

GIACOMO CASANOVA

THE MEMOIRS OF
JACQUES CASANOVA DE
SEINGALT, 1725-1798.

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**The Memoirs of Jacques
Casanova de Seingalt, 1725-1798.
Volume 16: Depart Switzerland**

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CHAPTER I

The Door—Keeper's Daughters—The Horoscopes—Mdlle. Roman

The idea of the sorry plight in which I had left the Marquis de Prie, his mistress, and perhaps all the company, who had undoubtedly coveted the contents of my cash-box, amused me till I reached Chamberi, where I only stopped to change horses. When I reached Grenoble, where I intended to stay a week, I did not find my lodging to my liking, and went in my carriage to the post-office, where I found several letters, amongst others, one from Madame d'Urfe, enclosing a letter of introduction to an officer named Valenglard, who, she told me, was a learned man, and would present me at all the best houses in the town.

I called on this officer and received a cordial welcome. After reading Madame d'Urfe's letter he said he was ready to be useful to me in anything I pleased.

He was an amiable, middle aged man, and fifteen years before had been Madame d'Urfe's friend, and in a much more intimate degree the friend of her daughter, the Princess de Toudeville. I told him that I was uncomfortable at the inn, and that the first service I would ask of him would be to procure me a comfortable lodging. He rubbed his head, and said,—

"I think I can get you rooms in a beautiful house, but it is outside the town walls. The door-keeper is an excellent cook, and for the sake of doing your cooking I am sure he will lodge you for nothing."

"I don't wish that," said I.

"Don't be afraid," said the baron, "he will make it up by means of his dishes; and besides, the house is for sale and costs him nothing. Come and see it."

I took a suite of three rooms and ordered supper for two, warning the man that I was dainty, liked good things, and did not care for the cost. I also begged M. de Valenglard to sup with me. The doorkeeper said that if I was not pleased with his cooking I had only to say so, and in that case I should have nothing to pay. I sent for my carriage, and felt that I had established myself in my new abode. On the ground floor I saw three charming girls and the door-keeper's wife, who all bowed profoundly. M. de Valenglard took me to a concert with the idea of introducing me to everybody, but I begged him not to do so, as I wished to see the ladies before deciding which of them I should like to know.

The company was a numerous one, especially where women were concerned, but the only one to attract my attention was a pretty and modest-looking brunette, whose fine figure was dressed with great simplicity. Her charming eyes, after having thrown one glance in my direction, obstinately refused to look at me again. My vanity made me conclude at once that she behaved thus only to increase my desire of knowing her, and to give me plenty of time to examine her side-face and her figure, the proportions of which were not concealed by her simple attire. Success begets assurance, and the wish is father to the thought. I cast a hungry gaze on this young lady without more ado, just as if all the women in Europe were only a seraglio kept for my pleasures. I told the baron I should like to know her.

"She is a good girl," said he, "who sees no company, and is quite poor."

"Those are three reasons which make me the more anxious to know her."

"You will really find nothing to do in that quarter."

"Very good."

"There is her aunt, I will introduce you to her as we leave the concert-room."

After doing me this service, he came to sup with me. The door-keeper and cook struck me as being very like Lebel. He made his two pretty daughters wait on me, and I saw that Valenglard was delighted at having lodged me to my satisfaction, but he grumbled when he saw fifteen dishes.

"He is making a fool of you and me," he said.

"On the contrary, he has guessed my tastes. Don't you think everything was very good?"

"I don't deny it, but"

"Don't be afraid; I love spending my money."

"I beg your pardon, I only want you to be pleased."

We had exquisite wines, and at dessert some ratafia superior to the Turkish 'visnat' I had tasted seventeen years before at Yussuf Ali's. When my landlord came up at the end of supper, I told him that he ought to be Louis XV.'s head cook.

"Go on as you have begun, and do better if you can; but let me have your bill every morning."

"You are quite right; with such an arrangement one can tell how one is getting on."

"I should like you always to give me ices, and you must let me have two more lights. But, unless I am mistaken, those are candles that I see. I am a Venetian, and accustomed to wax lights."

"That is your servant's fault, sir."

"How is that?"

"Because, after eating a good supper, he went to bed, saying he was ill. Thus I heard nothing as to how you liked things done."

"Very good, you shall learn from my own lips."

"He asked my wife to make chocolate for you tomorrow morning; he gave her the chocolate, I will make it myself."

