

DUMAS
ALEXANDRE

THE REGENT'S
DAUGHTER

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The Regent's Daughter:

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Alexandre Dumas

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CHAPTER I.

AN ABBESS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

On the 8th February, 1719, a carriage, bearing the fleur-de-lis of France, with the motto of Orleans, preceded by two outriders and a page, entered the porch of the Abbey of Chelles, precisely as the clock struck ten, and, the door having been quickly opened, its two occupants stepped out.

The first was a man of from forty-five to forty-six years of age, short, and rather stout, with a high color, easy in his movements, and displaying in every gesture a certain air of high breeding and command.

The second, who followed slowly, was short, and remarkably thin. His face, though not precisely ugly, was very disagreeable, although bearing the evidences of a keen intellect. He seemed to feel the cold, and followed his companion, wrapped up in an ample cloak.

The first of these two made his way up the staircase with the air of a man well acquainted with the locality. Passing through

a large antechamber containing several nuns, who bowed to the ground as he passed, he ran rather than walked to a reception-room, which, it must be confessed, bore but little trace of that austerity which is ordinarily ascribed to the interior of a cloister.

The other, who followed leisurely, was saluted almost as humbly by the nuns.

"And now," said the first, "wait here and warm yourself, while I go to her, and in ten minutes I will make an end of all these abuses you mention: if she deny, and I want proof, I will call you."

"Ten minutes, monseigneur," replied the man in the cloak; "in two hours your highness will not have even broached the subject of your visit. Oh! the Abbess de Chelles is a clever woman!"

So saying, he stretched himself out in an easy chair, which he had drawn near the fire, and rested his thin legs on the fender.

"Yes, yes," replied he who had been addressed as "your highness;" "I know, and if I could forget it, you take care to remind me of it often enough. Why did you bring me here to-day through all this wind and snow?"

"Because you would not come yesterday, monseigneur."

"Yesterday, it was impossible; I had an appointment with Lord Stair at five o'clock."

"In a house in the Rue des Bons Enfants. My lord does not live any longer, then, at the English embassy?"

"Abbe, I had forbidden you to follow me."

"Monseigneur, it is my duty to disobey you."

"Well, then, disobey; but let me tell stories at my pleasure,

without your having the impertinence to show me that you know it, just for the sake of proving the efficiency of your police."

"Monseigneur may rest easy in future – I will believe anything!"

"I will not promise as much in return, abbe, for here I think you have made a mistake."

"Monseigneur, I know what I said, and I repeat it."

"But look! no noise, no light, perfect quiet, your account is incorrect; it is evident that we are late."

"Yesterday, monseigneur, where you stand, there was an orchestra of fifty musicians; there, where that young sister kneels so devoutly, was a buffet: what was upon it I cannot tell, but I know it was there, and in the gallery on the left, where a modest supper of lentils and cream cheese is now preparing for the holy sisters, were two hundred people, drinking, dancing, and making – "

"Well, making what?"

"Making love, monseigneur."

"Diable! are you sure of this?"

"Rather more sure than if I had seen it, and that is why you do well in coming to-day, and would have done better in coming yesterday. This sort of life does not become an abbess, monseigneur."

"No, it is only fit for an abbe. Ha!"

"I am a politician, monseigneur."

"Well, my daughter is a political abbess, that is all."

"Oh, let it be so, if it suits you, monseigneur; I am not so particular in point of morals, you know. To-morrow there will be another song or two out, but what does that matter?" – "Well, well, wait for me, and I will go and scold."

"Take my word for it, monseigneur, if you wish to scold properly you had better do it here, before me; if you fail in memory or arguments, sign to me, and I will come to the rescue."

"Yes, yes, you are right," said the person who had undertaken to redress wrongs, and in whom we hope the reader has recognized Philippe d'Orleans. "Yes, this scandal must be quieted a little, at any rate: the abbess must not receive more than twice a week. There must be none of these dances and assemblies, and the cloisters must be re-established. Mademoiselle d'Orleans passed from gayety to a religious life; she left the Palais Royal for Chelles in spite of all I could do to prevent her; now, for five days in the week she must be the abbess, and that will leave her two to play the great lady."

"Ah, monseigneur, you are beginning to see the thing in its true light."

"Is not this what you wish?"

"It is what is necessary. It seems to me that an abbess who has thirty valets, fifteen footmen, ten cooks, eight grooms, and a mute – who fences, plays the horn, and the violincello – who is a surgeon and a hairdresser – who shoots and makes fireworks – cannot be very dull."

"Has not my daughter been told of my arrival," said the duke

to an old nun who crossed the room with a bunch of keys in her hand; "I wish to know whether I shall go to her, or whether she is coming to me."

"Madame is coming, monseigneur," replied the sister, respectfully.

"It is well," murmured the regent, somewhat impatiently.

"Monseigneur, remember the parable of Jesus driving out the money-changers from the temple; you know it, or ought to know it, for I taught it you when I was your preceptor. Now, drive out these musicians, these Pharisees, these comedians and anatomists; three only of each profession will make a nice escort for our return."

"Do not fear, I am in a preaching vein."

"Then," replied Dubois, rising, "that is most fortunate, for here she is."

At this moment a door, leading to the interior of the convent, was opened, and the person so impatiently expected appeared.

Let us explain who was this worthy person who had succeeded, by repeated follies, in rousing the anger of Philippe d'Orleans, the most indulgent man and father in France.

Mademoiselle de Chartres, Louise-Adelaide-d'Orleans, was the second and prettiest of the regent's daughters. She had a beautiful complexion, fine eyes, a good figure, and well-shaped hands. Her teeth were splendid, and her grandmother, the princess palatine, compared them to a string of pearls in a coral casket. She danced well, sang better, and played at sight. She had

learned of Cauchereau, one of the first artists at the opera, with whom she had made much more progress than is common with ladies, and especially with princesses. It is true that she was most assiduous; the secret of that assiduity will be shortly revealed.

All her tastes were masculine. She appeared to have changed sex with her brother Louis. She loved dogs and horses; amused herself with pistols and foils, but cared little for any feminine occupations.

Her chief predilection, however, was for music; she seldom missed a night at the opera when her master Cauchereau performed; and once, when he surpassed himself in an air, she exclaimed, "Bravo, bravo, my dear Cauchereau!" in a voice audible to the whole house.

The Duchesse d'Orleans judged that the exclamation was somewhat indiscreet for a princess of the blood, and decided that Mademoiselle Chartres knew enough of music. Cauchereau was well paid, and desired not to return to the Palais Royal. The duchess also begged her daughter to spend a fortnight at the convent of Chelles, the abbess of which, a sister of Marechal de Villars, was a friend of hers.

It was doubtless during this retreat that mademoiselle – who did everything by fits and starts – resolved to renounce the world. Toward the end of the holy week of 1718, she asked and obtained her father's permission to spend Easter at Chelles; but at the end of that time, instead of returning to the palais, she expressed a wish to remain as a nun.

The duke tried to oppose this, but Mademoiselle de Chartres was obstinate, and on the 23d of April she took the vows. Then the duke treated with Mademoiselle de Villars for the abbey, and, on the promise of twelve thousand francs, Mademoiselle de Chartres was named abbess in her stead, and she had occupied the post about a year.

This, then, was the abbess of Chelles, who appeared before her father, not surrounded by an elegant and profane court, but followed by six nuns dressed in black and holding torches. There was no sign of frivolity or of pleasure; nothing but the most somber apparel and the most severe aspect. The regent, however, suspected that he had been kept waiting while all this was preparing.

"I do not like hypocrisy," said he, sharply, "and can forgive vices which are not hidden under the garb of virtues. All these lights, madame, are doubtless the remains of yesterday's illumination. Are all your flowers so faded, and all your guests so fatigued, that you cannot show me a single bouquet nor a single dancer?"

"Monsieur," said the abbess in a grave tone, "this is not the place for fetes and amusements." – "Yes," answered the regent, "I see, that if you feasted yesterday, you fast to-day."

"Did you come here, monsieur, to catechise? At least what you see should reply to any accusations against me."

"I came to tell you, madame," replied the regent, annoyed at being supposed to have been duped, "that the life you lead

displeases me; your conduct yesterday was unbecoming an abbess; your austerities to-day are unbecoming a princess of the blood; decide, once for all, between the nun and the court lady. People begin to speak ill of you, and I have enemies enough of my own, without your saddling me with others from the depth of your convent."

"Alas, monsieur, in giving entertainments, balls, and concerts, which have been quoted as the best in Paris, I have neither pleased those enemies, nor you, nor myself. Yesterday was my last interview with the world; this morning I have taken leave of it forever; and to-day, while still ignorant of your visit, I had adopted a determination from which I will never depart."

"And what is it?" asked the regent, suspecting that this was only a new specimen of his daughter's ordinary follies.

"Come to this window and look out," said the abbess.

The regent, in compliance with the invitation, approached the window, and saw a large fire blazing in the middle of the courtyard. Dubois – who was as curious as if he had really been an abbe – slipped up beside him.

Several people were rapidly passing and repassing before the fire, and throwing various singular-shaped objects into the flames.

"But what is that?" asked the regent of Dubois, who seemed as much surprised as himself.

"That which is burning now?" asked the abbe. – "Yes," replied the regent.

"Ma foi, monseigneur, it looks to me very much like a violincello."

"It is mine," said the abbess, "an excellent violincello by Valeri."

"And you are burning it!" exclaimed the duke.

"All instruments are sources of perdition," said the abbess, in a tone which betrayed the most profound remorse.

"Eh, but here is a harpsichord," interrupted the duke.

"My harpsichord, monsieur; it was so perfect that it enticed me toward earthly things; I condemned it this morning."

"And what are those chests of papers with which they are feeding the fire?" asked Dubois, whom the spectacle seemed to interest immensely.

"My music, which I am having burned."

"Your music?" demanded the regent.

"Yes, and even yours," answered the abbess; "look carefully and you will see your opera of 'Panthée' follow in its turn. You will understand that my resolution once taken, its execution was necessarily general."

"Well, madame, this time you are really mad! To light the fire with music, and then feed it with bass-viols and harpsichords is really a little too luxurious."

"I am doing penance, monsieur."

"Hum, say rather that you are refitting your house, and that this is an excuse for buying new furniture, since you are doubtless tired of the old."

"No, monseigneur, it is no such thing."

"Well, then, what is it? Tell me frankly."

"In truth, I am weary of amusing myself, and, indeed, I intend to act differently."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I am going with my nuns to visit my tomb."

"Diable, monseigneur!" exclaimed the abbe, "her wits are gone at last."

"It will be truly edifying, will it not, monsieur?" continued the abbess, gravely.

"Indeed," answered the regent, "if you really do this, I doubt not but people will laugh at it twice as much as they did at your suppers."

"Will you accompany me, messieurs?" continued the abbess; "I am going to spend a few minutes in my coffin; it is a fancy I have had a long time."

"You will have plenty of time for that," said the regent; "moreover, you have not even invented this amusement; for Charles the Fifth, who became a monk as you became a nun, without exactly knowing why, thought of it before you."

"Then you will not go with me, monsieur?" said the abbess.

"I," answered the duke, who had not the least sympathy with somber ideas, "I go to see tombs! I go to hear the De Profundis! No, pardieu! and the only thing which consoles me for not being able to escape them some day, is, that I shall neither see the one nor the other."

"Ah, monsieur," answered the abbess, in a scandalized tone, "you do not, then, believe in the immortality of the soul?"

"I believe that you are raving mad. Confound this abbe, who promises me a feast, and brings me to a funeral."

"By my faith, monseigneur," said Dubois, "I think I prefer the extravagance of yesterday; it was more attractive."

The abbess bowed, and made a few steps toward the door. The duke and Dubois remained staring at each other, uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

"One word more," said the duke; "are you decided this time, or is it not some fever which you have caught from your confessor? If it be real, I have nothing to say; but if it be a fever, I desire that they cure you of it. I have Morceau and Chirac, whom I pay for attending on me and mine."

"Monseigneur," answered the abbess, "you forget that I know sufficient of medicine to undertake my own cure, if I were ill: I can, therefore, assure you that I am not. I am a Jansenist; that is all."

"Ah," cried the duke, "this is more of Father le Doux's work, that execrable Benedictine! At least I know a treatment which will cure him."

"What is that?" asked the abbess.

"The Bastille."

And he went out in a rage, followed by Dubois, who was laughing heartily.

"You see," said the regent, after a long silence, and when they

were nearing Paris, "I preached with a good grace; it seems it was I who needed the sermon."

