DUMAS ALEXANDRE

BALSAMO, THE MAGICIAN; OR, THE MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN

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Balsamo, the Magician; or, The Memoirs of a Physician

Дюма А.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE GRAND MASTER OF THE SECRET SOCIETY

On the left bank of the Rhine, near the spot where the Selz rivulet springs forth, the foothill ranges rise of many mountains, of which the bristling humps seem to rush northerly like herds of frightened buffaloes, disappearing in the haze. These mountains tower over a deserted region, forming a guard around one more lofty than the rest, whose granite brow, crowned with a ruined monastery, defies the skies. It is Thunder Mount.

On the sixth of May, 1770, as the great river wavelets were dyed in the rainbow hues of the setting sun, a man who had ridden from Maintz, after a journey through Poland, followed the path out of Danenfels Village until it ended, and, then, alighting and leading his steed, tied it up in the pine woods.

"Be quiet, my good *Djerid* (javelin)," said the horseman to the animal with this Arabian name which bespoke its blood, and its speed; "and good-bye, if we never meet again."

He cast a glance round him as if he suspected he were overheard.

The barb neighed and pawed with one foot.

"Right, Djerid, the danger is around us."

But as if he had made up his mind not to struggle with it, the venturesome stranger drew the charges from a pair of splendid pistols and cast the powder and bullets on the sward before replacing them in the holsters. He wore a steel-hilted sword which he took off with the belt, and fastened it to the stirrup leather so as to hang from the saddle-horn point down.

These odd formalities being done, he ungloved, and searching his pockets produced nail-scissors and pocket-knife, which he flung over his shoulder without looking to see whither they went.

Drawing the longest possible breath, he plunged at random into the thicket, for there was no trace of a path.

He was a man about thirty, taller than the average, but so wonderfully well built that the utmost strength and skill seemed to circulate in his supple and nervy limbs. He wore a black velvet overcoat with gilt buttons; the flaps of an embroidered waistcoat showed below its lowest buttons, and the buckskin riding breeches defined legs worthy to be a sculptor's models; the elegant feet were cased in patent leather boots.

His countenance was a notable mixture of power and intelligence, with all the play of Southern races; his glance, able to display any emotion, seemed to pierce any one on whom it fell with beams that sounded the very soul. His cheeks had been browned by a sun hotter than that of France. His mouth was large but finely shaped, and parted to reveal magnificent teeth, all the whiter from his dark complexion. His hand was small but muscular; his foot long but fine.

Scarcely had he taken a dozen steps within the glade before he heard faint footsteps. He rose on tiptoe and perceived that unseen hands had unhitched Djerid and were leading him away. He frowned slightly, and a faint smile curled his full cheeks and choicely chiseled lips.

He continued into the heart of the forest.

For a space the twilight guided him, but soon that died out, and he stood in gloom so dense that he had to stop lest he blundered blindly.

"I reached Danenfels from Maintz," he said, aloud, "as there was a road. I reached this forest as there was a path: I am here as there was some light: but I must stop now as I have no sight."

Scarcely had he spoken, in a dialect part French, part Sicilian, than a light flashed out only fifty paces off.

"Thanks! I will follow the light as long as it leads."

The light at once moved onward, regularly and steadily, like a stage lamp managed by the lime-light operator.

At a hundred paces, a breath in the adventurer's ear made him wince.

"Turn and you die!" came this whisper.

"All right," answered the stranger.

"Speak, and you die!" whispered a voice on the left-hand.

He bowed without speaking.

"But," said a voice seeming to issue from the bowels of the earth, "if you are afraid, go back to the plain, by which it will be clear that you are daunted, and renounce your errand."

The traveler waved his hand to imply that he was going ahead, and ahead he went.

But it was so late and the shade so deep that he stumbled during the hour the magic light preceded him, but he did not murmur or show any tremor in fear, while he heard not a breath.

All of a sudden, the light went out!

He had passed through the woodland, for on lifting his eyes, he could see a few stars glitter on the darksome sky.

He kept on in the same direction till he saw loom up the somber mass of the ruins of a castle – its spectre. At the same time his foot met its fallen stones.

A clammy thing wound itself round his forehead and sealed his eyes. He could no longer see even the shadows. It was a wet linen cloth. It must have been an expected thing, for he made no resistance to being blindfolded. But he put forth his hand silently as a blinded man naturally does to grope. The gesture was understood, for on the instant a cold, dry, bony hand clutched his fingers. He knew it was a skeleton's, but had it possessed feeling, it must have owned that his own hand no more trembled.

For a hundred yards the seeker was dragged forward rapidly.

All at once the bandage was plucked aloof, and he stopped; he had reached the top of the Thunder Mount.

Before him rose the moldy, mossy steps of the portico of the old Castle of Donnerberg. On the first slab stood the phantom with the osseous hand which had guided him thither. From head to foot a long shroud enwrapped it; through a slit the dead eyes peered without luster. The fleshless hand pointed into the ruins where the goal seemed to be a hall too high up to be viewed, but with the collapsed ceiling flickering with a fickle light.

The traveler nodded in consent. Slowly the ghost mounted the steps one by one, till amid the ruins. The man followed with the same solemn and tranquil pace regulating his walk, and he also entered.

Behind him slammed the principal door as noisily as a ringing bronze gate.

The phantom guide had paused on the threshold of a round hall hung with black and illumined with greenish hues of three lamps.

"Open your eyes," said the ghastly guide.

"I see," replied the other, stopping ten paces from him.

Drawing a double-edged sword from his shroud with a swift and haughty gesture, the phantom smote with it a brazen column which boomed a note like a gong.

Immediately, all around, the slabs of the hall floor rose up, and countless ghosts like the guide, stole in with drawn swords and took posts on steps where they stood like statues on their pedestals, cold and motionless. They stood out against the sable drapery.

Higher than the steps was a dais for seven chairs; on these six ghosts took place, leaving one seat vacant; they were chiefs.

"What is our number, brothers?" challenged one of the six rising in the middle.

"Three hundred is the right tally," answered the spectres, with one voice thundering through the hall and dying amid the black hangings.

"Three hundred," said the presiding chief, "representing each ten thousand associates; three hundred swords worth three millions of daggers. What do you want, stranger?" he demanded, turning to the intruder.

"To see the Light," was the rejoinder.

"The paths leading to the Mountain of Fire are hard and toilsome – fear you not to tread them?"

"I fear nothing."

"You can not turn back once you start. Bear this in mind."

"I mean to stop only at the goal."

"Are you ready to take the oath?"

"Say it and I will repeat."

The president lifted his hand and slowly and solemnly uttered these words:

"In the name of the Master Carpenter, swear to break all carnal bonds tying you to whomsoever, and above all to those to whom you may have pledged faith, obedience or service."

The new-comer in a firm voice repeated what was pronounced.

"From this out," continued the president, "you are absolved from plights made to native land and rulers. Swear to reveal to your new leader what you have seen and done, heard or learned, read or guessed, and further to spy and discover all passing under your eyes."

On his ceasing the novice repeated.

"Honor and respect the Water of Death," went on the president without a change of voice, "as a prompt means in skilled hands, sure and needful, to purge the globe by the death or insanity of those who strive to stifle the Truth or snatch it from our hands."

An echo could not more faithfully repeat the vow.

"Avoid Spain, Naples, and all accursed lands; and moreover the temptation to let out what you learn and hear – for the lightning is less swift to strike than we with our unseen but inevitable blade, wheresoever you may flee. Now, live in the name of the Supernal Three!"

In spite of the final threat, no emotion could be descried on the novice's face, as he reiterated the words with as calm a tone as he used at the outset.

"Now, deck the applicant with the sacred ribbon," said the president.

Two shrouded figures placed on the bent brow of the stranger a sky-blue ribbon with silver letters and female figures; the ends of the badge were tied behind on the nape. They stepped aside, leaving him alone again.

"What do you want?" asked the chief officer.

"Three things: the iron hand to strangle tyranny; the fiery sword to drive the impure from earth; and the diamond scales to weigh the destinies of mankind."

"Are you prepared for the tests?"

"Who seeks to be accepted, should be ready for everything."

"The tests!" shouted the ghosts.

"Turn round," said the president.

The stranger faced a man, pale as death, bound and gagged.

"Behold a traitor who revealed the secrets of the Order after taking such an oath as you did. Thus guilty, what think you he deserves?"

"Death."

"Death!" cried the three hundred sword-bearers.

Instantly the unhappy culprit, despite superhuman resistance, was dragged to the back of the hall. The initiated one saw him wrestling and writhing in the torturers' hands and heard his voice hissing past the gag. A poniard flashed in the lamplight like lightning, and after it fell, with a slapping sound of the hilt, the dead body landed heavily on the stone floor.

"Justice has been executed," observed the stranger, turning round to the terrifying circle, whose greedy eyes had gazed on him out of their grave clothes.

"So you approve of the execution?"

"Yes, if the slain were truly guilty."

"And would you drink the downfall of any one who sold the secrets of this Ancient Association?"

"In any beverage."

"Bring hither the cup," said the arch-officer.

One of the two executioners drew near with a skull brimming with a warm and ruddy liquid. The stranger took the goblet by its brass stem and said, as he held it up: "I drink to the death of all false brothers." Lowering the cup to his lips, he drained it to the last drop, and calmly returned it to the giver.

A murmur of astonishment ran around the assemblage, as the phantoms glanced at one another.

"So far well. The pistol," said the chief.

A ghost stole up to the speaker holding a pistol in one hand, and powder and ball in the other, without the novice seeming to deign a glance in that direction.

"Do you promise passive obedience to the brotherhood, even though it were to recoil on yourself?"

"Whoso enters the household of the Faithful is no longer his own property."

"Hence you will obey any order given you?"

"Straightway."

"Take this firearm and load it."

"What am I to do with it?"

"Cock it."

The stranger set the hammer, and the click of it going on full cock was plainly heard in the deep stillness.

"Clap the muzzle to your temple," ordered the president, and the suppliant obeyed without hesitating.

The silence deepened over all; the lamps seemed to fade, and the bystanders had no more breath than ghosts.

"Fire!" exclaimed the president.

The hammer fell and the flint emitted sparks in the pan; but it was only the powder there which took fire and no report followed its ephemeral flame.

An outcry of admiration burst from nearly every breast, and the president instinctively held out his hand toward the novice.

But two tests were not enough for some doubters who called out: "The dagger!"

"Since you require it, bring the dagger," said the presiding officer.

"It is useless," interrupted the stranger, shaking his head disdainfully.

"What do you mean?" asked several voices.

"Useless," repeated the new-comer, in a voice rising above all the others, "for you are wasting precious time. I know all your secrets, and these childish proofs are unworthy the head of sensible beings. That man was not murdered; the stuff I drank was wine hid in a pouch on his chest; the bullet and powder I loaded the trick-pistol with fell into a hollow in the stock when the weapon was cocked. Take back the sham arm, only good to frighten cowards. Rise, you lying corpse; you cannot frighten the strong-minded."

A terrible roar shook the hall.

"To know our mysteries, you must be an initiate or a spy," said the president.

"Who are you?" demanded three hundred voices together, as a score of swords shone in the grip of the nearest and were lowered by the regular movement of trained soldiers toward the intruder's bosom.

Calm and smiling, he lifted his head, wound round with the sacred fillet, and replied:

"I am the Man for the Time."

Before his lordly gaze the blades lowered unevenly as they on whom it fell obeyed promptly or tried to resist the influence.

"You have made a rash speech," said the president, "but it may have been spoken without your knowing its gravity."

"I have replied as I was bound," said the other, shaking his head and smiling.

"Whence come you, then?" questioned the chief.

"From the quarter whence cometh the Light," was the response.

"That is the East, and we are informed that you come from Sweden."

"I may have passed through there from the Orient," said the stranger.

"Still we know you not. A second time, who are you?"

"I will tell you in a while, since you pretend not to know me; but, meantime, I will tell you who you are."

The spectres shuddered and their swords clanked as they shifted them from the left to the right hands again to point them at his breast.

"To begin with you," said the stranger, pointing to the chief, "one who fancies himself a god and is but a forerunner – the representative of the Swedish Circles – I will name you, though I need not name the others. Swedenborg, have not the angels, who speak familiarly with you, revealed that the Man you expect was on the way?"

