

Gibbs George

The Love of Monsieur



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«Public Domain»

Gibbs G.

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THIS VOLUME IS

INSCRIBED TO

M. H. G

THE “NORSE GODDESS”

with all my heart and best endeavors in tender appreciation of those sympathies and encouragements which make a pleasure of labor, and life a fruition of every hope and dream

CHAPTER I

THE FLEECE TAVERN

“Who is this Mornay?”

Captain Cornbury paused to kindle his tobago.

“Mornay is of the Embassy of France, at any game of chance the luckiest blade in the world and a Damon for success with the petticoats, whether they’re doxies or duchesses.”

“Soho! a pretty fellow.”

“A French chevalier – a fellow of the Marine; but a die juggler – a man of no caste,” sneered Mr. Wynne.

“He has a wit with a point.”

“Ay, and a rapier, too,” said Lord Downey.

“The devil fly with these foreign lady-killers,” growled Wynne again.

“Oh, Mornay is a man-killer, too, never fear. He’s not named Bras-de-Fer for nothing,” laughed Cornbury.

“Bah!” said a voice near the door. “A foundling – an outcast – a man of no birth – I’ll have no more of him.”

Captain Ferrers tossed aside his coat and hat and came forward into the glare of the candles. Behind him followed the tall figure of Sir Henry Heywood, whose gray hair and more sober garb and lineaments made the gay apparel of his companion the more splendid by comparison. Captain Ferrers wore the rich accouterments of a captain in the Body-guard, and his manner and address showed the bluster of a bully of the barracks. The face, somewhat ruddy in color, was of a certain heavy regularity of feature, but his eyes were small, like a pig’s, and as he came into the light they flickered and guttered like a candle at a puff of the breath. There were lines, too, at the corners of the mouth, and the pursing of the thin lips gave him the air of a man older than his years.

“Come, Ferrers,” said Cornbury, good-naturedly, “give the devil his due.”

Wynne laughed. “Gawd, man! he’s givin’ him his due. Aren’t you, Ferrers?”

The captain scowled. “I’ faith I am. Two hundred guineas again last night. May the plague take him! Such luck is not in nature.”

“He wins upon us all, by the Lord!” said Cornbury, stoutly.

Heywood sneered. “Bah! You Irish are too easy with your likes – ”

“And dislikes, too,” returned Cornbury, with a swift glance.

“Faugh!” snapped Ferrers. “The man saved your life, but you can’t thrust him down our throats, Captain Cornbury.”

“He’s cooked his goose well this time, thank God!” said Wynne. “We’ll soon be rid of him.”

“Another duel?” asked Heywood, carelessly.

“What!” cried Downey. “Have you not heard of the struggle for precedence this afternoon? Why, man, ’tis the talk of London. To-day there was a fight between the coaches and retainers of the Embassades of France and Spain. Thanks to Mornay, the French coach was disastrously defeated by the Spaniards. There is a great to-do at Whitehall, for the Grand Monarque thinks more of his prestige in London even than in Paris. God help the man who thwarts him in this! It is death or the Bastille, and our own King would rather offend God than Louis.”

“And Mornay – ”

“As for Mornay – ” For an answer, Lord Downey significantly blew out one of the candles upon the table. “Pf! – That is what will happen to Mornay. The story is this: The coaches were drawn up on Tower Wharf, waiting to follow the King. In the French coach were seated Mornay and the son of the ambassador. In the Spanish coach were Baron de Batteville and two ladies. After his Majesty had

passed, both the French and Spanish coaches endeavored to be first in the street, which is here so narrow that but one may pass at a time. The Frenchman had something of the advantage of position, and, cutting into the Spaniard with a great crash, sent the coach whirling over half-way upon its side, to the great hazard of the Spaniard and ladies within. Then Mornay, who has a most ingenious art of getting into the very thick of things, leaped upon the coachman's seat and seized the reins of the coach-horses. He was beset by the Spaniards and cut upon the head."

"And he hung on?"

"What d'ye think the fellow did? Pulled the French horses back and aside and let the Spanish coach down upon four wheels and out of danger. Was it not a pretty pass? The rest was as simple as you please. The Spaniard whipped, and though smashed and battered, won first through the narrow passage."

"And Mornay?"

"Does not deny it. He says it would have been impossible for a gentleman to see such ladies thrown into a dirty ditchwater."

"And the ladies, man? Who were the ladies?" said Ferrers.

"Aha! that is the best of it. The Spaniards relate that Mornay came down from the coachman's seat wiping the blood from his cheek. To one of the ladies he said, 'Madame, the kingdom of France yields precedence only to a rank greater than Majesty. The honor France loses belongs not to Spain, but to the beautiful Barbara Clerke.'"

Sir Henry Heywood caught at a quick breath.

"Mistress Clerke! My ward!"

Captain Ferrers looked from Downey to Cornbury, only to see verification written upon their faces. He pushed back his bench from the table, his countenance fairly blazing with anger, and cried, in a choking voice:

"Mornay again! To drag her name into every ordinary and gaming hell in London! Coxcomb! – scoundrel! – upstart that he is! Mornay, always Mornay – "

The candles flickered gayly as Monsieur Mornay entered. His figure and costume were the perfection of studied elegance. The perruque was admirably curled, and the laces and jewels were such that a king might have envied him. A black patch extending along the forehead gave him an odd appearance, and the white brow seemed the more pallid by contrast. His features in repose bore the look of settled melancholy one sometimes sees on the faces of men who live for pleasure alone. But as his eyes turned towards the table a smile, full of careless good-humor, came over his features. He advanced, pausing a moment as Wynne and Heywood pushed Ferrers down by main force into his seat.

"Messieurs," said Mornay, smiling quizzically, "your servitor." He stopped again. "I thought my name was spoken. No?" He looked from one to the other. "My name I comprehend, but, messieurs, my titles – my new titles! To whom am I indebted for my titles? Ah, Monsieur le Capitaine Ferraire, *mon ami*, I am glad that you are here. I thought that I had fallen among enemies."

He laughed gayly. It was rippling and mellow, a laugh from the very cockles of the heart, full of the joy of living, in which there lurked no suspicion of doubt or insincerity – the situation was so vastly amusing. Cornbury laughed, too. He was an Irishman with a galloping humor; nor was Downey slow to follow his example.

For Heywood and Ferrers it was another matter. The elder man sat rigidly, glaring at the Frenchman with eyes that glittered from lids narrow with hate. Ferrers, disconcerted by the defenselessness of the Frenchman, sat stupidly, his features swollen with rage, his lips uncertain and trembling for a word to bring the quarrel to a head. But before he could speak, Sir Henry Heywood, very pale, had thrust himself forward over the table to Mornay in a way not to be mistaken, and said, briefly:

"Gad, sirrah, your laugh is the sign of an empty mind!"

Mornay was truly taken by surprise. But as he looked up at this new enemy he found no difficulty in understanding Heywood's meaning. He rose to his feet, still smiling, and said, coolly, with a sedulous politeness:

"I am empty of brains? It takes a wit like that of monsieur to discover something which does not exist."

Captain Ferrers had floundered to his feet, blustering and maddened at being cheated out of his quarrel. He burst violently upon the colloquy, and, seizing Heywood by the arm, dragged him back to the window-seat.

"Tis not your quarrel, Heywood," he began.

But Sir Henry shook himself free of Ferrers, and they both faced Monsieur Mornay, who, somewhat languidly, but with a polite tolerance, stood leaning against the table watching this unlooked for development of the drama.

"Messieurs," he smiled, "an *embarras de richesse*. Never have I been so greatly honored. I pray that you do not come to blows on my account. *One* of you might kill the *other*, which would rob *me* of the honor of killing you *both*."