When he had left the room M. de Valenglard said, in a manner that was at the same time pleased and surprised, that Madame d'Urfe had been apparently joking in telling him to spare me all expense.

"It's her goodness of heart. I am obliged to her all the same. She is an excellent woman."

We stayed at table till eleven o'clock, discussing innumerable pleasant topics, and animating our talk with that choice liqueur made at Grenoble, of which we drank a bottle. It is composed of the juice of cherries, brandy, sugar, and cinnamon, and cannot be surpassed, I am sure, by the nectar of Olympus.

I sent home the baron in my carriage, after thanking him for his services, and begging him to be my companion early and late while I stayed at Grenoble—a request which he granted excepting for those days on which he was on duty. At supper I had given him my bill of exchange on Zappata, which I endorsed with the name de Seingalt, which Madame d'Urfe had given me. He discounted it for me next day. A banker brought me four hundred louis and I had thirteen hundred in my cash-box. I always had a dread of penuriousness, and I delighted myself at the thought that M. de Valenglard would write and tell Madame d'Urfe, who was always preaching economy to me, what he had seen. I escorted my guest to the carriage, and I was agreeably surprised when I got back to find the doorkeeper's two charming daughters.

Le Duc had not waited for me to tell him to find some pretext for not serving me. He knew my tastes, and that when there were pretty girls in a house, the less I saw of him the better I was pleased.

The frank eagerness of the two girls to wait on me, their utter freedom from suspicion or coquetry, made me determine that I would shew myself deserving of their trust. They took off my shoes and stockings, did my hair and put on my night-gown with perfect propriety on both sides. When I was in bed I wished them a goodnight, and told them to shut the door and bring me my chocolate at eight o'clock next morning.

I could not help confessing that I was perfectly happy as I reflected over my present condition. I enjoyed perfect health, I was in the prime of life, I had no calls on me, I was thoroughly independent,

I had a rich store of experience, plenty of money, plenty of luck, and I was a favourite with women. The pains and troubles I had gone through had been followed by so many days of happiness that I felt disposed to bless my destiny. Full of these agreeable thoughts I fell asleep, and all the night my dreams were of happiness and of the pretty brunette who had played with me at the concert.

I woke with thoughts of her, and feeling sure that we should become acquainted I felt curious to know what success I should have with her. She was discreet and poor; and as I was discreet in my own way she ought not to despise my friendship.

At eight o'clock, one of the door-keeper's daughters brought me my chocolate, and told me that Le Duc had got the fever.

"You must take care of the poor fellow."

"My cousin has just taken him some broth."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Rose, and my sister is Manon."

Just then Manon came in with my shirt, on which she had put fresh lace. I thanked her, and she said with a blush that she did her father's hair very well.

"I am delighted to hear it, and I shall be very pleased if you will be kind enough to do the same offices for me till my servant recovers."

"With pleasure, sir."

"And I," said Rose, laughing, "will shave you."

"I should like to see how you do it; get the water."

I rose hastily, while Manon was preparing to do my hair. Rose returned and shaved me admirably. As soon as she had washed off the lather, I said,

"You must give me a kiss," presenting my cheek to her. She pretended not to understand.

"I shall be vexed," said I, gravely but pleasantly, "if you refuse to kiss me."

She begged to be excused, saying with a little smile, that it was not customary to do so at Grenoble.

"Well, if you won't kiss me, you shan't shave me."

The father came in at that point, bringing his bill.

"Your daughter has just shaved me admirably," said I, "and she refuses to kiss me, because it is not the custom at Grenoble."

"You little silly," said he, "it is the custom in Paris. You kiss me fast enough after you have shaved me, why should you be less polite to this gentleman?"

She then kissed me with an air of submission to the paternal decree which made Manon laugh.

"Ah!" said the father, "your turn will come when you have finished doing the gentleman's hair."

He was a cunning fellow, who knew the best way to prevent me cheapening him, but there was no need, as I thought his charges reasonable, and as I paid him in full he went off in great glee.

Manon did my hair as well as my dear Dubois, and kissed me when she had done without making as many difficulties as Rose. I thought I should get on well with both of them. They went downstairs when the banker was announced.

He was quite a young man, and after he had counted me out four hundred Louis, he observed that I must be very comfortable.

"Certainly," said I, "the two sisters are delightful."

"Their cousin is better. They are too discreet."

"I suppose they are well off."

"The father has two thousand francs a year. They will be able to marry well-to-do tradesmen."

