

EMMA ORCZY

THE BRONZE EAGLE: A
STORY OF THE
HUNDRED DAYS

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**The Bronze Eagle: A Story
of the Hundred Days**

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THE LANDING AT JOUAN

The perfect calm of an early spring dawn lies over headland and sea—hardly a ripple stirs the blue cheek of the bay. The softness of departing night lies upon the bosom of the Mediterranean like the dew upon the heart of a flower.

A silent dawn.

Veils of transparent greys and purples and mauves still conceal the distant horizon. Breathless calm rests upon the water and that awed hush which at times descends upon Nature herself when the finger of Destiny marks an eventful hour.

But now the grey and the purple veils beyond the headland are lifted one by one; the midst of dawn rises upwards like the smoke of incense from some giant censers swung by unseen, mighty hands.

The sky above is of a translucent green, studded with stars that blink and now are slowly extinguished one by one: the green has turned to silver, and the silver to lemon-gold: the veils beyond the upland are flying in the wake of departing Night.

The lemon-gold turns to glowing amber, anon to orange and crimson, and far inland the mountain peaks, peeping shyly through the mist, blush a vivid rose to find themselves so fair.

And to the south, there where fiery sea blends and merges with fiery sky, a tiny black speck has just come into view. Larger and larger it grows as it draws nearer to the land, now it seems like a bird with wings outspread—an eagle flying swiftly to the shores of France.

In the bay the fisher folk, who are making ready for their day's work, pause a moment as they haul up their nets: with rough brown hands held above their eyes they look out upon that black speck—curious, interested, for the ship is not one they have seen in these waters before.

"'Tis the Emperor come back from Elba!" says someone.

The men laugh and shrug their shoulders: that tale has been told so often in these parts during the past year: the good folk have ceased to believe in it. It has almost become a legend now, that story that the Emperor was coming back—their Emperor—the man with the battered hat and the grey redingote: the people's Emperor, he who led them from victory to victory, whose eagles soared above every capital and every tower in Europe, he who made France glorious and respected: her citizens, men, her soldiers, heroes.

And with stately majesty the dawn yields to day, the last tones of orange have faded from the sky: it is once more of a translucent green merging into sapphire overhead. And the great orb in the east rises from out the trammels of the mist, and from awakening Earth and Sea comes the great love-call, the triumphant call of Day. And far away upon the horizon to the south, the black speck becomes more distinct and more clear; it takes shape, substance, life.

It divides and multiplies, for now there are three or four specks silhouetted against the sky—not three or four, but five—no! six—no! seven! Seven black specks which detach themselves one by one, one from another and from the vagueness beyond—experienced eyes scan the horizon with enthusiasm and excitement which threaten to blur the clearness of their vision. Anyone with an eye for sea-going craft can distinguish that topsail-schooner there, well ahead of the rest of the tiny fleet, skimming the water with swift grace, and immediately behind her the three-masted polacca—hm! have we not seen her in these waters before?—and the two graceful feluccas whose lateen sails look so like the outspread wings of a bird!

But it is on the schooner that all eyes are riveted now: she skips along so fast that within an hour her pennant is easily distinguishable—red and white! the flag of Elba, of that diminutive toy-kingdom which for the past twelve months has been ruled over by the mightiest conqueror this modern world has ever known.

The flag of Elba! then it is the Emperor coming back!

A crowd had gathered on the headland now—a crowd made up of bare-footed fisher-folk, men, women, children, and of the labourers from the neighbouring fields and vineyards: they have all come to greet the Emperor—the man with the battered hat and the grey redingote, the curious, flashing eyes and mouth that always spoke genial words to the people of France!

Traitors turned against him—Ney! de Marmont! Bernadotte! those on whom he had showered the full measure of his friendship, whom he had loaded with honours, with glory and with wealth. Foreign armies joined in coalition against France and forced the people's Emperor to leave his country which he loved so well, had sent him to humiliation and to exile. But he had come back, as all his people had always said that he would! He had come back, there was the topsail-schooner that was bringing him home so swiftly now.

Another hour and the schooner's name can be deciphered quite easily—*L'Inconstant*, and that of the polacca *Le Saint-Esprit* . . . and beyond these *L'Etoile* and *Saint Joseph, Caroline*. And the entire little fleet flies the flag of Elba.

The Emperor has come back! Bare-footed fisherfolk whisper it among themselves, the labourers in the valley call the news to those upon the hills.

Why! after another hour or so, there are those among the small knot who stand congregated on the highest point of the headland, who swear that they can see the Emperor—standing on the deck of the *L'Inconstant*.

He wears a black bicorne hat, and his grey redingote: he is pacing up and down the deck of the schooner, his hands held behind his back in the manner so familiar to the people of France. And on his hat is pinned the tricolour of France. Everyone on shore who is on the look-out for the schooner now can see the tricolour quite plainly. A mighty shout escapes the lusty throats of the men on the beach, the women are on the verge of tears from sheer excitement, and that shout is repeated again and again and sends its ringing echo from cliff to cliff, and from fort to fort as the red and white pennant of the kingdom of Elba is hauled down from the ship's stern and the tricolour flag—the flag of Liberty and of regenerate France—is hoisted in its stead.

The soft breeze from the south unfurls its folds and these respond to his caress. The red, white and blue make a trenchant note of colour now against the tender hues of the sea: flaunting its triumphant message in the face of awakening nature.

The eagle has left the bounds of its narrow cage of Elba: it has taken wing over the blue Mediterranean! within an hour, perhaps, or two, it will rest on the square church tower of Antibes—but not for long. Soon it will take to its adventurous flight again, and soar over valley and mountain peak, from church belfry to church belfry until it finds its resting-place upon the towers of Notre Dame.

One hour after noon the curtain has risen upon the first act of the most adventurous tragedy the world has ever known.

Napoleon Bonaparte has landed in the bay of Jouan with eleven hundred men and four guns to reconquer France and the sovereignty of the world. Six hundred of his old guard, six score of his Polish light cavalry, three or four hundred Corsican chasseurs: thus did that sublime adventurer embark upon an expedition the most mad, the most daring, the most heroic, the most egotistical, the most tragic and the most glorious which recording Destiny has ever written in the book of this world.

The boats were lowered at one hour after noon, and the landing was slowly and methodically begun: too slowly for the patience of the old guard—the old "growlers" with grizzled moustache and furrowed cheeks, down which tears of joy and enthusiasm were trickling at sight of the shores of

France. They were not going to wait for the return of those boats which had conveyed the Polish troopers on shore: they took to the water and waded across the bay, tossing the salt spray all around them as they trod the shingle, like so many shaggy dogs enjoying a bath; and when six hundred fur bonnets darkened the sands of the bay at the foot of the Tower of la Gabelle, such a shout of "Vive l'Empereur" went forth from six hundred lusty throats that the midday spring air vibrated with kindred enthusiasm for miles and miles around.

CHAPTER I

THE GLORIOUS NEWS

I

Where the broad highway between Grenoble and Gap parts company from the turbulent Drac, and after crossing the ravine of Vaulx skirts the plateau of La Motte with its magnificent panorama of forests and mountain peaks, a narrow bridle path strikes off at a sharp angle on the left and in wayward curves continues its length through the woods upwards to the hamlet of Vaulx and the shrine of Notre Dame.

Far away to the west the valley of the Drac lies encircled by the pine-covered slopes of the Lans range, whilst towering some seven thousand and more feet up the snow-clad crest of Grande Moucherolle glistens like a sea of myriads of rose-coloured diamonds under the kiss of the morning sun.

There was more than a hint of snow in the sharp, stinging air this afternoon, even down in the valley, and now the keen wind from the northeast whipped up the faces of the two riders as they turned their horses at a sharp trot up the bridle path.

Though it was not long since the sun had first peeped out above the forests of Pelvoux, the riders looked as if they had already a long journey to their credit; their horses were covered with sweat and sprinkled with lather, and they themselves were plentifully bespattered with mud, for the road in the valley was soft after the thaw. But despite probable fatigue, both sat their horse with that ease and unconscious grace which marks the man accustomed to hard and constant riding, though—to the experienced eye—there would appear a vast difference in the style and manner in which each horseman handled his mount.

One of them had the rigid precision of bearing which denotes military training: he was young and slight of build, with unruly dark hair fluttering round the temples from beneath his white sugar-loaf hat, and escaping the trammels of the neatly-tied black silk bow at the nape of the neck; he held himself very erect and rode his horse on the curb, the reins gathered tightly in one gloved hand, and that hand held closely and almost immovably against his chest.

The other sat more carelessly—though in no way more loosely—in his saddle: he gave his horse more freedom, with a chain-snaffle and reins hanging lightly between his fingers. He was obviously taller and probably older than his companion, broader of shoulder and fairer of skin; you might imagine him riding this same powerful mount across a sweep of open country, but his friend you would naturally picture to yourself in uniform on the parade ground.

The riders soon left the valley of the Drac behind them; on ahead the path became very rocky, winding its way beside a riotous little mountain stream, whilst higher up still, peeping through the intervening trees, the white-washed cottages of the tiny hamlet glimmered with dazzling clearness in the frosty atmosphere. At a sharp bend of the road, which effectually revealed the foremost of these cottages, distant less than two kilometres now, the younger of the two men drew rein suddenly, and lifting his hat with outstretched arm high above his head, he gave a long sigh which ended in a kind of exultant call of joy.

"There is Notre Dame de Vaulx," he cried at the top of his voice, and hat still in hand he pointed to the distant hamlet. "There's the spot where—before the sun darts its midday rays upon us—I shall hear great and glorious and authentic news of *him* from a man who has seen him as lately as forty-eight hours ago, who has touched his hand, heard the sound of his voice, seen the look of confidence and of hope in his eyes. Oh!" he went on speaking with extraordinary volubility, "it is

all too good to be true! Since yesterday I have felt like a man in a dream!—I haven't lived, I have scarcely breathed, I . . ."

The other man broke in upon his ravings with a good-humoured growl.

"You have certainly behaved like an escaped lunatic since early this morning, my good de Marmont," he said drily. "Don't you think that—as we shall have to mix again with our fellow-men presently—you might try to behave with some semblance of reasonableness."

But de Marmont only laughed. He was so excited that his lips trembled all the time, his hand shook and his eyes glowed just as if some inward fire was burning deep down in his soul.

"No! I can't," he retorted. "I want to shout and to sing and to cry 'Vive l'Empereur' till those frowning mountains over there echo with my shouts—and I'll have none of your English stiffness and reserve and curbing of enthusiasm to-day. I am a lunatic if you will—an escaped lunatic—if to be mad with joy be a proof of insanity. Clyffurde, my dear friend," he added more soberly, "I am honestly sorry for you to-day."

"Thank you," commented his companion drily. "May I ask how I have deserved this genuine sympathy?"

"Well! because you are an Englishman, and not a Frenchman," said the younger man earnestly; "because you—as an Englishman—must desire Napoleon's downfall, his humiliation, perhaps his death, instead of exulting in his glory, trusting in his star, believing in him, following him. If I were not a Frenchman on a day like this, if my nationality or my patriotism demanded that I should fight against Napoleon, that I should hate him, or vilify him, I firmly believe that I would turn my sword against myself, so shamed should I feel in my own eyes."

It was the Englishman's turn to laugh, and he did it very heartily. His laugh was quite different to his friend's: it had more enjoyment in it, more good temper, more appreciation of everything that tends to gaiety in life and more direct defiance of what is gloomy.

He too had reined in his horse, presumably in order to listen to his friend's enthusiastic tirades, and as he did so there crept into his merry, pleasant eyes a quaint look of half contemptuous tolerance tempered by kindly humour.

"Well, you see, my good de Marmont," he said, still laughing, "you happen to be a Frenchman, a visionary and weaver of dreams. Believe me," he added more seriously, "if you had the misfortune to be a prosy, shop-keeping Englishman, you would certainly not commit suicide just because you could not enthuse over your favourite hero, but you would realise soberly and calmly that while Napoleon Bonaparte is allowed to rule over France—or over any country for the matter of that—there will never be peace in the world or prosperity in any land."

The younger man made no reply. A shadow seemed to gather over his face—a look almost of foreboding, as if Fate that already lay in wait for the great adventurer, had touched the young enthusiast with a warning finger.

Whereupon Clyffurde resumed gaily once more:

"Shall we," he said, "go slowly on now as far as the village? It is not yet ten o'clock. Emery cannot possibly be here before noon."

He put his horse to a walk, de Marmont keeping close behind him, and in silence the two men rode up the incline toward Notre Dame de Vaulx. On ahead the pines and beech and birch became more sparse, disclosing the great patches of moss-covered rock upon the slopes of Pelvoux. On Taillefer the eternal snows appeared wonderfully near in the brilliance of this early spring atmosphere, and here and there on the roadside bunches of wild crocus and of snowdrops were already visible rearing their delicate corollas up against a background of moss.

The tiny village still far away lay in the peaceful hush of a Sunday morning, only from the little chapel which holds the shrine of Notre Dame came the sweet, insistent sound of the bell calling the dwellers of these mountain fastnesses to prayer.

The northeasterly wind was still keen, but the sun was gaining power as it rose well above Pelvoux, and the sky over the dark forests and snow-crowned heights was of a glorious and vivid blue.

II

The words "Auberge du Grand Dauphin" looked remarkably inviting, written in bold, shiny black characters on the white-washed wall of one of the foremost houses in the village. The riders drew rein once more, this time in front of the little inn, and as a young ostler in blue blouse and sabots came hurriedly and officiously forward whilst mine host in the same attire appeared in the doorway, the two men dismounted, unstrapped their mantles from their saddle-bows and loudly called for mulled wine.

Mine host, typical of his calling and of his race, rubicund of cheek, portly of figure and genial in manner, was over-anxious to please his guests. It was not often that gentlemen of such distinguished appearance called at the "Auberge du Grand Dauphin," seeing that Notre Dame de Vaulx lies perdu on the outskirts of the forests of Pelvoux, that the bridle path having reached the village leads nowhere save into the mountains and that La Motte is close by with its medicinal springs and its fine hostels.

But these two highly-distinguished gentlemen evidently meant to make a stay of it. They even spoke of a friend who would come and join them later, when they would expect a substantial *déjeuner* to be served with the best wine mine host could put before them. Annette—mine host's dark-eyed daughter—was all a-flutter at sight of these gallant strangers, one of them with such fiery eyes and vivacious ways, and the other so tall and so dignified, with fair skin well-bronzed by the sun and large firm mouth that had such a pleasant smile on it; her eyes sparkled at sight of them both and her glib tongue rattled away at truly astonishing speed.

Would a well-baked omelette and a bit of fricandeau suit the gentlemen?—Admirably? Ah, well then, that could easily be done!—and now? in the meanwhile?—Only good mulled wine? That would present no difficulty either. Five minutes for it to get really hot, as Annette had made some the previous day for her father who had been on a tiring errand up to La Mure and had come home cold and starved—and it was specially good—all the better for having been hotted up once or twice and the cloves and nutmeg having soaked in for nearly four and twenty hours.

Where would the gentlemen have it—Outside in the sunshine? . . . Well! it was very cold, and the wind biting . . . but the gentlemen had mantles, and she, Annette, would see that the wine was piping hot. . . . Five minutes and everything would be ready. . . .

What? . . . the tall, fair-skinned gentleman wanted to wash? . . . what a funny idea! . . . hadn't he washed this morning when he got up? . . . He had? Well, then, why should he want to wash again? . . . She, Annette, managed to keep herself quite clean all day, and didn't need to wash more than once a day. . . . But there! strangers had funny ways with them . . . she had guessed at once that Monsieur was a stranger, he had such a fair skin and light brown hair. Well! so long as Monsieur wasn't English—for the English, she detested!

Why did she detest the English? . . . Because they made war against France. Well! against the Emperor anyhow, and she, Annette, firmly believed that if the English could get hold of the Emperor they would kill him—oh, yes! they would put him on an island peopled by cannibals and let him be eaten, bones, marrow and all.