Captain Cornbury until this time had been an interested and amused onlooker. He dearly loved a fight, and the situation was enjoyable; but here was the evening flying and his game of cards gone a-glimmering.

"Zounds, gentlemen!" he broke in. "A pretty business – to fight at the Fleece Tavern. Pleasant reading for the Courant – a fitting end to a comedy begun upon the street."

"Tis not your quarrel, Cornbury," growled Ferrers.

"Nor yours, Ferrers," said Heywood, coldly.

"You see, monsieur," said Mornay to Downey, with mock helplessness, "there is no help for it."

Cornbury swore a round oath:

"I' faith, I wash my hands of ye. If fight ye must, quarrel dacently over the cards, man; but do not drag a lady's name through the streets of London."

Mornay turned to Cornbury. "It is true, *mon ami*– it is true." Then, in a flash, gayly, aloud, almost like a child, he shouted: "*Allons*, time is flying. To-morrow we shall fight, but to-night – to-night we shall play at quinze. Monsieur Ferraire, you owe me three hundred guineas. We shall play for these. If you win, you will die to-morrow with a clear conscience. If you lose, monsieur, I'll be your undertaker. Come, *maître d'hôtel*! – wine!"

CHAPTER II

MISTRESS BARBARA DANCES THE CORANTO

Mistress Barbara's deep-abiding dislike for Monsieur Mornay began even before the struggle for precedence between the French and Spanish coaches. Such an incident, grown to international importance, might have turned the heads of ladies with greater reputations than hers. Nor should it have been a small thing that a reckless young man had risked his life to say nothing of his honor, in her service, and got a very bad cut upon his head in the bargain. But Mistress Clerke was not like some other ladies of the court. She had heard of the gallantries of Monsieur Mornay, and had set him down as a woman-hunter and libertine – a type especially elected for her abomination. His recent attentions to the Countess of Shrewsbury and the engaging Mrs. Middleton were already the common gossip of the court. She herself had seen this man, perfumed and frilled, flaunting himself in Hyde Park or the Mall with one or the other of his charmers, but the assurance which made him successful elsewhere only filled her with disgust. What the Englishwomen could see in such a fellow it was difficult for her to determine. He was certainly not over-handsome. What strength the face possessed she ascribed to boldness; what pride in the curve of the nose and lips – to arrogance; what sensitiveness and delicacy of molding in lip and chin – to puny aims and habits of fellows of his trade. She was a person who divined rapidly and with more or less inaccuracy, and so she had prepared herself thoroughly to dislike the man, even before his own presumption had heightened her prejudice. Mistress Barbara had first won and now held her position at court, not by a lavish display of her talents and charms, but by a nimble wit and unassailable character and sincerity, qualities of a particular value, because of their rarity. This was the reason she could discover no compliment in the gallantry of Monsieur Mornay on Tower Wharf. For beneath the mask of his subservience she discovered a gleam of unbridled admiration, which, compliment though it might have been from another, from him was only an insult.

Several days of deliberation had brought no change in her spirit. She resolved, as she put the last dainty touches to her toilet, that if Monsieur Mornay again thrust his attentions upon her that night at the ball of the Duchess of Dorset, she would give him a word or two in public which should establish their personal relations for all time. And as she stood before her dressing-table, her mirror gave her back a reflection which justified her every jealous precaution. The candles shimmered upon the loveliest neck and arms in the world. The forehead was wide, white, and smooth, and her hair rippled back from her temples in a shower of gold and fell in a natural order which made the arts of fashion superfluous. Her cheeks glowed with a color which put to shame the rouge-pot in her toilet-closet. She was more like some tall Norse goddess, with the breath of the sea and the pines in her nostrils, than a figure in a world of luxury and pampered ease. Her eyes, clear and full, were strangers to qualms and apprehensions, and the thought of a possible scene with this impertinent Frenchman gave them a sparkle which added to their shadowed luster. In the thinking, she did Monsieur Mornay the honor to add just one more patch to her chin. And then, of course, if trouble arose and the worst came, there was Captain Ferrers, whom she might marry some day, or her guardian, Sir Henry Heywood, who could be called upon. Little did she know of the meeting between Mornay and Sir Henry, arranged for that very morning, which had miscarried because of an untimely intervention by the watch.

The Duke of Dorset danced well. When Mistress Clerke entered his ballroom the tabors were sounding for a brawl. His grace espied her at this moment, and, coming forward with an air of the *grand seigneur* which many a younger man might have envied him, carried her off under the very noses of Wynne, Howard, Russell, and Jermyn, to say nothing of Captain Ferrers, who had brought her there in his coach.

It was a very merry dance, better suited to young legs than to old, and Mistress Barbara, with a rare grace, put even his grace's spryness to the test. Monsieur Mornay, who had just come in, made to himself the solemn promise that if it lay in his power she should favor him upon that evening. If he suspected that she would receive him with an ill grace, he did not show it, for he made no scruple to hide his open admiration as she danced along the gallery. Twice she passed the spot where he stood, and once she looked quite through him at the blank wall behind. But, unabashed, when the dance was done he lost no time in letting the Duke of Dorset know that he wished to be presented, in such a manner that recognition would be unavoidable.

"With all the good-will in the world," said his grace. "Another moth to the flame," he laughed. "Another star to the constellation. Be careful, Sir Frenchman. 'Tis not a lady pleased with frivolity."

"Monsieur, behold," said Mornay, piously, "I am as solemn as a judge – as virtuous as —*ma foi!* as virtuous as the she-dragon duenna of the Queen."

"Nor will that please her better," said Captain Cornbury, who had come up at this moment. "I' faith, Mornay, she's most difficult – as full of whims as the multiplication table. At present she spends both her time and her fortune – where d'ye suppose, Monsieur Mornay? In the fire region and the prisons. Strange tastes for the heiress of half a province in France and the whole of the fortune of the Bresacs."

"Ma foi! Une sérieuse!"

"Ochone! she's saucy enough – with a bit of a temper, too, they say."

"But the prisons?"

"Are but her trade to-day – perhaps to-morrow – that's all. What do ye think? She has but just promised the coranto and an hour alone in the garden to the man who brings her Nick Rawlings' pardon from the King."

"The cutpurse?"

"The very same. She says 'tis an old man and ill fit to die upon the scaffold."

"*Pardieu!*" said Mornay, casting a swift glance at her train of followers. "She's more cruel to her lovers than to her poor."

Cornbury laughed. "I' faith, so far as she's concerned, they're one and the same, I'm thinking. A stroke of janius, Mornay! Have yourself but thrown into prison, and you may win her, after all."

He moved away. Mornay looked around him for this scornful mistress, but she had gone into the garden with Captain Ferrers.

"*Mordieu!*" he growled. "There's truth in that jest. In prison I'll be, soon enough, unless the King – " He paused, with a curious smile. "The King – aha! I've a better use for Charles than that," and he made his way to the retiring-room, where his lackey, Vigot, resplendent in a yellow coat and black waistcoat, was awaiting his orders.

The night progressed. Came next the country dances – invented upon a time by his grace of Buckingham's grandmother to introduce to the court some of her country cousins. Hoydenish they were, but the sibilance of the silks and satins and the flaunt of laces robbed them of much of their rustic simplicity. Mistress Clerke, her color heightened, held her court up and down the gallery, until Mistress Stewart and my lady Chesterfield, in turn, jealous of their prestige, called their recalcitrant admirers to account. His grace of Dorset, somewhat red and breathless, could contain himself no longer. "By my faith!" he said, "Castlemaine and Hamilton had better look to their laurels. Nay, she has a wit as pretty as that of my lord of Rochester."

"But cleaner," put in Jermyn, dryly.

