

DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE CONSPIRATORS

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The Conspirators

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Alexandre Dumas

The Conspirators / The Chevalier d'Harmental

CHAPTER I. CAPTAIN ROQUEFINETTE

On the 22d of March, in the year of our Lord 1718, a young cavalier of high bearing, about twenty-six or twenty-eight years of age, mounted on a pure-bred Spanish charger, was waiting, toward eight o'clock in the morning, at that end of the Pont Neuf which abuts on the Quai de l'Ecole.

He was so upright and firm in his saddle, that one might have imagined him to be placed there as a sentinel by the Lieutenant-General of Police, Messire Voyer d'Argenson. After waiting about half an hour, during which time he impatiently examined the clock of the Samaritaine, his glance, wandering till then, appeared to rest with satisfaction on an individual who, coming from the Place Dauphine, turned to the right, and advanced toward him.

The man who thus attracted the attention of the young chevalier was a powerfully-built fellow of five feet ten, wearing, instead of a peruke, a forest of his own black hair, slightly grizzled, dressed in a manner half-bourgeois, half-military, ornamented with a shoulder-knot which had once been crimson, but from exposure to sun and rain had become a dirty orange. He was armed with a long sword slung in a belt, and which bumped ceaselessly against the calves of his legs. Finally, he wore a hat once furnished with a plume and lace, and which – in remembrance, no doubt, of its past splendor – its owner had stuck so much over his left ear, that it seemed as if only a miracle of equilibrium could keep it in its place. There was altogether in the countenance and in the carriage and bearing of the man (who seemed from forty to forty-five years of age, and who advanced swaggering and keeping the middle of the road, curling his mustache with one hand, and with the other signing to the carriages to give place), such a character of insolent carelessness, that the cavalier who watched him smiled involuntarily, as he murmured to himself, "I believe this is my man."

In consequence of this probability, he walked straight up to the new-comer, with the evident intention of speaking to him. The latter, though he evidently did not know the cavalier, seeing that he was going to address him, placed himself in the third position, and waited, one hand on his sword and the other on his mustache, to hear what the person who was coming up had to say to him. Indeed, as the man with the orange ribbon had foreseen, the young cavalier stopped his horse by him, and touching his hat – "Sir," said he, "I think I may conclude, from your appearance and manner, that you are a gentleman; am I mistaken?"

"No, palsam-bleu!" replied he to whom this strange question was addressed, touching his hat in his turn. "I am delighted that my appearance speaks so well for me, for, however little you would think that you were giving me my proper title, you may call me captain."

"I am enchanted that you are a soldier; it is an additional security to me that you are incapable of leaving a brave man in distress."

"Welcome, provided always the brave man has no need of my purse, for I confess, freely, that I have just left my last crown in a cabaret on the Port de la Tonnelle."

"Nobody wants your purse, captain; on the contrary, I beg you to believe that mine is at your disposal."

"To whom have I the honor to speak?" asked the captain, visibly touched by this reply, "and in what can I oblige you?"

"I am the Baron Rene de Valf," replied the cavalier.

"I think," interrupted the captain, "that I knew, in the Flemish wars, a family of that name."

"It was mine, since we are from Liege." The two speakers exchanged bows.

"You must know then," continued the Baron de Valef, "that the Chevalier Raoul d'Harmental, one of my most intimate friends, last night, in my company, picked up a quarrel, which will finish this morning by a meeting. Our adversaries were three, and we but two. I went this morning to the houses of the Marquis de Gacé and Comte de Sourgis, but unfortunately neither the one nor the other had passed the night in his bed; so, as the affair could not wait, as I must set out in two hours for Spain, and that we absolutely require a second, or rather a third, I installed myself on the Pont Neuf with the intention of addressing the first gentleman who passed. You passed, and I addressed myself to you."

"And you have done right, pardieu! rest satisfied, baron, I am your man. What hour is fixed for the meeting?"

"Half-past nine this morning."

"Where will it take place?"

"At the Port Maillot."

"Diable! there is no time to lose; but you are on horseback and I am on foot; how shall we manage that?"

"There is a way, captain."

"What is it?"

"It is that you should do me the honor of mounting behind me."

"Willingly, baron."

"I warn you, however," added the young cavalier, with a slight smile, "that my horse is rather spirited."

"Oh, I know him!" said the captain, drawing back a step, and looking at the beautiful animal with the eye of a connoisseur; "if I am not mistaken, he was bred between the mountains of Grenada and the Sierra Morena. I rode such a one at Almanza, and I have often made him lie down like a sheep when he wanted to carry me off at a gallop, only by pressing him with my knees."

"You reassure me. To horse then, captain." – "Here I am, baron."

And without using the stirrup, which the young cavalier left free for him, with a single bound the captain sprang on to the croup.

The baron had spoken truly; his horse was not accustomed to so heavy a load, therefore he attempted to get rid of it. Neither had the captain exaggerated, and the animal soon felt that he had found his master; so that, after a few attempts, which had no other effect than to show to the passers-by the address of the two cavaliers, he became obedient, and went at a swinging trot down the Quai de l'Ecole, which at that time was nothing but a wharf, crossed at the same pace the Quai du Louvre and the Quai des Tuileries, through the gate of the Conference, and leaving on the left the road to Versailles, threaded the great avenue of the Champs-Élysées, which now leads to the triumphal Arc de l'Etoile. Arrived at the Pont d'Antin, the Baron de Valef slackened his horse's pace a little, for he found that he had ample time to arrive at the Port Maillot at the hour fixed.

The captain profited by this respite.

"May I, without indiscretion, ask why we are going to fight? I wish, you understand, to know that, in order to regulate my conduct toward my adversary, and to know whether it is worth killing him."

"That is only fair," answered the baron; "I will tell you everything as it passed. We were supping last night at La Fillon's. Of course you know La Fillon, captain?"

"Pardieu! it was I who started her in the world, in 1705, before my Italian campaign."

"Well," replied the baron, laughing, "you may boast of a pupil who does you honor. Briefly, I supped there tete-à-tete with D'Harmental."

"Without any one of the fair sex?"

"Oh, mon Dieu, yes! I must tell you that D'Harmental is a kind of Trappist, only going to La Fillon's for fear of the reputation of not going there; only loving one woman at a time, and in love for the moment with the little D'Averne, the wife of the lieutenant of the guards."

"Very good!"

"We were there, chatting, when we heard a merry party enter the room next to ours. As our conversation did not concern anybody else, we kept silence, and, without intending it, heard the conversation of our neighbors. See what chance is. Our neighbors talked of the only thing which we ought not to have heard."

"Of the chevalier's mistress, perhaps?"

"Exactly. At the first words of their discourse which reached me, I rose, and tried to get Raoul away, but instead of following me, he put his hand on my shoulder, and made me sit down again. 'Then Philippe is making love to the little D'Averne?' said one. 'Since the fete of the Marechal d'Estrée, where she gave him a sword-belt with some verses, in which she compared him to Mars,' replied another voice. 'That is eight days ago,' said a third. 'Yes,' replied the first. 'Oh! she made a kind of resistance, either that she really held by poor D'Harmental, or that she knew that the regent only likes those who resist him. At last this morning, in exchange for a basketful of flowers and jewels, she has consented to receive his highness.'"

"Ah!" said the captain, "I begin to understand; the chevalier got angry."

"Exactly. Instead of laughing, as you or I would have done, and profiting by this circumstance to get back his brevet of colonel, which was taken from him under pretext of economy, D'Harmental became so pale that I thought he was going to faint; then, approaching the partition, and striking with his fist, to insure silence, 'Gentlemen,' said he, 'I am sorry to contradict you, but the one who said that Madame d'Averne had granted a rendezvous to the regent, or to any other, has told a lie.'

"It was I who said it, and who repeat it, and if it displeases you, my name is Lafare, captain of the guards.' 'And mine, Fargy,' said a second voice. 'And mine, Ravanne,' said the third. 'Very well, gentlemen,' replied D'Harmental, 'to-morrow, from nine to half-past, at the Port Maillot.' And he sat down again opposite me. They talked of something else, and we finished our supper. That is the whole affair, captain, and you now know as much as I."

The captain gave vent to a kind of exclamation which seemed to say, "This is not very serious;" but in spite of this semi-disapprobation, he resolved none the less to support, to the best of his power, the cause of which he had so unexpectedly been made the champion, however defective that cause might appear to him in principle; besides, even had he wished it, he had gone too far to draw back. They had now arrived at the Port Maillot, and a young cavalier, who appeared to be waiting, and who had from a distance perceived the baron and the captain, put his horse to the gallop, and approached rapidly; this was the Chevalier d'Harmental.

"My dear chevalier," said the Baron de Valef, grasping his hand, "permit me, in default of an old friend, to present to you a new one. Neither Sourgis nor Gacé were at home. I met this gentleman on the Pont Neuf, and told him our embarrassment, and he offered himself to free us from it, with the greatest good will."

"I am doubly grateful to you then, my dear Valef," replied the chevalier, casting on the captain a look which betrayed a slight astonishment. "And to you, monsieur," continued he. "I must excuse myself for making your acquaintance by mixing you up thus with an unpleasant affair. But you will afford me one day or another an opportunity to return your kindness, and I hope and beg that, an opportunity arising, you would dispose of me as I have of you."

"Well said, chevalier," replied the captain, leaping to the ground; "and in speaking thus you might lead me to the end of the world. The proverb is right: 'It is only mountains that don't meet.'"

"Who is this original?" asked D'Harmental of Valef, while the captain stamped the calls with his right foot, to stretch his legs.

"Ma foi! I do not know," said Valef, "but I do know that we should be in a great difficulty without him. Some poor officer of fortune, without doubt, whom the peace has thrown abroad like so many others; but we will judge him by-and-by, by his works."

"Well!" said the captain, becoming animated with the exercise he was taking, "where are our adversaries?"

"When I came up to you," replied D'Harmental, "they had not arrived, but I perceived at the end of the avenue a kind of hired carriage, which will serve as an excuse if they are late; and indeed," added the chevalier, pulling out a beautiful watch set with diamonds, "they are not behind time, for it is hardly half-past nine."

"Let us go," said Valef, dismounting and throwing the reins to D'Harmental's valet, "for if they arrive at the rendezvous while we stand gossiping here, it will appear as though we had kept them waiting."

"You are right," said D'Harmental; and, dismounting, he advanced toward the entrance of the wood, followed by his two companions. — "Will you not take anything, gentlemen," said the landlord of the restaurant, who was standing at his door, waiting for custom.

"Yes, Maitre Durand," replied D'Harmental, who wished, in order that they might not be disturbed, to make it appear as if they had come from an ordinary walk, "breakfast for three. We are going to take a turn in the avenue, and then we shall come back." And he let three louis fall into the hands of the inn-keeper.

The captain saw the shine of the three gold pieces one after another, and quickly reckoned up what might be had at the "Bois de Boulogne" for seventy-two francs; but as he knew whom he had to deal with, he judged that a little advice from him would not be useless; consequently, in his turn approaching the maitre d'hotel —

"Listen, my friend," said he; "you know that I understand the price of things, and that no one can deceive me about the amount of a tavern bill. Let the wines be good and varied, and let the breakfast be copious, or I will break your head! Do you understand?"

"Be easy, captain," answered Durand, "it is not a customer like you whom I would deceive."

"All right; I have eaten nothing for twelve hours. Arrange accordingly."

The hotel-keeper bowed, as knowing what that meant, and went back to his kitchen, beginning to think that he had made a worse bargain than he had hoped.

As to the captain, after having made a last sign of recognition, half amicable, half threatening, he quickened his pace, and rejoined the chevalier and the baron, who had stopped to wait for him.

The chevalier was not wrong as to the situation of the hired carriage. At the turn of the first alley he saw his three adversaries getting out of it. They were, as we have already said, the Marquis de Lafare, the Comte de Fargy, and the Chevalier de Ravanne.

Our readers will now permit us to give them some short details of these three personages, who will often reappear in the course of this history. Lafare, the best known of the three, thanks to the poetry which he has left behind him, was a man of about thirty-six or thirty-eight years, of a frank and open countenance, and of an inexhaustible gayety and good humor. Always ready to engage with all comers, at table, at play, or at arms, and that without malice or bitterness; much run after by the fair sex, and much beloved by the regent, who had named him his captain of the guards, and who, during the ten years in which he had admitted him into his intimacy, had found him his rival sometimes, but his faithful servant always. Thus the prince, who had the habit of giving nicknames to all his boon companions, as well as to his mistresses, never called him any other than "bon enfant." Nevertheless, for some time the popularity of Lafare, established as it was by agreeable antecedents, was fast lowering among the ladies of the court and the girls of the opera. There was a report current that he was going to be so ridiculous as to become a well-behaved man. It is true that some people, in order to preserve his reputation for him, whispered that this apparent conversion had no other cause than the jealousy of Mademoiselle de Conti, daughter of the duchess, and granddaughter of the great

Conde, who it was said honored the regent's captain of the guards with a particular affection. His alliance with the Duc de Richelieu, who on his side was supposed to be the lover of Mademoiselle de Charolais, gave consistency to this report.

The Comte de Fargy, generally called "Le Beau Fargy," thus substituting the title which he had received from nature for that which his fathers had left him was cited, as his name indicates, as the handsomest man of his time, which in that age of gallantry imposed obligations from which he had never recoiled, and from which he had always come with honor. Indeed, it was impossible to be a more perfect figure than he was. At once strong and graceful, supple and active, he seemed to unite all the different perfections of a hero of romance of that time. Add to this a charming head, uniting the most opposite styles of beauty; that is to say, black hair and blue eyes, strongly-marked features, and a complexion like a woman. Unite with all these, wit, loyalty, the greatest courage, and you will have an idea of the high consideration which Le Fargy must have enjoyed from the society of that mad period.

As to the Chevalier de Ravanne, who has left us such strange memoirs of his early life, that, in spite of their authenticity, one is tempted to believe them apocryphal, he was still but a youth, rich and of noble birth, who entered into life by a golden door, and ran into all its pleasures with the fiery imprudence and eagerness of his age. He carried to excess, as so many do at eighteen, all the vices and all the virtues of his day. It will be easily understood how proud he was to serve as second to men like Lafare and Fargy in a meeting which was likely to "make a noise."

CHAPTER II. THE MEETING

As soon as Lafare, Fargy, and Ravanne saw their adversaries appear at the corner of the path, they walked to meet them. Arrived at ten paces from each other, they all took off their hats and bowed with that elegant politeness which was a characteristic of the aristocracy of the eighteenth century, and advanced some steps thus bareheaded with a smile on their lips, so that to the eyes of the passer-by, ignorant of the cause of their réunion, they would have appeared like friends enchanted to meet.

"Gentlemen," said the Chevalier d'Harmental, to whom the first word by right belonged, "I hope that neither you nor we have been followed; but it is getting late, and we might be disturbed here. I think it would be wise in us to find a more retired spot, where we shall be more at ease to transact the little business which we have in hand."

"Gentlemen," said Ravanne, "I know one which will suit you, a hundred yards from here – a true cover."

"Come, let us follow the child," said the captain; "innocence leads to safety."

Ravanne turned round, and examined, from head to foot, our friend with the yellow ribbons.

"If you are not previously engaged, my strapping friend," said he, in a bantering tone, "I claim the preference."

"Wait a moment, Ravanne," interrupted Lafare; "I have some explanations to give to Monsieur d'Harmental."

"Monsieur Lafare," replied the chevalier, "your courage is so well known, that the explanations you offer me are a proof of delicacy for which I thank you; but these explanations would only delay us uselessly, and we have no time to lose."

"Bravo!" cried Ravanne, "that is what I call speaking, chevalier. As soon as we have cut each other's throats, I hope you will grant me your friendship. I have heard you much spoken of in good quarters, and have long wished to make your acquaintance."

"Come, come, Ravanne," said Fargy, "since you have undertaken to be our guide, show us the way."

Ravanne sprang into the wood like a young fawn: his five companions followed. At the end of about ten minutes' walking, during which the six adversaries had maintained the most profound silence, either from fear of being heard, or from that natural feeling which makes a man in the moment of danger reflective for a time, they found themselves in the midst of a glade, surrounded on all sides by a screen of trees.

"Well," said Ravanne, looking round him in a satisfied manner, "what do you say to the locality?"

"I say that if you boast of having discovered it," said the captain, "you are a strange kind of Christopher Columbus. If you had told me it was here you were coming, I could have guided you with my eyes shut." – "Well," replied Ravanne, "we will endeavor that you shall leave it in the same manner."

"It is with you that my business lies, Monsieur de Lafare," said D'Harmental, throwing his hat on the ground.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the captain of the guards, following the example of the chevalier; "and at the same time I know that nothing could give me more honor and more pain than a rencontre with you, particularly for such a cause."

D'Harmental smiled as a man on whom this flower of politeness was not lost, but his only answer was to draw his sword.

"It appears, my dear baron," said Fargy, addressing himself to Valef, "that you are on the point of setting out for Spain."

"I ought to have left last night; and nothing less than the pleasure I promised myself in seeing you this morning would have detained me till now, so important is my errand."

"Diable! you distress me," said Fargy, drawing, "for if I should have the misfortune to retard you, you are the man to bear me deadly malice."

"Not at all. I should know that it was from pure friendship, my dear count," replied Valef; "so do your best, I beg, for I am at your orders."

"Come, then, monsieur," said Ravanne to the captain, who was folding his coat neatly, and placing it by his hat, "you see that I am waiting for you."

"Do not be impatient, my fine fellow," said the old soldier, continuing his preparations with the phlegm natural to him; "one of the most essential qualities in arms is sang-froid. I was like you at your age; but after the third or fourth sword-blow I received, I understood that I was on the wrong road, and I returned to the right path. There," added he, at last drawing his sword, which I have said was of extreme length.

"Peste!" said Ravanne, throwing a glance on his adversary's weapon, "what a charming implement you have there! It reminds me of the great spit in my mother's kitchen; and I am grieved that I did not order the maitre-d'hotel to bring it me, as a match to yours."