"Well, you are a happy father, that is all; I compliment you on your younger daughter, Mademoiselle de Chartres. Unluckily your elder daughter, the Duchesse de Berry – "

"Oh, do not talk of her; she is my ulcer, particularly when I am in a bad temper."

"Well?"

"I have a great mind to make use of it by finishing with her at one blow."

"She is at the Luxembourg?"

"I believe so."

"Let us go to the Luxembourg, monseigneur."

"You go with me?"

"I shall not leave you to-night."

"Well, drive to the Luxembourg."

CHAPTER II.

DECIDEDLY THE FAMILY BEGINS TO SETTLE DOWN

Whatever the regent might say, the Duchesse de Berry was his favorite daughter. At seven years of age she had been seized with a disease which all the doctors declared to be fatal, and when they had abandoned her, her father, who had studied medicine, took her in hand himself, and succeeded in saving her.

From that time the regent's affection for his daughter became almost a weakness. He allowed the haughty and self-willed child the most perfect liberty; her education was neglected, but this did not prevent Louis XIV. from choosing her as a wife for his grandson the Duc de Berry.

It is well known how death at once struck a triple blow at the royal posterity, and within a few years carried off the dauphin, the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgoyne and the Duc de Berry.

Left a widow at twenty years of age, loving her father almost as tenderly as he loved her, and having to choose between the society of Versailles and that of the Palais Royal, the Duchesse de Berry, young, beautiful, and fond of pleasure, had quickly decided. She took part in all the fetes, the pleasures and follies of her father.

The Duc d'Orleans, in his increasing fondness for his daughter

– who already had six hundred thousand francs a year – allowed her four hundred thousand francs more from his private fortune. He gave up the Luxembourg to her, gave her a bodyguard, and at length, to the scandal of those who advocated the old forms of etiquette, he merely shrugged his shoulders when the Duchesse de Berry passed through Paris preceded by cymbals and trumpets, and only laughed when she received the Venetian ambassador on a throne, raised on three steps, which nearly embroiled France with the republic of Venice.

About this time the Duchesse de Berry took a fancy to fall in love with the Chevalier de Riom.

The Chevalier de Riom was a nephew or grand-nephew of the Duc de Lauzun, who came to Paris in 1715 to seek his fortune, and found it at the Luxembourg. Introduced to the princess by Madame de Mouchy, he soon established the same influence over her as his uncle, the Duc de Lauzun, had exercised over La Grande Mademoiselle fifty years before, and was soon established as her lover, supplanting Lahaie, who was sent on an embassy to Denmark.

The duchess had the singular moderation of never having had more than two lovers; Lahaie, whom she had never avowed, and Riom, whom she proclaimed aloud.

This was not the true cause of the malice with which the princess was pursued; it arose rather from the previous offenses of her passage through Paris, the reception of the ambassadors, her bodyguard, and her assumptions. The duke himself was

indignant at Riom's influence over his daughter. Riom had been brought up by the Duc de Lauzun, who in the morning had crushed the hand of the Princesse de Monaco with the heel of the boot which, in the evening, he made the daughter of Gaston d'Orleans pull off, and who had given his nephew the following instruction, which Riom had fully carried out.

"The daughters of France," said he, "must be treated with a high hand;" and Riom, trusting to his uncle's experience, had so well schooled the Duchesse de Berry that she scarcely dared to give a fete without his permission.

The duke took as strong a dislike to Riom as his careless character allowed him to take to any one, and, under pretext of serving the duchess, had given him a regiment, then the government of Cognac, then the order to retire to his government, which almost made his favors look like disfavor and disgrace.

The duchess was not deceived; she went to her father, begged, prayed, and scolded, but in vain; and she went away threatening the duke with her anger, and declaring that Riom should not go.

The duke's only reply was to repeat his orders for Riom's departure the next day, and Riom had respectfully promised to obey.

The same day, which was the one preceding that on which our story opens, Riom had ostensibly set out, and Dubois himself had told the duke that he had left for Cognac at nine o'clock.

Meanwhile the duke had not again seen his daughter; thus,

when he spoke of going to finish with her, it was rather a pardon than a quarrel that he went to seek. Dubois had not been duped by this pretended resolution; but Riom was gone, and that was all he wanted; he hoped to slip in some new personage who should efface all memory of Riom, who was to be sent to join the Maréchal de Berwick in Spain.

The carriage stopped before the Luxembourg, which was lighted as usual.

The duke ascended the steps with his usual celerity, Dubois remained in a corner of the carriage. Presently the duke appeared at the door with a disappointed air.

"Ah, monseigneur," said Dubois, "are you refused admittance?"

"No, the duchesse is not here."

"Where, then – at the Carmelites?"

"No, at Meudon."

"At Meudon, in February, and in such weather; what can she be doing there?"

"It is easy to know."

"How?"

"Let us go to Meudon."

"To Meudon!" said the regent, jumping into the carriage; "I allow you five-and-twenty minutes to get there."

"I would humbly beg to remind monseigneur," said the coachman, "that the horses have already gone ten leagues."

"Kill them, but be at Meudon in five-and-twenty minutes."

There was no reply to be made to such an order; the coachman whipped his horses, and the noble animals set out at as brisk a pace as if they had just left the stable.

Throughout the drive Dubois was silent, and the regent thoughtful; there was nothing on the route to arrest the attention of either, and they arrived at Meudon full of contradictory reflections.

This time both alighted; Dubois, thinking the interview might be long, was anxious to find a more comfortable waiting-place than a carriage.

At the door they found a Swiss in full livery – he stopped them – the duke made himself known.

"Pardon," said the Swiss, "I did not know that monseigneur was expected."

"Expected or not, I am here; send word to the princess."

"Monseigneur is to be at the ceremony?" asked the Swiss, who seemed embarrassed.

"Yes, of course," put in Dubois, stopping the duke, who was about to ask what ceremony; "and I also."

"Then shall I lead monseigneur at once to the chapel?"

"To the chapel?" asked the duke.

"Yes; for the ceremony is already commenced."

"Ah, Dubois," said the duke, "is she also going to take the veil?"

"Monseigneur," said Dubois, "I should rather say she is going to be married."

"Pardieu!" exclaimed the regent, "that would crown all;" and he darted toward the staircase, followed by Dubois.

"Does not monseigneur wish me to guide him?" asked the Swiss.

"It is needless," cried the regent; "I know the way."

Indeed – with an agility surprising in so corpulent a man – the regent darted through the rooms and corridors, and arrived at the door of the chapel, which appeared to be closed, but yielded to the first touch. Dubois was right.

Riom, who had returned secretly, was on his knees with the princess, before the private chaplain of the Luxembourg, while M. de Pons, Riom's relative, and the Marquis de la Rochefoucauld, captain of the princess's guard, held the canopy over their heads; Messrs. de Mouchy and de Lauzun stood, one by the duchess and the other by Riom.

"Certainly fortune is against us, monseigneur," said Dubois; "we are five minutes too late."

"Mordieu!" cried the duke, exasperated, "we will see."

"Chut," said Dubois; "I cannot permit sacrilege. If it were any use, I do not say; but this would be mere folly."

"Are they married, then?" asked the duke, drawing back.

"So much married, monseigneur, that the devil himself cannot unmarry them, without the assistance of the pope."

"I will write to Rome!"

"Take care, monseigneur; do not waste your influence; you will want it all, so get me made a cardinal."

"But," exclaimed the regent, "such a marriage is intolerable."

"Mésalliances are in fashion," said Dubois; "there is nothing else talked of – Louis XIV. made a mésalliance in marrying Madame de Maintenon, to whom you pay a pension as his widow – La Grande Mademoiselle made a mésalliance in marrying the Duc de Lauzun – you did so in marrying Mademoiselle de Blois, so much so, indeed, that when you announced the marriage to your mother, the princess palatine, she replied by a blow. Did not I do the same when I married the daughter of a village schoolmaster? After such good examples, why should not your daughter do so in her turn?"

"Silence, demon," said the regent.

"Besides," continued Dubois, "the Duchesse de Berry's passion began to be talked about, and this will quiet the talk; for it will be known all through Paris to-morrow. Decidedly, monseigneur, your family begins to settle down."

The Duc d'Orleans uttered an oath, to which Dubois replied by a laugh, which Mephistopheles might have envied.

"Silence!" cried a Swiss, who did not know who it was that was making a noise, and did not wish the pious exhortation of the chaplain to be lost.

"Silence, monseigneur," repeated Dubois; "you are disturbing the ceremony."

"If we are not silent," replied the duke, "the next thing they will do will be to turn us out."

"Silence!" repeated the Swiss, striking the flagstone with his

halberd, while the Duchesse de Berry sent M. de Mouchy to learn who was causing the disturbance.

M. de Mouchy obeyed the orders of the duchess, and perceiving two persons who appeared to be concealing themselves in the shade, he approached them.

"Who is making this noise?" said he; "and who gave you permission to enter this chapel?"

"One who has a great mind to send you all out by the window," replied the regent, "but who will content himself at present with begging you to order M. de Riom to set out at once for Cognac, and to intimate to the Duchesse de Berry that she had better absent herself from the Palais Royal."

The regent went out, signing to Dubois to follow; and, leaving M. de Mouchy bewildered at his appearance, returned to the Palais Royal.

That evening the regent wrote a letter, and ringing for a valet: "Take care that this letter is dispatched by an express courier to-morrow morning, and is delivered only to the person to whom it is addressed."

That person was Madame Ursule, Superior of the Ursuline Convent at Clisson.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT PASSED THREE NIGHTS LATER AT EIGHT HUNDRED LEAGUES FROM THE PALAIS ROYAL

Three nights after that on which we have seen the regent, first at Chelles and then at Meudon, a scene passed in the environs of Nantes which cannot be omitted in this history; we will therefore exercise our privilege of transporting the reader to that place.

On the road to Clisson, two or three miles from Nantes – near the convent known as the residence of Abelard – was a large dark house, surrounded by thick stunted trees; hedges everywhere surrounded the inclosure outside the walls, hedges impervious to the sight, and only interrupted by a wicket gate.

This gate led into a garden, at the end of which was a wall, having a small, massive, and closed door. From a distance this grave and dismal residence appeared like a prison; it was, however, a convent, full of young Augustines, subject to a rule lenient as compared with provincial customs, but rigid as compared with those of Paris.

The house was inaccessible on three sides, but the fourth, which did not face the road, abutted on a large sheet of water;

and ten feet above its surface were the windows of the refectory.

This little lake was carefully guarded, and was surrounded by high wooden palisades. A single iron gate opened into it, and at the same time gave a passage to the waters of a small rivulet which fed the lake, and the water had egress at the opposite end.

In the summer, a small boat belonging to the garden was seen on the water, and was used for fishing.

Sometimes, also, in summer, on dark nights, the river-gate was mysteriously opened, and a man, wrapped in a large brown cloak, silently dropped into the little boat, which appeared to detach itself from its fastenings, then glided quietly along, and stopped under one of the barred windows of the refectory.

Soon a sound was heard, imitating the croaking of a frog or the cry of the owl so common there, and then a young girl would appear at the window, and pass her head through the opening between the bars, which were, however, too high for the man to reach. A low and tender conversation was then carried on, and at length, after a different hour and a different signal had been agreed upon for their next interview, they separated, the boat disappeared, the gate shut gently, and the young girl closed the window with a sigh.

But now it was the month of February, and in the terrible winter of 1719. The trees were powdered with hoar frost, and it was at this time impossible to glide quietly along in the little boat, for the lake was covered with ice. And yet, in this biting cold, in this dark, starless night, a cavalier ventured alone into

the open country, and along a cross-road which led to Clisson. He threw the reins on the neck of his horse, which proceeded at a slow and careful pace.

Soon, however, in spite of his instinctive precaution, the poor animal, which had no light to guide him, struck against a stone and nearly fell. The rider soon perceived that his horse was lamed, and on seeing a trail of blood upon the snow, discovered that it was wounded.

The young man appeared seriously annoyed at the accident, and while deliberating what course to take, he heard a sound of horses' feet on the same road; and, feeling sure that if they were pursuing him he could not escape them, he remounted his horse, drew aside behind some fallen trees, put his sword under his arm, drew out a pistol, and waited.

The cavalcade soon appeared; they were four in number, and rode silently along, passing the group of trees which hid the cavalier, when suddenly they stopped. One who appeared the chief alighted, took out a dark lantern, and examined the road.

