

EMMA ORCZY

I WILL REPAY

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Baroness Emmuska Orczy

I Will Repay

PROLOGUE

I

Paris: 1783

"Coward! Coward! Coward!"

The words rang out, clear, strident, passionate, in a crescendo of agonised humiliation.

The boy, quivering with rage, had sprung to his feet, and, losing his balance, he fell forward clutching at the table, whilst with a convulsive movement of the lids, he tried in vain to suppress the tears of shame which were blinding him.

"Coward!" He tried to shout the insult so that all might hear, but his parched throat refused him service, his trembling hand sought the scattered cards upon the table, he collected them together, quickly, nervously, fingering them with feverish energy, then he hurled them at the man opposite, whilst with a final effort he still contrived to mutter: "Coward!"

The older men tried to interpose, but the young ones only laughed, quite prepared for the adventure which must inevitably ensue, the only possible ending to a quarrel such as this.

Conciliation or arbitration was out of the question. Déroulède should have known better than to speak disrespectfully of Adèle de Montchéri, when the little Vicomte de Marny's infatuation for the notorious beauty had been the talk of Paris and Versailles these many months past.

Adèle was very lovely and a veritable tower of greed and egotism. The Marnys were rich and the little Vicomte very young, and just now the brightly-plumaged hawk was busy plucking the latest pigeon, newly arrived from its ancestral cote.

The boy was still in the initial stage of his infatuation. To him Adèle was a paragon of all the virtues, and he would have done battle on her behalf against the entire aristocracy of France, in a vain endeavour to justify his own exalted opinion of one of the most dissolute women of the epoch. He was a first-rate swordsman too, and his friends had already learned that it was best to avoid all allusions to Adèle's beauty and weaknesses.

But Déroulède was a noted blunderer. He was little versed in the manners and tones of that high society in which, somehow, he still seemed an intruder. But for his great wealth, no doubt, he never would have been admitted within the intimate circle of aristocratic France. His ancestry was somewhat doubtful and his coat-of-arms unadorned with quarterings.

But little was known of his family or the origin of its wealth; it was only known that his father had suddenly become the late King's dearest friend, and commonly surmised that Déroulède gold had on more than one occasion filled the emptied coffers of the First Gentleman of France.

Déroulède had not sought the present quarrel. He had merely blundered in that clumsy way of his, which was no doubt a part of the inheritance bequeathed to him by his bourgeois ancestry.

He knew nothing of the little Vicomte's private affairs, still less of his relationship with Adèle, but he knew enough of the world and enough of Paris to be acquainted with the lady's reputation. He hated at all times to speak of women. He was not what in those days would be termed a ladies' man, and was even somewhat unpopular with the sex. But in this instance the conversation had drifted

in that direction, and when Adèle's name was mentioned, every one became silent, save the little Vicomte, who waxed enthusiastic.

A shrug of the shoulders on Déroulède's part had aroused the boy's ire, then a few casual words, and, without further warning, the insult had been hurled and the cards thrown in the older man's face.

Déroulède did not move from his seat. He sat erect and placid, one knee crossed over the other, his serious, rather swarthy face perhaps a shade paler than usual: otherwise it seemed as if the insult had never reached his ears, or the cards struck his cheek.

He had perceived his blunder, just twenty seconds too late. Now he was sorry for the boy and angered with himself, but it was too late to draw back. To avoid a conflict he would at this moment have sacrificed half his fortune, but not one particle of his dignity.

He knew and respected the old Duc de Marny, a feeble old man now, almost a dotard whose hitherto spotless *blason*, the young Vicomte, his son, was doing his best to besmirch.

When the boy fell forward, blind and drunk with rage, Déroulède leant towards him automatically, quite kindly, and helped him to his feet. He would have asked the lad's pardon for his own thoughtlessness, had that been possible: but the stilted code of so-called honour forbade so logical a proceeding. It would have done no good, and could but imperil his own reputation without averting the traditional sequel.

The panelled walls of the celebrated gaming saloon had often witnessed scenes such as this. All those present acted by routine. The etiquette of duelling prescribed certain formalities, and these were strictly but rapidly adhered to.

The young Vicomte was quickly surrounded by a close circle of friends. His great name, his wealth, his father's influence, had opened for him every door in Versailles and Paris. At this moment he might have had an army of seconds to support him in the coming conflict.

Déroulède for a while was left alone near the card table, where the unsnuffed candles began smouldering in their sockets. He had risen to his feet, somewhat bewildered at the rapid turn of events. His dark, restless eyes wandered for a moment round the room, as if in quick search for a friend.

But where the Vicomte was at home by right, Déroulède had only been admitted by reason of his wealth. His acquaintances and sycophants were many, but his friends very few.

For the first time this fact was brought home to him. Every one in the room must have known and realised that he had not wilfully sought this quarrel, that throughout he had borne himself as any gentleman would, yet now, when the issue was so close at hand, no one came forward to stand by him.

"For form's sake, monsieur, will you choose your seconds?"

It was the young Marquis de Villefranche who spoke, a little haughtily, with a certain ironical condescension towards the rich parvenu, who was about to have the honour of crossing swords with one of the noblest gentlemen in France.

"I pray you, Monsieur le Marquis," rejoined Déroulède coldly, "to make the choice for me. You see, I have few friends in Paris."

The Marquis bowed, and gracefully flourished his lace handkerchief. He was accustomed to being appealed to in all matters pertaining to etiquette, to the toilet, to the latest cut in coats, and the procedure in duels. Good-natured, foppish, and idle, he felt quite happy and in his element thus to be made chief organiser of the tragic farce, about to be enacted on the parquet floor of the gaming saloon.

He looked about the room for a while, scrutinising the faces of those around him. The gilded youth was crowding round De Marny; a few older men stood in a group at the farther end of the room: to these the Marquis turned, and addressing one of them, an elderly man with a military bearing and a shabby brown coat:

"Mon Colonel," he said, with another flourishing bow; "I am deputed by M. Déroulède to provide him with seconds for this affair of honour, may I call upon you to ..."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the Colonel. "I am not intimately acquainted with M. Déroulède, but since you stand sponsor, M. le Marquis ..."

"Oh!" rejoined the Marquis, lightly, "a mere matter of form, you know. M. Déroulède belongs to the entourage of Her Majesty. He is a man of honour. But I am not his sponsor. Marny is my friend, and if you prefer not to ..."

"Indeed I am entirely at M. Déroulède's service," said the Colonel, who had thrown a quick, scrutinising glance at the isolated figure near the card table, "if he will accept my services ..."

"He will be very glad to accept, my dear Colonel," whispered the Marquis with an ironical twist of his aristocratic lips. "He has no friends in our set, and if you and De Quettare will honour him, I think he should be grateful."

M. de Quettare, adjutant to M. le Colonel, was ready to follow in the footsteps of his chief, and the two men, after the prescribed salutations to M. le Marquis de Villefranche, went across to speak to Déroulède.

"If you will accept our services, monsieur," began the Colonel abruptly, "mine, and my adjutant's, M. de Quettare, we place ourselves entirely at your disposal."

"I thank you, messieurs," rejoined Déroulède. "The whole thing is a farce, and that young man is a fool; but I have been in the wrong and ..."

"You would wish to apologise?" queried the Colonel icily.

The worthy soldier had heard something of Déroulède's reputed bourgeois ancestry. This suggestion of an apology was no doubt in accordance with the customs of the middle-classes, but the Colonel literally gasped at the unworthiness of the proceeding. An apology? Bah! Disgusting! cowardly! beneath the dignity of any gentleman, however wrong he might be. How could two soldiers of His Majesty's army identify themselves with such doings?

But Déroulède seemed unconscious of the enormity of his suggestion.

"If I could avoid a conflict," he said, "I would tell the Vicomte that I had no knowledge of his admiration for the lady we were discussing and ..."

"Are you so very much afraid of getting a sword scratch, monsieur?" interrupted the Colonel impatiently, whilst M. de Quettare elevated a pair of aristocratic eyebrows in bewilderment at such an extraordinary display of bourgeois cowardice.

"You mean, Monsieur le Colonel?"—queried Déroulède.

"That you must either fight the Vicomte de Marny to-night, or clear out of Paris to-morrow. Your position in our set would become untenable," retorted the Colonel, not unkindly, for in spite of Déroulède's extraordinary attitude, there was nothing in his bearing or his appearance that suggested cowardice or fear.

"I bow to your superior knowledge of your friends, M. le Colonel," responded Déroulède, as he silently drew his sword from its sheath.

The centre of the saloon was quickly cleared. The seconds measured the length of the swords and then stood behind the antagonists, slightly in advance of the groups of spectators, who stood massed all round the room.

They represented the flower of what France had of the best and noblest in name, in lineage, in chivalry, in that year of grace 1783. The storm-cloud which a few years hence was destined to break over their heads, sweeping them from their palaces to the prison and the guillotine, was only gathering very slowly in the dim horizon of squalid, starving Paris: for the next half-dozen years they would still dance and gamble, fight and flirt, surround a tottering throne, and hoodwink a weak monarch. The Fates' avenging sword still rested in its sheath; the relentless, ceaseless wheel still bore them up in their whirl of pleasure; the downward movement had only just begun: the cry of the oppressed children of France had not yet been heard above the din of dance music and lovers' serenades.

