DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE QUEEN'S NECKLACE

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Содержание

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PROLOGUE. – THE PREDICTIONS

AN OLD NOBLEMAN AND AN OLD MAÎTRE-D'HÔTEL

It was the beginning of April, 1784, between twelve and one o'clock. Our old acquaintance, the Marshal de Richelieu, having with his own hands colored his eyebrows with a perfumed dye, pushed away the mirror which was held to him by his valet, the successor of his faithful Raffè and shaking his head in the manner peculiar to himself, "Ah!" said he, "now I look myself;" and rising from his seat with juvenile vivacity, he commenced shaking off the powder which had fallen from his wig over his blue velvet coat, then, after taking a turn or two up and down his room, called for his maître-d'hôtel.

In five minutes this personage made his appearance, elaborately dressed.

The marshal turned towards him, and with a gravity befitting the occasion, said, "Sir, I suppose you have prepared me a good

dinner?"

"Certainly, your grace."

"You have the list of my guests?"

"I remember them perfectly, your grace; I have prepared a dinner for nine."

"There are two sorts of dinners, sir," said the marshal.

"True, your grace, but – "

The marshal interrupted him with a slightly impatient movement, although still dignified.

"Do you know, sir, that whenever I have heard the word 'but,' and I have heard it many times in the course of eighty-eight years, it has been each time, I am sorry to say, the harbinger of some folly."

"Your grace – "

"In the first place, at what time do we dine?"

"Your grace, the citizens dine at two, the bar at three, the nobility at four – "

"And I, sir?"

"Your grace will dine to-day at five."

"Oh, at five!"

"Yes, your grace, like the king – "

"And why like the king?"

"Because, on the list of your guests, is the name of a king."

"Not so, sir, you mistake; all my guests to-day are simply noblemen."

"Your grace is surely jesting; the Count Haga,[1] who is among the guests – "

"Well, sir!"

"The Count Haga is a king."

"I know no king so called."

"Your grace must pardon me then," said the maître-d'hôtel, bowing, "but, I believed, supposed – "

"Your business, sir, is neither to believe nor suppose; your business is to read, without comment, the orders I give you. When I wish a thing to be known, I tell it; when I do not tell it, I wish it unknown."

The maître-d'hôtel bowed again, more respectfully, perhaps, than he would have done to a reigning monarch.

"Therefore, sir," continued the old marshal, "you will, as I have none but noblemen to dinner, let us dine at my usual hour, four o'clock."

At this order, the countenance of the maître-d'hôtel became clouded as if he had heard his sentence of death; he grew deadly pale; then, recovering himself, with the courage of despair he said, "In any event, your grace cannot dine before five o'clock."

"Why so, sir?" cried the marshal.

"Because it is utterly impossible."

"Sir," said the marshal, with a haughty air, "it is now, I believe, twenty years since you entered my service?"

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[1] The name of Count Haga was well known as one assumed by the King of Sweden when traveling in France.

"Twenty-one years, a month, and two weeks."

"Well, sir, to these twenty-one years, a month, and two weeks, you will not add a day, nor an hour. You understand me, sir," he continued, biting his thin lips and depressing his eyebrows; "this evening you seek a new master. I do not choose that the word impossible shall be pronounced in my house; I am too old now to begin to learn its meaning."

The maître-d'hôtel bowed a third time.

"This evening," said he, "I shall have taken leave of your grace, but, at least, up to the last moment, my duty shall have been performed as it should be;" and he made two steps towards the door.

"What do you call as it should be?" cried the marshal. "Learn, sir, that to do it as it suits me is to do it as it should be. Now, I wish to dine at four, and it does not suit me, when I wish to dine at four, to be obliged to wait till five."

"Your grace," replied the maître-d'hôtel, gravely, "I have served as butler to his highness the Prince de Soubise, and as steward to his eminence the Cardinal de Rohan. With the first, his majesty, the late King of France, dined once a year; with the second, the Emperor of Austria dined once a month. I know, therefore, how a sovereign should be treated. When he visited the Prince de Soubise, Louis XV. called himself in vain the Baron de Gonesse; at the house of M. de Rohan, the Emperor Joseph was announced as the Count de Packenstein; but he was none the less emperor. To-day, your grace also receives a guest, who

vainly calls himself Count Haga – Count Haga is still King of Sweden. I shall leave your service this evening, but Count Haga will have been treated like a king."

"But that," said the marshal, "is the very thing that I am tiring myself to death in forbidding; Count Haga wishes to preserve his incognito as strictly as possible. Well do I see through your absurd vanity; it is not the crown that you honor, but yourself that you wish to glorify; I repeat again, that I do not wish it imagined that I have a king here."

"What, then, does your grace take me for? It is not that I wish it known that there is a king here."

"Then in heaven's name do not be obstinate, but let us have dinner at four."

"But at four o'clock, your grace, what I am expecting will not have arrived."

"What are you expecting? a fish, like M. Vatel?"

"Does your grace wish that I should tell you?"

"On my faith, I am curious."

"Then, your grace, I wait for a bottle of wine."

"A bottle of wine! Explain yourself, sir, the thing begins to interest me."

"Listen then, your grace; his majesty the King of Sweden – I beg pardon, the Count Haga I should have said – drinks nothing but tokay."

"Well, am I so poor as to have no tokay in my cellar? If so, I must dismiss my butler."

"Not so, your grace; on the contrary, you have about sixty bottles."

"Well, do you think Count Haga will drink sixty bottles with his dinner?"

"No, your grace; but when Count Haga first visited France, when he was only prince royal, he dined with the late king, who had received twelve bottles of tokay from the Emperor of Austria. You are aware that the tokay of the finest vintages is reserved exclusively for the cellar of the emperor, and that kings themselves can only drink it when he pleases to send it to them."

"I know it."

"Then, your grace, of these twelve bottles of which the prince royal drank, only two remain. One is in the cellar of his majesty Louis XVI. – "

"And the other?"

"Ah, your grace!" said the maître-d'hôtel, with a triumphant smile, for he felt that, after the long battle he had been fighting, the moment of victory was at hand, "the other one was stolen."

"By whom, then?"

"By one of my friends, the late king's butler, who was under great obligations to me."

"Oh! and so he gave it to you."

"Certainly, your grace," said the maître-d'hôtel with pride.

"And what did you do with it?"

"I placed it carefully in my master's cellar."

"Your master! And who was your master at that time?"

"His eminence the Cardinal de Rohan."

"Ah, mon Dieu! at Strasbourg?"

"At Saverne."

"And you have sent to seek this bottle for me!" cried the old marshal.

"For you, your grace," replied the maître-d'hôtel, in a tone which plainly said, "ungrateful as you are."

The Duke de Richelieu seized the hand of the old servant and cried, "I beg pardon; you are the king of maîtres d'hôtel."

"And you would have dismissed me," he replied, with an indescribable shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, I will pay you one hundred pistoles for this bottle of wine."

"And the expenses of its coming here will be another hundred; but you will grant that it is worth it."

"I will grant anything you please, and, to begin, from to-day I double your salary."

"I seek no reward, your grace; I have but done my duty."

"And when will your courier arrive?"

"Your grace may judge if I have lost time: on what day did I have my orders for the dinner?"

"Why, three days ago, I believe."

"It takes a courier, at his utmost speed, twenty-four hours to go, and the same to return."

"There still remain twenty-four hours," said the marshal; "how have they been employed?"

"Alas, your grace, they were lost. The idea only came to me the day after I received the list of your guests. Now calculate the time necessary for the negotiation, and you will perceive that in asking you to wait till five I am only doing what I am absolutely obliged to do."

"The bottle is not yet arrived, then?"

"No, your grace."

"Ah, sir, if your colleague at Saverne be as devoted to the Prince de Rohan as you are to me, and should refuse the bottle, as you would do in his place – "

"I? your grace – "

"Yes; you would not, I suppose, have given away such a bottle, had it belonged to me?"

"I beg your pardon, humbly, your grace; but had a friend, having a king to provide for, asked me for your best bottle of wine, he should have had it immediately."

"Oh!" said the marshal, with a grimace.

"It is only by helping others that we can expect help in our own need, your grace."

"Well, then, I suppose we may calculate that it will be given, but there is still another risk – if the bottle should be broken?"

"Oh! your grace, who would break a bottle of wine of that value?"

"Well, I trust not; what time, then, do you expect your courier?"

"At four o'clock precisely."

"Then why not dine at four?" replied the marshal.

"Your grace, the wine must rest for an hour; and had it not been for an invention of my own, it would have required three days to recover itself."

Beaten at all points, the marshal gave way.

"Besides," continued the old servant, "be sure, your grace, that your guests will not arrive before half-past four."

"And why not?"

"Consider, your grace: to begin with M. de Launay; he comes from the Bastile, and with the ice at present covering the streets of Paris – "

"No; but he will leave after the prisoners' dinner, at twelve o'clock."

"Pardon me, your grace, but the dinner hour at the Bastile has been changed since your grace was there; it is now one."

"Sir, you are learned on all points; pray go on."

"Madame Dubarry comes from the Luciennes, one continued descent, and in this frost."

"That would not prevent her being punctual, since she is no longer a duke's favorite; she plays the queen only among barons; but let me tell you, sir, that I desire to have dinner early on account of M. de la Pérouse, who sets off to-night, and would not wish to be late."

"But, your grace, M. de la Pérouse is with the king, discussing geography and cosmography; he will not get away too early."

"It is possible."

"It is certain, your grace, and it will be the same with M. de Favras, who is with the Count de Provence, talking, no doubt, of the new play by the Canon de Beaumarchais."

"You mean the 'Marriage of Figaro'?"

"Yes, your grace."

"Why, you are quite literary also, it seems."

"In my leisure moments I read, your grace."

"We have, however, M. de Condorcet, who, being a geometrician, should at least be punctual."

"Yes; but he will be deep in some calculation, from which, when he rouses himself, it will probably be at least half an hour too late. As for the Count Cagliostro, as he is a stranger, and not well acquainted with the customs of Versailles, he will, in all probability, make us wait for him."

"Well," said the marshal, "you have disposed of all my guests, except M. de Taverney, in a manner worthy of Homer, or of my poor Raffè."

The maître-d'hôtel bowed. "I have not," said he, "named M. de Taverney, because, being an old friend, he will probably be punctual."

"Good; and where do we dine?"

"In the great dining-room, your grace."

"But we shall freeze there."

"It has been warmed for three days, your grace; and I believe you will find it perfectly comfortable."

"Very well; but there is a clock striking! Why, it is half-past

four!" cried the marshal.

"Yes, your grace; and there is the courier entering the courtyard with my bottle of tokay."

"May I continue for another twenty years to be served in this manner!" said the marshal, turning again to his looking-glass, while the maître-d'hôtel ran down-stairs.

"Twenty years!" said a laughing voice, interrupting the marshal in his survey of himself; "twenty years, my dear duke! I wish them you; but then I shall be sixty – I shall be very old."

"You, countess!" cried the marshal, "you are my first arrival, and, mon Dieu! you look as young and charming as ever."

"Duke, I am frozen."

"Come into the boudoir, then."

"Oh! tête-à-tête, marshal?"

"Not so," replied a somewhat broken voice.

"Ah! Taverney!" said the marshal; and then whispering to the countess, "Plague take him for disturbing us!"

Madame Dubarry laughed, and they all entered the adjoining room.

II. – M. DE LA PEROUSE

At the same moment, the noise of carriages in the street warned the marshal that his guests were arriving; and soon after, thanks to the punctuality of his maître-d'hôtel, nine persons were seated round the oval table in the dining-room. Nine lackeys, silent as shadows, quick without bustle, and attentive without importunity, glided over the carpet, and passed among the guests, without ever touching their chairs, which were surrounded with furs, which were wrapped round the legs of the sitters. These furs, with the heat from the stoves, and the odors from the wine and the dinner, diffused a degree of comfort, which manifested itself in the gaiety of the guests, who had just finished their soup.

No sound was heard from without, and none within, save that made by the guests themselves; for the plates were changed, and the dishes moved round, with the most perfect quiet. Nor from the maître d'hôtel could a whisper be heard; he seemed to give his orders with his eyes.

The guests, therefore, began to feel as though they were alone. It seemed to them that servants so silent must also be deaf.

M. de Richelieu was the first who broke the silence, by saying to the guest on his right hand, "But, count, you drink nothing."

This was addressed to a man about thirty-eight years of age, short, fair-haired, and with high shoulders; his eye a clear blue, now bright, but oftener with a pensive expression, and with

nobility stamped unmistakably on his open and manly forehead.

"I only drink water, marshal," he replied.

"Excepting with Louis XV.," returned the marshal; "I had the honor of dining at his table with you, and you deigned that day to drink wine."

"Ah! you recall a pleasing remembrance, marshal; that was in 1771. It was tokay, from the imperial cellar."

"It was like that with which my maître-d'hôtel will now have the honor to fill your glass," replied Richelieu, bowing.

Count Haga raised his glass, and looked through it. The wine sparkled in the light like liquid rubies. "It is true," said he; "marshal, I thank you."

These words were uttered in a manner so noble, that the guests, as if by a common impulse, rose, and cried, —

"Long live the king!"

"Yes," said Count Haga, "long live his majesty the King of France. What say you, M. de la Pérouse?"

"My lord," replied the captain, with that tone, at once flattering and respectful, common to those accustomed to address crowned heads, "I have just left the king, and his majesty has shown me so much kindness, that no one will more willingly cry 'Long live the king' than I. Only, as in another hour I must leave you to join the two ships which his majesty has put at my disposal, once out of this house, I shall take the liberty of saying, 'Long life to another king, whom I should be proud to serve, had I not already so good a master.'"

"This health that you propose," said Madame Dubarry, who sat on the marshal's left hand, "we are all ready to drink, but the oldest of us should take the lead."

"Is it you, that that concerns, or me, Taverney?" said the marshal, laughing.

"I do not believe," said another on the opposite side, "that M. de Richelieu is the senior of our party."

"Then it is you, Taverney," said the duke.

"No, I am eight years younger than you! I was born in 1704," returned he.

"How rude," said the marshal, "to expose my eighty-eight years."

"Impossible, duke! that you are eighty-eight," said M. de Condorcet.

"It is, however, but too true; it is a calculation easy to make, and therefore unworthy of an algebraist like you, marquis. I am of the last century – the great century, as we call it. My date is 1696."

"Impossible!" cried De Launay.

"Oh, if your father were here, he would not say impossible, he, who, when governor of the Bastile, had me for a lodger in 1714."

"The senior in age, here, however," said M. de Favras, "is the wine Count Haga is now drinking."

"You are right, M. de Favras; this wine is a hundred and twenty years old; to the wine, then, belongs the honor – "

"One moment, gentlemen," said Cagliostro, raising his eyes,

beaming with intelligence and vivacity; "I claim the precedence."

"You claim precedence over the tokay!" exclaimed all the guests in chorus.

"Assuredly," returned Cagliostro, calmly; "since it was I who bottled it."

"You?"

"Yes, I; on the day of the victory won by Montecucully over the Turks in 1664."

A burst of laughter followed these words, which Cagliostro had pronounced with perfect gravity.

"By this calculation, you would be something like one hundred and thirty years old," said Madame Dubarry; "for you must have been at least ten years old when you bottled the wine."

"I was more than ten when I performed that operation, madame, as on the following day I had the honor of being deputed by his majesty the Emperor of Austria to congratulate Montecucully, who by the victory of St. Gothard had avenged the day at Especk, in Sclavonia, in which the infidels treated the imperialists so roughly, who were my friends and companions in arms in 1536."

"Oh," said Count Haga, as coldly as Cagliostro himself, "you must have been at least ten years old, when you were at that memorable battle."

"A terrible defeat, count," returned Cagliostro.

"Less terrible than Cressy, however," said Condorcet, smiling.

"True, sir, for at the battle of Cressy, it was not only an army,

but all France, that was beaten; but then this defeat was scarcely a fair victory to the English; for King Edward had cannon, a circumstance of which Philip de Valois was ignorant, or rather, which he would not believe, although I warned him that I had with my own eyes seen four pieces of artillery which Edward had bought from the Venetians."

"Ah," said Madame Dubarry; "you knew Philip de Valois?"

"Madame, I had the honor to be one of the five lords who escorted him off the field of battle; I came to France with the poor old King of Bohemia, who was blind, and who threw away his life when he heard that the battle was lost."

"Ah, sir," said M. de la Pérouse, "how much I regret, that instead of the battle of Cressy, it was not that of Actium at which you assisted."

"Why so, sir?"

"Oh, because you might have given me some nautical details, which, in spite of Plutarch's fine narration, have ever been obscure to me."

"Which, sir? I should be happy to be of service to you."

"Oh, you were there, then, also?"

"No, sir; I was then in Egypt. I had been employed by Queen Cleopatra to restore the library at Alexandria – an office for which I was better qualified than any one else, from having personally known the best authors of antiquity."

"And you have seen Queen Cleopatra?" said Madame Dubarry.

"As I now see you, madame."

"Was she as pretty as they say?"

"Madame, you know beauty is only comparative; a charming queen in Egypt, in Paris she would only have been a pretty grisette."

"Say no harm of grisettes, count."

"God forbid!"

"Then Cleopatra was – "

"Little, slender, lively, and intelligent; with large almond-shaped eyes, a Grecian nose, teeth like pearls, and a hand like your own, countess – a fit hand to hold a scepter. See, here is a diamond which she gave me, and which she had had from her brother Ptolemy; she wore it on her thumb."

"On her thumb?" cried Madame Dubarry.

"Yes; it was an Egyptian fashion; and I, you see, can hardly put it on my little finger;" and taking off the ring, he handed it to Madame Dubarry.

It was a magnificent diamond, of such fine water, and so beautifully cut, as to be worth thirty thousand or forty thousand francs.

The diamond was passed round the table, and returned to Cagliostro, who, putting it quietly on his finger again, said, "Ah, I see well you are all incredulous; this fatal incredulity I have had to contend against all my life. Philip de Valois would not listen to me, when I told him to leave open a retreat to Edward; Cleopatra would not believe me when I warned her that Antony would be

beaten: the Trojans would not credit me, when I said to them, with reference to the wooden horse, 'Cassandra is inspired; listen to Cassandra.'"