"True, they told me so," answered the principal, parting his shroud the better to look out.

This act, against the rule and habit during the rites, displayed the venerable countenance and snowy beard of an old man of eighty.

"And on your left," continued the stranger, "sits the representative of Great Britain, the chief of the Scottish Rites. I salute your lordship. If the blood of your forefathers runs in your veins, England may hope not to have the Light die out."

The swords dropped, for anger was yielding to surprise.

"So this is you, captain?" went on the stranger to the last leader on the president's left; "in what port have you left your handsome cruiser, which you love like a lass. The *Providence* is a gallant frigate, and the name brings good luck to America."

"Now for your turn, Prophet of Zurich," he said to the man on the right of the chief. "Look me in the face, since you have carried the science of Physiognomy to divination, and tell me if you do not read my mission in the lines of my face?"

The person addressed recoiled a step.

"As for you, descendant of Pelagius, for a second time the Moors must be driven out of Spain. It would be an easy matter if the Castilians have not lost the sword of the Cid."

Mute and motionless dwelt the fifth chief: the voice seemed to have turned him to stone.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" inquired the sixth delegate, anticipating the denouncer who seemed to forget him.

"Yea, to you I have to say what the Son of the Great Architect said to Judas, and I will speak it in a while."

So replied the traveler, fastening on him one of those glances which pierced to the heart.

The hearer became whiter than his shroud, while a murmur ran round the gathering, wishful to call the accused one to account.

"You forget the delegate of France," observed the chief.

"He is not among you – as you well know, for there is his vacant place," haughtily made answer the stranger. "Bear in mind that such tricks make them smile who can see in the dark; who act in spite of the elements, and live though Death menaces them."

"You are a young man to speak thus with the authority of a divinity," resumed the principal. "Reflect, yourself – impudence only stuns the ignorant or the irresolute."

"You are all irresolute," retorted the stranger, with a smile of supreme scorn, "or you would have acted against me. You are ignorant, since you do not know me, while I know ye all. With boldness alone I succeed against you, but boldness would be vain against one with irresistible power."

"Inform us with a proof of this power," said the Swedenborg.

"What brings ye together?"

"The Supreme Council."

"Not without intention," went on the visitant, "have you come from all quarters, to gather in the sanctuary of the Terrible Faith."

"Surely not," replied the Swede; "we come to hail the person who has founded a mystic empire in the Orient, uniting the two hemispheres in a commonalty of beliefs, and joining the hands of human brotherhood."

"Would you know him by any token?"

"Heaven has been good enough to unveil it by the intermediation of its angels," answered the visionary.

"If you hold this secret alone and have not revealed it to a soul, tell it aloud, for the time has come."

"On his breast," said the chief of the Illuminati, "he wears a diamond star, in the core of which shines the three initials of a phrase known to him alone."

"State those initials."

"L. P. D."

With a rapid stroke the stranger opened his overcoat, coat and waistcoat and showed on the fine linen front, gleaming like flame, a jeweled plate on which flared the three letters in rubies.

"HE!" ejaculated the Swede: "can this be he?"

"Whom all await?" added the other leaders, anxiously.

"The Hierophant of Memphis – the Grand Copt?" muttered the three hundred voices.

"Will you deny me now?" demanded the Man from the East, triumphantly.

"No," cried the phantoms, bowing to the ground.

"Speak, Master," said the president and the five chiefs, bowing, "and we obey."

The visitor seemed to reflect during the silence, some instants long.

"Brothers," he finally said, "you may lay aside your swords uselessly fatiguing your arms, and lend me an attentive ear, for you will learn much in the few words I address you. The source of great rivers is generally unknown, like most divine things: I know whither I go, but not my origin. When I first opened my eyes to consciousness, I was in the sacred city of Medina, playing about the gardens of the Mufti Suleyman. I loved this venerable old man like a father, but he was none of mine, and he addressed me with respect though he held me in affection. Three times a day he stood aside to let another old man come to me whose name I ever utter with gratitude mixed with awe. This august receptacle of all human wisdom, instructed in all things by the Seven Superior Spirits, bore the name of Althotas. He was my tutor and master, and venerable friend, for he is twice the age of the oldest here."

Long shivers of anxiety hailed this speech, spoken in solemnity, with majestic gesticulation and in a voice severe while smooth.

"One day in my fifteenth year, in the midst of my studies, my old master came to me with a phial in hand. 'Acharat,' he said – it was my name – 'I have always told you that nothing is born to die

forever in this world. Man only lacks clearness of mind to be immortal. I have found the beverage to scatter the clouds, and next will discover that to dispel death. Yesterday I drank of this distillation: I want you to drink the rest to-day.'

"I had extreme trust in my teacher but my hand trembled in taking this phial, like Eve's in taking the apple of Life.

"'Drink,' he said, smiling. And I drank.

"'Sleep,' he said, laying his hands on my head. And I slept.

"Then all that was material about me faded away, and the soul that solitarily remained lived again, like Pythagoras, for centuries through which it had passed. In the panorama unfolded before it, I beheld myself in previous existence, and, awaking, comprehended that I was more than man."

He spoke with so strong a conviction, and his eyes were fixed heavenward with so sublime an expression that a murmur of admiration hailed him: astonishment had yielded to wonder, as wrath had to astonishment.

"Thereupon," continued the Enlightened One, "I determined to devote my existence at present, as well as the fruit of all my previous ones, to the welfare of mankind. Next day, as though he divined my plan, Althotas came to me and said:

"'My son, your mother died twenty years ago as she gave birth to you; for twenty years your sire has kept hidden by some invincible obstacle; we will resume our travels and if we meet him, you may embrace him – but not knowing him.' You see that all was to be mysterious about me, as with all the Elect of heaven.

"At the end of our journeys, I was a Theosophist. The many cities had not roused my wonderment. Nothing was new to me under the sun. I had been in every place formerly in one or more of my several existences. The only thing striking me was the changes in the peoples. Following the March of Progress, I saw that all were proceeding toward Freedom. All the prophets had been sent to prop the tottering steps of mankind, which, though blind at birth, staggers step by step toward Light. Each century is an age for the people. Now you understand that I come not from the Orient to practice simply the Masonic rites, but to say: Brothers, we must give light to the world. France is chosen to be the torch-bearer. It may consume, but it will be a wholesome conflagration, for it will enlighten the world. That is why France has no delegate here; he may have shrunk from his duty. We want one who will recoil from nothing – and so I shall go into France. It is the most important post, the most perilous, and I undertake it."

"Yet you know what goes on there?" questioned the president.

Smiling, the man called Acharat replied: "I ought to know, for I have been preparing matters. The king is old, timid, corrupt, but less antiquated and hopeless of cure than the monarchy he represents. Only a few years further will he sit on the throne. We must have the future laid out from when he dies. France is the keystone of the arch. Let that stone be wrenched forth by the six millions of hands which will be raised at a sign from the Inner Circle, and down will fall the monarchical system. On the day when there shall be no longer a king in France, the most insolently enthroned ruler in Europe will turn giddy, and spring of his own accord into the gulf left by the disappearance of the throne of Saint Louis."

"Forgive the doubt, most venerated Master," interrupted the chief on the right, with the Swiss accent, "but have you taken all into calculation?"

"Everything," replied the Grand Copt, laconically.

"In my studies, master, I was convinced of one truth – that the characteristics of a man were written on their faces. Now, I fear that the French people will love the new rulers of the country you speak of – the sweet, clement king, and the lovely amiable queen. The bride of the Prince Royal, Marie Antoinette, is even now crossing the border. The altar and the nuptial bed are being made ready at Versailles. Is this the moment to begin your reformation?"

"Most illustrious brother," said the supreme chief to the Prophet of Zurich, "if you read the faces of man, I read the features of the future. Marie Antoinette is proud and will obstinately continue the conflict, in which she will fall beneath our attacks. The Dauphin, Louis Auguste, is good and mild; he will weaken in the strife and perish like his wife, and with her. But each will fall and perish by the opposite virtue and fault. They esteem each other now – we will not give them time to love one another, and in a year they will entertain mutual contempt. Besides, brothers, why should we debate on the point whence cometh the light, since it is shown to me? I come from out of the East, like the shepherds guided by the star, announcing a new birth of man. To-morrow, I set to work, and with your help I ask but twenty years to kill not a mere king but a principle. You may think twenty years long to efface the idea of royalty from the hearts of those who would sacrifice their children's lives for the little King Louis XV. You believe it an easy matter to make odious the lilyflowers, emblem of the Bourbon line, but it would take you ages to do it.

"You are scattered and tremble in your ignorance of one another's aspirations. I am the master-ring which links you all in one grand fraternal tie. I tell you that the principles which now you mutter at the fireside; scribble in the shadows of your old towers; confide to one another under the rose and the dagger for the traitor or the imprudent friend who utters them louder than you dare – these principles may be shouted on the housetops in broad day, printed throughout Europe and disseminated by peaceful messengers, or on the points of the bayonets of five hundred soldiers of Liberty, whose colors will have them inscribed on their folds. You tremble at the name of Newgate Prison; at that of the Inquisition's dungeon; or of the Bastile, which I go to flout at – hark ye! We shall all laugh pity for ourselves on that day when we shall trample on the ruins of the jails, while our wives and children dance for joy. This can come to pass only after the death of monarchy as well as of the king, after religious powers are scorned, after social inferiority is completely forgotten, and after the extinction of aristocratic castes and the division of noblemen's property. I ask for a generation to destroy an old world and rear a new one, twenty seconds in Eternity, and you think it is too much!"

A long greeting in admiration and assent hailed the somber prophet's speech. It was clear that he had won all the sympathy of the mysterious mandatories of European intellect. Enjoying his victory just a space, the Grand Copt resumed:

"Let us see now, brothers, since I am going to beard the lion in his den, what you will do for the cause for which you pledged life, liberty and fortune? I come to learn this."

Silence, dreadful from its solemnity, followed these words. The immobile phantoms were absorbed in the thoughts which were to overthrow a score of thrones. The six chiefs conferred with the groups and returned to the president to consult with him before he was the first to speak.

"I stand for Sweden," he said. "I offer in her name the miners who raised the Vasas to the throne – now to upset it, together with a hundred thousand silver crown pieces."

Drawing out tablets, the Hierophant wrote this offer. On the president's left spoke another:

"I am sent by the lodges of England and Scotland. I can promise nothing for the former country, which is burning to fight us Scots. But in the name of poor Erin and poor Scotia, I promise three thousand men, and three thousand crowns yearly."

"I," said the third speaker, whose vigor and rough activity was betrayed beneath the winding sheet fettering such a form. "I represent America, where every stick and stone, tree and running brook, and drop of blood belong to rebellion. As long as we have gold in our hills, we will send it ye; as long as blood to shed, we will risk it; but we cannot act till we ourselves are out of the yoke. We are so divided as to be broken strands of a cable. Let a mighty hand unite but two of the strands, and the rest will twist up with them into a hawser to pull down the crowned evils from their pride of place. Begin with us, most venerable master. If you want the French to be delivered from royalty, make us free of British domination."

"Well spoken," said the Hierophant of Memphis. "You Americans shall be free, and France will lend a helping hand. In all languages, the Grand Architect hath said: 'Help each other!' Wait a while. You will not have long to bide, my brother."

Turning to the Switzer, he drew these words from him:

"I can promise only my private contribution. The sons of our republic have long supplied troops to the French monarchy. They are faithful bargainers, and will carry out their contracts. For the first time, most venerated Master, I am ashamed of their loyalty."

"Be it so, we must win without them and in their teeth. Speak, Spain!"

"I am poor," said the grandee, "and have but three thousand brothers to supply. But each will furnish a thousand *reals* a year. Spain is an indolent land, where man would doze though a bed of thorns."

"Be it so," said the Grand Master. "Speak, you, brother."

"I speak for Russia and the Polish clubs. Our brothers are discontented rich men, or serfs doomed to restless labor and untimely death. In the name of the latter, owning nothing, not even life, I can promise nothing; but three thousand rich men will pay twenty louis a head every year."

The other deputies came forward by turns, and had their offers set down in the Copt's memorandum book as they bound themselves to fulfill their plight.