I was curious to see the cousin who was said to be prettier than the sisters, and as soon as the banker had gone I went downstairs to satisfy my curiosity. I met the father and asked him which was Le Duc's room, and thereon I went to see my fine fellow. I found him sitting up in a comfortable bed with a rubicund face which did not look as if he were dangerously ill.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir. I am having a fine time of it. Yesterday I thought I would be ill."

"What made you think that?"

"The sight of the three Graces here, who are made of better stuff than your handsome housekeeper, who would not let me kiss her. They are making me wait too long for my broth, however. I shall have to speak severely about it."

"Le Duc, you are a rascal."

"Do you want me to get well?"

"I want you to put a stop to this farce, as I don't like it." Just then the door opened, and the cousin came in with the broth. I thought her ravishing, and I noticed that in waiting on Le Duc she had an imperious little air which well became her.

"I shall dine in bed," said my Spaniard.

"You shall be attended to," said the pretty girl, and she went out.

"She puts on big airs," said Le Duc, "but that does not impose on me. Don't you think she is very pretty?"

"I think you are very impudent. You ape your betters, and I don't approve of it. Get up. You must wait on me at table, and afterwards you will eat your dinner by yourself, and try to get yourself respected as an honest man always is, whatever his condition, so long as he does not forget himself. You must not stay any longer in this room, the doorkeeper will give you another."

I went out, and on meeting the fair cousin I told her that I was jealous of the honour which she had done my man, and that I begged her to wait on him no longer.

"Oh, I am very glad!"

The door-keeper came up, and I gave him my orders, and went back to my room to write.

Before dinner the baron came and told me that he had just come from the lady to whom he had introduced me. She was the wife of a barrister named Morin, and aunt to the young lady who had so interested me.

"I have been talking of you," said the baron, "and of the impression her niece made on you. She promised to send for her, and to keep her at the house all day."

After a dinner as good as the supper of the night before, though different from it in its details, and appetising enough to awaken the dead, we went to see Madame Morin, who received us with the easy grace of a Parisian lady. She introduced me to seven children, of whom she was the mother. Her eldest daughter, an ordinary-looking girl, was twelve years old, but I should have taken her to be fourteen, and said so. To convince me of her age the mother brought a book in which the year, the month, the day, the hour, and even the minute of her birth were entered. I was astonished at such minute accuracy, and asked if she had had a horoscope drawn.

"No," said she, "I have never found anybody to do it."

"It is never too late," I replied, "and without doubt God has willed that this pleasure should be reserved for me."

At this moment M. Morin came in, his wife introduced me, and after the customary compliments had passed, she returned to the subject of the horoscope. The barrister sensibly observed that if judicial astrology was not wholly false, it was, nevertheless, a suspected science; that he had been so foolish as once to devote a considerable portion of his time to it, but that on recognizing the inability of man to deal with the future he had abandoned astrology, contenting himself with the veritable truths of astronomy. I saw with pleasure that I had to deal with a man of sense and education, but Valenglard, who was a believer in astrology, began an argument with him on the subject. During their discussion I quietly copied out on my tablets the date of Mdlle. Morin's birth. But M. Morin saw what I was about, and shook his head at me, with a smile. I understood what he meant, but I did not allow that to disconcert me, as I had made up my mind fully five minutes ago that I would play the astrologer on this occasion.

At last the fair niece arrived. Her aunt introduced me to her as Mdlle. Roman Coupier, her sister's daughter; and then, turning to her, she informed her how ardently I had been longing to know her since I had seen her at the concert.

She was then seventeen. Her satin skin by its dazzling whiteness displayed to greater advantage her magnificent black hair. Her features were perfectly regular, and her complexion had a slight tinge of red; her fine eyes were at once sweet and sparkling, her eyebrows were well arched, her mouth small, her teeth regular and as white as pearls, and her lips, of an exquisite rosy hue, afforded a seat to the deities of grace and modesty.