The young Duc de Châteaudun was there, he who, nine years later, went to the guillotine on that cold September morning, his hair dressed in the latest fashion, the finest Mechlin lace around

his wrists, playing a final game of piquet with his younger brother, as the tumbril bore them along through the hooting, yelling crowd of the half-naked starvelings of Paris.

There was the Vicomte de Mirepoix, who, a few years later, standing on the platform of the guillotine, laid a bet with M. de Miranges that his own blood would flow bluer than that of any other head cut off that day in France. Citizen Samson heard the bet made, and when De Mirepoix's head fell into the basket, the headsman lifted it up for M. de Miranges to see. The latter laughed.

"Mirepoix was always a braggart," he said lightly, as he laid his head upon the block.

"Who'll take my bet that my blood turns out to be bluer than his?"

But of all these comedies, these tragico-farces of later years, none who were present on that night, when the Vicomte de Marny fought Paul Déroulède, had as yet any presentiment.

They watched the two men fighting, with the same casual interest, at first, which they would have bestowed on the dancing of a new movement in the minuet.

De Marny came of a race that had wielded the sword of many centuries, but he was hot, excited, not a little addled with wine and rage. Déroulède was lucky; he would come out of the affair with a slight scratch.

A good swordsman too, that wealthy parvenu. It was interesting to watch his sword-play: very quiet at first, no feint or parry, scarcely a riposte, only *en garde*, always *en garde* very carefully, steadily, ready for his antagonist at every turn and in every circumstance.

Gradually the circle round the combatants narrowed. A few discreet exclamations of admiration greeted Déroulède's most successful parry. De Marny was getting more and more excited, the older man more and more sober and reserved.

A thoughtless lunge placed the little Vicomte at his opponent's mercy. The next instant he was disarmed, and the seconds were pressing forward to end the conflict.

Honour was satisfied: the parvenu and the scion of the ancient race had crossed swords over the reputation of one of the most dissolute women in France. Déroulède's moderation was a lesson to all the hot-headed young bloods who toyed with their lives, their honour, their reputation as lightly as they did with their lace-edged handkerchiefs and gold snuff-boxes.

Already Déroulède had drawn back. With the gentle tact peculiar to kindly people, he avoided looking at his disarmed antagonist. But something in the older man's attitude seemed to further nettle the over-stimulated sensibility of the young Vicomte.

"This is no child's play, monsieur," he said excitedly. "I demand full satisfaction."

"And are you not satisfied?" queried Déroulède. "You have borne yourself bravely, you have fought in honour of your liege lady. I, on the other hand ..."

"You," shouted the boy hoarsely, "you shall publicly apologise to a noble and virtuous woman whom you have outraged—now—at—once—on your knees ..."

"You are mad, Vicomte," rejoined Déroulède coldly. "I am willing to ask your forgiveness for my blunder ..."

"An apology—in public—on your knees ..."

The boy had become more and more excited. He had suffered humiliation after humiliation. He was a mere lad, spoilt, adulated, pampered from his boyhood: the wine had got into his head, the intoxication of rage and hatred blinded his saner judgment.

"Coward!" he shouted again and again.

His seconds tried to interpose, but he waved them feverishly aside. He would listen to no one. He saw no one save the man who had insulted Adèle, and who was heaping further insults upon her, by refusing this public acknowledgment of her virtues.

De Marny hated Déroulède at this moment with the most deadly hatred the heart of man can conceive. The older man's calm, his chivalry, his consideration only enhanced the boy's anger and shame.

The hubbub had become general. Everyone seemed carried away with this strange fever of enmity, which was seething in the Vicomte's veins. Most of the young men crowded round De Marny, doing their best to pacify him. The Marquis de Villefranche declared that the matter was getting quite outside the rules.

No one took much notice of Déroulède. In the remote corners of the saloon a few elderly dandies were laying bets as to the ultimate issue of the quarrel.

Déroulède, however, was beginning to lose his temper. He had no friends in that room, and therefore there was no sympathetic observer there, to note the gradual darkening of his eyes, like the gathering of a cloud heavy with the coming storm.

"I pray you, messieurs, let us cease the argument," he said at last, in a loud, impatient voice. "M. le Vicomte de Marny desires a further lesson, and, by God! he shall have it. En garde, M. le Vicomte!"

The crowd quickly drew back. The seconds once more assumed the bearing and imperturbable expression which their important function demanded. The hubbub ceased as the swords began to clash.

Everyone felt that farce was turning to tragedy.

And yet it was obvious from the first that Déroulède merely meant once more to disarm his antagonist, to give him one more lesson, a little more severe perhaps than the last. He was such a brilliant swordsman, and De Marny was so excited, that the advantage was with him from the very first.

How it all happened, nobody afterwards could say. There is no doubt that the little Vicomte's sword-play had become more and more wild: that he uncovered himself in the most reckless way, whilst lunging wildly at his opponent's breast, until at last, in one of these mad, unguarded moments, he seemed literally to throw himself upon Déroulède's weapon.

The latter tried with lightning-swift motion of the wrist to avoid the fatal issue, but it was too late, and without a sigh or groan, scarce a tremor, the Vicomte de Marny fell.

The sword dropped out of his hand, and it was Déroulède himself who caught the boy in his arms.

It had all occurred so quickly and suddenly that no one had realised it all, until it was over, and the lad was lying prone on the ground, his elegant blue satin coat stained with red, and his antagonist bending over him.

There was nothing more to be done. Etiquette demanded that Déroulède should withdraw. He was not allowed to do anything for the boy whom he had so unwillingly sent to his death.

As before, no one took much notice of him. Silence, the awesome silence caused by the presence of the great Master, fell upon all those around. Only in the far corner a shrill voice was heard to say:

"I hold you at five hundred louis, Marquis. The parvenu is a good swordsman."

The groups parted as Déroulède walked out of the room, followed by the Colonel and M. de Quettare, who stood by him to the last. Both were old and proved soldiers, both had chivalry and courage in them, with which to do tribute to the brave man whom they had seconded.

At the door of the establishment, they met the leech who had been summoned some little time ago to hold himself in readiness for any eventuality.

The great eventuality had occurred: it was beyond the leech's learning. In the brilliantly lighted saloon above, the only son of the Duc de Marny was breathing his last, whilst Déroulède, wrapping his mantle closely round him, strode out into the dark street, all alone.

II

The head of the house of Marny was at this time barely seventy years of age. But he had lived every hour, every minute of his life, from the day when the Grand Monarque gave him his first

appointment as gentleman page in waiting when he was a mere lad, barely twelve years of age, to the moment—some ten years ago now—when Nature's relentless hand struck him down in the midst of his pleasures, withered him in a flash as she does a sturdy old oak, and nailed him—a cripple, almost a dotard—to the invalid chair which he would only quit for his last resting place.

Juliette was then a mere slip of a girl, an old man's child, the spoilt darling of his last happy years. She had retained some of the melancholy which had characterised her mother, the gentle lady who had endured so much so patiently, and who had bequeathed this final tender burden—her baby girl—to the brilliant, handsome husband whom she had so deeply loved, and so often forgiven.

When the Duc de Marny entered the final awesome stage of his gilded career, that deathlike life which he dragged on for ten years wearily to the grave, Juliette became his only joy, his one gleam of happiness in the midst of torturing memories.

In her deep, tender eyes he would see mirrored the present, the future for her, and would forget his past, with all its gaieties, its mad, merry years, that meant nothing now but bitter regrets, and endless rosary of the might-have-beens.

And then there was the boy. The little Vicomte, the future Duc de Marny, who would in *his* life and with *his* youth recreate the glory of the family, and make France once more ring with the echo of brave deeds and gallant adventures, which had made the name of Marny so glorious in camp and court.

The Vicomte was not his father's love, but he was his father's pride, and from the depths of his huge, cushioned arm-chair, the old man would listen with delight to stories from Versailles and Paris, the young Queen and the fascinating Lamballe, the latest play and the newest star in the theatrical firmament. His feeble, tottering mind would then take him back, along the paths of memory, to his own youth and his own triumphs, and in the joy and pride in his son, he would forget himself for the sake of the boy.

When they brought the Vicomte home that night, Juliette was the first to wake. She heard the noise outside the great gates, the coach slowly drawing up, the ring for the doorkeeper, and the sound of Matthieu's mutterings, who never liked to be called up in the middle of the night to let anyone through the gates.

Somehow a presentiment of evil at once struck the young girl: the footsteps sounded so heavy and muffled along the flagged courtyard, and up the great oak staircase. It seemed as if they were carrying something heavy, something inert or dead.

She jumped out of bed and hastily wrapped a cloak round her thin girlish shoulders, and slipped her feet into a pair of heelless shoes, then she opened her bedroom door and looked out upon the landing.

Two men, whom she did not know, were walking upstairs abreast, two more were carrying a heavy burden, and Matthieu was behind moaning and crying bitterly.

Juliette did not move. She stood in the doorway rigid as a statue. The little cortège went past her. No one saw her, for the landings in the Hotel de Marny are very wide, and Matthieu's lantern only threw a dim, flickering light upon the floor.