"The word of command," said the leader, "already spread in one part of the world, is to be dispensed through the others. It is symbolized by the three letters which you have seen. Let each one wear them in the heart as well as on it, for we, the Sovereign Master of the shrines of the Orient and the West, we order the ruin of the Lilies. L. P. D. signifies *Lilia Pedibus Destrue*– Trample Lilies Under! I order you of Spain, Sweden, Scotland, Switzerland and America, to Trample down the Lilies of the Bourbon race."

The cheering was like the roar of the sea, under the vault, escaping by gusts down the mountain gorges.

"In the name of the Architect, begone," said the Master. "By stream and strand and valley, begone by the rising of the sun. You will see me once more, and that will be on the day of triumph. Go!"

He terminated his address with a masonic sign which was understood solely by the six chiefs, who remained after the inferiors had departed. Then the Grand Copt took the Swede aside.

"Swedenborg, you are really an inspired man, and heaven thanks you by my voice. Send the cash into France to the address I shall give you."

The president bowed humbly, and went away amazed by the second sight which had unveiled his name.

"Brave Fairfax," said the Master to another, "I hail you as the worthy son of your sire. Remind me to General Washington when next you write to him."

Fairfax retired on the heels of Swedenborg.

"Paul Jones," went on the Copt to the American deputy, "you have spoken to the mark, as I expected of you. You will be one of the heroes of the American Republic. Be both of you ready when the signal is flying."

Quivering as though inspired by a holy breath, the future capturer of the *Serapis* likewise retired.

"Lavater," said the Master to the Swiss, "drop your theories for it is high time to take up practice; no longer study what man is, but what he may become. Go, and woe to your fellow countrymen who take up arms against us, for the wrath of the people is swift and devouring even as that of the God on high!"

Trembling, the physiognomist bowed and went his way.

"List to me, Ximenes," said the Copt to the Spaniard; "you are zealous, but you distrust yourself. You say, Spain dozes. That is because no one rouses her. Go and awake her; Castile is still the land of the Cid."

The last chief was skulking forward when the head of the Masons checked him with a wave of the hand.

"Schieffort, of Russia, you are a traitor who will betray our cause before the month is over; but before the month is out, you will be dead."

The Muscovite envoy fell on his knees; but the other made him rise with a threatening gesture, and the doomed one reeled out of the hall.

Left by himself in the deserted and silent hall, the strange man buttoned up his overcoat, settled his hat on his head, pushed the spring of the bronze door to make it open, and went forth. He strode down the mountain defiles as if they had long been known to him, and without light or guide in the woods, went to the further edge. He listened, and hearing a distant neigh, he proceeded thither. Whistling peculiarly, he brought his faithful Djerid to his hand. He leaped lightly into the saddle, and the two, darting away headlong, were enwrapped in the fogs rising between Danenfels and the top of the Thunder Mountain.

CHAPTER II
THE LIVING-WAGON IN THE STORM

A week after the events depicted, a living-wagon drawn by four horses and conducted by two postboys, left Pont-a-Mousson, a pretty town between Nancy and Metz. Nothing like this caravan, as show people style the kind, had ever crossed the bridge, though the good folks see theatrical carts of queer aspect.

The body was large and painted blue, with a baron's insignia, surmounting a J. and a B., artistically interlaced. This box was lighted by two windows, curtained with muslin, but they were in the front, where a sort of driver's cab hid them from the vulgar eye. By these apertures the inmate of the coach could talk with outsiders. Ventilation was given this case by a glazed skylight in the "dickey," or hind box of the vehicle, where grooms usually sit. Another orifice completed the oddity of the affair by presenting a stovepipe, which belched smoke, to fade away in the wake as the whole rushed on.

In our times one would have simply imagined that it was a steam conveyance and applauded the mechanician who had done away with horses.

The machine was followed by a led horse of Arab extraction, ready saddled, indicating that one of the passengers sometimes gave himself the pleasure and change of riding alongside the vehicle.

At St. Mihiel the mountain ascent was reached. Forced to go at a walk, the quarter of a league took half an hour.

Toward evening the weather turned from mild and clear to tempestuous. A cloud spread over the skies with frightful rapidity and intercepted the setting sunbeams. All of a sudden the cloud was stripped by a lightning flash, and the startled eye could plunge into the immensity of the firmament, blazing like the infernal regions. The vehicle was on the mountain side when a second clap of thunder flung the rain out of the cloud; after falling in large drops, it poured hard.

The postboys pulled up. "Hello!" demanded a man's voice from inside the conveyance, "what are you stopping for?"

"We are asking one another if we ought to go on," answered one postillion with the deference to a master who had paid handsomely.

"It seems to me that I ought to be asked about that. Go ahead!"

But the rain had already made the road downward slippery.

"Please, sir, the horses won't go," said the elder postillion.

"What have you got spurs for?"

"They might be plunged rowels deep without making the balky creatures budge; may heaven exterminate me if – "

The blasphemy was not finished, as a dreadful lightning stroke cut him short. The coach was started and ran upon the horses, which had to race to save themselves from being crushed. The equipage flew down the sloping road like an arrow, skimming the precipice.

Instead of the traveler's voice coming from the vehicle, it was his head.

"You clumsy fellows will kill us all!" he said. "Bear to the left, deuce take ye!"

"Oh, Joseph," screamed a woman's voice inside, "help! Holy Madonna, help us!"

It was time to invoke the Queen of Heaven, for the heavy carriage was skirting the abysm; one wheel seemed to be in the air and a horse was nearly over when the traveler, springing out on the pole, grasped the postboy nearest by the collar and slack of the breeches. He raised him out of his boots as if he were a child, flung him a dozen feet clear, and taking his place in the saddle, gathered up the reins, and said in a terrifying voice to the second rider:

"Keep to the left, rascal, or I shall blow out your brains!"

The order had a magical effect. The foremost rider, haunted by the shriek of his luckless comrade, followed the substitute impulse and bore the horses toward the firm land.

"Gallop!" shouted the traveler. "If you falter, I shall run right over you and your horses."

The chariot seemed an infernal machine drawn by nightmares and pursued by a whirlwind.

But they had eluded one danger only to fall into another.

As they reached the foot of the declivity, the cloud split with an awful roar in which was blended the flame and the thunder.

A fire enwrapped the leaders, and the wheelers and the leaders were brought to their haunches as if the ground gave way under them. But the fore pair, rising quickly and feeling that the traces had snapped, carried away their man in the darkness. The vehicle, rolling on a few paces, stopped on the dead body of the stricken horse.

The whole event had been accompanied by the screams of the woman.

For a moment of confusion, none knew who was living or dead.

The traveler was safe and sound, on feeling himself; but the lady had swooned. Although he guessed this was the case, it was elsewhere that he ran to aid – to the rear of the vehicle.

The led horse was rearing with bristling mane, and shaking the door, to the handle of which his halter was hitched.

"Hang the confounded beast again!" muttered a broken voice within; "a curse on him for shaking the wall of my laboratory." Becoming louder, the same voice added in Arabic: "I bid you keep quiet, devil!"

"Do not wax angry with Djerid, master," said the traveler, untying the steed and fastening it to the hind wheel; "he is frightened, and for sound reasons."

So saying, he opened a door, let down the steps, and stepped inside the vehicle, closing the door behind him.

He faced a very aged man, with hooked nose, gray eyes, and shaking yet active hands. Sunken in a huge armchair, he was following the lines of a manuscript book on vellum, entitled "The Secret Key to the Cabinet of Magic," while holding a silver skimmer in his other hand.

The three walls – for this old man had called the sides of the living-wagon "walls" – held bookcases, with shelves of bottles, jars and brass-bound boxes, set in wooden cases like utensils on shipboard so as to stand up without upsetting. The old man could reach these articles by rolling the easy chair to them; a crank enabled him to screw up the seat to the level of the highest. The compartment was, in feet, eight by six and six in height. Facing the door was a furnace with hood and bellows. It was now boiling a crucible at a white heat, whence issued the smoke by the pipe overhead exciting the mystery of the villagers wherever the wagon went through.

The whole emitted an odor which in a less grotesque laboratory would have been called a perfume.

The occupant seemed to be in bad humor, for he grumbled:

"The cursed animal is frightened: but what has he got to disturb him, I want to know? He has shaken my door, cracked my furnace, and spilt a quarter of my elixir in the fire. Acharat, in heaven's name, drop the beast in the first desert we cross."

"In the first place, master," returned the other smiling, "we are not crossing deserts, for we are in France; and next, I would not abandon a horse worth a thousand louis, or rather priceless, as he is of the breed of Al Borach."

"I will give you a thousand over and over again. He has lost me more than a million, to say nothing of the days he has robbed me of. The liquor would have boiled up without loss of a drop, in a little longer, which neither Zoroaster nor Paracelsus stated, but it is positively advised by Borri."

"Never mind, it will soon be boiling again."

"But that is not all – something is dropping down my chimney."

"Merely water – it is raining."

"Water? Then my elixir is spoilt. I must renew the work – as if I had any time to spare!"

"It is pure water from above. It was pouring, as you might have noticed."

"Do I notice anything when busy? On my poor soul, Acharat, this is exasperating. For six months I have been begging for a cowl to my chimney – I mean this year. You never think of it, though you are young and have lots of leisure. What will your negligence bring about? The rain to-day or the wind to-morrow confound my calculations and ruin all my operations. Yet I must hurry, by Jove! for my hundredth year commences on the fifteenth of July, at eleven at night precisely, and if my elixir of life is not then ready, good-night to the Sage Althotas."

"But you are getting on well with it, my dear master, I think."

"Yes, by my tests by absorption, I have restored vitality to my paralyzed arm. I only want the plant mentioned by Pliny, which we have perhaps passed a hundred times or crushed under the wheels. By the way, what rumbling is that? Are we still going?"

"No; that is thunder. The lightning has been playing the mischief with us, but I was safe enough, being clothed in silk."

"Lightning? Pooh! wait till I renew my life and can attend to other matters. I will put a steel bridle on your electric fluid and make it light this study and cook my meals. I wish I were as sure of making my elixir perfect – "

"And our great work – how comes it on?"

"Making diamonds? That is done. Look there in the glass dish."

Joseph Balsamo greedily caught up the crystal saucer, and saw a small brilliant amid some dust.

"Small, and with flaws," he said, disappointed.

"Because the fire was put out, Acharat, from there being no cowl to the chimney."

"You shall have it; but do take some food."

"I took some elixir a couple of hours ago."

"Nay, that was at six this morning, and it is now the afternoon."

"Another day gone, fled and lost," moaned the alchemist, wringing his hands; "are they not growing shorter? Have they less than four-and-twenty hours?"

"If you will not eat, at least take a nap."

"When I sleep, I am afraid I shall never wake. If I lie down for two hours, you will come and call me, Acharat," said the old man in a coaxing voice.

"I swear I will, master."

At this point they heard the gallop of a horse and a scream of astonishment and disquiet.

"What does that mean?" questioned the traveler, quickly opening the door, and leaping out on the road without using the steps.

CHAPTER III
THE LOVELY LORENZA

The woman who was in the fore part of the coach, in the cab, remained for a time deprived of sense. As fear alone had caused the swoon, she came to consciousness.

"Heavens!" she cried, "am I abandoned helpless here, with no human being to take pity upon me?"

"Lady," said a timid voice at hand, "I am here, and I may be some help to you."

Passing her head and both arms out of the cab by the leather curtains, the young woman, rising, faced a youth who stood on the steps.

"Is it you offered me help? What has happened?"

"The thunderbolt nearly struck you, and the traces were broken of the leading pair, which have run off with the postboy."

"What has become of the person who was riding the other pair?" she asked, with an anxious look round.

"He got off the horses as if all right and went inside the other part of this coach."

"Heaven be praised," said she, breathing more freely. "But who are you to offer me assistance so timely?"

"Surprised by the storm, I was in that dark hole which is a quarry outlet, when I suddenly saw a large wagon coming down at a gallop. I thought it a runaway, but soon saw it was guided by a mighty hand, but the lightning fell with such an uproar that I feared I was struck and was stunned. All seemed to have happened in a dream."