"Oh! it is charming," said Madame Dubarry, shaking with laughter; "I have never met a man at once so serious and so diverting."

"I assure you," replied Cagliostro, "that Jonathan was much more so. He was really a charming companion; until he was killed by Saul, he nearly drove me crazy with laughing."

"Do you know," said the Duke de Richelieu, "if you go on in this way you will drive poor Taverney crazy; he is so afraid of death, that he is staring at you with all his eyes, hoping you to be an immortal."

"Immortal I cannot say, but one thing I can affirm – "

"What?" cried Taverney, who was the most eager listener.

"That I have seen all the people and events of which I have been speaking to you."

"You have known Montecucully?"

"As well as I know you, M. de Favras; and, indeed, much better, for this is but the second or third time I have had the honor of seeing you, while I lived nearly a year under the same tent with him of whom you speak."

"You knew Philip de Valois?"

"As I have already had the honor of telling you, M. de Condorcet; but when he returned to Paris, I left France and returned to Bohemia."

"And Cleopatra."

"Yes, countess; Cleopatra, I can tell you, had eyes as black as yours, and shoulders almost as beautiful."

"But what do you know of my shoulders?"

"They are like what Cassandra's once were; and there is still a further resemblance, – she had like you, or rather, you have like her, a little black spot on your left side, just above the sixth rib."

"Oh, count, now you really are a sorcerer."

"No, no," cried the marshal, laughing; "it was I who told him."

"And pray how do you know?"

The marshal bit his lips, and replied, "Oh, it is a family secret."

"Well, really, marshal," said the countess, "one should put on a double coat of rouge before visiting you;" and turning again to Cagliostro, "then, sir, you have the art of renewing your youth? For although you say you are three or four thousand years old, you scarcely look forty."

"Yes, madame, I do possess that secret."

"Oh, then, sir, impart it to me."

"To you, madame? It is useless; your youth is already renewed; your age is only what it appears to be, and you do not look thirty."

"Ah! you flatter."

"No, madame, I speak only the truth, but it is easily explained: you have already tried my receipt."

"How so?"

"You have taken my elixir."

"I?"

"You, countess. Oh! you cannot have forgotten it. Do you not remember a certain house in the Rue St. Claude, and coming there on some business respecting M. de Sartines? You remember rendering a service to one of my friends, called Joseph Balsamo, and that this Joseph Balsamo gave you a bottle of elixir, recommending you to take three drops every morning? Do you not remember having done this regularly until the last year, when the bottle became exhausted? If you do not remember all this, countess, it is more than forgetfulness – it is ingratitude."

"Oh! M. Cagliostro, you are telling me things – "

"Which were only known to yourself, I am aware; but what would be the use of being a sorcerer if one did not know one's neighbor's secrets?"

"Then Joseph Balsamo has, like you, the secret of this famous elixir?"

"No, madame, but he was one of my best friends, and I gave him three or four bottles."

"And has he any left?"

"Oh! I know nothing of that; for the last two or three years, poor Balsamo has disappeared. The last time I saw him was in America, on the banks of the Ohio: he was setting off on an expedition to the Rocky Mountains, and since then I have heard that he is dead."

"Come, come, count," cried the marshal; "let us have the secret, by all means."

"Are you speaking seriously, sir?" said Count Haga.

"Very seriously, sire, – I beg pardon, I mean count;" and Cagliostro bowed in such a way as to indicate that his error was a voluntary one.

"Then," said the marshal, "Madame Dubarry is not old enough to be made young again?"

"No, on my conscience."

"Well, then, I will give you another subject: here is my friend, M. Taverney – what do you say to him? Does he not look like a contemporary of Pontius Pilate? But perhaps, he, on the contrary, is too old."

Cagliostro looked at the baron. "No," said he.

"Ah! my dear count," exclaimed Richelieu; "if you will renew his youth, I will proclaim you a true pupil of Medea."

"You wish it?" asked Cagliostro of the host, and looking round at the same time on all assembled.

Every one called out, "Yes."

"And you also, M. Taverney?"

"I more than any one," said the baron.

"Well, it is easy," returned Cagliostro; and he drew from his pocket a small bottle, and poured into a glass some of the liquid it contained. Then, mixing these drops with half a glass of iced champagne, he passed it to the baron.

All eyes followed his movements eagerly.

The baron took the glass, but as he was about to drink he hesitated.

Every one began to laugh, but Cagliostro called out, "Drink,

baron, or you will lose a liquor of which each drop is worth a hundred louis d'ors."

"The devil," cried Richelieu; "that is even better than tokay."

"I must then drink?" said the baron, almost trembling.

"Or pass the glass to another, sir, that some one at least may profit by it."

"Pass it here," said Richelieu, holding out his hand.

The baron raised the glass, and decided, doubtless, by the delicious smell and the beautiful rose color which those few drops had given to the champagne, he swallowed the magic liquor. In an instant a kind of shiver ran through him; he seemed to feel all his old and sluggish blood rushing quickly through his veins, from his heart to his feet, his wrinkled skin seemed to expand, his eyes, half covered by their lids, appeared to open without his will, and the pupils to grow and brighten, the trembling of his hands to cease, his voice to strengthen, and his limbs to recover their former youthful elasticity. In fact, it seemed as if the liquid in its descent had regenerated his whole body.

A cry of surprise, wonder, and admiration rang through the room.

Taverney, who had been slowly eating with his gums, began to feel famished; he seized a plate and helped himself largely to a ragout, and then demolished a partridge, bones and all, calling out that his teeth were coming back to him. He ate, laughed, and cried for joy, for half an hour, while the others remained gazing at him in stupefied wonder; then little by little he failed again,

like a lamp whose oil is burning out, and all the former signs of old age returned upon him.

"Oh!" groaned he, "once more adieu to my youth," and he gave utterance to a deep sigh, while two tears rolled over his cheeks.

Instinctively, at this mournful spectacle of the old man first made young again, and then seeming to become yet older than before, from the contrast, the sigh was echoed all round the table.

"It is easy to explain, gentlemen," said Cagliostro; "I gave the baron but thirty-five drops of the elixir. He became young, therefore, for only thirty-five minutes."

"Oh more, more, count!" cried the old man eagerly.

"No, sir, for perhaps the second trial would kill you."

Of all the guests, Madame Dubarry, who had already tested the virtue of the elixir, seemed most deeply interested while old Taverney's youth seemed thus to renew itself; she had watched him with delight and triumph, and half fancied herself growing young again at the sight, while she could hardly refrain from endeavoring to snatch from Cagliostro the wonderful bottle; but now, seeing him resume his old age even quicker than he had lost it, "Alas!" she said sadly, "all is vanity and deception; the effects of this wonderful secret last for thirty-five minutes."

"That is to say," said Count Haga, "that in order to resume your youth for two years, you would have to drink a perfect river."

Every one laughed.

"Oh!" said De Condorcet, "the calculation is simple; a mere nothing of 3,153,000 drops for one year's youth."

"An inundation," said La Pérouse.

"However, sir," continued Madame Dubarry; "according to you, I have not needed so much, as a small bottle about four times the size of that you hold has been sufficient to arrest the march of time for ten years."

"Just so, madame. And you alone approach this mysterious truth. The man who has already grown old needs this large quantity to produce an immediate and powerful effect; but a woman of thirty, as you were, or a man of forty, as I was, when I began to drink this elixir, still full of life and youth, needs but ten drops at each period of decay; and with these ten drops may eternally continue his life and youth at the same point."

"What do you call the periods of decay?" asked Count Haga.

"The natural periods, count. In a state of nature, man's strength increases until thirty-five years of age. It then remains stationary until forty; and from that time forward, it begins to diminish, but almost imperceptibly, until fifty; then the process becomes quicker and quicker to the day of his death. In our state of civilization, when the body is weakened by excess, cares, and maladies, the failure begins at thirty-five. The time, then, to take nature, is when she is stationary, so as to forestall the beginning of decay. He who, possessor as I am of the secret of this elixir, knows how to seize the happy moment, will live as I live; always young, or, at least, always young enough for what he has to do

in the world."

"Oh, M. Cagliostro," cried the countess; "why, if you could choose your own age, did you not stop at twenty instead of at forty?"

"Because, madame," said Cagliostro, smiling, "it suits me better to be a man of forty, still healthy and vigorous, than a raw youth of twenty."

"Oh!" said the countess.

"Doubtless, madame," continued Cagliostro, "at twenty one pleases women of thirty; at forty, we govern women of twenty, and men of sixty."

"I yield, sir," said the countess, "for you are a living proof of the truth of your own words."

"Then I," said Taverney, piteously, "am condemned; it is too late for me."

"M. de Richelieu has been more skilful than you," said La Pérouse naïvely, "and I have always heard that he had some secret."

"It is a report that the women have spread," laughed Count Haga.

"Is that a reason for disbelieving it, duke?" asked Madame Dubarry.

The old duke colored, a rare thing for him; but replied, "Do you wish, gentlemen, to have my receipt?"

"Oh, by all means."

"Well, then, it is simply to take care of yourself."

"Oh, oh!" cried all.

"But, M. Cagliostro," continued Madame Dubarry, "I must ask more about the elixir."

"Well, madame?"

"You said you first used it at forty years of age – "

"Yes, madame."

"And that since that time, that is, since the siege of Troy – "

"A little before, madame."

"That you have always remained forty years old?"

"You see me now."

"But then, sir," said De Condorcet, "you argue, not only the perpetuation of youth, but the preservation of life; for if since the siege of Troy you have been always forty, you have never died."

"True, marquis, I have never died."

"But are you, then, invulnerable, like Achilles, or still more so, for Achilles was killed by the arrow of Paris?"

"No. I am not invulnerable, and there is my great regret," said Cagliostro.

"Then, sir, you may be killed."

"Alas! yes."

"How, then, have you escaped all accidents for three thousand five hundred years?"

"It is chance, marquis, but will you follow my reasoning?"

"Yes, yes," cried all, with eagerness.

Cagliostro continued: "What is the first requisite to life?" he asked, spreading out his white and beautiful hands covered with

rings, among which Cleopatra's shone conspicuously. "Is it not health!"

"Certainly."

"And the way to preserve health is?"

"Proper management," said Count Haga.

"Right, count. And why should not my elixir be the best possible method of treatment? And this treatment I have adopted, and with it have preserved my youth, and with youth, health, and life."

"But all things exhaust themselves; the finest constitution, as well as the worst."

"The body of Paris, like that of Vulcan," said the countess. "Perhaps, you knew Paris, by the bye?"

"Perfectly, madame; he was a fine young man, but really did not deserve all that has been said of him. In the first place, he had red hair."

"Red hair, horrible!"

"Unluckily, madame, Helen was not of your opinion: but to return to our subject. You say, M. de Taverney, that all things exhaust themselves; but you also know, that everything recovers again, regenerates, or is replaced, whichever you please to call it. The famous knife of St. Hubert, which so often changed both blade and handle, is an example, for through every change it still remained the knife of St. Hubert. The wines which the monks of Heidelberg preserve so carefully in their cellars, remain still the same wine, although each year they pour into it a fresh supply;

therefore, this wine always remains clear, bright, and delicious: while the wine which Opimus and I hid in the earthen jars was, when I tried it a hundred years after, only a thick dirty substance, which might have been eaten, but certainly could not have been drunk. Well, I follow the example of the monks of Heidelberg, and preserve my body by introducing into it every year new elements, which regenerate the old. Every morning a new and fresh atom replaces in my blood, my flesh, and my bones, some particle which has perished. I stay that ruin which most men allow insensibly to invade their whole being, and I force into action all those powers which God has given to every human being, but which most people allow to lie dormant. This is the great study of my life, and as, in all things, he who does one thing constantly does that thing better than others, I am becoming more skilful than others in avoiding danger. Thus, you would not get me to enter a tottering house; I have seen too many houses not to tell at a glance the safe from the unsafe. You would not see me go out hunting with a man who managed his gun badly. From Cephalus, who killed his wife, down to the regent, who shot the prince in the eye, I have seen too many unskilful people. You could not make me accept in battle the post which many a man would take without thinking, because I should calculate in a moment the chances of danger at each point. You will tell me that one cannot foresee a stray bullet; but the man who has escaped a thousand gun-shots will hardly fall a victim to one now. Ah, you look incredulous, but am I not a living proof? I do not

tell you that I am immortal, only that I know better than others how to avoid danger; for instance, I would not remain here now alone with M. de Launay, who is thinking that, if he had me in the Bastile, he would put my immortality to the test of starvation; neither would I remain with M. de Condorcet, for he is thinking that he might just empty into my glass the contents of that ring which he wears on his left hand, and which is full of poison – not with any evil intent, but just as a scientific experiment, to see if I should die."

The two people named looked at each other, and colored.

"Confess, M. de Launay, we are not in a court of justice; besides, thoughts are not punished. Did you not think what I said? And you, M. de Condorcet, would you not have liked to let me taste the poison in your ring, in the name of your beloved mistress, science?"

"Indeed," said M. de Launay, laughing, "I confess you are right; it was folly, but that folly did pass through my mind just before you accused me."

"And I," said M. de Condorcet, "will not be less candid. I did think that if you tasted the contents of my ring, I would not give much for your life."

A cry of admiration burst from the rest of the party; these avowals confirming not the immortality, but the penetration, of Count Cagliostro.

"You see," said Cagliostro, quietly, "that I divined these dangers; well, it is the same with other things. The experience of

a long life reveals to me at a glance much of the past and of the future of those whom I meet. My capabilities in this way extend even to animals and inanimate objects. If I get into a carriage, I can tell from the look of the horses if they are likely to run away; and from that of the coachman, if he will overturn me. If I go on board ship, I can see if the captain is ignorant or obstinate, and consequently likely to endanger me. I should then leave the coachman or captain, escape from those horses or that ship. I do not deny chance, I only lessen it, and instead of incurring a hundred chances, like the rest of the world, I prevent ninety-nine of them, and endeavor to guard against the hundredth. This is the good of having lived three thousand years."

"Then," said La Pérouse, laughing, amidst the wonder and enthusiasm created by this speech of Cagliostro's, "you should come with me when I embark to make the tour of the world; you would render me a signal service."

Cagliostro did not reply.

"M. de Richelieu," continued La Pérouse, "as the Count Cagliostro, which is very intelligible, does not wish to quit such good company, you must permit me to do so without him. Excuse me, Count Haga, and you, madame, but it is seven o'clock, and I have promised his majesty to start at a quarter past. But since Count Cagliostro will not be tempted to come with me, and see my ships, perhaps he can tell me what will happen to me between Versailles and Brest. From Brest to the Pole I ask nothing; that is my own business."

Cagliostro looked at La Pérouse with such a melancholy air, so full both of pity and kindness, that the others were struck by it. The sailor himself, however, did not remark it. He took leave of the company, put on his fur riding coat, into one of the pockets of which Madame Dubarry pushed a bottle of delicious cordial, welcome to a traveler, but which he would not have provided for himself, to recall to him, she said, his absent friends during the long nights of a journey in such bitter cold.

La Pérouse, still full of gaiety, bowed respectfully to Count Haga, and held out his hand to the old marshal.

"Adieu, dear La Pérouse," said the latter.

"No, duke, au revoir," replied La Pérouse, "one would think I was going away forever; now I have but to circumnavigate the globe – five or six years' absence; it is scarcely worth while to say 'adieu' for that."

"Five or six years," said the marshal; "you might almost as well say five or six centuries; days are years at my age, therefore I say, adieu."

"Bah! ask the sorcerer," returned La Pérouse, still laughing; "he will promise you twenty years' more life. Will you not, Count Cagliostro? Oh, count, why did I not hear sooner of those precious drops of yours? Whatever the price, I should have shipped a tun. Madame, another kiss of that beautiful hand, I shall certainly not see such another till I return; au revoir," and he left the room.

Cagliostro still preserved the same mournful silence. They

heard the steps of the captain as he left the house, his gay voice in the courtyard, and his farewells to the people assembled to see him depart. Then the horses shook their heads, covered with bells, the door of the carriage shut with some noise, and the wheels were heard rolling along the street.

La Pérouse had started on that voyage from which he was destined never to return.

When they could no longer hear a sound, all looks were again turned to Cagliostro; there seemed a kind of inspired light in his eyes.

Count Haga first broke the silence, which had lasted for some minutes. "Why did you not reply to his question?" he inquired of Cagliostro.

Cagliostro started, as if the question had roused him from a reverie. "Because," said he, "I must either have told a falsehood or a sad truth."

"How so?"

"I must have said to him, – 'M. de la Pérouse, the duke is right in saying to you adieu, and not au revoir.'"

"Oh," said Richelieu, turning pale, "what do you mean?"

"Reassure yourself, marshal, this sad prediction does not concern you."

"What," cried Madame Dubarry, "this poor La Pérouse, who has just kissed my hand – "

"Not only, madame, will never kiss it again, but will never again see those he has just left," said Cagliostro, looking

attentively at the glass of water he was holding up.

A cry of astonishment burst from all. The interest of the conversation deepened every moment, and you might have thought, from the solemn and anxious air with which all regarded Cagliostro, that it was some ancient and infallible oracle they were consulting.

"Pray then, count," said Madame Dubarry, "tell us what will befall poor La Pérouse."

Cagliostro shook his head.

"Oh, yes, let us hear!" cried all the rest.

"Well, then, M. de la Pérouse intends, as you know, to make the tour of the globe, and continue the researches of poor Captain Cook, who was killed in the Sandwich Islands."

"Yes, yes, we know."

"Everything should foretell a happy termination to this voyage; M. de la Pérouse is a good seaman, and his route has been most skilfully traced by the king."

"Yes," interrupted Count Haga, "the King of France is a clever geographer; is he not, M. de Condorcet?"

"More skilful than is needful for a king," replied the marquis; "kings ought to know things only slightly, then they will let themselves be guided by those who know them thoroughly."

"Is this a lesson, marquis?" said Count Haga, smiling.

"Oh, no. Only a simple reflection, a general truth."

"Well, he is gone," said Madame Dubarry, anxious to bring the conversation back to La Pérouse.

"Yes, he is gone," replied Cagliostro, "but don't believe, in spite of his haste, that he will soon embark. I foresee much time lost at Brest."