The men stopped outside the Vicomte's room. Matthieu opened it, and then the five men disappeared within, with their heavy burden.

A moment later old Pétronelle, who had been Juliette's nurse, and was now her devoted slave, came to her, all bathed in tears.

She had just heard the news, and she could scarcely speak, but she folded the young girl, her dear pet lamb, in her arms, and rocking herself to and fro she sobbed and eased her aching, motherly heart.

But Juliette did not cry. It was all so sudden, so awful. She, at fourteen years of age, had never dreamed of death; and now there was her brother, her Philippe, in whom she had so much joy, so much pride—he was dead—and her father must be told ...

The awfulness of this task seemed to Juliette like unto the last Judgment Day; a thing so terrible, so appalling, so impossible, that it would take a host of angels to proclaim its inevitableness.

The old cripple, with one foot in the grave, whose whole feeble mind, whose pride, whose final flicker of hope was concentrated in his boy, must be told that the lad had been brought home dead.

"Will you tell him, Pétronelle?" she asked repeatedly, during the brief intervals when the violence of the old nurse's grief subsided somewhat.

"No—no—darling, I cannot—I cannot—" moaned Pétronelle, amidst a renewed shower of sobs.

Juliette's entire soul—a child's soul it was—rose in revolt at thought of what was before her. She felt angered with God for having put such a thing upon her. What right had He to demand a girl of her years to endure so much mental agony?

To lose her brother, and to witness her father's grief! She couldn't! she couldn't! she couldn't! God was evil and unjust!

A distant tinkle of a bell made all her nerves suddenly quiver. Her father was awake then? He had heard the noise, and was ringing his bell to ask for an explanation of the disturbance.

With one quick movement Juliette jerked herself free from the nurse's arms, and before Pétronelle could prevent her, she had run out of the room, straight across the dark landing to a large panelled door opposite.

The old Duc de Marny was sitting on the edge of his bed, with his long, thin legs dangling helplessly to the ground.

Crippled as he was, he had struggled to this upright position, he was making frantic, miserable efforts to raise himself still further. He, too, had heard the dull thud of feet, the shuffling gait of men when carrying a heavy burden.

His mind flew back half-a-century, to the days when he had witnessed scenes wherein he was then merely a half-interested spectator. He knew the cortège composed of valets and friends, with the leech walking beside that precious burden, which anon would be deposited on the bed and left to the tender care of a mourning family.

Who knows what pictures were conjured up before that enfeebled vision? But he guessed. And when Juliette dashed into his room and stood before him, pale, trembling, a world of misery in her great eyes, she knew that he guessed and that she need not tell him. God had already done that for her.

Pierre, the old Duc's devoted valet, dressed him as quickly as he could. M. le Duc insisted on having his *habit de cérémonie*, the rich suit of black velvet with the priceless lace and diamond buttons, which he had worn when they laid le Roi Soleil to his eternal rest.

He put on his orders and buckled on his sword. The gorgeous clothes, which had suited him so well in the prime of his manhood, hung somewhat loosely on his attenuated frame, but he looked a grand and imposing figure, with his white hair tied behind with a great black bow, and the fine jabot of beautiful point d'Angleterre falling in a soft cascade below his chin.

Then holding himself as upright as he could, he sat in his invalid chair, and four flunkies in full livery carried him to the deathbed of his son.

All the house was astir by now. Torches burned in great sockets in the vast hall and along the massive oak stairway, and hundreds of candles flickered ghostlike in the vast apartments of the princely mansion.

The numerous servants were arrayed on the landing, all dressed in the rich livery of the ducal house.

The death of an heir of the Marnys is an event that history makes a note of.

The old Duc's chair was placed close to the bed, where lay the dead body of the young Vicomte. He made no movement, nor did he utter a word or sigh. Some of those who were present at the time declared that his mind had completely given way, and that he neither felt nor understood the death of his son.

The Marquis de Villefranche, who had followed his friend to the last, took a final leave of the sorrowing house.

Juliette scarcely noticed him. Her eyes were fixed on her father. She would not look at her brother. A childlike fear had seized her, there, suddenly, between these two silent figures: the living and the dead.

But just as the Marquis was leaving the room, the old man spoke for the first time.

"Marquis," he said very quietly, "you forget—you have not yet told me who killed my son."

"It was in a fair fight, M. de Duc," replied the young Marquis, awed in spite of all his frivolity, his light-heartedness, by this strange, almost mysterious tragedy.

"Who killed my son, M. le Marquis?" repeated the old man mechanically. "I have the right to know," he added with sudden, weird energy.

"It was M. Paul Déroulède, M. le Duc," replied the Marquis. "I repeat, it was in fair fight."

The old Duc sighed as if in satisfaction. Then with a courteous gesture of farewell reminiscent of the *grand siècle* he added:

"All thanks from me and mine to you, Marquis, would seem but a mockery. Your devotion to my son is beyond human thanks. I'll not detain you now. Farewell."

Escorted by two lacqueys, the Marquis passed out of the room.

"Dismiss all the servants, Juliette; I have something to say," said the old Duc, and the young girl, silent, obedient, did as her father bade her.

Father and sister were alone with their dead. As soon as the last hushed footsteps of the retreating servants died away in the distance, the Duc de Marny seemed to throw away the lethargy which had enveloped him until now. With a quick, feverish gesture he seized his daughter's wrist, and murmured excitedly:

"His name. You heard his name, Juliette?"

"Yes, father," replied the child.

"Paul Déroulède! Paul Déroulède! You'll not forget it?"

"Never, father!"

"He killed your brother! You understand that? Killed my only son, the hope of my house, the last descendant of the most glorious race that has ever added lustre to the history of France."

"In fair fight, father!" protested the child.

"'Tis not fair for a man to kill a boy," retorted the old man, with furious energy.

"Déroulède is thirty: my boy was scarce out of his teens: may the vengeance of God fall upon the murderer!"

Juliette, awed, terrified, was gazing at her father with great, wondering eyes. He seemed unlike himself. His face wore a curious expression of ecstasy and of hatred, also of hope and exultation, whenever he looked steadily at her.

That the final glimmer of a tottering reason was fast leaving the poor, aching head she was too young to realise. Madness was a word that had only a vague meaning for her. Though she did not understand her father at the present moment, though she was half afraid of him, she would have rejected with scorn and horror any suggestion that he was mad.

Therefore when he took her hand and, drawing her nearer to the bed and to himself, placed it upon her dead brother's breast, she recoiled at the touch of the inanimate body, so unlike anything she had ever touched before, but she obeyed her father without any question, and listened to his words as to those of a sage.

"Juliette, you are now fourteen, and able to understand what I am going to ask of you. If I were not chained to this miserable chair, if I were not a hopeless, abject cripple, I would not depute anyone, not even you, my only child, to do that, which God demands that one of us should do."

He paused a moment, then continued earnestly:

"Remember, Juliette, that you are of the house of Marny, that you are a Catholic, and that God hears you now. For you shall swear an oath before Him and me, an oath from which only death can relieve you. Will you swear, my child?"

"If you wish it, father."

"You have been to confession lately, Juliette?"

"Yes, father; also to holy communion, yesterday," replied the child. "It was the Fête-Dieu, you know."

"Then you are in a state of grace, my child?"

"I was yesterday morning, father," replied the young girl naïvely, "but I have committed some little sins since then."

"Then make your confession to God in your heart now. You must be in a state of grace when you speak the oath."

The child closed her eyes, and as the old man watched her, he could see the lips framing the words of her spiritual confession.

Juliette made the sign of the cross, then opened her eyes and looked at her father.

"I am ready, father," she said; "I hope God has forgiven me the little sins of yesterday."

"Will you swear, my child?"

"What, father?"

"That you will avenge your brother's death on his murderer?"

"But, father ..."

"Swear it, my child!"

"How can I fulfil that oath, father?—I don't understand ..."

"God will guide you, my child. When you are older you will understand."

For a moment Juliette still hesitated. She was just on that borderland between childhood and womanhood when all the sensibilities, the nervous system, the emotions, are strung to their highest pitch.

Throughout her short life she had worshipped her father with a whole-hearted, passionate devotion, which had completely blinded her to his weakening faculties and the feebleness of his mind.

She was also in that initial stage of enthusiastic piety which overwhelms every girl of temperament, if she be brought up in the Roman Catholic religion, when she is first initiated into the mysteries of the Sacraments.

Juliette had been to confession and communion. She had been confirmed by Monseigneur, the Archbishop. Her ardent nature had responded to the full to the sensuous and ecstatic expressions of the ancient faith.

And somehow her father's wish, her brother's death, all seemed mingled in her brain with that religion, for which in her juvenile enthusiasm she would willingly have laid down her life.

She thought of all the saints, whose lives she had been reading. Her young heart quivered at the thought of *their* sacrifices, their martyrdoms, their sense of duty.

An exaltation, morbid perhaps, superstitious and overwhelming, took possession of her mind; also, perhaps, far back in the innermost recesses of her heart, a pride in her own importance, her mission in life, her individuality: for she was a girl after all, a mere child, about to become a woman.

But the old Duc was waxing impatient.

"Surely you do not hesitate, Juliette, with your dead brother's body clamouring mutely for revenge? You, the only Marny left now!—for from this day I too shall be as dead."