And Annette's dark eyes grew very round and very big as she gave forth her opinion upon the barbarous hatred of the English for "l'Empereur!" She prattled on very gaily and very volubly, while she dragged a couple of chairs out into the open, and placed them well in the lee of the wind and brought a couple of pewter mugs which she set on the table.

She was very much interested in the tall gentleman who had availed himself of her suggestion to use the pump at the back of the house, since he was so bent on washing himself; and she asked many questions about him from his friend.

Ten minutes later the steaming wine was on the table in a huge china bowl and the Englishman was ladling it out with a long-handled spoon and filling the two mugs with the deliciously scented

cordial. Annette had disappeared into the house in response to a peremptory call from her father. The chapel bell had ceased to ring long ago, and she would miss hearing Mass altogether to-day; and M. le curé, who came on alternate Sundays all the way from La Motte to celebrate divine service, would be very angry indeed with her.

Well! that couldn't be helped! Annette would have loved to go to Mass, but the two distinguished gentlemen expected their friend to arrive at noon, and the *déjeuner* to be ready quite by then; so she comforted her conscience with a few prayers said on her knees before the picture of the Holy Virgin which hung above her bed, after which she went back to her housewifely duty with a light heart; but not before she had decided an important point in her mind—namely, which of those two handsome gentlemen she liked the best: the dark one with the fiery eyes that expressed such bold admiration of her young charms, or the tall one with the earnest grey eyes who looked as if he could pick her up like a feather and carry her running all the way to the summit of Taillefer.

Annette had indeed made up her mind that the giant with the soft brown hair and winning smile was, on the whole, the more attractive of the two.

III

The two friends, with mantles wrapped closely round them, sat outside the "Grand Dauphin" all unconscious of the problem which had been disturbing Annette's busy little brain.

The steaming wine had put plenty of warmth into their bones, and though both had been silent while they sipped their first mug-full, it was obvious that each was busy with his own thoughts.

Then suddenly the young Frenchman put his mug down and leaned with both elbows upon the rough deal table, because he wanted to talk confidentially with his friend, and there was never any knowing what prying ears might be about.

"I suppose," he said, even as a deep frown told of puzzling thoughts within the mind, "I suppose that when England hears the news, she will up and at him again, attacking him, snarling at him even before he has had time to settle down upon his reconquered throne."

"That throne is not reconquered yet, my friend," retorted the Englishman drily, "nor has the news of this mad adventure reached England so far, but . . ."

"But when it does," broke in de Marmont sombrely, "your Castlereagh will rave and your Wellington will gather up his armies to try and crush the hero whom France loves and acclaims."

"Will France acclaim the hero, there's the question?"

"The army will—the people will—"

Clyffurde shrugged his shoulders.

"The army, yes," he said slowly, "but the people . . . what people?—the peasantry of Provence and the Dauphiné, perhaps—what about the town folk?—your mayors and *préfets*?—your tradespeople? your shopkeepers who have been ruined by the wars which your hero has made to further his own ambition. . . ."

"Don't say that, Clyffurde," once more broke in de Marmont, and this time more vehemently than before. "When you speak like that I could almost forget our friendship."

"Whether I say it or not, my good de Marmont," rejoined Clyffurde with his good-humoured smile, "you will anyhow—within the next few months—days, perhaps—bury our friendship beneath the ashes of your patriotism. No one, believe me," he added more earnestly, "has a greater admiration for the genius of Napoleon than I have; his love of France is sublime, his desire for her glory superb. But underlying his love of country, there is the love of self, the mad desire to rule, to conquer, to humiliate. It led him to Moscow and thence to Elba, it has brought him back to France. It will lead him once again to the Capitol, no doubt, but as surely too it will lead him on to the Tarpeian Rock whence he will be hurled down this time, not only bruised, but shattered, a fallen hero—and you will—a broken idol, for posterity to deal with in after time as it lists."

"And England would like to be the one to give the hero the final push," said de Marmont, not without a sneer.

"The people of England, my friend, hate and fear Bonaparte as they have never hated and feared any one before in the whole course of their history—and tell me, have we not cause enough to hate him? For fifteen years has he not tried to ruin us, to bring us to our knees? tried to throttle our commerce? break our might upon the sea? He wanted to make a slave of Britain, and Britain proved unconquerable. Believe me, we hate your hero less than he hates us."

He had spoken with a good deal of earnestness, but now he added more lightly, as if in answer to de Marmont's glowering look:

"At the same time," he said, "I doubt if there is a single English gentleman living at the present moment—let alone the army—who would refuse ungrudging admiration to Napoleon himself and to his genius. But as a nation England has her interests to safeguard. She has suffered enough—and through him—in her commerce and her prosperity in the past twenty years—she must have peace now at any cost."

"Ah! I know," sighed the other, "a nation of shopkeepers. . . ."

"Yes. We are that, I suppose. We are shopkeepers . . . most of us. . . ."

"I didn't mean to use the word in any derogatory sense," protested Victor de Marmont with the ready politeness peculiar to his race. "Why, even you . . ."

"I don't see why you should say 'even you,'" broke in Clyffurde quietly. "I am a shopkeeper—nothing more. . . . I buy goods and sell them again. . . . I buy the gloves which our friend M. Dumoulin manufactures at Grenoble and sell them to any London draper who chooses to buy them . . . a very mean and ungentlemanly occupation, is it not?"

He spoke French with perfect fluency, and only with the merest suspicion of a drawl in the intonation of the vowels, which suggested rather than proclaimed his nationality; and just now there was not the slightest tone of bitterness apparent in his deep-toned and mellow voice. Once more his friend would have protested, but he put up a restraining hand.

"Oh!" he said with a smile, "I don't imagine for a moment that you have the same prejudices as our mutual friend M. le Comte de Cambray, who must have made a very violent sacrifice to his feelings when he admitted me as a guest to his own table. I am sure he must often think that the servants' hall is the proper place for me."

"The Comte de Cambray," retorted de Marmont with a sneer, "is full up to his eyes with the prejudices and arrogance of his caste. It is men of his type—and not Marat or Robespierre—who made the revolution, who goaded the people of France into becoming something worse than man-devouring beasts. And, mind you, twenty years of exile did not sober them, nor did contact with democratic thought in England and America teach them the most elementary lessons of commonsense. If the Emperor had not come back to-day, we should be once more working up for revolution—more terrible this time, more bloody and vengeful, if possible, than the last."

Then as Clyffurde made no comment on this peroration, the younger man resumed more lightly:

"And—knowing the Comte de Cambray's prejudices as I do, imagine my surprise—after I had met you in his house as an honoured guest and on what appeared to be intimate terms of friendship—to learn that you . . . in fact . . ."

"That I was nothing more than a shopkeeper," broke in Clyffurde with a short laugh, "nothing better than our mutual friend M. Dumoulin, glovemaker, of Grenoble—a highly worthy man whom M. le Comte de Cambray esteems somewhat lower than his butler. It certainly must have surprised you very much."

"Well, you know, old de Cambray has a horror of anything that pertains to trade, and an avowed contempt for everything that he calls 'bourgeois.'"

"There's no doubt about that," assented Clyffurde fervently.

"Perhaps he does not know of your connection with . . ."

"Gloves?"

"With business people in Grenoble generally."

"Oh, yes, he does!" replied the Englishman quietly.

"Well, then?" queried de Marmont.

Then as his friend sat there silent with that quiet, good-humoured smile lingering round his lips, he added apologetically:

"Perhaps I am indiscreet . . . but I never could understand it . . . and you English are so reserved . . ."

"That I never told you how M. le Comte de Cambray, Commander of the Order of the Holy Ghost, Grand Cross of the Order du Lys, Hereditary Grand Chamberlain of France, etc., etc., came to sit at the same table as a vendor and buyer of gloves," said Clyffurde gaily. "There's no secret about it. I owe the Comte's exalted condescension to certain letters of recommendation which he could not very well disregard."

"Oh! as to that . . ." quoth de Marmont with a shrug of the shoulders, "people like the de Cambrays have their own codes of courtesy and of friendship."

"In this case, my good de Marmont, it was the code of ordinary gratitude that imposed its dictum even upon the autocratic and aristocratic Comte de Cambray."

"Gratitude?" sneered de Marmont, "in a de Cambray?"

"M. le Comte de Cambray," said Clyffurde with slow emphasis, "his mother, his sister, his brother-in-law and two of their faithful servants, were rescued from the very foot of the guillotine by a band of heroes—known in those days as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"I knew that!" said de Marmont quietly.

"Then perhaps you also knew that their leader was Sir Percy Blakeney—a prince among gallant English gentlemen and my dead father's friend. When my business affairs sent me to Grenoble, Sir Percy warmly recommended me to the man whose life he had saved. What could M. le Comte de Cambray do but receive me as a friend? You see, my credentials were exceptional and unimpeachable."

"Of course," assented de Marmont, "now I understand. But you will admit that I have had grounds for surprise. You—who were the friend of Dumoulin, a tradesman, and avowed Bonapartist—two unpardonable crimes in the eyes of M. le Comte de Cambray," he added with a return to his former bitterness, "you to be seated at his table and to shake him by the hand. Why, man! if he knew that I have remained faithful to the Emperor . . ."

He paused abruptly, and his somewhat full, sensitive lips were pressed tightly together as if to suppress an insistent outburst of passion.

But Clyffurde frowned, and when he turned away from de Marmont it was in order to hide a harsh look of contempt.

"Surely," he said, "you have never led the Comte to suppose that you are a royalist!"

"I have never led him to suppose anything. But he has taken my political convictions for granted," rejoined de Marmont.

Then suddenly a look of bitter resentment darkened his face, making it appear hard and lined and considerably older.

"My uncle, Marshal de Marmont, Duc de Raguse, was an abominable traitor," he went on with ill-repressed vehemence. "He betrayed his Emperor, his benefactor and his friend. It was the vilest treachery that has ever disgraced an honourable name. Paris could have held out easily for another four and twenty hours, and by that time the Emperor would have been back. But de Marmont gave her over wilfully, scurvily to the allies. But for his abominable act of cowardice the Emperor never would have had to endure the shame of his temporary exile at Elba, and Louis de Bourbon would never have had the chance of wallowing for twelve months upon the throne of France. But that which is a source of irreparable shame to me is a virtue in the eyes of all these royalists. De Marmont's treachery against the Emperor has placed all his kindred in the forefront of those who now lick the boots of that infamous Bourbon dynasty, and it did not suit the plans of the Bonapartist party that we—in the provinces—should proclaim our faith too openly until such time as the Emperor returned."

"And if the Comte de Cambray had known that you are just an ardent Bonapartist? . . ." suggested Clyffurde calmly.

"He would long before now have had me kicked out by his lacqueys," broke in de Marmont with ever-increasing bitterness as he brought his clenched fist crashing down upon the table, while his dark eyes glowed with a fierce and passionate resentment. "For men like de Cambray there is only one caste—the *noblesse*, one religion—the Catholic, one creed—adherence to the Bourbons. All else is scum, trash, beneath contempt, hardly human! Oh! if you knew how I loathe these people!" he continued, speaking volubly and in a voice shaking with suppressed excitement. "They have learnt nothing, these aristocrats, nothing, I tell you! the terrible reprisals of the revolution which culminated in that appalling Reign of Terror have taught them absolutely nothing! They have not learnt the great

lesson of the revolution, that the people will no longer endure their arrogance and their pretensions, that the old regime is dead—dead! the regime of oppression and pride and intolerance! They have learnt nothing!" he reiterated with ever-growing excitement, "nothing! 'humanity begins with the *noblesse*' is still their watchword to-day as it was before the irate people sent hundreds of them to perish miserably on the guillotine—the rest of mankind, to them, is only cattle made to toil for the well-being of their class. Oh! I loathe them, I tell you! I loathe them from the bottom of my soul!"

"And yet you and your kind are rapidly becoming at one with them," said Clyffurde, his quiet voice in strange contrast to the other man's violent agitation.

"No, we are not," protested de Marmont emphatically. "The men whom Napoleon created marshals and peers of France have been openly snubbed at the Court of Louis XVIII. Ney, who is prince of Moskowa and next to Napoleon himself the greatest soldier of France, has seen his wife treated little better than a chambermaid by the Duchesse d'Angoulême and the ladies of the old *noblesse*. My uncle is marshal of France, and Duc de Raguse and I am the heir to his millions, but the Comte de Cambray will always consider it a mesalliance for his daughter to marry me."

The note of bitter resentment, of wounded pride and smouldering hatred became more and more marked while he spoke: his voice now sounded hoarse and his throat seemed dry. Presently he raised his mug to his lips and drank eagerly, but his hand was shaking visibly as he did this, and some of the wine was spilled on the table.

There was silence for a while outside the little inn, silence which seemed full of portent, for through the pure mountain air there was wafted the hot breath of men's passions—fierce, dominating, challenging. Love, hatred, prejudices and contempt—all were portrayed on de Marmont's mobile face: they glowed in his dark eyes and breathed through his quivering nostrils. Now he rested his elbow on the table and his chin in his hand, his nervy fingers played a tattoo against his teeth, clenched together like those of some young feline creature which sees its prey coming along and is snarling at the sight.

Clyffurde, with those deep-set, earnest grey eyes of his, was silently watching his friend. His hand did not shake, nor did the breath come any quicker from his broad chest. Yet deep down behind the wide brow, behind those same overshadowed eyes, a keen observer would of a surety have detected the signs of a latent volcano of passions, all the more strong and virile as they were kept in perfect control. It was he who presently broke the silence, and his voice was quite steady when he spoke, though perhaps a trifle more toneless, more dead, than usual.

"And," he said, "what of Mlle. Crystal in all this?"

"Crystal?" queried the other curtly, "what about her?"

"She is an ardent royalist, more strong in her convictions and her enthusiasms than women usually are."

"And what of that?" rejoined de Marmont fiercely. "I love Crystal."

"But when she learns that you . . ."

"She shall not learn it," rejoined the other cynically. "We sign our marriage contract to-night: the wedding is fixed for Tuesday. Until then I can hold my peace."

An exclamation of hot protest almost escaped the Englishman's lips: his hand which rested on the table became so tightly clenched that the hard knuckles looked as if they would burst through their fetters of sinew and skin, and he made no pretence at concealing the look of burning indignation which flashed from his eyes.

"But man!" he exclaimed, "a deception such as you propose is cruel and monstrous. . . . In view, too, of what has occurred in the past few days . . . in view of what may happen if the news which we have heard is true . . ."

"In view of all that, my friend," retorted de Marmont firmly, "the old regime has had its nine days of wonder and of splendour. The Emperor has come back! we, who believe in him, who have remained true to him in his humiliation and in his misfortunes may once more raise our heads and

loudly proclaim our loyalty. The return of the Emperor will once more put his dukes and his marshals in their rightful place on a level with the highest nobility of France. The Comte de Cambray will realise that all his hopes of regaining his fortune through the favours of the Bourbons have by force of circumstances come to naught. Like most of the old *noblesse* who emigrated he is without a sou. He may choose to look on me with contempt, but he will no longer desire to kick me out of his house, for he will be glad enough to see the Cambray 'scutcheon regilt with de Marmont gold."

"But Mademoiselle Crystal?" insisted Clyffurde, almost appealingly, for his whole soul had revolted at the cynicism of the other man.

"Crystal has listened to that ape, St. Genis," replied de Marmont drily, "one of her own caste . . . a marquis with sixteen quarterings to his family escutcheon and not a sou in his pockets. She is very young, and very inexperienced. She has seen nothing of the world as yet—nothing. She was born and brought up in exile—in England, in the midst of that narrow society formed by impecunious *émigrés*. . . ."

"And shopkeeping Englishmen," murmured Clyffurde, under his breath.

"She could never have married St. Genis," reiterated Victor de Marmont with deliberate emphasis. "The man hasn't a sou. Even Crystal realised from the first that nothing ever could have come of that boy and girl dallying. The Comte never would have consented. . . ."

"Perhaps not. But she—Mademoiselle Crystal—would she ever have consented to marry you, if she had known what your convictions are?"