As they could not see far, they returned some steps, and, by the light of their lantern, perceived the cavalier.

The sound of cocking pistols was now heard.

"Hola!" said the cavalier with the wounded horse, taking the initiative; "who are you, and what do you want?"

"It is he," murmured two or three voices.

The man with the lantern advanced toward the cavalier.

"Advance one step further and you are a dead man," said

the cavalier. "Declare your name at once, that I may know with whom I have to deal."

"Shoot no one, Gaston de Chanlay," replied the man with the lantern, calmly; "and put up your pistols."

"Ah! it is the Marquis de Pontcalec."

"Yes; it is I."

"And what do you come here for, may I ask?"

"To demand some explanation of your conduct. Approach and reply, if you please."

"The invitation is singular, marquis. If you wish for an answer, could you not ask it in other terms?"

"Approach, Gaston," said another voice; "we really wish to speak with you."

"A la bonne heure," said Chanlay, "I recognize you there, Montlouis; but I confess I am not accustomed to M. de Pontcalec's manner of proceeding."

"My manners are those of a frank and open Breton, monsieur," replied the marquis, "of one who has nothing to hide from his friends, and is willing to be questioned as freely as he questions others."

"I join Montlouis," said another voice, "in begging Gaston to explain amicably. Surely it is not our interest to quarrel among ourselves."

"Thanks, Du Couëdic," said De Chanlay, "I am of the same opinion; so here I am" – and sheathing his sword at these words, the young man issued from his retreat and approached the group.

"M. de Talhouet," said Pontcalec, in the tone of a man who has a right to issue commands, "watch that no one approaches."

M. de Talhouet obeyed, and rode round in a circle, keeping both eyes and ears open.

"And now," said the marquis, "let us put out our lantern, since we have found our man!"

"Messieurs," said De Chanlay, "all this seems to me somewhat strange. It appears that you were following me – that you were seeking for me, now you have found me, and may put out your lantern. What does it mean? If it is a joke, I confess I think both time and place ill-chosen."

"No, monsieur," replied Pontcalec, in his hard, dry voice, "it is not a joke; it is an interrogatory."

"An interrogatory?" said De Chanlay, frowning.

"An explanation, rather," said Montlouis.

"Interrogatory or explanation, it matters not," said Pontcalec, "the thing is too serious to argue about words. M. de Chanlay, I repeat, reply to our questions."

"You speak roughly, Marquis de Pontcalec," replied the chevalier.

"If I command, it is because I have the right to do so. Am I, or am I not, your chief?"

"Certainly you are; but that is no reason for forgetting the consideration which one gentleman owes to another."

"Monsieur de Chanlay, all these objections seem to me like shuffling. You have sworn to obey – do so now."

"I swore to obey," replied the chevalier, "but not as a servant."

"You swore to obey as a slave. Obey, then, or submit to the consequences of your disobedience!"

"Monsieur le Marquis – !"

"My dear Gaston," cried Montlouis, "speak, I beg, as soon as possible: by a word you can remove all suspicion."

"Suspicion!" cried Gaston, pale with anger, "am *I* suspected, then?"

"Certainly you are," said Pontcalec, with his ordinary roughness. "Do you think if we did not suspect you we should amuse ourselves by following you on such a night as this?"

"Oh, that is quite another matter!" said Gaston, coldly; "tell me your suspicions – I listen."

"Chevalier, remember the facts; we four were conspiring together, and we did not seek your aid; you offered it, saying, that besides being willing to aid in the public good, you had a private revenge to serve in this. Am I not right?"

"You are."

"We received you – welcomed you as a friend, as a brother; we told you all our hopes, all our plans; nay, more – you were elected, by chance, the one to strike the glorious blow. Each one of us offered to take your part, but you refused. Is it not so?"

"You have spoken the strictest truth, marquis."

"This very morning we drew the lots; this evening you should be on the road to Paris. Instead of that, where do we find you? on the road to Clisson, where are lodged the mortal enemies of

Breton independence, where lives your sworn foe – the Marechal de Montesquieu."

"Ah! monsieur," said Gaston, scornfully.

"Reply by open words, and not by sneers: reply, M. de Chanlay, and quickly."

"Reply, Gaston," said Du Couëdic and Montlouis, imploringly.

"And to what am I to reply?"

"You are to account for your frequent absence during the last two months – for the mystery which surrounds you – for refusing, as you do, once or twice weekly, to join our nightly meetings. We confess, Gaston, all this has made us uneasy; by a word you can reassure us."

"You see, monsieur, that you are proved guilty by hiding, instead of pursuing your course."

"I did not pursue my course, because my horse was wounded; you may see the stains of blood upon the road."

"But why did you hide?"

"Because I wished to know first who was pursuing me. Have I not the fear of being arrested, as well as yourselves?"

"And where are you going?"

"If you had followed my steps as you have done hitherto, you would have found that my path did not lead to Clisson."

"Nor to Paris."

"I beg," said De Chanlay, "that you will trust me, and respect my secret – a secret in which not only my own honor, but that

of another, is concerned. You do not know, perhaps – it may be exaggerated – how extreme is my delicacy on this point."

"Then it is a love-secret," said Montlouis. – "Yes, and the secret of a first love," replied Gaston.

"All evasions," cried Pontcalec.

"Marquis!" said Gaston, haughtily.

"This is not saying enough, my friend," replied Du Couëdic. "How can we believe that you are going to a rendezvous in such weather, and that this rendezvous is not at Clisson – where, except the Augustine Convent, there is not a single house for two miles around."

"M. de Chanlay," said the Marquis de Pontcalec, in an agitated voice, "you swore to obey me as your chief, and to devote soul and body to our holy cause. Monsieur, our undertaking is serious – our property, our liberties, our lives and our honor are at stake; – will you reply clearly and freely to the questions which I put to you in the name of all, so as to remove all doubts? If not, Gaston de Chanlay – by virtue of that right which you gave me, of your own free will, over your life – if not, I declare, on my honor, I will blow your brains out with my own hand!"

A solemn silence followed these words; not one voice was raised to defend Gaston; he looked at each one in turn, and each one turned away from him.

"Marquis," said the chevalier at length, in a tone of deep feeling, "not only do you insult me by suspicions, but you grieve me by saying that I can only remove those suspicions by declaring

my secret. Stay," added he, drawing a pocketbook from his coat, and hastily penciling a few words on a leaf which he tore out; "stay, here is the secret you wish to know; I hold it in one hand, and in the other I hold a loaded pistol. Will you make me reparation for the insult you have offered me? or, in my turn, I give you my word as a gentleman that I will blow my brains out. When I am dead, open my hand and read this paper; you will then see if I deserved your suspicions."

And Gaston held the pistol to his head with the calm resolution which showed that he would keep his word.

"Gaston! Gaston!" cried Montlouis, while Du Couëdic held his arm; "stop, in Heaven's name! Marquis, he would do as he said; pardon him, and he will tell us all. Is it not so, Gaston? You will not have a secret from your brothers, who beg you, in the names of their wives and children, to tell it them."

"Certainly," said the marquis, "I not only pardon but love him; he knows it well. Let him but prove his innocence, and I will make him every reparation, but, before that, nothing: he is young, and alone in the world. He has not, like us, wives and children, whose happiness and whose fortune he is risking; he stakes only his own life, and he holds that as cheaply as is usual at twenty years of age; but with his life he risks ours; and yet, let him say but one word showing a justification, and I will be the first to open my arms to him."

"Well, marquis," said Gaston, after a few moments' silence, "follow me, and you shall be satisfied."

"And we?" asked Montlouis and Du Couëdic.

"Come, also, you are all gentlemen; I risk no more in confiding my secret to all than to one."

The marquis called Talhouet, who had kept good watch, and now rejoined the group, and followed without asking what had passed.

All five went on but slowly, for Gaston's horse was lame; the chevalier guided them toward the convent, then to the little rivulet, and at ten paces from the iron gate he stopped.

"It is here," said he.

"Here?"

"At the convent?"

"Yes, my friends; there is here, at this moment, a young girl whom I have loved since I saw her a year ago in the procession at the Fete Dieu at Nantes; she observed me also – I followed her, and sent her a letter."

"But how do you see her?" asked the marquis.

"A hundred louis won the gardener over to my interest; he has given me a key to this gate; in the summer I come in a boat to the convent wall; ten feet above the water is a window, where she awaits me. If it were lighter, you could see it from this spot – and, in spite of the darkness, I see it now."

"Yes, I understand how you manage in summer, but you cannot use the boat now."

"True; but, instead, there is a coating of ice, on which I shall go this evening; perhaps it will break and engulf me; so much the

better, for then, I hope, your suspicions would die with me."

"You have taken a load from my breast," said Montlouis.

"Ah! my poor Gaston, how happy you make me; for, remember, Du Couëdic and I answered for you."

"Chevalier," said the marquis, "pardon and embrace us."

"Willingly, marquis; but you have destroyed a portion of my happiness."

"How so?"

"I wished my love to have been known to no one. I have so much need of strength and courage! Am I not to leave her to-night forever?"

"Who knows, chevalier? You look gloomily at the future."

"I know what I am saying, Montlouis."

"If you succeed – and with your courage and sang-froid you ought to succeed – France is free: then she will owe her liberty to you, and you will be master of your own fate."

"Ah! marquis, if I succeed, it will be for you; my own fate is fixed."

"Courage, chevalier; meanwhile, let us see how you manage these love affairs."

"Still mistrust, marquis?"

"Still; my dear Gaston, I mistrust myself: and, naturally enough; after being named your chief, all the responsibility rests on me, and I must watch over you all."

"At least, marquis, I am as anxious to reach the foot of that wall as you can be to see me, so I shall not keep you waiting long."

Gaston tied his horse to a tree; by means of a plank thrown across, he passed the stream, opened the gate, and then, following the palisades so as to get away from the stream, he stepped upon the ice, which cracked under his feet.

"In Heaven's name," cried Montlouis, "be prudent."

"Look, marquis," said Gaston.

"I believe you; I believe you, Gaston."

"You give me fresh courage," replied the chevalier.

"And now, Gaston, one word more. When shall you leave?"

"To-morrow at this time, marquis, I shall probably be thirty leagues on the way to Paris."

"Come back and let us embrace, and say adieu." – "With pleasure."

Gaston retraced his steps, and was embraced cordially by each of the chevaliers, who did not turn away till they saw that he had arrived safely at the end of his perilous journey.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING HOW CHANCE ARRANGES SOME MATTERS BETTER THAN PROVIDENCE

In spite of the cracking of the ice, Gaston pursued his way boldly, and perceived, with a beating heart, that the winter rains had raised the waters of the little lake, so that he might possibly be able to reach the window.

He was not mistaken; on giving the signal, the window was opened, then a head appeared nearly at the level of his own, and a hand touched his; it was the first time. Gaston seized it, and covered it with kisses.

"Gaston, you have come, in spite of the cold, and on the ice; I told you in my letter not to do so."

"With your letter on my heart, Helene, I think I can run no danger; but what have you to tell me? You have been crying!"

"Alas, since this morning I have done little else."

"Since this morning," said Gaston, with a sad smile, "that is strange; if I were not a man, I too should have cried since this morning."

"What do you say, Gaston?"

"Nothing, nothing; tell me, what are your griefs, Helene?"

"Alas! you know I am not my own mistress. I am a poor orphan, brought up here, having no other world than the convent. I have never seen any one to whom I can give the names of father or mother – my mother I believe to be dead, and my father is absent; I depend upon an invisible power, revealed only to our superior. This morning the good mother sent for me, and announced, with tears in her eyes, that I was to leave."

"To leave the convent, Helene?"

"Yes; my family reclaims me, Gaston."

"Your family? Alas! what new misfortune awaits us?"

"Yes, it is a misfortune, Gaston. Our good mother at first congratulated me, as if it were a pleasure; but I was happy here, and wished to remain till I became your wife. I am otherwise disposed of, but how?"

"And this order to remove you?"

"Admits of neither dispute nor delay. Alas! it seems that I belong to a powerful family, and that I am the daughter of some great nobleman. When the good mother told me I must leave, I burst into tears, and fell on my knees, and said I would not leave her; then, suspecting that I had some hidden motive, she pressed me, questioned me, and – forgive me, Gaston – I wanted to confide in some one; I felt the want of pity and consolation, and I told her all – that we loved each other – all except the manner in which we meet. I was afraid if I told her that, that she would prevent my seeing you this last time to say adieu."

