stupefaction fell upon the thunder-struck banqueters. Some exchanged frightened glances. Others, deep in thought, sought for the key to the enigma. The rest stared at Victoria with anxious curiosity. Abbot Morlet alone said to himself: "Aha! I catch the woman's trend."

"How, Marchioness," fumbled Plouernel, "according to you – the King – would be – a revolutionist – and so cut out for the gibbet?"

"What was your motive, Count, for giving up your commission as colonel in the French Guards?" returned Victoria, unmoved.

"As I wrote you, Marchioness, I surrendered the command of my regiment because the King refused to authorize the severity which alone, to me, seems capable of re-establishing discipline among my soldiers and preventing them from becoming the allies of the revolution."

"And yet you are astonished when I pronounce the name of the accomplice of the revolutionists! I denounce the King, Louis XVI."

"You are a woman of genius, madam," acclaimed the Viscount of Mirabeau warmly. "You justly signalize one of the causes of the revolution. Honor to you, madam."

"I have no right to these praises, Viscount. I am a woman whom God has dowered with some little good sense, that is all. I am a patrician and a Catholic."

"Nevertheless, Madam Marchioness," interposed the Duke who had spoken before, "it seems to me hazardous to pretend that the King, our Sire, is a revolutionist. In truth, it is pursuing the metaphor to its extreme limits. I should hesitate to follow you upon that ground."

Here the Marquis broke in again with his irrepressible laugh, saying: "On one side the revolutionary King – on the other the 'sovereign people.' What a comicality! What a mess!"

Victoria continued: "King Louis XVI is the first, the most damnable of revolutionists. Neither grace nor pity for the guilty! What I say, I maintain; I shall prove it. I shall essay to rouse in you all remorse – for you represent here the nobility, the clergy, and the world of money, and you are nearly as responsible as the King. I shall soon make it clear to you."

"By the life of God, Marchioness, I am of your opinion," echoed the Viscount of Mirabeau. "Six months ago the nobility should have saddled its horses, and, whether the King consented or no, ridden against the revolution and put every peasant to the saber."

"Six months ago the curates should have stirred themselves, roused their parishes to the sound of the tocsin, and put arms into their hands. They also will have to enter the fight," quoth Abbot Morlet, speaking aloud for the first time since the beginning of the banquet.

"We understand each other, Monsieur Abbot," answered Victoria; and then to Mirabeau: "We judge the situation alike, Monsieur Viscount – the moment calls for a general and armed uprising."

"But we who are less keen-sighted," objected the Duke, "we confess the weakness of our prevision; we reject your conclusions."

"We are the three ninnies – the Duke, the Cardinal and I," put in the Marquis, cracking another joke.

"Decidedly," observed the Cardinal aside to himself. "I was the dupe of an accidental resemblance. This patrician Marchioness has nothing in common with the lovely nymph of the Dubois woman's lupanar."

Victoria began her proof: "Is not Louis XVI the worst of the revolutionists? Judge! On May 5th of this year, 1789, did he not convene the States General, instead of summoning to Versailles

25,000 men whom he had under his hand, led by resolute heads? At that time the revolution, hardly hatched, could have been stamped into oblivion. I am willing to excuse him for that mistake, but here is one more serious: The States General convened the 5th of May. The majority of the nobility and the clergy attempted to hold their deliberations by Order, and refused to mingle with the bourgeois for the examination of credentials. The Third Estate insisted, and upon a new refusal of the nobles and clergy, left the hall. At length the deputies of the communes had the insolence to declare themselves, on the 17th of June, the National Assembly, in the name of the pretended sovereignty of the people. They arrogated to themselves the right to vote the taxes, and declared that if the royal authority should order them to dissolve, they would not be responsible for the outcome. Did not the King tolerate all these audacities?"

"'Tis true," acquiesced the Viscount of Mirabeau. "It all passed before our eyes, at Versailles."

"That is the second crime I impute to the King," Victoria continued. "Louis XVI could still have crushed out in its cradle this rising rebellion, scattered by force this handful of malcontents – "

"That has been tried, madam, by us of the court party," interposed the Duke. "We induced his Majesty to allow the seats of the Assembly to be occupied by troops. On the morning of the 19th of June these so-called Representatives of the people found the corridors of their chamber occupied by two companies of grenadiers, with loaded muskets."

"Yes," put in the Marquis bitterly, "the King had the cleverness on that occasion to commit what was, from the point of view of the revolutionists, an assault upon the National Assembly, by allowing their meeting place to be invaded by the troops; and at the same time to perpetrate a new assault against royalty by not preventing the rebels from reuniting in the Tennis Court at Versailles; mistakes, mistakes, ever more mistakes."

"All this is conclusive evidence," chimed in Barrel Mirabeau. "This unfortunate King seems to be infatuated with folly."

"Either brace up foolish Kings or suppress them – else look out for the safety of the monarchy, Monsieur Viscount," replied Victoria.

"Thanks to God," went on a cavalry officer at the other end of the table, "thanks to God the King's brother, Monseigneur the Count of Provence, rose to the emergency. At this vexatious juncture the prince took an energetic step. Without even asking the King, he hired the Tennis Court for a whole month!"

Victoria broke out into a peal of grim and mocking laughter. "There is a party leader," she said, "of great bravery and great wisdom! One need go into no ecstasies over his courage!"

"Madam the Marchioness is right," chimed in the Viscount of Mirabeau again. "This measure had no other effect upon the rebels than to cause them, the next day, to instal themselves in the Church of St. Louis."

"And then the clergy, or at least a part of the clergy, committed another imbecility – they rallied to the Third Estate. The shaven-heads have their share of responsibility in all this," said the Count of Plouernel.

"The high clergy protested, against this treason, the blame of which should be thrown on the curates of the country districts," declared the Cardinal in self-defense.

"Monsieur the Cardinal is in error!" it was the harsh voice of Abbot Morlet that broke in. "That fraction of the clergy which went over to the Third Estate displayed great political sense. The low clergy did just what they should have done."

"Peace, Abbot, peace there!" cried the Cardinal in accents of sovereign scorn. "You are talking nonsense, my dear sir!"

"I maintain what I stated – 'tis but little I care for the approbation of Monsieur the Cardinal," snapped Morlet.

"What's that you say, Abbot?" flashed back the Cardinal in great irritation. "Measure your words!"

"I wish to talk with reasonable men," returned Morlet, impassibly. "This is addressed to you, gentlemen. The royal power having tolerated the existence of this Assembly of malcontents, the clergy, both high and low, should have seized upon the fact, and turned it to its own advantage. By the simple means of choosing its best men, and joining them to the Third Estate, it would then have been able at need to stand in with revolutionary motions, in order to drive the dissatisfied element to the last extremes in the paroxysms of their rage."

"Monsieur the Abbot is a profound politician; he is in the right of the matter," assented Victoria.

"At the risk of contradicting you, Madam the Marchioness," objected the Cardinal passionately, "I must declare that the Abbot has only once more exhibited the evil spirit of the Society of Jesus, which has always been a veritable pest to the Church. Our holy mother were well rid of that abominable, execrable society!"

"So the priest is a Jesuit!" thought Victoria to herself, a light dawning upon her.

"The true pest of the Church," retorted Abbot Morlet, "has always been clad in the purple – cardinals and prelates, nearly all sots, imbeciles and peacocks!"

"The impudence of this priestlet, this scoundrel, this hypocrite!" the Cardinal cried in a fury. "Out of here with the insolent fellow!"

"By the blood of Christ," interjected Victoria quickly, addressing the two churchmen, "is this the hour for discord and recrimination? Do you forget, your Eminence, and you, Monsieur Abbot, that at this moment the safety of the Church depends upon the unity of her defenders?"

All the company, with the sole exceptions of the Cardinal and the Abbot, took up the word: "'Tis true – 'tis evident! Let us not forget. Let us remain united for the conflict!"

When the tumult had subsided, Victoria took up again her interrupted discourse: "In casting a rapid glance over the past, I did not intend to arouse suspicion among you or raise dissension. In pointing out the faults committed, I wished only to forewarn you against similar errors, and to show you how to escape new mistakes. Please, then, to give me your attention a few minutes longer: The session in the Tennis Court was a brutal challenge hurled in the teeth of royalty. The Queen, who is a woman of valor, understood it; she pressed the King to take energetic measures, and pledged him to have the National Assembly dissolved by force. Louis XVI submitted to the influence of the Queen; on the 28th of June he went into the heart of the Assembly, surrounded by his guards, and through his chancellor ordered the deputies to disperse, abolished their decrees, and annulled their deliberations. He acted the part of a sovereign."

"His Majesty indeed displayed great courage that day, and many of the deputies of the nobility and the clergy applauded the act of dissolution and immediately left the chamber," declared the Duke.

"The King," assented Victoria sardonically, "his faithful nobles and his faithful clergy left the hall. But they left the rebels behind them. Then Abbot Sieyès sprang to the tribunal and cried 'Continue in session, Representatives of the people! We are to-day what we were yesterday!'"

"But the King did not falter, thank God!" continued the Duke. "His Majesty commanded the Marquis of Brezé to convey to the malcontents his orders to disperse."

"Shame and misfortune!" exclaimed the Viscount of Mirabeau. "It was my own brother who then answered Brezé, 'Go and say to your master who sent you, that we are here by the will of the people, and that we shall never quit this hall save by force of bayonets!'"

"Very well, Monsieur Viscount! Your brother pointed out to the royal power its means of safety — *force of bayonets*," answered Victoria. "By the blood of Christ, what did Louis XVI do to restore the rebels to their senses? Absolutely nothing. Then the latter, encouraged by their immunity from punishment, declared, in their next session, the inviolability of the National Assembly."

"Alas, it was upon the motion of my abominable brother that that declaration was carried! God's blood, I think I could have turned fratricide at the moment," declared Barrel Mirabeau.

"Your house was not the only one to tremble at such felony," Victoria replied. "Did not nearly all the deputies of the nobility, even the most hostile to the revolution, rally around the Third Estate, dragging with them all the clericals?"

"Should the members of the nobility, then, Madam Marchioness," objected the Duke, "because the monarchy showed weakness, have abandoned it without attempting to defend it from within the Assembly? No, certainly not."

"Sir Duke," replied Victoria, "the members of the nobility and of the clergy who remained faithful to the throne were in the minority. What could they do for the monarchy? Nothing. Their presence among the ranks of the rebels served only to excuse the slips of the King, for then he could respond with a show of reason, 'I can not dissolve an Assembly which contains so great a number of my servants.'"

"Such was, in fact, the response made by his Majesty to the Queen when she secured the recall of Necker and the appointment of a new minister chosen by Monsieur Broglie. Nevertheless, with the assistance of the Marshal, the monarchy will still prove able to overcome the revolution. At least, that is my opinion," vouchsafed the Count of Plouernel.

"May God so will it," rejoined Victoria again. "But up till now the new minister has done nothing but make mistakes –"

Victoria was interrupted by the entrance of one of the lackeys, whom Plouernel had dismissed from the banquet hall in order that his guests might discuss political affairs confidentially and in safety, who said:

"The steward, my lord, asks to see you immediately."

"Let him enter," said the Count; and as the lackey went to fetch him, the host explained to his guests: "I charged my steward to send out several of my men in disguise, in order to learn through them what was going on in the several quarters of Paris."

"It is indeed very useful, in these days of effervescence," nodded Victoria, "to keep closely informed on the state of affairs."

The steward entered, bowed humbly to the company, and took up his post close by the door, like a servant awaiting orders.

"Well, Master Robert, what news?" demanded the Count. The company turned around in their chairs and fixed their attention upon the new arrival.

CHAPTER VII

NEWS FROM THE BARRICADES

Pursuant to the Count's order, the steward, bowing again, proceeded with his account of what he had learned.

"The news, alas, is very bad, my lord," he began. "One of our men has just arrived from the suburb of St. Antoine. The streets are blocked with barricades; they are forging pikes in the iron-mongers' and blacksmiths' shops; the houses are all illuminated. People are carrying up to the roofs of their dwellings beams and paving stones, to hurl down upon the troops of his Majesty Louis XVI, whom may God protect! Women and children are pouring musket balls and making cartridges. They have pillaged the armorers' shops in the district. In short, the whole of that impious plebs is swarming in the streets, screeching like the damned, especially against her Majesty our good Queen, his Royal Highness the Count of Artois, and their Holinesses our lords the Princes of Conti and Condé."

"And what are the pretexts for these insolent cries and rebellious preparations?" asked the Count.

"My lord, it is the word among this blasphemous people that the court is plotting evil against the deputies of the Third Estate, and that his Majesty our Sire – may God protect him – is preparing to march on Paris at the head of fifty thousand troops, to deliver the suburbs to the flames, blood, sack and pillage, and the girls and women to infamy!"

"The rabblement is at least aware of the punishment it deserves – and will receive!" cried the younger Mirabeau.

"What is the feeling in the other quarters," queried the Count of Plouernel. "Are they also, perchance, boiling over?"

"In the neighborhood of the St. Honoré Gate the mob has invaded the Garde-Meuble, or King's Storage-House, and seized the old arms they found collected there. It is a pity, my lord; you can see tattered brigands, in their bare feet, yet casqued and cuirassed, and with lances in their fists. Such magnificent arms in such hands! What a desecration!"