"Your mother is a worthy woman, and her 'cuisine' is a good one; I have heard both spoken of with great praise, Monsieur le Chevalier," replied the captain with an almost paternal manner; "I should be grieved to take you from one or the other for a trifle like that which procures me the honor of crossing swords with you. Suppose, then, that you are only taking a lesson from your fencing-master, and keep the distance."

The recommendation was useless. Ravanne was exasperated by his adversary's calmness, to which, in spite of his courage, his young and ardent blood did not allow him to attain. He attacked the captain with such fury that their swords engaged at the hilt. The captain made a step back. "Ah! you give ground, my tall friend." "Ah! you give ground, my tall friend."

"To give ground is not to fly, my little chevalier," replied the captain; "it is an axiom of the art which I advise you to consider; besides, I am not sorry to study your play. Ah! you are a pupil of Berthelot, apparently; he is a good master, but he has one great fault: it is not teaching to parry. Stay, look at this," continued he, replying by a thrust in "seconde" to a straight thrust; "if I had lunged, I should have spitted you like a lark."

Ravanne was furious, for he had felt on his breast the point of his adversary's sword, but so lightly that he might have taken it for the button of a foil. His anger redoubled at the conviction that he owed his life to the captain, and his attacks became more numerous and more furious than ever.

"Stop, stop," said the captain; "now you are going crazy, and trying to blind me; fie! fie! young man; at the chest, morbleu! Ah! at the face again; you will force me to disarm you. Again! Go and pick up your sword, young man; and come back hopping on one leg to calm yourself."

And with a sudden twist he whipped Ravanne's sword out of his hand and sent it flying some twenty paces from him. This time Ravanne profited by the advice. He went slowly to pick up his sword, and came back quietly to the captain; but the young man was as pale as his satin vest, on which was apparent a small drop of blood.

"You are right, captain," said he, "and I am still but a child; but this meeting will, I hope, help to make a man of me. Some passes more, if you please, that it may not be said you have had all the honors."

And he put himself on guard. The captain was right; the chevalier only required to be calm to make him a formidable adversary: thus, at the first thrust of this third engagement, he saw that he must attend solely to his own defense; but his superiority in the art of fencing was too decided for his young adversary to obtain any advantage over him. The matter ended as it was easy to foresee. The

captain disarmed Ravanne a second time; but this time he went and picked up the sword himself, and with a politeness of which at first one might have supposed him incapable.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said he, extending his hand to Ravanne, "you are a brave young man; but believe in an old frequenter of schools and taverns, who was at the Flemish wars before you were born, at the Italian when you were in your cradle, and at the Spanish while you were a page; change your master. Leave Berthelot, who has already taught you all he knows, and take Bois-Robert; and may the devil fly away with me, if in six months you are not as good a fencer as myself."

"Thanks for your lesson," said Ravanne, taking the hand of the captain, while two tears, which he could not restrain, flowed down his cheeks; "I hope it will profit me."

And, receiving his sword, he did what the captain had already done – sheathed it. They then both cast their eyes on their companions to see how things were going. The combat was over. Lafare was seated on the ground, with his back leaning against a tree: he had been run through the body, but happily the point of the sword had struck against a rib, and had glanced along the bone, so that the wound seemed at first worse than it really was; still he had fainted – the shock had been so violent. D'Harmental was on his knees before him, endeavoring to staunch the blood with his handkerchief. Fargy and Valef had wounded each other at the same moment. One was struck in the thigh, the other run through the arm; both had apologized, promising to be friends for the future.

"Look, young man," said the captain, showing Ravanne these different episodes of the field of battle. "Look on that, and meditate. There is the blood of three brave gentlemen flowing – probably for a folly."

"Faith, captain," answered Ravanne, quite calmed down, "I believe you are right, and that you are the only one of us all that has got common sense."

At that moment Lafare opened his eyes and recognized D'Harmental in the man who was tending him.

"Chevalier," said he, "take a friend's advice; send me a kind of surgeon whom you will find in the carriage, and whom I brought with me in case of accident. Then gain Paris as fast as possible. Show yourself to-night at the opera ball, and if they ask you about me, say that it is a week since you have seen me. As to me, you may be quite easy. Your name shall not pass my lips; and if you get into any unpleasant discussion with the police, let me know at once, and we will manage so that the affair shall have no consequences."

"Thanks, Monsieur le Marquis," answered D'Harmental, "I quit you because I leave you in better hands than mine; otherwise, believe me, nothing should have separated me from you until I had seen you in your bed."

"Pleasant journey, my dear Valef," said Fargy, "for I do not think that scratch will hinder your going. On your return, do not forget that you have a friend at No. 14, Place Louis-le-Grand."

"And you, my dear Fargy, if you have any commission for Madrid, you have but to say so, and you may rely upon its being executed with the exactitude and zeal of a true comrade."

And the two friends shook hands as if nothing had passed.

"Adieu, young man, adieu," said the captain to Ravanne; "do not forget the advice which I have given you. Give up Berthelot, and take to Bois-Robert. Be calm – give ground when it is necessary – parry in time, and you will be one of the best fencers in the kingdom of France. My implement sends its compliments to your mother's great spit."

Ravanne, in spite of his presence of mind, could not find anything to reply to the captain; so he contented himself with bowing and going up to Lafare, who appeared to be the most seriously wounded.

As to D'Harmental, Valef, and the captain, they rapidly gained the path, where they found the coach, and inside, the surgeon, who was enjoying a nap. D'Harmental woke him; and showing him the way he must go, told him that the Marquis de Lafare and the Comte de Fargy had need of his

services. He also ordered his valet to dismount and follow the surgeon in order to aid him; then, turning toward the captain —

"Captain," said he, "I do not think that it would be prudent to go and eat the breakfast which we have ordered; therefore receive my thanks for the assistance you have rendered me, and in remembrance of me, as it seems you are on foot, will you accept one of my two horses? you can take one by chance; they are both good, and neither will fail you if you have need to go eight or ten leagues in the hour."

"Faith, chevalier," answered the captain, casting a look on the horse which had been so generously offered to him, "there was no need for that. Their blood and their purses are things which gentlemen lend each other every day; but you make the offer with so good a grace that I know not how to refuse you. If you ever have need of me, for anything whatever, remember that I am at your service."

"If that case should occur, where should I find you, monsieur?" said D'Harmental, smiling.

"I have no fixed residence, chevalier, but you may always hear of me by going to La Fillon's and asking for La Normande, and inquiring of her for Captain Roquefinette."

And as the two young men mounted their horses, the captain did the same, not without remarking to himself that D'Harmental had left him the best of the three. Then, as they were near a four-cross road, each one took his own way at a gallop.

The Baron de Valf re-entered by the Barriere de Passy, and returned straight to the arsenal to receive the commissions of the Duchesse de Maine, to whose establishment he belonged, and left the same day for Spain.

Captain Roquefinette made two or three tours round the Bois de Boulogne, walking, trotting, and galloping, in order to appreciate the different qualities of his horse; and having satisfied himself that it was, as the chevalier had told him, a fine and pure-blooded animal, he returned to Durand's hotel, where he ate, all alone, the breakfast which had been ordered for three. The same day, he took his horse to a dealer and sold it for sixty louis. It was about half what it was worth; but one must be prepared to make sacrifices, if one wishes to realize promptly.

As to the Chevalier d'Harmental, he took the road to La Muette, entered Paris by the great avenue of the Champs-Élysées, and on returning to his home in the Rue de Richelieu, found two letters waiting for him. One of these letters was in a handwriting so well known to him that he trembled from head to foot as he looked at it, and after having taken it up with as much hesitation as if it had been a burning coal, he opened it with a hand whose shaking betrayed the importance he attached to it. It read as follows:

"My dear Chevalier – No one is master of his own heart – you know that; and it is one of the misfortunes of our nature not to be able to love the same person, or the same thing, long at a time. As to myself, I wish at least to have, beyond other women, the merit of never deceiving the man who has been my lover. Do not come, then, at your accustomed hour, for you will be told that I am not at home; and I am so scrupulous that I would not willingly endanger the soul even of a valet or a waiting-maid by making them tell so great a lie.

"Adieu, my dear chevalier. Do not retain too unkind a remembrance of me, and behave so that ten years hence I may still think what I think now – that is to say, that you are one of the noblest gentlemen in France.

"Sophie d'Averne."

"Mon Dieu!" cried D'Harmental, striking his fist on a beautiful buhl table, which he smashed to bits, "if I have killed that poor Lafare I shall never forgive myself."

After this outburst, which comforted him a little, the poor fellow began to walk backward and forward between the door and the window in a manner that showed that he still wanted more

deceptions of the same sort in order to arrive at the perfection of moral philosophy which the faithless beauty preached to him. Then, after two or three turns, he saw the other letter, which he had entirely forgotten, lying on the floor. He passed it once or twice, looking at it with a supreme indifference. At last, seeming to think that it would make some diversion on the first, he picked it up disdainfully, opened it slowly, looked at the writing, which was unknown to him, searched for the signature, but there was none; and then, led on by the mysterious air of it, he read as follows:

"Chevalier – If you have in your mind a quarter of the romance, or in your heart half the courage, that your friends give you credit for, some one is ready to offer you an enterprise worthy of you, and the result of which will be at the same time to avenge you on the man you hate most in the world, and to conduct you to a goal more brilliant than you can have hoped for in your wildest dreams. The good genius who will lead you thither by an enchanted road, and in whom you must trust entirely, will expect you this evening at ten o'clock at the opera ball. If you come there unmasked, he will come to you; if you come masked, you will know him by the violet ribbon which he will wear on his left shoulder. The watch-word is 'open sesame;' speak boldly, and a cavern will open to you as wonderful as that of Ali Baba."

"Bravo!" said D'Harmental; "if the genius in the violet ribbons keeps only half his promise, by my honor he has found his man!"

CHAPTER III. THE CHEVALIER

The Chevalier Raoul d'Harmental, with whom, before going further, it is necessary that our readers make a better acquaintance, was the last of one of the best families of Nivernais. Although that family had never played an important part in history, yet it did not want a certain notoriety, which it had acquired partly alone and partly by its alliances. Thus the father of the chevalier, the Sire Gaston d'Harmental, had come to Paris in 1682, and had proved his genealogical tree from the year 1399, an heraldic operation which would have given some trouble to more than one duke and peer. In another direction, his maternal uncle, Monsieur de Torigny, before being named chevalier of the order in the promotion of 1694, had confessed, in order to get his sixteen quarterings recognized, that the best part of his scutcheon was that of the D'Harmentals, with whom his ancestors had been allied for three hundred years. Here, then, was enough to satisfy the aristocratic demands of the age of which we write.

The chevalier was neither poor nor rich – that is to say, his father, when he died, had left him an estate in the environs of Nevers, which brought him in from 20,000 to 25,000 livres a year. This was enough to live well in the country, but the chevalier had received an excellent education, and was very ambitious; therefore he had at his majority, in 1711, quitted his home for Paris. His first visit was to the Comte de Torigny, on whom he counted to introduce him at court. Unfortunately, at that time the Comte de Torigny was absent from home; but as he remembered with pleasure the family of D'Harmental, he recommended his nephew to the Chevalier de Villarceaux, who could refuse nothing to his friend the Comte de Torigny, and took the young man to Madame de Maintenon.

Madame de Maintenon had one good quality – she always continued to be the friend of her old lovers. She received the Chevalier d'Harmental graciously, thanks to the old recollections which recommended him to her, and some days afterward, the Marechal de Villars coming to pay his court to her, she spoke a few such pressing words in favor of her young protégé, that the marechal, delighted to find an opportunity of obliging this queen "in partibus," replied that from that hour he attached the chevalier to his military establishment and would take care to offer him every occasion to justify his august protectress's good opinion of him.

It was a great joy to the chevalier to see such a door opened to him. The coming campaign was definitive. Louis XIV. had arrived at the last period of his reign – the period of reverses. Tallard and Marsin had been beaten at Hochstett, Villeroy at Ramilies, and Villars himself, the hero of Friedlingen, had lost the famous battle of Malplaquet against Marlborough and Eugene. Europe, kept down for a time by Colbert and Louvois, rose against France, and the situation of affairs was desperate.

The king, like a despairing invalid who changes his doctor every hour, changed ministers every day. Each new attempt but revealed a new weakness. France could not sustain war and could not obtain peace. Vainly she offered to abandon Spain, and limit her frontier. This was not sufficient humiliation. They exacted that the king should allow the hostile armies to cross France, in order to chase his grandson from the throne of Spain; and also that he should give up, as pledges, Cambray, Mettray, La Rochelle, and Bayonne, unless he preferred dethroning him himself, by open force, during the following year.

These were the conditions on which a truce was granted to the conqueror of the plains of Senef, Fleurus, of Steerckirk, and of La Marsalle; to him who had hitherto held in the folds of his royal mantle peace and war; to him who called himself the distributor of crowns, the chastiser of nations, the great, the immortal; to him in whose honor, during the last half century, marbles had been sculptured, bronzes cast, sonnets written, and incense poured.

Louis XIV. had wept in the full council. These tears had produced an army, which was intrusted to Villars.

Villars marched straight to the enemy, whose camp was at Denain, and who slept in security while watching the agony of France. Never had greater responsibility rested on one head. On one blow of Villars hung the salvation of France. The allies had established a line of fortifications between Denain and Marchiennes, which, in their pride of anticipation, Albemarle and Eugene called the grand route to Paris.

Villars resolved to take Denain by surprise, and, Albemarle conquered, to conquer Eugene. In order to succeed in this audacious enterprise, it was necessary to deceive, not only the enemy's army, but also his own, the success of this coup de main being in its impossibility.

Villars proclaimed aloud his intention of forcing the lines of Landrecies. One night, at an appointed hour, the whole army moves off in the direction of that town. All at once the order is given to bear to the left. His genius throws three bridges over the Scheldt. Villars passes over the river without obstacle, throws himself into the marshes considered impracticable, and where the soldier advances with the water up to his waist; marches straight to the first redoubts; takes them almost without striking a blow; seizes successively a league of fortifications; reaches Denain; crosses the fosse which surrounds it, penetrates into the town, and on arriving at the place, finds his young protégé, the Chevalier d'Harmental, who presents to him the sword of Albemarle, whom he has just taken prisoner.

At this moment the arrival of Eugene is announced. Villars returns, reaches, before him, the bridge over which he must pass, takes possession of it, and awaits him. There the true combat takes place, for the taking of Denain had been but a short skirmish. Eugene makes attack after attack, returns seven times to the head of the bridge, his best troops being destroyed by the artillery which protects it, and the bayonets which defend it. At length, his clothes riddled with balls, and bleeding from two wounds, he mounts his third horse, the conqueror of Hochstett and Malplaquet retreats crying with rage and biting his gloves with fury. In six hours the aspect of things has changed. France is saved, and Louis XIV. is still Le Grand Roi.

D'Harmental had conducted himself like a man who wished to gain his spurs at once. Villars, seeing him covered with blood and dust, recalled to his mind by whom he had been recommended to him; made him draw near, while, in the midst of the field of battle, he wrote on a drum the result of the day.

"Are you wounded?" asked he.

"Yes, Monsieur le Marechal, but so slightly that it is not worth speaking of."

"Have you the strength to ride sixty leagues, without resting an hour, a minute, a second?"

"I have the strength for anything that will serve the king or you."

"Then set out instantly; go to Madame de Maintenon; tell her from me what you have seen, and announce to her the courier who will bring the official account."

D'Harmental understood the importance of the mission with which he was charged, and bleeding and dusty as he was, he mounted a fresh horse and gained the first stage. Twelve hours afterward he was at Versailles.

Villars had foreseen what would happen. At the first words which fell from the mouth of the chevalier, Madame de Maintenon took him by the hand, and conducted him to the king. The king was at work with Voisin, but, contrary to his habit, in his room, for he was a little indisposed.

Madame de Maintenon opened the door, pushed D'Harmental to the feet of the king, and raising her hands to heaven:

"Sire," said she, "give thanks to God, for your majesty knows we are nothing by ourselves, and it is from Him comes every blessing."

"What has happened, monsieur? Speak," said the king quickly, astonished to see this young man, whom he did not know, at his feet.

"Sire," replied the chevalier, "the camp at Denain is taken. Albemarle is a prisoner. Prince Eugene has taken flight; and the Marechal de Villars places his victory at your majesty's feet."

Louis XIV. turned pale, in spite of his command over himself. He felt his limbs fail him, and leaned against the table for support.

"What ails you, sire?" said Madame de Maintenon, hastening to him.

"It is, madame, that I owe you everything," said Louis XIV.; "you save the king, and your friends save the kingdom."

Madame de Maintenon bowed and kissed the king's hand respectfully.

Then Louis XIV., still pale and much moved, passed behind the great curtain which hid the alcove containing his bed, and they heard a prayer of thanksgiving. He then reappeared, grave and calm, as if nothing had happened.

"And now, monsieur," said he, "tell me the details."

D'Harmental gave an account of that marvelous battle, which came as by a miracle to save the monarchy; then, when he had finished:

"And have you nothing to tell of yourself?" asked Louis XIV. "If I may judge by the blood and dust with which you are yet covered, you did not remain idle."

"Sire, I did my best," said D'Harmental, bowing; "but if there is really anything to tell, I will, with your permission, leave it to the Marechal de Villars."

"It is well, young man; and if he forgets you by chance, we shall remember. You must be fatigued. Go and rest. I am pleased with you."

D'Harmental retired joyously, Madame de Maintenon conducting him to the door; he kissed her hand again, and hastened to profit by the royal permission. For twenty hours he had neither eaten, drunk, nor slept. On his awaking, they gave him a packet which had been brought from the minister of war. It was his brevet as colonel. Two months afterward peace was made. Spain gave up half its monarchy, but France remained intact. Louis XIV. died. Two distinct and irreconcilable parties were in existence. That of the bastards, centering in the Duc de Maine, and that of the legitimate princes, represented by the Duc d'Orleans. If the Duc de Maine had had the will, the perseverance, the courage of his wife, Louise Benedicte de Conde, perhaps, supported as he was by the royal will, he might have triumphed; but he had to defend himself in broad day, as he was attacked; and the Duc de Maine, weak in mind and heart, dangerous only because he was a coward, was only good at underhand deeds.