In the meanwhile Monsieur Mornay had received a packet.

"In God's name, what have you done?" (it ran). "You juggle too lightly with the affairs of nations, Monsieur Mornay. 'Tis a serious offense for you, and means death, or the Bastile at the very least. Here is what you ask. I have no more favors to give. Leave London at once, for when the post from France arrives, I cannot help you. – C."

Mornay looked at it curiously, with pursed lips and loose fingers, and then rather a bitter smile came over his features. "Twas too strong a test of his fellowship," he muttered; "too strong for his friendship even."

He shoved the document among his laces and moved to the gallery, where the gentlemen were choosing their partners for the coranto. He sought the Duke at once. His grace was standing near Mistress Barbara's chair, watching with amusement a discussion of the rival claims of the Earl of St. Albans and Captain Ferrers upon her clemency for the dance.

"Your grace," said Mornay, "I claim your promise. I am for the coranto."

"With *la belle* Barbara? My word, Mornay, you are incurable."

"A disease, monsieur; I think fatal." Mistress Barbara beamed upon the Duke. Ferrers made way; he did not see the figure at the heels of Dorset.

"Madame," said his grace, with a noble flourish of the arm, "I present to you a gentleman of fine distinction in Germany and England, a gallant captain in the Marine of France – René Bras-de-Fer – Monsieur le Chevalier Mornay."

During the prelude she had sat complaisantly, a queen in the center of her court. But as Mornay came forward she arose and drew herself to her splendid height, looking at the Frenchman coldly, her lips framed for the words she would have uttered. But Monsieur Mornay spoke first.

"Madame," he said, quietly, his hand upon his heart, "I am come for the coranto."

She looked at him in blank amazement, but for a moment no sound came from her lips.

"Monsieur," she stammered at last in breathless anger – "monsieur – "

Mornay affected not to hear her.

"The coranto, madame," he said, amusedly; "madame has promised me the coranto."

"Tis an intrusion, monsieur," she began, her breast heaving. Mornay had drawn from his laces the pardon of Nick Rawlings. Before she could finish he had opened the paper and handed it towards her.

"It is the pardon, madame."

That was all he said. But the crimson seal of the crown, dangling from its cords, caught her eye, and, half bewildered, she glanced down over the writing.

"Clemency – thief – murderer – Nick Rawlings – pardon? – a pardon for *me*, monsieur?"

Monsieur Mornay showed his white teeth as he smiled.

"Madame forgets her promise of the coranto. *Voilà!* Here is the pardon. There is the *musique*. Will madame not dance?"

A silence had fallen upon those within earshot, and not a couple took the floor for the dance. His grace of Dorset looked serious. Sir Henry Heywood thrust himself into the circle. But the music tinkled bravely, and Monsieur Mornay still stood there, awaiting her reply.

The struggle lasted for some moments. She turned white and red by turns as she fought for her self-control and pressed her hand to her breast to still the tumult which threatened to burst from her lips.

Captain Ferrers made a step as though to come between them, but Monsieur Mornay did not notice him. Nor until then did Mistress Clerke break her silence.

"Stop, Captain Ferrers," she coldly said. "I will dance with this – this Monsieur Mornay." Her tone was frozen through and through with the bitterness of utter contempt.

And then, giving Mornay her fingers, she went with him to the middle of the gallery. While the company, too interested or amazed to follow in the dance, stood along the walls of the ballroom, Mistress Barbara Clerke and Monsieur Mornay ran through the mazes of the dance.

Mornay moved with an incomparable grace and skill. It was a dance from Paris, and every turn of the wrist, neck, or heel proclaimed him master. From his face one could only discover the signal joy he felt at being honored by so gracious and beautiful a companion. The countenance of Mistress Clerke betrayed a less fortunate disposition. In the bitterness of her defeat by this man whom she had

promised herself publicly to demean, she maintained her outward composure with difficulty. The physical action of dancing gave her some relief, but as she faced him her eyes blazed with hatred and her fingers, fairly spurning a contact, chilled him with the rigidity of their antipathy.

Twice they made the round of the room, when Ferrers, who had mounted the steps into the loft, bade the musicians stop playing. A look of relief chased the scorn for a moment from Mistress Barbara's face, and, as though half unconscious of Mornay's presence, she said aloud, in a kind of gasp:

"Thank God, 'tis done!"

They stood opposite an open window that led to the garden. Mornay frowned at her.

"And the hour alone?" he asked. "Surely madame cannot so soon have forgotten?"

Her gray eyes had turned as dark as the open window looking into the night, and the lids which her scorn let down to hide her anger concealed but in part the smoldering light of her passion.

"It is preposterous, monsieur!" she said, chokingly. "I cannot! I will not!"

"And your promise, madame. Mistress Clerke will forget her promise?"

She looked about helplessly, as though seeking a way to escape. But Mornay was merciless.

"Perhaps, madame, you fear!" he said, ironically.

He had judged her aright. With a look that might have killed had Mornay been made of more tender stuff, she caught her gown upon her arm and swept past him out into the darkness of the terrace beyond.

The air was warm and fragrant, full of the first sweet freshness of the summer. The light of the moon sifted softly through the haze that had fallen over the gardens and trembled upon each dewy blade and leaf. It was so peaceful and quiet! – so far removed from rancor and hatred! – a night for fondness, gentleness, and all the soft confidences of a tenderness divine and all-excelling – a night for love!

This thought came to them both at the same moment – to Mistress Barbara with a sense of humiliation and anger, followed by the burst of passion she had struggled so long to control. She stopped in the middle of the garden-walk and turned on him:

"You!" she cried, immoderately. "You again! Has a lady no rights which a man, whatever he be, is bound to respect? Why do you pursue me? Listen to me, Monsieur Mornay. I hate you! – I hate you! – I hate you!" And then, overcome by the every excess of her emotion, she sank to the bench beside her. Monsieur Mornay stood at a distance and occupied himself with the laces at his sleeves.

To a Frenchman this was surely an ill-requiting of his delicate attentions.

"Madame," he began, calmly, then paused.

"No, madame does not mean that." He made no attempt to go nearer, but stood, his hand resting upon the hilt of his sword, his eyes, dark and serious, looking quietly down at her.

She made no reply, but sat rigidly, her arm upon the back of the bench, the seat of which her skirts had completely covered. There was no indication of the turmoil that raged within her but the tapping of her silken shoe upon the graveled walk.

"How have I offended, madame?" he continued. "Is it a fault to admire? Is my tribute a sin? Is my service a crime? Have I not the right of any other of your poor prisoners – to do you honor from afar?"

"From afar?" she asked, coldly satirical.

Mornay shrugged his shoulders with a pretty gesture.

"*Ma foi*, madame. My mind cannot imagine a greater distance between us –"

"Monsieur's imagination is not without limits," she interrupted; and then, after a pause, "In England a lady is allowed the privilege of choosing her own following."

"In France," he replied, with an inclination of the head – "in France the following confers an honor by choosing the lady."

"Yes, *in France*, monsieur."

There was a hidden meaning to her words.

He thought a moment before replying.

“But madame is of a house of France. The English Mistress Clerke is also the French Vicomtesse de Bresac.”

She turned fully towards him and met his gaze steadily.

“But, thank God! the part of me that is English is the part of me which scorns such attentions as yours. To be the object of such gallantries is to be placed in a class” – she paused to measure out the depth of her scorn – “in a class with your Shrewsburys and Middletons. It is an insult to breathe the air with you alone. My cavaliers are gentlemen, monsieur, and in England – ”

She broke off abruptly, as if conveying too full an honor by conversing with him; and then, woman-like, “Why did you save the Spanish coach?” she cried, passionately.