"Oh, the gallant cavaliers – armed cap-a-pie for the tourney!" cried the Marquis, affecting laughter.

"Those among this awful horde who have bonnets on," continued the steward, "have fastened in them cockades of green cloth or paper, as a sign of hope. My lord, it is like a frenzy. Out in the open street the scoundrels hug without knowing each other, and with tears in their eyes, cry, like henhawks 'To arms, citizens! Down with tyranny! Long live liberty! Long live the nation!'"

"But the other suburbs," pursued the Count. "Are they also wrought up like this cursed suburb of St. Antoine?"

"Aye, my lord – unless it be the suburb of St. Marcel, which is almost deserted. The evil creatures of that district, to the number of twenty thousand, flocked to the City Hall during the day to demand arms. The Provost of the merchants, Monsieur Flesselles, sent them to the Lazarist monks. When the great band of beggars arrived at the holy convent, the good and religious men made answer to them that Monsieur Flesselles was making game of them, for never had a grain of powder or a firearm found its way into the Convent of St. Lazare. Then these bandits from St. Marcel broke out into threats of death against Monsieur Flesselles, and being presently joined by another mob of rascals from the suburb of St. Victor, they went off all together to the Hospital of the Invalids in search of weapons."

"And were received, no doubt, with the gun-fire of the brave veterans sheltered there?" said the Count.

"Alas, no! my lord. The pensioners made not the slightest resistance, and the scoundrelly people fell into possession of more than thirty thousand guns and several cannon."

"The veterans!" gasped the Viscount of Mirabeau. "They, old soldiers, to give up their arms! Do we then face defection and treason on every side! Very well! we shall hang and shoot the invalids, men and officers, to the last one."

"Oh, the idea!" shouted the Marquis, with another burst of forced laughter, "So now our bare-feet have thirty thousand guns – and some cannon – which they don't know how to use!"

"You have nothing else to tell us?" said Plouernel to the steward.

"No, my lord."

"Then send our men out again for information. The instant they return, come to me with what they have learned."

The steward bowed for the third time and withdrew. Upon the faces of the convivial friends blank consternation reigned at the news he had brought. They gazed at one another speechless.

"Do you know, gentlemen," at last spoke up the Cardinal, "that all this is getting frightful? The very marrow in my bones is chilled."

"It is my opinion," the Duke answered, "that France will soon be no longer habitable. We shall have to flee abroad."

"Come, come, my dear Duke," said the Count of Plouernel, "a few regiments of infantry, supported by a piece of artillery or two, will suffice to exterminate these upstarts. The French nobility will whip them down. We shall unsheath our swords."

"I think the rabble will whip better troops than those, once they have got the smell of gunpowder," said Abbot Morlet.

"You are talking nonsense, Abbot," replied Mirabeau. "It is impossible that bare-footed ragamuffins, poorly armed, and without discipline, should be victorious over seasoned troops. If it ever came to that pass, I should snap my sword."

For the first time since the arrival of the momentous news, Victoria spoke: "A traitorous King would prevent you from breaking it; he would order you to return it to its scabbard."

"It is for us to have the courage to sacrifice the King to the safety of the monarchy. We shall have all the brave ones – " Mirabeau began.

"By heaven!" interrupted the Duke, "this is serious, and requires thought. Sacrifice the King!"

"What shall we do with the King?" questioned the Cardinal.

"In other times," replied Victoria, "they shut up do-nothing Kings in, the depths of a cloister. Force Louis XVI to abdicate. The Dauphin is an infant, you will constitute a council of regents, composed of men of inflexibility. The shameless plebeians have too much blood; it will rise to their heads and give them a false energy. Bleed them, bleed them white, by repression and defeat. You have cannons and muskets; bombard them – blow them back into the depths they sprung from!"

"Ah, Marchioness," answered Plouernel, "you are the terrible archangel who with her flaming sword will defend the monarchy and nobility. You are right. Safety lies in the abdication of the King and the formation of an inflexible council of regents. The monarch must be eliminated."

"Your most dangerous enemy, Count of Plouernel," replied she, "is the Third Estate! Has this bourgeoisie not told you, through Sieyès's organ, that up till now it has been nothing, it *which ought to be everything*! There is the enemy. The people, its intoxication once passed, will fall back into its misery and abject submissiveness. Having cried its cry in the public place, hunger will again seize it by the throat. 'The people, always ridden by want, has never the time to carry out the revolutions which it essays.' It is against the bourgeoisie that war to the knife must be carried on."

"For one proof out of a thousand of the truth of that statement," assented the Count, "is not Desmarais the lawyer one of the fieriest tribunes in the National Assembly?"

"My dear Count," said the cavalry officer to Plouernel, "did you not once treat a fellow of that name to a good cudgeling?"

"This Desmarais is himself the hero of that episode you refer to – the very same whippersnapper," answered the Count.

Aside Victoria said to herself: "And my brother John is the sweetheart of Mademoiselle Desmarais. A singular coincidence!"

"How did you come to give him his cudgel sauce, Count?" inquired the Cardinal.

"My counsel were arguing before the court a case involving an estate left to my brother, Abbot Plouernel, at present in Rome. Desmarais, forgetting the respect due to a man of my station, had the insolence to speak of me in terms hardly reverent. Informed of the fact by my attorneys, I had Desmarais seized by three of my servants one night as he was leaving his lodgings. They administered to him a sound drubbing with green sticks, after which my first lackey said to him: 'Sir, the thrashing which we have just had the honor of presenting to you, is from Monseigneur Plouernel, our master. Let the lesson be a profitable one.'"

"That," said the Viscount of Mirabeau, "was as good as the exquisite bastinado given to Arouet 'Voltaire' by the orders of the Prince of Rohan. That's the way to treat the bourgeoisie."

"Voltaire perhaps owes his fame to that little chastisement," suggested the Duke.

Coming back to the subject which was on everyone's mind, Abbot Morlet was the next to speak. "Madam the Marchioness has just uttered a great truth," said he. "The Church, the nobility and royalty have no more terrible enemy than the bourgeoisie. In a state, three elements are necessary for a good organization – a God, a King, and a people. In order to carry on production and nourish the representatives of God and the King, the bourgeoisie should be suppressed."

"You are stingy in your allotments, Abbot," put in the Duke. "Would you, then, suppress the nobility?"

"Who says *King* says *nobility*, and who says *God* says *clergy*," replied the Abbot. "In other words, if we wish to enjoy our privileges in peace, we must either extirpate or annul the bourgeoisie. Now, if we know how to use the people skilfully, they will come to our aid in this task of extirpation, for the plebeian hates a bourgeois more than he does a noble."

"Still, we see the populace gone mad over the deputies of the Third Estate. Several of them have already grown to the bulk of idols," said the Count.

"The bourgeoisie is, and will for still a long time remain, as hostile toward the people as it is toward the nobles. The people know this, and that is what renders them hostile to the bourgeoisie," Victoria declared.

"It is marvellous how the thoughts of Madam the Marchioness accord with mine," exclaimed Abbot Morlet. "This antagonism which she has just mentioned will some day, perhaps, be our salvation; for I have no faith in the party of the court, composed in part, as it is, of young mad-caps."

"By heaven, Abbot," the whole company cried with one voice, "but you are impertinent!"

The Abbot shrugged his shoulders and continued impassively. "The revolution will plunge on in its course. First the royalty and the nobility will fall beneath the blows of the tribunes of the Third Estate. Then will fall the Church – but only to rise more powerful than before, to rear again the scaffolds and relight the pyres of the Inquisition."

"You are talking nonsense, Abbot," again put in Barrel Mirabeau. "Your prophecies partake of desperation."

"Nobility and royalty will disappear in the tempest," pursued the Abbot, "but it remains with us to make that disappearance one of the phases of a rebirth that will establish theocracy more powerful than ever. The instant will be decisive, momentous. It may one day come about that the bourgeoisie will merge its cause with that of the populace; that it will establish education free, unified, common, and uncontrolled by the Church; that it will abolish private property, making common to each and all the tools of production. Should the bourgeoisie decide thus to emancipate the proletariat, Throne and Altar are done for forever. It is for us, then, to nurse the antagonism already existent between the two, to envenom their mutual mistrust and reproaches. We must inflame the fear of the bourgeoisie for the populace; we must kindle the mistrust of the laborers toward the bourgeois; we must prick the people on to excess; above all we must invoke to pillage and massacre that furious beast which is

not the people, but which in times of revolution is confounded with it – it is the *red specter* which we must make use of to terrify the bourgeoisie and drive it to sunder its cause from that of the people. That is how we can countermining the revolution, and force the sovereigns of Europe to unite, to invade France, and to exterminate our enemies. Let us mingle, in disguise, with the people; let us provoke and irritate their appetite for blood. Let us and our agents strike the first blows – pillage – burn – mow off heads – those of our friends, too, for we must above all avert suspicion; make the blood pour, to rouse the beast and put it in appetite for sack and massacre!"

Even Barrel Mirabeau was taken aback at this diatribe. "God's death, Sir Abbot," he cried with horror, "do you take us for gallows-tenders?"

"To make of us mowers of heads!" cried the Count of Plouernel. "'Tis insanity!"

"What exquisite fastidiousness!" retorted Morlet.

"You must have clean lost your senses, Abbot," returned Plouernel. "To dare to propose such a role to us – to make hyenas out of us!"

"We sons of the Church," answered the Abbot, "shall then assume the role ourselves, if it is so repugnant to you, gentlemen of the nobility.⁸ You fear to soil your lace cuffs and silk stockings with mire and blood; we of the clergy, less dainty, and arrayed in coarser garb, are free from any such false delicacy. We shall roll up our cuffs to the elbow, and perform our duty. We shall save you, then, my worthy gentlemen, with or without your aid; that will be an account to be settled afterwards between us."

"The priest has been vomited forth from hell," thought Victoria, to herself. "He is a demon incarnate."

"We shall know how to save the monarchy, Sir Abbot," replied the Count of Plouernel to his friend Morlet, "even without the need of you folks of the Church; have no worry on that score. You forget that it was our sword which established the monarchy in Gaul and revived the Catholic Church, fourteen centuries ago, without the aid of the cassocks of that time."

"Fine words – but empty," answered the Abbot. "If you are indeed so determined to draw the sword, Monsieur Count, will you then please tell me why, this very day, you resigned into the hands of the King the command of your regiment? Your boast comes at a poor season."

"You well know why, Monsieur Abbot," the Count retorted. "My regiment grew uncontrollable. The evil, however, dates far back. The first symptoms of insubordination in the French Guards showed themselves two years ago. A sergeant named Maurice" – Victoria shuddered – "had the insolence to pass me without saluting; and after I took off his cap with a stroke of my cane, he had the audacity to raise his hand against his colonel. I handed the mutineer over to the scourges till he dropped dead. That is how I avenge my honor."

As Monsieur Plouernel thus told the story of Sergeant Maurice, Victoria was unable to control herself. Her features contracted, and she fixed on Plouernel a look of menace. Then a sudden flush overspread her features. None of this was lost upon the Abbot. "What is this mystery?" he pondered. "The Marchioness casts an implacable look at the Count, then she blushes – she who till now has been as pale as marble. What can there have been between this Italian Marchioness and this sergeant in the French Guards, now two years dead?"

At that moment the steward again entered the banquet hall and approached the Count of Plouernel.

"What news, Robert?" asked the latter.

"Terrible, my lord!"

⁸ For an exactly parallel line of conduct, see that of Abbot Le Roy, at the time of the invasion of Reveillon's paper factory in the St. Antoine suburb, as given in the admirable *History of the Revolution* by Louis Blanc. We are glad to render here this public testimony of our sympathy and old friendship for an illustrious campaign in exile.

"My Robert is not an optimist," explained Plouernel to the company. "In what does this terrible news consist?"

"The barriers of the Throne and St. Marcel are on fire. Everywhere the tocsin is clanging. The people of the districts are gathering in the churches."

"Behold the sway of our holy religion over the populace – they pray before the altars," cried the Cardinal briskly.

"Alas, my lord, it is not to pray, at all, that the rebels are swarming into the churches, but to listen to haranguers, and among others a comedian by the name of Collot D'Herbois, who preaches insurrection. They trample the sacred vessels under foot, spit on the host, and tear down the priestly ornaments."

"Profanation! Sacrilege!" exclaimed the Cardinal, suddenly modifying his ideas on the sway of his faith over the people.

"One of our men," continued the steward, "saw them putting up bills which the rabble read by the light of their torches. One of the placards read: 'For sale, because of death, the business of Grand Master of Ceremonies. Inquire of the widow Brezé.'"

"Ah, poor Baked one," sang out the Marquis, making a hideous pun on the unfortunate officer's name, "you are cooked! All they have to do now is to eat you!"

"On other placards were written in large letters, 'Names of the Traitors to the Nation: Louis Capet – Marie Antoinette – Provence – Artois – Conti – Bourbon – Polignac – Breteuil – Foulon' – and others."

"That is intended to point out these names to the fury of the populace!" gasped the Viscount of Mirabeau.

"The rumor runs through Paris that to-morrow the people will rise in arms and march on Versailles."