"Crystal is only a child," said de Marmont with a light shrug of the shoulders. "She will learn to love me presently when St. Genis has disappeared out of her little world, and she will accept my convictions as she has accepted me, submissive to my will as she was to that of her father."

Once more a hot protest of indignation rose to Clyffurde's lips, but this too he smothered resolutely. What was the use of protesting? Could he hope to change with a few arguments the whole cynical nature of a man? And what right had he even to interfere? The Comte de Cambray and Mademoiselle Crystal were nothing to him: in their minds they would never look upon him even as an equal—let alone as a friend. So the bitter words died upon his lips.

"And you have been content to win a wife on such terms!" was all that he said.

"I have had to be content," was de Marmont's retort. "Crystal is the only woman I have ever cared for. She will love me in time, I doubt not, and her sense of duty will make her forget St. Genis quickly enough."

Then as Clyffurde made no further comment silence fell once more between the two men. Perhaps even de Marmont felt that somehow, during the past few moments, the slender bond of friendship which similarity of tastes and a certain similarity of political ideals had forged between him and the stranger had been strained to snapping point, and this for a reason which he could not very well understand. He drank another draught of wine and gave a quick sigh of satisfaction with the world in general, and also with himself, for he did not feel that he had done or said anything which could offend the keenest susceptibilities of his friend.

He looked with a sudden sense of astonishment at Clyffurde, as if he were only seeing him now for the first time. His keen dark eyes took in with a rapid glance the Englishman's powerful personality, the square shoulders, the head well erect, the strong Anglo-Saxon chin firmly set, the slender hands always in repose. In the whole attitude of the man there was an air of will-power which had never struck de Marmont quite so forcibly as it did now, and a virility which looked as ready to challenge Fate as it was able to conquer her if she proved adverse.

And just now there was a curious look in those deep-set eyes—a look of contempt or of pity—de Marmont was not sure which, but somehow the look worried him and he would have given much to read the thoughts which were hidden behind the high, square brow.

However, he asked no questions, and thus the silence remained unbroken for some time save for the sighing of the northeast wind as it whistled through the pines, whilst from the tiny chapel

which held the shrine of Notre Dame de Vaulx came the sound of a soft-toned bell, ringing the midday Angelus.

Just then round that same curve in the road, where the two riders had paused an hour ago in sight of the little hamlet, a man on horseback appeared, riding at a brisk trot up the rugged, stony path.

Victor de Marmont woke from his rêverie:

"There's Emery," he cried.

He jumped to his feet, then he picked up his hat from the table where he had laid it down, tossed it up into the air as high as it would go, and shouted with all his might:

"Vive l'Empereur!"

IV

The man who now drew rein with abrupt clumsiness in front of the auberge looked hot, tired and travel-stained. His face was covered with sweat and his horse with lather, the lapel of his coat was torn, his breeches and boots were covered with half-frozen mud.

But having brought his horse to a halt, he swung himself out of the saddle with the brisk air of a boy who has enjoyed his first ride across country. Surgeon-Captain Emery was a man well over forty, but to-day his eyes glowed with that concentrated fire which burns in the heart at twenty, and he shook de Marmont by the hand with a vigour which made the younger man wince with the pain of that iron grip.

"My friend, Mr. Clyffurde, an English gentleman," said Victor de Marmont hastily in response to a quick look of suspicious enquiry which flashed out from under Emery's bushy eyebrows. "You can talk quite freely, Emery; and for God's sake tell us your news!"

But Emery could hardly speak. He had been riding hard for the past three hours, his throat was parched, and through it his voice came up hoarse and raucous: nevertheless he at once began talking in short, jerky sentences.

"He landed on Wednesday," he said. "I parted from him on Friday . . . at Castellane . . . you had my message?"

"This morning early—we came at once."

"I thought we could talk better here—first—but I was spent last night—I had to sleep at Corps . . . so I sent to you. . . . But now, in Heaven's name, give me something to drink. . . ."

While he drank eagerly and greedily of the cold spiced wine which Clyffurde had served out to him, he still scrutinised the Englishman closely from under his frowning and bushy eyebrows.

Clyffurde's winning glance, however, seemed to have conquered his mistrust, for presently, after he had put his mug down again, he stretched out a cordial hand to him.

"Now that our Emperor is back with us," he said as if in apology for his former suspicions, "we, his friends, are bound to look askance at every Englishman we meet."

"Of course you are," said Clyffurde with his habitual good-humoured smile as he grasped Surgeon-Captain Emery's extended hand.

"It is the hand of a friend I am grasping?" insisted Emery.

"Of a personal friend, if you will call him so," replied Clyffurde. "Politically, I hardly count, you see. I am just a looker-on at the game."

The surgeon-captain's keen eyes under their bushy brows shot a rapid glance at the tall, well-knit figure of the Englishman.

"You are not a fighting man?" he queried, much amazed.

"No," replied Clyffurde drily. "I am only a tradesman."

"Your news, Emery, your news!" here broke in Victor de Marmont, who during the brief colloquy between his two friends had been hardly able to keep his excitement in check.

Emery turned away from the other man in silence. Clearly there was something about that fine, noble-looking fellow—who proclaimed himself a tradesman while that splendid physique of his should be at his country's service—which still puzzled the worthy army surgeon.

But he was primarily very thirsty and secondly as eager to impart his news as de Marmont was to hear it, so now without wasting any further words on less important matter he sat down close to the table and stretched his short, thick legs out before him.

"My news is of the best," he said with lusty fervour. "We left Porto Ferrajo on Sunday last but only landed on Wednesday, as I told you, for we were severely becalmed in the Mediterranean. We came on shore at Antibes at midday of March 1st and bivouacked in an olive grove on the way to Cannes. That was a sight good for sore eyes, my friends, to see him sitting there by the camp fire,

his feet firmly planted upon the soil of France. What a man, Sir, what a man!" he continued, turning directly to Clyffurde, "on board the *Inconstant* he had composed and dictated his proclamation to the army, to the soldiers of France! the finest piece of prose, Sir, I have ever read in all my life. But you shall judge of it, Sir, you shall judge. . . ."

And with hands shaking with excitement he fumbled in the bulging pocket of his coat and extracted therefrom a roll of loose papers roughly tied together with a piece of tape.

"You shall read it, Sir," he went on mumbling, while his trembling fingers vainly tried to undo the knot in the tape, "you shall read it. And then mayhap you'll tell me if your Pitt was ever half so eloquent. Curse these knots!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Will you allow me, Sir?" said Clyffurde quietly, and with steady hand and firm fingers he undid the refractory knots and spread the papers out upon the table.

Already de Marmont had given a cry of loyalty and of triumph.

"His proclamation!" he exclaimed, and a sigh of infinite satisfaction born of enthusiasm and of hero-worship escaped his quivering lips.

The papers bore the signature of that name which had once been all-powerful in its magical charm, at sound of which Europe had trembled and crowns had felt insecure, the name which men had breathed—nay! still breathed—either with passionate loyalty or with bitter hatred:—"Napoleon."

They were copies of the proclamation wherewith the heroic adventurer—confident in the power of his diction—meant to reconquer the hearts of that army whom he had once led to such glorious victories.

De Marmont read the long document through from end to end in a half-audible voice. Now and again he gave a little cry—a cry of loyalty at mention of those victories of Austerlitz and Jena, of Wagram and of Eckmühl, at mention of those imperial eagles which had led the armies of France conquering and glorious throughout the length and breadth of Europe—or a cry of shame and horror at mention of the traitor whose name he bore and who had delivered France into the hands of strangers and his Emperor into those of his enemies.

And when the young enthusiast had read the proclamation through to the end he raised the paper to his lips and fervently kissed the imprint of the revered name: "Napoleon."

"Now tell me more about him," he said finally, as he leaned both elbows on the table and fastened his glowing eyes upon the equally heated face of Surgeon-Captain Emery.

"Well!" resumed the latter, "as I told you we bivouacked among the olive trees on the way to Cannes. The Emperor had already sent Cambronne on ahead with forty of his grenadiers to commandeer what horses and mules he could, as we were not able to bring many across from Porto Ferrajo. 'Cambronne,' he said, 'you shall be in command of the vanguard in this the finest campaign which I have ever undertaken. My orders are to you, that you do not fire a single unnecessary shot. Remember that I mean to reconquer my imperial crown without shedding one drop of French blood.' Oh! he is in excellent health and in excellent spirits! Such a man! such fire in his eyes! such determination in his actions! Younger, bolder than ever! I tell you, friends," continued the worthy surgeon-captain as he brought the palm of his hand flat down upon the table with an emphatic bang, "that it is going to be a triumphal march from end to end of France. The people are mad about him. At Roccavignon, just outside Cannes, where we bivouacked on Thursday, men, women and children were flocking round to see him, pressing close to his knees, bringing him wine and flowers; and the people were crying 'Vive l'Empereur!' even in the streets of Grasse."

"But the army, man? the army?" cried de Marmont, "the garrisons of Antibes and Cannes and Grasse? did the men go over to him at once?—and the officers?"

"We hadn't encountered the army yet when I parted from him on Friday," retorted Emery with equal impatience, "we didn't go into Antibes and we avoided Cannes. You must give him time. The people in the towns wouldn't at first believe that he had come back. General Masséna, who is in command at Marseilles, thought fit to spread the news that a band of Corsican pirates had landed

on the littoral and were marching inland—devastating villages as they marched. The peasants from the mountains were the first to believe that the Emperor had really come, and they wandered down in their hundreds to see him first and to spread the news of his arrival ahead of him. By the time we reached Castellane the mayor was not only ready to receive him but also to furnish him with 5,000 rations of meat and bread, with horses and with mules. Since then he has been at Digue and at Sisteron. Be sure that the garrisons of those cities have rallied round his eagles by now."

Then whilst Emery paused for breath de Marmont queried eagerly:

"And so . . . there has been no contretemps?"

"Nothing serious so far," replied the other. "We had to abandon our guns at Grasse, the Emperor felt that they would impede the rapidity of his progress; and our second day's march was rather trying, the mountain passes were covered in snow, the lancers had to lead their horses sometimes along the edge of sheer precipices, they were hampered too by their accoutrements, their long swords and their lances; others—who had no mounts—had to carry their heavy saddles and bridles on those slippery paths. But *he* was walking too, stick in hand, losing his footing now and then, just as they did, and once he nearly rolled down one of those cursed precipices: but always smiling, always cheerful, always full of hope. At Antibes young Casabianca got himself arrested with twenty grenadiers—they had gone into the town to requisition a few provisions. When the news reached us some of the younger men tried to persuade the Emperor to march on the city and carry the place by force of arms before Casabianca's misfortune got bruited abroad: 'No!' he said, 'every minute is precious. All we can do is to get along faster than the evil news can travel. If half my small army were captive at Antibes, I would still move on. If every man were a prisoner in the citadel, I would march on alone.' That's the man, my friends," cried Emery with ever-growing enthusiasm, "that's our Emperor!"

And he cast a defiant look on Clyffurde, as much as to say: "Bring on your Wellington and your armies now! the Emperor has come back! the whole of France will know how to guard him!" Then he turned to de Marmont.

"And now tell me about Grenoble," he said.

"Grenoble had an inkling of the news already last night," said de Marmont, whose enthusiasm was no whit cooler than that of Emery. "Marchand has been secretly assembling his troops, he has sent to Chambéry for the 7th and 11th regiment of the line and to Vienne for the 4th Hussars. Inside Grenoble he has the 5th infantry regiment, the 4th of artillery and 3rd of engineers, with a train squadron. This morning he is holding a council of war, and I know that he has been in constant communication with Masséna. The news is gradually filtering through into the town: people stand at the street corners and whisper among themselves; the word 'l'Empereur' seemed wafted upon this morning's breeze. . . ."

"And by to-night we'll have the Emperor's proclamation to his people pinned up on the walls of the Hôtel de Ville!" exclaimed Emery, and with hands still trembling with excitement he gathered the precious papers once more together and slipped them back into his coat pocket. Then he made a visible effort to speak more quietly: "And now," he said, "for one very important matter which, by the way, was the chief reason for my asking you, my good de Marmont, to meet me here before my getting to Grenoble."

"Yes? What is it?" queried de Marmont eagerly.

Surgeon-Captain Emery leaned across the table; instinctively he dropped his voice, and though his excitement had not abated one jot, though his eyes still glowed and his hands still fidgeted nervously, he had forced himself at last to a semblance of calm.

"The matter is one of money," he said slowly. "The Emperor has some funds at his disposal, but as you know, that scurvy government of the Restoration never handed him over one single sou of the yearly revenue which it had solemnly agreed and sworn to pay to him with regularity. Now, of course," he continued still more emphatically, "we who believe in our Emperor as we believe in God, we are absolutely convinced that the army will rally round him to a man. The army loves him

and has never ceased to love him, the army will follow him to victory and to death. But the most loyal army in the world cannot subsist without money, and the Emperor has little or none. The news of his triumphant march across France will reach Paris long before he does, it will enable His Most Excellent and Most Corpulent Majesty King Louis to skip over to England or to Ghent with everything in the treasury on which he can lay his august hands. Now, de Marmont, do you perceive what the serious matter is which caused me to meet you here—twenty-five kilomètres from Grenoble, where I ought to be at the present moment."

"Yes! I do perceive very grave trouble there," said de Marmont with characteristic insouciance, "but one which need not greatly worry the Emperor. I am rich, thank God! and . . ."

"And may God bless you, my dear de Marmont, for the thought," broke in Emery earnestly, "but what may be called a large private fortune is as nothing before the needs of an army. Soon, of course, the Emperor will be in peaceful possession of his throne and will have all the resources of France at his command, but before that happy time arrives there will be much fighting, and many days—weeks perhaps—of anxiety to go through. During those weeks the army must be paid and fed; and your private fortune, my dear de Marmont, would—even if the Emperor were to accept your sacrifice, which is not likely—be but as a drop in the mighty ocean of the cost of a campaign. What are two or even three millions, my poor, dear friend? It is forty, fifty millions that the Emperor wants."

De Marmont this time had nothing to say. He was staring moodily and silently before him.

"Now, that is what I have come to talk to you about," continued Emery after a few seconds' pause, during which he had once more thrown a quick, half-suspicious glance on the impassive, though obviously interested face of the Englishman, "always supposing that Monsieur here is on our side."

"Neither on your side nor on the other, Captain," said Bobby Clyffurde with a slight tone of impatience. "I am a mere tradesman, as I have had the honour to tell you: a spectator at this game of political conflicts. M. de Marmont knows this well, else he had not asked me to accompany him to-day nor offered me a mount to enable me to do so. But if you prefer it," he added lightly, "I can go for a stroll while you discuss these graver matters."

He would have risen from the table only that Emery immediately detained him.

"No offence, Sir," said the surgeon-captain bluntly.

"None, I give you my word," assented the Englishman. "It is only natural that you should wish to discuss such grave matters in private. Let me go and see to our *déjeuner* in the meanwhile. I feel sure that the fricandeau is done to a turn by now. I'll have it dished up in ten minutes. I pray you take no heed of me," he added in response to murmured protestations from both de Marmont and Emery. "I would much prefer to know nothing of these grave matters which you are about to discuss."

This time Emery did not detain him as he rose and turned to go within in order to find mine host or Annette. The two Frenchmen took no further heed of him: wrapped up in the all engrossing subject-matter they remained seated at the table, leaning across it, their faces close to one another, their eyes dancing with excitement, questions and answers—as soon as the stranger's back was turned—already tumbling out in confusion from their lips.

Clyffurde turned to have a last look at them before he went into the house, and while he did so his habitual, pleasant, gently-ironical smile still hovered round his lips. But anon a quickly-suppressed sigh chased the smile away, and over his face there crept a strange shadow—a look of longing and of bitter regret.

It was only for a moment, however, the next he had passed his hand slowly across his forehead, as if to wipe away that shadow and smooth out those lines of unspoken pain.

Soon his cheerful voice was heard, echoing along the low rafters of the little inn, loudly calling for Annette and for news of the baked omelette and the fricandeau.