"But did you not tell, Helene, what were my plans; that, bound

to an association myself for six months, perhaps for a year, at the end of that time, the very day I should be free, my name, my fortune, my very life, was yours?"

"I told her, Gaston; and this is what makes me think I am the daughter of some powerful nobleman, for then Mother Ursula replied: 'You must forget the chevalier, my child, for who knows that your new family would consent to your marrying him?'"

"But do not I belong to one of the oldest families in Brittany? and, though I am not rich, my fortune is independent. Did you say this, Helene?"

"Yes; I said to her, 'Gaston chose me, an orphan, without name and without fortune. I may be separated from him, but it would be cruel ingratitude to forget him, and I shall never do so.'"

"Helene, you are an angel. And you cannot then imagine who are your parents, or to what you are destined?"

"No; it seems that it is a secret on which all my future happiness depends; only, Gaston, I fear they are high in station, for it almost appeared as if our superior spoke to me with deference."

"To you, Helene?"

"Yes."

"So much the better," said Gaston, sighing.

"Do you rejoice at our separation, Gaston?"

"No, Helene; but I rejoice that you should find a family when you are about to lose a friend."

"Lose a friend, Gaston! I have none but you; whom then

should I lose?"

"At least, I must leave you for some time, Helene."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Fate has endeavored to make our lots similar, and that you are not the only one who does not know what the morrow may bring forth."

"Gaston! Gaston! what does this strange language mean?"

"That I also am subject to a fatality which I must obey – that I also am governed by an irresistible and superior power."

"You! oh heavens!"

"To a power which may condemn me to leave you in a week – in a fortnight – in a month; and not only to leave you, but to leave France."

"Ah, Gaston! what do you tell me?"

"What in my love, or rather in my egotism, I have dreaded to tell you before. I shut my eyes to this hour, and yet I knew that it must come; this morning they were opened. I must leave you, Helene."

"But why? What have you undertaken? what will become of you?"

"Alas! Helene, we each have our secret," said the chevalier, sorrowfully; "I pray that yours may be less terrible than mine."

"Gaston!"

"Were you not the first to say that we must part, Helene? Had not you first the courage to renounce me? Well; blessings on you for that courage – for I, Helene, had it not."

And at these last words the young man again pressed his lips to her hand, and Helene could see that tears stood in his eyes.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" murmured she, "how have we deserved this misery?"

At this exclamation Gaston raised his head. "Come," said he, as if to himself, "courage! It is useless to struggle against these necessities; let us obey without a murmur, and perhaps our resignation may disarm our fate. Can I see you again?"

"I fear not – I leave to-morrow."

"And on what road?"

"To Paris."

"Good heavens!" cried Gaston; "and I also."

"You, also, Gaston?"

"Yes, Helene; we were mistaken, we need not part."

"Oh, Gaston; is it true?"

"Helene, we had no right to accuse Providence; not only can we see each other on the journey, but at Paris we will not be separated. How do you travel?"

"In the convent carriage, with post horses and by short stages."

"Who goes with you?"

"A nun, who will return to the convent when she has delivered me over to those who await me."

"All is for the best, Helene. I shall go on horseback, as a stranger, unknown to you; each evening I may speak to you, or, if I cannot do so, I shall at least see you – it will be but a half separation."

And the two lovers, with the buoyant hopes of youth, after meeting with tears and sadness, parted with smiles and joyous confidence in the future. Gaston recrossed the frozen lake, and found, instead of his own wounded horse, that of Montlouis, and, thanks to this kindness, reached Nantes safely in less than three quarters of an hour.

CHAPTER V.

THE JOURNEY

That very night Gaston made his will, and deposited it with a notary at Nantes.

He left everything to Helene de Chaverny; begged her, if he died, not to renounce the world, but to accept the career opening to her youth and beauty; but, as he was the last of his family, he begged her, in memory of him, to call her first son Gaston.

He next went to see each of his friends, and once more told them that he believed the enterprise would be successful. Pontcalec gave him half a piece of gold and a letter, which he was to present to a certain Captain la Jonquiere, their correspondent at Paris, who would put Gaston in communication with the important persons he went to seek. He then put all the ready money he had into a valise, and, accompanied only by an old servant named Owen, in whom he had great confidence, he set out from Nantes.

It was midday, a bright sun shone on the stream, and sparkled on the icicles which hung from the leafless trees, as Gaston made his way along the deserted road, looking in vain for anything resembling the convent carriage.

The servant appeared much more anxious to quicken their pace than Gaston himself did, for to him the journey was fraught

with annoyances, and he was so anxious to arrive at that Paris of which he had heard such wonderful tales, that, had it been possible, he would willingly have added wings to their horses' feet.

Gaston, however, traveled slowly as far as Oudan, but the convent carriage proceeded more slowly still. At Oudan he halted; he chose the Char Couronne, a house which had some windows overlooking the road, and which, moreover, was the best inn in the village.

While his dinner was preparing, Gaston, in spite of the cold, remained in the balcony; but in vain he looked for the carriage he so much wished to see.

Then he thought that perhaps Helene had preceded him, and was already in the inn. He went at once to a window at the back, overlooking the courtyard, to inspect the carriages standing there.

His attention was arrested by seeing, not the carriage, but his servant, Owen, speaking earnestly to a man dressed in gray and wrapped in a sort of military cloak, who, after a short conversation, mounted his horse and rode off with the air of a man to whom speed is of the utmost importance, as Gaston heard his steps along the road to Paris.

At this moment the servant raised his eyes, and began busily brushing the snow from his boots and clothes.

Gaston signed to him to approach.

"Who were you talking with, Owen?"

"To a man, M. Gaston."

"Who is that man?"

"A traveler – a soldier, who was asking his way."

"His way; to what place?"

"To Rennes."

"But you could not tell him, for you do not know this place."

"I asked the landlord, monsieur."

"Why could not he ask himself?"

"Because he had had a quarrel with him about the price of his dinner, and did not wish to speak to him again."

"Hum," said Gaston.

Nothing was more natural than this, yet Gaston became thoughtful; but he quickly threw off his suspicions, accusing himself of becoming timid at a time when he most needed courage; his brow remained clouded, however, for the carriage did not appear.

He thought at one moment that Helene might have chosen another road in order to part from him without noise or quarrel, but he soon concluded that it was only some accident which delayed her; he sat down again to table, though he had finished his dinner, and when Owen appeared to clear away, "Some wine," said he. Owen had already removed a half empty bottle.

"Some wine?" repeated the servant in astonishment, for Gaston usually drank but little.

"Yes, some wine; is there anything surprising in that?"

"No, monsieur," replied Owen.

And he transmitted the order for a second bottle of wine to the waiter. Gaston poured out a glass, drank it, then a second.

Owen stared.

Then, thinking it both his duty and his interest to prevent his master's finishing the bottle —

"Monsieur," said he, "I have heard that if you are riding, it is bad to drink when it is very cold. You forgot that we have a long way to go, and that it will be getting still colder, and, if we wait much longer, we shall get no post-horses. It is nearly three o'clock, now, and at half-past four it will be dark."

This behavior surprised Gaston.

"You are in a very great hurry, Owen," said he; "have you a rendezvous with the man who was asking his way of you?"

"Monsieur knows that to be impossible," replied Owen, "since he is going to Rennes, and we to Paris."

However, under the scrutinizing gaze of his master, Owen turned red, when suddenly, at the sound of wheels, Gaston ran to the window. It was the dark carriage.

At this sight Gaston darted from the room.

It was then Owen's turn to run to the window to see what it was that had so much interested his master. He saw a green and black carriage stop, from which the driver alighted and opened the door; then he saw a young lady in a cloak go into the hotel, followed by an Augustine sister; the two ladies, announcing that they should only remain to dine, asked for a room.

But to reach this room they had to cross a public salon, in

which Gaston stood near the fire-place; a rapid but meaning glance was exchanged between him and Helene, and, to Gaston's great satisfaction, he recognized in the driver of the carriage the convent gardener. He let him pass, however, unnoticed, but as he crossed the yard to go to the stable, he followed him.

He accosted the gardener, who told him that he was to take the two ladies to Rambouillet, where Helene would remain, and then he was to take back Sister Therese to Clisson.

Gaston, raising his eyes suddenly, saw Owen watching him, and this curiosity displeased him.

"What are you doing there?" asked he.

"Waiting for orders," said Owen.

"Do you know that fellow?" asked Gaston of the gardener.

"M. Owen, your servant? Of course I do; we are from the same place."

"So much the worse," murmured Gaston.

"Oh, Owen is an honest fellow."

"Never mind," said Gaston; "not a word of Helene, I beg."

The gardener promised; and, indeed, it was his own interest to keep the secret, for, had it been discovered that he had given Gaston the key, he would have lost his place.

After a hasty meal, the carriage was again ordered, and at the door Gaston met the ladies, and handed them in. Chanlay was not quite unknown to the sister, so she thanked him graciously as he handed her in.

"Monsieur," said Owen, behind the chevalier, "our horses are

ready."

"One more glass," said Gaston, "and I shall start."

To Owen's great surprise, Gaston returned to the room and ordered a third bottle – for Owen had removed the second, of which Gaston had only drunk his two glasses.

Gaston remained about a quarter of an hour, and then, having no further motive for waiting, he set out.

When they had ridden a short distance, they saw the carriage imbedded in a deep rut, where, in spite of the efforts of the horses and the gardener, it remained stationary. Gaston could not leave him in such a dilemma, and the gardener, recognizing Owen, called to him for aid. The two riders dismounted, opened the carriage door, took out the ladies, and succeeded in freeing the carriage, so that they were able to proceed.

An acquaintanceship was thus established, and the poor nun, who was very timid, inquired of Gaston if the road were safe. Gaston reassured her, and said that he and his servant would escort them, and his offer was at once accepted with thanks.

Meanwhile Helene had played her part admirably, showing that a young girl, however simple and naïve, has the instinct of dissimulation, which only requires opportunity to develop itself.

Gaston rode along close to the door, for the road was narrow, and Sister Therese asked him many questions. She learned that he was called the Chevalier de Livry, and was the brother of one of the young ladies who had been in the convent school, but who was now married to Montlouis.

They stopped, as previously arranged, at Ancenis.

The gardener confirmed what Gaston had said of his relationship to Mademoiselle de Livry, so that Sister Therese had no suspicion, and was very friendly with him.

She was, in fact, delighted, on starting the next morning, to find him already mounted, and to receive his accustomed politeness in handing them into the carriage. As he did so, he slipped a note into Helene's hand, and by a glance she told him he should receive a reply.

Gaston rode by the side of the carriage, for the road was bad, and assistance was frequently required, either to free a wheel, to assist the ladies to alight for the purpose of walking up a steep ascent, or some of the many accidents of a journey. "My dear Helene," said Sister Therese, several times, "what would have become of us without the aid of this gentleman?"

Before arriving at Angers, Gaston inquired at what hotel they were going to stay, and, finding that it was the same at which he intended to put up, he sent Owen on before to engage apartments.

When they arrived, he received a note, which Helene had written during dinner. She spoke of her love and happiness as though they were secure and everlasting.

But Gaston looked on the future in its true light. Bound by an oath to undertake a terrible mission, he foresaw sad misfortunes after their present short-lived joy. He remembered that he was about to lose happiness, just as he had tasted it for the first time, and rebelled against his fate. He did not remember that he had

sought that conspiracy which now bound him, and which forced him to pursue a path leading to exile or the scaffold, while he had in sight another path which would lead him direct to happiness.

It is true that when Gaston joined the conspiracy he did not know Helene, and thought himself alone in the world. At twenty years of age he had believed that the world had no pleasure for him; then he had met Helene, and the world became full of pleasure and hope: but it was too late; he had already entered on a career from which he could not draw back.

Meanwhile, in the preoccupation of his mind, Gaston had quite forgotten his suspicions of Owen, and had not noticed that he had spoken to two cavaliers similar to the one whom he had seen the first evening; but Owen lost nothing of what passed between Gaston and Helene.

As they approached the end of their journey, Gaston became sad; and when the landlord at Chartres replied to the question of Sister Therese, "To-morrow you may, if you choose, reach Rambouillet," it was as though he had said, "To-morrow you separate forever."

Helene, who loved as women love, with the strength, or rather the weakness, to sacrifice everything to that love, could not understand Gaston's passive submission to the decrees of Providence, and she would have preferred to have seen him make some effort to combat them.