"That would be a pity," said De Condorcet; "this is the time to set out: it is even now rather late – February or March would have been better."

"Oh, do not grudge him these few months, M. de Condorcet, for, during them, he will at least live and hope."

"He has got good officers, I suppose?" said Richelieu.

"Yes, he who commands the second ship is a distinguished officer. I see him – young, adventurous, brave, unhappily."

"Why unhappily?"

"A year after I look for him, and see him no more," said Cagliostro, anxiously consulting his glass. "No one here is related to M. de Langle?"

"No."

"No one knows him?"

"No."

"Well, death will commence with him."

A murmur of affright escaped from all the guests.

"But he, La Pérouse?" cried several voices.

"He sails, he lands, he reembarks; I see one, two years, of successful navigation; we hear news of him, and then – "

"Then?"

"Years pass – "

"But at last?"

"The sea is vast, the heavens are clouded, here and there appear unknown lands, and figures hideous as the monsters of the Grecian Archipelago. They watch the ship, which is being carried in a fog amongst the breakers, by a tempest less fearful than themselves. Oh! La Pérouse, La Pérouse, if you could hear me, I would cry to you. You set out, like Columbus, to discover a world; beware of unknown isles!"

He ceased, and an icy shiver ran through the assembly.

"But why did you not warn him?" asked Count Haga, who, in spite of himself, had succumbed to the influence of this extraordinary man.

"Yes," cried Madame Dubarry, "why not send after him and bring him back? The life of a man like La Pérouse is surely worth a courier, my dear marshal."

The marshal rose to ring the bell.

Cagliostro extended his arm to stop him. "Alas!" said he, "All advice would be useless. I can foretell destiny, but I cannot change it. M. de la Pérouse would laugh if he heard my words, as the son of Priam laughed when Cassandra prophesied; and see, you begin to laugh yourself, Count Haga, and laughing is contagious: your companions are catching it. Do not restrain yourselves, gentlemen – I am accustomed to an incredulous audience."

"Oh, we believe," said Madame Dubarry and the Duke de Richelieu; "and I believe," murmured Taverney; "and I also," said Count Haga politely.

"Yes," replied Cagliostro, "you believe, because it concerns La Pérouse; but, if I spoke of yourself, you would not believe."

"I confess that what would have made me believe, would have been, if you had said to him, 'Beware of unknown isles;' then he would, at least, have had the chance of avoiding them."

"I assure you no, count; and, if he had believed me, it would only have been more horrible, for the unfortunate man would have seen himself approaching those isles destined to be fatal to him, without the power to flee from them. Therefore he would have died, not one, but a hundred deaths, for he would have gone through it all by anticipation. Hope, of which I should have deprived him, is what best sustains a man under all trials."

"Yes," said De Condorcet; "the veil which hides from us our future is the only real good which God has vouchsafed to man."

"Nevertheless," said Count Haga, "did a man like you say to me, shun a certain man or a certain thing, I would beware, and I would thank you for the counsel."

Cagliostro shook his head, with a faint smile.

"I mean it, M. de Cagliostro," continued Count Haga; "warn me, and I will thank you."

"You wish me to tell you what I would not tell La Pérouse?"

"Yes, I wish it."

Cagliostro opened his mouth as if to begin, and then stopped, and said, "No, count, no!"

"I beg you."

Cagliostro still remained silent.

"Take care," said the count, "you are making me incredulous."

"Incredulity is better than misery."

"M. de Cagliostro," said the count, gravely, "you forget one thing, which is, that though there are men who had better remain ignorant of their destiny, there are others who should know it, as it concerns not themselves alone, but millions of others."

"Then," said Cagliostro, "command me; if your majesty commands, I will obey."

"I command you to reveal to me my destiny, M. de Cagliostro," said the king, with an air at once courteous and dignified.

At this moment, as Count Haga had dropped his incognito in speaking to Cagliostro, M. de Richelieu advanced towards him, and said, "Thanks, sire, for the honor you have done my house; will your majesty assume the place of honor?"

"Let us remain as we are, marshal; I wish to hear what M. de Cagliostro is about to say."

"One does not speak the truth to kings, sire."

"Bah! I am not in my kingdom; take your place again, duke. Proceed, M. de Cagliostro, I beg."

Cagliostro looked again through his glass, and one might have imagined the particles agitated by this look, as they danced in, the light. "Sire," said he, "tell me what you wish to know?"

"Tell me by what death I shall die."

"By a gun-shot, sire."

The eyes of Gustavus grew bright. "Ah, in a battle!" said he;

"the death of a soldier! Thanks, M. de Cagliostro, a thousand times thanks; oh, I foresee battles, and Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII. have shown me how a King of Sweden should die."

Cagliostro drooped his head, without replying.

"Oh!" cried Count Haga, "will not my wound then be given in battle?"

"No, sire."

"In a sedition? – yes, that is possible."

"No, not in a sedition, sire."

"But, where then?"

"At a ball, sire."

The king remained silent, and Cagliostro buried his head in his hands.

Every one looked pale and frightened; then M. de Condorcet took the glass of water and examined it, as if there he could solve the problem of all that had been going on; but finding nothing to satisfy him, "Well, I also," said he, "will beg our illustrious prophet to consult for me his magic mirror: unfortunately, I am not a powerful lord; I cannot command, and my obscure life concerns no millions of people."

"Sir," said Count Haga, "you command in the name of science, and your life belongs not only to a nation, but to all mankind."

"Thanks," said De Condorcet; "but, perhaps, your opinion on this subject is not shared by M. de Cagliostro."

Cagliostro raised his head. "Yes, marquis," said he, in a

manner which began to be excited, "you are indeed a powerful lord in the kingdom of intelligence; look me, then, in the face, and tell me, seriously, if you also wish that I should prophesy to you."

"Seriously, count, upon my honor."

"Well, marquis," said Cagliostro, in a hoarse voice, "you will die of that poison which you carry in your ring; you will die – "

"Oh, but if I throw it away?"

"Throw it away!"

"You allow that that would be easy."

"Throw it away!"

"Oh, yes, marquis," cried Madame Dubarry; "throw away that horrid poison! Throw it away, if it be only to falsify this prophet of evil, who threatens us all with so many misfortunes. For if you throw it away you cannot die by it, as M. de Cagliostro predicts; so there at least he will have been wrong."

"Madame la Comtesse is right," said Count Haga.

"Bravo, countess!" said Richelieu. "Come, marquis, throw away that poison, for now I know you carry it, I shall tremble every time we drink together; the ring might open of itself, and – "

"It is useless," said Cagliostro quietly; "M. de Condorcet will not throw it away."

"No," returned De Condorcet, "I shall not throw it away; not that I wish to aid my destiny, but because this is a unique poison, prepared by Cabanis, and which chance has completely

hardened, and that chance might never occur again; therefore I will not throw it away. Triumph if you will, M. de Cagliostro."

"Destiny," replied he, "ever finds some way to work out its own ends."

"Then I shall die by poison," said the marquis; "well, so be it. It is an admirable death, I think; a little poison on the tip of the tongue, and I am gone. It is scarcely dying: it is merely ceasing to live."

"It is not necessary for you to suffer, sir," said Cagliostro.

"Then, sir," said M. de Favras, "we have a shipwreck, a gun-shot, and a poisoning which makes my mouth water. Will you not do me the favor also to predict some little pleasure of the same kind for me?"

"Oh, marquis!" replied Cagliostro, beginning to grow warm under this irony, "do not envy these gentlemen, you will have still better."

"Better!" said M. de Favras, laughing; "that is pledging yourself to a great deal. It is difficult to beat the sea, fire, and poison!"

"There remains the cord, marquis," said Cagliostro, bowing.

"The cord! what do you mean?"

"I mean that you will be hanged," replied Cagliostro, seeming no more the master of his prophetic rage.

"Hanged! the devil!" cried Richelieu.

"Monsieur forgets that I am a nobleman," said M. de Favras, coldly; "or if he means to speak of a suicide, I warn him that I

shall respect myself sufficiently, even in my last moments, not to use a cord while I have a sword."

"I do not speak of a suicide, sir."

"Then you speak of a punishment?"

"Yes."

"You are a foreigner, sir, and therefore I pardon you."

"What?"

"Your ignorance, sir. In France we decapitate noblemen."

"You may arrange this, if you can, with the executioner," replied Cagliostro.

M. de Favras said no more. There was a general silence and shrinking for a few minutes.

"Do you know that I tremble at last," said M. de Launay; "my predecessors have come off so badly, that I fear for myself if I now take my turn."

"Then you are more reasonable than they; you are right. Do not seek to know the future; good or bad, let it rest – it is in the hands of God."

"Oh! M. de Launay," said Madame Dubarry, "I hope you will not be less courageous than the others have been."

"I hope so, too, madame," said the governor. Then, turning to Cagliostro, "Sir," he said, "favor me, in my turn, with my horoscope, if you please."

"It is easy," replied Cagliostro; "a blow on the head with a hatchet, and all will be over."

A look of dismay was once more general. Richelieu and

Taverney begged Cagliostro to say no more, but female curiosity carried the day.

"To hear you talk, count," said Madame Dubarry, "one would think the whole universe must die a violent death. Here we were, eight of us, and five are already condemned by you."

"Oh, you understand that it is all prearranged to frighten us, and we shall only laugh at it," said M. de Favras, trying to do so.

"Certainly we will laugh," said Count Haga, "be it true or false."

"Oh, I will laugh too, then," said Madame Dubarry. "I will not dishonor the assembly by my cowardice; but, alas! I am only a woman, I cannot rank among you and be worthy of a tragical end; a woman dies in her bed. My death, a sorrowful old woman abandoned by every one, will be the worst of all. Will it not, M. de Cagliostro?"

She stopped, and seemed to wait for the prophet to reassure her. Cagliostro did not speak; so, her curiosity obtaining the mastery over her fears, she went on. "Well, M. de Cagliostro, will you not answer me?"

"What do you wish me to say, madame?"

She hesitated – then, rallying her courage, "Yes," she cried, "I will run the risk. Tell me the fate of Jeanne de Vaubernier, Countess Dubarry."

"On the scaffold, madame," replied the prophet of evil.

"A jest, sir, is it not?" said she, looking at him with a supplicating air.

Cagliostro seemed not to see it. "Why do you think I jest?" said he.

"Oh, because to die on the scaffold one must have committed some crime – stolen, or committed murder, or done something dreadful; and it is not likely I shall do that. It was a jest, was it not?"

"Oh, mon Dieu, yes," said Cagliostro; "all I have said is but a jest."

The countess laughed, but scarcely in a natural manner. "Come, M. de Favras," said she, "let us order our funerals."

"Oh, that will be needless for you, madame," said Cagliostro.

"Why so, sir?"

"Because you will go to the scaffold in a car."

"Oh, how horrible! This dreadful man, marshal! for heaven's sake choose more cheerful guests next time, or I will never visit you again."

"Excuse me, madame," said Cagliostro, "but you, like all the rest, would have me speak."

"At least I hope you will grant me time to choose my confessor."

"It will be superfluous, countess."

"Why?"

"The last person who will mount the scaffold in France with a confessor will be the King of France." And Cagliostro pronounced these words in so thrilling a voice that every one was struck with horror.

All were silent.

Cagliostro raised to his lips the glass of water in which he had read these fearful prophecies, but scarcely had he touched it, when he set it down with a movement of disgust. He turned his eyes to M. de Taverney.

"Oh," cried he, in terror, "do not tell me anything; I do not wish to know!"

"Well, then, I will ask instead of him," said Richelieu.

"You, marshal, be happy; you are the only one of us all who will die in his bed."

"Coffee, gentlemen, coffee," cried the marshal, enchanted with the prediction. Every one rose.

But before passing into the drawing-room, Count Haga, approaching Cagliostro, said, —

"Tell me what to beware of."

"Of a muff, sir," replied Cagliostro.

"And I?" said Condorcet.

"Of an omelet."

"Good; I renounce eggs," and he left the room.

"And I?" said M. de Favras; "what must I fear?"

"A letter."

"And I?" said De Launay.

"The taking of the Bastile."

"Oh, you quite reassure me." And he went away laughing.

"Now for me, sir," said the countess, trembling.

"You, beautiful countess, shun the Place Louis XV."

"Alas," said the countess, "one day already I lost myself there; that day I suffered much."

She left the room, and Cagliostro was about to follow her when Richelieu stopped him.

"One moment," said he; "there remains only Taverney and I, my dear sorcerer."

"M. de Taverney begged me to say nothing, and you, marshal, have asked me nothing."

"Oh, I do not wish to hear," again cried Taverney.

"But come, to prove your power, tell us something that only Taverney and I know," said Richelieu.

"What?" asked Cagliostro, smiling.

"Tell us what makes Taverney come to Versailles, instead of living quietly in his beautiful house at Maison-Rouge, which the king bought for him three years ago."

"Nothing more simple, marshal," said Cagliostro. "Ten years ago, M. de Taverney wished to give his daughter, Mademoiselle Andrée, to the King Louis XV., but he did not succeed."

"Oh!" growled Taverney.

"Now, monsieur wishes to give his son Philippe de Taverney, to the Queen Marie Antoinette; ask him if I speak the truth."

"On my word," said Taverney, trembling, "this man is a sorcerer; devil take me if he is not!"

"Do not speak so cavalierly of the devil, my old comrade," said the marshal.

"It is frightful," murmured Taverney, and he turned to implore

Cagliostro to be discreet, but he was gone.

"Come, Taverney, to the drawing-room," said the marshal; "or they will drink their coffee without us."

But when they arrived there, the room was empty; no one had courage to face again the author of these terrible predictions.

The wax lights burned in the candelabra, the fire burned on the hearth, but all for nothing.

"Ma foi, old friend, it seems we must take our coffee tête-à-tête. Why, where the devil has he gone?" Richelieu looked all around him, but Taverney had vanished like the rest. "Never mind," said the marshal, chuckling as Voltaire might have done, and rubbing his withered though still white hands; "I shall be the only one to die in my bed. Well, Count Cagliostro, at least I believe. In my bed! that was it; I shall die in my bed, and I trust not for a long time. Hola! my valet-de-chambre and my drops."

The valet entered with the bottle, and the marshal went with him into the bedroom.

END OF THE PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I.
TWO UNKNOWN LADIES

The winter of 1784, that monster which devoured half France, we could not see, although he growled at the doors, while at the house of M. de Richelieu, shut in as we were in that warm and comfortable dining-room.

A little frost on the windows seems but the luxury of nature added to that of man. Winter has its diamonds, its powder, and its silvery embroidery for the rich man wrapped in his furs, and packed in his carriage, or snug among the wadding and velvet of a well-warmed room. Hoar-frost is a beauty, ice a change of decoration by the greatest of artists, which the rich admire through their windows. He who is warm can admire the withered trees, and find a somber charm in the sight of the snow-covered plain. He who, after a day without suffering, when millions of his fellow-creatures are enduring dreadful privations, throws himself on his bed of down, between his fine and well-aired sheets, may find out that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

But he who is hungry sees none of these beauties of nature; he who is cold hates the sky without a sun, and consequently without a smile for such unfortunates. Now, at the time at which we write, that is, about the middle of the month of April, three hundred thousand miserable beings, dying from cold and hunger,

groaned in Paris alone – in that Paris where, in spite of the boast that scarcely another city contained so many rich people, nothing had been prepared to prevent the poor from perishing of cold and wretchedness.

For the last four months, the same leaden sky had driven the poor from the villages into the town, as it sent the wolves from the woods into the villages.

No more bread. No more wood.

No more bread for those who felt this cold – no more wood to cook it. All the provisions which had been collected, Paris had devoured in a month. The Provost, short-sighted and incapable, did not know how to procure for Paris, which was under his care, the wood which might have been collected in the neighborhood. When it froze, he said the frost prevented the horses from bringing it; if it thawed, he pleaded want of horses and conveyances. Louis XVI., ever good and humane, always ready to attend to the physical wants of his people, although he overlooked their social ones, began by contributing a sum of 200,000 francs for horses and carts, and insisting on their immediate use. Still the demand continued greater than the supply. At first no one was allowed to carry away from the public timber-yard more than a cart-load of wood; then they were limited to half this quantity. Soon the long strings of people might be seen waiting outside the doors, as they were afterwards seen at the bakers' shops. The king gave away the whole of his private income in charity. He procured 3,000,000

francs by a grant and applied it to the relief of the sufferers, declaring that every other need must give way before that of cold and famine. The queen, on her part, gave 500 louis from her purse. The convents, the hospitals, and the public buildings were thrown open as places of asylum for the poor, who came in crowds for the sake of the fires that were kept there. They kept hoping for a thaw, but heaven seemed inflexible. Every evening the same copper-colored sky disappointed their hopes; and the stars shone bright and clear as funeral torches through the long, cold nights, which hardened again and again the snow which fell during the day. All day long, thousands of workmen, with spades and shovels, cleared away the snow from before the houses; so that on each side of the streets, already too narrow for the traffic, rose a high, thick wall, blocking up the way. Soon these masses of snow and ice became so large that the shops were obscured by them, and they were obliged to allow it to remain where it fell. Paris could do no more. She gave in, and allowed the winter to do its worst. December, January, February, and March passed thus, although now and then a few days' thaw changed the streets, whose sewers were blocked up, into running streams. Horses were drowned, and carriages destroyed, in the streets, some of which could only be traversed in boats. Paris, faithful to its character, sang through this destruction by the thaw as it had done through that by famine. Processions were made to the markets to see the fisherwomen serving their customers with immense leathern boots on, inside which their trousers were

pushed, and with their petticoats tucked round their waists, all laughing, gesticulating, and splashing each other as they stood in the water. These thaws, however, were but transitory; the frost returned, harder and more obstinate than ever, and recourse was had to sledges, pushed along by skaters, or drawn by roughshod horses along the causeways, which were like polished mirrors. The Seine, frozen many feet deep, was become the rendezvous for all idlers, who assembled there to skate or slide, until, warmed by exercise, they ran to the nearest fire, lest the perspiration should freeze upon them. All trembled for the time when, the water communications being stopped, and the roads impassable, provisions could no longer be sent in, and began to fear that Paris would perish from want. The king, in this extremity, called a council. They decided to implore all bishops, abbés, and monks to leave Paris and retire to their dioceses or convents; and all those magistrates and officials who, preferring the opera to their duties, had crowded to Paris, to return to their homes; for all these people used large quantities of wood in their hotels, and consumed no small amount of food. There were still the country gentlemen, who were also to be entreated to leave. But M. Lenoir, lieutenant of police, observed to the king that, as none of these people were criminals, and could not therefore be compelled to leave Paris in a day, they would probably be so long thinking about it, that the thaw would come before their departure, which would then be more hurtful than useful. All this care and pity of the king and queen, however, excited

the ingenious gratitude of the people, who raised monuments to them, as ephemeral as the feelings which prompted them. Obelisks and pillars of snow and ice, engraved with their names, were to be seen all over Paris. At the end of March the thaw began, but by fits and starts, constant returns of frost prolonging the miseries of the people. Indeed, in the beginning of April it appeared to set in harder than ever, and the half-thawed streets, frozen again, became so slippery and dangerous, that nothing was seen but broken limbs and accidents of all kinds. The snow prevented the carriages from being heard, and the police had enough to do, from the reckless driving of the aristocracy, to preserve from the wheels those who were spared by cold and hunger.