Monsieur Mornay smiled blithely.

“Madame would not look half so handsome dead as she does alive.” He took a step as though to go nearer, and she rose to her feet, turning towards the house.

“Come nearer, monsieur, and I – I leave at once.”

Mornay’s brows contracted dangerously as he said:

“The hour is mine”; and then, with an angry irony, “You need not fear me, madame. I am no viper or toad that you should loathe me so.”

She looked defiantly up at him.

“There are things even less agreeable than toads and vipers.” The words dropped with cold and cruel meaning from her lips. In a moment she would have given her fortune to withdraw them. Monsieur Mornay stepped back a pace and put the back of his hand to his head where a patch still hid the scar upon his temple. He stammered painfully, and lowered his head as though bowing to some power over which he had no control.

“You – you mean the misfortune of my birth?”

Mistress Clerke had turned her face away again; she put her hand to her brow, her look steadily averted. Deep down in the heart she so carefully hid, she knew that what she had done was malignant, inhuman. Whatever his sins of birth or education, was he not built in the semblance of a gentleman? And had he not jeopardized his life and good repute in her service? It was true. Whatever his origin, his frank attachment deserved a better return than the shame she had put upon it. If he had not stood there directly before her she would have said something to have taken the bitter sting from her insult. But as she felt his eyes burn into her, she could not frame her words, and her pride made her dumb.

“Madame has heard that?” he stammered; and then, without waiting for a reply, he said, with a quiet dignity, “It is true, I think. If madame will permit, I will conduct her to the gallery.”

Mistress Clerke did not move. Her eyes were fixed upon the swinging lanterns at the end of the terrace.

“Come, madame, I give you back your hour,” he said. “Nick Rawlings and I will take our liberty together. If you will but allow me – ”

There was a sound of rapid footsteps upon the walk, and three figures came into the glare of the shifting lanterns. In the colored light Mornay could dimly make out Ferrers, Heywood, and Wynne. Heywood peered forward into their faces.

“Enough of this,” he said, sternly. “Mistress Clerke, be so kind as to give your arm to Captain Ferrers. If you will but take her to the Duchess, Ferrers – ”

Mistress Clerke had arisen to her feet and looked from her guardian to Monsieur Mornay, who stood at his ease, awaiting their pleasure. She opened her lips as though to speak, but the Frenchman, with an air of finality which could not be mistaken, bowed low, and then, turning coldly away, stood facing the darkness of the garden.

CHAPTER III

MONSIEUR MORNAY BECOMES UNPOPULAR

The footsteps of Mistress Barbara and Captain Ferrers vanished into the night. Sir Henry Heywood moved a step nearer Mornay, and the Frenchman turned. His face shone with an unwonted pallor, and an air of distraction had settled in the repose of his features which the dim light of the swinging lanterns could not conceal. His eyes, dark and lustrous, looked at Sir Henry from under half-closed lids, a little *ennuyé*, but with a perfect composure and studied politeness.

"It is unfortunate that we cannot seem to meet," said Sir Henry, struggling to control himself.

"I am bereaved, Monsieur de Heywood. Perhaps to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" broke in Heywood, violently. "There may be no to-morrow. I will meet you to-night, monsieur, here – now – at this very spot!" He nervously fingered the laces at his throat.

Mornay paused a moment. "Monsieur de Heywood would violate the hospitality –"

"Yes," interrupted Heywood, "we shall have no constables here –"

"But, monsieur –"

"Enough! Will you fight, or shall I –" He made a movement towards Mornay. There came so dangerous a flash in the Frenchman's eyes that Heywood stopped. Mornay drew back a step and put his hand upon his sword.

"At last," sneered Heywood – "at last you understand."

Mornay shrugged his shoulders as though absolving himself from all responsibility.

"*Eh bien*," he said. "It shall be as you wish."

There had been so many duels with fatal results in London during the last few months that it was as much as a man's life was worth to engage in one, either as principal or second. But this affair admitted of no delay, and Ferrers and Wynne had so deep a dislike for Mornay that they would have risked much to see him killed. Wynne found Captain Cornbury, who hailed with joy the opportunity of returning Mornay a service the Frenchman had twice rendered him. The gentlemen removed their periwigs, coats, and laces, and when Captain Ferrers returned, the game began.

It was soon discovered that Monsieur Mornay had a great superiority in the reach, and he disarmed his elderly opponent immediately. It was child's play. Almost before the Baronet had taken his weapon in hand it flew to the ground again. With this he lost his temper, and, throwing his seconds aside, sprang upon the Frenchman furiously. A very myriad of lunges and thrusts flashed about Monsieur Mornay, and before the seconds knew what had happened the Baronet seemed to rush upon the point of the Frenchman's sword, which passed into his body.

Ferrers and Cornbury ran forward and caught the wounded man in their arms, while Wynne, seeing that he still breathed, ran without further ado to the house in search of aid. Monsieur Mornay alone stood erect. As Cornbury rose to his feet the Frenchman asked:

"Well?"

"Clear through. There's a hole on both sides. Ye must be off. They will be here presently."

"And you?"

"I'll stay. I can serve ye better here"; and as Mornay paused, "Come, there's no time to be lost." He caught up the Frenchman's coat, hat, and periwig, and hurried down the garden towards the gate. Mornay cast a glance at the figure upon the ground and followed.

"I mistrust Ferrers," whispered Cornbury. "If he will but tell a dacent story, his grace may hush the matter. If not –"

"*Eh bien* – I care not –"

"If not, 'tis a case for the constables, perhaps of the prison; 'tis difficult to say – a plea of chance-medley – a petition to the King –"

Mornay tossed his head impatiently as he replied:

“I have nothing to expect from the King, Cornbury.”

“Tush, man! All will be well. But do ye not go to yer lodgings. Meet me in an hour at the Swan in Fenchurch Street, and I’ll tell ye the lay of the land. Go, and waste no time where ye see the lantern of the watch,” with which he pushed the Frenchman past the grilled door at the garden entrance and out into the street.

Monsieur Mornay paused a moment while he slowly and carefully adjusted his coat, cravat, and periwig. As he moved down the lane in the deep shadow of the high wall in the darkness and alone with his thoughts, his poise and assurance fell from him like a doffed cloak; his head drooped upon his breast, as with shoulders bowed and laggard feet he walked, in the throes of an overmastering misery. He passed from the shadows of the walls of Dorset Gardens and out into the bright moonlight of the sleeping street. Had he wished to hide himself, he could not have done so more effectually, for in this guise he made rather the figure of a grief-ridden beldam than the fiery, impulsive devil-may-care of the Fleece Tavern. When he again reached the protecting shadow he sank upon a neighboring doorstep and buried his face in his knees, the very picture of despair. No sound escaped him. It was the tumultuous, silent man-grief which burns and sears into the soul like hot iron, but knows no saving relief in sob or tear. Once or twice the shoulders tremulously rose and fell, and the arms strained and writhed around the up-bent knees in an agony of self-restraint. Ten, fifteen minutes he sat there, lost to all sense of time or distance, until his struggle was over. Then he raised his head, and, catching his breath sharply, arose.

“If there were but an end,” he sighed aloud, constrainedly – “an end to it all!”

Then a bitter laugh broke from him.

“It is true – what she said was true. I am a loathsome creature – a thing, a creeping thing, that lives because it must, because, like a toad or a lizard, it is too mean to kill.” There was a long silence. At last he brushed his hand across his forehead and rose to his feet abruptly.