"No, father," said the young girl in an awed whisper, "I do not hesitate. I will swear, just as you bid me."

"Repeat the words after me, my child."

"Yes, father."

"Before the face of Almighty God, who sees and hears me ..."

"Before the face of Almighty God, who sees and hears me," repeated Juliette firmly.

"I swear that I will seek out Paul Déroulède."

"I swear that I will seek out Paul Déroulède."

"And in any manner which God may dictate to me encompass his death, his ruin or dishonour, in revenge for my brother's death."

"And in any manner which God may dictate to me encompass his death, his ruin or dishonour, in revenge for my brother's death," said Juliette solemnly.

"May my brother's soul remain in torment until the final Judgment Day if I should break my oath, but may it rest in eternal peace the day on which his death is fitly avenged."

"May my brother's soul remain in torment until the final Judgment Day if I should break my oath, but may it rest in eternal peace the day on which his death is fitly avenged."

The child fell upon her knees. The oath was spoken, the old man was satisfied.

He called for his valet, and allowed himself quietly to be put to bed.

One brief hour had transformed a child into a woman. A dangerous transformation when the brain is overburdened with emotions, when the nerves are overstrung and the heart full to breaking.

For the moment, however, the childlike nature reasserted itself for the last time, for Juliette, sobbing, had fled out of the room, to the privacy of her own apartment, and thrown herself passionately into the arms of kind old Pétronelle.

CHAPTER I

Paris: 1793

The outrage

It would have been very difficult to say why Citizen Déroulède was quite so popular as he was. Still more difficult would it have been to state the reason why he remained immune from the prosecutions, which were being conducted at the rate of several scores a day, now against the moderate Gironde, anon against the fanatic Mountain, until the whole of France was transformed into one gigantic prison, that daily fed the guillotine.

But Déroulède remained unscathed. Even Merlin's law of the suspect had so far failed to touch him. And when, last July, the murder of Marat brought an entire holocaust of victims to the guillotine—from Adam Lux, who would have put up a statue in honour of Charlotte Corday, with the inscription: "Greater than Brutus", to Charlier, who would have had her publicly tortured and burned at the stake for her crime—Déroulède alone said nothing, and was allowed to remain silent.

The most seething time of that seething revolution. No one knew in the morning if his head would still be on his own shoulders in the evening, or if it would be held up by Citizen Samson the headsman, for the sansculottes of Paris to see.

Yet Déroulède was allowed to go his own way. Marat once said of him: "Il n'est pas dangereux." The phrase had been taken up. Within the precincts of the National Convention, Marat was still looked upon as the great protagonist of Liberty, a martyr to his own convictions carried to the extreme, to squalor and dirt, to the downward levelling of man to what is the lowest type in humanity. And his sayings were still treasured up: even the Girondins did not dare to attack his memory. Dead Marat was more powerful than his living presentment had been.

And he had said that Déroulède was not dangerous. Not dangerous to Republicanism, to liberty, to that downward, levelling process, the tearing down of old traditions, and the annihilation of past pretensions.

Déroulède had once been very rich. He had had sufficient prudence to give away in good time that which, undoubtedly, would have been taken away from him later on.

But when he gave willingly, at a time when France needed it most, and before she had learned how to help herself to what she wanted.

And somehow, in this instance, France had not forgotten: an invisible fortress seemed to surround Citizen Déroulède and keep his enemies at bay. They were few, but they existed. The National Convention trusted him. "He was not dangerous" to them. The people looked upon him as one of themselves, who gave whilst he had something to give. Who can gauge that most elusive of all things: *Popularity*?

He lived a quiet life, and had never yielded to the omni-prevalent temptation of writing pamphlets, but lived alone with his mother and Anne Mie, the little orphaned cousin whom old Madame Déroulède had taken care of, ever since the child could toddle.

Everyone knew his house in the Rue Ecole de Médecine, not far from the one wherein Marat lived and died, the only solid, stone house in the midst of a row of hovels, evil-smelling and squalid.

The street was narrow then, as it is now, and whilst Paris was cutting off the heads of her children for the sake of Liberty and Fraternity, she had no time to bother about cleanliness and sanitation.

Rue Ecole de Médecine did little credit to the school after which it was named, and it was a most unattractive crowd that usually thronged its uneven, muddy pavements.

A neat gown, a clean kerchief, were quite an unusual sight down this way, for Anne Mie seldom went out, and old Madame Déroulède hardly ever left her room. A good deal of brandy was being

drunk at the two drinking bars, one at each end of the long, narrow street, and by five o'clock in the afternoon it was undoubtedly best for women to remain indoors.

The crowd of dishevelled elderly Amazons who stood gossiping at the street corner could hardly be called women now. A ragged petticoat, a greasy red kerchief round the head, a tattered, stained shift—to this pass of squalor and shame had Liberty brought the daughters of France.

And they jeered at any passer-by less filthy, less degraded than themselves.

"Ah! voyons l'aristo!" they shouted every time a man in decent clothes, a woman with tidy cap and apron, passed swiftly down the street.

And the afternoons were very lively. There was always plenty to see: first and foremost, the long procession of tumbrils, winding its way from the prisons to the Place de la Révolution. The forty-four thousand sections of the Committee of Public Safety sent their quota, each in their turn, to the guillotine.

At one time these tumbrils contained royal ladies and gentlemen, *ci-devant* dukes and princesses, aristocrats from every county in France, but now this stock was becoming exhausted. The wretched Queen Marie Antoinette still lingered in the Temple with her son and daughter. Madame Elisabeth was still allowed to say her prayers in peace, but *ci-devant* dukes and counts were getting scarce: those who had not perished at the hand of Citizen Samson were plying some trade in Germany or England.

There were aristocratic joiners, innkeepers, and hairdressers. The proudest names in France were hidden beneath trade signs in London and Hamburg. A good number owed their lives to that mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, that unknown Englishman who had snatched scores of victims from the clutches of Tinville the Prosecutor, and sent M. Chauvelin, baffled, back to France.

Aristocrats were getting scarce, so it was now the turn of deputies of the National Convention, of men of letters, men of science or of art, men who had sent others to the guillotine a twelvemonth ago, and men who had been loudest in defence of anarchy and its Reign of Terror.

They had revolutionised the Calendar: the Citizen-Deputies, and every good citizen of France, called this 19th day of August 1793 the 2nd Fructidor of the year I. of the New Era.

At six o'clock on that afternoon a young girl suddenly turned the angle of the Rue Ecole de Médecine, and after looking quickly to the right and left she began deliberately walking along the narrow street.

It was crowded just then. Groups of excited women stood jabbering before every doorway. It was the home-coming hour after the usual spectacle on the Place de la Révolution. The men had paused at the various drinking booths, crowding the women out. It would be the turn of these Amazons next, at the brandy bars; for the moment they were left to gossip, and to jeer at the passer-by.

At first the young girl did not seem to heed them. She walked quickly along, looking defiantly before her, carrying her head erect, and stepping carefully from cobblestone to cobblestone, avoiding the mud, which could have dirtied her dainty shoes.

The harridans passed the time of day to her, and the time of day meant some obscene remark unfit for women's ears. The young girl wore a simple grey dress, with fine lawn kerchief neatly folded across her bosom, a large hat with flowing ribbons sat above the fairest face that ever gladdened men's eyes to see.

Fairer still it would have been, but for the look of determination which made it seem hard and old for the girl's years.

She wore the tricolour scarf round her waist, else she had been more seriously molested ere now. But the Republican colours were her safeguard: whilst she walked quietly along, no one could harm her.

Then suddenly a curious impulse seemed to seize her. It was just outside the large stone house belonging to Citizen-Deputy Déroulède. She had so far taken no notice of the groups of women

which she had come across. When they obstructed the footway, she had calmly stepped out into the middle of the road.

It was wise and prudent, for she could close her ears to obscene language and need pay no heed to insult.

Suddenly she threw up her head defiantly.

"Will you please let me pass?" she said loudly, as a dishevelled Amazon stood before her with arms akimbo, glancing sarcastically at the lace petticoat, which just peeped beneath the young girl's simple grey frock.

"Let her pass? Let her pass? Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the old woman, turning to the nearest group of idlers, and apostrophising them with a loud oath. "Did *you* know, citizeness, that this street had been specially made for aristos to pass along?"

"I am in a hurry, will you let me pass at once?" commanded the young girl, tapping her foot impatiently on the ground.

There was the whole width of the street on her right, plenty of room for her to walk along. It seemed positive madness to provoke a quarrel singlehanded against this noisy group of excited females, just home from the ghastly spectacle around the guillotine.

And yet she seemed to do it wilfully, as if coming to the end of her patience, all her proud, aristocratic blood in revolt against this evil-smelling crowd which surrounded her.

Half-tipsy men and noisome, naked urchins seemed to have sprung from everywhere.

"Oho, quelle aristo!" they shouted with ironical astonishment, gazing at the young girl's face, fingering her gown, thrusting begrimed, hate-distorted faces close to her own.

Instinctively she recoiled and backed towards the house immediately on her left. It was adorned with a porch made of stout oak beams, with a tiled roof; an iron lantern descended from this, and there was a stone parapet below, and a few steps, at right angles from the pavement, led up to the massive door.