The lady nodded as if this satisfied her, but rested her head on her hand in deep thought. He had time to examine her. She was in her twenty-third year, and of dark complexion, but richly colored with the loveliest pink. Her blue eyes sparkled like stars as she appealed to heaven, and her hair fell in curls of jet, unpowdered contrary to the fashion, on her opal neck.

"Where are we?" she suddenly inquired.

"On the Strasburg to Paris highway, near Pierrefittes, a village. Bar-le-Duc is the next town, with some five thousand population."

"Is there a short cut to it?"

"None I ever heard of."

"What a pity!" she said in Italian.

As she kept silent toward him, the youth was going away, when this drew her from her reverie, for she called him for another question.

"Is there a horse still attached to the coach?"

"The gentleman who entered, tied it to the wheel."

"It is a valuable animal, and I should like to be sure it is unhurt; but how can I go through this mud?"

"I can bring it here," proposed the stripling.

"Do so, I prithee, and I shall be most grateful to you."

But the barb reared and neighed when he went up.

"Do not be afraid," said the lady: "it is gentle as a lamb. Djerid," she called in a low voice.

The steed recognized the mistress's voice, for it extended its intelligent head toward the speaker, while the youth unfastened it. But it was scarcely loose before it jerked the reins away and bounded up to the vehicle. The woman came forth, and almost as quickly leaped on the saddle, with the dexterity of those sylphs in German ballads who cling to riders while seated on the crupper. The youth sprang toward her but she stopped him with an imperative wave of the hand.

"List to me. Though but a boy, or because you are young, you have humane feelings. Do not oppose my flight. I am fleeing from a man I love, but I am above all a good Catholic. This man would destroy my soul were I to stay by him, as he is a magician whom God sent a warning to by the lighting. May he profit by it! Tell him this, and bless you for the help given me. Farewell!"

Light as the marsh mist, she was carried away by the gallop of Djerid. On seeing this, the youth could not restrain a cry of surprise, which was the one heard inside the coach.

CHAPTER IV
GILBERT

The alarmed traveler closed the coach door behind him carefully, and looked wistfully round. First he saw the young man, frightened. A flash of lighting enabled him to examine him from head to foot, an operation habitual to him on seeing any new person or thing. This was a springald of sixteen, small, thin and agile; his bold black eyes lacked sweetness but not charm: shrewdness and observation were revealed in his thin, hooked nose, fine lip and projecting cheek bones, while the rounded chin stuck out in token of resolution.

"Was that you screamed just now, – what for?" queried the gentleman.

"The lady from the cab there rode off on the led horse."

The traveler did not make any remark at this hesitating reply; not a word; he rushed to the fore part and saw by the lightning that it was empty.

"Sblood!" he roared in Italian, almost like the thunder peal accompanying the oath.

He looked round for means of pursuit, but one of the coach-horses in chase of Djerid would be a tortoise after a gazelle.

"Still I can find out where she is," he muttered, "unless – "

Quickly and anxiously he drew a small book from his vest pocket, and in a folded paper found a tress of raven hair.

His features became serene, and apparently he was calmed.

"All is well," he said, wiping his streaming face. "Did she say nothing when she started?"

"Yes, that she quitted you not through hate but fear, as she is a Christian, while you – you are an atheist, and miscreant, to whom God sought to give a final warning by this storm."

"If that is all, let us drop the subject."

The last traces of disquiet and discontent fled the man's brow. The youth noticed all this with curiosity mingled with keen observation.

"What is your name, my young friend?" inquired the traveler.

"Gilbert."

"Your Christian name, but – "

"It is my whole name."

"My dear Gilbert, Providence placed you on my road to save me from bother. I know your youth compels you to be obliging: but I am not going to ask anything hard of you – only a night's lodging."

"This rock was my shelter."

"I should like a dwelling better where I could get a good meal and bed."

"We are a league and a half from Pierrefitte, the next village."

"With only two horses that would take two hours. Just think if there is no refuge nearer."

"Taverney Castle is at hand, but it is not an inn."

"Not lived in?"

"Baron Taverney lives there – "

"What is he?"

"Father of Mademoiselle Andrea de Taverney – "

"Delighted to hear it," smilingly said the other: "but I want to know the kind of man he is."

"An old nobleman who used to be wealthy."

"An old story. My friend, please take me to Baron Taverney's."

"He does not receive company," said the youth, in apprehension.

"Not welcome a stray gentleman? He must be a bear."

"Much like it. I do not advise your risking it."

"Pooh! The bear will not eat me up alive."

"But he may keep the door closed."

"I will break it in; and unless you refuse to be my guide – "

"I do not; I will show the way."

The traveler took off the carriage lamp, which Gilbert held curiously in his hands.

"It has no light," he said.

"I have fire in my pocket."

"Pretty hard to get fire from flint and steel this weather," observed the youth.

But the other drew a silver case from his pocket, and opening the lid plunged a match into it; a flame sprang up and he drew out the match aflame. This was so sudden and unexpected by the youth, who only knew of tinder and the spark, and not of phosphorus, the toy of science at this period, that he started. He watched the magician restore the case to his pocket with greed. He would have given much to have the instrument.

He went on before with the lighted lamp, while his companion forced the horses to come by his hand on the bridle.

"You appear to know all about this Baron of Taverney, my lad!" he began the dialogue.

"I have lived on his estate since a child."

"Oh, your kinsman, tutor, master?"

At this word the youth's cheek colored up, though usually pale, and he quivered.

"I am no man's servant, sir," he retorted. "I am son of one who was a farmer for the baron, and my mother nursed Mademoiselle Andrea."

"I understand; you belong to the household as foster-brother of the young lady – I suppose she is young?"

"She is sixteen."

He had answered only one of the two questions, and not the one personal to him.

"How did you chance to be on the road in such weather?" inquired the other, making the same reflection as our own.

"I was not on the road, but in the cave, reading a book called 'The Social Contract,' by one Rousseau."

"Oh, found the book in the lord's library?" asked the gentleman with some astonishment.

"No, I bought it of a peddler who, like others of his trade, has been hawking good books hereabouts."

"Who told you 'The Contract' was a good book?"

"I found that out by reading it, in comparison with some infamous ones in the baron's library."

"The baron gets indecent books, always costly, in this hole?"

"He does not spend money on them as they are sent him from Paris by his friend the Marshal Duke of Richelieu."

"Oh! of course he does not let his daughter see such stuff?"

"He leaves them about, but Mademoiselle Andrea does not read them," rejoined the youth, drily.

The mocking traveler was briefly silent. He was interested in this singular character, in whom was blended good and evil, shame and boldness.

"How came you to read bad books?"

"I did not know what they were until read; but I kept on as they taught me what I was unaware of. But 'The Contract' told me what I had guessed, that all men are brothers, society badly arranged, and that instead of being serfs and slaves, individuals are equal."

"Whew!" whistled the gentleman, as they went on. "You seem to be hungry to learn?"

"Yes, it is my greatest wish to know everything, so as to rise – "

"To what station?"

Gilbert paused, for having a goal in his mind, he wanted to keep it hidden.

"As far as man may go," he answered.

"So you have studied?"

"How study when I was not rich and was cooped up in Taverney? I can read and write; but I shall learn the rest somehow one of these days."

"An odd boy," thought the stranger.

During the quarter of an hour they had trudged on, the rain had ceased, and the earth sent up the sharp tang replacing the sulphurous breath of the thunderstorms.

"Do you know what storms are?" questioned Gilbert, after deep musing.

"Thunder and lightning are the result of a shock between the electricity in the air and in the earth," he said, smiling.

"I do not follow you," sighed Gilbert.

The traveler might have supplied a more lucid explanation but a light glimmered through the trees.

"That is the carriage-gateway of Taverney," said the guide.

"Open it."

"Taverney gate does not open so easily as that."

"Is it a fort? Knock, and louder than that!"

Thus emboldened, the boy dropped the knocker and hung on to the bell, which clanged so lustily that it might be heard afar.

"That is Mahon barking," said the youth.

"Mahon? He names his watchdog after a victory of his friend my Lord Richelieu, I see," remarked the traveler.

"I did not know that. You see how ignorant I am," sighed Gilbert.

These sighs summed up the disappointments and repressed ambition of the youth.

"That is the goodman Labrie coming," said the latter at the sound of footsteps within.

The door opened, but at the sight of the stranger the old servant wanted to slam it.

"Excuse me, friend," interposed the traveler; "don't shut the door in my face. I will risk my travel-stained garb, and I warrant you that I shall not be expelled before I have warmed myself and had a meal. *I* hear you keep good wine, eh? You ought to know that?"

Labrie tried still to resist, but the other was determined and led the horses right in with the coach, while Gilbert closed the gates in a trice. Vanquished, the servant ran to announce his own defeat. He rushed toward the house, shouting:

"Nicole Legay!"

"Nicole is Mademoiselle Andrea's maid," explained the boy, as the gentleman advanced with his usual tranquility.

A light appeared among the shrubbery, showing a pretty girl.

"What is all this riot; what's wanted of me?" she challenged.

"Quick, my lass," faltered the old domestic, "announce to master that a stranger, overtaken by the storm, seeks hospitality for the night."

Nicole darted so swiftly toward the building as to be lost instantly to sight. Labrie took breath, as he might be sure that his lord would not be taken by surprise.

"Announce Baron Joseph Balsamo," said the traveler; "the similarity in rank will disarm your lord."

At the first step of the portal he looked round for Gilbert, but he had disappeared.

CHAPTER V
TAVERNEY AND HIS DAUGHTER

Though forewarned by Gilbert of Baron Taverney's poverty, Baron Balsamo was not the less astonished by the meanness of the dwelling which the youth had dubbed the Castle. On the paltry threshold stood the master in a dressing gown and holding a candle.

Taverney was a little, old gentleman of five-and-sixty, with bright eye and high but retreating forehead. His wretched wig had lost by burning at the candles what the rats had spared of its curls. In his hands was held a dubiously white napkin, which proved that he had been disturbed at table. His spiteful face had a likeness to Voltaire's, and was divided between politeness to the guest and distaste to being disturbed. In the flickering light he looked ugly.

"Who was it pointed out my house as a shelter?" queried the baron, holding up the light to spy the pilot to whom he was eager to show his gratitude, of course.

"The youth bore the name of Gilbert, I believe."

"Ugh! I might have guessed that. I doubted, though, he was good enough for that. Gilbert, the idler, the philosopher!"

This flow of epithets, emphasized threateningly, showed the visitor that little sympathy existed between the lord and his vassal.

"Be pleased to come in," said the baron, after a short silence more expressive than his speech.

"Allow me to see to my coach, which contains valuable property," returned the foreign nobleman.

"Labrie," said Lord Taverney, "put my lord's carriage under the shed, where it will be less uncovered than in the open yard, for some shingles stick to the roof. As for the horses, that is different, for I cannot answer for their supper; still, as they are not yours, but the post's, I daresay it makes no odds."

"Believe me, I shall be ever grateful to your lordship – "

"Oh, do not deceive yourself," said the baron, holding up the candle again to light Labrie executing the work with the aid of the foreign noble; "Taverney is a poor place and a sad one."

When the vehicle was under cover, after a fashion, the guest slipped a gold coin into the servant's hand. He thought it a silver piece, and thanked heaven for the boon.

"Lord forbid I should think the ill of your house that you speak," said Balsamo, returning and bowing as the baron began leading him through a broad, damp antechamber, grumbling:

"Nay, nay, I know what I am talking about; my means are limited. Were you French – though your accent is German, in spite of your Italian title – but never mind – you would be reminded of the rich Taverney."

"Philosophy," muttered Balsamo, for he had expected the speaker would sigh.

The master opened the dining-room door.

"Labrie, serve us as if you were a hundred men in one. I have no other lackey, and he is bad. But I cannot afford another. This dolt has lived with me nigh twenty years without taking a penny of wages, and he is worth it. You will see he is stupid."

"Heartless," Balsamo continued his studies; "unless he is putting it on."

The dining-room was the large main room of a farmhouse which had been converted into the manor. It was so plainly furnished as to seem empty. A small, round table was placed in the midst, on which reeked one dish, a stew of game and cabbage. The wine was in a stone jar; the battered, worn and tarnished plate was composed of three plates, a goblet and a salt dish; the last, of great weight and exquisite work, seemed a jewel of price amid the rubbish.