He was threatened openly, and his numerous artifices and wiles were of no use to him. In one day, and almost without a struggle, he was precipitated from that height to which he had been raised by the blind love of the old king. His fall was heavy, and above all disgraceful; he retired mutilated, abandoning the regency to his rival, and only preserving, out of all the favors accumulated upon him, the superintendence of the royal education, the command of the artillery, and the precedence over the dukes and peers.

The decree, which had just passed the parliament, struck the old court and all attached to it. Letellier did not wait to be exiled. Madame de Maintenon took refuge at Saint Cyr, and Monsieur le Duc de Maine shut himself up in the beautiful town of Sceaux, to finish his translation of Lucrece.

The Chevalier d'Harmental saw, as a passive spectator, these different intrigues, waiting till they should assume a character which would permit him to take part in them. If there had been an open and armed contest, he would have taken that side to which gratitude called him. Too young and too chaste, if we may say so, in politics, to turn with the wind of fortune, he remained faithful to the memory of the old king, and to the ruins of the old court.

His absence from the Palais Royal, round which hovered all those who wished to take a place in the political sky, was interpreted as opposition; and one morning, as he had received the brevet which gave him a regiment, he received the decree which took it from him.

D'Harmental had the ambition of his age. The only career open to a gentleman was that of arms. His debut had been brilliant, and the blow which at five-and-twenty took from him his hopes for the future was profoundly painful.

He ran to Monsieur de Villars, in whom he had found so warm a protector. The marshal received him with the coldness of a man who not only wishes to forget the past, but also to see it forgotten.

D'Harmental understood that the old courtier was about to change his skin, and retired discreetly. Though the age was essentially that of egotism, the chevalier's first experience of it was bitter to him; but he was at that happy time of life when a disappointed ambition is rarely a deep or lasting grief.

Ambition is the passion of those who have no other, and the chevalier had all those proper to five-and-twenty years of age; besides, the spirit of the times did not tend to melancholy, that is a modern sentiment, springing from the overthrow of fortunes and the weakness of man. In the eighteenth century it was rare to dream of abstract things, or aspire to the unknown: men went straight to pleasure, glory, or fortune, and all who were handsome, brave or intriguing could attain them. That was the time when people were not ashamed to be happy. Now mind governs matter so much that men dare not avow that they are happy.

After the long and somber winter of Louis XIV.'s old age appeared all at once the joyous and brilliant spring of a young royalty. Every one basked in this new sun, radiant and benevolent, and went about buzzing and careless, like the bees and butterflies on the first fine day. The Chevalier d'Harmental had retained his sadness for a week; then he mixed again in the crowd, and was drawn in by the whirlpool which threw him at the feet of a pretty woman.

For three months he had been the happiest man in the world. He had forgotten Saint Cyr, the Tuileries, and the Palais Royal. He did not know whether there was a Madame de Maintenon, a king, or a regent. He only knew that it is sweet to live when one is loved, and he did not see why he should not live and love forever. He was still in this dream, when, as we have said, supping with his friend, the Baron de Valf, at La Fillon's, in the Rue Saint Honore, he had been all at once brutally awakened by Lafare. Lovers are often unpleasantly awakened, and we have seen that D'Harmental was not more patient under it than others. It was more pardonable in the chevalier, because he thought he loved truly, and that in his juvenile good faith he thought nothing could replace that love in his heart.

Thus Madame d'Averne's strange but candid letter, instead of inspiring him with the admiration which it merited at that time, had at first overwhelmed him. It is the property of every sorrow which overtakes us to reawaken past griefs which we believed dead, but which were only sleeping. The soul has its scars as well as the body, and they are seldom so well healed but a new wound can reopen them.

D'Harmental again began to feel ambitious. The loss of his mistress had recalled to him the loss of his regiment. It required nothing less than the second letter, so unexpected and mysterious, to divert him from his grief. A lover of our days would have thrown it from him with disdain, and would have despised himself if he had not nursed his grief so as to make himself poetically melancholy for a week; but a lover in the regency was much more accommodating. Suicide was scarcely discovered, and if by chance people fell into the water, they did not drown as long as there was the least little straw to cling to. D'Harmental did not affect the coxcomby of sadness. He decided, sighing, it is true, that he would go to the opera ball; and for a lover betrayed in so unforeseen and cruel a manner this was something; but it must be confessed, to the shame of our poor species, that he was chiefly led to this philosophic determination by the fact that the letter was written in a female hand.

CHAPTER IV. A BAL-MASQUE OF THE PERIOD. – THE BAT

The opera balls were then at their height. It was an invention of the Chevalier de Bullon, who only obtained pardon for assuming the title of Prince d'Auvergne, nobody exactly knew why, by rendering this service to the dissipated society of the time. It was he who had invented the double flooring which put the pit on a level with the stage: and the regent, who highly appreciated all good inventions, had granted him in recompense a pension of two thousand livres, which was four times what the Grand Roi had given to Corneille. That beautiful room, with its rich and grave architecture, which the Cardinal de Richelieu had inaugurated by his "Mirame," where Sully and Quinault's pastorals had been represented, and where Moliere had himself played his principal works, was this evening the rendezvous of all that was noble, rich, and elegant.

D'Harmental, from a feeling of spite, very natural in his situation, had taken particular pains with his toilet. When he arrived, the room was already full, and he had an instant's fear that the mask with the violet ribbons would not find him, inasmuch as the unknown had neglected to assign a place of meeting, and he congratulated himself on having come unmasked. This resolution showed great confidence in the discretion of his late adversaries, a word from whom would have sent him before the Parliament, or at least to the Bastille. But so much confidence had the gentlemen of that day in each other's good faith, that, after having in the morning passed his sword through the body of one of the regent's favorites, the chevalier came, without hesitation, to seek an adventure at the Palais Royal. The first person he saw there was the young Duc de Richelieu, whose name, adventures, elegance, and perhaps indiscretions, had already brought him so much into fashion. It was said that two princesses of the blood disputed his affections, which did not prevent Madame de Nesle and Madame de Polignac from fighting with pistols for him, or Madame de Sabran, Madame de Villars, Madame de Mouchy, and Madame de Tencin, from sharing his heart.

He had just joined the Marquis de Canillac, one of the regent's favorites, whom, on account of the grave appearance he affected, his highness called his mentor. Richelieu began to tell Canillac a story, out loud and with much gesticulation. The chevalier knew the duke, but not enough to interrupt a conversation; he was going to pass, when the duke seized him by the coat.

"Pardieu!" he said, "my dear chevalier, you are not de trop. I am telling Canillac an adventure which may be useful to him as nocturnal lieutenant to the regent, and to you, as running the same danger as I did. The history dates from to-day – a further merit, as I have only had time to tell it to about twenty people, so that it is scarcely known. Spread it, you will oblige me, and the regent also."

D'Harmental frowned. The duke had chosen his time badly. At this moment the Chevalier de Ravanne passed, pursuing a mask. "Ravanne!" cried Richelieu, "Ravanne!"

"I am not at leisure," replied he.

"Do you know where Lafare is?"

"He has the migraine."

"And Fargy?"

"He has sprained himself." And Ravanne disappeared in the crowd, after bowing in the most friendly manner to his adversary of the morning.

"Well, and the story?" asked Canillac.

"We are coming to it. Imagine that some time ago, when I left the Bastille, where my duel with Gacé had sent me, three or four days after my reappearance Rafé gave me a charming little note from Madame de Parabere, inviting me to pass that evening with her. You understand, chevalier, that it is not at the moment of leaving the Bastille that one would despise a rendezvous, given by the mistress

of him who holds the keys. No need to inquire if I was punctual; guess who I found seated on the sofa by her side. I give you a hundred guesses."

"Her husband," said Canillac.

"On the contrary, it was his royal highness himself. I was so much the more astonished, as I had been admitted with some mystery; nevertheless, as you will understand, I would not allow myself to appear astonished. I assumed a composed and modest air, like yours, Canillac, and saluted the marquise with such profound respect, that the regent laughed. I did not expect this explosion, and was a little disconcerted. I took a chair, but the regent signed to me to take my place on the sofa. I obeyed.

"My dear duke,' he said, 'we have written to you on a serious affair. Here is this poor marchioness, who, after being separated from her husband for two years, is threatened with an action by this clown, under pretext that she has a lover.' The marchioness tried to blush, but finding she could not, covered her face with her fan. 'At the first word she told me of her position,' continued the regent, 'I sent for D'Argenson, and asked him who this lover could be.'

"'Oh, monsieur, spare me!' said the marchioness. – 'Nonsense, my little duck; a little patience.' – 'Do you know what the lieutenant of police answered me, my dear duke?' – 'No,' said I, much embarrassed. – 'He said it was either you or me.' – 'It is an atrocious calumny,' I cried. – 'Don't be excited, the marchioness has confessed all.'

"'Then,' I replied, 'if the marchioness has confessed all, I do not see what remains for me to tell.' – 'Oh!' continued the regent, 'I do not ask you for details. It only remains for us, as accomplices, to get one another out of the scrape.' – 'And what have you to fear, monseigneur?' I asked. 'I know that, protected by your highness's name, I might brave all. What have we to fear?' – 'The outcry of Parabere, who wants me to make him a duke.'

"'Well, suppose we reconcile them,' replied I. – 'Exactly,' said his highness, laughing; 'and you have had the same idea as the marchioness.' – 'Pardieu, madame, that is an honor for me. There must be a kind of apparent reconciliation between this tender couple, which would prevent the marquis from incommoding us with the scandal of an action.' – 'But the difficulty,' objected Madame de Parabere, 'is, that it is two years since he has been here; and, as he piques himself on his jealousy and severity, what can we say? He has made a vow, that if any one sets foot here during his absence, the law should avenge him.'

"'You see, Richelieu, this becomes rather uncomfortable,' added the regent. – 'Peste! It does indeed.' – 'I have some means of coercion in my hands, but they do not go so far as to force a husband to be reconciled to his wife, and to receive her at his house.' – 'Well,' replied I, 'suppose we bring him here.' – 'There is the difficulty.' – 'Wait a moment. May I ask if Monsieur de Parabere still has a weakness for champagne and burgundy?' – 'I fear so,' said the marchioness. – 'Then, monseigneur, we are saved. I invite the marquis to supper, with a dozen of mauvais sujets and charming women. You send Dubois.' – 'What! Dubois?' asked the regent.

"'Certainly; one of us must remain sober. As Dubois cannot drink, he must undertake to make the marquis drink; and when everybody is under the table, he can take him away from us and do what he likes with him. The rest depends on the coachman.' – 'Did I not tell you, marchioness,' said the regent, 'that Richelieu would give us good advice? Stop, duke,' continued he; 'you must leave off wandering round certain palaces; leave the old lady to die quietly at St. Cyr, the lame man to rhyme at Sceaux, and join yourself with us. I will give you, in my cabinet, the place of that old fool D'Axelles; and affairs will not perhaps be injured by it.' – 'I dare say,' answered I. 'The thing is impossible; I have other plans.' – 'Obstinate fellow!' murmured the regent."

"'And Monsieur de Parabere?' asked the Chevalier d'Harmental, curious to know the end of the story. – "Oh! everything passed as we arranged it. He went to sleep at my house, and awoke at his wife's. He made a great noise, but there was no longer any possibility of crying scandal. His carriage had stopped at his wife's hotel, and all the servants saw him enter. He was reconciled in spite of himself. If he dares again to complain of his beautiful wife, we will prove to him, as clearly as

possible, that he adores her without knowing it; and that she is the most innocent of women – also without his knowing it."

"Chevalier!" at this moment a sweet and flute-like voice whispered in D'Harmental's ear, while a little hand rested on his arm.

"You see that I am wanted."

"I will let you go on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you will tell my story to this charming bat, charging her to tell it to all the night-birds of her acquaintance."

"I fear," said D'Harmental, "I shall not have time."

"Oh! so much the better for you," replied the duke, freeing the chevalier, whom till then he had held by the coat; "for then you must have something better to say."

And he turned on his heel, to take the arm of a domino, who, in passing, complimented him on his adventure. D'Harmental threw a rapid glance on the mask who accosted him, in order to make sure that it was the one with whom he had a rendezvous, and was satisfied on seeing a violet ribbon on the left shoulder. He hastened to a distance from Canillac and Richelieu, in order not to be interrupted in a conversation which he expected to be highly interesting.

The unknown, whose voice betrayed her sex, was of middle height, and young, as far as one could judge from the elasticity of her movements. As M. de Richelieu had already remarked, she had adopted the costume best calculated to hide either graces or defects. She was dressed as a bat – a costume much in vogue, and very convenient, from its perfect simplicity, being composed only of two black skirts. The manner of employing them was at the command of everybody. One was fastened, as usual, round the waist; the masked head was passed through the placket-hole of the other. The front was pulled down to make wings; the back raised to make horns. You were almost certain thus to puzzle an interlocutor, who could only recognize you by the closest scrutiny.

The chevalier made all these observations in less time than it has taken to describe them; but having no knowledge of the person with whom he had to deal, and believing it to be some love intrigue, he hesitated to speak; when, turning toward him:

"Chevalier," said the mask, without disguising her voice, assuming that her voice was unknown to him, "do you know that I am doubly grateful to you for having come, particularly in the state of mind in which you are? It is unfortunate that I cannot attribute this exactitude to anything but curiosity."

"Beautiful mask!" answered D'Harmental, "did you not tell me in your letter that you were a good genius? Now, if really you partake of a superior nature, the past, the present and the future must be known to you. You knew, then, that I should come; and, since you knew it, my coming ought not to astonish you."

"Alas!" replied the unknown, "it is easy to see that you are a weak mortal, and that you are happy enough never to have raised yourself above your sphere, otherwise you would know that if we, as you say, know the past, the present and the future, this science is silent as to what regards ourselves, and that the things we most desire remain to us plunged in the most dense obscurity."

"Diable! Monsieur le Genie," answered D'Harmental, "do you know that you will make me very vain if you continue in that tone; for, take care, you have told me, or nearly so, that you had a great desire that I should come to your rendezvous."

"I did not think I was telling you anything new, chevalier. It appeared to me that my letter would leave you no doubt as to the desire I felt of seeing you."

"This desire, which I only admit because you confess it, and I am too gallant to contradict you – had it not made you promise in your letter more than is in your power to keep?"

"Make a trial of my science; that will give you a test of my power."

"Oh, mon Dieu! I will confine myself to the simplest thing. You say you are acquainted with the past, the present and the future. Tell me my fortune."

"Nothing easier; give me your hand."

D'Harmental did what was asked of him.

"Sir," said the stranger, after a moment's examination, "I see very legibly written by the direction of the 'adducta,' and by the arrangement of the longitudinal lines of the palm, five words, in which are included the history of your life. These words are, courage, ambition, disappointment, love, and treason."

"Peste!" interrupted the chevalier, "I did not know that the genii studied anatomy so deeply, and were obliged to take their degrees like a Bachelor of Salamanca!"

"Genii know all that men know, and many other things besides, chevalier."

"Well, then, what mean these words, at once so sonorous and so opposite? and what do they teach you of me in the past, my very learned genius?"

"They teach me that it is by your courage alone that you gained the rank of colonel, which you occupied in the army in Flanders; that this rank awakened your ambition; that this ambition has been followed by a disappointment; that you hoped to console yourself for this disappointment by love; but that love, like fortune, is subject to treachery, and that you have been betrayed."

"Not bad," said the chevalier; "and the Sybil of Cuma could not have got out of it better. A little vague, as in all horoscopes, but a great fund of truth, nevertheless. Let us come to the present, beautiful mask."

"The present, chevalier? Let us speak softly of it, for it smells terribly of the Bastille."

The chevalier started in spite of himself, for he believed that no one except the actors who had played a part in it could know his adventure of the morning.

"There are at this hour," continued the stranger, "two brave gentlemen lying sadly in their beds, while we chat gayly at the ball; and that because a certain Chevalier d'Harmental, a great listener at doors, did not remember a hemistich of Virgil."

"And what is this hemistich?" asked the chevalier, more and more astonished.

"Facilis descensus Averni," said the mask, laughing.

"My dear genius," cried the chevalier, trying to peep through the openings in the stranger's mask, "that, allow me to inform you, is a quotation rather masculine."

"Do you not know that genii are of both sexes?"

"Yes; but I had never heard that they quoted the *Æneid* so fluently."

"Is not the quotation appropriate? You speak to me of the Sybil of Cuma; I answer you in her language. You ask for existing things; I give them you. But you mortals are never satisfied."

"No; for I confess that this knowledge of the past and the present inspires me with a terrible desire to know the future."

"There are always two futures," said the mask; "there is the future of weak minds, and the future of strong minds. God has given man free will that he might choose. Your future depends on yourself."

"But we must know these two futures to choose the best."

"Well, there is one which awaits you, somewhere in the environs of Nevers, in the depth of the country, among the rabbits of your warren, and the fowls of your poultry-yard. This one will conduct you straight to the magistrate's bench of your parish. It is an easy ambition, and you have only to let yourself go to attain it. You are on the road."

"And the other?" replied the chevalier, visibly piqued at the supposition that in any case such a future could be his.

"The other," said the stranger, leaning her arm on that of the young man, and fixing her eyes on him through her mask; "the other will throw you back into noise and light – will make you one of the actors in the game which is playing in the world, and, whether you gain or lose, will leave you at least the renown of a great player."

"If I lose, what shall I lose?" asked the chevalier.

"Life, probably."

The chevalier tossed his head contemptuously.

"And if I win?" added he.

"What do you say to the rank of colonel of horse, the title of Grandee of Spain, and the order of the Saint Esprit, without counting the field-marshal's baton in prospective?"

"I say that the prize is worth the stake, and that if you can prove to me that you can keep your promise, I am your man."

"This proof," replied the mask, "must be given you by another, and if you wish to have it you must follow me."