It was about a week after the dinner given by M. de Richelieu that four elegant sledges entered Paris, gliding over the frozen snow which covered the Cours la Reine and the extremity of the boulevards. From thence they found it more difficult to proceed, for the sun and the traffic had begun to change the snow and ice into a wet mass of dirt.

In the foremost sledge were two men in brown riding coats with double capes. They were drawn by a black horse, and turned from time to time, as if to watch the sledge that followed them, and which contained two ladies so enveloped in furs that it was impossible to see their faces. It might even have been difficult to distinguish their sex, had it not been for the height of their coiffure, crowning which was a small hat with a plume of

feathers. From the colossal edifice of this coiffure, all mingled with ribbons and jewels, escaped occasionally a cloud of white powder, as when a gust of wind shakes the snow from the trees.

These two ladies, seated side by side, were conversing so earnestly as scarcely to see the numerous spectators who watched their progress along the boulevards. One of them taller and more majestic than the other, and holding up before her face a finely-embroidered cambric handkerchief, carried her head erect and stately, in spite of the wind which swept across their sledge.

It had just struck five by the clock of the church St. Croix d'Antin and night was beginning to descend upon Paris, and with the night the bitter cold. They had just reached the Porte St. Denis, when the lady of whom we have spoken made a sign to the men in front, who thereupon quickened the pace of their horse, and soon disappeared among the evening mists, which were fast thickening around the colossal structure of the Bastile.

This signal she then repeated to the other two sledges, which also vanished along the Rue St. Denis. Meanwhile, the one in which she sat, having arrived at the Boulevard de Menilmontant, stopped.

In this place few people were to be seen; night had dispersed them. Besides, in this out-of-the-way quarter, not many citizens would trust themselves without torches and an escort, since winter had sharpened the wants of three or four thousand beggars who were easily changed into robbers.

The lady touched with her finger the shoulder of the

coachman who was driving her, and said, "Weber, how long will it take you to bring the cabriolet you know where?"

"Madame wishes me to bring the cabriolet?" asked the coachman, with a strong German accent.

"Yes, I shall return by the streets; and as they are still more muddy than the boulevard, we should not get on in the sledge; besides, I begin to feel the cold. Do not you, petite?" said she, turning to the other lady.

"Yes, madame."

"Then, Weber, we will have the cabriolet."

"Very well, madame."

"What is the time, petite?"

The young lady looked at her watch, which, however, she could hardly see, as it was growing dark, and said, "A quarter to six, madame."

"Then at a quarter to seven, Weber."

Saying these words, the lady leaped lightly from the sledge, followed by her friend, and walked away quickly; while the coachman murmured, with a kind of respectful despair, sufficiently loud for his mistress to hear, "Oh, mein Gott! what imprudence."

The two ladies laughed, drew their cloaks closer round them, and went tramping along through the snow, with their little feet.

"You have good eyes, Andrée," said the lady who seemed the elder of the two, although she could not have been more than thirty or thirty-two; "try to read the name at the corner of that

street."

"Rue du Pont-aux-Choux, madame."

"Rue du Pont-aux-Choux! ah, mon Dieu, we must have come wrong. They told me the second street on the right; – but what a smell of hot bread!"

"That is not astonishing," said her companion, "for here is a baker's shop."

"Well, let us ask there for the Rue St. Claude," she said, moving to the door.

"Oh! do not you go in, madame; allow me," said Andrée.

"The Rue St. Claude, my pretty ladies?" said a cheerful voice. "Are you asking for the Rue St. Claude?"

The two ladies turned towards the voice, and saw, leaning against the door of the shop, a man who, in spite of the cold, had his chest and his legs quite bare.

"Oh! a naked man!" cried the young lady, half hiding behind her companion; "are we among savages?"

"Was not that what you asked for?" said the journeyman baker, for such he was, who did not understand her movement in the least, and, accustomed to his own costume, never dreamed of its effect upon them.

"Yes, my friend, the Rue St. Claude," said the elder lady, hardly able to keep from laughing.

"Oh, it is not difficult to find; besides, I will conduct you there myself;" and, suiting the action to the words, he began to move his long bony legs, which terminated in immense wooden shoes.

"Oh, no!" cried the elder lady, who did not fancy such a guide; "pray do not disturb yourself. Tell us the way, and we shall easily find it."

"First street to the right," said he, drawing back again.

"Thanks," said the ladies, who ran on as fast as they could, that he might not hear the laughter which they could no longer restrain.

CHAPTER II.
AN INTERIOR

If we do not calculate too much on the memory of our readers, they certainly know the Rue St. Claude, which joins at one end the boulevard, and at the other the Rue St. Louis; this was an important street in the first part of our story, when it was inhabited by Joseph Balsamo, his sibyl, Lorenza, and his master, Althotas. It was still a respectable street, though badly lighted, and by no means clean, but little known or frequented.

There was, however, at the corner of the boulevard a large house, with an aristocratic air; but this house, which might, from the number of its windows, have illuminated the whole street, had it been lighted up, was the darkest and most somber-looking of any. The door was never seen to open; and the windows were thick with dust, which seemed never disturbed. Sometimes an idler, attracted by curiosity, approached the gates and peeped through; all he could see, however, were masses of weeds growing between the stones of the courtyard, and green moss spreading itself over everything. Occasionally an enormous rat, sole inmate of those deserted domains, ran across the yard, on his way to his usual habitation in the cellars, which seemed, however, to be an excess of modesty, when he had the choice of so many fine sitting-rooms, where he need never fear the

intrusion of a cat.

At times, one or two of the neighbors, passing the house, might stop to take a survey, and one would say to the other:

"Well, what do you see?"

"Why," he would reply, "I see the rat."

"Oh! let me look at him. How fat he has grown!"

"That is not to be wondered at; he is never disturbed; and there must be some good pickings in the house. M. de Balsamo disappeared so suddenly, that he must have left something behind."

"But you forget that the house was half burned down."

And they would pursue their way.

Opposite this ruin was a high narrow house inclosed within a garden wall. From the upper windows, a light was to be seen; the rest was shrouded in darkness. Either all the inhabitants were already asleep, or they were very economical of wood and candles, which certainly were frightfully dear this winter. It is, however, with the fifth story only that we have any business.

We must, in the first place, take a survey of the house, and, ascending the staircase, open the first door. This room is empty and dark, however, but it opens into another of which the furniture deserves our attention.

The doors were gaudily painted, and it contained easy chairs covered in white, with yellow velvet trimming, and a sofa to match; the cushions of which, however, were so full of the wrinkles of old age as scarcely to be cushions any longer. Two

portraits hanging on the walls next attracted attention. A candle and a lamp – one placed on a stand, about three feet high, and the other on the chimney-piece – threw a constant light on them.

The first was a well-known portrait of Henry III., King of France and Poland; a cap on his head, surmounting his long pale face and heavy eyes; a pointed beard, and a ruff round his neck.

Under it was the inscription, traced in black letters, on a badly-gilded frame, "Henri de Valois."

The other portrait, of which the gilding was newer, and the painting more fresh and recent, represented a young lady with black eyes, a straight nose, and rather compressed lips, who appeared crushed under a tower of hair and ribbons, to which the cap of Henry III. was in the proportion of a mole-hill to a pyramid.

Under this portrait was inscribed, "Jeanne de Valois."

Glance at the fireless hearth, at the faded curtains, and then turn towards a little oak table in the corner; for there, leaning on her elbow, and writing the addresses of some letters, sits the original of this portrait.

A few steps off, in an attitude half curious, half respectful, stands a little old woman, apparently about sixty.

"Jeanne de Valois," says the inscription; but if this lady be indeed a Valois, one wonders however the portrait of Henry III., the sybarite king, the great voluptuary, could support the sight of so much poverty in a person not only of his race, but bearing his name.

In her person, however, this lady of the fifth story did no discredit to her portrait. She had white and delicate hands, which from time to time she rubbed together, as if to endeavor to put some warmth into them; her foot also, which was encased in a rather coquettish velvet slipper, was small and pretty.

The wind whistled through all the old doors, and penetrated the crevices of the shaking windows; and the old servant kept glancing sadly towards the empty grate. Her lady continued her occupation, talking aloud as she did so.

"Madame de Misery," she murmured; "first lady of the bedchamber to her majesty – I cannot expect more than six louis from her, for she has already given to me once." And she sighed. "Madame Patrick, lady's-maid to her majesty, two louis; M. d'Ormesson, an audience; M. de Calonne, some good advice, M. de Rohan, a visit; at least, we will try to induce him," said she, smiling at the thought. "Well, then, I think I may hope for eight louis within a week." Then, looking up, "Dame Clotilde," she said, "snuff this candle."

The old woman did as she was bid, and then resumed her place. This kind of inquisition seemed to annoy the young lady, for she said, "Pray go and look if you cannot find the end of a wax candle for me; this tallow is odious."

"There is none," replied the old woman.

"But just look."

"Where?"

"In the ante-chamber."

"It is so cold there."

"There is some one ringing," said the young lady.

"Madame is mistaken," replied the obstinate old woman.

"I thought I heard it, Dame Clotilde;" then, abandoning the attempt, she turned again to her calculations. "Eight louis! Three I owe for the rent, and five I have promised to M. de la Motte, to make him support his stay at Bar-sur-Aube. Pauvre diable, our marriage has not enriched him as yet – but patience;" and she smiled again, and looked at herself in the mirror that hung between the two portraits. "Well, then," she continued, "I still want one louis for going from Versailles to Paris and back again; living for a week, one louis; dress, and gifts to the porters of the houses where I go, four louis; but," said she, starting up, "some one is ringing!"

"No, madame," replied the old woman. "It is below, on the next floor."

"But I tell you it is not," said she angrily, as the bell rang yet louder.

Even the old woman could deny it no longer; so she hobbled off to open the door, while her mistress rapidly cleared away all the papers, and seated herself on the sofa, assuming the air of a person humble and resigned, although suffering.

It was, however, only her body that reposed; for her eyes, restless and unquiet, sought incessantly, first her mirror and then the door.

At last it opened, and she heard a young and sweet voice

saying, "Is it here that Madame la Comtesse de la Motte lives?"

"Madame la Comtesse de la Motte Valois," replied Clotilde.

"It is the same person, my good woman; is she at home?"

"Yes, madame; she is too ill to go out."

During this colloquy, the pretended invalid saw reflected in the glass the figure of a lady talking to Clotilde, unquestionably belonging to the higher ranks. She then saw her turn round, and say to some one behind, "We can go in – it is here."

And the two ladies we have before seen asking the way prepared to enter the room.

"Whom shall I announce to the countess?" said Clotilde.

"Announce a Sister of Charity," said the elder lady.

"From Paris?"

"No; from Versailles."

Clotilde entered the room, and the strangers followed her.

Jeanne de Valois seemed to rise with difficulty from her seat to receive her visitors.

Clotilde placed chairs for them, and then unwillingly withdrew.

CHAPTER III.
JEANNE DE LA MOTTE VALOIS

The first thought of Jeanne de la Motte was to examine the faces of her visitors, so as to gather what she could of their characters. The elder lady, who might have been, as we have said, about thirty-two years of age, was remarkably beautiful, although, at first sight, a great air of hauteur detracted slightly from the charm of her expression; her carriage was so proud, and her whole appearance so distingué that Jeanne could not doubt her nobility, even at a cursory glance.

She, however, seemed purposely to place herself as far as possible from the light, so as to be little seen.

Her companion appeared four or five years younger, and was not less beautiful. Her complexion was charming; her hair, drawn back from her temples, showed to advantage the perfect oval of her face; two large blue eyes, calm and serene; a well-formed mouth, indicating great frankness of disposition; a nose that rivaled the Venus de Medicis; such was the other face which presented itself to the gaze of Jeanne de Valois.

She inquired gently to what happy circumstance she owed the honor of their visit.

The elder lady signed to the younger, who thereupon said, "Madame, for I believe you are married – "

"I have the honor to be the wife of M. le Comte de la Motte, an excellent gentleman."

"Well, Madame la Comtesse, we are at the head of a charitable institution, and have heard concerning your condition things that interest us, and we consequently wished to have more precise details on the subject."

"Mesdames," replied Jeanne, "you see there the portrait of Henry III., that is to say, of the brother of my grandfather, for I am truly of the race of Valois, as you have doubtless been told." And she waited for the next question, looking at her visitors with a sort of proud humility.

"Madame," said the grave and sweet voice of the elder lady, "is it true, as we have also heard, that your mother was housekeeper at a place called Fontelle, near Bar-sur-Seine?"

Jeanne colored at this question, but replied, "It is true, madame; and," she went on, "as Marie Jossel, my mother, was possessed of rare beauty, my father fell in love with her, and married her, for it is by my father that I am nobly descended; he was a St. Rémy de Valois, direct descendant of the Valois who were on the throne."

"But how have you been reduced to this degree of poverty, madame?"

"Alas! that is easily told. You are not ignorant that after the accession of Henry IV., by which the crown passed from the house of Valois to that of Bourbon, there still remained many branches of the fallen family, obscure, doubtless, but

incontestably springing from the same root as the four brothers who all perished so miserably."

The two ladies made a sign of assent.

"Then," continued Jeanne, "these remnants of the Valois, fearing, in spite of their obscurity, to be obnoxious to the reigning family, changed their name of Valois into that of St. Rémy, which they took from some property, and they may be traced under this name down to my father, who, seeing the monarchy so firmly established, and the old branch forgotten, thought he need no longer deprive himself of his illustrious name, and again called himself Valois, which name he bore in poverty and obscurity in a distant province, while no one at the court of France even knew of the existence of this descendant of their ancient kings."

Jeanne stopped at these words, which she had spoken with a simplicity and mildness which created a favorable impression.

"You have, doubtless, your proofs already arranged, madame," said the elder lady, with kindness.

"Oh, madame," she replied, with a bitter smile, "proofs are not wanting – my father arranged them, and left them to me as his sole legacy; but of what use are proofs of a truth which no one will recognize?"

"Your father is then dead?" asked the younger lady.

"Alas! yes."

"Did he die in the provinces?"

"No, madame."

"At Paris, then?"

"Yes."

"In this room?"

"No, madame; my father, Baron de Valois, great-nephew of the King Henry III., died of misery and hunger; and not even in this poor retreat, not in his own bed, poor as that was. No; my father died side by side with the suffering wretches in the Hôtel Dieu!"

The ladies uttered an exclamation of surprise and distress.

"From what you tell me, madame, you have experienced, it is evident, great misfortunes; above all, the death of your father."

"Oh, if you heard all the story of my life, madame, you would see that my father's death does not rank among its greatest misfortunes."

"How, madame! You regard as a minor evil the death of your father?" said the elder lady, with a frown.

"Yes, madame; and in so doing I speak only as a pious daughter, for my father was thereby delivered from all the ills which he experienced in this life, and which continue to assail his family. I experience, in the midst of the grief which his death causes me, a certain joy in knowing that the descendant of kings is no longer obliged to beg his bread."

"To beg his bread?"

"Yes, madame; I say it without shame, for in all our misfortunes there was no blame to my father or myself."

"But you do not speak of your mother?"

"Well, with the same frankness with which I told you just now

that I blessed God for taking my father, I complain that He left me my mother."

The two ladies looked at each other, almost shuddering at these strange words.

"Would it be indiscreet, madame, to ask you for a more detailed account of your misfortunes?"

"The indiscretion, madame, would be in me, if I fatigued you with such a long catalogue of woes."

"Speak, madame," said the elder lady, so commandingly, that her companion looked at her, as if to warn her to be more guarded. Indeed, Madame de la Motte had been struck with this imperious accent, and stared at her with some astonishment.

"I listen, madame," she then said, in a more gentle tone; "if you will be good enough to inform us what we ask."

Her companion saw her shiver as she spoke, and fearing she felt cold, pushed towards her a rug, on which to place her feet, and which she had discovered under one of the chairs.

"Keep it yourself, my sister," said she, pushing it back again. "You are more delicate than I."

"Indeed, madame," said Jeanne, "it grieves me much to see you suffer from the cold; but wood is now so dear, and my stock was exhausted a week ago."

"You said, madame, that you were unhappy in having a mother," said the elder lady, returning to the subject.

"Yes, madame. Doubtless, such a blasphemy shocks you much, does it not?" said Jeanne; "but hear my explanation. I

have already had the honor to tell you that my father made a mésalliance, and married his housekeeper. Marie Jossel, my mother, instead of feeling gratified and proud of the honor he had done her, began by ruining my father, which certainly was not difficult to a person determined to consult only her own pleasures. And having reduced him to sell all his remaining property, she induced him to go to Paris to claim the rights to which his name entitled him. My father was easily persuaded; perhaps he hoped in the justice of the king. He came then, having first turned all he possessed into money. He had, besides me, another daughter, and a son.

"His son, unhappy as myself, vegetates in the lowest ranks of the army; the daughter, my poor sister, was abandoned, on the evening of our departure, before the house of a neighboring farmer.