But Helene was in this unjust to Gaston; the same ideas tormented him. He knew that at a word from him Helene would

follow him to the end of the world – he had plenty of gold – it would be easy for Helene one evening, instead of going to rest, to go with him into a post-chaise, and in two days they would be beyond the frontier, free and happy, not for a day or a month, but forever.

But one word, one little word, opposed itself to all this. That word was honor. He had given his oath, and he would be disgraced if he did not keep it.

The last evening Helene expected that Gaston would speak, but in vain, and she retired to rest with the conviction that Gaston did not love her as she loved him.

That night Gaston never slept, and he rose pale and despairing. They breakfasted at a little village. The nun thought that in the evening she would begin her homeward journey toward her beloved convent. Helene thought that it was now too late to act, even if Gaston should speak. Gaston thought that he was about to lose forever the woman whom he loved.

About three o'clock in the afternoon they all alighted to walk up a steep hill, from the summit of which they could see before them a steeple and a number of houses. It was Rambouillet; they did not know it, but they felt that it was.

Gaston was the first to break the silence. "There," said he, "our paths separate. Helene, I implore you preserve the recollection of me, and, whatever happens, do not condemn or curse me."

"Gaston, you only speak of the most terrible things. I need courage, and you take it from me. Have you nothing joyful to

tell me? I know the present is dark, but is the future also as dreadful? Are there not many years, and therefore many hopes, to look forward to? We are young – we love one another; are there no means of struggling against the fate which threatens us? Oh, Gaston! I feel in myself a great strength, and if you but say – but no, I am mad; it is I who suffer, and yet I who console."

"I understand you, Helene – you want a promise, do you not? Well, judge if I am wretched; I dare not promise. You tell me to hope, and I can but despair. If I had ten years, five years, one year, at my own disposal, I would offer them to you, Helene, and think myself blessed, but from the moment I leave you, we lose each other. From to-morrow morning I belong no more to myself."

"Oh!" cried Helene, "unhappy that I am, did you then deceive me when you said you loved me; are you pledged to another?"

"At least, my poor Helene," said Gaston, "on this point I can reassure you. I have no other love."

"Then we may yet be happy, Gaston, if my new family will recognize you as my husband."

"Helene, do you not see that every word you utter stabs me to the heart?"

"But at least tell me what it is."

"Fate, which I cannot escape; ties which I dare not break."

"I know of none such," cried the young girl. "I am promised a family, riches, station, and a name; and yet, Gaston, say but one word and I leave them all for you. Why, then, will you not do as

much for me?"

Gaston answered not; and at this moment Sister Therese rejoined them, and they again got into the carriage. When they neared the town, the nun called Gaston, told him that, perhaps, some one might come to meet Helene, and that a stranger should not be seen with them. Gaston bowed silently and sadly, and turned to leave them.

Helene was no ordinary woman; she saw Gaston's distress. "Is it adieu, or au revoir?" cried she, boldly.

"Au revoir," said Gaston, and he rode off quickly.

CHAPTER VI.

A ROOM IN THE HOTEL AT RAMBOUILLET

Gaston went away without saying how they were to meet again; but Helene thought that he would certainly manage that, and she contented herself with watching him as long as she could. Ten minutes later the carriage stopped at the Tigre-Royal. A woman, who was waiting, came out hastily, and respectfully assisted the ladies to alight, and then guided them through the passages of the hotel, preceded by a valet carrying lights.

A door opened, Madame Desroches drew back to allow Helene and Sister Therese to pass, and they soon found themselves on a soft and easy sofa, in front of a bright fire.

The room was large and well furnished, but the taste was severe, for the style called Rococo was not yet introduced. There were four doors; the first was that by which they had entered – the second led to the dining-room, which was already lighted and warmed – the third led into a richly-appointed bedroom – the fourth did not open.

Helene admired the magnificence of all around her – the quiet and respectful manner of the servants; while Sister Therese rejoiced, when she saw the smoking supper, that it was not a fast day.

Presently Madame Desroches returned, and approaching the sister, handed her a letter. She opened it, and read as follows:

"Sister Therese may pass the night at Rambouillet, or leave again at once, according to her own wish. She will receive two hundred louis offered to the convent by Helene, and will give up her charge to the care of Madame Desroches, who is honored by the confidence of Helene's parents."

At the bottom of the letter, instead of a signature, was a cipher, which the sister compared with that on a letter which she had brought from Clisson. The identity being proved —

"My child," said she, "I leave you after supper."

"So soon!" said Helene, to whom Therese was now the only link to her past life.

"Yes, my child. It is at my option to sleep here, but I prefer to return at once; for I wish to be again at home, where the only thing wanting to my happiness will be your presence."

Helene threw herself on Therese's neck, weeping. She recalled her youth, passed so happily among affectionate companions, and she again saw the towers and steeples of her former residence.

They sat down to table, and Sister Therese hastily partook of some refreshment, then embraced Helene, who wished to accompany her to the carriage; but Madame Desroches begged her not to do so, as the hotel was full of strangers.

Helene then asked permission to see the poor gardener, who had been their escort, once more. This man had become a friend

to her, and she quitted him and Therese sadly.

Madame Desroches, seeing that Helene felt vainly in her pocket, said, "Does mademoiselle want anything?"

"Yes," said Helene; "I should wish to give a souvenir to this good man."

Madame Desroches gave Helene twenty-five louis, and she, without counting them, slipped them into the gardener's hand, who overwhelmed her with tears and thanks.

At length they were forced to part, and Helene, hearing the sound of their carriage driving away, threw herself on a sofa, weeping.

Madame Desroches reminded her that she had eaten nothing. Helene insisted that she should sup with her. After her meal she showed Helene her bedroom, saying, "Will mademoiselle ring when she requires her femme-de-chambre; for this evening mademoiselle will receive a visit."

"A visit!" cried Helene.

"Yes, mademoiselle; from a relation."

"And is it the one who watches over me?"

"From your birth, mademoiselle."

"Oh, mon Dieu!" cried Helene; "and he is coming?"

"He is most anxious to know you."

"Oh," murmured Helene; "I feel as if I should faint."

Madame Desroches ran to her, and supported her.

"Do you feel so much terror," asked she, "at seeing one who loves you?"

"It is not terror, it is agitation," said Helene. "I did not know that it would be to-night; and this important news quite overcomes me."

"But I have not told you all: this person is necessarily surrounded by mystery."

"Why so?"

"I am forbidden to reply to that question, mademoiselle."

"What necessity can there be for such precautions with a poor orphan like me?"

"They are necessary, believe me."

"But in what do they consist?"

"Firstly, you may not see the face of this person; so that you may not recognize him if you meet him in the world."

"Then he will come masked?"

"No, mademoiselle: but the lights will be extinguished."

"Then we shall be in darkness?"

"Yes."

"But you will remain with me, Madame Desroches."

"No, mademoiselle; that is expressly forbidden."

"By whom?"

"By the person who is coming."

"But do you, then, owe such absolute obedience to this person?"

"More than that, mademoiselle, I owe him the deepest respect."

"Is he, then, of such high station?"

"He is of the very highest in France."

"And he is my relation?"

"The nearest."

"For Heaven's sake, Madame Desroches, do not leave me in uncertainty on this point."

"I have already told you, mademoiselle, that there are some questions to which I am expressly forbidden to reply," and she was about to retire.

"Why do you leave me?" asked Helene.

"I leave you to your toilet."

"But, madame – "

Madame Desroches made a low, ceremonious curtsy, and went out of the room, closing the door behind her.

CHAPTER VII.

A SERVANT IN THE ROYAL LIVERY. – MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC D'ORLEANS

While the things which we have related were passing in the parlor of the hotel Tigre-Royal, in another apartment of the same hotel, seated near a large fire, was a man shaking the snow from his boots, and untying the strings of a large portfolio. This man was dressed in the hunting livery of the house of Orleans; the coat red and silver, large boots, and a three-cornered hat, trimmed with silver. He had a quick eye, a long pointed nose, a round and open forehead, which was contradicted by thin and compressed lips.

This man murmured to himself some phrases which he interrupted by oaths and exclamations, which seemed less the result of words than thoughts.

"Come, come," said he, "M. de Montaran did not deceive me, and our Bretons are hard at the work; but for what earthly reason can he have come by such short stages? He left at noon on the 11th, and only arrived on the evening of the 21st. This probably hides some new mystery, which will be explained by the fellow recommended by Montaran, and with whom my people were in

communication on the journey. Hola!"

And he rang a silver bell. A man, dressed in gray, like those we have seen on the route, appeared.

"Ah! it is you, Tapin?"

"Yes, monseigneur; the affair being important, I thought it better to come myself."

"Have you questioned the men you placed on the road?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but they know nothing but the places at which our conspirators stopped; in fact, that is all they were told to learn."

"I will try to learn from the servant. What sort of man is he?"

"Oh, a mischievous simpleton, half Norman, half Breton; a bad fellow."

"What is he about now?"

"Serving his master's supper."

"Whom, I hope, they have placed as I desired?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"In a room without curtains?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And you have made a hole in the shutter?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well, then, send me the servant, and remain within call."

The man in the red coat consulted his watch.

"Half-past eight," said he; "at this hour Monseigneur the Regent returns to St. Germain and asks for Dubois; as Dubois is not there, he rubs his hands and prepares for some folly. Rub your

hands, Philippe d'Orleans, and amuse yourself at your pleasure, for the danger is not at Paris, but here. We shall see if you will laugh at my secret police this time. Ah! here is our man."

At this moment Tapin introduced Owen.

"Here is the person you wished to see," said he.

Owen remained standing, trembling, near the door, while Dubois wrapped himself in a large cloak, which left only the upper part of his face visible to him on whom he fixed his cat-like eyes.

"Approach, my friend," said Dubois.

In spite of the cordiality of this invitation, it was given in so harsh a voice that Owen would have preferred being at a greater distance from this man, who looked at him so strangely.

"Well, fellow," said Dubois, seeing that he did not stir, "did you not hear me?"

"Yes, monseigneur," said Owen.

"Then why do you not obey?"

"I did not know you spoke to me."

And Owen then stepped forward.

"You have received fifty louis to speak the truth to me," continued Dubois.

"Pardon, monseigneur," said Owen, who began to recover his composure; "I have not received them; they were promised to me, but –"

Dubois took a handful of gold from his pocket, counted fifty louis, and placed them in a pile on the table.

Owen looked at the pile with an expression of which one would have supposed his dull countenance incapable.

"Good," thought Dubois; "he is avaricious."

In reality, the fifty louis had always appeared very doubtful to Owen. He had betrayed his master with scarcely a hope of obtaining his reward; and now the promised gold was before his eyes.

"May I take them?" asked Owen, spreading his hand toward them.

"Wait a moment," said Dubois, who amused himself by exciting that cupidity which any but a peasant would have concealed; "we will make a bargain."

"What is it?" asked Owen.

"Here are the fifty louis."

"I see them," said Owen, passing his tongue over his lips, like a thirsty dog.

"At every answer you make to a question of mine, I either add ten louis if it is important, or take them away if it is unimportant and stupid."

Owen started; he did not like the terms.

"Now," said Dubois, "let us talk. What place have you come from?"

"Direct from Nantes."

"With whom?"

"With the Chevalier Gaston de Chanlay."

These being preliminary questions, the pile remained

undisturbed.

"Listen!" said Dubois.

"I am all attention."

"Did your master travel under his own name?"

"He set out in his own name, but changed it on the journey."

"What name did he take?"

"M. de Livry."

Dubois added ten louis, but as they would not stand on the others, he commenced a second pile.

Owen uttered a joyful cry.

"Oh," said Dubois, "do not exult yet. We are not near the end. Is there a M. de Livry at Nantes?"

"No, monseigneur; but there is a Demoiselle de Livry."

"Who is she?"

"The wife of M. de Montlouis, an intimate friend of my master."

"Good," said Dubois, adding ten louis; "and what was your master doing at Nantes?"

"What most young men do; he hunted, danced, and so on."

Dubois took away ten louis. Owen shuddered.

"Stop," said he, "he did something else."

"Ah! what was that?"

"I do not know," replied Owen.

Dubois held the ten louis in his hand.

"And since his departure, what has he done?"

"He passed through Oudon, Ancenis, Le Mans, Nogent, and

Chartres."

Dubois stretched out his hand, and took up another ten louis.

Owen uttered a dolorous cry.

"And did he make no acquaintance on the route?"

"Yes; with a young lady from the Augustine convent at Clisson, who was traveling with a sister of the convent, named Therese."

"And what was the young lady called?"