“Bah! a bit of womanish folly!” he laughed. “Tis some humor or sickness. The plague is still in the air. *Mordieu!*” he shouted. “There is money to win and bright eyes to gleam for Monsieur Mornay. I can laugh and jest still, *mes amis*–”

The closing of doors and the clatter of a coach upon the cobbles surprised him into a sense of the present. A footstep here and there and the sound of shouts close at hand recalled him to himself. He saw from the garden gate of Dorset House the flashing of a lantern and heard the shooting of the bolts and the rasp of a rough voice. The spirit of self-preservation rose strong within him and put to rout every thought but flight. He peered cautiously from his doorway, and, finding that the gate was not yet opened, he went forth and hurried down the street and around the corner until all the sounds of pursuit were lost to hearing.

By the time Monsieur Mornay had reached the Swan in Fenchurch Street, he was so far in possession of his senses that, with a manner all his own, he roused the master of the house from his bed and bade him set out a cold pâté and two bottles of wine in the back room upstairs against the coming of the Irishman. Nor had he long to wait, for Captain Cornbury, flushed and breathless, soon burst into the room. When he saw Mornay his face relaxed in a look of relief.

“Egad! ye’re here,” he said. “Twixt this and that I’ve had a thousand doubts about ye. For the present, then, ye’re safe.”

Mornay pushed a bench towards him.

“Then Ferrers has –”

“Ferrers and Dorset – I’ faith, between them they’ve raised the divil. And Captain Ferrers – by the ten holy fingers of the Pope! there was a fine notary spoiled when Ferrers took service with the King. For all the lyin’ scoundrels –”

“He accused me?”

“Egad! he swore *you* were the head and foot of the whole business –”

“*Tonnerre de Dieu!* And the Duke?”

“I raged and swore to no purpose. Dorset believes Ferrers. He says you began it in the gallery.”

The Frenchman looked towards the ceiling with hands upraised. “The unfortunate *politesse* of Monsieur Mornay! The English I cannot understand.”

“Ferrers swears it was a plot hatched in the Fleece Tavern, and that I was a party to it.”

Mornay arose and grasped the Irishman’s shoulder.

“*You!* My poor friend, *YOU!*” he exclaimed; “and I disarmed him twice. It is too much – let us go at once and face them.”

Cornbury pushed him down. “Ye’ll do no such thing. ’Twould be arrant suicide. The streets are full of men looking for you by this – and me, too.”

“They cannot – you didn’t even know.”

“’Tis true, or I’m Dutch. Look ye, man, we’re safe here, and snug. Four-and-twenty lances couldn’t get through Tom Boyle downstairs if he’d set his mind to stop them. Rest awhile and compose yer mind. Besides – ” He broke off abruptly and reached for the bottle. “Give me a drink – I can talk no more. The words are all – parchin’ in my throat.”

Mornay sank back upon his bench, while the Irishman filled and drained his cup. At last he gave a great grunt of satisfaction, and with smiling face set the vessel down upon the table with a clatter.

“Ochone! Talking is but a dry thrade.”

“*Allons, Captain,*” said Mornay, “tell me all.”

He drew the platter over and helped himself liberally from the pâté.

“Well, monsieur, when I went back, Heywood was making a kind of statement to Ferrers – something in the nature of a dying confession. It appears that this fellow Heywood is a thieving rascal, and if ye’ve killed him ’tis good riddance, say I.” He paused a moment to pour his wine. “As ye know,” he continued, his mouth full – “as ye know, the man is the guardian of Mistress Barbara Clerke. He has the disposition in the law of her fortune. Well, from what he confesses, ’tis not her fortune, after all.”

Mornay’s eyes opened wide with astonishment and interest. He set down upon the table, untasted, the cup he had raised to his lips, and leaned intently forward.

“Is it true?” he exclaimed; “and Mistress Barbara has nothing – nothing at all?” He broke into a hard, dry little laugh. “*Pardieu!* ’twill lower her chin, I’m thinking.” Then his face clouded again.

“Go on, monsieur,” he urged, impatiently – “go on.”

“If I can remember it, there’s a bit of family history ye have not heard, perhaps. Well, ye must know that the Chevalier Bresac, great-grandfather of this Mistress Clerke, bore a most intolerant hatred of Spain and the Spanish. His son René inherited this antipathy. So when he married an English girl and settled in London, he vowed that if any one of his three daughters married a Spaniard he would cut her off with a louis.”

He took a long draught of his wine. “Here is where the confession begins. The eldest daughter disobeyed and married a Spaniard in Paris. She kept the marriage from her father, and, going to Amiens, gave birth to a boy. Before she could summon courage to tell old Bresac of her disobedience, poor cratur, she died.”

“Leaving an heir to the estate.”

“Not so fast. Ye see, not a word of this was known in London; nor is to-day. At her death the bulk of the fortune went to the second daughter, who was the mother of this Mistress Barbara. The third daughter married Heywood’s uncle. Of this there was no issue, but that’s how the man came to be the guardian.” Cornbury pulled a pipe from a rack and filled it.

“Now here’s the villainy of the thing. This Spaniard came of gentle birth, but *au fond* was a sodden beast. Heywood went to Paris as the envoy of Wilfred Clerke – Barbara’s father – and, after a shrewd bargain, bought all the secret papers in evidence of this Spanish marriage.”

“And the real heir?”

“As much alive as you are.”

Monsieur Mornay contemplated the bottom of his bowl.

“*Mille tonnerres!*” he growled. “’Tis the very refinement of perfidy.”

The Irishman drank deep. “A lucky stroke of yours, Mornay, I say. I would it had been mine.”

“What became of the papers?”

“That’s why Heywood confessed, I suppose. Ye see, he loved his ward, and wanted Ferrers to destroy them. This he will do, I’m thinking, for he loves the lady himself.”

“And Mistress Clerke?”

“Hasn’t a notion of it.”

Mornay folded his arms and sat looking at the floor, a strange smile upon his lips. “*Pardieu!*” he said; “’twould touch her pride – ’twould wring her proud heart to have the heir come back to his own.” The bitterness of his tone caused Cornbury to look at him in surprise.

“Oh, there’s never a chance of it,” he said. “You see, this Spaniard, D’Añasco, put the boy upon a ship. Why, what ails ye, man? What is it? Are ye mad?”

Mornay had seized him by the arm with a grip of iron and leaned forward with eyes that stared at him like one possessed.

“The name, monsieur?” he said, huskily – “the name – the Spanish name you said – ?”

“Gawd, man, don’t grip me so! You’ve spilled the tobago. ’Twas D’Añasco, I think, or Damasco, or some such unspeakable thing.”

“Think, man – think!” cried Mornay, passionately. “’Tis a matter of life and death. Was the name Luis d’Añasco, of Valencia?”

It was Cornbury’s turn to be surprised. He looked at Mornay in amazement.

“I’ faith, now you mention it, I think it was. But how – ”

“And the name of the boy became Ruiz? The ship was the *Castillano*?”

Cornbury’s eyes were wider than ever.

“It was – it was!”

Cornbury paused. Mornay had arisen to his feet and stumbled to the dormer-window, where he fell rather than leaned against the sill. The Irishman could see nothing but the upheave of the shoulders and the twitching of the hands as the man struggled for his self-control. Cornbury was devoured with curiosity, but with due respect for the Frenchman’s silence sat smoking vigorously until Mornay chose to speak. As the Frenchman looked out at the quiet stars across the roof-tops of London he became calmer, and at last turned around towards the flickering candles.

“Monsieur,” began Cornbury, with a touch of sympathy.

But Mornay raised his hand in quiet protest. “D’Añasco was my father, *voilà tout*,” he said slowly. And as the Irishman arose, Mornay continued:

“I can finish the story, Monsieur Cornbury,” he said, lightly, but with a depth of meaning in his tone that did not escape the other. “When the boy Ruiz grew old enough to know, the Spaniard told him that he had no mother – nor ever had – that he was no-woman’s child. He put him on the *Castillano* and sent him out into the great world, without a thought, without a blessing, without a name – the very shuttle and plaything of fortune. That child, Cornbury, was myself.”

