

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE PARISIANS —
VOLUME 10**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон
The Parisians — Volume 10

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The Parisians — Volume 10

BOOK X

CHAPTER I

Graham Vane had heard nothing for months from M. Renard, when one morning he received the letter I translate:

"MONSIEUR,—I am happy to inform you that I have at last obtained one piece of information which may lead to a more important discovery. When we parted after our fruitless research in Vienna, we had both concurred in the persuasion that, for some reason known only to the two ladies themselves, Madame Marigny and Madame Duval had exchanged names—that it was Madame Marigny who had deceased in the name of Madame Duval, and Madame Duval who had survived in that of Marigny.

"It was clear to me that the *beau Monsieur* who had visited the false Duval must have been cognisant of this exchange of name, and that, if his name and whereabouts could be ascertained, he, in all probability, would know what had become of the lady who is the object of our research; and after the lapse of so many years he would probably have very slight motive to preserve the concealment of facts which might, no doubt, have been convenient at the time. The lover of the *soi-disant* Mademoiselle Duval was by such accounts as we could gain a man of some rank—very possibly a married man; and the liaison, in short, was one of those which, while they last, necessitate precautions and secrecy.

"Therefore, dismissing all attempts at further trace of the missing lady, I resolved to return to Vienna as soon as the business that recalled me to Paris was concluded, and devote myself exclusively to the search after the amorous and mysterious Monsieur.

"I did not state this determination to you, because, possibly, I might be in error—or, if not in error, at least too sanguine in my expectations— and it is best to avoid disappointing an honourable client.

"One thing was clear, that, at the time of the *soi-disant* Duval's decease, the *beau Monsieur* was at Vienna.

"It appeared also tolerably clear that when the lady friend of the deceased quitted Munich so privately, it was to Vienna she repaired, and from Vienna comes the letter demanding the certificates of Madame Duval's death. Pardon me, if I remind you of all these circumstances no doubt fresh in your recollection. I repeat them in order to justify the conclusions to which they led me.

"I could not, however, get permission to absent myself from Paris for the time I might require till the end of last April. I had meanwhile sought all private means of ascertaining what Frenchmen of rank and station were in that capital in the autumn of 1849. Among the list of the very few such Messieurs I fixed upon one as the most likely to be the mysterious Achille—Achille was, indeed, his *nom de bapteme*.

"A man of intrigue—a *bonnes fortunes*—of lavish expenditure withal; very tenacious of his dignity, and avoiding any petty scandals by which it might be lowered; just the man who, in some passing affair of gallantry with a lady of doubtful repute, would never have signed his titular designation to a letter, and would have kept himself as much incognito as he could. But this man was dead—had been dead some years. He had not died at Vienna—never visited that capital for some years before his death. He was then, and had long been, the *ami de la maison* of one of those

grandes dames of whose intimacy *grands seigneurs* are not ashamed. They parade there the *bonnes fortunes* they conceal elsewhere. Monsieur and the grande dame were at Baden when the former died. Now, Monsieur, a Don Juan of that stamp is pretty sure always to have a confidential Leporello. If I could find Leporello alive I might learn the secrets not to be extracted from a Don Juan defunct. I ascertained, in truth, both at Vienna, to which I first repaired in order to verify the renseignements I had obtained at Paris, and at Baden, to which I then bent my way, that this brilliant noble had a favourite valet who had lived with him from his youth—an Italian, who had contrived in the course of his service to lay by savings enough to set up a hotel somewhere in Italy, supposed to be Pisa. To Pisa I repaired, but the man had left some years; his hotel had not prospered—he had left in debt. No one could say what had become of him. At last, after a long and tedious research, I found him installed as manager of a small hotel at Genoa—a pleasant fellow enough; and after friendly intercourse with him (of course I lodged at his hotel), I easily led him to talk of his earlier life and adventures, and especially of his former master, of whose splendid career in the army of '*La Belle Deesse*' he was not a little proud. It was not very easy to get him to the particular subject in question. In fact, the affair with the poor false Duval had been so brief and undistinguished an episode in his master's life, that it was not without a strain of memory that he reached it.

"By little and little, however, in the course of two or three evenings, and by the aid of many flasks of Orviette or bottles of Lacrima (wines, Monsieur, that I do not commend to any one who desires to keep his stomach sound and his secrets safe), I gathered these particulars.

"Our Don Juan, since the loss of a wife in the first year of marriage, had rarely visited Paris where he had a domicile—his ancestral hotel there he had sold.