"Oh!" said D'Harmental, "am I deceived, and are you but a genius of the second order – a subaltern spirit, an intermediate power? Diable! this would take away a little of my consideration for you."

"What does it matter if I am subject to some great enchantress, and she has sent me to you?"

"I warn you that I do not treat with ambassadors."

"My mission is to conduct you to her."

"Then I shall see her?"

"Face to face." – "Let us go, then."

"Chevalier, you go quickly to the work; you forget that before all initiations there are certain indispensable ceremonies to secure the discretion of the initiated."

"What must I do?"

"You must allow your eyes to be bandaged, and let me lead you where I like. When arrived at the door of the temple, you must take a solemn oath to reveal nothing concerning the things you may hear, or the people you may see."

"I am ready to swear by the Styx," said D'Harmental, laughing.

"No, chevalier," said the mask, in a grave voice; "swear only by your honor; you are known, and that will suffice."

"And when I have taken this oath," asked the chevalier, after an instant's reflection, "will it be permitted to me to retire, if the proposals made are not such as a gentleman may entertain?"

"Your conscience will be your sole arbiter, and your word the only pledge demanded of you."

"I am ready," said the chevalier.

"Let us go, then," said the mask.

The chevalier prepared to cross the room in a straight line toward the door; but perceiving three of his friends, who might have stopped him on the way, he made a turn, and described a curve which would bring him to the same end.

"What are you doing?" asked the mask.

"I am avoiding some one who might detain us."

"Ah!" said the mask, "I began to fear."

"Fear what?" asked D'Harmental.

"To fear that your ardor was diminished in the proportion of the diagonal to the two sides of a square."

"Pardieu!" said D'Harmental, "this is the first time, I believe, that ever a rendezvous was given to a gentleman at an opera ball to talk anatomy, ancient literature, and mathematics. I am sorry to say so, but you are the most pedantic genius I ever met in my life."

The bat burst out laughing, but made no reply to this sally, in which was betrayed the spite of the chevalier at not being able to recognize a person who appeared to be so well acquainted with his adventures; but as this only added to his curiosity, both descended in equal haste, and found themselves in the vestibule.

"What road shall we take?" asked the chevalier. "Shall we travel underground, or in a car drawn by griffins?"

"With your permission, chevalier, we will simply go in a carriage; and though you appear to doubt it, I am a woman, and rather afraid of the dark."

"Permit me, then, to call my carriage," said the chevalier.

"Not at all; I have my own."

"Call it then."

"With your permission, chevalier, we will not be more proud than Mahomet with the mountain; and as my carriage cannot come to us, we will go to it."

At these words the bat drew the chevalier into the Rue St. Honore. A carriage without armorial bearings, with two dark-colored horses, waited at the corner of the street. The coachman was on his seat, enveloped in a great cape which hid the lower part of his face, while a three-cornered hat covered his forehead and eyes. A footman held the door open with one hand, and with the other held his handkerchief so as to conceal his face.

"Get in," said the mask.

D'Harmental hesitated a moment. The anxiety of the servants to preserve their incognito, the carriage without blazon, the obscure place where it was drawn up, and the advanced hour of the night, all inspired the chevalier with a sentiment of mistrust; but reflecting that he gave his arm to a woman, and had a sword by his side, he got in boldly. The mask sat down by him, and the footman closed the door.

"Well, are we not going to start?" said the chevalier, seeing that the carriage remained motionless.

"There remains a little precaution to be taken," said the mask, drawing a silk handkerchief from her pocket.

"Ah! yes, true," said D'Harmental; "I had forgotten. I give myself up to you with confidence." And he advanced his head. The unknown bandaged his eyes; then said —

"Chevalier, you give me your word of honor not to remove this bandage till I give you permission?"

"I do."

"It is well."

Then, raising the glass in front, she said to the coachman —

"You know where, Monsieur le Comte."

And the carriage started at a gallop.

CHAPTER V. THE ARSENAL

They both maintained a profound silence during the route. This adventure, which at first had presented itself under the appearance of an amorous intrigue, had soon assumed a graver aspect, and appeared to turn toward political machinations. If this new aspect did not frighten the chevalier, at least it gave him matter for reflection. There is a moment in the affairs of every man which decides upon his future. This moment, however important it may be, is rarely prepared by calculation or directed by will. It is almost always chance which takes a man as the wind does a leaf, and throws him into some new and unknown path, where, once entered, he is obliged to obey a superior force, and where, while believing himself free, he is but the slave of circumstances and the plaything of events.

It was thus with the chevalier. Interest and gratitude attached him to the party of the old court. D'Harmental, in consequence, had not calculated the good or the harm that Madame de Maintenon had done France. He did not weigh in the balance of genealogy Monsieur de Maine and Monsieur d'Orleans. He felt that he must devote his life to those who had raised him from obscurity, and knowing the old king's will, regarded as a usurpation Monsieur d'Orleans' accession to the regency.

Fully expecting an armed reaction against this power, he looked around for the standard which he should follow. Nothing that he expected happened; Spain had not even protested. Monsieur de Maine, fatigued by his short contest, had retired into the shade. Monsieur de Toulouse, good, easy, and almost ashamed of the favors which had fallen to the share of himself and his elder brother, would not permit even the supposition that he could put himself at the head of a party. The Marshal de Villeroi had made a feeble and systemless opposition. Villars went to no one, but waited for some one to come to him. D'Axelles had changed sides, and had accepted the post of secretary for foreign affairs. The dukes and peers took patience, and paid court to the regent, in the hope that he would at last take away from the Dukes of Maine and Toulouse the precedence which Louis XIV. had given them.

Finally, there was discontent with, and even opposition to, the government of the Duc d'Orleans, but all impalpable and disjointed. This is what D'Harmental had seen, and what had resheathed his half-drawn sword: he thought he was the only one who saw another issue to affairs, and he gradually came to the conclusion that that issue had no existence, except in his own imagination, since those who should have been most interested in that result seemed to regard it as so impossible, that they did not even attempt to attain to it.

Although the carriage had been on the road nearly half an hour, the chevalier had not found it long: so deep were his reflections, that, even if his eyes had not been bandaged, he would have been equally ignorant of what streets they passed through.

At length he heard the wheels rumbling as if they were passing under an arch. He heard the grating of hinges as the gate opened to admit him, and closed behind him, and directly after, the carriage, having described a semi-circle, stopped.

"Chevalier," said his guide, "if you have any fear, there is still time to draw back; if, on the contrary, you have not changed your resolution, come with me."

D'Harmental's only answer was to extend his hand.

The footman opened the door; the unknown got out first, and then assisted the chevalier. His feet soon encountered some steps; he mounted six – still conducted by the masked lady – crossed a vestibule, passed through a corridor, and entered a room.

"We are now arrived," said the unknown, "you remember our conditions; you are free to accept or refuse a part in the piece about to be played, but, in case of a refusal, you promise not to divulge anything you may see or hear."

"I swear it on my honor," replied the chevalier.

"Now, sit down; wait in this room, and do not remove the bandage till you hear two o'clock strike. You have not long to wait."

At these words his conductress left him. Two o'clock soon struck, and the chevalier tore off the bandage. He was alone in the most marvelous boudoir possible to imagine. It was small and octagonal, hung with lilac and silver, with furniture and portieres of tapestry. Buhl tables, covered with splendid china; a Persian carpet, and the ceiling painted by Watteau, who was then coming into fashion. At this sight, the chevalier found it difficult to believe that he had been summoned on grave matters, and almost returned to his first ideas.

At this moment a door opened in the tapestry, and there appeared a woman who, in the fantastic preoccupation of his spirit, D'Harmental might have taken for a fairy, so slight, small, and delicate was her figure. She was dressed in pearl gray satin, covered with bouquets, so beautifully embroidered that, at a short distance, they appeared like natural flowers; the flounces, ruffles, and head-dress was of English point; it was fastened with pearls and diamonds. Her face was covered with a half-mask of black velvet, from which hung a deep black lace. D'Harmental bowed, for there was something royal in the walk and manner of this woman which showed him that the other had been only an envoy.

"Madame," said he, "have I really, as I begin to believe, quitted the earth for the land of spirits, and are you the powerful fairy to whom this beautiful palace belongs?"

"Alas! chevalier," replied the masked lady, in a sweet but decided voice, "I am not a powerful fairy, but, on the contrary, a poor princess, persecuted by a wicked enchanter, who has taken from me my crown, and oppresses my kingdom. Thus, you see, I am seeking a brave knight to deliver me, and your renown has led me to address myself to you."

"If my life could restore you your past power, madame," replied D'Harmental, "speak; I am ready to risk it with joy. Who is this enchanter that I must combat; this giant that I must destroy? Since you have chosen me above all, I will prove myself worthy of the honor. From this moment I engage my word, even if it cost me my life."

"If you lose your life, chevalier, it will be in good company," said the lady, untying her mask, and discovering her face, "for you would lose it with the son of Louis XIV., and the granddaughter of the great Conde."

"Madame la Duchesse de Maine!" cried D'Harmental, falling on one knee; "will your highness pardon me, if, not knowing you, I have said anything which may fall short of the profound respect I feel for you."

"You have said nothing for which I am not proud and grateful, chevalier, but, perhaps, you now repent. If so, you are at liberty to withdraw."

"Heaven forbid, madame, that having had the honor to engage my life in the service of so great and noble a princess, I should deprive myself of the greatest honor I ever dared to hope for. No, madame; take seriously, I beg, what I offered half in jest; my arm, my sword, and my life."

"I see," said the Duchesse de Maine, with that smile which gave her such power over all who approached her, "that the Baron de Valef did not deceive me, and you are such as he described. Come, I will present you to our friends."

The duchess went first, D'Harmental followed, astonished at what had passed, but fully resolved, partly from pride, partly from conviction, not to withdraw a step.

The duchess conducted him to a room where four new personages awaited him. These were the Cardinal de Polignac, the Marquis de Pompadour, Monsieur de Malezieux, and the Abbe Brigaud.

The Cardinal de Polignac was supposed to be the lover of Madame de Maine. He was a handsome prelate, from forty to forty-five years of age; always dressed with the greatest care, with an unctuous voice, a cold face, and a timid heart; devoured by ambition, which was eternally combated by the weakness of his character, which always drew him back where he should advance; of high birth, as his name indicated, very learned for a cardinal, and very well informed for a nobleman.

Monsieur de Pompadour was a man of from forty-five to fifty, who had been a minion of the dauphin's, the son of Louis XIV., and who had so great a love for his whole family, that, seeing with grief that the regent was going to declare war against Philip V., he had thrown himself, body and soul, into the Duc de Maine's party. Proud and disinterested, he had given a rare example of loyalty, in sending back to the regent the brevet of his pensions and those of his wife, and in refusing for himself and the Marquis de Courcillon, his son-in-law, every place offered to them.

Monsieur de Malezieux was a man of from sixty to sixty-five, Chancellor of Dombes and Lord of Chatenay: he owed this double title to the gratitude of M. de Maine, whose education he had conducted. A poet, a musician, an author of small comedies, which he played himself with infinite spirit; born for an idle and intellectual life; always occupied in procuring pleasure for others, and above all for Madame de Maine, whom he adored, he was a type of the Sybarite of the eighteenth century, but, like the Sybarites who, drawn by the aspect of beauty, followed Cleopatra to Actium, and were killed around her, he would have followed his dear Bénédicte through fire and water, and, at a word from her, would, without hesitation, and almost without regret, have thrown himself from the towers of Notre-Dame.

The Abbe Brigaud was the son of a Lyons merchant. His father, who was commercially related with the court of Spain, was charged to make overtures, as if on his own account, for the marriage of the young Louis XIV. with the young Maria Theresa of Austria. If these overtures had been badly received, the ministers of France would have disavowed them; but they were well received, and they supported them.

The marriage took place; and, as the little Brigaud was born about the same time as the dauphin, he asked, in recompense, that the king's son should stand godfather to his child, which was granted to him. He then made acquaintance with the Marquis de Pompadour, who, as we have said, was one of the pages of honor. When he was of an age to decide on his profession, he joined the Fathers of the Oratory. He was a clever and an ambitious man, but, as often happens to the greatest geniuses, he had never had an opportunity of making himself known.

Some time before the period of which we are writing, he met the Marquis de Pompadour, who was seeking a man of spirit and enterprise as the secretary of Madame de Maine. He told him to what the situation would expose him at the present time. Brigaud weighed for an instant the good and evil chances, and, as the former appeared to predominate, he accepted it.

Of these four men, D'Harmental only knew the Marquis de Pompadour, whom he had often met at the house of Monsieur de Courcillon, his son-in-law, a distant relation of the D'Harmentals.

When D'Harmental entered the room, Monsieur de Polignac, Monsieur de Malezieux, and Monsieur de Pompadour were standing talking at the fireplace, and the Abbe Brigaud was seated at a table classifying some papers.

"Gentlemen," said the Duchesse de Maine, "here is the brave champion of whom the Baron de Valf has spoken to us, and who has been brought here by your dear De Launay, Monsieur de Malezieux. If his name and antecedents are not sufficient to stand sponsor for him, I will answer for him personally."

"Presented thus by your highness," said Malezieux, "we shall see in him not only a companion, but a chief, whom we are ready to follow wherever he may lead."

"My dear D'Harmental," said the Marquis de Pompadour, extending his hand to him, "we were already relations, we are now almost brothers."

"Welcome, monsieur!" said the Cardinal de Polignac, in the unctuous tone habitual to him, and which contrasted so strangely with the coldness of his countenance.

The Abbe Brigaud raised his head with a movement resembling that of a serpent, and fixed on D'Harmental two little eyes, brilliant as those of the lynx.

"Gentlemen," said D'Harmental, after having answered each of them by a bow, "I am new and strange among you, and, above all, ignorant of what is passing, or in what manner I can serve you;

but though my word has only been engaged to you for a few minutes, my devotion to your cause is of many years' standing. I beg you, therefore, to grant me the confidence so graciously claimed for me by her highness. All that I shall ask after that will be a speedy occasion to prove myself worthy of it."

"Well said!" cried the Duchesse de Maine; "commend me to a soldier for going straight to the point! No, Monsieur d'Harmental, we will have no secrets from you, and the opportunity you require, and which will place each of us in our proper position – "

"Excuse me, Madame la Duchesse," interrupted the cardinal, who was playing uneasily with his necktie, "but, from your manner, the chevalier will think that the affair is a conspiracy."

"And what is it then, cardinal?" asked the duchess, impatiently.

"It is," said the cardinal, "a council, secret, it is true, but in no degree reprehensible, in which we only seek a means of remedying the misfortunes of the state, and enlightening France on her true interests, by recalling the last will of the king, Louis XIV."

"Stay, cardinal!" said the duchess, stamping her foot; "you will kill me with impatience by your circumlocutions. Chevalier," continued she, addressing D'Harmental, "do not listen to his eminence, who at this moment, doubtless, is thinking of his Lucrece. If it had been a simple council, the talents of his eminence would soon have extricated us from our troubles, without the necessity of applying to you; but it is a bona fide conspiracy against the regent – a conspiracy which numbers the king of Spain, Cardinal Alberoni, the Duc de Maine, myself, the Marquis de Pompadour, Monsieur de Malezieux, l'Abbe Brigaud, Valf, yourself, the cardinal himself the president; and which will include half the parliament and three parts of France. This is the matter in hand, chevalier. Are you content, cardinal? Have I spoken clearly, gentlemen?"

"Madame – " murmured Malezieux, joining his hands before her with more devotion than he would have done before the Virgin.

"No, no; stop, Malezieux," said the duchess, "but the cardinal enrages me with his half-measures. Mon Dieu! are these eternal waverings worthy of a man? For myself, I do not ask a sword, I do not ask a dagger; give me but a nail, and I, a woman, and almost a dwarf, will go, like a new Jael, and drive it into the temple of this other Sisera. Then all will be finished; and, if I fail, no one but myself will be compromised."

Monsieur de Polignac sighed deeply; Pompadour burst out laughing; Malezieux tried to calm the duchess; and Brigaud bent his head, and went on writing as if he had heard nothing. As to D'Harmental, he would have kissed the hem of her dress, so superior was this woman, in his eyes, to the four men who surrounded her.

At this moment they heard the sound of a carriage, which drove into the courtyard and stopped at the door. The person expected was doubtless some one of importance, for there was an instant silence, and the Duchesse de Maine, in her impatience, went herself to open the door.

"Well?" asked she.

"He is here," said a voice, which D'Harmental recognized as that of the Bat.

"Enter, enter, prince," said the duchess; "we wait for you."

CHAPTER VI. THE PRINCE DE CELLAMARE

At this invitation there entered a tall, thin, grave man, with a sunburned complexion, who at a single glance took in everything in the room, animate and inanimate. The chevalier recognized the ambassador of their Catholic majesties, the Prince de Cellamare.

"Well, prince," asked the duchess, "what have you to tell us?"

"I have to tell you, madame," replied the prince, kissing her hand respectfully, and throwing his cloak on a chair, "that your highness had better change coachmen. I predict misfortune if you retain in your service the fellow who drove me here. He seems to me to be some one employed by the regent to break the necks of your highness and all your companions."

Every one began to laugh, and particularly the coachman himself, who, without ceremony, had entered behind the prince; and who, throwing his hat and cloak on a seat, showed himself a man of high bearing, from thirty-five to forty years old, with the lower part of his face hidden by a black handkerchief.

"Do you hear, my dear Laval, what the prince says of you?"

"Yes, yes," said Laval; "it is worth while to give him Montmorencies to be treated like that. Ah, M. le Prince, the first gentlemen in France are not good enough for your coachmen! Peste! you are difficult to please. Have you many coachmen at Naples who date from Robert the Strong?"

"What! is it you, my dear count?" said the prince, holding out his hand to him.

"Myself, prince! Madame la Duchesse sent away her coachman to keep Lent in his own family, and engaged me for this night. She thought it safer."

"And Madame la Duchesse did right," said the cardinal. "One cannot take too many precautions."