"Mademoiselle Helene de Chaverny."

"Helene! A promising name. Doubtless, she is your master's mistress?"

"I do not know," said Owen; "he would not have told me."

"He is a shrewd fellow," said Dubois, taking ten louis from the fifty.

Owen trembled: four such answers, and he would have betrayed his master for nothing.

"And these ladies are going to Paris with him?"

"No, monseigneur; they stop at Rambouillet."

"Ah," said Dubois.

The tone of this exclamation gave Owen some hope.

"Come," said Dubois, "all this is not very important, but one must encourage beginners."

And he added ten louis to the pile.

"Sister Therese," continued Owen, "is already gone home."

"So that the young lady remains alone?"

"No," answered Owen.

"How so?"

"A lady from Paris awaited her."

"From Paris?"

"Yes."

"Do you know her name?"

"I heard Sister Therese call her Madame Desroches."

"Madame Desroches!" cried Dubois, and he began another pile with ten louis.

"Yes," replied Owen, delighted.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am; she is a tall, thin, yellow-looking woman."

Dubois added ten louis. Owen thought that if he had made an interval between each adjective he might have had twenty louis.

"Thin, tall, yellow," repeated Dubois; "just so."

"From forty to forty-five," added Owen.

"Exactly," said Dubois, adding ten louis.

"In a silk dress, with large flowers on it."

"Very good," said Dubois.

Owen saw that his questioner knew enough about the lady, and waited.

"And you say that your master made acquaintance with the young lady en route?"

"Yes, monsieur, but I think it was a farce."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that they knew each other before; and I am sure of one thing, that my master waited for her three hours at Oudon."

"Bravo," said Dubois, adding ten louis; "we shall make something of you."

"You do not wish to know anything more, then?" asked Owen, extending his hand toward the two piles of gold.

"Stop," said Dubois; "is the young lady pretty?"

"Beautiful as an angel," answered Owen.

"And, no doubt, they made an appointment to meet in Paris?"

"No, monsieur, I think they said adieu forever."

"Another farce."

"I do not think so, monsieur; my master was so sad when they separated."

"And they are not to meet again?"

"Yes, once more, I think, and all will be over."

"Well, take your money; and remember that if you mention one word of this, in ten minutes you will be a dead man."

Owen snatched the money, which disappeared in his pocket instantly.

"And now," said he, "may I go?"

"No, idiot; from this moment you belong to me, for I have bought you, and you will be more useful to me at Paris than elsewhere."

"In that case I will remain, monsieur, I promise."

"There is no need to promise."

At this moment the door opened, and Tapin appeared, looking very much agitated.

"What has happened now?" asked Dubois.

"Something very important, monseigneur; but send away this man."

"Return to your master," said Dubois, "and if he writes to any one whatever, remember that I am most anxious to see his writing."

Owen went out, delighted to be set free.

"Well, Tapin," said Dubois, "what is it?"

"Monseigneur, after the hunt at St. Germain, his royal highness, instead of returning to Paris, sent away every one, and gave orders to proceed to Rambouillet."

"The regent coming to Rambouillet!"

"He will be here in half an hour, and would have been here now, if hunger had not luckily obliged him to enter the chateau and procure some refreshment."

"And what is he coming to Rambouillet for?"

"I do not know, monseigneur, unless it be for the young girl who has just arrived with a nun, and who is now in the pavilion of the hotel."

"You are right, Tapin; it is doubtless for her; and Madame Desroches, too. Did you know that Madame Desroches was here?"

"No, monseigneur, I did not."

"And are you sure that your information is correct, my dear Tapin?"

"Oh, monseigneur, it was from L'Eveille, whom I placed near his royal highness, and what he says is gospel truth."

"You are right," said Dubois, who seemed to know the qualities of this man, "if it be L'Eveille, there is no doubt."

"The poor fellow has lamed his horse, which fell near Rambouillet."

"Thirty louis for the horse; he may gain what he can of it."

Tapin took the thirty louis.

"You know the situation of the pavilion, do you not?"

"Perfectly."

"Where is it?"

"One side looks on the second courtyard; the other on a deserted lane."

"Place men in the courtyard and in the lane, disguised as stablemen, or how you please; let no one enter the pavilion but monseigneur and myself; the life of his royal highness is at stake."

"Rest easy, monseigneur."

"Do you know our Breton?"

"I saw him dismount."

"Do your men know him?"

"They all saw him on the road."

"Well, I recommend him to you."

"Shall we arrest him?"

"Certainly not; he must be allowed to go where he pleases, and act as he pleases, and he must have every opportunity to do so. If he were arrested now, he would tell nothing, and our plans would be disconcerted; no, no, these plans must hatch."

"Hatch what, monseigneur?" said Tapin, who appeared to be

on confidential terms with Dubois.

"My archbishop's miter, M. Lecocq," said Dubois, "and now to your work; I go to mine."

Both left the room and descended the staircase, but separated at the door; Lecocq went along the Rue de Paris; and Dubois, slipping along by the wall, went to peep through the hole in the shutter.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE UTILITY OF A SEAL

Gaston had just supped; for at his age, whether a man be in despair or in love, nature asserts her rights. He was leaning on the table thoughtfully. The lamp threw a light over his face, and enabled Dubois to gratify his curiosity.

He looked at him with an attention almost alarming: his quick eye darted – his lip curled with a smile, which gave one the idea of a demon smiling at the sight of one of those victims who seem to have vowed their own perdition.

While looking, he murmured, "Young, handsome, black eyes, proud lips – he is a Breton, he is not corrupted, like the conspirators of Cellamare, by the soft glances of the ladies at court; – then the other spoke of carrying off, dethroning, but this one —*diable*, this one; and yet," continued he, after a pause, "I look in vain for traces of cunning on that open brow. I see no Machiavelism in the corners of that mouth, so full of loyalty and honor; yet no doubt all is arranged to surprise the regent on his visit to this Clisson demoiselle. Who will say again that Bretons have dull brains?"

"No," said Dubois, after another pause, "it cannot be so. It is impossible that this young man with his calm sad face should be ready in a quarter of an hour to kill a man, and that man

the first prince of the blood. No, I cannot believe in such sang-froid; and yet the regent has kept this amourette secret even from me; he goes out to hunt at St. Germain, announces aloud that he shall sleep at the Palais Royal, then all at once gives counter orders, and drives to Rambouillet. At Rambouillet, the young girl waits, and is received by Madame Desroches; who can she be watching for, if not for the regent? and this young girl is the mistress of the chevalier – but is she? – Ah! we must learn. We must find out how far we can depend on Owen," and Dubois left his observatory and waited on the staircase – he was quite hidden in the shade, and he could see Gaston's door in the light.

The door presently opened, and Owen appeared.

He held a letter in his hands, and after hesitating a minute, he appeared to have taken his determination, and mounted the staircase.

"Good," said Dubois, "he has tasted the forbidden fruit, and he is mine."

Then, stopping Owen: "Give me the letter which you were bringing me, and wait here."

"How did you know I had a letter?" asked Owen, bewildered.

Dubois shrugged his shoulders, took the letter, and disappeared.

In his room he examined the seal; the chevalier, who had no wax, had used that on the bottle, and had sealed it with the stone of a ring.

Dubois held the letter above the candle, and the wax melted.

He opened the letter and read:

"Dear Helene – Your courage has doubled mine; manage so that I can enter the house, and you shall know my plans."

"Oh!" said Dubois, "it seems she does not know them yet. Things are not as far advanced as I supposed."

He resealed the letter with one of the numerous rings which he wore, and which resembled that of the chevalier, and calling Owen —

"Here," said he, "is your master's letter; deliver it faithfully, bring me the answer, and you shall have ten louis."

"Ah!" thought Owen, "has this man a mine of gold?" And he went off.

Ten minutes after he returned with the reply.

It was on scented and ornamented paper, sealed with the letter H.

Dubois opened a box, took out a kind of paste in which he was about to take the impression of the seal, when he observed that from the manner in which it was folded, he could read it without opening. It was as follows:

"The person who sent for me at Bretagne is coming to meet me here instead of waiting at Paris, so impatient is he, I am told, to see me. I think he will leave again to-night. Come to-morrow morning before nine. I will tell you all that has passed, and then we can arrange how to act."

"This," said Dubois, still taking Helene for the chevalier's accomplice, "makes it clearer. If this is the way they bring up

young ladies at Clisson, I congratulate them and monseigneur, who, from her age, concludes her to be simple and ingenuous. Here," said he to Owen, "here is the letter, and your ten louis."

Owen took them.

At this moment ten o'clock struck, and the rolling of a carriage was heard. Dubois went to the window, and saw it stop at the hotel door.

In the carriage was a gentleman whom Dubois at once recognized as Lafare, captain of his royal highness's guards. "Well," said he, "he is more prudent than I thought; but where is he? Ah!"

This exclamation was uttered at the sight of a man dressed in the same red livery which he himself concealed under his cloak, and who followed the carriage mounted on a superb Spanish jenet, which, however, he could not have ridden long, for while the carriage horses were covered with foam, this one was quite fresh.

Lafare at once demanded a room and supper; meanwhile the man dismounted, threw the reins to a page, and went toward the pavilion.

"Well," said Dubois, "all this is as clear as a mountain stream; but how is it that the face of the chevalier does not appear? is he too much occupied with his chicken to have heard the carriage? Let us see. As to you, monseigneur," continued Dubois, "be assured; I will not disturb your *tete-à-tete*. Enjoy at your pleasure this commencement of ingenuity, which promises such happy

results. Ah! monseigneur, it is certain that you are short-sighted."

Dubois went down, and again took up his post at his observatory. As he approached it, Gaston rose, after putting his note in his pocket-book.

"Ah," said Dubois, "I must have that pocket-book. I would pay high for it. He is going out, he buckles on his sword, he looks for his cloak; where is he going? Let us see: to wait for his royal highness's exit? No, no, that is not the face of a man who is going to kill another; I could sooner believe he was about to spend the evening under the windows of his sweetheart.

"Ah, if he had that idea it would be a means – "

It would be difficult to render the expression which passed over the face of Dubois at this moment.

"Yes, but if I were to get a sword-thrust in the enterprise, how monseigneur would laugh; bah! there is no danger: our men are at their post, and besides, nothing venture, nothing gain."

Encouraged by this reflection, Dubois made the circuit of the hotel, in order to appear at one end of the little lane as Gaston appeared at the other.

As he had expected, at the end of the lane he found Tapin, who had placed L'Eveille in the courtyard; in two words he explained his project. Tapin pointed out to Dubois one man leaning on the step of an outer door, a second was playing a kind of Jew's harp, and seemed an itinerant musician, and there was another, too well hidden to be seen.

Dubois, thus sure of support, returned into the lane.

He soon perceived a figure at the other end, and at once recognized the chevalier, who was too thoughtful even to notice that he was passing any one.

Dubois wanted a quarrel, and he saw that he must take the initiative. He turned and stopped before the chevalier, who was trying to discover which were the windows of the room in which Helene was.

"My friend," said he roughly, "what are you doing at this hour before this house?"

Gaston was obliged to bring back his thoughts to the materialism of life.

"Did you speak to me, monsieur?" said he.

"Yes," replied Dubois, "I asked what you were doing here."

"Pass on," said the chevalier; "I do not interfere with you; do not interfere with me."

"That might be," said Dubois, "if your presence did not annoy me."

"This lane, narrow as it is, is wide enough for both, monsieur; walk on one side, and I will walk on the other."

"I wish to walk alone," said Dubois, "therefore, I beg you will choose some other window; there are plenty at Rambouillet to choose from."

"And why should I not look at these windows if I choose?" asked Chanlay.

"Because they are those of my wife," replied Dubois. – "Of your wife!"

"Yes; of my wife, who has just arrived from Paris, and of whom I am jealous, I warn you."

"Diable," murmured Gaston; "he must be the husband of the person to whom Helene has been given in charge;" and in order to conciliate a person who might be useful to him —

"Monsieur," said he politely, "in that case I am willing to leave a place where I was walking without any object in view."

"Oh," thought Dubois, "here is a polite conspirator; I must have a quarrel."

Gaston was going away.

"You are deceiving me, monsieur," said Dubois.

The chevalier turned as though he had been bitten by a serpent; however, prudent for the sake of Helene, and for the mission he had undertaken, he restrained himself.

"Is it," said he, "because I was polite that you disbelieve my word?"

"You spoke politely because you were afraid; but it is none the less true that I saw you looking at that window."