V

"You really could have talked quite freely before Mr. Clyffurde, my good Emery," said de Marmont as soon as Bobby had disappeared inside the inn. "He really takes no part in politics. He is a friend alike of the Comte de Cambray and of glovemaker Dumoulin. He has visited our Bonapartist Club. Dumoulin has vouched for him. You see, he is not a fighting man."

"I suppose that you are equally sure that he is not an English spy," remarked Emery drily.

"Of course I am sure," asserted de Marmont emphatically. "Dumoulin has known him for years in business, though this is the first time that Clyffurde has visited Grenoble. He is in the glove trade in England: his interests are purely commercial. He came here with introductions to the Comte de Cambray from a mutual friend in England who seems to be a personage of vast importance in his own country and greatly esteemed by the Comte—else you may be sure that that stiff-necked aristocrat would never have received a tradesman as a guest in his house. But it was in Dumoulin's house that I first met Bobby Clyffurde. We took a liking to one another, and since then have ridden a great deal together. He is a splendid horseman, and I was very glad to be able to offer him a mount at different times. But our political conversations have never been very heated or very serious. Clyffurde maintains a detached impersonal attitude both to the Bonapartist and the royalist cause. I asked him to accompany me this morning and he gladly consented, for he dearly loves a horse. I assure you, you might have said anything before him."

"*Eh bien!* I'm sorry if I've been obstinate and ungracious," said the surgeon-captain, but in a tone that obviously belied his words, "though, frankly, I am very glad that we are alone for the moment."

He paused, and with a wave of his thick, short-fingered hand he dismissed this less important subject-matter and once more spoke with his wonted eagerness on that which lay nearest his heart.

"Now listen, my good de Marmont," he said, "do you recollect last April when the Empress—poor wretched, misguided woman—fled so precipitately from Paris, abandoning the capital, France and her crown at one and the same time, and taking away with her all the Crown diamonds and money and treasure belonging to the Emperor? She was terribly ill-advised, of course, but . . ."

"Yes, I remember all that perfectly well," broke in de Marmont impatiently.

"Well, then, you know that that abominable Talleyrand sent one of his emissaries after the Empress and her suite . . . that this emissary—Dudon was his name—reached Orleans just before Marie Louise herself got there. . . ."

"And that he ordered, in Talleyrand's name, the seizure of the Empress' convoy as soon as it arrived in the city," broke in de Marmont again. "Yes. I recollect that abominable outrage perfectly. Dudon, backed by the officers of the gendarmerie, managed to rob the Empress of everything she had, even to the last knife and fork, even to the last pocket handkerchief belonging to the Emperor and marked with his initials. Oh! it was monstrous! hellish! devilish! It makes my blood boil whenever I think of it . . . whenever I think of those fatuous, treacherous Bourbons gloating over those treasures at the Tuileries, while our Empress went her way as effectually despoiled as if she had been waylaid by so many brigands on a public highway."

"Just so," resumed Emery quietly after de Marmont's violent storm of wrath had subsided. "But I don't know if you also recollect that when the various cases containing the Emperor's belongings were opened at the Tuileries, there was just as much disappointment as gloating. Some of those fatuous Bourbons—as you so rightly call them—expected to find some forty or fifty millions of the Emperor's personal savings there—bank-notes and drafts on the banks of France, of England and of Amsterdam, which they were looking forward to distributing among themselves and their friends. Your friend the Comte de Cambray would no doubt have come in too for his share in this distribution. But M. de Talleyrand is a very wise man! always far-seeing, he knows the improvidence, the prodigality, the ostentation of these new masters whom he is so ready to serve. Ere Dudon reached

Paris with his booty, M. de Talleyrand had very carefully eliminated therefrom some five and twenty million francs in bank-notes and bankers' drafts, which he felt would come in very usefully once for a rainy day."

"But M. de Talleyrand is immensely rich himself," protested de Marmont.

"Ah! he did not eliminate those five and twenty millions for his own benefit," said Emery. "I would not so boldly accuse him of theft. The money has been carefully put away by M. de Talleyrand for the use of His Corpulent Majesty Louis de Bourbon, XVIIIth of that name."

Then as Emery here made a dramatic pause and looked triumphantly across at his companion, de Marmont rejoined somewhat bewildered:

"But . . . I don't understand . . ."

"Why I am telling you this?" retorted Emery, still with that triumphant air. "You shall understand in a moment, my friend, when I tell you that those five and twenty millions were never taken north to Paris, they were conveyed in strict secrecy south to Grenoble!"

"To Grenoble?" exclaimed de Marmont.

"To Grenoble," reasserted Emery.

"But why? . . . why such a long way?—why Grenoble?" queried the young man in obvious puzzlement.

"For several reasons," replied Emery. "Firstly both the préfet of the department and the military commandant are hot royalists, whilst the province of Dauphiné is not. In case of any army corps being sent down there to quell possible and probable revolt, the money would have been there to hand: also, if you remember, there was talk at the time of the King of Naples proving troublesome. There, too, in case of a campaign on the frontier, the money lying ready to hand at Grenoble could prove very useful. But of course I cannot possibly pretend to give you all the reasons which actuated M. de Talleyrand when he caused five and twenty millions of stolen money to be conveyed secretly to Grenoble rather than to Paris. His ways are more tortuous than any mere army-surgeon can possibly hope to gauge. Enough that he did it and that at this very moment there are five and twenty millions which are the rightful property of the Emperor locked up in the cellars of the Hôtel de Ville at Grenoble."

"But . . ." murmured de Marmont, who still seemed very bewildered at all that he had heard, "are you sure?"

"Quite sure," affirmed Emery emphatically. "Dumoulin brought news of it to the Emperor at Elba several months ago, and you know that he and his Bonapartist Club always have plenty of spies in and around the préfecture. The money is there," he reiterated with still greater emphasis, "now the question is how are we going to get hold of it."

"Easily," rejoined de Marmont with his habitual enthusiasm, "when the Emperor marches into Grenoble and the whole of the garrison rallies around him, he can go straight to the Hôtel de Ville and take everything that he wants."

"Always supposing that M. le préfet does not anticipate the Emperor's coming by conveying the money to Paris or elsewhere before we can get hold of it," quoth Emery drily.

"Oh! Fourier is not sufficiently astute for that."

"Perhaps not. But we must not neglect possibilities. That money would be a perfect godsend to the Emperor. It was originally his too, *par Dieu!* Anyhow, my good de Marmont, that is what I wanted to talk over quietly with you before I get into Grenoble. Can you think of any means of getting hold of that money in case Fourier has the notion of conveying it to some other place of safety?"

"I would like to think that over, Emery," said de Marmont thoughtfully. "As you say, we of the Bonapartist Club at Grenoble have spies inside the Hôtel de Ville. We must try and find out what Fourier means to do as soon as he realises that the Emperor is marching on Grenoble: and then we must act accordingly and trust to luck and good fortune."

"And to the Emperor's star," rejoined Emery earnestly; "it is once more in the ascendant. But the matter of the money is a serious one, de Marmont. You will deal with it seriously?"

"Seriously!" ejaculated de Marmont.

Once more the unquenchable fire of undying devotion to his hero glowed in the young man's eyes.

"Everything pertaining to the Emperor," he said fervently, "is serious to me. For a whim of his I would lay down my life. I will think of all you have told me, Emery, and here, beneath the blue dome of God's sky, I swear that I will get the Emperor the money that he wants or lose mine honour and my life in the attempt.

"Amen to that," rejoined Emery with a deep sigh of satisfaction. "You are a brave man, de Marmont, would to heaven every Frenchman was like you. And now," he added with sudden transition to a lighter mood, "let Annette dish up the fricandeau. Here's our friend the tradesman, who was born to be a soldier. M. Clyffurde," he added loudly, calling to the Englishman who had just appeared in the doorway of the inn, "my grateful thanks to you—not only for your courtesy, but for expediting that delicious *déjeuner* which tickles my appetite so pleasantly. I pray you sit down without delay. I shall have to make an early start after the meal, as I must be inside Grenoble before dark."

Clyffurde, good-humoured, genial, quiet as usual, quickly responded to the surgeon-captain's desire. He took his seat once more at the table and spoke of the weather and the sunshine, the Alps and the snows while Annette spread a cloth and laid plates and knives and forks before the distinguished gentlemen.

"We all want to make an early start, eh, my dear Clyffurde?" ejaculated de Marmont gaily. "We have serious business to transact this night with M. le Comte de Cambray, and partake too of his gracious hospitality, what?"

Emery laughed.

"Not I forsooth," he said. "M. le Comte would as soon have Satan or Beelzebub inside his doors. And I marvel, my good de Marmont, that you have succeeded in keeping on such friendly terms with that royalist ogre."

"I?" said de Marmont, whose inward exultation radiated from his entire personality, "I, my dear Emery? Did you not know that I am that royalist ogre's future son-in-law? *Par Dieu!* but this is a glorious day for me as well as a glorious day for France! Emery, dear friend, wish me joy and happiness. On Tuesday I wed Mademoiselle Crystal de Cambray—to-night we sign our marriage contract! Wish me joy, I say! she's a bride well worth the winning! Napoleon sets forth to conquer a throne—I to conquer love. And you, old sober-face, do not look so glum!" he added, turning to Clyffurde.

And his ringing laugh seemed to echo from end to end of the narrow valley.

After which a lighter atmosphere hung around the table outside the "Auberge du Grand Dauphin." There was but little talk of the political situation, still less of party hatred and caste prejudices. The hero's name was still on the lips of the two men who worshipped him, and Clyffurde, faithful to his attitude of detachment from political conflicts, listened quite unmoved to the impassioned dithyrambs of his friends.

But so absorbed were these two in their conversation and their joy that they failed to notice that Clyffurde hardly touched the excellent *déjeuner* set before him and left mine host's fine Burgundy almost untasted.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD REGIME

I

On that same day and at about the same time when Victor de Marmont and his English friend first turned their horses up the bridle path and sighted Notre Dame de Vaulx (when, if you remember, the young Frenchman drew rein and fell to apostrophising the hamlet, the day, the hour and the glorious news which he was expecting to hear) at about that self-same hour, I say, in the Château de Brestalou, situate on the right bank of the Isère at a couple of kilomètres from Grenoble, the big folding doors of solid mahogany which lead from the suite of vast reception rooms to the small boudoir beyond were thrown open and Hector appeared to announce that M. le Comte de Cambray would be ready to receive Mme. la Duchesse in the library in a quarter of an hour.

Mme. la Duchesse douairière d'Agen thereupon closed the gilt-edged, much-bethumbed Missal which she was reading—since this was Sunday and she had been unable to attend Mass owing to that severe twinge of rheumatism in her right knee—and placed it upon the table close to her elbow; then with delicate, bemittened hand she smoothed out one unruly crease in her puce silk gown and finally looked up through her round, bone-rimmed spectacles at the sober-visaged, majestic personage who stood at attention in the doorway.

"Tell M. le Comte, my good Hector," she said with slow deliberation, "that I will be with him at the time which he has so graciously appointed."

Hector bowed himself out of the room with that perfect decorum which proclaims the well-trained domestic of an aristocratic house. As soon as the tall mahogany doors were closed behind him, Mme. la Duchesse took her spectacles off from her high-bred nose and gave a little sniff, which caused Mademoiselle Crystal to look up from her book and mutely to question Madame with those wonderful blue eyes of hers.

"Ah ça, my little Crystal," was Madame's tart response to that eloquent enquiry, "does Monsieur my brother imagine himself to be a second Bourbon king, throning it in the Tuileries and granting audiences to the ladies of his court? or is it only for my edification that he plays this magnificent game of etiquette and ceremonial and other stupid paraphernalia which have set me wondering since last night? M. le Comte will receive Mme. la Duchesse in a quarter of an hour forsooth," she added, mimicking Hector's pompous manner; "*par Dieu!* I should think indeed that he would receive his own sister when and where it suited her convenience—not his."

Crystal was silent for a moment or two: and in those same expressive eyes which she kept fixed on Madame's face, the look of mute enquiry had become more insistent. It almost seemed as if she were trying to penetrate the underlying thoughts of the older woman, as if she tried to read all that there was in that kindly glance of hidden sarcasm, of humour or tolerance, or of gentle contempt. Evidently what she read in the wrinkled face and the twinkling eyes pleased and reassured her, for now the suspicion of a smile found its way round the corners of her sensitive mouth.

There are some very old people living in Grenoble at the present day whose mothers or fathers have told them that they remembered Mademoiselle Crystal de Cambray quite well in the year that M. le Comte returned from England and once more took possession of his ancestral home on the bank of the Isère, which those awful Terrorists of '92 had taken away from him. Louis XVIII., the Benevolent king, had promptly restored the old château to its rightful owner, when he himself, after years of exile, mounted the throne of his fathers, and the usurper Bonaparte was driven out of France by the armies of Europe allied against him, and sent to cool his ambitions in the island fastnesses of Elba.

Mademoiselle de Cambray was just nineteen in that year 1814 which was so full of grace for the Bourbon dynasty and all its faithful adherents, and in February of the following year she attained her twentieth birthday. Of course you know that she was born in England, and that her mother was English, for had not M. le Comte been obliged to fly before the fury of the Terrorists, whose dreaded Committee of Public Safety had already arrested him as a "suspect" and condemned him to the guillotine. He had contrived to escape death by what was nothing short of a miracle, and he had lived for twenty years in England, and there had married a beautiful English girl from whom Mademoiselle Crystal had inherited the deep blue eyes and brilliant skin which were the greatest charm of her effulgent beauty.

I like to think of her just as she was on that memorable day early in March of the year 1815—just as she sat that morning on a low stool close to Mme. la Duchesse's high-backed chair, and with her eyes fixed so enquiringly upon Madame's kind old face. Her fair hair was done up in the quaint loops and curls which characterised the mode of the moment: she had on a white dress cut low at the neck and had wrapped a soft cashmere shawl round her shoulders, for the weather was cold and there was no fire in the stately open hearth.

Having presumably arrived at the happy conclusion that Madame's wrath was only on the surface, Crystal now said gently:

"Father loves all this etiquette, *ma tante*; it brings back memories of a very happy past. It is the only thing he has left now," she added with a little sigh, "the only bit out of the past which that awful revolution could not take away from him. You will try to be indulgent to him, aunt darling, won't you?"

"Indulgent?" retorted the old lady with a shrug of her shoulders, "of course I'll be indulgent. It's no affair of mine and he does as he pleases. But I should have thought that twenty years spent in England would have taught him commonsense, and twenty years' experience in earning a precarious livelihood as a teacher of languages in . . ."

"Hush, aunt, for pity's sake," broke in Crystal hurriedly, and she put up her hands almost as if she wished to stop the words in the old lady's mouth.

"All right! all right! I won't mention it again," said Mme. la Duchesse good-humouredly. "I have only been in this house four and twenty hours, my dear child, but I have already learned my lesson. I know that the memory of the past twenty years must be blotted right out of our minds—out of the minds of every one of us. . . ."

"Not of mine, aunt, altogether," murmured Crystal softly.

"No, my dear—not altogether," rejoined Mme. la Duchesse as she placed one of her fine white hands on the fair head of her niece; "your beautiful mother belongs to the unforgettable memories, of those twenty years. . . ."

"And not only my beautiful mother, aunt dear. There are men living in England to-day whose names must remain for ever engraved upon my father's heart, as well as on mine—if we should ever forget those names and neglect for one single day our prayers of gratitude for their welfare and their reward, we should be the meanest and blackest of ingrates."

"Ah!" said Madame, "I am glad that Monsieur my brother remembers all that in the midst of his restored grandeur."

"Have you been wronging him in your heart all this while, *ma tante*?" asked Crystal, and there was a slight tone of reproach in her voice "you used not to be so cynical once upon a time."

"Cynical!" exclaimed the Duchesse, "bless the child's heart! Of course I am cynical—at my age what can you expect?—and what can I expect? But there, don't distress yourself, I am not wronging your father—far from it—only this grandeur—the state dinner last night—his gracious manner—all that upset me. I am not used to it, my dear, you see. Twenty years in that diminutive house in Worcester have altered my tastes, I see, more than they did your father's . . . and these last ten months which he seems to have spent in reviving the old grandeur of his ancestral home, I spent, remember,

with the dear little Sisters of Mercy at Boulogne, praying amidst very humble surroundings that the future may not become more unendurable than the past."