"Ah, your eminence," said Laval, "I should like to know if you would be of the same opinion after passing half the night on the box of a carriage, first to fetch M. d'Harmental from the opera ball, and then to take the prince from the Hotel Colbert."

"What!" said D'Harmental, "was it you, Monsieur le Comte, who had the goodness –"

"Yes, young man," replied Laval; "and I would have gone to the end of the world to bring you here, for I know you. You are a gallant gentleman; you were one of the first to enter Denain, and you took Albemarle. You were fortunate enough not to leave half your jaw there, as I did in Italy. You were right, for it would have been a further motive for taking away your regiment, which they have done, however."

"We will restore you that a hundredfold," said the duchess; "but now let us speak of Spain. Prince, you have news from Alberoni, Pompadour tells me."

"Yes, your highness."

"What are they?"

"Both good and bad. His majesty Philip V. is in one of his melancholy moods and will not determine upon anything. He will not believe in the treaty of the quadruple alliance."

"Will not believe in it!" cried the duchess; "and the treaty ought to be signed now. In a week Dubois will have brought it here."

"I know it, your highness," replied Cellamare, coldly; "but his Catholic majesty does not."

"Then he abandons us?"

"Almost."

"What becomes, then, of the queen's fine promises, and the empire she pretends to have over her husband?"

"She promises to prove it to you, madame," replied the prince, "when something is done."

"Yes," said the Cardinal de Polignac; "and then she will fail in that promise."

"No, your eminence! I will answer for her."

"What I see most clearly in all this is," said Laval, "that we must compromise the king. Once compromised, he must go on."

"Now, then," said Cellamare, "we are coming to business."

"But how to compromise him," asked the Duchesse de Maine, "without a letter from him, without even a verbal message, and at five hundred leagues' distance?"

"Has he not his representative at Paris, and is not that representative in your house at this very moment, madame?"

"Prince," said the duchess, "you have more extended powers than you are willing to admit."

"No; my powers are limited to telling you that the citadel of Toledo and the fortress of Saragossa are at your service. Find the means of making the regent enter there, and their Catholic majesties will close the door on him so securely that he will not leave it again, I promise you."

"It is impossible," said Monsieur de Polignac.

"Impossible! and why?" cried D'Harmental. "On the contrary, what is more simple? Nothing is necessary but eight or ten determined men, a well-closed carriage, and relays to Bayonne."

"I have already offered to undertake it," said Laval.

"And I," said Pompadour.

"You cannot," said the duchess; "the regent knows you; and if the thing failed, you would be lost."

"It is a pity," said Cellamare, coldly; "for, once arrived at Toledo or Saragossa, there is greatness in store for him who shall have succeeded."

"And the blue ribbon," added Madame de Maine, "on his return to Paris."

"Oh, silence, I beg, madame," said D'Harmental; "for if your highness says such things, you give to devotion the air of ambition, and rob it of all its merit. I was going to offer myself for the enterprise – I, who am unknown to the regent – but now I hesitate; and yet I venture to believe myself worthy of the confidence of your highness, and able to justify it." – "What, chevalier!" cried the duchess, "you would risk –"

"My life; it is all I have to risk. I thought I had already offered it, and that your highness had accepted it. Was I mistaken?"

"No, no, chevalier," said the duchess quickly; "and you are a brave and loyal gentleman. I have always believed in presentiments, and from the moment Valef pronounced your name, telling me that you were what I find you to be, I felt of what assistance you would be to us. Gentlemen, you hear what the chevalier says; in what can you aid him?"

"In whatever he may want," said Laval and Pompadour.

"The coffers of their Catholic majesties are at his disposal," said the Prince de Cellamare, "and he may make free use of them."

"I thank you," said D'Harmental, turning toward the Comte de Laval and the Marquis de Pompadour; "but, known as you are, you would only make the enterprise more difficult. Occupy yourselves only in obtaining for me a passport for Spain, as if I had the charge of some prisoner of importance: that ought to be easy."

"I undertake it," said the Abbe Brigaud: "I will get from D'Argenson a paper all prepared, which will only have to be filled in."

"Excellent Brigaud," said Pompadour; "he does not speak often, but he speaks to the purpose."

"It is he who should be made cardinal," said the duchess, "rather than certain great lords of my acquaintance; but as soon as we can dispose of the blue and the red, be easy, gentlemen, we shall not be miserly. Now, chevalier, you have heard what the prince said. If you want money –"

"Unfortunately," replied D'Harmental, "I am not rich enough to refuse his excellency's offer, and so soon as I have arrived at the end of about a million pistoles which I have at home, I must have recourse to you."

"To him, to me, to us all, chevalier, for each one in such circumstances should tax himself according to his means. I have little ready money, but I have many diamonds and pearls; therefore want for nothing, I beg. All the world has not your disinterestedness, and there is devotion which must be bought."

"Above all, be prudent," said the cardinal.

"Do not be uneasy," replied D'Harmental, contemptuously. "I have sufficient grounds of complaint against the regent for it to be believed, if I were taken, that it was an affair between him and me, and that my vengeance was entirely personal."

"But," said the Comte de Laval, "you must have a kind of lieutenant in this enterprise, some one on whom you can count. Have you any one?"

"I think so," replied D'Harmental; "but I must be informed each morning what the regent will do in the evening. Monsieur le Prince de Cellamare, as ambassador, must have his secret police."

"Yes," said the prince, embarrassed, "I have some people who give me an account." – "That is exactly it," said D'Harmental.

"Where do you lodge?" asked the cardinal.

"At my own house, monseigneur, Rue de Richelieu, No. 74."

"And how long have you lived there?"

"Three years."

"Then you are too well known there, monsieur; you must change quarters. The people whom you receive are known, and the sight of strange faces would give rise to questions."

"This time your eminence is right," said D'Harmental. "I will seek another lodging in some retired neighborhood."

"I undertake it," said Brigaud; "my costume does not excite suspicions. I will engage you a lodging as if it was destined for a young man from the country who has been recommended to me, and who has come to occupy some place in an office."

"Truly, my dear Brigaud," said the Marquis de Pompadour, "you are like the princess in the 'Arabian Nights,' who never opened her mouth but to drop pearls."

"Well, it is a settled thing, Monsieur l'Abbe," said D'Harmental; "I reckon on you, and I shall announce at home that I am going to leave Paris for a three months' trip."

"Everything is settled, then," said the Duchesse de Maine joyfully. "This is the first time that I have been able to see clearly into our affairs, chevalier, and we owe it to you. I shall not forget it."

"Gentlemen," said Malezieux, pulling out his watch, "I would observe that it is four o'clock in the morning, and that we shall kill our dear duchesse with fatigue."

"You are mistaken," said the duchess; "such nights rest me, and it is long since I have passed one so good."

"Prince," said Laval, "you must be contented with the coachman whom you wished discharged, unless you would prefer driving yourself, or going on foot."

"No, indeed," said the prince, "I will risk it. I am a Neapolitan, and believe in omens. If you overturn me it will be a sign that we must stay where we are – if you conduct me safely it will be a sign that we may go on."

"Pompadour, you must take back Monsieur d'Harmental," said the duchess.

"Willingly," said the marquis. "It is a long time since we met, and we have a hundred things to say to each other."

"Cannot I take leave of my sprightly bat?" asked D'Harmental; "for I do not forget that it is to her I owe the happiness of having offered my services to your highness."

"De Launay," cried the duchess, conducting the Prince of Cellamare to the door, "De Launay, here is Monsieur le Chevalier d'Harmental, who says you are the greatest sorceress he has ever known."

"Well!" said she who has left us such charming memoirs, under the name of Madame de Staël, "do you believe in my prophecies now, Monsieur le Chevalier?"

"I believe, because I hope," replied the chevalier. "But now that I know the fairy that sent you, it is not your predictions that astonish me the most. How were you so well informed about the past, and, above all, of the present?"

"Well, De Launay, be kind, and do not torment the chevalier any longer, or he will believe us to be two witches, and be afraid of us."

"Was there not one of your friends, chevalier," asked De Launay, "who left you this morning in the Bois de Boulogne to come and say adieu to us."

"Valef! It is Valef!" cried D'Harmental. "I understand now."

"In the place of Œdipus you would have been devoured ten times over by the Sphinx."

"But the mathematics; but the anatomy; but Virgil?" replied D'Harmental.

"Do you not know, chevalier," said Malezieux, mixing in the conversation, "that we never call her anything here but our 'savante?' with the exception of Chaulieu, however, who calls her his flirt, and his coquette; but all as a poetical license. We let her loose the other day on Du Vernay, our doctor, and she beat him at anatomy."

"And," said the Marquis de Pompadour, taking D'Harmental's arm to lead him away, "the good man in his disappointment declared that there was no other girl in France who understood the human frame so well."

"Ah!" said the Abbe Brigaud, folding his papers, "here is the first savant on record who has been known to make a bon-mot. It is true that he did not intend it."

And D'Harmental and Pompadour, having taken leave of the duchess, retired laughing, followed by the Abbe Brigaud, who reckoned on them to drive him home.

"Well," said Madame de Maine, addressing the Cardinal de Polignac, "does your eminence still find it such a terrible thing to conspire?"

"Madame," replied the cardinal, who could not understand that any one could laugh when their head was in danger, "I will ask you the same question when we are all in the Bastille."

And he went away with the good chancellor, deploring the ill-luck which had thrown him into such a rash enterprise.

The duchess looked after him with a contempt which she could not disguise: then, when she was alone with De Launay:

"My dear Sophy," said she, "let us put out our lantern, for I think we have found a man."

CHAPTER VII. ALBERONI

When D'Harmental awoke, he wondered if all had been a dream. Events had, during the last thirty-six hours, succeeded each other with such rapidity, that he had been carried away, as by a whirlpool, without knowing where he was going. Now for the first time he had leisure to reflect on the past and the future.

These were times in which every one conspired more or less. We know the natural bent of the mind in such a case. The first feeling we experience, after having made an engagement in a moment of exaltation, is one almost of regret for having been so forward. Little by little we become familiarized with the idea of the dangers we are running. Imagination removes them from our sight, and presents instead the ambitions we may realize. Pride soon becomes mingled with it, as we think that we have become a secret power in the State. We walk along proudly, with head erect, passing contemptuously those who lead an ordinary life; we cradle ourselves in our hopes, and wake one morning conquering or conquered; carried on the shoulders of the people, or broken by the wheels of that machine called the government.

Thus it was with D'Harmental. After a few moments' reflection, he saw things under the same aspect as he had done the day before, and congratulated himself upon having taken the highest place among such people as the Montmorencies and the Polignacs. His family had transmitted to him much of that adventurous chivalry so much in vogue under Louis XIII., and which Richelieu with his scaffolds, and Louis XIV. with his antechambers, had not quite been able to destroy. There was something romantic in enlisting himself, a young man, under the banners of a woman, and that woman a granddaughter of the great Conde.

D'Harmental lost no time in preparing to keep the promises he had made, for he felt that the eyes of all the conspirators were upon him, and that on his courage and prudence depended the destinies of two kingdoms, and the politics of the world. At this moment the regent was the keystone of the arch of the European edifice; and France was beginning to take, if not by arms, at least by diplomacy, that influence which she had unfortunately not always preserved. Placed at the center of the triangle formed by the three great Powers, with eyes fixed on Germany, one arm extended toward England, and the other toward Spain, ready to turn on either of these three States that should not treat her according to her dignity, she had assumed, under the Duc d'Orleans, an attitude of calm strength which she had never had under Louis XIV.

This arose from the division of interests consequent on the usurpation of William of Orange, and the accession of Philip V. to the throne of Spain. Faithful to his old hatred against the stadtholder, who had refused him his daughter, Louis XIV. had constantly advanced the pretensions of James II., and, after his death, of the Chevalier de St. George. Faithful to his compact with Philip V., he had constantly aided his grandson against the emperor, with men and money; and, weakened by this double war, he had been reduced to the shameful treaty of Utrecht; but at the death of the old king all was changed, and the regent had adopted a very different line of conduct. The treaty of Utrecht was only a truce, which had been broken from the moment when England and Holland did not pursue common interests with those of France.

In consequence, the regent had first of all held out his hand to George I., and the treaty of the triple alliance had been signed at La Haye, by Dubois, in the name of France; by General Cadogan, for England; and by the pensioner, Heinsiens, for Holland. This was a great step toward the pacification of Europe, but the interests of Austria and Spain were still in suspense. Charles VI. would not recognize Philip V. as king of Spain; and Philip V., on his part, would not renounce his rights over those provinces of the Spanish empire which the treaty of Utrecht had given to the emperor.

It was in the hopes of bringing these things about that the regent had sent Dubois to London, where he was pursuing the treaty of the quadruple alliance with as much ardor as he had that of La Haye. This treaty would have neutralized the pretensions of the State not approved by the four Powers. This was what was feared by Philip V. (or rather the Cardinal d'Alberoni).

It was not thus with Alberoni; his was one of those extraordinary fortunes which one sees, always with new astonishment, spring up around the throne; one of those caprices of destiny which chance raises and destroys; like a gigantic waterspout, which advances on the ocean, threatening to annihilate everything, but which is dispersed by a stone thrown from the hand of a sailor; or an avalanche, which threatens to swallow towns, and fill up valleys, because a bird in its flight has detached a flake of snow on the summit of the mountain.

Alberoni was born in a gardener's cottage, and as a child he was the bell-ringer. When still a young man he exchanged his smock-frock for a surplice, but was of a merry and jesting disposition. The Duke of Parma heard him laugh one day so gayly, that the poor duke, who did not laugh every day, asked who it was that was so merry, and had him called. Alberoni related to him some grotesque adventure. His highness laughed heartily; and finding that it was pleasant to laugh sometimes, attached him to his person. The duke soon found that he had mind, and fancied that that mind was not incapable of business.

It was at this time that the poor bishop of Parma came back, deeply mortified at his reception by the generalissimo of the French army. The susceptibility of this envoy might compromise the grave interests which his highness had to discuss with France. His highness judged that Alberoni was the man to be humiliated by nothing, and he sent the abbe to finish the negotiation which the bishop had left unfinished. M. de Vendome, who had not put himself out for a bishop, did not do so for an abbe, and received the second ambassador as he had the first; but, instead of following the example of his predecessor, he found in M. de Vendome's own situation so much subject for merry jests and strange praises, that the affair was finished at once, and he came back to the duke with everything arranged to his desire.

This was a reason for the duke to employ him a second time. This time Vendome was just going to sit down to table, and Alberoni, instead of beginning about business, asked if he would taste two dishes of his cooking, went into the kitchen, and came back, a "soupe au fromage" in one hand, and macaroni in the other. De Vendome found the soup so good that he asked Alberoni to take some with him at his own table. At dessert Alberoni introduced his business, and profiting by the good humor of Vendome, he twisted him round his finger.

His highness was astonished. The greatest genius he had met with had never done so much. The next time it was M. de Vendome who asked the duke of Parma if he had nothing else to negotiate with him. Alberoni found means of persuading his sovereign that he would be more useful to him near Vendome than elsewhere, and he persuaded Vendome that he could not exist without "soupe au fromage" and macaroni.

M. de Vendome attached him to his service, allowed him to interfere in his most secret affairs, and made him his chief secretary. At this time Vendome left for Spain. Alberoni put himself in communication with Madame des Ursins; and when Vendome died, she gave him, near her, the same post he had occupied near the deceased.

This was another step. The Princesse des Ursins began to get old, an unpardonable crime in the eyes of Philip V. She resolved to place a young woman near the king, through whom she might continue to reign over him. Alberoni proposed the daughter of his old master, whom he represented as a child, without character, and without will, who would claim nothing of royalty but the name. The princess was taken by this promise. The marriage was decided on, and the young princess left Italy for Spain.

Her first act of authority was to arrest the Princesse des Ursins, who had come to meet her in a court dress, and to send her back, as she was, with her neck uncovered, in a bitter frost, in a carriage of

which the guard had broken the window with his elbow, first to Burgos, and then to France, where she arrived, after having been obliged to borrow fifty pistoles from her servants. After his first interview with Elizabeth Farnese, the king announced to Alberoni that he was prime minister. From that day, thanks to the young queen, who owed him everything, the ex-ringer of bells exercised an unlimited empire over Philip V.

Now this is what Alberoni pictured to himself, having always prevented Philip V. from recognizing the peace of Utrecht. If the conspiracy succeeded – if D'Harmental carried off the Duc d'Orleans, and took him to the citadel of Toledo, or the fortress of Saragossa – Alberoni would get Monsieur de Maine recognized as regent, would withdraw France from the quadruple alliance, throw the Chevalier de St. George with the fleet on the English coast, and set Prussia, Sweden, and Russia, with whom he had a treaty of alliance, at variance with Holland. The empire would then profit by their dispute to retake Naples and Sicily; would assure Tuscany to the second son of the king of Spain; would reunite the Catholic Netherlands to France, give Sardinia to the Dukes of Savoy, Commachio to the pope, and Mantua to the Venetians. He would make himself the soul of the great league, of the south against the north; and if Louis XV. died, would crown Philip V. king of half the world.

All these things were now in the hands of a young man of twenty-six years of age; and it was not astonishing that he should be, at first, frightened at the responsibility which weighed upon him.

As he was still in deep thought, the Abbe Brigaud entered. He had already found a lodging for the chevalier, at No. 5, Rue du Temps-Perdu; a small furnished room, suitable to a young man who came to seek his fortune in Paris. He brought him also two thousand pistoles from the Prince of Cellamare.

D'Harmental wished to refuse them, for it seemed as if he would be no longer acting according to conscience and devotion; but Brigaud explained to him that in such an enterprise there are susceptibilities to conquer, and accomplices to pay; and that besides, if the affair succeeded, he would have to set out instantly for Spain, and perhaps make his way by force of gold. Brigaud carried away a complete suit of the chevalier's, as a pattern for a fresh one suitable for a clerk in an office. The Abbe Brigaud was a useful man.