"Ah, you let your gaze linger on my salt dish?" said the host. "You have good taste to admire it. You notice the sole object presentable here. No, I have another gem, my daughter – "

"Mademoiselle Andrea?"

"Yes," said Taverney, astonished at the name being known; "I shall present you. Come, Andrea, my child, and don't be alarmed."

"I am not, father," said a sonorous but melodious voice as a maiden appeared, who seemed a lovely pagan statue animated.

Though of the utmost plainness, her dress was so tasteful and suitable that a complete outfit from a royal wardrobe would have appeared less rich and elegant.

"You are right," he whispered to his host, "she is a precious beauty."

"Do not pay my poor girl too many compliments," said the old Frenchman carelessly, "for she comes from the nunnery school and may credit them. Not that I fear that she will be a coquette," he continued; "just the other way, for the dear girl does not think enough of herself, and I am a good father, who tries to make her know that coquetry is a woman's first power."

Andrea cast down her eyes and blushed; whatever her endeavor she could not but overhear this singular theory.

"Was that told to the lady at convent, and is that a rule in religious education?" queried the foreigner, laughing.

"My lord, I have my own ideas, as you may have noticed. I do not imitate those fathers who bid a daughter play the prude and be inflexible and obtuse; go mad about honor, delicacy and disinterestedness. Fools! they are like seconds who lead their champion into the lists with all the armor removed and pit him against a man armed at all points. No, my daughter Andrea will not be that sort, though reared in a rural den at Taverney."

Though agreeing with the master about his place, the baron deemed it duty to suggest a polite reproof.

"That is all very well, but I know Taverney; still, be that as it may, and far though we are from the sunshine of Versailles Palace, my daughter is going to enter the society where I once flourished. She will enter with a complete arsenal of weapons forged in my experience and recollections. But I fear, my lord, that the convent has blunted them. Just my luck! my daughter is the only pupil who took the instructions as in earnest and is following the Gospel. Am I not ill-fated?"

"The young lady is an angel," returned Balsamo, "and really I am not surprised at what I hear."

Andrea nodded her thanks, and they sat down at table.

"Eat away, if hungry. That is a beastly mess which Labrie has hashed up."

"Call you partridges so? You slander your feast. Game-birds in May? Shot on your preserves?"

"Mine? My good father left me some, but I got rid of them long ago. I have not a yard of land. That lazybones Gilbert, only good for mooning about, stole a gun somewhere and done a bit of poaching. He will go to jail for it, and a good riddance. But Andrea likes game, and so far, I forgive the boy."

Balsamo contemplated the lovely face without perceiving a twinge, wrinkle or color, as she helped them to the dish, cooked by Labrie, furnished by Gilbert, and maligned by the baron.

"Are you admiring the salt dish again, baron?"

"No, the arm of your daughter."

"Capital! the reply is worthy the gallant Richelieu. That piece of plate was ordered of Goldsmith Lucas by the Regent of Orleans. Subject: the Amours of the Bacchantes and Satyrs – rather free."

More than free, obscene – but Balsamo admired the calm unconcern of Andrea, not blenching as she presented the plate.

"Do eat," said the host; "do not fancy that another dish is coming, for you will be dreadfully disappointed."

"Excuse me, father," interrupted the girl with habitual coolness, "but if Nicole has understood me, she will have made a cake of which I told her the recipe."

"You gave Nicole the recipe of a cake? Your waiting maid does the cooking now, eh? The next thing will be your doing it yourself. Do you find duchesses and countesses playing the kitchen-wench? On the contrary, the king makes omelets for them. Gracious! that I have lived to see women-cooks under my roof. Pray excuse my daughter, baron."

"We must eat, father," rebuked Andrea tranquilly. "Dish up, Legay!" she called out, and the girl brought in a pancake of appetizing smell.

"I know one who won't touch the stuff," cried Taverney, furiously dashing his plate to pieces.

"But the gentleman, perhaps, will," said the lady coldly. "By the way, father, that leaves only seventeen pieces in that set, which comes to me from my mother."

The guest's spirit of observation found plenty of food in this corner of life in the country. The salt dish alone revealed a facet of Taverney's character or rather all its sides. From curiosity or otherwise, he stared at Andrea with such perseverance that she tried to frown him down; but finally she gave way and yielded to his mesmeric influence and command.

Meanwhile the baron was storming, grumbling, snarling and nipping the arm of Labrie, who happened to get into his way. He would have done the same to Nicole's when the baron's gaze fell on her hands.

"Just look at what pretty fingers this lass has," he exclaimed. "They would be supremely pretty only for her kitchen work having made corns at the tips. That is right; perk up, my girl! I can tell you, my dear guest, that Nicole Legay is not a prude like her mistress and compliments do not frighten her."

Watching the baron's daughter, Balsamo noticed the highest disdain on her beauteous face. He harmonized his features with hers and this pleased her, spite of herself, for she looked at him with less harshness, or, better, with less disquiet.

"This girl, only think," continued the poor noble, chucking the girl's chin with the back of his hand, "was at the nunnery with my daughter and picked up as much schooling. She does not leave her mistress a moment. This devotion would rejoice the philosophers, who grant souls to her class."

"Father, Nicole stays with me because I order her to do so," observed Andrea, discontented.

By the curl of the servant's lip, Balsamo saw that she was not insensible to the humiliations from her proud superior. But the expression flitted; and to hide a tear, perhaps, the girl looked aside to a window on the yard. Everything interested the visitor, and he perceived a man's face at the panes.

Each in this curious abode had a secret, he thought; "I hope not to be an hour here without learning Andrea's. Already I know her father's, and I guess Nicole's."

Taverney perceived his short absence of mind.

"What! are you dreaming?" he questioned. "We are all at it, here; but you might have waited for bedtime. Reverie is a catching complaint. My daughter broods; Nicole is wool-gathering; and I get puzzling about that dawdler who killed these birds – and dreams when he kills them. Gilbert is a philosopher, like Labrie. I hope you are not friendly with them? I forewarn you that philosophers do not go down with me."

"They are neither friends nor foes to me," replied the visitor; "I do not have anything to do with them."

"Very good. Zounds, they are scoundrelly vermin, more venomous than ugly. They will ruin the monarchy with their maxims, like 'People can hardly be virtuous under a monarchy;' or, 'Genuine monarchy is an institution devised to corrupt popular manners, and make slaves;' or yet, 'Royal authority may come by the grace of God, but so do plagues and miseries of mankind.' Pretty flummery, all this! What good would a virtuous people be, I beg? Things are going to the bad, since his Majesty spoke to Voltaire and read Diderot's book."

At this Balsamo fancied again to spy the pale face at the window, but it vanished as soon as he fixed his eyes upon it.

"Is your daughter a philosopher?" he asked, smiling.

"I do not know what philosophy is; I only know that I like serious matters," was Andrea's reply.

"The most serious thing is to live; stick to that," said her father.

"But the young lady cannot hate life," said the stranger.

"All depends," she said.

"Another stupid saying," interrupted Taverney. "That is just the nonsense my son talks. I have the misfortune to have a son. The Viscount of Taverney is cornet in the dauphin's horse-guards – a nice boy; another philosopher! The other day he talked to me about doing away with negro slavery. 'What are we to do for sugar?' I retorted, for I like my coffee heavily sweetened, as does Louis XV. 'We must do without sugar to benefit a suffering race.' 'Suffering monkeys!' I returned, 'and that is paying them a compliment.' Whereupon he asserted that all men were brothers! Madness must be in the air. I, brother of a blackamoor!"

"This is going too far," observed Balsamo.

"Of course. I told you I was in luck. My children are – one an angel, the other an apostle. Drink, though my wine is detestable."

"I think it exquisite," said the guest, watching Andrea.

"Then you are a philosopher! In my time we learnt pleasant things; we played cards, fought duels, though against the law; and wasted our time on duchesses and money on opera dancers. That is my story in a nutshell. Taverney went wholly into the opera-house; which is all I sorrow for, since a poor noble is nothing of a man. I look aged, do I not? Only because I am impoverished and dwell in a kennel, with a tattered wig, and gothic coat; but my friend the marshal duke, with his house in town and two hundred thousand a year – he is young, in his new clothes and brushed up perukes – he is still alert, brisk and pleasure-seeking, though ten years my senior, my dear sir, ten years."

"I am astonished that, with powerful friends like the Duke of Richelieu, you quitted the court."

"Only a temporary retreat, and I am going back one day," said the lord, darting a strange glance on his daughter, which the visitor intercepted.

"But, I suppose, the duke befriends your son?"

"He holds the son of his friend in horror, for he is a philosopher, and he execrates them."

"The feeling is reciprocal," observed Andrea with perfect calm. "Clear away, Legay!"

Startled from her vigilant watch on the window, the maid ran back to the table.

"We used to stay at the board to two A. M. We had luxuries for supper, then, that's why! and we drank when we could eat no more. But how can one drink vinegar when there is nothing to eat? Legay, let us have the Maraschino, provided there is any."

"Liqueurs," said Andrea to the maid, who took her orders from the baron thus second-hand.

Her master sank back in his armchair and sighed with grotesque melancholy while keeping his eyes closed.

"Albeit the duke may execrate your son – quite right, too, as he is a philosopher," said Balsamo, "he ought to preserve his liking for you, who are nothing of the kind. I presume you have claims on the king, whom you must have served?"

"Fifteen years in the army. I was the marshal's aid-de-camp, and we went through the Mahon campaign together. Our friendship dates from – let me see! the famous siege of Philipsburg, 1742 to 1743."

"Yes, I was there, and remember you – "

"You remember me at the siege? Why, what is your age?"

"Oh, I am no particular age," replied the guest, holding up his glass to be filled by Andrea's fair hand.

The host interpreted that his guest did not care to tell his years.

"My lord, allow me to say that you do not seem to have been a soldier, then, as it is twenty-eight years ago, and you are hardly over thirty."

Andrea regarded the stranger with the steadfastness of deep curiosity; he came out in a different light every instant.

"I know what I am talking about the famous siege, where the Duke of Richelieu killed in a duel his cousin the Prince of Lixen. The encounter came off on the highway, by my fay! on our return from the outposts; on the embankment, to the left, he ran him through the body. I came up as Prince Deux-ponts held the dying man in his arms. He was seated on the ditch bank, while Richelieu tranquilly wiped his steel."

"On my honor, my lord, you astound me. Things passed as you describe."

"Stay, you wore a captain's uniform then, in the Queen's Light Horse Guards, so badly cut up at Fontenoy?"

"Were you in that battle, too?" jeered the baron.

"No, I was dead at that time," replied the stranger, calmly.

The baron stared, Andrea shuddered, and Nicole made the sign of the cross.

"To resume the subject, I recall you clearly now, as you held your horse and the duke's while he fought. I went up to you for an account and you gave it. They called you the Little Chevalier. Excuse me not remembering before, but thirty years change a man. To the health of Marshal Richelieu, my dear baron!"

"But, according to this, you would be upward of fifty."

"I am of the age to have witnessed that affair."

The baron dropped back in the chair so vexed that Nicole could not help laughing. But Andrea, instead of laughing, mused with her looks on the mysterious guest. He seemed to await this chance to dart two or three flaming glances at her, which thrilled her like an electrical discharge. Her arms stiffened, her neck bent, she smiled against her will on the hypnotizer, and closed her eyes. He managed to touch her arm, and again she quivered.

"Do you think I tell a fib in asserting I was at Philipsburg?" he demanded.

"No, I believe you," she replied with a great effort.

"I am in my dotage," muttered Taverney, "unless we have a ghost here."

"Who can tell?" returned Balsamo, with so grave an accent that he subjugated the lady and made Nicole stare.

"But if you were living at the Siege, you were a child of four or five."

"I was over forty."

The baron laughed and Nicole echoed him.

"You do not believe me. It is plain, though, for I was not the man I am."

"This is a bit of antiquity," said the French noble. "Was there not a Greek philosopher – these vile philosophers seem to be of all ages – who would not eat beans because they contained souls, like the negress, according to my son? What the deuse was his name?"

"That is the gentleman."

"Why may I not be Pythagoras?"

"Pythagoras," prompted Andrea.

"I do not deny that, but he was not at Philipsburg; or, at any rate, I did not see him there."