After some moments' conversation, M. Morin was obliged to go out on business, and a game of quadrille was proposed, at which I was greatly pitied for having lost a louis. I thought Mdlle. Roman discreet, judicious, pleasant without being brilliant, and, still better, without any pretensions. She was high-spirited, even-tempered, and had a natural art which did not allow her to seem to understand too flattering a compliment, or a joke which passed in any way the bounds of propriety. She was neatly dressed, but had no ornaments, and nothing which shewed wealth; neither ear-rings, rings, nor a watch. One might have said that her beauty was her only adornment, the only ornament she wore being a small gold cross hanging from her necklace of black ribbon. Her breast was well shaped and not too large. Fashion and custom made her shew half of it as innocently as she shewed her plump white hand, or her cheeks, whereon the lily and the rose were wedded. I looked at her features to see if I might hope at all; but I was completely puzzled, and could come to no conclusion. She gave no sign which made me hope, but on the other hand she did nothing to make me despair. She was so natural and so reserved that my sagacity was completely at fault. Nevertheless, a liberty which I took at supper gave me a gleam of hope. Her napkin fell down, and in returning it to her I pressed her thigh amorously, and could not detect the slightest displeasure on her features. Content with so much I begged everybody to come to dinner with me next day, telling Madame Morin that I should not be going out, and that I was therefore delighted to put my carriage at her service.

When I had taken Valenglard home, I went to my lodging building castles in Spain as to the conquest of Mdlle. Roman.

I warned my landlord that we should be six at dinner and supper the following day, and then I went to bed. As Le Duc was undressing me he said,

"Sir, you are punishing me, but what makes me sorry you are punishing yourself in depriving yourself of the services of those pretty girls."

"You are a rogue."

"I know it, but I serve you with all my heart, and I love your pleasure as well as my own."

"You plead well for yourself; I am afraid I have spoilt you."

"Shall I do your hair to-morrow?"

"No; you may go out every day till dinner-time."

"I shall be certain to catch it."

"Then I shall send you to the hospital."

"That is a fine prospect, 'por Dios'."

He was impudent, sly, profligate, and a rascally fellow; but also obedient, devoted, discreet, and faithful, and his good qualities made me overlook his defects.

Next morning, when Rose brought my chocolate, she told me with a laugh that my man had sent for a carriage, and after dressing himself in the height of fashion he had gone off with his sword at his side, to pay calls, as he said.

"We laughed at him."

"You were quite right, my dear Rose."

As I spoke, Manon came in under some pretext or other. I saw that the two sisters had an understanding never to be alone with me; I was displeased, but pretended not to notice anything. I got up, and I had scarcely put on my dressing-gown when the cousin came in with a packet under her arm.

"I am delighted to see you, and above all to look at your smiling face, for I thought you much too serious yesterday."

"That's because M. le Duc is a greater gentleman than you are; I should not have presumed to laugh in his presence; but I had my reward in seeing him start off this morning in his gilded coach."

"Did he see you laughing at him?"

"Yes, unless he is blind."

"He will be vexed."

"All the better."

"You are really very charming. What have you got in that parcel?"

"Some goods of our own manufacture. Look; they are embroidered gloves."

"They are beautiful; the embroidery is exquisitely done. How much for the lot?"

"Are you a good hand at a bargain."

"Certainly."

"Then we must take that into account."

After some whisperings together the cousin took a pen, put down the numbers of gloves, added up and said,

"The lot will cost you two hundred and ten francs."

"There are nine louis; give me six francs change."

"But you told us you would make a bargain."

"You were wrong to believe it."

She blushed and gave me the six francs. Rose and Manon shaved me and did my hair, giving me a kiss with the best grace imaginable; and when I offered my cheek to the cousin she kissed me on the mouth in a manner that told me she would be wholly mine on the first opportunity.

"Shall we have the pleasure of waiting on you at the table?" said Rose.

"I wish you would."

"But we should like to know who is coming to dinner first; as if it is officers from the garrison we dare not come; they make so free."

"My guests are Madame Morin, her husband, and her niece."

"Very good."

The cousin said, "Mdlle. Roman is the prettiest and the best girl in Grenoble; but she will find some difficulty in marrying as she has no money."

"She may meet some rich man who will think her goodness and her beauty worth a million of money."

"There are not many men of that kind."

"No; but there are a few."

Manon and the cousin went out, and I was left alone with Rose, who stayed to dress me. I attacked her, but she defended herself so resolutely that I desisted, and promised it should not occur again. When she had finished I gave her a louis, thanked her, and sent her away.

As soon as I was alone I locked the door, and proceeded to concoct the horoscope I had promised to Madame Morin. I found it an easy task to fill eight pages with learned folly; and I confined myself chiefly to declaring the events which had already happened to the native. I had deftly extracted some items of information in the course of conversation, and filling up the rest according to the laws of probability and dressing up the whole in astrological diction, I was pronounced to be a seer, and no doubts were cast on my skill. I did not indeed run much risk, for everything hung from an if, and in the judicious employment of ifs lies the secret of all astrology.