On these steps the young girl had taken refuge. Proud, defiant, she confronted the howling mob, which she had so wilfully provoked.

"Of a truth, Citizeness Margot, that grey dress would become you well!" suggested a young man, whose red cap hung in tatters over an evil and dissolute-looking face.

"And all that fine lace would make a splendid jabot round the aristo's neck when Citizen Samson holds up her head for us to see," added another, as with mock elegance he stooped and with two very grimy fingers slightly raised the young girl's grey frock, displaying the lace-edged petticoat beneath.

A volley of oaths and loud, ironical laughter greeted this sally.

"'Tis mighty fine lace to be thus hidden away," commented an elderly harridan. "Now, would you believe it, my fine madam, but my legs are bare underneath my kirtle?"

"And dirty, too, I'll lay a wager," laughed another. "Soap is dear in Paris just now."

"The lace on the aristo's kerchief would pay the baker's bill of a whole family for a month!" shouted an excited voice.

Heat and brandy further addled the brains of this group of French citizens; hatred gleamed out of every eye. Outrage was imminent. The young girl seemed to know it, but she remained defiant and self-possessed, gradually stepping back and back up the steps, closely followed by her assailants.

"To the Jew with the gewgaw, then!" shouted a thin, haggard female viciously, as she suddenly clutched at the young girl's kerchief, and with a mocking, triumphant laugh tore it from her bosom.

This outrage seemed to be the signal for the breaking down of the final barriers which ordinary decency should have raised. The language and vituperation became such as no chronicler could record.

The girl's dainty white neck, her clear skin, the refined contour of shoulders and bust, seemed to have aroused the deadliest lust of hate in these wretched creatures, rendered bestial by famine and squalor.

It seemed almost as if one would vie with the other in seeking for words which would most offend these small aristocratic ears.

The young girl was now crouching against the doorway, her hands held up to her ears to shut out the awful sounds. She did not seem frightened, only appalled at the terrible volcano which she had provoked.

Suddenly a miserable harridan struck her straight in the face, with hard, grimy fist, and a long shout of exultation greeted this monstrous deed.

Then only did the girl seem to lose her self-control.

"A moi," she shouted loudly, whilst hammering with both hands against the massive doorway. "A moi! Murder! Murder! Citoyen Déroulède, à moi!"

But her terror was greeted with renewed glee by her assailants. They were now roused to the highest point of frenzy: the crowd of brutes would in the next moment have torn the helpless girl from her place of refuge and dragged her into the mire, an outraged prey, for the satisfaction of an ungovernable hate.

But just as half-a-dozen pairs of talon-like hands clutched frantically at her skirts, the door behind her was quickly opened. She felt her arm seized firmly, and herself dragged swiftly within the shelter of the threshold.

Her senses, overwrought by the terrible adventure which she had just gone through, were threatening to reel; she heard the massive door close, shutting out the yells of baffled rage, the ironical laughter, the obscene words, which sounded in her ears like the shrieks of Dante's damned.

She could not see her rescuer, for the hall into which he had hastily dragged her was only dimly lighted. But a peremptory voice said quickly:

"Up the stairs, the room straight in front of you, my mother is there. Go quickly."

She had fallen on her knees, cowering against the heavy oak beam which supported the ceiling, and was straining her eyes to catch sight of the man, to whom at this moment she perhaps owed more than her life: but he was standing against the doorway, with his hand on the latch.

"What are you going to do?" she murmured.

"Prevent their breaking into my house in order to drag you out of it," he replied quietly; "so, I pray you, do as I bid you."

Mechanically she obeyed him, drew herself to her feet, and, turning towards the stairs, began slowly to mount the shallow steps. Her knees were shaking under her, her whole body was trembling with horror at the awesome crisis she had just traversed.

She dared not look back at her rescuer. Her head was bent, and her lips were murmuring half-audible words as she went.

Outside the hooting and yelling was becoming louder and louder. Enraged fists were hammering violently against the stout oak door.

At the top of the stairs, moved by an irresistible impulse, she turned and looked into the hall.

She saw his figure dimly outlined in the gloom, one hand on the latch, his head thrown back to watch her movements.

A door stood ajar immediately in front of her. She pushed it open and went within.

At that moment he too opened the door below. The shrieks of the howling mob once more resounded close to her ears. It seemed as if they had surrounded him. She wondered what was happening, and marvelled how he dared to face that awful crowd alone.

The room into which she had entered was gay and cheerful-looking with its dainty chintz hangings and graceful, elegant pieces of furniture. The young girl looked up, as a kindly voice said to her, from out the depths of a capacious armchair:

"Come in, come in, my dear, and close the door behind you! Did those wretches attack you? Never mind. Paul will speak to them. Come here, my dear, and sit down; there's no cause now for fear."

Without a word the young girl came forward. She seemed now to be walking in a dream, the chintz hangings to be swaying ghostlike around her, the yells and shrieks below to come from the very bowels of the earth.

The old lady continued to prattle on. She had taken the girl's hand in hers, and was gently forcing her down on to a low stool beside her armchair. She was talking about Paul, and said something about Anne Mie, and then about the National Convention, and those beasts and savages, but mostly about Paul.

The noise outside had subsided. The girl felt strangely sick and tired. Her head seemed to be whirling round, the furniture to be dancing round her; the old lady's face looked at her through a swaying veil, and then—and then ...

Tired Nature was having her way at last; she folded the quivering young body in her motherly arms, and wrapped the aching senses beneath her merciful mantle of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER II

Citizen-Deputy

When, presently, the young girl awoke, with a delicious feeling of rest and well-being, she had plenty of leisure to think.

So, then, this was his house! She was actually a guest, a rescued protégé, beneath the roof of Citoyen Déroulède.

He had dragged her from the clutches of the howling mob which she had provoked; his mother had made her welcome, a sweet-faced, young girl scarce out of her teens, sad-eyed and slightly deformed, had waited upon her and made her happy and comfortable.

Juliette de Marny was in the house of the man, whom she had sworn before her God and before her father to pursue with hatred and revenge.

Ten years had gone by since then.

Lying upon the sweet-scented bed which the hospitality of the Déroulèdes had provided for her, she seemed to see passing before her the spectres of these past ten years—the first four, after her brother's death, until the old Duc de Marny's body slowly followed his soul to its grave.

After that last glimmer of life beside the deathbed of his son, the old Duc had practically ceased to be. A mute, shrunken figure, he merely existed; his mind vanished, his memory gone, a wreck whom Nature fortunately remembered at last, and finally took away from the invalid chair which had been his world.

Then came those few years at the Convent of the Ursulines. Juliette had hoped that she had a vocation; her whole soul yearned for a secluded, a religious, life, for great barriers of solemn vows and days spent in prayer and contemplation, to interpose between herself and the memory of that awful night when, obedient to her father's will, she had made the solemn oath to avenge her brother's death.

She was only eighteen when she first entered the convent, directly after her father's death, when she felt very lonely—both morally and mentally lonely—and followed by the obsession of that oath.

She never spoke of it to anyone except to her confessor, and he, a simple-minded man of great learning and a total lack of knowledge of the world, was completely at a loss how to advise.

The Archbishop was consulted. He could grant a dispensation, and release her of that most solemn vow.

When first this idea was suggested to her, Juliette was exultant. Her entire nature, which in itself was wholesome, light-hearted, the very reverse of morbid, rebelled against this unnatural task placed upon her young shoulders. It was only religion—the strange, warped religion of that extraordinary age—which kept her to it, which forbade her breaking lightly that most unnatural oath.

The Archbishop was a man of many duties, many engagements. He agreed to give this strange "cas de conscience" his most earnest attention. He would make no promises. But Mademoiselle de Marny was rich: a munificent donation to the poor of Paris, or to some cause dear to the Holy Father himself, might perhaps be more acceptable to God than the fulfilment of a compulsory vow.

Juliette, within the convent walls, was waiting patiently for the Archbishop's decision at the very moment, when the greatest upheaval the world has ever known was beginning to shake the very foundations of France.

The Archbishop had other things now to think about than isolated cases of conscience. He forgot all about Juliette, probably. He was busy consoling a monarch for the loss of his throne, and preparing himself and his royal patron for the scaffold.

The Convent of the Ursulines was scattered during the Terror. Everyone remembers the Thermidor massacres, and the thirty-four nuns, all daughters of ancient families of France, who went so cheerfully to the scaffold.

Juliette was one of those who escaped condemnation. How or why, she herself could not have told. She was very young, and still a postulant; she was allowed to live in retirement with Pétronelle, her old nurse, who had remained faithful through all these years.

Then the Archbishop was prosecuted and imprisoned. Juliette made frantic efforts to see him, but all in vain. When he died, she looked upon her spiritual guide's death as a direct warning from God, that nothing could relieve her of her oath.

She had watched the turmoils of the Revolution through the attic window of her tiny apartment in Paris. Waited upon by faithful Pétronelle, she had been forced to live on the savings of that worthy old soul, as all her property, all the Marny estates, the *dot* she took with her to the convent—everything, in fact—had been seized by the Revolutionary Government, self appointed to level fortunes, as well as individuals.