"But you saw Viscount Jean Barreaux, one of the Black Horse Musketeers?"

"Rather; the musketeers and the light cavalry took turns in guarding the trenches."

"The day after the Richelieu duel, Barreaux and you were in the trenches when he asked you for a pinch of snuff, which you offered in a gold box, ornamented with the portrait of a belle, but in the act a cannon ball hit him in the throat, as happened the Duke of Berwick aforetimes, and carried away his head."

"Gad! just so! poor Barreaux!"

"This proves that we were acquainted there, for I am Barreaux," said the foreigner.

The host shrank back in fright or stupefaction.

"This is magic," he gasped; "you would have been burnt at the stake a hundred years ago, my dear guest. I seem to smell brimstone!"

"My dear baron, note that a true magician is never burnt or hanged. Only fools are led to the gibbet or pyre. But here is your daughter sent to sleep by our discussions on metaphysics and occult sciences, not calculated to interest a lady."

Indeed, Andrea nodded under irresistible force like a lily on the stalk. At these words she made an effort to repel the subtle fluid which overwhelmed her; she shook her head energetically, rose and tottered out of the room, sustained by Nicole. At the same time disappeared the face glued so often to the window glass on the outside, which Balsamo had recognized as Gilbert's.

"*Eureka!*" exclaimed Balsamo triumphantly, as she vanished. "I can say it like Archimedes."

"Who is he?" inquired the baron.

"A very good fellow for a wizard, whom I knew over two thousand years ago," replied the guest.

Whether the baron thought this boast rather too preposterous, or he did not hear it, or hearing it, wanted the more to be rid of his odd guest, he proposed lending him a horse to get to the nearest posting house.

"What, force me to ride when I am dying to stretch my legs in bed? Do not exaggerate your mediocrity so as to make me believe in a personal ill will."

"On the contrary, I treat you as a friend, knowing what you will incur here. But since you put it this way, remain. Labrie, is the Red-Room habitable?"

"Certainly, my lord, as it is Master Philip's when he is here."

"Give it to the gentleman, since he is bent on being disgusted with Taverney."

"I want to be here to-morrow to testify to my gratitude."

"You can do that easily, as you are so friendly with Old Nick that you can ask him for the stone which turns all things to gold."

"If that is what you want, apply to me direct."

"Labrie, you old rogue, get a candle and light the gentleman to bed," said the baron, beginning to find such a dialogue dangerous at the late hour.

Labrie ordered Nicole to air the Red Room while he hastened to obey. Nicole left Andrea alone, the latter eager for the solitude to nurse her thoughts. Taverney bade the guest good-night, and went to bed.

Balsamo took out his watch, for he recalled his promise to awake Althotas after two hours, and it was a half-hour more. He asked the servant if his coach was still out in the yard, and Labrie answered in the affirmative – unless it had run off of its own volition. As for Gilbert, he had been abed most likely since an hour.

Balsamo went to Althotas after studying the way to the Red Room. Labrie was tidying up the sordid apartment, after Nicole had aired it, when the guest returned.

He had paused at Andrea's room to listen at her door to her playing on the harpsichord to dispel the burden of the influence the stranger had imposed upon her. In a while he waved his hands as in throwing a magic spell, and so it was, for Andrea slowly stopped playing, let her hands drop by her sides, and turned rigidly and slowly toward the door, like one who obeys an influence foreign to will.

Balsamo smiled in the darkness as though he could see through the panels. This was all he wanted to do, for he groped for the banister rail, and went up stairs to his room.

As he departed, Andrea turned away from the door and resumed playing, so that the mesmerist heard the air again from where she had been made to leave off.

Entering the Red Room, he dismissed Labrie; but the latter lingered, feeling in the depths of his pocket till at last he managed to say:

"My lord, you made a mistake this evening, in giving me gold for the piece of silver you intended."

Balsamo looked on the old servingman with admiration, showing that he had not a high opinion of the honesty of most men.

"'And honest,'" he muttered in the words of Hamlet, as he took out a second gold coin to place it beside the other in the old man's hand.

The latter's delight at this splendid generosity may be imagined, for he had not seen so much gold in twenty years. He was retiring, bowing to the floor, when the donor checked him.

"What are the morning habits of the house?" he asked.

"My lord stays abed late, my lord; but Mademoiselle Andrea is up betimes, about six."

"Who sleeps overhead?"

"I, my lord; but nobody beneath, as the vestibule is under us."

"Oh, by the way, do not be alarmed if you see a light in my coach, as an old impotent servant inhabits it. Ask Master Gilbert to let me see him in the morning."

"Is my lord going away so soon?"

"It depends," replied Balsamo, with a smile. "I ought to be at Bar-le-Duc tomorrow evening."

Labrie sighed with resignation, and was about to set fire to some old papers to warm the room, which was damp and there was no wood, when Balsamo stayed him.

"No, let them be; I might want to read them, for I may not sleep."

Balsamo went to the door to listen to the servant's departing steps making the stairs creak till they sounded overhead; Labrie was in his own room. Then he went to the window. In the other wing was a lighted window, with half-drawn curtains, facing him. Legay was leisurely taking off her neckerchief, often peeping down into the yard.

"Striking resemblance," muttered the baron.

The light went out though the girl had not gone to rest. The watcher stood up against the wall. The harpsichord still sounded, with no other noise. He opened his door, went down stairs with caution, and opened the door of Andrea's sitting-room.

Suddenly she stopped in the melancholy strain, although she had not heard the intruder. As she was trying to recall the thrill which had mastered her, it came anew. She shivered all over. In the mirror she saw movement. The shadow in the doorway could only be her father or a servant. Nothing more natural.

But she saw with spiritual eyes that it was none of these.

"My lord," she faltered, "in heaven's name, what want you?"

It was the stranger, in the black velvet riding coat, for he had discarded his silken suit, in which a mesmerist cannot well work his power.

She tried to rise, but could not; she tried to open her mouth to scream, but with a pass of both hands Balsamo froze the sound on her lips.

With no strength or will, Andrea let her head sink on her shoulder.

At this juncture Balsamo believed he heard a noise at the window. Quickly turning, he caught sight of a man's face beyond. He frowned, and, strangely enough, the same impression flitted across the medium's face.

"Sleep!" he commanded, lowering the hands he had held above her head with a smooth gesture, and persevering in filling her with the mesmeric fluid in crushing columns. "I will you to sleep."

All yielded to this mighty will. Andrea leaned her elbow on the musical-instrument case, her head on her hand, and slept.

The mesmerist retired backward, drew the door to, and went back to his room. As soon as the door closed, the face he had seen reappeared at the window; it was Gilbert's.

Excluded from the parlor by his inferior position in Taverney Castle, he had watched all the persons through the evening whose rank allowed them to figure in it. During the supper he had noticed Baron Balsamo gesticulate and smile, and his peculiar attention bestowed on the lady of the house; the master's unheard-of affability to him, and Labrie's respectful eagerness.

Later on, when they rose from table, he hid in a clump of lilacs and snowballs, for fear that Nicole, closing the blinds or in going to her room, should catch him eavesdropping.

But Gilbert had other designs this evening than spying. He waited, without clearly knowing for what. When he saw the light in the maid's window, he crossed the yard on tiptoe and crouched down in the gloom to peer in at the window at Andrea playing the harpsichord.

This was the moment when the mesmerist entered the room.

At this sight, Gilbert started and his ardent gaze covered the magician and his victim.

But he imagined that Balsamo complimented the lady on her musical talent, to which she replied with her customary coldness; but he had persisted with a smile so that she suspended her practice and answered. He admired the grace with which the visitor retired.

Of all the interview which he fancied he read aright, he had understood nothing, for what really happened was in the mind, in silence.

However keen an observer he was, he could not divine a mystery, where everything had passed quite naturally.

Balsamo gone, Gilbert remained, not watching, but contemplating Andrea, lovely in her thoughtful pose, till he perceived with astonishment that she was slumbering. When convinced of this, he grasped his head between his hands like one who fears his brain will burst from the overflow of emotions.

"Oh, to kiss her hand!" he murmured, in a gush of fury. "Oh, Gilbert, let us approach her – I so long to do it."

Hardly had he entered the room than he felt the importance of his intrusion. The timid if not respectful son of a farmer to dare to raise his eyes on that proud daughter of the peers. If he should touch the hem of her dress she would blast him with a glance.

The floor boards creaked under his wary tread, but she did not move, though he was bathed in cold perspiration.

"She sleeps – oh, happiness, she sleeps!" he panted, drawing with irresistible attraction within a yard of the statue, of which he took the sleeve and kissed it.

Holding his breath, slowly he raised his eyes, seeking hers. They were wide open, but still saw not. Intoxicated by the delusion that she expected his visit and her silence was consent, her quiet a favor, he lifted her hand to his lips and impressed a long and feverish kiss.

She shuddered and repulsed him.

"I am lost!" he gasped, dropping the hand and beating the floor with his forehead.

Andrea rose as though moved by a spring under her feet, passed by Gilbert, crushed by shame and terror and with no power to crave pardon, and proceeded to the door. With high-held head and outstretched neck, as if drawn by a secret power toward an invisible goal, she opened the door and walked out on the landing.

The youth rose partly and watched her take the stairs. He crawled after her, pale, trembling and astonished.

"She is going to tell the baron and have me scourged out of the house – no, she goes up to where the guest is lodged. For she would have rung, or called, if she wanted Labrie."

He clenched his fists at the bare idea that Andrea was going into the strange gentleman's room. All this seemed monstrous. And yet that was her end.

That door was ajar. She pushed it open without knocking; the lamplight streamed on her pure profile and whirled golden reflections into her wildly open eyes.

In the center of the room Gilbert saw the baron standing, with fixed gaze and wrinkled brow, and his hand extended in gesture of command, ere the door swung to.

Gilbert's forces failed him; he wheeled round on the stairs, clinging to the rail, but slid down, with his eyes fastened to the last on the cursed panel, behind which was sealed up all his vanished dream, present happiness and future hope.

CHAPTER VI
THE CLAIRVOYANT

Balsamo had gone up to the young lady, whose appearance in his chamber was not strange to him.

"I bade you sleep. Do you sleep?"

Andrea sighed and nodded with an effort.

"It is well. Sit here," and he led her by the hand the youth had kissed to a chair, which she took.

"Now, see!"

Her eyes dilated as though to collect all the luminous rays in the room.

"I did not tell you to see with your eyes," said he, "but with those of the soul."

He touched her with a steel rod which he drew from under his waistcoat. She started as though a fiery dart had transfixed her and her eyes closed instantly; her darkening face expressed the sharpest astonishment.

"Tell me where you are."

"In the Red Room, with you, and I am ashamed and afraid."

"What of? Are we not in sympathy, and do you not know that my intentions are pure, and that I respect you like a sister?"

"You may not mean evil to me, but it is not so as regards others."

"Possibly," said the magician; "but do not heed that," he added in a tone of command. "Are all asleep under this roof?"

"All, save my father who is reading one of those bad books, which he pesters me to read, but I will not."

"Good; we are safe in that quarter. Look where Nicole is."

"She is in her room, in the dark, but I need not the light to see that she is slipping out of it to go and hide behind the yard door to watch."

"To watch you?"

"No."

"Then, it matters not. When a girl is safe from her father and her attendant, she has nothing to fear, unless she is in love – "

"I, love?" she said sneeringly. And shaking her head, she added sadly: "My heart is free."

Such an expression of candor and virginal modesty embellished her features that Balsamo radiantly muttered:

"A lily – a pupil – a seer!" clasping his hands in delight. "But, without loving, you may be loved?"

"I know not; and yet, since I returned from school, a youth has watched me, and even now he is weeping at the foot of the stairs."

"See his face!"

"He hides it in his hands."

"See through them."

"Gilbert!" she uttered with an effort. "Impossible that he would presume to love me!"

Balsamo smiled at her deep disdain, like one who knew that love will leap any distance.

"What is he doing now?"

"He puts down his hands, he musters up courage to mount hither – no, he has not the courage – he flees."

She smiled with scorn.

"Cease to look that way. Speak of the Baron of Taverney. He is too poor to give you any amusements?"

"None."

"You are dying of tedium here; for you have ambition?"

"No."

"Love for your father?"