"Afraid – I afraid!" cried Chanlay, facing him; "did you say that I was afraid?"

"I did," replied Dubois.

"Do you, then, seek a quarrel?"

"It appears so. I see you come from Quimper – Corentin."

"Paques-Dieu!" said Gaston, drawing his sword, "draw!"

"And you, off with your coat," said Dubois, throwing off his cloak, and preparing to do the same with his coat.

"Why so?" asked the chevalier.

"Because I do not know you, monsieur, and because those who walk at night frequently have their coat prudently lined with a shirt of mail."

At these words the chevalier's cloak and coat were thrown aside; but, at the moment when Gaston was about to rush on his adversary, the four men appeared and seized him.

"A duel, monsieur," cried they, "in spite of the king's prohibition!" and they dragged him toward the door.

"An assassination," murmured Gaston, not daring to cry out, for fear of compromising Helene; "cowards!"

"We are betrayed, monsieur," said Dubois, rolling up Gaston's cloak and coat, and putting them under his arm; "we shall meet again to-morrow, no doubt."

And he ran toward the hotel, while they shut up Gaston in the lower room.

Dubois ran up the staircase and into his room, where he opened the precious pocket-book. He found in one pocket a broken coin and a man's name. This coin was evidently a sign of recognition, and the name was probably that of the man to whom Gaston was addressed, and who was called Captain la Jonquiere. The paper was oddly folded.

"La Jonquiere," said Dubois; "we have our eyes on *him* already."

He looked over the rest of the pocket-book – there was nothing.

"It is little," said Dubois, "but it is enough."

He folded a paper like the other, took the name, and rang the bell.

Some one knocked; the door was fastened inside. "I forgot," said Dubois, opening it, and giving entrance to Monsieur Tapin.

"What have you done with him?"

"He is in the lower room, and watched."

"Take back his cloak and coat to the place where he threw them; make your excuses, and set him free. Take care that everything is in his pockets, so that he may suspect nothing. Bring me my coat and cloak."

Monsieur Tapin bowed low, and went to obey his orders.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VISIT

All this passed, as we have said, in the lane under Helene's windows. She had heard the noise; and, as among the voices she thought she distinguished that of the chevalier, she ran anxiously to the window, when, at the same moment, Madame Desroches appeared.

She came to beg Helene to go into the drawing-room, as the visitor had arrived.

Helene started, and nearly fell; her voice failed her, and she followed, silent and trembling.

The room into which Madame Desroches led her was without any light, except what was thrown on the carpet by the last remains of a fire. Madame Desroches threw some water over the flame, and left the room entirely dark.

Begging Helene to have no fear, Madame Desroches withdrew. The instant after, Helene heard a voice behind the fourth door, which had not yet opened.

She started at the sound, and involuntarily made a few steps toward the door.

"Is she ready?" said the voice.

"Yes, monseigneur," was the reply.

"Monseigneur!" murmured Helene; "who is coming, then?"

"Is she alone?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Is she aware of my arrival?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"We shall not be interrupted?"

"Monseigneur may rely upon me."

"And no light?"

"None whatever."

The steps approached, then stopped.

"Speak frankly, Madame Desroches," said the voice. "Is she as pretty as they said?"

"More beautiful than your highness can imagine."

"Your highness! who can he be?" thought Helene, much agitated.

At this moment the door creaked on its hinges and a heavy step approached.

"Mademoiselle," said the voice, "I beg you to receive and hear me."

"I am here," said Helene, faintly.

"Are you frightened?"

"I confess it, mon – Shall I say 'monsieur' or 'monseigneur'?"

"Say 'my friend.'"

At this moment her hand touched that of the unknown.

"Madame Desroches, are you there?" asked Helene, drawing back.

"Madame Desroches," said the voice, "tell mademoiselle that

she is as safe as in a temple before God."

"Ah! monseigneur, I am at your feet, pardon me."

"Rise, my child, and seat yourself there. Madame Desroches, close all the doors; and now," continued he, "give me your hand, I beg."

Helene's hand again met that of the stranger, and this time it was not withdrawn.

"He seems to tremble also," murmured she.

"Tell me are you afraid, dear child?"

"No," replied Helene; "but when your hand clasps mine, a strange thrill passes through me."

"Speak to me, Helene," said the unknown, with an expression of tenderness. "I know already that you are beautiful, but this is the first time I have heard your voice. Speak – I am listening."

"But have you seen me, then?" asked Helene.

"Do you remember that two years ago the abbess had your portrait taken?"

"Yes, I remember – an artist came expressly from Paris."

"It was I who sent him."

"And was the portrait for you?"

"It is here," said the unknown, taking from his pocket a miniature, which Helene could feel, though she could not see it.

"But what interest could you have in the portrait of a poor orphan?"

"Helene, I am your father's friend."

"My father! Is he alive?"

"Yes."

"Shall I ever see him?"

"Perhaps."

"Oh!" said Helene, pressing the stranger's hand, "I bless you for bringing me this news."

"Dear child!" said he.

"But if he be alive," said Helene, "why has he not sought out his child?"

"He had news of you every month; and though at a distance, watched over you."

"And yet," said Helene, reproachfully, "he has not seen me for sixteen years."

"Believe me, none but the most important reasons would have induced him to deprive himself of this pleasure."

"I believe you, monsieur; it is not for me to accuse my father."

"No; it is for you to pardon him if he accuses himself."

"To pardon him!" cried Helene.

"Yes; and this pardon, which he cannot ask for himself, I ask in his name."

"Monsieur," said Helene, "I do not understand you."

"Listen, then, and give me back your hand."

"Here it is."

"Your father was an officer in the king's service; at the battle of Nerwinden, where he charged at the head of the king's household troops, one of his followers, called M. de Chaverny, fell near him, pierced by a ball. Your father wished to assist him,

but the wound was mortal, and the wounded man, who knew that it was so, said, 'Think not of me, but of my child.' Your father pressed his hand as a promise, and the man fell back and died, as though he only waited this assurance to close his eyes. You are listening, are you not, Helene?"

"Oh! need you ask such a question?" said the young girl.

"At the end of the campaign, your father's first care was for the little orphan. She was a charming child, of from ten to twelve years, who promised to be as beautiful as you are. The death of M. de Chaverny, her father, left her without support or fortune; your father placed her at the convent of the Faubourg Saint Antoine, and announced that at a proper age he should give her a dowry."

"I thank God," cried Helene, "for having made me the child of a man who so nobly kept his promise."

"Wait, Helene," said the unknown, "for now comes the time when your father will not receive your praises."

Helene was silent.

The unknown continued: "Your father, indeed, watched over the orphan till her eighteenth year. She was an adorable young girl, and his visits to the convent became longer and more frequent than they should have been: your father began to love his protégée. At first he was frightened at his own love, for he remembered his promise to her dying father. He begged the superior to look for a suitable husband for Mademoiselle de Chaverny, and was told that her nephew, a young Breton, having

seen her, loved her, and wished to obtain her hand."

"Well, monsieur?" asked Helene, hearing that the unknown hesitated to proceed.

"Well; your father's surprise was great, Helene, when he learned from the superior that Mademoiselle de Chaverny had replied that she did not wish to marry, and that her greatest desire was to remain in the convent where she had been brought up, and that the happiest day of her life would be that on which she should pronounce her vows."

"She loved some one," said Helene.

"Yes, my child, you are right – alas! we cannot avoid our fate – Mademoiselle de Chaverny loved your father. For a long time she kept her secret, but one day, when your father begged her to renounce her strange wish to take the veil, the poor child confessed all. Strong against his love when he did not believe it returned, he succumbed when he found he had but to desire and to obtain. They were both so young – your father scarcely twenty-five, she not eighteen – they forgot the world, and only remembered that they could be happy."

"But since they loved," said Helene, "why did they not marry?"

"Union was impossible, on account of the distance which separated them. Do you not know that your father is of high station?"

"Alas! yes," said Helene, "I know it."

"During a year," continued he, "their happiness surpassed their hopes; but at the end of that time you came into the world,

and then – "

"Well?" asked the young girl, timidly.

"Your birth cost your mother's life."

Helene sobbed.

"Yes," continued the unknown, in a voice full of emotion, "yes, Helene, weep for your mother; she was a noble woman, of whom, through his griefs, his pleasures, even his follies – your father retains a tender recollection; he transferred to you all his love for her."

"And yet," said Helene, "he consented to remove me from him, and has never again seen me."

"Helene, on this point pardon your father, for it was not his fault. You were born in 1703, at the most austere period of Louis XIV.'s reign; your father was already out of favor with the king, or rather with Madame de Maintenon; and for your sake, as much or more than for his, he sent you into Bretagne, confiding you to Mother Ursula, superior of the convent where you were brought up. At length, Louis XIV. being dead, and everything having changed through all France, it is decided to bring you nearer to him. During the journey, however, you must have seen that his care was over you, and when he knew that you were at Rambouillet, he could not wait till to-morrow – he is come to you here, Helene."

"Oh, mon Dieu!" cried Helene, "is this true?"

"And in seeing, or rather in listening to you, he thinks he hears your mother – the same accent in the voice. Helene, Helene, that

you may be happier than she was is his heartfelt prayer!"

"Oh, heavens!" cried Helene, "this emotion, your trembling hand. Monsieur, you said my father is come to meet me."

"Yes."

"Here at Rambouillet?"

"Yes."

"You say he is happy to see me again?"

"Oh yes, very happy!"

"But this happiness was not enough, is it not so? He wished to speak to me, to tell me himself the story of my life – that I may thank him for his love – that I may fall at his feet, that I may ask his blessing. Oh!" cried Helene, kneeling, "oh, I am at your feet; bless me, father!"

"Helene, my child, my daughter!" cried the unknown, "not at my feet, but in my arms!"

"My father, my father!" was Helene's only reply.

"And yet," continued he, "I came with a different intention, prepared to deny all, to remain a stranger to you; but having you so near me, pressing your hand, hearing your voice, I had not the strength; but do not make me repent my weakness, and let secrecy – "

"I swear by my mother's grave," cried Helene.

"That is all I desire," cried the unknown. "Now listen, for I must leave you."

"What, already!"

"It must be so."

"Speak, then, my father. I am ready to obey you."

"To-morrow you leave for Paris; there is a house there destined for you. Madame Desroches will take you there, and at the very first moment that I can do so, I will come there to see you."

"Soon, I hope, for do not forget that I am alone in the world."

"As soon as possible;" and pressing his lips to Helene's forehead, the unknown imprinted on it one of those kisses as sweet to the heart of a father as a kiss of love to the heart of a lover.

Ten minutes later Madame Desroches entered with a light. Helene was on her knees praying; without rising, she signed to Madame Desroches to place the light on the chimney-piece, which that lady did, and then retired.

Helene, after praying for some time, rose, and looked around her as though for some evidence that the whole was not a dream; her own emotion, however, assured her that it was really a great event in her life which had taken place. Then the thought of Gaston rose to her mind; this father whom she had so dreaded to see – this father, who himself had loved so ardently and suffered so deeply, would not do violence to her love; besides, Gaston was a scion of an ancient house, and beyond all this, she loved him, so that she would die if she were separated from him, and her father would not wish her death.

The obstacles on Gaston's side could be but the right, and would doubtless be easily overcome, and Helene fell asleep to

dream of a happy and smiling future.

Gaston, on his part, set at liberty with many apologies from those who pretended to have mistaken him for another person, went back to fetch his coat and cloak, which he was overjoyed to find where he had left them; he anxiously opened his pocket-book – it was as he had left it, and for greater safety he now burned the address of La Jonquiere. He gave his orders for the next day to Owen and retired.

Meanwhile, two carriages rolled away from the door of the Tigre-Royal; in the first were two gentlemen in traveling costume, preceded and followed by outriders.

In the second was a single traveler, wrapped in a large cloak; this carriage followed close behind the other as far as the Barriere de l'Etoile, where they separated, and while the first stopped at the Palais Royal, the other drew up at the Rue de Valois.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH DUBOIS PROVES THAT HIS POLICE WAS BETTER ORGANIZED AT AN EXPENSE OF 300,000 FRANCS THAN THE GENERAL POLICE FOR THREE MILLIONS

Whatever might have been the fatigues of the preceding night, the Duc d'Orleans still gave his mornings to business. He generally began to work with Dubois before he was dressed; then came a short and select levée, followed again by audiences, which kept him till eleven or twelve o'clock; then the chiefs of the councils (La Valliere and Le Blanc) came to give an account of their espionage, then Torcy, to bring any important letters which he had abstracted. At half-past two the regent had his chocolate, which he always took while laughing and chatting. This lasted half an hour, then came the audience hour for ladies, after that he went to the Duchesse d'Orleans, then to the young king, whom he visited every day, and to whom he always displayed the greatest reverence and respect.