"The journey exhausted our little resources – my father wore himself out in fruitless appeals – we scarcely ever saw him – our house was wretched – and my mother, to whom a victim was necessary, vented her discontent and ill-humor upon me: she even reproached me with what I ate, and for the slightest fault I was unmercifully beaten. The neighbors, thinking to serve me, told my father of the treatment I experienced. He endeavored to protect me, but his interference only served to embitter her still more against me.

"At last my father fell ill, and was confined first to the house, and then to his bed. My mother banished me from his room

on the pretext that I disturbed him. She made me now learn a sentence, which, child as I was, I shrank from saying; but she would drive me out into the street with blows, ordering me to repeat it to each passer-by, if I did not wish to be beaten to death."

"And what was this sentence?" asked the elder lady.

"It was this, madame: 'Have pity on a little orphan, who descends in a direct line from Henri de Valois.'"

"What a shame!" cried the ladies.

"But what effect did this produce on the people?" inquired Andrée.

"Some listened and pitied me, others were angry and menaced me; some kind people stopped and warned me that I ran a great risk from repeating such words; but I knew no other danger than that of disobeying my mother. The result was, however, as she hoped: I generally brought home a little money, which kept us for a time from starvation or the hospital; but this life became so odious to me, that at last, one day, instead of repeating my accustomed phrase, I sat on a doorstep all the time, and returned in the evening empty-handed. My mother beat me so that the next day I fell ill; then my poor father, deprived of all resources, was obliged to go to the Hôtel Dieu, where he died."

"Oh! what a horrible history," cried the ladies.

"What became of you after your father's death?" asked the elder lady.

"God took pity upon me a month after my father's death, my

mother ran away with a soldier, abandoning my brother and me. We felt ourselves relieved by her departure, and lived on public charity, although we never begged for more than enough to eat. One day, I saw a carriage going slowly along the Faubourg Saint Marcel. There were four footmen behind, and a beautiful lady inside; I held out my hand to her for charity. She questioned me, and my reply and my name seemed to strike her with surprise. She asked for my address, and the next day made inquiries, and finding that I had told her the truth, she took charge of my brother and myself; she placed my brother in the army, and me with a dressmaker."

"Was not this lady Madame de Boulainvilliers?"

"It was."

"She is dead, I believe?"

"Yes; and her death deprived me of my only protector."

"Her husband still lives, and is rich."

"Ah, madame, it is to him that I owe my later misfortunes. I had grown tall, and, as he thought, pretty, and he wished to put a price upon his benefits which I refused to pay. Meanwhile, Madame de Boulainvilliers died, having first married me to a brave and loyal soldier, M. de la Motte, but, separated from him, I seemed more abandoned after her death than I had been after that of my father. This is my history, madame, which I have shortened as much as possible, in order not to weary you."

"Where, then, is your husband?" asked the elder lady.

"He is in garrison at Bar-sur-Aube; he serves in the

gendarmerie, and is waiting, like myself, in hopes of better times."

"But you have laid your case before the court?"

"Undoubtedly."

"The name of Valois must have awakened some sympathy."

"I know not, madame, what sentiments it may have awakened, for I have received no answer to any of my petitions."

"You have seen neither the ministers, the king, nor the queen?"

"No one. Everywhere I have failed."

"You cannot now beg, however."

"No, madame; I have lost the habit; but I can die of hunger, like my poor father."

"You have no child?"

"No, madame; and my husband, by getting killed in the service of his king, will find for himself a glorious end to all our miseries."

"Can you, madame – I beg pardon if I seem intrusive – but can you bring forward the proofs of your genealogy?"

Jeanne rose, opened a drawer, and drew out some papers, which she presented to the lady, who rose to come nearer the light, that she might examine them; but seeing that Jeanne eagerly seized this opportunity to observe her more clearly than she had yet been able to do, she turned away as if the light hurt her eyes, turning her back to Madame de la Motte.

"But," said she, at last, "these are only copies."

"Oh! madame, I have the originals safe, and am ready to produce them."

"If any important occasion should present itself, I suppose?" said the lady, smiling.

"It is, doubtless, madame, an important occasion which procures me the honor of your visit, but these papers are so precious – "

"That you cannot show them to the first comer. I understand you."

"Oh, madame!" cried the countess; "you shall see them;" and opening a secret drawer above the other, she drew out the originals, which were carefully inclosed in an old portfolio, on which were the arms of the Valois.

The lady took them, and after examining them, said, "You are right; these are perfectly satisfactory, and you must hold yourself in readiness to produce them when called upon by proper authority."

"And what do you think I may expect, madame?" asked Jeanne.

"Doubtless a pension for yourself, and advancement for M. de la Motte, if he prove worthy of it."

"My husband is an honorable man, madame, and has never failed in his military duties."

"It is enough, madame," said the lady, drawing her hood still more over her face. She then put her hand in her pocket, and drew out first the same embroidered handkerchief with which we

before saw her hiding her face when in the sledge, then a small roll about an inch in diameter, and three or four in length, which she placed on the chiffonier, saying, "The treasurer of our charity authorizes me, madame, to offer you this small assistance, until you shall obtain something better."

Madame de la Motte threw a rapid glance at the little roll. "Three-franc pieces," thought she, "and there must be nearly a hundred of them; what a boon from heaven."

While she was thus thinking, the two ladies moved quickly into the outer room, where Clotilde had fallen asleep in her chair.

The candle was burning out in the socket, and the smell which came from it made the ladies draw out their smelling-bottles. Jeanne woke Clotilde, who insisted on following them with the obnoxious candle-end.

"Au revoir, Madame la Comtesse," said they.

"Where may I have the honor of coming to thank you?" asked Jeanne.

"We will let you know," replied the elder lady, going quickly down the stairs.

Madame de la Motte ran back into her room, impatient to examine her rouleau, but her foot struck against something, and stooping to pick it up, she saw a small flat gold box.

She was some time before she could open it, but having at last found the spring, it flew open and disclosed the portrait of a lady possessing no small beauty. The coiffure was German, and she wore a collar like an order. An M and a T encircled by a laurel

wreath ornamented the inside of the box. Madame de la Motte did not doubt, from the resemblance of the portrait to the lady who had just left her, that it was that of her mother, or some near relation.

She ran to the stairs to give it back to them; but hearing the street-door shut, she ran back, thinking to call them from the window, but arrived there only in time to see a cabriolet driving rapidly away. She was therefore obliged to keep the box for the present, and turned again to the little rouleau.

When she opened it, she uttered a cry of joy, "Double louis, fifty double louis, two thousand and four hundred francs!" and transported at the sight of more gold than she had ever seen before in her life, she remained with clasped hands and open lips. "A hundred louis," she repeated; "these ladies are then very rich. Oh! I will find them again."

CHAPTER IV.
BELUS

Madame de la Motte was not wrong in thinking that the cabriolet which she saw driving off contained the two ladies who had just left her.

They had, in fact, found it waiting for them on their exit. It was lightly built, open and fashionable, with high wheels, and a place behind for a servant to stand. It was drawn by a magnificent bay horse of Irish breed, short-tailed, and plump, which was driven by the same man whom we have already heard addressed by the name of Weber. The horse had become so impatient with waiting, that it was with some difficulty that Weber kept him stationary.

When he saw the ladies, he said, "Madame, I intended to bring Scipio, who is gentle and easy to manage, but unluckily he received an injury last evening, and I was forced to bring Bélus, and he is rather unmanageable."

"Oh, Weber, I do not mind in the least," said the lady; "I am well used to driving, and not at all timid."

"I know how well madame drives, but the roads are so bad. Where are we to go?"

"To Versailles."

"By the boulevards then, madame?"

"No, Weber; it freezes hard, and the boulevards will be dreadful; the streets will be better."

He held the horse for the ladies to get in, then jumped up behind, and they set off at a rapid pace.

"Well, Andrée, what do you think of the countess?" asked the elder lady.

"I think, madame," she replied, "that Madame de la Motte is poor and unfortunate."

"She has good manners, has she not?"

"Yes, doubtless."

"You are somewhat cold about her, Andrée."

"I must confess, there is a look of cunning in her face that does not please me."

"Oh, you are always difficult to please, Andrée; to please you, one must have every good quality. Now, I find the little countess interesting and simple, both in her pride and in her humility."

"It is fortunate for her, madame, that she has succeeded in pleasing you."

"Take care!" cried the lady, at the same time endeavoring to check her horse, which nearly ran over a street-porter at the corner of the Rue St. Antoine.

"Gare!" shouted Weber, in the voice of the Stentor.

They heard the man growling and swearing, in which he was joined by several people near, but Bélus soon carried them away from the sound, and they quickly reached the Place Baudoyer.

From thence the skilful conductress continued her rapid

course down the Rue de la Tisseranderie, a narrow unaristocratic street, always crowded. Thus, in spite of the reiterated warnings of herself and Weber, the numbers began to increase around them, many of whom cried fiercely, "Oh! the cabriolet! down with the cabriolet!"

Bélus, however, guided by the steady hand which held the reins, kept on his rapid course, and not the smallest accident had yet occurred.

But in spite of this skilful progress, the people seemed discontented at the rapid course of the cabriolet, which certainly required some care on their part to avoid, and the lady, perhaps half frightened at the murmurs, and knowing the present excited state of the people, only urged on her horse the faster to escape from them.

Thus they proceeded until they reached the Rue du Coq St. Honoré, and here had been raised one of the most beautiful of those monuments in snow of which we have spoken.

Round this a great crowd had collected, and they were obliged to stop until the people would make an opening for them to pass, which they did at last, but with great grumbling and discontent.

The next obstacle was at the gates of the Palais Royal, where, in a courtyard, which had been thrown open, were a host of beggars crowding round fires which had been lighted there, and receiving soup, which the servants of M. le Duc d'Orleans were distributing to them in earthen basins; and as in Paris a crowd collects to see everything, the number of the spectators of this

scene far exceeded that of the actors.

Here, then, they were again obliged to stop, and to their dismay, began to hear distinctly from behind loud cries of "Down with the cabriolet! down with those that crush the poor!"

"Can it be that those cries are addressed to us?" said the elder lady to her companion.

"Indeed, madame, I fear so," she replied.

"Have we, do you think, run over any one?"

"I am sure you have not."

But still the cries seemed to increase. A crowd soon gathered round them, and some even seized Bélus by the reins, who thereupon began to stamp and foam most furiously.

"To the magistrate! to the magistrate!" cried several voices.

The two ladies looked at each other in terror. Curious heads began to peep under the apron of the cabriolet.

"Oh, they are women," cried some; "Opera girls, doubtless," said others, "who think they have a right to crush the poor because they receive ten thousand francs a month."

A general shout hailed these words, and they began again to cry, "To the magistrate!"

The younger lady shrank back trembling with fear; the other looked around her with wonderful resolution, though with frowning brows and compressed lips.

"Oh, madame," cried her companione, "for heaven's sake, take care!"

"Courage, Andrée, courage!" she replied.

"But they will recognize you, madame."

"Look through the windows, if Weber is still behind the cabriolet."

"He is trying to get down, but the mob surrounds him. Ah! here he comes."

"Weber," said the lady in German, "we will get out."

The man vigorously pushed aside those nearest the carriage, and opened the door. The ladies jumped out, and the crowd instantly seized on the horse and cabriolet, which would evidently soon be in pieces.

"What in heaven's name does it all mean? Do you understand it, Weber?" said the lady, still in German.

"Ma foi, no, madame," he replied, struggling to free a passage for them to pass.

"But they are not men, they are wild beasts," continued the lady; "with what do they possibly reproach me?"

She was answered by a voice, whose polite and gentlemanly tone contrasted strangely with the savage murmurs of the people, and which said in excellent German, "They reproach you, madame, with having braved the police order, which appeared this morning, and which prohibited all cabriolets, which are always dangerous, and fifty times more so in this frost, when people can hardly escape fast enough, from driving through the streets until the spring."

The lady turned, and saw she was addressed by a young officer, whose distinguished and pleasing air, and fine figure,

could not but make a favorable impression.

"Oh, mon Dieu, monsieur," she said, "I was perfectly ignorant of this order."

"You are a foreigner, madame?" inquired the young officer.

"Yes, sir; but tell me what I must do? they are destroying my cabriolet."

"You must let them destroy it, and take advantage of that time to escape. The people are furious just now against all the rich, and on the pretext of your breaking this regulation would conduct you before the magistrate."

"Oh, never!" cried Andrée.

"Then," said the officer, laughing, "profit by the space which I shall make in the crowd, and vanish."

The ladies gathered from his manner that he shared the opinion of the people as to their station, but it was no time for explanations.

"Give us your arm to a cab-stand," said the elder lady, in a voice full of authority.

"I was going to make your horse rear, and thereby clear you a passage," said the young man, who did not much wish to take the charge of escorting them through the crowd; "the people will become yet more enraged, if they hear us speaking in a language unknown to them."

"Weber," cried the lady, in a firm voice, "make Bélus rear to disperse the crowd."

"And then, madame?"

"Remain till we are gone."

"But they will destroy the carriage."

"Let them; what does that matter? save Bélus if you can, but yourself above all."

"Yes, madame;" and a slight touch to the horse soon produced the desired effect of dispersing the nearest part of the crowd, and throwing down those who held by his reins.

"Your arm, sir!" again said the lady to the officer; "come on, petite," turning to Andrée.

"Let us go then, courageous woman," said the young man, giving his arm, with real admiration, to her who asked for it.

In a few minutes he had conducted them to a cab-stand, but the men were all asleep on their seats.

CHAPTER V.
THE ROAD TO VERSAILLES

The ladies were free from the crowd for the present, but there was some danger that they might be followed and recognized, when the same tumult would doubtless be renewed and escape a second time be more difficult. The young officer knew this, and therefore hastened to awaken one of the half-frozen and sleepy men. So stupefied, however, did they seem, that he had great difficulty in rousing one of them. At last he took him by the collar and shook him roughly.

"Gently, gently!" cried the man, sitting up.

"Where do you wish to go, ladies?" asked the officer.

"To Versailles," said the elder lady, still speaking German.

"Oh, to Versailles!" repeated the coachman; "four miles and a half over this ice. No, I would rather not."

"We will pay well," said the lady.

This was repeated to the coachman in French by the young officer.

"But how much?" said the coachman; "you see it is not only going, I must come back again."

"A louis; is that enough?" asked the lady of the officer, who, turning to the coachman, said, —

"These ladies offer you a louis."

"Well, that will do, though I risk breaking my horses' legs."

"Why, you rascal, you know that if you were paid all the way there and back, it would be but twelve francs, and we offer you twenty-four."

"Oh, do not stay to bargain," cried the lady; "he shall have twenty louis if he will only set off at once."

"One is enough, madame."

"Come down, sir, and open the door."

"I will be paid first," said the man.

"You will!" said the officer fiercely.

"Oh! let us pay," said the lady, putting her hand in her pocket. She turned pale. "Oh! mon Dieu, I have lost my purse! Feel for yours, Andrée."

"Oh! madame, it is gone too."

They looked at each other in dismay, while the young officer watched their proceedings, and the coachman sat grinning, and priding himself on his caution.

The lady was about to offer her gold chain as a pledge, when the young officer drew out a louis, and offered it to the man, who thereupon got down and opened the door.

The ladies thanked him warmly and got in.

"And now, sir, drive these ladies carefully and honestly."

The ladies looked at each other in terror; they could not bear to see their protector leave them.

"Oh! madame," said Andrée, "do not let him go away."

"But why not? we will ask for his address, and return him

his louis to-morrow, with a little note of thanks, which you shall write."

"But, madame, suppose the coachman should not keep faith with us, and should turn us out half way, what would become of us?"

"Oh! we will take his number."

"Yes, madame, I do not deny that you could have him punished afterwards; but meanwhile, you would not reach Versailles, and what would they think?"

"True," replied her companion.

The officer advanced to take leave.

"Monsieur," said Andrée, "one word more, if you please."

"At your orders, madame," he said politely, but somewhat stiffly.

"Monsieur, you cannot refuse us one more favor, after serving us so much?"

"What is it, madame?"

"We are afraid of the coachman, who seems so unwilling to go."

"You need not fear," replied he; "I have his number, and if he does not behave well, apply to me."

"To you, sir?" said Andrée in French, forgetting herself; "we do not even know your name."

"You speak French," exclaimed the young man, "and you have been condemning me all this time to blunder on in German!"

"Excuse us, sir," said the elder lady, coming to Andrée's

rescue, "but you must see, that though not perhaps foreigners, we are strangers in Paris, and above all, out of our places in a hackney coach. You are sufficiently a man of the world to see that we are placed in an awkward position. I feel assured you are generous enough to believe the best of us, and to complete the service you have rendered, and above all, to ask us no questions."

"Madame," replied the officer, charmed with her noble, yet pleasing manner, "dispose of me as you will."

"Then, sir, have the kindness to get in, and accompany us to Versailles."

The officer instantly placed himself opposite to them, and directed the man to drive on.

After proceeding in silence for some little time, he began to feel himself surrounded with delicate and delicious perfumes, and gradually began to think better of the ladies' position. "They are," thought he, "ladies who have been detained late at some rendezvous, and are now anxious to regain Versailles, much frightened, and a little ashamed; still, two ladies, driving themselves in a cabriolet! However," recollected he, "there was a servant behind; but then again, no money on either of them, but probably the footman carried the purse; and the carriage was certainly a very elegant one, and the horse could not have been worth less than one hundred and fifty louis; therefore they must be rich, so that the accidental want of money proves nothing. But why speak a foreign language when they must be French? However, that at least shows a good education, and they speak

both languages with perfect purity; besides, there is an air of distinction about them. The supplication of the younger one was touching, and the request of the other was noble and imposing; indeed, I begin to feel it dangerous to pass two or three hours in a carriage with two such pretty women, pretty and discreet also; for they do not speak, but wait for me to begin."

On their parts, the ladies were doubtless thinking of him, for just as he had arrived at these conclusions, the elder lady said to her companion, but this time in English:

"Really, this coachman crawls along; we shall never reach Versailles; I fear our poor companion must be terribly ennuyé."

"Particularly," answered Andrée, smiling, "as our conversation has not been very amusing."

"Do you not think he has a most distinguished air?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Besides, he wears the uniform of a naval officer, and all naval officers are of good family. He looks well in it, too, for he is very handsome."