"But you are glad to be back at Brestalou again? and you *will* remain here with us—always?" queried Crystal, and with tender eagerness she clasped the older woman's hands closely in her own.

"Yes, dear," replied Madame gently. "I am glad to be back in the old château—my dear old home—where I was very happy and very young once—oh, so very long ago! And I will remain with your father and look after him all the time that his young bird is absent from the nest."

Again she stroked her niece's soft, wavy hair with a gesture which apparently was habitual with her, and it seemed as if a note of sadness had crept into her brisk, sharp voice. Over Crystal's cheeks a wave of crimson had quickly swept at her aunt's last words: and the eyes which she now raised to Madame's kindly face were full of tears.

"It seems so terribly soon now, *ma tante*," she said wistfully.

"Hm, yes!" quoth Mme. la Duchesse drily, "time has a knack now and then of flying faster than we wish. Well, my dear, so long as this day brings you happiness, the old folk who stay at home have no right to grumble."

Then as Crystal made no reply and held her little head resolutely away, Madame said more insistently:

"You are happy, Crystal, are you not?"

"Of course I am happy, *ma tante*," replied Crystal quickly, "why should you ask?"

But still she would not look straight into Madame's eyes, and the tone of Madame's voice sounded anything but satisfied.

"Well!" she said, "I ask, I suppose, because I want an answer . . . a satisfactory answer."

"You have had it, *ma tante*, have you not?"

"Yes, my dear. If you are happy, I am satisfied. But last night it seemed to me as if your ideas of your own happiness and those of your father on the same subject were somewhat at variance, eh?"

"Oh no, *ma tante*," rejoined Crystal quietly, "father and I are quite of one mind on that subject."

"But your heart is pulling a different way, is that it?"

Then as Crystal once more relapsed into silence and two hot tears dropped on the Duchesse's wrinkled hands, the old woman added softly:

"St. Genis, who hasn't a sou, was out of the question, I suppose."

Crystal shook her head in silence.

"And that young de Marmont is very rich?"

"He is his uncle's heir," murmured Crystal.

"And you, child, are marrying a kinsman of that abominable Duc de Raguse in order to regild our family escutcheon."

"My father wished it so very earnestly," rejoined Crystal, who was bravely swallowing her tears, "and I could not bear to run counter to his desire. The Duc de Raguse has promised father that when I am a de Marmont he will buy back all the forfeited Cambray estates and restore them to us: Victor will be allowed to take up the name of Cambray and . . . and . . . Oh!" she exclaimed passionately, "father has had such a hard life, so much sorrow, so many disappointments, and now this poverty is so horribly grinding. . . . I couldn't have the heart to disappoint him in this!"

"You are a good child, Crystal," said Madame gently, "and no doubt Victor de Marmont will prove a good husband to you. But I wish he wasn't a Marmont, that's all."

But this remark, delivered in the old lady's most uncompromising manner, brought forth a hot protest from Crystal:

"Why, aunt," she said, "the Duc de Raguse is the most faithful servant the king could possibly wish to have. It was he and no one else who delivered Paris to the allies and thus brought about the downfall of Bonaparte, and the restoration of our dear King Louis to the throne of France."

"Tush, child, I know that," said Madame with her habitual tartness of speech, "I know it just as well as history will know it presently, and methinks that history will pass on the Duc de Raguse just about the same judgment as I passed on him in my heart last year. God knows I hate that Bonaparte as much as anyone, and our Bourbon kings are almost as much a part of my religion as is the hierarchy of saints, but a traitor like de Marmont I cannot stomach. What was he before Bonaparte made him a marshal of France and created him Duc de Raguse?—An out-at-elbows ragamuffin in the ranks of the republican army. To Bonaparte he owed everything, title, money, consideration, even the military talents which gave him the power to turn on the hand that had fed him. Delivered Paris to the allies indeed!" continued the Duchesse with ever-increasing indignation and volubility, "betrayed Bonaparte, then licked the boots of the Czar of Russia, of the Emperor, of King Louis, of all the deadly enemies of the man to whom he owed his very existence. Pouah! I hate Bonaparte, but men like Ney and Berthier and de Marmont sicken me! Thank God that even in his life-time, de Marmont, Duc de Raguse, has already an inkling of what posterity will say of him. Has not the French language been enriched since the capitulation of Paris with a new word that henceforth and for all times will always spell disloyalty: and to-day when we wish to describe a particularly loathsome type of treachery, do we not already speak of a 'ragusade'?"

Crystal had listened in silence to her aunt's impassioned tirade. Now when Madame paused—presumably for want of breath—she said gently:

"That is all quite true, *ma tante*, but I am afraid that father would not altogether see eye to eye with you in this. After all," she added naively, "a pagan may become converted to Christianity without being called a traitor to his false gods, and the Duc de Raguse may have learnt to hate the idol whom he once worshipped, and for this profession of faith we should honour him, I think."

"Yes," grunted Madame, unconvinced, "but we need not marry into his family."

"But in any case," retorted Crystal, "poor Victor cannot help what his uncle did."

"No, he cannot," assented the Duchesse decisively, "and he is very rich and he loves you, and as your husband he will own all the old Cambray estates which his uncle of ragusade fame will buy up for him, and presently your son, my darling, will be Comte de Cambray, just as if that awful revolution and all that robbing and spoliation had never been. And of course everything will be for the best in the best possible world, if only," concluded the old lady with a sigh, "if only I thought that you would be happy."

Crystal took care not to meet Madame's kindly glance just then, for of a surety the tears would have rushed in a stream to her eyes. But she would not give way to any access of self-pity: she had chosen her part in life and this she meant to play loyally, without regret and without murmur.

"But of course, *ma tante*, I shall be happy," she said after a while; "as you say, M. de Marmont is very kind and good and I know that father will be happy when Brestalou and Cambray and all the old lands are once more united in his name. Then he will be able to do something really great and good for the King and for France . . . and I too, perhaps. . . ."

"You, my poor darling!" exclaimed Madame, "what can you do, I should like to know."

A curious, dreamy look came into the girl's eyes, just as if a foreknowledge of the drama in which she was so soon destined to play the chief *rôle* had suddenly appeared to her through the cloudy and distant veils of futurity.

"I don't know, *ma tante*," she said slowly, "but somehow I have always felt that one day I might be called upon to do something for France. There are times when that feeling becomes so strong that all thoughts of myself and of my own happiness fade from my knowledge, and it seems as if my duty to France and to the King were more insistent than my duty to God."

"Poor France!" sighed Madame.

"Yes! that is just what I feel, *ma tante*. Poor France! She has suffered so much more than we have, and she has regained so much less! Enemies still lurk around her; the prowling wolf is still at her gate: even the throne of her king is still insecure! Poor, poor France! our country, *ma tante*! she

should be our pride, our glory, and she is weak and torn and beset by treachery! Oh, if only I could do something for France and for the King I would count myself the happiest woman on God's earth."

Now she was a woman transformed. She seemed taller and stronger. Her girlishness, too, had vanished. Her cheeks burned, her eyes glowed, her breath came and went rapidly through her quivering nostrils. Mme. la Duchesse d'Agen looked down on her niece with naive admiration.

"*Hé* my little Joan of Arc!" she said merrily, "*par Dieu*, your eloquence, *ma mignonne*, has warmed up my old heart too. But, please God, our dear old country will not have need of heroism again."

"I am not so sure of that, *ma tante*."

"You are thinking of that ugly rumour which was current in Grenoble yesterday."

"Yes!"

"If that Corsican brigand dares to set his foot again upon this land . . ." began the old lady vehemently.

"Let him come, *ma tante*," broke in Crystal exultantly, "we are ready for him. Let him come, and this time when God has punished him again, it won't be to Elba that he will be sent to expiate his villainies!"

"Amen to that, my child," concluded Madame fervently. "And now, my dear, don't let me forget the hour of my audience. Hector will be back in a moment or two, and I must not lose any more time gossiping. But before I go, little one, will you tell me one thing?"

"Of course I will, *ma tante*."

"Quite frankly?"

"Absolutely."

"Well then, I want to know . . . about that English friend of yours. . . ."

"Mr. Clyffurde, you mean?" asked Crystal. "What about him?"

"I want to know, my dear, what I ought to make of this Mr. Clyffurde."

Crystal laughed lightly, and looked up with astonished, inquiring, wide-open eyes to her aunt.

"What should you want to make of him, *ma tante*?" she asked, wholly unperturbed under the scrutinising gaze of Madame.

"Nothing," said the Duchesse abruptly. "I have had my answer, thank you, dear."

Evidently she had no intention of satisfying the girl's obvious curiosity, for she suddenly rose from her chair, gathered her lace shawl round her shoulders, and said with abrupt transition:

"The hour for my audience is at hand. Not one minute must I keep my august brother waiting. I can hear Hector's footsteps in the corridor, and I will not have him see me in a fluster."

Crystal looked as if she would have liked to question Madame a little more closely about her former cryptic utterance, but there was something in the sarcastic twinkle of those sharp eyes which caused the young girl to refrain from too many questions, and—very wisely—she decided to hold her peace.

Madame la Duchesse threw a quick glance into the gilt-framed mirror close by. She smoothed a stray wisp of hair which had escaped from under her lace cap: she gave a tug to her fichu and a pat to her skirts. Then, as the folding doors were once more thrown open, and Hector—stiff, solemn and pompous—appeared under the lintel, Madame threw back her head in the grand manner pertaining to the old days at Versailles.

"Precede me, Hector," she said with consummate dignity, "to M. le Comte's audience chamber."

And with hands folded before her, her aristocratic head very erect, her mouth and eyes composed to reposeful majesty, she sailed out through the mahogany doors in a style which no one who had never curtsied to the Bien-aimé Monarque could possibly hope to imitate.

II

For some little while after her aunt had sailed out of the room Crystal remained where she was sitting on the low stool beside the high-backed chair just vacated by the Duchess.

Her eyes were still glowing with the enthusiasm which had excited the admiration of the older woman a while ago, and the high colour in her cheeks, the tremor of her nostrils showed that that same enthusiasm still kept her nerves on the quiver and caused the young, hot blood to course swiftly through her veins.

But something of the lightness of her mood had vanished, something of the exultant joy of the heroine had given place to the calmer resignation of the potential martyr. Gradually the colour faded from her cheeks, the light died slowly out of her eyes, and the young fair head so lately tossed triumphantly in the ardour of patriotism sunk gradually upon the still heaving breast.

Crystal was alone, and she was not ashamed to let the tears well up to her eyes. Despite her proud profession of faith the insistent longing for happiness, which is the inalienable share of youth, knocked at the portals of her heart.

Not even to the devoted aunt who had brought her up, who had known her every childish sorrow and gleaned her every childish tear, not even to her would she show what it cost her to sink her individuality, her longings, her hopes of happiness into that overwhelming sense of duty to her father's wishes and to the demands of her name, her country and her caste.

She had repeated it to herself often and often that her father had suffered so much for the sake of his convictions, had endured poverty and exile where opportunism would have dictated submission to the usurper Bonaparte and the acceptance of riches and honours at his hands, he had remained loyal in his beliefs, steadfast to his King through twenty years of misery, akin to squalor, the remembrance of which would for ever darken the rest of his life, but he had endured all that without bitterness, scarcely without a murmur. And now that twenty years of self-abnegation were at last finding their reward, now that the King had come into his own, and the King's faithful friends were being compensated in accordance with the length of the King's purse, would it not be arrant cowardice and disloyalty for her—an only child—to oppose her father's will in the ordering of her own future, to refuse the rich marriage which would help to restore dignity and grandeur to the ancient name and to the old home?

Crystal de Cambray was born in England: she had lived the whole of her life in a small provincial town in this country. But she had been brought up by her aunt, the Duchesse douairière d'Agen, and through that upbringing she had been made to imbibe from her earliest childhood all the principles of the old regime. These principles consisted chiefly of implicit obedience by the children to the parents' decrees anent marriage, of blind worship of the dignity of station, and of duty to name and caste, to king and country.

The thought would never have entered Crystal's head that she could have the right to order her own future, or to demand from life her own special brand of happiness.

Now her fate had been finally decided on by her father, and she was on the point of taking—at his wish—the irrevocable step which would bind her for ever to a man whom she could never love. But she did not think of rebellion, she had no thought of grumbling at Fate or at her father: Crystal de Cambray had English blood in her veins, the blood that makes men and women accept the inevitable with set teeth and a determination to do the right thing even if it hurts. Crystal, therefore, had no thought of rebellion; she only felt an infinity of regret for something sweet and intangible which she had hardly realised, hardly expected, which had been too elusive to be called hope, too remote to be termed happiness. She gave herself the luxury of this short outburst of tears—since nobody was near and nobody could see: there was a fearful pain in her heart while she rested her head against the cushion of the stiff high-backed chair and cried till it seemed that she never could cry again whatever sorrow life might still have in store for her.

But when that outburst of grief had subsided she dried her eyes resolutely, rose to her feet, arranged her hair in front of the mirror, and feeling that her eyes were hot and her head heavy, she turned to the tall French window, opened it and stepped out into the garden.

It had suffered from years of neglect, the shrubs grew rank and stalky, the paths were covered with weeds, but there was a slight feeling of spring in the air, the bare branches of the trees seemed swollen with the rising sap, and upon the edge of the terrace balustrade a red-breasted robin cocked its mischievous little eye upon her.

At the bottom of the garden there was a fine row of ilex, with here and there a stone seat, and in the centre an old stone fountain moss-covered and overshadowed by the hanging boughs of the huge, melancholy trees. Crystal was very fond of this avenue; she liked to sit and watch the play of sunshine upon the stone of the fountain: the melancholy quietude of the place suited her present mood. It was so strange to look on these big evergreen trees and on the havoc caused by weeds and weather on the fine carving of the fountain, and to think of their going on here year after year for the past twenty years, while that hideous revolution had devastated the whole country, while men had murdered each other, slaughtered women and children and committed every crime and every infamy which lust of hate and revenge can engender in the hearts of men. The old trees and the stone fountain had remained peaceful and still the while, unscathed and undefiled, grand, dignified and majestic, while the owner of the fine château of the gardens and the fountain and of half the province around earned a precarious livelihood in a foreign land, half-starved in wretchedness and exile.

She, Crystal, had never seen them until some ten months ago, when her father came back into his own, and leading his daughter by the hand, had taken her on a tour of inspection to show her the magnificence of her ancestral home. She had loved at once the fine old château with its lichen-covered walls, its fine portcullis and crenelated towers, she had wept over the torn tapestries, the broken furniture, the family portraits which a rough and impious rabble had wilfully damaged, she had loved the wide sweep of the terrace walls, the views over the Isère and across the mountain range to the peaks of the Grande Chartreuse, but above all she had loved this sombre row of ilex trees, the broken fountain, the hush and peace which always lay over this secluded portion of the neglected garden.

The earth was moist and soft under her feet, the cheeky robin, curious after the manner of his kind, had followed her and was flying from seat to seat ahead of her watching her every movement.

"Crystal!"

At first she thought that it was the wind sighing through the trees, so softly had her name been spoken, so like a sigh did it seem as it reached her ears.

"Crystal!"

This time she could not be mistaken, someone had called her name, someone was walking up the avenue rapidly, behind her. She would not turn round, for she knew who it was that had called and she would not allow surprise to resuscitate the outward signs of regret. But she stood quite still while those hasty footsteps drew nearer, and she made a great and successful effort to keep back the tears which once more threatened to fill her eyes.

A minute later she felt herself gently drawn to the nearest stone seat, and she sank down upon it, still trying very hard to remain calm and above all not to cry.

"Oh! why, why did you come, Maurice?" she said at last, when she felt that she could look with some semblance of composure on the half-sitting, half-kneeling figure of the young man beside her. Despite her obstinate resistance he had taken her hand in his and was covering it with kisses.