From that attic window she had seen beautiful Paris writhing under the pitiless lash of the demon of terror which it had provoked; she had heard the rumble of the tumbrils, dragging day after day their load of victims to the insatiable maker of this Revolution of Fraternity—the Guillotine.

She had seen the gay, light-hearted people of this Star-City turned to howling beasts of prey, its women changed to sexless vultures, with murderous talons implanted in everything that is noble, high or beautiful.

She was not twenty when the feeble, vacillating monarch and his imperious consort were dragged back—a pair of humiliated prisoners—to the capital from which they had tried to flee.

Two years later, she had heard the cries of an entire people exulting over a regicide. Then the murder of Marat, by a young girl like herself, the pale-faced, large-eyed Charlotte, who had committed a crime for the sake of a conviction. "Greater than Brutus!" some had called her. Greater than Joan of Arc, for it was to a mission of evil and of sin that she was called from the depths of her Breton village, and not to one of glory and triumph.

"Greater than Brutus!"

Juliette followed the trial of Charlotte Corday with all the passionate ardour of her exalted temperament.

Just think what an effect it must have had upon the mind of this young girl, who for nine years—the best of her life—had also lived with the idea of a sublime mission pervading her very soul.

She watched Charlotte Corday at her trial. Conquering her natural repulsion for such scenes, and the crowds which usually watched them, she had forced her way into the foremost rank of the narrow gallery which overlooked the Hall of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

She heard the indictment, heard Tinville's speech and the calling of the witnesses.

"All this is unnecessary. I killed Marat!"

Juliette heard the fresh young voice ringing out clearly above the murmur of voices, the howls of execration; she saw the beautiful young face, clear, calm, impassive.

"I killed Marat!"

And there in the special space allotted to the Citizen-Deputies, sitting among those who represented the party of the Moderate Gironde, was Paul Déroulède, the man whom she had sworn to pursue with a vengeance as great, as complete, as that which guided Charlotte Corday's hand.

She watched him during the trial, and wondered if he had any presentiment of the hatred which dogged him, like unto the one which had dogged Marat.

He was very dark, almost swarthy a son of the South, with brown hair, free from powder, thrown back and revealing the brow of a student rather than that of a legislator. He watched Charlotte Corday earnestly, and Juliette who watched him saw the look of measureless pity, which softened the otherwise hard look of his close-set eyes.

He made an impassioned speech for the defence: a speech which has become historic. It would have cost any other man his head.

Juliette marvelled at his courage; to defend Charlotte Corday was equivalent to acquiescing in the death of Marat: Marat, the friend of the people; Marat, whom his funeral orators had compared to the Great, the Sacred Leveller of Mankind!

But Déroulède's speech was not a defence, it was an appeal. The most eloquent man of that eloquent age, his words seemed to find that hidden bit of sentiment which still lurked in the hearts of these strange protagonists of Hate.

Everyone round Juliette listened as he spoke: "It is Citoyen Déroulède!" whispered the bloodthirsty Amazons, who sat knitting in the gallery.

But there was no further comment. A huge, magnificently-equipped hospital for sick children had been thrown open in Paris that very morning, a gift to the nation from Citoyen Déroulède. Surely he was privileged to talk a little, if it pleased him. His hospital would cover quite a good many defalcations.

Even the rabid Mountain, Danton, Merlin, Santerre, shrugged their shoulders. "It is Déroulède, let him talk and he list. Murdered Marat said of him that he was not dangerous."

Juliette heard it all. The knitters round her were talking loudly. Even Charlotte was almost forgotten whilst Déroulède talked. He had a fine voice, of strong calibre, which echoed powerfully through the hall.

He was rather short, but broad-shouldered and well knit, with an expressive hand, which looked slender and delicate below the fine lace ruffle.

Charlotte Corday was condemned. All Déroulède's eloquence could not save her.

Juliette left the court in a state of mad exultation. She was very young; the scenes she had witnessed in the past two years could not help but excite the imagination of a young girl, left entirely to her own intellectual and moral resources.

What scenes! Great God!

And now to wait for an opportunity! Charlotte Corday, the half-educated little provincial should not put to shame Mademoiselle de Marny, the daughter of a hundred dukes, of those who had made France before she took to unmaking herself.

But she could not formulate any definite plans. Pétronelle, poor old soul, her only confidante, was not of the stuff that heroines are made of. Juliette felt impelled by duty, and duty at best is not so prompt a counsellor as love or hate.

Her adventure outside Déroulède's house had not been premeditated. Impulse and coincidence had worked their will with her.

She had been in the habit, daily, for the past month, of wandering down the Rue Ecole de Médecine, ostensibly to gaze at Marat's dwelling, as crowds of idlers were wont to do, but really in order to look at Déroulède's house. Once or twice she saw him coming or going from home. Once she caught sight of the inner hall, and of a young girl in a dark kirtle and snow-white kerchief bidding him good-bye at his door. Another time she caught sight of him at the corner of the street, helping that same young girl over the muddy pavement. He had just met her, and she was carrying a basket of provisions: he took it from her and carried it to the house.

Chivalrous—eh?—and innately so, evidently, for the girl was slightly deformed: hardly a hunchback, but weak and unattractive-looking, with melancholy eyes, and a pale, pinched face.

It was the thought of that little act of simple chivalry, witnessed the day before, which caused Juliette to provoke the scene which, but for Déroulède's timely interference, might have ended so fatally. But she reckoned on that interference: the whole thing had occurred to her suddenly, and she had carried it through.

Had not her father said to her that when the time came, God would show her a means to the end?

And now she was inside the house of the man who had murdered her brother and sent her sorrowing father, a poor, senseless maniac, tottering to the grave.

Would God's finger point again, and show her what to do next, how best to accomplish what she had sworn to do?

CHAPTER III

Hospitality

"Is there anything more I can do for you now, mademoiselle?"

The gentle, timid voice roused Juliette from the contemplation of the past.

She smiled at Anne Mie, and held her hand out towards her.

"You have all been so kind," she said, "I want to get up now and thank you all."

"Don't move unless you feel quite well."

"I am quite well now. Those horrid people frightened me so, that is why I fainted."

"They would have half-killed you, if ..."

"Will you tell me where I am?" asked Juliette.

"In the house of M. Paul Déroulède—I should have said of Citizen-Deputy Déroulède. He rescued you from the mob, and pacified them. He has such a beautiful voice that he can make anyone listen to him, and ..."

"And you are fond of him, mademoiselle?" added Juliette, suddenly feeling a mist of tears rising to her eyes.

"Of course I am fond of him," rejoined the other girl simply, whilst a look of the most tender-hearted devotion seemed to beautify her pale face. "He and Madame Déroulède have brought me up; I never knew my parents. They have cared for me, and he has taught me all I know."

"What do they call you, mademoiselle?"

"My name is Anne Mie."

"And mine, Juliette—Juliette Marny," she added after a slight hesitation. "I have no parents either. My old nurse, Pétronelle, has brought me up, and—But tell me more about M. Déroulède—I owe him so much, I'd like to know him better."

"Will you not let me arrange your hair?" said Anne Mie as if purposely evading a direct reply. "M. Déroulède is in the salon with madame. You can see him then."

Juliette asked no more questions, but allowed Anne Mie to tidy her hair for her, to lend her a fresh kerchief and generally to efface all traces of her terrible adventure. She felt puzzled and tearful. Anne Mie's gentleness seemed somehow to jar on her spirits. She could not understand the girl's position in the Déroulède household. Was she a relative, or a superior servant? In these troublous times she might easily have been both.

In any case she was a childhood's companion of the Citizen-Deputy—whether on an equal or a humbler footing, Juliette would have given much to ascertain.

With the marvellous instinct peculiar to women of temperament, she had already divined Anne Mie's love for Déroulède. The poor young cripple's very soul seemed to quiver magnetically at the bare mention of his name, her whole face became transfigured: Juliette even thought her beautiful then.

She looked at herself critically in the glass, and adjusted a curl, which looked its best when it was rebellious. She scrutinised her own face carefully; why? she could not tell: another of those subtle feminine instincts perhaps.

The becoming simplicity of the prevailing mode suited her to perfection. The waist line, rather high but clearly defined—a precursor of the later more accentuated fashion—gave grace to her long slender limbs, and emphasised the lissomeness of her figure. The kerchief, edged with fine lace, and neatly folded across her bosom, softened the contour of her girlish bust and shoulders.

And her hair was a veritable glory round her dainty, piquant face. Soft, fair, and curly, it emerged in a golden halo from beneath the prettiest little lace cap imaginable.

She turned and faced Anne Mie, ready to follow her out of the room, and the young crippled girl sighed as she smoothed down the folds of her own apron, and gave a final touch to the completion of Juliette's attire.

The time before the evening meal slipped by like a dream-hour for Juliette.

She had lived so much alone, had led such an introspective life, that she had hardly realised and understood all that was going on around her. At the time when the inner vitality of France first asserted itself and then swept away all that hindered its mad progress, she was tied to the invalid chair of her half-demented father; then, after that, the sheltering walls of the Ursuline Convent had hidden from her mental vision the true meaning of the great conflict, between the Old Era and the New.

Déroulède was neither a pedant nor yet a revolutionary: his theories were Utopian and he had an extraordinary overpowering sympathy for his fellow-men.