"But happening to visit that capital of Europe a few months before we come to our dates at Aix-la-Chapelle, he made acquaintance with Madame Marigny, a natural daughter of high-placed parents, by whom, of course, she had never been acknowledged, but who had contrived that she should receive a good education at a convent; and on leaving it also contrived that an old soldier of fortune—which means an officer without fortune—who had served in Algiers with some distinction, should offer her his hand, and add the modest dot they assigned her to his yet more modest income. They contrived also that she should understand the offer must be accepted. Thus Mademoiselle '*Quelque Chose*' became Madame Marigny, and she, on her part, contrived that a year or so later she should be left a widow. After a marriage, of course the parents washed their hands of her—they had done their duty. At the time Don Juan made this lady's acquaintance nothing could be said against her character; but the milliners and butchers had begun to imply that they would rather have her money than trust to her character. Don Juan fell in love with her, satisfied the immediate claims of milliner and butcher, and when they quitted Paris it was agreed that they should meet later at Aix-la-Chapelle. But when he resorted to that sultry and, to my mind, unalluring spa, he was surprised by a line from her saying that she had changed her name of Marigny for that of Duval.

"I recollect,' said Leporello, 'that two days afterwards my master said to me, 'Caution and secrecy. Don't mention my name at the house to which I may send you with any note for Madame Duval. I don't announce my name when I call. *La petite* Marigny has exchanged her name for that of Louise Duval; and I find that there is a Louise Duval here, her friend, who is niece to a relation of my own, and a terrible relation to quarrel with—a dead shot and unrivalled swordsman—Victor de Mauleon. My master was brave enough, but he enjoyed life, and he did not think *la petite* Marigny worth being killed for.'

"Leporello remembered very little of what followed. All he did remember is that Don Juan, when at Vienna, said to him one morning, looking less gay than usual, 'It is finished with *ca petite* Marigny—she is no more.' Then he ordered his bath, wrote a note, and said with tears in his eyes, 'Take this to Mademoiselle Celeste; not to be compared to *la petite* Marigny; but *la petite* Celeste is still alive.' Ah, Monsieur! if only any man in France could be as proud of his ruler as that Italian was of my countrymen! Alas! we Frenchmen are all made to command—or at least we think ourselves

so—and we are insulted by one who says to us, 'Serve and obey.' Nowadays, in France, we find all Don Juans and no Leporellos.

"After strenuous exertions upon my part to recall to Leporello's mind the important question whether he had ever seen the true Duval, passing under the name of Marigny—whether she had not presented herself to his master at Vienna or elsewhere—he rubbed his forehead, and drew from it these reminiscences.

"'On the day that his Excellency,'—Leporello generally so styled his master—'Excellency,' as you are aware, is the title an Italian would give to Satan if taking his wages,' told me that *la petite* Marigny was no more, he had received previously a lady veiled and mantled, whom I did not recognise as any one I had seen before, but I noticed her way of carrying herself—haughtily—her head thrown back; and I thought to myself, that lady is one of his grandes dames. She did call again two or three times, never announcing her name; then she did not reappear. She might be Madame Duval—I can't say.'

"'But did you never hear his Excellency speak of the real Duval after that time?'

"'No—*non mi ricordo*—I don't remember.'

"'Nor of some living Madame Marigny, though the real one was dead?'

"'Stop, I do recollect; not that he ever named such a person to me, but that I have posted letters for him to a Madame Marigny—oh, yes! even years after the said *petite* Marigny was dead; and once I did venture to say, 'Pardon me, Eccellenza, but may I ask if that poor lady is really dead, since I have to prepay this letter to her?'"

"'Oh,' said he, 'Madame Marigny! Of course the one you know is dead, but there are others of the same name; this lady is of my family. Indeed, her house, though noble in itself, recognises the representative of mine as its head, and I am too *bon prince* not to acknowledge and serve any one who branches out of my own tree.'

"A day after this last conversation on the subject, Leporello said to me: 'My friend, you certainly have some interest in ascertaining what became of the lady who took the name of Marigny (I state this frankly, Monsieur, to show how difficult even for one so prudent as I am to beat about a bush long but what you let people know the sort of bird you are in search of).

"'Well,' said I, 'she does interest me. I knew something of that Victor de Mauleon, whom his Excellency did not wish to quarrel with; and it would be a kindly act to her relation if one could learn what became of Louise Duval.'

"'I can put you on the way of learning all that his Excellency was likely to have known of her through correspondence. I have often heard him quote, with praise, a saying so clever that it might have been Italian, "Never write, never burn;" that is, never commit yourself by a letter—keep all letters that could put others in your power. All the letters he received were carefully kept and labelled. I sent them to his son in four large trunks. His son, no doubt, has them still.'

"Now, however, I have exhausted my budget. I arrived at Paris last night. I strongly advise you to come hither at once, if you still desire to prosecute your search.