"Why did you come," she reiterated pleadingly, "you must know that it is no use. . . ."

"I can't believe it. I won't believe it," he protested passionately. "Crystal, if you really cared you would not send me away from you."

"If I really cared?" she said dully. "Maurice, sometimes I think that if *you* really cared you would not make it so difficult for me. Can't you see," she added more vehemently, "that every time

you come you make me more wretched, and my duty seem more hard? till sometimes I feel as if I could not bear it any longer—as if in the struggle my poor heart would suddenly break."

"And because your father is so heartless . . ." he began vehemently.

"My father is not heartless, Maurice," she broke in firmly, "but you must try and see for yourself how impossible it was for him to give his consent to our marriage even if he knew that my happiness was bounded by your love. . . . Just think it over quietly—if you had a sister who was all the world to you, would *you* consent to such a marriage? . . ."

"With a penniless, out-at-elbows, good-for-nothing, you mean?" he said, with a kind of resentful bitterness. "No! I dare say I should not. Money!" he cried impetuously as he jumped to his feet, and burying his hands in the pockets of his breeches he began pacing the path up and down in front of her. "Money! always money! Always talk of duty and of obedience . . . always your father and his sorrows and his desires . . . do I count for nothing, then? Have I not suffered as he has suffered? did I not live in exile as he did? Have I not made sacrifices for my king and for my ideals? Why should I suffer in the future as well as in the past? Why, because my king is powerless or supine in giving me back what was filched from my father, should that be taken from me which alone gives me incentive to live . . . you, Crystal," he added as once again he knelt beside her. He encircled her shoulders with his arms, then he seized her two hands and covered them with kisses. "You are all that I want in this world. After all, we can live in poverty . . . we have been brought up in poverty, you and I . . . and even then it is only a question of a few years . . . months, perhaps . . . the King must give us back what that abominable Revolution took from us—from us who remained loyal to him and because we were loyal. My father owned rich lands in Burgundy . . . the King must give those back to me . . . he must . . . he shall . . . he will . . . if only you will be patient, Crystal . . . if only you will wait. . . ."

The fiery blood of his race had rushed into Maurice de St. Genis' head. He was talking volubly and at random, but he believed for the moment everything that he said. Tears of passion and of fervour came to his eyes and he buried his head in the folds of Crystal's white gown and heavy sobs shook his bent shoulders. She, moved by that motherly tenderness which is seldom absent from a good woman's love, stroked with soothing fingers the matted hair from his hot forehead. For a while she remained silent while the paroxysm of his passionate revolt spent itself in tears, then she said quite softly:

"I think, Maurice, that in your heart you do us all an injustice—to me, to father, to yourself, even to the King. The King cannot give you that which is not his; your property—like ours—was confiscated by that awful revolutionary government because your father and mine followed their king into exile. The rich lands were sold for the benefit of the nation: the nation presumably has spent the money, but the people who bought the lands in good faith cannot be dispossessed by our King without creating bitter ill-feeling against himself, as you well know, and once more endangering his throne. Those are the facts, Maurice, against which no hot-blooded argument, no passionate outbursts can prevail. The King gave my father back this dear old castle, because it happened to have proved unsaleable, and was still on the nation's hands. Our rich lands—like yours—can never be restored to us: that hard fact has been driven into poor father's head for the past ten months, and now it has gone home at last. These grey walls, this neglected garden, a few sticks of broken furniture, a handful of money from an over-generous king's treasury is all that Fate has rescued for him from out the ashes of the past. My father is every whit as penniless as you are yourself, Maurice, as penniless as ever he was in England, when he gave French and drawing lessons to a lot of young ragamuffins in a middle-class school. But Victor de Marmont is rich, and his money—once I am his wife—will purchase back all the estates which have been in our family for hundreds of years. For my father's sake, for the sake of the name which I bear, I must give my hand to Victor de Marmont, and pray to God that some semblance of peace, the sense of duty accomplished, will compensate me for the happiness to which I shall bid good-bye to-day."

"And you are willing to be sold to young de Marmont for the price of a few acres of land!" retorted Maurice de St. Genis hotly. "Oh! it's monstrous, Crystal, monstrous! All the more monstrous as you seem quite unconscious of the iniquity of such a bargain."

"Women of our caste, Maurice," she said in her turn with a touch of bitterness, "have often before now been sacrificed for the honour of their name. Men have been accustomed to look to them for help when their own means of gilding their escutcheons have failed."

"And you are willing, Crystal, to be sold like this?" he insisted.

"My father wishes me to marry Victor de Marmont," she replied with calm dignity, "and after all that he has suffered for the honour and dignity of our name, I should deem myself craven and treacherous if I refused to obey him in this."

Maurice de St. Genis once more rose to his feet. All his vehemence, his riotous outbreak of rebellion seemed to have been smothered beneath a pall of dreary despair. His young, good-looking face appeared sombre and sullen, his restless, dark eyes wandered obstinately from Crystal's fair bent head to her stooping shoulders, to her hands, to her feet. It seemed as if he was trying to engrave an image of her upon his turbulent brain, or that he wished to force her to look on him again before she spoke the last words of farewell.

But she wouldn't look at him. She kept her head resolutely averted, looking far out over the undulating lands of Dauphiné and Savoie to where in the far distant sky the stately Alps reared their snow-crowned heads. At last, unable to bear her silence any longer, he said dully:

"Then it is your last word, Crystal?"

"You know that it must be, Maurice," she murmured in reply. "My marriage contract will be signed to-night, and on Tuesday I go to the altar with Victor de Marmont."

"And you mean to tear your love for me out of your heart?"

"Yes!"

"Were its roots a little deeper, a little stronger, you could not do it, Crystal. But they are not so deep as those of your love for your father."

She made no reply . . . perhaps something in her heart told her that after all he might be right, that, unbeknown to herself even, there were tendrils of affection in her that bound her, ivylike, and so closely—to her father that even her girlish love for Maurice de St. Genis—the first hint of passion that had stirred the smooth depths of her young heart—could not tear her from that bulwark to which she clung.

"This is the last time that I shall see you, Crystal," said Maurice with a sigh, seeing that obviously she meant to allow his taunt to pass unchallenged.

"You are going away?" she asked.

"How can I stay—here, under this roof, where anon—in a few hours—Victor de Marmont will have claims upon you which, if he exercised them before me would make me wish to kill him or myself. I shall leave to-morrow—early . . ." he added more quietly.

"Where will you go?"

"To Paris—or abroad—or the devil, I don't know which," he replied moodily.

"Father will be sorry if you go?" she murmured under her breath, for once again the tears were very insistent, and she felt an awful pain in her heart, because of the misery which she had to inflict upon him.

"Your father has been passing kind to me. He gave me a home when I was homeless, but it is not fitting that I should trespass any longer upon his hospitality."

"Have you made any plans?"

"Not yet. But the King will give me a commission. There will be some fighting now . . . there was a rumour in Grenoble last night that Bonaparte had landed at Antibes, and was marching on Paris."

"A false rumour as usual, I suppose," she said indifferently.

"Perhaps," he replied.

There was silence between them for awhile after that, silence only broken by the twitter of birds wakening to the call of spring. The word "good-bye" remained unspoken: neither of them dared to say it lest it broke the barrier of their resolve.

"Will you not go now, Maurice?" said Crystal at last in pitiable pleading, "we only make each other hopelessly wretched, by lingering near one another after this."

"Yes, I will go, Crystal," he replied, and this time he really forced his voice to tones of gentleness, although his inward resentment still bubbled out with every word he spoke, "I wish I could have left this house altogether—now—at once—but your father would resent it—and he has been so kind . . . I wish I could go to-day," he reiterated obstinately, "I dread seeing Victor de Marmont in this house, where the laws of chivalry forbid my striking him in the face."

"Maurice!" she exclaimed reproachfully.

"Nay! I'll not say it again: I have sufficient reason left in me, I think, to show these parvenus how we, of the old regime, bear every blow which fate chooses to deal to us. They have taken everything from us, these new men—our lives, our lands, our very means of subsistence—now they have taken to filching our sweethearts—curse them! but at least let us keep our dignity!"

But again she was silent. What was there to say that had not been said?—save that unspoken word "good-bye." And he asked very softly:

"May I kiss you for the last time, Crystal?"

"No, Maurice," she replied, "never again."

"You are still free," he urged. "You are not plighted to de Marmont yet."

"No—not actually—not till to-night. . . ."

"Then . . . mayn't I?"

"No, Maurice," she said decisively.

"Your hand then?"

"If you like." He knelt down close to her; she yielded her hand to him and he with his usual impulsiveness covered it with kisses into which he tried to infuse the fervour of a last farewell.

Then without another word he rose to his feet and walked away with a long and firm stride down the avenue. Crystal watched his retreating figure until the overhanging branches of the ilex hid him from her view.

She made no attempt now to restrain her tears, they flowed uninterruptedly down her cheeks and dropped hot and searing upon her hands. With Maurice's figure disappearing down the dark avenue, with the echo of his footsteps dying away in the distance, the last chapter of her first book of romance seemed to be closing with relentless finality.

The afternoon sun was hidden behind a bank of grey clouds, the northeast wind came whistling insistently through the trees:—even that feeling of spring in the air had vanished. It was just a bleak grey winter's day now. Crystal felt herself shivering with cold. She drew her shawl more closely round her shoulders, then with eyes still wet with tears, but small head held well erect, she rose to her feet and walked rapidly back to the house.

III

Madame la Duchesse had in the meanwhile followed Hector along the corridor and down the finely carved marble staircase. At a monumental door on the ground floor the man paused, his hand upon the massive ormolu handle, waiting for Madame la Duchesse to come up.

He felt a little uncomfortable at her approach for here in the big square hall the light was very clear, and he could see Madame's keen, searching eyes looking him up and down and through and through. She even put up her lorgnon and though she was not very tall, she contrived to look Hector through them straight between the eyes.

"Is M. le Comte in there?" Madame la Duchesse deigned to ask as she pointed with her lorgnon to the door.

"In the small library beyond, Madame la Duchesse," replied Hector stiffly.

"And . . ." she queried with sharp sarcasm, "is the antechamber very full of courtiers and ladies just now?"

A quick, almost imperceptible blush spread over Hector's impassive countenance, and as quickly vanished again.

"M. le Comte," he said imperturbably, "is disengaged at the present moment. He seldom receives visitors at this hour."

On Madame's mobile lips the sarcastic curl became more marked. "And I suppose, my good Hector," she said, "that since M. le Comte has only granted an audience to his sister to-day, you thought it was a good opportunity for putting yourself at your ease and wearing your patched and mended clothes, eh?"

Once more that sudden wave of colour swept over Hector's solemn old face. He was evidently at a loss how to take Mme. la Duchesse's remark—whether as a rebuke or merely as one of those mild jokes of which every one knew that Madame was inordinately fond.

Something of his dignity of attitude seemed to fall away from him as he vainly tried to solve this portentous problem. His mouth felt dry and his head hot, and he did not know on which foot he could stand with the least possible discomfort, and how he could contrive to hide from Madame la Duchesse's piercing eyes that very obvious patch in the right knee of his breeches.

"Madame la Duchesse will forgive me, I hope," he stammered painfully.

But already Madame's kind old face had shed its mask of raillery.

"Never mind, Hector," she said gently, "you are a good fellow, and there's no occasion to tell me lies about the rich liveries which are put away somewhere, nor about the numerous retinue and countless number of flunkies, all of whom are having unaccountably long holidays just now. It's no use trying to throw dust in my eyes, my poor friend, or put on that pompous manner with me. I know that the carpets are not all temporarily rolled up or the best of the furniture at a repairer's in Grenoble—what's the use of pretending with me, old Hector? Those days at Worcester are not so distant yet, are they? when all the family had to make a meal off a pound of sausages, or your wife Jeanne, God bless her! had to pawn her wedding-ring to buy M. le Comte de Cambray a second-hand overcoat."

"Madame la Duchesse, I humbly pray your Grace . . ." entreated Hector whose wrinkled, parchment-like face had become the colour of a peony, and who, torn between the respect which he had for the great lady and his horror at what she said was ready to sink through the floor in his confusion.

"Eh what, man?" retorted the Duchesse lightly, "there is no one but these bare walls to hear me; and my words, you'll find, will clear the atmosphere round you—it was very stifling, my good Hector, when I arrived. There now!" she added, "announce me to M. le Comte and then go down to Jeanne and tell her that I for one have no intention of forgetting Worcester, or the pawned ring, or the sausages, and that the array of Grenoble louts dressed up for the occasion in moth-eaten liveries

dragged up out of some old chests do not please me half as much round a dinner table as did her dear old, streaming face when she used to bring us the omelette straight out of the kitchen."

She dropped her lorgnon, and folding her aristocratic hands upon her bosom, she once more assumed the grand manner pertaining to Versailles, and Hector having swallowed an uncomfortable lump in his throat, threw open the huge, folding doors and announced in a stentorian voice:

"Madame la Duchesse douairière d'Agen!"

IV

M. le Comte de Cambray was at this time close on sixty years of age, and the hardships which he had endured for close upon a quarter of a century had left their indelible impress upon his wrinkled, careworn face.

But no one—least of all a younger man—could possibly rival him in dignity of bearing and gracious condescension of manner. He wore his clothes after the old-time fashion, and clung to the powdered peruque which had been the mode at the Tuileries and Versailles before these vulgar young republicans took to wearing their own hair in its natural colour.

Now as he advanced from the inner room to meet Mme. la Duchesse, he seemed a perfect presentation or rather resuscitation of the courtly and vanished epoch of the Roi Soleil. He held himself very erect and walked with measured step, and a stereotyped smile upon his lips. He paused just in front of Mme. la Duchesse, then stopped and lightly touched with his lips the hand which she held out to him.

"Tell me, Monsieur my brother," said Madame in her loudly-pitched voice, "do you expect me to make before you my best Versailles curtsy, for—with my rheumatic knee—I warn you that once I get down, you might find it very difficult to get me up on my feet again."

"Hush, Sophie," admonished M. le Comte impatiently, "you must try and subdue your voice a little, we are no longer in Worcester remember—"

But Madame only shrugged her thin shoulders.

"Bah!" she retorted, "there's only good old Hector on the other side of the door, and you don't imagine you are really throwing dust in *his* eyes do you? . . . good old Hector with his threadbare livery and his ill-fed belly. . . ."

"Sophie!" exclaimed M. le Comte who was really vexed this time, "I must insist. . . ."

"All right, all right my dear André. . . . I won't say anything more. Take me to your audience chamber and I'll try to behave like a lady."

A smile that was distinctly mischievous still hovered round Madame's lips, but she forced her eyes to look grave: she held out the tips of her fingers to her brother and allowed him to lead her in the correct manner into the next room.

Here M. le Comte invited her to sit in an upright chair which was placed at a convenient angle close to his bureau while he himself sat upon a stately throne-like armchair, one shapely knee bent, the other slightly stretched forward, displaying the fine silk stocking and the set of his well-cut, satin breeches. Mme. la Duchesse kept her hands folded in front of her, and waited in silence for her brother to speak, but he seemed at a loss how to begin, for her piercing gaze was making him feel very uncomfortable: he could not help but detect in it the twinkle of good-humoured sarcasm.

Madame of course would not help him out. She enjoyed his obvious embarrassment, which took him down somewhat from that high altitude of dignity wherein he delighted to soar.

"My dear Sophie," he began at last, speaking very deliberately and carefully choosing his words, "before the step which Crystal is about to take to-day becomes absolutely irrevocable, I desired to talk the matter over with you, since it concerns the happiness of my only child."

"Isn't it a little late, my good André," remarked Madame drily, "to talk over a question which has been decided a month ago? The contract is to be signed to-night. Our present conversation might have been held to some purpose soon after the New Year. It is distinctly useless to-day."

At Madame's sharp and uncompromising words a quick blush had spread over the Comte's sunken cheeks.