"So much the better," exclaimed the Viscount. "They will be cut to pieces, this rabble. Cannoniers – to your pieces – fire!"

"Go on, tell us what you know," said Plouernel to his steward Robert. "Is that all?"

"Alas no, my lord. This miserable populace in arms surrounds and threatens the City Hall. The old Board of Aldermen is dissolved, and is replaced by a new revolutionary committee, which has taken the power into its own hands."

"Are the names of this committee known?" asked the Count.

"Yes, my lord. From the City Hall windows they threw to the rioting people lists with the names. Here is one which our emissary got hold of: – 'President of the permanent committee, Monsieur Flesselles, ex-Provost of the merchants' –"

"Oh, well," laughed the Duke, "if the other members of the committee are revolutionists of that stamp, we can sleep in peace. Flesselles is in our employ."

"Finish reading your paper," ordered the Count.

"The said committee, in session assembled, decrees: Article I – A city militia shall immediately be organized in each district, composed of licensed business men. Article II – The cockade of this militia shall be blue and red, the city colors."

"Is that all? Finish reporting," said Plouernel, seeing the steward pause.

"One of our spies, on entering the neighborhood of the Palais Royal, heard threats hurled against his Majesty Louis XVI, and especially against her Majesty, the Queen. Everyone looks for terrible events to-morrow, my lord."

Seeing he had nothing more to report, Plouernel allowed the steward to depart, first ordering him to come back with any fresher information.

"Now gentlemen," Victoria began when the steward had withdrawn from the room, "the gravity of the situation takes foremost place. There is no longer room for deliberation – there must be action."

Time is pressing. Count, has the court foreseen that the agitation in Paris would drive the malcontents to open revolt? Is it prepared to combat the uprising?"

"Everything has been anticipated, madam," answered Plouernel. "Measures are on foot to repulse the rebels. This very morning I received word as to the plans of the court."

"Why then do you allow us to wander into objectless suppositions and discussions?" asked the Cardinal.

"I was commanded to exercise the utmost discretion in the matter of the court's projects. But in view of the information which my steward has just brought in on the popular frenzy in Paris, and on the assaults which the discontented element is meditating, I hold it my duty to inform you of the plans laid down."

Drawing a note from his pocket, the Count continued, reading:

"Monsieur the Marshal Broglie is appointed commander-in-chief. He said this morning to the Queen: 'Madam, with the fifty thousand men at my command I pledge myself to bring to their senses both the luminaries of the National Assembly and the mob of imbeciles which hearkens to them. The gun and the cannon will drive back under earth these insolent tribunes, and absolute power will again assume the place which the spirit of republicanism now disputes with it.'

"Monsieur the Marshal Broglie is invested with full military powers. Bezenval is placed in command of Paris, De Launay holds the Bastille and threatens with his artillery the suburb of St. Antoine; the garrison of that fortress has for several days been secretly increased, and ammunition worked in. The Bastille is the key to Paris, inasmuch as it commands the respect of the most dangerous suburbs, and can annihilate them with its guns.

"The last regiments recalled from the provinces by the Marshal will arrive to-night on the outskirts of Versailles and will powerfully re-enforce the Swiss and the foreign regiments. An imposing array of artillery and a large troop of cavalry will complete this corps of the army. Thus united, the troops will move, day after to-morrow, July the 15th, to the invasion of the National Assembly, which will have been allowed to convene. The Assembly will be surrounded by the German regiments, and the ring-leaders of the Third Estate forthwith arrested."

In a lowered and confidential tone the Count continued:

"The most dangerous of the rebels will be shot at once. A goodly number of them will be thrown into the deepest dungeons of the different State prisons of the kingdom. Finally, the small fry of the Third Estate will be exiled to at least a hundred leagues from Paris. A royal warrant will dissolve the National Assembly and annul its enactments. After which Monsieur Broglie, at the head of his army, will march on Paris, take military possession of it, establish courts-martial which will at once judge and put to death all the chiefs of the sedition, banish the less culpable, and confiscate their goods to the benefit of the royal fisc. Should it resist, Paris will be besieged and treated like a conquered city – three days and three nights of pillage will be granted to the troops. After which, the royal authority will be re-established in full glory."

"There, gentlemen, that is the plan of campaign of the court."

Loud acclamations from the company – excepting only the Abbot – greeted the reading of the communication by Monsieur Plouernel.

"This plan seems to me to be at all points excellently expeditious and practical," said Victoria. "It has every chance of success. Still, has the court foreseen the event of Paris, protected by barricades

and defended by determined men, resisting with the force of despair? Has the court foreseen the event of Monsieur Broglie being defeated in his conflict with the people?"

"Madam, that case also is provided for," answered Plouernel. "The King and the royal family, protected by a powerful force, will leave Versailles and retire to a fortified place on the frontier. The Emperor of Austria, the Kings of Prussia and Sweden, and the majority of the princes of the Germanic Confederation, will be prepared to assist the royal power. Their armies will cross the frontier, and his Majesty, at the head of the arms of the coalition, will return to force an entry into his capital, which will be subjected to terrible chastisement."

"One and all, we are prepared to shed our blood for the success of this plan," cried the Viscount of Mirabeau, swelling with enthusiasm. "To battle!"

"Has this plan the approval of the King?" asked Victoria. "Can one count on his resolution?"

"The Queen but awaits the hour of putting it into practice to inform his Majesty of it," answered the Count. "Nevertheless, the King has already consented to the assembling of a corps of the army at Versailles. That is a first step gained."

"But if the King should refuse to follow the plan? What course do you then expect to take?" persisted Victoria.

"It will go through without the consent of Louis XVI. If necessary, we shall proceed to depose him. Then Monseigneur the Count of Provence will be declared Lieutenant-General of the kingdom, and the Queen, Regent, with a council of unbending royalists. Then we shall see courts-martial and firing squads in permanence! Volleys unceasing!"

"It is done for royalty if the court dare put its plan, into execution," muttered Victoria to herself. "To-morrow the Bastille will be taken." Then, rising, her face glowing with animation, and holding her glass aloft, she called, in her brilliant voice:

"To the death of the Revolution! To the re-establishment of Royalty! To the triumph of the Church! To the Queen!"

And catching her fire, the whole company, with one voice, cried:

"Death to the Revolution!"

"Meet me to-morrow morning at Versailles, gentlemen, in battle," cried Plouernel.

And all except the Abbot shouted back the reply:

"In battle! We shall all be at Versailles to deal the people its death-blow!"

The sarcastic coolness of the priest sat the Count ill. "Are you stricken dumb, Abbot," he inquired, "or do you lack confidence in our plan?"

"No, I have not the slightest confidence in your plans," answered the prelate calmly. "Your party is marching from blusterings to retreats, and on to its final overthrow, which will be that of the monarchy. But we shall be there, we the 'shaven-heads,' the 'priestlets,' as you dub us; the 'creatures of the Church,' 'hypocrites and Pharisees,' to repair your blunders, you block-heads, you lily-livers! We of the frock and cassock condemn you!"

This deliverance of the Abbot was followed by a storm of indignant cries from the assembled guests. Threats and menaces rose high.

"By heaven!" shouted Barrel Mirabeau, "if you were not a man of the cloth, Abbot, you would pay dear for your insults!"

"Let him rave," said the Cardinal, shrugging his shoulders, "let him rave, this hypocrite of the vestry-room, this rat of the Church, this Jesuit!"

"Mademoiselle Guimard awaits his Eminence in her carriage!" called out a lackey, stepping into the room.

"The devil! The devil!" muttered his Eminence the Cardinal as he rose to go. "I clean forgot my Guimard in the midst of my political cares. Well, I must go to face the anger of my tigress!"

The banquet broke up. The guests left the table, and gathered in little groups before parting, still carrying on the discussion of the evening. Only Abbot Morlet stood apart, and as he let his sardonic glance travel from group to group, he muttered to himself grimly:

"Simpleton courtiers! Imbecile cavaliers! Stupid prelates! Go to your Oeil-de-Boeuf! Go to Versailles – go! To-morrow the dregs of the populace will have felled their first head. The appetite for killing comes by killing. As to that foreign Marchioness, of whom it is well to have one's doubts, if it becomes advisable to get rid of her, her handsome head with its black hair will look well on the end of a pike some of these days. So let's be off. I must prepare that bully of a Lehiron, the old usher of the parish of St. Medard, to call together to-night his band of rascals, ready for anything. And then to get ready my disguise and that of my god-son, little Rodin!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE HALL OF THE PORTRAITS

Half an hour later none of that brilliant company remained in the home of the Count of Plouernel save the Count himself, and Victoria Lebrenn. The two were in the Hall of the Portraits, in contemplation of which the beautiful Marchioness seemed lost. Struck with her long silence, and seeing her gaze riveted upon the pictures, the Count approached her, saying in a surprised and passionate voice:

"Do you know, Madam Marchioness, that I shall end by becoming jealous of my ancestors? For several minutes they alone have been happy enough to draw your attention."

"True, Count. I was reflecting on the glory of your race. Proud was I, for your sake, of your illustrious origin."

"Ah, Victoria, such words! But allow me to tell you, my radiant Marchioness, how I love you. Every day I feel my mad passion grow. By my honor as a gentleman, you could have led me on to treason as easily as you have confirmed me in the path of loyalty which I now tread. You have so mastered me that to possess your love I would have betrayed my King, and forever stained my escutcheon." Then, casting himself on his knees before the Marchioness, the Count continued in a trembling voice, "Is that not yet sufficient, Victoria?"

At the moment that the Count of Plouernel had seized and was covering with kisses the hand of Victoria, a loud knock was heard at the door of the salon.

"Rise, Count," said Victoria, quickly. "It is one of your men."

Robert the steward entered precipitately, bearing in one hand a tray on which lay a despatch. He said to his master:

"A courier from Versailles brought this despatch for my lord. The courier reached the house only with the greatest difficulty. To escape arrest by the people in the streets he was forced to leave his horse some distance from the barrier, and to throw off his royal livery."

"You may go," replied Monsieur Plouernel, as he took the message.

He tore open the envelope and made haste to read the contents of the missive, while Victoria followed him with curiosity burning in her eyes, and said in her most winning voice as she drew close to him, "News of importance, no doubt, my dear Gaston? You seem much moved by it."

"Read, Marchioness, for I have no secrets from you," answered Plouernel, handing the despatch to Victoria. "Judge of the extreme urgency of my information!"

The young woman eagerly grasped the letter, cast her eyes over it, and then said, with a silvery laugh: "But it is in cipher. Give me the key. I cannot read it – without your help."

"True – pardon my distraction," replied the Count, and he read as follows, translating the cipher as he went:

"To-day's events in Paris, and the news from the country, are of such nature that our measures must be pushed forward to execution. Repair to Versailles at once. Let not one of our friends be missing. It will probably be done to-morrow.

"Versailles, seven o'clock in the evening."

"And it is now past midnight!" exclaimed Victoria, "You should have received the message at least two or three hours ago. Whence the delay? Must it be laid to negligence, or treachery? Both suppositions are possible."

"You forget, Marchioness, that the messenger was compelled to use great precautions to enter Paris, and that his precautions in themselves, were quite capable of causing the delay. So that it is neither false play nor carelessness – no one is guilty."

"So it may be. But there is not a moment to lose. You must be off to Versailles at once. Order your carriage immediately. Let your coach-wheels scorch the pavement."

"It would be imprudent to take a carriage into the streets to-night. I shall go on horseback accompanied by one of my men; I shall go towards Great Rock and Queen's Court, till I pick up the road that runs from Courbevoie to Versailles. Then, like the wind for Versailles."

Monsieur Plouernel grasped the young woman's hand and added in a voice of emotion – "God save the throne!"

Victoria turned towards the door, paused a moment on the sill to make a final gesture of farewell, and left the room, musing to herself:

"In order to strike terror to the court, to make their plant miscarry, the people must take the Bastille to-morrow! No hesitation – it must be done!"

CHAPTER IX

FILIAL CONFIDENCES

The home of Monsieur Desmarais, attorney at the court of Paris, deputy of the Third Estate to the National Assembly, the same who had been beaten by the orders of the Count of Plouernel, was situated near the St. Honoré Gate. There he occupied a beautiful dwelling of recent construction and decorated with taste. The day after the banquet participated in at the Plouernel mansion by the heads of the court party, Madam Desmarais and her daughter Charlotte, a charming girl of seventeen, were engaged in a sad interchange of thoughts.

"Ah, my child," said Madam Desmarais, "how troubled I feel at what is going on in Paris!" As her child did not answer, the mother stopped and looked at her. The girl was plunged in deep reverie.

For a moment longer the girl maintained her silence. Then, her face suffused and her eyes filled with tears, she fell upon her mother's neck, buried her face in the maternal breast, and murmured in a smothered voice:

"Mother, dear, for the first time in my life I have lacked confidence in you. Pardon your child!"

Surprised and disturbed, Madam Desmarais pressed her daughter to her bosom, dried her tears, urged her to calm herself, and said, embracing her tenderly: "You, to lack confidence in me, Charlotte? You have a secret from me? Am I not, then, your *bestest* friend?"

"Alas, I fear I had almost forgotten it. Be indulgent toward your daughter!"