Here the young man interrupted them. "Your pardon, ladies," said he, in excellent English, "but I must tell you that I understand English perfectly; I do not, however, know Spanish; therefore, if you can and like to speak in that language, you are safe from my understanding you."

"Oh, monsieur," replied the lady, laughing, "we had no harm to say of you, as you must have heard; therefore we will content ourselves with French for the remainder of the time."

"Thanks, madame, but if my presence be irksome to you – "

"You cannot suppose that, sir, as it was we who begged you to accompany us."

"Exacted it, even," said Andrée.

"Oh, madame, you overwhelm me; pray pardon me my momentary hesitation; but Paris is so full of snares and deceptions."

"You then took us for – "

"Monsieur took us for snares, that is all."

"Oh! ladies," said the young man, quite humiliated, "I assure you, I did not."

"But what is the matter? The coach stops."

"I will see, madame."

"Oh! I think we are overturning; pray take care, sir."

And Andrée, in her terror, laid her hand on the young man's shoulder.

He, yielding to an impulse, attempted to seize her little hand; but she had in a moment thrown herself back again in the carriage. He therefore got out, and found the coachman engaged in raising one of his horses, which had fallen on the ice.

The horse, with his aid, was soon on its legs again, and they pursued their way.

It seemed, however, that this little interruption had destroyed the intimacy which had begun to spring up, for after the ladies had asked and been told the cause of their detention, all relapsed into silence.

The young man, however, who had derived some pleasure from the touch of that little hand, thought he would at least have a foot in exchange; he therefore stretched out his, and endeavored to touch hers, which, was, however, quickly withdrawn; and when he did just touch that of the elder lady, she said, with great sang-froid, —

"I fear, sir, I am dreadfully in your way."

He colored up to the ears, and felt thankful to the darkness, which prevented it from being seen. After this, he desisted, and remained perfectly still, fearing even to renew the conversation, lest he should seem impertinent to these ladies, to whom, at first, he had thought himself rather condescending in his politeness.

Still, in spite of himself, he felt more and more strongly attracted towards them, and an increasing interest in them. From time to time he heard them speak softly to each other, and he caught these words:

"So late an hour! what excuse for being out?"

At last the coach stopped again, but this time it was no accident, but simply that they had arrived at Versailles.

The young man thought the time had passed with marvelous quickness.

"We are at Versailles," said the coachman.

"Where must he stop, ladies?" asked the officer.

"At the Place d'Armes."

"At the Place d'Armes, coachman," said the officer; "go on. – I must say something to them," thought he, "or they will now think

me a stupid, as they must before have thought me impertinent."

"Mesdames," said he, "you are at length arrived."

"Thanks to your generous assistance."

"What trouble we have given you," added Andrée.

"Oh, madame, do not speak of it!"

"Well, sir, we shall not forget; will you tell us your name?"

"My name?"

"Certainly, sir; you do not wish to make us a present of a louis, I hope."

"Oh, madame, if that is it," said the young man, rather piqued, "I yield; I am the Comte de Charney, and as madame has already remarked, a naval officer."

"Charney," repeated the elder lady, "I shall not forget."

"Yes, madame, Georges de Charney."

"And you live – ?"

"Hôtel des Princes, Rue de Richelieu."

The coach stopped. The elder lady opened the door and jumped out quickly, holding out a hand to her companion.

"But pray, ladies," said he, preparing to follow them, "take my arm; you are not yet at your own home."

"Oh, sir, do not move."

"Not move?"

"No; pray remain in the coach."

"You cannot walk alone at this time of night; it is impossible."

"Now, you see," said the elder lady, gaily, "after almost refusing to oblige us, you wish to be too obliging."

"But, madame – "

"Sir, remain to the end a loyal and gallant cavalier; we thank you, M. de Charney, with all our hearts, and will not even ask your word – "

"To do what, madame?"

"To shut the door, and order the man to drive back to Paris, without even looking where we go, which you will do, will you not?"

"I will obey you, madame; coachman, back again." And he put a second louis into the man's hand, who joyfully set off on his return.

The young man sighed, as he took his place on the cushions which the unknown ladies had just occupied.

They remained motionless till the coach was out of sight, and then took their way towards the castle.

CHAPTER VI.
LAURENT

At this moment our heroines heard the clock strike from the church of St. Louis.

"Oh, mon Dieu! a quarter to twelve," they cried, in terror.

"See, all the doors are shut," said Andrée.

"Oh, that is nothing; for, if they were open, we would not go in here. Let us go round by the reservoirs." And they turned to the right, where there was a private entrance.

When they arrived there, "The door is shut, Andrée," said the elder lady, rather uneasily.

"Let us knock, madame."

"No, we will call; Laurent must be waiting for me, for I told him perhaps I should return late."

"I will call," said Andrée, approaching the door.

"Who is there?" said a voice from inside.

"Oh, it is not Laurent!" said she, terrified.

"Is it not?" and the other lady advanced, and called softly, "Laurent."

No answer.

"Laurent?" again she called, louder.

"There is no Laurent here," replied the voice, rudely.

"But," said Andrée, "whether he be here or not, open the

door."

"I cannot open it."

"But Laurent would have opened it immediately."

"I have my orders," was all the reply.

"Who are you, then?"

"Rather, who are you?"

Rude as the question was, it was no time to find fault, so they answered, "We are ladies of her majesty's suite, we lodge in the castle, and we wish to get home."

"Well, I, mesdames, am a Suisse of the Salischamade company, and I shall do just the contrary of Laurent, for I shall leave you at the door."

"Oh!" murmured the ladies, in terror and anger.

Then, making an effort over herself, the elder lady said, "My friend, I understand that you are obeying orders, and I do not quarrel with you for that – it is a soldier's duty; only do me the favor to call Laurent – he cannot be far distant."

"I cannot quit my post."

"Then send some one."

"I have no one to send."

"For pity's sake!"

"Oh, mon Dieu, sleep in the town, that is no great thing; if I were shut out of the barracks, I would soon find a bed."

"Listen," said the lady again; "you shall have twenty louis, if you open this door."

"And twelve years at the galleys: no, thank you. Forty-eight

francs a year is not sufficient pay for that."

"I will get you made a sergeant."

"Yes, and he who gave me the order will have me shot."

"And who did give you the order?"

"The king."

"The king!" cried they; "oh, we are lost!"

"Is there no other door?"

"Oh! madame, if this one is closed, be sure all the others will be so also," said Andrée.

"You are right, Andrée. 'Tis a horrible trick of the king," she said, with a contempt almost menacing.

There was a sort of bank outside the door, which they sank down upon in despair. They could see the light under the door, and could hear the steps of the sentinel as he paced to and fro.

Within this little door was salvation; without, shame and scandal.

"Oh! to-morrow, to-morrow, when they will find out," murmured the elder lady.

"You will tell the truth, madame."

"But shall I be believed?"

"Oh! we can prove it; besides, the soldier will not stay all night; he will be relieved, and perhaps his successor will be more complacent."

"Yes, but the patrol will pass directly, and will find me here, waiting outside. It is infamous; I am suffocated with rage."

"Oh, take courage, madame! you, who are always so brave."

"It is a plot, Andrée, in order to ruin me. This door is never closed. Oh, I shall die!"

At this moment they heard a step approaching, and then the voice of a young man, singing gaily as he went along.

"That voice," cried the lady, "I know it, I am sure."

"Oh, yes, madame, he will save us."

A young man, wrapped up in a fur riding-coat, came quickly up, and without noticing them, knocked at the door, and called, "Laurent."

"Brother," said the elder lady, touching him on the shoulder.

"The queen," cried he, taking off his hat.

"Hush," said she.

"You are not alone?"

"No, I am with Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney."

"Oh, good evening, mademoiselle."

"Good evening, monseigneur."

"Are you going out, madame?" asked he.

"No."

"Then you are going in."

"We wished to do so."

"Have you not called Laurent?"

"Yes, we have, but – "

"But what?"

"You call Laurent, and you will see."

The young man, whom the reader has, perhaps, already recognized as the Comte d'Artois, approached and again called

"Laurent."

"I warn you," answered from within the voice of the Suisse, "that if you torment me any more I will go and fetch my commanding officer."

"Who is this?" asked the count, turning round in astonishment to the queen.

"A Swiss who has been substituted for Laurent."

"By whom?"

"By the king."

"The king?"

"Yes, he told us so himself."

"And with orders?"

"Most strict, apparently."

"Diable! we must capitulate."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Offer him money."

"I have already done so, and he has refused it."

"Offer him promotion."

"I have offered that also, but he would not listen."

"Then there is but one way."

"What?"

"To make a noise."

"My dear Charles, you will compromise us."

"Not the least in the world; you keep in the background, I will knock like thunder, and shout like a madman; they will open at last, and you can slide in with me."

"Try, then."

The young prince began calling Laurent, knocking at the door and striking with his sword, till at last the Swiss said, "Ah, well! I will call my officer."

"Go and call him, that is just what I want."

They soon heard other steps approaching. The queen and Andrée kept close, ready to slip in if the door should open; then they heard the Swiss say, "It is a gentleman, lieutenant, who insists on coming in."

"Well, I suppose that is not astonishing, as we belong to the castle," said the count.

"It is no doubt a natural wish, but a forbidden one," replied the officer.

"Forbidden – by whom? morbleu!"

"By the king."

"But the king would not wish an officer of the castle to sleep outside."

"Sir, I am not the judge of that; I have only to obey orders."

"Come, lieutenant, open the door; we cannot talk through this oak."

"Sir, I repeat to you that my orders are to keep it shut; and if you are an officer, as you say, you know that I must obey."

"Lieutenant, you speak to the colonel of a regiment."

"Excuse me, then, colonel, but my orders are positive."

"But they cannot concern a prince. Come, sir, a prince cannot be kept out."

"My prince, I am in despair, but the king has ordered – "

"The king has ordered you to turn away his brother like a beggar or a robber? I am the Comte d'Artois, sir. Mordieu! you keep me here freezing at the door."

"Monseigneur, God is my witness that I would shed my blood for your royal highness. But the king gave me his orders in person, and confiding to me the charge of this door, ordered me not to open to any one, should it be even himself, after eleven o'clock. Therefore, monseigneur, I ask your pardon humbly for disobeying you, but I am a soldier, and were it her majesty the queen who asked admittance, I should be forced most unwillingly to refuse."

Having said this, the officer turned away and left the place.

"We are lost," said the queen.

"Do they know that you are out?" asked the count.

"Alas, I know not!"

"Perhaps, then, this order is leveled against me; the king knows I often go out at night, and stay late. Madame la Comtesse d'Artois must have heard something, and complained to him, and hence this tyrannical order."

"Ah, no, brother, I thank you for trying to reassure me, but I feel that it is against me these precautions are taken."

"Impossible, sister! the king has too much esteem – "

"Meanwhile, I am left at the door, and to-morrow a frightful scandal will be the result. I know well I have an enemy near the king."

"It is possible; however, I have an idea."

"What? only be quick. If you can but save us from the ridicule of this position, it is all I care for."

"Oh, I will save you; I am not more foolish than he, for all his learning."

"Than whom?"

"Ah, pardieu, the Comte de Provence."

"Ah, then, you also know my enemy."

"Is he not the enemy of all that are young and beautiful, of all who are better than himself?"

"Count, I believe you know something about this order."

"Perhaps, but do not let us stop here. Come with me, dear sister."

"Where?"

"You shall see, somewhere where at least you will be warm, and en route I will tell you all I know about this. Take my arm, sister, and you the other, Madlle. de Taverney, and let us turn to the right."

"Well, but now go on," said the queen.

"This evening after the king's supper, he came to his cabinet. He had been talking all day to Count Haga, you had not been seen – "

"No, at two o'clock I left to go to Paris."

"I know it. The king, allow me to tell you, dear sister, was thinking no more about you than about Haroun-al-Raschid, or his Vizier Giaffar, and was talking geography. I listened with

some impatience, for I also wanted to go out; probably not with the same object as you."

"Where are we going?" interrupted the queen.

"Oh, close by; take care, there is a snow-heap. Madlle. de Taverney, if you leave my arm you will certainly fall. But to return to the king: he was thinking of nothing but latitude and longitude, when M. de Provence said to him, 'I should like to pay my respects to the queen.'

"'The queen sups at home,' replied the king.

"'Oh, I believed her at Paris.'

"'No, she is at home,' said the king, quietly.

"'I have just come from there, and been denied to her,' said M. de Provence.

"Then I saw the king frown. He dismissed us, and doubtless went to make inquiries. Louis is jealous by fits, you know; he must have asked to see you, and being refused, become suspicious."

"Yes, Madame de Misery had orders to do so."

"Then, to know whether you were out or not, he has given these strict orders."

"Oh, it is shameful treatment. Confess, is it not?"

"Indeed, I think so; but here we are."

"This house?"

"Does it displease you?"

"No, I do not say that – it is charming. But your servants?"

"Well!"

"If they see me."

"Come in, sister, and I will guarantee that no one sees you, not even whoever opens the door."

"Impossible!"

"We will try," said he, laughing; and laying his hand on one of the panels, the door flew open.

"Enter, I pray you," said he, "there is no one near."

The queen looked at Andrée, then, making up her mind, went in, and the door shut behind them.

She found herself in a vestibule, small, but ornamented in perfect taste. The floor was mosaic work, representing bouquets of flowers, while numerous rose-trees on marble brackets scented the air with a perfume equally delicious as rare at that time of the year.

It looked all so charming, that the ladies began to forget their fears and scruples.

"So far well," said the queen; "we have a shelter, at all events, and seemingly a very charming one; but you had better see to one thing – that is, to keep off your servants."

"Oh, nothing more easy;" and the prince, seizing a little bell which hung on one of the pillars, rang one clear stroke.

"Oh!" cried the queen, frightened, "is that the way to keep them off? I should have thought it would bring them."

"If I had rung again, it would have done so, but when I only ring once, they know they are not wanted."

"Oh, you are a man of precaution!" said the queen laughing.

"Now, dear sister, take the trouble to go up-stairs."

"Let us obey," said the queen, "the genius of this place appears not disagreeable;" and they went up, their steps making no sound on the thick Aubusson carpet.

At the top, the prince rang another bell, which gave them a fresh start of surprise, and their astonishment increased when they saw the doors open of themselves.

"Really, Andrée," said the queen, "I begin to tremble, do not you?"

"Oh, madame, I shall follow fearlessly wherever your majesty goes."

"Enter," said the prince, "for here is your apartment;" and he ushered them into a charming little room, furnished 'en buhl,' with a painted ceiling and walls, and a rosewood floor. It opened into a boudoir, fitted up with white cashmere, beautifully embroidered with groups of flowers, and hung with tapestry of exquisite workmanship. Beyond the boudoir was a bedroom, painted blue, hung with curtains of silk and lace, and with a sumptuous bed in an alcove. A fire burned on the hearth, and a dozen perfumed wax-lights in candelabra.

Such were the marvels which presented themselves to the eyes of the wondering ladies. No living being was to be seen; fire and lights seemed to have come without hands.

The queen stopped on the threshold of the bedroom, looking half afraid to enter.

"Sister," said the count, "these are my bachelor apartments;

here I come alone."

"Always?" asked the queen.

"Doubtless," answered he.

"I understand now," said the queen, "why Madame la Comtesse is sometimes unquiet."

"Confess, however, that if she is unquiet to-night, it Will be without reason."

"To-night, I do not say, but other nights." Then, sitting down; "I am dreadfully tired," she said; "are not you, Andrée?"

"I can scarcely stand, and if your majesty permits – "

"Indeed you look ill, mademoiselle," said the count.

"You must go to bed," said the queen. "M. le Comte gives us up this room; do you not, Charles?"

"Entirely, madame."

"One moment, count. If you go away, how can we recall you?"

"You will not need me; you are mistress of this house."

"But there are other rooms."

"Certainly, there is a dining-room, which I advise you to visit."

"With a table ready spread, no doubt."

"Oh, yes, and Mademoiselle de Taverney, who seems to me to need it much, will find there jellies or chicken, and wine, and you, sister, plenty of those fruits you are so fond of."

"And no servants?"

"None."

"We will see; but how to return?"

"You must not think of returning to-night. At six o'clock the

gates will be opened, go out a quarter before, you will find in these drawers mantles of all colors and all shapes, if you wish to disguise yourselves. Go therefore to the château, regain your rooms, go to bed, and all will be right."

"But you, what will you do?"

"Oh, I am going away."

"We turn you out, my poor brother!"

"It is better for me not to remain in the same house with you."

"But you must sleep somewhere."

"Do not fear; I have three other houses like this."

The queen laughed. "And he pretends Madame la Comtesse has no cause to be anxious; oh, I will tell her!"

"You dare not."

"It is true, we are dependent upon you. Then, to go away to-morrow morning without seeing any one?"

"You must ring once, as I did below, and the door will open."

"By itself?"

"By itself."

"Then good night, brother."

"Good night, sister." He bowed and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.
THE QUEEN'S BED-CHAMBER

The next day, or rather the same morning, for our last chapter brought us to two o'clock, the King Louis XVI., in a violet-colored morning dress, in some disorder, and with no powder in his hair, knocked at the door of the queen's ante-chamber.

It was opened by one of her women.

"The queen?" asked Louis, in a brusque manner.

"Her majesty is asleep, sire."

The king made a movement, as though to pass in but the woman did not move.

"Do you not see," he said, "that I wish to come in."

"But the queen is asleep, sire," again she said timidly.

"I told you to let me pass," answered the king, going in as he spoke.

When he reached the door of the bedroom, the king saw Madame de Misery, the first lady-in-waiting, who was sitting reading from her mass book.

She rose on seeing him. "Sire," she said, in a low voice, and with a profound reverence, "her majesty has not yet called for me."

"Really?" said the king, in an ironical tone.

"But, sire, it is only half-past six, and her majesty never rings

before seven."

"And you are sure that her majesty is asleep in bed?"

"I cannot affirm that she is asleep, sire, but I can that she is in bed."

The king could contain himself no longer, but went straight to the door, which he opened with some noise. The room was in complete darkness, the shutters closed, and the curtains drawn. A night lamp burned on a bracket, but it only gave a dim and feeble light.