"Yes; though I bear him a grudge for squandering my mother's fortune so that poor Redcastle pines in the garrison and cannot wear our name handsomely."

"Who is Redcastle?"

"My brother Philip is called the Knight of Redcastle from a property of the eldest son, and will wear it till father's death entitles him to be 'Taverney.'"

"Do you love your brother?"

"Dearly, above all else; because he has a noble heart, and would give his life for me."

"More than your father would. Where is Redcastle?"

"At Strasburg in the garrison; no, he has gone – oh, dear Philip!" continued the medium with sparkling eyes in joy. "I see him riding through a town I know. It is Nancy, where I was at the convent school. The torches round him light up his darling face."

"Why torches?" asked Balsamo in amaze.

"They are around him on horseback, and a handsome gilded carriage."

Balsamo appeared to have a guess at this, for he only said:

"Who is in the coach?"

"A lovely, graceful, majestic woman, but I seem to have seen her before – how strange! no, I am wrong – she looks like our Nicole; but as the lily is like the jessamine. She leans out of the coach window and beckons Philip to draw near. He takes his hat off with respect as she orders him, with a smile, to hurry on the horses. She says that the escort must be ready at six in the morning, as she wishes to take a rest in the daytime – oh, it is at Taverney that she means to stop. She wants to see my father! So grand a princess stop at our shabby house! What shall we do without linen or plate?"

"Be of good cheer. We will provide all that."

"Oh, thank you!"

The girl, who had partly risen, fell back in the chair, uttering a profound sigh.

"Regain your strength," said the magician, drawing the excess of magnetism from the beautiful body, which bent as if broken, and the fair head heavily resting on the heaving bosom. "I shall require all your lucidity presently. O, Science! you alone never deceive man. To none other ought man sacrifice his all. This is a lovely woman, a pure angel as Thou knowest who created angels. But what is this beauty and this innocence to me now? – only worth what information they afford. I care not though this fair darling dies, as long as she tells me what I seek. Let all worldly delights perish – love, passion and ecstasy, if I may tread the path surely and well lighted. Now, maiden, that, in a few seconds, my power has given you the repose of ages, plunge once more into your mesmeric slumber. This time, speak for myself alone."

He made the passes which replaced Andrea in repose. From his bosom he drew the folded paper containing the tress of black hair, from which the perfume had made the paper transparent. He laid it in Andrea's hand, saying:

"See!"

"Yes, a woman!"

"Joy!" cried Balsamo. "Science is not a mere name like virtue. Mesmer has vanquished Brutus. Depict this woman, that I may recognize her."

"Tall, dark, but with blue eyes, her hair like this, her arms sinewy."

"What is she doing?"

"Racing as though carried off on a fine black horse, flecked with foam. She takes the road yonder to Chalons."

"Good! my own road," said Balsamo. "I was going to Paris, and there we shall meet. You may repose now," and he took back the lock of hair.

Andrea's arms fell motionless again along her body.

"Recover strength, and go back to your harpsichord," said the mesmerist, enveloping her, as she rose, with a fresh supply of magnetism.

Andrea acted like the racehorse which overtaxes itself to accomplish the master's will, however unfair. She walked through the doorway, where he had opened the door, and, still asleep, descended the stairs slowly.

CHAPTER VII
THE MAID AND THE MISTRESS

Gilbert had passed this time in unspeakable anguish. Balsamo was but a man, but he was a strong one, and the youth was weak: He had attempted twenty times to mount to the assault of the guest room, but his trembling limbs gave way under him and he fell on his knees.

Then the idea struck him to get the gardener's ladder and by its means climb up outside to the window, and listen and spy. But as he stooped to pick up this ladder, lying on the grass where he remembered, he heard a rustling noise by the house, and he turned.

He let the ladder fall, for he fancied he saw a shade flit across the doorway. His terror made him believe it, not a ghost – he was a budding philosopher who did not credit them – but Baron Taverney. His conscience whispered another name, and he looked up to the second floor. But Nicole had put out her light, and not another, or a sound came from all over the house – the guest's room excepted.

Seeing and hearing nothing, convinced that he had deluded himself, Gilbert took up the ladder and had set foot on it to climb where he placed it, when Andrea came down from Balsamo's room. With a lacerated heart, Gilbert forgot all to follow her into the parlor where again she sat at the instrument; her candle still burned beside it.

Gilbert tore his bosom with his nails to think that here he had kissed the hem of her robe with such reverence. Her condescension must spring from one of those fits of corruption recorded in the vile books which he had read – some freak of the senses.

But as he was going to invade the room again, a hand came out of the darkness and energetically grasped him by the arm.

"So I have caught you, base deceiver! Try to deny again that you love her and have an appointment with her!"

Gilbert had not the power to break from the clutch, though he might readily have done so, for it was only a girl's. Nicole Legay held him a prisoner.

"What do you want?" he said testily.

"Do you want me to speak out aloud?"

"No, no; be quiet," he stammered, dragging her out of the antechamber.

"Then follow me!" which was what Gilbert wanted, as this was removing Nicole from her mistress.

He could with a word have proved that while he might be guilty of loving the lady, the latter was not an accomplice; but the secret of Andrea was one that enriches a man, whether with love or lucre.

"Come to my room," she said; "who would surprise us there! Not my young lady, though she may well be jealous of her fine gallant! But folks in the secret are not to be dreaded. The honorable lady jealous of the servant, – I never expected such an honor! It is I who am jealous, for you love me no more."

In plainness, Nicole's bedroom did not differ from the others in that dwelling. She sat on the edge of the bed, and Gilbert on the dressing-case, which Andrea had given her maid.

Coming up the stairs, Nicole had calmed herself, but the youth felt anger rise as it cooled in the girl.

"So you love our young lady," began Nicole with a kindling eye. "You have love-trysts with her; or will you pretend you went only to consult the magician?"

"Perhaps so, for you know I feel ambition – "

"Greed, you mean?"

"It is the same thing, as you take it."

"Don't let us bandy words: you avoid me lately."

"I seek solitude – "

"And you want to go up into solitude by a ladder? Beg pardon, I did not know that was the way to it."

Gilbert was beaten in the first defenses.

"You had better out with it, that you love me no longer, or love us both."

"That would only be an error of society, for in some countries men have several wives."

"Savages!" exclaimed the servant, testily.

"Philosophers!" retorted Gilbert.

"But you would not like me to have two beaux on my string?"

"I do not wish tyrannically and unjustly to restrain the impulses of your heart. Liberty consists in respecting free will. So, change your affection, for fidelity is not natural – to some."

Discussion was the youth's strong point; he knew little, but more than the girl. So he began to regain coolness.

"Have you a good memory, Master Philosopher?" said Nicole. "Do you remember when I came back from the nunnery with mistress, and you consoled me, and taking me in your arms, said: 'You are an orphan like me; let us be brother and sister through similar misfortune.' Did you mean what you said?"

"Yes, then; but five months have changed me; I think otherwise at present."

"You mean you will not wed me? Yet Nicole Legay is worth a Gilbert, it seems to me."

"All men are equal; but nature or education improves or depreciates them. As their faculties or acquirements expand, they part from one another."

"I understand that we must part, and that you are a scamp. How ever could I fancy such a fellow?"

"Nicole, I am never going to marry, but be a learned man or a philosopher. Learning requires the isolation of the mind; philosophy that of the body."

"Master Gilbert, you are a scoundrel, and not worth a girl like me. But you laugh," she continued, with a dry smile more ominous than his satirical laugh; "do not make war with me; for I shall do such deeds that you will be sorry, for they will fall on your head, for having turned me astray."

"You are growing wiser; and I am convinced now that you would refuse me if I sued you."

Nicole reflected, clenching her hands and gritting her teeth.

"I believe you are right, Gilbert," she said; "I, too, see my horizon enlarge, and believe I am fated for better things than to be so mean as a philosopher's wife. Go back to your ladder, sirrah, and try not to break your neck, though I believe it would be a blessing to others, and may be for yourself."

Gilbert hesitated for a space in indecision, for Nicole, excited by love and spite, was a ravishing creature; but he had determined to break with her, as she hampered his passion and his aspirations.

"Gone," murmured Nicole in a few seconds.

She ran to the window, but all was dark. She went to her mistress' door, where she listened.

"She is asleep; but I will know all about it to-morrow."

It was broad day when Andrea de Taverney awoke.

In trying to rise, she felt such lassitude and sharp pain that she fell back on the pillow uttering a groan.

"Goodness, what is the matter?" cried Nicole, who had opened the curtains.

"I do not know. I feel lame all over; my chest seems broken in."

"It is the outbreak of the cold you caught last night," said the maid.

"Last night?" repeated the surprised lady; but she remarked the disorder of her room, and added: "Stay, I remember that I felt very tired – exhausted – it must have been the storm. I fell to sleep over my music. I recall nothing further. I went up hither half asleep, and must have thrown myself on the bed without undressing properly."

"You must have stayed very late at the music, then," observed Nicole, "for, before you retired to your bedroom I came down, having heard steps about – "

"But I did not stir from the parlor."

"Oh, of course, you know better than me," said Nicole.

"You must mistake," replied the other with the utmost sweetness: "I never left the seat; but I remember that I was cold, for I walked quite swiftly."

"When I saw you in the garden, however, you walked very freely."

"I, in the grounds? – you know I never go out after dark."

"I should think I knew my mistress by sight," said the maid, doubling her scrutiny; "I thought that you were taking a stroll with somebody."

"With whom would I be taking a stroll?" demanded Andrea, without seeing that her servant was putting her to an examination.

Nicole did not think it prudent to proceed, for the coolness of the hypocrite, as she considered her, frightened her. So she changed the subject.

"I hope you are not going to be sick, either with fatigue or sorrow. Both have the same effect. Ah, well I know how sorrows undermine!"

"You do? Have you sorrows, Nicole?"

"Indeed; I was coming to tell my mistress, when I was frightened to see how queer you looked; no doubt, we both are upset."

"Really!" queried Andrea, offended at the "we both."

"I am thinking of getting married."

"Why, you are not yet seventeen – "

"But you are sixteen and – "

She was going to say something saucy, but she knew Andrea too well to risk it, and cut short the explanation.

"Indeed, I cannot know what my mistress thinks, but I am low-born and I act according to my nature. It is natural to have a sweetheart."

"Oh, you have a lover then! You seem to make good use of your time here."

"I must look forward. You are a lady and have expectations from rich kinsfolks going off; but I have no family and must get into one."

As all this seemed straightforward enough, Andrea forgot what had been offensive in tone, and said, with her kindness taking the reins:

"Is it any one I know? Speak out, as it is the duty of masters to interest themselves in the fate of their servants, and I am pleased with you."

"That is very kind. It is – Gilbert!"

To her high amaze, Andrea did not wince.

"As he loves you, marry him," she replied, easily. "He is an orphan, too, so you are both your own masters. Only, you are both rather young."

"We shall have the longer life together."

"You are penniless."

"We can work."

"What can he do, who is good for nothing?"

"He is good to catch game for master's table, anyway; you slander poor Gilbert, who is full of attention for you."

"He does his duty as a servant – "

"Nay; he is not a servant; he is never paid."

"He is son of a farmer of ours; he is kept and does nothing for it; so, he steals his support. But what are you aiming at to defend so warmly a boy whom nobody attacks?"

"I never thought you would attack him! it is just the other way about!" with a bitter smile.

"Something more I do not understand."

"Because you do not want to."

"Enough! I have no leisure for your riddles. You want my consent to this marriage?"

"If you please; and I hope you will bear Gilbert no ill will."

"What is it to me whether he loves you or not? You burden me, miss."

"I daresay," said Nicole, bursting out in anger at last; "you have said the same thing to Gilbert."

"I speak to your Gilbert! You are mad, girl; leave me in peace."

"If you do not speak to him now, I believe the silence will not last long."

"Lord forgive her – the silly jade is jealous!" exclaimed Andrea, covering her with a disdainful look, and laughing. "Cheer up, little Legay! I never looked at your pretty Gilbert, and I do not so much as know the color of his eyes."

Andrea was quite ready to overlook what seemed folly and not pertness; but Nicole felt offended, and did not want pardon.

"I can quite believe that – for one cannot get a good look in the nighttime."

"Take care to make yourself clear at once," said Andrea, very pale.