"My heaven! What anguish you are putting me to! I can not believe my ears. You – to have committed a fault?"

"I doubted your heart and your justice. I formed a bad judgment of my father and you, who have surrounded me with tenderness since my birth."

"Finish your confidence, painful as it may be. Put an end to my uncertainty," pleaded the mother.

Charlotte drew back a moment; then she proceeded in broken accents:

"About six months ago, we came to live on the second story of this house, then still unfinished. Father was much taken with one of the workmen – "

"You speak of John Lebrenn, the foreman of our ironsmith, Master Gervais?"

"Struck with the excellent education of Monsieur John Lebrenn, father offered him the freedom of our library, and made him promise to come and visit us on his holidays. Father therefore considered Monsieur John Lebrenn worthy of admission to our friendship. That is how I must interpret father's actions."

"Your father evinced, perhaps, too much good will towards the young fellow, and my brother has taken my husband to task for authorizing too intimate relations between us and a simple workman. Each should keep his place."

"Uncle Hubert," answered Charlotte, "always showed himself hostile towards Monsieur Lebrenn, and even jealous of him."

"Your uncle Hubert is a banker of wealth, and could have entertained for the protégé of my husband neither jealousy nor animosity."

"Nevertheless, father's 'protégé' has been able to be of value to him, for I have often heard father say to Monsieur John that it was to him and his efforts that he owed his election as deputy for Paris."

"It is a matter of common kindness for my husband to thank this young workman for some services he was able to perform in the interest of his election."

"Allow me, dear mother, to tell you that father does not look at things as you do; for last Sunday he invited Monsieur John to dinner with us, calling him *my friend*. Father repeated to him several times that, thanks to the progress of the revolution, privileges of birth would be soon wiped out, and that equality and fraternity would reign among men."

"Well, Charlotte! And suppose equality were to reign among men – what conclusion do you draw from that?"

"Monsieur John Lebrenn being the equal of my father, bonds of friendship could exist between them."

"I shall admit, for the moment, that an ironsmith's apprentice might think himself the equal of an attorney at the bar of Paris. What do you conclude therefrom?"

"I hoped you would have understood," stammered the young girl in confusion, and more embarrassed than ever at seeing her mother so far from suspecting the nature of the confidence she was about to make.

Suddenly a dull and heavy roar, prolonged and repeated from echo to echo, shook and rattled the windows of the room.

"What noise is that!" cried Madam Desmarais with a start, and raising her head.

Crash upon crash, more distinct than the first, rattled again the windows and even the doors of the dwelling. At that instant in rushed one of Madam Desmarais's maids, screaming out with affright:

"Madam, Oh, madam! It is the cannon! It is the roar of artillery!"

"Great God!" exclaimed Madam Desmarais, turning pale. "And my husband! To what dangers will he be exposed!"

"Do not worry, dear mother. Father is at Versailles," spoke out Charlotte, now the comforter.

"They are attacking Paris. The counter-attack will lead on to Versailles. There will be uprisings, insurrections, massacres!"

"The suburbs are attacking the Bastille," answered Gertrude, the maid, all of a tremble. "At daybreak our neighbor, Monsieur Lebrenn the ironsmith, armed with sword and gun, placed himself at the head of a troop, and marched upon the fortress."

"Alas, he rushes into the arms of death – I shall never see him more!" cried Charlotte, starting to her feet. And overcome with emotion and fear, she paled, her eyes closed, and she fainted in the arms of her mother and the servant, who bent over her plying their simple restorative cares.

For a long time the detonation of the artillery and the rattle of musketry continued unabated. At length the firing slackened, became desultory, and finally ceased altogether. The tumult gave way to a profound silence. Charlotte regained consciousness. Her face hidden in her hands, she was now seated beside her mother, who regarded her daughter with a severe and saddened look. The older woman seemed to hesitate to speak to the girl; finally she addressed her in a voice that was hard and dry:

"Thank heaven, Charlotte, you have recovered from your faint. Let us continue our interview, that was so unfortunately interrupted. Meseems it is of extreme importance for us all. I can guess its conclusion."

The hard lines in the face of Madam Desmarais and the iciness in her tone took the young girl aback; but overcoming the passing emotion, she raised her head, revealing her countenance wet with tears, and answered:

"I have never practised dissimulation towards you. So, just now, I could not conceal the fears which assailed me for John Lebrenn – for I love him passionately. I have pledged him my faith, I have received his in return. We have sworn our troth, one to the other. There, my dear mother, that is the confidence, I wished to make to you."

"Oh, woe is us! The predictions of my brother are realized. How right he was to reproach my husband for his relations with that workingman! Unworthy daughter!" continued Madam Desmarais addressing Charlotte, "How could you so far forget your duties as to think of uniting your lot with that of a miserable artisan? Shame and ignominy! Dishonor to your family – "

"Mother," replied Charlotte, raising her head proudly, "my love is as noble and pure as the man who calls it forth."

Gertrude, the serving maid, here again broke precipitately into the room, joyfully crying as she crossed the threshold:

"Madam, good news! Your husband has just entered the courtyard."

"My husband in Paris!" exclaimed Madam Desmarais. "What can have taken place at Versailles? Perhaps the Assembly is dissolved! Perhaps he is proscribed, a fugitive! My God, have pity on us!"

She rushed to the door to meet her husband, but checked herself long enough to say to Charlotte:

"Swear to me to forget at once this shameful love. On that condition I consent to withhold from your father all knowledge of the wretched affair."

"My father shall know all!" replied Charlotte resolutely, as Monsieur Desmarais entered the room.

CHAPTER X

DEPUTY DESMARAIS

The deputy of the Third Estate was a man in the prime of life; his intellectual face betrayed more of diplomacy than of frankness. The disorder of his apparel and the perspiration that covered his brow bespoke the precipitancy of his return. His pallor, the contortion of his features, the fear portrayed upon them, disclosed the anxiety of his mind. But his whole expression relaxed at sight of Charlotte and her mother. He pressed them several times in turn to his bosom, and cried joyously:

"Dear wife – dear daughter – embrace me again! I never before thought what a consolation in these cursed times the sweet joys of the domestic hearth would prove."

And again embracing his wife and daughter, the advocate added, "Blessings on you both for your presence. You have made me forget for a moment the atrocities committed by a cannibal people!"

As Monsieur Desmarais uttered these last words, a storm of triumphal outcries, first distant, then gradually drawing nearer, smote upon his ear: "Victory! The Bastille is taken by the people! Down with the court! Down with the traitors! Down with the King! Death to the King! Long live the Nation!"

Then as gradually the cries moved away and died out in the distance.

"The Bastille is taken – but how much blood had to be shed in the heroic attack!" thought Charlotte, endeavoring to curb her apprehensions for John Lebrenn. Then, carrying her handkerchief to her lips to smother a sob, she added to herself, "He is dead, perhaps. O, God, have pity on my grief."

"What mean these cries, my friend?" asked Madam Desmarais of her husband. "Is it possible that the Bastille has fallen into the hands of the people? Can the working classes have overcome the army? In what sort of times do we live?"

"The Bastille is taken! Cursed day – the people are on top!"

Charlotte heard with astonishment the execrations of her father on the victory just won by the people. But before she was able to explain to herself this revulsion in her father's beliefs, Gertrude re-entered the room, calling out through the open door —

"Good news again! Mother Lebrenn, our neighbor, has sent one of her apprentices to inform you that she has just received a note from Monsieur John, saying that he received a slight gunshot wound in the shoulder during the battle – and announcing that the people is everywhere victorious!"

"John Lebrenn!" exclaimed Monsieur Desmarais, enraged. "He took part in that insurrection! Send answer to Mother Lebrenn that I take no interest in parties to massacre!" Then recollecting himself, he added, "No – say to the apprentice that you have delivered the message."

"Not a word of interest, and John wounded," thought Charlotte. "Ah, at least, thanks to You, my God, John's wound is slight. I need not tremble for his life."

"If the revolution one of these days miscarries, it will be the fools of the stamp of this Lebrenn who will be to blame," continued Desmarais bitterly. "They will not comprehend that the ideal government is a bourgeois, constitutional monarchy, amenable to the courts, disarmed, and subordinated to an assembly of representatives of the Third Estate. These miserable workingmen dishonor the revolution by assassination."

"Father," responded Charlotte firmly, her forehead flushed with a generous resolve, "Monsieur John Lebrenn can not be called an assassin."

"I, too, believed in the honesty of that workman whom I showered with favors, in spite of the warnings of your uncle Hubert," replied Desmarais. "But when John Lebrenn takes part in this insurrection, I withdraw my esteem. I look upon him as a brigand!"

"John Lebrenn a brigand!" exclaimed Charlotte, unable to restrain her indignation. "Is it you, father, who thus insult a man whom you but now called your friend! What a contradiction in your language!"

"My dear husband," interposed Madam Desmarais, interrupting her daughter to retard an explanation of which she dreaded the issue: "You have not yet told us what compelled your departure from Versailles, and why you are in Paris instead of in session with the National Assembly."

"Last evening and night the most sinister rumors were in circulation about Versailles. According to some, the court party had secured from the King the dissolution of the Assembly. The members of the Left were to be arrested as seditious characters, and imprisoned or banished from the kingdom."

"Great heaven – that is where you sit, my friend! To what danger have you not been exposed!"

"They would not have taken me from my curule chair alive," responded the attorney grandly. "But the court party, frightened by the peals of the cannon at the Bastille, the roar of which carried to Versailles, drew back before the fearsome consequences of such an attempt."

"I breathe again," exclaimed Madam Desmarais with a sigh of relief. "You are neither a fugitive nor proscribed. God be praised!"

"Still, other reports agitated Versailles and the Assembly on the score of the uneasiness in Paris. During the night they saw, from the housetops, the gleam of burning barriers. In the morning a courier despatched by Baron Bezenval, commandant of Paris, brought news to the government that the people of the suburb of St. Antoine, assisted by those from the other suburbs, were besieging the Bastille. This sort of aggression was considered by the majority of the representatives an enterprise as blameworthy as it was senseless. No one could conjecture that a mob of people, in rags, almost without arms, could take a fortress defended by a garrison and a battery of artillery. The attempt was in the highest degree extravagant."

"The victory of the people was truly heroic," answered Madam Desmarais. "It really savors of the miraculous."

"Alas, a few more miracles of that stamp and the royal power is overthrown, and we fall into anarchy," moodily replied the advocate. "The people, drunk with its triumph, will not content itself with wise reforms. Having overthrown the royalty, the nobility, and the clergy, it will turn on the bourgeoisie, and we, its allies during the combat, shall become its victims after the victory. It will push to the end the logic of its principles."

"Good heavens, my friend, you express to-day the same opinions you till lately fought in my brother!"

"Your brother Hubert is a violent man who knows nothing of politics," answered the attorney, much embarrassed by his wife's observation; and he added, "This morning the National Assembly, wishing to ascertain the truth as to the conflicting rumors of events in Paris, commissioned several of its members, myself among the number, to learn by actual witness the march of affairs, and, if possible, to check the shedding of blood. In spite of our haste to the city, when we arrived the people were already masters of the Bastille and had already disgraced their victory by slaughtering the Marquis De Launay, governor of the fortress, and several officers. These murders were then followed by ghoulish scenes, which I beheld with my own eyes. But everything in its time. My colleagues and I went to the City Hall. We succeeded, with much effort, in working our way through the swarms of people in arms. We saw the unhappy Flesselles, President of the Committee of Notables, livid, whelmed with blows and insults, his clothing torn to ribbons, dragged into the square and massacred: after the noble, the bourgeois! Among the assassins I remarked a brawny giant, with the face of a gallows-bird, and a little short man whose visage half vanished under a shock of red beard, evidently false, who dragged at his side a young boy of eight or nine years. At one instant I thought that the unhappy Fleselles might be saved, but the declamations of the red-bearded man and the giant raised to a paroxysm the fury of a band of savages whom they seemed to direct, and I knew then that the Provost of the merchants was lost. The fellow with the red beard drew up to him and cracked his head at one blow, with the butt of his pistol. The savage band hurled itself upon the unfortunate man as he fell to earth, and riddled him with wounds. The giant put the climax to the horrible deed: he cut

off the head and impaled it on the end of a pike. Then the whole band of scoundrels, the little boy along with the rest, began to dance around the hideous trophy, singing and shouting."

"My blood freezes in my veins, my friend, when I think of the danger you ran in the midst of that frantic populace," said Madam Desmarais. "Those madmen are worse than cannibals – and Paris seems to be in their power."

"That is what I saw; but unfortunately that is not the only crime there is to deplore. Other murders followed this first one. The blood thus shed threw the populace into a species of frenzy. Finally I was able to escape, to get out of the crowd, and I hastened to you, dear wife, and to our daughter. These are the crimes that the takers of the Bastille either perpetrated, or are accomplices in. By giving the signal for insurrection, they have thrown the people into all the dangers of a revolt. That is why John Lebreun is no better in my eyes than a common bandit."

"You are unjust, father, toward him whom you called your friend," ventured Charlotte, in a voice firm with resolution. "On reflection you will return to sentiments that are more just to Monsieur Lebreun."