The Irishman put his arm upon Monsieur Mornay’s shoulder and clasped him by the hand.

They stood thus a moment until Cornbury broke away and, with a shout that made the rafters ring, again filled the drinking-bowls upon the table.

“A health, monsieur!” he cried. “You’ll never drink a better. To the better fortunes of René d’Añasco, Vicomte de Bresac!”

CHAPTER IV

MONSIEUR WAITS UPON A LADY

Captain Cornbury was no fledgling. He was the younger son, none too highly esteemed by the elder branch, of a hard-drinking, quick-fighting stock of ne'er-do-wells. He knew a trick with a sword, and for twenty years had kept a certain position by his readiness to use it. His last employment had been in the King's service as captain in a regiment of dragoons, but he lived, of a preference, upon his wits. There was never a game of dice or cards at which he could not hold his own at luck or skill. Skill at the Fleece Tavern, too, often meant dexterity in manipulation; and where every man with whom he played took shrewd advantage of his neighbor there was little to cavil at.

But of late fortune had turned a wry face upon the man. His regiment was disbanded for lack of money, his pittance from the Earl, his brother, ceased altogether; and, with a reckless manner of living, a debtors' prison stared him in the face. He sat upon the couch in Mornay's new room at the Swan Tavern, watching with a somewhat scornful expression of countenance Vigot help his master to make his toilet. His eyes blinked sleepily at the light, for it was high noon; and his wig having been removed for comfort, the light shone brilliantly upon a short crop of carrotty-red hair which took all the colors of the rainbow.

Mornay wore a splendid silken night-gown, little in keeping with the dinginess of the apartment. While Vigot dressed his master's perruque, Mornay told the Irishman of the note from the King and of the arrival of the post from France, with the news of the anger of the Grand Monarque and of his promise of death or imprisonment should Mornay be brought to France.

Cornbury pursed his lips in a thin whistle.

"Viscount," he said, frowning, "ye're skatin' on thin ice."

Mornay had completely recovered his good spirits. He tossed his night-robe to Vigot and snapped his fingers.

"*Mais, monsieur,*" he smiled. "'Tis an exercise so exhilarating."

"D – n it, man, 'tis no time for jesting," growled the Irishman, rising. "The post from France to-day says ye are to be put in the Bastile or have your head chopped off; in London ye're a fugitive from justice for killing; and, lastly, yer good friend Charles has turned a cold shoulder on ye. And ye talk of exhilaration!" Cornbury's disgust was illimitable.

Mornay dusted a speck from his sleeve and smiled gayly. "It is not every day, my good Cornbury, that a man may become possessed of a family, a fortune, and, *ma foi*, such a beautiful, scornful she-cousin –"

"Zoons, man! How can ye prove it without the papers? The mere word 'D'Añasco' will not open their ears or their hearts. I believe it, but who else would?"

"I can prove that I am the boy Ruiz, I tell you."

"And ye're fleeing for your life?"

Mornay's face grew stern. "Yes, I am fleeing for my life," he cried, "but they have not caught me yet. Last night I would not have cared if they had sent me back to France. To-day it is different. They have robbed me of my estates, of my name; they have made me a mere creeping thing – a viper. *Morbleu!* they shall feel the viper's sting. Monsieur de Heywood is dead. Mistress Barbara Clerke –"

Cornbury leaned forward in his chair. "Surely you don't mean –"

"Oh, put your mind at rest, *mon ami*. I shall do my pretty cousin no violence. I shall see her – that's all. But first – first, about the papers with this Capitaine Ferraire –"

Cornbury smiled dryly.

"Why, ye have but to poke a nose an inch beyond the door to be carted to the Tower. How will ye see Captain Ferrers, then? 'Tis the height of absurdity. Take my advice and keep close till ye find

a ship. Then set your course for the Plantations till yer matter is cooled. I've a debt or two myself, and I'm inclined to accompany ye."

Mornay looked at him in surprise. "Why, Cornbury, you have but a faint heart!"

"It is this news from France – ye have no backing – "

"Come! have done!" cried Mornay. "You sap my will. If you cannot look the situation gallantly in the face, why, then – " He stopped and lowered his voice, casting a glance at the Irishman. "*Mon ami*, I expect too much. More than I can claim." Mornay walked towards the door and took Cornbury's cloak and hat. "*Allons!* You shall leave me at once. Your only danger is in my society. Go at once upon the street, and they can prove nothing; stay with me, and you harbor an enemy of the state and a fugitive from justice."

Cornbury threw a look at him and rose to his feet with an oath. "D – n ye, man, d'ye think I'd quit ye now? Ye give me credit for a smallish sense of dacency." He walked to the window and looked down upon the street. Mornay followed him at once and took him by the hand.

"I have offended you? Forgive me. This matter is the turning of gall to honey for me, Cornbury. I cannot leave it without a struggle. I pray you, bear with me."

Cornbury was smiling in a moment. "What do ye plan?" he said.

"Listen. Vigot is clever. He shall discover for me when Captain Ferrers will wait upon madame, *ma cousine*. I, too, will call upon her."

"And ye've just killed her guardian!" said Cornbury, dryly. "She'll not receive ye with kisses."

Mornay smiled and slowly answered:

"You will think it strange that a gentleman should intrude upon a woman. But to-morrow, perhaps to-day, I may go from this city and country forever. Before that I shall make one effort to establish my good name. I shall not succeed; but I shall have done my duty to myself and the mother who bore me. As for the Capitaine Ferraire – " Mornay's eyes flashed ominously. "If I knew where he had put the papers – if I could but get him to fight – "

"Fight! Ye couldn't coax a fight from Ferrers with the flat of yer hand. He'd rather see ye in the Bastille or the Tower. He's too sure to take any risks. Besides, if ye'd kill him the papers would be lost forever. No, he'll not fight. He owes ye money, and while the constables can cancel the debt ye may be sure that *he* will *not*."

Mornay passed his hand over his brow. "'Tis true. But I must see them together. That is the only chance. I will go to-day."

"But how, Mornay?" asked Cornbury, dryly. "In a coach and four?"

Mornay sprang to his feet in delight. "*C'est ça!*" he cried, joyfully. "Oh, monsieur, but you have the Irish wit. Vigot shall bring me a coach. I shall ride in state."

Cornbury rose to his feet angrily.

"What nonsense is this?" he cried. Mornay smiled on him benignly.

"Can you not see, Monsieur le Capitaine? While they are looking for me at the Fleece, in Covent Garden, in the Heaven Inn, or in the Hell Tavern, here will I be riding along the Mall to the very place they would be least likely to look for me – in my lady's boudoir!"

Cornbury at once saw the value of the plan, but he never looked more sober.

"And after?" he asked.

"After?" replied Mornay, lightly. "After? Monsieur, you leave too little to the imagination. I think but of the present. *Le bon Dieu* will provide for the future."

Vigot was given his orders to make shrewd inquiries of the servants of the neighbors of Mistress Clerke as to the hour of Captain Ferrers's daily visits. He was also told to get a coach for monsieur. He stood puzzled a moment.

"Monsieur wishes a haquenée?" he asked.

"A haquenée? No, sirrah!" said Mornay, brusquely.

"A pair, then?" he asked, scratching his head.

“A pair?” roared Mornay. “No, sirrah! *Foi de ma vie!* I wish a coach and four. Twenty guineas at the very least. If I wait upon madame at night, a dozen links. Be off with you!”

Cornbury shook his head hopelessly.