After the first casual greetings with Juliette, he had continued a discussion with his mother, which the young girl's entrance had interrupted.

He seemed to take but little notice of her, although at times his dark, keen eyes would seek hers, as if challenging her for a reply.

He was talking of the mob of Paris, whom he evidently understood so well. Incidents such as the one which Juliette had provoked, had led to rape and theft, often to murder, before now: but outside Citizen-Deputy Déroulède's house everything was quiet, half-an-hour after Juliette's escape from that howling, brutish crowd.

He had merely spoken to them, for about twenty minutes, and they had gone away quite quietly, without even touching one hair of his head. He seemed to love them: to know how to separate the little good that was in them, from that hard crust of evil, which misery had put around their hearts.

Once he addressed Juliette somewhat abruptly: "Pardon me, mademoiselle, but for your own sake we must guard you a prisoner here awhile. No one would harm you under this roof, but it would not be safe for you to cross the neighbouring streets to-night."

"But I must go, monsieur. Indeed, indeed I must!" she said earnestly. "I am deeply grateful to you, but I could not leave Pétronelle."

"Who is Pétronelle?"

"My dear old nurse, monsieur. She has never left me. Think how anxious and miserable she must be, at my prolonged absence."

"Where does she live?"

"At No. 15 Rue Taitbout, but ..."

"Will you allow me to take her a message?—telling her that you are safe and under my roof, where it is obviously more prudent that you should remain at present."

"If you think it best, monsieur," she replied.

Inwardly she was trembling with excitement. God had not only brought her to this house, but willed that she should stay in it.

"In whose name shall I take the message, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"My name is Juliette Marny."

She watched him keenly as she said it, but there was not the slightest sign in his expressive face, to show that he had recognised the name.

Ten years is a long time, and every one had lived through so much during those years! A wave of intense wrath swept through Juliette's soul, as she realised that he had forgotten. The name meant nothing to him! It did not recall to him the fact that his hand was stained with blood. During ten years she had suffered, she had fought with herself, fought for him as it were, against the Fate which she was destined to mete out to him, whilst he had forgotten, or at least had ceased to think.

He bowed to her and went out of the room.

The wave of wrath subsided, and she was left alone with Madame Déroulède: presently Anne Mie came in.

The three women chatted together, waiting for the return of the master of the house. Juliette felt well and, in spite of herself, almost happy. She had lived so long in the miserable, little attic alone with Pétronelle that she enjoyed the well-being of this refined home. It was not so grand or gorgeous of course as her father's princely palace opposite the Louvre, a wreck now, since it was annexed by the Committee of National Defence, for the housing of soldiery. But the Déroulèdes' home was essentially a refined one. The delicate china on the tall chimney-piece, the few bits of Buhl and Vernis Martin about the room, the vision through the open doorway of the supper-table spread with a fine white cloth, and sparkling with silver, all spoke of fastidious tastes, of habits of luxury and elegance, which the spirit of Equality and Anarchy had not succeeded in eradicating.

When Déroulède came back, he brought an atmosphere of breezy cheerfulness with him.

The street was quiet now, and when walking past the hospital—his own gift to the Nation—he had been loudly cheered. One or two ironical voices had asked him what he had done with the aristo and her lace furbelows, but it remained at that and Mademoiselle Marny need have no fear.

He had brought Pétronelle along with him: his careless, lavish hospitality would have suggested the housing of Juliette's entire domestic establishment, had she possessed one.

As it was, the worthy old soul's deluge of happy tears had melted his kindly heart. He offered her and her young mistress shelter, until the small cloud should have rolled by.

After that he suggested a journey to England. Emigration now was the only real safety, and Mademoiselle Marny had unpleasantly drawn on herself the attention of the Paris rabble. No doubt, within the next few days her name would figure among the "suspect." She would be safest out of the country, and could not do better than place herself under the guidance of that English enthusiast, who had helped so many persecuted Frenchmen to escape from the terrors of the Revolution: the man who was such a thorn in the flesh of the Committee of Public Safety, and who went by the nickname of The Scarlet Pimpernel.

CHAPTER IV

The faithful house-dog

After supper they talked of Charlotte Corday.

Juliette clung to the vision of that heroine, and liked to talk of her. She appeared as a justification of her own actions, which somehow seemed to require justification.

She loved to hear Paul Déroulède talk; liked to provoke his enthusiasm and to see his stern, dark face light up with the inward fire of the enthusiast.

She had openly avowed herself as the daughter of the Duc de Marny. When she actually named her father, and her brother killed in duel, she saw Déroulède looking long and searchingly at her. Evidently he wondered if she knew everything: but she returned his gaze fearlessly and frankly, and he apparently was satisfied.

Madame Déroulède seemed to know nothing of the circumstances of that duel. Déroulède tried to draw Juliette out, to make her speak of her brother. She replied to his questions quite openly, but there was nothing in what she said, suggestive of the fact that she knew who killed her brother.

She wanted him to know who she was. If he feared an enemy in her, there was yet time enough for him to close his doors against her.

But less than a minute later, he had renewed his warmest offers of hospitality.

"Until we can arrange for your journey to England," he added with a short sigh, as if reluctant to part from her.

To Juliette his attitude seemed one of complete indifference for the wrong he had done to her and to her father: feeling that she was an avenging spirit, with flaming sword in hand, pursuing her brother's murderer like a relentless Nemesis, she would have preferred to see him cowed before her, even afraid of her, though she was only a young and delicate girl.

She did not understand that in the simplicity of his heart, he only wished to make amends. The quarrel with the young Vicomte de Marny had been forced upon him, the fight had been honourable and fair, and on his side fought with every desire to spare the young man. He had merely been the instrument of Fate, but he felt happy that Fate once more used him as her tool, this time to save the sister.

Whilst Déroulède and Juliette talked together Anne Mie cleared the supper-table, then came and sat on a low stool at madame's feet. She took no part in the conversation, but every now and then Juliette felt the girl's melancholy eyes fixed almost reproachfully upon her.

When Juliette had retired with Pétronelle, Déroulède took Anne Mie's hand in his.

"You will be kind to my guest, Anne Mie, won't you? She seems very lonely, and has gone through a great deal."

"Not more than I have," murmured the young girl involuntarily.

"You are not happy, Anne Mie? I thought ..."

"Is a wretched, deformed creature ever happy?" she said with sudden vehemence, as tears of mortification rushed to her eyes, in spite of herself.

"I did not think that you were wretched," he replied with some sadness, "and neither in my eyes, nor in my mother's, are you in any way deformed."

Her mood changed at once. She clung to him, pressing his hand between her own.

"Forgive me! I—I don't know what's the matter with me to-night," she said with a nervous little laugh. "Let me see, you asked me to be kind to Mademoiselle Marny, did you not?"

He nodded with a smile.

"Of course I'll be kind to her. Isn't every one kind to one who is young and beautiful, and has great, appealing eyes, and soft, curly hair? Ah me! how easy is the path in life for some people! What

do you want me to do, Paul? Wait on her? Be her little maid? Soothe her nerves or what? I'll do it all, though in her eyes I shall remain both wretched and deformed, a creature to pity, the harmless, necessary house-dog ..."

She paused a moment: said "Good-night" to him, and turned to go, candle in hand, looking pathetic and fragile, with that ugly contour of shoulder, which Déroulède assured her he could not see.

The candle flickered in the draught, illumining the thin, pinched face, the large melancholy eyes of the faithful house-dog.

"Who can watch and bite!" she said half-audibly as she slipped out of the room. "For I do not trust you, my fine madam, and there was something about that comedy this afternoon, which somehow, I don't quite understand."

CHAPTER V

A day in the woods

But whilst men and women set to work to make the towns of France hideous with their shrieks and their hootings, their mock-trials and bloody guillotines, they could not quite prevent Nature from working her sweet will with the country.

June, July, and August had received new names—they were now called Messidor, Thermidor, and Fructidor, but under these new names they continued to pour forth upon the earth the same old fruits, the same flowers, the same grass in the meadows and leaves upon the trees.

Messidor brought its quota of wild roses in the hedgerows, just as archaic June had done. Thermidor covered the barren cornfields with its flaming mantle of scarlet poppies, and Fructidor, though now called August, still tipped the wild sorrel with dots of crimson, and laid the first wash of tender colour on the pale cheeks of the ripening peaches.

And Juliette—young, girlish, feminine and inconsequent—had sighed for country and sunshine, had longed for a ramble in the woods, the music of the birds, the sight of the meadows sugared with marguerites.

She had left the house early: accompanied by Pétronelle, she had been rowed along the river as far as Suresnes. They had brought some bread and fresh butter, a little wine and fruit in a basket, and from here she meant to wander homewards through the woods.

It was all so peaceful, so remote: even the noise of shrieking, howling Paris did not reach the leafy thickets of Suresnes.

It almost seemed as if this little old-world village had been forgotten by the destroyers of France. It had never been a royal residence, the woods had never been preserved for royal sport: there was no vengeance to be wreaked upon its peaceful glades and sleepy, fragrant meadows.

Juliette spent a happy day; she loved the flowers, the trees, the birds, and Pétronelle was silent and sympathetic. As the afternoon wore on, and it was time to go home, Juliette turned townwards with a sigh.