Struck with astonishment at his daughter's words and tone, the advocate questioned his wife with a look, as if to seek the cause of this strange appeal on the part of Charlotte for Monsieur John.

"It is I, father, who can give you the explanation you seek of my mother. I shall not falter in doing so," said Charlotte; and after a momentary pause she continued:

"I shall not recall to you how many times you have uttered yourself in terms of friendship and esteem for Monsieur Lebreun. The good opinion you held of him was merited, and I dare vouch that he will continue to show himself worthy of it. I shall not recall to you the proofs of devotion Monsieur Lebreun has given you, notably at the time of your election. It is not willingly that I bring back to your memory the incident of the outrage of which you were the victim at the instigation of Monsieur the Count of Plouernel, and which you communicated to Monsieur Lebreun in confidence one evening about two months ago. It costs me much to reopen in your heart that rankling wound. But do you remember the generous choler with which Monsieur Lebreun was seized at your revelation? 'I am but a mechanic, and without doubt this great lord will consider me unworthy to raise a sword against him,' said Monsieur John to you, 'but I swear to God, I shall punish the wretch with these stout arms that heaven has bestowed upon me.' Already he was bounding towards the door to be off to avenge your insult, when you and my mother stopped him with great difficulty, plying your supplications to make him promise not to attack your enemy. And then, clasping him in your arms, you said to him, your voice quivering with emotion, and your eyes filled with tears, 'Ah, my friend, you shall be my son; for no otherwise than as a son did you feel the insult I received. This mark of attachment, joined to all the other proofs of your affection, renders you so dear to my heart that from this moment I shall look upon you as one of the members of our family. You have won all our hearts – '"

"And what has all this to do with the excesses which Monsieur Lebreun has been one of the instigators of, and with the assassinations which I have witnessed? Come, speak clearly, explain yourself. I understand nothing of all this pathos."

"By what right, father, do you render Monsieur Lebreun responsible for a murder to which he was an entire stranger?"

"But whence this great interest, my daughter, in taking the part of Monsieur Lebreun against your father?"

"In spite of my ignorance of politics, dear father, I know that in attacking the Bastille the people wished to destroy the house of durance where shuddered so many innocent victims. And perhaps Monsieur Lebreun, in joining himself with the insurgents, hoped to find his father in one of the dungeons of the fortress."

"And if by chance he should discover him!" exclaimed advocate Desmarais, more and more surprised and irritated at his daughter's persistence in defending Lebreun. "Does that chance absolve him from the excesses for which the taking of the Bastille was the signal? Ought not the responsibility

for these acts fall upon those who took part in the attack, among others on Monsieur Lebrenn, who, it seems, is one of the leaders of the insurrection?"

"Does the memory of services rendered, father, weigh so heavily upon you that you seek to evade all recollection of them, under the pretext of a responsibility which you endeavor to load on a generous man for the crimes committed by others?"

"Do you know, Charlotte," answered the advocate severely, after a few moments' reflection, "that your persistence in defending that man would justly give me strange suspicions regarding your conduct?"

"My friend," interrupted Madam Desmarais, "do not attach any importance to a few words which have escaped our daughter in a moment of excitement."

"You are mistaken, dear mother. I am perfectly calm. But I can not submit to hearing a man of heart and honor calumniated without protesting against what I regard as a great wrong to him. Why should I not say to father what I have just said to you, mother – that for two months my faith has been pledged to Monsieur John Lebrenn, that I have sworn to him to have no other husband than he? And I shall add, before you, my father, and you, my mother, that I shall be true to my promise."

"Great God!" cried the advocate, stunned with amazement, "that miserable workman has dared to raise his eyes to my daughter! He has stolen my child from me! Death and damnation, I shall have vengeance!"

"You are in error, father; your daughter has not been stolen away," proudly returned Charlotte. "That *miserable* workingman in whose presence you have so many times argued against the privileges of birth, against the artificial distinctions which separate the classes in society – that *miserable* workingman whom you treated as a friend, an equal, when you judged his support necessary to your ambition – that *miserable* workingman placed his faith in the sincerity of your professions, father, he saw in me his equal – and his love has been as pure, as respectful as it has been deep – and devoted – and my heart – is given to him – "

"You are a brazen hussy!" yelled the lawyer, pale with rage. "Leave my presence! You disgrace my name!"

"On the contrary, father, I hope I do honor to your name, in putting into practise those principles of equality and fraternity whose generous promoter you have made yourself."

At that moment the noise of many voices was heard under the windows of the Desmarais apartment, crying enthusiastically: "Long live Citizen Desmarais! Long live the friend of the people! Long live our representative!" These eloquent testimonies of the popular affection for Monsieur Desmarais offered so strange a contradiction to the reproaches which he had just addressed to Charlotte, that under the impression of the contrast the lawyer, his wife and his daughter fell silent.

"Do you hear them, father?" Charlotte at last ventured. "These brave people believe, the same as I, in the sincerity of your principles of equality. They acclaim you as the friend of the people."

At the same instant Gertrude ran into the room breathless with excitement, exclaiming: "A troop of the vanquishers of the Bastille, with Monsieur John Lebrenn at their head, has halted before the house. They want monsieur to appear on the balcony and address them."

"Death of my life! This is too much," snarled the advocate, at the moment that new cries resounded from without:

"Long live Citizen Desmarais. Long live the friend of the people! Come out! Come out! Long live the Nation! Down with the King! Death to the aristocrats!"

"My friend, you can not hesitate. You will run the greatest danger by not appearing and saying a few good words to these maniacs. In bad fortune we must show a good heart," said Madam Desmarais, alarmed; then addressing Gertrude: "Quick, quick, open the window to the balcony."

CHAPTER XI

LIONS AND JACKALS

Gertrude hastened to execute her mistress's order, and revealed to the deputy's family St. Honoré Street, packed, as far as the eye could reach, with a dense crowd. The windows of the houses bordering on it were filled by their inhabitants, drawn thither by the commotion. The column of the vanquishers of the Bastille was stationed in front and to both sides of the Desmarais domicile; it was composed for the most part of men of the people, clad in their working clothes. Some carried guns, pikes, or swords; several among them were armed with the implements of their trade. All, bourgeois, mechanics, soldiers, acclaimed the victory of the people with the cry, a thousand times repeated:

"Long live the Nation!"

In the center of the column glowered two pieces of light artillery captured in the courtyard of the redoubtable prison. On the caisson of one of these cannon, erect, majestically leaning on a pike-staff from which floated the tricolor, stood a woman of massive stature, a red kerchief half concealing the heavy tresses which fell down upon her shoulders. Her dark robe disclosed her robust arms. She held her pike in one hand – in the other a shattered chain. Woman of the people as she was, she seemed the genius of Liberty incarnate.

To the rear of the cannon rested a cart trimmed with green branches and surrounded by men who bore at the end of long poles or of pikes chains, garrottes, gags, iron boots, iron corsets, pincers, and other strange and horrible instruments of torture gathered up in the subterranean chambers of the Bastille. In the car were three of the prisoners delivered by the people. One of these was the Provost of Beaumont, imprisoned fifteen years before for having denounced the famine agreement. Another, who seemed to have lost his reason in the sufferings of a long and drear captivity, was the Count of Solange, imprisoned by *lettre de cachet* during the reign of Louis XV. The last of the three prisoners was broken, bent to the ground, tottering. He lifted to heaven his colorless eyes – alas, the unfortunate man had become blind in his dungeon. It was the father of John Lebreun. Poor victim of tyranny! He feebly supported himself by the arm of his son, wounded though the latter was.

Such was the picture that met the gaze of advocate Desmarais as he stepped out upon the balcony of his dwelling, his wife and daughter on either side of him. Charlotte's first glances went in search of, and as soon found, John Lebreun. With a woman's intuition she divined that the aged figure beside him, snatched from the cells of the Bastille was indeed his father.

The appearance of advocate Desmarais and his family was greeted with a new outburst of acclaim:

"Long live the friend of the people!"

In stepping forth upon the balcony, Desmarais had yielded merely to policy. He made a virtue of necessity. Condescending, gracious, complaisant, he began by greeting with smile, look, and gesture the populace assembled beneath his windows. Then he bowed, and placed his hand on his heart as if to express by that pantomime the emotion, the gratitude, which he experienced at the demonstration of which he was the object.

Silence was re-established among the crowd. John Lebreun, still standing in the cart beside his father, addressed the attorney in a voice clear and sonorous:

"Citizen Desmarais, defender of the rights of the people, thanks to you, our representative in the National Assembly! Your acts, your speeches, have responded to all that we expected of you. Honor to the friend of the people!"

The advocate signified that he wished to reply. The tumult was hushed, and the deputy of the Third Estate delivered himself as follows:

"Citizens! my friends, my brothers! I can not find words in which to express the admiration your victory inspires me with. Thanks to your generous efforts, the most formidable rampart of despotism

is overthrown! Be assured, citizens, that your representatives know the significance of the taking of the Bastille. The Assembly has declared that the ministers and the councillors of his Majesty, whatever their rank in the state, are responsible for the present evils and those which may follow. Responsibility shall be demanded of the ministers and all functionaries!"

"Bravo! Long live Desmarais! Long live the Assembly! Long live the Nation! Death to the King! Death to the Queen! Down with the aristocrats!"

"Nothing could be more pleasing to me, citizens," continued Desmarais, "than the choice you have made of Citizen Lebrenn as the spokesman of the sentiments that animate you. Honor to this young and valiant artisan, the son of one of the victims rescued from the Bastille!"

This allocution, pronounced by advocate Desmarais with every appearance of great tenderness, moved the people. Tears dimmed the eyes of all. The father of John Lebrenn seized his son in his arms, and Charlotte, unable to restrain her tears, murmured as she cast a look of gratitude toward heaven, "Thanks to you, my God! My father is his true old noble self again. He sees the injustice of his opposition to John!"

When the emotion produced by his last words had somewhat subsided, advocate Desmarais resumed: "Adieu till we meet again, citizens, my friends – my brothers! I return to Versailles. The Assembly has despatched three of my colleagues and myself to learn at first hand how it fares with the good people of Paris. When our report is called for, we shall be ready. Long live the Nation!"

With a final farewell gesture to the throng, Desmarais quitted the balcony and re-entered his apartment. In a few moments the column took up its interrupted march, and disappeared. Almost immediately there disgorged itself tumultuously into St. Honoré Street a band of men of an aspect strangely contrasting with that of the populace just addressed by Monsieur Desmarais. Some were dressed in rags, others wore a garb less sordid, but nearly all bore on their faces the stamp of vice and crime. The band was composed of men without occupation; do-nothing workmen; debauched laborers; petty business men ruined by misconduct, become pickpockets, sharpers, infesters of houses of ill fame and other evil resorts; robbers and convicts, assassins – a hideous crowd, capable of every crime; an execrable crowd, whom our eternal enemies keep in fee and easily egg on to these saturnalia, for which the people is but too often held culpable; wretches in the hire of the priests, the nobles and the police.

At the head of these bandits marched a man with the face of a brigand, of gigantic stature and herculean frame, and conspicuously well clad. Once a "cadet," then a gaming-house proprietor, then usher of the Church of St. Medard, Lehiron, for such was the name of the leader of the band, had been expelled from his last employment for the theft of the poor-box. Around his waist a sash of red wool held two horse-pistols and a cutlass that had parted company with its sheath. His coat and the cuffs of his shirt rolled back to the elbow, he gesticulated wildly with his bare hands, which were clotted with blood. At the end of a pike he still bore the head of Monsieur Flesselles, and from time to time, while brandishing the hideous trophy, he would cry out in a stentorian voice:

"Long live the Nation! To the lamp-post with the aristocrats! Death to all the nobles!"

"Death to the enemies of the people! The aristocrats to the lamp-post!" repeated all the bandits, brandishing their pikes, their sabers, or their guns blackened with powder.

"To the lamp-post with the aristocrats!" also cried the shrill and piercing voice of an urchin who gave his hand to a miserably clad character, the man of the false beard of whom Desmarais had spoken. It was the Jesuit Morlet, and the boy his god-son, little Rodin. At the moment that the band hove in sight of the lawyer's dwelling, the Jesuit drew close to Lehiron, and spoke a few words to him in a low voice. The latter stopped, signed to his followers for silence and cried at the top of his leathern lungs:

"Death to the bourgeois! Death to the traitors! To the lamp-post with Desmarais!"

Then the band resumed its way; and Abbot Morlet, posted at the head of the troop, made haste to bring it up to the last straggling files of the vanquishers of the Bastille. Then, upon the carriage

of the cannon whence she dominated the throng, he beheld the woman with the red handkerchief and the dark robe. In spite of the change which her costume imparted to her features, the Jesuit was stupefied to recognize – Marchioness Aldini!

Barely had he recovered from his surprise when the Marchioness descended from the piece of artillery. As hastily, the Jesuit quitted his companions in order to trace her, and, if possible, clear up the suspicions which in his mind surrounded this one-time Marchioness, now heroine of the people. Little Rodin followed his dear god-father, and the two, elbowing their way through the people of the quarter, who were seized with surprise and affright at the murderous cries uttered by the sinister band which approached, inquired, as they went, for the beautiful dark woman coiffed in a red handkerchief who had just leaped down from the cannon – having, so the Abbot pretended, a message for her. Finally a woman haberdasher, drawn to the threshold of her booth, replied to Abbot Morlet's interrogations:

"Yes, the beautiful young woman you seek has entered house No. 17, along with our neighbor John Lebrenn. That is all I can tell you."