The king walked rapidly towards the bed.

"Oh, Madame de Misery," said the queen, "how noisy you are – you have disturbed me!"

The king remained stupefied. "It is not Madame de Misery," he murmured.

"What, is it you, sire?" said Marie Antoinette, raising herself up.

"Good morning, madame," said the king, in a surly tone.

"What good wind blows you here, sire? Madame de Misery, come and open the shutters."

She came in instantly, as usual, opened all the doors and windows, to let in light and fresh air.

"You sleep well, madame," said the king, seating himself, and casting scrutinizing glances round the room.

"Yes, sire, I read late, and had your majesty not disturbed me, might have slept for some time longer."

"How was it that you did not receive visitors yesterday?" asked

the king.

"Whom do you mean? – M. de Provence," said the queen, with great presence of mind.

"Yes, exactly; he wished to pay his respects to you, and was refused."

"Well!"

"They said you were out."

"Did they say that?" asked the queen carelessly. "Madame de Misery – "

The lady appeared, bringing in with her a number of letters on a gold salver. "Did your majesty call?" she asked.

"Yes. Did they tell M. de Provence yesterday that I was out? Will you tell the king, for really I forget."

"Sire," said Madame de Misery, while the queen took her letters and began to read, "I told Monseigneur le Comte de Provence that her majesty did not receive."

"And by whose orders?"

"By the queen's, sire."

Meanwhile, the queen had opened one of the letters, and read these lines: "You returned from Paris yesterday, and entered the château at eight o'clock in the evening; Laurent saw you."

Madame de Misery left the room.

"Pardon, sire," said the queen, "but will you answer me one question?"

"What, madame?"

"Am I, or am I not, at liberty to see M. de Provence only when

it pleases me?"

"Oh, perfectly at liberty, madame, but – "

"Well, his conversation wearies me; besides, he does not love me, and I like him no better. I expected his visit, and went to bed at eight o'clock to avoid it. But you look disturbed, sire."

"I believed you to be in Paris yesterday."

"At what time?"

"At the time at which you pretend to have gone to bed."

"Doubtless, I went to Paris; but what of that?"

"All, madame, depends on what time you returned."

"Oh, you wish to know at what time exactly I returned?"

"Yes."

"It is easy. Madame de Misery – "

The Lady reappeared.

"What time was it when I returned from Paris yesterday?"

"About eight o'clock, your majesty."

"I do not believe it," said the king, "you make a mistake, Madame de Misery."

The lady walked to the door, and called, "Madame Dural!"

"Yes, madame," replied a voice.

"At what time did her majesty return from Paris yesterday?"

"About eight o'clock, madame," replied the other.

"The king thinks we are mistaken."

Madame Dural put her head out of the window, and cried, "Laurent!"

"Who is Laurent?" asked the king.

"The porter at the gate where her majesty entered," said Madame de Misery.

"Laurent," said Madame Dural, "what time was it when her majesty came home last evening?"

"About eight o'clock," answered Laurent.

Madame de Misery then left the room, and the king and queen remained alone.

He felt ashamed of his suspicions.

The queen, however, only said coldly, "Well, sire, is there anything else you wish to know?"

"Oh, nothing!" cried he, taking her hands in his; "forgive me; I do not know what came into my head – my joy is as great as my repentance. You will not be angry, will you? I am in despair at having annoyed you."

The queen withdrew her hand, and said; "Sire, a queen of France must not tell a falsehood."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I did not return at eight o'clock last evening."

The king drew back in surprise.

"I mean," continued the queen in the same cold manner, "that I only returned at six o'clock this morning."

"Madame!"

"And that, but for the kindness of M. le Comte d'Artois, who gave me an asylum, and lodged me out of pity in one of his houses, I should have been left all night at the door of the château like a beggar."

"Ah! you had not then returned?" said the king, gloomily; "then I was right."

"Sire, you have not behaved towards me as a gentleman should."

"In what, madame?"

"In this – that if you wish to know whether I return late or early, you have no need to close the gates, with orders not to open them, but simply to come to me and ask, 'Madame, at what time did you return?' You have no more reason to doubt, sire. Your spies have been deceived, your precautions nullified, and your suspicions dissipated. I saw you ashamed of the part you had played, and I might have continued to triumph in my victory, but I think your proceedings shameful for a king, and unworthy of a gentleman; and I would not refuse myself the satisfaction of telling you so.

"It is useless, sire," she continued, seeing the king about to speak; "nothing can excuse your conduct towards me."

"On the contrary, madame," replied he, "nothing is more easy. Not a single person in the château suspected that you had not already returned; therefore no one could think that my orders referred to you. Probably they were attributed to the dissipations of M. le Comte d'Artois – for that I care nothing. Therefore, madame, appearances were saved, as far as you were concerned. I wished simply to give you a secret lesson, from which the amount of irritation you show leads me to hope you will profit. Therefore, I still think I was in the right, and do not repent what

I have done."

The queen listened, and seemed to calm herself, by an effort, to prepare for the approaching contest. "Then, sire," she said, "you think you need no excuse for keeping at the door of your castle the daughter of Maria Theresa, your wife, and the mother of your children? No! it is in your eyes a pleasantry worthy of a king, and of which the morality doubles the value. It is nothing to you, to have forced the Queen of France to pass the night in this 'petite maison,' where the Comte d'Artois receives the ladies of the Opera and the 'femmes galantes' of your court. Oh no! that is nothing. A philosopher king is above all such considerations. Only, on this occasion, I have reason to thank heaven that my brother-in-law is a dissipated man, as his dissipation has saved me from disgrace, and his vices have sheltered my honor."

The king colored, and moved uneasily on his chair.

"Oh yes!" continued the queen, with a bitter laugh, "I know that you are a moral king, but your morality produces strange effects. You say that no one knew that I was out. Will you tell me that M. de Provence, your instigator, did not know it; or M. le Comte d'Artois – or my women? who, by my orders, told you falsehoods this morning; or Laurent – bought by M. d'Artois and by me? Let us continue this habit, sire; you, to set spies and Swiss guards; and I, to buy them over and cheat you; and in a month we will calculate together how much the dignity of the throne and our marriage has gained by it."

It was evident that her words had made a great impression on

him to whom they were addressed.

"You know," said he, in an altered voice, "that I am always sincere, and willing to acknowledge if I have been wrong. Will you prove to me that you were right to go into Paris in sledges, accompanied by a gay party, which, in the present unhappy state of things, is likely to give offense? Will you prove to me, that you were right to disappear in Paris, like maskers at a ball, and only to reappear scandalously late at night, when every one else was asleep? You have spoken of the dignity of the throne, and of marriage; think you that it befits a queen, a wife, and a mother, to act thus?"

"I will reply in a few words, sire; for it seems to me, that such accusations merit nothing but contempt. I left Versailles in a sledge, because it is the quickest way of getting to Paris at present. I went with Madlle. de Taverney, whose reputation is certainly one of the purest in our court. I went to Paris, I repeat, to verify the fact that the King of France, the great upholder of morality – he who takes care of poor strangers, warms the beggars, and earns the gratitude of the people by his charities, leaves dying of hunger, exposed to every attack of vice and misery, one of his own family – one who is as much as himself a descendant of the kings who have reigned in France."

"What!" cried the king in surprise.

"I mounted," continued the queen, "into a garret, and there saw, without fire, almost without light, and without money, the granddaughter of a great prince, and I gave one hundred louis

to this victim of royal forgetfulness and neglect. Then, as I was detained late there, and as the frost was severe, and horses go slowly over ice, particularly hackney-coach horses – "

"Hackney-coach horses!" cried the king. "You returned in a hackney-coach?"

"Yes, sire – No. 107."

"Oh, oh!" said the king, with every sign of vexation.

"Yes, and only too happy to get it," said the queen.

"Madame!" interrupted he, "you are full of noble feelings; but this impetuous generosity becomes a fault. Remember," continued he, "that I never suspected you of anything that was not perfectly pure and honest: it is only your mode of acting and adventurous spirit that displease me. You have, as usual, been doing good, but the way you set about it makes it injurious to yourself. This is what I reproach you with. You say that I have faults to repair – that I have failed in my duty to a member of my own family. Tell me who the unfortunate is, and he shall no longer have reason to complain."

"The name of Valois, sire, is sufficiently illustrious not to have escaped your memory."

"Ah!" cried Louis, with a shout of laughter, "I know now whom you mean. La petite Valois, is it not? – a countess of something or other."

"De la Motte, sire."

"Precisely, De la Motte; her husband is a gendarme."

"Yes, sire."

"And his wife is an intrigante. Oh! you need not trouble yourself about her: she is moving heaven and earth; she worries my ministers, she teases my aunts, and overwhelms me with supplications, memorials, and genealogies."

"And all this uselessly, sire."

"I must confess it."

"Is she, or is she not, a Valois?"

"I believe she is."

"Well, then, I ask an honorable pension for her and a regiment for her husband. In fact, a decent position for this branch of the royal family."

"An honorable pension? Mon Dieu! how you run on, madame. Do you know what a terrible hole this winter has made in my funds? A regiment for this little gendarme, who speculated in marrying a Valois? Why, I have no regiments to give, even to those who deserve them, or who can pay for them. An income befitting a Valois for these people? when we, monarch as we are, have not one befitting a rich gentleman. Why, M. d'Orleans has sent his horses and mules to England for sale, and has cut off a third of his establishment. I have put down my wolf-hounds, and given up many other things. We are all on the privation list, great and small."

"But these Valois must not die of hunger."

"Have you not just given them one hundred louis?"

"And what is that?"

"A royal gift."

"Then give such another."

"Yours will do for us both."

"No, I want a pension for them."

"No, I will not bind myself to anything fixed; they will not let me forget them, and I will give when I have money to spare. I do not think much of this little Valois."

Saying these words, Louis held out his hand to the queen, who, however, turned from him and said, "No, you are not good to me, and I am angry."

"You bear malice," said the king "and I – "

"Oh, you shut the gates against me; you come at half-past six to my room, and force open the door in a passion."

"I was not in a passion," said the king.

"You are not now, you mean."

"What will you give me if I prove that I was not, even when I came in?"

"Let me see the proof."

"Oh, it is very easy; I have it in my pocket."

"Bah!" said the queen; but adding, with curiosity, "You have brought something to give me, but I warn you I shall not believe you, unless you show it me at once."

Then, with a smile full of kindness, the king began searching in his pockets, with that slowness which makes the child doubly impatient for his toy, the animal for his food, and the woman for her present: at last he drew out a box of red morocco leather, artistically ornamented in gold.

"A jewel box!" cried the queen.

The king laid it on the bed.

She opened it impatiently, and then called out, "Oh, mon Dieu! how beautiful!"

The king smiled with delight. "Do you think so?" said he.

The queen could not answer – she was breathless with admiration. Then she drew out of the box a necklace of diamonds, so large, so pure, so glittering, and so even, that, with sparkling eyes, she cried again, "Oh! it is magnificent."

"Then you are content?" said the king.

"Enchanted, sire; you make me too happy."

"Really?"

"See this first row; the diamonds are as large as filberts, and so even, you could not tell one from the other; then how beautifully the gradation of the rows is managed; the jeweler who made this necklace is an artist."

"They are two."

"Then I wager it is Bœhmer and Bossange."

"You have guessed right."

"Indeed, no one but they would risk making such a thing."

"Madame, take care," said the king; "you will have to pay too dear for this necklace."

"Oh, sire!" cried the queen, all the delight fading from her countenance.

"You must pay the price of letting me be the first to put it on: " and he approached her, holding in his hands the two ends of the

magnificent necklace, of which the clasp was one great diamond.

She stopped him, saying, "But, sire, is it very dear?"

"Have I not told you the price?"

"Ah, Louis, we must not jest. Put the necklace back again."

"You refuse to allow me to put it on?"

"Oh no, sire, if I were going to wear it."

"What?" said the king, surprised.

"No," she said; "no one shall see a necklace of this price round my neck."

"You will not wear it?"

"Never."

"You refuse me."

"I refuse to wear a million or a million and a half of francs round my neck, for this necklace must cost that."

"I do not deny it," said the king.

"Then I do refuse to wear such a necklace while the king's coffers are empty, when he is forced to stint his charities, and to say to the poor, 'God help you, for I have no more to give.'"

"Are you serious in saying this?"

"Listen, sire; M. de Sartines told me a short time since that with that sum we could build a ship of the line; and in truth, sire, the king has more need of a ship than the queen of a necklace."

"Oh!" cried the king, joyfully, and with his eyes full of tears, "what you do is sublime. Thanks, Antoinette; you are a good wife!" and he threw his arms round her neck and kissed her. "Oh! how France will bless you," continued he; "and it shall hear what

you have done."

The queen sighed.

"You regret," said he: "it is not too late."

"No, sire; shut this case, and return it to the jewelers."

"But listen, first; I have arranged the terms of payment, and I have the money."

"No, I have decided. I will not have the necklace; but I want something else."

"Diable! then my 1,600,000 francs are gone, after all."

"What! it would have cost that?"

"Indeed it would."

"Reassure yourself; what I ask is much cheaper."

"What do you wish for?"

"To go to Paris once more."

"Oh! that is easy enough, and not dear."

"But wait – "

"Diable!"

"To the Place Vendôme, to see M. Mesmer."

"Diable!" again said the king; but added: "Well, as you have denied yourself the necklace, I suppose I must let you go; but, on one condition."

"What?"

"You must be accompanied by a princess of the blood."

"Shall it be Madame de Lamballe?"

"Yes, if you like."

"I promise."

"Then I consent."

"Thanks, sire."

"And, now," said the king, "I shall order my ship of the line, and call it the 'Queen's Necklace.' You shall stand godmother, and then I will send it out to La Pérouse;" and, kissing his wife's hand, he went away quite joyful.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE QUEEN'S PETITE LEVEE

No sooner was the king gone than the queen rose, and went to the window. The morning was lovely, and had the charming feeling of the commencement of spring, while the sun seemed almost warm. The wind had gone round to the west, and if it remained in that quarter this terrible winter was probably at an end.

The snow was beginning to drip from the trees, under the influence of this genial morning.

"If we wish to profit by the ice," cried the queen, "I believe we must make haste; for look, Madame de Misery, the spring seems to have begun. I much wish to make up a party on the Swiss lake, and will go to-day, for to-morrow it may be too late."

"Then at what hour will your majesty wish to dress?"

"Immediately; I will breakfast and then go."

"Are there any other orders, madame?"

"See if Madlle. de Taverney has risen, and tell her I wish to speak to her."

"She is already waiting for you in the boudoir, madame."

"Already?" said the queen, who knew at what time she had gone to bed.

"She has been there for twenty minutes, madame."

"Ask her to come in."

Andrée soon entered, dressed with her usual care, and smiling, though rather unquiet.

The queen's answering smile quite reassured her.

"Go, my good Misery, and send me Leonard."

When she was gone, "The king has been charming," said the queen to Andrée; "he has laughed, and is quite disarmed."

"But does he know, madame?"

"You understand, Andrée, that a woman does not tell falsehoods when she has done no wrong and is the Queen of France."

"Certainly, madame."

"Still, my dear Andrée, it seems we have been wrong – "

"Doubtless, madame, but how?"

"Why, in pitying Madame de la Motte; the king dislikes her, but I confess she pleased me."

"Here is Leonard," said Madame de Misery, returning.

The queen seated herself before her silver-gilt toilet-table, and the celebrated hair-dresser commenced his operations.

She had the most beautiful hair in the world, and was fond of looking at it; Leonard knew this, and therefore with her was always tardy in his movements, that she might have time to admire it.

Marie Antoinette was looking beautiful that morning: she was pleased and happy.

Her hair finished, she turned again to Andrée.

"You have not been scolded," she said; "you are free: besides, they say every one is afraid of you, because, like Minerva, you are too wise."

"I, madame?"

"Yes, you; but, oh, mon Dieu! how happy you are to be unmarried, and, above all, to be content to be so."

Andrée blushed, and tried to smile.

"It is a vow that I have made," said she.

"And which you will keep, beautiful vestal?"

"I hope so."

"Apropos," said the queen, "I remember, that although unmarried, you have a master since yesterday morning."

"A master, madame?"

"Yes, your dear brother; what do you call him? – Philippe, is it not?"

"Yes, madame."

"Has he arrived?"

"He came yesterday."

"And you have not yet seen him? I took you away to Paris, selfish that I was; it was unpardonable."

"Oh, madame! I pardon you willingly, and Philippe also."

"Are you sure?"

"I answer for both of us."

"How is he?"

"As usual, beautiful and good, madame."

"How old is he now?"

"Thirty-two."

"Poor Philippe! do you know that it is fourteen years since I first met him! But I have not seen him now for nine or ten."

"Whenever your majesty pleases to receive him he will be but too happy to assure you that this long absence has not altered the sentiment of respectful devotion which he has ever felt for his queen."

"I will see him at once."

"In a quarter of an hour he will be at your majesty's feet."

Scarcely was Andrée gone, when the queen saw reflected in the glass an arch and laughing face. "My brother D'Artois," cried the queen; "how you frightened me!"

"Good morning, your majesty," said the young prince; "how did your majesty pass the night?"

"Very badly, brother."

"And the morning?"

"Very well."

"That is the most important; I guessed that all had gone right, for I have just met the king, and he was smiling most graciously."

The queen laughed, and he echoed it.

The queen had just cast off her dressing-gown of India muslin, and put on her morning dress, when the door opened and Andrée entered, leading by the hand a handsome man with a brown complexion, noble black eyes, profoundly imbued with melancholy, and a soldier-like carriage. He looked like one of Coypel's or Gainsborough's beautiful portraits.

He was dressed in a dark gray coat, embroidered in silver, a white cravat, and a dark waistcoat; and this rather somber style of dress seemed to suit the manly character of his beauty.

"Your majesty," said Andrée, "here is my brother."

Philippe bowed gravely.

The queen, who had until now been looking at his figure reflected in her mirror, turned round and saluted him. She was beautiful, with that royal beauty which made all around her not only partisans of the throne, but adorers of the woman. She possessed the power of beauty; and, if we may make use of the inversion, the beauty of power. Philippe, seeing her smile, and feeling those limpid eyes, at once soft and proud, fixed upon him, turned pale, and could hardly restrain his emotion.