D'Harmental passed the rest of the day in preparing for his pretended journey, and removed, in case of accident, every letter which might compromise a friend; then went toward the Rue St. Honore, where – thanks to La Normande – he hoped to have news of Captain Roquefinette. In fact, from the moment that a lieutenant for his enterprise had been spoken of, he had thought of this man, who had given him, as his second, a proof of his careless courage. He had instantly recognized in him one of those adventurers always ready to sell their blood for a good price, and who, in time of peace, when their swords are useless to the State, place them at the service of individuals.

On becoming a conspirator one always becomes superstitious, and D'Harmental fancied that it was an intervention of Providence which had introduced him to Roquefinette. The chevalier, without being a regular customer, went occasionally to the tavern of La Fillon. It was quite fashionable at that time to go and drink at her house. D'Harmental was to her neither her son, a name which she gave to all her "habitués," nor her gossip, a word which she reserved for the Abbe Dubois, but simply Monsieur le Chevalier; a mark of respect which would have been considered rather a humiliation by most of the young men of fashion. La Fillon was much astonished when D'Harmental asked to see one of her servants, called La Normande.

"Oh, mon Dieu! Monsieur le Chevalier!" said she, "I am really distressed; but La Normande is waiting at a dinner which will last till to-morrow evening."

"Plague! what a dinner!"

"What is to be done?" replied La Fillon. "It is a caprice of an old friend of the house. He will not be waited on by any one but her, and I cannot refuse him that satisfaction."

"When he has money, I suppose?"

"You are mistaken. I give him credit up to a certain sum. It is a weakness, but one cannot help being grateful. He started me in the world, such as you see me, monsieur – I, who have had in my house the best people in Paris, including the regent. I was only the daughter of a poor chair-bearer. Oh! I am not like the greater part of your beautiful duchesses, who deny their origin; nor like two-thirds of your dukes and peers, who fabricate genealogies for themselves. No! what I am, I owe to my own merit, and I am proud of it."

"Then," said the chevalier, who was not particularly interested by La Fillon's history, "you say that La Normande will not have finished with this dinner till to-morrow evening?"

"The jolly old captain never stays less time than that at table, when once he is there."

"But, my dear presidente" (this was a name sometimes given to La Fillon, as a certain quid pro quo for the presidente who had the same name as herself), "do you think, by chance, your captain may be my captain?"

"What is yours called?"

"Captain Roquefinette."

"It is the same."

"He is here?"

"In person."

"Well, he is just the man I want; and I only asked for La Normande to get his address."

"Then all is right," said the presidente.

"Have the kindness to send for him."

"Oh! he would not come down for the regent himself. If you want to see him you must go up."

"Where?"

"At No. 2, where you supped the other evening with the Baron de Valef. Oh! when he has money, nothing is too good for him. Although he is but a captain, he has the heart of a king."

"Better and better," said D'Harmental, mounting the staircase, without being deterred by the recollection of the misadventure which had happened to him in that room; "that is exactly what I want."

If D'Harmental had not known the room in question, the voice of the captain would soon have served him for a guide.

"Now, my little loves," said he, "the third and last verse, and together in the chorus." Then he began singing in a magnificent bass voice, and four or five female voices took up the chorus.

"That is better," said the captain; "now let us have the 'Battle of Malplaquet.'"

"No, no," said a voice; "I have had enough of your battle."

"What! enough of it – a battle I was at myself?"

"That is nothing to me. I like a romance better than all your wicked battle-songs, full of oaths." And she began to sing "Linval loved Arsene –"

"Silence!" said the captain. "Am I not master here? As long as I have any money I will be served as I like. When I have no more, that will be another thing; then you may sing what you like; I shall have nothing to say to it."

It appeared that the servants of the cabaret thought it beneath the dignity of their sex to subscribe to such a pretension, for there was such a noise that D'Harmental thought it best to announce himself.

"Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up," said the captain.

D'Harmental followed the instruction which was given him in the words of Little Red Riding-hood; and, having entered, saw the captain lying on a couch before the remains of an ample dinner, leaning on a cushion, a woman's shawl over his shoulders, a great pipe in his mouth, and a cloth rolled round his head like a turban. Three or four servants were standing round him with napkins in their hands. On a chair near him was placed his coat, on which was to be seen a new shoulder-knot, his hat

with a new lace, and the famous sword which had furnished Ravanne with the facetious comparison to his mother's spit.

"What! is it you?" cried the captain. "You find me like Monsieur de Bonneval – in my seraglio, and surrounded by my slaves. You do not know Monsieur de Bonneval, ladies: he is a pasha of three tails, who, like me, could not bear romances, but who understood how to live. Heaven preserve me from such a fate as his!"

"Yes, it is I, captain," said D'Harmental, unable to prevent laughing at the grotesque group which presented itself. "I see you did not give me a false address, and I congratulate you on your veracity."

"Welcome, chevalier," said the captain. "Ladies, I beg you to serve monsieur with the grace which distinguishes you, and to sing him whatever songs he likes. Sit down, chevalier, and eat and drink as if you were at home, particularly as it is your horse we are eating and drinking. He is already more than half gone, poor animal, but the remains are good."

"Thank you, captain, I have just dined; and I have only one word to say to you, if you will permit it."

"No, pardieu! I do not permit it," said the captain, "unless it is about another engagement – that would come before everything. La Normande, give me my sword."

"No, captain; it is on business," interrupted D'Harmental.

"Oh! if it is on business, I am your humble servant; but I am a greater tyrant than the tyrants of Thebes or Corinth – Archias, Pelopidas, Leonidas, or any other that ends in 'as,' who put off business till to-morrow. I have enough money to last till to-morrow evening; then, after to-morrow, business."

"But at least after to-morrow, captain, I may count upon you?"

"For life or death, chevalier."

"I believe that the adjournment is prudent."

"Prudentissimo!" said the captain. "Athenais, light my pipe. La Normande, pour me out something to drink."

"The day after to-morrow, then, captain?"

"Yes; where shall I find you?"

"Listen," replied D'Harmental, speaking so as to be heard by no one but him. "Walk, from ten to eleven o'clock in the morning, in the Rue du Temps Perdu. Look up; you will be called from somewhere, and you must mount till you meet some one you know. A good breakfast will await you."

"All right, chevalier," replied the captain; "from ten to eleven in the morning. Excuse me if I do not conduct you to the door, but you know it is not the custom with Turks."

The chevalier made a sign with his hand that he dispensed with this formality, and descended the staircase. He was only on the fourth step when he heard the captain begin the famous song of the Dragoons of Malplaquet, which had perhaps caused as much blood to be shed in duels as there had been on the field of battle.

CHAPTER VIII. THE GARRET

The next day the Abbe Brigaud came to the chevalier's house at the same hour as before. He was a perfectly punctual man. He brought with him three things particularly useful to the chevalier; clothes, a passport, and the report of the Prince of Cellamare's police respecting what the regent was going to do on the present day, March 24, 1718. The clothes were simple, as became the cadet of a bourgeois family come to seek his fortune in Paris. The chevalier tried them on, and, thanks to his own good looks, found that they became him admirably.

The abbe shook his head. He would have preferred that the chevalier should not have looked quite so well; but this was an irreparable misfortune. The passport was in the name of Signior Diego, steward of the noble house of Oropesa, who had a commission to bring back to Spain a sort of maniac, a bastard of the said house, whose mania was to believe himself regent of France. This was a precaution taken to meet anything that the Duc d'Orleans might call out from the bottom of the carriage; and, as the passport was according to rule, signed by the Prince de Cellamare, and "viséd" by Monsieur Voyer d'Argenson, there was no reason why the regent, once in the carriage, should not arrive safely at Pampeluna, when all would be done.

The signature of Monsieur Voyer d'Argenson was imitated with a truth which did honor to the calligraphers of the Prince de Cellamare. As to the report, it was a chef-d'œuvre of clearness; and we insert it word for word, to give an idea of the regent's life, and of the manner in which the Spanish ambassador's police was conducted. It was dated two o'clock in the morning.

"To-day the regent will rise late. There has been a supper in his private rooms; Madame d'Averne was there for the first time instead of Madame de Parabere. The other women were the Duchesse de Falaris, and Saseri, maid of honor to madame. The men were the Marquis de Broglie, the Count de Nocé, the Marquis de Canillac, the Duc de Brancas, and the Chevalier de Simiane. As to the Marquis de Lafare and Monsieur de Fargy, they were detained in bed by an illness, of which the cause is unknown. At noon there will be a council. The regent will communicate to the Ducs de Maine and de Guiche the project of the treaty of the quadruple alliance, which the Abbe Dubois has sent him, announcing his return in three or four days.

"The rest of the day is given entirely to paternity. The day before yesterday the regent married his daughter by La Desmarets, who was brought up by the nuns of St. Denis. She dines with her husband at the Palais Royal, and, after dinner, the regent takes her to the opera, to the box of Madame Charlotte de Baviere. La Desmarets, who has not seen her daughter for six years, is told that, if she wishes to see her, she can come to the theater. The regent, in spite of his caprice for Madame d'Averne, still pays court to Madame de Sabran, who piques herself on her fidelity – not to her husband, but to the Duc de Richelieu. To advance his affairs, the regent has appointed Monsieur de Sabran his maitre-d'hotel."

"I hope that is business well done," said the Abbe Brigaud.

"Yes, my dear abbe," replied D'Harmental; "but if the regent does not give us greater opportunities than that for executing our enterprise, it will not be easy for us to take him to Spain."

"Patience, patience," said Brigaud; "if there had been an opportunity to-day you would not have been able to profit by it."

"No; you are right."

"Then you see that what God does is well done. He has left us this day; let us profit by it to move."

This was neither a long nor difficult business. D'Harmental took his treasure, some books, and the packet which contained his wardrobe, and drove to the abbe's house. Then he sent away his

carriage, saying he should go into the country in the evening, and would be away ten or twelve days. Then, having changed his elegant clothes for those that the abbe had brought him, he went to take possession of his new lodging. It was a room, or rather an attic, with a closet, on the fourth story, at No. 5, Rue du Temps Perdu. The proprietor of the house was an acquaintance of the Abbe Brigaud's; therefore, thanks to his recommendation, they had gone to some expense for the young provincial. He found beautifully white curtains, very fine linen, and a well-furnished library; so he saw at once that, if not so well off as in his own apartments, he should be tolerably comfortable.

Madame Denis (this was the name of the abbe's friend) was waiting to do the honors of the room to her future lodger. She boasted to him of its convenience, and promised him that there would be no noise to disturb him from his work. To all which he replied in such a modest manner, that on going down to the first floor, where she lived, Madame Denis particularly recommended him to the care of the porter and his wife. This young man, though in appearance he could certainly compete with the proudest seigneurs of the court, seemed to her far from having the bold and free manners which the young men of the time affected. 'Tis true that the Abbe Brigaud, in the name of his pupil's family, had paid her a quarter in advance.

A minute after, the abbe went down to Madame Denis's room and completed her good opinion of his young protege by telling her that he received absolutely nobody but himself and an old friend of his father's. The latter, in spite of brusque manners, which he had acquired in the field, was a highly respectable gentleman.

D'Harmental used this precaution for fear the apparition of the captain might frighten Madame Denis if she happened to meet him. When he was alone, the chevalier, who had already taken the inventory of his own room, resolved to take that of the neighborhood. He was soon able to convince himself of the truth of what Madame Denis had said about the quietness of the street, for it was not more than ten or twelve feet wide; but this was to him a recommendation, for he calculated that if pursued he might, by means of a plank passed from one window to that opposite, escape to the other side of the street. It was, therefore, important to establish amicable relations with his opposite neighbors.

Unfortunately, they did not seem much disposed to sociability; for not only were the windows hermetically sealed, as the time of year demanded, but the curtains behind them were so closely drawn, that there was not the smallest opening through which he could look. More favored than that of Madame Denis, the house opposite had a fifth story, or rather a terrace. An attic room just above the window so carefully closed, opened on this terrace. It was probably the residence of a gardener, for he had succeeded, by means of patience and labor, in transforming this terrace into a garden, containing, in some twelve feet square, a fountain, a grotto, and an arbor.

It is true that the fountain only played by means of a superior reservoir, which was fed in winter by the rain, and in summer by what he himself poured into it. It is true that the grotto, ornamented with shell work, and surrounded by a wooden fortress, appeared fit only to shelter an individual of the canine race. It is true that the arbor, entirely stripped of its leaves, appeared for the time fit only for an immense poultry cage. As there was nothing to be seen but a monotonous series of roofs and chimneys, D'Harmental closed his window, sat down in an armchair, put his feet on the hobs, took up a volume by the Abbe Chaulieu, and began to read the verses addressed to Mademoiselle de Launay, which had a double interest for him, since he knew the heroine.

The result of this reading was that the chevalier, while smiling at the octogenarian love of the good abbe, discovered that he, less fortunate, had his heart perfectly unoccupied. For a short time he had thought he had loved Madame d'Averne, and had been loved by her; but on her part this deep affection did not withstand the offer of some jewels from the regent, and the vanity of pleasing him.

Before this infidelity had occurred, the chevalier thought that it would have driven him to despair. It had occurred, and he had fought, because at that time men fought about everything which arose, probably from dueling being so strictly forbidden. Then he began to perceive how small a place

this love had held in his heart. A real despair would not have allowed him to seek amusement at the bal-masque, in which case the exciting events of the last few days would not have happened.

The result of this was, that the chevalier remained convinced that he was incapable of a deep love, and that he was only destined for those charming wickednesses so much in vogue. He got up, and began to walk up and down his room; while thus employed he perceived that the window opposite was now wide open. He stopped mechanically, drew back his curtain, and began to investigate the room thus exposed.

It was to all appearance occupied by a woman. Near the window, on which a charming little Italian greyhound rested her delicate paws, was an embroidery frame. Opposite the window was an open harpsichord between two music stands, some crayon drawings, framed in black wood with a gold bead, were hung on the walls, which were covered with a Persian paper. Curtains of Indian chintz, of the same pattern as the paper, hung behind the muslin curtains. Through a second window, half open, he could see the curtains of a recess which probably contained a bed. The rest of the furniture was perfectly simple, but almost elegant, which was due evidently, not to the fortune, but to the taste of the modest inhabitant.

An old woman was sweeping, dusting, and arranging the room, profiting by the absence of its mistress to do this household work, for there was no one else to be seen in the room, and yet it was clear it was not she who inhabited it. All at once the head of the greyhound – whose great eyes had been wandering till then, with the aristocratic indifference characteristic of that animal – became animated. She leaned her head over into the street; then, with a miraculous lightness and address, jumped on to the window-sill, pricking up her long-ears, and raising one of her paws. The chevalier understood by these signs that the tenant of the little room was approaching. He opened his window directly; unfortunately it was already too late, the street was solitary.

At the same moment the greyhound leaped from the window into the room and ran to the door. D'Harmental concluded that the young lady was mounting the stairs. In order to see her at his ease, he threw himself back and hid behind the curtain, but the old woman came to the window and closed it. The chevalier did not expect this denouement. There was nothing for him but to close his window also, and to come back and put his feet on the hobs. This was not amusing, and the chevalier began to feel how solitary he should be in this retreat. He remembered that formerly he also used to play and draw, and he thought that if he had the smallest spinet and some chinks, he could bear it with patience.

He rang for the porter, and asked where he could procure these things. The porter replied that every increase of furniture must be at his own expense. That if he wished for a harpsichord he must hire it, and that as to pencils, he could get them at the shop at the corner of the Rue de Clery.

D'Harmental gave a double louis to the porter, telling him that in half an hour he wished to have a spinet and some pencils. The double louis was an argument of which he had before found the advantage; reproaching himself, however, with having used it this time with a carelessness which gave the lie to his apparent position, he recalled the porter, and told him that he expected for his double louis to have, not only paper and pencils, but a month's hire of his instrument.

The porter replied that as he would speak as if it were for himself, the thing was possible; but that he must certainly pay the carriage. D'Harmental consented, and half an hour afterward was in possession of the desired objects. Such a wonderful place is Paris for every enchanter with a golden wand. The porter, when he went down, told his wife that if the new lodger was not more careful of his money, he would ruin his family, and showed her two crowns of six francs, which he had saved out of the double louis. The woman took the two crowns from the hands of her husband, calling him a drunkard, and put them into a little bag, hidden under a heap of old clothes, deploring the misfortune of fathers and mothers who bleed themselves to death for such good-for-nothings. This was the funeral oration of the chevalier's double louis.

CHAPTER IX.

A CITIZEN OF THE RUE DU TEMPS PERDU

During this time D'Harmental was seated before the spinet, playing his best. The shopkeeper had had a sort of conscience, and had sent him an instrument nearly in tune, so that the chevalier began to perceive that he was doing wonders, and almost believed he was born with a genius for music, which had only required such a circumstance to develop itself. Doubtless there was some truth in this, for in the middle of a brilliant shake he saw, from the other side of the street, five little fingers delicately raising the curtain to see from whence this unaccustomed harmony proceeded. Unfortunately, at the sight of these fingers the chevalier forgot his music, and turned round quickly on the stool, in hopes of seeing a face behind the hand.

This ill-judged maneuver ruined him. The mistress of the little room, surprised in the act of curiosity, let the curtain fall. D'Harmental, wounded by this prudery, closed his window. The evening passed in reading, drawing, and playing. The chevalier could not have believed that there were so many minutes in an hour, or so many hours in a day. At ten o'clock in the evening he rang for the porter, to give orders for the next day; but no one answered; he had been in bed a long time, and D'Harmental learned that there were people who went to bed about the time he ordered his carriage to pay visits.

This set him thinking of the strange manners of that unfortunate class of society who do not know the opera, who do not go to supper-parties, and who sleep all night and are awake all day. He thought you must come to the Rue du Temps Perdu to see such things, and promised himself to amuse his friends with an account of this singularity. He was glad to see also that his neighbor watched like himself. This showed in her a mind superior to that of the vulgar inhabitants of the Rue du Temps Perdu. D'Harmental believed that people only watched because they did not wish to sleep, or because they wanted to be amused. He forgot all those who do so because they are obliged. At midnight the light in the opposite windows was extinguished; D'Harmental also went to his bed. The next day the Abbe Brigaud appeared at eight o'clock. He brought D'Harmental the second report of secret police. It was in these terms:

"Three o'clock, a. m.