"Last night, I saw – "

"Andrea!" came a voice from below, in the garden.

"My lord your father," said Nicole, "with the stranger who passed the night here."

"Go down, and say that I cannot answer, as I am not well. I have a stiff neck; and return to finish this odd debate."

Nicole obeyed, as Andrea was always obeyed when commanding, without reply or wavering. Her mistress felt something unusual; though resolved not to show herself, she was constrained to go to the window left open by Legay, through a superior and resistless power.

CHAPTER VIII
THE HARBINGER

The traveler had risen early to look to his coach and learn how Althotas was faring.

All were still sleeping but Gilbert, who peeped through a window of his room over the doorway and spied all the stranger's movements.

The latter was struck by the change which day brought on the scene so gloomy overnight. The domain of Taverney did not lack dignity or grace. The old house resembled a cavern which nature embellishes with flowers, creepers and capricious rookeries, although at night it would daunt a traveler seeking shelter.

When Balsamo returned after an hour's stroll to the Red Castle ruins, he saw the lord of it all leave the house by a side door to cull roses and crush snails. His slender person was wrapped in his flowered dressing-gown.

"My lord," said Balsamo, with the more courtesy as he had been sounding his host's poverty, "allow my excuses with my respects. I ought to wait your coming down, but the aspect of Taverney tempted me, and I yearned to view the imposing ruins and pretty garden."

"The ruins are rather fine," returned the baron; "about all here worth looking at. The castle was my ancestors'; it is called the Red Castle, and we long have borne its name together with Taverney, it being the same barony. Oh, my lord, as you are a magician," continued the nobleman, "you ought with a wave of your wand uprear again the old Red Castle, as well as restore the two thousand odd acres around it. But I suppose you wanted all your art to make that beastly bed comfortable. It is my son's, and he growled enough at it."

"I protest it is excellent, and I want to prove it by doing you some service in return."

Labrie was bringing to his master a glass of spring water on a splendid china platter.

"Here's your chance," said the baron, always jeering; "turn that into wine as the greatest service of all."

Balsamo smiling, the old lord thought it was backing out and took the glass, swallowing the contents at a gulp.

"Excellent specific," said the mesmerist. "Water is the noblest of the elements, baron. Nothing resists it; it pierces stone now, and one of these days will dissolve diamonds."

"It is dissolving me. Will you drink with me. It has the advantage over wine of running freely here. Not like my liquor."

"I might make one useful to you."

"Labrie, a glass of water for the baron. How can the water which I drink daily comprise properties never suspected by me? As the fellow in the play talked prose all his life without knowing it, have I been practising magic for ten years without an idea of it?"

"I do not know about your lordship, but I do know about myself," was the other's grave reply.

Taking the glass from Labrie, who had displayed marvelous celerity, he looked at it steadily.

"What do you see in it, my dear guest?" the baron continued to mock. "I am dying with eagerness. Come, come! a windfall to me, another Red Castle to set me on my legs again."

"I see the advice here to prepare for a visit. A personage of high distinction is coming, self-invited, conducted by your son Philip, who is even now near us."

"My dear lord, my son is on military duty at Strasburg, and he will not be bringing guests at the risk of being punished as a deserter."

"He is none the less bringing a lady, a mighty dame – and, by the way, you had better keep that pretty Abigail of yours at a distance while she stays, as there is a close likeness between them."

"The promised lady guest bears a likeness to my servant Legay? What contradiction!"

"Why not? Once I bought a slave so like Cleopatra that the Romans talked of palming her off for the genuine queen in the triumph in their capital."

"So you are at your old tricks again?" laughed the baron.

"How would you like it, were you a princess, for instance, to see behind your chair a maid who looked your picture, in short petticoats and linen neckerchief."

"Well, we will protect her against that. But I am very pleased with this boy of mine who brings guests without forewarning us!"

"I am glad my forecast affords you pleasure, my dear baron; and, if you meant to properly greet the coming guest, you have not a minute to lose."

The baron shook his head like the most incredulous of beings, and as the two were near the dwelling part of the baron's daughter, he called out to her to impart the stranger's predictions.

This was the call which brought her to the window despite herself, and she saw Balsamo. He bowed deeply to her while fixing his eyes upon her. She reeled and had to catch the sill not to fall.

"Good-morning, my lord," she answered.

She uttered these words at the very moment when Nicole, telling the baron that his daughter would not come, stopped stupefied and with gaping mouth at this capricious contradiction.

Instantly Andrea fell on a chair, all her powers quitting her. Balsamo had gazed on her to the last.

"This is deusedly hard to believe," remarked the baron, "and seeing is believing – "

"Then, see!" said the wonder-worker, pointing up the avenue, from the end of which came galloping at full speed a rider whose steed made the stones rattle under its hoofs.

"Oh, it is indeed – " began the baron.

"Master Philip!" screamed Nicole, standing on tiptoe, while Labrie grunted in pleasure.

"My brother!" cried out Andrea, thrusting her hands through the window.

"This is the commencement," said Balsamo.

"Decidedly you are a magician," said the baron.

A smile of triumph appeared on the mesmerist's lips.

Soon the horse approached plainly, reeking with sweat and smoking, and the rider, a young man in an officer's uniform, splashed with mud up to the countenance, animated by the speed, leaped off and hurried to embrace his father.

"It is I," said Philip of Taverney, seeing the doubt. "I bear a great honor for our house. In an hour Marie Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria and bride of the Dauphin of France, will be here."

The baron dropped his arms with as much humility as he had shown sarcasm and irony, and turned to Balsamo for his forgiveness.

"My lord," said the latter, bowing, "I leave you with your son, from whom you have been long separated and to whom you must have a great deal to say."

Saluting Andrea, who rushed to meet her brother in high delight, Balsamo drew off, beckoning Nicole and Labrie, who disappeared with him under the trees.

CHAPTER IX
THE KNIGHT OF REDCASTLE

Philip of Taverney, Knight of Redcastle, did not resemble his sister, albeit he was as handsome for a man as she was lovely for a woman.

Andrea's embrace of him was accompanied by sobs revealing all the importance of this union to her chaste heart. He took her hand and his father's, and led them into the parlor, where he sat by their sides.

"You are incredulous, father, and you, sister, surprised. But nothing can be more true than that this illustrious princess will be here shortly. You know that the Archduchess made her entry into our realm at Strasburg? As we did not know the exact hour of her arrival, the troops were under arms early, and I was sent out to scout. When I came up with the royal party, the lady herself put her head out of the coach window, and hailed me. My fatigue vanished as by enchantment. The dauphiness is young like you, dear, and beautiful as the angels."

"Tell me, you enthusiast," interrupted the baron, "does she resemble any one you have seen here before?"

"No one could resemble her – stay, come to think of it – why, Nicole has a faint likeness – but what led you to suggest that?"

"I had it from a magician, who at the same time foretold your coming."

"The guest?" timidly inquired Andrea.

"Is he the stranger who discreetly withdrew when I arrived?"

"The same; but continue your story, Philip."

"Perhaps we had better make something ready," hinted the lady.

"No," said her father, staying her; "the more we do, the more ridiculous we shall appear."

"I returned to the city with the news, and all the military marched to receive the new princess. She listened absently to the governor's speech and said suddenly: 'What is the name of this young gentleman who was sent to meet me?' And her governess wrote on her tablets my name, Chevalier Philip Taverney Redcastle. 'Sir,' she said, 'if you have no repugnance to accompany me to Paris, your superior will oblige me by relieving you of your military duties here, for I made a vow to attach to my service the first French gentleman met by me in setting foot in France; and to make him happy, and his family the same, in case princes have the power to do so.'"

"What delightful words!" said Andrea, rubbing her hands.

"Hence, I rode at the princess's coach door to Nancy, through which we marched by torchlight. She called me to her to say that she meant to stop a while at Taverney, though I said our house was not fit to receive so mighty a princess.

"'The sweeter will be the welcome, then, the more plain but the more cordial,' she replied. 'Poor though Taverney may be, it can supply a bowl of milk to the friend who wishes to forget for a time that she is the Princess of Austria and the Bride of France.' Respect prevented me debating further. So I have ridden ahead."

"Impossible," said Andrea; "however kind the princess may be, she would never be content with a glass of milk and a bunch of flowers."

"And if she were," went on Taverney, "she would not tolerate my chairs which break one's back, and my ragged tapestry offending the sight. Devil take capricious women! France will be prettily governed by a featherbrain, who has such whims. Plague take such a token of a singular reign!"

"Oh, father! how can you talk so of a princess who floods our house with favors?"

"Who dishonors me!" returned the old noble. "Who was thinking about Taverney? – not a soul. My name slept under Redcastle ruins not to come forth till I arranged the fit time; and here comes

the freak of a royal babe to pull us out into public, dusty, tattered and beggarly. The newspapers, always on the lookout for food for fun, will make a pretty comic talk of the brilliant princess's visit to the Taverney hovel. But, death of my life! an idea strikes me. I know history, and of the Count of Medina setting fire to his palace to win a queen's attention. I will burn down my kennel for a bonfire to the Dauphin's bride."

As nimble as though twenty once more, the old peer ran into the kitchen and plucking a brand, hurried out and over to the barn, but as he was nearing the trusses of forage, Balsamo sprang forth and clutched his arm.

"What are you about, my lord?" he asked, wrenching away the flambeau. "The Archduchess of Austria is no Constable of Bourbon, a traitor, whose presence so fouls a dwelling that it must be purified by fire."

The old noble paused, pale and trembling and not smiling as usual.

"Go and change your gown, my lord, for something more seemly," continued the mysterious guest. "When I knew the Baron of Taverney at Philipsburg Siege, he wore the Grand Cross of St. Louis. I know not of any suit that does not become rich and stylish under the ribbon of that order. Take it coolly: her highness will be kept so busy that she will not notice whether your house be new or old, dull or dazzling. Be hospitable, as a noble is bound to be. Never forestall vexations, my lord. Every dog has his day."

Taverney obeyed with the resignation he had previously shown and went to join his children, who were hunting for him, uneasy at his absence. The magician silently retired like one engaged in a piece of work.

CHAPTER X
MARIE ANTOINETTE

As Balsamo had warned them, there was no time to lose. On the high road, commonly so peaceful, resounded a great tumult of coaches, horses and voices.

Three carriages stopped at the door, held open by Gilbert, whose distended eyes and feverish tremor denoted the sharpest emotion at so much magnificence. The principal coach, loaded with gilding and mythological carvings, was no less mud-spattered and dusty than the others.

A score of brilliant young noblemen ranked themselves near this coach, out of which was assisted a girl of sixteen by a gentleman clad in black, with the grand sash of the St. Louis order under his coat. She wore no hair powder, but this plainness had not prevented the hairdresser building up her tresses a foot above her forehead.

Marie Antoinette Josepha, for it was she, brought into France a fame for beauty not always owned by princesses destined to share the throne of that realm. Without being fine, her eyes took any expression she liked; but particularly those so opposite as mildness and scorn; her nose was well shaped; her upper lip pretty; but the lower one, the aristocratic inheritance of seventeen kaisers, too thick and protruding, even drooping, did not suit the pretty visage, except when it wanted to show ire or indignation.

On this occasion, Marie Antoinette wore her womanly look and womanly smile, more, that of a happy woman. If possible, she did not mean to be the royal princess till the following day. The sweetest calm reigned on her face; the most charming kindness enlivened her eyes.

She was robed in white silk, and her handsome bare arms supported a heavy lace mantle.

She refused the arm of the gentleman in black, and freely advanced, snuffing the air, and casting glances around as though wishful to enjoy brief liberty.

"Oh, the lovely site! What fine old trees! and the pretty little house!" she ejaculated. "How happy they must dwell in this nice air and under these trees which hide us in so well."

Philip Taverney appeared, followed by Andrea, giving her arm to her father, wearing a fine royal blue velvet coat, last vestige of former splendor. Andrea wore a ruddy gray silk dress and had her hair in long plaits. Following Balsamo's hint, the baron had donned the insignia of the Knightly Order.

"Your highness," said Philip, pale with emotion and noble in his sorrow, "allow me the honor to present Baron de Taverney, Red Castle, my sire, and Mademoiselle Claire Andrea, my sister."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.