"I could not consult you before, Sophie," he said coldly, "you chose to immure yourself in a convent, rather than come back straightaway to your old home as we all did when our King was restored to his throne. The post has been very disorganised and Boulogne is a far cry from Brestalou,

but I did write to you as soon as Victor de Marmont made his formal request for Crystal's hand. To this letter I had no reply, and I could not keep him waiting in indefinite uncertainty."

"Your letter did not reach me until a month after it was written, as I had the honour to tell you in my reply."

"And that same reply only reached me a fortnight ago," retorted the Comte, "when Crystal had been formally engaged to Victor de Marmont for over a month and the date for the signature of the contract and the wedding-day had both been fixed. I then sent a courier at great expense and in great haste immediately to you," he added with a tone of dignified reproach, "I could do no more."

"Or less," she assented tartly. "And here I am, my dear brother, and I am not blaming you for delays in the post. I merely remarked that it was too late now to consult me upon a marriage which is to all intents and purposes, an accomplished fact already."

"That is so of course. But it would be a great personal satisfaction to me, my good Sophie, to hear your views upon the matter. You have brought Crystal up from babyhood: in a measure, you know her better than even I—her father—do and therefore you are better able than I am to judge whether Crystal's marriage with de Marmont will be conducive to her permanent happiness."

"As to that, my good André," quoth Madame, "you must remember that when our father and mother decided that a marriage between me and M. le Duc d'Agen was desirable, my personal feelings and character were never consulted for a moment . . . and I suppose that—taking life as it is—I was never particularly unhappy as his wife."

"And what do you adduce from those reminiscences, my dear Sophie?" queried the Comte de Cambray suavely.

"That Victor de Marmont is not a bad fellow," replied Madame, "that he is no worse than was M. le Duc d'Agen and that therefore there is no reason to suppose that Crystal will be any more unhappy than I was in my time."

"But . . ."

"There is no 'but' about it, my good André. Crystal is a sweet girl and a devoted daughter. She will make the best, never you fear! of the circumstances into which your blind worship of your own dignity and of your rank have placed her."

"My good Sophie," broke in the Count hotly, "you talk *par Dieu*, as if I was forcing my only child into a distasteful marriage."

"No, I do not talk as if you were forcing Crystal into a distasteful marriage, but you know quite well that she only accepted Victor de Marmont because it was your wish, and because his millions are going to buy back the old Cambray estates, and she is so imbued with the sense of her duty to you and to the family escutcheon, that she was willing to sacrifice every personal feeling in the fulfilment of that duty."

"By 'personal feeling' I suppose that you mean St. Genis."

"Well, yes . . . I do," said Madame laconically.

"Crystal was very much in love with him at one time."

"She still is."

"But even you, my dear sister, must admit that a marriage with St. Genis was out of the question," retorted the Count in his turn with some acerbity. "I am very fond of Maurice and his name is as old and great as ours, but he hasn't a sou, and you know as well as I do by now that the restoration of confiscated lands is out of the question . . . parliament will never allow it and the King will never dare. . . ."

"I know all that, my poor André," sighed Madame in a more conciliatory spirit, "I know moreover that you yourself haven't a sou either, in spite of your grandeur and your prejudices. . . . Money must be got somehow, and our ancient family 'scutcheon must be regilt at any cost. I know that we must keep up this state pertaining to the old regime, we must have our lacqueys and our liveries, sycophants around us and gaping yokels on our way when we sally out into the open. . . . We must

blot out from our lives those twenty years spent in a democratic and enlightened country where no one is ashamed either of poverty or of honest work—and above all things we must forget that there has ever been a revolution which sent M. le Comte de Cambray, Commander of the Order of the Holy Ghost, Grand Cross of the Ordre du Lys, Seigneur of Montfleury and St. Eynard, hereditary Grand Chamberlain of France, to teach French and drawing in an English Grammar School. . . ."

"You wrong me there, Sophie, I wish to forget nothing of the past twenty years."

"I thought that you had given your memory a holiday."

"I forget nothing," he reiterated with dignified emphasis, "neither the squalid poverty which I endured, nor the bitter experiences which I gleaned in exile."

"Nor the devotion of those who saved your life."

"And yours . . ." he interposed.

"And mine, at risk of their own."

"Perhaps you will believe me when I tell you that not a day goes by but Crystal and I speak of Sir Percy Blakeney, and of his gallant League of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Well! we owe our lives to them," said Madame with deep-drawn sigh. "I wonder if we shall ever see any of those fine fellows again!"

"God only knows," sighed M. le Comte in response. "But," he continued more lightly, "as you know the League itself has ceased to be. We saw very little of Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney latterly for we were too poor ever to travel up to London. Crystal and I saw them, before we left England, and I then had the opportunity of thanking Sir Percy Blakeney for the last time, for the many valuable French lives which his plucky little League had saved."

"He is indeed a gallant gentleman," said Mme. la Duchesse gently, even whilst her bright, shrewd eyes gazed straight out before her as if on the great bare walls of her own ancestral home, the ghostly hand of memory had conjured up pictures of long ago:—her own, her husband's and her brother's arrest here in this very room, the weeping servants, the rough, half-naked soldiery—then the agony of a nine days' imprisonment in a dark, dank prison-cell filled to overflowing with poor wretches in the same pitiable plight as herself—the hasty trial, the insults, the mockery:—her husband's death in prison and her own thoughts of approaching death!

Then the gallant deed!—after all these years she could still see herself, her brother and Jeanne, her faithful maid, and poor devoted Hector all huddled up in a rickety tumbril, being dragged through the streets of Paris on the road to death. On ahead she had seen the weird outline of the guillotine silhouetted against the evening sky, whilst all around her a howling, jeering mob sang that awful refrain: "Cà ira! Cà ira! les aristos à la lanterne!"

Then it was that she had felt unseen hands snatching her out of the tumbril, she had felt herself being dragged through that yelling crowd to a place where there was silence and darkness and where she knew that she was safe: thence she was conveyed—she hardly realised how—to England, where she and her brother and Jeanne and Hector, their faithful servants, had found refuge for over twenty years.

"It was a gallant deed!" whispered Mme. la Duchesse once again, "and one which will always make me love every Englishman I meet, for the sake of one who was called The Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Then why should you attribute vulgar ingratitude to me?" retorted the Comte reproachfully. "My feelings I imagine are as sensitive as your own. Am I not trying my best to be kind to that Mr. Clyffurde, who is an honoured guest in my house—just because it was Sir Percy Blakeney who recommended him to me?"

"It can't be very difficult to be kind to such an attractive young man," was Mme. la Duchesse's dry comment. "Recommendation or no recommendation I liked your Mr. Clyffurde and if it were not so late in the day and there was still time to give my opinion, I should suggest that Mr. Clyffurde's money could quite well regild our family 'scutcheon. He is very rich too, I understand."

"My good Sophie!" exclaimed the Comte in horror, "what can you be thinking of?"

"Crystal principally," replied the Duchesse. "I thought Clyffurde a far nicer fellow than de Marmont."

"My dear sister," said the Comte stiffly, "I really must ask you to think sometimes before you speak. Of a truth you make suggestions and comments at times which literally stagger one."

"I don't see anything so very staggering in the idea of a penniless aristocrat marrying a wealthy English gentleman. . . ."

"A gentleman! my dear!" exclaimed the Comte.

"Well! Mr. Clyffurde is a gentleman, isn't he?"

"His family is irreproachable, I believe."

"Well then?"

"But . . . Mr. Clyffurde . . . you know, my dear. . . ."

"No! I don't know," said Madame decisively. "What is the matter with Mr. Clyffurde?"

"Well! I didn't like to tell you, Sophie, immediately on your arrival yesterday," said the Comte, who was making visible efforts to mitigate the horror of what he was about to say: "but . . . as a matter of fact . . . this Mr. Clyffurde whom you met in my house last night . . . who sat next to you at my table . . . with whom you had that long and animated conversation afterwards . . . is nothing better than a shopkeeper!"

No doubt M. le Comte de Cambray expected that at this awful announcement, Mme. la Duchesse's indignation and anger would know no bounds. He was quite ready even now with a string of apologies which he would formulate directly she allowed him to speak. He certainly felt very guilty towards her for the undesirable acquaintance which she had made in her brother's own house. Great was his surprise therefore when Madame's wrinkled face wreathed itself into a huge smile, which presently broadened into a merry laugh, as she threw back her head, and said still laughing:

"A shopkeeper, my dear Comte? A shopkeeper at your aristocratic table? and your meal did not choke you? Why! God forgive you, but I do believe you are actually becoming human."

"I ought to have told you sooner, of course," began the Comte stiffly.

"Why bless your heart, I knew it soon enough."

"You knew it?"

"Of course I did. Mr. Clyffurde told me that interesting fact before he had finished eating his soup."

"Did he tell you that . . . that he traded in . . . in gloves?"

"Well! and why not gloves?" she retorted. "Gloves are very nice things and better manufactured at Grenoble than anywhere else in the world. The English coquettes are very wise in getting their gloves from Grenoble through the good offices of Mr. Clyffurde."

"But, my dear Sophie . . . Mr. Clyffurde buys gloves here from Dumoulin and sells them again to a shop in London . . . he buys and sells other things too and he does it for profit. . . ."

"Of course he does. . . . You don't suppose that any one would do that sort of thing for pleasure, do you? Mr. Clyffurde," continued Madame with sudden seriousness, "lost his father when he was six years old. His mother and four sisters had next to nothing to live on after the bulk of what they had went for the education of the boy. At eighteen he made up his mind that he would provide his mother and sisters with all the luxuries which they had lacked for so long and instead of going into the army—which had been the burning ambition of his boyhood—he went into business . . . and in less than ten years has made a fortune."

"You seem to have learnt a great deal of the man's family history in so short a time."

"I liked him: and I made him talk to me about himself. It was not easy, for these English men are stupidly reticent, but I dragged his story out of him bit by bit—or at least as much of it as I could—and I can tell you, my good André, that never have I admired a man so much as I do this Mr. Clyffurde . . . for never have I met so unselfish a one. I declare that if I were only a few years younger," she continued whimsically, "and even so . . . heigh! but I am not so old after all. . . ."

"My dear Sophie!" ejaculated the Comte.

"Eh, what?" she retorted tartly, "you would object to a tradesman as a brother-in-law, would you? What about a de Marmont for a son? Eh?"

"Victor de Marmont is a soldier in the army of our legitimate King. His uncle the Duc de Raguse. . . ."

"That's just it," broke in Madame again, "I don't like de Marmont because he is a de Marmont."

"Is that the only reason for your not liking him?"

"The only one," she replied. "But I must say that this Mr. Clyffurde . . ."

"You must not harp on that string, Sophie," said the Comte sternly. "It is too ridiculous. To begin with Clyffurde never cared for Crystal, and, secondly, Crystal was already engaged to de Marmont when Clyffurde arrived here, and, thirdly, let me tell you that my daughter has far too much pride in her ever to think of a shopkeeper in the light of a husband even if he had ten times this Mr. Clyffurde's fortune."

"Then everything is comfortably settled, André. And now that we have returned to our sheep, and have both arrived at the conclusion that nothing stands in the way of Crystal's marriage with Victor de Marmont, I suppose that I may presume that my audience is at an end."

"I only wished to hear your opinion, my good Sophie," rejoined M. le Comte. And he rose stiffly from his chair.

"Well! and you have heard it, André," concluded Madame as she too rose and gathered her lace shawl round her shoulders. "You may thank God, my dear brother, that you have in Crystal such an unselfish and obedient child, and in me such a submissive sister. Frankly—since you have chosen to ask my opinion at this eleventh hour—I don't like this de Marmont marriage, though I have admitted that I see nothing against the young man himself. If Crystal is not unhappy with him, I shall be content: if she is, I will make myself exceedingly disagreeable, both to him and to you, and that being my last word, I have the honour to wish you a polite 'good-day.'"

She swept her brother an imperceptibly ironical curtsey, but he detained her once again, as she turned to go.

"One word more, Sophie," he said solemnly. "You will be amiable with Victor de Marmont this evening?"

"Of course I will," she replied tartly. "Ah, ça, Monsieur my brother, do you take me for a washerwoman?"

"I am entertaining the préfet for the *souper du contrat*," continued the Comte, quietly ignoring the old lady's irascibility of temper, "and the general in command of the garrison. They are both converted Bonapartists, remember."

"Hm!" grunted Madame crossly, "whom else are you going to entertain?"

"Mme. Fourier, the préfet's wife, and Mlle. Marchand, the general's daughter, and of course the d'Embruns and the Genevois."

"Is that all?"

"Some half dozen or so notabilities of Grenoble. We shall sit down twenty to supper, and afterwards I hold a reception in honour of the coming marriage of Mlle. de Cambray de Brestalou with M. Victor de Marmont. One must do one's duty. . . ."

"And pander to one's love of playing at being a little king in a limited way. . . . All right! I won't say anything more. I promise that I won't disgrace you, and that I'll put on a grand manner that will fill those worthy notabilities and their wives with awe and reverence. And now, I'd best go," she added whimsically, "ere my good resolutions break down before your pomposity . . . I suppose the louts from the village will be again braced up in those moth-eaten liveries, and the bottles of thin Médoc purchased surreptitiously at a local grocer's will be duly smothered in the dust of ages. . . . All right! all right! I'm going. For gracious' sake don't conduct me to the door, or I'll really disgrace you under

Hector's uplifted nose. . . . Oh! shades of cold beef and treacle pies of Worcester . . . and washing-day . . . do you remember? . . . all right! all right, Monsieur my brother, I am dumb as a carp at last."

And with a final outburst of sarcastic laughter, Madame finally sailed across the room, while Monsieur fell back into his throne-like chair with a deep sigh of relief.

CHAPTER III

THE RETURN OF THE EMPEROR

I

But even as Madame la Duchesse douairière d'Agen placed her aristocratic hand upon the handle of the door, it was opened from without with what might almost be called undue haste, and Hector appeared in the doorway.

Hector in truth! but not the sober-faced, pompous, dignified Hector of the household of M. le Comte de Cambray, but a red-visaged, excited, fussy Hector, who for the moment seemed to have forgotten where he was, as well as the etiquette which surrounded the august personality of his master. He certainly contrived to murmur a humble if somewhat hasty apology, when he found himself confronted at the door by Mme. la Duchesse herself, but he did not stand aside to let her pass.

She had stepped back into the room at sight of him, for obviously something very much amiss must have occurred thus to ruffle Hector's ingrained dignity, and even M. le Comte was involuntarily dragged out of his aristocratic aloofness and almost—though not quite—jumped up from his chair.

"What is it, Hector?" he exclaimed, peremptorily.

"M. le Comte," gasped Hector, who seemed to be out of breath from sheer excitement, "the Corsican . . . he has come back . . . he is marching on Grenoble . . . M. le préfet is here! . . ."

But already M. le Comte had—with a wave of the hand as it were—swept the unwelcome news aside.

"What rubbish is this?" he said wrathfully. "You have been dreaming in broad daylight, Hector . . . and this excitement is most unseemly. Show Mme. la Duchesse to her apartments," he added with a great show of calm.

Hector—thus reproved, coloured a yet more violent crimson to the very roots of his hair. He made a great effort to recover his pomposity and actually took up the correct attitude which a well-trained servant assumes when he shows a great lady out of a room. But even then—despite the well-merited reproof—he took it upon himself to insist:

"M. le préfet is here, M. le Comte," he said, "and begs to be received at once."

"Well, then, you may show him up when Mme. la Duchesse has retired," said the Comte with quiet dignity.

"By your leave, my brother," quoth the Duchesse decisively, "I'll wait and hear what M. le préfet has to say. The news—if news there be—is too interesting to be kept waiting for me."

And accustomed as she was to get her own way in everything, Mme. la Duchesse calmly sailed back into the room, and once more sat down in the chair beside her brother's bureau, whilst Hector with as much grandeur of mien as he could assume under the circumstances was still waiting for orders.

M. le Comte would undoubtedly have preferred that his sister should leave the room before the préfet was shown in: he did not approve of women taking part in political conversations, and his manner now plainly showed to Mme. la Duchesse that he would like to receive M. le préfet alone. But he said nothing—probably because he knew that words would be useless if Madame had made up her mind to remain, which she evidently had, so, after a brief pause, he said curtly to Hector:

"Show M. le préfet in."