"Then the Lebrenn family lives in this street, my dear woman?"

"Certainly. Mother Lebrenn and her family occupy two rooms on the fourth floor of No. 17."

"Thank you for your information, my dear woman," replied the Jesuit, with difficulty concealing the joy that the unexpected discovery caused him. "Many thanks!"

"And so," continued the Abbot, "I recover the traces of that family whom we have lost from sight for over a century. What a lucky chance! Two woodcocks in one spring – Marchioness Aldini and the family of Lebrenn. An enemy spotted, is one-half throttled. Let us train our batteries to suit."

"Dear god-father," put in little Rodin at that moment, with a determined air, "I am not afraid to look at heads mowed off."

"My child," replied the Jesuit with fatherly pride and happiness, "it is not enough to have no fear; one must actually feel his heart grow lightened when he sees the enemies of our holy mother, the Church of Rome, put to death."

"Dear god-father, was Monsieur Flesselles, then, an enemy of our holy mother, the Church?"

"My child, the death of Monsieur Flesselles, innocent or guilty, was useful to the good cause."

Meanwhile, Lehiron's band, just then passing under the windows of Desmarais's home, continued to shriek, "Death to the enemies of the people! Death to the bourgeois! To the lamp-post with Desmarais!"

The cries had not yet reached the ears of the attorney, who had no sooner withdrawn from the balcony than his daughter, throwing herself into his arms, said to him in a voice broken with sobs of joy:

"Thanks, Oh, thanks, father, for what you have just said!"

"What are you thanking me for now?"

"For the noble utterances you have just addressed to Monsieur John Lebrenn," replied Charlotte delighted, not noticing the brusque transformation which came over the face of the advocate at her words.

"How! You have the presumption to abuse the necessity I found myself reduced to, in speaking a few words of good will to that laborer in order to save my house from pillage, and perhaps to protect my own life and that of my wife and daughter – you presume to abuse that necessity to oblige me to give my consent to your union with an ironsmith's apprentice? You are an unworthy daughter!"

"Then – your cordial words, your touching protestations, were but lies!" murmured the young girl, crushed by her father's rough speech. "It was all comedy and imposture!"

"Charlotte," continued Desmarais in a tone of harsh resolve, "cut short this passion which is a disgrace to all of us! I swear you shall never see that man again. To-morrow you leave Paris. It is my will."

"Father, my father – I implore you – revoke that sentence – "

"My dear friend," pursued Desmarais, addressing his wife and not heeding his daughter, "I shall delay for twenty-four hours my return to Versailles. Hasten all your preparations for the trip. We shall leave to-morrow morning. I shall take you along, as well as our daughter."

"Pity, father! Do not drive me to despair – "

"You know my will. Nothing can bend it."

"Cursed be this day," cried the young girl with indignation; "cursed be this day when you force me to forget the respect I owe a father. Helas! it is you, you yourself, father, who just now, this very hour, protested your love for the people, your disdain for the privileges of birth and wealth. And now you declare before me that your protestations were false, that you despise the people, fear them, hate them. The imposture and the lie drive me to rebel."

"Hold your tongue, unworthy minx! Do you not see the window is open, and that your imprudent words can be heard without? Have you resolved to get us all killed?" cried Desmarais, running to the window to close it.

It was just the minute that Lehiron's band was passing the house. At the instant that the lawyer took hold of the casement fastening to draw shut the window, over the rail of the balcony, at the height of his own countenance, there appeared the livid head of Flesselles, impaled on its pike. A cry of fear broke from Desmarais, and he recoiled from the sill, clapping his hands before his eyes to shut out the grisly spectacle. The band halted before the attorney's door. Anew the cries burst loose without:

"Long live the Nation!"

"Death to the enemies of the people!"

"To the lamp-post with the aristocrats! – to the lamp-post with Desmarais!"

The clamors seemed to come so pat upon the words of Charlotte, that Madam Desmarais, stricken with affright, threw herself on her knees in an attitude of prayer, clasped her hands, and stammered out an appeal to God.

"To the lamp-post with Desmarais! Death to the traitor!" shrieked Lehiron's band once more, and passed on its way. The cries of "Death!" faded away in the distance as Lehiron's troop followed in the wake of the conquerors of the Bastille. It was the pack of jackals following the lions.

Desmarais gradually recovered from the state of rigid fright in which he was plunged, and cried out to Charlotte in a voice trembling with repressed rage:

"Unnatural daughter! Parricide! Did you hear the cries of death hurled at your father by those cannibals of Paris, who carry in triumph the head of Flesselles? These men, who perhaps quite soon will have made your father undergo the same torture, are the friends, the brothers of John Lebreun. Your lover is, like them, an assassin. Horror upon all this revolted plebs!"

CHAPTER XII

REUNITED FROM THE BASTILLE

While advocate Desmarais was whelming his daughter with reproaches on the score of her love for John Lebreun, the latter was at his mother's knee in their modest lodgings on the fourth floor of the old house in St. Honoré Street. In the larger of the two rooms composing the family's apartments, were to be seen two beds. One had never been occupied for years, since the day Ronan Lebreun disappeared without a soul knowing what had become of him. The room also contained a sort of little bookshelf garnished with books printed with his own hand, a portable workbench at which John in the evenings finished up pieces belonging to his ironsmith's trade, tools, some little furniture, and a buffet of walnut-wood in which reposed the relics and legends of the family.

Madam, or Mother, Lebreun, as she was called in the neighborhood, was nearly sixty years of age. Domestic griefs, rather than years, had enfeebled and ruined her health. Her venerable countenance was of an extreme pallor, and sadly sunken. The poor woman held in her hands the head of her son, kneeling before her. The aged mother stroked it several times, saying in a voice thrilled with emotion:

"Dear boy, you have come back to me at last. I can now reassure myself on the state of your wound. Helas! how great was my anguish during all the time of that frightful combat. The little note you sent me after the taking of the Bastille indeed calmed a little my terrors for you, but without stilling them completely. I feared lest, out of tenderness, you sought to deceive me as to the gravity of your hurt. Now I am coming to myself from my fears, and yet I still must hold you in my arms. Dear and only child whom God has left to a poor widow – how sweet it is for a mother to embrace her son!"

"Come, good mother, I see your spirit is still troubled by the pangs of this morning. But are you quite sure you are a widow? Am I truly your only child?"

"Helas! have not your father and sister both disappeared? Are they not lost forever to your poor mother?"

"But why should they not return to us some day?"

"Dear boy, if they lived, your father and sister whom you love so much, would we not have heard some news of them, even if it were impossible for them to come to us?"

"You are right, good mother. But you presume that it would have been possible for them to have sent us some intelligence of their fate. May we not suppose, though, that father was thrown into some state prison, and that he was deprived of all communication with the outside? So sad a supposition has nothing strange in it."

"In that case, my child, the prison would have proven your father's tomb, so frail was his health. We could not dare to hope that he would be able to surmount the rigors of his captivity."

"But it might also be, good mother, that the hope of seeing us some day may have helped him to endure his sufferings."

"Do not essay, dear boy, to raise in my heart hopes, which, deceived too soon, will but plunge me back again into despair. My dear husband is indeed lost to me, helas! As to your sister, we may well believe we shall never see her more. She also is lost to us. Without doubt she has sought in death a refuge from her anguish, since the fatal revelation of her earlier life to her fiance, Sergeant Maurice."

"Nothing has come to light so far to confirm your apprehensions on the subject of these afflictions – dear, good mother – "

"If my poor girl is not dead – what can have been her lot? I shudder even to think of it – misery, or dishonor!"

"I do not wish, good mother, to hold out to you hopes, which, when deceived, will revive your sorrow and seriously compromise your health, perhaps your life. But I believe I can without danger accustom you to the idea that my sister still lives, and has not ceased to be worthy of your affection;

and also that father, after having languished long years in a prison pit, may still recover his liberty, and that we may see him. – That is a hope in my heart which I would cause you to share. Follow well my reasoning – "

"'Twould be too much happiness for me – I cannot believe it. And if I could believe it, I ask myself whether I have the strength to bear so much joy. Rapture can kill, as well as grief, my dear son."

"And so, dear mother, if such events are to be told, I shall have recourse to roundabout methods to make you acquainted with such un hoped-for news. If it were about father – for example – I would say, that the victorious people penetrated into the Bastille to deliver the persons thrown into the dungeons, and that, among them, we found one who resembled father; that we seized the prison registrars and made them search in their registers for the records of a prisoner who was very dear to me, as it might have chanced that my father was among the number; that, in one of these registers, I read the date, 'April 22, 1783,' and right after it, 'No. 1297 – incarcerated – upper tier – cell No. 18.'"

"April 22, 1783," repeated Madam Lebrenn pensively. "That is the day after your father disappeared."

"I would tell you that beside the date there was no name given for the prisoner, it being the usage to replace the name with a number. I would add, that, struck by the singular coincidence between the date and the time of father's disappearance, I went down to visit cell No. 18, as was indicated in the register – "

"And then?" exclaimed Madam Lebrenn feverishly, and with growing anxiety.

"The cell was empty. But they told me that the prisoner who occupied it was an old man grown blind, alas, during his confinement. I asked where they had taken the unfortunate man, and dashed off to seek him. Isn't this all interesting, mother?"

"Why do you break off your story? For I feel that your supposings are but preparations for some revelation that you are about to make. You look away from me – John, my boy, my dear boy!" cried Madam Lebrenn, reaching towards her son and making him turn his face up to her – "You weep! No more doubt of it – Lord God! the old man – was – he was – "

She could not finish. The word died on her lips, and she nearly swooned away. John, still kneeling before her, sustained her in his arms, saying: "Courage, good mother. Hear the end of my tale."

"Courage, say you? But you are deceiving me, then? It was not then – your father?"

"It was he! 'Twas indeed he whom I held in my arms. He lived – you shall see him soon. But, poor dear mother, have courage. We are not yet at the end of our trials."

"Since your father lives, courage is easy to me! Let them bring him to us quick!"

"Alas, you forget that in his dungeon father lost his sight. Besides, the weight of his irons, the humidity of his cell, have palsied, have paralyzed his limbs. He can hardly drag himself along."

"But he lives! Ah, well! His infirmities will render him more dear to us," cried Madam Lebrenn in lofty exaltation, and suddenly rising. "Let us go to meet him."

"One moment, good mother. They are bringing him to us. But I have still to prepare you for another piece of good fortune. You know the proverb, good mother, 'Good fortune never comes singly.' But, first, I want to acquaint you with the person who broke open father's cell, who freed him from his irons, and who bestowed upon him the simple cares that he long needed."

"Tell me, dear son, who was your father's liberator?"

"His liberator was a woman – an intrepid, heroic woman, who during the assault of the Bastille braved the fire of musketry and cannon and led the attackers, red flag in hand. Under a perfect hail of bullets she let down the drawbridge across one of the moats of the fortress, and was the first to run to the dungeons to free the prisoners. It was she who rescued father from his living grave."

"Blessed be that woman! I shall cherish her as a daughter!"

"That heroic woman, who is truly worthy of your love – is Victoria! Is that enough happiness for us? Father and sister, both have come home to your caresses. They are there, close to us, at our neighbor Jerome's, and await but the pre-arranged signal to come in."

And John Lebrenn, joining the action to the words, struck three blows on the wall.

The door flew open, and on the sill appeared father Lebrenn, leaning on one side on the arm of Victoria, on the other on that of neighbor Jerome. Madam Lebrenn, intoxicated with joy, flung herself into the arms of her husband and daughter.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LEBRENN FAMILY

Thus reunited, the Lebrenn family gave themselves up to those sweetest of reminiscences, the recollections of sorrows now no more. The father recounted to his wife and children the tortures of his long captivity. Victoria retold the events in which she had been an actor since she had left them, not neglecting her affiliation with the sect of the Voyants, or "Seeing Ones." Due tribute having been paid by the family to the civil cares of the day, the conversation turned upon their private interests.

John informed his father of his love for Charlotte Desmarais, and of the hope he cherished of soon uniting his destiny with hers. After listening attentively to his son, the old man said, in a voice marked with sadness:

"Alas, my dear John, I augur no good of your love. Advocate Desmarais is rich; he belongs to the bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie, like the nobility, has its arrogance, its haughtiness. I much doubt whether he will give his consent to the marriage."

"That would have been true before, good father," replied John. "But ideas have changed of late years; great progress has been made during your sad imprisonment. People and bourgeoisie are now but one party, united by the same interests, by the same hopes, and both resolved on ending the privileges of our enemies, royalty, the Church, and the nobility. The bourgeoisie has learned that in the struggle it has joined with the monarchy, it has but one support, the people. If it is the head, we are the arms. The Third Estate possesses the shining lights, the wealth; but we, of the seed of the people, we have the numbers, the force, the courage. And then, to accomplish the revolution, our co-operation is absolutely necessary to the bourgeoisie. They must count on the workingmen, the proletariat. We have the power and the right."