Once a week he received foreign ministers, and on Sundays

heard mass in his private chapel.

At six, on council days, at five on others, all business was over; then the regent would go to the opera, or to Madame de Berry, with whom, however, he had quarreled now, on account of her marriage with Riom. Then came those famous suppers.

They were composed of from ten to fifteen persons, and the regent's presence among them sometimes added to their license and freedom, but never restrained it. At these suppers, kings, ministers, chancellors, ladies of the court, were all passed in review, discussed, abused; everything might be said, everything told, everything done; provided only that it were wittily said, told, or done. When all the guests had arrived, the doors were closed and barred, so that it was impossible to reach the regent until the following morning, however urgent might be the necessity.

Dubois was seldom of the number, his bad health forbade it; and this was the time chosen to pick him to pieces, at which the regent would laugh as heartily as any one. Dubois knew that he often furnished the amusement of these suppers, but he also knew that by the morning the regent invariably forgot what had been said the night before, and so he cared little about it.

Dubois, however, watched while the regent supped or slept, and seemed indefatigable; he appeared to have the gift of ubiquity.

When he returned from Rambouillet, he called Maitre Tapin, who had returned on horseback, and talked with him for an hour, after which he slept for four or five, then, rising, he presented

himself at the door of his royal highness; the regent was still asleep.

Dubois approached the bed and contemplated him with a smile which at once resembled that of an ape and a demon.

At length he decided to wake him.

"Hola, monseigneur, wake up!" he cried.

The duke opened his eyes, and seeing Dubois, he turned his face to the wall, saying —

"Ah! is that you, abbe; go to the devil!"

"Monseigneur, I have just been there, but he was too busy to receive me, and sent me to you."

"Leave me alone; I am tired."

"I dare say, the night was stormy."

"What do you mean?" asked the duke, turning half round.

"I mean that the way you spent the night does not suit a man who makes appointments for seven in the morning."

"Did I appoint you for seven in the morning?"

"Yes, yesterday morning, before you went to St. Germain's."

"It is true," said the regent.

"Monseigneur did not know that the night would be so fatiguing."

"Fatiguing! I left table at seven."

"And afterward?"

"Well! what afterward?"

"Are you satisfied, monseigneur, and was the young person worth the journey?"

"What journey?"

"The journey you took after you left the table at seven."

"One would think, to hear you, that from St. Germain here, was a long distance."

"No, monseigneur is right; it is but a few steps, but there is a method of prolonging the distance."

"What is that?"

"Going round by Rambouillet."

"You are dreaming, abbe."

"Possibly, monseigneur. I will tell you my dream; it will at least prove to your highness that even in my dreams I do not forget you."

"Some new nonsense."

"Not at all. I dreamed that monseigneur started the stag at Le Treillage, and that the animal, after some battling, worthy of a stag of high birth, was taken at Chambourcy."

"So far, your dream resembles the truth; continue, abbe."

"After which, monseigneur returned to St. Germain, sat down to table at half-past five, and ordered that the carriage without arms should be prepared and harnessed, with four horses, at half-past seven."

"Not bad, abbe, not bad; go on."

"At half-past seven, monseigneur dismissed every one except Lafare, with whom he entered the carriage. Am I right?"

"Go on; go on."

"The carriage went toward Rambouillet, and arrived there at

a quarter to ten, but at the entrance of the town it stopped, Lafare went on in the carriage to the Tigre-Royal, monseigneur following as an outrider."

"Here your dream becomes confused, abbe."

"No, no, not at all."

"Continue, then."

"Well, while Lafare pretended to eat a bad supper, which was served by waiters who called him Excellency, monseigneur gave his horse to a page and went to a little pavilion."

"Demon, where were you hidden?"

"I, monseigneur, have not left the Palais Royal, where I slept like a dormouse, and the proof is, that I am telling you my dream."

"And what was there in the pavilion?"

"First, at the door, a horrible duenna, tall, thin, dry, and yellow."

"Dubois, I will recommend you to Desroches, and the first time she sees you, she will tear your eyes out."

"Then inside, mon Dieu! inside."

"You could not see that, even in a dream, abbe."

"Monseigneur, you may take away the 300,000 francs which you allow me for my secret police, if – by their aid – I did not see into the interior."

"Well, what did you see?"

"Ma foi, monseigneur, a charming little Bretonne, sixteen or seventeen years old, beautiful, coming direct from the Augustine

convent at Clisson, accompanied to Rambouillet by one of the sisters, whose troublesome presence was soon dispensed with, was it not?"

"Dubois, I have often thought you were the devil, who has taken the form of an abbe to ruin me."

"To save you, monseigneur, to save you."

"To save me; I do not believe it."

"Well," said Dubois, "are you pleased with her?"

"Enchanted, Dubois; she is charming."

"Well, you have brought her from so far, that if she were not, you would be quite cheated."

The regent frowned, but, reflecting that probably Dubois did not know the rest, the frown changed to a smile.

"Dubois," said he, "certainly, you are a great man."

"Ah, monseigneur, no one but you doubts it, and yet you disgrace me – "

"Disgrace you!"

"Yes, you hide your loves from me."

"Come, do not be vexed, Dubois."

"There is reason, however, you must confess, monseigneur."

"Why?"

"Why did you not tell me you wanted a Bretonne. Could not I have sent for one?"

"Yes."

"Yes, of course I could."

"As good?"

"Yes, and better. You think you have found a treasure, perhaps?"

"Hola, hola!"

"Well, when you know what she is, and to what you expose yourself."

"Do not jest, abbe, I beg."

"Ah! monseigneur, you distress me."

"What do you mean?"

"That you are taken by a glance, a single night fascinates you, and there is no one to compare to the new comer. Is she then very pretty?"

"Charming."

"And discreet: virtue itself, I suppose."

"You are right."

"Well, I tell you, monseigneur, you are lost."

"I?"

"Yes; your Bretonne is a jade."

"Silence, abbe."

"Why silence?"

"I forbid you to say another word."

"Monseigneur, you, too, have had a dream – let me explain it."

"Monsieur Joseph, I will send you to the Bastille."

"As you please, monseigneur, but still you must know that this girl – "

"Is my daughter, abbe."

Dubois drew back stupefied.

"Your daughter; and who is her mother?"

"An honest woman, who had the honor of dying without knowing you."

"And the child?"

"The child has been concealed, that she might not be sullied by the looks of such creatures as you."

Dubois bowed, and retired, respectfully.

The regent looked triumphant.

"Ah!" said Dubois, who had not quite closed the door, "I thought this plot would bring me my archbishop's miter – if I am careful, it will bring me my cardinal's hat."

CHAPTER XI.

RAMBOUILLET AGAIN

At the appointed hour Gaston presented himself at Helene's domicile, but Madame Desroches made some difficulty about admitting him; Helene, however, said firmly that she was quite at liberty to judge for herself what was right, and that she was quite determined to see M. de Livry, who had come to take leave of her. It will be remembered that this was the name which Gaston had assumed during the journey, and which he intended to retain, except when with those connected with his mission to Paris.

Madame Desroches went to her room somewhat out of humor, and even attempted to overhear the conversation, but Helene bolted the outer door.

"Ah, Gaston," said she, "I have been expecting you. I did not sleep last night."

"Nor I, Helene; but I must admire all this splendor."

Helene smiled.

"And your head-dress – how beautiful you are, like this."

"You do not appear much pleased."

Gaston made no reply, but continued his investigations.

"These rich hangings, these costly pictures, all prove that your protectors are opulent, Helene."

"I believe so," said Helene, smiling, "yet I am told that

these hangings, and this gilding, which you admire, are old and unfashionable, and must be replaced by new."

"Ah, Helene, you will become a great lady," said Gaston, sighing; "already I am kept waiting for an audience."

"My dear Gaston, did you not wait for hours in your little boat on the lake?"

"You were then in the convent. I waited the abbess's pleasure."

"That title is sacred, is it not?"

"Yes."

"It gives security, imposes respect and obedience."

"Doubtless."

"Well, judge of my delight. Here I find the same protection, the same love, only more powerful, more lasting."

"What!" exclaimed Gaston, surprised.

"I find – "

"Speak, in Heaven's name."

"Gaston, I have found a father."

"A father – ah, my dear Helene, I share your joy; what happiness! a father to watch over my Helene, my wife!"

"To watch from afar."

"Is he separated from you?"

"Alas, it seems the world separates us."

"Is it a secret?"

"A secret even to me, or you may be sure you should know all. I have no secrets from you, Gaston."

"A misfortune of birth – a prescription in your family – some

temporary obstacle?" – "I do not know."

"Decidedly, it is a secret; but," said he, smiling, "I permit you to be discreet with me, if your father ordered it. However, may I ask some more questions?"

"Oh, yes."

"Are you pleased? Is your father one you can be proud of?"

"I think so, his heart seems noble and good. His voice is sweet and melodious."

"His voice! but is he like you?"

"I do not know. I have not seen him."

"Not seen him?"

"No, it was dark."

"Your father did not wish to see his daughter; and you so beautiful; oh, what indifference!"

"No, Gaston, he is not indifferent; he knows me well; he has my portrait – that portrait which made you so jealous last spring."

"But I do not understand this."

"It was dark, I tell you."

"In that case one might light these girandoles," said Gaston.

"That is well, when one wishes to be seen; but when one has reasons for concealment – "

"What!" interrupted Gaston; "what reason can a father have for hiding from his own daughter?"

"Excellent reasons, I believe, and you should understand them better than I can."

"Oh, Helene!" said Gaston, "with what terrible ideas you fill

my mind."

"You alarm me, Gaston!"

"Tell me – what did your father speak of!"

"Of his deep love for me."

Gaston started.

"He swore to me that in future I should be happy; that there should be no more uncertainty as to my fate, for that he would despise all those considerations which had induced him as yet to disown me as a daughter."

"Words, words; but what proof did he give you? Pardon me these questions, Helene. I dread misfortune. I wish that for a time your angel's innocence could give place to the sharpness and infernal sagacity of a fiend; you would then understand me. I should not need to subject you to this interrogatory, which now is so necessary."

"I do not understand your question, Gaston. I do not know how to reply to you."

"Did he show you much affection?"

"Yes."

"But in the darkness, when he wished to speak to you?"

"He took my hand, and his trembled the most."

Gaston clenched his hands with rage.

"He embraced you paternally, did he not?"

"He gave me a single kiss on the forehead, which I received on my knees."

"Helene!" he cried, "my fears were not groundless; you are

betrayed – you are the victim of a snare. Helene, this man who conceals himself, who fears the light, who calls you his child, is not your father."

"Gaston, you distress me."

"Helene, angels might envy your innocence; but on earth all is abused, even angels are insulted, profaned, by men. This man, whom I will know, whom I will seize and force to have confidence in your love and honor, shall tell me – if he be not the vilest of beings – whether I am to call him father, or kill him as a wretch!"

"Gaston, your brain is wandering; what can lead you to suspect such treachery? And, since you arouse my suspicions, since you hold a light over those ignoble labyrinths of the human heart which I refused to contemplate, I will speak to you with the same freedom. Was I not in this man's power? Is not this house his? Are not the people by whom I am surrounded devoted to his orders? Gaston, if you love me, you will ask my pardon for what you have thought and said of my father."

Gaston was in despair.

"Do not destroy one of the purest and holiest joys I have ever tasted. Do not poison the happiness of a life which I have often wept to think was solitary and abandoned, without other affection than that of which Heaven forbids us to be lavish. Let my filial ties compensate for the remorse which I sometimes feel for loving you almost to idolatry."

"Helene, forgive me," cried Gaston. "Yes, you are right; I sully

your pure joys by my contact, and it may be the noble affection of your father, but in Heaven's name, Helene, give some heed to the fears of my experience and my love. Criminal passions often speculate on innocent credulity. The argument you use is weak. To show at once a guilty love would be unlike a skillful corrupter; but to win you by a novel luxury pleasing to your age, to accustom you gradually to new impressions, to win you at last by persuasion, is a sweeter victory than that of violence. Helene, listen to my prudence of five-and-twenty years – I say my prudence, for it is my love that speaks, that love which you should see so humble, so devoted, so ready to accept a father whom I knew to be really your parent."

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