I carefully re-read the document, and thought it admirable. I felt in the vein, and the use of the cabala had made me an expert in this sort of thing.

Just after noon all my guests arrived, and at one we sat down to table. I have never seen a more sumptuous or more delicate repast. I saw that the cook was an artist more in need of restraint

than encouragement. Madame Morin was very polite to the three girls, whom she knew well, and Le Duc stood behind her chair all the time, looking after her wants, and dressed as richly as the king's chamberlain. When we had nearly finished dinner Mdlle. Roman passed a compliment on my three fair waiting-maids, and this giving me occasion to speak of their talents I got up and brought the gloves I had purchased from them. Mdlle. Roman praised the quality of the material and the work. I took the opportunity, and begged leave of the aunt to give her and her niece a dozen pair apiece. I obtained this favour, and I then gave Madame Morin the horoscope. Her husband read it, and though an unbeliever he was forced to admire, as all the deductions were taken naturally from the position of the heavenly bodies at the instant of his daughter's birth. We spent a couple of hours in talking about astrology, and the same time in playing at quadrille, and then we took a walk in the garden, where I was politely left to enjoy the society of the fair Roman.

Our dialogue, or rather my monologue, turned solely on the profound impression she had made on me, on the passion she had inspired, on her beauty, her goodness, the purity of my intentions, and on my need of love, lest I should go down to the grave the most hapless of men.

"Sir," said she, at last, "if my destiny points to marriage I do not deny that I should be happy to find a husband like you."

I was emboldened by this frank declaration, and seizing her hand I covered it with fiery kisses, saying passionately that I hoped she would not let me languish long. She turned her head to look for her aunt. It was getting dark, and she seemed to be afraid of something happening to her. She drew me gently with her, and on rejoining the other guests we returned to the dining-room, where I made a small bank at faro for their amusement. Madame Morin gave her daughter and niece, whose pockets were empty, some money, and Valenglard directed their play so well that when we left off to go to supper I had the pleasure of seeing that each of the three ladies had won two or three louis.

We sat at table till midnight. A cold wind from the Alps stopped my plan of proposing a short turn in the garden. Madame Morin overwhelmed me with thanks for my entertainment, and I gave each of my lady-visitors a respectful kiss.

I heard singing in the kitchen, and on going in I found Le Duc in a high state of excitement and very drunk. As soon as he saw me he tried to rise, but he lost his centre of gravity, and fell right under the kitchen table. He was carried away to bed.

I thought this accident favourable to my desire of amusing myself, and I might have succeeded if the three Graces had not all been there. Love only laughs when two are present, and thus it is that the ancient mythology tells no story of the loves of the Graces, who were always together. I had not yet found an opportunity of getting my three maids one after the other, and I dared not risk a general attack, which might have lost me the confidence of each one. Rose, I saw, was openly jealous of her cousin, as she kept a keen look-out after her movements. I was not sorry, for jealousy leads to anger, and anger goes a long way. When I was in bed I sent them away with a modest good night.

Next morning, Rose came in by herself to ask me for a cake of chocolate, for, as she said, Le Duc was now ill in real earnest. She brought me the box, and I gave her the chocolate, and in doing so I took her hand and shewed her how well I loved her. She was offended, drew back her hand sharply, and left the room. A moment after Manon came in under the pretext of shewing me a piece of lace I had torn away in my attempts of the day before, and of asking me if she should mend it. I took her hand to kiss it, but she did not give me time, presenting her lips, burning with desire. I took her hand again, and it was just on the spot when the cousin came in. Manon held the piece of lace, and seemed to be waiting for my answer. I told her absently that I should be obliged if she would mend it when she had time, and with this she went out.

I was troubled by this succession of disasters, and thought that the cousin would not play me false from the earnest of her affection which she had given me the day before in that ardent kiss of hers. I begged her to give me my handkerchief, and gently drew her hand towards me. Her mouth fastened to mine, and her hand, which she left to my pleasure with all the gentleness of a lamb, was

already in motion when Rose came in with my chocolate. We regained our composure in a moment, but I was furious at heart. I scowled at Rose, and I had a right to do so after the manner in which she had repulsed me a quarter of an hour before. Though the chocolate was excellent, I pronounced it badly made. I chid her for her awkwardness in waiting on me, and repulsed her at every step. When I got up I would not let her shave me; I shaved myself, which seemed to humiliate her, and then Manon did my hair. Rose and the cousin then went out, as if to make common cause together, but it was easy to see that Rose was less angry with her sister than her cousin.