You all know that road through the woods, which lies to the north-west of Paris: so leafy, so secluded. No large, hundred-year-old trees, no fine oaks or antique elms, but numberless delicate stems of hazel-nut and young ash, covered with honeysuckle at this time of year, sweet-smelling and so peaceful after that awful turmoil of the town.

Obedient to Madame Déroulède's suggestion, Juliette had tied a tricolour scarf round her waist, and a Phrygian cap of crimson cloth, with the inevitable rosette on one side, adorned her curly head.

She had gathered a huge bouquet of poppies, marguerites and blue lupin—Nature's tribute to the national colours—and as she wandered through the sylvan glades she looked like some quaint dweller of the woods—a sprite, mayhap—with old mother Pétronelle trotting behind her, like an attendant witch.

Suddenly she paused, for in the near distance she had perceived the sound of footsteps upon the leafy turf, and the next moment Paul Déroulède emerged from out the thicket and came rapidly towards her.

"We were so anxious about you at home!" he said, almost by way of an apology. "My mother became so restless ..."

"That to quiet her fears you came in search of me!" she retorted with a gay little laugh, the laugh of a young girl, scarce a woman as yet, who feels that she is good to look at, good to talk to, who feels her wings for the first time, the wings with which to soar into that mad, merry, elusive and called Romance. Ay, her wings! but her power also! that sweet, subtle power of the woman: the yoke which men love, rail at, and love again, the yoke that enslaves them and gives them the joy of kings.

How happy the day had been! Yet it had been incomplete!

Pétronelle was somewhat dull, and Juliette was too young to enjoy long companionship with her own thoughts. Now suddenly the day seemed to have become perfect. There was someone there to appreciate the charm of the woods, the beauty of that blue sky peeping through the tangled foliage of the honeysuckle-covered trees. There was some one to talk to, someone to admire the fresh white frock Juliette had put on that morning.

"But how did you know where to find me?" she asked with a quaint touch of immature coquetry.

"I didn't know," he replied quietly. "They told me you had gone to Suresness, and meant to wander homewards through the woods. It frightened me, for you will have to go through the north-west barrier, and ..."

"Well?"

He smiled, and looked earnestly for a moment at the dainty apparition before him.

"Well, you know!" he said gaily, "that tricolour scarf and the red cap are not quite sufficient as a disguise: you look anything but a staunch friend of the people. I guessed that your muslin frock would be clean, and that there would still be some tell-tale lace upon it."

She laughed again, and with delicate fingers lifted her pretty muslin frock, displaying a white frou-frou of flounces beneath the hem.

"How careless and childish!" he said, almost roughly.

"Would you have me coarse and grimy to be a fitting match for your partisans?" she retorted.

His tone of mentor nettled her, his attitude seemed to her priggish and dictatorial, and as the sun disappearing behind a sudden cloud, so her childish merriment quickly gave place to a feeling of unexplainable disappointment.

"I humbly beg your pardon," he said quietly, "And must crave your kind indulgence for my mood: but I have been so anxious ..."

"Why should you be anxious about me?"

She had meant to say this indifferently, as if caring little what the reply might be: but in her effort to seem indifferent her voice became haughty, a reminiscence of the days when she still was the daughter of the Duc de Marny, the richest and most high-born heiress in France.

"Was that presumptuous?" he asked, with a slight touch of irony, in response to her own hauteur.

"It was merely unnecessary," she replied. "I have already laid too many burdens on your shoulders, without wishing to add that of anxiety."

"You have laid no burden on me," he said quietly, "save one of gratitude."

"Gratitude? What have I done?"

"You committed a foolish, thoughtless act outside my door, and gave me the chance of easing my conscience of a heavy load."

"In what way?"

"I had never hoped that the Fates would be so kind as to allow me to render a member of your family a slight service."

"I understand that you saved my life the other day, Monsieur Déroulède. I know that I am still in peril and that I owe my safety to you ..."

"Do you also know that your brother owed his death to me?"

She closed her lips firmly, unable to reply, wrathful with him, for having suddenly and without any warning, placed a clumsy hand upon that hidden sore.

"I always meant to tell you," he continued somewhat hurriedly; "for it almost seemed to me that I have been cheating you, these last few days. I don't suppose that you can quite realise what it means to me to tell you this just now; but I owe it to you, I think. In later years you might find out, and then regret the days you spent under my roof. I called you childish a moment ago, you must forgive me; I know that you are a woman, and hope therefore that you will understand me. I killed your brother in fair fight. He provoked me as no man was ever provoked before ..."

"Is it necessary, M. Déroulède, that you should tell me all this?" she interrupted him with some impatience.

"I thought you ought to know."

"You must know, on the other hand, that I have no means of hearing the history of the quarrel from my brother's point of view now."

The moment the words were out of her lips she had realised how cruelly she had spoken. He did not reply; he was too chivalrous, too gentle, to reproach her. Perhaps he understood for the first time how bitterly she had felt her brother's death, and how deeply she must be suffering, now that she knew herself to be face to face with his murderer.

She stole a quick glance at him, through her tears. She was deeply penitent for what she had said. It almost seemed to her as if a dual nature was at war within her.

The mention of her brother's name, the recollection of that awful night beside his dead body, of those four years whilst she watched her father's moribund reason slowly wandering towards the grave, seemed to rouse in her a spirit of rebellion, and of evil, which she felt was not entirely of herself.

The woods had become quite silent. It was late afternoon, and they had gradually wandered farther and farther away from pretty sylvan Suresness, towards great, anarchic, deathdealing Paris. In this part of the woods the birds had left their homes; the trees, shorn of their lower branches looked like gaunt spectres, raising melancholy heads towards the relentless, silent sky.

In the distance, from behind the barriers, a couple of miles away, the boom of a gun was heard.

"They are closing the barriers," he said quietly after a long pause. "I am glad I was fortunate enough to meet you."

"It was kind of you to seek for me," she said meekly. "I didn't mean what I said just now ..."

"I pray you, say no more about it. I can so well understand. I only wish ..."

"It would be best I should leave your house," she said gently; "I have so ill repaid your hospitality. Pétronelle and I can easily go back to our lodgings."

"You would break my mother's heart if you left her now," he said, almost roughly. "She has become very fond of you, and knows, just as well as I do, the dangers that would beset you outside my house. My coarse and grimy partisans," he added, with a bitter touch of sarcasm, "have that advantage, that they are loyal to me, and would not harm you while under my roof."

"But you ..." she murmured.

She felt somehow that she had wounded him very deeply, and was half angry with herself for her seeming ingratitude, and yet childishly glad to have suppressed in him that attitude of mentorship, which he was beginning to assume over her.

"You need not fear that my presence will offend you much longer, mademoiselle," he said coldly. "I can quite understand how hateful it must be to you, though I would have wished that you could believe at least in my sincerity."

"Are you going away then?"

"Not out of Paris altogether. I have accepted the post of Governor of the Conciergerie."

"Ah!—where the poor Queen ..."

She checked herself suddenly. Those words would have been called treasonable to the people of France.

Instinctively and furtively, as everyone did in these days, she cast a rapid glance behind her.

"You need not be afraid," he said; "there is no one here but Pétronelle."

"And you."

"Oh! I echo your words. Poor Marie Antoinette!"

"You pity her?"

"How can I help it?"

"But your are that horrible National Convention, who will try her, condemn her, execute her as they did the King."

"I am of the National Convention. But I will not condemn her, nor be a party to another crime. I go as Governor of the Conciergerie, to help her, if I can."

"But your popularity—your life—if you befriend her?"

"As you say, mademoiselle, my life, if I befriend her," he said simply.

She looked at him with renewed curiosity in her gaze.

How strange were men in these days! Paul Déroulède, the republican, the recognised idol of the lawless people of France, was about to risk his life for the woman he had helped to dethrone.

Pity with him did not end with the rabble of Paris; it had reached Charlotte Corday, though it failed to save her, and now it extended to the poor dispossessed Queen. Somehow, in his face this time, she saw either success or death.

"When do you leave?" she asked.

"To-morrow night."

She said nothing more. Strangely enough, a tinge of melancholy had settled over her spirits. No doubt the proximity of the town was the cause of this. She could already hear the familiar noise of muffled drums, the loud, excited shrieking of the mob, who stood round the gates of Paris, at this time of the evening, waiting to witness some important capture, perhaps that of a hated aristocrat striving to escape from the people's revenge.

They had reached the edge of the wood, and gradually, as she walked, the flowers she had gathered fell unheeded out of her listless hands one by one.

First the blue lupins: their bud-laden heads were heavy and they dropped to the ground, followed by the white marguerites, that lay thick behind her now on the grass like a shroud. The red poppies were the lightest, their thin gummy stalks clung to her hands longer than the rest. At last she let them fall too, singly, like great drops of blood, that glistened as her long white gown swept them aside.

Déroulède was absorbed in his thoughts, and seemed not to heed her. At the barrier, however, he roused himself and took out the passes which alone enabled Juliette and Pétronelle to re-enter the town unchallenged. He himself as Citizen-Deputy could come and go as he wished.

Juliette shuddered as the great gates closed behind her with a heavy clank. It seemed to shut out even the memory of this happy day, which for a brief space had been quite perfect.

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