"In consequence of the regular life which he led yesterday, the regent has given orders to be called at nine.

"He will receive some appointed persons at that time.

"From ten to twelve there will be a public audience.

"From twelve till one the regent will be engaged with La Vrilliere and Leblanc.

"From one to two he will open letters with Torcy.

"At half-past two there will be a council, and he will pay the king a visit.

"At three o'clock he will go to the tennis court in the Rue du Seine, to sustain, with Brancas and Canillac, a challenge against the Duc de Richelieu, the Marquis de Broglie, and the Comte de Gacé.

"At six he will go to supper at the Luxembourg with the Duchesse de Berry, and will pass the evening there.

"From there he will come back, without guards, to the Palais Royal, unless the Duchesse de Berry gives him an escort from hers."

"Without guards, my dear abbe! what do you think of that?" said D'Harmental, beginning to dress; "does it not make your mouth water?"

"Without guards, yes," replied the abbe; "but with footmen, outriders, a coachman – all people who do not fight much, it is true, but who cry very loud. Oh! patience, patience, my young friend. You are in a great hurry to be a grandee of Spain."

"No, my dear abbe, but I am in a hurry to give up living in an attic where I lack everything, and where I am obliged to dress myself alone, as you see. Do you think it is nothing to go to bed at ten o'clock, and dress in the morning without a valet?"

"Yes, but you have music," replied the abbe.

"Ah! indeed!" replied D'Harmental. "Abbe, open my window, I beg, that they may see I receive good company. That will do me honor with my neighbors."

"Ho! ho!" said the abbe, doing what D'Harmental asked; "that is not bad at all."

"How, not bad?" replied D'Harmental; "it is very good, on the contrary. It is from Armida: the devil take me if I expected to find that in the fourth story of a house in the Rue du Temps Perdu."

"Chevalier, I predict," said the abbe, "that if the singer be young and pretty, in a week there will be as much trouble to get you away as there is now to keep you here."

"My dear abbe," said D'Harmental, "if your police were as good as those of the Prince de Cellamare, you would know that I am cured of love for a long time, and here is the proof. Do not think I pass my days in sighing. I beg when you go down you will send me something like a pâté, and a dozen bottles of good wine. I trust to you. I know you are a connoisseur; besides, sent by you, it will seem like a guardian's attention. Bought by me, it would seem like a pupil's debauch; and I have my provincial reputation to keep up with Madame Denis."

"That is true. I do not ask you what it is for, but I will send it to you."

"And you are right, my dear abbe. It is all for the good of the cause."

"In an hour the pâté and the wine will be here."

"When shall I see you again?"

"To-morrow, probably."

"Adieu, then, till to-morrow."

"You send me away."

"I am expecting somebody."

"All for the good of the cause?"

"I answer you, go, and may God preserve you."

"Stay, and may the devil not get hold of you. Remember that it was a woman who got us turned out of our terrestrial paradise. Defy women."

"Amen," said the chevalier, making a parting sign with his hand to the Abbe Brigaud.

Indeed, as the abbe had observed, D'Harmental was in a hurry to see him go. The great love for music, which the chevalier had discovered only the day before, had progressed so rapidly that he did not wish his attention called away from what he had just heard. The little which that horrible window allowed him to hear, and which was more of the instrument than of the voice, showed that his neighbor was an excellent musician. The playing was skillful, the voice sweet and sustained, and had, in its high notes and deep vibrations, something which awoke an answer in the heart of the listener. At last, after a very difficult and perfectly executed passage, D'Harmental could not help clapping his hands and crying bravo! As bad luck would have it, this triumph, to which she had not been accustomed, instead of encouraging the musician, frightened her so much, that voice and harpsichord stopped at the same instant, and silence immediately succeeded to the melody for which the chevalier had so imprudently manifested his enthusiasm.

In exchange, he saw the door of the room above (which we have said led on to the terrace) open, and a hand was stretched out, evidently to ascertain what kind of weather it was. The answer of the weather seemed reassuring, for the hand was almost directly followed by a head covered by a little chintz cap, tied on the forehead by a violet ribbon; and the head was only a few instants in advance of a neck and shoulders clothed in a kind of dressing-gown of the same stuff as the cap.

This was not quite enough to enable the chevalier to decide to which sex the individual, who seemed so cautious about exposing himself to the morning air, belonged. At last, a sort of sunbeam having slipped out between two clouds, the timid inhabitant of the terrace appeared to be encouraged to come out altogether. D'Harmental then saw, by his black velvet knee-breeches, and by his silk stockings, that the personage who had just entered on the scene was of the masculine gender.

It was the gardener of whom we spoke. The bad weather of the preceding days had, without doubt, deprived him of his morning walk, and had prevented him from giving his garden his ordinary attention, for he began to walk round it with a visible fear of finding some accident produced by the wind or rain; but, after a careful inspection of the fountain, the grotto, and the arbor, which were its three principal ornaments, the excellent face of the gardener was lighted by a ray of joy, as the weather was by the ray of sun. He perceived, not only that everything was in its place, but that the reservoir was full to overflowing. He thought he might indulge in playing his fountain, a treat which, ordinarily, following the example of Louis XIV., he only allowed himself on Sundays. He turned the cock, and the jet raised itself majestically to the height of four or five feet. The good man was so delighted that he began to sing the burden of an old pastoral song which D'Harmental had heard when he was a baby, and, while repeating —

"Let me go
And let me play
Beneath the hazel-tree,"

he ran to the window, and called aloud, "Bathilde! Bathilde!"

The chevalier understood that there was a communication between the rooms on the third and fourth stories, and some relation between the gardener and the musician, and thought that perhaps if he remained at the window she would not come on to the terrace; therefore he closed his window with a careless air, taking care to keep a little opening behind the curtain, through which he could see without being seen. What he had foreseen happened. Very soon the head of a charming young girl appeared on the terrace; but as, without doubt, the ground, on which he had ventured with so much courage, was too damp, she would not go any further. The little dog, not less timid than its mistress, remained near her, resting its white paws on the window, and shaking its head in silent denial to every invitation. A dialogue was established between the good man and the young girl, while D'Harmental had leisure to examine her at ease.

She appeared to have arrived at that delicious time of life when woman, passing from childhood to youth, is in the full bloom of sentiment, grace, and beauty. He saw that she was not less than sixteen nor more than eighteen years of age, and that there existed in her a singular mixture of two races. She had the fair hair, thick complexion, and graceful neck of an English woman, with the black eyes, coral lips, and pearly teeth of a Spaniard.

As she did not use either rouge or white, and as that time powder was scarcely in fashion, and was reserved for aristocratic heads, her complexion remained in its natural freshness, and nothing altered the color of her hair.

The chevalier remained as in an ecstasy – indeed, he had never seen but two classes of women. The fat and coarse peasants of the Nivernais, with their great feet and hands, their short petticoats, and their hunting-horn shaped hats; and the women of the Parisian aristocracy, beautiful without doubt, but of that beauty fagged by watching and pleasure, and by that reversing of life which makes them what flowers would be if they only saw the sun on some rare occasions, and the vivifying air of the morning and the evening only reached them through the windows of a hot-house. He did not know this intermediate type, if one may call it so, between high society and the country people, which had all the elegance of the one, and all the fresh health of the other. Thus, as we have said, he remained

fixed in his place, and long after the young girl had re-entered, he kept his eyes fixed on the window where this delicious vision had appeared.

The sound of his door opening called him out of his ecstasy: it was the pâté and the wine from Abbe Brigaud making their solemn entry into the chevalier's garret. The sight of these provisions recalled to his mind that he had now something better to do than to abandon himself to contemplation, and that he had given Captain Roquefinette a rendezvous on the most important business. Consequently he looked at his watch, and saw that it was ten o'clock. This was, as the reader will remember, the appointed hour. He sent away the man who had brought the provisions, and said he would lay the cloth himself; then, opening his window once more, he sat down to watch for the appearance of Captain Roquefinette.

He was hardly at his observatory before he perceived the worthy captain coming round the corner from the Rue Gros-Chenet, his head in the air, his hand on his hip, and with the martial and decided air of a man who, like the Greek philosopher, carries everything with him. His hat, that thermometer by which his friends could tell the secret state of its master's finances, and which, on his fortunate days was placed as straight on his head as a pyramid on its base, had recovered that miraculous inclination which had so struck the Baron de Valf, and thanks to which, one of the points almost touched his right shoulder, while the parallel one might forty years later had given Franklin, if Franklin had known the captain, the first idea of his electric kite.

Having come about a third down the street, he raised his head as had been arranged, and saw the chevalier just above him. He who waited, and he who was waited for, exchanged nods, and the captain having calculated the distance at a glance, and recognized the door which ought to belong to the window above, jumped over the threshold of Madame Denis's poor little house with as much familiarity as if it had been a tavern. The chevalier shut the window, and drew the curtains with the greatest care – either in order that his pretty neighbor might not see him with the captain, or that the captain might not see her.

An instant afterward D'Harmental heard the sound of his steps, and the beating of his sword against the banisters. Having arrived at the third story, as the light which came from below was not aided by any light from above, he found himself in a difficulty, not knowing whether to stop where he was, or mount higher. Then, after coughing in the most significant manner, and finding that this call remained unnoticed —

"Morbleu!" said he. "Chevalier, as you did not probably bring me here to break my neck, open your door or call out, so that I may be guided either by the light of heaven, or by the sound of your voice; otherwise I shall be lost, neither more nor less than Theseus in the labyrinth."

And the captain began to sing in a loud voice —

"Fair Ariadne, I beg of you,
Help me, by lending me your clew.
Toutou, toutou, toutaine, toutou!"

The chevalier ran to his door and opened it.

"My friend," said the captain, "the ladder up to your pigeon-house is infernally dark; still here I am, faithful to the agreement, exact to the time. Ten o'clock was striking as I came over the Pont-Neuf."

CHAPTER X. THE AGREEMENT

The chevalier extended his hand to Roquefinette, saying:

"Yes, you are a man of your word, but enter quickly; it is important that my neighbors should not notice you."

"In that case I am as dumb as a log," answered the captain; "besides," added he, pointing to the pâté and the bottles which covered the table, "you have found the true way of shutting my mouth."

The chevalier shut the door behind the captain and pushed the bolt.

"Ah! ah! mystery – so much the better, I am fond of mystery. There is almost always something to be gained when people begin by saying 'hush.' In any case you cannot do better than address yourself to your servant," continued the captain, resuming his mythological language. "You see in me the grandson of Hippocrates, the god of silence. So do not be uneasy."

"That is well, captain," answered D'Harmental, "for I confess that what I have to say to you is of sufficient importance for me to claim your discretion beforehand."

"It is granted, chevalier. While I was giving a lesson to little Ravanne, I saw, out of a corner of my eye, that you were a skillful swordsman, and I love brave men. Then, in return for a little service, only worth a fillip, you made me a present of a horse which was worth a hundred louis, and I love generous men. Thus you are twice my man, why should I not be yours once?"

"Well," said the chevalier, "I see that we understand each other."

"Speak, and I will listen," answered the captain, assuming his gravest air.

"You will listen better seated, my dear guest. Let us go to breakfast."

"You preach like St. John with the golden mouth, chevalier," said the captain, taking off his sword and placing that and his hat on the harpsichord; "so that," continued he, sitting down opposite D'Harmental, "one cannot differ from you in opinion. I am here; command the maneuver, and I will execute it."

"Taste that wine while I cut the pate."

"That is right," said the captain, "let us divide our forces, and fight the enemy separately, then let us re-unite to exterminate what remains."

And joining practice to theory, the captain seized the first bottle by the neck, drew the cork, and having filled a bumper, drank it off with such ease that one would have said that nature had gifted him with an especial method of deglutition; but, to do him justice, scarcely had he drunk it than he perceived that the liquor, which he had disposed of so cavalierly, merited a more particular attention than he had given it.

"Oh!" said he, putting down his glass with a respectful slowness, "what have I done, unworthy that I am? I drink nectar as if it were trash, and that at the beginning of the feast! Ah!" continued he, shaking his head, "Roquefinette, my friend, you are getting old. Ten years ago you would have known what it was at the first drop that touched your palate, while now you want many trials to know the worth of things. To your health, chevalier."

And this time the captain, more circumspect, drank the second glass slowly, and set it down three times before he finished it, winking his eyes in sign of satisfaction. Then, when he had finished

"This is hermitage of 1702, the year of the battle of Friedlingen. If your wine-merchant has much like that, and if he will give credit, let me have his address. I promise him a good customer."

"Captain," answered the chevalier, slipping an enormous slice of pate on to the plate of his guest, "my wine-merchant not only gives credit, but to my friends he gives altogether."

"Oh, the honest man!" cried the captain. Then, after a minute's silence, during which a superficial observer would have thought him absorbed in the appreciation of the pate, as he had been an instant before in that of the wine, he leaned his two elbows on the table, and looking at D'Harmental with a penetrating glance between his knife and fork —

"So, my dear chevalier," said he, "we conspire, it seems, and in order to succeed we have need of poor Captain Roquefinette."

"And who told you that, captain?" broke in the chevalier, trembling in spite of himself.

"Who told me that, pardieu! It is an easy riddle to answer. A man who gives away horses worth a hundred louis, who drinks wine at a pistole the bottle, and who lodges in a garret in the Rue du Temps Perdu, what should he be doing if not conspiring?"

"Well, captain," said D'Harmental, laughing, "I shall never be discreet; you have divined the truth. Does a conspiracy frighten you?" continued he, filling his guest's glass.

"Frighten *me*! Who says that anything on earth can frighten Captain Roquefinette?"

"Not I, captain; for at the first glance, at the first word, I fixed on you as my second."

"Ah! that is to say, that if you are hung on a scaffold twenty feet high, I shall be hung on one ten feet high, that's all!"

"Peste! captain," said D'Harmental, "if one always began by seeing thing in their worst light, one would never attempt anything."

"Because I have spoken of the gallows?" answered the captain. "That proves nothing. What is the gallows in the eyes of a philosopher? One of the thousand ways of parting from life, and certainly one of the least disagreeable. One can see that you have never looked the thing in the face, since you have such an aversion to it. Besides, on proving our noble descent, we shall have our heads cut off, like Monsieur de Rohan. Did you see Monsieur de Rohan's head cut off?" continued the captain, looking at D'Harmental. "He was a handsome young man, like you, and about your age. He conspired, but the thing failed. What would you have? Everybody may be deceived. They built him a beautiful black scaffold; they allowed him to turn toward the window where his mistress was; they cut the neck of his shirt with scissors, but the executioner was a bungler, accustomed to hang, and not to decapitate, so that he was obliged to strike three or four times to cut the head off, and at last he only managed by the aid of a knife which he drew from his girdle, and with which he chopped so well that he got the neck in half. Bravo! you are brave!" continued the captain, seeing that the chevalier had listened without frowning to all the details of this horrible execution. "That will do – I am your man. Against whom are we conspiring? Let us see. Is it against Monsieur le Duc de Maine? Is it against Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans? Must we break the lame one's other leg? Must we cut out the blind one's other eye? I am ready."

"Nothing of all that, captain; and if it pleases God there will be no blood spilled."

"What is going on then?"

"Have you ever heard of the abduction of the Duke of Mantua's secretary?"

"Of Matthioli?" – "Yes."

"Pardieu! I know the affair better than any one, for I saw them pass as they were conducting him to Pignerol. It was the Chevalier de Saint-Martin and Monsieur de Villebois who did it; and by this token they each had three thousand livres for themselves and their men."

"That was only middling pay," said D'Harmental, with a disdainful air.

"You think so, chevalier? Nevertheless three thousand livres is a nice little sum."

"Then for three thousand livres you would have undertaken it?"

"I would have undertaken it," answered the captain.

"But if instead of carrying off a secretary it had been proposed to you to carry off a duke?"

"That would have been dearer."

"But you would have undertaken it all the same?"

"Why not? I should have asked double – that is all."

"And if, in giving you double, a man like myself had said to you, 'Captain, it is not an obscure danger that I plunge you into; it is a struggle in which I am myself engaged, like you, and in which I venture my name, my future, and my head:' what would you have answered?"

"I would have given him my hand, as I now give it you. Now what is the business?"

The chevalier filled his own glass and that of the captain.

"To the health of the regent," said he, "and may he arrive without accident at the Spanish frontier, as Matthioli arrived at Pignerol."

"Ah! ah!" said the captain, raising his glass. Then, after a pause, "And why not?" continued he, "the regent is but a man after all. Only we shall neither be hanged nor decapitated; we shall be broken on the wheel. To any one else I should say that a regent would be dearer, but to you, chevalier, I have only one price. Give me six thousand livres, and I will find a dozen determined men."

"But those twelve men, do you think that you may trust them?"

"What need for their knowing what they are doing? They shall think they are only carrying out a wager."

"And I," answered D'Harmental, "will show you that I do not haggle with my friends. Here are two thousand crowns in gold, take them on account if we succeed; if we fail we will cry quits."

"Chevalier," answered the captain, taking the bag of money and poising it on his hand with an indescribable air of satisfaction, "I will not do you the injustice of counting after you. When is the affair to be?"

"I do not know yet, captain; but if you find the pate to your taste, and the wine good, and if you will do me the pleasure of breakfasting with me every day as you have done to-day, I will keep you informed of everything."

"That would not do, chevalier," said the captain. "I should not have come to you three mornings before the police of that cursed Argenson would have found us out. Luckily he has found some one as clever as himself, and it will be some time before we are at the bar together. No, no, chevalier, from now till the moment for action, the less we see of one another the better; or rather, we must not see each other at all. Your street is not a long one, and as it opens at one end on the Rue du Gros-Chenet, and at the other on the Rue Montmartre, I shall have no reason for coming through it. Here," continued he, detaching his shoulder-knot, "take this ribbon. The day that you want me, tie it to a nail outside your window. I shall understand it, and I will come to you."