As Manon was finishing my toilette, M. de Valenglard came in. As soon as we were alone, the officer, who was a man of honour and of much sense, in spite of his belief in astrology and the occult sciences, said that he thought me looking rather melancholy, and that if my sadness had any connection with the fair Roman, he warned me to think no more of her, unless I had resolved to ask her hand in marriage. I replied that to put an end to all difficulties I had decided on leaving Grenoble in a few days. We dined together and we then called on Madame Morin, with whom we found her fair niece.

Madame Morin gave me a flattering welcome, and Mdlle. Roman received me so graciously that I was emboldened to kiss her and place her on my knee. The aunt laughed, the niece blushed, and then slipping into my hand a little piece of paper made her escape. I read on the paper the year, day, Hour, and minute of her birth, and guessed what she meant. She meant, I thought, that I could do nothing with her before I had drawn up her horoscope. My resolve was soon taken to profit by this circumstance, and I told her that I would tell her whether I could oblige her or not next day, if she would come to a ball I was giving. She looked at her aunt and my invitation was accepted.

Just then the servant announced "The Russian Gentleman." I saw a well-made man of about my own age, slightly marked with the small-pox, and dressed as a traveller. He accosted Madame Morin with easy grace, was welcomed heartily by her, spoke well, scarcely gave me a glance, and did not say a word to the nieces. In the evening M. Morin came in, and the Russian gave him a small phial full of a white liquid, and then made as if he would go, but he was kept to supper.

At table the conversation ran on this marvellous liquid of his. M. Morin told me that he had cured a young man of a bruise from a billiard ball in five minutes, by only rubbing it with the liquid. He said modestly that it was a trifling thing of his own invention, and he talked a good deal about chemistry to Valenglard. As my attention was taken up by the fair Mdlle. Roman I could not take part in their conversation; my hope of succeeding with her on the following day absorbed all my thoughts. As I was going away with Valenglard he told me that nobody knew who the Russian was, and that he was nevertheless received everywhere.

"Has he a carriage and servants?"

"He has nothing, no servants and no money."

"Where did he come from?"

"From the skies."

"A fair abode, certainly; how long has he been here?"

"For the last fortnight. He visits, but asks for nothing."

"How does he live?"

"On credit at the inn; he is supposed to be waiting for his carriage and servants."

"He is probably a vagabond."

"He does not look like one, as you saw for yourself, and his diamonds contradict that hypothesis."

"Yes, if they are not imitation stones, for it seems to me that if they were real he would sell them."

When I got home Rose came by herself to attend on me, but she continued to sulk. I tried to rouse her up, but as I had no success I ordered her to go and tell her father that I was going to give a ball next day in the room by the garden, and that supper was to be laid for twenty.

When the door-keeper came to take my orders the following morning, I told him that I should like his girls to dance if he didn't mind. At this Rose condescended to smile, and I thought it a good omen. Just as she went out with her father, Manon came in under the pretext of asking me what lace I would wear for the day. I found her as gentle as a lamb and as loving as a dove. The affair was happily consummated, but we had a narrow escape of being caught by Rose, who came in with Le Duc and begged me to let him dance, promising that he would behave himself properly. I was glad that everybody should enjoy themselves and consented, telling him to thank Rose, who had got him this favour.

I had a note from Madame Morin, asking me if she might bring with her to the ball two ladies of her acquaintance and their daughters. I replied that I should be delighted for her to invite not only as many ladies but as many gentlemen as she pleased, as I had ordered supper for twenty people. She came to dinner with her niece and Valenglard, her daughter being busy dressing and her husband being engaged till the evening. She assured me that I should have plenty of guests.

The fair Mdlle. Roman wore the same dress, but her beauty unadorned was dazzling. Standing by me she asked if I had thought about her horoscope. I took her hand, made her sit on my knee, and promised that she should have it on the morrow. I held her thus, pressing her charming breasts with my left hand, and imprinting fiery kisses on her lips, which she only opened to beg me to calm myself. She was more astonished than afraid to see me trembling, and though she defended herself successfully she did not lose countenance for a moment, and in spite of my ardent gaze she did not turn her face away. I calmed myself with an effort, and her eyes expressed the satisfaction of one who has vanquished a generous enemy by the force of reason. By my silence I praised the virtue of this celestial being, in whose destiny I only had a part by one of those caprices of chance which philosophy seeks to explain in vain.