"You, Monsieur, can do what I could not venture to do; you can ask the son of Don Juan if, amid the correspondence of his father, which he may have preserved, there be any signed Marigny or Duval—any, in short, which can throw light on this very obscure complication of circumstances. A grand seigneur would naturally be more complaisant to a man of your station than he would be to an agent of police. Don Juan's son, inheriting his father's title, is Monsieur le Marquis de Rochebriant; and permit me to add, that at this moment, as the journals doubtless inform you, all Paris resounds with the rumour of the coming war; and Monsieur de Rochebriant—who is, as I have ascertained, now in Paris—it may be difficult to find anywhere on earth a month or two hence.—I have the honour, with profound consideration, &c., &c., RENARD."

The day after the receipt of this letter Graham Vane was in Paris.

CHAPTER II

Among things indescribable is that which is called "Agitation" in Paris— "Agitation" without riot or violence—showing itself by no disorderly act, no turbulent outburst. Perhaps the cafes are more crowded; passengers in the streets stop each other more often, and converse in small knots and groups; yet, on the whole, there is little externally to show how loudly the heart of Paris is beating. A traveller may be passing through quiet landscapes, unconscious that a great battle is going on some miles off, but if he will stop and put his ear to the ground he will recognise by a certain indescribable vibration, the voice of the cannon.

But at Paris an acute observer need not stop and put his ear to the ground; he feels within himself a vibration—a mysterious inward sympathy which communicates to the individual a conscious thrill—when the passions of the multitude are stirred, no matter how silently.

Tortoni's cafe was thronged when Duplessis and Frederic Lemercier entered it: it was in vain to order breakfast; no table was vacant either within the rooms or under the awnings without.

But they could not retreat so quickly as they had entered. On catching sight of the financier several men rose and gathered round him, eagerly questioning:

"What do you think, Duplessis? Will any insult to France put a drop of warm blood into the frigid veins of that miserable Ollivier?"

"It is not yet clear that France has been insulted, Messieurs," replied Duplessis, phlegmatically.

"Bah! Not insulted! The very nomination of a Hohenzollern to the crown of Spain was an insult—what would you have more?"

"I tell you what it is, Duplessis," said the Vicomte de Breze, whose habitual light good temper seemed exchanged for insolent swagger—"I tell you what it is, your friend the Emperor has no more courage than a chicken. He is grown old, and infirm, and lazy; he knows that he can't even mount on horseback. But if, before this day week, he has not declared war on the Prussians, he will be lucky if he can get off as quietly as poor Louis Philippe did under shelter of his umbrella, and ticketed 'Schmidt.' Or could you not, M. Duplessis, send him back to London in a bill of exchange?"

"For a man of your literary repute, M. le Vicomte," said Duplessis, "you indulge in a strange confusion of metaphors. But, pardon me, I came here to breakfast, and I cannot remain to quarrel. Come, Lemercier, let us take our chance of a cutlet at the Trois Freres."

"Fox, Fox," cried Lemercier, whistling to a poodle that had followed him into the cafe, and, frightened by the sudden movement and loud voices of the habitués, had taken refuge under the table.

"Your dog is poltron," said De Breze; "call him Nap." At this stroke of humour there was a general laugh, in the midst of which Duplessis escaped, and Frederic, having discovered and caught his dog, followed with that animal tenderly clasped in his arms.

"I would not lose Fox for a great deal," said Lemercier with effusion; "a pledge of love and fidelity from an English lady the most distinguished: the lady left me—the dog remains."

Duplessis smiled grimly: "What a thoroughbred Parisian you are, my dear Frederic! I believe if the tramp of the last angel were sounding, the Parisians would be divided into two sets: one would be singing the Marseillaise, and parading the red flag; the other would be shrugging their shoulders and saying, 'Bah! as if le Bon Dieu would have the bad taste to injure Paris—the Seat of the Graces, the School of the Arts, the Fountain of Reason, the Eye of the World;' and so be found by the destroying angel caressing poodles and making *bons mots* about les femmes."

"And quite right, too," said Lemercier, complacently; "what other people in the world could retain lightness of heart under circumstances so unpleasant? But why do you take things so solemnly? Of course there will be war idle now to talk of explanations and excuses. When a Frenchman says, 'I am insulted,' he is not going to be told that he is not insulted. He means fighting, and not apologising. But what if there be war? Our brave soldiers beat the Prussians—take the Rhine—return to Paris

covered with laurels; a new Boulevard de Berlin eclipses the Boulevard Sebastopol. By the way, Duplessis, a Boulevard de Berlin will be a good speculation—better than the Rue de Louvier. Ah! is not that my English friend, Garm Varn?" here, quitting the arm of Duplessis, Lemercier stopped a gentleman who was about to pass him unnoticed. "*Bon jour, mon ami!* how long have you been at Paris?"

"I only arrived last evening," answered Graham, "and my stay will be so short that it is a piece of good luck, my dear Lemercier, to meet with you, and exchange a cordial shake of the hand."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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