"It appears, M. de Taverney," said she, "that you pay me your first visit; I thank you for it."

"Your majesty deigns to forget that it is I who should give thanks."

"How many years have passed since we last met, monsieur? Alas! the most beautiful part of our lives."

"For me, madame, but not for your majesty, to whom all days are alike charming."

"You were then pleased with America, M. de Taverney, as you remained there so long?"

"Madame," answered Philippe, "M. de la Fayette, when he left the New World, had need of an officer in whom he could place confidence to take the command of the French auxiliaries. He

proposed me, therefore, to General Washington, who accepted me."

"It seems," said the queen, "that this new country sends us home many heroes."

"Your majesty does not mean that for me?" asked Philippe, laughing.

"Why not?" Then turning to the Comte d'Artois, "See, brother," she said; "has not M. de Taverney the look of a hero?"

Philippe, seeing himself thus introduced to the young prince, bowed low. He returned it, and said, "I am most happy to make the acquaintance of such a gentleman. What are your intentions in returning to France, sir?"

"Monseigneur," answered Philippe, "my sister is my first consideration; whatever she wishes, I shall do."

"But she has a father, I believe," said the count.

"Never mind him," said the queen, quickly, "I prefer Andrée under her brother's protection, and he under yours, count. You will take charge of M. de Taverney, will you not?"

The count bowed an assent.

"For, do you know," continued she, "that a very strong link binds me to M. de Taverney?"

"What do you mean, sister?"

"That he was the first Frenchman who presented himself to my eyes when I arrived in this country; and I had taken a very sincere vow to promote the happiness of the first Frenchman I should meet."

Philippe felt the blood rush to his face, and Andrée looked at him rather sadly.

The queen observed these looks of the brother and sister, and fancied she divined the cause. "Why," she thought, "should not Monsieur de Taverney have partaken the epidemic passion which pervaded all France for the dauphiness in 1774?" Marie Antoinette therefore attributed these looks to some confidence of this kind which the brother had made to the sister; and in consequence, she smiled still more upon him, and redoubled her kindness towards Andrée.

The queen was a true woman, and gloried in being loved.

It was an innocent coquetry, and the most generous souls have the most strongly these aspirations for the love of all who surround them.

Alas! a time is coming for thee, poor queen, when those smiles towards those who love thee, with which thou hast been reproached, thou shalt vainly bestow on those that love thee not!

The Comte d'Artois approached Philippe while the queen was talking to Andrée, and said, "Do you think Washington so very great a general?"

"Certainly a great man, monseigneur."

"And what effect did our French produce out there?"

"As much good as the English did harm."

"Ah, you are a partisan of the new ideas, my dear M. Philippe de Taverney; but have you reflected on one thing?"

"What, monseigneur? I assure you that out there, encamped in

the fields, and in the savannahs on the borders of the great lakes, I had plenty of time for reflection."

"On this, that in making war out there, it was neither on the Indians nor on the English, but on us."

"Ah, monseigneur, I do not deny that that is possible."

"Therefore I do not admire so much these victories of M. de la Fayette and Washington. It is egotism, perhaps, but it is not egotism for myself alone."

"Oh, monseigneur!"

"But do you know why I will still support you with all my power?"

"Whatever be the reason, I shall be truly grateful."

"It is, because you are not one of those whose names have been blazoned forth. You have done your duty bravely, but you have not thrust yourself forward; you are not known in Paris."

The young prince then kissed the queen's hand, and bowing to Andrée, left the room.

Then the queen turned again to Philippe, saying, "Have you seen your father, sir?"

"No, madame."

"Why did you not go to see him first?"

"I had sent home my valet, and my luggage, but my father sent the servant back again, with orders to present myself first to you, or the king."

"It is a lovely morning," said the queen; "to-morrow the ice will begin to melt. Madame de Misery, order my sledge and send

my chocolate in here."

"Will not your majesty take something to eat? You had no supper last night."

"You mistake, my good Misery, we had supper. Had we not, Andrée?"

"A very good one, madame."

"So I will only have my chocolate. Quick, Madame de Misery; this fine weather tempts me, and the Swiss lake will be full of company."

"Your majesty is going to skate?" asked Philippe.

"Ah, you will laugh at us, M. l'Américain; you, who have traversed lakes where there are more miles than we have feet here."

"Madame," replied Philippe, "here you amuse yourself with the cold, but there they die of it."

"Ah, here is my chocolate; Andrée, take a cup with me."

Andrée bowed, coloring with pleasure.

"You see, M. de Taverney, I am always the same, hating all etiquette, as in old times. Do you remember those old days? Are you changed since then, M. Philippe?"

"No, madame," replied the young man, "I am not changed – at least, not in heart."

"Well, I am glad to hear that, for it was a good one. A cup for M. de Taverney, Madame de Misery."

"Oh, madame!" cried Philippe, "you cannot mean it; such an honor for a poor obscure soldier like me."

"An old friend," said the queen; "this day seems to remind me of my youth; I seem again happy, free, proud and yet foolish. This day recalls to me that happy time at my dear Trianon, and all our frolics there, Andrée and I together. This day brings back to my memory my roses, my strawberries, and my birds, that I was so fond of, all, even to my good gardeners, whose happy faces often announced to me a new flower or a delicious fruit; and M. de Jussieu and that original old Rousseau, who is since dead. But come," continued she, herself pouring the chocolate into his cup, "you are a soldier, and accustomed to fire, so burn yourself gloriously with this chocolate, for I am in a hurry."

She laughed, but Philippe, taking it seriously, drank it off most heroically.

The queen saw him, and laughing still more, said, "You are indeed a perfect hero, M. de Taverney." She then rose, and her woman brought her bonnet, ermine mantle, and gloves.

Philippe took his hat under his arm, and followed her and Andrée out.

"M. de Taverney, I do not mean you to leave me," said the queen. "Come round to my right."

They went down the great staircase; the drums were beating, the clarions of the body-guard were playing, and this whole scene, and the enthusiasm everywhere shown towards that beautiful queen by whose side he was walking, completed the intoxication of the young man. The change was too sudden, after so many years of exile and regret, to such great joy and honor.

CHAPTER IX.
THE SWISS LAKE

Every one knows this piece of water, which still goes by the same name. An avenue of linden trees skirts each bank, and these avenues were on this day thronged with pedestrians, of all ranks and ages, who had come to enjoy the sight of the sledges and the skating. The toilets of the ladies presented a brilliant spectacle of luxury and gaiety, their high coiffures, gay bonnets with the veils half down, fur mantles, and brilliant silks with deep flounces, were mingled with the orange or blue coats of the gentlemen.

Gay lackeys also, in blue and red, passed among the crowd, looking like poppies and cornflowers blown about by the wind.

Now and then a cry of admiration burst from the crowd, as St. George, the celebrated skater, executed some circle so perfect, that a mathematician could scarcely have found a fault in it.

While the banks of the lake were thus crowded, the ice itself presented a scene not less gay, and still more animated: sledges flew about in all directions. Several dogs, clothed in embroidered velvet, and with plumes of feathers on their heads, looking like fabulous animals, drew a sledge in which sat M. de Lauzun, who was wrapped up in a tiger skin. Here you might see a lady masked, doubtless on account of the cold, in some sledge of a quieter character, while a handsome skater, in a velvet riding-

coat, hangs over the back, to assist and direct her progress; whatever they may be saying to each other is quite inaudible, amidst this busy hum of voices; but who can blame a rendezvous which takes place in the open air, and under the eyes of all Versailles? and whatever they may be saying matters to no one else: it is evident that in the midst of this crowd their life is an isolated one; they think only of each other.

All at once a general movement in the crowd announces that they have recognized the queen, who is approaching the lake. A general cry of "Vive la reine!" is heard, and all endeavor to approach as nearly as possible to the place where she has stationed herself. One person alone does not appear to share this feeling, for on her approach he disappears with all his suite as fast as possible in the opposite direction.

"Do you see," said the Comte d'Artois to the queen, whom he had hastened to join, "how my brother Provence flies from you?"

"He fears that I should reproach him."

"Oh, no; it is not that that makes him fly."

"It is his conscience, then."

"Not even that, sister."

"What then?"

"I will tell you. He had just heard that M. de Suffren, our glorious commander, will arrive this evening; and as the news is important, he wishes to leave you in ignorance of it."

"But is the Minister of Marine ignorant of this arrival?"

"Ah, mon Dieu, sister, have you not learned enough of

ministers, during the fourteen years you have passed here, as dauphiness and queen, to know that they are always ignorant of precisely what they ought to know? However, I have told him about this, and he is deeply grateful."

"I should think so," said the queen.

"Yes, and I have need of his gratitude, for I want a loan."

"Oh," cried the queen, laughing, "how disinterested you are."

"Sister," said he, "you must want money; I offer you half of what I am going to receive."

"Oh no, brother, keep it for yourself; I thank you, but I want nothing just now."

"Diable! do not wait too long to claim my promise, because if you do, I may not be in a condition to fulfil it."

"In that case I must endeavor to find out some state secret for myself."

"Sister, you begin to look cold."

"Well, here is M. de Taverney returning with my sledge."

"Then you do not want me any longer?"

"No."

"Then send me away, I beg."

"Why? do you imagine you will be in my way?"

"No; it is I who want my liberty."

"Adieu, then."

"Au revoir, dear sister."

"Till when?"

"Till this evening."

"Is there anything to take place to-night, then?"

"Yes; this evening the minister will bring M. de Suffren to the jeu du roi."

"Very well, then, till this evening."

And the young prince, bowing with his habitual elegance, disappeared among the crowd.

Old Taverney, who was one of the nearest spectators of all this, had been watching his son eagerly, and felt almost chagrined at this conversation between the queen and her brother-in-law, as it interrupted the familiar intercourse which his son had before been enjoying; therefore, when the young man returned with the queen's sledge, and, seeing his father, whom he had not met for ten years, advanced towards him, he motioned him away, saying, "We will talk afterwards, when you have left the queen."

Philippe, therefore, returned to the queen, who was getting into the sledge with Andrée. Two attendants approached to push it, but she said, "No; I do not wish to go like that; you skate, M. de Taverney? Does he not, Andrée?"

"Philippe used to skate remarkably well," replied she.

"And now I dare say he rivals St. George," said the queen.

"I will do my best to justify your majesty's opinion," said he; and putting on his skates, he placed himself behind her sledge, and they commenced their course.

St. George, seeing the queen on the ice, began to execute his most skilful maneuvers, and finished off by going in circles round her sledge, making the most elegant bows each time he passed

her.

Then Philippe, moved to emulation, began to push along the sledge with such wonderful rapidity that St. George found no little difficulty in keeping pace with it.

Several people, however, seeing the queen move at this marvelous rate, uttered cries of terror.

"If your majesty desires," said Philippe, "I will stop, or go slower."

"Oh no!" said she, with that enthusiasm which she carried into everything; "oh no! I am not at all afraid; quicker still, chevalier, if you can."

"Oh yes, madame, and you are quite safe; you may trust to me;" and his vigorous arm propelled them at a still increased pace. He emulated the circles of St. George, and flew round as fast with the sledge as could even that experienced skater without it.

Then, leaving these evolutions, he pushed the sledge straight before him, and with such force that he himself remained behind.

St. George, seeing this, made a tremendous effort to gain the sledge before him, but was distanced by Philippe, who once more seized it, turned it, and flew in a new direction.

The air now rang with such acclamations, that Philippe began to feel ashamed.

Then the queen, who had joined the applause with her hands, turned round and said to him, "And now, M. de Taverney, that you have gained the victory, stop, I beg, or you will kill me."

CHAPTER X.
THE TEMPTER

Philippe, at this request of the queen, made a strong effort, and stopped the sledge abruptly.

"And now, rest yourself," said she, coming out of it all trembling. "Indeed, I never could have believed the delight of going so fast, but you have made me quite tremble;" and she took Philippe's arm to support herself, until a general murmur reminded her that she was once more committing a breach of etiquette.

As for Philippe, overwhelmed by this great honor, he felt more ashamed than if his sovereign had insulted him publicly; he lowered his eyes, and his heart beat as though it would burst.

The queen, however, withdrew her arm almost immediately, and asked for a seat. They brought her one.

"Thanks, M. de Taverney," said she; then, in a lower tone, "Mon Dieu, how disagreeable it is to be always surrounded by spying fools!"

A number of ladies and gentlemen soon crowded round her, and all looked with no little curiosity at Philippe, who, to hide his confusion, stooped to take off his skates, and then fell into the background.

After a short time, however, the queen said, "I shall take cold

if I sit here, I must take another turn;" and she remounted her sledge.

Philippe waited, but in vain, for another order.

Twenty gentlemen soon presented themselves, but she said, "No, I thank you, I have my attendants;" and she moved slowly off, while Philippe remained alone.

He looked about for St. George, to console him for his defeat by some compliment, but he had received a message from his patron, the duke d'Orleans, and had left the place.

Philippe, therefore, rather tired, and half frightened at all that had passed, remained stationary, following with his eyes the queen's sledge, which was now at some distance, when he felt some one touch him; he turned round and saw his father.

The little old man, more shrunk than ever, enveloped in furs like a Laplander, had touched his son with his elbow, that he might not be obliged to take his hands out of the muff that hung from his neck.

"You do not embrace me, my son," said he.

"My dear father, I do it with all my heart."

"And now," said the old man, "go quickly;" and he pushed him away.

"Where do you wish me to go, sir?"

"Why, morbleu, over there."

"Where?"

"To the queen."

"No, I thank you, father."

"How? No, I thank you! are you mad? You will not go after the queen?"

"My dear father, it is impossible!"

"Impossible to join the queen, who is expecting you?"

"Who is expecting me!"

"Yes, who wishes for you."

"Wishes for me? Indeed, father," added he, coldly, "I think you forget yourself."

"It is astonishing!" said the old man, stamping his foot. "Where on earth do you spring from?"

"Monsieur," said his son, sadly, "you will make me conclude one of two things."

"What?"

"Either that you are laughing at me, or else, excuse me, that you are losing your senses."

The old man seized his son by the arm so energetically that he made him start. "Listen, M. Philippe," said he; "America is, I know, a country a long way from this, and where there is neither king nor queen."

"Nor subjects."

"Nor subjects, M. Philosopher; I do not deny it; that point does not interest me; but what does so is that I fear also to have to come to a conclusion – "

"What, father?"

"That you are a simpleton, my son; just trouble yourself to look over there."

"Well, sir!"

"Well, the queen looks back, and it is the third time she has done so; there! she turns again, and who do you think she is looking for but for you, M. Puritan?"

"Well, sir," said the young man; "if it were true, which it probably is not, that the queen was looking for – "

"Oh!" interrupted the old man, angrily, "this fellow is not of my blood; he cannot be a Taverney. Sir, I repeat to you that the queen is looking for you."

"You have good sight, sir," said his son, dryly.

"Come," said the old man, more gently, and trying to moderate his impatience, "trust my experience: are you, or are you not, a man?"

Philippe made no reply.

His father ground his teeth with anger, to see himself opposed by this steadfast will; but making one more effort, "Philippe, my son," said he, still more gently, "listen to me."

"It seems to me, sir, that I have been doing nothing else for the last quarter of an hour."

"Oh," thought the old man, "I will draw you down from your stilts. I will find out your weak side." Then aloud, "You have overlooked one thing, Philippe."

"What, sir?"

"When you left for America, there was a king, but no queen, if it were not the Dubarry; hardly a respectable sovereign. You come back and see a queen, and you think you must be very

respectful."

"Doubtless."

"Poor child!" said his father, laughing.

"How, sir? You blame me for respecting the monarchy – you, a Taverney Maison-Rouge, one of the best names in France."

"I do not speak of the monarchy, but only of the queen."

"And you make a difference?"

"Pardieu, I should think so. What is royalty? a crown that is unapproachable. But what is a queen? a woman, and she, on the contrary, is very approachable."

Philippe made a gesture of disgust.

"You do not believe me," continued the old man, almost fiercely; "well, ask M. de Coigny, ask M. de Lauzun, or M. de Vaudreuil."

"Silence, father!" cried Philippe; "or for these three blasphemies, not being able to strike you three blows with my sword, I shall strike them on myself."

The old man stepped back, murmuring, "Mon Dieu, what a stupid animal! Good evening, son; you rejoice me; I thought I was the father, the old man, but now I think it is I who must be the young Apollo, and you the old man;" and he turned away.

Philippe stopped him: "You did not speak seriously, did you, father? It is impossible that a gentleman of good blood like you should give ear to these calumnies, spread by the enemies, not only of the queen, but of the throne."

"He will not believe, the double mule!" said the old man.

"You speak to me as you would speak before God?"

"Yes, truly."

"Before God, whom you approach every day?"

"It seems to me, my son," replied he, "that I am a gentleman, and that you may believe my word."

"It is, then, your opinion that the queen has had lovers?"

"Certainly."

"Those whom you have named?"

"And others, for what I know. Ask all the town and the court. One must be just returned from America to be ignorant of all they say."

"And who say this, sir? some vile pamphleteers!"

"Oh! do you, then, take me for an editor?"

"No, and there is the mischief, when men like you repeat such calumnies, which, without that, would melt away like the unwholesome vapors which sometimes obscure the most brilliant sunshine; but people like you, repeating them, give them a terrible stability. Oh! monsieur, for mercy's sake do not repeat such things."

"I do repeat them, however."

"And why do you repeat them?" cried Philippe, fiercely.

"Oh!" said the old man with his satanic laugh, "to prove to you that I was not wrong when I said, 'Philippe, the queen looks back; she is looking for you. Philippe, the queen wishes for you; run to her.'"

"Oh! father, hold your tongue, or you will drive me mad."

"Really, Philippe, I do not understand you. Is it a crime to love? It shows that one has a heart; and in the eyes of this woman, in her voice, in everything, can you not read her heart? She loves; is it you? or is it another? I know not, but believe in my own experience: at this moment she loves, or is beginning to love, some one. But you are a philosopher, a Puritan, a Quaker, an American; you do not love; well, then, let her look; let her turn again and again; despise her, Philippe, I should say Joseph de Taverney."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.