“Ye’re going to your funeral in style,” he said.

Mistress Barbara sat alone, looking out upon the quiet street. While she looked she saw nothing, and every line of her figure, in abandonment to her mood, spoke of sorrow and distraction. Her eyelids were red, and the richly laced *mouchoir* which fell from the hand beneath her chin was moist with tears. Upon a tray were the dishes of a luncheon, untouched, and a number of papers, some of them torn, fell from her hand upon the floor. A dish of roses, a few French romances, a *manteau* girdle, a copy of the *Annus Mirabilis* of Dryden, a pair of scented gloves of Martial, and a cittern in the corner completed the gently bred disorder of the room.

True, Sir Henry Heywood was no blood relation of hers, and had only been her guardian. A man of the world in the worst rather than the better sense, there had been little in his life to appeal to her. But he loved her in his own way and had been good to her in all matters that pertained to her estate, and so she mourned him as one would mourn the loss of one whom nearness had made dear. There was some bond which seemed to bind them more closely than their mere surface relations of ward and guardian – an undercurrent of devotion and servitude which she felt, though she could not understand the meaning. His death wrung her mind, if it did not wring her heart.

And by this Frenchman! There had been a moment or two of regret the other night that she should have used this Mornay so cruelly, a moment when the bitterness, the grief, the utter loneliness and longing she had seen in his face had filled her rebellious soul with compassion for his misery. For she had a glimpse – the very first – of his pride overborne and beaten to earth in spite of its mighty struggle to rise. But now! Now, whatever regret had sprung into her heart, whatever kindness, had been engulfed again in a bitterness which cried out for justice. While the woman in her had shrunk from the thought of him and wished him well away from London, a sense of the fitness of things called for retribution for the wrong that had been done her and hers. They had not caught him yet. Oh, he was cunning and skillful; that she knew. But Captain Ferrers had assured her that to oblige Louis of France, the King had directed all the constables of London to be upon the watch for him. It could not be long before they would have him fast behind the walls of the Tower, with God knows what in store for him there, or at the Bastile if he were taken back to France. The Bastile? She shivered a little and put her kerchief over her face.

“God forgive me,” she murmured, “if I have misjudged him!”

There was a commotion below in the street – the sound of galloping horses and the rumble of a fast-flying vehicle. A plum-colored calash with red wheels and splendid equipments was coming at a round pace up the street. There were four sorrel horses, a coachman, footman, and two outriders. With a whirl of dust and the shouting of men the horses were thrown upon their haunches and the coach came to a stop directly before Mistress Barbara’s door. She peered out of the window, curiously agape, to know the identity of her visitor. From the way in which he traveled abroad it must be a person of condition – she felt assured a minister or dignitary of the city, come perhaps to beseech her influence. There was a glimmer of bright color in the sunlight. A splendid figure, periwigged and bonneted in the latest mode, sprang out and to her front door. She had barely time to withdraw her head before there was a knock and her lackey opened in some trepidation.

“Madame, ’tis Monsieur the Vicomte de Bresac – ”

“Did I not give orders – ” she began, and then stopped. “De Bresac! De Bresac! What can it mean?”

“Madame, ’tis a matter of importance and – er – ”

She stood debating whether she should call her governess or deny herself to her visitor, but before she could do the one or the other footsteps came along the hallway and the lackey stepped aside as Monsieur Mornay entered.

Mistress Clerke turned a pallid face towards him. She stepped back a pace or two, her hands upon her breast, her eyes glowing with fear. Monsieur Mornay turned to the lackey, who still stood doubtful upon the threshold. The look he gave the man sent him through the doorway and hall, where the sound of his footsteps mingled with those of others without. Mistress Clerke cast a fleeting glance towards the boudoir, but Monsieur Mornay had taken his stand where he could command both entrances to the room. She scorned to cry aloud for assistance, nor would she risk his interference by trying to pass him. He read her easily. She made no motion to leave or speak to him, but stood against the wall of the fireplace, her muscles rigid and tense with fear and her eyes regarding him with all the calmness she could command.

“Madame,” he said, solemnly, looking out at her from under his dark brows, “before God, I mean you no harm!” He said it as though it were a sacrament. “In half an hour or less I shall be gone from this room, from your life forever. But you must hear what I have to say.” He paused. “No, no, madame. It is not that which you suppose – you need have no fear of me. It is not that – I swear it!”

Mistress Barbara moved uneasily.

“I pray that you will be seated, madame. No? As you please. What I have to say is not short. Shall I begin?”

“Twere sooner over,” she said, hoarsely.

He bowed politely. “I will endeavor to be brief. Many years ago, your great-grandfather went to Florida with the expedition of Jean Ribault. Perhaps you have been told of the massacre by the Spanish and how the Seigneur de Bresac escaped to France? *Merci!* You also doubtless know his and your grandfather’s great hatred of the Spanish people as the result of this massacre? *Eh bien.* Your grandfather told his three daughters – one of whom was your mother – that if one of them married a Spaniard he would refuse her a part of his fortune and deny her as a child of his – ”

“I pray you, monsieur – ”

“I crave your patience. Lorange, your mother, married Monsieur Clerke, and Julie, the younger sister, married Sir George Maltby. That is well known. The elder sister was Eloise.” His voice fell, and the name was spoken with all the soft tenderness of the name itself. “Perhaps you do not know, madame, that she, too, was married – ”

“There was a mystery,” she muttered. “I heard – ” Then she stopped.

“Madame heard?” he asked, politely. But she was silent again.

“Eloise was married,” he continued, “while visiting at the château of the Duc de Nemours, near Paris, to Don Luis d’Añasco, who was a Spaniard. Fearing her father’s wrath and disinheritance, this unfortunate woman concealed the facts of this marriage, the record of which was the acknowledgment of the priest who married them and the statements of a nurse and another witness who had accompanied her to Amiens, where in or about the year 1635 she gave birth to a son – ”

If Mistress Clerke had allowed herself to relax a little before, her interest now had dominated all feeling of fear and suspense. She leaned a little forward, breathless, her hand upon the chair before her, her eyes fixed upon the lips of the Frenchman, who spoke slowly, concisely, and held her with an almost irresistible fascination.

“The saddest part of the story is to come, madame. The mother was grievously ill – she suffered besides all the pangs of solitude at a time when a woman needs consolation and sympathy the most. Her mother had died, her husband was worse than useless, and she feared to let her father know the truth, lest his stern and pitiless nature would wreak some terrible vengeance upon the Spanish husband, whom she still loved, in spite of the fact that he had married her for her fortune and not for herself. She had almost made up her mind to tell her father all when – she died.” He paused a moment to give her the full import of his words. And then, looking at her steadily and somewhat sternly, “Her son, René d’Añasco, Vicomte de Bresac, is still alive.”

Mistress Barbara stood looking at him. He met the look unflinchingly. At last her eyes fell. When she lifted them she did so suddenly and drew herself up at the same time, all instinct with

doubt and suspicion of this man, who had first insulted, then injured her, and was now seeking to rob her of her birthright.

“And you?” she asked, bitterly, her scorn giving wings to her fear. “And *you*? Can I believe *you*?”

It was as though she had expressed her thought in words. Monsieur Mornay felt the thrust. But where the other night it could wound him mortally, to-day it glanced harmlessly aside. He still looked calmly at her, and the least perceptible touch of irony played at the corners of his lips.

She mistook the smile for effrontery – for the mere impudence of a man without caste who reckes nothing for God or man. She flung her back towards him with a sudden gesture and turned towards the window.

“You lie,” she said, contemptuously.

Monsieur Mornay knit his brows, and his eyes followed her angrily, but he did not even take a step towards her. His voice was as low as before when he spoke.