"Perhaps, my son. Yet, social prejudices are not effaced in a day. And for a long time to come, I fear, the bourgeois will see between himself and the artisan the same distance which separates him, the bourgeois, from the nobility."

"Nevertheless, my friend," interposed Madam Lebrenn, "Monsieur Desmarais has always received our son on a footing of equality, calling him friend, and inviting him to pass his evenings with him. He has heaped upon our son many marks of his gratitude."

"Marks of gratitude, Marianne? For what?" asked the blind man. "What service has our son done Monsieur Desmarais? Or is his friendship disinterested?"

"I did my best to insure his election to the States General," replied the young artisan.

"So," said the old man, thoughtfully, "advocate Desmarais owes his election to your efforts, to your exertions?"

"He owes it to his merit, to his value. I only suggested Monsieur Desmarais to those of our fellow citizens who had confidence in me, and all acclaimed him."

"In short, you powerfully aided in his election. I am no longer astonished that he treats you as a friend, an equal. But it is a far cry, my son, from words to acts. I doubt the sincerity of this lawyer's affection."

"That doubt would never enter your thoughts, good father, if you knew the excellent man. If you had heard him inveigh, as I have, against the distinctions of birth and fortune –"

"Perhaps he had in mind only the privileges of the nobility," observed Victoria, who until then had remained grave and silent. "The prejudices of the Third Estate are tenacious."

"I should add, dearest sister, that he idolizes his daughter so, that to see her happy, he would sacrifice all the prejudices of his class – even if he were still under their influence, which I can not believe. I am well assured of that."

"And his daughter is an angel," added Madam Lebrenn. "I have seen and can appreciate her."

"The excellence of our son's choice is not doubted," replied the old man, half convinced. "And, after all, it may be that Monsieur Desmarais does belong to that portion of the bourgeoisie which sees in the proletariat, disinherited for so many centuries, a brother to be guided and helped along the path of emancipation. If such is the case, my son, your marriage with Mademoiselle Desmarais may be consummated, and become the joy of my old age."

"Brother," asked Victoria, "has Mademoiselle Desmarais informed her family of this projected union?"

"At our last meeting, she assured me that she would soon broach the subject to her mother, and inform her that she had pledged me her faith, as I have mine to her. But I can not yet tell you whether the confidence has been made."

"Does Mademoiselle Desmarais seem to have any doubts as to the consent of her relatives?"

"Among those relatives there is an uncle, Hubert, a rich banker, who without doubt will oppose the project. This moneyed bourgeois entertains for the working class the most supreme contempt. But the violence of his opinions has brought about a rupture between him and Monsieur Desmarais. As to the latter and his wife, Mademoiselle Charlotte has no doubt of their consent, by reason of the affection and esteem they have always evinced for me."

"Brother," continued Victoria after a moment's reflection, "I counsel you, make your demand for the hand of Mademoiselle Charlotte this very day. I base my advice on urgent grounds. If Monsieur Desmarais really sees in you a friend, an equal, if his devotion to the people and the revolution is sincere, the glory you have won at the taking of the Bastille can not but plead in your favor; his consent will be given immediately. On the contrary, if his protestations of love for the people have been but a mask of hypocrisy, it is better to know at once how to regard him; in that case, he will repulse you, or will evade giving you a direct answer. It is not merely a question of your love, brother, but of our cause – of a grave responsibility that weighs upon you. Your friends placed their faith in you when you asked their votes for Monsieur Desmarais; you owe it to them, now that the occasion presents itself, to make a decisive test, and assure yourself whether the convictions expressed by Monsieur Desmarais are sincere. If he refuses you the hand of his daughter, it shows that he is with us from the lips only, not from the heart. In that case, it will be proven that advocate Desmarais is a hypocrite and a traitor! Would not then your duty, your honor, brother, demand that you unmask the double-dealer?"

"Nothing more just than what Victoria has said," declared the old man. "You should, my son, go this very day and lay your suit before Monsieur Desmarais."

John thought for an instant, and answered: "You are right, father. My line of conduct is mapped out for me. I go at once to Monsieur Desmarais's, and formally present my request for the hand of Charlotte."

"Brother," interposed Victoria, suppressing a sigh, "have you informed Monsieur Desmarais fully on our father's disappearance? He should know all that relates to that mournful event."

"Monsieur Desmarais knows that immediately upon the publication of a hand-bill by father, he disappeared, and that we believed him dead or shut up in some state prison. He even knows the contents of the pamphlet which father wrote, and often has he shed tears in my presence when speaking of the disgrace of which you were a victim at the hands of Louis XV."

A bitter smile contracted Victoria's lips, and she replied, "My father hid the truth in what he wrote, in order to stigmatize the first crime, and he threw a veil over the consequences of my dishonor. Have you raised the veil which covered my life? Did you speak of the series of assaults of which I was the victim?"

"Sister," answered John Lebrenn, "out of respect for our family, I did not inform Monsieur Desmarais of the consequences of that first royal dishonor. I merely told him that you had been snatched from us, the same as my father, and that we knew not what had become of you. My confidences did not extend beyond that."

"Your reserve was wise and prudent, dear brother. Continue to guard my secret from Monsieur Desmarais and his daughter. For them, as for all who know you, I must remain as dead."

"Let it be as you desire, sister. But the dissimulation weighs on my heart like an act of cowardice."

"The dissimulation is necessary to-day, brother, but it will not last forever. When you shall have a deeper knowledge of the character of your wife; after some years of marriage and motherhood shall have ripened her judgment, then, and only then, you may make to her a complete confidence of my past. Until then, I must remain dead to her, as to all – except you three and one other of our relatives, the Prince of Gerolstein, my initiator into the Voyants. Dead I shall be to the world, but living to you and to Franz of Gerolstein."

"This Franz of Gerolstein," asked Victoria's father, "is he not one of the princes of that sovereign house of Germany founded of old by the descendants of our ancestor Gaëlo the Pirate?"

"Yes, father; the heir to a reigning prince was to-day one of the most fearless attackers of the Bastille."

At this moment a knock was heard at the door.

"Enter," cried John, and to the astonished eyes of the Lebrenn family appeared Franz of Gerolstein. In the Prince, whom Victoria had just named, John recognized one of his fellow-combatants of the day.

"Franz, here is my brother, of whom I have often spoken to you," said Victoria, taking John's hand and pressing it into that of the Prince. "You are relatives – now be friends. You are both worthy, one of the other. Both march in the same path."

"My dear John – for so it is that friends and relatives of the same age should greet," answered Franz with cordial familiarity, affectionately closing in his own hand that of the young artisan, "I know through your sister all the good that can be thought of you. That will tell you how glad I am to meet you."

"I also, my dear Franz, am happy to find in you a relative and a friend," John made answer, no less affectionately than the Prince. "Chance has made you of the sovereign race, yet you fight for the freedom of the people."

"My dear John, I am, like you, a son of Joel, the brenn of the tribe of Karnak. More than once, across the ages, the republican ardor of the old Gallic blood has roused itself in my plebeian race – although, by an uncouth stroke of destiny, it has been muffled under a sovereignty and a grand-ducal crown."

"Aye, we are indeed of the same blood – your words, your acts prove it," said the blind father. "Your hand – let me also press your hand, my brave young man."

Franz stepped toward Monsieur Lebrenn. "I am deeply sensible of these marks of fatherly goodwill," he said. "They console me for the rigors of my own father, who has banished me from his presence and forbade me from his states."

"What can have been the cause of such severity!" rejoined the old man in surprise. "What is your crime?"

"My crime?" replied Franz, with a slight smile. "My crime consists in attaching scant weight to our sovereignty. I tried more than once to bring my father to more just, more modest appreciation of our origin. 'Did not our family,' I said to him, 'come into its power through the audacity of an adventurer? May the earth lie light on our ancestor Gaëlo! But he was the companion and pupil of old Rolf, a frightful bandit, who, each spring, came to ravage the banks of the Loire and the Seine.' My father's answer was that all the crowned heads of the world, big or little, were sprung from no less savage a beginning. To which I retorted that there would come the day when the people, enlightened as to the origin of their pretended masters, would tire of being the exploitable property, the forced laborers, the chattels of a few royal families whose founders were fit for the galleys or the gibbet; and that I feared for kings, princes, emperors and Popes lest, by some terrible reversal of things

here below, the people, driven to the limit of endurance, should treat them as their august founders deserved, and the most of them to this very day deserve to be treated."

"In good sooth," said John Lebrenn, laughing, "that language was surely severe for a Prince to hold – and to monarchs!"

"So, my dear John, my father grew furious at my language. In fine, I concluded by urging him to set a great example to the other princes of the Germanic Confederation, by laying aside his grand-duchy. 'Lay aside,' I said to him, 'a power stained with crime in its very origin, and lead the people of your states and the other German principalities to unite in a republic like the cantons of the Swiss, or the provinces of the Netherlands. The Poles, the Hungarians, the Moldavians, the Wallachians, enslaved by Prussia, by Russia and by Austria, but trained to republicanism by their old elective customs, will soon be attracted by the example and the cry of liberty! Then the three last powerful despotisms of Europe – Prussia, Austria, and Russia – will find themselves hemmed in, threatened by free peoples, and we shall soon have an end of these last lairs of royalty!'"

"That was preparing for the future!" the old man exclaimed. "The United States of Europe! The Universal Republic!"

"But my father preferred to hang to his throne," continued Franz. "Then convinced of the futility of my appeals, and holding the duty of a citizen in precedence over that of a son, I passed from word to action. With all my power and by every means at my disposal I propagated in Germany, its cradle, the society of the Illuminati; my father banished me."

"Your account of yourself, Monsieur Gerolstein, deepens still more the esteem in which I needs must hold you," nodded the old man.

"These words of regard are doubly precious, Monsieur Lebrenn. They shall add their bonds to those of the relationship already existent between us. It is in the name of those very bonds that I am about to reveal to you one of the motives of my visit – a cordial offer of my services. It is a blood-relation, it is a friend who speaks, Monsieur Lebrenn; do not then, I beg of you, yield to a susceptibility in itself honorable, but perhaps exaggerated. You were a printer. For long your labor provided for the wants of your family. But now you have lost your sight in prison; you are feeble. Madam Lebrenn is old. What are to be your resources against the material needs of existence?"

"My health, thanks to God, is not so weakened that I can no longer work," replied Madam Lebrenn brightly. "The presence of my husband will double my strength."

"And I, mother," added John, "am I not here by you? Reassure yourself, Franz, my father and mother shall want for nothing. We are, nevertheless, deeply sensible of your offer. We thank you, but we decline, firmly."

"John, allow me to interrupt you," began the Prince. "I know from your sister what an industrious and skilful workman you are. But, please you, let us look at the situation together. Have you been able to go to your shop for the last four days? Considering the great events close at hand, of which the taking of the Bastille is but the precursor and sign, can you count on the full disposition of your time? The struggle once engaged between the nation and the royal power, will it not continue impetuous, implacable? Is it at a season when the liberty of the people trembles in the balance that you ought to abandon the field of battle? And still your family must live, and it can only live by your daily labor."

"Often have I said," exclaimed Victoria, "that the people has never had the time to complete the revolutions it began! or else, if they were accomplished promptly, decisively and overwhelmingly, the time has always been lacking to defend the conquest, to maintain it, consolidate it, and fructify it. The people's enemies, on the other hand, gentlemen of leisure, free from care, kings, priests, nobles or tax-farmers, have awaited, under cover, the certain hour to ravish from the people the benefits of its short-lived conquest."

"Alas, it is but too true," assented her father. "The time has always been lacking – the time and the money."

"Such is the fatal verity!" continued Gerolstein. "Would that verity could convince the people that if they can, which is rarely the case, make some little savings from their meager pay, it is not at the tavern they should spend them. For those savings of the worker should, when the day arrives, insure to him a portion of the necessary leisure to emancipate himself. And if he has been able to put aside nothing, he is in error to yield to an exaggerated scruple of delicacy and repulse the aid fraternally offered to him by his friends in order that he may be assured one of the means to clinch his victory."

"A singular occurrence which I witnessed this morning," responded the young artisan, "strikingly reinforces your argument. One of my friends, a journeyman carpenter, and several others of our comrades, were gathered at break of day in the neighborhood of the Bastille, awaiting the signal for the attack. A man simply clad, and with an open countenance, accosted them: 'Brothers,' said he, 'you go to-day to fight for your liberty. It is your duty. But to-day you will not go to your shops, and will earn nothing. If you have families, how will they live to-morrow? If you are bachelors, what will you live on yourselves? Allow then, one of your unknown friends to come to your aid as a brother. It is not an alms that I offer; I only assure you your leisure for this great day, by delivering you from your cares for the morrow.'"

"That 'unknown friend' was the banker Anacharsis Clootz, the treasurer of the Voyants, and rich enough in his own name to aid our brothers for a long time to come," explained Franz in an undertone to Victoria, without interrupting John, who continued:

"My comrades accepted the offer so delicately made, without much hesitation."

"Now, Monsieur Lebrenn, can you still shrink from accepting, as John does, my tenders of service?"

"No, Monsieur Gerolstein, neither I nor my son will hesitate any further in accepting your generous offer, should there arise any necessity of falling back upon it," replied the father of the house.