"How, captain!" said D'Harmental, seeing that his companion was fastening on his sword. "Are you going without finishing the bottle? What has the wine, which you appeared to appreciate so much a little while ago, done to you, that you despise it so now?"

"It is just because I appreciate it still that I separate myself from it; and the proof that I do not despise it," said the captain, filling his glass, "is that I am going to take an adieu of it. To your health, chevalier; you may boast of having good wine. Hum! And now, n – o, no, that is all. I shall take to water till I see the ribbon flutter from your window. Try to let it be as soon as possible, for water is a liquid that does not suit my constitution."

"But why do you go so soon?"

"Because I know Captain Roquefiette. He is a good fellow; but when he sits down before a bottle he must drink, and when he has drunk he must talk; and, however well one talks, remember that those who talk much always finish by making some blunder. Adieu, chevalier. Do not forget the crimson ribbon; I go to look after our business."

"Adieu, captain," said D'Harmental, "I am pleased to see that I have no need to preach discretion to you."

The captain made the sign of the cross on his mouth with his right thumb, placed his hat straight on his head, raised his sword for fear of its making a noise or beating against the wall, and went downstairs as silently as if he had feared that every step would echo in the Hotel d'Argenson.

CHAPTER XI. PROS AND CONS

The chevalier remained alone; but this time there was, in what had just passed between himself and the captain, sufficient matter for reflection to render it unnecessary for him to have recourse either to the poetry of the Abbe Chaulieu, his harpsichord, or his chinks. Indeed, until now, he had been only half engaged in the hazardous enterprise of which the Duchesse de Maine and the Prince de Cellamare had shown him the happy ending, and of which the captain, in order to try his courage, had so brutally exhibited to him the bloody catastrophe. As yet he had only been the end of a chain, and, on breaking away from one side, he would have been loose. Now he was become an intermediate ring, fastened at both ends, and attached at the same time to people above and below him in society. In a word, from this hour he no longer belonged to himself, and he was like the Alpine traveler, who, having lost his way, stops in the middle of an unknown road, and measures with his eye, for the first time, the mountain which rises above him and the gulf which yawns beneath his feet.

Luckily the chevalier had the calm, cold, and resolute courage of a man in whom fire and determination – those two opposite forces – instead of neutralizing, stimulated each other. He engaged in danger with all the rapidity of a sanguine man; he weighed it with all the consideration of a phlegmatic one. Madame de Maine was right when she said to Madame de Launay that she might put out her lantern, and that she believed she had at last found a man.

But this man was young, twenty-six years of age, with a heart open to all the illusions and all the poetry of that first part of existence. As a child he had laid down his playthings at the feet of his mother. As a young man he had come to exhibit his handsome uniform as colonel to the eyes of his mistress; indeed, in every enterprise of his life some loved image had gone before him, and he threw himself into danger with the certainty that, if he succumbed, there would be some one surviving who would mourn his fate.

But his mother was dead, the last woman by whom he had believed himself loved had betrayed him, and he felt alone in the world – bound solely by interest to men to whom he would become an obstacle as soon as he ceased to be an instrument, and who, if he broke down, far from mourning his loss, would only see in it a cause of satisfaction. But this isolated position, which ought to be the envy of all men in a great danger, is almost always (such is the egotism of our nature) a cause of the most profound discouragement. Such is the horror of nothingness in man, that he believes he still survives in the sentiments which he has inspired, and he in some measure consoles himself for leaving the world by thinking of the regrets which will accompany his memory, and of the pity which will visit his tomb. Thus, at this instant, the chevalier would have given everything to be loved, if it was only by a dog.

He was plunged in the saddest of these reflections when, passing and repassing before his window, he noticed that his neighbor's was open. He stopped suddenly, and shook his head, as if to cast off the most somber of these thoughts; leaning his elbow on the table, and his head on his hand, he tried to give a different direction to his thoughts by looking at exterior objects.

The young girl whom he had seen in the morning was seated near her window, in order to benefit by the last rays of daylight; she was working at some kind of embroidery. Behind her the harpsichord was open, and, on a stool at her feet, her greyhound slept the light sleep of an animal destined by nature to be the guard of man, waking at every noise which arose from the street, raising its ears, and stretching out its elegant head over the window-sill; then it lay down again, placing one of its little paws upon its mistress's knees. All this was deliciously lighted up by the rays of the sinking sun, which penetrated into the room, sparkling on the steel ornaments of the harpsichord and the gold beading of the picture-frames. The rest was in twilight.

Then it seemed to the chevalier (doubtless on account of the disposition of mind he was in when this picture had struck his eye) that this young girl, with the calm and sweet face, entered into his life, like one of those personages who always remain behind a veil, and make their entrance on a piece in the second or third act to take part in the action, and, sometimes, to change the denouement.

Since the age when one sees angels in one's dreams, he had seen no one like her. She was a mixture of beauty, candor, and simplicity, such as Greuze has copied, not from nature, but from the reflections in the mirror of his imagination. Then, forgetting everything, the humble condition in which without doubt she had been born, the street where he had found her, the modest room which she had inhabited, seeing nothing in the woman except the woman herself, he attributed to her a heart corresponding with her face, and thought what would be the happiness of the man who should first cause that heart to beat; who should be looked upon with love by those beautiful eyes, and who, in the words, "I love you!" should gather from those lips, so fresh and so pure, that flower of the soul – a first kiss.

Such are the different aspects which the same objects borrow from the situation of him who looks at them. A week before, in the midst of his gayety, in his life which no danger menaced, between a breakfast at the tavern and a stag-hunt, between a wager at tennis and a supper at La Fillon's, if D'Harmental had met this young girl, he would doubtless have seen in her nothing but a charming grisette, whom he would have had followed by his valet-de-chambre, and to whom, the next day, he would have outrageously offered a present of some twenty-five louis.

But the D'Harmental of a week ago existed no more. In the place of the handsome seigneur – elegant, wild, dissipated, and certain of life – was an insulated young man, walking in the shade, alone, and self-reliant, without a star to guide him, who might suddenly feel the earth open under his feet, and the heavens burst above his head. He had need of a support, so feeble was he; he had need of love, he had need of poetry. It was not then wonderful that, searching for a Madonna to whom to address his prayers, he raised in his imagination this young and beautiful girl from the material and prosaic sphere in which he found her, and that, drawing her into his own, he placed her, not such as she was, doubtless, but such as he wished her to be, on the empty pedestal of his past adorations.

All at once the young girl raised her head, and happened to look in his direction, and saw the pensive figure of the chevalier through the glass. It appeared evident to her that the young man remained there for her, and that it was at her he was looking. Then a bright blush spread over her face. Still she pretended she had seen nothing, and bent her head once more over her embroidery. But a minute afterward she rose, took a few turns round her room; then, without affectation, without false prudery, but nevertheless with a certain embarrassment, she returned and shut the window. D'Harmental remained where he was, and as he was; continuing, in spite of the shutting of the window, to advance into the imaginary country where his thoughts were straying.

Once or twice he thought that he saw the curtain of his neighbor's window raised, as if she wished to know whether he whose indiscretion had driven her from her place was still at his. At last a few masterly chords were heard; a sweet harmony followed; and it was then D'Harmental who opened his window in his turn.

He had not been mistaken, his neighbor was an admirable musician; she executed two or three little pieces, but without blending her voice with the sound of the instrument; and D'Harmental found almost as much pleasure in listening to her as he had found in looking at her. Suddenly she stopped in the midst of a passage. D'Harmental supposed either that she had seen him at his window, and wished to punish him for his curiosity, or that some one had come in and interrupted her. He retired into his room, but so as not to lose sight of the window, and soon discovered that his last supposition was the true one.

A man came to the window, raised the curtain, and pressed his fat, good-natured face against the glass, while with one hand he beat a march against the panes. The chevalier recognized, in spite of a sensible difference which there was in his toilet, the man of the water-jet whom he had seen

on the terrace in the morning, and who, with a perfect air of familiarity, had twice pronounced the name of "Bathilde."

This apparition, more than prosaic, produced the effect which might naturally have been expected; that is to say, it brought D'Harmental back from imaginary to real life. He had forgotten this man, who made such a strange and perfect contrast with the young girl, and who must doubtless be either her father, her lover, or her husband. But in either of these cases, what could there be in common between the daughter, the wife, or the mistress of such a man, and the noble and aristocratic chevalier? The wife! It is a misfortune of her dependent situation that she rises and falls according to the grandeur or vulgarity of him on whose arm she leans; and it must be confessed that the gardener was not formed to maintain poor Bathilde at the height to which the chevalier had raised her in his dreams.

Then he began to laugh at his own folly; and the night having arrived, and as he had not been outside the door since the day before, he determined to take a walk through the town, in order to assure himself of the truth of the Prince de Cellamare's reports. He wrapped himself in his cloak, descended the four stories, and bent his steps toward the Luxembourg, where the note which the Abbe Brigaud had brought him in the morning said that the regent was going to supper without guards.

Arrived opposite the palace of the Luxembourg, the chevalier saw none of those signs which should announce that the Duc d'Orleans was at his daughter's house: there was only one sentinel at the door, while from the moment that the regent entered a second was generally placed there. Besides, he saw no carriage waiting in the court, no footmen or outriders; it was evident, then, that he had not come. The chevalier waited to see him pass, for, as the regent never breakfasted, and took nothing but a cup of chocolate at two o'clock in the afternoon, he rarely supped later than six o'clock; but a quarter to six had struck at the St. Surplice at the moment when the chevalier turned the corner of the Rue de Conde, and the Rue de Vaugirard.

The chevalier waited an hour and a half in the Rue de Tournon, going from the Rue du Petit-Lion to the palace, without seeing what he had come to look for. At a quarter to eight he saw some movement in the Luxembourg. A carriage, with outriders armed with torches, came to the foot of the steps. A minute after three women got in; he heard the coachman call to the outriders, "To the Palais Royal;" and the outriders set off at a gallop, the carriage followed, the sentinel presented arms; and, quickly as the elegant equipage with the royal arms of France passed, the chevalier recognized the Duchesse de Berry, Madame de Mouchy, her lady of honor, and Madame de Pons, her tire-woman.

There had been an important error in the report sent to the chevalier; it was the daughter who went to the father, not the father who came to the daughter.

Nevertheless, the chevalier still waited, for some accident might have happened to the regent, which detained him at home. An hour after he saw the carriage reappear. The Duchesse de Berry was laughing at a story which Broglie was telling her. There had not then been any serious accident; it was the police of the Prince de Cellamare, then, that were at fault.

The chevalier returned home about ten o'clock without having been met or recognized. He had some trouble to get the door opened, for, according to the patriarchal habits of Madame Denis's house, the porter had gone to bed, and came out grumbling to unfasten the bolts. D'Harmental slipped a crown into his hand, saying to him, once for all, that he should sometimes return late, but that each time that he did so he would give him the same; upon which the porter thanked him, and assured him that he was perfectly welcome to come home at any time he liked, or even not to return at all.

On returning to his room, D'Harmental saw that his neighbor's was lighted up; he placed his candle behind a piece of furniture, and approached the window, so that, as much as the muslin curtains allowed, he could see into her room, while she could not see into his.

She was seated near a table, drawing, probably, on a card which she held on her knees, for he saw her profile standing out black against the light behind her. Shortly another shadow, which the chevalier recognized as that of the good man of the terrace, passed twice between the light and the

window. At last the shade approached the young girl, she offered her forehead, the shadow imprinted a kiss on it, and went away, with his candle in his hand. Directly afterward the windows of the fifth story were lighted up. All these little circumstances spoke a language which it was impossible not to understand. The man of the terrace was not the husband of Bathilde, he must be her father.

D'Harmental, without knowing why, felt overjoyed at this discovery; he opened his window as softly as he could, and leaned on the bar, which served him as a support, with his eyes fixed on the shadow. He fell into the same reverie out of which he had been startled that morning by the grotesque apparition of his neighbor. In about an hour the girl rose, put down her card and crayons on the table, advanced toward the alcove, knelt on a chair before the second window, and offered up her prayers. D'Harmental understood that her laborious watch was finished, but remembering the curiosity of his beautiful neighbor, when he had begun to play the first time, he wished to see if he could prolong that watch, and he sat down to his spinet. What he had foreseen happened; at the first notes which reached her, the young girl, not knowing that from the position of the light he could see her shadow through the curtains, approached the window on tiptoe, and thinking herself hidden, she listened to the melodious instrument, which, like the nightingale, awoke to sing in the middle of the night.

The concert would have probably continued thus for some hours, for D'Harmental, encouraged by the result produced, felt an energy and an ease of execution such as he had never known before. Unluckily, the occupier of the third floor was undoubtedly some clown, no lover of music, for D'Harmental heard suddenly, just below his feet, the noise of a stick knocking on the ceiling with such violence that he could not doubt that it was a warning to him to put off his melodious occupation till a more suitable period. Under other circumstances, D'Harmental would have sent the impertinent adviser to the devil, but reflecting that any ill-feeling on the lodger's part would injure his own reputation with Madame Denis, and that he was playing too heavy a game to risk being recognized, and not to submit philosophically to all the inconveniences of the new position which he had adopted, instead of setting himself in opposition to the rules established without doubt between Madame Denis and her lodgers, he obeyed the intimation, forgetting in what manner that intimation had been given him.

On her part, as soon as she heard nothing more, the young girl left the window, and as she let the inner curtains fall behind her, she disappeared from D'Harmental's eyes. For some time longer he could still see a light in her room; then the light was extinguished. As to the window on the fifth floor, for some time that had been in the most perfect darkness. D'Harmental also went to bed, joyous to think that there existed a point of sympathy between himself and his neighbor.

The next day the Abbe Brigaud entered the room with his accustomed punctuality. The chevalier had already been up more than an hour; he had gone twenty times to his window, but without seeing his neighbor, although it was evident that she was up, even before himself; indeed, on waking he had seen the large curtains put up in their bands. Thus he was disposed to let out his ill-humor on any one.

"Ah! pardieu! my dear abbe," said he, as soon as the door was shut; "congratulate the prince for me on his police; it is perfectly arranged, on my honor!"

"What have you got against them?" asked the abbe, with the half-smile which was habitual to him.

"What have I! I have, that, wishing to judge for myself, last evening, of its truth, I went and hid myself in the Rue Tournon. I remained there four hours, and it was not the regent who came to his daughter, but Madame de Berry who went to her father."

"Well, we know that."

"Ah! you know that!" said D'Harmental.

"Yes, and by this token, that she left the Luxembourg at five minutes to eight, with Madame de Mouchy and Madame de Pons, and that she returned at half-past nine, bringing Broglie with her, who came to take the regent's place at table."

"And where was the regent?"

"The regent?"

"Yes."

"That is another story; you shall learn. Listen, and do not lose a word; then we shall see if you will say that the prince's police is badly arranged."

"I attend."

"Our report announced that at three o'clock the duke-regent would go to play tennis in the Rue de Seine."

"Yes."

"He went. In about half an hour he left holding his handkerchief over his eyes. He had hit himself on the brow with the racket, and with such violence that he had torn the skin of his forehead."

"Ah, this then was the accident!"

"Listen. Then the regent, instead of returning to the Palais Royal, was driven to the house of Madame de Sabran. You know where Madame de Sabran lives?"

"She lived in the Rue de Tournon, but since her husband has become maitre d'hotel to the regent, she lives in the Rue des Bons Enfants, near the Palais Royal."

"Exactly; but it seems that Madame de Sabran, who until now was faithful to Richelieu, was touched by the pitiable state in which she saw the prince, and wished to justify the proverb, 'Unlucky at play, lucky at love.' The prince, by a little note, dated half-past seven, from the drawing-room of Madame de Sabran, with whom he supped, announced to Broglie that he should not go to the Luxembourg, and charged him to go in his stead, and make his excuses to the Duchesse de Berry."

"Ah, this then was the story which Broglie was telling, and at which the ladies were laughing."

"It is probable; now do you understand?"

"Yes; I understand that the regent is not possessed of ubiquity, and could not be at the house of Madame de Sabran and at his daughter's at the same time."

"And you only understand that?"

"My dear abbe, you speak like an oracle; explain yourself."

"This evening, at eight o'clock, I will come for you; we will go to the Rue des Bons Enfants together. To me the locality is eloquent."

"Ah! ah!" said D'Harmental, "I see; so near the Palais Royal, he will go on foot. The hotel which Madame de Sabran inhabits has an entrance from the Rue des Bons Enfants; after a certain hour they shut the passage from the Palais Royal, which opens on the Rue des Bons Enfants: and he will be obliged, on his return, to follow either the Cour des Fontaines, or the Rue Neuve des Bons Enfants, and then we shall have him. Mordieu! you are a great man, and if Monsieur de Maine does not make you cardinal, or at least archbishop, there will be no justice done."

"I think, therefore, that now you must hold yourself in readiness."

"I am ready."

"Have you the means of execution prepared?" – "I have."

"Then you can correspond with your men?"

"By a sign."

"And that sign cannot betray you?"

"Impossible."

"Then all goes well, and we may have breakfast; for I was in such haste to tell you the good news that I came out fasting."

"Breakfast, my dear abbe! you speak coolly; I have nothing to offer you, except the remains of the paté and two or three bottles of wine, which, I believe, survived the battle."

"Hum! hum," murmured the abbe; "we will do better than that, my dear chevalier."

"I am at your orders."

"Let us go down and breakfast with our good hostess, Madame Denis."

"And why do you want me to breakfast with her? Do I know her?"

"That concerns me. I shall present you as my pupil."

"But we shall get a detestable breakfast."

"Comfort yourself. I know her table."

"But this breakfast will be tiresome."

"But you will make a friend of a woman much known in the neighborhood for her good conduct, for her devotion to the government – a woman incapable of harboring a conspirator. Do you understand that?"

"If it be for the good of the cause, abbe, I sacrifice myself."

"Moreover, it is a very agreeable house, where there are two young people who play – one on the spinet, and the other on the guitar – and a young man who is an attorney's clerk; a house where you may go down on Sunday evenings to play lots."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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