Madame Morin came up to me, and asked me to explain some points in her daughter's horoscope. She then told me that if I wanted to have four beauties at my ball she had only to write a couple of notes.

"I shall only see one beauty," said I, looking at her niece.

"God alone knows," said Valenglard, "what people will say in Grenoble!"

"They will say it is your wedding ball," said Madame Morin to her niece.

"Yes, and they will doubtless talk of my magnificent dress, my lace, and my diamonds," said the niece, pleasantly.

"They will talk of your beauty, your wit, and your goodness," I replied, passionately, "goodness which will make your husband a happy man."

There was a silence, because they all thought I was alluding to myself. I was doing nothing of the sort. I should have been glad to give five hundred louis for her, but I did not see how the contract was to be drawn up, and I was not going to throw my money away.

We went to my bedroom, and while Mdlle. Roman was amusing herself with looking at the jewellery on my toilette-table, her aunt and Valenglard examined the books on the table by my bedside. I saw Madame Morin going to the window and looking closely at something she held in her hand. I remembered I had left out the portrait of the fair nun. I ran to her and begged her to give me the indecent picture I had so foolishly left about.

"I don't mind the indecency of it," she said, "but what strikes me is the exact likeness."

I understood everything, and I shuddered at the carelessness of which I had been guilty.

"Madam," I said, "that is the portrait of a Venetian, lady, of whom I was very fond."

"I daresay, but it's very curious. These two M's, these cast-off robes sacrificed to love, everything makes my surprise greater."

"She is a nun and named M— M—."

"And a Welsh niece of mine at Camberi is also named M— M—, and belongs to the same order. Nay, more, she has been at Aix, whence you have come, to get cured of an illness."

"And this portrait is like her?"

"As one drop of water is like another."

"If you go to Chamberi call on her and say you come from me; you will be welcome and you will be as much surprised as I am."

"I will do so, after I have been in Italy. However, I will not shew her this portrait, which would scandalize her; I will put it away carefully."

"I beg you not to shew it to anyone."

"You may rely on me."

I was in an ecstasy at having put her off so effectually.

At eight o'clock all my guests arrived, and I saw before me all the fairest ladies and the noblest gentlemen of Grenoble. The only thing which vexed me was the compliments they lavished on me, as is customary in the provinces.

I opened the ball with the lady pointed out to me by M. Valenglard, and then I danced with all the ladies in succession; but my partner in all the square dances was the fair Mdlle. Roman, who shone from her simplicity—at least, in my eyes.

After a quadrille, in which I had exerted myself a good deal, I felt hot and went up to my room to put on a lighter suit, and as I was doing so, in came the fair cousin, who asked me if I required anything.

"Yes, you, dearest," I replied, going up to her and taking her in my arms. "Did anyone see you coming in here?"

"No, I came from upstairs, and my cousins are in the dancing-room."

"That is capital. You are fair as Love himself, and this is an excellent opportunity for skewing you how much I love you."

"Good heavens! What are you doing? Let me go, somebody might come in. Well, put out the light!"

I put it out, shut the door, and, my head full of Mdlle. Roman, the cousin found me as ardent as I should have been with that delightful person. I confess, too, that the door-keeper's niece was well worthy of being loved on her own merits. I found her perfect, perhaps better than Mdlle. Roman, a novice, would have been. In spite of my ardour her passion was soon appeased, and she begged me to let her go, and I did so; but it was quite time. I wanted to begin over again, but she was afraid that our absence would be noticed by her two Argus-eyed cousins, so she kissed me and left the room.

I went back to the ball-room, and we danced on till the king of door-keepers came to tell us supper was ready.

A collation composed of the luxuries which the season and the country afforded covered the table; but what pleased the ladies most was the number and artistic arrangement of the wax lights.

I sat down at a small table with a few of my guests, and I received the most pressing invitations to spend the autumn in their town. I am sure that if I had accepted I should have been treated like a prince, for the nobility of Grenoble bear the highest character for hospitality. I told them that if it had been possible I should have had the greatest pleasure in accepting their invitation, and in that case I should have been delighted to have made the acquaintance of the family of an illustrious gentleman, a friend of my father's.

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