He took up his favourite position, in his throne-shaped chair—one leg bent, the other stretched out, displaying to advantage the shapely calf and well-shod foot. M. le préfet Fourier, mathematician

of great renown, and member of the Institut was one of those converted Bonapartists to whom it behoved at all times to teach a lesson of decorum and dignity.

And certainly when, presently Hector showed M. Fourier in, the two men—the aristocrat of the old regime and the bureaucrat of the new—presented a marked and curious contrast. M. le Comte de Cambray calm, unperturbed, slightly supercilious, in a studied attitude and moving with pompous deliberation to greet his guest, and Jacques Fourier, man of science and préfet of the Isère department, short of stature, scant of breath, flurried and florid!

Both men were conscious of the contrast, and M. Fourier did his very best to approach Mme. la Duchesse with a semblance of dignity, and to kiss her hand in something of the approved courtly manner. When he had finally sat down, and mopped his streaming forehead, M. le Comte said with kindly condescension:

"You are perturbed, my good M. Fourier!"

"Alas, M. le Comte," replied the worthy préfet, still somewhat out of breath, "how can I help being agitated . . . this awful news! . . ."

"What news?" queried the Comte with a lifting of the brows, which was meant to convey complete detachment and indifference to the subject matter.

"What news?" exclaimed the préfet who, on the other hand, was unable to contain his agitation and had obviously given up the attempt, "haven't you heard? . . ."

"No," replied the Comte.

And Madame also shook her head.

"Town-gossip does not travel as far as the Castle of Brestalou," added M. le Comte gravely.

"Town gossip!" reiterated M. Fourier, who seemed to be calling Heaven to witness this extraordinary levity, "town gossip, M. le Comte! . . . But God in Heaven help us all. Bonaparte landed at Antibes five days ago. He was at Sisteron this morning, and unless the earth opens and swallows him up, he will be on us by Tuesday!"

"Bah! you have had a nightmare, M. le préfet," rejoined the Comte drily. "We have had news of the landing of Bonaparte at least once a month this half-year past."

"But it is authentic news this time, M. le Comte," retorted Fourier, who, gradually, under the influence of de Cambray's calm demeanour, had succeeded in keeping his agitation in check. "The préfet of the Var department, M. le Comte de Bouthillier, sent an express courier on Thursday last to the préfet of the Basses-Alpes, who sent that courier straight on to me, telling me that he and General Loverdo, who is in command of the troops in that district, promptly evacuated Digue because they were not certain of the loyalty of the garrison. The Corsican it seems only landed with about a thousand of his old guard, but since then, the troops in every district which he has traversed, have deserted in a body, and rallied round his standard. It has been, so I hear, a triumphal march for him from the Littoral to Digne, and altogether the news which the courier brought me this morning was of such alarming nature, that I thought it my duty, M. le Comte, to apprise you of it immediately."

"That," said M. le Comte condescendingly, "was exceedingly thoughtful and considerate, my good M. Fourier. And what is the alarming news?"

"Firstly, that Bonaparte made something like a state entry into Digne yesterday. The city was beflagged and decorated. The national guard turned out and presented arms, drums were beating, the population acclaimed him with cries of 'Vive l'Empereur!' The préfet and the general in command had intended to resist his entry into the city, but all the notabilities of the town forced them into submission. Duval, the préfet, fled to a neighbouring village, taking the public funds with him, while General Loverdo with a mere handful of loyal troops has retreated on Sisteron."

Though M. le Comte de Cambray had listened to the préfet's narrative with all his habitual grandeur of mien, it soon became obvious that some of his aristocratic sangfroid had already abandoned him. His furrowed cheeks had become a shade paler than usual, and the slender hand which toyed with an ivory paper-knife on his desk had not its wonted steadiness. Mme. la Duchesse

perceived this, no doubt, for her keen eyes were fixed scrutinisingly upon her brother; she saw too that his thin lips were quivering and that the reason why he made no comment on what he had just heard was because he could not quite trust himself to speak. It was she, therefore, who now remarked quietly:

"And in your department, M. le préfet, in Grenoble itself, is the garrison equally likely to go over to the Corsican brigand?"

M. Fourier shrugged his shoulders. He was not at all sure.

"After what has happened at Digne, Mme. la Duchesse," he said, "I would not care to prophesy. Général Marchand does not intend to trust entirely to the garrison. He has sent to Vienne and to Chambéry for reinforcements . . . but . . ."

The préfet was hesitating, evidently he had not a great deal of faith in the loyalty of those reinforcements either.

M. le Comte made a vigorous protest. "Surely, M. Fourier," he said, "you don't mean to suggest that Grenoble is going to turn traitor to the King?"

But M. le préfet apparently had meant to suggest it.

"Alas, M. le Comte!" he said, "we must always bear in mind that the whole of the Dauphiné has remained throughout a bed of Bonapartism."

"But in that case . . ." ejaculated the Comte.

"Général Marchand is doing all he can to ensure effectual resistance, M. le Comte. But we are in the hands of the army, and the army has never been truly loyal to the King. At the bottom of every soldier's haversack there is an old and worn tricolour cockade, which is there ready to be fetched out at a moment's notice, and will be fetched out at the mere sound of the Corsican's voice. We are in the hands of the army, M. le Comte, and in the Dauphiné; alas! the army is only too ready to cry: 'Vive l'Empereur!'"

There was silence in the stately room now, silence only broken by the tap-tap of the ivory paper-knife with which M. le Comte was still nervously fidgeting. M. Fourier was wiping the perspiration from his overheated brow.

"For God's sake, André, stop that irritating noise," said Mme. Duchesse after awhile, "that tapping has got on my nerves."

"I beg your pardon, Sophie," said the Comte loftily.

He was offended with her for drawing M. Fourier's attention to his own nervous restlessness, yet grateful to be thus forcibly made aware of it himself. His attitude was on the verge of incorrectness. Where was the aristocratic sangfroid which should have made him proof even against so much perturbing news? What had become of the lesson in decorum which should have been taught to this vulgar little bureaucrat?

M. le Comte pulled himself together with a jerk: he straightened out his spare figure, put on that air of detachment which became him so well, and finally turned once more to the préfet a perfectly calm and unruffled countenance.

Then he said with his accustomed urbanity:

"And now, my good M. Fourier, since you have so admirably put the situation before me, will you also tell me in what way I may be of service to you in this—or to Général Marchand?"

"I am coming to that, M. le Comte," replied the préfet. "It will explain the reason of my disturbing you at this hour, when I was coming anyhow to partake of your gracious hospitality later on. But I do want your assistance, M. le Comte, as the matter of which I wish to speak with you concerns the King himself."

"Everything that you have told me hitherto, my good M. Fourier, concerns His Majesty and the security of his throne. I cannot help wondering how much of this news has reached him by now."

"All of it at this hour, I should say. For already on Friday the Prince d'Essling sent a despatch to His Majesty—by courier as far as Lyons and thence by aerial telegraph to Paris. The King—may God

preserve him!" added the ex-Bonapartist fervently, "knows as much of the Corsican's movements at the present moment as we do; and God alone knows what he will decide to do."

"Whatever happens," interjected the Comte de Cambray solemnly, "Louis de Bourbon, XVIIIth of his name, by the Grace of God, will act like a king and a gentleman."

"Amen to that," retorted the préfet. "And now let me come to my point, M. le Comte, and the chief object of my visit to you."

"I am at your service, my dear M. Fourier."

"You will remember, M. le Comte, that directly you were installed at Brestalou and I was confirmed in my position as préfet of this department, I thought it was my duty to tell you of the secret funds which are kept in the cellars of our Hôtel de Ville by order of M. de Talleyrand."

"Yes, of course I remember that perfectly. French money, which the unfortunate wife of that brigand Bonaparte was taking out of the country."

"Quite so," assented Fourier. "The funds are in a convenient and portable form, being chiefly notes and bankers' drafts to bearer, but the amount is considerable, namely, twenty-five millions of francs."

"A comfortable sum," interposed Mme. la Duchesse drily. "I did not know that Grenoble sheltered so vast a treasure."

"The money was seized," said the Comte, "from Marie Louise when she was fleeing the country. Talleyrand did it all, and it was his idea to keep the money in this part of the country against likely emergencies."

"But the emergency has arisen," exclaimed M. Fourier excitedly, "and the money at Grenoble is useless to His Majesty in Paris. Nay! it is worse than useless, it is in danger of spoliation," he added with unconscious *naïveté*. "If the Corsican marches into Grenoble, if the garrison and the townspeople rally to him, he will of a truth occupy the Hôtel de Ville and the brigand will seize the King's treasure which lies now in one of its cellars."

"True," mused the Comte, "I hadn't thought of that."

"Well!" exclaimed Madame with light sarcasm, "seeing that the money was originally taken from his wife, the brigand will not be committing an altogether unlikely act, I imagine, by taking what was originally his."

"His, my good Sophie?" exclaimed the Comte, highly shocked. "Money robbed by that usurper from France—his?"

"We won't argue, André," said Madame sharply, "let us hear what M. le préfet proposes."

"Propose, Mme. la Duchesse," ejaculated the unfortunate préfet, "I have nothing to propose! I am at my wits' end what to do! I came to M. le Comte for advice."

"And you were quite right, my dear M. Fourier," said the Comte affably.

He paused for a few seconds in order to collect his thoughts, then continued: "Now let us consider this question from every side, and then see to what conclusion we can arrive that will be for the best. Firstly, of course, there is the possibility of your following the example of the préfet of the Basses-Alpes and taking yourself and the money to a convenient place outside Grenoble."

But at this suggestion M. Fourier was ready to burst into tears.

"Impossible, M. le Comte," he cried pitiably, "I could not do it. . . . Where could I go? . . . The existence of the money is known . . . known to the Bonapartists, I am convinced. . . . There's Dumoulin, the glovemaker, he knows everything that goes on in Grenoble . . . and his friend Emery, who is an army surgeon in the pay of Bonaparte . . . both these men have been to and from Elba incessantly these past few months . . . then there's the Bonapartist club in Grenoble . . . with a membership of over two thousand . . . the members have friends and spies everywhere . . . even inside the Hôtel de Ville . . . why! the other day I had to dismiss a servant who . . ."

"Easy, easy, M. le préfet," broke in M. le Comte impatiently, "the long and the short of it is that you would not feel safe with the money anywhere outside Grenoble."

"Or inside it, M. le Comte."

"Very well, then, the money must be deposited there, where it will be safe. Now what do you think of Dupont's Bank?"

"Oh, M. le Comte! an avowed Bonapartist! . . . M. de Talleyrand would not trust him with the money last year."

"That is so . . . but . . ."

"It seems to me," here interposed Mme. la Duchesse abruptly, "that by far the best plan—since this district seems to be a hot-bed of disloyalty—would be to convey the money straightway to Paris, and then the King or M. de Talleyrand can dispose of it as best they like."

"Ah, Mme. la Duchesse," sighed M. Fourier ecstatically as he clasped his podgy little hands together and looked on Madame with eyes full of admiration for her wisdom, "how cleverly that was spoken! If only I could be relieved from that awful responsibility . . . five and twenty millions under my charge and that Corsican ogre at our gates! . . ."

"That is all very well!" quoth the Comte with marked impatience, "but how is it going to be done? 'Convey the money to Paris' is easily said. But who is going to do it? M. le préfet here says that the Bonapartists have spies everywhere round Grenoble, and . . ."

"Ah, M. le Comte!" exclaimed the préfet eagerly. "I have already thought of such a beautiful plan! If only you would consent . . ."

M. le Comte's thin lips curled in a sarcastic smile.

"Oh! you have thought it all out already, M. le préfet?" he said. "Well! let me hear your plan, but I warn you that I will not have the money brought here. I don't half trust the peasantry of the neighbourhood, and I won't have a fight or an outrage committed in my house!"

M. le préfet was ready with a protest:

"No, no, M. le Comte!" he said, "I wouldn't suggest such a thing for the world. If the Corsican brigand is successful in capturing Grenoble, no place would be sacred to him. No! My idea was if you, M. le Comte—who have oft before journeyed to Paris and back—would do it now . . . before Bonaparte gets any nearer to Grenoble . . . and take the money with you . . ."

"I?" exclaimed the Comte. "But, man, if—as you say—Grenoble is full of Bonapartist spies, my movements are no doubt just as closely watched as your own."

"No, no, M. le Comte, not quite so closely, I am sure."

The insinuating manner of the worthy man, however, was apparently getting on M. le Comte's nerves.

"Ah, ça, M. le préfet," he ejaculated abruptly, "but meseems that the splendid plan you thought on merely consists in transferring responsibility from your shoulders to mine own."

And M. le Comte cast such a wrathful look on poor M. Fourier that the unfortunate man was stricken dumb with confusion.

"Moreover," concluded the Comte, "I don't know that you, M. le préfet, have the right to dispose of this money which was entrusted to you by M. de Talleyrand in the King's behalf without consulting His Majesty's wishes in the matter."

"Bah, André," broke in the Duchesse in her incisive way, "you are talking nonsense, and you know it. There is no time for red-tapeism now with that ogre at our gates. How are you going to consult His Majesty's wishes—who is in Paris—between now and Tuesday, I would like to know?" she added with a shrug of the shoulders.

Whereupon M. le Comte waxed politely sarcastic.

"Perhaps," he said, "you would prefer us to consult yours."

"You might do worse," she retorted imperturbably. "The question is one which is very easily solved. Ought His Majesty the King to have that money, or should M. le préfet here take the risk of its falling in Bonaparte's hands? Answer me that," she said decisively, "and then I will tell you how best to succeed in carrying out your own wishes."

"What a question, my good Sophie!" said the Comte stiffly. "Of course we desire His Majesty to have what is rightfully his."

"You mean he ought to have the twenty-five millions which the Prince de Bénévant stole from Marie Louise. Very well then, obviously that money ought to be taken to Paris before Bonaparte gets much nearer to Grenoble—but it should not be taken by you, my good André, nor yet by M. le préfet."

"By whom then?" queried the Comte irritably.

"By me," replied Mme. la Duchesse.

"By you, Sophie! Impossible!"

"And God alive, why impossible, I pray you?" she retorted. "The money, I understand, is in a very portable form, notes and bankers' drafts, which can be stowed away quite easily. Why shouldn't I be journeying back to Paris after Crystal's wedding? Who would suspect me, I should like to know, of carrying twenty-five millions under my petticoats? All I should want would be a couple of sturdy fellows on the box to protect me against footpads. Impossible?" she continued tartly. "Men are always so ready with that word. Get a sensible woman, I say, and she will solve your difficulties before you have finished exclaiming: 'Impossible!'"

And she looked triumphantly from one man to the other. There was obvious relief on the ruddy face of little M. Fourier, and even M. le Comte was visibly taken with the idea.

"Well!" he at last condescended to say, "it does sound feasible after all."

"Feasible? Of course it's feasible," said Madame with a shrug of contempt. "Either the King is in want of the money, or he is not. Either Bonaparte is likely to get it or he is not. If the King wants it, he must have it at any cost and any risk. Twenty-five millions in Bonaparte's hands at this juncture would help him to reconstitute his army and make it very unpleasant for the King and for us all. M. le préfet, who has been in charge of the money all along, and M. le Comte de Cambray, who is the only true royalist in the district, are both marked down by spies: ergo Mme. la Duchesse d'Agen is the only possible agent for the business, and an inoffensive old woman without any political standing is the least likely to be molested in her task. If I fail, I fail," concluded Madame decisively, "if I am stopped on the way and the money taken from me, well! I am stopped, that's all! and M. le préfet or M. le Comte de Cambray or any male agent they may have sent would have been stopped likewise. But I maintain that a woman travelling alone is far safer at this business and more likely to succeed than a man. So now, for God's sake, don't let's argue any more about it. Crystal is to be married on Tuesday and I could start that same afternoon. Can you bring the money over with you to-night?"

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