“Madame has a certain skill at hatred,” he said. “Insults fall as readily from her lips as the petals from a flower.” He paused. “But they do not smell so sweet. I do not lie, madame,” he said, with a gesture as though to brush the insult aside. When he raised his voice it was with a tone and inflection of command which surprised and affrighted her. She turned in alarm, but he had not moved from his position near the door.

“Hear me you shall, madame. Listen.” And rapidly, forcefully, masterfully even, he told the story of the fate of the young D’Añasco, called Ruiz, the perfidy of the drunken father in sending him away upon the ship *Castillano*, and the bargain by which his inheritance had been sold. She heard him through, because she could not help it, but as he proceeded, and the names of her father, Sir Wilfred Clerke, and Sir Henry Heywood were mentioned, she arose to her full height, and with magnificent disdain threw fear to the winds and said, coldly:

“Stop! I have heard enough.” And with reckless mockery, “You, monsieur, I presume, are René d’Añasco, Vicomte de Bresac?”

Monsieur Mornay bowed.

The door of the room opened suddenly and Captain Ferrers entered. A look of bewilderment was on his features as he glanced at Mistress Clerke.

“Why, Barbara – these men without – What – ?” Monsieur Mornay had turned his head, and the flowing curls no longer hid his countenance.

“I was expecting you, Capitaine Ferraire,” said the Frenchman.

Ferrers stepped back a pace or two, astonishment and consternation written upon his features. Had Sir Henry Heywood come back to life, the Captain could not have been put into a greater quandary. He looked at the Frenchman and then at Mistress Clerke for the solution of the enigma. But Mistress Barbara had sunk upon the couch in an agony of fear. A moment before she had prayed for this interruption. Now that it had come she was in a terror as to its consequences. She made no reply, but looked at the two men who stood a few feet apart with lowering looks – the Englishman flushed red with anger, the Frenchman cool, impassive, dangerous.

Ferrers spoke first. He stepped a pace or two towards the Frenchman, his brow gathered, his shoulders forward, menace in every line of his figure.

“You have dared to force your way into this house?”

The elbow was bent and the fist was clinched, and an exclamation burst from Mistress Barbara, who was gazing horror-struck at the impending brutality. But the Frenchman did not move. The only sign of anything unusual in his appearance was the look in his eyes, which met those of the Englishman with an angry glitter of defiance. If Ferrers had meant personal violence to the Frenchman, he did not carry out his intentions. He cast his eyes for a moment in the direction of Mistress Barbara, and then, drawing back again with a muttered exclamation, made straight for the door. Before he could place his hand upon the knob Mornay interposed.

“One moment, Ferraire. My men were told to let you in —*not* to let you out.” And as Ferrers paused a moment, “Have patience, Monsieur le Capitaine. Presently I will leave madame and you; but first you must listen.” Ferrers had grown white with rage, and his hand had flown to his sword hilt. He looked at the quiet figure of the Frenchman and at Mistress Barbara, whose eyes were staring at him widely. He bit his lip in chagrin, and then struggled to control his voice.

“Your reckoning is not far distant, Monsieur Mornay,” he said, hoarsely. “If there is justice in England, you shall hang this day week.”

CHAPTER V

INDECISION

Mornay waited while the Englishman smothered his rage. Then, with a sudden motion, he brushed his kerchief across his temples, as though to wipe the clouds from his forehead.

"If madame will but bear with my brutality a little longer" – he smiled – "a little longer – then she will have done with me forever." The gesture and the air of contrition were rather racial than personal characteristics. But, as one sometimes will in times of great stress, Mistress Barbara could not but compare Mornay's ease and sang-froid with the heavy and somewhat brutal bearing of Captain Ferrers. She hated herself for the thought, and, as Monsieur Mornay spoke, turned her face resolutely to the window and away from him.

"If madame will remember what I have had the honor to tell her, she will now discover how Monsieur Ferraire becomes concerned." He glanced at Ferrers, who stood to one side, his arms folded, his features sullen and heavy with the impotence of his wrath. The Frenchman was playing a desperate game, with every chance against him. To unmask the secret, he must take the somewhat heavier Englishman off his guard. Of one thing he felt sure, Ferrers knew little more as to the papers than did Cornbury and himself. He began abruptly, without further preface:

"Madame has just learned from my lips of certain matters, Monsieur le Capitaine, which bear strongly upon her interests in the estate of Bresac. She has yet to learn how much a part of it all you have become. She has been told of the fortunes of Eloise d'Añasco and of the rightful heir to the estates. What she wishes most to learn is the contents and purport of the papers in your possession."

Mornay had spoken slowly, to give force to his words, and the effect of his information upon Ferrers was remarkable. The lowering crook came out of his brows, and his hand made an involuntary movement to his breast, the fingers trembling a moment in the air. His face relaxed like heated wax, and he stared at the Frenchman, his mouth open, the picture of wonderment and uncertainty.

Mistress Clerke, who had been about to speak, paused bewildered. Ferrers stammered awkwardly, as though gathering his wits for a reply.

"The papers!" he gasped at last. "The papers!" And then with a futile attempt at sang-froid, "What papers, monsieur?"

If the Englishman had not been so completely off his guard he would have seen a flash of triumph in the Frenchman's eyes. Mornay narrowly watched his discomfiture; then continued, quietly:

"Monsieur le Capitaine Ferraire, René d'Añasco has been found. The son of Eloise de Bresac has come to life and is to-day in London. He knows of the sale of his birthright. He has discovered the proofs of his mother's marriage and of his birth at Amiens. He but awaits a favorable opportunity to bring the matter before a court." By this time Captain Ferrers had recovered a certain poise. He swaggered over to the mantel, where he turned to Mistress Clerke.

"A fine tale!" he sneered. "A pretty heir, Mistress Barbara, to send a hunted man as his ambassador." Then the presence of Cornbury at the dying confession came to his memory, and the situation dawned upon him for the first time. He laughed aloud with real blatant merriment.

"I see!" he cried. "It is you — *you*, Mornay, the outcast – Mornay, the broken gambler, the man without a creed or country, who is now become the Vicomte de Bresac. It is a necromancy worthy of Dr. Bendo."

He was firm upon his feet again. The very absurdity of the claim had restored his heavy balance – somewhat disturbed by the announcement of his possession of the papers. He turned to Mistress Clerke and found her eyes, full of wonder and inquiry, still turned upon him. She was sensible of an influence which the Frenchman's words had wrought, and felt rather than saw the surprise and alarm which underlay the somewhat blustery demeanor of Captain Ferrers. During the dénouement not a

word had passed her lips. When she had tried to speak it seemed as though she had been deprived of the power. She had sat looking from the one to the other, fear and doubt alternating in her mind as to the intentions of the Frenchman. What did it all mean? Captain Ferrers, at the best of times, was not a man who could conceal his feelings; but why had he lost countenance so at the mention of papers? Why had he not done something at the first that would prove the Frenchman the cheat and impostor that he was? Why did the irony of his words fall so lightly upon the ears of Monsieur Mornay that he seemed not even to hear them? Why were the Frenchman's eyes so serious, so steady, so clear to return her gaze? With an effort she slowly arose, struggling against she knew not what – something which seemed to oppress her and threaten the freedom of her speech and will. A feeling that she had allowed herself, if even only for a moment, to be influenced against her better judgment, filled her with resentment against this man who had broken past her barriers again and again, and now offended not only the laws of society but the laws of decency by brutally pushing past her servants and holding her against her will a prisoner in her own apartments. As she stood upon her feet she regained her composure, and when she spoke her voice rang with a fearlessness that surprised even herself. It was the exuberance and immoderation of fear – the sending of the pendulum to the other end of its swing.

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