"John," said Victoria, suddenly, "it is growing late. Go at once to Monsieur Desmarais, who is liable at any moment to leave for Versailles. Your plan must not be altered."

"True," answered the young man with a shudder. "The project is now doubly important. I must to it without delay."

"My friends, you know advocate Desmarais, deputy of the Third Estate in the States General?" asked Franz of Gerolstein. "He is reputed a good citizen and a friend of the revolution."

"We all believe that Monsieur Desmarais is not one of those suspicious and craven bourgeois who tremble at the revolution," John answered, as he made toward the door. Then he returned – "Till we meet again, Franz, I hope; meseems we are already old friends."

"Franz will await here the result of your visit, brother," said Victoria.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BOURGEOIS UNMASKED

Monsieur Desmarais, still affected by the cries uttered by Lehiron's mob and unable to account for the apparently sudden revulsion of the sentiments entertained for him by the people, was earnestly conversing with his wife and her brother, Monsieur Hubert. The latter he had summoned to his side to consult on the weighty resolves he felt forced to take, both on the score of his daughter, and on the line of policy which he should adopt to ride the gathering political storm.

Monsieur Hubert, Desmarais's brother-in-law and a rich banker of Paris, was a very honest man, in the accepted sense of honesty in the commercial jargon; that is to say, he scrupulously fulfilled his engagements, and never loaned his money at higher rates than the law allowed. At heart he was dry; his spirit was jealous and sinister. A man of inflexible opinions, he nursed an equal aversion for the clergy, the nobility, and the proletariat. He regarded the Third Estate as called to reign under the nominal authority of a constitutional head, an emperor or king, whom he called a "pig in clover," in imitation of the English; the intervention of the people in public affairs he considered the height of absurdity. Monsieur Hubert lived in the St. Thomas of the Louvre quarter, a quarter hostile to the revolution, where he had recently been promoted to the grade of commander of the battalion. This battalion, called the "Daughters of St. Thomas of the Louvre," was almost entirely composed of royalists. The banker was about fifty years of age; of slight build, one could see in his physiognomy, in his glance, that in him nervous force supplied the place of physical energy. At this moment he was plunged in a deep silence. His sister and Monsieur Desmarais seemed to hang with an uneasy curiosity on the result of the financier's reflections. The latter at length seemed to have reached the end of his cogitation, for he raised his head and said sardonically:

"In the light of your confidences, dear brother-in-law, I can only remind you that four months ago I told you you were wrong to let yourself be dragged into what you called the 'cause of the people.' My sincerity caused a sort of break between us, but at your first call, you see me back again. My previsions have been fulfilled. To-day the populace has been unchained, and I see you all struck with fright at the cries of death that have rung in your ears."

"My dear Hubert," replied Desmarais, restraining his impatience, but interrupting the financier, "please, do not let us concern ourselves with politics now. We begged you to come to our aid with your advice; you put to one side our disagreement; we thank you. So please you then, help us to recall to her senses our unworthy daughter, who is madly smitten with an ironsmith's apprentice, our neighbor, whom you have several times met in our house."

"Very well then, my dear Desmarais; let us put aside politics for the moment. Nevertheless, since we are concerned with the unworthy love of my niece for that artisan, I must, indeed, recall to your mind that I have often reproached you for your intimacy with the young fellow. To-day, a grave peril menaces you. Your regrets are tardy."

"My dear Hubert, we waste precious time in vain recriminations of the past. Unfortunately, what is done, is done. Let us speak, I pray you, of the present. My wife and I, in order to cut short this attachment of Charlotte for John Lebrenn, have decided to take our daughter with us to Versailles. What do you think of that resolution?"

"That it will not accomplish the object you seek. Versailles is too near to Paris. If your man is as persevering as enamored – not of Charlotte, but of her fortune, for, do not mistake, the fellow is after nothing but her dower – he will find a way to meet her. My advice would be to send Mademoiselle Charlotte, instantly, a hundred leagues from Paris, to throw this lover off the track. Send her, say, to Lyons, to our cousin Dusommier; my sister will accompany her and remain beside her until this puppy-love is forgotten. A month or two will do for that."

"Your advice, brother, seems wise. But I fear that Charlotte will not consent to the trip."

"Heavens, sister! Is paternal authority an empty word! A flightabout of seventeen years to dare disobey the orders of her parents? That is not probable, surely. Have some strength."

"But it is well to be prepared for everything. Let us suppose this case – she refuses to obey – "

"In that case, brother-in-law, willy-nilly, bundle Mademoiselle Charlotte into the stage for Lyons – then, whip up, coachman!"

Just then Gertrude the servant entered and said: "Monsieur John Lebreun desires to speak with monsieur on a very pressing matter. He is in the vestibule."

"What! The wretch still has the audacity to present himself here!" cried Hubert, purple with rage.

"He does not know that my daughter has revealed their engagement; and besides – a while ago – " stammered Desmarais, turning red with confusion, "I had to give him a cordial greeting."

"Yes, brother," said Madam Desmarais, coming to the aid of her husband, "a while ago, a column returning from the Bastille, commanded by John Lebreun, halted before our house, shouting 'Long live Citizen Desmarais! Long live the friend of the people!'"

"And so, I had to bow to necessity," acknowledged the lawyer. "I was forced to harangue the insurgents."

"Wonderful, brother-in-law, wonderful!" retorted Hubert, with a burst of cutting laughter. "The lesson and the punishment are complete!"

"My friend – if you receive this young man, be calm, I conjure you," said Madam Desmarais uneasily to the lawyer. "Refuse him politely."

"Death of my life! my poor sister, have you not a drop of blood in your veins?"

"Brother, I beg of you, do not speak so loud. John Lebreun is even now, perhaps, in the dining room."

"Ah, heaven, if he is there – so much the better! And since no one here dares speak outright to one of the famous conquerors of the Bastille, I take it upon myself," cried Hubert still louder, his eyes glaring with anger, and starting for the door of the room.

But Madam Desmarais, alarmed and suppliant, seized the financier by the arm, exclaiming in a trembling voice, "Brother, I beg you! Oh, God, have pity on us!"

Hubert yielded to the prayers of his sister and stopped just as Desmarais, emerging from his reverie, said to his wife with a sigh of relief, "Dear friend, I have hit upon quite a plausible way, in case Monsieur Lebreun has the impudence to ask for our daughter's hand, to reject his demand without giving him anything to be offended at. I shall refuse him without irritating him."

"Another cowardice that you are meditating," cried Hubert, exasperated. "Let me receive your workingman!"

"I thank you, brother-in-law, for your offer. Please leave me alone. I shall know how to guard my dignity." Then, addressing Gertrude.

"Show Monsieur Lebreun in."

"We shall leave you, my friend," said Madam Lebreun to her husband. "Come, brother, let us find Charlotte. I count on your influence to dissuade her from this match, and to bring her back to herself."

Hubert took the arm of his sister, and left the room; but not without saying to himself as he did so, "By heaven, I shall not lose the opportunity of speaking my mind to that workingman, if only for the honor of the family. I shall have my chance to talk."

As the wife and brother-in-law of lawyer Desmarais disappeared through one of the side-doors of the room, John Lebreun was shown in by Gertrude through the principal entrance. Desmarais, at the sight of John, controlled and hid his anger under a mask of cordial hospitality. He took two steps to meet the young man, and clasped him affectionately by the hand:

"With what pleasure do I see you again, my dear friend! Your hurt, I hope, is not serious? We were quite alarmed about you."

"Thanks to God, my wound is slight; and I am truly touched by the interest you show in me."

"Nothing surprising, my dear John. Do you not know that I am your friend?"

"It is just to throw myself upon your friendship that I have come to see you."

"Well, well! And what is it?"

"It is my duty at this solemn moment to answer you without circumlocution, monsieur," said John Lebreun in a voice filled with emotion. "I love your daughter. She has returned my love, and I am come to ask of you her hand."

"What do I hear!" exclaimed advocate Desmarais, feigning extreme surprise.

"Mademoiselle Charlotte, I am certain, will approve the request that I now prefer to you, and which accords with the sentiments she has shown me."

"So, my dear John," continued the attorney with a paternal air that seemed to augur the best for the young workman, "my daughter and you – you love, and you have sworn to belong to each other? So stands the situation?"

"Six months ago, Monsieur Desmarais, we pledged ourselves to each other."

"After all, there is nothing in this love that should surprise me," continued Desmarais, as if talking to himself. "Charlotte has a hundred times heard me appreciate, as they deserve to be, the character, the intelligence, the excellent conduct of our dear John. She knows that I recognize no social distinction between man and man, except only that of worth. All are equal in my eyes, whatever the accidents of their birth or fortune. Nothing more natural – I should rather say, nothing more inevitable – than this love of my daughter for my young and worthy friend."

"Ah, monsieur," cried the young mechanic, his eyes filling with tears and his voice shaken with inexpressible gratitude, "you consent, then, to our union?"

"Well!" replied Monsieur Desmarais, continuing to affect imperturbable good-fellowship, "if the marriage pleases my daughter, it shall be according to her desire. I would not go against her wishes."

"Oh, please, monsieur, ask mademoiselle at once!"

"It is needless, my dear John, perfectly needless; for, between ourselves, a thousand circumstances until now insignificant now flock to my memory. There is no necessity for my questioning my daughter Charlotte to know that she loves you as much as you love her, my young friend. I am already convinced of it!"

"Hold, monsieur – pardon me, I can hardly believe what I hear. Words fail me to express my joy, my gratitude, my surprise!"

"And what, my dear John, have you to be surprised at?"

"At seeing this marriage meet with not a single objection on your part, monsieur. I am astonished, in the midst of my joy. The language so touching, so flattering, in which you frame your consent, doubles its value to me."

"Good heaven! And nothing is more simple than my conduct. Neither I nor my wife – I answer to you for her consent – can raise any objection to your marriage. Is it the question of fortune? I am rich, you are poor – what does that matter? Is the value of men measured by the franc mark? Is not, in short, your family as honorable, in other words, as virtuous as mine, my dear John? Are not both our families equally without reproach and without stain? Are not – "

And Desmarais stopped as if smitten with a sudden and terrible recollection. His features darkened, and expressed a crushing sorrow. He hid his face in his hands and murmured:

"Great God! What a frightful memory! Ah, unhappy young man! Unhappy father that I am!"

Apparently overcome, Desmarais threw himself into an arm-chair, still holding his hands before his eyes as if to conceal his emotion. Stunned and alarmed, John Lebreun gazed at the lawyer with inexpressible anguish. A secret presentiment flashed through his mind, and he said to Charlotte's father as he drew closer to him, "Monsieur, explain the cause of the sudden emotion under which I see you suffering."

"Leave me, my poor friend, leave me! I am annihilated, crushed!"

John Lebrenn, more and more uneasy, contemplated Charlotte's father in silent anguish, and failed to notice that one of the side doors of the room was half-opened by Monsieur Hubert, who warily put his head through the crack, muttering to himself, "While my sister and her daughter are in their apartment, let me see what is going on here, where my intervention may come in handy."

After a long silence which John feared to break, advocate Desmarais rose. He pretended to wipe away a tear, then, stretching out his arms to John, he said in a smothered voice:

"My friend, we are very unfortunate."

The young artisan, already much moved by the anxieties the scene had aroused, responded to Desmarais's appeal. He threw himself into the latter's arms, saying solicitously:

"Monsieur, what ails you? I know not the cause of the chagrin, which, all so sudden, seems to have struck you; but, whatever it be, I shall fight it with all my spirit."

"Your tender compassion, my friend, gives me consolation and comfort," said Desmarais in a broken voice, pressing John several times to his heart; and seeming to make a violent effort to master himself, he resumed in firmer tones, "Come, my friend, courage. We shall need it, you and I, to touch upon so sad a matter."

"Monsieur, I know not what you are about to say, and yet I tremble."

"Ah, at least, my dear John, our friendship will still be left to us. It will remain our refuge in our common sorrow."

"But to what purpose?"

Perceiving out of the corner of his eye the nonplussed countenance of John Lebrenn, who stood pale and speechless, advocate Desmarais heaved another lamentable sigh, pulled out his handkerchief and again buried his face in his hands.

"What the devil is my brother-in-law getting at?" exclaimed Hubert to himself, cautiously introducing his head again through the half-open door, and observing the young artisan. The latter, dejected, his head bowed, his gaze fixed, was in a sort of daze, and searched in vain in his troubled brain for the true significance of Desmarais's lamentations. Finally, desirous at any price to escape from the labyrinth of anxiety that tortured his soul and filled his heart with anguish, he said falteringly to the lawyer:

"Monsieur, it is impossible for me to picture the apprehension with which I am tortured. I adjure you, in the name of the friendship you have up to this moment shown me, to explain yourself clearly. What is this cause for our common sorrow? You have just appealed to my courage; I have courage. But, I pray you, let me at least know the blow with which I, with which we, are threatened!"

"You are right, my dear John. Excuse my weakness. Let us face the truth like men of heart, howsoever hard it may be." Desmarais took the hands of the young artisan in his own and contemplated him with an expression of fatherly tenderness. "You would have rendered certain the happiness of my only child, of that I am sure. But this marriage is impossible!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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